



YU

By

Terence Hughes

WHY I LIKE IT: *Acting Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes...*

Some of the greatest pieces of acting advice I ever got have never served me well as an actor. They served half-bettered as a writer.

#1 "Find the humor in the drama, and bring the drama to the humor."

#2 "Wax on, wax off"

#3 "Piss when it's opportune, never when it's necessary"

Those sorts of things.

But finding balance (see advice #1) is a tricky thing as a playwright. We are supposed to think about pacing, plot development, characterization, back stories, subtext, nuance etc. and balance them all effortlessly in a "voice" (da fuq?) of our own. Tall beast to slay in just one playing.

In American Yu by Terence Patrick Hughes, we are given quite a meaty beast to slay. Politically charged and littered with giggling dialogue and relevancy that transcends the page; this beast is clearly fleshed in totality. My mind raced and heartbeat thumped along rapidly to this one.

I hope yours does too. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

Five Stars

American Yu

by

Terence Patrick Hughes

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Characters in their Order of Appearance

YU ZHANG Chinese dissident, professor of American literature, male

BARNABUS HICKS President of NMU, male

TED LEWIS Chief of NMU Campus Police, male

KAITLIN GARCIA Aide to Governor Lester, Latina female

GOVERNOR LESTER Governor of Minnesota, male

ASHER FINN African American student, male

Time marches in war and peace, circa the present

The entire play takes place within one mid-afternoon in President Hicks' office at Northern Minnesota University (NMU).

Play Synopsis

A Chinese dissident arrives at a small Minnesota college to begin teaching American Literature, when a campus speech by the state's Governor is interrupted by a minor riot. The backlash that ensues against a troubled student pits politicians against the school's administration as well as the new, outspoken professor.

Terence Patrick Hughes - Bio

Terence Patrick Hughes writes fiction, poetry, and drama. His theatre work has been developed and produced in New York City, around the USA and internationally, and published in university literary magazines, including those of Goddard and Georgia College, as well as Best Contemporary One-Act Plays. Recent short stories were published with the Sandstone Review and Fleas on the Dog and are nominated for the PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers. The New York Times noted that his work "...explores heavy subject matter with humorous dialogue and strong characters". Born in Lawrence, MA, Hughes lives with his wife and two children in Woodstock, NY.

American Yu - Development History

- ❖ First Flight Festival, Boomerang Theatre, New York, NY, 2017
- ❖ Two-Week Workshop & Staged Reading, Prologue Theatre, Arlington, VA, 2020

Act One

SETTING: *Scene One takes place in a space between darkness and light. The remaining scenes take place in a clean and ordered office containing a desk, bookcases, and other items befitting an executive of college administration.*

AT RISE: *In the darkness, a traditional Chinese song plays softly, and as it rises in volume, the faintest hints of a brass band playing a Souza march can be heard. As the Chinese song rises, so too does the Souza march which soon overtakes the Chinese song, which in turn overtakes the Souza march, until both songs reach a hardly recognizable crescendo, then sudden silence. YU appears and as he speaks, straight thin bars of light grow around him, finally encasing him in a prison cell or cage of illumination.*

YU

My name is Yu. When I was a boy, just at the age of my memory, likely not more than four or five, I lived with my family in a small village outside of Chengdu. One day my father was asked by my mother to watch over me for several hours as she went to visit a sick friend. I was an only child and under my mother's care I'd been free and happy to do as I please in our little house. But this wet summer afternoon, my father introduced me to the state of absolute control. The rules were hard and simple. I was not allowed outside, I was to be silent unless urgent matters of biology compelled me to speak, and I was to take part solely in the improvement of the home. I scrubbed, I mopped, I washed clothing. The tasks my mother carried out with sweet songs were repugnant to my young spirit, I had beads to string, my pencil drawing of the great whale lay incomplete on the table, but my father was stern, grim, unmovable, and so I remained mute throughout my tasks. I replaced the workload of my mother with my young hands and this took many hours and more than a few tears. And when the grueling labors were complete, and the rains had subsided leaving a mist around our moss-grown patch of a yard, my father took me out and sat me on a pile of dirt as he chopped silky oak for the fire. The reward for my hard work was to hear my father tell stories of being a boy himself, shoeless, working on a farm from the age of ten, always exhausted, always hungry, and always on the run. First, he ran from the Japanese bombs, escaping only by a hair's length, crawling into the high grass as shards of shrapnel sliced his hands and feet. Then the Japanese bombs went away and the Kuomintang soldiers came, taking all they wanted and leaving behind a once serene community scattered like shattered glass. My father hated the Kuomintang and prayed for simpler times. He was unsure exactly who heard his prayers for soon the Japanese bombs returned and again he was on the run. While he chopped the wood and told these tales, the mist receded, and the sun appeared over our heads. It became very hot so my father took off his shirt and when he turned to place it on the wood pile, I saw them...purple, red scars, some small, others whose raised range of skin stretched from his shoulder to the small of his back. He heard me gasp, so he turned and asked if I knew how the scars came to him. The Japanese? No. The Kuomintang? No. Then who I asked with wide eyes, who hurt you like this? My father lowered

YU

(cont.)

his face to mine, so close I could smell the dried leaves from his pipe on his breath when he

whispered ‘Shu-shu’. Now, my father or mother had no brother and I no uncle so right away I said, ‘shu-shu who?’ And he put his lips to my ear as our sweat mingled and my cheek burned from his scratchy chin, and that whisper, no I believe he exhaled the words... ‘Mao shu-shu’... and he then looked at me with his deep, sad brown eyes and held a finger to his lips. Much happened to me in those seconds of silence. My head was filled with images of this Mao shu-shu who cuts people and whose name must be whispered like a curse word. I grabbed my father by the arms and I shouted ‘why didn’t you run from him?’ And he asked me without pause ‘why didn’t you run today? I made you clean the waste, mop the floors, all without protest without complaint, why didn’t you run? Why didn’t you escape?’ And I did not pause in my reply ‘Because I love you.’ I said. And I am certain that it was the same answer that my father had deep inside of him but perhaps it had been imprisoned within for far too long, because his eyes fell from mine, he dropped our embrace, quickly gathered the cuts of wood, and went away. We never spoke of it again...even the few years later on the night that he died. I was there, my mother, my mother’s sister...but no there was no shu-shu in those final hours...or at the dawn of the new day, the first without my good and quiet father. And as the sun rose I went to our yard and stood by the cutting-pile where secrets lay in the dirt and wood-dust and I swore that no shu-shu would ever get hold of me...I would struggle, I would resist, I would fight ...no shu-shu will cut my skin...no shu-shu will keep me silent...I will not love that way... Yu will not love that way...

As the final bar of light surrounds YU, a long pause into lights down. End of Scene One.

*Scene Two. The song ‘Feel Good Inc.’ by Gorillaz plays in the darkness until lights up to the fine and spacious office of **BARNABUS HICKS**, president of Northern Minnesota University (NMU). The clean and ordered room contains all the professional accoutrements befitting a careful and learned man. A large window at backstage wall shows a splendid view of the campus, a chapel, grand spruce trees, and a welcoming early September afternoon’s sky. **YU** enters from stage right door, scans the room, and then moves to gaze at the bookcases. He comes upon a volume of interest and slips it into his hands. He walks to a corner chair, sits, and begins to read. **HICKS** enters from the same door in a hurry. He does not see Yu and moves to his desk and withdraws a bottle and a glass from his drawer, unscrews the bottle, and starts to pour when he sees Yu.*

HICKS

Oh, for god’s sake...

As they speak, HICKS pours the drink back in the bottle and places it in the drawer.

HICKS

...are you, you must be...

YU

Yu Zhang

HICKS

Of course. I didn't expect...well first off, welcome, sir, welcome. I see that you are...

YU

Reading...

HICKS

....making yourself comfortable with...

YU

...you know one of the few books in English that my family owned was a collection of American Prose. My friends spent time consulting the I-Ching. I preferred to have my fate determined by Hawthorne and Poe.

HICKS

Well I'm afraid that's one of the few literature anthologies you'll find on my shelves. I got a doctorate in Finance, myself.

YU

You studied money.

HICKS

Yes, I mean, the whole idea of it. Not just the monetary exchange.

YU

What did you learn?

HICKS

Learn? Oh goodness, what didn't I? Markets, buying cycles, statistics, the whole system behind the curtain, I guess.

YU

Good or bad.

HICKS

What's that?

YU

The secrets behind the curtain. Did you conclude if they were good or bad?

HICKS

No. Not really. I did take one course called 'Ethics in Offshore Banking'.

YU

In American Literature, it is often quite easy to identify good and bad.

HICKS

We do love our heroes and villains.

YU

Oh, I'm afraid those are not so easy to identify.

HICKS

Right...so right...so...Yu.... let me begin by saying that your scholarly achievements are quite impressive which is largely why we reached out after your...situation...with NYU.

YU

Your kind gesture was a lifeline. I am now back in queue for a visa so...be assured I shall repay your goodwill with hard work.

HICKS

That's nice....to hear...but there are other matters which are...not so...nice...in any sense.

YU

Is that so.

HICKS

Please...let's sit?

HICKS sits behind the desk, YU sits on the opposite side.

HICKS

OK...now understand, after you were, I mean after your...exit...from NYU, we extended our offer as more of a...symbolic gesture of support...

YU

It resembled a job offer far more than a round of applause.

HICKS

...well when you accepted it was quite a surprise. I mean we're a fine university but not exactly up to speed with NYU.

YU

I would suggest that NYU should consider its pace.

HICKS

Ha-ha. Yes...it's all in the pacing! Ha, ha...here's the deal...I've gone through quite a bit of hell recently, is hell the word? I think it is. Because of or should I say due to...or...your taking a position here was celebrated at first and then...it wasn't.

YU

Ah yes, the great narrative of my life. You offered me a job, President Hicks, and I accepted and now you're telling me what...there is no job? I'd say you owe me a better explanation than that.

HICKS

Now slow down, we're not exactly...oh god...dealing with dissatisfaction amongst the faculty is basically my job description. I've settled professional matters amicably when hand to hand combat seemed the only solution but this issue...your issue...involves not only faculty and staff but the Board of Trustees and now, ahem...politicians. Let's just say that this chair I occupy with great pride is getting almost too hot to stand...or...sit. The truth of...

Officer LEWIS bursts into the office from stage right.

LEWIS

Barney! Barney!

HICKS

Ted! What's the...

LEWIS

I lost em! I stopped to tie my shoe! I swear, a knot and two loops and he was gone!

HICKS

This is...

LEWIS

I got my guys looking all over, he should be easy to spot...oh...he's right there.

HICKS

Call off the hounds.

YU

Did I do something wrong?

HICKS

Officer Lewis is the head of campus police. We thought you'd be...happier...with an...escort.

YU

For my safety or for that of the faculty and staff?

LEWIS

Oh, you got nothing to worry about. I mean it's a big campus...take one wrong turn and...but it's safe, made one arrest in the last month and that was only a stalker. Kid was stone cold sober, too, said he just likes to get naked and run.

HICKS

Ted...

YU

You arrested the young man.

LEWIS

Sure.

YU

And what was the charge?

LEWIS

Not sure. We hand em' over to the local cops. Probably exposure, public nuisance, the usual naked teenager stuff.

YU

Isn't it common courtesy to throw the little ones back?

LEWIS

My job ain't exactly fishing, mister.

