

# INDIFFERENT BLUE

by  
George Pate

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*For Donald Greiner,  
who taught me to stop worrying and love poetry.*

## INDIFFERENT BLUE

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*Indifferent Blue* won the 2008 Tennessee Williams Literary Festival One-Act Play Contest. It premiered at the University of New Orleans on March 11, 2009. The production was directed by Marshall Carby and was cast as follows:

GERALD----- Jonathan Mares  
STANLEY ----- Matthew Martinez  
ELISE ----- Adeana Gamble  
PETER----- Matthew Rigdon

### **Characters**

**STANLEY**- Recently deceased. Late twenties/ early thirties.

**GERALD**- Older than Stanley and has been in Heaven longer.

**PETER**- St. Peter. Takes his job at the gates seriously.

**ELISE**- About the same age as Stanley. Even more recently deceased. Bright, bubbly, and sometimes a little scary.

### **Setting**

The set for the entire play should be very bare, with simple set pieces which are rolled in and out by CHERUBS as needed.

# INDIFFERENT BLUE

## Scene 1

*STANLEY sits alone at a cafeteria table which is very plain except for the fact that it is painted bright gold. There is an empty chair beside him. He is well groomed and wears very plain attire, probably all grey or white. He pokes absentmindedly at the food on his plate. Occasionally takes a bite and sighs. GERALD walks on with a tray of food. He is dressed identically to Stanley. He is somewhat older and has a demeanor of uneasy happiness. He sits down next to Stanley. As Gerald eats his food, he makes a show of enjoying it extravagantly, although not for Stanley's sake. They eat in silence for a few moments, Stanley virtually ignorant of Gerald's presence, Gerald looking as though he expects Stanley to start the conversation.*

**GERALD.** Stanley.

**STANLEY.** Hey, Gerald.

**GERALD.** How are you doing today?

**STANLEY.** Fine.

**GERALD.** Just fine?

**STANLEY.** Just fine.

**GERALD.** Oh. Surely nothing's wrong?

**STANLEY.** Of course not.

**GERALD.** Stanley, you're not telling me something.

**STANLEY.** Good observation.

**GERALD.** Come on, what's a guardian angel for?

**STANLEY.** You are not my guardian angel, Gerald.

**GERALD.** Yes I am.

**STANLEY.** No, you got randomly assigned to me as part of some stupid big brother orientation program.

**GERALD.** And the name of that program is "Guardian Angels." So, at least nominally, I am your guardian angel.

**STANLEY.** Never mind. *(They return to eating in silence, Gerald somewhat*

*deflated. After a few awkward moments, Stanley drops his silverware and stands up from the table.)*

**STANLEY.** I'll see you later, Gerald. I'm going for a walk. Or something.

**GERALD.** But you haven't finished eating.

**STANLEY.** Oh, yes I have. For good, as far as I'm concerned.

**GERALD.** Won't you get hungry?

**STANLEY.** No, Gerald. I don't think that's going to happen.

**GERALD.** Oh. I suppose not.

**STANLEY.** Then I really don't see the point in eating.

**GERALD.** Something to do?

**STANLEY.** Another exercise in monotony.

**GERALD.** But the food is-

**STANLEY.** Don't say it.

**GERALD.** It's perfect.

**STANLEY.** If you like it so much, then have mine, too.

**GERALD.** But-

**STANLEY.** Or throw it away. Or make a sculpture out of it. Or do whatever you want with it. I don't want it.

**GERALD.** Stanley, this is nothing to get this excited over. Calm down. Why don't you just sit down and- *(Gerald stops himself.)*

**STANLEY.** Eat my food? Yeah, sure, why not? *(He sits back down at the table.)*

Let's just have a seat and enjoy this perfect meal. This divine bounty. Come on. Dig in. *(Stanley takes a bite and makes an exaggerated show of enjoying it.)*

