

Tilting

by Jennie Webb

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Tilting

CHARACTERS:

A, "a capable-looking woman," is all in America that is good and conservatively compassionate and blind. She sees only what she wants to see, and will not be convinced that there is more or less than there seems to be. In her view. Because things are nicer and more manageable that way. She likes words, especially interpreting them. This empowers her. She can turn on a dime, but is America and all its value and ethics. And since America is the only thing *with* value ...

B, "a reluctant man," prides himself on seeing all and hearing all and knowing enough about everything to tell you what's wrong with it. He is quite comfortable wearing his discomfort with the country and the world on his expensive, tailored sleeve, pointing out what is unjust and what should have been done. By somebody else. In theory. Think intellectuals who write in journals and prophesy doom to their inner circles over single malt scotch, all the while enjoying their money and holding their purse strings.

C, "a worn and wary woman," has worked all her life and will probably work until the day she dies. But she's strangely invisible. Despite the fact that her skin color or her cultural or religious practices, or her lack of an education, make her quite different from the people who hire her. She may be one of America's disadvantaged, but feels it's to her advantage to provide—it's her job—with the hope that something, some day, will come trickling down.

X, "a somewhat vacant man who doesn't take up much space," is an empty vessel created in America's image. Raised in the public's eye, he has learned to tell people what they want to hear. To the best of his abilities, anyway. Since he has absolutely nothing to say. Although this makes him very wrong for the role he's been cast in, he's surrounded by people who tell him he's perfect in the part and he's just stupid enough to believe them. As a result of his impressively steel-clad ignorance of his vacuousness, he is difficult to stop once he sets his small mind to something, and ultimately very dangerous.

Y, "a loud and bright girl," appears to have multiple personalities. She is pleased as punch with herself and what she does, because she's damn good at it. Manipulating all facets of public perception, she skillfully handles, spins or embroiders whatever material she has to work with. She pulls the wool over the eyes of a grateful America; what's black she can color white, and vice versa. By making up the rules as she goes along, she can turn anything into gold. She's so good at playing the game that she forgets it is a game, and sees nothing wrong with switching teams at half time.

Z, "a confrontational young woman," is a member of a disaffected generation; she's disgusted with the country the way it's been left to her, but doesn't have enough confidence to think she can change it. It pisses her off to see people getting away with shit, because she can't. She feels like she's all alone, wants to belong to something and be worth noticing. But what she does or says to get noticed generally makes everyone close their car windows. It seems like maybe she's very, very close to giving up because it's all too hard.

LOUDSPEAKER reports the news.

SETTING:

Anyplace in America where there is a table to which things are brought, around which things are decided, or on which things are set, served, lain out.

Tilting

A capable-looking woman, called A, sits alone at a long table which runs across the width of the stage. Placed along the upstage side of the table are three chairs; the woman sits in the center chair; in front of her is a bell. She holds a letter and is beaming, obviously pleased with herself and the world around her. She speaks directly to the audience.

A:

Do I seem as if I'm about to explode?

Because that's certainly the way I feel. Now that I've got *this ... (indicating the letter)* it's as if I'm bursting from the seams!

No. That's not right. It's not ... Bursting *at* the seams! Yes. Almost ready to pop. To take off. Well, not really to take off, that gives rather a mixed message. Implying removal. And has nothing to do with seams.

But you know that feeling inside when just *everything* couldn't be more right, because an *emptiness* is about to be *filled*? It's an extraordinary feeling, let me tell you. One which makes our country look a whole lot better, especially to those of us who didn't even know we were empty! Ha ha!

To be honest, I suppose I've been waiting for a moment like this my entire life. Hoping for it. Dreaming of it. Even working toward it, as funny as that sounds. Because this is a rare moment of *absolute certainty*! The kind of moment you simply must share!

She looks around her at the empty stage, then back at the audience.

But *you* all know exactly what I'm talking about. Because each and every day, if we wake up with the least bit of doubt about the gentle nature of the world and our supreme place in it, we've only to look down at our doorsteps and there it is, sharing with *us*, providing proof irrefutable: *(reverently) the paper.*

I might as well admit it. I can't start my day without the paper. It's not that it's my guide, but rather ... my meter. Something to tell me that everything's just so, and this is what's what, and who's who, and where it is to be. That's an important ... measurement for me. As a matter of fact, it's imperative. To read, in black and white, the way things are.

Pause.

So where is it? *(shouting offstage)* And where are you? What could you possibly be doing? I'm ready to share, I can't find the paper, and you won't even sit down at the table when I'm talking to you? How come—?

B:
(interrupting) You're not talking to me.

A reluctant man, called B, has appeared.

A:
I could be talking to you. If you were here. If you were with me at the table, I could be talking to you. I would be talking to you. We two would be talking. And sharing. But no.

B:
No.

Pause.

A:
(patting the chair beside her) Please?

B:
No.

A:
Pretty please.

B:
No.

A:
But—

B:
(interrupting) Why should I come to the table?

A:
The *mail* came!

B:
Before. The mail came before.

A:
Yes. The mail came and it brought something very ... Well, if you were here with me we could have read it together!

B:
At the table.

A:
Yes!

B:

But now?

A:

Now?

B:

Why should I sit down now? There's absolutely no reason. The only reason would be if there was, say, *food* at the table ...

A:

Please! It's not even dinner time!

B:

It never is.

A:

What?

B:

How long has it been since dinner?

A:

Since dinner?

B:

Since the last dinner. The last time we had dinner.

A:

I don't know why you're getting upset.

B:

I'm getting hungry, is what I'm getting.

A:

Did I mention that the mail came?

B:

Yes.

A:

Yes?

B:

Yes.

A:

Yes!

Pause.

A:
And that doesn't pique your interest?

B:
No!

Pause.

A:
Well then ...

She rings the bell. A worn and wary woman, called C, appears.

C:
Yes?

A:
Celeste!

C:
No.

A:
I— What?

C:
It's not Celeste.

A:
Oh. Cherise.

C:
No.

A:
Carol.

C:
No.

A:
Carla.

C:
N—

A:
(interrupting) The paper! Have you seen the paper?!

Pause.

C:
No.

A:
No?

C:
No. I haven't seen the paper.

A:
No.

Pause.

I thought not. Thank you ... *(waiting for a name to come to her—it doesn't)*
Thank you.

The woman called C nods and disappears. The man called B noisily turns a page of the newspaper he's reading which catches the woman called A's attention.

Oh.

She turns back to face the audience.

If you would come to the table, we could both read it.

Pause.

If you would sit down—

B:
(interrupting) I don't know why I pay for this. There's absolutely nothing in it.

He throws the newspaper onto the table, and disappears.

A:
(stroking the newspaper like it's a cat) Nothing in it ... *(loudly)* **The paper!**

Y:
The paper!

A loud and bright girl, called Y, has appeared.

The woman called A hands her the newspaper, and as she opens it we hear a voice from the audience through a loudspeaker.

LOUDSPEAKER:

“June 8, 2001. President Signs Tax Cut Into Law.”

A:

Yes!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Touting advance ‘relief payments’ in the form of checks for individual taxpayers...”

A:

Relief! That’s the word!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“...the White House calls the legislation ‘an historic move toward government responsibility.’”

A:

At last!!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“However, this effort to revive a sagging economy has been widely condemned by officials...”

A:

What?

LOUDSPEAKER:

(continuing) “...as disproportionately benefitting the wealthiest few.”

A:

What on earth is going on here?

She looks to the man called B who is of no help, then to the girl called Y.

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Many say the cuts are of such an enormous and unwieldy scope ...”

A:

(to the girl called Y) Hello?

LOUDSPEAKER:

(continuing) “... that the budget’s ability to meet spending priorities such as Social Security and Medicare will be—”

Y:
(interrupting, reading from the newspaper) "Rejoice and welcome ye all to prosperity!"

A:
Ah!

Y:
"Citizens across this great land of ours can now march into a future which smells distinctly of financial freedom!"

A:
(sniffing) Why, yes! It does!

Y:
"Our chosen one will be remembered in years to come as the shining force who ushered in economic justice!"

LOUDSPEAKER:

"But top leaders call the tax plan 'ill-conceived' and even 'criminal,' warning that the cuts will bring disastrous consequences nationwide with global—!"

The loudspeaker is interrupted by the girl called Y abruptly closing the newspaper.

Y:
"And any nay-sayers can look with envy at the rest of America, cocooning in a secure safety net of fiscal fidelity!"

A:
Well! What did I tell you! Isn't that wonderful! *(to the girl called Y)* But my horoscope! What about my horoscope?

Y:
I'm looking ...

Z:
For what? What is she looking for?

A confrontational young woman, called Z, has appeared.

A:
Hello, darling. If it isn't my favorite daughter!

Z:
I'm your only daughter.

A:

My favorite and my only daughter.

The girl called Y folds up the newspaper.

Z:

Can I ask you something—why do you act surprised to see me? Every day it's the same, "Hello, darling!" Like I'm your long-lost—

A:

(harshly, interrupting) And now you're found. Sit down.

She sits.

(turning to the girl called Y) Well?

Y:

(without looking at the newspaper; her tone and demeanor have distinctly changed) "Today is your lucky day. As the Moon makes a beeline through Aires, fortune smiles upon you! You may be bristling at the unexpected, but take it all in stride. Nothing is what it seems. More and more comes your way, and you handle it in style."

The girl called Y places the folded-up newspaper underneath the stage right legs of the table, and disappears. The table has begun to tilt.

A:

Well!

Posing herself stylishly, the woman called A considers the young woman called Z.

I am now going to share something with you. *(producing her letter with great flourish)* Do you know what this is?

Z:

A letter?

A:

No! Well, yes. But this ... *this...* also *sig-ni-fies* something. Something immediate and direct. And at the same time, it's also a broad, sweeping gesture that makes me part of a larger picture, something long-term and all-inclusive. It's not only a ...

(shouting offstage) What did it say it was?

Y's VOICE:

A "notice of status."

A:
Yes! A “notice of status!” See! A “notice of status,” personalized to me ...
(again offstage) To me?

Y’s VOICE:
To “Taxpayer.” It says, “Dear Taxpayer.”

A:
Yes! “Taxpayer!” That’s me. “*Dear Taxpayer!*” But it’s more than that, really.
What this is, in my hand, is an acknowledgment of my need for ...
“reconciliation,” and a promise. A promise born out of ...

Pause.

Y’s VOICE:
“Economic growth.”

A:
Yes! *(smiling a very broad smile, and speaking again directly to the audience)*
“Economic growth.” I can’t tell you how that makes me feel.

Pause. Perhaps a patriotic song begins to swell in the background

Sure I can! Safe! That’s how I feel. *(short pause)* But I know you feel the same.
We all do. All Americans.

Pause.

All Americans who pay income taxes. Who have incomes. Who work.

Pause.

Americans who work! Working Americans. Americans, together, working for
America. That’s how I like to think.

Pause.