HICKS

Officer Lewis, we're done.

LEWIS

Ok, but, Barney, the Governor's supposed to get here soon and I ain't heard a peep from his security.

HICKS

Well, go and make sure everything is secure until they peep you.

LEWIS

Gotcha. And I'll have one of the boys drive the professor over to the...

HICKS

No! I'll take him...there myself. I'm hoping that after we finish our...chat...and come to some sort of...I thought then we might attend the Governor's speech together.

YU

That's getting ahead of ourselves, don't you think?

HICKS

Yes. But...I hope that you recognize his visit as a big deal. State politicians do not make appearances up here very often

LEWIS

Unless their looking for votes.

HICKS

OK, Ted, go.

LEWIS

So long.

LEWIS exits.

HICKS

I apologize but...I need a drink. Would you like one?

HICKS withdraws the bottle

YU

No, thank you. My time in prison was not very kind to my liver.

HICKS

Oh, for goodness sake...here please, have some water. Everyone's a bit jumpy with the Governor coming and your arrival...we don't usually attract celebrities here...other than Paul Bunyan.

Slight pause

HICKS

You see, we let a Paul Bunyan convention use the campus in July. Lots of lumber-jack dress-up. They roast a big blue ox. Fun, fun.

YU

President Hicks...

HICKS

Please, call me Barney.

YU

OK, Barney...I am an employee of this university.

HICKS

Well as I said...

YU

My first lecture is tomorrow at 8.15. 'Morality in Literature' We will be discussing Hawthorne's 'Wakefield'. Do you know the story?

HICKS

I'm sure I do. Yes. In fact, no, I don't. But let's not...

YU

A man leaves his loving wife for a trip with a promised return at the end of the week. Instead, the man takes a room on the opposite street, disguises himself and his whereabouts and does not return home for twenty years.

HICKS

That's quite odd. But, Yu, as I've already stated...

YU

He spends the twenty years somberly watching his house and the daily practices of his wife.

HICKS

Well many of us do that...but not from afar. Regardless, there's not going to be a...

YU

He does eventually return home, yet it is his reasons for departure that the class will discuss. After Hawthorne, we will move into Melville. I emailed you a complete syllabus of all my classes...along with the executed contract. I have a copy of it in my luggage, if you'd like to examine your own signature...

HICKS

No, thank you.

YU

Now that I've satisfactorily performed every function of my new job, I would very much like to go to my room.

HICKS

You don't seem to understand the difficult situation that I'm in, so, perhaps this will help...we have you staying at a hotel.

YU

I was promised faculty housing.

HICKS

And I was promised a stress-free career! Oh...I'm sorry...heck, Yu, it's like this...

HICKS quickly pours himself a drink, downs it, and continues.

HICKS

I'm a man of peace...and Northern Minnesota University is a peaceful institution, a tranquil place, an oasis of enlightenment. Do you know I once met Rosalynn Carter? The president's ex-wife? I mean the ex-president's wife. Someone got her here for a fundraiser and we sat together for a short while. After a bit of chit-chat, I asked her if there was ever a time during her husband's term in office that she wished he'd bombed somebody. They'd all dropped them around the globe, Truman, Ike, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, even Ford managed a few Asian firefights in his abbreviated time...uh...but those Carter years, those were quiet years, and I wanted to know if she thought the president might have kept the world a safer place if he'd blown some things up. And do you know what Rosalynn said?She said, 'You can't grow anything in scorched earth.' I just loved that. Political folks are so good at aphorisms. And I like to think that I model my job here at NMU after the practice of one of our greatest one-term presidents, avoid conflict at all costs so that you may keep the ground fertile. So there was...is...are...some issues with your joining our faculty. Now don't get the wrong idea. We are thrilled to have you here, such distinction and courage is rarely...still your individual achievements must also be weighed in proportion to the individual rights of the present employees and some individuals have raised objections to your appointment, specifically with the things that you said in your recent New York Times piece. Now, I am not a judge. No, sir. I took one law course as an undergraduate and I got a 'C' simply because the professor and I both had long hair. I'm convinced of that. But in this case...a good many teachers and a lot of administration feel as though they are being pushed into your spotlight and because you were critical of democracy in print...now I didn't read the article myself, I don't know exactly what you said but there are at least three professors who are outright incensed and one of them happens to be a brilliant political scientist, a twenty-plus year tenured employee of this university, the pet of the Trustees, and the biggest pain in my administrative ass. Excuse me. So...as a man of peace...and administration, I seek compromise. Not from you or...them...but for the sake of the students and the school...and me, of course...would you mind apologizing...a little?

YU

What the hell am I apologizing for...!?

HICKS

I am in a tough situation right now, sir, and I would appreciate...

YU

I'm thirty days away from being kicked out of the country! How's that for tough?

HICKS

I don't think I like your tone.

YU

Look...I'm fortunate to be in America but here I am! It's not like I can change my history to suit your administration. I need the job. I really need the job! And you know who I was when you hired me.

HICKS

We...I mean I wouldn't dare to suggest that you change who you are. Just a show of contrition, a temporary one at that...to calm the waters.

YU

Who is 'we' exactly? Because I'm getting the feeling that it's not your ring that I'm being asked to kiss?

HICKS

No! Not me, I could care less...about politics, I mean...not that I don't take an active part in...anyway they want you to apologize to the Governor.

YU

So that's what he's coming here for?

HICKS

All I know is that they want some kind of a symbolic gesture so that....anyway you'll say 'no', I don't blame you, but then I have to take action which really, really....

YU

I either deliver an apology to a politician or I am no longer employed by this university. Just to be clear, that is what you're saying.

HICKS

Oh god it sounds so authoritarian. Please, that's not me, really it isn't. I'm just an old hippie who long ago lost his...

Slight pause

HICKS

...yes, aside from a litany of contractual and financial x's and o's...that's about right.

YU

This is bullshit. Bullshit!

HICKS

You're right! But this is the corral we find ourselves in so you must somehow step your way around it or...

YU

When can I speak to the Governor?

HICKS

Well my car is right out front, we can pop over to your hotel and I don't know if we'll catch him before the speech but...I thought we'd all come back here and discuss whatever it is they have in mind.

YU

I wouldn't dare venture to guess the states of their mind.

HICKS

I don't know the governor at all...but honestly if we can make it past this rough start...I would like to get to know you, professor.

YU

That would only be possible if I can still recognize myself. Excuse me, I'll get my luggage.

YU exits

HICKS

That was good. It was good. It's all good. It's all good...

HICKS takes another quick drink and exits. Lights down. End of Scene Two.

Scene Three. In the darkness, the sound of a large outside gathering of college students and faculty listening to Governor Lester's speech broadcasted over a PA system, there is chatter and the usual din of a young crowd. Suddenly loud cracks of what sounds like gunfire spurs the crowd into a frenzy of screams and shouts, which is then intermingled with police sirens, officers on bullhorns, until the sounds of the minor riot goes silent but for the distant voice on a police scanner.

SCANNER VOICE

All units, all units, to NMU campus, shooting in progress, all units, I repeat, all units to NMU campus, a shooting is in progress.

Lights up to President HICKS office, a short time later. HICKS bursts into the office and circles his desk.

HICKS

Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit.

LEWIS enters.

LEWIS

Barney!

HICKS

Ted...shit!

LEWIS

You all right?

HICKS

No!

LEWIS

What do you need?

HICKS

I don't know!

HICKS hugs LEWIS. The phone rings.

LEWIS

You gonna answer the phone?

HICKS

No!

LEWIS

It could be your wife.

HICKS releases LEWIS.

LEWIS

Or the newspapers.

HICKS

I don't want to talk to either of them.

LEWIS

You got to, Barney. I just spent twenty minutes pepper-spraying teenagers, least you can do is answer the phone.

HICKS answers the phone.

HICKS

Hello? Yes, this is...yes, officer. I...what? Who reported...? What?

HICKS cell phone begins to ring, he takes it out, looks at it.

HICKS

You don't...no, no, there was a problem but we're all safe now, please, can you hold on just one...

HICKS takes the call on the cell phone.

HICKS

Meredith, I'm all right. Yes. I'm on the phone. I mean the other phone, hold on...

HICKS takes the other call.

HICKS

Hello, yes, it was just, listen to me, it was a package of firecrackers.

HICKS switches to cell phone

HICKS

Did you hear that Meredith?

Back to other phone

HICKS

I said it was only a package of firecrackers.

LEWIS

It was five packages. And a bottle rocket. That kid was loaded for bear.

HICKS

Listen to me, no one's been hurt, well, I think a few students might have gotten a little pepper in their eyes...

LEWIS

A lot. Two cans. I'm always loaded for bear.

HICKS

Some students caused a slight distur...no we don't need the National Guard! Wait, hold on...

HICKS switches back to cell phone.

HICKS

Meredith, I'll call you back. What? I'm fine. Hm? I don't know. I'll call you back. Just...I don't care what you tell your mother...I'll call you back!

Back to other call.

HICKS

Hello, I'm sorry, my life is hysterical. I mean, my wife is...listen, some students got out of hand, firecrackers, resisting arrest, that's all. State of Emergency? Well, it was a bit jarring, but I wouldn't say... no, I told you it was a student with...what? Yes, I can hold.

LEWIS

Who is that?

HICKS

The state police. Someone called in a report of riot and looting.

LEWIS

Here?

HICKS

He said the National Guard has been mobilized. My wife saw it on TV. She's very upset. They cut into her soap.

LEWIS

But it was just firecrackers.

HICKS

Didn't you hear me say that? He's transferring me to the office of Homeland Security.

Slight pause

HICKS

And the hold music is just awful.

LEWIS

I got to update my men.

HICKS

No! Don't say anything yet.

LEWIS

Barney, my boys took a few lumps. Them kids put up a fight before we broke out the pepper.

HICKS

Couldn't you have gone a little easier?

LEWIS

Pepper is goin' easy.

HICKS

Where's the Governor?

LEWIS

He's got his posse down the hall in the lounge.

HICKS

And where's the boy who started it? What's his name?

LEWIS

Asher Finn. And this kid's no stranger. He's one of the crew that squatted in Wilson Hall.

HICKS

Ugh.

LEWIS

I got him in a car downstairs with two of my boys. Says he wants a lawyer.

HICKS

Ugh! What do we do?

LEWIS

First you got to get the Governor to call this Emergency thing off.

HICKS

Can you get him in here? Say it's police business. Say anything.

LEWIS

OK. I'll try good cop, first.

HICKS

And I want to see the boy, too.

LEWIS

Now that's a bad mix.

HICKS

We have to fix this thing, Ted! And I'm talking in minutes. Right now, there are alumni who write massive checks to keep our lights on who are watching images of their alma matter on TV above a scroll that reads 'RIOT ON CAMPUS'!

LEWIS

Yeh. I'd probably watch that, too.

HICKS

Go!

LEWIS

Governor and the kid, comin' right up.

LEWIS moves to exit.

HICKS

Wait a minute. Where's Yu? I lost him in the confusion.

LEWIS

I don't trust that fellah.

HICKS

I'm not yet a fan myself but...the man is a decorated scholar.

LEWIS

Doesn't mean I'd lend him money.

HICKS

Ted, I'm about to violently lose my mind.

LEWIS exits. HICKS returns the call to speakerphone and for a few moments we hear one of the worst pieces of hold-music ever made. As HICKS stares out the window, YU enters.

YU

President Hicks?

