

Michael Bettencourt

One-Act Plays: Volume 4

Block & Tackle Productions Press



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Michael Bettencourt

**Termagant • To...Or Not...
Translation • When The Military Bears Its Breast...
Meet John Doe: A Radio Play**

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Block & Tackle Productions Press



Co-Founders Elfin Frederick Vogel and Michael Bettencourt

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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

Termagant

DESCRIPTION

When evil comes and lays down its bet, what is a Quaker super-hero to do?

CHARACTERS

- KRISSY HEINZ
- BIDDY SOWELL
- HE

Miscellaneous

- Props, set, etc. are all in the script.
- Stagehand will be needed for set changes.

* * * * *

Scene 1

Lights bump from black to early fall.

Upstage is the porch of a plain, well-built house, with two Adirondack chairs and a small wooden storage box, which could just be the two Adirondack chairs and small wooden storage box or something more elaborate, as budget permits.

Krissy Heinz, wearing an unbuckled bike helmet, holds a decorated coffee can for donations to something.

Facing her is Biddy Sowell, owner of the house. She is dressed in jeans and wears work boots. An olive tee-shirt dangles from her left back pocket. Under a bloodied apron, Biddy is shirtless. She wears a blue-and-white striped conductor's hat, sweat-stained. She carries a small hatchet for killing chickens, bloodied.

They look at each other.

BIDDY

Who are you and what do you want?

Krissy is a bit shocked at the shirtless Biddy. Biddy tosses the hatchet to the ground, slips off the apron and tosses it to the ground, slips on the tee-shirt.

BIDDY

Better?

KRISSY

Thank you.

BIDDY

Who are you and what do you want?

Krissy holds out the can. Biddy cocks her head to read it.

KRISSY

We're collecting. For the victims of the shooting. Some were from my college. Friends.

BIDDY

"Victims."

Said as if spitting out something distasteful. Biddy picks up the apron and hatchet from the ground.

BIDDY

I've got no time for you.

* * * * *

Scene 2

Lights shift to downstage left, where this is set up a wooden stump, four stained white 5-gallon buckets, and a small empty chicken wire coop. Two of the buckets move, as if dying chickens were flopping around inside them -- which is true.

Biddy walks to the stump, drives the hatchet into it. She slips off the tee-shirt, slips on the apron, stuffs the tee-shirt in her back pocket.

Krissy follows.

KRISSY

Why do you say that? That's what they were. Victims of the crazy guy.

Biddy gestures for Krissy to give her the can. Krissy hands it over.

Biddy puts it on the stump. She turns out one of her jeans pockets, or the apron pocket, takes whatever lint and dust is there, and puts it in the can. She hands the can back to Krissy.

BIDDY

From dust to dust. We're done.

Krissy shakes out the can.

KRISSY

That's disrespectful.

Biddy picks up a whetstone from the stump and starts sharpening the hatchet blade.

BIDDY

What's disrespectful is you calling them victims.

KRISSY

What would you call 'em?

BIDDY

Look in the bucket. Go on.

Krissy looks into one of the moving white buckets. Biddy continues to sharpen the blade.

BIDDY

What's in there is what they were. All those people chose to be there --

KRISSY

To watch a movie.

BIDDY

The late-summer blockbuster massacre flick -- they got what they paid for.

KRISSY

You can't say that!

BIDDY

They got what they paid for. And the guns came home to roost.

As Krissy watches inside the bucket, the bucket stops moving. So does the other bucket. Biddy looks at the empty coop.

BIDDY

Looks like I'm fresh out. Got others waiting in the wings. You want to watch?

KRISSY

What about the six-year-old?

BIDDY

At a midnight show.

KRISSY

Maybe a special night out --

BIDDY

Special. The last thing she saw six minutes in --

Biddy slams the axe head into the stump with fierce emphasis.

BIDDY

People being butchered. Bought and paid for by her parents.

KRISSY

You've seen the movie.

BIDDY

Yesterday, over in the capital -- we're still a crime scene around here. I like to know what I'm talking against.

Krissy holds out the can.

KRISSY

So for the little girl -- she bought nothing. Didn't have a choice.

One of the buckets gives a final kick, which startles Krissy.

BIDDY

Persuasive.

KRISSY

So be persuaded.

BIDDY

No.

Biddy wrenches the axe out of the stump.

BIDDY

We finished?

KRISSY

Fine.

Krissy turns and leaves, carrying her can, her helmet straps jingling. Biddy follows. Lights shift, and they are back in front of the porch.

Stagehand moves off stump, buckets, coop.

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Scene 3

BIDDY

I like that you don't back down.

KRISSY

Fat lot of good it does me.

BIDDY

Makes you better than that can you're holding.

KRISSY

I'm okay with this can.

BIDDY

What's your name?

KRISSY

Krissy. Heinz.

BIDDY

The "B." in "B. Sowell" on the mailbox at the end of that road
stands for Biddy, which is short for --

(in an Irish accent)

-- "Brigit," the saintly Brigit.

KRISSY

Enjoy your butchery, Brigit.

BIDDY

Done in your memory, Krissy.

Biddy gives her a "Queen Elizabeth" wave goodbye.

BIDDY

Be careful riding back to campus.

Lights shift: upstage in darkness, downstage tight and bright. Biddy exits.
Krissy moves center stage.

* * * * *

Scene 4

Stagehand places a single mattress center stage. Lights shift there.

Krissy puts the helmet and can by the head of the mattress, then stretches herself out. Before long, she's napping. Lights become weird. Screams and gunshots and a garbled movie track as underscore.

Biddy enters, dressed as the Shooter. She presses a gun against Krissy's cheek. Krissy jerks awake, sees Biddy as Shooter but does not scramble to get away.

Biddy speaks in an altered voice -- mechanical, robotic.

BIDDY

The time has come.

Krissy kneels on the bed, facing Biddy. Biddy presses the gun against Krissy's forehead.

BIDDY

Your time has come.

Instead of moving back, Krissy grabs the gun barrel and holds it tight against her forehead, eyes closed, breathing deep, backed arched in submission and arousal.

Biddy slides the barrel out of Krissy's hands. Biddy backs off. Krissy collapses onto the bed, splayed as if fallen from a great height. The cacophony fades away.

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Scene 5

Lights shift to early evening.

Krissy pops her eyes open, looks around. She reaches into her shorts, pulls out her hand, smells it, wipes it on her shorts. She kneels at the edge of the mattress, shaking her head as she stares at the floor. Krissy breathes deep, both terrified and post-coital. She grabs the helmet and the can.

Stagehand moves off the mattress.

* * * * *

Scene 6

Krissy back at Biddy's. Biddy is seated in one of the Adirondack chairs, sanding rust off an adze. A thermos stands near her chair. The second chair is nearby.

Krissy marches to the porch. If she were a cartoon character, she would have steam shooting out of her ears.

KRISSY

You were going to kill me in my dream, you were the gunman
-- you pressed the gun right here!

Krissy jabs a rigid index finger against her forehead.

Biddy stops sanding, gives Krissy a tender look.

BIDDY

I apologize for that.

KRISSY

That's it?

BIDDY

Come on up -- that chair's got your name on it.

Krissy hesitates, then tromps to the chair, sits, puts the can down by her foot like a patient dog, lays down the helmet.

Somewhere, a raven caws.

Biddy places the adze onto the porch, pulls up the thermos.

KRISSY

Why would I dream -- I don't even --

Biddy unscrews the top, pours hot tea into the cup.

BIDDY

Something to soothe you --

Biddy hands it to Krissy, who cups the warmth.

BIDDY

My germs on it, but they're pretty harmless.

Krissy sips. The tea calms her.

KRISSY

That's an adze.

BIDDY

Most people wouldn't know that.

KRISSY

I'm not most people.

BIDDY

Found it in the back of the barn -- good, just rusted. Like me. Tea okay?

Krissy raises the cup like a toast.

BIDDY

Whenever you're ready.

Krissy looks at her hands holding the cup.

KRISSY

I come from Quaker, Brigit. Real Quaker, not flannel Quaker, like my father would say.

BIDDY

I like your father.

KRISSY

And I guess we're in meeting.

BIDDY

The Society of Friends.

KRISSY

You said my time had come. The gun --

Krissy presses her finger against her forehead again.

KRISSY

Your face -- but not your voice -- all mutated --

BIDDY

The movie's voice.

Krissy's voice goes silent but not her body. Biddy pushes the conversation.

BIDDY

Horrible, yep, this face --

KRISSY

But --

BIDDY

Spit it out.

KRISSY

Not one hundred percent horrible --

BIDDY

What percent wasn't?

KRISSY

In meeting -- there are moments when the silence feels good to me --

BIDDY

Golden --

KRISSY

No, I mean good -- you know -- good --

BIDDY

You mean not saintly good.

KRISSY

No saints with Quakers -- but, yes. The gun -- against --

Krissy points to her forehead again.

KRISSY

-- felt good.

BIDDY

You have an unsaintly percent.

KRISSY

You can't trust the body.

BIDDY

But what else can you trust? Here.

Biddy gestures for the cup, which Krissy hands over. Biddy refills it and hands it back. Krissy sips, puts her index finger against her forehead.

KRISSY

This? Not victims.

BIDDY

Nope.

KRISSY

Sacrifices.

BIDDY

Yep -- chickens.

KRISSY

Terror feeling good, sacrificed like feeling alive -- makes no sense --

BIDDY

Your Jesus, you know --

Biddy throws her arms to each side, Jesus on the cross.

KRISSY

That's not us --

BIDDY

But many nail themselves in ecstasy to crosses -- the body is a funny thing.

KRISSY

I'm laughing on the inside.

Biddy goes to answer, but Krissy gestures for her to stop. Biddy gets out of her chair, steps to the porch rail.

BIDDY

You need a sign.

Biddy lets loose three perfectly voiced raven's caws. She listens, then does it again two more times. Then, in response, three caws come back to her.

BIDDY

See up there?

KRISSY

Yes.

BIDDY

I nursed her back to health, and she stays nearby to do the same for me.

KRISSY

Will she come down here?

BIDDY

Not till you're better known. Means you'll have to come back again -- she likes a chin rub.

Biddy does a throat squawk, then three more caws. An answer, then off the raven flies.

BIDDY

Better than liquor sometimes. Speaking of which --

Biddy goes to the wooden box, pulls out a dented hip flask.

BIDDY

Bring me the cup.

Krissy does, and Biddy pours out a smidgen of clear liquid, hands it back.

BIDDY

Home distilled palate cleanser -- a raven.

Biddy takes a sip, swishes it around, and swallows. After a brief hesitation, so does Krissy -- no flinch.

BIDDY

You have classes tonight?

KRISSY

Classes tonight! ART 210, Marketing for the Visual Artist. I'm getting a degree in graphic storytelling.

BIDDY

A Quaker comic-book maker.

KRISSY

You should see my super-heroes.

Biddy laughs as she caps the flask and puts it back in the box. She takes the cup from Krissy, shakes it out, recaps the thermos.

KRISSY

I have a tee-shirt -- my parents love it, though it embarrasses my mother: "I am a Quaker who bitches."

BIDDY

(laughing)

Love it!

Biddy sits, picks up the adze, sands.

KRISSY

Those are the villains that come to visit me.

BIDDY

You're welcome to stay if you want.

Krissy sits. Krissy's heel nudges the can out of the way, and the rocker begins a slow back-and-forth, a gentle knocking against the porch floor.

A raven caws. Sandpaper sands.

* * * * *

Scene 7

Lights bump to downstage. Stagehand brings on a mattress. Biddy comes to the mattress, lies down, is asleep.

The knocking of the rocker against the floor turns into the mutated drumming of a clock.

Krissy appears dressed as a disheveled Quaker super-hero -- sweats, a half-mask, definitely a cape, which looks more like a blanket.

She pokes Biddy, who stirs but doesn't wake. Krissy pokes her again. Nothing. One more time, really hard, does the trick.

KRISSY

I, The Bitching Quaker, have come to gather your sacrifice.

BIDDY

Got nothing. Go away.

KRISSY

You have to sacrifice your hatred of people.

BIDDY

I don't hate them -- I just have no use for most of them.

Krissy begins her Quaker kung-fu.

BIDDY

What the fuck is that?

KRISSY

Quaker kung-fu.

BIDDY

You look spastic. I'm going back to sleep.

Biddy goes to lay down, but Krissy intercepts her and through her moves forces Biddy to move.

Krissy never touches Biddy but still gets her to move around the room -- this is, after all, the essence of Quaker kung-fu.

KRISSY

People are not about "useful." They just are. Who cares if they're useful to you?

BIDDY

I care.

KRISSY

(thunderous and reverberating)

The Universe is not about you!

BIDDY

I didn't know Quakers had an outside voice.

KRISSY

The Bitching Quaker does. Hu-SHIN!

BIDDY

It's never worked treating people like precious elements.

KRISSY

Hee-YAH!

BIDDY

Leave me alone!

KRISSY

Cow-FONG!

BIDDY

I prefer to wash my hands --

KRISSY

Lay-FLIK!

BIDDY

-- of the whole zero-sum mess -- stop it!

KRISSY

Nope.

BIDDY

I'm going back to sleeping.

They have circled the room back to the bed. Krissy stands arms akimbo, super-hero pose. They glare at each other, then Biddy relents.

BIDDY

Of course --

KRISSY

Can't hear you!

BIDDY

They shouldn't have been slaughtered!

KRISSY

Darn right! So grieve for them.

BIDDY

To breathe is to grieve, one and the same.

KRISSY

(outside voice)

Bullshit! Just mouth music.

Krissy advances on Biddy, who is forced to sit on the bed.

KRISSY

Hee-YAH-YAH-YAH! Your heart aches for mankind only in private.

Krissy kneels down, their faces in profile, close. Krissy pushes up her mask.

KRISSY

I breathe. I grieve. But I don't do it alone like you. I sit in meeting. That makes all the difference.

BIDDY

I think I'd rather take a drink.

The flask appears in Krissy's hand.

KRISSY

Go ahead.

Biddy takes it, shakes it.

BIDDY

Empty.

KRISSY

Try it.

Biddy opens the flask and turns it upside down. Out comes glitter.

KRISSY

Better than home-distilled.

BIDDY

Look at that.

The flask drops out of Biddy's hand as she collapses forward into Krissy's arms.

Krissy guides Biddy back, swings her legs around, makes Biddy comfortable. She does a few more kung-fu moves --

KRISSY
(whispering)

Hi-LOW! Up-SCALE! Ha-HA!

-- which resemble gestures of blessing, then stands with arms akimbo like Superman.

KRISSY

Biddy Sowell, we have work to do! Whoosh!

Krissy picks up the flask and mock-flies into the darkness: up, up, and away!

Light shifts to morning. Clock ticks.

Biddy sorts herself awake, sits up.

She looks at the floor for the flask, but it isn't there. She smiles, shakes her head, stands. She shakes out her body, then does a few Quaker kung-fu moves, laughing.

BIDDY

Need-COFFEE! De-fi-nite-LY.

* * * * *

Scene 8

Stagehand brings on two stools and a backpack. He sets the stools, hands Biddy the backpack, and takes off the mattress. Biddy sits.

Lights up to a nice fall day. Krissy comes by.

BIDDY

Didn't know if I would catch you.

KRISSY

Good guess, hanging out by the department offices --

BIDDY

But who knew where you'd be.

KRISSY

Graphic Storytelling III, MGD 225.

BIDDY

Night class, then a day class following -- tough schedule.

KRISSY

There must be a reason why you're here.

Biddy pats the bench.

KRISSY

I have studio in 15 minutes.

BIDDY

I couldn't sleep because of you. Yours was a lot more gentle: The Bitching Quaker.

Krissy is suddenly all a big smile and sits.

KRISSY

Really?

BIDDY

That was your super-hero -- The Bitching Quaker.

Krissy just laughs.

KRISSY

That's the best thing I have heard all day.

BIDDY

Still early.

KRISSY

I'm confident. The Bitching Quaker.

BIDDY

Wanted my sacrifice.

Krissy stares at her shoes, smiling.

KRISSY

The Quaker super-hero prime directive. Betcha it wasn't a bloody one.

BIDDY

Depends. The sacrifice for this cranky old woman: give up hating people. "I have no use" is what I said.

KRISSY

What does that even mean. You couldn't pee in the morning without other people.

Krissy uses her index fingers to outline an imaginary rectangle. Krissy takes a pencil from her backpack and draws.

KRISSY

Here's Brigit Sowell trying to pee without any use for anyone. Of course no toilet paper --

BIDDY

I can use newspaper.

KRISSY

You won't.

BIDDY

Could.

KRISSY

Even then, paper products -- see that squirrely face when you use newspaper --

BIDDY

Hilarious.

Krissy finishes with a flourish that is probably her signature on the picture and leans back, tucks the pencil behind her ear.

KRISSY

Tah-dah. Nonsense defeated. The Bitching Quaker triumphs again.

BIDDY

The flask -- color came out when I tried to drink.

KRISSY

The divine spark comes out of you.

BIDDY

You were dressed in sweats --

KRISSY

Quaker comfort dress.

BIDDY

-- and doing weird kung-fu-ish stuff --

Biddy demonstrates.

KRISSY

Bet I never laid a finger on you. No gun to the head. No nothing to the head except an idea.

Krissy gets ready to leave.

KRISSY

Studio.

Biddy stands up as well.

BIDDY

What about evil for the Society of Friends?

KRISSY

Twelve Quakers, twelve theories. Here's mine: it comes when you have no use for people.

BIDDY

Ouch.

KRISSY

When you lose the inner light, Biddy, you can do the unspeakable.

BIDDY

I'm not sure we all have it.

KRISSY

Here.

Krissy's hands frame another canvas. She takes her pencil and draws: stars tumbling out of a flask, signs it. Krissy mimes folding the sketch and handing it to Biddy.

KRISSY

You have it. But sometimes you have to shut your trap and sit in quiet so you can hear what's what.

Give a shove to my inner light: come to lunch -- I can cook.

KRISSY

Deal. Never pass up home-cooking in someone's home. Gotta go.

Krissy kung-fus her way off.

BIDDY

Sunday. 2 PM.

KRISSY

On one condition -- a request -- hee-YAH!

BIDDY

What?

KRISSY

We'll go to the memorial service on Sunday at the chapel -- oo-RAH! Well?

BIDDY

Deal. Chapel may fall down when I enter.

KRISSY

Jesus doesn't care about the real estate -- fi-LEE! Gotta go.

BIDDY

Kick the devil's butt in a compassionate way.

KRISSY

Pee well with the help of the world -- ooo-LAH!

They both turn to leave, but before they can exit --

* * * * *

Scene 9

Flashing lights of emergency vehicles - police cruisers, ambulances, fire trucks. Sounds of chaos: shouts, helicopters, radio chatter, and so on.

Biddy and Krissy return to the two stools from the previous scene, now a bench near a parked ambulance. Stagehand brings each of them blankets, which they wrap around themselves.

KRISSY

Did -- did they get him --

BIDDY

I don't know, don't know -- this time --

Krissy pounds her right thigh in frustration.

KRISSY

Did we get what we paid for tonight? It was a -- f[ucking] --

Krissy wants to swear but can't.

KRISSY

-- a -- memorial --

Biddy puts a hand on Krissy to stop her, but Krissy shrugs the hand off.

KRISSY

Quaker super-heroes -- useless.

Krissy launches herself off the bench. The blanket falls off her shoulders.

BIDDY

Don't --

KRISSY

Who needs 'em? If you hadn't pulled me down -- I would have stood up. I would've stretched everything at him --

Krissy extends all ten fingers.

KRISSY

-- I would have shot prayers back -- a hundred thousand prayer rounds -- Don't lose the light! Don't lose --

BIDDY

He would've shot you dead.

KRISSY

Who cares?

Krissy stretches really hard.

KRISSY

(singing)

When The Bitching Quaker is in town / Everyone will throw their weapons down / She will break up every single fight / And peace shall dwell in the house of sweetness and light.

Biddy stands up and laces her fingers into Krissy's. The blanket falls from her shoulders.

BIDDY

He would have shot you dead. Quaker super-hero only has skin and bone.

KRISSY

Don't lose the light! Don't lose --

Krissy and Biddy stand there, arms outstretched and fingers interlaced, facing each other.

BIDDY

Don't lose the light. Don't. Lose. The. Light.

Krissy unlaces her fingers, steps back.

KRISSY

I wasn't afraid.

BIDDY

You'd be dead.

KRISSY

So what? It's the way you die -- you know that -- you know that --

Krissy throws out her ten fingers again, in Biddy's direction, scrunches her faces, intones.

KRISSY

Don't lose the light! Don't lose the light! Don't lose the light!

Without warning, Biddy faints dead away. Biddy twitches while on the ground.

For a moment Krissy is stunned -- even stares at her fingers.

Krissy drops to Biddy's side -- listens for a breath, feels the pulse in her neck, then yells for help.

But the sounds of chaos grow so loud that Krissy's voice is drowned out -- only her lips and mouth can be seen to move as she shouts for help.

Stagehand, as an EMT, runs over and kneels by Biddy, examines her. Stagehand and Krissy lay Biddy across the two stools.

The sounds of chaos rise higher and higher to an ear-deafening pitch until they morph into the crash of an emergency room at full tilt.

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Scene 10

Voices cram the air: shouted commands, intercom broadcasts, and so on. People run the hallway, but Krissy focuses on biddy, laid out on the gurney -- across the two stools -- eyes closed but breathing. Krissy holds Biddy's left hand in both of her hands.

Krissy's lips move as she recites Quaker kung-fu: "Hee-YAH. Oo-RAH! Fi-LEE! Hoo-SHIN! Lay-FLIK! Hi-LOW!"

Biddy snorts herself to consciousness, looks around, looks up and sees Krissy. They smile.

Their hands grip tighter. Noise swirls.

* * * * *

Scene 11

Lights bump to downstage. Stagehand wheels on a truck stacked with three boxes filled with petitions and camera gear sitting on top and a foam-core sign. He places the boxes downstage, hands Biddy the sign, then takes up the camera gear and becomes the media.

Krissy and Biddy step forward. Biddy holds up a foam-core sign which says, "Proposition 185: Gun Registration, Information, Training, and Sanity," with a big red checkmark by the word "YES."

Stagehand takes pictures as Krissy speaks.

KRISSY

Three hundred thousand signatures! It's on the ballot, and we are going to win!

Lights strobe like camera flashes.

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Scene 12

Stagehand takes off the boxes, sign, and camera. Biddy and Krissy bring the stools downstage. Lights have become the glow of some sort of screen. Their faces show that the initiative has lost.

Biddy gets up, paces, mutters. Krissy looks crestfallen. Biddy throws out her ten fingers at the screen, but in a sarcastic way.

They look at each other. There is nothing left to say.

* * * * *

Scene 13

Lights come to late autumn. Stagehand brings on Krissy's suitcase.

Krissy stands stock still, the suitcase next to her.

Biddy sits in one of the Adirondack chairs.

BIDDY

Did you tell the taxi to come down the road?

KRISSY

I did.

Biddy comes off the porch to join Krissy.

BIDDY

No need to lug the suitcase out to the road.

KRISSY

No need.

BIDDY

What time's your plane?

KRISSY

You know the time.

BIDDY

And your folks?

KRISSY

You already know: glad I'm coming home. Anything else to avoid the obvious?

BIDDY

It just --

KRISSY

Go on -- Quaker meeting.

BIDDY
(deep sigh)

It just -- sticks, you know.

Biddy taps her breastbone.

BIDDY

Right here.

KRISSY

We were close on the vote.

BIDDY

Horseshoes and hand grenades. No comfort to me.

KRISSY

Me neither.

BIDDY

Or anyone.

KRISSY

To no one.

BIDDY

Human stupidity. I know -- more forgiveness in you about that than I have.

KRISSY
(shaking her head)

These days --

BIDDY

Butchery, twice -- the same person -- but we gotta bear our arms --

KRISSY

Sacrifices.

BIDDY

Slaughter -- like it's a goddamn war.

Biddy paces, and as she does she shakes out her body with appropriate guttural sounds. Krissy smiles.

BIDDY
(shouting)

This is Biddy king-fu. I do hate them, all of 'em who voted "no."

Krissy jumps in with Biddy and shakes out her body as well.

KRISSY

Hate hate hate hate --

The two of them, like a ritual dance, shake out the hates. Biddy king-fu is, after all, a version of Quaker kung-fu.

The sound of a taxi pulling up. Taxi honks, but still they jump around and shout.

They wind down their dance.

The taxi honks again.

The look they share is both tender and sad. Biddy opens her arms.

BIDDY

I have gotten much better at the hug-thing.

They embrace.

KRISSY

You have.

BIDDY

I will miss you.

KRISSY

Back in a couple of weeks -- gotta soothe the folks.

BIDDY

Go, before they overcharge you too much. Go!

Krissy grabs her suitcase and exits.

Biddy watches. Car doors slam, car tires crunch against gravel and then fade away.

BIDDY

And away she flies.

Biddy bends over, her hands on her knees, and breathes hoarsely, as if trying to breathe away a pain.

Biddy kneels, her hands still on her knees -- a race between the pain and the breathing to control the pain.

Finally the pain subsides and the breathing slows. Biddy sits back on her heels, then stands and throws out her arms in a Krissy-gesture of salvation, stretching and straining to cast healing into the world. She stops, then does it again. Stops, then does it one last time.

Off in the distance, a gunshot.

Biddy listens, half-smiles.

A gunshot from a different direction.

BIDDY

And there's my answer: deer season. Completely forgot it was fucking deer season.

Biddy opens the wooden storage box, rummages inside. She pulls out a neon orange vest and pants, which she dumps on the porch floor. Rummages some more, then pulls out a pot and wooden spoon. She slams the lid down.

She vests herself in neon orange.

BIDDY
(muttering)

It is time for The Bitch Who Bitches to go into action.

Gleaming neon orange and holding the pot and spoon, Bidy comes downstage. Lights follow her, and she is ready to cross the border from her cleared land into her forest.

She bangs the pot and yells.

BIDDY
Fly away fly away fly away now / the hunters want to turn
you to chow --

Bang bang shout shout -- Bidy is on her march.

BIDDY
Fly away now says Alfred Lord Tennyson / the hunters just
want to grind you to venison --

Bang bang shout shout.

BIDDY
Fly away fly away fly away --

Bang bang bang bang as the lights fade to black.

* * * * *

Scene 14

The sound of hammering, screw-gunning, sawing.

Stagehand sets up an old camcorder downstage, extension cord running to offstage. Also sets the two stools.

Lights up. Bidy stands in front of the camcorder. As usual, she wears her jeans, boots, and a blue-and-white striped engineer's cap marked with dirt and a sweat line. She is also shirtless. An olive tee-shirt drapes hangs out of her back pocket. She holds a hammer.

BIDDY
Can't believe this piece of crap still works.

She puts down the hammer, grabs the tee-shirt. Off comes the hat, on goes the shirt, fiddles with the camcorder, sits on the stool.

BIDDY

All right -- practice run. My name is Biddy Sowell. Today is day one in the Sovereign State of Sowell. Already built my border sign -- it's parked over there. I now declare my secession from these lunatic United States.

Upstage, He appears from around what would be the corner of the house. He wears a Guy Fawkes mask and carries a Wilson Combat Carry .45 ACP in His right hand, a leather rucksack over one shoulder.

BIDDY

I have my reasons, the primary one being the absolute lunaticality of the country that surrounds me. Not everyone, of course -- not Krissy Heinz and the other Quaker superheroes in life -- but enough to --

Biddy stops, sensing His presence. She does not turn around.

BIDDY

Who is it?

HE

You should turn around.

BIDDY

I'm okay for now.

HE

Maybe Biddy Sowell is. Maybe Biddy Sowell is not. How will she know?

Biddy turns to face him. He throws his rucksack to the ground, sits on the other stool.

BIDDY

How do you know my name?

HE

Who doesn't? Biddy Sowell, gun-control bitch, with her sidekick, Krissy Heinz. Makes you the right choice for

me. The thing you posted in the pennysaver about your "sovereign state" -- definitely my right choice.

The mask nods in affirmation, then drifts to the side, as if He has lost focus.

BIDDY

I thought they'd gotten you.

HE

Wishful thinking.

BIDDY

Who wouldn't wish it?

HE

Me, for one. I am tired.

BIDDY

Especially wearing that. Must suffocate you.

He speaks without rancor.

HE

Why don't you shut the fuck up? I'm tired.

They sit in meeting. The air zizzes with insects buzzing.

