

LITURGY
A solo show
By Joe Hoover

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Cast of Characters:

DANIEL:

A man in his mid-40s

Place

Omaha, NE

Time

2013

ACT 1

Setting: A Catholic Church in Omaha in 2013, two years since the church made changes to several of the invocations and responses in the liturgy. It is the 8:30 a.m. Mass. The play can be set in an actual church; or on a bare stage with one or two wooden pews facing the audience.

[NOTE: The early morning Mass is typically a stripped-down liturgy, often with no songs. Few to none of the Mass parts are sung. Throughout the play, Daniel provides the Mass responses to a priest we do not see. Primarily we are inside Daniel's mind during Mass. We hear his internal monologue. The words in bold are the Mass responses Daniel gives. Extended dashes indicate those parts of the Mass the priest would speak, or the scripture readings by members of the congregation, none of which we hear.]

At Rise: Daniel walks down the aisle, genuflects, slides into a pew, kneels and prays. He stands up and makes the sign of the cross as the Mass begins.

DANIEL

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And with your spirit.

That's one of the new parts of the Mass. It used to be the priest would say "The Lord be with you" and we'd say, "*And also with you.*" Now he says, "The Lord be with you, and we say "*And with your spirit*". And with your spirit, and with your spirit and with your spirit...(the high school cheer) *We've got spirit yes we do we've got spirit how 'bout you?!?!?*

Good morning Father. Just get back to the Mass....Yes, it is beautiful outside. This is not a drive-time talk show. Go back to the Mass.....Yeah, saw the big game! Clipping on the final punt return. An outrage! Just go back to the liturgy. The Confiteor. The Confiteor. The Confiteor! "I confess...almighty God...brothers sisters...done failed to do!" Holy smokes this guy!

(Pause)

I never used to be bothered by the priest going off script, adding words, making up his own little rituals. Until I started reading about liturgy and how it's supposed to go. Now whenever I go to Mass, I'm angry the entire time. Which I think is good. Because it shows I really care.

(The priest finally begins the Confiteor.)

I confess to almighty God...

Thank you!

**And to you my brothers and sisters
That I have greatly sinned,
In my thoughts and in my words,
In what I have done and in what I have failed to do,**

(HE gently strikes his breast at each "fault".)

**Through my fault, through my fault,
Through my most grievous fault.**

Hitting yourself is new too. They put in a bundle of changes. They're awesome.

**Therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
All the Angels and Saints,
And you, my brothers and sisters
To pray for me to the Lord our God.**

**Lord have mercy.
Christ have mercy.
Lord have mercy.**

**Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace to people of good will.**

They changed that part too--they added "on earth" or moved around "on earth" or something. I don't even know why they have "on earth" in the first place. I mean where else do people live, who need peace, except "on earth"? My wife and I have been married *on earth* twelve years. I don't mean we have been married like *19 years* total, but only twelve of them *on earth* and the rest in, like, space. I'm just saying: Twelve years. That's a long time. Or a short time. Depending on what you wanted out of the marriage. And your thoughts on time. And the aging process. And wine. And cured strips of beef.

**We praise you,
We bless you,
We adore you,
We glorify you,
We give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,**

O God, almighty Father.

That part too. It used to be just “Almighty Father.” Now they added, “*O God, Almighty Father.*” This all happened a couple years ago, Two Thousand Eleven. The people who run the church got together and said, “We’re gonna change things up!” So they put in words, and they took out words, and they moved words around. Like, this word used to be on the *east side* of that word and now it’s on the *west side*. They did it to make it harder for people who’ve left the faith to come back to church. So there’s some cost. “You want to come back and be Catholic again? Just like that? Oh, not so fast. You gotta pay a price you wanna come back. We made all the words different: *And with your spirit!*”

**Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
You take away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us;**

(A shift in the lights.)

A few weeks ago I plucked a feather out of someone’s hair.

(Snaps back to liturgy.)

**You take away the sins of the world,
Receive our prayer;
You are seated at the right hand of the Father,
Have mercy on us.**

At work. The feather.

**For you alone are the holy one.
You alone are the Lord.
You alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
With the Holy Spirit,
In the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

A new girl...woman...person...newly a person, to me new, a few weeks, at work, and then suddenly had something in her hair. And it looked like a feather. Which made me think of things with feathers. Like dead birds. Or angels. But real ones.

**You alone are the Most High
Jesus Christ
With the Holy Spirit,
In the glory of...**

Hold on, hold on, we already did that part. How did that part used to go? In Latin? The Mass used to be in Latin. They changed it, like around when “Abbey Road” came out.

(He chants the Latin translation.)

“...tu solus Altíssimus, Jesu Christe....cum Sancto Spírítu: in glória Dei Patris. Amen.”

(He continues chanting.)

