

Michael Bettencourt

Full-Length Plays: Volume 4

Block & Tackle Productions Press



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**In The Name Of • Liberty Creek
Light. Fantastic.**

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Block & Tackle Productions Press



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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

In The Name Of

DESCRIPTION

In a time when the USA-PATRIOT Act is standard practice, a young man hits upon the possibility of personal freedom -- and the government hits back. Hard.

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.

* * * * *

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 --

SPURGEON spits.

SPURGEON

-- 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.

BALKIS

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. 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

Let him raise his head a little. Now, repeat after me. "I, Jimmy Sloh -- "

SLOH

"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

"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 --

BALKIS indicates SLOH's clothes.

BALKIS

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 lisping 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.

BALKIS speaks into the camera.

BALKIS

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

* * * * *

Scene 2: Jimmy Sloh Is Captivated By Balkis

Transition music morphs into CROWD SOUNDS.

SOUND: 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

Stop it! Stop it!

SLOH has his right hand down her pants, stupid grin on his face. Then, a harsh light, CROWD SOUNDS out.

SOUND: AIR HORNS blow.

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

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.

* * * * *

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.

SPURGEON chops him in back of neck.

SPURGEON

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 fucking 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-laughes, 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 McKennitt.

* * * * *

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

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.

SOUND: The guillotine.

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

* * * * *

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 Leeds! 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.

* * * * *

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, swivels the gun 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.

SLOH takes his last swig.

SLOH

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 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 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.

* * * * *

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 -- 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.

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.

GRIG stands, clears her throat.

GRIG

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.

* * * * *

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. 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
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 as anemic as 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 --

BALKIS gives her a piece of paper.

BALKIS

-- 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. Ladder on. GRIG climbs the ladder to observe.

* * * * *

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

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

SLOH eyes them; they eye him.

SLOH

"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 fucking 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." 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.

SLOH

No fucking movement from the Movement. The moveless Movement.

SLOH grinds his hips.

SLOH

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 -- 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
"speak-a funny"? 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.

SOLIDER 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 SOLIDERS wait. BENT looks at FLETCH, who looks back but says nothing. BENT decides to act.

BENT

Uh, you can put him down.

The SOLIDERS do not put him down.

BENT

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.

BENT

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, your handler, 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 the 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.

FLETCH turns to LEE.

FLETCH

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. 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.

* * * * *

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. 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

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 admiral'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 -- 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

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.

* * * * *

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 SOLIDER 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

"I've done nothing wrong" -- yeah, 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

Scene 12: Sloh Observes How The Movement Will Be Set Up

LAXMETER's country home. LAXMETER and MICHAEL are pitching horseshoes.

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 sits.

LAXMETER
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.

MICHAEL turns binoculars backward.

MICHAEL

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 the pitcher.

LAXMETER

We need more water. 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. 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 at BALKIS through the binoculars.

MICHAEL

Are you her poetry reader?

BALKIS

What?

MICHAEL

Her stanza before and stanza after?

BALKIS

I am not one for poetry.

LAXMETER

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. 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

Mother --

A stand-off moment between mother and son, the MICHAEL surrenders.

MICHAEL

I will move along.

(to BALKIS)

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

MICHAEL waves.

MICHAEL

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 nods to GRIG.

BALKIS

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 -- 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 --

BALKIS takes out another photo and a loupe, both of which he hands to LAXMETER.

BAKLIS

-- Johnson Fletcher -- here is a closer photograph.

LAXMETER

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, absently hands it to SLOH.

BALKIS

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.

BALKIS points at the horseshoe pitch.

BALKIS

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.

* * * * *

Scene 13: 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 -- 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

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.

BALKIS

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

Satisfes. 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.

* * * * *

Scene 14: 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

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. 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

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. Smeared 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 Caffé. 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

Bloody fucking carrion!

HANNAH looks sweetly at BENT.

HANNAH

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 Fletcher.

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.

FLETCH gestures to HANNAH.

FLETCH

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

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.

* * * * *

Scene 15: 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.

* * * * *

Scene 16: 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.

SLOH looks at his thumb.

SLOH

Another joke, right?

HANNAH

Can't compete with the joke of you.

SLOH

I'll stick this up your --

HANNAH

Wash it first.

SLOH

It's a thumb.

FLETCH

And?

SLOH gestures as if he's hitch-hiking.

SLOH

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.

* * * * *

Scene 17: 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.

SLOH holds up his thumb.

SLOH

This -- got me thinking. Yeah. It did. 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

Maybe.

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

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.

SLOH taps his forehead.

SLOH

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. Will you? 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 moves away.

MICHAEL

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.

* * * * *

Scene 18: 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.

HANNAH looks at CLERGYMAN.

HANNAH

Sorry. 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

Nowandatthehourofoudeathamen.

The CLERGYMAN bolts.

BALKIS

Go on.

SPURGEON

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

FLETCH

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

Before this gets any more pathetic.

The SOLDIERS handcuff everyone. BALKIS points at SLOH.

BALKIS

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! 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

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.

* * * * *

Scene 19: 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

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 -- 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

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

Are you sure? Are you sure?!

GRIG looks at BALKIS, who barely nods to her.

LAXMETER

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.

* * * * *

Scene 20: 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, burlap bags in their hands.

ASSASSIN 1 slides the bag over GRIG's head. ASSASSIN 2 slides the bag over MICHAEL's head.

ASSASSIN 1

In the name of The Movement.

ASSASSIN 2

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 with a bullet behind the ear.

ASSASSIN 1

Do you have anything to say --

ASSASSIN 2

-- in your defense?

ASSASSIN 1

I guess not.

ASSASSIN 2

Be seeing you.

* * * * *

Scene 21: 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.

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.

When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

(A Techno-Pastoral)

Special thanks to Jonatha Newcomb for her stories
"Grategranmama" and "I Think My Eyes Are About To Open"

DESCRIPTION

In 1999, Liberty Creek is one of a handful of rural "unincorporated territories" not wired for phone service. But finally, after the work of JONATHA CALDWELL and her niece, HANNAH CALDWELL, phone lines have finally come to Liberty Creek, starting and ending traditions with one simple dial tone.

CHARACTERS

- JAKE CALDWELL: 80s, still vigorous but has to move with help, which comes in the form of large knobby walking staff as tall as he is.
- JONATHA CALDWELL: JAKE's sister (also in her 80s), who lives with him; for the past five years she has lobbied to get phone service to Liberty Creek and has now succeeded.
- HANNAH CALDWELL: JAKE's daughter and JONATHA's niece, in her 50s; helped JONATHA on the phone line campaign. One half of Two-Oh Duo, with ROLLINS.
- JASON BOCK: Reporter, 50s, sent out to cover the coming of the phone to Liberty Creek; wears an old fedora with a card in the band, on which is written "PRESS" -- both a joke and a homage.
- ROLLINS FREEMAN: A repairer of instruments, especially guitars, and who is the other half of Two-Oh Duo, with HANNAH; in his 50s, never really out of his 20s.
- ARCHIE "WOLFGANG" MCFEE: Runs a pirate radio station from his Barcalounger; lives with ALICE; makes his living as a shang hunter.
- ALICE DUAL: The town historian, same age as ARCHIE; lives with ARCHIE; makes her living as one of the very few female loggers in the state.

NOTE

ROLLINS and HANNAH must be able to sing competently.

SETTING

The play takes place primarily in the living room, kitchen, and downstairs bedroom of the house of JAKE CALDWELL. There is an exit door upstage right, the door to the outside. Stage left is the bedroom to where JONATHA

CALDWELL retreats; a partial wall contains a door with a transom. In the bedroom is a table and a chair, a manual typewriter on the table, a single bed made up, and miscellaneous boxes of all kinds. A window is in the upstage wall of the bedroom, with a chair next to it. If anything, it should look like a small spare cabin. There is also a radio in the room, and when it is on, it is tuned to ARCHIE's station.

Somewhere in the mix is a large-print -- and I mean LARGE PRINT -- calendar which shows the year to be 1999. Anything else that can be included in the set that indicates that year is fair game.

At stage right is ARCHIE's radio station. The same LARGE PRINT calendar is there. A phone sits on a small table. Other scenes will take place in areas defined by light.

* * * * *

Scene 1: Prologue

Music: Andrew Sisters, "Telephone Song." ARCHIE is in his "pirate radio station." ARCHIE wears a headset and sits in a Barcalounger, surrounded by radio equipment.

ARCHIE

Welcome back to Liberty Creek's Radio True Blue, I Love
You, and I am your one and only host, "Wolf" --

ARCHIE pronounces this with a German accent: "Vulf" -- and after he says "Vulf," ARCHIE howls.

ARCHIE

"Gang" --

ARCHIE pronounces this as "gong" -- ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

ARCHIE

-- Vulfgang! -- broadcasting to you from my trusty lounger,
Barca.

ARCHIE barks several times.

ARCHIE

The only pirate radio station in the first circle of hell. And while we wait radiophonically for the return of Alice Dual from the hospital, let me give you an update on Liberty Creek vitals.

ARCHIE cranes his neck.

ARCHIE

Weather: we have some around, and I confidently predict it will continue for the entire program -- and even beyond. Also, Liberty Creek Week is fast flying towards us, our annual tribute to us from us -- and this year we will celebrate the historic coming of the phones to our fair hamlet, thanks to Hannah and Jonatha Caldwell -- the coming of which is a quite a sea-change for us even though we're land-locked in the mountains.

ALICE DUAL enters, flustered, and sits. ARCHIE gives her a thumbs up.

ARCHIE

All right! Here she is, folks, a breath of fresh air breezing in, our very own Alice Dual, town historian, with our much awaited extra-special report.

ARCHIE bangs the gong.

ARCHIE

Grab your breath and report, oh mighty chronicler.

ALICE

Well, as you all know, I just came from the hospital --

But ALICE can't quite catch her breath.

ARCHIE

Alice, breathe deeply -- and all of you out there -- take a deep breath, a little "air time," for Alice Dual.

ARCHIE takes a deep breath.

ARCHIE

Now, ready?

Ready. ALICE

Set. ARCHIE

Set. ALICE

Go. ARCHIE

I just came from the hospital -- ALICE

And? ARCHIE

And I want to let everyone know that Jake Caldwell is all right. ALICE

Our patriarch is patched up? ARCHIE

As mended as medicine can make him. ALICE

Anybody there with him? ARCHIE

Hannah. Rollins, too. ALICE

And Jonatha, right? ARCHIE

And Jonatha -- ALICE

You need to mention her. ARCHIE

ALICE

Well, to lose Jake -- I don't even want to think --

ARCHIE

Don't try to imagine the unimaginable before midnight, Alice. Besides, Jake's turnaround shows the protective effects of ten parts "old coot" vinegar to one part human blood.

ALICE

Pith and vinegar.

ARCHIE

Like that "lithp."

ARCHIE gives her an affectionate look.

ARCHIE

Whew, Alice Dual!

ALICE

Whew, Archie McFee.

ARCHIE

What a way to cap it all off: pedal-to-the-metal opera, wouldn't you say?

ALICE

And a near-death experience bringing us all near death.

ARCHIE

Why, it was just a week ago today, in the gentle environs of Liberty Creek --

ALICE

Archie -- not "wayback woo-woo" again?

ARCHIE

Folks, I am definitely going into "wayback woo-woo" -- seems like a good time to reverb [pronounced REE-verb] the dramatic and delightful drama of when the phones came to Liberty Creek.

ALICE

I hope Jake is not listening.

ARCHIE

Jake never listens to me. Besides, he is doing his job by making himself whole for us again.

ARCHIE does "wayback woo-woo," the aural equivalent of the television or movie screen going fuzzy to indicate a move back into time.

ARCHIE

On the day the phone lines came to Liberty Creek -- help me set the mood, Alice --

ALICE
(reluctantly)

On the day --

ARCHIE

After five years of political persuasion by Jonatha and Hannah Caldwell --

ALICE

To bring Liberty Creek into the century in which it lives --

ARCHIE

After all of this --

ALICE
-- not a rump found itself resting --

ARCHIE

Ants in their pants -- bees in their BVDs --

ARCHIE smiles and gives ALICE a thumbs-up.

ALICE

And Archie, you and I know that in uncertain times --

ARCHIE

Yes?

ALICE

A restless rump --

ARCHIE

Yes?

ALICE

Can be a dangerous thing, indeed.

ARCHIE

Indeed, indeed. Okay, listeners, go for your next glass of whatever it is you're drinking while we take a small break. Then -- onto the epic story of "When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek" from the only pirate radio station powered by the methane effusions of bovines.

ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- The Andrew Sisters, "Telephone Song." ALICE looks tired and worried.

ARCHIE

Even after all these years --

ALICE

My problem, Archie, is that I can imagine, before midnight, that Jake --

ARCHIE puts a tender hand on ALICE's shoulder.

ARCHIE

It looks like he's going to be fine, Alice.

ALICE

Woo-woo. And us, you and me?

ARCHIE

I confidently predict we will continue for the entire program -- and even beyond.

ALICE

I heard that on my way in.

ARCHIE

Bears repeating, Alice Dual.

They give each other a chaste kiss and hold hands as the music plays.

* * * * *

Scene 2: The House of Caldwell

Music button from opening section of Manhattan Transfer's version of "Operator." On the table is a cardboard box; everyone stares at it. ARCHIE has a portable tape recorder and a microphone. HANNAH holds the plug-end of a telephone line. JONATHA slowly takes a phone out of the box and everyone continues to stare at it. Except for JAKE, everyone speaks in something of a hush.

ALICE stands next to JAKE, with her arm through his.

ALICE

The first one. The very first one, Jake. The first one ever.

JAKE

Just like the serpent in the Garden, Alice. You can all leave now. Begone!

HANNAH

Dad --

Everyone stares at the phone sitting on the table.

JAKE

Thank you all for ignoring me in my own house.

JAKE turns to ALICE.

JAKE

Give 'em a dime, they'll take your dollar.

ALICE

Jake -- it'll be over soon.

JAKE

That's what you think. Gone be!

HANNAH turns to ROLLINS.

HANNAH

Will it work? What if it doesn't [work] --

ROLLINS

It'll work, Hannah nirvana. We checked out Consumer Reports, we did our homework --

JAKE

Fine by me if it doesn't.

JONATHA

It'll work.

JAKE

She commandeth!

ARCHIE

Hey, big-city scribe.

ROLLINS

It'll work, Hannah.

JASON touches his hat brim.

JASON

My low-wattage king.

ARCHIE
(to the others)

Just love him, don't'cha?

ROLLINS

No.

ARCHIE

You ready?

JASON

Ready, radio-meister.

ROLLINS
(a little louder)

Suck-up.

JAKE

Thank you all, again, for ignoring me in my own house.

ARCHIE

Alice Dual -- stand here with me and let's have the finger of
Clio amuse us all.

ARCHIE and ALICE do their "color commentary": ALICE holds the
microphone while ARCHIE holds the recorder itself.

ARCHIE

"And we are recording live from the home of Jake and
Jonatha Caldwell -- "

JAKE

House is in my name, not hers.

ARCHIE

"Jonatha looks as skittish as a cow with a buck-toothed calf,
staring at the phone -- "

ALICE

"And, Archie -- "

ARCHIE

"Yyyeeesss -- "

ALICE

"Hannah's a bit white around the gills as well."

ARCHIE

"Momentous day."

ALICE

"Yes it is."

JAKE

All traps should be shut.

ARCHIE

Getting the purple prose?

JASON

The ink runneth over.

JONATHA

Okay, everyone --

But JONATHA does not move, just stares. HANNAH hovers near.

ARCHIE

"We're going to do a little move-through-the-crowd verité here."

Which they do, hovering near HANNAH and JONATHA.

HANNAH

Jonatha?

JONATHA

Everyone, please -- we don't have much time.

JAKE

She commandeth! Againeth!

JONATHA gestures to HANNAH.

JONATHA

Hannah? That plug in your hand -- give it to me -- gently --

JAKE

Too crowded in here.

JONATHA

Gently.

JAKE

It's not the heat -- it's the humanity.

HANNAH carefully brings the phone line and hands it to JONATHA. JONATHA gets ready to insert the plug.

ARCHIE

"There's a pause -- the phone plug clutched in Jonatha's fingers."

ALICE

"Moment of connection here. But wait!"

ARCHIE

"She hands it off to Hannah -- "

ALICE

"Too nervous to make the connection herself."

ARCHIE

"Hannah takes a deep starting-line breath."

ROLLINS
(sotto voce)

Go, girl.

ALICE

"Hannah plugs it in."

Everyone takes a step back quickly as if a bomb has been activated.

JAKE

The seventh seal is off.

Everyone shushes him.

JAKE

The four horsemen fart by.

Everyone shushes him again. Everyone waits. Then, like a blast, the phone rings.

ARCHIE

It works.

ALICE

The first one ever.

After several rings, JONATHA picks it up. ARCHIE and ALICE record.

JONATHA

Hello? Yes -- this is she.

JAKE

Uses the objective case --

JONATHA

Hello, Governor. Yes, right on time -- loud and clear, yes it is. Oh, we're all here -- no, not all of us, but those that could get away. Well, all right, if that's what you want.

JONATHA holds the phone up in the air and encourages everyone to say hello to the Governor, which they do in a variety of ways.

JAKE

I didn't vote for you!

JONATHA gets back on the line.

JONATHA

Yes, this is historic.

JAKE

Won't ever vote for you.

JONATHA

Yes, we're looking forward to everything it can bring.

JAKE

Rather vote Communist --

JONATHA

And thank you for all your support in this.

JAKE

Let the corruption begin!

JONATHA

No, no, just noisy in the background here.

JAKE

See, it's already started!

JONATHA

Thank you, Governor. Yes, technology is an amazing thing. Call again.

Everyone cheers, dances around, etc.

ROLLINS

Ready, Hannah?

HANNAH and ROLLINS break into a chorus of "Hello, My Baby." ARCHIE and ALICE record away.

ROLLINS & HANNAH

Hello! ma baby, Hello! ma honey,
Hello! ma ragtime gal.
Send me a kiss by wire,
Baby my heart's on fire!
If you refuse me, Honey,
You'll lose me,
Then you'll be left alone;
Oh baby, telephone and tell me I'm your own.

While they sing, JAKE looks on with disgust. As he walks up to JONATHA, the song trails off, and as he speaks, everyone quiets down to listen, more or less frozen in place, as if this were inevitable and unavoidable. ARCHIE and ALICE, of course, record away.

JAKE

Well, sister of mine, I do believe you think you have brought progress to Liberty Creek.

JONATHA

I have, brother of mine.

JAKE

Oh, but you haven't. You're all going to lose! You're all going to be losers!

HANNAH

Dad --

ROLLINS

Mr. C --

JONATHA

Don't try reason on him. You can't reason with a relic.

Overlapping.

ARCHIE

Ooooh --

ALICE

The gall --

ROLLINS

Hey!

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JAKE slams down his stick.

JAKE

A relic! At least a relic is useful. Show it off. Sell it. Heave it through the palace windows and kill a czar. But that!

JAKE points his staff at the phone.

JAKE

The world's corruption will now ooze into your homes because of that! You want to be connected, on-line, wired. Arguments for five years, in my ear like wasps -- and all of you sheep-like -- bah, bah, bah -- because it would make your lives easier! Easy? Spirit becomes sharp and hard by fighting!

JAKE points at each and every one of them.

JAKE

None of you has any fight left. Giving in to gravity, to luxury. Upward! That's where the fight goes. Keeps us out of the slime, the company of animals. That --

JAKE once more points his staff at the phone.

JAKE

-- that is the millstone to drown you in your own desires.

JAKE slams his staff down to make his point.

JONATHA

You are a dried-up old Jeremiah.

HANNAH moves toward JONATHA, but JAKE waves her off.

JAKE

And you are a sybaritic disgusting bag of bones.

HANNAH turns on ARCHIE and ALICE, pointing to the tape recorder.

HANNAH

Turn it off!

JONATHA

You're still jealous --

HANNAH
(to ARCHIE)

Now!

JONATHA

-- because I went to New York.

HANNAH

Christ, not this!

JAKE

Jealous of a deserter?

JONATHA

Forty years gnawing my bones --

JAKE

A. De. Ser. Ter!

JONATHA

An escapee!

JAKE

Who left me to clean up everything --

JONATHA

Who so loved a mess --

JAKE

-- so she could pursue her gift --

JONATHA

That's right!

JAKE

Brilliant painter unequalled!

JONATHA

I had a life to make.

JAKE

Unmade everyone to make it.

HANNAH

This is old news --

JONATHA

Farm wife, schoolmarm, nurse --

JAKE

What was wrong with nurse?

(to ARCHIE)

Is that off?!

ARCHIE turns it off.

