

# **BEFORE YOU GO**

By

John C. Ashton

## BEFORE YOU GO

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BEFORE YOU GO

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**CAST**

**BETTY BAKER**, 70s – Her life may be nearing an end, but she’s still pretty lively. Still full of love and a quirky sense of humor.

**MARK BAKER**, mid 40s – Betty’s oldest son. A thoughtful, troubled, cynical romantic; a cocky, insecure fellow, with a guilty conscience. Does he have the courage to ask for forgiveness?

**PAT BAKER**, early 40s – An agnostic Catholic priest. Devoted to serving people, no fan of dogma. He might be considered the white sheep of the family.

**JILL BAKER**, late 30s-early 40s – A street-smart, loving person with a tough exterior, a checkered past, and high spirits. She has a tender heart, and she guards it well.

**MARTY HOLLISTER**, late 30s – Jill’s significant other. Though his stage name is Sammy Suicide, it’s true: You can take the boy out of the Midwest, but you can’t take the Midwest out of the boy.

**Place**

Betty Baker’s home, Tucson, Arizona

**Time**

A little while ago

**Running Time**

90 minutes plus Intermission

BEFORE YOU GO

BEFORE YOU GO had its world premiere at Miners Alley Playhouse (Len Matheo, Producing Artistic Director; Lisa DeCaro, Executive Director) in Golden, Colorado, opening on August 27, 2021. It was directed by the author; the set design was by Jonathan Scott-McKean; the costume design was by Steffani Bolmer-Day; the lighting design was by Vance McKenzie; the original music was composed and performed by Mark Collins. The cast was as follows:

MARK BAKER . . . . . Eric Mather  
JILL BAKER . . . . . Missy Moore  
FATHER PAT BAKER . . . . . Mark Collins  
BETTY BAKER (MOM) . . . . . Billie McBride  
MARTY . . . . . Damon Guerrasio

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# BEFORE YOU GO

ACT 1  
SCENE 1

*Inside Betty Baker's modest home in Tucson, Arizona.*

*Livingroom and Kitchen Great Room: A couch, easy chair, and coffee table, and a speaker (amp); full kitchen with table and chairs. Door to the outside is Left. The door to Betty's bedroom is Up Right.*

*It's about 10 p.m.*

*In the dark, MARK BAKER, Betty's oldest son, sits on the speaker as he plays an electric guitar and sings softly. We barely hear the guitar strings; he's got sound going to his headphones.*

**MARK.** *(Singing:)*

WHAT DO I BELIEVE IN?

WHAT DO I FEEL IS REAL?

I DON'T BE—LIEVE— *(Mark hits the wrong chord; tries another one:)*

BE-LIEVE. *(That's not it. He tries again:)*

BE-LIEVE. *(Finally, the right chord. He continues:)*

—IN A THING THAT I DON'T SENSE FOR MYSELF.

AND I CAN'T MAKE SENSE OF WHAT I FEEL.

*(A woman -- JILL, Betty's youngest -- bursts in the front door. She wears a backpack and carries a motorcycle helmet with a smear of blood on it. She slams the front door shut and immediately turns to lock the dead bolt. She hasn't noticed Mark, who has jumped up, startled. They're surprised to see each other.)*

**MARK.** Jill?

**JILL.** Mark?

**MARK.** Hey.

**JILL.** *(Having trouble locking the door.)* Damn it!

**MARK.** Here, let me—

**JILL.** I can do it! *(She locks it.)* There! *(She removes her backpack.)*

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**MARK.** What's going on, Jill? Who's out there?

**JILL.** I need a drink. *(Jill heads for the kitchen, Mark following. Jill looks in the fridge.)* No beer?

**MARK.** Nope. There's hard liquor.

**JILL.** I'll have a triple whatever.

**MARK.** There's vodka, Grand Marnier, and Jameson.

**JILL.** Jame-O, please. *(Mark pours the whiskey into a glass. Jill takes a sip.)*  
Oh that's good.

**MARK.** Hey. Nice to see you. *(Mark reaches out to hug her. Jill pats his shoulders politely.)*

**JILL.** Where's Mom?

**MARK.** In the bedroom. She's—

**JILL.** I should go say Hi. Tell her I'm here.

**MARK.** Not right now, Jill. She uh—she's had a tough day. She's probably asleep.

**JILL.** Okay... I sure didn't expect to see you here.

**MARK.** Did you just get into town?

**JILL.** Couple hours ago.

**MARK.** Is somebody after you, Jill?

**JILL.** Maybe.

**MARK.** Like who?

**JILL.** Just a couple of raunchy rednecks who got seriously out of line at a bar.

**MARK.** The first thing you did when you got to town was go to a bar?

**JILL.** I was thirsty. And besides, what's it to you?

**MARK.** What bar was this?

**JILL.** I don't know. The Something Horse.

**MARK.** The Flying Horse?

**JILL.** Yeah. Flying Horse. It looked friendly, and I needed a little quiet time.

**MARK.** So what happened?

**JILL.** I was sitting there, getting myself centered as best I could before I came here, to Mom's, when all of a sudden, the cowpoke version of Beavis and Butthead comes galumphing over and starts hitting on me. The last thing in the world I wanted to deal with. I told them to get out of my face, but they kept at it— saying stupid crude things, leaning in, *breathing* on me. I told

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them I was a lesbian, but that just made them hotter. Finally, I put some cash on the table, shoved past them, and left. Then, I'm out in the parking lot, about to hop on my bike, when one of them grabs me from behind.