HICKS

Oh...Yu...

YU

Am I interrupting?

HICKS turns off the speakerphone, holds phone to his ear.

HICKS

No, I'm just on hold with... a federal bureaucracy.

YU

That can't be pleasant.

HICKS

Ah, ha-ha, no... everything's fine.

YU

There are soldiers outside.

HICKS

What?

HICKS moves to the window.

HICKS

Shit! Sorry, I mean... shit!

YU

Is this some sort of invasion or is Minnesota annexing North Dakota?

HICKS

Someone alerted the National Guard by mistake. They train in an old armory down the street. Look, there's Howard Schenkel, he's still got his butcher's apron on. Listen... I'm sorry about the disturbance... but we have the boy that started the trouble and the other hooligans are being held... so it may be best if you return to your hotel until we can...

KAITLIN enters

KAITLIN

President Hicks?

HICKS

Yes.

KAITLIN

Kaitlin Garcia. I'm aide to the Governor and currently in charge of managing this crisis. Who are you on the phone with?

HICKS

Ah, it's the Office of Homeland Security.

KAITLIN

Put them on speakerphone.

HICKS

But I'm just on...

KAITLIN

Do it now!

HICKS turns on the speakerphone and again we hear the worst hold music ever made.

KAITLIN

Is this some kind of a joke?

HICKS

The state police called...

KAITLIN

What did you tell them?

HICKS

Nothing. They said something about a state of emergency and then they transferred me.

KAITLIN

Hang up.

HICKS

But it's the Office of Homeland...

KAITLIN

This is the Governor's office speaking...hang up!

HICKS hangs up.

KAITLIN

Who's this?

HICKS

Allow me to introduce Professor Yu.

KAITLIN

Yu Zhang. The source of all our troubles.

YU

Hello, Governor's office.

HICKS

I don't think you...

KAITLIN

Quiet! The Governor is doing a favor to this college by appearing here. A man who is being groomed for the highest office in this country, canceled lunch with the St. Paul Veterans Commission so that he could sit in a puddle jumper for an hour to get to this god-forsaken outpost all because your intellectual import from China decided to drop an op-ed piece that states, and I believe I quote verbatim, 'America is not a functioning democracy'.

HICKS

'Functioning' is such a tricky word. Do you know when I briefly studied Latin...

KAITLIN

Then as the Governor delivers a moving speech to a crowd of students destined to become enlightened dairy farmers, someone attempts to assassinate him.

HICKS

What?

YU

That's absurd.

KAITLIN

This is a major crisis. Fortunately, our team responded immediately. State and local police have been ordered to lock down the campus. The telephone and cable lines are being shut down. Your cell phones please.

HICKS fishes for his phone and hands it over.

HICKS

Why do you want my...wait...was there an assassination attempt that I missed?

KAITLIN

And yours?

YU

I have no phone. I much prefer to speak in person.

HICKS

Pardon...when can I have that back? My wife is a chronic communicator.

KAITLIN

Phones and cameras will be returned after they are dismissed as evidence. The Governor will be joining us any minute. He asked me to brief you. You've been briefed.

HICKS

OK, well, thank you but.... I'm still not clear about what the hell is going on. There was a disturbance not...my god, assassination...

LEWIS enters.

LEWIS

Hey, Barney. They locked down the campus. Cops and soldiers everywhere. And this little gal took my cell phone.

HICKS

She took mine, too!

KAITLIN

Officer, where is the hoodlum that incited the riot?

LEWIS

Well, I saw the Governor coming down the hall, so I stuffed the kid in a closet.

HICKS

Ted!

LEWIS

It's OK. I locked it.

GOVERNOR Lester enters.

GOVERNOR

Kaitlin, goddamn it, what's the status?

KAITLIN

Washington's approved the request, so it's entirely under your jurisdiction...however time is of the essence before the national networks catch...

GOVERNOR

Just fix it! So...who do we have here?

HICKS

Hello, Governor, I'm President Hicks, we are so proud to welcome you to NMU...and at the same time deeply ashamed...about the disturbance, I mean.

GOVERNOR

I think someone is locked in the hallway closet.

HICKS

Yes. Right. Go check it out, Ted!

LEWIS

I will. I'll go check it out of the closet but then...what do you want me to do?

HICKS

Wait until we call for you.

LEWIS

But little miss bossy took my phone.

HICKS

We'll find you, just go!

LEWIS

Roger, that.

LEWIS exits

GOVERNOR

Well, it's been quite a visit to your campus, President Hicks.

HICKS

I'm so sorry. I take full...well at least partial responsibility but...Governor, do you think you can help to call off the state of emergency? Everyone is very nervous.

GOVERNOR

That's more or less the desired effect. And this is...

KAITLIN

Mr. Yu.

GOVERNOR

Mr. Yu. I understand you have something to say to me.

YU

In fact, I do. I was an eyewitness.

KAITLIN

To what?

YU

The speech and its strange reception.

HICKS

Yes, the professor was with me.

KAITLIN moves and whispers something to GOVERNOR.

GOVERNOR

Please sit down.

YU

Why thank you.

YU sits

KAITLIN

Mr. Yu, have you spoken with anyone since the event?

YU

Just President Hicks. Why?

KAITLIN

We'd appreciate if no one on the staff or any...fellow travelers...of the school make statements to the public or the press, unless directed by me.

HICKS

Of course. But the state of emergency, there's really no...

KAITLIN

We also need you both to sign affidavits as to the events as they unfolded. One is being emailed now.

YU

From where?

KAITLIN

The Governor's office.

YU

But the kid set the firecrackers off here.

GOVERNOR

That's not exactly right, that is to say not at all...

KAITLIN

Sir, may I?

The GOVERNOR silences. KAITLIN moves in on YU.

KAITLIN

What you heard were gunshots.

YU

Come now...

HICKS

I think there's been a big...

KAITLIN

You can sit down.

HICKS

Just a moment...

KAITLIN

This is what happened. Gunshots were fired. Then in the tense moments that followed the Governor selflessly put his own life in danger by pulling a pregnant female administrator out of harm's way.

HICKS

Do you mean Provost Hellman? Is she all right?

KAITLIN

Thanks to the Governor, the woman and expectant child are a bit jostled but just fine.

YU

This is exaggeration bordering on fiction.

KAITLIN

Turn on a television. Go online. The official word is that an attempt was made on the Governor's life.

HICKS

But there was never any...

KAITLIN

And at present, we are not ruling out the involvement of ANTIFA.

HICKS

What? When did they get here?

GOVERNOR

OK, listen up we're just as anxious to get this whole thing resolved. After all, war zones have their time and place...

KAITLIN

The Governor will advise Homeland Security to lift the order as soon as we turn the suspect over to proper authorities.

HICKS

Oh, good, good.

GOVERNOR

I understand he's being detained by the campus police.

HICKS

That's right.

GOVERNOR

The shooter will be handed over to federal marshals.

YU

Ah-ha, there it is.

KAITLIN

You are talking way too much.

HICKS

Well, Ted is...that is, my police chief is bringing the boy here now but...

YU

I have a question.

KAITLIN

There's a whole university full of answers outside that door, Mr. Yu and we're very busy so...

YU

The Governor is elected by the state so why are federal marshals coming?

GOVERNOR

It's very complicated.

YU

That's why I'm asking questions.

HICKS

Yu, maybe you'd better...

KAITLIN

This is off the record, right? No quotes by either side to be used against the other.

YU

Sure.

KAITLIN

Good. You're not in China anymore, Mr. Yu. You're in America and here the politicians don't fear the intellectuals. We laugh at them. So unless you obtain some press credentials and show up at the Governor's next Q& A, you can document your parenthetical musings, send them to our office, and we'll get back to you...promptly...I promise.

GOVERNOR

Kaitlin, can you get me a coffee?

KAITLIN

Sir?

GOVERNOR

Coffee. I want some. Go.

HICKS

Perhaps we could all...

GOVERNOR

President Hicks please show Kaitlin where the coffee is?

HICKS

Ah...yes, of course...can we get you anything, professor?

YU

I find myself craving reality.

HICKS

Oh. Ha. Ho.

KAITLIN

We'll be just a moment.

HICKS and KAITLIN exit.

GOVERNOR

So...Mr. Yu. Or...is it Professor Yu?

YU

It depends if you want a passing grade.

GOVERNOR

Ha- ha. Please excuse my assistant. Hell of a smart kid. But she's a loaded pistol all right. Ha-ha, yes sir, a loaded pistol.

YU

I hope you have a permit to carry her.

GOVERNOR

You know we are here because of you. Myself, my staff, we canceled meetings, rearranged schedules...because you decided to come to Minnesota. Could you share with me your thinking?

YU

Governor, I've spent my whole life thinking. For a change, I'd like to spend time teaching.

GOVERNOR

You write stories.

YU

Guilty as charged.

GOVERNOR

And you give speeches.

YU

In the past...

GOVERNOR

Let me ask, when you were fired from NYU...

YU

I resigned.

GOVERNOR

There was a work visa problem, as I understand it, a risk of deportation. That can be a slippery slope all right.

YU

If America wants me, I am happy to remain.

GOVERNOR

Well in that case, you can use a friend like me. Sometimes it's a matter of pulling strings, other times keeping them from being pulled...a bit like a puppeteer. I just need to have confidence in the things that you'll say while you're here.

Slight pause

YU

I wrote books and made speeches in China and I was imprisoned for it. So, no matter how fine a story I could write here in America or however moving a speech I might give, I could never escape the ubiquitous guilt of the second chance. So instead of inciting people and being punished...I'd like to settle down...to teach...and find some peace.

GOVERNOR

Oh, well you've found a peaceful state for sure. Once the snow starts falling, you'll be giving speeches to yourself. Now, bottom line, I respect what you did in China; standing up for beliefs, for human rights. I'm a fan of that. But I also understand why NYU wanted you out. You can't let one man stand in the way of international relations. I'll tell you, I occupy a similarly bold position within my own party. A moderate amongst conservatives you might say.

YU

I wish you more luck with your party than I had with mine.

GOVERNOR

Well that's just it. You've put me in a difficult position with that 'functioning democracy' remark in the Times. Did you have to print that and then hop on a plane to Minnesota? My bosses are burning my butt to come down on you.

YU

Who's the boss of the Governor?

GOVERNOR

Well, there's the president for one.

YU

I never intended to upset the president...although he upsets me all the time.

GOVERNOR

He's a love em or hate em kind of guy. And to keep myself on the love side, I have to make a counterstatement about your statement. Now, so far, I like you and I'm inclined to say that you were couching your language in the terms of literature. An educated man often speaks in analogies that can confuse the lay person. Democracy is a broad term...often misused.

YU

In word and action.

GOVERNOR

See. Lofty language! It will get you in trouble in these parts. Can't you see that I'm offering you protection? I mean, what transpired today...that's the direct result of people like you churning these kids up with your...look...you need to issue an apology, nothing fancy, just a few words that will cover your butt and mine, what do say?

YU

Do you believe that kid tried to shoot you?

GOVERNOR

What?

YU

The student with the firecrackers. I mean, come on...assassination?

