

In The Name Of

by

Michael Bettencourt

549 Gregory Avenue, Weehawken NJ 07086

(201)770-0550 • m.bett@verizon.net • <http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

(Copyright © 2003 by Michael Bettencourt)

Published in SCENE4 Magazine (www.scene4.com) and provided as a free PDF download.

All Rights Reserved by the Author

In The Name Of

CHARACTERS (ethnicity does not matter in casting; roles will be doubled)

- Jimmy Sloh, *agent, The Department*
- Sarah Young, *agent; The Department*
- Mr. White, *special agent in charge, The Department. He speaks with a Southern accent, more Virginia than Texas.*
- Mr. Price, *field agent, The Department. Irish, Scottish, or Jamaican accent would be nice.*
- Secretary Wright, *Secretary of The Department*
- Michael Wright, *her son*
- Fletch, Lee, Torres, Bent, Louder -- *SWAT officers in a special unit of The Department but also members of the Movement*
[NOTE: The image of the Movement should be like those platoon movies emblematic of a melting-potted America: one Italian, one Jew, one corn-fed Midwest Protestant, and so on.]
- Hannah, *Movement member; also plays WOMAN AT THE DEMONSTRATION and LANDLADY*
- 4 UTILITY ACTORS, who will move on scenery and play various roles (SOLDIERS, ASSASSINS, etc.)

Actors will also play UTILITY ROLES in crowd scenes, etc.

TIME

Just past the present day, when all proposals for terrorist prevention contained in the "Uniting and Strengthening America Act by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act" (USA-PATRIOT Act) and "Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003" have become standard practice, the database linking proposed by The Information Awareness Office (under the direction of Admiral John Poindexter) has been accomplished, such restraints on police infiltration of suspect groups like the Handschu Agreement (in New York City) have been abolished, and American citizens can routinely be named "enemy combatants." It is Lewis Lapham's "participatory fascism," Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, Jeremy Bentham's "panopticon."

STAGE

It would be good if actors and audience are not widely separated and, where possible, entrances and exits go through the audience in order to enhance the "panopticon" effect that a world of total surveillance aims to achieve.

There is a platform upstage, high enough to fall off. Scattered around are A-frame ladders, used as observation posts for spying.

Clothes poles, or other ways of hanging clothes, are set about the stage, containing the costumes that the actors will wear. Actors will put on and take off the costumes in full view of the audience.

NOTES

- SLOH speaks in two different voices: when addressing the audience, he is quite the speaker: articulate, poetic. When he speaks as SLOH the character, he "dumbs down" considerably. By the end of the play, and closer to the time of his death, these two modes of speaking will begin to blend.

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

In The Name Of

Scene 1

[Dark. As fanfare, the SOUND of a guillotine. At the same moment lights bump up on JIMMY SLOH, standing center stage, dressed in a white tee-shirt, leather jacket, jeans, sneakers, baseball cap or doo-rag in the colors of the American flag -- scruffy yet attractive, and all-American.]

[ACTORS stand on either side of the upstage platform. WHITE and PRICE stand to one side, dressed in their usual black bearing the Insignia.]

[NOTE: Whenever SLOH speaks to the audience, he does so directly, by making eye contact and, if close enough, actual physical contact. He always speaks to somebody.]

[As SLOH speaks, he moves toward and into the audience.]

SLOH

My name is Jimmy Sloh. S-L-O-H -- open to schoolyard ridicule -- (*schoolyard nasal*) hey, you're sloooooowww, Jimmy! -- but the name fits -- fit -- me because I was slow all my life. Like a lot of people. Slow as escargot. Slow as an Australian soap opera. No Roadrunner brain for me -- beep, beep! No satisfying escape. (*makes the SOUND of a bullet*) I was way too slow at a time when being faster than fast -- being quantum physics fast -- was no guarantee to be fast enough.

[Starts circling back to platform.]

SLOH

And why am I talking to you? And you? And you back there? Because in times like these, in times like ours, in times like *now*, the only ones who speak with any authority -- give any warning -- break any bread and make any promises -- are the dead. The defunct -- the departed -- the extinct -- the late, lifeless, spiritless -- the gone.

[By this time he is on the upstage platform. SLOH puts his hand over his heart, as if hearing the national anthem, smiles.]

SLOH

The Jimmy Sloh.

[SLOH falls into the arms of the ACTORS, who quickly stand him upright. One ACTOR brings over a wooden box holding two hammers and spikes. Another ACTOR sets up a video camera. Three sawhorses are set up, lumber strewn around. Lights up on WHITE and PRICE.]

WHITE

Special agent in charge White.

PRICE

Field agent Price. (*points to WHITE*) My boss.

SLOH

From The Department. Which one? Doesn't matter. Now it's just "The Department" -- "that is all ye know in life, and all ye need to know." (*blesses them*) Begin.

[An effect here to indicate that with the permission we have moved into the theatrical production proper -- people have now taken on their roles.]

WHITE

Mr. Price.

[PRICE hits SLOH in way to knock him to his knees.]

WHITE

Jimmy, I do want to thank you for --

SLOH

For coöperating.

WHITE

Yes.

SLOH

I've always coöperated with you.

WHITE

You always have, Jimmy, in this strange new Post-Attack world of ours.

PRICE

He did make our work easier for us.

WHITE

Until now.

SLOH

Because now I have a spine. Because now I *think* for myself.

WHITE

In our strange new Post-Attack world. (*pointing to camera*) Over there. Look! Repeat after me.

[SLOH refuses to look.]

WHITE

Mr. Price.

[The two ACTORS force SLOH into the hands of PRICE sitting on one of the sawhorses, who puts SLOH into a full nelson.]

WHITE

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

SLOH

(guttural) "I, the fucked one -- "

[PRICE bends his head forward painfully until SLOH can hardly breathe.]

WHITE

Back off a little, Price. Now, Jimmy, again: "I, Jimmy Sloh -- "

SLOH

(hoarsely) "I, Jimmy Sloh -- "

WHITE

"Do hereby declare myself an enemy combatant."

SLOH

"Do hereby declare myself -- "

WHITE

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

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

WHITE

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

[WHITE indicates to PRICE to release SLOH.]

WHITE

Your declaration of freedom was a beautiful thing, Jimmy -- like most useless, artistic gestures. But now -- (indicating SLOH's clothes) Off.

SLOH

White --

WHITE

The prosecution has finished.

PRICE

(*indicating his clothes*) Take them off.

[SLOH does not move. WHITE gestures, and the ACTORS strip SLOH naked.]

WHITE

You never had much going for you, Jimmy -- you always wanted someone to pet you and stroke you and praise you. Always wanting a *pal*.

SLOH

Until I *reasoned* -- until I *thought for myself!* --

WHITE

A most wonderful, useless, antique gesture in the strange new world of Post-Attack.

[SLOH is completely stripped. The crucifix is set up on the three sawhorses. With efficiency PRICE and his crew nail SLOH's wrists to the cross, taking the hammers and spikes from the wooden box. PRICE ties SLOH's feet to the wood with rope, then moves the video camera for a close shot.]

WHITE

(*speaking into the camera*) This will close out the case of Jimmy Sloh for treason. (*said in an almost ritualistic tone*) In the name of the Victims and the State, and pledging our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor in the war against terror -- so be it. (*to SLOH*) You'll bleed quickly, Jimmy, since we've crushed some vital plumbing. We've found this a well-tested method by which empires correct their mistakes.

[WHITE and PRICE step downstage, PRICE rubbing his hand.]

WHITE

What?

PRICE

Bruised it.

WHITE

Let me see.

[WHITE takes PRICE's hand, examines it.]

WHITE

We'll put some ice on it when we get back. I'm sorry it hurts.

PRICE

I appreciate that.

[PRICE and the ACTORS exit. WHITE takes from his coat an official-looking form with a seal and molds it over SLOH's face. He pokes a hole through it where SLOH's mouth is, then exits.]

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

[Beat. SLOH gets off the cross, stands, peels the paper off, faces the audience, light tight on his head and shoulders.]

SLOH

(holds up paper) Everything needs its paperwork, huh?

[SLOH balls it up and throws it away. ACTORS hand him clothes and he gets dressed.]

SLOH

Paperwork. A certain randy ex-President and the Pope died on the same day, and due to some administrative foul up, the "ex" gets sent to heaven and the Pope gets sent to hell. The Pope explains the situation to the hell administration, they check their paperwork, and the error is acknowledged. They explain, however, that it will take about 24 hours to make the switch.

The next day, the Pope is called in and the hell administration bids him farewell and he heads for heaven. On the way up, he meets the "ex" on the way down, and they stop to chat. The Pope goes, "I'm sorry about the mix up," to which the "ex" replies, "No problem." The Pope continues: "Well, I'm really excited about going to heaven." "Why's that?" asks the prior prez. "All my life I've wanted to meet the Virgin Mary." To which the "ex" replies with a little smile: "You're a day late."