ARCHIE

It's off!

But ALICE surreptitiously turns it back on. They exchange a look.

JONATHA

Nurse, punching bag for an alcoholic husband -- my full menu. Not for me, the dark ages!

JAKE

Always had to be brighter!

JONATHA

Broader --

JAKE

Badder --

JONATHA

Bigger --

JAKE

Head to match!

JONATHA

And I was damn good in "New Yawk"!

JAKE

"Damned" was right!

JONATHA

I knew every artist worth knowing, and they knew me!

JAKE

But couldn't hack it because no iron your spine --

JONATHA

Like that rod up your butt?

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JAKE

Came crawling back when they wouldn't pet you anymore.

JONATHA

You know nothing about anything of my life!

JAKE

I know you're a coward.

HANNAH makes a "T" sign with her hands.

HANNAH

Time out!

They ignore her.

JONATHA

This from someone who popped out of the womb already
an old man.

HANNAH

Time out!

They ignore her.

JAKE

Born wise --

HANNAH

This is old news --

JONATHA

Afraid of "new," always spitting over his left shoulder --

JAKE

(childish tone)

New, new, new, new --

JONATHA

At least I tried --

JAKE

And it got you no husband, no children --

JONATHA

Never wanted.

JAKE

No home --

JONATHA

Not desired.

JAKE

Nothing solid --

JONATHA

Didn't need a stone crushing my chest --

JAKE

Unless all those crates in the attic with your "works" nailed up tight is a life -- not very solid to me --

JONATHA

You like the stone on your chest --

JAKE

Nothing to lay your hands on and say, "This will last."

JONATHA

And does your Rock of Gibraltar include the wife dead by childbirth --

HANNAH

Jonatha!

ROLLINS

Whoa, Jonatha!

JAKE

Leave Hannah out of --

JONATHA

I'm sure Hannah maiden name Dempster really appreciated that wifely duty!

ROLLINS

Miz C --

ALICE

Jonatha, that's really out of line --

JONATHA

And naming the daughter -- what a stroke!

JAKE

They are exempt --

ROLLINS

Miz C -- that's not --

JONATHA

Shut up!

JONATHA squares right up to JAKE.

JONATHA

Exempt? Why? Why, why, why?

JONATHA gives them all a glare.

JONATHA

Look at you -- oh weeping tragedy! This good man, stayer-at-home, Mom-and-Dad-protector, dubya-dubya-two vet, raiser-of-Hannah in motherless sorrow and alone -- how could everybody not love Jake! Even Christ comes up short!

JAKE

All your smart-ass --

JONATHA

You want smart-ass, my Moses-like holier-than-me proverb-chewing squat-faced brother of mine.

JONATHA jabs a finger at the phone.

JONATHA

Here's progress for the two of us. Now you can call me so I don't have to look at your upright face when it pronounces sentence on me --

JONATHA her gaze around the room.

JONATHA

-- or any of yours, either.

JONATHA focuses on HANNAH.

JONATHA

And especially you. I was your mother when he couldn't handle you anymore --

HANNAH

I know --

JONATHA

His cry of the heart -- "come help your Hannah!" -- that's why I really came home --

JAKE

How she spins the web of her defeat!

JONATHA

And just look at your face now -- all slopped over on his side.

HANNAH

That's not true!

JONATHA

You all look like you got a fart jammed up your nostrils.

JAKE

That's it.

JAKE aims his staff at the phone.

JAKE

The snake. The snake must be scotched.

JONATHA

The reasoning of a relic.

JAKE raises his stick over his head to smash the phone -- everyone freezes. Scene shifts to JASON and ARCHIE at the radio station. As they speak, the cast does a slow motion ballet called "The Smashing of The Phone by Jake." The phone will disassemble, and ACTORS will pick up pieces and make them "fly" through the air. They then follow the action as described by JASON and ARCHIE.

ARCHIE

Welcome back to the only radio station powered by "D" batteries. Folks, I have with me Jason Bock, the reporter the "big city" rag loaned us to cover the new phone lines come to Liberty Creek. Welcome, again.

JASON

Happy to make you happy, Archie.

ARCHIE

What a day, huh? Tell us what you saw. The inquiring public of Liberty Creek --

JASON

All thirty-seven registered voters.

ARCHIE

They want to know.

JASON

Well -- Jake did not take kindly to it --

ARCHIE

The old guard dog bit!

JASON

Old guard-dog like him knew he was going to get wasted in the global marketplace.

JAKE begins the slow descent of his stick.

JASON

Anger of God, it felt like.

ARCHIE

Righteous!

JASON

People dodging hither and zither --

ARCHIE

Thither and yon --

JASON

-- either trying to save the phone or hold Jake back --

ARCHIE

Try a full nelson on a force of nature!

JASON

-- that club incoming at the speed of wrath. When it hit --

ARCHIE

Bam!

The phone pieces "fly" through the air.

JASON

Jonatha never moved -- you could see the "I dare you" in her eyes.

ARCHIE

To me it was "FU" in her eyes -- excuse my Indo-European, folks.

JASON

Whatever it was, Jake saw it.

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric OK Corral.

JASON

But she did move when he came after her --

ARCHIE

Funny, that --

JASON

Not funny, really, but -- funny -- watching him drive her to the bedroom --

ARCHIE

Head 'em up!

JASON

-- her using the handset like a little rapier --

ARCHIE

Touché.

JASON

But not funny, no --

ARCHIE

No, no, not really -- no, no, not at all.

They laugh a hearty laugh.

JASON

Well, because none of us was sure how much was for real
and how much Jake was hustling everybody. Him shouting
--

JAKE

"You need to be quarantined, sister of mine."

JASON

Like she was an immigrant.

JAKE

"You are infected and I'm going to keep you away from
everybody."

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric Ellis Island.

JASON

At one point, Jonatha crammed against the bedroom door,
she just stopped. Cold. Stood up straight as she could.

ARCHIE

"Wreck"-titude.

JASON

Handed the handset to Hannah.

ARCHIE

Passing the torch.

JASON

Turned. Opened the door. And went in.

ARCHIE

Under her own pig-head of steam.

JASON

Noble.

ARCHIE

Human interest galore, hey?

JASON

At least no gore galore.

ARCHIE

It's a keeper for the archives.

Lights out -- ARCHIE and JASON rejoin the crowd in "real time." In the silence is heard the tape recorder clicking off. HANNAH, noticing, walks over to ARCHIE, takes out the cassette, throws it on the floor, and smashes it under foot.

HANNAH

Christ! Dad -- Dad --

JAKE stands stolid and silent, bearing the eyes of everyone.

HANNAH

Jonatha, come on out.

JONATHA, in the bedroom, seethes.

ALICE

Immovable force.

ARCHIE

Irresistible object.

ROLLINS

Like Greek -- the House of Caldwell --

He makes the sounds and gestures of a house falling in on itself.

HANNAH

Dad, Jonatha -- Christ! This was a day to celebrate -- come on!

JONATHA rattles the key in the door, as if locking it, then throws the key over the transom into the living room. HANNAH picks it up.

JASON

She's locked herself in.

ROLLINS

Yow.

JASON

And only you can unlock her out.

ROLLINS

Twist of fate.

JASON

Practical problems here.

HANNAH

You can't stay in my old room --

ROLLINS

No bathroom.

HANNAH

You've got nothing to eat --

ROLLINS

No food.

HANNAH

I'm going to unlock the door --

ROLLINS

No food, though, then you don't need a bathroom.

ARCHIE

Mind's a steel trap, Rollins.

JASON

Jaws of death.

HANNAH

Tell her to come out. Tell her you're sorry.

JAKE

Fresh out.

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JONATHA

Rather eat June bugs.

HANNAH

You know you didn't mean it, Dad. I know you. I know you love her. Come on.

JAKE approaches the bedroom "wall"; so does JONATHA on her side.

Everyone expects them to speak, but instead, JAKE stamps his staff three times; in response, JONATHA stamps her foot three times.

HANNAH

Boy, are we all connected now!

Transition: Lightnin' Hopkins, "Hello, Central" or Blondie, "Call Me."

* * * * *

Scene 3: The Election

ARCHIE

Welcome back to Radio Hot Tamale, By Golly, and I am your one and only griot, Wolfgang! reporting to you from the only pirate radio station powered by the fall of a butterfly's wing. And just to remind you about the upcoming town council special election for the seat recently vacated by Buzz Larch. Buzz, you may remember, recently died in a kind of, well -- what else can you call it but a bizarre twizzler of fate. As reported here on the only radio station for pirates, Buzz, a little down on his money but with a strong thirst for a buzz, mixed gasoline and milk. Not surprising, when it hit bottom it came right back up -- but, unlucky for Buzz, he vomited right into the full-going fireplace. The vomit exploded, Buzz

exploded, the house exploded -- and we got ourselves a special election.

Bangs the gong. Transition music: Big Bopper or Jerry Lee Lewis, "Chantilly Lace" or Paul Anka, "Kissin' On The Phone."

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Scene 4: The House of Rollins

ROLLINS at his work table, a phone near him. He holds an unfinished body of some musical instrument, like a violin or mandolin, that he has been working on. Tools, sandpaper, chisels, etc.

He picks up the phone but doesn't dial -- he simply listens to the dial tone. He re-sets the hook, listens again. Dials his own number.

ROLLINS

My number is busy.

ROLLINS hangs up.

ROLLINS

Amazing.

He works on the instrument. A bell tingles, indicating a door opening. JASON shows up, carrying a portable tape recorder. ROLLINS stiffens but doesn't stop what he's doing.

JASON

Front door was open.

ROLLINS

It's open to anyone, friends and strangers alike.

JASON

I thought we were supposed to do the promo now.

ROLLINS

Everyone's running on Liberty Creek time -- big-city scheduling doesn't hunt here.

JASON

It's just that Archie --

ROLLINS

She will be here.

JASON

O-kay.

JASON starts fiddling with the tools on ROLLIN's table. ROLLINS indicates for him to stop it.

JASON

How did you ever come up with the name "Two-Oh Duo" for you and Hannah?

ROLLINS

Are we doing small-talk now?

JASON

Inquiring minds want to know.

ROLLINS

Is that what's under your hat?

JASON

I asked Hannah, but she told me to ask you.

ROLLINS

And you just love doing what Hannah tells you to do.

JASON

I'd be stupid if I didn't -- even if it means having to ask you.

They glare: squaring off. ROLLINS goes back to vigorous sandpapering. They wait.

The bell tingles again, and in walks HANNAH, looking very dispirited and carrying the broken handset from the telephone. She sits.

ROLLINS

Hannah --

No response.

ROLLINS

Hannah --

No response.

JASON

Why don't you just let her engine idle?

ROLLINS

And who are you to tell me --

JASON

Hannah has her own rhythms.

ROLLINS

And how would you know that?

JASON

You should spend that kind of time knowing her.

ROLLINS

And you have?

ROLLINS is suddenly aware of how harsh he's sounding and backs off, focuses on HANNAH.

ROLLINS

Hannah -- they're going to be all right. They're just being stubborn -- they could give lessons to a mule.

HANNAH jabs the handset like a little rapier while she looks at everybody.

ROLLINS

Well, yeah, there was that.

HANNAH brings the handset over her head like a hammer and then down.

ROLLINS

And that, too.

HANNAH does a mock righteousness pose, a parody of JAKE. JASON tugs on his ear lobe.

JASON

Sounds like -- brimstone.

HANNAH points at him as if to say, "The prize!"

ROLLINS

Okay, so it's kind of post-Apocalypse over there at the moment. But it can't last forever -- not with the size of their bladders.

HANNAH looks at ROLLINS and then laughs softly. ROLLINS mugs at JASON, as if to say, "See what I made happen and you didn't?"

ROLLINS

Bladders -- yeah!

HANNAH laughs, uses her thumb and forefinger to indicate a small size.

HANNAH

They got thimbles.

ROLLINS

Bang those thimbles! Pride falleth before pee pee! Now, that's a good face!

HANNAH

Rollins -- Rollins, Rollins -- you know what scared me the most?

ROLLINS

Tell on.

HANNAH

I had this -- vision pass in front of me, you know, when he was standing like this and she's, you know, like that -- that they would both drop dead at that moment with all that -- that -- whatever carved into their faces. And that's how their thousands of days on this earth would get remembered. Not raising me when Mama passed away, not how they opened to me when David died -- that people would not remember

their long arc of life -- just some stupid moment of stupid pride -- end up a joke on one of Archie's "woo-woo's" with Alice. The essentials -- pfft! -- lost --

ROLLINS gives JASON a side-glance.

ROLLINS

Yeah, no one's life should end up in a joke. And it won't happen, not with us around. Hannah, you know you don't have to do the gig tonight.

HANNAH

I am going to do the gig tonight, Rollins.

ROLLINS

I can solo it --

HANNAH

A solo duo? Even with us off at the tavern, 70 pairs of registered eyes will be trained on that house tonight. They are not going to lack for observation. I am going to sing -- you know that.

JASON

Speaking of which -- Archie needs the promo.

ROLLINS

You up for it?

HANNAH nods yes.

ROLLINS

O-kay, journalista, you got that thing ready?

JASON

Promo for Two-Oh Duo ready to roll.

ROLLINS

And aren't you ever going back to your real job?

HANNAH

Pitch me, will you?

ROLLINS hums a note. They sing a capella the first verse and chorus of ROLLINS' new song, "Telephone Zone" -- see Act I, Scene 6. JASON dutifully records, and when the piece is over, he rewinds the tape.

HANNAH
(to ROLLINS)

That was cool.

ROLLINS

Just comes.

HANNAH
Oh, Master, so much Zen coming off you.

ROLLINS
Not to mention sweat and fretboard shavings.

JASON
The Liberty Creek aphrodisiac.

JASON hands ROLLINS the tape.

JASON
Nice work, Rollins.

ROLLINS
Good to have the big city weigh in.

JASON mockingly tips his hat.

ROLLINS
And when did you say you were going back?

JASON
Some human interest stuff to finish up --

ROLLINS
More like humid interest --

HANNAH
And I think I need to go.

ROLLINS

I'll walk you.

HANNAH

No. Give me the tape -- I'll drop it off at Archie's.

ROLLINS hands it off, but HANNAH doesn't leave right away.

HANNAH

Are we too old to be doing "gigs"?

ROLLINS

When you're too old for gigs, butter won't melt in your mouth because you'll be stone-cold dead.

JASON

There's a lot to be said for growing up.

ROLLINS

So I can wear a funny hat?

And immediately ROLLINS is sorry he said that with HANNAH in the room.

HANNAH

See you tonight.

HANNAH exits -- the bell tingles. JASON and ROLLINS look at each other.

ROLLINS

You won't get her.

JASON

You haven't gotten her after how long of knowing her?

ROLLINS

There's been an understanding.

JASON

I understand --

ROLLINS

We go back a long way.

JASON

But time moves forward.

ROLLINS

Maybe I should get a hat like you.

JASON

It'll take more than a hat.

ROLLINS

Isn't there a war you should be off covering?

JASON

I like this one just fine.

They glare at each other, then JASON books out of the shop to catch up with HANNAH, leaving ROLLINS alone with his sweat and fretboard shavings.
Transition music: Paul Anka, "Kissin' On The Phone."

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Scene 5: The Siege

JAKE is cutting lengths of yellow "Caution" tape to cover JONATHA's door when HANNAH enters. JONATHA is drawing with pastels in a sketch-pad. She hears everything. She tries to keep drawing, but eventually she is drawn toward the wall of the bedroom.

HANNAH

Dad, you can't --

JAKE looks at her.

HANNAH

Well, you shouldn't.

JAKE

Counseling me?

HANNAH

No --

JAKE

Good.

HANNAH

-- but you shouldn't.

JAKE goes back to the taping.

HANNA

How'd you get it?

JAKE

Alice gave me a ride to town -- she was on her way to the woodlot -- Archie gave me a ride back after dropping off his shang to Sarah.

HANNAH

One or two strips, you know -- people will get the idea.

JAKE

I don't want them to get the idea, Hannah. I want them to get the smell of apocalypse. "When a man's heart is full of fire, sparks fly out of his mouth."

HANNAH

"Even absurdity has a champion to defend it."

JAKE

Quoting me back, "quoter" queen? You have a place you call your own, right?

HANNAH

Right.

JAKE

Do I tell you how to keep your house?

HANNAH

No.

JAKE

Have I ever?

HANNAH

Never.

JAKE

So, butt out. I am my own INS here. I am making a border and making sure my house stays clean.

HANNAH

She's not some foreigner.

JAKE

Your aunt was always some foreigner.

JAKE starts to do the taping, slowly because of his age.

HANNAH

Dad -- Dad --

JAKE

What?

HANNAH speaks as much to let JONATHA know as in protest.

HANNAH

You can't -- tack up yellow caution tape across the door!

JAKE

Scene of an accident, aren't we?

HANNAH

No --

JAKE

Watch me festoon!

HANNAH

There's been no accident.

JAKE

I see destruction all around.

HANNAH

What are you talking about?

JAKE
Haven't you noticed already?

HANNAH
Noticed what?

JAKE
The trucks.

HANNAH
Trucks.

JAKE
Phone company trucks.

HANNAH
Well --

JAKE
"Mention the devil and in he rides."

HANNAH
Just getting hooked up --

JAKE
"Hooked up," yes. Yes. Hooked. Hooked. On.

HANNAH
It's about time.

JAKE
Convenience, safety --

HANNAH
They deserve it.

JAKE
Heard all your arguments, ad infinitum nauseum, right in this room.

HANNAH
Then you can hardly blame them.

JAKE gets down off the ladder, and what he says is as much pitched to JONATHA as it is to HANNAH.

JAKE

Yes I can, Hannah. I can blame them because they're throwing away treasures with their eyes wide open. That kind of waste I can, and I will, blame.

HANNAH

It's not waste to --

JAKE

Taking what is good and replacing it with what is new -- how often have fools done that?

HANNAH

You think we will never ever see each other again --

JAKE

We won't.

HANNAH

-- never bring over a casserole, never get invited in for coffee --

JAKE

Exactly.

HANNAH

You think people are just going to forget each other --

JAKE

They will.

HANNAH

-- and be hovering, waiting, waiting, waiting for that special phone call --

JAKE

The green chalkboards.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH

I don't understand --

JAKE

Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

What's going to happen to our green chalkboards?

HANNAH

I don't know.

JAKE takes a piece of chalk out of his pocket.

JAKE

I have my chalk. I always have my chalk. Check your pocket.

HANNAH takes out her piece of chalk. JONATHA also brings out her chalk.

JAKE

So do you. You always do, don't you? I'll bet you even she -- right? And so does everybody. We all have our chalk. What's going to happen to these?

HANNAH

I don't know.

JAKE

Dumped into Archie's attic for the museum that man will never build, no matter how much he promises, and no one will ever write again --

JAKE writes on the air.

JAKE

"Haven't seen you in a whole moon -- how's the heart?"
Or, "Left the coffee-cake on the transom so the squirrels
wouldn't get wind." After David passed away, didn't you
always seek a message when you came to your door? And
wasn't there always one there?

HANNAH

You and Jonatha.

JAKE

All of us -- we made the effort.

HANNAH

Yes.

JAKE

Not leaving this no-body voice on a machine, something
you could do sitting on the toilet! Push the body through
the air, along the road, lift it against gravity, and leave the
message. A piece of yourself behind. Who wouldn't love
that?

HANNAH

I loved it every time.

JAKE

And sometimes you'd go to leave a message and up they'd
come behind you, the ones you were leaving it for. So, a
cup of coffee. The latest about the new roof patch or the
cabbage that looks like Calvin Coolidge. Advice about the
sump pump. A couple of stories or three about the human
femur Henry found digging in his root cellar or the pony that
used to fart whenever any child came near to ride it.

HANNAH

That happened to me!

JAKE

And since it's dark, why not stay for supper? Sleep over if
you need.

JAKE struggles to break the chalk in half.

JAKE

Damn!

Finally he breaks the chalk piece in half. JONATHA can barely keep herself from speaking out.

JAKE

Now, not any more. Because now we do things the way everyone else does them. We're going to be just like everybody else.

JAKE stuffs the pieces into his pocket, goes back to his taping.

JAKE

"What is new -- "

HANNAH

Dad --

As JAKE says the proverb, JONATHA lip-synchs with him.

JAKE

"What is new is not true, and what is true is not new." Thus endeth the reading of the old coot. Now go -- I have work to do.

HANNAH

Wait.

JAKE

Why?

HANNAH does not speak right away.

JAKE

Why?

HANNAH

Because that's not all of it. And you know that, Dad. If you were sitting in this room listening to their arguments -- to my argument about David! -- then you know.

