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SF PERUSALS

Apostasy

Gino Dilorio

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH.COM
SAMUELFRENCH-LONDON.CO.UK

ISBN 978-0-573-69608-4

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APOSTASY was first produced on July 15, 2006 at the New Jersey Repertory Theatre.

SHEILA . . . . . Susan G. Bob
DR. JULIUS STRONG . . . . . .Evander Duck Jr.
RACHEL . . . . . Natalie Wilder

Directed by SuzAnne Barabas
Set design by Carrie Mossman
Lighting design by Jill Nagle
Sound design by Merek Royce Press
Costume design by Patricia E. Doherty
Stage Managere by Rose Riccardi
Properties by Jessica Parks

APOSTASY received its New York premiere on March 15, 2007 at the Urban Stages Theatre.

SHEILA . . . . . Susan Greenhill
RACHEL . . . . . Susan Louise O'Conner
DR. JULIUS STRONG . . . . . Harrold Surratt

Directed by Frances Hill
Set design by Roman Tatarowicz
Costume design by Nadia Fadeeva
Lighting design by Josh Bradford
Video design by William Cusick
Sound design by David Margolin Lawson
Stage managed by Carol A. Sullivan

CHARACTERS

SHEILA GOLD – An attractive woman in her 50s. She suffers from terminal cancer and has decided to spend her last days at a hospice. She was a successful businesswoman and can be difficult to deal with.

RACHEL GOLD – Her daughter, a plain woman in her 30s, almost the exact antithesis of her mother. She has worked at Planned Parenthood for five years and believes she is a disappointment to her mother.

DR. JULIUS STRONG – He is a dashing black man in his early 50s. He wears a sharp suit and has a magnetic stare. His smile is constant, but not painted on. Despite the trappings of his profession, there is something endearing about his demeanor

Time

The present

Place

A Hospice

ACT 1

Scene One

(A cottage at a private hospice. It is pleasantly furnished, with assorted New Age trinkets. Whatever warmth the room possesses is forced. But aside from some hospital equipment off to the side, it almost seems like a summer home by a lake. **SHEILA** *sits in bed staring straight out at the audience. Behind her is a huge television screen and on it, we see the face of a passionate televangelist,* **DR. JULIUS STRONG**.*)*

DR. JULIUS STRONG. *(V.O.)* Have faith! Brothers and sisters, we have nothing without our faith. The greatest minds the world has ever known, greater minds than I, Albert Einstein, Saint Augustine, they knew that the deeper we go into our knowledge, the more we see the essential nature of faith. Well, you say, Brother Julius, we live in age of reason! Is that so? When your body is tired and broken and you want to give up, it's not reason that gets you out of bed in the morning. When you're certain you cannot take one more step and you're ready to give in to all that limits you, it's not reason that makes you put one foot in front of the other. What is it? It's FAITH, brothers and sister. Faith and reason, hand in hand. If it offends reason it cannot be an article of faith. Faith is the basis of all knowledge. Faith is the road to Jesus Christ. *(pause)* HAVE FAITH. *(He whispers.)* Have faith, and faith will be given to you.

(There is the sound of the knob turning. **SHEILA** *jumps up, shuts the TV and runs into the bathroom. There is a pause and then some knocking.)*

RACHEL. Ma?

SHEILA. *(O.S.)* What?

RACHEL. Are you all right?

SHEILA. *(O.S.)* I'm in the bathroom.

RACHEL. What?

SHEILA. *(O.S.)* I said I'm in the bathroom.

RACHEL. *(***RACHEL** *opens the door with her key.)* Why is the door locked?

SHEILA. *(O.S.)* I can't hear you.

RACHEL. Why is the door locked?

SHEILA. *(O.S.)* I lock it sometimes!

RACHEL. Oh. Are you all right?

SHEILA. *(O.S.)* I'll be out in a minute.

RACHEL. This place is a mess.

SHEILA. *(O.S.)* What?

RACHEL. Nothing.

(She takes off her coat and begins cleaning.)

SHEILA *(exiting)* What did you say?

RACHEL. I said this place is a mess.

SHEILA. Oh, don't worry, the cleaning woman straightens up.

RACHEL. I've got some weed for you.

SHEILA. That's good.

RACHEL. And after we smoke this, I've got some muffins.

SHEILA. Lucky me.

RACHEL. Where's your pipe?

SHEILA. On the dresser. Where were you last night?