[SLOH is fully dressed now.]

SLOH

Fall a day late and a step behind, and you get what you deserve whether you deserve it or not. And if that's a true blue clue of how this new universe turns, then how did such a low-rent and common-run putz like Jimmy Sloh end up as road kill on the way to empire? Therein lies a tale.

[Lights bump to black and transition music kicks in.]

* * *

Scene 2

[Transition music morphs into CROWD SOUNDS of a political demonstration: chants, music, etc. Lights up.]

[Police barricades up, penning them in, and pressed against it is WOMAN AT THE DEMONSTRATION. CROWD SOUNDS continue underneath.]

WOMAN & OTHERS

About time to kill the swine! About time to kill the swine! About time to kill the swine!

[CROWD lip-synchs as SLOH speaks.]

SLOH

(to audience) There was always juice loose when the protestors started to pump.

[SLOH insinuates himself behind the WOMAN and snakes his hand around her waist to grope her breasts. She tries to fend him off, but the crowd is so dense she has nowhere to move, and he begins to hump her in time to the chants.]

WOMAN

(drowned out) Stop it! Stop it!

[SLOH has his right hand down her pants, stupid grin on his face. Then, a harsh light, CROWD SOUNDS out, AIR HORNS blow, and BENT, LEE, TORRES, and PRICE rush in as SWAT POLICE, batons out, and surround SLOH and the WOMAN. Freeze: SLOH's hand down her pants, stupid grin. PRICE slides SLOH's hand out of her pants, then throws him on the ground and puts his foot on his neck. BENT holds the WOMAN. TORRES has a video camera. LEE takes off the barricade, then returns.]

[WHITE enters. PRICE takes his foot off SLOH's neck, drags him up to his knees. WHITE takes SLOH's right hand and smells the fingertips, then has the WOMAN smell the fingertips.]

WHITE

(to WOMAN) Yes?

WOMAN

Not supposed to happen like this --

WHITE

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

[BENT and WOMAN exit. WHITE gestures to PRICE, who hits SLOH so that he falls forward onto his hands and knees. WHITE snaps his fingers and speaks to SLOH as if he were speaking to a dog.]

WHITE

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

[SLOH lifts his head, and PRICE smacks him again. He drops it.]

WHITE

Come on, pal. Come on over here.

[SLOH crawls on his hands and knees. WHITE slaps his own right thigh.]

WHITE

Heel. Pull in tight. That's a boy. *(to PRICE)* What do you think?

PRICE

I think he'll fit in with what you have in mind.

WHITE

Now bark, just once. *(SLOH barks)* Again. *(SLOH barks)* Good. *(to PRICE and the others)*
Ain't nothin' but a hound dog!

PRICE

Rockin' all the time.

* * *

Scene 3

[Transition music: Elvis Presley. LEE and TORRES exit. PRICE brings out a chair, slams it down. Music out. SLOH speaks to the audience.]

SLOH

In those days -- in "the day" -- if you looked up "stupid" in the dictionary, you'd see two mug shots: one of my kisser, and one of my prick. The one-eyed worm led me on, making me the Pecker as World Wrecker. My dick was a like a dowsing rod. I didn't read newspapers, didn't know any math past three meals a day -- I was, like, totally "virtual," man -- all brain stem, all the time. I was, in short, a man perfectly suited to his time and place in history.

[SLOH stands by the chair.]

SLOH

Then Mr. White gave me my job interview. I was to become -- useful. And what a shock that was!

[PRICE slams SLOH into the chair, pulls out duct tape, and wraps it once around SLOH and the chair. He then wheels in a contraption that has what looks like Excalibur hanging from a thread and puts it behind SLOH so that the sword dangles right over him. Affixed to the front of the device and pointing at SLOH is a little spy-cam. Lights frame a terrified SLOH.]

WHITE

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

SLOH

Honest, I didn't know you guys had new rules -- really, I didn't --

PRICE

Obviously.

SLOH

My pals told me you can always find radical pussy at a demonstration --

WHITE

With *pals* like those, Jimmy --

PRICE

You now got enemies.

SLOH

They were kidding me, eh?

WHITE

You were at a gathering that we had disallowed.

PRICE

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

WHITE

Bad choice on your part. The new rules, Post-Attack? That you obviously don't know about? Whether you hide or don't hide, we will still seek you out.

SLOH

What's that hanging there, over my head?

WHITE

The truth. You lie to me --

PRICE

I cut the thread. (*chops him in back of neck*) Those without a spine, it slides in like butter.

SLOH

If you got a spine? Not that I --

WHITE

It still slides in like butter.

SLOH

Am I in, like, a lot of trouble?

WHITE

You're in trouble's ninth circle, Jimmy. Do you know what that means?

SLOH

No.

[WHITE and PRICE look at SLOH intently.]

SLOH

What can I do, you know, to get out of it? I really don't want --

WHITE

Would you like a job?

SLOH

A job?

WHITE

In service to your country?

SLOH

Really? How much does it pay?

PRICE

Listen to him! We don't bury you right away.

WHITE

(pointing) That camera up there? Technology is a marvelous thing. But technology can only -- probe so far. Our enemies -- your enemies, if you decide to accept -- move in shadows -- the cameras aren't so good in shadows. But your eyes, your ears --

SLOH

You want me to be, like, a spy?

WHITE

You'll become an agent of The Department, part of our Total Information Network.

PRICE

In service to your Post-Attack country.

SLOH

Be like you two?

WHITE

You can aspire --

PRICE

But probably not.

[SLOH hesitates for a moment. WHITE gestures to PRICE.]

WHITE

Cut.

PRICE

Cutting away.

SLOH

No!

PRICE

Sorry.

[SLOH yells -- but the sword does not fall, though there is a GUILLOTINE SOUND EFFECT as if the sword fell. SLOH breathes heavily in relief, and PRICE leans down to laugh in his ear in staccato syllables.]

PRICE

Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha.

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

WHITE

Welcome aboard, Jimmy Sloh.

[WHITE holds out a form, the one pasted over SLOH's face in Scene 1, and SLOH signs it without looking at it. Guillotine SOUND again and lights bump out, then transition music, something vaguely pseudo-Middle Eastern, like Loreena McKinnett.]

* * *

Scene 4

[In separate spots, five ACTORS dressed in what passes for Western misunderstanding of Middle Eastern men: turbans, beards, etc. ACTOR 6 is dressed as an "ordinary" person. As SLOH speaks, he hands his tee-shirt to PRICE in exchange for a black tee-shirt, his hat for a black cap with an Insignia on it. PRICE exits.]

[SLOH addresses the audience.]

SLOH

Spy -- no, *field agent* of [said as if one word] The-Department-part-of-the-Total-Information-Network. Yee-haw! Jimmy Sloh was finally getting a bigger fucking piece of the fucking pie. A person shit on all his life knew exactly how to shit on others. And, boy, did I shit on to beat the band. By shitting on, I felt connected to. I had found my home.

[SLOH bullies up to ACTOR 1.]

Boo! SLOH
[ACTOR 1 jumps in fright.]

Do you love this country? SLOH

(quizzical) What? ACTOR 1

Do you love -- SLOH

Of course I do -- ACTOR 1

Hup, not quick enough. SLOH
[SLOH slaps an Insignia sticker on the ACTOR's forehead.]

Enemy. Guards! SLOH

I'm not an -- ACTOR 1
[BENT and LEE come in, take away ACTOR 1.]

(to audience) One for me. (to ACTOR 2) Allahallahallahallah -- SLOH

What? ACTOR 2

Do you love Western culture? SLOH

Well, the Arabs did invent the zero -- ACTOR 2
[SLOH slaps in Insignia sticker on the ACTOR's forehead.]

Mocker! Guards! SLOH

[BENT and LEE take away ACTOR 2.]

SLOH

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

ACTORS 3, 4, 5

Yes.

SLOH

(pointing) Fundamentalists!

[BENT and LEE spray mace in everyone's face and drag them off.]

SLOH

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

ACTOR 6

You know, like the fucking Bill of Rights -- what the fuck are you guys doing --

SLOH

Blasphemer!

[SLOH does a Three Stooges two-fingers to the eyes, and LEE and BENT drag ACTOR 6 away.]

[The guillotine SOUND. WHITE enters and tosses SLOH a "treat." SLOH smiles. WHITE gives him a gentle slap on the cheek. Transition music.]

* * *

Scene 5

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

SLOH

(to audience) Easy work -- *easy!* Never hard to find a goat to scape. And the pool of goats to choose from just got bigger and bigger -- *it tumesced*, like my already overly fizzing dick! Can you understand the erotic power of Power? Have any of you ever felt it? To have control -- To fuck over -- Who wouldn't want to be Caesar with all the apparatus of Rome at the tip of your tongue? And White -- Mr. White -- and Price -- Mr. Price -- were not too particular -- quantity had its own quality for them, bulk was best. So I just sizzled along -- *(Road Runner sound)* Beep, beep! *(bullet sound)* Peeshoo!

