

Executive: A Play

Honors Thesis

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Abstract

Executive is a play, first and foremost, that I wrote to grapple with moral issues both eternal and contemporary. What is the nature of right action? Do ends justify means? Is killing ever permissible? These questions, and more, are the ones I attempt to examine in this thesis project you have before you.

The play is about many things. It's about, as I mentioned moral issues, but it's also about political and emotional ones. The main character, Geoffrey, is an autobiographical vessel; many of the elements of this work form a pastiche of my life. Like Geoffrey, I too struggle with fears about our contemporary political situation—with its absurdity, its hatred, and its uncertainty—as well as fears over the quotidian; I fear being dead, I fear being forgotten, and I fear being, ultimately, unimportant. As I struggle with these fears, so too do I make Geoffrey struggle. There is, of course, one important difference between him and me; Geoffrey—in a Twilight Zone-esque twist—is granted the ability to kill the bigoted politicians that plague his well-being and his TV screen *with his mind*.

How these powers are granted are never explained because I did not really *care* to explain them. What interested me more was what a person—a person very much like myself—would do if given these powers and what would happen as a result of his actions.

If that sounds intriguing to you then, hopefully, the play proper will make for a good read. I will offer up no spoilers in this abstract, so you will just have to read the work itself if you would like to know how the play ends. Is our hero victorious? What would victory even mean here? Who knows? All I can say is this; right or wrong, writing the death of a Donald Trump analogue was a fairly cathartic experience.

Acknowledgements

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On a more personal level: My love and thanks must go out to my parents, who have supported me through all of the various, sometimes quixotic, endeavors I have undergone.

Finally, thank you Amory Thomas. I love you.

A Brief Artist's Statement

Executive was inspired by too many things to properly mention in a short space. The plot is a jumble of the 2016 election and my life, and it is my attempt to tackle philosophical issues of morality filtered through a pop cultural lens inspired by such things as the novels of John Steinbeck, the plays of Harold Pinter, *The Twilight Zone*, superhero comics, and the manga series *Death Note*. It is an eclectic grouping of inspirations to say the least.

Now, I could specify how each of the sources above fed into my writing, but the search for meaning and understanding is a quest that each reader must undergo for themselves. This isn't because—or just because—I am a pretentious son of a bitch who wants the reader to work to get on “my” level. Rather, art is in the eye of the beholder; I had my own meaning in mind when I wrote this play, but that meaning does not have to be your own. Everyone who interacts with a piece of art is an artist; they create the art from their interaction with it. Meaning cannot be delivered to the masses by the extra-textual words of the writer. As Samuel Beckett once said, “It's in the text”.

I just hope this text is an enjoyable one.

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Scene 1

For the first scene, the right half of the stage will be bathed in darkness. In that dark half, the three Politicians will stand equidistant from each other. Over the course of the scene, each Politician will have a moment where he is lit up by a spotlight. When this occurs, the individual in the spotlight should be the only one on the dark half who can be seen (though, the other half of the stage will remain lit for the duration of the scene.)

On the other half of the stage is what appears to be a modestly furnished room. Posters on the wall for albums (such as David Bowie or Nirvana) and movies (Star Wars, the Avengers, etc.) The main piece of furniture which takes up the center of the left half of the stage is a couch, slightly beat up but functional. On the left arm of the couch is a remote control for a TV.

Enter Geoffrey. Early 20s college student. He is wearing a Batman t-shirt and blue pajama pants and carries a bowl of cereal. He looks tired but not un-alert. He walks over to the couch and sits next to the remote control. He begins to eat his cereal, picks up the remote, and turns on the TV. When he does so, a spotlight appears on Politician 1.

Politician 1: -merica is under siege! *(He pauses for emphasis)*

Geoffrey: *(under his breath)* This asshole.

Politician 1: Yes! America is under siege! It is under siege from the liberals who control the media and tell us we're wrong! That we're "backwards". Well, I say that they are the ones who are wrong. They are the ones who are backward! *(Applause and cheers are heard. We head someone with a Mid-Western accent shout "You tell 'em")* They are wrong because they want to make this country weak! They want to force their PC "values" down our throats. Well the only values *(extreme emphasis, borderline self-parody)* we need are our Christian values! *(More applause, even louder than before.)* Our God given Constitution

Geoffrey: *(at the same time)* *(with cereal in his mouth, very annoyed)* "God given?!"

Politician 1: *(at the same time)* is being trampled on by our President! *(He looks extremely self-satisfied)* *(Yet more applause)* And I vow that I will take back the White House for good, honest, and, above all, Christian people like you and me!

Geoffrey: *(picking up remote)* Smug dick. *(Clicks on the remote)*

(Spotlight on Politician 1 goes down. Spotlight on Politician 2 goes up.)

Geoffrey: *(groans)*

Politician 2: -ank you! Thank you! I'm glad to be back in my home state of Georgia! People down here, well, let's just say we know what's right and what isn't. We've got real values! *(Applause)*

Geoffrey: And the rest of the country doesn't?

Politician 2: Now, I've been on the campaign trail for awhile now, and I love that I have the chance to come down here and just talk with some honest Americans about the issues that we, as Americans, all have to deal with.

Geoffrey: Oh, this should be good.

Politician 2: And what I want to address with you today is an issue that just plain disgusts me, and that is the issue of "men" and "women" who think they can change the Constitution, that hallowed document, to allow them to marry people of the same sex. *(Boos from the audience)* It's sickening that our UNELECTED Supreme Court allowed that to pass, and I promise that as president--

Geoffrey: Oh, fuck off. *(Switches channel again. Spotlight goes off Politician 2. Spotlight goes up on Politician 3)*

Politician 3: -ause the only way to keep our country safe is to make sure that Mexico and those *(venomously)* Muslim countries stop sending their worst men to kill our men and rape our women! *(Hooting and hollering from the crowd, which is cut off by Geoffrey turning of the TV.)*

Geoffrey: Okay, five minutes in and it's already overbearing. I don't think I can watch anymore. *(He stands up with his finished bowl of cereal.)* I gotta get ready for class anyway. *(He exits, but soon returns with the clothes he will wear during the rest of the day.)*

Geoffrey: *(Walks to center stage carrying the clothes. Spotlight on him. As he speaks, the stage is set for Scene 2 and he changes from his pajamas into his day clothes)* My friend Danielle was telling me the other day about how one of those politicians came to speak at her university. She didn't go, but she saw pictures and videos of the speech on the school's Facebook page. She said she was scared by what she saw; the politician spoke for an hour about the exact same shit that they did this morning. He talked about the "moral degeneracy" of Muslims, Mexicans, and the people in the LGBTQ community. But that wasn't the scary part. The scary was that that video had six thousand likes at a school of seven thousand. She said the comment section almost made her cry, but she didn't go into detail. *(He reflects)* I never knew it was so bad out there. I guess I live in an echo chamber, but I never thought it was still **this** bad. I knew bigotry and racism were out there...but to this extent? To the extent where someone can call for a ban on Muslims, fundamentally destroying freedom of religion, and be within reach of the highest office in the US? *(Geoffrey walks to the desk that he will be sitting in during scene two. The spotlight follows him).* Sometimes I feel really ignorant. Like I'm supposed to know way more than I do. I try to keep up with the news, so I don't feel so...uninformed. So childish. *(Pause)* I think I need to learn more. *(He closes his notebook, and the stage is lit up for Scene 2)*

Scene 2

A college classroom. 10 desks are arranged in a horseshoe. The students sit in this order (from left to right): Geoffrey, Kamala, Frederick, Stacy, Rita, Rob, George, Brenna, Gwen, and Shelby. As the scene opens, they are mostly keeping to themselves; flipping through notes, looking at their phones, staring out to space, etc. They may make brief hellos to one another.