And together we’re getting taxed for it!

Silence.

Well. *(short pause)* I feel as if I need something.

Z:
I feel as if I need something.

A:
But I feel as if I need something real. A real thing. A real something.

Z:
I can think of something real.

A:
I need some money!

She rings the bell. The woman called C appears.

C:
Yes?

A:
I need some money. Will you please bring me some money?

The woman called C seems confused.

Is there a problem?

C:
No. I mean ... You just asked me to bring you some money ...

A:
Is that a question? Are you asking me whether I just asked you, or are you stating that I just asked you? In either case, the answer is "Yes!" It's either an answer to your question, or a validation of your statement. "Yes."

Pause.

Yes. Yes!

Pause.

Well?

C:
I'll have to ask ... (*pointing offstage after the man called B*)

A:
Oh. Him. Never mind, then.

Pause.

Thank you. That'll be all ...

The woman called C disappears.

A:
... Christine.

Z:

“Christine?”

A:

Yes! Christine.

Z:

That’s not—

A:

(interrupting) Have you seen your brother?

Z:

My brother.

A:

Your brother. Have you seen your brother? It’s not a trick question.

Z:

I don’t know about that.

A:

What? What don’t you know about?

Z:

“My brother.” No, I haven’t seen him. Ring a bell or something.

A:

What?

Z:

Or call for him. He always comes when you call, doesn’t he?

A:

Yes, he does, as a matter of fact. Bless his heart. Because he knows the way to *my* heart! He’s my favorite—

Z:

(interrupting) Your favorite?

A:

My favorite son! He’s my favorite son.

Z:

(under her breath) You don’t have a son.

A somewhat vacant man, called X, appears and doesn’t take up much space. The woman called A doesn’t notice him.

A:

There are many women who would give their eye teeth for a son like him. Their eye teeth, I tell you!

Pause.

A:

I don't know about that, but I'd certainly give up plenty for him. For all of you.

Z:

All of us?

A:

All of us! All of us here! All of us now! All of us in this whole, huge, wonderful—

X:

(interrupting) I can't tell you how glad I am to be here and glad to tell you of my gladishness and to hear how telling it is that I am here and gladder ... I tell you.

A:

Oh! I didn't see you come in!

Z:

(getting up from the table) And I'm going out.

A:

You're not.

Z:

Huh? I am. I'm going out.

A:

You may think you're going out, but you're not. You're already here.

Z:

Well, if you want to look at it like that. I guess I'm already here, but let's just say, I'm going *there*. *Elsewhere*. Somewhere that's *NOT* here!

A:

You can call it what you like, but there's nowhere to go! *(short pause)* *You're already here!*

Z:

Uh huh. *(short pause)* See you, then.

The young woman called Z disappears.

A:
(*after the young woman called Z*) Darling?

X:
Yes?

A:
Oh.

Pause.

So. (*short pause*) How has your day been? Did I tell you that the mail came? The paper came, too. I can't start my day without the paper. Today it had the most delightful horoscope in it, did I tell you that? I can't remember what it was, my horoscope—what it said—but I do remember that it was delightful all the same. It made my day, my horoscope.

Which is rather funny, really. Because that's the reverse of what should happen. If you look at the day backwards. From the end to the start. The horoscope predicted what did happen. Already. So your day makes your horoscope, after the fact, if you're a day ahead. A good thing to remember when traveling internationally.

X:
Where did she go?

A:
What? Oh. Nowhere.

X:
Nowhere?

A:
Nowhere. Not anywhere.

Pause.

Don't worry about it. Come. Sit with me.

He sits to her left.

Tell me all about your day. Every little thing.

Pause.

Or just the big things.

Pause.

Would you like me to start?

She holds up the letter.

Do you know what this is?

Pause.

A:

Well, it's a letter, but a letter containing a message. To me— well, to us. And I mean a message in the largest sense of the word. A message to the individual—that's me—well, us—but also to our country. That we count and are counted. We count, we're counted, *and ... And we get relief!*

That's right! It says so right here. "*Immediate relief.*" No waiting around for this relief! But here's my favorite part. You want to know my favorite part of this? Not only of "this," as in the larger picture, but "this" as in this letter. My absolute, favorite part? Is ...

Pause.

(shouting offstage) My favorite part is ...?

Y's VOICE:

"You need take no additional steps."

A:

Yes! "You need take no additional steps." How do you like that! Which means ... *(whispering)* All we have to do is sit here!

Pause.

(shouting offstage) So sit down, will you? Didn't you hear that?

B:

Oh, I heard you.

The man called B has appeared.

As a matter of fact, I can't imagine a day going by where I don't hear you. And I also read the letter.

A:

You did!

B:

I did. I read the mail, and I read the paper.

A:

You did.

B:

Like I do every day.

Pause.

A:
And?

B:
You said it yourself. There's nothing to do but wait!

A:
I said that?

B:
You said that! You delighted in saying that! It was your favorite part, is what you said.

A:
No. That's not what I said.

B:
In effect, that's what you said.

A:
Ha! In *effect!* Which is not in reality.

B:
It's the same thing.

A:
It's not the same thing! Effect and reality are not at all the same thing! (*short pause*) I said to sit down! I said to sit down here with me right now! That's what I said! **Sit down!**

Pause.

B:
No.

A:
(*to the man called X*) Explain it to him.

X:
Explain it to him?

A:
Yes. Explain it to him.

X:
Explain what to him?

A:
The difference: Effect versus Reality.

X:
Yes. *(short pause)* It's my opinion that reality is arguably limited to effects of real opinionators opinioning, and the effectiveness of having opinions may be within the arguable limits of effectivically expressioning—not arguing reality.

Pause.

A:
(to the man called B) Does that answer your question?

B:
I don't recall having a question that needed answering ...

A:
(to the man called X) Thank you! I'll have you know that my mind is at rest!

B:
... by him.

A:
(to the man called X) You may go now.

X:
Now?

A:
Now.

The man called X disappears.

B:
He's an idiot.

A:
He's a genius.

She rings the bell. The woman called C appears.

C:
Yes?

A:
Has the mail come?

C:
The mail? No.

A:
Then have you seen the paper?

C:
No. I haven't seen the paper.

A:
No ...

She turns to see the man called B who is again reading a newspaper, then turns back to the woman called C.

Wouldn't this be a wonderful place if some people were able to find it in their hearts to open themselves up, and realize that the world is a bigger place than just their little piece of it? What a surprise it would be to find out that there are other people in it who think in other ways about other things! Who have needs and want to be informed and feel connected and—

The man called B throws the newspaper onto the table.

(beaming, to the woman called C) Well, Ch ... Cr ... Ca ... (giving up) What are you waiting for?

Pause.

C:
You're welcome.

She disappears.

A:
The paper!

She hands it to the girl called Y who has appeared.

Y:
The paper!

We again hear the loudspeaker as the newspaper is opened.

LOUDSPEAKER:
"August 10, 2001. White House Hastily Enacts Controversial Policies!"

A:
Oh, my!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“The specter of the religious right in policy making has caused grave misgivings from medical research groups and leading scientists.”

A:

(to the girl called Y) Well?

Y:

(reading again from the paper) “Look to the heavens those who are infirm and dying! Today, our leader took a bold step forward.”

A:

Hallelujah!

LOUDSPEAKER:

(increasing volume) “Coupled with the President’s attempts to call a fetus and unborn child and his signature ‘faith-based initiative’...”

Y:

(increasing volume) “Christians in this great land of ours can be assured a life free of disease, misery and evil!”

LOUDSPEAKER:

(continuing, again increasing volume before being drowned out by the girl called Y) ... limits placed on stem cell research can be seen as defeat for modern medicine and a victory for fundamentalists and anti-abortion...”

Y:

(overlapping) “And indeed, Jesus himself could not have arrived at such a clever decision, one which will serve every interest of **every American in this or any universe!**”

The girl called quickly Y shuts and folds the newspaper, under the scrutiny of the man called B.

A:

Doesn’t *that* do my heart good! And ...?

Y:

(changing tone) “The stars are in perfect alignment. Today is the day to tackle new adventures, and meet new people. Great advancements are on the horizon, and you will be at the center of each and every one of them. Take no notice of anyone who gets in your way. Your answer to those who question you? ‘So there!’”

A:

(to the man called B) Did you hear that?

B:
How could I not hear that?

A:
“So there!” That’s what I say to you! “So there!”

The girl called Y has again placed the newspaper underneath the legs of the table. She disappears.

The table now obviously tilts down toward audience right. The actors onstage lean stage right, as if to compensate for the ground tilting the opposite direction. (NOTE: If technical elements allow, the tilting can be exaggerated by lifting the stage right end of the table with wires, or hydraulics, etc. The “papers” and other media matter placed under the table throughout can also be representational, and/or made with bulky materials which effect a more extreme angle.)

B:
Where did you find her, anyway?

A:
What do you mean? *(catching herself)* I mean, “So there!”

B:
Right.

A:
She’s always been here. You just haven’t noticed. *(short pause)* So there.

B:
Fine.

Z:
I don’t feel well.

The young woman called Z has appeared, and is noticeably affected by the tilting.

A:
Hello, darling!

Z:
I don’t.

A:
I just thought of something. “I feel badly.” That’s something many children say. Adults, too. “I feel badly.” Which is to say that they don’t feel well, as in feeling, as in sensory perception, hands-on ... Touching. Which is not the same as “touching!” As in, “I found that touching,” as in it made me feel, well ...

A:

Wait. Is it, "I don't feel well," or "I'm not feeling well?"

"I'm feeling bad." "I feel bad." "I'm feeling bad." Not "badly," but "bad." Which would also imply loss of sensation, wouldn't it? Or diminished quality? Or quantity, I suppose. But a loss or lessening, at any rate.

Z:

I need to lie down.

She lies in a near fetal position.

A:

Now there's another one! "Lay down," or "Lie down?" You lie down, but I would lay you down. Or lay something down on top of you.

Z:

A blanket.

A:

Blanket. That's a word which is two things, a noun and a verb. I could lay a blanket on you, or blanket you with ... a blanket. Blanketing with snow, that's what you mostly hear about, but that isn't something that's really in my ... domain. My capacity as a blanket-er.

And blanket can also be an adjective. A blanketing argument would be an argument which blanketed, which covered up whatever it was that it was supposed to have concealed, or blanketed.

She notices the man called B, again reading a newspaper.

A long time ago, in this country—when there were many, many people without jobs or money or even homes—people would lie down, just like you're doing now, curl up on the street or where ever they could find, and they would use the paper as a blanket! Blanketed with the paper. Hah!

She and the man called B look at one another.

The blanketing effects of the news of the day. How funny that is.

B:

I'm not finished yet.

The man called X appears.

X:

I have thought long and hard about this, and my team says it is by no means an easy decision. Which it might have been if this one man hadn't thought long, or thought hard, or decided without my team.