[SLOH sees the LANDLADY.]

SLOH

(startled) Yo.

LANDLADY

Rent.

SLOH

It's due?

LANDLADY

Several months.

SLOH

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

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

LANDLADY

Is that my payment?

SLOH

(smugly) Do you have a brother in Cairo?

LANDLADY

What?

SLOH

Ibrahim?

LANDLADY

I have only sisters.

SLOH

Yeah, sure. And your father --

LANDLADY

Don't slander my father!

SLOH

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

LANDLADY

My father was a baker in Queens! (snatches the "report") What do you have there?

SLOH

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

LANDLADY

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

SLOH

Very top se[cret] --

LANDLADY

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

SLOH

Really?

LANDLADY

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

SLOH

(blustering) Yeah, well -- I know *what* you are. You're a fart-sucking parasite of the rentier class! Yeah.

[A little stunned at the phrase, the LANDLADY not sure if she should laugh.]

SLOH

Enemy of the State, yeah!

LANDLADY

(recovering herself) I want you out.

SLOH

You can't --

LANDLADY

Out.

SLOH

Wait!

LANDLADY

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

SLOH

You can't kick me [out] --

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

LANDLADY

White is going to get an earful.

SLOH

No!

[But LANDLADY just waits.]

SLOH

Don't tell White! (*picking up "report"*) Don't. Jesus Christ Buddha tits -- All your frigging names sound alike, anyway.

[Bravado -- a fake punch, a threatening lurch -- but LANDLADY doesn't budge.]

SLOH

Can I at least take --

LANDLADY

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

SLOH

Fine -- fine -- (*pointing at her*) We're going to nail you, you know.

LANDLADY

Like they nailed your balls to the wall?

SLOH

You got a mouth.

LANDLADY

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

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

SLOH

(to audience) My big power move -- and I was suddenly dumped on the street looking to meet up with a cardboard box. Jimmy Sloh, ace spy -- who couldn't spy out what a sad sack of shit he was. That's when I met Ms. Sarah Young, with her tongue of ice and heart of quartz.

* * *

Scene 6

[Video arcade, indicated by lights and sound. SLOH plays a video game that requires shooting/blasting things. SARAH YOUNG sits at a table with a glass of water. A second table, two chairs: SLOH's. A beer, several empty bottles.]

SLOH

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck -- got you, you lousy towelhead. C'mon, c'mon -- up the alley -- around -- over -- where are you? where are you? bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! bam! Yes, yes, yes, yes -- Got you, you sand snake, you Bedouin bunghole! Yee-haw, yee-haw, yee-haw! *(the word "yee-haw" finally breaking down into a series of brays, like a mule)*

[SLOH looks at YOUNG, who looks away, but slowly, with no embarrassment at being discovered looking at him.]

SLOH

Got the fucking Madam Saddam [pronounced mah-DAHM sah-DAHM] himself! Oooh, free games racking up! Care to pop a few? *(no response)* Not one not for blood or guts? *(no response)* 'Sgood for scraping out the sludge in your veins. *(no response)* Everyone's veins need a good reaming out. Or are you never one for a reaming out? A little organic Roto-Rooter? *(no response)* Then you must be an angel. *(no response)* Nothing hurt by asking.

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

SLOH

An act of amazing -- something -- on the part of Jimmy Sloh here, being that he will not use his racked-up games but leave them for the next doinker, thus giving that doinker the feeling that he -- or she -- has a lucky day.

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

SLOH

What do you think of that? Why do you come to a video arcade and don't play? I'd guess waiting for someone -- vodka or water? -- water, I guess, for the angel. *(takes a swig, last one)* I need a room -- do you have a room I could share?

YOUNG

No, I don't.

SLOH

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

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

WHITE

Hello, Jimmy.

SLOH

(animated) Hola, amigo!

WHITE

Much luck, Jimmy?

SLOH

Got Madam Saddam. Twice.

WHITE

If only reality were as easy. Get me a chair, will you? Ms. Sarah Young?

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

YOUNG

Yes.

WHITE

Mr. White.

SLOH

Do you mind if I -- ?

WHITE

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

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

WHITE

Ms. Young, I'm glad we are here together --

YOUNG

He asked me if I had a room.

WHITE

That's because our mascot here --

YOUNG

He works for you?

SLOH

I'm not a mascot.

WHITE

Works *with* us, yes.

SLOH

I'm not a fucking mascot.

WHITE

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

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

SLOH

I'm not a fucking mascot! She's getting stroked a lot nicer than you ever stroked me. Why do you rate? All I get are slaps.

WHITE

(to YOUNG) Go ahead -- tell him the story-- we have time.

SLOH

(to audience) And this is what I learned about why Ms. Sarah Young didn't have to bark.

* * *

Scene 7

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

YOUNG

(to SLOH) Secretary Wright, the head of The Department.

WHITE

Your ultimate boss, Jimmy. And mine.

YOUNG

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

[YOUNG snaps her fingers, or points at them as she is holding a remote.]

SLOH

(to audience) And we started.

[The scene begins, as if a videotape has been released from "pause" mode.]

MICHAEL

Touching upon all your newly legislated terrorists, where is your ever-vigilant bodyguard?

SLOH

Wait -- back it up!

[YOUNG stops the "tape."]

What? YOUNG

What's he mean "legislated terrorists?" SLOH

The ones you bring to me. WHITE

Why doesn't he just say that, then? SLOH

Do I have to -- YOUNG

No, go right ahead. Jimmy -- don't try to think. WHITE

[YOUNG starts the "tape."]

Touching upon all your newly legislated terrorists, where is your ever-vigilant bodyguard? MICHAEL

You don't see him? WRIGHT

Afraid of being rubbed out by, let's say (*indicating YOUNG*) the waiter? MICHAEL

[YOUNG stands to attention but does not move.]

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

That's pissant soap opera, man -- SLOH

Because *I* never lose hope that my son will take *some* pride in what I have been *called* to do. WRIGHT

I loathe what you do. MICHAEL

Ooooh! SLOH

MICHAEL

Are going to do. Have done. Won't admit to doing. Whether you feel called or not.

WRIGHT

So why sit here with the monstrous politician?

SLOH

Why sit there with that *mother*?

MICHAEL

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

SLOH

Out pop the fangs!

MICHAEL

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

SLOH

(*whispering*) Excellent!

MICHAEL

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

WRIGHT

And all this before the appetizers.

MICHAEL

Did you really expect anything less?

SLOH

In the ribs!

[They open their menus again. YOUNG, seeing the lull, makes for WRIGHT's table, grabbing a chair enroute.]

WHITE

Notice her initiative, Jimmy. Let's stop there for a moment to underline the point.

[WHITE snaps his fingers, and WRIGHT and MICHAEL freeze again, annoyance on WRIGHT's face, keen interest in YOUNG on MICHAEL's.]

SLOH

What'd you do?

YOUNG

I asked for a job outright. From her.

No shit!

SLOH

With a little help.

YOUNG

[YOUNG snaps her fingers again. Action starts.]

Everyone has to go through my office.

WRIGHT

Sarah Young, one of the commoners, mom --

MICHAEL

Everyone has to --

WRIGHT

-- come to petition her government.

MICHAEL

-- go through my office.

WRIGHT

Give her leave.

MICHAEL

I want to offer you --

YOUNG

Young the commoner has an offer, mom.

MICHAEL

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

WRIGHT

For Christ's sake, Sarah Young, spit it out! Go on! Go on! Now! Or forever hold your peace!

MICHAEL

I want to be an agent! *(pause)* I want to be an agent. An agent of the government.

YOUNG

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

MICHAEL

SLOH

If I could explain it to you.

MICHAEL

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

YOUNG

If I could explain.

SLOH

(echoing YOUNG, overlapping) If I could explain --

MICHAEL

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

SLOH

He is slut-butt nasty, man!

MICHAEL

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

YOUNG

If I could explain. On my own.

WHITE

This was priceless.

YOUNG

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

SLOH

I'm impressed.

MICHAEL

(to YOUNG) Impressive shamelessness.

YOUNG

Careful what you say about people's beliefs.

MICHAEL

Your "beliefs" are like underwear, Sarah Young -- off and on depending upon who's groping. (to *WRIGHT*) She is definitely your man, so to speak.

WHITE

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

[WRIGHT and MICHAEL freeze. YOUNG moves back to SLOH and WHITE.]

SLOH

Wait. Wait!

WHITE

What?

SLOH

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

[YOUNG snaps her fingers.]

WRIGHT

I personally think democracy is still worth defending.

MICHAEL

If we had any left to defend.

