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End Days

by

Deborah Zoe Laufer



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

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Cover photo from the Phoenix Theatre of Indianapolis production,
January 3 - February 2, 2008.

In the photo: Phebe Taylor (left) and Matthew Van Oss (right);
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Development of *END DAYS* was supported by the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Artistic Director; Wendy C. Goldberg, during a residency at the National Playwrights Conference of 2007. Originally presented by Florida Stage, Louis Tyrrell, Producing Director, Nancy Barnett, Managing Director. The rolling world premiere of *END DAYS* was partially funded by the National New Play Network's Continued Life of New Plays Fund and was produced by Florida Stage, Phoenix Theatre (Indianapolis) and Curious Theatre (Denver)

In addition, LORT licensees shall be required to include the biography of the Florida Stage (which can be found on page 7) in all programs.

The Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, National Playwrights Conference
Wendy C. Goldberg, Artistic Director
presents

End Days



DEBORAH ZOE LAUFER

Directed by REBECCA BAYLA TAICHMAN

There will be one 10 minute intermission.

CAST

Nelson	David Ross
Arthur	Peter Friedman*
Sylvia	Caitlin O'Connell*
Jesus/Hawking	Ryan King*
Rachel	Zoe Lister-Jones*
Stage Directions	Lily Feinn

ARTISTIC & PRODUCTION STAFF

Scenic Designer	Rachel Hauck
Lighting Designer	Brian J. Lilienthal
Sound Designer	Matt Callahan
Props Designer	Faye Armon
Dramaturg	Martin Kettling
Assistant Stage Manager	Danielle Monica Long
Assistant Scenic Designer	Alex Calle
Assistant Director	Alexandra Bassett
Assistant Lighting Designer	Susannah Scott
Assistant Sound Designer	Ben Inniger
Light Board Operator	Sophia Giordano
Stage Management Interns	Lauren Hirsh Danielle Palliser
Literary Representatives	Juliana Avery Allison Kellar Lenhardt

*Member of Actors Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.
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the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, and United Scenic Designers.

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for the duration of the reading. The use of photography during the performance is expressly forbidden by law.



Louis Tyrrell
Producing Director

Nancy Barnett
Managing Director

and

Kay and Jim Morrissey
Co-Producer

End Days

By Deborah Zoe Laufer

A NATIONAL NEW PLAY NETWORK WORLD PREMIERE

Scenic & Lighting Design by Richard Crowell

Costume Design by Erin Amico*

Sound by Matt Kelly

Production Stage Manager: James Danford*

Directed by Louis Tyrrell†

Development of *End Days* was supported by the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center during a residency at the National Playwrights Conference of 2007.

CAST

(in alphabetical order)

Nelson Steinberg		Scott Borish
Rachel Stein		Michaela Cronan
Sylvia Stein		Elizabeth Dimon
Jesus / Stephen Hawking		Terry Hardcastle
Arthur Stein		Jim Shankman

PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Manager	Richard Crowell	Musical Consultant	Tom Kenaston
Technical Director	Phillip Schroeder	Wigs Provided by	Wigboys
Assistant Technical Director	Josh Aune	Assistant to the Master Electrician	George Sciarrino
Prop Master	Michael Blair	Assistant to the Stage Manager	Ashley Simon
Costume Coordinator	Erin Amico	Assistant to the Costume Coordinator	Leslye Menshouse
Sound Engineer	Matt Kelly	Assistant to the Sound Engineer	Chris Shafer
Master Electrician	Michael Jon Burris	Scene Shop Assistants	Aaron Burton
Crew Chief	Stephanie Kelly	Stage Crew	Aaron Burton, George Sciarrino and Chris Shafer
Carpenters	Jim Gibbons, Michael O'Rourke		
Scenic Artist	Cindi Blank Taylor		

*Member, United Scenic Artists

*Member, Actors Equity Association

†Member, Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers

The Actors and Stage Manager employed in this stage production are members of Actors Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

PHOENIX THEATRE

END DAYS

by

Deborah Zoe Laufer

January 3 - February 3, 2008

CAST

Nelson Steinberg.....	MATTHEW VAN OSS
Sylvia Stein.....	MARTHA JACOBS*
Arthur Stein.....	BILL SIMMONS*
Jesus/Stephen Hawking.....	MATTHEW ROLAND
Rachel.....	PHEBE TAYLOR*
Stephen Hawking.....	MATTHEW ROLAND

There will be one 12-minute intermission.

CREW

Director/Set & Light Design.....	BRYAN FONSECA*
Set Design.....	JAMES GROSS
Costume Design.....	KAREN A. WITTING
Sound Design/Original Music.....	TIM BRICKLEY
Technical Director/Properties.....	JUSTIN KIDWELL
Stage Manager/Sound/Light Operator.....	MICHAEL MARSHALL
Set Construction.....	JAMES GROSS, JUSTIN KIDWELL & MICHAEL MARSHALL

*Indicates member of Actors Equity Association

The videotaping or other audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.

The Phoenix Theatre's Mission

The Indianapolis-based Phoenix Theatre entertains by presenting the best of professional, contemporary theatre in an intimate setting. Engaging our community, patrons, and staff with issue-oriented plays, the Phoenix enlightens audiences about social concerns while challenging them to re-examine their roles in society.

Special thanks to: Gale Nichols, Ted Widlanski, Bill Taylor, Adrienne Reiswerg, Matthew Chaifetz & Lara Schmutte, Rabbi Aaron Spiegel, Tom Swiezy, Larry Williams, Florida Stage

Very special thanks to: J. Scott Keller

The building housing The Phoenix Theatre, built as a First United Brethren Church in 1907, was donated by **J. Scott Keller** in memory of his cousin, **Miss Janet (Genet) Flanner**, member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and Paris correspondent for *The New Yorker* for 30 years.

FLORIDA STAGE BIOGRAPHY

Florida Stage is a not-for-profit professional theatre company that produces exclusively new and developing works in its intimate, 250 seat home in Manalapan, Florida, just south of Palm Beach. The theatre was founded as the Learning Stage in 1985 by award-winning actor/director Louis Tyrell. Over the past two decades, the company has produced more than 125 plays, more than 25 of which have been world premieres.

