

LOCKED AND LOADED,
CAN I HELP YOU?

a short play
for two actors
by

David Ives

LOCKED AND LOADED, CAN I HELP YOU? was originally produced for radio and Playing On Air's podcast by Playing On Air (Claudia Catania, Founder and Artistic Director) as part of its Fall 2021 season. The show remains available online at playingonair.org.

Walter Bobbie directed the production. John Kilgore was the sound designer and engineer. Dan Moses Schreier was the composer. Adam Kantor sang the accompanying version of "I Am A Poor Wayfaring Stranger." The cast was as follows:

Wayne.....	Hank Azaria
Jesus.....	Jonathan Groff

“LOCKED AND LOADED, CAN I HELP YOU?”

(We are in a gun shop. There's one automatic weapon on display in the shop's case. WAYNE is behind the case. He's 50 or more, dressed in outdoor clothing with a PISTOL holstered on his hip. Near to him, sitting on the case, is a telephone, the old-fashioned, bell-ringer-kind.)

(At lights up, WAYNE is reading a MAGAZINE. The PHONE RINGS.)

WAYNE

(into phone)

Yeah. Locked And Loaded, this is Wayne, can I help you? The XR-34 Concord semi-automatic, yes sir, we just got that in. A gorgeous weapon. My wife already owns two of these babies. So's this item for you, Pilgrim? Daughter's birthday? How old? *Thirteen*. Perfect! Emma is gonna love it. This one here has got young Emma's name written all over it. So –

(SHOP BELL HEARD.)

Hang on, Pilgrim, I gotta buzz somebody in, here.

(WAYNE presses a button behind the counter. We hear A SECURITY BUZZER.)

Door's open!

(JESUS ENTERS. Thirty-three, attractive.)

JESUS

Good morning!

(AN ANGELIC CHOIR IS HEARD briefly.)

Peace be unto this gun shop.

WAYNE

(into phone)

Oh, boy... Yeah, listen, Pilgrim, can you call back? I got a kook here just walked in. This is a bearded guy in a white robe and sandals *with a halo*. I better deal with this. 'Bye.

(WAYNE hangs up.)

Good morning. Can I help you somehow?

JESUS

So this is “Locked and Loaded.” I've never seen the inside of a gun shop before. I'm sorry, is it Wayne?

WAYNE

Wayne DeMerritt, Owner and Proprietor, just like it says out front.

JESUS

This is quite some arsenal you have in here.

WAYNE

Like I like to say, it's mine to defend. Which is why I carry this loaded .38 right here on my hip.

JESUS

Oh. Well then I guess I'll have to behave myself, won't I.

WAYNE

Can I do something for you today, stranger?

JESUS

Wayne, Wayne, Wayne. You don't recognize me?

WAYNE

Uh, no, not really.

JESUS

The white robe, the beard, the sandals. The *halo*. They don't ring a bell? Bloody holes in my hands and feet and this open wound here in my side?

WAYNE

Help me out a little.

JESUS

I'm Jesus, Wayne.

(The ANGELIC CHORUS is HEARD AGAIN, a bit louder.)

I'm Jesus.

WAYNE

Jesus. Mmm-hmm. Not "Hay-zoos"? Or...?

JESUS

Well, yes, "Hay-zoos," of course, to any Spanish speakers around the globe. I mean Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, the only son of the living god. Eternal savior. And so on and so on.

WAYNE

Okay. Okay. Well. Welcome – "Jesus."

JESUS

As they say: Put her there, Wayne!

(They shake hands.)

WAYNE

Whoa!

JESUS

What's the matter?

WAYNE

Whoa. That is some serious hand wound you got there.

JESUS

I'm sorry, did I get some blood on you?

WAYNE

No problem, no problem. I got a rag here'll wipe that right off.

(Takes out a RAG and rubs his hand.)

You know, you might want to get those wounds looked into.

JESUS

They've been bleeding for twenty centuries. They're called "holy stigmata," technically. From the Greek. You know how theologians are.

WAYNE

Mm-hm, mm-hm.