*(***RACHEL** *gathers the pipe and during this, begins prepping the weed.)*

RACHEL. I had to work late.

SHEILA. Why?

RACHEL. We had some last minute issues to deal with.

SHEILA. Like what?

RACHEL. This woman. She was crying cause it was her 7th abortion, okay? Lucky seven. And I tried, as politely as

I could, to explain to her that maybe a different form of birth control would be a legitimate option at this juncture of her life. But then she got all hostile on me. "Who did I think I was, this is my job, I'm supposed to be serving her, blah blah," like it's me, right? And I did something I never did before.

SHEILA. You smacked her.

RACHEL. I should have smacked her. That would have made sense. No, instead, *I* started crying. She's in there, and yelling at me, and I just broke down; like she's beating me up and I'm thanking her for it…like what the hell am I doing here, right? Am I just not cut out for this?

SHEILA. Wait, I thought you were management now.

RACHEL. I am. But we're short counselors as it is and Gabby called in sick, so I had to fill in.

SHEILA. Maybe it's time for a change.

RACHEL. I did change. I took the position.

SHEILA. How long have you been doing this?

RACHEL. Going on five years.

SHEILA. That's a long time to be doing volunteer work.

RACHEL. It's not volunteer. I get paid.

SHEILA. Barely. It sounds like twice the work for the same money.

RACHEL. *(She begins lighting the pipe.)* All right, this is not the response I was looking for. It was just a tough day and –

SHEILA. Why don't you go back to school and get your masters?

RACHEL. Because I don't want to. Smoke this.

SHEILA. But you could be –

*(***RACHEL** *sticks the pipe in* **SHEILA***'s mouth.)*

RACHEL. Get busy.

SHEILA. I'm just asking.

RACHEL. Finish that so you can eat something.

SHEILA. Honey, I just threw up.

RACHEL. You gotta eat.

SHEILA. You're beginning to sound like me.

RACHEL. Just smoke so you'll get an appetite so you'll eat.

SHEILA. Close the window.

RACHEL. Why?

SHEILA. I don't want anyone to smell it.

RACHEL. Who's gonna smell it, the geriatric patrol?

SHEILA. Just do it, please. I don't want to get thrown out.

RACHEL. They're not going to throw you out. The whole place is high as a kite. The only difference is, their drugs are legal. I thought you said they respected your privacy.

SHEILA. Can you please just do what I ask? Just once? Ever since you were a little girl – whoa, what's in this?

RACHEL. I don't know, I had to change dealers. I got from some Haitian guy in the projects. What a neighborhood.

SHEILA. That'll put some hope in your rope. Wow. Maybe you could start a delivery service.

RACHEL. Junkie Jews, we deliver.

SHEILA. This is *much* better than last time. My gosh, I can't feel my tuchus.

RACHEL. The guy said, "dis is some good shit, mon."

SHEILA. Sure is. And who is this guy?

RACHEL. He's a dealer, Ma. I'm not dating him.

SHEILA. Uh-huh. And how *is* the dating scene?

RACHEL. Okay. Any other buttons you'd like to push?

SHEILA. I'm not allowed to ask?

RACHEL. Fine. I had a date Thursday night.

SHEILA. Oh.

RACHEL. It was a freakin' nightmare.

SHEILA. Tell me.

RACHEL. The Titanic meets the Poseidon Adventure.

SHEILA. What happened?

RACHEL. Nooo…

SHEILA. I'll give you a hit of my weed.

RACHEL. That's medicinal.

SHEILA. Take it.

RACHEL. Oh, why not.

*(***RACHEL** *takes a hit.)*

SHEILA. Tell me the story.

RACHEL. Boy, that is good stuff.

SHEILA. Maybe you should date the dealer.

RACHEL. Okay. Guy was late, and I'm sitting there with the Italian bartender at Pietro's, Joe Bagadoughnuts, or whatever his name is –

SHEILA. *(noticing the "Kubaton" key chain, next to* **RACHEL***'s purse)* What's that?

RACHEL. Huh? Nothing, it's a key chain.

SHEILA. What the hell kind of key is that?

RACHEL. It's the style Ma. It sticks out, see? It's easy to find. Do you want to hear this or not?

SHEILA. All right!

RACHEL. Anyway, it's past 9 and I figure I'm getting stood up –

SHEILA. Wait, where did you find this guy?

RACHEL. I found him on "It's A Match." Remember? That Jewish Singles Website thing you bought me for my birthday?

SHEILA. Oh.