In addition to its innovative main stage program, the theatre maintains a vibrant education department, offering a full roster of creative, artist-driven programs for students. The theatre also holds an annual new play festival called 1st Stage. Florida Stage has been honored in many ways for its artistic and education efforts, including the Theatre League of South Florida's inaugural Bill Von Maurer Award for Theatrical Excellence, to honor its many years of bringing the highest quality work to South Florida.

CHARACTERS

RACHEL STEIN - 16 year-old nihilistic Goth. Feels angry and orphaned since 9/11, as both of her parents have withdrawn into their own worlds.

SYLVIA STEIN - Her mother. 40s. Newly Evangelical, with a close, personal relationship to Jesus.

ARTHUR STEIN - Her father. 40s. Deeply depressed.

NELSON STEINBERG - Also 16 years old. Their new neighbor. Passionate about science, dresses as Elvis, loves Rachel.

JESUS and **STEPHEN HAWKING** - Played by the same actor.

SETTING

The Stein kitchen/den. We see the kitchen table, a glimpse of the appliance area to the rear, and a step down to a small den to the right.

Various other locations should be indicated with simple set pieces – a high school locker. The sign of a XXX movie theater. The table and chairs of a Starbucks.

TIME

Late September, 2003

For Alex, Charlie and David

(In the darkness, we hear an acoustic guitar. NELSON is softly singing his ode to RACHEL. A cantorial prayer blends in with, and then overtakes the guitar. It is then drowned out by an Evangelical choir. Each sound is beautiful and soulful, but as they begin competing for attention the sound becomes cacophonous and jarring. The music climaxes in one long discordant sound, which cuts out leaving only NELSON's voice held in one long, pleading word. It has the wailing minor tones of a Hebraic prayer. RAAAACHHHEEEL. Lights come up on NELSON. He is sixteen. He is dressed like Elvis. The 70's Elvis. He is playing guitar, singing a song he has written.)

NELSON. *(singing)* Rachel. Rachel. Rachel Stein.

Harris High would be heaven, if you would be mine.

If I asked you to Borders, would you decline?

Rachel Stein.

(A pint sized milk carton is hurled onstage and hits NELSON squarely on the side of the head. Far off laughter. He chuckles acknowledgement.)

You guys!

(back to the song)

The first time I saw you was on the lunch line.

Cafeteria loud. Lunch two ninety-nine.

OFFSTAGE VOICE. Hey freak!

NELSON. We both chose the tuna. It seemed like a sign.

Rachel Stein.

OFFSTAGE VOICE. Asswipe!

NELSON. Ms. Holloway's class, the black board was thine.

You soared through equations like Albert Einstein.

OFFSTAGE VOICE. Yo. Jeff. Let's go kill the freak!

NELSON. Your mountainous math skills not short of Alpine.

Rachel...

(A general rallying war cry. A barrage of milk containers comes hurling at NELSON. Then the sounds of a stampede of Reeboks.)

(NELSON finally takes the hint, gets up and dashes offstage.)

OFFSTAGE VOICES. Kill the freak!!!!

(lights shift)

(A church bell chimes seven times. Lights up. Morning. The Stein kitchen. ARTHUR sits in his pajamas, slumped across the kitchen table, asleep.)

(Offstage we hear SYLVIA.)

SYLVIA. Help! Oh no. Arthur! Help!

(The clatter of many books falling.)

Crap! Arthur, could you help me?

(huge crash)

Darn! Darn it!

(a beat)

(SYLVIA enters with an enormous stack of bibles, furious and disheveled.)

Did you hear me? I was shouting for you.

ARTHUR. *(waking)* What? What time is it?

SYLVIA. The whole stack was coming down. It's a miracle I wasn't killed.

ARTHUR. I'm sorry. I didn't hear.

SYLVIA. Honestly.

(She goes back off and comes in with a poster of Jesus. It says, "Jesus Loves You" across the top.)

Did you spend the whole night out here again?
Arthur?

ARTHUR. I must have dozed off.

SYLVIA. It's a beautiful day, praise God. You need to get showered and dressed.

(soto voce:)

You're starting to smell.

ARTHUR. I'm sorry.

SYLVIA. We're going door to door on West Lake this morning. You should join me.

(She goes back off and reenters with yet more bibles and a stack of brochures.)

And then this afternoon we're back in front of the triple X video store on Townsend. The first day we prayed there, twenty-two sinners went in. Last night it was less than ten. It's the miracle of prayer.

(JESUS, the same JESUS as on the poster, enters from the other door, carrying a stack of bibles. Not sure where to put them. SYLVIA clears a spot.)

Thank you, Jesus. Oh, I'll get the new youth group brochures. I can't wait to show you what I've done.

(She rushes back out. JESUS follows. From offstage:)

Did you make coffee? Arthur? Could you put up a pot?

(There is a knock on the door.)

Honey, could you get that?

(ARTHUR doesn't move. The door opens slightly.)

NELSON. Hello?

(NELSON enters. Still in his Elvis attire. He has a guitar slung over his shoulder. His arm is now in a sling.)

Hi. Is Rachel home?

SYLVIA. *(still offstage)* Who is it Hon?

ARTHUR. It's the king.

SYLVIA. The what?

ARTHUR. It's Elvis.

NELSON. Oh. No. I'm...Nelson Steinberg? We just moved in? Last month? Number 81?

ARTHUR. You're dressed like Elvis.

NELSON. Umm. Is Rachel here? I thought she lived here. I mean, I followed her home yesterday and I saw her come here.

ARTHUR. You followed her home?

NELSON. Yesterday. Well, yesterday and Wednesday. And Tuesday. And..

SYLVIA. (*entering with a stack of brochures, a knapsack and JESUS*) Who was that at the...oh!

NELSON. Hi. I'm Nelson Steinberg? From 81?

ARTHUR. He's stalking Rachel.

SYLVIA. Hello.

NELSON. I live there? Across the street? Wow. I can't believe how much your place is like our place. They're like exactly alike.

ARTHUR. Condos.

NELSON. Except for the stuff inside. And our sink and refrigerator and stove and oven and counters and closet are on that side, and our table and chairs are on this side.

SYLVIA. You're the new people.