BIDDY

I have food --

Again, without rancor.

HE

Shut the fuck up. Like I'm some lonesome traveler.

BIDDY

You are. Just happen to be a mass murderer.

He places the muzzle against His temple.

HE

Oh boo hoo.

BIDDY

Go ahead -- first death in the State of Sowell.

He points the gun at Biddy, mock shoots.

HE

Should be the founder's death.

He then lets the gun droop between His knees. He really is tired. He takes off the mask, dandles it.

BIDDY

How'd you get away -- it's been a year --

Biddy leans over, her hand reaching down for the hammer.

Without taking His eyes off His boot, He points the gun at Biddy.

HE

I'm not blind, and I'm not stupid. Stop leaning over. I shucked everything off, joined the mad rush for the exits -- found my own sovereign state. Not hard to disappear if you want to.

He looks up and locks eyes with Biddy. This time the pointed gun is steady and demanding.

HE

Come on -- we have work to do.

BIDDY

I'm not on your payroll.

* * * * *

Scene 15

A car's horn offstage gets their attention, then the faint sound of a car pulling away. They both watch, and several seconds later Krissy appears, pulling her suitcase. She wears a pink tee-shirt that spells out in white lettering with a subtle drop-shadow "The Bitching Quaker." A cape ripples beneath the lettering. He looks at Biddy with a half-smile and a shake of His head, the gun still steady. The cicadas buzz.

HE

You knew this?

BIDDY

Supposed to be my only guest. It's who you think it is.

KRISSY

He should put the fucking gun down.

HE

That how a bitching Quaker acts?

KRISSY

The Bitching Quaker.

HE

Is The Bitching Quaker scared?

KRISSY

Terrified.

HE

She doesn't sound it.

KRISSY

She's had a year to practice.

HE

Good practice.

Krissy sets the suitcase upright, telescopes the handle, sits on it. He takes the mask, sits.

The cicadas' buzz underscores a socially awkward half-comic moment: what to talk about next?

The gun's alertness suddenly goes slack as exhaustion washes over Him.

KRISSY

What're you going to do to us?

Instead of an answer, He holds up His right hand -- the gun hand -- in a gesture of "Stop." He stares off.

HE

Do you think The Bitching Quaker can solve my problem?

KRISSY

I need a name.

HE

Call me Ishmael. Call me The Misfit.

Another staring pause.

KRISSY

What's. Your. Problem.

HE

Life after this life -- the "after life" -- is it yes or is it no.

KRISSY

Can't answer The Misfit's question. I can't. Because to The BQ, yes or no, the afterlife doesn't matter.

HE

It's gotta matter.

KRISSY

Only lonely sad people think it matters. That's not me.

BIDDY

Not me either.

HE

Shut up. Here's my dilemma --

He holds the Guy Fawkes mask in front of His face.

BAILEY

Jesus finding me was the worst thing that ever happened.
I have always wanted to be in His mansion -- but -- I wasn't
there, when he rose, third day, so I can't know for sure --
can't touch the blood --

He shakes the mask in disbelief.

HE

Maybe all a lie -- those gospel guys just making shit up -- but the lie started the hunger, and the hunger fought with the doubt -- and all the while the wicked around me prospered -- prospered --

He tosses the mask onto the rucksack.

HE

So I thought that since I couldn't know -- the difference between doing great goodness or great wickedness didn't matter. Didn't matter a fucking bit. So I chose great wickedness -- seemed more in line with God's plan for His creation --

KRISSY

The BQ always tries to go for goodness.

HE

And that's what makes a horserace. Stand up. Now. I have come to do what I need to do with whom I need to do it.

Krissy and Biddy stand up. Krissy unzips an outer pocket of the suitcase and pulls out a BQ tee-shirt and tosses it to Biddy.

KRISSY

Swap it out.

Biddy does.

He looks at the two of them, then indicates for Krissy to step towards Him. She steps up to Him.

He reverses the gun in His grip so that it is pointing toward Him, thumb on the trigger. In the same moment He grabs Krissy's right hand and lays it over His own on the gun. He sticks the gun against His forehead.

Then He fires, killing himself. Acoustic sound effect for the gunshot by the Stagehand. His body crumples, leaving Krissy holding the gun.

Krissy looks down at the shattered body, then at her right hand.

Krissy squats down, then kneels, staring at Him. Bidy does the same on His other side. They look at each other. There is agreement between them.

Krissy raises the gun, aims, and squeezes off one more round. Acoustic sound effect of the gunshot by Stagehand.

They stand.

BIDDY

You dotted the "i," crossed the "t."

Krissy tosses the gun onto His body. Bidy indicates the camcorder.

BIDDY

We can't look too crazy when shit and fan meet.

They embrace each other. They let their fear drain away.

KRISSY

No one is going to convict us.

Bidy turns the camcorder off.

BIDDY

His afterlife. We've got a lot to do.

KRISSY

So what's new?

Krissy stares at Him on the ground.

BIDDY

You waiting for the body to disappear?

KRISSY

Never know.

BIDDY

This one is not going anywhere.

KRISSY

Odd how he wanted someone with him in his last moment.

BIDDY

He didn't know The BQ was not going to be his best choice.

KRISSY

I was his best choice. He got the best of my Quaker kung-fu. His question got answered.

Krissy gives Bidy another big hug, which is generously returned.

BIDDY

You okay?

KRISSY

No. You?

BIDDY

No. But I'm not not-okay either -- in-between. Come on. Let's get the scut work done so that we can enjoy the freedoms of the new nation of Sowell.

They move toward the porch. Bidy has turned the mask over and is looking at something. She slows her walk, then stops, as she reads.

BIDDY

Look at this.

KRISSY

Wow.

BIDDY

Yeah.

KRISSY

You said once you wouldn't write him out of the family of man.

BIDDY

Still mean it -- though it's a pretty fucked-up family, isn't it?

Krissy looks back at Him. She leaves her luggage and walks back to the body, stands over it and stares. Bidy joins her, holding the mask. Krissy takes the mask, holds it over her face. They stare.

To...Or Not...

DESCRIPTION

Abortion may well be the "Civil War" of our age, but 70-year old Alma Gordon is not going to let the barbarians win, which is why she engages in ritual combat and more with Melinda Marsh, young mother and pro-lifer, who is too young to remember the back alleys and casual carnage of the pre-Roe days.

CHARACTERS

- Alma Gordon, pro-choice protestor, at least 65 to 70 old. If a younger actor, the impersonation must be very good, but the preference is for an actor of that actual age.
- Melinda Marsh, pro-life protestor, 40

(Note: Ethnicity of the characters does not matter)

SETTING

- Large abortion protest rally in a major city

TIME

- January 22 -- anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*

MATERIALS

- Winter coats and other winter accouterments, as needed
- Two canvas bags, one for each character, in which they can carry things
- Placards with slogans on them attached to sticks; the placards must be able to be removed and put back on the sticks (probably with Velcro)
- Two chairs
- A small journal, which MARSH can carry in her coat pocket, with pencil
- A long knitting needle
- White sweater, small purse
- Grubby vest and lab coat
- Tupperware cup, with lid (or any plastic container with a lid)

SOUND

- Crowd sounds in the background
- Music for ritual combat scene: very percussive and heavy on the bass
- Three loud gun shots
- Other music/sound as indicated in script

NOTE: A second table is set upstage center, on which will be all props. When an actor "exits," she will go upstage and stand by the prop table.

* * * * *

Scene 1

Just before the lights go down, the audience hears Lou Reed's "Bus Load of Faith." As the light go to dark, the music changes into crowd sounds at a large abortion rally: chants, etc. GORDON and MARSH enter and stand on chairs placed on opposite sides of the stage. They are chanting, holding placards that bear their words. They see each other, in the sense that they

GORDON

"Without a choice, you have no voice."

MARSH

"Jesus loves every baby you kill."

After three or four chants, the lights change to a lurid red; crowd sounds are abruptly replaced by low thumping diabolical music. GORDON and MARSH turn to face each other like ancient warriors and bow. They take the placards off their poles and face each other, combat-ready.

MARSH begins brandishing her pole; GORDON stands center, still, holding her pole in her hands. MARSH starts to circle. It is she who strikes the first blow; GORDON always fends off the blow without ever moving off her center. The combat should be ritualized. Their lines are said in rhythm to the combat, and when they say "Hee-yah," that indicates a strike and block at the same time.

MARSH

Evil one. Baby killer.

GORDON

Religion-infected nutcase.

MARSH

Murderer. Hedonist.

GORDON

Sex-hating, family-values tightass.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

MARSH

You'd waste babies for pure convenience.

GORDON

You believe in gods that detest women.

MARSH

You slander motherhood.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

GORDON

Compassionate conservative.

MARSH

Liberal slime.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

GORDON

Shove women into the back alley.

MARSH

People should suffer the consequences of their sinful pleasures.

GORDON

Back-alley butcher.

MARSH

Godless wretch.

GORDON

Hee-yah!

MARSH

Hee-yah!

GORDON

Freedom is most important.

MARSH

Life is most important.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

MARSH

A fetus is a child.

GORDON

A fetus is a fetus.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

GORDON

Woman has the right to enjoy her body.

MARSH

Woman is a sacred vessel.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

The combat ends with each staff resting on the other person's left shoulder. In tandem, they draw the tips of the staffs across the throat to the right shoulder. When they reach the right shoulder, they should whip the staffs away, as if completing a cut. The motion should be as if they have just beheaded each other. Then they back off, bow like ancient warriors, re-attach their placards. Lights change. They look at each other, sensing something has happened, but they do not know what.

GORDON

Cold today.

MARSH

I was hoping for the January thaw.

GORDON

Be nice if the Supreme Court issued it in the spring, huh?

MARSH

They should never have said anything at all.

GORDON

I'm sure the back-alley butchers' lobby would've liked that.

MARSH

I'm going back.

GORDON

If you get your way, we all will.

MARSH goes back to her station. The crowd sounds come back strong. GORDON returns to her station. They both take up their chanting again.

They chant five times, then they and the crowd sounds cut out abruptly.

Everything goes to darkness and silence, and in that dark and silence three loud gun shots rings out.

* * * * *

Scene 2

In the darkness, transition music: Lou Reed's "Common Ground." GORDON and MARSH bring the chairs to the center stage; this is a "coffee shop."

MARSH sits in one chair, writing furiously in a journal with a pencil. A thermos is at her feet. Her placard is on the floor next to her. GORDON enters with a cup of coffee and watches MARSH for a moment. Transition music becomes background music in the coffee shop. During the scene they take off their winter clothes and put them on the chairs.

GORDON

Surprising you don't rip through the paper.

MARSH

Oh. You --

GORDON

Go ahead.

MARSH

No, I'm finished.

(reluctantly)

Would you like to sit down?

GORDON

No.

MARSH

All right.

GORDON

Because then we'd have to chat the chit, wouldn't we, and we probably don't have much to say to each other.

MARSH

All right.

GORDON

But if I did sit down, could you pretend?

MARSH freezes. Lights down; bright light on GORDON, who steps out.

GORDON

I know I couldn't. I'd want to bite her head off. No one her age should have strong principles, especially religious ones. There's nothing like principles to screw up your morality.

Light off. MARSH unfreezes.

MARSH

I wouldn't pretend -- I don't do that. We might be able to share --

GORDON freezes. Lights down; bright light on MARSH.

MARSH

Share what? She's believes in killing babies! And at her age! She should be stuck on an ice floe and put out to sea.

Light off. GORDON unfreezes.

GORDON

Share what? Common ground? Big myth.

MARSH

Think so --

GORDON

Based on what?

Bright light on both. Each line in each pair of lines said alternately, distinctly and slowly.

GORDON

You have a god, I don't.

MARSH

I have a god, you don't.

GORDON

I believe in the Constitution --

MARSH

Life begins at conception --

GORDON

-- you believe in the Inquisition.

MARSH

-- the soul begins at fertilization.

The lines are repeated, said at the same time.

GORDON

You have a god, I don't.

MARSH

I have a god, you don't.

GORDON

I believe in the Constitution --

MARSH

Life begins at conception --

GORDON

-- you believe in the Inquisition.

MARSH

-- the soul begins at fertilization.

Bright lights off.

GORDON

You and I -- You know, in an earlier age and different gender, we'd duel.

Music change: something baroque, from an age of elegance, harpsichord. It continues underneath. Lighting change: something warm, candle-like.

They move downstage and face each other; they should pretend they are dressed well: adjust cuffs, smooth lapels, etc. Lights dim on the coffee shop.

MARSH

You are a godless infidel, you know.

GORDON

"Godless infidel" --

MARSH

Just thought I would note that.

GORDON

Always that weakness for redundancy: you see, an infidel is Godl[ess] --

MARSH

And your next dinner date with Satan is -- ?

GORDON

But always first-rate conversation!

MARSH

You use blasphemy like a condiment.

GORDON

Sign of a well-balanced mind.

MARSH

Referring to your own?

GORDON

Not yours, obviously -- at least not while it's so God-infected.

MARSH

You always overreach yourself.

GORDON

What's an appetite for?

MARSH

To control.

GORDON

To control it is to kill it.

MARSH

To kill it is to find salvation.

GORDON

Synonym for boredom.

MARSH

If you had God for your tutor --

GORDON

My rooty-toot-tutor!

MARSH

-- he'd strip that pride from your tongue.

GORDON

Which means I would have less to wag --

MARSH

Ah, the serpent flicks!

GORDON

-- and be that much less charming.

MARSH

A blessing for us all.

GORDON

Not all, obviously. But --

MARSH

But --

GORDON

Since God seems on holiday --

MARSH

I must.

GORDON

You must.

MARSH

I must.

GORDON

His viceroy.

MARSH

In his name.

GORDON

And your name -- ?

MARSH

His name is mine.

GORDON

I am sure that disappoints your parents. Well, then, I suppose --

MARSH

It is time.

An imaginary butler comes up with an imaginary gun case.

GORDON

Ah, the means to the end have arrived.

They mime taking out the guns, inspecting them, and so on.

MARSH

Fit the mark?

GORDON

A blaze of craftsmanship.

MARSH

Once more, dear friend, I would like to appeal to your soul --

GORDON

Cannot appeal to what I do not have.

MARSH

Then, we have our course.

They stand back to back and proceed to march in opposite directions. After two steps, GORDON turns and follows MARSH, gun held out. MARSH turns and sees the gun.

GORDON

My advantage.

MARSH

Fair play?

GORDON

Ridiculous notion. There is nothing "fair" about your poison.
My "must" is to stop it.

MARSH

By killing me?

GORDON

Of course not. Give me your gun. Give it. Ridicule makes
the best cut.

GORDON fires one gun into the air -- gunshot sound.

GORDON

And we're off. You were ready, based on your shining "faith," your "love of all life," to erase me. No one, as far as I know, has ever been killed in the name of atheism. Only your kind kills in the name of the Prince of Peace. And if you are able to twist murder into a cleansing, then you are capable of painting any black evil white. Religious faith is a very evil thing, indeed -- a wonderful whitewash for the dirtiest of desires.

(raises the second gun)

A duel implies equality -- but why should I fight with such a smelling mass of secondary hypocrisy?

(fires the other gun into the air)

It is finished.

(throws the guns on the ground)

I feel unclean in your presence -- I must go wash myself in blood of absinthe and baptize myself in the river of gin.

Lights change to back coffee shop. Music changes back to Lou Reed. They move back into their original positions.

GORDON

But we won't duel.

MARSH

Too civilized for that.

GORDON

Too civilized?

(leans into MARSH)

It wasn't anybody on my side that shot doctors. No one from my ranks stormed the clinics.

MARSH

Your side just kills babies.

GORDON

If only you knew what you were talking about.

* * * * *

Scene 3

Sound: tinny radio as if heard through a wall -- Paul Anka's "Having My Baby." GORDON puts the placards and poles and one chair upstage. MARSH moves into a pool of light downstage: a harsh white light. MARSH looks considerably younger through some small change in her costume, e.g., a barette, which GORDON can give her, which holds her hair back. GORDON hands her the long knitting needle, then waits by the prop table.

MARSH

It can't be true.

(holds her hand on her stomach)

It can't be. It can't -- It just can't -- I can't -- I can't -- I won't --

She carefully gets down on her knees and very slowly mimes hiking up her skirt -- excruciatingly slowly. When she has lifted it far enough, she slips the knitting needle underneath. Long pause. Then she takes it out, unused.

MARSH

(she begins striking herself with the needle)

I can't -- I can't -- I can't -- I can't --

She remains kneeling. She folds her hands as if to pray, but they still clutch the needle. She lays the needle on the floor with both hands, as if it were a sword, then clasps her hands again.

MARSH

Hail Mary -- Our Father --

MARSH waves her hands back and forth, as if she were erasing the words from the air.

MARSH

I have sinned -- I have failed --

GORDON enters wearing a vest and dirty lab coat, carrying the white sweater, purse, and hat; she also brings the chair downstage center. A harsh white light. MARSH leaves the needle and sits in the chair. GORDON drapes the sweater over MARSH's shoulders and hands her the purse, and then steps out of the lights.

As GORDON says the names of the abortifacients, she circles behind MARSH. MARSH stands, steps downstage, and speaks to an imaginary doctor. GORDON's recitation should be continuous throughout, which means the names will be repeated.

MARSH

Excuse me? I'm sorry, I didn't hear -- Well, I'm here to see the doctor.

GORDON

Pennyroyal, Snakeroot --

MARSH

I have an appointment. Yes, I do -- see, there, in your book.

GORDON

Cotton root bark, Silphium --

MARSH

That's all right -- I'll wait.

Moves several steps, as if into another room; she speaks to the doctor.

GORDON

Aloe, Wormwood --

MARSH

Oh, yes, thank you -- Well. My problem?

GORDON

Rocket, Calomel, Hyssop --

GORDON stops to watch MARSH during these next lines.

MARSH

Yes, I did make an appointment. No, no, most everything feels fine. Most everything. Not everything, no. I'm pregnant. I'm sure. Three -- this would make three.

GORDON

(without moving)

Rue, Myrrh --

MARSH

He's a night watchman -- not a large salary, no. Though he says they might be hiring up soon -- but no, no guarantee of that. We barely have the money for the four of us -- neither of us have had new clothes -- the children --

GORDON
(without moving)

Black cohosh --

MARSH

He doesn't believe in using -- Catholic. I can't agree with what you just said -- but I agree with it.

GORDON
(moving again)

Seneca, Rockrose --

MARSH

I can't have this baby. It will kill me. I bled so much -- I know you can't -- I know -- I shouldn't have come -- What?

She takes something handed to her: a note, which she opens to read.

GORDON

Blue cohosh, Sweet cicely --

MARSH

He will -- Of course, you're right, not out loud. But he will? Of course, of course, no mention. Thank you.

GORDON

Once these remedies were ours. Our knowledge. Our power. Now taken from us and dropped into the hands of men.

Change of lights, and MARSH is now in GORDON's "office," which is the chair.

GORDON

Do you have the money?

MARSH

Yes, yes, I do.

GORDON

Good. You can pay me after. You know what you're doing?

MARSH

Yes.

GORDON

Are you sure?

MARSH

Yes.

GORDON

Does anyone know you're here?

MARSH

No.

GORDON

Come alone?

MARSH

Yes.

GORDON

That's not good. Who's going to take you home?

MARSH

There's the bus -- We don't have a car.

GORDON

The bus! This isn't like getting a cavity filled!

MARSH

It's the opposite -- I know.

GORDON

I don't like this.

MARSH

You can't turn me away! I've got the money!

GORDON

Didn't he --

MARSH

I'll be all right. I'm strong.

GORDON

Didn't he tell you to bring somebody -- I should send you home --

MARSH

I won't come back -- It's now --

GORDON

Catholic?

MARSH

I can't have a third.

GORDON

Does your husband --

MARSH

Not a thing.

GORDON

Usually best. Well.

GORDON exits. MARSH sits, and the light tightens to her face. During this next speech, the actor and director can add any words or lines that bring out the emotional impact.

MARSH

Oh, God -- Oh my God -- That hurts! I'll try. No, stop, that hurts! Ahhh! Gently, gently, oh please -- Ahhh! Hail Mary -- mother of God -- sinners -- This - is - not - me -- This - is - not - happening --

(sings)

Maresy dotes and dosey dotes and little lambsy divey, a kiddly divey too -- Ahhhhh!

This last is a long drawn-out howl of pain. Lights bump to black in the middle of the howl, so that it ends in darkness.

Sound: crowd noise as at top of show, strident and loud.

* * * * *

Scene 4

GORDON brings in the other chair; MARSH puts sweater and purse on the prop table. The two chairs face each other: the inside of a police van. They should have their winter gear on. Lights up: MARSH nervous, GORDON feisty. Crowd sounds muted. The dialogue should move briskly.

GORDON

And that's how it fucking used to be.

(to officer)

Hey, Officer Krupke! I have to pee. No? That contravenes the Geneva Convention on Urination Protocols. My hands?

(sighs)

Cops: if you can't beat 'em -- they beat you. Have to pee?

MARSH

No.

GORDON

I have a bladder the size of a half walnut.

(to the officer)

Do you get a commission for each back you crack?

(to MARSH)

So they nabbed you, too?

MARSH does not answer.

GORDON

First time? Not mine. Me and Paddy O'Wagon here are intimates.

MARSH does not answer.

GORDON

Fuck! I really have to go. Do you have something I can use?

MARSH does not answer.

GORDON

Cup, bottle, sandwich bag, jar, Tupperware for Christ's sake?

MARSH

I have a cup. A plastic cup. With a cover.

GORDON

May I?

MARSH

What?

GORDON

What?! Either give it to me or I stink up the joint.

MARSH gets a child's "sippy" cup out of her bag and hands it to her.

GORDON

And hold open your coat? Don't have much, but don't want to drive'em crazy up front.

MARSH, showing great disgust, stands up, with her back to GORDON, and mimes spreading her coat. GORDON simply stands behind MARSH, facing upstage. There is a pause, then a sigh of relief from GORDON. There does not actually have to be any movement mimicking or sound of peeing.

GORDON

Ahhh, yes. That relieves the mind.

MARSH

Are you done?

GORDON

Wait. Wait. Wait. Yes.

MARSH

Can I sit down?

GORDON

May I. Go ahead.

MARSH sits. GORDON puts the cup under her chair.

GORDON

Ah, now I can concentrate.

A silence falls between them.

GORDON

Well.

MARSH does not respond.

GORDON

So, are you mad at me?

MARSH

No.

GORDON

No.

MARSH

No, I'm not.

GORDON

So forgiving. Well, I would've been mad if some dried-up little cunt presumed to tell me "how it was."

MARSH

Please don't swear.

GORDON

Admit it, though, you didn't know any of that.

MARSH

I'm sure Christ forgave those women.

GORDON

I'll bet your mother knew about those women. I'll bet she knew some of those women personally.

MARSH

My mother did a lot of work in the Church.

GORDON

I'll bet some people out there right now lobbing plastic dead fetuses are glad Jane Roe did what she did.

MARSH

I wouldn't know.

GORDON

No, you wouldn't. No, you wouldn't. Any kids?

MARSH

Two.

GORDON

I don't have any. Never wanted any.

MARSH

I can understand why.

GORDON

You can? Tell me.

MARSH

It wouldn't be proper --

GORDON

Tell me.

MARSH

I don't want to.

GORDON

I don't get it. Out there you people have no problem telling complete strangers that they're devil's shit --

MARSH

It's not about judgment.

GORDON

Lest ye be judged.

MARSH

We want them to remember their souls --

GORDON

Holy shoemakers --

MARSH

-- and the souls of the babies.

GORDON

Yet in here, one on one -- nothing.

(large mocking sigh)

I must be getting too old -- I'm missing the connections.

MARSH

I don't know you.

GORDON

You don't know them.

MARSH

That's different.

GORDON

Zing, zing, miss, miss. Can you explain? No, don't. I'll just end up having to kill you --

MARSH

It's different --

GORDON

-- for spouting nonsense in a contained environment.

MARSH

It's different because --

GORDON

Oh, Christ, she's off --

MARSH

It's different because it's clear why they're going where they're going.

GORDON

(looking around)

Any sharp instruments --

MARSH

They're going to kill a baby.

GORDON

(to the officer)

Can I borrow your truncheon?

MARSH

They're going to kill --

GORDON

Stop it! Just stop your drive! I get very fucking upset when I hear the voice of death buzzing so close.

MARSH

It's the voice of life!

GORDON

It's the voice of fucking death. It's the voice of the Grand fucking Inquisitor. It's the voice of the fucking hangman.

MARSH

I can't talk to you. You have no respect.

GORDON

One of the blessings of old age. So, let's shift -- Two kids, huh?

MARSH does not respond.

GORDON

I always felt it'd be easier to know a dolphin's mind than understand what drove people to want children. How about you? Why? Accident? Huh?

MARSH

Both planned.

GORDON

That's good. It creeps up on so many people -- insert here, and suddenly a child appears. So, why?

MARSH

A family completes me.

GORDON

Completes you. You like being a mother.

MARSH

It's one of the best things a woman can do. Actually, the best.

GORDON

The best.

MARSH

The best.

(indicating GORDON)

So, why not?

GORDON

I was blessed with a mother who never let me forget my world was the whole world. So that's where I made my home. I can never remember ever having the urge to slip one out the canal.

MARSH

You'd feel invaded.

GORDON

Perceptive.

MARSH

I was completely the opposite.

GORDON

You planned.

MARSH

Yes.

GORDON

You chose.

MARSH

Yes.

GORDON

Choice.

MARSH

Choice before conception.

GORDON

But once the sperm worms in --

MARSH

The choice isn't mine any more.

GORDON

Or anybody else's.

MARSH

It's murder. Murder can't be a choice.

GORDON

But what if you really believe it's not murder?

MARSH

Just like the Nazis? the slaver owners? Life has to be respected.

GORDON

I don't disagree with you there. Though we disagree completely. A dolphin would be easier.

GORDON gives her a look.

GORDON

Do you love me?

MARSH

What?

GORDON

Do you love me?

MARSH

What are you asking?

GORDON

Does this foul-mouthed geezer, this maybe dyke, merit love?

MARSH

Everyone does. I love you because Christ loves you. I love your soul.

GORDON

But what about me?

MARSH

I want to save your soul.

GORDON

I don't have a soul.

MARSH

You can't reject it.

GORDON

I do. Can you love me? Here's the test. I hate everything your Church stands for. Can you love me? I think religious faith is a form of insanity. Can you love me? I think your love of "life" is fascism. Can you love me? I think a Christian nation would be dull beyond belief and ripe with hypocrisy -- Can you love me?

MARSH

I would love you, yes.

GORDON

As a duty.

MARSH

Personally, you disgust me. But charity --

GORDON

Condescension.

MARSH

You have more sin than I know what to do with.

GORDON

That's my vaccination.

By this time the crowd sounds have died down, and it is silent.

GORDON

Sounds like things have broken up.

(to the officer)

Is everything over? Can we go home now? I promise I will write 500 times -- No sense of humor.

(to MARSH)

We're off to the station soon. I'm sure -- I'm afraid -- we'll see each other in a year, if not earlier. Been nice talking with you.

As the lights fade, GORDON makes a sign of the cross in the air. Lights out.

* * * * *

Scene 5

In the darkness, three loud gun shots, then crowd sounds at a large abortion rally: chants, etc. GORDON and MARSH place the chairs as at the top of the play and get their placards. They stand on the chairs and chant.

GORDON

"Without choice, you have no voice."

MARSH

"Jesus loves every baby you kill."

The chanting goes on for only 10 repetitions or so, then lights change to a lurid red; crowd sounds are replaced by low thumping diabolical music. MARSH and GORDON remove their placards from their signs.

MARSH begins brandishing her pole; GORDON stands center, still, holding her pole in her hands. MARSH starts to circle. It is she who strikes the first blow; GORDON always fends off the blow without ever moving off her center. The combat should be ritualized. Their lines are said in rhythm

to the combat, and the whole thing should move very quickly. "Hee-yah" indicates when the blows are struck.

MARSH

Hee-yah! Demon. Child killer.

GORDON

Blind religious drone.

MARSH

Murderer. Hedonist.

GORDON

Woman-hater.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

MARSH

You'd waste babies for pure convenience.

GORDON

You believe in gods that detest women.

MARSH

You slander motherhood.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

GORDON

You betray love.

MARSH

Creature of darkness.

GORDON

Creature of darkness.

MARSH

People should suffer for sin.

GORDON

Save us from Christ.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

GORDON

Freedom is most important.

