

In The Name Of

by

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In The Name Of

CHARACTERS (ethnicity does not matter in casting; roles can be doubled where needed)

- JIMMY SLOH, agent, The Department
- SARAH GRIG, agent; The Department
- MR. BALKIS, special agent in charge, The Department. He speaks with an accent -- Southern, perhaps.
- MR. SPURGEON, field agent, The Department. He speaks with an accent -- Irish, Scottish, or Jamaican would work.
- SECRETARY LAXMETER, Secretary of The Department
- MICHAEL LAXMETER, her son
- FLETCH, LEE, TORRES, BENT, LOUDER -- SWAT officers in a special unit of The Department but also members of The Movement
- HANNAH, Movement member; also plays WOMAN AT THE DEMONSTRATION and LANDLADY
- 4 UTILITY ACTORS, who will move on scenery and play various roles (SOLDIERS, ASSASSINS, etc.)

[NOTE: The image of The Movement should be like those platoon movies emblematic of a melting-potted America: one Italian, one Jew, one corn-fed Midwest Protestant, and so on.]

TIME

- Just past the present day, deep into the panopticon.

SETTING

- Total surveillance and interaction.

NOTES

- The "Insignia" mentioned in the play is an Insignia of the Nation, worn much like the American flag pin is now worn by police officers, fire fighters, etc. Its design is up to the director and his or her team, but wherever possible, the Insignia should be omnipresent.
- The SWAT Officers should have a special uniform of some kind to set them apart from the army.
- The music used for the scene transitions should always have an energized quality to it, sometimes through sheer volume and percussive drive, sometimes through ironic comment on the action, sometimes by a contrasting quietness (a simple snare drum, say, such as the beginning of Paul Simon's *Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover*). Choice is up to the director.
- SOUND DESIGN: In addition to the music and suggestions in the script, the director is free to come up sound design-soundscape ideas as needed.

In The Name Of

Act I, Scene 1: The Cruciform Deletion of Jimmy Sloh

Stage is dark, but when the light comes up, it is a hidden basement room. On the floor, lumber, sturdy but not top-grade. Two pieces are crossed and bolted, though the audience will not know this until they are picked up from the floor. Three saw-horses. A wooden box with hardware, such as bolts, various tools, etc. Other items as desired to show the discarded nature of the room. From off-stage, the voice of SLOH yells old cheerleading chants.

SLOH

"Two - four - six - eight / Who do we appreciate?" Me - me - me!

A click, and the stage bursts into buzzing fluorescent light. SPURGEON backs into the scene pulling a red wagon, in which stands SLOH, still chanting. Following is BALKIS. Both SPURGEON and BALKIS wear something like pea coats and black leather gloves. On their pea coats is an Insignia large enough to be noticeable. SLOH is dressed in a tee-shirt and jeans, sneakers with no socks.

SLOH

"Hit 'em high / hit 'em low / hit 'em where / their cherries grow."

SPURGEON

Sloh, shut your hole.

BALKIS

That's enough, Jimmy.

SLOH

"The ref brought his lunch -- eat it, ref, eat it!"

BALKIS

Jimmy.

SPURGEON

You can't wake the dead here, so stop your blabbering. It bothers me to no end.

SLOH

"Who" or "whom" do we appreci[ate] -- ?

BALKIS

At this point, Jimmy Sloh, if I were you --

SLOH

You're lucky you're not me, then.

SPURGEON

Step off. Now.

SLOH jumps out of the wagon. SPURGEON puts the wagon to one side, then sets up a video camera for recording.

SLOH

(indicating wagon)

That could be a collector's item.

BALKIS

In a sense, it is, isn't it, Jimmy. It has collected you, has it not?

SPURGEON

It has collected the likes of you --
(spits)

-- to us.

A moment of suspended silence.

SLOH

The likes of me. It's whom. "Whom do we" --

SPURGEON

Rhymes with tomb.

BALKIS

I do want to thank you for --

SLOH

My coöperation.

BALKIS

Yes.

SLOH

I've always coöperated with you.

BALKIS

You have always coöperated, Jimmy, in this strange new world of ours.

SLOH

Post-Attack.

BALKIS

One of your -- perhaps your most --

SPURGEON

His only.

BALKIS

-- saving grace.

SPURGEON
Not like you have many to spare.

SLOH
Always flexible.

SPURGEON
Lacking a spine, you mean. Nothing personal,
Jimmy, but you have to admit --

BALKIS
(holds up his hand)
I wanted to thank you.
(to SPURGEON)
He made our work easier in this, our Post-Attack
world. Until now -- of course. Ready, Spurgeon?

SPURGEON
Now uncoöperative.
(to BALKIS)
Yes.

SLOH
You mean I have a spine now.

BALKIS
You can mean this however you like, Jimmy -- you
have claimed that freedom for yourself. A
wonderful thing, isn't it? That freedom. To
allow yourself to believe whatever crosses your
mind, to make yourself feel good about what is,
well, not really so very good -- for you -- at
this moment -- but you do now have that freedom!

SLOH
Balkis --

BALKIS
You'll notice that I am finished.

SLOH
Post-Attack.

BALKIS
(pointing to camera)
Now, look over there. Look! Repeat after me --

SLOH
(chanting)
"Whom do we appreciate / Me, me, me -- "

SPURGEON comes behind SLOH and puts him in a full nelson and then sits
on a sawhorse, SLOH in his lap as if a ventriloquist's dummy.

BALKIS
(to SPURGEON)
Let him raise his head a little. Now, repeat
after me. "I, Jimmy Sloh -- "

SLOH
(gutteral)
"I, the fucked one -- "

SPURGEON bends his head forward painfully until SLOH can hardly breathe.

BALKIS
Relent a little, Spurgeon. Now, Jimmy, again:
"I, Jimmy Sloh -- "

SLOH
(hoarsely)
"I, Jimmy Sloh -- "

BALKIS
"Do hereby declare myself an enemy combatant."

SLOH
"A fucking enemy combatant -- "

BALKIS
(not letting him finish)
"A foe of the Nation -- "

SLOH tries to reply, but BALKIS barrels through the pro forma declaration. SLOH sputters to a stop, scarcely able to breathe.

BALKIS
"An abettor of terrorism and giver of comfort to
the opponents of freedom. In the name of the
Victims of the Attack, in the name of the
Obligations of the State, and under security laws
passed in the defense of the Homeland, I declare
myself null and void."

BALKIS indicates to SPURGEON to release SLOH, which he does.

BALKIS
Your declaration of freedom was an act of beauty,
Jimmy -- like most useless, artistic gestures.
But now --
(indicating SLOH's clothes)
Off.

SLOH
Balkis --

BALKIS

You'll notice that the prosecution is finished.

SPURGEON

Off with them.

SLOH does not make a move.

BALKIS

Jimmy. Jimmy.

SLOH still does not move to take off his clothes, speaks right to the camera.

SLOH

"Elevator, elevator -- we got the shaft!" Hey, what is that drooling from your sticky lips?

SPURGEON

That's uncalled for --

SLOH

Ripe sons-a-bitches, you are. To do this to me. After all I --

SPURGEON moves toward SLOH again, but BALKIS stops him.

BALKIS

After what, Jimmy? Pal? What you had was never very good -- always wanting a lispin hand to pet you and stroke you, a lubricated voice praising you, always wanting a pal, your crotch and your belly --

SPURGEON

Creature of appetite --

BALKIS

-- too often calling the shots for your brain --

SPURGEON

-- a downfall in these times.

SLOH

Until I reasoned -- until I thought! --

BALKIS

And as I said, a most wonderful, useless, antique gesture in our strange new world of Post-Attack. Off, Jimmy. No other choice, Jimmy. We are not forever patient.

SLOH hesitates, then relents.

SLOH

Fine.

SLOH slips off his tee-shirt.

SLOH

It'll be fucking good to get it over.

BALKIS

And the rest, please -- you should not have to be told something so -- elementary.

SLOH kicks off his sneakers, unbuttons his pants, slips them off. SPURGEON puts the clothes in the wagon.

Meanwhile, BALKIS and SPURGEON set up the three saw-horses: one upstage, one stage left, one stage right. They then pick up the crossed pieces of lumber -- clearly a crucifix -- and place the head and arms against the saw-horses, the foot of it downstage.

SPURGEON brings over the wooden box, then walks over to SLOH and in one swift movement pulls SLOH's underwear to his ankles. He then knocks SLOH's calf, indicating for him to step out of them, which SLOH does. SPURGEON throws the underwear into the red wagon.

SLOH

I won't! I fucking defy you! I --

Before SLOH can finish his sentence, SPURGEON smoothly disables him. BALKIS and SPURGEON lay SLOH on the cross, SLOH choking but struggling until SPURGEON punches him in the groin. BALKIS pins down one arm.

From the box SPURGEON takes a ball peen hammer and a spike and drives it through SLOH's wrist. He then hops over and does the same to the other wrist. BALKIS steps away while SPURGEON ties SLOH's feet to the wood with rough rope, then moves the video camera for a close shot.

BALKIS

The bleeding will be quick, Jimmy, since we have crushed some vital anatomical infrastructure. A long-tested method for empires.

(speaking into the camera)

This will close out the case of Jimmy Sloh for treason.

(in an almost ritualistic tone)

In the name of the Victims and the State, and pledging our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor in the terrorcide -- so be it.

BALKIS and SPURGEON step downstage, SPURGEON rubbing his hand.

BALKIS

What?

SPURGEON

Bruised it.

BALKIS

Let me see.

BALKIS takes SPURGEON's hand, examines it.

BALKIS

Ice. I'm sorry it hurts. I'll get you ice when we get back.

SPURGEON gets the wagon.

SPURGEON

I appreciate that.

SPURGEON exits with wagon. BALKIS takes from his coat an official-looking form with a seal and molds it over SLOH's face.

BALKIS

Everything breeds its paperwork.

BALKIS pokes a hole through it where SLOH's mouth is, then exits.

Lights tighten on SLOH's head. The harsh INTAKE and OUTBREATH, the paper moving in and out. SOUND EFFECT comes up of this breathing, louder and louder and louder until it suddenly cuts out.

A suspension of time.

Then SLOH gets off the cross, stands, peels the paper off, faces the audience naked, arms outstretched, bloodstained, joy on his face.

Lights bump to black and transition music kicks in.

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Act I, Scene 2:: Jimmy Sloh Is Captivated By Balkis

Transition music morphs into CROWD SOUNDS of a political demonstration: chants, music, etc. The area where the protesters stand is roped off, forcing them to crowd together. In front of the CROWD, angriest of all, is the WOMAN.

STROBE LIGHTS show the crowd: young, angry, with placards sporting slogans like "FUCK FASCISM" and "CAPTIAL PUNISHMENT FOR CAPITALISTS." Crowd chants as well: "There's no way we're gonna pay!", "It's about time to kill the swine!" Louder and louder, strobes moving faster and faster until the strobes bump out, lights bump up, crowd in full chant, CROWD SOUNDS continuing underneath.

SLOH moves through the crowd. By this time SLOH has insinuated himself behind the WOMAN and snakes his hand around her waist so that

he can grope her breasts. She tries to fend him off, but the crowd is so dense she has nowhere to move, and he begins to hump her in time to the chants.

SLOH & CROWD

It's about time to kill the swine! It's about
time to kill the swine! It's about time to kill
the swine!

WOMAN

(drowned out)

Stop it! Stop it!

SLOH has his right hand down her pants, stupid grin on his face. Then, a harsh light, CROWD SOUNDS out, AIR HORNS blow, and BENT, LEE, TORRES, and SPURGEON along with the rest of the protestors, except for the WOMAN, rip off their jackets to reveal themselves as undercover SWAT POLICE, batons thrashing until everyone is belly-down on the ground.

SPURGEON puts a boot on SLOH's neck, pinning him. BENT helps the WOMAN sit up. BALKIS enters, surveys the "catch," then gestures. The rest of the POLICE move off, taking the barricades. LEE stays. TORRES has a video camera and tapes the following action.

BALKIS gestures again. SPURGEON takes his foot off SLOH's neck, drags him up to his knees. BALKIS takes SLOH's right hand and smells the fingertips, then has the WOMAN smell the fingertips.

BALKIS

(to WOMAN)

Yes?

WOMAN

Not supposed to be like this. This is not
supposed to happen --

BALKIS

(to BENT)

Escort her, nicely, to the detention area --
she's had a shock to her idealism.

(to WOMAN)

We are doing the best we can.

BENT and WOMAN exit. BALKIS hovers around SLOH, then gestures to SPURGEON, who hits SLOH so that he falls forward onto his hands and knees. BALKIS snaps his fingers and speaks to SLOH as if he were speaking to a dog.

BALKIS

Come here, boy. Come here, come here. Come
here, come here.

SLOH lifts his head, and SPURGEON smacks him again. He drops it.

BALKIS

Come on, pal. Come on over here.

SLOH crawls on his hands and knees. BALKIS slaps his own right thigh.

BALKIS

Heel, boy. Heel. Pull in tight. That's a boy.
What do you think?

SPURGEON

I think he'll do. I think he'll do what you want
to be done.

BALKIS

And do, and do, and do, no doubt. Sniff, my boy.
Good. Now bark. Good. Again, in a continuous
manner.

SLOH barks again, but this time BALKIS raps him on the back of the
head.

BALKIS

Now, bark.