WRIGHT

You said you had one more point to make?

MICHAEL

I'm leaving. This country. Soon.

SLOH

Wow.

MICHAEL

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

WRIGHT

Which is?

MICHAEL

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

WRIGHT

I wish you wouldn't leave.

MICHAEL

The price of attachment to you is eternal vigilance.

WRIGHT

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

[Beat.]

MICHAEL

We should order.

[WHITE snaps his fingers. Lights out on WRIGHT and MICHAEL, who exit. Table, chairs, etc. off as well.]

* * *

Scene 8

[The scene continues without break.]

SLOH

They're like a butcher going at the beef. But it's sad, too. But he's got a kind of backbone.

WHITE

Enough.

SLOH

He does! I think I admire him.

WHITE

Enough.

SLOH

(to himself) I do.

WHITE

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

SLOH

(coming back) What?

WHITE

(to YOUNG) Why, Sarah? I will call you "Sarah" now. *(indicating SLOH)* For him: why do you want to do this job? *(to SLOH)* Listen.

[Beat.]

YOUNG

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

SLOH

A pretty fucking good answer, Sarah.

WHITE

I agree, Jimmy.

[WHITE takes a manila envelope out of his case.]

SLOH

Now, about my room --

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

WHITE

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

SLOH

Hey!

WHITE

(ignoring him) Now, Sarah, I like to have my agents plowing the fields right away --

[WHITE takes photos out of manila envelope, hands one to YOUNG.]

WHITE

Do you know the man in the middle?

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

SLOH

No photo for me?

[SLOH moves to see the photo.]

YOUNG

No, I don't recognize him.

WHITE

His name is Johnson Fletcher.

YOUNG

Still don't recognize him.

SLOH

Me, neither.

WHITE

Any of the men surrounding the one in the middle, or the woman?

[Another STROBE, SOUND EFFECT.]

SLOH

Let me see.

WHITE

Hands off, Jimmy.

YOUNG

None of them, either.

WHITE

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

[The OFFICERS exit.]

WHITE

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

SLOH

Beer's got a radical bite. Sorry.

WHITE

(ignoring him again) They call themselves the Movement -- capital "M" -- and something is brewing there --

SLOH

Get it!

WHITE

Watch them, Sarah. Bring your reapings to me, Sarah.

YOUNG

All right.

[WHITE packs his things and rises.]

SLOH

My room --

WHITE

But before you go, Sarah, I have an assignment for the two of you to share. Please stand, both of you. That's better. *(to YOUNG)* Do you have any hobbies?

SLOH

I like to --

YOUNG

No, I don't.

WHITE

I do. Bonsai. Do you know it?

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

WHITE

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

[Lights out. ACTOR exits.]

WHITE

A hobby, Sarah, is a comfort.

YOUNG

So I've just been told.

WHITE

Consider it strongly.

[WHITE looks at YOUNG; YOUNG does not look away. SLOH watches, rapt. Then WHITE takes out an Insignia and pins it to her jacket, like a corsage.]

WHITE

Goodbye.

[WHITE exits. Beat.]

SLOH

Pals, now, right?

YOUNG

I suppose so.

SLOH

Don't get a hernia being too excited.

YOUNG

Whatever.

SLOH

Good. Because I don't have pals. Do you? This is a tricky business, Sarah Young -- a need for bonding, right? To be bonded? So now we are bonded.

YOUNG

All right.

SLOH

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

YOUNG

Agreed.

[Unexpectedly, SLOH punches YOUNG in the upper arm, hard. Then he points to his own arm.]

SLOH

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

[YOUNG, with an unexpected force, slams SLOH hard enough to knock him back. He laughs, but before he is ready, YOUNG slams him hard again -- clearly vicious. SLOH laughs again, but not quite so heartily. YOUNG slams him a third time, threatens a fourth.]

SLOH

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

[Beat.]

SLOH

Is it really true about you not having a room?

[Transition music. Table, chairs off. Park bench on. YOUNG exits.]

* * *

Scene 9

[A street. A park bench. Clothes come flying onto the stage, and SLOH changes into ratty clothes while SWAT OFFICERS TORRES, LEE, and BENT, dressed in

uniform bearing the Insignia and full equipment, watch him. SLOH throws back clothes he won't use. YOUNG climbs the ladder with binoculars to watch.]

SLOH

(to himself while dressing) A Mr. White "special" assignment -- what's so special about the shovel and the shit? *(eyes them; they eye him)* "Probe their reactions -- pinch 'em, poke 'em, prod 'em -- see what the Movement does." More frigging pain for the fucking dog. The fucking dog that's kicked when a dog needs to get kicked.

[SLOH finishes dressing as he speaks to the audience.]

SLOH

Etcetera, etcetera. Another example of my so-self-insightful patter during my "regime" as a spook. The pig-Latin of a guinea pig. But watch closely -- you will see tectonics in action, the shifting of wisdoms. Special assignment, indeed.

[SLOH finishes, looks at YOUNG, who nods, then SLOH exits and reenters.]

SLOH

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

LEE

(hissing) Get the hell out of here!

SLOH

Ass-wipe ossifers --

TORRES

Do you know him?

PETER

-- waiting for the knife to kiss your ass!

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

SLOH

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

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

BENT

Christ!

LEE

What?

BENT

You heard him! He's right --

LEE

Don't --

BENT

That prick-head is right on the fucking nose.

LEE

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

BENT

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

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

TORRES

(looking around) Because our work --

BENT

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

TORRES

No!

BENT

Well, what then, pray tell, *amigo*?

TORRES

Our work *is grounded on* being in service to --

BENT

"The great cause of freedom." *(to LEE)* His fucking constant mantra.

LEE

It's not a bad one.

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

SLOH

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

BENT

Get out --

SLOH

(dances away from BENT) No fucking movement from the Movement. The moveless Movement. *(starts swiveling his hips)* I got better fucking movements than the Movement. My fucking bowels move more than the Movement --

[SLOH moons the OFFICERS but suddenly spies the SOLIDERS somewhere.]

SLOH

Fuck!

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

LEE

He's going to get himself killed.

BENT

So why aren't we protecting him?

TORRES

(to BENT) Listen to me! In service to a great truth, I was going to say.

LEE

I second that. The Constitution's been betrayed.

BENT

Every day on every shift.

LEE

And we took an oath -- *we promised!*

BENT

It was supposed to be about getting a good job and a pension, not --

TORRES

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

LEE

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

BENT

But the pretending -- I hate --

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

SLOH

Shit-eaters. Piss guzzlers.

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

BENT

Where is he?

LEE

Chief Fletch will be here.

BENT

I have some complaints --

TORRES

When don't you?

BENT

About the way we have been forced to break things up -- break up meetings -- people -- the *people* we're supposed to be -- (to TORRES) that's what our fucking "service to a great truth" has come to --

[SLOH runs on again.]

SLOH

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

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

SOLDIER 1

That slimebag is a terrorist.

SOLDIER 2

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

BENT

Your new marching orders, hey?

TORRES

Smear that bastard! Go! *Go!*

[SOLDIERS exit.]

BENT

Yesterday --

LEE

That one boiled me.

BENT

Giving "protection" when Immigration rounded up --

TORRES

Head 'em up, move 'em out --

BENT

What was it this week? left-handed swarthy types who *(in a silly accent)* "speak-a funny"? *(to TORRES)* That is *not* what I signed up for --

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

FLETCH

The hunt is on, I see.

BENT

When is it ever off now?

LEE

Good to see you, sir.

BENT

I've got some complaints. Sir.

FLETCH

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

LEE

Welcome, friend.

LOUDER

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

BENT

Like a frigging iron rain.

LOUDER

-- but something is happening.

FLETCH

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

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

SOLIDER 1

Note how his tongue no longer flaps.

SOLDIER 2

Note how silent he has become.

[SLOH does not speak, looks at the OFFICERS with only partly mock terror on his face. Several beats as the SOLIDERS wait.]

SLOH

(stage whispers) Ya gotta help me --

[BENT looks at FLETCH, who says nothing. BENT decides.]

BENT

(to SOLDIERS) Uh, you can put him down.

[The SOLIDERS do not put him down.]

BENT

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

SLOH

Not like that --

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

SLOH

They don't care if --

BENT

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

SOLDIER 1

Do you have an answer for him?

BENT

(holds up his hand) It'd be better for you to just go home, enjoy what you have there, go to your work the next day with a -- *(fumbles for word)*

SOLDIER 2

(to FLETCH) Sir -- what's he taking about?

BENT

He's dangerous to nobody.

SOLDIER 2

(*indicating BENT*) Is he speaking for anybody?

BENT

(*to FLETCH*) They can release him, right?

[FLETCH does not answer.]

SOLDIER 1

Sir?

BENT

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

SLOH

(*hissing*) That's not right, that's not right, you've got to --

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

SLOH

(*hissing, to FLETCH*) Hey!