A:

Oh! I didn't know you were—

X:

(interrupting) Decisioning is not an easy process for me in any way. If it were easy, I would not consult with my team, and the process would be a short and simple team-less thinking session, rather than a process demanding thinking about hard, not easy, team decisions. The thinking process teamly that happens here involves the thoughts of a thinkerer who is not on a team but faced with decisions that are demanding, not the un-hard—non-long—processage that sometimes decides. No. That would be easy.

Pause.

B:

Maybe he needs food.

A:

Give me the paper.

Z:

Where did he get a team?

B:

(looking at the girl called Z) She looks like she could use something to eat.

Z:

(trying to rise from the table) Help me up, someone.

The man called X goes toward her, but she takes no notice and the man called B helps her stand.

(looking at the man called X) What is he doing here, anyway?

B:

He's an idiot.

A:

He's a genius.

Z:

No, what is he *doing* here? What is his purpose? Why is he here?

Pause.

Z:

And where's his god damn team?!

The woman called A rings the bell. The woman called C appears, catching her balance as she comes onstage.

C:

Yes?

A:

I must ask you something: "How are you feeling?"

C:

How am I feeling?

A:

Yes. How are you feeling? (*short pause*) Do you feel well?

Pause.

C:

You mean, how is my health and how are my emotions, or how do I rate tactilely?

A:

Oh, go away. You're no fun at all.

C:

You're welcome.

She disappears.

Z:

I really don't— I mean, I think I'm dying. I'm really, really dying here. I'm burning up. Feel me.

A:

Oh, I shouldn't. I don't feel well. Nerve damage.

B:

She needs to eat. We all need to eat.

A:

Quit whining and sit down why don't you!

The man called X has let himself drift far stage left.

A:
Where are you going! Come back to the table and sit down! Everyone, SIT!

The man called X fights the forces of gravity and sits to the left of the woman called A. The young woman called Z falls in a chair to her right. The woman called A looks at the man called B expectantly.

B:
Where am I supposed to sit?

A:
Oh. We'll get you a ...

She rings the bell and the woman called C appears.

C:
Yes?

A:
We need—

B:
(interrupting) I'm not sitting.

A:
But she'll—

B:
(interrupting) I'm not sitting.

A:
(to the woman called C) Can you please—?

B:
(interrupting) I'm not!

Pause.

A:
You're not.

B:
Not until there's food on the table.

A:
Not until ...

She turns and looks expectantly at the woman called C.

C:
Yes?

A:
All right. I know that there are certain things which are, how shall I put this, “out of your control.” Not in your domain. A bit beyond your reach. Areas in which you are not, truly, the proper purveyor. Anymore. You may have been once, but we must understand that there are things you cannot, at this time, purvey. Any longer. Times are changing, and if in these changing times it is not in your purview to provide us with ... that which ... some of us—one of us—have—has—so adamantly and, if I might say, inappropriately requested owing to the situation ...

Z:
What are you trying to tell her?

A:
(to the woman called C) Oh, just bring in the mail, will you?

C:
The mail hasn’t—

A:
(interrupting) Bring in something, then!

C:
(indicating the man called B and his newspaper) The paper?

Y:
The paper!

The girl called Y has appeared. The woman called C disappears as the girl called Y takes the paper from the man called B and opens it. We hear the loudspeaker.

LOUDSPEAKER:
“August 18, 2001. President Defends His Stance on the Environment. Amidst sharp criticism from all levels—“

A:
(interrupting) Ohhhhhh!

Y:
(reading from the newspaper) “Our people must come first!’ is the statement ringing forth loud and clear from our benevolent leader.”

LOUDSPEAKER:

(continuing, increasing volume) "... the White House applauded the President's denying the phenomenon of global warming, renouncing the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gasses—"

Y:

(interrupting, increasing volume) "You can listen to the hogwash of Chicken-Little scientists and their *The Sky is Falling!*—"

LOUDSPEAKER:

(interrupting, continuing with increasing volume before being drowned out by Y) "... easing restrictions for industrial polluters, and authorizing drilling in Arctic Wilderness Areas, National Parks, Wildlife Refuges..."

Y:

(overlapping, continuing) "... or look into my eyes and repeat after me: **'Americans for America! And if we don't have money in the bank who cares whether there's birds in the sky or angry, dirty have-nots on foreign soil, so to hell—'**"

A:

(interrupting, closing the paper in Y's hands) **My horoscope!**

Y:

(changing tone) "Keep a sharp watch for dissenting forces around you today, as only you know what is your true path. Stay focused on yourself and your needs, and in no time at all you'll be able to exploit the Virgo Moon. Think self!"

A:

Hah!

The girl called Y places the newspaper under the stage right end of the table and disappears. The tilting increases, and the young woman called Z is having difficulties sitting at the table.

Z:

Ah! I'm dizzy!

The man called X reaches out but she takes no notice.

A:

(to the young woman called Z) Oh, darling, please ...

X:

Yes?

A:

No, not—

Z:

And is anyone else hot? It's like an oven in here! Is there—

X:

(interrupting) I must say this! I say, I must, that neither I nor my team can no longer blatantly ignore the disregard for the truthful person's ignorance, and the distrust felt is and are longer than they are blatant. The soon and long of it being that in my personal regardedness of those around me, the longer I ignore the truth, the sooner I can say whether I am blatant, disregarded, or distrusted ...

Z:

Huh?

X:

... and that hurts me. It hurts my team. Personalifically. I don't mind saying so.

The man called X disappears.

A:

(to the man called B) Look what you've done!

B:

What I've done!

Z:

I'm going to ... *(losing her balance)* Ah!

She grabs onto the woman called A.

A:

Darling, not at the dinner table!

Z:

I—

B:

(interrupting, pointedly) The "dinner" table?

A:

Just what is that supposed to mean?

B:

How can it be the dinner table when *there's no dinner* on it???

Pause.

A:

I have two words for you: Think self.

B:

Your horoscope, not mine.

A:

Must you keep harping on the same thing?

B:

I'm not harping!

A:

It certainly sounds like harping to me! *(to the young woman called Z, who is struggling to stay on her feet)* Harping, or not harping?

B:

No. You "harp" about little things. This isn't a little thing, it's a big thing. I say we need a meal here!

A:

I don't know if I agree with that.

B:

What?

A:

I think you're wrong.

B:

I am not wrong! *(to the young woman called Z)* Aren't you hungry?

Z:

I'm—

B:

(interrupting) Will you tell me where all my money's going around here, please? She's obviously starving, and I don't even remember the last time I ate!

A:

Will you stop being so petty!

B:

Sustenance is not petty!

A:

No! What I mean—what I meant—is that harping does not necessarily imply, as you so simplistically put it, "little things." One can harp on larger, important issues. We all need things and be assured that our needs will be addressed! So I don't know why you insist on going on and on ad nauseam in this particular theme—

B:
(interrupting) And food is not a theme! Food is something physical and tangible and right here and right now!

A:
Where? Where is it, then? I don't see any! Will you explain your logic to me?

B:
(moving away from the table in frustration) **Ahhhhhh!**

Z:
(losing her balance and falling into a chair at the table) **Ahhhhhh!**

The woman called A rings the bell and the woman called C appears, but before she can speak,

Y:
The paper!

The girl called Y has appeared, and with great flourish produces a newspaper from an unsuspecting man called B—perhaps she pulls it from behind his ear or reaches down his pants, but in any case he didn't know he had one. As the girl called Y opens it,

LOUDSPEAKER:

“August 25, 2001. Military Budget Top Priority. The Commander-in-Chief defends increased spending for unproven programs to protect against so-called ‘rogue states’—“

Y:
(interrupting, reading) “Listen all you whiners! Our position is and always has been that no costs should be spared—

LOUDSPEAKER:

(interrupting, continuing with increasing volume) “... while the multi-billion dollar missile shield combined with our Nation's costly ‘2-War’ military policy and certain withdrawal from foreign treaties—“

Y:
(overlapping, continuing) “...**in making our home-land of god-fearing Americans safe from the evil forces hard at work doing evil things and making evil plans outside our borders!**”

Short pause.

LOUDSPEAKER:

(continuing) “...all but cements the image of a hostile U.S. bent on an arms race!”

Pause.

A:
Thank you, but that's not—

Y:
(changing tone) “The world as you create it needs your guidance. Those around you may speak out, but never fear. By following you and your infinite wisdom, they'll soon learn the ropes. The shift of Neptune plays havoc with your emotions, but keep a straight course. Things will all be tied up neatly, and your crew will be on board!”

The girl called Y places the newspaper under the legs of the table and disappears as the tilting again increases.

A:
(to herself) Oh my! *(short pause)* Well! *(to the others)* Did you hear that!?

B:
Like we had any choice in the matter.

A:
Were you all listening?! “Infinite wisdom!” “Never fear!” “Keep a straight course!”

Z:
(fighting to stay upright) They've got to be kidding: “A straight course ... ”

The woman called C starts to leave.

(to the woman called C) Wait. Please. Help me out here.

C:
How?

Z:
I don't know. But something's really not right. Am I the only one who—?

The man called X appears.

X:
(interrupting) I've given it some more thought ...

Z:
Oh, god!

X:
(interrupting) And my current thinking is that negative thoughts are currently left up to those folks who are negatively situated in a defending position. A current collective thinkage defense rather than a collection of thinkerers. Or a situationer who has opportuned a contributing of thoughtful defensive folks. For my entire team.

Z:
What is he talking about?!

B:
He's an idiot.

A:
He's a genius!

Z:
(standing, holding onto the table for support) But he's not saying anything! Does anyone understand what he's saying? *What is he doing here?*

The woman called C starts to leave again.

(to the woman called C) No! Don't go!

C:
There's nothing I can—

A:
(interrupting, to the young woman called Z) Oh, darling ...

X:
Yes?

Z:
(to the man called X) Hey mister—your team! What about your team?

X:
What?

Z:
Who's behind you? I wanna see 'em.

A:
(to the young woman called Z) Please! Soon you will recognize the “infinite wisdom.” *(to the man called X)* “The world as you create it needs your guidance—”

B:

(interrupting) That's your horoscope, not his.

A:

(seething) We're the same sign!

Z:

Mother! He doesn't belong here! He has no *right* to be here!

A:

How can you say that?

Z:

I'm sorry. But—

A:

(interrupting) Just look at this face. *(grabbing the man called X)* This is the face of America. This is the face of our future—you and me and our entire family, young lady! Together, we have chosen this as a vision of who we are and where we're going ...

Z:

Who chose him? I didn't choose him! *(to the woman called C who is drifting away)* Did you choose him?

C:

I don't get to—

A:

(interrupting, firmly) And let me tell you that he and his team have taken the responsibility of being the chosen one—the chosen ones?—very seriously indeed!

Z:

Oh. My. God!

She lets go of the table and falls into the arms of the man called B, firmly footed stage left. The woman called A turns to the woman called C.

A:

You! Choyung-Celoni-Carisota— Oh, whoever you are!

