

**BEFORE THE ROOSTER  
CROWS THREE TIMES**

Writing on a black screen:

*God is alive and well, he's just working on a less ambitious project.*

Anonymous

## **1. NEUTRAL ENVIRONMENT**

Black. Silence. Then a voice. Deep, searing.

GOD (O.S.)

Human groups composed of at least  
three people have a seemingly  
spontaneous tendency to divide into  
hostile subgroups.

The black begins to take shape, slowly, while the voice gets more  
and more persuasive, almost bragging.

GOD (O.S.)

Many people believe that I am  
unjust or cruel. Or worse. That I  
don't exist. Want to know  
something? Never trust a culture  
that believes God is dead and Elvis  
is alive.

We see something take shape in the black. Colored pixels.

GOD (O.S.)

But I am neither unjust nor cruel.  
The truth is that I don't do more  
than a croupier does at the green  
table. I hand out cards face down.  
And when everyone has their cards  
in hand, the game is set.

Slowly Handel's *Hallelujah* can be heard, getting louder.

Now we clearly see the image. It is a photograph on glossy  
magazine paper, cheap grain. It shows a young man in a white  
undershirt with open arms, his face displaying a sensual pout, rain  
wetting his clothes, the ends of his hair dyed blonde.

It's him talking. The young man better known to the world as Justin Timberlake, pop singer of recent and planetary fame.

The pout, for a second, becomes a sadistic sneer. But it's only a second.

## **2. CLASS. INTERIOR. DAY.**

Agonizing silence interrupted only by the rhythmic clacking of a pair of high heels walking along the hospital-green tiled hallway. Shoes of an old teacher approaching retirement.

Mrs. Susani is handing out the Greek translation to her students that is the in-class assignment. Her face clearly shows the irrecoverable loss of love for her job.

RIGHINI

Mrs. Susani, I swear I'm going to get eight this time!

With a look of disdain the professor proceeds to the next desk.

CALISTRI

Thanks Mrs. Susani.

Calistri, sitting in the second row, face of the bully, receives his assignment and looks at the teacher with a respectful and demure air, then proceeds to pretend to read his translation, for a second, and then releases a punch that lands with a silent thud on the back of the girl sitting in front of him.

CALISTRI

If you don't give me the translation  
I'll kill you.

The girl in front of him does not turn around, frozen in terror. Now we see her face: Francescona. Overweight. Glasses low on the nose. Braces. Oily hair pulled up in a bun. The tiny hairs on her upper lip damp with sweat.

She turns towards the back of the class in search of Arturo Ronzoni. Ronzoni, wearing an impeccable bolero, surrounded by solitude, glances icily at the class. Then his gaze meets Francescona's, and his face reveals a bright encouraging smile.

He is cleaning a recorder with a thin and long cleaner perpetually soaked in saliva, with the same care that Lee Harvey Oswald probably dedicated to his precision Mannlicher.

At the first desk, Francescona looks at her assignment. The title reads:

*"The gods are immortal, but sometimes they don't scorn coming down to earth and conversing with the humans."*

A thud is heard. It's Francescona's desk mate who with a tyrannical gesture has pushed her large Greek dictionary left with impunity at the center of the desk, and in a domino reaction catapults her school diary onto the floor. It now lies face down, showing off its multicolored cover. Francescona leans over to pick it up, extending her hand.

GOD (O.S.)

Distrust Greek.

Francescona's hand stops, hesitates for a moment.

GOD (O.S.)

A language where every word has between sixteen and sixty semantic definitions is a language created by the devil.

Francescona picks up her diary with a resolute gesture, closes it and puts it back on the desk. Then she turns towards her desk mate, to see if she too heard the voice. But the girl, wearing a hateful smile, only indicates the demarcation line she has drawn in pink permanent marker down the middle of the desk. Not really down the middle. The line is relentlessly leaning towards Francescona's side.

### **3. SCHOOL GYM. INTERIOR. DAY.**

Three rows of kids, lined from top to bottom. They are singing.

CHOIR

I SING FOR CHRIST WHO WILL  
FREE ME WHEN HE'LL COME  
IN GLORY...

They are between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, boys and girls, all busy singing a childish church hymn off-key, between blue mats and exercise bar. The last two rows are standing in a precarious equilibrium on the gymnastic risers.