FLETCH

You can let him go.

[The SOLDIERS stop.]

SOLDIER 1

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

[FLETCH walks up to SLOH and punches him, hard.]

FLETCH

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

[TORRES then kicks SLOH several times.]

TORRES

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

[The SOLDIERS drop SLOH.]

SOLDER 1

Better.

[SOLDIER 2 takes out a form.]

SOLDIER 2

We'll be watching for you.

SOLDIER 1

By the way, are you left-handed?

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

SOLDIER 1

Next round-up, then.

[SOLDIERS exit. FLETCH helps SLOH up.]

SLOH

(to BENT) You almost bought me the farm, you peckerhead! *(to FLETCH)* Your guys don't know crap from crayolas!

BENT

Who the hell are you?

FLETCH

(to BENT) Can't you tell?

SLOH

What?

FLETCH

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

SLOH

And who the fuck would that be?

[FLETCH looks long and hard at SLOH.]

SLOH

What? What?

FLETCH

You don't belong there. And you don't belong here. Not yet, at least.

SLOH

What in Christ's piss are you jabbering about?

FLETCH

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

[Beat.]

SLOH

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

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

LEE

You didn't have to do that to him!

FLETCH

Weren't you paying attention?

BENT

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

LEE

Your what?

BENT

Charity! It makes you a suspect now, Post-Attack.

LEE

You made me sick. We can't go around banging on people we're supposed to --

BENT

Chief Fletch did the right thing. Torres did --

LEE

They can't be right!

FLETCH

Torres.

TORRES

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

LEE

That's stupid!

TORRES

-- be *more* than like Them.

LEE

Even stupider.

TORRES

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

LEE

That is [absurd] --

FLETCH

Only the best of us -- the *best* of us -- will be able to remember our original reasons why as the fight makes us hard and necessary. (to LEE) You should have done what we did yourself -- vomit afterwards, scratch your face, wail if you want -- but still have done it.

[Beat.]

BENT

In service to a great truth.

[Beat.]

BENT

(to FLETCH) What do you want us to do? Sir?

FLETCH

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

BENT

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

[Lights out on them. SLOH climbs down. ACTORS set up YOUNG's room.]

SLOH

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

But *they* didn't. *They* didn't. Pals. What did they ever fucking see in spine-free me? But Fletch -- he saw -- something -- and that's all it took --

[SLOH grinds the palms of his hands together.]

SLOH

Tectonics. (looking up at YOUNG) Let's go.

[YOUNG drops down, right into the next scene.]

* * *

Scene 10

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

I appreciate you letting me. SLOH

[Beat.]

Awake? SLOH

Yes. YOUNG

I said thank you. SLOH

All right. YOUNG

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

That ointment stinks. YOUNG

Blame White. He pitched me like a penny against the wall. SLOH

Each according to his own worth. YOUNG

(pauses in rubbing) Weird, though, today -- that guy, Fletch? That look -- wait -- wait -- SLOH

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

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

I heard. YOUNG

SLOH

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

YOUNG

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

SLOH

(not hearing her) I didn't know what the fuck he meant! But I knew he meant *something!* I could feel it!

[SLOH looks at YOUNG through the glasses.]

SLOH

What do you think he meant?

YOUNG

Put the glasses down.

SLOH

(glasses still up) What do you think --

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

YOUNG

And you don't listen.

SLOH

Story of my life, Sarah.

[YOUNG returns to the bed. Beat.]

YOUNG

Your life is shit and yet you go on.

SLOH

You don't agree with doing that?

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

SLOH

So what bank do you put *your* money in?

YOUNG

In nothing but my own appetite, Jimmy.

SLOH

Nothing else?

YOUNG

I wouldn't know how else. In all this dismantling of rights. In all the sheep lifting up their necks for the knife. In this tarring of everybody with terror. In the categorizing and butchering done in the name of the good. I will find what my appetite wants. That's our difference, Jimmy. I won't ever bark. And I won't stay here for very long. Where there is an "up" to go, I am going up.

SLOH

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

YOUNG

Because you settle for *pals*.

[YOUNG puts the hat on SLOH.]

YOUNG

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

SLOH

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

YOUNG

I'm going to sleep.

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

SLOH

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

YOUNG

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

SLOH

I would say so if I knew.

YOUNG

Sleep.

[Beat. Caps ointment, takes off hat.]

SLOH
But I don't know. (*pause, then to audience*) I didn't know.

[Transition music.]

* * *

Scene 11

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

ACTOR 1
(*hissingly*) Come on!

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

ACTOR 1
Better. (*quizzical*) What? Of course I do --

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

SLOH
Do you love Western culture?

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

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

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

ACTORS 3, 4, 5
Yes.

[SLOH goes to say "Fundamentalists!" as he had before, but a pain shoots up the side of his neck, and nothing comes out. ACTORS exit. ACTOR 6 just looks at SLOH, then exits. WHITE enters and tosses SLOH a "treat," but it bounces off him. WHITE gives him a hard slap on the cheek, exits. Immediately the video

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

SLOH

(*audience*) As useless as. Tits on a bull. An egg-laying rooster. Rubber lips on a woodpecker. Screendoor on a submarine. Dried spit. He couldn't fall off a fence in a windstorm. The journey of a thousand schleps had just begun.

[The guillotine SOUND of the sword falling. Lights out.]

* * *

[At this point, there will be an intermission, though the intermission will consist of a 10-minute play, which people can stay and watch or not, as they see fit.]

* * * * *

Scene 12

[WRIGHT's country home. A table with a water pitcher, glasses, an extra pair of horseshoes, and binoculars. In the center of the table is a perfectly sculpted bonsai tree. Outdoor chairs. Off to the side is an Adirondack chair, indicating another part of the outdoor space.]

SLOH

Welcome back. For a little bit now, I am going to disappear on you -- well, not disappear as in "disembody," "deliquesce," shuffle off the mortal coil, kick the wicked bucket. No, imagine me off on the side of the road -- battered, spattered, spat upon, left for crows -- ready for a samaritan, you might say, waiting for *his* footsteps. Hibernation of sorts. A period of -- wait.

[SLOH reaches into a pocket and pulls out a small mirror.]

SLOH

Of reflection. See you around.

[SLOH flashes the mirror at the audience, then exits.]

MICHAEL

Anybody *servicing* you these days?

WRIGHT

Michael --

MICHAEL

Shtup, then? A hot dog in the bun?

WRIGHT

Enough.

MICHAEL

A push in the bush? Does he take his socks off for the Mother of the Nation?

WRIGHT

I am doing the best I can.

MICHAEL

Said the Mother of the Nation.

WRIGHT

I am!

[MICHAEL looks at her through the wrong end of the binoculars.]

MICHAEL

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

WRIGHT

This was a mistake. *(grabs pitcher)* We need more water. *(moves to exit, comes back)* Michael, you have to be very careful about disgust.

MICHAEL

I am very strict in my disgust.

WRIGHT

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

MICHAEL

Or worse.

WRIGHT

-- than any one else.

MICHAEL

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

WRIGHT

We need more water.

[WRIGHT exits with pitcher. MICHAEL drain his glass, picks up a horseshoe and handles it. WHITE enters, followed by YOUNG and SLOH, YOUNG dressed now in Department black clothing, with Insignia. WHITE carries his case. He sees MICHAEL but says nothing.]

WHITE

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

[MICHAEL sits, holding the horseshoe.]

WHITE

This is very nice. Horseshoes. *(pointing)* A near-ringer --

MICHAEL

Hers.

WHITE

Is she here? I was told --

MICHAEL

She just went into the house.

WHITE

Ah. *(pause)* Mr. White.

MICHAEL

I'm her son.

WHITE

I know.

MICHAEL

I'm sure you would.

WHITE

This is our weekly meeting.

[WRIGHT enters, carrying the pitcher of water.]

MICHAEL

(looks through binoculars) Are you her push in the bush?

WHITE

What?

WRIGHT

(to MICHAEL) I forgot to tell you.

MICHAEL

Your weekly meeting.

WRIGHT

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

To do the best you can.

[MICHAEL trains the binoculars on YOUNG.]

MICHAEL

I know you. So they took you in. (to *WRIGHT*) Do you remember her? Sarah Young. You thought she was an assassin-waiter. Such initiative -- almost took her heart away!

WRIGHT

Michael --

YOUNG

I have a lot to thank Madam Secretary for.

MICHAEL

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

WRIGHT

Michael.

MICHAEL

(chidingly) Mother --

[A stand-off moment between mother and son.]

MICHAEL

(surrendering) I will move along. (to *WHITE*) The "eff-to-eff," so essential for the proper functioning of government -- (*MICHAEL waves*) long may it wave.

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

[A moment of silence, then WHITE gives WRIGHT an inquisitive look.]

WHITE

Should we?