JONATHA makes a move encouraging HANNAH. JAKE listens but says nothing.

HANNAH

If you're going to fight this thing, fight fair. "Fight fair, and you'll fare well," I seem to remember someone saying.

JAKE

The "quoter" queen again.

JONATHA cheers HANNAH on.

HANNAH

Do I have "fair"?

JAKE

Go on.

HANNAH

Mrs. Snole's diabetic shock with no one around. Melanda's miscarriage. The Carter house fire. Marcus almost crushed by the tractor. The Noble boys sliding off the bridge. Bundy losing his arm in the snowblower. And every time, the same thing. And you know I know this -- know it inside-out right to the bone! Ten miles down the hill to the gas station pay phone, pray to God that when you dropped the coins the line hadn't died again, then the tone, the 911, the explanation just spewing out and hoping, pray to God, that you gave the right directions -- left at the sycamore, look for the Mickey Mouse windsock, because we can't even be bothered to name the streets and number the houses! Then racing back, hoping that when you got there you wouldn't have to sit with the dead while the EMTs came. Oh, we're neighbors, all right, you'd like to keep us neighbors even if it kills -- "Fate is the course when men fail to act" -- right? I have already, thank you, had enough fate in my life.

HANNAH breaks her chalk half, puts the pieces in her pocket.

HANNAH

If phone lines make fate go away even a little for anybody, then, mister, I am all for as many of them as we can string

up. I have to meet Rollins at his shop -- help him with the back orders. I'll leave you to your work.

As HANNAH goes to leave, ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS

Yo!

JAKE

Hannah --

HANNAH makes a gesture as if to say, "Not now."

JAKE

Don't you knock?

ROLLINS

Since when have I ever knocked, Mr. C? I haven't knocked since I weighed 120 pounds.

ROLLINS sees the tape.

ROLLINS

Redecorating?

HANNAH

C'mon, let's go.

ROLLINS

I finished all the back orders last night -- guitars glued, violins screwed, dulcimers at their highest amplitude. Just wondering if you could help me ship 'em out. What's up, Mr. C?

JAKE and HANNAH refuse to speak.

ROLLINS

I see. This is what it must feel like just before, you know, two duellers get ready to blow each other's brains out. Suspended aggravation. So?

JAKE

Ask the woman over there on whom you've been sweet for years and who refuses to take advantage of you.

HANNAH

Let's go, Rollins.

ROLLINS

I already know that, Mr. C.

HANNAH

Let's go!

ROLLINS

Someday she'll get the advantage of taking advantage of me.

JAKE

Not while we got the journalist in the chicken coop.

ROLLINS

Working on that.

JAKE

More tolerant man than I am.

ROLLINS

Wouldn't be hard, Mr. C.

HANNAH

Are you two finished?

ROLLINS

Mr. C, I've never been one to question you, not someone who's lived the kind of life you've lived -- respect your elders, my elders always told me, so, "No lip." But, the tape -- a little cold, don't you think, Mr. C? This ain't the end of the world.

HANNAH

You just missed the latest brimstone!

JAKE

Do you have your chalk?

ROLLINS reaches into his pocket and pulls it out. JAKE looks at HANNAH.

JAKE

What are you going to do with it?

ROLLINS

I don't know.

JAKE

Chuck it, because now it's just garbage.

HANNAH

He thinks we'll never visit again.

ROLLINS

We all know you're a little -- ragged about this phone thing.

JAKE

A little ragged?

ROLLINS

All right, Armageddon pissed -- but Mr. C, it's a no-brainer.

JAKE

From the no-brainer.

ROLLINS

Good thing us no-brainers don't have the brains to take offense. Look, Mr. C, between a phone and -- this -- with a phone I can book more gigs for the band, which means more time to gather manna with Hannah -- that's to the good, hey? And I can take in more work doing my instrument repair.

JAKE

Put him up to this?

ROLLINS

Flo can get more of her tofu to town -- especially the garlic! Ron and Polly can check on their patients -- and with a

phone they could do that insurance claim gig at home they want to do. Ray can juggle those fourteen hundred jobs he has -- and when the kids go away to college, they can all call mom and dad for more money! With that line, man, we are now in this century, all connected to all! I don't mean to disrespect, Mr. C, but the fact is, you lost. And it's going to stay lost for you because it's just better this way.

ROLLINS holds up his chalk.

ROLLINS

Nice, but horse-and-buggy.

JONATHA does a few cheerleading moves.

HANNAH

Rollins -- that was just fine.

ROLLINS

Well -- good, then. Good. I guess we better go. Mr. C --

ROLLINS points at the tape.

ROLLINS

Clashes with everything else.

Before she leaves, HANNAH gives JAKE a kiss.

HANNAH

You are so poetic.

ROLLINS

And it's only the middle of the afternoon.

They exit. JAKE and JONATHA look at each other through the "wall." As JAKE moves, JONATHA moves -- it is as if they are miming each other's movements.

JAKES bangs his staff three times.

JAKE

Oye, oye, oye -- the court is now in session.

JAKE suddenly seems to lose energy and sits on the couch. So does JONATHA, and she sits on the bed.

JAKE

"Everything is good for something."

JONATHA

"Swallows and sparrows cannot understand the ambitions of swans."

JAKE painfully lays down on the couch and falls asleep.

* * * * *

Scene 6: The Gig

We are at the "gig": ROLLINS and HANNAH, and JASON has tagged along.

ROLLINS

Well, all you masters of being plastered, we have one more number to do before our break, a ditty somewhat inspired by those thin little lines that've come snaking into our homes recently in Liberty Creek, delivering us to the outside world.

HANNAH begins doing the Twilight Zone theme. The song is sung a capella and done to the tune of "Feed Me Jesus."

ROLLINS

So be afraid, be very afraid -- you have entered a different time and dimension. You have entered -- "The Telephone Zone."

First Verse

Ringing, ringing, ringing, ringing -- phones are everywhere

Chirping in the bathrooms -- breep, breep in your underwear

Cell phone, mobile, wireless -- there's a calling plan for you

Bounce your words off satellites from here to Katmandu

Refrain A

Buzz me, beep me, ping me, zing me -- free minutes by the score

So why can't we communicate much better than before?

Seems its part of human nature, deep in our protein

No matter the technology, we can't say what we mean

Second Verse

Surgically implanted headsets -- just what people want

Palm Pilots sewn into our palms -- you'll be so au courant

Fully wired while attired, looking "fly" and looking "phat"

But when we're asked to tell the truth, we all go, "What is that?"

Refrain A

Repeat

Third Verse (slower)

So let's take a breath -- breathe deep -- exhale -- let your eyes go Zen

Breathe once more -- once more -- once more -- and then once more again

You're on the verge of cosmic truth, you can hear Nirvana sing --

And then it all goes straight to *(fart noise) when the friggin' pager rings!*

Refrain B

Buzzed out, beeped out, pinged out, zinged out -- can't take it anymore

Let's conversate "f-to-f" like we used to do before

I'd really like to talk with you, hear what you have to say

So when you get on home tonight -- (*spoken*) *just give me a ring -- okay?*

End of song. They bow.

ROLLINS

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

JASON comes over and hugs HANNAH.

JASON

That was great!

ROLLINS forcibly takes one of JASON's hands and shakes it.

ROLLINS

Thank you for your support, big-city dude.

JASON

It was good, Rollins.

ROLLINS continues to shake his hand.

ROLLINS

I wrote it.

JASON

I know you did.

HANNAH

Rollins --

JASON

You can let the hand go.

HANNAH

Let go of his hand.

ROLLINS does, and immediately bear-hugs JASON in an unfriendly way, back-slapping, etc.

ROLLINS

It was so good of you to come. Really good. Really great, Jason.

ROLLINS holds JASON at arm's length.

ROLLINS

Now -- you can leave!

HANNAH

Rollins -- stop acting like a prick.

ROLLINS

Can't -- it's the peer pressure from da man here -- gotta keep up with him.

JASON

What is your problem?

ROLLINS lets JASON go.

ROLLINS

I don't have a problem. Wait -- that's not true. I don't want to be accused of being a liar. I do have a problem -- something about stupid hats.

JASON

I wasn't aware my -- hat -- was so unwelcome.

ROLLINS

It and everything under it -- for some time, now.

JASON

Not by everybody. Liberty Creek is a really welcoming place. Right, Hannah?

ROLLINS

Tell him to book, Hannah.

But HANNAH says nothing.

ROLLINS

Huh. Huh. Beverages, I guess, right?

But ROLLINS moves off to his own space, leaving HANNAH and JASON.
He can watch them.

JASON

Is he always so --

HANNAH

Jason, don't be dense. You know why.

JASON

Give me your hand. The offer still stands.

HANNAH

I can't leave.

JASON

Yet.

HANNAH

I can't.

JASON

Jake and Jonatha will work it out.

HANNAH

"Work each other over" is more like it. And, besides, even
if --

JASON

You couldn't.

HAHHAH

Me, there --

JASON

Liberty Creek, your downhome home, your downhome
homies --

HANNAH

People have let you in, so you have no room to say anything low about them! You will go back someday and make bread off what you wrote here, but while you're in the town limits you will not pity me because I am tangled up with them. Without "these people" --

JASON

Like Rollins --

HANNAH

Especially that man! Especially. That. Man. He gave me life back --

JASON

So you've said. So why are you here talking to me and not off with him getting "beverages"? Can I guess? I think you think I am not entirely out of line asking you to come back with me because, I think, you want to come to the city -- maybe with me, maybe not -- though I'm not a bad-looking dance partner. Or maybe not "the city" but definitely to some place different than "good" "old" Liberty Creek. Where you don't have a five-year fight to get a phone line. Where no one knows your business, or even cares. With a little bit more liberty than Liberty Creek.

JASON pops a little dance move.

JASON

Not so bad, am I?

HANNAH

Except for the hat.

JASON

Promise to change it inside the city limits.

JASON holds up his hat, as if at an auction.

JASON

Going once, going twice -- are we gone?

They look at each other, then HANNAH moves away to her own space.

The three actors are now in separate lights.

ROLLINS sings.

ROLLINS

"Seems its part of human nature, deep in our protein -- "

HANNAH claps four times. The next lines are spoken in rhythm.

HANNAH

I'm talking 'bout these twisted --

ALL

Lines, lines.

ROLLINS

Getting all these mixed up --

ALL

Signs, signs.

JASON

Left side of mouth goes --

ALL

You're just fine.

HANNAH

Right side of mouth goes --

ALL

You're asinine --

JASON

Knots and tangles and cramps and sighs --

ROLLINS

Lies on lies on lies on lies --

HANNAH

A half-look here --

JASON

There, a look away --

HANNAH

Never saying what we want --

ROLLINS

Never meaning what we say --

HANNAH

A life in subtitles.

They all clap once. Lights out. Transition music: snippet from Ray Parker, "Ghostbuster."

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Scene 7: The Choice

JAKE asleep on the couch. JONATHA is sitting in her chair; fidgets. She takes off her socks, puts them on her hands, and begins having the "puppets" talk.

JONATHA

Jake, how could you be so cruel?

I'm doing it for your own damn good.

So it's for my own good that I'm sitting in here starving and in need of a good pee?

It'll teach you manners, something you've never had.

Oh, you're so right -- I have always been a selfish little twat. Now I can be just like you -- sphincter as tight as a plugged septic system!

You'll never be as good as me.

Yes, I will

No, you won't.

The two puppets fight until JONATHA gets tired. She puts the socks back on.

JONATHA

So many bridges turned to bitches; so much time turned to slime.

JONATHA rolls a piece of paper in the typewriter and idly begins to type -- doing patterns, like the old Maxwell House coffee commercial, or something like that. Then she gets up in agitation, holding her stomach, squeezing her knees.

JONATHA

Damn!

JONATHA goes over to the door. Cautiously she opens it and sneaks through the web of "Caution" tape. She tip-toes out of sight -- there are opening door sounds, the toilet seat being put down, a pause, a huge sigh, and the flush of a toilet. She comes back into view and goes to the kitchen, gathers what food she can quietly. All this time she is eyeing JAKE.

Provisioned, she moves back to the door, and as she gets to the door, JAKE suddenly wakes up, clutching his heart and in short breath. He gets off the couch and is in obvious pain. JONATHA makes a move to help him, then stops, and instead watches him.

GraALICEly his breathing calms and it is clear he is okay. She slips through the tape, and as she quietly closes the door, JAKE turns to look and sees her -- though she is not aware he has seen her.

JONATHA puts the food on the bed and then turns back to the door, clearly unsure whether she should go back and help. She listens and watches JAKE through the "wall"; JAKE stares at her door, perhaps even moves to it, looking very old. Then, deciding, JONATHA moves to the typewriter, rolls in a piece of paper, and begins writing as she munches on something; JAKE listens.

Lights out.

INTERMISSION

Sound: Throughout the intermission, a loop of a manual typewriter at work.

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Scene 8

Light comes up on JONATHA at her typewriter -- she is typing. Beside her is a growing pile of paper. Throughout the scene she continues.

Lights up on ARCHIE and ALICE at the radio station. Next to ALICE is a chainsaw.

ARCHIE

Welcome to Radio Daddio, with your one, holy, catholic, and apostolic host, Wolfgang!, the radio-active pirate. And this morning we have our weekly report from Alice, the town "hysterian." Report, oh logorrheaic one.

ALICE

Well, the story that has flushed through the vast metropolitan suburbs of Liberty Creek is, of course, the standoff currently known as "Mexican" between Jake and Jonatha Caldwell.

ARCHIE

And what a story, eh? Passionate anger, angry passion, smashed and flying telephones, tragico-comedical, comico-tragedical --

ALICE

Operatic to the kind of max that Jonatha loves.

ARCHIE

And not a fat lady in sight, from what I hear.

ALICE

No Fat Lady finale from the Ice Queen any time soon, it seems.

ARCHIE

And how many days now?

ALICE

Been three -- going on eternity.

ARCHIE

Any inside information on, well, don't want to be indelicate here, but the more uro- and procto- elements of the impasse --

ALICE

You mean, What's she doing for a potty?

ARCHIE

I mean, What's she doing for a potty?

ALICE

Maybe it all just feels at home inside --

ARCHIE

Cast-iron bladder, knowing Jonatha.

ALICE

Even cast-iron rusts, Archie.

ARCHIE

Knowing Jonatha, she's probably repealed the laws of oxidation.

ALICE

She's so repealing, isn't she?

ARCHIE

Any historical predictions?

ALICE

She has reached rock bottom and shows signs of starting to dig.

ARCHIE

Anything else?

ALICE

"You can never know the length of a snake until it is dead."

ARCHIE

An enigma knotty enough to puzzle a Philadelphia lawyer from our own historicized "hysterian," Alice Dual.

ALICE

I'd also like to say --

ARCHIE

Thank you, Alice. And folks: don't forget to vote today -- exercise your franchise and vote for the one who is constant and wise. Alice?

ALICE

I second and third that.

ARCHIE

10-4.

ALICE

24-7

TOGETHER

Three-sixty-five.

ARCHIE

And we'll see you all again tonight.

ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- Irving Berlin's "All Alone."

ARCHIE

Honey, you could try to hide it a little -- not that the FCC is going to say anything.

ALICE

Everyone knows I don't like her.

ARCHIE

Everyone does, indeed.

ALICE

"Put silk on a goat, and it's still a goat" is what I say. I gotta go.

ALICE stands and grabs the chainsaw.

ARCHIE

Where are you working today?

ALICE

Leverett Lindenholder wants his top ten acres thinned --
gave me the wood for free.

ARCHIE

More logs for those urban fireplaces.

ALICE

Ornament for them, money for us. You?

ARCHIE

Got a big order for that natural food store again.

ALICE

They love your shang.

ARCHIE

They love my shang.

ALICE

I love your shang. That's what got me, you know.

ARCHIE faces ALICE.

ARCHIE

I picked that wood chip off your cheek.

ALICE

And when you did that, the smell of the ginseng root off
your fingers, the smell of the dirt, the light touch -- made
me dizzy.

ARCHIE

American wild ginseng -- Panax quinquefolium -- known to
cure what ails ya. I did take a similar liking to your eau de
chainsaw oil.

ALICE

That and oak bark is a powerful aroma.

ARCHIE

Olfactory overflow.

There is a moment when, perhaps, they would rather not go off to work but do something else.

ALICE

C'mon.

ARCHIE

You can't blame me for wondering if we could.

ALICE turns to go, the chainsaw hanging from her confident hand.

ALICE

Isn't one of your top ten spots over near Leverett's?

ARCHIE

I get your drift.

ALICE

Maybe see ya later, then.

ARCHIE

Let's go vote, and you can drop me off.

The song ends. ARCHIE shuts down the station and grabs his shang sack from behind the lounge, and off they go.

JONATHA continues to type.

* * * * *

Scene 9

Transition music: snippet from Jim Croce, "Operator." JAKE reading. HANNAH enters, carrying another phone; JONATHA types. JAKE looks up, goes back to his reading.

JAKE

Not in my house.

HANNAH

You now have a new phone.

JONATHA

Fine.

HANNAH puts down the phone, takes it out of the box.

HANNAH

What are you typing? What's she typing?

JAKE

I'm not privy.

HANNAH

What are you typing?

JONATHA

My last will and testament.

JAKE

Need a sound mind and body for that.

HANNAH goes to the door but does not touch it.

HANNAH

What are you doing?

JONATHA

It's my magnum opus.

JAKE

Her magnum sourpuss. She's been at it for three days now.

HANNAH

Aren't you hungry?

JONATHA

Nope.

HANNAH

Don't you have to, like --

JAKE

Go ahead, say it.

HANNAH
-- evacuate?

JONATHA
Cast-iron bladder.

HANNAH
It's been three days.

JONATHA
Just like Christ.

JAKE
He disappeared. No such luck --

HANNAH
Dad --

JONATHA
I shall be always with ye.

JAKE
As with a liver fluke.

HANNAH
You sure --

JONATHA
Nothing, thank you!

HANNAH
Okay, okay. And how are you?

JAKE
I was just fine till you brought that.

HANNAH
That's not going away.

HANNAH hooks up the phone. JAKE watches her, then stands.

JAKE
Well, if you insist -- then, I am left with no choice.

HANNAH

Meaning --

JAKE

You've both forced me out play out my role of being the mean old bastard.

HANNAH

Meaning --

JAKE

Since "fish and visitors -- and old writers -- smell in three days," I must play my part.

HANNAH

What are you gabbing about?

JAKE

I want you to know something.

JAKE points to the door with his staff.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

Go on -- walk over there.

HANNAH walks to the door.

JAKE

Take down the tape. Go ahead, rip it down. De-festoon. Now, try the door handle.

HANNAH

It's locked.

JAKE

Go on -- it won't bite.

HANNAH grabs the handle.

JAKE

Turn it! -- do I have to tell you everything?

HANNAH

It's locked.

JAKE

Turn it!

HANNAH

It's unlocked.

JAKE

Open says-a-you.

HANNAH

It's unlocked.

JAKE

Apparently been unlocked.

HANNAH

But I have the key --

JONATHA

A jiggle --

HANNAH

What?

JONATHA

A jiggle, a rattle, a righteous toss over the transom --

JAKE

She's been using the loo and the larder.

HANNAH

Have you?

JAKE

Far as I read, Jesus stayed put for his three days.

HANNAH

How do you know?

JAKE

That Jesus rose --

HANNAH

No! About --

JAKE

She fooled you, too.

HANNAH

How do you know?

JAKE

I've seen her.

HANNAH

How?

JAKE

Sleeping out here on the coach one night -- saw her tippy-toe out, tippy-toe back, as selfish as a sponge. Go on -- grill her.

HANNAH

You said it was about principle.

JONATHA

It is.

HANNAH

It can't be if you can get up and pee any time you want!

JONATHA

Peeing doesn't have anything to do with principle.

JAKE

That's why she's been a failure all her life --

HANNAH

Dad --

JAKE

Only of her own comfort --

HANNAH

Dad, mine, not yours, so bug off. Sorry.

JAKE

Don't mind at all. Go on.

HANNAH

So what has this been about?

JONATHA

What it has always been about -- "bringing these people into the modern age." Now leave me alone.

HANNAH marches into the room. JAKE follows. JONATHA types.

JONATHA

Later, Hannah.

HANNAH

Now.

JONATHA

Fine.

HANNAH

What are you typing?

JONATHA

I told you.

HANNAH

A last will and testament doesn't run an inch-thick.

JONATHA

Some of us have thicker lives than others.

JAKE

And some are just thicker than others.

HANNAH

Jonatha -- answer me --

HANNAH, angered, goes to pick up a page to read, and JONATHA slams her hand on the pile.

JONATHA

My eyes only.

HANNAH

Only?