Slight pause

GOVERNOR

Let me tell you, I love this country. I loved it as a kid growing up playing stickball in the streets of St. Paul and I love it today as I hold this great state's highest office. But one lesson I learned in my early days in the back alleys of the city is that you have to stand up to troublemakers. If someone pushes you, push back harder. If they throw a bottle at you, hurl back the whole garbage can. Now, granted, my perspective has changed over the years, it's mostly barbs and bon mots that I toss about today, but hear this, I will never back down from a fight. I will not allow hoodlums to attack our leaders, particularly me. It is dangerous, it is unruly, and it is un-American...and I don't love anything that is un-American.

Slight pause

YU

I have a story called 'The Magic Milk Can'.

GOVERNOR

Can't say I've read it.

YU

Then I will share it with you! It's about an old man who one day decides that the gods have blessed him with a promise to refill his milk can each morning. So, he goes out and tells the townspeople how touched by the heavens he is and that they should all respect him for his divine gift.

GOVERNOR

Very good. Now...

YU

But wait! We're almost to the best part! You see, for a very short time, the old man was popular, talked about by the whole village, and even feared by a few, until the townsfolk found him one morning, starved to death in his home, clutching the empty milk can, destitute and alone.

GOVERNOR

I won't hold my breath for the film version.

KAITLIN enters with coffee, hands it to the GOVERNOR.

GOVERNOR

I'm almost done.

KAITLIN

We've got a problem.

GOVERNOR

Don't tell me there's no Sweet & Lo.

HICKS, LEWIS, and ASHER enter. ASHER is in handcuffs, led by LEWIS.

LEWIS

Here's the kid who...

KAITLIN

It's the suspect, sir.

GOVERNOR

Sit him down.

LEWIS puts ASHER in a chair.

KAITLIN

Sir, the federal marshals are late. It appears they went to the state university by mistake.

HICKS

People often confuse NMU with NMSU. I don't know why. We're the Wolf Spiders and they're the Fightin' Fisher Cats.

KAITLIN

They estimate thirty to forty minutes tops. And that's not the big problem.

ASHER

I want a lawyer.

See?
KAITLIN

You're not under arrest.
GOVERNOR

He sure looks like he's under arrest.
YU

If you need em, we've got the local police right outside...
LEWIS

Tell them to stand down.
GOVERNOR

Well, OK...but they're already having coffee.
LEWIS

I want a lawyer.
ASHER

The boy is requesting counsel.
HICKS

Officer, do you have a compound on campus? Any kind of lock-up?
KAITLIN

I got a cell at the station but it's jammed like a clown car due to the fracas.
LEWIS

Fine. He stays here. But no one is to speak to him, is that clear?
KAITLIN

Slight pause

I want a lawyer.
ASHER

Slight pause

I want a lawyer.
ASHER

Slight pause

I want a lawyer.

ASHER

This is ridiculous.

YU

Let him cry it out.

KAITLIN

I'm sorry but this student is under our care and I must make every effort to protect his interests.

HICKS

HICKS moves to exit.

Where are you going?

GOVERNOR

To pull the boy's file. We'll call his parents. Let them deal with this mess.

HICKS

HICKS exits

That's a problem.

GOVERNOR

Understood. Officer, we need to move the young man.

KAITLIN

To where?

LEWIS

An undisclosed location.

KAITLIN

I want a lawyer.

ASHER

Like I said, I got the local police right outside...

LEWIS

No locals. We're going to keep this off the grid.

GOVERNOR

But that's who takes all our...

LEWIS

In this situation, we can't risk town police.

KAITLIN

This is not a traffic ticket.

GOVERNOR

No, you're right. But...what is it?

LEWIS

Blatant injustice comes to mind.

YU

This is all just formality, Mr. Yu, so stay out of it.

GOVERNOR

I suggest we move him to a church basement. It would be safe yet compassionate.

KAITLIN

That might be a problem.

LEWIS

No, it mightn't.

KAITLIN

If you're takin' him instead of the cops, we got to file a charge with the school. I ain't losin' my job over a technicality.

LEWIS

So charge him.

GOVERNOR

With what?

LEWIS

Contempt of country.

YU

Attempted assassination of the Governor.

KAITLIN

Huh? I want a lawyer!

ASHER

LEWIS

Now hold on, I can charge him with all kinds of university infractions, but we never booked no assassination. That kind of thing just don't happen...even when the Vikings play the Packers.

KAITLIN

Let's just go.

LEWIS stands guard over ASHER.

LEWIS

Ah, sorry, like I said, he's got to be charged and I don't think it's my place to...

GOVERNOR

Fine. Who else can do it?

LEWIS

The Provost...but she went home. I understand her and the Governor hit the deck pretty hard.

ASHER

Yeah, they did!

LEWIS

Then of course, President Hicks can...

GOVERNOR

Get him in here.

KAITLIN exits.

ASHER

I want a lawyer.

Slight pause

ASHER

I want a lawyer.

Slight pause

ASHER

I want a lawyer!

LEWIS

You know, once we charge the kid, I think we got to hear him, too.

GOVERNOR moves in on ASHER.

GOVERNOR

So...you want a lawyer. Well...I'm a lawyer. And my professional advice to you is keep your mouth shut. You're in scalding hot water and if you want out before you're cooked alive...you'll do it quietly. That's my advice. And what I have to say personally is...if I were your age, I'd take you behind the woodshed and whip the fight right out of you.

ASHER

Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha...!

GOVERNOR

You think what you did is funny?

LEWIS

You can slap him if he gets sassy. That's free and legal in custody.

ASHER

I want a lawyer.

YU

Governor, it's within his rights to...

GOVERNOR

There's no time to secure him counsel.

YU

Come on, I heard America has so many lawyers that they're forced to work ten to an office.

KAITLIN and HICKS enter.

HICKS

There's no emergency contact in the boy's file. I hate when they do that.

GOVERNOR

President Hicks we need you to charge this young man so that we can depart.

HICKS

Charge? Well, Lewis why don't you have the police...

KAITLIN

No police.

HICKS

Really? But there are so many of them outside.

LEWIS

They got me kinda flummoxed on this one, too.

YU

President Hicks, this situation is getting out of control.

KAITLIN

The suspect is coming with us. The officer insists that you record a charge with the school first.

LEWIS

We can't just hand him over, Barney.

HICKS

Oh, well then perhaps the Provost...

LEWIS

She went home. Said the Governor took her down like a linebacker.

ASHER

Yeah, he did.

KAITLIN

The Provost is just fine. We'll be releasing her statement soon.

HICKS

Well...I suppose that leaves me for now, ah, let's see...I could level an ethics charge but I'd prefer to have a hearing.

GOVERNOR

Go right ahead but get it done in the next three minutes.

HICKS

That's not our normal...you see if it's an ethics hearing we need well, me, and also a second faculty member. Professor Yu has not begun lecturing yet but he...

KAITLIN

Keep Yu out of this.

YU

I am having the worst luck getting a job today.

GOVERNOR

What about him?

HICKS

Officer Lewis is not technically faculty. He doesn't...

KAITLIN

When a new officer joins the police force, do you show him around campus?

LEWIS

Well, yeh I...

KAITLIN

He's an instructor.

HICKS

Really?

YU

Barney, don't hand this kid over like...

HICKS

That's enough, Yu! We're following procedure...mostly...all right, we also need a member of the student body.

GOVERNOR points to ASHER.

GOVERNOR

You've got one right there.

HICKS

But he's the one being charged.

KAITLIN

He can do both.

YU

All your missing now is a kangaroo.

HICKS

This is all going very fast.

ASHER

I want a lawyer.

GOVERNOR

Get it done.

HICKS

But...

GOVERNOR

President Hicks, we appreciate your help. As soon as we're gone, we'll get this state of emergency taken care of and you can return to being a sleepy little campus.

HICKS

Sleepy...

ASHER

I want a lawyer.

HICKS

Gosh. I suppose...OK, I hereby call this hearing of the Ethics Committee to order.

ASHER jumps up.

ASHER

I WANT A LAWYER!

KAITLIN

Sit down!

YU

I'll represent him.

GOVERNOR

Oh, great.

KAITLIN

You can't.

YU

Why? The police officer gets to be a professor. I want to be a lawyer.

GOVERNOR

This isn't a game.

YU

Really?

Slight pause.

GOVERNOR

You know what? Knock yourself out.

KAITLIN

Mistake.

GOVERNOR

Enough, Kaitlin. I'm trying to get from A to B. Yu is the kid's counsel.

YU

Hey...his wrists are bleeding.

LEWIS

He was pretty ornery before. I went extra tight on the cuffs.

YU

Are they necessary?

GOVERNOR/KAITLIN

Yes.

HICKS

If he's in pain...

YU

Are you afraid of him, governor? A tough kid like you from the streets of St. Paul?

KAITLIN

This miscreant tried to...

GOVERNOR

Has he been frisked?

LEWIS

Yep. Nothin' on him but a wallet with seven bucks and an old condom.

HICKS

Ted!

LEWIS

Sorry, prophylactic.

GOVERNOR

I'm not concerned. Officer, take off the cuffs but if he tries to get out of the chair, shoot him.

LEWIS

Really?

Yes. GOVERNOR

Where? In the leg? In the arm? LEWIS

Surprise me. GOVERNOR

LEWIS removes the cuffs from ASHER.

All right. You heard the man. Keep your seat or I got a decision to make. LEWIS

Yes, then...eh, the purpose of this hearing is to charge...ah, state your name, please... HICKS

George Orwell. ASHER

Don't get smart. His name's Asher Finn. LEWIS

Right. We are considering a charge against Asher Finn of...with...what's the charge, Ted? HICKS

I don't know. They say assassination. All we got is disorderly conduct. LEWIS

You can put on record that it was attempted assassination. KAITLIN

I didn't try to kill anybody! I lit firecrackers. You people are crazy! ASHER

Just charge the kid, will you? GOVERNOR

Hold on. Asher, do you own any weapons? YU

No. ASHER

KAITLIN

Handguns are very easy to obtain.

LEWIS

Like apple pie and baseball.

YU

Asher, explain in detail what happened earlier.

ASHER

I heard the Governor was giving a speech, so I went and listened to about three minutes of total bullshit and then I lit some firecrackers to...

GOVERNOR

Wait a minute, this isn't a trial. We don't need deposition. This kid created a school disturbance and he's being charged. Now do it!

HICKS

Asher Finn you are charged with disorderly conduct in...

YU

Where does he go after he leaves here?

KAITLIN

That's need to know.

YU

What about his parents? You can't just abduct a student from a college campus.

GOVERNOR

His family will be contacted. Compensated. Whatever. Officer, I want you to escort the suspect to my car and keep him there until the marshals arrive.

LEWIS

Yes, sir.

YU

That was the hearing?

HICKS

Unless anyone has any further comments.

YU

I do.

KAITLIN

Not interested.

GOVERNOR

We're going. Officer put the cuffs on.

LEWIS

Yes, sir.

ASHER

Wait!

HICKS steps up

HICKS

No.

GOVERNOR

What?

HICKS

I'm sorry but...I haven't closed the hearing.

KAITLIN

OK, hearing closed. Let's go.

HICKS

I'm sorry but...no.

Slight pause

HICKS

I don't care for the way that this has...Yu is allowed to speak...and then we can close.

GOVERNOR

I thought you weren't here to give speeches.

YU

This isn't a speech. I don't have a party behind me. I'm not looking for votes. I just have a story to tell...thirty years ago, in China...

KAITLIN

Can't we keep this discussion domestic?

YU

...I wasn't much older than this young man when I was arrested for the first time...

I had you spotted...

LEWIS

Ted.

HICKS

...and my crime was writing a poem about my father.

