

SALVATION ROAD

A new play by D.W. Gregory

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By D.W. Gregory

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For six to seven actors

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SALVATION ROAD

THE STORY:

When his hip older sister disappears with members of a fundamentalist church, 17-year-old Cliff Kozak struggles to hold it all together, pretending that he isn't hurt by her decision to cut him out of her life. But a year later, a chance sighting of Denise at a New Jersey strip mall leads Cliff and his best buddy Duffy on a road trip into the heart of a deepening mystery. How could such a smart and talented girl fall for the hollow promises of a sketchy preacher? Could it be that faith is just another word for a desperate need to belong?

CHARACTERS:

Cliff Kozak, 17, and earlier, in memory
Jill, his sister, 15, and earlier, in memory
Denise, their sister, 19 and earlier, in memory
Brian Duffy, Cliff's friend, 18
Elijah, early to mid 20s, a current member of the Disciples
Rebecca, a current member of the Disciples
Sister Jean, a campus chaplain
Simi, a girl, 20, who left the Disciples

Father's voice (can be recorded).

The time: the present

The place: suburban Philadelphia and various locations in a New Jersey college town.

Slashes (// or ///) indicate overlapping lines.

The play can be performed by six or more actors,. At a workshop at New York University, the casting was doubled as follows:

CLIFF
JILL/SIMI
DENISE
DUFFY/FATHER'S VOICE
ELIJAH
SISTER/REBECCA/CLERK

In a seven actor version, Jill and Simi would be played by two different actors, and Simi would double as the clerk.

NOTES ON PRODUCTION:

Salvation Road is intentionally minimalistic in style, more evocative than literal, allowing for a fluid movement from location to location by rearranging a few furnishings--a table, two chairs, a low bench--and using only those props essential to the action.

In such a staging, set changes are to be effected by the actors, whose movements should be incorporated into the ongoing action. More elaborate staging is possible, but in any case, the point is to create an almost cinematic sense of continuous motion, so that at no point should the stage go dark.

CREDITS:

The following must be included in any program materials for productions of this play:

Salvation Road was developed by New Plays for Young Audiences at New York University's Steinhardt School under the direction of David Montgomery and opened there Oct. 26, 2012. It was subsequently produced by Louisville, Kentucky's Walden Theatre as part of its Slant Culture Series, November 8, 2012. Directed by Alec Volz.

ABOUT THE MUSIC:

The script suggests certain songs for key moments in the play; other choices are possible. It is up to the producing organization to obtain the performance rights for any song used in production.

AT RISE: -

We hear an electric guitar riff--the fading strains of an original composition, as lights rise on Denise, performing before a crowd--three other girls backing her up. Denise is flush with the pleasure of a song well received.

DENISE

Thank you--thanks! Okay. All right. Yeah! That's uh, that's called 'You Can Run, But You Can't Hide.' (wryly) Dedicated to my kid brother, Cliff Kozak--who, I guess, had better things to do tonight? Than support Guatemalan earthquake relief? (she scans the audience, hoping to see him) But hey--you are all here--which is awesome!--and I am just--so grateful to everybody who stepped up and came out tonight? Because--it's like--you know, fate? You don't choose your fate. It chooses you. So if you're lucky in this life--and I think we are all pretty lucky, really--well, you have an obligation, you know? To do what you can for the ill-fated of this world. So thanks everyone once again--and okay, we have two more bands coming up---the Sledgehammers from Upper Dublin High (applause from audience). Yeah--and Dwindling Hopes from--(soft voice, from behind, correcting her)--sorry? Dwindling ... Dwindling Homes. Okay, Dwindling Homes from Jenkintown. But first--one last song. Something a little different...

The other girls cross off as Denise sets her electric guitar aside.

DENISE

That my dad taught me. So Dad? This one is for you--:

She sings in a clear, confident voice a 60's era protest tune, such as:

DENISE

What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?

I learned that Washington never told a lie.
I learned that soldiers seldom die.
I learned that everybody's free,
And that's what the teacher said to me.
That's what I learned in school today.
That's what I learned in school.

As she sings, lights fade out on Denise and rise on Cliff alone, a year later, listening to the track. Track fades, and Cliff addresses the audience.

CLIFF

My sister Denise. Neechie to us. She always had an opinion about everything--but she was right about one thing: There really are times when you have to step up. Even if you think you can't. Like in the movies? Where the hero is separated from his regiment? And he's on this, like, super secret rescue mission to save the girl spy--only he's lost in the dark and he doesn't know what to do. And then suddenly--lightning flashes across the pitch dark sky--and he sees this German unit in the fields--and suddenly he realizes--they're going after the girl! And he has to stop them. So he takes his rifle, and picks them off one by one! From the rear--like in a turkey shoot. (noise like a rifle) Ke-shew, ke-shew. And the lightning flashes--the thunder booms--Ke-shew, ke-shew! And in the very next scene, the hero is like, running through the woods with the girl ... or getting a medal or something. Mission accomplished! (beat) That's the movies. In my life, it doesn't exactly go like that? Doesn't start in an open field. It's our rec room in Willow Grove. On a Sunday afternoon in late October--the year after Neechie disappeared. And there aren't any German soldiers ... just my younger sister, Jill ...

Enter JILL

JILL

(eager)

Cliff! Come on! We're ready to look at it.

CLIFF

Who is like, too young to drive--

JILL

Clifford!

CLIFF

But too old to ignore.

Enter DUFFY.

DUFFY

Kozak! You are not gonna believe this.

CLIFF

Brian Duffy. My best friend since, like, third grade ...

A remote control in his hand, Duffy attempts to get a DVD to load.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

A total techno freak.

DUFFY

I uploaded this video from my brother's cell phone? So it's a little ... I dunno... grainy?

CLIFF

But not a talented techno freak.

DUFFY

But man, you really gotta see this!

CLIFF

Oh and the girl spy? No spy. It's Neechie. And until this moment--we have no idea where she's been.

DUFFY

Dude?

JILL

Clifford! Brian is talking to you!

CLIFF

(to audience) Like I need her to tell me that? But hey.
(casually joining the scene) My philosophy is: if it doesn't kill me. I don't care. (to Jill) So, yeah. He uploaded it from his cell phone. And?

DUFFY

Scott's phone, actually. But man---you really gotta see it.

A beat as they watch a video, which may be unseen by the audience. Duffy proudly waits for their reaction.

JILL

What are we looking at?

DUFFY

On the right.

Jill looks again, doesn't comprehend.

DUFFY (CONT'D)

In the blue.

JILL

Neechie?

CLIFF

No way.

DUFFY

I was like two feet from her, man.

As they reconsider the image,

DUFFY (CONT'D)

She hasn't changed *that much* since last fall.

JILL

What's that in her hand?

DUFFY

Flowers. (off Jill) They were selling them. (off Cliff) For world hunger?

CLIFF

World hunger. (cynical) Of course.

DUFFY

I know! Like I was gonna give 'em five bucks for a carnation? Anyway--we go in and order--

JILL

Wait--you didn't take this on campus?

DUFFY

Strip mall on Route 1. So we sit down and Scott goes: Hey isn't that Kozak's sister? And I go--

JILL

Did you talk to her?

DUFFY

Not really. That kid (indicating) did most of the talking.

Jill studies the video.

JILL

It's Elijah.

DUFFY

Elijah?

JILL

From Neechie's church.

CLIFF

The guy who ran that house in Amherst.

JILL

The one who said Daddy was toxic.

DUFFY

(on //)
That's // the dude?

JILL

(agitated, on //)
Said our whole family was *toxic*!

CLIFF

Dad was pretty pissed. You gotta admit.

JILL

He just wanted to talk to her!

CLIFF

Correction. He wanted to yell at her?

JILL

So she would come home.

CLIFF

And you see how well that worked out.

JILL

It's not his fault, Cliff!

DUFFY

Hey. Guys.

He turns off the video as they break.

DUFFY (CONT'D)

I thought you'd be interested in this.

CLIFF

Sorry, man.

JILL

Sorry, Brian.

DUFFY turns on the video again.

DUFFY

Anyway. (warming into it) There I am. About to bite down on a Big Mac, when Scott goes, 'Hey isn't that Kozak's sister?' And I look up--and there she is. So I say: Get some pictures; I'm gonna talk to these guys. (as the hero of his own story) And I go out ... and tell this Elijah dude, okay, I'll take a flower. (pleased with himself) You know? And while he's making change, Denise is standing there--I can sorta feel her looking at me? But when I look at her, she looks away.

JILL

Like she was embarrassed?

DUFFY

Maybe.

JILL

Why would she be embarrassed?

DUFFY

Hard to say. But she's not saying anything, so I don't either. I just talk to him: (in the moment) so are you guys, like, here a lot? This seems like a good cause, blah blah--- and he tells me how everybody needs an anchor in life and he didn't have one 'til he found Jesus and now he does, whatever. And just then, another guy drives up in this rusted out van and before I can say another word--boom!--everybody piles in. And that's when she looks at me. Like, right at me--with this look of---I don't know ---'help me.'

JILL

Ohmigod.

DUFFY

Yeah.

CLIFF

(unimpressed)

Yeah.

DUFFY

I'm telling you, dude. She seriously wants outta there.

CLIFF

You don't know what she wants. You didn't talk to her.

DUFFY

It was in her eyes, man.

CLIFF

Oh. Her eyes said what her lips couldn't?

JILL

Don't be such a dick. You weren't even there.

CLIFF

Neither were you.

DUFFY

I kinda got the feeling she was, you know. Afraid to talk?

JILL

Because of Elijah?

DUFFY

And if we went back---

JILL
When?

DUFFY
And got her alone--

JILL
I'll totally go with you--

CLIFF
Hold it! You're not planning some kind of commando raid?
Cause somebody tried that already.

DUFFY
I just figured: Make contact. Let her know she's got help.

CLIFF
I hate to break it to you guys: But she knows where we live.
If she wanted a ticket home--she'd have one.

DUFFY
Might not be that simple, dude.

JILL
She might not have the money.

CLIFF
She can pick up a phone.

DUFFY
What if she can't get to a phone?

CLIFF
Who in America can't get to a phone?

DUFFY
So what are you saying, man? We just let this go?

JILL
We can't just let it go!

CLIFF
So what are you gonna do? Kidnap her? Hold her hostage?

A moment.

JILL
Maybe you're right. (as she leaves) But you're still a dick.

She is gone.

DUFFY
Think about it, okay? 'Cause if it was my sister---I'd at
least try to do something.

As he goes.

CLIFF

Like what? What am I supposed to do? Neechie doesn't take orders from me.

Sound of the protest song, finishing, off. Cliff listens. Denise's voice, far away: "Hey I love you guys!" Followed by the laughter of an audience.