I told her she had something there, a feather, maybe, and asked her if she'd...

(He stops chanting the lines and just speaks.)

...like me to take it out. And she sort of looked at me. Looked at me like: “Yes. Please do that.” And then she stood there, absolutely still. And I did that. The feather. Strands of her hair, in my fingers. A little static spark, a little light. God numbering the hairs. It wasn't a feather, it was a woodchip. Very thin. We were both incredibly still for like three moments. And then I said:

(Mimes giving her the woodchip.)

“Here.” And she said, “Thank you.”

(He sits for the reading of scripture.)

First reading, Joshua.

He's going around the walls, our friend Joshua. Hoping they'll fall. (beat) No one really listens to the first reading.

(He looks around, maybe flips through hymnal, waves at someone, distracted.)

(Finally the reading ends.)

Thanks be to God.

Depending on the content of the reading and the skill level of the reader you could be saying “Thanks be to God!” because the reading's finally over. Or “Thanks be to God!” because you liked what the reading had to say. Usually it's the first kind. No one knows how to read up there. She and I chat, here and there. At work. Ever since the feather.

(Pause.)

I never say her name. My co-worker. I feel like it would spoil it somehow. If you keep something hidden it's more fun and exciting, like Christmas. My wife knows this woman. I don't say my wife's name much either. For different reasons. Maybe because I'm like a Jewish person--a person who is Jewish--who would not say the name of “G-d.” And in the same way I won't say the name of my “w-fe”. Or maybe I don't say my wife's name because saying her name makes

me think of the person behind the name. Who I'm happily married to. And likes her. My wife, this girl. They met when my wife picked me up from work one day. They chatted. They liked each other's neck scarves. She's very nice, this girl. She's got these sleepy eyes. And her hair is, like... it's like, how women who have sleepy eyes have their hair. And her mouth is like this little... (He is at a loss to even describe how cute her mouth is.) And when she and I are talking at work, people who walk by us, it's like we are this *thing* that they're walking by. Even if she's talking to someone else, while we're standing there. Every word she's saying to that guy, she's really saying in reverse. To me. My wife doesn't talk to me that much. I told her I was going out of town looking for a new job and she didn't seem that interested.

“You redeem our hearts, Lord, like the deer redeems the stream.”

Like if I got a job, maybe she'd go with me to the new city because that's just what she'd have to do as a married wife.

“You redeem our hearts Lord, Like the deer redeems the stream.”

Like, if you're auburn, the color, you sort of have to go on being auburn forever. But It's not like there's any virtue in that. It's not like you're bravely, wonderfully, choosing to be auburn. You're just doing what you have to do. Like my wife would be doing what she...it's not that things are bad between us or we have a lot of big fights or anything. It's just that we sort of walk through the house and when we see each other we say “Hi.”

“You redeem our hearts Lord, like the deer...”

I'm not gonna do this weird response anymore.

(Pause)

My wife makes more money than I do. Which is supposed to make men insanely jealous and shameful and everything, but it doesn't make me jealous. Because her job you don't have to be very good at to make a ton of money. I don't really know what she does.

Second reading. Colossians. Second reading's usually even worse than the first. It's not even a story. It's just them telling you what to do. Is that disrespectful? I don't mean to be disrespectful. I like the readings. I like the bible. I *read* the bible. People say “Haha, Catholics, they don't read the bible. They just read the Notre Dame box scores.” I like the readings and how it's just a little bit each week. So you can digest them, like a warm cinnamon roll. I just have a hard time focusing lately. Maybe that's kind of evident.

Thanks be to God.

(HE stands.)

Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Gospel. The big show. The *pièce de résistance*;

Alleluia, Alleluia.

And with your spirit.

Again.

Glory to you O Lord.

(He quickly signs himself with three fingers on his forehead, lips and heart.)

I have no idea why we scratch ourselves like that.

(He listens to the first lines of the Gospel reading.)

The woman caught in adultery. Now there's an object lesson for the men out there. Fellas! Listen up! This one's for you! And Jesus drawing in the dust. Drawing what? A mystery. Nobody knows! And those men. Dropping their rocks. It's like Jesus took out an X-ray machine—a first century X-ray machine, takes a little time to start up..we pause....we pause...Okay now it's going—and he looks straight into their hearts—these men who want to kill this woman. And he sees their past deeds. And they see that *he* sees their past deeds. And they just drop their rocks and walk away. None of them is without sin and can cast the first stone! And then it's just him and her, and he's all, (perhaps a John Wayne voice) *Is there no one to condemn you? Then neither do I condemn you.* BAM!! What a line. *Neither do I condemn you.* Like a math equation. Take away X, then Y's gotta go too. *They don't condemn, I don't condemn.* What I want is just one night with her. The bearer of wood chips. One...or more....nights. And then that's it. And I want it to be, if possible, this thing where it happens...and then all of a sudden it *didn't* happen. And nobody knows about it. Maybe she and me don't even know about it anymore. We meet up and...you know...and then the universe instantly erases that we ever met up. I feel like there's a thing where that actually occurred.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

(HE sits.)

