THE FARCE [of an authoritarian coverup] IN PROGRESS

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CAST

(in order of speaking)

OFFICER

CAPTAIN

ARTIST

CHIEF

PRESS

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Or, "The setup."

The Captain's office in police headquarters. It must have a desk, a few chairs, a desk telephone, a window, and two doors… because those things get used.

The Captain stands facing the window. A door opens; it is the Officer escorting the Artist.

OFFICER: Sir, this is the writer you wanted to see.

CAPTAIN: Good. *(to the Artist, like a dog.)* Sit.

ARTIST: Why am I here?

CAPTAIN: Sit.

ARTIST: This officer banged on my door and told me I needed to come to police headquarters—immediately. He didn't tell me why.

CAPTAIN: You're here to clear up some important questions. Sit.

ARTIST: Am I under arrest?

CAPTAIN: Not yet.

OFFICER: *(to the Artist)* You're free to decline to answer the questions, or to leave at any time.

CAPTAIN: Don't tell a man what he can do with his own rights; that's his affair!

ARTIST: What's this all about?

CAPTAIN: It's come to our attention that you're writing a play that depicts an ongoing and active investigation by this police department.

ARTIST: This is all about the play I'm writing? I think I will sit…

CAPTAIN: The investigation concerns a domestic terrorist.

ARTIST: …Are you certain that he was a terrorist?

CAPTAIN: *(certainly)* He was an Antifa militant member.

OFFICER: A male dancer.

CAPTAIN: MUST be Antifa, hardcore.

ARTIST: I see. …My understanding, as far as the facts go, is that he was a peaceful protestor brought in for questioning—brought into this very building, I believe—and somehow, while under questioning, he went out of a window. Just like that window right there.

CAPTAIN: *(unperturbed)* There is overwhelming evidence of his guilt as a terrorist. He was the worst kind of terrorist. A bad hombre. If you attempt to portray him as anything else, you could taint a jury, compromise legal proceedings, or otherwise criminally obstruct justice. You must cease and desist from writing your play—immediately.

ARTIST: …How do you even know that I'm writing a play?

CAPTAIN: It was child's play. Your internet searches into this case triggered a keyword alert in our systems. You've been on our radar.

ARTIST: A lot of people must have searched into this case.

CAPTAIN: A lot of people have been on our radar.

ARTIST: …Aha… And then, how did you access my play?

CAPTAIN: If you must know, our cyber team made a honey pot for "independent researchers" like you. You visited a site we made that contained a kind of spyware, and the spyware silently downloaded all of your files.

ARTIST: It just goes to show how ignorant I am.

CAPTAIN: It does.

ARTIST: I would have thought that you'd need a warrant to do something like that. Was setting a trap like that strictly legal?

OFFICER: We're the police, so it must have been legal.

ARTIST: …Sure. Look, the play I'm writing, if you read it you've seen, it's not even about this case; not really. The case is just the premise. The play is really more about YOU—or rather, what you're doing. No offense, but it seems like a coverup.

CAPTAIN: *(scandalized)* A coverup?

OFFICER: A coverup?

ARTIST: Yet another coverup by people in authority. …Now, I don't know exactly what happened here. …Or what's HAPPENING, present tense… But I do know there have been a LOT of contradicting statements, just so far. One statement says the suspect jumped out the window. Another says it was an accident. For all we know, you'll say he FLEW out of the window next, with unsupported data about how many antifascists seem to think they can fly…

CAPTAIN: Stop right there! These statements you're making are malicious fabrications!

ARTIST: The statements I'M making are fabrications? This is just what's been reported; what's been said by this department. It's verifiable.

CAPTAIN: *(a threat)* I'll give you something VERIFIABLE.

ARTIST: Please do. I would LOVE to hear from YOU what REALLY happened. That's what the play I'm writing is REALLY about: it's about what's really happening beneath a coverup. Because, there are coverups all over America today; coverups all over the world; but they all work in essentially in the same way… To coverup the facts, you must CONTROL how they're perceived. It's all about spin. How the story's being told. A coverup's already like a play. THAT'S what I'm writing about. …This case just seemed like a perfect premise, because the coverup here seemed so OBVIOUS.

CAPTAIN: *(offended)* Obvious?

ARTIST: So obvious that it's farcical.

CAPTAIN: Farcical?

ARTIST: Yes. And so farcical that it's laughable.

CAPTAIN: DON'T LAUGHT AT US.

ARTIST: I'm not laughing at you exactly, it's just the coverup; it's pathetic!

OFFICER: Pathetic?

ARTIST: Well, you're struggling to keep a simple story in the air here; you're not very convincing—

CAPTAIN: And YOU'RE trying to get people to distrust public officials. You're an insurrectionist! An anarchist! You should be behind bars!

ARTIST: For writing a play? Isn't a play protected speech?

CAPTAIN: NOT if it falls into the unprotected category—speech that could lead to lawlessness!

ARTIST: Then by all means, please, set me straight. Tell me: what really happened here. Tell me as much as you can. Did the suspect go out of that window, right there? Did they sit in this very same chair?

CAPTAIN: No.

ARTIST: But it did happen at this police headquarters, didn't it?

OFFICER: Yes.
CAPTAIN: No.

OFFICER: I mean, did what happen here.

CAPTAIN: Look, we're not going to give you any more information. We don't need any MORE stories out in circulation.

ARTIST: But I don't want a story. I want the facts.

CAPTAIN: It was a mistake bringing you in.

ARTIST: But you DID bring me in!

CAPTAIN: Well, and now you can get out!

ARTIST: Just tell me what really happened with the "terrorist" at the window!

CAPTAIN: *(severe)* We're done here.

ARTIST: I want to hear it from your side. The truth!

CAPTAIN: *(fiercely)* Never!

ARTIST: I'm sure you've got nothing to hide! It's not like this behavior is suspicious…

CAPTAIN: Get out or I'll throw you out.

ARTIST: Throw me out? Ever thrown anyone else out before? Say, out of a window?

CAPTAIN: GET OUT!

(At each 'Get Out' now, the Captain, finger pointed, flings a fascist-like salute!)

Get out! Get out! Get out!

ARTIST: *(firmly holding onto his seat)* We've got people getting hauled into vans out there! Getting detained, getting deported, getting disappeared! Getting separated from their families! Getting deprived of their rights and even their lives— without due process or even cause! What's it all about? What's going on!? It doesn't seem like a lawful reality; it seems like a lawless farce!

CAPTAIN: *(trying to get the Artist out of the chair)* There's nothing farcical about this, sonny jim!

OFFICER: *(frustrated)* LOOK, WHAT DO YOU WANT?

ARTIST: I WANT THE TRUTH!

OFFICER: YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH!

ARTIST: That was marvelous! *(stands to shake the Officer's hand.)* Marvelous presence, Officer. Maybe you could be a good actor.

CAPTAIN: I've had enough of this. *(forcefully escorts the Artist to the door)*

ARTIST: Captain, I'm sure you could be a good actor, too. Just think of it like wearing a mask. I bet you know how to do that, don't you.

CAPTAIN: I never want to see your face again. *(slams door on the Artist)*

Finally, I'm not trained for this.

OFFICER: Sir, I'm afraid we're running late for a meeting.

CAPTAIN: Are we? God, I lost all track of time.

OFFICER: That's a sign that it was compelling.

CAPTAIN: That what was compelling.

OFFICER: The story. *(glances covertly at us)*

CAPTAIN: Don't talk to me about stories; every raconteur can tell a 'story.'