NELSON. One of them.

SYLVIA. Welcome! We prayed for you just last week!

NELSON. Thanks.

SYLVIA. I've been meaning to stop by with some baked goods but I'm just breathless with the ministry lately. The Rapture is coming, you know.

NELSON. It is?

SYLVIA. (*She and JESUS exchange a smile.*) That's what I hear!

NELSON. Great! What's the Rapture? It sounds so...

(*JESUS pulls out some flyers and SYLVIA hands them to NELSON.*)

SYLVIA. Here!

NELSON. ...intense. And passionate. The Rapture!

SYLVIA. This will tell you all about it. It's very important to welcome Jesus into your heart, Nathan, and truly repent, so that when End Days comes you'll be saved. Here, why don't you take one for your parents.

NELSON. Well, they're dead, actually.

SYLVIA. Oh...

NELSON. But I've got step-parents.

SYLVIA. Great! Do you have any friends you'd like to give some to?

NELSON. Oh, sure. I've got tons of friends.

(She gives him some more brochures.)

SYLVIA. *(to JESUS)* Look how well I'm doing today! And I haven't even left the house yet.

(JESUS pats her back. Holds up another brochure.)

Right! You know, Nathan, we have a very active youth group. Maybe you'd like to join them some time.

(an aside to JESUS)

Don't these look good? I changed the font.

NELSON. It looks great. Does Rachel belong?

SYLVIA. Well...

ARTHUR. No.

SYLVIA. Not yet.

NELSON. Umm...is she here?

SYLVIA. She must be getting dressed.

(calling up the stairs)

Rachel!

She must still be getting dressed. So...

NELSON. *(sitting at the table with ARTHUR)* That's okay. I can wait.

(SYLVIA and ARTHUR and JESUS stare at him a moment.)

SYLVIA. Well. All right then. You'll excuse me, Nathan. I need to get ready. I'm off to battle Satan!

NELSON. Nelson?

SYLVIA. *(confused)* Satan.

NELSON. No. My name, Ma'am. It's Nelson. Nelson Steinberg? It used to be Nelson Wallen, but then my step mom remarried and we changed our names and now

it's Steinberg. Which is so great because I get to sit behind Rachel in homeroom. Stein. Steinberg?

SYLVIA. Oh.

NELSON. I also sit behind her in calculus. She's really great in math. Really great. Which is so wonderful for a girl. Not that girls are inherently poor in math, of course not, but, you know, sociological pressures make it uncommon for girls to excel in Math or Science. I bet she's great in science - wish I could sit behind her in science.

ARTHUR. Rachel's not allowed to take science any more.

NELSON. Wow. Too bad. Physics is amazing. They should start with physics in like kindergarten. Don't you think?

SYLVIA. Okay!

(JESUS gives her a nod that they should go.)

Well, I should be going!

NELSON. Kids would really pay attention in math if they had physics earlier.

(JESUS gives SYLVIA a little tug on her sleeve.)

SYLVIA. I still have to collate some flyers, so...

NELSON. I mean, it's like if they taught you to read before you could speak. You'd think, what are all these words, except you wouldn't think it in words, because you wouldn't know words yet.

(JESUS points to his watch.)

SYLVIA. I really do have to be getting ready. End Days isn't going to wait for me!

(She and JESUS rush back out.)

NELSON. Did I just talk too much?

ARTHUR. Maybe a little.

NELSON. Sometimes I do that. I'm supposed to look to see if anyone's interested but sometimes I forget to look, and sometimes even if I look it's hard to tell. People are really hard to read, don't you find?

ARTHUR. Yes.

NELSON. And then I get on a roll and it's hard for me to stop. I'm supposed to pretend to take an interest in the other person - ask questions so I don't monopolize the conversation, that's what they tell me.

ARTHUR. That seems sound.

NELSON. Thanks. So...

Tell me about yourself, Mr. S.

ARTHUR. What would you like to know?

NELSON. (*pulls a list out of his pocket and consults it*) Do you have any hobbies or special interests? That's usually a good icebreaker.

ARTHUR. Not really.

NELSON. (*goes back to the list*) What do you do for a living?

ARTHUR. I don't really do anything any more.

NELSON. Huh.

(*list again*)

Crazy weather we're having.

ARTHUR. I haven't been out for a while.

NELSON. Boy. This is tough. Any big plans for the day?

ARTHUR. I think I might just take a little nap.

NELSON. A nap! That's great. Were you up late last night with Rachel, conversing about her various interests or plans for the future?

ARTHUR. I just don't sleep.

NELSON. You don't?

ARTHUR. At night. And then, in the day it seems to be the only thing I can do.

NELSON. It sounds like you're off your cycle, sir.

ARTHUR. Maybe that's it.

NELSON. Or maybe you're clinically depressed. Have you seen a health care professional?

ARTHUR. Not lately.

NELSON. You shouldn't let that sort of thing go, Sir. Huge mood swings. Lack of sleep. How's your appetite?

ARTHUR. I don't know. I don't really eat.

NELSON. Sounds to me like you could use some help.

ARTHUR. I'll be okay.

NELSON. That's exactly what my father said, and then one morning we found him hanging from the basement ceiling pipes. None of us saw it coming. So you really can't take these things too lightly.

(There is a long stunned silence.)

That was inappropriate, wasn't it? Too much information. Didn't read the signs. Sorry about that.

ARTHUR. No, I appreciate your confidence.

NELSON. Really?

ARTHUR. Maybe I will make an appointment. Maybe a sleep clinic. Or something.

SYLVIA. *(reenters with JESUS)* Sleep clinic! You just need to do some good works.

Think about others instead of yourself and you'll sleep like a baby, am I right, Nelson? You need to welcome Jesus into your life.

NELSON. Or sometimes warm milk helps.

(RACHEL enters. She is a scowling sixteen-year old Goth. White white skin, black hair, black clothes, black lips, black outlined eyes. She sees NELSON. Deeply suspicious.)

RACHEL. What are you doing here?

NELSON. Rachel! Hi! Rachel.

(quickly referencing his notes)

I thought maybe since I was going that way maybe we could walk to school this morning. Together.

RACHEL. No thanks.

(searching the cabinet)

There's still no cereal.

