

WESTERN UNION ASSASSIN

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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

JOEL W. SCHWARTZ- 65 YEARS OLD. He has a caustic sense of humor.

CAROL SCHWARTZ - 63 YEARS OLD - Good natured and keeps Joel in check.

SHIRLEY VOIT - Attractive - 55 to 60 - A little flighty.

JACK VOIT- Balding with a paunch - 65 years old - Pragmatic salesman.

AGENT JACKSON - 30 to 40 years old. He is a somewhat bored bureaucrat. Can be played by any race.

ACT I SCENE I

(Setting livingroom of a middle class suburban home. Dining table DR with four chairs. Sofa and club chairs SC. Telephone on the side table next to the sofa. Doorway to hallway UR. Front door UC, book case near the front door with a coat rack on the other side of the door).

JOEL

(Joel is sitting with a cup of coffee at the dining table reading the morning paper and is obviously upset with what he is reading.) God Damn it. I can't believe this crap.

CAROL

(Carol enters from the hall holding a cup of coffee.) What crap would that be?

JOEL

(He looks up at her and puts down the newspaper.) It doesn't matter. It's all crap.

CAROL

(Takes a sip of cup of coffee) I really prefer specific crap with my morning coffee. You know, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. So exactly what crap are you serving? Gluten free crap is my preference.

JOEL

Okay, you want to know *(He taps the newspaper with his finger as he speaks.)* Elephants are at the tipping point. Because of ivory poachers, more elephants are being killed each year than are being born. That, my love, is a recipe for extinction. Of course, China is the biggest importer of illegal ivory. Guess who is second?

CAROL

Since you are really pissed off, I assume it's not Finland.

JOEL

Finland? That's cute. It's the US. That's "US" as in us..

CAROL

I can understand why that would piss you off, but I'm sure they'll pass a law to stop it. When the American people hear that Dumbo and his entire family are going to be wiped out, they'll write their Congressman to make a law. That's the way it works.

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JOEL

Sure it does. I'm sure they'll set up a committee to study the issue. Now I'm going to tell you what really pissed me off so you will lose your appetite for the rest of the day. Congress already has written a bill, but the NRA has come out against it. They say it is a ploy to take their guns.

CAROL

How can saving elephants from being slaughtered into extinction take their guns?

JOEL

Who knows. Maybe because some fancy pistols use ivory gun grips. *(He raises his coffee cup as in a toast)* Bon Appetit.

CAROL

(Carol crosses to the table and sits down next to him.) Joel, we've talked about this before. If you keep reading the newspaper, you're going to have a stroke. There's no point in upsetting yourself over things you can't control. I just don't understand why you feel it is necessary to be pissed off all the time. You're not a kid. You know you don't have the power to change things. I think you do this just to aggravate me. You know I'm right.

JOEL

No, I don't know you're right. Why does everything have to be about you? You close your eyes and go to your woman's book club and discuss the literary merits of some romance novel. I can close my eyes too, but I can't turn off my brain. *(He gets up and paces.)* Do you realize Congress has an approval rating of about 11 percent and yet 90 percent of the son of bitches get reelected! How can that be?

CAROL

First of all you pompous ass we don't read romance novels. Most of our selections are historical fiction.

JOEL

So are there characters who suffer from unrequited love? Are there characters doomed to live their lives without their soul mates?

CAROL

Yes, I suppose so, but it's in an historical setting.

JOEL

So, let me get this right. If it happens today, it's a romance novel. However, if it happens in 1875, it's literature.

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CAROL

Exactly. Now that we have that settled, I invited Jack and Shirley over dinner. They just got back from their Alaskan Cruise and I want to see their pictures. I would appreciate it if you make an effort not to not be a royal pain the ass about everything. Just for once can you just smile and be cordial?

JOEL

Great... just what I want to see. Fifty pictures of a midnight buffet and one picture of a glacier.

CAROL

(She reaches over and pinches his cheeks) You know you always enjoy making fun of them. It will be a lovely evening and you're going to have more fun than anyone.

JOEL

Well, when you put it that way, who could resist?

CAROL

So what's *your* plans for the day? Do you want to come to Walmart with me?

JOEL

A lovely excursion to the evil empire. Who wouldn't accept an invitation like that? Oh gee, I just remembered. I need to pick up the dog poop in the side yard. Maybe next time.

CAROL

Really Joel, do you have to be such a pompous elitist? Everyone shops at Walmart. You don't seem to have any problem using the stuff I buy there. So what's the difference if I buy it or if we buy it? See how your fellow Americans buy the necessities of life. Consider it a life experience.

JOEL

I know it's such a wonderful experience to be waited on by orange vested, underpaid, desperate people with no medical insurance. It just makes my heart sing to see what good deals we get there.

CAROL

You know my father was right.

JOEL

What was your father ever right about?

CAROL

He said you were a bleeding heart.

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JOEL

Is that supposed to be an insult? I'm honored to be a bleeding heart that actually gives a shit. As a matter of fact, I want that on my tombstone. *(Hold his hands up and make quotes)* "At least He Gave a Shit"

CAROL

Okay, you have a lovely time picking up dog poop and I'll head off to buy you all things you can't live without.

JOEL

I'll tell you what I can live without. I can live without salmon from China, cheap shirts that say they're "Large" when they are really "Small" from Indonesia, and shoes that fall apart when they get wet from India. What I could use is some well made stuff made in the United States. Oh, but wait, they don't sell that at Walmart.

CAROL

Really, Joel you can take all the fun out of shopping. Haven't you heard we live in a global economy. Everyone has the right to export to us all the crappy products they want, and we have the right to buy it at great prices. It's a win/win.

JOEL

(He thinks for a moment) You know what really scares me? What you just said has a certain logic to it. Give me a minute and I'll go with you. *(He exits UR)*

CAROL

It's getting chilly. Put on a jacket. Why don't you put on the faux suede one I got you from the Philippines. You know the faux suede is actually better. It doesn't spot in the rain.

JOEL

(Re enters from Hallway wearing a NFL Sweat Shirt) I opted to wear my official NFL Sweat Shirt made in China.

CAROL

You look very rugged in that. You know I think I heard the NFL is thinking about expanding to China. Wouldn't you love to see a game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Beijing Bandits?

JOEL

Yeah, I wonder how long it would take them to hack into the Cowboys computers and steal their game plan.

CAROL

Didn't the New England Patriots get caught spying on other teams?

7.

JOEL

(He shakes his head) You win. Point, set, match. Okay, let's get going and do our patriotic duty and spend our hard earned retirement savings on crappy knock offs at unbelievably low prices.

CAROL

(She walks to the front door UC) Now you got the spirit. *(She opens the door. He shakes his head and follows her out.)*

Fade Out

ACT I SCENE II

(Lights up as Carol enters first with Joel following carrying multiple bags)

JOEL

Where would you like me to put all of this crap?

CAROL

Just put it on the kitchen table. I'll put everything away later. *(She collapses on the sofa.)* I don't know why I go shopping on a Saturday morning. Walmart was a zoo today.

JOEL

(Comes from hallway and collapses on the sofa next to her) Yeah, all I could think while we were parking a mile from the front door is who needs a gym membership?

CAROL

Well, we had a nice lunch at the mall.

JOEL

You do realize we shopped at Walmart, had lunch at Round Table, and dessert at Baskin Robbins. Every place we went was a chain. What happened to non corporate stores where the owner waited on you...who might even know your name, and be grateful for your business?

CAROL

You're being elitist again. Any way, people find chains comforting.

JOEL

Comforting? What the hell does that mean?

CAROL

Comforting. You know consistent. If I'm in Cleveland or Phoenix, I can go into a Walmart and I know where everything is. You see consistency is what the American people value. They feel secure knowing what to expect.

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JOEL

You have heard the expression that consistency in the hobgoblin of mediocre minds?

CAROL

Maybe that's the point. Mediocrity gives people a feeling of security. No surprises. You don't expect too much and then you're not surprised or disappointed. You on the other hand are always disappointed. Joel I love you, but you wear me out.

JOEL

I'm sorry I wear you out. Just remember you are not any walk in the park. What you just said is however, very disturbing. *(He rises.)* In fact, in forty-five years that is the most disappointing thing I have ever heard you say. I need a drink. You want one?

