

Elephant  
*St. Elizabeth's Hospital Serenade*  
a one act play  
by Mark Noonan  
(Winter 2003)

Characters:

Father Ben  
Christopher  
Melanie  
Stephen  
Cardinal Rule

Scene:

A nice hospital room. A single bed center; a small closet left; further left a bathroom. Right, a round table with three chairs in front of a big row of windows that look out on sunny trees (the beginning of autumn if possible). Below the bed center are two more chairs. There is no television, no radio, no stereo. Books, magazines, and manila folders are laid out on the table, chairs, and bed. Atop the bedside table is a strange looking device, it appears some sort of oxygen mask.

Outside the room, stage left, is a hallway. Perhaps a chair or two against the far left side wall.

As lights come up a Man, early sixties, paces around the room, but not nervously, almost in a daze. He is a large man, not tall-average height-but built solidly like a bear or a long retired football tackle. Two tufts of gray hair on each side of his head, a pink bulbous face. He is dressed casually, maybe jeans and a sweater.

A Young Man and a Nurse approach his room from upstage left. The Nurse is late forties, dressed in scrubs and a nametag; the Young Man is early twenties, maybe wears corduroys and a dress shirt. They stop halfway, out of earshot from the open door to the Man's room.

NURSE: Great. He's right in there. I can take your bag for you.

YOUNG MAN: Oh, that's okay.

NURSE: It might just be easier for you. So you don't have to lug it around.

YOUNG MAN: It's okay. I don't mind. I'm kind of psychotic about controlling—I'm sorry, that was the wrong word to use.

NURSE: No. It's all right. Do you plan on giving him anything?

YOUNG MAN: Giving him? Like what?

(Enter a small, thin Man from upstage left. He is dressed in Salvation Army type clothes: perhaps old jeans and a faded button down shirt. He wears a red wrist band and is around thirty years old.)

STEPHEN: Melanie, Melanie, who's this? Who's this? Who's this? Who's this?

NURSE (MELANIE): Could you just give us a minute, Stephen?—Like food or CD's—

STEPHEN: Oh, okay, okay. Bye. Bye.

(Exit Stephen upstage left.)

MELANIE: --Or books?

YOUNG MAN: Books?

MELANIE: Yes. You can't give him anything. He's not supposed to be given *anything*, that's Doctor Halloran's orders, not mine.

YOUNG MAN: Oh, no. I won't—Who was that?

MELANIE: That was Stephen. Don't worry. He's harmless.

YOUNG MAN: Oh. Okay.

MELANIE: Look, it's just that you can't leave your bag unattended, even for a second. It's like being at the airport. If you go to the bathroom or to get a drink of water or to—

YOUNG MAN: Here. You might as well just take it.

MELANIE: Thank you.

YOUNG MAN: Oh, wait. (he unzips a pocket and removes a pack of gum) Is gum all right?

MELANIE: Oh. Uh...Well...I suppose. Just, just keep it in your pocket.

YOUNG MAN: Sure...(awkward pause) He's a very smart man, you know.

MELANIE: Oh, yes. He is. He's such a nice man.

YOUNG MAN: (looking off to the room) Uh hun.

MELANIE: I'll keep your bag behind the front desk, that way no one can get in it.

YOUNG MAN: (distant) Swell...

MELANIE: Just come back to the desk when you're done.

(She starts to exit.)

YOUNG MAN: Okay...Is there anything else I need to know?

MELANIE: I don't think so. He's on some medication but that's about it. I'm sure he'll be happy to see you.

YOUNG MAN: Uh hun...What kind of medication?

(But Melanie is already gone.)

YOUNG MAN: Probably not LSD. Let's hope not. Well, here goes nothing.

(The Young Man approaches the open door. He sees a piece of paper taped to the wall next to the door. Written in pencil, it reads: Fr. B.)

(Father is behind the door by the bathroom, having just splashed some cold water on his face. The Young Man knocks quietly and peeks inside.)

YOUNG MAN: Father?...Father?...Hello?...

FATHER: Yes? One second. (emerging from behind door) Oh. Christopher!

YOUNG MAN (CHRISTOPHER): Father. Hello.

