

CRUCIFIXATION
BY ROYCE WOOD

*for Laura Tesman,
teacher and friend*

CRUCIFIXATION**SCENE ONE**

(a small shop. Dozens of crucifixes and crosses of all shapes, sizes, colors, and materials fill the walls, shelves, and bins. GORDON is hunched over a desk on stage right, carving a wooden crucifix.

Sound: bell, from stage left, indicating someone entering the shop.

DAMON enters slowly from left, taking in the atmosphere. The two do not acknowledge each other for quite some time. Eventually, GORDON speaks without looking up.)

GORDON

God awful hot today.

(DAMON, startled, knocks a few crosses off a shelf onto the floor with much clatter.)

DAMON

Oh my god, I am so sorry. I'll clean it up, I -

GORDON

Don't worry about it, son.

(GORDON rises and crosses over to the spill.)

DAMON

(picking up spilled crosses and putting them on the shelf)

I think I broke a couple, I'm sorry.

GORDON

No, these look okay. I keep the expensive ones on the walls anyway.

DAMON

Okay. (*rises, examining the wall*) Quite a collection you've got here.

GORDON

Eh, it's all right. Are you looking for something in particular?

DAMON

Oh, no, I'm just browsing. I'm not religious.

GORDON

Neither am I, but we all have to make a living. People need these. You know what they say, food, water, and crucifixes.

DAMON

So where do you get all of these? Are you a collector?

GORDON

I make them.

DAMON

They're all different.

GORDON

And everyone who comes in buys a different one.

DAMON

You can probably tell a lot about a person's faith by the way they choose their crucifix.

GORDON

I wouldn't know.

(*beat*)

DAMON

It must be a lot of work to make all of these.

GORDON

Oh, I don't make all of them. Some of the more generic ones I get from wholesalers. But I don't display them.

DAMON

So why do you buy them?

GORDON

To sell them. It's hard selling the more personal works. It's like giving away your children. Each represents how I was feeling at the time.

DAMON

Why crosses?

GORDON

It's what comes out. Each week, I start work on a new piece. I never know what it's going to be before I make it, but it always ends up being a cross or a crucifix. Wood, clay, leather, wire, aluminum, no matter what the material, always a crucifix.

DAMON

Are you looking for something? Answers?

GORDON

I like the shape. It's symmetrical one way and not the other. The expressions on his face fascinate me. Such complex emotions.

DAMON

Surely you must know the religious significance of this symbol, this object.

GORDON

So I've gathered.

DAMON

So what does it mean to you then?

GORDON

It's a piece of art, a piece of beauty. It makes me think about ... people.

DAMON

I've been thinking a lot about people myself lately. Thanks for answering my questions.

GORDON

No problem.

(DAMON goes to leave)

GORDON

If you're ever in need of a crucifix, you know where to come.

DAMON

I'll keep this place in mind.

GORDON

The perfect accessory for every room in the home.

DAMON

Right.

GORDON

They make great gifts.

DAMON

Sounds great.

GORDON

I've got bulk rates too if you need a whole bunch of them.

DAMON

Listen, I really have to go.

GORDON

Have a nice day.

SCENE TWO

(DAMON's new apartment. Empty. White walls. DAMON enters with a duffel bag. Looks around, sets the bag down. NATALIE follows, holding a nightstand and a lamp. She wears a gold cross on a thin chain around her neck. She puts the nightstand on stage left and puts the lamp on top of it.)

NATALIE

The rest of the furniture is at Grace's. We can go pick it up whenever you want. The fridge and microwave are already in the kitchen.

DAMON

Wow. This is great.

NATALIE

Do you like it?

DAMON

Yes. Thanks so much for finding this place for me, Natalie. I really appreciate it.

NATALIE

It's no problem, really. I want to make sure you're taken care of. *(pause)* Do you know how long you were gone?

DAMON

I lost track.

NATALIE

Nine months. *(beat)* Where did you go?

DAMON

Everywhere and nowhere. I didn't care. I just went, to see how far I could get.

NATALIE

How far did you get?

DAMON

Anchorage.

NATALIE

Wow.

DAMON

By then I had been out of money for about three weeks. I was cold, hungry, and had realized you could only get so far before you inevitably come crawling back.

NATALIE

The prodigal son.

(she laughs. he doesn't.)

DAMON

That's not funny.

NATALIE

Sorry.

DAMON

No need to apologize. I just didn't think it was funny.

NATALIE

Right.

DAMON

But that's behind me. I'm back, right?