**STANLEY.** Oh, man. Oh my goodness. This is amazing. This is beyond anything I could have ever imagined.

**GERALD.** Stanley, I'm not sure it's such a good idea to make fun-

**STANLEY.** Make fun? Who's making fun? This is absolutely perfect, to use your word. Well, now, surely nothing could ever match that. *(He takes another bite, with the same amount of show as before.)* Well, bite my ear and call me Evander, that was just as good as the last one. *(Takes another bite. Slightly less enthusiastic.)* Hey, there it is again. Exactly the same thing. *(Another bite. Less enthusiastic.)* Yep, this sure is great. *(Another bite. Less enthusiastic.)* Oh, yeah. Just the best there is. And you know what? I bet it'll be just exactly as good tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow to the very last freaking syllable of time. And there's absolutely no

chance that it will be so consistently good—no, perfect—that the very idea of perfection will cease to have any meaning because there’s nothing to judge it against. It’s not even perfection anymore, it’s just routine. And it’s pretty boring. So, I say you can take this utopian feast, this veritable nectar and ambrosia, which for all I know is the real nectar and ambrosia, and shove it. *(Stanley throws his food to the ground.)*

**GERALD.** Just because you don’t want it doesn’t mean you should waste it.

**STANLEY.** Waste it? You can’t waste something that has an infinite supply, Gerald.

**GERALD.** I guess not. But you’ll get it dirty.

**STANLEY.** You think so? *(Stanley dives down and takes a bite of his food straight off the floor. He immediately spits it out.)*

**GERALD.** Disgusting?

**STANLEY.** Delicious. I should have known. Even the floors here are clean enough to eat off of. Know what I would love? A fast food hamburger. A really cheap one. We’re talking dollar-menu.

**GERALD.** You would choose a grey mass of assorted cow parts over divine culinary perfection.

**STANLEY.** In a heartbeat. Not all the time, you know, just every once in a while. Just as a sort of reminder of what’s so great about this place.

**GERALD.** It’s not as if they’re going to institute a burger day or anything.

**STANLEY.** I guess it would be too much to hope for square pizza.

**GERALD.** I think so.

**STANLEY.** That’s it, then.

**GERALD.** That’s what?

**STANLEY.** I’m out of here.

**GERALD.** What, the cafeteria?

**STANLEY.** No, here, you know, this whole place, whatever it is. Heaven, I guess, but I hate calling it that.

**GERALD.** But that’s what it is.

**STANLEY.** I know. It just sounds too, I don’t know, pretentious? No, I think, and this sounds crazy given our current circumstances, I think I still feel a little silly saying anything that sounds religious.

**GERALD.** You’re an atheist?

**STANLEY.** Well not anymore, obviously.

**GERALD.** And now that you've found yourself in Heaven, you want to turn your back on that?

**STANLEY.** Yeah, I guess.

**GERALD.** You have some nerve, you know that?

**STANLEY.** What?

**GERALD.** God grants you entrance to Heaven, even without your asking. Even though you didn't believe in him. And you're just going to say "Thanks, but no thanks." Do you have any idea how ungrateful that is? Do you have any idea how that might make those of us who have dedicated our entire lives to God feel? We denied ourselves pleasure, did work in His name, prayed constantly, told ourselves we were unworthy, all just to gain entrance to the kingdom of heaven, and then they just let you in, which is bad enough in itself, but you decide that in front of all these people who have, for the entirety of their existence, wanted nothing more than the gift you have been given, you're just going to throw it away. It's like telling each and every one of us that our lives were a complete waste.

**STANLEY.** I'm sorry you went to all that trouble just to find out it wasn't necessary. But you got what you wanted in the end, right? So what do you care how I got here or what I do? Look, to you, it's a gift. To me, it's a prison. And I'm getting out of here even if it takes forever, which is convenient because that's exactly how much time I have. *(Stanley starts to leave.)*

