

THE GIRLS IN THE VAN

by Greg Moleski

*Persons Represented:*

ANNA—Driving

HELEN—Passenger seat

NANCY—Backseat behind Anna

JOAN—Backseat behind Helen

*The Scene: (Curtain rises on FOUR WOMEN sitting in simple wooden folding chairs arranged in two rows of two chairs each. A downstage placard on an easel reads: “YAHWEH’S EIGHTH DAY BYSTANDERS.” All read from prayer books, and are dressed in medium-length charcoal gray skirts and modest off-white blouses. All except HELEN, who wears slacks.)*

ALL: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.”

*(HELEN steals a glance at the other women, then turns her gaze out the window to the passing world. Sighs.)*

ALL: “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”

ANNA: Amen.

ALL: Amen. *(All close prayer books. Sigh.)*

NANCY: *(chipper)* My goodness, what a wonderful sunny day!

*(ANNA and JOAN concur with affirmative exhales, all filled with the Word of the Lord. HELEN, who clears her throat, speaks hesitatingly.)*

HELEN: So uh... has uh anyone else taken a good look at this month's cover?

ANNA: How's that, sister?

HELEN: This month's magazine. The picture on the cover.

ANNA: Why of course! It's all we've been reading since it came out last week.

HELEN: Isn't there something about the cover that strikes you as a little... strange, sister?

ANNA: What do you mean exactly, sister?

HELEN: Well, take a careful look. It's a very detailed drawing, inspired no doubt, by the very Word of God...

ALL: No doubt.

HELEN: And we can see, quite clearly, all of the wonderful details of Heaven as it shall be after the Rapture has come to pass—happy children playing in the sunny green fields... palm trees, blue skies... a bountiful family picnic. And the Good Shepherd looming large in the background, watching over us all.

ALL: Amen.

HELEN: Amen. It all looks so very bright and so very very wonderful. Just like, San Diego, only not as crowded. *(to Joan)* But look... look right here, in the foreground of the drawing. What do you see, sister?

JOAN: Why, it's a beautiful tiger, lying on the grass!

HELEN: I know—a tiger! That's what I'm saying!

ANNA: What's wrong with that, sister?

HELEN: Well, I don't know about you, but I'm afraid of tigers! I don't want to go through all the trouble of the Rapture and then get to Heaven and find out there's a bunch of tigers running around loose!

ANNA: Oh sister. It's just a drawing. It's... symbolic. You know, a symbol.

HELEN: Symbolic? Tigers in Heaven are symbolic? Symbolic of what?

ANNA: It's symbolic of uh... all creatures, great and small. Of man, and Jesus, and, uh... tigers... all living in perfect peace and harmony in the Kingdom of Heaven!

HELEN: Well, I'm not so sure about this symbolism idea. I don't think a symbol should be vague or obscure. A real symbol should be

something very specific. Like... the new Olympics logo, that Eskimo thingamajiggy.

JOAN: The Inukshuk.

HELEN: Exactly. I mean, that's a real good example of a symbol if you ask me. When I see that, I know it means it's the Olympics.

ANNA: Oh sister, I think you are getting pleats in your skirt over nothing with this symbolism idea.

HELEN: Well I just don't think we should have to be told what a symbol means. It should represent something we already understand, something we already know. And look, look... there's no other animals in the picture! No dogs, no cats, nothing! Just a tiger! And he's fucking huge!

*(Stunned silence.)*

HELEN *(softly)*: Oh my...

*(Beat. Finally, ANNA clears her throat.)*

ANNA: Wh... wha.. what did you just say, sister?

HELEN: Oh my. I don't... I don't know what... oh dear... Henry and I rented an R-rated movie the other evening, by mistake of course, and that word was in the movie, quite often. I guess... I guess I've been kind of thinking about it ever since. *(pause)* I'm sorry.

ANNA: That's a very bad word.

HELEN: I know, I know...

ANNA: A very very bad word!

HELEN: I know, I know! But, well... it's just a word, really. That's what I was thinking about. That it's just sounds, letters. It has no real meaning unless we give it meaning.

