



Angels Dancing on the Head of a Pin

RANDY DOYLE HAZLETT, PHD

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A full-length play

By Randy Doyle Hazlett

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Cover art: *The Saintly Throng in the Form of a Rose* by Gustave Dore (1832-83) in *The Divine Comedy*.

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CHARACTERS

THERAPIST	Black woman in purple hospital scrubs and a big dose of skepticism.
PATIENT	A frail, wheelchair-bound woman much younger than she appears.
BODYGUARD	Tall, young, muscular man with CIA dark suit, sunglasses, and slicked-back hair. All business.
DAN MACARTHUR	Reporter with classic nerdish look and matching confidence deficit.
BISHOP MCMAHON	Tall, charismatic clergyman with red hair and infectious smile.
LEWIS MCMAHON	A younger version of the pre-ordained Bishop.
NURSE TORY	An aging, endowed caregiver without the care.
DR. LOCKE	Psychiatrist who never leaves his labcoat behind.
FULMORE BAYLOR	An elderly man with a story to tell and burden to unload.
DRIVER	Drives by the book, complete with chauffeur's cap and uniform.
ASSISTANT	Contemporary businesswoman who knows how to get things done.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT 1

- SCENE 1 San Francisco General Hospital 3:00 p.m., Monday,
July 25, 2011
- SCENE 2 Green Oaks Psychiatric Hospice 8:55 a.m., Monday,
July 22, 1996
- SCENE 3 San Francisco General Hospital 5:05 p.m., Monday,
July 25, 2011

ACT 2

- SCENE 1 Ritz-Carlton Hotel Suite 5:05 p.m., Monday,
August 1, 2011
- SCENE 2 Green Oaks Psychiatric Hospice 8:55 a.m., Monday,
July 29, 1996
- SCENE 3 Ritz-Carlton Hotel Suite 6:45 p.m., Monday,
August 1, 2011
- SCENE 4 Green Oaks Psychiatric Hospice 8:55 a.m.,
Wednesday, July
31, 1996
- SCENE 5 Ritz-Carlton Hotel Suite 8:55 p.m., Monday,
August 1, 2011
- SCENE 6 Inside Lewis's Classic Beamer 9:00 p.m., Monday,
August 1, 2011

ACT I
SCENE ONE

(San Francisco General Hospital outside the private room of Irish Bishop Lewis McMahon. Considerable press are outside clamoring for a report. Cameras flash every time the door opens. A steady flow of nurses come and go. Doctors holding x-rays exit the room shaking their heads in disbelief. A physical therapist wheels a patient by the mayhem.)

THERAPIST

(tired)

Is this what you wanted to see? For cryin' out load, is this a hospital or a Hollywood premiere?

PATIENT

(excitedly disappointed)

But it's Bishop McMahon! I was so hoping to catch a glimpse.

(The patient squirms in her chair while contorting her neck, fishing for a better view.)

THERAPIST

(grumbling)

Girl, the chair is not your problem. You are the third patient today requesting a gander at this sideshow. I've got two good legs, Girl, and from up here, I spot only the inglorious behinds of a flock of clamoring goats.

PATIENT

(excitedly)

But it's Bishop McMahon! They say he'll soon be elevated to Cardinal ... or higher. Why, some say he's already met the qualifications for sainthood, ... except the one about being dead. You know ... the miracles - the snakebite in the Carolinas - just like St. Paul on the isle of Malta! And then there was the rectory fire - a total loss, but like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he walked out of the furnace without even the smell of smoke on his clothes! And now this! I was so hoping to catch a glimpse

...

THERAPIST

(skeptical)

You came to get yourself a miracle? Lordy be, that's your aim? You know what the doctor said 'bout your case. Honey, the Pope himself couldn't absolve you of your malady.

PATIENT

(steadfastly)

But it's Bishop McMahon ...

(The therapist wheels the uncooperative patient away. Meanwhile, one of two bodyguards stationed outside receives a message through his earpiece. He motions for a young man with horn-rimmed glasses, an elfish face, and unsure countenance to approach. The young man, with notepad in hand, is in awe of the invitation but approaches awkwardly due to the hospital environment. The hospital smell nauseates him to the point of illness. He has beads of sweat forming on his rather large forehead. A sea of press part for Dan MacArthur to pass in an uncharacteristically reverent manner, like a wedding procession when the bride enters the hall. Everyone becomes silent and turns to honor the favored one among a throng of camera-happy, tabloid free-lancers.)

BODYGUARD

(commandingly)

Bishop McMahon will see you now.

(Dan steps forward)

DAN

(sheepishly)

Are you sure? I can come back another time.

(stammering)

It's ... it's not all that important that we do this now. I mean ... here. It can wait until the Bishop is feeling better.

BODYGUARD

(forcefully)

But, he *is* feeling better and eager to resume his schedule. Just here for further observation due to the severity of the crash.

DAN

(timidly)

How, may I ask, are the others? The driver? His secretary?

BODYGUARD

(uncharacteristically softening)

D.O.A. - massive head trauma. The Bishop has already prayed for their souls.

(The bodyguard manages the door handle, using his large frame to blockade the entrance for but one. Dan scoots through. The bodyguard gently applies force to the chest of the ringleader in the surging crowd, stretching for a line of sight behind the door.)

BODYGUARD

(addressing the mob)

Ladies and gentlemen, the Bishop will not be entertaining any more interviews today. This appointment will be a prolonged one. Then, the Bishop must have his rest.

(grinning for the first time)

Doctors orders!

(Cutting through to the private room with little resemblance to a hospital recovery unit. The room is teeming with flowers. Behind a sea of roses and daffodils comes a modest voice.)

BISHOP

(candidly)

If you can see your way past the vinery, I think this interview can best be accomplished by trading fragrance for forthrightness. You are there, Danann, my boy, ... are you not?

DAN

(makes tortuous path forward;
stammering)

In ... indeed, Bishop, ... but the name is Dan, not Danann.

(apologetically)

We really don't have to do this now. It could wait until
you ...

BISHOP

(dismissing)

Nonsense! Just a few scratches here and there, and we
have so little time before ...

(He stops as if revealing too much
too soon.)

Well, time is of the essence - a commodity without equal,
a gift of God not to be squandered sitting in a bed
waiting for the next nursing shift to take vitals and
leave feeling both awe and bewilderment. I am but a man
... like yourself, Mr. Mac Cuill.

(changing gears)

I much prefer Dan, if I may, ... but then, I already have.
Please accept my sincere apology for trampling on your
good name with an air of familiarity.

(slowing reflectively)

It is a good name - a good Irish name. My Danny Boy ...
better than Danann anyday. Are you originally from The
Green Isle?

DAN

(now at ease)

No, Bishop, and it's not Mac Cuill, though that was my
mother's maiden name. My last name is MacArthur. My
parents were both born here - U.S. citizens.

(sporting an amusing accent)

T'was me granpappy t'hew 'bandoned ye ole spud furm fur a
nu lif abuv grownd,

(removing the accent and sporting a
resolute tone)

and we never looked back.

BISHOP

(breaking the stiffness entirely)

And rightly so.

(leaning in)

Just between you and me, I only visit the old country out of curiosity. I keep thinking that I belong when I really don't at all. Why, half the time, I have to rely on an interpreter to cut through the deep lore. Mr. Mac Éthur ... Dan

(coming close)

we really aren't that much different, you and me. If your Protestant notions don't subvert this visit, we may begin.

DAN

(puzzled)

What makes you think I am not a Catholic like yourself? And it's pronounced MacArthur, not Mac Éthur - fully Americanized, you know.

BISHOP

Sorry, lad. I'm usually not one prone to make mistakes. As for your religious disposition, I saw it on your face when you glared at me in full regalia. I suspect you thought I was in one of those ridiculous hospital gowns that would make both of us uncomfortable - me in humility and yourself in imbalance. I saw it in your eye - the uneasiness. No, in a hospital gown, we both would be uncomfortable, but now that uneasiness persists in only one soul, you are decidedly not a Catholic. If my attire makes you think differently of me, I can request a change of clothes. I assure you that a man of the cloth is no different without ornamental linens.

(leaning over)

The cloth that matters is the one from which we are hewn,
(looking directly in the eye)
and I see we are equals in that respect.

(slowly and deliberately)

I am sure of it. We must begin this process ... this interview, in the best of light. Oh, and also, do you think I would really grant an interview without a full background check?

(not waiting for a reply)

Of course not. Dan MacArthur: single, hard working, graduate of Pepperdine, journalism major, currently working freelance, recently returned from a gig in provincial China. Shall we do this with or without the collar?

(reaching back and removing it)

You were engaged, Dan, to write my memoirs. Are you ready to begin the voyage?

DAN
(staggered)

How did you ...?

BISHOP
(plainly)

I did my homework, Dan. A person doesn't get to my position and stay there without reconnaissance. By the way, how did you like China?

DAN
(still a little stunned)

China was ... great. Not many get beyond Shanghai and Beijing. Rural china, away from the smog and fireworks, is a different world indeed - like stepping back in time a thousand years, maybe two.

BISHOP
(impatiently)

If we have time, I'd love to hear more, but for now, the speaking and listening roles must be reversed. Are we ready to launch into this project?

DAN
(reservedly)

My pen and pad have assumed the position. You may proceed, but am I to ask questions or merely take dictation?

BISHOP
(lecturing)

My Protestant friend, Dan, you are to capture every detail to its fullest extent.

(slowly with emphasis)

This requires, above all else, that you understand every thought, every motive, every action - only do not embellish the facts. This will be no scandalized account.

DAN
(with inaudible gulp)

Bishop, I am ready when you are.