CAROL

(Stands and heads to the hall UR) Sorry you're disappointed. Now you can join the rest of us and get over it. You have your drink. I'll just put everything away. *(She exits.)*

JOEL

(He crosses to the buffet and pours himself a drink. He smells it and takes a drink.) At last. Scotch made in Scotland. *(Phone rings)* Hello. Oh, hi Jack. Hey, that's kind of funny. I bet no one ever shouts a greeting to you at the airport. You know someone sees you and shouts "Hi Jack!" Yeah, I guess it's not that funny. So Carol tells me you and Shirley are joining us for dinner tonight. Yeah? No kidding? You stayed up for the Midnight Buffet this time. They carved the fruit into people? Wow, that must have been something to see. You have pictures. Wonderful...can't wait to see them. What can you bring? I think Carol has everything covered. Just bring a bottle of wine. Seven o'clock is perfect. Can't wait to see you.

FADE OUT

ACT I SCENE III

(Dining Room Table is set for dinner. Carol enters carrying a tray of hors d'oeuvres. She sets on the buffet and then exits. A moment later Carol reenters carrying a vase with flowers and sets it in the middle of the dining room table. She looks at the flowers for a moment and then moves them to the coffee table.)

CAROL

(Calling down the hall) Hey lover boy, are you almost ready? They're going to be here anytime. You know Jack. If you tell him 7 o'clock, he always shows up at 6:45.

JOEL

(Enters from hall. He is nicely dressed in a casual style.) You know that doesn't bother me. I hate it when people are late. Look at us. We're never late.

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CAROL

That's true. We are always the first to arrive unless Jack and Shirley are coming. Haven't you ever heard of the term "fashionably late"?

JOEL

There is no such thing. That term was made up by people who can't move their asses. You know whenever I invite Bob and Alice over I always give them a time an hour before I want them to get here so they come on time. Why can't they just come at the right time? Am I too demanding?

CAROL

You demanding? Of course not. Everyone thinks you're a ray of sunshine.

JOEL

That's what I thought. You want a glass of wine?

CAROL

Not yet. You go ahead. Just don't eat the hors d'oeuvres. (She exits.)

JOEL

(Joel goes to the buffet and pours himself a glass of wine. Then looking over his shoulder at the hallway door he takes an hors d'oeuvre and pops it in his mouth. He then arranges the plate to cover the vacant spot.) You put out a nice spread.

CAROL

(From off stage) You're not eating my hors d'oeuvres are you?

JOEL

Don't you think I can follow directions?

CAROL

(Carol enters and walks over to the buffet to examine the plate) The question is not can you follow directions. The question is will you follow directions? *She looks at the plate and is satisfied it looks undisturbed).* What time is it?

JOEL

(Looks at his watch and the door bell rings before he can speak) 6:45 on the button. *(He goes UC to the front door and opens it). Jack and Shirley both enter smiling carrying a bottle of wine.)*

JACK

Here we are. Hope we're not too early.

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SHIRLEY

If you didn't want to be early, why were you pacing and yelling at me to hurry up?

CAROL

You guys are right on time. I was just telling Jack how considerate you are always being on time.

SHIRLEY

You do know we're early...*(Looks at Jack)* again?

JOEL

Really? I hadn't noticed. Come on in and we'll get you a glass of wine.

CAROL

Shirley, why don't you keep me company. I have to make the finishing touches on dinner. *(The women exit to the hall and the men go to the buffet).*

JOEL

Jack, do you want wine or Scotch?

JACK

That's a rhetorical question isn't it?

JOEL

Scotch it is. *(He pours them both a glass neat. They walk to the club chair with their scotch and sit.)* So Alaska? That must have been exciting.

JACK

You have no idea. Do you know you can order everything on the menu and they'll bring it to you? It was like being at an all you can eat buffet that goes non stop for seven days. I must have gained a pound a day. You know that's why I still bring a tux on cruises. The pants have those expandable clips on the waist.

JOEL

That sounds interesting, but what about Alaska?

JACK

You know fresh air, glaciers, whales - just like the brochures. The food and the entertainment were really spectacular.

JOEL

You could have had good food and shows here. Weren't you inspired with the grandeur of nature?

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JACK

To be honest, I'm not really into nature. Don't get me wrong... I like scenery. That's why if there's a movie with great scenery I always try to see it at an IMAX. That way you feel like you're actually there.

JOEL

But you were actually there. You just got back from the last frontier for Christ sake!

JACK

Yes, we were there and it was almost as good as IMAX.

JOEL

You know why I like you Jack? You don't even try to pretend to be interested in anything.

JACK

What are you talking about? I'm interested in lots of things. Would you believe they had a juggler who juggled two watermelons and one apple. Every time the apple came around he took a bite out of the apple. Now don't tell me that's not interesting.

JOEL

Wow, that must have been something to see. But what about the Glaciers?

JACK

Big and icy. They just don't..

JOEL

Juggle.

(Carol and Shirley enter carrying platters of food and place them on the table)

SHIRLEY

(In a radio voice Italian accent) Attencion, Attencion. Main Dining is being served in the Grand Dining Room. Bon Appetito!

JACK

(He applauds) Just like we never left Alaska! *(They all take their seats at the dining table and start serving dinner.)* What is this?

CAROL

Osso Buco.

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JACK

No kidding. They had it on the ship. I didn't know what it was so I didn't order it. Oh well, next time.

JOEL

If they'll let you eat everything on the menu why wouldn't you just order it to see if you liked it? So Shirley what did you think of the glaciers?

SHIRLEY

Actually, I missed them. I was in a bridge tournament and there were no windows in that room.

JOEL

I'm confused. Jack doesn't like nature. You would rather play bridge in a windowless room than see the glaciers. Just why the hell did you take a cruise to Alaska?

CAROL

What Joel means is...

SHIRLEY

I know what he means. The fact is we do it for the sex.

JOEL

At last something interesting. So tell me what's so sexy about Alaska?

JACK

It's not Alaska. It's the movement of the ship on the water. I tell you it's just sexy as hell.

SHIRLEY

The best part is Jack doesn't wear his watch for the entire week. We're never early. Now that is sexy.

CAROL

Maybe we should go on a cruise.

JOEL

Why? I already know what Osso Buco tastes like. *(Carol gives him the look)* Okay let me ask you is there anything you would like to go and not see?

SHIRLEY

(Laughing) Hey, that's funny.

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CAROL

Yeah, that's my funny man. Come on Joel, we really should take a vacation. We haven't been anywhere in years. Let's hit the road, widen our horizons, have new experiences.

JOEL

I thought the Walmarts were the same everywhere. *(She gives him the "look")* Okay, what the hell. We'll go somewhere. Someplace with water.

JACK

Hmmm...this Osso stuff is really tasty.

CAROL

Osso Buco...I'm glad you like it. I'll give Shirley the recipe.

JACK

Don't bother. My lovely bride only knows how to make reservations. Haven't you ever noticed we always take you out to restaurants?

SHIRLEY

As my mother used to say, "You can't be good in every room".

JOEL

Okay, enough sexual innuendoes. I want to play a little game we used to play when I was in college. Are you up for it? *(They all nod their heads and murmur agreement.)* If you could invite four people from the present or history to have for dinner, who would you invite?

SHIRLEY

(Raising her hand excitedly) I want to go first. Okay four people to have for dinner. I assume someone else will do the cooking. I would want Brad Pitt, Carey Grant, Paul Newman, and Fred Astaire. And I want Fred Astaire to dance with me after dinner because I always wanted to dance with a really good dancer.

JACK

What are you talking about? I'm a good dancer.

SHIRLEY

You're a terrible dancer and you know it.

JACK

That's because you always insist on leading. Okay I have my four. I want Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, and Miss February. And, after dinner, I want them to show me how to straighten out my slice.

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SHIRLEY

Three golfers and a slut. Why aren't I surprised.

JACK

Miss February is not a slut. She says she plans to work for world peace.

SHIRLEY.

Is that what they call it now?

CAROL

I think I have my four. I want Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Bronte, Margaret Mitchell, and Nicholas Sparks.

JOEL

Who's the guy?

CAROL

He wrote "Message in a Bottle" It's a very touching and romantic novel. *(Joel gives her a look.)* You said I could choose anyone I like and those are my choices. So who would you invite?

JOEL

To be honest, I've given this some thought. I would want Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, Alexander King, and the Western Union Assassin.

JACK

I know Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain, but who the hell are the other two?