YU

Can I object?

KAITLIN

I don't think so.

HICKS

Well I do anyway.

KAITLIN

YU

Did you hear me? The crime was writing a poem, not more than one-half page and it wasn't political at all, in fact it was personal...and painful... but one day a friend of mine told me that people were taking their poems and essays and hanging them in the square, so I went and I saw them, hundreds of pages taped to a wall so that they fluttered in the breeze like...fresh spring leaves sprouting from an old tree.

This sounds like a speech.

GOVERNOR

YU

I never said a thing that day. I hung up my page and I read the others, endless laments of young men and women facing a hard life with no hope and just with words on paper, they acted out in opposition to society's demands; demonstrating that obedience and fear were not the emotions that a human being desires at the age of twenty or nineteen or eighteen or seventeen or...

Isn't there a time limit or something?

KAITLIN

I'm not sure, this is my first hearing.

HICKS

YU

But in one catastrophic midnight gust those leaves were ripped from their branches and the next morning the wall stood as it had before...tall, cold, and barren. And then my friends began to disappear. Until finally one morning I was brought to the police to identify my writing and to be thrown into a cell and then another and then another. I lost my passport. I lost my schooling. I

lost my standing. I became no one of any future...for what? Can anyone guess what actual crime I committed as a young man in China?

KAITLIN

Writing bad poetry?

YU

I was a criminal in the eyes of the law because I dared to look the law in the eyes and that's what this young man has done...why should the punishment be so severe for a simple critic of the government?

GOVERNOR

We appreciate the exotic remarks. President Hicks, I assume your hearing is now closed?

HICKS

Well, I suppose.

YU

I'm not finished. This is a clear abuse of this student's rights. President Hicks?

HICKS

What more can we do?

KAITLIN

Officer, cuff him, now.

LEWIS moves to cuff ASHER.

LEWIS

Yes, sir. I mean, sorry, sir, I mean, ma'am.

ASHER

That's it? Where are they taking me? I want a lawyer! A real lawyer!

LEWIS

Hold still, you little...

ASHER

Get off of me! I didn't do anything! You can't!

HICKS

Please, Ted...

LEWIS

Stop it or I'll...

ASHER and LEWIS briefly struggle, and ASHER grabs the gun from LEWIS's holster, backing into a corner.

Give me that! LEWIS

Stay back! Stay back or I'll... ASHER

Good Lord! HICKS

GOVERNOR grabs KAITLIN and uses her as a shield as LEWIS approaches ASHER.

Get him! Get him! GOVERNOR

Hey! Oh! KAITLIN

No young man...not this way... YU

Now...come on, kid. Give me that thing... LEWIS

Stay back! Or... ASHER

ASHER holds the gun up to his own head.

I'll do it. I swear!! ASHER

LEWIS slightly backs off.

Easy, son. HICKS

Easy? Easy?!? I lit firecrackers! Just because the Governor is a chicken-shit doesn't mean I tried to kill him! ASHER

OK. OK. LEWIS

ASHER

He's a liar! And a coward! I saw him hide behind that lady on the stage. Just like he's doing now!

GOVERNOR casts KAITLIN aside.

GOVERNOR

That's nonsense.

GOVERNOR realizes he is unprotected and instantly hides behind KAITLIN again.

ASHER

I saw you! And we got pictures, asshole! Hiding behind a pregnant lady, knocking her down! We're going to get you!

GOVERNOR

Can someone please subdue him?

ASHER

What's the matter, you scared? You talked so tough when you came to Warren to get votes. Promising to keep the refinery open. You swore it wouldn't close!

GOVERNOR

I never swore.

ASHER

Yes, you did!

KAITLIN

It was an assurance.

HICKS

Now is not the time to split hairs, I mean!

ASHER

Then you get elected and bam! My dad lost his job, my uncle, everybody! You lying sack of shit! Everybody lost everything!

LEWIS

Kid...gimme the gun and then we can...

ASHER

No!

YU

We want to help you...

ASHER

Nobody ever helps us! We're drowning! We ain't got nothing! I can't stay in school...there's no jobs, there's nothing! Don't you know what happens when you leave us nothing?

ASHER approaches GOVERNOR until he gets right in his face.

ASHER

This! This is what you get when you take everything away. Blood! Under this skin you hate and the bones you want to crush...there's nothing left but blood! And I'm going to splash it all across your liar's face. Blood. Blood! Blood! That's what you want. Ain't it? You want me gone! You want me dead! You want my blood!! Don't you? Don't you? Don't you!?

Blackout.

End of Act One

Act Two

SETTING: *As in Act One, the action takes place in the office of President Barnabus Hicks at NMU.*

AT RISE: *In darkness, the old tune 'Cutty Wren' plays for a few moments and suddenly switches to Rage Against the Machine's 'Bulls on Parade' which cuts off as lights come up. The room's neat order has been disturbed by signs of a very recent struggle; a chair is overturned along with many papers strewn about or items knocked off of the shelves and walls. The day outside is not so bright, with clouds forming into an overcast sky. The office is empty but for ASHER, who is seated in front of the desk and tied tightly with different kinds of rope to the chair as well as gagged with several cloths fastened together. LEWIS stands guard over him.*

LEWIS

Oh ho-ho, yes-sir-ee, sure as eggs and bacon in the morning, they're gonna get you, son. Whatever you was thinkin' musta come from a shit-for-brains part of your noggin' cause now, you ain't just the firecracker kid, hell no, you're a pistol wieldin' politician terrorizin' maniac. You gone and got yourself into a sure-fire federal offense...and you kicked me in the balls, you little prick. You're on some kind of upper, ain't you? Kids'll swallow anything that gives you a ride. Geez-Louise-on-a-toboggan. Bout' a month ago a girl drags her boyfriend into the station, says he drank rubbin' alcohol. Thousands a kinds of foreign and domestic beers in this country and he bellies up for what's supposed to go on a boo-boo. Bunch of mind-altered cable-TV-pampered shit-bums, is what you are. And I'll tell you exactly what the problem is, is nobody beats their kids no more. Shoot, when I was growin' up you couldn't walk down the block without hearin' the echoes of an old-fashioned belt whippin'. Whack! Whack! Whack! That's the goddamned soundtrack of my youth. Hell, if I pulled what you pulled, wavin' a gun around like I'm Jessie James, my daddy would've taken out his special leather belt with that big silver Stars-and-Bars buckle and plain out murdered me. Nowadays, bah...you all got them mobile phones with the cameras in em. Taking pictures of the least bit of parental punishment and puttin' em up on the internet like you're some kind of suburban prisoner-of-war. You got a problem with the government, right? You don't like that president that we elected free and legal? So your bright idea is to set off firecrackers. Listen up, shit-bum, Goliath is way bigger than he was in the old days and no David is gonna knock him down with a slingshot. What's the matter with you kids? You don't like them wars we're out fighting. You don't think we got a responsibility to kick some ass around the world? Well, god-damn when I was growing up my daddy would tell me

stories about Nazis. Cooking people in ovens, gassin' women and babies. There ain't near that kind of country terrorizin' folks no more and you know why? Because of us! The goddamned

LEWIS
(*cont.*)

United-Out-There-Saving-Everybody's-Ass-States-of-America. Now I know you all got to blow your steam off, hell, I was young once. But me and my boys would get us some beer and some girls and go...well never mind all that...what the hell kind of fun is startin' riots and occupying buildings? What the hell statement you tryin' to make by lockin' yourselves in an auditorium and sittin' in the corners like a bunch of raccoons? The government ain't ever gonna listen to you. They can't. While your foulin' up school property with your britches at your knees, they're half-way round the world fightin' wars to keep us free.

ASHER mumbles beneath the gag.

LEWIS

Oh, you got plenty to say I'm sure. Too bad you didn't try oratin' a little bit before you grabbed the gun. You want to know what you punks need? Forced labor. They make you delinquents clean some sewers or straddle a jackhammer in the blazing sun all summer, that'd take the sass right out of you. Come back in the fall and get your education nice and peaceful then. Instead your lazin' around, stayin' up tik all hours, suckin' down them soda-caffeine explosion drinks and having sex on the computer or playin' them car-chase-rap-music-shoot-em-up video games. Shit. I'll tell you, there was only one game in my house when I was growin up and that was keep away from daddy when he's drunk. Suppose that's why I got into the law enforcement business in the first place. I like to maintain order...cause when it falls away, I know just what kind of scary-as-shit sons-of-bitches are waitin' around the corner. So...you got something to say...well, spit it out!

LEWIS pulls the gag down a bit.

ASHER

Sounds to me like instead of watching your racist, scare the shit out of whitey news channel, you should read Kafka.

LEWIS gags ASHER again.

LEWIS

Yeh. Kafka. Another Nazi. Everyone was a Nazi back then. But that's what you shit-bums don't understand is there's no Nazis no more. We gone and fought all the wars-to-end-all-wars and now I suppose we just got the little wars that-ain't never gonna-end but that's life in the 21st century, so get used to it! Read your goddamn books, go to your keg-of-beer-naked-orgy parties and shut up and graduate. Enough of this protestin' and occupyin'. You got nothin' to complain

about, there ain't no world wars, there's a chicken in every pot and there ain't no goddamned Nazis no more!

ASHER mumbles beneath the gag. LEWIS goes to him and pulls down the gag.

ASHER

Where are these naked orgy parties at?

LEWIS places the gag on again.

LEWIS

Never you mind, you little anarchist pervert. You got bigger fish to fry. Cause trust me...sure as a sailor shits in the sea...oh, ho-ho, they're gonna get you, son.

KAITLIN bursts in the room.

KAITLIN

Officer! There's another riot starting at the library.

LEWIS

What?

KAITLIN

It's a bloodbath! Hurry!

LEWIS runs for the door.

LEWIS

But I ain't supposed to leave...

KAITLIN

I'll watch him. Go, please!

LEWIS runs out. KAITLIN locks the door. She turns to ASHER.

KAITLIN

We need to talk.

KAITLIN moves to ASHER, takes the gag down.

ASHER

There's no riot at the library.

KAITLIN

OK, you're smart. Good.

ASHER

We don't meet there.

KAITLIN

Keep talking.

ASHER

The fuck are you anyway? A politician? An assistant? Following that sad excuse for a man around like he owns you.

KAITLIN

I can help you.

ASHER

Great! Untie me!

KAITLIN

I don't mean like that.

ASHER

Then you don't mean help, either.

KAITLIN

Please understand, I know how you feel.

ASHER

Yes? You get tied up a lot? Now that's interesting.

KAITLIN

You have no idea what they can do to you. Forget school suspension or arrest. We're talking about serious, serious charges. You'll be disgraced, vilified, virtually unemployable...

ASHER

It can't get worse.

KAITLIN

Oh, yes it can.

ASHER

Oh no, it can't! You think I spend my days like this? You think I woke up this morning and stretched my arms and said 'wow, this is a good day to get into total shit with the cops'. Fuck no! You motherfuckers put me here!

KAITLIN

Listen up, Asher, the Governor recognizes that your family has suffered hardship...

ASHER

You don't know my family.

KAITLIN

You must understand that his actions had nothing to do with your father's losing his job.

ASHER

My dad's dead.

KAITLIN

What?

ASHER

He...

Slight pause

KAITLIN

What happened?

ASHER

How you gonna help me?

KAITLIN

I'm not sure yet. But I know I want to. I just need you to trust me.