RACHEL. Yeah. Couldn't you have given me a book?

SHEILA. So impersonal

RACHEL. I like impersonal. Impersonal is easy.

SHEILA. Whatever. Keep going.

RACHEL. Okay, half past nine, I'm about to leave, when in walks this guy –

SHEILA. And he's drop dead gorgeous.

RACHEL. In – your life.

SHEILA. Come on.

RACHEL. In – your life. Face was chiseled, kinda cute, little scruffy, ripped jean kinda thing, Calgon take me away.

SHEILA. Wow.

RACHEL. I smile at him, he's smiles back, and we're having a moment, for once this is gonna be great. But then, he walks right – by – me. Because he's not meeting me, he's meeting set of tits at the end of the bar. And sure enough, walking right behind him, in the shadow of Mr. Drop Dead Gorgeous, is Mr. Nebbish of the Universe, Norman the Bean Counter with a dead squirrel on his head. THAT's my date.

SHEILA. Why did he have a dead squirrel on his head?

RACHEL. It was a rug Ma! A roadkill rug! And I'm in a panic. I can't go left, can't go right, I'm in his sights, he's got the hand out, winding up the smile, putting on the "charmed to meet you" face, the whole thing. And I'm hoping by some chance miracle my brain implodes or there's a fire drill, but to no avail. Next thing I know I'm stuck talking to Mr. Blind Date and his dead pet squirrel helmet for the next two hours. Like, why me, right?

SHEILA. So you tried it, you meet some people.

RACHEL. I'm 31 years old, I've met enough people.

SHEILA. I'm sorry, I thought it would be a nice gift.

RACHEL. It was. I know your heart was in the right place. Give me a nice gift now and eat something.

(holding a box of muffins)

SHEILA. What's this one?

RACHEL. I think its Apple Banana.

SHEILA. Feels like rubber.

RACHEL. It's fat free.

SHEILA. Why did you get fat free?

RACHEL. They're not all fat free.

SHEILA. Do I look like I need to lose weight?

RACHEL. No, it's just that I thought –

SHEILA. I got cancer eating me from the inside out and you're cutting my calorie intake?

RACHEL. So don't eat that one. Try another.

SHEILA. Oh come on.

RACHEL. (*playfully patronizing)* We have to eat something now.

SHEILA. We have to find you a guy.

RACHEL. We have to get you better.

SHEILA. Please.

RACHEL. Come on, this one is, what's this…corn.

SHEILA. All right.

*(***SHEILA** *cuts a piece off and starts to nibble on it.)*

RACHEL. What am I gonna do without you?

SHEILA. *(sings)* "You'll get along without me, very well."

RACHEL. Eat.

SHEILA. This is the best muffin I ever had.

RACHEL. You got the munchies.

SHEILA. Great. I could be one of those articles in True Story. I WAS A HOSPICE JUNKIE. "My daughter got me high – now there's no turning back."

RACHEL. It works.

SHEILA. It does work.

(She takes a bite.)

At least for a while. Wait, let me see that key chain.

RACHEL. *(handing it to* **SHEILA***)* It's nothing, you can stick it in your jeans.

SHEILA. It's heavy – Oh, I've seen one of these. This is a karate thing.

RACHEL. It's a Kubaton. It's a little –

SHEILA. Like a club. Right? You poke the guy in the eyes with it or something.

RACHEL. Something like that.

SHEILA. What's going on that you need this?

RACHEL. I just thought it'd be good to have. To protect myself. Hey, did I see Josie walking through?

SHEILA. Yes, she's still working here. You do what you have to do I suppose.

RACHEL. Of course. And what exactly does she do?

SHEILA. It's creative visualization, Reiki, whatever it is.

RACHEL. It's a rip off.

SHEILA. It's not a rip off to someone who's run out of choices.

RACHEL. I'm sorry, but –

SHEILA. You don't take away someone's hope. It may be all that they have.

RACHEL. You don't take away their life savings either.

SHEILA. Oh please, she's not getting rich giving those treatments. And you shouldn't judge. You of all people.

RACHEL. What's that supposed to mean?

SHEILA. She's a healer. Do you do any healing?

RACHEL. Planned Parenthood is a legitimate medical establishment.

SHEILA. Teaching prep school drop outs how to put condoms on bananas.

RACHEL. Ma, that is so not true.

SHEILA. You just got through saying you were fed up and you wanted to quit.

RACHEL. I never said that. And most of our patients come from poor neighborhoods. At least I'm not some witch doctor pawning off cures when there aren't any.

