

ABANDON ALL HOPE

by **Peter Fenton**

DEFINITIVE EDITION

25 April 2024

Peter Fenton
P.O. Box 93
Lahaska PA 18931

Dramatists Guild of America
peterfentonwriting@gmail.com
www.byPeterFenton.com

This play contains dark humor, mature themes, sexual innuendo, profanity, alcohol consumption, and some criticism of organized religion. Recommended for ages 14+

© 2020, 2024 by Peter Fenton. All rights reserved.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

This play is written for a cast of 4 actors (2F/2M)

TERESA (46/Any Ethnicity/Female)

A fun-loving, strategic mastermind film noir femme fatale type assuming the role of a trickster demon. Despite her immortality, she has existential questions of her own. She was once human prior to working for the afterlife. In life, she was an actress in the golden age of Hollywood (stage name "Hope Ambrosia") who never got her big break.

MELISSA JONES (19/Any Ethnicity/Female)

Clever, politically ambitious sorority pledge with a strong internal bullshit detector. Her brash exterior is a defense mechanism against her deep longing to belong--anywhere.

SEAN LIU (19/East Asian/Male)

Quick-witted, cocky Ivy League student, expert in game theory and debate. His bravado and wit hide a scared, sweet gay boy wanting to step away from his famous family's spotlight.

EVAN DAIGLE (19/Probably White/Male)

Clean-cut, naïve evangelical Christian out to prove he truly is a man after God's own heart. Earnest in beliefs and genuinely kind, but often cluelessly, brutally judgmental.

This play features three memory sequences played as movies watched and acted out in-universe by the main cast. Each sequence features the character watching the film "as themselves" and casts the other three members of the cast in fitting roles: TERESA as at least one showpiece torture figure, one of the other teens as a love interest, and the remaining teen in a supporting role.

"The Wages of Sin" (Carlisle, PA)

Starring EVAN as himself.

SEAN as happy-go-lucky roommate ISAIAH LEM.

MELISSA as gentle girl-next-door RACHEL NASCIMENTO.

TERESA as communication department chair DR. AMY BURGE.

"As Mediated by Hollow Rhetoric" (Downingtown, PA)

Starring MELISSA as herself.

EVAN as selfless friend R.J. MENGEL.

SEAN as funky finance bro JUSTIN CALLAWAY.

TERESA as both a BEGGAR and charming scholar KRISTA SPRADLIN.

"Black-Bottom Hazelnut Pie" (Lancaster, PA)

Starring SEAN as himself.

MELISSA as curious big sister SARAH WEAVER.

EVAN as clever heartthrob ADAM WEAVER.

TERESA as country radio superstar DANNI WESSON.

PRODUCTION, CASTING, & DOUBLING NOTES

Abandon All Hope as written is for 4 Actors (2F/2M):

TERESA (35+/Any/F) doubles as AMY, BEGGAR, KRISTA, DANNI.

MELISSA (18-25/Any/F) doubles as RACHEL, SARAH.

SEAN (18-25/East Asian/M) doubles as ISAIAH, JUSTIN.

EVAN (18-25/Probably White/M) doubles as R.J., ADAM.

SEAN is to be portrayed by an East Asian actor. This is required.

EVAN probably works best if he's white, but this is not required.

If a non-white actor plays EVAN, omit the reference to his skin color when AMY says "straight--white--Christian--man."

To follow precedent set by the original readings and world premiere production, cast **MELISSA** as Latina and/or Black.

TERESA is open to portrayal by any ethnicity. Casting TERESA should be contingent on the actress's ability to showboat while playing a calculated mind game--think Katharine Hepburn, Daniel Craig in *Knives Out*, or Rachel Brosnahan's *Mrs. Maisel*.

The three "death movie" memory sequences are intended to be read as abstract presentations of the days Evan, Melissa, and Sean died stylized like Old Hollywood movies written, directed, and produced by "Hope Ambrosia" who, naturally, has cast herself in at least one role in each "film". The memory sequences can be fully done with pantomime and careful lighting and sound design.

You are free to expand the cast with the single stipulation that in every production of this play, **TERESA** must double as **AMY BURGE**, the **BEGGAR**, and **DANNI WESSON**. If there are any more than four actors in your production, modify TERESA's casting proclamation at the top of each "movie" sequence to just say, "Starring CHARACTER as [him/her]self and Hope Ambrosia as [TERESA'S CHARACTER(S)]."

