

THE BREAK OF NOON



NEIL
LABUTE



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For Blaise Pascal and Howard Brenton

CHARACTERS

MAN / JOHN	male, middle-aged
LAWYER	male, fifties
HOST	female, thirties
GINGER	female, middle-aged
DIVA MIDNIGHT	female, twenties
DETECTIVE	male, forties
JESSIE	female, middle-aged

SETTING

Various places in and around a big city.

TIME

Present.

NOTES

A slash denotes an attempt at interruption between the present line and the next speakers line.

The text that follows represents the script as the production went into rehearsals for the New York premiere.

Silence. Darkness.

A light snaps on. Harsh. Direct. It reveals a man seated on a metal chair in front of us. He shields his eyes.

MAN *(hesitating)* . . . I'm . . . my name is—sorry, that light is really strong and it's *shining right into my* . . . *could you* . . . *maybe* . . . ?

The light is adjusted. By degrees. Finally the MAN smiles and nods that he can continue.

MAN Thanks a lot. Thank you for . . . it's much better that way. I don't know what it was before but it caught me square in the—it doesn't matter. That's great. *(Beat.)* So, from the beginning of my—how it started? Right? Yeah. From the . . .

He takes a deep breath, nodding. Starts to speak. Stops. Another breath or two before he can begin.

MAN . . . it was almost twelve. I remember that because I've noticed—I mean, from where my office is—that just before, like, a minute or two at most . . . when the clock's just getting ready to strike, you know it's time because lots of people get up early and grab their stuff so that they can be out the door first. Or, well, on the first elevator, I'm saying. On their way down just as the hour hits. People do that all the time. Yep. *(Beat.)* So I knew it—I could already tell what time it was but I wasn't in any kind of hurry. No. I figured that I might go down and get something, a sandwich or whatever, but there wasn't

any rush. Let the crowd go by and then I'd head on down, that's the way I usually go about it on a day when I don't have a lunch set up or that kinda deal . . . I'm pretty basic. My needs and all that. I'm good-to-go with a half sandwich and a soup or even, like, the special they've got at the corner deli. I'm happy to live with that—sausage and peppers or whatever they're serving. The gyro platter, even. That's fine. By now, I'm a pro at lunch.

He smiles and stops for a minute, looking out into the darkness.

He squints, then continues.

MAN Anyhow, that's what I did. I did that . . . let my colleagues stampede each other and then I started to get up, went to use the restroom and finally headed downstairs. *(Beat.)* The shot that I heard—of course in the beginning I didn't know what it was but, yeah, now I know it was a gun—came when I was washing my hands. I was doing that, *drying* them, actually, and I heard this “pop” sound from somewhere in the building. Now, you have to understand what I'm describing for you here is only a sense of the place. It's huge. Sanford-Gross? Place is massive . . . so, when I say folks are heading out and I'm doing this and that . . . it's still almost completely full of people. Lots and lots of my, you know, coworkers are about to have their lunch. It's a bit of a madhouse in there. *(Beat.)* It honestly is.

He takes a breath. Almost a sigh.

MAN So, my thinking here is, and I'm just . . . this is only speculation because I know they still have a lot of whaddayacallit to do? *Forensic* work and all that, but I figure he came up on that noon elevator. Right? Now that sounds—there's no such thing as a “noon” elevator, those things are up and down all day long, opening and closing all the time, but I'm saying that he must've planned it that way. Being on the one that arrived right when they're all waiting there to jump on for an hour break. Doesn't that seem . . . ? *(Beat.)* Maybe not, maybe it's just a pure coincidence, but it does seem kinda logical to me . . . I mean, look, the guy knows the layout, has a sense of the routine, I'm saying of the *overall* office routine, and therefore he shows up right at the busiest time of the day. I mean, arguably. Mornings are very frenzied around there, too, but the evenings are generally less so—with lots of folks out for drinks or headed off to the suburbs after their last meeting out of the office, that sort of thing. Don't like to think about it, you know, as if I was him—that's creepy—but it's true. If you wanted to make the kind of, like, statement that he did, create panic and widespread *havoc* on a major scale, then you'd pretty much do what it seems like he did. You'd come into the place with your guns blazing as all these men and women are wandering around taking drink orders or grabbing their coats and not a thought in their heads other than a Cobb salad or maybe the *shrimp* basket over at that Irish pub thing that's catty-corner from us on Sixth. *(Beat.)* That's how you create chaos in about two seconds flat. And I do think that's what he did. From the looks of it. *(Beat.)* Like I said, I wasn't down near that end of the hall when he first came in, but those sounds that I heard,

followed by all the screaming that came right afterwards—well, it must've been something very much like that. *(Sits up.)* I don't suppose anybody from that general area made it out of—no, 'course not . . . from what your people've told me. I know the shots started happening more quickly after the first one—the noise his thing was making, that rifle—it was like one of those, what, some kind of machine gun, right? Some of the police guys who got to me said that. He was using an automatic weapon—that's what they said. An "AK-47" or whatever those things are known as . . . Russian? Right? It's a gun from Europe or something. And that is what he's using as he wanders through the place. Plus handguns and some knives, even. Someone said he stabbed a few—one of my assistants, this nice girl from Florida, only moved up here about *eight* months ago with her two kids. He, ahhhhh . . . guess he cut her throat in the copy room. Where he found her down on the floor. Trying to pretend she was dead. *(Laughs.)* Why would she do that? I mean, I guess you do all kinda shit when your life's . . . and she was just guessing. Right? I mean, with all that's going on . . . she doesn't know how many guys are doing this, if it's, like, a *gang* or something. So she goes down on the tile there, see, so she can pretend like she's already been shot or whatnot, I mean, I might've done the very same thing. Yeah. Really. Problem is—thing she couldn't know—there's only one man. He comes to the Xerox area there, sees her playing possum and knows *he* didn't kill her . . . and then stops, in the middle of this, you know, his rampage, to do that. To her. That's what he did. He goes and he slits her throat and then he—he took the time to do that.

Yeah. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry but that is just sorta off-the-goddamn-charts from what I know about human behavior. It really is.

The MAN stops for a moment, fighting back tears. He turns away and then looks back. Shaking his head.

MAN That's the kinda stuff you read on, like, the Internet—not *live* through, lunchtime of some regular workday in September. It just isn't. And I don't know how to come back from that, how you put things in any kind of perspective after you have that happen to you. I mean, luckily for me I had this whole, you know . . . thing happen, and I *still* have nightmares about it! I can put it all into some . . . tangible Christian context but I just know that that's not going to stop me from being doubled over by guilt and fear and, and flashbacks that're all—it's hard for me to imagine a time when I'll be okay with this. When I'll be back to being that guy again. "Me." So . . . it's . . .

He squints again, holding a hand up toward the lights. Waits.

MAN I'm sorry? *(Beat.)* Oh, sure, absolutely—so there were those first moments, this beat of just pure . . . panic inside me. One *moment* where I'm thinking—because now I get it—I can feel what's going on and I wanna tell you, it's not like a movie. It is not. Like, when you're a kid and you see something on TV or at the drive-in and think, "I could get out of that! I'd find a way through the fire or the, like, *natives* or Nazis or whatever." Bunch of bank robbers. But you don't.

Most people get shot or crushed by concrete or have a heart attack or something. Very few of us turn out to be heroes. It's just not the way this stuff works out. But we always *think* we're immortal—we feel like we're the one who's not gonna die, who'll stop where they are and never grow old. We do, though. We do age and get sick or ripped apart by *sharks* or end up on that wrong plane or, or, or on the Israeli *Olympic* team . . . we make these choices that seem like nothing at the time, so frivolous and happenstance and then, just like . . . (*snaps his fingers*) that! You're a story on ABC for ten minutes and you were dead wrong—you're just a person and life's over and that was that. Your one chance is gone. (*Beat.*) That's how *I* felt. Right then. My life was . . . I . . . I'm sorry.

