

FEED

By
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FEED

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FEED

“Hope is the worst of evils,
for it prolongs the torments of man.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche

“Not only is another world possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day I can hear her breathing.”

- Arundhati Roy

FEED

FEED was originally produced by Open at the Top Productions at the NoHo Arts Center in Los Angeles, California. It opened on January 19, 2007. The production was Directed by James Mellon, with scenic design by Craig Siebles, lighting design by Luke Moyer, sound design by Madonna Cacciatore, costume design by David Matwijkow, video production by Tony Mark, and the production stage manager was Kelli Tager. The cast was as follows:

Joseph Truman (Cowboy).....Robert W. Arbogast
Diego Keller.....Paul Denniston
Sydney Marginski (SID).....Andrea Lockhart
Justice #1.....Janet Fontaine
Justice #2.....Mark Wyrick
Justice #3.....Michael Shapiro
Bailiff #1.....Daniel Rennick
Bailiff #2.....Antoinette Valente

A subsequent version of FEED was developed through the Playwrights Unit at Ensemble Studio Theatre, Los Angeles (EST/LA) in November of 2023. The reading was moderated by Stephen Dierkes and the cast was as follows:

Joseph Truman (Cowboy).....Johnny Cannizzaro
Diego Keller.....Eric B. Anthony
Sydney Marginski (SID).....Tamika Katon-Donegal
Justice.....Janet Fontaine
Bailiff.....Adam Foster Ballard
Child.....Elin Hampton

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CAST: 3 Men, 3 Women

CHARACTERS:

JOSEPH TRUMAN (COWBOY): Male, 45, a public defender

DIEGO KELLER: Male, 35, a prosecutor

SYDNEY MARGINSKI (SID): Female, 32, the defendant

JUSTICE: Female, 60, a magistrate

BAILIFF: Male, 25

CHILD: Female, 10

TIME: An unusually hot spring, in the not-too-distant future.

PLACE: In and around a Judicial Chamber.

* A note on inclusivity: The above breakdown includes character specifics that are integral to the story. Beyond these criteria, diversity in casting is strongly encouraged.

FEED

FEED

ACT I

SCENE 1: Morning. Cowboy's office

SCENE 2: Immediately following. The Chamber

SCENE 3: Immediately following. An interrogation room

SCENE 4: Immediately following. The Chamber

SCENE 5: Immediately following. Keller's office

ACT II

SCENE 1: The following morning. Cowboy's office

SCENE 2: Immediately following. An interrogation room

SCENE 3: Immediately following. The Chamber

SCENE 4: Immediately following. A hallway

SCENE 5: Immediately following. An interrogation room

SCENE 6: Immediately following. Keller's office

SCENE 7: Immediately following. The Chamber

ACT III

SCENE 1: The following morning. Cowboy's office

SCENE 2: Immediately following. A hallway

SCENE 3: Immediately following. A small, sterile room

SCENE 4: Immediately following. A hallway

SCENE 5: Immediately following. An interrogation room

SCENE 6: Immediately following. The Chamber

SCENE 7: Immediately following. A small, sterile room

The main action of the play takes place in and around a Judicial Chamber. It is suggested that the entire space be utilized for the Chamber and additional locations be created by carving off smaller sections with lighting as needed. The goal is to keep the flow of action swift and seamless.

An intermission should fall between Act II and Act III.

The light and sound associated with the start and stop of the FEED are intended to happen simultaneously and should feel intrusive.

FEED

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

Morning. A small, dark office. A dim light shines on an unconscious and disheveled JOSEPH TRUMAN (COWBOY) slumped over in his desk chair. An empty highball glass is clutched in his hand. After a moment, the glass drops. After another moment, BAILIFF enters and taps Cowboy's shoulder.

COWBOY. *(still not fully awake)* Don't....

BAILIFF. Counselor?

COWBOY. Don't go.

BAILIFF. *(another nudge)* It's time.

COWBOY. *(bleary-eyed)* What? What is it?

BAILIFF. It's time.

COWBOY. Huh. Yeah yeah. *(Cowboy retrieves a well-worn shoulder holster containing an old revolver that hangs on the back of his chair and puts it on.)*

BAILIFF. *(regarding the gun)* I need to see.

COWBOY. Where's...a... what's his name? He knows. Where's the regular guy?

BAILIFF. I am the regular guy now. And they told me to check.

COWBOY. They told you?

BAILIFF. Yup.

COWBOY. Well then. *(Cowboy removes the revolver, flips open the chamber and hands it to Bailiff. Cowboy fishes a tie out of his coat pocket and puts it on while Bailiff examines the revolver.)* It's empty. It's always empty. Even if I wanted to, it would be near impossible to find bullets for an antique like that.

BAILIFF. Near impossible. Probably so, still—

COWBOY. We gotta go through the motions.

FEED

BAILIFF. We do.

COWBOY. Why is that?

BAILIFF. Well, if you're asking me. I mean. No one carries guns anymore. Not on the inside. Not even me. On the inside we have no need for these anymore, right?

COWBOY. If you say so, sure.

BAILIFF. Protected in here from whatever might be left out there. In the old world. Compared to that, to outside, we got it made.

COWBOY. Yeah. Fuckin' Shangri-La.

BAILIFF. For some of us it is.

COWBOY. Well, you can have my part of it.

BAILIFF. Anyway, how I see it is this. Long as you insist on totting crap like this, it's what we gotta do. Go through the motions.

COWBOY. Thanks for your highly insightful perspective, Bailiff. And just so you know, it's toting.

BAILIFF. What's that?

COWBOY. Toting. It means to carry. As long as I'm toting. You said toting.

BAILIFF. Cause that's what I meant. Look it up maybe. Toting means digging through rubbish and looking for things other folks thought were useless. Reclaiming some old garbage you think might still have value. That's what toting means, counselor. Just so you know.

COWBOY. *(Cowboy grabs a laptop from his desk, approaches Bailiff, and opens his coat to expose the empty holster.)* The regular guy. Where did you say he is?

BAILIFF. Sick, maybe. Reassigned, retired, who knows? It's me now. *(Bailiff places the revolver back into the holster.)*

COWBOY. Right. *(Cowboy exits. Bailiff retrieves the highball glass from the floor and exits as the lights shift.)*

SCENE 2

Immediately following. Inside a Judicial Chamber. Music: Concerto della Donne, The Salutation. DIEGO KELLER regards a projection on a

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large, overhead screen. It is a scene of ruins, Pompeii. After a moment, Keller hits a button on his open laptop and advances the image. Projection: More ruins, Pompeii. Again, the image changes. Projection: Pompeii, more of the same. After a moment, Cowboy enters.

KELLER. Good morning, Cowboy.

COWBOY. Keller. How was your vacation?

KELLER. Splendid. Yours?

COWBOY. You know. A little a this, a little a that.

KELLER. Sounds about right.

COWBOY. So, you and me in the bloody ring today?

KELLER. Looks like it.

COWBOY. Mano a mano.

KELLER. So to speak.

COWBOY. That's too bad. I was looking forward to a fair fight. Oh well, I got you. Guess I'll just have to think of it as an extended holiday.

KELLER. Fuck you, Cowboy.

COWBOY. Language. Such disrespect in a court of law and from so sweet a face.

KELLER. Eat me.

COWBOY. In your wet dreams. *(Another projection: Pompeii, more ruins.)* What's all that mess?

KELLER. Pompeii.

COWBOY. Italy?

KELLER. Last time I checked a map.

COWBOY. Why?

KELLER. I'm a bit of a history buff. Just one of my many fascinating traits. *(Another projection: Pompeii, Dog.)*

COWBOY. What the hell?

KELLER. A dog. You don't recognize one of your own?

COWBOY. Statue?

KELLER. Plaster. When Mount Vesuvius erupted in seventy-nine CE, the whole city was covered. Interred under layers of stone and ash. Hundreds of years later some farmer's out digging a well and unearths an archeological goldmine. Men of science excavated and discovered these

FEED

inexplicable pockets of air. Puzzling at first, but then someone had the bright idea to fill one of the mysterious, vacant cavities with plaster.

COWBOY. Huh.

KELLER. They continued to fill in the hollow spaces, wait for the plaster to harden, and then dig. This is what they found. (*Another projection: Pompeii, Bodies.*)

COWBOY. Jesus.

KELLER. Without warning, innocent people just going about their day were buried alive. A thriving civilization. Entire communities silenced, Suffocated, snuffed out and preserved for posterity.

COWBOY. What kind of numb-nuts sets up shop at the foot of an active volcano?

KELLER. Yes, that's just what I was thinking.

