

A PLAGUE OF MIRACLES

by

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Cast:

Fr. Thomas Brennigan ... Male, 45. A Catholic priest. Pastor of St. Martin's parish.

Angela Doyle Female, mid-30s. The sister of Fr. Brennigan.

Dora Smith Female, 65. An eccentric parishioner.

Peter Rossi Male, early-to-mid 20s. A seminarian, currently an intern at St. Martin's parish.

Kathy Oakes Female, early-to-mid 20s. A reporter.

Offstage Voices: A television announcer.
The Archbishop of San Francisco (male, 50-70).

Time: The present.

Acts:

Act I: The Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent.

Act II: The morning of Christmas Eve.

Place: Father Brennigan's office at St. Martin's Catholic Church, San Francisco.

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(Lights up on a priest's office in a parish in San Francisco. There are bookshelves, a desk, a table with a small television, and various chairs. It is the day before the first Sunday of Advent. Father Thomas Brennigan is seated at the desk. There is a large thump offstage.)

Peter?
Ow!
Peter!
You found it!
It's a miracle, Father!
A miracle.
Another miracle! Right in front of my eyes!
Peter, I've told you.
Yes, Father, but—
What was it this time?
I dropped it! On my foot!
You what?!
The sheep. It just slipped out of my hands and landed right on my foot.

BRENNIGAN

(Gets up, in pain)

(Hobbles to door)

(Peter opens the door and walks in carrying a painted ceramic sheep with a red ribbon tied around its neck)

PETER

BRENNIGAN

PETER

BRENNIGAN

PETER

BRENNIGAN

PETER

BRENNIGAN

PETER

BRENNIGAN

Are you all right?

PETER

I'm fine! Totally unharmed.

BRENNIGAN

How about the sheep. Is it broken?

PETER

No! Not at all!

BRENNIGAN

Good! Mrs. Rizzo made that sheep herself twenty years ago. I shudder to think what her children would say if it was damaged.

PETER

But Father, it should have broken my foot!

BRENNIGAN

Nonsense. It's not that heavy.

PETER

I really think it's a miracle. We should call the Archbishop. Just in case. Imagine...the miracle of the Incorruptible Sheep!

BRENNIGAN

Peter! Peter, since you got here, how many miracles have you...experienced?

PETER

Including the thing with the holy water?

BRENNIGAN

Sure.

PETER

Four. Well, now this makes five.

BRENNIGAN

In under four months?

PETER

It's amazing. This is truly a holy parish. I feel so blessed to be here!

BRENNIGAN

This isn't a miracle.

PETER

It seems miraculous to me!

BRENNIGAN

When a miracle happens, I'll tell you. But we are not going to call his Excellency just because you're wearing a sturdy pair of shoes.

PETER

But...yes, Father.

BRENNIGAN

And don't go around talking about "Incorruptable Sheep". The Church has gone though enough these last years. You don't need to make it worse by introducing *that* into the lexicon.

PETER

Yes, Father.

ANGELA
(From offstage)

Tom?!

BRENNIGAN
(To Angela)

In here!

(To Peter)

Put Agnus on the table. We'll put the crèche together this afternoon.

PETER

Agnus?

BRENNIGAN

Huh? Oh. Mrs. Rizzo named the sheep.

ANGELA
(Enters)

Hello, Tom. Hi Peter.

BRENNIGAN

Good morning. I was just telling Peter here about about Agnus.

PETER

The sheep is named Agnus. Like *Agnus Dei*. Lamb of God. What a beautiful name. And how appropriate for a crèche!

BRENNIGAN

I thought she named it after her spinster aunt.

ANGELA

The one that ran the gentlemen's club down in Milpitas, yes.

PETER

Oh. That is...not what I would have expected.

ANGELA

The other two are Denise and Paula. I think those were her grandmothers.

PETER

Did they, uh...

BRENNIGAN

No, I don't think it was a family business.

PETER

No no, I mean...have they—the other sheep—ever exhibited miraculous properties?

BRENNIGAN

No, they have not. Now, if we're finished with that, I need you to run down to Chad's and pick up some candles for the advent wreath. Here's the address.

(Gives Peter notes with address)

Get them right away; we'll need them by tonight.

PETER

Yes, Father.

(Exits, right)

ANGELA

Miraculous properties? What was it this time?

BRENNIGAN

He dropped it. On his foot.

ANGELA

Ouch.

BRENNIGAN

He's fine.