(Pause. **SHEILA** *says nothing.)*

Look, just forget it. All right? You want to try a blue berry?

SHEILA. Do you like being the big macher? *(pronounced Mah-ka.)*

RACHEL. It's a different set of problems. Now I answer to the regional manager and she's a walking cliché, "let's

try thinking out of the box." I can't even FIND the box, all right? The box got tossed into the compactor. And then we've got security issues…now.

SHEILA. What?

RACHEL. It's nothing. You want butter?

SHEILA. What security issues? What are you talking about?

RACHEL. Nothing. A couple of crackpot phone calls.

SHEILA. So you got this?

(She picks up the kubaton.)

RACHEL. I didn't want to worry you.

SHEILA. I'm you're mother, I worry.

RACHEL. These Pro Life Neo Nazis put out a website giving the addresses of doctors who perform abortions and certain Planned Parenthood addresses. There's no sign, like, "go kill these doctors," but you get the point. It's nothing more than an open invitation to violence, it's a threat. Like there they are, go get them and…our center showed up on the list.

SHEILA. Oh my God.

RACHEL. I knew I shouldn't have told you.

SHEILA. Did you tell the police?

RACHEL. There's not much they can do about it. It's a free speech issue and it's going to court and all this stuff. But everyone is really nervous and –

SHEILA. Well, are you going to hire a security guard or –

RACHEL. We have security. There's surveillance, they even want to monitor my apartment building.

SHEILA. Why?

RACHEL. Cause…just as a precaution.

SHEILA. Are they doing that for everyone?

RACHEL. No, just….okay. My name showed up on the website.

SHEILA. You?

RACHEL. I don't know how they found out so quickly, but you go on and there it is, Center Manager, Rachel

Gold.

SHEILA. Get another job.

RACHEL. I believe in this one.

SHEILA. If anything ever happened to you –

RACHEL. Nothing is going to happen. Don't worry. Besides, you were the one who always told me to take chances, to stand up for what I believed in, right?

SHEILA. This isn't what I had in mind.

RACHEL. All right. Mom, we don't need to get into this again. I'd just like to think when push comes to shove, you would support me.

SHEILA. I do and I'm proud of you.

RACHEL. No, you're not.

SHEILA. I want you to be happy.

RACHEL. You wanted me to take over the business.

SHEILA. Well, it would have been nice if you were more involved –

RACHEL. Seriously, deep down, you're pissed at me because I didn't take over "Sheila's Closet."

SHEILA. If you took over the business then I never would have been able to sell it, now would I?

RACHEL. To be in business you have to be ruthless. You have to lie and cheat –

SHEILA. Not all the time.

RACHEL. – To be successful at it you do. Believe me, it would have been a disaster and –

SHEILA. *(overlapping)* I just thought it would have been a –

RACHEL. – I would have been miserable.

SHEILA. – step up for you.

RACHEL. Besides, I saw what that place did to you and everyone else.

SHEILA. What do you mean?

RACHEL. You were never around, Ma.

SHEILA. I was building a business.

RACHEL. Right. At the expense of other things.

SHEILA. You mean my family.

RACHEL. Well, yeah.

SHEILA. You think it's my fault that my marriage failed.

RACHEL. No, it's nobody's fault –

SHEILA. That's why you chose to live with your father –

RACHEL. Here we go. It is not –

SHEILA. You were always closer to him, you always sided with him, and that's why you chose him –

RACHEL. Because you were never there. You were out fourteen hours a day working on the goddamned – (business.)

SHEILA. So you're saying if I was there more often, your father never would have left me.

RACHEL. No, I'm not. But you had your priorities. You put it all into the store and….you didn't need us. As much.

(pause)

Oh come on Ma, this is…Look, you accomplished a lot. And…it's amazing. You really built up something there. It's like, I mean jeez, you made a bundle when you sold it, right?

SHEILA. So?

RACHEL. So…it's quite an accomplishment.

(Trying to change the subject, **RACHEL** *begins cleaning up.)*

Hey, it's a good thing I never took it over. Imagine me selling stuff on line. I wouldn't know where to begin.

SHEILA. At least no one would be trying to kill you. Now would they.

RACHEL. Ma, it's a bunch of crackpots, all right? They're all talk.

(pause)

It smells like a Grateful Dead concert in here.

SHEILA. I've had enough.

RACHEL. You wanna eat some more?

SHEILA. No, put it away.