COWBOY. So why the creepy slide show and the pretentious soundtrack? (*Another projection: Pompeii, Mother and Child.*)

KELLER. That's the one I was looking for.

COWBOY. What's that?

KELLER. Mother and child.

COWBOY. Poor kid. One day it just starts raining fire.

KELLER. Civilization is a precarious pastime. Today's case just got me thinking about this particular image. It's interesting considering.

COWBOY. Considering what?

KELLER. Seven zero five three.

COWBOY. Seven zero five three?

KELLER. Today's pending. Our case, counselor. Do you even know who you're defending? Haven't you—I sent— Did you at least go through my briefs?

COWBOY. I bet you'd like that wouldn't you, sweetheart.

KELLER. Actus reus.

COWBOY. Ahh, Latin. You know how that gets me all hot and bothered. And how many times have I told you I don't like briefs. I'm a boxer boy. That is if I wear anything at all. (*The lights shift and Bailiff ushers in SYDNEY MARGINSKI (SID) who is thrashing and screaming.*)

SID. I want to see my child.

COWBOY. What the hell?

FEED

SID. I have a right to see that she's okay.

KELLER. Don't look now boxer boy, but it looks like someone is about to be buried in ash. *(Cowboy quickly moves to his laptop.)*

COWBOY. Fuck you, Keller.

SID. Where is she?

KELLER. Oh, I bet you'd like that wouldn't you? Sweetheart.

SID. This is bullshit. *(JUSTICE enters. Projection: 7053.)*

JUSTICE. Begin the FEED. *(Lights and Sound. The FEED is on. Justice sits.)*

JUSTICE. Judicial broadcast 7053 of the Federal Education and Entertainment Display is now live.

SID. I do not recognize this assembly.

JUSTICE. Good morning, everyone.

SID. You have no right. *(Cowboy pours hurriedly through files on his laptop looking for information.)*

KELLER. Good morning, your honor.

JUSTICE. *(to Keller)* Counselor.

SID. You have no fucking right.

JUSTICE. *(to Cowboy)* Defense council, please / control your client.

SID. I do not recognize this assembly.

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* Would you please calm down.

SID. No right. I do not recognize this assembly.

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* Quiet. Please.

SID. None of you. You have no right.

COWBOY. *(to Bailiff)* Could you please control her?

JUSTICE. *(to Cowboy)* Counselor—

SID. No God damn right, you hear me?

COWBOY. Quiet.

JUSTICE. Mr. Truman, if you / can't control your—

SID. I refuse to—

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* Shut the fuck up! *(Sid is silent for the first time.)*

JUSTICE. Mr. Truman, I—

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* And sit down. *(Sid sits.)* Thank you.

JUSTICE. Good morning, Mr. Truman.

COWBOY. Your honor. Good morning.

FEED

JUSTICE. You had a pleasant holiday I trust?

COWBOY. Yes, thank you, I just relaxed.

JUSTICE. Is that so?

COWBOY. Yes. Oh, and um well....

JUSTICE. Would you like a moment with your client, counselor?

COWBOY. Yes, your honor, thank you that would be—

JUSTICE. Five minutes. Use them wisely. Suspend the FEED. (*Lights. Sound. The FEED is off.*)

COWBOY. Thank you, magistrate, and how was your holiday?

JUSTICE. A brief excursion out to the coast with my daughter and her husband.

COWBOY. Very nice.

JUSTICE. Yes. Thank you for asking, Mr. Truman. It was almost tolerable.

COWBOY. Oh, well I just—

JUSTICE. Five minutes, Mr. Truman, and counting. (*Lights.*)

SCENE 3

Immediately following. An interrogation room. Cowboy is speeding through files on his laptop. SID is seated.

SID. I do not recognize.... (*Cowboy does not respond.*) You have no right. (*Still not response.*) You have no—

COWBOY. Stop. I heard you the first time. We all heard you. Everyone heard you the first— Listen, lady, in that chamber when the FEED is streaming, you are on. The world is watching. Anyone. Any Tom, schmuck, or schmo can tune you in. And yes, technically in the end your fate is held solely in the greasy palms of that malicious, judicial succubus in heels. However, because every few years she is forced to lay her quivering neck on the chopping block of the electorate, public opinion is key. So, you need the people. And that means the FEED. You need them with you, so that she has no choice but to rule in our favor. To that end, as we proceed, it's in your best interest not to have to be

FEED

dragged in there kicking and screaming like you have just been crowned queen of the raving cuckoos, get me? (*regarding the files*) Now, it says here that your name is Sydney Marginski is that correct? Did I pronounce that correctly? (*Sid slowly begins to shake her head no.*) No? No what? No that's not your name, or no I didn't pronounce it correctly?

SID. You have no—

COWBOY. Right. I know. Listen, how about I start? My name is Joseph Truman. I don't know if anyone took the time to inform you, but I am your lawyer. You can call me Joe or Joseph or Truman or Mr. Truman or Counselor, or hey pit stains if you like. Personally, I think titles are a waste of otherwise perfectly good oxygen, but I'll let you decide.

SID. Sid.

COWBOY. Sid?

SID. No one calls me Sydney anymore.

COWBOY. (*regarding his laptop*) All right, Sid, it looks here like you're facing quite a list of accusations.

SID. All just bullshit and—

COWBOY. Wait. Please let's try to move forward shall we, Sid? Forgery, obstruction, resisting arrest, child endangerment—

SID. Fuck them if—

COWBOY. Hup. Child endangerment, neglect, and kidnapping. So? (*SID does not respond.*) True, not True, kinda-sorta, what do you say? (*Sid cringes in pain, her arm across her abdomen.*) Are you okay?

SID. I want to see my daughter.

COWBOY. First things first, Sid, we need—

SID. (*through the pain*) I want to see her.

COWBOY. Listen to me, we don't have time. That magistrate in there, she is the one running this sadistic little sideshow and you can mark my words Ms. Marginski, she doesn't give a flaccid fuck about what you want. Her only concern is what the FEED viewing public wants. And that fresh-faced, young prosecutor in there? He will offer you up like bloody chum to that leering, masochistic throng because that is his job. And just between you, me, and this fucking table, he loves his job. He is very good at his job. My job is to keep you from being ingested. That is

FEED

what I have been charged with, but I cannot advocate without information so I need something substantive from you now because without your help I might as well go in there and pass out bibs. So please. For expediency's sake, to the aforementioned charges, how do you wish to plead?

SID. You have no right. (*Lights.*)

SCENE 4

Immediately following. The Chamber.

JUSTICE. Resume the FEED. (*Lights. Sound. The FEED is on. Projection: 7053.*) Welcome back, everyone.

KELLER. Thank you, your honor.

JUSTICE. I trust that we have all taken the time to breathe deeply and to respectfully compose ourselves into a manner befitting the time and the occasion.

COWBOY. Yes. Thank you, your honor, we have.

JUSTICE. Hence, I trust, we are ready to proceed with our opening statements.

COWBOY. With all due respect to the court, and in the best interest of my client, I would like to request some additional time in order to—

JUSTICE. More time, Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Yes, if it pleases the court, I—

JUSTICE. What would please the court, counselor, is the submission of a proper and formal petition of continuance.

COWBOY. I understand completely, however, what with everyone having just returned from holiday— Well, I mean that coupled with the fact that it just seems logical to me that— What I mean to say is that the process may be better served if we could all—

KELLER. Excuse me, your honor. If I may be permitted to toss defense counsel a lifeline?

JUSTICE. Please. And quickly, Mr. Keller, before Mr. Truman is swept irretrievably out to sea in a riptide of swirling incoherence.

FEED

KELLER. I have submitted a request, formally, which, if it pleases the court, might as a matter of necessity afford Mr. Truman some of the time he so desperately needs. (*Justice and Cowboy refer to their computers.*)

JUSTICE. I see. Mr. Truman, any objections?

COWBOY. This looks like a request for a medical examination.

KELLER. That's right.

JUSTICE. Is there a problem, Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Well, I assume there was already an examination done at some point between the time of apprehension and incarceration.

KELLER. There was, however as stipulated in the briefs which I have provided to both the court and to counsel, as governed by existing law with which I am sure Mr. Truman is intimately familiar, the initial medical evaluation was cursory at best and therefore highly inconclusive. What I am requesting here is a far more extensive examination by a mutually agreed upon expert of both the defendant and the child so that—

SID. (*on her feet*) No. I will not permit my child to be—

COWBOY. (*to Sid*) Please. Be quiet and sit down.

KELLER. To be clear, we don't even know if that is her child.