ASHER

Phhhh!

KAITLIN

Asher, I'm twenty-four. A few of years ago I was just like you.

ASHER

Nah...you're an old lady doing an old man's job.

KAITLIN

The person that I am for the Governor, it isn't me. Yes, I do a job. It's a tough, tough job and yes it gets ugly, believe me, I take breaks just to scream...but I'm human. I care about people and I'm here and I'm listening, and the Governor listens to me. Just please give me some information that I can use to influence him. What happened to your father?

Slight pause

Asher, come on!

KAITLIN

He got put away. And now he's dead.

ASHER

And you blame Governor Lester.

KAITLIN

When he closed the refinery everybody in my town went down with it. I say he's a fucking criminal and he says I'm a criminal but look who gets tied up.

ASHER

Tell me what happened.

KAITLIN

Slight pause

Please?

KAITLIN

One night...outta nowhere he started lighting fires, all over the house, and he had a knife, saying he was gonna...so, we called the cops and they came and...they took him...we just figured he'd get locked up 'til he was sober but...

ASHER

What happened? We may be able to do something about it.

KAITLIN

Then why didn't you catch him when they threw him down the fucking stairs! Go ahead. Shut the place down. You tossed good people out of work why not axe the fucking lynching motherfuckers at Wharton's nut house.

ASHER

That's where they sent him.

KAITLIN

We don't have any money, so they threw into a pit, wasn't there three days when they called and said he was dead.

ASHER

Oh my, I'm so sorry. I'll talk to the Governor; I'll explain your loss. But to come to a compromise, you're going to have to meet somewhere in the middle.

KAITLIN

ASHER

I don't negotiate with terrorists.

KAITLIN

Asher, think of your mother. Think of your brother.

ASHER

Lay off my...what did you say?

KAITLIN

You have to consider what this would do to...

ASHER

How you know I have a brother? You fucking spy. Get the fuck out of my face.

KAITLIN

Asher...

ASHER

Get your Kool-Aid drinking, fake-as-shit lying ass out of here! I'm done talking to you!

KAITLIN

OK.

Slight pause

KAITLIN

In a few minutes we're going to come in here with some paperwork. You need to sign it.

ASHER

Ain't gonna happen...

KAITLIN

Basically, it will indemnify the Governor against any slander you may produce pertaining to today's events, but more importantly it frees you from any wrongdoing.

ASHER

Whitewash bullshit. No different than putting this fucking gag around my face.

KAITLIN

And you must surrender any photos or video of the attack.

ASHER

You mean the pregnant lady smack-down? You saw it, we all did...but you won't say you saw it because then that bug they planted in your brain will go off and your fucking head will explode...but you saw your boss grabbing a lady...a pregnant lady...to hide from firecrackers.

KAITLIN

As part of your agreement, you'll provide the names of all others involved. If you cooperate, you might be sleeping in your dorm room tonight. If you don't....

Loud knocking from the door. KAITLIN puts the gag back on ASHER.

KAITLIN

Asher, the Governor is an important man on the road to a possible presidency, that only happens with the help of very, very powerful friends...and I can tell you for certain it is a seriously bad idea to embarrass any of them. So like I said, I'm on your side, and I really hope you sign what we give you because I do like you. You sort of remind me of my brother before he went to law school.

ASHER mumbles, KAITLIN takes down the gag.

ASHER

Please...untie me.

KAITLIN gags ASHER and moves to the door and opens it. Officer LEWIS, President HICKS, and YU enter.

HICKS

Ms. Garcia, you expressly ordered us all to stay out of this office.

KAITLIN

Yes, that's true.

LEWIS

She told me there was a riot at the library.

KAITLIN

Now that was a lie.

KAITLIN exits.

LEWIS

That gal's a loose cannon.

YU

My analogy would be a toxic cloud.

HICKS moves to ASHER.

HICKS

Son are you all right. How's your circulation?

ASHER mumbles beneath the gag.

HICKS

Can't I take this gag off?

LEWIS

Go ahead. But he'll probably tell you to read Kafka.

Very slight pause. HICKS removes the gag.

ASHER

I have to pee. I also want a phone call and a few minutes to explain civil rights to you all but...I really have to pee.

HICKS

Oh. I see. Hmmm...

LEWIS

No problem.

LEWIS gags ASHER again and drags the chair with ASHER in it to the door.

YU

You're not going to untie him?

LEWIS

Fat chance. This kid kicked me in the balls.

HICKS

Ted!

LEWIS

Sorry. Testicles. He stays tied up till it's time to go. It's OK. You just tip the chair over the bowl. I had to do it with my cocker spaniel when he was passing a stone.

LEWIS exits dragging ASHER in the chair.

YU

Barney...this student is being treated like a....

HICKS

You know that drink that you declined earlier? I think I'll have it.

HICKS moves to his drawer, pours a quick drink, and downs it.

YU

I am very familiar with these situations...there is not much time for us to keep this young man from disappearing.

HICKS

Please! It's not that dire...we all just need to...oh...how in god's name did I become president of Assassination University!

YU

They put you in your position because you're a leader. So now it's time to lead.

HICKS

I don't have any precedent to act on! Prior to here, I was the head of a Catholic boy's academy. The archdiocese made all the decisions for me.

YU

Barney, for god's sake wake up! This kid pulled a gun on a group of adults, a few of which can actually pass for human beings. He's in trouble and unless you do something he's headed for a whole lot more.

HICKS moves to the window.

HICKS

No one told him to grab the officer's weapon. Firecrackers I can excuse with a warning but weapons...

YU

What if you had denied your Catholic academy boy's the act of penance, denied them their right to express regret for their sins.

HICKS

This is not the same thing!

YU

It is the potential loss of a soul!

HICKS

I hate this! I hate it! I want to quit but I can't! Jesus!

Slight pause as HICKS slowly paces toward the window.

HICKS

I know...I know I have to do something to help the young man and...to salvage this university's reputation...to get these soldiers off of our oh...no! No!

HICKS moves to the door and shouts offstage.

HICKS

Mary? Who said the soldiers could order pizza? We can't look like we're coddling them. We have to maintain an independent...what? Well that was nice of him but...no, I'm not hungry. Just get the pizza boxes off the green as soon as they're finished. And Mary...absolutely no soda, do you here?

HICKS close the door.

HICKS

The Governor ordered food for the soldiers. Can you believe it?

YU

I've learned to suspend my disbelief indefinitely.

HICKS

I'm trying to solve this dilemma and he's throwing a party.

YU

Barney, when they take him, I'm going to go with them.

HICKS

Oh...that is not a good idea.

YU

You're right, it's a nightmare. He's headed for jail. When he's finally allowed counsel, the kid is destitute, he'll get a court appointed lawyer who will be powerless to keep him from a maximum sentence. For what? Can you live with yourself knowing that a kid lit firecrackers and got twenty to life?

HICKS

These are ugly people.

YU

Well sorry to say, so are you and so am I...so let's lose any misconception that this will all just resolve itself, we have to push back. You were a hippie once, Barney! Remember?

HICKS

I was just playing the part. The closest I came to activism was smoking dope and reading Camus.

YU

And what would our long, lost friend Albert say in this situation?

HICKS

Something deep and pithy.

YU

He'd say 'the only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.'

HICKS

Well I am free...and I feel as tied up as that young man.

YU

Because you're doing nothing to change the outcome. Saving your skin might feel good now but trust me after this kid disappears it will haunt you for the rest of your life!

HICKS

What can I do? I signed the Governor's paperwork. I can't talk to anyone about this. Not even my wife. And she'll be furious.

YU

I need your help, Barney.

HICKS

No, no.

YU

I'm not exactly the picture of influence in Northern Minnesota, I'll be lucky if I don't see a prison cell before I get to the kid, but you...you look like you stepped right off the cover of the Saturday Evening Post. People will listen to you.

HICKS

I'm sorry...I can't.

YU

You can't or you won't? One can be cured, the other is terminal.

HICKS

It's just that...oh for god's sake, I don't...I'm not using it as an excuse mind you but...perhaps in your present position you can relate. I was fired from the Catholic academy.

YU

I see.

HICKS

It was...damn it the matter was far too similar to this situation and all these memories are coming back...those damn Catholics and their guilt.

YU

What happened?

HICKS

A couple of students...troublemakers, real bad kids, they were harassing a younger boy and somehow, he fell off of the bleachers and well, he got hurt very badly.

YU

Ai-yah...

HICKS

I was certain they had pushed him. They were laughing, right in my office. I suspended them on the spot, made them pack their bags and call their parents, which they did...and one of the fathers turned out to be a state's attorney. He was in my office the next morning, his son was back in class the next day and because I refused to drop the matter...I was out of a job by the end of the week.

YU

I'm sorry.

HICKS

I spent almost two years looking until I secured this position and...I'm not a rich man, Yu, not by any stretch of the imagination and although I know that I should climb to the top of the campus tower and shout out that this kid is innocent...I can't...I won't.

YU

I plan to call my friend at the New York Times.

HICKS

No. No! You said quiet. Teaching, remember? No trouble. Teaching!

YU

It may be the only way to save this kid.

HICKS

It won't save your job, that's for sure!

YU

I would keep it strictly off the record if you object.

HICKS

I object. I object!

YU

I just figured a man of conscience...

HICKS

Stop! Step away from my conscience. God...I was continuously warned about you. Faculty, friends, family, they all said 'sooner or later if Yu can't find trouble, he'll make it' and they also suggested that you'd try to get me to share the heat. Well, I'm not a revolutionary and I want no part in your battles, so if you want to keep your job, go back to your hotel, stay off the phone, and if you must pour gas on this fire....you will keep me out of it, do you understand? When it comes to running this school, I cannot rely on the ethics of Albert Camus.

KAITLIN and the GOVERNOR enter.

GOVERNOR

...was a hair-brained idea in the first place!

KAITLIN

I did my best, sir! Gentleman...we ...wait, where is...?

HICKS

Oh, Asher had to go to the little boy's room.

GOVERNOR

You let the shooter go to the bathroom?

KAITLIN

That's disturbing.

HICKS

It's all right. He's tied up and Officer Lewis is with him.

KAITLIN

More disturbing.

GOVERNOR

I just spoke with Washington. The state of emergency has been lifted.

HICKS

Thank Goodness.

KAITLIN

However, the campus is still on lockdown and will remain so until we finish up our business.

LEWIS kicks open the door and drags ASHER in.

LEWIS

Well that's the last time I do that! The shit-bum slipped his bib in the john and starts screamin' about torture. Pissed on my shoes and everythin'!

HICKS

Ted!

LEWIS

Sorry, urinated. He scared the bejesus out of Professor McShane, imagine walking in on that!

HICKS

OK, OK.

LEWIS

Damn, I got to go change my shoes, Barney. I'm soaked to my socks with...

HICKS

Go!

LEWIS

Be just a few minutes. Let me know if he acts up.

LEWIS slaps ASHER on the head.

LEWIS

Shit-bum.

LEWIS exits.

GOVERNOR

Mr. Yu, Kaitlin tells me you haven't signed your paperwork.

YU

That's right.

GOVERNOR

Why?

YU

I'm not a fan of my words being roped and tied.

KAITLIN

So, you plan on making public statements about this afternoon?

YU

Not at the moment. But I would never sign away my future.

I don't have high hopes for your future.

GOVERNOR

Then why do you want to possess it?