BISHOP

(overzealous)

Fantastic! I knew when I hand-picked you for this project, there could be no other, for where could I find another Dan MacArthur but you? Oh, by the way, while you have pen and paper handy, could you please make a notation for me. I am afraid I am in need of a new driver and secretary. Please jot down a reminder for me to call the central office tout de suite. Everyone needs someplace to go and a way to get there, especially me. What's a shepherd without sheep?

Now, memoirs ...

(Reflectively)

We must return to the beginning. I was no man of the cloth. I much preferred premium black leather. Neither was I celibate.

(glancing to Dan for shock value)

I was a yuppie here in the Bay Area leading a Bay Area existence. I was good at selling. My car could testify on my behalf - a brand new silver BMW touring sedan, tricked to the max. I recall a commute on one particularly brisk Frisco morning that changed my life.

(castigatingly, seeing no action of the wrist)

Dan, I have begun. Have you?

(The lights fade on the hospital scene, leaving only the characters illuminated during the narrative.)

BISHOP

I resided in Marin County, frequented restaurants I could not afford, and ordained this jar of clay in designer-wear, like any up-and-coming Republican. I was surrounded by ornaments to broadcast an air of success. That morning, I was unusually preoccupied and in desperate need of self-assurance, even if self-administered.

It was a normal day for the Bay Area - sweater weather. The sun was straining to peer through a wall of gray and white, but like most days, it just wasn't going to happen. Only rain was allowed to seep through the morning shield of billowy gloominess. Early showers had

played Twister™ with the morning commute, but no matter the tortuous route through the foothills, all had to cross *that* bridge. Fortunately, I was not snarled in a row of irritable sojourners waiting to traverse as usual. True, I, like countless others, sacrificed time and gasoline for a handful more square inches I could call my own. Still, I was not to break and pedal that morning with the caravan toward the monument to the god of the hills that mocks any notion of slip faults or earth tremors. No, I had a different agenda for the day. I was Oakland-bound, via Richmond. My lawyer called to suggest I visit a great uncle before he slipped through to the other side of the ledger sheet. I didn't know the man, but I assumed there was an estate of some kind. The Bay Area was expensive. Every dollar helps - earned, borrowed, stolen, or charitably subscribed.

Breakfast was a Starbucks™ double espresso and a bagel - sun-dried tomato. The combination of aromas was simply divine. I juggled one hand between the two - taking a chomp of bagel, then curling my hand around the branded paper cup. I could feel the warmth of the transfer through the hide of paper to my hand and the confidence building inside courtesy of the caffeine-rich brew. I leaned heavily on the Beamer's GPS system, for I never went to Oakland - no need whatsoever. I was just following directions: exit here, veer right, pull into the second driveway on the left. I had one of those zombie moments. A slight coffee spill on the hand brought me back to reality. I flinched and, with a nearby napkin, soaked up the drip from the seat, my hand, then the cup.

With the car already in park between a pair of fading yellow stripes, I regained self-awareness. I remember wondering, "How on earth did I get here?" I was driving on autopilot, logging no entries into memory at all. I bumped my wristwatch as a reality check. According to Señor Tag Heuer, I had lost forty-five minutes of conscience living, yet progress was achieved. I checked the address against the numbers on my sticky note - a perfect match. I patted the Beamer's console for a job well done - efficient and effortless. I exited the car, still with a quarter cup of Java, to diligently survey the property.

The place looked like it was built in the fifties - red brick, white mortar, windows and doors with heavy metal framing, extensively cracked walkways oozing with weathered tar in a concerted attempt at low-cost preservation. I fancy to step on tar for the occasional high-frequency pop of a trapped air pocket. Still, I had to look dignified, not childlike, so I compromised my steps toward the main entrance. I didn't know what I would find on the other side of those double glass doors: a shriveled old man dying of emphysema, a rotund bag of bones too big to roll out of bed, a sweet gentleman just dying to make acquaintance with a long lost heir. I pocketed the keys, only to retrieve them. Was I really ready for whatever I might find inside?

No matter the awkwardness or degree of repulsion, composure was an absolute. I donned a smile and vowed to utter only kind words. Old people love to talk; I knew I had to feign attentiveness, even if I were intellectually hundreds of miles away - like on a *really* bad date. I dreaded the forthcoming inquisition. I felt like I was going on trial - an interview to see if I was worthy of the privilege to spend the hard earned money of a life filled with sacrifice and self-deprivation. Not that I feared falling short of a passing grade, for I could hold my own, but to be given the fifth degree by a stranger who will judge me, ... that was not worth any amount of money! Nonetheless, ... I saw it merely as a game, ... and if that is all it took, I was game.

Juggling my cup, I slid a comb out, slipped it through my hair, then effortlessly holstered my prop. I just needed a moment to gain my faculties and put on my best face. My objective was to keep him talking and share as little as possible - you know, active listening. My goals? I always have goals going into any business meeting, and this was business. Let's see ... I wanted to affirm our kinship and convey interest in *his* life and well-being. It was of particular interest to gather info on his present health and prognosis - you know ... how long until a teary-eyed reading of the will and transfer of assets.

I continued toward the building like a deer in headlights, then I remembered this was Oakland! I reached

back into my pocket and hit the button. A single chirp. No, I *had* locked her up.

Now, I was ready. I reached for the right vertical bar handle but grabbed the left one by mistake. Conformity is its own reward. I stopped mid-pull to take notice of the silvered nameplate, **The Green Oaks Psychiatric Hospice**. All that I had scribbled on my sticky note was Green Oaks Clinic. I thought it weird that a terminal patient would be living his final days in a clinic.

I turned for a second opinion. Green Oaks? Odd. Nothing but blacktop - no greenery, no oaks, just cement, tar, pawn shops, and liquor joints. I could even smell the booze drifting on the westerly breeze from across the street - nauseating but enticing.

Dismissing the paradox, I returned to the mission at hand. Not having applied enough force to clear the door, the recoil of the springs tossed the remainder of my espresso on my white button down. Wincing, I glanced for witnesses.

Now, *that* was embarrassing - a spry lad like myself who went to the gym three times a week, marked as a klutz. Given, I spent more time on the ladies than my biceps, but neither was I a limp noodle! Perhaps a security measure, you know, industrial springs to keep those weak patients from unscheduled adventures -- quite clever.

(lamenting)

But it was such good espresso ... I rotated my shoulders, and with one long step, I was in.

(The lights fade to black on the hospital scene.)

SCENE TWO

(Green Oaks Psychiatric Hospice. A 1950s building with original décor. Very cosmetic appearance and smell. Sterile atmosphere filled with one-dimensional staff.)

LEWIS

(to himself in self-examination)

There, that wasn't too awkward looking, but there is the matter of this unforgivable stain.

(He blots what he can with a napkin remnant from his pocket and looks for a trash receptacle in which to toss the evidence. Locating one in the front waiting area, he makes a beeline there.)

LEWIS

(to himself surveying the layout)

The failing eyesight of these residents will be a plus. No security cameras in sight - no permanent record of a false step.

(tossing the napkin)

No evidence.

(The napkin misses the mark and falls to the floor. Lewis scoops it up and makes sure the second attempt is a success. Once the mission is accomplished, Lewis's vision shifts to his surroundings.)

LEWIS

(to himself; sniffing)

Is this a cosmetic shop? The attendants are in those bib things, not as obvious as hospital garb, but clothing that would never pass for street gear. Everything is neatly put away - no piles of paperwork, no dirty laundry, no stranded carts. Still, the landscape is too sterile - no artwork, no plants, no color, and the smell is some strange blend of medicine and floor sanitizer. At least it's not the urine smell of retirement centers with attendants forever lax in their duties. I purposefully chose cotton over cashmere so as to not absorb the day's unpleasantness on dry clean only.

Still, I much prefer the aroma from across the street. After a few moments, the old nasal passages will get desensitized, and then, I am fit for duty. The clothes, however ... I might just have to burn them. Mental note: shampoo twice tonight.

(Lewis approaches the receptionist - a blue-haired, heavily perfumed lady donning a white uniform complete with hat. She is plump in all the right places, but Lewis simply cannot see past the uniform and the odor.)

LEWIS

(whispering to himself, waving off the smell)

Way too masculine - a force shield to incoming traffic!

(Lewis backs off, offended by the odor, then comes in for a second approach.)

LEWIS

Hello, Nurse ...

(zeroing in on her name badge)

Tory. I am here for a scheduled visit with an old relative of mine - a Mister Baylor. You should find me on a list somewhere for a 9:00 o'clock visit.

NURSE

(businesslike)

And you are ...

LEWIS

(clicking his heels in military style)

Lewis McMahon, at your service.

NURSE

(unimpressed)

I have a Lugh Manannon on the guest roster.

LEWIS

(compromisingly)

That's close enough. I'll take it.

NURSE

(bossy)

Just have a seat over there, and the doctor will be out shortly.

LEWIS

(resistant)

But I didn't come here to see a doctor.

NURSE

(adamant)

Mr. Baylor is not allowed visitors without a briefing.

LEWIS

(resigned)

Very well, then. Let the good doctor know that I am waiting, but I can't stay long.

(Lewis is still standing.)

NURSE

(insistent)

Just have a seat. The doctor is with a patient.

(Lewis succumbs. He sifts through a stack of magazines.)

LEWIS

(to himself)

Good Housekeeping, Lawn and Gardens, Readers Digest ...
Don't they have any man magazines? No *GQ* or *Condé Nast Traveler*? Not even *Golf Digest*!

(picking up a magazine)

Ladies Home Journal? Just show me a good cookie recipe!

(Lewis impatiently flips through a prolonged series of pages before being hailed by the nurse.)

NURSE

(imposing)

The doctor is ready for you now, Mr. Manannon.

LEWIS
(jovially irritated)

That's McMahon.

NURSE
(stares Lewis down, then points
with a nod of the head)

You, first door on the right down *this* hall.