Pause.

C:

Yes?

A:

Well?

C:
What?

A:
What?

C:
What?!

Pause.

A:
Well?!

Pause.

C:
The paper's not coming today.

A:
Wha— It's not?

C:
No. *(short pause, looking at the man called B)* The subscription's been cancelled.

A:
Cancelled? Cancelled. How can it have been cancelled? How can something like that have happened? Been allowed to happen. I can't start my day without the—!

B:
(interrupting) "Think self."

C:
(to the man called B) You're welcome.

The woman called C disappears.

A:
(to the man called B) I have had just about enough of you!

B:
You have, have you? You've had enough?

A:
Yes! I have!

B:
Funny, because I feel exactly the opposite. I pay the bills, but I haven't had enough of anything, for a very long time.

A:
Well, if you never come to the table ...

B:
For what? What am I going to get if I strap myself down, like you, to that table as if it's a life raft? I paid for it, but there's no reason for me to even look at that damn table! That table might as well be your coffin, and I refuse to come near it!

Z:
I can't take any more of this.

A:
(to the young woman called Z) Darling?

X:
Yes?

Y:
The paper!

The girl called Y comes on with an open newspaper and we hear the loudspeaker.

LOUDSPEAKER:
(quickly) "September 4, 2001. Critics Reject President's 'Spirit of Cooperation.' Leaders around the globe call the President's foreign policy decisions isolationist, and even destructive in light of the actions he has taken since in office!"

Y:
(reading) "The word, sisters and brothers, is 'exceptionalism!'"

LOUDSPEAKER:
"He has refused—!"

Y:
(interrupting) "Are we not a super power who protects each of its children in each and every way, exceptionally?"

LOUDSPEAKER:
"He has resisted—!"

Y:
(interrupting) "Aren't we exceptionally dedicated to the wants and needs of our exceptional sons and daughters above all else?"

LOUDSPEAKER:

“He has denied—!”

Y:

(interrupting) “Then why should we, the exceptional, be giving hand-outs to heathens who aren’t handing back? Helping people that don’t look like us or speak our language or worship our god?”

LOUDSPEAKER:

Can I get some help here?!

B:

(to the girl called Y) You there, stop that! Stop! You’re not supposed to be here!

Y:

(closing the paper) It’s a free promotion.

(to the woman called A, changing tone) “Too bad that the stars and planets have chosen to punish you for not planning ahead. The warnings were there, buried beneath the messages of hope. Saturn’s influence can be overcome, however, at a price. Snatch up the bargain close at hand. It will prove valuable in the long run.”

The girl called Y places the newspaper under the stage right end of the table and disappears. The table and characters are now at a frightening angle.

The woman called A clutches the man called X at her side.

A:

Oh!

Z:

Mother?

A:

(to the man called X) Don’t worry. I’ve got you.

The young woman called Z begins to work her way against the incline to the woman called A.

Z:

Mother! What are you doing?

A:

Quiet! He needs his rest! He’s got a big day ahead of him!

Z:

Mother! He's not— He doesn't need you! And he can't do anything for you!
He's—

A:

(interrupting, covering the man called X's ears) Stop talking like that! What if he hears you?

Z:

(to the man called X) Tell her! Why don't you tell her!

X:

(feigning deafness) What? I can't—

A:

(to the man called X, as if comforting a baby) Shhhhh!

Z:

Mother, he is not one of us. He pretends to be one of us, but he's not!

A:

That will be all! He is a member of our family! My favorite—

Z:

(interrupting) He's not! *(to the man called X)* Tell her!

X:

(to the woman called A) Your favorite—?

Z:

Stop it! Leave us alone! Go back to your team!

A:

(to the young woman called Z) I'm warning you ...!

Z:

(shouting offstage) Hey! Guys! Come and get him! We don't want him anymore! We never wanted him in the first place! *(to the man called X)* Tell them to come out here!

X:

My team?

Z:

Yeah! Every one of 'em. It's time to bring in the troops! You got 'em armed, don't you?

A:
(caressing the man called X) Shhhhhh.

X:
(looking at the woman called A) My team!

A:
Yesssss.

Z:
Mother! He's dangerous. You don't know what you're doing!

B:
She knows, all right.

Z:
(to the man called B) No! Tell her to look at him for what he really is!

She clutches onto the chair to the right of the woman called A.

Or what he isn't! *(to the woman called A)* That is not your son!

A:
Be quiet!

Y:
(her tone has changed again, somehow combining her two personalities)
BEHOLD!

The girl called Y has appeared with a large stack of newspapers.

LOUDSPEAKER:
"Behold?"

Y:
Behold!

LOUDSPEAKER:
No! People have to know about the—!

Y:
(interrupting) "Mars brings with it terrifying news. One you trusted turns and shows true colors. Signs of mutiny could poison the waters in the days to come. Cut your losses, unify forces, and remember that your own divine calling cannot be understood by everyone!"

The girl called Y places the newspapers under the stage right end of the table and disappears.

Z:
Mother!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The angle of the table indicates such an exaggerated tilting that the young woman called Z literally cannot stay onstage. With her chair, she falls off stage left, sliding directly past the man called B.

Long silence.

Both the man called B and the woman called A look off stage left. She begins to rise from the table.

A:
Darling ...?

X:
Yes.

He pulls the woman called A back into her chair. She looks at him.

A:
Darling.

Pause.

X:
There are certain times when, as in times like these, I am certain that the demands for statements cannot begin to express the demand for expressioning. In the many ways the timers and the expressers and demanders and even the statemeters would like. So I'll just put it like this: The poor need longer, the children well-oiled, and the chickens in the pocketbooks just a little bit more marginal.

Pause.

The woman called A rings the bell. The woman called C appears.

C:
Yes?

A:
I'm ... I need something.

The woman called C looks for the young woman called Z.

C:
Yes. Where is ...?

A:

Is there anything that you can—

C:

(interrupting) No. *(short pause)* I can't. There's nothing I can bring, nothing I can do, nothing I can say. Period. Where did she—?

A:

(interrupting) You haven't been paid, is that it? Well, that's just a cog in the works. Things will rebound in no time.

C:

But at this point it's—

A:

(interrupting) Dinner time! Well! We've all certainly worked up an appetite! *(to the man called X)* No arguments, now. You're going to need your strength! You've got some big decisions to make! *(to the woman called C)* Why don't I help you serve? This is a special time, when we each need to come forward and reach out. So I'll help you. Would you like that?

C:

You don't understand. It's too late! No matter how much I want to or how hard I try there's nothing that I can possibly—

A:

(interrupting) No, *you* don't understand. I'm expecting a letter! Where is the mail? There should be a letter! A check, really. It was promised! It'll be here ... *(shouting)* **It'll be here ...?**

Y's VOICE:

"Immediately!"

X (overlapping):

"Immediately!"

A:

Yes! *(to the man called B)* Did you hear that? "Immediately!"

B:

I heard.

Still looking off stage left, the man called B hasn't moved since the departure of the young woman called Z. The woman called C moves toward him.

C:

Did she ...?

B:

Yes.

C:

How did ...?

B:

She just— She's just gone.

A:

Gone?

B:

Yes.

A:

No! *(short pause)* She was never here.

B:

What?

A:

Weren't you listening? I said she was never here!

B:

How can you say that?

A:

As easily as I can say this: we're all on the same team! *(To the man called X)* Aren't we, darling? *(to the woman called C)* Will you please bring me my check?

C:

I don't have your check.

A:

It was a promise! *(to the man called X)* Right?

X:

Immediate relief.

A:

And just the first installment of long-term relief! Now, I don't know about the rest of you, but this team member could sure use some relief! Right now!

B:

How dare you.

Pause.

A:

Is he talking to me?

B:

I wish I wasn't. I wish I never had to talk to you again.

A:

(with venom) You don't. *(to the man called X)* You may go now.

B:

You can't say she wasn't here.

A:

I can and I did! *(to the man called X)* Up you go!

B:

She was here.

A:

Who?

B:

You know who. She was here and she was right and saying what needed to be said and there you sit, not listening to any of it because you only have eyes for—

A:

(interrupting, to the man called X) Why don't you go and get your little friend? She was a breath of fresh air. Where's she gone off to, anyway?

B:

You are preposterous, do you know that?

A:

"Preposterous?" Did you just say preposterous? What a ridiculous word!

B:

You are preposterous, ridiculous, and horrifying.

A:

Horrifying? Oh, my! Do I horrify you?

B:

Yes, you do.

A:

Well, isn't that a shame.

B:
You are.

A:
I'm shameful, too?

B:
Yes.

A:
Really!!

B:
Yes!

A:
Do you know what's really shameful? Someone who moans and whines and "Oh, that poor girl! She was right, she was right! She was so brave and how could you let that happen to her and how can you listen to him" and that same someone listens to everything and sees everything and knows everything and hangs onto their wallet to make sure no one's getting anything from it and still wants dinner on the table, but doesn't do a damn thing about any if it.

Pause.

B:
(to the woman called C) There's got to be something you can do.

C:
Me?

B:
Something we can do.

A:
Hah! *(to the man called X)* Darling, I hate to be a nag, but did I not mention it's time? Past time!

C:
(to the man called B) You just let her go, didn't you?

A:
She was never here!

B:
(to the woman called C) I didn't let her ...

A:
Hah!

C:
(to the man called B) But you didn't stop her!

A:
There was no one *to* stop!

B:
(to the woman called C) Please. You see what I have to deal with.

A:
Hah!

C:
Right.

She turns to leave.

B:
No! I know, I know. I'm sorry. But I need your help.

A:
You need *her* help? What's she going to do? *(To the man called X)* Darling? If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times ...!

C:
(to the man called B) My hands are tied, you've got to know that.

A:
Now *that* is the silliest thing I've ever heard! *(to the man called X)* Does it look like her hands are tied to you?

The woman called C takes a scrap of newspaper from her pocket.

C:
(loudly, reading) "September 8, 2001. "Energy policy secrets hint at Administration's insider operations and foreign oil agenda."

LOUDSPEAKER:

Yes! *(perhaps clearing throat)* "Refusing to disclose sources for the President's controversial energy plan, the Administration cites executive privilege when questioned about its closed-door tactics—"

The girl called Y has appeared, carrying an enormous stack of books, videos and magazines.

Y:
(interrupting) “It seems like everyone in your path is determined to twist your words and actions to their own desires!”

LOUDSPEAKER:
Where in the hell—?

Y:
(interrupting) “If you’re not careful, Mercury in retrograde will add to their efforts! But stick to your guns and you’ll harness the power needed to crush them all!”

The girl called Y places magazines under the stage right end of the table. The man called B must grab the end of the table so he doesn’t fall off stage left.

A:
(to the man called B) Coming to the table now, are you? Decided not to wait for dinner? *(to the man called X)* What was it you said, darling?

X:
Make the pie higher!

A:
Exactly!

The woman called C finds another scrap of paper.