NATALIE

Are you coming on Sunday?

DAMON

I might.

NATALIE

Might?

DAMON

No, I will. I'm still sorting out some issues.

NATALIE

About what?

DAMON

(sighs)

Life. Who I am.

NATALIE

Have you ... figured anything out?

DAMON

Some things. Not everything.

NATALIE

Is that why you left? To figure things out?

DAMON

Sort of. Not really.

NATALIE

Then why?

DAMON

Listen, I just got back. I need some time to settle in.

NATALIE

Right. I understand. I'll stop pestering you.

DAMON

No, no, you're fine.

NATALIE

I mean, you go away for this long time and I don't hear from you ... I wanted to know what happened. But I can wait. Remember, I'm two floors up if you need anything.

DAMON

Right.

(NATALIE turns to leave. But she rushes back and embraces him suddenly. He is startled. She lets him go, then leaves quickly.)

SCENE THREE

(later. DAMON and SKYLER bring in a small couch from stage right.)

SKYLER

Man! I'm glad you only live on the second floor.

DAMON

Thanks for helping.

SKYLER

Anything for you, man. Let me go get the cushions.

(SKYLER leaves. DAMON adjusts the couch, pushing it up against the right stage wall. He looks at it, and nods. His cell phone rings.)

DAMON

Hello?

NATALIE

Hi, it's me.

DAMON

Hi.

NATALIE

Just calling to see how you're doing.

DAMON

We got the couch from Grace's and Skyler's helping me move it up here.

NATALIE

Oh ... Skyler's over there?

DAMON

Yeah. Why?

NATALIE

No reason, just - never mind. It's not important.

DAMON

Oh. Okay.

NATALIE

Hey, ask him if he wants to come on Sunday.

DAMON

You know what he'll say.

NATALIE

No harm in trying, right?

DAMON

Right ...

(SKYLER enters with cushions)

DAMON

Well, gotta go.

NATALIE

Talk to you later.

DAMON

Bye.

(DAMON hangs up.)

SKYLER

Who was that?

DAMON

Natalie.

SKYLER
(*bitter*)

What did she want?

DAMON

Just calling. So, what have you been doing?

SKYLER

Working. But forget me, dude, you're the one who went on the big trip. Tell me about it.

DAMON

What do you want to know?

SKYLER

Where did you go? What did you do? I don't know, man, you tell me.

DAMON

Well, I did a lot of thinking.

SKYLER

About what?

DAMON

Where I am right now in my life. I feel like I'm at crossroads, you know? This is an important time in my life.

SKYLER

Right.

DAMON

So I went to see what was out there. Mostly I talked to people. Asked them questions, found out what made them tick.

SKYLER

You went all the way across the country to talk to people? There are people here, man.

DAMON

I know, but I wanted to get a cross-section of the entire population. Not everywhere is like here.

SKYLER

Okay, yeah, I hear you. So what kind of people did you meet?

DAMON

All sorts. At first, I didn't talk to anyone. I'd take the bus or the subway and pretend to do the crossword while I watched people. People do interesting things when they think no one is watching.

SKYLER

Like what?

DAMON

Oh, I don't know. I guess the only one I remember was this adorable little cross-eyed girl who I actually saw a couple of times. She always dug through her mom's purse for pens to put in her shirt pocket. She put them in one by one, very carefully.

SKYLER

So?

DAMON

Well, she was smart about it. She knew the bus stop right before the stop they had to get off. Then she'd start putting them back, one by one like before. I don't think her mom ever noticed.

SKYLER

Okay, so did you do anything exciting?

DAMON

What do you mean?

SKYLER

You go away for this really long time—

DAMON

Nine months.

SKYLER

Whatever. And all you have to show for it was some girl who put pens in her pocket?

DAMON

Well, more happened then just that ...

SKYLER

I'm sure. You've got plenty of time to tell me about it. But listen, I'm going to a club on Sunday night. Do you want to come?

DAMON

I don't know. I told Natalie I'd go to church with her, and they meet Sunday nights now, you know.

SKYLER

Oh, sure, spend time with *her*. Just cross me off your list—

DAMON

Skyler, it's not like that. I was already going to go when she invited me. I'd invite you too, but I don't want to get caught in the crossfire between you two.

SKYLER

Whatever. I'll see you later.

(SKYLER exits.)

SCENE FOUR

(Faith First Church. A giant cross dominates center stage. GORDON, as the pastor, is giving a sermon from behind a podium.)