RACHEL, R.J.*, KRISTA, SARAH can be played by one or more actors.
ISAIAH, JUSTIN, ADAM can be played by one or more actors.
Extras can be implemented in the Busy Street, Protest in the Park, Rooftop Party, and County Fair scenes if desired.
(*R.J. is written male but can be portrayed as any gender)

Pronunciation Guide

Lancaster: lang-KISST-her

Daigle: DAY-gle (rhymes with 'bagel')

Liu-Ogden: LIU-OG (as in 'hog')-din

Burge: BURRj

Nascimento: NÔ-SEE-me-YEN-to

Spradlin: sprÆD-lynn

Edgemere: edge-MEER (as in 'meerkat')

Jean-Paul Sartre: ZHAN-paul SART

Redeemer University is a Christian college (Messiah, Wheaton)
Downingtown College is a state university (West Chester, York)
Edgemere University is an Ivy League school (Princeton, UPenn)

ORIGINAL CAST & DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

STAGED READINGS

Virtual: Redwood City, CA (2020), Nashville, TN (2021)

In-Person: Lambertville Hall, Lambertville, NJ (2022)

TERESA -- Krystina Jackson (20), Avery Kellington (21, 22)

MELISSA -- Natalia Dominguez (20, 21), Kara Groom (22)

SEAN -- Geoffrey Ko (20, 21), Jonathan P. Chen (22)

EVAN -- Peter Fenton (20, 21), Will Rittweger (22)

WORLD PREMIERE

June 10, 2023 at Theatre Row, New York City

Directed by Gorman Ruggieri

Produced by Peter Fenton & Avery Kellington

with special thanks to Suzanne Fisher

Staged in the 2023 Rogue Theater Festival

TERESA -- Avery Kellington

MELISSA -- Yuliana Sleme

SEAN -- Jonathan P. Chen

EVAN -- Michael De Los Angeles

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DEDICATION

Thank you to every single person listed above who has been part of the development process, but especially to my producing partner and "Demon Queen" Avery Kellington. Thank you for workshopping both the stage play and screenplay of *Abandon All Hope* week in and week out with me for so long--I sometimes don't even know where Avery ends and TERESA begins. You're a badass.

Thank you to Dad, for being by my side through every step of the journey and for our conversation following my horrible first draft. Thank you for being along with me as I try new things and always encouraging me to learn from my mistakes.

Thank you to Mom, for the daily walks we took while I was writing the first and second drafts of *Abandon All Hope* and letting me often monopolize that time by talking through my plot and character developments out loud.

This play is dedicated to the life and memory of Rachel Held Evans (1981-2019), whose own writing met countless at the gates of faith --touching the hearts, minds, and lives of both those looking for a way out and those looking for a way in. I offer this humble story for the mantle of Rachel's legacy, as a face in the crowd who was touched by the life she lived.

ACT I, SCENE ONE. 664 BRIMSTONE HALL - BEFORE

664 BRIMSTONE HALL, on an eerie October twilight. Present day. Pieces of an abstract dorm room are set over an elegant chess board floor.

The furnishing is sparse: two beds, two chairs, two desks. A disconnected door sits at one end of the stage, a bookshelf at the other. Neatly packed storage boxes or luggage items line the perimeter of the "arena". Everything in the room serves to create a highly personalized graveyard, haunting three college freshmen with deep regrets.

Three large, unsettling portraits loom over the set: one respectively of EVAN, an eager church camp counselor; MELISSA, a scrappy sorority pledge with streaky dyeage in her hair; and SEAN, a wealthy East Asian valedictorian.

A large sign with a typo hangs above it all, reading in a garish comic sans:

"ABANDON ALL HOEP YE WHO ENTER HERE"

The stage is dark and still as the play begins. A spotlight flashes quickly on EVAN (19), who is clutching a Bible. Preaching fervently.

EVAN

God said it. I believe it. That settles it.

Spotlight appears on MELISSA (19), radiating insecure spite masked by a smile. She's holding a phone.

MELISSA

Babe?! Can you take my picture?

Spotlight appears on SEAN (19) standing with a plush toy in hand, gazing longingly, lovingly.

SEAN

J-just my best friend.

CUT TO BLACK.

Sean, Evan, and Melissa exit.

SPOTLIGHT APPEARS ON:

A glamorous film noir femme fatale in a sharp red cocktail dress and a black fascinator hat pours a glass of wine. This is fun-loving demon TERESA (16).

In front of her is an intricate, inscrutable cork-board on wheels with design plans, color swatches, and photos of Evan, Melissa, and Sean interconnected with string.