**MARK.** What'd you do?

**JILL.** Oh, Mark.

**MARK.** Tell me.

**JILL.** I whacked him in the head with my helmet and put a Kin Geri [*kin-GEER-ee*] move on him/

**MARK.** A what?

**JILL.** /hopped on the bike and drove away.

**MARK.** What'd you put on him? A King Jerry move?

**JILL.** Kin Geri. Basically it's a (*doing the move*) kick to the groin. First time I had to use it outside of class. Worked pretty good.

**MARK.** Uh hunh. Then what?

**JILL.** I get two blocks away and this big-wheel pick-up comes roaring up behind me, flashing its headlights, honking the horn. They chased me all over town. It was scary, but I'm pretty sure I lost them.

**MARK.** You were lucky, kiddo. Drunken horny pissed-off cowboys. They could've hurt you bad.

**JILL.** I can handle jerks like that. If I have to.

**MARK.** You think so.

**JILL.** I have two things going for me. One: I got experience in that area, and Two: I got a gun in my backpack.

**MARK.** You mean like an actual loaded firearm?

**JILL.** Hell yes loaded. What do you think? An unloaded handgun is basically just a hammer.

**MARK.** What the fuck! You got a permit?

**JILL.** In Arizona? Are you kidding? Guns are required accessories here, aren't they? They won't let you in a Walmart in this state unless you're packing iron.

**MARK.** It won't do you much good tucked away in your backpack. (*With one quick-draw motion Jill draws the gun from her backpack.*) Yikes.

**JILL.** It's a shame, I know, but— shit happens. (*Jill returns the handgun to her backpack. Mark heads for the kitchen.*)

**MARK.** I think I'll have a hit of that Jameson. Would you uh...?

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**JILL.** I'm good.

**MARK.** Did you say you were a lesbian?

**JILL.** That's just what I told those jerks at the bar.

**MARK.** But are you?

**JILL.** It's not my lifestyle, but I've dabbled. Have you?

**MARK.** I've dabbled. I've double-dabbled, in fact.

**JILL.** I don't want to hear about it.

**MARK.** Good. Me neither... So you just got into town from—L.A., right?

**JILL.** Yeah. Well, West Covina. Kind of a suburb.

**MARK.** What made you decide to come here all of a sudden?

**JILL.** I had an unexpected urgent need to get the hell out of Dodge, and I figured it's been a while, I'll go see Mom.

**MARK.** How'd you get here?

**JILL.** A Kawasaki Ninja 900.

**MARK.** A motorcycle?

**JILL.** No. It's a flat-screen TV. Yes, it's a motorcycle. We were just talking about it.

**MARK.** Oh yeah.

**JILL.** I stole it.

**MARK.** You stole it? This gets better and better.

**JILL.** I took it without permission from the individual whose name is on the title. Officially, it belongs to my boyfriend, Sammy Suicide, but I've paid for more than half—

**MARK.** Sammy Suicide?

**JILL.** That's his stage name. His real name is Martin Hollister the Third.

**MARK.** Why did you "steal" his motorcycle?

**JILL.** It's faster than the Prius, and more fun.

**MARK.** And what prompted your urgent need to get out of Dodge?

**JILL.** I don't want to talk about it.

**MARK.** Oh come on.

**JILL.** *(She'd rather not discuss this part, but she figures she might as well.)*  
I caught him cheating on me.

**MARK.** Ah.

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**JILL.** I decided to come home for lunch, and I caught him messing around with a couple of floozies from this club he's been playing at, and I kinda--threw a fit.

**MARK.** What kind of fit?

**JILL.** I smushed a plate of nachos in his face and shoved one of the ladies into the swimming pool. We have a pool in our apartment complex. It's kinda nice actually.

**MARK.** What did Mister Suicide do?

**JILL.** He just stood there, looking kinda stunned and stupid, with gooey chunks of chips and cheese oozing down his face. And then I split. I tossed some stuff into my backpack, hopped on the bike, and drove away. I didn't know where to go, so I came here.

**MARK.** Well, welcome.

**JILL.** I can't stay long. I have to be back at work on Monday.

**MARK.** What do you do?

**JILL.** I work part-time in a home for at-risk single moms. Teenagers mostly. Kids with babies. We give them a safe place to stay, teach them basic skills, help them find their strengths, encourage them, love them, hold them while they cry.

**MARK.** Sounds like you're doing some good in the world.

**JILL.** Trying to. We can only do so much. To see the messes these girls get into, and how ill-equipped they are to handle them, it can break your heart. But many of them -- not all, but many of them -- walk out of there a few months later

with hope and skills and a positive self-image. And that's why I do it.

*("Blitzkrieg Bop" plays on Jill's phone.)* Well shit. *(Jill answers her phone.)* What do you want, Marty? ... No! Stop calling me! *(She disconnects the call. She looks around the room.)* Weird. She took everything from the house in Saint Louis and brought it down here. Same furniture, same pictures on the walls. You got out of there just in time, didn't you?

**MARK.** Yeah. Right about the time Mom's drinking got really bad and Dad started shacking up with his secretary.

**JILL.** I think it was the other way around. But anyway, Davey and I went through it without you.

**MARK.** I had to go back to school. I had a whole life back there.

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**JILL.** Yes, you did. And that's the one you chose to live. Hey, it's okay. We managed... I heard you got strung out on coke for a while.

