The Man From Earth

Synopsis
Every 10 years or so, John Oldman has to move on. No matter what he’s doing. No matter who he’s with. He has to pack up and leave, or there will be talk of him not aging.

John was born 14,000 years ago. He has not aged a day since he was 35. On this instance, he decides, on a whim, to tell his friends why he is leaving, turning an impromptu farewell-party into a mysterious and intense interrogation.

The only setting is in and around Oldman’s house, with the plot advancing through intellectual arguments between Oldman and his fellow faculty members.

Issues Explored
- Mortality
- Empirical evidence
- Religious faith

Characters
1. John Oldman
2. Dan (mellow/chilled out anthropologist, quiet+smart)
3. Harry (biologist, loud and strange yet endearing)
4. Edith (older woman, devout Christian)
5. Sandy (historian, John’s girlfriend)
6. Art Jenkins (cool archeologist with a bad-ass bike)
7. Linda Murphy (Art's charming student)
8. Will Gruber (old psychiatrist)
The Man From Earth

By

Jerome Bixby
ACT I

Scene 1: The Van Gogh

John is stacking boxes into his pickup track as his friends arrive.

DAN
Hey, buddy! You don't waste time, do you?

JOHN
I try not to.

DAN
Well, you need help?

JOHN
Sure!

John and Dan lift a heavy box onto the truck.

HARRY
Would you like to tell us what the hell that was all about?

JOHN
I don't like good-byes.

(shrugs)

HARRY
Kind of the point of a good-bye party, John! Went to a certain amount of trouble, you know? Could've at least stayed a few minutes, huh? Eaten some of the food we so feverishly prepared?

JOHN
(hugging Edith)
I apologize, Harry!

EDITH
But why are you moving so quickly, you only resigned a couple of days ago!

DAN
You got the history chair at Stanford.

JOHN
I wish!

HARRY
Well, tacos, chicken wings, tuna salad and beer. If we'd had more time, we'd'a done something a little more grandiose. ...Candlelight dinner at McDonalds. (doing a small hip-shake) ...Strippers!

JOHN
(warmly yet authoritatively)
Tacos are fine!

HARRY
A'right
DAN
    Art's gonna be along too. He's, uh, talking to a student. Pfft.
EDITH
    Is George taking over for you?
JOHN
    George or Trimbell - Has the dean made up his mind?
SANDY
    He hasn't called.
    Edith suddenly notices the painting behind John.
EDITH
    My god! Wh-what is this? It looks like a van Gogh, but I've never seen it before!
DAN
    Is that an original, John?
JOHN
    No, it's just a gift someone gave me...
EDITH
    Still, it's a superb copy! Contemporaneous, I think! May I...take a closer look?
JOHN
    Please, yeah!
EDITH
    (lifting the painting)
    Yeah! It's the same stretcher as van Gogh used.
DAN
    Yeah, there's writing on the back, it's in French
EDITH
    Oh, "to my friend Jacque Borne." Wonder who that was?
JOHN
    Someone he knew, I guess.
HARRY
    Brilliant deduction, Sherlock!
    Harry moves towards the inside, the rest slowly follow.
EDITH
    Surely you'll have this looked at, appraised?
JOHN
    Well, maybe sometime, but I... wouldn't... really want money for it.
    (taking the painting and putting it in the truck)
That does it.
    (calling out to Harry)
Put that stuff in the kitchen.
HARRY
    No, I'm going to put it in the bathroom, John.
JOHN
Gas is off, electricity's on. Get comfortable while you can, furniture's going this afternoon.
  Edith and John follow the others inside.

Scene 2: The Bow

DAN
'Sbeen years since I sat on a floor.
  Heh, I can't remember her name.
HARRY
  Eh, it's good for the back.
EDITH
  Can we do Yoga exercises?
HARRY
  Tantric Yoga, we can!
    (chuckles)
DAN
  So, you're leaving. Rather suddenly, you must admit.
JOHN
    (nods)
DAN
  Truth time, John. Is there a problem?
JOHN
  No.
    (shaking head)
DAN
  Oh c'mon, you know we want to help.
JOHN
  That's appreciated, but really - there's no problem.
DAN
  Well now, I am curious. Where are you going?
HARRY
  Givin' up tenure-
DAN
  A decade of professorship, in line to chair the department, and you don't know where you're going?
JOHN
    (reassuringly)
      Call it cabin fever. After a while, I get itchy feet. I've done this before.
DAN
  No, no, no, you're too young to have done this before.
EDITH
    (chuckling)
      And he hasn't aged a day in ten years! Any woman on the faculty would give anything to have that secret.
HARRY
    Is that what they're after, Edith?
EDITH
    Oh, stop, Harry.
HARRY
    (chuckles)
    *Sandy finds a bow.*
SANDY
    Wow! Can you pull this?
HARRY
    What the hell?
    (taking the bow from Sandy)
DAN
    (Whoa!) What d'ya hunt?
JOHN
    Deer, mostly.
HARRY
    With a bow and arrow?
DAN
    Most people can't bag a deer with a rifle and a
telescopic sight!
    (examining the bow)
    Though good eating!
JOHN
    The best. Wild game. Lives naturally, eats
    naturally.
EDITH
    (taking the bow)
    Well it's beautiful.
    *Enter: Art and Linda on Art's bike.*
JOHN
    Art.
    (heads out to receive him)
Scene 3: Johnny Walker

ART
   Ah.
   (taking off his helmet)
   (to Linda)
   So, do I get an A for Awesome?
LINDA
   (rolling her eyes)
   Oh my gosh. That was fun!
ART
   (chuckling)
   Hey! John! You know Linda. You had her last semester.
LINDA
   Hey.
JOHN
   Hi.
ART
   She's one of my victims now; I'm taking her home. She wanted to come by and say hello-goodbye.
JOHN
   (escorting them in)
   Is Art as tough as I hear?
LINDA
   Oh! Archaeology's tough. Dr. Jenkins is a fine teacher.
ART
   Oh, that's very politic!
LINDA
   It's very true!
ART
   Uh huh!
   (handing John a book)
   Something for you to read on the road, pal.
JOHN
   "Shadows of the cave: parallels to early man."
   Arthur M. Jenkins.
   (holding the book up)
ART
   Publish or perish!
   Everyone claps.
JOHN
   I'd rather read than write another one.
ART
   Thank you.
LINDA
   (waving nonchalantly)
   Hi!
ART
Oh! Everybody, this is Linda. Linda, this is everybody.

HARRY
  Linda! Hi.

ART
  So! Where you going, John, like we give a damn?

DAN
  We've already covered that. John's got itchy feet.

HARRY
  There are over-the-counter remedies for that, John.

  (everyone chuckles, John looks down)

DAN
  So there is a problem?

JOHN
  No.

    (firmly)
    I just like to move on, now and then.
    (raising his hands)
    It's a personal...thing.

DAN
  ...Well, not to pry.
  Awkward pause.

JOHN
  I'm sorry I don't have more to offer you.
  Got conversation. Some seats for your behinds.
  And, uh...

    John lifts his finger as if he's remembered something and suddenly moves for the door.

HARRY
  Is he ducking out on us again?

JOHN
  (enters carrying a box of scotch)
  ...I do have this.

HARRY
  Oh ho ho! Johnny Walker Green!
  (walking over and grabbing the bottle)
  Ha ha, didn't even know they made it in green!
  What do they pay you?
  (thumping John on his shoulder)

JOHN
  (patting Harry on the back)
  Nothing is too good for my friends.
  But I'm sorry, we're down to plastic cups now.

DAN
  That's a sacrilege I'll tolerate.
HARRY
I will do the honours!
Oh, come to papa!
(chuckles)
Ooh! Here, cups, cups? There we go!
(pouring everyone a glass)
Step on in, there ya go!
Excuse me! Art?
(offerings Art a glass.)

ART
No, not for me

HARRY
(offerings it to Linda)

LINDA
Oh, no, I don't drink!

HARRY
Heh, we're not gonna card you darling!
Oh, alright, here, join the circle at least!

DAN
Well. To long life, and good fortune to our esteemed friend, and colleague John Oldman. May he find undeserved bliss wherever he goes.

HARRY
Hear, hear!

EDITH
Na Z'drovya!

SANDY
Cheers!

HARRY
Mm! Oh that's good!

Everyone makes themselves comfortable, Linda warming herself in front of the fire.
Scene 4: The Burin

ART
John, we're all sorry to see you go. Truly.
... Okay. Now we're done with that, what do we do for the rest of the afternoon?

HARRY
Anyone got a good topic?

DAN
Like this, maybe? Heh.

SANDY
What is that?

DAN
It's a burin. Of a parrot beak. Inclined chisel point...probably early Magdalenian.

ART
May I see that?

DAN
Sure.
(hands it over)

ART
(examines it carefully)
Yes indeed, that's what it is.