CHOIR  
... WHEN LIFE WITH HIM WILL  
BE REBORN. HALLELUJAH.  
HALLELUUUJAAAAHH!

We see Francescona in the choir. Next to her, Ronzoni with his recorder, that seems to dominate in an annoying way even the loudest of voices. Other faces, all different but with one dominant characteristic in common. The irrefutable mark of dorkiness. Glasses. Concealed ugliness. High-waisted pants. Pants that are way too short. Daring color schemes. Zits.

But they sing, and they seem happy.

#### **4. CLASSROOM. INTERIOR. DAY.**

The math teacher is filling the blackboard with incomprehensible equations. His back is to the class. Behind him there is chaos. Papers fly. Blowguns are created out of pens.

#### **MATH TEACHER**

Studying a function that is simply the opposite of another helps us see things from a different point of view. Power (in the sense of a mathematical expression) is bright, it has the name of a goddess, it takes numbers and shoots them into the sky like fireworks. Then one day the logarithm shows up. He's mean, half-blind, he looks like a loser and has an accountant's name, he's up to no good but he'll show you things you've never seen.

Francescona's row instead is busy with other activities. A long row of heads that move slowly, everyone to the right, everyone to the left, everyone forward, everyone backwards, and the first one in the row holds the hypothetical steering wheel, leading the fake train. She's the only one not participating and when the fake train simulates turning right, her neighbor's head hits hers. At that point, not wanting to, she decides to join the stupid game.

The teacher turns around. Suddenly silence. Everyone stops like statues. Everyone except Francescona, who hasn't understood that the game is over and continues to move her head. Everyone

laughs. Even the teacher, a laugh that seems a little scathing, but in a second is serious and filled with compunction, before saying:

MATH TEACHER

For Tuesday study until chapter thirteen.

BASTIANELLI

But professor, Tuesday is the sit-in!

The teacher turns toward the kid who spoke, Bastianelli, looking at him like he was a vomit stain on the carpet.

MATH TEACHER

For Tuesday. Up to chapter fifteen.

Diaries are opened listlessly, in unison, like the dancers on variety shows. Francescona too opens hers. But it's a second. She is assaulted by a

VOICE (O.S.)

HALLELUJAH!!!

Yelled loudly as if five hundred people were singing it five centimeters from her ears, an ecstatic choir accompanied by a bright light. Like a flash. Francescona quickly shuts the diary closed.

The teacher shoots her a glacial stare.

MATH TEACHER

Are you not going to write your homework?

Against her wishes, Francescona reopens the diary to write the assignment. Immediately, the voice of God starts up again.

GOD (O.S.)

At the beginning of the last century,  
the mathematician Ivan Panin  
illustrated the mathematical  
structure of the Bible.

Francescona rapidly flips through the pages, finds the right one and writes as fast as she can.

GOD (O.S.)

In Genesis, particularly. Where the  
numerical value of the letters, and

the actual number of letters and words, is totally tied to the number 7 and its multiples. Given the possibility of such a combination is from 1 to 700 billion it's hard to believe that this arrangement is fortuitous. It's the hand of God, child.

Francescona slams the diary shut, the voice is interrupted, and she takes a breath as if she just avoided death.

**CUT:**

Everyone leaves the classroom. From the pervasive chatter we learn that the next day there will be a Carnival party at school. Francescona remains there, alone, at the first desk. She timidly reaches for her diary. Finally she opens it in one quick movement. The pages move by themselves in a frantic whirl. Finally they open up to a page. In the middle there is a cutout from a magazine. A picture of Justin Timberlake. Wet, aspiring sex symbol, like we saw in the first scene.

GOD (O.S.)

I knew you would come back to me. People like you all come to me. Those who endure during the day and can't sleep at night. Because God is much more seductive than the devil. The most powerful orgasms in history were had by Saint Theres—

Francescona shuts it again quickly, and the voice immediately stops. But she can't resist. And reopens.

GOD (O.S.)

And you know why you come back to me? Because I'm nice. God's main gift is a sense of humor.

And Justin smiles a large smile that horrifies Francescona, who shuts the diary, puts it in her backpack and then runs away.

