

BLAME

A play in one act

Kit Thornton

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BLAME Character List

STEVE: 30's. A megalomaniacal, Machiavellian child, whose ambition has taken him far above his ability. The stress of realizing that he is about to fail, largely due to his own inability and delusions of grandeur, has snapped his connection to reality. He is a pathetic figure, fronting absolute confidence and a brittle calm.

CHANCE: Mid 20's. A bright worker, loyal to Steve, but terrified as he has watched Steve and the Corporation disintegrate. Was loyal to F.P., and likes the money and comforts that come with the job.

F.P.: 60's. Death brings perspective, but he's still a bastard. Always had a contempt for humanity, and death has not improved his misanthropy. He is enjoying torturing Steve and the Board from his new vantage point. He doesn't give a damn about anything, anymore, especially not the Corporation or Steve.

Note: F.P. remains an unmoving corpse throughout the play. The voice, when it is heard, should be heard from offstage.

OSCAR: 60's. The old corporate functionary. He still calls Steve "Stevie," which angers Steve no end. Friend of F.P. who is in his position largely because of his skill as a "yes man." He is deeply frightened of what will happen if the Corporation fails. "Gave the best years of his life" to the Corporation.

HARRY: 40-50's. The technocrat. He has the facts. He will tell them without any emotional involvement or mercy on anyone.

BOB: 40's. The "socially aware" corporatist. Makes much noise about the workers, the consumers, etc. He is patronizing and always trying to calm the room. A buzzword addict.

CARL: Late 30's. The climber. He resents Steve's promotion. Cool and cruel. Sees Steve's cracking as his opportunity.

BILL: 40's. The "team player." He wants to preserve the Corporation at all costs. Athletic metaphors galore.

All roles can be played by men or women.

SETTING

The boardroom of a major corporation.

TIME

Contemporary. One scene, set in real time.

BLAME

(A corporate boardroom. A screen conceals part of the set. A large conference table DSC, with chairs for eight people.)

(STEVE enters, followed by CHANCE.)

CHANCE
...could be a real problem if the audit shows...

STEVE
Yeah, well, it will. What of it?

CHANCE
That's not going to sit well with the board. What do you want to...

STEVE
Not a damned thing.

CHANCE
What? But...

STEVE
They're blind mice. Blind. I'm the cat.

CHANCE
You're the cat. Yes. Well. There's a new report from finance. It's not good, and...what's that smell? Like rotting flowers, or something.

STEVE
(smiles) Smells like liberation, Chance. Breathe it in deep.

CHANCE
Steve, you've got to review this. Harry and Carl will..

STEVE
They won't do shit. They'll sit there, and stare with their mouths hanging like the slop suckers they are. And they'll get their answers. All they can stand. More than they want.

(OSCAR and BOB enter. They greet STEVE with a strained jocularity. They ignore CHANCE, of course, who is just an assistant.)

OSCAR

Stevie! Good to see you. Good to see you. Tough times, but you're tough people, right? Just like the old man. F.P. Would be proud at the way you're handling all this, yes? We've had tough times before, real tough.

BOB

Well, good to see you, Steve. I'm glad you called this meeting. Old F.P. knew how important it is to get on top of something like this. He knew. Of course he never had a quarter like this, but I'm sure if we all stick together, we can...

STEVE

Yeah. Well. Good to see you both here. Should be a meeting that everyone remembers, remembers for a long time. A very long time. Ah, here's Carl. Knew he wouldn't miss this.

(CARL enters.)

OSCAR

Carl, my friend! Glad you could be here. Seems you're awfully busy in the new division. Going well? Of course its going well! A get-things-done kind of guy. Sure is.

CARL

Hello, Steve. You're looking a little stressed. Been a tough quarter, hasn't it?

STEVE

It'll get better.

CARL

Sure it will. One way or another. Leadership. That's what its all about now, eh? You know, F.P. used to say that leadership was what makes or breaks a company.

BOB
Leadership and teamwork. Pulling
together as a team.

CARL
Yeah, a team. A family. Of course the
families of those people you laid off
might have a different view. And the
cutbacks in benefits - well, Bob, they
might be feeling a little let down by
Steve's initiatives, yes?

BOB
I'm sure Steve did all he could. Times
are tough for everyone.

CARL
Well, not so tough for Steve, maybe. But
that bonus we voted for him had to
soften the burden of leadership a bit.
Not so bad, eh? Of course if things keep
going the way they are, it won't be a
team for long. Gotta worry you, Oscar,
being just a couple of years from that
big, gold watch. But don't worry. I'm
sure Steve has a masterful plan that
will save the day, don't you? Sure you
do.

(HARRY and BILL
arrive.)

OSCAR
Here's Harry and Bill! Hello, fellas!
Glad you could make it. Gonna get some
work done today! Turn this thing around!
Isn't that right, Stevie?

BILL
Hello, Oscar. Hey, it looks like a
goddamned funeral in here! C'mon, cheer
up! There's always a way, as long as we
play the game like the champions we are!
(seeing little effect, he sits down,
discouraged.) What the Hell is that
smell?

