SIDES

A Play in One Act

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(The stage consists of a long counter positioned UL and running DL. It divides the room in two, with two thirds of the stage open SR, and one third of the stage L outfitted with a desk and chair. UR is a cork board with notice posted on it, including an FBI "Wanted" poster and two chairs positioned under it along the upstage wall. It is as dismal a bureaucratic setting as one will find. A sign reads "Bureau of Elections.")

n, Bud, Deputy papers lies the

(Two down at the heels reporters, Jerzy and Bill, 20s, huddle UR. A man 60s, stands at the counter, leaning on one elbow, facing the audience. A Sheriff's guards the door SR. Mary, 60s, enters and approaches the counter. She sets some down on it. Bill approaches, gives her a smile, and they exchange words. Bill study papers for a moment, and returns to Jerzy.)
JERZY
Any word yet?
BILL
No Well, Podunk County is in.
JERZY
Oh God. How did they find the courthouse?
BILL
The head poll worker has a directional in his toe.
JERZY
What about socks and shoes?
BILL
They don't
ВОТН
wear socks and shoes.
JERZY

Walked into that one. How did the good people of Podunk vote?

I don't think I want to tell you.
JERZY
That reply tells me all I need to know.
BILL
Well, you know, they always vote for the incumbent.
JERZY
They figure a new name doesn't belong to anyone they're related to. (<i>Mutters</i>) Dumb country fucks. They don't know what the fuck they are.
BILL
Ha ha. Right.
JERZY
Go ask her what the polling data says.
BILL
Are you kidding? Polling? In this county?
JERZY
Go ask her if she knows anything.
BILL
You go ask her.
JERZY
She hasn't been nice to me lately. Since I tried to take away her patronage job.
BILL
Yeah, that'll do it.

BILL

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JERZY

Let me ask you something, sir. You live at the courthouse. Who do you think is gonna win tonight?

BUD

The snot-nose reporter from out of town who doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground.

JERZY

Out of town. Like that has anything to do with anything. And at least I don't sit around the courthouse all day long eating doughnuts.

(Bill laughs at this.)

BUD

I've earned the right to eat doughnuts. I worked my whole life. You make minimum wage working for that crappy newspaper.

(This quiets Jerzy momentarily.)

BILL

He's got you there, Jerzy. It is a crappy paper.

JERZY

So what did you do to make ...

BILL

Don't ...

JERZY

... ends meet? At least before you retired prematurely.

BUD

I was a federal marshal for thirty years. I guarded the federal courthouse so psychos couldn't get in.

JERZY

Yeah. God forbid people have a right to know. (Bill approaches the counter as Mary places some more papers down. The two chat briefly, and they laugh.) Or have business there.

BUD

Go stand over there. (He points toward the door SR.)

JERZY

Maybe they were coming in to eat doughnuts. You ever think of that?

BUD

Do you think those stories you wrote are gonna make any difference? An endorsement from your paper is like the kiss of death.

JERZY

Tell me again what a marshal does, because I'm not sure. Did you ever kill any of those dangerous non-violent offenders?

BUD

Shut up. (*He turns away*.)

JERZY

That's clever. Ignoring you now. (Jerzy *returns to the spot he had staked out with* Bill.)

BUD

I can buy and sell you.

JERZY

Old fart.
(Bill rejoins Jerzy at their original spot.)
What's the score?
BILL
Bodean, Hooterville and
JERZY
Bumfuck?
BILL
(In mock amazement.) How did you know? Anyway, they're in.
JERZY
And? How did the great unshod vote?
BILL
I'd start readying my concession speech.
JERZY
You mean if I were Nelson?
BILL
No, if I were you.
JERZY
Oh, man. Don't say that.
BILL
I'm kidding, dude. It's too close, too early.
JERZY
My brain is shot. I've been on this election for weeks. I couldn't sleep last night.

(Enter from SR David Cohen, 20s, handsome, wearing a business suit with a "Nelson for Congress" button, and Madison, a young, attractive female, dressed smartly, with the same campaign button. David stops at the door and flips out a crisp bill for the Sheriff's Deputy, who pockets it.)

DAVID

(Inhales emphatically) I love the smell of election night adrenaline. Smells like two more years. (He strides over to Bud and flips out another bill from his money clip. Bud doesn't take the bill, but rather continues to hold his hand out, not looking at David. Bud is reading the election returns.) Oops. Forgot. (David takes out another bill, and Bud grabs the money without looking.)

(David approaches the counter and tosses three crisp bills into the air. They flutter to the floor on Mary's side of the counter.) Two more years of good governance. Two more years of the right people being in power. (Mary scrambles around her desk, as fast as she can, and eagerly gathers the bills from the floor.) But wait! The perfume of victory is polluted by the rank effluvia of professional failure!

(David turns to Jerzy and Bill, who stare at Madison, mouths agape. Madison refuses to acknowledge them.) You're staring at my appurtenance. Dream on, witless scribes.

JERZY

David, my old friend. I'm surprised to see you here. One can't help but wonder how a fifteenth-rate staffer like you ended up in a rural dung heap like this.

MARY

Hey!

JERZY

Sorry, Mary ... In a crucial part of the district like this one. Did you do something wrong?

BILL

(Aside, to Jerzy) Be cool.

JERZY

He's the one who has to be cool. I can write down whatever he says and does.

All you're going to be writing is Mr. Nelson's victory speech. You're just a typist. That's all you are. (Mary exits SL. Bud takes his cell phone out of his jacket and crosses SR. He stops to say something to the Deputy still stationed at the door. They point at Jerzy and laugh. When Jerzy turns to look at them, they clam up. Jerzy wants to speak, but the Deputy fixes him with a menacing stare.)

