

# Amusing Ourselves To Death

by

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

A man arrested for painting “hope” in large letters across a street is at the center of a story about betrayal, revenge, and love.

## CHARACTERS

- PETER WALDO—50s, has been an insurance salesman forever
- ISAIAH—late 20s/early 30s
- SARAH—50s, PETER’s assistant and perhaps more
- CHIEF HANNAH BARTLETT—65, going on retirement
- HELIOS
- KATHERINE

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## Scene 1

*ISAIAH stands in the woods.*

*On the ground is a well-stuffed well-worn rucksack with a tent and a sleeping bag attached.*

*He kneels down in front of a flat rock. On the rock is a cell phone. In ISAIAH’s hand is a small hammer.*

*He breaks the cellphone, then carefully picks up the pieces and puts them in a burlap bag.*

*Next, he puts a laptop on the stump and smashes that. Puts the pieces in the bag. Perhaps even a tablet. Those pieces go in as well.*

*He shakes the bag, then stands and swings the bag over his head like a dead cat by the tail and lets out a wild whoop—several, in fact, that echo through the woods. They could be wails of mourning.*

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## Scene 2

*The office of PETER WALDO, insurance salesman. SARAH, his assistant, sits on the other side of his desk, appointment book in hand.*

SARAH  
You did hear what I said.

PETER  
No. Yes. I did.

SARAH  
Glad the memory's still working.

SARAH  
So really?

SARAH  
Yes really—

PETER  
Hmm—

SARAH  
There's someone on your land.

PETER  
By the pond?

SARAH  
Those heavenly eleven acres.

PETER  
Who?

SARAH  
Walt.

PETER  
Walt. Walt would be in a position to know.

SARAH  
Park rangers have a way of knowing.

PETER  
Did Walt say anything? Do anything?

SARAH

About “say”—nothing but tell me. About “do”—it’s not his job.

PETER

True—Walt’s job is to tell you, yes. About Walt—

SARAH

Auto’s coming up—and his boat—

PETER

Thought so—

SARAH

You don’t seem worried.

PETER

About Walt? He always pays on time.

SARAH

Come on.

PETER

Should I be? I don’t if I should be. So why be worried about what I don’t know.

SARAH

That’s not a good attitude for an insurance salesman—

PETER

True.

SARAH

—and I’d like to keep my job.

PETER

Though insurance agent of the year, four years running.

SARAH

And year five—

PETER

Year five—is—will be—year five. Not to worry about what you don’t know—not too bad for life in general, don’t you think? At least most days.

Everything all right? SARAH

Yeah. PETER

SARAH  
Because you're sounding grumpy like the bar guys down at the VFW.

PETER  
Nobody can match them, Sarah. No, I feel right as rain, though I have no idea what that saying is supposed to mean.

SARAH  
If you're a thirsty plant—

PETER  
The lament of the dry riverbed. Is the billing done?

*SARAH stands.*

SARAH  
Going out today, just as it has always gone out at the time it is supposed to go out. Are you sure?

PETER  
I think so.

SARAH  
You going to check him out?

PETER  
I suppose I should. Did Walt say who he was? Is?

SARAH  
Walt didn't get that close, just saw someone from the access road. It's your land. You've got building plans for it.

PETER  
What's a day without having your plans?

SARAH  
Grump. I think you should go back to eating yogurt—you had a glow then.

PETER

Just an expensive glass of milk.

SARAH

Just a suggestion. You've got the meeting with the Rotary today and then the Willetts for their new boat.

PETER

Bundle it with the auto, save them a bundle.

SARAH

Let the slogans begin.

PETER

Have never failed us yet.

SARAH

Oh, and by the way—

PETER

What? And why the smirk?

SARAH

Charles Brixton.

PETER

What?

SARAH

So you haven't heard.

PETER

No.

SARAH

I just got news they found Charles Brixton passed away. You know, got it through my telephone grapevine.

PETER

Charles Brixton?

SARAH

Supposedly sitting in his bathrobe at his desk in his mansion at the top of his hill overlooking his town—

PETER

Don't speak ill—

SARAH

Oh, I was done speaking ill of Charles Brixton long time ago—only so many curse words in the dictionary you can apply to a man like him, a family like that, and I just ran out.

PETER

I can understand, Sarah.

SARAH

You should—

PETER

Your father should've gotten treated better—

SARAH

What Charles Brixton tried to do to my father was shrimpcakes compared to you—

PETER

But it didn't work, did it, either way—your father got out from under, and so did I, and here I am—here we are—bundling things together to make people's lives better.

SARAH

If I didn't know you better, I would've sworn that was sarcasm.

PETER

Just skimming along the edge.

*SARAH turns to leave.*

SARAH

Have to say that my grapevine is a lot better than the internet—  
better quality outrage—

*SARAH leaves. PETER muses. He reaches pulls out what looks like a well-thumbed Bible and reads.*

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### Scene 3

*PETER, wearing a classic alpaca coat, tromps across his land and finds ISAIAH seated in front of his tent on a camp stool, roll-up variety. He is writing in a small journal.*

*The burlap bag is on the ground beside him.*

PETER

I own this land, you know.

ISAIAH

You kicking me off it?

PETER

I'm just stating the fact for the record, that's all. What're you doing on it?

ISAIAH

What are you doing owning it? What does that mean, for the record?

PETER

Do you know who I am?

ISAIAH

Will that make a difference? He's deciding.

PETER

You must have your reasons. Do I know you?

ISAIAH

Does anyone know anyone?

PETER

You are full of questions, but not the ones I'm asking you—

ISAIAH

It's what I'm giving you back.

PETER

So you don't answer what I ask—life is still good. Just that if I did know you, I don't recognize you, and so I'm sorry for that. Do you have another one of those stools? These shoes are not made for the woods.

ISAIAH

Should've prepared better.

PETER

Yea, verily, for all times. Do you?

*ISAIAH reaches into the tent and pulls out another camp stool. He goes to unroll it, but PETER indicates that he doesn't have to do that, and so opens it himself and sits.*

PETER

These are pretty nifty. You brought two—interesting.

*PETER unlaces his shoes, loosens them. They muse.*

*ISAIAH reaches down, grabs the burlap bag, and tosses it over to PETER, where it lands with a thump and a rattle.*

ISAIAH

Act of contrition. Mine.

*PETER looks in the bag, nods in appreciation, closes it, sets it on the ground beside him. They muse.*

PETER

Right as rain. Do you know what “right as rain” means? Today I said, to a dear friend of mine, that I was right as rain. I don't believe I am. Right, that is. As rain. Walt, the park ranger, was the one who told me about you. The park borders all the lake over there, except for this parcel.

ISAIAH

So your “parcel” kept the whole thing from being a park for everyone.

PETER

You could put it that way. I keep it open—obviously—contiguous. Post for no hunting but not for trespassing.

ISAIAH

To you that sounds like doing enough.

PETER

It's worked so far.

ISAIAH

So what does my being here make me?



PETER

Who knows what enough is, what is enough. Right as rain—  
maybe that's what you are.

*PETER looks around him.*

PETER

Nice to be out here—I don't get out here enough.

ISAIAH

One thing that makes me is an excuse.

*PETER picks up the burlap bag, shakes it.*

PETER

Why are you so angry?

ISAIAH

Why aren't you?

PETER

You can't know if I am or not, but—

*PETER holds up the bag.*

PETER

You are, so your question to me is just, what, grumpiness—like  
the bar guys down at the VFW.

ISAIAH

I'm nothing like those leftovers.

PETER

You know them?

ISAIAH

Know of them.

PETER

So why are you deflecting my question with a question—a verbal  
en garde of yours, it seems.

ISAIAH

All right, then this: why shouldn't I be angry?

PETER

I heard once that it means you're paying attention—actually, more than once. Is that true? Is that what you're doing—trying to do? Pay attention? By now Walt the park ranger has told Chief of Police Hannah Bartlett—we're progressive, a woman—tough woman—tough—he's told her that you're out here and that I know you're out here. It's not a static situation—things are in motion, no matter how much you cram into the burlap bag.

ISAIAH

I'm going to bury that bag.

PETER

Doesn't make a difference. Change is afoot, change is abroad. Even out here. Speaking of feet—

*PETER re-ties his shoes.*

PETER

Time to herd them back in.

*PETER checks his watch, stands.*

PETER

I have my rounds to keep.

ISAIAH

Are. You. Kicking. Me. Off.

*PETER picks up the stool, re-folds it. He stares at his shoe tips, at ISAIAH, at the burlap bag, at the sky.*

PETER

You have your reasons. You have appeared.

*PETER offers ISAIAH the stool. ISAIAH takes it.*

PETER

I'll talk to Walt. I'll talk to Chief Bartlett. Don't burn the place down. You'll probably get a visit from the chief—don't underestimate her, the way you generally seem to be doing with this entire current situation.

*PETER turns to go, walks a bit, turns back.*

PETER

We should exchange names, now that you're my temporary tenant. You don't have to, but I'll find it out anyway—Walt, Chief Bartlett, they like to know these things and so, in the due course of time, they will come to find out—

ISAIAH

Isaiah.

PETER

That your given name or one assumed—I am referring to the burlap bag.

ISAIAH

It's a given name.

PETER

Clever answer. Just don't be clever with Walt or the Chief—I'm not such a libertarian that I won't stop them from coming on here to take you off if they think it the thing to do.

ISAIAH

Is the shoreline yours?