**MARK.** Where'd you hear that?

**JILL.** I saw it on Facebook.

**MARK.** What!?

**JILL.** Yeah. It got about three 300 Likes and 8 Shares.

**MARK.** No way.

**JILL.** No. Of course not. Mom told me.

**MARK.** How did *she* know?

**JILL.** Mom knows everything.

**MARK.** Everything?

**JILL.** Sooner or later. You're not still doing coke, are you? That shit went out with disco.

**MARK.** For the record, I stopped doing cocaine one disgusting bird-chirpy Spring morning about fifteen years ago.

**JILL.** What? You gave it up for Lent?

**MARK.** Ha. I had just got home from my second trip to the emergency room. I went into the bathroom and had a heart-to-heart talk with the frazzled fuck in the mirror, and he told me I had to quit that shit or die. I dumped half a gram into the toilet, and I haven't done a speck of it since.

**JILL.** Cold turkey? No rehab program or anything? All on your own?

**MARK.** I had a little help from Saint Jude.

**JILL.** Saint Jude?

**MARK.** Yeah. The patron saint of lost causes.

**JILL.** You prayed?

**MARK.** I'm kidding. I haven't prayed since the last game of the 1985 World Series, when I realized that either God didn't care about baseball, or He was a Kansas City Royals fan, and either way, from that day forward, Him and Me were through. I did have help, though, quitting coke. An ex-girlfriend kinda looked after me as I went through it. Carmen Gettit.

**JILL.** No.

**MARK.** Her real name was Leslie Boggs. Carmen Gettit was her Roller Derby name.

**JILL.** You do get around, don't you? ... So what else? Did you ever finish your Great American Novel?

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**MARK.** You remembered about the novel. Hunh...I'm still working on it. *(Jill says nothing.)* You're the one who should write, Jill. Songs, or a movie, or whatever. With everything you've been through.

**JILL.** No thanks. I'd rather live life than write about it ... I gotta go to the ladies'. *(Jill heads for Mom's bedroom.)*

**MARK.** Hold on a second.

**JILL.** What? I gotta pee. And I want to say Hi to Mom, let her know I'm here.

**MARK.** Two things. One: Father Pat is in there with her.

**JILL.** Pat's here? Why didn't you tell me? *(She turns to go.)*

**MARK.** Jill.

**JILL.** What?!

**MARK.** She's dying, Jill. Mom is dying.

**JILL.** Oh man . . . Mom's dying? *(Mark nods. Jill takes this in. She goes to finish off her drink, but she puts it down instead.)* Well, that sucks. *(Jill heads for Mom's bedroom as the LIGHTS FADE.)*

## SCENE 2

*Next morning. PAT (Father Pat, the number-two son) is in the kitchen. Mark is at the couch, folding a blanket, tidying up where he spent the night. He checks to make sure Pat's not looking, then slips the gun from Jill's backpack, and is removing the bullets when—*

**PAT.** Hey, Mark? *(Startled, Mark drops the gun and the bullets. He tucks the empty gun back into the backpack and hurries to gather up the bullets scattered in and around the couch.)* You want some tea?

**MARK.** Uh...

**PAT.** There's tea here. You want some?

**MARK.** No thanks. I got coffee going. *(Mark counts the bullets, sees that one is missing.)*

**PAT.** You want to go to Senior Wences? [WEN-sez] Pick up some breakfast burritos? What are you looking for over there? Spare change?

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**MARK.** Guitar pick ... Ah! (*Mark furtively slips bullets into a pocket, then heads for the kitchen, pretending to hold up a guitar pick. Pat is looking sad.*) You okay? (*Pat offers a half-hearted smile.*) What's up?

**PAT.** I was in there with Mom, watching "Murder She Wrote." I look over and her eyelids have closed, her breath is shallow, and this tiny little gurgly-raspy sound seeps out of her, and I think, this could be it, and I figure I better go get you guys, just in case. I turn off the TV, head for the door, and I hear, "Hey! I was watching that!"

**MARK.** Well yeah. No way Mom's going to miss the last scene of a "Murder She Wrote."

**PAT.** She's going to be missing them pretty soon, I think. Her doctor said it was time for her to go to a hospice. But she refused to go. Said she didn't want to spend her "final days" in somebody else's bedroom. She wanted to come home.

**MARK.** You got to hand it to her. She's duking it out with Death, the undefeated heavyweight champ. He's got her on the ropes, and she just keeps punching.

**PAT.** Have you ever known Betty Baker to give up on anything she thought was worthwhile?

**MARK.** That's kind of a loaded question. But she sure as hell ain't giving up easy. What are you drinking? It smells like fertilizer.

**PAT.** Green Tea with Kombucha [*kom-BOO-cha*]. It's (*reading the box*) "a fermented drink made from bacteria and yeast."

**MARK.** Sounds like a venereal disease. (*That image is too much for Pat. He slowly places his cup down.*) Let me ask you something, Father Pat.

**PAT.** Aw-oh. Is this a question for the Reverend Patrick Baker, or good ol' Pat, the younger brother who used to laugh at your fart jokes.

**MARK.** Let's make it official. What do you, Father Patrick Baker, think happens when you die?

**PAT.** Ah. Well, when you die, your soul leaves your body and goes up to stand before Almighty God for Final Judgement. And He will either welcome you into Heaven, where you will live for all eternity in glorious supernatural bliss, or cast you down to Hell, where you will writhe and cry out in horrible physical agony and emotional despair forever, until the end of time.