DEPUTY

(Aggressively) What?

(David and Madison approach the counter. David begins going through election returns.)

JERZY

Gee, Bill, do you think he's upset about that story I wrote on his boss? (*Pause*) So, what are the actual returns?

BILL

Maybe I better call Kelly and see. Hard to tell with just the countrified precincts in. Does it seem like nobody's moving out to the country anymore?

JERZY

Yeah.

BILL

They city's enjoying a renaissance. (He laughs at this, as if he has just created an inside joke.)

JERZY

Yeah, they're trying to herd us all into ghettos so they can exterminate us.

BILL

(He is laughing somewhat more loudly at this.) What?

JERZY

No, no ... think about it. You destroy the economy, jack up gas prices, tank home prices. Get everyone at each other's throats ... It's a bloodsport.

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You're crazy. I really hope this election turns out your way.

JERZY

What way? I don't have a way. I am an objective reporter. Are you drunk?

BILL

It's election night.

JERZY

Well, be careful man. There's a county oinker right over there.

BILL

Right. I can get away with it. I'll just blame you.

JERZY

Sorry, I'm an enabler.

BILL

I know. That's one of the things I love about you, man.

(Jerzy nods, happily, and heads over to David and Madison at the counter.)

JERZY

David old friend! Got a question for you. (To Madison) Hey, how ya doin? (Madison pointedly turns her head and moves away from Jerzy, who follows her as she circles David to get away from him, turning her head so as not to directly look at him.) Hey, come on. No hard feelings.

MADISON

David, make him stop.

DAVID

See here, ink stained wretch. The lady is trying not to acknowledge your existence.

(Jerzy stops circling. So does Madison.) Sorry, babe. You too, whatever your name is, miss. (Bill, who has been watching this with amusement, extracts a cigarette pack from his shirt pocket and exits SR.)

DEPUTY

Everything OK over there?

JERZY

Yeah, we're just having some trouble throwing an 80 year old widow out of her house. (The Deputy *starts over*.) Um, OK, kidding. We're just having a little fun. (The Deputy *returns to his station*.) No, you see ... my colleague and I were having an argument about whether the mass migration of our population back to the cities is the result of some vast government conspiracy to tear us apart from within.

DAVID

And *I* say he's a paranoid loon.

JERZY

Freedom of speech.

DAVID

Constitutional republic. (Madison *looks at* David *and gives him a mock yawn, complete with a delicate patting of her mouth.*) Madison, go give our friend there a little treat, will you? (He *peels a bill from his money clip and hands it to* Madison. *She crosses R to the* Deputy *and hands him the bill, which he pockets.* Madison *then exits SR.*) The day I think of you as a colleague is the day I seek out a new career path.

JERZY

Actually, I was being generous. The only way I look at a politician is down. You think you can hurt me with that grandstanding? I got you. Your boss is going down. Tonight.

DAVID

You know, I was getting my hair cut in D.C. once ...

JERZY

Is this going to be a long story? Because I really don't have time.

DAVID

and a White House correspondent, famous at the time, came in and said he was
going to get the president. I thought, what cojones, to go after a sitting president. But you
know what? He didn't get the president, and you didn't get Nelson. Nelson's an
honorable man.

JERZY

Sure, when the devil's tapping you on the shoulder you'll think ...

DAVID

Do you even know what you're talking about?

JERZY

He took money.

DAVID

It was for the common good.

JERZY

It's a crime.

DAVID

Not if a congressman does it.

JERZY

Could you just be a little more of a tool, please?

DAVID

You're above it all, eh? You and that dinky little paper that no one reads ... here: (David holds up a bill from his money clip and gestures for Jerzy to take it. David sniffs the bill, as if to demonstrate its tempting potential.) buy a new pair of baggy pants.

(Jerzy takes the money and crosses R to exit.)

Ahh, see! You took money!

JERZY

No I didn't. And leave my pants out of this. (*To the* Deputy) Do you have a match or a lighter? (The Deputy *glares at him.*) Of course not ... what would you be doing with a match or a li ... (Bill *and* Madison *enter from SR*) What were you doing?

BILL

Smoking a cig. (Madison *crosses L to* David, *avoiding eye contact with* Jerzy.)

JERZY

Good, lemme see your lighter.

BILL

OK (He passes Jerzy his cheap plastic lighter. Jerzy ignites it and holds it under the bill. David runs over in a panic.)

DAVID

No!

DEPUTY

Hey! You can't light currency in here, sir.

DAVID

That's taxpayer money!

BILL

Dude ...

(Jerzy relents.)

JERZY

Maybe it would help you accept it if I were in the act of (*To the* Deputy) evicting an old lady or (*To* David) taking a bribe.

DAVID

You are so getting sued for that shit article.

JERZY

It was a series, and not if it's the truth. Hey – destroying money is supposed to be a federal offense, even though the feds have devalued it to the point where it is ... well, shit.

DAVID

Blah, blah, blah ...

JERZY

Yeah, blah, ... but let's get a legal expert in here. Someone like, I don't know ... a retired federal marshal.

BUD

(*Entering SR*) Somebody call me?

JERZY

Yes, I did. Tell me – in all your vast experience of running a metal detector and harassing people who don't – in your opinion – stand up fast enough for the judge, what section of the United States Code am I violating if I burn this money? (*He holds up the bill again and ignites the lighter underneath it to demonstrate.*)

BUD

The useless reporter's act of 1972. Also the a computer took my job act, subsection kiss my ass. (*He crosses L to the counter*.)