CLIFF

Denise always set her own agenda. From the very beginning. Like she was supposed to be a boy? Dennis.

Light shifts to an early morning at the breakfast table. Denise enters, with an electric guitar, dressed in an affected, artsy fashion that cries out "I am my own self (sort of)." She picks at the guitar, which is not plugged in, and makes notations in a notebook.

CLIFF

She had other ideas.

DENISE

All children are female during the first 10 weeks of gestation. Scientific fact. Then the balls form. Your balls, for your information? Start out as ovaries. And your penis, in case you didn't know this--is an inside out vagina.

CLIFF

Gross.

DENISE

So Freud had it backwards. Women are not incomplete men. Men are overdeveloped women.

CLIFF

(to the audience)

Not exactly a candidate for the nunnery?

Denise makes a face.

CLIFF

But we're not what you call mortify-the-flesh type Catholics. At least I'm not. I mean, I go to Mass. When I can't get out of it. But I don't let that religious stuff *affect* me.

DENISE

The hell you don't.

CLIFF
(joining the scene)
I no longer buy into the Sky God myth.

DENISE
You tell Mom that?

CLIFF
She's aware.

DENISE
(amused)
I bet that went over well.

CLIFF
What's the point? I sit in a pew every Sunday. And listen to some guy in a dress give a sermon. What's that do for me?

DENISE
The reason you're turned off by your religion? Is that it has nothing to do with the rest of your life.

CLIFF
You're telling me.

DENISE
It would if you let it. But instead, you put up this pathetic Chinese wall--

CLIFF
You know that's not plugged in.

DENISE
Between going to Mass ... and living your life.

CLIFF
How can you practice if it's not plugged in?

DENISE
Which is totally twisted 'cause--if you're going to even bother to have a religion, you ought to like, you know, *live it*.

CLIFF
I guess you save energy that way, if it's not plugged in.

DENISE
Trying to work something out.

CLIFF
A new form of music? Like John Cage? Only worse?

DENISE
Can't plug in before 10. Dad's rules.

CLIFF

Wise man, my father.

(A beat)

DENISE

So did you talk to Brian and Scott?

CLIFF

About?

DENISE

The benefit. (off Cliff) For the earthquake victims?

CLIFF

I'm not really into global issues.

DENISE

It's not optional, Cliff. You live in the world, you are "into" global issues.

CLIFF

Please.

DENISE

We're talking about human suffering!

CLIFF

Human suffering? Is that like, when I'm up till three, studying for my chemistry exam?

DENISE

No. It's like when you're 10 years old, and you've got nothing to eat ... and your mother just died of AIDS.

CLIFF

Way too early for this.

DENISE

That's the reality for millions of people, Cliff ... And we just make it worse. By the way we live in this country.

CLIFF

And I'm supposed to fix that, exactly how? By not eating Cheerios?

DENISE

It's a start.

CLIFF

No Cheerios. Got it.

DENISE

If one person makes one small change ... another person will follow ... and another. And before you know it, a global movement is born.

CLIFF

Hey. I refuse to be part of any global movement that would have me as a member.

DENISE

You're pathetic.

CLIFF

And you're naive. If you think people are starving to death 'cause I eat Cheerios for breakfast. It's like, some big diamond cartel or some warlord in Zimbabwe. Or something. Believe me, I could like turn into a Franciscan monk overnight and eat nothing but worms and dirt for the rest of my life--and there would *still* be starving kids in Africa.

DENISE

What a convenient philosophy. 'Why should I care? It's out of my hands.'

CLIFF

It is out of my hands. Out of your hands, too.

DENISE

I don't believe that. And a lot of your friends don't believe it either. So if you stay home tomorrow night, you'll be the only one.

CLIFF

No, I won't. (leaning in) Phillies versus The Mets. 7 o'clock. Channel 17.

He sits back with a smug grin.

DENISE

You are a selfish pig, you know that?

CLIFF

It's so interesting how, whenever you lose an argument with me-- it's because I'm a pig.

He goes for the cereal as Denise gets up and marches out

CLIFF (CONT'D)

And for your information--a pig is not selfish. It's acting in rational self-interest by eating as much as it can. Thank you very much.

He snarfs cereal from the box. A beat and Denise returns. She studies him, and with a concerted change in tone,

DENISE

Cliff. If you come to the benefit. It would mean a lot to me. Mom and Dad and Jill are coming. And if you came, my whole family would be there ... and that would make me feel really, really good.

A beat as he takes her in,

DENISE (CONT'D)

So I hope you will think about it.

With dignity, she goes off again. Cliff eyes the audience.

CLIFF

Okay, I was a dick. I didn't go to the benefit. And I didn't ask about it either. Even when I heard it was a big deal, and they raised like fifteen hundred dollars or something, I made a point *not* to ask her about it. I made a point not to do a lot of things. Like take out the garbage when it was my turn. Or wait for her at the bus stop. Or lend her money when she came up short for her share of the pizza. I ate her share of the pizza. (beat) And then one day, she disappears.

Light shift to late night as Cliff picks up the video remote,

CLIFF (CONT'D)

... and becomes *The Forbidden Subject*: She Who Cannot Be Named. Because if you make the mistake of talking about it, your mom spends the rest of the night crying in the kitchen---

He settles on the couch.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

While your Dad sits in the rec room, with the remote in his hand -- staring at a blank TV....

He turns on the video again. Now that he is alone, he allows himself to feel the full weight of what he sees.

You figure it out pretty fast, what not to say.

As Jill enters,

JILL

Cliff?

He turns off the video abruptly.

JILL (CONT'D)
Were you watching it again?

CLIFF
Just ... flipping channels.

JILL
Can't you sleep?

CLIFF
I sleep fine. (beat as he gets busy) Got a paper due.

Jill picks up the remote and turns on the video. She looks to Cliff, who steadfastly ignores her.

JILL
I can understand. If you think we shouldn't try anything, but --- (bravely) We should at least tell Daddy about this.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
Good idea. Then he and Mom can get into another fight.

JILL
They have a right to know.

CLIFF
Know what? (off Jill) Somebody saw her at a mall. That's all we know.

JILL
We know where she is now.... And we know she's not happy.

CLIFF
Just 'cause peddling carnations isn't your idea of a good time--

JILL
(cutting him off)
How could anybody be happy doing that?

CLIFF
Easy. She's with her friends. She's saving the world. For her, that's Nirvana.

JILL
Get serious, Cliff.

CLIFF
I'm totally serious. (a shift in tone) But look, you want to tell them, be my guest. Maybe this time, Dad will get a clue-- and instead of calling the cops, he'll hire a private eye.

JILL

Very funny.

CLIFF

And they can lock her in a motel room until she comes to her senses.

JILL

Something *happened* to her! Don't you even wonder what it was?

CLIFF

We know what it was. She went to college. And met that Elijah dude.

JILL

It's more than that.

CLIFF

That's totally it. She thinks he's hot. And now she's chasing him around. Like girls do.

JILL

Oh get out!

CLIFF

Girls do it. They get all, "He's everything to me!" -- and totally go off the deep end.

JILL

When did Neechie ever do that?

CLIFF

Uh, last October? When we went up to Amherst to see her?

A light shift to a college campus --
and Denise returns in memory.

DENISE

Jill! Over here!

Jill turns. Denise is dressed more conservatively now, a look that startles Jill.

CLIFF

You remember how freaky friendly she was?

Cliff watches from the couch as Denise rushes to Jill and embraces her.

JILL

Neechie!

DENISE
Praise be you got here safe!

Jill gives Cliff a quizzical look.

DENISE (CONT'D)
(releasing Jill)
How was the drive? Okay?

CLIFF
(crossing into the memory)
Got stuck in traffic and almost ran out of gas.

DENISE
Oh, no!

Denise tries for a hug. He backs off.

CLIFF
What are you doing?

DENISE (CONT'D)
I'm glad to see you. I know you're secretly glad to see me.
(poking at him) Admit, it Cliff. Come on--

CLIFF
(in the memory)
Okay, all right! Just don't get extreme about it.

DENISE
I can't help it. It's how I feel right now!

JILL
What's going on? Did you get another band together?

CLIFF
Another band? What happened to the first one?

JILL
They split up.

CLIFF
Missed that news.

DENISE
You can't expect to keep playing together when you're at
different schools. But it's okay. Things are coming together--
in the most amazing way.

JILL
What happened?

DENISE
Well ...

Enter Elijah, briskly and cheerfully,
with a Bible.

Oh. JILL

You must be Jill. ELIJAH

Hi. JILL

I'm Elijah. ELIJAH

From my fellowship? DENISE

Great to meet you. I know Denise is so excited to have you here. ELIJAH

What fellowship? CLIFF
(to Jill)

The most fantastic church. DENISE

And you have to be Cliff. ELIJAH

Yeah, when I have to be, I guess I am. CLIFF

Funny guy. I like that. ELIJAH

Thanks. CLIFF

Denise has told me so much about you---she says you're a history buff? World War II? ELIJAH

Not really-- CLIFF

You've got like, 200 books or something? ELIJAH

Not 200. A few. CLIFF

JILL

Most of it's videos.

ELIJAH

Videos. You want to make movies?

CLIFF

Nah, I just. You know. It's. An interesting ... period ... In history.

ELIJAH

It's fascinating. A time when people really stepped up--made sacrifices. Pulled together. You knew who the enemy was. And who the good guys were.

CLIFF

I guess so.

ELIJAH

I totally get it--but I imagine you get some grief for it? From the other kids?

CLIFF

(taken aback because it's true)

Once in a while, maybe

ELIJAH

No surprise. Most kids your age don't have that kind of focus. To really dig into a subject. Make yourself an expert. That's a rare quality. I admire that.

CLIFF

Um--yeah. I've read a lot of stuff--memoirs lately. Escape from Colditz? It's totally a true story.

ELIJAH

(with genuine enthusiasm)

That sounds fantastic! I really want to hear more about it. But I know you guys have catching up to do, so--great to meet you. (to Denise) See you at dinner.

DENISE

Okay.

As she watches Elijah go.

CLIFF

(to Jill, in the present)

Look at that. Look at the way she looks at him.

DENISE

I hope you don't mind. Elijah's coming with us to the diner.

CLIFF

It was totally that guy.

JILL

(in the present, off Cliff)

Elijah wasn't her boyfriend.

CLIFF

(in the present)

Maybe not then.

JILL

(in the present)

Not ever. She told me so.

DENISE

(still in the past)

Isn't he terrific! The fellowship has really turned my life around. Everybody is so warm and accepting! (warming into it) And the man who started it? Reverend Douglas. Was this business guy who was all into money and everything? But now he has this network of, like, mission houses--and we've got this soup kitchen on Tuesdays. Oh! And I'm gonna start a literacy program there. It was totally my idea--and everybody was like, YES! Praise be!