**MARK.** You don't really believe all that, do you?

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**PAT.** No. But I know a lot of people who do, or think they do. And those are the folks I minister to. You been thinking about death, Mark?

**MARK.** I have been lately. I keep catching glimpses of the Grim Reaper, lurking in the dark corners, checking his watch.

**PAT.** What do you think is going to happen when he comes for *you*?

**MARK.** I prefer to think that I'm going to live forever.

**PAT.** Good luck with that.

**MARK.** I figure if Keith Richards can do it, so can I.

**PAT.** No, truly. You brought it up. What do you think happens when you die?

**MARK.** It's pretty simple: When you die, you cease to be. Your body starts to decompose, and you as a person no longer exists.

**PAT.** Yeah. Don't you find that kinda depressing?

**MARK.** I find it sensible, logical, physiologically inevitable, and yeah, kinda depressing -- when I stop to think about it. Contemplating your own oblivion isn't a ton of fun. How do you even imagine not existing? It's terrifying. But here's the thing: Knowing there's no afterlife makes the one life you got all the more precious. And I find no comfort whatsoever in the cockamamie fairy tales promulgated by your ilk about life after death. In fact, I resent it.

**PAT.** Why do you even care what that ilk thinks?

**MARK.** It's just that they're always so smug and righteous about it.

**PAT.** And you're not?

**MARK.** But *I'm* right. All we have in our unending quest to determine what's really true, and to figure out the what, how, and why of it all, is Science: observation, calculation, and logic.

**PAT.** Do you really believe that Science can explain Everything? They're not even sure what Gravity is anymore. Top scientists around the world are having cat fights over what Consciousness is. On my side of the fence, we call it your Soul.

**MARK.** No. Soul is what James Brown has but guys like you and me do not.

**PAT.** There are more things in Heaven and Earth, pal, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. (*Jill, recently awakened, enters from Mom's bedroom to fetch her backpack.*) Good morning, sunshine. (*Jill doesn't stop, but she waves half-heartedly.*)

**JILL.** Morning. (*She gets her backpack and takes it into the bedroom.*)

**MARK.** You know she's got a pistol with her.

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**PAT.** Woman all by herself, riding a motorcycle across the desert? Not a bad idea to bring a weapon, just in case.

**MARK.** As long as that's what she wants it for.

**PAT.** What? ... Oh... That happened years ago, in her seventh circle of Hell. Her rock bottom. She's come a long way since then.

**MARK.** Yeah.

**PAT.** Thank God she's here, hunh? I wonder how she knew.

**MARK.** Knew what?

**PAT.** That Mom was so sick.

**MARK.** She had no idea. You should have seen her when I told her. She almost crumpled up on the floor. No, she came here after she caught her boyfriend frolicking poolside with a couple of groupies, and went all Quentin Tarantino on 'em.

**PAT.** But that's not what brought her here. That's just the drama she created to make it happen.

**MARK.** Hunh?

**PAT.** She must have sensed somehow that Mom was transitioning, and she needed to get here as soon as she could to say goodbye. I've been thinking, too, that there might perhaps be another reason the universe has brought you two together like this.

**MARK.** The Universe should mind its own business.

**PAT.** Talk to her. *(An awkward pause.)*

**MARK.** No. Not now.

**PAT.** Why not? I'll find some excuse to get out of the house for a while, and you go for it.

**MARK.** I even had a dream about it once. A couple years ago. The whole conversation, start to finish.

**PAT.** Well, it's about time you did it for real. And when you do, be sure to give her space to say whatever, and react however she wants. You're both sensible, loving people. You guys can work this out.

**MARK.** We'll see.

**PAT.** Bless you, my son. *(Pat gives Mark a blessing. Mark crosses his arms to shield himself.)* Are you going to share anything with her about Uncle Jack and all that stuff when you were little?

**MARK.** God no. Why would I do that?

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**PAT.** Isn't that like important context?

**MARK.** I'm not looking for excuses, Pat.

**PAT.** Have you ever talked to anyone besides me about Uncle Jack? (*Mark says nothing.*) Maybe you ought to. (*Jill enters from Mom's room.*)

**JILL.** (*Turning back toward the bedroom to call back to Mom:*) You can have your cigarettes, or you can have your oxygen, but you can't have both! (*To Mark and Pat:*) She's driving me crazy.

**PAT.** She loves you.

**JILL.** I know. What's for breakfast, fellas?

**MARK.** Pat has some tasty fermented bacteria.

**PAT.** Kombucha.

**JILL.** I smell coffee.

**MARK.** I'll get it. You sit. How do you take it?

**JILL.** I like my coffee like I like my men... With plenty of sugar.

**MARK.** Comin' up!

**PAT.** How's Mom doing?

**JILL.** She's a tough old broad.

**MARK.** That's where you get it.

**JILL.** Oh yeah. We're both so tough.

**MARK.** You are, though. Both of you. (*Mark hands coffee to Jill. She takes a sip.*)

**JILL.** Perfect.

**MARK.** (*Realizing it's his turn.*) Should I--?

**JILL.** No, she's fine. She's got the TV going, got her headphones on, sipping on a Diet Doctor Pepper. I think she'd rather not be disturbed at the moment.

**MARK.** I won't bother her then.

**JILL.** So. You guys been talking about me?

**PAT.** Your name has come up.

**JILL.** What do you think? Did I do the right thing? Causing a disturbance and ditching on Marty?

**PAT.** You did what you had to do.

**JILL.** I guess.

**PAT.** We're just glad you're here. And you're looking pretty darn chipper for a gal who just rode a motorcycle four hundred miles across the desert.