MARSH

Life is most important.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

MARSH

A fetus is a child.

GORDON

A fetus is a fetus.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

GORDON

Woman has the right to enjoy her body.

MARSH

Woman is a sacred vessel. You shall lose.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah!

GORDON

We shall win.

TOGETHER

Hee-yah! Hee-yah!

The combat ends with mutual endangerment: their staffs are poised to do great damage to each other. The staffs rest on the other person's left shoulder. In tandem, they draw the tips of the staffs across the throat to the right shoulder. When they reach the right shoulder, they should whip the

staffs away, as if completing a cut. The motion should be as if they've just beheaded each other. Then they back off, bow like ancient warriors. Lights to black.

Music for curtain call: Lou Reed's "Bus Load of Faith."

Translation

Special thanks to Kathy Somssich

DESCRIPTION

Helen Guild, a successful appraiser of theatre photography, must decide if she wants to trust Oral Timmins, a stranger, to translate a journal that may contain revelations she is uncertain she wants to know. For his part, Oral Timmins learns a lesson about the power of words to transform and the capacity of love to transcend time, place, gender, and language.

CHARACTERS

- ORAL TIMMINS, a free-lance translator
- HELEN GUILD, a buyer, appraiser, and curator of theatre photography
- PALLAS WORTE, a buyer, appraiser, and curator of photography
- JEFFREY MITCHELL, Oral's friend
- UTILITY 1 will play VOICE OVER INTERCOM, KARLA BAEDER, ROSA at the Goethe Institute, WOMAN WITH CHILD at the café, PIPER at Jeffrey's workplace -- late fifties/early sixties, in physically good shape
- UTILITY 2 will play GEORG BETHE, CUSTOMER at the Goethe Institute, WAITER at the café, SID at Jeffrey's workplace, MAN AT PHONE BOOTH -- late fifties/early sixties, in physically good shape

Note: All the actors will have to speak some German.

Time: Mid-1980s: no cell phones and email, and phone booths still exist

Setting: Any American city; Berlin

* * * * *

Scene 1

A smartly furnished office, solid, without ostentation. Behind the desk, a window. During the scene the color gradually changes as time passes until it is early evening. A second desk or table sits off to the side.

On the desk is a 1-inch thick manuscript in a three-ring binder, black and unlabeled.

A voice comes over the intercom.

VOICE

Ms. Guild? Ms. Guild?

HELEN

Yes?

VOICE

There's someone here to see you.

HELEN

Yes.

VOICE

He's from --

A whispered consultation.

VOICE

-- from the translation agency.

HELEN

-- from the translation agency -- yes, I know. Tell him to wait a moment.

HELEN takes the binder. She holds it so that the upper-right hand corner is in her right palm and lower-left hand corner is in her left palm. Then she spins the binder, getting as many revolutions out of it as she can. Then she slams the binder down on the desk, squares it, then calls the receptionist.

HELEN

Send him in.

ORAL enters, clutching a small leather portfolio. HELEN waits. ORAL fidgets.

HELEN

I need some German documents translated.

ORAL

Okay -- I brought my résumé and samples --

HELEN

Actually, not documents -- just one document.

ORAL

Good -- I can show you --

HELEN

What is your name?

ORAL

My name. Timmins. Oral Timmins.

HELEN

Oral Timmins?

ORAL

Oral Timmins.

HELEN

What a --

ORAL

Yes.

HELEN

-- singular name for a translator.

ORAL

Yes.

HELEN

I've only heard of -

ORAL

-- one man with that name --

HELEN

Yes.

ORAL

The "deeply sighing, always-dying, keeps on crying Oral Roberts." My namesake.

HELEN

Now you might have me fascinated.

ORAL

It's not --

HELEN

But it is -- go on --

ORAL

My parents -- big supporters, dollar- and Bible-wise. Hoping I'd follow the Oral's path --

HELEN

So they named you --

ORAL

They had high hopes.

HELEN

But.

ORAL

But. They knew they'd pretty much lost the battle when around ten years old I was calling son Richard "Dental" and his father "Hygiene."

HELEN

Hygiene.

ORAL

At age ten -- thought it was a great joke -- repeated it -- to everyone.

HELEN

"Were" supporters?

ORAL

Still are. I'm sorry -- are you --

HELEN

Not to worry, Oral Timmins. I actually hoped the Lord would keep him when he threatened to die if he couldn't raise money.

ORAL

Headline: "GOD TO ORAL: DROP DEAD."

HELEN

And your parents --

ORAL

They are still Sunday-morning folks -- though I'm not sure who they're watching now.

HELEN

Do you ever -- well, how else to put it? -- resent --

ORAL

My parents weren't vicious. Just hopeful.

HELEN

And you don't --

ORAL

You can't hate them for being hopeful.

HELEN

No -- we can't -- or at least shouldn't.

ORAL

Look, I can show you --

HELEN

Are you a sermonizer?

ORAL

Just a humble hack at heart. "Have tongue, will translate."

HELEN

But Bible-raised, yes? Words as weapons.

ORAL

More like words as flesh.

HELEN

Flesh --

ORAL

Speaking and living -- cognate. Sympathetic.

HELEN

My parents named me Helen because they wanted a goddess.

ORAL

All right.

HELEN

Daughter of Zeus and Leda, wife of Spartan Menelaus --

ORAL

Eloper with Paris to Troy -- destroyer of cities --

HELEN

"She moves a goddess -- "

ORAL

"-- and she looks a queen."

HELEN

I learned that one early on -- used it on the playground to confuse the attack dogs.

ORAL

And the Helenas: All's Well That Ends Well, St. Helena, mother of Constantine. And St. Helen's fire -- uh, blue flames on the ship's masts: if one, bad weather; if two or more, it be fair sailin', me hearties.

HELEN

Their tuition was well spent --

ORAL

They might [argue] --

HELEN

But to the heart of the matter -- your German.

ORAL

Fluent. Since this high.

HELEN

First language?

ORAL

Third-generation parents, so I got English with my oatmeal. It was the older people in town, at the Turn Verein -- a kind of community center. Trouped there every day for German lessons --

HELEN

Show me.

ORAL

What?

HELEN

Show me a lesson.

ORAL

Really?

HELEN

How else can I test the goods? Stand up.

ORAL

Well, all right. One crusty old Teuton coming up.

Takes the posture of a stern teacher, speaks English in a German accent.

ORAL

"Now, class, the numbers. Very important -- think of them as pennies, adding up, adding up. Repeat: eins, zwei, drei, vier, fuenf -- " I loved saying "fuenf"! Fuenf! Do you want me to go on -- it gets boring in another three numbers --

HELEN

Part A done --

ORAL

Cubic yards of irregular verbs. Getting all the glottals right --

ORAL makes the proper hacking sound in his throat.

ORAL

-- "machen."

HELEN

You hated it.

ORAL

Are you kidding -- you could make disgusting noises and get praised!

HELEN

Heaven for a ten-year old. Oral gratification.

ORAL

Well, yes, in a manner of speaking --

HELEN falls silent.

HELEN

Part B. Help me remember something, Oral Timmins. I memorized this once -- How does it begin?

(flat pronunciation)

"Und diese menschlichere Liebe" -- would that be right, "menschlichere"? [pronounces it as "mens-likker"]

ORAL

Mensch - the ssh sound, a little forceful, tongue behind the air. Mensch.

HELEN

Mensch.

ORAL

Menschlichere. Not "likker" -- let the air escape. Soft, not hard. Menschlichere.

HELEN

Menschlichere.

ORAL

Well, not native -- yet. Okay, "Und diese menschlichere Liebe" -- "And this more human love -- "

HELEN

-- "die unendlich rücksichtsvoll" -- is that right?

ORAL

"Rücksichtsvoll" -- don't know. Continue.

HELEN

"Rücksichtsvoll und leise" -

ORAL

Ah! -- "that will fulfill itself, infinitely" -- "Infinitely considerate and gentle" -- I know this.

HELEN

"Und gut und klar in Binden und Lösen sich --"

ORAL

"Sich vollziehen wird" -- "and kind and clear in binding and releasing." "Wird jener ähneln, die wir ringend und mühsam vorbereiten, der Liebe, die darin besteht, dass zwei Einsamkeiten einander schützen, grenzen und grüssen."

HELEN

Couldn't have said it better myself.

ORAL

"And this more human love -- "

HELEN

Wait.

HELEN opens the drawer of her desk and opens a copy of Rilke.

HELEN

"And this more human love --

HELEN indicates for him to continue.

ORAL

"And this more human love -- that will fulfill itself, infinitely considerate and gentle, and kind and clear in binding and releasing -- "

HELEN holds up a finger to stop him; she continues.

HELEN

" -- will resemble that which we are preparing with struggle and toil, the love which consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other." Thunderous applause.

ORAL

When did you have to memorize Rilke?

HELEN

Didn't "have to." I wanted to be the young poet.

HELEN puts the book back in the drawer.

ORAL

So you memorized it --

HELEN

Many burned bridges ago. Mr. Oral Timmins, on that desk sits an unusual document.

ORAL

All right.

HELEN

Unsolicited it came to me -- though I know who wrote it. Would you bring it to me?

ORAL takes the binder to HELEN. She points to photographs on the "wall."

HELEN

Some of my background. Please, look.

ORAL walks along the "wall" looking at the photos, listening while HELEN speaks. He finishes as she finishes.

HELEN

I deal in photography -- buy, sell, and appraise. This past May I went to Germany to evaluate a private collection taken during the Weimar period. A buyer here wanted photos of American blacks who went to Germany to perform

-- especially some exquisite Josephine Baker images. He hired me to tell him their worth, agreed to pay all my expenses. So off I went. While there I met the person hired by the family to do their appraisal. We had much in common. I sent off the appraisal and decided to stay for a small vacation. This person made my stay delightful. After my return we wrote several letters, then lost contact -- until --

HELEN holds up the binder.

HELEN

I can pick out words here and there -- days of the week. Numbers. "Fuenf." Places. My name. Her name.

ORAL

Work-related?

HELEN

No.

ORAL

May I see it --

HELEN

Weimar Germany --

ORAL

All right.

HELEN

Full of -- the right word? -- ambiguity.

ORAL

Unsettled, I suppose.

HELEN

Many of the photographs I saw were chock-full of ambiguity -- lines crossed in gender, dress, class. And soon the "facts" ground them out because their lines weren't neat. As a translator, Mr. Timmins, don't you always lie?

ORAL

The old insult: "translator" as "traitor"?

HELEN

Did Rilke say what you said he said?

ORAL

It's a facsimile.

HELEN

A lie.

ORAL

The best way to say in English what's said in German.

HELEN

And how does that happen?

ORAL

A mix. A guess.

HELEN

Rummaging in the dark --

ORAL

Some words carry over directly but concepts -- estimates.

HELEN

How do you estimate?

ORAL

One gets taught --

HELEN

No -- not one. Not one. You. If you're not using the facts -- Mr. Timmins -- if the reference books don't tell you what you need -- where does it come from?

ORAL

One develops -- I develop -- a feel --

HELEN

A grope --

ORAL

A feel for what's underneath.

HELEN

Rummaging in the dark.

ORAL

Yes, but not in the dark -- in life, life in general -- in my own life, in my own heart. "Thoughts come not from the head but from the heart."

HELEN puts down the binder, opens a desk drawer and takes out a Polaroid camera.

HELEN

Parry with a quote.

ORAL

Always quote to impress.

HELEN

It does not. Look at me.

HELEN takes a picture of ORAL, puts the camera on the desk but holds the picture.

HELEN

You trust your heart?

ORAL

Yes.

HELEN

And why should I?

ORAL

Actions speak louder -- you haven't sent me home yet.

HELEN

That just means I don't distrust.

ORAL shows his portfolio.

ORAL

I can show you my own "pictures," if you want --

HELEN

Your words to action.

ORAL

Words to flesh.

HELEN points to the portfolio.

HELEN

How would you grade what you've done?

ORAL

Done as well as anyone's.

HELEN

As well as anyone's.

ORAL

As well as yours.

HELEN

Should I be complimented or dismayed?

ORAL

Depends.

HELEN

On?

ORAL

Pardon me for saying this -- "forward" as my folks would say -- but it depends upon your own heart.

HELEN

Pass on that for the moment.

HELEN looks at the Polaroid, shows it to him from a distance.

HELEN

And this portfolio -- full complement of human virtue?

ORAL

And vice.

HELEN

That is good to know.

ORAL

And in-between.

HELEN

The ambiguities.

ORAL

I have never let a fact outshine the ambiguous.

HELEN hands the Polaroid to ORAL.

HELEN

Is this a face you would trust? Is this face a good translation?

ORAL makes a funny gesture.

ORAL

Fuenf!

HELEN

I think I have danced around enough.

ORAL

All right.

HELEN spins the binder as before, then hands it to ORAL. ORAL hands her the photo, takes the binder but does not open it.

HELEN

I need to know what this says and have to trust you to tell me. At least, I have to not distrust you to tell me. We need to make a contract. Not an agency contract --

ORAL

No -- not even a contract -- a -- covenant.

HELEN

An "Oral Hygiene" word. Covenant, then. And your end?

ORAL

Simple -- what you've been testing here: the best my head
and heart can offer.

HELEN picks up Polaroid, looks at it and then at ORAL; ORAL looks straight
back at her.

HELEN

Open it. Read the first paragraph.

ORAL

Now?

HELEN

"The world wants to be betrayed." Always quote to impress.
Yes, now.

By this time the window has darkened considerably. The room is also in
semi-darkness. ORAL opens the binder to the first page and reads silently,
tracing his index finger under the lines. He looks at HELEN, then back down
to the page.

HELEN

Are you ready?

ORAL

Yes.

HELEN

Two blue flames, wasn't it, for good weather?

HELEN holds up both hands and wiggles the fingers as if they were flames.

HELEN

And away.

Transition music: The Threepenny Opera.

* * * * *

Scene 2

A richly appointed room, though not ostentatious. The light through the window should be bright sunlight, warm and comforting. On the table are several archival boxes of photographs, neatly arranged and in sleeves, and a loupe.

From off stage voices approach. The conversation is animated, friendly. Entering the room are GEORG BETHE and KARLA BAEDER; after several beats, HELEN GUILD and PALLAS WORTE enter. Note: The German characters should speak their English with German accents, though these do not have to be heavy. PALLAS has the lightest accent of all.

GEORG

What a good meal!

KARLA

Georg, I can't believe you.

GEORG

And I love talking with the American!

KARLA

Georg! Don't change the subject.

GEORG

And the subject is --

KARLA

That you believe love is irrelevant.

GEORG

I didn't say "irrelevant," Karla -- I said "troublesome." And I added, if you remember, "probably unnecessary."

KARLA

Now you're just being a provocateur!

GEORG

We're born alone, we're mostly alone while we coast along, we die alone. Where's the tragedy in that?

KARLA

So arid. So forlorn.

GEORG

You're my lawyer -- you're not supposed to have a heart. If I find out you have a heart -- I'm going to have to watch you!

GEORG walks to table, looks at photographs.

GEORG

Besides, it's much better to make money -- though I'll be glad when this business is over. Imagine some American wanting to buy this -- trash. And for so much lettuce!

PALLAS and HELEN enter, HELEN paying close attention to PALLAS.

KARLA

Your parents required it in their will.

GEORG

The dead hand of the dead past.

KARLA

Don't be too sentimental.

GEORG

Ah, our better halves. I hope Frau Worte here hasn't chewed your ear off -- don't you just love American slang! Chewed your ear off!

HELEN

Pallas has been just marvelous.

PALLAS

Yes I have! And her ear is quite intact, Georg. Her lovely ear is quite intact.

HELEN

Alles ist einfach wunderbar.

GEORG

You have just spoken more German than most Americans speak in a lifetime.

HELEN

No excuse for not being better at it, except laziness.

KARLA

And that you are American.

PALLAS

Karla!

GEORG

Karla, you've turned nationalist.

KARLA

I meant in terms of language. Americans are so ignorant of other languages. Accept my apology -- I did not mean to mean that you were some "ugly American."

PALLAS

She certainly is not.

GEORG

Pallas to the rescue again. And a lawyer with manners! Most certainly have to keep a close eye on you! Helen -- what did you think of our dear lawyer's penchant for pathos over lunch, all that Rilke about love and solitude? What does the American say about love?

HELEN

Is there an American point of view?

PALLAS

Don't let him bully you.

GEORG

Rilke, Rilke, Rilke, Rilke --

KARLA

Grow up --

HELEN

Very true, Georg -- Rilke is Rilke is Rilke is Rilke.

GEORG

So?

HELEN

I think what he says is very true. That's it.

GEORG

Which is?

KARLA

Don't bother her with all this. I should go.

GEORG

Wait, Karla. Helen?

HELEN

The American point of view?

PALLAS

One American point of view.

HELEN

In general --

GEORG

The debater's thrust --

HELEN

-- love and solitude are two things Americans don't connect.
It's much the opposite.

GEORG

But you like Rilke?

HELEN

I do.

GEORG

But you're American?

KARLA

Master of the [obvious] --

HELEN

Yes.

GEORG

So why? What makes you so different?

PALLAS

Like a mongoose!

GEORG

But debonair!

KARLA

Now you have me curious.

PALLAS

So I guess you must answer.

HELEN

If you insist -- because Rilke doesn't give in to the noise.

GEORG

Explain.

HELEN

In the United States, everything has to have a sound track. I was in a bar once where they even had televisions in the bathroom. If you have the noise, you don't have to think.

GEORG

And thinking and love have to do with each other --

HELEN

A very artful debater, Georg -- first you pooh-pooh -

GEORG

Pooh-pooh? Was bedeutet das "pooh-pooh"? [What is this pooh-pooh?]

HELEN

An elegant American phrase for "dismiss." First you dismiss Karla for saying that love is necessary, and now you seem

to say that love should be spontaneous, not the product of thinking -- which would imply that you think it's necessary.

GEORG

Help me out here!

KARLA

Why? Continue making my point.

HELEN

Rilke's point -- I think. Before you can love someone else --

GEORG

Does this "you" mean you, too?

HELEN

Before you can love someone else --

GEORG

Another debater's point.

PALLAS

Let her finish.

GEORG
(to KARLA)

The summing-up, eh?

HELEN
(to PALLAS)

Thank you. Before you can love someone else, you have to so love yourself as to be completely alone with yourself --

PALLAS

Yes.

HELEN
-- completely at ease with your solitude -- safe in your loneliness. In that respect, Georg, you're right -- we're born, live, and die alone.

PALLAS

But not all kinds of alone are the same.

HELEN

Right. Right. This is how it hits me: it's only out of that solitude that you can love someone else. And people who love each other need to protect each other's solitude. No sound tracks. No noise.

KARLA

Game, set, match.

GEORG

Pallas -- a kindred soul here, perhaps.

PALLAS

Perhaps.

KARLA

Georg, I must go -- I do have other clients.

GEORG

Other lunches, she means.

KARLA

Pallas, a pleasure working with you again. Helen. I know the way out.

GEORG

All the ins and outs. May you find love.

KARLA

May you pay my bill on time.

GEORG

I love you.

KARLA

Put the check in the mail to show it.

GEORG

Consider it done.

KARLA

Then I love you, too.

KARLA leaves.

GEORG

A lawyer with a heart -- how rare, how rare. Pallas, I have a question to ask you.

GEORG goes to the boxes of photos on the table; to HELEN.

GEORG

Helen, please excuse me for a moment -- a little more business -- well, pleasure, for me at least. Unless, of course, your Mr. Wiley wants to buy these as well.

HELEN

Pallas has already persuaded me to spend more of Mr. Wiley's money than he had expected. You are sharp.

PALLAS

Always easier to play with other people's money.

GEORG

Pallas. Pallas. We also found these photos in the vault -- a hand-signed note said they had been taken by Erfurth.

GEORG shows her the note, a protective sleeve.

GEORG

Pictures of Erwin Piscator, the Red Revue, Blue Blouses. What do you think?

While GEORG is talking, HELEN moves to the window, calm. PALLAS, trying to listen to GEORG, nonetheless lets her gaze go to HELEN.

GEORG

Look at these. Mahagonny. And that's Brecht. Brecht!

Picks up the loupe, leans down to look at the photo more closely.

GEORG

Look. Das ist sehr lecker. Lecker! [This is so delicious. Delicious.]

GEORG becomes absorbed in looking at the pictures. As he does, PALLAS moves to HELEN.

PALLAS

You seem pensive.

HELEN

I'm sorry.

PALLAS

Don't apologize. His beloved Brecht!

PALLAS recites, from Threepenny.

PALLAS

"The world is poor and men are bad / There is of course no more to add." From Threepenny. Die Dreigroschenoper.

HELEN

Quote to impress?

PALLAS

Only among strangers. Georg knows all of Threepenny.

HELEN

I've never even heard it.

PALLAS

No matter -- knowing all of it is not a great accomplishment to my mind. Are you pensive?

HELEN

Just thinking about going back. I'm done here.

GEORG

Pallas -- look at this!

PALLAS

In a moment.

(to HELEN)

Is your patron expecting you?

HELEN

Not for several more days. You moved things right along!

PALLAS

Then why not stay?

GEORG

Pallas! Look!

PALLAS

In a moment. Will you? Stay?

GEORG

Truly remarkable! Like silken thighs. Like the soft underbreast.

At GEORG's statement, HELEN and PALLAS look at each other and then burst out laughing.

GEORG

What? What?

PALLAS

Your critical terminology -- You're embarrassing our American.

HELEN

I don't scare that easily.

PALLAS

Good.

GEORG

You tell me, then. Look at this Blossfeldt. Look at the luminescence in his picture of the thistle -- he makes something so common look extra-ordinary. Like you'd never seen it before. Something lifted out of the ordinary.

PALLAS

Perhaps Helen would like to see some of your other Blossfeldt.

GEORG
Would you?

PALLAS
Say yes.

HELEN
Yes.

GEORG
Good! I'll be right back!

GEORG hurries from the room.

HELEN
What was that about?

PALLAS
I just wanted a moment -- to get your answer.

HELEN
About what?

PALLAS
About lingering. For a few days. You said yourself you don't need to be right back.

PALLAS takes HELEN's hand in hers.

PALLAS
It would give me great pleasure if you stayed.

HELEN pulls her hand away slowly.

HELEN
I think it's possible.

PALLAS
What are you doing this evening?

HELEN
I have to write up my report and fax it to Mr. Wiley.

PALLAS

Tomorrow morning, then?

HELEN

Do you really like this picture?

PALLAS

Do you?

HELEN

I can see what Georg liked.

PALLAS

Do you like it?

HELEN

It does shine. Just as Georg said.

PALLAS

It does shine -- as Georg said.

HELEN

Do you like it?

PALLAS

This is what I like. I like how it seems to say, "Here and now." Present at the present tense. Dasein.

HELEN

Dasein?

PALLAS

Being. Zuhanden sein.

HELEN

Zuhanden sein.

PALLAS

Being at hand.

HELEN

Coffee tomorrow morning?

PALLAS

That will do for a start.

HELEN

Where?

PALLAS

Near your hotel is a nice little Konditorei.

HELEN

I'll meet you there. At 10.

GEORG enters with a large volume, puts it on the table and opens it.

GEORG

More and more and more and more.

HELEN

Georg --

GEORG

Yes?

HELEN gives PALLAS a smile as she speak.

HELEN

Vielen Dank für die Gastfreundschaft.

PALLAS

Very good.

GEORG

Have you been getting tutored? Your German has improved immensely in the last five minutes.

HELEN

It must be the atmosphere.

GEORG

No need to thank me -- just thank me by looking. There!

They look at the photo.

PALLAS

Like silken thighs.

HELEN

Like the soft underbreast.

GEORG

Couldn't have said it better myself.

Lights down as they continue looking through the book. Transition music: something from Marlene Dietrich.

* * * * *

Scene 3

The Goethe Institute -- can be a simple morph from GEORG's house. ORAL sits at a table going through books, doing research, taking notes -- quite busy. ROSA comes in, lugging books, and plunks them down on the table next to ORAL. ORAL does not even look up.

ORAL

Rosa, Rosa, my love --

ROSA

Not your love, Mr. Timmins.

ORAL

-- my love --

ROSA

Jeffrey is your love.

ORAL

I was poetically speaking, of course --

ROSA

Not your type.

ORAL

But what would I do without your type? And, to be honest, you without me? And the Goethe Institute without the likes of us?

ROSA

The last two on your list would survive.

ORAL

You are harsh.

ROSA

You should see how I treat people I don't like.

ORAL

I believe you just gave me a left-handed compliment. Then a harsh love is better than none, and I accept.

ROSA rearranges, straightens the materials on the desk.

ORAL

I need that.

ROSA hands a book to him.

ROSA

You haven't been here in a while.

ORAL

I have not been many places in a while, Rosa. I seem to be in state of some hibernation.

ROSA

And no more details than that?

ORAL

You'll have to buy the memoir.

ROSA

That will never happen.

ORAL

Your buying?

ROSA

Your writing -- you'd actually have to be organized.

ORAL

Touché, ouch, and all of that.

ROSA sits, starts looking through the materials.

ROSA

You were once more talkative.

ORAL

I was once more a lot of things, Rosa -- I think -- I can't always remember -- some days I just feel old and -- dodgy -- yes --

ROSA

Dodgy -- but not today, apparently -- a very interesting collection of materials -- "priapic," one might say.

ORAL

Not only phallic -- I've got Walter Lacquer and Peter Gay around here somewhere -- and there's some "gyno" stuff thrown -- somewhere -- about prostitutes.

ROSA

(picks up book)

Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin.

ORAL shuffles the books around as he speaks.

ORAL

And there is this other material about "kul-cha" -- the Bauhaus, Dix, Kollwitz -- intellectuals -- Spengler, Heidegger, Jaspers --

ROSA rises to leave.

ROSA

Well, I will leave you with your "investigations" --

ORAL

You're dying to know, aren't you?

ROSA

I will formally say no --

ORAL

As a discreet librarian should --

ROSA

But of course yes. Who wouldn't be intrigued when a penniless translator --

ORAL

Wait --

ORAL rummages in his pockets, holds up two pennies.

ORAL

I have pennies, Rosa -- plural --

ROSA

Ah -- so when a tuppenny translator, then, looks at dirty pictures of naughty boys --

ORAL

And girls --

ROSA

At a library where he does not belong --

ORAL

Aided by the golden-hearted if gruff and superb --

ROSA

Should he be trusted --

ORAL

He should -- because he has a job.

ROSA

Researching this stuff.

ORAL

Not exactly -- but it's connected. I know that look, but it's true! My new boss connected it -- I wouldn't have thought it up myself. Weimar and ambiguity seemed to niggle at the back of her mind, and so --

ROSA

Straight to arms of the Institute.

ORAL

And my Rosa -- you being the only one that lets me use a library without a membership.

ORAL puts away his pennies.

ORAL

And two pennies does not mean I'm still not_penniless.

ROSA

Any clues?

ORAL

To?

ROSA

Why?

ORAL

Well, my "job" is translating a document that my boss "she" got from another "she."

ROSA

Is your boss "she" a "she-inclined person"?

ORAL

"She," I think --

ROSA

The "boss she" --

ORAL

The "boss she" is "she unsure" --

ROSA

"She-shy" -- so to speak --

ORAL

But, apparently, not completely "she-no" --

ROSA

Or "she-yes" --

ORAL

Aye, there's the rub that brought on the Weimar --

ROSA

And this "other she" wrote --

ORAL

I read part of it out loud to "boss she" --

ROSA

And?

ORAL

"Boss she" said "yes" to what could've been "no" right then
and there -- because the "other she's" words --

ROSA

Were --

ORAL

Enough to make me glad I have this job.

ROSA

"Boss she" wants to know --

ORAL

Forbidden fruit --

ORAL points to his books.

ROSA

And that's why --

ORAL

I'm looking through the historical garden.

ROSA rises, looking preoccupied, walks away from the table.

ORAL

And, Rosa, it's amazing what was there. Berlin was wide-open -- free --

ORAL rummages among his notes, pulls out a notecard.

ORAL

I got this from Louise Brooks: "Sex was the business of the town. At the Eden Hotel, where I lived, the cafe bar was lined with the higher-priced trollops. The economy girls walked the street outside. On the corner stood the girls in boots, advertising flagellation...."

ORAL rummages again, comes up with another notecard.

ORAL

Apparently there was a whole color scheme with boots and shoes that let clients know the inclinations of the wearer --

ORAL tosses the card, continues reading.