JOEL

Alexander Kings was a fantastic storyteller, artist, author, and notorious drug addict who used to appear on the Jack Paar Show before Johnny Carson replaced him. I used to stay up late with my Mom and watch it and sometime Alexander King would come on and tell these amazing stories. My favorite was about pink neckties. It seems when King was a young man before World War I he worked at a New York newspaper as an illustrator. One day at lunch he wandered into this posh men's clothing store. The salesman looked at him and his cheap suit with disdain. King, too embarrassed to just leave, began to browse. He went over to the ties and was shocked that they cost \$5 each. Since his weekly salary was \$8, this was serious money. The salesman then pointed to a pink tie that was on sale for \$2. In order to save face, he bought the tie and the next day wore it to work. When he arrived at the paper, he was unmercifully hooted at for his pink tie. He said to himself "Who are they to make fun of my new tie" He then wore that pink tie to work every day for the next year. One day he took it off and had it on the back of his chair when he took a break. When he came back someone had dipped his pink tie in the ink well. He was furious and, after work, he went back to the clothing store, but they no longer stocked any pink ties. He then found a tie maker in an old building on the lower East Side. The owner was an older Jewish man who had immigrated from Germany before the war. Mr. Cohen, the owner,

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said he could make him ties in any color he liked. He just needed him to bring him two yards of the fabric. So King brought him two yards of bright pink fabric and a week later returned to the tie maker. Mr. Cohen handed him a package and a bill for \$8. King was furious that he was charging him so much money for a tie. Cohen was visibly upset by the accusation, and he opened the package and showed King there were 18 pink ties inside. It seems you can make a lot of ties from a couple of yards of fabric. And so for the next twenty five years Alexander King wore his pink neck ties everyday and when he needed new ones he would buy some pink fabric and go to Cohen's store to replenish his stock for the next year. One day, he went with his fabric to see Cohen, but when he entered the shop a much younger version of Cohen was there to greet him. He was Cohen's son. He explained his father has passed away. The fact is, he said my brothers and I own this building, but my father was always worried we might fail so he kept his shop. At the end, you were his only customer. He took out a ledger and showed it to King. "Two yards of pink fabric to make 18 ties for Mr. Alexander King. I don't know what he does with these pink ties, but he seems like a good man. My father asked me to be sure to fill your order when you came again. So if you leave me your fabric, we will for the last time make your ties, and when those were all gone he stopped wearing his pink ties.

SHIRLEY

Wow, that's a lovely story. But why would you choose him?

JOEL

Because he was a true maverick. He lived up to his own expectations not what other people expected he should do. He made lots of mistakes, but at least he didn't accept (*He looks at Carol*) mediocrity. (*Carol smiles and gives him the finger*).

JACK

Yeah, good story, but who the hell is the Western Union Killer?

JACK

Assassin. The Western Union Assassin. I don't know his real name. That's just what I call him. I was in 9th or 10th grade and I read this story in the newspaper about an old man in Switzerland. He had a life savings of \$10,000 which in those days was a lot of money. He spent all of his savings sending telegrams to world leaders asking them to work for world peace. I couldn't believe anyone would give everything they had for such a foolhardy plan. I always wanted a chance to ask him why he did it. Surely he must have know it wouldn't work. So I would like to have dinner with him too.

CAROL

But why call him assassin?

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JOEL

I figure one of those powerful men would assume he was nuts and possibly dangerous. The fact is his bullets were words in a telegram. I never found out what happened to him. Never saw a follow up story in the paper. Maybe he'll tell me at dinner.

SLOW FADE OUT

ACT I SCENE IV

(The following morning Joel is sitting at the dining room table with a cup of coffee and the morning newspaper. He reads and shakes his head. Carol enters in a good mood).

CAROL

Good morning Mr Sunshine. That was a fun evening. I really liked your story about the guy with the pink ties. I never heard that one before. I never heard you talk about the Western Union guy either. After all of these years, I would have bet the ranch I had heard all of your stories.

JOEL

(Smiling up from his paper) I've got a few moves left to surprise you. What are you up to?

CAROL

I'm meeting Shirley downtown for lunch and then she's going to take me to her travel agent.

JOEL

Travel Agent? I was just kidding last night.

CAROL

I wasn't. We are going on a vacation. You agreed and I have witnesses. So where would you like to go?

JOEL

I like it here.

CAROL

So do I, but you'll like it even more when we go someplace else. So do you like it cool or hot?

JOEL

I don't know. Just something in the middle I guess. What did you have in mind?

CAROL

There's a whole world out there. We could go to Paris or London or Israel and see Masada and Jerusalem. We could go to Australia and see kangaroos and the Great Barrier Reef. There's an entire world out there we haven't seen. Isn't that an exciting thought? I'm going to get brochures and then we're going to make a bucket list. This is going to be so much fun.

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JOEL

Do they have Walmart in Jerusalem?

CAROL

Probably not. But all the newspapers are in Hebrew so you won't be able to read them and get aggravated. You'll have to find new and interesting ways to get pissed off.

JOEL

Well, that's a pleasant thought.

CAROL

What are your plans for the day?

JOEL

Thought I send some telegrams.

CAROL

You do know that there is a little thing called email now, and it's free.

JOEL

Yes, I know that and I went online to send some emails to Members of Congress . Many of them don't accept emails unless they are from their constituents. Anyway, a telegram would be so weird it might have more impact - something about getting a written message you can't simply delete and forget. Did I ever tell you about my complaint to Mars Candy Company?

CAROL

(She sits down next to him.) No, I don't think so. You mean you have another story I've never heard?

JOEL

I think you'll like this one. Before we got married, I was working part time at Macy's. I had the swing shift from 4pm to 9pm when the store closed. It was a good schedule because I could go to all my classes and still have time to get to work. My usual dinner was a Snickers candy bar out of the vending machine in the employee area. One night I bought my usual candy bar and when I opened it, I realized it was smaller. It seems Mars Company who made Snickers reduced the size of the bar but put a large piece of cardboard on the bottom so that from the outside it looked to be the same size it had always been. I was so incensed I sat down and wrote a letter of complaint and told them even though Snickers was my favorite candy bar, I would never buy one again. Guess what happened?

CAROL

You lost weight?

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JOEL

Cute. I got a letter about a week later apologizing for their new marketing approach. They agreed it was wrong and were going back to the former size and enclosed a certificate for a complimentary case of snickers. I later learned that companies take letters of complaint very seriously. It seems for every letter they receive, there are ten thousand other consumers out there who feel the same way, but didn't take the time to complain.

CAROL

That's actually very interesting. *(She rises.)* Well, you have fun with your telegram writing. I'm off to arrange our adventure.

JOEL

Cool.

CAROL

(Looks at him questioningly) Yeah, I think it's cool too

JOEL

No - someplace cool. I don't like it too hot. You can always put more clothes on, but you can only take so much off.

CAROL

Is that your new philosophy of life?

JOEL

Yes it is. It's part of my anti-nudist campaign. Do you remember the time we inadvertently wandered onto that clothing optional beach? As I recall, the only people who took off their clothes were people you would never want to see naked.

CAROL

(She heads for the front door) Right - not too hot. Got it. *(She exits)*

JOEL

(He opens up a folder he has on the table and then picks up the phone and dials.) Hello, Western Union. I want to send the same telegram to a lot of people and I want the hard copy to be actually delivered. Can you do that? Good. Yes, I understand it is a lot more expensive to deliver the telegram. The fact is young man, not everything good in this life is on sale. Okay, I'm going to send this telegram to the 435 Members of Congress, the 100 Members of the U.S. Senate, and to the President of the United States. I also want you to send copies to the news departments at CBS, FOX, NBC, ABC, PBS,MSNBC, and CNN. Yes, I have the names and all the addresses. *(He smiles.)* Are you ready?

FADE OUT

19.

ACT I SCENE V

(Scene is set in Jack and Shirley's living room. This is a quick change. Recommend throws over the sofa and chairs. Remove leaves from table to change the shape. Put down an area rug. Flip pictures. Just give the effect it's another home. Shirley enters pushing a vacuum cleaner and Jack is asleep in a chair with the newspaper in his lap. Shirley turns on vacuum cleaner and starts vacuuming near Jack's feet. He abruptly wakes up and looks around.)

JACK

Oh boy, I must have fallen asleep.

SHIRLEY

(Turns off the vacuum cleaner) What did you say?

JACK

I said I must have fallen asleep.

SHIRLEY

Really? I hadn't noticed. So now that you're awake are you going to clean out the garage for the big pick up?

JACK

Why the hell would I want to do that?

SHIRLEY

You said you wanted to make room for one of the cars.

JACK

Yeah, that would be nice, but it's never going to happen. I've emptied out all the boxes in the garage onto the driveway four times in the last two years. You never let me throw anything away. You have to go through it all first. What happens? You decide there are maybe two boxes of crap you can live without and I wind up lugging 50 or 60 boxes right back into the garage. The fact is, Shirley, you are a hoarder. Not like a reality show hoarder, but bad enough.

SHIRLEY

That's not true. I just don't want you throwing things away that might be important.