HARRY
I have the numbers. All of them.

CARL
That's a good idea, Harry. Look at the
sales numbers after the new ad campaign.
Steve really likes the new campaign,
don't you? Your brainchild, your
innovation. Expensive, sure, but hey,
the proof is in the pudding. Let's hear
the good news. (smiles sarcastically)

HARRY

(referring to his notes) Down fourteen percent. Twenty-two percent in the new division. Total cost eleven million. Total households..

OSCAR

Well, give it time, right? Give it a little time. Next quarter...

HARRY

Next quarter costs - twenty-two million. Estimated households...

BOB

Maybe a more family oriented...

STEVE

That's enough. Let's call this freak show to order.

(The board shifts uncomfortably in their seats. CHANCE prepares to take minutes.)

STEVE

Harry, run the numbers.

HARRY

Total sales down seventeen percent for the quarter. Expenses, not including debt service, up eleven percent...

(STEVE takes it all in with a smile. The board becomes increasingly worried.) CARL, who expected STEVE to squirm, is puzzled at STEVE'S lack of reaction.)

HARRY

Debt service is up nine percent. Due to our new allocation, our tax liabilities are up eleven percent. Operating costs are up seven percent. Reserves are down by twenty-eight percent...

BOB

Jesus...

BILL

Worse than I...

CARL

Don't worry, guys. I'm sure our new Chief has an answer. After all, it's all about leadership, right? It's like F.P. said when he decided to give you...

STEVE

The situation will be handled. (growing angry) And I'm sick of hearing about what F.P. wanted. He left me this fucking mess...the new division, the old, piece of shit equipment, the goddamned antique middle-management, you damned toadies and bootlicking...

CARL

Now, now, Steve! Why, criticizing poor old F.P., that's practically blasphemy around here! He's been dead for four months now, and you're going to piss on his grave?(grins) After all, he's the one who decided to put you in charge. Questioning his judgment now? (pause) Should we?

(They all look at STEVE. The room is on dagger points. After a long pause, STEVE begins laughing - a strange, strained laugh.)

STEVE

F.P.'s judgment? You want...

BILL

Steve, it's all about the quarterback. We know you got a mess on your hands, but you gotta play the...

BOB

There's a lot of people, a lot of families, a lot of jobs riding on the decisions you...

STEVE

You want to question F.P.'s judgment. So do I. So do I. I'm not going to take the fall for...

CARL

Your company now, your mess. And you've had the power for a quarter now. I think we can see how that's...

STEVE

You can't see shit, Carl. You can't see shit. This company was a goddamned wreck a year ago. And you sat there and listened to F.P., and kissed his ass, and didn't question shit. You want to question now? Okay. That's only fair, right? I've got questions, too. You want to ask questions, motherfucker?

(STEVE stands up, and suddenly rips down the screen revealing F.P.'s corpse tied into his desk chair. The board reacts in horrified silence.)

STEVE

(jovially) Hello, F.P.! How're you doing with your new position? How's Hell, you bastard? (STEVE wheels F.P. to the head of the table.) Now Carl, and the rest of your ass-kissing board wants to ask a few questions, as to how this clusterfuck came to be.

BOB

Wh..what..

BILL

Sick...

OSCAR

F.P., how the...what the...

STEVE

See, Mr. Chairman? Lots of questions. Questions everywhere. Now, first, I'm sure everyone wants to know why our expenses went through the roof last year. Eight million off the books and...(he seems to hear an answer) Ah. Well, that's not helpful, F.P. You have to account for the...ah! Well, that's not good enough, is it old man?

OSCAR

(terrified)
Stevie...Stevie...he's...you're not well. The stress...Stevie...

STEVE

(quietly, not looking away from F.P.)
Stop calling me Stevie, you condescending old faggot. The Chairman is talking.

(CHANCE stands up quietly and starts, carefully toward OSR. STEVE, still not looking away from F.P., produces a pistol and slowly puts it on the table.)

STEVE

Chance, sit down. You're supposed to be taking minutes. Nobody leaves until business is done. Nobody. (CHANCE sits quietly.) Why aren't you taking notes? Every drop of wisdom from those putrefying lips is a pearl.

CHANCE

I...I can't hear him, Steve. I can't...

CARL

This has got to stop. Steve, you've lost your fucking mind. Put away that gun, and this...thing, you goddamned...

(CARL, startled, suddenly stares at F.P. He sits down slowly, badly shaken.)

OSCAR

I hear him. God help me, I'm losing my...

BOB

Then I am too. Steve, how are you doing this? Why are you...

CHANCE

I can't hear...

STEVE

I'm not doing anything. You wanted to talk to F.P., didn't you? Well, ask all your damned questions. (screaming) Ask them!

OSCAR

(shuddering) F.P...I...(he looks nervously at STEVE, and at the gun)...F.P...(he startles, having heard F.P. quite clearly.) I...I...don't...what are we supposed to...

BOB

I don't believe...

BILL

Boss, I, I...the company. Are we really finished? I mean, can we turn this around?

CARL

(to Bill) You're asking a goddamned corpse...you're all a bunch of cracked...