**JILL.** That was pretty cool, actually.

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**PAT.** I could never ride a motorcycle long distance like that. I'd be afraid my kidneys would disintegrate.

**JILL.** The vibrations are part of the fun. (*Mark and Pat would rather not comment on that.*)

**PAT.** Are you still Mrs. Pomphrey? Or have you moved on, title-wise.

**JILL.** No. I dropped the name when I dropped the man. Turns out Mike Pomphrey was a miserable failure at success. In the early days, when he was working hard, solving crises and being creative, he was a joy to be with. But once he started making piles of dough he turned into a selfish, arrogant...

**PAT.** What about Marty? Is he a good man? Does he treat you right? Do you love him?

**JILL.** Yes. He's a good man. But he's still a *man*, you know? He really pissed me off this time, Pat. It just...hurt.

**PAT.** Sounds like it.

**JILL.** I do love him, though. And he loves me. We have the best possible relationship: We're good friends who love to... *bow chicka bow wow*. Not much of that lately, though. And I haven't been feeling all that sexy. So to catch him bumping poonies with these two sexy young... sweet tarts— It just— I lost it.

**PAT.** I'm really glad you're here, Jill.

**MARK.** Me too.

**PAT.** Your being here is a blessing for Mom. You're the one she's closest to. You gals, in there dissin' and dishin'.

**JILL.** She told me having us all here makes her feel young again.

**PAT.** You realize we haven't all been together since—Dave's funeral?

**JILL.** He only signed up to impress Dad. You knew that, right? You should have seen little Davey peeking out from under that helmet, barely able to hold on to that big ol' rifle. When I visited him at Fort Benning, we giggled together about how he was crushing on his drill sergeant. Then, before they could send him overseas, he fractures three vertebrae on the obstacle course.

**PAT.** Four back operations. Can you imagine? He was in pain like all the time.

**JILL.** It was the pain killers that did him in. Fucking Oxies or whatever. At least he died in his sleep. I thought Mom was going to keel over when they

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told her. But she didn't. She stood there like a soldier, holding back tears.  
*(Pause. Jill's phone plays "Blitzkrieg Bop" again.)*

**PAT.** What is *that*?

**JILL.** It's my phone. It's Marty.

**PAT.** "Blitzkrieg Bop"?

**JILL.** What can I say? He likes the classics. *(The song continues. Jill finally relents and fetches her phone.)* What do you want, Marty? ... Who said I was in Tucson? ... What app? ... No kidding. *(Jill checks out her phone, but can't find the app. She puts the phone back to her ear.)* What's it called again? *(She has accidentally disconnected him.)* Dang it! *(To Mark and Pat:)* Did you know there's an app on your phone that lets other people track your location?

**MARK.** Everybody over the age of seven knows that.

**JILL.** How can that be legal? What about my whatever-amendment-it-is right to privacy? I mean, this is America! Land of the Free, Home of the— Good guys! *(Her phone goes off again.)*

**MARK AND PAT.** *(With the music:)* Hey! Ho! Let's go! *(Jill takes the call.)*

**JILL.** *(After a moment:)* ... So talk! ... I'm at my mom's place. *(Jill steps away from her brothers.)* Yeah. I wanted to get as far away from you as I could ... *Our* motorcycle, remember? ... Take the Prius ... On the hook in the kitchen! Dang, Marty! *(Mark and Pat both edge a little closer to listen in.)* Grow up! ... Well, I'm pissed! How could you do that to me? ... You call that nothing? ... Bullshit, Marty. You were nuzzling that one girl's neck, Marcie, or whatever her name is, and that other gal, the blonde, was rubbing her big plastic tits all over you-- ... "They're real." Fuck you, Marty!

**PAT.** HA! *(Jill glares at Pat, who surprised himself with that outburst.)*

**JILL.** *(On the phone:)* That was Pat ... Pat Baker, my brother. Father Pat ... It's true ... Come on, Marty. I would never do that to you. And besides, what if I did? ... He doesn't live here. He came down from Saint Louis. You know, where we all grew up ... What do you mean, "Why?" We were born there ... Marty, don't start-- ... I'm not ready to talk about this right now ... Because I'm not! ... I'm just-- ... My Mom is dying! Okay, Marty? And I'm just—I can't even— *(Jill is working hard to hold back tears. Pat stands by, ready to hold her, but she'd rather take care of herself.)*

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### SCENE 3

*Mid-afternoon. Pat and Jill in the kitchen.*

**JILL.** Mondays.

**PAT.** Corned beef and cabbage. Fridays.

**JILL.** Tuna casserole. Sundays.

**JILL AND PAT.** Chicken and dumplings!

**JILL.** Remember that time they had the CEO from Dad's company over for dinner, with his poopy-pants wife, and it was this fancy-schmancy evening with the heavy silverware and the good china and all that, and we had to promise we'd be on our best behavior ... and they were having cocktails in the living room, and the dog pranced in proud as hell with the pot roast in her mouth?

**PAT.** Duchess! The German Shepherd.

**JILL.** Yeah. With one good eye.

**PAT.** Oh yeah. And the roast fell out of her mouth and rolled across the floor right between Mrs. What's-her-name's feet.