He takes a moment to gather his thoughts. Not wanting to go back to that place.

MAN . . . this is hard. It's really . . . just . . . yeah. Hard. (*Beat.*) I knew that's how I was gonna end up—some *statistic*—if I didn't do something. Make a move or get myself outta there. Hide. And so I did. Yeah. I scrambled outta the bathroom and kept my head down, moving off between the first set of those—what're they called?—the room dividers that I came to down the corridor. Heading the other way. I kept down low and darted back toward the rear of our floor, figuring I could make it to an exit or something, use the stairs, before I'd be spotted. There's this eerie sort of silence in the air now—I suppose the initial panic had subsided, that moment where everybody first saw the guy and he opened fire. There was a lot of yelling and, like, the screams of women then, but

as he moved past and that first bunch was killed—after that moment, I think we were all just trying to survive from then on. Find some corner to crawl into, get out a door or some side window, *anything*. See, we're too high up to jump, really—it's six floors down—but if you are trapped like that you'll do whatever to try and live, it's true . . . leap, even. Leap onto rocks or into some burning pit of, like, *cobras* . . . because we think there might be a chance! There is a *chance* I'll survive and it's better than being shot down by some crazy person in my business suit. Coffee cup in my hand . . . (*Beat.*) So there I go—I'm crawling, all down on my hands and knees practically, trying to figure out which side of the room he's headed to or which one of the aisles he's gonna come down, or might use next. As I move, I'm passing these open portals into other people's offices . . . you know, like, all the mini-offices for the salespeople and junior execs who sit right out in the middle of the floor with their little . . . plants and crap, pictures of their kids out for all of us to see—and then, every so often. BAM! BAM-BAM! That sound of his gun. Firing. You know? BAM! It was . . . BAM! You know? (*Beat.*) God . . .

The MAN rubs a hand across his face, trying to wipe away some of the memories.

MAN I see folks I haven't talked to in *weeks*—you work in the same company but you just don't have time to stand around and be so funny with everyone you meet, know what I mean? These are a bunch of people that're my colleagues but I'm not out at the bar with 'em, night after night. I can't even remember some of their first names! But I see them there,

a few of 'em, anyway, as I'm sneaking along. Grown men, hunched up under their desks and weeping into their cell phones, calling the police or their wives—*anybody*—trying to figure out what to do next. How to . . . or dead. Most of 'em were already dead . . . it was terrible. And horrible. And just what you'd imagine it would be like. It wasn't like the movies, I know I've told you that, but that's the only frame of reference I have for it and it just wasn't that . . . I didn't feel all strong or smart or like I could move any mountains. I pissed my pants, that's what I did. I saw Marjorie, one of the, ahhh, older ladies from Word Processing over on the floor—she'd been hit somewhere in the back or something, I'm not sure—and she had pulled herself down the hall towards the break room. I don't think she ever even saw what hit her. I really don't. Blood pouring down the back of her blouse and, and some other guy, this salesman who . . . he stops in about once a *month*—Yeah! How's that for luck?—with most of his face blown off. He had to've gotten shot right up front, early on because those guys hardly even check in with reception and they're out the door—how he got here, down so far toward the rear exits, I dunno . . . I don't think he could've run back, not with his face like that, but you really would be amazed what the human body is capable of when the adrenaline kicks in and your will to live takes over. So I guess he might've just took off running once he got hit. Anyway, he was dead, too. (*Beat.*) And then I saw him. The gunman. He turned this corner about fifty yards down the hall from me and looked both ways. That's when I—and I don't know why, I really don't, but I—that's when I snapped the photograph. Of him. Right then. I guess the flash was—he spotted me

down on the floor there and fired off a few rounds. That's how I got this . . . (*Points to his leg.*) One of those bullets kicked up off the linoleum and grazed my leg—it's alright now, they treated me right afterwards, but that's how it happened. Even though I was hit I got up and ran off, down this short passage to the other side of the room. I could hear his boots—he was wearing some sort of outfit when they found him, right? And I could hear that, the heavy sound of his boots on the floor. As he's running toward me. I was frantic now, thinking as I'm going, "He's seen me! He's seen me!!" And not knowing what to do. I can hear—it's almost, like, surrealistic by this time—helicopters outside and that sound of the police talking over their big—not megaphones, not those, cheerleaders use those . . . but bullhorns. Yeah. Those. You guys're outside the place and I can see the smoke rising up from tear gas—the color it's making with the light as it comes in the windows on that side of the office, it's almost beautiful—and now is the time I find myself the most scared. In those, ohh, probably only two or three minutes before I'm found, see, because this is the bit where you so want to live—You are close! You can make it!—but this guy is coming now. He knows the authorities are on the way in and he's spotted me as another guy he can kill before it's over. I can hear the shouting of the officers as they're pouring into the room, their shadows dancing off the . . . but now I can see that I've got myself backed into a corner. After that moment when I got hit—when he took a shot at me—I got myself turned around and headed east instead of west—the exit is on the opposite side of the room! There's nothing but the water cooler and this . . . soft-seating area over in that corner of the building and it's where

I've crawled to. I bump into a love seat and I immediately realize what I've done. I realize it and I burst out crying right there. How could I be so *stupid*?! Huh? Oh-Dear-God. (Beat.) And then there's this—and this is the part your people didn't want to hear from me earlier but I need to say it . . . because it's how it went and if you want my statement then you'll listen to me and you will write it down. Alright? (Waits.) Fine. I was there, down on my hands and knees and I know this guy is gonna come around the corner any second and I am gonna be the last sonofabitch he kills before they bring him down, I just know it! I saw his face earlier and he's one of . . . I recognize him from the recruits that were sandwiched in late last year—he's one of our own employees, a customer service rep who sits about ten feet from my office, chatting on a headset all day to very irate customers. And I am sure that it's a shitty job and I'd hate it, too, but it is not something that would make me break with reality and go off on some shooting spree! It's not, no, but I just can't process any of that right then, I'm aware that I recognize the guy and I can feel him as he's coming around—and then it happens. I'm about to get back on my feet, make a run down the hallway back toward where I hear the police when this voice—and I am *not* talking about in my head, no, this is not *in* my head or some other employee or me being *disoriented* by the smoke and the panic and anything of that nature—I stop and hear a voice call out to me. Using my name, and it says to me, "Remain here and you will be safe, John. Stay where you are and you shall be saved." (Beat.) Yes. Now, you can make fun of me all you want—and I heard the word "shall" like I hear you now, so say what you want. I heard this and it was spoken directly

to me. John Smith. And so that's what I did. I stayed there, I closed my eyes and I stayed down on my knees. And it's all I remember until I was . . . sitting next to an ambulance talking to you guys and having my ankle looked at. Yes. That is it. That's the truth as I'm aware of it. Alright?

The MAN stops for a moment—he hasn't taken a breath for a bit. His shoulders rise and fall a few times. He looks around. Waiting. Looks up when he's asked a question:

MAN No. I . . . I have no idea about any of that. How it happened. Yeah, I know . . . yes. I get that. But I didn't see it go down and wasn't aware of . . . no. You found me there, still on my knees and the guy was dead—what was his name? Juan or . . . something like that. I barely knew him. I think his name's "Juan." A guy who had been laid off. (Beat.) . . . listen, I don't *care* if he was lying there in front of me—I don't give a damn if that's—I didn't kill him! Don't you think I'd tell you if I'd done something like that? Heroic. I'm not a . . . I took his picture, that's all I was able to . . . *that's* what I did. That one picture. But I'm no hero . . .