TERESA

Melissa Jones. Sean Liu. Evan Daigle. Three perfect challenges for my set of skills.

An ominous grandfather clock chimes.

TERESA

Shit! Shit.

Um... hmm--OK, that's done. Yep, did that. The necklace! Oh--

She pulls an ugly necklace off the board. The grandfather clock chimes again.

TERESA

I'll get an idea. Does this work?

She snaps her fingers.

LIGHTS FLASH RED.

A roaring rumble of thunder. She snaps her fingers again.

LIGHTS RETURN TO NORMAL.

TERESA

OK. OK. This has to work. It's gotta work. One chance.

The clock chimes again.

TERESA

Let's deal these jokers in.

She snaps her fingers.

CUT TO BLACK.

We hear a trippy, confusing symphony of death. A bus is heard screeching its brakes.

RACHEL (IN THE DARK)

What are you doing? Evan, get out of the road!!

The bus crashes. A scream broken up by a breath is heard. A skull is heard cracking.

JUSTIN (IN THE DARK)

Oh my god.

An ambulance is heard in the chaos. All goes quiet.

ADAM (IN THE DARK)

Sean??

(Beat.)

Sean?!

ACT I, SCENE TWO. 664 BRIMSTONE HALL - WELCOME

664 BRIMSTONE HALL. The necklace and cork-board have disappeared, the glass of wine sits in Teresa's hand.

LIGHTS UP ON:

Evan, Melissa, and Sean are positioned around the room like propped-up corpses, eyes closed. Teresa snaps her fingers. Melissa opens her eyes.

TERESA

Good evening, my queen!

MELISSA

God, this is so embarrassing. I--I don't... um? Did we--? Why's my picture here?

TERESA

Loved your feed, girl!
All your selfies and that's the one I went with. Just had a certain haunting quality.

Melissa's eyes dart around the room to find an exit.

She makes a beeline for the door. She jiggles at the doorknob--it's stuck.

MELISSA

(Shouted.)

Help! Let me out of here!!

TERESA

Hang tight. Here, I'll bring you a friend.

She snaps her fingers. Sean comes to.

TERESA

Sean--

MELISSA

Where the hell did he come from?

SEAN

(Without missing a beat)

Malibu.

TERESA

Sean--babe. I'm so glad you're here.

Melissa checks Sean out.

MELISSA

Me too.

TERESA

Yeah, good luck with that. Sean, I'm curious if you heard--any of that. Does 'Black-Bottom Hazelnut Pie' mean anything to you?

SEAN

I'm allergic to hazelnut.

TERESA

How about 'The Great American Dumpster-Fire'?

SEAN

Not unless you're talking about New Jersey.

TERESA

Not ringing any bells?

SEAN

I have genuinely no idea what you're talking about.

TERESA

Interesting. Very interesting...

She snaps her fingers. Evan comes to.

MELISSA

OK seriously, the--the hot guys, the pictures on the wall--
What the hell is going on here?

TERESA

Funny choice of words there.

MELISSA

I barely said--

TERESA

Hell.
Hell is what's going on here. The three of you have died.
You're in Hell.

A pregnant pause.

TERESA

Welcome!

MELISSA

Cut the bullshit. What is this place?

TERESA

You're dead. This is the start of your afterlife:

Evan was hit by a bus.
Melissa fell off a roof.
Sean choked on pie.

You each died at a similar quality of soul at age nineteen in
the state of Pennsylvania on the night of Friday, October
11th. You each have a very good reason you're here.
No bullshit.
And per the regulations as handed down from God and Jesus up
in corporate, you three have been assigned to my care!

MELISSA

(Heavy sarcasm.)

Love that for me. So you must be Satan?

Teresa laughs.

TERESA

You think *Satan himself* has time in his schedule to torture
you? Call me Teresa. Or Momma T!

EVAN

Are you a demon?

TERESA

I prefer "Guardian," but, sure.
And look who we have here! Evan Daigle. The pastor's
firstborn disappointment. *Delighted* to finally meet you.

Evan shrinks back.

EVAN

Hi.