ORAL

"The nightclub Eldorado displayed an enticing line of homosexuals dressed as women. At the Maly, there was a choice of feminine or collar-and-tie lesbians. Collective lust roared unashamed at the theater. In the revue Chocolate Kiddies, when Josephine Baker appeared naked except for a girdle of bananas, it was precisely as Lulu's stage entrance was described by Wedekind: 'They rage there as in a menagerie when the meat appears at the cage.'"

ORAL puts the card away.

ORAL

I mean, every orifice had its price listed on the orifice menu. Brutal, I guess, but -- free -- unfurled --

ORAL sees the preoccupied ROSA.

ORAL

Was it the word "orifice"?

ROSA

I'm thinking of them both --

ORAL

From "she" to shining "she" -- so to speak --

ROSA

Stop it -- just stop it --

ORAL

All right.

ROSA

Stop thinking it was fun.

ROSA paces.

ROSA

Good -- you shut up.

ORAL

What are you thinking about?

ROSA

I'm thinking of prices.

ORAL

For? Or is it "of"?

ROSA

You want some "oral" history? My mother -- my dear dear mutter -- was a kontroll girl in Berlin.

This takes ORAL back for a moment. Then he rummages, picks out a book, flips to a chapter, holds it up.

ORAL

The clean prostitutes.

ROSA

Let me see that.

ROSA scans the chapter while she speaks.

ROSA

Yes -- yes -- with their kontroll books certifying their "clean venereal health."

Light up on UTILITY 1 as CUSTOMER, looking like a figure from a painting by George Grosz or Otto Dix. ROSA moves slowly toward him.

ORAL

She told you this?

ROSA

She showed me the book.

ORAL

She kept it?

ROSA

She wasn't ashamed. She ate well. She had me.

As ROSA approaches the CUSTOMER, she takes a small book out of her pocket and shows it to him. He thumbs it, checks something, hands it back. She puts it away.

ORAL

And your father --

ROSA

Who knew? Who cared? As far as I was concerned, I only had my mother's blood in me. That was certified, at least.

As ROSA speaks, she and the CUSTOMER dance The Dance of Solicitation. The movements should be simply and sharply choreographed, appropriate to the actors' abilities, and get increasingly rougher as the dance goes on.

ROSA

At least she didn't do the cheap crawl of the Alexanderplatz, where every dirty towel bore a face-print like Veronica's veil of torture and spunk. Or the Gravelstone, where crept the disfigured ones -- acid-scarred, crippled, limbless -- but they had their paying scavengers, too, as do all carcasses. Or the Münzis, pregnant but open -- triple rates, and you could have one according to your desired month of gestation -- such selection -- the "orifice menu" -- at least she was

too old for a telephone-girl -- young nymphs dressed up
as adult celebrities -- have a small-titted Dolly Haas or the
hairless cunt of Lya de Putti --

A moment of danger for ROSA with her CUSTOMER. ROSA breathes
heavily.

An exchange of looks, of money, of release. CUSTOMER exits, and
everything is back to the present tense.

ROSA

It's a dark business, this crossing borders. It's not all -- not
always -- [liberating] --

ORAL

I supposed I shouldn't be so -- fizzy -- about it, eh?

ROSA gives him what, for ROSA, would be a gentle look.

ROSA

Why do you think I keep bringing you the books?

ORAL

You all right?

ROSA

Do you need anything else?

ORAL

I think I have enough to chew on.

ROSA

You don't, but you will.

ORAL

Did your mother die happy?

ROSA

Who said she's dead?

ORAL

She would have to be --

ROSA

She's every year of what you're counting.

ORAL

Something improved her mortality.

ROSA

Yeah -- not dying!

ORAL

I suppose there's a lesson in that.

ROSA

There's a lesson in everything. Be careful.

ROSA exits. ORAL studies. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 4

A small Kafé in Berlin, with some charm to it. PALLAS is sitting at a table, cup of coffee in front of her. Next to the cup is a wrapped gift. A light coat is draped on her chair. Music in the background. HELEN enters.

HELEN

Sorry, sorry, sorry.

PALLAS

You aren't that late.

HELEN

I hate being any kind of late.

PALLAS

Don't fret -- take off your coat, sit down, relax. I command you to relax.

HELEN

Coat is off. I am seated. I have obeyed. I am obeying.

PALLAS
(lengthening the "e")

Breathe. Deeply.

HELEN
Notice also that I have closed my eyes.

PALLAS
Quietly.

HELEN
I am obeying.

PALLAS
Good. Breathe. You cannot be late because time only begins when you get here. Our time begins now. Good. You may now rise to higher consciousness.

HELEN
And coffee, I hope.

PALLAS
Aren't they the same thing? A little more patience. In the meantime: small talk. Begin.

HELEN
I was talking with Karla -- again.

PALLAS
More negotiations?

HELEN
Karla thinks that my Mr. Wiley is not really serious about wanting to dicker down the price -- and I agree. I'm pretty sure Mr. Wiley is just doing it because he thinks it proves the -- manhood of the American businessman.

PALLAS
At least his dickering -- is that really an English word? --

HELEN
Yes it is -- dicker, dicker, dicker --

PALLAS

Well, at least his dickering kept you here a few extra days.
Without guilt, I might add.

HELEN

Don't add anything.

A WAITER brings HELEN a cup of coffee.

HELEN

Oh, but you can add this, though. Danke. Ah, yes, yes,
yes, yes, yes. I am really beginning to like his place.

HELEN raises her glass.

HELEN

We can thank my American for adding guiltless time -- and
extra money, to boot.

PALLAS

I took the liberty -- if you don't mind -- of having that ready
for you the moment you swept in. It has that flavor you like.

HELEN

Vielen, vielen Dank. [Many, many thanks.] Chilly outside.

PALLAS

Unusual weather.

HELEN

But not unpleasant. Reminds me of home.

HELEN indicates the gift.

PALLAS

Yes?

HELEN

Is that for me?

PALLAS

This gaudily wrapped bauble, thing of no importance, sitting
by my right hand. That?

HELEN

Yes, that that!

PALLAS

Well, what does it look like?

HELEN

A gaudily wrapped -- gift.

PALLAS

No flies on you -- is that the phrase?

HELEN

And is that that for me?

PALLAS

So American -- no subtlety!

HELEN

Straightforward.

PALLAS

Impatient.

HELEN

Omnivorous.

PALLAS

A thing of appetite.

HELEN

Of hearty appetite.

PALLAS

That's yet to be proved.

HELEN

That's yet to be provoked.

PALLAS

This might be the agent provocateur we're looking for.

HELEN

So I may open it?

PALLAS

Not yet.

HELEN

You dangle -- then withdraw. Pout, pout.

PALLAS

It's our European decadence --

HELEN

Really?

PALLAS

-- gaudy, full of mystery -- luring in the innocent American.

HELEN

In order to?

PALLAS

In order to educate, of course! Raise to a higher power.

HELEN

I thought decadence was a loss of power.

PALLAS

How little you know.

HELEN

How much you don't know how much I know.

PALLAS

It seems, then, more than enough mysteries to go around.

HELEN

And around.

PALLAS

Time to savor.

HELEN

I'll savor this coffee.

PALLAS

Savor this time.

HELEN

Consider me commanded.

PALLAS

You've already said that. So, how did your Mr. Wiley do on his negotiations?

HELEN

Georg held firm. Why not? Mr. Wiley knows what he wants, Georg knows what Mr. Wiley wants and how much he wants it -- Without the bluff, you can't win the hand.

PALLAS uses a mock American gangster voice, laced with her German accent.

PALLAS

Ain't it da truth?

HELEN

No, no! More flat: "Ain't it da truth?"

PALLAS
(mangling it)

Ain't it da truth?

HELEN

Flatter. Here --

HELEN takes PALLAS's jaw into her hand to manipulate it.

HELEN

Move your mouth this way. Say it with me: "Ain't it da truth?"

As they say this, HELEN moves PALLAS' jaw around so that the words come out garbled. PALLAS puts her hand on HELEN's as HELEN moves her jaw around. They laugh. There is a moment when HELEN becomes

aware of their physical connection and slowly, but decidedly, moves her hand back to her coffee cup.

PALLAS

That felt nice.

HELEN

Yes. Even as we speak, the phone lines hum with Wiley dollars turning into Bethe deutschmarks. Transaction and translation.

PALLAS

Is that life?

HELEN

Of course not. Economics is not life.

PALLAS

That's good to hear.

HELEN

I've savored five sips of my coffee. May I open it now?

PALLAS

Such impatience! A bit more savor.

PALLAS calls the WAITER over to fill her cup, which he does.

PALLAS

What will you do now?

HELEN

This now?

PALLAS

Later now. After now.

HELEN

I don't know. Some upcoming auctions a few of my clients want me to scope out, but they're not immediate. Curatorial work with a university -- probably a summer project. You know, at the moment, I don't have a single, goddamned "should" on my calendar!

PALLAS

You sound -- startled.

HELEN

I am! You know, if I had left when I was supposed to, I would be back in New York filling myself up with "busyness," making believe I was being productive. And yet --

PALLAS

And yet, you're here with me.

HELEN

Here. And here with you. Decadencing my powers -- my new word. And things seem to be taking care of themselves. Now may I open it?

PALLAS laughs and pushes the gift towards her.

PALLAS

Christmas has arrived.

HELEN

Oh, Tannenbaum!

At this moment they hear a WOMAN's voice yelling at a young child. It is just audible under the dialogue.

WOMAN

Du bist sehr unerzogen. [You are being very bad.]

HELEN

What is that?

WOMAN

Setz dich! Setz dich! [Sit down! Sit down!]

PALLAS

Someone yelling - at a child, it sounds like.

HELEN

She must be screaming -- we can hear her in here. Something's not right --

HELEN gets up and goes to the café door.

PALLAS

Helen, don't, sit -- it's not your business.

HELEN opens the door; the WOMAN's voice become very clear. PALLAS joins HELEN. The following lines can overlap as needed.

WOMAN

Du kriegst keinen Luftballon, bis du aufhörst zu jammern.
[You will not get the balloon until you stop crying.]

HELEN

What is she saying?

PALLAS

He can't have the balloon until he stops crying.

WOMAN

Und wenn du nicht aufhörst, gebe ich dir wirklich 'nen Grund zum Jammern! [And if you don't stop crying, I will give you something to cry about.]

HELEN

He really wants that balloon.

WOMAN

Ich schäme mich für dich. Nun kriegst du keinen Luftballon.
[I am ashamed of you. And now you won't get the balloon.]

PALLAS

She's telling him he's being very bad and that she's ashamed of him. He won't get the balloon.

WOMAN

Du bist aber ein böser Junge! [You are being a naughty boy.]

HELEN

Look at him -- that's all he wants. Why is she so mad? I can't stand this!

PALLAS

Helen -- don't -- it's not your business.

HELEN

What do you mean --

PALLAS

Don't interfere.

HELEN

She looks like she's going to hit him!

PALLAS

Come back.

HELEN

Oh, look -- look -- she let it go -- she let the balloon go! She let it go.

WOMAN

Siehe dir an, was du gemacht hast! [Now look what you went and did!]

PALLAS

Now look what you did.

WOMAN

Warte bis wir nach Hause kommen! [Wait till I get you home!]

PALLAS

Wait till I get you home.

There is a silence: the WOMAN has gone.

HELEN

What he did?

HELEN walks back into the café; PALLAS follows. They sit.

PALLAS

Are you all right?

HELEN

She should have given him the balloon.

PALLAS

Yes.

HELEN

The child always, always, always deserves to get the balloon.

PALLAS

We can only speak out of our own experiences.

Very slowly PALLAS pushes the gift across the table to HELEN.

PALLAS

Now.

HELEN takes it and opens it. As she does, she smiles.

PALLAS

German on one side, English on the other. It's your balloon.

Without looking at PALLAS, HELEN holds out her hand. PALLAS takes it.

HELEN

Ain't it da truth?

Transition music: German cabaret music segues into rock.

* * * * *

Scene 5

ORAL's apartment. The window is dark except for a soft glow, as if from street lights.

ORAL

Home again, home again, jiggedy-jig. Mr. Oral's apartment looks like the sty of a pig.

ORAL leafs through the binder.

ORAL

I'll be damned. Damn! "Was folgt schreibe ich sowohl als Erläuterung wie auch Erklärung." I like that internal rhyme: Erläuterung, Erklärung. "I write this as both an explanation and declaration."

ORAL closes the binder, thinks.

ORAL

"Rule #1: Who says something is as important as what they say. In fact, the two cannot be separated." Who is this Ms.? Frau? Fräulein? Sister? This Pallas Worte? Appraiser of photographs? Yes. Charming host to an American visitor? Yes. Poet? Inclined to "yes" on that. Lover? Hmmm. Ms. Helen Guild's future? Hmmm -- what would Rosa say?

ORAL goes back to reading. Appearing on stage and touching ORAL is PALLAS. She stays on only for several lines before she turns and leaves.

PALLAS

"As explanation, it will fall short of what my heart wants you to taste."

ORAL

And what, Pallas Worte, do you want Helen to taste?

PALLAS

"I can only hope your heart gives body to the silence that falls between one word and the next and the next after that."

ORAL

Okay, okay, not bad, not bad.

PALLAS

"As declaration, it is straightforward, arrow-like" --

ORAL

Interesting construction there, "aufrichtig wie der Pfeil" --

PALLAS

"I let go the bow string to erase the distance."

PALLAS leaves; ORAL closes the binder, nods in appreciation. The phone rings. Lights come up on JEFFREY a small table with a telephone on it. The tone is light-hearted and strained.

ORAL

Oral Timmins.

JEFFREY

Hello, my cunning linguist.

ORAL

Jeffrey! Jeffrey! Jeffrey! Oh, it is good to hear your voice.

JEFFREY

Nice to hear that it's nice to be heard.

ORAL

Everything okay?

JEFFREY

Just fine.

ORAL

What's that I hear, then?

JEFFREY

It's just so unusual to find you home. And in good spirits. The stars must be in their proper houses.

ORAL

I know, I know --

JEFFREY

Busy, yes.

ORAL

Well, I have a new job -- and as a writer I think you'll appreciate the "art" of this one.

JEFFREY

Do I get the story through this tinny earphone or a private reading?

ORAL

Private, of course -- but not tonight.

JEFFREY

Oh.

ORAL

Got to translate a hunk of this for tomorrow.

JEFFREY

A hunk? Who are you working for?

ORAL

That's for you and you alone. I meant pages.

JEFFREY

I know what you meant. It's just that I'd like you to send a hunk my way once in a while.

ORAL

You're right, we deserve a well-deserved break because we're so deserving. But not tonight. Breakfast tomorrow? I'll fill you in then.

JEFFREY

In public?

ORAL

Jeffrey --

JEFFREY

Just trying to see if the rise can still rise. Yes, breakfast tomorrow. An hour at a formica table with you is better than nothing. Actually, I'd prefer it on the table.

ORAL

Quite the condiment, wouldn't it?

JEFFREY

It's always good to use condom-ments.

ORAL

I'm laughing on the inside. Alishia's?

JEFFREY

I'll grab the table by the window.

ORAL

Great. And Jeffrey?

JEFFREY

Yes?

ORAL

I miss you as well.

JEFFREY

I was beginning to wonder.

ORAL

Wonder no more.

JEFFREY

Took you long enough to read between the lines. Some translator you are. Bye.

JEFFREY hangs up.

ORAL

Bye.

ORAL hangs up. Light down on JEFFREY. ORAL looks at the phone for a moment, lost in thought. He rests his hand on it, pauses, then picks it up and starts to dial a number.

ORAL

(each letter matching a number)

J-E-F-F-R-E-Y.

But as soon as he finishes dialing he presses the hang-up button, then slowly lowers the handset to the cradle.

ORAL

Tomorrow.

ORAL takes the binder and opens it up. He flips a few pages, obviously looking for his place; he then leans back in his chair and begins reading, exclaiming occasionally about the writing. Enter PALLAS.

PALLAS

I write this as both an explanation and declaration.

ORAL

What?

PALLAS

As an explanation, it will fall short of what my heart wants you to taste. I can only hope your heart gives body to the silence that falls between one word and the next and the next after that. As declaration, it is straightforward, arrow-like -- I let go the bow string to erase the distance.

ORAL walks into PALLAS' light.

ORAL

I have a question for you -- Well, let me just plunge, then. You use "eine Bedeutung" when you say "gives body to the silence." Did you really mean die Bedeutung or did you want to use die Verkörperung? I mean, a world of difference, isn't there, between Bedeutung, "a meaning," and Verkörperung, "the incarnation, the embodiment"? I would have used die Verkörperung -- seems to fit better. "Meaning" is kind of anemic; "incarnation" -- almost sacred, doesn't it? A kind of thrill. You can answer anytime you want.

PALLAS

Rule #3

ORAL

Rule #3.

PALLAS

There are no synonyms.

ORAL

Right, right! I mean, you wrote in German to force her hand, correct? So it's important that I get it as right as I can if you want her to get your intentions. So what should it be?

PALLAS

Use the second.

ORAL

I have to admit that this is one of the better translating jobs I've had. You write -- I mean -- lines just -- thrill me -- like here.

PALLAS does not even look at the binder.

PALLAS

"This is a journal, beginning with the day you left, of the time I spent mourning, missing, blaming, cursing you -- especially cursing, because you didn't let yourself take what I knew you wanted: the harbor of my arms, my breath, my hands. I am glad the universe offered you to me, but the gladness bitters me because it measures what I cannot have. You will now know what I know."

ORAL

Luscious, really.

PALLAS

All a head game with you, isn't it? A puzzle.

ORAL

No --

PALLAS

It's in your voice: "Luscious, really." Grad student comment, self-congratulation. "Die Bedeutung" or "die Verkörperung?" You're showing off --

ORAL

Come on --

PALLAS

You don't know what you're digging into.

ORAL

Wait --

PALLAS

That is someone's life. Two lives. Risiko.

ORAL

What?

PALLAS

Risiko.

PALLAS gestures for him to translate.

ORAL

Risk.

PALLAS

Verlust.

ORAL

Loss.

PALLAS

Schande.

ORAL

Shame.

PALLAS

All possible.

ORAL

And, also possible -- liebe.

ORAL gestures for PALLAS to answer.

PALLAS

Love.

ORAL

Freundschaft.

PALLAS

Friendship.

ORAL

Verständnis.

PALLAS

Understanding. No flies on you, it appears. Rule #2.

ORAL

Yes.

PALLAS & ORAL

"Who you are is as important as what the words say."

ORAL

"No one can translate who doesn't know his or her own voice."

PALLAS

"What, mein guter Bekannte, is your voice? What can it say about this covenant?"

ORAL spins the binder as HELEN had done.

ORAL

This might be easier for some people, I suppose, if it were an American businessman being pursued by a German woman declaring her love. It would fit all the proper commercial -- even ideological -- even mythological -- story lines.

PALLAS

No danger.

ORAL

Everything ready-made. Look, you may have meant to pierce her heart with this -- what's that phrase you used: "tipped with air and not steel, aimed not to kill but to pierce" -- but believe me, with the opening paragraph, two hearts in that room flew out the window. What does gender have to do with what you wrote, what you're feeling? Your words are a plate anyone can eat from.

PALLAS

How did she take them?

ORAL

When I make a spot translation for someone, I'm so focused on the words I don't really notice the person.

PALLAS

But she?

ORAL

After I translated the first lines to myself, I couldn't help it -- I had to watch what they would do.

PALLAS

Setting?

ORAL

Four o'clock-ish on a late autumn afternoon, greyish-blue light filling the room.

PALLAS

That light -- she said it made her feel outside herself --

ORAL

Had to tilt the page toward the window to get enough light. And the words just fell out so easily -- sworn I'd written them. Or at least had thought them somewhere deep in the bone.

PALLAS

But she?

ORAL

In profile to me, both of us facing the window. The words, slowly -- and I watched. She put her hand flat against the window and spread her fingers. Then raised it until only the fingertips touched the glass. I finished. A moment of profile. Then she turned on the light -- bam! -- and said she wanted to see more of it tomorrow. That was all. Very snappy, businesspersonlike.

She takes his hand and places her fingertips against his. His hand automatically follows hers.

PALLAS

Like this?

ORAL

Yes.

PALLAS drops his hand.

PALLAS

We agreed to meet at a small restaurant for the preliminary discussions about the collection. I got there early. When she came in, she was blowing on her hands to warm them up. She apologized, saying she had forgotten to bring gloves because she hadn't known she would need them. I told her I had an extra pair in my purse and held up my hand to measure hers.

PALLAS holds up her hand.

PALLAS

She hesitated at first, then put her hand against mine.

ORAL puts his hand against hers.

PALLAS

And for some reason we both thought of the children's hand game about the spider --

They both cup their hands until only the fingertips are touching.

PALLAS

And laughed and laughed. A good beginning.

ORAL

So many questions --

PALLAS

You can't -- at least not of me.

ORAL

You're leaving.

PALLAS

I am gone.

She exits. He looks in her direction for a moment, then moves back to his desk as the light goes down. He suddenly looks up from the binder and looks around for PALLAS.

ORAL

Am I the philosopher or the butterfly? I could love that woman if I could love a woman. Why couldn't I love her?

ORAL puts his two hands together, then cups them so that only the fingertips touch.

ORAL

Spiders. Why not, indeed?

ORAL picks up the phone but hesitates a moment too long and does not dial.

ORAL

Your earful tomorrow, Jeffrey.

ORAL takes the binder.

ORAL

Come on, Pallas -- back to the covenant.

ORAL turns off the desk lamp. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 6

Alishia's. Diner sounds and conversations. ORAL has his hands together like the spiders.

ORAL

And this -- this I saw in my waking dream.

JEFFREY

Uh-huh.

ORAL

C'mon, like a spider doing push-ups on a mirror.

JEFFREY

A child's game.

ORAL

I don't know if it's true, that they actually did that. I mean, it was just a dream.

JEFFREY

Uh-huh.

ORAL

Uh-huh what?

JEFFREY

Been sitting here now for, oh, almost twenty minutes watching your face, and I would swear you'd had some kind of religious experience. You actually look excited.

ORAL

Is that, like, an accusation?

JEFFREY

No -- it is, like, jealousy. The green eyes?

ORAL

Like hot emeralds! About -- ?

JEFFREY

That would take us through lunch and dinner.

ORAL

We've gone through lunch and dinner before.

JEFFREY

I don't have lunch and dinner. Just tell me some more about these hand-crossed lovers.

ORAL

Jeffrey --

JEFFREY

It's all right.

ORAL

Sure?

JEFFREY

Who can resist?

ORAL

Maybe I shouldn't really be revealing any of this to you.

JEFFREY

You don't reveal things to me -- you share them. That's the nature of our nature. "Reveal" implies a surprise, something nasty, like "I've been seeing someone else much hairier than you -- and I like it." "Reveal" is what someone ugly does when they take off their clothes.

ORAL

I'll agree with you there.

JEFFREY

"Share," on the other hand -- respiratory, linked breaths. You're a linguist -- you should know these things. Didn't they teach you all this in Words for Nerds?

ORAL

I made a promise to Ms. Guild, that's all -- act with some discretion. You are familiar with discretion?

JEFFREY

Doesn't that require moral fiber? Your moral fiber: polyester -- in flame the moment something hot touches it. Now, tell me or not.

ORAL

Well, let me share it with you.

JEFFREY

Up it goes in flames!

ORAL

Ah, but who basks in the heat?

JEFFREY

Flushed, I'm sure. Now, on to the sororal story of Ms. Guilt.

ORAL

Guild! You have guilt, I have Guild.

JEFFREY

I do not have guilt -- You have guilt, I have a refined moral nature.

ORAL

I am so lucky to be in the presence.

They both pause. They both relax.

JEFFREY

Proceed: the story.

ORAL

I could only put together a little of the event. That this woman, Pallas, made it known how much she wanted Ms. Guild. That Ms. Guild is quite ambivalent but not turned off. That they seemed to have had a wonderful time.

JEFFREY

That's all?

ORAL

It's a start.

JEFFREY

I could have told you all that without reading the thing.

ORAL

How?

JEFFREY

Why else would our Ms. Guilt want it translated? Could have chucked the thing -- gone! -- but she aches to know.

ORAL

The first of many yieldings?

JEFFREY

Oral, don't you remember -- I distinctly remember a very reluctant "opening up" when I made my first overture to you.

ORAL

I was in the limbo stage --

JEFFREY

But what helped you finally accept the witty man standing in front of you? The excitement of giving in to the desire? My Argyle socks?

ORAL

You've never had Argyle socks!

JEFFREY

That means you looked me over from top to toe. "I like this man because he doesn't wear Argyle socks." Maybe all of that. But there was something else.

ORAL

What?

JEFFREY

What made you stay up until four AM in the bird-singing morning to work on this stuff?

ORAL

It's a job.

JEFFREY

A job. I've seen you finishing your "jobs" on the subway ten minutes before you arrive. You've never been quite this diligent.

ORAL

It's very well written. You can appreciate that.

JEFFREY

Well, if you won't give me the straight answer, I'll go straight to it --

JEFFREY stands behind ORAL, leans over to him, and punches a finger in his left pectoral, over his heart.

JEFFREY

That.

ORAL

What?

JEFFREY

That --

Jabs him in the left pectoral again.

ORAL

My logo?

Jabs.

JEFFREY

Cold.

ORAL

My pencil protector.

Jabs.

JEFFREY

Colder.

ORAL

Adam's rib.

Jabs.

JEFFREY

Luke, as in warm.

ORAL

The seat of all passions.

JEFFREY

Ah! The night you had dinner with me, and we went to the movies and held hands as timidly as any freshman jock and princess?

JEFFREY feints another jab at ORAL but instead place his hand over ORAL's heart.

JEFFREY

That was where you sat. I know you well enough to know that whatever demons haunt you, your heart eventually tells you enough truth to keep you honest. Your problem now --

ORAL

My problem?

JEFFREY

What makes you and mars you, my sweet prince, is that of late you seem deaf to your heart. Which is why I feel like I'm watching my best friend stand on a ship as it disappears over the horizon. It's not jealousy, really -- you've become cautious. With everything. With me especially. And when I see a glister of it as you tell me this story --

ORAL looks hang-dog, apologetic.

JEFFREY

That's not what I want.

JEFFREY reaches for the binder and takes out the manila folder with typed pages in it. Riffles through the pages.

JEFFREY

Where's that part you read to me? Here: "Today you were late for our morning coffee. You rushed in flushed and emphatic, breathing out apologies. But behind your 'I'm sorry' your face cleaved the light with your happiness at being there." Can you remember the last time your face "cleaved the light" in just that way?

ORAL takes the folder from JEFFREY's hand and puts it back in the binder.

JEFFREY

Not over the guilt coals -- really, I'm not. But I'd be lying -- taking us at a discount, really -- if I didn't tell you how angry I feel inside. I'm just telling you my heart.

ORAL

Just translating, huh?

JEFFREY

Toughest language to work with.

ORAL

I've got to go --

JEFFREY

Yes, right -- we're at that point. But I want you to remember something.

JEFFREY puts his hands together as the spiders.

JEFFREY

Remember skiing in Vermont? Remember how you wiped out so badly you lost your gloves in some glove-sucking mound of snow? And I sandwiched your hands between mine to warm them up, and gave you my gloves to wear back to the lodge? During that late afternoon light I like so much?

JEFFREY stands, takes out money.

JEFFREY

There are no synonyms.

ORAL

Wait.

ORAL holds up his hand, palm facing JEFFREY. JEFFREY hesitates, and then hands the money to ORAL and exits. Transition music.

* * * * *

Scene 7

HELEN GUILD's office. HELEN is looking over ORAL's typescript. The binder sits conspicuously on the desk. ORAL waits.

HELEN

A journal, yes -- the dates, other things --

ORAL

I need to check some alternate word choices, but I think it's fairly faithful to the original --

HELEN

How did you come to do this? Translating?

ORAL

Excuse me?

HELEN

How did you arrive at doing the work you do?

ORAL

Do you mean because of my name?

HELEN

Why freelance with an agency for -- whatever it is they pay you? Why not one of those people behind the president as he travels around the world, whispering diplomacies into his ear? A translator at the U.N.? Working overseas?

ORAL

I don't know -- I like this work -- it gives me a certain kind of freedom.

HELEN

Limited. Your work -- good, done quickly and well -- and you'll make enough for next month's rent. You haven't asked me to explain the work I do. Appraiser of photography -- not a collector or producer, just an -- accountant. Not what I would call the most essential of professions.

