

Abe:
Okay. I'm going to stay down here and finish my beer.

Ruth:
And smoke a cigarette?

Abe:
No.

Ruth:
Abe.

Abe:
Maybe.

Ruth:
Abe.

Abe:
Yes.

Ruth:
At least be honest about it.

Abe:
Okay.

(Ruth leans over and gives Abe a long and loving kiss. She rises.)

Ruth:
Just brush your teeth before you come to bed.

Abe:
Okay.

Ruth:
And gargle.

Abe:
Yes, ma'am.

Ruth:
I warned you!

(Ruth jumps on Abe and tickles him into oblivion. Before he can retaliate, she runs inside. Abe laughs to himself and pounds the rest of his beer. After opening another one, he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Lighting one, he sits smoking and enjoying the still of the night. After a moment, Moses hesitantly approaches the front yard. A struggling former drug addict, Moses looks much older than his real age. His wary, fragile frame is cloaked in baggy khakis and a tattered blue blazer. Obviously a stranger, Abe is confused by Moses' advancement.)

Moses:

Hey, man. I can bum a smoke?

Abe:

What's that?

Moses:

I can bum a smoke?

Abe:

I'm sorry, what did you say?

(Abe stands and walks down the steps leading into the front yard.)

Moses:

A smoke, man. A cigarette. I can have one?

Abe:

Oh, shit. A smoke. Shit. Um, yeah, man. Yeah.

(Abe takes out his pack and hands a cigarette to Moses.)

Moses:

Thanks.

Abe:

No problem.

(There is an awkward pause. Abe struggles to break the tension.)

Abe (Cont'd.):

Yeah, sorry. I didn't understand you before. It's just, you know.

Moses:

No worries.

Abe:

Yeah, it's just, you know, the way you asked it was funny.

Moses:

What's that?

Abe:

You just asked for the cigarette kind of funny. You know, you asked for it in the form of a statement.

Moses:

I don't follow.

Abe:

(*A question.*) "I can have a cigarette?" Like, you know. (*A statement.*) "I can have a cigarette." It's really a statement when you think about it. Not a question.

Moses:

So?

(Abe realizes that he's not helping lighten the mood.)

Abe:

(*Clearing his throat.*) Nothing, man. Don't worry about it.

(Another awkward pause. Moses stares at Abe. Abe forces a smile.)

Moses:

Well?

Abe:

Well what?

Moses:

I can have a light?

Abe:

(Laughing.) Oh, shit! Shit! Yeah, I'm sorry, man! Sorry.

(Abe continues laughing while handing his lighter to Moses. He finds the situation a bit too humorous, which annoys Moses.)

Moses:

(Sternly.) Thanks.

Abe:

No problem. *(And then jokingly.)* You want a beer, too?

Moses:

(Doesn't think it's a joke.) Sure.

Abe:

(Realizing that Moses is serious.) Oh. Okay. Well, hang on.

(Abe walks up to the front porch and grabs a beer for Moses. Walking back down, he hands the beer over to Moses and then sits down at the patio table, taking a drink from his own. Moses opens his beer and joins him.)

Moses:

(Taking a large gulp.) Damn. That's good.

Abe:

Yeah, it's my favorite brewery.

Moses:

Yeah, well thanks. Thanks.

Abe:

Oh, I'm Abe. By the way.

Moses:

Moses.

Abe:

Moses?

Moses:

Yeah, Moses.

Abe:
Crazy, man!

Moses:
What?

Abe:
We both have biblical names.

Moses:
Oh. Yeah. That's true.

Abe:
(*Still laughing.*) Old Testament and everything. Hilarious.

Moses:
You probably think a lot of things are hilarious, uh?

Abe:
Kind of. I mean, you kind of have to. Otherwise everything is just so goddamn depressing.

Moses:
I hear you, brother.

Abe:
So, um, do you, uh, live around here? I've never seen you around.

Moses:
I moved in with my sister last month. She lives just around the block.

Abe:
Oh, cool. I don't think I've ever seen her around.

Moses:
Nah. Esthie doesn't really go out all that much. She goes to work and that's it. She just got me a job at her restaurant.

Abe:
No shit? What are you doing?

Moses:
Washing dishes.

Abe:

Aw, dude. Man, I am sorry.

Moses:

What?

Abe:

That's just got to be, like, the worst job ever.

Moses:

Nah. I love it.

Abe:

Really?