ANGELA

Which is what makes it a miracle?

BRENNIGAN

Exactly. So how are you?

ANGELA

Fine. Fine. Everything's fine. I wanted to return these.

(Gives books to Brennigan)

BRENNIGAN

Ah, thank you.

ANGELA

They were very...interesting.

BRENNIGAN

You didn't finish them, did you?

ANGELA

They're 1,500 pages! I—

PETER

(Enters)

Excuse me. Father...uh, I don't think you gave me the right address.

BRENNIGAN

(Takes paper with address and reads it)

Chad's Rad Candles. 2121 Castro St. Yup, that's it.

PETER

Okay. It's just...I would have thought—

BRENNIGAN

Thought what?

PETER

You know...these are candles for the church.

BRENNIGAN

I see. Well, Peter, you will need to watch out. You see, the owner of the store—Chad—
Chad is...

PETER

Yes?

BRENNIGAN
He's a...how do I put this?

PETER
Father, I—

BRENNIGAN
He's a Lutheran.

PETER
Oh! Well, I thought...never mind.

ANGELA
Don't hold it against him. It's a diverse city.

PETER
Of course.

BRENNIGAN
But his husband's Catholic. I'm hoping he can get Chad to convert.

PETER
Uh...Yes, Father.

BRENNIGAN
And remember, purple candles. Purple. Don't let him sell you fuchsia. It's not the same thing. Well, it probably is for Lutherans. But not for us. All right?

PETER
Yes Father.

BRENNIGAN
Oh, and here.

(Gives Peter books Angela brought it)
You should read these. They're on the history of Jewish people from the death of Alexander to the destruction of the Jewish temple.

PETER
Yes, Father.

BRENNIGAN
What?

PETER
We have studied this in the seminary.

BRENNIGAN

But not in the depth you should.

PETER

I'll put them on the stack.

BRENNIGAN

Good.

(Notices other books)

What's are these?

ANGELA

Some other books. *Moby Dick*. *The Weeping Angel*. And *The Road to the Sky*; it's by that sci-fi author you and Jason like.

PETER

Oh, *The Weeping Angel*. My grandma gave it to me when I was a kid.

ANGELA

I found that in a used bookshop somewhere. It's about an angel living on Earth. It seems like something you'd like.

PETER

I love that part where the angel has her first baby and names it after her brother. My grandma would tell me that—

ANGELA

Peter!

PETER

What?!

ANGELA

I'm sorry. It's just...could you excuse us, please?

PETER

Okay.

(Crosses to right)

Oh, Father...that reporter?

BRENNIGAN

Yes?

PETER

She's supposed to be here at 10:00.

BRENNIGAN

That's right. Thank you. And Peter, bring me the aspirin and some water when you get a chance, please.

(Peter exits, right)

Angela, what—

ANGELA

Aspirin?

BRENNIGAN

It's my back.

ANGELA

Again? You should see a doctor.

BRENNIGAN

I'm fine. It's just stress.

ANGELA

Stress? What's wrong?

BRENNIGAN

Nothing. Just for the past couple of months it's been, I don't know...stressful. I'll be fine in a few days.

(Pause)

So. What's up?

ANGELA

Uh...it's just that I needed to...talk to you about...the new stained glass window.

BRENNIGAN

Oh, yes.

ANGELA

Normally, I would say that you should be trying to raise money now, before the end of the year. But given how big a window you'll need, well...

BRENNIGAN

We won't be able to raise all that money in a month.

ANGELA

It's probably going to be a year-long effort. Maybe two.

BRENNIGAN

I see. What about that window I showed you? Do you think we could get it?

ANGELA

Do you mean the...?

BRENNIGAN

(Produces a printout, or paper catalog)

This one. From that old church in France that closed.

ANGELA

Oh. Yes.

BRENNIGAN

I love how Blessed Virgin Mary is tickling Jesus's feet, and he's laughing and grabbing at her chin. I've always really liked that image, and...Angela?

ANGELA

(Crying)

Tom, it's...it's...

BRENNIGAN

Angela! What wrong?!

ANGELA

I'm sorry, Tommy, I...

BRENNIGAN

It's okay.

ANGELA

It's about Jason.

BRENNIGAN

What? What's wrong?

ANGELA

You know how Jason and I have been putting off having kids.

BRENNIGAN

Yes.

ANGELA

We...we've actually been trying.

BRENNIGAN

You have?