RACHEL. Do you want to go for a walk?

SHEILA. Maybe later. I'd rather sleep.

RACHEL. Okay. Now, I've got some stuff to do tomorrow morning, but I can swing by around eleven for lunch, okay? That way if we have to build your appetite again, that gives us some time.

SHEILA. You don't have to.

RACHEL. I want to.

SHEILA. But I know you're busy –

RACHEL. Enough, would you? I'm going to leave these in case you're hungry later.

*(***RACHEL** *puts the pipe into dresser drawer, and pulls out some brochures.)*

What's this?

SHEILA. Oh let me have those.

RACHEL. "Heritage Church of the Living Christ."

SHEILA. It's nothing.

RACHEL. Where did you get this?

SHEILA. It's nothing. It's some literature I sent away for. It's nothing.

RACHEL. What are you doing with this?

SHEILA. I'm thinking of converting.

RACHEL. What?

SHEILA. To Christianity.

(Pause. **RACHEL** *laughs. After a moment,* **SHEILA** *joins her.)*

RACHEL. That's funny.

SHEILA. Yeah.

RACHEL. *(both still laughing)* What the hell is in this weed?

*(***SHEILA** *stops laughing.)*

SHEILA. I'm serious.

RACHEL. What.

SHEILA. About converting.

RACHEL. No.

SHEILA. Yeah.

RACHEL. But…you can't.

SHEILA. Why not?

RACHEL. Cause you're Jewish.

SHEILA. I know.

RACHEL. Well…what am *I* gonna do?

SHEILA. You can do whatever you want.

RACHEL. Ma –

SHEILA. It's something I've been thinking about for a long time.

RACHEL. You can't be serious. You bought me a subscription to a Jewish Singles Website so I would find a Jewish guy, right?

SHEILA. I know.

RACHEL. You made me break up with Tony Giamarco because he wasn't Jewish.

SHEILA. You didn't like him.

RACHEL. The hell I didn't.

SHEILA. He ended up in prison.

RACHEL. So what? He was my boyfriend.

SHEILA. It is not a decision I make lightly.

RACHEL. I know, but –

SHEILA. A lot of things have changed.

RACHEL. *(overlapping)* – you're talking about your entire identity? How can you throw away everything you've ever thought about the world?

SHEILA. How do you know what I think about the world?

RACHEL. Ma…

SHEILA. Maybe it's none of your business.

RACHEL. *(overlapping)* How can you say that –

SHEILA *(overlapping)* I don't owe you –

RACHEL *(overlapping)* I don't even –

SHEILA *(overlapping)* – an explanation.

RACHEL. know what to –

SHEILA. It's hard for me to explain it to myself. I just know what I feel and lying here for all this time and taking an account of things, I've been feeling a little differently. That's all. Lately.

RACHEL. *(pause)* Does this mean no brisket on Passover?

SHEILA. I won't even make it to Passover.

RACHEL. Don't say that.

SHEILA. *(pause)* Look at the bright side. Remember when you were in grade school and you felt left out at Christmas? Now you can hang a stocking, too.

RACHEL. So what are you, Born Again?

SHEILA. No, I'm just thinking about it.

RACHEL. Dr. Julius Strong.

SHEILA. He's an evangelist.

RACHEL. Like a Southern Baptist?

SHEILA. No, he's not from the South. There are ministries all over.

RACHEL. Ministries of Heritage Creek, California. Couldn't you at least have run off with some Catholics? At least they got better songs.

SHEILA. They have songs. He has a show, *The Strong Hour*. It's very inspiring.

RACHEL. I'll bet. Don't waste any time asking you for money, do they?

SHEILA. Are you worried about it?

RACHEL. What?

SHEILA. The money.

RACHEL. Of course not. What do you mean?

SHEILA. The money I'm leaving you.

RACHEL. Ma.

SHEILA. I just thought you –

RACHEL. What does the money have to do with it?

SHEILA. Nothing, just –

RACHEL. How can you insult me this way? I don't give a damn about the money, I care about you. Who brought up money? I don't need your money.

SHEILA. Honey, I didn't mean –

RACHEL. What the hell are you talking about?

SHEILA. Nothing. I'm sorry, I got confused.

RACHEL. I was talking about how they were asking for money.

SHEILA. I'm tired.

RACHEL. In the brochure.

(Pause. **RACHEL** *is still in shock over this, not knowing what to say.)*

Okay. Fine. I'll be by tomorrow. Do you need anything?

