

Stimulus

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace, #2, Weehawken NJ 07086
201-770-0770 • 347-564-9998 • m.bett@verizon.net

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

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Stimulus

CHARACTERS

- LAUREL, a worker
- JEWEL, a worker
- NUB, a husband
- DEKE, a survivalist
- ALBUMEN, a politician

Stimulus

Scene 1: A Theory of Labor Relations

LAUREL, pistol in her right hand. JEWEL, burlap bag in hand.

JEWEL
You can't.

LAUREL
Bastard.

JEWEL
Yes, but --

LAUREL
Bastards.

JEWEL
Shouldn't, really -- can't --
You just can't -- shouldn't --
Not these days.
Not any days, really, but -- especially -- these
days -- homeland security --

LAUREL shivers in rage.

LAUREL
Then what? Then what?

JEWEL
Don't know.

LAUREL
Then what?

JEWEL
I said don't know.

LAUREL
Then what I want to do
is as good a thing to do
as anything anyone can do
when they do what they
have done to us --
are still doing -- are planning to do --

LAUREL raises her right arm, fires the pistol into the air. Plaster
dust falls. They both seem a bit surprised by this.

LAUREL
Hell to pay for that.

JEWEL

Better -- feel bet[ter] --?

LAUREL

The time for making believe is done.
Five shots readied, waiting.

LAUREL pauses.

LAUREL

No, not better, not really.

JEWEL

A plan, then?
To get inside --
To get past --
To get to --
He won't be alone --
Bosses are never alone --
Only five shots.

LAUREL

I don't want just him -- he's nothing --
Garbage.
What he sits at the head of --
What he commands --
All catpiss-rotted --

JEWEL

The whole shebang --

LAUREL

But he'll do
Because of what he did
To me to us --

JEWEL

Your plan, then, is to --

LAUREL fires four shots into the air. Even more plaster dust. Even more surprise on their part. As dust rains down, JEWEL moves behind LAUREL.

LAUREL

Now one left --

JEWEL pounces on LAUREL, putting the burlap bag over her head, wrestling her to the ground, kicking away the gun, pinning her.

LAUREL does not put up much of a struggle.

JEWEL

I can't let you.
Not what you and I
Went over there
To fight for --
Two tours --
If you do this
People will get --

LAUREL

I'm done --
Take it off.

JEWEL slips the bag off LAUREL's head.

JEWEL

People will get
The wrong idea --

LAUREL

And what idea
Is the wrong one
That they would be getting?

JEWEL

The feeling of assassination
Feeling so good
To do away with --

LAUREL

What would feel so good
Is the feeling of it
Feeling so right.

LAUREL struggles -- sort of -- but JEWEL will not let her up,
continues whispering into her ear.

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Scene 2: On The Origin of a Chain's Links

NUB, DEKE, JEWEL -- all seated. Plaster dust around.

JEWEL

Only time my military training
Came in useful.

NUB

The ceiling --

JEWEL

Had to use it on a fellow soldier.

NUB
Original horsehair plaster --
Original to this house --

DEKE
How'd the burlap bag figure [in] --

NUB
Original to our home!

JEWEL
I knew --
Ever since she got the pink slip --
We all got the pink slip --
Written all over her --
Everyone could read it off her --

NUB
Why do you think she --

JEWEL
I think betrayal --
I think it was the sense
Of betrayal --

NUB
She's never done --
Never acted like --
The ceiling --
I don't know --
She wasn't really going to
Was she?

DEKE
The bag.

JEWEL
She asked me to bring it.
"Just in case," she said --
A case of "just in case."

A moment of silence.

DEKE
That's her.
She wanted to make sure
You made her chicken out.