F.P.

But you hear me, too, don't you, Carl? So you're just as batshit as they are. Don't fight it, you little turd. All you ever wanted was to be in charge. To suck the brass ring right off my cock. Well, you're going to get it. Very soon. And its going to give you just what you deserve, you sneaking little slimeball.

CARL

I don't hear it! I don't...

STEVE

You do. We all do.

CHANCE

(mystified, terror-stricken) I don't hear anything!

F.P.

Oscar, you miserable old pervert. Can't even get it up for the little boys anymore. You're more dead than I am.

OSCAR

Oh God!

BOB

F.P...I don't know what's happening here, but...but there has to be a...there's a lot depending on us...maybe...

F.P.

Bob, do you know what the two best things about being dead are, and the one bad thing? Do you?

BOB

N...n...

F.P.

First good thing: perspective. I don't give a shit about the goddamned company anymore. Second good thing: I don't give a shit about you, any of you. One bad thing: As long as anybody remembers you, you have to watch. You see and hear and smell and feel everything. I've been watching - living - your pathetic, perverted little lives. And I've seen it all. I've smelled, tasted your wives, your mistresses, Oscar's little boys, felt their silky cunts, heard your whining voices as your pathetic incompetence tightens the nooses around your necks.

BILL

Boss, I...well...I mean all that, sure, all that's bad, but we gotta, I dunno...

F.P.

"Pull together as a team?" God, you sicken me, Bill. That's what you say before you thrash your son with a leather belt, every time. Do you know that I feel what you feel when you bruise and blister him? Do you know I feel your guilt, your shame, your...excitement, Bill? I know you enjoy it, Bill. You get off on beating your son. Making a man of him. Giving it to him like you had to take it. Just like you had to take it.

(pause)

HARRY

(calmly) Go ahead, F.P. Have your turn at me. Have a ball, dead man.

F.P.

Heh. But Harry, there's nothing to say. You've been a quiet little number-crunching nobody. You've never cheated on your mouse of a wife, you've never even stolen a cent from the company. You're the perfect little drone. Too afraid, too much a nobody for crime, perversion, or even disloyalty. You're nobody now, you were nobody then, you will be nobody. Because you're not a man. You're barely human. - just a function, like shitting or pissing. And you'll always be just that. Only that.

HARRY

(trembling with fury) You're a bastard, F.P. A dead bastard.

(Bob twitches,
fearfully)

F.P.

Oh, relax Bob. You're not worth the trouble. A soft, hypocritical nobody. Do you think that anybody gives a shit about your condescending pity for the poor, downtrodden workers? I don't have forever...well, I do...but I don't want to spend one more minute with you wretched failures than I must. Maybe this is Hell. Maybe.

STEVE

Then burn in it, you fuck. You left this mess. You. And you chose everyone here. Everyone. And you controlled everything.

F.P.

And I made you my heir, Stevie. You. The new Chairman of an old, decrepit titan of a corporation, falling into the sewer where it belongs. Have you ever asked why? Why I put you, you sniveling little wad of ego, into the driver's seat? Did you imagine that I saw talent? Drive? Worthiness? Yeah, you probably thought that, you blind, arrogant ass.

(STEVE slowly
picks up the
pistol, stands on
trembling legs.)

STEVE

Go ahead. Say it. Say it.

F.P

Like I said, Stevie - perspective. You know, when you walk around getting brown-nosed by sickly little apes like you, you develop, first a contempt, then a hatred for all of the lickspittles. And you, Stevie, my most proficient brown-noser. I knew it was all going down in flames. I wanted to watch you fail. I wanted to watch you all fail. Dying didn't stop that. I wanted to see you humiliate yourselves. You especially, Stevie. You especially. And you did not fucking disappoint. You got me off, one last time.

(STEVE screams and fires several rounds into F.P.'s corpse. CHANCE grabs him in a panic, and STEVE accidentally shoots himself.) He collapses to the floor. CHANCE has the gun in his hand.)

STEVE

Oh, God. Hurts. Oh. Jesus. Somebody get me a doctor. Don't just sit there staring...a doctor. Please don't let me go to him. Please don't let me...

(STEVE dies.)

(Long pause. CHANCE puts the gun back on the table)

CARL

You were his personal assistant, right?

CHANCE

Yes.

CARL

Well...we won't be requiring your services anymore. Go. Get out.

(CHANCE stands for a beat, looking at STEVE. The Board all start talking at once.)

HARRY

You'll recall that you signed a non-disclosure agreement that requires that you not share information about internal company matters with outside parties under penalty...

BOB

Jesus! What are we going to do with this...this...when the press gets hold of this we'll be up to our asses in reporters and the stockholder's meeting will be a fiasco and the quarterly...

BILL

C'mon now, fellas! We gotta face this all together. Pull together and we'll get through this and the we can still win this. I remember when we played State College and I had a broken leg and the...

OSCAR

Charles? No, Chance, right? Chance? Your service here at the corporation was appreciated and we want to assure you on behalf of all of us that your contribution to the success of this company will be remembered. We all wish you every success as you...

(CHANCE leaves.)

END