The MAN looks around but there is no response in return. He continues.

MAN I'm telling the truth here. I was on my knees . . . down there on my knees and I'm praying and there comes a voice, this beautiful, deep, clear voice that tells me what I told you and so I did what it commanded. And here you see me, before you and alive. I know what I heard. And what I didn't.

This is a miracle—I know that is old-fashioned and people don't like to hear that stuff anymore but you call it what you want. It was not SWAT that brought me here . . . it was not my own ingenuity, I'm not some Bruce Willis who saved the day—my Heavenly Father stepped in like one of those, you know . . . like a story from the Bible where men were once placed in ovens or inside of caverns with lions about, like a page from Exodus or—I was saved! I was seen as, as worthy and forgiven and that is how I sit before you today. Believe me or don't. Make me some figure of ridicule if you wish. The truth is here, right *here* in front of you. God saved me. He did. For some reason on that particular day he reached a hand down and he saved me. (Beat.) No. Actually, *no*, he did more than that—no one else survived, not *one* other person made it out and that is—it was *me* who was chosen. I don't say it with *pride* but as a simple fact . . . God chose only me. Only *me*. Jonathan Smith. (Beat.) I alone was *spared*.

The MAN puts his head down. Glances up at that light again.

MAN Could you . . . ? Nothing. No. It's alright. (Beat.) I'd like to rest now. If that's . . .

He lowers his head into his hands. Rubs his eyes. Stays with his face covered.

A burst of intense light carries us on to:

An office. JOHN sitting with a LAWYER—in his fifties—at a table. He is sorting through papers and pictures. He slows down to study one as he finishes a glass of water.

LAWYER . . . oh. Jesus. That's . . . / Oh.

JOHN I know. / Yes.

LAWYER That's . . . really . . . *shit*.

JOHN Yeah. I know.

LAWYER . . . ahhh. Huh. (Looks closer.) That is a pretty clear shot of—wait, what is that? She's on the . . . *what* is that?

JOHN It's from an angle. See? (Turns picture.) There.

LAWYER Oh, right, I see, that's her . . . (Looks.) I still don't know what that is.

JOHN That?

LAWYER Yeah. Right *there*. Is that her . . . *tit*?

JOHN Her breast. Yes. (Points.) It's on the—they're not connected.

LAWYER Oh! So that's . . . I get it. That's her . . . it isn't on her torso. It's over in a separate sort of . . . huh. / A little pile. It got literally . . . *blown* off. Right? I mean, like . . . boom!

JOHN Right. / That's right.

The LAWYER looks up at JOHN for a moment—studies him. Silence. He goes back to the stack. Holds another up.

LAWYER Damn! (Another photo.) Who's this? Is . . . ?

He holds up a photo—almost a portrait—of a beautiful young girl. JOHN reacts, reaching out for it.

JOHN Sorry, no, that's—(*Explains.*) That one's my daughter.

Chrissy. At a school play.

LAWYER I see. (*Beat.*) She wasn't . . . at the . . . ?

JOHN No! God, no . . . no, I just printed all of the, you know . . . everything I could pull off the phone there. The whole file. I only took the one picture during the . . .

LAWYER Got it. Alright. Wheeew!!

The LAWYER sets this photo aside and shuffles through the rest. He finally goes back to the first photo.

LAWYER Is that him? This guy?

JOHN Ummmm . . . yeah. He's—that's the gunman. Right there.

LAWYER God! Look at his eyes! The way the sun just caught his . . . wow!! Whole thing's just...creepy. (*Looking at John.*) I can't even *imagine* how you're . . . very brave stuff. What you did.

JOHN . . . Thank you.

LAWYER It's really just . . . well, shocking. When you think about it. And you were *right* in the . . . shit! It's frightening.

JOHN Yes. (*Beat.*) But I had the Lord on my side during it all.

LAWYER Right.

JOHN He came into my heart during all of this and so I can . . . / I'm free to . . . be . . .

LAWYER Yeah, about that. / Listen. John. We need to talk about this. *Now.*

JOHN Alright.

LAWYER You can't just . . . look, I know you've been through a lot—the whole psychological . . . how's that going, by the way?

JOHN . . . it's fine. *I'm* fine, I just need to . . .

LAWYER They did get you a therapist, right? Someone for you to . . . ? / Great.

JOHN . . . yes, but . . . / I'm not sure he's . . .

LAWYER That's good, no, that's terrific but you need to . . . / You really should be . . .

JOHN . . . I'm not *certain* that I can . . . / I'm . . .

LAWYER John! *Stop.* We're talking over each other here and I need you to . . . wait. Hear what I have to say first. (*Sighs.*) You cannot keep doing this. Going around with the, ummmm, "conversion" story, okay? You can't.

JOHN . . . but . . .

LAWYER No. You cannot. / John . . .

JOHN Yes, I can. / Because it's true.

LAWYER Know what? That's the kind of thing that could put me out of a job. The "truth" . . . (*Smiles.*) I'm not saying it didn't happen.

JOHN Good, because . . .

LAWYER I'm not gonna argue religion with you at this particular moment, alright? / And I'm someone who loves to argue . . .

JOHN That's fine, but . . . / I'll bet!

LAWYER Seriously, I do. (*Beat.*) When I was a kid, I'd take the side that nobody else wanted and I mean about anything! My mom . . . woman hated me, and I don't mean in the "Ohhhh, that boy of mine" way—I'm saying it was actual hatred. / Outright.

JOHN No. / That's not . . .

LAWYER You know her?

JOHN Of course not.

LAWYER So then please don't tell me about my mom if you don't mind—she couldn't wait for me to graduate, to get outta the house. I bet we haven't talked more than a *dozen* times or so since I was eighteen. I am now fifty-three. (*Beat.*) Bitch is alive and well down in Arizona, I pay for everything—amazing how “guilt” works!—and yet it's all done by my business guy and cashier's checks and whatnot. / It is what it is.

JOHN Jeez. / That's horrible.

LAWYER That's life. That's my life and I would not trade it with anybody—you think I envy *you*? Huh? You could be dead now . . .

JOHN That's true. But I'm not.

LAWYER Exactly! You're not, and that's your life that you're living at this moment. You've lived through the most . . . I mean, what're they saying on the TV? It's one if not *the* worst office shooting in history. In American *history* and you were right there in the middle of it! Taking a *picture*! It blows my mind, it really does.

JOHN I know. (*Nods.*) Listen, I'm aware of just how blessed I am—people think it's luck but it's not, that's what I need to make clear to everyone—that's why I'm . . .

LAWYER No. Don't say it. Not the “God” thing.

The LAWYER gets up and crosses to pour himself a glass of water. Offers to JOHN, who declines.

JOHN No thank you.

LAWYER Sure? (*Waits.*) Six glasses a day of this crap, my doctor insists.

JOHN I've heard that. It's supposed to . . .

LAWYER Yeah, for ladies who want to look twenty again!

For people who go to “Curves” and buy into that “Weight Watchers” bullshit. Not some old guy like me who just wants to work and eat and take a nice, gracious dump a few times a week. I need to drink water like I'm some refugee kid in *Asia*? (*Shakes his head.*) I don't think so! Hell, I don't even like *kids*, but hey . . .

JOHN . . . I don't know . . .

LAWYER Exactly! Nobody knows anything—not that it stops this guy from speaking his mind, and *me* paying the jerk for the pleasure. Ahh, well. (*Drains the glass.*) That's two.

He puts the glass down and turns back to JOHN. Lays his hands on top of JOHN's shoulders.

LAWYER You need to listen to me now, and then I will shut up. / I promise.

JOHN Alright. / Okay.

