

Excerpt from...

## The Man Who Came to Breakfast

by Ethan Downing

*Lights go down and "2001 A Space Odyssey" theme begins. Lights come up on Manager in the same manner as before, however this time the manager's suit is hanging on a nail in the wall, sleeves are rolled up, and tie is pulled loose. Lights reach full with the musical climax. Manager pauses momentarily to let the grandeur sink in, and then starts pacing back and forth in front of an empty stool (God), downstage, center. He is visibly frustrated as he tries to explain:*

MANAGER

God, we have some bad news. There's no easy way to put this. I guess the best approach is the quick n dirty, like tearing off a band-aid, straight to the point. (beat) It's just that, well it's really bad. (beat) Sorry sir. Right. Straight to the point. Your approval ratings have been plummeting lately. We aren't quite sure whether it was the flood, the allowing of innocent death, or the brink of another world war, but people are viewing you, well, in a sort of

Lenny

"vengeful" way.

MANAGER

Exactly, we really can't put our fingers on why that is at the moment. Don't get us wrong, we think you are doing a wonderful job up here...

LENNY

Fabulous.

MANAGER

...It's just that there is the possibility you might be a little misunderstood...

LENNY

Misconstrued.

MANAGER

It's really no big deal, happens all the time. For Christ's sake – sorry – you're going up against Buddha and Nirvana. Now I don't have a damn clue what that's about, but it sure is one hell of a resume, and as far as names go, well, Vishnu does sound pretty bad ass.

LENNY

*(Using movie announcer voice)*"Vishnu, God of gods!"

MANAGER

Lenny, what did we say about talking?

LENNY

Think first.

MANAGER

That's a good intern. (To God) So here's the deal, the boys in Research and I think that you could use some help in the image department, nothing drastic, just a little softening around the edges. We were watching some reality TV and think that it would be good for you to have a sort of overhaul, a "real-life" makeover, if you will.

LENNY

"Pimp My God."

MANAGER

What we were hoping for is if you could kind of hit the campaign road again, you know, sort of like the old days with Peter and Paul? Living off the land, preaching to all that will listen? (beat) No? (beat) Yes, well I understand where you are coming from. You've already done that. It's just that it's a way for people to identify with (beat) Sure, I absolutely agree, it would totally be a regression.

LENNY

Completely regressive, loss of synergy.

MANAGER

And hey, you're the boss.

LENNY

The Big Guy, El Jefe, CEO, the Bill Gates of Heaven.

MANAGER

Shut up Lenny. Getting back to the topic at hand, sir. Here's our other idea (beat) No sir, it is not a musical. (beat) Yes sir, we know that you like those. I'll see if Andrew Lloyd Webber is busy in the morning (beat) Lenny!

LENNY

Yes?

MANAGER

Lenny, place a call to Mr. Webber's office in the morning to see what his availability is for a meeting.(beat) Yes sir, I agree, his earlier work was much better. (beat) Don't worry, sir, Oprah will not be part of it. (beat) No sir, I was not aware that she was moving in down the street. (beat) I agree, they'll let just about anyone in these days. (beat) Mmm, yes, it will affect property values, but if we could focus on the topic for a minute, sir. Get this: (*using hands like a billboard ad*)"God Goes Global." Pretty catchy, huh? The boys really think it has potential. Here's the pitch: you go for the one on one connections - no more of this mainstream, heavy hitter bullshit. You work the masses starting with the little people, showing them you care when it counts.

LENNY

Kissing babies, performing miracles.

MANAGER

But not that water into wine shit, that's getting old. We would strictly be talking dinner engagements and (beat) Yes, I understand the last one didn't go so well.<sup>1</sup> Hmm, ok, well...

---

<sup>1</sup> Generally, being betrayed by one of your disciples during a dinner that is supposed to promote love and blessedness is a bad thing.

LENNY

How about breakfast?

MANAGER

Breakfast! Fantastic idea! Is breakfast good for you, sir? Research shows it can actually be eaten anytime of the day, just look at IHOP, per capita it (beat) Yes sir? (beat) Sorry sir, didn't mean to ramble sir. Alright then, breakfast it is. Lenny will make up a schedule and your first appointment will be tomorrow morning.

Scene 3

*Lights up on a quaint 1950's style living room couch and table set. Walter is seated in a chair, enraptured with a newspaper. Bunny is busy with breakfast details, rushing on and off stage with coffee, eggs, cakes, etc. On one trip she places an extraordinarily large crucifix on the wall behind the couch. Suzanne remains on the couch in a low cut, cleavage friendly dress, apparently enraptured with herself.*

*BUNNY enters from kitchen.*

BUNNY

Suzanne, quit fussing with yourself, Billy isn't going to be here, so it isn't necessary to flaunt the fact that you have a chest to the whole world simply because you now have one. It is very unbecoming. Honestly, couldn't you have found a dress that isn't so revealing. (*Suzanne appears not to hear and continues pushing her breasts up at odd angles in self admiration.*) Walter, dear, put away that paper, we have someone important coming to breakfast.