OFFICER: You mean stories like lies?

CAPTAIN: No, not lies. Everybody tells lies. Big deal. I mean stories like *(he hates them)* satires. Satirists mimic real men—like monkeys do. They're not funny. I hate satire.

OFFICER: With respect, sir, I think you're thinking of parody. A parody is a mimicry. A satire imitates something but offers its own social critique. Satirists use irony, exaggeration, and understatement to show, with a greater or lesser degree of humor, the follies of mankind, especially when it comes to the paradoxical and the idiotic. A farce, like the writer mentioned, is a form of satire depicting a serious situation that has turned ridiculous.

CAPTAIN: …Which is it the late night comedians do? I, like some other people, hate them.

OFFICER: I'd say the late nights use a bit of parody and satire, but primarily they use observational comedy; they find the funny in details and—

CAPTAIN: —Forget the god damn comic formats. Christ. Come on, let's go out this way. We're late for a meeting.

(the police go out the second door, which slams. The first door opens slightly)

ARTIST: *(enters, now alone, to us)* I'll never get a better chance to know what's going on in here… I'll take a page from their book: ask forgiveness, not permission.

(to us) I'm glad you're still here. I think police forget… that there's always someone watching. Let's have a look around…

(picks up a file) What's this? An investigation into…. "Aggravated theft… in a pharmacy." Drug prices what they are, it's the pharmacy that should be charged with aggravated theft... I rule that this investigation be dropped.

(He tears up the file, drops it out the window. He opens a desk drawer.)

And who's in here? More human grapes for the wine press of Justice? If they can't afford to defend themselves then squeeze them dry? Be free. May your records never be digitized…

(He drops all the files out the window. Opening another drawer he sees…)

What's this one?...

(Reads) "Investigation in progress… recommending the possible dismissal of the Captain from his police service!…" It looks like… did he really throw that suspect out a window?!... More shocking still, are the police really going to turn on one of their own? Maybe he's a sacrifice.

(The phone rings, and rings again) I have to answer it, don't I?

(the phone rings again; he answers in a different accent)

Hello? Who's this, please? …You're, who did you say? …You're the Police Chief?? …What a pleasure. The Police Chief, himself! Where are you calling from? …From upstairs on the fourth floor, of course you are; silly of me. The Captain was just saying—what was that? …Who am I?...

(can't think of what to say…) Oh, I bet you can guess! …What do you mean you don't have time for this. You don't have time for… an old colleague? Hint hint? Come on, now, and guess…

(repeating the Chief, almost to himself) Andrews?

(to the phone) Yes, you guessed it in one! I am Andrews! …In from out of town, that's right. …What am I doing here?—Never mind about that. What did you want to say to the Captain? …No, he can't talk right now, just tell me.

(repeats) "The FCC Inquisitor is coming here soon." The "FCC Inquisitor?" I had no idea there WAS such a person! The FCC as in the Federal Communications Commission, the FCC? …Has an Inquisitor?… He's, what was that? …The president said, on the news, that he's going to send the FCC Inquisitor to look into the death of the Antifa terrorist who went out a window… To put an end to all the rumors and stories, I see. Does the Captain already know about this? …He does.

Chief, is there really such a person as the FCC Inquisitor? That sounds like an ominous and official and totally made up thing the president would say to sound like he's getting something done.

(the phone makes angry noises)

Hey, don't let's get excited here, I'm not doubting the president's word; I just mean that I've never heard of such a person until now, that's all. …What's— …Alright, I UNDERSTAND, the FCC Inquisitor is coming. He has a presidential directive. It's all over the news, so it must be true. Right.

So, what do you want us to do about this, Chief. How can we help.

(repeats) …"You need copies of all the documents from the internal investigation… concerning the Captain's potential involvement in the death of the antifascist." Right. Yes, I'm looking at those files as I speak…

Listen, no offense Chief, but why would the Captain have had full access to these files?…Why do I have access to these files, for that matter? Anyone could have tampered with them…What do you mean 'that's why you want to make copies now'? That's idiotic! —Sorry! That was the Captain, not me!

(explaining) ...The Captain just called you an idiot.

(very angry noises on the phone)

Hey! Chief. I can't let you threaten the Captain like that! Hey…Don't you say that you'll smash in his face! Just because he said that you're an idiot? Don't you say that you'll smash in his face!

(the phone makes angry noises)

…Fine! That's between you two! Fine, be here in 5 minutes! You come downstairs and sort this out between you. I, Andrews, have got to go. I've got work to do. Just one last question, Chief: have you ever met or seen the FCC Inquisitor? …No?

(huge grin) Pleasure talking with you, Chief!

(Artist hangs up the phone, and then throws the phone out the window.)

(entering an open-ended conversation with us) I mean, I haven't acted in a minute, but I HAVE to pretend to be the FCC Inquisitor, don't I? *(audience yes/no)*

If there's a coverup happening here, the FCC Inquisitor can see exactly how it happens. We all can… THIS will be my play. The real play. The farce in progress.

You know, it's a sign of the times. Police misconduct used to be looked at by the DOJ, now it's looked at by the FCC. It's not about justice, it's about 'communications.' *(sighs)*

So who IS the FCC Inquisitor... If they're a real person… Would they be dressed like this? *(audience yes/no)*

No, they wouldn't dress like me; they'd dress like them.

(puts on the Captain's coat and hat) People like them respond well to other people who look like them; for the Captain, this will be like looking in a mirror. And even if he thinks I'm wearing some of his clothes, if I just act like I have UNQUESTIONABLE AUTHORITY, I think NONE OF THEM SHALL QUESTION ME. How do I look? *(audience responses)*

Well, it's worth a shot; nothing ventured. Now let's just do a little quick dramaturgy into the FCC. What exactly do YOU know about the FCC? *(audience responses)*

(helps; takes over) Right, so here's what I know… The FCC is an independent agency that regulates the national news networks. They're independent from the government so they can remain fair and unbiased from politics, right? But the commissioners who lead the FCC are appointed by the president of the United States…

So, supposing there's an "FCC Inquisitor," and they're being sent here by a presidential directive, they're probably here to make sure the "real news" about this "antifascist out the window" business is being distributed on all the national news networks… And by "real news" I mean the "news story" that the president wants reported. Right? Does that sound right? *(audience responses…)*

Alright, I think I'm as ready as I can be. *(conjuring)* No coverup shall happen without my knowing; objective reality must be confessed to me; for I am… The FCC Inquisitor!

(The Artist goes out the first door with a bang. The Captain and Officer enter through the second.)

CAPTAIN: Christ, that didn't need to be a meeting. Today couldn't get any worse.

OFFICER: Knock on wood, sir.

CAPTAIN: *(knock, knock, knocks at his desk; then notices the missing files)* Where's the file that was on my desk?

(looks into the open, empty drawers) Where are all the files??

OFFICER: *(looking down from the window, seeing the paperwork)* Sir?

CAPTAIN: *(looking back to the desk)* Where's my phone??

(then, looking down from the window, sees the files and phone, perhaps some papers blow by) ...Why are they out there??

(to the Officer) How did this happen??

(out the window) Who would have done this??

(to the Officer) We can get this cleaned up before anyone important comes, can't we???

(a knock on the door; they both turn to the door.)

CAPTAIN: (cont.) *(whisper to the Officer)* See who it is. Send them away. Don't let them in.

(Officer goes to the door, blocking the view of the inside)

CAPTAIN: (cont.) Where's my coat?? Why?...

OFFICER: *(at the door)* Captain sir. The Chief's come down to see you. He's waiting just outside.