FATHER: Hello there.

CHRISTOPHER: Hey. Hi. How are you?

(They hug.)

FATHER: What are you doing here?

CHRIS: I live here.

FATHER: That's right. What a nice unexpected surprise.

CHRIS: It's good to see you.

FATHER: Yes. It's good to see you too. Please, come in.

(Father clears a chair of books. He tries to tidy up the already neat room.)

CHRIS: They didn't tell you I was coming?

FATHER: Oh, no, no, no. But that's okay.

CHRIS: They were supposed to tell you.

FATHER: It's fine. Come on. Sit. Please, sit down.

(They sit in the chairs below the bed.)

FATHER: So what brings you here?

CHRIS: I came here to see you.

FATHER: Right. Right...How's your family?

CHRIS: Good. Good.

FATHER: That's good...

(Father's eyelids sag heavily and his head falls forward until his chin hits his chest, then he snaps back awake.)

FATHER: You'll have to forgive me. They have me on this medication that makes me drowsy.

CHRIS: Oh. I see...

(Father inhales, holds the breath in, then lets it out slowly.)

CHRIS: So, Father...How are you doing?

FATHER: Good. Good. Well, I guess not so good, that's why they threw me in here. (chuckles)

CHRIS: (laughs awkwardly) Well, what's going on?

FATHER: Oh, not too much. I drove up here for a wedding, you know.

CHRIS: Yes.

FATHER: And when I got here a friend of mine, Father Corrigan, thought I didn't seem right so he brought me here. To detox. (chuckles)

CHRIS: (laughs uneasily, draws it out) I see...Who was getting married?

FATHER: It was Sarah Ferguson. And the young man was Neil Woodson? Woodhall? Woodwood? Something like that. It involved wood. Sarah grew up in Saint Kolman's. I've known the whole family for...oh...at least twenty years.

CHRIS: Where was the wedding?

FATHER: Oh. The chapel at Holy Cross. It's not really a chapel, it's more like a cathedral. It's a beautiful church. She went to school there.

CHRIS: Ah...

FATHER: Are you getting married anytime soon?

CHRIS: Oh. Well. I don't think so, Father.

FATHER: But there are girls?

CHRIS: Well, yes. But not at the moment. I'm not involved with anyone.

FATHER: Well that's okay.

CHRIS: Right. Sure...

FATHER: The Cardinal and I are going to get together.

CHRIS: (unsure what to say) Oh, really?

FATHER: Yes. I need to see him. So in a way this was a blessing.

CHRIS: Uh hun...If you don't mind my asking, Father, what exactly happened at the wedding?

FATHER: Oh. It was...I've probably performed hundreds of weddings. Hundreds and hundreds. It's nothing new.

CHRIS: No. Of course not.

FATHER: And this was a beautiful wedding. I guess all weddings are beautiful but this was one of the more expensive ones. The Ferguson's own a series of funeral homes. Very successful. So money was really no problem with this wedding...

CHRIS: Uh hun.

(Father's head falls slowly and his chin rests on his chest.)

CHRIS: Father?...Father?...Father!

FATHER: (head jerks up) So I was performing the blessing. I was in the middle of the actual marriage rite, which I must've said hundreds of times, to the point where I don't even need the Bible, it's all been long memorized long ago. But somewhere, I can't remember exactly where, I had a mishap. My mind went totally blank. I couldn't think. So they brought me here.

CHRIS: And Father Corrigan finished the wedding?

FATHER: Yes. Luckily he was there and was able to take over—I don't really remember any of this—but later at the hospital he explained to me that he finished the ceremony, thank Lord, and that it all worked out fine. I suppose...I feel awful about the whole thing. To tell you the truth, Chris, it's very embarrassing. I feel terrible about it.

CHRIS: I'm sure the, uh...They understand.

FATHER: I hope so.

CHRIS: Did you fall down?

FATHER: No. I don't think so. They said I was just out of it. Catatonic. Like a coma or something like that. I have no idea.

CHRIS: That's weird.

FATHER: Yes it is. Weird...

(Father's chin falls to chest.)

CHRIS: Father?...Father!