LAWYER You like religion? You think you've heard the voice of God? Fine. You keep this up: people-will-crucify-you. There, that's a religious word for you and I'm not even speaking metaphorically. This *cannot* be the way you go about discussing the . . .

JOHN No, I have to . . . *no*. God told me to . . .

LAWYER Stop! It's my turn to talk, remember? So you listen. You hired me, you bring all this . . . *stuff* . . . to me, ask my opinion . . . *pay* me to give you my learned . . . so hear me out. (*Picks up the photo.*) John. John Smith. How much do you make a year?

JOHN What're you . . . ?/ That's not your . . .

LAWYER Your salary. / What is it? (*Beat.*) I'm your *lawyer*, John, I'm not going to judge you.

JOHN I'm . . . it's roughly \$100,000 annually. / And there are bonuses, too, if I'm . . .

LAWYER Okay, that's . . . / Listen, that's fine. One-hundred thou. Very respectable. And you probably have a 401K and some . . . whatever. You're tucking a little bit away for the future. You've gotta be, what? How old? Hmmm?

JOHN I'm forty-five. (*Beat.*) My hair is . . . it's all . . .

LAWYER Forty-five years old. Right? (*Holds up the photo.*) This picture you took—a photo that you got on your cell during what is now being regularly described as a “massacre . . . ”

JOHN Yes?

LAWYER Consider it El Dorado. Or Fort Knox. A leisurely dip in the goddamn fountain of youth. (*Beat.*) I can get you three million for it. Today. Probably more.

JOHN For that picture?

LAWYER For this very snapshot. *People* magazine or the *Enquirer*—*The New York Times*, even . . . you think they're above this? No way in hell they are! You see any of the London bombing photos a few years back? This is a *hundred* times better! You got *bodies*. Better yet, you've got *body parts*! (*Beat.*) Whomever you give this to as an exclusive, with your story—and I'm not even figuring international rights into that—you're about to become a goddamn phenomenon.

JOHN I see. (*Beat.*) That's not why I came to you . . . / Not for any . . . sort of . . .

JOHN doesn't know what to say. His LAWYER nods at this.

LAWYER John, I even believe that. I do. / But the fact remains . . .

JOHN It's the truth. I was *told* to . . . by . . .

LAWYER See there? Right there. / That.

JOHN What? / *What?*

LAWYER The “voice” shit again and you're—that stops now or you're fucked. I don't like to use that kind of language when I'm in the office but you need to hear it. Okay? There's one way for you to bring this all down like a house of goddamn cards! (*Beat.*) You keep on with the “God spoke to me” crap and you *might* get a couple bucks from Pat Robertson and a seat on the *700 Club* for a few weeks. / Am I making myself clear here?

JOHN I see. / Yes.

LAWYER It's cynical, I know. And yet there it is. The truth.

JOHN If that's . . . I'm not sure that I can . . .

LAWYER John, I'm just here to assess all this and to give you my advice. You're paying for me to do that. I can do nothing less.

He stands, pours himself another glass of water. Drinks.

LAWYER Ugh. God. (*Shivers.*) That's three.

JOHN I understand that you're just giving me a glimpse of what you . . . feel is . . .

LAWYER No, John, in this case I'm giving you the facts. There's only *one* here, in fact, and I'm here to give it to you. “Fact.”

JOHN I don't understand.

LAWYER You're sitting on top of a diamond mine. That little SIM card of yours is a mint—but you cannot keep talking about God! So you're gonna have to choose.

JOHN That's . . . no, I won't go against what I've been commanded to do. / I can't! The very fact that I'm . . . the whole *purpose* of my escaping there was to, you know . . . to . . .

LAWYER John . . . / *Please* hear what I'm . . .

JOHN No. Give it away—I didn't shoot it for money. It wasn't a calculated . . . this was a record. My *testament* . . . I thought I was going to *die* and I'm not going to . . . no! That's my answer. Do as you see fit—if they pay you then give most of it away to charity. Half.

LAWYER Yeah? And the other half? Because people will be . . . you know. Curious.

JOHN My wife. Or . . . you know. Ex-wife. I should leave a portion for her, although I need to speak with her, too. There's still a few things that we're . . . and my daughter. That's . . . any that would go to *me* I would like to give away. / At some point . . .

LAWYER I can do that. / Fine. You think about it.

JOHN And you'll tell them the story?

LAWYER If you make me. At gunpoint. / *Joking* . . .

JOHN Please. / That's not very . . . funny . . .

LAWYER Then "yes," I will. I can't promise you what we'll get for it—I *can* promise you it's gonna be a lot less with the Jesus bit left in.

JOHN It wasn't Jesus. / I don't *think* it was . . .

LAWYER Save it. / I'm not interested in the—I'll see what I

can do. (*Picks up the picture again.*) So that's the *guy*. The shooter.

JOHN Who? Oh. Yes. That's him.

LAWYER With the . . . ?

JOHN Lemme see . . . yes. (*Pointing.*) Right there. You can see that he's . . . with his mouth open and he's . . .

LAWYER Smiling. Shit! He was right . . . *you* took that of him? / While he was, I mean . . . ?

JOHN Yes. / I just snapped it.

LAWYER What're you, like, Robert Capa?

JOHN I don't know who that is . . .

LAWYER He was a guy who used to take war—that's not important. What he did was dangerous.

JOHN Oh.

LAWYER *How* the fuck did you get that?

JOHN He was turned slightly. He didn't see me.

LAWYER And you . . . ? / I mean this is worth, probably . . . *lots*. Wow. Goddamn.

JOHN Yes. / Please don't keep . . . the profanity.

LAWYER Sorry. (*Looks at photo.*) People are gonna *freak* when they see this—and some might even hate you for it, so . . . be prepared.

JOHN Yeah. I suppose so.

LAWYER And the cops are . . . what? I mean . . .

JOHN They confiscated my phone for evidence but the photo is mine. They kept one for their records. / But they can't stop me showing it or . . . you know . . .

LAWYER Fine. / Good. Nice. (*Looks again.*) What is he, some, Mexican or something? / Didn't I read he was a Mexican guy, or . . . ?

JOHN I'm not sure. / I don't . . . *Honduran*, maybe. I think it's Honduras . . . or, or . . .

LAWYER Whatever. He's from someplace else—our Mr. *Diaz*. It's a good angle. Fine. / We can use that. The “foreign” element.

JOHN What is? / Oh. (*Beat.*) How?

LAWYER He's not one of us—it's a nice selling point. (*Smiles.*) John! Try and be happy! Relax, go get a *massage*, for Christ's sake. Somebody's about to become very, very rich. . .

The LAWYER pats JOHN heavily on the shoulder and heads back to the water. Pours another glass. Downs it.

LAWYER . . . shit. (*Makes a face.*) That's four.

A burst of intense light carries us on to:

A forest. Out near the water. Sound of a summer day that might lull you to sleep. Perfect.

JOHN carries a basket and a blanket, with a lovely woman on his arm. Ex-wife, in fact—GINGER SMITH. Almost his age. She has her eyes covered by a scarf and is being guided along by her former spouse.

JOHN . . . follow me.

GINGER This is silly . . .

JOHN Just a bit farther.

GINGER John, really, come on. The ground is—I can still walk! I'm not *that* old . . .

JOHN Ginger, please, it's fun! Lemme help you, okay? / Step over the . . .

GINGER . . . John . . . / You're making it harder . . .

JOHN Come on . . . / We're almost there.

GINGER For heaven's sake. / Good.

JOHN Another ten yards or so . . . just . . .

GINGER This is a great way to twist an ankle, you know.

JOHN I won't let you.

GINGER I'm serious, and then I'm . . . I've got my cycling class tomorrow and I don't wanna be all . . .

JOHN We're here. This is it.