CAPTAIN: *(panicking)* Please ask him to keep waiting!...

(the Chief pushes past the Officer and walks straight up to the Captain)

CAPTAIN: (cont.) Now wait, just wait, Chief!

CHIEF: Call me an idiot, will you?

CAPTAIN: *(mystified)* All right, you're an idiot.

(The Chief knocks the Captain unconscious. He looks at the Officer. The Officer averts his eyes, as if he didn't see anything.)

ARTIST: *(at the door again, hat in hand, in the middle of his change to a suit for the FCC Inquisitor; to us)* And then I'd say, "blackout!" and we'd all go "ha ha ha," because that's a dark joke, literally, ha ha ha ha ha…

(invites us to go 'ha ha ha') …and then… the lights blackout.

(lights blackout) Good.

(the officers ad lib: 'hey, hey, watch where you're stepping')

ARTIST: (cont.) *(in darkness)* Then there would be scene change music here… 'As time goes by,' in a minor key …I'll hum it for you. ….Da-dy-da-dy-dee-dum…da-dy-da-dy-dee-dum…

(Scene change music swells up.) Perfect.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO.

Or, "Let's get to the main story line." Or, "No one expects the FCC Inquisition…"

ARTIST: *(Beginning in blackness)* Act one, scene two. Begins in blackness. A brief time has passed—it is still today. As the light returns…

(the light returns) We find ourselves in the Chief's office, similar to the Captain's. The furniture's mostly the same, but it has been rearranged. A window is still there, it is still open. It looks out from the fourth floor now.

(the view out the window changes to be one story higher)

The Artist's already there, in the room, his back to the audience, face to the window. He is backlit as he stands there, dramatically…

(the backlight intensifies dramatically)

After a few moments of thrilling suspense… … … ….the Chief of Police approaches…

(The Chief approaches, rubbing his right hand from the punch; he stops just inside the door.

The Chief is joined by the Officer.

The Artist remains facing the window.)

CHIEF: *(quietly, to the Officer who joins him)* So who is that? What does he want?

OFFICER: *(quietly)* Well, I'm not sure, Chief… He just entered with so much AUTHORITY, I didn't feel like I could QUESTION him… He told me to get you and the Captain; said he needed to talk with you two.

CHIEF: *(who has never stopped massaging his right hand)* He said, "he needed to talk"? …That can't be good…

(braces himself, approaches the Artist, a little obsequiously) How are we this morning? I was told that you wanted to see me?

ARTIST: *(terrifyingly impassive, he barely beckons a greeting by lifting his hat)* Good day.

(he pauses to gaze at the hand the Chief continues to massage) What happened to your hand.

CHIEF: Ah… nothing. …With whom do I have the pleasure?...

ARTIST: "Nothing" happened to your hand… So why do you massage it? Is it some kind of a tick?

CHIEF: …Yes, that's it. It's a tick. But with whom... do I have the pleasure?!...

ARTIST: I once met a priest who would massage his hand like that. …He was a hypocrite.

CHIEF: Who are you??

ARTIST: Are you a hypocrite??

CHIEF: *(stunned)* No, for Heaven's sake… no… but…

ARTIST: *(changing his tone instantly)* No, of course, you're not. But that priest, he was a hypocrite. He was a liar. He was always massaging his right hand. Just like that.

CHIEF: Look, I've stopped. Hey, let's shake?

ARTIST: *(does not even consider shaking hands)* That massaging yourself all the time is a symptom of guilt…insecurity…sexual dissatisfaction…Are you impotent?

CHIEF: NO! *(he punches the table, and then in pain, massages his right hand again)*

ARTIST: AHA! And NOW the TRUTH comes out! You lied to me didn't you. Lied to my face. You told me that was a "tick" with your hand. It wasn't a tick. You punched someone, didn't you. Punched someone, yes. You punched them in the face, now didn't you; CONFESS!

CHIEF: Confess?! Ah…

(way off balance, he laughs warily) Ah, I do confess, that I hate to see you standing! Have a seat. Let me take your hat and coat. And what is your name, sir?...

ARTIST: *(a steely beat)* How rude of me…

(he takes off his hat with a studied slowness) I should remove my hat inside. I sometimes forget, you see; I'm susceptible to chill… And that big window's wide open, as you see. …Do you think we could close it?

CHIEF: *(dry-mouthed)* ...I'm afraid not. It was involved in an… accident…

ARTIST: *(beat, then jovial)* Good man! That was a test! It's part of the crime scene, of course! We must not tamper with it! Good man. Good man. Sorry for the runaround. …I've just got to make sure I'm getting the real "story" here... I am the FCC Inquisitor. Come out here to lend a hand with this antifascist out the window business… at the request of the president…

CHIEF: *(he realizes with new terror now)* Aha, you're the Inquisitor?... You exist! And you're here! You're here already!...

ARTIST: *(grinning at the Chief's clear apprehension)* I am the Inquisitor. I exist, and I'm here. I'm here, as you say: already.

CHIEF: I see…

ARTIST: *(mock aggression)* WHAT do you "see"?...

CHIEF: I see nothing, nothing!

ARTIST: *(mock aggression)* SEE NOTHING, SAY NOTHING![1]...

(the Chief cowers; the Artist's tone completely changes)

ARTIST: (cont.) God, look at your face! Come on. I'm only pulling your leg, Chief! I'm just having a little fun here. But… in all seriousness… you weren't supposed to know when I was coming. Couldn't risk the Captain finding out about my visit and tampering with the evidence. Working on a different story. You know. Everything here has to be found to be pure and innocent. You see. You see why we had to take every precaution to make sure the Captain didn't know about my coming. You see…

CHIEF: *(on the ropes for a new reason now)* ...I do see now, I uh, I do see that now…

ARTIST: …My God, Chief…You didn't tell him? Did you? Could you be that stupid? Don't lie to me now! I can always tell a lie! Like you: I have a tick!

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[1] Could be, "I thought," "What did you think," "What right do I have to think, right." (Casablanca)
Could be "NOTHING WILL COME OF NOTHING, SPEAK AGAIN!" (Lear)
Could be "NOTHING? NOTHING? Nothing, tra la la?" (Labyrinth)

(he discovers a tick) You see? Just happens naturally whenever someone lies to me…

OFFICER: *(impressed)* What a great tick!…

CHIEF: *(sweating, embarrassed)* Well you see I, I had to get a copy of his files from him and so I…

ARTIST: *(unbelievable!)* …HE was in possession of the files?!

CHIEF: …Well, they were about him so…

ARTIST: *(fuming)* And he, let's remember, is a police captain who is strongly suspected of a pushing a man out of a window, that window, in cold blood! Is it possible that a man who'd commit cold-blooded murder, might also use his authority, as a police captain, to cover the whole murder up? This is the person you trusted to hold onto the files concerning this matter?!

CHIEF: *(panicked, sputtering)* Yes exactly, that's exactly why I needed to copy the files! I!…

ARTIST: *(laughs, changes tone)* Gosh, I've really caught you off-guard, haven't I? You are very surprised!

CHIEF: *(getting back on the ball)* I am! I am surprised. Your, your plan to surprise us has worked like a charm!... Now, will you, won't you sit down, please, sit, sit. And let me take your hat.

(takes the hat, then stops) No wait, you said you'd prefer to keep it?

ARTIST: You can take it, you can keep it. It's not even mine.

CHIEF: What?

ARTIST: What?

CHIEF: …Would you like me to close the window then?