FATHER: (head jerks up) Yes. How do you like Boston?

CHRIS: Oh. It's fine. I went to school up here.

FATHER: That's right. Boston College?

CHRIS: Right.

FATHER: And things are okay, with your family?

CHRIS: Yeah. Things are fine.

FATHER: That's good...We can talk as long as you want but just so you know the Cardinal might show up at any minute and so our conversation might have to end sort of abruptly.

CHRIS: (skeptical at best) Right...

FATHER: So, where were we? What were we discussing?

CHRIS: What kind of medication do they have you on?

FATHER: Oh. I don't know. It's some sort of sedative. It's right over there if you want to have a look.

(Chris goes to the nightstand and checks the prescription bottle.)

FATHER: It's a long name.

CHRIS: Tributerollaxcitophin.

FATHER: Yes. Wow. I'm impressed.

CHRIS: Thank you.

FATHER: Is that okay?

CHRIS: I think so. It's just a sedative, I think.

FATHER: I'm on some other pills too. Do you know about that?

CHRIS: Yeah. Uncle Dan told me.

FATHER: Right. So if I seem out of sorts, if I'm talking in tongues, I blame those.

CHRIS: No. You seem okay.

FATHER: But not entirely like myself?

CHRIS: No.

FATHER: I guess that's why I'm here.

CHRIS: Yes...

FATHER: Danny sent you.

CHRIS: Yeah, Danny and Linda. They were just concerned, that's all.

FATHER: Danny's a good brother.

CHRIS: Yes. He is.

FATHER: And a good drinker.

CHRIS: That's also true.

FATHER: You know about my brother, Jim, right?

CHRIS: Oh...I suppose.

FATHER: He committed suicide thirty-one years ago.

CHRIS: Yeah. I've heard about it, I guess.

FATHER: Here's a picture of him.

(Father removes a photograph from a folder and hands it to Chris. The picture is a black and white snapshot of Jim, a thin young man, standing in front of an old Buick with his shirt off and a big, toothy smile.)

CHRIS: (unsure what to say) Yes...

(Chris hands the photo back.)

FATHER: So I guess I've been feeling some guilt about that. Like I could've done more. Seen it coming. It's impossible. But...

(His eyelids drops, head falls, and chin hits chest again. Then he snaps awake.)

FATHER: *Plus*, I suppose you know about all the troubles the church is having?

CHRIS: Yes. I do. Of course. It's everywhere.

FATHER: Well, I was kind of wrapped up in that myself, way back. Well...here.

(Father removes a cutout newspaper article from a manila folder and hands it to Chris. While Chris quickly reads the article Father's hands fold across his stomach, his chin rests against his chest and he appears asleep. Once finished:)

CHRIS: Father?...Father?

FATHER: *All* done? So, you can see. I was...back then.

CHRIS: Yes...

FATHER: And that poor boy...I tried to help him but it...it just didn't work.

CHRIS: No, but you shouldn't be quite so hard, at least right now—

FATHER: (slams fist against armrest) There's major changes. Major changes we need to make. I want to show you something.

(Father picks up his Catechism off the bed, opens it to a bookmarked page.)

FATHER: Eight seventeen. The highlighted part.

(He hands the book to Chris. Again, as Chris reads Father tries to stay awake but slowly succumbs to drowsiness.)

CHRIS: I'm done.

FATHER: (head jerks up) You see? I've been reading that passage over and over. It's stuck in my head. Now read this.

(Father returns the Catechism to the bed and picks up a Bible. He opens it and hands the bookmarked page to Chris.)

FATHER: Chapter four, verses one to six.

(Christopher starts to read to himself.)

FATHER: Out loud. Please.

CHRIS: (reading) I beg you—I, a prisoner here in jail for serving the Lord—to live and act in a way worthy of those who have been chosen for such wonderful blessings as these. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of our love. Try always to be led along together by the Holy Spirit, and so be at peace with one another.

(Chris stops and looks up; Father is awake and looking at him.)

FATHER: Go on. Keep reading.

CHRIS: We are all parts of one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. For us there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and we all have the same God and Father who is over us all and in us all, and living through every part of us.