(Mary enters from SL and places a few sheets of paper on the counter, fanning them out. Jerzy, Bill and David look at one another, then Jerzy and David sprint for the counter. Bill takes his time. The Deputy manages to snatch the bill out of Jerzy's hand before Jerzy crosses, and he pockets it. They almost trample Bud in the process, but now he too lunges quickly for the counter. David is first to the counter, and he grabs all the papers. He reads quickly, carefully, as Jerzy and Bill read over his shoulder. Bud also sneaks in front of David and tries to see. David triumphantly throws the papers in the air and crosses quickly SR, dialing a cell phone as he goes. Bud and Jerzy scramble for the pages scattered on the floor.)

DAVID

Yes!

(Reading) No ... this ... can't be.

(Bud races around the counter, grabs Mary and starts dancing her around the desk.)

MARY

Oh my goodness!

DAVID

You move pretty fast for an old guy, Bud.

BUD

Thank you sir. (They stop dancing. Mary fans herself.)

JERZY

(To Bill) I have to leave. Old people are dancing.

(Bud stops dancing, and returns to the counter to read the election returns.)

DAVID

This wouldn't be personal to you, would it? I mean, our guy pulls ahead by five points and you run off with your underfed tail between your legs.

JERZY

I have to call my editor. And leave my tail – and my legs – out of this. I swear you've been watching my ass all night, Cohen.

DAVID

Is that how your feeble mind works?

BILL

Hey! You know how this game is played.

What game? I BILL
Leave personalities out of it.
DAVID
He started it
BILL
And don't threaten to sue him.
DAVID
It's not a threat, William.
BILL
You would have already
DAVID
It's injury to reputation.
BILL
Where's the injury to reputation? Nelson's ahead by five points.
JERZY
Yeah
DEPUTY
(Approaches) Take it outside.
JERZY
I'm just asking David here if he has an axe to grind against me.
DAVID
Anything that

BILL
Can we just get past this?
DEPUTY
Outside.
DAVID
hurts my boss hurts me.
JERZY
What? He's not even your boss. You're just
DAVID
I'm campaign staff.
JERZY
praying he'll give you a job
DAVID
I have a job
JERZY
or a reference for law school.
DEPUTY
OK. (He grabs Jerzy by the shoulder and points him toward the door SR.)
JERZY
All right!
BILL
Go call Kelly. See what he wants to do.
(The Deputy begins to walk Jerzy out.)

JERZY	7
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(Shakes loose) All right I said! Get your fucking hands off me!
MARY
Oh my!
DEPUTY
That's it!
DAVID
You can't curse in here. This is the Board of Elections.
MARY
Evict him.
DAVID
With extreme prejudice.
JERZY
Yeah, evict me, Deputy Dan. That's what you do bes
(The Deputy grabs Jerzy by the neck and forces him toward the door SR. Jerzy slams into it, but stays upright, trying to grab onto something for balance and to remain dignified.)
JERZY
(Composing himself) Wow, you just pushed me around like I was a grandma at the airport.
DEPUTY
Come on. (He grabs Jerzy by the neck and opens the door, forcing him out. The Deputy follows.)
JERZY (O.S.)

Don't you have to be inside to make sure the votes are miscounted?

MADISON
What is wrong with him?
BILL
Who, Jerzy?
(Mary exits SL, fanning herself.)
MADISON
Obviously.
BILL
He's just a bit tense.
MADISON
I'll say.
BILL
It's his busy season.
DAVID
Yeah, for sedition. You know, he could have thrown the whole United States Congress out of balance.
BILL
So he shouldn't have filed the story?
DAVID
Until after. Or even then or maybe even checked his sources.
BILL
Would that have made a difference?

DAVID

	Yes, because	se after the	election	everybody'	s antennae	come	down	and	the	story
runs its	s course thro	ugh the nor	mal news	s cycle, and l	by the time	Nelso	n's up	for re	eelec	ction,
people	have forgott	ten about it.								

BILL

That's one way to silence political dissent that isn't on the books.

DAVID

I'm getting fed up with that angry young man act too.

BILL

I'll talk to him. There's only so much I can do. He's very stubborn.

DAVID

I know. I know you're just trying to do your job and protect him. But jeez ...

BILL

I'll see what I can do.

(David pulls out his money clip and extracts a bill, then another. Bill reluctantly takes them.)

BILL

How do you live with yourself?

DAVID

Same way you will.

MADISON

You get used to it.

DAVID

As the voice of reason in this particular journalistic catastrophe, you need to tell Edward R. Murrow to clear all stories with our office.

BILL
That sounds like a recurring task
DAVID
We have unlimited resources.
BILL
worthy of a recurring stipend.
DAVID
You're one of us now.
BUD
I don't like the way some of these precincts are coming in.
DAVID
What?
BUD
We're trailing on the west side.
DAVID
What
BUD
We're trailing on
DAVID
That area is a bastion of white heathen Nelsonhood.
BUD
Take a look. (<i>He hands</i> David <i>a sheet</i> .)

(He snaps the paper away from Bud and gives it a cursory glance.) Not good.	
BILL	
But you're winning. Where is all your support coming from?	
MADISON	
White heathens.	
DAVID	
I could tell you, but then I'd have to discredit you	
BILL	
Don't	
DAVID	
Publicly	
BILL	
worry about me.	
DAVID	
and then disavow all knowledge.	
BILL	
I'm part of the <i>team</i> .	
MADISON	
I don't care what happens, as long as I don't have to look at him or listen to him	l.
DAVID	
Madison here dislikes bourgeoisie scum.	