SLOH hesitates, then barks but at the same moment pulls away.

BALKIS

Good.

SPURGEON

He's a quick idiot.

BALKIS

Ain't nothin' but a hound dog!

SPURGEON

Rockin' all the time.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 3: Jimmy Sloh Is Dealt To

Transition music: Elvis Presley. LEE and TORRES exit. SPURGEON
brings a chair, slams SLOH into it, pulls out a bungee cord, and wraps
it around SLOH and the chair. He then wheels in a contraption that
has what looks like Excalibur hanging from a thread and puts it behind
SLOH so that the sword dangles right over him. Affixed to the front
of the device and pointing at SLOH is a little spy-cam. Music bumps
out as the lights bump up to frame only a terrified SLOH.

BALKIS

You don't know the rules now, do you?

SLOH

Didn't know there were new rules.

SPURGEON

Of course.

SLOH

My pals told me you can always find radical pussy at a demonstration -- the juice of injustice flowing -- you know --

BALKIS

With pals like those --

SLOH

They were kidding me, eh?

SPURGEON

Dawn comes late, eh?

BALKIS

You were at a demonstration we had disallowed.

SPURGEON

Of course we didn't tell the yahoos who showed up that. Why the fuck should we?

BALKIS

Bad choice on your part to be there. The new rules, that you obviously don't know about? Really, only one new rule: hide or not hide, we seek.

SLOH

What's that over my head?

BALKIS

The truth, well-hung. You lie to me --

SPURGEON

I slit the thread.

(chops him in back of neck)

Those without a spine, it slides in like butter.

SLOH

If you got a spine? Not that I --

BALKIS

It still slides in like butter.

SLOH

Spine don't matter, then.

SPURGEON

Spine is like an appendix -- better if you take it out.

SLOH

Am I in a lot of trouble?

BALKIS

You are in trouble's ninth circle, Jimmy. Do you know what that reference refers to?

SLOH

No.

BALKIS and SPURGEON stare at SLOH as long as they want.

SLOH

What can I do, you know, to get my ass out of this sling? I really don't want --

SPURGEON

What can the slug do to unsling his ass?

BALKIS

Would you like a job?

SLOH

A job? A job?

BALKIS

In service? To your country?

SLOH

A job? You're dicking me, right? Your version of spanking the monkey, right?

BALKIS and SPURGEON just look at him for as long as they want.

SLOH

How much does this job, like, pay?

SPURGEON

Listen to him!

BALKIS

(to SPURGEON)

Remember, old rules.

SPURGEON

The pay, butt-suck, is that we don't bury you on the first date.

BALKIS

Mr. Spurgeon. That camera up there? Technology is a marvelous thing, Jimmy. But technology can only -- probe so far. Our enemies -- your enemies, if you decide to accept -- move in camera-less shadows -- your eyes, your ears --

SLOH

You want me to be, like, a spy?

BALKIS

You will become, like, an agent of The Department, part of our Total Information Network.

SPURGEON

In service to your Post-Attack country.

SLOH

Be like you two?

BALKIS

You can aspire --

SPURGEON

But probably not.

SLOH hesitates for a moment.

BALKIS

Cut.

SPURGEON

Cutting away.

SLOH

No!

SPURGEON

Sorry.

SLOH yells -- but the sword does not fall, though there is a GUILLOTINE SOUND EFFECT as if the sword fell. Instead, SPURGEON simply puts his hand on SLOH's neck and pets him. He leans down to laugh in his ear in staccato syllables.

SPURGEON

Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. First paycheck.

As SPURGEON mock-laughs, SLOH barks in concert, looking at BALKIS for affirmation. BALKIS takes an Insignia and plasters it to SLOH's sweating forehead, then kisses SLOH on the cheek.

BALKIS

It takes one on whom one has been shit to shit on others. Welcome aboard, Jimmy Sloh.

BALKIS holds out a form, the one pasted over SLOH's face in Scene 1. SPURGEON unwraps the bungee cord, and SLOH signs the form without looking at it. SPURGEON pulls out a tee-shirt and hat that bear the Insignia and hands them to SLOH, who takes off his old tee-shirt and puts on the new one.

Guillotine SOUND again and lights bump out, then transition music, something pseudo-Middle Eastern, like Loreena McKinnett.

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Act I, Scene 4: Jimmy Sloh Begins His Life's Work

In separate spots, five ACTORS dressed in what passes for Western misunderstanding of Middle Eastern men: turbans, beards, etc. ACTOR 6 is dressed as an "ordinary" person.

SLOH

Boo!

ACTOR 1 jumps in fright.

SLOH

Do you love this country?

ACTOR 1
(quizzical)

What?

SLOH

Do you love --

ACTOR 1

Of course I do --

SLOH

Hup, not quick enough.

SLOH slaps in Insignia sticker on the ACTOR's forehead.

SLOH

Enemy. Guards!

ACTOR 1

I'm not --

BENT and LEE come in, take away ACTOR 1.

SLOH

One for me.

(to ACTOR 2)
Allahallahallahallah --

ACTOR 2
What?

SLOH
Do you love Western culture?

ACTOR 2
Well, the Arabs did invent the zero --

SLOH slaps in Insignia sticker on the ACTOR's forehead.

SLOH
Mocker! Guards!

LEE and TORRES come in, take away ACTOR 2.

SLOH
I love my job!
(addressing ACTORS 3,4,5)
Do you believe the Arabs invented the zero?

ACTORS 3, 4, 5
Yes.

SLOH
(pointing)
Fundamentalists!

BENT and LEE spray mace in everyone's faces and drag them off.

SLOH
(to ACTOR 6)
And what about you? You look normal.

ACTOR 6
You know, like you're shredding the fucking Bill
of Rights -- what the fuck are you guys fucking
doing --

SLOH
Blasphemer!

SLOH does a Three Stooges two-fingers to the eyes, and TORRES drags
ACTOR 6 away.

The GUILLOTINE SOUND. BALKIS enters and tosses SLOH a "treat." SLOH
smiles. BALKIS gives him a gentle slap on the cheek. Transition
music.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 5: Jimmy Becomes Homeless

SLOH's dirty apartment. His LANDLADY, older, agitated, appears "foreign." SLOH enters, cocky.

SLOH
(startled)

Yo.

LANDLADY

Rent.

SLOH

It's due?

LANDLADY

Several months.

SLOH

Well -- I'm sorry to have to do this. But not really.

SLOH pulls an official-looking "report" out of his jacket pocket, opens it.

LANDLADY

My payment?

SLOH

Do you have a brother in Cairo?

LANDLADY

What?

SLOH

Ibrahim?

LANDLADY

I have only sisters.

SLOH

Yeah, sure. And your father --

LANDLADY

Don't slander my father!

SLOH

-- is a nuclear scientist who traveled to, well, a country we don't like.

LANDLADY

My father was a baker in Queens! What do you have there?

SLOH

That's government prop[erty] -- hey!

LANDLADY

As I was thinking. "The Office of Information Awareness" -- what is that?

SLOH

Give it back!

LANDLADY

What is that?

SLOH

Very top se[cret] -- c'mon!

LANDLADY

This isn't me. You got the wrong name.

SLOH

Really?

LANDLADY

I'm a citizen -- didn't you know that?

SLOH

Yeah, well -- I know what you are. You're a fart-sucking parasite of the rentier class! Yeah. Got that at a rally for social justice -- enemies of the State, yeah!

LANDLADY

I want you out.

SLOH

You can't --

LANDLADY

Out.

SLOH

Wait!

LANDLADY

Don't tell me you'll get me the fucking rent -- I wouldn't take dirt from you if I had the last seeds on earth. Out!

SLOH

You can't kick me [out] --

LANDLADY in fact kicks him, hard, right in the back of the knees, and SLOH buckles to the ground, where she gives him several more well-placed kicks, then stops. She rips the "report" in half and drops it on SLOH.

LANDLADY

Balkis is going to get an earful.

SLOH

No!

LANDLADY waits.

SLOH

Don't tell Balkis! Don't. Jesus Christ Buddha tits -- All your frigging names sound alike, anyway. Can I at least take --

LANDLADY

You touch anything, I'll break your metacarpals twice.

SLOH

Fine -- fine -- We're going to nail you, you know.

LANDLADY

Like they nailed your balls to the wall?

SLOH

You got a mouth.

LANDLADY

Look who I have talk to. Slither out of here.

SLOH retreats, pointing threateningly -- no effect. Lights out on LANDLADY.

SLOH

Every dog needs a lower dog to kick. Shit!

Video arcade lights and sound come up. SARAH GRIG sits at the arcade. Transition music.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 6: Jimmy Must Find A Pal

SLOH jumps into playing a video game that requires shooting/ blasting things. GRIG sits at a table with a glass of water. A second table, two chairs: SLOH's. A beer, several empty bottles.

SLOH

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck -- got you, you lousy
towelhead. C'mon, c'mon -- up the alley --
around -- over -- where are you? where are you?
bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam!
bam! bam! Ah, yes, yes, yes, yes.

SLOH pauses, moves the gun around as if following a target, then
fires.

SLOH

Got you, you sand snake, you Bedouin bunghole!
Yee-haw, yee-haw, yee-haw!

The word "yee-haw" finally breaks down into BRAYS, like a mule.

SLOH looks over at GRIG, who looks away from him, but slowly, with no
embarrassment at being discovered looking at him.

SLOH

Love these freaking video ex-tra-va-ganzas, you
know? Great for venting, you know, the bullshit
of the world that gunks up your veins? Man who
invented these should be made a hero of the
nation. Probably keeps down the murder rate.

SLOH makes an especially important kill, to which he raises his arms,
shouts continually "yo, yo, yo, yo", lifts up his shirt and wags his
pelvis at the game.

SLOH

Got the fucking Madam Saddam [pronounced mah-DAHM
sah-DAHM] himself! Oooh, free games racking up!
Care to pop a few? That deliberate dead-eye of
yours -- look, close, then turn away -- I've
gotten that a lot, you know? From people most
likely better than you, higher up the food chain
than you. Not one not for blood or guts? Then
you must be an angel -- "yoo-neek" in this world,
maybe.

SLOH slowly brings the gun to his shoulder.

SLOH

Even as a kid -- taken away by the sleek recruit
lingo, you know, the sleek military way they'd
throw the ropes down in the adverts and sleekly
fly to the ground like -- well, avenging angels.

SLOH points the gun at GRIG.

SLOH

The promise of being all a person could be --
while getting paid for it. That was a me I
dreamed that could be. But now --

SLOH reaches out to punch in his next game.

SLOH

Now I have the sloppy seconds of this machine.
Fuck the dream.

Suddenly, SLOH stands up straight, looks straight at the machine, then
at GRIG, who in fact has been watching him and now looks away again.

SLOH

I think this game should be yours. It's only a
game, angel. Everyone's veins need a good
reaming out. Or are you never one for a reaming
out? Nothing hurt by asking.

SLOH stands to a sloppy attention and salutes the machine, puts the
imaginary gun back into its imaginary holster.

SLOH

An act of amazing -- something -- on the part of
Jimmy Sloh here, being that he will not use his
racked-up games but leave them for the next
doinker to find unplayed, thus giving said
doinker the feeling that it is, indeed, his -- or
maybe her -- lucky day.

SLOH goes back to his table, slugs from his beer.

SLOH

What do you think of that? Why do you come to a
video arcade and don't play? Pose of waiting for
someone -- drinking either vodka or water --
water, I guess, for you.

(takes a swig, last one)

I need a room -- do you have a room I could
share?

GRIG

No, I don't.

SLOH

No, you ain't got a room, or no, you ain't got a
room to share? I'm not finicky about a three-by-
six floorspace to crap out on, you know? I'm
compact. Grave-size. I can even curl up baby-
like if the floorspace --

BALKIS enters, carrying a very small leather case, wearing an elegant black coat with the Insignia on it.

BALKIS
Hello, Jimmy.

SLOH
Hello, hello, hello!

BALKIS
Much luck, Jimmy?

SLOH
Got Madam Saddam. Twice.

BALKIS
If only reality could accommodate us so easily.

SLOH
Yeah!

BALKIS
Get me a chair, will you? Ms. Sarah Grig?

SLOH brings over a chair. BALKIS sits, opens case, takes out a Palm Pilot or other PDA and a rather elegant looking stylus. He will check off items.

GRIG
Yes.

BALKIS
Mr. Balkis.

SLOH
Do you mind if I -- ?

BALKIS
No, Jimmy -- I called you to this meeting, too.

SLOH sits. Video sounds and lights out; light remains on the three of them.

BALKIS
Ms. Grig, I'm glad you are here together --

SLOH
About my room --

BALKIS
On the agenda, Jimmy, but not at the top.

GRIG
He asked me if I had a room.

BALKIS

That's because our mascot here --

GRIG

He works for you?

SLOH

I'm not a mascot.

BALKIS

Works with us, yes.

SLOH

I'm not a fucking mascot.

BALKIS

It takes all kinds, Ms. Grig, to keep track of all the kinds we have to keep track of these days, Post-Attack.

ACTORS now begin to set up for the next scene, using SLOH's table.

SLOH

I'm not a mascot.

BALKIS

If you insist. Jimmy, our non-mascot, was recently evicted for calling his landlady -- ah, yes -- a "fart-sucking parasite of the rentier class." Is that accurate?

GRIG

Can we move on with --

BALKIS

We should.