Enter Dr. Michaels: a professor of Ethics. Mid-30s, bushy beard, a man with an occasionally mischievous, but always earnest, grin. He wears a collared shirt tucked in with all but the top button buttoned. From his entrance, he stands to Geoffrey's left.

Dr. Michaels: *(mixture of sincere and joking: this is something he says, if not every day, than on a fairly regular basis)* Well, good morning my young budding philosophers.

(Some of the students, including Geoffrey, give an affectionate "Heh". Others stay silent. Brenna rolls her eyes.)

Dr. Michaels: So, are we all set to discuss today's readings?

(Silence. The students look at Dr. Michaels with confusion.)

Dr. Michaels: ...you guys, did do the reading, right?

(The students begin to appear nervous. Each one looks at the others to make sure that he/she is not alone at having no idea what the professor is talking about. There is an awkward silence.)

Frederick: Uh, professor, what reading?

Dr. Michaels: The reading for today. On the trolley problem? I sent it in an e-mail after class on Monday, did nobody get it?

(The students all take out their phones almost simultaneously and begin to check their e-mails. After some searching, they begin to chime in, truthfully.)

Frederick: I'm not seeing it, professor.

Kamala: Me either.

Rita: When did you say you sent it?

Dr. Michaels: Monday afternoon!

Rob: I don't have any e-mails from Monday.

Geoffrey: Sorry, professor, I got nothing.

Dr. Michaels: Ah god damn school e-mail server. I knew I should have just sent the article with my g-mail; the freaking school one never works.

Brenna: Like, nothing works in this school. You can only get wi-fi in, like, two rooms in any of the school buildings.

Dr. Michaels: You're telling me; half the time, I can't even get a signal in my office.

Kamala: Sometimes it feels like the school doesn't care about us.

Dr. Michaels: Well there are plenty of professors here that do. (*Grins*) The administration though...

Rita: The school needs more money.

Brenna: What? It's already too expensive.

Rita: Well, maybe students shouldn't be expected to pay for everything anyway.

Dr. Michaels: This is all great, but we're getting off track.

Geoffrey: How is that ironic?

Dr. Michaels: Because today's class was supposed to be a discussion about the trolley problem. Trolleys. Tracks. Trolleys going off tracks. There's something ironic in there, I'm sure of it.

Geoffrey: Sounds more like a coincidence to me.

Dr. Michaels: (*chuckles, not unkindly but with the slightest air of superiority*) Oh, man, don't try to argue semantics with the man who wrote his master's thesis on semantic arguments. You will lose.

Geoffrey: Any time you want to debate Professor Michaels, any time.

Dr. Michaels: E-mail me, we'll settle this online. (*Pause, collecting thoughts*) Now, what were we talking about before we got off onto that tangent?

Kamala: The "trolley problem?"

Dr. Michaels: This is why I assign the readings ahead of time; it saves valuable time. None of you could have shot me an e-mail saying 'Hey Dr. Michaels, you know how we always have a reading before class? We didn't get one this week.' It's fine, though, I can adapt; I'm a professional. Have any of you heard of the trolley problem before?

(*Frederick, Geoffrey, and Rita raise their hands*)

Dr. Michaels: Okay, good. Frederick, do you want to explain it to your classmates?

Frederick: Uh, sure. I guess. So, yeah, it kinda goes something like this; there's a group of three workers on a set of trolley tracks, right? And...and a runaway trolley is speeding towards them

and there's, uh, there's no time for them to get out of the way. Meanwhile, you're in the control booth for the trolley tracks, and you can, like, move the trolley onto a different set of tracks and save the group of workers.

Dr. Michaels: Right! Anything else?

Frederick: Huh? Oh, right; on the other set of tracks is a single guy, and, if you move the trolley onto those tracks, it'll hit him instead.

Dr. Michaels: You got it! So, the question is: should you move the trolley onto the other path and have the one die so the group can live, or do you stand by and let the group die? What do you guys think would be the most ethical thing to do?

(Pause. The students think about the problem. Geoffrey somewhat tepidly raises his hand.)

Dr. Michaels: Yes, Geoffrey.

Geoffrey: Well, I think the right thing to do would have to be to move the trolley so it only hits the one man. Needs of the many and what not.

Dr. Michaels: *(grinning)* Oh, so it's alright to sentence a man to die to save total strangers? I'm sure that would be really reassuring to the man's family.

Geoffrey: *(slightly embarrassed)* Well, what I mean is--

Dr. Michaels: Relax, Geoffrey. I know what you meant. Okay. So that's one vote for killing the poor slob who is all alone on the tracks? Who thinks it would be better to just let the three guys get flattened? Anybody?

Shelby: *(raises her hand, Dr. Michaels points to her)* Kidding aside, I think that is what would be the right thing to do. They were going to die anyway, but, if you switch the tracks, it's like you're actively killing the man on the other path.

Geoffrey: *(slightly indignant)* But if you just do nothing and let three people die, isn't that literally just as bad as killing them yourself?

Frederick: I think I'm gonna have to go with Geoffrey; there really doesn't seem to be a difference.

Shelby: *(irritated)* There's totally a difference.

Geoffrey: The difference is that instead of three people dying, only one person dies. It'd be better if nobody had to die, but, since that's not an option in this scenario, the ethical choice is to go with the fewest fatalities.

Shelby: The ethical choice is to not physically point the trolley in someone's way and kill them.

Geoffrey: There's a greater good—

Shelby: The “greater good” is just an excuse for people to do whatever they want.

Geoffrey: I don’t think that’s fair assessment; sometimes you’re stuck with shitty choices, but that doesn’t mean you don’t have to make one.

Shelby: But when you make, like, a choice you...you become responsible.

Dr. Michaels: Hey, this is all good stuff. I like what I'm hearing so far, and Shelby, Geoffrey, I think you both have hit on two of the major ways people look at this problem. Shelby, you've got a very Kantian view of the issue. For you, ethics is about not actively infringing upon anyone's rights. As long as you don't commit a wrong action, you are behaving ethically, and since you're being inactive but letting the trolley follow its course, you are not committing a wrong action.