BILL
You're in the middle of a cornfield, babe.
MADISON
After tonight, I am on the first plane to D.C.
BILL
That's a long way from Podunk County.
DAVID
All politics are local. <i>Is</i> local? Is that a singular or plural? I can never remember that. Anyway, I'm just happy to bring it back to the people.
MADISON
Now I'm nauseous.
BILL
Me too, dude.
DAVID
Why don't you go burn one, my dear? I hear that helps.
MADISON
(<i>Mocking him</i>) Capital idea, my dear. Come, William, let us retire to the delicious fire escape so that we may partake of one, uninterrupted. (<i>She begins to cross R to exit.</i>)
BILL
What she said. (He joins her.) Perks. (They exit SR.)
DAVID

BUD

She gets to have fun and you don't. Doesn't seem fair, does it?

That leaves just you and me, Bud.

DAVID

DAVID
Let me tell you what my tasks are here, Bud. I am a surety. I am the guarantor of continuity and comportment.
BUD
Hey, when is Congress gonna allocate some more money for the roads around here?
DAVID
It's been submitted for feasibility study. We expect a conclusion in six months. And technically, Congress doesn't
BUD
When are they supposed to vote on appropriations?
DAVID
It's in committee.
BUD
Reform?
DAVID
Committee.
BUD
Regulation?
DAVID
Committee.
BUD
Resolution?

(Committee. BUD
I	t's good to know Mr. Nelson is working hard for the district.
	DAVID
Ŋ	You keep securing the vote, Bud, and we'll keep working.
	BUD
Ŋ	You're a good man, David.
	DAVID
	Have a cookie. (David holds out a bill and dangles it over Bud's head, at the end tstretched arm. Bud reaches up, snatches and pockets the bill.)
(Mary enters from SL, and sits at her desk.)
	BUD
A	Anything new back there, Mary?
	MARY
1	Nope
	BUD
V	What's wrong?
	MARY
(Oh, it's that damn phone. People wanting to know who's winning.
	DAVID
I	Oon't answer it.
	MARY
V	We have to. Some of it's press, and with both parties watching
	DAVID

You have to perpetuate the illusion of democracy. MARY
Something like that, yes.
BUD
Look at it this way. If you didn't answer the phone and tell them what they wanna know, you'd have a hundred Jerzys down here.
DAVID
No, you can't duplicate him.
(Jerzy enters from SR, limping, slightly doubled over, and holding a can of soda over his right eye. The Deputy enters behind him, amused.)
DAVID (Cont.)
Hey Jerzy. How's <i>your</i> election night going? Did you get beat up or something?
JERZY
Did any other results come in?
BUD MARY
No!
JERZY
Where's Bill?
DAVID
He is outside, feeding the beast.
JERZY
What?
DAVID
You write for a newspaper and you've never heard the expression "feeding the beast?"

JERZY
No.
DAVID
Every entity has certain core needs that have to be satisfied, or it ceases to exist We in the outside world call these needs "the beast." Your newspaper has a certain number of useless, pointless column inches to fill
JERZY
Oh, I get it, I get it
DAVID
or it comes out blank.
JERZY
feeding the beast.
BUD
In the case of your newspaper, blank would be an improvement.
JERZY
I didn't know safety forces could read. (To Deputy) No offense, Deputy Brutality.
BUD
I can read my paycheck. And I know it's bigger than yours.
JERZY
It's a pension check at this point, isn't it? I have to pay taxes so bums like you car retire. But don't worry – I'm happy to do it. You know, I couldn't even imagine you it you weren't sucking on the government sugar tit.
DEPUTY

Watch it!

MARY
He's so offensive (She exits SL)
DAVID
Look around, you idiot. Everybody in this room works for the government.
(Madison and Bill enter from SR)
JERZY
Not anymore.
DAVID
I have nothing more to say to you.
BUD
How'd you like to be wearing that pop on your face?
JERZY
Go to hell, old man. I'll kick your walker out and stomp on your head.
(Bud and Deputy approach Jerzy)
BUD
(Sarcastically) I'm scared.
BILL
Hey, what's going on?
JERZY
They're gonna cuff me and beat me up, and then charge me with disorderly conduct. Again.

BUD

Just get out.

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J	E	$\mathbf{\Gamma}$	L	1

I have a right to be here.

BUD

Deputy Dan, this looks like one of those enemy combatants to me. What about you?

DEPUTY

He's on the list.

JERZY

Again, I didn't know safety forces could read.

(Bud and the Deputy each place a hand on Jerzy's shoulders and begin to lead him out R. Mary enters SL holding a sheaf of papers. She places the paper on the counter. David, Bud, Bill and Jerzy all hesitate for a moment, then collectively break frantically for the counter. Madison watches in amusement, then begins texting on her phone. Jerzy is held back by the Deputy, however, and then is forced to the ground. His can of soda goes skittering away, spraying foam. Jerzy tries to crawl across the floor, arms outstretched and grasping air, but the Deputy holds him in place with a boot in his back.)

JERZY (Cont.)

Let me go!

DEPUTY

That's it - I'm taking you to the woodshed.

JERZY

Where are we, Mayberry? Oh wait, we are.

(*The* Deputy *forces* Jerzy *to his feet and begins to lead him out SR.*)

JERZY (Cont.)

I have a right to be here! What about the little guy? Doesn't anyone care about the little guy? About real people ...