SLOH

Wait. She's getting stroked a lot nicer than you ever stroked me. Why do you rate? All I get are slaps.

BALKIS

Go ahead -- tell him the story-- we have time.

GRIG

Do I have to?

BALKIS gives her an appraising stare.

BALKIS

It does not hurt in our line of work to make a practicing show of pity.

SLOH

I don't really need the real thing -- really, I don't --

GRIG gets up from the table.

SLOH

Good.

GRIG

This is why I do not have to bark.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 7: How Grig Shows She Is Not Like Jimmy

A restaurant, fancy. SECRETARY LAXMETER and her son MICHAEL at a table, frozen. Wine, bread, menus. LAXMETER is dressed in a black business suit; on her left lapel is the Insignia. GRIG in but not of the scene. She puts on a black vest, buttoned, and drapes a cloth over her forearm: a waiter.

GRIG

Secretary Laxmeter, the head of The Department.

BALKIS

Your ultimate boss, Jimmy. And mine.

GRIG

Her son, Michael. He hates her. She's invited him to lunch to once again try to make up.

GRIG snaps her fingers. The scene begins as if a recording has been released from "pause."

MICHAEL

Touching upon said newly legislated terrorists, where is your ever-vigilant Spurgeon?

LAXMETER

You don't see him?

MICHAEL

I'm sure he's body-guarding quite well even if you can't see him --

LAXMETER

Where is he?

MICHAEL

My mother afraid to be "x-ed" out --

LAXMETER

Be quiet!

MICHAEL

-- just when she's balanced on her cusp of greatness.

LAXMETER

Where is he?

MICHAEL

Rubbed out by, let's say --
(indicating GRIG)
-- the waiter.

GRIG stands to attention but does not move.

LAXMETER

Two years have not stopped you being the shit you were two years ago when you left.

SLOH

That's pissant soap opera, man --

MICHAEL

And yet you're sitting here with me now.

LAXMETER

Because I never lose hope that my son will take some pride in what I have found myself having to do, what I have been called to do.

MICHAEL

I loathe what you do.

SLOH

Ooooooh!

MICHAEL

Have done. Are going to do. Whether you feel called or not.

BALKIS

Ms. Grig.

LAXMETER and MICHAEL freeze. Snap of the fingers. The scene, further along.

SLOH

Why sit there with that mother?

MICHAEL

When I got your beseeching letter I think I was struck by a momentary familial blindness --

SLOH

Pop go the fangs!

MICHAEL
-- but when I saw you walk in here, your
constipation-faced bodyguard --

SLOH
(whispering)
Excellent!

MICHAEL
-- eyeing everybody to protect the Secretary from
anti-terrorism, it all went -- pfft! It seems I
still think you're as vile as I thought you were
then.

LAXMETER
And all this before the appetizers.

MICHAEL
Did you really expect anything more or less?

SLOH
In the ribs!

They open their menus again. GRIG, seeing the lull, makes for
LAXMETER's table, grabbing a chair enroute.

BALKIS
Notice her initiative.

LAXMETER
Who are you? Who are you? Spurgeon!

MICHAEL enjoys the interruption. SPURGEON enters, trips.

MICHAEL
(to GRIG)
What is this dagger I see before me?

SPURGEON
Damn!

GRIG
I've followed you here because I have --

SPURGEON
Get away from her!

SPURGEON falls again, gets up.

MICHAEL
(laughing)
Iced and wasted while he gains his feet!

GRIG

I've followed you because I have a favor to ask of you.

SPURGEON

Get away!

MICHAEL

I'm sure your bellowing will blow her away, Spurgeon.

GRIG

My name is Sarah Grig.

LAXMETER

Everyone has to go through my office.

MICHAEL

Sarah Grig, one of the commoners, mom --

LAXMETER

Everyone has to --

MICHAEL

-- come to petition her government.

LAXMETER

-- go through my office.

MICHAEL

Give her leave.

GRIG

I want to offer you --

MICHAEL

Grig the commoner has an offer, mom.

LAXMETER

I am not going to listen to you unless you do it the right way.

SPURGEON

Up. Now.

MICHAEL

For Christ's sake, Sarah Grig, spit it out! Spurgeon, keep your pistol in your pocket. Go on! Go on! Now! Or forever hold your peace!

SPURGEON looks at LAXMETER, who nods. He stands to the side.

SPURGEON

I'm right here, if needed.

GRIG

Thank you. I want to be an agent. An agent of the government.

MICHAEL

A spy, she means.

The silence of LAXMETER and SPURGEON.

MICHAEL

You both look like the other farted and neither will admit it.

(to GRIG)

You're going to have to be much, much, much more forceful.

GRIG

I'm out of work. And out of money.

MICHAEL

(prompting)

And so you've been drawn, thanks to my mother, to join the one growth industry in the Post-Attack country of today.

GRIG

Yes.

MICHAEL

You want to be part of the one third of a nation spying on another third of the nation with the third third of the nation spying on the spiers, and a fourth third hovering like the gods.

GRIG

If I could explain it to you.

MICHAEL

Information hotlines, neighborhood watch groups, interlaced databases, summary detentions, little moles and great big moles burrowing through the dung heaps -- all care of my mother --

GRIG

If I could explain.

SLOH

(echoing GRIG, overlapping)

If I could explain --

MICHAEL

So, spread cheeks, extend tongue, and lick, lick, lick --

SLOH

Slut-butt nasty, man!

MICHAEL

-- such is the state of their art, and such is the state of your ambition. And from such a pretty one. Am I right?

GRIG

If I could explain. On my own.

BALKIS

This was priceless.

GRIG

May I? Thank you.

(clears throat, stands)

The price of liberty is everlasting vigilance against those who would steal it from us. It is. When I was a child it was a golden age. My father told me so, showed me how it worked, said to me that here anyone with a drive and an ambition could have success that other people in other places could only imagine -- and would be jealous about. But things -- changed. I had that drive, had that ambition -- and yet others got the success. Something new had come into being, and it was not good. Things, ways had been lost, broken. I saw my father dry up and blow away. And now, after the Attack, even less good, what with those surrounding us committed bodily and soul to our destruction. I am not going to sit here and watch more things be taken away from me. From us. Everlasting vigilance. And that is why I want to be an agent.

(to BALKIS)

I had practiced it a lot.

SLOH

I'm fucking impressed -- now about my room --

MICHAEL

Impressive shamelessness.

GRIG

Careful what you say about people's beliefs.

MICHAEL

Your "beliefs" are like underwear, Sarah Grig -- off and on depending upon who's groping.

(to LAXMETER)

Which means she is definitely your man, so to speak.

BALKIS

And that, Jimmy Sloh, is why she isn't made to bark. Thank you, Ms. Grig.

LAXMETER and MICHAEL freeze. GRIG moves back to SLOH and BALKIS.

SLOH

Wait. Wait!

BALKIS

What?

SLOH

The Secretary and her son -- what happens? Come on, just a coupla minutes more. It's a great story, don't you think -- son hating the mother and all that ja-zazz. C'mon. C'mon!

GRIG snaps her fingers.

LAXMETER

There are no clean hands in this business, Michael.

MICHAEL

And when you became anointed --

LAXMETER

Appointed.

MICHAEL

As the patriotic leader of The Department --

LAXMETER

I personally think democracy is still worth defending.

MICHAEL

If we had any left to defend.

LAXMETER

You said you had one more point to make?

MICHAEL

I'm leaving. This country. Soon.

SLOH

Wow.

MICHAEL

Your country isn't my country anymore. Everyone seems to have the same face you do --

LAXMETER

Which is?

MICHAEL

Full of fear and hobnails and a mouth giving up any name they can think of.

LAXMETER

I wish you wouldn't leave.

MICHAEL

The price of attachment to you is eternal vigilance.

LAXMETER

I'm going to the country house this weekend. We can talk there. Come and stay.

MICHAEL

We should order.

BALKIS snaps his fingers. Lights out on LAXMETER, MICHAEL, and SPURGEON, who exit. Table, chairs, etc. off as well.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 8: Grig Gets Her Assignment and Jimmy Is Samaritan'd

The scene continues without break.

SLOH

They're like mosquitoes at a blood bank. That's sad. But he's got a spine.

BALKIS

Enough.

SLOH

He does! I think I admire him.

BALKIS

Enough.

SLOH

(to himself)

I do.

BALKIS

One more thing before we get to our business -- and take this as a warning, Jimmy.

SLOH

What?

BALKIS

Why, Sarah? I will call you "Sarah" now.
(indicating SLOH)
For him: why do you want to join?

SLOH

Yes, Sarah, my angel -- why spy?

GRIG

The real reason?

BALKIS

As far as "real" operates in the real world.

GRIG

There are too many delays.

BALKIS

Your time is rapidly not becoming your own, which means that there are no such things as delays for you. But I'll make a nod to courtesy, one last time: tell him the real reason.

(to SLOH)

Listen.

GRIG

Because doing this job sends a thick shiver of unprocessed pleasure right down my spine into my groin.

SLOH

A pretty fucking good answer, Sarah.

BALKIS

I agree, Jimmy.

SLOH

(to GRIG)

Told you you were an angel. Good. Now, my room
--

BALKIS

(to SLOH)

Because our work cannot be sustained by anything close to the heat of principle or duty.

BALKIS shuts off his PDA, puts it in the case.

BALKIS

Though I tell you, it is difficult impressing that upon people, now that we've extended our

outreach to take in many we might not have taken in before.

SLOH

He means doinkers like me.

BALKIS takes a manila envelope out of his case.

SLOH

Now, about my room --

BALKIS

I have made my note, Jimmy.

SLOH

You don't understand -- "about my room" because I have no room!

BALKIS

I appreciate everything you've done.

SLOH

Well, it would be nice to be shown it.

Enter FLETCH, LEE, TORRES, BENT, LOUDER in uniform and full equipment. Their uniform bears the Insignia. They arrange themselves in conversation. FLETCH is in the middle. HANNAH stands to one side, rag in hand. Freeze.

BALKIS

You are on the top of my next list, Jimmy --

SLOH

Hey!

BALKIS

Nothing you do goes unnoticed by me.

SLOH

Hey!

BALKIS

Now, Sarah, we like to have our associates plowing the fields, so to speak, in order that our harvests be regular and full.

BALKIS takes photos out of manila envelope, hands one to GRIG.

BALKIS

Do you know the man in the middle?

A STROBE flashes, SOUND EFFECT of a SHUTTER. Group shifts to new position.

SLOH

No photo for me?

SLOH moves to see the photo.

GRIG

No, I don't recognize him.

BALKIS

Any of the men surrounding the one in the middle?

Another STROBE, SOUND EFFECT.

SLOH

Let me see.

BALKIS

Hands off, Jimmy.

GRIG

None of them, either.

BALKIS

The woman?

SLOH

No great looker.

BALKIS

Bent, Lee, Torres, and Louder -- he's from out West.

The OFFICERS exit.

BALKIS

They -- and others -- congregate at a small coffee shop --
(giving her a piece of paper)
-- at this latitude and longitude. The woman, Hannah, owns it. Like the coffeehouses of old -- caffeine as the drug and spur of revolution --

SLOH

Beer's got a radical bite. Sorry.

BALKIS

They call themselves the Movement -- capital "M" -- and something is brewing there --

SLOH

Brewing! Coffee-house! Got it!

BALKIS

Watch them, Sarah. Bring your reapings to me, Sarah. Consider me the lord of the manor taking in his tithes on a very regular basis. Clear?

GRIG

Yes.

BALKIS packs his things and rises.

SLOH

My room --

BALKIS

But before you go, Sarah, I have an assignment for the two of you. To share. Please stand, both of you. That's better.

(to GRIG)

Do you have any hobbies?

SLOH

I like to --

GRIG

No, I don't.

BALKIS

I do. Bonsai. Do you know it?

ACTOR holds up a perfect bonsai tree, light tight on it.

BALKIS

Snip, clip, shape, discipline -- all about reducing essences to essences. Quite relaxing.

Lights out. ACTOR exits.

BALKIS

A hobby, Sarah, is a comfort.

GRIG

So I've just been told.

BALKIS

Consider it strongly.

BALKIS looks at GRIG for several seconds -- longer than one would socially do, examining her. GRIG does not look away. SLOH watches, rapt. Then BALKIS takes out an Insignia and pins it to her jacket, like a corsage.

BALKIS

Goodbye.

BALKIS exits.

SLOH

We are now in service together. Pal?

GRIG

I suppose so.

SLOH

Don't get a hernia being too excited.

GRIG

We can be pals. Comrades.

SLOH

Good. Because I don't have pals. Do you?
Tricky business, ours -- a need for bonding,
right? So now we are bonded.

GRIG

All right.

SLOH

And when I say that, I mean that. I may be a
half-finished bastard about a lot of things, but
when I have a pal, I am not half about it at all.
You and me, in service -- back-to-back,
protecting each other's back. This is serious.

GRIG

Agreed.

Unexpectedly, SLOH punches GRIG in the flesh of the upper arm, hard.
Then he points to his own arm.

SLOH

Go ahead. If you want to be my pal. I told you,
nothing by half.

GRIG, with unexpected force, slams SLOH hard enough to knock him back.
He laughs, but before he is ready, GRIG slams him hard again --
clearly vicious. SLOH laughs again, but not quite so heartily. GRIG
slams him a third time, then lights into him, then stops sharply, as
if a switch switched off.