SHEILA. Rolling papers. I'm kidding.

RACHEL. This is a little hard for me.

SHEILA. I know.

RACHEL. I feel betrayed. I guess.

SHEILA. You shouldn't.

RACHEL. Well, I do.

SHEILA. Okay, you know how I feel? I feel as though I'm at the edge of something and I'm not at all ready to jump. And I need help.

RACHEL. I understand that.

SHEILA. We all know that we're going to die and we spend no time at all preparing for it.

(pause)

Sometimes I sit here and I'm amazed at how empty my heart is. I'm supposed to look back and feel I don't know, fulfilled or a sense of joy and accomplishment. I just look back and feel nothing.

RACHEL. You make me feel bad, how can you say this?

SHEILA. This is not about you; this is about me. The business, everything, it just doesn't seem to be enough. I thought…I don't know what I thought. You come, you visit, doesn't it seem strange that there's…something

that we never mention?

RACHEL. What?

SHEILA. The D word. We never mention it. The fact that I'm dying. Honey, we never talk about it.

RACHEL. I'm sorry, it's hard for me.

SHEILA. Well, I'm dying. And people who have faith die differently than people who don't have faith. I know it. I've seen it. And I don't want to be like them. So do me a favor, don't feel betrayed.

RACHEL. You can't tell me how to feel.

SHEILA. I just did.

RACHEL. Okay I won't.

SHEILA. Okay.

RACHEL. Maybe tomorrow when I come, we can go outside and smoke a bowl.

SHEILA. The family that gets high together, stays together, prays together.

RACHEL. I love you.

(She kisses **SHEILA** *on the cheek.)*

SHEILA. Love you, too.

RACHEL. *(Pause.* **RACHEL** *searching for a reason.)* Did I let you down?

SHEILA. Of course not.

RACHEL. But you feel empty.

SHEILA. This has nothing to do with you, I'd be proud of you no matter what you did.

RACHEL. Really

SHEILA. Yes.

RACHEL. Remember what I used to ask you when I was little?

*(***SHEILA** *shakes her head.)*

I came home one day, I think I got in a fight with somebody in the schoolyard and I asked you, "Ma, would you still love me if I killed someone"?

SHEILA. What did I say?

RACHEL. You told me to wash my hands.

RACHEL. *(She moves to the door.)* Bye. I'll see you tomorrow.

SHEILA. Bye Sweetheart, drive carefully. Leave the door open I want to air this place out.

*(***RACHEL** *exits.* **SHEILA** *moves to the window, watching her walk across the parking lot. She reaches for the phone and begins dialing.)*

SHEILA. Barbara Newman please. Oh, hi, Barbara, how are you? Good. Oh, you know, good days and bad. How is the paperwork coming along…the changes that I… Why not? Well, when will they be ready? Those changes have to be made by the end of the month. Okay. No – the end of the month. Right. So once everything is in order you can come by and I'll sign whatever and that'll be…

(She sees, framed in the doorway, **DR. JULIUS STRONG**. *He is a dashing black man in his early 50s. He wears a sharp suit and has a magnetic stare. His smile is constant, but not painted on. Despite the trappings of his profession, there is something endearing about his demeanor.)*

SHEILA. *(continued)* …that'll be that. Thanks for all your help Barbara. So long.

(Barbara hangs up the phone.)

JULIUS. Excuse me. Good afternoon.

SHEILA. Hello.

JULIUS. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you. I'm looking for Sheila Gold.

SHEILA. That would be me.

JULIUS. I'm Dr. Julius Strong.

SHEILA. I know.

(Blackout)

Scene Two

(Later that afternoon, **SHEILA** *and* **JULIUS** *are laughing.)*

JULIUS. See sometimes you get what we call a "show me" congregation, you understand? They all sit back all fuss and frowns, arms folded back like this. *(He demonstrates).* And they're saying, "Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay Reverend, go ahead. You wanna take me to the Promised Land? All right. But you gotta show me some miracles first. Split the red sea. Turn some water into wine or something." But this group, no, no. They're up and yelling and I'm thinking, this is gonna be like shooting fish in a barrel. And I'm just about to quiet everybody down and start to speak, when I notice right there about ten feet above my head, circling like the Goodyear Blimp…is a fly. Not just any old fly. Like one of them big old horseflies. The kind that needs to register with the FAA. And it musta been a Baptist fly cause he's flying about like he's all excited speaking in tongues. And I kinda got my eye on him 'cause he seems to be a fly on a mission. So the music dies down and the crowd sits down and everybody's waiting on me. I open my mouth and give 'em a great big, "Good Morning and Glory Be to God Halleluiah." And right when I hit the "Uh" in "Halleluiah", wouldn't you know that fly just up and buzzed right inside my mouth.