DEPUTY

which he hits, recoiling back.) Oops! (The

Solut up! (He pushes Jerzy into the door, which he hits, recoiling be Deputy opens the door and forces Jerzy out SR, following behind.)	а
DAVID	
I don't believe this! How could we be down?	
BUD	
They have more votes than we do.	
DAVID	
Well, yes, I know that, but	
BILL	
Wait do I still get paid?	
DAVID	
how	

BILL

... because, you know, if Nelson loses ...

BUD

Stop talking nonsense.

DAVID

... could this be happening?

MADISON

David, can we go to the after party now?

DAVID

(Ignoring Madison, as she begins texting through the following dialogue.) Something's not right. We own these precincts. Christ, we own the company that counts the votes.

BILL	

You? I thought we de-briefed you. Don't be getting all journalistic on me like your goofy friend.

DAVID

BUD

Mary, what's going on back there?

MARY

How should I know? I just vote and answer the telephone.

BILL

Sometimes you bring the results out.

MARY

Oh, hush!

Excuse me?

DAVID

How much of the vote is counted?

BUD

Almost two-thirds.

DAVID

And we're down what ... six points? Not insurmountable.

BILL

What about the margin of error?

DAVID

This isn't polling data. This is the real thing. Where are we trailing?

	BUD
	Just the city, the suburbs and the country.
	DAVID
	How could that be? We were ahead!
	BILL
	The word on the street is that no one likes Nelson anymore.
	DAVID
	But why? He is a great man. He always votes with the party
	BILL
	Do I still get paid?
	DAVID
	I must call my people Mary, I trust your people are working on this.
	MARY
speak.	The director has calls in to the other counties. They're working on this as we
	DAVID
	Fix this.
	BILL
	Wow.
	DAVID
	What?
	BILL
	You can really do this?

DAVID
Do what?
BILL
Re-interpret the vote.
DAVID
It's above my pay grade to order a re-interpretation of the vote; well, everything's above my pay grade, but in cases of system malfunction the machines should default to incumbency.
BILL
Wow, this is really exciting.
BUD
You're an insider now, kid.
BILL
How do I write this one up?
DAVID
"Nelson Wins See-Saw Battle."
BILL
I like it.
DAVID
It does have a certain dramatic flair.
BUD
I would read that article.
DAVID
Well, I was a (He finally notices Madison) Excuse me. Honey, what are you doing?

	MADISON
I	'm texting.
	DAVID
A	Anyone I know?
	MADISON
the texting	Oh, me and the other wives are just having a gabfest. It's the Tupperware party of age.
	DAVID
V	Vould you mind? It's an emergency.
	MADISON
(Texts a few more seconds and then puts the phone away) What is it?
	DAVID
N	No no, we need your phone. Get it out. (As she hesitates) Get it out! Get it out!
	MADISON
(David <i>h</i> cleavage	As she fishes the phone out of her smart purse.) I don't respond well to orders, nolds up a bill from his money clip, and she takes it and tucks it away in here, with flourishes, as Bill, Bud, David and even Mary stare in stunned silence.) nat's so fucking important?
	DAVID
I	need you to tweet something.
	MADISON
V	Vhat?
	DAVID
Т	That Nelson is ahead and is the projected winner.
	MADISON

My followers depend on me for the truth. Is that accurate?
DAVID
I think you know the answer to that.
BILL
Damn
BUD
You see? You newspapermen are obsolete.
BILL
Good thing old people still read us.
DAVID
OK, everybody out! (<i>He motions</i> Bill, Bud <i>and</i> Madison <i>toward the door</i> .) I want her to send a clear and unambiguous transmission.
MADISON
The reception in here is fine.
MARY
The county owns an acre of land five hundred feet away for a cell tower.
BUD
Really?
MARY
It brings money in
DAVID
Out
MARY

... and we can record phone calls. **DAVID** (Motioning) Out, out, out! (Reluctantly, they begin filing out SR; Madison, then Bill, Bud and David, who grandly bows out of the room.) **MARY** I like him. (Mary folds and throws a simple paper airplane toward the door SR.) (Jerzy enters from SR, in worse shape than before. He is bleeding from his nose and the corner of his mouth, and his right eye appears swollen. He takes a seat on the bench below the cork board.) **JERZY** I need something. Could you get me a paper towel? **MARY** I can't. I'm on my break. **JERZY** Come on ... **MARY** The guy who usually does that isn't here right now. **JERZY** Boy, you county employees really stick together, don't you?

MARY

JERZY

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

I mean your deputy just beat the ... if you'll pardon my language ... the crap out of me, and you won't even get me a paper towel.

MARY

Those come out of our budget. I can't just give those to anyone who walks in. We're on a tight budget.

JERZY

But you know me ...

MARY

Yes, I do.

(Jerzy manages to rise from the chair and cross to the counter, where he begins rifling through the papers which Mary has rearranged.)

MARY (Cont.)

(With severity) What are you doing?

JERZY

I'm reading the returns.

MARY

Do you see me going through your desk and moving all your papers around?

JERZY

Well then, what do you propose I do? We've already established that you won't do me the courtesy of moving them for me, and I can't read through the top sheet, so ...

MARY

What I *propose* is that you keep them nice and neat, in order.

JERZY

Like this? (Jerzy picks up the stack and tosses it lightly in the air. The papers land, scattered, on his side of the counter.)

MARY

Hey! Pick those up!

JERZY

(He begins to do so, a bit taken aback by Mary's hostile tone.) I'm sorry, Mary, just a reaction to being bullied tonight, I guess.

MARY

You bring it on yourself.