SLOH

All right! All right! Christ, meant to be
friendly! Blood brother shit without the blood!
Why does everyone have to pound on me to prove a
point? Back yourself off!

GRIG backs off, waits.

SLOH

Is it really true about you not having a room?

Transition music. Table, chairs off. Park bench on. GRIG exits.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 9: Jimmy Meets The Movement And Is Moved

A street. A park bench. Clothes come flying onto the stage, and SLOH changes into ratty clothes while SWAT OFFICERS TORRES, LEE, and BENT, dressed in uniform bearing the Insignia and full equipment, watch him. If possible, a low buzz of CHATTER through their radios. SLOH throws back clothes he won't use.

SLOH

(dressing)

A Mr. Balkis "special" assignment -- what's so special about some shovel and some shit?

(eyes them; they eye him)

"Probe their reactions -- pinch 'em, poke 'em, prod 'em -- see what the Movement does." More frigging pain, that's all this is going to be. More frigging pain for the fucking dog that gets kicked when a dog needs to get kicked. "Jimmy will be in and out, on 'special' assignment." Fuck, fuck!

SLOH finishes, a deep breath, then exits and enters at a different entrance.

SLOH

You are all a bunch of bucket shitters, you are!

LEE

(hissing)

Get the hell out of here!

SLOH

Ass-wipe ossifers --

TORRES

Do you know him?

PETER

-- waiting for the knife to kiss your ass!

NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIER, in riot gear, enters opposite, sees SLOH.

SLOH

Christ, Balkis! You didn't have to send in the fucking clowns, too --

SLOH runs, chased by the SOLDIER in a kind of quick-march.

BENT

Christ!

LEE

What?

BENT

You heard him! He's right --

LEE

Don't --

BENT

That prick-head is right on the fucking nose.

LEE

Don't be too hard on yourself. Or us.

BENT

Why not? Either of you tell me why we are
dicking around playing at being the --

A second SOLDIER in riot gear runs in and points his visored face at the OFFICERS. TORRES points in the wrong direction, and the SOLDIER exits.

TORRES

(looking around)

Because our work --

BENT

Our "work" is a crock! We sit around and pretend
--

TORRES

No!

BENT

Well, what then, pray tell, amigo?

TORRES

Our work is grounded on being in service to --

BENT

"The great cause of freedom."

(to LEE)

His fucking constant mantra.

LEE

It's not a bad one.

SLOH runs through, razzes the OFFICERS, pulls up his shirt, etc.

SLOH

You'll all be fucking grave-meat by the time you guys do anything!

BENT

Get out --

SLOH

(dances away from BENT)

No fucking movement from the Movement. The moveless Movement.

(starts swiveling his hips)

I got better fucking movements than the Movement. My fucking bowels move more than the Movement --

SLOH moons the OFFICERS but suddenly spies the SOLIDERS somewhere.

SLOH

Fuck!

SLOH exits in a rush. BENT follows for a few steps, then stops.

LEE

He's going to get himself killed.

BENT

So why aren't we protecting him?

TORRES

In service to a great truth, I was going to say.

LEE

I second that. I truly do. The Constitution's been betrayed, hasn't it? Hasn't it?

BENT

Every day on every shift.

LEE

And we took an oath -- we said the words, we made a promise!

BENT

It was always just about getting a good job and a pension, not --

TORRES

And now it won't be. And now you won't be.

LEE

So why not sign on to set it right side up? That's what Chief Fletch said to us.

BENT

But the pretending -- all the time -- this
nothing-doing I hate!

SLOH runs on again, stares at the three of them.

SLOH

Shit-eaters. Piss guzzlers.

The TWO SOLDIERS chase him, running in quick-step. SLOH nimbly bolts.
The three stand silent for a moment, digesting SLOH's analysis.

BENT

Where is he?

LEE

Chief Fletch will be here.

BENT

I have some complaints --

TORRES

When don't you?

BENT

About the way we have been forced to break things
up -- break up meetings -- people -- the people
we're supposed to be --

(to TORRES)

-- that's what our fucking "service to a great
truth" has come to --

SLOH runs on again.

SLOH

Why are you fucking over the protestors? Because
you'll take it up any hole, won't'cha?

SOLDIERS appear on the other side. SLOH razzes them, turns and exits.

SOLDIER 1

That slimebag is a terrorist.

SOLDIER 2

A terrorist is a person thinking he or she can do
whatever he or she wants to do.

LEE

Your new marching orders, hey?

BENT

Smear that bastard! Go! Go!

SOLDIERS exit.

BENT

Yesterday --

LEE

That one boiled me.

BENT

Giving "protection" when Immigration rounded up -
-

TORRES

Head 'em up, move 'em out --

BENT

What was it this week? left-handed swarthy types
who --

(in a silly accent)

-- "speak-a funny"?

(to TORRES)

That is not what I signed up for --

Enter FLETCH, dressed as they are, but wearing the white hat of a police chief. He is followed by LOUDER, dressed as they are. SLOH runs in, goes to say something, looks over his shoulder, and bolts.

FLETCH

The hunt is on, I see.

BENT

When is it ever off now?

LEE

Good to see you, sir.

BENT

I've got some complaints. Sir.

FLETCH

This is Louder. From the West Coast. They have started to organize there, like us -- he's here about linking the Movement --

LEE

Welcome, friend.

LOUDER

We're small -- all these laws rolled down so quickly after the Attack --

BENT

Like a frigging iron rain.

LOUDER

-- but something is happening.

FLETCH

And like it or not, Bent, we are the keepers
right now of that most bitter virtue, patience.

SLOH comes on again to insult them, but the SOLDIERS come from behind
him, scoop him up by the arms, and carry him over to FLETCH and the
others.

SOLDIER 1

Notice how his tongue no longer flaps.

SOLDIER 2

Notice how silent he has become.

SLOH does not speak, looks at the OFFICERS with only partly mock
terror on his face. Several beats as the SOLDIERS wait. BENT looks
at FLETCH, who looks back but says nothing. BENT decides to act.

BENT

(to SOLDIERS)

Uh, you can put him down.

The SOLDIERS do not put him down.

BENT

(to SLOH)

You have been making a big mistake fighting
against what is in your best interests.

SLOH

Not like that --

BENT hisses at him, as if to say, "Shut up!"

SLOH

They don't care if --

BENT

You'll ruin all of us if you continue to think
that thinking for yourself is what this country
of ours needs now after the Attack.

SOLDIER 1

Do you have an answer for him?

BENT

(holds up his hand)

It'd be better for you to just go home, enjoy
what you have there, go to your work the next day
with a --

BENT fumbles for the word.

TORRES

Chastened.

BENT

Chastened heart.

SOLDIER 2
(to FLETCH)

Sir?

BENT

He's dangerous to nobody.

SOLDIER 2
(indicating BENT)

Is he speaking for anybody?

BENT
(to FLETCH)

They can release him, right?

FLETCH does not answer.

SOLDIER 1

Sir?

BENT

It's all right. Really. He can go.

SLOH
(hissing)

That's not right, that's not right, you've got to
--

The two SOLDIERS exchange looks, confused by BENT's leniency and FLETCH's silence. They turn and escort SLOH away.

SLOH
(hissing, to FLETCH)

Hey!

FLETCH

You can let him go.

The SOLDIERS stop.

SOLDIER 1

I'm afraid we can't unless you --

FLETCH walks up to SLOH and punches him, hard.

FLETCH
(very quietly)
And get your head on straight, you bucket
shitter.

LEE
Sir!

TORRES then kicks SLOH several times.

TORRES
(equally quiet)
Get out of my sight, traitor!

The SOLDIERS drop SLOH, who falls to his knees. SOLDIER 2 takes out a
form.

SOLDIER 1
Better.

SOLDIER 2
We'll be watching for you.

SOLDIER 1
By the way, are you left-handed?

SLOH holds up his right hand. FLETCH signs the form.

SOLDIER 1
Next round-up, then.

SOLDIERS exit. FLETCH helps SLOH up.

SLOH
(to BENT)
You almost bought me the farm, you pisshead!

(to FLETCH)
Your guys don't know crap from crayolas!

BENT
Who the hell are you?

SLOH
Common man.

FLETCH
(to BENT)
Can't you tell who he is?

SLOH
I am what I said I am.

FLETCH

No you're not.

(to BENT)

He's our test. He's the man who fell on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

SLOH

And who the fuck would that sad sack be because that ain't me!

FLETCH looks long and hard at SLOH.

FLETCH

A Sunday school teacher was telling her class the story of the Good Samaritan, in which a man was beaten, robbed and left for dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. She described the situation in vivid detail so that her students would catch the drama. Then she asked the class, "If you saw a person lying on the roadside all wounded and bleeding, what would you do?" A thoughtful little girl broke the hushed silence. "I think I'd throw up."

SLOH

What? What?

FLETCH

But, lo, behold -- we haven't done that as we look at you. You don't belong there. And you don't belong here. Not yet, at least.

SLOH

What in Christ's piss are you jabbering about? I'm one of the people --

FLETCH

We saved your ass -- you know that. We didn't have to. It would've been safer not to. You think your keeper would've cared? We did you, a complete and foul-mouthed stranger, a service.

SLOH

I don't get the fuck of why you did that. I don't. But thanks.

FLETCH gives him a firm shove, and SLOH goes to exit but actually climbs onto a ladder to eavesdrop, occasionally glancing at GRIG.

LEE

You didn't have to do that to him!

FLETCH
Weren't you watching them?

BENT
(to LEE)
What they wanted to do to us, not him, because of
my --

LEE
Because of your what?

BENT
Charity makes you a suspect now, Post-Attack!

LEE
It made me sick. We can't go around pummeling
the people we're supposed to be helping!

BENT
Chief Fletch did the right thing. Torres did --

LEE
They can't be right!

FLETCH
Torres.

TORRES
To resist Them, we'll have to be like Them --

LEE
That's stupid!

TORRES
-- be more than like Them.

LEE
Even stupider.

TORRES
Use violence for peaceful ends. Use pain for
future pleasure. So as to keep Them off our
scent.

LEE
That is [absurd] --

FLETCH
Only the best of us -- the best in us -- will be
able to remember our original reasons why as the
fight makes us hard and necessary.

(to LEE)

You should have done what we did yourself -- vomit afterwards, scratch your face, wail if you want -- but still have done it.

TORRES

Doing that is not what I would want. For any of us. Just to know that about me. But what I want may not be what I really need to want.

BENT

In service to a great truth.

(to FLETCH)

What do you want us to do?

FLETCH

Patience is a minor form of despair, isn't it?

BENT

I think, Chief, that it ain't so minor.

They exit. SLOH climbs down. ACTORS set up GRIG's room.

SLOH

Why do these guys have the feel of pals about them? Eh?

SLOH takes several steps toward where they exited. GRIG climbs down.

SLOH

Fletch -- he saw -- something --

GRIG walks up to SLOH.

GRIG

There are certain things you should keep to yourself.

SLOH and GRIG exit into the next scene. Transition music.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 10: Jimmy Cannot Match Sarah's Ambitions

GRIG's room, not much different from SLOH's room earlier, though neater, and with a table. SLOH on a blanket on the floor, GRIG in the narrow bed. SLOH rubs ointment into his bruises and grimaces whenever he hits a particularly tender place.

SLOH

I appreciate your letting me. Awake?

GRIG

Yes.

SLOH

I said thank you.

GRIG

All right.

SLOH

That's the longest hand-off of words we've had since --

GRIG

That ointment stinks.

SLOH

Blame Balkis. He pitched me like a penny against the wall.

GRIG

Each according to his own worth.

SLOH

I'm sniffing out the terrorists for him, it's that plain and simple, and I'll tell you that since I've been looking I have been finding them everywhere, in places low and high and everywhere. If they the least little criticize, I brand them right then and there "terrorist," and if they go on defending themselves, appealing to rights and whatnot, their name goes up to him. Mr. Balkis. Many names up to him by now.

(pauses in rubbing)

Weird, though, today -- that guy, Fletch? That look -- wait -- wait --

SLOH puts the ointment down, picks up two water glasses and puts them to his eyes, like binoculars.

SLOH

That look -- microscope-like, you know -- like he knew. Said, "You don't belong there -- "

GRIG

I heard.

SLOH

" -- and you don't belong here. Not yet, at least."

GRIG

If you said nothing at all, you'd still talk too much.

SLOH

I didn't know what the fuck he meant! But I knew he meant something! I could feel it!

SLOH looks at GRIG through the glasses.

SLOH

What do you think he meant?

GRIG

Put the glasses down.

SLOH

(glasses still up)

What do you think --

Like a shot, GRIG is off the bed and has the glasses in her hands before SLOH realizes anything. Slams them down.

GRIG

And you don't listen.

SLOH

Story of my life, Sarah.

GRIG returns to the bed.

GRIG

Your life is shit and yet you go on.

SLOH

You don't agree with doing that?

GRIG gets up again, takes a leaf of newspaper, and from it makes an origami pirate's hat.

SLOH

So what bank do you put your money in?

GRIG

In nothing but my own appetite, Jimmy.

SLOH

Nothing else?

GRIG

I wouldn't know how else. In all this dismantling of rights. In all the sheep lifting up their necks for the knife. In this tarring of everybody with terror. In the categorizing and

butchering done in the name of the good. I will find what my appetite wants. That's our difference, Jimmy. I won't ever bark.