SID. (*on her feet again*) That is my daughter you sleazy, snake-tongued motherfucker, and I will not—

COWBOY. (*to Sid*) Stop.

KELLER. Your honor, the state is not wholly comfortable moving forward, most specifically with a charge of kidnapping, without knowing definitively to whom the child actually belongs.

COWBOY. Your honor, a simple blood test would easily determine—

JUSTICE. The bench concurs with Mr. Keller.

COWBOY. But—

JUSTICE. It's a lifeline, Mr. Truman, I strongly suggest you grab it. Is there anything else, Mr. Truman, before we stand in recess, pending the results of the agreed-upon examination?

COWBOY. No, your honor.

JUSTICE. Mr. Keller?

KELLER. Perhaps, one small suggestion. It occurs to me that it wouldn't be too much trouble to have a supplemental FEED put on the

FEED

child and run into the chamber here.

SID. Yes.

COWBOY. Wait a minute.

KELLER. That way Ms. Marginski would at least have some peace of mind as to the ongoing care and well-being of the child.

COWBOY. Your honor, I have to object—

SID. Yes.

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* Please let me handle this.

JUSTICE. A highly magnanimous offer, Mr. Keller. The court will certainly consider the matter. Perhaps, Mr. Truman, you and your client can use this time to, among other things, hammer out the intricacies of the hierarchy of your working relationship, yes?

COWBOY. Yes, your honor.

JUSTICE. The court will use this time to go through the briefs which Mr. Keller has been kind enough to so meticulously prepare and so promptly provide. We suggest Mr. Truman should do the same.

KELLER. I like to pride myself on being thorough, so I apologize to opposing counsel if my summation seems excessively long and needlessly dense.

JUSTICE. I trust, Mr. Truman, you will not be put off by the length and density of Mr. Keller's briefs?

KELLER. On the contrary, your honor, I have the utmost confidence that defense counsel will be able to take it all in with surprising ease. And, of course, I'm always here to lend a hand.

JUSTICE. That is exceedingly gracious, counselor. Thank you. Gentlemen, we stand in recess. Suspend the FEED. *(Lights. Sound. The FEED is off. Keller makes a phone gesture with his hand and mouths "Call me". COWBOY gestures back.)*

SCENE 5

Immediately following. Keller's office. Keller is packing to leave as Cowboy enters.

FEED

COWBOY. Okay, what the fuck is going on you pathetic little butt suck?

KELLER. Come on in, Cowboy.

COWBOY. I'm already in, Keller.

KELLER. Yes, so you are. Sorry, Cowboy, but rumor has it that with you it's sometimes just a little hard to tell.

COWBOY. Is that right?

KELLER. What do you want?

COWBOY. Me? A ticket out, that's what I want. This whole fucked-up mess of an ant farm. You can have it. I'd rather take my chances outside.

KELLER. Yes, I did hear through the grapevine that your most recent petition for relocation was rejected. Unfortunately, your self-loathing desire for exodus is currently above my pay grade or I would happily send you back to whatever societal mayhem may still exist out there.

COWBOY. What's going on?

KELLER. Going on? I'm not sure I—

COWBOY. Look, Keller, don't jerk me around. I know when I've been set up, sandbagged, side-swiped. It's clear that you and that judge have some sort of common agenda, that you're working together somehow, yeah? That somehow, you're-you're in cahoots.

KELLER. Cahoots, Cowboy?

COWBOY. You know what I mean.

KELLER. Have you considered that perhaps our Justice simply recognizes in me a superior litigator? Or, I don't know, maybe she just likes my smile?

COWBOY. Well, I can assure you she's going to like your smile a whole lot less after I have removed your expensive, pearly white caps with the butt of my revolver. *(Cowboy flashes his holstered gun and then starts out.)*

KELLER. Hey, Cowboy. Jeez, you are something else, man.

COWBOY. *(he stops)* So I've been told. On occasion.

KELLER. I'll bet. Cahoots? That was really pathetic.

COWBOY. Tell me what you know. And I'm asking nicely. For the moment. So just give me a bloody fucking break.

KELLER. Nice. No one is ganging up on you, Cowboy. This is what I

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know. I know that your client was born, coded and sterilized. Like you, like me, like all of us on the inside, she was coded and rendered infertile in accordance with state mandated regulations. I know that your client, over a period of two years, starting at the age of twenty, submitted multiple applications requesting a license for lawful procreation. She clearly wanted a child of her own and your client sought authorization via the proper channels. I also know, however, that every one of those applications was denied. I know that there is no record of a legally sanctioned medical procedure that would have made it possible for your client to lawfully conceive. And then, a decade ago your client seemingly dropped off the grid. Vanished. And finally, I know that she was apprehended two days ago at which time she was in possession of a child. A little girl child. A little girl child with no code. No coding whatsoever. A child with no record of birth or existence. All very suspicious considering your client claims, with ear-piercing, foul-mouthed vehemence that the child is hers. And that, pending the outcome of the recently ordered and mutually agreed upon medical examination, is just about all I know.

COWBOY. Just about. But you do know a little something more am I right? Something you're not sharing?

KELLER. Dolo opportuna, counselor. I know how you like a little Latin.

COWBOY. Yeah? Well here's a little Latin from me to you. Phallus manducare, you conniving little prick. *(Cowboy turns to leave.)*

KELLER. Cooler heads, counselor. And I suggest you get her cleaned up a little bit. She's not exactly the sympathetic portrait of an ideal mother. And once we get back into that chamber, the FEED is on, my friend. *(As Cowboy exits.)* The FEED is on. *(Lights.)*

FEED

ACT 2
SCENE 1

The following morning. Cowboy's office. The lights come up on Cowboy seated at his desk. He is unconscious and slumped across his glowing laptop. After a moment, Bailiff enters.

BAILIFF. Morning. *(Cowboy is unresponsive and Bailiff moves closer.)*
Counselor?

COWBOY. *(stirring slightly)* No.

BAILIFF. Counselor— *(Bailiff places a hand on Cowboy's shoulder.)*

COWBOY. *(jerking to life)* WAIT.

BAILIFF. Sorry, I just....

COWBOY. *(acclimating)* Wait. What is the...?

BAILIFF. Good morning. It's time.

COWBOY. Right. Any news? *(During the following, Cowboy hands the revolver to Bailiff while he puts himself together. Bailiff carefully inspects the gun.)*

BAILIFF. The numbers are way up.

COWBOY. The numbers?

BAILIFF. Yesterday's proceedings were the highest ratings ever for a judicial FEED.

COWBOY. What?

BAILIFF. People are paying attention. They're watching like never before. Watching us.

COWBOY. You're an idiot.

BAILIFF. Maybe. Maybe, but I know that a lot of those folks out there aren't too happy with your client. As a matter of fact, the consensus is that they're mostly pretty pissed off. And those big-ass, angry numbers? There's no way that spells anything good for you and your client.

COWBOY. I was referring to the medical exam. Marginski and the girl. Is there any news on that front?

BAILIFF. Oh, that. Nope. Not as far as I know. Should be anytime now I expect. I'll certainly let you know. *(Now dressed and ready, Cowboy approaches Bailiff.)*

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COWBOY. Thanks. For keeping your finger on the pulse. (*exposing his empty holster*) We good here?

BAILIFF. It's just that we don't often get a chance. You know, most of us working the Judicial FEEDs, to have the attention of so many people. You want to be sure you say what needs saying. Do what needs doing. That's all.

COWBOY. I said, are we good?

BAILIFF. Sure. We're just dandy. (*Bailiff places the revolver in the holster and Cowboy exits. Lights.*)

SCENE 2

Immediately following. An interrogation room. Sid is seated with her head resting on the table in front of her. Cowboy enters.

COWBOY. Up and at 'em, sunshine.

SID. What time is it?

COWBOY. It's early yet.

SID. I...um.... I don't, a—

COWBOY. How are you feeling?

SID. Like I was hit. Like I just got run over by—

COWBOY. Yeah, well, they pretty much ran every test they could think of, lady. The full arsenal. No stone unturned.

SID. I assumed they were going to turn the stones over. I just didn't guess that they were going to hit me over the head with them.

COWBOY. Is that a sense of humor I'm detecting?

SID. Did they do this to my little girl?

COWBOY. Probably.

SID. How is she?

COWBOY. I don't know.

SID. I need to see her and I'm not fucking around any— Ahh. (*Sid cringes a bit.*)

COWBOY. Listen, you just need to take it easy.

SID. I need to see her. To know that she's okay.

FEED

COWBOY. It's not that simple.