SYLVIA. Honey, I thought you were going to go grocery shopping.

ARTHUR. I was so tired.

RACHEL. You haven't been out of those pajamas in three weeks.

(She finds a candy bar in a drawer and starts eating it.)

(under her breath)

You're starting to smell.

SYLVIA. Don't talk to your father like that.

ARTHUR. I'm sorry.

RACHEL. *(to NELSON)* Shouldn't you be going to school?

SYLVIA. Your father needs our love and support, Rachel.

ARTHUR. I'll go shopping today.

SYLVIA. The ministry is praying for you, Arthur. I wish you would come with me. I know if you came and asked for Jesus' love and forgiveness, you would be healed.

(JESUS opens his arms to ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR. I'll go shopping. I really think I will.

(SYLVIA looks to JESUS. He shrugs.)

SYLVIA. Nelson. Have you accepted Jesus as your personal savior?

NELSON. No. But it sounds really interesting.

RACHEL. Okay. Time for school. Go Nelson.

SYLVIA. Have you read the good book?

RACHEL. Mom, just let him go.

NELSON. You mean the Bible?

RACHEL. You're going to be late.

SYLVIA. There's always time for the good news.

(JESUS hands her a Bible, which she adds to NELSON's pile of brochures.)

Since I began a personal relationship with Jesus, my life is filled with joy and meaning, Nelson. I'm not afraid any more.

NELSON. That's so great.

SYLVIA. Maybe you'd like to come with us this Sunday. We're having a healing service.

NELSON. I'd love to! Wow. I've got Hebrew School at two but my morning is free.

ARTHUR. Hebrew school?

NELSON. My step-mom married Ben, so I'm converting and getting Bar Mitzvahed. It's a lot to learn on top of an eleventh grade curriculum but luckily I'm very bright. So, anyway, if your thing's in the morning that would be great.

SYLVIA. Eight a.m.

NELSON. Excellent! Thanks! Will you be going, Rachel?

RACHEL. No.

SYLVIA. Yes, she will.

NELSON. Great!

RACHEL. No.

SYLVIA. She'll be going and Arthur will be going and now you'll be going!

ARTHUR. I think I'm free, but...

RACHEL. I'm not. Now go to school, Nelson.

SYLVIA. Honey, this week it's nonnegotiable.

RACHEL. I'm not going to sit through that bullshit.

SYLVIA. Rachel! Don't use that language.

RACHEL. "Religion is all bullshit." Remember?

SYLVIA. (*to JESUS, who is shocked*) I never said...

RACHEL. Whenever Grandma and Grandpa asked to bring me to Shul...

SYLVIA. Honey – Grandma and Grandpa were Ultra Orthodox.

RACHEL. So?

SYLVIA. So that was a whole other thing. That was very extreme.

RACHEL. (*motions to the Bibles and signs*) That was extreme? Are you fucking kidding me?

SYLVIA. Rachel! Your grandmother shaved her head and wore a wig. All right? And your grandfather – if he were alive, he wouldn't even touch you now. Once I turned twelve he wouldn't touch me because I might

be “unclean.”

(At this, JESUS backs out of the room.)

RACHEL. They were my grandparents. They wanted me to come with them.

SYLVIA. The whole service was in Hebrew. You wouldn't have understood a word of it.

RACHEL. Whose fault is that?

SYLVIA. Where is this coming from? You didn't want to go. I let you choose and you chose not to.

ARTHUR. *(under this, to himself)* I'm so tired.

RACHEL. I was five years old! You said it was bullshit, what do you think I'd say?

SYLVIA. All right. Fine. You want to go to Shul –

RACHEL. *(overlapping)* I'm not saying that's what I want.

SYLVIA. The women sit behind a curtain so the men won't be distracted from their holy thoughts...

RACHEL. You don't even listen to what I want.

SYLVIA. I'll drop you off there on Saturday! Or no. You want to be Orthodox – you can walk.

NELSON. You could come with me! We're reform so – hey! We could even sit together!

RACHEL. I don't want any of it. *I* still think it's bullshit. I just don't understand what *you* want any more.

SYLVIA. Come with me to Blessed Name. Come and you'll understand.

RACHEL. It's like you shut off part of your brain.

SYLVIA. I'm happy.

RACHEL. I hate happy.

SYLVIA. Rachel...

RACHEL. You told me there was no God. That when we died, we were dead and that sucked but deal with it.

SYLVIA. *(reaching for her)* But that's terrible, honey. I'm sorry I told you that.

(JESUS drifts back into the room and stands beside

SYLVIA.)

RACHEL. (*pulling away, very upset*) You told me to think for myself. Remember? I mean, we read Kafka together when everyone else was reading *Little Women*. We read Camus. I don't understand what happened.

(JESUS *puts his hand on SYLVIA's shoulder.*)

SYLVIA. Look. Honey. If you came to Blessed Name...

RACHEL. No.

SYLVIA. I'm not doing this to punish you. I love you.

RACHEL. (*suddenly furious*) Then buy some fucking groceries!

SYLVIA. Rachel!

RACHEL. Stop shoving all this crap down my throat! Stop parading all over town with your nutty signs. Stop embarrassing me.

SYLVIA. I'm not trying to embarrass you. I'm trying to save you.

RACHEL. Yeah. I'll pass, thanks.

SYLVIA. I'm terrified for you, Rachel. You're going to be left behind. When the Rapture comes...

RACHEL. Then I'll stay behind! I'll take frogs and leeches and blood in the streets over all your holier than thou crap.

SYLVIA. That's it! Go to your room!

RACHEL. I have school.

SYLVIA. You're not going to school today. Get upstairs.

RACHEL. Jesus wants me to be a truant now?

SYLVIA. Listen, you. Do not talk to me like that. I'm your mother. If I decide to home school you...

RACHEL. Home school me?

SYLVIA. ...then you don't go to public school any more.

RACHEL. You're never home!

SYLVIA. (*overlapping*) If I send you to religious school, you go to religious school. If I send you to reform school, you go to reform school.

(JESUS *tries to calm SYLVIA down. She shrugs him off*)

and he quickly walks offstage.)

RACHEL. *(over SYLVIA)* Reform school? You're nuts. You've totally lost your mind.