ANNA *(stern)*: I think it's best we not discuss this topic any further and return our thoughts to God.

HELEN: But what...

ANNA: And return our thoughts to God!

*(ALL nod in agreement. Helen turns her gaze back out the window.)*

NANCY: *(after a soft sigh)* My goodness, what a wonderful sunny day!

HELEN: God is everything. This is His creation. All the plants and trees and people. It's all God.

ANNA: That's more like it.

HELEN: Eskimos, Americans... we are all God.

ALL: Amen.

HELEN: Amen. *(after a beat)*. Hitler, for example, is also part of God.

JOAN: Goodness!

ANNA: Sister! What has gotten into you today?

HELEN: Well, if God is everything in creation, and Hitler was part of creation, then Hitler must be part of God too!

ANNA: God is not necessarily in everything! The Devil is in some things, like... Hitler, and certain filthy foul words! *(takes a deep breath, calms)* Sister Helen. I suspect there is something else on your mind today besides tigers and Hitlers. Am I correct?

HELEN: Actually, you are right. But it is very hard for me to... to say.

JOAN: Put your trust in God and try your best to say the words.

NANCY: *(after a soft sigh, slightly anxious)* My goodness, what a wonderful sunny day...

HELEN: Well... it's...

ANNA: Yes...

HELEN: I just wonder...

ANNA: Go ahead...

HELEN: I just wonder... how much fornicating should we be doing, or, I mean... are we allowed to be doing? How often, I mean... what do the teachings say about... urges?

ANNA: Well, it... I... it is normal that everyone gets uh... urges.

HELEN: And these urges, they are from God?

ANNA: Well, they can be, yes. If they are... if they come... in the proper

spirit.

HELEN: How often do you and Richard... ?

ANNA: I do not think...

HELEN: Joan... ?

JOAN: Oh. Oh. Um, well, uh... well, I guess if I had to put a number on it, um... maybe, once a month?

HELEN: Once a month? Oh goodness. Henry would not go for that, no, not at all!

JOAN: How often... do you?...

HELEN: Twice.

JOAN: Twice... a month?

HELEN: No...

JOAN: Twice... a week?

HELEN: Well, um...

JOAN: Twice... a... ?

HELEN: (*with a wince*) Day. Twice a day.

(*Stunned silence.*)

JOAN: Don't you get tired and... sore? Your female parts?

HELEN: Well, we do other kinds of fornicating too, not just regular fornicating fornicating but...

ANNA: Sister Helen...!

HELEN: We pray for God's guidance, of course... before, and after...

ANNA: Sister Helen...!

HELEN: Sometimes even during... well Henry, anyway...

ANNA: SISTER HELEN, PLEASE!!!

HELEN: Oh what the hell... Henry and I fuck like tigers!!!

(*ANNA SLAMS ON THE BRAKES. All lurch forward in their seats.*)

NANCY: (*shaken*) My goodness, what a wonderful sunny day!

ANNA: Enough of this, this nonsense talk! Let us proceed with the work we have been chosen to perform, for Christ's sake!

*(ANNA rises, crosses downstage, steps into audience. JOAN and NANCY rise, follow. JOAN pauses, turns back to HELEN.)*

JOAN: Actually Helen, there are no more Eskimos.

HELEN: Oh. Are they all dead?

JOAN: No. We just don't call them that anymore.

HELEN: Ah. Native Americans?

JOAN: Inuits.

HELEN: Oh. *(concerned)* Has anyone told them about the change?

JOAN: *(has to think about it)* I'm not sure.

*(HELEN nods. JOAN steps offstage, joins ANNA and NANCY passing out fliers to the audience. HELEN soliloquizes.)*

HELEN: God is everything. I am part of everything.

*(HELEN slowly rises. ORGAN MUSIC fades up.)*

HELEN: So surely, we can say, that I am part of God. And if I am part of God, that must mean that I am God!

*(ANNA turns, listens to HELEN.)*

HELEN: The eye with which I see God is exactly the same eye with which God sees me! My eye and God's eye are one!

*(ORGAN MUSIC rises.)*

HELEN: One seeing!