LINDA
What's a...burin?

ART
A burin's a flint tool for grooving wood and bone, antlers especially, to make spear and harpoon points. Magdalenians weren't noted for flint work, so this is a very nice specimen.

HARRY
(smirking)
Okay. What's a "Magdalenian"?

DAN
A later Cro-Magnon, without getting technical. It's the final culture of the upper-Paleolithic. If stones could speak, eh, Art?
So where'd you get that, John?

JOHN
Believe it or not, from a thrift shop. 5 bucks.

ART
You lucky dog! Me, I gotta go digging for this kinda stuff.

HARRY
Can I, uh...?

ART
Yeah.

HARRY
Huh...
(motioning to Edith then handing her the burin)

JOHN
(surveying the room)
...Maybe...
I'm glad you did this.

DAN
Did what?
You mean, come over?
...Maybe?

JOHN
Definitely.

HARRY
Gee, thanks!

DAN
Well, so are we(?).
So are we! We couldn't let you just run off.

JOHN
(taking the burin from Edith to put back into the box)
Thanks.

Scene 5a: The Set-up

HARRY
John, what is up, huh?! Are you running from the cops? We won't turn you in!

JOHN
(pacing)

DAN
Yeah come on, out with it. You're among friends.

EDITH
Snoopy friends.

JOHN
Forget it.

HARRY
You are creating the mystery here. Obviously you have something you'd like to say. Say it!

JOHN
Well, maybe I...

HARRY
10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5...

SANDY
Harry, stop.

JOHN
There is something I'm tempted to tell you, I think. I've never done this before and I wonder how it'll pan out.
...I wonder if I could ask you a silly question.

ART
John we're teachers, we answer silly questions all the time.
LINDA
   Hey!

      (elbowing Art)
JOHN
What if a man from the upper Paleolithic...survived until the present day?
DAN
...Wh-what d'ya mean "survived"? Never died?
JOHN
Yes. What would he be like?
HARRY
Arnold Schwarzenegger.
  A few smirks.
DAN
It's an interesting idea. What, are you working on a science-fiction story?
JOHN
Say I am. What would he be like?
HARRY
Pretty tired.
  Everyone chuckles.
DAN
Well, seriously, as Art's book title suggests, he might be like any of us.
EDITH
Dan! A caveman?
DAN
Well, there's no anatomical difference between, say, a Cro-Magnon and us.
ART
Except that as a rule, we've grown taller.
LINDA
What's the selective advantage of height?
ART
Better to see predators in tall grass, my dear.
DAN
Actually, tall and skinny radiates heat more effectively in warmer climates.
ART
And as for Neanderthals, that strain's still with us, of course.
HARRY
Arnold Schwarzenegger!
EDITH
But...he'd be a caveman.
DAN
No, he wouldn't. John's hypothetical man would've lived through a hundred and forty centuries...
ART
Yeah, roughly.
...And changed with every one of them. I mean, assuming normal intelligence. Well, we think men of the upper Paleolithic were as intelligent as we are. They just didn't know as much. John's man would have learned as the race learned. In fact, if he had an inquiring mind, his knowledge might be...astonishing.

(pointing at John)
If you do write that, let me have a look at it. I'm sure you'll make some anthropological boners.

JOHN
It's a deal.

LINDA
What would keep him alive?

EDITH
What does the biologist say?

HARRY
Cigarettes. And ice-cream.

Everyone scoffs and chuckles.

HARRY
Alright, alright, I'll play, I'll play. Alright, um, in science fiction terms, I would say...
...Perfect cellular regeneration caused by circulating Mesenchymal stem cells originating from bone marrow. Especially in the vital organs. Actually, the human body appears designed to live about a hundred and ninety years. Most of us just die...
(motions to his glass)
...of slow poisoning.
(smiles and takes a sip)

JOHN
Maybe he did something right. Something everybody else in history had done wrong.

ART
What, like eat the food, drink the water and breathe the air?

DAN
...Prior to modern times, those were pristine. We've extended our lifespan in a world that's, uh... not fit to live in.
(sighs)
HARRY
Y'know, it could happen! Yeah! The pancreas turns over cells every twenty-four hours, the stomach lining in three days, the entire body in seven years, but the process falters. Waste accumulates, eventually proves fatal to function. Now if a quirk in his immune system led to perfect detox, perfect renewal, then yeah. He could, uh... duck decay.

EDITH
Mm, that's a secret we'd all love to have.

JOHN
Would you really want to do that? ...Live 14,000 years?

ART
Well, if I could stay healthy and I didn't age, I mean, why not?

LINDA
Yeah. What a chance to learn.

SANDY
Is anyone hungry?
(Heads off-stage to the kitchen)

**Scene 5b: The Revelation**

HARRY
Y'know, the more I think about it, yeah, it's possible. Anything is possible, right? After all, one century's magic, another century's science. They thought Columbus was a nut-case, right? Pasteur? Copernicus?

JOHN
Aristarchus long before that.
(Nonchalantly, as he gets up to pour himself another drink)
I had a chance to sail with Columbus, only I'm not the adventurous type.

DAN
What?

Music starts...

JOHN
I was pretty sure the Earth was round, but at that point, I still thought he might fall off an edge some place...
Incredulous, confused reactions.

ART
(Bemused, laughing nervously)
Look around, John. We just did.

DAN
I suppose there's a joke in there somewhere, but I don't get it.

JOHN
There's nothing to get.

Music builds...
DAN
   What are we talking about?
ART
   We were just talking about a caveman...who survives until the present time.
JOHN
   As you said, what a chance to learn, once I learned to learn.
DAN
   Did you start the whiskey before we got here?
JOHN
   Pretend it's science fiction. Figure it out.
HARRY
   Okay, a- (heh heh) -very old Cro-Magnon living until the present.
   Music crescendos...
JOHN
   (slowly leans forward and suddenly GRUNTS LOUDLY like a caveman)
   Everyone jumps, startled, and then laughs.
EDITH
   Oh!
Scene 6a: The First Lifetime

SANDY
(entering)
What?

ART
John just confided that he's fourteen thousand years old.

SANDY
Oh, John, you don't look a day over nine hundred!

ART
(laughing)
Okay!

HARRY
Alright Spock, I'll play your little game. What do you want? What's the punch line?

JOHN
Every ten years or so, when people start to notice I don't age, I move on.

ART
...That's very good, that's very quick John. I wanna read that story when you're done.

JOHN
You want more?

HARRY
Yeah, by all means. This is great! Alright, now... (chuckles) ...So you think you're a- a-uh- Cro-Magnon.

JOHN
Well, I didn't learn it in school. That's my best guess. Based on archaeological data, maps, anthropological research. Since Mesopotamia, I've got the last...four thousand years straight.

ART
Well you're ahead of most people, so please, go on.

JOHN
Well you know the background stuff, so I'll make it brief. In what I call my first lifetime, I aged to about thirty-five. What you see. I ended up leading my group. They saw me as magical. I didn't even have to fight for it. Then, fear came. And they chased me away. They thought that I was...stealing their lives away to stay young.

HARRY
The prehistoric origin of the vampire myth. That is good!
JOHN
First thousand years, I didn't know up from sideways.

DAN
How do you know the first thousand years?

JOHN
An informed guess, based on what I've learned in my memories.

ART
Most people can scarcely remember their childhood, but you have memories of that time?

JOHN
Like yours. Selective. Y'know, the high points, the low points, traumas. They stick in the mind forever. Put down at three or thirty-five, you still feel a twinge.

DAN
Go on.

JOHN
I kept getting chased because I wouldn't die, so I got the hang of joining new groups I found. I also got the idea of periodically moving on. We were semi-nomadic, of course, following the weather and the game we hunted. The first two-thousand years were cold. We learned it was warmer at lower elevations. Late glacial period, I assume.

ART
What was the terrain like?

JOHN
Mountainous. Vast plains to the West-

DAN
West - something you learned in school.

JOHN
Towards the setting sun. I suspect I saw the British Isles from what is now the French coast. Huge mountains on the other side of an enormous deep valley that was shadowed by the setting sun. This is before they were separated from the continent by rising seas, as the glaciers melted.

HARRY
That happened?

DAN
Yes, the end of the Pleistocene. So far what he says fits.