SHEILA. Oh my God.

JULIUS. What could I do? They all answered back, "Halleluiah." And I just stood there and went like this.

(He nods up and down and demonstrates a kind of dance.)

Cause I don't know if I should swallow that there fly or spit him out or go get water or kneel down to pray, cause believe you me, there is nothing in the Preacher's Handbook about swallowing no Baptist Flies. And I can feel that horsefly flying around in there, trying to cut a new path to the afterlife. And everybody's looking at me and

I'm doing the horsefly dance, and wouldn't you know they all start doing the horsefly dance with me. And I got an entire congregation up on their feet wiggling up and down like we all trying to swallow that fly. And finally I just stopped and looked em up and down and I just let it out at the top of my lungs "PRAISE GOD" and that fly jumped out of my mouth faster than a sailor on a four hour pass. And he flew down the center aisle right out the double doors but wouldn't you know for the next hour, all those good folk kept dancing that Horsefly dance like it was a message from on high.

SHEILA. Did you tell them?

JULIUS. Me? No Sir! Don't kill the message or the messenger!

SHEILA. Now wait a minute, I've always wanted to ask you something.

JULIUS. Go ahead.

SHEILA. Okay. When you're moving up and down that stage and you hold the Bible open with one hand, how is it that you never lose your place?

JULIUS. Ah, now that's a trade secret.

SHEILA. What?

JULIUS. I couldn't.

SHEILA. Please.

JULIUS. You promise you'll never tell a soul?

SHEILA. I promise.

JULIUS. *(whispers)* Hair spray.

SHEILA. No.

JULIUS. From Leviticus to Deuteronomy, a little spritz around the edges and you will never be lost.

SHEILA. So that's it?

JULIUS. That's it. Oh, before I forget, I have a present for you.

(He reaches into a bag and pulls out a hardcover Bible.)

It's a New Testament, just like the ones you see on television, that we use at the ministry.

SHEILA. Thank you.

JULIUS. It is the book of Good News for all who come to his altar to receive.

SHEILA. Yes.

JULIUS. That's what gospel means, did you know that? Gospel means Good News.

SHEILA. I didn't know that.

JULIUS. Now, do you want me to get a little hair spray and spray the edges for you? That way, when you're at home running around this fine cottage, preaching the word of the lord along with Reverend Julius, you too can never lose your place!

(He does an imitation of himself preaching, **SHEILA** *laughs.)*

SHEILA. Oh, wait. I have something for you, too.

JULIUS. No.

SHEILA. It's just a little something. *I knew you were coming, I just didn't know when.* Here you are.

(She hands him a small box.)

JULIUS. You shouldn't have.

SHEILA. It's the least I could have done. Open it.

JULIUS. *(opening it)* It's a fountain pen.

SHEILA. The written word shapes the spoken word.

JULIUS. Oh my goodness –

SHEILA. Do you like it?

JULIUS. I love it. I haven't seen a pen like this in years.

SHEILA. You fill it up from the side.

JULIUS. Yes, yes. I know. This lever moves up, right?

SHEILA. And you draw the ink from the well.

JULIUS. It's beautiful. Very…what's the word…elegant.

SHEILA. I suppose.

JULIUS. It is. This is no pen to be writing out a shopping list. This is a pen to write a letter to a long lost friend, to someone in need, to a lover, so far away from you…

SHEILA. Yes.

JULIUS. *(He places his hand on top of hers.)* I shall treasure it always.

(She smiles. And the two catch eyes for a moment.)

All right. I'm not going to pull any punches now. There is another side to this visit of course.

(He takes his hand away.)

I read your last letter and I was truly touched. I am honored by the fact that you would even consider making such a generous contribution. It was totally unexpected. And I promise you, should you decide to follow through on this commitment –

SHEILA. Oh, I'm serious about it –

JULIUS. Well, I appreciate that. I'm here to assure you that it will be put to good use. The plans for the new campus are being finalized and we plan to begin building next fall. And your donation represents a giant leap in attaining our goals. Imagine the students and the good they will do in the world all because of your generosity. Praise God.