ARTIST: *(fogs his glasses to clean them)* …Crime scene…

CHIEF: *(mortified)* Crime scene! Oh! I'm all mixed up. I'm never like this!…

ARTIST: Ha!…You tough cops are all such nervous nellies… Chief, please don't make yourself uncomfortable. Why don't you just go find the Captain and bring him in here. Let's get to the main story line.

(he glances at us)

CHIEF: …Of course. But would you maybe like to come with me and meet in his office instead? It will be less draughty in there.

ARTIST: *(drily)* How thoughtful. But this is the room where the death of the antifascist happened. Have I got that right?

CHIEF: *(uncomfortable)* Yes, that's right… it happened here.

ARTIST: *(he opens his arms wide)* Then Chief, we shall play our scene in here. Because after all, every "true news story" these days is a kind of work of Art. Like a play. *(smiles)* No one reports anything that can legally be called "news" anymore. Look it up. They're "news stories," legally. So we're going to have to rehearse our "news story." And then make sure it doesn't seem "rehearsed." …Get it?

CHIEF: Got it.

ARTIST: Good. …Go get the Captain.

(The Chief is talking quietly with the Officer who's standing by the door. Meanwhile, the Artist is laying out many files on the desk.)

ARTIST: (cont.) I would prefer, Chief, that you always speak loudly and clearly while we're working on this. And with good enunciation.

CHIEF: *(turning, apologetic)* I'm sorry.

ARTIST: Try it again.

CHIEF: *(to the Officer, cheating out, loudly, clearly, and with good enunciation)* Please escort the Captain to my office right away.

ARTIST: Once more, with more urgency please. Give that officer a reason to MOVE. Again!

CHIEF: *(with Great urgency)* I want to see the Captain urgently! Bring him here to me now, it is urgent!

OFFICER: *(going urgently)* Yes, sir!

(Chief turns with a sense of accomplishment back to the Artist, but the Artist has already moved on. The Chief watches the Artist as he finishes sorting his paperwork and continues to sift through drawers and this and that.)

CHIEF: *(at length breaks the silence)* I wonder what could be keeping the Captain…

ARTIST: You don't mind if I have a look around?

CHIEF: No. Of course not.

ARTIST: …Mind if I ask you something, Chief?

CHIEF: Please. Be my guest.

ARTIST: Thanks. About the Captain… before he gets here… you did say, he's had access to all of these documents, didn't you. All the records into this investigation?

CHIEF: …Yes. …The archives are here in this building, so…

ARTIST: *(peremptory)* Yes, I'm not asking about your filing storage system, I suppose my question really is, would he fiddle with these files, do you think? Given the chance? Omit things? Rewrite things?

CHIEF: …Honestly? I couldn't say. …If he's guilty, I think he would, yes.

ARTIST: Because if he was innocent…

CHIEF: There would be no need.

(The Captain, with a bruised eye, enters as if he'd been catapulted; he's followed close by the Officer)

CAPTAIN: Alright, I'm here! My God, this officer was urgent!

(The Artist has pretended to drop some paperwork and is crouching now behind the desk)

CHIEF: Captain, let me introduce you to…

CAPTAIN: (cont.) I thought that he must have been joking, 'the Chief wants to see you urgently' he said. Wants to see me? For why? Are you full of remorse and of shame now? Does it feel like a punch in the face? You dick…

CHIEF: Not another word, Captain! We must both be on our best behavior now. I must introduce you to…

(he turns now and sees no one; he is perplexed.)

CAPTAIN: …Introduce me to who? Is this some kind of an act? What, are we five years old now? Be on our best behavior? Come on… I have to watch my mouth everywhere I go these days, the press are everywhere—The press aren't here, are they? Are they hiding in here?! Look out!

(he looks for press) Is this some kind of sacrifice, you pig? Some kind of a set-up?!

ARTIST: *(appears behind the Captain)* Yes, it is a kind of a set-up. If you will… But I am not the press, Captain.

CAPTAIN: …My god it's you…

(Will the Captain recognize the Artist?? Beat. Then paling…)

You must be the FCC Inquisitor…

ARTIST: *(privately amused)* Yes, I must be. …But no need to stand on formality. "FCC Inquisitor" sounds so formal. Just call me "Your Excellency."

CAPTAIN: …As you wish, yes of course, Your Excellency.

CHIEF: Captain, ahem, you would have had no way of knowing, because you never heard about this matter until now, but His Excellency has come here at the request of the president to help us get the true story out about the accidental death of that Antifa terrorist.

CAPTAIN: *(playing along, a little obviously and nervously)* Aha-ha! Of course! I had no way of knowing about this! This is the first I've heard anything about an FCC Inquisitor coming here. This is very surprising.

ARTIST: I am sorry to surprise you like this, Captain. Please, don't hold it against your Chief, here. He was only following regulations for matters like these. Weren't you, Chief?

CHIEF: ...Sure I was.

ARTIST: Sure he was.

CAPTAIN: …Sure he was…

(The Artist watches the Captain closely. ...Does the Captain NOT recognize him?...)

ARTIST: *(to the Captain)* Look, I'm sorry to stare, but you look so familiar… I feel like we must have met before… You haven't featured in some nasty news story before…have you? Something the FCC got involved with once upon a time?

CAPTAIN: *(perhaps he has! He stammers)* I-I-I…

ARTIST: No, of course not. If you'd abused your power before, you couldn't possibly hold your position now. Right?

CAPTAIN: I-I-I…

ARTIST: …Put a pin in that. Shall we get down to business?

CHIEF: Yes, to business!

CAPTAIN: To business.

ARTIST: To business. Yes.

(selecting certain documents) Here are the facts as I understand them thus far. In the first place, you were holding a male dancer for questioning regarding his suspected involvement in domestic terrorist activities… And according to one of your sworn statements, you said and I quote, "I had a great deal of evidence linking that male dancer to the organization known as Antifa." Is that what you said?

CAPTAIN: That's what I said.

ARTIST: So where is the evidence?

CAPTAIN: Where is the evidence?

ARTIST: That's what I said.

CAPTAIN: Well, in the first place…

ARTIST: We are in the first place…

CAPTAIN: The evidence—isn't it in there?

ARTIST: No it isn't. God, you're terrible at this! *(helping)* …Is it possible the antifascist stole the evidence?

CAPTAIN: That's exactly what happened! He stole the evidence!

ARTIST: Of course he did! Because the evidence against him was so absolute, he knew he didn't stand a chance in hell against it. He was desperate. Suicidal.

CAPTAIN: It's like you were there in the room.

ARTIST: I wasn't though. *(to the Chief)* You were there, weren't you, Chief?

CHIEF: I was there… at least at the beginning…

ARTIST: Mmhm. Then you play the antifascist.

CHIEF: What?

ARTIST: We need to reenact the scene. Make sure we've got our story "right." Look. This is how it works. Here's a brief demonstration. Officer, pretend you're holding a news camera. Ok?

(the Officer does so)

And you point it at those two.

(meaning the Chief and Captain; the Officer does)

Now Chief, punch the Captain.

(the Chief tries to punch the Captain, who ducks).

Good try. Now, Officer, you were holding the camera. What did you see?

OFFICER: I saw the Chief try to punch the Captain.

ARTIST: That's right. And that's what everyone would see from your camera footage. But what really happened is: I told the Chief to punch the Captain. But that part's not on the camera, right? So that's not what anyone sees. They are seeing the honest story… just not the whole story. You see? It's absolutely honest… in its way. Now here with this business of the antifascist… the president has an interest in making sure that the world sees this story HIS way: that you police were so right to detain that male dancer as a violent and radicalized Antifa terrorist… and that

it's a good thing he's dead. I don't need that to be the whole story. I just need that to be THE story. And so do you. Get it?