ORAL

I'm sure it has its merits --

HELEN

The diplomat -- appraising photographs has no use whatsoever. People frame what I tell them to buy, trade them like stocks, sometimes even admire them -- but all in a series of consciously small concentric orbits. It wasn't something I planned. Actually, I wanted to be on the stage -- my picture --

HELEN mimics Brando.

HELEN

"Coulda been a thespian." But that one high school drama teacher --

ORAL

And you believed him.

HELEN

Doesn't matter. So what else was I fit for?

ORAL

Things are fragile.

HELEN

Fit for dealing in second-hands. You didn't answer my question. Why not the foreign service, etcetera, etcetera?

ORAL

I don't know [exactly] --

HELEN

How much freedom really, Mr. Oral Timmins? Always hustling for work, never producing something of your own --

ORAL

I'm quite -- happy with [my life] --

HELEN

-- relegated to translating -- things -- like this --

ORAL

I haven't had as much enjoyment with language in a long time as I have had with a "thing" like this.

HELEN

And what is this "thing," Mr. Oral Timmins?

ORAL

I'm not sure I under[stand] -- it's --

HELEN

How can it be trusted? I often have to make judgments about authenticity -- money riding on the outcome. And with dispatch, I bring my best learning to bear, and people nod, say "um-hum," and pay. But so often -- nothing more than a good guess because nothing signs the air "Fake" or "Real." I dread that day when I say "Real" and someone -- rubbing his hands like a fly and smirking -- steps up and says, "Sorry, Fake, and here's the smoking gun." And then shoots me with it. So this "thing" -- where's the gun, what's to trust?

ORAL

The "gun" is in the words.

HELEN

Not an exact art, you said. What if you --

ORAL

Ms. Guild, either you trust what the messenger brings or you don't. There's not much in-between. It's also good not to kill the messenger.

HELEN

Tell me again what you think of the writing.

ORAL

The writing is the "gun."

HELEN

You already said that -- surface. Shoot me, I guess -- put it through my brain -- go on --

ORAL

I read it out loud -- to myself -- trying to forget a woman wrote it, as if it were some lost text, a scrap of a fragment of some buried scroll from a ghost with no fingerprints, okay?

And -- no gender -- simply heart to heart, to any heart, without a tilt to the X or Y chromosome. The gun? Why I trust? It spoke to me about me. It -- gave me -- pause --

HELEN

You trust that?

ORAL

I don't have a choice.

HELEN

It's a woman --

ORAL

I know.

HELEN

Don't you wonder --

ORAL

Wonder what?

HELEN

Ball in my court?

ORAL

Yes.

HELEN

By the end of the week?

ORAL

By the end of the week.

HELEN gets up and moves toward the door, as if to let him out.

HELEN

On Friday, then.

ORAL doesn't move immediately to the door.

HELEN

What?

ORAL

Do you remember our covenant?

HELEN

I do.

ORAL

I said that I would promise you the best my head and heart could offer.

HELEN

So --

ORAL

I had --

HELEN

Go on.

ORAL

I had a dream about her last night.

HELEN

A dream.

ORAL

Actually, more like a visitation, I think. I worked late, fell asleep at my desk.

HELEN

And?

ORAL

She spoke English in the dream --

HELEN

What did she look like?

ORAL

Funny -- I don't remember her face, but her voice --

HELEN

Her voice --

ORAL

Saturated. Like a white -- like a white porcelain bowl filled with these scarlet raspberries. I remember feeling that her voice wouldn't hurt me. And the hands. When you stood at the window yesterday, when I was reading, you did this.

ORAL demonstrates the "spider."

ORAL

Now, tucked that away under the stairs because it came back in the dream -- only she told me it happened because you didn't have any gloves and your hands were cold. She said you'd put your hands together like this, like spiders --

HELEN

We never did anything like that. We never did anything like that.

ORAL

Ah -- it, um, it must have come from somewhere else - I'm sorry --

HELEN

No, no -- this far, why not more?

ORAL

You don't have to --

HELEN

On the last day, as I was getting on the plane, I walked through the gate and down the runway to board --

ORAL

It's none of my --

HELEN

-- I did not want to turn around, but I did. She was standing to the side of the door, which had a full-length window in the wall. She had her hand pressed against the glass. I turned around and walked back against the press of people. And I placed my hand against the glass as well. That moment --

HELEN stops. A silence descends. HELEN moves to the door.

HELEN

On second thought -- on more than second thought -- I don't want you to finish this.

ORAL

Don't finish this?

HELEN

Are you a parrot?

ORAL

I can't just stop --

HELEN

I'll make sure you're well paid.

ORAL

It's not the money -- I want to finish [it] --

HELEN

I don't. I know enough --

ORAL

You don't know the half of what's unfinished!

HELEN

And that means what, Mr. Timmins?

ORAL

You don't know what "this" is, do you?

HELEN

What are you talking about?

ORAL

When you left, you had a piece of glass between you. In that last moment --

HELEN

Your dream continues --

ORAL

-- it wasn't flesh, it was separation -- this breaks the glass --

ORAL takes her hand and presses it against his.

ORAL

"This" is a hand, her hand --

HELEN snaps her hand back. ORAL retreats.

ORAL

I'm sorry -- I don't have -- Damn! Damn! I'll send an invoice --

ORAL leaves. HELEN stares. She then crosses to the desk and places the binder on one corner of her desk. Then she picks it up, spins it, then puts it back down in the same place, but slams it down. She makes a gesture as if she had just let go of a balloon. She sits, then gets up and exits, carrying ORAL's translation. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 8

JEFFREY's workplace -- an office shared by three people who work for a children's book publisher, which includes a bunch of stuffed animals on JEFFREY's desk, including a teddy bear, preferably blue in color and wearing a cape like a superhero. Workspaces for UTILITY 1 (PIPER) and UTILITY 2 (SID), JEFFREY's co-workers.

JEFFREY enters. PIPER and SID look up.

PIPER & SID

An "Oral."

They nod simultaneously, like Laurel and Hardy. JEFFREY struggles out of his overcoat, slams it down onto his chair.

JEFFREY

What are we working on?

PIPER

We are working up the story of Crusty Bonecrusher.

SID

Crusty B.

JEFFREY

Crusty -- Crusty Bonecrusher --

SID

That's what we are working on --

PIPER

But you are working on --

SID

Working out --

PIPER

Working in and out --

JEFFREY

Ha. Ha. Ha. Piper. Diaper.

PIPER

Stones and sticks --

SID

Notice he ignores me.

JEFFREY

Ha. Ha. Ha. Sid. Retar-did.

SID

May give their licks --

SID & PIPER

But names'll never hurt us.

JEFFREY picks up his coat, hangs it straight on the back of his chair, then sits. He fidgets. PIPER and SID watch, amused. JEFFREY gets up, hesitates, then walks around to the front of his desk, drops to the ground, and starts doing push-ups. Not very well. And not very many until he belly-flops to the ground, spent, arms out to side.

SID gets up, goes to JEFFREY's desk and picks up the teddy bear wearing the superhero cape.

SID

It's time for Crusty Bonecrusher to come to the aid of his creator.

SID kneels, puts CRUSTY on the floor next to JEFFREY's head so that JEFFREY can see it. JEFFREY and CRUSTY eye each other for a moment. They stare. Then SID moves CRUSTY's arm so that CRUSTY punches JEFFREY in the face, then sits back, waits. CRUSTY does it again.

JEFFREY still does not respond. Instead, he levers himself up to do, at most, two or three more push-ups, then collapses. CRUSTY waits, then punches JEFFREY again.

JEFFREY

All right you flea-bitten bag of synthetic --

JEFFREY grabs CRUSTY. CRUSTY resists. And the two of them roll on the floor in a wrestling match, with JEFFREY switching voices between CRUSTY and himself. CRUSTY's voice, if described in a phrase, would be a cigar-and-whiskey voice.

JEFFREY

I'm not gonna take --

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

Yer gonna take it and like it --

JEFFREY

Yeah, booger breath?

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

Yeah, weenie toast!

JEFFREY

Blue punk.

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

Dweeb dick.

JEFFREY

Cotton crotch.

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

Suck face.

Finally, they come to a stand-off -- that is, JEFFREY holds CRUSTY at arm's length, and they eye each other warily.

SID gets up, goes to JEFFREY's desk, and grabs two more animals, tosses one to PIPER. Now the three toys face JEFFREY, and when SID and PIPER speak, they speak for the toys, using any kind of voice they want.

JEFFREY

What? What?

SID

It looks like him and Oral --

PIPER

Had another quarrel.

SID

Good!

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

You been shakin' and he ain't been bakin'.

JEFFREY

Crusty!

JEFFREY speaks to the other animals.

JEFFREY

Cut it out, you guys --

JEFFREY (AS CRUSTY)

Get wise, shmuck -- yer outta luck --

PIPER

Let's get choral --

SID

For Oral --

SID & PIPER

The luckless shmuck who needs a --

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

Yer offendin' my ears!

The tune for the following "ballad" has to be improvised, just as it might be in an improv performance -- it's not based on any known song.

SID

I've got a linguist in my heart

PIPER

But I want his tongue in my ear

SID & PIPER

I want some multilingual lingering
'Round my front door and my rear

JEFFREY

My sentence he can diagram

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

My clause he can subordinate

JEFFREY, SID, & PIPER

I want a good irregular verb
That we can conjugate

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

But you only get shit
From this little twit --

JEFFREY

I do, my Crusty, I do --

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

So dump the little chump
Get yerself a hump --

JEFFREY

A little whoop-ti-doo?

SID & PIPER

Yoo-hoo!

JEFFREY looks at them all.

JEFFREY

No can do.

PIPER

You love him?

JEFFREY

I do.

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

You just need a screw.

JEFFREY

That's true.

SID

The world according to Crusty -- a screw makes everything new.

JEFFREY holds CRUSTY aloft.

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

'Sbetter than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick!

JEFFREY

And it's better than a poke in your stick with a sharp eye.

Show over. SID, PIPER, and JEFFREY hold their animals, look around.

JEFFREY

Sorry.

SID

Not a problem. Is it a problem, Piper?

PIPER

Not a problem, Sid.

JEFFREY

I'm always bringing it in --

PIPER

Look, if we ever do a Crusty for adults, we got the show all mapped out. And besides, at least speaking for myself -- at least you have someone to kvetch about.

SID

You sentimental fools!

SID (PET)

Oh my, he's so full of --

SID

Don't listen to her!

SID (PET)

-- braggadocio and bravado, don't it just make you wanna weep for his lonely --

JEFFREY (CRUSTY)

Cut it out, youse wimps! Life ain't nothin' but a bump and grind, with mostly not enough bump and too much grind -- you'd think ya kept yer brains in yer pelvises -- just suck it up and die with a hard chin and no pee stains on yer underwear -- what more do ya want than that?

PIPER

So saith.

The three of them do a "belly bump" with their animals, and then animals dance around as if they are all in the end zone after a touchdown. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 9

Park and bench. HELEN enters with ORAL's translation and sits. PALLAS enters. The convention is that what HELEN reads becomes what they are saying to each other.

HELEN

Pallas -- I need you to talk again.

PALLAS

Talk.

HELEN

Very cunning of you -- force me to find a translator who cares enough to make a fool of himself, just to make sure I go the whole distance to you.

PALLAS

I didn't plan that.

HELEN

I doubt it.

PALLAS

But he has turned out well. Read.

HELEN

"May."

PALLAS

May.

HELEN

"You had just arrived."

PALLAS

You had just arrived.

HELEN

Ah, yes -- set me. Soothe me.

PALLAS

You had just arrived.

HELEN

I had just arrived. I tried a few German phrases --

PALLAS

And you looked immensely relieved when I comforted you in English.

HELEN

Comforted, yes.

PALLAS

Out of all the details in that moment --

HELEN

So many details, Pallas --

PALLAS

What struck me was the way your cheekbone slightly rouged caught the sunlight off the leaded windows.

HELEN

A moment of tenderness.

PALLAS

A moment saved from the mercenary logic of the moment. Have you ever felt anything like that?

HELEN

I did with you. "Here. Now. Here and now -- "

PALLAS

"This is what it's about."

HELEN

My cheek, sketched by the light --

PALLAS

Lifted me in just that way, said "Now."

HELEN

Passion, yes.

PALLAS

Passion, yes! I admit --

HELEN

I admit, too -- that for the rest of the meeting I had to force myself to concentrate on that other business between us.

PALLAS

But also, surprisingly, patience --

HELEN

Yes.

PALLAS

As if a siege had been lifted --

HELEN

And all the anxiety could escape.

PALLAS

Dissolve.

HELEN

Passion and patience --

PALLAS

It made for an interesting afternoon.

PALLAS takes the pages and selects one; HELEN reads.

PALLAS

Remember the child and the balloon? We didn't talk about it when we sat down again at our table, but I had learned something about you from reading your face as you watched. This above all: You could be reached.

HELEN turns to the last page in the stack.

PALLAS

I can only guess how hard it is to trust a stranger to know you by translating me. But if you have taken that chance -

HELEN

-- then a deeper chance to know much deeper.

PALLAS

This is not easy love -

HELEN

-- this opening of solitudes. Sex, gender, the entire
constructed self --

PALLAS

-- all lean against the offer. But here it is. It makes no
difference in the beginning and the end --

HELEN

What shape the skin takes or how the equipment works.

PALLAS

What matters --

HELEN

What matters is the company we choose --

PALLAS

The company that keeps our hearts alive and our eyes full
of light.

PALLAS

I want you for this journey --

HELEN

I want this journey --

PALLAS

Do you assent?

HELEN

Do I assent? Thank you.

PALLAS

For the company.

HELEN

And the light.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Park and bench, this time with a payphone nearby. Sitting on the bench is ORAL with JEFFREY.

JEFFREY

Twice in one day.

ORAL

Will miracles never cease.

JEFFREY

You sounded very upset on the phone.

ORAL

I've been sitting here for the better part of the morning. This phone has been used exactly four times: twice to make lunch dates (I -- you -- you and I -- were one of those), once to make conversation so low I couldn't hear it, though the caller laughed a lot. And once to yell at someone in a foreign language that spit a lot.

JEFFREY

What happened?

ORAL

Great device, the telephone. Closes the distances, opens the world. Puts people in touch.

ORAL gets up, goes to the phone, picks up the receiver.

ORAL

Such a hopeful device, really. Bell -- what a great name, really, for a guy dedicated to making something that would allow deaf people to hear -- you punch in a code, and in the flicker of an electronic moment you suddenly have a path open up to exchange yourself with someone else. A translator's dream. Simple physics. Simple, simple physics. It's what lies at either end that mucks up the elegance.

ORAL hangs up the receiver.

ORAL

I mucked up, Jeffrey, pure and simple. I really mucked it up.

JEFFREY

What happened?

ORAL

Straight lines open, number dialed. I told her about the dream. But it was all wrong -- the hands touching, it didn't have anything to do with gloves. When she was leaving, Pallas put her hand on a window that separated them, in a gesture of goodbye. Ms. Guild put her hand against the other side of the glass. Semaphore of farewell. How was I supposed to know --

JEFFREY

Know what? Am I feeding you the right lines to keep this conversation going?

ORAL

It's all because of you.

JEFFREY

You must explain my wonderful influence.

ORAL

After she told me about the hands, she followed up by saying that she didn't want me to finish. I don't know exactly what happened -- but something in me became very -- fierce.

JEFFREY

Crusty Bonecrusher.

ORAL

I couldn't accept her -- dismissal. So, I said something like "You don't know what's unfinished," and I grabbed her hand.

JEFFREY

You grabbed [her hand] --

ORAL

Right -- put it against mine, and proceeded to lecture her that what Pallas -- as if I know her! -- that what Pallas was

doing was giving them a way to break the glass. A little sanctimonious?

JEFFREY

Hmmm. And I --

ORAL

This morning, at Alishia's. One thing you never do, you gunsel, is give up. I swing between a bit moody and a lot moody, and you just keep knocking on the door and saying "But there's this matter of a man I love -- " When you wouldn't take my hand this morning, it stung -- but it also made me realize how long it had been since I had actually felt you. So when Ms. Guild decided to end it, it was your hand that made me grab hers.

JEFFREY

Sanctimonious? Naw! Naw. Mawkish.

ORAL

What?

JEFFREY in a "Big Daddy" voice.

JEFFREY

"I smell the odor of mawkishness." Believe me, I love the compliment, and it's true, I do keep knocking because I love what's behind Door Number Three. But please! Not opera. What do you want me to do now? A little gush? A hand on your shoulder and a squeeze? So you can come away a little humbled? You think a little hand-touching this morning would have made up for -- I want to see you next week, when this moment has passed.

ORAL

So I'm not sincere --

JEFFREY

Always sincere. But always hedged around, guarded, until it busts -- and then drowns all unsuspecting bystanders. Sincerity comes daily -- not a gesture, not an explosion --

A MAN walks to the phone. Not slovenly, not neatly dressed.

MAN

Either of you gentlemen have coins for the phone? I got fifties and others but no silverado for the jingle.

JEFFREY

I think -- here --

MAN

Many and mighty thanks.

Picks up the phone, dials, waits, gets an answer. He speaks very loudly during the scene and draws all attention to himself.

ORAL

What should I do?

MAN

Jimbo?

ORAL

Should I go back and -

MAN

Get Jimbo for me.

ORAL

-- properly abase myself?

JEFFREY

You've already reached demeaning. By all means, move on to abasement.

MAN

Hey, my man -- Yeah, yeah, my action is crap, too, my Carib amigo. Look, I got to cut out today --

ORAL

I want to finish what I started --

MAN

What?

JEFFREY

Sounds like she needs to as well.

MAN

Now, look, I've covered your sawtoothed ass many times,
and I think you owe -- yeah, owe!

ORAL makes a "T" with his hands.

ORAL

Time out.

MAN

Don't pull sanctimony on me. I know your secrets, and
they'll die with me, unless of course you try to take my head
off, and then I'll puree your life quicker than ginsu knives --
Call waiting? You got fucking call waiting? -- All right, take
it. Jesus Christ's Buddha tits.

MAN looks over at JEFFREY and ORAL.

MAN

The quality of help today.

JEFFREY

It's horrible.

MAN

He's from St. Croix, St. Crotch -- what more need I say?

ORAL

What more?

The voice comes back on. From here on in, the MAN can, through facial
and body gestures, include JEFFREY and ORAL in the conversation.

MAN

Are you done with your fancy-dick call waiting? Who was
it? Oh, now you got secrets you ain't puttin' in the hopper.
Fine, fine. I don't have time to help you feel more important
than you really are. I just got to cut out today, and I need
your lyin' ass to sing a song to the boss. Wait, wait, wait just

a minute for the love of the Virgin Mary's gynecologist. Are you refusing? Call waiting again? How fucking convenient.
(to JEFFREY and ORAL)

He'll give in --

JEFFREY

Yeah?

MAN

He always does. Just watch. The magic of his balls in my hand. Watch.

The conversation returns.

MAN

No more call waiting, all right. Listen closely, my friend -- I only got four words to say to you: Jo-se-phi-na. Actually, let me add two more words to that: under-eighteen-Jo-se-phi-na. Just six little words. That's better.

MAN makes a squeezing gesture to ORAL and JEFFREY.

MAN

I only need about an hour. Yeah, yeah, I'll call you when I'm done.

MAN hangs up and turns to ORAL and JEFFREY.

MAN

You know, sometimes you gotta make a move to make sure you don't have to do something later that's worse.

MAN balances a quarter on the tip of one of his fingers.

MAN

Got this left over -- want it?

JEFFREY

Put it in your trust fund.

MAN

Well, then, this is how I'm gonna go spend my hour, right out to the fingertip. She'll love it.

MAN exits.

JEFFREY

Another visitation?

ORAL

An annunciation.

JEFFREY

Of what?

ORAL

I don't know. But there it is -- with a dirty joke.

JEFFREY

Single entendre. What are you going to do?

ORAL

I don't know. Anything salvageable?

JEFFREY

I don't know. Why would you want to go back?

ORAL

Moral fiber? Okay, okay, I want to convince her not to give up listening to Pallas.

JEFFREY

Because -- ?

ORAL

Because I want to tell her -- because I want to tell her -- and talk about sanctimonious lingo! -- I want to tell her not to let caution defer the sunlight.

JEFFREY

Whew!

ORAL

Because knowing is better than regret.

JEFFREY

Better. But translate.

ORAL reaches into JEFFREY's pocket, takes out a quarter, and balances it on his finger.

ORAL

Right out to the fingertip.

ORAL palms the coin in JEFFREY's hand.

ORAL

I love Jeffrey. And Helen for Pallas.

JEFFREY

Brief. Succinct. No stitch dropped. And gives me back the quarter. Lunch?

ORAL goes to the phone, dials his number.

ORAL

I am famished.

JEFFREY

You have been famished a long time.

ORAL

And you, too.

JEFFREY

Then I declare it's time for health.

ORAL

I agree. Messages.

ORAL listens.

ORAL

She wants to see me this afternoon, at two o'clock.

JEFFREY

Oh? Lost appetite?

ORAL hangs up the handset.

ORAL

Actually, no. Sharper. Let's go.

They leave. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 11

HELEN in her office with ORAL.

HELEN

Sit down. It's all right -- nothing's rigged. I want you to deliver something for me.

HELEN takes out a letter from the desk, indicates for him to read it.

ORAL

Are you sure?

HELEN

Yes -- sure. At least sure that that is what I want to say. Or what I want our common German poet to say for me. Not so sure of the rest.

ORAL

You said, "Deliver"?

HELEN

To Berlin.

ORAL

You want me to go to Berlin?

HELEN

Expect you to go. I know you don't have any other clients at the moment because I called the agency and had them re-assign your other work. I told them that I needed your undivided attention for a very important project. You see, I've been busy since we last -- engaged. There's a ticket waiting for you at the airport for a late afternoon flight. Included in that package are two return tickets.

HELEN slides a paper over to ORAL.

HELEN

This is an important phone number and address -- don't lose it.

ORAL

Should I eat this once I'm done with it?

HELEN

You mean eat my words?

ORAL

Just kidding.

HELEN

Neither of us have time for that.

ORAL

Stupid question, maybe --

HELEN

It is a day for them.

ORAL

Why send me? Why not go yourself?

HELEN

She sent me a journal -- now I'm sending one back. I don't want to make it too easy -- and besides, I need to ease [into] --

ORAL

Turned into someone else's words -- what an appropriate [fate] --

HELEN

Will you go?

ORAL's body language says "yes."

ORAL

But what if she's not there?

HELEN

I called.

ORAL

You spoke with [her] --

HELEN

No. A message left -- so, it's a crap-shoot. But no more hedging. Besides, you said you haven't been to Germany in a while -- here's a trip, gratis.

ORAL

When do I leave?

HELEN

In four hours. Sorry. Impulse commanded.

ORAL

And I will be staying --

HELEN

Booked you into the same hotel where I stayed.

ORAL

And what did you tell her?

HELEN

That you would meet her at high noon at the café, bearing an important gift -- that being you, of course. That is your letter of introduction to Pallas Worte from the Court of Helen Guild. Note the coat of arms: two blue flames. We're crossing borders here, so you will get to do some diplomatic work after all.

ORAL

And my portfolio?

HELEN

Up to your discretion. You know all you need to know.

ORAL

Something more specific, please. I really don't want to screw this up.

HELEN

This, then: I want her to finish translating the journal to me.
I like your work, but --

HELEN indicates the letter.

HELEN

Might as well bring in the heavy artillery.

ORAL

You won't need to lay in much of a siege.

HELEN

How about a quote to impress?

ORAL

"Kunst-Werke sind von einer unendlichen Einsamkeit..."

HELEN

"Only love can apprehend and hold them."

ORAL

I guess I better get going.

HELEN

Yes.

HELEN gives him the binder. ORAL offers her a handshake. Instead, she takes it and puts it against hers in "spider style." Transition music.

* * * * *

Scene 12

ORAL's apartment; JEFFREY is there. ORAL has a small suitcase.

JEFFREY

Three times in one day.

ORAL

I've heard good things come in threes.

JEFFREY

This doesn't feel so lucky.

ORAL

I don't know what the flight times are, but I will call you and let know when we're coming back.

JEFFREY

It'd be a shame to go to all this trouble and come back with the same baggage you left with.

ORAL

I've been stung by a metaphor.

JEFFREY

Isn't this a little above and beyond?

ORAL

I don't know -- just feels right. Why not take the charge and follow it through? Jeffrey, Jeffrey. Love of my life. Yes, love of my life. I am going to return.

JEFFREY

To me.

ORAL

To you. Not a question. But I also want to come back to something else. I don't know what, but -- clean. Simple. Simpler. Less. And it can't be done without you. I have to go. Lock up, okay? I will call you with all the details about arrivals and stuff. I want you there to welcome me home.

They embrace, kiss. ORAL leaves. JEFFREY takes a coin out of his pocket and flips it, catches it, and slaps it on the back of his hand. He looks at the result, smiles slightly, puts the coin at the end of his finger, and then pockets it. Transition music.

* * * * *

Scene 13

An airport terminal for international arrivals. HELEN is seated; JEFFREY enters and sits, but then immediately starts pacing around.

JEFFREY

I do not wait well.

HELEN acknowledges him but does not answer.

JEFFREY

It also makes me talkative. I hope you don't mind. I'll keep it low and to myself. "Danke schön, ooh darling, danke schön..."

HELEN looks at him.

JEFFREY

"Edelweiss, edelweiss..."

JEFFREY pauses.

JEFFREY

"Wunderbar, wunderbar..."

JEFFREY pauses.

JEFFREY

"Welcome, bienvenue, welcome..."

JEFFREY's at a loss for another song, then starts singing again.

JEFFREY

"Danke schön, ooh darling, danke schön..."

HELEN

You're singing German.

JEFFREY

I'm trying to remember all the songs I know with German in them. Do you know any? I wish I knew more songs. I only know parts of songs.

HELEN

I can't seem to distract myself when I'm nervous.

JEFFREY

I can't seem to do anything else when I'm nervous. I hate how everything inside feels like a Slinky going downstairs.

HELEN

You're waiting for someone.

JEFFREY

Impatiently. You?

HELEN

For friends. From Berlin.

JEFFREY

So am I. What a coincidence.

JEFFREY starts pacing again.

JEFFREY

How does that go: "Du bist mein..."

JEFFREY stops pacing.

JEFFREY

From Berlin?

HELEN

Yes.

JEFFREY

Berlin. Do you like word games?

HELEN

What?

JEFFREY

Could I try a word association with you?

HELEN

What?

JEFFREY

A word association. It'll pass the time -- and keep me from singing.

HELEN

I suppose airport serial killers usually don't sing German show tunes. All right.

JEFFREY

Oral. Hygiene. What does it make you think of?

HELEN

You know -- ?

JEFFREY

-- Helen Guild? Not directly.

HELEN

I don't know you.

JEFFREY

Jeffrey Mitchell. The significant other of one Oral Timmins.

HELEN

He never told me -- That's why -- !

JEFFREY

"Danke schön -- "

HELEN

"Ooh, darling, danke schön -- "

JEFFREY

Sing it to me, Wayne Newton.

VOICE

Flight 422 from Frankfurt, with connections from Berlin, has arrived at the International Terminal. Passengers will be passing through customs shortly.

HELEN and JEFFREY look at each other, then face the audience, as if facing the doors through which ORAL and PALLAS will come. The sounds of the airport rise in volume as the lights quickly go to black.

When The Military Bares Its Breast...

(Full Title: When The Military Bares Its Breast,
The Eagle Finds Its True Devotion]

DESCRIPTION

Carver is back home in the land she defended after doing her tours. It is not a place that has a place for her.

CHARACTERS

- Carver
- Sindle and all the others

CLOTHING

CARVER wears some combination of lace-up boots, camo or cargo pants, a sleeveless shirt, another overshirt, a hoodie -- all Salvation Army issue.

TECH

It would nice if there was some way to batch dial a group of cellphones in the audience, arranged for beforehand with selected audience members.

* * * * *

Scene 1

A space outside a city hall in a moderately sized city -- and two people who tumble into this space in great distress.

Well, CARVER is in distress, and SINDLE is in distress over CARVER's distress.

CARVER enters as if she's escaping from SINDLE's grasp, or as if SINDLE finally let her go when they reached this open place, wherever it is, whatever it is.

CARVER breathes deeply, ragged. SINDLE watches, waits.

SINDLE

You settled down?

CARVER

Sindle.

SINDLE

Are you?