GORDON: We must be the light and salt of the world. Jesus loves you. If you have a light, do you hide it under a bushel? No. Jesus loves you. You put it on a stand to banish the darkness. Jesus loves you. In the same way, we must show our light to the others around us by the way we live. Jesus loves you. If others are opposing our beliefs, we must defend them. Jesus loves you. For our Lord said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one goes to the father except by me." Jesus loves you. This means that other beliefs are untrue and deceiving, ploys by the Enemy to bring us down. Jesus loves you. So, stand for your faith and you will be rewarded. Jesus loves you.

(quick fade. On rise, GORDON and DAMON, talking. NATALIE is nearby, watching.)

GORDON

Damon. It's so good to see you back.

DAMON

It's good to be back.

GORDON

Have you talked to Skyler recently?

DAMON

No, I haven't.

GORDON

If you see him, invite him back, will you?

DAMON

I will.

GORDON

Thank you, brother.

(GORDON exits. NATALIE approaches DAMON, with a knowing look.)

DAMON

What?

NATALIE

You don't have to lie to him.

DAMON

Do you know where I learned to lie? I was thinking about it while I was gone.

NATALIE

Where?

DAMON

Sunday school.

NATALIE

What?

DAMON

They train you to give them the answer they want. Do you love Jesus? Do you pray every day? Are you reading your
(con't)

DAMON (*con't*)

Bible? You learn to ignore the real answer and give them the 'right' one.

NATALIE

I can't believe you saying this, Damon. You're starting to sound like Skyler.

DAMON

That isn't what this is. I'm starting to see things in a different light.

NATALIE

Why did you come back then?

DAMON

... I don't know.

NATALIE

Maybe you're just confused. Maybe you believe more than you think.

DAMON

If I knew what I believed we wouldn't have to figure it out.

(pause)

NATALIE

Good sermon.

(no response)

NATALIE

No?

DAMON

I've heard it before.

NATALIE

It's still good.

(pause)

NATALIE

Damon ... can I tell you something?

DAMON

Go ahead.

NATALIE

I've always admired your faith. You were the core of our youth group. Whenever we got into discussions you always had the deepest insights. You're the reason I didn't leave when I could have. I thought, Damon has a faith that is so real, and I want that too. You inspired me to become a better person. I wouldn't be the person I am today if it wasn't for you. So ... I just wanted to say ... thank you.

DAMON

Wow. I ... don't know what to say.

(Silence. GORDON enters.)

GORDON

Hello, you two. Natalie, how is the youth fundraiser going?

NATALIE

Excellent, Pastor Gordon. We should have enough in a couple more weeks for everyone to go on the mission trip.

GORDON

Praise the lord. Natalie, if you wouldn't mind, I would like to speak in private with Damon.

NATALIE

That's fine. I have to go anyway. I'll talk to you later, Damon.

DAMON

Bye.

(NATALIE exits)

DAMON

What did you want to talk to me about, Pastor Gordon?

GORDON

Damon, there has been something weighing on my heart recently.

DAMON

If this is about why I left, I assure you it has nothing to do with you. I just needed some time to think things over, and now I'm back, so we can put all that behind us.

GORDON

That wasn't exactly what I wanted to talk to you about.

DAMON

What then?

(GORDON gives him an intent gaze)

DAMON

Oh.

GORDON

I've been meaning to discuss this with you for quite some time.

DAMON

I - I - I don't think this is the right time. I got back a couple days ago, and I'm still settling in. This is not a good time.

GORDON

This is God's timing.

DAMON

I'm sorry, but you and He will have to wait a little while. I have to go.

GORDON

I need you, Damon.

DAMON

I'll talk to you later.

(DAMON exits. GORDON breathes a deep sigh and shakes his head.)

SCENE FIVE

(DAMON's apartment, later that evening. DAMON has his face pressed up against the upstage wall, and his arms are outstretched, like a

cross. He is breathing heavily. There is a knock at the door. DAMON does not respond at first. After the second knock, his head turns to face the door. His face is scrunched up unpleasantly. A third, more violent, series of knocks.)

DAMON
(groggy)

I'm coming, I'm coming.

(He peels himself away from the wall and staggers over to the door. As soon as he opens it, SKYLER, slightly drunk, bursts in and embraces DAMON.)

SKYLER
I love you, man! What would I do without you, man?

DAMON
Skyler?

(DAMON is getting uncomfortable.)

SKYLER
You're always here for me. You've never let me down.

DAMON
What time is it?

SKYLER
My best friend. My only true pal.