SYLVIA. You're a minor. You do what I say. And you are going to church Sunday morning. If I have to drag you by the hair I'll do it.

RACHEL. Gee, that doesn't sound very Christian.

SYLVIA. *(completely frustrated and furious)* Look! Look, you people! I am trying to do something here. I am trying to save this family! I have found something...I have finally found something that has given me hope and joy and peace. I'm happy. Since Jesus came into my life, I am finally happy! And you people are not going to ruin this for me. You hear? Rachel? Arthur? You're both coming with me on Sunday and you are going to listen to the Good Word, and you are going to open your hearts and let Jesus save you!

(There is a pause. We hear the squeal of bus brakes.)

RACHEL. There's the bus! See ya!

(She grabs her books and races out the door.)

NELSON. Wait! Rachel, I thought maybe...

(But she's gone.)

(Pause. SYLVIA notices that JESUS is gone. Frightened.)

SYLVIA. Jesus?

(He comes back into the room.)

Oh, God.

(collecting herself)

Well, I really should get going too.

(JESUS hands her her backpack.)

Thank you, Jesus. All right then.

(chipper again)

You get dressed and go shopping now, Arthur! I'll see you Sunday, Nelson. Have a blessed day!

(She takes her backpack and signs and she and JESUS leave. NELSON and ARTHUR sit in silence for a moment.)

NELSON. Wow. Rachel really doesn't seem to like me.

ARTHUR. She doesn't seem to like me either.

(They both sit glumly for a moment.)

NELSON. Guess I should head out too then.

ARTHUR. Do you have to?

NELSON. Well, I've got school.

ARTHUR. Right.

NELSON. So...

ARTHUR. You could skip it.

NELSON. What?

ARTHUR. If you feel like. We could play cards or something.

You ever play gin, Nelson?

NELSON. I don't think so.

ARTHUR. I could teach you. It's not hard.

NELSON. Well, we've got calculus.

ARTHUR. Oh.

NELSON. First period.

ARTHUR. Oh. Okay.

NELSON. Yeah.

(pause)

I really would like to learn, though. I mean, I've often thought that. That I'd like to learn cards.

(ARTHUR doesn't respond.)

So...

(pause)

Hey, what if I came after school? How would that be?

ARTHUR. Okay.

NELSON. Great! I'll come back after school. And we could play some card games.

ARTHUR. Okay.

(NELSON starts to leave. Turns back.)

NELSON. Do you think you might go shopping today?
Rachel seemed kind of mad about that.

ARTHUR. I guess.

NELSON. I think you should.

ARTHUR. I don't know, Nelson. It all seems exhausting lately.

NELSON. What?

ARTHUR. All of it. Sleeping and getting up and washing and eating and using the john.

NELSON. Huh.

ARTHUR. We do it all every day and then...what? We do it all again and again and again and again. And then... eventually we don't do it any more.

NELSON. I'll come after school, okay?

ARTHUR. Okay.

NELSON. You'll go shopping. And then I'll come after school.

ARTHUR. Okay.

(Light shift. Cafeteria sounds. RACHEL sits at a long, empty table, reading a textbook.)

(NELSON heads toward her, struggling to hold his tray while maneuvering around the sling and the guitar. There is now a large bandage across the bridge of his nose.)

NELSON. Rachel! Hi! Rachel. Mind if I join you?

RACHEL. *(refusing to look up)* Yes.

NELSON. Oh.

(He looks around blankly.)

RACHEL. There's an empty table over there.

NELSON. Okay.

(But he just stands there, silent for a moment. Then:)

You were so amazing this morning. At the blackboard. Had you worked out that equation before? Because you wrote it out so fast. It's like you were channeling it or...something...

(**RACHEL** finally looks up at him.)

RACHEL. What happened to your nose?

NELSON. This? Oh, I was just horsing around with some of the guys.

RACHEL. If you'd stop dressing like that, they might stop beating you up.

NELSON. No, no. We were just roughhousing. It was all in fun.

A VOICE FROM OFFSTAGE. Hey freak!

(An empty milk carton comes flying through the air and clocks **NELSON** in the head. *Laughter.*)

NELSON. (*laughingly, to them*) You guys!

Anyway, Nurse Liz is real nice. Stopped the bleeding in about two seconds. Patched me right up.

RACHEL. Whatever.

(*She goes back to her book.*)

NELSON. I was saying to your dad, it's too bad you're not taking physics. With your calculus, you'd be a natural.

RACHEL. Yeah. Look, don't come by my house any more, okay? And don't tell anybody about...anything at my house. Okay?

NELSON. You can count on me, Rachel. What happens between us, stays between us.

RACHEL. Great.

(*She goes back to her book. Barely acknowledges him through the following.*)

NELSON. (*Trying to consult some notes, while balancing his tray.*)
I can't believe how alike our houses are.

RACHEL. Uh huh.

NELSON. Have you lived there long?

RACHEL. No.

NELSON. Where are you from?

RACHEL. New York.

NELSON. New York City? Wow. You're from New York City.
How great is that?

RACHEL. Great.

NELSON. Why did you move?

RACHEL. My dad lost his job.

NELSON. Oh. How did he...

RACHEL. It blew up when a plane flew into it.

NELSON. A plane...Wow. Was he okay?

RACHEL. Oh yeah. He's great.

*(Another milk carton beans NELSON in the head.
Laughter offstage.)*

NELSON. *(To offstage boys.)* Hey! You've got quite an arm!

(Another carton comes flying in.)

RACHEL. *(Shouting offstage.)* Stop it you freakin' goons!

(more laughter offstage)

(to NELSON) Sit. Would you just sit for Christ's sakes.

NELSON. Gee. Thanks.

*(He eagerly sits down and starts eating his macaroni
and cheese.)*

They've got very good macaroni and cheese here.
Much better than my last school. Less gooey.

RACHEL. I'd really like to just read, okay?

NELSON. Yeah? Me too. I love to read. Did you ever read this?

(He holds up his book. "A Brief History of Time.")

RACHEL. What is it?

NELSON. It's only the greatest book ever written.

RACHEL. What is it?

NELSON. Stephen Hawking explains pretty much everything in the universe.