TERESA

Any coroner could tell you death leaves little souvenirs on
your body, your clothes, that tell your story and how it
ended. Vehicular manslaughter. Traumatic brain injury.
Anaphylactic shock. I picked each one of you out myself.
Froze you in a moment--a snapshot that tells me exactly who
you are. Every ounce of insecurity. Every shred of
desperation. Every last shameful secret.
Take Melissa. She spent what little money she had on whatever
was in vogue--the balayage was brand new, wasn't it? Big
birthday splurge...
Sean was dressed for a casual night out, but you can just
smell the money ooze off him: the jacket, the shoes, the
watch. His underwear's Armani.
And Evan: wooden cross necklace. Graphic T. Cargo shorts.
Would you believe he was the coolest kid in youth group?
A surface-level glance around this room--and each other--you
may be thinking this is all pretty tame, especially if you've
heard anything like I have about Hell. And I'd say you may be
right. This room is not designed for the very worst humanity
has to offer, but it's perfect for each of you. It's barely
big enough for one. Bigger than the broom closet you could
rent in Manhattan for a thousand a month, but not by much.
Two beds, two chairs, three people. No way to fully disappear
into private study or watching Netflix on a laptop. And
definitely no privacy for porn. You have nowhere to hide from
your roommates as you become increasingly aware of their
every move and breath.
If Jean-Paul Sartre was right when he said, "Hell is other
people," then a freshman dorm room might just be your perfect
picture of Hell on Earth.

She swirls the wine in her glass.

TERESA

Welcome to eternal damnation. Welcome to 664 Brimstone Hall.

MELISSA

Room 666 was already taken?

TERESA

As a matter of fact, yes! That's the room right next door.
It's Josef, Benny, and--ah, what's his name?

Through the walls, an angry male voice shouts in German.

TERESA

Oh! Adolf. *Duh.* So the three of you are confined to this room, forever.

EVAN

B-but wait a second. There must be some mistake. I don't belong in Hell.

TERESA

Nah. You do.

EVAN

I don't accept this.

TERESA

And yet--here you are!

EVAN

I--I'll do anything to make it right.

TERESA

Anything, huh?

She suggestively touches Evan's shoulder. He bristles like a wet cat.

TERESA

Why don't we play a game for it?

In life, you play the hand you're dealt. It's the same in death. I've hidden something of great power in this room. Before a demon is assigned her first batch of humans to torture, she's given a talisman--a necklace. It's real pretty! Gives me the power to do some of the more spectacular torture.

SEAN

Define "spectacular".

TERESA

Oh, any nightmare your heart could dream up. Love simulating childbirth--lotta men crumble at even the *slightest* little--

Evan and Sean both unconsciously--simultaneously--cringe.

TERESA

All you have to do is place the talisman around your neck, concentrate every ounce of fury to call upon all the powers of Hell, and then it just--happens! Simple as that.

MELISSA

Simple as that?

SEAN

So essentially: you hid the source of your power somewhere in this room, and you want us to find it because without it you can't really torture us? I don't understand the incentive here--

TERESA

Find the talisman tonight.

SEAN

Tonight--why tonight?

TERESA

I'm getting there, babe. This is a game. And games have rules, so listen up: Find the talisman hidden somewhere in this room. With its power, you can open the door and walk right out. I've got some contacts up in Heaven... We'll slip you right in and the powers that be will be never-the-wiser.

EVAN

Oh my gosh, that's amazing! We gotta find this thing.

SEAN

But why bother with the game if you're taking us to Heaven? Seems counterproductive unless you're some kind of rogue demon or--

TERESA

Here's the best part. Only one of you can win. The losers will be stuck in Hell. Forever.

Evan notices the banner.

EVAN

(Reading aloud.)

"Abandon all ho-ep, ye who enter here"

TERESA

I've a little bit on the nose, wouldn't you say? When they hang that big old sign above the entrance to Hell just to tell you, "Give up. It doesn't get better"?

MELISSA

That font was a choice.

TERESA

I'd imagine a human soul with an eternity of torture in front of them every moment of the remainder of their existence would see that sign and think, "Yeah. No shit." ... which means it's perfect.

SEAN

There's a typo on that sign.

(To Teresa.)

You gotta fix--

TERESA

Nah.

(Grins.)

It's perfect. One of you will win. It's practically inevitable. Dawn is coming in a few hours and this room is very small. And I will be watching.

The ominous grandfather clock goes TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK

TERESA

Time will keep ticking away and there's no way of knowing when it will be up. Don't forget to have fun!

Teresa disappears. Evan retreats into a corner to pray.

ACT I, SCENE THREE. 664 BRIMSTONE HALL - FIRST TURN

664 BRIMSTONE HALL, continuous from the previous scene. Evan prays in a corner. Melissa and Sean are perplexed.

SEAN

Where did she--?

MELISSA

Did she just--vanish? What was her name?

(Shouts.)

Denise?!

SEAN

Teresa.

MELISSA

This has to be a dream.