(He releases DAMON.)

SKYLER
Damon, Damon, Damon. You know, if you replace the A in your name with an E it spells—

DAMON
Yes, yes, I know.

SKYLER
That's wild if you ask me.

(He collapses on the couch.)

SKYLER

You don't mind if I spend the night here, do you?

DAMON

No, that's fine.

SKYLER

See what I mean? My pal.

DAMON

What have you been doing, Skyler?

SKYLER

I was at the club. You should have come, man. It was awesome. But, man, some idiot has to come over and ruin the whole night. So, I'm talking to this good-looking guy, right? That's all. And this asshole walks by and must have read into it because he says something like, "They should put up a sign to keep the fags out of this place." And I'm like, "Screw you." So I shove him. And we get into this fight.

DAMON

Then what?

SKYLER

We both got thrown out. But I could have kicked his ass, I tell you. I could of.

DAMON

I believe you. But listen, Skyler—

SKYLER

It's like nobody understands, you know? I mean, you understand, and some other people do too, but like, the rest of them, you know? People I thought were my friends.

DAMON

Skyler, please. I don't want to talk about this right now.

SKYLER

I mean, what gives her the right to tell me how to live my life?

DAMON

She's just trying to understand you. She cares.

SKYLER

Can she do it without shoving doctrine down my throat?

DAMON

You're over-exaggerating.

SKYLER

Why do you always have to stick up for her, man?

DAMON

She's not here to defend herself. I'm only being fair.

SKYLER

You could take my side once and a while.

DAMON

I do. When you're not here.

SKYLER

Why even bother? She could never understand my point of view.

DAMON

But can you understand hers?

SKYLER

Why?

DAMON

(getting frustrated)

This is what it always comes down to. You two refuse to even try to understand each other.

SKYLER

She's so full of garbage it makes me sick. At least you're starting to get some sense.

DAMON

What are you talking about?

SKYLER

It's like you were telling me before you left. You're leaving First Faith for good.

DAMON

I'm taking stock of my options right now. I haven't decided for sure yet.

SKYLER

It'll be awesome. We could go clubbing together all the time. It'd be great.

DAMON

Skyler, I don't think—

SKYLER

You'd fit right in with my other friends. You could be one of us.

DAMON

I don't think you really understand where I am right now.

SKYLER

(rising)

Whatever, man, I know what you really want. Alright, good night, pal.

(SKYLER goes to embrace him. DAMON puts his hand up.)

DAMON

Good night.

SCENE SIX

(The apartment, the next morning.)

DAMON

Natalie, I wasn't expecting you.

NATALIE

I thought I'd drop by, see how things are going.

DAMON

Everything's going great.

NATALIE

When did you want to talk?

SKYLER

(from kitchen)

Do you not have anything to eat, man?

DAMON

There should some bread on the counter.

NATALIE

... who was that?

SKYLER

(from kitchen)

Dude, you know I only eat whole grain.

DAMON

That's all I got. Sorry.

SKYLER

(from kitchen)

Whatever.

(he enters left)

SKYLER

I'll go get a bagel at - oh. I didn't know she was here.

NATALIE

It's good to see you too.

DAMON

Please, guys. You always fight and never get anywhere.

SKYLER

I'm leaving anyway. See you round, Damon.

(He exits right. NATALIE stares at DAMON, wanting an explanation.)

DAMON

(nervously fanning himself)

Hot, isn't it? Do you want something to drink?

(he escapes left, to the kitchen)

NATALIE

What do you have?

(she sits on the couch)

DAMON
(from kitchen)

Looks like bottled tea ... Gatorade ... and milk.

NATALIE
(makes a face)

Tea sounds fine.

(he returns with an Arizona tea in one hand and a half finished bottle of orange Gatorade in the other. He offers the tea to her.)

DAMON

Here you are.

NATALIE

Thanks.

(she takes the drink and twists off the cap. She notices he is still standing.)

NATALIE

You can sit down if you want.

(she gestures towards the empty space next to her on the couch)

DAMON

I'm fine.

NATALIE

I'll scoot over.

DAMON

You can have the whole couch to yourself, really. I don't mind standing.

NATALIE

I don't want you to be uncomfortable in your own home.

DAMON

Fine. *(he sits on the floor.)* Better?

(pause)

NATALIE

Why did you leave?

DAMON

I left. That's all there is to it.

NATALIE

What were you looking for?

DAMON

What would I be looking for?

NATALIE

Something inside of you, understanding about the universe, I don't know. Forget it.