**JILL.** Dad rinsed it off under the faucet, Mom heated it up again, and dinner was served!

**PAT.** They could be pretty cool sometimes.

**JILL.** Most of the time, actually.

**PAT.** *(Back to business:)* So um we don't want to make pot roast, do we?

**JILL.** God no. *(Pat hands her a flyer off the fridge door.)*

**PAT.** We could order a pizza.

**JILL.** Okay, but I get to pick what's on it. *(Pat gives her a skeptical look.)* Mushrooms, black olives, and anchovies.

**PAT.** *(Sarcastic:)* What—No pineapple?

**JILL.** Oh yeah, pineapple! *(Jill makes the call.)* Yeah hi. I want to order two medium pizzas ... Mushrooms, black olives, anchovies, and pineapple ... Of course I'm sure ... Really? Not ever? *(To Pat:)* "Nobody's ever ordered that combination before."

**PAT.** Sweet.

**JILL.** *(Back on the phone.)* No anchovies? You're kidding. How the hell can a pizza joint not have anchovies? ... "Hell" is not a "curse word." It's in the

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Bible! A lot! WTF is your problem, Miss? ... “WTF” is not cussing. It’s initials, for Chrissake! *(The pizza person terminates the call. Jill gives the finger to her phone.)* How about Chinese?

**PAT.** No! I don’t want to start an international incident. Let’s see what’s in the fridge.

**JILL.** Good idea. *(They look in the fridge. Jill recoils.)* Aah! Gross!

**PAT.** Don’t let the smell scare you. There’s a few specialty items for Mom, and most of the other stuff, we don’t know what it is, and we’re kinda afraid to touch it, so usually we just pick something up at a fast-food place.

**JILL.** Do men ever really grow up?

**PAT.** I heard that the average male starts to emerge from adolescence right about age 50.

**JILL.** If ever.

**PAT.** *(Re a covered plastic container:)* Here’s something.

**JILL.** I’m not eating anything with green hair on it.

**PAT.** You’re gonna love this.

**JILL.** What is it?

**PAT.** Elizabeth Garavelli Byrne Baker’s world-famous, award-winning, special-occasion, made-from-scratch lasagna. *(Pat opens the container. They cautiously sniff at the contents. Jill shrugs.)* I think we’re good to go.

**JILL.** What if she was saving it for...something.

**PAT.** She was. She was saving it for us. Look here. *(Pat shows Jill the inside of a folded paper label.)*

**JILL.** *(Reading:)* “For you, my dears.”

**PAT.** That’s us, right? We’re her “dears.” I mean, who else? Come on, Jill. It’ll be just like when we were kids.

**JILL.** Don't you think we ought to wait?

**PAT.** For what? No. Let's have it tonight. A Betty Baker Celebration-of-Life Dinner. And if it turns out she *has* been saving it for something, we can always cook up another one.

**JILL.** We can't. She's the only one who knows the recipe.

**PAT.** So this could be our very last lasagna supper. Ever. *(Mark emerges from the bedroom, just a bit shaken, carrying a small bowl. He quietly closes the bedroom door, crosses to the kitchen.)*

**PAT.** Hey. How are things?

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**MARK.** Good. All good.

**PAT.** *(He doubts it.)* Yeah?

**MARK.** Yeah. She had me read to her from "Winnie the Pooh."

**JILL.** Mom has a copy of "Winnie the Pooh"?

**MARK.** It's my old copy, from when I was a kid. She's kept it all these years. I had no idea. What's going on out here?

**PAT.** We need you to help us make a difficult decision about tonight's dinner.

**MARK.** I don't care; I'll eat whatever.

**PAT.** No no. Check it out: *(Pat presents the frozen lasagna.)*

**MARK.** Is that Mom's lasagna?

**PAT.** Yup.

**MARK.** Are we gonna eat it?

**PAT.** We're deliberating.

**JILL.** Sure beats Pronto Pizza.

**MARK.** Hell yes.

**PAT.** Let's do it.

**JILL.** Okay. But if Mom gets pissed, I'm gonna tell her it was your guys' idea.

## SCENE 4

*A couple hours later. Mark is moving the bullets from his pocket to a zip-lock bag. As Jill enters through Mom's bedroom door, Mark hurriedly hides the bag in the amp and grabs the guitar.*

**MARK.** Hey.

**JILL.** Mm! That lasagna smells like ... home.

**MARK.** Yeah. Hey, where's Pat?

**JILL.** We needed to get salad, garlic bread, and two or three bottles of wine. He volunteered.

**MARK.** Good. A real home-cooked meal. I haven't had one of those since Sheryl ran off to join the circus.

**JILL.** Hah. She moved out to Silicon Valley, right? And you refused to go with her.

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**MARK.** I couldn't. I had other commitments.

**JILL.** Like what?

**MARK.** I had subscriptions to a couple magazines, and a landline phone.

**JILL.** I liked Sheryl. She was smart, nice, and funny. And she loved you. What's your deal, Mark? Do you just like being alone?

**MARK.** At the risk of being honest and open about it, when I'm alone, I wish I had a girlfriend, and when I actually have one, I usually end up wishing I was alone.

**JILL.** No commitments.

**MARK.** No hits, no runs, nobody on base.

**JILL.** I hate to ask, but are you happy?

**MARK.** Well that's—I don't know. Happy? What does that even mean? I try to look on the bright side.

**JILL.** No you don't.

**MARK.** I said I try. And anyway, Nietzsche [*NEE-chuh*] says happiness is for wimps. If you want to create art, or just be a real person, you got to suffer.