**GERALD.** Wait. *(Stanley pauses.)* I'm coming with you.

**STANLEY.** So now suddenly you want to leave, too? I thought that would be ungrateful.

**GERALD.** No. I mean, yes it would be ungrateful, but no, I don't want to leave.

**STANLEY.** Then why would you want to come along?

**GERALD.** To keep an eye on you. After all, I'm still your guardian angel.

**STANLEY.** No, you are not.

**GERALD.** Fine then, call it curiosity.

**STANLEY.** Curiosity killed the cat.

**GERALD.** I'll remember to take that advice to heart as soon as I grow whiskers and a tail.

**STANLEY.** You need to work on your sarcasm.

**GERALD.** I know.



**STANLEY.** Alright. If you're coming, you'd better do it now, because I'm gone. *(Stanley and Gerald exit. CHERUBS enter and remove the cafeteria table and chairs. The Cherubs then move onto stage two very simple armchairs, painted bright gold all over.)*

## Scene 2

*Stanley and Gerald enter. Stanley walks center and looks around, not sure where to go next. Gerald watches him and grins smugly.*

**GERALD.** So?

**STANLEY.** So what?

**GERALD.** So what's the plan?

**STANLEY.** The plan for what?

**GERALD.** Apparently the plan is to answer all of my questions with questions. What is your plan for getting out of here, Stanley?

**STANLEY.** I don't really have one, I guess. I thought I'd just, you know, look around and hope I came across something eventually.

**GERALD.** Ah, yes, the exit to eternity is something one is likely to just stumble upon at random.

**STANLEY.** At least your sarcasm is getting better.

**GERALD.** I'm a quick study. Shall we resume the aimless wandering?

**STANLEY.** Alright. You're right. We need a plan. We'll just sit down and come up with a plan. *(Stanley sits down in one of the chairs.)*

**GERALD.** Now that sounds like a plan. *(Gerald sits down beside him. They both sit in awkward silence for a few moments. Gerald looking pleased with himself, Stanley anxious.)*

**STANLEY.** So, what are you in for?

**GERALD.** What?

**STANLEY.** You know, what are you in for? It's what they say in all those prison movies. Although I'd guess that it doesn't actually get said very much in prisons in reality.

**GERALD.** It doesn't.

**STANLEY.** What?

**GERALD.** I imagine it doesn't.

**STANLEY.** So come on, what are you in for?

**GERALD.** I'm still not sure what you mean.

**STANLEY.** How did you die?

**GERALD.** I'm not entirely sure how this helps us come up with a plan.

**STANLEY.** Come on, I can't think right now. Just have some conversation with me. How did you die?

**GERALD.** Ok, fine. Well, it was quite peaceful actually. Painless even. I went to sleep and simply didn't wake up.

**STANLEY.** So what was it, heart attack? Stroke? You don't really seem old enough for any of that. (*Gerald doesn't answer.*) Can you die just from being boring? That I would believe.

**GERALD.** I haven't exactly seen the autopsy report, now have I? I fell asleep and then I was here, ok?

**STANLEY.** Sorry.

**GERALD.** It's ok. I just don't like to think about my life.

**STANLEY.** It's all I think about.

**GERALD.** Yeah? So what about you? How did you kick the proverbial bucket? How did you put it? What are you here for?

**STANLEY.** *In* for. But close enough. I fell asleep, too. But I woke up. In the driver's seat of my car, just before it hit the water. I must've torn right through the guard rail. One minute I'm panicking and pushing my car door against unbelievable water pressure and jamming my nose into the cloth lining of the top of the car trying to breathe that last bit of air, next thing I know I'm at the pearly gates. That was a shock because like I said I thought they were a kids' story. Turns out they're real although significantly less impressive than I would have imagined if I had ever imagined them. And even weirder than just being there is the fact that I'm welcome. Although if I'd known what was on the other side I might not have been so humbled. I have a lot of regrets, but none so big as walking through those gates.

**GERALD.** If that's your biggest regret, then you're probably the luckiest person I've ever met.

**STANLEY.** What's yours?

**GERALD.** What's my what?

**STANLEY.** Now who's answering questions with questions? What's your biggest regret, if mine is so insignificant?

**GERALD.** Aren't you supposed to be coming up with a plan?

**STANLEY.** Yeah, ok, get off my back, dad. How do you get out of Heaven? Sounds like a bad riddle or a joke or something.