DAMON

God?

NATALIE

Yes!

DAMON

That's not it.

NATALIE

Why bring it up then? Why -

(she buries her face in her hands suddenly)

DAMON

Whoa, Natalie, what's wrong?

NATALIE

(bursting)

What was Skyler doing here? Did he spend the night?

DAMON

(rising)

Hold on. You're reading way too much into this.

NATALIE

I come in, and Skyler's already here. What am I supposed to think? Why do you even spend time with him?

DAMON

He's my friend. Am I not allowed to spend time with my friends?

NATALIE

(rising)

He changed, Damon. He's not the same person anymore.

DAMON

He didn't change. Why can't you accept him for who he is?

NATALIE

Because what he is is wrong! He turned his back on all of us.

DAMON

No, you turned your backs on him. They practically threw him out of the church.

NATALIE

What were we supposed to do? *(she shakes her head)* It's happening all over. Remember, Skyler left for a little while before he told us all? And now you've left—

DAMON

What? No, you've - God.

NATALIE

I worry about you, Damon.

DAMON

Don't.

NATALIE

I see you going down this path. I'm not going to lose you too. Especially not you.

(silence. Damon exits to kitchen.)

NATALIE

Where are you going?

DAMON

(from kitchen)

Do you want something to drink?

NATALIE

What?

DAMON

Looks like all I have is milk.

NATALIE

Damon ...

DAMON

Yeah, I want milk too. Milk it is then.

(she shakes her head. Damon returns with a glass of milk in each hand.)

DAMON

One for you ...

(He offers her the glass. She doesn't take it.)

DAMON

I thought you wanted milk.

NATALIE

You already got me tea.

DAMON

Right. *(he looks away)* I thought maybe we could start over again.

(He sets the milk down on the floor. Silence. NATALIE reaches out and touches DAMON on the shoulder. He pulls away.)

NATALIE

Damon ... I love you.

(He turns around slowly and gives her an intent gaze. Slow fade.)

SCENE SEVEN

(the crucifix shop. GORDON is up and about, adjusting his creations as a gardener would tend to his plants. sound: bell. DAMON enters from left.)

GORDON

Ah! Back again?

DAMON

Yeah. I think I'm interested in buying something today.

GORDON

Oh. Good. Did you have anything in mind?

DAMON

Why don't you just show me what you have?

GORDON

Okay. How do you like this one? *(he indicates a large, ornate crucifix)* One of my early pieces. I am particularly fond of the contrast between the hard edges of the cross and the fluid figure of the man.

DAMON

That's a little fancier than I was hoping for.

GORDON

All right ... *(he moves down the wall)* This is a nice piece. I carved it on the beach, out of driftwood.

DAMON

I think I want one without the ... you know ... the guy on them.

GORDON

A cross rather than a crucifix? Always an option. *(he moves over to the shelves)* Here are some lovely ceramic pieces with gemstone inlays ...

DAMON

Eh ...

GORDON

Do you think you would like a wrought iron piece in the gothic style? I have some in the back.

DAMON

No, thanks though. *(he notices a bin and kneels down.)* What about these?

(He pulls a few out of the bin. They are very simple and rustic-looking, little more than sticks tied together with twine.)

GORDON

Oh. Something downscale.

DAMON

You said something the other day about bulk rates?

GORDON

Yes. Let me see.

(he moves behind the counter and pulls out a cardboard box)

GORDON

I've been trying to get rid of these for a while.

(he opens the box and removes a few blue plastic crosses. DAMON, intrigued, crosses over to the counter.)

DAMON

This is more of what I was looking for. *(he examines one)* "Made in Taiwan".

GORDON

How many did you want?

DAMON

How many do you have?

GORDON

There's twelve here. I'll throw in an extra if you buy all of them.

A baker's dozen.

DAMON

Ten sound fair?

GORDON

(DAMON tosses a bill on the counter, seizes the box and dashes out of the shop. GORDON shakes his head, puzzled. He pockets the bill)

SCENE EIGHT

(The apartment. DAMON is in the process of hanging the crosses in a perfect row along the wall. NATALIE enters from left. She has spent the night.)

Good morning. You're up early.

NATALIE

I had an idea for a project.

DAMON

(He gestures towards the crosses on the wall.)

That's ... interesting.

NATALIE

To say the least, I'm sure.

DAMON

I don't think I get it. *(pause)* Does this have something to do with why you left?

NATALIE

You're really interested in that, aren't you?