C:
(loudly, reading) “September 9. President in Panic Over Flailing Economy.”

LOUDSPEAKER:
“Defending its tax cuts for the rich, the Administration readied budget-bashing bills for domestic programs—“

Y:
(interrupting) “O ye of little faith! Venus leaves a trace of itself not only in Libra, but in the sad reminders of all you overlooked as you dragged your heels past the— “

X:
(interrupting) **Promisalistic!**

Pause.

Y:
“... *promisalistic* souls in seeking to satiate your hunger for the safe and the familiar. Look ahead, and place your trust in the one you know best: yourself!”

The girl called Y places books under the stage right end of the table, where the woman called C has wedged herself.

The man called B is barely hanging on and the woman called A is only supported by the man called X who sits solidly to her left.

A:

(to the man called B) So, what have you got to say for yourself now?

B:

Can't you see what's happening?

A:

That you're finally recognizing what's *promisalistic* in your life? *(to the man called X)* Hurry! You need to move along now, darling. People are counting on you! They're waiting!

The woman called C finds another scrap of paper.

C:

(loudly, reading)"September 10. Administration at War With Girl Scouts"

LOUDSPEAKER:

"In a conference organized by UNICEF, a U.S. delegation strongly opposed special mention of abuse and rehabilitation of adolescents in war zones—"

Y:

(interrupting) "Never fear! Uranus in Pisces tells you you are not alone! You'll see that those who meant to help you by raising your—"

X:

(interrupting) **Expectationalings!**

Y:

"—are still there. Look to what you know and listen to only those who are truly—"

X:

(interrupting) **Commitmentated!**

Y:

"—to your cause. But this is a time which demands—"

X:

(interrupting) **Decidingness!**

Y:

"So do it! Act fast, and don't look back!"

The girl called Y places the videos under the stage right end of the table and with great effort climbs her way off stage right.

The woman called A reaches over to the man called B to pry his hands from the edge of the table. But he grabs her hands, and she slips past the man called X.

A:
(to the man called X) Help me!

He doesn't.

Together, the man called B and the woman called A fall off stage left, she with her chair, perhaps ringing the bell.

B:
He's an idiot!!!!!!

A:
He's a genius!!!!!!!!!!!!

They are gone, and the man called X hangs onto his chair at the table, which is now almost at a 90° angle.

C:
He's a ...

Exasperated, under the stage right side of the table the woman called C pulls out one last newspaper clipping. She reads it to herself, and we begin to hear a patriotic song accompanied by cheering. She again looks at the audience.

Hero...!?

The man called X moves as if to greet the masses, and falls off stage left as the table completely topples over.

The music and crowd noises become louder, and the woman called C returns to the paper, clinging to the up-ended table. She speaks above the music which continues to increase in volume.

C:
(reading) "September 11, 2001..."

We begin to hear overlapping headlines from all directions. Carrying a boom box (from which the music & crowd noises now grow even louder), the girl called Y makes her grandest entrance yet. She holds out a letter and shouts above the cacophony of sounds.*

Y:
The mail!

C:
What? What mail?

Y:
The mail! The check!

C:
What check?

Y:
The check! Tax relief!

C:
Tax relief?

Y:
Tax Relief!!!

She rips open the envelope

... for America's workers!!!

Out of the envelope comes a seemingly endless supply of red, white and blue confetti, which the girl called Y gleefully distributes around the stage.

The woman called C looks again the audience, and gradually the headlines, the music & sounds of overwhelming public approval fade.

End Act I

Tilting

Headlines* - p. 45-46 (End Act I)

VOICE:

“White House
Calls Attacks
Acts of War”

VOICE:

“‘Why Do
They Hate
Us?’
Americans
Cry”

VOICE:

“Tearful
President
Vows to
Eliminate
Evil”

VOICE:

“Pentagon
Announces
Operation
Noble Eagle”

VOICE:

“American
Sorrow Turns
to Talk of
Vengeance”

VOICE:

“U.S.
Religious
Leaders
Blame
Attacks on
Abortionists,
Homo-
sexuals,
Feminists and
ACLU”

VOICE:

“‘War Will
Take Years—
Prepare For
Casualties”

VOICE:

“Pentagon
Announces
Operation
Infinite
Justice”

VOICE:

“Evidence
Shows
Terrorists
Were Armed
and Trained
by U.S.
Forces”

VOICE:

VOICE:

“White House
Considers
Nuclear
Retaliation”

VOICE:

“American
Attacks Have
Begun—‘We
Gave Them
Fair
Warning”

VOICE:

“Hate Crimes
Across the
Nation On
The Rise”

VOICE:

“U.S. Drops
Food Along
With Bombs
into Foreign
Countryside”

VOICE:

“Peace
Demon-
strations
Called Un-
American”

VOICE:

“Military
Operation
Now Named
‘Enduring
Freedom”

VOICE:

“Newspaper
Columnists
Fired for
Criticizing
President”

VOICE:

“White House
Defends
Restrictions
on Civil
Liberties”

VOICE:

“More Attacks
on U.S.
Promised as
Bombing
Continues”

VOICE:

“President
Accepts
Responsibility
of What He
Terms ‘God’s
Plan”

Act II

Covering the newspapers, books, etc. on the stage area is huge swath of red, white and blue fabric. The table has been righted and stands on its end, like an obelisk or skyscraper. On top of it is an American flag. Beside it is a single chair.

Placed on the fabric around the stage are creature-like pieces of electronic equipment, which collectively let us know that big brother is watching, and listening: cameras and microphones and things that go beep at inopportune times.

The woman called C is alone onstage. Perhaps she tentatively sits in the chair as Act II begins, and we hear overlapping headlines:

VOICE:

“President Renews
Pledge to ‘Hunt
Down Evildoers”

VOICE:

“Limits on Personal
Freedoms
Necessary, President
Says—Over 1000
Detained”

VOICE:

“Death Toll Gives
President’s Faith-
Based Plans New
Life”

VOICE:

“President’s Plan to
Stimulate
Economy—Tax Cuts
For Business
Interests”

VOICE:

“Sources are Secret,
But President Vows
Enemy Was Behind
Attack”

VOICE:

“President’s Advice:
In the Face of
Tragedy, Go
Shopping!”

VOICE:

“President Pledges to
Keep Airport Ticket
Counters Flying”

VOICE:

“‘My Personal
Trifecta’—President
Sees Good in
National Crisis”

VOICE:

“President
Reassures Nation of
United Goals:
‘There’s No Doubt in
My Mind ... We Will
Fail”

The woman called C speaks directly to the audience.

C:

Is it just me, or is something very wrong happening here? Something very, very ...

There is a loud click or beep or movement from the electronics, and she moves closer to the audience.

C:

Things are different, now. Everything's different. That's what they're saying. And I keep hearing that / should be different, feel different, think differently. Because look around!

But when I do, the way I see it, the changes that are happening are saying to me something very different than everyone else says they're saying. Or maybe not everyone else, but definitely the people who decide what gets said and to who and what people like me are supposed to do about it. They're telling me something's happening that I need to be a part of, and I feel like I want to be a part of something because I know that things need changing.

So they make their speeches, while I work putting food on the table and try to help the people who can't work or put food on their tables. But here's what I notice: the changes they're talking about aren't going to do a thing for me.

This is what I'm supposed to be part of? I say to myself as I clean up after the people in charge of change. The people who never seem to notice that a lot of us ... have stayed exactly the same.

The young woman called Z enters the stage, now dressed in corporate attire. She has been outfitted with a headset, or carries a microphone. The woman called C remains onstage, but seems unsure of where to stand.

The young woman called Z also directly addresses the audience. In contrast to the forthright woman called C, she delivers her amplified speech with a strangely false tone. And although she has a smile pasted across her face, there is intense anger beneath it.

Z:

"And here we have the center of operations, where everything that's anything is finally brought to the table..."

C:

You're here!

The young woman called Z briefly pauses, without acknowledging the woman called C.

Z:

"It's the heart of the company, if you will. Or the corporate gastrointestinal center..."

C:

I can't tell you how glad I am to see you. Really!

Z:

"The place where everything begins, and ultimately finishes. Is devoured. Consumed. Digested. Spat out and—"

C:

(interrupting) I mean, I thought you were gone! Really gone.

Z:

(breaking from her speech, going off mic) Oh, I'm here all right. I'm so *really* here. Now will you please get gone and let me do my job?

C:

I'm— I'm sorry.

Z:

Yeah. That's what you all say.

C:

What?

Z:

Okay. Listen, I know I don't exactly know you ...

C:

What do you mean, you don't know me?

Z:

What I mean is that we've never actually met. I've seen you. Or someone like you. I think it was you. But I've never ...

C:

What do you mean, you've never?

Z:

Look. What I'm trying to say is, where would we have met? I mean, *met* met. You and I would never have— But none of this matters! Go away—you're not supposed to be in yet!

C:

I don't understand.

Z:

(under her breath) You people ... *(spelling it out)* You ... don't ... come in ... until—

A:

(interrupting, to the young woman called Z) Is there a problem here?

The woman called A has come onstage carrying a bell, highly energized if a bit manic.

A:

Because I really can't guess who you think you're talking to. Hadn't we all better get back to our jobs before the working day gets away from us? Just look around you! Everything has changed! And at a time like this, we need to be spit spot, on top of things! No shirking or wavering! Nose to the grindstone, down the pike, through the gamut and hitting the target the first time out!

The woman called A rings the bell, and the young woman called Z turns again to the audience.

Z:

"Our organization was built around the core belief that man knows best what is good for him, and his family, and has a god-given right to protect himself, and his family, from those who want what's worst for him. *(short pause)* And his family. Anchored by our founder..."

She mechanically motions to a spot stage right, which is empty, then looks to the woman called A.

A:

Goodness! Is no one up to speed?

She rings the bell and shouts offstage.

Our founder! Keep up with the changes! Get out here!

(to the young woman called Z) This kind of thing really shouldn't be happening right now! I mean, chaos is chaos but there's still a business to be run and I'm starting to think I'm going to have to do something drastic!

(shouting offstage) Do you hear me? Drastic!

(to the young woman called Z) But *you* are doing a wonderful job, young lady. I can't wait until you reach the peak of your capabilities! You're supposed to be the best and the brightest, after all! *(to the audience)* We're so lucky to have found her! *(short pause)* "Found-her." What do you know!

(ringing the bell and shouting offstage again) "Our founder?"

The man called B appears, carrying a large, gilded picture frame which could be electronically monitored, like a prison anklet. He stoically stands stage right, frame in front of his face. He has lost what edge he had, and is now a castrated figurehead.

The young woman called Z continues, gesturing toward him.

Z:

“Anchored by our founder, we’ve held fast to our goals, our dreams, and our profits, as we plow our way into the 21st Century. With high technology coursing through our veins—“

A:

(interrupting) Oh! No! Sorry! No technology! Cut the technology bit!

Z:

Excuse me?

