

# THE GOD FILE

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## PART ONE: THE WAY

“But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

- Matthew 14:30-31

CHARACTERS, in order of appearance:

**Professor Elgin Odell**

Lieutenant Singer

Commander Rowal - the COOK

Yost - Security/Communications

Merrow - Infantry

Daugherty - Transportation

**Agent Thury**

Fay (a prostitute)

**Sun Edland**

Mr. Stitchwell

Sholes and Glidden

NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT:

At times a character will respond as if another character has said a line or asked them a question, though that line or question is silent.

In other words, one side of dialogue is unspoken -- dialogue becomes monologue. At other times, it's just a normal scene between characters.

(Performed by one person, that is.)

PLACE & TIME:

USA. Near future.

SET:

A rectangular box consisting of frame with three solid sides, approximately 16" x 24" x 48". Various locations are implied based on it's orientation -- it can be a desk, bench, podium, cage, miniature train car, etc.

**PREFACE — LECTURE HALL**

*A podium center stage. A chair just left.*

*Odell enters from the audience, stumbling down the aisle. He looks like hell, like someone's out to kill him.*

*He takes the stage and mounts the podium. A crutch.*

*Odell catches his breath, runs his eyes over the audience... This is his element.*

ODELL:

Good morning class. I hope everyone had a good weekend. Instead of proceeding to eastern religions, as the syllabus states, I want to take a moment to talk about neurology...

*A student raises a hand. Odell points at him.*

Yes. (*Odell listens.*) Your midterms? No, I don't have, I didn't bring them, didn't even grade them because your essay answers attempting to connect Mithraism to modern Christianity, well, it just doesn't mean shit any more. (*back on track.*) In 1980 a man named "Roger" lost a crap-load of his brain due to an episode of herpes simplex encephalitis. He was left with bilateral limbic system damage. The limbic system is at the center, bottom of our brain, right on top of our spine. There's the thalamus, hypothalamus, amygdala, and hippocampus, actually there's some disagreement to exactly what the limbic system embodies. Anyway, these parts of our brain regulate our autonomic nervous system -- fight and flight -- our emotions -- fear, anger, anxiety, stuff like that. They also convert our short term memory into long term memory. There is now evidence that we store deep core emotional memories here, memories that we are absolutely unconscious of. So, what happened to Roger? How did he change after this part of his brain was completely wiped away? He couldn't form new memories. His personality changed. He became inordinately jolly. Friendly and outgoing, more than he'd ever been. He also stopped believing in God. Prior to the brain damage, he'd be a church-going Christian. When these parts of his brain were blown away, suddenly he had no faith. No belief. None whatsoever. Now I'm not arguing a neurological substrate for belief. Scientists didn't find the god-brain. People loose their religion all the time without brain damage. Happened to me in seventh grade, REM did it in the 90s. Nor am I saying that Atheists are brain-damaged. Not all of them. The point I'm making is that this thing called faith can be deleted. And when it is, we can still be happy. Now, I know I promised I would not get esoteric in this class. Dr. Mawson does a great job putting his Philosophy 307 class to sleep down the hall. Instead today I'm going to share with you something... extraordinary. Right now. Right here. I'm going to show you something... (*He laughs. long pause.*) Four days ago I was arrested and put in a holding cell...

*Odell rotates the podium sideways like a desk and sits behind it in the chair.*

**SCENE 1 – HOLDING CELL**

*He has been sitting behind this desk for a long time, his wrists handcuffed to the top of the table.*

*Someone enters and sits opposite him.*

ODELL:

I told the other officer. In fact, I told it... five times to the, I think they recorded it. Look, officer? Singer. Officer Singer... Lieutenant Singer. I have been here, I really don't know how long, at least ten hours, maybe twelve. Yes, they brought me a sandwich. Egg salad. No, it wasn't very good. I could use an aspirin. Am I being arrested here? I haven't been read my rights. I haven't had my phone call. I'm not a lawyer, but I'm pretty sure this is not legal. I'm a professor, yes, college professor. George Washington University. No, adjunct. Comparative Religion. It's the study of religions. We begin with the animistic indigenous beliefs, then to western religion -- Christianity, Judaism, Islam -- and then eastern religions -- Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism -- I'd like to make my phone call.

