

JAY AND RUBY GET RELIGION

A play

by Joseph Hoover

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CHARACTERS

RUBY:	Early 30s, struggling New York actress.
JAY:	Late 30s, former seminarian starting a new life in New York.
BECKENSTEIN:	Early 30s.
THALIA:	Late 20s, late-night cable actress.
KAI:	Early 50s, a Protestant pastor.
MS. VAUGHN:	Mid-70s. THALIA's grandmother.

SETTING

New York City. Present.

TIME

Late fall.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(Early afternoon. RUBY sitting on a bench by “the Pond” on the southeast edge of Central Park. She wears a flowing silk scarf and, in the style of the day, a modified turban. Looks at her watch. Looks around. Addresses the audience.)

RUBY

I haven't seen Jay in seven years. This is the perfect place to meet up again. I love Central Park.

(pause)

It'll be weird to see how much he's changed from that grungy, 90s-obsessed guy I used to know. He finally left his flannel shirts behind and started a new life. I'm so proud of him! God do we need him out here.

(Enter JAY. Nineties look: flannel wrapped around waist, cargo shorts, boots.)

RUBY

JAY!! You're back!

JAY

I'm back!

RUBY

You're back!

(quickly, overlapping each other)

JAY

I'm back!

RUBY

You're back!

JAY

I'm back!

RUBY

You're back!

JAY

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!! Overlapping dialogue! I never did that in my life!

RUBY

It's fun to see you so happy! You must have really been itching to finish up seminary.

JAY

Oh yeah. I was dying to get back here. This place is so amazing.

RUBY

New York is incredible.

JAY

I was just on the subway, and they're like: *Ladies and Gentlemen, if you see an elderly disabled pregnant person, please give up your seat.* I didn't even know people like that existed. But they have them here!

RUBY

I didn't know that either! Meeting a person like that would be a very good experience for me.

JAY

Right?

RUBY

You're a priest now! Did they send you from Omaha to the big city to convert everyone? Get out there Jay! Preach fiery sermons on the street corners! Tell us how awful we are! We're terrible sinners! Why aren't you wearing the collar? You wore this when we first met that summer. This is what you always wear. Oh, you're undercover. Good strategy!

(JAY sees something off in the distance)

JAY

Oh my God. Is that...

(pause)

It couldn't be. She looks way too happy. She wouldn't be in a park in the sunlight anyway. All these cheerful ponds and trees. There's no cold misty bleak rain out here. Who am I kidding? I'll never find her.

RUBY

What are you talking about?

JAY

I just saw....a rabbit.

RUBY

That's weird. I heard they vanished from the city. They probably followed the muggers out.

JAY

What do you mean?

RUBY

There are no criminals here anymore Jay.

You're kidding. JAY

No crime, no trash, no graffiti. New York is terrible. RUBY
JAY

I knew it was getting bad, but not that bad.

They even tore down that old rock club. Lucy's Beer and Bait. It was legendary! It was an institution! It had been there since 2012! It was dirty and trashy and rat-infested and the food made people sick!!! It was the best. Now it's gone. RUBY

There's no respect. JAY

But you're here. My priest! Do I call you reverend? Are you revered? RUBY

No. Ruby, I didn't tell you this... JAY

Tell me what? RUBY

I left. JAY

Omaha. RUBY

No, I left. Seminary. Before I was done. I didn't finish. JAY

You what? RUBY

That's why I'm here. I decided not to become a priest. JAY

You did not. RUBY

I did. JAY

So you're not undercover? RUBY

No. JAY

RUBY

Jay! You were so certain priesthood was what you wanted! Even if you did have to give up women and marriage and wear black outfits. Even though your color scheme is definitely an autumn--which darker shades do not flatter. You were telling me all about it at the Goo-Goo Dolls concert. How did we start talking anyway?

JAY

I like to reach out.

RUBY

I was the only black person there! Oh, that's so sweet.

JAY

I'm not saying I'm Bobby Kennedy or anything.

RUBY

It took you years to finally join up the first place! But when you did you were so pumped up! Your excitement about your faith even got me thinking. I don't know if I'd ever been that enthusiastic about anything in my life. You can't have left! I needed you in there! You were better than us! You were like...a star. No, that's dumb. You were like, a bright point of light in a dark sky.

JAY

Well, it just didn't work out.

RUBY

I can't believe you didn't tell me!

JAY

I was afraid you'd get all mad at me. Like you are!

RUBY

I'm not mad at you!

JAY

Yes you are.

RUBY

Yes I am. It was so cool though. You were in this old school men's club. You all probably used straight-edged razors. Did you use straight-edged razors?

JAY

No. And it wasn't a men's club. It was a religious order. Remember? Like, if the church was baseball, religious orders would be different teams with different styles, but they'd play in the same league. The Franciscans, Dominicans, Trinitarians.

RUBY

What were you?

JAY

A Pomeranian.

RUBY

Pomeranian. Right. That always sounded familiar to me. Pomeranian. Isn't that, like, a cute little dog?

JAY

A fierce little dog.

RUBY

Why did you leave?

JAY

I don't want to get into it. It's over! This city will be my religion.

RUBY

What a cop out. New York is the worst. It's just all these people having these annoying picnics in Central Park. I hate Central Park.

JAY

You wanted to meet here.

RUBY

(glaring at him)

They're all out there with classy food from Fairway Like No Other Market. Lying around on the freshly-cut green grass. People with friends they like and jobs they have and money they buy things with. Drinking, eating, laughing. Way into the night. With no fear.

JAY

I kind of like picnics.

RUBY

They're awful.

(JAY takes out rosary and absently rubs the beads.)

I've been here more than a decade and I still haven't gotten my big break. All my friends have given up acting. They're back in Pittsburgh and Louisville and Iceland and they're married and have kids and uncomplicated hairstyles. I have difficult hairstyles and weird headgear and layers of clothes and scarves. All these scarves, that don't even do anything. I hate scarves. And now you're leaving the priesthood.

JAY

I wasn't even a priest yet!

(RUBY points at rosary.)

RUBY

What is that? Isn't that a rosary?

JAY

It's just something to occupy my hands. It was a rosary. Blessed and everything. But I had it unblessed.

RUBY

Unblessed? How did you do that?

JAY

I went to this tattoo removal place. They do a lot of religious items too. These days everyone's getting stuff unblessed.

RUBY

No one wants anything to be sacred?

JAY

Everything is sacred. You don't need things to be blessed by some priest.

RUBY

We need priests to bless things! I can't believe you gave it up!

JAY

I didn't give up. It was a calling. I was called out of the seminary.

RUBY

By who? God? He wouldn't do that. He's not stupid.

JAY

No, I was called out by...

(Pause)

I don't want to talk about it.

RUBY

I should probably give up acting too. I would, except I've really come far with my craft. I'm working so hard in class on my object and animal work. Marlon says it's really good for our range.

JAY

Marlon?

RUBY

My acting teacher. Marlon *Brando*.

JAY

Oh. Of course.

RUBY

I've been a squirrel, a dog, a fish, a windmill. The coast of Portugal. A mollusk. I'm really good at mollusk. I can sit in my shell, all day.

JAY

I'd love to sit in a shell.

RUBY

Oh, you have no idea. Then you end up with reed. From mollusk you always go to swaying reed. It's called playing the opposites.

JAY

Have you been auditioning?

RUBY

Not yet. *Brando* wants me to really get some things down first before I get out there. Not just the animal work. Some stage combat. Stuff like that. A little more seasoning.

JAY

How long have you been studying with him?

RUBY

Six years.

JAY

Oh, okay. It takes a while.

RUBY

Of course it takes a while. Goddam Kerry Washington didn't just make it overnight.

JAY

Kerry Washington? Is she one of your idols?

(RUBY sees someone off in the park)

RUBY

There goes Beckenstein! What is he doing out?

JAY

Who's Beckenstein?

RUBY

He's a very annoying horrible clueless man.

JAY

So you like him! That's great!

RUBY

I do not like him.

(addressing the audience)

He's an old neighbor from back in Pittsburgh. His mom asked me to keep an eye on him. Make sure he was still a good boy. His mom's a bit much.

(SHE turns back to JAY)

RUBY

He should not be out here! He's Jewish!

JAY

What does his being Jewish--

Quiet!

RUBY

What does he do?

JAY

He's a producer.

RUBY

JAY
That's so awesome!!!! I just saw a producer with "stein" in his name! I'm really back in New York!

RUBY
That's offensive! They are a proud people. With traditional foods. Learn some sensitivity. That chosen little shit! Why is he out? It's a holy day. Let's see where he's going. He's coming this way! Hide!

(THEY hide behind bench. RUBY folds down into a crouch, head down, hands over HER head.)

JAY
(whispering)
What are you doing?

RUBY
It's a mollusk.

(Enter BECKENSTEIN, finishing call on phone.)

He's just having a fun little time. Look at him in the park having fun!

JAY
That's terrible.

RUBY
He's drinking coffee. Coffee has caffeine. It's forbidden!

JAY
The Jews don't forbid--

RUBY
Shhhh!

(BECKENSTEIN texts on phone.)

RUBY
He's texting! I am outraged. I'm gonna put an end to this. You should take a walk for a minute. This might not be pretty.

JAY
I see, you two need some private time.

RUBY

Haha!

(JAY sneaks off. RUBY slowly rises up from behind bench, arms overhead, gently swaying.)

Hey, Beckenstein. How you doing?

(Throughout play BECKENSTEIN speaks in various accents, slipping into them without realizing it. HE begins this scene with an exaggerated Yiddish accent)

BECKENSTEIN

Ruby! This is such a surprise!

RUBY

What brings you here?

BECKENSTEIN

Nothing! Nothing! Why are your arms like that?

RUBY

It's a reed.

BECKENSTEIN

Of course! How could I have not known?

RUBY

Why do you sound that way?

BECKENSTEIN

Sound what way?

RUBY

Like an old Jewish man.

BECKENSTEIN

I do?

(HE quickly reverts to his own accent)

Oh God. I do. I was just talking on the phone with Grandpa Milton. You remember him. He's from the old country. Wherever that was. Whenever I talk with him I start to sound like him. And it's funny, because I don't think he really sounds like that either. I think he just tries to talk like a comedian from the borscht belt.

RUBY

(putting her arms down)

What's the borscht belt?

BECKENSTEIN

I don't really know. I was wondering when you were going to put your arms down.

RUBY

Don't worry about me Beckenstein. I have a question. Aren't we in the Unique and Incomparable Time of Yom Kippur?

BECKENSTEIN

We are.

RUBY

So, do you want to explain yourself?

BECKENSTEIN

Explain what?

RUBY

You're out here. By a pond. A scenic romantic pond! Just like anyone else. Totally disregarding the events at hand.

BECKENSTEIN

You mean Yom Kippur?

RUBY

I don't mean the Rockettes.

BECKENSTEIN

I was not disregarding them. I don't have to explain myself to you!

RUBY

I think you do Beckenstein. What would your mother think!

BECKENSTEIN

Who cares! She's not me! She thinks she is. But she's not! Besides, I was celebrating in my own way.

RUBY

It's solemn. You don't celebrate.

BECKENSTEIN

It's just my heritage. It's not something I have to do. Lots of Jews don't practice their religion.

RUBY

Oh, I see. You're getting all the milk for free without having to buy the cow!

BECKENSTEIN

What does that mean?

RUBY

You get all the upsides to being Jewish without accepting the whole Jewish faith.

BECKENSTEIN

There are no upsides to being Jewish.

RUBY

That is anti-semitic!

BECKENSTEIN

I'm Jewish! I can say that!

RUBY

Well there's an upside! You can be anti-semitic and no one can say nothing! And Grandpa Milton should not be using the phone on YK Day.

BECKENSTEIN

He's willing to break the rules to reach out to me. And no one calls Yom Kippur YK Day.

RUBY

Oh, don't start acting like an expert.

BECKENSTEIN

Why am I getting into this with you? Don't you think I'd like to talk about something else? I'm just a guy who doesn't go to temple? That's all I am to you? You don't even care about my, about my...

RUBY

Your what? Spit it out! It'll be Purim by the time you finish.

BECKENSTEIN

My...my...never mind.

RUBY

What were you going to say? Your heart? Of course I care about your heart.

BECKENSTEIN

You do? Ruby, you do? I can't believe it. I was always hoping you'd say that.

RUBY

Well, your mom told me it was weak which was why you could never play sports. So of course I care about your heart.

BECKENSTEIN

My mom? My heart? My actual heart? You're worried about my heart in my body? My mom made that up! She kept me out of sports because that's what Jewish moms do with their sons.

RUBY

Anti-semitic! Getting the milk for free!

(Per HER acting instruction, RUBY embodies a cow)

Moo! Moo!! Stop taking my milk!

BECKENSTEIN

That's a pretty good cow.

RUBY

Oh, thank you! I've been working really hard on my animal--you're getting off the point. Here you are. Just like any other sinner out there. I know what the Hallowed Utmost Time of Yom Kippur is about. You're supposed to be atoning! You're supposed to be miserable! Not looking at ducks. We were counting on you! Not just your mother. All of us!! Next holy day I expect to see you in that church.

BECKENSTEIN

It's called a temple!

RUBY

How would you know!

BECKENSTEIN

It's my religion.

RUBY

They probably started calling it a church since the last time you went!

BECKENSTEIN

(slipping into Yiddish)

No, it's still called a temple!

RUBY

There's Grandpa again.

(JAY re-enters but is not noticed)

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, thanks. I have to go. Gotta work on those shows I'm producing right now.

(HE starts to leave)

You know, maybe if you believed in something I'd take your advice more seriously.

RUBY

Don't turn this around on me! Next time atone!

BECKENSTEIN

I tried Yom Kippur once. Fasting all day is not good for my blood sugar.

RUBY

That's a terrible excuse.

BECKENSTEIN

That's because I just made it up.

RUBY

Well think of a better one.

BECKENSTEIN

I can't right now. I'll go work on it. While I'm producing.

(Exits)

JAY

Wow!

RUBY

Were you listening? Pathetic! That horrible man, with his stupid hedgehog face and fake-Hebrew eyes and thick locks of golden brown pagan hair.

JAY

I knew it.

RUBY

Knew what?

JAY

"His thick locks of golden brown hair?"

RUBY

What are you talking about? I didn't say that.

JAY

You have it bad for him. That's wonderful.

RUBY

I don't know where you're getting this from Jay. His hair is not the issue. It's his religious practice.

JAY

Give him a break will you? I don't go to mass.

RUBY

What is going on out here? Who are these Pomeranians? What did they do to you?
Right before you entered seminary you were nervous, but you kept saying this mantra:
"I'm going hungry, I'm going hungry."

JAY

Eddie Vedder...

RUBY

So beautiful.

JAY

...and that other singer.

RUBY

You were going to give us hope. Everything out here is shallow. Show business is so vicious. It eats you alive.

JAY

You're not in show business. You haven't even auditioned for anything in six years.

RUBY

Excuse me? I am an actor. I am an actor. I am an actor. And you're a priest and you're supposed to remind us that there's more to life than just...this! What happened?

JAY

The church. I woke up and I saw the church. For what it really is.

RUBY

What is it?

JAY

Sex abuse scandals! And being against gay marriage! And not having women priests! And forbidding birth control. And all that wealth in the Vatican. And the scandals of the Renaissance popes and going on Crusades and selling indulgences and leading the Inquisition and prosecuting Galileo and Pope Benedict was in the Hitler Youth! The HITLER GODDAM YOUTH! And finally I got religion and left religion because religion just screws everything up, right?

RUBY

So you met a girl.

JAY

Basically.

RUBY

What's her name?

JAY

Thalia Brackish.

RUBY

What's she like?

JAY

Well, I don't know. I mean, she is a vampire. But beyond that, I'm not really sure.

RUBY

A vampire?

JAY

Yeah. She's a really good vampire.

RUBY

You abandoned your religious call for a vampire?

JAY

I had a new call. From her.