SLOH
(half-joking)

Woof, woof.

GRIG
I won't stay here for very long. Where there is an "up" to go, I will go up.

GRIG puts on the hat.

SLOH
I think you're going to be whatever you want to be. I've never dreamed of wanting anything like that. Never.

GRIG
Because you settle for pals.

GRIG puts the hat on SLOH.

GRIG
Encompassed in a nutshell -- that's me. The rest everybody else can have -- let them all be sticky with their needs. But not near me.

SLOH
I can't believe you believe that having pals is -
- If being alive's just all piss and blather and nothing else --
(shakes his head)
I believe there will always be a pal somewhere --

GRIG
I'm going to sleep.

SLOH grabs the ointment, moves away from the bed. Lights out on the bed. He rubs in the ointment meditatively.

SLOH
A fucking shooting star. I think that what you want blows a hole right through me in a way like nothing has -- that kind of wanting so clear. Pure. No, no -- that's not right. Not like nothing has. The look that guy Fletch gave me -- "You don't belong there. And you don't belong here. Not yet, at least."

SLOH shakes his head to clear it.

GRIG
(from the darkness)
Are you now headed in the right direction, Jimmy Sloh?

SLOH
I would say so if I knew.

GRIG
Sleep.

Caps ointment, takes off hat.

SLOH
I don't know.

Transition music.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 11: Jimmy Is Wholly Unmasted

In separate spots, five ACTORS dressed in what passes for Western misunderstanding of Middle Eastern men: turbans, beards, etc. ACTOR 6 is dressed as an ordinary person. SLOH wanders into the scene, preoccupied, wearing the Insignia.

ACTOR 1
(hissingly)
Come on!

SLOH
What? Oh, all right. Do you love this country?

ACTOR 1
Better.

(quizzical)
What? Of course I do --

SLOH goes to say "Hup, not quick enough. Enemy. Guards!" as he had before, but something grips him like a hand around his throat, and nothing comes out. Light out on ACTOR 1, exits. SLOH moves to the next person.

SLOH
Do you love Western culture?

ACTOR 2
Well, the Arabs did invent the zero --

SLOH goes to say "Mocker! Blasphemer! Guards!" as he had before, but something gets caught in his throat, and nothing comes out. Light out on ACTOR 2, exits. SLOH moves to the next people.

SLOH
(addressing the rest)
Do you believe the Arabs invented the zero?

ACTORS 3, 4, 5
Yes.

SLOH goes to say "Fundamentalists!" as he had before, but a pain shoots up the side of his neck, and nothing comes out. ACTORS exit. ACTOR 6 just looks at SLOH, then exits.

BALKIS enters and tosses SLOH a "treat," but it bounces off him. BALKIS gives him a hard slap on the cheek, exits.

Immediately the video arcade lights come up, and he aims at the target -- but cannot pull the trigger. He puts the imaginary gun back into its imaginary holster. Arcade lights out.

SOLDIER 1 and SOLDIER 2 drag in the naked body of a MAN, clearly post-crucifixion, a bloodied sack. They pull as if the body is incredibly heavy. They pass in front of SLOH.

SOLDIER 1
Done nothing wrong -- right!

SOLDIER 2
To speak out against -- wrong!

SOLDIER 1
Since any little disturbance of what is
established --

The SOLDIERS let go of the MAN but continue moving across the stage with the same movements as if they still had the MAN in their hands.

SOLDIER 2
Only makes it easier for them to infiltrate and
undermine. Therefore, a loose mind --

SOLDIER 1
Is a necessary thing to waste. Rule Number 1.

SOLDIER 2
And also Rule Number 2, referring to Rule Number
1 for guidance.

SOLDIER 1
So sayeth.

SOLDIER 2
And sayeth again and again.

They exit. SLOH stares at the MAN. The MAN sits up and stares back at SLOH.

A series of really fast STROBE flashes, then the guillotine SOUND of the sword falling. Blackout.

INTERMISSION

Act II, Scene 1: Sloh Observes How The Movement Will Be Set Up

LAXMETER's country home. LAXMETER and MICHAEL are pitching horseshoes, all mimed -- sound effect, acoustically made or done electronically, when the shoe hits the pitch, such as a clang against the stake, etc. Off to one side, a table with a water pitcher, glasses, an extra pair of horseshoes, and binoculars. In the center of the table is a perfectly sculpted bonsai tree. Outdoor chairs. Off to the other side is something like an Adirondack chair, indicating another part of the outdoor space.

MICHAEL

Anyone servicing you these days?

LAXMETER

Michael.

MICHAEL

Do you?

LAXMETER

Your word choice sometimes.

MICHAEL

Shtup, then? Hot dog in the bun? A push in the bush? And does he take his socks off?

LAXMETER

He actually reads to me.

MICHAEL

Such as?

LAXMETER

Poetry.

MICHAEL

During?

LAXMETER

He finds a stanza or two before and after quite sufficient.

MICHAEL

A sufficient sockless reader -- you're coming up in the world.

LAXMETER
(just missing a ringer)

Damn!

LAXMETER goes to pour a glass of water.

MICHAEL
(continuing to pitch)
How did you find me?

LAXMETER
(sitting)
We do use more than directory assistance.

MICHAEL sits as well, but not for long -- fidgety. Through his next lines he makes use of the binoculars.

MICHAEL
I was trying hard to be out of your sight, and thus out of your mind. But then -- your letter. The day I received your letter.

LAXMETER
You're going to tell me a story.

MICHAEL
I had just come home from work -- you probably have that recorded in my dossier.

LAXMETER
You don't have a dossier.

MICHAEL
Liar. I live in an apartment complex --

LAXMETER
I know that.

MICHAEL
Four towers, so that from any window you can see the other three. Wretched -- but within my means. On slow evenings I drag out the binoculars and troll. All these everyday framed dramas -- except for this couple -- man, woman -- with a somewhat nightly ritual.

LAXMETER
You're going to tell something I don't want to hear.

MICHAEL
Binoculars, too, and they stand naked at their respective windows watching each other

masturbate. They time it to lift off together -- well, you can see his liftoff, though she could be faking it -- but they do time something for some kind of mutuality.

LAXMETER

And you watch?

MICHAEL

Not alone in that.

(turns binoculars backward)

Binoculars ping-ponging from window to window -- multiple sets of binocularized eyes meeting across space, eyebeams tangled, all of us, diddling or not, continuing onto our sweet and bitter ends.

LAXMETER

I used to have a son who liked his mother.

MICHAEL

I'd like to meet him.

LAXMETER

I guess this was a mistake.

MICHAEL

A strange intimacy strung out along that distance -- touching but not touching. After all such servicing was done -- then that was the proper time to read your letter.

LAXMETER can stand it no longer.

LAXMETER

I think it's disgusting. I think you're disgusting.

MICHAEL

You're saying you wouldn't watch? Couldn't?

LAXMETER

It's smut.

MICHAEL

It's choice. And no one gets hurt by anyone else. Which is not a bad -- which is an unusual -- outcome these days.

LAXMETER

And that kind of thinking will pull us down now, right to the depths --

MICHAEL

Freely choosing? Each to his own?

LAXMETER

I mean being unthinking and selfish. Not acting for the greater good.

MICHAEL

An orphan phrase coming from your mouth.

LAXMETER

I am doing the best I can.

MICHAEL

Said the Mother of the Nation.

LAXMETER

I am!

MICHAEL

That little voice quiver -- But these days I can't seem to forget that those doing the best they can, like my dear mother of the nation, are doing the best they can to unlock the lowest instincts in the species --

LAXMETER

This was a mistake.

MICHAEL

-- while having poetry read to them before, not during, and after looking through their own private -- releasing.

LAXMETER

(grabs pitcher)

We need more water.

(moves to exit, comes back)

Michael, you have to be very careful about disgust.

MICHAEL

I am very strict in my disgust.

LAXMETER

It tricks you into thinking you're righteous when all you are is empty. It may give you a thick shiver down your spine, but it doesn't make you any better --

MICHAEL

Or worse.

LAXMETER

-- than any one else.

MICHAEL

I'd be happy with "not worse" if I could get away with it.

LAXMETER

We need more water.

LAXMETER exits with the pitcher. MICHAEL drain his glass, picks up a horseshoe and handles it. BALKIS enters, followed by GRIG and SLOH, GRIG dressed now in Department black clothing, with Insignia. BALKIS carries his case. He sees MICHAEL but says nothing.

BALKIS

I was told she'd be here, in the backyard.

MICHAEL sits, holding the horseshoe.

BALKIS

This is very nice. Horseshoes.

(pointing)

A near-ringer --

MICHAEL

Hers.

BALKIS

Is she here? I was told --

MICHAEL

She's just gone into the house.

BALKIS

Ah. Mr. Balkis.

MICHAEL

I'm her son.

BALKIS

I know.

MICHAEL

I'm sure you would.

BALKIS

This is our weekly meeting.

LAXMETER enters, carrying the pitcher of water.

MICHAEL
(looks through binoculars)
Are you her poetry reader?

BALKIS
What?

MICHAEL
Her stanza before and stanza after?

BALKIS
I am not one for poetry.

LAXMETER
(to MICHAEL)
I forgot to tell you.

MICHAEL
Your weekly meeting.

LAXMETER
I'm sorry.

MICHAEL
Your weekly meeting to do the best you can.

MICHAEL trains the binoculars on GRIG.

MICHAEL
I know you. So they took you in.

(to LAXMETER)
Do you remember her? Sarah Grig. You thought
she was an assassin-waiter. Such initiative --
almost took her heart away!

LAXMETER
Michael --

GRIG
I have a lot to thank Madam Secretary for.

MICHAEL
So say hello to your valued Department employee,
Madam Secretary.

LAXMETER
Michael.

MICHAEL
(chidingly)
Mother --

A stand-off moment between mother and son.

MICHAEL
(surrendering)

I will move along.

(to BALKIS)
The "eff-to-eff," so essential for the proper
functioning of government --

(MICHAEL waves)
-- long may it wave.

MICHAEL puts down the binoculars, picks up a horseshoe and tosses it to BALKIS, who catches it handily, then exits.

A moment of silence, then BALKIS gives LAXMETER an inquisitive look.

BALKIS
Should we?

LAXMETER hesitates, then nods yes.

BALKIS
(to GRIG)
Follow him.

GRIG hesitates.

BALKIS
Go. Ahead.

GRIG exits to follow MICHAEL.

LAXMETER refills her own glass but does not offer one to BALKIS. She sits, then indicates for BALKIS to sit as well.

SLOH stands several steps back but within hearing and seeing distance. LAXMETER and BALKIS completely ignore him. BALKIS opens his case, takes out the same photos he'd shown GRIG.

LAXMETER
Let's begin so we can put an end to this.

BALKIS
Do you know any of these people?

LAXMETER
Officers in our special squad --
(looking closer)
-- a chief, too, it looks like -- but no, I don't
know them. But if I am going to have to know
them, why do I have to know them?

BALKIS
That man in the middle --

(takes out another photo and a loupe)
-- Johnson Fletcher -- here is a closer
photograph.

LAXMETER
(uses loupe)
Still no. What are these about?

BALKIS taps the photo with his index finger.

LAXMETER
What?

BALKIS
Did you notice this? Across the Insignia.

LAXMETER
It looks like a black --

BALKIS
It is tape. An obscuring -- perhaps even
insulting -- strip of black tape.

LAXMETER
You can barely see it, it's so thin.

BALKIS
They're all wearing it.

LAXMETER
Yes -- they are.

LAXMETER hands back the photo and loupe.

LAXMETER
Maybe someone fell in the line [of duty] --

BALKIS
These officers work for you, and yet -- And no
one has fallen. That I know.

BALKIS draws a line across his own Insignia.

BALKIS
So, why, Madam Secretary? And this.

BALKIS shows her one more photograph. She looks at it, looks
dismayed, off-handedly hands it to SLOH.

BALKIS
(to SLOH)
Give it to me!

SLOH hands it back to BALKIS after sneaking a peek at who it is.

BALKIS

You recognize the Attorney General.

LAXMETER

Of course I recognize the Attorney General!

BALKIS

And you saw the eradicating tape --

LAXMETER gets up, agitated -- perhaps even tosses a horseshoe.

LAXMETER

Before you tell me something I feel I'm not going to like hearing --

BALKIS

That black tape is like the canary in the cave -- he did resist setting up the Department --

LAXMETER

Careful what you are saying. Attacked, yes -- society, values, buildings, all attacked -- but also some sense of proportion.

BALKIS

And proportionate responses.

LAXMETER

But respond to what? Very easy to shine a light and then be scared by the shadows you create yourself and then think every shadow holds an enemy, and then and then and then and then -- it's not my duty to trump up conspiracies for the sake of --

BALKIS

You are Madam Secretary of The Department.

LAXMETER

And what security have we won if everyone comes to think we're no different or better than the assassins we say we want to defeat?

BALKIS looks around him, as if trying to see someone.

LAXMETER

What?

BALKIS

There is no press gallery here, Madam Secretary.

LAXMETER

Don't get flippant, Balkis!

BALKIS

I just wanted to remind you that here you don't have to play to --

LAXMETER

I actually believe this, you know. That we're doing this to protect a way of life worth protecting. Like being a parent, Balkis -- you must be straight with your children if you want them to trust you, but sometimes, you have to -- maneuver -- things -- without them knowing --

BALKIS

A loving by lying.