ANGELA

We wanted it to be a surprise. I know how you miss not seeing our nieces and nephews, and I wanted...I knew you'd like to have more family right here. But...

BRENNIGAN

Don't worry about me. What happened?

ANGELA

Nothing! That's the point. Jason and I have been trying...we've been trying for over a year. And nothing's been happening. So finally we went to the doctor. And...

BRENNIGAN

It's all right.

ANGELA

I'm fine. Everything's fine with me. But Jason...he...

BRENNIGAN

Oh, no.

ANGELA

He can't. He—

BRENNIGAN

I'm sorry.

ANGELA

He's just torn up about it. He doesn't say anything, but I can tell.

BRENNIGAN

Is there anything the doctors can do?

ANGELA

We've talked to some specialists. Tried everything they said. Nothing. He down in L.A. right now, seeing someone, but...it's a long shot.

(Beat)

It's just...I want kids. Sure. But Jason: he's been talking about this for years. And now...

BRENNIGAN

If wants to talk to me...

ANGELA

Thanks. I don't know what we're going to do.

BRENNIGAN

Angela?

ANGELA

Yes?

BRENNIGAN

I just want you to know...whatever you decide to do...you've got my full support. Both of you.

ANGELA

Thank you, Tom.

(Peter enters)

Anyway, uh...that is a beautiful window, but I don't think it will still be available by the time we have the money.

BRENNIGAN

That's too bad.

PETER

Father, she's here. The reporter.

BRENNIGAN

All right. Give us just another minute or two.

(Peter exits, closing door behind him)

ANGELA

Don't worry. I'm sure you'll get something magnificent. I'll start putting together a fundraising plan, and we should probably think about kicking it off in mid-February.

BRENNIGAN

Thank you.

ANGELA

I'm happy to do it. A reporter?

BRENNIGAN

Oh, uh, someone from the paper. They want to do a story on the 100th anniversary of the church building.

ANGELA

Sounds interesting.

BRENNIGAN

I don't particularly care for reporters. Especially after...well, you know...

ANGELA

Right. So, another miracle.

BRENNIGAN

Another miracle.

ANGELA

I think he's sweet. He reminds me of you a little, when you were his age.

BRENNIGAN

Nonsense. I never had that much energy.

ANGELA

He's very devoted.

BRENNIGAN

Yes. Yes he is. And I've been running him around like an errand boy ever since my back went out, and he hasn't complained once. He really is a good kid. He'll make a good priest.

(Beat)

Are you going to be all right?

ANGELA

I'm fine. Really.

BRENNIGAN

Of course. You're in my prayers. As always.

ANGELA

Thank you. Two months?

BRENNIGAN

Huh?

ANGELA

You've been stressed for two months, you said?

BRENNIGAN

About that.

ANGELA

Well, what happened two months ago?

(Beat)

You had a birthday.

BRENNIGAN

Don't remind me.

ANGELA

It's not uncommon for people at your age...to take stock. Look at the choices they've made.

BRENNIGAN

It's not a mid-life crisis, if that's what you mean.

ANGELA

Okay.

BRENNIGAN

Well...maybe a little.

ANGELA

It's all right. Everyone goes through it.

BRENNIGAN

You're probably right. Now, I probably should get this over with.

ANGELA

Want me to stick around?

BRENNIGAN

(To offstage)

Peter!

(To Angela)

Thanks, but I'll be okay.

PETER

(Sticks head in from offstage)

Yes?

BRENNIGAN

Send her in, please.

PETER

Okay.

ANGELA

I'll talk to you later.

(Peter walks in with Kathy following. Kathy is on crutches)

PETER

Careful!

KATHY

Thank you.

(To Brennigan)

Father Brennigan, how nice to finally meet you. Kathy Oakes, with the San Francisco Reporter.

BRENNIGAN

(Stands)

Nice to meet you to, Ms. Oakes.

PETER

Let me get you a chair.

BRENNIGAN

What happened?

KATHY

(To Peter)

Thank you.

(To Brennigan)

I was in an auto accident. I broke my ankle. In three places.

PETER

Ouch.

ANGELA

How terrible.

KATHY

Well...it's all right. My physical therapy is coming along pretty well. I should be fine in a few months.

(To Angela)

And you are?

ANGELA

Angela Doyle. Father Brennigan's sister.

PETER

That's biological sister.

(Pause)

Not...you know...a nun.

(Pause)

Just a little Catholic humor.

(Pause)

I'll go get the candles now.