ART
Oh, yeah, into any textbook.
JOHN
And that's where I found it. How can I have knowledgeable recall if I didn't have knowledge? It's all retrospective. All I can do is integrate my recollections with modern findings.
EDITH
Caveman, you gonna hit me over the head with a club and drag me into the bedroom?
JOHN
You'd be more fun conscious.
EDITH
Oh, John.
HARRY
Let me get this straight. We're not talking about, uh, reincarnation. You're not saying that you remember, whatever the hell it would be, 200 separate lifetimes, dying and being born again and yada yada?
JOHN
One lifetime.
HARRY
Some lifetime.
(laughs)
Wow! Maybe there is something to this reincarnation thing. You're supposed to come back again and again, learn and learn, and somehow, John, you just managed to bypass all the other bodies.
DAN
Well, what's the point?
LINDA
What about oceans?
JOHN
Didn't see them till much later.
LINDA
So how would you know an ocean from a lake?
JOHN
Big waves. Something else I can only surmise in retrospect.
LINDA
Were you curious about where it all came from?
JOHN
We would look up at the sky and wonder. "There's gotta be some big guys up there. What else made all this down here?"
At first I thought there was, uh, something wrong with me - maybe I was a bad guy for not dying. Then I began to wonder if I was cursed, or perhaps blessed. Then I thought maybe I had a mission.
EDITH
   Do you still think you do? God works in mysterious ways.

JOHN
   I think I just happened.
   Phone rings, aside.

HARRY
   (laughs)
   Wow.

Scene 6b: Ellie's Midterm

JOHN
   (picking up the phone, set slightly away from stage)
   Hello?
   Yes, Ellie?
   What's wrong?
   (calls out)
   Sandy?

SANDY
   Coming.
   Yeah?

JOHN
   Do we have Ellie's midterm here?

SANDY
   Yeah, sorry. I picked it up with the periodicals.

JOHN
   Got it.
   No, you're worried about your parents? Don't- don't worry. You passed, C+.
   (Changes grade on paper)
   Take care of yourself.
   Good kid. What does a pre-Med need with history?

Scene 6c: Explanations

SANDY
   Sorry, guys. John, please continue.

ART
   Come on, I thought we were done with that.

HARRY
   No! Let's go on with it. It's interesting. Besides, I think he's making a certain amount of sense.

ART
   Like Hegel: logic from absurd premises.

EDITH
   That Van Gogh?

JOHN
   He gave it to me. I was, uh, Jacque Borne at the time.
A pig farmer.

HARRY

A pig farmer?

Harry and Art Laugh, the ladies giggle/smile.

JOHN

I like to work with my hands. He would come out to the place, paint. We talked about capturing nature in Art. Turner, Cezanne, Pissarro.

EDITH

Oh, the Nolde landscapes.

JOHN

Not in Van Gogh's time. He would have loved them, though.

EDITH

Yes.

LINDA

Well, I don't understand why you can't remember where you're from. Geography hasn't changed. I learned that in-

ART

Professor Hansen's tepid lectures. But you're right.

JOHN

Where did you live when you were five years old?

LINDA

Little Rock.

JOHN

Your mother, she took you to the market?

LINDA

Mm-hmm.

JOHN

What direction was it? From your house.

LINDA

I-I don't know.

JOHN

How far?

LINDA

Um, three blocks.

JOHN

Were there any references that stuck in your mind?

LINDA

Well, there was a gas station and a big field. I was told I could never go there alone.

JOHN

And if you went back there today, would it be the same?

LINDA

No. I'm sure it's all different and built up.
JOHN
Thus the saying: "You can't go home again."
Because it isn't there anymore. Picture it on my scale- I migrated through an endless flat space full of endless new things- Forests, mountains, tundra, canyons. My memory sees what I saw then. My eye sees highways, flyovers, urban sprawl, Big Macs under the Eiffel tower.
Early on, the world got bigger and bigger, and then...
Think what I've had to unlearn.

ART
And now you're moving on.

JOHN
As you've said, there's talk of my not aging, and when that happens, I move on.

DAN
Well, it might make sense to set up your next identity, your next ten years, and then just drop into it.

JOHN
I've done that a few times, even passed as my own son. "Oh, you're an engineer, too? You're Ben's son. He was a good man." Saves trouble with credentials and references. On the other hand, I've been busted a few times. Spent a year in jail, Belgium, 1862- I won't forget that- For faking a government application.

LINDA
When'd you come to America?

JOHN
1890, right after Van Gogh's death, with some French immigrants...
Moving On. 
Pause.

ART
An answer for every question. Except one, John. Why're you doing this?

JOHN
A whim. Maybe not such a good idea. I... wanted to say goodbye to you as me, not what you thought I was.

ART
Well, since this isn't funny, we think you might have a problem. A very serious problem.

JOHN
I've got boxes to move.

SANDY
I'll give you a hand.
DAN
Wouldn't you have some relic, an artifact to remind you of your early life? Like this, maybe? (holds up the burin)

JOHN
Thrift shop. Really.
If you lived a hundred- a thousand years... (holding up a pen)
Would you still have this? What would cause you to keep it? As a memento to your beginnings, even if you didn't have the concept of beginnings? It would be gone, lost.
No. I don't have artifacts. (tosses the pen to Harry) (to Dan)
Keep that.

DAN
Interesting. You could have lied about that.

JOHN
Don't talk about me while I'm gone.

Scene 7: Sandy
John and Sandy load a few boxes. Sandy pauses

SANDY
I love you, you know.
Soft music.

JOHN
I know.

SANDY
Since my first week at the office.
...And?

JOHN
I care very much about you, but now you know what you'd be getting into.

SANDY
Do you really think you're a caveman?

JOHN
Do you?

SANDY
Could you love me, or don't you believe in that anymore?

JOHN
I've gotten over it too many times.
Fond of you... Certainly attracted to you.
Sandy giggles.

SANDY
That's it?
...I can work with that.

JOHN
If what I'm saying is true, you and any children will age. I won't. And one day I'll leave.
SANDY
You'll go back to your May-December romances.

JOHN
The simple fact is that I can't give you forever.

SANDY
How long's forever? Who ever really has it? My parents split up before I was born, and then my mom's next marriage lasted what, a whole three years? Then there's death, illness, acts of god...no one knows how long they have. Or how little. I love you. Take whatever you can get.

JOHN
Like ten years?

Scene 8: Cave-paintings and Buddha

DAN
Is he serious?
    Art walks over to the phone.

EDITH
If he is, I'm sorry to say he's...
    Oh, how could he have concealed that for ten years?

HARRY
At least he doesn't appear to be dangerous.

DAN
What are you doing?

HARRY
Checkin' for a hidden mic. Candid Camera.
    Art is on the phone to one side.

ART
He's fabricating these wild stories. I've never seen him acting like this.
    Oh, it's crazy.
    Alright. Alright, a-as soon as you can, then.
        As John enters the room, Harry jumps him, yelling.

HARRY
Ah! Ha ha ha!
    John expertly counters, and pushes him to the floor.

HARRY
Uhn! Jeez! Oh.

JOHN
Why did you do that?

HARRY
I wanted to see how fast you were. Check your reflexes.
JOHN
I don't have eyes in the back of my head, I can't hear a flea walking, I am not in any way superman.
HARRY
Yeah. Well, I'm a second-degree black belt.
JOHN
Give it another thousand years.
    (Gives him a hand)
HARRY
Well. I got it, I got it, I got it.
    (Struggling to his feet)
    Oh. Jesus.
DAN
Smooth demonstration, Harry.
HARRY
Sit on it, Dan.
LINDA
I still have questions.
ART
Ya, I-I do too, John. I mean, a-a-are we done with prehistory yet? Remember any of your original language?
JOHN
A little. One thing hasn't changed much...
    (wolf whistles towards Sandy, causing her to blush)
LINDA
Did you ever do any cave Art?
JOHN
Do you know the rock Art at Les Eyzies?
LINDA
Mm-hmm?
JOHN
It was the work of a man named... Giraud. He did a pretty good job. He would draw the animals that we hoped to find to eat. One day after a fruitless hunt, our chief stomped his teeth out because his magic had failed him. After that, someone had to chew his food for him. Finally, he got- I suspect- An infected jaw, and he was abandoned.
EDITH
That's awful.
JOHN
You have to know what to kill.
LINDA
Is this why all your students say your knowledge of history is...so amazing?
JOHN
   No, that's mostly based on study. Remember, it's one man, one place at a time, my solitary viewpoint of a world I knew almost nothing about.
DAN
   Well, let's talk about what you say you do know about- Historical times.
EDITH
   Don't encourage him.
DAN
   Edith.
JOHN
   Next few thousand years, it got warmer.
ART
   A few thousand years- See, now, I know you're guessing.
JOHN
   You can't get there from here, Art.
ART
   Well then, pray, continue.
JOHN
   We hunted reindeer, mammoths-
ART
   ...Bison, horses. The game retreated northward as the climate changed, you got the idea of growing food rather than gathering it, raising animals rather than hunting them. Am- Am I- Am I getting warm, here? I bet I am. Lakeside living becomes commonplace! Fishing, fowling- Come on! John, this is out of any textbook.
JOHN
   Even yours. You got most of it right. Eventually I headed to the East. I'd grown curious about the world. I'd gotten the hang of going it alone, learning how to fit in when I wanted to.
DAN
   East. Towards the rising sun?
JOHN

Yes. I thought it might be warmer there. That's when I saw an ocean. The Mediterranean, probably. It was around the beginning of the Bronze Age, so I followed the trade routes from the East. Copper. Tin. Learning languages as I went. Everywhere, creation myths, new gods, so many, so different. I finally realized that it was...probably all hogwash.