## **5. SCHOOL HALLWAY. INTERIOR. DAY.**

Suede boots, bearskin skirt, leather strings wrapped around her calves, bow over her shoulder, hair pulled back in two braids, a

rainbow of feathers on her head, and an Invicta backpack over her shoulder that clashes dramatically with the rest, Francescona walks down the hallway. Dressed like a squaw. Steps heavy like boulders. Step after step, as she approaches in slow motion, she realizes that she is the only one wearing a costume. And everyone, parted along the hallway, laughs and throws on her stuff from the garbage. They trip her. She falls. She gets up again. Silent tears streak her cheeks and the lipstick marks she drew on her face.

KIDS  
FLIGHT OF THE ANGEL!!!

Three classmates, led by Calistri, jump on her with their elbows and throw her on the floor laughing, mimicking a wrestling move.

She's down again. Francescona, face on the floor, her glasses fogging up.

CALISTRI

You're gross Francesca, and in this world that's your problem.

FRANCESCONA

I won't be the one judging you,  
God will do it for me.

But her voice is so choked up that no one hears her. She frees herself from the wrestling hold and goes into the bathroom. Perhaps the verb escapes is more appropriate.

**6. RESTROOM. INTERIOR. DAY.**

Bored teenage girls sit on the windowsill smoking, and only shoot her a look, eyebrows raised.

Francescona, at the sink, turns on the water and tries to remove the lipstick. But it's useless, the lipstick won't budge. So she opens the bathroom cabinet but the only thing in there is a cylindrical package of Comet, bathroom cleaner in green powder form.

She shakes a fistful into her hand, and soaps up her cheek. Her eyes are wet. From crying, from rage, from the chemical fumes of the industrial cleaner.



She goes into a stall, sits on the toilet, and bursts out crying. She opens her backpack. She pulls out the diary. She opens it to Justin Timberlake's picture. He begins talking.

GOD (O.S.)

This is the decisive moment. How much longer until the end of the first semester?

Francescona furrows her brow, trying to win over the obvious hesitation to talking to a photograph, and then says:

FRANCESCONA

A week.

GOD (O.S.)

Let me explain something to you. This is where everything is decided. The first semester of the first year of high school.

Francescona listens very attentively.

GOD (O.S.)

There is a line that separates the submerged from the saved. And the line is drawn now. And there is no going back. Decide what side you want to be on. Save yourself now. Or at forty you'll be spending all your money on self-help books in train station newsstands. You understand?

FRANCESCONA

Actually, no.

GOD (O.S.)

I'm saying you still have a chance. Take off those clothes that make you look like a pagan who worships wooden animals, and do as I say.

Hendel's Hallelujah picks up again, covering their voices. Francescona nods her head, looking very perplexed and still sniffing.

## **7. SCHOOL GYM. INTERIOR. DAY.**

## HEAD OF THE MEETING

Because the school has to be ours! And our school shouldn't be a corporation that produces obedient personnel and temporary workers that are taken advantage of with no possibility of rebellion. We have to build our future, by ourselves, we can't leave it in the hands of people that have demonstrated that they are incapable... and we have to stop being the rebellious children of the middle-class who sit on the chair as soon as they get their first sweetener.

Dozens of students sit on the floor. A meeting is in progress, but it's obvious that that no one is really interested in what is happening. Some people make out, Ronzoni continues to clean his recorder with autistic obsession; a girl draws a tattoo with her pen on her friend's shoulder.

Francescona sits between ferocious revolutionary children and the shy group of the Children of God, the choir from scene 3. Her hair is loose, freed from the horrible bun we've seen it in until now.

Behind a desk someone gets restless and yells against the government, the administration and the toilet paper that's never there, and every curse word, which he emphasizes, is greeted by mature and united applause.

All around, his comments get mixed in with a detailed account of the tattooed girl's date with some guy, with the comments on Roberta Paoletti (the school's hottie)'s ass, with the Children of God talking about scout camp.

Francescona, in the middle of it all, seems bored from centuries. She yawns, she stretches. And here the irreparable happens.

## GIRL

The comrade in the back wants to speak.

All the heads, in unison, turn menacingly towards Francescona. Who remains frozen.

## GIRL

C'mon comrade.