JESUS

I wish you could see your face. You still don't believe who I am?

WAYNE

Sure. Sure. It's just, there's people come in here, who are, if I may use the term, crazy. As in crazy-violent, wanna make trouble. I'm not saying *you're* violent. See, there's other customers, they're unusual but they just *look* wacky. I had a guy come in last week looking for a Glock .9 – he was dressed as George Washington.

JESUS

George Washington.

WAYNE

First president of the United States?

JESUS

Yes, I know George.

WAYNE

Anyway, this guy had the wig, the uniform, the whole she-bang.

JESUS

Isn't that wonderful. What did you do, Wayne?

WAYNE

He put down his money, ten minutes later he walked out with Glock .9.

JESUS

So he got his wish.

WAYNE

Fulfilling wishes, that's my job.

JESUS

Which is how many people see *me*. Wrongly, by the way. As if I were some kind of cosmic Santa Claus, handing out gifts or answers to prayers. When all I'm doing is going about my father's business.

WAYNE

You mean – carpentry?

JESUS

No. Being God.

(ANGELIC CHORUS is heard again.)

Enough!

(ANGELIC CHORUS stops.)

Sorry about that. They just do that from time to time. It's their job.

WAYNE

So. Okay. Hang on a minute. Are you...are you really *the* Jesus, I mean, *Jesus* Jesus? Bible Jesus?

JESUS

Yes I am. I am Bible Jesus.

WAYNE

Well, wow. *Wow*. You are famous. You are *famous* famous. I oughta get your picture for my wall here.

JESUS

Mmm. I don't really photograph very well.

WAYNE

You and me both, brother, you and me! Well, it is an honor to have you in my shop, sir. I always loved your hymns, way back.

(Sings the old hymn:)

"I am a poor...!"

WAYNE & JESUS

(sing together)

“...wayfaring stranger! I’m traveling through this land of woe!”

WAYNE

Beautiful. Congratulations.

JESUS

Thank you.

WAYNE

So, was there a reason for this visit, something I can help you with today? *Jesus?* My man?

JESUS

Actually, I’m here on a mission. Two missions.

WAYNE

Two missions. Okay, hit me.

JESUS

Did you get a call this morning, somebody looking for a gift, a family member?

WAYNE

Yeah, yeah, there was a guy just a while ago, looking for an XR-34 for his daughter.

JESUS

His daughter Emma, was it?

WAYNE

Yeah, 13th birthday tomorrow. Why? Is this guy bad news? You know stuff on people. I can turn him down.

JESUS

It’s complicated...

WAYNE

Hey. *Complications* are what guns were designed to solve.

JESUS

That is so interesting you say that. Given my other mission.

WAYNE

Yeah, yeah, you said *two* missions.

JESUS

You’re probably not going to believe me on this one.

WAYNE

Hey! You're Jesus! 'Course I believe you!

JESUS

I'm thinking about buying a gun.

WAYNE

Excuse me?

JESUS

I said I'm thinking about...

WAYNE

No, no, no, I heard you. It's just... Come on. *You? Jesus of Nazareth*, the son of God and so on – you want to buy a gun?

JESUS

Why? What's wrong? Just because I'm Jesus of Nazareth I can't buy a gun?

WAYNE

Sure sure, free country, anybody can buy a gun. George Washington can buy a gun. Somebody looks like him.

JESUS

Is it very hard? Buying one?

WAYNE

Naw, it's a snap! You pick out a weapon, show me a driver's license, passport, bing bang boom, we're done.

JESUS

Mmm. Too bad I don't have a driver's license. No passport.

WAYNE

Not a problem. We can work around that. You got any other I.D.?

JESUS

Well – the halo.

WAYNE

I'll accept that. I can feel it from here. But can I just ask, why would you personally – I mean, being Jesus and all – why would you want a gun?

JESUS

One hears so much about guns these days.

WAYNE

And with good reason. You looked at the world lately?

JESUS

A lot of violence?

WAYNE

A *lotta* violence.

JESUS

Well, if you know your Bible, you know what I said.

WAYNE

Yeah. Refresh my memory.