DAMON

When someone I care about disappears for nine months I want an explanation.

NATALIE

DAMON

Okay, okay. Yes, this does have something to do with why I left.

NATALIE

Are you thinking about leaving First Faith?

DAMON

That's not it.

NATALIE

What then?

DAMON

Does this look right to you? Does it line up with the others?

NATALIE

Damon!

DAMON

(sighs)

Natalie, please don't take this the wrong way, but I just don't think you'll understand.

(He goes back to what he was doing. NATALIE crosses over to the couch.)

NATALIE

I've been praying for you. Every night since you left.

DAMON

What for?

NATALIE

That you'd find whatever you were looking for.

DAMON

I found it.

NATALIE

What is it?

DAMON

Don't raise your expectations too high. You'll be disappointed.

NATALIE
Try me.

(pause)

DAMON
The spacing. Do you think I should change the spacing?

NATALIE
Why are you asking me?

(silence. DAMON puts up the last cross.)

DAMON
There. Perfect.

(He stands back to admire his work. NATALIE crosses and stands next to him.)

DAMON
What do you think?

NATALIE
It makes me feel uncomfortable.

DAMON
No reason it should.

NATALIE
But when you deal with such a powerful symbol—

DAMON
But is it? These were made in Taiwan.

NATALIE
You can cheapen the material, but you can't cheapen the meaning.

DAMON
I disagree.

NATALIE
What does it mean to you then?

DAMON

Very little.

NATALIE

Then why bother coming back to First Faith? If it doesn't mean anything to you—

DAMON

Hold on.

NATALIE

Why don't you just have Skyler over here every night? Huh? Why do you have to walk in the middle. Choose a side.

DAMON

A side? This isn't about sides.

NATALIE

Damon, the world is divided into good forces and evil forces. You're either on one side or the other.

DAMON

Do you want me to leave the church?

NATALIE

If it doesn't mean anything to you. I don't want you to live a lie.

DAMON

You didn't care before.

NATALIE

I didn't know.

DAMON

And now that you do?

NATALIE

You didn't really change, did you?

SCENE NINE

(the apartment. DAMON is sitting in the center of the room, cross-legged, knees in the crooks of his arms. SKYLER enters from right.)

SKYLER

Hey man. Ready to go?

DAMON

Almost.

SKYLER

Cool crosses.

DAMON

Do you get it?

SKYLER

I think so. So, are you going back to First Faith for sure?

DAMON

What kind of a question is that?

SKYLER

You got crosses up on your wall, man. What am I supposed to think?

DAMON

You don't get it at all.

SKYLER

Would you like to explain it to me?

DAMON

No, actually. I'm sick of explaining things to people who don't understand.

SKYLER

Well sorry. I was just asking.

DAMON

People have been asking me a lot of questions lately. Trying to put me into a category.

SKYLER

I know what you mean.

DAMON

You're either here or there.

SKYLER

Black or white.

DAMON

Exactly. But it's involuntary. We do it without thinking about it.

SKYLER

That doesn't make it right.

DAMON

No, but that's the way it is.

SKYLER

And once they've got you penned that's the end of it.

DAMON

I disagree. I think people can be taught to understand.

SKYLER

How?

DAMON

That's the question.

SKYLER

You have too much faith in people.

DAMON

You don't have enough.

SKYLER

You'll be disappointed.

DAMON

I guess we'll just have to see.

SKYLER

So are you thinking about going back to First Faith at all?

DAMON

You know, I might. Just to spite you.

SKYLER

I'm glad my opinion means so much to you.

DAMON

I live my life based on other people's whims.

SKYLER

Do you want to keep bantering or should we go?

DAMON

Let's go.

SCENE TEN

(First Faith Church.)

GORDON

I'm so glad you finally decided to come speak to me.

DAMON

It's important. For both of us.

GORDON

Damon, let me start by saying that Natalie has been telling me a lot about you recently.

DAMON

That's good, because she understands the situation completely.

GORDON

So I thought. It pains me to see a brother drift from the faith.

DAMON

Mmm.

GORDON

It reminds me of the parable of the prodigal son—

DAMON

I know the story, pastor. You don't have to tell it.

GORDON

I'm glad that you have not let go of all of the teachings.

DAMON

They're part of who I am.

GORDON

As much as I would like to talk about this right now, there are more pressing matters we must attend to.

DAMON

Such as?

GORDON

We both know our shared past, Damon.

DAMON

Please, I don't want to go there right now.

GORDON

And I know you must hurt very much. But we can heal this hurt. Together.