JONATHA

Yes.

HANNAH

After all --

JONATHA

Niece of mine, all in good time.

JAKE

High-handed wench, ain't she?

HANNAH

I cannot believe this!

To get JONATHA to listen to her, HANNAH sticks her hand into the typewriter, to block the keys. JONATHA sits back, waits.

HANNAH

That look -- I am heartily sorry for having interrupted your creative flow! But the door -- you left it unlocked deliberately --

JONATHA

Always have an exit --

HANNAH

You lied, Jonatha. To me. To everybody. We all saw you backed into a corner by --

JONATHA

Armageddon over there.

HANNAH

We saw you walk in, throw the key away -- the rebel -- I was ready to -- my own father -- because I believed what you believed.

JAKE

She used you, Hannah.

JONATHA

Jake --

JAKE

She used your sadness over David's death --

JONATHA

Shut. Up.

JAKE

Nerve has been hit!

JONATHA

I didn't use anybody.

JAKE

That would be unusual for you.

HANNAH

Dad! I thought we were close -- this kind of close. Five years to get phones here -- you and me -- the hearings -- affidavits!

JONATHA

We fought the right fight --

JAKE

You should just listen.

HANNAH

Both of you should! Is that what you're writing about in this, the "right fight"? Is it? Or is he right -- did you just use me to get you wired up? Used all of us?

JONATHA says nothing. HANNAH drops to her hands and knees and rummages under the bed until she pulls out a scrapbook. With immense anger, she slams the scrapbook onto the bed.

HANNAH

Have you ever seen this?

JAKE shuffles over to the bed, sits, and opens the scrapbook.

JAKE

You should see this.

Still JONATHA says nothing, does not move.

HANNAH

I would cut the articles out of the newspapers in the library, like a thief -- tear things out of the magazines at the drugstore --

JAKE

Hannah, I never -- Jonatha -- you should --

HANNAH

Always held you in my heart -- my aunt the artist from the world!

JAKE

You really did a lot --

HANNAH

And I always thought I could be the --

HANNAH makes a gesture of linking.

HANNAH

-- between you and Dad, make up for whatever it was the two of you blamed each other for.

JONATHA

Then you had a tragedy with a husband --

JAKE

Jonatha --

HANNAH

I had a tragedy --

JONATHA

Yes.

HANNAH

Is -- is that your real mind about David --

JONATHA

You found out that the world doesn't owe you a thing that you don't fight for -- and what was wrong with that? You fought, you got stronger -- and you won back a life -- life! -- for yourself. That's the only way it ever happens for real. As for him -- we fight like we breathe, as a habit -- don't bother yourself with our salvation. I have to write.

HANNAH rips the page out of the typewriter. JONATHA, without missing a beat, puts in a fresh sheet and continues typing. HANNAH rips out that one; JONATHA replaces it. HANNAH rips out a third; JONATHA replaces it and waits.

HANNAH

You are dead to me. You have ice for a heart.

JONATHA

Then you have learned much.

HANNAH

Last swill and excrement.

ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS

Yo, Hannah!

HANNAH

Christ!

ROLLINS

Hey, Mr. C. Hey, Miz C. You're all in the bedroom.

JAKE

Ever the steel trap, Rollins.

ROLLINS

What are you all doing in the bedroom? I thought we had a Prisoner of Zenda thing going on here.

By this time ROLLINS is at the bedroom door.

ROLLINS

Hey, Hannah.

No one responds as he steps into the room

ROLLINS

Whoa -- thick --

JAKE taps his skull, as if to say, "Sharp!"

ROLLINS

What's up?

No one responds.

ROLLINS

All right, shift subjects here. I have come by to take you all down to town hall to vote. You guys ready to go vote? Miz C -- you ready to re-join Liberty Creek in the democratic process?

JONATHA

I have had enough of democracy, Rollins. I've voted myself out.

ROLLINS

Boy -- density in here. Well, if Miz C is opting out of opting in, then the Voter Express is looking to bring in at least three votes.

JAKE

Come on, Hannah, let's go.

ROLLINS

The air, you could say, is thick with anticipation.

JAKE

You could say --

HANNAH

Rollins --

ROLLINS

What?

HANNAH

Nothing.

ROLLINS

Nothing it is.

HANNAH

Dad, you ready?

JAKE

That question always scared me.

ROLLINS

The pumpkin awaits. Miz C, you absolutely sure?

JONATHA simply sits.

ROLLINS

Silence is deafening and definite.

Everyone leaves. JONATHA goes to type and then just sits back for a moment, as if thinking. She then goes to the bedroom door and looks out at the empty living room.

Then, with great reluctance, she takes up the scrapbook from the bed and sits in the chair by the window.

But before she leafs through many pages, she closes it, tosses it back on the bed, and paces paces paces. She turns on the radio -- and it is not ARCHIE's show. She begins to rummage through cabinets and closets until she comes across a box that holds a sculpture in wood done by JAKE decades ago, along with the photographs of other pieces and a note that they are stored in ARCHIE's attic; she examines the sculpture, clearly amazed that her brother had done this.

She pulls on a pair of hiking boots, grabs her coat, and heads out the door. She can't stay inside any longer, and so off she goes.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Transition music: Dr. Hook, "When You're In Love With A Beautiful Woman." JAKE's house. JAKE enters alone. HANNAH and ROLLINS are on the stage opposite ARCHIE's radio station, sitting in two chairs, which are actually the front seat of ROLLIN's truck. They sit quietly, listening to music off a Walkman with a double set of headphones.

JAKE

They are going to asphyxiate themselves in that truck, and not from oil fumes. "Hatred and love are blind."

As he takes off his jacket, he sees the statue, and he knows what JONATHA has found. Before he can do anything, JASON enters, wearing a new hat.

JASON

Hello, Mr. Caldwell. Just saw you come in.

JAKE

You're still here?

JASON

Loose ends.

JAKE

All my ends are loose.

JASON

Is your sister around?

JAKE

Not quite sure where Jonatha is -- why?

JASON

Apparently, she is the vote that would have made the difference -- wanted to talk with her.

JAKE

Jonatha make a difference?

JASON

Tie vote at town hall -- 18 votes each.

JAKE

Don't say -- well, that should provide enough gossip for the next century. She's not here.

JASON

Any idea when --

JAKE

Jonatha does not follow any clock known to man.

JASON

Okay -- well, if you see her --

JAKE

Mr. Bock, I won't be a message service for my sister. Go snoop.

JASON

Yes, sir.

JAKE

By the way -- since you're on about tying up loose ends, a little lesson in knots for you. I know what you've asked Hannah to do. Don't look surprised, or whatever that look on your face is. "Don't make love by the garden gate / love is blind but the neighbors ain't." We got a fast and thick

grapevine around here. What has she told you? And tell me the truth.

JASON

She hasn't told me yes or no.

JAKE

You know about her and Rollins.

JASON

To be honest, I see smoke but not much fire.

JAKE

That's always been a slow fire, to be sure -- but it's burned long. And her husband?

JASON

She told me.

JAKE

It nearly destroyed her -- hell, it did. It did. Destroyed all of us -- we loved David dearly. She has built back a life here, and we have built one back around her -- I would hate to see it decomposed by an offer that held no water. And, to be honest, Sir City-Man --

JASON

Yes?

JAKE

-- I don't have much faith in your offer.

JASON

How do you know what my offer is?

JAKE

It's a repeat from the Garden of Eden: "How would you like to bite an apple, young woman?"

JASON

I do find her -- hungry.

JAKE

I know you do. But don't confuse your hunger for her with her. She has battles outside your scope.

JASON

So what are you telling me, Mr. Caldwell?

JAKE

I wish I could make this sound more threatening than it's going to sound -- the creaking bones kind of robs it of its bite -- but here it is: Leave her alone and just leave.

JAKE shakes his stick, half-joking, more than half-serious.

JAKE

Or I will wreak vengeance!

JASON

All phones --

JAKE

And phonies!

JASON

-- beware!

JAKE

She has hungers, yes, but they're not what you think they are. Or as simple.

JASON

And mine are simple?

JAKE

Much like yourself. This is a whim for you -- admit it. Beautiful woman, well-aged tragedy, thrill of running away -- Go file your last story and go home. You don't need Hannah, and she certainly doesn't need you.

JASON

You're a scalpel.

JAKE

I'm her father forever, so I am allowed to cut -- one benefit of mortal decay.

JASON

I think I'll let Hannah make her decision.

JAKE

Don't get me wrong, Mr. Bock. I may not be the latest WWF bodywrecker, but I will protect Hannah from all invaders great and small. I will haunt you if you hurt her -- and by asking her you have hurt her. I will find a way.

JASON

I'm going to see if I can find Miss Caldwell.

JAKE

That would be a better use of your time. Give my best to the Scorpion Lady. My sting is nothing in compare.

As he exits, JASON sees HANNAH and ROLLINS in the truck. ROLLINS has his eyes closed, but HANNAH sees JASON. They look at each other, then HANNAH waves goodbye. JASON hesitates, then doffs his hat to her and exits. HANNAH leans back and closes her eyes, then takes ROLLINS' hand, and for a moment they both nod in rhythm to the music.

Meanwhile, JAKE looks at the statue. Then, he goes to the bedroom and sees the manuscript. He reads, and his face is a mixture of laughter and great pain.

JAKE

Oh, my, my, my.

JAKES reads from the cover page.

JAKE

"Jake and Jonatha -- Still Life."

"These episodes were retrieved by deliberate creative self-induced regression to four or five years of age, with undisciplined words and spelling and syntax, each story written in one breath, which is how they should be read, and out loud. Remember that a young child can learn life

around and outside of the amnesia we later impose on ourselves as adults by fear and threat."

"To Jake, Irish twin brother of mine."

JAKE turns the first page and reads silently at first.

JAKE

I remember this. I remember this naming.

NOTE: the story should follow the pauses, rushes, and odd syntax -- do not make it smooth.

"GRATEGRANMAMA -- She is sitting up in her cripple wheel chair like Papa told us she would be but he did not tell us that her eye would be glued to one end of a black pipe that has its other end stuck thru the window into the night or that we would be standing here watching her twiddle the little nobbs we can just but barely see on the black box that is holding the pipe up on three legs Papa is saying to her maMA but he does not say it again until she is taking her eye away from the pipe and rolling her chair around to look at our faces so Papa is saying maMA I have brought over your grategrandchildren for you to meet and I think you will find out that a lot of you has been passed on into them but grategranamaMA is turning her chair back to look into the pipe and telling Papa we would have to wait until she got this chance to get Andromeda in clear fokus for her calculations ofasudden is letting out a skreechy sound that sounds like YOUREEKA and she wheels around to us again saying beautiful beautiful Beautiful and she is asking Papa how old we are and he is telling her we are almost 5 and she is trying to take a look at us which she does and she is saying too young much MUCH too young and Papa is answering back and asking her to let us take one look thru her tele skope be cause we would not touch any part of it and would never forget what she would let us see so sure enuf she is wheeling herself out of the way saying do not trip and stumble on my legs and she is holding a big cane out at us to show that she means it Papa is putting a little stool which he knew was there for us to stand up on I go first my eye is seeing a site it says I can not beleeve because it is looking at a round

piece of night cram full of stars winking and twinkling and one most of all and I suprise myself hearing myself say out loud ANDROMEDA Papa is moving me down off of the stool and I am wishing that I could leave my eye glued to the pipe at least for a while longer Jake pulls his eye to the pipe and ANDROMEDA comes out between his teef like the woof of steam from the kettle GrategranmaMA is saying not bad not bad but much too young you may bring them here again when they are a few years older I say Papa Andromeda will be my name from now on foreverand a day but GreatgranmaMA is saying like she means it that is a very frivlus notion and quite impossible Andromeda is the name of a heavenly body and not for any child yet born But Jake looks at me look at him and our mouths spit stars when we say quiet outside GrategranmaMA's ears under the per simmon bush ANDROMEDA ANDROMEDA"

JAKE looks up from the book.

JAKE

Andromeda. Andromeda. I had forgotten. My Irish twin.

Suddenly, pain. He holds on to the manuscript as he makes his way to the living room. He hesitates, looking at the door and at the phone. Then he dials 911.

JAKE

Yes, this is Jake Caldwell, calling from Liberty Creek -- I am having a heart attack. I need help because I cannot move. Third house on the right after the second fork with the steel sculpture of the tin-can goat. You'll see two people sitting in a truck outside. No, I can't get to them. And no, I am not going to stay on the phone -- I trust you will get here when you do.

JAKE hangs up. There is a strip of the "Caution" tape on the table. He takes it and wraps it around his forehead like a headband. Then he grabs hold of the sculpture and the manuscript as he sits there.

* * * * *

Scene 11

JONATHA enters ARCHIE and ALICE's house. ARCHIE is just winding up his show.

ARCHIE

Well, it's official, folks, as just reportaged to by Alice Dual, town cliometrician -- the Fat Lady has sung her aria. We have an unprecedented outcome in the two-person election to fill the vacant seat of the dearly deposited Buzz Larch.

ALICE

18 checkmarks for one.

ARCHIE

And --

ALICE

18 checkmarks for the other.

ARCHIE

That's right: tie, tie, tie one on. Because -- if you can do the math -- some one person did not vote out of the thirty-seven registered voters of Liberty Creek.

ALICE turns and gives JONATHA a full frontal stare.

ALICE

We are not at liberty to say who that is, but whoever you are, you know who you are.

JONATHA pauses for a moment to realize that it is she about whom they are talking.

ARCHIE

Stay tuned as people of good heart and a peppy good humor try to figure a way out of our constitutional crisis. Signing off for Radio True Blue, I Love You, this is Wolfgang!

ARCHIE snaps off the transmitter, and the two of them look at JONATHA.

ARCHIE

Well, well, well, here is Miss Single-Vote-That-Could-Have-Made-A-Difference.

JONATHA

Sorry I fell down on my civic duty. What is this? And these?

JONATHA hands the letter and book of photos to ALICE.

ALICE

It's a letter from your brother --

JONATHA

To you --

ALICE

Giving me custody over these --

JONATHA

Sculptures.

ALICE

And the pictures.

JONATHA

My brother did sculptures.

ALICE

Yes, he did.

JONATHA

And he gave custody of them to you?

ALICE

He did.

JONATHA

Why to you?

There is the briefest of glances between ARCHIE and ALICE, which JONATHA doesn't miss.

JONATHA

Alice --

ARCHIE

It didn't mean anything then, it doesn't mean anything now,
at least to me. You can say what you want about it, Alice.

ALICE

Your brother was a sculptor, and I was an -- admirer. I think
that's all I'm going to say about it.

JONATHA

The town "hysterian" and Jake?

The silence in the room is answer enough for JONATHA.

ALICE

As the letter says, Jake handed them over to me, for the
museum --

JONATHA

Which will never get built.

ARCHIE

Don't be so pessimistically quick about that --

ALICE

In any case, Jonatha, it's clear Jake didn't want everyone
to know --

JONATHA

And you were not everyone.

ALICE

Obviously not. And he especially didn't want you to know.
He made that clear.

JONATHA

Where are they?

ARCHIE points up.

JONATHA

How do I get up there?

ARCHIE

Stairs are over there.

ALICE

Do you have Jake's permission? For that matter, do you have Archie's permission? Or mine?

JONATHA

Give me the photos.

ALICE

The magic words?

JONATHA waits, saying nothing. ALICE does not give her the photos.

ALICE

I have not liked you since the day you came back.

JONATHA

Then you got started late --

ALICE

But I held my tongue --

JONATHA

A blessing for us all.

ALICE

-- because Hannah seemed to get straight with herself because of you and because I have only great respect for Jake.

JONATHA

It seems you had a lot more.

ALICE

Shut up. Are we done with that?

JONATHA

Yes.

ALICE

Are we?

JONATHA

Yes.

ALICE

I am old enough now not to like you out loud, and I save my awe and respect for things that deserve it. It is so like you to march in and expect to command. Not now.

ALICE holds up the photos.

JONATHA

May I please -- ?

ALICE hands them over. JONATHA simply crosses to the other side of the stage, now ARCHIE's attic. ARCHIE and ALICE follow. All the objects are "mimed."

ARCHIE

I don't know where they'd be. Once the museum goes up, though, we can inventory full across the board -- you found 'em -- like a homing pigeon.

JONATHA, with her hand, traces the outlines of one of the sculptures, and then another, and then another.

ARCHIE

Out there, wood just like that, twisted or knotted or splayed -- big, little, didn't matter -- there's a whole box over there of stuff no more than a foot high, hard-carved and polished -- he'd lug them home and, well, just work them.

ALICE

That's not right, Archie. He didn't just "work" them. He was not like some hack tourist chainsaw artist with porcupine bookends. Do you want to know what it was like to watch him work?

JONATHA

Tell me.

ALICE

I saw him at it more than once -- like he sat inside the wood and figured out what it wanted to be. Then he just followed it out. It was one of the most peaceful moments I think I have ever tasted on this earth to watch his hands run over its grain and his eyes light on its shape.

ALICE and JONATHA look straight at each other. The air is suddenly thick with subtext.

ALICE

His hands were strong. A delight to watch.

JONATHA

Really.

ALICE

Always. He was an artist, Jonatha, pure at home in it. What more needs to be said?

ARCHIE

Alice.

JONATHA

Why?

ALICE

Be more specific.

JONATHA

Why did he stop?

ALICE

Life. A daughter growing up in a reckless time without a mother. Money to pay this, pay for that -- the man must have had half a dozen jobs.

ARCHIE

Fish counter --

ALICE

Logger --

ARCHIE

Stand-in driver at the funeral home --

ALICE

Maybe he thought one artist tearing at a family was enough.

JONATHA looks at the sculptures. ALICE touches ARCHIE, and they get ready to exit.

ALICE

At least up here, they have aged well. Turn the lights out when you leave.

They exit. JONATHA alone.

Then ALICE hurries back on, looking worried.

ALICE

We have to talk.

Transition: "Wichita Lineman" by Jim Webb.

* * * * *

Scene 12

A hospital room. Around the bed are seated HANNAH and ROLLINS. HANNAH has JONATHA's manuscript. JONATHA enters with ALICE and sits.

HANNAH

Hello.

JONATHA

Hello.

HANNAH

Alice.

ALICE

Hello.

HANNAH

How did you hear?

JONATHA

Over Archie's scanner.

HANNAH

Who brought you here?

ALICE

Jason Bock. He wanted to interview the ball-breaker who was supposed to be the tie-breaker.

HANNAH

He would do that.

ALICE

He's waiting to take me back, so I can give Archie an update. Lots of people heard the ambulance.

JONATHA

What happened?

ROLLINS

Looks like heart attack --

HANNAH

Not hard, but hard enough against an old body.

JONATHA

And --

HANNAH

He's fully alive.

ROLLINS

The doctors are monitoring.

JONATHA

Aren't we all? How did they get --

HANNAH

He used the phone. He dialed 911.

ROLLINS

Should we?

JONATHA

What?

ROLLINS holds up the "Caution" tape, hands it to JONATHA.

HANNAH

When they found him, he had this wrapped around his forehead. "Festoon!"

They all laugh gently.

JONATHA

The renegade.

ROLLINS

T- N- T.

HANNAH

It calmed the paramedics -- I'm frantic, and they're smiling -- I'm flipped, and he's whispering, "Festoon!" to me. He didn't want anyone to worry.

ALICE

He called 9-1-1.

HANNAH

Satisfied?

JONATHA

Very. My brother's alive.

HANNAH

And so is my father.

ROLLINS

And our friend.

ALICE

Yes. Our friend. I should go.

ROLLINS

Wait, Alice. Miz C, sometimes I think it's like that giant mushroom up in Michigan.

JONATHA

What?

ROLLINS

The giant mushroom.

JONATHA

What is?

ROLLINS

Life.

JONATHA

Life's a giant mushroom in Michigan?

ROLLINS

The "humungous fungus," biggest living thing ever discovered --

HANNAH

He reads a lot --

ROLLINS

-- covers acres and acres -- but all underground and out of sight. Sometimes I think it is all very much like that.

JONATHA

Rollins?

ROLLINS

Yes, Miz C.

JONATHA

You do have some sometimes poetry in you.

HANNAH

More often than sometimes.

ROLLINS

Good of you to notice. Come on, Alice -- I'll give you an escort. And maybe we'll try out some of that excellent cuisine they have in the vending machines. Care to partake?

JONATHA

Not hungry.

ROLLINS

Hannah banana?

HANNAH

Bring me back something hot to drink and sweet to eat. Take your time.

ROLLINS

Rock on. Let's go, amigo.

JONATHA

Alice. Thank you.

ALICE

That's a start. Keep him safe.

ROLLINS and ALICE exit.