YU

Listen, smarty-pants...

GOVERNOR

I'm sorry, Governor, we should...

KAITLIN

Yes. Right. Get it done.

GOVERNOR

KAITLIN moves to ASHER.

KAITLIN

Asher, time is short. I spoke to the Governor on your behalf and based on your family's recent hardships, and the true dedication that this administration has to assisting the working class, we're willing to make you an offer.

KAITLIN removes papers from a folder.

We want you go to work for us.

KAITLIN

Oh my...doing what?

HICKS

KAITLIN

We're going to document the Governor's taking pity on you and make it the focus of a media campaign.

GOVERNOR

Like the White House pardoning the Thanksgiving turkey; very classy.

YU

And what does Asher get in exchange for his inner being?

KAITLIN

Now understand that outside of approved statements from the Governor's office, you will never speak publicly of today's events. If you do, you may be taken into custody on the original charge.

YU

Wait a second, how is that legally possible?

GOVERNOR

I'm good friends with the Attorney General. He's very talented.

KAITLIN

You will provide the names of those parties that took part in or possess digital or video footage of today's events and if they all cooperate like yourself, then this day will soon be forgotten.

ASHER mumbles beneath the gag.

HICKS

Son, I read my paperwork thoroughly and if it's any consolation, I feel that silence is a fair exchange based on what's happened here today.

GOVERNOR

I don't have the authority to draft these agreements. This comes from Washington. You've caused major problems today, son. You should feel blessed that we're offering you a way out.

YU

I'd like to review the agreement.

KAITLIN

Never going to happen.

GOVERNOR

Either he agrees or he goes with the marshals. We have a plane to catch.

ASHER mumbles

GOVERNOR

Take the gag down.

KAITLIN takes the gag off of ASHER.

ASHER

You can tie me up. You can gag me. You can arrest me. You can send me to jail. You can fly me to the moon for all I care. But what you should have done was let me shoot myself in the head because I am going to come back from wherever you send me and I will never stop telling people what a chicken-shit coward you are, and that you're a fake and a liar...

Gag him. GOVERNOR

KAITLIN attempts to gag ASHER.

ASHER
You call yourself a leader. A leader stands up for people. A leader doesn't hide, he fights. You're not a fighter, you're a pussy.

I said gag him. GOVERNOR

I'm trying. KAITLIN

Asher, please... HICKS

ASHER
A rich, lying pussy who bought his way into the machine. And I'm going to take you down. Hard!

Give me that. GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR tries to gag ASHER. ASHER bites him.

Owww! GOVERNOR

Stop biting! Let go! KAITLIN

Oh, now, oh, please! HICKS

GOVERNOR backs off, KAITLIN goes to his aid.

Son-of-a-bitch! GOVERNOR

YU

Tell us what hurts worse, the bite or the truth?

ASHER

You just try running for president, chicken-shit. When people see pictures of you taking down that pregnant lady and they hear what you did to my town, you're done! We're going viral on you, Governor! You're done! You're fucking done!

GOVERNOR

Forget the deal.

KAITLIN

Governor ...

GOVERNOR

He almost took my finger off. I want him in a cage.

YU

Please...Asher, let me.

YU takes the gag.

ASHER

I don't want that thing on anymore!

YU

Take my word for it, right now silence is your best friend.

ASHER spits.

HICKS

Please don't spit in here.

ASHER

Sorry. The governor tastes like hairy soap.

YU

You can trust me...I promise.

YU gags ASHER.

HICKS

Thank-you, Professor.

YU

I'm not trying to silence him...he needs time to think.

GOVERNOR

How long until the marshals arrive?

KAITLIN

Minutes.

KAITLIN moves to ASHER.

KAITLIN

Asher...we are offering you freedom in exchange for a little bit of cooperation...and if you don't accept, you will be handed over to federal marshals on the charges of attempted assassination of the governor.

ASHER mumbles below the gag.

KAITLIN

I think Mr. Yu is correct. He needs a few minutes to gather his thoughts.

GOVERNOR

Five minutes. I'm going to go call Washington and tell them that he bit me. Hicks get me an office, a phone, and a first aid kit.

GOVERNOR exits.

HICKS

I'll be right back. Please don't let him bite anyone else.

HICKS exits. KAITLIN moves to ASHER

KAITLIN

Think about it, Asher. Please...you easily can get yourself out major trouble.

YU

So...you're on his side?

KAITLIN

I'm an objective party.

YU

I object to your objectivity.

KAITLIN

Not my concern. Asher, I'll keep the governor busy for as long as I can.

KAITLIN moves to exit.

YU
You're Latina.

KAITLIN
I'm part Mexican. So what?

YU
So...don't you relate to this kid's situation at all?

KAITLIN
I spent my entire afternoon relating to his situation and I personally drafted his escape plan.

YU
No. You offered him a car he can't afford, a house he'll never get a mortgage on, an invitation to a party that will never let him in...

KAITLIN
Go write your story, Mr. Yu, I'm not interested.

YU
Have you ever been to Mexico? Have your parents? Or are you a home-grown gal who shits red, white, and blue.

KAITLIN
Please take this with every intention, professor...fuck off.

YU
Hey, don't get me wrong. I'm in awe of you. Climbing through the system, an obvious armor around you to deflect the casual and not so casual racism that seethes behind so many of your colleagues smiles...it's impressive.

KAITLIN
At least I'm not a refugee.

YU
Aren't you? Is it possible that you got your job because they needed a minority on staff?

KAITLIN
Don't you dare slander my accomplishments, I fought for my position!

YU

And once you got in...the taste of power...the cocaine of human oppression got you so hooked that you lost yourself...you're not Mexican-American...

KAITLIN

I...

YU

You're a refugee from your ancestors' culture. You look the part, sure, yet underneath there's nothing but cold American blood.

KAITLIN

You don't know anything about me!

YU

I know that if you saw yourself clearly then you'd see this kid clearly as well.

KAITLIN

You are so full of shit! I do see myself clearly and that's not Mexican or American but a woman who pushed her way into a stacked system and won every single fight that came my way and I am trying *everything* to get this problem resolved through negotiation because that's the way we solve problems in America.

YU

America! My god you are so caught up with being a cog in the machine that you don't recognize that you aren't even in America! Look at this kid! He is bound and gagged, bleeding and scared and all you can do is take pride in your career? God! America? Please! We're in China! We're in Russia! We're in Turkey! You clouded, naïve little kiss-ass!

KAITLIN

Fuck you...you...you...don't listen to this crackpot, Asher. He's peacocking his dissidence for show. He'll get you to refuse our deal and then tomorrow when you're locked up, he'll be hunting down the next grand cause to hang his hat on.

YU

Look to your conscience, young lady. With any luck, it may be the only thing left that isn't all American.

KAITLIN

Will you just FUCK OFF!

YU

Look to your conscience...look to your heart, god...just look at him.

KAITLIN stares at ASHER and exits. YU moves to ASHER and takes the gag down.

ASHER

Wooooaahh.

YU

I know. I threw a couple of low blows but fuck it, this is war.

ASHER

Is she right?

YU

She's certainly not left.

ASHER

About you not caring about my trouble...that you just like to hang with shit like this.

YU

No. I honestly care about your well-being.

ASHER

Why?

Slight pause

YU

What if I said that meeting you is the first time in my six months in America that I've had any hope.

ASHER

I'd say...if staring at a black kid tied up in a chair is hopeful...then you're as fucked-up as they are. But...if you're on my side, untie me and let's get the hell out of here.

YU

All right, listen up, Rule Number One. Don't run. They always find you and you end up only running from yourself. Rule Number Two. Don't be an idiot. There are dozens of officers and soldiers surrounding the building.

ASHER

So, I'm screwed. Thanks for the help.

YU

What is it you want?

ASHER

To get the fuck out of here.

YU

Why'd you light the firecrackers?

ASHER

To keep the liar from lying anymore.

YU

You could have done what they're accusing you of.... you could have found yourself a gun and killed him

ASHER

Wait a second, you trying to get me to confess?

YU

Do you want him dead?

ASHER

No...I want him to pay...for his lies and his not fucking caring....

YU

How do you want him to pay? Huh?

ASHER

Dude, enough with the questions.

YU

With no questions, there are no answers. And the question is 'what exactly do you want?'

ASHER

Why the hell do you care?

YU

Because I've been in your chair. I've had the gag around my mouth. I've been beat up, locked up, and a few times almost strung up but the one thing that I never did was shut up. And unless you figure out exactly what you want to say, no one will ever listen. Now enough of this bullshit...answer! What do you want?!

ASHER

I want...recognition, man! I want them to recognize me and my family and my friends, they never do! They beg us to vote em in but then they go fucking brain dead about us.

YU

I recognize you...far more than you know.

ASHER

Well they don't. Never have. Never will.

Slight pause

ASHER

You really been through this kind of shit before?

YU

In China, yes, but the American translation is not far off.

ASHER

What can I do?

YU

If you want recognition...then you must learn to use much more powerful weapons than firecrackers.

ASHER

I don't want to kill anybody.

YU

Just words, kid, I'm just talking about words.

HICKS enters, he is carrying some paperwork.

HICKS

Oh, what a shit-show. We're through the rabbit hole and I can't stand it!

HICKS withdraws the bottle, it is empty.

HICKS

Shit! All right, what the hell has been going on in here? Don't you dare radicalize this boy any more than he already is.

YU

We were just talking.

ASHER

I'm not a radical. I'm a Citizen of the World.

HICKS

Well Mr. Citizen, thanks to your outburst I'm now supposed to sign this!

HICKS throws the papers on his desk.

YU

What is it?

HICKS

They're not going to arrest you, Asher. Apparently they find that too lenient...they plan to have you committed.

ASHER

What do you mean?

HICKS

It means that they want to take you for mental observation...the consolation is that it's near your home...it's called the...Wharton's Mental Facility.

ASHER

What?!? That fucking bitch! She told them!

HICKS

Easy son...

ASHER

Fucking BITCH! I can't go there. I can't...they can't...that's where they sent my...you bitch! That's where they threw my father! They fucking killed him in there!

HICKS

But son, they want to make this matter disappear. Work with them and then walk away.

ASHER

To where? To what? No...no. I'm going to get him. People need to know. But...they were talking about jail not...

YU

What if they keep you there, in that place, not for just observation but for...?

ASHER

I'm not afraid about being locked up...it's just, shit...people need to know about that guy! And I'm going to do it! I'm not afraid!

YU

You suggested the policeman read Kafka. Kafka would suggest that you have no idea what it is that you are not afraid of.

ASHER

They can't keep me there...can they?

HICKS

Asher, it's quite simple, if the choice is confinement or freedom, you must obviously choose...

ASHER

Rule Number One...don't run.

HICKS

What?

ASHER

They always find you...and the only one you end up running away from is yourself...

HICKS

What does that even mean? You've broken a few laws and are in a plumb position to walk away with a reprimand. Be smart, work with them and see what happens.

ASHER

What would you do?

YU

Fight them.

HICKS

Yu, come on.

YU

But not with fireworks or guns.

ASHER

Words.

YU

The words are just the weapons. I'm talking about fighting with your life.

HICKS

OK. End of counseling session.

YU

If they lock you up, spend the time reading, if they don't give you books, spend the time thinking...

HICKS

He could easily do that here...in far less confinement

YU

Become what they despise, but not for an afternoon, or a semester, but for your whole life.

HICKS

No.