Why does the priest have to now tell us what the Gospel reading meant? Wasn't Jesus good enough? Didn't he get his point across? It's not like he's not the *Son of God* and can't make his own case, but has to have some priest do it for him. He's a pretty good storyteller, Jesus. Top five all time. Homer. Virgil. Aesop. Raymond Carver. Jesus Christ. He's right up there. But no! Now the priest's gotta go up there and muddy the waters by trying to...Is that disrespectful? I don't mean to be disrespectful. I can listen. I want to listen. Jesus is refracted...we learned this in First Communion class...he's refracted through the priest. What are they teaching 8-year-olds terms like refracted for? That's a very scary word: *refracted*. Very disturbing. Am I being refracted? By what? She's just someone I work with! Nothing has happened! She's not my girlfriend. It's just that...

(Pause.)

It's like those voting district maps. Where you've got, like, this big box of Republicans. And then right next to it, there's a big box of Democrats. And then there's this island—this little sandbar, sticking out of the Republican shore way into the Democratic sea. And then it winds back to the main section of Republicans. What do they call that? With the maps, where they go this way, then that way, and you're all, *there's some of my voters way over here, so I'm gonna make the map go over there and then back to...* Gerrymandering! Right! Gerrymandering! A piece of a thing that goes out of the normal part. And then back into the normal part. That's how I want it to be with me and her. Where the borders of my district go along and along and along and it's fine, and it's cool and everyone gets it...and then my district just sort of takes a turn to this sandbar—*and whoah! look who else is on that sandbar! What a surprise!* Because it was *gerrymandered that way. I didn't even make it happen*. Some unseen political machine put this in place. And then I visit her on that sandbar once...or twice...or maybe a week. And then we both go back to work and everything is normal and fine. Because it was a thing that happened *out there*. It wasn't a thing that happened *in here*. My *marriage* is in here. This thing that was gerrymandered to happen is in a *completely different locale*. It has *nothing to do* with my marriage--because it wasn't even really *me* doing it. The real me is in a state of eternal wedlock. This *other me* just spontaneously generated for a day or two outside the borders of my district and then disappeared. Does that make sense?

(HE stands for the Nicene Creed.)

**I believe in one God,
The Father almighty
Maker of heaven and earth.**

Used to be "Creator" of heaven and earth. Nicene Creed. Ton of changes in this one. Can't just waltz back in here lapses! You gotta earn this!

Of all things visible and invisible.

Used to be "seen and unseen."

**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
The Only Begotten Son of God**

**Born of the Father before all ages,
 God from God, Light from Light,
 True God from true God,
 Begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father;**

Used to be “one in being with the Father.” They dragged in *consubstantial* from the galaxy of “words no one ever knew existed before.” But you know what, it’s okay. These little changes, sure, they trip you up, but they make you think about what you’re saying. Focus harder on what you believe. Which is the whole point, right?

**Through him all things were made.
 For us men and for our salvation
 He came down from heaven**

(A small bow of the head)

This bow is new. I don’t know. Maybe a bit much.

**And by the Holy Spirit was incarnate
 Of the Virgin Mary,
 And became man.**

I had an affair once! In the eighth grade. We met up in the library of the Jewish Community Center. I asked her out. She was already going out with Paul Vapor. She was quick to abandon old Paul Vapor. While keeping up pretenses. That’s a funny name. Vapor. Like water you can’t see. Kind of fitting somehow for old Paul. She and I made out and I got all the way to—you know, *baseball analogies*. And then I went to church. And I sat down in that pew. And I looked up at Jesus on that cross who’d done all this suffering and dying for my sins. And I said, “You know what dude? I don’t feel guilty at all about this, because I’m having a blast and we’re going to keep making out and baseball analogies and it’s awesome.”

(Pause)

We actually weren’t that impressive of baseball players. I was like one of those player-managers who couldn’t handle either part of the job very well. Either managing the two of us, or running the base paths. But at least I was on the team. (beat) Nevertheless there was Paul Vapor’s side of the equation. And whenever I’d see him, I’d always feel a little bad for him, because he was the kind of person you always felt sad for in the first place. And I thought of going up to him and saying, “Hey, Paul, better luck next time.” You know, to cheer him up for me taking his girlfriend. So I did. That didn’t help. But at least it probably did make Paul feel better about himself, as a person, when he compared himself, as a person, to me.