RUBY

Where did you meet her?

JAY

I haven't really met her. In the literal sense of the word "meet." I just know her from this TV series, *Dark Sunlight*. That's where her vampire abilities are showcased.

RUBY

She's a vampire on a TV show? Jay, you know that's just made up. She's not a real vampire.

JAY

I know that.

RUBY

Are you sure?

JAY

Of course.

(Pause)

How do you know she's not real? You've never seen the show.

RUBY

Because, real vampires don't let themselves get filmed. Real vampires don't have anything to do with shows like that. Come on Jay. What's wrong with you?

JAY

She's just super convincing. There was this one scene, where she was hanging out in this steam room. She had *gravitas*.

RUBY

So, is that why you moved to New York? Do they film *Dark Sunlight* here?

JAY

Yes, but I'll probably never meet her, will I? This city's so big. I'm kind of scared. I'm not scared.

RUBY

I felt scared when I first showed up too. But after a few months living in New York I didn't have any feelings at all, so that took care of that. Except it does make it hard to be an actor.

JAY

You have lots of feelings! Look how excited you were when I came.

RUBY

Well, you're the first positive thing to happen around here in a long time!

JAY

Oh, really? I didn't know I meant that much to you. That's sweet.

(Pause)

I don't mean that much to you, do I? You're not getting all whatever, are you?

RUBY

No I am not getting all whatever. So don't worry.

JAY

We just need to be clear here. No weird energy between us. Don't get me wrong. I've so appreciated your support all these years. Sending me the Third Eye Blind Basement Tapes.

RUBY

Your letters. On whatever scrap of food-stained paper-based trash you could find. Always just what I needed to hear.

JAY

But I'm just really valuing our friendship.

RUBY

That's what I loved about it. It was so great to meet someone who wasn't just into, you know, dating me. Listening to me. Being with me. All the time.

JAY

Right, right.

RUBY

You were safe. Not available. And I want to keep it that way. You've got your little vampire to fall for. But we're pals.

JAY

And not like a romantic comedy way. Where the friends date other people and then end up falling for each other.

RUBY

Right. And not in some romantic comedy way where the friends mention romantic comedies and how they won't end up together like friends in the romantic comedies do. But then they do end up together.

JAY

No. And not like a romantic comedy where they mention romantic comedies that mention romantic....Marlon Brando...Marlon Brando? You're taking acting classes with Marlon Brando?

RUBY

Yes.

JAY

Are you kidding me? Marlon Brando! I didn't even know he was still alive.

RUBY

No--

JAY

That's incredible! He is known as one of the greatest actor's that's ever--

RUBY

No, not him. Brando. The emphasis is on the "ndo."

JAY

Brando.

RUBY

Brando.

JAY

Wow. Two Marlon Brando's. And they both went into theatre.

RUBY

He draws a ton of students. But most of them tend to leave after the first class. Or after they meet him, really. I guess they can't hack it. He's really intense.

JAY

Is that's what got you all wound up? All worried about my life? A life which happens to not be your life? You poor thing. You're worn out from studying with this intense teacher and making Kerry Washington your god and being an actor who doesn't act. You're looking for something deeper. You want other people like me and Beckenstein to live out the religious path you yourself are too afraid to go on and now we're--

RUBY

Oh my God! This is definitely not a romantic comedy. Because you are a very mean mean mean man!

JAY

Yeah. I hear that sometimes when I tell the truth.

RUBY

I have Marlon Brando as a teacher but I do not have Kerry Washington as a god.

JAY

I hope I'm wrong.

(Pause)

Especially about her.

RUBY

Kerry Washington? What about her?

JAY

It's nothing.

RUBY

Tell me!

JAY

You don't know about K Dub?

RUBY

Jay, you're trying to get me off track from--

JAY

She's a complete nightmare. People can't stand working with her.

RUBY

Really?

JAY

Yes! It is known in the industry.

RUBY

Kerry Washington? No way!

JAY

I mean, she's a good actress. If you call that acting. And she's got that charity. For kids, or turtles, or whatever. But really, she is not pleasant. At all. She throws tantrums on the set. She once puked on a baby. On purpose. Just because.

RUBY

I had no idea she was like that. Amazing. Am I in the right line of work? Maybe acting turns you that way.

JAY

I think it's just her DNA.

RUBY

She has DNA?

JAY

Yeah.

RUBY

That's so sad! DNA! Well that probably explains it. Poor thing. Isn't there a foundation for DNA? Maybe she should forget about the turtles and raise money for DNA.

JAY

No. DNA. Everyone has DNA.

RUBY

Everyone has it? It's gone this far? I wouldn't be surprised. My little cousin has ADD. My niece has HPV. Kerry's got DNA. What's going on out there?

JAY

DNA! DNA is the building blocks of the...is that right? DNA? DNA. DNA. DNA. DNA. Now it sounds totally meaningless.

RUBY

Well, I think we should all get tested is what I think. Just to be safe.

JAY

You're probably right. Wait! No! DNA is the stuff that--

RUBY

Jay, please. That's what gets people in trouble. When they think they know. They've got it all figured out! That's when catastrophe strikes.

JAY

You've got a point.

RUBY

DNA is the silent killer. You better take care of yourself.

JAY

I will. I will.

RUBY

Call me if you get any symptoms. I'll be at work.

JAY

At the hotel bar?

RUBY

Where they don't want customers. It's awesome.

JAY

I just got a job as a doorman. In the projects in the Bronx.

RUBY

Cool! Which ones?

JAY

Where each building's named after a legendary New York Yankee. Ruby. Look, I'm sorry. About saying you're not an actor and everything. I was just trying to help.

RUBY

Well, remember that just because you tell the truth...

...doesn't mean it is the truth. JAY

You just finished my sentence. Oh my God. RUBY

I better go. (Pause)

Okay! JAY

(RUBY exits)

SCENE 2

(Street near the AKA Hotel just south of Central Park. RUBY walks down street. Looks up at sign on a door for a church.)

Never noticed this place. It kind of looks like a church. RUBY

(Looks around to check if anyone sees HER.)

Guess I have a few minutes before work. No one ever comes to that bar anyway.

(Enters. Sits. Nervous. Enter KAI.)

Hi, welcome! KAI

Oh, hi. Are you the pastor? RUBY

"Pastor." Kind of vertical isn't it? Me above you-ish? KAI

Uhhh-- RUBY

My name's Kai. KAI

Well, I'm Ruby. RUBY

Ruby. What a fun name! KAI

Is this a church? RUBY

KAI

Oh, if you want to call us that--"church"--you could say we are.

RUBY

Oh, okay. I wasn't sure.

KAI

You weren't sure if this was a church?

RUBY

No.

KAI

Great! Great! That's fantastic!

RUBY

What kind of church, or not church, is this?

KAI

You could say we're mainline Protestant. My sister says the term should be sideline Protestant. Because that's where the mainliners are these days. End of the bench. No one visits us. Not even the waterboy. All of us down there--Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians etcetera etcetera.

RUBY

Which one are you?

KAI

Not really sure. They all just kind of blended together a while ago. But for us, the word "church" doesn't necessarily fit. We're trying different things. Do you think you could come up front?

RUBY

Uhhh.

KAI

Yeah, I think that's best. Come right up here.

RUBY

I guess...

KAI

We're starting service in about half an hour. Don't want all that diversity tucked in the back.

RUBY

I can't stay.

KAI

Well, it is so nice that you have walked through our doors. We haven't had someone under 50 in this place since, geez, when did Ross first kiss Rachel? Oh, that Ross and Rachel. Those shows that we all watched. Do you have any tattoos? Not that it matters. It doesn't. What am I talking about?

RUBY

Well, long as you asked, I do have this lovely map of Kyrgyzstan on the back of my--

KAI

Perfect. Love it! Don't go to church much, do you? Or maybe you do. I don't know. What do I know? I don't know a thing! That's not true. I know a lot of things. I'm aware. You're aware. This is an aware kind of place. Have you had an abortion?

RUBY

What?

KAI

That sounded awful. Dammit! Have you had a woman's health issue?

RUBY

What's a woman's health issue?

KAI

An abortion. Not that I'd judge you if you did have a woman's health issue. I don't judge. I'm here to help. You might have experienced trauma, regret. Or not. No trauma, no regret. Which is fine too. We are here with open arms.

(HE begins singing "Open Arms" by Journey)

And so now here I am, with open arms!..You know the rest.

RUBY

Actually, I came to church...I never thought I believed in anything. But, lately...

KAI

Whatever it is, we are here. We are church. I mean, like I said, we're really not church. People come to us and they say, "*This is church?*" We love it when they say that. We have a whole podcast of people saying, "*This is church?*" They like it because they feel comfortable here. Because it's no different than the rest of the world out there.

RUBY

Oh. That makes sense. But, wait. Why would they want to come to something that's just like anywhere else they can go?

KAI

Oh, you kiddier! All these questions. Am I on Dr. Phil?

RUBY

(laughing)

Guess so!

(Pause)

So, you're a church or you're not a church?

KAI

We're low barrier is what we are. Do you know what that means? Low barrier?

RUBY

Nope.

KAI

Neither do I. I picked it up from the mega-churches. They are showing the way! They pack 'em in! They even get the kids in the hats. Pork pies, stingy brim fedoras. Clunky green glasses and canvas shoes with no arch support. They got good sermons and good music. That's the key. Those churches figured it out. Although they're pretty bible-happy, which can be a bit much, you know? They read that thing at nearly every service. Anyway, we're still working on our mission statement. We do have our vision statement.

RUBY

What's the difference?

KAI

A mission statement describes what you do. A vision statement describes what you intend to achieve.

RUBY

Well what's that?

KAI

Our vision statement is that we intend to finish our mission statement. We've only been working on it five years. Which is pretty good for non-profits. We're not a church. We're mainly a non-profit social club.

RUBY

Is this Catholic? Are you Pomeranian? My friend was Pomeranian, which is Catholic.

KAI

Shhhhh! Keep your voice down. No, we're not Catholic.

RUBY

Oh. Okay. Well, I guess I was just wondering...let's say I did have an abortion--

KAI

Thank you Jesus! Oh God the credibility. Depths to heights. Weepy poignant talks fighting back tears in the parish hall...not that we'd judge you.

RUBY

Let's say I did, and one of the reasons I came to church was that I wanted to work through, or ask forgiveness. Or I don't know if I even need forgiveness because I don't know if it was wrong. I just don't know what to think.

KAI

Neither do I! Isn't that great! You've met someone who doesn't know what to think either! Just because I got this North Carolina accent people think I'm another judgmental closed-minded preacher who's got fixed opinions about current topics. But I don't! I don't have opinions! And so we can help each other! Only when we're both down there in darkness and confusion and a lack of even the faintest hint of coherent moral direction can we then communicate. And it's really all about communicating! Do you ever wear ripped jeans?

RUBY

Maybe like once or--

KAI

I mean tore up, just shredded, like they been in a wood chipper.

RUBY

I could look in my closet.

KAI

If you have any, don't feel like you have to leave them at home. You can wear them to church! You can wear ripped jeans to church! In the front row or nearby sections! "This is Church?"

RUBY

Do you think it's wrong? If I had an abortion?

KAI

Do you think it's wrong?

RUBY

Do you think it's wrong?

KAI

Do you think it's wrong?

RUBY

Do you think it's wrong?

KAI

Do you think it's wrong?

RUBY

I thought you might have some insight. Maybe I had too high expectations?

KAI

Just remember, you have it within you to figure out your own vision. Live the questions! said Venus Williams. You know, the stars are really bright when there's no lights on. Which sounds obvious, *and it is obvious*.

RUBY

That's great. Totally. All of it. Do you have anything, I don't know, Jesus might have said?

KAI

Oh, but not everyone believes in Jesus.

RUBY

This is a Christian church, right?

KAI

Yes. But if I say something Jesus said, someone might not feel welcome into that circle of community that has just encircled.

RUBY

But, everyone isn't here. It's only me.

KAI

But they could be here. They could just creep in. Like I'm saying, "Oh, Jesus said this! And, Jesus proclaimed that!" And all of a sudden they're right there, saying, "don't shove your religion down my throat!!!!" And I'm having to backtrack. "I wasn't trying to shove my religion down your throat." And they're all, "I don't need your guilt trip." And I'm like, "A guilt trip is the last thing in the world I want to offer you! Jesus was not about guilt trips. He was liberating. Like Shakyamuni Buddha." See, not everyone knows the Buddha's first name! I do. This is Church? Jesus was very helpful. He helped a lot of people. And it's all about people, don't you realize? I'm a person. You're a person. We're all people." So, tell me about your abortion.

RUBY

I didn't have an abortion.

KAI

Oh. Are you sure?

RUBY

Yes.

KAI

Maybe you blocked it out.

RUBY

I didn't block it out. I just wanted to see how you guys would react. How you think about things.

KAI

We don't think about things.

RUBY

I guess not.

KAI

Thinking just gets in the way of the spiritual. We think too much in this society.

RUBY

Really?

KAI

All my education. Who needs education! You can just look at the bible and tell what it's saying! Without even opening it up! All this schooling gets in the way of life, of reality! We need to live in reality.

RUBY

I don't know anything about reality. I'm trying to be an actor. I am an actor. I'm lonely. I'm not lonely. Do you think I should pray?

KAI

Do you think you should pray?

RUBY

Do you think I should pray?

KAI

Do you think--

RUBY

Let's not start that again! It's just that, my life could be so good. New York is safe now and clean and awesome and I just want to sit on the grass on a blanket with my good-looking friends, but I don't have any friends at all except a priest who isn't a priest and a Jewish guy who isn't Jewish and I'm an actor but I've never acted and Kerry Washington is my god! I actually tried to pray to her once. To Kerry Washington! And I imagined her saying "Guards! Take her away! I'm in make-up!" Which I guess was actually pretty mild for her. She's a total maniac. So I thought maybe I should try praying to a different god. The main god. Which I did.

KAI

How did that go?

RUBY

Well, I imagined God as this old man. This old white man with a long white beard.

KAI

Oh, Ruby, Ruby. We need to talk.

RUBY

Really?

KAI

Yes, really. Old white man. Ugh! Ruby. Just remember. God works through the way you work.

RUBY

What?

KAI

Um, God works through the way you work?

RUBY

That's interesting. What does that mean?

KAI

I have no idea. Sometimes I just say things.

RUBY

He works through, like, what I do?

KAI

Maybe. Or maybe not. Let's go talk in my study. We can figure this out. Or not figure it out.

(Starts to exit)

RUBY

Don't you have service in a few minutes?

KAI

Associate pastor has it. Do I look stretchy enough to teach ninety minutes of Kundalini yoga?

SCENE 3

(JAY standing at podium in lobby of a building wearing doorman's outfit, speaking on phone)

JAY

Hi, just checking on that cab I called for Chuck Knoblauch Housing?...391st Street....You don't go that high? Why, just because we're poor minorities?....I am too a minority. When I'm here. I don't have to put up with this!

(Hangs up phone. Addresses the audience)

This is all so weird. I thought that leaving seminary would make me happy. But I don't know if I am happy. Did I make the right choice? How am I going to meet a huge TV star like Thalia Brackish? She'll probably have bodyguards all around her. And if I do meet her, why would she even go out with me? And if she does go out with me, where would we go? There's so many restaurants to choose from. And if we do choose a restaurant and I totally fall for her, what if she doesn't fall for me?

(Enter RUBY)

Ruby! What're you doing up here?

RUBY

Enough small talk! I want to know more about God. I'm not getting anywhere with the other guy that's not stretchy.

JAY

What other guy that's not stretchy?

RUBY

Why are none of you guys who are supposed to be religious religious? Why did you leave the Pomeranians? I know it wasn't just this vampire biddy. Did you find her by the way?

JAY

No.

RUBY

Well. Keep looking.

JAY

I will.

RUBY

But you wouldn't skip outta seminary just for her. As sterling a person as she probably is. You loved Jesus and the Church and everything! What happened!