RACHEL. Does he explain why you're dressed like that?

NELSON. No, you know, like all the great scientific theories from Aristotle and Ptolemy pretty much up until now.

RACHEL. Oh.

NELSON. You would love it.

RACHEL. I don't think so.

NELSON. No, you would – I mean, it all comes down to math. Unification. To have a mathematical equation that integrates Einstein's general relativity with quantum mechanics. An equation that encompasses everything.

RACHEL. And then what?

NELSON. And then we know how it all works.

RACHEL. And then what?

NELSON. And then we can figure out how it all started.

RACHEL. And then what?

NELSON. Ummm. And then we know.

(RACHEL goes back to her book.)

He's so amazing. Stephen Hawking. He's got A.L.S. – they told him he'd die when he was like twenty, and he's lived more than forty years past that and he rides around in a motorized wheelchair and he talks through a computer. It's like the greatest brain on the planet riding around on this chair. You want to borrow it?

RACHEL. No thanks.

NELSON. It's okay. I've got my name in the cover.

RACHEL. No.

NELSON. It's really easy. I mean, it's written in a way that anyone can understand.

(pause)

Come on. Take it. And then you can tell me what you think.

(She takes the book.)

Great! Wow! This is so great!

RACHEL. I probably won't read it.

NELSON. But you might.

RACHEL. I might.

NELSON. And then we could talk about it. Oh my God. That would be just about the greatest thing ever.

(RACHEL looks at him for a long moment.)

RACHEL. You should stop wearing that outfit.

NELSON. That's okay.

RACHEL. They won't stop beating on you till you stop.

NELSON. I'm used to it.

RACHEL. But why get used to it? Why not just be normal?

NELSON. Why do you wear that outfit?

RACHEL. So people will leave me alone.

NELSON. Oh.

RACHEL. Clearly it's not working.

NELSON. Some people think he's like a savior or something.

Elvis. That he didn't really die, or that he'll rise again.

RACHEL. They're nuts.

NELSON. Maybe. My mom loved him. She got me an Elvis outfit for Halloween when I was five and I would never take it off.

RACHEL. That was probably cute. When you were five.

NELSON. Yeah. So, I just kept on wearing it. Everywhere. Even to my Mom's funeral I wore it. My dad finally threw it away and I wouldn't get dressed. Went to kindergarten in my underwear.

RACHEL. You're kidding.

NELSON. Nope. So eventually he got me a new one. I find it really comforting. We've got the same birthday. Elvis and I. January 8th. And guess who else has it?

RACHEL. Who?

NELSON. Guess.

RACHEL. No.

NELSON. Come on. Somebody amazing.

RACHEL. Just tell me for Christ sakes.

NELSON. Stephen Hawking! The guy I was just telling you about! The book guy.

RACHEL. So?

NELSON. Isn't that cool?

RACHEL. Maybe you should dress like him.

NELSON. It's okay. They always beat me up the first month or so. But it gets old after a while. I expect it'll stop soon.

*(A barrage of milk containers starts hammering at them.
Laughter offstage.)*

RACHEL. *(Snapping from 1 to 10 in about a second. Picks up the milk containers and starts pummeling them back.)* Leave us alone you freakin' assholes!

NELSON. Wow. You've got great aim!

RACHEL. Friggin' Neanderthals!

(NELSON picks up a container with his good arm and hurls it back, weakly.)

NELSON. Friggin' Neanderthals!

(He grins, delighted.)

(Light shift. SYLVIA is on a folding chair in front of the XXX video store. She is having a little chat with someone off stage. There is an empty folding chair beside her.)

SYLVIA. So finally I say, *(flirting)* "Well, I would love it if you came with me, Mr. Jenks. We could sit together."

And – boom. You know? But I thought, hey, if we can just get him there.

(JESUS enters with two paper cups of hot coffee and joins SYLVIA in the other folding chair.)

SYLVIA. Thank you, Jesus.

JESUS. You're welcome, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. *(with growing passion and fury)* It's so frustrating. I wanted to say, "Mr. Jenks, the world is a horrible, dangerous, terrifying place. At any moment you could be raped, or knifed or gunned down. Some tsunami could wipe out your village, or you could get mad cow disease, or a meteor could hit, or a bus could plow into you, or you could be poisoned by anthrax, or some crazy foreign fanatic could try to blow you up."

(JESUS looks disapproving)

But, of course you can't say that. Can you?

JESUS. No.

(They both take a sip.)

SYLVIA. This is very good coffee.

But, I mean, hello! Here you are offering him eternal life and safety, off this Earth, in Heaven, where nobody who would harm him could even get in.

JESUS. (*putting a pink packet into his coffee*) Sweetener?

SYLVIA. I'm good, thanks. I know you said, "blessed are the poor in spirit." Remember when you said that? In Matthew?

JESUS. Right.

SYLVIA. But, enough already. Get some spirit. Get on board. Anyway, he loved being at the mission so much, he said he's going to come every week. So, it all worked out. And can you imagine, we nearly lost him to the Unitarians.

JESUS. Sylvia!

SYLVIA. Sorry.

(JESUS *laughs*.)

JESUS. Well. No, you're right.

(SYLVIA *laughs*.)

SYLVIA. Oh Jesus! I just love you so much!

JESUS. I love you too, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. You really saved a wretch like me, you know? I wish everyone felt what I feel! I wish I could talk about you to every single person on earth.

JESUS. You're off to a good start, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Thanks.

(*They each take a sip*.)

This is nice. Here.

JESUS. Yes.

SYLVIA. Praise God. Before you came into my life, there's no way in heck I would be out here sipping coffee in the broad daylight where any drive-by shooter could take me out. And now – let 'em try. Death is just a gateway to a lifetime with you.

JESUS. Amen.

SYLVIA. How do I get through to Rachel and Arthur, Jesus? I really lost my mind this morning, didn't I? Reform school? Crazy.

JESUS. You just want the best for them. You're a good person, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Am I?

JESUS. You're a good person. And you're doing good in the world.

SYLVIA. Thank you, Jesus. It means so much to me that you think so.

JESUS. I do.

SYLVIA. Well, they're coming Sunday. Maybe they'll be moved by the spirit.

JESUS. I'll do what I can.