[WRIGHT hesitates, then nods yes.]

WHITE

(to *YOUNG*) Follow him.

[YOUNG hesitates.]

WHITE

Go ahead.

[YOUNG exits to follow MICHAEL.]

[WRIGHT refills her own glass but does not offer one to WHITE. She sits, then indicates for WHITE to sit as well. SLOH stands several steps back but within hearing and seeing distance. WRIGHT and WHITE completely ignore him. WHITE opens his case, takes out the same photos he'd shown YOUNG.]

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

Do you know any of these people?

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

That man in the middle -- *(takes out another photo and a loupe)* -- Johnson Fletcher -- here is a closer photograph.

WRIGHT

(uses loupe) No. *(hands back picture and loupe)* What are these about?

[WHITE hands back the picture and loupe, taps the photo with his index finger.]

WRIGHT

What?

WHITE

Did you notice this? Across the Insignia.

WRIGHT

It looks like a black --

WHITE

It's tape. A strip of black tape.

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

They're all wearing it.

WRIGHT

Yes -- they are.

[WRIGHT hands back the photo and loupe.]

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

No one has fallen. That much I know. *(drawing a line across his own Insignia)* So, why, Madam Secretary? And this.

[WHITE shows her one more photograph. She looks at it, looks dismayed, hands it to SLOH, who hands it back to WHITE after sneaking a peek at who it is.]

WHITE

You recognize him.

WRIGHT

The Attorney General -- of course.

WHITE

And you saw the tape across his --

[WRIGHT gets up, agitated -- perhaps even tosses a horseshoe.]

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

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

WRIGHT

(stops him) Careful -- careful -- We've been attacked, yes -- our society, our values, our buildings, all attacked -- but we can't forget some sense of proportion!

WHITE

And proportionate responses.

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

You are Secretary of The Department.

WRIGHT

And what security are we giving people if everyone comes to think we're no better than the assassins we say we want to defeat?

[WHITE looks around him, as if trying to see someone.]

WRIGHT

What?

WHITE

I was just looking to see if there were members of the press hanging in the bushes.

WRIGHT

Don't get flippant, White!

WHITE

I just wanted to remind you that you don't have to play to the gallery in your own backyard.

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

A loving by lying.

WRIGHT

You miss the point.

WHITE

Of course.

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

I understand, Madam Secretary -- I understand how things look to you from up on your level, that -- higher level. (*pause*) But --

[WHITE picks up the photos, shuffles them.]

WHITE

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

[WRIGHT stops him, paces, agitated. WHITE neatens his pile of photographs. WRIGHT finally sees SLOH.]

WRIGHT

Who is he?

WHITE

He's been surveilling Fletcher and the others.

WRIGHT

Get him out of here.

[WHITE indicates for SLOH to leave, so SLOH backs up toward the house.]

WRIGHT

Wait!

[WRIGHT picks up the binoculars and tosses them to SLOH.]

WRIGHT

Get these wretched things out of my sight.

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

WHITE

If there weren't conspiracies, The Department wouldn't have been created. The fact that it's been created must mean that the conspiracies exist. And if they exist, then --

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

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

WRIGHT

All right.

WHITE

That's why you --

WRIGHT

All *right!*

WHITE

-- hired me.

WRIGHT

It's just hard to think that --

WHITE

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

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

And the people --

WRIGHT

-- that we do this right.

WHITE

I have my people watching. *(pause)* Does it being this close to home upset you?

WRIGHT

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

[WRIGHT looks up and sees SLOH, and SLOH scuttles out. WHITE takes a form out of his case, unfolds it, offers WRIGHT a pen.]

WHITE

Your directive.

[WRIGHT signs it. WHITE gathers his materials and puts them back.]

WHITE

It's very pleasant out here. A real treat to be able to get away, to escape. "All created equal," *e pluribus unum*, that's what it says up there -- but this is very nice, isn't it? *(smiles)*

WRIGHT

I need something stronger.

[WRIGHT exits into the house.]

* * *

Scene 13

[Scene shifts without pause to the Adirondack chair. WHITE unrolls a small leather pouch of tools and proceeds to work on the bonsai, occasionally glancing at the scene with MICHAEL and YOUNG. Light on him should be well-defined. MICHAEL enters, sits. YOUNG enters and startles him. In the background, unseen, is SLOH, who watches everything through the binoculars.]

MICHAEL

My "tail."

I do what they want me to do.

YOUNG

Would you seduce my mother if they told you to?

MICHAEL

If they told me to.

YOUNG

How?

MICHAEL

This is what I would whisper in her ear.

YOUNG

I'm all ears.

MICHAEL

"Sanctimony stirs the juices of your cunt -- "

YOUNG

That to *my* mother?

MICHAEL

(*ignoring him*) " -- you feel it but deny it but still feel it under the denial -- "

YOUNG

You give my mother way too much --

MICHAEL

(*ignoring him again*) " -- the air fills with your moist fruit-fish smell, perfume of power that rims my nostrils and rides my tongue with a tingle to lick the first silver dew drop hanging off your clitoris -- "

WRIGHT

[YOUNG pauses, looks directly at MICHAEL.]

Go on.

MICHAEL

You want me to.

YOUNG

Finish it off.

MICHAEL

YOUNG

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

MICHAEL

I can't but think that my mother might just -- she just may, you know. (*with disgust*) But the thought of it --

YOUNG

If not mother, then son?

MICHAEL

Now, did they tell you to offer *that*?

YOUNG

Yes or no?

MICHAEL

Or is this a rogue assignment?

[YOUNG waits.]

MICHAEL

Is this the face that my corruption will wear?

YOUNG

Is it such a bad face?

MICHAEL

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

YOUNG

And you might do with me --

MICHAEL

-- makes this face more delicious than it is.

YOUNG

So will you do?

MICHAEL

I will hate myself for saying yes. But yes.

[WHITE pitches what he says to SLOH, though he never faces SLOH directly. He makes eye contact with the audience.]

WHITE

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

[The "entanglement" of YOUNG and MICHAEL should be choreographed, in the sense that the movements are planned precisely. It is a dance of mutual exploitation and animal desire and should appear so. WHITE continues to work on his bonsai. SLOH stands behind him.]

WHITE

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

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

WHITE

It's not healthy to be too inquisitive. Much better to have controlled idealisms, things that are rounded-off and well-maintained. In that lies more than enough happiness.

[YOUNG and MICHAEL stand, arrange themselves.]

MICHAEL

I am going to postpone my leaving.

YOUNG

I'm not asking you to.

MICHAEL

I don't want to be asked.

YOUNG

I promise nothing.

MICHAEL

What better gift?

[WHITE walks into their area.]

WHITE

(to MICHAEL) You are out of your league with her.

MICHAEL
 You forget whose son I am.

WHITE
 You forget whose son you are.

YOUNG
 Don't forget.

[MICHAEL exits.]

WHITE
 You are so governed by appetite.

YOUNG
 Lucky for you.

WHITE
(grabs her arm) Prove I'm lucky.

YOUNG
 Why are you being so hard on me?

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

YOUNG
 You misread these tits, Mr. White.

WHITE
 I am not weak like Michael Wright.

YOUNG
 No one is that weak.

WHITE
 Then make me trust your appetite.

YOUNG
 Let me go first.

[Beat, then WHITE lets her go.]

YOUNG
 I do this job well -- *(as a statement)* I do, don't I?

So far.

WHITE

Because I am just like you.

YOUNG

I don't bend to flattery.

WHITE

I am completely empty of faith.

YOUNG

Go on.

WHITE

Clean as a hollow log.

YOUNG

You're in the black so far.

WHITE

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

YOUNG

I remember your answer to my question "why."

WHITE

Thick shiver down the spine.

YOUNG

You'd thought about the answer before answering.

WHITE

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

YOUNG

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

WHITE

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

YOUNG

[YOUNG picks up the bonsai, examines it.]

YOUNG

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

WHITE

Find Sloh -- we have to leave.

YOUNG

(*puts down the bonsai*) I take it that means you like the answer.

[*YOUNG exits.*]

WHITE

Where, oh where, are there more like her?

[*Lights out on WHITE. Lights stay on SLOH, who comes to the Adirondack chair. He smells the seat of the chair, circles it, smells the air around him.*]

SLOH

(*to audience*) I am back. These are things I must remember. I must. Not. Forget.

[*Transition music. Garden off, coffee shop on.*]

* * *

Scene 14

SLOH

(*to audience*) The coffee shop. White had said this is where they met. Something -- like an unfinished sentence -- made me come here.

[*LOUDER, TORRES, BENT, and LEE at a table, coffee cups. HANNAH, the barista, by the coffee-making machines, rag in hand. Other tables and chairs. During the next lines, SLOH slides in, unobserved at first, except by YOUNG, who is off to one side, on a ladder with headset and binoculars.*]

TORRES

(*to HANNAH*) We're sorry, Hannah.