JAY

Are you sure you want to hear this?

RUBY

Yes.

JAY

I had a flashback. A repressed memory. That suddenly came back.

RUBY

Oh, Jay.

JAY

What I remembered was sitting in a classroom. And it was all dark. And this man gets up and starts walking over to me. He's in black, white collar. It was Fr. Jamie. The entire school loved Fr. Jamie. Great teacher. Always joking, laughing. But tough when he had to be.

(Pause)

That day he must've been wearing the same after-shave lotion my dad wore. And smelling that made me feel safe. Like I was at home. But I wasn't at home.

RUBY

Jay. Is this too difficult?

JAY

He comes over to me...in the dark...and he....takes his hand...and he puts it...on the pause button of the VCR, which was right in front of me.

RUBY

The VCR?

JAY

And he's like, "All right eighth grade--Nicky, Tommy, Jay, Kerry, Kristin, Kristin, Kristin--since you won't quit screwing around we're not gonna finish the end of *The Next Karate Kid* with young Hillary Swank in her breakout role." And he turns off the movie.

RUBY

Hold on.

JAY

What kind of man would do that? To twelve year-olds! I have never watched the end of *The Next Karate Kid*. I have no idea who won the big match. Maybe she won on a really cool final move even though her liver had been, like, literally kicked out of her body. Or maybe the other guy won, because he kicked her liver out of her body. But it was some kind of larger victory for the next Karate Kid--

RUBY

Wait!

JAY

What?

RUBY

Some priest didn't let you finish the end of *The Next Karate Kid* and you remembered that and suddenly abandoned your entire life calling?

JAY

If that's what a priest does, I want nothing to do with it. I was a kid. He took something from me I'll never get back.

RUBY

You could watch *The Next Karate Kid* on your own.

JAY

I don't want anything to do with that movie. I was destroyed. That stuff stays with you forever. You can't trust anyone. All your future relationships have been ruined.

RUBY

So, he didn't touch you?

JAY

No.

RUBY

Are you sure?

JAY

Yes I am sure. You know, that is such anti-Catholic crap. This idea that every priest on the planet does nothing but touch kids.

RUBY

No one said every priest on the planet--

JAY

And if you do the research, you will find out that Catholic clergy have a lower sexual abuse rate than stepfathers, and public school teachers and foster parents in Sweden in the 1950s. And farmers.

RUBY

Farmers?

JAY

Yes. Farmers.

RUBY

Where did you hear that?

JAY

The website. Priests Against Farmers. So let's get our facts straight.

RUBY

Why are you defending the Catholic Church? You just complained about the sex abuse crisis.

JAY

Because. I feel it's important to speak the truth. But it doesn't matter anyway. The entire hierarchical religion thing is over.

RUBY

No it's not.

JAY

Yes it is. We're not thinking those ways anymore. The culture has shifted.

RUBY

Shifted where?

JAY

(flipping through notes on podium)

To spiritual freedom. Where we decide what to believe or not believe. What is true for you may not be true for me. As the seminal thinker Charles Taylor writes in...some book that this very sweet adjunct professor explained to me while he filled my drink order at Buffalo Wild Wings...we all used to be enchanted by the notion that God moved every little molecule in the universe. But we were just under the spell of the shadowy titans of the "sacred" oligarchy. The ones who interpreted what God did. Who told us how God wanted us to live. So what you thought was a connection to great wisdom was just a bunch of men lecturing you. And don't you hate it when men lecture you.

RUBY

I'm bored. Help me with my stage combat. We can use these wiffle ball bats that happens to be lying right here next to us.

(SHE picks up bats)

JAY

Don't you want to hear this?

RUBY

No.

JAY

Really?

RUBY

Really.

JAY

I'll bet Thalia Brackish would want to hear it.

RUBY

Being the academic genius she probably is, I'm sure you're right. Take this bat.

JAY

(takes bat, they start fighting)

She is smart. She thinks for herself. Which is what we're all doing now. We've finally broken through the gates of the religious autocracy. It took a while but we got there. Voltaire and Descartes and Kant and Darwin and Freud and Led Zeppelin kicked down the doors and we all came barreling through. We're back to figuring out life on our own. You don't need to ride the coyote to get to the well. You just go to the well and let the coyote go off and graze and the church is the coyote somehow.

(HE goes back to podium and holds up his notes, which turn out to be a magazine. HE holds it up.)

It's all summarized very nicely in this article in *Family Circle*.

RUBY

So we let the coyotes graze.

JAY

That's right. We don't need some handed down dogmatic truth to guide our lives. There is no such thing as truth. And that's the truth.

(Pause as HE considers this. Then:)

Check out my fencing skills!

(JAY starts making elaborate and thrusts and parries with the bat as RUBY watches, irritated. Finally)

RUBY

Jay, you are getting on my last nerve. If I don't get this down there will be hell to pay with Marlon Brando. But you probably don't even believe in hell do you? Or Jesus.

JAY

I've got nothing against Jesus. He was a great teacher. He was very spiritual. He said many things. But he's no better than the other teachers out there. There is wisdom in all the great spiritual paths, and in the end they all fit together. If you get bogged down in one you lose sight of the big picture. Of what the universe is trying to tell you.

RUBY

Wow. Streets full of pagans around here. Very interesting!

(Suddenly strikes at JAY. HE barely blocks it in time.)

JAY

Hey!

RUBY

I thought the universe would protect you.

JAY

Don't make fun of me. Beckenstein was right. You're off judging everyone around you but you don't believe in anything!

RUBY

After I met you I read a few books. Took a class or two. Tell me. How does someone leave behind faith in Jesus Christ, and trade it for faith in "the universe?"

JAY

We are made of everything that's out there. You don't worry so much about how you are going to end up because we have already ended up. We are in all things.

(Pause)

I know. You probably think that's super New Agey and crystally and ridiculous. But thinking that way makes people less judgmental. More patient. Accepting. You put your problems and your desires out to the universe and you get what you need in return. It happens to be a very peaceful way of living.

(She turns to leave)

RUBY

I can't take this.

JAY

Where are you going?

RUBY

I am so disappointed in you.

You're disappointed in yourself JAY

Hah! RUBY

You're afraid of the truth! JAY

I'm afraid of spiders. RUBY

Spiders? Oh, come on. JAY

No, really. I am. It's been that way since my childhood. RUBY

Oh, I'm sorry. JAY

Oh, thanks but it's not that bad. I've actually made some progress--what am I saying! I'm leaving! RUBY

(SHE exits)

I don't need your religion! JAY

(takes out rosary and starts worrying the beads)

(Enter A WOMAN wearing sunglasses.)

Can you call up Dora Vaughn? WOMAN

What? Oh, sure. Who may I say is here? JAY

Her granddaughter. WOMAN

Sure. JAY

(HE dials)

Have I seen you before? JAY

WOMAN

I don't know.

JAY

(speaking into phone)

Ms. Vaughn, your granddaughter is here.

(Hangs up.)

She'll be right down.

(WOMAN sits down. Takes off sunglasses.)

JAY

Oh my God.

(WOMAN looks up.)

WOMAN

Yes?

JAY

(holding out the rosary right in front of her)

That was you down in the park. You're Thalia Brackish. You came to me. Not even in the dark sunlight. In the light sunlight.

THALIA

Excuse me?

JAY

I can't believe you're right here.

(Looks down at what HE is holding in his hands)

A cross!

(Quickly puts rosary away)

I love *Dark Sunlight*.

THALIA

Thank you.

JAY

What are you doing up at Knoblauch? Did you by chance feel the wind pushing you here?

THALIA

I'm visiting my grandma.

JAY

Oh, right. Wait a minute. Your grandma lives here?

THALIA

Hey, don't give me that tone. I tried to get her to move out, had a place all set up for her. She refused to leave.

JAY

Do you mind if I ask something?

THALIA

Go ahead.

JAY

You know that last scene from the season five finale? In the locker room sauna? At night? Mist coming from the hot rocks. Drops of sweat forming on you like dew on a cricket.

THALIA

I remember.

JAY

And you got that text from Sarcaphagos saying he wanted to start over with you, and you texted back that you would? And right then you knew you were just going back into that cycle of misery and addiction and nasty bloody teeth and so you started crying, and shrieking and throwing all the towels and sauna rocks around?

THALIA

Yes.

(Pause)

JAY

That was a good scene.

THALIA

Thank you.

(Enter MS. VAUGHN.)

MS. VAUGHN

Hey Father Jay.

JAY

I'm not a priest Ms. Vaughn. I left seminary. You know that. I was just talking to Ms. Brackish--

MS. VAUGHN

Oh, I see you met my granddaughter. Thalia, this Father Jay. He a monk. He don't date girls.

JAY

No! That's not true!

MS VAUGHN

Whatever you say Father Jay!

JAY

No, really.

MS VAUGHN

You know, I been meaning to tell you something Father Jay. I heard the ghost of my husband, Boots, come into my house last night. He with Jesus now. But guess he got tired of Jesus for a little bit, wanted to come be with me. What do you think about that Father Jay?

THALIA

Grandpa did not come to see you.

MS VAUGHN

Hush. What do you know? You wasn't there.

JAY

Sounds like you had a very spiritual experience.

MS VAUGHN

I understand him leaving. Maybe too long a line to be hanging out with Jesus that night. Everyone wanting his attention. Jesus, tie my shoe. Jesus, let's have a drink. Now, I just say Jesus because Boots was a Jesus person. I'm not much into Jesus.

JAY

You're not much into--

MS VAUGHN

This a man, Thalia, you can just tell things to. He's a regular monk. Gonna perform an exorcism on some of these hoodies out here. But without Jesus and Elijah and the fiery angels of God. No, gonna use Mr. Frederick Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Robert Plant.

JAY

You're not much into Jesus?

MS VAUGHN

No.

JAY

Even though you're...

MS VAUGHN

(storming)
What? An old black lady?

JAY

Well, no, I didn't mean that.

MS VAUGHN

(smiling)
I'm just kidding! I just think the universe is gonna take care of us, is all.

JAY

The universe?

THALIA

I just started going back to church! And you're leaving it?

JAY

You started going back to church? You? But you're on *Dark Sunlight*. You...do things on *Dark Sunlight*. A lot of very interesting things.

MS VAUGHN

You do what makes you feel good child.

THALIA

Aren't you disappointed in me? You used to be disappointed in me for exposing myself on basic cable! Well, no more! I've reclaimed my virginity!

JAY

No!

MS VAUGHN

It's live and let learn is what I say. Father Jay says the Universe got us covered because Immanuel Kant and Charles Darwin and the Fender Stratocaster double-necked guitar rearranged everyone's molecules so the brain got little stop signs for the totalitarians of religion cuz they mess everything up.

JAY

Wow. I never knew people actually listened to me.

(HE turns to THALIA.)

Now what is this about reclaiming your virginity? Isn't that kind of a cult?

MS VAUGHN

You always going on about the universe got me thinking. You're a cute feller. Made me more likely to believe you. Oh shoot. I left my Metro-card upstairs.

THALIA

We're not taking the subway Grandma.

MS. VAUGHN

You never know, your car might break down.

THALIA

That only happened once!

JAY

Your car broke down?

THALIA

I don't get paid as much for *Dark Sunlight* as you might think.

(MS. VAUGHN exits.)

Grandma!

JAY

(addressing the audience)

I didn't know I could actually change someone's mind. Sometimes I just say things and I'm not even sure I believe in what I'm saying. I mean, I do believe what I'm saying. But I don't know if anyone else should believe it.

THALIA

She's supposed to be upset with me! I've known for years I'm better than *Dark Sunlight*. Sometimes I feel like my whole life has been wasted. I've just been doing these meaningless vampire shows that have no substance!

JAY

I love your series! Do you ever drink blood off camera? When you're not filming?

THALIA

Why would I do that?

JAY

I just...never mind.

THALIA

That's ridiculous.

JAY

I'm sorry.

THALIA

Drink blood off camera.

JAY

All right!

THALIA

I need to use my influence to do something positive! With kids or turtles or something.

JAY

What would you do?

THALIA

A TV pilot with values. Or a feature film. Or something even more prestigious. A short-lived web series. A web series that would flow out of my new-found Christian faith.

JAY

Oh no. You want to make a short-lived Christian web series? What about a secular romantic comedy? Christians shows are always so--

THALIA

So...what?

(phone rings)

JAY

Hold on.

(answers phone)

Knoblauch. Yes Ms. Vaughn. Yes, she's right here.

(gives phone to THALIA)

THALIA

Grandma? Okay. Okay! I'll be right there.

(hangs up)

She needs help finding her Metro card. She thinks Grandpa Boots might have taken it. This might take a while.

JAY

I get off work pretty soon, but I have to leave real quick. They don't like having me around longer than I need to be. They're scared I'll attract more of my kind and ruin the neighborhood. Do you think I could see you another time?

Sure!

Really? Why?

What do you mean why? I want to talk about my web series ideas. No one else is taking me seriously.

I take you seriously. Do you know the AKA hotel bar in midtown?

Yes!

Tomorrow night. 7pm.

See you then!

(SHE exits)

(RUBY reenters)

RUBY

Okay, so, let's say you're this little fish in a fish tank. A purple betta.

JAY

Hey! Guess what?

RUBY

I don't care.

JAY

Guess who I met?

RUBY

Chuck Knoblauch. Now listen up. Let's say you're a purple betta.

JAY

Ruby, You want to hear this.

RUBY

Don't distract me. Let's say you're a purple betta.

JAY

What's a purple betta?

RUBY

It's a fish! And you and all the other betta's in the tank aren't doing so great. Because you get the crap kicked out of you. All the time! And you do the same to each other! So the guy who actually made the fish tank finally sends this other fish. This...Asian carp...to show you how to live and take care of each other. How it's all about love and forgiveness.

JAY

I see where this is going.

RUBY

JUST LISTEN! And this little Oriental fish is so good at what he does--healing the other fish and swimming on water--

JAY

He's a fish. Of course he can swim on water.

RUBY

On water. Have you ever seen a fish swim on top of the water?

JAY

No. I haven't.

RUBY

Well, this fish could. And he calls out the hypocrites and raises the dead and casts out demons and feeds people on just a few loaves and, well, fishes. And some of the fish in charge of the tank get scared because they think he's going to take their power. But he doesn't care, because nothing gets under his skin! He just goes on telling everyone: Love! Love your neighbors! Love your enemies! Love is the way--

JAY

I GET IT! THE FISH IS JESUS AND HE PREACHED LOVE AND THEY KILLED HIM AND HE'S GREAT AND WHATEVER. I GET IT!!!

RUBY

What are you even talking about?

JAY

You're trying to tell me how fantastic Jesus Christ is.

RUBY

No I'm not. I just wanted to talk about a fish. I mean, wouldn't it be cool to have a fish like that?

JAY

Oh. That wasn't about Jesus?

RUBY

No! God! Can't a sister just talk about marine life without everyone having to ruin it?

JAY

She can.

RUBY

I mean, you draw these conclusions.

(long pause)

But, come to think of it, that could be an analogy, couldn't it?

JAY

Well, that's what I was trying--

RUBY

Yeah! Because Jesus does talk about love. And he does get killed. And rises from the dead!

JAY

Exactly.

RUBY

And gets airlifted straight to heaven.

JAY

That's the legend.

RUBY

And yet you don't believe in him anymore because you've decided that instead of believing in HIM, you'd rather believe in THE FISH TANK ITSELF!!!

(pause)

Meaning the fish tank is the universe.

JAY

I get it!

RUBY

So you leave all this, to follow that?

JAY

What difference does it make to you?

RUBY

I'm just pointing out what your religion says! God made the universe. He's the one in all things! He works through the way we work. Whatever that means. And by the way, I read about those German little future popes. They had to be Hitler Youth. Those kids didn't have any choice! And coyotes don't graze.

JAY

What?

RUBY

You said they graze. They don't graze. They eat meat.