(Father inhales deeply. Chris hands him the Bible.)

FATHER: (exhales slowly) Thank you. You see? That's what we need to do. I've been thinking about this over and over again, and that's the answer. So, you see, if I can

convince the Cardinal that we need to open ourselves up and ask for forgiveness. And I'm willing to be the guinea pig. The lamb. To go first. Then we can start to rebuild. (pauses in thought) To be the lamb of God. (closes his eyes) Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Say it with me. You know it.

FATHER & CHRIS: 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.

FATHER: (pauses, then opens his eyes) So that's why I have to see Cardinal Rule. To convince him of my plan. To get everything out in the open and talk about the guilt and pain.

CHRIS: I see...

FATHER: Because I'm worried, Chris. Something horrible is coming. You can feel it. The Holy Land is all in upheaval. And Timmy. Timmy will be the first one in—in those helicopters he flies—right into the heart of it. And I don't know what's going to happen. But our faith. Our church. We need to make our church strong again. Something people can believe in. The leaders—

CHRIS: Father, can I?

FATHER: Yes?

CHRIS: It's, well, what...What does that thing do?

FATHER: Oh...That is my CPAP Machine. Continuous Positive Airway Pressure. It's for when I sleep. I snore. It's unhealthy. It's called sleep apnea. That device keeps me breathing normally. Otherwise I wouldn't get any sleep at all. It's a Godsend, really. It helped my energy tenfold, a hundredfold.

CHRIS: It looks, kind of...

FATHER: It looks worse than it is. You just put it on and breath normally. You get used to it. (checks his watch) The Cardinal could show up at any time. Just so you know.

CHRIS: Right. Anytime. He's had a rough go of it lately.

FATHER: Yes. He has. But he still has the opportunity to gain people's faith back. But he has to be willing to open up the past. Open up the doors and windows—like Vatican two did—and then open all the basement doors and filing cabinets, the locked attics and the trunk locks. Open it all up. Let it all out in the open.

CHRIS: Yes...Father...How many...

(Long pause.)

FATHER: Too many. Too many...I could say I was simply following the bishop's orders but I knew what he was doing and I did it anyway. And I remained silent. I didn't say anything. Not a word. There was no discussion on the topic. No discourse. Questioning was not allowed. I even worked out better ways to move them without anyone being able to tell where one came from and where one was going. It was a brilliant system. Sick but brilliant...I'm not proud of it...Do you know the percentage of priests who are homosexual?

CHRIS: Uh. I'm sorry? No?

FATHER: Let's just say it's high.

CHRIS: Yes. It must be.

FATHER: All the young ones are. And that's fine. Lord knows we need more priests. It doesn't matter if you're homosexual or heterosexual. It's the vow of celibacy that matters. Keeping it. Your sexuality doesn't matter. But why does the priesthood attract the type that likes the young boys? Pedophiles. Why is that? It's just wrong. It's plain wrong. And I let it continue. Aided and abedded. Kept it quiet. Like a mouse. Like a little mouse kept in the rectory basement. Well that mouse has grown into an elephant, and you can't keep hiding elephants. It's just wrong. Plain wrong.

CHRIS: I don't know, Father. You're right. I don't...

FATHER: We should—the Cardinal should be here any minute. I need to tell him all this that I've told you. There's a conference in Dallas in two weeks and he needs to set this all straight. We need to do this. We can't have more cases like Jimmy Cantor. That boy did nothing wrong and the church, his own church, disregarded him and told him, urged him, I urged him, to keep it quiet so that he could deal with it privately. And he did it. He didn't know any better. He did what his parents and what I told him to do. I knew better. It was wrong. It was simply wrong.

CHRIS: Father, would you hear my confession?

(Pause.)

FATHER: Your confessh...I think maybe you should hear mine. (chuckles)

(Chris kneels on the floor.)

CHRIS: Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was...it's been a long time.

FATHER: How long?

CHRIS: Oh. At least a presidential term.

FATHER: That's okay. What have you to confess, my son?

CHRIS: I don't remember the terminology, or the form, the way this is supposed to go—

FATHER: It's all right. Just speak freely.