**JILL.** Do you think Mom's happy?

**MARK.** Hard to say. How happy can you be when you know you're heading for the last round-up?

**JILL.** I read in *Psychology Today* that sometimes, in the very moment of death, people often experience this profound wave of incredible happiness.

**MARK.** That's just endorphins kicking in.

**JILL.** There you go again, looking on the bright side.

**MARK.** What can I tell you? I have difficult thoughts.

**JILL.** Is that what made you lose your religion?

**MARK.** I didn't lose my religion, I threw it away. Actually, it's more accurate to say I just left it at the altar.

**JILL.** Whatever that means.

**MARK.** You want to hear the story of the origins of my apostasy?

**JILL.** "Apostasy"? What's that?

**MARK.** "Apostasy": The triumph of reason over religion. Walking on the moon versus walking on water. Facts over faith. Penicillin over prayer.

**JILL.** How about "sarcasm over salvation"?

**MARK.** Sure. I believe in sarcasm. Salvation not so much.

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**JILL.** What happened at the altar? You didn't get fondled by some priest back when you were an altar boy, did you?

**MARK.** No. In fact, in all my years of Catholic grade school, high school, and college, I was never sexually abused in any way by any priest, nun or brother.

**JILL.** You were never sexually victimized growing up?

**MARK.** I didn't say that. Just no clergy.

**JILL.** But you--

**MARK.** Let's not go there.

**JILL.** Have you talked about it with anyone? (*Mark says nothing.*) What happened at the altar?

**MARK.** It wasn't at the altar; it was in the confessional. I was kneeling there in that tiny, dark, stuffy closet, confessing my adolescent sins. I always went to Father Monaghan for confession because he was hard-of-hearing and always pretended to hear everything you said. So I could just whisper my most embarrassing stuff to him, and he would--

**JILL.** Wait a minute. How did you know he couldn't hear you?

**MARK.** One time, just to make sure, I said, "I shot the sheriff, but I did not shoot the deputy," and we just kept going. Anyway, after I told him my sins, I started to recite the Act of Contrition, like you're supposed to, and--

**JILL.** The what?

**MARK.** Act of Contrition. You know. We grew up with it.

**JILL.** You did, maybe. After all the men left home – Dad to his girlfriend, Pat to seminary, Davey to the fucking Army, and you to Never-Neverland, I think Mom stopped seeking refuge in that Old Time Religion.

**MARK.** Lucky you.

**JILL.** I guess.

**MARK.** You tell the priest your sins, and he absolves you -- forgives you -- and then you recite the Act of Contrition. "Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because of Thy just punishments," and bullshit-bullshit-bullshit-- And all of a sudden it dawns on me: I don't detest all my sins! There's some of them I kinda like. In fact, Jeanie Weiss and I were hoping to commit a few of them that very evening. And besides, where in the Bible does it say, No French kissing? No getting to First Base?

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**JILL.** Did you mention this revelation to Father Monaghan?

**MARK.** Hell no.

**JILL.** You quit the Church? Just like that?

**MARK.** It took a while, but once I got in the habit of applying reason and reliable data to dogma and Bible study, it was pretty easy to get off the bus.

**JILL.** So now you're an atheist. A devout and cranky atheist.

**MARK.** Yes. With a dash of Buddhism. Buddhists don't have commandments; they don't have dogma. Basically, their whole deal boils down to two things: Stay calm and be nice. And I say: Amen to that. What are you?

**JILL.** I'm a ... *(Taking a stab at it:)* Mystical Humanist.

**MARK.** ... Okay...

**JILL.** I believe there's love in all of us, and sometimes you gotta dig deep to find it.

*(Mark takes a moment to let this sink in. Jill smiles. After a moment's reflection:)*

**MARK.** Hey. Can we ... talk for a second about ... something that's hard to talk about?

**JILL.** Sure.

**MARK.** This is-- It's about what happened back when we were kids ...

**JILL.** Uh hunh ... *(Pat enters through the front door with two bags.)*

**PAT.** Honey! I'm home! *(Pat plops the bags down on the kitchen table.)*  
What have I missed?

## SCENE 5

*Dinner time. Mark, Jill, and Pat are at the kitchen table. Pat has just poured wine for Mark, who takes a connoisseur-like taste.*

**MARK.** Excellent. Just like Jesus used to make.

**PAT.** *(To Jill:)* You were saying?

**JILL.** She kept holding my hand, really tight. In her sleep. Snoring. After a while my hand got numb.

**PAT.** What did you do?

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**JILL.** I tickled her nose with a handkerchief, so she had to let go of my hand to scratch her nose.

**MARK.** What do you guys talk about when you're in there?

**JILL.** She likes to tell stories about when she was young, and about us when we were growing up. She remembers more from thirty years ago than thirty minutes ago.

**MARK.** Pat?

**PAT.** The other night we were reminiscing about those weekend drives we all used to take out in the country—

**MARK.** I hated those drives. They were hot and boring, and I'd have to pee really bad, and Dad would never pull over to let me go behind a tree or something ... But now, I miss them.

**PAT.** Remember how she used to get us all singing? (*Quietly at first, Jill starts to sing. And then and Mark join in.*)

**JILL.** YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE

**JILL, PAT, MARK.** MY ONLY SUNSHINE

YOU MAKE ME HAPPY

WHEN SKIES ARE GREY.

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW, DEAR

HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU.