JACK

Important? You still have your college textbooks, and clothes you haven't worn in 20 years out there. The books are out of date and the clothes you wouldn't fit in. Last time I moved everything out you insisted on keeping a box of eight track tapes. We don't even have a machine to play them on. In fact, I don't think anyone in the Western Hemisphere has an eight track player.

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SHIRLEY

(Resignedly) Okay, you made your point. This time you can get rid of the eight track tapes. But not my clothes or cooking magazines. I might lose weight and clothing styles come back. You'll be glad I kept those outfits.

JACK

How about this? If and when you lose weight, I will be thrilled to buy you a whole new wardrobe.

SHIRLEY

Are you saying I'm fat?

JACK

No, no, no. My mother didn't raise idiots. There is no way to answer a question like that.

SHIRLEY

What do you mean? It's a simple yes or no answer.

JACK

There's nothing simple about that question. If I said yes, you would be insulted. If I say no honey I think you're gorgeous, you would say I'm being patronizing. That is the definition of a lose/lose question, and I refuse to be suckered into it. Where do you want to go for dinner?

SHIRLEY

No thank you. I'm starting my new eating plan today. Maybe you should do it with me. It's really easy. You have a vitamin shake that tastes like a chocolate malt for breakfast and lunch, and then a low calorie meal for dinner.

JACK

I already know how to lose weight. I just have to eat your cooking. *(She turns on the vacuum cleaner. The phone rings. Jack goes over to the phone.)* Turn off the vacuum I can't hear whose on the phone. *(She turns off the vacuum.)* Hello. Oh, hi Joel. Thanks for a nice evening last night. No, I haven't seen Carol. One second. *(He hands the phone to Shirley).*

SHIRLEY

Hi Joel. Well after we left my travel agent, she was going straight home. Maybe she stopped to get some groceries on the way. Oh, she made it home. She's just not home now. Where did she go? You don't know? Didn't she say where she was going? Oh...you had an argument and she walked out. What was she mad about? You spent all the money on your credit cards. What for? Telegrams? How many did you send? Five hundred and forty two? Would you like to speak to Jack? Okay, we'll let you know if we see her. You let us know if she comes back too.

21.

JACK

Did I hear you right? He sent out five hundred and forty two telegrams. Depending on how long they were that could be thousands of dollars. *(Door bell rings. Shirley opens the front door and Carol walks in holding an overnight bag in one hand and bottle of scotch in the other)*

CAROL

I've run away from home. I just can't deal with that sanctimonious son of bitch. *(She looks at the bottle of scotch she is holding)* Oh how rude of me. I brought refreshments. *(Jack takes the bottle and crosses to his bar to pour her a drink)*. That's Joel's good stuff so I'll have a double.

SHIRLEY

(Takes her suitcase and leads Carol to the sofa). We just got off the phone with Joel. He told us what happened. Are you alright?

CAROL

I'm broke and I'm sober. At least I can fix one of those things.. So what did my revolutionary have to say?

JACK

(Returns with a glass of scotch for Carol) He said something about you being upset because he sent some telegrams.

CAROL

Yes, he sent some telegrams. I came home all excited with an armful of travel brochures and my hero proudly tells me he sent out 542 telegrams.

SHIRLEY

Who did he send them to?

CAROL

Let me see. I want to get this right. He sent out 200 word telegrams to the entire Congress, the President, and all the major TV news departments. Do you have any idea how much that would cost? Well, I didn't. It turns out it costs over \$16,000. And he paid for it by maxing out all of our credit cards which means, unless we want to pay 22 percent interest, we'll have to clean out a big hunk of our savings - which means... we won't be checking out which countries have Walmarts for anytime in the near future.

JACK

What was in the telegrams?

SHIRLEY

Who cares what they said. He spent their savings without even discussing it.

22.

JACK

Yeah, I get that, but aren't you even a little bit curious what he said?

CAROL

What he said? Let's see. He told them, as an American voter, how he felt about immigration, foreign aid, women's rights, boots on the ground, Congressional dead locks, and ivory poaching.

JACK

Ivory poaching?

CAROL

I don't know what to do. I honestly think he's losing it. Why would he do that? He must know that no one is actually going to read his telegrams. People don't give a damn about anything that doesn't personally affect them.

SHIRLEY

Maybe you should call a lawyer. See if you could get Western Union to reverse the charges because he is obviously nuts. I don't mean to be hard on Joel, but maybe he suffering from some kind of early onset dementia.

CAROL

Oh don't worry I'm going to call a lawyer and I'm going to take that whining, moody, pompous son of bitch to the cleaners.

JACK

You know Shirley does have a point. No one in their right mind would spend sixteen thousand dollars to tell a bunch of politicians how they feel. He would have been more effective just writing checks to them.

CAROL

You just don't get it. It's not just the money. He doesn't care what I think. He's so caught up in solving the world's problems he doesn't care about ours. God I'm tired of being in second place. Enough is enough. I just can't stand to think of seeing him read another morning newspaper and shaking his head. Just once I would like him to say "Good Morning Honey. Did you sleep well?" But since I don't have any tusks growing out of my face that would never occur to him.

(Phone rings and Jack picks it up)

JACK

Hello...oh hi Joel. Funny you should call we were just talking about you. Yes, Carol just got here. Would you like to speak with her? *(He hands the phone to Carol)*

23.

CAROL

Yes I'm here. Where the hell would I be? If I had a credit card that actually had any available money I could have gone to a hotel and ordered room service. That's what credit cards are used for. You get to go places and pay for it with a credit card. I really don't want to talk to you. How about I send you a telegram? Oh wait. I don't have any money for that too. Tomorrow I'm going to see a lawyer about having you and your pathetic big yellow writing pads removed from my house. Yes I did say my house. You can go find some telegram cult to join. I'm going to have Jack drive me over to get more things and I don't want to talk to you. I'll be there in about a half hour so why don't you take a long walk. What did you say? Oh?

SHIRLEY

What did he say?

CAROL

He said to park around the corner because all the News vans have blocked the street in front of the house.

FADE OUT

ACT I SCENE VI

(Next morning at Joel and Carol's living room. Carol is sitting in a club chair and watching the news on the TV. The set is not visible. Only the sound can be heard as she looks forward and watches)

NEWS COMMENTATOR

Local retired store owner, Joel Schwartz, became the center of what has become a national debate. Two days ago Mr. Schwartz used a sizeable amount of his retirement savings and sent telegrams to the President and all the members of Congress. He said he hoped that such an unusual action would capture their attention. This story and others will be on Channel 7 at Noon.

(Carol picks up the remote and changes channels.)

NEWS COMMENTATOR II

Good Morning one and all. This is John Snyder with Fox News Today where you hear the news they don't want you to hear. Our lead story today is a Pennsylvania retiree with obvious Socialist leanings, who sent out telegrams to Congress and the President. I guess he didn't feel the liberal news media was covering the great issues of the day. Even though his leftist suggestions would have made Ted Kennedy cringe, you got to give him credit for style points. We hope to have Mr. Schwartz on Sunday on Fox. That is, if he has the courage to show up. You know it's like I always say. "Love it or leave it." He can always buy a ticket and see if things are better some place else. This country was built on working together and not washing our dirty laundry on the world stage.

24.

(Carol clicks the remote.)

NEWS COMMENTATOR III

Good day. This is Joan Baker with MSNBC News. Our top story is about Joel Schwartz, a retired shop keeper from a Philadelphia suburb. Mr. Schwartz appears to be a member of the conservative tea party who sent out telegrams to the President and the entire U.S. Congress. It is believed that he got his funding from a PAC supported by the ultra conservative Koch brothers.

(Carol turns off the TV and throws the remote onto the sofa. Joel enters from the hallway.)

CAROL

There he is! My very own right wing Ultra Conservative Leftist Socialist. You have succeeded in having everyone hate you. Congratulations for pulling the country together.

JOEL

Please lets not start again. You're right I should have discussed sending the telegrams with you. I just didn't think you would be so angry.

CAROL

You're right. You didn't think.

JOEL

(Looks out the window) They're still out there. Maybe I should go out there and talk to them.

CAROL

It's either that or I call Amazon to deliver groceries. It's been over 48 hours. There must be something else for them to cover. I mean, really, this is ridiculous. There are wars, murders, riots, and they're still on our front lawn because you sent telegrams.

(Phone rings and Joel answers it.)

JOEL

Hello. Hello is anyone there? Oh. there you are. Who is this? Yes. this is Joel Schwartz. Yes. I'm the one who sent the telegrams. Who is this? You want me to hold for Mr. Bill O'Reilly. You called me and you want to put me on hold? Tell Mr. O'Reilly if he wants to speak with me to pick up the phone and call me. *(He hangs up.)* Can you imagine that? Someone wants to talk with you and they have someone else call and put you on hold. That kind of rudeness is what's wrong with this country.