JAY

I don't know what coyotes do. I just know those coyote days are over and they're not coming back. Which makes you sad, because you're looking for someone to tell you what to believe in.

RUBY

You're being ridiculous.

JAY

Did I hit a nerve Ruby?

RUBY

I happen to think people should believe what they say they believe.

JAY

You've never even tried it. What, you read books? Went to a class?

RUBY

That class was two hours long! Every week! For four weeks!

JAY

If you think top-down regimented bible-thumping approaches to the spiritual is actually still a thing, who am I to argue? You just explained the whole Jesus story without even realizing it. It's in your blood now. And by the way. I met her. I met Thalia Brackish. She showed up right here. The universe brought her to this building.

RUBY

The vampire?

JAY

Yes.

RUBY

You found her?

JAY

She found me.

RUBY

Oh. Great! I'm so happy for you. Great. Jay, what you always wanted.

SCENE 4

(The AKA Hotel Bar. RUBY is alone.)

(SHE wipes off bar, washes glasses. Looks around. Sees no one is there. Kneels on the floor.)

RUBY

Dear Kerry...GODDAMMIT!!! I mean, Dear God. First off, I want to say I'm probably doing this wrong. I only see you as an old white man with a long white beard and Pastor Kai "Just Call Me Kai" told me I shouldn't see you as an old white man. That was totally outdated. Follow your heart! Don't listen to institutions and traditions and establishments telling you what to do and what to think! Listen to yourself!

(Pause)

But wasn't it himself that was telling me to listen to myself? How can I actually listen to myself if all I can hear is him telling me to listen to myself? So I'm really listening to him. Who am I actually supposed to be listening to? And besides, my high school art teacher Mr. Meador was an old white man with a big beard and he was really inspiring! And I can think of other old white men who are awesome. Like Clint Eastwood. Even though in his movies he's always pretty much wasting everyone in sight. But you, God, kill a lot of people too. And people are going to die anyway so what an honor it would be to get taken out by the best, right? Because you work through the way we work! Like you help us...get work. That doesn't sound right. My point is I'm praying wrong so this isn't very fun. Am I even talking to you or am I just talking to myself? What do you want from me?

(Pause)

I want you to be happy Ruby. I love you.

(Pause)

Oh come on! Wasn't that just me telling myself to be happy and to love myself? That wasn't God. This is a disaster! I'm failing at my acting career and I'm failing at prayer and at everything. Jay found what he wanted but I haven't found anything! The closer I try to get to you the further away I get. I want to get closer to you because I want forgiveness for my abortion. Even though I didn't have an abortion. I mean a woman's health issue. But I feel like I must have had an abor--a woman's health issue. Because in a movie every time a girl goes into a church alone, or kneels down in an empty bar to pray to you it means she just had a woman's health abortion issue. I'm not getting this language right. Or is thinking of having her health aborted. Dammit. Or wishes her abusive boyfriend had been the victim of a healthy abortion. What? And because the movie has an abor...a choice...a health...screw it, AN ABORTION--it's seen as controversial and brave and everyone's moved and impressed and it gets all this critical acclaim. Maybe if I did have an abortion I'd have a reason to ask for forgiveness. Because that's what it's all about. Forgiveness. And then I'd get closer to you. And you'd be closer to me.

(SHE gets up, takes off her apron and leaves. ENTER THALIA and JAY)

THALIA

Nice bar. It's so quiet.

JAY

We're probably the only customers they've had in months.

THALIA

So. When we talked before you started saying something about my newfound Christian faith.

JAY

Right, your newfound Christian--

THALIA

I want to get your opinion. You started to say Christians shows are always so...

JAY

Oh, really, you don't want my opinion--

THALIA

I do! Really!

JAY

It's just that those kinds of shows, blatantly religious, they're just not...ever...the acting...the writing...

RUBY

(she moves closer)

What about the acting? The writing?

JAY

It's never very....

(he looks into her eager eyes)

enough....of how much...of the good that it is.

RUBY

What?

JAY

Christian shows are so good. Profound, complex. They are just what we need in this culture. The Apostles, the martyrs. How long does one usually reclaim their virginity for?

THALIA

I don't know. It's new to me. I've got a lot of reclaiming to do. I didn't know you were so into the faith.

JAY

Yeah, when I'm out with some girl, because I date women...a lot...but no decent women. Not that I date indecent women---the point is I talk about my faith

THALIA

It's a good way of life.

JAY

It used to be called "the way." In fact, the early Christians were known as the "Wayans." As in the Wayans Brothers. When people were like, which way should we follow? The Wayans were like, this way! And then the people would get all confused because the Wayans didn't have any arms to point with because they got chewed off by Bengal tigers in the Roman synagogues.

THALIA

You don't really know what you're talking about.

JAY

I got through a semester of theology! Half a semester.

THALIA

All's I'm trying to say is there's no good Christian movies or TV pilots or web serieses. I mean, if old black women are leaving the faith, what hope is there for the rest of us!

JAY

But, wait a minute. Don't you think the culture has changed? We've returned to an encounter with the universal wisdom where organized spirituality is useless and you no longer need the coyote.

THALIA

What are you talking about?

JAY

Dumb things.

THALIA

Remember the priest from *On the Waterfront*?

JAY

He was ferocious!

THALIA

He was a man! He decked Marlon Brando, and then ordered a beer!

JAY

The first Marlon Brando.

THALIA

What?

JAY

Never mind. Movie priests were men back then! Guys like that inspired me to be a priest. To stand with the proletariat.

THALIA

I love the proletariat. It's such a pretty word.

JAY

Karl Malden's all telling the mob "Taking the life of Joey Doyle to stop him from testifying is a crucifixion!" Priests are all wimps now.

THALIA

I could make a show like that. It would also diversify my career.

JAY

Yeah!

THALIA

It's gotta be *just so*.

JAY

It has to be delicate.

THALIA

You don't want a pathetic web series where everyone's at least a little bit happy all the time and the pony is lost in the snowstorm for only, like, half an hour.

JAY

Where it's obvious the goddam little horse is gonna come back and everything's gonna turn out okay.

THALIA

I just started going back to church. I'm so behind on my bible study. I would need a religion adviser.

JAY

I know Jesus. Christ is the center of my life.

RUBY

Really?

JAY

There is no other way to the Father except through the Son.

THALIA

Great! You could help! You might want to start going over your church history again.

JAY

(transfixed on her)

It's not about history Thalia. It's about my heart.

THALIA

What?

JAY

My heart...land. I'm from Nebraska.

THALIA

Great! You can help us market it to regular people! But regular people aren't stupid! They need something subtle. I'm not interested in beating anyone over the head with this!

JAY

Right! It can't be messagey! People are too smart for that!

THALIA

American audiences can't be preached at! They'll smell it a mile off! We need to gently put the needle of truth under their skin.

JAY

In fact, it should be so obscure that no one should even get this show.

THALIA

Yeah. It can't be one of those shows with, like, a point. People will just shut their Macs down. Midway through!

JAY

The souls are out there. Lost. Looking for this short-lived web series. Why is it short-lived?

THALIA

Because we pull it.

JAY

Right! And why do we do that?

THALIA

So the audience will clamor for it to come back.

JAY

Yes. Clamor.

THALIA

But we don't we bring it back.

JAY

No sir! And the reason for that is...

THALIA

Is so it becomes legendary.

JAY

Right! A legendary short-lived web series no one will understand. But will bring them back to...you know...something.

To Jesus! THALIA

Oh, right. To Jesus. JAY

Jesus. THALIA

(THALIA looks at JAY as if for the first time)

You're really into the Lord?

Yes. Why? JAY

You don't meet a lot of men who are these days. THALIA

I know. We need to repent. We men walk in the valley of the shadow of death. JAY

But God is by your side. THALIA

And he shall lead us to refreshing waters. JAY

And he shall explode my career--Jesuses career. Jesus! Yes. We just need a producer. THALIA

Did you say we need a producer? JAY

Yes. For the show. Jay, why are you smiling? THALIA

SCENE 5

(An aisle in Fairway. RUBY enters.)

Fairway Like No Other Market. Love this place. RUBY

(Enter BECKENSTEIN. HE is speaking with an over-the-top Mexican accent)

What up homes! I was surprised you wanted to talk. Thought you hated me! BECKENSTEIN

RUBY

I don't hate you.

BECKENSTEIN

Well, that's a good thing. Wonderin' if I was gonna be out here like a lost little chico without my old friend Ruby. Even if she don't care about my other heart.

RUBY

Whose voice are you doing now?

BECKENSTEIN

What voice? I'm not doing a--

(Hearing himself, HE flips to his own accent)

Oh, dammit. I was just with my dealer.

RUBY

Your dealer? You have a dealer?

BECKENSTEIN

Yeah. This Mexican guy in Queens. He's on the corner of 48th and Placebo.

RUBY

Oh, Beckenstein! You're dragging your people back into Egypt!

BECKENSTEIN

I don't know about that. He fixed me up with a sweet Cutlass Ciera. 1996. The good years.

RUBY

He's a car dealer?

BECKENSTEIN

Yeah. Johnny Torres Used Cars and Leaf Blowers. What kind of dealer you think he was? A taco dealer? Is that what you thought?

RUBY

No! I don't know what I'm even talking about. I'm in Egypt too. A lot has happened lately. I got thinking about things and I really reached out and tried to pray, and I realized, it's hard. I don't know what I'm doing. I guess I can see why you abandoned your religion and everything.

BECKENSTEIN

(Yiddish)

I didn't abandon my religion!

RUBY

Oh, who are you kidding? And you're back to Grandpa.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, thanks.

(SHE receives a text)

Oh, it's my pastor don't call me pastor.

BECKENSTEIN

Isn't he helping you with your faith?

RUBY

Not really. But his church has this great oxygen therapy. You go to this room and everyone just breathes. The air. It's amazing.

(SHE reads text)

Ruby, you are your own unique individual. Don't let any authority figure tell you what to do or how to think. So think about that. Does that make sense? I guess it must. He took the time to type it out.

BECKENSTEIN

You know, I really don't need to be here. I have a dozen women I could call up any minute of the day and night. I'm a producer!

RUBY

You are a producer.

BECKENSTEIN

Yes I am.

RUBY

Producing all the time.

BECKENSTEIN

I'm a top-notch producer.

RUBY

OF PRODUCE!! You produce produce! You work here at Fairway Like No Other Market. I know you work here. I see you in here all the time!

BECKENSTEIN

You do? Oh shit. I never see you.

RUBY

Well, I am here. I see you in produce. Stacking lettuce and beetroots. You happen to be very good at that. You're very strong. Lifting those boxes. The sweat glistening on your...never mind!

BECKENSTEIN

People never usually ask what I produce. I have actresses melting in my presence.

RUBY

I actually misled my friend that you were a movie producer.

BECKENSTEIN

What?

RUBY

My friend told me he found his...thing. And he and his...thing need a producer. They're coming here to meet you.

BECKENSTEIN

Why me? There are a thousand other producers out there. Who actually produce films.

RUBY

Well, he was so excited that he thought he knew a producer and I didn't have the heart to let him down. But I also think that maybe you could be a movie producer, if you wanted to be. And maybe this is just the thing you needed.

BECKENSTEIN

It's not! I know what I want!

(This time he falls into a thick Irish brogue)

What is your deal Ruby? Why do you keep pestering me? Why are you here? I've known you my whole life and you're always yelling at me and making me feel bad!

(Pause)

Do you fancy me?

RUBY

Oh God. Beckenstein.

BECKENSTEIN

You like me! I've been waiting by me old turf fire for years waiting for you to express your--

RUBY

You're talking like an Irishman.

(Unmoved, HE maintains the brogue)

BECKENSTEIN

I am?

RUBY

Yes.

BECKENSTEIN

It's probably because I'm feeling miserable, desperate and unfulfilled.

RUBY

(receiving text)

They're here. They want us to meet them in the Christian food aisle. Let's go.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, let 'em stay where they are. The sky is wretched and gray. The night is rushing down fast. The rocky fields need to be ploughed and we've been sitting in the tavern all day. Da's dead and mom's keening in church while the drunk pastor goes off and says his prayers in the graveyard.

RUBY

Stop talking that way. I really need you. Will you help me? Please? I need someone to produce their show.

BECKENSTEIN

(finally back to his own accent)

You want me to produce a film? How am I even going to do that?

RUBY

It's a web series.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, no kidding?

RUBY

I don't know all the details but my friend and his friend are putting it together. She's a super annoying famous actress from *Dark Sunlight*.

BECKENSTEIN

She's super annoying?

RUBY

What? I didn't say that.

BECKENSTEIN

Yes you did.

RUBY

Can anyone around here hear correctly?

BECKENSTEIN

Fine. You didn't say annoying. What's with *Dark Sunlight*? When is that on?

RUBY

Every other Tuesday at 3 am. Its main demographic is Bosnian men in their 80s. Would you listen to my friend? And his...friend? They're trying to do something good in the world! They mean well!

BECKENSTEIN

But what am I supposed to say?

RUBY

Just, be creative. I believe in you.

BECKENSTEIN

No you don't.

RUBY

You're right. I don't. But come on. Just this once. For the old country. Or at least for the old sub-division.

(THEY exit)

SCENE 6

(JAY and THALIA standing in an aisle in Fairway.)

THALIA

This is so fascinating! I didn't know there was specifically Christian food.

(JAY holds up a familiar yellow box)

JAY

Oh yeah. Like Velveeta? Very Christian.

(Enter BECKENSTEIN and RUBY)

JAY

Hey you!

RUBY

Beckenstein, this is Jay and...

(SHE looks at THALIA, turns back to JAY)

...this is Jay.

THALIA

Why are we meeting here anyway?

RUBY

Why not? You got a problem with classy food?

THALIA

(holding up box of Velveeta.)

Clearly I don't.

BECKENSTEIN

Hi! Ruby was pretty excited about your project. So, tell me about it.

THALIA

We want to make a short-lived Christian web series.

But not a short-lived *Christian* web series. JAY

Right. It can't have any crosses. THALIA

No one going like this. JAY

(Stretches arms out wide)

Not even if they're playing one-on-one. THALIA

(Defends imaginary hoops opponent, arms outstretched.)

Kids need to be chaste. JAY

But not obviously. THALIA

They don't talk about it. JAY

Maybe just once. THALIA

Mumbled. JAY

Mumbled once. THALIA

But not too chaste. JAY

One confused Christian boy had sex. Once. But regrets it. THALIA

But not obviously. JAY

One of them works at a blood bank. THALIA

What? Why a blood bank? JAY

Because! Who wouldn't want to work at a blood bank? THALIA

JAY

Fine.

BECKENSTEIN

We'd have to...uh...test market the regretting sex part.

JAY

No need to! Because our kid's not going on and on about it with all this sexual shame and how he and the girl became like two boards stuck together but then pried apart with splinters from the other person--

THALIA

It's gotta have the whiff of Christian. Like it's been sprayed with something.

JAY

Some kind of Christian "Glade."

THALIA

And if there's a part of the show that actually does speak to the gospel--some authentic heart-rending confessional moment, it immediately has to be followed by a joke. To soften it.

JAY

Disguise it.

THALIA

To damn near wipe the Jesus out of it.

JAY

So no one can recognize anything vaguely moral or self-sacrificing about it.

THALIA

But they sort of like what they hear.

JAY

And they probably never recognize the deeper truths.

THALIA

But they change.

JAY

But not obviously.

THALIA

They start to do little things, because of this series. Be more kind. Be better people. But not too much better.

JAY

Not obviously.

THALIA

Not embarrassingly better. So everyone notices.

JAY

But still, a little better.

THALIA

But they can't trace it back to the non-Christian Christian show.

JAY

Or maybe they can trace it. On their death beds.

THALIA

Or sooner. It doesn't have to be their death bed. It could be a moment in the garage.

JAY

Gathering up the lawn torches.

THALIA

And it all becomes clear.

JAY

A light dawns.

THALIA

Oh, that's deep.