SEAN

Pretty sure we're dead. And this is some kind of afterlife.

MELISSA

There's no such thing?

Sean laughs.

SEAN

Well, I mean, I don't think there's any field of study or body of scientists, even meta-physicists--who'd completely--

MELISSA

What?

SEAN

Uh, sorry. I'll dumb it down for you: Most scientists--

MELISSA

We got off on the wrong foot. I'm Melissa Jones. She/her. Kappa Theta.

SEAN

Sean Liu.

MELISSA

I study poli-sci at Downingtown. I'm an *intersectional feminist*, so--

SEAN

Nice. I--

MELISSA

(Steamrolling.)

I devoted my life to fighting for justice. I grew up in South Philly and I came from nothing. My mom's a hairdresser and I never met my dad.

*She milks her story--embellished or not
--for all it's worth.*

MELISSA

I want to build communities of people who--who give a shit about the outcasts. Use my words and my platform to inspire people to change the world. I'll run for Congress the minute I turn twenty-five.

SEAN

I'm a freshman at Edgemere.

MELISSA

Someone's got money.

SEAN

It's an Ivy.

MELISSA

I know. I got in, too.

SEAN

I'm a sophomore by credit, actually. Computer science and math. If I don't pick up a third major, I'll probably finish undergrad in two and a half years. Well--maybe not anymore, since I'm dead.

Sean has a laugh at his own joke. Evan finishes his prayer in the corner.

EVAN

Amen.

Evan crosses to MELISSA and SEAN.

MELISSA

This whole situation is insane. Right. And you look familiar.

SEAN

I--um.

MELISSA

Do we all somehow know each other?

(To Evan.)

I saw you praying. You're--religious?

EVAN

I wouldn't say that I'm a religious person, but I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

MELISSA

So, super religious.

EVAN

Following Jesus isn't really a religion. It's a relationship.

Sean laughs; incredulous.

SEAN

Christianity, by definition, is a religion.

EVAN

Are you Christian?

SEAN

Let's suppose I were. With self-applied labels, it's always beholden to whatever it is our interpretations are of the word--so, in this case, "Christian". It's like saying you're "righteous" or--

(Freudian slip.)

--"sexy". There's no way of quantifying--

EVAN

But you'd know. I'd know. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. And, like, no offense, but I've been a Christian my whole life. I'm at Redeemer University. I went to Tanglewood Christian High. I was a counselor at Camp Whitestone. I had a bumper sticker that said "When the world tells me 'No way,' I tell them, 'Yahweh.'"

I think of being a Christian this way: if you were put on trial for following Jesus, would there be enough evidence to convict you? And for me--the evidence was there.

SEAN

That's not a very good argument, but let's pretend it was. As you suggested, the first thing this hypothetical jury would look for is where you spent your time. I went to Catholic school K through 12, I was a straight-A student. All the nuns loved me, I went through CCD and was confirmed at fifteen and I'll still go to Mass when I'm with my parents, so I'd say by your metric, the evidence would be there to convict--

EVAN

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.

MELISSA

I forgot how much religion just poisons people--

EVAN

Jesus loves you.

SEAN

See, the problem for me--especially in this moment--is we have the necessary evidence for the existence of God--

MELISSA

Whose side are you on?

SEAN

Given we can trust the demon to some extent, she says she got regulations from God in corporate. Any argument for the non-existence of God could completely fall apart if this new evidence could be corroborated--

MELISSA

OK, think about the crusades. Touchy priests. Those weird white savior mission trips to Africa--and don't even get me started on a woman's right to choose--

EVAN

It was my mom's "right to choose" being at home, raising three sons.

MELISSA

Well. Good for her. I'm glad for people like you. Now, women have fewer rights than assault rifles.

EVAN

What even gives you life or hope? Since you're not a Christian?

MELISSA

Humanity has evolved past any primitive need for religion.

EVAN

How do you know right from wrong if--

MELISSA

You need a wizard overlord to tell you that killing people is bad?

EVAN

Are you--mad at God?

MELISSA

There is no god.

A beat as her words sink in. Evan, Sean, and Melissa posture themselves like a Mexican standoff.

The clock continues: TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK.

SEAN

It's kinda weird--this, uh, game. Kinda like a battle royale... escape room.

TICK-TOCK-TICK-TOCK.

EVAN

Well. There's a chance to go to Heaven. And, uh--

It's tense. All three of their hearts are pounding--nobody wants to be the first to move, all are ready to pounce.

Finally, Melissa makes a run for it. She plows over to the pile of storage boxes and slashes one open.