JERZY

Yeah, I do, I really do. Hey, what's that? (He spots the paper airplane, goes over and picks it up.) Is this coming out of your budget? (He gathers whatever papers remain on the floor, stacks them neatly – but in no particular order – and then over-elaborately straightens out the stack by tapping it on the counter.)

MARY

If my deputy was here right now ...

JERZY

But your deputy isn't here, is he, ma'am? You see, while he was beating the, uh ... shit out of me, a couple of kids drove into that back lot where they – and apparently your deputy – thought they would be alone to do whatever it is that kids and psychopaths do. I don't know. I don't have a life. But in any event, one of them has one of these new cell phones. These new ones, they can take video images, pretty good. Me, I don't know. I just like the basic phone. Even mine can shoot video, come to think of it. You probably aren't aware of this technology, since they still eat squirrel here. Whatever ... Anyway, the deputy sees them taking pictures and ...

MARY

Oh no ...

JERZY

... oh yeah ... The kids take off. And I mean fast. If there's any justice – and God I hope there is – they're going somewhere where they can put this on You Tube. Not sure how that works, exactly, technologically. Anyway, your deputy sees this and takes off after them. I tell you, I never saw the pointy headed bastard move so fast. He left me back there to get eaten by raccoons. But here I am.

MARY No one will believe you. **JERZY** Me by myself – probably not. They'll say I was drunk, or worse. Me with video, I'm guessing they will. That's probably why he tore out of that alley so darn fast. **MARY** No ... **JERZY** Oh yes ... **MARY** You won't get away with this. **JERZY** Get away with what? You, I think I read somewhere that the county's insurance won't cover this ... you know, a deliberate beating. Is that true? (Pause) Look who I'm asking ... **MARY** You will be laughed out of court. **JERZY** That's not what my lawyer will say. I think I'll go take a visit to the city tomorrow. Right after they check me for broken bones. Let's go shopping for quacks and shysters! Road trip! (Mary exits quickly SL.) JERZY (Cont.) Bye. (He takes the papers and spreads them out across the length of the counter.) Hag.

(Bill enters from SR.)

JERZY (Cont.)

Bill, where the hell have you been? I see we're up by five points.
BILL
I know what happened?
JERZY
Oh, Deputy Cornhole did a little square dance on my head.
BILL
What? Are you OK?
JERZY
I'm fine
BILL
You don't look fine
JERZY
No, really, I'm OK.
BILL
How many column inches?
JERZY
I'm not doing an article on my getting beat up by an ignoramus. I'm going to su their asses, new school.
BILL
You had a camera?
JERZY
No, but somebody did.
BILL

Somebody?
JERZY
Yes, and that somebody is now being pursued at high speed, I'm guessing.
BILL
You better get a police report filed. (Pause) I need time to process this, man.
JERZY
Process what? Hey, where are the beautiful people? And Bud?
BILL
It's cool. They're outside. They're OK.
JERZY
They're not OK.
BILL
I was talking to Madison. She's actually pretty accessible. And did you know Dave collects old motorcycles?
JERZY
Gee, Bill no, I didn't Wait. You did not drink the Kool-Aid, did you?
BILL
No
JERZY
Yes, I think you did.
BILL
No, I
JERZY

You went to a revival meeting and you took a bath, didn't you?
BILL
It wasn't like that
JERZY
How could you <i>do</i> that? Do you know how close we are to taking that fucker down? I don't think we can be friends anymore.
BILL
What?
JERZY
Under the circumstances
BILL
Why are you like this?
JERZY
Like what?
BILL
Why do you have this seething revenge mindset all the time? You can't be a reporter with that attitude. You can't go through life like that.
JERZY
Thanks, dad.
BILL
I'm serious.
JERZY
Dude, you know me. We've been drunk in both of the bars in this town. I'm a crusader.
BILL

It's one thing to pad your resume
JERZY
If I see an injustice
BILL
build a portfolio
JERZY
I have to fight
BILL
but this is just overkill
JERZY
That's just me.
BILL
$\ensuremath{OK},$ stop. We will continue this discussion tomorrow when you've had time to cool down \dots
JERZY
I won't
BILL
and your face heals. (Bill crosses R) Please? OK? (Bill exits SR)
JERZY
I won't cool down.
(David and Madison enter from SR. Madison sees Jerzy's physical state and is repulsed, refusing to proceed more than a few steps into the office. David attempts to pull her toward Jerzy, but she shakes her head and resists.)

DAVID

What happened, guy? Did you get into a bar fight?

JERZY

No. How's it going, Mads? (Madison *pointedly ignores him.*) No? (Madison *crosses R slightly, ignoring both* Jerzy *and* David, *and punches keys on her cell phone, texting.*) Well, your pituitary freak retard of a deputy tuned me up a little bit, that's all.

DAVID

Yeah, I should have mentioned that he doesn't handle insults real well.

JERZY

He's a mullethead.

DAVID

You just don't get the whole public service thing, do you? We pay taxes and in return get valuable services.

JERZY

Like what? All I've ever seen sheriffs do is hand out tickets and foreclose on old ladies.

DAVID

Those are people who broke the law. He's keeping you *safe*.

JERZY

You'll pardon me if I don't laugh just now. I think my teeth are broken.

DAVID

Shut ...

JERZY

Hey, just because you're doomed to a life on the public tit, don't go telling me the law is far. Or fairly applied.

DAVID

It is fairly applied.