WALTER

It's Iowa, Bunny, who could possibly be coming that would be more important than my paper? It's not like the Pope's coming or anything, right?

BUNNY

No, just God. (*Walter isn't paying attention, he is more focused on his paper*)

WALTER

Good. I'd like to have a chat with him about some things. Besides who comes over for breakfast? Sounds like a hippie loving communist if you ask me. Is God a hippie, Bunny? (*Walter returns to his paper*)

BUNNY

Oh, I don't know dear. Never Mind. Suzanne, quit admiring yourself and spread out the dishes, will you already? Honestly I don't know who you are trying to impress.

*BUNNY exits. SUZANNE gives up her exploration and resigns herself to setting the table, pausing to admire her figure in one of the plates while fixing her hair.*

*BUNNY enters with more food.*

BUNNY

I hope the eggs aren't overdone, perhaps He won't notice? Walter! Didn't I tell you to get rid of that paper? Here, use this instead. (*Bunny snatches the paper from Walter and replaces it with a ridiculously large bible that seems to go against everything Walter stands for: fishing, hunting, and sports.*<sup>2</sup> *The table suddenly catches her attention and she rushes to it like an injured bird.*) Oh, Suzanne! Salad fork, then soup spoon, not soup spoon, salad fork!

SUZANNE

What's the difference? It's breakfast, we don't need either of them. It's not like we are going to Hell over a soup spoon.

BUNNY

Honey, we're Catholic, you can go to hell for far less<sup>3</sup>, now don't put on airs with me young lady, just do as I say. Now go get your Grandmother.

*SUZANNE exits. BUNNY exits opposite side. Walter has wedged the bible under his chair to prevent it from tilting and is examining the food display.*

---

<sup>2</sup> By this criteria, the author has discovered he is not a man. Damn.

<sup>3</sup> This is true.

WALTER

Bunny, when did you say "what's his name" is coming? Bob?<sup>4</sup>

BUNNY

Ten O'clock, and don't eat anything.

*SUZANNE enters pushing GRANDMA in a wheel chair. Grandma is stuck in a pose that is reminiscent of an easel and seems to have been there for some time. She stares directly in front of herself and although her lips are constantly moving, no words come out.<sup>5</sup> After placing Grandma next to the couch, Suzanne retrieves a gaudy portrait of Christ from behind the couch and places it on her already outstretched arms.*

*Doorbell rings.*

BUNNY

That's him, now everyone remember...

ALL

Look holy.

BUNNY

Good.

*BUNNY walks to the front of the stage and mimes opening a door and ushers in the invisible guest (the stool is still present from earlier). Lights get brighter on God's entrance, and the family shields their eyes.*

BUNNY

Hi, you must be God. I could tell by the eternal blessedness shining from you. My name is Bunny and this is my husband Wal-

---

<sup>4</sup> It is sad that so much of the play is based on Walter confusing 'God' with 'Bob' because of their phonetic similarities and the fact that he doesn't listen to his wife. Well, mistaken identities worked for Shakespeare...

<sup>5</sup> Although absolutely nothing remains, Grandma was quite the looker in her day. Rumors say that she was Frank Sinatra's trophy girl until she joined the circus as the incredibly flexible woman (which explains why Frank liked her so much).

WALTER

Walter Olfrum, 2nd Lieutenant, 35th airborne division, 'Nam. Pleasure to meet you.

BUNNY

Yes. and this is our daughter Suzanne.

SUZANNE

Hi. A pleasure, I'm sure. (*Very breathily as she uses on hand to twirl her hair and the other drifts precariously low underneath her waist*)

BUNNY

And this is Grandma. Don't worry, she's always like that, it's quite normal. She's been that way ever since Wilbert passed away.

SUZANNE

Her dog.

BUNNY

Would you like to have seat (*indicating the stool downstage*). I am sure it is a little tiring coming all the way from heaven. I hope traffic wasn't bad.<sup>6</sup> Those are some, uh, interesting clothes you have there. They don't leave much to the imagination do they?

SUZANNE

No...they don't.

WALTER

Looks like a dress if you ask me.

BUNNY

Walter!

---

<sup>6</sup> God drives a pink Cadillac with fuzzy dice and a license plate that says, "God 1" and bumper stickers that say "WWID" and "You are going to Hell...seriously." Speaking of which, the author would like to pose a paradoxical question to the reader: If you were to cut God off while driving would it be instantaneous damnation, or because God is all loving, would you be forgiven?