Geoffrey: But...she is committing an action...in the scenario. She's making a choice and standing by.

Dr. Michaels: Right, but to a Kantian, you don't have to seek to prevent harm, you just have to not be the source of it. Make sense?

Geoffrey: I guess.

Dr. Michaels: I'm sensing your hesitation there, and that's because I'm thinking you've got more of a Utilitarian frame of mind. We'll be talking about that philosophy way more in depth later next week, but the abridged version of it is that Utilitarians believe that they have a responsibility to maximize the utility of every action they make. Now, utility can be defined in a whole lot of ways, but much of the time it's seen as a something people want, like happiness. When an ethical decision pops up, a Utilitarian will do a utility calculation to try and figure out what action will have the most utility. I'm guessing you did that when making your decision for the scenario, but not in so many words? Am I close?

Geoffrey: Yeah. I mean, it might sound kind of bad, but three people do kind of matter more than one person. They most likely have more family combined to mourn them if they die than the one person does.

Dr. Michaels: And a Utilitarian would take something like that into account. Again, though, we'll get back to Utilitarianism in a little bit. The important part of the scenario, though, in my mind is the way it does create that divide between ways of thinking. (*grins again*) You've got on the one hand people like Shelby who don't lift a finger to stop a group of workers from becoming pancakes and on the other hand you have egomaniacs like Geoffrey and Frederick who think they can play God with people's lives.

(A hallway at Geoffrey's university. He is waiting outside a classroom. Enter Kamala)

Kamala: Hi Geoffrey.

Geoffrey: Oh, hi Kamala. What's up? Heading to class?

Kamala: Nah, done for the day. Going back to my dorm. Need some sleep.

Geoffrey: I don't blame you. Those RA shifts must suck. You're up to, what, 2 AM?

Kamala: 3 AM.

Geoffrey: Ouch.

Kamala: Eh, it's not so bad; I watch a lot of Netflix at the desk.

Geoffrey: I wish I had time for Netflix. I feel like I don't have any free time these days between work and school. The only thing I seem to watch on a consistent basis now is the news.

Kamala: Ha, you sound like a real adult.

Geoffrey: God, I know! When did that happen? The other day, a woman with a kid asked me for directions, and, when the kid tried to interrupt, she told him that the "grown-ups were talking". I feel like I **was** that kid, like, ten years ago.

Kamala: It's crazy, isn't it? Well, good for you for watching the news. I can't stand it; especially now with all of those BS politicians on all the time saying it's **my** family's responsibility to rat out Muslim terror cells.

Geoffrey: Ugh, I can't stand those guys. It's like they get paid for being stupid and awful. Don't even know why I watch them.

Kamala: Why **do** you watch them?

Geoffrey: I don't know...I guess I just feel like I have to, you know? I mean, people have to hear the lies they're saying in order to call them on the lies they're saying. It's like I was saying in Ethics, not doing something is still kind of a choice, and-and if I choose to do nothing while those politicians blast hatred all the time then I think I'd feel guilty. (*Sighs*) So I watch them, and then I write in protest.

Kamala: Oh yeah, heh, I've seen the angry Facebook posts of yours. They get really long sometimes.

Geoffrey: Ha! Yeah, I do tend to rant, don't I?

Kamala: Nothing else you can do, right?

Geoffrey: The system's too fucked up right now to do much else.

Kamala: God, we sound so jaded; we **are** adults.

Geoffrey: Had to happen someday. (*Checks the time on his phone*) Well, I have to go in. Class. Talk to you later?

Kamala: Yeah, it was good seeing you Geoffrey. Feel like we don't hang out enough anymore.

Geoffrey: Yeah, me too. We'll have to fix that soon. See you, Kamala.

Kamala: See you Geoffrey!

Scene 4

Enter Geoffrey. Spotlight on him.

Geoffrey: I don't want to be hurt. I've seen things, terrible things, on the news. It's scary out there. People have...people have turned sour, or they've revealed the rottenness that was always there. There was this one corner store in New York state; it was owned and operated by a family of Brazilian descent. A gang smashed the place up and beat the man at the cashier into a coma. His children were in the backroom. They later said that the gang had called their father a "dirty Mexican cuck" and that, when the election was over, him and his were going to be deported back to Mexico. I suppose it didn't matter that the family had never even been to Mexico...

The cops, white cops, found the guys that did it. The cops arrested them without drawing their guns once, even after one of the gang said they would cut the officers with a knife. Reportedly, one of the gang said, "What are you arresting us for? We're on the same side!" Another one told the first to be quiet and that, "We'll be pardoned after the election; maybe we'll even be on the police." A third said, "You can't arrest all of us; there are thousands, hundreds of thousands, and we want this country back!"

Later, a lawyer for the group said that they weren't racists; they were just "politically motivated Samaritans" who, though their hearts were in the right place, had gone a little far. Beating an innocent man half to death and traumatizing a family is going "a little" far.

I wish I could say there was uniform outrage over the attack, but I've seen so many people trying to excuse the guys that did it or brush them under the rug as a fringe group. I wish I could say this was the only such attack, but it's not. Hate-crimes are on the rise. Violence is on the rise. And I-I-I'm scared. I'm so goddamn scared. I walk down the street, and I am terrified that any one of the people I pass could be ...I don't know...violent. I've become too afraid to even do most of the things I used to do online. I used to tweet and retweet jokes and disparaging comments about certain candidates. Now, I'm afraid someone will track me down, somehow, through my Twitter account and...do horrible things to me because they think I'm some kind of traitor to the country.

Because you hear stories. Stories of people hacking into accounts online and getting all sorts of personal information. I don't want to die, and it feels more and more like, if I say anything, I'm putting myself at risk.

I wish someone would do something to stop this insanity. I don't want to be scared anymore. I don't want others to be hurt. I...I don't want to be hurt.

Scene 5

Three chairs sit equidistant from each other with walls between them. Geoffrey, Steven, and Danielle sit in the chairs from left to right. All three are on their phones, messaging each other. As they begin to do so, they stand up and face the audience. Ideally, the actors should not be able to see each other during this scene. When each character speaks, they type at the same time. They will occasionally glance at their phone as they do so, but, overall, they will be looking forward.

Geoffrey: I just don't get why people vote for these politicians. They literally say that their hero is Ayn Rand: the woman who preached not caring about other people AS A LIFE PHILOSOPHY! Why would you want that kind of person as your elected official? They are saying flat out that they only care about themselves.

Steven: Hey man. It's like my mother says all the time: never underestimate the stupidity of people. You think the average voter is well read enough to know about the intricacies of Randian thought?

Geoffrey: What intricacies. It literally boils down to "Fuck people, get money."

Steven: Still. People just don't read enough.

Geoffrey: I guess.

(Pause)

Danielle: Hey guys...