SINDLE

I didn't hurt anyone.

SINDLE

No you didn't. Except for maybe some eardrums.

CARVER

Sometimes it takes a lot of volume to make sense.

SINDLE

What makes you think you were making sense?

CARVER half-laughs.

CARVER

Because I was loud.

SINDLE

You may need to re-think that equation.

CARVER

I may have to re-think that equation. But I was making sense.

SINDLE

But you never got to your point.

CARVER

Sindle -- was that a real taser he pulled on me?

SINDLE

Why do you think I wrestled you out of the meeting room?

CARVER

A taser, in this town.

SINDLE

You didn't need it.

CARVER

I've felt worse.

SINDLE

In-country, sure -- but this isn't Fallujah.

CARVER

Not on the outside, no it isn't. But that taser? Makes the places feel the same.

SINDLE

I don't know how to answer you.

CARVER

Thank me again for saving your life in the city of mosques.

SINDLE

Every day I breathe.

CARVER

Semper fee fi fo fum.

An active silence.

CARVER

I was loud. Too loud.

SINDLE

You were screaming "danger."

CARVER

Because the in-country over there has oozed to the in-country over here. I hate it.

SINDLE

You couldn't do it any other way, which is unfortunate.

CARVER

For their eardrums.

SINDLE

Yeah.

CARVER

They think they're safe. Safer, because now they've got this --

SINDLE

They hunger for "safe," sweetheart, but that's not what they think. You, loud loud loud, just remind them how scared they are and how deep they aren't admitting it.

CARVER

Fear makes them stupid.

SINDLE

The same way it makes you stupid.

CARVER

Different stupid.

SINDLE

That's what all good prophets say: my stupid is better than yours.

CARVER

Thanks for hustling me out of there.

SINDLE

I knew you could handle the taser -- I just didn't want to handle you after you handled it, so out we went.

CARVER

The things we've seen.

SINDLE

The things still yet to see.

CARVER

Think they'll let me back in? I wasn't finished.

SINDLE

A shared beer sounds like a better option.

CARVER hesitates.

SINDLE

Make it boilermakers.

CARVER goes back into the meeting. SINDLE follows.

Transition: "Fallujah" by Knut from Terraformer [<http://v1.audiodo.com/t/fallujah--knut/591cf5979996f7f/> to hear the song]

* * * * *

Scene 2

CARVER is arguing with a POLICE OFFICER.

CARVER

What the hell is this?

OFFICER

A 50-caliber gun. Machine gun.

CARVER

On top of an armored personnel carrier?

OFFICER

Yeah. Thanks to the Department of Defense.

CARVER

Who approved this?

OFFICER

The mayor. Looks pretty good in front of city hall.

CARVER

It never came up at the meeting.

OFFICER

Didn't have to -- mayor's got discretionary funds.

CARVER

But he's got no discretion.

OFFICER

Matter of opinion.

CARVER

We're just a podunk police department.

OFFICER

Terror can strike anywhere.

CARVER

You're right -- I'm terrified of you. Of that.

OFFICER

Shouldn't be -- we're the good guys.

CARVER

How can you be the good guys if you have that? Because once you have it, you'll want to use it.

OFFICER

Naw.

CARVER

Oh ye of little faith.

OFFICER

We'll just run it in the July 4 parade.

CARVER

No you won't. You're going to kill somebody with that.

OFFICER

No we won't.

CARVER spreads open her arms.

OFFICER

What are you doing now?

CARVER

You should just shoot me now so we can get the blood sacrifice out of the way.

OFFICER

You just should shut up and move on.

CARVER

How can I do either one? Do it now -- don't leave me in suspense -- don't leave you in suspense.

OFFICER

It doesn't have any bullets.

CARVER

You mean in it?

OFFICER

It's not loaded.

CARVER

But it's got bullets?

OFFICER

Of course we got bullets.

CARVER

Would you shoot me if it was loaded?

OFFICER

I have no reason to shoot you.

CARVER

That's never stopped one of your tribe.

OFFICER

You should move the fuck along.

CARVER

You didn't answer my question.

OFFICER

I'm not answering your question.

CARVER

Do you know what a 50-caliber round can do to a body? It's five inches long. You know I know. What if the terrorists came down Main Street right now, you with no bullets and only your pistol and taser?

OFFICER

I'd throw you at them.

CARVER

Because I could explode.

OFFICER

You've been an IED ever since you got back from your tours.

CARVER

Get rid of it now and save your soul.

OFFICER

They won't take it back -- it's DoD surplus.

CARVER

Our tax dollars at work.

CARVER flings her arms open even more.

CARVER

Get rid of the surplus.

OFFICER gently pulls them down to her sides.

OFFICER

We gotta save the village idiot for something better.

CARVER

What's better than being a blood sacrifice?

OFFICER

Go home. Go find Sindle.

CARVER

I'll bring this up at the next meeting.

OFFICER

It's already been bought and paid for.

CARVER

You mean you're bought and paid for --

OFFICER

You're straining my patience.

CARVER

That's the real problem -- the whole department, him in the corner office, you're all bought, you're all paid for, no better than mercenaries.

OFFICER

My Christian duty tells me to ignore every word you're saying.

CARVER

Exactly.

CARVER grabs the grips of an imaginary .50-caliber Browning machine gun and lets fly several rounds at OFFICER, her body responding to the recoil, her voice mimicking the sharp crack of the rounds.

CARVER

Feel anything?

OFFICER

Go home.

CARVER

You need to begin to learn how to feel something about this.

OFFICER

You are now bordering on something I don't want you to border on. Go.

CARVER flings her arms open.

CARVER

Last chance.

OFFICER

Pass. Go.

CARVER

Get out of jail free.

CARVER spins in place like a Sufi.

CARVER

If only it was that eeeeeaaaassssyyyy. Save your soul!

CARVER folds over in mirthless laughter.

CARVER

Merrily merrily merrily merrily life is but a dream.

Transition: "The Massacre in Fallujah" by Avskum from Uppror Underifran.

* * * * *

Scene 3

OFFICER now becomes a WW II anti-aircraft gun aimed at the sky.

CARVER

Behold this hunk of crap. Ecce crap.

GUN

I'm not crap.

CARVER

Nothing but crap scrap metal.

GUN

As a veteran you should be more respectful.

CARVER

Of what?

GUN

I shot down lots of Jap planes.

CARVER

Jap planes.

GUN

I defended my country!

CARVER

You killed people. They were called Japs.

GUN

No choice.

CARVER

Should've melted you down, turned you into something useful. But no, in their infinite wisdom, they plant you here.

GUN

What's wrong with here?

CARVER

Look over there.

GUN

It's a nice park, soccer, dog run --

CARVER

You don't get it.

GUN

You're the one talking to a World War II anti-aircraft gun.

CARVER

They put you in front of the day care center.

GUN

So?

CARVER

The day care center.

GUN

So?

CARVER raises her arms.

CARVER

I wish they would shoot me now.

GUN

What's the problem?

CARVER

I wish they would shoot me now.

GUN

They've got me angled up nicely into the sky, they repaint me every year for veterans day --

CARVER

You're a weapon of destruction.

GUN

Exactly.

CARVER

Planted outside the entrance to the place where dozens of kids pass you by every day.

GUN

I still don't get you. The kids should know.

CARVER

It's better if they're taught to forget.

GUN

I've got nothing to be ashamed of! And neither do the guys who kicked me back and poured fire into the sky.

CARVER drops her arms and hangs her head.

GUN

But you -- that's what it is, isn't it? You're ashamed.

CARVER

Every day.

GUN

Of what?

CARVER

Of what I caused.

GUN

You were in service, don't forget. In Fallujah, of all places.

CARVER

In service to my own stupidity.

GUN

The best the country has to offer --

CARVER

Me?

GUN

Protect and defend.

CARVER

I'm the best this country has to offer to the world?

GUN

You kept the nation safe.

CARVER

The empire.

GUN

You did your part.

CARVER

I have been crippled, just like you, spiked at an impossible angle. My beliefs broke my bones. I am rusted into place.

GUN

People think you talk too much.

CARVER

I didn't pass by you every day, like the children that go into that building, but I got it injected into my veins just the same.

GUN

You talk too much because you think too much.

CARVER

The military needle in the veins every day, the patriotic Schedule 1 drug mainlined. Yellow ribbons. Decals on the cars. Support the troops.

GUN

We shouldn't do this?

CARVER

Army Strong. The few, the proud.

GUN

So we shouldn't do this?

CARVER

Always 100% on watch. Be all that you can [be] --

GUN

Answer me!

CARVER

No we shouldn't.

GUN

Yes we should.

CARVER

No.

GUN

Yes, because it's all good --

CARVER

No.

GUN

It's all for the good.

CARVER

No it's not, I wish I could say yes, but I gotta say no. And they soak it up every day by looking at you as they walk into that building.

GUN

So I'm turning 'em into little butchers, eh?

CARVER

No, just softening 'em up, making the indoctrine part of the air they breathe.

GUN

The indoctrine!

CARVER

This is so exhausting.

GUN

Then you should give it a rest, friend, like everyone suggests.

CARVER sits down, legs crossed.

GUN

I'd be careful doing that -- not every dog goes to the dog run.

CARVER

Good for them. They're my compatriots.

GUN

Your entourage of freely shitting dogs.

CARVER kneels, faces GUN.

CARVER

The indoctrine.

GUN

What.

CARVER

That dying for your country has more majesty than living for it. That the country, right or wrong, is always right, and if you don't think it's right, then you're wrong.

GUN

What did you see over there on your tours?

CARVER

Did you ever think of the Japs?

GUN

With every round.

CARVER

Did you ever think of the Japs' faces?

GUN

I could only give them one face. What did you see?

CARVER

Did you ever let your imagination fill in the spaces between the rounds?

GUN

I couldn't.

CARVER

I couldn't stop.

GUN

I couldn't ever.

CARVER

I couldn't stop seeing faces.

GUN

I think you should shut up now.

CARVER

I couldn't get enough patriotic needle in me to keep things faceless.

GUN

Japs attacked us, and so they deserved --

CARVER

We kill conscience to make killing possible.

GUN

We had the right to defend. The security of the nation.

CARVER

But where lived compassion in the Christian nation.

CARVER gives a mirthless laugh, makes some dismissive gestures.

CARVER

Oh, you should ignore me -- I am an unreliable veteran because conscience has turned me to the dark side. To a coward. A traitor. A treason. I am trying to be needle-free. I am boring and full of rage. I am exhausted.

CARVER climbs painfully to her feet, checks her pants for dog shit.

CARVER

Dog-poop-less, I believe.

GUN

How long a lifeline do you think you have?

CARVER

Not long if I let you sit pretty out here leaking all your Jap-plane greatest-generation memories.

GUN

No matter how loud you shout, you're not going to change anything.

CARVER

If I don't shout, I die even faster. I'm going to submit a petition to the council.

GUN

For what?

CARVER

For having you removed.

GUN

You wouldn't dare!

CARVER

I'll lose, like you suggest -- but then you never know.

GUN

You can't get rid of me!

CARVER

Maybe even the rest of the war memorials in this park, too.

GUN

You can't.

CARVER

"In perpetual memory of" -- it's horrible.

GUN

They won't.

CARVER

Probably.

GUN

They won't abandon me, abandon us.

CARVER

Probably. But shake things up! Spill the salt!

GUN

Families offended!

CARVER

Prick the slimy collective brain --

GUN

Like crapping on --

CARVER

-- rummage in its guttural id --

GUN

-- on a headstone!

CARVER

-- and we'll see what pops. Bam!

CARVER slaps her forehead.

CARVER

Like a damn Grand Central Station at rush hour up here --
all sorts of crack-ups and mash-ups in progress.

GUN

They'll just hear you insult them.

CARVER

If they love their children the way they say they love 'em,
then we'll have no problem.

GUN

They say they do but they don't mean it, not down to the
bone-marrow -- this is not a great world for children.

CARVER

So you agree with me? Eh?

GUN pulls back, falls silent.

CARVER

So you agree with me that they should demolish you?
Demolish all these memorials to death and murder?

GUN stays silent.

CARVER

Then again, how could you agree, really? With your limited
view of the horizon. Me? Beat you into ploughshares --
beat you thoroughly and forever into ploughshares. Isaiah
is comin' to the city council!

CARVER embraces GUN.

CARVER

Goodbye.

GUN, angled to the sky, watches CARVER slouch away.

GUN ack-acks away, as if firing into its glory days.

GUN

Japs Japs Japs Japs Japs Japs Japs Japs Japs

The glory days fade. GUN is heartbroken.

Transition: Cass Dillon, "Christmas in Fallujah" by Billy Joel.

* * * * *

Scene 4

CARVER enters as if she's escaping from OFFICER's grasp. This time OFFICER carries an AR-15 or M-16 assault rifle.

OFFICER

I will taser you if you don't control yourself!

CARVER circles. OFFICER is wary.

CARVER

You wouldn't dare.

OFFICER

After what you said in there, you're lucky they still don't whip people in the public square.

CARVER

What did I say?

OFFICER

Go home.

CARVER

What did I say that swindled them out of their smug --

OFFICER

You don't even make half-sense on your best days. Go home.

CARVER

The coup d'état has happened.

OFFICER

Go home now.

CARVER stares at OFFICER.

CARVER

Even in a podunk city like this, it's happened.

OFFICER

Go home.

CARVER points at OFFICER.

CARVER

You had the riot mask on, but I knew it was you.

OFFICER

What's over is over.

CARVER

Just occupying the city hall steps.

OFFICER

Go --

CARVER

Well, 99% of the steps -- people still had to pay their parking tickets, wanted to respect the revenue stream. Does baton against bone feel manly? What does it feel like to beat up the people who pay your salary? Who know your face? What'd'ya think the chances are the city council will approve my petition?

OFFICER

Shut up. Go home and take your amendments with you.

OFFICER leaves but this doesn't stop CARVER.

CARVER

It's connected if you don't already know that I should have turned you in for what you did to me to the people next to me I'd even lie to get you canned say that you raped me say that you threatened to kill me which is not far off get you stripped of pay of pension of respect make you terrified of the screaming bomb raining down inject terror into your brain so that you would know what it's like to feel helpless and unprotected and exposed and drain you of the smug power infused in your guns pepper sprays restraints

barricades rubber bullets tasers a death squad is all you've
become paramilitary house pets praetorian guard a thin
blue line wrapped around our necks choking us for law for
order for property an unmanned drone an unmanly drone
which is why you need such a big hard stick --

OFFICE comes back in, wearing a riot mask, but this time as DRONE: a
drone model hung by a line at the end of a stick. DRONE circles silently
overhead, finally hovering over CARVER.

CARVER stops as DRONE enters the airspace -- even though she can't see
the drone, she senses it. She moves, all stealth. DRONE moves.

Sound as underscore: wind, gear-whirr, photo shutter, hiss of garbled tech-
talk.

DRONE stalks CARVER, even into the audience. DRONE also flies over
the audience.

Selected cellphones in the audience go off, which are answered. DRONE
sends a message, as part of the soundscape.

DRONE

You have been notified. You have been warned. You have
been informed. You have been advised.

Cellphones out.

CARVER gets to the center of the stage, crouches. DRONE hovers
overhead.

Sound: the sharp cracking hiss of taser electricity from the DRONE. (Yes,
this is technically possible.) Appropriate lighting effect, appropriate physical
pain.

CARVER, having been bolted from Zeus, is flat-out unconscious.

DRONE flies away. Sun sets on CARVER.

Transition: "Fallujah" from The Perimeter Road Show by City City City.

* * * * *

Scene 5

Barely visible in shadow sits SINDLE on a small stool, a bowl of water and a towel as well as another small stool to one side.

CARVER actually lets out a small humanizing snore, and her sleep is not, at the moment, the sleep of the damned but of the weary.

SINDLE places the bowl, towel, and stool close by to her, then goes back to sitting and waiting.

Sound: someone somewhere, on a just barely tuned piano, plays Debussy's "Clair de lune". As if on cue, a pale moonlight eases in.

CARVER lets out a quite larger snore, which brings her to.

SINDLE

Well. She snorts herself back into the land of the living.

CARVER sits up, still sleep-drowsed.

SINDLE

Next to you.

CARVER dips the fingers of one hand into the water bowl, rubs the water into her eyes to clean them, sits on the stool.

CARVER

I went lost again, didn't I?

SINDLE

I don't know.

CARVER

You found me, though.

SINDLE

Yes. I brought you back here. But I lost sight of you.

CARVER

You never lose sight of me.

SINDLE

But I did.

CARVER

I don't mean literally.

SINDLE

But I did.

CARVER

It was lightning from Zeus. Or an epileptic seizure. You couldn't have seen ahead on that.

CARVER shakes herself, a spastic puppet.

CARVER

Felt like a puppet at the end of electrified string.

Sound: the taser electricity. CARVER shakes herself, makes goofy sounds. SINDLE smiles.

CARVER

I was Punch. I was Judy. I was punching Judy, then Elmo, then Lambchop.

CARVER holds up her fingers.

CARVER

Even now -- tingling. Tingly. A visitation by the gods is my preference. Wandering on the shore of the river Styx is my preference.

CARVER goes to pull off the top layer of her clothing.

SINDLE

It might have been the new drone the police department just auditioned.

CARVER stops, gives SINDLE a look of astonishment.

SINDLE

You didn't know.

CARVER

No. Must've been too stunned by the 50-caliber machine gun.

SINDLE

On loan from the Department of Hopeless Security.

CARVER

Me?

SINDLE

You are a person of interest to the city police department.

CARVER pulls off the top layer of her clothing, folds it carefully.

CARVER

You mean I'm the only raving lunatic they have on call.

SINDLE

The experimented upon.

CARVER

Part of their coup d'état.

SINDLE

"Their" who?

CARVER pulls off her next layer, folds it.

CARVER

C'mon. The military. Our former employers of record. And their apologists, of course. Why take over the White House and then have to govern when you can just give shit to police departments to do the work for you?

CARVER pulls off her next layer and folds it, leaving her only wearing a sleeveless shapeless shirt. She unlaces her boots.

CARVER

The creeping coup d'état. Like the frog in the hot water. We've been over this.

SINDLE

I'm not sure I can go over it again any more.

This brings CARVER to a halt. She may look at SINDLE, she may not.

The music shifts to Gershwin's Prelude No. 2.

CARVER wants to speak but dares not speak, afraid of lightning, afraid of loss.

Instead, she finishes unlacing the boots, takes them off, places them carefully.

Music drifts in.

CARVER

You said.

SINDLE

I know what I said.

CARVER

Now it sounds like you're unsaying it. No more?

SINDLE

No more like this.

CARVER

You not only said, you promised.

SINDLE

No more like this.

Instead of replying, CARVER strips off the rest of her clothes until she stands fully naked.

Music drifts in. If Gershwin is done, music changes to Erik Satie's Gnossienne No. 1.

SINDLE goes to stand next to her to hold the bowl and towel, but CARVER waves away the gesture.

On CARVER's right side, just below the ribs, is a scar in a particular shape. Around a defined circle the size of a half-dollar -- the entrance wound for a rifle round or shrapnel -- is a starburst of scarred lines, not part of the original wound but scored by hand into the flesh.

CARVER puts the bowl of water on the stool, wets the cloth and wrings it out, then washes herself everywhere.

CARVER

The berserkers the Norse warriors "soldier" is such an anemic word pussy word by comparison to "warrior" you remember this --

SINDLE

I watched you -- attended --

CARVER

Bled like a madonna parting the flesh on my right side by knife-edge the pain after the pain of the wound I took for the good of the country dulce et decorum est fuck that pain to signify that the good of my country was not any longer very good and it was time to admit the filth and emptiness of our "service" of our "duty" of our "love" of our "honor" of our "mission" admit to ourselves the murderous business we had become score into my flesh that we were nothing but berserkers in the bastard work of empire like the berserkers gone lunatic gone fey gone rhapsodic in rage that drove the knife forward and through incision into the hatred of what I had become we had become better to admit being "discarded" instead of numbed by some epic of purpose erecting memorials to the soldier dead in city parks makes me gag makes me spit vomit forth rage Achilles

CARVER has finished washing herself down. She throws the cloth at SINDLE.

CARVER

Sometimes it still bleeds. Weeps. No surprise for such a thing conceived in acid.

CARVER re-dresses herself.

The music ends with the player banging on the keyboard, which then just cuts out.

CARVER

We will not talk about this again. Either we are together or you are dead to me, just as if I had left you at that checkpoint in Fallujah. I have no space for you being in-between -- that's what this coup d'état has done to me.

SINDLE watches her re-dress. He swipes the cloth across his face, folds it. Then he leaves.

CARVER takes her time to finish dressing. She reaches under her shirt to touch the wound. Her hand comes away wet.

The piano starts up again as if a child is playing "Chopsticks": hesitant and playful. Through the scene, the playing gets more and more frantic.

OFFICER enters, this time carrying a SURVEILLANCE CAMERA hanging from the end of a long pole. A red light on the camera blinks.

CARVER looks up at CAMERA.

CARVER

When did they put you up?

CAMERA

Can't tell you that -- matter of city security.

CARVER

My tax money paid for that.

CAMERA

Doesn't matter -- doesn't belong to you.

CARVER

So now you can watch the terrorists come down Main Street at any time night or day.

CAMERA

Nothing too small in the fight to protect our way of life.

CARVER

Machine guns, drones, cameras -- our way of life.

CAMERA

Protecting freedom.

CARVER

Except you're watching me.

CAMERA

Protecting you.

CARVER

Invading me.

CAMERA

For the greater good.

CARVER

An ugly ugly phrase.

CARVER grabs a stool and places it underneath CAMERA, then stands on the stool and speaks to CAMERA.

CARVER

Whoever's at the other end. Tonight I have been abandoned. After the second battle of Fallujah, Iraq, 2004, Operation Phantom Fury. I saved his ass. He promised to serve and protect. Me. Forever. No more forever as of tonight.

CAMERA

Boo-hoo.

CARVER

I'm watching you.

CAMERA

I'm watching you back. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

CARVER

You know nothing about the price of freedom.

CARVER reaches under her shirt to touch her wound.

CAMERA

What are you doing?

CARVER smears her hand across the lens, re-wets it from her wound and does it again.

CAMERA

Hey! What are you --

CARVER

Extending the hand of freedom.

CAMERA

I can't see!

CARVER

For my greater good.

CARVER gets down, kicks away the stool.

CAMERA

I can't see! You've blinded me!

CARVER

So my day has not been wasted.

CARVER steps back and spreads her arms to the side. She spins and shouts. She jumps up and down. CAMERA keeps complaining.

CAMERA

What're you doing? I can't see! What're you doing?

CARVER

I am coming down Main Street! Making a list, checking it twice -- naughty or nice!

The person playing "Chopsticks" bangs on the keyboard again, then that goes to silence. Faint, then louder, a police cruiser approaching until it pulls up and stops. Its pulsing lights fill the space.

CARVER, breathless, stops, still smiling.

CARVER

The greater good now approaches. The raven caws. The night's mists boil away. Charon, take the abandoned one across the River Styx now!

The piano begins with Erik Satie's Gymnopédie No.1. Cruiser lights pulse, then stage goes to black. Music continues through transition.

* * * * *

Scene 6

Music out.

CARVER sits at a table, with a notebook, a la Spalding Grey. A digital voice recorder and a cellphone are also on the table. Perhaps a table lamp, making the lighting constricted.

She is nervous, agitated. She looks overhead: faint but noticeable, the rotors of helicopters. The sound is not imagined.

She touches, then pulls away, from the voice recorder, as if it were hot to the touch. Finally, she turns on the voice recorder.

CARVER

Dear Mr. President I've already sent you one of my broadcasts already but I don't think you really listened to it not really

CARVER pulls a letter from the back of the notebook, but before she says anything more, she looks overhead again.

CARVER

Can you hear them the helicopters they pass themselves off as news copters the morning tunnel traffic etcetera but they're not I know this focus focus

CARVER punches the pause button, but it's too late since it's recorded what she said.

CARVER

Damn keep going keep going

She unpauses it. The helicopter sound does not go away but continues, subsonic, as an underscore, coming in and out as the helicopters change position.

CARVER opens the letter.

CARVER

Your response it's a form letter form letter and that's not your real signature I'm pretty sure you robo-signed a bill from Europe so you can robo-sign from anywhere like operating a drone "Thank you for your communication" "I listened to it with interest" I don't think you did Mr. President I don't think you did either listen to it or with interest

A police siren approaches and passes. CARVER waits, gathers herself.

CARVER

Focus

Another police siren approaches and passes, trying to catch up to the previous cruiser. CARVER turns a page in her notebook. She turns pages as she needs to.

Helicopters still in the background.

CARVER

Mr. President this is my second communication to you I think your staff didn't really let you hear my first one which is why I'm sending you this second one because I think time is running short is running out I really do for all of us for me and for all of us and that includes you and yours I was walking through the bus station the other day half a dozen soldiers in camo lined up on either side with pistols and AR-15s and for what some of the cops also had AR-15s and for what I didn't feel any safer with all of these weapons around all this testosterone in their fingers do you really think this scares the terrorists no because it's not about the terrorists it's about making all of us terrorized and keeping us in line because that's what governments do like to do that you like to do I have to say with regret because that's the kind of president you've turned into a scaremonger with an appetite for

Something that sounds like a footfall. CARVER stops to listen. A second footfall. Then nothing.

Helicopters still in the background.

CARVER

You've become a horrible president I say that with great respect I mean great regret and yes respect I guess not only about making promises and not keeping them but being worse than the person who came before you which is not easy I mean that non-elected one we carried on our backs for eight years you still don't think voting machines can be hacked and from a distance it's just like the way those drone operators kill at a distance you brought back military commissions and never closed Gitmo Gitmo so Marine and never rolled back all of the invasions of the fourth fifth six eighth amendments in the Patriot Act warrantless wiretaps still going on NSA Verizon

The cellphone vibrates. CARVER looks at it, puzzled, but does not pick it up. It buzzes and buzzes until it stops.

CARVER

Torture you're still doing torture it's still going on and you want the power to put Americans in Gitmo forever Gitmo if you think if you think they did something you didn't like that you didn't like ever hear of habeas corpus mister constitutional scholar but now to you habeas corpus is like we've got your body and who's to tell us we can't have it not the Supreme Court that's for sure it's not just the liberties stuff you should be ashamed of I mean you've turned the White House and Justice Department and the Department of Hopeless Security into these machines these engines for making us slaves without putting any chains around us

The phone buzzes again. Two more footfalls. Helicopters still in the background.

CARVER

You and the non-elected guy before you just tell us to go shopping so that we can make the economy go north again that is just stupid when you don't do anything to put a muzzle on the Goldman Sucks and Citigroups and Bank

of Charge 'Em Five Bucks To Use Their Debit Cards and put the wolves next door to your office who are only going to take care of their wolf buddies and when some people finally just can't take anymore how the game is just rigged against them and decide to do something pretty inoffensive like take over a public park and say the 99 percent is mad as hell and won't take it anymore and why should we and instead of respect from you for making sure the Constitution still works mister constitutional scholar by really testing it out they get torture done back to them by thugs paid for by public money our money in our name and there's no big vomit in the society about how they got smashed for speaking their minds because the stage set by you and the non-elected guy in front of you makes it okay the default option to use violence against something you don't like like Libya who gave you the right to start another war you should've been impeached and Afghanistan is like you have to prove to somebody that you're tough by making a lot of young men and women die on your watch that was the thing with Bin Laden wasn't it that you could say I can kill with the best of 'em this from the president who got the peace prize but who doesn't have the first idea of what a peaceful world would look like or to make it come home to roost I bet you got a hard-on

CARVER stops, looks abashed. She pauses the recorder. She gets up to pace -- her pacing is circumscribed, as if she were in a small room -- or thinks she's in a small room.

A footfall. Helicopters. Cellphone buzzes. She puts her fingertips on the phone.

CARVER

It's a burn phone no one's supposed to

She pulls back her fingers, as if singed.

CARVER

Well of course they're doing it you idiot

CARVER sits back down, checks her notes, and unpauses the recorder.

CARVER

Sorry I shouldn't have said that about the hard-on

She pauses the recorder again. She chides herself silently but agitatedly for speaking this way.

She unpauses the recorder.

CARVER

Because this is not about making it personal or slander ad hominem

Cellphone buzzes.

CARVER

I don't think I have much time

She watches the phone until it stops.