CAROL

Maybe you should send him a telegram.

25.

JOEL

Maybe I will. What the hell is going on today? I mean really it's disgusting. People don't communicate face to face anymore. They e mail or, even worse, text. You know that golf GPS I just bought. I opened the package and there are no directions on how it works. You have to go to the website and download 33 pages of directions. You know what's not on their website? They don't list their company telephone number, because they don't want to speak with their customers. You know who's the worst offender. The phone company. Did you ever try to get the goddamn phone company on the phone? A machine gives you a choice of 12 different numbers to push and none of them is to talk to a human being. If you don't choose any of the selections, they recommend you check out the FAQs on their website. What the hell is a FAQ?

CAROL

Frequently asked question.

JOEL

Really? How did you know that?

CAROL

What does FAQ stand for is the number one frequently asked question.

JOEL

This is crazy. I'm just going to go outside and answer their questions. Then they'll leave and I can get my newspaper. *(He puts on his coat and goes out the front door. There is the sound of crowd noise and camera flashes are seen through the window. Reporter begin to shout questions that overlap and are unintelligible. Carol stands by the window and shakes her head. After a couple of minutes a shaken Joel reenters the front door. He takes off his coat and collapses on the sofa.)*

CAROL

What happened? Did you answer their questions?

JOEL

I tried. They were all shouting questions at the same time. It's like they only wanted to film their questions and weren't really interested in my answers. One of them wanted to know when we planned on moving to Russia. I thought he was kidding and asked if they had Walmart there? He followed up with was I accusing Walmart of being a communist enterprise? Then someone from the street shouted if I still wanted to kill babies. I said that's crazy. That's like asking some one if they still beat their wife? So of course then someone asked how many times I had been arrested for beating you? Someone else wanted to know how many guns I had. No one wanted to ask about what I said in the telegrams. I didn't know what to do so I just came back inside. *(Phone rings and Joel answers it)* Hello. Yes I'm the guy who wrote the telegram. Excuse me? Let me get this straight. You want to come over here, and kick my commie ass. Well that is really considerate of you to call for an appointment. Yes, I do have a smart ass. Apparently

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smarter than your entire brain. By the way you do realize that the cold war is over and calling someone commie is kind of *passee*? Just out of curiosity, did you read what I wrote in the telegram? You don't have time to read commie propaganda. Do you vote? In the elections. So that's a yes. You do vote. Well that explains Congress. Have a blessed day. (*He hangs up the phone*).

CAROL

Have a blessed day?

JOEL

Yeah, I had a telemarketer last week who wanted to sell me something, and when I said I wasn't interested she said "Have a blessed day". I've been waiting for a really good time to use that line.

CAROL

Wonderful. Now you can add Fundamentalist Christians to people who don't like you.

JOEL

We're east coast Jews. Believe me when I tell you, that horse has already left the barn.

CAROL

You know you could at least pretend to be nice.

JOEL

You know you have a point. Next time an imbecile calls me up and threatens to kick my smart ass, I will be sure to thank him so much for showing me the errors of my ways. (*The phone rings and Carol crosses to answer it.*) Are you sure you want to answer that?

CAROL

(*She answers the phone*)

Hello. Oh? Yes he's here...one second please. (*She covers the phone and whispers*) It's for you. It's the White House calling.

JOEL

It's probably Jack pulling a joke. Is he doing his bad British accent?

CAROL

Why would anyone from the White House have a British accent? Anyway, it's a woman.

JOEL

(*Resignedly he rises and takes the phone from her*) Hello, this is Joel Schwartz. What can I do for you. The President what? He wants to meet with me? Why would the President want to meet with me? Oh well, in that case, I would be honored. Yeah, my schedule is wide open. I look forward to hearing from you. (*He hangs up the phone.*) You won't believe this. The President invited both of us to dinner at the White House. When he heard about the telegram, he asked to see it and he really liked it.

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CAROL

Oh my God! What do I wear to the White House?

JOEL

A dress, I guess. She said it won't be formal. Just go to Walmart and buy a dress.

CAROL

Are you really so oblivious? Who the hell would wear a Walmart dress to eat dinner with the President? I'll borrow something from Shirley. She has dresses she got for the formal nights on the cruise. What are you going to wear?

JOEL

Let me think a moment. I could wear my grey suit or I could wear my grey suit. You know I only have one suit. Maybe I'll buy a new tie and get my shoes professionally shined. That should do it. So are we alright or do we announce our impending divorce at the White House?

CAROL

Cute. Very cute. Don't make me regret I came back. Now as for your White House dress code get a solid blue tie. Politicians always wear blue ties when they want to appear sincere.

JOEL

First of all I'm not a politician, and secondly what makes you think I'm not sincere?

CAROL

Don't be so sensitive. You know what I meant.

(A brick comes crashing through the window. Carol gives out a small scream. Joel goes over and picks up the brick.)

JOEL

Now I'm really pissed off! Is that sincere enough for you?

FADE TO BLACK
End of Act I

28.

ACT II SCENE I

(Later the same day. Joel comes into the living room carrying a piece of plywood and pushes it into the frame of the broken window. Carol enters and watches him.)

CAROL

Will that stay in?

JOEL

It's only temporary until the glazer can come out and replace the window. I called the insurance company, but they were too busy to answer the phone. I assume there will be a deductible that will be more than the cost to fix the window. *(He picks up the brick.)* I wonder if this is a pro socialist or a pro fascist brick.

CAROL

I don't know how this could happen here. This is a nice neighborhood. We've lived here for 23 years. I just don't understand why anyone would do something like this.

JOEL

I guarantee you they didn't read what I actually wrote in the telegram.

CAROL

Actually, I haven't read it either. What could you possibly have said to cause this kind hate?

JOEL

(He goes over to the dining room table and picks up a legal pad) Basically, I just put down my feelings about some of the issues the politicians keep talking about. I thought it might be helpful for them to get feedback.

CAROL

Kind of like your Snickers complaint letter.

JOEL

Exactly. So here's what I wrote: Dear Mr. President, Senators, Representatives, and Members of the News Media, I am a retired American citizen. I served in the Air Force as an enlisted man during the Vietnam War. I've been married to the same wonderful women for 45 years and have raised two children. I have never been arrested and I pay all of my taxes. I thought you might find it enlightening to hear how I feel about the issues of the day. First of all, I am convinced that if men could become pregnant instead of women there would be vending machines in every men's room in the country selling the morning after pill. Eighty percent of the American public favor gun control. Just thought you should know this. Medicare should be able to negotiate with drug companies to get the best prices just like they do in Canada. We should ask the American people if we want to participate in any war. Sending our young men and women into foreign lands shouldn't be based on how much oil they produce. It should be based on doing the right thing. Congress should not be able to pass a law that does not require members of Congress to obey it too. Election campaigns should be limited to six weeks, and no one can spend more than \$1 per voter for advertising. Only voters could contribute to campaigns. Citizens would be required to vote or face a fine of \$1000. We're in this together and everyone has a responsibility

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to participate in the process. This country was built by immigrants and we should be open to allowing hard working people be part of the dream. Also, I would appreciate it if Congress passed the bill to stop illegal ivory imports before all the elephants are hunted into extinction. I look forward to your comments and suggestions. Sincerely, Joel Schwartz, United States Citizen. *(He puts down the pad and picks up the brick on the table)* So what do you think? Is that so radical?

CAROL

Let me see. You took on Right to Life, NRA, the drug companies, Unions and Corporations, and the entire political structure. Not to mention the Military Industrial Complex and the America is only for Americans lobby. Seems like you pissed off everyone equally. I'm pretty sure no one will be sending you a case of candy. *(Doorbell rings and Carol goes to answer it. She looks through the window. There's a man holding up a badge. (She opens the door).*

AGENT JACKSON

I'm Treasury Agent, Richard Jackson. I have some questions for Mr. Joel Schwartz.

JOEL

(Crossing to the Agent as he enters through the front door). I'm Joel Schwartz. What does the Treasury Department want with me?

AGENT JACKSON

Actually, I'm with the Secret Service. We are part of the Department of Treasury. The reason I'm here today is about your dinner invitation with the President and his family. You see we have to do a background check on anyone having a possible meeting with the President. *(He notices Joel is holding a brick).* Are you working on something?

JOEL

No. One of my fellow Americans threw this through my window. I was trying to decide if I should put it on the book case or the coffee table. What do you think?