CHRIS: I have...lied. I've used the Lord's name in vain. I've coveted many things. I've fornicated.

FATHER: Fornicated?

CHRIS: Yes, fornicated.

FATHER: There's a term you don't hear anymore.

CHRIS: No?

FATHER: No. Just speak freely. In your own words.

CHRIS: It's been awhile.

FATHER: That's fine.

CHRIS: I'm used to the formal stuff. The thou shalls and shall nots.

FATHER: It's okay. Just speak what's on your mind.

CHRIS: Okay...

(Chris looks up and sees Father's chin against his chest.)

CHRIS: Father!

FATHER: *Yes!* Go on. I'm awake.

CHRIS: I've...I don't really think I'm even a Catholic anymore. I don't consider myself a Catholic. I didn't before and especially now, I want nothing to do with this church. This church that indoctrinates guilt. Breeds prejudice. Teaches that sexuality is bad. The mass does nothing for me, although I still find the Our Father, spoken aloud by many people, is a powerful prayer. But I get nothing out of mass, or communion...The fundamental hypocrisies in the church, we're all God's children unless you desire someone of the same sex, then you're still a child of God but a broken one. Nature. It's not natural. Neither is birth control. Neither is teaching children when they're twelve years old that if they touch themselves that's a mortal sin—something that is at its core the most natural; you're against that but for the missionary position...The church has problems, many

problems, and at its core there is good, but you can't live off the pit. Tradition isn't a good enough reason for sticking your head up your ass, which is what all good Catholics would do if the Pope said so...Sorry about that.

(Chris looks up and sees Father's chin to his chest.)

CHRIS: Father. Father!

FATHER: *Yes!* The church has problems.

CHRIS: I've also stolen food. I've lied. I lie a lot. For no good reason whatsoever, just for fun. That's my biggest sin. And I've masturbated, which you consider a sin.

(Enter Cardinal Rule with Melanie from upstage left. They walk straight to Father's door. The Cardinal is dressed in his black suit with white collar. He is mid-sixties. He carries himself gracefully and has the smooth ease with people of a politician.)

FATHER: Yes...Well...for penance I want you to think about ways you can curb your lying. And five Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys.

CARDINAL RULE: (sing-song) Hello...(he knocks softly and gently pushes open the half-open door.) Hello?

FATHER: (stands) Your Eminence.

(Father Ben is not surprised to see the Cardinal, but he is very formal. Christopher is completely surprised, stands, but remains informal.)

CARDINAL: I wanted to stop by and say hello. Am I interrupting something?

FATHER: No, your Eminence. I was just hearing his confession.

CARDINAL: Ah. Well you should finish that first. I'll just wait—

FATHER: Oh no, we were done. I'd just given him his penance.

CARDINAL: Ah. Excellent. Hello, young man.

CHRIS: Hello.

FATHER: Your Eminence, this is Christopher Mooney. He's from back home in Ohio but now he lives here with you.

CARDINAL: Very nice to meet you, Christopher.

(Cardinal and Christopher shake hands. Cardinal wraps both his hands around Christopher's one.)

CHRIS: Nice to meet you.

CARDINAL: If you don't mind so very much, Christopher...

(Cardinal gently touches Christopher's bicep.)

CHRIS: I'll just wait outside.

CARDINAL: That would be wonderful. Very nice to meet you, young man.

(Father stoops over and kisses the Cardinal's ring as Christopher exits the room and Melanie closes the door behind him.)

MELANIE: (beaming) That's the Cardinal. He's never come in here before.

CHRIS: Oh, really. That's nice.

MELANIE: He's such a warm man, don't you think? When he holds your hand, it's so warm. So full of warmth. And then his voice. So calm and kind. So soothing. Comforting. Like listening to the ocean. Oh, what a treat. You're very lucky. You were introduced.

CHRIS: Right. Can I get my bag now?

(Exit Christopher and Melanie off left.)

CARDINAL: Have you had many visitors?

FATHER: No. Not really. Father Corrigan. And Chris was nice enough to come.

CARDINAL: Yes...I wanted to come and see how you were feeling.