CHIEF: Got it.

ARTIST: Good. So sit in this chair, Chief. …This is the chair used by the antifascist?

CAPTAIN: The very same.

ARTIST: Good. Now begin, Captain! Bring your great amount of evidence against him! Let's see how it happened.

CAPTAIN: *(tentatively, to the Chief as the antifascist)* We know you go to the No Kings rallies.

CHIEF: *(politely incredulous as the antifascist)* …So?

CAPTAIN: We know you're a member of Antifa!

CHIEF: *(amused as the antifascist)* I'm not a member of Antifa. No one is. It's not an organized group. It's an anti-fascist ideology. It's an idea. That fascism is bad. *(he smiles)*

CAPTAIN: A likely story…

ARTIST: *(who has been following along in the transcript)* I like that line, "A likely story;" plays into the whole cop trope… Only, it isn't in the transcript.

CAPTAIN: In the transcript?

ARTIST: *(obviously)* …In the transcript of the actual questioning. The dialogue of what was said.

CAPTAIN: …There's a transcript?

ARTIST: *(impatiently)* Yes, of course. …And things you're saying now, just aren't in here.

CAPTAIN: Isn't that in there?

ARTIST: *(impatiently!)* No. It says here, the suspected antifascist was incredulous about the charges. It says here he actually smiled at them. That he was in no way wild or abusive, or anything other than merely polite and bemused… You're doing very well, Chief.

CHIEF: Thank you.

ARTIST: Thank you. But you, Captain, are very bad at this. You're completely off your lines. I think the Officer had better give it a go.

CAPTAIN: *(a little discouraged and confused)* …I don't think I fully understood what we were doing here.

ARTIST: *(to us)* Ain't that the truth.

(to the Officer) You be the Captain now.

OFFICER: *(doing the Captain, grabbing the Chief as antifascist)* Aha! Smile at me again, I dare you… I dare you to laugh at me!!

CHIEF: *(breaks character, to Artist)* I'm sorry, what did the antifascist say then?… That last line threw me… hearing it from this side.

ARTIST: It says here, "the antifascist did not seem touched by this outburst, but smiled incredulously, and laughed again."

CHIEF: Thank you so much.

(to the Officer) Can we take that again, please?

OFFICER: Of course. *(to the Chief, checking in, makes eye contact)* Ready?

(as the Captain) Aha! Smile at me again, I dare you… I dare you to laugh at me!!

(Chief smiles incredulously and laughs as the antifascist)

ARTIST: And… scene! Bravo, Chief! Such empathy, humanity!

CHIEF: Thank you!

ARTIST: Bravo to you too, Officer. Now, how did we get from here… to the next beat… From smiling incredulously and laughing… to suicidally throwing himself out the window… in possession of all of the evidence against him…which was never recovered… The transcripts don't seem to say what happened in between the being-dared-to-laugh and the laughing… and the dying. It seems void in this transcript; void like the open window there…

CAPTAIN: It just sort of…happened.

CHIEF: Yes, that's just how it happened…

ARTIST: Well, I don't believe it.

(to us) People won't believe that. Will they? No!

(to them) Don't play coy, boys… Tell us what really happened!

CAPTAIN: Ah…

CHIEF: Ah…

CAPTAIN: Ah…

OFFICER: Ah…

ARTIST: Ah'll tell you what really happened! It's obvious, of course!...

(will he point the finger at the Captain?...)

...It was a clear case of excited delirium! Wasn't it, boys?

CHIEF: *(relieved)* Of course…

ARTIST: Of course. Excited delirium. Happens all the time, to all kinds of people… especially poor and politically powerless people!... And when excited delirium takes one of them over, police officers like yourselves have every right, nay, obligation, to restrain, to abuse, and even to mmmurder them!

(ALL THE POLICE): Thank you, Your Excellency!

ARTIST: Please. …On the other hand, people are catching on to the fact that excited delirium's a made-up condition… They're starting to call it "a widely debunked pseudoscience." I think we'll need something concrete to offer—no pun intended—to show them all how real, how necessary it still is… So let's get to the backstory; see if that helps us. Why had you picked up the antifascist? What was he doing at the time?

CAPTAIN: The antifascist was at a protest. Protesting the US government! So, they were clearly un-American! Right?

ARTIST: Of course you're right. …As long as we forget the fact that it's a hallmark of what makes this great country great: the right of the citizens to peacefully protest the government for redress, so that their voice must be heard. …But perhaps this protest wasn't peaceful? Was it violent? Were there riots? Were there cars on fire? That's when you know things are serious. When cars are on fire.

CAPTAIN: Not yet. Not yet. But it was only a matter of time.

ARTIST: Mm. Was the antifascist in question behaving badly at the time?

CAPTAIN: Well, he was dancing.

ARTIST: How dare he. Dancing in the streets? Laughing, singing, music swinging, dancing in the streets? …What fresh hell is this?

CAPTAIN: What fresh hell is right.

ARTIST: What was the dance like?

(they think)

OFFICER: …I'd say 'satirical.'

ARTIST: —Satirical. You've interested me.

CAPTAIN: He was dancing to the YMCA.

OFFICER: Parodying how the president dances.

(he laughs to remember it, then) ...It was disrespectful to the office of the president.

ARTIST: Of course it was disrespectful. It should be a federal crime to mock the president! Show me the video of that demonic dance; this whole case will be open and shut.

CAPTAIN: …Show you the video?

ARTIST: Yes, show me! …Surely you and your officers were all wearing body cameras, weren't you? As you made your way through the violent fray of satirical dancing… surely you were wearing body cameras… as you took those criminally offensive dancers from off the streets?

CHIEF: …Of course, all of our officers always wear their body cameras, as mandated by a court order. …It's just that none of the cameras were turned on.

OFFICER: It's the constant pressure of being "on" all the time…

ARTIST: DAMN! Damn. We were almost in the clear on this thing… But look, never fear!

(as if addressing a rally) Throughout the history of this great country, we, who favor good honest oppression, have always struggled to maintain our control… We've been dealt some hard blows in the name of freedom, equality, and justice… But every time we oppressors have really put our minds to it, we have always found a way to keep… at least a foot in the door of this great nation. Or at least, a finger getting repeatedly slammed in the door of this great nation. But we'll never take our finger away, no matter the pain, no matter the cost, we will never go away! There will always be oppressors in this great nation!

…It wasn't easy for the slaveholders when slavery was outlawed, was it? No. It wasn't easy for landowners to rig the systems for themselves when ordinary people, and even women, got the vote. It wasn't easy for public officials of all kinds as laws were passed requiring greater transparency, including damn FOIA requests bringing all kinds of things into light…But we're still here, despite it all! Because we have a right to be here! We have a right to our dreams of oppression; a right to always strive for absolute control! That's what our America's all about!

We have to fight the good fight, for our God-given rights, to lie, and exploit, and have more power and money than everyone else put together! It's just OUR TURN to fight the fight now, boys! We GET this opportunity win one for our side today! To cover this up! So let's get to it!

(All the police cheer, woot, whistle, and applaud; inspired by this rally speech.)

CAPTAIN: *(adding on with a swagger)* I "got to it" when I was talking to that antifascist.

ARTIST: I bet you did. What did you do?

(mock threat) What did you do?...

CAPTAIN: *(laughs)* Well, I told him we had captured one of his friends, and his friend had given him up! Told him we had absolute proof about his terrorist activities.