JAY

How do you like it so far?

BECKENSTEIN

I think it could be a...

RUBY

(whispering in his ear)

Mid-season replacement.

BECKENSTEIN

A mid-season replacement! Middle of summer. That's when the lawn torches come out.

JAY

Yes!

THALIA

And they're real people. Our audience.

JAY

If they went to church that church would be, like, in a boiler room.

THALIA

Or on a hunting trip.

JAY

In a deer stand. That's their church.

THALIA

Amen.

JAY

Lying up there drenched in deer piss.

THALIA

What?

JAY

Hunters wear deer piss when they hunt.

THALIA

Like, actual urine?

JAY

Yes.

THALIA

Like our web series.

JAY

Yes, the scent attracts deer the way our series will attract lost souls.

THALIA

That's a metaphor.

JAY

We could call the web series *Pee of the Deer*.

THALIA

That's not bad. It would be very edgy.

BECKENSTEIN

Titles are important. Most shows should have a title.

JAY

And everyone is wondering what the title means. Because it has nothing to do with the series.

THALIA

Just like *Chariots of Fire*. I didn't see one chariot in that movie. Or fire.

RUBY

(jumping in)

The story is a woman on a journey.

THALIA

This is not your short-lived web series.

RUBY

I'm not finished.

THALIA

I think you are finished.

JAY

No, that's good. Anytime you say "journey" something deeper is going on.

THALIA

Don't go along with her!

RUBY

It's too late.

JAY

It's not just any woman on a journey. It's this woman.

(JAY puts lettuce under his shirt, totters around awkwardly,
body contorted, chomping his gums, pretending to lean on a
cane.)

THALIA

What is that?

RUBY

An old handicapped pregnant person!

JAY

Yes!

RUBY

Who wants an abortion!

JAY

Exactly.

RUBY

Or wishes her current abusive boyfriend--

JAY

...had been the victim of an abortion.

RUBY

We're finishing each other's sentences!

JAY

I know!

RUBY

And in the story, she has an abortion!

JAY

Or just agonizes over it.

RUBY

Okay fine. Either way, the actress starts writing her Emmy speech.

BECKENSTEIN

And first off she thanks the producer, Beckenstein.

JAY

(grabbing a head of lettuce)

Finally she decides to have have the baby and leaves it in a basket...

(RUBY starts swaying like a reed)

...in the reeds!

(JAY puts lettuce at RUBY'S feet.)

RUBY

Off the coast of Portugal!

(JAY embodies Portugal)

JAY

Where it's picked up by Mia...

RUBY & JAY

...Farrow's daughter!

JAY

So one day he can grow up to lead his people into the promised land, filled with graffiti and trash and wanton criminality.

RUBY

But instead he grows up gets hit by an ice cream truck and dies on the spot.

JAY

Perfect.

RUBY

Oh the turmoil of this show. Souls churning on their way to Father Abraham.

JAY

Except they don't get there.

RUBY

No sir!

JAY

Not just the dead ice cream kid. None of them. The ending of the show everything is in wreckage. There is no hope. All characters have made the wrong decisions.

RUBY

The one character you thought you could believe in has made a turn towards personal destruction.

JAY

Everything has gone down in flames.

RUBY

And then it ends.

JAY

And you leave thinking...

RUBY

...God that was sad.

(Silence)

THALIA

But maybe there is hope for those characters.

RUBY

No there's not.

THALIA

Maybe they end up getting back on track.

JAY

Hmmm.

THALIA

In some completely implausible way.

JAY

But maybe.

RUBY

Don't go along with her!

THALIA

The audience has to supply the hope.

RUBY

No hope. It's all lost.

JAY

It's the job of the viewers.

THALIA

That's the real beauty of it. All the pagan black grandmothers will be back! We do anything more Jesusy the audience'll see right through it!

JAY

We don't have to do anything!

RUBY

Because there's nothing to be done! It's beyond repair!

JAY

Someone told me once God is in all things.

THALIA

I told you that.

JAY

She told me that.

RUBY

She did not! I told you that!

THALIA

You better step off.

RUBY

Excuse me?

THALIA

You heard me girl.

RUBY

Girl?

THALIA

Girl.

RUBY

Girl!

THALIA

Girl!

RUBY

Girl!

THALIA

You can't out-girl me girl.

JAY

Hey, hey, cut it out!

THALIA

So, anyway. It's all on the audience to bring the Jesus.

JAY

You don't really need to do anything to make *Jesus* happen.

THALIA

You don't even have to try. He's already there.

JAY

We just need funding.

THALIA

I'm willing to invest some of my own money. But things are tight. Bosnian men in their 80s don't exactly purchase a lot of consumer goods. We'd like a little help.

JAY

When I was a Pomeranian we could raise some cash. And quick. But those days are over.

THALIA

What's a Pomeranian?

RUBY

Wouldn't you like to know.

THALIA

Isn't that a dog? You were a dog?

RUBY

Guess you don't know everything about him, do you?

JAY

Never mind about the Pomeranians. I'm just saying, we don't need the money.

THALIA

I'm not gonna say something cliché like "God will provide."

JAY

Because this isn't a Christian web series where it's all clichés.

THALIA

But something will provide. Or maybe we'll just steal to make this series.

JAY

We will kill people to get this sucker made.

THALIA

Blood will be shed. Homes raided, throats cut, children terrorized.

JAY and THALIA

Will you fund us?

BECKENSTEIN

(Yiddish)

Just one question. I'm a Jewish man. Why would I want to make a Christian web series?

JAY

You're not Jewish!

BECKENSTEIN

I too am Jewish.

JAY

You don't even go to church!

RUBY

All right. That's enough. It's called a temple. You're doing the voice again.

BECKENSTEIN

(back to his own accent)

Thank you. The fact is, I don't have any money. I don't know people with money. I don't know people who know people with money. And even if I did, I don't really know how to produce anything in the first place.

(Pause)

So, let me think about it.

JAY

Sounds good to me.

BECKENSTEIN

Well, great then. I'll get back to you. Someday. Probably never.

(HE exits)

THALIA

We can wait.

JAY

Patience is a virtue!

(to THALIA)

I think that went well!

THALIA

Really well! It's going to be so great for my caree--my Jesus. My Jesus. Do you want to get some coffee?

JAY

Sure!

THALIA

I'll be right back. I have to go get a transfusion.

(EVERYONE stares at HER)

Of juice!

(THALIA hurries off)

BECKENSTEIN

I gotta get back to work. Where's my apron?

(HE exits.)

JAY

Apron? Oh, to hold film reels and stuff.

RUBY

Jay, this is bullshit! We don't need a web series to save us. We have to get back to the basics of Jesus. We need to give away our cloaks and our tunics. We need to research what a tunic is so we can know what to give away.

JAY

What are you talking about?

RUBY

Something's wrong out there. Nobody is anything! I feel so lost. Who can I believe in! Where is the truth? Who loves me? Why do I think the title of this store is Fairway Like No Other Market! It's just Fairway! That last part's a slogan!

JAY

Ohhh. You're right.

RUBY

Everything is screwed up. I can't even pray!

JAY

You can't pray? Oh Ruby. It's seminary 101. When you finally tell God you can't pray is when you're actually starting to pray. Did I just say that?

(pause)

But that doesn't matter. This web series is your chance. Don't you get it? There will be a part for you. A big part.

RUBY

It still won't matter! I'm probably not meant to be an actor anyway. Maybe it's me that's wrong. I tried reading that article in *Family Circle*. It had a great layout. Lots of beautiful pictures of walnut brownies and happy women filled with secret rage.

JAY

Look, you're worried over small things. I know this web series is not going to save us. Nothing's gonna save us. Saying you need to be saved by some outside force is just another way of making your life small. Of giving away your power.

RUBY

But maybe I don't want to be the one with all the power! That's a lot of pressure!

JAY

Don't run from your strength. You create your salvation. I have to head out. We're going for coffee.

RUBY

Yeah. I heard. Guess you like black girls. Good for you.

JAY

I do not like black girls.

RUBY

You don't like black girls!? What the hell is wrong with you?

JAY

I don't mean I don't like black girls. You just made it sound like all's I like is black girls.

RUBY

There you go, drawing conclusions again. Well, have fun. Just be careful. She's probably got DNA.

JAY

Don't you say that!

RUBY

Too late! Have fun.

JAY

I will.

RUBY

So long.

JAY

So long.

(pause)

I mean, it's not like you and me could have ever been...

RUBY

...a thing? No. Maybe.

JAY

We have been finishing each other's sentences.

RUBY

That is a sure-fire way to know if two people are meant to be together. But, maybe not for us.

JAY

No. But...just for the hell of it, let's test it.

RUBY

How?

JAY

Let's try...hugging each other. For, like 9 seconds.

RUBY

Okay. I can deal with that.

(THEY lean in tentatively and hold each other awkwardly A-frame style.)

JAY

1...2...

RUBY

You don't have to count.

(THEY remain like that for a few moments longer.)

RUBY

This isn't really--

JAY

It doesn't feel--

(Slowly THEY pull away from each other.)

RUBY & JAY

Holding you is like holding...

RUBY

...firewood

JAY

...a tater tot.

RUBY

Excuse me?

JAY

It just is.

RUBY

I don't think this is you anyway. You still seem like you're a monk. I'm telling you.

JAY

How can you say that? You're not me.

RUBY

Sometimes other people see you better than you can see you.

(THALIA re-enters)

THALIA

Jay!

RUBY

You've held onto that unblessed rosary.

JAY

(taking rosary out of pocket)

So?

RUBY

You were defending the church.

THALIA

(sultry)

Jay, all this producing talk's got me--

JAY

Hold on.

(to RUBY)

I was defending the church because it's not the church that hurts people, it's us. If there was no such thing as religion, we'd just use something else to hammer each other with. Did I just say that?

RUBY

You're right! Those sinister dark lords of religious heierarchy are probably just sinister dark lords trying to understand God like you are!

JAY

If there was no truth bigger than ourselves, we'd have no way to even live together!

THALIA

(moaning, overcome with passion)

Like I was saying! All this being creative's got me feeling kinda--

JAY

I convinced an old black woman to leave Jesus. That's not right.

RUBY

No it's not.

JAY
I told the universe seminary was peaceful.

RUBY
See!

THALIA
(writhing in ecstasy)
Oh the fluorescent lights! The moist green vegetation!

JAY
Do you think the Pomeranians would even let me return?

RUBY
Yes!

JAY
Do you think I'm the pony lost in the snowstorm? And now I'm coming back?

RUBY
You are that pony, whatever that means.

THALIA
All this has got me feeling oh so, you know...

JAY
(turning to THALIA)
No. I don't know.

(THALIA whispers into JAY's ear. HE falls at her feet.)

JAY
I thought you reclaimed your virginity.

THALIA
It's been nine days! I'm entitled to a break.

(JAY is enraptured)

RUBY
Jay! No!

THALIA
And I do drink blood off-camera. I am a vampire.

(RUBY takes JAY's rosary and walks toward THALIA)

RUBY
Oh yeah? Then get out!

THALIA
(backing away)
But I'm a Christian vampire!

RUBY
Then why are you backing away?

THALIA
Because I'm confused!

(Holds out rosary out to JAY.)

RUBY
Come on Jay.

(HE backs off.)

RUBY
Why are you backing off? He's on your side!

JAY
I'm confused!

RUBY
How can you still not have this figured out? You're too old for this!

(Pause)

Give me that flannel.

JAY
No.

RUBY
It's time to grow up. That decade is gone.

JAY
(walking back and forth between the cross and THALIA)
She's an actual vampire. Do you know how long I've... Then again, there are deeper truths to consider...

RUBY
I'm taking it.

(SHE takes flannel from around his waist)

JAY
You can't just do that.

RUBY
Yes I can! And I'm gonna throw it straight into the--oh, this is nice. All-cotton. Hand-stitched. Is this a Pendleton?

JAY

No, I think it's a Polo.

RUBY

Clean seams. Sturdy yet pliable--you're getting me off track!

JAY

Maybe I just need a retreat. I can go walk that road in Spain. She's un-reclaiming her virgini-- that pilgrim road! The El Camino. I'll walk down it. Then, I'll walk it back the other way. Then I'll journal. Actually I have get back to work. I only have forty-four dollars in the bank. We can figure this out later.

RUBY

You're never going to decide, are you?

JAY

Probably not.

RUBY

Back and forth, never in never out. The vampire, the cross. The girl, the priesthood. God, the universe! Always in between. Always hedging your bets. Always wondering what you could have been because you never abandoned yourself to anything.

JAY

That sounds about right.

(JAY exits)

THALIA

(hurrying after JAY)

Jay! Don't leave me! I wasn't kidding. This is all yours!

(Pause. RUBY looks at JAY's flannel)

RUBY

Why am I so caught up in your life? I am not you. Jay, I give you to the universe!

(SHE drops flannel to the floor)

(Re-enter BECKENSTEIN with heads of lettuce and beet-roots)

BECKENSTEIN

We need some more beet-roots in the--oh, hi. Excuse me. I just have to load up some--

RUBY

Beetroots? Go ahead. Give me that lettuce.

(SHE takes a head of lettuce)

I've never worked with lettuce. Embodying shit is the only thing I know how to do.

(She looks it over. Holding onto it, she crouches down into ball, BECKENSTEIN goes off sorting lettuce, not paying attention.)

What's the meaning of it all Beckenstein? Do you think God works through the way you work?

BECKENSTEIN

What do you mean?

RUBY

I don't know! Maybe just expressing yourself with....expired iceberg lettuce...

BECKENSTEIN

(turning to RUBY)

That's a misprint.

(During speech RUBY slowly makes way to standing position)

RUBY

...is a way to express God. Maybe you don't have to be all abortioney and personally destructive to get close to him and his only begotten Judeo-Christian son. You just do what you love. You just be who you are, totally, and completely.

(Without realizing it, SHE stretches her arms wide into "cross")

And God's in that. Does that sound right?

BECKENSTEIN

That sounds so beautiful.

RUBY

And peaceful.

BECKENSTEIN

And fulfilling.

(Pause)

BECK

It can't be true.

(almost overlapping)

RUBY

I don't buy it.

RUBY

That's it. I'm taking a break from God. I'm going to church.

BECKENSTEIN

That makes no sense.

RUBY

You've never been to my church. I just missed the 5 o'clock service but there's a class at 7. They're studying the prophets.

BECKENSTEIN

But you're taking a break from all that.

RUBY

(wrapping flannel around waist)

It's not the Bible prophets. It's the prophets of '90s grunge rock.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh. You know, one of my favorite prophetic rock songs is--

RUBY

...“Hunger Strike” by Eddie Vedder.

BECKENSTEIN

...and that other singer. Did you just finish my sentence?

RUBY

No.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, I thought you did.

RUBY

Can I just live my life? Will you leave me alone!

BECKENSTEIN

Okay.

(HE starts to leave.)

RUBY

Why are you leaving me alone!

BECKENSTEIN

You just said...

RUBY

Beckenstein!

BECKENSTEIN

What?

(pause)

RUBY

Will you come with me?

(BECKENSTEIN pauses and looks at her, as if considering whether this is sincere)

BECKENSTEIN

Yeah.

(HE takes her hand, and they start to walk off, quietly singing "I'm going hungry, I'm going hungry...")

(THEY exit. End of "Hunger Strike blares," the band Temple of the Dog--Eddie Vedder and that other singer, (Chris Cornell)--screaming *I'm going hungry...*)

(Black)

END of PLAY

So, he didn't touch you? RUBY

No. JAY

Are you sure? RUBY

JAY
Yes I am sure. You know, that is such anti-Catholic crap. This idea that every priest on the planet does nothing but touch kids.

RUBY
No one said every priest on the planet--

JAY
And if you do the research, you will find out that Catholic clergy have a lower sexual abuse rate than stepfathers, and public school teachers and foster parents in Sweden in the 1950s. And farmers.

RUBY
Farmers?