Sean and Evan dart in separate directions.

ACT I, SCENE FOUR. 664 BRIMSTONE HALL - PLAYER 1'S TURN

664 BRIMSTONE HALL, continuous from the previous scene. It's an all-out mad dash. All are moving identically with cutthroat intent--nobody wants to lose:

Evan tosses things around the room, searching manically.

Sean picks up a yellow legal pad and ballpoint pen, frantically jotting.

Melissa tries to remove her photo from the wall--it's stuck. She backs up to get a little perspective.

MELISSA

Guys. Wait--can you hold up for a sec. So--I mean, this is absolutely insane. You realize what's going on here, right? I hope you would, Edgemere.

SEAN

Yeah. Find the talisman.

MELISSA

Yeah, I don't buy that. There's gotta be more than that going on here. I say if there really is a "talisman," let's find it together. Figure out how to use it. Turn her into confetti or something.

EVAN

But then no one goes to Heaven.

MELISSA

Yeah, but--?

EVAN

You think she's lying?

MELISSA

She's a demon. We're in Hell. I know we'll find it soon.

EVAN

I--I think we can trust Teresa. We have to--

MELISSA

Make a deal with the devil? Bold.

EVAN

No--I'm just doing what must be done--

MELISSA

But you'd only be going to Heaven because you--what? Won a contest? How could you live with that?

SEAN

Well technically, we're all dead--

MELISSA

Shut up.

A beat.

MELISSA

Fine. Don't listen to me.

She picks up a book off the floor and reads the title page.

MELISSA

"The Sparkly Boy and the Furry Man: An Erotic Paddington Bear Fan Fiction--"
Jesus. We are in Hell.

*Melissa plops down on the bed to read.
Sean resumes scribbling.*

EVAN

Uh... what are you doing?

SEAN

Game theory scenarios.

EVAN

Game theory?

SEAN

Yeah. I started analyzing what I know about us. I included Teresa in the calculus, too. I don't think she's a neutral party in this. Unless our variables change, it's going to be the dominant strategy for me--

EVAN

I think we should all team up.

SEAN

Why?

EVAN

She made a good point. If this is Hell, then it probably doesn't make sense to--

SEAN

(Flippant.)

You're adorable.

Evan and Sean are both surprised.

SEAN

Objectively, it's in your best interest to get the thing for yourself.

EVAN

I just--

SEAN

Don't you want to be with Jesus?
Isn't that the one thing you want?

Evan sinks down to the floor. A light appears over Evan as he prays.

EVAN

Father God, I'm... I'm at a loss. I can't even begin to understand--just, why God, I love you, Lord. You are the only thing that matters in the vast ocean of the universe, God. You're perfect. I gave my life to pick up my cross and--I don't get it. I know that without Your love, the transformative love of God sacrificing His only son on the cross, every single one of us deserves to go to Hell... even me. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death. And yes--I understand in my heart how and why someone like Melissa belongs here. And maybe Sean, too--but surely I'm not like them.

(Pause.)

Am I?

I know I wasn't everything my dad wanted me to be but, but You've always taught me that while man cares only about what is outside to be seen, God sees the beauty within.

(Pause.)

Are you listening?

Do you even hear the cry of my heart, God?

No response.

EVAN

Amen.

Sean picks up a pillow and tosses it to Evan, smacking him in the face.

SEAN
You look uncomfortable.
Obviously.

EVAN
Oh--thanks.

Sean resumes writing.

EVAN
(Calling out.)
Teresa!

Teresa enters, sneaking up behind Evan.

EVAN
Ah!

Teresa laughs.

EVAN
(Earnestly.)
I need to speak with God.

TERESA
Oh yeah? What do you wanna tell Her Holiness?

EVAN
"Her"?

TERESA
God's not dead and God is a woman! Isn't that fun?

EVAN
I--?

TERESA
You won't be able to see God tonight, but your concern is very important to Her. You can just tell me! What do you want to say to God right now?

EVAN
I don't belong in Hell.

TERESA
Nope! You do. Sorry, sweetheart.

(Mock-reverently.)
"Thus saith the Lord."
She's incapable of being wrong. Or do you not believe your God is perfect?

EVAN

No. No, God *is* perfect, but I...
I was a Biblical man. "A quest to endure, a war to win, a
princess to save."

TERESA

Ah, yes. Dean Ragsdale. *The Battle for Manhood*.

EVAN

I swear on my soul I bowed to no other name than Jesus
Christ. And Jesus said "*whosoever believeth*" will inherit
eternal life.