So I was Sumerian for 2,000 years, then finally Babylonian under Hammurabi. Great man. And I sailed as a Phoenician for a time.

See, moving on had been easier as a Hunter-Gatherer...difficult when villages emerged. Tougher still in city states where authority was centralized. Strangers were suspect. It seemed as though I was always moving on.

I learned some new tricks- even faked my death a couple of times.

I continued east to India, luckily at the time of Gautama Buddha.

ART

Luckily.

JOHN

Most extraordinary man I've ever known. He taught me things I'd never thought about before.

HARRY

You studied... with the Buddha?

JOHN

Until he died. He knew there was something different about me. I never told him.

Scene 9a: Dr. Gruber

DAN

This is fascinating. I almost wish it were true.

ART

Y-y-y-eah, if it was true, why are you telling us? I mean, we might leave here today, we'll go out there, tell everybody!

JOHN

It would vanish in disbelief. A story that goes around the room. No credibility. Even if I could make you believe me, in a month, you wouldn't. Some of you would call me a psychopath, others would be angry at a pointless joke.

ART

Well John, Some of us are angry now.

JOHN

This- This was a bad idea. Uh, I love you all, and I do not want to put you through anything.

EDITH
Then why are you doing it?

JOHN

'Cause I wanted to say goodbye-

EDITH

...As yourself. I think you've done that, whoever that self is.

DAN

Easy, Edith. We're just grading his homework.

ART

I see what's going on. You're playing the good cop, Dan. That's fine. Just enjoy it.

All right, I think this whole thing is just a crock! I should leave, but I'm gonna stay. You know why? 'Cause I wanna see what this is all about.

EDITH

So do I. What is this all about?

ART

Well, let's ask Dr. Freud, who's just arrived.

Hey, Will! Will!

WILL

Art. Hey.

John! I'm glad I caught you. Someone mentioned that you were leaving today-

JOHN

Called you, told you that I've lost it. Glad you're here. Things are going in unexpected directions.

WILL

Yes, so I hear.

SANDY

Hi. Are you hungry?

WILL

Uh, thank you, no.

HARRY

Whiskey? Johnny Walker green!

WILL

Ohhh, yes!

(he chaperones the party to the seating)

You look very familiar, my dear.

LINDA

Linda Murphy. I'm in your Tuesday Psych 1 class, Dr. Gruber.

WILL

Ah, well, this lesson may be something I could not have imagined.

I regret being so...obvious about this, John, but these people are all very concerned for you.

JOHN

Yes, I'm cutting out paper dinosaurs.
WILL
I really wish I'd been here from the beginning.

JOHN
Me too.

DAN
Well, let me just say something right now. There's absolutely no way in the whole world for John to prove this story to us, just like there's no way for us to disprove it. No matter how outrageous we think it is, no matter how highly trained some of us think we are, there's absolutely no way to disprove it. Our friend is either a caveman, a liar, or a nut. So while we're thinking about that, why don't we just go with it? I mean, hell, who knows, he might jolt us into believing him, or we might jolt him back to reality.

EDITH
Believing?!

ART
Whose reality?

WILL
So... You're a caveman.

JOHN
Yes. Uh... Uh, I was a Cro-Magnon, I think.

WILL
You don't know if you're a caveman or not?

JOHN
No, I'm sure about that.

WILL
A Cro-Magnon, then. When did you first realize this?

JOHN
Well, when the Cro-Magnon was first identified, when anthropology gave them a name, I had mine.

WILL
Well, please continue. I'm sure you must have more to say.

JOHN
Would you like for me to lie on the couch, doctor?

WILL
(laughing, patting the couch)
As you wish.
As a physician, I'm curious. In this enormous lifetime you describe, have you ever been ill?

JOHN
Sure, as much as anyone.

WILL
Seriously ill?
Sometimes.

WILL
Of what? Do you know?

JOHN
In prehistory, I can't tell you. Maybe pneumonia once or twice. Last few hundred years, I've gotten over typhoid, yellow fever, smallpox...I survived the black plague.

WILL
Bubonic? Oh, that's terrible.

JOHN
More so than history describes.

WILL
And smallpox—But you're not scarred.

JOHN
I don't scar.

HARRY
No, John, that is not possible.

WILL
Please, let's take John's story at face value and explore it from that perspective. If he doesn't scar, it's no stranger than the rest.

HARRY
John, would you please stop by my lab before you take off, suffer a few tests from your friendly neighborhood biologist?

JOHN
I'm leery of labs. Afraid I might go in and stay for a thousand years while cigarette-smoking men try to figure me out.

HARRY
You don't think that I would betray you in any way?

JOHN
Walls have ears.

DAN
Medical tests might be a way of proving what you say.

JOHN
I don't wanna prove it.

ART
So you're telling us this, the yarn of the century, and you don't care if we believe it or not?

JOHN
I guess I shouldn't have expected you to. You're not as crazy as you think I am.

EDITH
Amen.
SANDY
  I've always liked you.
EDITH
  Why, thank you, dear.
SANDY
  Now that's changing.
EDITH
  Surely you don't believe this nonsense?
SANDY
  I think we should remain courteous to someone who we've known and trusted, Edith.
LINDA
  Here you sit- You can't break his story. All you can do is thumb your nose at it.
ART
  Is that what you're doing, John? Are you laughing at us inside?
JOHN
  I wish you didn't feel that way.
ART
  What you're saying- It offends common sense!
JOHN
  So does relativity, quantum mechanics- That's the way nature works.
DAN
  But your story doesn't fit into nature as we know it.
JOHN
  But we know so little, Dan. We know so little. I mean how many of you know five geniuses in your field that you disagree with... One you would like to strangle?
DAN
  Ugh, strangle them all.
EDITH
  Damn it, Dan, it's bad enough we have to listen to Harry's idiotic jokes.
HARRY
  Thank you very much, Edith. Maybe when I'm 110, I'll be as smart as you are.
EDITH
  If you lived as long as John did, you still wouldn't grow up.
DAN
  Come on, guys. Take it easy. How often do we get to meet someone who says he's a stone-age man?
EDITH
  (mutters)
  Well, once is enough.
HARRY
  Edith.
DAN
    All right. A guy with your mind—You'd have studied a great deal.
JOHN
I have ten degrees, including all of yours... Except yours, Will.

HARRY
That makes me feel a trifle Lilliputian.

JOHN
That's over the span of 170 years. I got my biology degree at Oxford in 1840, so I'm a little behind the times. The same in other areas— I can't keep up with the new stuff that comes along. No one can. Not even in their specialty.

ART
So much for the myth of the super-wise, all-knowing immortal.

DAN
I see your point, John. No matter how long a man lives, he can't be in advance of his times. He can't know more than the best of the race knows, if that— I mean, when the world learned it was round, you learned it.

JOHN
It took some time. News traveled slowly before communications were fancy. There were social obstacles, preconceptions, screams from the church.

ART
Ten doctorates. That's impressive, John. Did you teach them?

JOHN
Some. You might have all done the same. Living 14,000 years didn't make me a genius. I just had time.

DAN
Time. We can't see it, we can't hear it, we can't weigh it, we can't measure it in a laboratory. It's a subjective sense of becoming what we are instead of what we were a nanosecond ago, becoming what we will be in another nanosecond. The Hopis see time as a landscape, existing before and behind us, and we move through it, slice by slice.

LINDA
Clocks measure time.

DAN
No, they measure themselves. The objective referent of a clock is another clock.

EDITH
How very interesting. What has it got to do with John?
DAN
    Oh, he- He might be a man who lives outside of
time as we know it.
WILL
    Yes, uh, well. People do go around armed these
days.
    (Points at John with hand in jacket
    pocket, as if holding a gun)
    If I shot you, John- You're immortal? Would you
    survive this?
JOHN
    I never said I was immortal, just old. I might
die. And then you could wonder the rest of your
incarcerated life what you shot.
WILL
    Well, uh, may I?
    (Pulls out a pipe)
    Everyone sighs with relief.
HARRY
    Preferable to a gun.
DAN
    Will, that was a bit much.
WILL
    (peering into a box)
    Ooh. Books. Doctorates. Yes, you have grown and
changed. But there is always innate nature.
Wouldn't you be more comfortable squatting in
the backyard?
DAN
    Sometimes I do, will. Look up at the stars.
    Wonder.
WILL
    And what did primitive man make of them?
JOHN
    A great mystery. There were gods up there then.
    Shamans who knew about them told us.
HARRY
    They still do.
WILL
    Have you ever wished it would end?
JOHN
    No.
WILL
    Fourteen thousand years. Injuries, illness,
disasters. You've survived them all. You're a
very lucky man.
    Pensive pause, followed by a knock at the
door.
Scene 9b: CharityNow and Death

JOHN

Come in.