GINGER Good. (*Points.*) Lemme take it off, then.

JOHN I'll help, it's twisted . . . no, here . . .

GINGER I'm . . . *don't* . . . my hair's getting all . . .

GINGER stops speaking when the blindfold is removed. She is a little dumbfounded, staring out at the landscape.

JOHN Well?

GINGER Ummm . . . huh. / Wow.

JOHN Isn't it great? / Right?

GINGER I'm . . . yeah, it is. It's, you know . . . nostalgic or whatever. I guess.

JOHN Gee, *thanks*. (Beat.) I thought it'd mean something. Does to me.

GINGER It's . . . I don't get it. John?

JOHN I brought you here. To this . . . *our* spot.

GINGER Yes. You did. Our spot from twenty years ago. (Beat.) Soooo?

JOHN Doesn't it do anything for you? I mean . . .

GINGER Sure, yeah. I'm . . . (Beat.) Is this part of your therapy or something? Because . . .

JOHN No, of course not! No . . . (Laughs.) It's nothing like that, I just thought we'd have a, you know, a moment together. Us. Away from Chrissy or lawyers or . . . that sort of thing. Like when we first got married. Here and alone and in love . . . that it might stir up something. Some *memories*. (Beat.) Is that crazy?

GINGER No, no, not really, it's just . . . it's a bit unexpected, that's all.

She studies him for a moment. Carefully. He looks away.

GINGER . . . the hair is . . . wow. / It's amazing.

JOHN I know. / It was literally overnight. I'm in the hospital, I go to sleep, and pow!

GINGER Ha! (Beat.) My God. And completely *white*? That's not you doing any . . . ?

JOHN Course not, no! Why would I? (Beat.) No.

JOHN is carrying a large bag with stuff in it. He moves to arrange things and after a beat GINGER joins him, in the groove of it. JOHN puts his coat down for her.

JOHN Gorgeous day, huh?

GINGER Uh-huh . . .

JOHN Beautiful! Look at those clouds . . .

GINGER Yeah, they're . . . yep. *Cloudy*.

JOHN No, not cloudy, but—I mean, I'm not contradicting you, but—they're . . .

GINGER I know . . . it's okay . . .

JOHN Call it "cloudy" if you want to, but it's just . . . I think it's gorgeous out here.

A smile from JOHN. GINGER tries to join in—a moment is shared between them. Not much of one, but it's something.

JOHN So. "Here we are." (Grins.) I just . . . I think you'll like the food I got. Some nice sandwiches and stuff. Salads.

GINGER Great . . .

JOHN That one tuna that you love, with those, ahh, what-do-you-call-'ems? / You know . . .

GINGER What? / Oh, yeah, scallions. I like that. (Beat.) You went to that little . . . ? Over by my cousin's? / By Jesse's apartment.

JOHN Uh-huh. / Yes. That deli over on 23rd. Not the Jewish place, the high-end one . . .

GINGER Nice. *Expensive.* (Beat.) And way too much! Why'd you get so much stuff? This is . . .

JOHN Hey, only the best for us, right? / It's a new leaf for me—being more carefree.

GINGER I guess. / I ordered pizza for Chrissy, so I'll try not to feel, like, you know, too *gluttonous* here or anything . . .

JOHN Right! Nah, she'll be fine. / What?

GINGER *starts to open a plastic container, then stops.*

GINGER 'Spose so. / John, we need to, I mean, I wanna . . . talk. This is, like . . . it's time. I know you're still recovering, but . . .

JOHN Alright . . . / What do you mean?

GINGER I'm just . . . what's up?/ You're . . . come on. *This.* All this you're doing here. It's . . . I saw you on the news and you were so . . . what's the point of it? I mean . . .

JOHN It's . . . nothing. I'm spreading the word.

GINGER John. (Beat.) *John* . . .

JOHN . . . Ginger . . .

GINGER What? I'll eat your food, I promise . . . we'll have our little "moment" and everything here, we will, but you need to tell me. You *have* to. John, what's up with you lately? / Come on . . .

JOHN Nothing. / I don't know what you mean . . .

GINGER Listen . . . if you're still feeling . . . I'm just saying that I'd understand.

JOHN No, come on, I don't wanna turn this into one of our big *discussion* times. I don't.

GINGER No, I wasn't. / I was not gonna do that.

JOHN Yes, uh-huh . . . / Yes you were . . .

GINGER No, John, I just want to . . . you're . . .

JOHN I want this to be about us right now, okay? Can it just be that? A minute out in the country with my wife . . . away from the . . . stuff! My God, I have people camped at my door, every day, *photographers* and . . .

GINGER "Ex." / "Ex"-wife.

JOHN What? / Okay, right. Yes. Sure. *Whatever.* With my "ex" for a bit . . . away from the legal questions and family therapies, nights out with our daughter so she feels involved and loved. Look, I'm just trying to do something for you and me. Okay? The original *couple* in all this, you know? I mean . . . hell . . .

GINGER I get that, I see it now, and that's nice of you . . . it is. John, I was just asking a question, putting it out there, because you seem different to me. Acting a bit differently, so I said something . . . if that's not the case, then I'm sorry. (Beat.) I know that you've got people *hounding* you all the time now, so I'm. . .

JOHN . . . it's alright . . .

GINGER We can do the tuna thing and talk later.

JOHN But that's just it! I don't wanna "talk later" about stuff—the Jarlsberg wasn't supposed to *lead* to anything . . . it's a meal, that's all. A *picnic*. Simple as that . . .

GINGER . . . then fine.

JOHN Well, that's the death of it right there. "Then fine."

GINGER It is what it is, John.

JOHN Yeah, great.

GINGER Exactly. (Beat.) Did you bring any drinks?

JOHN I have water and some kind of fruity something. It's supposed to be healthy. (He holds up both.) Which?

GINGER Doesn't matter. / You pick.

JOHN Right . . . / *(To himself.)* What a disaster.

GINGER If it is you're helping to create it. I just asked a simple question . . .

JOHN No, uh-uh, I'm not gonna accept that. Not *that*. I'm the one that went out at seven this morning to gather up all this crap. Go over to Walmart even and buy a *plaid* blanket so it'd all be perfect, so don't tell me that I've turned this into some kind of . . . travesty . . . here because if anybody's killing the thing it's you. Like always, it's *you*. With all your . . . *talk*. *(Grabs a drink.)* Here.

GINGER . . . thanks. *(Drinks.)* It's nice. Fizzy.

JOHN Good. It's got pear in it, I think, and other various . . . some berries, maybe.

GINGER Ahhh.

JOHN I don't—that's not why I dragged you out here, to continue the battle on some new territory, I really did wanna try . . . something. Try again or whatnot. *(Beat.)* This is me reaching out to you here, so I'm . . .

GINGER Yeah?

JOHN I am, yes.

GINGER Then thank you. I appreciate that.

JOHN Well, it's worth it to me. Obviously. And it would take a *lot*, after all the crap we've—that *I've* done—but I'm trying.

GINGER No, yeah, I can see that . . . that you're making an effort. *(Smiles.)* You usually hate *plaid*, so that must've been hard!

JOHN Ha-ha. *(Grins.)* Very funny . . .

GINGER I do get it, John. The "gesture" part of it, I'm saying. Thanks for trying . . .

JOHN My pleasure. I guess . . .

GINGER Uh-huh. *(Beat.)* And so you're not gonna answer me, then, right?

JOHN About . . . ?

GINGER You. The "what's up?" part of you.

JOHN I'm . . . I don't get it. Why do you always have to do *this*?! Huh?

GINGER Just because . . .

JOHN Yeah, that really helps. Thanks. "Just because." *(Beat.)* Why do you have to . . . *question* everything? Huh? It's not . . . I'm . . .