**GERALD.** Maybe it is.

**STANLEY.** Gerald, could you please sit there and stay quiet while I'm trying to think?

**GERALD.** Fine. I'll just sit here like a good little boy while you ponder for hours in futility. At least the chairs are comfortable.

**STANLEY.** Hey, what are these chairs doing out here in the first place?

**GERALD.** Because we needed a place to sit.

**STANLEY.** Oh, no. *(Stanley quickly jumps out of his chair and stares at it in horror.)*

**GERALD.** Whatever you need is provided.

**STANLEY.** Come on. *(Stanley kicks over his chair. Gerald laughs at him.)*

**GERALD.** I really don't understand you. It's as though you have an aversion to being happy. Or is it just good food and comfy chairs you hate?

**STANLEY.** I don't hate good food or comfy chairs or being happy. What I hate is sameness. Things being exactly the same way, all the time.

**GERALD.** Even if the way things are is perfect.

**STANLEY.** Yes! I just want something to go wrong.

**GERALD.** Go wrong?

**STANLEY.** I don't know, I'd just like to see a little chink in the armor is all. Something to make this place interesting. I mean look at it. Flat and bare for miles and miles. Not a single irregularity on the entire landscape. Give me hills and mountains, ruptures from the irregular and violent collisions of land masses. How can you deal with a place where even the scenery is boring? It's like Kansas. *(Stanley shivers.)*

**GERALD.** I'm from Kansas.

**STANLEY.** That explains so much. And what exciting occupation did you pursue in Kansas, Gerald? Data entry?

**GERALD.** I told you I don't like talking about my life.

**STANLEY.** You're the one who brought it up.

**GERALD.** Well now I'm un-bringing-it-up. Maybe if you didn't waste so much time trying to pry into my personal life you could have come up with a plan by now.

**STANLEY.** I don't know why this has to be so hard. It's not really fair to keep people trapped here like this.

**GERALD.** Trapped? This isn't a trap.

**STANLEY.** Of course it is. I didn't choose to be here, and I can't get out. Sounds like a trap to me.

**GERALD.** But that has such a negative connotation.

**STANLEY.** It's supposed to. If it wasn't a trap, there would be a simple way to leave.

**GERALD.** You were expecting a door, maybe? How ridiculous, a door. Who said anything about a door?

**STANLEY.** *(An idea dawning on him.)* Not a door, maybe, but a gate. Come on. *(Stanley starts to exit leaving Gerald behind.)*

**GERALD.** *(Screaming after him.)*

Where are you going?

**STANLEY.** *(As he leaves.)* To pay a visit to St. Peter.

**GERALD.** *(Running after Stanley.)* Stanley! I'm not sure this is a good idea. *(Gerald exits.)*

### Scene 3

*Two Cherubs wheel the pearly gates on stage. It should be unimpressive other than the fact that is completely and brilliantly white. It would be nice if ST. PETER had a platform attached to the gates so that he could ride on stage. Peter should be dressed as a 1920's bellboy with a halo attached to the top of his hat. Stanley and Gerald enter and approach the back of the gate.*

**STANLEY.** There it is. Oh, man. I can't believe it's so simple.

**GERALD.** Then maybe it isn't.

**STANLEY.** Don't ruin this for me Gerald. I'm finally going to get out of here.

**GERALD.** I don't think this is such a good idea.

**STANLEY.** So you've said. *(Stanley starts to walk away. Gerald grabs his arm.)*

**GERALD.** Stanley, don't.

**STANLEY.** What's your deal, Gerald? I thought you were just along for the ride.

**GERALD.** I was, sort of. But I feel a need to look after you.

**STANLEY.** Gerald, how many times do we have to go over this? You are not my-

**GERALD.** Not as a guardian angel. As a friend. I'm not entirely sure we're friends, but I feel like we're at least moving in that direction. And, as your friend, I think you're making a huge mistake. I don't think this is going to work, mind you, but it might. And if it does, you'd be turning your back on the greatest gift there is.