TERESA

And this isn't eternal life?

EVAN

No. I lived my life waiting for the moment I'd be face-to-
face with God Himself.

TERESA

Herself.

EVAN

If God is real and...

(Pained.)

"She"...
sent Jesus to save us, I see no good reason why I'm in Hell.

TERESA

How about I show you the day you died? This could be fun. You
got hit by a bus!

EVAN

Whoa.

TERESA

Yeah, why don't we jog your memory? Close your eyes.

Evan shuts his eyes.

CUT TO BLACK.

Sean and Melissa exit.

ACT I, SCENE FIVE. CARLISLE, PA - OCTOBER 11TH

*Old-school film reel is heard alongside
the faint sound of a classic patriotic
song and/or Christian hymn.*

TERESA (OFF STAGE)

"The Wages of Sin: The Cautionary Parable of Evan Daigle"--
starring Evan Daigle as himself, Sean Liu as Isaiah Lem, with
Melissa Jones as Rachel Nascimento and Hope Ambrosia as
communication department chair Dr. Amy Burge.

LIGHTS UP ON:

DR. AMY BURGE'S OFFICE AT REDEEMER
UNIVERSITY, early afternoon on October
11th. Evan stands at center stage. AMY
BURGE (40s) sits at the desk.

EVAN

Professor Burge?

AMY

Come in.

Evan enters.

AMY

Tell me about your project, Evan.

EVAN

Think I'm almost ready, I finished my outline, just working
on the slides here--

AMY

Oh! That's--

I wanted to meet one-on-one because I wanted to help you
choose a new topic.

EVAN

Uh... why?

AMY

So your assignment is an extemporaneous speech laying out two
opposing arguments on a controversial topic without giving
away which side you favor. And you've submitted a proposal in
which you will give a speech laying out arguments regarding
"male friendship and masculinity."

EVAN

Yes, masculinity needs to be reclaimed in my generation.

AMY

I don't really follow. Help me understand.

EVAN

I wouldn't expect you--

AMY

And neither did Peter, my TA.

EVAN

I think guys are told that Biblical manhood means you have to be tough, but everyone's different, but we are all the same at our core. Ragsdale says, "Inside the soul of every man are three unshakable desires: a quest to endure, a war to win, and a princess to save."

AMY

OK. Sounds like you've read a book.

EVAN

But society today is failing us. I read a study where 20% of men say they have no friends.

AMY

That's very sad to hear, but I don't understand how this relates to the assignment. Where are the multifaceted arguments you can draw out?

EVAN

Well, people say all the time that men don't matter.

Amy raises an eyebrow.

EVAN

You know. Feminists. And the LBGT. Why don't people ever talk about men's rights? Or, like, straight pride--

AMY

There's this concept I think would blow your mind called Standpoint Theory. Conversations about gender--and even race, class, sexuality, they're always filtered through a person's position in society.

EVAN

What does this have to do with anything?

AMY

What does this have to do with anything? Evan, it's everything. You as a straight, white, Christian man going to school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, some things you take for granted actually could--

A beat. This is going nowhere.

AMY

You're clearly passionate about your beliefs, Evan, but I'm sorry. This topic is a presentation for nobody.

(Beat.)

Let's talk about some real ideas you can present.

Amy exits. Isaiah enters and has a seat on the bed.

Evan crosses toward the bed.

ACT I, SCENE SIX. CARLISLE, PA - OCTOBER 11TH

207 STAUBER HALL, A FRESHMAN DORM ROOM AT REDEEMER UNIVERSITY, about an hour later on October 11th. Happy-go-lucky roommate ISAIAH (18) sits on the bed with a ukulele in hand, strumming and picking away. The edibles have just kicked in.

ISAIAH

Yo! What's wrong, dude?

EVAN

Burge. She--we talked for an hour and I have to start the whole project over again. Says manhood is a presentation for nobody.

ISAIAH

That sucks.

EVAN

Yeah.

ISAIAH

Are you gonna pick a new topic?

EVAN

She basically decided for me. I'm going to talk about whether women should preach since I'm "so passionate about gender roles".

ISAIAH

What's the controversy there?

EVAN

I don't think there is any. The Bible's pretty clear: "A woman should remain silent in church."

(Beat.)

But she did say something weird. Like there's some theory that'll blow my mind about sex?

ISAIAH

Wait, what?

EVAN

I--just--I think she was trying to say there's something bad about being a straight Christian man?

ISAIAH

No way, dude. Isn't she married?