LEWIS
(appreciative)

Thank you.

(Lewis walks down the short hallway,
stops, and notes the nameplate. He takes a
deep sigh in front of the designated door,
then turns the handle.)

LEWIS
(salesmanly)

Dr. Stevens, I am Lewis McMahon.

DOCTOR
(reaching across the desk to shake
hands; embarrassed)

Pleasure to meet you, but I am not Dr. Stevens. My name
is Dr. Locke.

LEWIS
(awkwardly)

Sorry, the nameplate says Stevens.

DOCTOR
(apologetically)

Yes, I've been meaning to get that changed. I have taken
over Dr. Stevens' practice and his patients - a most
unfortunate mishap. We are trying our best at damage
control. I see you are here to be screened to visit Mr.
Baylor.

LEWIS
(taking a seat)

Yes, Mr. Baylor. Do you mind if I ask what happened?

DOCTOR

(returning to his chair, leaning back)

To Mr. Baylor? It's all quite complicated, and I have just begun studying his file. A quite unusual case ...

LEWIS

(clarifying)

Well, I was asking about Dr. Stevens, but eventually, I was to get around to Mr. Baylor. I am his relative.

DOCTOR

(confused)

A relative to Dr. Stevens or Mr. Baylor?

LEWIS

(clumsily)

I am Mr. Baylor's distant nephew but closest heir. No relation to Dr. Stevens - just curious.

DOCTOR

(terse)

It was in *all* the newspapers!

LEWIS

(with a smile)

I guess I'm more of a CNN guy.

DOCTOR

(shrugging off the humor)

The official report was suicide. I suppose it's possible. Lots of professionals go into psychology and psychiatry with underlying motive to treat themselves. Sometimes it just doesn't take. Police found him dangling from the rafters. All say it was odd. He was so happy earlier that day - just back from vacation in Maui. Only had one patient his first day back. It was a shock for Mr. Baylor - quite a setback in his regiment. Like I say, I am new to the case. Anyway, under these circumstances, we are screening all of Mr. Baylor's visitors.

LEWIS
(with self-interest)

Does he have many?

DOCTOR
(plainly)

No. I suppose you're the first in a good while, other than the staff. He scares most of them off - his appearance and all.

LEWIS
(curiously)

What do you mean?

DOCTOR
(with disbelief)

You say you are his relative? Let me ask you this: When was the last time you saw Mr. Baylor?

LEWIS
(embarrassed)

Actually, ... we have never met. That's why I am here - to get to know my uncle. I am told he has not much time left.

DOCTOR
(surprised)

Who told you that?

LEWIS
(deductively)

No one really, but my lawyer insisted that I come, and he is my *great* uncle.

DOCTOR
(with apprehension)

Mr. Baylor is in remarkably good health for his age. He may outlive us all.

LEWIS
(curiously)

So why is he here?

DOCTOR
(professionally)

He is self-committed.

LEWIS
(skeptical)

You mean he can leave here anytime he wants?

DOCTOR
(uneasily)

That is the case, but there are complications.

LEWIS
(concerned)

What complications?

DOCTOR
(nervous)

I think your screening is complete. Perhaps your remaining questions could best be answered with a personal visit.

(rising up out of his chair)

Before we allow a one-on-one; however, I think it best you first see Mr. Baylor from a *safe* vantage point.

LEWIS
(edgy)

Safe? I thought you said he could technically leave on his own power. Do you not have an obligation to keep everyone safe?

DOCTOR
(reluctant)

It will all become clear with a trip down the hall.

(They walk down the corridor past a secure checkpoint.)

DOCTOR
(nosey)

By the way, what happened to you?

LEWIS
(clueless)

What do you mean?

DOCTOR
(clarifying)
That nasty spot on your shirt.

LEWIS
(lightheartedly)
My cup and I couldn't get along. Why? Will Mr. Baylor take offense? You never know what might set some folks off.

DOCTOR
(amused)
No, I don't think he'll even notice. Oh, ... you don't have any sharp instruments on you, do you?

LEWIS
(in jest)
Blimy, Ah stowed me shiv in the belly ov me Beamer.
(Seeing no smile on the doctor's face)
Sorry, just a little joke.

(They pass through a door requiring keypad entry and into a two-way mirrored viewing area.)

LEWIS
(horrified)
Oh, My God! Is that him?

(Behind the glass, a man sits in a wooden chair in a hospital gown with house shoes and padded mittens. His eyes are sewn shut. The stitch job is poorly done.)

LEWIS
(snooping)
What happened? Was he in a fight?

DOCTOR
(reluctantly)
No, nothing of the sort.

LEWIS

(in disbelief)

I am looking at a man in restraints with a sideshow reverse eyelift, and you say *nothing* has happened to him?

DOCTOR

(justifyingly)

The stitches are self-inflicted. The restraints are at his request. He knows you are coming. Are you ready to go in?

LEWIS

(upset)

I don't know what I've gotten myself into. Of course, I am not ready to voluntarily enter a room with a self-proclaimed monster!

DOCTOR

(logically)

It would be a major setback to his psyche and his therapy. He knows you are coming. He has been talking of nothing else for days. I believe he even arranged this meeting through ... your lawyer.

LEWIS

(beginning a tirade)

My lawyer! He drafted my will, for land's sake! He is the named executor of my estate. I'll *never* take his advice again. I'm pulling my account first thing in the morning. That is, if morning ever comes!

DOCTOR

(uncomfortably)

This is two-way mirror. We've never actually performed a sound check. Mr. Baylor may have already taken offense. I urge you not to upset him further in the wake of the Stevens incident and all he has done to make this day happen. Just calm down.

LEWIS

(slowly calming but unsure)

Is it safe?

DOCTOR
(explicitly)

For you or him? I assure you, he will do you no harm. I stake my professional reputation on it.

LEWIS
(unconvinced)

You're sure?

DOCTOR
(confidently)

Absolutely.

LEWIS
(shaking his head in his hands;
with abandon)

Let's just get this over with then.

DOCTOR
(dispassionate)

Wonderful. How much time would you like? I have scheduled an hour. Will that be enough?

LEWIS
(withdrawn)

Oh, I don't think it'll take that long. It's our first meeting. We really have nothing to talk about. Just chit-chat - getting to know you stuff.

DOCTOR
(disregarding)

I'll come back in an hour. Just go right through that door on the left. I will buzz you through from security.

(The doctor leaves. Shortly there is a loud buzz. Lewis is at first reluctant to move forward, but the persistent buzzing drives him to action. He reaches for the door, takes a deep breath, and enters the room. The buzzing doesn't stop until he shuts the door behind him. Lewis is inside alone with Mr. Baylor.)

LEWIS
 (businesslike)
 Hello, Mr. Baylor, I am Lewis McMahon.

MR. BAYLOR
 (with thick contrived Irish accent)
 Ov curs ya ahr, me lad. Did ya get ahl settled wit Dr. Stevens? Ah cud hear some commotion but cudn't pinpoint ya problem.

LEWIS
 (reluctant)
 Uhm, no problem, Mr. Baylor, that couldn't be worked out, but I spoke only with Dr. Locke.

MR. BAYLOR
 (artificial)
 He's a gud mahn, too,
 (whispering)
 but ah haven't really gotten ta know em. Might he still be watchin' us?

LEWIS
 (forthright)
 No, he said he'd be back in an hour.

MR. BAYLOR
 (concerned)
 An hour! Then we hud really butter be gettin' dahwn ta business. An hour, ya say.

(Lewis tries desperately not to establish facial contact.)

MR. BAYLOR
 (probing)
 Tell me, duz me appearance ... frighten ya?

LEWIS
 (fidgety)
 Frighten? No. Well, perhaps a bit.

MR. BAYLOR
 Ner lik doin' business wit a mahn who wudn't tell ya the truth.

(leaning and whispering)

Frankly, Ah frighten meself ... that's ta very reason em here. But then, yar har to hep take care ov thut. Yahs, me season ov agony tis nearly complete ... now thut yar har.

LEWIS

(confused)

I am afraid I don't follow.

MR. BAYLOR

(laughing)

Well, ov curs not! Tis a story yet untold. Tell me, Lew. Ya doon't meand if ah cull ya Lew, dah ya? And dah ya meand

(changing accent to perfect English)

if I lose the accent? It drives me crazy. Ha! Drives me crazy, here in a nut house. Sorry for the pun. It was in poor taste, but I couldn't resist.

LEWIS

(puzzled)

I don't understand. Why fake an accent?

MR. BAYLOR

(laughing, upbeat)

Why fake an accent?

(serious)

Fake a life?

(jovial)

It's fun ... that's all ... for a while. With a name like Baylor and a face like mine, at least the way I used to look, people expect Irish to pulse through your speech, not just your veins ... And it does help when visiting the old country.

(reminiscent)

Ah ... the old country ... too old for me, but a visit is worth a pint or two. Mr. McMahon, I'm sorry, Lew, do you drink? I just thought, being Irish and all.

LEWIS

(at ease)

I have been known to on occasion.

MR. BAYLOR

(in jest)

Sorry this cannot be one of those occasions. Fresh out! Polished off the last of the imported stuff yesterday. Don't drink domestic. That is, unless it's sporting a fancy label.

(halfway serious)

Are you carrying a flask on you?

LEWIS

(surprised)

They allow you to drink here?

MR. BAYLOR

(unrepentant)

I am here of my own doing! Besides, I have given them enough money, they should name a wing after me. Blimey, why not the whole hospital! Enough about drink, let's get down to business. You are probably wondering why you are here, my lad. Tell me, what do you do for a living? My research was not as thorough as you may have been led to believe.

LEWIS

(evasive)

I am a man of many skills.