JEWEL
Maybe --
She could've shot me --
I don't know --

NUB

She wasn't the only one --

JEWEL

She didn't have a plan --
I think --

NUB

Not the only one who
Got fired --
So "why" I gotta keep asking --

DEKE

Gotta have a plan always --
Gotta have a plan because
They always have plans --
Plans spinning within plans --
You think them closing the plant
Wasn't part of a plan?
Dismantling it, packing it off to
Cheap worker heaven
Wasn't part of a plan?
Plan plan plan --

JEWEL

Stop -- just stop --
She had your gun
In her hand.

A moment of silence.

DEKE

She knew where I kept 'em.

JEWEL

Not the point.
Did you give it to her?

NUB

Did you give it to her?

DEKE

I always say, Knowledge is power.

NUB

I should hurt you.

DEKE

You won't.

NUB

I should.

DEKE

Where is it now?

JEWEL pulls it from her belt, hands it to DEKE. LAUREL enters, holding the burlap bag.

LAUREL

I did have a plan.
I did.

NUB

Honey --

LAUREL

I call "apocalypse" a plan.

JEWEL

That is not a good attitude --

DEKE

Works for God
He employs it steadily.

LAUREL

Anyone --
Tell me what attitude
Would be a good attitude.

NUB

You weren't the only one let go --

LAUREL

To me, I am the only one.

NUB

The union is going to fight [this] --

DEKE

Union --

JEWEL

You shouldn't badmouth the union --

LAUREL

I'm not gonna fix the ceiling.
I am not going to fix the ceiling.
Understand?
Nothing fixed.

LAUREL and NUB look at each other, then NUB confronts DEKE.

NUB

I know where your guns are, too.

DEKE

I think it's time to find
A new place
To put my guns.

NUB

I think it's time
You either put up
Or you shut up.

LAUREL kneels by NUB.

LAUREL

Yes.

LAUREL puts the bag over NUB's head.

LAUREL

Welcome to the club
The prisoner club
They got us all
You comin'?

JEWEL

We did that to prisoners --
Dumb fucks --
When we were over there.
It has a meaning.
It has an intention.

NUB pulls the bag off.

NUB

This isn't where
I want to go.

DEKE

Your five shots?
You grouped 'em nice.

LAUREL

I didn't even look --
That's how dangerous close I came.

LAUREL tousles NUB's hair.

LAUREL

Except for you.

JEWEL

I'm not sure you're undangerous.

NUB

You shouldn't've given her the gun.

DEKE

It all worked out.

NUB

You wanted her
To do your dirty work.

LAUREL

No not his --
My own
For us --

LAUREL touches NUB's hair again.

LAUREL

I have some distance to go
But I will go that distance --

NUB

I'll fix the ceiling.
Even if it means nothing
To do it.

LAUREL

Because that's you.

NUB

This is all new words for us.

JEWEL

The bag pulled over the head has meaning.
The bag pulled off the head has meaning.
New words -- yup, new words.

DEKE

Includes me?

JEWEL

We are thrown together now
Like rocks in a downstream rush.
Right?

LAUREL

Right.
Rush.

NUB

But to where?

JEWEL

Someone asked the centipede
"Which leg do you move first?"
Couldn't walk after that.

LAUREL

She means the answer comes
Before the question.

DEKE

Thinking --
That's what they want you to do.
Thinking's the enemy.
Action!

NUB

You said
We should always have a plan.

DEKE

That too.

NUB

Do you have any idea --

LAUREL

No I don't.
First time in my life.

DEKE

Action!

NUB

I'm doing the plaster
First.

LAUREL

You do that.

NUB

I will.

LAUREL strokes his hair.

* * * * *

Scene 3: In the Cloud

ALBUMEN on a swing. Flag pin on his lapel. Red politician tie.

ALBUMEN

These are hard times.
Economically.
No doubt about it.
We need to be active in
Helping the less fortunate.
We also have to make sure
The fortunate stay fortunate,
Give them the relief they need
To feel relieved.
Things will pick up --
The fundamentals are sound --
But in the meantime --

ALBUMEN stops swinging.

ALBUMEN

I think I've said enough for today
To keep my position secure.
The contributions
Have rushed in like rocks
Tumbling down a stream.
Altogether a good day's work.