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
 He suffered death and was buried,
 And rose again on the third day
 In accordance with the scriptures.**

It used to be he rose again in “*fulfillment* of the scriptures.” And whenever you’d say that—“fulfillment” you’d get this sorta thing where your breath went *up!* Like, the “f” and the “l” and the “u” sort of made your voice and your mouth go upwards. *Fulfillment*. And you got the sense that, *Hey, things worked out. Jesus fulfilled stuff! They got a ton better. They got awesome.* But now it’s like, “*in accordance.*” “Kuh” and “Duh.” Your voice goes straight out and harsh. “In accordance.” It’s legal. Jesus fit the bill—he’s “in accordance.” He wasn’t a thing that lifted everyone up—in fulfillment!”

(Pause)

I don’t want a thing to just be “in accordance” with something else. I want a thing to fulfill something else. To let you know that there’s hope. The real thing. That your life could be lifted, completed, fulfilled. The only question is: what’s really going to fulfill it?

**He ascended into heaven
And is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
To judge the living and the dead
And his kingdom will have no end.**

I’d been wondering for some time if she was really that into me. The new gal. Like maybe I’d been getting the wrong signals from her. And then I found a note on my desk at work one day.

(He realizes he actually has the note with him. He takes note out of his jacket pocket and reads it.)

It said, “Anytime, anywhere.”

(Pause)

At first I thought, this was about, you know, where I could put the new fax machine. Because she handled office equipment and I’d bought one, and had written a note to her asking if I could move things around, and in this note she was saying back to me that I could put the new fax machine *anywhere*. And I could do that at *anytime*. So I read the note. And I looked at her across the office and nodded. And she looked back at me. And she smiled. And I looked back at the note. And I looked back at her. And I realized, this is not a transportation of office hardware kind of smile she’s giving me. It’s a completely different kind of smile. It has nothing to do with fax machines. Fax machines are about as far as you can get from what that note was talking about.

(He continues the Nicene Creed)

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of notes...giver of life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
Who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
Who has spoken through the prophets.**

Now apparently God wants me to think about the time I visited a House of Ill Repute. Because that's what I'm thinking about. And let me say here, it was not all it was cracked up to be. Afterwards, I felt lonely and desperate and mean and petty and gross and consumed with fear that this was as good as life was gonna get. Meaning not very good at all. And the money I paid my evening partner—and it was a lot—did not really match up to the experience I received. Which, if this goes on in a lot of houses of ill repute, this level of dissatisfaction, is something I think the wider ill-reputed community really needs to look into. They need to do some real soul-searching.

(Pause)

So why did I go there in the first place? Because, it was on my way to and from work. If I went the long route. Which I almost always did. And so one day I'm like, let's just go see. Go up to the door. I've never even come that close to the front door of the place. So I walk up there. Glass door, arm thing on top of the door that swings it open. Wilted plants and decorative lava rocks on this landing inside the door. And I'm like *Whoa, rocks! I'm this close to the rocks! Danger!* And the sin and the wonder and the sin and the thrill and the sin and the danger just flowing out of this place. And then I left. And I didn't think about it anymore. Which is not true. I thought about it every minute of the day and night until I came back the next week, just to see if it was as exciting and sinful and wondrous as it was the first time—being this close to a cathouse—fun word—or if it had worn off and was old hat and I couldn't be bothered with it anymore. It was not old hat and I could be bothered with it a ton more. And what was even more exciting was the fact that I wasn't going to *go into* this building. I wasn't going to despoil this place by entering it, like a used tongue depressor into someone's mouth. I was going to respectfully observe this edifice, from a safe distance away. (beat) Third time I went back I was like, *what if I just went in?* I'm not going to. But what if that just happened? What would that be like? And so I stood there. And I stood there. And my mouth actually started to water. And then I said *this is getting too close for comfort, I am not coming back here anymore* and I walked away. (beat) Standing at the door an hour later I was like I'm gonna *tell myself* I'm going inside and that'll be exciting. I'm not gonna do it, but it'll just be like having a fun conversation with myself: *I'm going in! It's gonna happen!* Like saying "*I'm going to the moon!*" But saying that only as a way to get myself psyched up for doing something not as hard as going to the moon but still pretty hard. Like passing my real estate license test. Which I never took because I was like, "Why?" And then telling myself I was going in became *convincing* myself I was going in, and that whole thing just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger till it was like this housing bubble inside me that just blew up and up and up. And then convincing myself I was going inside became me *actually going into* the building—I can't believe I'm thinking about this at church—and then as long as I was in the door I didn't want to, you know, let myself down. I mean, not "myself" but the "self" that had *convinced myself* to go inside. I didn't want the *persuading* me to be let down by the "me" me. The *acting* me. So I walked upstairs.