MR. BAYLOR

(unappeased)

A well-rounded man! Splendid! Name a few.

LEWIS

(reluctant)

You know. Cars, real estate, antiques.

MR. BAYLOR

(anecdotal)

Antiques! I'll have to show you a few of mine from the old country. Are you a learned man?

LEWIS

(proud)

College? Notre Dame.

MR. BAYLOR

(pleased)

Go Irish! Catholic - very good! Very good indeed. So, do you like the classics ... reading, I mean?

LEWIS

(avoiding)

I read a few ... when they were assigned. Not much of a reader on my own. As I told Dr. Locke, I'm a CNN kind of guy.

MR. BAYLOR

(justifyingly)

Nothing wrong with that ... with your busy lifestyle.

LEWIS

(interjecting)

I do read the Times.

(apologetically)

That is ... the internet headlines from the Times.

MR. BAYLOR

(matter-of-factly)

We all need to stay up with current events.

LEWIS

(responsive)

I try.

MR. BAYLOR

(slowly and deliberately)

Lew, ... do you believe the Bible?

LEWIS

(defensive)

What do you mean? Of course I believe in the Bible. I'm Catholic.

MR. BAYLOR

(redirecting)

No, do you believe what it says? Every word?

LEWIS

(evaluating)

I guess I haven't given it much thought.

MR. BAYLOR
(commanding)

Read to me.

LEWIS
(hesitatingly)

You want me ... to read *aloud*?

MR. BAYLOR
(rationalizing)

How else shall I hear the Word of God - the Sword of the Spirit?

LEWIS
(elusive)

I didn't bring my Bible.

MR. BAYLOR
(delighted)

Glad to know you own one. Many just let the priest read to them. Only problem is that he gets to pick and choose. You can use mine.

LEWIS
(looking around, disbelievingly)

You want me to read to you from your Bible?

MR. BAYLOR
(cheerfully steering)

Now you're with me. I say, you are indeed a man of many skills. You shall find my favorite Bible on the nightstand. It's *our* family Bible. Maybe one day, it'll be yours. Enough talk about the future, I want to be read to in the present.

LEWIS
(succumbing halfhearted)

So where shall I start?

MR. BAYLOR
(cavalier)

The beginning is always a good place. Every good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

(redirecting)

On second thought, I know how the story begins. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. In how many days did God create the world as we know it?

LEWIS
(suspiciously)

Six days?

MR. BAYLOR
(provoking)

Six days and no more?

LEWIS
(irritated)

It says six days, does it not?

MR. BAYLOR
(inciting)

And you believe it?

LEWIS
(candid)

I really haven't given it much thought.

MR. BAYLOR
(scourging)

Hmm. Wrong answer! You are not to think. You are to read and believe. Do you or do you not believe the Bible?

LEWIS
(conceding)

Yes, every word.

MR. BAYLOR
(lecturing)

A man must know what he believes. We cannot float through life like clouds adrift on winds of change.

(focusing)

Where were we? Oh yes, creation ... You can read that for yourself later. Let just skip forward a few pages. Why not begin reading in Genesis, Chapter 3? Yes, Chapter 3 is a fine place to start.

(sternly)

Need I remind you, you will be reading to *me*. If your soul is refreshed in the process, so be it.

LEWIS
(obedient)

Genesis 3, The Fall of Man

MR. BAYLOR
(impatiently)

Just skip down to verse four.

LEWIS
(obliging)

Very well.

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

MR. BAYLOR
(satisfied)

You can stop there. Can you pleasure an old man? Can you reread verse seven?

LEWIS
(compliant)

Then the eyes of both of them were opened ...

MR. BAYLOR.

(abruptly)

STOP! Now turn to Genesis, Chapter 21, and start reading from verse fourteen.

LEWIS

(affirming)

Genesis?

MR. BAYLOR

(calmly)

Chapter 21, Verse fourteen.

LEWIS.

(anticipating)

Okay.

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob. God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

MR. BAYLOR

(abruptly)

STOP! Read that last sentence again.

LEWIS

(compliant)

So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink?

MR. BAYLOR.
(amending)

No, the line before.

LEWIS
(compliant)

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.

MR. BAYLOR
(absorbing)

Interesting, I never get tired of it. Quickly, I feel we are on a roll. Turn to Numbers, Chapter 22, and begin reading at verse 21.

LEWIS
(lost)

Numbers?

MR. BAYLOR
(discipling)

Yes, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers - the fourth book.

LEWIS
(recovering)

I've got it now. Chapter 21?

MR. BAYLOR
(peevied, adjusting)

No, chapter 22, verse 21.

LEWIS
(inhaling)

Alright.

Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road.

Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again. Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said. Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her." Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back." The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

MR. BAYLOR
(entertained)

I just love it - a talking donkey. It's one of my favorites. Repeat verse 31, if you please.

LEWIS

(willingly compliant)

Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

MR. BAYLOR

(interrogatingly)

Tell me, Lew, have you ever seen something that wasn't there? I mean, it *is* there, but nobody sees it except you?

LEWIS

(baffled)

I don't believe so, sir.

MR. BAYLOR

(fatigued)

Not so formal, Lewis. I tire. Let's have a go at one more. What do you say?

LEWIS

(consenting)

Fine, but Dr. Locke will be returning shortly.

MR. BAYLOR

(dismissing)

Oh, yes, the good doctor. Let's just turn the page to Chapter 24.

LEWIS

(tiring)

Still in Numbers?

MR. BAYLOR

(caught off guard)

Why, yes. Chapter 24, starting with the first verse.

LEWIS

(inhaling deeply)

Numbers 24:

Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorcery as at

other times, but turned his face toward the desert. When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him and he uttered his oracle:

"The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,
 the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly,
 the oracle of one who hears the words of God,
 who sees a vision from the Almighty,
 who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened:
 "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob,
 your dwelling places, O Israel!
 "Like valleys they spread out,
 like gardens beside a river,
 like aloes planted by the LORD,
 like cedars beside the waters.
 Water will flow from their buckets;
 their seed will have abundant water.
 "Their king will be greater than Agag;
 their kingdom will be exalted.
 "God brought them out of Egypt;
 they have the strength of a wild ox.
 They devour hostile nations
 and break their bones in pieces;
 with their arrows they pierce them.
 Like a lion they crouch and lie down,
 like a lioness – who dares to rouse them?
 "May those who bless you be blessed
 and those who curse you be cursed!"

MR. BAYLOR

(with familiarity)

Ah, the oracle of the Lord to the one whose eyes see clearly, to the one who hears the words of God, to the one who sees a vision from the Almighty, to the one whose eyes are opened. Tell me, Lew, do you think such a man is blessed?

(crescendoing)

Does not having your eyes opened sound like a good thing? To peer into the spiritual realm, isn't that the desire of every Christian?

(calming down)

Balaam was later butchered by the same Israelites.

(pausing, then sincerely)

He was lucky.

(switching gears)
I feel like one more. Have we time?

LEWIS
(shaky)
The doctor has not made an appearance.

MR. BAYLOR
(anticipatingly)
Then let us proceed to the final passage. Turn to Second Kings 6, starting at verse eight.

LEWIS
(dutifully)
I have it.

Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place." The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places. This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?" "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's

eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria. After they entered the city, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria. When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?" "Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master." So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

MR. BAYLOR

(anxiously recapping)

A spiritual army, there but unseen by all but those whose eyes were opened. Do you believe the Bible, Lewis? Do you believe every word to be true? I know you do - a good Irish Catholic and all. I have enjoyed so much your reading to me. I have taken liberty to schedule another visit ... that is, if you are willing to make the trip across the bay?

LEWIS

(begrudgingly)

The drive is not the problem ...

MR. BAYLOR

(abruptly)

Then I shall see you the same time next week. I believe Dr. Locke is here to escort you out. Goodbye, Lewis.

(Dumbfounded, Lewis turns to the sound of security buzzing him through. Dr. Locke is outside the door to meet him before the two-way mirror.)

DOCTOR
(curiously)

A good get acquainted session?

LEWIS
(still in shock)

Uh, yeah, ...

(sarcastically)

great.

DOCTOR
(facetious)

I see you survived.

LEWIS
(haggardly)

Just as you said. I didn't feel threatened, once I got passed the urge to vomit. It just wasn't what I expected coming out here today - not at all what I expected.

(They walk through security and toward the front door together.)

DOCTOR
(anxiously)

I have you down for the same time next week.

LEWIS
(backpedaling)

Umm ... about that. I just don't know. I mean, I'll have to check my calendar.

DOCTOR
(pressing)

Can't you do that now with the gadget in your pocket?

LEWIS
(resentfully)

Yes, I suppose so.

(surveying his pda)

I have nothing penciled in at the moment ...

DOCTOR
(bluntly)

Then we shall see you next week. Same time. Same place.
Same Bat channel.

(seeing no laugh)

Sorry, my attempt at humor was no better than yours.

(extending his hand)

It was a pleasure.

(Shaking hands, the doctor returns to his
office. Lewis passes by the front desk,
making a beeline to the door.)

NURSE
(shouting)

Mr. Manannon! Mr. Manannon, I have something for you.

LEWIS
(pivoting)

Excuse me, Nurse Tory,

(startled)

you have something for *me*?

NURSE
(businesslike)

Yes, a check for your services.

LEWIS
(contending)

There must be some mistake. I am not a therapist. I am
a visitor - an invited guest.

NURSE
(insistent)

I was given quite explicit instructions to make *sure* you
did not leave without picking up your check - to
compensate you for lost time and wages.

(She hands Lewis an envelope. He
forthrightly slips it into his pocket and
exits the building. In front of the
Beamer, Lewis opens the envelope.)

LEWIS

(in disbelief)

A thousand dollars! A thousand dollars for reading a Bible! I was set to bail, but I think I can muster the strength for a round two.