Steven: *(smiling)* Danielle!

Geoffrey: Danielle, I almost forgot you were a part of this message.

Steven: It's been awhile since you've said anything.

Geoffrey: What's up?

Danielle: Can I...can I talk to you guys about something?

Steven: Of course.

Geoffrey: Sure, go for it.

Danielle: Never mind. I shouldn't bring it up. I'm sorry.

Geoffrey: *(concerned)* Danielle, is there something wrong?

Danielle: I'm sorry. I just. I'm sorry.

Steven: There's nothing to be sorry about. Is something bugging you? You can talk to us.

Geoffrey: Yeah, we're your friends, after all. *(Pause, half smile)* Is it the stuff about Ayn Rand? Have we insulted your favorite author? Lol. *(Pause, reflects, realizes he may be being inappropriate.)* I'm sorry. I shouldn't joke right now when you're upset.

Danielle: I'm not upset! Okay, maybe I am. I just. *(starts to tear up a little, but fights against it)* Today was really bad.

Steven: What happened? Are you okay?

Danielle: I'm...I'm really shaken up. *(Pause. Pause.)* I got screamed at today.

Geoffrey: For what?

Steven: Who would yell at you and for what? I can't imagine you offending anyone.

Danielle: It was this....this guy. Really big dudebro kind of guy. He saw me coming out of the women's restroom, and he just went off. He said...he said... *(starts to cry. Steven and Geoffrey stare at their phones because, of course, they do not know what Danielle is doing on her end.)*

Steven: Danielle? Are you okay? Still there?

Geoffrey: What did he say? *(Pause. Puts phone in pocket. To himself, not the chat group)* Fucking idiot, Geoffrey, you know what she's going to say. *(Takes phone back out of pocket to rejoin the group)*

Danielle: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Steven: There's nothing to apologize for Danielle. Do you still want to talk about it?

Danielle: I *(Pause. She reflects.)* Yeah. *(She takes a deep breath)* So I came out of the restroom and, like I said, this guy came up to me, and he said *(Tears, but not sobs)* "What the hell were you doing in there, you fucking pervert?" And I said, "Excuse me?" And he said, "You know what the fuck I'm talking about. I know about you. Goddamn trannies. Put on women's clothes and go into their bathrooms to spy on them. Friggin' sickos. You're mentally ill. You pretend to be women" And I tried to interrupt him and say, "Sir, I am a woman."

Geoffrey: That was too nice of you, I wouldn't have called a piece of shit like that "sir".

Danielle: Yeah, well, I was afraid he was going to beat the shit out of me, wasn't I?

Geoffrey: Danielle, I *(Pause.)* I'm sorry. You're right. I wasn't there. I don't know how I would have reacted. I don't know what it's like to *(Pause)* be in your shoes.

Danielle: It's fine. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have taken it out on you. I'm just still so shaken up.

Geoffrey: Please don't apologize. I shouldn't talk about things I don't really know about. But what happened after that?

Danielle: The guy he laughed in my face. I felt his spit on my cheek. He said, "You're goddamn mental is what you are." By this point, people were starting to stare at us. I felt so...so humiliated. *(Pause)* No. I felt like shit. I knew if I stayed there any longer, I was going to start

crying, and I didn't want to give the guy the satisfaction. So I started to leave, but the guy grabbed me by the shoulder and said, "Where the hell do you think you're going, you son of a bitch." *(Pause)* The "son" was drawn out.

Steven: *(His anger prompts him physically)* That asshole!

Geoffrey: I don't even know what to say. He grabbed you? That sadistic fuck grabbed you?

Danielle: He grabbed me, and, honest to God, I thought he was going to kill me. I thought, "This man is going to kill me in front of an entire mall full of people, and no one is going to stop him." I bet he would have to. I really, honestly, bet he would have, but, then, a security guard walked over. He said, "What's going on here?" and the guy just looks at him with a look that said, "Really? You don't get what's happening? I'm beating up a fucking tranny. No big deal."

Steven: What did he actually say?

Danielle: It wasn't that far off. He said, "Hey, man, this dude was in the women's restroom." And the guard said, "That doesn't look like a man to me, and what do you care what restroom *she* uses? Let her go." And he did. And he walked away. And the guard said to me, "Are you alright miss?" And I was still so scared from what had happened, so I said, "I'm fine. Thank you for your help." And I just kind of fast walked away. *(Pause)* The guard called after me, but he didn't try to stop me. I hurried to my car, drove back to my dorm, and, when I got there, I just broke down in tears. Luckily my roommate was working, cause I did *not* want her to see me cry.

(There is a silence as Steven, Geoffrey, and Danielle all reflect on what has just been said.)

Steven: Danielle *(Pause)* Does this sort of thing happen a lot?

Danielle: You have no idea. On campus there are unisex toilets, but, out in the real world, I'm lucky if I can go once a month without being called out for using the women's restroom. *(Pause)* I hate going to school in Iowa. I should have followed my instincts and studied in Canada.

Geoffrey: Middle America can be a bit of backwards shit-show, yeah.

Danielle: This whole country is a bit of a backwards shit-show. Things aren't much better when I'm back in Boston either.

(Pause)

Geoffrey: Well, at least the security guard was there to help you out.

Steven: Yeah, not everyone is such a scumbag.

Danielle: You guys just don't get it. I don't want to have to have men sticking up for me against scumbags. I don't want to have to be rescued. I don't want there to be scumbags attacking me and insulting me. I just want to not be treated like a freak.

Geoffrey: I'm sorry Danielle. You're right.

(Pause)

Danielle: Well, I should go. I think I made things awkward enough.

Steven: No. You didn't make things awkward at all. You need to get these things out.

Geoffrey: We're your friends, Danielle. We go back to middle school for God's sake. You can talk to us.

Steven: You've been there for me Danielle. You've let me vent to you about all the shit in my life. The least we can do is let you vent about *your* troubles, which are way more legitimate than the unimportant crap I can go on about.

Geoffrey: Yeah, don't feel bad about telling us about the shit that happens to you. That's what friends are for. I just wish people weren't such douchebags.

Danielle: It's the culture.

Steven: It's evil and ignorant is what it is.

Geoffrey: *(again, he puts his phone in his pocket to talk to himself)* Oh god. I wish there was something more I could say. *(Takes out his phone, rejoins conversation)* I wish there I was more we could do, but if you ever need to, you know we're here.

Steven: Yeah, we don't want you to feel so alone.

Danielle: Thanks guys. I...just thanks.

Geoffrey: You are welcome.

Steven: You got it.

Danielle: Bye guys.

Steven: Bye Danielle

Geoffrey: Talk to you later.

(The lights dim on Steven and Geoffrey, while Danielle stays illuminated. She stares at her phone for a moment without interacting with it. She places the phone in her pocket and slumps against the wall. She looks drained but not necessarily like she is going to cry. This scene lingers for a moment before blackout.)