In front of Francescona, Righini, one of the guys from the "Flight

of the Angel”, sends her a challenging look as he holds on to a pretty girl with round eyes who chews her gum, looking bored.

RIGHINI

C’mon dickhead. Make us laugh.

Francescona gets up, heads like an android towards the stage, mumbling a hypnotic and desperate word.

FRANCESCONA

(to herself)

Fuck fuck fuck

When she gets to the podium, a girl wearing a keffiyeh and Doc Martens hands her the microphone. The audience shifts between amused giggles and glacial silence. She has absolutely no idea what they are saying, nor can imagine what she should say. But it’s too late.

FRANCESCONA

Nothing...I wanted to say...It’s that...

A deafening sound from the microphone interrupts the beginning of her speech. It’s agony.  
In the back, a boy that can’t be seen:

BOY

LOUDER!

Dreadful silence. Eyes on her, obsessive and ferocious. Francescona gasps, and in the end plays her last card. From her backpack she removes her diary, opens it to Justin’s page and pretends to read.

GOD (O.S.)

Give yourself to me. And together we will spread disorder.

Francescona places the open diary onto the desk. She looks around. She clears her throat. And she begins to speak.

FRANCESCONA

The Calvinist ethic implies an extremely competitive vision of human relations.

The silence is now a wall of steel. Solid. Uniform.  
Heads lean forward.

FRANCESCONA  
Credits and Debits. Competition  
and punishment. This is what our  
school has been reduced to.  
Indelible debts.

The girl in Righini's arms pops her chewing gum, but Righini  
shuts her up immediately.

FRANCESCONA  
You carry them with you like a  
cross, for five years. Like an  
offence. But we have the right to  
make mistakes. And we have the  
right to be forgiven. Forgive us our  
trespasses, they teach us. But our  
education system has become one  
based on reckoning.

Francescona is gaining confidence, and her tone gets stronger.

FRANCESCONA  
And a calculating man is a vile man.  
Reckoning consists in thinking about  
losses and gains, and this leads to  
selfishness.

Disbelieving eyes and agape mouths, towards the stage.

FRANCESCONA  
He who thinks of death as a loss and  
life as a gain, is afraid of death. And  
thus, he is a coward. (*a pause for  
effect*) And we are not.

An absolutely surreal silence. Roberta Paoletti breaks it with a  
mean laugh, or at least she tries, but a menacing roar resounds in  
the room.

In the end, like a wave, a long applause takes over all the students  
at the meeting.

Francescona, completely bewildered, is swept away by the  
applause as if by a wave of happiness.

## **8. FRONT OF THE SCHOOL. EXTERIOR. DAY.**

The second part of the Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* resounds in the  
air, all a cappella, in countermelody, somewhat childlike and  
joyous.

We see two windows, right next to each other. Behind the two panes, the girl with the kefia and the boy from the meeting simultaneously appear. The two windows open in unison. The girl with the kefia throws a sheet to the boy at the next window. Together they unravel it. On the sheet, once extended, the words "Mameli School Okkupied". The boy and the girl close the windows as commotion begins outside that we cannot see. We only see the colored smoke of the smoke bombs slowly undulating upwards. We see bottles quickly travel through the frame, the arc of some solitary rock. Background voices, screaming and laughter. Then one of the windows is opened again, and Francescona leans out, taking it all in. Francescona as we have never seen her before. Smiling.

### **9. CLASSROOM. INTERIOR. DAY.**

A banner reads:

*"I refuse to believe in a God that made me imperfect only to one day punish me for it."*

Calistri, standing against the greenish wall at the end of the classroom. He's holding a small plastic orange ball.

CALISTRI

Carlo Azeglio Five points. Jesus  
Christ ten.

Like a baseball pitcher Calistri winds up and then releases the ball hitting the picture of Ciampi above the teacher's desk.

CALISTRI

(To Ciampi's picture)

Bastard.

As if it were the most natural act in the world, Calistri hands Francescona the ball. She looks at the opposite wall. She looks at the crucifix. We slowly zoom in on it. Christ on the cross. Francesca's ball hits hit dead on, and Christ falls to the ground with an unsettling organ note.

CALISTRI

Wow.

He says it with incredibly sincere astonishment, awe. And

Francesca wears a satisfied smile. No one, in her whole life, had ever said “Wow” to her.