A:

Ix-nay on the echnology-tay!

She points to the very obvious equipment.

(whispering) You see, for security reasons, we don’t want to draw attention to it! Not at a time like this!

Z:

Then what am I doing here? That’s the whole reason you hired me.

A:

Of course, but we’re “re-framing” because “hi-tech” isn’t a term we use anymore. It brings to mind “ankruptcy-bay” and people are afraid the red ink might rub off on their money!

B:

(to himself) Oh, that’s rich.

A:

What’s rich? Where? Who’s that?

She rings the bell, not looking at the man called B.

B:

No one. Nothing. Never mind.

The woman called C moves toward the man called B.

C:

Hey! Is that...? You. Wow. You look so... Are you okay?

B:

(without emotion) Of course I’m okay. I’m the “founder” aren’t I? Sitting pretty, selling out to the highest bidder, sharing in the record returns. Watching everything I worked for mutating into an infectious corporate lesion. How could I not be okay?

C:
Oh! Well, I don't know, it's just that...

A:
It's a beautiful thing that's happening here, isn't it? Look around you! We've never been in a more attractive position!

B:
(to the woman called C) See? It's completely moot that there's absolutely nothing I can do about anything or anyone anymore. Because it's my money and I've never been more attractive!

He dourly poses in his frame.

C:
Okay...

A:
(to the young woman called Z) Now. Where were we?

Z:
Where were we? Without technology? Well... "Watch as we proudly harness the strengths of ... pencil & paper. So without abandoning our ties to the past..."

She gestures toward the man called B.

"...we have clear sights set on the future ..."

She gestures offstage, but no one appears.

(pointedly, to the woman called A) Got any control over the future?

A:
Oh, I'm sure he'll be here any minute. He's in the midst of multi-national negotiations, you know. Security is tight! A clever girl like you must be able to vamp, or something?

Z:
I'm sorry, but I don't vamp. Not for what he's paying me.

A:
Then just skip to the next part.

Z:
What next part?

A:
My next part! The part where you introduce me!

Z:
I don't have a part where I introduce you.

A:
The part about keeping in touch with the common man?

Pause.

"Never forgetting to keep in touch with the common man by embracing its representatives at every opportunity."

Z:
That's not you.

B:
That's definitely not you.

A:
I don't recall you having any lines at this juncture! No one's asking you to do anything but just stand there and look solid!

She rings the bell and he does, again silently framed.

Z:
"The common man?" (*pointing to the woman called C*) That's her.

C:
What? What did you say? What's me?

Z:
"The representative of the common man."

C:
Is me?

A:
Not anymore. She's been replaced.

Z:
What?

C:
What?

B:
What?

A:

I said she's been replaced!

Z:

By *you*?

A:

It's hard to imagine me as "common," I know. And the "man" part is neither here nor there. (*looking at the man called B*) Literally. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized, what better representative for the people, en masse—the *majority* in this great nation—than me! By proxy the majority stockholder! Who better cares for its interests, or knows what it needs, than someone who has a financial stake in it!

Z:

So if it's his money, how is it your financial stake?

A:

That's how I think about it. I embody the financial stake.

Z:

You do?

A:

I do. For everyone. I am the food on the family. The economic meat and potatoes.

Z:

Meat and potatoes?

C:

You want to be meat and potatoes?

B:

I remember meat and potatoes.

A:

You are spoiling everything! I can be meat and potatoes if I want to be meat and potatoes. And I can also be a financial stake! Or "steak." Ha ha. That's me! A financial "steak," charred pink!

Z:

So what about (*indicating the woman called C*) ...?

A:

I told you! She's been replaced! She doesn't exist. Can't you see that she's invisible?

C:
Invisible?

A:
Yes! Completely! Don't try to deny it! No one can see nor hear you.

C:
Really?

Z:
This is getting completely out of hand.

B:
Getting out of hand?

A:
Just what's that supposed to mean?

The man called B lowers his frame.

B:
I mean that it's already gotten out of hand. It is out of hand. The hand is empty. It's gone.

A:
You don't think I can read between the lines or know what you mean when you talk about that mysterious "hand" of yours. Well, I wouldn't be too sure about that!

The woman called A rings the bell and the man called B restores the frame to its place.

(*to all*) So here's my suggestion. I am about to make a suggestion, and I think it's a good one. It is my opinion that it is a suggestion which should be taken. That is why I am making it. My suggestion is: We are all here together, in a changed America, working together for a better tomorrow, brought together by the tragic events of yesterday. Therefore ...

Let's stop this quibbling. That's my suggestion. At a time like this, our nation needs us to unite, to form a singular front, not bicker divisively within ourselves.

C:
Can I say something? I'm not trying to cause trouble, but I'm confused. Can we get back to the invisibility part?

A:
(*to the man called B*) And for the sake of clarity, should you have any more qualifying queries, when it comes to the bickering my choice of words was "divisively," not "derisively."

C:
But since when am I invisible?

A:
The bare bones? We shouldn't bicker at all. No ifs, ands or buts about it.

C:
(to the young woman called Z) Can you not see me? Can no one see me?

B:
(to the woman called C) Let me just say, things have turned out very differently than I pictured they would.

A:
Oh! Shall I share something funny, and a bit charming with you all? When I was a child, and I heard that expression, "No ifs, ands or buts," I thought it was ... Well, I thought the end of the expression referred to another sort of ... *end* ... Ha ha!

We hear patriotic music and crowds cheering.

Speaking of which, it's time! Everyone, he's here! It's time!

The man called X enters, together with the girl called Y, who carries the boombox and is outfitted like a special services agent. The man called X is now wearing a military uniform, and issues a royal wave to his adoring fans.

(to the young woman called Z) It's time! The introduction?

Z:
Maybe you'd better handle this one.

A:
But you were doing so beautifully! Really you were! I believed everything you said!

The young woman called Z speaks to the audience above the music.

Z:
Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce to you a man ... *(short pause)* who needs no introduction!

A:
(to the audience, covering) But here he is, the future! Our beloved and trusted CEO!

The music and cheering from the boombox fades.

X:

(reading from a speech) Good morning. I'm here today to reassure every one of you that the evil terror which threatens us now cannot get past the folks who are hard at work today and every day, threatening. I estimate that it's those folks, those hard working folks, who have compassionated against the hidden terror in the holes of our evil enemies. It's those folks who have dedicated themselves to the every day smoking-out of evil. It's those folks who work compassionately, today and every day we dedicate to terror. I assurance you. And today we must remember that those folks are working, hardly, to assurance the evil enemy who are smoking in the terror holes. They are. But we'll get them. Every day the tourist enemy have most certainly underestimated us in our compassioning. Evil will find that they cannot hide in holed-up smoked enemy folks. Tourists or no tourists. Be misassured that the reestimating is working to be dedicated. They are. And every day, the enemy who have smokage and evilers and holeage—

Y:

(interrupting) Thank you! Any questions?

The man called X finds his way to the chair.

A:

Well! He has certainly found his voice, hasn't he! *(rallying the troops, for the benefit of the electronics)* **Hasn't he!!**

Z:

So what did he say?

Y:

I'm glad you asked that.

The girl called Y throws a great deal of money at the young woman called Z.

Our leader thanks you all for your support in this time of national togetherness, and pledges to do all it takes as a leader to make sure that in each and every action he leads, the will of the American businessmen—for the businessmen and by the businessmen—is followed to the letter.

A:

To the very letter! Doesn't that sound just like a leader!

Z:

That's what he said?

Y:

I'm glad you asked that!

She throws more money at the young woman called Z.

Y:

(radically changing demeanor) This man is just a man, like any other. A man who has been called to rise above his station, not to prove that he's been to college or dazzle you with a list of figures, but to talk plain talk, real talk. Perhaps we've gotten used to hearing lies, so maybe it's hard to understand the plain words of a plain man whose role model is none other than Jesus Christ. But even in these troubled times, his spirit overflows with the faith of his followers. And with god on his side, he won't let us down!

A:

He won't let us down!

C:

That doesn't sound right to me.

A:

But did you notice his uniform? Can you imagine a better fit?

C:

Wait. What's happening here? I think we're missing something. We need to find out what's going on, what's ... I can't believe I'm saying this, but does anyone have ...

Z:

Have what? ***The paper?***

Y:

The paper! I'm glad you asked that!

The young woman called Z receives an especially extravagant shower of money.

Y:

(changing demeanor again) In this day and age, we have no need for rudimentary communication conceits such as "the paper." No, today's systems demand nothing less than 24-hour interactive streaming. So you'll be there the moment the phone call is made. Hear the instant the bombs are dropped. See the second the land masse is annihilated. What do you trust? The black and white of flawed print journalism, or the naked truth of events before they happen, brought to you live and in color!

A:

In other words, "the paper" is yesterday's news!

C:

I thought you loved the paper. Couldn't start your day without the paper.

A:

That was yesterday. Now everything's changed.

The girl called Y starts to shred documents into strips which begin to cover the stage, or distributes documents, perhaps humming a patriotic song as she does so. As the papers layer the stage throughout the second act, the table gradually lowers. (NOTE: This be might achieved by constructing the table of fabric or lightweight material to be suspended/lowered by a nylon string, or by building the table out of pieces, which could be removed by the girl called Y and the man called X to gradually decrease the height of the table. Also, the shredded documents might be strips of lightweight material creating more mass than actual paper.)

B:

(surreptitiously to the woman called C) Someone should really get to the bottom of this. We should really have the paper.

A:

Didn't you hear? There will be no paper! There is no need for a paper!

Z:

That's not— I'm sorry, but that's not right. You can't take away the paper.

A:

Oh, but you're an employee. You can't read the paper. Not on the job.

B:

Well, I'm the founder, and I want my paper!

C:

I'm not even here, apparently, and even I think—

A:

(interrupting) Hello? I speak for the majority and I say that there is no paper! There will be no paper! No paper, not anymore!

Pause.

LOUDSPEAKER:

How about the radio?

Pause.

Z:

The what?

C:

The radio!

B:

The radio!

LOUDSPEAKER:

The radio!

We hear headlines with voiced static in between.

“European Allies Call U.S. ‘Fanatics’ in War Against Terror” ... “As Economy Tanks, More Funds for Religious Groups” ... “President Concedes to Climate Changes, Says ‘Adapt’” ...

Y:

No, no, no, no, no...

She goes to her boombox.

LOUDSPEAKER:

“War Budget Skyrockets Deficit” ... “No Legal Obstacles to Domestic Spying” ... “Surprise! Poor Lose Again on Medical Front” ...

Blaring Musak comes from the boombox, drowning out the loudspeaker.

Y:

We are pleased to announce the purchase of the entity formerly known as free American radio by the people who have dedicated their lives to ensure your safety, security and emotional sanctification. Stay tuned for all you need to hear, from those you’ll learn to trust, precisely when you need to hear it.

She returns to littering the stage.