**STANLEY.** It's a gift I don't want. Now I'm going to go see if I can return it.

*(Stanley walks over to the gate. Gerald stays behind. Stanley clears his throat to get Peter's attention.)*

**PETER.** Greetings, brother.

**STANLEY.** Yeah, hi. Listen, I was wondering if you could just open the gate and let me out.

**PETER.** The gate doesn't open out. Gate opens in.

**STANLEY.** Um, ok. I'll stand back so you can open it, and then I'll walk out.

**PETER.** Gate opens in.

**STANLEY.** Right. I got that. Look, could you just open the gate? *(Peter looks around.)*

**PETER.** But no one is coming in.

**STANLEY.** But I would like to go out.

**PETER.** Gate opens in. *(Gerald laughs.)*

**STANLEY.** You keep your mouth shut. I'm trying to think of a way to get past this moron.

**GERALD.** Oh, and then what. Look out there. It's more of the same, flat and boring, as you put it. It's nothing. What do you think it's going to be like on the other side of that gate?

**STANLEY.** It's got to be better than this.

**GERALD.** Actually, no, it doesn't. In fact, it can't be. It has to be worse, if you think about it.

**STANLEY.** Whatever. At least it has to be different. *(Stanley approaches the gate again.)* Excuse me, Peter.

**PETER.** Greetings, brother.

**STANLEY.** Yeah. You know what a house looks like, right?

**PETER.** Of course.

**STANLEY.** You know I grew up in a house.

**PETER.** Two stories, three bedrooms, two baths. Tudor exterior.

**STANLEY.** Wow, yeah exactly. So you know that this house I grew up in had some doors leading to the outside.

**PETER.** Three of them. One to the front yard, one to the back porch, and one to the garage.

**STANLEY.** Then I guess you know in which direction each of these doors opened.

**PETER.** Doors opened in.

**STANLEY.** They sure did. And yet somehow, every once in a while, I still managed to figure out a way to get out of my house. You see, just because a door opens in doesn't mean you can't walk out of it.

**PETER.** Oh, ok. I see what you're saying.

**STANLEY.** Good. Then please open the gate inward so that I can get out of here.

**PETER.** Gate opens in. (*Stanley screams into his hands.*)

**GERALD.** Can't you just give up on this?

**STANLEY.** I'm going to get out of here. I don't care what it takes, and I don't care whether or not you're with me, but I'm getting out.

**GERALD.** (*Sighs.*) Fine. Let's keep looking.

**STANLEY.** No way. I'm going to sit right here until somebody dies and he has to open the gate. You hear that, Pete? I'm going to sit right here and wait until your stupid "gate opens in."

**PETER.** That could take a while.

**STANLEY.** What are you talking about? People die every minute.

**GERALD.** Every second.

**PETER.** And yet no one has shown up in the entire time we've been talking, have they?

**STANLEY.** Hey, yeah. Why is that? Judging by present company it can't be because this place is terribly exclusive.

**PETER.** That's not a very nice thing to say about your friend.

**STANLEY.** I was talking about me. Gerald here is a saint.

**PETER.** Then the papacy has changed its criteria for canonization since I last checked.

**STANLEY.** Hey, would you stop picking on Gerald and explain to me why not one



single soul has come through the gates while we've been talking.

**PETER.** Time moves differently here. One second on Earth is like twelve hours here. Otherwise I'd be swamped. There would be a line to get in as far as you could see. We made the system permanent during the first world war to deal with the projected continuing increases in traffic. Which is also when I got this uniform. Both were appropriate at the time. But I think maybe we over-compensated because sometimes I'll sit here for hours and hours just waiting for someone.

**STANLEY.** Then I'll wait for hours and hours. I've got nothing better to do.

**PETER.** You're welcome to, but it won't do you much good. Only one person can pass through the gate each time it's opened. Prevents people crowding and rushing the gate when there's a catastrophe.