**I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
And I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
And the life of the world to come. Amen.**

And so long story short there was a night clerk type person at a front desk and long story short I chose my “person” and long story short that is about as long as this story is going to get. And when I left I felt sad and depressed and miserable and what the hell. And it was the same way the next night. And the next night, and the next night and the next night and the next... And then I took a night off just to prove I could. And then I came back again and again and again and one night I almost got arrested but I didn’t, and then this other time when I went back I actually did get arrested and that was interesting but this high school lawyer friend of mine got me off and then I went back again and again and this went on for an unspecified amount of time and then eventually, I ran out of money and stopped going. And thus ended the Cat House Epoch of my life. And then I met my future wife and we started going out. And I’d be lying if I told myself, which I won’t because I’m at Mass, that once I found out she had money, and even though things weren’t going so hot on our first few dates, I’d be lying if I said that I wasn’t enticed to keep going out with her so I could eventually ask her for money to go back to the House of Ill Repute. To be sure, I would cut off the last part of that sentence and end with “money, Tara” not “money to go back to houses of ill repute, Tara.”

(Pause.)

I just said her name, didn't I? Tara. Okay, her name is *Tara*. I mean are you kidding me?

(Beat)

Prayers of the Faithful.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord hear our prayer.

Lord hear our prayer.

Prayer intentions in the silence of our hearts. I can never think of anything. Okay, the poor!

Lord, hear our prayer.

(He sits)

(HE sees the collection basket is going around.)

(He takes a bill out of his wallet. When he sees what denomination it is—\$20, \$50?---he quickly jams the bill into his pocket. He searches through the wallet and his pockets for a smaller denomination. He does not find one. As the imagined basket stretches toward him Daniel quickly pulls out a rosary from his pocket, bows his head, closes his eyes and pretends to pray until

the basket is gone. He opens his eyes and continues his monologue.)

I never asked Tara for money. But I always thought I would. And thinking I would do that helped me to overlook the pretty obvious structural flaws in our blossoming relationship--I'm just thinking about this for the first time--and instead keep things going with her because surely those gals wanted to see me one last time. (beat) But anyway, the relationship ended up getting on the right track and we're doing fine now.

Blessed be God forever.

Blessed be God forever.

Tara doesn't go to this mass. She goes to the Saturday night "anticipation Mass." Which if you go to that Mass, it "counts" for Sunday. You're supposed to go to Mass on Sunday, but the Catholic Church has made it so that Saturday *is* Sunday. Why doesn't she go to Mass with me? Am I giving signals? I liked going to Mass with her. I liked looking up at the same important thing together. It took some of the pressure off us. You'd realize, *it's not just about us*. We're not in charge--ultimately--of this relationship. There's something bigger keeping an eye on us. And not doing a great job of it, I grant you. I mean, not to judge you, God. But we could use a little help down here. But at least she and I would show up and try. To get God to try. Which was something.

(HE stands)

And with your spirit.

Getting a lot of mileage outta that one.

We lift them up to the Lord.

It is right and just.

It used to be when the priest was at the altar about to consecrate the bread and wine, he'd say, "Let us give thanks to the Lord." And we'd say, "It is right to give him thanks and praise." Now we just say: "It is right and just," Like, we don't need to say any more. We get it. Jesus is right and just. He's the one. He's the only one. He's the only real way to God. Oh, I know that's not cool to say anymore: "Jesus is the only real way to God." It's supposed to be: "All religions are

the equal way to God!” But they’re not. It’s not like Jesus is just *equal* to Buddha and Mohammed and Moses and Shiva and Kali and Zeus and Apollo and Crazy Horse. No! He’s life coach for all those guys. It’s just that not everyone realizes it yet. But, once they do realize it—and this is my point—that there’s only one way to God, then they’ll also realize that means *everything else* is up for grabs. Meaning that in terms of how you get anywhere else, there are many ways to that thing. And this is my point. What I’m trying to say is...marriage. Being committed. There’s a lot of ways to do that. A lot of roads and channels you can go down. God? One road. His only begotten son. But with staying committed to someone you are committed to, there’s a lot of possibilities to live in accordance with that. In accordance. With your vows. What I’m trying to say is...she, the feather...that wasn't a feather...being with her...etc...would one way to be faithful to my marriage because Jesus was faithful to God...No, seriously, I’m getting there, I’m getting there...the fact that Jesus already *did what he did* means no one else can do it...*it* being the one perfect pure path to God...meaning it would be like arrogant of anyone else to think they could only take one straight ahead road to whatever it is they wanted...meaning roads, they go along, and they have lots of interesting...and they crumble. They crumble and they collapse and you collapse because only Jesus was able to...but a wood chip, wood flake, spark in the hair, that’s something to consider, as worthy...of attention...and if people don’t think that makes sense, that’s really their problem. I’m sorry, it just is.

(He looks up at the altar)

If I had to, I could do this entire next priest part. I’d just walk up to the altar and I’d be like:

(HE turns to the congregation and takes on the voice of the priest and continues the “Eucharistic prayer” the priest has been reciting.)