(he smiles) I really tried to scare him. Really tried to get him to give something up! Really put the screws to him, you know?

ARTIST: Aha, entrapment! The use of threats, fraud, or harassment to induce or coerce someone to do or say something they wouldn't ordinarily say or do. …I love it, of course. Only, it doesn't say that you said that in here…

CAPTAIN: Let me see your copy of the transcript?

(heavy air quotes throughout) Aha, you know, I think you've got the "first draft" there. I think there may be some later "rewrites" coming—in an effort to "fairly and accurately" portray the events as they "actually happened." Ha ha ha ha.

(The Chief and the Artist share a brief look: he WOULD fiddle with the files, for what it's worth.)

ARTIST: *(as if the look hadn't happened, to the Captain)* Ha ha ha ha. Very good! Lots of air quotes. Nothing suspicious at all about that. So let's hear the "rewritten" version which we're told is "more accurate." Start at the top please, whenever you're ready.

CAPTAIN: I'll come in through the door and begin?

ARTIST: Very good.

CAPTAIN: *(goes out, beat, he comes back in, dramatic)* "Bad news for you, antifascist!.."

ARTIST: —Let me just stop you there. Where are you looking? Who are you talking to?

CAPTAIN: I'm talking to the antifascist.

ARTIST: I don't know who you're talking to. Are you watching the audience watch you?

CAPTAIN: Sorry. I just hadn't noticed people were watching us before…

ARTIST: *(looks at the audience, thumbing at the cops)* Amateurs.

(to the Captain) Look, I'll be the antifascist; I'm in the chair now. You're going to give me some "bad news" about how you definitely know I'm a terrorist; it's going to be a lie; but I need you to make me believe you. Again!

CAPTAIN: *(goes out the door, beat, he comes back in)* Bad news for you, antifascist! Your friends have given you up! We have sworn statements now that confirm you are a domestic terrorist!

ARTIST: That's better; I believe you! I believe you. I believe… you hauled an innocent person off the streets because they were exercising their first-amendment right to peacefully protest the government. I believe you detained them illegally. Threatened them, more than once. I believe

that you tried to entrap them… I even believe the "excited delirium" story now because what upstanding citizen wouldn't go crazy being treated like this? …By an authority figure who has sworn to protect them? Who wouldn't become indignant? Who wouldn't become desperate and angry enough to possibly even THROW themselves out of a window? Out of a police headquarters fourth story window in a final act of protest?!... I BELIEVE: you're responsible for that antifascist's death, whether or not you pushed him out of that window!!

CAPTAIN: What?? But…but, you said, before, that we were within our God-given rights to oppress and?...

ARTIST: Are you kidding me? You don't have ANY EVIDENCE against the person you detained! You just took them off the street, abducted them!

CAPTAIN: But…but, you said 'we get the opportunity to cover this up,' and we all cheered!.. and, and…

(collapses into a chair; miserable agonies)

ARTIST: *(...relents)* …No, no, you're right. I did say that. And I meant it. But it's not going to be easy… Christ… For a while there, there was a "witch hunting" climate in the press, and that would lend a case like this some deniability. 'We're being vilified for no reason, the Democrats, etcetera.' Some people might have believed us then. But right now, all the people are out for real justice! For holding power accountable! So this is not going to be easy! I mean, look at these news reports… You're quoted as saying, at one point, you, Captain, said: "the antifascist was probably just a nice kid that got mixed up with some of those screwballs who wear Guy Fawkes masks and capes made out of towels." Did you say that?

CAPTAIN: I did say that… I shouldn't have said that… I forgot there was still press around the place… I made a mistake.

ARTIST: *(fatherly)* We all make mistakes. …This is just a really big one. Here, this other news report says, that you said, "we have incontrovertible evidence against that antifascist." And then you went on, in some detail, about the various politicians they'd voted for in the past, and the various organizations they'd given money to. Various associations they'd been associated with… Various UNIONS they'd been unified with, good heavens… Now, my question for you is: …Where'd you get all of the information you mentioned in this report? It isn't here in all these papers. May I see it?

CAPTAIN: Well, no.

ARTIST: *(eyes the Captain incredulously)* ...No?

CAPTAIN: See… I just made it all up.

ARTIST: …You just made it all up. Wow. …You could be a writer! If writers weren't being replaced by AI.

OFFICER: Writers aren't be replaced by AI; they're being replaced by people who know how to use it.

ARTIST: *(to the Officer)* My tick! It's back! It must be a lie!

(returns to the Captain)…Writer or not, you may need a new career soon, Captain…

CAPTAIN: You mean, that I may be dismissed from police service?!

ARTIST: I mean: the reason I came out here is to represent the FCC as its Inquisitor. I mean: it's my job to make a decision here about what really happened, and how it's going to be reported… and how this will affect you all for the rest of your lives. I mean, I'm here at the request of the president of the United States…

(the police stand at attention)

…and he doesn't care how this turns out for you, or for anyone else. He care about how he comes out of this. That's what I mean. And you know it.

(a horror sets in.)

CHIEF: *(points a finger at the Captain)* Listen, Your Excellency, listen, look. It was all his fault! Let's just throw the book at him and be done!

ARTIST: *(they're wearing him thin…)* "Throw the book" is a cliché. Say that same thought in a different way.

CHIEF: …Throw him under the bus?

ARTIST: There's just so much "throwing"!…

OFFICER: Too much throwing?

ARTIST: *(to us, impatient and unimpressed)* I think so. Yes.

CAPTAIN: Lookit, listen, you can't throw anything at me! I'm a cop, a hero!

OFFICER: Well, it wasn't my fault. I was just following orders!

CAPTAIN: That's right, pass the buck up! You…pig!

CHIEF: You're both out of here! I can't be seen condoning behavior like yours.

CAPTAIN: Don't you dare scapegoat me! You know what will happen to me and my life? I'll get threats, I'll get trolled, I'll be a joke to everyone in uniform!...

ARTIST: Yes. You may even get bullied and beaten in the streets!...

OFFICER: You may even get killed.

CHIEF: *(thinking aloud)* On the street, or in prison…

CAPTAIN: Don’t say that! Don’t say that! I can’t let this happen! What should I do? Tell me, I’ll do anything! What should I do?!?!

ARTIST: You want my advice?

CAPTAIN: Desperately, yes!

ARTIST: Throw yourself out of the window!

CAPTAIN: —How will that help anything??

ARTIST: It won’t help anything, you’re right. How about this, then. We’ll martyr you. We’ll make people think better of you in your death. We’ll blot this whole incident from the world’s memory; all the world will remember is the blot of you on the street… You just have to be sacrificed, that’s all. I’ll help you. I’ll push you. Come on.

CAPTAIN: Don’t push me out of the window!!

ARTIST: This is for our own good.

CAPTAIN: No! No! Help! Help! God! Fine! This is it!

(the Artist almost has the Captain ‘dead to rights,’ but stops him from going out the window; the Artist grimaces and laughs to himself.)

ARTIST: Pretty frightening? Look all the way down there. Look how far you would have fallen…

CAPTAIN: …You know for a second there, I-I almost jumped?…

ARTIST: For a second there, I almost let you. But you know… I had to stop you because… this isn’t really your fault.

(the police are surprised)

OFFICER: …Isn’t it?

ARTIST: “Isn’t it, Your Excellency.”

OFFICER: Isn’t it, Your Excellency?

ARTIST: Isn’t it what?

OFFICER: …Isn’t it his fault?

