

GOD and FATS WALLER

or

"They kneel, casting their gaze to the heavens,  
expectantly awaiting the miracles they implore, when  
those blessings are before their very eyes!"

Sceme from THE CAROUSEL

An original screenplay by Ross E Cooper

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EXT. MAIN STREET - FORT LEE, NJ - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN CROSSE (50) and his chauffeur MARCUS (42) are on their daily commute to work. Traffic cops and meter maids they encounter along the way wave and shout flattering words to Marcus as he passes. Marcus acknowledges them with a silky charm of his own.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

Is there anyone you don't know  
between my home and office?

MARCUS

I know some from my days in  
security, others from church.

ETHAN

Well, I know people too, but I  
don't feel obligated to wave or  
make friendly chit chat.

MARCUS

You'd be surprised how just a nod  
or hello can make someone's day.

EXT. TRAFFIC LIGHT - FORT LEE, NJ - CONTINUOUS

At an intersection, Marcus leans out the window to make a few jovial comments to the policeman directing traffic. Cars collect behind them and impatiently HONK their horns. Their conversation ends with a burst of raucous laughter. Marcus drives through the intersection on to the next town.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

You know Marcus ... you amaze me!  
We've known each other for years,  
sharing intimate details about my  
business, my home and yet ... you  
still call me Mr. Crosse!

MARCUS

You are my friend, Mr. Crosse, but  
I try to be professional.  
Besides ... I know these people from  
my leisure time ... from church.  
It's different!

EXT. STREETS - PALISADES PARK, NJ - CONTINUOUS

Marcus takes the River Road shortcut. The street is narrower, the buildings taller and closer to the curb. The effect is an endless row of tall buildings that appear to be leaning inward, lining the street like dominoes.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

I want you to know that I don't  
see myself as Mr. Crosse.

MARCUS

I know, Mr. C.

ETHAN

Your church serves you well ...  
You get to hear awesome gospel at  
your regular services, wear your  
Sunday best threads, make friends  
and eat down home food at the  
prayer breakfasts.

MARCUS

Church would not seem the same  
without music. When I'm in the  
spirit ... you know ... feelin' the  
Holy Ghost ... it's the music that  
brings me closer to God --

ETHAN

-- and the church knows it! Bach wrote his first commissioned works by the age of fifteen and Fats Waller was a church organist ... .. at the age of eight?

MARCUS

Don't know much about Fats ... .. eight years old?

ETHAN

You talk about feelin' the Holy Spirit ... speaking in tongues ... all that stuff ... do you ever feel like God speaks to us through music.

MARCUS

God speaking through Fats Waller?

ETHAN

Fats was the son of a Baptist minister who violently opposed his interest in jazz. The good son dutifully played the hymns for services during the day, but at night, after the church elders had left, he played the new kind of jazz that was filling his soul.

EXT. STREETS - PALISADES PARK, NJ - CONTINUOUS

The limo has stopped at an intersection. A construction worker waves a red flag to hold up traffic while a long procession of caterpillars, cranes and dump trucks cross the road to a worksite on the other side.

A line of a dozen people wait on line at a bus shelter. They are slumped and lifeless, dressed in drab raincoats, oblivious to all but their financial newspapers and cell phones. Some thumb furiously on their Blackberrys, not noticing the long, black limousine pulled beside them.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

Will you get a load of those  
people waiting for a bus?  
They look half-dead!!

MARCUS

I don't know ... just workin'  
stiffs, like anybody else.

ETHAN

Stiffs is right!

MARCUS

I'm not sure I know what --

ETHAN

-- When I listen to Fats, sometimes  
I imagine God listening, with pride  
and pleasure, to the music of this  
ghetto-child prodigy soaring from  
his house of worship, late at night.

Hey Marcus ... do you still have  
that CD mix I gave you?

MARCUS

It's here in the console. Why?

ETHAN

Put it on ... the third track is  
"Ain't Misbehavin'".

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Marcus finds the CD and puts "Ain't Misbehavin'" on the  
car's stereo, played by Fats Waller on a massive organ.  
Ethan, from his ceiling remote console, opens the windows  
on the right side of the car and then the sunroof.

ETHAN

Turn it up Marcus.

MARCUS

Are you sure? Why????

Marcus turns it up and Fats is lilting out the windows.

EXT. STREETS - PALISADES PARK, NJ - CONTINUOUS

The commuters take notice and see Ethan stand up through the sunroof with torso above the roofline. Arms spread skyward, blue eyes glinting in the fall sun, white hair billowing in the morning breeze, Ethan looks like a biblical prophet, as De Mille would have us believe.

MARCUS (O.S.)

Mr. C!! Mr. C!!!

Ethan delivers his message as if it were for an evangelical tent revival. It is hard to discern if he is doing a burlesque of a preacher or if he is deadly serious. The COMMUTERS are befuddled.

ETHAN

Humans! Enjoy the creative fruits of the heavens! The man you would call a musical genius, could not explain from where his creation came. He was merely an empty vessel for our Lord's bountiful beauty to flourish.

COMMUTER#1

Is that Ethan Crosse??

COMMUTER#2

What the hell is he doing?

COMMUTER#1

Maybe they've finally run out of real estate!

ETHAN

Oh laugh, unseeing ones ...  
 ... It is you that giveth God cause to contemplate the many blessings he bestows upon mankind ...  
 ... without fanfare or recognition.

COMMUTER#2

This is the guy they were gonna' draft for governor? Where's a news crew when you need one?

ETHAN

It is you ...

Ethan points accusingly at Commuter#2 as if a lightening bolt from his forefinger would strike the unbelieving dead. The commuter shrinks from Ethan's pointed accusation.

ETHAN - CONT'D

... that maketh God reflect in  
bitter irony and disappointment.

Ethan speaks as if he is God, still pointing at Commuter#2, who continues to shrink from his gaze.

ETHAN - CONT'D

Foolish mortals ...  
... they ask me for miracles and  
I give them an abundance of  
inexplicably glorious treasures.

Yet, they fail to notice even one!

What vacuous creatures they are,  
desperately seeking fulfillment, as  
if drowning in a sea of emptiness.  
They beseech me for enlightenment,  
when divine wisdom fills the room  
in which they pray.

They kneel, cast their eyes to the  
heavens and expectantly await the  
miracles they implore ...  
... when those blessings are before  
their very eyes!

The hardhat waves the traffic on as the caravan has made it across to the other side. Marcus takes off, glad to leave behind the gaggle of confused commuters.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan withdraws from the sunroof and thumps down on his seat as the car accelerates. Marcus closes the sunroof and windows, turns around with small hint of a tear in the corner of his eye.

ETHAN

You're a lucky man, Marcus!  
I wish I had your faith.

MARCUS

But, you do Mr. C! I know you do.  
I'm not sure what just happened,  
but you had to believe some of it.  
Even if you don't think you did,  
in your heart, you meant it.  
I know you don't go to church, Mr.  
Crosse, but what you just said  
should be spoken from the pulpit.