PETER

And fifty feet into the lake.

ISAIAH

I'm thinking of hygiene.

PETER

Pit privy would be recommended. You have tools?

ISAIAH

I have the means.

PETER

I'll trust you're telling me the truth.

*PETER turns and leaves, throws his words over his shoulder.*

PETER

Anger. Careful. Bury it deep. Glad you've got a second stool. Shows hope.

*PETER leaves. ISAIAH shouts after him.*

ISAIAH  
Bottom of the privy—that deep enough for you?

*No response. Quiet woods. ISAIAH puts the second stool inside the tent, picks up the burlap bag, sets it down by his stool. He gives it a good stomp with his heel, then sits down, picks up the journal, writes.*

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#### **Scene 4**

*At the Rotary lunch. Lunch sounds, garbled voice of a boring speaker. BARTLETT plays with the cutlery.*

BARTLETT  
You sure?

PETER  
I sell insurance, Hannah—I'm not in the "sure" business.

BARTLETT  
Don't be smart.

PETER  
Are you in the "sure" business?

BARTLETT  
Serve and protect.

PETER  
You're being professionally worried for no good reason.

BARTLETT  
I can run him off for trespassing.

PETER  
It's not posted for that.

BARTLETT  
Doesn't have to be posted—you know [that]—

PETER  
Is that what he's doing?

Technically. BARTLETT

Letter of the law— PETER

That's it. BARTLETT

—but, really, Hannah, what does that mean, “technically”? PETER

Did you get something in your chicken that I didn't get? BARTLETT

Same rubber protein— PETER

You have a different kind of rubber in your chicken, then? BARTLETT  
Because you're not making—

I am just saying that he doesn't seem to be a threat to public PETER  
safety.

Until your woods go up, along with the state park, and then the BARTLETT  
new developments along the county road. Should I continue to  
enumerate?

I don't have a good comeback. PETER

Let me at least show my face to him. BARTLETT

I told him you might do that—so you should go ahead and do that. PETER

*PETER makes a sign of the cross.*

I give you my blessing. PETER

BARTLETT

I don't need your blessing.

PETER

I give it to you anyway, free of charge.

BARTLETT

Keep it for someone who wants it. Did he give you a last name?

PETER

Why so grumpy, Hannah?

BARTLETT

Did he give you a last name?

PETER

No, he did not. I don't know if the name he gave is a first name or a last, or even his. Why so grumpy? You're like the guys at the VFW.

BARTLETT

I can't speak about it.

PETER

Even though everyone knows about it—c'mon—have gossip, will travel.

BARTLETT

So. You heard about Charles Brixton?

PETER

From Sarah and her grapevine.

BARTLETT

Sent Figaro up there this morning to check it out—seems like a pure heart failure, no foul play. But King Charles Brixton dies just when—I can't speak about it.

*PETER gives BARTLETT a look that says, "Don't be silly."*

BARTLETT

It's just—"creepy" is the only word—Brixton kicks off and we get a man who paints the word "hope" in big swooshy letters across Oak Street, we take him in, he calls himself "Helios"—out of a book, he says—you know what "Helios" means?

PETER

I do.

BARTLETT

I didn't, not until I—

PETER

So he forced to use your computer—

BARTLETT

It's not funny.

PETER

Well, Hannah, you and computers—

BARTLETT

You don't seem to particularly care about the law today, either.

PETER

Sorry—I can see—sorry. Maybe it is the chicken. Is the painting all he's done?

BARTLETT

All that we know about.

PETER

I don't know what book he's referring to.

BARTLETT

I don't care about the book—I don't even care about the painting, though it's defacing public property—Oak Street is part of a state highway, for God's sake, so there's the state police to have to—

PETER

What is it, Hannah?

BARTLETT

What I care about is this feeling I have that—well—

PETER

Well?

BARTLETT

Shouldn't be talking about this.

PETER

Then let's not talk about it here. We can go—the desserts are rolling out, and that's usually like the starting bell for the greyhound races.

*They get up and move off to the side. PETER pulls a snuff box out of his pocket and dollops a little into the palm of his hand. He hands BARTLETT the box—she also puts some into her palm and hands back the box.*

*Together, they snuff their tobacco. They do not sneeze—they are not beginners at this.*

BARTLETT

At least they haven't made that illegal yet.

PETER

Be a shame to have to turn in my grandfather's snuff box.

BARTLETT

So—

PETER

So, Chief—

BARTLETT

So. I'm retiring soon, you know that, and I don't want to have these kinds of feelings in my gut—I want it smooth, I want to exit with a minimum of—perturbation—how's that for a word, eh?

PETER

Helios—

BARTLETT

He makes me feel like there are creatures in the earth coming out that shouldn't be seeing the light of day. And then Brixton turns up dead—

PETER

He didn't "turn up dead," Hannah—he just died like the old man he was.

BARTLETT

You must feel some good about that.

PETER

Mixed, to be honest.



BARTLETT

I, for one, am glad to see his line end, but with him and this Helios and the cemetery vandalism, the dead baby we found in the parking lot, two murders—two, Peter, since when have we ever had two—

PETER

Helios can't be responsible for—

BARTLETT

I'm not saying he is. But these are signs.

PETER

Maybe it's just the thought of retirement that has you spooked—

BARTLETT

More than that. We've got a rash of trouble, like the fabric is coming apart. End-times, you know—seismic changes—who cares enough about "hope" these days to paint it on a street and then be arrested for it and then—

*BARTLETT suddenly clams up. PETER gives her an inquisitive look.*

PETER

That was a pretty sharp shut of your trap, Hannah—what did you almost let out?

BARTLETT

You heard about his face?

PETER

No.

BARTLETT

Part-covered in scar tissue, like he'd been through fire. And he knows things. About us. About the city. About Brixton. About me.

PETER

He's said things.

BARTLETT

Things that would be known only by someone who would know them to tell them. He's a sign, Peter, he's a sign.

PETER

And don't forget we also got a guy named Isaiah wandering the woods—and smashing up the symbols of modern civilization.

BARTLETT

Hadn't thought of that—in that way.

PETER

Hannah, I am not saying or suggesting anything—just an observation—

BARTLETT

But everything is connected.

PETER

Doesn't mean they're connected to each other—any one thing causing another.

BARTLETT

What else is law enforcement—what else is my job—except believing that—effect and cause and figuring out who pays.

PETER

Sometimes—

BARTLETT

Peter?

PETER

Sorry—just keeping myself from saying something that sounds profound but is really just silly.

BARTLETT

Your grandfather wouldn't have stopped himself.

PETER

A civil tongue was not the minister's strong suit. It's my bread-and-butter. Let it go. I've got to get out to the Willetts.

BARTLETT

Glad we missed the dessert.

PETER

Given your stomach.

BARTLETT

One other thing about this Helios—

PETER

Walk me to my car.

BARTLETT

He's a really good magician—he picked Kashinsky's pocket while handcuffed and Kashinsky was marching him to the holding cell—

PETER

That's not magic.

BARTLETT

No, you're right—feels more like apocalypse.

*And off they go.*

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### **Scene 5**

*BARTLETT at ISAIAH's campsite. Burlap bag is still in view. ISAIAH is seated on one of the stools, whittling.*

*BARLETT stands there, hands on hips, watching. Waiting. Exasperated.*

BARTLETT

Okay—okay okay okay. Again, I'd like you to tell me why you're out here.

ISAIAH

You sure you don't want to sit down?

BARTLETT

No I don't.

ISAIAH

You'd like me to tell you.

BARTLETT

My asking's a formality.

ISAIAH

Uh-huh.

BARTLETT

I want to know why you're here. Even though Mr. Waldo says you can stay here, truth is that you're still trespassing, which is my domain, not his.

ISAIAH

Though where we're sitting—well, you standing—right here—this is his domain, right?

BARTLETT

Deed-wise, yes, you'd be right. We're not talking about deeds.

ISAIAH

You'd like me to tell you, you asked. No, I don't want to—not yet, at least. What are your theories?

BARTLETT

I don't have any—

ISAIAH

Would you like to sit down?

BARTLETT

I'm fine.

ISAIAH

It's not a short walk to your cruiser over there on the access road. That I know. Let me do you a good deed, even if it isn't about deeds.

*ISAIAH pulls the second camp stool from the tent and sets it up. Finally, BARTLETT sits.*

BARTLETT

Just for—

ISAIAH

Water?

BARTLETT

Fine.

ISAIAH

It's all I've got—

BARTLETT

Just fine. I'd like to know some facts—

ISAIAH

The fact of my pit privy is over there, more than 100 feet from the water line, as prescribed by your law—

BARTLETT

How would you know that?

ISAIAH

I read it—at your library.

BARTLETT

Today.

ISAIAH

The other day.

BARTLETT

You don't have the permit to dig—

ISAIAH

Mr. Waldo, as you call him, asked me to make sure—so, a permit, sort of, right? His domain, deed-wise.

BARTLETT

You walked to the library.

ISAIAH

It's not far. It's been done before. It's also where I learned more about Helios.

BARTLETT

On-going investigation.

ISAIAH

Aren't they all? When is an investigation ever really finished? Painting "hope" across a street—

BARTLETT

Why are you out here? Why have you appeared?

ISAIAH

You'll be interested to know that I've been living off my own form of MREs, carefully collecting any waste—

BARTLETT

Those are just details—

ISAIAH

You want facts.

BARTLETT

Facts.