SYLVIA. Oh look! Here come some sinners!

JESUS. Time to pray.

(They bow their heads.)

(Light shift. RACHEL is sitting somewhere outside the school, rolling a joint. She lights up, leans back, and begins reading "A Brief History of Time.")

(A church bell chimes four times. Lights up on ARTHUR. He is still at the kitchen table, but is now lying across it, asleep.)

(There is a knock at the door.)

NELSON. *(offstage)* Mr. S.?

(Arthur doesn't waken.)

(NELSON knocks again, then enters, now on crutches. His nose is still bandaged and his arm still in a sling.)

Mr. S.?

(He sees ARTHUR slumped over the table. Rushes to him, shakes him.)

Oh no! Mr. S.! Mr. S.!

(ARTHUR rouses with a start.)

ARTHUR. What? What time is it?

NELSON. Don't scare me like that, Mr. S. I thought you'd done something drastic.

ARTHUR. Is school over?

NELSON. For an hour. I waited outside to follow Rachel home, but she never came. You're still in your pajamas.

ARTHUR. Oh. Yeah.

NELSON. I guess you didn't go shopping, huh?

ARTHUR. I guess not. Do you want to play gin?

NELSON. Let's go get some groceries. Do you have a car?

ARTHUR. Not any more.

NELSON. Well, we'll walk. It'll be good for us, right? And cereal doesn't weigh too much.

ARTHUR. I don't know, Nelson. I'm kind of tired.

NELSON. Where are your clothes?

ARTHUR. I'll go tomorrow. Definitely.

NELSON. Go get dressed.

ARTHUR. I haven't been outside in a while, Nelson.

NELSON. It'll be fun.

ARTHUR. A long while.

NELSON. It'll be an adventure.

(Lights shift. RACHEL is running to her locker at school. The hallway is dimly lit and empty. She madly starts entering her combination code. The lock doesn't budge. She tries it again, more frantic. Nothing. She begins banging on the locker and kicking it. She completely loses it and kicks and pounds on the locker hysterically. Crumples to the foot of the locker, defeated and spent.)

(STEPHEN HAWKING appears from behind the locker. He is in his motorized wheelchair with its electronic speaking device. His voice is the unearthly robotic monotone of the computer.)

STEPHEN HAWKING. Maybe you should get the janitor.

(RACHEL stares at him, speechless.)

Or you could just kick it some more. That seems productive.

RACHEL. (*stunned*) Oh my God. I was just reading your book.

STEPHEN. Did you buy it?

RACHEL. No, it's Nelson's copy.

STEPHEN. You should buy it. I like it when people buy it.

RACHEL. How did you get here?

STEPHEN. Chair.

RACHEL. Oh my God. I'm cracking up. I'm my mother. I'm a nut like my mother.

STEPHEN. You seem to be having a problem with your locker.

RACHEL. Oh my God. Oh my God.

STEPHEN. And you're an atheist of convenience. Very sensible.

RACHEL. Did you come here...did you...did you travel through a wormhole?

STEPHEN. You haven't read the papers?

RACHEL. Huh?

STEPHEN. I was wrong about the wormholes. There's no surviving them.

RACHEL. Wow.

STEPHEN. Bummer, right?

RACHEL. How are you here? Am I crazy? I'm losing my mind, aren't I?

STEPHEN. This is your mind on drugs.

RACHEL. I was reading. I lost track of time.

STEPHEN. Space and time not only affect but are also affected by everything that happens in the universe. Think about it.

RACHEL. They're going to lock down the school. I can't get my books. I can't open my locker. I don't know what to do.

STEPHEN. 32-7-46.

RACHEL. Huh?

STEPHEN. Your locker.

RACHEL. 32-7-46!

(She jumps up and tries the combination. The locker opens. She turns around. STEPHEN HAWKING is gone.)

(Light shift. NELSON and ARTHUR standing in the cereal aisle at Shoprite.)

NELSON. Crunchy? Flaky?

ARTHUR. I don't know.

NELSON. Does she like frosted or plain?

ARTHUR. I don't know.

NELSON. Chex? Raisin Bran? Total?

ARTHUR. I don't know, Nelson.

(They move a few inches.)

NELSON. Wow. There sure are a lot of cereals. Okay. Try to picture her sitting down to breakfast.

ARTHUR. I can't. I can't picture her at all.

NELSON. She has an empty bowl in front of her.

ARTHUR. No.

NELSON. A spoon. A napkin.

ARTHUR. I can't do this, Nelson. This is too hard.

NELSON. She reaches out. She picks up a box. She opens it and pours it into her bowl...What color is the box?!

(Pause. ARTHUR crumbles.)

ARTHUR. I don't know. I never noticed what color box her cereal was in. I never noticed that she ate cereal. I was out of the house before she got up. I came home at 9. I don't know what she ate for dinner. I don't know what she packed for lunch.

NELSON. She buys actually.

ARTHUR. I don't know. I don't know her. Let's go. Please. Let's go home.

NELSON. You could get to know her now. It'll be fun. We could both get to know her.

ARTHUR. She doesn't want me to know her.

NELSON. That's okay. She doesn't want me to know her either. You just have to be persistent.

ARTHUR. She hates me.

NELSON. No.

ARTHUR. I don't blame her.

NELSON. She doesn't hate you.

ARTHUR. I used to be a Senior Vice President. I used to wear a suit and tie. Now I can't even get dressed.

NELSON. You are dressed.

ARTHUR. I used to tell sixty-five people what to do. All those people. All gone.

NELSON. How about Rice Crispies?

ARTHUR. If I hadn't run into that guy in the stairwell. Some guy with a flashlight. I don't know who that guy was. I'll never know.

NELSON. Or maybe Corn Flakes.

ARTHUR. I'd be gone too. I should be gone too.

NELSON. I bet she likes Cheerios. Everyone likes Cheerios.

ARTHUR. Sixty-five people. Now I can't even get dressed.

NELSON. You are dressed, Mr. S.

(pause)

Hey, we'll get one of everything! It'll be great. We'll get one of every cereal. And we'll all eat breakfast together. Every day.

ARTHUR. I don't eat.

NELSON. Now you'll eat. We'll eat cereal.