LAXMETER

You miss the point.

BALKIS

Of course.

LAXMETER

You maneuver things to put control where a parent is supposed to put control. That is my duty.

BALKIS

Understood, Madam Secretary -- understood how, on your level, that -- higher level. But --

BALKIS picks up the photos, shuffles them.

BALKIS

Having my ear pinned to the ground, as you pay me to do -- there are, out there, things that cannot be ignored. Let me put it to you straight. A movement -- no, The Movement -- people, citizens, not the illegals this time, banding together, people in trusted positions, who truly believe --

LAXMETER stops him, paces, agitated. BALKIS neatens his pile of photographs. LAXMETER finally sees SLOH.

LAXMETER

Who is he?

BALKIS

He's been surveilling Fletcher and the others.

LAXMETER

Get him out of here.

BALKIS indicates for SLOH to leave, so SLOH backs up toward the house.

LAXMETER

Wait!

LAXMETER picks up the binoculars and tosses them to SLOH.

LAXMETER

Get these wretched things out of my sight.

SLOH retreats a few steps more but doesn't quite exit yet.

BALKIS

If there were not conspiracies, The Department would not have been created. The fact that it has been created must mean that the conspiracies exist. And if they exist, then --

LAXMETER

You might as well say that creating The Department created the conspiracies.

BALKIS

And in a sense, Madam Secretary, is that not true? Was that not what was needed in response to the Attack? What the people wanted? Done in their name? So that they could believe paradise had not been lost? And do we not answer to what the people want? It is my job to put these things together and inform you about them.

LAXMETER

All right.

BALKIS

That is why you --

LAXMETER

All right!

BALKIS

-- hired me.

LAXMETER

We have to be careful of our language. I mean it. If we let the language slip, then everything else falls apart.

BALKIS

Point taken.

LAXMETER

I am not being academic about this!

They look at each other.

BALKIS

Of course. Speak clearly.

They continue to look at each other.

LAXMETER

It's just hard to think that --

BALKIS

If these officers decide to do whatever they are deciding to do -- if Fletcher is allowed to lead them on -- then --

LAXMETER

We do this right. It's important for the President --

BALKIS

And the people --

LAXMETER

-- that we do this right.

BALKIS

I have my people watching. We will watch our language. Does it being this close upset you?

LAXMETER

I stay in the loop, do you hear me? Do you hear me?

LAXMETER looks up and sees SLOH, and SLOH scuttles out. BALKIS takes a form out of his case, unfolds it, offers LAXMETER a pen.

BALKIS

Your directive.

LAXMETER signs it.

BALKIS

It is very pleasant out here. A real treat to be able to get away, to escape.

(pointing at the horseshoe pitch)

Almost a ringer there. "All created equal," e pluribus unum, but this is very nice, isn't it?

LAXMETER

I need something stronger.

LAXMETER exits into the house.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 2: Sloh Watches Grig In Action

Scene shifts without pause to the Adirondack chair. BALKIS unrolls a small leather pouch of tools and proceeds to work on the bonsai, occasionally glancing at the scene with MICHAEL and GRIG. Light on him should be well-defined.

MICHAEL enters, sits. GRIG enters and startles him. In the background, unseen, is SLOH, who watches everything through the binoculars.

MICHAEL

My "tail."

GRIG

I do what they want me to do.

MICHAEL

Would you seduce my mother if they told you to?
Someone already reads her poetry.

GRIG

If they told me to.

MICHAEL

How would you do that?

GRIG

This is what I would whisper in her ear.

MICHAEL

I've spent a life trying not to --

GRIG

"Sanctimony stirs the juices of your cunt -- "

MICHAEL

That said to my mother?

GRIG

(ignoring him)

" -- you feel it but deny it but still feel it
under the denial -- "

MICHAEL

You give my mother far too much --

LAXMETER

(ignoring him again)

" -- the air fills with your moist fruit-fish
smell, perfume of power that rims my nostrils and

rides my tongue with a tingle to lick the first
silver dew drop hanging off your clitoris -- "

GRIG pauses, looks directly at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

Go on.

GRIG

You want me to.

MICHAEL

Finish it off.

GRIG

" -- a light lick to spark a thick shiver up your
spine before I suck -- "

MICHAEL

I can't but think that my mother might just --
she just might, you know. The sound of it --

(with disgust)

But the thought of it --

GRIG

If not mother, then son?

MICHAEL

Let me tell you a story about the use of
binoculars --

GRIG

Yes or no?

MICHAEL

Did they tell you to offer me that?

GRIG

Yes or no?

MICHAEL

Did they or didn't they?

GRIG waits.

MICHAEL

Or is this a rogue assignment?

GRIG waits.

MICHAEL

Is this the face that my corruption will wear?

GRIG

Is it such a bad face?

MICHAEL

I can't say if it isn't because it isn't or because wanting to do what my mother would never want to do to you but you would do to her --

GRIG

And you might do to me --

MICHAEL

-- makes this face more delicious than it is.

GRIG

So will you do?

MICHAEL

I will hate myself for saying yes. But yes.

BALKIS pitches what he says to SLOH, though he never faces him.

BALKIS

Like bonsai -- the corruptions, through disciplined desire, become pure and sculpted.

The "entanglement" of GRIG and MICHAEL should be choreographed and precise. It is a dance of mutual exploitation and animal desire and should appear so. BALKIS continues to work on his bonsai. SLOH stands behind him.

BALKIS

I had started out as a young man starts out in the world -- with a drive and a draft of stupidities otherwise known as "dreams." But things of great evil sickened me, and evil made me ask so many questions that had no answers. It drove me mad -- my questioning boiled down everything into a doubt that was drowning me. Until I decided to doubt no more. I found that those who didn't ask questions were much, much happier. And I wanted to be like them. So I resolved to ask no more questions that could not be satisfied by interrogations, evidence, reports, conclusions. In bonsai I found art. In espionage I found security.

GRIG and MICHAEL freeze -- BALKIS gives a few more snips, then stops for several beats. GRIG and MICHAEL melt out of their pose into post-coital rest. BALKIS puts away his tools and gets ready to leave.

BALKIS

Inquisition is not health. Much better to have controlled idealisms, things rounded-off and well-maintained. In that lies more than enough happiness.

GRIG and MICHAEL stand, arrange themselves.

MICHAEL

I am going to postpone my leaving.

GRIG

I'm not asking you to.

MICHAEL

I don't want to be asked.

GRIG

I promise nothing.

MICHAEL

What better gift?

BALKIS walks into their area.

BALKIS

(to MICHAEL)

You are out of your league with her.

MICHAEL

You forget whose son I am.

BALKIS

You forget whose son you are.

GRIG

Don't forget.

MICHAEL exits.

BALKIS

You are so governed by appetite.

GRIG

Lucky for you.

BALKIS

Prove I'm lucky.

GRIG

Why be so hard on me?

BALKIS

(grabs her arm)

Because I think a person guided by appetite is an idealist -- and idealists are always like tits on a bull, and thus useless to me.

GRIG

You misread these tits, Mr. Balkis.

BALKIS

I am not weak like Michael Laxmeter.

GRIG

No one is that weak, even Jimmy Sloh.

BALKIS

Then make me trust your appetite.

GRIG

Let me go first.

BALKIS lets her go.

GRIG

I do this job well -- I do, don't I?

BALKIS

So far.

GRIG

Because I am just like you.

BALKIS

I don't bend to flattery.

GRIG

I am completely empty of faith.

BALKIS

Go on.

GRIG

Clean as a hollow log.

BALKIS

You're in the black so far.

GRIG

All beliefs are equal to me because they are all equally useless. I don't care because I don't have any ideas, and I don't have any ideas because I don't care. And why? Because only appetite is dependable. Isn't it?

BALKIS

I remember your answer to my question "why."

GRIG

Thick unprosthetic shiver down the spine.

BALKIS

You'd thought about the answer before answering.

GRIG

And I still think before doing. Isn't it possible that having an in with the son of the Secretary of The Department might prove useful at some point? And if it doesn't -- then what's been the harm?

BALKIS

Disguised as a waiter, she grabs a chair and --

GRIG

I am your perfect employee, Mr. Balkis. I am the perfect post-Attack jack-of-all-trades janitor on red-alert homeland clean-up. I am the perfect patriot.

GRIG picks up the bonsai, examines it.

GRIG

Someone like me allows her to get a good night's sleep while she shoulders her incredible burden. We let them all sleep soundly in the face of their hidden terrors. You shouldn't let any distrust of these tits get the best of you.

BALKIS

Find Sloh -- we have to leave.

GRIG

I take it that means the answer satisfies you.

GRIG puts down the bonsai and exits.

BALKIS

Satisfies. Where, oh where, are there more like her?

Lights out on BALKIS. Lights stay on SLOH, who comes to the Adirondack chair. He smells the chair, circles it, smells the air around him.

SLOH

These are things I must remember. Must. Not. Forget.

Lights out. Transition music.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 3: Sloh Has To Face Himself In The Coffee Shop

The coffee shop. LOUDER, TORRES, BENT, and LEE at a table, coffee cups in front of them. HANNAH, the barista, stands by the coffee-making machines, rag in hand. Other tables and chair. Off to one side, with headset and binoculars, sits GRIG on a ladder eavesdropping. A heavy silence.

TORRES
(to HANNAH)

We're sorry, Hannah.

LEE

We all are.

HANNAH

For what?

TORRES

Your -- pain.

BENT

For how they wasted Sam --

HANNAH

Fuck the sentiment. How did he look?

TORRES

You don't need to --

HANNAH
(fiercely)

My shop. My rules. What'd they do?

LEE

Dumped his body in the field, after, you know --
through the wrists --

LOUDER

Poor bastard.

HANNAH

Now Fletch can have himself a martyr.

LEE

Don't run Fletch down!

HANNAH

Dead Sam's no use to me. Let Fletch have him.
That'll make Sam more useful than he ever was
alive.

LOUDER

They assassinated the man you called your --

HANNAH

He knew what price [for] --

LOUDER

-- and I didn't see you cry -- instead, you're
ready to --

HANNAH

And what would your fucking West Coast genius
suggest?

LOUDER

There are still laws. There are. We are still a
nation of laws -- or what else are we doing here?

Without warning, HANNAH snaps her cloth into LOUDER's face; he grabs
his face in pain.

HANNAH

They dumped his body in a field. Food for
ravens. Those're the "laws" now.

HANNAH garrotes LOUDER with the rag. No one puts a hand on her.

HANNAH

You're the stranger around here -- maybe you're
the fink who did him in.

LOUDER

I'm not --

TORRES

Hannah --

In desperation, LOUDER grabs one of the cups and throws the contents
of it into HANNAH's face, which makes her let go. In a heartbeat
LOUDER is out of his chair and bearing down on HANNAH. BENT gets in
his way.

FLETCH enters, catching the last of what happened. He looks
exhausted.

LOUDER

I'll kill her!

BENT
It's her grief, Louder.

LOUDER
That's grief?!

BENT
Can't you find a place for it?

HANNAH
Let him!

BENT
It's grief, goddamn it!

HANNAH
You gave Sam up! You are the snitch!

LEE
No he's not.
(to LOUDER)
He's not. We checked.

LOUDER
You checked?

LEE
Don't look so insulted.

LOUDER
My record --

BENT
Sit. Down. Christ, the last thing is to do
their work for 'em.

FLETCH
It's always easier for the jailers if the
prisoners punish themselves.

FLETCH sits, HANNAH serves him.

FLETCH
Hannah, I'm sorry.

HANNAH
Apparently I'm supposed to be officially in grief
--

HANNAH lets loose an ear-splitting wail.

HANNAH
Done. You look grey.

FLETCH looks at HANNAH ruefully, then speaks.

FLETCH

If I have any bowels left after today, I will be surprised.

BENT

We've been infiltrated.

FLETCH

That can wait.

BENT

Wormed their way in. The Movement has now been -
- open season --

FLETCH

The Attorney General -- have you heard this?

LEE

No.

FLETCH

The Attorney General has been -- detained.
Secretary Laxmeter, with an okay from the
President. The man who appointed him. The
secret tribunals under the Act -- have started --

HANNAH

(to LOUDER)

There go your "laws -- "

FLETCH

I think I've lost everything from here to here.
Everything feels --

BENT

Then there's only one choice --

TORRES

And what's that?

BENT

We have to let up, we have to stop organizing!

FLETCH

No.

BENT

Our meeting, it's treason, now. Written on the
wall. Smearred on the [wall] --

HANNAH

I'm all for that.

BENT

Don't be stupid!

HANNAH

Lick my eye teeth, Bent. I'm grieving.

BENT

And if what we're doing is now treason, then we're going to hang.

LOUDER

Drawn and quartered.

LEE

And nailed.

BENT

We have to go underground, we have to plan, structure -- build cells --

FLETCH

And be worms? Not for me, not for us, not for Sam.

BENT

Suddenly I feel like wheat, with the reaper in the row.

FLETCH

What we're doing is honorable, but only honorable if we keep it in the open.

BENT

Great! An open conspiracy. Let's have us a treasonous picnic and invite --

LEE

Don't be stupid.