SID. The other lawyer said they could run a FEED in. If he was nice enough to—

COWBOY. Nice? Nice, is that what you think he was being in there?

SID. He said—

COWBOY. Agenda. He's got one. The judge has got one. The bailiff. Everyone. Every cluster of carbon that draws a breath exhales ulterior motive. It's involuntary. Trust no one.

SID. But I don't understand—

COWBOY. It's a tactic, lady. Putting a FEED on your little girl. He wants them to see, to pity her so everyone watching out there will hate you for what you did to her.

SID. I didn't—

COWBOY. For what he will claim you did.

SID. But, I—

COWBOY. And, if we allow that nice man to show the world her pretty, little, innocent, incarcerated face, they will want to hold someone accountable for her suffering. People are already flocking like flag-waving lab rats to her defense. And, as that groundswell of support grows for her, that mob-fueled lunacy will be matched, measure for measure, to the amount of blame that is heaped on you. "For every action," yeah? It's just your basic Newton, lady.

SID. I need to see for myself that she is okay.

COWBOY. Listen, lady, I think—

SID. And stop calling me lady, you know my fucking name. *(a beat)*

COWBOY. I think the incoming FEED is a bad idea. I am, however, willing to keep the possibility on the table if the judge allows it, which is doubtful, and more importantly if you agree to work with me. You cannot be combative, especially in there. In front of those cameras, you know? And for starters, maybe just dial it down a wee bit on the fucking expletives. And above all, Sid, you have to listen to what I say and you need to trust me.

SID. You just said trust no one.

COWBOY. That's good. One eye in the rear view. Touché. We've got to keep one eye in the rear-view mirror at all times. *(Cowboy removes*

FEED

his jacket and hangs it on the back of a chair. Sid notices the gun.)

SID. What is that?

COWBOY. Thirty-eight caliber, Enfield, Commando.

SID. Why, Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Excuse me?

SID. In a society without conflict, almost completely without violence, why carry a gun?

COWBOY. That is a first-generation paradigm. Completely ass backwards. The limited view of someone like you who was born on the inside. A carefully cultured ignorance.

SID. I am not ignorant.

COWBOY. You were bred in a bubble and suckled on some lie of sanctuary. A society without conflict, are you fucking serious?

SID. We're better off now, is all I meant. Evolved.

COWBOY. After what's been done to you and to your child. Is that how you see this world? Evolved? Seriously, you have no clue.

SID. Then tell me.

COWBOY. What?

SID. Outside. You were there? Born out there?

COWBOY. Yes, I was, but—

SID. Then, what was it like?

COWBOY. Better than this. A roaring dumpster fire, sure, but at the end of the long, fucking day it was— Listen, Ms. Marginski, this relationship works best when I ask the questions.

SID. If you ask all the questions, it's not a relationship. There's got to be a give and take, that's just how relationships work. *(Bailiff enters with a cup of coffee and a small duffle bag.)*

COWBOY. Great. Anywhere is fine. I thought you could maybe use some coffee.

SID. Thank you.

COWBOY. It's not some kind of a gesture. I just need you to be alert. *(Bailiff sets the bag on the table and places the cup in front of Sid.)*

BAILIFF. I wasn't sure how you like it. I'm happy to get you some tea or something else if you'd rather.

SID. This is fine.

FEED

BAILIFF. It's no problem at all, really.

SID. Thank you.

COWBOY. Yes, thank you. (*COWBOY throws a hard look at Bailiff and he exits.*)

COWBOY. What was that?

SID. Nothing. What?

COWBOY. That person is not your friend, you understand?

SID. Okay.

COWBOY. You don't know who that person is. No clue. I mean you have no idea who that person is.

SID. He gave me coffee and—

COWBOY. He brought you a cup of coffee because I told him to.

SID. So, I just thanked him.

COWBOY. Well, in the future, don't. Because you don't know. So just don't.

SID. All right then. Jesus, you really are—

COWBOY. Here. (*Cowboy pushes the duffle bag towards Sid.*)

SID. What's this?

COWBOY. Change of clothes. A little war paint.

SID. Really, I don't think I—

COWBOY. Right. Exactly right, Sid, you don't think. I think. You just do what I say, remember? If you are attached, in any way, to the possibility of ever being in the same room with that child again, you will allow me to do my job. What I say goes, and right now I say you look like shit. And I say that I cannot have the mother of that little girl, if indeed that is who you turn out to be, making one more appearance in that chamber looking like a dirty, strung-out, dime-store hooker.

SID. You, Mr. Truman, are a prick.

COWBOY. On that point, Ms. Marginski, you would be hard-pressed to get an argument from even my mother. (*Cowboy drops the bag in Sid's lap, and through the following, she puts herself together.*) So, break it down for me, Sid.

SID. The truth?

COWBOY. That would be refreshing.

SID. She's mine.

FEED

COWBOY. So you claim, and yet I have a copy of your certificate of sterilization. Medical records that, time and again, confirm the fact that you, like all of us living inside, were rendered infertile. I also have a myriad of applications, signed by you, requesting license for procreation and each one is red stamped with a corresponding letter of denial. I have no record anywhere of a state-authorized medical procedure that would allow you to conceive legally and no supporting evidence of motherhood. Nothing. Not a shred.

SID. And yet she is mine.

COWBOY. Ms. Marginski, any minute now I will have the results of your very extensive medical examination. At which time, there will be no hiding from the facts. (*regarding his computer*) I will be handed a file to load into this machine here and all your insides will come gushing forth. And not just for me, no, your entrails will also be placed in the hands of that climbing young prosecutor who will, without hesitation, toss them like a gnarled, bloody rope over the crowded parapet in hopes of pulling himself just a wee bit higher. And best of all, they will be served-up on a platter for that carnivorous judge, like tender, bite-size bits of tripe. Yes, everyone will be fed to the tits on truth Sid, I was just hoping to get it from you first.

SID. You think those doctors, with all their fancy scopes and probes, you think that they were able to crawl up inside of me and find the truth? You think you can simply skim through a file, some third-party determination of what is fact, and think that you have some intimate knowledge of who I am? No. (*Sid cringes in pain.*) Those tests may contain information, maybe, but not truth. Not my truth, not all of it.

COWBOY. Look. You're in pain and I want to help, but I need to understand.

SID. It really is so simple. I met a man. We fell in love. Or so I thought. Unfortunately, love, like truth, isn't something you can biopsy and isolate in a Petri dish to verify its existence. There is no scientific method for examining the purity of a human soul, is there? You can't know if love is benign or malignant until it has spread. Completely embedded itself into every fiber of your being. By then, of course, the roots are deep. Extrication is, well, messy at best. But I believed. We

FEED

both wanted a child. So, we filled out all the proper paperwork, but our preliminary applications were denied because of what they said was financial instability. But, we were determined. He got a better job. I got a better job. And we applied again. This time we jumped every hurdle without a stumble. All except one. My medical exam came back with a big red stamp. The gatekeepers urged us to try again, you know, sometimes there is a mistake in the lab or something. But again, I was red-stamped. I could never get them to give me a clear explanation. We wish we could tell you more, they would say, but it's just one of those things. I continued to apply, but it was the same every time. Anyway, that's when the man I loved began to extricate himself. So fucking messy. It didn't last long after that. He found someone. Someone else. Someone who *was* able to clear every hurdle. Yes. She was what you would call a thoroughbred, Mr. Truman. *(Sid has finished changing and applying makeup. Her transformation is not unnoticed by Cowboy.)*

COWBOY. So, you were on your own and...?

SID. That desire for a child. That never went away. Never.

COWBOY. So?

SID. So, I pursued other avenues.

COWBOY. Such as?

SID. Faith.

COWBOY. In a sterile world, a child conceived in the complete absence of sperm and egg?

SID. Lots and lots of faith.

COWBOY. Perfect. Are you suggesting that I go in there and argue a virgin birth? Because, frankly, I should not need to remind you that it has been done. Oh yes, and in grand style. To the nines, as they say. Mary, the name must ring a bell. Yeah, she played that hand and broke the fucking bank. *(Bailiff enters with a file and Cowboy snatches it. As Cowboy crosses to load the file, Bailiff crosses to Sid and speaks into her ear.)* Great, here we are. Your test results and based on your account I'm anticipating images of a glorious annunciation. Flying messengers, blooming lilies, and glowing halos. God help us, I don't think the world is ready for a second coming. Mankind hasn't quite fully recovered from the first go around on that crazy, fucked up— *(clocking Bailiff and Sid)*

FEED

Hey. Excuse me. Excuse me.

BAILIFF. Yes?

COWBOY. Get out.