ISAIAH

You are a fact-based person.

BARTLETT

Live and breathe.

ISAIAH

All right—facts for you.

*ISAIAH picks up the burlap bag and tosses it to BARTLETT. BARTLETT looks at it like it's a snake.*

ISAIAH

It won't bite. It's bitten me, but that's all the bite it has. Bite is gone. It won't bite you.

*BARTLETT moves the bag with her toe, then picks it up and looks inside.*

BARTLETT

Bitten you.

ISAIAH

All those devices—those technical marvels—not a saving grace among them.

BARTLETT

Why smash 'em up?

ISAIAH

As I said—not a saving grace among them. Things that don't have any saving graces should be smashed.

BARTLETT

Technically, I could consider that a terrorist statement, according to some of the laws these days—

ISAIAH

In your hands I rest our homeland security. I don't blame you—common-sense is terrorist—threatening to think straight can be terrorist—

*BARTLETT puts the bag down.*

ISAIAH

Still no theories?

BARTLETT

Technology is such a bastard these days.

ISAIAH

These days? What about that technology on your hip, your “side arm”—

BARTLETT

Something happen about a side arm?

ISAIAH

That bag—I keep it to remind me of pointlessness. I am planning to bury it, but it keeps reminding me. That's a fact for you: I have come here because of pointlessness.

BARTLETT

Why here?

*ISAIAH laughs but without much humor.*

ISAIAH

You mean, how did I choose to come bother you and not some other defender of homeland security? Let's keep my choice of Mr. Waldo's wilderness part of your on-going investigation.

*ISAIAH whittles. BARTLETT watches.*

ISAIAH

Anything else?

*BARTLETT stands, readies to go.*

ISAIAH

Any theories?

BARTLETT

Oh, I don't know. I don't know. I'm thinking grief—anger—can smell something like that coming off you. A nose, you know—have to have a nose for these things.

*ISAIAH tries to act indifferent, but he doesn't mask it well.*

BARTLETT

Nose around. Careful not to cut yourself. Medical help'd be hard to come by out here, especially without a phone.

ISAIAH

Thank you for your words of caution.

BARTLETT

Those are the only words I've got for you. I'm sure you know my drill—you've got Mr. Waldo's permission, but I don't have to abide by it—

ISAIAH

Got it. Got them.

BARTLETT

Just facts. Grief—anger—that's my first theory.

ISAIAH

Enjoy.

*BARTLETT hitches up her belt, gets herself ready to walk back to the access road.*

BARTLETT

Grant you—it's nice out here.

ISAIAH

Good luck with Helios.

BARTLETT

Luck has nothing to do with it.

ISAIAH

Wrong theory.



*They give each other the once over, but ISAIAH isn't giving up anything else.*

*BARTLETT leaves.*

*ISAIAH whittles a bit more, then stops, muses. He pulls a photo out of his shirt pocket, muses over it, looks off while toying with the photo—as if the decision he is making and the photo he holds have something to do with each other.*

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### **Scene 6**

*PETER's office, PETER reading from his Bible. SARAH leads in ISAIAH.*

SARAH

Your tenant.

*PETER closes the Bible, stands, holds out his hand. ISAIAH, flustered by the gesture, shakes his hand.*

PETER

Make yourself comfortable. Thanks, Sarah.

ISAIAH

Thanks.

SARAH

Make sure he's got the rent check.

PETER

You keep me honest.

*SARAH leaves the office.*

PETER

She doesn't think I'm doing the right thing—

ISAIAH

Obviously.

PETER

—about you.

ISAIAH

What can you say? Who is she?

Sarah—how do I begin? PETER

Do you like her? ISAIAH

Of course I like her. Everyone likes her. PETER

Come on. Come on. Unrequited. ISAIAH

Not about Sarah. PETER

Then about many things— ISAIAH

Not really. PETER

Shoes and ships and sealing wax— ISAIAH

Can't be satisfied all the time. PETER

Life. Living. ISAIAH

You could say that. PETER

*An active silence. ISAIAH fidgets.*

I don't mean to be prying— PETER

But you will. ISAIAH

You came here, so it opens it up. But I won't if you don't want me to. PETER

ISAIAH  
Go ahead—it's all right.

PETER  
Well, it's just that you seem—agitated.

ISAIAH  
Do you have any water?

PETER  
I can ask Sarah to—

ISAIAH  
I don't want you to bother her—no use making her day worse—if you don't have it in here, it's okay—I left my stuff at the tent so your police chief could check it out at her leisure—

PETER  
It's her job.

ISAIAH  
There are jobs, and there are jobs.

PETER  
She told me her theory. About you.

ISAIAH  
What's your theory? You must have a theory.

PETER  
That Jesus Christ meant what he said—or at least what the four have him say. Everything after that went the wrong way.

*For some reason, this agitates ISAIAH even more, and he gets up to pace. PETER watches him.*

PETER  
Chief Bartlett thinks Helios is a sign—of things to come or things that are already coming. What's your theory about that theory, since we seem to be in the mode of exchanging theories.

*SARAH enters with two glasses of water. She gives one to PETER, the other to ISAIAH.*

SARAH  
It's a long walk, even on a day like today.

ISAIAH

Thank you.

*ISAIAH takes a sip, then finds that he's downing the whole glass. PETER offers ISAIAH his own. ISAIAH takes that and drinks it down. SARAH takes the glasses.*

ISAIAH

Thirstier than I thought.

SARAH

Thought so. More?

*ISAIAH shakes his head no.*

PETER

Sarah—your opinion. Chief Bartlett thinks Helios is a sign, a sign of things to come or things that are already coming. What's your theory about that?

SARAH

Every town has its deposit of secrets. Charles Brixton, for instance. More?

PETER

I'm good. You?

ISAIAH

Fine. Thank you.

PETER

You sure—

SARAH

The Chief would think of signs—

ISAIAH

—I'm fine.

SARAH

That's her job, seeing signs. Helios? Maybe, maybe not, who knows? But you? If there's a sign, I think it's you.

ISAIAH

What could I be a sign of?

SARAH

That would be for my boss to find out—it's his property. His land.

PETER

Come on, Sarah—a theory, at least. Our Isaiah here thinks everyone has them—right?

SARAH

All right, twist my rubber arm. For me, the apocalypse is always happening, just in slow motion—how do you like that one? Takes ages, never finishes, leaves bones behind wherever it goes. Like a glacier. Him—Helios? And you? Don't know your particular secret, don't really care—yet—but whatever it is, it drove you to come to this longitude and latitude and not somewhere else to look for bones. I said I don't care, and I don't, but I will care if what you're digging for hurts him. That's my theory. And now—

*SARAH does a little curtsey and leaves.*

PETER

Out of the mouth of a babe—sorry, bad joke, not even sure why I said it.

*PETER looks at ISAIAH.*

ISAIAH

What?

PETER

Well, a response. To what she said. Some reaction.

ISAIAH

It was a mistake to come here.

PETER

Now, wait. You walked to this office for a reason, and so far people have cut you enough slack to allow you to do that. You are a sign—Sarah's or somebody's, I don't know—but, really, unless there's something soon, the Chief is going to get her way, no matter what I say.

*ISAIAH hems, haws, maunders a little, then finally speaks.*

ISAIAH

I need your help. I want to speak to Helios.

PETER

So ask the Chief. I'm serious. But she'll ask you what I'm about to ask you: why? And unless you can answer that.

ISAIAH

I just need to speak with him.

PETER

And, again, why? You're getting close to having to give a "why" unless you just want to live out on my property until the Chief hauls you away, mission not accomplished.

ISAIAH

I can't say "why" until I talk with him. I just can't.

PETER

You're asking me to trust you.

ISAIAH

"Jesus Christ meant what he said."

PETER

That has no bearing on things at the moment.

ISAIAH

If it doesn't have any bearing, what's the point of having a theory about it? And telling it to me?

*PETER muses about the request.*

PETER

The Chief is going to ask me why—no way around that. If I do this favor for you, I need something on my side going in. Something that says—

ISAIAH

Who is he to me, this strange man, this apparition.

PETER

Something like that.

ISAIAH

Change in request, then. Tell the Chief that you want me brought in for trespassing—you know, scare me a little, scare me straight. Leave me in there, bail me out, doesn't matter—but I guess it's time to bring in the law.

PETER

You're sure.

ISAIAH

As sure as my pit privy.

PETER

Thank you for that, by the way.

ISAIAH

I'm leaving. You will?

PETER

I'll—consider it.

ISAIAH

She's had enough time to go through my stuff—at least she'll see I'm not a terrorist, though that will probably disappoint her.

*ISAIAH leaves.*

PETER

That is not what is going to disappoint her.

*PETER taps his Bible. SARAH enters, papers in hand.*

SARAH

You're being awfully Christian about this.

PETER

What else can you be to a sign of the apocalypse?

SARAH

Get him off your property as soon as you can.

PETER

I will.

SARAH

He's no reason to bruise your friendship with Hannah.

PETER

He knows something about this Helios—or thinks he does.

*SARAH puts the papers on PETER's desk.*

SARAH

Checks, for invoices. Sign 'em. I don't care if he knows.

PETER

But I do. Checks. Okay.

SARAH

Don't forget. That's what the "babe" thinks. Didn't think I heard, did you?

*SARAH gives him a big smile, and for the moment PETER's mood is lightened. SARAH kisses him on the cheek, then backs out, making fun of him with swami hand-gestures.*

SARAH

Don't forget. Don't forget. Don't forget.