CHARITYNOW GUY #1

John Oldman?

JOHN

Yes.

CHARITYNOW GUY #1

CharityNow. We're here to pick up the furniture.

JOHN

It's all yours.

HARRY

Here, take this chair. I'm gonna go drink in the corner.

CharityNow guys start removing the furniture.

DAN

You're, uh... you're donating it? Everything?

JOHN

I'll get more.

EDITH

Do you always travel this light?

JOHN

It's the only way to move.

WILL

Oh, you- You've talked a good deal about your extraordinary amount of living. What do you think of dying, John? Do you fear death?

JOHN

Who wouldn't?

WILL

How did primitive man regard death?

JOHN

Well, we had the practical concept. You know, we stopped, fell down, didn't get up, started to smell bad, come apart. Injuries we could understand- If someone's insides were all over the ground. Infections... They were, uh, mysterious. Aging... The biggest mystery of all.

WILL

You realized you were different.

JOHN

Uh, longer to realize how I was different, to find a way to synthesize my experience into a view of myself. At first, I thought everybody had something wrong with them. They got old and they died, animals, too... but not me.

WILL

You live simply.

JOHN
I've owned castles, but why leave a lot if you're always leaving? I have money.

WILL

As one grows older, the days, weeks, months go by more quickly. What does a day or a year or a century mean to you? The birth-death cycle?

JOHN

Turbulence. I meet someone, learn their name, say a word, they're gone. Others come like waves. Rise, fall. Ripples in a wheat field, blown by the wind.

WILL

Do you ever get tired of it all?

JOHN

I get bored now and then. They keep making the same stupid mistakes over and over.

WILL

Hey! Then you see yourself as separate from the rest of humanity.

JOHN

I didn't mean it that way. But of course...I am.

WILL

(Chuckling darkly)

Are you comfortable knowing that you have lived while everyone you knew—Everyone you knew, John!—Has died?

JOHN

I've regretted losing people...often.

WILL

Have you ever felt guilt about that—Something akin to survivor's guilt?

JOHN

In the strict psychological sense? I suppose I have. Yeah. ...But what can I do about it?

WILL

Indeed.

CHARITY

NOW GUY #2

(To Edith on the couch)

I'm sorry, ma'am.

Edith, Dan and Sandy rise off the couch.

JOHN

Gentlemen, I'm- I'm gonna keep the couch. Thanks.

Ladies? Will?

WILL

Oh, no...

JOHN

You've got a heart condition. Don't grump about it.

WILL

(scoffs, defeatedly)
HARRY
Hey, how about changing the subject, Will? Enough with the, uh- With the dying.

WILL
But this is the flip side of this coin, Harry. I'm very curious to know his feelings. Would you prefer I asked him about his father?

JOHN
I thought you always started with "tell me about your mother."

WILL
Yes, but prehistory was strongly patriarchal. Surely you remember your father?

JOHN
I seem to remember a figure, perhaps an older brother, a social father, maybe.

WILL
Well, no matter. I can scarcely remember mine. Do you feel a vacancy in your life about that, John, something you wish could be filled by a face, a voice, an image?

JOHN
Not at this late date.

WILL
There must be someone- Probably many- That you valued intensely?

(wearily)
Loved. You saw them age and die- A friend, a colleague, a-

(hesitates, lump in throat)
...wife. Certainly you've had wives and children?

JOHN
I'd move on. I had to move on.

HARRY
Making him history's biggest bigamist.

(Chuckles softly)

WILL
Have you ever in your life thought, "It should have been me"?

JOHN
Maybe.

WILL
Yeah, Art has told me that some of your early fellows feared you were stealing their lives? Have you thought that perhaps you were? Perhaps you are! There have always been legends of such a thing, a creature, not quite human taking not the blood, but the life force itself?

DAN
My god, Will.
WILL
(continuing)
...Unconsciously, perhaps, by some biological or psychic mechanism that we can only guess at? I'm not saying you would do such a thing deliberately. I'm not saying that you would even know how to...
...Would you?
...But would such a thing be fair?

JOHN
So you believe me now?

WILL
I'm only exploring what you have said. Whether I believe it or not is of no importance. We will die... You will live. Will you come to my funeral, John?

DAN
Hey, Will...

SANDY
You've gone too far. John didn't ask to be what he is.

WILL
And we did not ask to hear about it. But if it were true, is there one among us who would not feel envy, even perhaps a touch of hatred? You told us of yourself, John. Can you imagine how we feel?

JOHN
I never thought of that.

WILL
Since you may not die, while we most assuredly will... there must be a reason for that, no? Perhaps you are an expert.

CHARITYNOW GUY #1
Uh, that's it, Mr. Oldman. Have a good one.

JOHN
Thank you. You too.

Music gets dark

WILL
Or are you a vampire, John? Even an unknowing one? Do you stand alive and tall in a graveyard that you helped to fill?

DAN
That's going too far.

WILL
(dismissing Dan and continuing with gusto)
Bored, perhaps lonely, because your heart cannot keep its treasures. Is that what you're doing? Have you led a wrongful life? Well, then, perhaps...
...it is time to die.

Wait a minute, now. Look, I don't know what John is doing, but I sure as hell don't like what you're doing. Now you give me that gun or I'm gonna break your goddamn arm.

You sound like our football coach, Dan. What do you think, John? A shot to the arm? Perhaps we could watch it heal. A bullet in the head—What exactly will happen? *Dramatic pause...*

I have papers to correct. As much as I dislike that job, it'll be preferable to this. I leave you with it.

Jesus Christ. What the hell was that all about?

Where'd he get a gun?

He had you on the ropes, John. Are you really so damn smart?

It's not like Will.

(quietly)

Mary passed away yesterday. John glances up and dashes out of the door after Will.

Who?

His wife. She had, uh, pancreatic cancer.
Scene 10: Jesus

JOHN
Will! I didn't know about Mary. I'm sorry. I can see how this might have hit you.

WILL
Please, permit me to be infantile by myself.

JOHN
(holding out his hand, with the other hand on Will's arm)
Will, please.

WILL
(hands him the gun, turns around and walks away)

JOHN
(checks gun to find it unloaded)

Meanwhile, inside.

HARRY
What the hell were you thinking, Art?

ART
Oh, come on. Something had to be done.

EDITH
I have to say I agree.

DAN
And he's our friend. Whatever else on earth is going on, he's our friend!

EDITH
You sure about that?

HARRY
Why the hell are you being so hard on him, Edith?

EDITH
One of my favorite people has disappeared. Can you get Alzheimer's at 35? Maybe I'm trying to wake him up. Maybe I'm too sad to cry.

JOHN
(entering)
What I said about myself hurt him. He struck back.

DAN
Expertly- That stuff about stealing life forces?

JOHN
I've always wondered about the reasons.
HARRY
Well, we still have an afternoon to kill, right?
Charades?
(chuckling)
No. John? I have a charade, and it is just for you. A'right? Sandy, come here. Come on, come on, come on. Okay, this one's for you.
A'right. Ready?
(grunts like ape)
(notices Sandy and wolf whistles)
(more grunting, play-acts whacking Sandy on head with club)
Ooh! ...Unh.
(puts arm around Sandy)

JOHN
My first wedding?

HARRY
There you go. There you go! Very good, and I bet at least one of us...
(points around the room)
...is your direct descendent.

DAN
And I didn't even send a Christmas card.

HARRY
Christmas card? What about a birthday card? And don't even get me started on the candles... with the blowing and the...
(huffs)
...and all the candles!
Yeah, all right. I tried.

DAN
Well, uh, call me underdeveloped, but I'd like to hear more.

HARRY
Me too.

LINDA
More.

HARRY
You double-darn swear this isn't some cockamamie science fiction story you're pulling on us?

DAN
Next question.

ART
You- You- You realize this is an invitation to men in white suits with happy pills.

DAN
Think about it- A mechanism allowing survival for thousands of years?

ART
Run out of room even faster.
DAN
   Well then we'd have to go to Mars as a colony as we expanded, as we'd have to.
JOHN
   I'd like that. On a planet of another star?
DAN
   I envy you.
LINDA
   Did you have a pet dinosaur?
JOHN
   (smiling)
   They were a little bit before my time.
DAN
   At least something is.
ART
   No doubt you could give us a thousand details, John, corroborating your story, from the Magdalene to the Buddha to now.
JOHN
   Ten thousand, and you could stay out of the books.
EDITH
   Oh, it's getting chilly.
HARRY
   (beckoning to the fireplace)
   Here, come over here. Join me.
DAN
   That, uh, raises an interesting question, John. Could there be others like you who escaped the aging process as you have?
HARRY
   Representing something terrific we don't even know about biology.
DAN
   We're learning all the time.
HARRY
   Yeah, but how would he know? He doesn't wear an armband, an I.D. Badge saying "yabba dabba doo."
   (chuckles)
JOHN
   There was a man in the 1600s.
EDITH
   (interrupting)
   Where were you in 1292 A.D.?
JOHN
   Where were you a year ago on this date? Anyway, it was the 1600s, and I met a man, and I had a hunch that he was...like me, so I told him.
ART
   Ah. See, you said this was a first.
JOHN
I forgot.