FATHER: Oh. Well, okay, I suppose. I feel a little funny at the moment.

CARDINAL: They have you on some medication.

FATHER: Yes. Tributer-something.

CARDINAL: Father Corrigan told me about the wedding.

FATHER: Yes. I feel terrible about that.

CARDINAL: These things happen, Father. It's nothing to feel ashamed about.

FATHER: I know—Can I show you something, your Eminence?

CARDINAL: Of course.

(Father hands Cardinal the newspaper clipping.)

FATHER: That's from the Plain Dealer. Nineteen eighty-four.

CARDINAL: I see...You knew this young man.

FATHER: Yes. I tried to help him. It was uh...He had some trouble. Well, it wasn't his fault. Not his fault at all. I didn't see it coming.

CARDINAL: (perusing the clipping) I see...

FATHER: He was abused...for three years. By a Father Mc—it doesn't matter. Which is why I wanted to speak to you.

CARDINAL: Oh?

FATHER: Yes. Now, I know you are having some troubles at the moment with similar concerns and I thought I could be of assistance.

CARDINAL: At the moment it is a difficult time for the church, but all will be resolved quickly and judiciously, with the grace of God.

FATHER: Yes, indeed. May I read something for you?

CARDINAL: Certainly.

(Chris re-enters from off left. He carries his bag and sits down in a chair against the left wall.)

FATHER: I'm sure you know this passage. Chapter four, verses one to six. (reading) I beg you—I, a prisoner here in jail for serving the Lord—to live and act in a way worthy of those who have been chosen for such wonderful blessings as these. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of our love. Try always to be led along together by the Holy Spirit, and so be at peace with one another. We are all parts of one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. For us there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and we all have the same God and Father who is over us all and in us all, and living through every part of us.

CARDINAL: I always liked the way Paul put that.

FATHER: Yes. So you see, your Eminence. We need to find a way—and you have the power—to open up the church: the rectories, the basements, the attics, the storage facilities, to cast the locks of these doors away and let clean fresh air in to—and get it all out in the open and accept responsibility, that we were wrong, yes, and show that we are willing to accept responsibility. Us, see. Not the church. And show that man is a sinner. We all sin. And that we have sinned. And express our guilt and ask forgiveness. That is the only way. And I'm willing to be the guinea pig, the lamb. We have the bishop's conference coming up and I think there, that is the place I'm willing, I want to open myself up and show that we were wrong, but just because we were wrong doesn't mean the church is wrong. You see? I know you do...

(The adrenaline drops; Father's chin falls to chest.)

CARDINAL: Yes. I agree with you wholeheartedly, Father...Father?...Father!

FATHER: *Yes*, your Eminence.

CARDINAL: When did your brother pass away?

FATHER: It was, uh...November first, nineteen seventy-one. All Saint's Day.

CARDINAL: Would you like to offer up your confession, Father?

FATHER: Yes. Yes, I would, your Eminence. Very much.

(With some discomfort in the knees Father slowly kneels on the floor.)

FATHER: Bless me, your Eminence, for I have sinned...

(Chris sits in his chair outside the room reading the newspaper. Stephen slides along the wall left and sneaks up on Chris.)

STEPHEN: (whisper) Christopher!

CHRIS: Jesus!

STEPHEN: I'm Stephen.

CHRIS: (flatly) Nice to meet you, Stephen.

(They shake hands.)

STEPHEN: What are you reading?

CHRIS: Sports section. Did you want a section?

STEPHEN: No. I already read the paper.

CHRIS: The whole thing?

STEPHEN: Yeah.

CHRIS: Good for you.

STEPHEN: Can I ask you a question?

CHRIS: Sure.

STEPHEN: Have you found our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ?

CHRIS: I don't know. Has he gone somewhere?

STEPHEN: No. But you have to find him—

CHRIS: I don't know about that, Stephen. Really, I'm just here—

STEPHEN: Because first, that's what you have to do. You have to put all your faith in the Lord and he'll see you through.

CHRIS: Yes...

STEPHEN: Because the Lord Jesus, he died on the cross for us. For you and me.

(Stephen points to each of them and smiles.)

CHRIS: Yes he did.