*SARAH turns and goes. PETER moves the checks to one side, opens the Bible, reads.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Scene 7**

*HELIOS and ISAIAH are in "cells," which take up most of the stage. Crammed to one side is an observation room with a video monitor and a speaker system.*

*HELIOS is seated in a meditative position. His face is partially disfigured by scar tissue, his suit is dirtied, his hair is wild.*

*ISAIAH watches him.*

*PETER and BARTLETT in the room with video monitor.*

BARTLETT

I'm not supposed to question him directly—state police want to do that on their own. But with modern communications—



PETER

Cells are monitored.

BARTLETT

State requirement—safety of the prisoners. Except we couldn't afford the one-way-mirror—would've had to knock out the wall—

PETER

He's safe?

BARTLETT

Unless Helios can, well, shrink through the bars.

PETER

You do not sound certain.

BARTLETT

He says things—does things—knows things—

PETER

Maybe he's from here.

BARTLETT

He look like anybody ever bought a policy from you? Maybe he's a lost member of the Rotary—or the Odd Fellows—

PETER

Just looking at the options, Hannah.

BARTLETT

The state police are my options, I shall not want. Good to get them both out of here. You are going to press the trespassing, right? Peter?

PETER

I'm considering it.

BARTLETT

Considering? Then why did you have me—

HELIOS

Chief Bartlett? I know you have access to us.

*PETER and BARTLETT clam up, though they know HELIOS can't hear them. BARTLETT turns off the room light, though she knows he can't see them.*

PETER  
He can't see [us]—

BARTLETT  
Sssh—

*BARTLETT paces, lit by the light of the video monitor in the room. HELIOS sighs.*

HELIOS  
The law, the thin blue line between—well, between what and what? Each “what” must answer. Chief Bartlett, my local habitation is a big old house on LaGrange Street, where I dream alone of metaphysics.

*BARTLETT stops pacing abruptly, stares. PETER starts at the mention of his own address.*

BARTLETT  
How's he know where you live? I told you—

HELIOS  
As a friend I can tell you: metaphysics can ruin a person for life.

PETER  
Metaphysics—

HELIOS  
I'll bet he is mouthing the word.

ISAIAH  
She.

HELIOS  
He. You think you know but you don't.

ISAIAH  
What don't I know?

HELIOS  
Where shall I begin? How about this: Requiem aeternam dona eis,  
Domine—

*HELIOS continues to say the prayer as BARTLETT and PETER converse. After ISAIAH's line, HELIOS stops saying the words and simply mouths them while looking at ISAIAH, perhaps even making the sign of the cross, but backwards, or in some other loopy fashion.*

HELIOS

—et lux perpetua luceat eis. Requiescant in pace.

ISAIAH

It is you, isn't it?

HELIOS

—Te decet hymnus Deus in Sion; et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem: exaudi orationem meam; ad te omnis caro veniet. Dies irae, dies illa solvet saeculum in favilla, teste David cum Sibylla. Quantus tremor est futurus, quando judex est venturus, cuncta stricte discussurus!

BARTLETT

What's he saying?

PETER

The prayer for eternal rest—

BARTLETT

Really?

PETER

Catholic—requiem, mass for the dead—

BARTLETT

And how would you know Latin?

PETER

Apparently, I know metaphysics, too.

BARTLETT

Doesn't answer my question.

*PETER shrugs.*

BARTLETT

Why am I feeling like you're not on my side all of a sudden?

PETER

Hannah—

BARTLETT

I'm gonna move the kid—and it isn't good he knows where you live—

*Everyone is interrupted by a slice of Mozart's "Requiem" that fills the air—but as if it's playing through the PA system. So short that no one can say for sure they heard it—though they heard it.*

*HELIOS finishes the prayer.*

BARTLETT

All right, that's it. That's f[ucking]—Christ enough already—sixty-five and—

*BARTLETT swings out of her office into the cell area. PETER, musing, follows.*

*As BARTLETT arrives, trailed by PETER, KATHERINE appears, though only HELIOS can see her, wearing a simple flame-colored shift. She passes through the cell area like a ghost, which is what she is. She can touch HELIOS, but HELIOS cannot touch her. ISAIAH watches HELIOS watch KATHERINE.*

*KATHERINE waits to the side.*

BARTLETT

What's your name? What's your goddamn name?

*HELIOS slowly pivots his gaze away from KATHERINE to BARTLETT.*

BARTLETT

What were you looking at?

*HELIOS looks at PETER.*

HELIOS

I am looking at nothing. Peter Waldo was known in history as a pious man who made the mistake of believing the gospels meant what they said.

BARTLETT

What's he talking about?

PETER

Where I come from.

BARTLETT

That tells me nothing. He tells me nothing, you tell me nothing. One more time: what is your name?

HELIOS

Puddin Tane.

BARTLETT

I'm not in the mood for smart[ass]—

HELIOS

It's my first and second nature.

BARTLETT

You've committed a serious crime. You cognizant of that?

HELIOS

The Lord is my cognizant, I shall not want.

BARTLETT

Do you have a job? Do you have any means of support?

HELIOS

I am employed by the insurance policy of metaphysics.

*Something about this answer strikes BARTLETT. She pulls the ring of keys off her gear belt and opens ISAIAH's cell.*

BARTLETT

Come on!

*BARTLETT grabs ISAIAH and shoves him into PETER's arms.*

BARTLETT

Back out there, now! Go!

*BARTLETT re-locks the cell door, replaces the keys. PETER guides ISAIAH out of the area. ISAIAH resists but not too strongly, and they end up in the observation room, video monitor still on.*

*BARTLETT paces—at various times, she comes close enough to HELIOS' cell for HELIOS to reach out and touch her if he wanted to. He will, at some point, slip the keys off her belt.*

HELIOS

Why are you shaking?

*KATHERINE settles into ISAIAH's former cell. If anything, the light on her makes it appear as if she is in a madonna in flame. HELIOS sees her—when they speak to each other, BARTLETT doesn't hear them.*

BARTLETT

You're an intelligent man, obvious—

HELIOS

I am the Lord God of Hosts.

BARTLETT

But you're smartass intelligent—the Lord God of—

KATHERINE

Don't harass her so.

BARTLETT

—Hosts—what was the Lord's purpose, writing "hope" on a busy highway?

HELIOS

The world craves more hope, sister.

(To KATHERINE)

I'm not lying.

KATHERINE

Let it go, sweet—

BARTLETT

More hope?—more hope?—

KATHERINE

—let it go.

BARTLETT

Is defacing public property any way to get more hope?

HELIOS

When the spirits say paint—

BARTLETT

Stop talking gibberish.

HELIOS

You ask the wrong questions, you use the wrong vocabulary.

BARTLETT

And "hope" is the right [word]—

KATHERINE

Gentle—you know how.

HELIOS

It brought the four of us together—no, five—no, six—

BARTLETT

Answer my question. Answer my—

HELIOS

I've forgotten what it was.

BARTLETT

What was your purpose—

HELIOS

Why do you keep pacing? Sit down. Relax. You make me nervous.

BARTLETT

I'll decide when it's time to sit down.

HELIOS

No, you won't.

BARTLETT

I won't?

HELIOS

You'll put it off until the last minute and then you'll fall on your sixty-five-year old retirement posterior, calling it "duty."

*The fact that HELIOS knows about the retirement gives BARTLETT pause.*

HELIOS

Serving and protecting. Watchdog of society. Why do you shake so? Answer my question.

BARTLETT

Where do you really live? Just answer my questions.

HELIOS  
How should I answer that?

KATHERINE  
It's been your question for years.

BARTLETT  
What happened to your face?

HELIOS  
What happened to yours?

KATHERINE  
So much pain.

*KATHERINE gets up to go.*

HELIOS  
No!

BARTLETT  
No?

HELIOS  
Requiescat in pace.

KATHERINE  
Never, sweet—none of us.

*KATHERINE leaves.*

BARTLETT  
What? Who should—

HELIOS  
I want to talk with the prophet.

BARTLETT  
No.

*BARTLETT backs out of the cell area.*

BARTLETT  
No. No.



*BARTLETT moves back to the room.*

*HELIOS waits—then BARTLETT's keys appear in his hands. He unlocks the cell door, steps out, drops the keys on the floor, and exits just as BARTLETT comes to the observation room.*

*PETER and ISAIAH have seen what HELIOS did. BARTLETT looks at the monitor, sees that HELIOS is gone, feels the empty gear belt, bolts out of the room.*

*BARTLETT sees the keys on the floor, just stares at them.*

BARTLETT

Punked—I got punked by a—

*BARTLETT looks up where the video camera would be; ISAIAH and PETER stare at BARTLETT in the monitor.*

*Then BARTLETT picks up the keys and barrels out of the room to see if anyone in the station saw the ghost leave.*

*PETER and ISAIAH come into the cell area.*

PETER

You know who he is, don't you?

ISAIAH

No.

PETER

I heard you ask him. I don't think Chief Bartlett heard you.

ISAIAH

I said no.

PETER

Your face says different.

ISAIAH

So don't look at my face.

PETER

It's filling up the room—hard to miss. We should leave.

ISAIAH

Where am I going to go?

*BARTLETT walks back in—her face shows that no one in the station saw HELIOS leave. The three look at each other, at a loss for words.*

BARTLETT  
I'm thinking I should lock you both up.