DAN
A crack in your story, John?

JOHN
A touch of senility. Anyway, he said yes, but from another time, another place. We talked for two days. It was all pretty convincing, but we couldn't be sure. We each confirmed what the other said, but how do we know if the confirmation was genuine or an echo? I knew I was legit, but I thought, "maybe he's playing a game on me." You know, a scholar of all we spoke about. He said he was inclined with the same reservation.

DAN
Now, that's interesting. Just as we can never be sure, even if we wanted to- I mean, if we were sure, you couldn't be sure of that.

JOHN
We parted, agreeing to keep in touch- But of course, we didn't- And 200 years later I thought I saw him in a train station in Brussels. Lost him in the crowd.

EDITH
Oh, what a shame.
I- I mean, if it were true.

HARRY
Okay, here's one for you. What do you do in your spare time?

JOHN
(laughing)
Oh every 50 years or so, when I wanna get away from the rush, I go down to a primitive tribe in New Guinea, Where I'm worshipped as an immortal god, and they have a huge statue of me. It's a big party. Yeah, I've got a lot of pictures of it, but I've already packed them up. I'm sorry.

EDITH
I won't make the obvious nasty crack about more unwashed cavemen.

JOHN
Actually, bathing was the style until the middle ages when the church told us it was sinful to wash away god's dirt, so people were sewn into their underwear in October and they popped out in April.

EDITH
You said you just happened. I don't believe that. If your story's true, why did God allow you to happen?
DAN
That makes an interesting point. Are you religious, John?

JOHN
I don't follow a known religion. No.

DAN
Ever?

JOHN
Long time ago I did, like most people. Some just never get over it.

DAN
Do you believe in god?

JOHN
As Laplace said, "I have no need of that hypothesis." He may be around, though.

EDITH
He's everywhere. We just can't see him.

HARRY
Pfft. If this were the best I could do, I'd be hiding, too.

DAN
And creation...

JOHN
It's here, I'm not so sure it was created.

EDITH
What then?

JOHN
Maybe it's just accumulated, fields affecting fields.

ART
What about the source of the field energies? Wouldn't that imply a prime mover?

JOHN
I'd wonder about the source of the prime mover, and turtles all the way down, infinite regress, but that doesn't imply anything to me.

...Back to the mystery.

EDITH
It's a very old question, but there's no answer except in religious terms. If you have faith, it's answered.

DAN
Did you ever meet any person from our religious history? A Biblical figure?

JOHN
In a way.

EDITH
Who?

JOHN
We should skip this one.

HARRY
No, no, no skipping. Come on.

JOHN
  Next question.

HARRY
  No, come on!
  *Everyone clamoring.*

ART
  Come on, spit it out!

DAN
  Good lord! You were one of them!

JOHN
  This is going in a direction that I- I- I- I didn't expect. I hoped it wouldn't- We...should call it a night.

ART
  Come on! You were someone in religious history?

JOHN
  *(hesitates)*
  Yes.

EDITH
  In the bible?

JOHN
  *(hesitates)*
  Yes.

HARRY
  Someone we know?

EDITH
  How could we not know someone in the bible?

HARRY
  I mean somebody important.

JOHN
  You may think you know him, but it's mostly myth.

ART
  *(loudly)*
  The entire bible is...mostly myth and allegory with maybe some...basis in historical events. Y-You...were part of that history?!

JOHN
  Yes.

LINDA
  Moses.

JOHN
  Moses was based on Misis, a Syrian myth, and there are earlier versions- All found floating on water, the staff that changed to a snake, waters that were parted so followers could be led to freedom and even receive laws on stone or wooden tablets.

LINDA
  One of the apostles
JOHN
They weren't really apostles. They didn't do any real teaching. Peter the fisherman learned a little more about fishing.

ART
How do you know that?

JOHN
The mythical overlay is so enormous...and not good. The truth is so... so... simple. The New Testament in a hundred words or less. You ready?

EDITH
I don't think I wanna hear this. Harry, will you take me home?

HARRY
No! Not right now. I do want to hear this.

ART
Sit down, Edith. You act like you believe him.

EDITH
(softly)
It's sacrilege.

HARRY
How can it be sacrilege? He hasn't said anything yet.

EDITH
(righteously)
The new New Testament is sacrilege.

DAN
There are a dozen new new testaments, from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to Tyndale, all the way to King James, all revisionist, and all called revealed truth.

EDITH
I mean a new New Testament in 100 words.

HARRY
I can give you the Ten Commandments in ten words: Don't. Don't, don't, don't. Don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't.

DAN
(laughing)
Don't. The commandments are just modern updates of more ancient laws. Hammurabi's code.

HARRY
That's right, and they weren't the first, right? Edith, I was raised on the Torah... My wife, on the Quran. My oldest son is an Atheist. My youngest is a Scientologist. My daughter is studying Hinduism. I imagine that there is room there for a holy war in my living room. But we practice live and let live.
Why don't you sit down?

*Edith hesitantly sits*

**HARRY**
What is your preferred version of the bible?

**EDITH**
The King James, of course. It's the most modern, the work of great scholars.

**DAN**
Modern is good.

**HARRY**
Alright, John, hit us with the short form.

*Choral/religious music...*

**JOHN**
Guy met the Buddha, likes what he heard, thought about it for a while— say 500 years, while he returned to the Mediterranean, became an Etruscan. Seeped into the Roman Empire. He didn't like what they became— a giant killing machine. He went to the near East thinking, "Why not pass the Buddha's teachings on in a modern form?" So he tried. One dissident against Rome? Rome won. The rest is history. Well, sort of. Lot of fairy tales mixed in.

**EDITH**
(quietly)
I knew it.

He's saying he was Christ.

**JOHN**
Oh, no. That's the medal they pinned on Jesus to fulfill prophecy.

**DAN**
The crucifixion.

**JOHN**
He blocked the pain, as he had learned to do in Tibet and India. He also learned to slow his body processes down to the point where they were undetectable. They thought he was dead. So his followers pulled him from the cross, placed him in a cave... His body normalized as he had trained it to... He attempted to go away undetected, but some devotees were standing watch. Tried to explain. They were ecstatic. Thus, I was resurrected, and I ascended to central Europe to get away as far as possible.

**EDITH**
You don't mean a word of this, John. My god, why are you doing this?!

**ART**
Let me see your wrists.

**JOHN**
I don't scar. Besides, they tied me...but nails and blood make better religious Art.
HARRY

(laughing)
All the speculations about Jesus. He was black, he was Asian, he was a blue-eyed Aryan with a golden beard and hair straight out of Vidal Sassoon's, he was a benevolent alien, he never existed at all.
...Now he's a caveman.

(laughs)

DAN
The Christ figure goes all the way back to Krishna- Hercules, of course.

HARRY
Hercules?

JOHN
Born of a virgin: Alcmene. A god for a father: Zeus. The only begotten. The savior- The Greek? "Soter". The Good Shepherd, the Prince of Peace, bringing gentle persuasion and divine wisdom. He died, joined his father on Olympus a thousand years before Gethsemane.

EDITH
How can you compare Pagan mythology to the true word?

HARRY
Pretty damn closely, I'd say.

DAN
The early Christian leaders, they threw away Hebrew manuscripts and borrowed from Pagan sources all over the place.

EDITH
Do you realize how...inconsiderately you're treating my feelings?

DAN
About as inconsiderately as we're treating John's.

EDITH
Well, he does- he doesn't believe what he's saying!

SANDY
Do you believe literally everything in the bible, Edith?

EDITH
Yes!
...N- Uh- Before you say it, I know it's undergone a lot of changes, but God has spoken through man to make his word clearer.

HARRY
He couldn't get it right the first time?

EDITH
We-we're imperfect! He had t-to work to make us understand.

HARRY
He couldn't get us right the first time, Edith?

DAN
Taken alone, the philosophical teachings of Jesus are Buddhism with a Hebrew accent—Kindness, tolerance, brotherhood, love... A ruthless realism acknowledging that life is as it is here on earth, here and now. The Kingdom of God, meaning...goodness, is...is right here, where it should be. "I am what I am becoming." That's what the Buddha brought in.