JAY
Yes. Farmers.

RUBY
Where did you hear that?

JAY
The website. Priests Against Farmers. So let's get our facts straight.

RUBY

Why are you defending the Catholic Church? You just complained about the abuse crisis.

JAY

Because. I feel it's important to speak the truth.

RUBY

Comparing a priest molesting a kid to a priest not letting you watch *The Next Karate Kid* is completely disrespectful to survivors of--

JAY

Clearly you've never seen *The Next Karate Kid*. But it doesn't matter anyway. The entire hierarchical religion thing is over.

RUBY

No it's not.

JAY

Yes it is. We're not thinking those ways anymore. The culture has shifted.

RUBY

Shifted where?

JAY

(flipping through notes on podium)

To spiritual freedom. To a time when we decide what to believe or not believe. What is true for you may not be true for me. It used to not be that way. As the seminal thinker Charles Taylor writes in...some book that this very sweet adjunct professor explained to me while he filled my drink order at Buffalo Wild Wings...we all used to be enchanted by the notion that God moved every little molecule in the universe. God named the truth. But the real enchanters were the shadowy titans of the "sacred" oligarchy. The ones who interpreted what God's truth was. Who told us how God wanted us to live. So what you thought was a connection to great wisdom was just a bunch of men lecturing you and getting you to think how they think. And don't you hate it when men lecture you.

RUBY

I'm bored. Help me with my stage combat. We can use these wiffle ball bats that happens to be lying right here next to us.

(SHE picks up bats)

JAY

Don't you want to hear this?

RUBY

No.

JAY

Really?

RUBY

Really.

JAY

That makes me sad. I'll bet Thalia Brackish would want to hear it.

RUBY

Being the academic genius she probably is, I'm sure you're right. Take this bat.

JAY

(takes bat, they start fighting)

She is smart. She thinks for herself. Which is what we're all doing now. We've finally broken through the gates of the religious autocracy. It took a while but we got there. Voltaire and Descartes and Kant and Darwin and Freud and Led Zeppelin kicked down the doors and we all came barrelling through. We're back to figuring out life on our own. You don't need to ride the coyote to get to the well. You just go to the well and let the coyote go off and graze and the church is the coyote somehow.

(HE goes back to podium and holds up his notes, which turn out to be a magazine. HE holds it up.)

It's all summarized very nicely in this article in *Family Circle*.

RUBY

So we let the coyotes graze.

JAY

That's right. We don't need some handed down dogmatic truth to guide our lives. There is no such thing as truth. And that's the truth.

(Pause as HE considers this. Then:)

Check out my fencing skills!

(JAY starts making elaborate and thrusts and parries with the bat as RUBY watches, irritated. Finally)

RUBY

Jay, you are getting on my last nerve. If I don't get this down there will be hell to pay with Marlon Brando. But you probably don't even believe in hell do you? Or Jesus.

JAY

I've got nothing against Jesus. He was a great teacher. He was very spiritual. He said many things. But he's no better than the other teachers out there. There is wisdom in all the great spiritual paths, and in the end they all fit together. If you get bogged down in one you lose sight of the big picture. Of what the universe is trying to tell you.

RUBY

Wow. Streets full of pagans around here. Very interesting!

(Suddenly strikes at JAY. HE barely blocks it in time.)

JAY

Hey!

RUBY

I thought the universe would protect you.

JAY

Don't make fun of me. Beckenstein was right. You're off judging everyone around you but you don't believe in anything!

RUBY

After I met you I read a few books. Took a class or two. Tell me. How does someone leave behind faith in Jesus Christ, and trade it for faith in "the universe?"

JAY

We are made of everything that's out there. You don't worry so much about how you are going to end up because we have already ended up. We are in all things.

(Pause)

I know. You probably think that's super New Agey and crystalline and ridiculous. But thinking that way makes people less judgmental. More patient. Accepting. You put your problems and your desires out to the universe and you get what you need in return. It happens to be a very peaceful way of--

RUBY

(throwing stick down)

Okay, so, let's say you're this little fish in a fish tank. A purple betta.

JAY

What's a purple betta?

RUBY

It's a fish! And you and all the other bettas in the tank aren't doing so great. Because you get the crap kicked out of you. All the time! And you do the same to each other! So the guy who actually made the fish tank finally sends this other fish. This...Asian carp...to show you how to live and take care of each other. How it's all about love and forgiveness.

JAY

I see where this is going.

RUBY

JUST LISTEN! And this little Oriental fish is so good at what he does--healing the other fish and swimming on water--

JAY

He's a fish. Of course he can swim on water.

RUBY

On water. Have you ever seen a fish swim on top of the water?

JAY

No. I haven't.

RUBY

Well, this fish could. And he calls out the hypocrites and raises the dead and casts out demons and feeds people on just a few loaves and, well, fishes. And some of the fish in charge of the tank get scared because they think he's going to take their power. But he doesn't care, because nothing gets under his skin! He just goes on telling everyone: Love! Love your neighbors! Love your enemies! Love is the way--

JAY

I GET IT! THE FISH IS JESUS AND HE PREACHED LOVE AND THEY KILLED HIM AND HE'S GREAT AND WHATEVER. I GET IT!!!

RUBY

What are you even talking about?

JAY

You're trying to tell me how fantastic Jesus Christ is.

RUBY

No I'm not. I just wanted to talk about a fish. I mean, wouldn't it be cool to have a fish like that?

JAY

Oh. That wasn't about Jesus?

RUBY

No! God! Can't a sister just talk about marine life without everyone having to ruin it?

JAY

She can.

RUBY

I mean, you draw these conclusions...

JAY

I don't need to do that.

RUBY

Well, thank you. Just keep that in mind for the future, okay?

JAY

Okay.

RUBY

Okay.

(long pause)

But, come to think of it, that could be an analogy, couldn't it?

JAY

Well, that's what I was trying--

RUBY

Yeah! Because Jesus does talk about love. And he does get killed. And rises from the dead!

JAY

Exactly.

RUBY

And gets airlifted straight to heaven.

JAY

That's the legend.

RUBY

And yet you don't believe in him anymore because you've decided --

JAY

I've decided what?

RUBY

You've decided that instead of believing in HIM, you'd rather believe in THE FISH TANK ITSELF!!!

(pause)

Meaning the fish tank is the universe.

JAY

I get it!

RUBY

So you leave all this, to follow that?

JAY

What difference does it make to you?

RUBY

I'm just pointing out what your religion says! God made the universe. He's the one in all things! He works through the way we work. Whatever that means. And by the way, I read about those German little future popes. They had to be Hitler Youth. Those kids didn't have any choice! And coyotes don't graze.

JAY

What?

RUBY

You said they graze. They don't graze. They eat meat.

JAY

I don't know what coyotes do. I just know those coyote days are over and they're not coming back. Which makes you sad, because you're looking for someone to tell you what to believe in.

RUBY

You're being ridiculous.

JAY

Did I hit a nerve Ruby?

RUBY

I happen to think people should believe what they say they believe.

JAY

You've never even tried it. What, you read books? Went to a class?

RUBY

That class was two hours long! Every week! For four weeks!

JAY

If you think top-down regimented bible-thumping approaches to the spiritual is actually still a thing, who am I to argue? You just explained the whole Jesus story without even realizing it. It's in your blood now. What is that scent you're wearing?

RUBY

Its called sweat!

JAY

Well it doesn't smell terrible!

RUBY

Are you trying to say I smell nice?

JAY

I'm not saying anything!

RUBY

I'm not saying anything either

JAY

We are really going to get far this way aren't we?

RUBY

I have to go back to work. You can go back to your universe. Don't bother coming into mine.

(SHE exits)

JAY

(calling after HER)

Don't you worry. I'm gonna go find Thalia Brackish. She's a pagan! And she's gonna teach me paganry...ism...whatever. Her sweat probably smells like death! And I'm gonna love it.

(Addressing the audience)

We're fighting. And not in just some cute, everything's gonna be okay way. If this was a madcap comedy filled with romantic hi-jinks it would be the kind where everyone ends up beat down and bloody and dead and cast into the bottomless pits of hell! I know that's kind of extreme! But I just thought I'd put that out there! You never know what's coming!

End Act 1

ACT 2

Scene 1

(The AKA Hotel Bar. RUBY is alone.)

(SHE wipes off bar, washes glasses. Looks around. Sees no one is there. Kneels on the floor.)

RUBY

Dear Kerry...GODDAMMIT!!! I mean, Dear God. First off, I want to say I'm probably doing this wrong. I only see you as an old white man with a long white beard and Pastor Kai "Just Call Me Kai" told me I shouldn't see you as an old white man. That was totally outdated. Follow your heart! Don't listen to institutions and traditions and establishments telling you what to do and what to think! Listen to yourself!

(Pause)

But wasn't it himself that was telling me to listen to myself? How can I actually listen to myself if all I can hear is him telling me to listen to myself? So I'm really listening to him. Who am I actually supposed to be listening to? And besides, my high school art teacher Mr. Meador was an old white man with a big beard and he was really inspiring! And I can think of other old white men who are awesome. Like Clint Eastwood. Even though in his movies he's always pretty much wasting everyone in sight. But you, God, kill a lot of people too. And people are going to die anyway so what an honor it would be to get taken out by the best, right? Because you work through the way we work! Like you help us...get work. That doesn't sound right. My point is I'm praying wrong so this isn't very fun. Am I even talking to you or am I just talking to myself? What do you want from me?

(Pause)

I want you to be happy Ruby. I love you.

(Pause)

Oh come on! Wasn't that just me telling myself to be happy and to love myself? That wasn't God. This is a disaster! I'm failing at my acting career and I'm failing at prayer and at everything. The closer I try to get to you the further away I get. I want to get closer to you because I want forgiveness for my abortion. Even though I didn't have an abortion. I mean a woman's health issue. But I feel like I must have had an abor--a woman's health issue. Because in a movie every time a girl goes into a church alone, or kneels down in an empty bar to pray to you it means she just had a woman's health abortion issue. I'm not getting this language right. Or is thinking of having her health aborted. Dammit. Or wishes her abusive boyfriend had been the victim of a healthy abortion. What? And because the movie has an abor...a choice...a health...screw it, AN ABORTION--it's seen as controversial and brave and everyone's moved and impressed and it gets all this critical acclaim. Maybe if I did have an abortion I'd have a reason to ask for forgiveness. Because that's what it's all about. Forgiveness. And then I'd get closer to you. And you'd be closer to me.

SCENE 2

(JAY stands apart from podium)

O uinverse.

(As HE starts speaking he makes sign of cross. HE catches himself halfway through. Irritated he reverses the sign of the cross and shakes the Catholicism off his hands. Begins again)

JAY

O universe. You who are so...big. Thank you for being the universe. The air, and trees, and birds. Or, if you're in Brooklyn, the boids. You know how they talk out there. Or do you? Are you all-knowing and all-seeing? What are your rules? Do you have a catechism? Not that I need rules or a catechism. I'm totally free of those things.

(HE takes out rosary.)

But I could use a hand. Will I ever find Thalia Brackish? She haunts my every waking moment. She is everything I ever dreamed of. She's bleak and godless and constantly unhappy. She's a dream come true. Will you help me? And if I can't find her, give me a sign whether I should--I can't believe I'm saying this--go back to seminary. It was kind of peaceful there. I'll still believe in you O universe! I'll have to say "Jesus" and "Mary" but you and I will know. We'll know.

(Enter A WOMAN wearing sunglasses.)

Can you call up Dora Vaughn? WOMAN

(startled)
What? Oh, sure. Who may I say is here? JAY

Her granddaughter. WOMAN

Sure. JAY

(HE dials)

Have I seen you before? JAY

I don't know. WOMAN

(speaking into phone)
Ms. Vaughn, your granddaughter is here. JAY

(Hangs up.)

She'll be right down.

(WOMAN sits down. Takes off sunglasses.)

Oh my God. JAY

(WOMAN looks up.)

WOMAN

Yes?

JAY

(holding out the rosary right in front of her)

That was you down in the park. You're Thalia Brackish. You came to me. Not even in the dark sunlight. In the light sunlight.

THALIA

Excuse me?

JAY

I can't believe you're right here.

(Looks down at what HE is holding in his hands)

A cross!

(Quickly puts rosary away)

I love *Dark Sunlight*.

THALIA

Thank you.

JAY

What are you doing up at Knoblauch? Did you by chance feel the wind pushing you here?

THALIA

I'm visiting my grandma.

JAY

Oh, right. Wait a minute. Your grandma lives here?

THALIA

Hey, don't give me that tone. I tried to get her to move out, had a place all set up for her. She refused to leave.

JAY

Do you mind if I ask something?

THALIA

Go ahead.

JAY

You know that last scene from the season five finale? In the locker room sauna? At night? Mist coming from the hot rocks. Drops of sweat forming on you like dew on a cricket.

THALIA

I remember.

JAY

And you got that text from Sarcaphagos saying he wanted to start over with you, and you texted back that you would? And right then you knew you were just going back into that cycle of misery and addiction and nasty bloody teeth and so you started crying, and shrieking and throwing all the towels and sauna rocks around?

THALIA

Yes.

(Pause)

JAY

That was a good scene.

THALIA

Thank you.

(Enter MS. VAUGHN.)

MS. VAUGHN

Hey Father Jay.

JAY

I'm not a priest Ms. Vaughn. I left seminary. You know that. I was just talking to Ms. Brackish--

MS. VAUGHN

Oh, I see you met my granddaughter. Thalia, this Father Jay. He a monk. He don't date girls.

JAY

No! That's not true!

MS VAUGHN

Whatever you say Father Jay!

JAY

No, really.

MS VAUGHN

You know, I been meaning to tell you something Father Jay. I heard the ghost of my husband, Boots, come into my house last night. He with Jesus now. But guess he got tired of Jesus for a little bit, wanted to come be with me. What do you think about that Father Jay?

THALIA

Grandpa did not come to see you.

MS VAUGHN

Hush. What do you know? You wasn't there.

JAY

Sounds like you had a very spiritual experience.

MS VAUGHN

I understand him leaving. Maybe too long a line to be hanging out with Jesus that night. Everyone wanting his attention. Jesus, tie my shoe. Jesus, let's have a drink. Now, I just say Jesus because Boots was a Jesus person. I'm not much into Jesus.

JAY

You're not much into--

MS VAUGHN

This a man, Thalia, you can just tell things to. He's a regular monk. Gonna perform an exorcism on some of these hoodies out here. But without Jesus and Elijah and the fiery angels of God. No, gonna use Mr. Frederick Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Robert Plant.

JAY

You're not much into Jesus?

MS VAUGHN

No.

JAY

Even though you're...

MS VAUGHN

(storming)
What? An old black lady?

JAY

Well, no, I didn't mean that.

MS VAUGHN

(smiling)
I'm just kidding! I just think the universe is gonna take care of us, is all.

JAY

The universe?

THALIA

I just started going back to church! And you're leaving it?

JAY

You started going back to church? You? But you're on *Dark Sunlight*. You...do things on *Dark Sunlight*. A lot of very interesting things.

MS VAUGHN

You do what makes you feel good child.

THALIA

Aren't you disappointed in me? You used to be disappointed in me for exposing myself on basic cable! Well, no more! I've reclaimed my virginity!

JAY

No!

MS VAUGHN

It's live and let learn is what I say. Father Jay says the Universe got us covered because Immanuel Kant and Charles Darwin and the Fender Stratocaster double-necked guitar rearranged everyone's molecules so the brain got little stop signs for the totalitarians of religion cuz they mess everything up.

JAY

Wow. I never knew people actually listened to me.

(HE turns to THALIA.)

Now what is this about reclaiming your virginity? Isn't that kind of a cult?

MS VAUGHN

You always going on about the universe got me thinking. You're a cute feller. Made me more likely to believe you. Oh shoot. I left my Metro-card upstairs.

THALIA

We're not taking the subway Grandma.

MS. VAUGHN

You never know, your car might break down.