PETER  
I'm sorry, Hannah.

BARTLETT  
You're not going to press him, are you?

*PETER doesn't answer. BARTLETT is barely holding in her rage.*

BARTLETT  
You realize what this means for me? Both of you—do you realize? Pension, my service record You. Both. Should. Go.

*BARTLETT gives ISAIAH a direct look.*

BARTLETT  
The only reason I'm not arresting you is because I don't want you anywhere near me, near this place—I want you away and gone—off his land, out of this city—

*BARTLETT swivels her gaze to PETER.*

BARTLETT  
And you—you—I don't think we're doing another Rotary lunch together. Trust, eh? Trust. Go.

*ISAIAH leaves. PETER lingers.*

BARTLETT  
It'd better be for a good reason, Peter.

*PETER leaves. BARTLETT stares.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Scene 8**

*PETER in his office. He has papers spread out, files open, a box of files on the floor with the top off. He's doing research.*

*SARAH pops her head in.*

Peter? SARAH

Scared me. PETER

What are you doing? SARAH

What are you doing? PETER

I saw the light on— SARAH

I didn't mean to upset— PETER

I was bringing mom home— SARAH

Ah, right, the once-a-week. PETER

Surf and turf at the Coach—never varies. SARAH

Comfort in that. PETER

For some—for her. So, what— SARAH

Charles Brixton— PETER

We didn't do his insurances, ever. SARAH

No we didn't. Come in— PETER

SARAH  
So what's up?

PETER  
Just that your mention of him—brought something back—

SARAH  
With that look on your face—

PETER  
Dead giveaway—

SARAH  
—I should get the scotch.

PETER  
Might be a good idea.

*SARAH goes and pulls out the office scotch and two tumblers and pours it, neat. She hands him one, takes the other herself, sits, sips. PETER sips. They sip together.*

SARAH  
I think you're going to have to start this one off.

PETER  
Yes.

SARAH  
So?

PETER  
What do you recall about the Brixton family?

SARAH  
What do I recall? A large brood up on the hill. "A large brood of vipers" is, I believe, the standard way of—

PETER  
Not all of them.

SARAH  
Maybe. The youngest—the end of the line—Kate—

PETER  
Katherine—

SARAH  
She seemed nice—she came off the hill, walked among us  
commoners—

PETER  
Sarah—

SARAH  
Can't help myself, Peter, you know that.

PETER  
About Katherine—what—what else?

*SARAH sips for a moment, then a wave of memory comes across her face.*

SARAH  
Oh—

PETER  
Right.

SARAH  
You're thinking about—

PETER  
Yeah—

SARAH  
Peter, that fire has to be—twenty years ago—

PETER  
Twenty years it is.

SARAH  
I do remember that fire—

PETER  
The twins' graves are in the Methodist cemetery. Still.

SARAH  
Always will be, you know.

PETER  
That is the nature of graves.

Her husband— SARAH

Go on. Go on. PETER

*SARAH laughs, raises her glass.*

You're baiting me. SARAH

I know how you like to get out your pitchfork, storm the castle. PETER

And yes, our other lordly family, yon Pruitts, on yon other hill. SARAH

*SARAH chuckles as she sips and remembers.*

Calvin. Pru-itt. "If it moves, Pruitt'll screw it." The goat. The horny goat. So horny he'd screw the crack of dawn—so it was said, not by me, of course— SARAH

*And SARAH laughs again.*

You do have a mean streak. PETER

Peter, it's not mean to tell the truth— SARAH

The dead can't fire back. PETER

Makes it even easier—and sweeter. And you know I'm telling the truth. SARAH

Pruitt blew it—that's the legacy. PETER

Pitied his wife— SARAH

PETER

Ah—

SARAH

You know what I'm saying—having to bear all those kids. Nine?

PETER

Ten.

SARAH

Ten, that we know of. God, the poor woman's pelvis.

*They sip.*

SARAH

Peter—what? What it is? Or are you just up for an evening of town Jeopardy—

PETER

Samuel Pruitt—Sammy—the last son, last of the ten. And then Katherine's husband, as you were saying.

*SARAH refreshes their drinks.*

SARAH

I can't remember his—

PETER

I couldn't either, so thus this mess. Cameron. Cameron Pruitt was the husband's name, the fifth of the ten.

SARAH

Cameron Pruitt and Kathleen Brixton. And twins. And Charles Brixton. All gone. To those who are gone. To long dead fires.

*SARAH raises her glass as a toast, PETER raises his.*

SARAH

Which begs the question of. Why. All. This. For Cameron Pruitt and Kathleen Brixton. And the dead Charles Brixton. And the dead Calvin Pruitt.

*PETER doesn't answer, stares at his glass.*

Fires do not die? Is that it? SARAH

Yes. And. Here. Is. Why. PETER

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 9

*Twilight, with full moon in the sky. ISAIAH enters his campground, using an LED flashlight to light his way. As the light moves across the ground, it finds HELIOS seated on one of the camp chairs, which gives ISAIAH a start.*

It's not like they're not going to think about looking for you here. ISAIAH

You're a material witness. HELIOS

To what? ISAIAH

Turn off the light. It will help us think through this better. HELIOS

*ISAIAH turns off the light.*

Think what through better? ISAIAH

Are you choking yet? HELIOS

I don't understand. ISAIAH

Your disgust. I don't care about your disgust, but I want to know about your disgust. HELIOS

I don't feel any disgust. ISAIAH





Shared pain— KATHERINE

I loved her, too— ISAIAH

Private pain. HELIOS

*KATHERINE puts her finger to her lips.*

My ass, private—you want to know the horrible part— ISAIAH

Quiet. Quiet! HELIOS

*The stabs of a flashlight's light in the darkness, sound of footsteps. HELIOS melts away. KATHERINE dims.*

*ISAIAH turns on his own flashlight.*

Who is it? ISAIAH

*There is no answer, just the closer approach of the footsteps.*

Who is it? ISAIAH

*It is SARAH who comes in to view, breathing heavily, wearing a light jacket. She and ISAIAH look at each other in the flashlights.*

What are you doing here? ISAIAH

Do you have something I can sit on? I don't fancy rocks or dirt. SARAH

*ISAIAH pulls out the second camp chair, also pulls out an LED lantern and turns it on. SARAH sits.*

Can't toast a marshmallow over that thing. SARAH

ISAIAH

Don't want to be the guy known as burning down the state forest.

SARAH

Sit. That's not what you'll be known for.

*SARAH pulls a metal flask out of her pocket and takes a sip, offers it to ISAIAH, who declines.*

SARAH

At least not only that. Ah—that hits the spot that needs to be hit.

*KATHERINE becomes more visible. SARAH puts the flask away.*

SARAH

No, that's not what you'll be known for, even if you do burn down Peter Waldo's property and everything around it. I heard you talking.

ISAIAH

How could you hear anything? You were crashing like a bear.

SARAH

I'll assume you mean that as a thing of prowess. I repeat, I heard you talking. Not Hannah Bartlett, clearly, and not to Peter Waldo, clearly—

ISAIAH

So? He's gone. What are you doing here?

SARAH

He's not gone—well, maybe from around us—

*SARAH speaks in a sarcastically loud voice.*

SARAH

Our. Immediate. Vicinity.

*SARAH cups her ears, as if waiting for a response, then laughs.*

SARAH

But he's not gone—Chief Bartlett's sign of the end-times is most definitely not gone.

ISAIAH

Then I'll go—I'll go right now—

SARAH

Sit down and stop being dramatic.

KATHERINE

Samuel—Sammy—

*ISAIAH stops. SARAH notices him staring into the middle distance.*

SARAH

Someone else? I didn't hear—

ISAIAH

Sshh!

*ISAIAH listens intently.*

ISAIAH

Please, again—please, again—again—please—

*SARAH watches ISAIAH. KATHERINE goes to ISAIAH and touches him on the cheek, then drifts away. ISAIAH responds to the touch as if it were both electricity and divine comfort. He turns and turns looking for the source of the touch, but of course KATHERINE is gone—and she is a ghost, after all.*

*SARAH says nothing, watches intently.*

*Finally, ISAIAH returns to the land of the living, notices SARAH watching him.*

SARAH

There is already a dragnet out for Helios. Dragnet—I don't even know if they use that word anymore, but whatever they use—APB, BOLO—they're doing it. Tromping through this forest pretty soon.

ISAIAH

You come to warn me?

SARAH

What do I care about you, I mean, beyond just respecting you like any human being. I'm concerned about the pain you're causing Peter Waldo.

ISAIAH

I don't even know the man.

SARAH

You hear about Charles Brixton? In all your trips to our public library, open to one and all?

*ISAIAH doesn't answer—doesn't do anything. SARAH pulls out the flask, sips.*

SARAH

I can wait.

*ISAIAH gestures for the flask. SARAH passes it to him. He sips, hands it back.*

ISAIAH

What is that—

SARAH

Rye whiskey.

ISAIAH

Rye—

SARAH

Nobody drinks rye whiskey any more, which is why I drink it. What would that make you to Brixton?

ISAIAH

What?

SARAH

You heard me.

ISAIAH

I don't know who Brixton is.

SARAH

You do, you do, you do. This family relationship thing is tricky—

ISAIAH

Shut up.

SARAH

Whatever you were staring at is gone.

ISAIAH

I know! Shut up.

SARAH

Co-brother-in-law would be my choice. Helios!