BAILIFF. Oh, I was just letting Ms. Marginski here know that the doctor offered to send over some medication.

COWBOY. Really?

BAILIFF. Just in case there was any lingering discomfort. Any residual pain.

COWBOY. Sweet.

SID. Thank you. Right now, I think I'm fine.

BAILIFF. Just know that I can get something if you need it.

SID. Thank you.

COWBOY. We finished?

BAILIFF. Yes. *(Cowboy grabs Sid's discarded clothes, shoves them in the duffle bag, and thrusts it at Bailiff.)*

COWBOY. Good. *(Cowboy takes Bailiff's arm and leads him toward the door.)*

BAILIFF. *(pulling away)* Hey, man, please don't put your hands on—

COWBOY. Get the fuck out. *(Bailiff exits.)*

SID. I don't understand why you have to treat people like—

COWBOY. I don't have time. People. Vultures, most of them. Blood-sucking, bottom-feeding, back-stabbing land cancer.

SID. Is there anything you do believe in?

COWBOY. Yes. That which can be empirically proven. Fact. *(sitting down in front of his computer)* Now, is there anything else you'd like to tell me before I take a tour of your insides?

SID. I had faith.

COWBOY. Faith, Ms. Marginski, is like trusting a parachute packed by a stranger. No thank you. Shall we? *(Cowboy opens the file.)*

SID. Faith, Mr. Truman, is simply opening your eyes to possibility when those around you have given up.

COWBOY. Holy fuck. This is what Keller and that judge were fishing for. Mutilation this report says. Scaring, extensive bowel and bladder damage, Sid, the list goes on. This is not the work of a God, no, this was clearly the work of a human or something that passes itself off as

FEED

human. The claw marks are unmistakable. This was a butcher. So much physical torture so you could have a baby? No wonder you're in pain, Sid. You could have died. The fact that you've survived this long without any follow-up medical attention is a miracle.

SID. Really? A miracle? Is that a fact?

COWBOY. We're toast. You know that don't you?

SID. I don't think—

COWBOY. Yes. *(still regarding his computer)* And now? Perfect. Like clockwork. There it is. Keller has just submitted a whole new batch of idiotic charges. Yes sir, we are burnt black, on both sides, mother-fucking toast. Keller will have a field day with this shit. He will lockjaw on our jugular like a pit-bull on a toy poodle. Any suggestions?

SID. Faith.

COWBOY. In the face of complete and utter annihilation, I do not think the best course of action is to passively hang your hopes on the heroic intervention of some AWOL, dipshit deity.

SID. I didn't say God, Mr. Truman. *(Sid reaches out and touches Cowboy's arm.)* I am putting my faith in you. You. Because when the plane is going down, a parachute packed by a stranger is a whole lot better than no parachute at all. *(Lights.)*

SCENE 3

Immediately following. The Chamber. Lights. Sound. The FEED is on. Projection: 7053. Cowboy, Keller, Sid, Justice, and Bailiff are present.

COWBOY. This is ludicrous, your honor, these accusations are insane.

KELLER. These charges, counselor, which have already been filed in accordance with—

COWBOY. What, Keller? You are completely certifiable.

JUSTICE. *(warning)* Counselor.

COWBOY. Nuts. This crosses over. Beyond incompetence.

KELLER. With all due respect to counsel and to the court, due to the revelatory nature of the highly incriminating information gleaned from

FEED

the results of the mutually agreed-upon medical examination, these amended charges are more than warranted.

JUSTICE. A warning to you both. I will not allow—

COWBOY. Please. With all due respect, these charges are nothing more than a massive, steaming, putrid pile of bull—

JUSTICE. Stop, Mr. Truman.

COWBOY. Your honor, we are all aware that Mr. Keller's reputation for courtroom chicanery is without rival. And heaven knows that I am the first one to stand and cheer for dazzling, juristic theatricality, but when, and only when, said theatrics are lawfully founded. I will not, however, allow my client's opportunity for a fair trial, her right to due process, her journey through this system we call justice, I will not allow this woman's flight to exoneration to be hijacked by Mr. Keller's reckless, self-serving, spotlight-whoring hijinks.

JUSTICE. Breathe, Mr. Truman.

COWBOY. Your honor—

JUSTICE. Breathe.

COWBOY. But—

JUSTICE. Inhale. (*Cowboy reluctantly complies.*) Exhale. Splendid.

KELLER. Your honor if I may—

JUSTICE. No, Mr. Keller, you may not. Gaffs away, gentlemen, and stayed for the remainder of these proceedings. I will not caution you again. Now, the court will consider the amended charges. We will also weigh, with much caution, the gravity of this new indictment against its seemingly inherent merit. All of this we will do as we continue our marathon plod down the arduous path which we hope will lead us eventually to the much anticipated and now frightfully delayed opening statements. Before we take the next laborious step, however, the state has graciously decided to grant the prosecution's request that the defendant be allowed to view the child as we proceed. That is, of course, if it has been determined by Mr. Truman to be in the best interest of his client.

SID. Yes.

JUSTICE. Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Yes, your honor. I believe it would be highly reassuring for

FEED

Miss Marginski to have, at the very least, visual access to her child.

JUSTICE. Mr. Keller, are you still in agreement? *(Keller nods.)* Bailiff, has the incoming FEED been made ready?

BAILIFF. Yes, your honor. *(Justice motions. Projection: a CHILD, approximately ten years old, appears on the screen in a clinical setting. The Child is dressed in clean, institutional-looking garb and sits at a small table drawing.)*

JUSTICE. The continuation of the incoming FEED will remain solely at the court's discretion. If we feel that it causes the least bit of delay or the slightest hint of a distraction, it will be cut.

COWBOY. We understand the parameters. Thank you.

JUSTICE. Ms. Marginski?

COWBOY. Sid?

SID. Yes. Thank you.

JUSTICE. Now, Mr. Keller, please explain for the court your basis for these new charges.

COWBOY. If I may, your honor, be afforded the brief opportunity to reiterate—

JUSTICE. Your opposition, Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Yes, and—

JUSTICE. Your dismay?

COWBOY. Yes. Because of—

JUSTICE. The far-reaching and incendiary nature of these new charges?

COWBOY. Exactly. For the record.

JUSTICE. Thank you, Mr. Truman, your warning of the impending onslaught of bovine excrement has been duly noted. For the record.

COWBOY. Thank you.

JUSTICE. With pleasure. Mr. Keller.

KELLER. Thank you. I trust that both the court and opposing counsel received copies of my motion to amend the charges.

JUSTICE. Yes, indeed we did, Mr. Keller. A page-turning opus, I have no doubt. We were, however, hoping that you would be so kind as to bottom-line your memo orally.

KELLER. Of course. Simply stated, the people feel it is inappropriate,

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to say the least, to proceed with the former litany of charges, all of which were rooted in the central indictment of kidnapping, after the medical examination has clearly proven that the child in question is, indeed, the biological offspring of the defendant.

COWBOY. Defense agrees, your honor. Those charges should be thrown out.

KELLER. As they have already been and supplanted by far more appropriate and far more egregious charges. *(There is a bloated pause before Justice motions for Keller to continue.)* Yes, of course. We are, all of us, the by-products of a gluttonous time. We remain scavengers in the aftermath of an era of unrestrained consumption. We are, all of us, children of consequence. The decision of when, where, and how to procreate was relinquished by us as individuals decades ago at a time—No. The very hour. The precise moment that our species stood on the edge of oblivion. Mass and painful sacrifice was required on a global scale to ensure that the sun might have a chance to rise on one more generation of humanity. We are, all of us, residents of a reimagined society where childbearing is a privilege. A legal right that is granted by the state to worthy individuals in consideration of all of us fortunate enough to be living on the inside. An elite populace that continues to balance precariously on a creaking, rotted plank that spans a deep and dangerous chasm of—

(Cowboy bangs his head on the table.)

JUSTICE. Bottom line, please, Mr. Keller.

KELLER. Your honor, Ms. Marginski, as evidenced by an array of supporting documentation that has been substantially corroborated by the results of her recent medical examination, has apparently decided to take the matter of mankind's future existence into her own hands.

COWBOY. What?