BENT

So, do we post full-pagers in the newspapers -- assuming they haven't been completely bought off -- announcing our meeting times, our goal of organizing to resist the -- Thursdays at 7 PM at Café Caffe. Bring a friend. Is that what we should do, Fletch? Is that what we should do?

Everyone looks at FLETCH, who himself looks ashen and undecided.

BENT

I want to live, not be --

HANNAH
(shouting)
Bloody fucking carrion!

(to BENT sweetly)
Right?

SLOH enters, hears HANNAH's line. GRIG reacts to SLOH's entrance.

BENT
This funny thing about not going to the boneyard
before my time.

FLETCH
No.

BENT
Christ!

BENT looks at everyone, seeing if they're with him. When they aren't,
he exits.

FLETCH
He'll be back.

TORRES
All part of the boneyard anyway.

Everyone looks at SLOH.

HANNAH
An actual customer.

SLOH
(to HANNAH)
Black, no sweet, no cow.

HANNAH serves him. Everyone watches SLOH.

SLOH
I'm looking for a man named Fletch.

LEE
Would he be looking for you?

SLOH
I was told he'd be here.

LEE
Who told?

SLOH
I was told.

TORRES
A name?

SLOH
Someone --

TORRES
A name.

SLOH
A someone! Said that if a man was a friend of
freedom, he should come here, talk to Fletch.
That's what someone told me.

FLETCH
Are you?

SLOH
What?

FLETCH
A friend of freedom?

SLOH
Like it as well as the next.

FLETCH
(mimicking)
"Like it as well as the next." A man?

SLOH
I have some questions --

FLETCH
What about the singular you?

SLOH
Me?

FLETCH
What has the government of, by, and for the
singular you been doing lately in your singular
name?

SLOH
Not much of a paper reader --

FLETCH
(indicating his cup)
Black, right, you said?

SLOH
Yes.

FLETCH
No sugar --

SLOH
No milk. So what?

FLETCH
Then a new taste for you.

(to HANNAH)
The almond. Go on.

HANNAH takes one of the flavor bottles and walks to SLOH's table. After shooting him a sour look, she pours a shot into SLOH's cup.

SLOH
Hey!

FLETCH
Try it.

SLOH tries it.

SLOH
It's good.

FLETCH
Now offer me, us, something, friend of freedom, for our taste. Tell me, us, one thing -- any one thing -- that is a clear and present danger to any friend of freedom.

SLOH, flustered, drinks his coffee, looking at the others look at him.

SLOH
What're you talking about?

FLETCH
Just one.

SLOH
There's a fuckload of dangers.

FLETCH
A "fuckload."

SLOH
Yeah.

FLETCH
Come on, stand up.

FLETCH walks to SLOH's table, claps a hand on his shoulder in a way both friendly and not friendly.

FLETCH

Stand up and announce to us the dangers we face.
At least one of the dangers. Shouldn't be hard
if there's a "fuckload" from which to choose.

FLETCH pulls out a chair, slaps his hand on it for SLOH to stand on.

FLETCH

Rise above us, with the smell of almonds on your
breath, and tell us what we do not know.

SLOH hesitates.

SLOH

You don't think I can do it.

FLETCH

I don't know what to think about what you can do
-- stranger.

SLOH stands on the chair. Everyone waits.

HANNAH

Go on.

SLOH

Well --

FLETCH

Just one from the "fuckload."

SLOH

Um -- I mean, who can just pick one?

FLETCH

You asked for me, you came to tell me of your
love of liberty --

SLOH

There're so many --

FLETCH

-- and yet --

SLOH

I'm thinking!

FLETCH

-- and yet --

SLOH

Well -- Christ, it's not right to put someone on
the spot like this --

FLETCH
He thinks he's on a spot.

SLOH
Look, there's --

FLETCH
On the "X" that marks the bulls-eye.

SLOH
Quit interrupting me!

FLETCH
Get down.

SLOH
I'm not some jerk-off little kid that you can --

FLETCH
Get down.

SLOH
Habeas corpus!

HANNAH
Get the fuck down!

SLOH
There! See! Habeas --

HANNAH walks up to SLOH, grabs his belt, and pulls him off the chair.

HANNAH
What a fucking embarrassment to biology.

FLETCH
Let me tell you what you should've told us.

SLOH
Look --

FLETCH
Sit.

SLOH
You think you got the fucking right to --

FLETCH
Sit! Down! You came here! You bark for them!
We didn't invite you.

SLOH sits.

FLETCH

Ecce homo! Upon these shoulders freedom rests.

HANNAH

God have mercy or vengeance --

FLETCH

Of all the things I hate that they have done, are doing, to shred what had a rough but fair face, what gave people hope -- of all the things I hate, I hate you most of all. I hate that they have sent such a low-rent shit-piece to rat us out.

SLOH

I'm taking that as a compliment.

FLETCH

That they have peeled you apart, sucked out the pulp, and sent us the leftovers.

HANNAH

It's a crying fucking shame.

FLETCH

No guts, this waste of clothes --

SLOH

Are you done?

FLETCH

A bum-fuck bent-over for anybody with a passing whim.

SLOH

Hey!

FLETCH

Ecce the new homo! Don't you ever want to taste what it's like to be a free man? A man who's free?

SLOH

I'm not free?

HANNAH

As free as these nibbles on the bar. Offering your dick to any mouth.

SLOH

No, I am a free man! I am!

TORRES

Any rat --

SLOH

I'm no rat!

TORRES

-- who gets enough cheese thinks the maze is paradise.

SLOH

I got money in my pocket -- some -- I got food in my gut, I can get a fuck whenever I want it --

HANNAH

Who'd want to fuck a jar of used jelly?

FLETCH

"I got, I got" -- that's what they want you to believe. "I got" is all they let you have.

SLOH

No, wait -- wait!

HANNAH

The barking dog wants to speak --

SLOH

It's all up in your heads, this freedom stuff -- It's you who don't get it! Don't got! You! Food, roof, clothes, pin money -- that's freedom. That's freedom! I'm not worrying my gut with the idea of it, I'm living it! I am! I go and come as I want.

FLETCH

Poor, poor poochy on his leash. When they gab you up about "preserving freedom" -- they're just nailing the likes of you to the wall --

HANNAH

And they won't even give you the steam off their piss to warm your hands.

SLOH

Well, who's got freedom, then? Huh? If spit like me don't have it, and the archangels upstairs don't have it, then whose got it? Where is it? What is it? Where do I find it? Where? Where?!

SLOH has more desperation in his voice than he had expected.

SLOH

Not that I'm -- you know --

HANNAH

They're using you, slug, "in the name of,"
because you think so low of yourself --

SLOH

Hey, wait --

HANNAH

-- no more than scum thinks it's anything but the
scum that it is --

LEE

-- when the scum bothers to think at all --

SLOH

No one uses me!

TORRES

It's people like you taking a bullet behind the
ear --

SLOH

Stop that!

TORRES

-- even as They declare that the bullet's shot in
your name.

SLOH

I don't kill any[body] --

HANNAH

A lot easier when They hide the bullet behind a
face like that.

LEE

Usable --

SLOH

No one uses me!

LEE

-- because you're nothing but "yes" and "yes" and
"yes" and "yes" for anyone who asks you for one.

FLETCH

Freedom, my lap dog?

SLOH

I'm not --

FLETCH
For you, pooch? Freedom?

SLOH
What?

FLETCH
Only when you can say no. Only when you can say
no.

GRIG escorts SLOH downstage into a separate light.

GRIG
Remember that the future of your freedom depends
entirely on saying "yes" early and often and
without hesitation to whoever pays you whenever
they ask you.

GRIG pushes SLOH away, goes back to her ladder.

GRIG
Get away from me, you momzer.

SLOH
Like fucking ashes in my mouth! Like a fucking
wasp in my brain!

SLOH exits in anger. GRIG watches him, then looks at the people in
the coffee shop. Lights out. Transition music.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 4: Tribunal

LAXMETER and BALKIS join GRIG, seated in three seats, or on three
ladders, like a tribunal. SLOH watches them.

SLOH
So many wheels turning within wheels --

LAXMETER
I have just signed off on the arrests --

BALKIS
Johnson Fletcher and his merry band of traitors
are --

The three "punctuate" with a choreographed snipping motion.

GRIG
I have proof they have a "dirty bomb."

LAXMETER
They're calling me a fascist.

BALKIS
Exceptional times need exceptional acts by
exceptional [people] --

GRIG
Fuck history.

The three look at each other on the curse.

GRIG
The Attack justifies.

BALKIS
We do what must be done --

GRIG
In the name of --

LAXMETER
-- so that we will not be "done to" again.

A final choreographed snip. Lights out on their section. SLOH back to the coffee shop, though it does not need to be set up completely. GRIG's apartment is set up. BENT joins them.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 5: Sloh Comes Back for Another Shot

SLOH
You guys are fucked. They said you had a "dirty bomb."

HANNAH laughs and points to her head as the "bomb."

HANNAH
Yeah, up here. And the bomb's got "Fuck Laxmeter" tattoo'd on the fuse. What does the weasel want?

SLOH
I want to know -- I want to know!

No one responds to him.

SLOH
I want to know who I am!

Another silence, and then HANNAH claps once on "pop."

HANNAH
And pop! goes the weasel!

FLETCH indicates to HANNAH to hold off.

FLETCH

Sit down and tell us what you know.

SLOH

Stop her making a fool of me.

HANNAH

Then stop opening your mouth.

SLOH

I left here and didn't know a fucking thing!
Tell me. Tell me who I am.

FLETCH

We can't. We don't want to.

SLOH

You told me before! You were all telling me.
Give me a hook to hang onto!

LEE

Go to your boss, the butcher, if you want a hook.

TORRES

They're hanging carcasses every day --

HANNAH

Not rags and bones like him, though.

FLETCH

You already know everything you need to know
about who you are.

SLOH

No! No!

BENT

We have to go!

Something in SLOH's desperation gets FLETCH to relent.

FLETCH

Tell me about your thumb.

SLOH

Thumb?

FLETCH

The one that's up your arse at the moment. Pull
it out and look.

SLOH

My thumb.

(looks at it)
Another joke, right?

HANNAH
Can't compete with the joke of you.

SLOH
I'll stick this up your --

HANNAH
Wash it first.

SLOH
(pushing his thumb at FLETCH)
It's a thumb.

FLETCH
And?

SLOH
(makes as if he's hitch-hiking)
When I was sixteen, I used this to get me across
the country.

FLETCH
Away from home.

HANNAH
Away from your mother.

SLOH
And father -- yeah.

HANNAH
With their blessing.

SLOH
I didn't hate them. I hated --

TORRES
You hated --

SLOH
I did -- I hated everything about their lives.
But not them.

FLETCH
And so now you are beginning to tell yourself to
yourself.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 6: Sloh Explains His Self-Discovery To Grig

SLOH crosses to GRIG in GRIG's apartment. GRIG is getting ready to go out. Lights out on coffee shop.

GRIG

I'm going out.

SLOH

That flat dumb face they gave me, at first, making me stand on the chair, making me come up empty --

GRIG

You shouldn't have gone back.

SLOH

Wanted to explode -- bleh! -- all over them. But for the wrong reason, man, because they were just making me see how empty a vessel --

GRIG

Vessel?

SLOH

-- I was.

GRIG

Vessel?

SLOH

But not empty now.

(holds up his thumb)

See this -- they got me thinking. Yeah. They did. Fletch did.

GRIG

Johnson Fletcher is now prime cut to be cut [out]
--

SLOH

I have respect for all of them. For how they know who they are. I've never had respect for anything in my life -- I have been careless, really careless, paying attention to trash, not keeping my eyes straight-on, level, so I've decided that I respect only two people in the world. Fletch. And now myself. That's all.

GRIG

Not me?

SLOH

Not you. And not Balkis. No more dogging for him.

GRIG

So now a member of The Movement, eh?

SLOH

(hesitates)

Yes.

GRIG

That makes you a charter member of shit.

SLOH

You just don't know. Like having this real mirror I can see myself in.

GRIG

Move away [from me] --

SLOH

I never had anyone to tell me why this screwed-up face is in the mirror. But there are reasons --

GRIG

So Jimmy Sloh has a vision.

SLOH

And why the Christ shouldn't he? me?

GRIG

Like a monkey in a tuxedo.

SLOH

You miss the point.

GRIG

I'm warning you --

SLOH

Look at what we're doing with our lives --

GRIG

Stay away.

SLOH

Look at how someone's pulling our strings and we just dance.

GRIG

I'm not in a prison.

SLOH

Oh ho, you say that, but you don't know.

GRIG

Ignorance is bliss.

SLOH
You are in a prison.

GRIG
I'm going out.

SLOH
I want to tell you --

GRIG
I want you out -- Jimmy, Jimmy --

SLOH
What?

GRIG
Once Fletch and company take their hand off your
cock --

MICHAEL enters.

MICHAEL
The garbage I can walk around -- on the other
hand, the drunks piled three-deep in the lobby --

GRIG
Meet my "pal" Jimmy Sloh.

MICHAEL
I know who you are -- dog and pony for Mr.
Balkis. Your "pal"?

SLOH
Him?

GRIG
Disgusted?

SLOH
Sad. I'm sad.

GRIG
Jimmy's been yakking it up with Johnson Fletcher
and crowd, and they have led him to the light.

SLOH
You shouldn't tell --

GRIG
Do you think I care? Do you think anything is
going to matter after this?