YU

Yes.

ASHER

I can't believe you teach here.

HICKS

He hasn't started yet!

YU

If you can't get the word out, I'll cast my public criticism, as will others. So, if your true desire is to show people how elected officials punish the innocent for their own gains, then yes, you must be locked up.

HICKS

That advice is unsound and inappropriate. ...you don't realize what you're risking!

YU

President Hicks is right, if you choose to be imprisoned, you must be prepared to lose everything.

ASHER

I don't have anything.

HICKS

What about your mother?

ASHER

She doesn't have anything, either. Our mortgage went bust, so she's moving in with her sister. I can't live there. I can't live here. Don't you get it? It's like the old saying. 'I've got nothing left to lose.'

LEWIS enters

LEWIS

Hey, Barney, them government marshals are here.

HICKS

Where are they?

LEWIS

Down on the green having pizza with the soldiers. And they parked in the handicap spot. I told em to move and one of em called me a...anyway I told em to move.

KAITLIN and the GOVERNOR enter

KAITLIN

OK, Asher. Your ride is here.

GOVERNOR

So? What's the decision?

Slight pause

ASHER

I...I've thought about it and...I've changed my mind about what I saw...about what the Governor did.

KAITLIN

Great. I knew you'd...

ASHER

He not only tackled that pregnant lady but on the way down I saw him grabbing her tits.

HICKS

Oh my...

ASHER

With both hands.

GOVERNOR

You little shit.

KAITLIN

Stop talking, Asher, just stop...

ASHER

Hey everybody! Let's all vote for Governor pregnant-lady-tackling-titty-grabbing-chicken-shit!

GOVERNOR

Officer, gag him!

LEWIS gags ASHER.

LEWIS
OK! Kid, you got balls the size of Minneapolis!

HICKS
Ted!

LEWIS
Sorry! But he does!

HICKS
This won't help you, Asher.

GOVERNOR
Hand him over to the marshals.

LEWIS
Oh, sure thing. I swear, though, size of Minneapolis...

KAITLIN
I'll go with them to the car. Chances are he'll agree before...

GOVERNOR
No. You'll stay here.

KAITLIN
But I'm sure I can get him to...

YU
Does anyone have a statement they'd like to jot down for the paper?

Slight pause

GOVERNOR
What?

YU
This is way too good of a story, political revenge, power and its abuses. How could you keep a thing like this quiet?

KAITLIN
If you as much as...

GOVERNOR

Shut up, Kaitlin. Mr. Yu, it has been a truly wonderful experience making your acquaintance. I had heard you were a genius, some kind of hero of the intellect. That's obviously not the case. Because making whining speeches is not heroic, complaining about the justice system is not heroic. Doing something about it is heroic. Being an active part in politics is heroic. Try it sometime. Become a citizen of somewhere that can stand you and your socialist agenda for more than ten minutes and settle down and start doing for a change, instead of tirelessly bitching about the ways things are.

YU

Yes. I do complain about the system. I do object to injustice. Because unlike yourself, I'm not a man who spends his life on his knees.

GOVERNOR

Listen, asshole...

HICKS

Governor ...

GOVERNOR

This isn't coming from the Governor, this is coming from Bill Lester. Not for one hot second will I be lectured to by this, this...reject, this communist cast-off who thinks every time a person steps on an ant there should be a fucking peace vigil. Asshole. *Asshole!* So, you've been locked up. Congratulations. Go write a book. Be a beacon of hope to dissident shitheads the world over but stay out of my goddamn way or I will crush you! I don't stop for demonstrations. So, if you stand in front of my tank then you'd better say your prayers because I'll roll right the fuck over your ass, you stupid pacifist-philosophy-spewing ill-bred Chink!

HICKS

Whoah.

LEWIS

Finally, some straight talk.

KAITLIN

I think the Governor meant...

GOVERNOR

I know what I meant! Hicks, I want you to fire this man immediately.

HICKS

I...well, couldn't we deal with one issue at a time...

GOVERNOR

He is the issue. If this prick hadn't shown up none of this crap would have gone down! Fire him!

YU

Boy, the revenge just keeps on coming.

HICKS

Yu, I can't say I disagree with him. But Governor, please...

KAITLIN

Sir, can't we just...

GOVERNOR

I will end your professional life with one phone call, Hicks. Whoever gives money to this dump will pull out faster than shit through a goose! You want to keep your job? Fire him! Now!!

HICKS

Yu.... I...

YU

You're a leader, Barney, so...now it's time to lead.

HICKS

I...I...

Slight pause

HICKS

...you're fired.

GOVERNOR

See that, you pathetic piece of shit? No one wants you. Your own country kicks you out, then you come here and search for causes so that you can crucify yourself over and over. You don't care about this kid. You're just in it for your own fucking ego...officer get the suspect outside, now.

LEWIS

OK, but let me tighten them ropes. I got two sets of stairs to pull him down.

ASHER

Mmhm...mmhmmm...

HICKS

We need to hear what he...this young man deserves some final words.

GOVERNOR

Goddamn bleeding hearts.... you have seconds...

YU takes down ASHER's gag.

ASHER

Why you keep trying to help me, man? You lost your job...

YU

On the night of my escape from China, my son drove me to the boat...he refused to trust anyone else with...my freedom. On his way home, the police stopped him...and they...it's been over six months so...I suppose I am dealing with my punishment for breaking Rule Number One.

HICKS

Oh, Yu, I...guess one must just keep going on and hope for the best.

ASHER

I'm sorry. I didn't...I see you now, man, you're one of the good guys.

GOVERNOR

Oh, please!

ASHER

Hey if they won't let me call...can you? Can you call my mother?

YU

Of course.

ASHER

Don't tell her where I am. Just tell her...that I can't come home for a while cause...I got a new job and it's a real hard one, so I got to spend a lot of time learning how to do it and also...just...tell her I love her...

YU

We will see you again, son.

ASHER

I'm not afraid.

GOVERNOR

Famous last words.

ASHER

These aren't my last words.

GOVERNOR

Also, famous last words.

LEWIS

OK, Barney, we're ready to move.

HICKS

Asher, I don't condone your actions, but I do hope you eventually find peace.

LEWIS gags ASHER. KAITLIN moves to join them.

KAITLIN

This isn't right. I'm sure he'll give in. Just let me...

GOVERNOR

Get over here, Kaitlin.

KAITLIN

Trust me, I can talk him into...

GOVERNOR

Get over here and shut your mouth!!

GOVERNOR leads KAITLIN away from ASHER.

LEWIS

OK, all tied up and ready to go. I'll tell you; I don't like this kid but I got to say, he's got guts. Gotta admire that. Now, it don't mean if he makes trouble I won't pepper him til his eyes turn black but...

HICKS

Ted.

LEWIS

I'm just sayin', he's got guts. *(to Governor)* And that's more than I can say for some people.

GOVERNOR

Officer, are you challenging me?

HICKS

Ted, please go now. Although I must admit...

Slightest pause

HICKS

...I have to agree with you.

GOVERNOR

Get that punk out here!

LEWIS

OK? Off we go, shit-bum, and then it's quittin' time. This is a bloody steak and half-bottle-a-bourbon night if there ever was one.

LEWIS exits dragging ASHER.

I'm going with him.

KAITLIN

Will you please! Just go call the car.

GOVERNOR

No! This was...this isn't...this isn't....

KAITLIN

Go call the...

GOVERNOR

This isn't what I wanted for...this isn't noble or important or...I'm going with him and I'm going to get him a lawyer...he shouldn't be...Jesus Christ, it was just firecrackers.

KAITLIN

Hey...

GOVERNOR

Don't come near me...you...this isn't leadership...this isn't politics...this isn't America.

KAITLIN

KAITLIN exits

Kaitlin...Kaitlin!

GOVERNOR

Watch out, Governor, a loaded pistol can be a very dangerous thing.

YU

What? Oh, to hell with you people.

GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR takes out a cell phone and dials.

This is the last time I ever travel this close to Canada. Hey. Send a detail up here. Now. I'm ready to move.

GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR hangs up and moves to exit.

HICKS

Governor before you go I must say...

A loud gunshot is heard from outside. HICKS and YU rush to the window.

HICKS

Dear God! Someone's been shot! Oh, is it Ted? My God, is it Ted?

YU

It is the boy.

HICKS

Oh my...Governor, the boy has been shot!

Sirens are heard in the background.

GOVERNOR

It's terrible. But I hear sirens. There's...not much else we can do.

HICKS

Not much...are you serious?

GOVERNOR

What do you want from me?

HICKS

What do I want? Emotion. Compassion. Jesus Christ...a boy has been shot!

GOVERNOR

There'll be an investigation.

HICKS

That's it?

GOVERNOR

Hey, it's unfortunate, OK? It's tragic. It's...listen...we'll get answers, I promise you but...I can't stop and mourn. I just can't. It would only cause more unrest. So...it's like you said a moment ago, Hicks...we just have to keep going on...and hope for the best.

GOVERNOR exits. HICKS joins YU by the window.

HICKS

Monstrous...monstrous...

YU

He will not survive.

HICKS

Call them, Yu. Call your friend at the New York Times.

YU

Yes.

HICKS

I don't care. I'll talk. We must...dear god, this madness...has to stop.

YU

Yes.

HICKS

Dear God, dear God, please...please let it stop.

YU

Amen.

Lights down.

End of Play

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *The roots of 'American Yu' run deep into our nation's past. The idea first began about fifteen years ago when I had the notion to create a modern tall tale in the vein of the great 19th century classics such as Paul Bunyan or Pecos Bill and to do my best to capture the current state of the country and its place in the world. In the late 2000's, we were still operating under various shades of red alert as the War on Terror churned onward and in the post-9-11 world breaking news always had the potential to be terrifying. The play was coming together as a highly satiric response to the lengths and contortions of power and surveillance that were at play during those years, much to the detriment of our cherished ideals of democracy, which began to disturbingly resemble political and social experiments coming out of China. For a while, East meets West in the setting of a rural American university and its racial and social paradigms began to drive the action of the play, then another tidal wave of change hit the country when the Black Lives Matter movement arose in force in 2012-2013 and onward. The burning issues of racial and social justice in America then became the gale force wind that filled the sails of this play and whipped it into completion. I suppose the most powerful and tragic influence to the writing process was and is man and woman's continued inhumanity to one another but this must also be considered with the fact that hope exists and flourishes in any single act of opposition to it. On the literary side, I like to think 'American Yu' is close to something George Orwell would create, or at least admire, if he appeared as a playwright in our midst, and certain degrees of influence can be found in the wit, emotion, and brutal honesty of works by August Wilson, Bertolt Brecht, and David Hare.*

AUTHOR BIO: Terence Patrick Hughes plays include *LINES*, *The Kiss of Caiaphas*, *Their Great Magic*, *American Yu*, *A Harmony of Both*, and a series of pieces set at the fictional grade school, *Our Lady of the Bleeding Heart*, *Mind*, and *Spirit – Once Reformed*. The New York Times noted that his work “...explores heavy subject matter with humorous dialogue and strong characters”. He has developed and produced plays with great theatres in NYC, across the country, and internationally. His youth plays are licensed to educators through Drama Notebook and include adaptations of Shakespeare’s ‘*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, ‘*The Tempest*’, and Marlowe’s ‘*Doctor Faustus*’. Born in Lawrence, MA, Hughes, his wife, and two children live in Woodstock, NY.