JOHN
And that's what I taught. But a talking snake make a lady eat an apple, so we're screwed. Heaven and Hell were peddled so priests could rule through seduction and terror...save our souls that we never lost in the first place. I threw a clean pass...they ran it out of the ballpark.

EDITH
This is blasphemy. It's horrible! Who else were you? Solomon? Elvis? Jack the Ripper?

DAN
It's been said that Buddha and Jesus would laugh or cry if they'd known what was done in their name.

HARRY
And if there is a creator, he'd probably feel the same way.

JOHN
I see ceremony, ritual, processions, genuflecting, moaning, intoning, venerating cookies and wine. And I think...it's not what I had in mind.

EDITH
But that's Vatican flapdoodle. It doesn't have a thing to do with God.

DAN
As you said, John. Everywhere, religions...from exalting life to purging joy as a sin. Rome does it as grand opera. A simple path to goodness needs a supernatural roadmap.

HARRY
Supernatural...

ART
A stupid word, I mean...anything that happens, happens within nature, whether we believe in it or not.

JOHN
(looks up)
...Like a 14,000-year-old caveman.
    The sound of a car approaching...
    John heads outside to receive Will.

WILL
    I--I--I drove for a while, and then I sat for a while. I'm so ashamed.
    (Shivering)
    And I'm freezing!

JOHN
    Well, come inside.

WILL
    I still don't believe you, of course. You need help.

JOHN
    Everybody needs help.

WILL
    Yes, well, some more than others.
    Fade out.
ACT II

Scene 1a: Eventide

Fade in, Will is warming himself in front of the fire, it is darker.

WILL

From the Buddha to the cross, I have always imagined both as entirely mythic. Ye- but I would like to hear more.

May I lie on the couch for a moment? I'm not as young as I used to be.

(plonks himself on the couch)

Ohh! Hah, so! You were Jesus. Well, perhaps somebody had to be, for better or for worse. The jury is still out.

When did you begin to believe you were Jesus?

JOHN

When did you begin to believe you were a psychiatrist?

WILL

Since I graduated Harvard medical school and finished my residency, I've had that feeling. Oh, I sometimes dream about it.

JOHN

Have you acted upon this belief?

WILL

I had a private practice for a while, and then I taught. Nothing unusual- Oh, until one day, I met a caveman who thought he was Jesus.

JOHN

Do you find that unusual?

WILL

Very. I would stake my reputation he is as sane as I am, so why does he persist in such a story?

JOHN

There must be a reason, though.

WILL

Unless I imagined it all? Is that possible?

JOHN

I think you're as sane as he is.

WILL

Oh, god, I-

(laughs)

No.

Did you ever find it prudent to worship yourself rather than be thought a heretic? That would be something!

JOHN

At the time Christianity was considered heresy, I had to pretend other faiths.
WILL
And what does Jesus have to say to those present who find it difficult to believe in Him?

JOHN
Believe in what he tried to teach, without rigmarole. Piety is not what the lessons bring to people. It's the mistake they bring to the lessons.
(slowly getting up and putting on his jacket)
Well, it's getting to be night. I still have stuff to carry and a long drive.

SANDY
I'll help.

DAN
John, do you have a destination in mind?
Never mind. I won't ask.

JOHN
Thank you.
(exits with Sandy, carrying boxes)

Scene 1b: Debate

WILL
Anyone mentally ill can imagine a fantastic background- Even an entire life- and sincerely believe it. The man who thinks he is Napoleon does believe it. His true identity has taken a backseat to his delusion and the need for it. If that's the case with John, there is a grave disorder.

ART
Organized brilliantly. He's got an answer for everything.

WILL
It might involve rejection of his father, of his entire early past, replaced by this fantasy.

HARRY
He says he can't remember his father.

WILL
Precisely. Why?

LINDA
You said he was sane.

WILL
Did I?

DAN
Do you think that perhaps our caveman has a monkey on his back?

EDITH
Drugs?
HARRY
    No, no, no, no. I've done a lot of consulting work with the narcotics division. I've seen people...tripping, strung out- Whatever's up with John, it isn't that. I've looked for signs- None.
LINDA
    Could cavemen really talk?
DAN
    We think that language came into existence sixty thousand years ago. The structure of Stone Age culture is evidence of the ability to communicate... verbally.
    *Harry wolf whistles, clicks his tongue.*
HARRY
    Oh, shut up.

**Scene 1c: Sandy**

    *John is looking at the stars.*
JOHN
    Maybe it'd be easier if I were.
SANDY
    Crazy? No.
    *Coyote howls. John then looks at Sandy.*

**Scene 2: The Last Spell**

DAN
    That is fascinating, though, isn't it, a brave attempt to teach Buddhism in the West. It's no wonder he failed. We're not ready for it.
EDITH
    You're talking as if you believed him.
DAN
    Well, it is possible, isn't it? I mean, anything is possible. Look, we have two simple choices. We can get all bent out of shape intellectualizing or bench-pressing logic, or we can simply relax and enjoy it. I can listen critically, but I don't have to make up my mind about anything. But you think you do?
ART
    Well, unfortunately, there's no authorities on prehistory, so we couldn't stop him there.
EDITH
    There are experts on the bible.
HARRY
    Chheh, dream on.
DAN
    Yeah, thus the lost years of Jesus. He didn't exist until John put on a hat.
EDITH
I don't believe in angels and the nativity and the star in the East, but there are stories about the childhood of Jesus.

WILL
History hates a vacuum. Improvisation, some of it very sincere, fills the gaps. It would have been easy to falsify a past back then—A few words, credulity—Time would do the rest.

EDITH
Now you're talking as if you believed him.

ART
Well, look at the popular myths surrounding the Kennedy assassination in a few short years—You had, uh, conspiracy, mafia, CIA—That's a mystique that'll never go away.

DAN
It's always been a small step from a fallen leader to a god.

EDITH
I don't think anybody will deify Kennedy. We're more sophisticated than that.

DAN
We are?
We are.

John and Sandy enter.

HARRY
Well, you're finally fulfilling one prophecy about the millennium, John.

JOHN
What's that?

HARRY
Here you are again.

John makes himself comfortable between Sandy and the fireplace.

WILL
You like the fire, John.

JOHN
Everywhere I've lived, I've had a fireplace. Childhood fixation, I guess. Helps me to feel secure.

SANDY
(smiling)
There are predators out there.

JOHN
One thing I didn't pack...I thought I might need it.

John puts on a tape/record of Beethoven's 7th Symphony.

ART
Wouldn't Sacre du Printemps be more appropriate?
HARRY
What?
DAN
You've got...four men of science completely baffled, my friend. We- We don't know what to make of you.

JOHN
Did you know Voltaire was the first to suggest that the universe was created by a gigantic explosion? I think Paul would agree. And then Goethe was the first to suggest that spiral nebulae were swirling masses of stars. We now call them galaxies. It's kind of funny how often new concepts of science find their first tentative forms of expression in the arts.

HARRY
So did Beethoven do physics on the side?

SANDY
He spent most of his time lying on the floor in front of his legless piano surrounded by orange peels and apple cores.

HARRY
Now we're on the floor listening to Beethoven. Full circle.

DAN
Did you have, um... any religious beliefs? Or didn't you give it much thought?

JOHN
You can't get there with thought.

DAN
You have faith?

JOHN
In a lot of things.

SANDY
Do you have faith in the future of the race?

JOHN
I've seen species come and go. Depends on their balance with the environment.

DAN
We've made a mess of it.

JOHN
There's still time, if we use it well.

EDITH
Christianity has been a worldwide belief for 2,000 years.

JOHN
How long did the Egyptians worship Isis? Or the Sumerians Ishtar? In India, sacred cows wandered freely as reincarnated souls. In a thousand years, they'll be barbecued and their souls will be in squirrels.
EDITH
   (firmly)
   You weren't Jesus!
   John smiles.

WILL
   Oh, Edith.
   (rises to his feet)

SANDY
   (clearing her throat)
   If it rains, y-...

JOHN
   (interrupting)
   -It won't.

ART
   How do you know that?

JOHN
   I don't smell it.

LINDA
   Were you... I guess a... medicine man?

JOHN
   I was a shaman a few times. I... revealed some truths to eat a little better.

EDITH
   You think that's all religion is about... selling hope and survival?

JOHN
   The Old Testament sells fear and guilt. The New Testament is a good code of ethics, put into my mouth by poets and philosophers that are much smarter than I am. The message is never practiced. Fairy tales build churches.

ART
   What about the name "Jesus"? Did you pull that out of a hat?

JOHN
   I called myself John. I almost always do. As tales of the resurrection spread, the name was confused with the Hebrew "Yochanan", meaning "God is gracious". My stay on earth was seen as divine proof of immortality. That led to "God is salvation", or Hebrew "Yahshua", which in translation became my proper name, changing to late Greek, "Iesous", Then to late Latin, "Iesus", and finally medieval Latin, "Jesus". And it was a wonder to watch it all happen.