Moses:

Yeah. I love washing dishes. It's just, see, the idea of running soap and hot water over something dirty and washing it clean. Like new. Fresh. Holy. It's therapeutic, religious even. I mean, brother, I could stand in front of a sink for hours, just washing dish after dish until my fingers turn to prunes. It's a ceremony, a ritual. Washing something clean. The act of God. Right there at your kitchen sink.

Abe:

Wow.

Moses:

Yeah.

Abe:

I'm an atheist.

Moses:

What?

Abe:

I'm an atheist. I don't believe in God.

Moses:

I know what it means.

Abe:

Sorry.

Moses:

Don't apologize for insulting my intelligence. Say you're sorry for not believing in God.

Abe:

Really?

Moses:

Yeah, brother. What the fuck?

Abe:

Everyone is entitled to their own system of belief.

Moses:

Well, I guess some people are also entitled to be stupid motherfuckers.

Abe:

Hey, man, I grew up a Christian. I was, like, a *Christian*. A charismatic Christian, you know? Speaking in tongues, slain in the spirit. All that shit.

Moses:

So what happened?

Abe:

It's kind of a long story.

Moses:

(*Silence.*) -.

Abe:

So, I mean, you know.

Moses:

(*Silence.*) -.

Abe:

I don't want to bore you or anything.

(Another pause. Moses looks around.)

Moses:

Does it look like I got some place to go?

Abe:

Okay, well, whatever. (*Pause.*) I was at a church over in Pensacola. They were going through a revival. You know, a continual praising of God, having church every night, that sort of thing. People lined up for hours every afternoon just to get a seat in the sanctuary. And they had overflow seating in the gym next door. I mean, this place would draw crowds, man. People flew from England, Japan, all over the place just to go to this church. It was as if that sanctuary was the only place on earth that offered the world a glimmer of hope. Well, the evangelist that ran the gig, he would get up every night and preach. One night while I was there, he went into this sermon about being "Pure in the Word of the Lord," you know what I mean?

Moses:

Yeah.

Abe:

Well, he just starts going on and on about all the sinners not living pure in the name of God. Hookers, drug addicts, gays. He started talking about how they were all going to rot in Hell. I mean, he screamed and shouted about homosexuals burning in flames for ten minutes, going into this sick, sick detail about just exactly how they were going to burn, and the entire time I'm looking around at the congregation and they're jumping up in down, falling over in their pews, yelling "amen" and "halleluiah!" I mean, I almost got sick watching it all. I decided right there and then. Fuck it. I want out.

Moses:

And that's it? That made you an atheist?

Abe:

Well, not *just* that. I mean, there are other instances in my life that led me to make the choice. But I guess you could call that the tipping point. The catalyst or whatever.

Moses:

Brother.

Abe:

But I mean, you know, I don't regret growing up in the church at all. Even though I spent all those years of my life praising a "God" that I now know never existed, I

Abe (Cont'd.):

don't regret it. I guess it's taught me to always think optimistically. To have faith that everything will always be, like, *good*. I don't know exactly what the faith is in, but I still have it regardless.

Moses:

So you're always looking on the bright side of things, even though you believe no one's up there looking out for you?

Abe:

Yeah, yeah I guess.

Moses:

Well, you know what that optimism is?

Abe:

What?

Moses:

That's God. He's still in you, brother. Even though you don't believe, he's there. He's never left. You just wait. You'll see him again soon enough.

Abe:

(Laughing.) Yeah, man. Whatever you say.

Moses:

I'm serious, brother. You just wait. When you find him again, you'll remember what I told you.

Abe:

Well, I'll be sure to send you a post card.

Moses:

He's helped me out.

Abe:

Who?

Moses:

God.

Abe:

Oh, yeah?

Moses:

Yes. My sister, too. Helped me overcome some addiction. I still struggle. But I know with God in my heart and Esthie on my back, I'll make it just fine.

Abe:

Cool.

(A pause.)

Moses:

So what'chu you do, Abe?

Abe:

Oh, I'm just finishing grad school.

Moses:

Well, congratulations. What are you studying?

Abe:

Religion.

Moses:

(Laughing for the first time.) You got to be kidding me! Oh that's good. That's good.

Abe:

What, man? Just because I don't believe in a certain religion doesn't mean that I'm not fascinated by the concept of it. I mean, religion is the source of nearly every war. It fuels hate crimes, discrimination, propaganda, you name it.

Moses:

But that don't mean God don't exist. Just because people are fucked up, that don't mean there ain't no God.

Abe:

Yeah, well if that's the case, I wish God would fess up for everything he's destroyed.

Moses:

You know what? I think you're blaming God for something that people do.

Abe:

Is that so?