CARVER

Regime change about Libya I was saying something I don't understand why we can't have it here because you're building a regime here that really should be changed that we should change but people are stupid about this they squeal about socialism and government control but they don't seem to mind being controlled by corporations this myth of the free market and business savvy and private is better really look at the poor the homeless the hungry the jobless the regime has taken such good care of us they give us Black Friday black all right like the death of sanity and reason and still people won't give it up the kool-aid Cyber Monday One-Day-Sale and then trample one of their own to death like the joke from the Catskills where one woman says how rotten the meals are and the other woman says yes and such small portions too amusing ourselves to death there is better there is better there is better

CARVER pauses the recorder again. This time she looks forlorn, forsaken. She paces again, looks up at the helicopter sound. Two footfalls. She unpauses the recorder.

CARVER

I am a patriot but not a patriot of the state a patriot of the heart not the flag-waving and bodily pain and punishment kind of patriot but a patriot of the it could be so much better so much better for everyone and my heart is my heart is my heart looks at actions your actions the actions of people you have trusted and shouldn't have and sees the road not taken and feels this really deep emptiness about how it could've been and wasn't and we fooled ourselves by placing all this hope in you even though you asked for it begged us to do it because we should never put hope in anyone hope is foolish we need to build a fire and keep your feet to it until they're fried and make sure that the game gets rigged our way for once and not be such suckers for stupidities like first black president and

CARVER stops, immensely sad. ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT, masked, steps into view, aims a high-powered rifle at CARVER.

CARVER

I could continue the list but you know what you haven't done I don't think there's any time left for you to do it right you've already wasted time and money and bodies it has cost us a lot and I don't think we should pay you anything like respect any more

CARVER turns and faces ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT.

CARVER

It's you, isn't it? Show me. Show me the one who's dead to me.

ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT takes off the mask, revealing SINDLE. SINDLE fires. The gun's report is amplified to a painful level. CARVER screams.

CARVER

Stop!!!!

Everything freezes: sound, light, bullet, SINDLE. CARVER faces the audience.

CARVER

You've gotta get out of here now. Get out! Get out! Now!
Now!

Helicopter sounds rise. Police sirens rise. The cellphone buzzes on the desk. If possible, it would be great if cellphones in the audience could also start ringing (arranged for beforehand, of course).

CARVER

Get out now! Get out now! Get out now! Get out now!

CARVER turns back to SINDLE. She throws open her arms. Time unfreezes. The bullet smashes through CARVER's heart and throws her to the floor.

SINDLE walks over to CARVER to make sure she's dead, then exits.

All sounds dwindle to silence.

The silence holds. And holds. And holds.

And then CARVER stirs. Sits up. Looks at everyone.

CARVER

Could happen that way. Already has in some places. The slow leak of freedom. The withering of compassion. The rise of a brutal individualism. The hardening of logic. The dictatorship of feeling. The triumph of the lie. When the chickens come home to roost, they always do so with this kind of vengeance in their gristly hearts. What need for invading armies or bomb vests if we will do the terrorizing to ourselves? Three planes crash into us, and we lose our nerve and turn into thugs.

CARVER gets up, goes to the desk, sits.

CARVER

Doesn't have to go that way.

CARVER turns the notebook back to the first page. She starts the recorder.

CARVER

Dear Mr. President --

Slowly rising the sound of helicopters. SINDLE appears, this time as SINDLE.

CARVER

I had the most horrible vision.

SINDLE

I will not lose sight of you again.

CARVER reaches under her shirt and wets her hand on her wound. She and SINDLE touch hands and then embrace, tight.

As they continue the embrace, the sounds of the approaching apocalypse play as a lullaby underneath.

Other possible music:

- Greg Smith's score to The Road to Fallujah: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHIDpeygY-w>
- David Rovics, "Fallujah: The Song" - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM12793_0Yw

Meet John Doe: Radio Play

Based on the screenplay (shooting draft, 1941) by Robert Riskin and the story by Richard Connell and Robert Presnell

MAIN CHARACTERS

- JOHN WILLOUGHBY - 30s, an intelligent drifter
- COLONEL - 40s, JOHN's gruff and misanthropic bosom buddy
- HENRY CONNELL - 60s, hard-boiled newspaper editor
- ANN MITCHELL - 30s, ambitious newspaper reporter

UTILITY CHARACTER-FEMALE

- MATTIE (secretary)
- EDITH (photographer)
- MOTHER (Ann's mother)
- STORMY (studio manager)
- VELMA (waitress in bar)

UTILITY CHARACTER-MALE

- OFFICE CLERK
 - JOE (compositor)
 - ANGELFACE
 - EMCEE
 - PILOT's VOICE
- D.B. NORTON - 60s, newspaper owner and ruthless businessman

* * * * *

SOUND: A busy office: phones, typewriters, etc.

OFFICE CLERK

Ann Mitchell?

ANN

Yes?

OFFICE CLERK

Sorry, but here's your pink slip. You used to work for The Bulletin: "A free press for a free people." You now don't work for The New Bulletin, "A streamlined newspaper for a streamlined age," courtesy of Mr. D.B. Norton, new overlord, and Mr. Henry Connell, managing overlord. My work here is finished.

ANN

Mr. Connell, I can't be without work --

CONNELL

Sorry, Ann. I gotta clean house, and your kind of column is dead -- just lavender and silk when Mr. D.B. Norton wants gin and nylon. He wants circulation.

ANN

I can gin and nylon with the best [of 'em] --

CONNELL

Ann, cashier's got your check, which you'll get when you finish your last column. Sorry, but you gotta go. So go.

SOUND: Slamming door with reverb.

ANN

Aaaarrggghhhh! Damn! Heads're rolling, are they? We'll see whose heads're gonna roll. Joe! Joe!

JOE

Yeah, Ann?

ANN

Get your pad and pencil -- here comes my last column.

JOE

You're supposed to type it out --

ANN

Start writing!

JOE

I'm writing, I'm writing!

ANN

Okay -- here goes. "Below is a letter which reached my desk this morning." You got that?

JOE

I don't see a letter, but I'm writing it down.

ANN

"It's a commentary on what we laughingly call the civilized world. 'Dear Miss Mitchell: Four years ago I was fired from

my job. Since then I can't get another one. At first I thought it was my fault, but I realized it's bigger than me. The whole world has gone to the dogs, and someone's gotta shock everyone hard so they can change it. So in protest I'm going to commit suicide -- "

JOE

Ann!

ANN

(ignores him)

" -- by jumping off the City Hall roof on Christmas Eve!"

JOE

Ann!

ANN

(ignores him)

"Signed, A disgusted American citizen, John Doe." What?

JOE

Ann, you can't have a guy commit suicide, and then do it on Christmas Eve! How many enemies do you want to make?

ANN

For what this newspaper just did to me?

JOE

And to me, too --

ANN

Oh, Joe, no! Then a thousand, a million, enemies isn't enough. Besides, it's not real -- just for shock value, for gin and nylon, for circulation -- like leaving a dead fish in D.B. Norton's mailbox. I got one last thing to say. Write.

JOE

One dead fish coming up.

ANN

"Final note: If you ask this columnist, the wrong people are jumping off roofs." You gonna show it to Connell?

JOE

Why be saints? This fish is going in the mailbox.

ANN

Let's give 'em some circulation.

ANN & JOE

Circulation!

* * * * *

SOUND: Newspaper presses morph into a busy office.

MATTIE

I went to Ann Mitchell's house, again, like you wanted me to.

CONNELL

And?

MATTIE

What'd'ya expect? It's in a bad way there. You know she supports a mother and two sisters.

CONNELL

Has she come back yet?

MATTIE

Nope. Her mom said that when Ann left the house she said she was going on a roaring drunk.

CONNELL

Great -- only 2361 bars to check.

MATTIE

And how would you know that number?

CONNELL

I'm the editor of a newspaper.

MATTIE

You know the biggest thing I found out? Remember Dr. John Mitchell?

CONNELL

Indeed I do. Lots of stories about him. He had the gift of the laying on of those doctor hands.

MATTIE

That was her dad.

CONNELL

Didn't know that. I remember running his obit. Top of the page.

ANN

Hello hello hello, Henry. And Mattie.

MATTIE

Well, sister, you are one wanted woman. You want me in or out?

CONNELL

You've done your job -- you can go.

MATTIE

Welcome back -- for what it's worth.

ANN

I hear you've been wanting to see me. Because I remember, distinctly, being fired.

CONNELL

Which you still are. But you have property that belongs to this newspaper, and I'd like to have it!

ANN

Which is?

CONNELL

The letter from John Doe.

ANN

Oh.

CONNELL

The whole place is in an uproar. We've got to find him. The letter's our only clue.

ANN

There is no letter.

CONNELL

What?

ANN

There is no letter. I made it up. You said you wanted fireworks, sledge-hammers. Circulation.

CONNELL

I think I just lost all of mine. There are nine jobs waiting for this guy. Twenty-two families want to board. Five women want to marry him, and the Mayor's ready to adopt him, just so he won't jump off his building. And you -- there's only one thing to do -- drop the whole business quickly. We'll run a story. Say John Doe was in here, sorry he wrote the letter -- that would do it! Came in here and I made him change his mind. "New Bulletin editor saves John Doe's life." That'll work. I'll get it written it up.

ANN

Such a genius of a newspaperman!

CONNELL

I like my job as well as the next guy.

ANN

But you don't mind taking mine away.

CONNELL

Wasn't my call.

ANN

You got bumped up to shoot some life into this dying paper because you've always had those kinds of ideas, just that no one ever listened to you, the lowly copy desk editor, until D.B. Norton needed a hatchet man --

CONNELL

It's "Managing Editor" in gold leaf on the door.

ANN

So do some managing! You get the whole town curious about this man and then, just like that, you're going to play it safe and bury him. There's enough circulation in that man to fill the veins of 10 managing editors.

CONNELL

In what man?

ANN

In our John Doe! The one I made up!

CONNELL

Making him up doesn't make him real.

ANN

Minor matter. Between now and Christmas Eve, when he's gonna jump, I'd run a daily post starting with his boyhood, his schooling, his first job! A wide-eyed youngster facing a chaotic world. The problem of the average man, of all the John Does in the world. Now, then comes the drama. He meets discouragement. He finds the world has feet of clay. His ideals crumble. So what does he do? He decides to commit suicide in protest against the state of civilization. He thinks of the river! But no, no, he has a better idea. The City Hall. Why? Because he wants to attract attention, he wants to make a political statement, he wants to get a few things off his chest -- who cares what? -- and this is the only way he can get himself heard.

CONNELL

So he writes you a letter? I can't believe I'm discussing this like it's an actual --

ANN

Open your mind. Maybe he's written a hundred letters, to all the papers, no one takes him seriously. But he sees my lavender and silk, knows I have a heart --

CONNELL

A steel trap --

ANN

And I go dig him up because I am a kick-ass reporter. He is so grateful, he pours out his soul to me, and from now on we run his quotes: "I protest, by John Doe." He protests against all the evils in the world: the greed, the lust, the hate, the fear, all of man's inhumanity to man. Arguments will start. Should he commit suicide or should he not! People will write in pleading with him. We keep the question in play, right up to Christmas Eve.

CONNELL

And then?

ANN

Then he has a change of heart -- sees the beauty of it all. You can give him that job. No one dies. Christmas comes. The Lord is risen.

CONNELL

That's Easter.

ANN

Doesn't matter -- that's how people will feel. See?

CONNELL

Except John Doe isn't real!

ANN

So we hire somebody for the job.

CONNELL

Someone to say he's gonna commit suicide on Christmas Eve -- that it?

ANN

Lots of desperate people out there.

CONNELL

Do me a favor, will you? Go out and get married and have a lot of babies -- I gotta get my story in so I can repair what you did. Mattie!

ANN

You're supposed to be a smart guy! If it was raining hundred dollar bills, you'd be out looking for a dime you lost some place.

CONNELL

Listening to a mad woman -- Mattie!

SOUND: A newspaper opening.

MATTIE

Did you see what the Chronicle is running on John Doe in today's paper? They're saying it's a fake. Imagine that!

CONNELL

"Amateur journalism. Palpably phony."

MATTIE

Palpably phony.

CONNELL

"It's a wonder anyone is taking it seriously."

MATTIE

My, my.

ANN

You have John Doe walk in, call the whole thing off: how's that gonna to play after this?

CONNELL

You've got me pinned to the wall.

MATTIE

I also got a dozen bums shoulder to shoulder out there all saying they wrote the letter.

ANN

Tell them all to wait.

MATTIE

Should I?

CONNELL

I fired her, but she's not staying very fired.

MATTIE

Not my fault.

ANN

Look, Mr. Connell, one of those men is your John Doe. They're desperate and will do anything for a cup of coffee -- believe me, I know. Pick one out and you can make that rag eat its words -- more circulation, more circulation --

MATTIE

If you ask me, "John Doe" is dynamite down your underwear.

CONNELL

That doesn't mean she isn't right. We can't let the Chronicle know the truth, so we've got to produce a John Doe, and it might as well be now. Go tell 'em to wait.

MATTIE

I am gone.

CONNELL

And you?

ANN

My job back.

CONNELL

Plus a finder's fee, I suppose?

ANN

A thousand dollars for keeping me from writing the words "I, Ann Mitchell, hereby certify that the John Doe letter was created by me -- "

CONNELL

The going price these days?

ANN

It's the going price for my verified mom and two kid sisters.

CONNELL

Packs everything, including heat.

ANN

What's a poor girl gonna do?

CONNELL

Okay, Miss Mitchell, you've got yourself a deal.

ANN

Do you have to clear it with Norton?

CONNELL

I'll clear it with him -- Mattie, show the first one in! -- I have a feeling this isn't going to bother him at all. All right, have a seat over there. What's your name?

JOHN

Willoughby. Long John Willoughby.

CONNELL

And who's he?

COLONEL

I'm the Colonel -- we travel together. We watch each other's backs.

CONNELL

What're you doing up here if you're traveling?

JOHN

The paper said there were some jobs around loose because of this John Doe thing. Thought there might be one left over for me.

ANN

Had any schooling?

JOHN

A little.

ANN

What do you do when you work?

JOHN

Baseball pitcher, until I busted my arm pitching a nineteen-inning game.

ANN

Where'd you play?

JOHN

Bush leagues mostly.

CONNELL

Got any family?

JOHN

No I don't.

ANN

So you're willing to make some money?

JOHN

Does a thirsty man drink water?

ANN

You be willing to say you wrote that John Doe letter -- and do what we tell you to do?

JOHN

If that's what it takes, then I'll take it.

ANN

Look at the face, Henry -- it's perfect.

COLONEL

Can we have those sandwiches on your desk?

CONNELL

Go ahead.

COLONEL

And the milk?

CONNELL

Sure.

COLONEL

Because we're hungry in the plural. Here, John.

JOHN

Thanks. It's been a while.

COLONEL

This John Doe business is batty, if you ask me.

ANN

Nobody asked you.

JOHN

That's never stopped him.

COLONEL

Trying to improve the world by jumping off buildings. You couldn't improve the world if the building jumped on you!

JOHN

The Colonel hates people. "Good faith" is just another dodge to him.

CONNELL

He likes you well enough to stick around.

JOHN

Met him in a box car a coupla years ago. I was playin' my harmonica; he joins in with his ocarina. Haven't been able to shake him since.

ANN

Excuse us -- keep eating -- we'll be right back. Henry, Henry!

(in a whisper)

He's perfect. He's the one. A baseball player. What could be more American!

CONNELL

I wish he had a family, though.

ANN

We'll have a hero without a family -- something new for the masses to take in. He stands alone. Against the world. People love that fairy tale, and that's what'll make them believe him. Come on. That's our man. He's made to order.

CONNELL

How're you sure he'll fall into line?

ANN

When you're desperate for money, a person can pull that string for a long time. He's our man, I tell you. We'll clean him up, put him in a hotel room, under bodyguards. We'll make him a mystery, then reveal him. Henry, it's time to talk contract. You agree?

CONNELL

I agree. It's time to talk contract.

ANN

C'mon.

CONNELL

John, this job is yours if you want it. Colonel, can we trust you?

COLONEL

I hate everything about what you're doing, but I've got his back if he wants to do this.

JOHN

I'm in.

COLONEL

The first thing I want is a copy of the John Doe letter in your own hand.

ANN

We'll get it done.

CONNELL

This is the agreement: exclusive story under your name from now until Christmas Eve. On Christmas day you get one railroad ticket out of town.

JOHN

Two.

CONNELL

Two, sorry.

JOHN

And what about my arm? It'd be great if you could have Bone-Setter Brown fix my arm, so I could play again.

CONNELL

Done. Mattie, type this up -- you sign it.

JOHN

And I won't have to jump.

ANN

That's just a come-on. We're not barbarians -- two train tix Christmas Day and you're outta here.

CONNELL

From now on, you answer to John Doe, not Long John Willoughby.

JOHN

All right.

CONNELL

Mattie'll have fifty dollars spending money for you. And let the good times roll.

ANN

Take it easy, John Doe.

CONNELL

Get them set up at the hotel so we can get the rumors started. Then pound the typewriter. We can't let the

Chronicle get any traction on what they've said. We need to blast their heads off.

ANN

Before you pop off too many rounds, don't forget that grand check for a grand. I'll take care of the rest: hotel, clothes, bodyguard.

CONNELL

Even in the rush, a memory like an elephant.

ANN

And the grace of a gazelle. Goodbye.

CONNELL

Don't leave out "fierce like a viper" and "foxy like" -- a fox, I guess. A viper and a fox. Mattie! Get me Norton on the phone. Mr. Norton? Have I got a story for you. We are gonna have an interesting Christmas.

* * * * *

SOUND: Newspaper presses, then the opening of a door.

JOHN

Colonel, smell the air in this hotel room -- smells nice. Smell nice to you?

ANGELFACE

I'm just here to guard your carcass. Not his, just yours.

COLONEL

You ain't gonna get me to stay here.

JOHN

Sure you are.

COLONEL

No I'm not. That spot under the bridge where we slept the other night's good enough for me. You remember, don't you, we were headed for the Columbia River country before all this John Doe business came up.

JOHN

Did your ears pop coming up in the elevator?

COLONEL

Long John -- I'm telling you -- this is no good. That fifty bucks in your pocket's already beginning to show up on you.

JOHN

Stop worrying, Colonel. I got things covered for us.

ANGELFACE

Here's a newspaper. I can get you a paper, too.

COLONEL

I don't read papers and I don't listen to radios. I know the world's been shaved by a drunken barber, and I don't have to read about it.

ANGELFACE

Suit yourself.

COLONEL

I'm trying to. I've seen guys like you go under before, you know. Guys that never had a worry --

JOHN

Except for my arm -- my means of production --

COLONEL

-- then they get some money and go screwy.

JOHN

That's not me, Colonel. Fifty bucks ain't going to ruin me. And I'm getting my arm fixed.

COLONEL

He starts wantin' to go into restaurants --

JOHN

You're not listening to me again.

COLONEL

He wants to sit at a table and eat salads -- and cup cakes -- and tea -- boy, what that food will do to your system!

JOHN

Sorry -- got him wound up --

COLONEL

The next thing, he can't sleep unless he has a bed. I seen plenty start out with fifty bucks and wind up with a bank account!

ANGELFACE

What's the matter with a bank account?

COLONEL

Long John, when you become a guy with a bank account, they got you. They got you!

ANGELFACE

Who's got him?

COLONEL

The heelots!

ANGELFACE

Who?

JOHN

Hey. There's the City Hall tower I'm supposed to jump from.

ANGELFACE

Who's got him?

COLONEL

The heelots!

JOHN

Say, is this one of those places where you ring if you want something?

COLONEL

See? It's already working on your brain!

ANGELFACE

Just dial zero on the phone.

JOHN

I have always wanted to do this!

SOUND: Dialing "zero" on the phone.

COLONEL

The heelots are goin' to get you!

JOHN

Will you send up three hamburgers with all the trimmings --

COLONEL

Two.

JOHN

-- three chocolate ice cream sodas --

COLONEL

Two.

JOHN

-- and three pieces of apple pie? No, apple, with cheese.

COLONEL

Two!

JOHN

Yeah. Thank you.

SOUND: Handset replaced.

COLONEL

Heelots!

ANGELFACE

Who are the heelots?

COLONEL

Listen, sucker, you ever been broke?

JOHN

You asked for it now.

ANGELFACE

Sure. Often. Which is why I'm guardin' him.

COLONEL

All right. You're walking along -- not a nickel in your jeans -- free as the wind -- hundreds pass you by in every line of business -- nice, gentle people -- and they let you alone. Right? Then you get some money, and what happens? All those nice, sweet, gentle people become heelots. A lotta heels. They begin creeping up on you -- trying to sell you something.

JOHN

I told you.

COLONEL

They've got long claws and they get a strangle-hold on you -- and you squirm and duck and shout and you try to push 'em away -- but you haven't got a chance -- they've got you! First thing you know, you own things. A car, for instance.

JOHN

He's good.

COLONEL

Now your whole life is messed up with more stuff -- license fees -- and number plates -- and gas and oil -- and taxes and insurance -- and identification cards -- and letters -- and bills -- and flat tires -- and traffic tickets and motorcycle cops and court rooms -- and lawyers -- and fines -- and a million and one other things.

JOHN

Here it comes across the plate.

COLONEL

And what happens? You're not the free and happy guy you used to be. You gotta have money to pay for all those things -- so you go after what the other feller's got -- and there you are -- you're a heelot yourself!

JOHN

You win, Colonel. Here's the fifty. Go on out and get rid of it.

COLONEL

As fast as I can! Gonna get some canned goods -- a fishing rod -- and the rest I'm givin' away.

ANGELFACE

Givin' away? You can give it to me!

JOHN

No luck -- he wants to save your soul!

SOUND: Door opening.

COLONEL

And here comes the queen of the heelots herself.

JOHN

I've got it covered, Colonel.

ANN

Well, well, well!

COLONEL

I'm goin'!

ANN

So go.

JOHN

I'll catch up with you -- be sure to give all of it away.

COLONEL

Columbia River's calling.

ANN

So answer it. Stand outside, okay? I've got a photographer coming, so let me know when she's here.

ANGELFACE

Sure thing.

SOUND: Door closed.

JOHN

A photographer?

ANN

It's all in what people see, John Doe -- no one reads anymore, so they don't think anymore, they just look, and then they feel, and then they have opinions, and then we print newspapers. The great chain of being. We're gonna need some action in these pictures.

JOHN

Action?

ANN

Can you do it?

JOHN

Like I'm getting ready to pitch?

ANN

No, no, no. Not that, not something so -- ordinary. Sit down. Let me comb your hair. There. That's better. You know, John Doe's got a nice face. Does he have a serious face?

JOHN

Can't. I'm feeling too good. And don't tell the Colonel that.

ANN

You are supposed to be disgusted with all of civilization.

JOHN

All of it?

ANN

Yes, you're sore at the world. Come on, now -- mean! No! No! You don't have to smell the world! All right, stand up. Now let's see what you look like when you protest.

JOHN

Against what?

ANN

Against anything -- it doesn't matter to them. Just protest.

JOHN
(laughs)

You got me -- I just can't.

SOUND: Door opens.

EDITH

Here I am -- have camera, will click.

ANN

Watch him close. I'm the umpire, and you just cut the heart of the plate with your fast one and I call it a ball. Ball! And it ain't the first one I've called like that. Ball! Ball!

JOHN
(real, not mock, anger)

Oh, you did, huh?

ANN

Yeah, I did!

JOHN

Why can't you call right, you bone-headed, pig-eared, pot-bellied --

ANN

Grab it, Edith, grab it! Grab it!

EDITH

Got it.

ANN

That's gonna go iconic! Yeah! Now read this with that same look, that same "I wanna kill the goddamn ump" look --

JOHN

"I protest against the collapse of decency in the world."
"I protest against corruption in local politics." "I protest
against all the brutality -- "

ANN

Yeah, you got it. Wait till that starts hitting the streets!

JOHN

Is that okay? I do okay?

ANN

More than okay. Better than okay, John Doe, better than okay.

* * * * *

SOUND: Mixed in with "America the Beautiful" is JOHN's VOICE, loud and with echoes, as if he's in a large stadium.

JOHN

"I protest against the collapse of decency in the world." "I protest against corruption in politics." "I protest against politicians being in league with crime." "I protest against welfare being used as political football." "I protest against all the brutality and slaughter in the world."

* * * * *

SOUND: The echoing reverb of JOHN DOE's voice fading away.

ANN

Personally, Mr. Norton, I think it's just plain nuts if you let him drop it now. He's going over like a house on fire!

NORTON

What are you afraid of, Connell? It's doubled our circulation, on the brink of even more.

CONNELL

Because everybody knows, in their gut, it's a phony -- it's John Doe in the flesh they want.

ANN

So let's reveal the mystery. Mr. Norton -- why not put him on your radio station?

NORTON

Why not? Station's no good if I don't use it.

CONNELL

Because we don't know what this bush-league pitcher will do under pressure. Get him out of town before this thing explodes in our pants!

ANN

If you do, Mr. Norton, you're just as much of a loser as he is! And excuse me for saying so.

CONNELL

Because you hate losing your meal ticket.

ANN

That meal ticket covers us both, and I like mine! But it's also a windfall for you, Mr. Norton -- no secret about you and politics. That's why you bought the newspaper and the station, isn't it? Put John Doe on. He'll say what we want him to say, and we'll script how anyone gets to him. And if this arouses national interest -- you'll be pulling those strings as well!

NORTON

Go to the office and arrange for some radio time.

CONNELL

D.B., don't fall for --

NORTON

Now.

CONNELL

Okay -- consider it done. Come on, let's go.

NORTON

Miss Mitchell can stay. You can leave.

CONNELL

Exit stage left.

NORTON

This John Doe idea -- it was yours.

ANN

Yes, sir.

NORTON

How much money does he pay you? It's a simple question.

ANN

Round up or down, it's still thirty dollars.

NORTON

And what are you after? A journalistic career? Respect for your craft?

ANN

(laughing)

Money.

NORTON

(laughing)

Good to hear somebody admit it! Could you write the radio speech that would put this man across?

ANN

I know I can.

NORTON

Do it, and you'll get a hundred dollars a week.

ANN

A hundred dollars.

NORTON

That's not enough?

ANN

Don't mistake being dumbfounded, Mr. Norton, for being ungrateful. I've just never had --

NORTON

That's only the start. Play your words right, and you'll never have to worry about money again. Ah, I knew could read it in that face. From now it'd be better if you work directly with me.

ANN

If that's what you want.

NORTON

I always say what I want. There's a car waiting for you at the front of the house. Until we meet again with your new speech.

ANN

Until we meet again.

* * * * *

SOUND: Ring of a cash register morphs into typewriting.

ANN

Damn. Damn!

MOTHER

Ann.

ANN

Sorry. Irene and Ellen in bed?

MOTHER

And sleeping. Though with all this paper thumping around out here --

ANN

Stick a fork through me! I'll never get this speech right.

MOTHER

Oh, yes you will, Ann dear -- you're very clever.

ANN

Clever as a lead weight. What are you looking for?

MOTHER

Your purse. I need ten dollars.

ANN

I gave you fifty the other day.

MOTHER

Yes, I know, but Mrs. Burke had her baby yesterday. Nine pounds! And there wasn't a thing in the house -- and then this morning the Community Chest lady came around and --

ANN

And the fifty's all gone. Who's the ten for?

MOTHER

The Websters.

ANN

The Websters.

MOTHER

Those lovely people your father used to --

ANN

I know who they are.

MOTHER

I thought I'd buy them some groceries. It's a shame, those poor --

ANN

You're marvelous, Ma, just like Dad used to be -- and look what that got him.

MOTHER

Don't get upset.

ANN

Do you realize that not long ago we didn't have enough to eat ourselves?

MOTHER

But these people need, and we have plenty now.

ANN

That thousand dollars is practically gone because we owed everybody in town. You've gotta stop giving our money away!

MOTHER

Ann!

ANN

I'm sorry -- sorry, sorry. I'm just upset about all -- this. I have this great chance to get somewhere, get us some security, and I'm stuck. If I can put this speech over, your Mrs. Burke can have six babies and all the trimmings!

MOTHER

Stuck on what?

ANN

I don't know! I created somebody who says he'll give up his life for a principle, hundreds of thousands of people are gonna listen to him over the radio and, unless he says something that's, well, that's -- pow! -- there goes the money, there goes --

MOTHER

Well, honey, I don't know what you want to end up with, but if it's like all the others, I don't think anybody'll listen.

ANN

What do they want to hear?