ARTIST: *(annoyed)* Isn’t what who’s fault. Give me something to work with here. This is terrible improv.

OFFICER: Isn’t it the Captain’s fault that the antifascist is dead, whether or not he jumped?

ARTIST: Yes, AND… It's those bastards in Washington, too… They thrive in a climate of social disorder, because: whenever the people have united, the people have ruled. The only chance for authoritarianism to thrive is among a deeply divided people. Make them distrust each other, suspect each other, fear each other. Fear is the best. Fear lasts longer than pain. Fear makes people feel powerless, cornered, self-interested, out of options… Fear is what lets authoritarians ravage the countryside… almost unchecked…

And then, to deflect all their fear-mongering away from themselves… the authoritarians put all the blame for all the fear on some group of people who they've deemed to be defenseless. Poor people, "other" people, Jews, blacks, gays, 'undocumented immigrants,' transexuals… Because what are they going to do about it. Right? How are they supposed to defend themselves from these kinds of invisible, rhetorical attacks?

OFFICER: *(helpfully)* And real attacks! The president himself has given us orders to go out and shoot folks like them in the legs!

ARTIST: That's true! Now, that's clearly an unlawful order, 'go shoot innocent folks in the legs.' Right?

OFFICER: But we're meant to follow orders, and to presume that the orders are lawful…

ARTIST: Exactly. YOU are put in an untenable position. All of you… You were just doing your jobs. You did absolutely right. That's why I'm really here. To help you out of this.

CHIEF: *(a glimmer of hope)* What?

OFFICER: What?

CAPTAIN: What?

ARTIST: Of course! Think about it!… it only makes sense! …You're the apple of an authoritarian's eye! They love you guys in Washington D.C.! You spread seeds of confusion, anger, and fear... everywhere you go! You're artists of senseless abuse! Modern-day Marquis de Sades! Folks are tearing out their hair trying to understand your motivations, your characters… there's so much chaos… you flood the zone, not even knowing what you do! Of course I'm here to help you out of this, so you can carry on! The trouble is all these… tall tales… You've got contradicting statements, unsupported statements… I mean, you've really a dug a hole for yourselves as you've tried to bury this story! But I think we can still possibly get this sorted…

CHIEF: I'm confident that we can get this sorted!

ARTIST: *(a note to the Chief)* …I hate feeling confident; it's a stupid mood to be in. I think we can still possibly get this sorted.

CHIEF: Thank you. Thank you, Your Excellency. Thank the FCC Inquisitor, boys.

(CAPTAIN AND OFFICER): Thank you, thank you! Thank you!

(The Artist waves his hand dismissively and looks back out the window.)

CHIEF: So, which version of the story do you think we go with, Your Excellency? Do we say the original story was true, or a "rewritten for greater accuracy" version?...

ARTIST: *(returns, thinks)* Well… I think we should ditch the "excited delirium" version.

(police all ad lib in agreement/disagreement: I liked it, it's a classic, it's been done, it's passé)

ARTIST: (cont.) No, I know I led us that way at one point, but that's why this is a process; I've made up my mind; we're not going with the excited delirium version. It just seems too convenient. Too much like an easy out. No, I think it's much stronger to say that this jerk, this antifascist, this cold-blooded domestic terrorist, threw himself out of the window… to protect the Antifa underground, and all their ongoing subversive activities! And!...He did it to give the finger to the cops who all the Antifa hate for no reason, and!... Raise awareness about his terrorist, "anti-fascist" cause!

(police all ad lib: that's very good, excellent!)

ARTIST: (cont.) Thank you. Now, if that's why he did it, you boys would all be innocent. Right? You'd have been right to bring him in; he was a terrorist. You would even have been brave to bring him in; this dangerous and radicalized male dancer!…Right?

CHIEF: Right!

CAPTAIN: Right!

OFFICER: Right!

ARTIST: There's just one thing… Why couldn't you stop him from throwing himself out the window? Why couldn't you thwart this radicalized act? …How do we explain that?

CHIEF: Ah…What do you mean? It… just happened, just all of a sudden!…

ARTIST: *(sighs wearily, looks to the heavens, then)* There is verifiable information that we have to work within. There is a reality we need to get people to buy that exists within… actual reality. For instance. Here is the chair. The antifascist sat in this chair. There is the window. We know these things. There is the desk, you must have sat there. You, officer, bet you were there? And you, you were somewhere here, too?

(they were there; nods and subdued agreement)

That's a lot of police. And a fair bit of furniture. And, I think, if the antifascist did indeed jump, he would need to get a running start to make it out of that window. So, how did he manage to get by all of you, and the furniture, and?...

(he whistles the fall)

CAPTAIN: *(hazards)* He was very athletic…

ARTIST: Yes that's true. He was a dancer. But take for instance, another fact that we need to account for. The antifascist smiled and laughed. And then… took his own life…athletically?... Seems maybe… incongruous? Implausible, maybe? I mean, maybe, maybe he was mentally unwell… to smile, laugh, and then…

(whistles the fall)

Maybe… but… being mentally unwell is something the press could fact-check—and that the police should have checked before questioning him… We don't want the press looking more into these kinds of questions, so let's not hand them that… Nothing too specific…

(thinks aloud) …The antifascist smiled and laughed... and then threw himself out of the window because… Why… Why…

(They all think for a very long time… with a few false starts.)

CHIEF: *(eventually)* Well… *(making it up)* You know what some terrorists are like!… Never happier than when they're about to strike!… He'd made up his mind what he was going to do; that's why he smiled and laughed?…

ARTIST: *(leaning forward now, thinking it through)* …That's very good! He'd been taken; knew the jig was up… He wanted to protect all his Antifa brothers and sisters in the underground… He wanted to give the finger to the police, and raise awareness for his antifascist cause. He had an idea, and it made him smile and laugh, "yes," the male dancer thought, "YES, I will throw myself out of the window!" He smiled and he laughed and he did!

CHIEF: It's a flawless argument!

ARTIST: Yes, but still, why couldn't any of you stop him... With so many cops in the room… That's not a good look, is it?

CHIEF: No.

OFFICER: No.

CAPTAIN: No.

ARTIST: No… Hmm… Hmm…

OFFICER: I must have looked away just for a moment! Getting a piece of chewing gum.

ARTIST: …Good! That could work. And what about you two?

CHIEF: I wasn't there.

ARTIST: No, that's verifiable. You were there. You have to be there.

CHIEF: I was there.

CAPTAIN: I think maybe he was only there in the first version, before the rewritten versions?...

ARTIST: No, he's there in all the versions, so he's in our version, too. And he…

(thinking on the spot) He was concerned. I mean, just look at him… Of course this man of deep thoughts was concerned… about… Concerned… about the nature of the antifascist. Concerned about the state of America. He was thinking profoundly... Contemplating, what was best to be done. And he… he wanted to do some real good… in that moment… To take a real stand for good. Right?

CHIEF: *(in character, appropriately moved)* You're God damned right.

ARTIST: So there you are, contemplating this antifascist, this threat to human lives and human rights… and he's sitting there smiling and laughing… and then… and then… How indignant you became when he started to sing!

CHIEF: *(he missed a beat)* —Sing?

ARTIST: Yes, sing! He started to sing the song the Nazis sing in Casablanca: Die Wacht am Rhein the song is called, "The Watch on the Rhein."

CAPTAIN: But why would he sing that?