JONATHA

I saw the sculptures.

HANNAH

Ah.

JONATHA

Why didn't you ever tell me? So much --

HANNAH

Humungous fungus. I think he did them to prove a point.

JONATHA

As always.

HANNAH

That all the talent in the family hadn't gone to one end of the pool.

JONATHA

You watched him.

HANNAH

I sneaked -- I loved what he did but couldn't admit it -- see, my aunt was the real artist, and of course my dad couldn't be a great hero like my aunt who lived real life. So, I sneaked -- I never gave him my full eye.

JONATHA

Jake, Jake, Jake --

HANNAH

Jonatha, favor me -- don't. Don't. Just don't. He had, clutched in his mitts, your "last will" when they brought him in.

JONATHA

Last "swill."

HANNAH

These true?

JONATHA

As true as I can remember.

HANNAH

I read some -- anything to get my mind away from Dad strapped-in like cargo -- Actually I had Rollins read them to me -- just -- sweet! -- he became this five-year old in an instant, right out there -- Don't -- just listen -- And the thing that I loved? How you two protected each other -- big grown-up ground-up world, and the two of you under the "per simmon bush." Made me feel hungry and sad all at the same time. And old.

JONATHA

My Irish twin was --

HANNAH

Is --

JONATHA

Is -- my brother for life.

HANNAH

I'm going to go see if Rollins has found the things hot and sweet I asked for.

(hands JONATHA the manuscript)

It's all so mixed, isn't it?

JONATHA

That's what makes a cake.

HANNAH

I'm going to go find the humungous.

HANNAH exits.

JONATHA

So the phone saved you. Somewhere in that damaged heart of yours I'm sure you appreciate it. I know I certainly appreciate it in my own damaged heart.

JAKE opens his eyes.

JAKE

Enough, Andromeda.

JONATHA

(half-laugh, half-cry)

Andromeda! Here, let me help you --

JAKE

Nice of you to come.

JONATHA

It's not like I had much of a choice.

JAKE

So you'd like to think.

JAKE picks up a water glass from the table. JONATHA goes to help him with it, but he brushes her away.

JONATHA

What do you mean?

JAKE

What I said -- you'd like to think you didn't have a choice.

JONATHA

Let me take that glass --

JAKE

I can handle it myself.

JONATHA

All right. You're saying I'd choose not to come at a time like this?

JAKE

I'm saying you keep such a choice on your list of choices.

JONATHA

That's cruel.

JAKE

Most truth is.

JONATHA

There's no time for --

JAKE

No, there isn't.

JONATHA

So spit it out. Now.

JAKE

I saw you, Jonatha.

JONATHA

What are you talking about?

JAKE

"I saw you" is what we're talking about.

JONATHA

What?

JAKE

The first time you snuck out of your den. To pee and graze.

JONATHA

You were on the couch.

JAKE

Getting my first fibrillations. I know you saw me. And I know you didn't help me. You chose otherwise, and that's what I mean by "Jonatha's Choices." Always an otherwise. You betrayed me once again. There, spat out.

Long silence.

JONATHA

All right, I'm sorry.

JAKE

Call the Guinness record folks -- I'm not interested.

JONATHA

Then what?

JAKE

Maybe nothing of what matters to you should matter to me now because a betrayal is a betrayal, and a death gets dealt out with that, and I should tell you to keep your mouth shut because apology is a poor substitute for conscience, and we'll finish it off there and lock the barn door. But I can't finish with it there.

JONATHA

So finish. Finish me off.

JAKE

Hardly that, you lug-nut. We're not doing the House of Caldwell here. But -- for a moment -- for the smallest of

moments, Jonatha -- when you closed that door -- when I heard the typewriter clack -- I hated you. For the first time -- and only time. No forgiveness, no slack, no excuses. Just hate.

JONATHA

You aren't the first --

JAKE stops her.

JAKE

That's a worn-out selfish response, Jonatha, so shut up.

JONATHA

Shut.

JAKE

Hating you -- do you know what that was like for me?

JONATHA

No.

JAKE

Like murder. Like I'd chiseled your heart right out of my chest. To hate you? To hate Jonatha? My wild Irish twin? I never felt so scared or so alone in my entire life. And I admit that it colored what I said to Hannah --

JONATHA

Doesn't matter -- doesn't matter -- Alone --

JAKE

Yep.

JONATHA

Scared --

JAKE

Yep.

JONATHA

And yet --

JAKE

And yet.

JONATHA

You didn't give me up --

JAKE

No.

JONATHA

No.

JAKE

The smallest of moments, I said -- the smallest. So, no, I didn't, against all the other moments in our lives. But with this right foot in the grave and the left on a banana peel -- unconfessed business becomes a sin. And you know the long form on me and sin. There, dope slap to you done. If you're stumped because you haven't had much practice at humility -- just pick one. That'd do for penance.

JONATHA

Jake --

JAKE

Dealer's choice. Aren't you always the one for more choices?

JONATHA

Me and my choices.

JONATHA picks up the manuscript, leafs through, stops.

JONATHA

When we were sick.

JAKE

Which time?

JONATHA

When they thought we had rheumatic fever.

JAKE

Ahhh -- house full of fear at that point.

JONATHA

Listen.

JAKE

And don't phone it in!

JONATHA

"I THINK MY EYES ARE ABOUT TO OPEN -- I wonder if I tell my hand to close will it know how to do it and what it will feel like if it does and I wonder if my head is too heavy for me to lift it off of this soggy pillow and I wonder if I can still be seeing my room and ever thing there is in it and any body in it like I am looking down at them from the ceiling or the sky but I do not feel like giving my self the trouble to try out any thing so I am just going to be where ever I am for a few minits but I feel a hand on my fore head and I can tell it is Mamas hand and she is saying Thank Gawd thank Gawd so I guess if I am up in heaven Mama is here too where she sposed to be with me and my eyes do not mind keeping them selves shut for a little while more but they do not get a chance to do it be cause I know Doctor Hudson is here be cause my rist is in his hand like he takes it when I am sick and I have to take back my notion that I am in heaven be cause Mama and Doctor Hudson probly do not go to the same ones and I let my eyes open up just a little crack and see Doctor Hudson shaking Mamas hand and telling her Well I guess this is proof again we make a good team we pulled those children over a bad hump again and Mama says Praise Gawd praise Gawd and Doctor Hudson is telling her to just leave us be as is and let us sleep until we wake up natural which I am very glad to hear be cause I do not want to be washed and handled I want to fix it in my magination how it was to be up over ever thing looking down on it to go with what I know about looking at people strate on at them but humpwegot them over humpwegot them over humpwe gotthem over keeps saying itself in my head and I do not even know what it means and I do not care be cause it is singing us to sleep to sleep"

JAKE seems ready to fall asleep.

JAKE

Good night sweet prince. Cess.

JONATHA

Rest.

JAKE

Time enough to rest in the grave. Don't plan to go there soon.

JONATHA

That is a very good idea.

JAKE

Jonatha.

JONATHA

Yes?

JAKE

I once heard that Mary Baker Eddy --

JONATHA

Who?

JAKE

Mary Baker Eddy, the maker-up of Christian Science. I heard she was buried with a phone in her grave so that when she was resurrected she could call people to tell them about it.

JONATHA

Long distance.

JAKE

Do me a favor? No phone in my grave.

JONATHA

Duly noted.

JAKE

Bad enough having one in the house.

JONATHA

Good enough, too.

JAKE

As I live and breathe. "To sleep to sleep to sleep" -- the stories are very good.

JONATHA

Good source material.

JAKE

That I cannot deny.

JONATHA

Sleep.

JAKE

That I cannot deny either.

JAKE closes his eyes and rests. JONATHA, feeling something under the covers, pulls out the small statue. JAKE pops one eye open, sees her with the statue. JAKE closes his eyes again and reaches for JONATHA's hand, finds it.

* * * * *

Scene 13

Lights up on ARCHIE's radio station. ARCHIE and ALICE sit there.

ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- The Andrew Sisters, "Telephone Song." ALICE looks tired and worried.

ARCHIE

Even after all these years --

ALICE

My problem, Archie, is that I can imagine, before midnight, that Jake --

ARCHIE puts a tender hand on ALICE's shoulder.

ARCHIE

It looks like he's going to be fine, Alice.

ALICE

Woo-woo. And us, you and me?

ARCHIE

I confidently predict we will continue for the entire program
-- and even beyond.

ALICE

I heard that on my way in.

ARCHIE

Bears repeating, Alice Dual.

They give each other a chaste kiss and hold hands as the music plays.

The phone rings, and it takes both of them by complete surprise. Rings again.

ALICE

The etiquette, I believe, is to answer it.

Rings again. ARCHIE picks it up.

ALICE

(whispers)

And to say hello.

ARCHIE

Hello. Radio True Blue. Why, thanks. Yes, I have that -- I'd be glad to play it, Sarah.

ARCHIE hangs up.

ARCHIE

A request. For music. You know, Alice, they have these devices where you can hook up a phone so that inquiring minds can hear whoever calls me up.

ALICE

Talk show.

ARCHIE

Yeah. You think?

ALICE

I think anything is now possible.

ARCHIE

But should I?

They consider the pros and cons of moving into the next tradition.

ALICE

(both question and statement)

You could call it --

ARCHIE

We could call it --

ALICE

-- "The Green Chalkboard."

ARCHIE

Bullseye.

ALICE

We.

ARCHIE

Of course.

Music ends. ARCHIE bumps a switch -- mike on.

ARCHIE

Welcome back, and coming up is a historic phonological event, folks -- the first ever call-in to the radio for pirates, from Sarah, requesting that I play this next song. So, Sarah, out it goes. The phones are open, listeners -- ring-a-ding-ding me up, and let's make some history together.

ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- Phil Collins, "Don't Lose My Number" or "Operator" by Midnight Star. As it plays, ARCHIE and ALICE look at each other, then dig out their pieces of chalk and hold them up to each other. They write on the air.

BLACKOUT

Light. Fantastic.

DESCRIPTION

After an attempt to take his own life, Prof. Cluny Martin, prompted by his wife Ana, convinces Dr. Hugh Solomon to bring him into his experiments on manipulating brain synapses in depressed and addicted people. Light. Fantastic. touches on the weighty matters of addiction and depression, brain neurons and their synapses, two forbidden kisses, single-malt scotch, and the wonderful green dance of blue and yellow laser lights.

CHARACTERS

- Dr. Hugh Solomon
- Prof. Cluny Martin
- Ana Martin

* * * * *

Scene 1

Lights bump from black to bright on the office of a very busy bioengineering researcher at the top of his game at a prestigious university: littered but orderly.

PROF. CLUNY MARTIN stands, dressed for autumn, hunched in his coat.

Seated is DR. HUGH SOLOMON. Waiting.

MARTIN

Why are you doing my wife this favor, giving me this appointment?

SOLOMON

Because Ana gets me the grants that let me research what I love.

MARTIN

Admit you are at least "in like" with her.

SOLOMON

It's only about the grants. Let's move this forward. Show me your neck.

MARTIN shucks off his coat, takes off his suit coat, unknots his tie, takes off his shirt. A bruise and a burn ring his neck.

SOLOMON examines MARTIN.

SOLOMON

A sheet, or something not hard-edged --

MARTIN

Sheet.

MARTIN puts his clothes on.

MARTIN

I stepped off a stool -- in my garage -- and she cut me down.

SOLOMON

You knew she'd be there in time.

MARTIN

I didn't.

SOLOMON

Is that true.

MARTIN

I didn't plan -- no plan.

SOLOMON

The knife --

MARTIN

Workbench.

SOLOMON

Within reach.

MARTIN

Yes.

SOLOMON

So, knife and stool and wife within reach.

An active silence.

MARTIN

Your clinic --

SOLOMON

I told Ana I'd offer you a seat.

MARTIN

With depressives and addicts --

SOLOMON

It's connected to my optogenetics research --

MARTIN

I'm not depressed. A drunk, yes -- in AA. Regular meetings.

SOLOMON

Good.

MARTIN

And in love with being addicted -- but not depressed. I want something different. The optogenetics. Not the clinic.

SOLOMON

A seat at the table is what's on the table.

MARTIN

What interests me more, Dr. Solomon, is in your lab.

SOLOMON

The rat studies.

MARTIN

What the rat studies are leading to -- your trials of humans for the optogenetics device.

SOLOMON

You're not who we're looking at.

MARTIN

Not a subject either. You need this addict for your experiments in optogenetics -- my ode to you, Dr. Hugh

Solomon, to your optogenetics -- "opto" -- light -- how you stuff light-sensitive genes -- "genetics" -- from two bacteria into the brain neurons you want to study, one for an on-switch, one for an off, then slip in fiber optic threads -- blue for on -- yellow for off -- neuron on, neuron off -- and see how the electrified brain feeds us our understandings and meanings. Ode done. Do you have any addictions?

SOLOMON

No.

MARTIN

In your clinic, yes, but in none yourself --

SOLOMON

I don't need them to solve them --

MARTIN

Their appetites are the easy stuff --

SOLOMON

So I'm missing what?

MARTIN

A metric for ecstasy. Ecstasy. From the letting go -- the liberation of shame -- the beautiful pain of a confessed soul --

SOLOMON

That's not my science --

MARTIN

It's the science of the people at your table, though.

SOLOMON

They don't have a science.

MARTIN

You think they don't have a science, but they do. The science of synapses neither on nor off but hungry.

SOLOMON

This is not how we usually do things.

MARTIN

Your royal "we" is obligated -- wife, don't forget -- and I want what I want.

SOLOMON

Project adviser.

MARTIN

Ana has carried enough Cluny Martin on her lovely back. Philosophy gets some neuroscience, and you get data from the wild. What say you, oh obligated one?

They appraise each other. MARTIN gets his coat.

MARTIN

I will have you know that the time here today has not been wasted, at least for me -- I will let Ana, on whose behalf I have been pitching all my fascinating rhetoric, know how the rest of her days will now pass.

SOLOMON laughs.

SOLOMON

Lame.

MARTIN

I know.

SOLOMON

Obligate me harder.

MARTIN

Tell me how.

SOLOMON

Earlier -- the "letting go" -- "ecstasy" -- shame -- I don't see the pleasure in such pain --

MARTIN

You don't have any addictions.

SOLOMON

What beauty in watching yourself hang?

MARTIN

You're already using my services.

SOLOMON

You haven't serviced anything yet. So?

MARTIN

Let me think about this.

SOLOMON

No ode ready-made for singing?

MARTIN

Not for how you've asked it.

SOLOMON

So when?

MARTIN

A couple of days. Check the events calendar on the department website. We will suss it out.

SOLOMON

Last call for the clinic.

MARTIN

Not the last call I'd usually answer. Goodbye.

MARTIN leaves. SOLOMON sits, take out a small journal, and begins writing in it. The stage fills with points of blue and yellow pulsing lights.

* * * * *

Scene 2

The pulsing lights become the lights of an early evening sky.

MARTIN seated on a bench in the university quad. He drinks from a bottle of water. Next to him sits a small oblong black box.

ANA enters.

ANA

Texted: "The bench. At 6."

MARTIN

And you came.

ANA

You knew I would.

MARTIN

Not sure.

ANA

Don't be a diva.

MARTIN

Mostly sure.

ANA

You knew. You know.

MARTIN

Good to be confirmed. Just water.

ANA sits, takes the bottle, smells it.

MARTIN

I know what I need to know.

ANA

Sometimes yes.

ANA sips.

ANA

Sometimes no. The bench. At 6. Here. So.

MARTIN

He's much in like with you.

ANA

Clu. Clu.

MARTIN

I am just saying.

ANA

Not saying what I came to hear.

MARTIN

I'm just saying he's got good taste.

ANA

It's just about the grants with him and not gettin' in the pants.
Helps he's a rock star in what he does --

MARTIN

And you have asked a rock star this very intimate favor.

ANA

Don't be a jerk.

MARTIN

I'm just seeing how things lay out.

ANA

Don't be a jerk! I know him just enough to embarrass
myself asking him about you. He made that okay, though
-- manners. I'm sailing home, Clu, unless you say what I'm
asking you to say.

MARTIN

We're negotiating.

ANA

He has an opening you need -- day and time is not a
negotiation. Clu? Clu.

MARTIN

I can't do the clinic.

ANA

Won't.

MARTIN

Right.

ANA

Christ. Christ.

MARTIN

I want to work with him --

ANA

Christ.

MARTIN

-- on his optogenetics device --

ANA

Shut up.

MARTIN

I didn't just walk out.

ANA

They're not looking at you.

MARTIN

Not a subject. A guide --

ANA

Tours have guides, Clu -- tours! Mountain climbing! Shit!

MARTIN

He studies depression and addiction but doesn't have either, so how's he know what he's missing? I am schooled in such [things] --

ANA

Stop it, Clu -- just stop. You've hurt my head hard enough.

MARTIN

He did do his best --

ANA

I said stop.

MARTIN

He tried to --

ANA turns on him in a flash and gives him a hard shove.

ANA

You don't listen! I said shut up. I cut you down -- what you don't know? I chose -- shut up! -- I took that knife -- I forced my hand to grab it -- I decided to cut you down, it didn't come -- from --

ANA stops herself but not for long.

ANA

Shit! -- shitshitshitshit -- for a split-second I'm thinking -- you selfish son-of-a-bitch -- you -- one sin just rolling up after another as I'm watching you hang.

MARTIN

Damned by one whose "thighs are like jewels" --

ANA

Could you just --

MARTIN

Sorry --

ANA

-- not be --

MARTIN

Sorry --

ANA

-- the cozy bastard that you are --

MARTIN

Sorry --

ANA

Not automatic, the choice, is what I'm saying --

MARTIN

I know --

ANA

-- the choice wasn't heartfelt! You know me, Clu -- you know me! -- that sin is eating at my heart -- sin, you hear me -- sin!

ANA stops. MARTIN reaches out to touch ANA, which she lets him do -- clumsy, indefinite, but allowed.

ANA indicates that she wants the water bottle. She drinks, he drinks.

MARTIN

The cozy bastard --

ANA

More bastard than cozy sometimes -- let's just stop this --

MARTIN

My thinking about the guide -- may I? This thing inside me -- the clinic, maybe, would dig deep enough -- but what he wants to do -- with light -- hook myself to that -- something larger -- something not myself -- something not more cozy for the cozy bastard --

An active silence.

MARTIN

If I help him find a way in, then maybe I can find a way in.

An active silence. MARTIN starts opening and closing the jewelry case. ANA puts a hand on his to keep him from doing that. MARTIN puts down the case.

ANA

The dark cloud this time --

MARTIN

It puzzled me, too -- I mean --

ANA

For you everything in place.

MARTIN

Exactly -- happy, even. Then the storm front -- melancholy -- and I'm feeling you can push back. Or not.

ANA

And you didn't -- on my watch --

MARTIN

This is where I need the good doctor --

ANA

Don't call him that.

MARTIN

What in a brain shifts, Ana -- what was off now on, on now off -- I am with you, you are doing what I have asked --

ANA

Never again.

MARTIN

Yeah.

ANA

You just said, "I'll be back" and you didn't come back.

MARTIN

How does that happen? Why? Solomon says that neurons are just on and off -- but I think in gangs they offer permissions -- it's what I'm at the end of.

ANA

I don't know if this will be enough for me, Clu, even if he lets you do it -- my hesitation --

MARTIN

Don't --

ANA

Can't jolly me out of my Catholic -- heart full of guilt.

MARTIN

Taking on the sins of the cozy bastard.

ANA

What're you smiling about?

MARTIN

I thought I had you one night, you know, about your Catholic.

ANA

When?

MARTIN

You'd just served me the most perfect Rob Roy --

ANA

Vermouth from an eyedropper. But yes to the death of God? Just to take you home with me.

MARTIN

Thought I'd convinced you that the universe was absurd.

ANA

And the next day off I want to Mass -- remember?

MARTIN

Not even tempted.

ANA

Always told you, Clu, nothing "lapsed" about my Catholic -- we're all sinners, rule number one.

MARTIN

Looking for forgiveness.

ANA

Rule number two, referring back to rule number one.

An active silence.

ANA

What's in the box?

MARTIN

A little decompression afterwards, so I walked through the jewelry district -- just seeing how much of the business I remember --

ANA

What is it?

MARTIN

Thai bracelet, with the invisible set for the rubies -- I wanted to get you a cabochon-cut pink tourmaline but nothing popped.

ANA

That's an old voice.

MARTIN

Comes on like a worn shirt.

MARTIN hands ANA the box, but she doesn't open it, just handles it, then puts it down between them.

ANA

It'll make a great find for whoever sits here next.

MARTIN goes to pick it up.

ANA

Don't you dare.

Again, not sure of the way forward.