THALIA

That only happened once!

JAY

Your car broke down?

THALIA

I don't get paid as much for *Dark Sunlight* as you might think.

(MS. VAUGHN exits.)

Grandma!

JAY

(addressing the audience)

I didn't know I could actually change someone's mind. Sometimes I just say things and I'm not even sure I believe in what I'm saying. I mean, I do believe what I'm saying. But I don't know if anyone else should believe it.

THALIA

She's supposed to be upset with me! I've known for years I'm better than *Dark Sunlight*. Sometimes I feel like my whole life has been wasted. I've just been doing these meaningless vampire shows that have no substance!

JAY

I love your series! Do you ever drink blood off camera? When you're not filming?

THALIA

Why would I do that?

JAY

I just...never mind.

THALIA

That's ridiculous.

JAY

I'm sorry.

THALIA

Drink blood off camera.

JAY

All right!

THALIA

I need to use my influence to do something positive! With kids or turtles or something.

JAY

What would you do?

THALIA

A TV pilot with values. Or a feature film. Or something even more prestigious. A short-lived web series. A web series that would flow out of my new-found Christian faith.

JAY

Oh no. You want to make a short-lived Christian web series? What about a secular romantic comedy? Christians shows are always so--

THALIA

So...what?

JAY

Soooo.....great! Just what we all need! The Christian, the Apostles, the martyrs. Yes! How long does one usually reclaim their virginity for?

THALIA

I don't know. It's new to me. I've got a lot of reclaiming to do. I didn't know you were so into the faith.

JAY

Yeah, when I'm out with some girl, because I date women...a lot...but no decent women. Not that I date indecent women---the point is I talk about my faith

THALIA

It's a good way of life.

JAY

It used to be called "the way." In fact, the early Christians were known as the "Wayans." As in the Wayans Brothers. When people were like, which way should we follow? The Wayans were like, this way! And then the people would get all confused because the Wayans didn't have any arms to point with because they got chewed off by Bengal tigers in the Roman synagogues.

THALIA

You don't really know what you're talking about.

JAY

I got through a semester of theology! Half a semester.

THALIA

All's I'm trying to say is there's no good Christian movies or TV pilots or web serieses. I mean, if old black women are leaving the faith, what hope is there for the rest of us!

JAY

But, wait a minute. Don't you think the culture has changed? We've returned to an encounter with the universal wisdom where organized spirituality is useless and you no longer need the coyote.

THALIA

What are you talking about?

JAY

Dumb things.

THALIA

Remember the priest from *On the Waterfront*?

JAY

He was ferocious!

THALIA

He was a man! He decked Marlon Brando, and then ordered a beer!

JAY

The first Marlon Brando.

THALIA

What?

JAY

Never mind. Movie priests were men back then! Guys like that inspired me to be a priest. To stand with the proletariat.

THALIA

I love the proletariat. It's such a pretty word.

JAY

Karl Malden's all telling the mob "Taking the life of Joey Doyle to stop him from testifying is a crucifixion!" Priests are all wimps now.

THALIA

I could make a show like that. It would also diversify my career.

JAY

Yeah!

THALIA

It's gotta be *just so*.

JAY

It has to be delicate.

THALIA

You don't want a pathetic web series where everyone's at least a little bit happy all the time and the pony is lost in the snowstorm for only, like, half an hour.

JAY

Where it's obvious the goddam little horse is gonna come back and everything's gonna turn out okay.

THALIA

I just started going back to church. I'm so behind on my bible study. I would need a religion adviser.

JAY

I know Jesus. Christ is the center of my life.

RUBY

Really?

JAY

There is no other way to the Father except through the Son.

THALIA

Great! You could help! You might want to start going over your church history again.

JAY

(transfixed on her)

It's not about history Thalia. It's about my heart.

THALIA

What?

JAY

My heart...land. I'm from Nebraska.

THALIA

Great! You can help us market it to regular people! But regular people aren't stupid! They need something subtle. I'm not interested in beating anyone over the head with this!

JAY

Right! It can't be messagey! People are too smart for that!

THALIA

American audiences can't be preached at! They'll smell it a mile off! We need to gently put the needle of truth under their skin.

JAY

In fact, it should be so obscure that no one should even get this show.

THALIA

Yeah. It can't be one of those shows with, like, a point. People will just shut their Macs down. Midway through!

JAY

The souls are out there. Lost. Looking for this short-lived web series. Why is it short-lived?

THALIA

Because we pull it.

JAY

Right! And why do we do that?

THALIA

So the audience will clamor for it to come back.

JAY

Yes. Clamor.

THALIA

But we don't we bring it back.

JAY

No sir! And the reason for that is...

THALIA

Is so it becomes legendary.

JAY

Right! A legendary short-lived web series no one will understand. But will bring them back to...you know...something.

THALIA

To Jesus!

JAY

Oh, right. To Jesus.

THALIA

Jesus.

(THALIA looks at JAY as if for the first time)

You're really into the Lord?

JAY

Yes. Why?

THALIA

You don't meet a lot of men who are these days.

JAY

I know. We need to repent. We men walk in the valley of the shadow of death.

THALIA

But God is by your side.

JAY

And he shall lead us to refreshing waters.

THALIA

And he shall explode my career--Jesuses career. Jesus! Yes. We just need a producer.

JAY

Did you say we need a producer?

THALIA

Yes. For the show. Jay, why are you smiling?

(black)

SCENE 3

(An aisle in Fairway. RUBY enters.)

RUBY

Fairway Like No Other Market. Love this place.

(Enter BECKENSTEIN. HE is speaking with an over-the-top Mexican accent)

BECKENSTEIN

What up homes! I was surprised you wanted to talk. Thought you hated me!

RUBY

I don't hate you.

BECKENSTEIN

Well, that's a good thing. Wonderin' if I was gonna be out here like a lost little chico without my old friend Ruby. Even if she don't care about my other heart.

RUBY

Whose voice are you doing now?

BECKENSTEIN

What voice? I'm not doing a--

(Hearing himself, HE flips to his own accent)

Oh, dammit. I was just with my dealer.

RUBY

Your dealer? You have a dealer?

BECKENSTEIN

Yeah. This Mexican guy in Queens. He's on the corner of 48th and Placebo.

RUBY

Oh, Beckenstein! You're dragging your people back into Egypt!

BECKENSTEIN

I don't know about that. He fixed me up with a sweet Cutlass Ciera. 1996. The good years.

RUBY

He's a car dealer?

BECKENSTEIN

Yeah. Johnny Torres Used Cars and Leaf Blowers. What kind of dealer you think he was? A taco dealer? Is that what you thought?

RUBY

No! I don't know what I'm even talking about. I'm in Egypt too. A lot has happened lately. I got thinking about things and I really reached out and tried to pray, and I realized, it's hard. I don't know what I'm doing. I guess I can see why you abandoned your religion and everything.

BECKENSTEIN

I didn't abandon my religion.

RUBY

Oh, who are you kidding?

BECKENSTEIN

Ruby!

RUBY

Beckenstein!

BECKENSTEIN

(slipping into Yiddish)

The law of my people is written on my heart! You shall love yourself with all your mind, and your strength!

RUBY

Just love yourself? Did they change that? And you're back to the borscht belt.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, thanks.

RUBY

No problem.

(SHE receives a text)

Oh, it's my pastor don't call me pastor.

BECKENSTEIN

Isn't he helping you with your faith?

RUBY

Not really. But his church has this great oxygen therapy. You go to this room and everyone just breathes. The air. It's amazing.

(SHE reads text)

Ruby, you are your own unique individual. Don't let any authority figure tell you what to do or how to think. So think about that. Does that make sense? I guess it must. He took the time to type it out.

BECKENSTEIN

You know, I really don't need to be here. I have a dozen women I could call up any minute of the day and night. I'm a producer!

RUBY

You are a producer.

BECKENSTEIN

Yes I am.

RUBY

Producing all the time.

BECKENSTEIN

I'm a top-notch producer.

RUBY

OF PRODUCE!! You produce produce! You work here at Fairway Like No Other Market. I know you work here. I see you in here all the time!

BECKENSTEIN

You do? Oh shit. I never see you.

RUBY

Well, I am here. I see you in produce. Stacking lettuce and beetroots. You happen to be very good at that. You're very strong. Lifting those boxes. The sweat glistening on your...never mind!

BECKENSTEIN

People never usually ask what I produce. I have actresses melting in my presence.

RUBY

I actually misled my friend that you were a movie producer.

BECKENSTEIN

What?

RUBY

My friend told me he found his...thing. And he and his...thing need a producer. They're coming here to meet you.

BECKENSTEIN

Why me? There are a thousand other producers out there. Who actually produce films.

RUBY

Well, he was so excited that he thought he knew a producer and I didn't have the heart to let him down. But I also think that maybe you could be a movie producer, if you wanted to be. And maybe this is just the thing you needed.

BECKENSTEIN

But I don't want to be a movie producer.

RUBY

But maybe you don't realize it.

BECKENSTEIN

I do realize it!

RUBY

But maybe you're wrong!

BECKENSTEIN

I'm not! I know what I want!

(This time he falls into a thick Irish brogue)

What is your deal Ruby? Why do you keep pestering me? Why are you here? I've known you my whole life and you're always yelling at me and making me feel bad!

(Pause)

Do you fancy me?

RUBY

Oh God. Beckenstein.

BECKENSTEIN

You like me! I've been waiting by me old turf fire for years waiting for you to express your--

RUBY

You're talking like an Irishman.

(Unmoved, HE maintains the brogue)

BECKENSTEIN

I am?

RUBY

Yes.

BECKENSTEIN

It's probably because I'm feeling miserable, desperate and unfulfilled.

RUBY

(receiving text)

They're here. They want us to meet them in the Christian food aisle. Let's go.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, let 'em stay where they are. The sky is wretched and gray. The night is rushing down fast. The rocky fields need to be ploughed and we've been sitting in the tavern all day. Da's dead and mom's keening in church while the drunk pastor goes off and says his prayers in the graveyard.

RUBY

Stop talking that way. I really need you. Will you help me? Please? I need someone to produce their show.

BECKENSTEIN

(finally back to his own accent)

You want me to produce a film? How am I even going to do that?

RUBY

It's a web series.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, no kidding?

RUBY

I don't know all the details but my friend and his friend are putting it together. She's a super annoying famous actress from *Dark Sunlight*.

BECKENSTEIN

She's super annoying?

RUBY

What? I didn't say that.

BECKENSTEIN

Yes you did.

RUBY

Can anyone around here hear correctly?

BECKENSTEIN

Fine. You didn't say annoying. What's with *Dark Sunlight*? When is that on?

RUBY

Every other Tuesday at 3 am. Its main demographic is Bosnian men in their 80s. Would you listen to my friend? And his...friend? They're trying to do something good in the world! They mean well!

BECKENSTEIN

But what am I supposed to say?

RUBY

Just, be creative. I believe in you.

BECKENSTEIN

No you don't.

RUBY

You're right. I don't. But come on. Just this once. For the old country. Or at least for the old sub-division.

(THEY exit)

SCENE 4

(JAY and THALIA standing in an aisle in Fairway.)

THALIA

This is so fascinating! I didn't know there was specifically Christian food.

(JAY holds up a familiar yellow box)

JAY

Oh yeah. Like Velveeta? Very Christian.

(Enter BECKENSTEIN and RUBY)

JAY

Hey you!

RUBY

Beckenstein, this is Jay and....

(SHE looks at THALIA, turns back to JAY)

...this is Jay.

THALIA

Why are we meeting here?

RUBY

Why not? You got a problem with classy food?

THALIA

(holding up box of Velveeta.)

Clearly I don't.

BECKENSTEIN

Hi! Ruby was pretty excited about your project. So, tell me about it.

THALIA

We want to make a short-lived Christian web series.

JAY

But not a short-lived *Christian* web series.

THALIA

Right. It can't have any crosses.

JAY

No one going like this.

(Stretches arms out wide)

THALIA

Not even if they're playing one-on-one.

(Defends imaginary hoops opponent, arms outstretched.)

JAY

Kids need to be chaste.

THALIA

But not obviously.

JAY

They don't talk about it.

THALIA

Maybe just once.

Mumbled. JAY

Mumbled once. THALIA

But not too chaste. JAY

One confused Christian boy had sex. Once. But regrets it. THALIA

But not obviously. JAY

One of them works at a blood bank. THALIA

What? Why a blood bank? JAY

Because! Who wouldn't want to work at a blood bank? THALIA

Fine. JAY

We'd have to...uh...test market the regretting sex part. BECKENSTEIN

No need to! Because our kid's not going on and on about it with all this sexual shame and how he and the girl became like two boards stuck together but then pried apart with splinters from the other person-- JAY

It's gotta have the whiff of Christian. Like it's been sprayed with something. THALIA

Some kind of Christian "Glade." JAY

And if there's a part of the show that actually does speak to the gospel--some authentic heart-rending confessional moment, it immediately has to be followed by a joke. To soften it. THALIA

Disguise it. JAY

To damn near wipe the Jesus out of it. THALIA

JAY

So no one can recognize anything vaguely moral or self-sacrificing about it.

THALIA

But they sort of like what they hear.

JAY

And they probably never recognize the deeper truths.

THALIA

But they change.

JAY

But not obviously.

THALIA

They start to do little things, because of this series. Be more kind. Be better people. But not too much better.

JAY

Not obviously.

THALIA

Not embarrassingly better. So everyone notices.

JAY

But still, a little better.

THALIA

But they can't trace it back to the non-Christian Christian show.

JAY

Or maybe they can trace it. On their death beds.

THALIA

Or sooner. It doesn't have to be their death bed. It could be a moment in the garage.

JAY

Gathering up the lawn torches.

THALIA

And it all becomes clear.

JAY

A light dawns.

THALIA

Oh, that's deep.

JAY

How do you like it so far?

BECKENSTEIN

I think it could be a...

RUBY

(whispering in his ear)

Mid-season replacement.

BECKENSTEIN

A mid-season replacement! Middle of summer. That's when the lawn torches come out.

JAY

Yes!

THALIA

And they're real people. Our audience.

JAY

If they went to church that church would be, like, in a boiler room.

THALIA

Or on a hunting trip.

JAY

In a deer stand. That's their church.

THALIA

Amen.

JAY

Lying up there drenched in deer piss.

THALIA

What?

JAY

Hunters wear deer piss when they hunt.

THALIA

Like, actual urine?

JAY

Yes.

THALIA

Like our web series.

JAY

Yes, the scent attracts deer the way our series will attract lost souls.

THALIA

That's a metaphor.

JAY

We could call the web series *Pee of the Deer*.

THALIA

That's not bad. It would be very edgy.

BECKENSTEIN

Titles are important. Most shows should have a title.

JAY

And everyone is wondering what the title means. Because it has nothing to do with the series.

THALIA

Just like *Chariots of Fire*. I didn't see one chariot in that movie. Or fire.

RUBY

(jumping in)

The story is a woman on a journey.

THALIA

This is not your short-lived web series.

RUBY

I'm not finished.

THALIA

I think you are finished.

JAY

No, that's good. Anytime you say "journey" something deeper is going on.

THALIA

Don't go along with her!

RUBY

It's too late.

JAY

It's not just any woman on a journey. It's this woman.

(JAY puts lettuce under his shirt, totters around awkwardly, body contorted, chomping his gums, pretending to lean on a cane.)

THALIA

What is that?

RUBY

An old handicapped pregnant person!

Yes! JAY

Who wants an abortion! RUBY

Exactly. JAY

Or wishes her current abusive boyfriend-- RUBY

...had been the victim of an abortion. JAY

We're finishing each other's sentences! RUBY

I know! JAY

And in the story, she has an abortion! RUBY

Or just agonizes over it. JAY

Okay fine. Either way, the actress starts writing her Emmy speech. RUBY

And first off she thanks the producer, Beckenstein. BECKENSTEIN

Finally she decides to have have the baby and leaves it in a basket... JAY
(grabbing a head of lettuce)

(RUBY starts swaying like a reed)

...in the reeds!