(inhaling the stack of bills)

Yes, I have the strength ...

(Lights fade. We hear the sound of Lewis cranking up the Beamer, shifting into gear, and taking off.)

SCENE THREE

(The flashback ends, and we find ourselves back with Bishop McMahon and Dan at the hospital.)

BISHOP

(confirming)

So, Dan, did you get all that - at least the gist of it?

DAN

(sniffling slightly)

Yes, Bishop, Sir.

BISHOP

(lethargically)

No need to be so formal, lad. Just call me Lewis. We've a long row to hoe ahead of us, but I'm getting a little tired, with me doing all the talking. I suspect your writing hand needed a break long ago. Maybe you should invest in some technology, lad. Stuff to do the work for you. Haven't they got stuff like that?

DAN

(absolvingly)

I suppose, but I like the paper trail in case of a problem.

BISHOP

(encouragingly)

Smart man, Dan. I knew you were the one for this job.

(resigned)

Whew! I need a break. Shall we get started again in the morning?

(studiously)

No, wait, I have a speaking engagement I cannot postpone. New York, then London ...

(compromisingly)

How about this same time next week? Oh, and stop by my agent on the way out. He has a check for you - something to tide you over.

DAN

(wiping brow)

Thank you, but it really wasn't expected.

BISHOP

(dismissing)

Nonsense. You've earned it. Just take good care of those notes. Maybe you could type it all up and get me a copy for proofreading. Goodbye, Mr. MacArthur.

DAN

(casually)

Just call me Dan.

BISHOP

(thankfully)

Cheers, Dan.

(They shake hands, and Dan is escorted out. He is handed a check, which Dan forthrightly opens once back in the public space.)

DAN

(sniffling; shocked)

A thousand dollars cash!

(grinning ear to ear)

I wonder if I have to declare this as income.

(Cut to black.)

ACT II
SCENE ONE

(The luxury hotel room of Bishop Lewis McMahon at the Ritz Carlton. An array of bodyguards and personal assistants with earpieces coming and going have turned the room into an office. Lewis is in full religious regalia. He looks out of place with the hotel style and the business dress of his people. Lewis is sitting on a couch with phone in hand.)

BISHOP

(talking on the phone; pressing aggressively)

Hello, is this Dan? Lewis here. Are we ready for another session? It's been a week.

(pausing)

I am sorry you are not feeling well. How long will it take you to get to the Ritz-Carlton? Time is of the essence, My Lad.

(pausing)

Can't you get out of bed?

(pausing)

And dress yourself?

(pausing)

Nonsense! You'll feel better after you're here.

(pausing)

I'll say a special prayer for you.

(pausing)

If you don't think you should get behind the wheel, I'll send my driver over to fetch you.

(pausing)

Just get ready, and my guy will be there in ten minutes. You'll be here in 20, and we can get started on the half hour.

(pausing)

Don't worry; you'll survive.

(The Bishop hangs up the phone and scribbles on a cocktail napkin.)

BISHOP

(giving orders)

Drive to this address and pick up my writer. His name is Dan MacArthur. He may appear ill ... and poorly dressed.

DRIVER

(compliant)

Yes, Bishop.

(The driver leaves. Paparazzi are seen outside the hotel room. They try to peer in as the door opens and shuts.)

BISHOP

(irritated)

Do those folks have a life?

ASSISTANT

(unshaken)

I wouldn't know, Bishop.

BISHOP

(prodded to action)

I'm going to take care of that herd of goats.

ASSISTANT

(admonishingly)

Bishop, that is not advisable.

BISHOP

(disregarding)

Life is full of the inadvisable.

(The Bishop walks to the door and opens it to the surprise of many photojournalists. There are a few flashes, but most are stunned.)

BISHOP

(angrily)

The next one to take a flash photo will miss out on my blessing.

(They all submit.)

BISHOP

(signing the cross; piously)

May the Lord bless you and keep you ... far from me. Now go home and be with your wives and children.

(To the surprise of all inside the suite, the crowd disperses.)

BISHOP

(double wiping hands)

That should buy us some tranquility.

ASSISTANT

(curiously)

How did you do that, Bishop?

BISHOP

(cultivating)

The Good Word says those I bless are blessed, and those I curse are cursed. I chose to give my blessing ... this time.

ASSISTANT

(complimenting)

That's remarkable.

BISHOP

(matter-of-factly)

That's faith - that of a mustard seed.

ASSISTANT

(accepting)

Yes, Bishop.

BISHOP

(impatiently checking his watch)

Dan MacArthur should be arriving any moment. I will need a solid hour of privacy.

ASSISTANT

(diligently)

The library is yours. I'll have your team vacate now. We can relocate to the second bedroom. There are advantages of booking the presidential suite.

BISHOP

(confirming)

I am learning to trust your judgment.

ASSISTANT

(informing)

Thank you, Bishop. Oh, the front desk just called. Hotel security has stopped your Mr. MacArthur from coming up. Something about proper attire - no shirt, no service.

BISHOP

(irked)

I thought he'd at least be able to manage a few buttons. Tell them to detain him no longer. Time is marching with us or without us.

ASSISTANT

(compliant)

Yes, Bishop.

(There is a knock at the door. The assistant checks the viewfinder, then he lets the bodyguard and Dan into the suite.)

BISHOP

(cajoling)

Dan, you look like hell! Pardon the expression. Let's see what we can do to spruce you up. I've got a spare frock in the back.

DAN

(irreverently)

Oh, No, Bishop! I couldn't.

BISHOP

(teasing)

Afraid you might go up in a puff of smoke? I wouldn't force you to wear the collar.

DAN

(adamant)

I simply cannot.

BISHOP

(redirecting)

Very well. Shauna, can you find Mr. MacArthur something to wear. Perhaps something from my valise might suit his taste.

DAN

(in anguish)

Bishop, I really feel awful.

BISHOP

(persistent)

Not a problem. I see you're a lamb - about this, I mean. Willing to rise from your sick bed for the sake of a tale. Besides, I have lots of clothes, and I can wear them only one set at a time.

DAN

(argumentative)

It's not the clothes, Bishop. It's my head - the fever, the chills.

BISHOP

(responsibly)

Oh, yes. I promised. Dan, bring me the leather Bible on the coffee table - the one under that small green book.

DAN

(unsure)

This one?

BISHOP

(still lightening the mood)

Yes, bring it here. I must find the appropriate spell.

(laughing)

Prayer ... I mean prayer, of course. Laughter is great medicine. Say, why don't you open it for me and read aloud. It will do you considerable service to read it for yourself. The Good Book is the Sword of the Spirit - capable of thwarting the enemy and inflicting serious harm, when on the offensive.

DAN

(unwilling)

Read what? I can barely focus.

BISHOP

(encouragingly)

The cure for what ails you, lad. I am the orchestra director, and you are the symphony. I'll direct, and you play. Now turn to Luke 9 - verses one and two.

DAN

(lost)

Luke?

(There is a look of unfamiliarity on Dan's face, and he opens the Bible clearly to the Old Testament.)

BISHOP

(instructively)

Dan, hold the Bible binding down. Find the middle, then take a cut midway from the center toward the end. You should find yourself in the New Testament. Then it's Matthew, Mark, Luke, John - the four Gospels.

DAN

(uncooperative)

Okay ... I'm there now. Luke what?

BISHOP

(patiently)

Luke 9 - verses one and two.

DAN

(sniffling throughout)

Here goes:

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

BISHOP

(building a case)

While you are not Catholic, Dan, do you believe I am called by God?

DAN

(sniffling)

I believe all clergymen have responded to a desire to serve God and their fellowman.

BISHOP

(checking)

According to the passage read, what did Jesus give his disciples authority to do?

DAN

(sniffling, unsure)

Preach ... and heal?

BISHOP

(authoritatively)

Is the Bible merely a history book?

DAN

(sniffling)

No?

BISHOP

(supportive)

Dan, you are such a good student! If I, as a disciple of Christ, were to tell you, "You were healed," would you believe it?

DAN

(sniffling)

I don't know.

BISHOP

(flexible)

Then we must turn to Mark 8:22-25.

DAN

(sniffling)

Mark?

BISHOP

(patiently)

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

DAN
(sniffing throughout)

Alright.

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

BISHOP
(testing)

Dan, why do you suppose the blind man was not healed the first time upon Jesus' touch?

DAN
(guessing)

I don't know. Lack of faith?

BISHOP
(placing his hand on Dan's shoulder)

What does the Word say happened on the second touch that didn't on the first?

DAN
(factually)

It says his eyes were opened.

BISHOP
(leading)

Exactly, Dan. Have your eyes been opened?

DAN
(off-guard)

I am awake.

BISHOP
(disappointed)
That's not what the passage is referring to, now, is it?

DAN
(self-aware)
No ... I have stopped sniffing, I think.

BISHOP
(probing)
And the fever? The nausea?

DAN
(confirming)
I guess they have subsided.

BISHOP
(disgusted)
I am afraid the only surviving symptom is your sickly wardrobe.

(The Bishop gets up, goes to the French doors, and calls out to his assistant.)

BISHOP
(forcefully)
Shauna, bring those clothes.
(turning to Dan)
I simply cannot gaze at you and labor at the same time.

(The Bishop tosses the set to Dan.)

BISHOP
(commanding)
Here, go into the second bath, and put these on.

(Dan complies. He returns ready to commence.)

BISHOP
(eagerly)
Now then, let's get to work! Where were we?

DAN
(apologetically)
I'm sorry. I came empty handed.

BISHOP
(improvising)
Just grab some hotel stationary and a pen from the desk. If it is more conducive, you can remain at the desk, and I'll just hover around the room as needed to jog the old noggin into recall.