**STANLEY.** And I guess there's no way you're going to let me out.

**STANLEY and PETER.** Gate opens in.

**STANLEY.** I know. Come on, Gerald, let's go. *(Stanley and Gerald exit. Cherubs come and roll Peter and the gate offstage.)*

#### Scene 4

*Stanley and Gerald enter onto an empty stage.*

**STANLEY.** Don't say anything. You have every right to gloat. I'm acknowledging that, so now you don't have to do it.

**GERALD.** I wasn't going to.

**STANLEY.** No, you probably weren't. You wouldn't do that. Gerald the freaking saint.

**GERALD.** I never said I was perfect. And I don't think I've done anything to deserve being picked on.

**STANLEY.** You're right, Gerald. I'm sorry. Sorry I called you perfect. *(beat.)* Geez, that sounded like I was being smart. I wasn't trying to be. I mean it.

**GERALD.** I know. Thanks.

**STANLEY.** I can say without a doubt that you are not perfect. How's that for a compliment. But good enough to get in, huh?

**GERALD.** I guess so.

**STANLEY.** But then again so was I. So that might not be such a big accomplishment. Not that I'm not sure you were a great guy.

**GERALD.** Sure.

**STANLEY.** You know, that still bugs me.

**GERALD.** What?

**STANLEY.** How I got in here. I must have broken every rule in the book. Not that I've read the book, but I'm guessing here. Except murder. I bet that's one that would keep you out of here for sure.

**GERALD.** Not necessarily.

**STANLEY.** You're probably right. I mean if I got in here, why not a murderer. Boy, this place would be torture for someone like that, huh?

**GERALD.** Not necessarily.

**STANLEY.** You keep saying that. Almost as bad as Mr. "Gate opens in" back there.

**GERALD.** I just don't think you can be sure that just because someone committed a sin like murder that they would be unhappy here.

**STANLEY.** Of course they would. Can you imagine? Some hardened criminal in a sterile place like this. Torture. Absolute torture. *(Having a revelation.)* Torture. Oh, man, that's it. Torture.

**GERALD.** You're not going to hurt Peter are you?

**STANLEY.** No. I'd like to, but I'm not even sure I could. I'm talking about me. I'm being tortured here. This isn't Heaven, this is Hell. It's so obvious, this is my punishment for not believing and for everything else I did. Oh, man it's so obvious. I'm going to be tortured with this, lifeless, hollow, stagnant place for the rest of eternity. And making me think it was Heaven at first. Just an extra little twist of the knife.

**GERALD.** Stop it Stanley.

**STANLEY.** What did you do?

**GERALD.** What?

**STANLEY.** What are you being punished for? Huh? What did you do that would have sent you to hell?

**GERALD.** Nothing. I did nothing.

**STANLEY.** Gerald, now is not the time to play around. I need you to be absolutely honest with me. Because if you did anything, anything at all that could have merited



your damnation then that's a pretty good sign to me that we are in hell. If you honestly can't think of any reason whatsoever why you'd be punished, then I'll accept that we're in Heaven. And I'd like to believe that you're this perfect person, because you seem like a nice guy.

**GERALD.** I'm certainly not perfect, but . . .

**STANLEY.** Oh, man, you did something bad, didn't you? That's what all that "not necessarily" business was about. What did you do, Gerald?

**GERALD.** I don't have to tell you.

**STANLEY.** What did you do? This isn't a game anymore. What did you do?

**GERALD.** No.

**STANLEY.** This isn't a yes or no question, Gerald.

**GERALD.** No.

**STANLEY.** Fine then, if you insist on yes or no, I'll ask you yes or no questions. Here we go: Did you rape someone?

**GERALD.** Goodness, no.

**STANLEY.** Don't get so defensive, you're the one who won't just come clean. I'm starting toward the worst you could have done and working my way backwards. So if you wanna tell me what you did I can stop now. *(Pause.)* Fine, we'll keep going. Did you kill someone? *(Pause, Gerald doesn't reply.)* Gerald, did you kill someone?

**GERALD.** I don't have to answer your questions.

**STANLEY.** No, but you could. And you might want to considering the implications here. I mean surely murderers go to hell right? And the fact that you're not answering this one like you answered the rape question makes me think that you're hiding something big. If you killed someone, that seals it. We're in hell.