J	ER	Z	Y

Right. You're innocent in America until you run out of money.
DAVID
You don't know anything.
JERZY
Maybe not. But how does it feel to be on the losing team? Did you come in here to concede?
DAVID
Dream on.
JERZY
Can I quote you on that?
(Madison gives David the "bored" signal – an emphatic yawn with her hand muffling the sound, and David crosses back to her side.)
(Bill and Bud enter from SR.)
BUD
Where is Deputy Dan?
DAVID
Why?
BUD
I want to shake his hand. He did what I've been dreaming about since I met numb nuts over there. (<i>Points at</i> Jerzy)
JERZY
I'm all right, thanks for asking.
BUD

I don't care about you. (David *snickers at this.*) Do you realize how many people are going to lose their jobs because of what you wrote? (David *stares* Bud *down*. A *spousal reproach*.) You know, if by some miracle Nelson loses. (David *continues staring*.) Which he won't ... lose, I mean. He'll win.

(David takes a quarter out of his pocket, flips it in Bud's direction. Bud can't quite catch it, and the coin skitters across the floor. Bud briefly gives chase, picks it up and pockets it.)

JERZY

Shameful. Are Bill and I the only ones in here who aren't on the take?

DAVID

I wouldn't be too sure about that enumeration, if I were you.

(Bill gives David an emphatic "no" signal behind Jerzy's back.)

JERZY

That's an awfully big word from a doucher like you.

BUD

(In mock amazement) Ho ho ... (He crosses L to the counter, begins flipping through papers, taking notes on a small pad.)

MADISON

(Still texting) Make him stop.

(David approaches Jerzy and twists his arm behind his back. Jerzy, suddenly, is in pain.)

DAVID

Say I'm sorry.

JERZY

You're sorry ... (David twists harder.) Ow ...

DAVID

Apologize.

JERZY
This is assault.
DAVID
Why don't you call a cop? (He lets Jerzy go.)
JERZY
The cops work for the beautiful people.
DAVID
That's fine. It's your prerogative to think that. Just like it is that not everyone can be bought. It's your <i>opinion</i> .
BILL
Let's just
JERZY
It's more than that. I know Bill here would never take payola. Ain't that right Bill?
BILL
Well
DAVID
Go ahead, tell him.
BILL
I
DAVID
You reporters. You're all the same. You'll take free food, free tickets, free this free that, and think it's free. Tell him, William!
BILL

(To Jerzy) He promised me a job. (Pause) OK, it was the way he talked to me, Jerzy, OK?
JERZY
No! (<i>To</i> David) You're telling me that you seduced my friend, who I've known for years, over to the dark side? On election night?
DAVID
Seduced is not the word I would use. And really, Madison here deserves a lot of the credit. She can be very persuasive.
MADISON
I am getting a massive headache.
JERZY
Oh God! (To Bill) Are you possessed?
BILL
No, dude.
DAVID
He may have indulged a bit too heavily in the election night painkillers. Isn't that right, William?
JERZY
You traitor! What's your editor going to think?
BILL
It's not what you think. They're actually pretty cool people.
JERZY
Well, I'm actually surprised. (Pause) I'm all alone
DAVID

As it should be.

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J.	$_{\rm LI}$	◢	

What the fuck is that supposed to mean?

DAVID

Hey Bud! Come over here. (Bud *approaches*.) We – that's the editorial we – think Jerzy here's going to *bump off* a politician someday soon. What say you?

JERZY

And I say David here's full of shit.

BUD

I ought to arrest you right now.

JERZY

Go x-ray a purse, old timer.

(Bud and Jerzy square off.)

BUD

Boy, I will take you apart.

JERZY

Come on, you old coot. Use that Medicare.

DAVID

(Stepping between them) Well, no, you don't need to prove my point right now, but think about it. It's always some angry lone misfit like you who becomes famous for wigging out and killing. In your case I say it will be political. You don't have the attention span to attempt a spree.

JERZY

Man, what the fu....

DAVID

It's always some wetback mutt like you that does it. Look at Oswald ...

JERZY
You're a dildo
DAVID
Travis Bickell
JERZY
I would never hurt anybody.
MADISON
Would never or could never?
(They all fall silent, stunned that Madison has rejoined the conversation to address Jerzy, someone she regards as a contemptible creature.)
(Mary enters from SL, carrying papers. She sees the others, silent now and watching her carefully. She reaches out to put the papers out for public consumption, and Bud, Jerzy, Bill and David dart toward the counter. But then Mary retracts the papers, and they stop, frozen in place. Mary then repeats the offer; Bud, Bill, Jerzy and David once again jerk into motion toward the counter and Mary once again retracts the papers, and they stop, frozen again in place. This is repeated once more. Mary then sets out the election returns and quickly moves away from the counter. Bud, Bill, Jerzy and David all scramble for the counter. A tangle of bodies. Jerzy is knocked down briefly, but recovers. David ends up with the stack of papers after a four-way tussle. Madison and Mary watch, amused.)
DAVID
I have them! (He emerges from the packs and holds the results away from the others, who grasp at them.) Back, you morons! (David swats away Bill and Jerzy. Bud already has retreated SR, but he watches David carefully.) Back! (David gives the others one last threatening wave of the stack of papers before reading.) Final results third Congressional District combined precincts
JERZY

DAVID

Come on!