*Perhaps a faint echo.*

SARAH

I know you'd know. Helios! A.k.a.—

*Before SARAH can finish, BARTLETT's voice comes through a bullhorn. Suddenly, the darkness is alive with flashlights.*

BARTLETT

Do. Not. Move.

*SARAH stands up, hands in pockets. BARTLETT tromps in, followed by PETER. Air crackles with radio chatter, lights bathe the campsite.*

*BARTLETT looks very tired.*

BARTLETT

Do you all know what time it is? And what the fuck are you doing here?

PETER

Sarah—

SARAH

Hannah, I'm doing my part to retard your apocalypse.

BARTLETT

Where is he?

ISAIAH

I don't know.

BARTLETT

He was here.

ISAIAH

And then he left when she walked in.

BARTLETT

Anyone else show up for a chat? Beelzebub? Nostradamus?

*BARTLETT pokes the flashlight into the tent, then looks around her. She brings the bullhorn to her mouth.*

BARTLETT

Fan out—he's not here.

*The lights disappear, footsteps walking away.*

BARTLETT

Are you all cognizant that when Helios—should I use his real name, but what the fuck does it matter?—

PETER

Hannah—

BARTLETT

Shut up. He took a service revolver with him. With bullets, in case you're wondering about his thoroughness. Now why would he do that?

ISAIAH

I didn't see him holding it.

BARTLETT

Because—and this is just a feeling I fucking have—people do not see what they do not want to see about him. Such love. You're pretty quiet about all of this.

PETER

I've got a good right to be. Like anybody else, I wish the dead would stay dead.

BARTLETT

Let's hope that's all that happens. Just keep Charles Brixton in mind, Sammy.

*BARTLETT stomps away.*

ISAIAH

What did she mean by that?

PETER

I told you not to do anything.

SARAH

You're not my parents or my husband. If I had one. So we're done with that list. You were the one that told me—expect me just to sit at home and cuddle with the facts? Not that I want to cuddle with either of you, but—still, Peter—

PETER

We should get out of here. Men with guns are walking around in the dark.

SARAH

I don't want to go home.

PETER

Then we'll go to my house. And you're coming, you're not staying here.

ISAIAH

I have to wait for him.

PETER

You won't find him—he will find you. He hides—he seeks, you seek, he hides—get it?

SARAH

Clever.

PETER

I'd do better if I weren't so—

SARAH

So what?

*But PETER doesn't finish the sentence, just turns and goes, stabbing his flashlight into the dark. SARAH grabs ISAIAH and pulls him along. ISAIAH pulls back for a moment, turns off the lantern, then joins SARAH.*

*KATHERINE floats into the darkness, inexpressible sadness on her face.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 10



*Light goes on. HELIOS in PETER's house, holding the gun on them as they enter. KATHLEEN is there as well. A simple living room: some chairs, a table, divan.*

*To one side are two ladders with a plank between them, about three feet up, dropcloth on the floor: PETER had been doing some plaster work on the wall.*

HELIOS

It is time for the time of our resolutions.

*PETER takes off his coat in a slow deliberate fashion, folds it over the chair back, straightens his clothes.*

PETER

At least let them leave.

HELIOS

Can't.

PETER

I'm responsible for their safety.

HELIOS

And you're practiced at that sort of thing.

PETER

Used to be.

ISAIAH

What are you two talking about?

PETER

Can they at least sit down? My house, but, you know, mi casa, su casa—

ISAIAH

What are you two—

HELIOS

Sit them down all you want—but they don't leave.

*PETER gestures, and SARAH sits down. ISAIAH does not.*

ISAIAH

I want to know—

*HELIOS pivots ever so slightly with the gun. With his free hand, he makes a silver dollar appear—a bit of sleight of hand to make it appear, then not appear—then tosses it to ISAI AH.*

For your pains. HELIOS

You're cruel. ISAI AH

Excellent tutorials. HELIOS

You can have— ISAI AH

*ISAI AH goes to toss the coin back.*

Ah, ah, ah—look at it. HELIOS

*ISAI AH looks at it, and he softens—just a bit, but enough to show. He speaks without rancor.*

You bastard. ISAI AH

But of a very specific lovable kind. Sit down. HELIOS

*ISAI AH sits.*

Lovable? SARAH

Tell her. HELIOS

A keepsake. ISAI AH

See, I have feelings. HELIOS

What of him are you keeping sacred? SARAH

ISAIAH  
Life with a chance for [parole]—

HELIOS  
Sentimental-session over. It is time, I said, for the time, I said, of  
our resolutions.

PETER  
Charles Brixton.

HELIOS  
Really?

PETER  
Is that what you said to Charles Brixton?

*Gun pivots ever so slightly.*

HELIOS  
I didn't say anything to Charles Brixton.

PETER  
That thing carrying bullets?

SARAH  
I was wondering the same.

HELIOS  
Hard to tell, given the quantum nature of the universe.

PETER  
"Yes" or "no" is not quantum.

HELIOS  
As a great man once said, "The world's a hospital."

ISAIAH  
Cam—please—

HELIOS  
Shut. Up.

*A big theatrical sigh.*

Are we all all knowing here? HELIOS

About some of the past. PETER

That's all anybody gets, even in the best of times/worst of times.  
Let us banish the past tense— HELIOS

It's not only your past. PETER

Please. HELIOS

Cameron. ISAIAH

*HELIOS turns his gaze to ISAIAH.*

Sam. HELIOS

Cameron— ISAIAH

Sammy. HELIOS

What are you doing? ISAIAH

I'm doing what I've come to do. HELIOS

I know why. ISAIAH

He does, Cam— KATHERINE

It's the same reason for me. ISAIAH

HELIOS

Not the same for you. At all.

KATHERINE

Cam, show him, show them all some mercy—

HELIOS

Mercy?! Mercy?!

*Everyone is startled by the outburst, since it's not said directly to any of them. HELIOS does not drop his guard.*

*KATHERINE's response is equally unexpected: she screams out her words.*

KATHERINE

Mercy! Mercy, Pity, Peace—

*They stare at each other. Everyone else is frozen.*

KATHERINE

Why are you teaching yourself to forget it all?

*They hold their gaze. HELIOS speaks to the rest of them.*

HELIOS

A hospital, did I say a great man said? A hospital—when you think about it, the world is more like the jailhouse than the hospital. We're chained in place by our illusions—

KATHERINE

Don't add suffering to them—

HELIOS

—hoping for the Great Lawyer's cleansing arrival—are they following me?

*To the three of them.*

HELIOS

Are you following me?!

PETER

The gun—

*HELIOS takes a deep breath. KATHERINE sits herself on the cross-plank.*

HELIOS

But. At the end of it all—instead of bail for the sufferants—

KATHERINE

Accident, Cameron—

HELIOS

—pfft, the crush of fire against us, flames in our throats—

KATHERINE

Accident—

HELIOS

—and the hands of strangers gloved in latex—

*SARAH points at the gun.*

SARAH

Peter—

PETER

Stop waving the gun.

HELIOS

Oh. Oh. An interruption. Am I waving it?

SARAH

Yes.

HELIOS

Oh. My. It seems to have a life of its own.

PETER

There is no one in this room who is an enemy.

HELIOS

Such confidence.

PETER

You painted “hope” on a highway.

ISAIAH  
I didn't know you'd be here, when I came—

HELIOS  
How did you hear?

PETER  
The gun—

HELIOS  
Oh, all right, Mr. Protector.

*HELIOS places the gun in his lap, though still in his grip. He faces ISAIAH.*

HELIOS  
Now—how did you—

ISAIAH  
Air is thick with—data—I smashed everything afterwards—what was the point afterwards?

HELIOS  
I didn't know I'd be here. I mean, where was I anyway, who was I, a nudnik, a nothing, and then—

*HELIOS turns to KATHERINE.*

HELIOS  
You. I have to say to you all that I have been a little—mad.

SARAH  
Twenty years mad, Cameron Pruitt. Just to slip in something edgewise.

HELIOS  
I still have business to do.

SARAH  
Twenty years of madness is—

ISAIAH  
Why are they here? They don't have anything to do with our—

HELIOS  
Your cue—and then I really must start the apocalypse countdown.

PETER

Not my story to tell, Cameron. Helios. Yours, his—

HELIOS

Peter Waldo is so—humble.

PETER

You're the one who painted "hope." That makes it Katherine's, too.

*HELIOS erupts, a volcanic cry of pain. KATHERINE matches his outburst, and they trade outbursts until it gets silly. She gestures for him to come close and sit beside her. He does. She lifts off the scar tissue, and for the moment they are young.*

KATHERINE

I do.

*ISAIAH is in tears.*

SARAH

You might as well say it.

PETER

Neither Charles Brixton nor Calvin Pruitt wanted the marriage.

*HELIOS shrugs.*

HELIOS

Eh.

PETER

Why?

HELIOS

Eh—not interested. But Peter Waldo—

PETER

In those days I advised both families on planning their estates.

SARAH

Really?

PETER

Oh yes—once upon a time I cut a wide margin.



HELIOS

So many skeletons in closets.

PETER

Which I used to make sure neither of you, of them, were disinherited.

ISAIAH

You blackmailed my father?

PETER

Equal opportunity blackmailing, Sam, both sides.

HELIOS

For our love. For our hope.

*HELIOS takes the scar tissue out of KATHERINE's hands and puts it back on.*

PETER

To give them a chance to breathe.

SARAH

You old radical, you.

PETER

And prices to pay.