ANNA: Sister Helen...

HELEN: One knowledge!!

ANNA: Sister Helen!...

*(ORGAN MUSIC swells.)*

HELEN: ONE LOVE!!!

ANNA: SISTER HELEN, PLEASE!!!

HELEN: *(enraptured)* Oh sister Anna! I stand before the pearly gates of Heaven, primed for admittance! Dripping with holiness!

*(ANNA storms back onstage. NANCY and JOAN follow.)*

ANNA: No! No! No! No! No! Absolutely not! God alone will judge whether you are worthy to be admitted to Heaven! It is not up to you!

HELEN: Oh yeah, that's another thing that's got me. According to the teachings, there's only supposed to be 144,000 people in Heaven, right? So, why are we out here everyday in this smelly old van trying to recruit new souls? I mean, We're just creating competition for ourselves, really!

JOAN: I've often wondered about that myself...

ANNA: We are not "recruiting" new souls! We are here to spread the Good Word of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, to the lost sheep of his creation! We are Yahweh's Eighth Day Bystanders, and we are here to bear witness to all of God's creation!

HELEN: Well, we couldn't actually cover all of creation, could we now sister? That's a lot of mileage...

ANNA: Of course not! It's a metaphor! It's... it's...

HELEN: ... symbolic?

ANNA: Exactly!

HELEN: So the teachings are symbolic.

ANNA: Well... wha..

HELEN: I mean, seriously, get this, imagine: "The Christmas Morning Of The Soul!" Where the Christ child is born within the dirty dingy mangers of each and every one of our dirty dingy hearts—providing, of course, that we have made our dirty dingy hearts pure and virginal. I find this idea much more convincing than the notion that Jesus was somehow miraculously born by a virgin woman! I mean, c'mon people! Let's get real here!

*(Stunned silence. Finally, JOAN clears her throat.)*

JOAN *(to Nancy)*: You know, I read that Hitler's brain is being kept alive in a jar or frozen or something. In New Orleans.

ANNA: I cannot believe what I am hearing...

HELEN: I mean, when it comes to symbols and myths and all that, what good are stories from the past if they can't provoke transformations in the present?

JOAN: I wonder if it would be right to steal the brain and destroy it?

ANNA: The birth of our savior is not a “myth” or a “story”...

NANCY: (*distressed*) My goodness, what a...

JOAN: I mean, someone probably paid good money for that brain, and that’s destroying personal property.

HELEN: But you said so yourself, that the teachings are just symbolic.

ANNA: I said no such thing!

NANCY: (*seriously distressed*) Whawha... wha wha...

JOAN: What if you knew that Hitler was going to do what he was going to do? Would it be okay if you killed him? Or, now, I guess I mean, would it be okay to destroy his brain? (*to Anna*) Is it okay to steal the brain and destroy it, sister Anna?

ANNA: Kill the brain? Kill what brain?!

JOAN: Hitler’s brain. Is it okay to steal it and destroy it? I mean, it is someone else’s property, and they probably paid good money for it, although it’s probably insured...

ANNA: What the...

HELEN: Are you talking about destroying the brain symbolically, sister Joan?

ANNA: Sister Helen!

JOAN: Hmm. I don’t know.

ANNA: Sister Joan!

HELEN: Well, I think as long as you don’t steal the brain, but just destroy it, that that would probably be okay...

ANNA: SISTERS PLEASE!!!

NANCY: (*steps in between everyone*) MY GOODNESS WHAT A WONDERFUL SUNNY DAY!!!

(*Beat. ALL sigh, catch their breaths.*)

ANNA: Sister. Helen. Let’s get it all out in the open once and for all! What is really on your mind?

HELEN: (*Edgar G. Robinson*) Oh, you want to take the gloves off, hey?

You think you're a tough guy, huh? Is that what you want? Huh? Huh?

ANNA: Yes! Let's get this all out in the open, right now!

HELEN: Fine. Fine. I have just one question, really. A simple question.

*(pause)* Where is God? I ask you, where is God in this world? We drive around all day long preaching the word of God and yet, we have no idea where He is.