Scene 6

Amber is having breakfast, scrambled eggs. She is dressed for the day.

Enter Geoffrey.

Geoffrey: What time did you get up? You weren't in bed when my alarm went off.

Amber: *(Noticing him)* Oh, good morning Geoffrey. I've been up for a while. Couldn't sleep.

Geoffrey: You get those leg cramps again?

Amber: Nah. Had bad dreams all night long.

Geoffrey: Oof. Sorry bae. Do you want to talk about them?

Amber: I don't really remember them...I think...I think I was being chased by something, and I didn't know what it was. No, wait, I remember, it was like a big massive horde of monsters.

Geoffrey: (*Teasing her*) A *big* massive horde, huh. That's a pretty massive horde. Not as big as a huge massive horde though.

Amber: (*Grinning, rolling her eyes*) Oh shut up. (*Small beat*) It was a scary dream though.

Geoffrey: I'm sure it was. Do you remember anything else from it?

Amber: Not really. Just the feeling of being chased by some massive group.

Geoffrey: I hate nightmares.

Amber: Who doesn't?

Geoffrey: Remember, a few weeks ago, when I woke up mumbling "help me!" because of that nightmare I was having?

Amber: What even was that dream about?

Geoffrey: It's actually a pretty common one. For me. It's like—it's like I'm in this box, right? A see-through box. And all around me, people are dying. I'm not sure why, but they are; they're dying. I try to break out, but the box is made of metal; it's somehow both see-through and metal. Then, all of a sudden, there's *something* in the room with me. Something I can't comprehend. It's a person, I think, but it's a person that is never *one* person. I look at it multiple times, and, each time, it's someone new. Someone I recognize but also can't recognize. And the danger is still there. It doesn't make any sense, but I know it's bad; I know it wants to hurt me, so I try to run from it, but there's nowhere to go, and it corners me. I still can't understand what it is, but it corners me. I open my mouth to scream and-and nothing comes out. I feel words and sounds attempting to from, but they get stuck in my throat. I'm trapped, helpless, and I can't even scream.

Amber: (*Caring*) Geoffrey, I'm sorry. (*She gets up and hugs him*) This is a common dream? Why didn't you tell me about it before?

Geoffrey: I don't know...I guess I just thought it was stupid.

Amber: It's not. I tell you about all of my dreams, even the stupid ones, and yours was not stupid.(*short beat, change of tone*) Do you think it's an anxiety dream?

Geoffrey: Maybe. Who wouldn't be anxious these days?

Amber: That's true, I guess...(Looks at her phone) I gotta run. Got class soon. I'll text you when I get out? I'd like it if we could just get coffee. I feel like it's been awhile since we've had time together. We sleep in the same bed, I feel like I haven't really seen you in forever. Do you think we can meet up?

Geoffrey: Yeah, sounds—wait, no, sorry. Tuesday, remember?

Amber: Crap, right, you have class right after mine.

Geoffrey: *(sighs)* Yup.

Amber: Well, let me know if it gets out early. *(She gets up to leave)* Love you Geoffrey.

Geoffrey: Love you too.

Scene 7

Geoffrey: Somedays I just lie on my bed doing nothing. Laptop resting on my ever increasing stomach, I just veg out online; I half watch YouTube videos or I play videogames or I refresh my e-mail twenty times in one minute just to see if something new comes in. This, **this**, is a regular existence of mine. We live multiple lives. Work life. School life. Home life. It's the life we have when we are alone, I think, and this is probably cliché but it's true, that says the most about us. And this is the life I lead when I'm alone.

(Pause)

Sometimes, though, sometimes while I'm like this, the thought strikes me that this could be my last day on earth. I'm young, I don't have any disease, but, still, tomorrow I could be driving on the highway and a truck could switch lanes without checking for cars and it could crash right into me and I would be dead. And, I mean, that's only one of the thousands of horrible, yet completely possible, things that could cause my death **any** day.

(Pause)

We don't like to think like that, though. We don't like to acknowledge how close we are to the precipice. Tragic and awful things always happen to somebody else; we couldn't possibly be one of the people who get electrocuted by faulty wiring or who slip in the kitchen and smash their head open on the counter or who get slaughtered at work by an angry man with an assault rifle. These are all things that happen to other people. They can't happen to us. *(Pause)* Except when they do.

(Pause)

I'm really scared of dying.

(Pause)

I'm really scared for a few reasons, but largely because I want my life to mean something. Something good. I want...I want to help people, but I don't know how. I don't feel like I can.

(Pause)

Today could be my last day alive. I should try to do something with it.

Scene 8

(Living room from the first scene. Enter Geoffrey. He turns on the television to see that Politician 1 is speaking. He rolls his eyes, but sits down to watch)

Politician 1:--and what this country needs, what it really needs, is more hard workers. We've got a nation of entitled children who think a college degree is a show of merit. We need people who work with their hands, not with their "minds". We need more plumbers, less English majors.

(There is cheering from the crowd, Geoffrey looks offended). Growing up, we didn't question the status quo. We didn't sit around all day wondering if something was "racist" or "offensive," and by God we were all the better for it. PC culture today runs amok, and, suddenly, every little thing is "sexist" this or "ableist" that. What does that even mean, "ableism", does anyone even know? It's just another made up piece of pseudo-psychology hand-holding for the participation trophy generation, and I'm sick of it. Aren't you all sick of it too? *(More cheering, Geoffrey's eyebrows are definitely furled)* I tell you, all those liberal millennials are in for a rude awakening when I am president-

Geoffrey: *(sarcasm)* Like that'll happen.

Politician 1: Because I'm not going to be giving out any trophies or handouts. They wanted to go to college so bad? Well they're going to pay for it! The government doesn't owe anyone a higher education. They think they're entitled because they come from a coddled generation, well it's time to smack the baby bottle out of their hands because we Conservatives know this: *(as if delivering a canned slogan)* there's no such thing as a free lunch. *(Applause and cheering, which is cut off when Geoffrey mutes the TV. Politician 1 can still be seen making his speech and gesticulating)*

Geoffrey: What an asshole. *(he unmutes the TV, only half paying attention)*

Politician 1: And now, can I tell you what really riles me up? I mean really makes me mad? I'll tell you; it's the Democrats defending pedophiles.

Geoffrey: *(Snaps to attention)* Excuse me?

Politician 1: That's right, you heard me; they defend pedophiles. Why else would they be in favor of letting MEN into WOMEN'S restrooms? *(Geoffrey's hand curls into a fist)* All this bull about these "transsexuals" these people who were "born in the wrong body," it's all nonsense. It's all a cover for *(strong emphasis)* MEN who want to be around little girls at their most vulnerable. And it makes me SICK. I don't know if the Democrats are stupid or just evil—*(a sudden obnoxious grin)* it's probably both—*(goes back to his serious tone)* but they are just plain wrong to allow for this immoral, perverted behavior. *(Geoffrey is silently fuming. He looks as though he is attempting to form words, but he can't)* Men dressed as women. It's messed up. You know what I'd do if I saw a MAN dressed as a woman going into the lady's restroom? I'd go over there and give HIM a piece of my mind. And if HE gave me any lip, I'd beat the HELL out of HIM. And then what I would do—

Geoffrey: *(His anger going over a tipping point)* WHY DON'T YOU JUST DIE?