*HELIOS rises, brandishes the gun again. KATHERINE wraps her arms around herself as if bound in a strait-jacket, loses all glow, all warmth.*

ISAIAH

There's my part in this, too—you won't leave me out. What do you think it was like being the ten-year-old tail-end of the Pruitt line, with a father as old and dry as the moon? You were the most father I had, ever had—Katherine was comfort.

SARAH

And then the fire—is that right?

HELIOS

Ashes, ashes, all fall down.

ISAIAH

Stop it. Stop it. I had to go back to that—

PETER

It was Chief Bartlett who told me that Katherine had died—in the same asylum they'd stuffed her away after the fire, the death of—

ISAIAH

I never stopped looking for her.

PETER

I never knew they'd done that.

SARAH

Talk about twenty years of madness—

PETER

Charles Brixton, another of his secrets, paying for a long slow tortured [death]—

HELIOS

Why should anything have changed him? Too much sentiment, Peter Waldo—

*ISAIAH kneels by KATHERINE's suffering, shivering, unresponsive body and gazes at her with great sadness. HELIOS watches them. This can take as long as it needs.*

HELIOS

The universe—not hospital, not jailhouse—not asylum, even—it's a machine-gun—bam bam bam bam bam—you build, build, build, but the cats eat the birds in the birdhouses and the fires eat the faces of the innocent and stupid alike—go—go!—

*HELIOS gets ISAIAH to rise and go back to his chair.*

HELIOS

—and nothing is left but bones and ashes, otherwise known as the soul. She's dead. She's dead. She's dead. Are we now done with the maudlin and memory?

*KATHERINE unwinds herself into the luminescent KATHERINE, stands on the plank.*

PETER

And you? Might as well ask you the same question, Sam.

ISAIAH

I'm not dead. I'm not giving up.

HELIOS

Ah, the youth these days—so ungrateful with all their “hope.” Don’t understand irony at all.

SARAH

What was the coin? The coin you gave him—he gave you?

HELIOS

This is all enough.

ISAIAH

Magic tricks—what ten-year-old kid doesn’t love magic tricks?  
Love his brother for magic—

*The gun, which had disappeared for a while, now re-appears—steady.*

HELIOS

Are we done?

PETER

Cameron?

HELIOS

Helios.

PETER

What happened with Charles Brixton?

HELIOS

Nothing.

PETER

According to the police report—

HELIOS

Tyranny of data.

PETER

—it wasn’t long after Brixton died that you showed up painting  
“hope” on a state highway. Using a can of aluminum roof-paint  
ordered especially for—

HELIOS

Like all tyrannies, data must be resisted.

*With one hand, HELIOS pulls plastic handcuffs out of his pocket. He gives two of them to PETER.*

HELIOS

Useful stuff at a police station. Her, behind the back, to the ladder.  
Him, behind the back.

*PETER cuffs SARAH, then ISAIAH.*

ISAIAH

Why—

HELIOS

Be grateful. Now you.

*There is a moment as PETER decides whether he should resist or not, and HELIOS knows this, sees this.*

HELIOS

The original Peter Waldo would never taint his soul with violence.

PETER

He did believe in justice.

HELIOS

Which protected him like a fart.

PETER

True.

*HELIOS points the gun at SARAH.*

HELIOS

So, will it be blood or gratitude on your hands today?

*Still, PETER is not compliant.*

HELIOS

You want to say something to him?

SARAH

I run his office, I don't run him—I'd like to keep it that way.

HELIOS

Sit.

*PETER puts his hands behind his back and sits, and HELIOS cuffs him to the chair. Gun is back in his hand.*

HELIOS

You two will figure out how to release yourselves before long, so I don't have much time left. Apocalypse can be so demanding!

*HELIOS leaves, pulling ISAIAH along. KATHERINE drifts away.*

SARAH

Got any sharp instruments on you?

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### Scene 11

*In PETER's basement. HELIOS sits ISAIAH down, tucks the gun in his pants, starts gathering materials: wood, cloth, and so on.*

ISAIAH

What are you doing? What are you doing?!

HELIOS

I have to meet my confessor—

ISAIAH

Stop it. Stop it!

*ISAIAH begins crying. HELIOS stops, but he looks more annoyed than compassionate.*

HELIOS

Let me add in my "stop it."

ISAIAH

I'm sorry. It's like you have no heart.

*HELIOS goes back to picking up materials.*

ISAIAH

No memory.

HELIOS  
You're still ten years old.

ISAIAH  
You should try it.

HELIOS  
You wouldn't want my first decade.

ISAIAH  
Do you even know what they did with her body?

*This brings HELIOS up short.*

ISAIAH  
You couldn't do anything about that, could you? No magic for that.

HELIOS  
The body's nothing.

ISAIAH  
Then why come back at all?

HELIOS  
It wasn't to taste the ashes again.

*HELIOS begins packing up the materials and some tools.*

ISAIAH  
Then why?

HELIOS  
Why did you?

ISAIAH  
Because I was thick with grief—I can't help it. And because I was hoping you would come.

HELIOS  
Definitely ten years old. I have to go.

ISAIAH  
Are you even glad to see me?

*HELIOS pauses.*

HELIOS

What—you want to save my soul?

ISAIAH

Yes—of course, Cam—if not both, at least one. Of course.

*This strikes HELIOS as incredibly absurd and deeply touching.*

ISAIAH

You should turn yourself in. Peter will help—

HELIOS

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood—

ISAIAH

What? What?

HELIOS

Peter has done his lifting. He owes no more, he pays no more. Besides, although he and Hannah Bartlett were once—in—love—after tonight, that will carry no weight with her about me.

ISAIAH

I can't follow—

HELIOS

It doesn't matter—

ISAIAH

Turn yourself in.

HELIOS

That's your offer? Your big redemption? Remember, like a great big machine gun.

ISAIAH

Then after, you and I can—

*HELIOS makes the sound and movement of a machine gun.*

HELIOS

Spend your time where it counts the most, brother of mine. And that is not on me. Now, I do have to go.

*HELIOS grabs his materials and tools, turns to go.*

ISAIAH

You are still worth it, Cam.

HELIOS

Without Katherine? Seriously?

ISAIAH

Yes.

HELIOS

For years it's been just brute habit, Sammy, and the pleasure that comes from being mean. The hint half guessed, the gift half understood—like I said.

*HELIOS turns to leave. ISAIAH scuttles after him. HELIOS turns, gun in hand—it moves around.*

HELIOS

Oh my, look how it waves around—you really should stay still.

*And with that, HELIOS is really gone. ISAIAH stares at his absence.*

ISAIAH

Katherine. Katherine.

*But KATHERINE is not there. And ISAIAH knows this.*

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## Scene 12

*The Presbyterian Church at midnight—a dim light over the entrance. A wooden ladder as the pulpit, a single chair as a pew.*

*On the sidewalk is a hopscotch diagram.*

*BARTLETT, in uniform, with her holstered gun, pulls out what looks like an invitation and reads it under the light.*



BARTLETT

"Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace: A Confab"—yeah? Well, fuck you, Helios.

*BARTLETT shoves the invitation back into her pocket.*

BARTLETT

And in a church—a fucking church. Fuck. You. Yeah. That feels good.

*BARTLETT steps into the cool darkness.*

*In the dimness she can see the dark hump of the pulpit. BARTLETT tries to calm her breathing.*

**SOUND: An enormous WHOOSH!**

*BARTLETT raises her hands to protect her face, perhaps even lets out a small sharp cry. Then it's gone.*

*BARTLETT slaps her holster, comes up empty-handed.*

BARTLETT

Son-of-a—son-of-a-bitch!

*Almost immediately, a stirring from the pulpit, and a resonant voice, full of anger and pride, leaps out.*

HELIOS

So—you have arrived.

*BARTLETT, startled, slides into the pew.*

HELIOS

Pay attention! We have much to discuss.

BARTLETT

There's nothing to discuss.

HELIOS

We share two murders.

BARTLETT

We don't share a thing—wait, two—

HELIOS

Truth is always the first to suffer. Then why are you here?

BARTLETT

To arrest you. You said "two."

HELIOS

Do you think Charles Brixton exited his wretched life of his own accord? You have the paint.

BARTLETT

No sign of trauma.

HELIOS

You can scare people to death. You can shout death into the ears of a defunct old man.

BARTLETT

Heart attack, said the EMTs.

HELIOS

An attack of the heart will do that. What would your men think about doe-eyed Hannah Bartlett sitting here, with me, alone, in the dark? Or former lover Peter Waldo? What is the truth, Hannah?

BARTLETT

If you're a murderer—

HELIOS

Is that what fascinates you about me?

BARTLETT

I'm not fascinated, I'm just—

HELIOS

Liar, liar, pants on fire.

BARTLETT

It's important to know—

HELIOS

Liar, liar—

BARTLETT

—the criminal mind—

HELIOS  
—pants on fire—especially when there's a thrill to be enjoyed for  
the knowing, when the criminal may be the one wearing the  
uniform.

*BARTLETT jumps up, angry—indistinguishable from being excited.*

BARTLETT  
That's stupid! You said two—

*BARTLETT moves toward the pulpit.*

BARTLETT  
I am not responsible for you—

**SOUND: Another enormous WHOOSH!**

*BARTLETT drops to her knees, shielding her face. Whatever it is whizzes past.*

*HELIOS's voice booms from another part of the church. BARTLETT crouches like a fighter.*

*HELIOS snaps on a flashlight held under his chin, his face swathed in nylon. The upward light  
paints him a complete ghoul.*

HELIOS  
Try your holster.