JESUS

I said I wasn't bringing peace, I was bringing a sword.

WAYNE

You really pack a sword? Sabre? Machete, what?

JESUS

It's a *metaphor*, Wayne.

WAYNE

Well, these days you'd say you weren't bringin' peace, you're bringin' a Bushmaster AR-15! So, thank you for reminding me, just off your own words there, carrying a weapon is a *Christian thing*! Whoa, whoa, whoa. Why are you looking at me like that? Why are you staring at me like that?

JESUS

Am I staring?

WAYNE

Yeah, you're staring at me really weird now. You're kinda freaking me out here, Jesus.

JESUS

I'm sorry. I wasn't aware I was staring.

WAYNE

Whoo. That's better. I almost crapped my pants, here!

JESUS

The question is, *would* I – being who I am, and all – would I buy a gun? Or *should* I buy a gun? You know the statistics. Forty thousand gun deaths last year – murders, mishaps...

WAYNE

Now hang on, hang on, that's a whole bunch of questions. First of all, as to *mishaps*, I can't help it people don't know how to handle a weapon properly! Some crazy accident happens! As for murders, look here. I'm a car salesman, I'm supposed to worry about all the drunks out there might crack up their car, kill their family? I sell you something, it ain't my look-out what you do with it. I'm just a business here.

JESUS

That sounds so reasonable.

WAYNE

I tell you, Jesus, I am sick and tired of gun-owners, and gun *sellers*, merchants with a *legal enterprise*, getting pegged as some kind of wing-nut loonies out to end the world!

JESUS

Back in the day, people thought *I* was crazy. Some still do.

WAYNE

Cancel them, brother, cancel them!

JESUS

So what would you recommend, Wayne? By way of a gun, if I were to buy one?

WAYNE

Question is, want you want a gun *for*. Though, if you're gonna open-carry, you might want to re-think the gown. Get some camo.

JESUS

The robe, you mean? It's too white, too bright, too eye-catching?

WAYNE

That, plus – you go around in a halo, you are making yourself a natural target. Never do that, Jesus. Never.

(He spritzes something out of a can onto his hand and rubs harder.)

Oh, *man*...! Whaddya got there, indelible blood?

JESUS

I'm sorry, is that still on your hand?

WAYNE

Naw, I'll get it out, I'll get it out... But hey, now I got you standing here – just outa curiosity – did you set out to be a celebrity? I mean, all the stories about you! Water into wine, bread into fishes, raising folks from the dead...

JESUS

Oh, I did a few little miracles here and there. But miracles weren't my mission here, Wayne. They were just, you might say, advertising.

WAYNE

I get you. And hey, the Bible is like the best damn platform ever!

JESUS

All I really wanted to do was tell people to love one another.

WAYNE

And did they believe you? No! For example, the S.O.B.'s who nailed you up. Man, you gotta have some anger issues about that. No wonder you want a gun!

JESUS

What does anger have to do with owning a gun?

WAYNE

Nothing! Nothing! I'm saying, you don't think an AK-47 wouldna come in handy in that circumstance? Against a Roman with a spear?

JESUS

Wayne, I acquiesced in my fate because I was saving mankind.

WAYNE

Okay, okay, we'll give you an asterisk. All I'm saying is, right there you got Reason One-A for owning a gun. *Self-defense*. Right? Somebody attacks you, BAM! you blow 'em away. Somebody busts into your house, BAM!, you blow 'em away.

JESUS

The problem is, my house is not of this world.

WAYNE

Well, in *this* world, the one I live in, you can never be protected good enough. Steel doors, trip wires, land mines, panic rooms, I don't care *what* you got.

JESUS

It is extraordinary how dangerous the world is. I am amazed people make it from breakfast to bedtime without an accident. Yet men and women wake up every morning ready to take things on. Is that a miracle, Wayne? Given all the chances to get seriously hurt?

WAYNE

Sure, sure. Takes courage just going out the door in the morning.

JESUS

And yet I say unto thee, Wayne DeMerritt, why depend on courage? Why not strap on the armor of unbending faith? Strap on the helmet of hope? Strap on the shield of charity?