DAMON

I wish I were as confident as you.

GORDON

I would like to start by saying ... I'm sorry.

(silence)

DAMON

Is that all?

GORDON

Do you have something to say to that?

DAMON

No.

GORDON

Do you accept my apology?

DAMON

No.

GORDON

Why not?

DAMON

Sorry is one of the cheapest words in the English language.

GORDON

I am telling you that I am truly sorry.

DAMON

Okay. Fine.

GORDON

And I would like to ask for forgiveness.

(silence)

DAMON

Excuse me?

GORDON

I'm asking you for forgiveness.

DAMON

I heard what you said. I can't believe it.

GORDON

This must be a very important moment for you.

DAMON

For me? *For me?* I think we both know this isn't about me.

GORDON

Of course it is.

DAMON

No. Asking for forgiveness is the most selfish thing you can do.

GORDON

But selfishness is the root of all sin.

DAMON

Quite a conundrum. The reason you want forgiveness is that you feel your immortal soul is in danger. So, to guarantee your place in the afterlife, you're putting me on the spot. This is all about you.

GORDON

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." If you don't forgive, you will not be forgiven.

DAMON

Oh. Playing the guilt card. You like that one, don't you? You use it all the time.

GORDON

I'm quoting gospel.

DAMON

Okay. You know what? I know the answer you want. I can give it to you. I'll be lying, but I can give it to you. I forgive you.

(Silence)

DAMON

Good job. You mustered up all your pastorly wisdom for this one. Here I come, wanting to ask a few questions and ready to come back to First Faith, and through a single act of terrible timing, you have helped me make my decision. *(pause)* I'm not coming back. I hope you're happy.

SCENE ELEVEN

(the apartment. Silence. DAMON enters from right, slowly crosses to the kitchen. He stops halfway. He turns, goes to the wall with the crosses. He looks at it for a moment, then he turns the center one upside-down. He exits left.)

SCENE TWELVE

(the apartment. DAMON is on the phone.)

DAMON

Alright. See you soon.

(He hangs up. He paces, phone in hand. Finally, he dials.)

NATALIE

Hello?

DAMON

Hi. It's me. Listen. Do you want to talk?

NATALIE

Sure.

DAMON

I want to tell you about why I left.

NATALIE

Oh. Hey, where are you?

DAMON

My apartment.

NATALIE

Is anyone else there?

DAMON

No.

NATALIE

Okay. I'll be right down, okay?

DAMON

Sure.

NATALIE

Okay.

DAMON

Alright. See you soon.

(He hangs up. Continues pacing, for quite some time. Adjusts the crosses on the wall. Eventually, NATALIE knocks at the door. DAMON opens it.)

NATALIE

I'm so glad you've finally decided to open up.

DAMON

I thought at first you wouldn't understand. But now I think you will.

NATALIE

I'm glad you trust me. I heard you went to talk to Pastor Gordon.

DAMON

Yes.

NATALIE

How did that go?

DAMON

Great.

NATALIE

Are you coming back to First Faith.

DAMON

Yes, I am.

NATALIE

Oh, Damon, I'm so glad you've finally pulled through.
Everything's going just like I wanted it to.

(there is a knock at the door.)

NATALIE

Who could that be?

DAMON

Skyler.

(DAMON opens the door, SKYLER enters)

SKYLER

Hey man, are you ready to—

(SKYLER sees NATALIE. They stare at each other.)

NATALIE

What is he doing here?

SKYLER

What is she doing here?

(DAMON closes the door)

DAMON

We're going to have a grand old time, aren't we?

NATALIE

Damon, this isn't funny.

SKYLER

We've tried this, Damon.

DAMON

One good try deserves another. There's only one rule. No one can leave until we've reached common ground.

SKYLER

We've already agreed to disagree. We don't need to have this conversation again.

DAMON

Do you have anything to say to that, Natalie?

(NATALIE is angry)

DAMON

Maybe not.

NATALIE

You know what, Skyler? I have no more respect for you.

SKYLER

The feeling is mutual.

NATALIE

What you do, who you are, what you stand for.

SKYLER

I was just about to say that.

NATALIE

I've tried to be compassionate, but you won't receive it.

SKYLER

I've tried to make you see your mistakes, but you won't look.

NATALIE

I can't understand your choice.

SKYLER

Choice?

NATALIE

Why did you change?

SKYLER

This is the way I am!

NATALIE

I refuse to believe that.

SKYLER

Then you will never understand me.