MARTIN

He's going to give me a call, one way or the other.

ANA

One way or the other I have to get home, Clu.

MARTIN

So do I.

ANA gathers herself, rises.

ANA

Behind me or beside me -- but I'm not following you.

ANA leaves. MARTIN toys with the box, leaves it on the bench, goes to catch up.

* * * * *

Scene 3

Bench moves as scene shifts to MARTIN's post-lecture. SOLOMON sits on the bench, coffee in hand, another coffee on the bench beside him. He holds a small notebook. MARTIN sees him.

MARTIN

A little chilly to be sitting here.

SOLOMON

Mental floss.

MARTIN

For me?

SOLOMON

Black.

MARTIN

Only way to drink it.

SOLOMON

Then it's yours.

MARTIN

Thanks. How did you know I'd like --

SOLOMON

I took a guess.

MARTIN

Good guess.

MARTIN toasts SOLOMON, who toasts back.

MARTIN

Did you hear the --

SOLOMON

No.

MARTIN

Good lecture --

SOLOMON

"The crossroads of advertising and ethics." Is that where you stand? About yourself?

MARTIN

Launch right in.

SOLOMON

Who else knows, other than your wife and me?

MARTIN

No one.

SOLOMON

So you give this lecture, even while on sabbatical, even after what you tried --

MARTIN

That offends you.

SOLOMON

It puzzles me. A lot. Why not more distressed? Why not locked away in a psych ward? Why is it you seem -- so --

MARTIN

Sounds like.

SOLOMON

Self-assured --

MARTIN

Most assuredly not self-assured.

SOLOMON

Whatever you call it, it doesn't fit with what you did to yourself.

SOLOMON opens the small notebook, flips a few pages.

MARTIN

Depends on what --

SOLOMON

Stop being coy. You tried to kill yourself.

MARTIN

I tried to find a solution.

SOLOMON

I said stop being coy. Right. I took some time to read --

MARTIN

The novel.

SOLOMON

Yes.

MARTIN

Trash --

SOLOMON

And the business ethics reader -- a couple of columns you write -- guest-lecturer -- on sabbatical --

MARTIN

And my wonderful wife.

SOLOMON leafs through pages.

SOLOMON

And your wonderful wife.

At times he will jot things down as ideas come to him.

SOLOMON

The novel -- how much is true?

MARTIN

That's a slippery [word] --

SOLOMON

You can be coy if you want, but then go home and stay away from my lab.

SOLOMON's directness impresses MARTIN.

MARTIN

Yes, I sold jewelry. I was "in the trade."

SOLOMON

Did "the trade" require so much cheating? You and your brother did a lot of it -- the brother?

MARTIN

Genuine.

SOLOMON

Is "the trade" why some of your first published work is about deception? And that journey from "the trade" to "philosophy professor" -- you can see, I've got a lot to ask, but this is really what I want to know about, the point: the letting go. Tell me about the letting go.

MARTIN

The long way around.

SOLOMON

Whichever road gets you there.

MARTIN

In the prep for your human trials -- how do you factor in deception? Because my evolutionary theory says that human consciousness came into bloom when humans learned how to cheat one another. Two words: "I" and "thou." I. Thou. To mislead you, I first have to split you off from me -- that lets me imagine how your "thou" works -- and then --

SOLOMON

And then get inside that --

MARTIN

To get advantage. My brother and I didn't have to lie so much as just jack into people's invented worlds -- their "thou" -- which made it easy to misdirect 'em in plain view. Let me teach you something about trading in I and Thou. Your watch.

MARTIN indicates for SOLOMON to hand it over.

MARTIN

I promise to give it back!

SOLOMON hands it over. MARTIN mocks it.

MARTIN

Let's pretend this -- item --

SOLOMON

A watch is just for telling time.

MARTIN

Wrong. In any case, for my purpose, this item is your aunt's antique gold bracelet -- she just died or needs chemo -- so you come to me, not just with the bracelet, but with needs -- my home court advantage. On to my scale, and I tell you that your 18-karat gold is 75% gold, 25% crap metal.

SOLOMON

Which is right.

MARTIN

I show you the current gold price -- true figure, right there on the website -- building your trust -- and I convert it to grams -- I show you how, convert this to this --

SOLOMON

Why convert?

MARTIN

Make you a little dizzy -- one ounce of gold equals, exactly, 31.1034807 grams -- I could baffle you in ounces, too, since gold is in troy ounces, not kitchen ounces --

SOLOMON

Multiply either unit by point-seven-five.

MARTIN

But we are by no means done with that figure -- I deduct 15%, smelting cost -- for me it's more like two to five, but how would you know? -- and I might not because it's not bad-looking --

SOLOMON

You might sell it.

MARTIN

But I'm not going to tell you that. Then another 10% -- "my profit, you see, not much, I only get the one-tenth" -- and then to round off, I take away another 25% for the crap alloys.

MARTIN and SOLOMON look at each other.

SOLOMON

You just deducted me twice for the alloy.

MARTIN

And more if I don't smelt it -- but everything in the open --

MARTIN hands the watch back.

MARTIN

Your needs are like static in your ears -- they let me get the number on your "thou" and turn you into what you fear you are -- a rube, a mark, a loser -- manipulation of invented worlds -- I'm doing it, they're doing it, how would you cross-check and account for this in your data?

SOLOMON makes some notes in his notebook, puts it on the bench.

SOLOMON

Let me have your watch.

MARTIN hands his watch to him.

SOLOMON

Is this really --

MARTIN

An 18-carat gold Rolex President? It's a Brazilian knock-off, from the old days -- cost \$4995 -- well, not me, but it would someone --

SOLOMON

But you still wear the fake. From the fake life.

MARTIN

I like to remind myself.

SOLOMON

So why didn't the self-deception stop the "letting go"? This is where the long way around has brought us, right? What was your static? Why were you a loser?

MARTIN takes his time.

MARTIN

Of late. I have been visited. By. This. Voice. Interrogative. Not pushy. Not bullying. Not. Despairing. Just. Plain. Brief.

MARTIN takes an inhale, then an exhale.

MARTIN

"What is the point?" it asks. Four single-syllable words: what is the --

SOLOMON

Do you try to answer it?

MARTIN

Doesn't feel like that kind of question. Like an answer would miss the point.

SOLOMON

But it doesn't leave you untouched.

MARTIN

Dr. Solomon, I am a drunk working on the puzzle of my sobriety. I'm not convinced about sobriety, you know. But its anti-Christ, Inebriation? Despite its many gifts -- so I have chosen the slow road to Damascus of the AA meeting.

SOLOMON

"What is the point?" -- is the question about being sober?

MARTIN

The question has been visiting me more and more as the sobriety has taken its "toll" -- such a toll! -- clearer thinking, a steadier pulse, sleep not a stupor, an adult perspective --

SOLOMON

How terrible.

MARTIN

But all this -- goodness -- a gift, I recognize all that -- but it's aggravated another -- warp in my temperament, this melancholy that sweeps in -- Ana and I call it the "dark cloud" -- in any case, about ten days or so ago, in it sweeps, with a four-syllable voice --

SOLOMON

And we come to that night.

MARTIN doesn't answer right away. SOLOMON plays with the watch.

SOLOMON

Professor Martin, it's not like there is another time we will interview about this.

MARTIN

The whole day -- the question pocking me like the tip of a nail: "What is the point?" "What is the point?" How do you explain the spark of permission -- the blue light -- that suddenly crackled out of this wetware? The permission to avoid the question altogether.

SOLOMON

This plain question of yours is also about being an adult, you know.

MARTIN

My plain question is also about futility because what answer could ever answer the question.

SOLOMON

Like I said, being an adult.

MARTIN

"Permission to avoid" was how I read it, not "futility makes me a better adult." If this is the adulthood that sober had gifted me --

SOLOMON

Have you ever thought about what the shift from jewelry to philosophy did to you?

MARTIN

To me?

SOLOMON

I'm sure for you, but, yes, to you --

SOLOMON holds up the watch.

SOLOMON

-- shifts in identity, in habits of pretending -- authenticity
-- "the point" -- it was all a kind of sobering up --

MARTIN indicates that he wants the watch back. SOLOMON hands it to him. MARTIN puts it back on.

MARTIN

All I know is -- and I'll admit what I know is full of -- holes
-- that on that night, sober brain in a blue buzz and a black cloud with this nagging voice in my ear, I wanted out.

SOLOMON

Except for the knocked-over stool and nearby blade. And wife. I can't keep those out of the account.

MARTIN

Meaning.

SOLOMON

Meaning that what we know is full of holes.

MARTIN

I know why I chose to hang myself -- why "What is the point" had no more point -- not the best but not an unreasonable choice. Guess.

SOLOMON

You're the guide.

MARTIN

To find the peace that passeth understanding. A short road to Damascus.

SOLOMON

Huh.

MARTIN

Did I just hit on something?

SOLOMON

There are times in the clinic when I listen to such suffering and wonder what it is that keeps their "thou," I don't know, still in the game.

MARTIN

Same thought when I look at a ravaged beggar: I want to ask, "Is it really that precious?" But unlike me, you're committed to keeping them in the game.

SOLOMON

Of course. Why suggest anything else? It's what pushes me to go for the optogenetics devices.

MARTIN

And your lizard part?

SOLOMON

I don't --

MARTIN

The night terrors? The flop sweats? My four apocalyptic syllables -- "what is [the]"

SOLOMON

Who hasn't had them? But just another reason to build the devices.

MARTIN

I'm not sure if you're blessed or not.

SOLOMON

I go for blessed.

SOLOMON stands, puts his coffee cup on the bench.

SOLOMON

I've made a note here.

MARTIN stands.

SOLOMON

Can you get me into an open AA meeting?

MARTIN

That shouldn't be a problem.

SOLOMON

Let me know when, then. In the meantime, I'll talk you over with my team.

MARTIN

That's only fair.

SOLOMON

So --

MARTIN

Enjoy.

SOLOMON starts off, then turns back.

SOLOMON

The aunt's bracelet -- did you ever just want to stop, cold, and say to the person "I'm sorry, I'm just selling you bullshit"?

MARTIN

Often.

SOLOMON

But you didn't.

MARTIN

In those days I thought they deserved to be cheated -- most of them, at least. They wanted to believe that some uncommon metal or some pressurized carbon would make them something they weren't. I despised that. Then.

SOLOMON

And profited thereby.

MARTIN

Then.

SOLOMON

And your Brazilian knock-off.

MARTIN

Reminds me to apply to myself what I'd thought about them. The fake keeps me honest.

They eye each other, and then SOLOMON laughs. MARTIN laughs.

SOLOMON

Call me tomorrow.

MARTIN

Consider yourself called.

And off SOLOMON goes. MARTIN sits back down on the bench. He takes a sip of his coffee but finds it gone cold. He checks his watch, adjusts it on his wrist. He looks at SOLOMON's empty coffee cup, then places his own cup next to it. He looks at both cups, then gazes outward into the middle distance.

* * * * *

Scene 4

ANA's office -- ANA is not there. SOLOMON walks in and sits. ANA enters, folders in her arms. SOLOMON stands.

ANA wears a nice bracelet. A green apple sits on her desk.

SOLOMON

Here, let me --

ANA

Nope, got 'em -- please, sit.

SOLOMON

On my way back to the lab --

ANA

You're a lucky man -- caught me between meetings.

SOLOMON

Meetings, bloody meetings, it looks like --

ANA

My curse --

ANA puts the folders on the desk, sits.

ANA

Annual appeal.

SOLOMON

Already.

ANA

Leaves get red, squirrels bag acorns -- and I hit up people for an early Christmas. Your name's in here, in case you were worried --

SOLOMON

Not worried any more --

ANA

Now one less on your to-do list.

SOLOMON

My too-long-to-do list --

ANA

Aw.

ANA makes the small violin gesture -- or a playful equivalent. She waits.
SOLOMON fidgets.

ANA

So -- just stopping by --

SOLOMON

I just had coffee with your husband.

ANA

After his lecture.

SOLOMON

Hmm.

An active silence.

SOLOMON

You've read the novel.

ANA

From the first time he wrote down the first page.

SOLOMON

Did you know your husband when he -- I'm sorry, I just --

ANA

My husband and I met as bartender and drinker -- drinker,
him --

SOLOMON

Yes --

ANA

At one of the jewelry shows -- extra self-improvement money for the townie trying out college -- a day like no other --

SOLOMON

With his brother --

ANA

They squired me around -- I met some spiky characters -- did a few gold buys for the trust fund. But Clu was already moving on -- and so did I.

SOLOMON

He did a "buy" on me --

ANA

The seventy-five percent. "Slick," Dr. Solomon, slick as baby -- well, slick as lavender oil -- that was Clu -- slick and, what?, fragrant?

ANA laughs, gives SOLOMON a searching look, which SOLOMON returns.

ANA

I shouldn't've asked you, right?

SOLOMON

He's been -- I don't know -- entertaining? -- fragrant? It's not how I usually deal with people -- it's put me in a --

ANA

What I'm trying to get at --

SOLOMON

Not what I'm getting at --

ANA

Then what?

SOLOMON

Let's see. In the past two days I have been out in the wild! -- lab free! -- and reading -- for pleasure --

ANA

Wonder of wonders --

SOLOMON

-- because of what you asked --

ANA

Early Christmas.

SOLOMON

Fun -- yes.

The "but" hangs in the air.

SOLOMON

Also something different. He told me I have an obligation.

ANA

You don't.

SOLOMON

But --

SOLOMON makes a fishing gesture, reeling in. ANA half-smiles.

SOLOMON

You know.

ANA

He's made you go "hmm."

SOLOMON

Hmm.

ANA

You go in, a ready hand --

SOLOMON

The clinic --

ANA

You lean -- but he leans --

SOLOMON

You go "hmm" --

ANA

Hardly feel the hook. He told me about his "guide" offer.

SOLOMON

I'll talk him over with my team. But I think he'll be coming through my door.

An active silence.

SOLOMON

I should go -- you're [busy] --

ANA

Dr. Solomon. What do you think I asked for when I asked you to meet with Clu? Really?

SOLOMON

But I failed --

ANA

Too early to tell.

ANA ponders what to say, then says it.

ANA

I cut him down, I know you know that, but you have to understand one thing about why I did what I did.

SOLOMON picks up the green apple and fidgets with it.

SOLOMON

You don't [have to] --

ANA

After I let him slump to the floor -- I slapped him. I mean hard and I mean twice. And the two bring him back -- but here's what you're going to hear: if the two hadn't've done it, I wasn't sure I'd've gone for a third.

SOLOMON puts the apple back on the desk.

ANA

In other words, I wasn't just asking you for him.

SOLOMON

He knew -- a lot about the optogenetics work -- something in it seemed to -- to set a hook -- does it interest you?

ANA

Yes.

ANA points to the apple.

ANA

My lunch. That apple.

SOLOMON

I'm sorry.

ANA

You didn't bruise it. Go on -- take it.

SOLOMON picks up the apple.

ANA

That's what you're doing in your lab, know it or not, why Clu has glommed onto it: the Garden of Eden before the eaten apple -- that's the device you're working on.

SOLOMON

I don't --

ANA

Sin. And release. What's the point without getting some of that? And why look surprised? Not like sin ever ran out. It's about yearning --

SOLOMON

In you?

ANA

Higher, please! All of us. If the soul could not so much be at the mercy of these brain sparks -- a little redemption -- a cleansing -- a release --

SOLOMON

But brain neurons are on or off -- not "redemption"/"sin" --

ANA

But when they gang-up? Look out! If we can handle the on and the off and the ganging up -- I call that a state of grace, a "point," Garden before the apple.

SOLOMON

Forgiveness.

ANA

How's that word taste?

ANA points to her folders.

ANA

Isn't forgiveness the annual appeal of annual appeals, the one we're always running? Annual? Hell, daily!

SOLOMON

I cannot disagree -- especially from such a messenger.

ANA

An angel of annunciation, that's me.

SOLOMON

Well.

ANA

As my mom used to say, "well" is a deep subject. Look, if Clu gets his help, Dr. Solomon, I get my mine. He's a complicated gift that way.

SOLOMON

Well.

ANA

Deep.

SOLOMON

I have to go --

ANA

And so do I --

There is a moment in which they have to decide to hug politely or shake hands. They shake hands.

SOLOMON hands her back the apple.

ANA

Keep it. Angel gift. And your name's in the mail. Now go to your bloody meetings and I'll go to mine --

SOLOMON laughs -- and it surprises him that he laughs. ANA laughs with him, though at a lower temperature.

SOLOMON

I'll reinforce the doorframe -- goodbye.

SOLOMON leaves. ANA pulls another apple and a knife from a desk drawer. ANA slices off a piece of the apple. She eats it. She slices another, eats it. Another. Another. She eats as if she definitely has a third slap in her.

* * * * *

Scene 5

An antiseptic light buzzes on: lab light.

The three enter, coats on, SOLOMON holding a scrum of keys. Perhaps the sound of a door being unlocked, opened, closed.

MARTIN

So this is the vaunted --

SOLOMON

Only the outer -- the actual work -- c'mon.

MARTIN

(to ANA)

What your money buys.

SOLOMON

This is what the money buys.

ANA

It's a seventy-five percent.

MARTIN

No it's [not] --

The lab light goes out, comes up on a second part of the stage. A table, chairs, perhaps a computer -- anything else to indicate "lab."

MARTIN

In here.

SOLOMON

Yes. Let me take your coats --

MARTIN shucks his off, hands it to SOLOMON. ANA keeps hers on.

MARTIN

So.

SOLOMON

I want to show you both something we managed to do a little while ago, just to show -- with brain neurons -- the rats' and then maybe yours --

ANA
(to CLU)

There you go.

MARTIN

Interspecies coöperation.

SOLOMON

Not --

MARTIN

There's hope for us yet.

ANA

You shouldn't get so inclusive about your species, Clu.

SOLOMON

Not like they really coöperate, Professor --

SOLOMON brings a chair to ANA.

MARTIN

(to ANA)

You're trying to be as quiet as a church mouse but it's not working --

SOLOMON brings over a chair for MARTIN as well. MARTIN sits. SOLOMON pops open a laptop -- the video will play in front of them.

SOLOMON

It's not long, but it's great.

MARTIN

Giddy. Popcorn!

ANA

Clu --

MARTIN

No budget, eh?

ANA

Cozy, cozy --

SOLOMON

Just watch.

SOLOMON presses go, then pauses it.

SOLOMON

Now, what do you see?

MARTIN

Rat in a bathtub --

SOLOMON

Storage pen. What else?

MARTIN

In its head.

SOLOMON

Fiber-optic connection.

MARTIN

Like a pencil eraser -- no, a --

SOLOMON

What color is it?

MARTIN

What?

SOLOMON

The connection.

MARTIN

Clear. Plastic.

MARTIN looks over to ANA.

MARTIN

Right?

ANA

Speak for both of us.

SOLOMON

Now, watch.

SOLOMON presses go.

SOLOMON

Rat wanders like a rat does -- the connection?

MARTIN

Still clear.

SOLOMON

And now?

MARTIN

Blue -- hell, look at that!

SOLOMON

Circling continuously to its left --

MARTIN

Round and round --

SOLOMON

And now?

MARTIN

Clear --

SOLOMON

And the rat stops, looks around --

MARTIN

"What the hell just happened to me?"

SOLOMON presses pause.

SOLOMON

More importantly, no damage -- a blue laser through the fiber-optic --

MARTIN

I got that --

SOLOMON

The rat's right-side motor cortex -- right brain, left side. But better? Only affected the on/off switch -- not any other cell, the way a deep-brain electrode --

MARTIN

Targeted.

SOLOMON

Targeted.

ANA

You two are acting like a one-legged man who's found his second leg. Look at the two of you.

SOLOMON hits another key -- the video changes.

SOLOMON

Now this.

MARTIN

What are we watching?

SOLOMON

A depressed mouse.

MARTIN

How do you depress a mouse?

SOLOMON

"Social defeat" experiences -- affects the prefrontal cortex
--

MARTIN

And then --

SOLOMON goes to unpause the video, But MARTIN does it instead.

SOLOMON

Blue light goes on and --

MARTIN

It moves -- through the maze -- plays nicely with the other
mice -- drinks some water --

SOLOMON

Sugar water. Just like normal.

SOLOMON stops the video.

MARTIN

And this is what the trials --

SOLOMON

The initial steps to take the initial steps to take the --

MARTIN

You're going to make them run in circles.

ANA

We all do enough of that already.

SOLOMON pulls up a chair and sits.

ANA

Just throwing in my two cents.

SOLOMON

Not circles, no -- not like meetings, bloody meetings, eh? --

ANA

Right.

MARTIN

What does that [mean] --

SOLOMON

The initial trials --

MARTIN

Ana?