LAUREL, NUB, JEWEL, and DEKE, hooded or masked, creep onstage and kidnap ALBUMEN. The burlap bag goes over his head. They hustle him off.

DEKE gives the swing a push. It sways.

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Scene 4: Contra-Dictions

ALBUMEN, bagged, bound to a chair under a light.

LAUREL, NUB, JEWEL, and DEKE, still hooded or masked, around him.

JEWEL pulls the bag off his head.

ALBUMEN

What do you want?

LAUREL

We want to buy you.

ALBUMEN

Are you a constituent of mine?
Any of you?

DEKE

Shut up.
The only constituents
You listen to have
Numbers to the left of
The decimal place.

ALBUMEN

Not true.

JEWEL

True.

LAUREL

Say it.
Say "true."

ALBUMEN

All right, so true.
So what?

LAUREL

That's why we want to buy you.
So you'll work for us.

ALBUMEN

You can't afford me
All you can do is
Vote me in or vote me out
Assuming the voting machines
Say what you tell them
To say.

DEKE

And you got that covered.

ALBUMEN

I have that base covered.

NUB

Put the bag back
On the bastard's mug.

JEWEL puts the bag back on ALBUMEN's head.

NUB pulls off his mask. So does LAUREL, who gives NUB a significant look.

JEWEL and DEKE take off their masks.

LAUREL

You never swear.

NUB

I fixed the goddamn
Horsehair plaster in the ceiling

JEWEL

He never swears.

DEKE

He's swearing now.

NUB

I made it right
After what you did

LAUREL

And what I did was wrong?

NUB

I thought so.

NUB points at ALBUMEN.

NUB

Now I don't think so.

DEKE

What're you saying?

LAUREL

What're you saying?

NUB

I don't know
What I'm saying
Only that I need
To say it

A moment of silence.

ALBUMEN

What are you all talking about?

NUB

We're talking about
Your fate.

DEKE

I wouldn't hope for much.

NUB

It's about repairing the plaster
It's about repairing anything
At all
What's the point
The fucking point
Is what it's about --

NUB rushes toward ALBUMEN with intent to do harm. JEWEL intercepts him, wrestles him to the ground, in the process knocking ALBUMEN over as well.

ALBUMEN

I am completely helpless here!

JEWEL holds NUB down, speaks to ALBUMEN.

JEWEL

Sorry about that.

That's when JEWEL looks up to see LAUREL holding a gun on her.

LAUREL

Let him be.

JEWEL

You'd do that?

ALBUMEN

What the Christ is going on?

LAUREL

I don't know
What my proclivities are
These days.

JEWEL

Deke!

ALBUMEN

You've let me hear your voices
You've used one of your names
How do you think
This will end?

JEWEL

Deke!

DEKE goes up to LAUREL with his hand out for the gun. LAUREL buries the barrel-tip of the gun in his palm.

LAUREL

You lookin' for
Nail holes?

DEKE pulls a gun out that had been tucked in his belt against the
small of his back. He doesn't point it at LAUREL.

DEKE

Put up or
Shut up, Nub,
You said.

ALBUMEN

Deke and Nub!
Deke and Nub!

DEKE

Shut up.
Puttin' it up now, Nub.

JEWEL

I'll let him rise.
Let's turn the swords
Into ploughshares, shall we?

LAUREL and DEKE put their guns away. JEWEL whispers to NUB.

JEWEL

Not now, amigo.
Not yet, amigo.

NUB gets up, sets ALBUMEN upright.

NUB

Are you afraid?

ALBUMEN

I'm always afraid when
Undecided people hold guns.

JEWEL

Except you support gun ownership.

ALBUMEN

May have to reconsider.

JEWEL

Maybe we just need to decide.

JEWEL looks at LAUREL and NUB.

JEWEL

It seems you two
Are driving the oncoming train.
Say what.

LAUREL kneels in front of ALBUMEN.

LAUREL

We can't buy you?