NATALIE

You can't say I didn't try.

SKYLER

If you have to keep lying to yourself to hold your doctrine together, fine. I know what I know.

NATALIE

So do I.

DAMON

See? You have so much in common. You could be great friends if you didn't hate each other.

SKYLER

I don't think we can go any father.

NATALIE

We disagree on a fundamental point.

DAMON

Yes, I know. But can you understand the other person's point of view? That's all I'm asking. Not to agree, but to understand.

(silence)

SKYLER

No.

NATALIE

No.

DAMON

Look, I can understand you both. I'm still friends with you both. Doesn't that mean something to you both?

*(Silence. Nothing happens.
Finally, DAMON goes to wall and
removes one of the crosses. He
comes center, holding it firmly*

with both hands. He snaps it in half.)

DAMON

One.

NATALIE

Damon!

SKYLER
(concerned)

Damon ...

(DAMON drops the two pieces on the floor. He turns around, trance-like, and continues to repeat the entire routine. After each break, he announces the number.)

DAMON

Two.

SKYLER

Are you feeling okay, man?

NATALIE

Snap out of it, Damon!

DAMON

(break) Three.

NATALIE

You're scaring me, Damon.

SKYLER

I think that's enough.

DAMON

No. It's not. *(break)* Four.

SKYLER

What are you trying to prove?

NATALIE

I don't like it, Damon.

DAMON

Don't worry. (*break*) Five. Eventually it will start to lose meaning.

NATALIE

What?

DAMON

Do you want to know what I did while I was gone? I'll tell you. (*break*) Six. I was making a list.

NATALIE

A list?

DAMON

I told you you'd be disappointed. (*break*) Seven.

NATALIE

A list of what?

DAMON

I listened for words and phrases that people used too much.

SKYLER

Like what?

DAMON

(*break*) Eight. 'I'm sorry' was a big one.

NATALIE

That's cynical.

DAMON

It's true. (*break*) Nine.

SKYLER

What else?

DAMON

'How are you?' and the obligatory response 'Fine'.

NATALIE

Damon, please.

DAMON

I think 'thank you' was up there somewhere. (*break*) Ten.

NATALIE

Damon, stop it.

DAMON

'How may I help you?' Oh. I remember another one. You're not going to like this.

NATALIE

What?

DAMON

'I love you'. *(break)* Eleven.

SKYLER

So what does this list mean to you?

DAMON

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

NATALIE

Then why make it? What's the point?

DAMON

That is the point.

NATALIE

What?

DAMON

(break) Twelve. The more times you say something, the less it means. You can repeat a word over and over again and forget that it ever had any meaning at all. Same with these crosses. I hung thirteen of them on my wall to see if I could repeat a symbol enough times to make it lose its meaning.

SKYLER

Did it work?

NATALIE

Did it work?

(break)

SCENE THIRTEEN

(the crucifix shop. As before, but GORDON is nowhere to be seen. Sound: bell. DAMON enters from left, with the box of broken crosses.)

DAMON
Hello? Is anyone here?

(no response. He wanders around, looking at the crucifixes on the wall. He stops and regards the large ornate one for quite some time. GORDON enters, from right.)

GORDON
Oh. I didn't hear you come in. Do you need more crosses?

DAMON
No, actually, I've come to return these ones I bought.

GORDON
What was wrong with them?

DAMON
They're broken.

GORDON
Let me see.

DAMON
(hands the box to him.)
Broken in half. Every single one of them.

GORDON
How did this happen?

DAMON
I broke them.

GORDON
Oh. *(pause)* Why?

DAMON
I was making a point. That was why I bought them in the first place. To make a point.

GORDON
Was it ... well received?

DAMON
No. It seems you can't ever tell people what to think. Which is their right, I suppose.

GORDON

I don't think I can give you your money back.

DAMON

That's not important.

GORDON

I probably wouldn't be able to sell them, even if I fixed them.

DAMON

Can they be fixed?

GORDON

Of course. It would be fairly simple. But the crack will still show. No one would want to buy them. Leaving them here would be the same as throwing them away.

DAMON

Oh.

GORDON

You could take these home and fix them yourself if you wanted. It wouldn't be too hard.

DAMON

The question is whether I still want to keep them.

GORDON

That's the question everyone has to ask themselves, I think.

(DAMON examines a few of the pieces)

DAMON

That's interesting. They each broke in a different way.

GORDON

You can probably tell a lot about a person's faith by the way they break their crucifix.

DAMON

I wouldn't know.

THE END