CAROL

(Rushes up to Agent Jackson) You'll have to excuse my husband. He has a warped sense of humor. You know ironic situations just seems to bring that out. Please have a seat. Can I get you a cup of coffee or tea?

AGENT JACKSON

(Sits on the club chair and takes out a pad and pen). No thank you. I am sorry you've been having trouble. Did you call the police?

JOEL

You know, I did just that. I called them up and reported a brick had been thrown through my front window. They asked if anyone had been injured. I said no. Just a broken window. They suggested I call my insurance company. Wasn't that helpful?

30.

AGENT JACKSON

(Looks at Carol) He's being ironic again?

CAROL

You're getting good at this.

AGENT JACKSON

This won't take too long. I just need to verify what we already have on file. I hope this a convenient time.

JOEL

It's either you or listening to a recording saying how important my business is to State Farm, followed by a never ending musical loop of "Since we're neighbors can't we be friends." After twenty minutes of hearing how important my business is to them, I gave up and threw the phone at the wall. You see I don't want to be friends with my insurance company. I want to be their customer, and I want them to answer the God Damn phone!

AGENT JACKSON

(Makes a note on the pad) You seem to have some anger problems Mr. Schwartz.

JOEL

I don't have anger problems, Agent Jackson. I have a broken window problem. *(He takes a deep breath and sits on the sofa.)* I'm sorry. It's not your fault that an asshole threw this brick or the police are too busy manning their speed trap on the frontage road to respond, or the insurance company is too busy processing my premiums to answer the phone. After all, you're just a government worker trying to get your job done before the Congress shuts down the government again.

AGENT JACKSON

(Looking at Carol again) I'll just put down that he has an ironic perception of life.

CAROL

That's a very polite way of saying he's old and pissed off. Are you sure you won't have something to drink?

AGENT JACKSON

No, thank you. I'm fine. Since your dinner is next week, we put you on the fast track and we've already pulled your financials, records of any criminal and or civil actions, telephone and e mail records, and of course social media posts.

JOEL

You had to check Facebook to see if I'm too dangerous to have dinner at the White House?

31.

AGENT JACKSON

I know it sounds a bit invasive, but you would be amazed at the things people say on the internet.

JOEL

Actually, that doesn't amaze me at all. Did you have to get warrants to check me out?

AGENT JACKSON

Warrants? *(He chuckles and then realizes Joel is serious)*. No warrants weren't required. It's all covered under the Patriot Act.

JOEL

Isn't the Patriot Act supposed to be for terrorists?

AGENT JACKSON

Yes, in theory, you're right, but then again we don't know if someone is a terrorist unless we use it and see. At any rate, don't be concerned. No red flags popped up. I'm just here today to meet you in person and write a final recommendation for your file.

JOEL

File? I have a file?

AGENT JACKSON

You do now. So I understand you sent a telegram to the President and that is why you were invited to dinner. Is that right?

JOEL

Actually, I sent out 542 telegrams and one of them happened to be to the President. He was the only one with the good manners to reply.

AGENT JACKSON

Five Hundred and Forty Two telegrams? That must have been expensive.

CAROL

Yes dear, why don't you tell the nice Agent exactly how much that costs?

JOEL

(Uncomfortably) Sixteen thousand two hundred and eleven dollars. We will, of course, get mileage on our credit cards.

CAROL

Oh, goodie. That should generate one half of a free domestic airline ticket that can't be used during blackout periods. *(Seething)* I'll start packing.

32.

AGENT JACKSON

(Embarrassed) I didn't mean to start an argument. I'm sorry if I asked something I shouldn't have asked.

JOEL

You didn't start an argument Agent Jackson. That's just Carol being... ironic. *(Smiling at her)* Isn't that so Carol?

CAROL

Yes dear, that is me just being ironic. Here's something else ironic. I am now going to go in the kitchen and clip coupons out of the newspaper to see if I can save us six dollars or so. *(She exits.)*

JOEL

So agent, is there anything else you wanted to ask me? How about if I've ever cheated on my wife, or if I like to dress in women's clothing?

AGENT JACKSON

Actually we already know the answers to those questions. *(Joel stares at him with his mouth open.)* Just kidding. You know this ironic stuff is kind of fun. Usually my interviews are so boring. People never say what they really believe. They never argue or get pissed off. You, on the other hand, Sir are not boring. Exactly what did you say in that telegram that made someone throw a brick through your window? *(Joel gets the pad and hands it to him. Agent Jackson reads the telegram and then puts down the pad)* Wow. You really covered the bases. I'm surprised you haven't had more bricks.

JOEL

Well, aren't you a ray of sunshine?

AGENT JACKSON

I'm sorry. I guess that sounded a little flippant. It's just that you seem to have an equal opportunity approach to your complaints. You don't like anyone do you?

JOEL

Actually, I like lots of people. I just don't like some of things some people do or don't do. The reason I wrote that telegram was in the hope of starting a conversation. It didn't matter if people agreed with me. The important thing is I wanted them to have an opinion. So I guess that about covers everything. Will we see you at the White House Agent Jackson?

AGENT JACKSON

I'm afraid not. *(He closes his pad and stands)* There's just no way I can recommend you be in a room with the President. You're just too... ironic. *(He shakes Joel's hand and exits. Joel sits at the dining table and begins to look at his notes on the legal pad.)*

33.

CAROL

Carol enters and looks around) Where's Agent Jackson? Are you all finished with your interview?

JOEL

All finished. There's something I need to talk with you about.

CAROL

He didn't even say goodbye. Was it just me or did you feel a little guilty being interviewed by the Secret Service. Not that we've done anything wrong. Kind of like being called to the Principal's Office and all you can think of is what did I do? Does that make sense?

JOEL

Sure that makes sense. I really should tell you something.

CAROL

He was just so serious. I guess when you're responsible for protecting the President you have to be serious. Maybe I'll write a note to his boss and tell him he did a good job.

JOEL

You might want to hold up writing a note.

CAROL

No, I'm not going to procrastinate. You've inspired me to take the bull by the horns and tell people exactly what I think. Maybe I've been too nice. I'm going to be more like you.

JOEL

I'm nice. Aren't I?

CAROL

Of course you are. That's not what I meant. What I meant is you do more than just talk about stuff. You actually do something about it. You write letters of complaint. You send telegrams to everyone. I'm damn proud of you. *(She crosses to him and gives a passionate kiss).*

JOEL

Wow! Where did that come from? Not that I'm complaining.

CAROL

I think I should go outside, and make a statement to the press. I'm going to tell them that it is a sad situation when someone tells Congress what they think and it becomes a big news story. Congress should get telegrams everyday. They should get thousands of them. It shouldn't be big news. It should be a normal daily occurrence. What do you think? Damn it! I'm going to do it!

34.

JOEL

Are you sure you really want to put yourself through that?

CAROL

(She goes over and puts on her coat) And I'm going to tell the President the same thing. She opens the front door and goes out. You can hear indistinct voices in the background.)

JOEL

(He goes to the door and opens it a crack to hear) Holy crap. What have I created? (He begins to pace around the room and then Carol comes back in smiling.)

CAROL

Well that wasn't so bad. They were really very nice. At first, they all started to shout questions at the same time. I just reminded them that people with good manners let someone answer a question before they ask another one. I also asked them to not stand in my flower beds.

JOEL

How did they take that?

CAROL

They got out of flower beds. It's just like when I used to teach second grade. You just have to give them the rules and be firm.

JOEL

Well I must say that's damn impressive. I thought they'd eat you for lunch.

CAROL

Don't be silly. The fact is, they're just used to dealing with people who are hiding something. Once they realized I would answer their questions, they couldn't have been nicer. I'm feeling really good. I think we should go downtown and go shopping in the little stores and maybe stop for something to eat at the coffee shop.

JOEL

Sure that sounds really nice. There is just one little thing I need to talk to you about.

(There's a knock at the door. Carol goes over and opens it and Shirley, carrying two gowns followed by Jack, enters.)

SHIRLEY

(Crosses to the sofa and lays the dresses over the back) Here we go. I like both of these dresses, but we'll see which one looks best with your coloring.

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CAROL

(Goes over and picks up each one at a time and holds them up to herself). Wow, these are beautiful. I've never worn anything so fancy. I feel like a Princess invited to the ball. Thank you so much for bringing them right over.

JACK

No problem. We wanted to see all the excitement anyway. I can't believe there are still news vans with satellite dishes parked in front of your house. Who are all the other people standing in the street, and what happened to your front window?

JOEL

Just well wishers, and someone threw a brick through it.

SHIRLEY

Oh my God! Are you alright?

JOEL

We're fine. Apparently, the really good brick throwers were already booked.