(pause)

Did you want to…make this a personal check or a banker's…uh, a certified….I'm sorry, how did you… what would be the best way for you to…

SHEILA. Well, I do have a lawyer who's handling my estate…

JULIUS. I see.

SHEILA. …and it's probably best to go through her.

JULIUS. Oh, I totally agree.

SHEILA. Because if there's one thing –

JULIUS. An amount this size –

SHEILA. – I've learned, it's –

JULIUS. – would certainly make a huge difference in our fundraising efforts. And it's important that everything is good and proper. Would it be easier for you if I was to contact her, or –

SHEILA. No, I don't think –

JULIUS. Just to reassure her that we are a legitimate church and that the money will go directly to the ministry and its work –

SHEILA. That won't be necessary.

JULIUS. It's just that if there are any questions –

SHEILA. Reverend –

JULIUS. Call me Julius.

SHEILA. Julius. That's a nice name.

JULIUS. I've always liked it. Liked saying it out loud, because you can play with the word so much. Like you're on a mountaintop. JUUUU – LEE – US. Or if you're in a tight spot, and you have to negotiate out of it, you take the quick attack. Jul-yus Strong, pleasure to meet you.

SHEILA. Or you can just sing it. Julius.

(She puts his name to a romantic tune, singing. He is a bit uncomfortable. Pause)

I've made arrangements for her to contact you. And I'm sure a check will go out by the end of the month.

JULIUS. I see.

SHEILA. Did you want it now?

JULIUS. What?

SHEILA. The check.

JULIUS. Oh no, not at all.

SHEILA. Well, you know what the cynical side of me would say.

JULIUS. I didn't know you had a cynical side.

(They both laugh.)

What would that side say?

SHEILA. Never mind.

JULIUS. You can tell me.

SHEILA. I wanted to meet you first.

JULIUS. I wanted to meet you, too.

SHEILA. I was always very careful with my money.

JULIUS. Of course. In this day and age, one can't be too careful.

SHEILA. I was a hard nosed businesswoman.

JULIUS. Oh, I can't imagine that.

SHEILA. I was. "Sheila's Closet" did millions in sales, we had 200 employees, believe me, you don't get to that level without stepping on a few toes

JULIUS. You seem so nice.

SHEILA. I have the soul of a banker but I wear the mask of a bohemian.

(They both laugh.)

Or maybe I wear the mask of a banker and the bohemian got drunk and left while I was counting my money. I don't know.

JULIUS. What about all your travels?

SHEILA. What?

JULIUS. You wrote to me, about taking trips to Nepal and India and doing Transcendental Meditation.

SHEILA. When did I….

JULIUS. Wait, I brought this one. Wait.

(He goes to his overcoat.)

SHEILA. What did you bring?

JULIUS. Your letter. This one.

(He pulls it out of the jacket pocket.)

SHEILA. Oh gosh –

JULIUS. This I think is my favorite.

(reading)

"I was searching for the kind of life I wish I had led. Where I felt everything was leading to something greater. Where I felt things deeply and saw the moon and stars and felt alive as much as I could. And where each day, I woke up and saw the possibility in things." That doesn't sound like the soul of a banker.

SHEILA. I wrote that?

JULIUS. Of course you did.

(laughing)

SHEILA. I was just trying to impress you.

JULIUS. No, it's more than that and you know it.

SHEILA. Well….

(She reaches into a drawer in her nightstand…)

I saved all of yours, too.

JULIUS. Really?

(pulling out a stack of letters)

SHEILA. Six months worth.

JULIUS. Wow. When did we start?

SHEILA. Um…I wrote you first and that was…September 14. So what's that, just over six months.

JULIUS. At least.

SHEILA. I was surprised when you wrote back.

JULIUS. Oh, I had to. I always looked forward to your letters. I would even re-read them once or twice, they're so wonderfully written.

SHEILA. Yours are.

JULIUS. Letter writing is a lost art, isn't it? I get hundreds of emails every day, but there's something wonderful about holding the written words of another in your hands. Feeling the space where they put pen to paper, where they spent a moment, and left part of themselves behind, to send a little smile your way.

SHEILA. Here's my favorite.

(reading.)

"I stood at the edge and I looked down. And I saw nothing. And I called out into the darkness because I couldn't stand to be so alone. And no echo came back to me. Only silence. But it was a true silence. The kind of silence where all I could hear was the beating of my own heart. And in that moment I came to enjoy the peace of being truly alone. For in that peace, there is love. And love is the only thing that matters.

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