CLIFF

(underneath, to Jill)

Mom's gonna freak.

DENISE

I just really feel--like I have a purpose now! (off Jill) So. Where's Mom?

JILL

(in the past)

Looking for a parking space.

CLIFF

(in the past)

Yeah--and if I were you, I wouldn't be all that psyched to see her.

DENISE

Why not?

CLIFF

Uh, she's got some "*business* with you?"

Cliff nods towards Jill

JILL

(wincing)

I kind of ...sort of ... let it slip? What you told me in your last email?

DENISE

She's upset.

JILL

Uh. Not upset. I mean, not *upset* upset. Just. She thinks you should give it more time...

DENISE

I want to make a difference in the world.

JILL

But nursing school?

CLIFF

Yeah, what's up with that? I thought you were gonna be some super-lawyer for the homeless. Or something.

DENISE

Law school... it's so academic-- I want something hands on.

CLIFF

Emptying bed pans. That's really hands on.

JILL

Hey! Why not medical school? I can totally see you as, like, a neurosurgeon!

DENISE

(an exasperated sigh)

Jill--

JILL

Or like--doing heart transplants! That would be way cool.

DENISE

(with finality)

We've already prayed about it.

CLIFF

We?

DENISE

The fellowship. (a beat) When you have a life choice to make? We all pray together. And--don't laugh. Elijah laid his hands on me.

Denise puts her hands on Jill's head

DENISE

Like this. And when he did--I felt the Spirit come to me. And now I'm sure. This is what the Lord wants.

CLIFF

The Lord told you that personally?

Jill giggles in spite of herself.
Denise pulls her hands away.

DENISE

(hurt)

I knew you wouldn't get it.

JILL

Necie

Denise crosses off to a point opposite where Elijah is sitting, reading the Bible.

JILL

Necie! (calling after) We were just kidding ...

Elijah and Denise move off. Defeated,
Jill returns to the rec room ...

JILL (CONT'D)

(in the present)

You shouldn't have done that.

CLIFF

(following her)

You shouldn't have blabbed about that email.

JILL

That's probably when she decided you were toxic. When you made fun of her.

CLIFF

(sharply)

You're the one who laughed.

A beat

JILL

You think that's it? (choking back tears) You think it's my fault?

CLIFF

Oh man.

JILL
 (breaking down)
 I didn't mean to laugh at her ...

She cries.

JILL
 It was just ... so weird---

Cliff watches her with a growing sense
 of guilt. He sighs.

CLIFF
 Okay. All right! It's not your fault. It's my fault! Okay? I
 shouldn't've made fun of her!

Jill sniffles

CLIFF
 But, man! She used to be able to take a joke!

JILL
 If we could only talk to her. I could apologize.

CLIFF
 Yeah. And I could tell her how messed up things are.

A beat

JILL
 I really miss her. You know?

She gazes at him.

JILL
 (plaintive)
 Don't you miss her?

She looks at him pleadingly. Finally
 Cliff can take it no longer,

CLIFF
 Oh what the hell.

JILL
 Oh--oh, Cliffy!

CLIFF
 Don't call me Cliffy. And don't hug me!

She retreats ...

CLIFF

And--whatever you do--this has got to be a secret mission.
Okay? We can't say anything to Mom.

JILL

No. For sure.

CLIFF

Or Dad. Especially not Dad.

JILL

Okay.

CLIFF

If we find her. Then we can say something.

JILL

When we find her.

CLIFF

We might not find her.

JILL

We'll find her. We just have to have faith.

CLIFF

You can have faith. I'm going with reality. (to the audience)
And so it was decided: An undercover reconnaissance
operation. Behind enemy lines--disguised as ordinary citizens--
- our mission is to gain the confidence of the enemy--and
find the hostage.

As Duffy enters cheerfully w/knapsack,
dressed for a casual weekend.

DUFFY

Dude, great news!

CLIFF

You got your brakes fixed?

DUFFY

Scott says we can crash with him!

CLIFF

Not literally, I hope.

DUFFY

Plus they're having a party Saturday night.

JILL

There's a party?

DUFFY

My brother's fraternity. Denise might wanna come.

JILL
That's why you're going? For Scott's party?

DUFFY
Just a fringe benefit. After hours kind of thing.

JILL
Does Mom know about this?

CLIFF
(sarcastic)
Oh yeah. She knows all about it. (aside) Dipwad. (to Jill)
Like I'm gonna tell her?

DUFFY
What did you tell her?

CLIFF
We're camping in the Poconos. With your Dad. What did you
tell your folks?

DUFFY
I said we were going to see Scott.

CLIFF
Hunh.

JILL
The truth. What a concept. (to Duffy) I'll get my stuff.

DUFFY
She's going, too?

CLIFF
No she is not.

JILL
Yes she is. Somebody has to make sure things get done.

CLIFF
Things will get done. Don't you worry.

DUFFY
I always get things done.

JILL
Between parties?

CLIFF
No way you can go. You're command central.

JILL
Command central?

CLIFF

The most important job, Jill. Keep an eye on Mom? Here's my phone. Hit 6 for Duffy.

DUFFY

Where's hers?

CLIFF

Locked in Dad's desk at the moment.

JILL

He says I need to unplug.

CLIFF

Yeah, we'll call it that. Now, here's the deal: If Mom calls--don't answer. Text only.

JILL

Text only.

CLIFF

Here's what you send:

He consults a sheet of paper.

CLIFF

At two o'clock, "Hi Mom. On a hike. Saw an eagle."

JILL

Get real.

CLIFF

This is serious. Seven o'clock--"stuffed on hot dogs. No room for beer. Ha, ha."

JILL

Ha, ha.

CLIFF

Ten o'clock, "nite Mom, luv U." Sunday morning---

JILL

(grabbing the paper)

Okay--I get it!

CLIFF

And if you hear from her--text us. We'll take it from there. Otherwise--

JILL

(looking at paper)

Hike, eagle, hot dogs, blah blah blah. And you'll call me, right? The minute you see Neechie?

CLIFF

No worries.

JILL

(to herself)

Right.

She crosses off as Cliff and Duffy pull two chairs together to indicate Duffy's car.

DUFFY

So Dude. Scott's roommate says there's this rockin' nun we really need to meet.

CLIFF

A nun?

DUFFY

Sister Jean. With Campus Ministry? She like specializes in crazed religious types.

CLIFF

What, other nuns?

DUFFY

People who get mixed up in weird groups. Scott says Sister Jean is really nice.

CLIFF

She's a nun, she has to be nice.

DUFFY

Not really, dude. I mean some nuns--hey.

CLIFF

What do you know about nuns?

DUFFY

I'm just saying.

CLIFF

(cutting him off)

Nothing.

A beat as Duffy drives.

CLIFF

You do know how to get there, right?

Duffy gives him a dirty look. He stops the car, and consults a GPS app. As he programs it,

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(to audience) Not starting well. (looking at Duffy) Like, how many times did the Dirty Dozen stop for directions?

DUFFY

If we take the turnpike, man, it's a toll.

CLIFF

What is it, two dollars? Take the freakin' turnpike!

Annoyed, Duffy starts the car.

DUFFY

Okay, Dude. But you're buying lunch.

CLIFF

And it goes from there--

The boys settle in, as if driving in silence for a while, and are bored.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Forty miles up the highway, my stomach starts turning inside out. Like, what am I gonna say to Denise when I see her? She already has 'The Answer.'

Denise enters, seen only by Cliff.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

I know what I want to say.

Denise appears in Cliff's imagination with Elijah. He is carrying a Bible. Elijah points out a passage in the Bible and hands it to her. She finds a carnation between the pages.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Listen, it's your life, okay? (crossing to her?) And I know you've found God and everything---which is cool, but we kind of need you to come home now 'cause Mom blames Dad and Dad blames her and neither one is saying much to anybody. Which makes for really fun family dinners?

He waits for an answer

CLIFF

You kinda dropped a big honkin' stink bomb in the middle of everything, okay?

He waits for an answer

CLIFF (CONT'D)

And I'd appreciate it if you'd come home and clean it up.

No response.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

It's not like you have to stay.

The lesson ends; embraces are exchanged and Elijah leaves. Denise remains for a moment, studying the carnation ...

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Just call home once in a while?

DUFFY

Dude?

Denise looks to Cliff. She blows him a kiss and crosses away, carrying Elijah's bible.

CLIFF

What I really want to ask her, though ... is: how are you so sure?

DUFFY

Sure of what?

CLIFF

(back to Duffy)

That there is a God. And not only that---He's the kind of God that wants her to do the stuff she's doing.

DUFFY

Sure there's a God.

CLIFF

How do you know?

DUFFY

There has to be.

CLIFF

Why?

DUFFY

Figure it out, man: If there's no God, then where did we come from?

CLIFF

The Big Bang.

DUFFY

And where'd that come from?

CLIFF

Gaseous matter.

DUFFY

And where'd the gas come from?

CLIFF

It was always here.

DUFFY

And if gas can always be here, then so can God. So: There's a God.

CLIFF

Your logic is amazing.

DUFFY

Not about logic. It's about belief. You either believe or you don't.

CLIFF

And if you don't?

DUFFY

Ask me: You're better off believing than not. 'Cause if there is a God--and you don't believe it. Man, you're toast.

Duffy's phone goes off.

DUFFY (CONT'D)

Talk to me.... Hold on. (to Cliff) Jill.

CLIFF

(grabbing the phone)

Didn't I tell you text only?...

Lights up on/ or enter Jill opposite.

JILL

I know, I know, but I thought of something. It might be important when you go see Sister Jean.

CLIFF

Sister Jean?

JILL

Brian said you're gonna see her today?

CLIFF

Oh he did? (to Duffy) I didn't know we had a meeting.

DUFFY

No meeting--just. If we have time...

JILL

I've been trying to figure out. What it was we did. And I keep going back to last Thanksgiving.

Denise enters again,

JILL (CONT'D)

I never said anything about this because

She turns to Denise.

DENISE

You've got to promise me this time. Not a word.

JILL

I swear, Neechie.

DENISE

Especially to Cliff.

JILL

Especially Cliff.

CLIFF

(watching this)

Pfff!

DENISE

(eagerly, drawing her aside)

You know the man I told you about? Douglas, our founder?

JILL

Right. The reverend.

DENISE

I finally met him. In New York. Until last week--I only saw him on the videos. Jill, it was so amazing. (with urgency) He thinks *I* have a special gift.

JILL.

Uh huh.

DENISE

He took my hands in his. And he said: "Denise. You can do so much good---for so many people. If you could only commit to our work. Truly commit." You know what that means? I have been *chosen*.