(Light shift. We hear a rendition of "Amazing Grace" as the church bell chimes ten times.)

(Lights up on the Stein kitchen. We hear the churchgoers SYLVIA, JESUS, ARTHUR, RACHEL and NELSON returning. As they enter:)

SYLVIA. Never. I mean, I've only been worshipping for three months but I've never seen a triple miracle, praise God. And on your first time.

NELSON. *(modestly)* I just felt...I mean, the music was so beautiful.

(As we see NELSON, the bandage is off his nose. SYLVIA is carrying his sling and his crutches.)

SYLVIA. You let Jesus into your heart, and he made you whole. Reverend Peter was beside himself. I only wish I'd been able to fill every pew in the church to witness it.

(RACHEL goes to the cabinet and takes down some Life cereal. She pours it into a bowl. ARTHUR, exhausted, goes to his place at the table and slumps down, more depressed than ever.)

It meant so much to me that you three came today. Thank you. Thank you Jesus.

RACHEL. *(looking in the refrigerator)* I should have prayed for milk.

NELSON. Oh no! We forgot milk!

(RACHEL begins eating her cereal dry.)

SYLVIA. While we're all so moved by the spirit, shall we make a whole day of it? I'm on my way to the women's shelter. We're ministering to the poor and offering hot lunches.

(JESUS reaches under the counter and brings out a huge soup tureen.)

RACHEL. Could you bring me back some food?

SYLVIA. Rachel! Why don't you come? You won't believe the feeling you get helping someone less fortunate.

RACHEL. I'm hungry.

SYLVIA. Arthur?

ARTHUR. I'm a little tired.

NELSON. Gosh, I'd love to. It sounds very life affirming, but I've got to go over my Torah portion before my private with Mr. Levine. He's really going at quite a clip.

SYLVIA. Your Torah portion?

NELSON. Two kids are turning thirteen next month so we might do a triple Bar Mitzvah. But Rabbi Baumbach says I really have to pick up the pace.

SYLVIA. *(to NELSON)* I just thought...I mean, you just had this life changing experience...

NELSON. I did. Absolutely.

SYLVIA. Oh.

(She takes the soup tureen from JESUS.)

Thank you, Jesus. So, will you be coming next Sunday?
To Blessed Name?

NELSON. Definitely. I wouldn't miss it.

ARTHUR. Think I might take a little nap.

(He exits.)

(JESUS gives SYLVIA a little pat on the shoulder and she is strengthened by it.)

SYLVIA. All right then. We'll all go together again! Wonderful. Have a blessed afternoon everyone!

RACHEL. Ta.

(SYLVIA and JESUS leave.)

NELSON. So...How about that? What a morning, right?

(RACHEL wads up a brochure and throws it at him. It beans him in the head.)

NELSON. Oops!

RACHEL. Catch!

(She throws another wad, which he swats at with his left hand.)

NELSON. What are you doing, Rachel?

RACHEL. Catch, damn it!

(She throws. He tries to catch with his right arm but it hurts.)

NELSON. Ow!

RACHEL. "I'm healed! Thank you Jesus! I can see!"

NELSON. I didn't say that.

RACHEL. Freakin' phony. Let me see you hop on one leg.

(He does.)

The sprained leg, stupid.

(He tries but it is clearly painful.)

NELSON. Well, maybe I'm not completely healed. But I'm feeling considerably better.

RACHEL. Yeah. It's a miracle.

(She returns to her dry cereal.)

NELSON. Didn't you love it there, Rachel? The music was so stirring, and Reverend Peter had such a deep booming voice and everyone was so nice. I really felt part of something big, didn't you?

RACHEL. God whore.

NELSON. What?

RACHEL. You have to pick, don't you get that? You can't be Jewish on Saturday and Evangelical on Sunday, just to cover all your bases.

NELSON. But I like them both.

RACHEL. You're not supposed to "like" them. And they're completely contradictory.

NELSON. Everything's contradictory. It's like Quantum Field Theory.

RACHEL. No it's not.

NELSON. It is. If you ask, "Is light a particle or a wave?" Well, actually, it can be both. I mean, if you ask a particle-like question, you get a particle-like answer, and if you ask a wave-like question, you get a wave-like answer. You just can't ask both questions at the same time.

RACHEL. Is this what you do every time you move?

NELSON. What?

RACHEL. You follow some girl home. Feed her astrophysics. Join her mother's freak-show church.

NELSON. I just...I like you, Rachel.

RACHEL. You have no reason to like me.

NELSON. Maybe it's pheromones.

RACHEL. Huh?

NELSON. Maybe you're giving off an indiscernible smell that I can't consciously recognize but that my body chemically responds to.

RACHEL. Don't smell me then, okay!? Don't smell me. Don't like me. And don't come around here pumping up my mother any more. She's fucking lost her mind and I don't need you here feeding her sick fantasies.

NELSON. I think your mom just loves you. My mom was like that. She wants you to be safe.

RACHEL. My mother has been inculcated into a cult.

NELSON. Maybe. Or maybe she's asking a wave-like question and you're asking a particle-like question.

RACHEL. That is such bullshit! How do you shove all this science down my throat and then act like you're healed. You genuinely think you were healed by God today?

NELSON. Probably not.

RACHEL. Probably not.

NELSON. But the idea of it made me happy. I would have liked there to be a miracle.

RACHEL. See, I like REALITY! Well, I don't like it. But everything else pisses me off!

NELSON. I'm sorry, Rachel. I wish I could stop pissing you off. I wish I could say the right thing. I never can say the right thing, and I want so much to say the right thing to you.

(Long pause while RACHEL considers this.)

RACHEL. I read your book.

NELSON. The Stephen Hawking? You read the Stephen Hawking? Oh my gosh. Why didn't you tell me?

RACHEL. You were too busy speaking in tongues.

NELSON. What did you think? Did you like it?

(Pause. Sigh.)

RACHEL. Yeah. I liked it.

NELSON. Oh my Gosh. You liked it. Wow. This is like the greatest day of my life.

RACHEL. But it's not about all that miracle crap. It's about figuring out...

NELSON. *(over this)* This is so great.! You liked it. I knew...I just knew you would. Oh my gosh. There are so many

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