(JAY puts lettuce at RUBY'S feet.)

Off the coast of Portugal! RUBY

(JAY embodies Portugal)

Where it's picked up by Mia... JAY

RUBY & JAY

...Farrow's daughter!

JAY

So one day he can grow up to lead his people into the promised land, filled with graffiti and trash and wanton criminality.

RUBY

But instead he grows up gets hit by an ice cream truck and is dead on the spot.

JAY

Perfect.

RUBY

Oh the turmoil of this show. Souls churning on their way to Father Abraham.

JAY

Except they don't get there.

RUBY

No sir!

JAY

Not just the dead ice cream kid. None of them. The ending of the show everything is in wreckage. There is no hope. All characters have made the wrong decisions.

RUBY

The one character you thought you could believe in has made a turn towards personal destruction.

JAY

Everything has gone down in flames.

RUBY

And then it ends.

JAY

And you leave thinking...

RUBY

...God that was sad.

(Silence)

THALIA

But maybe there is hope for those characters.

RUBY

No there's not.

Maybe they end up getting back on track. THALIA

Hmmm. JAY

In some completely implausible way. THALIA

But maybe. JAY

Don't go along with her! RUBY

The audience has to supply the hope. THALIA

No hope. It's all lost. RUBY

It's the job of the viewers. JAY

That's the real beauty of it. All the pagan black grandmothers will be back! We do anything more Jesusy the audience'll see right through it! THALIA

We don't have to do anything! JAY

Because there's nothing to be done! It's beyond repair! RUBY

Someone told me once God is in all things. JAY

I told you that. THALIA

She told me that. JAY

She did not! I told you that! RUBY

You better step off. THALIA

Excuse me? RUBY

You heard me girl. THALIA

Girl? RUBY

Girl. THALIA

Girl! RUBY

Girl! THALIA

Girl! RUBY

You can't out-girl me girl. THALIA

(From out of nowhere, enter KAI)

Hey, hey, cut it out! KAI

Pastor Kai just call me K-Dog! RUBY

(to THALIA) KAI

You leave my friend alone, Kerry Washington. You maniac. We don't need you around here. You've destroyed enough young women trying to pray to you.

That's not-- RUBY

I mean, where do you get off? Who raised you? KAI

I'm not-- THALIA

Not that I'm suggesting you were raised wrong, or that the people who raised you were wrong. Because they were people and people aren't wrong. People are always right. Do you ever go to church? And if so, do you have any cool piercings? KAI

I'm not Kerry Washington. THALIA

RUBY

This is Thalia Brackish. She's an actress, but she's on *Dark Sunlight*. Kerry Washington would never be on *Dark Sunlight*. Because *Dark Sunlight* is way too trashy for her.

THALIA

(simultaneous)

--is way too classy for her.

(THEY glare at each other)

RUBY

Kerry's on a different show.

KAI

I've actually never seen Kerry Washington's show...what am I talking about?

(HE speaks to anyone in earshot)

I have seen the Kerry Washington show! I know all about that show with the things that happen on the weekly evening time slot that they happen on!

THALIA

So, anyway, back to the pitch! It's all on the audience to bring the Jesus.

KAI

Not too loud! People are around!

JAY

You don't really need to do anything to make *Jesus* happen.

KAI

What did I tell you!!

THALIA

You don't even have to try. He's already there.

JAY

We just need funding.

THALIA

I'm willing to invest some of my own money. But things are tight. Bosnian men in their 80s don't exactly purchase a lot of consumer goods. We'd like a little help.

JAY

When I was a Pomeranian we could raise some cash. And quick. But those days are over.

THALIA

What's a Pomeranian?

RUBY

Wouldn't you like to know.

THALIA

Isn't that a dog? You were a dog?

RUBY

Guess you don't know everything about him, do you?

JAY

Never mind about the Pomeranians. I'm just saying, we don't need the money.

THALIA

I'm not gonna say something cliché like "God will provide."

JAY

Because this isn't a Christian web series where it's all clichés.

KAI

Thank you! Enough with the Christian clichés!

THALIA

But something will provide. Or maybe we'll just steal to make this series.

JAY

We will kill people to get this sucker made.

THALIA

Blood will be shed. Homes raided, throats cut, children terrorized.

JAY and THALIA

Will you fund us?

BECKENSTEIN

(Yiddish)

Just one question. I'm a Jewish man. Why would I want to make a Christian web series?

JAY

You're not Jewish!

BECKENSTEIN

I too am Jewish.

JAY

You don't even go to church!

RUBY

All right. That's enough. It's called a temple. You're doing the voice again.

BECKENSTEIN

(back to his own accent)

Thank you. The fact is, I don't have any money. I don't know people with money. I don't know people who know people with money. And even if I did, I don't really know how to produce anything in the first place.

(Pause)

So, let me think about it.

JAY

Sounds good to me.

BECKENSTEIN

Well, great then. I'll get back to you. Someday. Probably never.

(HE exits)

THALIA

We can wait.

JAY

Patience is a virtue!

KAI

This guy is impressive. Do you ever do fundraising for social clubs?

(Scurries after him. Stops.)

Oh, I forgot the food for our seminar tonight. There's the Velveeta. Ruby, don't forget. We're studying the prophets tonight.

(Exit KAI.)

RUBY

We'll see.

JAY

(to THALIA)

I think that went well!

THALIA

Really well! It's going to be so great for my caree--my Jesus. My Jesus. Do you want to get some coffee?

JAY

Sure!

THALIA

I'll be right back. I have to go get a transfusion.

(EVERYONE stares at HER)

Of juice!

(THALIA hurries off)

BECKENSTEIN

I gotta get back to work. Where's my apron?

(HE exits.)

JAY

Apron? Oh, to hold film reels and stuff.

RUBY

Jay, this is bullshit! We don't need a web series to save us. We have to get back to the basics of Jesus. We need to give away our cloaks and our tunics. We need to research what a tunic is so we can know what to give away.

JAY

What are you talking about?

RUBY

Something's wrong out there. Nobody is anything! Everybody is nothing! I feel so lost. Who can I believe in! Where is the truth? Who loves me? Why do I think the title of this store is Fairway Like No Other Market! It's just Fairway! That last part's a slogan!

JAY

Ohhh. You're right.

RUBY

Everything is screwed up. I can't even pray!

JAY

You can't pray? Oh Ruby. It's seminary 101. When you finally tell God you can't pray is when you're actually starting to pray. And then things happen. If you believe that kind of thing. But that doesn't matter. This web series is your chance. Don't you get it? There will be a part for you. A big part.

RUBY

It still won't matter! I'm probably not meant to be an actor anyway. Maybe it's me that's wrong. I tried reading that article in *Family Circle*. It had a great layout. Lots of beautiful pictures of brownies and happy women filled with secret rage.

JAY

Look, you're worried over small things. I know this web series is not going to save us. Nothing's gonna save us. Saying you need to be saved by some outside force is just another way of making your life small. Of giving away your power.

RUBY

But maybe I don't want to be the one with all the power! That's a lot of pressure!

JAY

Don't run from your own strength. You create your own salvation.

RUBY

What are you even talking about? You believe in salvation from Jesus! You're using God to get laid because you actually believe in God.

JAY

God is immutable!

RUBY

What does that mean?

JAY

I don't know. But it's not just about getting laid. I think I do have deeper feelings for Thalia. One day we will make love. And then, obviously, we will have authentic love. I have to head out. We're going for coffee.

RUBY

Yeah. I heard. Guess you like black girls. Good for you.

JAY

I do not like black girls.

RUBY

You don't like black girls!? What the hell is wrong with you?

JAY

I don't mean I don't like black girls. You just made it sound like all's I like is black girls.

RUBY

There you go, drawing conclusions again. Well, have fun. Just be careful. She's probably got DNA.

JAY

Don't you say that!

RUBY

Too late! Have fun.

JAY

I will.

RUBY

So long.

JAY

So long.

JAY

If we were in some obvious romantic comedy this would be the part where we're about to go out with other people--well, one of us anyway--

RUBY

You don't have to be that specific.

JAY

...and suddenly we look deep into each other's eyes and realize in fact we're the only two people we want to be with.

RUBY

That in spite of everything, all our arguments and fights and different beliefs that we're actually meant to end up in each other's arms.

JAY

Yep. That'd be it.

(RUBY produces an old, stained torn-up Kleenex box)

RUBY

When a girl gets long letters from a guy, where he pours open his heart? Letters on old crushed Kleenex boxes, cran-apple juice spilled all over them? You have no idea.

(JAY takes out a cassette tape with TEB scrawled on the back)

JAY

I never would have known Third Eye Blind is so brave and experimental. Maybe you were the one I really left seminary for. And I didn't even realize it. 'till now.

RUBY

You've been finishing my sentences all over the place. That's the only sure sign that two people are meant to be together.

(THEY stare at each other. Slowly they move towards each other. Soft guitar music starts to play. Gentle breathy female indie rock voices rise up.)

JAY

Where did that music come from?

RUBY

I don't know. It's nice though.

JAY

It is nice.

(THEY lean in to kiss, but slip past into a hug.)

JAY
I can't.

RUBY
Not happenin'.

(THEY hold each other awkwardly for a few moments, A-frame style.)

This isn't really--

RUBY

It doesn't feel--

JAY

(Slowly THEY pull away from each other.)

Holding you is like holding...

RUBY & JAY

...firewood

RUBY

...a tater tot.

JAY

Excuse me?

RUBY

It just is.

JAY

Jay, I don't know if we're meant to...

RUBY

I don't think so either.

JAY

I don't think this is you anyway.

RUBY

What do you mean?

JAY

Dating. Romance. You still seem like you're a monk.

RUBY

How can you say that? You're not me.

JAY

Sometimes other people see you better than you can see you.

RUBY

(THALIA re-enters)

THALIA

Jay!

RUBY

You've held onto that unblessed rosary.

JAY

(taking rosary out of pocket)

So?

RUBY

You were defending the church.

THALIA

(sultry)

Jay, all this producing talk's got me--

JAY

Hold on.

(to RUBY)

I was defending the church because it's not the church that hurts people, it's us. If there was no such thing as religion, we'd just use something else to hammer each other with. Did I just say that?

RUBY

You're right! Those sinister dark lords of religious heierarchy are probably just sinister dark lords trying to understand God like you are!

JAY

If there was no truth bigger than ourselves, we'd have no way to even live together!

THALIA

(moaning, overcome with passion)

Like I was saying! All this being creative's got me feeling kinda--

JAY

I convinced an old black woman to leave Jesus. That's not right.

RUBY

No it's not.

JAY

I told the universe seminary was peaceful.

RUBY

See!

THALIA

(writhing in ecstasy)

Oh the fluorescent lights! The moist green vegetation!

JAY
Do you think the Pomeranians would even let me return?

RUBY
Yes!

JAY
Do you think I'm the pony lost in the snowstorm? And now I'm coming back?

RUBY
You are that pony, whatever that means.

THALIA
All this has got me feeling oh so, you know...

JAY
(turning to THALIA)
No. I don't know.

(THALIA whispers into JAY's ear. HE falls at her feet.)

JAY
I thought you reclaimed your virginity.

THALIA
It's been nine days! I'm entitled to a break.

(JAY is enraptured)

RUBY
Jay! No!

THALIA
And I do drink blood off-camera. I am a vampire.

(RUBY takes JAY's rosary and walks toward THALIA)

RUBY
Oh yeah? Then get out!

THALIA
(backing away)
But I'm a Christian vampire!

RUBY
Then why are you backing away?

THALIA
Because I'm confused!

(Holds out rosary out to JAY.)

RUBY

Come on Jay.

(HE backs off.)

RUBY

Why are you backing off? He's on your side!

JAY

I'm confused!

RUBY

How can you still not have this figured out? You're too old for this!

(Pause)

Give me that flannel.

JAY

No.

RUBY

It's time to grow up.

JAY

(walking back and forth between the cross and THALIA)

She's an actual vampire. Do you know how long I've...Then again, there are deeper truths to consider...

RUBY

I'm taking it.

(SHE takes flannel from around his waist)

JAY

You can't just do that.

RUBY

Yes I can! And I'm gonna throw it straight into the--oh, this is nice. All-cotton. Hand-stitched. Is this a Pendleton?

JAY

No, I think it's a Polo.

RUBY

Clean seams. Sturdy yet pliable--you're getting me off track!

JAY

Maybe I just need a retreat. I can go walk that road in Spain. She's un-reclaiming her virgini-- that pilgrim road! The El Camino. I'll walk down it. Then, I'll walk it back the other way. Then I'll journal. Actually I have get back to work. I only have forty-four dollars in the bank. We can figure this out later.

RUBY

You're never going to decide, are you?

JAY

Probably not.

RUBY

Back and forth, never in never out. The vampire, the cross. The girl, the priesthood. God, the universe! Always in between. Always hedging your bets. Always wondering what you could have been because you never abandoned yourself to anything.

JAY

That sounds about right.

(JAY exits)

THALIA

(hurrying after JAY)

Jay! Don't leave me! I wasn't kidding. This is all yours!

(Pause. RUBY looks at JAY's flannel)

RUBY

Why am I so caught up in your life? I am not you. Jay, I give you to the universe!

(SHE drops flannel to the floor)

(Re-enter BECKENSTEIN with heads of lettuce and beet-roots)

BECKENSTEIN

We need some more beet-roots in the--oh, hi. Excuse me. I just have to load up some--

RUBY

Give me that lettuce.

(SHE takes a head of lettuce)

I've never worked with lettuce. Embodying shit is the only thing I know how to do.

(She looks it over. Holding onto it, she crouches down into ball, BECKENSTEIN goes off sorting lettuce, not paying attention.)

What's the meaning of it all Beckenstein? Do you think God works through the way you work?

BECKENSTEIN

What do you mean?

RUBY

I don't know! Maybe just expressing yourself with....expired iceberg lettuce...

BECKENSTEIN

(turning to RUBY)

That's a misprint.

(During speech RUBY slowly makes way to standing position)

RUBY

...is a way to express God. Maybe you don't have to be all abortioney and personally destructive to get close to him and his only begotten Judeo-Christian son. You just do what you love. You just be who you are, totally, with abandon.

(Without realizing it, SHE stretches her arms wide into "cross")

And he's in that.

BECKENSTEIN

You're in the form of a cross.

RUBY

(looking down at herself, astounded)

I am. This is exactly what I'm saying!

BECKENSTEIN

But you can't put your arms like that in a non-Christian Christian web series. Remember?

RUBY

But maybe I want to be in a non-Christian Christian web series.

(pause)

Or maybe I'm just...

BECKENSTEIN

...trying too hard?

(Pause. SHE looks at HIM.)

RUBY

I shouldn't have to do all the work here. I'm taking time off from God. I'm going to church.

BECKENSTEIN

That makes no sense.

RUBY

You've never been to my church. I just missed the 5 o'clock seance, but there's a class at 7. They're studying the prophets.

BECKENSTEIN

Yeah, I heard. But you're taking time off from--

RUBY

(wrapping flannel around waist)

It's not the bible prophets. We'll get to them someday. But it's the prophets of '90s grunge rock.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh. You know, one of my favorite prophetic rock songs is--

RUBY

...“Hunger Strike” by Eddie Vedder.

BECKENSTEIN

...and that other singer. Are we finishing each others' sentences?

RUBY

No.

BECKENSTEIN

Oh, I thought we were.

RUBY

Can I just live my life? Will you leave me alone!

BECKENSTEIN

Okay.

(HE starts to leave.)

RUBY

Why are you leaving me alone! You're coming with me.

(BECKENSTEIN pauses and looks at her, as if considering whether this is sincere)

BECKENSTEIN

Okay.

(HE takes her hand, and they start to walk off, quietly singing “I'm going hungry, I'm going hungry...”)

(THEY exit)

(Black)

END of PLAY