MICHAEL

(to SLOH, with compassion)

That was not a good move.

SLOH

Yeah, well, what do you know -- you're locked in a prison just like Madam Secretary of Garbage over there.

GRIG

The dead speak.

SLOH

Not me, not anymore.

(tapping forehead)

Got it all up here now, and no one can muscle it away from me. It's mine.

GRIG

You look stupid trying to look intelligent. Not two cents worth of bone in your back.

SLOH sticks his tongue out to MICHAEL.

SLOH

You got this muscle bulked up, son of homeland security? Because you may lick every square inch of her each hour on the hour, but you'll never wash off the dirt of her because it roots itself right into her bones. You'll just gag to death while the mud queen here laughs -- no, she won't even give you that.

(to GRIG)

Your face is like a spider's web and all of us just flies.

SLOH exits.

GRIG

What are you looking at?

MICHAEL

You're going to just let him go?

GRIG

He loves his new freedom -- let him take it for a walk if he wants.

MICHAEL

No loyalty among spooks?

GRIG

I'm not my brother's keeper.

MICHAEL

You know Balkis won't tolerate --

GRIG

Is this your first lick, this concern for Jimmy Sloh? Because it is turning me off.

MICHAEL

No -- just that his face -- the way he held himself -- Next to Balkis, he always brought to mind a dog at heel. But --

GRIG moves closer to MICHAEL.

GRIG

Have you now started feeling sentiments?

MICHAEL

(moving away)

For the sake of national security, "due to conditions after the Attack" -- do you know this?

GRIG

What?

MICHAEL

The major networks today were nationalized. Did you know that? Of those, the ones who'd editorialized about such now outdated ideas as rights -- arrested.

GRIG

Your mother must be all a-tingle.

MICHAEL

Tomorrow goes the universities.

GRIG

Another tongue stroke for me? Because now I am all a-tingle. And so are you. Otherwise, why would you be here? You think you should be appalled, your decency keeps trying to make you go north, to the Pole Star, but --

GRIG takes MICHAEL's hand and puts it down her pants.

GRIG

But what you really want is far to the south, in heat, in swamps, in carelessness --

GRIG pulls out his hand and sticks his fingertips into his mouth.

GRIG

You are appalled by not being appalled at the chaos. You are appalled that your own decline should have such a loose taste.

MICHAEL

You are very wicked.

GRIG

I am very nothing. I am the edge of the abyss. You like the edge of the abyss.

MICHAEL

And I am appalled at myself for liking --

GRIG begins to undress MICHAEL.

GRIG

For liking that I am the stars falling out of their orbits and comets screaming across the sky.

MICHAEL stops her.

MICHAEL

And that's where you're --

GRIG

Oh?

MICHAEL

You've raised self-disgust to an art, which in itself is disgusting.

GRIG

And that no longer draws you in?

MICHAEL

I can no longer keep up with you.

GRIG

And you're suddenly very much a drag. And a disappointment. But not yet useless.

GRIG puts MICHAEL's hands on her breasts and gives him a long, deep kiss, from which he tries to pull away but can't. Lights out, transition music.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 7: Sloh Is Betrayed By Grig And Balkis

A cemetery. The funeral of SAM. FLETCH, TORRES, BENT, LOUDER, HANNAH, SLOH. A CLERGYMAN.

CLERGYMAN

Ashes to ashes --

BENT

All Sam gets?

CLERGYMAN

Sssh! Dust to dust --

HANNAH

Shut up, Bent.

(to CLERGYMAN)

Sorry.

(to BENT)

Anyone spits something out, it's me, and I'm not.

BENT

So, just dump Sam in --

CLERGYMAN

By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ --

FLETCH

We're not here to satisfy your oratorical desires.

CLERGYMAN

May his soul find everlasting peace --

BENT

He was tortured, and all he gets is a scared little whisper?

CLERGYMAN

The resurrection and the light --

BENT

We are all fucked, and we might as well make the most of the worst that's going to be done to us.

LEE

Heroics, Bent -- that world is gone.

BENT

Cowards!

TORRES

The dirt is about all we can afford.

BENT

Weaklings!

BENT edges the CLERGYMAN aside.

BENT

Here lies a man who gave his all for --

In sharp formation BALKIS, along with SPURGEON, leads on a squad of SOLDIERS, who quickly surround FLETCH and everyone else.

CLERGYMAN

(almost a bleat)

Now and at the hour of our death, amen.

The CLERGYMAN bolts.

BALKIS

Go on.

SPURGEON

'Tis important to do the proper honors, ain't it?

FLETCH

(directly to BALKIS)

Here lies a man who gave his all.

BALKIS

Please, continue.

SPURGEON

All look like gaffed whales, blank and rubbery --

FLETCH

Who died at the hands of thugs and --

BALKIS

Defamation of character.

FLETCH

To protect --

SPURGEON

I'm insulted.

FLETCH

To serve --

BALKIS

I am beyond embarrassed -- Marc Antony you're not. Perhaps that's their greatest crime, eh?

FLETCH

Because he cared --

SPURGEON

Can't even honor the dead with poetry -- what a bunch of fugs and failures.

FLETCH

Because he cared --

BALKIS

(gestures to the SOLDIERS)

Before this gets any more pathetic.

The SOLDIERS handcuff everyone.

BALKIS

(pointing at SLOH)

Except for him.

SLOH

I'm with them!

HANNAH

And why does he opt you out, Jimmy Sloh?

BALKIS

You don't have to act any more, Jimmy.

SLOH

I'm not acting!

(to FLETCH)

I'm not!

SPURGEON

He got good, didn't he?

SLOH

You can't do this to me. I quit. I am one of them. One of you.

FLETCH

Judas was born Judas.

BALKIS

(to SPURGEON)

He has perfected his techniques, to be sure. All right, Jimmy -- Good job.

BENT

The cock crowed three times.

SLOH

It's not true, it's not true, it's not true --

BENT

I can't hear a dead man.

SLOH

It's not true, it's not true, it's not true --

But they do not hear him as the SOLDIERS lead them off. LAXMETER enters, riding in a bicycle rickshaw peddled by a DRIVER.

SLOH

You better send me with them. I am with them.

BALKIS

You heard them, Jimmy.

SPURGEON

Judas. Dead man. Not very welcoming.

SLOH

No more dog for you. Hear that?

BALKIS

We are way ahead of you.

SLOH

I will find a way to make you pay. I won't keep my mouth shut.

SPURGEON

Talk all you want to the air, Jimmy --

SLOH

I will!

BALKIS

-- we own that now --

SLOH

I will!

BALKIS

-- in the interests of national security.

SLOH

And you'll have to rip out my tongue to stop me.

BALKIS

It takes much less than doing that. Go on, now. You have your life to live as a free man.

SLOH

You don't scare me.

BALKIS

That's because you're still as clueless as you ever were. Your whole life has been nothing but a cock-up from the day they snagged you from your mother's cunt to the day they put pennies on your eyes and rouge on your pasty cheeks. Go.

SLOH exits.

LAXMETER

I'd never seen an operation. That went well.

SPURGEON

The fish helped by putting themselves into a barrel.

LAXMETER

And now?

BALKIS

Now the interrogations -- up to and beyond the third degree, as called for. You do want convictions? If you arrest, you have to convict.

SPURGEON

What's the point, otherwise?

LAXMETER

It's just that it's become so heavy.

BALKIS

But what gets heavier will only make us stronger.

LAXMETER

If only people would just listen to reason! Behave!

BALKIS

There's something else. A rogue agent.

LAXMETER

And that is my problem? Mr. Balkis, below a certain level of abstraction, I am not required to know or admit to anything. Agents, rogue or otherwise, are very far down the slope.

BALKIS

He needs to be -- corrected. He has flipped.

LAXMETER

So flip him back! You don't need my signature for that.

BALKIS

I was just checking --

LAXMETER

All I have is this desire to get on with it!
Ideals, aspirations -- they just get in the way.
The people get in the way. Rogue agents get in
the way. Of course, it's important to do this as
humanely as possible.

BALKIS

The corrections will be made.

LAXMETER

And then on we go, don't we? Warriors of a kind,
right? Bloodied, but unbowed. Yes -- that
raises it to the higher plane, the higher
purpose. Knowing that suffering is necessary if
we are going to conserve what is right. Above
politics, above the messy democracies, above the
complications of desires and disagreements. Yes
-- that will do.

LAXMETER squares her shoulders, tries to stand up taller.

LAXMETER

I am ready, Mr. Balkis.

LAXMETER gets into her rickshaw and exits.

SPURGEON

"Bloodied, but unbowed." As long as it's not her
blood.

BALKIS

Rank and its privileges.

SPURGEON

At our rank, correction feels exactly good.

BALKIS

And suffering is necessary.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 8: Grig Betrays Michael For Ambition

Action is continuous from the previous scene. BALKIS and SPURGEON
walk into an "interrogation room." Seated there is MICHAEL, under a
harsh downlight. To one side, in the shadow, is GRIG, holding BALKIS'
small leather case. On the far side of the stage is LAXMETER,
watching, as if on the other side of a two-way mirror.

BALKIS
It seems to be an infection.

MICHAEL
Why am I here?

BALKIS
(looking at GRIG)
We have information that you have -- changed
sides, so to speak.

MICHAEL
This is absurd -- you know who I am --

BALKIS takes the case from GRIG, opens it, and pulls out a dossier.

BALKIS
You like white pizza, don't you? Your latest
movie rental was --

MICHAEL
How do you know that?

SPURGEON
Don't move so abruptly.

MICHAEL
How?

BALKIS
(reading)
You've taken out some interesting books from the
library lately.

MICHAEL
Let me see --

SPURGEON
I told you not to move.

BALKIS
A bit of junk-food binging, it seems, from your
shopping records --

MICHAEL
How --

BALKIS
Databases. All linked together --
(flips through the pages in his hand)
Trips, bills you've paid -- available at a whim
and a keystroke.

BALKIS hands the material back to GRIG.

BALKIS

Here is how your life stands at the moment.

LAXMETER

I am his mother, yet --

BALKIS

I can show you meeting with people we have designated as undesirable -- Jimmy Sloh, for one --

MICHAEL

I was just trying to --

LAXMETER

Yet the evidence is there -- I have seen it --

SPURGEON

Quit moving.

BALKIS

You have traveled to places we don't like, read suspect books --

MICHAEL

Show me.

LAXMETER

We don't have to.

BALKIS

We don't have to -- the efficiency of our new laws.

SPURGEON

Due process no longer due to anyone.

LAXMETER

I can't believe my own son would turn --

BALKIS

Suffice it to say that your case is made. Constructed. What's left is punishment.

MICHAEL

(to GRIG)

All yours, isn't it? You got bored --

BALKIS

The more you protest --

LAXMETER

I have to be prepared to pay this price.

BALKIS
The more you will pay.

MICHAEL
Fine!

LAXMETER
Order is most important.

BALKIS looks at LAXMETER, who makes a gesture. BALKIS nods.

BALKIS
You can go.

MICHAEL
Go?

BALKIS
Go.

SPURGEON
Go.

MICHAEL
You're freeing me?

BALKIS
I didn't say that. Just go.

MICHAEL hesitates, then gets out of the chair, but before he exits, he walks over to the two-way mirror, stares at LAXMETER, then exits.

LAXMETER comes out from behind the "mirror."

LAXMETER
(to GRIG)
Are you sure? Are you sure?!

GRIG looks at BALKIS, who barely nods to her.

LAXMETER
(to GRIG)
Are you sure? Are you sure?!

GRIG
We are sure about anything we need to be sure about. So, yes, we are sure.

LAXMETER
I know you. I know you. Sex and power. Aphrodisiac. The high-voltage fuck. Right? Right? Don't believe it. Power? It shields me against what's scraped from the bottom of the barrel.

BALKIS

Bloodied but unbowed, I believe it was -- yes?

Lights out.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 9: Grig And Michael Deleted

Continuous with the last scene. MICHAEL seated stage right of center, GRIG seated staged left of center. Two HOODED ASSASSINS enter, guns drawn, burlap bags in their hands.

ASSASSIN 1

(slides bag over GRIG's head)

In the name of The Movement.

ASSASSIN 2

(slides bag over MICHAEL's head)

In the name of the State.

The two ASSASSINS look at each other. At that moment, SPURGEON enters, pulling the red wagon seen at the top of the play. He nods to them both as he crosses upstage and exits. The ASSASSINS salute each other, then execute MICHAEL and GRIG.

ASSASSIN 1

Do you have anything to say --

ASSASSIN 2

-- in your defense?

ASSASSIN 1

I guess not.

ASSASSIN 2

Be seeing you.

Exit.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 10: The Cruciform Aftermath Of Jimmy Sloh

Light up on SLOH, extreme upstage, standing naked, arms outstretched, bloodstained. Hesitantly at first, then with increasing joy.

SLOH

Free. Free. Free. Free.

SLOH walks from upstage to downstage as he speaks.

SLOH

No. And then "no." And then "no" again.

On the floor is cast a cross in light, with the base of it against SLOH's feet. SLOH stretches out his arms, leans his head back, and closes his eyes.

SLOH

Yes.

Lights begin to fade, but just before they do, stage lights go out, house lights go on, and SLOH looks directly at the audience.

SLOH

Go. Go. It's all out there. See it for yourselves. Go. Go.

House lights bump to black.