SINGER:

You don't got anyone to call, Mr. Odell. Your mother is in Salem, Oregon -- that's the house you grew up in, right? -- She's in no shape to fly out to DC to bail you out. And your ex wife, she in Phoenix still? Boy, that's hot down there. I do not like that. It's a dry heat though. Not like the deep south. That's humid hot. I'm sorry, where was I? Oh yes, your ex wife hates you. Well, you can't blame her, you left her for a younger woman, albeit less attractive. No reason with love, am I right? And then this woman leaves you... you get the point I'm making. You've done a marvelous job of becoming an island, Professor Elgen Odell. An *island*, is that right? (*pause.*) You caught me. I was being tricky there. I already knew you were a professor and where you teach. You got me. See, I wanted you to relax. People love talking about themselves. It works all the time. In your line of work, you probably don't use that. I mean, you have the roles there, right? Teacher. Student. For me, you'd be surprised how angry people are towards me. You for example, you are very angry right now. I'd feel the same way. No, no, no, this is not another ploy, sir. I am being honest with you Mr. Odell. What do I want? What do I want? I want to hear your story. From your mouth. What happened to you, Mr. Odell?

*Odell gathers himself. Begins:*

ODELL:

Yesterday. I was driving home from university. Class ended at four, I met with students, stayed to grade midterms, got into a 'discussion' with Dr. Mawson that just went on and on. I left around 9:30 or 10:00. It was raining a bit. I took I-66 to 495, exited on the Leesburg Pike, and it just happened. I wasn't even paying attention, I mean I was driving, paying attention to the road. Everyone always talks about how intense events make time slow down. That wasn't true for me. If anything time sped up, but every millisecond is burned into my memory, like frames of film.

*Breath. Lights dim. The sound of rain on a car hood.*

I'm driving in the rain. I'm almost home when I see a stalled car about a hundred yards ahead of me, lights blinking. I start to slow down just as I go under this overpass. The wipers start scraping dry windshield, and this shadow appears from the edge of the highway above me. It looked like a wad of fabric with loose bits flailing about. I remember thinking it must be some kids throwing something off the overpass, just causing trouble or something. It's falling in front of me, and then I'm right under it, and. It hits the front of my car and bounces into my windshield, shatters. The air bag slaps me in the face. I stomp the brakes. The tires ski wet pavement. I'm spinning and spinning and spinning in darkness. The bag is going to suffocate me. *(pause)* Everything is still. Perfectly. Rain hits the metal roof. The airbag is on my lap. A hand on the dash board. A limp, bloodied hand. Arm jutting through the fractured glass. Water drips down the sleeve. *(pause)* The police pull me out. My hands are cuffed behind my back and an officer pushes my head to sit down in the back of a police car. I really don't think they read my rights. Isn't that against the law?

SINGER:

You are being held under the National Defense Authorization Act, signed into law in 2012. Under Section 2021 -- lot of twos there, I'm a bit of an amateur numerologist -- Obama signed that into law. Anyway, we have the right to hold you without miranda rights for as long as deemed necessary. Are you a terrorist, Mr. Odell? Oh, I don't mean that kind of terrorist. Of course you're not with ISIS, declaring jihad on the US. Though you'd be surprised the number of American white males who are tempted by that kind of thing. But that is not what I'm talking about. There's all kinds of terror, Mr. Odell. All kinds of ways to threaten the fabric of our society. You're a smart man. You tell me what you think: An extremely intelligent middle-aged white male with very liberal leanings and no wife, no girlfriend or boyfriend, no friends at all really, one mentally-deficient mother on the other side of the country. No arrests of any kind, not even a parking ticket... I've got this man's file right here. This is a thin file. Your file is very thin, it's like two papers here. And this man is involved in the vehicular manslaughter of a DIA agent. Yes, Mr. Odell, you killed a federal agent, named Thury. That's a big deal. According to the autopsy which I also have here -- a little thicker than your file -- based on the injuries incurred to the body, he was alive when you hit him, Mr. Odell.

ODELL:

That's not true! He fell from the overpass!

SINGER:

At the borders to our country -- you know, the highways to Canada and Mexico and airports and whatnot -- the border agents are told to look for one of two things to find suspicious characters: either look for someone who is exactly what you'd expect -- nervous, angry, suspicious, middle-eastern descent, the stereotype. Or look for someone who is the exact opposite. Someone who is calm, looks you in the eye, has a vivid story. Normal. Clean. That's you, Mr. Odell. Normal and clean.

ODELL:

I'm just an island, like you said. It wasn't always that way. I had a wife. Friends. A girlfriend. It just didn't work out. I didn't work out. And now all I do is study and teach, abide by the law, apparently. I'm not hiding anything. I'm not a sociopath...

SINGER:

That's not the picture your ex-wife painted. I'm just telling you she did not come to your defense. *(beat)* You killed a very important man, Mr. Odell.

ODELL:

Stop saying my name!

SINGER:

Why did you kill Agent Thury? What was he doing on that highway? Was he on a mission? What was his mission, Mr. Odell?!

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