LEE

We all are.

HANNAH

For what?

TORRES
Your -- pain.

BENT
For how they wasted Sam --

HANNAH
Fuck the sentiment. How did Sam look?

TORRES
You don't need to --

HANNAH
(fiercely) My shop. My rules. What'd they do to Sam?

LEE
Dumped his body in the field -- with the wrists --

LOUDER
Poor bastard.

HANNAH
Now Fletch can have himself a martyr.

LEE
Don't run Fletch down!

HANNAH
My dead Sam's no use to me. Let Fletch have him. Sam'll be more useful than he ever was alive.

LOUDER
They assassinated the man you called your --

HANNAH
He knew what price [for] --

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

HANNAH
And what would your fucking West Coast genius suggest?

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

[Without warning, HANNAH snaps her cloth into LOUDER's face.]

HANNAH

(leaning over him) They dumped his body in a field. Those're the "laws" now.

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

HANNAH

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

LOUDER

(gagging) I'm not --

TORRES

Hannah --

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

LOUDER

I'll kill her!

BENT

It's her grief, Louder.

LOUDER

That's grief?!

BENT

Can't you find a place for it?

HANNAH

Let him!

BENT

It's grief, goddamn it! Christ, the last thing is to do their work for 'em.

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

FLETCH

Always easier if the prisoners punish themselves.

[FLETCH sits, HANNAH serves him.]

FLETCH

Hannah, I'm sorry.

HANNAH

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

[HANNAH lets loose an ear-splitting wail.]

HANNAH

Done. You look grey.

[FLETCH looks at HANNAH ruefully, then speaks.]

FLETCH

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

BENT

We've been infiltrated.

FLETCH

That can wait.

BENT

The Movement has now been --

FLETCH

The Attorney General -- have you heard this?

LEE

No.

FLETCH

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

HANNAH

(to LOUDER, mocking) Your "laws -- "

BENT

Then there's only one choice. We have to let up, we have to stop organizing!

FLETCH

No.

BENT

It's treason, now. Written on the wall. Smearred on the [wall] --

HANNAH

I'm all for that.

BENT

Don't be stupid!

HANNAH

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

BENT

What happened to Sam --

[Everyone finishes the sentence silently.]

BENT

We have to go underground --

FLETCH

And be worms? Not for me, not for us, not for Sam. It's only honorable if we keep it in the open.

BENT

So let's have ourselves a treasonous picnic and go join Sam dumped in the field. Is that what we should do?

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

BENT

I want to *live*, not be --

HANNAH

(shouting) Bloody fucking carrion! *(to BENT, sweetly)* Right?

BENT

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

FLETCH

No.

BENT

Christ!

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

FLETCH

He'll be back.

TORRES

All part of the boneyard anyway.

[Everyone looks at SLOH and knows exactly who he is and why he's there.]

SLOH

(to HANNAH) Black, no sugar, no cow juice.

[HANNAH serves him. Everyone watches SLOH.]

Someone told me -- SLOH

Yeah? HANNAH

-- that if a man was a friend of freedom -- SLOH

Yeah? HANNAH

-- he should come here, talk to Fletch. SLOH

Yeah? HANNAH

That's what someone told me. SLOH

And are you? FLETCH

What? SLOH

A man? FLETCH

I have some questions -- SLOH

A test, first. For the singular *you*. What has the government of, by, and for the singular *you* been doing lately in your singular name? FLETCH

Not much of a newspaper reader -- SLOH

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

Yes. SLOH

FLETCH

No sugar --

SLOH

No milk. So what?

FLETCH

A new taste for you. (to HANNAH) The almond. Go on.

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

SLOH

Hey!

FLETCH

Try it.

[SLOH tries it.]

SLOH

It's good.

FLETCH

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

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

FLETCH

Just one.

SLOH

There's a fuckload of dangers.

FLETCH

A "fuckload."

SLOH

Yeah.

FLETCH

Come on, stand up.

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

FLETCH

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

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

FLETCH

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

[SLOH hesitates.]

SLOH

You don't think I can do it.

FLETCH

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

[SLOH stands on the chair. Everyone waits.]

HANNAH

Go on.

SLOH

Well --

FLETCH

Just one from the "fuckload."

SLOH

Um -- *(laughs)* I mean, who can just pick one?

FLETCH

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

SLOH

There're so many --

FLETCH

-- and yet --

SLOH

I'm thinking!

FLETCH

-- and yet --

SLOH

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

He thinks *he's* on a spot. FLETCH

Look, there's -- SLOH

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

Quit interrupting me! SLOH

Get down. FLETCH

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

Get down. FLETCH

Habeas corpus! SLOH

Get the fuck down! HANNAH

There! See! Habeas -- SLOH

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

What a fucking embarrassment to biology. HANNAH

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

Look -- SLOH

Sit. FLETCH

You think you got the fucking right to -- SLOH

FLETCH

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

[Beat. SLOH sits.]

FLETCH

(to the others) Ecce homo! Upon these shoulders freedom rests.

HANNAH

God have mercy --

FLETCH

Of all the things I hate that they have done, are doing, to shred The Constitution, The Declaration, the rule of law and individual beauty, to tear down what had a rough but fair face, what gave hope to others for freedom and progress -- of all the things I hate, I hate *you* most of all. I hate that *they* have sent such a low-rent shit-piece like you to rat us out.

SLOH

I'm taking that as a compliment.

FLETCH

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

HANNAH

It's a crying fucking shame.

FLETCH

No guts, this waste of clothes --

SLOH

Are you done?

FLETCH

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

SLOH

Hey!

FLETCH

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

SLOH

I'm not free?

HANNAH

Offering your dick to any hand that whacks you off is not free.

SLOH

No, I am a free man! I am!

TORRES

Any rat --

SLOH

I'm no rat!

TORRES

-- with enough cheese thinks the maze is paradise.

SLOH

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

HANNAH

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

FLETCH

"I got, I got" is all you got.

SLOH

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

FLETCH

(to others) Poor, poor poochy on his leash. When they talk to you about "preserving freedom" -- they're just nailing the likes of you to the wall so that they can keep eating what they steal from everyone else.

HANNAH

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

[Beat.]

SLOH

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

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

SLOH

Not that I'm -- you know --

HANNAH

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

SLOH

Hey, wait --

HANNAH

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

LEE

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

SLOH

No one uses me!

TORRES

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

FLETCH

For you, lap dog? Will freedom ever be for you?

[Beat.]

SLOH

What?

FLETCH

Only when you can say no. Only when you can say *no*.

[Beat. YOUNG escorts SLOH downstage into a separate light.]

YOUNG

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

[YOUNG pushes SLOH away, goes back to her ladder.]

YOUNG

Get away from me, you momzer.

SLOH

(to audience) It was like fucking ashes in my mouth. It was like a fucking wasp in my brain.

* * *

Scene 15

[YOUNG joins WRIGHT and WHITE, seated in three seats, or on three ladders, like a tribunal. SLOH watches them but addresses the audience.]

SLOH

So many wheels turning within wheels --

WRIGHT

I have just signed off on the arrests --

WHITE

Johnson Fletcher and his merry band of traitors are --

[The three "punctuate" with a choreographed snipping motion.]

YOUNG

I have proof they have a "dirty bomb."

WRIGHT

They're calling me a fascist.

WHITE

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

YOUNG

Fuck history.

[The three look at each other on the curse.]

YOUNG

The Attack justifies everything.

WHITE

We do what must be done --

YOUNG

In the name of --

WRIGHT

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

[A final choreographed snip. Lights out on their section. During the next lines something indicating YOUNG's apartment is set up. SLOH back to the coffee shop, though it does not need to be set up completely. BENT joins them.]

* * *

Scene 16

SLOH

They said you had a "dirty bomb."

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

HANNAH

And the bomb's got "Fuck Wright" tattoo'd on the fuse. What does the weasel want?

SLOH

I want to know -- I want to know!

[No one responds to him.]

SLOH

I want to know who I am!

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

HANNAH

And pop! goes the weasel!

[FLETCH indicates to HANNAH to hold off.]

FLETCH

(to SLOH) Sit down and tell us what you know.

SLOH

Stop her making a fool of me.

HANNAH

Then stop opening your mouth.

SLOH

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

FLETCH

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

SLOH

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

LEE

Go to your boss, the butcher.

TORRES

They're hanging carcasses every day --

HANNAH

Not rags and bones like him, though.

FLETCH

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

SLOH

No! No!

BENT

We have to go!

[Something in SLOH's desperation gets FLETCH to relent.]

FLETCH

Tell me about your thumb.

SLOH

Thumb?

FLETCH

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

SLOH

My thumb. *(looks at it)* Another joke, right?

HANNAH

Can't compete with the joke of you.