A:

Well! That was particularly unpleasant! Don’t want any more distractions like that, now do we? Especially since we’re all in this together, don’t you think? I hate to imagine how such an interruption could play havoc on morale at a time like this! What an impact it would have on our profits!

B:

You know something? You are truly amazing.

A:

Why, thank you!

B:

Oh, you’re welcome! I’m absolutely floored by your unflappable ability to see exactly what you want to see, exactly the way you want to see it, at any given moment. There was a time when you at least gave a passing nod to the world at large, but you’ve moved way beyond that now!

A:

You know, I’m not sure how you meant that, exactly ...

The girl called Y throws money at her.

A:
But I'm going to take it as a compliment. Thank you again. Now! Let's all get back to the business a hand, shall we?

B:
And just what is that?

A:
Is what?

B:
The business at hand?

Pause.

A:
Perhaps the reason you don't remember is your little "the hand is empty" "the hand is gone" tirade! I haven't forgotten about that. You think I don't listen to your snide little comments, but I do. Nothing gets past me. You want to go handless?

She plays to the electronics.

Just remember that I see and hear everything and, as is my duty as a concerned citizen and shareholder, if there's anything that I deem *suspicious*—whether it involves crop-dusters or border activities or the denial of body parts—I don't care who you are, I'm going to do what I have to do with that information!

The girl called Y rewards her with more money.

At this point, the covered stage is piled with papers and cash—which the characters must wade through—and the table has lowered noticeably.

We again hear the music & crowds from the boombox, and the girl called Y retrieves the man called X.

A:
It's time! It's time! *(to the young woman called Z, ringing the bell)* You're needed here, young lady!

Z:
Sorry, I quit.

A:
You quit?

Z:

Yes, I quit.

A:

Well! What a positive, unifying attitude that is!

B:

I'd quit, too—

A:

(interrupting) You can't quit! Founders can't quit!

C:

Can I quit?

A:

And the invisible can't quit! Invisibility precludes quitting!

The music and cheering from the boombox fades. The girl called Y distributes cash throughout the following.

X:

(reading from a speech) Good afternoon. We must remember today, we can't forget that sorrowful Americans are at war, and the entire civilized world is at serious risk from the scope of tens of thousands of brutal enemy agents of the axis of evil. We can't forget that. Or be distracted from its economy. The world's worst fanatics may be the world's worst neighbors, the world's worst teachers, or worse, you. History has called upon me to threaten the evil axis of our way of life, with mad ambition bearing full guilt. Entire evil neighborhoods are now relying on brutal economic teaching. But remember that the war is won by distracting those who are sorrowful about their axis. And we're not afraid to seriously risk tens of thousands, no telling how many wars it's going to take!

Y:

Thank you!

A:

Oh my.

X:

Now lately, I am aware that the economic security of American workers has been threatened by homeland invasions such as corporate scandals and I, myself. I have been faced with questioning about things in my past that are nothing new because they were a long time ago. No matter what anyone says, ordinary things like unemployment and the uninsured and the economy are looking up. Because at a time like this, up is down and that is valuable! Look around you! At the workers who have ordinarily lost ideas about gooder services! Everything employable in America is working for only change!

Y:
Thank you!!

A:
Oh dear!

X:
And we need to keep our eyes on something else! Have I mentioned war? We are at war! We can't forget about war! Or terror! Evil! Because no matter how much you speak French, they're still out there! We are living in a time when crawfishing forest fires are started by trees, and I'm not about to get stiffed by someone else's appetite for weapons. I completely represent grave danger and pledge to deceive myself under the god-given challenge of obliterating America's safety ...with you, or without you!

Y:
Thank you!!! **Thank you very much!**

The girl called Y firmly seats the man called X in the chair.

A:
Oh god!!

Y:
Any questions?

Silence.

Thank you.

She returns to the task of document distribution and/or shredding.

A:
Well ...! Isn't that just ... It just makes me feel ... so ... so ... (*short pause*) Has anyone seen my horoscope?

She begins to search through the sea of paper onstage, which by this time has reached a significant level, covering the character's feet and the legs of the chair. (NOTE: It is suggested that this effect be technically heightened, and emphasized through the movements of the actors onstage.)

C:
(to the woman called A) Are you... Are you okay? Because you don't seem okay. You seem not okay and I am most definitely not okay. Actually, I don't see anyone around here who seems okay.

A:

At a time like this we need a strong guiding force, a harmonizing influence which encourages us, and readies us for the path that lies ahead.

C:

What? Wait. You're not talking about *him*?

B:

As a "harmonizing influence?" A "strong guiding force?"

C:

What worries me is "the path?" Can we go back to "the path?"

A:

No! No we can't. I need my horoscope. Where's my horoscope?

C:

It's not just me, is it? Did anyone else hear the path part?

A:

Stop it! None of you seem to understand that everything's different now, because *eve-ry-thing-has-changed!*

Z:

Right. Just keep telling yourself that. But if you actually look at the bottom line here, it's not. It hasn't. It hasn't at all.

A:

You know you're not on the payroll anymore, don't you?

Z:

See what I mean?! I thought maybe it had changed, too. I'd thought that I could finally get what's coming to me, what's rightfully *mine*, what I'm entitled to ... But no, it's the same fucked-up place it always was.

B:

That's not fair. There was a time when—

Z:

(interrupting) Who in the hell are you to talk about fair?

A:

Exactly! It's not a sympathetic portrait!

Z:

Both of you! All of you! This is all your fault! People like you are the reason we're here, and the reason he's here! The reason I'll never get a chance!

- B:
No! It's not me! I know it looks like me, but it's not me. I never bargained for any of this. I'm the founder but I can't even recognize myself anymore!
- A:
Which is somehow my responsibility? Because your limited vision doesn't allow you to see and embrace what's in front of you?
- B:
I wouldn't embrace what's in front of me if I were blind and stranded on a desert island!
- A:
Hah! You might as well be!
- Z:
You two are pathetic! But it doesn't matter, because if he's in charge, there's no way I'm gonna play this game—there's no way I can win! So goodbye! I'm leaving!

She begins to move through the papers and the man called B abandons his frame.

- B:
I was thinking the same thing.
- A:
What? You can't leave, you're—
- B:
(interrupting) I'm retired.
- A:
You're what?
- B:
I'm retired. This didn't turn out at all as it should have. I'm washing my hands of this whole business. Walking away from it.
- A:
As if you had hands to wash ...
- B:
Watch me! There's nothing for me here! Nothing of me here! When I started this, the world was a different place. People were different people. You could believe what they said and work and ideas actually meant something. You could trust people to do what they said they were going to do, and if everyone took care of themselves we'd all come out ahead. We'd all put money in the bank. We'd all have *dinner*, for Christ's sake! And now?

A:

You and your *people*. We're supposed to be in this together, we could be in this together, but instead you *are* blind. When we were struggling, the only reason we hung onto things like trust and ideals was we had nothing else! People were never—!

With a threatening motion, the girl called Y shoves a wad of bills at her.

Ahhhh!

Pause.

People were never more productive than they are today. Those who *have*, have never been in a more fortuitous scenario, more ideally suited to help make the world a *better* place.

You can't leave. Why would you want to? Just look around!

B:

Like I said. Watch.

The man called B goes after the young woman called Z who is heading offstage.

A:

No! Please! I haven't found my horoscope!

C:

But she's right. You can't leave.

B:

What?

C:

You can't leave. We can't leave. None of us can leave.

Z:

What are you talking about?

C:

You don't think I've tried? I'm invisible, right? So why hang around? Who'd notice me leaving! But I only got so far and ... Well, it doesn't take a genius to figure it out. This is all we've got—we're all we've got—and we'd better make the best of it. Maybe none of you have ever been in this ... position, but I gotta tell you it's all too familiar to me. Here's the deal: We're stuck here. "The path" is a dead end. We can't leave, because there's nowhere to go.

Pause.

Z:

For you, maybe.

C:

So welcome to my world.

Z:

All right. You wanna know where I'm going? Overseas! I'm going to make one call, and the offers will come flowing in!

C:

Really?

Z:

Yes, really! I don't know why I even tried to make it work here. I hate everything about this place, everything it stands for and everything it's done to me! Oh, I bought into the whole support-our-troops-long-may-they-wave bit because it was different this time. I devoted myself to this country and now I don't have a thing to show for it. But in the foreign markets? I am just what they want!

C:

Now? No one wants you now. With what we're doing and what we've done, they take one look at us and no one will touch us.

Z:

Who's we?

B:

I didn't mean for things to turn out like this ...

Z:

You mean we *us*? That's so wrong! We're *individuals* here! Only responsible for our own actions? This was all started before I was even born! I am not part of what's going on now, and the world's gotta know that! (*gesturing towards the man called X*) Why would anyone think that I have anything to do with—?

The man called X has picked up the frame, holds it in front of his face and mugs like a child, succeeding in a variety of horrifying smirks.

B:

We have to do something. He is not all there is. He's not who we are.

There is a loud buzzing noise offstage.

A:

Ahhhh!!!

Silence.

LOUDSPEAKER:

(from offstage) Fed Ex!

The woman called C moves toward the sound and the loudspeaker enters, with a box and a clipboard.

LOUDSPEAKER:

(to the woman called C) Sign here, please. I need proof of delivery.

A:

That package isn't mine, I swear it isn't!

B:

It's for me. It's been on back order.

Giving the woman called C a receipt, the loudspeaker takes pieces of newsprint out of the box, distributing them around the stage as they are read.

LOUDSPEAKER:

"America's 'Go it Alone' Doesn't Fly Overseas" ... "Big Brother is Reading: Private Data Now in Government's Hands" ... "President Not Personally Bound by Insider Trading Rules" ...

The girl called Y starts throwing cash at the loudspeaker

"Stealth 'Shock and Awe' Strategy Heavily Publicized" ... "Environmental Policy in the Dumpster" ... "The Cure For Sagging Economy? More Tax Cuts For Rich!"
...

The loudspeaker considers the money, then quickens his pace, continuing to release headlines.

"President Claims God as Ally" ... "Links Between U.S. Enemies a Fantasy" ...
... "Terror Alerts Based on Lies—"

The loudspeaker stops short as the girl called Y pulls a gun, and escorts the loudspeaker out of sight.

She returns to face the rest of the characters. The man called X may be busy with some important task, such as polishing his many shiny buttons.

The girl called Y proceeds to take command of the stage.

Y:

We're glad you asked that.

It has come to our attention that some of you are a bit ... *unhappy* about the way things are being handled around here ...

A:
I'm not unhappy! I've never been more happy in my life! I'm the happiest I've been in—

Y:
Quiet!

Pause.

And we're here to inform you that at a time like this, when everything has changed, this divisive attitude profoundly affects our collective well-being.

A:
(to the man called B) "Divisive!" Wasn't that my exact word?!

The girl called Y gives the woman called A a penetrating glance.

Y:
All we can say is that we are extremely disappointed in you.

The woman called A starts to speak but stops herself.