CLIFF

(into the phone)

Chosen. She really said that?

JILL
(to Cliff)
Just listen will you?

DENISE
Why are you looking that way?

JILL
What way?

DENISE
That dark look. You're judging.

JILL
No. Neechie--

DENISE
Just like Cliff. So cynical.

JILL
Neechie--I'm not judging. I'm -- So. What is, what is *chosen*?

DENISE
(plainly)
Everyone has a gift. But God favors one gift over all the others.

JILL
What gift?

DENISE
(with pride) The gift of intensity.

JILL
Intensity?

DENISE
(with affection) I know you don't get it, Jill, but---I've never felt this kind of love before.

CLIFF
What is she talking about, nobody loves her? How much did that freaking guitar of hers cost? Dad didn't bat an eye.

JILL
(to Cliff)
Will you shut up for two minutes and let me talk? (back to Denise). But we love you Neechie.

DENISE
Not like this. Everyone around you is so full of joy and purpose and passion. There's no criticism, just acceptance. (a beat) Come with me some time, you'll see.

JILL
Come to the fellowship?

DENISE
Come to New York--come and meet Douglas--experience it.

JILL
I don't think Mom would go for that.

DENISE
She doesn't have to know.

JILL
You want me to lie to Mom?

DENISE
She doesn't get it, Jill! I need someone to get it.

JILL
I couldn't go without her permission.

Denise backs away.

DENISE
If you really loved me, you would.

This hits hard.

JILL
Neechie.

And Denise is gone ...

CLIFF
Oh, man.

JILL
Do you think that's why I'm toxic, Cliff? 'Cause I didn't go to New York?

CLIFF
She can't really believe that, can she?

JILL
Will you ask Sister Jean about that?

CLIFF
She can't think nobody cares about her.

JILL
Ask if that's why I'm toxic.

CLIFF
Okay. If we see her, I'll ask. But next time--text me.

He hangs up. Jill mouths the word 'dick' at the phone in her hand, then crosses off.

DUFFY

What's up?

CLIFF

Just Jill and her weird theories. Isn't that our exit?

DUFFY

Oh right.

A sharp swerve.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(to the audience)

And so the moment of truth arrives. We are to meet the enemy on the field of battle ...

DUFFY

This is the place!

CLIFF

... a parking lot in Cental Jersey ... armed only with our wits ... and ... (a look to Duffy) our wits.

DUFFY

Now here's my plan.

CLIFF

Your plan?

DUFFY

I drop you here. And I'll park near the Starbucks down there. You go into the McDonald's and wait. Act like you don't know me.

CLIFF

(to audience)

Never good when Duffy has a plan.

DUFFY

And I'll go up to them. Very cool. Like I wanna join up. Put these on.

He hands Cliff a pair of James Bond-like sunglasses.

CLIFF

Listen, dude--

DUFFY

And this. (handing him a baseball cap) When it's safe I'll give you the signal.

CLIFF

You're going in alone?

DUFFY

Suppose she sees you and freaks out? The last thing you want, right?

Cliff puts on the sunglasses and cap.

CLIFF

You sure this is the right place?

DUFFY

Totally.

CLIFF

'Cause---I kind of ... don't ... see anybody....

Duffy scans the lot.

DUFFY

Maybe they're around back.

They break as light shifts to an interior of a fast-food restaurant. Others might enter and reintroduce the table, a few more chairs to create the sense of the restaurant, with a bored clerk behind the counter.

CLIFF

Now what?

DUFFY

Maybe they're working a different mall today.

CLIFF

A different mall.

DUFFY

Maybe they like, you know, switch off. Or something.

CLIFF

So we just drive around until we see them?

DUFFY

You got any better ideas?

Cliff notices the clerk glaring at him.

CLERK
Take your order?

CLIFF
We're looking for someone.

DUFFY
Some kids selling carnations?

CLERK
Ugh.

DUFFY
You've seen them?

CLERK
Who could miss 'em. They're here almost every day.

CLIFF
They're not here now.

CLERK
Yeah, thank God.

CLIFF
You know where they went?

CLERK
My manager got sick of 'em and called security. That's all I know.

DUFFY
When was this?

CLERK
I dunno--Thursday, maybe.

DUFFY
And you haven't seen them since?

CLERK
No--and I hope I never do. They are seriously creepy. All smiley--and plastic--wanting money. And your soul.

CLIFF
So ... you like, actually talked to them?

CLERK
I tried not to? But they won't leave you alone. They like, come at you, three at a time. Especially this one girl--real intense.

CLIFF
Intense how?

CLERK

She was, like, on fire? Like if you didn't give 'em five dollars--you were the most selfish person in the world?

DUFFY

Is this her?

He has produced a picture of Denise from his wallet. Clerk takes it.

CLIFF

Where'd you get that?

DUFFY

Senior picture. You must have one.

CLIFF

I don't carry it around with me.

CLERK

Yeah. I think it was her. Yeah. Her hair was different, though.

She hands the picture back, but Cliff takes it.

DUFFY

We really need to find her. So if she said anything--

CLERK

Like what?

DUFFY

Anything.

CLIFF

Like an address.

CLERK

An address?

DUFFY

(off Cliff)

Like where they hang out?

CLIFF

Or live. Did they say anything about where they live?

CLERK

They just ask for money and talk about Jesus.

DUFFY

And there were three of them?

CLERK

Three girls. Look. If you're not gonna order--I've kinda got stuff to do?

DUFFY

No problem.

CLIFF

You've been a big help. (sourly, as he moves away) A real big help.

DUFFY

Patience, dude. We're on the trail.

CLIFF

What trail? We don't even know where she went.

DUFFY

Okay, so. Let's drive up the strip. See what we find.

CLIFF

Why don't we just throw darts at a map?

DUFFY

Hey. You are way, way too negative. How 'bout a shake?

Cliff gestures his surrender; the clerk tosses a milkshake to Duffy. A light shift, and the scene transforms again, to Duffy and Cliff in the car. They settle in. Sounds of traffic on a heavily traveled retail strip. Duffy loudly slurps his milkshake as Cliff stares out the window.

CLIFF

That was a good idea, actually. To bring this picture.

DUFFY

Thanks.

CLIFF

Wouldn't even occur to me, to bring a picture.

DUFFY

Well, you know. I have some experience in these things.

CLIFF

What experience?

DUFFY

We lost our dog once.

CLIFF

This is like, so not the same thing.

DUFFY

Same principle. Appeal to people's sympathy--jog their memories--show a picture. You know.

A beat. Cliff absorbs this, pockets the photo as Duffy finishes his milkshake.

DUFFY

So. If you want to save souls and sell flowers--where do you go?

CLIFF

Where there are lots of souls ... and no flowers.

DUFFY

Where there are miserable souls. People who have like, a, you know, spiritual vacuum at the center of their lives.

CLIFF

A shopping mall?

DUFFY

Frat house.

CLIFF

(without enthusiasm)

Oh yeah. Absolutely.

DUFFY

Saturday night at Tau Kappa Epsilon. You've never seen so many lonely, messed up people.

CLIFF

Considering these guys are total Bible-thumping religious freaks? I kind doubt they're into beer blasts?

DUFFY

I'm just saying--if I wanted to recruit people to my church--- I'd look for somebody like that. Like, the nerdiest girl at the party. That's who you wanna tap.

CLIFF

Yeah, except--as we both agree--Denise wasn't exactly a nerd.

DUFFY

I'm talking strategy, man. General strategy.

CLIFF

(to the audience)

And that's when I see her. This girl, walking by herself. With a handful of carnations.

He stares at something the audience
does not see.

CLIFF

Dude.

Duffy looks

CLIFF

(to the audience)

She's on the median. Crossing away from us. (to Duffy) Pull
over.

DUFFY

You got it.

Cliff slips on the sunglasses

CLIFF

Cover me.

DUFFY

Wait--hold it--

And Cliff abruptly leaves the car--

DUFFY

Dude!--Hey!

Sound of traffic as Rebecca appears.
Duffy observes for a moment before
leaving the stage.

CLIFF

(to the audience)

I get a good look at her now. It's not Denise. But still--
she's by herself. Outside this video store.

Rebecca fixes on Cliff, as he tries to
adopt an attitude of coolness.

CLIFF

How ya doin'?

REBECCA

Hello.

(blocking him)

Would you care to buy one? Everything goes to the World
Hunger Project.

CLIFF

World Hunger, huh?

REBECCA

A five dollar donation?

CLIFF

Well--

REBECCA

I know that seems like a lot, but it's for a very good cause. Millions of people go hungry every day. And your donation will buy rice. And milk.

CLIFF

You have, like, a brochure or something?

REBECCA

Brochure?

CLIFF

You know. Like explaining what this World Hunger Project is?

REBECCA

(by rote)

The World Hunger Project is an ecumenical effort that has raised millions of dollars worldwide to fight hunger in developing countries. If you cannot afford five dollars--- even one dollar will help.

CLIFF

(digging into his pocket for a dollar)

Are you out here alone?

REBECCA

I'm never alone. I always have the Lord with me. // Looking over me.

CLIFF

(on //)

I meant your friends---

REBECCA

As God watches over you. God is watching over you.

CLIFF

So like---where is this church anyway?

REBECCA

And God blesses those who help the poor.

CLIFF

Your church. Can you just give me the address? I'd love to check it out some time.

REBECCA
Even a dollar will help.

CLIFF
Where do you live then?

REBECCA
Even a dollar---.

He grabs her arm.

CLIFF
Just tell me where you live!

Rebecca looks at him, panicked, then
pulls away. Duffy appears on the scene.
He observes as,

CLIFF (CONT'D)
I'll give you 10 dollars if you tell me where you live.

REBECCA
Please!

Rebecca starts to run--

CLIFF
Wait--don't you want my money?

And she is gone.

DUFFY
Dude. What are you doing? Have you lost it?

CLIFF
I just wanted the address.

DUFFY
You freaked her out, man.

CLIFF
Okay, so that was the wrong move.

DUFFY
This is not the plan!

CLIFF
Screw the plan! We're not getting anywhere with your stupid
plans.

DUFFY
You might if you actually followed them.

DUFFY's phone goes off.

DUFFY (CONT'D)
Talk to me. (to Cliff) Jill.

CLIFF
Tell her we're working on it.

DUFFY
We're working on it. (A beat, then) She says talk to her or she's telling your mother where you really are.

CLIFF grabs the phone.

CLIFF
Now what?

Lights up on Jill, opposite

JILL
Have you seen Neechie yet?

CLIFF
Not yet.

JILL
Just as well. 'Cause I got ahold of Sister Jean. She can see you at four o'clock.

CLIFF
What, you're making appointments for me now?