ALBUMEN

I am already bought.

LAUREL

Then what handed are you?

NUB

Which hand do you use
For the bribes?

ALBUMEN

Right.

LAUREL nods to NUB.

LAUREL

Untie it.

DEKE

This is what you call a plan?

JEWEL

Improvised explosive device.

DEKE

Those are three words
I'd prefer not to be near.

ALBUMEN's right hand is free. LAUREL puts her gun into it, raises it so that the barrel is pressed against her temple.

LAUREL

Do you know
What you are doing
At this particular
Moment?

ALBUMEN drops his hand. NUB puts it back into place, puts his face an inch away from ALBUMEN's.

NUB

Don't. You. Dare.

LAUREL

Do you know
What you are doing
At this particular
Moment?

ALBUMEN

I know what I'm doing
Physically
I don't know why I'm doing it --

LAUREL

You get money
From the company
That just cut out
Our hearts.

JEWEL

With a pink slip
Except it wasn't pink
It was just a
"Get the fuck out
Your job is going to China
You're not
Get the fuck out now" slip.

NUB

That color is blood.
Those words are bloody.

LAUREL

And you voted for --

ALBUMEN

All right!

DEKE

Blowback.

JEWEL

Yep.

LAUREL

Voted to give them a tax break
For breaking our backs --

DEKE

Blowback up your ass
It seems.

ALBUMEN

All right!
My arm is tired.

LAUREL

So pull the trigger
And finish the job
The company started --

NUB

Defend yourself.
We are thieves in your house.

DEKE

You did say that
Snot-breath
"Gun-owners have the right
to defend themselves" --

LAUREL

You're working for them
So finish the job.

DEKE puts his gun against ALBUMEN's temple.

JEWEL

What're you doing?

DEKE

Improvised explosive device.

ALBUMEN

I just shit my pants.

DEKE

Yes you did.

NUB

So? It's in your hand.

Standoff. Standoff. Without warning, ALBUMEN leaps up, the chair still attached to him. DEKE is knocked back, LAUREL's gun drops from his hand, and ALBUMEN dances the crazy dance, screaming and flinging himself around until he stands exhausted, heaving, slobbering.

DEKE sidles up to him, gingerly unfastens the other hand so that the chair drops away, and steps back.

DEKE

IED.

Everyone waits.

LAUREL

That's how it feels
Every day --
Pressed against the brain.

NUB

Being the good people
The salt of
The folk
The ones who get up every day

DEKE

How many times in your
Speechifying have you
Praised the common man --

NUB

Being the good people
Has turned us into fools.

DEKE

Blowback.

JEWEL

We should hose him down.
He's gone feral.

ALBUMEN takes off the hood, surveys his accusers.

ALBUMEN

I am beginning to have
No memory of this
I am beginning to acquire
Amnesia
It's one of the things
We do best
I do well.

NUB

Survival skill.

In the distance sounds of police sirens.

ALBUMEN

I also have
A radio chip
At the base of my neck
Implanted
I always want to be found.

Sirens grow louder.

DEKE hands LAUREL his gun, which she points at ALBUMEN. DEKE goes to ALBUMEN to check this out, nods yes to everyone. He reaches into a pocket, pulls out a small pen knife. NUB hugs ALBUMEN from the front, pinning his arms, while DEKE quickly cuts out the chip.

DEKE tosses it to JEWEL.

DEKE

Toss it into the canal.
Meet us back at the house.

JEWEL leaves. Everyone waits. The sirens come closer, then trail off. LAUREL still holds the gun on ALBUMEN.

DEKE

What are we going to do with you?

ALBUMEN

You can't buy me off.
But I could buy you off
All of you.

NUB

With what?

ALBUMEN

What you all want most.
A job.

DEKE

And suck off the
Same tit you do?
No thanks.

LAUREL

Now that we hold the snake
We only have one choice
Because snakes can only
Be trusted to be snakes.

LAUREL walks closer to ALBUMEN.