WAYNE

Or strap on a bulletproof vest. Coupla layers of Kevlar couldn't hurt!

JESUS

But if I did, as you say, go *BAM!* I'd be taking someone's life.

WAYNE

Jesus, Jesus, have I said you oughta go out and shoot somebody? No! You're not wearing a wire, are you?

JESUS

(*no idea what that is*)
"A wire..."

WAYNE

Lemme just say, we in my business do not recommend killing in any way or shape or form.

JESUS

What about assassination?

WAYNE

Not recommended.

JESUS

Because of political scruples?

WAYNE

Because it's killing.

JESUS

You're saying killing is wrong.

WAYNE

I'm saying we do not *recommend* it. Unless, like I say, it's self-defense. In which case it's self-defense. But guns are not just about *killing*. And as you know from the bumper sticker, guns don't kill people.

JESUS

Oh, right, right. You mean...

JESUS & WAYNE

(together)
...*PEOPLE* kill people.

JESUS

But isn't it people with guns killing people without guns?

WAYNE

Which is why them people *without* guns gotta go *get* some!

JESUS

But you just said guns aren't just about killing.

WAYNE

Look, look here, there's a million reasons for guns.

JESUS

Besides killing.

WAYNE

Besides killing. You also got, for example, hunting.

JESUS

Isn't that killing?

WAYNE

It's *useful* killing! For *food*! Unless you're some wacko likes to blow away gophers for fun. No! You got your deer hunting, duck hunting, moose hunting.

JESUS

Bison and buffalo.

WAYNE

Bison and buff... Uh, yeah, there's not so much of them anymore.

JESUS

They're fairly extinct by now.

WAYNE

Yeah, well, don't forget, you go grazing out in the open, you're kinda asking for it.

JESUS

So the bison were too eye-catching. They made themselves *a target*.

WAYNE

It's your damn halo problem all over again! But you still got coyotes you can shoot. You got wolves and bears. Maybe some predator's attacking your livestock.

JESUS

Not really applicable in my case. Unless you mean the sheep and the goats.

WAYNE

The sheep and the goats! 'Cept, weren't they a whaddyacallit metaphor of some kind...?

JESUS

True.

WAYNE

Okay, you can't shoot them. But there's target shooting. That's a reason. And a hell of a lotta fun!

JESUS

But doesn't the lead from the what do you call them...

WAYNE

Bullets?

JESUS

Doesn't all that lead pollute the soil?

WAYNE

Jesus, lemme tell ya. I feel bad for the soil. I do. But a) it's a big country with soil to spare and b) until there is an Amendment giving dirt more rights than me, I'm gonna target shoot. Anyway, there's all your reasons for being a gun-owner. You got hunting. Good reason. Self-defense. Very good reason.

JESUS

Didn't you forget one other reason?

WAYNE

What is that?

JESUS

Suicide.

WAYNE

Sure, sure. There's always suicide. The...inexplicable reason...

JESUS

The *inexplicable reason*. That is beautifully said, Wayne.

WAYNE

Thank you. Anyway. Enough sermonizing. Let's fix you up with something suitable to your needs – whatever those needs may be.

JESUS

What about this gun right here?

WAYNE

Now that is the Concord XR-34 I was talking about. Tell ya, I'm gonna make a pile offa this weapon, retire to Cancun! Here, give her a try.

(WAYNE takes the weapon out of the case and hands it to JESUS.)

JESUS

My oh my, that is *heavy*, isn't it?

WAYNE

Yes sir.

JESUS

And this here is the, what do you call...

WAYNE

The trigger?

JESUS

The trigger?

WAYNE

That's it. Just let 'er rip.

JESUS

(waving the weapon at WAYNE and making machine-gun noises)
Ack-ack-ack-ack-ack-ack!

WAYNE

Hold it! HOLD IT!

(Grabs the weapon away.)

Don't you ever do that! Don't you ever point a gun at somebody!

JESUS

I'm sorry. You said "let her rip" and I –

WAYNE

NEVER. You hear me? NEV-ER.