JILL
And she said to tell you absolutely come see her before you even try to talk to Denise. Can you get into your gmail account?

CLIFF
Not at this exact moment, no.

JILL
Well, she sent me this article. And I forwarded it to you. Get this---this church Neechie goes to? It isn't just called the Disciples? (with excitement) It's the True. Disciples. Mission. For Christ.

CLIFF
Oh. That clears up everything.

JILL
Plus: This guy, who started it? Know what he did originally?

CLIFF
Clue me in.

JILL
Sold vacuum cleaners.

CLIFF
Vacuum cleaners? What like, Dirt Devil?

DUFFY perks up, listening,
JILL
Now that. Is weird.

CLIFF
Not to defend the guy, Jill? But just 'cause he sold vacuum
cleaners before he became a minister---it's not a crime.

JILL
Not before. During. He sold them while he was doing his first
Church. In California. (beat) Cliff? Are you there?

CLIFF
Uh huh.

JILL
Four o'clock, Cliff. She's really busy, // so don't blow--

CLIFF
(on //)
I'll call you back.

He hangs up. Jill, opposite, mouths a
curse and crosses off. A look at Duffy.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
She said--

DUFFY
I heard.

CLIFF
Vacuum cleaners.

DUFFY
Yeah. (beat) Well. I guess it takes a while. Huh? Till your
church pays off?

CLIFF
I guess.

Another beat. Then they look at each
other, then burst out laughing.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
Vacuum cleaners. Man.

They fall silent, then serious.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

It's not funny.

DUFFY

No.

CLIFF

So not funny.

A beat.

CLIFF

We can get wireless on campus, right?

Light shift. They break as the scene transforms to the quad.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(to audience)

And there is more: How he claimed to be a graduate of a Bible College that didn't exist.

DUFFY

A vacuum cleaner salesman.

Duffy reads from his iPhone or other device.

CLIFF

Preaching this New Age/Enviro-Gospel--

DUFFY

Do good to feel good, dude.

CLIFF

Faith in Action. Gimme a break.

DUFFY

It must pay pretty well ...

He points something out to Cliff.

CLIFF

That's his house?

DUFFY

Swimming pool. Olympic size.

CLIFF

Where is this?

DUFFY

Marble tile. Sweet.

CLIFF

How can he afford that?

Cliff grabs the tablet.

DUFFY

I'm still reading that--

CLIFF

"It is virtually impossible to know how much of the money raised for The World Hunger Project ends up in Douglas Carter's ... pocket... but it appears to be substantial."

DUFFY

Five dollars for a carnation. There you go.

CLIFF

"Some of the funds do go for their intended purpose ..." (to Duffy) She talked about him ... like he was the Second Coming.

DUFFY

Pretty pathetic.

CLIFF

Mr. Amazing. And Dad said. That house in Amherst. Had like 10 kids in it? And almost no furniture ...

DUFFY

Better hope they don't find out about that Olympic pool.

CLIFF

How could anybody fall for this?

DUFFY

'Cause I'd be so outta there, man.

Beat

CLIFF

There's no way she knows about this. The one thing Denise hates. Is a hypocrite.

DUFFY

Guess we could enlighten her.

CLIFF

We've gotta find that house.

They break and shift the chairs again
as scene transforms to Sister's office.

CLIFF

This Sister Jean--I bet she knows where they are. We'll get that address from her.

Sister Jean enters briskly, opposite, with some files. She is youthful--not wearing a habit, but street clothes and a cross on a pendant or lapel pin. The boys turn to her as light bumps into the new scene.

SISTER

What address?

CLIFF

For the house.

SISTER

What house?

DUFFY

Where they're living now. That's their thing--they like, live together in these church houses--

CLIFF

Mission houses. Yeah.

DUFFY

And so we figure. They've got one here, too, right?

CLIFF

We just need to find it.

SISTER

I see. And when you get the address. Your plan is, what? Go down there and ...?

CLIFF

Talk to her.

DUFFY

Tell her about the Reverend.

CLIFF

Show her those stories you sent us.

DUFFY

That one article? Wow.

Beat.

CLIFF

And ... the pictures. We'll show her pictures.

DUFFY

The Olympic pool?

A longer beat.

SISTER

Okay. Let's get a couple things straight. First of all: What you're not going to do? Is go down there and knock on the front door.

CLIFF

But--

SISTER

That is not going to happen, okay?

CLIFF

She's--

SISTER

Listen to me. Do you want to find your sister or not?

CLIFF

Sure I want to find her.

SISTER

Then why are you arguing with me?

CLIFF

(mollified)

Right.

SISTER

Now. How about we take a deep breath here? And talk strategy.

DUFFY

Strategy. Cool.

As she sorts through a file.

SISTER

The thing you need to know: This outfit. Is an approved religious group of the university. As of this semester, it's official. They're authorized to meet here. Every Wednesday night. 204 Harris Hall. You should check it out, it's a trip.

She produces a flier. Duffy takes it.

DUFFY

(reading)

New on campus? Feeling lost? Join us for fun and fellowship.

SISTER

With a pizza, too. I'd sign up for that.

DUFFY

Doesn't look so bad.

SISTER

Not bad at all. But let me tell you. It turns my stomach, seeing those around campus. No, you keep it. There's plenty more in the residence halls. (beat as she sorts through another file) The second thing you need to know: The True Disciples are really, really good ... at playing the victim game. 'You don't like us? Don't like the way we do things? You must be anti-Christian.' That's rich. But people who are in a position to know better ... somehow miss the fact. That they are being played. For instance ...

She produces a photograph

CLIFF

Is that--?

SISTER

Yeah, that's your guy. The Reverend Douglas Carter. Good-looking dude. Very smooth. I've met him. But more important: the man on the left? (off Cliff) My Bishop.

DUFFY

Whoa.

CLIFF

What is this?

SISTER

Prayer breakfast in Metuchen. It was taken last year. (said with distaste) An ecumenical breakfast. That's the buzz-word these days. (brightly) Ecumenical. And just so we're clear? Where I'm coming from? Is not some old school, pre-Vatican II 'One True Church' kind of crap. Okay? Theology has nothing to do with it.

CLIFF

(not getting it)

Yeah, okay.

SISTER

And when I hear stories like yours--it really ticks me off that people call me an alarmist. Because I know: What happened to your sister was no accident. It's part of the business plan.

A beat.

SISTER

But. You can't go around saying that. And the last thing I need right now ...

is for the Bishop to get an angry phone call from the good Reverend. Claiming I am sending people down to harrass his flock.

CLIFF

Okay, so we don't go to the house.

DUFFY

We just need to find her, you know. That's all. Just get her alone ... so we can talk.

SISTER

Get her alone. Yeah. That's the problem. The Disciples. Are what we call a shepherding organization.

CLIFF

Shepherding?

SISTER

They are really into "guiding" their members? Through every life decision.... large and small. You are always guided by the group. It's hard to catch any of them alone.

DUFFY

We saw one girl alone. At the strip mall.

SISTER

One of the Disciples?

DUFFY

Pretty sure. Kozak tried to talk to her.

SISTER

And how did that go?

Cliff shrugs

DUFFY

Not so good.

SISTER

I promise you. She wasn't alone. One of her shepherds was nearby, I'm sure. (shifting gears) Okay. What would really help me, right now--is to get a better handle on what went down with your sister. (as she starts to take notes) Now I know it's upsetting. But I need some details. So: She joined the church--your family disapproved--

CLIFF

My Mom was pretty upset. My dad didn't get all that bent ... until Christmas.

SISTER

What happened at Christmas?

CLIFF

She wouldn't come home. Wanted to stay with the church.

SISTER

And?

CLIFF

And he goes like, off the deep end. Yelling--"she's coming home whether she wants to or not"--and goes charging on up there--

He stops, more upset than he wants her to see.

DUFFY

But they don't let him see her. So he threatens to come back with the cops.

SISTER

And the cops say there's nothing they can do.

DUFFY

Right.

SISTER

Because she's over 18.

DUFFY

Exactly.

SISTER

So he goes back to get her without them.

DUFFY

You know this story?

SISTER

Unfortunately, yeah. Same play, different cast. So what, he gets there and she's gone?

DUFFY

Without a trace.

CLIFF

Which is what my Mom was afraid would happen. She told him! You can't force her--she told him! Why didn't he freaking listen to her?

SISTER

He panicked.

CLIFF

(after a beat)

My dad?

SISTER

He knew your sister was in trouble. And he didn't know what to do.

CLIFF

Still. He shoulda listened to my mom.

SISTER

I'm sure he knows that now.

A beat.

CLIFF

The thing is--okay, it's her life?--and she can believe whatever she wants? But why cut me off? If she's pissed at my Dad? What makes me so 'toxic'?

DUFFY

We're all toxic, man.

CLIFF

But why? What did we do?

SISTER

You're a skeptic. And I imagine you don't keep it to yourself. So that makes you dangerous. Plus ... your father didn't help matters. Frankly.

Another beat as she studies them.

SISTER

Which is why you didn't tell him you were coming. Right?

CLIFF

He would've wiggled out.

SISTER

And I suppose your mother has no idea, either?

CLIFF

Why get her hopes up?

SISTER

So you're on your own. That can't be very good.

CLIFF

It's. What it is.

SISTER

Okay. What makes you think you'll have better luck than your father?

(This is the first time anyone has put that question to them.)

CLIFF

I'm not him.

DUFFY

Plus, I'm along. (off Cliff) That's one big difference.

CLIFF

And we're not gonna yell at her.

DUFFY

Just show her these articles.

CLIFF

Denise hates a hypocrite.

SISTER

An appeal to reason?

CLIFF

Once she reads this stuff about the Reverend. Yeah.

SISTER

You know what they'll say to that. Lies, lies, and more lies.

DUFFY

But it's in print.

SISTER

What, you mean the anti-Christian press? Published in San Francisco? You can't trust this.

DUFFY

That's insane.

SISTER

That's the argument you're going to get. What are you going to say in response?

Beat

DUFFY

Okay, so. Maybe we need a different plan?

CLIFF

(to Sister)

What should we say?

SISTER

Depends. Why do you want her back?

CLIFF

She's my sister!

SISTER
Oh, family duty.

DUFFY
We miss her.

SISTER
I'm asking him.

CLIFF
She's. There's--a big hole. Where she used to be.

SISTER
Hmmm. And there's a hole in her life. Where you used to be.
That's what you need to focus on. Not logic. Not reason.
Need.

Sister goes to her desk and writes out
a note.

SISTER
Okay. I have someone coming in, so we'll pick this up later.
But meantime, there's someone else you really ought to see.
Her name is Simi...

DUFFY
Is she a nun too?

SISTER
Student. She's active in this group I run. Pretty open--I
think she'll talk to you.