LAUREL

The only question left
Is how to kill
The snake in question.
And for that
We need to take him home.

* * * * *

Scene 5: Tweet, Tweet, Tweet

A barrage of images of a trussed-up ALBUMEN, hooded, with two naked women and two naked men, all hooded as well, all released into the cloud -- accompanied by the appropriate hard-edged music.

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Scene 6: Plan

LAUREL and JEWEL in a hard downlight. They are equipped with snipers rifles and all the appropriate gear.

LAUREL
Finally my army training
Comes in for something useful.

JEWEL
Mine too.

LAUREL
Any CEO of any
private or public corporation
who gets a salary bonus --

JEWEL
Unjustified by reason or morality --

LAUREL
We take them out.

JEWEL
Because they are nothing but thieves.

LAUREL
Let's go.

LAUREL and JEWEL exit.

NUB and DEKE in hard downlight wearing straightforward black business suits, white shirts, and thin black ties. And sunglasses.

NUB
We provide logistical support.

DEKE
We provide the cyber assault.

NUB
We make sure that they're secure.

DEKE
We do our small part
To rage against the machine.

The appropriate music rises as DEKE and NUB dance to the strains of the apocalypse.

Lights out and transition.

For the transition, a sound design that indicates something like an audio tape being rewound -- time itself is being rewound.

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Scene 7: Reprise

We are back at Scene 1.

LAUREL, pistol in her right hand. JEWEL, burlap bag in hand.

JEWEL
You can't.

LAUREL
Bastard.

JEWEL
Yes, but --

LAUREL
Bastards.

JEWEL
Shouldn't, really -- can't --
You just can't -- shouldn't --
Not these days.
Not any days, really, but -- especially -- these
days -- homeland security --

LAUREL shivers in rage.

LAUREL
Then what? Then what?

JEWEL
Don't know.

LAUREL
Then what?

JEWEL
I said don't know.

LAUREL
Then what I want to do
is as good a thing to do
as anything anyone can do
when they do what they do
to us -- have done to us --
are still doing -- are planning to do --

LAUREL raises the gun to fire it into the air, but JEWEL grabs her arm and pulls it down -- tight embrace again.

JEWEL

There will be hell
To pay if you do.

LAUREL

The plaster.
Original.

JEWEL

What do you want?

LAUREL looks at JEWEL.

LAUREL

I'm all right.

JEWEL lets her go.

JEWEL

Really. Want.

LAUREL

I had a dream about how
God would sort them out
If we gave Him the whatall
To sort through
Nub, Deke were in on it

JEWEL

A dream.

LAUREL

Not the right word.
A vision.

JEWEL

How does it begin?

LAUREL

Really?

JEWEL

After all we've been through?

LAUREL

Okay.

LAUREL raises the gun and fires once. Plaster comes down.

JEWEL

Hell to pay for that.

LAUREL

In the vision
We were already paying
They say sacrifice should be shared
I agree
Sacrifice should be shared
Share and share alike

LAUREL fires again. Plaster comes down.

LAUREL

Whether they want it or not
We'll share them some sacrifice
And help God sort 'em out
If they refuse the offer
My vision

JEWEL

How did it turn out?

LAUREL

They got their share
It was only a vision, though
Real would be harder

JEWEL

Because we can't shoot 'em all.

LAUREL

But we don't need to.
Just need to be terrorist
In the right focused way --
Maximize the guilty.
Make the élite tremble.
What do we have to lose?
They've lost us so much.

JEWEL holds out her hand. LAUREL hands her the gun. JEWEL fires once in the air. Plaster.

NUB and DEKE run in.

JEWEL

Laurel's got some thoughts
She wants to share
About pink slips.

NUB

The plaster.

LAUREL

Ain't important.
Come, boys,
Come let us reason together
For I have had a vision.

In a separate light appears ALBUMEN, neat, spruced-up, smiling. The four turn their gaze on him.

Blackout, with the appropriate music for apocalypse.