

CRUCIFIX

*A play by
George Halitzka*

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Chaplain Matt Leonard
Carl Piotrowski
Vince Corelli
Abby Piotrowski
Jason Piotrowski (age 18)
Haley
Jason Piotrowski (age 5)
Police Officer
Howard Grafton
Wes Bradley
Marcus Robert Porter
Sergeant Gleason

SETTING

Cook County Jail, Chicago

PREVIOUS PERFORMANCES

Crucifix, in an early draft, was performed by Drama Inc., Chicago, in various venues during a spring 1999 tour. A later draft was given a staged reading at Pacific Theatre, Vancouver, BC, in May 2000. This version is a complete rewrite of the play with largely new material.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my blushing bride Julie, who kept bugging me until I finished the rewrite; Larry Korbus, who helped the very first version see the light of stage; Lisa Ravensbergen, Andre Ong, and Sara Mondello, three of my most favorite-est dramaturgs; and Todd Schultz, who originated the role of Marcus Porter and helped me understand him. Todd, nobody plays a cold-blooded psychopath like you! You can take that any way you want.

- G.H.

The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful
and Terrible, was silent . . . Never shall I forget
those moments which murdered my God and my soul
and turned my dreams to dust.

Elie Weisel

CRUCIFIX

ACT ONE

(The outer lobby of Cook County Jail. A generic tiled floor; fluorescent lights; aging official placards on rough brick walls. In the center of the room, there is an airport-style metal detector and bag-screening apparatus with a battered portable TV set on top. In front of the security desk, there are rows of waiting-room chairs. Behind it, OFFICER VINCE CORELLI lounges in a beaten-up padded desk chair. A couple of other waiting-room chairs have been dragged back beside him; CARL PIOTROWSKI sits in one of them. CHAPLAIN MATT LEONARD enters from downstage and goes to join CORELLI and CARL.)

MATT

New evidence, counselor!

CARL

Someday Corelli's gonna arrest your ass.

CORELLI

(pointing to the metal detector)

How long you been workin' here, Chaplain?

MATT

You think I got a gun in the Bible? This is insulting.

CARL

So are body cavity searches.

(MATT backtracks to pass through the metal detector.)

MATT

Santa Claus, an honest lawyer, and an old drunk spot a hundred dollar bill. Who keeps it?

CARL

The old drunk; the other two don't exist.

MATT

The counselor never lets me finish a joke.

CORELLI

Has he ever told one?

MATT

Lord, how I suffer among sinners--

CORELLI

He's gettin' spiritual again--

CARL

It's an act. So what's this evidence, Leonard? You gonna keep Grafton off death row for me?

MATT

He's a free man!

CARL

What?

MATT

Last night, Howard goes to Brother Juan's Bible study--

CORELLI

The cop killer?

MATT

Hard heart; denied up and down he did it. But as Juan prays, Howard confesses his sin; breaks down crying--

CORELLI

I'll be damned.

CARL

And I thought the kid was dumber than a rock.

MATT

God uses the foolish things to confound the wise.

CARL

No, Robinson turned down Grafton's plea yesterday. Said he was goin' for Murder One.

MATT
(triumphantly)
God used difficulty to bring repentance--

CARL
Repentance my ass. Juries like a murderer who gets religion.

CORELLI
No atheists in County--

MATT
Except when the Office of the Public Defender shows up.

CARL
I'm agnostic.

MATT
You refuse to see God at work.

CARL
You refuse to see reality. That's why I like you, Leonard.

MATT
Listen, Piotrowski. Here's a man who shot a cop in cold blood.
Wouldn't even admit it--

CARL
He copped to Brother Juan. It's privileged.

MATT
I'm telling you and Corelli--

CARL
Hearsay. If he confesses to the jury, I'll be impressed.

MATT
Point is--

CARL
Point is, Grafton asks Jesus into his heart, he goes direct to
heaven, right?

MATT
Just like the thief on the cross.

CARL

That cop--what about him? Killed while protecting the earth from the scum of the universe. What if he was a good Muslim?

(MATT sees the trap; struggles for a moment to formulate a response.)

But friend Grafton? Free ride to the Pearly Gates.

CORELLI

You ever make a deal with God, Leonard?

MATT

What?

CORELLI

"Lord, I'll be a missionary to Africa if I can tell one good joke"--

CARL

I know they say God can do anything, but--

MATT

Have you, Piotrowski?

CARL

Cut a deal? What's it prove?

MATT

Immature but genuine faith.

CARL

It's desperation and it's worthless. Did you keep yours?

MATT

I swore to God I'd enter the ministry.

CARL

If He did what?

MATT

That would be telling.

CARL

(in a true spirit of one-upmanship)

I swore I'd go to church every Sunday.

CORELLI

Uh-huh.

CARL

God dropped the ball.

MATT

Just because He didn't answer a prayer, it's not--

CARL

Where I come from, we call that *argumentum ad ignorantium*.

CORELLI

Where *I* come from, we call it bullshit.

CARL

Grafton makes a deal, right? "God, I'll be a good Christian boy if you get me off." Now what's gonna happen when the jury fries him?

MATT

If his faith is genuine--

CARL

--He'll be praisin' God when the stick the needle in his arm. Am I right?

CORELLI

You're right.

MATT

But he's a baby Christian--

CARL

Leonard, we're gonna make a deal. You, me, and God. Corelli, you're the witness.

MATT

I told you; immature faith--

CARL

Whattayathink I got? If Grafton still believes after the sentencing--

CORELLI

Or if he gets off--

CARL
Robinson's on the ballot. If he gets off, there *is* a God.

MATT
And he's your client?

CARL
I'm a realist. If Grafton goes to chapel after "God have mercy on your soul"--

MATT
Fine. He stays in chapel; you go to church for a month.

CARL
Bullshit--

CORELLI
At the Bible-thumping cathedral of Leonard's choice.

CARL
No way--

CORELLI
Who brought it up, Piotrowski?

(Brief pause.)

CARL
Two weeks.

MATT
Can you believe it, Corelli? Carl's gonna get some *Jee-sus*.

CARL
Only if my horse comes through.

CORELLI
Hang on . . . I gotta use the phone.

CARL
Gonna call in the media?

CORELLI
Gonna book my ski trip to hell.

(From across the stage, ABBY'S voice calls out.
The lights transitions to CARL'S living room, a

comfortable but faded middle-class establishment. CARL picks up his briefcase, puts on his suit coat, and crosses the stage to his home. ABBY, his wife, is waiting impatiently.)

ABBY

Carl! Carl!

(pointing to CARL'S watch)

Do you ever look at that thing?

CARL

No, but I like how it turns my wrist green--

ABBY

It's seven o'clock Friday night, and where's my husband?

CARL

Paperwork, Abby--

ABBY

Uh-huh.

CARL

Look, I was worshiping the Lord--

ABBY

Why do you pick on that poor Chaplain?

CARL

Corelli was doin' it too, Mom.

ABBY

And if Officer Corelli jumped off a bridge?

CARL

Right behind him.

ABBY

Your firstborn's senior prom is tonight. Wanna see him before he goes?

CARL

That's not tonight!

ABBY

Tell it to the chauffeur.