SOLOMON

-- will be about measuring -- what is and isn't firing when a depressive talks about "the void" or a substance abuser --

MARTIN

Addict --

SOLOMON

-- not having the will power --

MARTIN

Weakling. Ana?

SOLOMON

The basal lateral amygdala does not equal a person's character.

MARTIN

It's all about not-sparking. Or maybe too much sparking --

ANA

What problem are you having now, Clu?

The air goes cold.

MARTIN

"Meetings, bloody meetings" -- what is that about? You two
-- behind my back?

SOLOMON

No.

ANA

He's making you go "hmm."

MARTIN

What?

ANA

PROFESSOR SOLOMON, YOU INVITED US HERE TONIGHT FOR
MORE THAN MOVIES. SOLOMON

Yes I did.

ANA

And that might be.

MARTIN

You two --

ANA

Shut up and listen.

An active silence.

SOLOMON

I've talked with my team and -- and they were mostly fine
with you coming in.

MARTIN

And you?

SOLOMON

I trust my team.

MARTIN

And you?

This is said more to ANA than MARTIN.

SOLOMON

I hope this will give you some peace of mind.

MARTIN

But what about you?

SOLOMON

I think -- it will be interesting.

MARTIN

Ah.

ANA

Satisfied?

MARTIN

Are you?

ANA

Did you get your annual appeal letter?

SOLOMON

Yesterday.

ANA

Then I pronounce myself satisfied.

MARTIN

I got mine.

ANA

Even better. Because now I know that some things are working the way they're supposed to. I'd like to go home.

SOLOMON rises before MARTIN, gets MARTIN's coat and holds it open for him to put on. MARTIN instead takes the coat and puts it on himself, then turns and helps ANA out of her chair.

MARTIN

When shall we three meet again? Well, at least two?

SOLOMON

I have my staff meeting tomorrow. At ten.

MARTIN

En punto, as they say, then.

MARTIN offers ANA his arm, which she takes, and they start for the door.
SOLOMON grabs his own coat.

MARTIN

Wouldn't it be so much easier with clear plastic beacons
poking out of our heads firing off/on as the case demanded?
Little lighthouses guiding us along.

ANA

And what color would you want your beacon to be?

MARTIN

The color of you.

ANA

Cozy.

ANA pulls MARTIN along.

ANA

Cozy little lighthouses --

SOLOMON follows. Lights out.

INTERMISSION [IF NEEDED]

Scene 6

MARTIN and SOLOMON at a table in a bar, indicated by music and lights.
A single glass of amber liquor faces them. MARTIN stares at it.

SOLOMON

The AA meeting?

MARTIN

At the church. Across the street.

SOLOMON

But that's not where we are.

MARTIN

We're across the street from across the street.

SOLOMON

And you had me order this drink. Very specific.

MARTIN

Do you hear anything?

SOLOMON

Other than your not answering me?

MARTIN

Just anything.

SOLOMON

Music, chatter -- a hum, kind of --

MARTIN points at the glass.

MARTIN

And from that.

SOLOMON

Liquor doesn't talk to me the way it talks to you.

MARTIN

So how would you measure what I hear of what it says? Do a regression analysis of the muscle tension that keeps my hand off that glass? Sample it.

SOLOMON ponders the glass.

MARTIN

Go on.

SOLOMON

Why does it suddenly feel like a snake?

MARTIN

It has a bite. "The bite" is the reason to sample it.

SOLOMON

That would be your thought.

SOLOMON takes a good sip.

MARTIN

Tell me.

SOLOMON

Be more specific.

MARTIN

Be less cautious.

SOLOMON

Heat. No. Warmth.

MARTIN

Glow. Where?

SOLOMON

Tongue, throat, sternum -- radiates.

MARTIN

Where else?

SOLOMON

Up to the temples, behind the eyes.

MARTIN

The sunburst.

SOLOMON

Back of the head.

MARTIN

Take another.

SOLOMON takes another good sip. They wait as it radiates.

MARTIN

The "around" around you -- annotate it.

SOLOMON

Lights.

MARTIN

Quality.

SOLOMON

Dim.

MARTIN

Sounds.

SOLOMON

Music. Voices. Clatter.

MARTIN

But your sense -- your sense of it all.

SOLOMON looks surprised.

SOLOMON

Warmth.

SOLOMON points at the glass.

SOLOMON

Like that.

MARTIN

From that.

SOLOMON

Yes.

MARTIN

Where everybody knows your name --

SOLOMON

Even if they don't know who you are.

MARTIN

Always companionate.

SOLOMON

Womb -- ish.

MARTIN

That oceanic feeling. Rock-a-bye baby.

SOLOMON

Snake -- womb --

MARTIN

You're getting the measure --

SOLOMON

The garden of algorithm --

MARTIN flashes SOLOMON a big smile, relaxes for the first time.

MARTIN

Two sips and a poet emerges. Sensing what you sense,
what else do you sense?

SOLOMON looks at the glass for a second, then another, then picks it up
and sips again, puts it down.

SOLOMON

This time, the taste -- not just warmth.

MARTIN

Single malt.

SOLOMON

Defined.

MARTIN

Not "highland" for nothing.

SOLOMON

Cleansing.

MARTIN

Too concrete. Sit inside the warmth.

SOLOMON ponders.

SOLOMON

Protected.

MARTIN

From the vile blows and buffets of the world.

SOLOMON ponders some more.

SOLOMON

I am thinking about choices that people make.

MARTIN

Oh, the moralist has entered the room. We will cover
Willpower 101 later. For now, just --

MARTIN points at the glass.

MARTIN

-- this. What does the poet hear, not the moralist?

SOLOMON

All right.

SOLOMON drains the glass. Puts it up to his ear. Waits. Puts it down.
Clears his throat.

MARTIN

Go on.

SOLOMON

What was the Garden of Eden before the apple?

MARTIN

From what neural network did that spring?

SOLOMON

Don't you know?

MARTIN

No.

SOLOMON

You should know.

MARTIN

How would I know?

SOLOMON

Then let's just say that I know --

MARTIN

Wait. Wait.

They appraise each other.

MARTIN

Bloody meetings. She --

SOLOMON overrides him.

SOLOMON

Warmth, sunburst, protected -- where everybody knows your name -- womb -- snake -- the liquor as communion, addiction as a faith --

MARTIN

She just pours out of you!

MARTIN dares SOLOMON to say ANA's name. SOLOMON stays mum. MARTIN holds up the glass.

MARTIN

Willpower 101. The abuse is not about the substance, at least not directly. It comes from the grip of desire -- its tenacity -- the way it answers the question with "this is the point" -- and so it is always active voice, not passive -- even the scum on the bottom of the barrel still raises his hand on his own and croaks, "Give me more." And so I would say,

say always, that you yourself pour it into yourself. Because why not? What does reality really have in its favor that it should trump the pouring in and all its associated wonders?

SOLOMON

"Barrel-scum" does not seem wonderful.

MARTIN

The problem is not the desire but the lack of well-tuned substances on the menu. Our chemists -- our bio-engineers -- have failed us!

SOLOMON

Desires multiply too quickly.

MARTIN

Need to speed up production!

SOLOMON

Perhaps people need more self-restraint.

MARTIN

Why? Warmth, sunburst, protected -- where everybody knows your name -- what you felt after a single pouring-in -- why hold back? Imagine an optogenetics device that would soften inhibition without softening the muscles -- life-work done in a gentle glow yet with perfect focus and coordination -- no need for the two-by-four of caffeine or money or highland between our tired eyes.

SOLOMON

Now who is it pouring out of?

MARTIN

This is the place for your optogenetics device.

SOLOMON

To aid and abet addiction.

MARTIN

It wouldn't be addiction if it made for less suffering, if it kept the craziness away -- if we had the right balance. We don't call prayer an addiction, or meditation, or yoga, or exercise,

yet they all aim at more pleasure with less unearned pain.
Less suffering. You wanted my consultation.

SOLOMON

How will this fit in with what I'm going to hear tonight?

MARTIN

Has the poet gone away?

SOLOMON

The poet -- waits.

MARTIN

As long as he hasn't gone away.

SOLOMON

He hasn't

MARTIN

Good. You want to take another drink for me?

SOLOMON

I'm good.

MARTIN pulls out a box of mints, opens it, offers it to SOLOMON.

MARTIN

Not cool to have it on your breath.

SOLOMON takes one. MARTIN takes one, but before he puts the box away, SOLOMON gestures for another one, which he takes from MARTIN.

MARTIN takes a bottle out of his pocket, shakes out a pill, slips it under his tongue, puts the bottle away.

MARTIN

What are you going to hear tonight? It won't be what I just told you -- we cannot talk about addiction and desire as if they are, well, positives. Even I can't really do it for real -- not now. Sweet Ativan.

SOLOMON

Has this been a seventy-five percent?

MARTIN

The better breath mint. No, no bluff.

SOLOMON

All those sayings you've been letting loose on my staff --
"addiction is rebellion" -- bluff?

MARTIN

No -- more like war stories. Sitting here with you, you
drinking that -- for me -- it provides a harbor, sort of. So
I can spin out my consultations for you -- I have been the
scum on the barrel-bottom -- you're right, it's not wonderful.
But it is also not false -- it is earned -- there is a weird honor
in it --

SOLOMON

A complicated gift.

MARTIN

Like the tales of woe you'll hear tonight.

SOLOMON

Are you nervous about these meetings? The Ativan.

MARTIN

I'm nervous coming to the meetings, I'm nervous if I don't
come to the meetings. I don't like them, but I like them
when I get to talk about myself, which everyone in there
likes to do since it's sometimes a big show -- stuff for the
local nightly news.

SOLOMON

When you were hanging there --

MARTIN

Now, there's a shift in subject --

SOLOMON

It's connected --

MARTIN

If you say so --

SOLOMON

As you were hanging -- electro-chemistry going silent -- anything?

MARTIN

Like life flashing?

SOLOMON

I don't know what I mean. I'm consulting my consultant.

MARTIN picks up the empty glass, looks at it, smells it -- any other gesture he wants except for tasting whatever residue is left.

SOLOMON

You don't remember.

MARTIN

Anything. At all.

SOLOMON

Before you were hanging, then -- placing the sheet --

MARTIN

If my electro-chemistry knew anything, it knew only four syllables matching the pointless question: Sheet. Step. Off. Free.

SOLOMON

Deliberate. De-liberate --

MARTIN puts the glass down more heavily than he intended. SOLOMON moves it away from MARTIN's hands.

SOLOMON sees how pensive MARTIN has become.

SOLOMON

But perhaps not tonight. In a dangerous place, after all. We should go.

MARTIN

Just -- just -- wait.

They wait.

MARTIN

You said, remember? warmth, sunburst, protected -- where everybody knows your name -- imagine losing that -- "what is the point?" hounding you -- and that is just gone. That's one answer. Here's my other. It's the hollow feeling that slides in when it's gone. Just. Empty. Just. Sadness. Whoosh!

SOLOMON

You look frightened --

MARTIN does, indeed, look a little spooked.

MARTIN

Me? Naw.

SOLOMON

Shouldn't lie.

MARTIN

I have every hope that tonight will be different from all other nights. No lie.

A moment of realigning feelings. Then they stand.

SOLOMON

Sent in your annual appeal yet?

MARTIN

Yes.

SOLOMON

Me, too.

MARTIN

We are both so adult.

SOLOMON

C'mon, Professor -- lead me on. Earn your keep.

MARTIN

Look, don't smile so much in the meeting, all right?

SOLOMON

I still have the sunburst --

MARTIN

Just don't --

SOLOMON

Only if you promise to smile a little.

MARTIN

Ask me to do something easy.

SOLOMON

So bluff a little. I have heard that you can do that.

MARTIN

Let us go.

They exit.

* * * * *

Scene 7

The Martin household, dimly lit. ANA sits at a table, accompanied by a bottle of amber highland single-malt. MARTIN enters smiling, maybe even whistling -- certainly light-hearted -- until he sees the bottle. MARTIN rushes over to examine the bottle. The bottle hasn't been opened.

ANA

You know it won't be open.

MARTIN

Why did you take it out?

ANA

Because I want this straight, no chaser.

ANA stands up. For a moment they stand quiet. ANA kisses him hard; she bites his bottom lip -- not hard. Then lets it go. A truce.

ANA

I was left lonely, Clu.

MARTIN

But I'm [back] --

ANA

Mistrust still bubbles up from the lizard brain.

ANA pushes MARTIN away gently, then sits.

ANA

How did your meeting go?

MARTIN takes off his coat, rolls up his sleeves, paces as he does so, wary. At some point he picks up the bottle, then puts it back down.

MARTIN

Old hat. Dr. Solomon -- touching for him, I think. The bottle is not supposed to be out.

ANA

I'm sure he thought you were all touched.

MARTIN

I need to put it away -- the whole moment comes flooding --

ANA

Why do you think I brought it out? You call it "the moment." I call it our house of horrors.

MARTIN is not sure.

ANA

This chase with him isn't mine --

MARTIN

Ana --

ANA

I had my own "open meeting" while you left me alone. I have loved you so hard, Clu -- tight, you know? Just when I felt nothing would pop for the bartender and her dinky associates degree -- you pop up. Took me seriously, from behind -- best of all, away, took me away. But now -- this is your chase, not mine --

MARTIN

What is your chase?

ANA

There must have been some touching stories of the collateral damage. Did those interest him?

MARTIN

I don't know -- he didn't say.

ANA straddles MARTIN, face-to-face, in his chair.

ANA

Maybe those were what opened him up, eh, not your crumpled-up tales of woe. You should poke him on this --

ANA pokes him.

ANA

-- in your role of filling him in.

ANA whispers into his ear.

ANA

Collateral. Damage.

ANA pulls back.

ANA

Co-lateral. Side-by-the-side-of the one who committed no sin except for loving the damager enough.

MARTIN goes to speak but ANA puts a finger on his lips, then leans back, still face-to-face.

ANA

This is where it falls apart for me, Clu.

They hold each other's gaze. MARTIN looks as if he will crumble.

ANA

I know you offered your story tonight -- in front of him and all of them --

ANA unstraddles him, kneels in front of him, back on her heels.

MARTIN

I did --

ANA snaps her fingers.

ANA

Like an "off" for you! A yellow! Relief! But you telling that story doesn't do anything for me.

A sob escapes from MARTIN. ANA speaks to him without rancor.

ANA

Don't. You. Dare. Clu. Seen this before -- shame, then a promise -- yellow, a blue, off, on --

MARTIN's voice is half-choked.

MARTIN

I can remorse with the best of 'em.

ANA

But not like me, Clu -- the shame I feel for what I felt then, at your "moment" -- the shame's not blue/yellow, on/off -- though lordy lordy wish it could be so easy --

MARTIN

There's no blame --

ANA

You don't get to give or take it away -- my sin, my stain -- stay in the chair -- I betrayed you, Clu --

MARTIN

Nothing compared to [what]--

ANA

My meeting! Stay in the chair!

An active silence.

ANA

I'd been doing the drinking for you -- like you'd asked --
doing your liquor porn -- but I had a clear head -- and I didn't
rush to it, leap from the gut. Your betrayal is finished, Clu
-- mine isn't over.

MARTIN

No no no no no, my sweet -- whose thighs are like jewels --
no no no not at all, never -- let me tell you why I was smiling
when I walked in, Ana, it'll make all the difference --

ANA

Clu --

MARTIN

It will, it'll make the whole difference --

ANA

I don't [want] --

MARTIN

-- of course I told the story -- him with his ears wide --
showing off -- but as I talked, I forgot about him, Ana, all of
them -- and it came -- the Damascus road moment --

ANA

Clu --

MARTIN

It came, Ana -- and it stayed --
just let me --
the telling,
different from all other times --
I just -- drained out --
just the same as if you upended this
and in Damascus I felt
the relief the bottle feels
when it's done spewing its poison --
now clear and blank and empty --

ANA

I can't trust that, Clu -- you know I can't [trust that --

MARTIN

At the meeting I didn't even know what that "that" was,
except how "new" it felt.

MARTIN laughs as he realizes.

MARTIN

But then it came to me, Ana, that I do know, I know what
"that" is. Like the Garden of Eden before the apple. Right?
Right? Isn't that what you always want? Isn't it?

ANA gestures for the bottle. MARTIN kneels down and hands it to her.

ANA puts the bottle to one side. She pushes MARTIN until he stretches
himself onto his back. ANA stretches on top of him, supporting herself so
that they look straight at each other, into each other.

* * * * *

Scene 8

SOLOMON's office, late. SOLOMON at his desk, writing in a journal. ANA
appears, wearing a London Fog or Burberry. She holds the bottle of liquor.

ANA

You look really surprised -- genuine -- and --

ANA appraises him.

ANA

A little -- scared, is it? I'm hoping for "terrified."

SOLOMON

I am -- all --

ANA

I enter your cave.

ANA comes in without waiting for an invite, puts the bottle on the desk. She
straddles one of the chairs, as a man might sit in it.

ANA

You know, you need to take some responsibility for what you feel.

SOLOMON

What are you doing here?

ANA

Why are you here so late? What are you writing?

SOLOMON

My notes.

ANA

About all the poor broke-ass [souls] --

SOLOMON

That's included --

ANA

On the advice of your guide -- let me see.

ANA reaches out to him, wiggles her fingers to indicate that SOLOMON should hand the journal to her. Which he does. With some reluctance. She reads. He waits.

SOLOMON

Does he [know] --

ANA speaks while reading.

ANA

No. He's asleep. The sleep of the forgiven -- he likes to think he's forgiven --

ANA reads as she speaks.

SOLOMON

You know, the security guard [is] --

ANA

I signed a fake name. These notes aren't scientific --

SOLOMON

Not technically.

ANA

A lot like a personal journal. I also used a Russian accent.
Completely faked her out.

ANA drops into and out of the Russian accent whenever she wants from here on in.

SOLOMON

I often do -- this -- that -- write --

ANA

What're you finding so hard, Hugh?

ANA closes the journal but does not give it back.

ANA

Why do I get blue and the one at home gets yellow?

ANA gets out of the chair, tosses the journal back to SOLOMON, starts pacing.

ANA

And what color for yourself?

SOLOMON

You should go back.

ANA

You're in over your head.

SOLOMON

Even more reason you should go --

ANA

Because you're right on the edge of falling into his trap. Go on. Ask me.

SOLOMON

Please go back home.

ANA

Glad you asked me. Here's the trap -- Clu likes to set this one out to save his own fragrance -- getting people to believe that the wounds of the alchies, the druggies, the spineless --

SOLOMON

Ana --

ANA smiles at the sound of her name.

ANA

Try my name again --

SOLOMON doesn't say anything but doesn't take his eyes off her.

ANA

I'll wait. "The wounds" are the thing that makes them human. I'm sure he's dropped his little sayings on you, like "addiction is rebellion", "pleasure trumps the oppressions of civilization" -- I'm sure he's said his crap to you --

SOLOMON

I call them his highlandisms.

ANA

Clever! Thus speaks Clu -- the drunks are saints and rebels -- can't judge them, only pity them -- God forbid that anyone would name them as the trash they are -- how about this one from him: "lust is a form of compliment" -- ah!

SOLOMON

Ah.

They have an understanding.

ANA

Clu's got another he likes: "mortal pain is proof of a soul" --

ANA picks up the bottle and sits facing SOLOMON.

ANA

I am in mortal pain, Hugh. On that night --

ANA displays the bottle.

ANA

Recognize?

SOLOMON

He bought a glass of it before we went in to the meeting,
for me --

ANA places the bottle on the desk.

ANA

That night -- I drank from this for him --

SOLOMON

He had me do that -- in the bar -- beforehand --

ANA

Self-destruction and love.

ANA points to the bottle.

ANA

And what good did it do? Halfway between picking it up
and putting it down, something -- an electro-brain-moment
-- I didn't share it --

SOLOMON

I don't know why his brain chose --

ANA

I am there with him -- catch his falls -- he knows this -- and
yet zap! and he walks away to the sheet! On his way he lost
his way -- he lost me --

SOLOMON

But you cut him down, and now things have gone to yellow.

ANA

Christ, Hugh, it's not a three-hankie movie!

SOLOMON

I was trying to sidetrack the mortal pain.

ANA

There are ways.

ANA gets up, takes off the coat, flings it down. She takes the bottle, unscrews the top, breaking the seal, and sets cap and bottle on the desk, her gaze direct.

ANA

When neurons gang up and say "yeah," they don't always spell out "despair." If mortal pain is proof of the soul-- are you in mortal pain?

SOLOMON

Yes.

ANA

Me, too. Well, let's test the proof.

SOLOMON

Let's not --

ANA stops him with a kiss, which SOLOMON returns without regret.