***It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
Always and everywhere to give you thanks, Father most holy,
Through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ,
Your Word through who you made all things,
Whom you sent as our Savior and Redeemer,
Incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin.***

Tara’s from Omaha. I’m from Council Bluffs, Iowa, right across the river. Council Bluffs and Omaha are the twin cities. Of the central part of the southern tip of the upper midwest. Council Bluffs the lesser, Omaha the greater. Council Bluffs low rent, Omaha glamorous. They get U2 at a huge arena, we get the Alan Parsons Project on a riverboat casino. When we met I told Tara I was from Omaha too. I didn’t think she’d want to go out with someone from Council Bluffs. And I did not dispel the illusion that I was from Omaha, for quite some time. She’d gone to Precious Blood. They were called the “Dames of the Precious Blood.” She’d gone to the Cattleman’s Cotillion. Her family had a white TV on an island in the kitchen. This is the level these people were operating out of. But I don’t think it made her all dameish and debutantish, you know? She’s a good woman. To this day. A good, strong—she has woman friends. They play bridge on weekends. I ask if the other husbands play. Her answer’s always kind of vague. “Well, they’re

not very good,” she’ll say. What does that mean? They play but they’re not very good? Or they *don’t play* because they’re not very good. I’d like some answers here. I don’t need answers. It’s her life. She has her life. I have my life. We’re like a Venn diagram, where we each have our own lives and then we have the parts of our lives that overlap. And that’s healthy. Right? And we are grateful to the people at the Venn Company for modeling for us a harmonious relationship.

***Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people,
He stretched out his hands as he endured his Passion,
So as to break the bonds of death and manifest the resurrection.
And so, with the Angels and all the Saints***

Why not just all the angels and saints?

***We declare your glory,
As with one voice we acclaim:
Holy, Holy, Holy God of power and might***

(Pause. He has it wrong.)

I mean....***Lord God of hosts—***

I liked it better when God had “power and might”.

***Heaven and earth are full of your glory
Hosanna in the highest
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
Hosanna in the highest.***

I eventually went to confession. After I stopped going to the cathouse and started going out with Tara.

(HE kneels and makes the sign of the cross.)

In the name of the Father and of The Son and of the Holy Spirit. Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been a while since my last confession.

(He switches to the priest, and speaks in a scratchy voice, the priest’s words in italics. Daniel goes back and forth between the priest and himself.)

Whadja do?

Well, I deprived a local business of one of their primary income streams and I just feel terrible about it. I am sorry for these and all my sins.

Did you steal from them?

No, but...well actually you could say I stole from them because I set up an expectation that I would keep going there and then all of a sudden I stopped.

Were you morally culpable?

(An aside)

The priest didn't talk like that. I just think it would be cool if he did.

(He resumes the confession.)

Were you morally culpable?

You mean...

Were you morally at fault for them losing this income stream? If they lose a customer, it's on them to go get another customer.

True, Father. True. But you see, the thing is, I went in there with such enthusiasm. Such fervor, that it was almost like promising them a fixed revenue. I mean, imagine if every time someone saw you they just went bat...guano...crazy with joy, and that gave you like this almost *monetary* jolt of happiness and then *all of a sudden* they stopped showing up—I mean, isn't that wrong?

No.

But I was practically one of them. I used to run my hand across the front desk if it was dusty. You see what I'm saying? We had an unspoken agreement, me and this place. What kind of world is this if you can't honor your unspoken agreements?

What kind of business was this?

El Gato De Casa.

El Gato de Casa?

Yes.

You mean a House of Ill Repute?

Let's just call it a bordello.

Let's call it prostitutes.

Fine.

So, your chief moral concern about going to prostitutes is that you don't go to prostitutes anymore.

(Daniel stumbles over a response, then finally:)

You have such a cool voice!

(The priest is not having it.)

Answer the question!

Yes.

Okay, outside of matters of economic justice, do you see any other possible moral considerations involved in your going into this establishment?

You mean the fact that I was paying women for premarital relations?

Like that.

I mean, I guess I see your point, theologically. But it was ultimately so sad, discouraging and nihilistic that it was less like a fun sin, and more like brutal penance.

Why'd you stop going?

I met someone and we started going out.

Did you tell her what you did? That you used to go to prostitutes?

No.

Why not?

I can see you haven't dated much lately, have you, Father? Transparency is not a high priority early in the courtship process. If at all.

If you keep going out with this girl, are you going to tell her?

I go to mass.

Okay.

Almost every day.

Okay.

I'm all in.

All in with what?

The whole thing.

Why are you telling me this?

Because, I'm the religion I am. I'm the person I am. I can do this. Be honest with someone about what I've done.

So you're going to tell her.

No. But it's in me to do so, and that's all she needs to know. That I'm a good man.