(There is a sound of a rope snapping, Politician 1 crumples to the floor, dead. Geoffrey stares first in incomprehension then surprise then horror)

(Blackout)

(Later, Geoffrey is watching the news again with stunned fear. He tries to pick up a glass of water, but his hand won't stop shaking. There is a newscaster on TV)

Newscaster: *(the scene begins mid newscast)*—no word on the cause of death, and, while there were no obvious signs of foul play, investigators have yet to rule it out compl—*(The spotlight on the TV goes out a Geoffrey turns it off)*

Geoffrey: C-coincidence. N-nothing b-but...it's got to...*(more confidently)* It's got to be. Fuck, am I going crazy? *(His cell phone rings. He is startled, but he answers it. Near the other end of the stage, a spotlight goes up on Amber, who is calling him)*

Geoffrey: H-hello?

Amber: Hey.

Geoffrey: Oh, hey Amber, how's it going?

Amber: Good, just calling to say I'm not going to be back tonight, co-worker called out, so-

Geoffrey: *(Not really paying full attention)* What? Oh, that's fine...

Amber: Hey, have you been watching the news at all? That politician that-

Geoffrey: *(hurriedly)* I saw. Crazy stuff.

Amber: I know, right? And they have no idea how it happened! How does someone just drop dead like that for no reason?

Geoffrey: Yeah, I don't, uh-

Amber: I bet someone poisoned him or some shit. Someone really fucked up, probably.

Geoffrey: Why, uh, why do you say that?

Amber: Well, you have to be messed up to kill someone. Hey, are you okay?

Geoffrey: *(slightly taken aback)* Yeah, why?

Amber: Is something the matter?

Geoffrey: No

Amber: *(pushing the matter)* Geoffrey-

Geoffrey: Amber, I...I'm fine

Amber: Geoffrey, I know you. You're doing that "I have something on my mind but I don't want to talk about it" voice.

Geoffrey: Oh, come on. I don't have a-

Amber: Yes, you do. It's obnoxious. Now, tell me, why are you upset?

Geoffrey: I...I was watching. When it happened. And I guess, it...I guess it shook me up.

Amber: Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, that must have been pretty crazy to see live. I only saw a clip on my phone, and it's...yeah.

Geoffrey: But, well, I mean, I guess it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy, don't you think?

Amber: Well don't say **that**.

Geoffrey: *(Getting a bit defensive)* Well, he was a scumbag. Being dead doesn't change the fact that he was a scumbag.

Amber: He was still a person. It's still pretty messed up.

(Geoffrey looks as if he wants to say something)

Geoffrey: Amber, I think I-

Amber: *(Just a second past simultaneously)* I hope that-

Geoffrey: Oh, sorry.

Amber: You go.

Geoffrey: No, you.

Amber: Well, I was just going to say, I hope that catch whoever did it.

Geoffrey: *(Taken slightly off guard)* Really?

Amber: Yeah, you can't just have crazy people running around killing politicians. *(Trying to lighten the mood)* Even if they **are** scumbags.

Geoffrey: *(Considers saying something, decides against it)* I guess. I guess it **is** pretty messed up.

Amber: Got that right. *(short beat)* Anyway, I'm sorry you got all shook up. I know I was shocked, and I heard it second hand. I gotta go, though. Work. We can talk later. Love you.

Geoffrey: Love you too.

(Pause)

Geoffrey: *(Muttering)* Pretty messed up...

(Black out)

Scene 10

(Geoffrey is watching Politician 2 with the sound off. He has an intense stare. His hand grips the arm of the couch upon which he sits. Politician 2 makes all of the standard gesticulations one might expect of a person in his position)

Geoffrey: *(He opens his mouth but closes it. Unsure of what to do, he continues to watch with no sound.)*

Geoffrey: Coincidence.

Geoffrey: *(Runs his hands through his hair in a stressed manner. He then covers his mouth, tightly, with his hands. He worriedly ponders.)*

Geoffrey: *(He looks down. He looks back up. In a daze)* Should...? *(He gets angry)* Okay, enough! I'm not...this isn't...ugh! I had nothing to do with what happened! Nothing! How could I? How fucking could I? I'm not a fucking mutant. No. No, that's insane. It was a coincidence. Nothing else. Nothing else. But it doesn't matter. I didn't do anything. But it doesn't matter. The politician deserved to die. He was a-a-a hateful fucking I-don't-know. He deserved it. I didn't kill him, but he deserved it. I didn't kill him. How could I? I'm not-I'm some master of fate! I'm not a god or...or...*(cannot find, or cannot bring himself to say, the word. The word is "monster")* whatever! So, yeah, I didn't kill him. He deserved to die, though. *(Looks at Politician 2)* HE deserves to die too, but that doesn't mean—

(As before, there is a sound of a rope snapping. Politician 2 crumbles to the floor, dead.)

Geoffrey: *(Pause)*

Geoffrey: *(Pause)*

Geoffrey: *(Pause)*

Geoffrey: *(quietly)* Oh God. Oh God...it's true.

Scene 11

(The office of Dr. Michaels. The Professor is grading papers and eating a sub. Enter Geoffrey.)

Dr. Michaels: *(Happy to see him)* Ah, hi Geoffrey.

Geoffrey: *(Nervously)* Hi, Dr. Michaels.

Dr. Michaels: You okay? Here *(he gestures)* take a seat. *(Geoffrey does so)*. What's up?

Geoffrey: Nothing I...things are pretty crazy out there, aren't they?

Dr. Michaels: *(Serious)* With the politicians? It is scary, isn't it? I was five when Reagan got shot, and I remember my parents being just terrified. Of course, Reagan was kind of a bastard, but when something like that happens, when someone tries to kill the president, it *is* a scary thing.

Geoffrey: *(Choosing his words carefully)* You think the deaths were killings?

Dr. Michaels: I don't like to jump to conclusions, but it would seem to point that way. The two politicians died the exact same way in such a short span of time. That has to be more than a coincidence. *(Smirks, shrugs)* Of course, induction **is** impossible, so I guess I can't say either way.

Geoffrey: I don't follow.

Dr. Michaels: Oh, that was a reference to Wittgenstein, specifically his work the *Tractatus Logic-Philosophicus*. Basically, Wittgenstein was arguing that empirical science is slightly

problematic and that there's really no basis for drawing general principles from individual instances. Anyway, it's just a line I liked; it's very blunt, and it's fun to say if you want to sound important.

Geoffrey: Do you think it's true? That induction is impossible?