KELLER. We know for a fact that the defendant could not have performed the barbaric procedure that allowed her to conceive. She could not have possibly done that to herself. Nor could she have simply pulled viable sperm out of thin air. Nor do we think that she could have carried, delivered, cared for and concealed this innocent child for almost ten years without help. No. We have to assume that there are larger

FEED

forces at work. Forces that we suggest must be working in collusion with Ms. Marginski. Or, in cahoots if it pleases counsel, to forcibly drag humanity back into harm's way. She and her menacing, secretive clan have flagrantly set their sights on that last merciful timber in the critically splintered scaffold of our very existence. They have chosen to wage a war. If she and those like her are not stopped, and in short order, that board will break. Snap. And when that happens, there will be nothing but thin and unforgiving air between mankind and our inevitable plummet to extinction. Therefore, the amended charges submitted are conspiracy with the intent to commit crimes against humanity.

JUSTICE. Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Your honor, counsel for the defense will need—

JUSTICE. Time, Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Yes.

JUSTICE. We will stand in recess, then, gentlemen. During which I will entertain properly submitted motions as they pertain to these newly tendered charges. Keep in mind that the nature of these motions should be both formal and succinct. Anything else, gentlemen, before we suspend the FEED?

KELLER. Yes, your honor. I noticed, as I'm sure did Mr. Truman, that the results of the child's medical exam were not made accessible to us, other than, of course, the nature of her genealogy, and I was curious as to why the court chose to suppress that information?

JUSTICE. If, Mr. Keller, you have a reason to believe that the girl's medical condition has bearing on these proceedings and/or on the new charges filed against the defendant, please feel free to put your concerns in writing in the form of a brief request to unsuppress. Breviloquence, yes? That means short, Mr. Keller. Is that all? (*Cowboy raises his hand.*)

JUSTICE. Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. Now that we all seem to agree that Ms. Marginski is undoubtedly the child's mother, it might be in the best interest of both my client and the child to allow some limited visitation between the two.

KELLER. The prosecution objects.

JUSTICE. Formally, Mr. Truman. That means in writing.

COWBOY. Of course, your honor. I just know, as a mother yourself,

FEED

you must have some very palpable understanding of my client's desire to be afforded the opportunity to comfort and reassure her child as these proceedings continue.

JUSTICE. Was that an appeal to my sex, Mr. Truman?

COWBOY. No, your honor, I—

JUSTICE. Good. I didn't think so. Suspend the FEED. (*Lights. Sound. The FEED is off.*) (*to Cowboy*) In the future, counselor, if you mistakenly choose to tread those waters again, I promise you this. You will find them deep, treacherous, and mercilessly unforgiving. (*Lights.*)

SCENE 4

Immediately following. A hallway outside the chamber. Cowboy is walking quickly to catch up to Keller.

COWBOY. Hey, Chicken Little.

KELLER. Cowboy.

COWBOY. I'm not getting high on this whole conspiracy thing.

KELLER. That's too bad, my friend, you should join the party. I know people. I can get you in.

COWBOY. Not my crowd, thanks. It's bunk, Keller. You know my client is not the leader of some extremist group. She is a woman who felt a need, an overwhelming desire to have a child. Free procreation. Granted she went to some drastic measures, but she's no Madonna of the apocalypse.

KELLER. What about the others, Cowboy?

COWBOY. Others?

KELLER. You really think that she's the only one? How many other Sydney Marginskis do you reckon are out there? And what about the person who cut her up? You saw her mutilated insides. You think that whoever that butcher was that he got it right the first time? How many of those women do you think didn't make it through that botched, back-alley procedure that was performed on your client? How many people do you think were maimed or murdered in the name of free procreation?

FEED

COWBOY. What the fuck are you talking about?

KELLER. Why do you think the judge agreed to my request for the incoming FEED on that little girl? Your client has something the state desperately wants.

COWBOY. Yeah, what's that?

KELLER. Information. Names. That kid's a carrot, Cowboy, that's all. But look on the bright side. Viewer ratings are through the roof. We are hot stuff. You might want to take this opportunity to get a decent haircut. Buy a new suit. You know, I'm a sucker for that just rolled out of the sack, disheveled, hungover, who gives a rat's ass style of yours, but the greater FEED viewing public might be just a tad more discriminating.

COWBOY. Is that all this is about for you? Your pathetic fifteen minutes?

KELLER. Fifteen? Oh. You really don't get me. You know that's one of your greatest flaws, Cowboy. Your tragic underestimation of just how far people are willing to go for what they want. For what they believe is rightfully theirs. *(Keller exits. Lights.)*

SCENE 5

Immediately following. An Interrogation room. Sid is sitting at a table. Cowboy enters and opens his laptop.

SID. Thank you.

COWBOY. For what?

SID. The incoming FEED. Agreeing to let me see her.

COWBOY. Against my better judgment.

SID. And asking for visitation.

COWBOY. You know they will never allow that, right? Not in a million years.

SID. But you asked. I thought that it was nice.

COWBOY. It was calculated. Keller came out with both barrels blazing. Launched into his campaign to turn you into the bride of Frankenstein. He wants the villagers to fear you and I just needed to take advantage of

FEED

the opportunity to remind people that you are that little girl's mother.

SID. I see.

COWBOY. Now, Sid, I think it's important that we regroup.

SID. Really? I wasn't aware that we had actually ever really grouped to begin with.

COWBOY. Fair enough. Be that as it may, now I need to know who did this to you.

SID. This? *(Cowboy slides the open laptop in front of Sid.)*

COWBOY. This hack job. As much as it pains me to say it, Sid, I'm in Keller's camp on this one. I have to assume that you could not have done this to yourself.

SID. It's... It's not...

COWBOY. It's not what?

SID. A movement. A conspiracy. As far as I know, it's just me and my daughter.

COWBOY. *And, Sid?* "I do not recognize this assembly." That is what you screamed when they were dragging you into the chamber. Who told you to say that? *(Bailiff appears in the doorway.)*

BAILIFF. Knock knock. *(Cowboy approaches Bailiff.)*

COWBOY. Are you waiting for me to say, who's there?

BAILIFF. No. I just wanted to deliver this. *(Bailiff produces a file and Cowboy snatches it.)*

COWBOY. And this is?

BAILIFF. I can't say.

COWBOY. Well thank you, Bailiff. Ms. Marginski and I greatly appreciate you taking the time to drop this by. You can run along now and we both would like to wish you a lovely day.

BAILIFF. Okay.

COWBOY. Bye-bye now. *(Bailiff exits as Cowboy loads the file into his laptop.)* How was that?

SID. It still needs a little work, but I appreciate the effort.

COWBOY. Shit.

SID. What is it?

COWBOY. Two. They have apprehended two more women. Women like you, who seem to be in the suspicious possession of undocumented

FEED

offspring. *(He places the laptop in front of her.)* Who are these women, Sid?

SID. I— I've never seen them before.

COWBOY. I don't know who you think you're protecting or why, but if you ever want to hold your child again—

SID. I told you I don't know them.

COWBOY. I do not recognize this assembly. Who told you to say that?

SID. There was....

COWBOY. What? There was a what?

SID. A man, Mr. Truman. A doctor. He was the only one I ever saw. The only one I knew. He told me what to say. In case. Just in case. He helped me. Just him.

COWBOY. Helped you? He carved up your insides, Sid, and left you with a chronic, painful reminder. He could have killed you.

SID. But he didn't. He didn't kill me. He put life in me. Can you understand that, Mr. Truman? I don't know how else to say it, but I hope that somehow, on some level you can understand that. He put life inside of me. *(Keller appears in the doorway.)*

KELLER. I hope I'm not interrupting.

COWBOY. Not at all, Keller, come on in.

KELLER. I'm already in.

COWBOY. So you are.

KELLER. *(to Cowboy, overtly sotto voce)* I take it you've heard the latest.

COWBOY. Wow, is that a new tie tack, Keller?

KELLER. Yeah, you like it?

COWBOY. It's shiny.

KELLER. I know.

COWBOY. What do you want?

KELLER. Well first and foremost I wanted to apologize to Ms. Marginski.

COWBOY. For what?

KELLER. For the appalling state of our judicial system. Specifically in the area of public defenders. It seems as though anyone with the ability to drink themselves through law school, and then miraculously awake

FEED

from a blackout on the other side of the bar exam, is somehow qualified to practice law. It doesn't seem right.

COWBOY. You know, Keller, you have taken the fine art of verbal flatulation to a whole new level.

KELLER. Thanks. Good afternoon, Ms. Marginski. I'm Diego Keller. We haven't met formally.

COWBOY. I'm sorry, did I not make the proper introductions?

KELLER. Well, you are known for many things, Cowboy, but good manners didn't quite make the list. So close, but shockingly, no.

COWBOY. What the fuck are you doing here, Keller? *(Keller produces a file from his jacket pocket and hands it to Cowboy.)* You don't waste any time. *(During the following, Cowboy plugs the file into his laptop and reviews the contents.)*

KELLER. Time, cowboy, is by far and away our most precious resource. And so elusive. In one moment seemingly abundant and in the next fleeting. Gone. Completely irretrievable. *(referring to the file)* It's a deal.