JACK

I don't see how you can be so blase about something like this. What did the police say?

JOEL

Funny you should ask. Seems the police don't make house calls unless there is blood involved. They recommended I call my insurance company. I did that, but my good friend that sends me computer generated birthday cards every year, without fail, had his message machine say he would be sure to get back to me within the next forty eight hours. He also said if this was an emergency I should call the Police.

CAROL

Joel has been a little out of sorts. You'll never guess who was just here. We just got interviewed by the Secret Service. Seems they have ultimate approval if someone is going to have access to the President. He was really such a nice man. He left while I was in the kitchen. Honey, how did everything go? *(She laughs)* Did we pass?

JOEL

(Uncomfortable) Passing a test is such a subjective criteria. After all you could answer all the questions honestly, and someone might not like your answers. Even if they were correct.

CAROL

(Drops the dresses and runs up to Joel) You son of bitch! What did you say?

JOEL

I didn't say anything. He asked me questions and I told him the truth.

CAROL

Why would you do something like that? Bureaucrats aren't interested in the truth. They just want to check all the boxes. I can't believe you told him the truth. All you had to do was to tell him what he wanted to hear.

JOEL

Hold it just one second. You wanted me to lie to the Secret Service just so you could have dinner with the President?

CAROL

Didn't I just say that? You must be the only person on the planet who doesn't know how to play the game.

JOEL

What game?

CAROL

The game of life. You ran a business for thirty years. If someone brought something back, did you ever say no returns or at least exchanges only? No you just gave them back their money no questions asked. Everyone in town knew they could just "borrow" something from your store, use it, and then return it without you ever questioning why they were returning it. You are a very nice man, Joel, but you let people take advantage of you.

JOEL

What does treating people nicely have to do with not telling the truth? Maybe we don't have as much money in our retirement account as we could have had if I had been a tougher businessman, but I sleep really good at night. I don't cheat people and don't lie. If other people choose to do that, then I feel sorry for them. I would rather have principles than more money in the bank. I'm sorry about the dinner. I didn't realize he would withdraw the invitation because I was truthful. I'm sorry you won't get to wear a nice dress at the White House. I'm sorry....*(Joel rubs his left arm and passes out).*

FADE OUT

ACT II SCENE II

(The Schwartz livingroom several days later. The mirror is covered with a black drape. Carol, Shirley, and Jack enter. They are all dressed in black clothing. Carol looking exhausted sits on the sofa).

SHIRLEY

You look so tired. I'll go and make us all some nice tea. Would you like a sandwich? *(No response from Carol)* I know when I'm feeling blue eating always makes me feel better.

CAROL

(Looks at her with a confused look) Do you think a turkey sandwich with mayo will chase away my blues? What the hell. Make mine a triple decker.

SHIRLEY

(Flustered) I'll get the tea started. *(She exits quickly).*

JACK

(He sits down next to her on the sofa) I'm sorry about Shirley. She just doesn't know what to say. She's never been good when it comes to dealing with...with a...

CAROL

Death. I understand. You know Joel stopped going to funerals. The fact is, I asked him not to go. He would cry so much he would make other people uncomfortable. Can you imagine that people felt uncomfortable if someone truly felt real grief? So if there was a funeral, I would go without him. Just like today. Jack can you answer me a question? *(Jack nods.)* What does it all matter? A good man died and was put in the ground and all I could think was why did I give a fuck what other people thought? I should have cherished every moment I had with that good man and now it's too late.

SHIRLEY

(Standing in the hall with the tea) Don't you say that. *(She crosses to the coffee table and puts the tray down)* Don't you ever say that. You were a wonderful wife. Joel was a funny duck, but he loved you. Everyone was jealous of what you two had. You guys were special. He would get passionate about so many different things. He would get incensed about school shootings and glaciers melting, and a younger generation that didn't know how to communicate on a personal level. I would act dumb just for the hell of it to egg him on, but he never got angry. He never looked down on me or treated me like some social idiot. He cared about important things and he wanted me to care too. You were always there to back him up. You were always there for each other *(She begins to cry)* And I just wanted you to know I give a fuck too.

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CAROL

Thank you Shirley. That is the first really true and honest thing anyone has said to me since Joel died. It is just so exhausting when people want to cheer you up. I don't want to be cheered up. I want to mourn my best friend. *(She begins to cry.)* I just want to cry.

SHIRLEY

You cry all you want. Be sad and lonely and really pissed off. That's what Joel would be. He wouldn't hold anything back.

JACK

She's right Carol. You do and feel anything you like. We'll be here for you. Joel was my best friend. I loved the way he made fun of me. He never realized I was just saying things to piss him off. I loved the way he was so passionate about everything.

CAROL

Yes he was passionate and sincere even without a blue tie. He would just try to do the right thing. God knows, he wasn't perfect, but he was a good guy. You know I'm really hungry. Let's go make some really big sandwiches.

FADE OUT

ACT II SCENE III

(The setting is in half light. Carol is sitting in Joel's chair at the dining table with glass of scotch and the bottle open on the table. There is a framed photo of Joel on the table that she speaks to.)

CAROL

(She picks up the glass of Scotch and toasts the picture. She's had quite a lot to drink.) Here's to you my old son of bitch. You had to go and drop dead. Always the dramatic exit. *(She takes a sip)* You were right about one thing. Scotch isn't half bad once you develop a taste for it. I didn't used to like it, but your good stuff is pretty good. You know why I never drank much? I couldn't help thinking how many calories there are in one of these. Now I don't care. You're gone and I'm pissed so I'm going to get pissed. Isn't that funny how the same word can mean both angry and drunk? Which in this case I am both so it is really the perfect word. I've been trying to remember the stages of grief. I think there are seven of them, but I can only remember three. Let me see there is anger. That's a check. There's bargaining, but I don't know who or what I'm suppose to bargain to get you back. And there is acceptance. Haven't gotten there yet. I can't imagine being able to accept I'm going to be alone. *(She pours some more into her glass).* Forty five years we were together. *(She laughs)* And they said it wouldn't last. Well, when you think of it, I guess they were right. Nothing lasts forever. I just thought we'd have another ten years or so. I would gladly give up the remainder of my time if we could spend even one more

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year together. Oh? There it is. That must be bargaining. Well there's another one checked off. Thought you would like to know your funeral was the highlight of the social season. Not only did we have friends and family show up, but so did Fox News. They had an "expert" on the Fox and Friends show that claimed your disappointment over not going to the White House brought on your heart attack. Some kind of broken heart syndrome. They actually had a reporter at the funeral who stuck a microphone in my face and asked me if I thought your death was Obama's fault. I was so shocked by the question I didn't know what to say, and then I thought what would you say? I asked her if cuts in education were responsible for their increased audience ratings. The reporter looked at me like I was talking in a foreign language so she rephrased it. Did the President break your husband's heart? I told her the only thing that broke your heart were idiots who asked really dumb questions. Of course they reported I had said that the President was an idiot. After the funeral Jack and Shirley came back and kept me company. Shirley even tried to make sandwiches. That woman really can't even boil water. So that's about all the news for now. I'm going to finish this bottle of scotch and then I'm going to try and figure out what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. *(She picks up the legal pad and a pen)* Any suggestions?

FADE OUT

ACT II SCENE IV

(The Schwartz living room a couple of weeks later. Carol is sitting at the dining room table writing in a legal pad. The doorbell rings and she goes to the door. Shirley is at the front door).

CAROL

Hi Shirley. What a nice surprise. What brings you to my neck of the woods?

SHIRLEY

I was getting a little concerned. *(She takes off her coat and they both sit at the dining table.)*
I've called you several times and you're never home.

CAROL

Really? Did you leave a message? I don't remember getting any.

SHIRLEY

No, I didn't leave a message. I didn't want you to think I was checking up on you.

CAROL

But you were checking up on me. You know, that's okay. I don't mind if you check up on me. The fact is I just needed to get out of here. This place just seems so quiet without Joel. It felt like the walls were closing in. Sometimes I would find myself talking to him. I kept waiting for him to answer me with his usual smart ass replies. God, I miss that.

SHIRLEY

So what have you been up to?

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CAROL

Mostly I've been going to meetings. In the past couple of weeks, I've gone to luncheons sponsored by Democratic Women, Republican Women, Tea Party Women, and University Women. I've also gone to some forums that dealt with Marijuana Legalization, National Healthcare, Gun Control, and a group that wants to form a woman's brigade as part of their militia in case the government tries to come and take their guns. They wanted to make sure we were all trained in gunshot first aid.

SHIRLEY

Oh my. Why would you go to all those different meetings? You've never been political. That was Joel's thing.