GINGER John . . . the whole thing I've been dealing with for years now, the "you" that gets tossed at Chrissy and me has changed in the last month or so, and frankly it unnerves me. Both of us, actually . . . *(Beat.)* There, now, how was that? Thirty seconds or so and I've said all I needed to, for me *and* her.

JOHN That's terrific.

GINGER You can say something back if you wanna.

JOHN . . . *please* . . .

GINGER I'm serious! Disagree or, or, you know . . . argue. Swear at me. I'm used to all that. But this guy . . . Mr. Happiness . . . he's . . .

JOHN Have I been *that* scary a person before? I mean, really? I'm just . . .

GINGER Sometimes, yeah. You were. *(Beat.)* I will admit that since the . . . you know . . . since what happened you've been different. *But*. You want the truth, there it is. Yes.

JOHN . . . I don't know what to say now.

GINGER There's nothing that goes with it, it's just a fact. You

made me nervous. . . . as a man, as a husband. A father, even. I never felt like I could trust you . . . because of what might come out of your mouth or how you were gonna handle some situation. Physically, emotionally, all that . . . you'd suck the air out of a room when you entered it. You lied all the time, continually. As if it was oxygen. I have other doubts, too, about you and, and . . . but we don't have to go there . . . no sense now. (*Beat.*) Do I really need to go on? I've said all of it before, in other ways, so it's just a repeat . . .

JOHN Right. (*Beat.*) And? I mean . . .

GINGER . . . and now *this*! This other guy who takes me out with a blindfold on into the woods and is helping me over *logs* and putting a coat down for me to sit on! Now, who the *hell* is that guy? Don't you figure I'd be a little, you know . . . curious? And I don't know *him*, either, if I can trust him, if this is just some act, or if it's . . . what?

JOHN It's not! It's just . . . me. The "new" me, I mean.

Someone I discovered in all the—I dunno, whatever. In whatever happened.

GINGER . . . listen to yourself . . .

JOHN I can't explain it! I'm . . . it's . . . imagine a light that's been . . . some switch that . . . no, that's not it, not a switch, but a . . . this moment of truth. A second that comes to you with glaring lights and, and . . . it sounds crazy, I know . . . but it happened.

GINGER What?

JOHN I dunno! I've had a . . . something. A thing. I've already told you. (*Beat.*) I'm a "new" man now, and I'm . . . I'm just . . .

GINGER Okay. (*Points.*) Can I have the carrot sticks there . . . ?

JOHN Sure. It's called "crudite" or something. On the little sign-thingie, I mean.

GINGER Ohhhh, really? That just means they can charge you an extra five bucks for it . . .

JOHN Probably!

A moment of peace between them. GINGER sips on her drink and tries a carrot.

JOHN It's . . . Ginger, I've changed. Really. I mean it this time . . .

GINGER "Changed" like how? What're you . . . ?

JOHN Just . . . you know. Changed. I'm not, like, a college professor, I don't know all the words for it, but this thing came over me and I'm . . . it's . . . ahh, forget it! I dunno.

GINGER No, I wanna hear this . . . specifically, I mean. What's changed? (*Beat.*) John?

JOHN *Me!* As a person. As a human being I have undergone some . . . it's hard to put it into simple terms.

GINGER Well, try. Seriously. I'm a *simple* gal. Is it inside, in your head, or has it . . . ?

JOHN I feel *lighter*. Not just the . . . light of Christ or anything, but freer . . . I have a testimony now. I'm converted, in a way.

GINGER So you say. I'd like you to explain it.

JOHN I don't know! It was, like . . . this flash and bright *things* or whatever. It was . . . this'll sound just goofy but for a moment I felt as if I'd been lifted up . . . I mean, literally *off* the ground . . . like Saul on the road to *Damascus*, or, or . . . you know?

GINGER Who? / Okay, seriously, you are spooking the shit outta me here, John! What does that even mean? “Saul?”

JOHN Honey, come on! / You’ve heard of him. I’m sure you have . . . Christmas mass and things like that. / We used to go sometimes.

GINGER No./ Yeah, but I wasn’t listening! I used to balance my *checkbook* . . .

JOHN Ging . . .

GINGER I’m serious! And you—John, you’re always dead asleep during that crap. (Beat.) What is all this?! I’m not kidding now.

JOHN Honey, I’ve had a sort of . . . this kind of, I don’t know the name of it! I’ve become enlightened, I guess. That’s what people call it these days . . . “faith” or whatever. I have faith in a higher . . . in God. In the *idea* of a God. Yeah. I now have this . . .

GINGER . . . “faith.” Huh. (Beat.) And . . . Jesus, I don’t even know what to say to you . . . (Thinks.) Not “Jesus,” I suppose. Right?

JOHN Not if you don’t have to, but hey . . . I’m not gonna be a freak about it. Honestly.

GINGER Oh, well, that’s *comforting* . . .

JOHN I’m really not! Promise. (Beat.) This’ll all take time and I’m prepared for that. (Beat.) But I think that we need to have another “go” at it. / Us. As a couple. We should be going through this together, in public. Building up our . . . our . . . whole . . .

GINGER Excuse me? / . . . I’m sorry, I’m not . . .

JOHN That’s what the spirit inside me’s been saying. To me. / Yes. (Beat.) I also feel like I should buy this piece of land and we should maybe . . . build a house here.

GINGER Oh, I see. The spirit inside you . . . / Who?

JOHN Us. As family—so we can all reconnect. On a spiritual level, too, I’m saying.

GINGER What’re you . . . ? You mean *all* of us, like, me and Chrissy? (Beat.) You’re not saying that we should become some . . . are you?

JOHN Of course, but very casually. I know that it’s gonna take some doing. I understand.

GINGER Oh, you do? / Great. That’s really . . .

JOHN Yes. / Absolutely, I do. Sure.

GINGER And that’d make us, what? Some sort of a “Christian” or, I dunno . . . “born again” or what? / I don’t even know what to call you now. What this is that you’re . . .

JOHN Well, you’d both be . . . / It doesn’t have to have a label. Does it? I mean . . .

GINGER It’d help, yeah.

JOHN Okay, fine, I’m sure there’s a . . . some . . .

GINGER Do you even *know*? I mean, really? Or is this just . . . some part of your recovery from the . . . you know . . . from all that . . . ?

JOHN Of course I do! (Smiles.) You’ve waited a long time for me to come around, to be a proper—all the things you’ve wanted from me in this marriage and now here I am a “new” man / I am, though! I’m better.

GINGER Stop saying that. / You keep going on . . .

JOHN I am, Ginger! Honestly. And I’m prepared to try again. For you. Give you the time to change. It’s all about a give-and-take, right? It is. It’s a, a, a balance.

GINGER Right, but John, we’re not even . . . / Yeah?

JOHN So, do it at your own pace! It’s the only way to find peace,

I think . . . / It really is. I found it through love. A complete sense of freedom through absolute love . . .

GINGER Huh. "Love." So that's how you did it?

JOHN Pretty much. I mean . . .

GINGER And, so, this is what . . . you're saying to me—we should try again. As man and wife? That you and I—because that's what I'm sure I heard a few seconds ago, that you want to be together again—to marry me and give this another . . . some sorta . . .

JOHN No, it's . . . I mean, I dunno! I'm trying to listen to God. That's all. / To what he's telling me to do! Why is that so . . . ?

GINGER Oh shit. / You're not honestly gonna keep going out there, I mean, in *public* . . . and saying stuff like that, are you?

JOHN Yes—maybe. I dunno! What would be wrong about it if I did? Huh? / Ginger, stop . . .

GINGER About a million things. / Maybe more.

JOHN We're supposed to be together!! That is what he's told me, in prayer. Yes. That we should be a family and living under a single roof again. He did. (*Beat.*) So.