STEPHEN: And so the least we can do is praise his name and continue his good works.

CHRIS: Right.

STEPHEN: But my question is this, have you really found Jesus, Christopher?

CHRIS: Well, Stephen...I suppose not.

STEPHEN: But if you try, you can. You know you can.

CHRIS: Right...

STEPHEN: That's why it's so important that you take the time every day to praise—

CHRIS: Listen, Stephen. I have to do some work. Can we talk about this later?

STEPHEN: Oh. Okay. Sure, sure, sure...

(Stephen slides away from Christopher.)

CHRIS: No. I didn't mean it like that—

STEPHEN: Sure, sure, sure.

(Stephen exits.)

CHRIS: Ah, shit. (He looks up) I'd ask forgiveness but this whole situation's pretty fucked up, Lord.

(Chris lifts his newspaper up over his face.)

CARDINAL: Feel better, Father?

FATHER: (seated again) Yes, your Eminence, I do. Thank you.

CARDINAL: Good. Good.

(Father's head falls forward; chin to chest.)

CARDINAL: Father?...Father?...Fa-ther? (beat) Wish I could sleep like that. Maybe they can give me some of those tributerol-thingies. Father? Out cold. You shouldn't be so hard on yourself. You weren't wrong. Perhaps the information you were given was wrong. Your orders might have been wrong, but what you did was not wrong. What choice did you have? It's not like you started this whole thing. It was passed down—It's been passed down. For years. Decades. Centuries. Well maybe not centuries. Certainly the age we live in hasn't helped. There are no more secrets anymore. What could you do? We are given orders, orders that we are to follow as soldiers of God. You can't question their orders. Can't question God's will. It's important that the church remain strong; that the church be kept on a place of worship; and likewise her priests...But to say I was wrong for doing what I was instructed to do? The church has problems, yes. That doesn't mean we have to drag out our dirty laundry. In this age of made for TV movies, tell-all books, and twenty-four hour news coverage where they camp out in front of my house like bears stalking a station wagon...Their aim, Father...is to humiliate the church. To knock the church down. To make it look base. That's big news. A big story. Big scoop. Make it look like we are incompetent, uncaring. Cast a villain, and run with it. That that's why we kept quiet. That's not why...All I do these days is read the book of Job. Every night I pick up my bible and without thinking, unconsciously I turn to Job. First thing. I know it's self-pitying. But I am drawn to Job's quiet dignity. Wanting to know why him. Why me. I have held this church together with my own small hands. And they're not going to take that away from me. The church needs strength to keep it together. Power to beget more

power. We cannot be viewed as weak, or those seeking to destroy us will...Father?...Father?...Father!

FATHER: *Yes*, your Eminence.

CARDINAL: With your blessing I will take your concerns to the conference and hope my words will speak your words as well.

FATHER: Oh. Yes. Well, I'm willing to come myself, your Eminence. I am fully prepared to offer myself up as the lamb—

CARDINAL: That's very...courageous of you, but I think it best, Ben, if you stay here and rest. There will be other conferences.

FATHER: Yes...Well, maybe I should. I could—

CARDINAL: You should rest.

FATHER: Yes...You will tell them what we've talked about. Opening up the doors, every last one of them?

CARDINAL: Absolutely. May I have your blessing for my trip.

FATHER: Oh. Yes. Certainly.

(Father holds his hands up and blesses the Cardinal, saying a prayer.)

CARDINAL: Thank you, Father.

FATHER: Yes. Thank you, your Eminence.

(Father stoops and kisses the Cardinal's ring.)

CARDINAL: Thank you, Father. Your words have been very informative. Very helpful.

FATHER: I'm so happy you came.

CARDINAL: As am I. Goodbye, Ben.

FATHER: Goodbye, Pat.

(Beat. Then Cardinal exits the room. He closes the door after himself. Christopher's head is stuck in the newspaper. He doesn't hear the Cardinal quietly approach him. Cardinal walks over to him, stands over Chris for a few seconds, then places a hand on Chris's shoulder. Christopher jumps.)

CHRIS: Jesus! Cardinal.

CARDINAL: I just wanted to say goodbye.