(Dan sits at the desk and assumes the position.)

BISHOP
(feigning difficulty in recall)
I believe we concluded the first session with Mr. Baylor.

DAN
(concurring)
Yes, indeed.

BISHOP
The week was uneventful, but I had already spent the money. I found myself looking forward to another visit, despite the peril, banking on a second payoff. On this trip, I turned off the GPS. I wanted to learn the route. I pulled into the parking lot and secured the exact same parking spot. No hesitation this time, as I made way to the reception area. Nurse Tory was not at her station, though I could smell her perfume. She was there somewhere. I took a seat and waited for her return.

(The scene fades on Bishop McMahon and Dan.)

SCENE TWO

(Dan is inside the hospice, seated in the vacant waiting area. The nursing station is likewise empty. Following a flushing sound, Nurse Tory turns the corner.)

NURSE

(surprisingly congenial)

Why, Mr. Manannon. So good to see you again. I was afraid we might have seen the last of you.

LEWIS

(mildly correcting)

Please, call me Lewis. I will answer to that without fail.

NURSE

(pleasantly)

Lewis it is. Just have a seat, and I will let the doctor know you are here.

LEWIS

(accepting)

Very well.

NURSE

(on phone)

Dr. Locke, Mr. Manannon is here.

(pausing, then with disbelief)

You want me to send him on in?

(Shaking her head, the nurse hangs up the phone and addresses Lewis.)

NURSE

(with anxiety)

I will escort you back. Dr. Locke says it is not necessary that he join you today.

LEWIS

Strange, but okay.

(jokingly)

I guess if I needed to see the doctor, he might start sending me a bill.

(There is no response. They walk awkwardly together past security. The nurse stops at the outer door.)

NURSE

(nervously)

You can make your way in. I will buzz you through from here.

LEWIS

(puzzled)

How will you know when I am ready to exit?

NURSE

(overtly)

I think a thousand dollars is good for an hour. I will be back in one hour's time.

(Lewis opens the door and immediately hears the buzz for the second. He walks directly through.)

MR. BAYLOR

(agitated)

Lew, I've been waiting for you a whole week!

LEWIS

(confused)

This is the scheduled date and time. You made the appointment.

MR. BAYLOR

(affirming)

And so I did. You are spot on. I just enjoyed our first visit so much, I caused myself undue anxiety in posting such a distant follow up.

LEWIS

(eager)

I am here now. What shall we do? The nurse has given us another hour.

MR. BAYLOR

(angrily)

What can we accomplish in an hour? What happened to Dr. Locke?

LEWIS
(contentiously)

Dr. Locke was otherwise engaged, I suppose.

MR. BAYLOR
(reluctantly)

Then let's make the most of it. Would you like to read to me again?

LEWIS
(enthusiastically)

Why, yes. I am up to it.

MR. BAYLOR
Fetch the Bible. It's on the bed this time.

LEWIS
(prying)
Have you had others reading to you? To help you sleep?

MR. BAYLOR
(purposefully short)
No, and sleep, in that case, would be elusive.

LEWIS
(persistently)
Then why is the Bible on your bed?

MR. BAYLOR
(plainly)
I read it myself.

LEWIS
(meddlesome)
What do you mean, you read it yourself? Have you memorized key passages? You did seem to have extraordinary recall of much on the last visit.

(As Mr. Baylor leans in, Lewis sees that there are new stitches across Mr. Baylor's

eyelids with crusty blood clinging to the fibers.)

MR. BAYLOR
(eerily)

I read it ... *myself*.

(Lewis walks to the bed and picks up a white towel partially obscuring the Bible. He immediately drops it after seeing blood stains on the towel and a needle still strung with surgical thread nearby.)

MR. BAYLOR
(honestly)

I might be crazy, but I'm not blind.

(The comfort upon which Lewis strode in has fled the building. Lewis is visibly shaken. He returns with the Bible in hand.)

LEWIS
(slowly with disbelief)

So you had your stitches removed so that you could read?

MR. BAYLOR
(correcting)

Not exactly. I took them out myself, had a good read, then put them back.

LEWIS
(in shock)

Wasn't that ... painful?

MR. BAYLOR
(with an odd smile)

Not as painful as what I read.

LEWIS
(jittery)

I'm ... not so sure I can *do* this today.

MR. BAYLOR

(reasoning)

Nonsense. The nurse gave us an hour, and an hour shall pass before a buzz at the door. We had better get to business.

LEWIS

(trapped)

Very well, then.

(shaken)

What passage would you like for me to read?

MR. BAYLOR

(nonchalantly)

Last time, I chose. It's your turn now.

LEWIS

(with derision)

My turn?

MR. BAYLOR

(leading)

Don't you have a favorite you'd like to share? Perhaps something in Psalm ... or Revelation! You look like a Revelation kind of man. Tell me, Lew, do you believe in hell? A literal hell? You told me you believe the Bible. How about hell?

LEWIS

(justifyingly)

Yes, a heaven and a hell, but I don't dwell on the subject ...

MR. BAYLOR

(with skepticism)

You do not shudder at the prospect of a literal hell? Eternal agony?

LEWIS

(sustaining)

I guess I've always comforted myself in believing heaven would be for me. Hell is for ... others.

MR. BAYLOR

(castigatingly)

You can sit in comfort with thoughts of yourself in heaven without concern for those in the here and now destined for hell?

LEWIS

(unemotionally)

I just choose not to dwell on it.

MR. BAYLOR

(pleased)

An excellent answer. I wish it were so simple. Please read Revelation 20:11-15.

LEWIS

(relieved)

No problem finding the last book of the Bible.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

MR. BAYLOR

(with awe)

Can you imagine - standing one day before a throne of judgment?

(grinning a bit)

It's a great equalizer ... knowing those great and small in this life will face their maker, stripped of all earthly accolades. This book of life ... is your name in it?

LEWIS

(honestly)

I don't know.

MR. BAYLOR

(irate)

What do you mean, you don't know? Something as important as that, and you don't know?

LEWIS

(backpedaling)

I don't wish to presume.

MR. BAYLOR

(calming significantly)

The Bible teaches we can know with unwavering certainty by meeting the criteria: Jesus is God's Son, his sacrifice on the cross was to purify us of sin, and we acknowledge him as Lord. People don't grasp that personal peace in knowing comes so easily.

(mystically)

Only, it doesn't say I can know *for* you, does it, Lewis?

LEWIS

(unaccepting)

I've never heard of such teaching. The Bible says, "Do not judge lest you be judged," somewhere. Maybe it's where the townspeople wanted to throw rocks at that girl.

MR. BAYLOR

(firing back)

Yet we *will* be judged nonetheless! What if I told you I could know for you? Would you want to know?

LEWIS

(contemplative)

It depends. I would want to know only if it were good news.

MR. BAYLOR

(eagerly)

Let's look at one more passage. How about Matthew 25: 31-46?

LEWIS

(confidently)

I think I can find my way there. Half, then half. Yes.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

MR. BAYLOR
(reverently)

Blimy! Separating sheep from the goats. This passage is so ... sad. Can you imagine, Lewis, spending your whole life thinking you were going to heaven only to be denied that future? Are you going to heaven, Lew? Would you want to know if I told you I could see your destiny?

LEWIS
(scared)

I don't think so.

MR. BAYLOR
(snarling)

That's what Dr. Stevens said, too.

LEWIS
(emending)

Dr. Stevens? You mean Dr. Locke. Dr. Stevens is ... dead - suicide, so they say.

MR. BAYLOR
(defiantly)

Dead? How unfortunate for him, that old goat!

LEWIS
(sadly)

I never met him.

MR. BAYLOR
(argumentative)

And you never will! He didn't think my stay here was in the best interest of the institution. He wanted me to leave, but the board didn't support his recommendation. I sealed his future. Guess he couldn't handle rejection - expedited things.

LEWIS
(plainly)

His nameplate is still on the door to Dr. Locke's office.

MR. BAYLOR
(exhausted)

I'll have that removed. Ah ... I tire so. When you get my age, everything makes you tired, but life just keeps going and going. Even when we want desperately to step off the ride, we don't have access to the switch.

(changing tone)
Sorry to be so depressing. You've been such a blessing.

(upbeat)
I've already scheduled another visit for us. Can't wait a whole week this time. No, that was *much* too long. How about Wednesday?

LEWIS
(unsure)
This coming Wednesday?

MR. BAYLOR
(uncompromisingly)
Wednesday is it, then.

(Just at that moment, there is a buzz from the door.)

MR. BAYLOR
(smiling)
I think it's for you.

LEWIS
(negotiatingly)
Wednesday?

MR. BAYLOR
(compensatingly)
And don't forget to stop at the front desk on your way out!

(Lewis walks down the hallway, but Nurse Tory isn't at security waiting to escort him. He instead finds her back at her post up front.)

NURSE
(with duplicity)
Ah, Mr. Manannon, I knew you could maneuver your way back on your own, so I just buzzed you out and came back to my duty station - to assist new arrivals.

(Lewis looks around and sees no one in the waiting area at all.)

LEWIS

(sarcastically)

I can see you are so ... busy, and it's Lewis. Remember?
Do you have something for me?

NURSE

(with praise)

Lewis, you are getting to know the routine. Yes, here is
your envelope. I shall see you on ...

(looking at her register)

Wednesday?

LEWIS

(noncommittal)

Wednesday is normally a very busy day for me, but I will
let you know if I need to cancel.

NURSE

(matter-of-factly)

See you Wednesday.

(Lewis shakes his head as he leaves the
building. He immediately slides open the
seal and pulls out a stack of bills. He
rifles through them.)

LEWIS

(to himself; astounded)

Two thousand? I thought I was good in *sales*.

(Cut to black.)