**GERALD.** Not necessarily.

**STANLEY.** Stop saying that. Answer the question Gerald.

**GERALD.** No.

**STANLEY.** No you won't answer the question or no you didn't kill anyone.

**GERALD.** No.

**STANLEY.** Gerald, did you kill someone? Gerald, come on. Did you do it? Gerald, are you a murderer?

**GERALD.** I am not a murderer! *(Pause.)*

**STANLEY.** But. . .

**GERALD.** Yes, but. But I did. I did kill someone. I killed two someones actually.

**STANLEY.** That's it then.

**GERALD.** No! That can't be it. You don't even know what happened. You don't understand.

**STANLEY.** Then tell me.

**GERALD.** Ok. My wife and I-

**STANLEY.** You killed your wife?

**GERALD.** Do you want me to tell you this or not?

**STANLEY.** Sorry. Go ahead.

**GERALD.** My wife and I had been married for twelve years. She wasn't beautiful, but she was smart and funny. So funny. She was always playing pranks. She had these eyes that looked like she was always making a joke, like she was always holding back the punchline, dying to let it out, but she knew how to make you wait for it. I came home one day after work, and she was, well, take a guess. I came home at exactly the same time I always came home, which should have struck me as odd. It was like she wanted to get caught. She didn't even bother to act surprised. He did though. He jumped out of the bed with the covers wrapped around him. I think he was laughing, but that might just be something I added in later in my head. Either way, it didn't phase me at the time. I beat him with a lamp, and when it broke, I stabbed him with it. I left it sticking straight up out of his back, like a camel with a grotesque, floral patterned hump. I realized she was screaming and hitting me. She was saying "stop it, I'm sorry, it was a joke." Well, I didn't think it was very funny. I grabbed her and threw her down to the floor and started choking her. They told me later that the choking was a lot of wasted effort, because I broke her neck when I threw her. I didn't even notice she had stopped breathing. I ran down to the kitchen to wash myself off, and I noticed a cake on the table. It was frosted white and in light blue icing it said "Happy Birthday Gerald." It was my birthday, you see, and I always insisted that we not have a party, but she always managed to find a way to throw one. I went back to the bedroom, and I turned on the overhead light because the lamp was, well.

**STANLEY.** Obviously.

**GERALD.** Obviously. You see it was so dark in the room, and it had been so bright outside, an exceptionally sunny day, and my eyes hadn't adjusted. We had these big, heavy dark curtains and they were drawn. I hadn't really seen much of anything in the room when I first came in, just my wife and another man. So I flipped on the

light, which also turned on the fan, and I heard this flapping sound, so I looked up, and there was a banner over the bed. It said, “Surprise”

**STANLEY.** Surprise.

**GERALD.** Very much so. I rolled over the man’s body with my foot, and I saw his face for the first time.

**STANLEY.** I don’t think I wanna know.

**GERALD.** My brother. That was also when I noticed he had his boxers on. It was a joke. One of my wife’s pranks. I moved her to another room and called the police. I told them that I had killed my wife and brother for trying to throw me a surprise party, and that they could kiss my f-ing a if they thought I was going to give myself over to a bunch of G.D. pigs.

**STANLEY.** You know it’s ok to curse if you’re just quoting.

**GERALD.** Actually I said “f-ing a” and “G.D.” Cursing has always made me uncomfortable.

**STANLEY.** Why?

**GERALD.** It just seems uncouth and unnecessary.

**STANLEY.** No, sorry, why did you move your wife?

**GERALD.** Oh, I didn’t want anyone to think they had been sleeping together.

**STANLEY.** Don’t you think that might have generated some more sympathy for you?

**GERALD.** Exactly. I didn’t want sympathy. I didn’t want to get off easy, or anything. I wanted to be punished, and I got my wish sure enough. I spent years on death row. Then one day they led me to a clean little hospital bed, swabbed my arm with alcohol, and shoved in the needle. Then it was like going to sleep, just without the waking up. You know I never thought about it before, but it’s kind of funny, the way they clean everything, and the alcohol swab. Seems strange to try to keep the soon to be dead from getting an infection.