#### **10. SCHOOL HALLWAY. INTERIOR. SUNSET.**

The sun is almost setting. Francescona and some other kids are playing “spin the bottle”. The girl that the bottle is pointing to removes the gum from her mouth and gives a boy a sensual kiss. Francescona’s eyes are wide open. As the two pull apart Ronzoni appears behind them.

RONZONI

(to Francescona)

Are we going to go sing?

A dead silence falls like a boulder on everyone. Francescona takes some time and then looks him straight in the eye.

FRANCESCONA

What the fuck are you saying? Go fuck yourself. Just disappear.

A thud. The diary has fallen onto the ground.

GOD (O.S.)

The traitors of their benefactors,  
immersed in the ice of Cocito: their  
teeth chatter from the cold and their  
tears freeze just as they emerge  
from their eyes, blinding them and  
increasing their pain.

Francescona wipes her eyes with her hand and looks down. She has betrayed her friend, and now she conceals the bitterness. While he walks away, head down, humiliated, Francescona angrily adds:

FRANCESCONA

What a loser.

Everyone around her laughs and Francescona lets out a sigh of relief. She is still on the side of the saved.

#### **11. CLASSROOM. INTERIOR. NIGHT.**

By now it’s night. The school’s prettiest girl, Roberta Paoletti, is meticulously drawing in her diary. In front of her is an array of 36 Stabilo markers, all carefully arranged in order of hue. She is drawing letters with a heart pattern that form the word “Roby”.

When she is finished, she examines the result, satisfied. Then she turns towards Francescona.

ROBERTA

Can I write you a note in your diary?

Francescona smiles like a dog at the pound that's about to be adopted, gets the diary from her backpack, looks at it and hesitates, thinking about the talking God that is within it, but then hands over to Roberta.

FRANCESCONA

Here.

Roberta flips through the diary until she stops when she sees the picture of Justin Timberlake.

ROBERTA

Oh my God.

Francescona is startled.

ROBERTA

(disgusted)

Don't tell me that you like Justin Timberlake?

A funereal music, like from a Gregorian chant, becomes more and more audible.

GOD (O.S.)

The first step towards salvation is always to renounce oneself.

Silence. Francescona looks at the picture. She swallows.

GOD (O.S.)

Go ahead. Deny me.

Francescona shakes her head. She doesn't know what to do. Justin looks at her challengingly from his glossy paper world.

GOD (O.S.)

God is for the lost. And now you are on the other side.

Finally Francescona decides. She takes the picture of Justin, crumples it up, and burns it with a lighter.

FRANCESCONA

I have no idea how it got there.

She has denied him.

GOD (O.S.)

Go. And never look back, not even  
to thank me.

Justin's picture contorts in the flames as the Gregorian chant  
loudly plays.

GOD (O.S.)

I will not punish you. Punishment  
requires a wrong. And wrong these  
days is only an abstraction.

Medieval fire that melts the glossy paper and distorts the edges.  
Smoke that rises dark and black spreads and the picture crumples  
onto itself, and finally is consumed into a gloomy bed of ashes.

Then the music suddenly stops as the first water balloon rips  
through the air. Followed immediately by a second, and then  
dozens more. The room fills with kids and laughter. They are  
playing war. The move through the hallways, together, happy,  
wet, and they empty buckets of freezing water on each other, and  
throw erasers dirty with chalk.

Calistri breaks the security glass and removes the fire  
extinguisher, holds it and uses it as if he were a Ghostbuster and  
Righini immediately follows him, taking another fire  
extinguisher. It is a mess of laughter and screams of joy, sprays of  
white, in slow motion, and the white slowly engulfs the whole  
frame, like a blinding light.

**CUT:**

The light of a new day comes through the windows. It lights up  
the room, unrecognizable, all covered in white like a blanket of  
snow, and on the ground, all scattered, dozens of sleeping bodies,  
seemingly lifeless, still, stretched out curled up, white, they  
almost look like the victims of Pompeii, and Francesca further  
down, sleeps snuggling with the boy from the meeting. Everyone  
is asleep, everything is white, and with the sunlight a glorious  
choir arises, a cappella, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, a cry of the purest  
of joys, that falls on the happy faces of the kids.