PLEASE DON'T TAKE MY SUNSHINE AWAY.

**PAT.** (*After a slight pause:*) And sometimes we meditate.

**MARK.** Meditate?

**JILL.** Mom meditates?

**PAT.** She likes it.

**MARK.** I would think the closest Mom would ever get to meditating would be when she watches *Andy of Mayberry*.

**PAT.** You should meditate, Mark. If you could somehow manage to quiet your mind, it'd be a great benefit-- to you and to the rest of us.

**MARK.** I've meditated. Or tried to. Free Meditation Mondays at Shambhala. I'd squat down on that snafu cushion or whatever they call it and try real hard to *not think*. But you can't just turn off your thoughts like that. They keep coming at you, whether you want them to or not. But then-- If you actually managed to stop having thoughts, then what? What do you do with yourself?

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**PAT.** You just keep sitting there, Grasshopper.

**JILL.** Yeah. On your snafu.

**MARK.** (*Nods acknowledgement he's been dissed, then moves on.*) This lasagna is like heaven.

**PAT.** Thanks, Mom. (*They toast Mom, who's still in her room.*)

**JILL.** It's none of my business, Pat, but has Mom ever asked you to hear her confession?

**PAT.** No. I mean, I would if I had to, but no. Thank God.

**JILL.** What's she going to do then? I mean, about her ... sins?

**PAT.** I'm pretty sure Mom has come to terms with herself and her God.

**JILL.** How'd she manage that?

**PAT.** Why don't you ask her.

**JILL.** She still believes in heaven and hell and...?

**PAT.** Do you?

**JILL.** For me, I don't think there is a heaven, but I believe in it anyway. And I doubt seriously there's even a God up there, but I've decided to believe in Him too. Or Her, actually. It's way more comforting to believe God is a woman.

**MARK.** You choose to believe, even though you know better.

**JILL.** Yeah. I do. It gives me somebody wise and wonderful to talk to. It's comforting. And if you don't approve, Mark, you can shove it up your apostasy.

**MARK.** What about you, Father Pat? Believing in God is kind of a job requirement for you, isn't it?

**PAT.** Define "God."

**MARK.** The God of the Bible.

**PAT.** The God of the Bible is a temperamental old crank. He's bipolar: One minute He sends down manna and love from heaven, and the next minute He's sending pestilence and bloodshed, and if you don't love Him, and forsake all others, He'll cast you into a lake of fire. And He has a really odd relationship with His only son.

**MARK.** If you don't believe in that God, what God do you believe in?

**PAT.** I believe there is a universal force of order and love, born out of the shared consciousness of all creation. It's always there, in us and around us. And all we have to do is be open to it. Embrace it. That's God.

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**JILL.** You believe in Jesus, though, don't you? You have to.

**PAT.** It's like this: There may have been a young firebrand who preached love and rebellion in Roman-occupied Judea around two thousand years ago. His name was not Jesus, he doesn't appear to be much of a family man, and contrary to popular belief among white folks, he did not look at all like one of the Bee-Gees. And the stories about him: born of a virgin, walking on water, rising up from the dead, all that stuff -- those are mostly just ancient folk tales.

**JILL.** I like the one where Jesus changes water into wine and later on in the temple he takes a whip to the moneychangers.

**MARK.** I like the one about Jesus shooting dice with the Roman soldiers and rolling nothing but sevens.

**PAT.** I don't recall that passage.

**MARK.** It's in the Acts of the Apostles. Act Two, Scene Three. Let me ask you this: What would Archbishop Whoza-whatzis say if you told him you thought God was bipolar?

**PAT.** That's funny. In my entire career as a priest, I have had one brief face-to-face conversation with the Most Reverend James Hanratty, and the subject of God never came up.

**MARK.** What *did* you talk about?

**PAT.** Golf.

**MARK.** If you don't believe in God or Jesus, how in good conscience can you be a priest?

**JILL.** Dang, Mark!

**PAT.** What I do is-- Do you really want to hear this, or are you just giving me shit for fun?

**MARK.** No, this is stuff I think about a lot.

**PAT.** First of all, for a devout atheist you seem to spend a lot of time fussing about God. And second, do you really want to get into it with me over questions of exegesis [*eck-suh-JEE-ziss.*] and hermeneutics [*her-meh-NYOO-ticks.*]?

**MARK.** I don't think so.

**PAT.** No. You don't. Look, what matters to me, as a priest, and in life, is how people behave, and what's in their hearts. People come to me for comfort and counsel. I don't care what Bible stories they do or don't believe in. My job is

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to offer love, and tough love, as needed. And that's what I do. So ... fuck you.  
*(Jill's phone: "Blitzkrieg Bop" again.)*

**JILL.** Oh for Christ's sake. *(She answers the phone.)* This is bordering on harassment, Marty ... No. Stay home... Where are you? ... Go home, Marty. I don't want you here ... Like hell you are. *(She disconnects.)* Batten down the hatches, boys. Sammy Suicide's coming to town.

## SCENE 6

*About 2 a.m. The house is dark. Everyone is asleep, but SOMEONE is in the kitchen. The freezer door opens, then closes. The figure we barely see moves to the light switch on the wall.*

**WOMAN'S VOICE (MOM).** Hey! *(A bright ceiling light fills the room. On the couch, Mark lurches up. Mom stands at the light switch. Pat emerges from the back hallway. Jill enters from the bedroom.)* Who ate my lasagna!?

## END OF ACT ONE

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