SLOH

I'll stick this up your --

HANNAH

Wash it first.

SLOH

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

FLETCH

And?

SLOH

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

FLETCH

Away from home.

HANNAH

Away from your mother.

SLOH

And father -- yeah. I didn't hate them. I hated --

TORRES

You hated --

SLOH

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

FLETCH

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

* * *

Scene 17

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

YOUNG

I'm going out.

SLOH

At first, making me stand on the chair, making me come up empty --

YOUNG

You shouldn't have gone back.

SLOH

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

YOUNG

Vessel?

SLOH

-- I was.

YOUNG

Vessel?

SLOH

But not empty now. *(holds up his thumb)* See this -- they got me thinking. Yeah. They did. Fletch did.

YOUNG

Johnson Fletcher is now prime cut --

SLOH

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

YOUNG

Not me?

SLOH

Not you. And not White. No more dogging it for him.

YOUNG

So now a member of the Movement, eh?

SLOH

(hesitates) Yes.

YOUNG

Makes you a member of shit.

SLOH

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

YOUNG

Move away [from me] --

SLOH

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

YOUNG

Because you're screwed up.

SLOH

-- there are *reasons why* -- to see them all laid out --

YOUNG

So Jimmy Sloh has a vision.

SLOH

And why the Christ shouldn't he? me?

YOUNG

Like a monkey in a tuxedo.

SLOH

You miss the point.

I'm warning you --

YOUNG

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

SLOH

Stay away.

YOUNG

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

SLOH

I'm not in a prison.

YOUNG

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

SLOH

Ignorance is bliss.

YOUNG

You are in a prison.

SLOH

I'm going out.

YOUNG

I *want* to tell you --

SLOH

I want you out -- Jimmy, Jimmy --

YOUNG

What?

SLOH

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

YOUNG

[*Beat. MICHAEL enters.*]

YOUNG

Meet my "pal" Jimmy Sloh.

MICHAEL

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

YOUNG

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

SLOH

You shouldn't tell --

YOUNG

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

MICHAEL

(to SLOH, with compassion) That was not a good move.

SLOH

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

YOUNG

The dead speak.

SLOH

Not me, not anymore. *(tapping forehead)* Got it all up here now, and no one can muscle it away from me. It's *mine*.

YOUNG

You look stupid trying to look intelligent.

SLOH

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

[SLOH exits.]

YOUNG

What are you looking at?

MICHAEL

Just let him go?

YOUNG

He loves his new freedom -- I'm not my brother's keeper.

MICHAEL

You know White won't --

YOUNG

Concern for Jimmy Sloh? That turns me off.

MICHAEL

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

[YOUNG moves closer to MICHAEL.]

YOUNG

Feelings?

MICHAEL

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

YOUNG

What?

MICHAEL

The major networks today were nationalized. Of those, the ones who'd editorialized about such now outdated ideas as the Constitution and civil rights -- arrested.

YOUNG

Your mother must be all a-tingle.

MICHAEL

Tomorrow goes the universities.

YOUNG

Now I am all a-tingle. And so are you. Otherwise, why would you be here? You think you *should* be appalled, your decency keeps trying to make you go north, to the Pole Star, but --

[YOUNG takes MICHAEL's hand and puts it down her pants.]

YOUNG

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

[YOUNG pulls out his hand and sticks his fingertips into his mouth.]

YOUNG

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

MICHAEL

(taking the fingers from his mouth) You are very wicked.

YOUNG

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

MICHAEL

And I am appalled at myself for liking --

[YOUNG begins to undress MICHAEL. MICHAEL stops her.]

MICHAEL

You've raised self-disgust to an art, which in itself is disgusting -- and I can no longer keep up with you.

[Beat.]

YOUNG

Suddenly you are a drag. And a disappointment. *(pause)* But not yet useless.

[YOUNG puts MICHAEL's hands on her breasts and gives him a long, deep kiss, from which he tries to pull away but can't. Transition music.]

* * *

Scene 18

[Coffee shop. WHITE and PRICE enter with four SOLDIERS.]

PRICE

They all look like gaffed whales, blank and rubbery --

FLETCH

Who died at the hands of thugs and --

WHITE

Defamation of character.

FLETCH

To protect --

PRICE

I'm insulted.

FLETCH

To serve --

WHITE

I am beyond embarrassed -- Marc Antony you're not.

PRICE

What a bunch of fugs and failures.

WHITE

(*gestures to the SOLDIERS*) Before this gets any more pathetic.

[*The SOLDIERS roughly handcuff everyone.*]

WHITE

(*pointing at SLOH*) Except for him.

SLOH

I'm with them!

HANNAH

And why does he opt you out, Jimmy Sloh?

WHITE

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

SLOH

I'm not acting! (*to FLETCH*) I'm not!

PRICE

He got good, didn't he?

SLOH

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

FLETCH

Judas was born Judas.

WHITE

(*to PRICE*) He has perfected his techniques, to be sure. All right, Jimmy -- good job.

BENT

The cock crowed three times.

SLOH

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

BENT

I can't hear a dead man.

SLOH

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

[*But they do not hear him as the SOLDIERS lead them off. WRIGHT enters in a wheelchair.*]

SLOH
You better send me with them.

WHITE
You heard them, Jimmy.

PRICE
Judas. Dead man.

SLOH
No more dog for you. Hear *that*?

WHITE
We are way ahead of you.

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

PRICE
Talk all you want to the air, Jimmy --

SLOH
I will!

WHITE
-- we own that now --

SLOH
I will!

WHITE
-- in the interests of national security.

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

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

SLOH
You don't scare me.

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

[SLOH exits.]

WRIGHT

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

PRICE

The fish helped by putting themselves into the barrel.

WRIGHT

And now?

WHITE

Interrogations. *(pause)* You do want convictions? If you arrest, you have to convict.

PRICE

What's the point, otherwise?

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

But what gets heavier will only make us stronger.

WRIGHT

If only people would just listen to reason! Behave!

WHITE

There's something else. A rogue agent.

WRIGHT

And that's my problem? Mr. White, below a certain level, I am not required to know anything. Agents, rogue or otherwise, are very far down the slope.

WHITE

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

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

I was just checking --

WRIGHT

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

WHITE

The corrections will be made.

WRIGHT

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

[WRIGHT squares her shoulders, tries to sit up taller.]

WRIGHT

I am ready, Mr. White.

[WRIGHT exits.]

PRICE

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

WHITE

Rank and its privileges.

PRICE

She was right about one thing: suffering is necessary.

* * *

Scene 19

[Action is continuous from the previous scene. WHITE and PRICE walk into an "interrogation room." Seated there is MICHAEL, under a harsh downlight. To one side, in the shadow, is YOUNG, holding WHITE' small leather case . WRIGHT watches, as if on the other side of a two-way mirror.]

MICHAEL

Why am I here?

WHITE

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

MICHAEL

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

[WHITE takes the case from YOUNG, opens it, and pulls out a dossier.]

WHITE

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

MICHAEL

How do you know that?

PRICE

Don't move so fast.

MICHAEL

How?

WHITE

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

MICHAEL

Let me see --

PRICE

I told you not to move.

WHITE

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

MICHAEL

How --

WHITE

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

[WHITE hands the material back to YOUNG.]

WHITE

Here is how your life stands at the moment.

WRIGHT

I am his mother, and yet I must --

WHITE

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

MICHAEL

I was just trying to --

WRIGHT

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

PRICE

Quit moving.

WHITE

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

WHITE

I didn't say that. Just go.

[MICHAEL hesitates, then gets out of the chair, but before he exits, he walks over to the two-way mirror, stares at WRIGHT for several beats, then exits.]

WRIGHT

(shouting) Are you sure? Are you sure?!

WHITE

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

* * *

Scene 20

[Continuous with the last scene. MICHAEL and YOUNG seated. Two HOODED ASSASSINS enter, guns drawn, burlap bags in their hands..]

ASSASSIN 1

(slides bag over YOUNG's head) In the name of the Movement.

ASSASSIN 2

(slides bag over MICHAEL's head) In the name of the State.

[The ASSASSINS look at each. At that moment, PRICE enters carrying a sawhorse. He nods to them as he crosses upstage and exits. The ASSASSINS salute each other, then execute MICHAEL and YOUNG, who slump to the floor.]

ASSASSIN 1

Do you have anything to say --

ASSASSIN 2

-- in your defense?

ASSASSIN 1

I guess not.

ASSASSIN 2

See you around.

[Exit.]

* * *

Scene 21

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

SLOH

Free. Free. Free. Free!

[Then SLOH makes eye contact with the audience. He will walk from upstage to downstage as he speaks the three "no's."]

SLOH

No. No. No.

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

SLOH

Yes.

[Lights begin to fade out, but just before they do, stage lights go out, house lights go on, and SLOH looks, for several beats, directly at the audience. Then house lights bump to black.]