CLIFF
About what?

SISTER
Until a few months ago--Simi was a devoted member ... of the
True Disciples. (as he takes the paper) Do yourselves a
favor, boys. Find out what you're up against. Before you go
blundering in?

Light shift. They break.

CLIFF
Oh man, this is really twisted.

DUFFY
It's not a one-day job, that's all.

CLIFF
We gotta find another way to get that address.

DUFFY

Yeah. ... About that, dude? Sister could be right: Maybe you're not the right guy for this.

CLIFF

What are you talking about, man?

DUFFY

You've got some baggage. Whereas--Denise and I--we always got along.

CLIFF

We got along.

DUFFY

You were always fighting with her.

CLIFF

That doesn't mean we didn't get along.

DUFFY

I'm just saying. She and I---well. We kind of. Had a thing.

CLIFF

What are you telling me?

DUFFY

We had a thing.

CLIFF

You hooked up with my sister?

DUFFY

I'm just saying--you know. I could tell. She was. Kind of... you know. Into me. And you know--if it wasn't for circumstances -- I mighta been into her. In a ... big way.

CLIFF

That is so not the image I want in my head right now.

DUFFY

I know she's your sister, and it's hard for you to grasp this concept--but Denise really is kind of ... hot.

CLIFF

Oh man!

DUFFY

And I just think ... you know ... that kind of attraction. Might give me some leverage.

CLIFF

Gimme your phone.

As Cliff punches a number.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Dude. I promise you. Putting the moves on Denise. Isn't the answer either.

DUFFY

Not the moves. Just--you know. My presence--

CLIFF

Your presence?

DUFFY

Could be an advantage.

As Cliff listens,

DUFFY (CONT'D)

Who you calling?

CLIFF

This handbill she gave us? There's a phone number on it.
(beat) Recording.

DUFFY

How 'bout I talk to this girl, Simi? She probably knows where the house is.

CLIFF

Okay, Duffy---how's this for a plan? I'll go see this Simi person. You go back to the strip and look for the flower girl.

DUFFY

I dunno--

CLIFF

Kill two birds, man. It's getting late.

Beat

DUFFY

Okay. But don't freak her out.

CLIFF

I won't freak her out.

DUFFY

I mean it, dude. You're way too East Coast here. Be a little more California.

CLIFF

And I'm serious about this: I don't care what kind of sick fantasies you have about my sister? I *am* the guy for this job. Okay? This is totally my mission.

DUFFY

Whatever, man.

CLIFF

So if you see Denise. Don't even talk to her. Just find a phone and call me.

DUFFY

Okay.

CLIFF

And get some burgers. I'll see you back here in forty.

Duffy goes off; Cliff is alone on stage. He pops on the sunglasses again, but with less swagger.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

California. Here we come.

Light shift to the exterior of Simi's apartment building. Simi enters-- a shy girl exploring a newly discovered freedom and is ambivalent about it.

CLIFF

Simi?

SIMI

I guess you're Cliff?

CLIFF

Yeah, uh--Sister Jean sent me?

SIMI

Yeah, she called. I thought there were two of you though.

CLIFF

Uh--he went to get some burgers.

SIMI

(offended)

He's not bringing them back here?

CLIFF

Well, he--

SIMI

I don't allow meat in my apartment.

CLIFF
Yeah, okay.

SIMI
Okay.

Beat
SIMI (CONT'D)
I can't ask you in anyway. We have to talk outside.

CLIFF
Okay.

SIMI
I know it seems rude.

CLIFF
No problem. It's a nice day.

He takes off the sunglasses, tries to
adopt an attitude of coolness.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
So.

SIMI
So.

CLIFF
Sister Jean said. I really have to talk to you.

SIMI
Have to?

CLIFF
Well. I guess she meant. Ought to. (faltering) She said you
have some ... special insight?

A silence

CLIFF (CONT'D)
I was...I was looking for my sister. She said you could tell
me what I was up against.

Simi regards him with anxiety.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
If you don't want to talk to me---that's okay. All I want is
the address.

SIMI
The address?

CLIFF

For the Disciples. Sister Jean wouldn't give it to me.

SIMI

If she wouldn't give it to you. Why should I?

CLIFF

(out of patience)

No clue, man.

He backs away.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Sorry to bother you.

SIMI

Wait... What's her name? Your sister?

CLIFF

Denise. We call her Neechie.

SIMI

You have a picture of her?

CLIFF

(surprised)

No. (remembering) Well--actually.

He produces the senior photo.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

It's an old one. I don't think she looks much like this now.

Simi hesitates examines the picture. A deep breath of recognition.

SIMI

Miriam.

CLIFF

No, Denise.

SIMI

I knew her as Miriam. (off Cliff) When you fully commit, you're rebaptized. And you choose a new name. (proudly) I was Esther. This is Miriam. A truly beautiful soul.

She hands the picture back.

SIMI (CONT'D)

I haven't seen her in months. Not since she left Amherst.

CLIFF

You were at Amherst?

SIMI
For a while. I came down here over the summer.

CLIFF
To set up the house?

SIMI
To go to school.

CLIFF
Okay. So how was she? Was she okay?

SIMI
Okay?

CLIFF
You know? Healthy ... happy?

SIMI
Happy. Oh, yes. She was very happy with us.

CLIFF
What happened? She like totally disappeared.

SIMI
She didn't disappear--

CLIFF
As far as we knew--

SIMI
She was needed in New York. That's where you should look for her. Long Island.

CLIFF
She's down here now. (off Simi) You didn't know that?

SIMI
No. What is she doing here?

CLIFF
Wish I knew. But we're toxic. So we don't get to find out.

SIMI
I see.

CLIFF
It's not like we did anything to her, either.

SIMI
People have the wrong idea about that.

CLIFF
Being toxic?

SIMI

Jean especially. She's very judgmental about it.

CLIFF

Kinda hard not to be.

SIMI

You have to make sacrifices to live that life ... Jean ought to understand it. She put her family aside, too.

CLIFF

I think this is a little different.

SIMI

It's the same thing. (softening) You put the world aside. So you can become closer to God. Anybody in a religious order does that. And if your family tries to stop you --- you have to choose God.

CLIFF

I'm not really into God? So it's kind hard for me to relate. (beat, a new tactic) But ... but I can see it's really important to you, so--so I guess you're not too happy about being out of it?

SIMI

They were my family.

CLIFF

Not your real family.

SIMI

It was home to me. That's what I meant.

CLIFF

Okay. So like--your real family? Were they toxic too?

SIMI

(a beat)

Miriam didn't cut you off to be cruel.

CLIFF

Was it something I said? Some stupid lame joke?

SIMI

Just accept it.

CLIFF

Or my dad? Was it something he did? Because if it was, why take it out on the rest of us?

SIMI

It's not about anger. It's just that Miriam. Is so much stronger. Than the rest of us.

Denise and Rebecca enter singing, a capella, an upbeat hymn such as 'I Will Call Upon the Lord' by Petra. Denise has her guitar on her shoulder. The women reposition the table to create the dining room as they sing; Simi and Cliff watch.

DENISE and REBECCA
 The Lord liveth and blessed be the Rock
 And let the God of my salvation be exalted
 The Lord liveth and blessed be the Rock
 And let the God of my salvation be exalted

REBECCA
 That was the best service yet!

DENISE
 I love that song.

REBECCA
 You should play one of yours next Sunday.

DENISE
 Maybe. I'm working on one.

REBECCA
 Truly? Can I hear it?

DENISE
 Not sure we have time. The kitchen police might object.

REBECCA
 Esther loves a schedule, that's true.

DENISE
 (with a knowing look)
 That's not all she loves.

REBECCA
 Now, Miriam.

DENISE
 You saw the way she was looking at him?

REBECCA
 A little hard to miss.

DENISE
 She wasn't listening to the sermon.

REBECCA
 Now we can't judge.

DENISE

We can't judge, it's true. (stage whisper) But we can make fun.

REBECCA

(scandalized, but liking it)

Miriam!

DENISE

Just don't tell Elijah. It'll go to his head. (at the guitar) Okay. I'll play one verse. Then we have to get to work.

They stop as Simi joins the scene.

REBECCA

What's up?

SIMI

Elijah's called conference.

DENISE

Now?

SIMI

He's found something.

Enter ELIJAH with his Bible and another book underneath it.

ELIJAH

Sisters.

He puts the books down and holds out his hands. As they join hands,

ELIJAH

In the name of the Lord, let us pray---as we stand before God and own up to the sins that separate us from Him. Give us the grace to see our weakness and reconcile.

They mutter Amen and part.

ELIJAH

I call this conference to pray for our dear sister, Miriam--who has worked so hard and come so far. We're all very happy to have you with us, Miriam.

DENISE

Thank you, brother.

ELIJAH

But we're worried about you also. You know why, sister?

DENISE

I already made my confession.

ELIJAH

Yes. But as you know, none of us can be truly free until we confess fully--before each other--and before God--the sins that bind us to this world.

DENISE

I've confessed all my sins.

ELIJAH

(to Simi)

What sin am I speaking of, Sister?

SIMI

The sin of pride.

ELIJAH

The sin of pride.

DENISE

I rid myself of pride. I wear the covering. And I pray--every day--

ELIJAH

These are outward signs. (bearing down on Simi) They mean nothing if you have not changed inside.

SIMI

(after a beat)

I've seen it.

ELIJAH

And you sister?

REBECCA

I--

ELIJAH

Of all of us, you are the closest to Miriam. Surely you've seen this sin of pride.

Beat

REBECCA

Sometimes. (off Elijah) Actually--quite often.

Another beat.

ELIJAH

The Bible tells us that we must be humbled before we can be admitted to the kingdom of God.

DENISE

But I have worked hard to rid // myself of--

ELIJAH

(on //)

Not enough, sister. Not enough. And this worries us because we know how worldly things get in the way. You know what I'm talking about.

DENISE

Truly I don't.

ELIJAH

I think you do. What is that worldly thing, sister?

SIMI

The music.

ELIJAH

The music, Miriam.

DENISE

But now I sing only the songs that praise the Lord.

ELIJAH

And draw attention to yourself.

He produces her music notebook.

ELIJAH

What is this?

DENISE

My notebook.

ELIJAH

When you committed to us. You vowed to put your old life behind you.

DENISE

But it's my music--the first song I ever wrote--.

Rebecca crosses away from her.

ELIJAH

Why do you still have this?

DENISE

And the songs I've written lately, too --You praised those songs.

ELIJAH

And here you go resisting us. Isn't she resisting us?

SIMI

She is resisting.

REBECCA

I see this resistance and pray for Miriam.

ELIJAH

Sister Rebecca does not resist us. Sister Esther does not resist us. And yet, when we point out to you--the cause of your sin--you resist us.