Dr. Michaels: Honestly, sometimes I don't know what to think. It's why I enjoy metaphysics though; trying to understand the logic of the universe is quite the puzzle. I think we've strayed from what you wanted to talk about, though, which I'm sure is pretty annoying. Forgive me, with current events so insane, I find it easier to talk about things I understand (or can convincingly pretend to understand).

Geoffrey: It-it is insane out there, isn't it? I don't know why things are happening the way they are. I'm like y—I feel like you; I feel like I don't understand.

Dr. Michaels: I'd say that's normal right about now. This whole election cycle has been over the top, and that was **before** politicians started to die (or get killed) for no reason.

Geoffrey: You think there's no reason for it?

Dr. Michaels: Well, I suppose there **is**, but I don't know what it could be.

Geoffrey: Maybe...maybe someone has had enough with what those politicians are saying. Maybe they're—

Dr. Michaels: Maybe they're getting killed for their hateful rhetoric?

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Dr. Michaels: I thought about that. I think that might be scarier than them dying for no reason.

Geoffrey: R-really?

Dr. Michaels: Yes. As vain, stupid, and horrible as those politicians can be, I'm not comfortable with them being killed just for speaking their (admittedly dreadful) beliefs.

Geoffrey: But they are stirring up hatred. They're promoting violence.

Dr. Michaels: That's true, but think about what kind of precedent is being set. There are a lot of problems with this country, but having freedom of speech is an amazing right we have. I don't like the notion of people being killed just for exercising their right to speak as they please. Imagine if someone started killing the politicians **you** agreed with just because they didn't like what they had to say.

Geoffrey: It's different. (*Hint of desperation*) It **has** to be different.

Dr. Michaels: How so?

Geoffrey: Because those politicians were dirt bags. Hate crimes are on the rise because of people like them. From a utility standpoint, isn't it...isn't it better that they're dead?

Dr. Michaels: Well, careful now. With a utility justification, you have to take into account **all** of the consequences of an action. Sure, there are probably, as you said, some positives to having racist politicians silenced, but there could be severe negative repercussions. Again, we don't want a precedent set where people can be killed **just** for having an unpopular opinion.

Geoffrey: So you think I'm—so you think that it's bad that those politicians were kil—that they're dead?

Dr. Michaels: Well, we'll have to wait and see. Generally, though I'm by and large a utilitarian, I do think that it is extraordinarily difficult to justify killing anyone for any reason. It's not impossible, but a person would have to have weighed all the consequences thoroughly.

Geoffrey: (*Disappointed. He did not receive the validation he was hoping for*) I see. I suppose that makes sense.

Dr. Michaels: Unfortunately, there are few easy answers when it comes to ethics. Everyday decisions are simple, but moral and ethical dilemmas...those, heh, those are tricky. (*Pause*) Anyway, sorry to cut our talk short, but I actually have to run to South Campus; I'm teaching a political philosophy class down there in about ten minutes. Considering our discussion, it would probably be up your alley, if you're interested; it runs again next semester.

Geoffrey: (*Lost in his own thoughts, upset but trying hard not to show it*) Huh? Oh, yeah. You-you bet.

Dr. Michaels: Talk to you later Geoffrey. Do me a favor? Shut my office door on your way out. It's not like there's anything worthwhile to steal, but I suppose I should pretend to have a professional office.

Geoffrey: Sure...sure thing. G-goodbye, Professor.

(*Dr. Michaels exits. Geoffrey sits there for a moment looking dazed.*)

Geoffrey: (*Muttering*) Consequences. Unforeseen consequences...

Geoffrey: I think I've fucked up.

(*Blackout*)

Scene 12

Geoffrey is watching Politician 3 on the TV.

Politician 3: Now look here, I'm really great, okay? Nobody is better for this country than me. Nobody is better than me, period. Anyone who says different is a liar okay. I'm just saying it like it is (*the audience cheers*). When I'm president, and, let's face it, I'm going to be president. My opponents are dead and the Democrats are jokes. I'm going to be president and I'm going to stomp all over our enemies. Anyone who doesn't like it is going to get it, trust me? Complain about me as President? You're going to jail. (*There is a huge applause*) I'm going to be president, and I'm going to make this country gr—(*he is cut off abruptly. Geoffrey has muted the TV*).

Geoffrey: Why are you like this? Why won't you stop. You! Are! An! Idiot!

(He gives an exasperated sigh)

He's going to ruin everything. Even if he loses, and he's **got** to lose, he's going to ruin everything. Every word that comes out of his mouth is just filled with hatred wrapped in idiocy wrapped in insanity. The longer this goes on...the worse it's going to get. I *(Pause)* I have to interfere, don't I? I have to do something. If he keeps on...if he becomes president...oh my God, if he becomes President... *(He looks at Politician 3)*

(Pleadingly) Please don't make me do what you're making me do. I don't...but you're so evil. I never imagined. *(Pause)* I mean, I've heard stories. I've read history. There have been some evil motherfuckers before. Bundy. Dahmer. Hell, there've been evil motherfuckers who come to power. But, that's in the past. But, that's elsewhere. You don't expect it to happen to you. You don't expect it to happen in your...I mean, how could it be in a civilized...?

But it's happening now, and it's happening here.

(Pause)

The damage he's doing. The hatred he's spewing and riling up...it's got to be stopped.

(Pause)

But why do I have to be the one to stop it?

Why am I the one who sees what has to be done? That has to destroy his...

(Pause)

With the others, it was an accident. I didn't realize. How could I? I mean, you fantasize about people you don't like dying, but to be able to make that fantasy a reality? That's crazy!

(He reflects)

Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe this is all some big delusion on my part. Killing people with your mind? That's Twilight Zone shit. It's not—it's not—it's not something that just happens!

(Pause)

It would be easier if I was crazy. Then I wouldn't have to worry about the fallout from my actions. No guilt, no responsibilities.

I'm either a crazy person or a murderer. *(The sadness of realization)* I killed those two. Sure, they were right-wing, pro-war, pro-big business, anti-choice bigot nut jobs but I...I killed them. And, sure, the world is a better place without them in it, but-but-but they were people. With families! Loved ones! They were living, and now they're not. And it's because of me. Because of me. I think I might be sick.

(Pause)

I can't do it. Even if it makes the world a better place. Before, I didn't mean it—I—it was an accident. I can't kill someone on purpose. I can't **murder** someone...even **him**. I thought I could, but I can't. *(Pause, defeated)* And even if I do...even if I do, what if I'm wrong? What if killing him causes something worse? Oh God, this is just too much. I can't stop this trolley from crashing right into us. *(He turns back to Politician 3)*

Politician 3: *(Nearly frothing)* And I'm going to round up the Mexicans, and I'm going to have them thrown out at gunpoint. Adios muchachos! *(Geoffrey begins to show visible signs of rage)* That's what I say! And next, comes the Muslims. We are ONE NATION UNDER ONE GOD. There's no place in the national anthem for Mohamad or Allah. If you can't get with our values, you better get the Hell out. How is that not fair? *(Geoffrey is trembling, hands fisted)* Get with the program or get out. And if you do leave, you better believe we won't let you come back! We

are going to bomb the ever loving **shit** out of the countries you're going back to, so, if you don't want to die, I seriously suggest you—

(Politician 3 never finishes his sentence because Geoffrey's rage boils over, and he screams)

Geoffrey: SHUT UP AND DIE!