*BARTLETT pulls out a flashlight.*

HELIOS  
I constantly astound you, don't I?

BARTLETT  
You sicken me.

HELIOS  
Pants on fire. Turn it on, hold it like mine—and remember who has  
your gun. Guns.

*Wreathed in darkness, they square off with the flashlights under their chins. Shadows leap to  
the vaulted ceiling.*

BARTLETT  
What do you want with me?

HELIOS  
To humiliate you, your regime.

BARTLETT  
You've done a pretty good job of that.

*Step by careful step, HELIOS moves toward BARTLETT.*

HELIOS  
Soon you will lose everything—and then you and I will be even closer.

BARTLETT  
You broke the law.

HELIOS  
I don't care about the law. I want to humiliate the law. I care about justice.

BARTLETT  
Justice!

HELIOS  
That puzzles you. I tell you about Charles Brixton, and I show not one sign of remorse.

*HELIOS stands close to BARTLETT.*

HELIOS  
It's the monsters that make us pay attention.

*HELIOS reaches out with his left hand to touch BARTLETT on the cheek, just hovers the fingertips without touching.*

HELIOS  
I have nothing left to lose, and that gives me complete freedom. Doesn't Hannah Bartlett ache for the same freedom from the law, from obligation, from "should" and "have to"?

*BARTLETT's head inclines toward HELIOS's hand, as if to lay her cheek in his palm and give over to his offer.*

HELIOS  
Aren't you feeling blood crash through parts of your body you thought had died?

*BARTLETT grabs HELIOS's wrist and pulls—and out of the sleeve pops a fake hand.*

*At the same instant, HELIOS pops off his flashlight and the pulpit geysers out a plume of smoke.*

*BARTLETT spins to look at the pulpit, when she whirls back, HELIOS has disappeared like the smoke from the pulpit. BARTLETT's stabbing flashlight beam finds nothing.*

*BARTLETT moves toward the pulpit.*

BARTLETT

I know you're still here!

*At the pulpit, BARTLETT waves away the smoke. She puts down the rubber hand, picks up a wooden box wrapped in heavy rope, and shakes it: a loud clunk.*

*BARTLETT exits the church, carrying the wooden box, the fake hand, and the flashlight.*

*Outside the church, BARTLETT kneels and, using a pocket knife, cuts through the rope. She opens the box and pulls out her gun, which she holsters, then puts the hand in the wooden box.*

*BARTLETT scouts around her, then stares at the sidewalk. She notices the hopscotch diagram.*

*She picks up a stone and pitches it into the first box.*

*She begins to hop.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Scene 13**

*Police station. BARTLETT, box under her arm, joins PETER, SARAH, and ISAIAH.*

BARTLETT

Are you all all right?

SARAH

He must have known we wouldn't take that long—the kitchen, a knife—voilà!

BARTLETT

Yeah, well, a regular jokester is our Helios—a real crack-up artist. Want to see what my evening was like?

*BARTLETT opens the wooden box and takes out the rubber hand.*

BARTLETT

Sixty-five, getting ready to retire, and this is my tribute.

*BARTLETT waves it around like a baton.*

BARTLETT

Rah, rah, rah.

ISAIAH

How did—

*BARTLETT pulls out the invite, hands it to PETER, who scans it.*

BARTLETT

Mayor will take everything away when he finds out that I was having a confab with a known criminal in a fucking—

PETER

Hannah—

BARTLETT

—church—

*BARTLETT grabs the invite and throws it down, throws down the hand. ISAIAH picks up the invite, looks at it, hands it to SARAH.*

BARTLETT

—shut up—Presbyterian, and I'm a fucking Methodist—a confab—

SARAH

About what?

PETER

Sarah—Hannah, look—

BARTLETT

Can't you read?

SARAH

But about what?

PETER

Sarah—

SARAH

Why are you so angry, Hannah? Peter, stop. The man—Helios, or Cameron Pruitt, or whatever you want to call him—

BARTLETT

Fucker—

SARAH

He is in anguish. Anguish.

*SARAH points to ISAIAH.*

SARAH

Ask him—he probably knows better than any of us.

BARTLETT

That gets him a pass?

SARAH

I don't know what it gets him.

BARLTETT

Show me somebody who isn't in anguish—

SARAH

It should still get him something.

BARTLETT

Should I give your brother a pass? Have you given him a pass? He broke the law!

SARAH

And who of us has entirely clean hands, Hannah? Especially if you have a rubber one?

*SARAH giggles.*

SARAH

I'm sorry, Hannah—I couldn't help it—it's been a strange night—

PETER

Hannah—Sarah, put it down—

SARAH

Rah, rah.

*But SARAH puts it down.*

PETER

Hannah, listen to me—how will the Mayor know you were even there?

*This brings BARTLETT up short.*

BARTLETT

What?

PETER

How will anyone know you were there, except for us?

BARTLETT

You want me to lie?

PETER

Did I say that?

*BARTLETT puts the box down, stares at it.*

BARTLETT

I told you he was the sign of the apocalypse.

PETER

Hannah—Hannah—what is the apocalypse but what we already know is coming?

BARTLETT

They'll ask me to investigate.

PETER

So investigate. Hoodlums.

SARAH

Hoodlums.

BARTLETT

He said he didn't care about the law. He wanted to humiliate the law. That he cared about justice.



*KATHERINE glides in, unseen, of course—except that ISAIAH senses something in the room.*

BARTLETT

What was he like, your brother?

ISAIAH

What?

BARTLETT

Your brother—what was he like?

ISAIAH

My brother? A prince, my brother—to me, to Katherine.

BARTLETT

Law-breaker?

ISAIAH

No—not Cam—unless you call having a big heart the same thing. He took me in. They took me in. Cam was Cam because Katherine was Katherine. They were the right family for me, for each other.

BARLETT

Was he like that—they like that?

PETER

Why do you think I did what I did?

BARTLETT

And then he kills Charles Brixton.

PETER

No evidence of that.

BARTLETT

He was there.

PETER

We don't know anything about what happened there.

BARTLETT

And now he's saying that it's the monsters that make us pay attention. I'm sixty-five and ready to lie my way into retirement—maybe he's right. Brixton was a monster for sure—

PETER

Katherine deserved better.

SARAH

And then he paints hope across a highway. Talk about the futile gesture.

ISAIAH

Wasn't.

SARAH

Convince me.

*BARTLETT stares at the box, the hand, the invitation.*

BARTLETT

What is it that we really know? Eh?

*HELIOS enters, gun in hand, and BARTLETT pulls her revolver. HELIOS is tilting crazily as if his shoes were nailed to the floor. He wears a crazy smile and his face is slick with tears.*

PETER

Hannah!

BARTLETT

Shut up. Put it down.

*HELIOS holds the gun and does a funny wave with his hands as if to say that he is surrendering, but KATHERINE bends his arm down so that the gun points toward the group.*

BARTLETT

Don't. Don't.

*HELIOS gives KATHERINE a smile. KATHERINE smiles back.*

KATHERINE

Soon, love.

*KATHERINE moves away. HELIOS goes back to his mad dance, and at some point, one of his gestures becomes too threatening, and BARTLETT shoots him through the heart.*

*BARTLETT kneels by the body.*

BARTLETT  
(without rancor)

You fucker.

*BARTLETT looks at the three of them.*

BARTLETT  
First time I ever fired the goddamn thing in the line of service. First  
goddamn time.

*What else is there to say?*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Scene 14**

*PETER, in funeral garb, stands. Beside him is ISAIAH.*

PETER  
What a gorgeous day.

ISAIAH  
I put in a special request.

PETER  
To whom?

ISAIAH  
No one specific—just let it fly up and out.

PETER  
Seemed to work.

ISAIAH  
We're free to believe whatever we want.

PETER  
No—but yes.

*They stand in silence.*

ISAIAH  
You noticed no one came from either family.

PETER

Then they aren't family.

ISAIAH

Who was left but us to come here today?

PETER

"Paying respects"—what an odd phrase.

ISAIAH

The two side by side. Cam got what he wanted.

PETER

If you don't laugh, the grief will kill you.

ISAIAH

Blessed are the meek.

PETER

They are going to need it.

ISAIAH

Even if you do laugh, it can kill you.

PETER

Amen.

ISAIAH

Amen.

*They turn away to leave.*

PETER

If you want, you can build something out there. I'll get you the permits. You can be Thoreau by the pond.

ISAIAH

It's worth a thought. Wait, wait, I'm thinking that thought.

PETER

Let me know when you're done with it.

ISAIAH

Wait, wait—thought I had the answer. It's going to take a little while longer.

PETER  
Just thought I'd offer.

ISAIAH  
It won't be for now—other parts to see first. Maybe later.

*SARAH comes in, takes PETER's hand.*

SARAH  
You off?

ISAIAH  
I think so. Think I have to be. Though he did offer me a cabin by the pond.

SARAH  
Because that's what he's always wanted.

ISAIAH  
So why not?

PETER  
No good answer.

ISAIAH  
Find one.

*The three of them look at each other, at a loss for words. ISAIAH finally nods and turns to go. SARAH puts a hand on his arm, smiles. PETER smiles. ISAIAH leaves.*

*SARAH and PETER look at each other, look back at where the graves would be.*

*Lights to black.*