So we're here. We're listening. Tell us. What is it we've done to make you turn on us like this? All we have been doing—'round the clock; morning, noon and night; at every available photo opportunity—is tearing our hearts out, planning how to protect you and your interests.

That's all we think about, talk about, all we consider in every move we make. You. And your families. Who, it seems, would sooner stab us in the back and begrudge us the food in our boardrooms than let us do the jobs we've been appointed to do!

The man called X has begun to weep.

Y:
But what you seem to forget is what's going on right now. YES! I said RIGHT NOW! The fact is that you are in danger, my friends! In deep and serious danger, surrounded by those who wish you harm, and you don't even see it!

While you bitch and moan about how your rights are being trampled on or your oceans are being dirtied, we are hunting down those who want to destroy you! Who want to make sure you never have the chance to bitch and moan again. And while that doesn't sound all that bad to us at a time like this, we're not going to let that happen! Because we're in this together!

X:
Together!

The man called X has rallied.

Y:

So the next time we hear any one of you dragging out old skeletons like “the economy” or “the environment” or “constitutional rights,” get a clear picture in your heads of the hate-mongers we keep telling you we’re battling! The tyrants, close at hand, who are after not only your stock options, but your soul! Those megalomaniacs at home and in foreign lands who are hiding behind religion to secure your eternal damnation!

X:

Amen, sister! Amen!

The man called X has stood up on his chair.

Y:

Thank you!

She returns to raising the onstage paper level.

B:

Wait. Did everyone hear that? Foreign lands? Somehow, suddenly “foreign lands” has an ominous ring to it. How many is “lands”?

A:

Shhhh! Weren’t you listening? How can you ask questions at a time like this?

B:

At a time like this we need to start asking questions! A whole lot of questions!

A:

But we’ve already got all the answers! Remember “globalization!” “privatization!” “de-regulation?!” I love those words; those are wonderful words! Words like that have made us what we are today!

B:

What we are today? Look around you! We’re collapsing! We’re in shambles! There’s no way we’re going to get out of this alive!

A:

Stop it! Stop talking like that! We’re on top and we’ve got the profit on paper to prove it!

The woman called C blows a whistle. Holding shredded documents and the loudspeaker’s receipt, she clings to the table as if it’s the upright end of a sinking ship.

C:
Something's not right here. Something's so not right and we need to take a look at it!

A:
Be quiet! I am sick and tired of negative input from invisible constituents!

B:
(to the women called C) I'm sorry. I really am. Believe me, I didn't know this was going to happen!

A:
You're apologizing? To her? You'd think you'd pay attention to your friends at a time like this! The ones who are watching out for you!

B:
You're right!

A:
Of course I'm right!

C:
(to the man called B) You don't understand! You have to see this! It's all here! You won't believe what's been—

B:
(interrupting) I know. I *can* imagine. What I mean is that I had almost forgotten about our "friends" who have been using my money and my name. It's about time we found out what *they've* been up to!

A:
Oh. That's not really ...

The man called B starts to disconnect and collect the electronic devices.

What are you doing?! You can't do that!

B:
I most certainly can, and should have a long time ago. *(to the woman called C)* You're right. This is all very, very wrong.

C:
(holding out the papers) And we can prove it!

A:
Ohhhhhhhhh. I was having a perfectly good day. I really was. I was feeling good about our operations, about my country, and about myself, and then—poof!—just like that! Everything went to pot!

B:
Nothing happens just like that. We look the other way while it's happening, that's what it is.

A:
Ahhhhhh!

The loudspeaker has crawled out from under the cloth covering the stage, looking very much like a drowning man. The man called B rushes toward him.

B:
(to the young woman called Z) Help me!

The man called B and the young woman called Z pull him to his feet.

(to the loudspeaker) What happened?

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Unemployment Rates at All Time High” ... “Nation’s Homeless Reach Record Numbers” ...

The loudspeaker coughs dramatically.

“U.S. Healthcare Not Covering Direst Cases”

C:
Bring him here!

As the man called B and the young woman called Z take the loudspeaker to the woman called C, the man called X again stands on his chair with the girl called Y by his side.

X:
(reading from a speech) Good Evening. As I stand here tonight, we can all bask in the glory of a job well done, one victory which marks one mission beautifully accomplished in the war against terror. But Americans, we've got a long road ahead ...

The man called X drops the speech into the morass of papers on the stage.

One I was born to travel down. Oh, they may have started it, but now it's our war! And we're not going to rest, we're not going to tire, we're not going to stop, until we finish it! Dead or alive!

The dialogue begins to increase in pace, with lines overlapping and cutting into one another.

Z:
What's going on now?

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Warrior President Lost in Role.”

A:

But the war is over!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Strained American Troops Show No Signs of Coming Home.”

B:

No. We won’t let this happen. Not again.

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Demand for Truth Resounding Across Nation!”

X:

People! Lately, not only has my exaggerated intelligence been vacuumed, but I have looked at many inaccurate statements to mislead ordinary Americans. So for all of you investigative critics and cynics who can’t let go of intelligent failures, try this on for size:

The girl called Y pulls out a large stack of bills.

Another big old tax cut for everyone who doesn’t need it!

With great effort, the girl called Y wades around the stage to dispense the last of the cash.

C:

Did he really just say that?

A:

He ... He ... He says what he means, and he means what he says!

B:

That’s what worries me!

A:

I can’t help it! He’s the will of the stockholders!

C:

And what about the rest of us? Who aren’t stockholders?

The girl called Y hands an envelope to the woman called A.

A:

For me? It’s a check!

Y:

Advance payment!

C:

For what?

Y:

Tax Relief! For America's Children!

C:

But not *my* children?

Z:

It doesn't make any difference! We're all in the same boat—it's all worthless anyway!

The woman called A now flails about the stage collecting bills, and the woman called C, man called B and the young woman called Z support one another and the loudspeaker, hanging onto what's left of the table, now seriously submerged.

LOUDSPEAKER:

"History's Greatest Deficit Could Increase for Decades"

Hands full of cash, the woman called A slips and falls under the current of money and papers.

A:

Ahhhh!

B:

(to the woman called A) Never mind that, come on!

A:

But I can't just... This is what makes it all—

LOUDSPEAKER:

(interrupting) "Increasing Body Count Erodes Presidential Support"

B:

Let it go!

LOUDSPEAKER:

"Government Prepares Futures Market On Terror Attacks"

A:

Oh, my, oh my. From poof to pot. Poof to pot. Just like that.

X:
Hello? I'm losing my patience here? The patriots out there know we'll spend whatever it takes to get an international quagmire going! We are securing power so trust me when I say we're prepared to find, round up and punish every one of those we'll betray!

A:
Ohh!

The loudspeaker makes his way toward the man called X.

LOUDSPEAKER:
"Security Legislation Declared Unconstitutional"

A:
Ohhhhhh!!

LOUDSPEAKER:
"Administration's Lies Tied to War's Corporate Profits"

C:
(to the woman called A) Now! Come on!

LOUDSPEAKER:
"Women's Right to Choose Next Casualty"

C:
Hurry, while there's still time!

LOUDSPEAKER:
(confronting the man called X) "The Nation's Greatest Danger? Too Much Power in the Hands of One Person!"

X:
All right! No more Mr. Nice Guy! You all wanna spend your time picking apart everything that comes out of my mouth... well here's one word. One Word. One word and don't you forget it: Pre-emptive Strike!

The girl called Y pulls out heavy artillery and/or battle gear, and in a display of extreme violence attacks the loudspeaker, drowning him in the sea of paper.

Y:
Argggghhhhhh!

LOUDSPEAKER:
Ahhhhhhhhh!

A:
(overlapping) Ohhhhhhhhhhhh!

Z:

(to the woman called A) Here!

The woman called A joins the others and the group fearfully watches the man called X.

X:

America, listen to me when I tell you that this “war” I’m talking about, in the largest sense of the word, is not a football game or Saturday morning cartoons. This is something I’ve been waiting for, working my whole life to achieve, and believe me—it is real. The violence is real. The blood is real. The bodies are real. Which is my way of telling you, this war is not going away! I know because I can taste it!

So from this day forward I will dedicate myself to doing exactly what I was put on this good earth to do. I am a hungry man who’s ready for the meal of a lifetime... And god help anyone who stands in my way.

The table is now entirely below the paper level. We see the sinking American flag, and begin to hear Y’s voice, decidedly hypnotic, which continues underneath the dialogue.

Y’s VOICE:

What a sight to see, Americans coming together in unquestioning, supportive droves...

The man called B holds the woman called A and everyone watches as the man called X ties a napkin around his neck, and takes out cutlery—knives which he sharpens throughout the following.

A:

Look. We’re sinking ...

Z:

We are, we’re sinking! Someone needs to help us! Help! Help!

C:

They can’t hear you. No one’s going to help us. Not while he’s up there.

Z:

But he’s not us. He doesn’t speak for us. Can’t they see that?

Y’s VOICE:

... marching through the streets of our nation to stand behind the man in charge, whatever it is he says or does ...

B:

I don’t think they can.

A:

I... I ... *(to the man called B)* I need something!

B:

I know.

C:

All right. Everyone. We've got what we need. We can do this. *(to the woman called A)* Together, right?

X:

(briefly pausing from the task at hand) **Ready?**

A:

What?

Y's VOICE:

...placing their hearts and lives in his hands as he does what he needs to, to secure America ...

C:

(to the woman called A) Together. That's what you said!

A:

I said that?

B:

Yes, you said that.

A:

But now that everything's changed ...

Y's VOICE:

... having faith that a better life is ahead for all Americans, whoever they may be, in whatever place that is ...

Z:

Yeah, now we *are* together. Stuck together. Like a dead weight. We're all alone and stuck together and by ourselves and we're all going to drown and it's too late to—!

A:

(interrupting) I don't understand! How could this have happened? How could we have gotten from here to there? It seems only yesterday that I was watching him take his first steps and ...

C:

And he needs to be stopped!

X:
(again, interrupting his sharpening) **Aim?**

Y's VOICE:
... accepting his decisions blindly, hearing his words without rushing to judgement ...

Z:
How can we stop him?! We're just—!

B:
(interrupting) If we put him up there, we can get him down!

Z:
Not me! I didn't—!

C:
(interrupting) We'll find a way. All of us. We have to!

Y's VOICE:
... finding comfort in the knowledge that a greater power is at work, paving a righteous way through the times to come ...

The young girl called Z leans against the woman called A, who strokes her head.

Z:
I feel scared. For the first time in my life, I feel very, very scared.

Y's VOICE:
... letting go of conflict, relaxing and releasing into whatever glorious fate lies ahead ...

A:
You know, you remind me of someone...

Z:
I do?

A:
Yes, you do. But I can't quite put my finger on it. It was someone I once knew. My favorite—

The woman called A is interrupted by the man called X. Holding his knives high, he takes a sharp breath as if he's about to issue a command.

A suspended silence.

End of Play