(Politician 3 dies)

(Pause, Geoffrey in stunned silence)

(Geoffrey breaks down into tears)

(Blackout)

Scene 13

(A Dream. Geoffrey appears in a spotlight. He is clothed in a robe consisting of stripes of prison jumpsuit orange and American money green. Hands are in handcuffs. His legs, importantly, cannot be seen at the current moment. Politician 3 enters, his suit on backwards)

Politician 3: *(He speaks with the voice of Politician 1 and the accent of Politician 2)* Geoffrey Veidt.

Geoffrey: You...?

Politician 3: You are to be tried.

Geoffrey: I've done n-nothing wrong.

Politician 3: Nothing is zero.

Geoffrey: I-

Politician 3: 3 is bigger than zero.

Geoffrey: Hey-

Politician 3: You have done something bigger than nothing. You have done something. And you will be tried.

Geoffrey: What right do you have to try me?

Politician 3: *(He pulls out his suit pockets, money falls to the ground)* Isn't it obvious? Isn't it blunt?

Geoffrey: *(anger)* What do you want with me?

Politician 3: To try you.

Geoffrey: To what end?

Politician 3: An end of itself.

Geoffrey: You are incredibly vague.

Politician 3: Death is vague.

Geoffrey: Am I going to die?

Politician 3: We are all going to die.

Geoffrey: I meant soon.

Politician 3: And I didn't?

(Pause, they both consider their situations)

Geoffrey: I don't regret what I did.

Politician 3: Really?

Geoffrey: You had no kindness in you. None of you did. All you did...all you did was speak to the worst in angry white people.

Politician 3: *(laughs with the voice of all 3 politicians)*

Geoffrey: What's so funny?

(Laughter continues)

Geoffrey: What's so damn funny?

Politician 3: *(Politician 3's voice, the other two keep laughing)* You say that as if it were something novel. It's not. *(All laughter continues, but it soon stops abruptly. Then, deadly serious)* You didn't think we were the first...? **Did you?**

Geoffrey: It-it doesn't matter what I thought. You'll be the last. *(Proudly)* I stopped y-

(The laughter picks up, louder than before)

Geoffrey: *(Irritated)* Stop it. *(Angrier)* Stop it. *(Angriest)* **STOP IT!** *(He snaps the handcuffs)* I stopped you, you fuckers, I. STOPPED. YOU.

Politician 3: *(Surprised by the feat of strength, but keeping his cool)* You sure about that?

Geoffrey: *(Enraged, he attempts to run at Politician 3. Unfortunately, and unknown to him and the audience, his legs had been shackled the entire time, and he falls on his face)* Ugh!

Politician 3: There's no stopping it. *(Laughter again)* Never.

Geoffrey: *(Ashamed and infuriated)* DIE!

Politician 3: Okay; it's not like it will make a difference. *(Sound of rope snapping. He crumples to the floor.)*

Scene 14

Several days later: Geoffrey enters in the same outfit as Scene 1. He looks drained. He goes over to the couch and turns on the TV. Spotlight on a professor in a tweed jacket sitting in a chair

Professor: What you have to realize about the end of World War I is that many soldiers were coming home both physically and mentally broken. Forced to do and endure horrible things, many were quite despondent, and they carried the pain with them for the rest of their lives. Some were able to take solace in the fact that they had participated in the "war to end all wars." Of course, history has tragically shown the falsity of that—*(Geoffrey changes the channel. Politician 4 is in the spotlight)*

Politician 4: When my predecessor died so suddenly, I knew it was up to me to carry his torch.

Geoffrey: *(uncertain)* Wait-

Politician 4: Our enemies cannot silence us!

Geoffrey: *(With creeping dread)* No-

Politician 4: No matter what evil, secret means they use to kill us.

Geoffrey: Fuck.

Politician 4: They cannot kill what we stand for.

Geoffrey: God damn.

Politician 4: The liberals, and the Muslims-

Geoffrey: No, no, no, no-

Politician 4: And those deranged Black Lives Matter protestors. They are all in on it. They conspire to wipe us out.

Geoffrey: W-why, h-how-?

Politician 4: They cannot silence us! We are the people. The fight to take back our country that my predecessor started; **I** will finish. We will bring all those who would cripple real America to heel!

Geoffrey: Not again. I can't (*Pauses, determined*) Die!

(Politician 4 *does not die*)

Politician 4: Because we are what the people want! The real people! We are what the people need!

Geoffrey: (*shocked*) D-die!

(Politician 4 *does not die*)

Politician 4: The degenerates who-

Geoffrey: (*Desperately*) Die! Die! Die!

(Politician 4 *does not die*)

Politician 4: -threaten our security with their un-American ways will pay the price. As my predecessor said, they will comply or they will-

Geoffrey: (*Fighting back tears*) Die! Please just-

(Politician 4 *does not die*)

Politician 4: Because we know what this country needs. Our cause is righteous. And, though we may lose some honored members, Rest in Peace my predecessor, we as a force shall never—

Geoffrey: (*With one last attempt*) Die!

Politician 4: Amen.

Curtain

On Seeing *Executive* Performed

As I sit down to type these words it has been almost exactly one week since I saw a staged reading of *Executive*. Directed and performed by students of the Salem State theatre department, the experience of hearing my words spoken by others and seeing my characters embodied by actors was a strange, yet very cool, one. Life was breathed into my text in a way that I had only imagined before, and witnessing the transformation of my ideas into a more or less concrete reality on stage was at once elevating and humbling.

The performance of *Executive*—with the passion imbued on stage by the actors—had a heart and resonance to it that my text could never have. I will never like my own writing, and this may be because, ultimately, I, on some level, do not care very much for myself; I see too much of myself in the words I write, and, as such, I can never be too happy with them. Nevertheless, the directors and performers of the staged reading of my play did something quite amazing; they made the work their own. Geoffrey—a cipher for myself during the writing of the play—became a new, whole, person when played by Dylan LeSage; the character retained the heart I had wanted for him, but he was stripped of all the pesky reminders of myself that I so hate to see reflected. The same can easily be said of the rest of the characters who, in the hands of talented performers, became flesh-and-blood humans: the kind my words could, by themselves, only dream of being.

Executive was meant to be a play that took on political, moral, and personal issues. If it succeeded in any of this, it is because of the directors and the cast. This end note, then, should properly be understood as a thank you to them.

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