JESUS

I'm sorry, Wayne. As I say, I don't know a lot about these things.

WAYNE

(putting the weapon back in the case)

Well anyway you can't have this particular one anyhow. This one's reserved for young Emma. Got her name written all over it. A popular item, too. My wife loves this gun. My wife owns two of these babies.

JESUS

Your wife owns two of these...

WAYNE

Yep. One just for Sundays. You're staring at me again. You're *staring at me, Jesus*. Will you stop it?

JESUS

Oh, Wayne, Wayne, Wayne.

WAYNE

What. *What...?! What're you looking at me like that for?*

JESUS

You know your wife can't own a gun. Your wife is dead.

WAYNE

Oh. Yeah... Yeah, so you heard about that, huh. You know about that.

JESUS

It was quite tragic, wasn't it. So sudden and all.

WAYNE

Yeah, well, like I say, there's crazy accidents happen sometimes, out of the blue. What're you gonna do, huh?

JESUS

Helen was a wonderful person.

WAYNE

Helen? Helen was the best. Best woman in the world. I mean, smart. Strong. Funny as hell. When she was in the funny-mood.

JESUS

What a terrible loss for you.

WAYNE

Yeah, well, what could I do? Huh? I wasn't there with her. The circumstances are ambiguous. Under those circumstances, I coulda *done* something? What could I have done?

JESUS

That is always the question, Pilgrim.

WAYNE

You think you know somebody. You lay beside 'em in bed for years and years, you think you know what's on their mind. What they're feeling. My God.

JESUS

Inexplicable.

WAYNE

Inexplicable.

JESUS

Well, as you say, the circumstances were ambiguous.

WAYNE

Now wait a minute, wait a minute. So...you musta known about her when you came in. You knew about her, you knew about me and you knew about this shop and everything else. You're Jesus. Know-it-all, knows everything.

JESUS

It's true, I do know a few things...

WAYNE

You know what I think? You didn't come in here to buy a gun. You came in here to make a *point*. With your holy stigmas and your damn *halo*. I mean, JESUS! What did you think? Did you think you were gonna *change my mind about guns*? You were gonna somehow make me *FEEL BAD*?

JESUS

I'll tell you why I'm here –

WAYNE

No, you listen to *me*. To a human person. To a non-god nobody. I don't make miracles. I don't raise people from the dead. I sell guns to people who want 'em. For *whatever* reason. As a business. But not to you. Uh-uh. You are not wanted in here, so get outta my shop. And I ain't scared of you. No way! I don't care what you are, I will put a hole in you! I will add *another* hole to the ones you got! So get outa my shop.

JESUS

Emma's going to die.

WAYNE

What are you talking about...?

JESUS

That 13-year-old girl? This gun here really does have her name on it, Wayne. You see her father is going to call you back in a minute. He's going to ask you for this gun to celebrate her birthday and if you sell it to him, amen amen I say unto you, Emma will be dead by sundown tomorrow. The top of her head blown off. Her face erased beyond recognition except in the memory of her father. Of course, you're just a salesman and you can't help it if people don't know how to handle a weapon, and what you do is your business. Emma is my business. She's my mission. *She's* why I'm here today.

WAYNE

I said get outta my shop.

JESUS

But Wayne, you'll be in my thoughts and prayers.

WAYNE

Get outta my shop!

(The PHONE RINGS.)

JESUS

There's Emma's father now. Wanting this gun.

(WAYNE takes out his pistol and points it at JESUS, cocking it.)

WAYNE

I said *GET THE HELL OUTTA MY SHOP!*

(PHONE RINGS.)

JESUS

Goodbye, Wayne. Nice talking.

(JESUS EXITS. SECURITY BUZZER is heard, then the SHOP BELL tinkling.)

WAYNE

Oh, *MAN...*! Oh man oh man oh man...

(PHONE RINGS. IT STARTS TO RING AGAIN. WAYNE picks up. Into phone:)

Locked and Loaded. This is Wayne.

(LIGHTS FADE. END OF PLAY.)