MOTHER

There are so many complaining political speeches -- everyone's got a plan to fix how rotten the world is. People are tired of all the doom and despair.

ANN

It's not great out there.

MOTHER

It doesn't need to be in their faces all the time. If you're going to get people to listen, have him say something simple and real, something with, I don't know, hope in it. If your father were alive, he'd know what to say.

ANN

The Doctor certainly would have the cure.

MOTHER

Wait a minute --

ANN

You've got your "I've decided something" look.

MOTHER

This is your father's diary.

ANN

I never knew he wrote a diary.

MOTHER

There's enough in it for a hundred speeches, simple things people ought to hear nowadays, be reminded of. Be careful with it.

ANN

You bet I will.

MOTHER

I'll let you work.

SOUND: Pages turning.

ANN

This is great -- this is really great. Ooh, yes, I can use that -- and that, too -- excellent!

SOUND: Typewriter, page ripped out, a new paper inserted, typing.

* * * * *

SOUND: A clip of big band music on the radio.

JOHN

All right, I admit it -- I'm getting a little bored --

COLONEL

I don't know how you're gonna stand it around here till after Christmas.

JOHN

But I got the speech tonight, so that's something.

COLONEL

You'll have hell to pay tonight, you mean.

ANGELFACE

You have a lot of opinions.

COLONEL

Not opinions -- facts. And here's another one: Ann Mitchell, that heelot: A woman like her you have to handle at arms-length and welder's gloves -- and LJ, your arms are not that long!

ANGELFACE

Doesn't have to turn out like that.

JOHN

What d'ya mean?

ANGELFACE

You must've been a pretty good pitcher.

JOHN

About ready for the majors when I chipped a bone in my elbow pitchin' a nineteen-inning game! A major league scout came down after the game with a contract, but I couldn't lift my arm to sign it. But I'll be okay again soon.

ANGELFACE

Yeah, well, wish you luck with that, but still --

JOHN

What do you mean?

COLONEL

Uh-oh.

ANGELFACE

Well, you'll never be able to really play again.

JOHN

What are you saying? I told you I'm gonna get --

ANGELFACE

Think baseball's gonna hire a guy in a racket?

COLONEL

Columbia River, Long John, I can hear the --

ANGELFACE

Naw, he's gotta hear this. This John Doe business. As soon as it comes out, you'll be washed up in baseball.

JOHN

I never thought about that.

COLONEL

The clear cool river, LJ.

ANGELFACE

And what about all the kids that look up to ball players? What are they gonna think about you?

JOHN

What d'ya think, Colonel? Colonel --

COLONEL

Elevators are still runnin' from here to the ground floor, as I understand it.

ANGELFACE

But you can get something out of this mess.

JOHN

How's that?

ANGELFACE

When you get on that radio, all you have to do is say the whole thing's a frame-up. Be a hero for telling the truth.

JOHN

But my arm?

ANGELFACE

You're not being a hero for free. I know somebody that'll give you five thousand dollars to get on that radio and tell the truth.

COLONEL

Five thousand dollars?

ANGELFACE

And you get it right away. You don't have to wait till Christmas -- it can be Christmas now.

COLONEL

You have it on you now?

ANGELFACE

The guy paying needs to know if he's takin' it.

COLONEL

They're closing in on you!

JOHN

Who's putting this up?

ANGELFACE

Look, I like you. This business just uses people up -- get something out of it while you can. Here's the speech you gotta give -- take it --

COLONEL

Five thousand dollars, Long John, five thousand heelots comin'. A whole army of them! Thirty pieces of silver and all.

ANGELFACE

It's on the level. But it's a one-time offer, limited edition. You read that speech -- car'll be at the side door for you, money inside.

COLONEL

What's it gonna be, Long John, whose side you gonna be on?

ANGELFACE

Your friend makes some excellent points for once.

* * * * *

SOUND: Sounds of a radio studio getting ready to broadcast.

STORMY

All right, everyone, put the harness on -- we're live in three minutes and counting. Here he is, Miss Mitchell.

ANN

John, John -- all set?

STORMY

We gotta keep it moving --

ANN

Okay, okay, I just need a moment.

STORMY

I can give you half of that. I'll be over there.

ANN

John, here's the speech, in caps and double-spaced so you won't have any trouble reading it. Not nervous, are you?

JOHN

No.

ANN

Of course not. He wouldn't be.

JOHN

Who?

ANN

John Doe. The one in those pages. Everything in that speech are things a certain man believed in -- my father, John -- a kind of John Doe himself, like you.

JOHN

I'm not your [father] --

ANN

And when he talked, people listened, just like they'll listen to you.

JOHN

Why would anyone listen [to me] --

STORMY

Half a moment's coming due.

ANN

Okay! You needn't be nervous, John. Just remember to make it sound sincere.

JOHN

That's all I gotta remember, huh?

ANN

Yes. Sound sincere, and that'll get you through. Good luck. I'll be on your shoulder, right there.

STORMY

I gotta get him up to the mike.

ANN

He's all yours -- treat him well.

CONNELL

You aren't going soft on him, are you?

ANN

Not hard-boiled me.

CONNELL

Not hard-boiled you, no.

STORMY

In about three-and-a-half seconds a nervous man comes out of that door and rings the bell that gets this train moving. So, to keep it simple: from your pie-hole into the microphone. That's the secret of radio. I am now going to abandon you to the emcee. Good luck, bucko.

COLONEL

We can still get out of it alive, LJ. The door's right there.

EMCEE

Hey, what are you doing here?

COLONEL

That's what I'd like to know.

EMCEE

Out. Out.

JOHN

He's a friend of mine -- I need him here, I need him close by.

EMCEE

Then stand right there and give him your silent support.

STORMY

Stand by, everyone!

EMCEE

Like she said, from here into there.

STORMY

On my count: Three. Two.

SOUND: After a silent "One," an orchestra fanfare.

EMCEE

And good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Kenneth Frye, speaking for The New Bulletin, "a streamlined newspaper for a streamlined age." Tonight we give you

something entirely new and different. Standing beside me is the young man who has declared publicly that on Christmas Eve he intends to commit suicide, giving as his reason, quote: "I protest against the state of civilization." End quote. Ladies and gentlemen, The New Bulletin takes pleasure in presenting the man who is fast becoming the most talked-of person in the whole country, John Doe! Don't be shy -- go on. The whole country is listening.

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen: I am the man you all know as John Doe. I took that name because it seems to describe -- because it seems to describe -- the average man, and that's me. Well, it was me -- before I started speaking my mind. Now I'm getting all sorts of attention. The Mayor and the Governor, for instance. They don't like those articles that talk about my protests. And I even got a bribe tonight to come up here and say that I'm not really what people have been saying I am. I don't know who tried it, but I'll tell you it didn't work. I am who I am. I'm still here. And they can stop worrying. I'm not gonna talk about them. I'm gonna talk about us, the average guys, the John Does -- and Jane Does, too, have to include the women. We're a great family, the John Does and Jane Does. We're the meek who are supposed to inherit the earth. You'll find us everywhere. We raise the crops, dig the mines, work the factories, raise the kids, wash the clothes and cook cook cook till everyone is full and can sleep soundly. We've existed since time began. We built the pyramids, we saw Christ crucified, we've been dying in war after war after war after war! In our struggle for freedom we've always bounced back! Because we're the people -- and we're tough! And when we all pull in the same direction, nothing can stop us! I know a lot of you are saying "What can I do? I'm just a little punk. I don't count." Well, you're dead wrong! The little punks have always counted because in the long run the character of a country is the sum total of the character of its little punks. But we've all got to get in there and pitch! We can't win the old ball game unless we have team work. And your teammate, my friends, is the person next door to you. Your neighbors! You're gonna need them and they are gonna need you. If they're sick, make a call. If they're hungry, feed them! If they're out of work, find 'em a job.

Tear down the fences that separate teammates, tear down those hates and prejudices! I know a lot of you are saying to yourselves: "He's asking for a miracle. He's expecting people to change all of a sudden." Well, you're wrong. It's no miracle because I see it happen every year. And so do you. At Christmas! There's something great about what that spirit does to people, all kinds of people. Now, why can't that spirit last the whole year? If every Doe would make that spirit last three hundred and sixty-five days -- 366 in a leap year -- we'd create such a tidal wave of good will that no human force could resist it. Yes, sir, my friends, the meek can inherit the earth, but only when neighbors start loving their neighbors. You'd better start right now. Don't wait till the game is called on account of darkness! You are the hope of the world!

EMCEE

And that concludes this evening's broadcast by John Doe, hosted by The New Bulletin, "a streamlined newspaper for a streamlined age." Until next time --

SOUND: Musical outro. Loud crush of congratulatory voices.

ANN

That was wonderful, so wonderful!

JOHN

Thanks -- you don't have to hug --

CONNELL

(overlapping)

Good work, John, good work -- you had me by the end. You really had me going!

JOHN

You don't have to shake [so hard] --

EMCEE

(overlapping)

Well done, Mr. Doe, very well done.

ANN

John, I want to introduce you to someone you don't know but who knows you pretty well.

NORTON

D.B. Norton, Mr. Doe.

COLONEL

John --

CONNELL

He pays the freight around here, John.

COLONEL

LJ --

NORTON

You interested in keeping this going?

JOHN

I signed a contract.

COLONEL

Which we can break any time we want by just --

NORTON

I'm asking you, John. I don't care about the contract. I want to know if you want to keep doing what we're doing here.

JOHN

What is it that we're doing, Mr. Norton?

ANN

John, you are John Doe. Mr. Norton wants to back what you started here -- he wants to send you on a lecture tour, start up John Doe Clubs.

NORTON

This could grow into a powerful movement. You could make a difference in people's lives.

COLONEL

They mean, Long John, pitch you for nineteen innings and then throw you away --

JOHN

Colonel is right. This thing belongs to the newspaper, it belongs to you -- just a bunch of whipped-up egg whites. Baseball is all I want, and I'm sticking to that.

NORTON

Good luck, with that arm of yours. And that reputation you're going to carry when people find out the truth.

JOHN

Come on, Colonel, let's get out of here.

ANN

John! Are you going to tell me that you didn't feel anything during that speech? That you didn't feel John Doe? You could've taken that bribe, but you didn't. You didn't. And why? Ah, see, I knew it -- I knew you felt something, I can see it in your face! What you felt was true, John -- no matter whose words they were, you made them true, made them yours, made them theirs. Henry, what about the telegrams?

CONNELL

They've already started coming in.

ANN

Letters'll be coming in too, by tomorrow. Thousands, John, thousands want to hear what you have to say.

COLONEL

Nineteen innings, Long John --

NORTON

What's it going to be, John? What is it going to be for John Doe? Nothing in your pocket, a nobody with a bum arm -- or doing something that might do some good for somebody?

COLONEL

Aw, heck, John -- John, I can see they got you --

JOHN

No they don't --

COLONEL

Yeah they do -- you're too good to tell 'em to go take a flying leap. I'm not --

JOHN

Colonel!

COLONEL

Excuse me, folks, excuse me, excuse me, but I've got a date with the highway!

SOUND: The sound of an exit door opening and closing, with reverb.

JOHN

Colonel!

ANN

Don't worry -- let him go. We've all got you covered. This is going to be wonderful, John.

JOHN

Which John are you talking to?

ANN

The one who needs to hear this. The one who's gonna keep going on with this, making a better world.

JOHN

And which John is this again?

* * * * *

SOUND: Train-traveling music shifts into tapping on a microphone.

NORTON

Good evening. My staff has been following John Doe and making sure the John Doe Clubs are properly organized and the charters issued -- they're working faster than a one-armed wallpaper hanger! And now -- the John Doe Convention! The work you have done as the organizing

committee will put our city on the map. Twenty-four hundred John Doe clubs are sending delegates! And we will roll out the welcome mat for them and my newspapers and radio stations will honor John Doe for his work! And now, if you will, just step into the outer office and look your best because photographers are waiting to take pictures of this historic moment.

* * * * *

SOUND: A storm of flashing strobes.

NORTON

Anything else?

CONNELL

We've covered pretty much everything -- the convention's all arranged just like you wanted it. And Ann and John are due to touch down from the western run in about an hour. All the pieces'll be in place.

NORTON

Did we forget something?

CONNELL

No.

NORTON

Then what?

CONNELL

You hired me because I'm supposed to know my way around, and so this is what I know: this John Doe movement costs you a fortune

NORTON

But?

CONNELL

I've got two pieces here and two pieces there -- but I'm a sucker if I can make four out of 'em. Other than circulation, what's the pay-off to you?

NORTON

You can know that I will have the satisfaction of knowing that my money has been spent for a worthy cause.

CONNELL

I see. I'd better stick to running the paper and the station.

NORTON

Wise choice. And Connell -- I'd like to have the John Doe contract, all the receipts for the money we have advanced him, and the letter Miss Mitchell wrote, for which I gave her a thousand dollars.

CONNELL

Yes. Sure.

NORTON

Before they touch down tonight.

CONNELL

I'll have it couriered right over when I get back to the office.

NORTON

You do that.

CONNELL

All right. I'll show myself out.

* * * * *

SOUND: An airplane.

JOHN

It'll be good to get home. How many people you think we've talked to, outside the radio, I mean?

ANN

Looks like about three hundred thousand.

JOHN

Three hundred thousand. What makes 'em do it? I've been trying to figure that out.

ANN
(sighs)

Especially since what we've been handing 'em they've heard a million times: "Love thy neighbor," "Clouds have silver linings," "Turn the other cheek."

JOHN
Now you sound like the Colonel -- wherever he is.

ANN
Well, he's not here with you.

JOHN
Don't be hard on him -- he's been more right about people than I have, lots of times. I never thought much about people -- just somebody in the bleachers to watch me play. But now -- in their faces -- I can see they're hungry for something. I know how they feel. I think I've been hungry for something practically all my life.

PILOT'S VOICE
Okay, folks, it's about ten minutes to touch down. You better buckle up.

JOHN
Coming in safe to home.

ANN
Yeah -- we're coming in safe.

SOUND: Airline sound gets louder, then fades away.

* * * * *

NORTON
You must be tired.

ANN
Multiple cities in multiple time zones will do that. Why did you want to see me? You already know everything that's been happening.

NORTON

Because I have a little something for you.

ANN

That?

NORTON

Yes.

ANN

A fur coat?

NORTON

You sound surprised.

ANN

A fur coat and I have never had a date. Oh!

NORTON

You might want to check the pocket --

ANN

Oh! Oh, it's a lovely bracelet!

NORTON

I hear they are a girl's best friend. Tokens of appreciation.
And there's one more thing.

ANN

Well, come on, spring what's on your mind.

NORTON

(roars with laughter)

That's what I like about you! All right, practical Annie, here it is. Tomorrow night, before fifteen thousand people, over a nation-wide radio hook-up, John Doe will announce the formation of The John Doe Party. Devoted to the John Does of the country. He will also announce the party's candidate for the presidency. A man he endorses, the best friend the John Does have.

ANN

Mr. D.B. Norton.

NORTON

And the crowd goes, "Yes!"

ANN

And Mr. D.B. Norton is on his way.

NORTON

Good things come in threes, Ann. Your new contract.

ANN

Every word of this is true?

NORTON

Every word. And now this. This is the speech that John Doe will give tomorrow night. I want you to make sure it gets into his hands.

ANN

He never reads the speeches before he gives 'em.

NORTON

Even better. Just directly and sincerely, like all his others. And make sure Mr. Connell gets the second copy, for the next day's special edition. You willing to come along for this ride?

ANN

(laughing)

I guess you can count me in, Mr. Norton.

SOUND: Thunderstorms begin, with rain, rain, rain.

* * * * *

SOUND: Old-fashioned torch ballad from an automatic piano.

CONNELL

Long John Willoughby.

JOHN

Mr. Connell, I got to get to the convention; Mr. Norton's got a car coming for me.

CONNELL

(slurred but clear)

C'mon, you have time for one drink.

JOHN

I don't drink.

CONNELL

Then I'll have yours. Velma!

VELMA

Two more comin' up.

JOHN

Mr. Connell, it's gettin' close to --

CONNELL

You're a nice guy, John. I like you. You're gentle. I like gentle people. Me? I come off tough, but under the tough, I've got a weakness. The national anthem. Play it, and I'm a sucker. Always gets me in the throat.

JOHN

Start of every game -- the back of the neck.

CONNELL

Well, every man to his own body part -- as long as he feels something somewhere. Thanks, Velma.

VELMA

More than welcome.

CONNELL

I'm a sucker for this country -- I like what we got here! But wouldn't it make you mad if you found someone betraying what we got?

JOHN

Yeah -- betrayal's right up there -- Colonel hates liars and cheats more than anything. "Worse than heelots" he calls them, and that's going some for him.

CONNELL

And right now I am mad, boiling mad, John. I'm getting mad for a lot of other guys besides myself -- I'm getting mad for a guy named Washington! And a guy named Jefferson -- and Lincoln. Lighthouses, John! Lighthouses in a foggy world! You know what I mean? It's because you're gentle you can't see what's happening. But betrayal -- that's what's happening, to you. You're mixed up with a skunk, my boy, a no-good, dangerous skunk!

JOHN

You're not talking about Mr. Norton?

CONNELL

I'm talking about him and his pet poodle, Ann Mitchell.

JOHN

That's wrong, Mr. Connell, just plain wrong.

CONNELL

Here, read this -- this is the speech you're giving tonight. And while you're reading, let me tell you a few things -- read! Up at Norton's house tonight -- keep reading -- the big political bosses and the labor leaders and a lot of other big shots are carving up the John Doe Clubs -- keep reading! -- and Ann Mitchell's up there with 'em -- fur coat and diamonds are the going price for her -- keep reading! -- she'd double-cross her mother for a handful of silver.

JOHN

Shut up!

CONNELL

You keep reading! Is that what you've been traveling the country to do, to make D.B. Norton a fatter cat than he already is? I know you weren't sold on "John Doe" at first -- but I know it's gotten inside you, right at the back of your neck. So you gotta know this, John, I had to make you know. Read it, and then you'll know who to hit. And I should be first in line.

SOUND: Chair scraping back.

CONNELL

John! John! Stay, don't go -- they'll cut you --

SOUND: Slamming door.

CONNELL

Damn! Damn! Velma!

VELMA

His seat's still warm.

CONNELL

That's the kind of guy he is.

VELMA

Well, what'd'ya got planned next, Mr. Connell, except the breaking of hearts and the dashing of dreams?

CONNELL

Everyone's a writer.

VELMA

So give me a job at The New Bulletin.

CONNELL

Fresh out. You better bring me a glass of milk.

VELMA

Wise choice. At least you'll get your stomach soothed.
Coming right up.

CONNELL

I wish it was going to be as easy as drinking it down.

* * * * *

SOUND: The sharp crack of thunder, the sharp flash of lightning.

ANN

I -- I -- just cannot believe what went on at dinner in there.

NORTON

And what do you think "went on"?

ANN

I saw you -- you were selling out the John Doe Clubs. I don't know any other way to say it.

NORTON

I wanted you to hear it all. I wanted you to know what all your work has accomplished.

ANN

My work?

NORTON

Ann, you are lovely, but not well-versed in the world. We live in daring times, with a new world order staring us in the face. This new order is vibrant, it's dynamic and electric! Democracy has run its course -- it no longer has the answers. It no longer has any voltage because too many concessions have been made to too many of the wrong people! What America needs is an iron hand and obedience!

ANN

Your hand. And your whip.

NORTON

And why not? Deep down what these John Does really want is safety -- they'll sacrifice much for certainty in uncertain times.

JOHN

Ann Mitchell!

NORTON

Well, look who's here. The one who is all wet.

ANN

Oh, John, I'm so glad to see --

JOHN

Did you write this speech? Did you write this?

ANN

No, I didn't.

JOHN

But you knew about it.

ANN

Yes.

JOHN

And you handed it off to me like it was from you.

ANN

Yes, I did, John.

JOHN

So -- a new order of things. Everybody taking a nice, fat slice of the John Does for themselves. Not after I go down to that convention and tell them exactly what you and all your "associates" here are cooking up for them! And in my own words this time.

NORTON

Listen to me, Long John Willoughby! The great John Doe! I own every particle of everyone in this room. And I own every particle of every John Doe out there tonight because I can give them what they really want: safety and security in return for a little bit of their freedom, which they don't use anyway. You want to tell them that "in your own words"? Go right ahead. And I will lay out for them what a fake you are, that you are such a good fake that you even got me, the great and successful D.B. Norton, to lay my money down on the promise that you were sincere and honest. You are a free man, John Doe, tell them whatever you want. But once you do, I will crush you to dust, then kill off the John Doe movement and lay all the blame for it on your grave. You think this is the only way we've got to get what we want? What is the great and illustrious John Doe gonna do now?

JOHN

The John Doe idea may be the one thing able to save this world from the dogs like you -- because it's bigger than whether I'm a fake, it's got more power than that, it deserves better than me, and that's what I'm going to tell 'em!

NORTON

You are both charming and an idiot.

ANN

John, don't go! Don't go!

JOHN

Let me go.

NORTON

Let him go. Let. Him. Go.

SOUND: Slamming door.

ANN

He will say what he said he's going to say.

NORTON

Do you think I've only got one plan?

SOUND: Rotary phone being dialed.

NORTON

Benedict, it's a go -- get the newspapers to the convention, then cut the microphone cables.

SOUND: Rotary phone being dialed again.

NORTON

Commissioner -- pick up Henry Connell, as we had discussed, and detain him until I say otherwise.

SOUND: NORTON hangs up the phone.

NORTON

By the time he gets there, everyone will have in their hands a newspaper spelling out what a fake John Doe is -- with special features like the confession of Ann Mitchell to writing the original letter. And he'll find the microphone cables cut anyway -- no one will hear him over the roar of their disappointment.

ANN

They won't abandon him!

NORTON

The way you haven't? They'll abandon him before the cock
crows three times.

ANN

I won't let him be alone -- I won't! I won't!

SOUND: Door slamming.

SOUND: Rotary phone dialing.

NORTON

Commissioner -- would you also pick up Ann Mitchell?
She'll be at the convention. Stick her with Henry Connell.

SOUND: Phone being hung up.

NORTON

Let the games begin! And so should I.

* * * * *

SOUND: A crowd chanting, muted.

OTHER ACTORS

(sotto voce)

John Doe! John Doe! John Doe! [continues as underscore]

COLONEL

Psst!

JOHN

Colonel, you're a sight for sore eyes! How'd you know --

COLONEL

I've been having you shadowed, John, ever since you got
back. Lotsa poor people on the street with lots of eyes
watching out for you.

JOHN

You didn't go up to the river?

COLONEL

Without you?

JOHN

We'll go, I promise, just as soon as I get this thing settled.
But I can't find my way in to the stadium -- I'm lost --

COLONEL

You don't want to go in there -- the heelots are on the hunt!
For you!

JOHN

I don't have a choice -- I gotta go in, Colonel -- but I don't
know where I am --

COLONEL

You can still get out with your skin on.

JOHN

I don't have a choice, Colonel. You hear that? I don't have
a choice.

COLONEL

Yeah, that's what you look like and that's what they sound
like. C'mon -- I got a way to get you in -- the brotherhood
of the janitors --

ALL ACTORS

(now full-throated, breaking into cheers)

John Doe! John Doe! John Doe! John Doe! Hooray!!
Yippee!! That's great!! [and so on]

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, I have something I gotta say
to you, something that's gotta be said, by me, about me,
about everything we're trying to do here.

OTHER ACTORS

Fake!! Fake!! John Doe is a fake!! [continuing]

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen! This is exactly what I came down here to tell you about tonight --

NORTON

John Doe, get away from those microphones. Don't listen to that man anymore! He is a fake! My name is D.B. Norton -- you all know me! And I accuse this man of being a faker! We've all been taken for a lot of suckers! And I'm the biggest of the lot! I spent a fortune backing this man in what I believed to be a sincere and worthy cause, just as you all did! And now I find out it's nothing but a racket! Cooked up by him and two of my employees for the purpose of collecting dues from John Does all over the country!

JOHN

That's a lie!

NORTON

It's not a lie! You can read all about it in the newspapers there!

JOHN

That's a lie! Don't believe what he says --

NORTON

This man had no intention of jumping off City Hall! He was paid to say so! Do you deny that?

JOHN

That's got nothing to do with it!

NORTON

Were you paid for it -- or weren't you?

JOHN

Yes! I was paid! But the --

NORTON

And the suicide note? You didn't write that, either!

JOHN

What difference does that make?

NORTON

Did you write it -- or didn't you?

JOHN

No, I didn't write it, but --

NORTON

You bet your life you didn't! You look in your papers, ladies and gentlemen, and you'll find Ann Mitchell's signed confession that she wrote it!

JOHN

It's a fact that I didn't write the letter, but this whole thing started --

NORTON

You see? He admits he's a fake. And for what you've done to all these good people -- they ought to run you out of the country -- and I hope they do it! Go on -- say whatever you want to say!

JOHN

Now that he's through shooting off his face, I've got a couple of things to tell you about --

VOICES

We can't hear you, we can't hear you, we can't hear you -- fake fake fake fake fake --

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen! Look -- this thing's bigger than whether I'm a fake --

VOICES

Fake fake fake fake fake --

COLONEL

John! John! Leave it to the Pontius Pilates. We gotta get outta here!

JOHN

The idea is still good!

COLONEL

C'mon!

JOHN

Believe me, folks! You are the hope of the world!

COLONEL

Come on! Come on!

VOICES
(trailing away)

Fake fake fake fake fake --

* * * * *

SOUND: The crowd's shouting in disappointment shifts into a chorus of children's voices singing "Silent Night."

SOUND: Bells toll the three-quarter hour.

CONNELL

11:45. 11:45.

COLONEL

He'd have to be a bird to get up here without us seeing him.

CONNELL

You haven't seen him for weeks -- maybe he's learned to walk on air to the top of City Hall.

SOUND: The heavy rooftop door slams open.

CONNELL

Ann -- Ann -- what are you doing here? Ann, you're sick -- you should be home in bed.

ANN

I couldn't stay -- I couldn't stay there --

CONNELL

You're burning up with fever.

ANN

What does it matter? It doesn't matter.

COLONEL

Looks like we all got ourselves a fever.

SOUND: The heavy rooftop door slams open.

CONNELL

Ah, Christ --

ANN

You should be ashamed.

NORTON

What makes you think I'm not?

ANN

It's a quality I never noticed.

CONNELL

D.B., you being here isn't right.

NORTON

Don't you think I know that?!

COLONEL

The way a dog buries what it leaves behind.

NORTON

He may not even come.

COLONEL

You'd like that -- one less loose thread you'd have to --

SOUND: The heavy door slams open again.

ANN

John! John!

CONNELL

John, don't get so close to the --

NORTON

I wouldn't do that, John. It'll do you no good.

JOHN

What do any of you know about my good? I saw the police down there.

NORTON

Why do you think I made it so easy for all of us to get into City Hall at midnight on Christmas Eve? We all have a bet on you -- don't we? We need to know how this plays out for John Doe.

JOHN

John Doe? You don't have to worry -- that zombie's dead. John Willoughby? He's the one I don't know about. If he doesn't go over -- then he has to live with this hard nut to crack: he wants to be John Doe again. John Willoughby must be the stupidest man alive because he wants to be born into John Doe again, have it all come alive again to make him feel alive again. Sometimes this hunger just makes him want to find the ledge.

ANN

Oh, John -- it can live again, or Norton wouldn't be here -- he's afraid! We can start it clean now -- that old Ann is gone, too. Someone already died, nearly two thousand years, to keep John Doe alive, so you don't need to --

JOHN

Sssh -- just sshh --

ANN

Help me!

COLONEL

What can we say, Long John? What can we do?

JOHN

You've all done whatever you can do. It's time.

SOUND: The bells ring out midnight.

SOUND: Sounds of running.

ANN

No, John, no! Somebody stop him -- stop him!!

COLONEL

(overlapping)

Oh God oh God oh God -- John, no!

SOUND: The heavy roof door opening and slamming shut.

COLONEL

I can catch him! I can catch him! I'll catch him, I'll save him
-- just -- gotta keep running -- keep running -- keep running
--

SOUND: Another door slamming open.

COLONEL

Oh God oh God oh God -- John, John, I wasn't fast
enough -- I wasn't fast enough to catch -- you -- I wasn't
-- aaahhhhhh!!! -- Long John, Long John, you poor sucker!
You poor poor sucker! Oh God oh God oh God --

SOUND: Inconsolable lamentation fades into silence.

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
&Tackle**
PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com