COWBOY. I see.

KELLER. A deal, by the way, that is far from exclusive. I can guarantee you as soon as our two new mystery mothers find themselves at this particular fork in the road, they too will be offered this very same deal. And only the earliest of birds will get the worm.

COWBOY. This is good, Sid, it's actually really good.

SID. I don't understand. What do you want from me?

KELLER. A name.

SID. What?

COWBOY. A name, Sid, that's it. The person who did this to you. That's all they want. They are not even requiring that you testify. You never even need to walk back into that chamber. It can be over right now. Done.

SID. This deal. What's in it for me? What do I get?

KELLER. A reduced sentence.

COWBOY. It's a downgrade to a minor charge. Accessory. Maximum three to five years. Probation only. That's no time served.

SID. And my daughter?

FEED

KELLER. She will likely become a ward of the court and eventually placed with a suitable, state sanctioned guardian. After your probation, you might petition for some kind of limited visitation.

SID. But she is mine.

COWBOY. Sid, you need to recognize this for what it is.

KELLER. Can we just cut to the chase? Please. Reuniting you with that little girl would set a dangerous precedent. There is no chance that the Court will ever grant you any type of custody over that child.

SID. My child. My child. (*Sid cringes in pain, her hand on her stomach.*)

KELLER. No, no longer, Ms. Marginski. No. They won't even release her medical file. They won't even give you the peace of mind of letting you know whether she is healthy or not.

SID. My daughter is perfect.

COWBOY. Keller, we will look this over and—

KELLER. Perfect? Really? You never took that child to a physician, did you?

SID. She's fine.

KELLER. That would have been too dangerous.

COWBOY. That's all, Keller.

KELLER. So, why all the sudden come out of hiding? What did you think was wrong with her that made you risk—

SID. Nothing.

COWBOY. (*to Keller*) That's all. We will let you know.

KELLER. Non-specific genetic incongruities. If I'm not mistaken, that was the big red stamp on all your rejected procreation applications.

SID. She's perfect.

KELLER. Ten fingers and ten toes, I'm sure you've counted many times, but God only knows what lies dormant in those pretty, little, incongruent genes you passed along.

COWBOY. That's enough, Keller.

KELLER. Fibromatosis, Hodgkin's disease, cystic fibrosis—

COWBOY. Enough.

SID. There is nothing wrong with her.

KELLER. Well, the court has sealed the records, so we'll never really

FEED

know for sure.

SID. I don't understand.

KELLER. That child was never sanctioned by the state.

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* Look, we need to focus on what's best for you.

KELLER. That child was never coded.

COWBOY. Sid, we have to at least consider.

KELLER. Like she never really existed.

COWBOY. This is a good deal.

SID. No. I'm telling you, Mr. Keller, that I am not giving up on my daughter.

KELLER. And I am telling you, Ms. Marginski, that you know longer have a daughter. *(Sid moves to Keller and slaps him across the face.)*

COWBOY. Sid.

KELLER. That's okay. It's only natural. Predictable. You can't blame the little lady for being human.

COWBOY. *(to Keller)* We will let you know.

KELLER. *(stopping in the doorway before he exits)* By the way, that offer has a shelf life. Tempus fugit. *(his hand on his face)* I suppose tacking on an assault charge now would be moot. *(Keller exits.)*

SID. I shouldn't have done that, I'm sorry. That was so stupid. I'm sorry.

COWBOY. It's okay.

SID. What if he tells them?

COWBOY. He won't. First, of all, he knows that no one would give a rat's ass. And more importantly, he knows that anyone who has ever spent more than two minutes alone with him has wanted to do the same thing. I'm sorry, I should have done it myself a long time ago.

SID. *(cringing in pain)* Ahh.

COWBOY. What is it? Sid?

SID. It's nothing.

COWBOY. I'm going to call someone.

SID. No. I'm fine. *(Cowboy helps Sid to a chair.)* Why does he call you Cowboy?

COWBOY. I don't know.

SID. Maybe it's the gun.

FEED

COWBOY. Maybe.

SID. You know, I read once somewhere that nicknames are usually a sign of affection.

COWBOY. Really?

SID. Cowboy. It's kind of romantic. And lonely.

COWBOY. Yeah, that's me. The last of a dying breed. *(Sid retrieves the file that Keller delivered and holds it out to Cowboy.)*

SID. I'm not giving up on my daughter. Not while there's breath left in my body. Without her there is nothing.

COWBOY. Long as you know that if we go forward it's all or nothing. And that our chances of winning are right next door to hopeless.

SID. Next door to hopeless. Yes, I know the neighborhood, Mr. Truman. I know it well. *(Cowboy takes the file from Sid and exits. Lights.)*

SCENE 6

Immediately following. Keller's office. Keller sits, working as Cowboy enters.

COWBOY. Keller.

KELLER. Hey.

COWBOY. Hey. *(Keller retrieves a bottle, two glasses, and pours.)* I've never known you to drink on the job.

KELLER. When have you ever known me to not be on the job, Cowboy? *(Keller hands Cowboy a glass.)*

COWBOY. You know, it has been brought to my attention that nicknames are generally considered to be a sign of affection.

KELLER. Really?

COWBOY. Yes. Apparently, they are. Immature perhaps. Awkward stabs at tenderness. You know, like on a playground when one little kid punches another little kid in the arm and neither one really understands why. Misplaced affection.

KELLER. You mean, like removing someone's teeth with the butt of your revolver?

FEED

COWBOY. Yes, well, that's my client's theory on the subject anyway.

KELLER. Fascinating.

COWBOY. I thought so.

KELLER. She's a firecracker.

COWBOY. Yeah, she's got it all. Thoughtful, pretty, and a killer right hook.

KELLER. Like I said, I can't prosecute the little lady for being human.

COWBOY. Really? But what if that's her only crime? Being human. What if she's just a woman who wanted a child? And now she's simply fighting with everything she has to hold on to what is biologically hers.

KELLER. You're forgetting the most important part. The how, Cowboy, this is not a custody case anymore it's a conspiracy case.

COWBOY. That's what you say it is, but maybe it's really about something far simpler than that. Something inherent. Inescapable. Something that's in all of us. As a collective. A connection. Our desire to belong.

KELLER. Please, you are the last person to lecture anyone about belonging. You're only meaningful connections are to cheap whisky and a broken down, antique pistol.

COWBOY. I don't mean just here and now, but forever.

KELLER. Oh, good Lord. For the sake of everyone involved, please tell me you are not planning to go back into that chamber and bludgeon us all with philosophy.

COWBOY. You don't know. People may think that—

KELLER. No. No, they will not think. They don't want to think. They want to feel. You want to save that woman, you need to make them laugh, or cry, or better yet, you need to make them so afraid they shit their pants. Or, best of all, you find some way to grab them by their tingly bits and squeeze just hard enough to keep them squirming on that exquisitely addictive line between pleasure and pain. That is what they really want.

COWBOY. Is it the gun, Keller? Is that why you call me Cowboy?

KELLER. Partly that and partly because of your tragically transparent attempt to pass yourself off as some kind of a loner. And partly because, for some baffling reason, people, almost all, without fail, seem to find

FEED

your old-fashioned, overblown, and over-compensating bravado irresistibly charming. In spite of your overpowering odor. (*Cowboy steps in very close to Keller.*)

KELLER. What are you doing? (*Cowboy reaches into his pocket and pulls out the file containing the deal. He holds the file up for Keller to see, before slowly reaching down and slipping it into Keller's pocket.*)

COWBOY. She says no.

KELLER. That's right. I almost forgot we're still working.

COWBOY. Always. (*Cowboy downs his drink and starts out.*)

KELLER. You need to change her mind, Cowboy. You need to help her take responsibility. Convince her that it's the right thing to do. That's all that is left for her now. You can't save her. You can't save them.

COWBOY. We'll see.

KELLER. You need to accept the fact that some people can't be saved. Some people shouldn't be saved. (*Bailiff enters.*)

BAILIFF. Excuse me, but—

COWBOY. And you, Keller? You need to reexamine the very real, very crucial, and very titanic semantic chasm that exists between prosecution and persecution.

KELLER. Thanks, I'll take a look.

BAILIFF. The judge says—

COWBOY. Look, I might be able to get her to bend, but we need more on the table.

KELLER. She is never going have custody of that child again. Not ever. You know that. The state will never allow it.

COWBOY. It's not over yet.