Then SOLOMON pulls back, flustered but also calm. He opens his journal, flips a few pages, and hands it to ANA.

SOLOMON

Before your anger pushes everything over the edge.

ANA reads, and what she reads stuns her. She lowers herself into the chair; this time she does not straddle it. The reading can take as long as it takes.

ANA finishes and speaks just above a whisper.

ANA

Took the wind right out of my sails.

SOLOMON

For both of us.

ANA

Damn. Damn.

SOLOMON

Add one in for me.

ANA holds up the journal.

ANA

Really?

SOLOMON

Like it says. Like he said it to me.

ANA hands back the journal. She takes the bottle and cap, then takes a swig from the bottle. She hands the bottle to SOLOMON.

SOLOMON

I seem to be getting better at this.

SOLOMON takes a swig, hands the bottle back. ANA puts the cap on, hands the bottle to SOLOMON.

ANA

Keep it for the office liquor. It's played out in our household.

ANA puts on her coat, then steps up to SOLOMON. A moment -- several -- of contemplation before they kiss without hesitation and for as long as it takes. ANA breaks free, leaves.

SOLOMON stares for a moment, uncaps the bottle, takes a swig. Waits while it works its way down. Caps the bottle. SOLOMON smells the neck of the bottle -- a deep inhale.

SOLOMON is not sure that to do next. The journal sits in front of him, waiting. The silence hangs.

SOLOMON

If in over your head feels like this --

SOLOMON uncaps the bottle. He opens the journal, takes up a pencil, dunks it in the liquor, and writes, dunks it again, writes again. He laughs, leans down to smell the page.

SOLOMON

Sunburst --

He writes in earnest.

* * * * *

Scene 9

MARTIN's office. On a whiteboard are blocks of notes under two really large block-letter headings: "WHAT IS GIVEN", and under that "FREE WILL???????" [The "notes" do not need to be legible.] Swooping between the notes, sometimes circling or underlining the notes, are blue and yellow lines. There is also a black marker.

MARTIN stands in front of the board, a journal in his hands, checking from one to the other. Perhaps there is music in the background.

SOLOMON steps into the office, looking a bit disheveled and wearing something of a goofy grin on the downside of being drunk. He's wearing a longish coat. MARTIN doesn't know it's SOLOMON -- he hears him but ignores him.

MARTIN

My office hours are this afternoon.

SOLOMON

Between the hours --

MARTIN turns to him. SOLOMON points at the board.

SOLOMON

The big F. W.

MARTIN

Why do you look like the cat that got the mouse?

SOLOMON

Something like that.

MARTIN

Well.

SOLOMON

Deep subject. I kissed your wife, Clu. Twice.

MARTIN

When?

SOLOMON

This morning. She said you were sleeping the sleep of the forgiven.

MARTIN

Did she want you to tell me?

SOLOMON

I don't know. Too late now. The cat that got the mouse is out of the bag.

MARTIN comes up to SOLOMON and smells him.

SOLOMON

The whole bottle. I've been writing. All night.

MARTIN

Kissed twice.

SOLOMON

Yes.

MARTIN

Should I smack you down?

SOLOMON

I don't know. Maybe.

SOLOMON points to the board.

SOLOMON

You have a choice. You've got Free Will. With six question marks.

SOLOMON goes to the whiteboard and erases the question marks. MARTIN puts them back.

MARTIN

It's a fact the way I like my facts. Twice.

SOLOMON

Fact.

MARTIN

Why not three times?

SOLOMON

Wanted to avoid the trap. Both, we both wanted to avoid the trap.

MARTIN

"We."

SOLOMON

Because there was a plural in the room.

MARTIN

The trap.

SOLOMON goes to the white board, picks up the blue and yellow markers.

SOLOMON

Any guess why you're using these colors? Doesn't matter. Here's my long way around.

SOLOMON takes the blue marker and circles "FREE," then circles "WILL" with the yellow marker. He takes the black marker and draws some arrows between the two terms.

SOLOMON

Ode to brain synapses -- see, I have an ode. Synapses are lightning -- positive ions at one end of the neuron wanting to bind -- tight tight tight! -- to the negative ions of the other neuron -- a carnal embrace -- back and forth --

SOLOMON mimes explosions and makes explosive sounds.

SOLOMON

But another fact -- very important -- the "rest" -- a breathing space -- a brain can't be doing this all the time --

SOLOMON again mimes explosions and makes explosive sounds.

SOLOMON

If it does -- seizures! zombie! So, the "rest" in between firings -- tiny tiny -- but it's there, like in music --

SOLOMON suddenly looks very tired -- body sags, etc.

SOLOMON

May I sit down?

MARTIN

Take a rest?

SOLOMON

Ha ha --

MARTIN

Just don't seizure on the furniture --

SOLOMON sits.

SOLOMON

I've been up all night. I've been writing.

SOLOMON mimes explosions and makes explosive sounds -- though this time quietly -- then catches his wind. He takes a water bottle from a pocket, drinks, offers to MARTIN.

SOLOMON

Just water.

MARTIN

I'm good.

SOLOMON

The "rest" -- the rest allows time to refresh the machine -- and in that rest -- nestled within that rest -- lies -- choice -- plasticity -- brain plasticity -- a lot hard-wired, but a lot soft-wired --

MARTIN

Soft-headed --

SOLOMON

Lot of that going around. I want to -- shift -- the wiring -- the on-rest-off-rest-on-rest --

MARTIN

I get it.

SOLOMON

I am tired.

A momentary silence.

SOLOMON

I think -- upon further reflection -- in addition to tired -- embarrassed. Not regretful -- but --

MARTIN

Why are you here?

SOLOMON

Why are you using those colored markers --

MARTIN

Answer my question, or I will hit you.

SOLOMON

The questions are connected. Have you ever hit anyone? I've never hit anyone, or been hit -- I didn't come to gloat --

MARTIN draws his chair around to go face-to-face with SOLOMON.

MARTIN

Let's get the masculine shit out of the way.

MARTIN perches himself on the chair's edge. SOLOMON slides forward, perches himself on his chair's edge. MARTIN indicates to SOLOMON to hold out his hands. Which he does. MARTIN makes sure they're palm-down. Then MARTIN slides his hands, palm-up, under SOLOMON's hands.

Then MARTIN slaps one of SOLOMON's hands before SOLOMON can pull it away. They re-set. A few more times before MARTIN misses. They reverse hand positions.

But before SOLOMON can take his turn, MARTIN slaps SOLOMON in the face. And before MARTIN can take any delight, SOLOMON slaps him back.

These are not very hard slaps. The equals stare each other down.

SOLOMON

Felt good, in a bad sort of way.

MARTIN

I was hit by a customer -- bought the fake Rolex --

SOLOMON

Right --

MARTIN

Felt the same way -- deserved it, glad it was over --

They hesitate, then slide back into their chairs: mutual retreat.

SOLOMON

The trap and the "rest" --

MARTIN

Two kisses --

SOLOMON

It takes two steps to cross a line, so, yes, twice-kissed. We wanted to avoid the trap. Lord knows desire bloomed when she walked in --

MARTIN

She came to you.

SOLOMON

She made that choice. While you were asleep -- she signed a fake name with the security guard. And she said she used a Russian accent. Why would you ever want to risk losing that?

MARTIN

It's not all cream and peaches.

SOLOMON

Who would eat that all the time? In any case, the trap --
you're very clever, you know, all your "highlandisms" --

SOLOMON mimes tiny explosions and makes tiny explosive sounds.

SOLOMON

Here's what came to me - writing writing writing writing --
the pleasures that come from self-destruction -- they need
a better wiring --

MARTIN

That's why I came to you.

SOLOMON

No it's not, but let me finish.

MARTIN

Yes it was --

SOLOMON

I'm not finished. On the first kiss -- I wanted the trap. Oh,
did I want the trap. I wanted to fall into sin -- the wickedness!
-- the release from making choices -- just fall and fall and
fall --

MARTIN

This is fascinating.

SOLOMON

I am indeed -- that ache to fall back into the Garden of Eden.

MARTIN

The framework of the flesh -- I told you --

SOLOMON gets up and walks to the board, peruses it.

SOLOMON

What Professor Clu Martin hath wrought.

SOLOMON grabs the three markers in one hand, in a bunch, and starts
drawing triple parallel lines all over the board.

SOLOMON

And then there was the second kiss.

Instead of continuing to talk, he continues to draw until he stops. Then he puts the markers down and faces MARTIN.

SOLOMON

I didn't bring that kiss to her. She didn't bring that kiss to me. We chose.

SOLOMON pulls the journal out of the coat pocket, opens it to a certain page, and hands it to MARTIN.

SOLOMON

Read. Go on.

MARTIN reads for as long as it takes to read, then closes the journal and hands it back.

MARTIN

What Doctor Hugh Solomon hath wrought for himself.

SOLOMON

The second kiss rewired the choice. The choices. Took advantage of the "rest" -- ode to synapses. It re-directed the falling -- fall in, fall out, fall back, fall flat on my face, all that falling --

SOLOMON indicates the board.

SOLOMON

Free will? Important to you guys but mostly crap if you look at the brain-body set-up, most of which is already dialed in. But freed will? Freed will -- yeah -- freed will -- I call that "the second kiss."

SOLOMON grabs a blue marker and makes a solid circle.

SOLOMON

Bbbbbblue --

Then he takes the yellow marker and makes an overlapping circle so that the overlap of the two circles creates green.

SOLOMON

Yyyyyyyellow -- fine -- on/off --

More little explosion sounds.

SOLOMON

But not sufficient --

SOLOMON uses the black marker to circle the green section.

SOLOMON

This -- the green -- is about our bodies, always in a state of "green" as on/off mix-ups and splatters and -- life is there --

SOLOMON pulls out his water bottle, sits as he drinks.

SOLOMON

And I am exhausted.

MARTIN pulls his chair close. SOLOMON gives him a wary eye.

MARTIN

What kind of "green" are we at this moment?

SOLOMON

I don't think I've gotten that far.

MARTIN

Really? You kissed my wife twice.

SOLOMON doesn't answer.

MARTIN

You are still unpracticed at this.

SOLOMON

But I know what your problem is -- I do. You are always going for the first kiss. You came to me as a chameleon, figuring a change of color would let you stay the same because you didn't really want to give up the first kiss. Still don't.

MARTIN

And this second kiss is what to you?

SOLOMON

And she knows this about you --

MARTIN

Don't speak for her -- just for you, and not even really for you because I am going to answer for you --

SOLOMON

By all means do because I am [tired] --

MARTIN

You think the second kiss has faithfulness in it, sweetness, an embrace without the carnal, with the incarnate, of a higher order --

SOLOMON

Wait, slow down --

MARTIN

-- "green" in its odor and tint, the pure gesture, the sin avoided -- don't lie to me, you felt virtuous, didn't you, when she left leaving the second kiss's linger still upon your lips?

SOLOMON agrees, a little.

MARTIN

You got the sugar without the sting -- I think your second kiss is nothing but cowardice, and second kissers are cowards.

They stare at each other.

SOLOMON

That was not how I was going to answer you.

MARTIN

I don't care. I'm done. I have work to do.

SOLOMON

So no reconciliation between us -- which is why I think I came, partly --

MARTIN

I am reconciled. With my fallen state, my sinful nature, my un-green imperfections. And, even better, she is still with me.

SOLOMON

For now --

MARTIN grabs SOLOMON's water bottle and pours the rest over him.

MARTIN

Prig. Prig squared. Prig cubed.

SOLOMON rises out of his chair. MARTIN tosses the bottle at him.

MARTIN

Now get the fuck out, bambino.

SOLOMON doesn't move, but he wants to attack.

MARTIN

Are those blue lights sparking behind those broody-looking eyes -- he's thinking, he's fuming, he's straining at the leash, trying to free his will --

SOLOMON still doesn't move, and now it's clear he's not going to.

MARTIN

Hup -- and now I think I see -- yes, indeed it's true, the yellow lights are clicking on. Yes, indeed, folks, that's happening. Nothing green and growing here today, is there?

MARTIN gives SOLOMON a push toward the door.

MARTIN

Just turning yellow.

Another shove.

MARTIN

Yellow, yellow --

Another shove. And then SOLOMON gives MARTIN a push back, hard -- enough to show MARTIN there is more power there than meets the eye.

MARTIN

Someone's been using the university gym --

And SOLOMON advances on MARTIN.

MARTIN

All right, all right --

SOLOMON pulls up short, and the two of them square off.

MARTIN

I've got a proposal for you. You listening? I've been thinking it over.

SOLOMON

For how long?

MARTIN

About thirty seconds, so I wouldn't get my face smashed -- but I think it's been marinating since the open meeting.

SOLOMON

I don't know if I would've hit you.

MARTIN

Let's say you did so we can clear off the testosterone. You interested in my proposal or not?

SOLOMON

I get into trouble when I hear proposals from you.

MARTIN

I think you're finding out you wouldn't have it any other way.

SOLOMON

Not another seventy-five-percent routine, is it?

MARTIN

One hundred percent serious.

SOLOMON

What about Ana?

An active silence.

SOLOMON

Right. I've got about five minutes before I fall asleep in that chair over there.

MARTIN

So get yourself in the chair.

SOLOMON sits.

MARTIN

We can probably bang out a syllabus in less than five minutes, then you can sleep the sleep of babes.

SOLOMON

A course.

MARTIN

We're at a university -- what else would manly academic men like us do?

SOLOMON sighs, closes his eyes.

SOLOMON

Hit me with your best shot -- fire away.

Lights -- blue, yellow, green in cycles. Transition music.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Outdoor table, three chairs, at a coffee shop. Thunder in the background but not yet rain.

SOLOMON and MARTIN at the table, coffees in hand, papers which they are marking and reading. Each has a briefcase.

MARTIN puts his papers on the table, looks off into the distance. SOLOMON notices, puts his papers on the table as well.

SOLOMON

Penny for your thoughts.

MARTIN

Hmm?

SOLOMON

Two pennies.

MARTIN

Hmm.

MARTIN doesn't answer, goes back to staring.

SOLOMON

Anything you want to go over?

MARTIN

Hmm?

SOLOMON

On the syllabus? The course?

MARTIN

I think it's going pretty well.

SOLOMON points to the papers.

SOLOMON

I think this assignment went really well.

MARTIN

With a few tweaks it will one day be great --

A non-stressful silence.

MARTIN

I like those moments when -- what should we call them?
When our students feel --

MARTIN searches for the word.

MARTIN

Confoundments --

SOLOMON

Shifts -- wrenches -- errrrkkk!! I like those, too --

MARTIN

The trials of our humans.

SOLOMON

A pleasure to watch them stop being so exact with themselves --

They know they're speaking about themselves as well.

MARTIN

Yes. Well, of course.

SOLOMON

A light shift --

MARTIN

An enlightenment shift --

SOLOMON

Aren't we clever.

MARTIN

Well, "The Second Kiss" -- "Philosophy in the Flesh" --

SOLOMON

"Philosophy in the Flesh" --

MARTIN

-- was mine.

SOLOMON

-- was yours, yes -- but I would like "science" somewhere in the title.

MARTIN

There is "Flesh" --

SOLOMON

Not equivalent.

MARTIN

Note, then: work in "Science" on the next go-around.

They sip their coffees, gather up their papers.

SOLOMON

Any word from Ana? When she'll be back?

MARTIN

Doctor, you make it sound like she's gone to the Peace Corps.

SOLOMON

She's been gone a week, Professor.

MARTIN

She's just on a retreat. It's just a retreat.

Rumbles of thunder in the distance.

MARTIN

She's been there before -- I even went with her -- they were nice about having an infidel in the house. I played the part of the infidel, by the way.

SOLOMON

I would never have guessed.

MARTIN

She has indeed been gone a week, Doctor.

Rumbles of thunder, now louder.

SOLOMON

I hadn't known about her "Catholic."

MARTIN

That's how we connected -- one of the ways. I noticed this small cross she wore -- from there it went theological. I want you to change the subject.

SOLOMON

Changed to the trials of humans. Following protocols, logging in data, building baseline measurements, working on the permissions for the second phase --

MARTIN

A little "tedious" in your voice.

SOLOMON

I have been pricked by the outside world, Professor. I have been bluffed by philosophy.

MARTIN

I'm going to do these later.

SOLOMON

Any more visitations recently?

MARTIN

Have you noticed anything?

SOLOMON

Not on my watch.

MARTIN

Not on mine, either. The electro-chemistry has shifted. Who knows why? What can I say?

SOLOMON

Nothing more mysterious than the electro-chemical.

MARTIN

Even after you measure and catalogue it. That's what's interesting about our class -- put philosophy in electro-chemical terms and --

ANA enters, a backpack slung over her shoulder, wearing a green tee-shirt.

MARTIN

And Ana appears.

ANA

I got your text. Texts.

MARTIN

I've been texting you every day.

ANA

I've been getting them every day.

MARTIN

You did say I could do that.

SOLOMON

I should go.

ANA

Absolutely not.

MARTIN

How was the retreat?

ANA

How "is" the retreat. I am advancing much during my retreat.

MARTIN

Do you want to sit? Do you want to walk?

Thunder is now louder.

MARTIN

Go singing in the rain?

ANA

I think I'd like to sit. And I think I'd like to say I'm sorry. I can also reverse that order.

MARTIN

The first would be pleasant, the second is unnecessary. Right?

SOLOMON

Right.

MARTIN

See, I speak for "we." What do you want, oh muse?

ANA sits. MARTIN and SOLOMON sit. Thunder says "Soon it's gonna rain."

MARTIN

Maybe we should move inside.

ANA

Wait -- no need. This is perfect.

ANA opens her backpack. She speaks like Natasha from Rocky and Bullwinkle.

ANA

The Girl Scout is prepared.

ANA pulls out a plastic bag.

ANA

Take one.

MARTIN reaches in and pulls out a small object wrapped in colorful sacred wrapping paper.

ANA

Now you.

SOLOMON takes one. ANA takes the last one.

ANA

And mine.

Thunder is really loud now.

ANA

I got lucky in the gift shop.

SOLOMON

They have a gift shop?

MARTIN

Oh yes.

ANA

Sacred jams, sacred jellies, sacred pictures on CD,
sacred coffee mugs, tee-shirts, baseball hats, books and
bookmarks -- and these.

ANA unwraps her package: a green umbrella. MARTIN half-unwraps his,
shows SOLOMON. SOLOMON half-unwraps his, shows MARTIN.

ANA

And are we all good?

A crack of lightning, thunder rumbles. SOLOMON and MARTIN completely
unwrap their umbrellas.

SOLOMON

We are at "good."

MARTIN

We are good to go.

ANA gets up.

MARTIN

Let's head on home.

ANA gestures for them to stay seated.

ANA

Just -- wait. I'm glad things are good. For the moment, at
least.

MARTIN

All right.

ANA

But I'm not going home. Let me finish. I didn't say the retreat was over. My advisor thought it'd be good to take a break. Check in. So I'm taking the break and checking in.

SOLOMON

A retreat from the retreat.

ANA

I am advancing much -- but still a ways to go, so -- I'll be back.

MARTIN

Can't you at least stay for dinner?

ANA

I could -- but it's not what I want to do.

ANA steps away.

MARTIN

So when?

ANA

I'm throwing in my sick days and personal days, too -- so, a while longer.

MARTIN

So when?

ANA

You'll get my text.

Thunder. Thunder.

ANA

Stay dry, fellahs.

ANA exits. They watch her. They speak to each other still watching her.

MARTIN

Where are the neurons for waiting, Professor, and how do you turn them off?

SOLOMON

How about "The Second Kiss: Brains, Bodies, and Beliefs"?
And we should probably get inside.

MARTIN

I thought you wanted "science" in the title.

SOLOMON

I'll got "brains" and "bodies" -- close enough. C'mon.

The rain comes. They pop open their umbrellas.

MARTIN

Close enough, you say?

SOLOMON

Close enough.

MARTIN

I'm glad you're satisfied.

SOLOMON

Work in progress. We've still got the next class to prepare
-- we might as well do it now. I'll order. You want anything
with your coffee?

MARTIN

I'll take tea.

SOLOMON

Tea? What kind?

MARTIN

Order on a whim.

SOLOMON

Tea on a whim, then.

SOLOMON exits.

MARTIN

What. Is. The. Point. Ana. Answer: You are. He is. We
are.

MARTIN waits, a bit abstracted, the way a radio antenna waits for a signal to come in. A half-smile.

MARTIN

The only dark cloud here is the rain cloud. We have advanced much.

A pop of lightning, bluish-white.

MARTIN

Soon. Tea.

MARTIN exits.

Blackout.

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also looks to collaborate with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) -- Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) -- Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

**Block
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PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com