So what do you want from me?

I want absolution from my sins.

Which sin? Not going to prostitutes anymore or going to prostitutes in the first place?

These are complicated...I just want peace.

Peace I cannot give you.

What can you give me?

My time. How's that?

I'll take it.

And God can grant you forgiveness if you think of a sin that needs forgiving

Okay, how about the sin that I don't know if it's a sin that I went to a house of ill repute. *That's not a sin.*

I'm not going to apologize for going there. I loved those women. They made me feel special.

Which was confusing, because everytime left I vowed I'd never return.

Why don't you get outta here and come back another time. Go think and pray about what you did, and why it might be something you could ask forgiveness for. Those women. Their lives. I'm not telling you what needs confessing. I'm just offering some things to think about.

(Daniel sits back on his haunches)

I didn't go back to confession. Because I don't think it would be legit. Because I always had it in my mind I would go back to the house. It's almost like I missed feeling that sad and hopeless.

(He stands and continues reciting the "priest parts".)

***At the time he was betrayed
And entered willingly into his Passion,
He took bread and, giving thanks, broke it,
And gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take this, all of you, and eat of it...***

Second "of" in the last line is new. WHY!!! Why do we need "of" in front of "it" all of a sudden!! How does that help anyone! If I was the priest I'd be going nuts! Two years we've been tripping

over all these penny-ante changes that don't do anything for anyone. Two years! Why do they gotta make it harder for everybody? HUH??!! Why? Just leave us alone. Leave us alone.

***For this is my body,
Which will be given up for you.***

When I think of Melinda...that's her name. The woodchip. Melinda. I hate that name. I'm sorry. I just do. I can't stand the name Linda in the first place. And then Mel on top of it just crushes it entirely. But when I think of her I think of a cool, pure, freshwater spring. Not just her body, but the whole thing of her, the whole idea of her....

In a similar way, when supper was ended

Used to be "same way."

He took the chalice

Used to be "cup." Tara once made snow cones for us. She's very creative. What it was was she put a bunch of ice in a blender...and blended it...and then poured grape juice over it. (beat) I guess that doesn't sound as impressive now as it did back then. I just thought it was very nice. No one had ever made me a homemade snow cone before. It was very sweet. I hate snow cones. My teeth are super sensitive. Eating that frickin' snow cone was ridiculously painful. It was four minutes of pain and misery. And trying to look like I enjoyed this hell was one of the most complicated things I'd ever had to do in my life. Face scrunched up. Trying to bypass my teeth and just use my lips to eat the ice. *While trying to smile.* I started sweating. I thought of planes crashing. It was a nightmare. But I was happy, because she was happy, thinking I was happy. Even though I wasn't happy. But I was. Because she was happy.

(Pause)

They haven't played my favorite song. They hardly ever do. It's called "Come to the Water." It's a song that tells people to come to the water. The water being Jesus. The most cool, refreshing, freshwater spring there is. Even more so than...her. Like, once you drink from the water of Jesus, you'll never be thirsty again. Or so I hear. Because I've been going to the river of church for a long time and I haven't had my thirst quenched. I've been drinking from Jesus my entire life and I haven't been slaked. (beat) Slaked.

***And, once more giving thanks,
He gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take this, all of you, and drink from it,
For this is the chalice of my blood,
The blood of the new and eternal covenant,***

Used to be "everlasting."

***Which will be poured out for you and for many
For the forgiveness of sins.***

Do this in memory of me.

The blood used to be poured out for you and for *all*. Now it's just for you and for *many*. I guess God sort of walked that one back a little. Which I'm not here to judge God. But it does make you wonder, if you're one of "the many" that the blood was poured out for. Or "the few" that it wasn't poured out for. And if you're one of "the few," I mean, what does that mean? That you're not in the game? At all?

***We proclaim your death O Lord,
And profess your Resurrection,
Until you come again.***

I go to Mass almost every morning and one day there's this woman in the pew across from me crying after communion. And I'm like, *She's connected*. I want that. So I sit there and I try to cry. And I can't. And I'm like, "What the hell church? You can't do this mystical emotional thing for that person and not for this person. You should do it for *all*, not just for many. We're all in this together, right?"

(Pause)

So I left church, dry as a bone and I went to work. It was a couple of days after she'd given me the note. On my desk was a second note.

(Realizes he has the second note in his pocket too. He takes it out and looks at it.)

It had one thing on it. A question mark.

***Our Father,
Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this daily our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespass,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.***

Why do we gotta be delivered from evil? Why didn't you make us good enough in the first place so you wouldn't have to deliver us from anything? You put us down here the way we are, and the world the way it is: everything trying to knock down our walls. So we have to crawl back to

you, and beg you to make us stronger. Why not just skip the repair work and make us right the first time? If I answered that question, on that note, the way it could be answered, I don't think it would end with just her. I think I would end up, one way or another, back at those houses..... again, and again, and again...