SCENE THREE

(The flashback ends, and we find ourselves back with Bishop McMahon and Dan at the hotel suite.)

DAN

(excited)

Blimey! This stuff is like a movie - you know ... Silence of the Lambs. Have you ever thought of selling your story to Hollywood?

BISHOP

(reeling in)

Dan, let's not get the cart before the horse. By the way, do you know the meaning behind that word?

DAN

(clueless)

Which word would that be, Bishop?

BISHOP

(reeling in)

You said, "Blimey." It's actually a contraction for *God blind me*.

DAN

(apologetically)

Blimey! Sorry, force of habit. I never knew. I hope the Lord is either not listening or not answering.

BISHOP

(courteously)

How are you feeling?

DAN

(self-evaluating)

Surprisingly grand.

BISHOP

(fervently)

Then can we continue?

DAN

(partly in jest)

We can ... unless you wanted to stop and ... give me an envelope or something.

BISHOP

(businesslike)

There will be plenty of time for envelopes later. Let's continue ...

It was Wednesday late morning when I received a call on my cell from a colleague concerning an important client - a wealthy client. I was already on the freeway well on the way to Oakland. I had been grooming Hudson for three weeks, and for some unknown reason, he wanted to close the deal that day. I negotiated an afternoon rendezvous, giving me time to finish business in Oakland. It cost me a pretty penny, as I had to swallow the cost of a fat, expensive lunch to tide the client over. My colleague laughed when he heard I was Oakland-bound. I told him, contrary to all we've heard, everything's not going to hell there. Amused, he laughed again. What I was giving up to spend some time flipping through an old man's Bible!

I pulled into the parking lot and my spot. I was now genuinely excited about visiting. I entered the building with a smile.

(The scene fades on the Bishop and Dan.)

SCENE FOUR

(Inside Green Oaks Psychiatric Hospice.)

LEWIS

(lively)

Nurse Tory, what a pleasure to see you.

NURSE

(intentional)

Hello, Mr. ... Lewis. No need to wait. You can go on back. This time I have instructions to allow you stay as long as necessary.

LEWIS

(indulgently)

Thank you, Nurse Tory, but I've really only budgeted an hour, as before. Got a pressing appointment.

NURSE

(cautious)

I do hope that will be long enough. Security can buzz you in. I will give them instructions to check on you after an hour. I do hope you can afford more.

LEWIS

(determined)

I'm afraid not today. See you in an hour.

(A fellow from security buzzes Lewis through to Mr. Baylor's room.)

MR. BAYLOR

(spirited)

Hello, Lewis. You are punctual. I like that in a man.

LEWIS

(anticipating)

Greetings, Mr. Baylor. Shall we be reading from your Bible today?

MR. BAYLOR

(divulging)

I've got another book for you today and a homework reading assignment from the Bible.

LEWIS

(apprehensively)

Homework? Hadn't had that in years, Mr. Baylor. Was never too fond of it, but seeing that you are the teacher, I am a willing student.

MR. BAYLOR

(relieved)

Excellent. But first, I want to recap a bit. When you get as old as me, it's possible to forget a detail or two along the way to a proper conclusion.

LEWIS

(respectfully)

Never you mind, Mr. Baylor. I've found you as sharp as any knife in the drawer.

MR. BAYLOR

(crass)

Enough with the Mr. Baylor crap. Just call me Fulmore, and I'll continue calling you Lew.

LEWIS

(submissive)

That's fine, Mr. ... Fulmore.

MR. BAYLOR

(comfortable)

That's better. Much less formal. It's like family, and though we've never really discussed it much, we are family.

LEWIS

(relaxed)

Yes, Fulmore - family.

MR. BAYLOR

(conciliatory)

Hey, if we've the time, we can put it on today's agenda - the whole family tree and all.

LEWIS

(protective)

I'd like that very much. Oh, but I only have an hour to spare today.

MR. BAYLOR
(angrily)

What! Those were *not* my instructions.

LEWIS
(firm)

I have to improvise today. Sorry.

MR. BAYLOR
(overzealous)

Let's get to it then. On the nightstand, you will find another book - a green, leather binding with gold lettering.

LEWIS
(troubled)

On the nightstand? You haven't been reading again?

MR. BAYLOR
(disregardingly)

No, this one I've internalized.

LEWIS
(primed)

Very well. Shall I start from the beginning? It's a rather small book with large print and pictures - a child's storybook.

MR. BAYLOR
(organized)

We must review first. Let's see. We established that you believe the Bible. Correct?

LEWIS
(wearily)

Yes, ... Fulmore.

MR. BAYLOR
(detailing)

And throughout time, God has chosen to open the eyes of many to see that which exists in the unseen. Right?

LEWIS
(nonchalant)

I suppose so.

MR. BAYLOR
(angrily)

What do you mean by "I suppose so?" Do we need to reread those passages?

LEWIS
(disarming)

No, 'tis so.

MR. BAYLOR
(leering)

Is a glimpse into the spiritual a blessing or a curse?

LEWIS
(absent)

I don't recall a treatise on the merits - only the facts.

MR. BAYLOR
(doggedly)

Exactly! But Lewis, do you suppose it is a blessing or a curse to see what others cannot?

LEWIS
(eluding)

Have we finished the review and moved on to interpretation?

MR. BAYLOR
(blunt)

You are avoiding a response.

LEWIS
(conceding)

I am ... I would say it depends on the circumstances - if the new information was good news or bad.

MR. BAYLOR
(unrelenting)

Precisely! And we confirmed in our readings that there is a literal hell, right?

LEWIS

(speculating)

Yes, and God will judge - separating the sheep from goats.

MR. BAYLOR

(unreserved)

So tell me, Lewis, if you could look at a man and tell if he were headed to heaven or hell, would you tell him?

LEWIS

(honestly)

I suppose I would only want to bear the good news and hide the bad.

MR. BAYLOR

(aggressively)

Hide it from him, but what about yourself? How can you hide it from yourself?

LEWIS

(unprepared)

I ... don't know.

MR. BAYLOR

(congratulatory)

Precisely! You don't know, and neither do I.

(soberly)

You don't know what it is like to look right through a person, seeing a soul marked for destruction, yet keep silent!

LEWIS

(confounded)

What are you saying?

MR. BAYLOR

(disturbingly)

You haven't asked me about this -

(pointing to his eyes)

Not one question as to why I have done this to myself. Does my appearance not offend you? It does me, and I don't even have to look at myself. Look, no mirrors in the rooms. Glass can cut. They like to keep us safe,

but there are some things against which there is no safety net.

(slowly and succinctly)

The Lord has opened my eyes, but I choose to close them. So many going to hell ... even more thinking they will go to heaven. One look, and I know. I know! I'd rather not know; I'd rather not look.

(calming, pointing to his stitches)

This is my solacium ... my remedy for a cursed gift - eyes sewn shut, body imprisoned, and mind starved from social contact.

(light and airy)

We are like angels dancing on the head of a pin - not room for many, some oh so close to the edge,

(gnashing his teeth)

and there are devils among us, oblivious to us all, pushing us to the brink.

LEWIS

(trembling)

Why am I here?

MR. BAYLOR

(pacificatory)

To help bring this chapter to a close. Shall we read the child's story now?

LEWIS

(nervously)

If that is the best use of the remaining time.

MR. BAYLOR

(determined)

It is.

LEWIS

(restlessly)

The Tails of Fomor

In the annals of ancient Ireland, the Green Isle, the Fomorians, swore an oath to annihilate their enemies, the Tuatha De Danann. The Fomorians held their position due to the strength of their leader, Balor - a mighty sorcerer said to have a giant eye, the size of

three men's fists, in the middle of his forehead, but it wasn't always so.

As a child, Balor watched in secret as his father's druids prepared magic potions strong enough to kill. Fumes from the deadly mix rose to expose Balor's hiding spot and penetrated his right eye. From that infusion, Balor's evil eye grew to inhuman proportions, grotesque in sight and unwieldy in power. A mere glance from Balor would emit firebrands of poisonous gas, making the armies of the Fomorians nearly invincible.

Balor, however, was an indiscriminate killing machine, taking down both friend and foe in range of the eye. Therefore, the eye remained shut except during combat. The weight of the eyelid was such that it required the strength of four soldiers to open using large hooks.

A prophet foretold that Balor's downfall could only be at the hand of his own flesh and blood - a grandson. To secure his life, Balor imprisoned his only child, Ethlinn, in a crystal tower on Tory Island, never to wed or know the delight of a man. Twelve matrons served as her guardians and only companions.

On the mainland, a man named Cian, one of the Tuatha De Danann, owned a magic cow with the curious ability to yield an unending supply of milk of unmatched quality. Lusting after the drink, Balor coaxed his druid's to transform his appearance to that of a young lad. When Cian came to the smith with his brothers to forge new weapons of steel, he sent forward his kin with his ore and silver, whilst he tended the cow. The lad told Cian he overheard the brothers instruct the smith to keep the money in full but forge Cian's weapon with lesser materials. In a fury, Cian left the cow's tether in the hands of the boy to correct the matter. Meanwhile, Balor rode the cow across the waters back to Tory Island. Cheated and enraged, Cian vowed to

secure from Balor something of even greater value.

With the aid of a sorceress, Cian disguised himself as a maiden feigning dire distress, abandoned on the shores of Tory Island. The isle maidens gave shelter and respite to the pitiful young victim. Gaining their confidence and affection, Cian seduced all the maidens, including Ethlinn. Balor's daughter subsequently gave birth to triplets. Determined to preserve himself and his rule, Balor demanded the infants be tossed into the sea. His attendants securely wrapped the children in a sheet for transport, but on the journey, one little lad unknowingly tumbled out. A druidess, Birog, found the lone child and gave him to Manannan mac Lir, who raised him as his own. The child, Lugh, grew into a strong warrior.