DENISE

I'm not resisting --I just...

ELIJAH

Do you know what sacrifice is? Sister?

DENISE

Of course.

ELIJAH

True sacrifice. (to Simi) What is *true* sacrifice, Sister?

SIMI

To give up the things you love most--in order to serve the Lord.

ELIJAH

That's right. And why does He ask this of us?

REBECCA, SIMI

Because He loves us.

ELIJAH

Because of His love for us---because of our love for each other. That is why we are here. To serve Him. By giving up. Our own selfish pleasures.

DENISE.

I don't play those songs any more. It's the ones at the back.

ELIJAH

Sister. (turning from her) I am beginning to doubt your dedication to us. Who else doubts Miriam?

SIMI

I do. I doubt her.

REBECCA

(under their gaze)

I doubt her, also.

SIMI

When she is playing that guitar--she is often late for things.

ELIJAH

To fellowship. I have seen that.

DENISE

Only once. But I was preparing for the service--

Elijah holds up his hand to silence her.

SIMI

I've seen how slow she is. About helping at dinner.

He looks to Rebecca.

ELIJAH

And Sister? What have you seen?

REBECCA

I've seen.... I've seen her ... say things about people. Behind their backs.

ELIJAH

A false witness! (with pain) Miriam.

REBECCA

I think she might be jealous of someone.

ELIJAH

Really? Are you jealous of someone, Miriam?

DENISE.

It was a joke ... I wasn't serious.

ELIJAH

A joke? So you say things you don't mean ... what is that?

REBECCA

(under his gaze)

A lie.

SIMI

A lie.

ELIJAH

A lie. Oh Miriam. We had such hopes for you.

The girls move further away ...

DENISE

But I was chosen---Douglas himself chose me!

ELIJAH

You must have deceived him, then.

REBECCA

She must have deceived him.

ELIJAH

And what a heartbreak it will be. When he discovers this. (a beat) Sister Rebecca will help you pack your things.

DENISE

Elijah, please--

ELIJAH

If your wordly things matter more than our love for you--

DENISE

Throw the notebook away! Please. I don't want it.

ELIJAH

(indicating the guitar)

And what about that?

DENISE

Sell it. Give the money to the hungry.

She hands it to him. He gives it to Simi, who carries it out.

A beat

ELIJAH

And are you ready now, to make a true confession?

Denise adopts an attitude of humility

DENISE

I confess to the sin of pride.

ELIJAH

All your sins, Miriam. You confess ...

DENISE

I confess to believing my music could make a difference to anyone--

ELIJAH

The sin of resistance?

DENISE

I confess to wanting more time by myself ...

ELIJAH

The sin of sloth?

DENISE
... lingering at the table after dinner--

ELIJAH
The sin of envy!

DENISE
Resenting sisters who are happier in the spirit ...

ELIJAH
The sin of false witness!

DENISE
... claiming Sister Esther wasn't paying attention today. It wasn't true.

ELIJAH
And the sin of attachment ...

DENISE
The sin of attachment?

ELIJAH
You must renounce your attachment to everything that came before.

DENISE
My music?

ELIJAH
Everything, Miriam. Everything!

DENISE
My ... my ...

ELIJAH
(blowing past)
Everything of this earth.

DENISE
Law school. A touring band.

ELIJAH
(over her)
Everything that stands between you and the Lord.

DENISE	ELIJAH
The idea. That I could do anything worthwhile on my own--	Anything that you ever valued. Above the love of God.
-.	

DENISE
My earthly family.

ELIJAH

YES! These things stand between you. And salvation. They stand between you and our love.

DENISE

I renounce my attachment to everything that came before.
(firmly) Everything.

A beat. Now it is as if everyone can breathe again. Elijah holds out his arms to her; she goes to him, and he embraces her.

ELIJAH

Dear Sister. It is out of love that we show you these things. So that your eyes may be opened--and you will be made pure.

SIMI

Miriam.

REBECCA

Miriam.

Simi and Rebecca cross to Denise and join in a gesture of affection.

ELIJAH

Now--we can sing--and praise the Lord our sister is returned to us!

A knocking off. They all turn to the sound.

SIMI

(without breaking)

And that's when we heard it. A man's voice.

FATHER'S VOICE

(off, distant)

I want my daughter!

ELIJAH looks to Denise

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Are you ready, Miriam? Are you ready to prove yourself? As one who is strong in the spirit?

SIMI

And again:

FATHER'S VOICE

(off, louder)

I want. My daughter.

ELIJAH

The sin of attachment, Miriam. The greatest sin of all.

FATHER'S VOICE

(off, more threatening)

I WANT MY DAUGHTER.

A beat.

DENISE

Don't let him in.

They break. Elijah exits and Rebecca takes Denise off in the other direction. Simi turns back to Cliff.

SIMI

She was strong enough to let go ...

CLIFF

That's so completely twisted!

SIMI (CONT'D)

It's necessary sometimes ...

CLIFF

If my Dad had any idea---

SIMI (CONT'D)

It says in the Bible.// In Luke...

CLIFF

(on //)

He gave her that // freaking guitar!

SIMI

(on //)

Anyone "who has left house // or wife

CLIFF

(on //)

He's the one who taught her how to play!

Quick beat

SIMI

... or brothers or parents or children. For the sake of the Kingdom of God ...

CLIFF

There's no freaking way this was her idea.

SIMI

Shall be rewarded many times over! And in Eternal Life.

CLIFF

Yeah? Then why are you out of it? If you think it was so great--

SIMI

Because I was weak.

CLIFF

You didn't have a guitar to sell?

SIMI

My mother got sick. Breast cancer.

CLIFF

Oh, man...

SIMI

I wanted to see her. They said I wasn't ready.

CLIFF

They kicked you out?

SIMI

But I went anyway ...

CLIFF

That is sick.

SIMI

They were afraid I'd lose faith. That I'd poison the others.

CLIFF

By visiting your mom.

SIMI

By going into the world alone. When I wasn't ready.

CLIFF

Maybe they were afraid you'd find out how the Reverend really lives.

SIMI

I don't know anything about that.

CLIFF

No? Sister Jean didn't tell you that part? Or you just didn't believe it?

SIMI

I don't know what to believe any more.

CLIFF

I can tell you. While you're so busy trying to get closer to God--this guy is having a very good time.

He produces the phone to show her --

CLIFF

Look at this---here. There's a picture of the Olympic pool. Oh, oh--and the condo at the beach. Pretty nice, huh?

SIMI

I don't care! I don't care about any condo! I just want to get back to the way it was before. That's all.

CLIFF

What do you mean you don't care? How can you not care?

SIMI

I belonged. You say you want to understand---that's all there is to understand. We belonged.

CLIFF

You belonged to a big hoax.

SIMI

You don't know.

CLIFF

People who really love you? Your friends ... and family? Okay, maybe they're not all touchy feely about it--but they don't mess with your head.

SIMI

I'd like you to go now.

CLIFF

And they sure wouldn't keep you from going home. They'd be like--what, your mom's sick? Here's the money for the bus ticket--I'll lend you my suitcase--here, have some brownies for the trip.

SIMI

Please, just GO!

She turns on her heels and marches away as Cliff realizes he's blown it again.

CLIFF

(a cry of frustration)

Gawd!!

A beat and he looks about, slightly embarrassed, but a bit relieved that he's alone.

CLIFF

I mean ... if there is a God ...

He settles on the ground and digs into the backpack for the flier. Cliff punches a number on his cell phone. Jill appears, a backpack at her feet.

CLIFF

Jill!

JILL

I thought you said text only.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Listen, I--

JILL

Did you see Sister Jean?

CLIFF

Can you do something for me?

JILL

You didn't see her, did you?

CLIFF

I'm gonna send you a text, okay?

JILL

You didn't even bother.

CLIFF

Jill, please! I saw her, okay? But will you please just listen to me? Please?

JILL

Okay.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

I'm sending a phone number. Will you call it for me? And leave a message?

JILL

What message?

CLIFF

You want to attend the meeting.

JILL

What meeting?

CLIFF

Faith in Action.

JILL

Faith in Action?

CLIFF

And when they call you back--get an address. A street address.

JILL

Okay. (beat) Cliff: What did Sister Jean say?

CLIFF

She said I'm an idiot.

He closes his phone. Light shift

CLIFF

It's dark by the time I get back--I don't see Duffy. But I hear organ music. And I realize, it must be the chapel---. Six o'clock mass. I don't know what else to do. So I just ... go in ... and wait for the place to empty out. Thinking--I don't know what. What? Light a candle, say a prayer? Ask the God I don't believe in to cut me a break?

Lights shift as if to the interior of the chapel, and Sister appears.

CLIFF

I wasn't really looking for her.

She genuflects at the altar. The sight of it embarrasses Cliff a little.

CLIFF

It wasn't really the plan.

A beat. Sister becomes aware of him.

SISTER

Cliff. How did it go?

CLIFF

(a bit shell-shocked)

She wants back in.

SISTER

Oh yes.

CLIFF

Is that how it's going to be with Denise?

SISTER

Every case is different.

CLIFF

But that was the point, right? You wanted me to see how insane it all is?

SISTER

Actually. I thought it would do her some good to talk to you.
(off Cliff) She needs to hear more stories like yours.

CLIFF

She kicked me out.

SISTER

(pleased)
You ticked her off?

CLIFF

Totally. I totally blew it.

SISTER

No, you just got to her. That's good.
Always helps to get a different perspective.

CLIFF

This is--this is like. I don't know. Those people are like--
they run your life.

SISTER

Pretty much.

CLIFF

How could you want that?

SISTER

There's a certain security. In having someone else make
decisions for you. And if you toe the line, you do feel
loved.

CLIFF

I just never thought Denise would fall for something like
that.

SISTER

Didn't you meet up with some of them? At one point?

CLIFF

In Amherst. This guy. Elijah.

SISTER

What did you think?

CLIFF

He seemed pretty cool, actually. Really nice.

SISTER

Very nice. Now imagine if you're alone. On a huge campus.
Away from home for the first time. And maybe you're fighting
with your parents. Or you just broke up with your boyfriend.
Or you're really confused about your major;

what you want to do. And someone like that comes along. Who makes you feel just wonderful about yourself. And it seems like he has all the answers. Are you going to tell him: get out of here, you're too nice?

CLIFF

Denise might.

SISTER

I wouldn't be so sure.

CLIFF

She used to be pretty good about seeing through people.

SISTER

Did you see through him?

CLIFF

Not then.

SISTER

Believe me, Cliff. The strongest, the sharpest, the boldest -- it doesn't matter. You get someone at just the right moment, sometimes that's all it takes.