WALTER

What? Back in 'Nam if we saw a man in a dress we shot him, unless he was Pretty Boy Lacy, he had a thing for floral prints, but that was sort of his thing. Is that how it is over where you're at, Bob? (beat) No? Oh, well. You a fisherman Bob? (beat) Sort of? How's the fishing been lately? (beat) Boy ain't that the truth, you catch some you loose some. You're not going to see any house dresses when you're fishing, that's for sure. I always say as long as you've got fishing.

BUNNY

Walter, honey?

WALTER

Dammit Bunny! Can't you see Bob and I are trying to have a conversation here? <sup>7</sup> (*Bunny thinks about trying to correct Walter's mistake, but quietly resigns herself*) So, Bob, tell me, did you serve? (beat) What do you mean "I served my fellow mankind?" What sort of bullshit is that? I meant did you serve in 'Nam? (beat) No? Well as long as you like fishing. I mean, don't get me wrong, when I came back to the states I wanted personally to deliver a first class ass-whopping to every one of those little ostriches who buried their heads when it came time to fight, but you know what I say now, "Hate the war, not the warrior."

SUZANNE

When did you ever say that?

WALTER

Dammit Suzanne. (beat) Oh, you don't promote violence at all? (beat) It isn't necessary? Well I'm not sure about that. I think there comes a time where you need to step in and (beat) What do you mean that isn't how it was intended? How the hell would you know? As far as I am concerned, that's something for God to decide - Dammit Bunny, will you leave me alone? Don't get me wrong Bob, I think you are a fine guy, and where I come from anyone who fishes is welcome to my daughter, but Bunny, this guy doesn't know any more about war than I do about quantum physics.

---

<sup>7</sup> See, this is funny, because to the audience, he isn't having a conversation, it is completely one-sided... Yet another sad ploy by the author to have a "unique" and avant-garde theatrical spin...see footnote 5 for the other.

BUNNY

You'll have to excuse him, he gets a little worked up sometimes.

WALTER

Dammit Bunny! I have 67 friends<sup>8</sup> who didn't come back from 'Nam to get worked up!

BUNNY

Perhaps something to eat? (beat) Oh I'm sorry, I wasn't aware that you were a vegetarian. (pause if there are any vegetarians in the audience who feel compelled to yell out in defiance against the great carnivorous red-meat Satan<sup>9</sup>) May I ask why, exactly? (beat) Oh, I see, health reasons at first. Then? (beat) Moral issues. That's understandable, I suppose you can't go around eating everything you created, it would be kind of counterproductive. (beat) But now it is just to piss people off? Oh, ok...

Grandma

Ay Dios Mio! En el nombre del padre, el hijo, y el spiritus sancto!<sup>10</sup>

*GRANDMA stands up, makes the sign of the cross, falls back into her chair, and dies.*

BUNNY

Oh dear. That can't be good.<sup>11</sup>

SUZANNE

About time.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Patrick, Kevin, Chris, Kris, Christopher, Christof, Christian, Karl, Carl, Carlisle, Bob, Robert, Roberto, Cameron, Ezekial, Ozymendias, Martin Sheen, Marlin Brando, the cast of Apocalypse Now...

<sup>9</sup> Why is it that every vegetarian you meet somehow feels compelled to argue with you about the moral righteousness of eating meat, like they automatically have to defend themselves? If you ask me, if you feel so bad about your eating habits that you have to attack a perfectly innocent human being to justify yourself, perhaps you should reflect on how morally correct it is in the first place. Besides, it's un-American, and if you don't eat meat, the terrorists win.

<sup>10</sup> There is no rhyme or reason to Grandma's Spanish, other than the fact that Spanish is funny, especially when it is on Telemundo with well-endowed women and the guy who announces the soccer games and says, "Goool."

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. O has an uncanny knack for stating the obvious.

<sup>12</sup> Like mother, like daughter.

BUNNY

Suzanne that is an awful thing to say. Walter say something.

WALTER

*(Looking through his newspaper again) 'bout time.*

BUNNY

Walter! *(turning to God's stool downstage)* Can't you do something about this? *(beat)* What do you mean it's not your department? Walter, do something!

WALTER

Dammit Bunny.

*WALTER puts down his newspaper, walks over to Grandma and closes her eyes, admires his handy work, eases Grandma's wheelchair away from the couch and sends her careening off stage with a mighty push. He goes back to his chair, sits down, and resumes reading the paper. Bunny stares in disbelief. Suzanne pauses from admiring herself to look up at God. She shifts her position to what she believes is more seductive.*