Nelson, fifty-three percent of the vote. Also-ran, forty-seven percent. (*Pause*) Nelson wins! (*He tosses the stack up in the air, and it scatters.*)

BILL
Hey! What about the other races?
JERZY
We need those results in order.
DAVID
Well, pick them up and put them in order. I don't care. We win. The people win!
(Jerzy, Bud and Bill pick up the scattered papers and compare them, to put them in some semblance of order.)
MADISON
Can we please leave now?
DAVID
Yes, well, there's no sense in us sticking around here. (<i>Victoriously</i>) Citizens, my work here is done. Here's my pre-printed press release. (<i>He hands it to</i> Bill.)
JERZY
Did you write one in case you lost?
DAVID
That's pretty funny.
BILL
Where's the after party?
DAVID
Don't you have a story to write?
BILL
Yes, but when I'm done
DAVID

Call us ...

BILL

Come on, Cohen – give me some credit. Don't you think I know you rented that bill hall up in Rube's Corner?

DAVID

Yeah, I don't know how long we'll be there. Write up a good story now. You too, Jerzy. (David hands Jerzy a press release. Jerzy crumples it and flings it away.) Oops! Let's go, Mads. (David and Madison cross R. Bud, Bill and Jerzy cross L to the counter and begin to organize sheets of paper.)

JERZY

You think this is over?

DAVID

Probably not. See you in two years, people.

(David waves grandly. He and Madison exit SR.)

JERZY

Yeah, well ...

BILL

That's how it goes.

JERZY

Satan's minions have rocked the house!

BUD

Another county heard from.

JERZY

What are you wheezing about, old man?

BUD

Bill, do you have page five?
JERZY
I have it.
BILL
I have nine, ten and thirteen.
BUD
Give me five. (Jerzy holds up his hand for a "high-five.") Very funny. May I have page five, please?
JERZY
What's in it for me?
BUD
Gimme god damn page fucking five!
JERZY
You sound upset, old man.
MARY
(Hands Bud a sheet of paper.) I have copies. Don't let him bother you.
BUD
(Brandishes a fist) It's no bother.
JERZY
What? Do you want to find out how many of your useless relatives still have government jobs?
BUD
Yes!
JERZY

Apologize.
BUD
No.
BILL
Let it go, man.
JERZY
I can't. If I let it go, I lose.
BUD
You've already lost.
JERZY
It's just an election, and Nelson will fuck up again.
MARY
Watch your language in here, this is a county courthouse!
JERZY
Are you fucking kidding?
BUD
(Approaches Jerzy) The lady said to watch your language.
JERZY
I'm sorry, the person that usually filters out my swear words isn't here right fucking now.
(Bill interposes himself between Jerzy and Bud.)
BILL
Guys, come on

JERZY

BUD

Do you want to know what my authority is? Your friend here, the one you got the crush on, works for us now.

JERZY

What?

BUD

It's true.

BILL

No it's not.

(Jerzy disengages from the fight and turns away. Mary exits SL. Bill gestures wildly to Bud to stop, but Bud ignores him.)

BUD

Oh yeah. He took money and he came over to our side.

JERZY

What? (*To* Bill) You got turned? Let me see your fangs. (Jerzy *makes a grab for* Bill's *mouth*.) Let me see your fucking fangs!

(Bill pulls violently away from Jerzy's aggressive reach. As Bill wheels away, Bud gets pushed back, but he rights himself. Bud is laughing.)

BUD

I knew that would get you. (Bud *begins to exit SR*.) Come on, Billy (Bill *follows*.) Good night, and good news.

BILL

I'll call you, man. I can explain.

BUD

Sure he can. (Bud and Bill exit.) **JERZY** Of course Nelson won. They ran a corpse against him. (JERZY pulls a notepad out of his back pocket, and then a cell phone. He goes to the counter, sets up with pen and paper, and dials.) JERZY (Cont.) Um, Mr. Nelson, please. (Pause) Jerzy Tolarczyk. (Nelson, in voice over, gets on the phone, preceded by music, shouts and cheers, the sounds of celebration. These are heard throughout the conversation. Nelson has no distinct accent but that of authority.) NELSON (V.O.) Hello? Hello? **JERZY** Yes, Mr. Nelson ... this is Jerzy Tolarczyk. How are you? NELSON (V.O.) Pretty good, as you would imagine. Do they call you JT? **JERZY** No. NELSON (V.O.) Well, darn it, they should! (*Laughs*) **JERZY**

NELSON (V.O.)

What are your plans now that you've won re-election?

We need to work together with state and local officials in the district and effect the legislative initiatives that have been introduced in prior terms. We need to get it done.

JERZY

What about the allegations against you that were raised during the campaign?

NELSON (V.O.)

The people of the district saw those allegations as election year politics, and voted instead with their hearts and wallets. This is a working man's district, and the people elected the man they know will work for them in Washington.

JERZY

Do you plan any new initiatives in this coming term?

NELSON (V.O.)

I'm going to work closely with our legislative caucus to enact a jobs bill so the people of our district can get back to work.

JERZY

Great.

NELSON (V.O.)

Is that all?

JERZY

Yes, Congressman, thank you.

NELSON (V.O.)

Cheer up, guy! It's a big win! Come on out and join us. We're going to be at ... (The crowd noise and Nelson's voice cut out abruptly, simultaneously. The phone was deliberately disconnected.)

(Jerzy prepares to leave. The Deputy enters, holding a Taser out in front of him. Without hesitating, he advances on Jerzy, who has turned to face him.)

JERZY

What are you doing? No ...

(The Deputy *presses the hand held Taser against* Jerzy's *chest.*)

DEPUTY

Write this.

(Jerzy falls to the ground and convulses. The Deputy laughs and exits SL. Jerzy lies motionless on the floor.)

(Madison enters from SR and approaches Jerzy. With a nurse's care and attention, she checks to see if he is conscious. She rises and then stomps on his chest. Madison exits SR.)

BLACKOUT