**STANLEY.** I’m in hell with a former death row inmate.

**GERALD.** Stop saying that. I can’t believe that. Look at this place. Where’s the fire and brimstone?

**STANLEY.** Gerald. What makes you think that cartoons give an accurate depiction of hell? And what better torture than to make you think you were in Heaven for a while. It just makes everything so much worse.

**GERALD.** You don’t know. You don’t know how these things work. They say

God works in mysterious ways.

**STANLEY.** I fail to see how responding to a surprise party with a double homicide is in any way the work of God.

**GERALD.** That's not what I mean.

**STANLEY.** After what you just told me, you can sit there and tell me with a straight face that you think you're in heaven.

**GERALD.** I begged every day for mercy. Every single day for I begged and pleaded. I didn't even try to get out of it. I never denied what I did. I took full responsibility. In fact, I did everything I could to make sure I was punished to the maximum. And I was. Believe me, this is no prison. And that means that it certainly can't be hell, because surely hell would have to be worse than any prison on Earth. If this is hell, it's a weak substitute. I've been through some of the worst you can go through on Earth. So when I got here, and saw I was forgiven, I made a commitment to always be grateful. So even when I get tired of eating the same food every day, I make an effort to enjoy it. Or at the very least to seem like I'm enjoying it. Because I certainly don't deserve it.

**STANLEY.** You get tired of the food?

**GERALD.** Please, Stanley, do you really think you're the only person to ever get bored of it all? That you're the only creature amongst the millions here rational or intelligent or sensitive enough to catch on the fact that absolute perfection gets boring after a while? Of course it does. Anything that doesn't change will get boring given enough time, and we have infinite time. And it's not like anything here is ever going to change, either.

**STANLEY.** Why not?

**GERALD.** Because if it had room for change then it wouldn't be an absolute.

**STANLEY.** But if it was absolutely perfect, then it wouldn't be possible for us to feel bored.

**GERALD.** That's not necessarily true.

**STANLEY.** Yes it is necessarily true. And maybe that means that things can change here.

**GERALD.** So now we're in heaven again?

**STANLEY.** I don't know. But if we are you'd think they could drop us a suggestion box.

**GERALD.** Why can't you just try and enjoy it here?

**STANLEY.** Because you shouldn't have to try to enjoy anything.

**GERALD.** You could. You could return a little bit of the love God has shown you.

**STANLEY.** That kind of trite church talk is beneath you. And besides, that's not love. That's what you call an obligation.

**GERALD.** I don't know what you mean.

**STANLEY.** Can you really not see what a trap this is? Either way. Let's say it's heaven for a moment. Then it's tyranny, except instead of torture or threats he uses gifts, and it's at least as effective. If he makes you feel like you owe him something, then of course you're going to worship him. He keeps you complacent by making you think you're getting some great gift. You're a willing prisoner, and that's the best kind there is.

**GERALD.** How can you speak like that, after what he's done for both of us. We are not prisoners.

**STANLEY.** Come on Gerald, just look at our clothes.

**GERALD.** I rather like the clothes.

**STANLEY.** They are prisoner's uniforms.

**GERALD.** You're disgusting.

**STANLEY.** What?

**GERALD.** I cannot imagine the kind of arrogance and self-assurance it must take to be unsatisfied with the most precious gift in the universe. You poor, cynical little man.

**STANLEY.** I'd rather be a cynic than a sycophantic coward.

**GERALD.** I'm not going anywhere with you anymore.

**STANLEY.** Oh, whatever will I do without my guardian freaking angel? I was getting tired of your judgmental attitude, anyway. And when I figure out how to get out of here or make some changes, you aren't going to get to see it.

**GERALD.** You are the most frustrating human being I have ever met. *(Gerald exits.)*

**STANLEY.** You're also very frustrating. *(beat.)* That was a terrible comeback. *(Stanley exits. Cherubs bring the table from scene one back on stage where it was before.)*

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