CAROL

And now, I guess it's mine. The fact is I've always been interested in politics. Joel just never realized I was listening. So you want to know what I've learned so far?

SHIRLEY

Sure.

CAROL

First of all, the food at these events is really crappy. I've decided to start a group that offers food outreach to introduce people to foods from other cultures. Let's face it, we all eat. Wouldn't it be fun to get together and try food from other people's heritages? I think it would be a really cool way to open a conversation. Maybe if people just sat down and broke bread together they would realize being different isn't bad. It's what makes America unique.

SHIRLEY

You know I don't cook. But I'm a world class eater and talker. Where do I sign up?

CAROL

(Carol hands Shirley a clip board) Here you go. The first meeting is right here next Tuesday at 7 o'clock.

SHIRLEY

I can't believe it. You already have organized the first meeting. Now I feel like an idiot. I was worried you would be sitting around and not knowing what to do with your life.

CAROL

Oh, I've done that too. After Joel died, I didn't know what I would do. I thought about traveling, but I didn't want to go by myself. I wanted to share all of those wonderful places with Joel. He made fun of the idea, but I really think he would have enjoyed it. *(The phone rings and Carol answers it.)* Hello. Yes this is Carol Schwartz. Yes I was married to Joel Schwartz. Who is this? The White House? Really? Would you tell the President I'm sorry we didn't get to come

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for dinner. Joel was really looking forward to it. Oh yes, of course. Hello, Mr. President. That's very kind of you. Yes, he was a good man. You would have enjoyed meeting him. He could be a bit quirky, but he really cared about people. *(She listens.)* Oh my, that would be an honor. Yes, I accept and thank you for taking the time to call me.

SHIRLEY

Oh my God! Were you just speaking with the President?

CAROL

I can't believe it. The President just called me up and invited me to his State of Union speech. He wants me to sit next to the First Lady. He going to talk about Joel and what he did. He wants people to know that everyone's voice is important. Would you believe it? Joel just got another case of Snickers.

FADE OUT

ACT II SCENE V

(Sometime later in the Schwartz living room. Carol is working at the dining room table on a poster that is attached to a pole. She puts the finishing touches on it and then raises it up and marches around the living room. The sign says "WALMART WORKERS UNITE FOR A FAIR LIVING WAGE ! There is a knock at the front door and she opens the door still holding the sign. Agent Jackson is at the door).

AGENT JACKSON

Excuse me Mrs. Schwartz. I don't mean to disturb you. I don't know if you remember me.

CAROL

Agent Jackson. What a surprise seeing you again. Please come in.

AGENT JACKSON

(He enters and is obviously disconcerted.) So you do remember me?

CAROL

Oh, how could I ever forget you. You were the last person to visit Joel before he dropped dead.

AGENT JACKSON

Yes, I know that. *(He notices her sign)* Nice sign. Are you picketing Walmart?

CAROL

Is that an official question for my file?

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AGENT JACKSON

No, it was just a small talk question. The fact is I've been very nervous about coming to see you. I waited in my car for over two hours until I could make myself knock on your door.

CAROL

Well, you're here now. Please make yourself comfortable.

AGENT JACKSON

(He sits in the club chair he had sat in previously and looks around.) Kind of deja vu.

CAROL

Not quite. Joel holding a brick would complete the scene. *(He looks guilty.)* I'm sorry. I'm being hard on you. It's probably bad luck that my husband had a heart attack right after you told him he didn't pass the test to break bread with the President.

AGENT JACKSON

Do you think so? Do you think it was just bad luck? Do you think it was a coincidence?

CAROL

Well, it certainly was bad luck. At least for Joel. Why are you here? Are you feeling guilty that Joel died?

AGENT JACKSON

Of course I feel guilty. I'm not a machine. I have feelings. The same day I interview him he had a heart attack. I can't help but to think I might have caused it. If I did, I want you know how truly sorry I am. The fact is, I liked your husband. He was funny and honest. I don't get to meet truly funny and honest people in my line of work. You see I work in Washington.

CAROL

Well, it's nice of you to say those things about Joel. He was funny in a cranky kind of way. As for honest, he worked at that. He worked at it everyday of his life. I personally don't think people are naturally honest. I think most people will tell the white lie or keep the wrong change at the cash register if they are given the chance. Joel would actually walk all the way back in the store from the parking lot if he found an item in the basket he hadn't paid for, and get back in line again to pay for it.

AGENT JACKSON

I got that feeling during our interview.

CAROL

Then why in the hell did you flunk him?

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AGENT JACKSON

Protocol. We don't fail people for not being honest. In fact, we expect it. It's the acceptable norm. What makes us nervous is when people tell us what they really think. That is, to be frank, considered abnormal. And abnormal equals dangerous. Even though I personally didn't think your husband was dangerous, I couldn't take the risk. Does any of this make sense?

CAROL

I think that is the saddest thing I've ever heard. Did you really think your bosses would peg my old cranky husband as some kind of assassin? He just sent telegrams. (*She shakes her head.*) Let me ask you a hypothetical question. If you were able to invite four people to dinner either alive or from history who would you invite?

AGENT JACKSON

Is this some kind of test?

CAROL

No, it's a game that Joel liked to play. For instance I had a list of novelists. Our friend Jack is an avid golfer and he had famous golfers. His wife, Shirley, had old movie stars.

AGENT JACKSON

Who did Mr Schwartz invite?

CAROL

Let me see. He had Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, a man who liked to wear pink ties, and another man he called the Western Union Assassin who spent all of his savings sending telegrams to world leaders asking them to work for world peace.

AGENT JACKSON

Oh now I understand why he sent the telegrams. Okay, let me think a minute. Who would I like to invite to dinner? You're going to think this is strange, but there is a common thread. I would like to have John Wilkes Booth, Leon Czolgosz, Nathuram Godse, and Lee Harvey Oswald.

CAROL

Well I recognize John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald. Who were the other two?

AGENT JACKSON

Leon Czolgosz assassinated President McKinley and Nathuram Godse killed Ghandi.

CAROL

Why in the world would you want to have dinner with four murderers?

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AGENT JACKSON

Professional curiosity. I spend hours every week trying to think of any small quirk that could help me stop someone from killing the President. The fact is, no matter how good we are at our job, if someone is willing to die they have a fifty/fifty chance of being successful. If I could identify that quirk and lower the odds, it might make a difference.

CAROL

You're not married are you?

AGENT JACKSON

No. I'm not married. Just haven't found the time to meet someone yet.

CAROL

You might want to make the time. I mean dinner with four murderers is just a little abnormal wouldn't you say?

AGENT JACKSON

Well, when you put it that way, maybe I wouldn't have passed my own test.

CAROL

It reminds me of an old joke my father used tell. This old lady goes into a butcher shop and asks the butcher to hand her a chicken from his case. She then begins to smell the chicken under each wing, each leg, and the neck. She hands it back to the butcher and asked for another chicken and proceeds to smell this chicken too in all the same places. The exasperated butcher than asked her, "Lady, could you pass that test?" So Agent Jackson, you don't strike me as a overly sentimental kind of guy. Why are you here today?

AGENT JACKSON

You're right. In order to get my job, I was given a full spectrum of tests and being sentimental was not a quality they were looking for. The fact is I really liked your husband. When I heard he had died after our meeting, I was shaken. I took a couple of weeks off. I've been rethinking our interview over and over again. Trying to figure out if I could have done something differently. The short answer is I just don't know. I don't think I did anything unprofessional, but I can't help but feel guilty that he died. Maybe just maybe if I had been a little more of a human being instead of a professional he would still be alive.

CAROL

And then again, maybe not. We all have a clock. We just don't know when the alarm is going to go off. Joel used to joke that people who jog were using up their minutes faster. He said he saw a lot more old fat guys than old thin guys. So, that said, let me say something to you. You seem like a nice fellow. You showed real guts to come back here to see me, and I appreciate that. So I'm going to give you a chance to get off the hook. Do you know why I'm picketing Walmart? They are owned by the richest family in the country, and yet they pay their employees

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so poorly they can't afford health care and many of them are on food stamps. Those things aren't free. We pay for them. So, by not paying a living wage, they can sell things cheaper and put small local businesses out of business. At the same time, they spend millions on lobbyists to make sure the minimum wage stays low because it would be bad for the "job creators". So here's the deal. *(She tosses him the picket sign which he catches)* You give me one hour in the Walmart parking lot and we'll call it even.

AGENT JACKSON

(He looks at the sign) Is this more irony?

CAROL

You bet it is. *(He walks to the door holding the sign and holds the door open for Carol. She picks up her coat and they walk out the door).*

BLACK OUT

THE END