Look around. Look around. The world has gone completely to hell in a hand basket! *(picks up a newspaper)* It's all f-messed up! Wars, rape, mutilation. Greed, hatred, lust!

We say that God is our father, a god of compassion and mercy. But what parent would let their children stray so far from his warm embrace? And this is nothing new. It's the way it's been since Day One.

I ask you, what kind of God are we talking about here?

Yes, let's pull all the curtains aside sister Anna, and take a good hard look at God's creation, right square in the eye!

Where is God to release us from our spiritual enslavement? WHERE THE FUCK IS GOD, GODDAMITT!!!!

*(ANNA stares, dazed, slack jawed.)*

ANNA: *(softly)* Oh.

*(ANNA collapses. HELEN, JOAN, and NANCY watch as ANNA wiggles about on the floor like a short-circuited cyborg. NANCY looks at HELEN, then JOAN, then turns to the audience. She moves her jaw and lips as if to say something, mouths an 'M,' but nothing comes out.)*

HELEN: Oh goodness! My words have caused sister Anna serious bodily injury!

*(HELEN leans down to listen to Anna's heart.)*

HELEN: It is quite serious indeed!

JOAN: We must revive her!

HELEN: But the teachings forbid it!

JOAN: Oh. Well, then we must pray.

HELEN: Good idea.

*(ALL kneel before ANNA.)*

HELEN: Oh God in heaven—so very far, far, far away in heaven—our sister Anna has fallen. Fallen, I fear, from words which I have spoken. Guide us, O Great One! You Who doth bringeth us both the beautiful bouquets of springtime lilies—alongside the awful stench of rotting decomposing mutilated corpses on the battlefields of war... the same God Who doth bringeth us the sublime beauty of Paris in the springtime—and then doth shower us with videos of Paris Hilton and her most private parts... O Magnificent One, guide us now in the moment of our greatest despair!

Yea! If my ways be wrong, if my words be untrue, then smiteth me! Yea! Smiteth me with Thou mostest holiest of thunders, Thou mostest violent of lightnings!

*(THUNDER rises. JOAN and NANCY scoot away from HELEN.)*

HELEN: Yea! Strike me dead if my words be wicked and wrong! If my path be so far strayed from your most divine holy purpose in this God-awful creation that revels in consuming its own decomposing carcass!

*(THUNDER gets closer.)*

HELEN: Oh Most Holy One! Hear our pathetic plea.! Show us the way!  
SHOW US THE WAY!!!

*(CRACK OF LIGHTNING explodes, strikes ANNA. She flops about the floor like a fish out of water, then finally expires. Beat. ALL open their prayer books.)*

ALL: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”

ALL: Amen. *(ALL close their prayer books. NANCY rises, slowly crosses downstage center.)*

NANCY: *(after a soft sigh, chipper)* My goodness, what a... *(she rips off her blouse to expose her bikini top)*... wonderful... *(she rips off her skirt to expose her bikini bottom)*... sunny day!

*(HELEN and JOAN rise, rip off their clothes.)*

HELEN: 1, 2, 3, 4...

*(MUSIC kicks in. ALL sing and dance, toss a beach ball around.)*

ALL: *(sing)* “God is everything/This is His creation/All the trees and people/All the tress and people/God is everything/This is His creation/It’s all God!/We’re all God!/It’s all God!”

ALL: *(sing)* “God is everything/This is His creation/All the trees and people/All the tress and people/God is everything/This is His creation/It’s all God!/We’re all God!/It’s all God!”

NANCY: *(sings)* “I just want to say/Oh what a beautiful day!/Oh what a beautiful day!/Oh what a beautiful day!/I just want to say/Oh what a beautiful day!/What a beautiful day!/What a beautiful day!/What a beautiful day!”

*(One more chorus, then ALL pause, hold the final line.)*

JOAN: *(to Helen)* When you say “Fuck like tigers,” what do you mean exactly, sister?

*(HELEN whispers in JOAN and NANCY’S ears.)*

NANCY: My goodness! What a wonderful sunny day!

ALL *(sing)*: “It’s all God!”

*(Curtain falls.)*

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