GINGER . . . amazing . . .

JOHN Yes. That we should use all this money I keep receiving for "good" and that we should . . . that this piece of land is where we need to start over. You and I. (*Beat.*) Ginger, I am not making this up! Why would I? No, I hear a . . . there was this . . . this voice and it . . . it told me . . .

GINGER *stands up and brushes herself off. Gets her purse, rummages through it. She produces a set of car keys.*

GINGER Great. So now you hear voices . . .

JOHN Honey, what're you doing?

GINGER I'm taking the car, John. *I* need to get back to, you know . . . the real world. To Civilization. *Earth.* (*Beat.*) You scare me now—worse than ever before. I wish you were a serial killer. I do. That you'd been found to be living some double life with *girls* chained up in a basement. Or a war criminal—I don't care how many women you'd raped or children or *Jews* that you might've killed . . . any of that shit would be easier to understand than this. And I mean that, as nutty as it sounds. (*Beat.*) God doesn't mean anything to us anymore. He's the boogeyman, that's all. Someone that parents use to scare their children into doing what they want 'em to do. It's the truth, John—it's not comforting, I'm not happy when you say this shit to me . . . when we die, we die. That's it. No Jesus, no heaven. It's bullshit and I knew it at *six*. We do what we do, we make *choices* and we're responsible—you were a shitty husband and now you're sorry. Some man, he put a gun in your face and now you're feeling bad about your life and you wanna change it. Fine. *Do* something. *Change* how you live the rest of it but that doesn't mean God is divine and he spoke to you . . . that is a crock of shit and you know it! In your heart? You *know* that . . . just be a *man* and say so. Go out and spread the Gospel of "I used to be a motherrfucking asshole." Try that. Or ask my forgiveness for how you treated me and we'll be even. (*Beat.*) I don't need money. I do not need all this *crap* you're doing here. No, I don't. An apology would be enough . . .

She finishes and looks at JOHN. He tries to hold her look but it's not easy.

JOHN I'm . . . I didn't expect you to believe me! Not at first. / I didn't! This isn't . . .

GINGER John. / *Don't.*

JOHN But, Ginger, listen, please. Please! This is not some, some, some . . . *game*, it's not. I've been . . . He spoke to me, he did. Over all the others that day . . . God came to me and he . . . he said that I should . . . we need to give this another chance! We *have* to!

During this JOHN gets to his feet and presses in on her, trying to hug her. She fights back, pushing him away.

GINGER No. (*Beat.*) I'm driving Chrissy to soccer at four, so—sit here and stuff your face or you can come with me. Either way is fine. (*Pointing.*) And I would dye it back if I were you—it makes you look old. And tired.

GINGER turns and leaves. JOHN sits alone on the blanket.

JOHN Ginger? Sweetie? (*To himself.*) Oh God . . .

JOHN stands now, looking around. Hoping for GINGER to return.

A burst of intense light carries us on to:

A television studio. Two chairs on a small stage with a shiny set behind them. A coffee table.

JOHN seated next to a chipper female HOST. JOHN, dressed in a shirt and tie, looks relatively uncomfortable.

A set of lights come up and the HOST smiles out toward an unseen audience and cameras.

HOST . . . and hello again! Thank you for coming back to what is shaping up to be, well, a fascinating hour. If you're just about to join us, thanks for stopping in, for those of you who've been with us—I can't imagine that you're not as transfixed by all this as I am. (*Turns.*) Hello there and welcome back, John Smith.

JOHN Thanks. Thank you.

HOST I'm sure all of this must be pretty strange to you . . . / It must be.

JOHN It is. Yes. / It's . . .

HOST Have you ever been on TV before?

JOHN Ummmm, no. Wait. Yes. This one time. My Little League team went to Nationals and I was the, you know . . . our spokesperson.

HOST Really? / That's terrific.

JOHN It's true. I was the pitcher, so . . . / Yep. They had me do most of the talking.

HOST Wonderful! (*Smiles.*) But never like this, never the subject of an interview, or the topic of an investigative piece . . . ?

JOHN Oh, no. Of course not. / Never.

HOST I see. / And yet here you are . . .

JOHN Yeah, well—you know what happened. We've talked about it. / *A lot!*

HOST Absolutely we have. / Yes. And calls.

JOHN Yep. That, too.

HOST Are you comfortable yet? Speaking about it all, I mean . . . the . . .

JOHN Not really. / I dunno. It's . . .

HOST Of course. How could you be? / And yet . . . people have a fascination—some might say a “morbid” fascination—with this kind of thing. / *Catastrophe.*

JOHN That's true. / *Uh-huh.*

HOST With death and gunfire and heartbreak.

JOHN I suppose. (*Beat.*) Do you think?

HOST Absolutely. In *this* country? Oh yes.

JJOHN Yeah, probably so.

HOST Oh, John, I know so. I *know* it! (*Smiles.*) I've been doing this for a few years now and I can promise you one thing: for some reason, people eat this up. It's a sickness, but it's a national sickness so we all feel pretty okay about it . . . (*Beat.*) We are drawn to the horrible and miserable, we *thrive* on the despair of others . . . It's like a drug but it doesn't cost a dime.

JOHN Huh. Not me.

HOST Excuse me?

JOHN I said “not me.” I've never been one to, you know . . . whatever. Read that stuff. To watch it on the television.

HOST No?

JOHN Not really. My wife used to, but she's . . .

HOST What? Your wife is . . . ?

JOHN I don't know anymore. She's not my, you know. We're not married so I don't know what she watches . . .

HOST I see. I'm sorry. / Right.

JOHN It's whatever. I made a lot of mistakes but I'd rather not . . . / It happens.

HOST It does, absolutely it does—and more and more often these days.

JJOHN That's what they say.

HOST I've said it myself. Right from this very seat! / It's true. Over fifty percent of marriages in this country fail. It's a fact and a shame, isn't it? Yes . . .

JOHN I'm sure you have. / That is a shame. *Fifty percent.*

HOST Over. (*Beat.*) But people also appreciate the positive. The *amazing*. Miracles . . . (*Beat.*) John, we've talked about that day, about the photo, even a bit about your life after the events of that shocking Thursday—but another thing happened to you that day, didn't it? Something else.

JOHN Yes. (*Beat.*) I was . . . yes. It did.

HOST Yes. Something that has come to define you as a person now—as a man, a father, a person of business.

JOHN I'm . . . I was . . .

HOST You were touched, weren't you? By a kind of . . . what? / A light and a voice . . . ? Was there something in that room with you . . . ?

JOHN This . . . it was a sort of . . . / yes . . .

HOST I don't want to put words in your mouth, but . . . (*Shuffles cards.*) It says here . . .

JOHN No, that's close to what . . . it was . . .

HOST . . . by the hand of God, you once described it as . . . this happened to you on that day, in the middle of what is now

seen as the blackest day in the history of domestic violence as related to an office setting. *Thirty-seven people dead. And you alone, unscathed.*

JOHN Well . . . my ankle was scraped but . . . yeah.

HOST And you have become, for better or worse, a man of God. Of faith. Is that right?

JOHN I have, yes.

HOST But not after the fact. Not months later when you were safely at home or anything like that, right?

JOHN No, it was during. / Right.

HOST *During the shooting. / The carnage. (Beat.)* You fell to your knees—I have your own description of it from an official police transcript—you were “on my knees when it happened and I was blinded by a vision of light.” (*Stops reading.*) Is that correct? God *lifted* you up and filled you with the spirit of, of his—am I *right* about this?

JOHN You are, yes. (*Beat.*) I don’t know why you’re smiling . . .

HOST Because we’re on TV, John. So, what kind of light was it? / Yes? Go on.