CHRIS: (stands) Oh...I...

CARDINAL: Thank you for coming and visiting Father Ben. (He shakes Christopher's hand, again his two wrapped around Chris's one.) That is very caring of you, young man, and it says a lot about who you are.

CHRIS: Well...

CARDINAL: Have you given any consideration yourself to serving the church? I'm sure you have.

CHRIS: You mean becoming a priest?

CARDINAL: Yes...Or any other way you could serve. You don't just have to become a priest...Although that's not a bad idea either. The church, as you know, needs more young men like yourself. Intelligent and kind. Especially in these times.

CHRIS: Yes...

CARDINAL: Think about it. If you want to talk, please feel free to call the archdiocese office and ask for me. We'd love to hear from you. Okay?

(Stephen enters, sliding along the wall from upstage left.)

CHRIS: Okay, Cardinal. Very good.

CARDINAL: Okay. Take care, young man.

(Stephen reaches the Cardinal and Chris.)

STEPHEN: It's all about finding Jesus, isn't it, Cardinal?

CARDINAL: Yes. It sure is.

STEPHEN: That's what I tried to tell Christopher.

CARDINAL: Yes...Well, I think he already knows that.

(Enter Melanie.)

MELANIE: Stephen. Stop bothering the Cardinal. I'm sorry, Cardinal.

CARDINAL: Oh, it's no problem.

MELANIE: Right this way, Cardinal.

CARDINAL: Ah, thank you.

(Melanie leads the Cardinal upstage left. Before he exits the Cardinal turns and waves back to Christopher and Stephen, the true politician taking over again. Stephen smiles and waves back. Chris does not wave. Exit Cardinal.)

STEPHEN: See, Christopher. I told you.

CHRIS: Yes. You were right, Stephen.

STEPHEN: I told you, all you have to do is find Jesus. You have to take the time every day to search your soul and find Jesus. That is the only way—

CHRIS: Stephen. (Pause. Chris looks straight at Stephen, coldly) I have to go in there. Okay?

STEPHEN: Oh. Okay. Sure, sure, sure...

(Stephen slides back along the wall and exits. Chris opens Father's door and enters.)

CHRIS: Father?...Father?...Father!

(Father, chin to chest, in his chair, wakes with a start.)

FATHER: *Ah.* Oh. Christopher. Come in. Come in.

CHRIS: How are you feeling?

FATHER: Oh, good, good. Excellent. (stands) I met with the Cardinal—we had a very productive meeting. The Cardinal knew exactly what I was talking about. I showed him the passages I showed you. The clippings. We talked. And he agreed. This is what we have to do.

CHRIS: Yes...Are you going to leave here soon?

FATHER: Oh, no, I don't know. The Cardinal thinks I should rest and I think he's right. It's probably best if I stay here 'til I'm thinking straight again. I'll see what he says next time he visits.

CHRIS: When's he coming back to see you?

FATHER: Oh, after the bishops conference he'll come see me.

CHRIS: Okay. Well...I should—

FATHER: You should go. It's a beautiful day out. You don't want to stay cooped up in here with an old fart like me.

CHRIS: Oh, no. I mean, would you like me to go?

FATHER: You probably should. I'm exhausted. I need to rest.

CHRIS: Yes, you should. That's a good idea.

FATHER: It was great to see you.

CHRIS: Yes, you too.

FATHER: Give my best to your parents.

CHRIS: Yes, I will. Definitely.

(They hug.)

FATHER: Take care of yourself. I'll keep you in my prayers.

CHRIS: Oh, great. Thank you. So will I.

FATHER: I appreciate it.

CHRIS: Sure. Okay, Father. See you.

FATHER: Yes. Bye, Chris.

(Christopher exits the room and leaves the door halfway open. He stands outside the door for a long while trying to gather his thoughts. Then he resolves himself, turns, and exits left. Father picks up the Bible off the bed, sits in his chair, breaths in and out a few times, opens the book to a bookmarked passage, and begins to read. After two lines of reading his eyelids sag, his head drops forward, and his chin lands against his chest. The Bible falls out of his hands and lands on the floor. Blackout.)