KELLER. And more to the point, when I am done, the people will never allow it.

COWBOY. Because you put a target on her back.

BAILIFF. Please, if I could—

KELLER. She chose. And there is a price to be paid. You think that the people are going to let her destroy what has taken decades of sacrifice to create because she wanted a child?

COWBOY. We've had death threats, Keller. You made her the enemy.

KELLER. She made herself the enemy.

FEED

COWBOY. Please, Keller, spare me the—

KELLER. No. No, counselor, you spare us. We live in a compromised sliver of a world ravaged by our blessed forefathers. We clawed our way through more than just a dark age. We survived the midnight hour. Complete blackness. Pitch. We clung to the devoured, rotting, war-torn shell of what used to be a majestic, glowing, blue and emerald sphere. Then, in a moment of panic-driven desperation, we plunged a poison dagger into the deepest part of ourselves and we cut out the very essence of our nature so that humanity might be spared. And in those barren fields we sowed a new hope. We tended a select and delicate crop. We harvested, with great care. We produced more than just a new civilization. A new world. Free. Free of war, free of hunger, free of disease—

COWBOY. Free of will.

KELLER. Yes. Will. The great sacrifice. Human nature. The seed. One seed with the astonishing power to produce two diametrically opposed yields. Two. Creation and destruction. I say the price is too high. I say that the glory of one is not worth the horror of the other. So, counselor, feel free to go in there and argue for your client's God-given right to be fruitful and multiply. To choose. One child, two, four, ten. Pound your fists on the table and raise your voice in advocational fury at the injustice done to her. But I feel it only fair to warn you that we the people will not sit apathetically by this time and quietly but woefully pick up the tab. We will not feed their starving children. We will not heal their self-inflicted wounds. We will not pull their discarded tiny corpses from overflowing trash bins. We will not lay them neatly to rest in sweeping green fields littered with gleaming white headstones. We will not go back. The people will say no. We will say damn her. We will say God damn her to hell before we do that.

COWBOY. Jesus Christ, Keller. What happened to breviloquence?

KELLER. Fuck you.

COWBOY. Ah, there it is. See you are capable.

BAILIFF. If I could—

COWBOY. *(to Bailiff)* What is it?

BAILIFF. The judge. She's calling for you both. *(Bailiff exits.)*

FEED

SCENE 7

Immediately following. The Chamber. Lights. Sound. The FEED is on. Cowboy, Keller, Sid, Justice, and Bailiff are present. Projection: 7053.

SID. *(regarding the screen)* Where is she?

JUSTICE. Mr. Truman, the court will not tolerate your client's disruption.

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* Please try to stay calm.

SID. I want to see my daughter. Where is the FEED? She said—

COWBOY. Please. Let me handle this. Your honor, we were not afforded an opportunity to carefully review, or reconsider rather, the very generous offer that was made.

SID. I have a right to know that she's okay.

JUSTICE. That offer has been rescinded. We were supplied with the name of a certain party, Mr. Truman, and he in turn supplied us with a wealth of information. Ample.

COWBOY. But—

JUSTICE. Including the name of your client. Therefore, Mr. Truman, I suggest you move quickly and with due diligence to plan B.

SID. Where is my—

COWBOY. *(to Sid)* Please, let me just—

SID. No. I want to see my daughter. I need to see her. I have a right.

JUSTICE. Your rights at this moment, Ms. Marginski, are few. A fair and speedy hearing happens to be what we are focusing our energy on at present. And in that regard, and in light of this new information, it is the state's decision to move swiftly forward with the amended charges.

SID. I want to see her.

JUSTICE. Specifically, the charge of conspiracy with the intent to commit crimes against humanity.

SID. Where is she?

JUSTICE. First thing tomorrow morning, gentlemen, we will, at long

FEED

last, commence with opening statements in this case.

SID. Where is my daughter?

JUSTICE. Ms. Marginski—

SID. I do not recognize this assembly.

JUSTICE. Noted. Both you, Mr. Truman, and you, Mr. Keller, will be given access to the complete statements that were freely supplied by the new defendants. I expect you both to be up to speed and ready to present—

SID. I want to see my daughter.

JUSTICE. Please inform your client, Mr. Truman, that I will have her removed from the chamber if she cannot conduct herself—

SID. *(moving toward Justice)* I want to see her.

JUSTICE. No. Sit down, Ms. Marginski.

COWBOY. Sid. Please.

SID. *(to Keller)* You fucker. What have you done with her? *(Sid stares at Keller. When he looks away, she flies at him.)* You have no right. Where is she? Where is my daughter? *(Sid continues to scream. Bailiff moves in and pulls her off Keller, but she continues to struggle.)*

COWBOY. Sid, that's enough. Sid.

SID. This is bullshit. I do not recognize— I don't. *(Eventually Bailiff wrestles Sid to the floor where she continues to thrash and scream.)* This is not justice. I want / my child. Mine. You can't keep me from—

COWBOY. Sid. Stop it. That's enough. Enough! *(Sid is finally still and quiet. She struggles to catch her breath.)* You're okay. *(to Bailiff)* It's fine. She's fine now. *(Cowboy moves down next to Sid.)* It's okay. It's fine. I've got her. She's good. You can let her go. *(Bailiff looks up. Justice nods and he releases Sid. As soon as Sid is free she grabs Cowboy and clings to him.)*

SID. They have no / right.

COWBOY. Right. I know. *(Bailiff moves back to his position.)* Come on. Let's go have a seat. *(Cowboy slowly begins to lift SID from the floor.)* Trust me. *(Sid reaches into Cowboy's jacket, grabs his gun from the holster, pushes him off, backs up and brandishes the weapon.)* Sid,

FEED

what are doing?

SID. No.

JUSTICE. Bailiff?

BAILIFF. I checked the gun myself this morning, your honor.

JUSTICE. Mr. Truman, please inform your client—

SID. I want to see. *(Sid points the gun at Justice. Bailiff begins to move, but Justice holds out a hand to stop him. Justice motions and projection: the incoming FEED shows the same clinical setting where the child was seen earlier. The room is now vacant.)* Injustice! *(Justice motions again and the incoming FEED is cut. Projection: 7053. Sid stares at the screen.)*

COWBOY. Sid....

JUSTICE. Bailiff. *(Bailiff moves toward Sid, but Cowboy stops him)*

COWBOY. Wait. *(Bailiff stops and Cowboy looks to Justice.)*

JUSTICE. Let me guess, Mr. Truman. Time?

COWBOY. Please.

JUSTICE. We will clear the chamber for two minutes while Mr. Truman corrals his client. *(Justice motions and the FEED lights dim. Bailiff exits.)*

KELLER. *(an aside to Cowboy as he passes)* You're a real crackerjack you know that, Cowboy. *(Keller exits. Justice holds up two fingers to Cowboy and then exits.)*

COWBOY. What do we do now, Sid?

SID. She's gone. *(Sid slowly turns the gun. Her thumb is now on the trigger, and she is staring down the barrel. The FEED lights glow a bit brighter.)*

COWBOY. Sid....

SID. That morning. The morning that they picked us up it was so warm outside. I woke up and she was crying. Her head was hurting she said. The weather had been so hot. For spring. Unbearable. We didn't go out often and never to places where people would need information. Not to a doctor. Not a real one. Not ever. I couldn't. But that morning— She started crying. I had never seen her so upset. I was just so fucking scared. What if? What if something was really wrong? We never even made it to a doctor. They grabbed us. It was so fast it— And I never

FEED

knew. They never told me. If she's okay.

COWBOY. Sid, you can't give up.

SID. There's nothing without her. What would I be giving up on?

COWBOY. Me. You put your faith in me, remember? Please. Don't give up on me. *(Sid places the gun on the floor.)* We are going to fight. But not with this. *(Cowboy retrieves the gun, opens it, and shows Sid the empty chambers.)*

SID. Why? If it's not loaded, why didn't you just take it?

COWBOY. I knew I didn't need to. I know how much you love her. Your child. How hard you'll fight. Your willingness to sacrifice everything. Your life for her wellbeing. I knew all of that. I just wanted them to see.

SID. But there's no one watching.

COWBOY. Someone's watching, Sid. Someone is always watching. *(The FEED lights and sound grow to their full intensity. Justice stands watching.)* Always.

SID. Oh, God. Please. Please make them stop.

COWBOY. *(to Justice)* That's enough now. Stop it.

SID. Make it stop. Please. Please. Please.

COWBOY. I said enough.

SID. Make them stop.

COWBOY. I said now. For the love of God. Stop the FEED. *(Justice motions. Blackout.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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