JOHN It was like . . . / I dunno, I mean, it . . . was so . . . bright. I couldn’t . . .

HOST And so this is me, Jenny Claflin, and I am being devil’s advocate here: could it not have been something other than God? I mean, isn’t it possible? / Helicopters?

JOHN No, I mean, it was . . . / How do you mean?

HOST The light. A spotlight. Or even the sun, maybe.

JOHN It was . . . no, there was this . . . I mean, I don’t know how to describe it, but . . . no. And why would spotlights . . . if the sun . . . ?

HOST Follow me here, because I wanna believe you, John. I do. I want nothing more. To believe. It’s sexy. But it’s also hard to do. Isn’t it? Today. It’s a tough age to believe in anything, and, well, if it’s something about God, then, it is almost impossible. We’ve all become so cynical and troubled and, and unwell. *And* we hate it when somebody else has the answers . . . when and if they’re doing okay. We hate it! So then there’s that. We want to believe but we don’t want to believe *you*—“you” being anyone we know, not just you, John. No offense. (*Beat.*) I wonder why that is. (*Remember to look at the audience . . .*)

JOHN Probably because . . . you know . . . it’s . . .

HOST What, John? Tell us.

JOHN Because it . . . it’s a new, I mean . . . this doesn’t happen every day. To people. So it’s, I dunno, hard to swallow, I guess. When some guy like me—this nobody—comes along and says, “Hey, God spoke to me.” (*Beat.*) I don’t know if I’d believe in it, either, if I heard it on the news. But it did happen. And it’s true. So. (*Beat.*) It is not something you’d ask for, believe me! I’m finding it very . . . it’s *rough* . . . I’ve had to move into a different home, I’m constantly being followed, *touched*. People seem to, I dunno, want a piece of me, as if I can . . . but I’m not that guy, not Jesus or . . . I’m just a man who was . . . I was given this message . . . and I have to get it out . . . so the world can . . . yeah.

HOST Interesting. Hmmm. (*Beat.*) Again, devil’s advocate here. Prove it.

JOHN I’m sorry?

HOST You’ve talked to God. Prove it. *Show me.*

JOHN I don’t know what you’re asking . . .

HOST I'm asking you, here and now, in front of a fairly sizable—
if I don't mind saying—audience, prove that you've really had
an experience of the kind you suggest.

JOHN How?

HOST Exactly! (*Smiles.*) Isn't that fascinating?

JOHN I don't really . . . what is? I'm lost.

HOST You want us to believe you, don't you? I mean, that's that
idea, right John?

JOHN Of course. But not for . . . *me* . . . it's . . .

HOST In the same way that you believe. Because you really
do believe it, don't you? That something happened to you in
there. That day. That this Old Testament idea we have of a
God—the flowing beard, the shining robes, all that—that he
singled you out.

JOHN . . . yes. Of course. (*Beat.*) Why would I be here
otherwise? I mean . . . *why?* I'm . . .

HOST It's alright. I don't want you to have to defend yourself—
all I'm saying is that you're asking us to believe that you had
a convert experience at a moment when people all around
you—good people, men and women with families, many with
very strong Christian backgrounds—these folks were dying.
Being hunted down and shot by a madman, and during that
same moment, a man of no significant religious or moral
background is singled out by God to live and to spread his
glorious word to all of the unenlightened after his rescue.

John? Is that correct?

JOHN That's not exactly . . . / I mean, yes, I was chosen to . . .
but. Yeah. Basically. That's how it happened. (*Beat.*) Yes.

HOST Isn't that true? / Amazing. Honestly.

JOHN Thank you.

HOST It thrills me, a story like yours.

JOHN It's . . .

HOST I'm *thrilled* by the ironies and, and . . . the improbabilities
of it. How nearly impossible it is, that this could ever happen
in this day and age. (*Beat.*) And yet. And yet. It could. It just
might—God *might* still work in mysterious ways. And *that's*
what keeps drawing us back.

JOHN What do you mean?

HOST Just this: it doesn't really matter in the end what
happened to you in there that day, John, because we can't
prove it one way or the other. If we choose to believe you
then we do. If not, we never will. And that, my friends (*turns to*
camera) is the true meaning of faith.

JOHN I'm . . . what're you saying? / No, but . . . I . . .

HOST I'm saying I believe you, John. / I believe in you even
though your story sounds like a bunch of horseshit—I can't
say that so it'll get buzzed out later—but honestly, your story
is incredibly hard to take in any serious way and yet. And yet.
I want to believe you. I *choose* to. It's a little like Pascal's
wager, isn't it?

JOHN I don't know what that means . . .

HOST Plus you've got a nice face, for an older guy. So . . .
(*Beat.*) What's he look like, John?

JOHN Who?

HOST You know. Come on . . .

JOHN I never said I saw him . . . the glow was . . .

HOST Not even for a second or . . . in the light there . . . ?

JOHN No. Not a face. He isn't this . . . / Some . . .

HOST What? / Not what? Tell us . . .

JOHN He's not, like, this *body* or anything, I don't think . . . /

Because I was . . . there was light and everything, a kind of . . . but he wasn't standing there. Not like a person.

HOST How do you know? I mean, if you haven't seen him. / He could be anything, then . . . I mean, if you didn't see him. Maybe he looks like we always see him in picture books. Or Dick Van Dyke. Personally I'm hoping he looks like that—I'd feel much less intimidated if he was more like a Rob Petrie type. Kind of funny, easygoing. Falls over the thing there, in the living room. (To JOHN.) What's it called? The, you know, the footrest-thing . . . they have a name. / Oh, come on! It's . . .

JOHN I dunno. / I'm sorry, I don't know . . .

HOST Doesn't matter. Just funny. (Beat.) So no face on this God of yours, hmmm? He did not manifest himself in any real . . . what? / Tell me. What? As a series of . . .

JOHN No, He was a . . . this sort of . . . / He's not like you or me, obviously . . . he's . . .

HOST You're sure it was a "he?" All sorts of ladies out there—the Gloria Steinems and Germaine Greer types—they'll be all over this in the morning . . .

JOHN Yes. I heard his voice. He was a man.

HOST Fine. Just asking. (Whispers.) You know how we ladies can get! We can be awfully territorial when it comes to power . . .

JOHN I guess. You're just joking with me now, right?

HOST I am, yes. But not making fun. There's a difference. / Good. Just so you do.

JOHN I know./ I do. It's okay.

HOST Thank you. For understanding . . . (Smiles.) John, God spoke to you—reached out and he made contact with you—as I said, I believe it because I want to. Fine. So tell me,

here in front of our audience, what did he say to you? At that moment of doubt and fear? Alarms are going off and it's . . . you have this *killer* still on the loose and you're crouching down . . . (Beat.) What did he say?

JOHN He told me . . . God said to me that I should try to . . . that I needed to be good. / That we should try and be good. To each other.

HOST . . . excuse me? / "Good?"

JOHN Yes. You know, like . . . kind.

HOST That's it? That you should be . . . what?

JOHN No, that we all did. We *all* need to be . . .

HOST We should be, what, good people? / Yeah? Even the Muslims? Because *somebody* needs to have a serious talk with those guys . . . (Beat.) I'm joking!

JOHN Yes. / Or better. Better than we are. That is what he was telling me—he told me to stay where I was, down on my knees . . .

HOST Show me. How it was . . . if you would.

JOHN Hmmm?

HOST Can you . . . ? (Indicates.) Get down and show me how you were. What it was like.

JOHN Here? You mean . . . in front of everybody?

The female HOST nods. JOHN hesitates but then gets out of his chair and drops to the carpet. Gets on his knees.

JOHN Like this—I was down on the floor like this here.

HOST And he spoke to you?