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory O Lord, now and forever. Amen.

On our first date Tara took me to this cornfield. And we stepped inside. And she looked at me. And then she took off the tassel from the top of a cornstalk. And she threw it to the ground. And I was like, *Oh my God. This woman.* (beat) And she told me she'd learned to do it as a kid. Detassel corn. They pay kids to do that. It has to do with pollination and cross breeding and higher yields of corn and that's not the point. The point is that then she showed me how to detassel a stalk of corn. And we stood there, detasseling corn. And talking. And detasseling. And the night fell, and we walked through the field, and you could look up out of the corn and the sky was like a blue whale and there were stars. And a few days later we went out again. And then we kept going out. And we didn't always detassel corn. But sometimes we did. I imagine we made some farmers out there pretty happy. And going out with her was, like, amazing. Because I finally had someone I could talk to. You know, talk about my day with. Ultimately, that's what you want the most out of a relationship: To have someone you can talk about yourself with. Okay, and listen to them talk about themselves too. You'd learn to do that. And I did. For a long time I did that. For years. Listened to her. Until there was no more listening to her. Because there was no more speaking on her part. And other people do speak on their part. Other people are interested. Which is kind of confusing, because it's like the person who's legally supposed to talk to you doesn't. And the person who, it's kind of illegal for her to talk to you, does. Which makes me realize...what I need...what I really so badly think I need...is sleep. I haven't gotten real sleep the past nine and a half weeks. Sleep is like a barricade keeping me on the right side of things. Why can't I sleep? Because I'm dreaming of being with this girl. Why am I dreaming of being with this girl? Because I can't sleep. So which comes first? The desire to be with her, that keeps me awake all night? Or is the fact that I am awake all night driving me to be with her? Thy ways are a mystery to me, O Lord. Wherever I am always with two women. One of whom I am married to. And the other of whom makes my marriage much more interesting. She does still say she loves me though, Tara. If you say to someone, "I love you," does that mean you have to mean it? Can you actually say to someone, "I love you", and it's not true? Or what if you say it but the way your voice is doesn't show it, and the way your actions are don't show it. Can it still be there? Maybe her love is there, it's just way deep down. Like a carp in the bottom of a river. It's just having a hard time surfacing. Maybe it's scared of coming up, for some reason. Maybe it's something I'm doing,

And with your spirit.

For the fourth time!

Sign of peace? I will not give these people a sign of peace!

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
Grant us peace.**

(HE kneels)

**Lord, I am not worthy
That you should enter under my roof...**

Used to be "receive you"...now we've all got roofs.

**But only say the word
And my soul shall be healed.**

(HE goes up for communion. A bow of the head. Cups his hands together. Takes host and consumes it.)

Amen.

(Goes back to seat and kneels. Silence.)

What if Tara found out? What if Tara found out? (beat) What if Tara found out...and she didn't care?

(Silence. Finally, he stands)

And with your spirit.

(It is the fifth time in Mass they have said that. He holds up five fingers.)

Thanks be to God!

Mass is ended.

(He leaves the church. Lights shift to reveal, off to the side of the pews, a small round table and two chairs, a coffee mug is on the table. It is a cafe.)

This cafe is like a refuge. Sometimes they play church songs in here. I think it's a marketing technique, to lure people after Mass so they can sort of extend the whole church experience. I told Melinda about this place a couple days ago, that I come here after the eight thirty. She said she comes here too, or might someday. As in maybe today. She said she was wondering, in case she saw me, would I be able to come over and help her move some furniture around. From one place to the next. I assume to redecorate. Not just for, like, exercise. I told her I'd probably be busy.

(Pause)

Other parts of the Mass trip you up too. Like the Eucharist. I mean, it looks like bread and wine. And it tastes like bread and wine. But it's supposed to be the Real Presence. Body and blood. Actual God inside you. In every cell and part of you. And sure you doubt, and wonder. But they keep telling you *it's real*, so you keep showing up. Hoping there's something there. Even if you don't always feel it. Even if your life is pretty much the same after you have it, you wonder, would it be even worse if you gave it up? Is it worth staying for, even if it is real, but it does nothing for you? Or do you go somewhere else?

(Suddenly his eyes light up. His song, "Come to the Water" is playing in the cafe.)

That's my song. I never hear this anymore!

(He quietly sings along.)

"And let all those who thirst, let them come to the water. And let all who have nothing. Let them come to the Lord. Without money, without price, why would you pay the price. Except for the Lo..."

(He trails off as he spies someone across room, offstage. He slowly stands up.)

And there's Melinda.

(Silence, as Daniel continues to look offstage at Melinda.)

(Lights down.)

CURTAIN