A beat

CLIFF

Simi said--she said. You're doing exactly the same thing.

SISTER

Yes, I've heard that.

CLIFF

I'm not saying I agree--but. You know. She does have a point. You left your family behind.

SISTER

So does anyone who goes into the world. It's called growing up.

CLIFF

You can't even see them.

SISTER

I see them.

CLIFF

Whenever you want to?

SISTER

Whenever I can.

CLIFF

But. Don't you have to do what other people tell you? It's like--what--vow of obedience?

SISTER

Oh that.

CLIFF

Yeah, that. The Bishop says, 'stand down,' and you have to. Right?

SISTER

(lightly)

I never was very good at that vow of obedience business. (beat) Okay. The big difference--okay, I'll tell you the big difference. I knew what I was signing on for. Simi didn't. And neither did your sister. That's the difference.

A beat

SISTER

Where does that leave us then? Are you going to call your father?

CLIFF

You won't give me the address?

SISTER

It's a big load to carry alone. None of us is that strong.

She goes. A moment. He is alone. He feels the strange sensation of wanting to pray, but it feels uncomfortable and he sits instead.

CLIFF

I guess I should say something here. (beat) But I don't know what to say. (another beat) If you're out there--I could use a little help?

A light shift ... and Duffy appears at the back of the chapel. A beat as Duffy takes it all in.

DUFFY

Kozak? (a beat) You okay?

CLIFF

(a deep sigh)

You know, Duffy ... if there really is no God. Then we really are alone down here.

DUFFY

Oh man! What happened?

CLIFF

... the universe is so huge ... and what are we, anyway? Just a couple of amoebas floating on this big cosmic ocean?

DUFFY

You freaked that girl out, didn't you?

CLIFF

It's kind of scary, when you think about it.

DUFFY

I knew this was gonna happen---

CLIFF

You can totally understand why people need to believe.

DUFFY

You freaked her out!

CLIFF

She freaked me out, man. That Simi girl is way out there. She like, wants back in.

DUFFY

Does she know about the house on Long Island?

CLIFF

She doesn't care.

DUFFY

Oh that's messed up.

A beat.

CLIFF

I guess some people need fences. You know? Don't go there. Don't do that. Don't think about these things. Otherwise, it's too much. They look around, and see how empty the place really is. And they can't take it.

A beat

DUFFY

So I guess it's safe to say ... you didn't get the address?

CLIFF

How about you?

DUFFY

I went to the McDonalds. Like you wanted. That girl at the counter? Name's Melanie. Cute. She's coming to the party.

CLIFF

Classic.

DUFFY

Have a burger.

Cliff waves it off.

CLIFF

You're in a church, dude.

DUFFY

It's not that bad. We'll eat something; go to Scott's, hit the party--

CLIFF

I can't deal with any party.

Party sounds, off.

DUFFY

Come on, man. (beat) We made a lot of progress today. You should feel good about it.

Party sounds intensify off, and Duffy goes off in that direction...

DUFFY

(as he goes) Scott says they've like, invited half the campus.

They break. Light shift. Scene transforms from the chapel to the front steps of Scott's fraternity house. Sounds of a party within. Cliff is overwhelmed by a sense of loneliness, of not fitting in.

CLIFF

So I'm outside the frat house. On the front steps, just watching the night get darker. And listening to people get crazier.

As party sounds intensify, Duffy returns with a beer.

DUFFY

There's like a whole sorority in here!

CLIFF

Not in the mood!

Duffy starts to go off. He pauses, then returns to sit by Cliff.

DUFFY

Okay, dude. Spill it.

CLIFF

Maybe this was how Neechie felt. When she first got to school?

Denise appears, looking a bit forlorn, as a college freshman, wandering through the party. Duffy and Cliff observe this.

CLIFF

Like there was a party going on in the next room---and she just couldn't get into it.

Enter Rebecca.

REBECCA

Denise.

DENISE

Hi. Rebecca, right?

REBECCA

Right. Are you here alone?

DENISE

My roommate is here somewhere--but. She has her own friends.

REBECCA

(gently)

Don't get along?

DENISE

I don't usually do parties like this.

REBECCA

No?

DENISE

Back home, me and my friends--we got together to play music a lot. This is just mostly beer.

REBECCA

Not my scene either. (beat) Maybe--maybe we could organize a party sometime. Your band could play.

DENISE

Thanks, but we're over.

REBECCA

Really? You're not playing any more?

DENISE

I got the official word today.

I'm so sorry.

REBECCA

Enter Elijah casually. Rebecca signals to him.

REBECCA

Oh look, there's my friend, Elijah. Have you met Elijah?

DENISE

I don't think so.

REBECCA

Elijah, this is Denise. The girl I told you about?

ELIJAH

Denise, yes! I hear you're into music. Electric guitar?

DENISE

Some.

REBECCA

Elijah plays banjo.

DENISE

Really?

ELIJAH

Not exactly playing. More like scratching.

DENISE

Can't be that bad.

REBECCA

You haven't heard it.

ELIJAH

(mock offense) Hey. But seriously. I really admire people who develop their musical talent.(off Denise) It takes a lot of work and concentration.

DENISE

A little discipline, that's all.

REBECCA

Not everybody has that.

ELIJAH

And commitment.

DENISE

That too.

ELIJAH

Where do you play?

DENISE

Nowhere now. I had a band--we called ourselves The Ball-busters.

ELIJAH

Wow.

DENISE

But. We're done.

REBECCA

She just found out today.

ELIJAH

I'm sorry.

(deep disappointment)

That's a real blow.

DENISE

We've been playing together since we were 15--but that doesn't matter to some people. The bass player is more interested in hockey now.

ELIJAH

If you're looking for an outlet ... We could use a guitar player at our fellowship.

DENISE

My stuff isn't exactly church music.

REBECCA

We can adapt.

DENISE

(amused)

I don't think so.

ELIJAH

The Bible says: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Doesn't say what style.

REBECCA

And it would make such a difference to us. To have real music.

ELIJAH

It would be amazing.

REBECCA

Please say yes.

ELIJAH
If you say no---I'll just keep asking.

Denise laughs

DENISE
Okay.

ELIJAH
All right then!

CLIFF
(to Duffy)
That's how it happened. It was that normal.

Denise, Elijah and Rebecca cross off together.

Cliff and Duffy are alone again.

DUFFY
They got her when she was down.

CLIFF
And Dad thinks it's his fault. That's why he can't talk about her. But I think it's more like a car accident. Just being in the wrong place. At the wrong time.

Jill enters, opposite.

DUFFY
Dude.

CLIFF
Oh man!

DUFFY
What are you doing here? This is a fraternity house.

CLIFF
They have beer here!

JILL
Don't freak out.

CLIFF
Oh, man. Oh man, I am dead.

JILL
Mom won't find out. Relax.

CLIFF
Like she won't notice you're missing?

JILL
Not till tomorrow. She thinks I'm at Tracy's.

DUFFY
How did you get here?

JILL
Greyhound.

CLIFF
You took a bus? By yourself?

JILL
I'm almost fifteen.

CLIFF
Dead meat. That's me.

JILL
Cliff will you shut up and listen? I think I know why Neechie is here.

CLIFF
Why?

JILL
Because of this. I saw it on the campus map.

She produces a print out.

JILL (CONT'D)
There.

CLIFF
School of nursing?

JILL
It's possible isn't it?

DUFFY
You think she's enrolled here?

JILL
Isn't it possible?

CLIFF
I don't know, maybe.

DUFFY
We can find out.

JILL
Oh--and the other thing....

She hands Cliff another piece of paper.

CLIFF
Holy crap! You got the address!

He grabs her and hugs her
Holy crap.

JILL
Okay, all right. Don't get extreme about it.

CLIFF
How did you get it?

JILL
I listened to the whole recording.

CLIFF
Oh.

JILL
Duh?

CLIFF AND DUFFY
Duh.

JILL
So. I figured, they like, have services tomorrow. You know, because it's Sunday? And they're a church?

CLIFF
Of course they would. (beat) But look. We can't just go barging in there--

JILL
But Cliff--

CLIFF
Jill. Listen: I talked to Sister Jean about what makes us toxic. It isn't anything we did--but if we're not careful we can make things worse.

JILL
Like Daddy.

CLIFF
Exactly. So we have to think things through.

JILL
Okay.

CLIFF
But the important thing is--you didn't do anything wrong. It's not you.

JILL
And it's not you either.

CLIFF
No.

JILL
Thanks for checking into it.

CLIFF
Thanks for this. You did good.

JILL
(pleased with herself)
Yeah. I did.

CLIFF
(he studies the paper, then, to
the audience)
Like a flash of lightning. In a pitch dark sky. A soldier
separated from his unit. Suddenly he sees the answer. And
it's nothing like the movies. (to Duffy, soberly) So I've got
a plan.

DUFFY
You have a plan.

CLIFF
If Denise is enrolled here--she's taking a class of some
kind. And if we can find out where it is--

JILL
We can catch her going in?

CLIFF
Or out. Right. It's our best chance to get her alone.

DUFFY
Sweet. And how do we engineer it so we are still here to do
this?

CLIFF
Here's the plan: We all go home tomorrow morning.

DUFFY
... And come back next week?

CLIFF
Jill and I come back ... with my dad.

DUFFY
Oh. Whoa. Okay, dude--that does sound like a plan.

CLIFF

But right now--I need to take a drive.

DUFFY

To?

CLIFF

I need to see her.

DUFFY

Okay. I'll get the car.

Light shift. Jill and Duffy exit.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(to audience) And so ... in the moment it all comes together. Late one fall evening in a college town in central New Jersey. Three kids tool down a side street in a rusted old Honda. Nobody pays any attention if they stop to check a map. Stop in front of an ordinary house on an ordinary corner. A van in the driveway. A light on, upstairs. And downstairs--in what might be the dining room, three girls at a table, sitting quietly ... as if in prayer. One looks a lot like Denise. And that makes me feel a whole lot better, knowing she is really there. We pause for a few minutes, taking it all in. And then, as we pull away, I imagine how it will go. What I will say. When I have my chance to speak to her, finally. I won't tell her about the Reverend. Or the house on Long Island. I won't even mention God.

Denise appears, as if coming out of class. He sees her, sees his chance. She sees him--a moment of recognition.

CLIFF

Denise.

Frightened, she moves on.

CLIFF

Neechie! Wait, Neechie!

She starts to walk away faster.

CLIFF

Miriam!

She stops. Looks at him in wonder.

CLIFF

I'm sorry I didn't go to the benefit. (beat) I really miss listening to you play.

Denise takes a step toward him,
curiously. A slight smile on her face.

CLIFF

At least, that's the way I imagine it will go.

They both turn towards the audience.
Lights fade, end play.