Thank you, Peter.

BRENNIGAN
(Peter exits, right)

KATHY
Father Brennigan's sister? How interesting. Would you mind if I included you in the interview?

ANGELA
Unfortunately, I have some errands to run.

KATHY
Maybe if I can ask just a couple of questions—

BRENNIGAN
Ms. Oakes. So, what made you decide to do a story about the anniversary of our parish here?

ANGELA
(Angela crosses right)

Bye.

KATHY
Tarot cards.

BRENNIGAN
Excuse me?

(Angela stops)

KATHY
Grand-ma-ma...she's the owner of the paper, you know...she did a Tarot reading last weekend, and the cards all pointed to this church.

BRENNIGAN
I see.

KATHY
And then she confirmed with her spirit guide and, yup, something big's going down here.

ANGELA
Really?

KATHY

And then, I just was talking with your intern, and he mentioned something about how the power of God fills this parish.

BRENNIGAN

Did he.

KATHY

So I have to find out what's going on.

ANGELA

Maybe I will stick around. Just for a bit.

BRENNIGAN

Nothing is going on.

KATHY

We'll see. So, Mrs. Doyle, what do you do?

ANGELA

Oh, I'm the executive director of Children Wanting.

KATHY

The charity?

ANGELA

Yes. We've just started our December fundraiser, actually.

KATHY

We could do a story on that. Let me get back to you.

ANGELA

That would be wonderful.

KATHY

So, Father, back to you. I...oh, hold on a minute.

(Hunts for tape recorder in purse)

BRENNIGAN

You were led here by a spirit guide! Really?

KATHY

Dentatus. Dentatus Maximus. He was a centurion in biblical Israel actually. I don't think he ever met Jesus, though.

BRENNIGAN

And what did...Dentatus think is going on here at St. Martin's?

KATHY

We don't know. Grand-ma-ma's Latin isn't all that good.

(Finds tape recorder)

Ah, here we go.

BRENNIGAN

Well...Latin isn't widely taught these days.

ANGELA

Father Brennigan's Latin is excellent.

KATHY

Really? How marvelous.

BRENNIGAN

Angela is exaggerating.

ANGELA

Nonsense. You can *cogito ergo sum* better than anyone I know.

KATHY

Great! Can I ask you to translate?

BRENNIGAN

Really, my Latin is not—

KATHY

(Takes paper out of purse)

I have the message right here.

BRENNIGAN

Perhaps later. Now is sort of a busy time. About the interview...

KATHY

Sure.

(Turns tape recorder on)

BRENNIGAN

You're going to record us?

KATHY

Of course. I want to make sure I don't misquote you.

BRENNIGAN

All right. You probably want to know about the history of the church.

KATHY

Actually, I—

BRENNIGAN

The parish itself was established in the late 19th century. The anniversary is the 100th anniversary of the building, which replaced a previous building that burned down when—

KATHY

Is it true that a miracle occurred here just the next year?

BRENNIGAN

A miracle?

ANGELA

Oh, that.

BRENNIGAN

What?

ANGELA

No one told you?

BRENNIGAN

Told me what?

ANGELA

It's just an old story.

KATHY

Please tell me, Mrs. Doyle.

ANGELA

You seem enterprising. I'm surprised you don't already know.

KATHY

The *Reporter's* records from that era are not very well organized. But I've heard that one year to the day after the church building was dedicated, it began to rain here. On the church.

BRENNIGAN

Why is that a miracle?

KATHY

It rained on the church, and nowhere else. If you walked a block in any direction, it was sunny. But over the church itself, nothing but rain.

ANGELA

Just wait until Peter finds out.

BRENNIGAN

Let me see...did it rain for three, seven or forty days?

KATHY

Three. You have heard of this!

BRENNIGAN

No, it's just that certain numbers appear in myths like this. If it was, say, nine days, that, at least, would be original.

KATHY

So you don't believe it?

BRENNIGAN

No.

KATHY

And what have you heard, Mrs. Doyle?

ANGELA

Pretty much the same thing. It's just an old story.

BRENNIGAN

Any place this old is bound to have stories attached to it. There's supposed to be a ghost that wanders Hope Cathedral, for example.

KATHY

I've never heard that. How fascinating. Hope Cathedral. Dentatus has never mentioned this.

BRENNIGAN

I wouldn't put too much stock into it.

KATHY

Well, then, let me ask you some questions about yourself.

BRENNIGAN

Like what?!