DAN
   Then you didn't claim to be the Son of God?
JOHN
Began as a schoolhouse and ended as a temple. I said I had a master that was greater than myself. I never said he was my father. I wanted to teach what I learned. I never claimed to be king of the Jews, I never walked on water, I never raised the dead. I never spoke of divine except in the sense of human goodness on earth.
(pause)
No wise men came from the East to worship at a manger. ...I did do a little healing with some eastern medicine I'd learned... That's it.

DAN
The three wise men began as a myth about the birth of the Buddha.

HARRY
John, I should be home, uh, kissing my wife. We're all here, trapped by your story...hoping for a...revolution? I don't know. Are there any, uh...more revelations for us?
John shakes his head, smiling.

DAN
It's just like old times.

EDITH
(after a pause, glaring at John, and then firmly, again)
You. Weren't. Jesus.

HARRY
Quote the Sermon on the Mount.

JOHN
Which one? Darby? King James? New American Standard?

EDITH
Do you know them all?

JOHN
No one knows the one, not even me. I...I did some teaching on a hill one day. Not that many people stayed.

DAN
But you...

JOHN
Biblical Jesus said, "Who do you think I am?" He gave them a choice. I'm giving you one.

EDITH
(timidly, her voice quivering, eyes tearing up)
W-were you?

JOHN
If I said no, could you ever be sure?
Edith's lips quiver, and she suddenly lets out a sob. Art switches the light on to break the spell.


**Scene 3: Denial**

**WILL**

(stepping forward)

Turn that off. Please.

John turns off the music.

**WILL**

This has gone far enough.

*Edith sobs again.*

**WILL**

It's gone much too far. These people are very upset. I don't believe you're mad, but what you're saying is not true. That leaves only one explanation. The time has come when you must admit this is a hoax... a lie. Isn't that true, John?

If you don't drop this now- If you can- I'll be convinced that you need a great deal of attention. I can have you committed for observation. You know that. I ask you now- I demand it- That you tell these people the truth. Give them closure.

It's time, John. Please.

*Long, tense pause...*

**JOHN**

End of the line. Everybody off.

**DAN**

Whaat?!

**JOHN**

It was a story.

(hands raised, rising to his feet and pacing)

It was all a story.

*Edith sobs in relief.*

**ART**

Good god!

**DAN**

Another fairy tale?

**EDITH**

(sobbing)

All of it? But what- What in the name of heaven...

**ART**

(angrily)

John, you had us wondering whether you were sane or not, and it's just a story! Where'd you come off with such a half-baked, asinine idea?

**JOHN**

At least you're relieved I'm not a nut.

**ART**

I'd prefer you were!

**JOHN**
You gave me the idea. All of you.

DAN

Come again?

JOHN

Edith saw my fake Van Gogh.

EDITH

You could have just told me.

JOHN

You commented that I never age. You gave me the book on early man. Dan, you spotted the burin and you said, "If stones could speak."

DAN

I knew it.

JOHN

I got the notion, I ran it past you to check your reactions, and I took it too far.

DAN

Too far? Check my reaction?

JOHN

You asked if I was a figure from religious history, if there were others like me, if I'd created future identities. We were chasing our tails around the maypole, enjoying the mystery, the analytical stretch. You were playing my game! I was playing yours.

DAN

Oh, man, you know, you had us going, right? You were good, man. You know those Chinese boxes, one, inside the other, inside the other, inside the other- I feel like I'm in the- I'm in the- I'm in the last box. You son of a...

(pause)

BITCH! How could you do this to us?

EDITH

(angrily)

I was worried about you.

JOHN

I know, I was tempted to cop out many times, but I couldn't resist seeing whether or not you could refute what I was saying. I had the perfect audience- anthropologist, archaeologist, Christian literalist... A psychologist.

ART

Okay, I've had enough of this. I'm outta here. You wanna come? Let's go.

HARRY

So, John. Are you gonna write the story?

JOHN

If I do, I'll send you copies.

ART
Don't bother with mine, okay? You are absolutely certifiable. I don't know you!
(storms out)

LINDA
It was nice seeing you again, Dr. Oldman.
...Your name's a pun, isn't it? Old man? Did that help you with your story?

ART
(calling out)
Linda!

LINDA
(waves nervously, smiling)
Bye.

JOHN
Well, Art was half right.

HARRY
(sniggers)
Which half?
...Well, at least I don't have to throw away half of what I know about biology.

DAN
Which half?
It's a beautiful idea, so rich, so full of possibilities.

JOHN
(to Will)
Perhaps you should write a paper on it, Doctor.

WILL
Maybe I will. I'll interview you in the rubber room for further details. You may still need help, my friend.
John grabs a bag and heads out. Sandy scrambles to her feet and rushes after him.

Scene 4: Truth

SANDY
My ass.

JOHN
I thought it sounded pretty good.

SANDY
They believe you because they have to. But the one thing that I know about you is that you would never use people or abuse their goodwill and intelligence like they think you've just done to them.

JOHN
Psych 101?

SANDY
No, it's Woman, one-on-one. So you're a pretty fast liar, Mr. Ugg, but I wanna know- What's your real name?
JOHN
Believe it or not, the sound was always John.

SANDY
Why'd you cave to Gruber?

JOHN
What happened was enough. Just- Just needed to stop. I- I shouldn't have expected it to work.

SANDY
Fourteen thousand years old. I bet that's a lot of women.

JOHN
Oh, are we counting?

SANDY
Maybe.

HARRY
(coming out, Edith following)
Well, I'm taking Edith home. Sandy?

SANDY
I'm gonna stay.

EDITH
(surveying John)
...Are you sorry for some of those things you said?

JOHN
I'm sorry I said them.

EDITH
Well. Like a good Christian, I...
...Oh, John.

(hugs John, he lifts her up giving her a tight hug)
Oh! Well, you did a terrible thing, but we're all so thankful you're all right. Even Art- He just hates things he can't understand.

HARRY
You're a sadist, John, but I admit I got a kick out of chasing my tail around your maypole... even if that is all I caught. Good luck to you.

(shakes John's hand)
Wish you the best.

JOHN
Thank you.

HARRY
Ready?

Edith puts her hand on John's face, and gives him a kiss on the cheek. They depart.

HARRY
- Later!

SANDY
- Okay, good night.

Dan comes out, hugs Sandy from the side.

SANDY
Mmm.
DAN
(to John)
I don't know, man. Something about this...
Something about you, John. The more I think
about it, the more I'm no longer in that Chinese
box.

(Inhaling deeply)
I sense...space. A kinda latitude of what we
happily call reality, in which, as everybody
keeps saying... anything's possible.

JOHN
Yes.

DAN
No. N-no. N-no. No- No more words. I'm gonna go
home, and I'm gonna watch Doctor Who for a dose
of sanity. Good luck to you, man, wherever this
may lead you. ...You drop me a line, sometime.
Let me know how you're making out.

JOHN
...I will.
Dan gives Sandy a friendly kiss and walks
off.

SANDY
So, John Oldman. What other pun names have you
used?
Will is slowly exiting, inadvertently
sneaking up on them.

JOHN
Lots. John Paley for John Paleolithic. John
Savage-
Got really crazy about 60 years ago, when I was
teaching at Harvard, I was John Thomas Partee.
John T. Partee- Boston tea party-
Will who is right behind them now takes a
step back with a look of shock on his face

SANDY
I get it.

JOHN
Yeah, I know.

WILL
Wait, wait, wait. B-Boston? 60 years ago? J-John
Partee?
John puts a hand on his mouth.

WILL
(angrily)
You did not teach chemistry! I do not believe
you!

JOHN
(putting his arm on Will's shoulder)
Your mother's name was Nola.
WILL
  No. No! Yea- Yes, Nola.
    (crying)
My mother!
    (angrily)
I reject this!
My- My- My dog's name. We had him before I was born.

JOHN
    (smiling and nodding)
  Woofie.

WILL
  Woof- Woof- Woofie...
    (sobbing)

JOHN
  Gruber. She remarried?

WILL
    (sobbing angrily)
  She said you abandoned us.

JOHN
  Sorry, I had to move on. You know that. I left enough. I left enough.

WILL
  I-I'm cooold!

JOHN
    (putting his arm around him and escorting him inside)
  Chilly Willy, always cold. Never could stand the cold.

WILL
    (Sobs)
  Wait, you- you had a beard!
    (stroking his face)

JOHN
  Yeah, you used to tug on it to see if it was real.

WILL
    (sobbing)
  Agh!
    (clutching his chest in pain)

JOHN
  Will! God. Call an ambulance, now!
    (Will gasps, collapses with John holding him)

JOHN
  Come on, Willy. Will. Come on, buddy.
    (Siren blaring, fade out)
fin