Lugh ruthlessly led the Tuatha into battle against the Fomorians. He wielded a magic sword, forged in the heat of a lightning bolt, with authority to cut through the most potent of mystic powers for the one whose grip was sufficient. Though suffering an otherwise fatal injury in the fight, Lugh held fast to a magic pigskin capable of healing all wounds. Lugh waited at range until Balor's eye grew weak. His attendants lowered the lid for Balor to renew his strength. As the soldiers raised the lid, but before the iris was exposed to unleash its force, Lugh hurled a spear of tempered steel directly into that horrid eye with such purpose that it exploded the back of Balor's skull. His attendants and all soldiers within a quarter furlong were overcome by the poison that spewed forth from the gaping wound. The slain leader fell face first, eye still open, cursing the ground beneath it, scouring a deep pit. The reign of Balor, King of the Fomorians, had ended without offset to prophesy.

Lugh led mightily, but whilst on military campaign, a man named Cermait took not so

uninvited liberties with Lugh's wife. Upon Lugh's return, the man was duly executed. The sons of Cermait of the Tuatha De Danann: Céthur Mac Greine, Éthur Mac Cuill, and Téthur Mac Cecht held their distance begrudgingly, awaiting an opportune time. Regrettably separated from his magic pigskin, Lugh fell from his mount while fording a swollen stream. 'Twas one of the sons of Cermait closest to the fall who extended nothing to grasp but a sword. The mighty warrior Lugh was dead -- drowned for naught but revenge for a father's fatal indiscretion -- a most tragic affair.

(Lewis sits stunned.)

MR. BAYLOR

(gratified)

There you have it, Lewis. Had you not heard this Irish legend? Perhaps your grandmother read it to you as a bedtime story when you were a lad. It is an excellent story worth telling and retelling. The book is yours to keep. Take it, if you like. I will not be needing it.

LEWIS

(naively)

What do you mean?

MR. BAYLOR

(impeaching)

Come now, Lewis. Do you pretend not to know why you are here? It is not by accident. The book does not lie.

LEWIS

(forthcoming)

The parallel is compelling: Balor of Fomor and Fulmore Baylor, Lewis McMahon and Lugh Manannan, Tory Island and this place run by Nurse Tory who continues to call me Mr. Manannan no matter the number of times I correct her. Folklore is exaggerated history, right, like Paul Bunyan or Daniel Boone? It's not real.

MR. BAYLOR

(eerily)

Call it what you will: folklore, coincidence, or fate. I am cursed with a gift, and you, my lad, can help me escape the nightmare. Many ask to see what God sees, to know his will, to have discernment between good and evil, but be careful for what you ask.

LEWIS

(in denial)

I refuse to believe it!

MR. BAYLOR

(uncaring)

To refuse it makes it no less the truth. If you do not believe, it is of no consequence as long as you are willing to humor an old man.

LEWIS

(desperate)

What can I do to end this charade?

MR. BAYLOR

(simplistic)

If you will agree to take my leather Bible also as your own, that is all I ask.

LEWIS

(unbelieving)

Take the Bible and the child's tale?

MR. BAYLOR

(allegorically)

That's all. If I am mad, you have a family heirloom, and I remain here - a bizarre, hopeless patient with an implausible yarn. If I am sane, you will receive word of my death, upon which you will receive my full estate. The paperwork is all in place with your lawyer. Just take my leather Bible as your own. Its words will cover you. Its content will protect you as it has me. Make it your life's work to live out the Word of God. I cannot end my misery while holding onto healing words.

(The door buzzes. Lewis is frozen.)

MR. BAYLOR
(pleading)

What will it be?

(Cut to black.)

SCENE FIVE

(The flashback ends. We are back with Dan and Bishop McMahon in the suite.)

DAN
(engrossed)

What happened?

BISHOP
(complimentary)

I knew you were an excellent choice, Dan. You share so much interest in your work and mine.

DAN
(sniffling again)

What happened to Mr. Baylor? Did you accept his gift? Did he die as prophesied? What happened to you next? There is such a shift between the man you described from your past and the Bishop McMahon we all know.

BISHOP
(empathetic)

I can understand the difficulty. I admit, it was a life-changing transformation, but then, that is God's specialty. I notice your sniffles have returned. We had better call it quits and reschedule the final session. I still need to review your notes from day one.

(conspiring)

There were a lot of Bible passages. Are you sure you got those word for word? It wouldn't sit right to misquote the Bible. It is the Sword of the Spirit.

DAN
(sniffling; confident)

I think I got them as dictated.

BISHOP
(concerned)

I have a suggestion. Just to make sure, why don't you take my Bible and review each passage.

DAN
(sniffling; awestruck)

Your Bible? I guess I could do that - in the name of good journalism.

BISHOP

(overjoyed)

Then it is settled. Here. Just check the wording at your leisure. Keep it as long as necessary.

(uneasy)

You know, Dan MacArthur, you should really get checked out thoroughly by a physician. I hear there has been a case of H5N1 documented at San Francisco General. We were just there not so many days ago.

DAN

(sniffling; clueless)

H5N1?

BISHOP

(forward)

Avian influenza - you know, bird flu. It's nothing to mess with - potentially deadly and very contagious. They say the lungs fill up with fluid comparable to drowning. I may need a checkup also, as I am feeling overly tired and a little feverish myself.

(Dan is shaken by the prospect. Color has faded from his countenance. The Bishop shows signs of weariness.)

BISHOP

(authoritatively)

Shauna, call my driver and have him take Mr. MacArthur back home.

(turning to Dan)

That is, unless you would rather have him transport you directly to San Francisco General?

(Dan gets up and follows the Bishop to the door.)

DAN

(sniffling; worried)

What about the clothes?

BISHOP

(disarming)

Only rags - woolen frocks to trim and pare. Just get well.

(With a worried look on his face Dan abruptly leaves with the driver.)

BISHOP
(alarmed)

Shauna, I do believe the transfer is complete. You had better round up the staff for treatment. My doctor is standing by. Early intervention is essential.

ASSISTANT
(insistent)

Bishop, come get the treatment with us.

BISHOP
(defiantly)

No, Shauna, I have insufferably survived accident and incident. I will not allow an antiviral to derail my plans. I will walk through the valley of the shadow of death vaccine free. I have seen enough. As I aided Mr. Baylor, so my Danann rescues me.

(The Bishop puts a hand on Shauna's shoulder.)

BISHOP
(passionately)

Shauna, tend the flock. Sheep without a shepherd dance far too close to the edge. There are devils amongst us.

ASSISTANT
(blankly)

Bishop, what shall I tell the press?

BISHOP
(reflectively)

Tell them ... tell them Bishop McMahon has forded the true Golden Gate and is at peace with his Lord. Tell them Bishop McMahon's last request was this: That all men and women, God's children of every age, examine themselves in light of God's Eternal Word to know without doubt or waver that their name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. They should know. They *must* know. None ... can settle it for them.

(Scene fades to black.)

SCENE SIX

(The scene cuts to a classic BMW in front of the Ritz-Carlton. It is pitch black outside. The driver opens the door for Dan. He forthrightly enters. Once seated, the driver turns to Dan.)

DRIVER
(businesslike)

Where to?

DAN
(paranoid)

Please take me to the hospital. I need to be examined as soon as possible. The Far East trip, the flu-like symptoms, it does add up. I need to be safe.

DRIVER
Very well.

(Dan begins flipping through the Bible and occasionally glancing outside.)

DAN
(to himself in a mist)

What passage did he have me read to make me feel better? I can't recall.

(impatiently to the driver)
How long do you suppose it will take?

DRIVER
Sir?

DAN
The trip to the hospital, how long will it take?

DRIVER
It's hard to say in Bay traffic. Could be anywhere from ten minutes to an hour.

(Dan continues to admire and fumble through the Bible.)

DAN

(to himself)

It appears to be quite old. I wonder when it was printed.

(Dan turns to the front pages in search of a printed date. Instead, he curiously finds an inscription.)

DAN

(to himself but unintentionally louder)

What's this?

DRIVER

Sir?

DAN

(suspiciously)

Sorry, I was just admiring the Bishop's Bible. There appears to be an inscription inside the front cover. Can you turn on the overhead light for me?

DRIVER

Certainly.

DAN

(reads aloud slowly with awe)

To Lugh

May the Word of God open your eyes. Bind it to your soul, and you will live forever.

Balor

(Dan allows the phrasing to soak in. He repeats it under his breath, then clutches the Bible to his chest. Dan pulls out his notes for review. He shuffles through the leaflets and reads anxiously.)

DAN

(with revelation)

Blimey! Why didn't I see it? Lewis ... Lugh, Baylor ... Balor, Éthur Mac Cuill of the Tuatha De Danann ... ? Dan MacArthur! I am not just some reporter chosen to write a memoir. I was chosen to seal it ... to end the story ... *his* story.

(contemplatingly)

With my infirmity, I have drowned the Bishop just as assuredly as if I had held him beneath the water's edge. His lungs will fill with fluid without remedy,

(extending the Bible)

for this, in my hand,

(with exuberance)

is his magical sword, the Sword of the Spirit, wrapped in pigskin - able to win every battle and heal every wound! What was his, is now mine -- such authority ... such responsibility.

(slowly with remorse)

Lugh is ... dead ... without offset.

(with amazement)

My eyes *have* been opened. My fever ... has run its course!

(The pages slowly sink to his lap. Dan stares blankly out the window and leans forward, clutching the book with arms crossed.)

DAN

(smiling curiously, breathing a sigh and addressing the driver)

On second thought,

(sporting an accent)

Lad, be ah lamb an jus take me home. Em startin' to feel butter already. Jus grand altogether!

(scene cuts to black)

THE END