Evan shakes his head.

ISAIAH

Can I show you this song I've been working on? It's a mashup of "This is My Father's World" with "Colors of the Wind" from *Pocahontas*--

EVAN

Are you ever worried that your professors aren't saved?

ISAIAH

Didn't everyone have to sign the community covenant?

EVAN

Yeah. But how hard is it to sign something you don't believe? It's right there in Matthew Seven, "Beware false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but are inwardly ravenous."

ISAIAH

Hmm.

EVAN

The day that I die, I'll stand before God's judgment with no regrets. I hope Burge can say the same.

ISAIAH

Word.

Isaiah exits. Evan picks up a Bible and crosses to center stage. Rachel enters and takes Evan's hand.

ACT I, SCENE SEVEN. CARLISLE, PA - OCTOBER 11TH

THE SIDEWALK NEXT TO A BUSY STREET ON THE CAMPUS OF REDEEMER UNIVERSITY on the evening of Friday, October 11th. Gentle girl-next-door RACHEL (18) walks hand in hand with Evan.

Evan tries to kiss Rachel. She steps away and squeezes his hand.

RACHEL

I think this'll be good for you. When was the last time you read something you didn't agree with?

EVAN

What, you do that?

RACHEL

I read your *Manhood* book, and I really don't agree with him at all.

EVAN

You told me you loved it.

RACHEL

I said it was interesting.

EVAN

Yeah. Interesting. Right?

RACHEL

It was interesting to learn about his perspective. Ragsdale is like, super old-fashioned!

EVAN

The Truth of the Gospel doesn't go out of fashion.

RACHEL

Evan. *The Battle for Manhood* isn't a book of the Bible. You can't... you can't seriously tell me I'm just stuck in some tower, waiting to be rescued by a man.

EVAN

It's only a metaphor.

RACHEL

Yeah, but it's a pretty sexist metaphor. And, come on. There's no part of me that wants to be some submissive housewife or--

She drops Evan's hand.

RACHEL

There's so many girls at Redeemer who--who'd read Ragsdale and want all that and... Evan, I love Jesus and all, but I'm really not like everyone else around here--

EVAN

That's why I love you.

RACHEL

Oh. I'm--

(Beat.)

I'm really sorry. I don't think this is going to work.

EVAN

What?

RACHEL

I tried. I kept praying over and over that I could be a good girlfriend for you.

EVAN

(Utmost sincerity.)

But you're the perfect girlfriend. I prayed for one and God gave me you.

RACHEL

I've been coming to terms with realizing I like girls. Maybe also guys. I--I really... I've fallen for women before. And when I think about how desperately you--I could list out all these reasons why I should be attracted, but it's not fair to you for me to keep--

(Blurts out.)

Evan, I'm bi. Or gay.

(Beat.)

Maybe. I don't know.

Silence. Evan opens his Bible.

EVAN

You know what God's word says about that?

RACHEL

We're both Bible/Theology majors.

EVAN

I'm *only* saying this because I love you, but the Bible clearly says that homosexual lifestyle is a sin.

RACHEL

I think it might be more nuanced than--

EVAN

The wages of sin is death, Rachel. God said it. I believe it. That settles it.

He flips to an early page in the Bible and steps into the busy street.

EVAN

Genesis Eighteen. "Then the Lord said, 'Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave--'"

A bus is heard barreling toward Evan-- no chance it slows down. Evan's nose is stuck in his Bible.

EVAN

No--no, where is--?

RACHEL

(Panicked.)

What are you doing? Evan, get out of the road!!

EVAN

There's a verse that you need to hear! It's...
Oh! Romans!

Rachel closes her eyes.

CUT TO BLACK.

In the dark, a bus is heard slamming on its brakes with a loud, gruesome CRASH!

Rachel screams.

Old-school film reel is heard rolling to a stop.

Teresa, Sean and Melissa resume their positions from the end of Act I, Scene Four.

ACT I, SCENE EIGHT. 664/BRIMSTONE HALL - PLAYER 1'S TURN

664 BRIMSTONE HALL, continuous from the end of Act I, Scene Four. Sean is at the desk, Melissa reading on the bed, Teresa standing center stage.

LIGHTS UP ON:

Evan opens his eyes.

EVAN

Whoa. That's embarrassing.

TERESA

Yeah.

EVAN

Should've known Romans One.

TERESA

Is that what you should've taken away from... any of that?

Evan sinks to the floor--conflicted. He knows there's more to it than that.

Teresa exits.

Melissa sets the book down.