ARTIST: *(witheringly)* It was SATIRE! Antifa's always weaponizing satire… You said it yourselves, he was parodying the president's dancing even as you picked him up. Well, here he goes again, using anti-authoritarian satire to playfully comment on challenging subjects that confront him… like his own unlawful detainment… Because, by singing the Nazi song from Casablanca, he was satirically implying that YOU were the fascists, you see!

(to the Chief) …And you! There you are, a clean-cut, deep-thinking kind of guy, contemplating this… satirical singing… It makes you sick. You feel compelled to rebel with a peaceful protest of your own against the antifascist!… So you sing your own song over his— La Marseillaise, which the French sing over the Germans in Casablanca… in Rick's Café American! …And you both joined the Chief! Didn't you? Yes! Everybody comes to Rick's! Inspired!! Now, let's reenact the scene! I'll be the antifascist, starting in the chair, singing Die Wacht am Rhein, and you drown out my singing with your singing La Marseillaise. Let's go.

CHIEF: …I don't sing.

ARTIST: ...You'll sing or this story will never hold up! You'll go down in history as a bunch of bull-shitters! But more importantly, and more immediately, you will simply GO DOWN.

(The Artist takes his place in the antifascist's chair and nods with great authority to the booth; a piano accompaniment starts for the German anthem; the Artist begins to sing Die Wacht am Rhein, as the antifascist. The Chief takes a deep breath and begins to belt La Marseillaise, joined

by the Captain and the Officer. Horns come to accompany them. They become so caught up in the song, they genuinely do not notice as the Artist as he makes his way from the antifascist's chair to the window. He leans on it, admiring them with some cynicism, a bit like Captain Renault as he leans against the bar at Rick's; the Artist picks up a coup glass from somewhere outside and under the window. As the singing ends, the Artist raises his glass, with real emotion.)

ARTIST: Vive la France!

Die Wacht am Rhein
Es braust ein Ruf wie Donnerhall,
Wie Schwertgeklirr und Wogenprall:
Zum Rhein, zum Rhein, zum deutschen Rhein,
Wer will des Stromes Hüter sein?
Lieb' Vaterland, magst ruhig sein,
Lieb' Vaterland, magst ruhig sein,
Fest steht und treu die Wacht am Rhein!
Fest steht und treu die Wacht am Rhein!

La Marseillaise:
Allons enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!
Contre nous de la tyrannie!
L'étendard sanglant est levé
Entendez-vous dans nos campagnes
Mugir ces féroces soldats?
Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras.
Egorger vos fils, vos compagnes!
Aux armes citoyens,
Formez vos bataillons
Marchons, marchons
Qu'un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons

The End of Act One.

Optional Intermission.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE.

Or, "Farce in rehearsal." Or, "Entrance of the gladiators."

(They are all as before, coup glass raised in the Artist's hand...)

ARTIST: And that's how he managed to evade all of the friendly police in this room and maliciously jump to his death, out of this window! Well, boys. I think I speak for all upstanding news consumers of the world when I say how glad and relieved I am… Anyone who has ever worried about the shouts they've heard from police officers… they can rest easy now knowing those shouts… are shouts of song!... And the bangs they hear are police just banging time!... Police aren't out on the streets shooting tear-gas grenades at pastors… they're tearing up at patriotic tunes!… …To America.

(the Artist drinks to the cops; cheers around 'to America, to America;' the Artist throws the coup glass out of the window.)

A VOICE: *(down on the street, below the window)* Hey! You at the window! …Stop throwing things out of that window!!

ARTIST: *(calls out the window)* Hey! You on the street! No one throws things out of these windows here. Anything that comes out of these windows: jumped. Maliciously.

A VOICE: You expect me to believe this coup glass maliciously jumped?

ARTIST: *(calls down)* I don't give a damn what you believe.

(to the cops) I give a damn what we can get away with.

(throws a bottle maliciously down to the street, turns and smiles) To that end, concerning the death of this antifascist… are we all happy with the Casablanca ending? Because personally, I think it's great. It's got everything.

OFFICER: You know, I just saw Casablanca for the first time recently!

CHIEF: No.

OFFICER: I know. I loved it.

CAPTAIN: *(candidly)* Casablanca is the best studio film ever made.

ARTIST: Good, good, good, good, good. We're all happy with it. Then let's move on! Let's advance! Always be advancing!

CAPTAIN: …Wait. Did you mean, are we happy with the Casablanca ending for OUR story?

ARTIST: Yes, of course!

CHIEF: What did you think we were talking about?

CAPTAIN: I thought we were just talking about the ending of Casablanca.

OFFICER: *(as Rick)* You better hurry. You'll miss that plane.

ARTIST: *(to the Captain)* What are you talking about? You don't want to go along with us on the Casablanca story? It's a great story!

CHIEF: *(from Casablanca)* Your papers, please…

CAPTAIN: I just don't think the singing story's going to hold up!...

ARTIST: Are you kidding me? People are going to love it! It has everything!

CAPTAIN: I'd just be more comfortable saying that, you know, we were just horsing around and he fell out of the window. An accident. Plain and simple.

ARTIST: If the press get our story and you're not with us on it, you'll regret it. …Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But soon, and for the rest of your life.

OFFICER: *(helpfully)* ...I could maybe imagine that we were just horsing around.

ARTIST: *(turning, warning)* Don't you start.

OFFICER: But… if we were horsing around with the antifascist… and that's why he accidentally fell… that would have to put us in… quite close proximity to him, wouldn't it? Why couldn't we grab him as he fell… if we were already grabbing at him?

CHIEF: *(proud)* You'll make a good detective! Poking holes in the story.

ARTIST: *(skeptical)* Yes. But can he plug them. …Say we entertain this idea of the Captain's, that you were all horsing around—may I touch you?

OFFICER: Sure.

ARTIST: *(puts hands on the officer)* Say you're horsing around like this…

(they do a half-speed fight, as if rehearsing; even the laugh is 'marked'...)

Ha ha ha horsing around… and we make our way over to the window like this, and then you—whoopsadaisy! Over he goes!

(they pause at the windowsill, still as if rehearsing a fight)

I think he'd have to go out head-first, wouldn't he?

OFFICER: Yes, I think so. Here switch with me?

(they do the same steps again in each other's roles)

Ha ha ha horsing around.. and then…

(they stop at the same spot).

If he fell out from this position… I THINK I could have CAUGHT him by the SHOE….

ARTIST: *(suddenly alert, spoofing My Fair Lady…)*…What was that?

OFFICER: *(unconsciously, 'the rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain')* …I THINK I could have CAUGHT him by the SHOE.

ARTIST: …Again.

OFFICER: I THINK I could have CAUGHT him by the… SHOE.

ARTIST: *(abruptly sings)* He THINKS he could have CAUGHT him by the SHO-OE! By George, he's got it! By George, he's got it! Don't you see? This is a great development! Because if you caught him by the shoe, that would prove that you didn't push him! YOU were trying to SAVE him! Don't you see?

(all rising, excited ad libs! Yes, of course, a stroke of genius!...)

ARTIST: *(panting with excitement)* ...So where is the shoe??

OFFICER: *(paling)* …Where is the shoe?

ARTIST: Yes, where is the shoe?? Produce it!

OFFICER: I ah…

ARTIST: I understand your storage is here in the building.

OFFICER: *(stammers)* Well I…

ARTIST: *(roars)* "WELL I, YOUR EXCELLENCY."

(Officer dissolves in tears)

CHIEF: *(interceding)* Your Excellency, I think you're too clever, too smart

ARTIST: Too wise

CHIEF: Too wise not to realize that there is no shoe. Besides which, there's another hole… in the sole… of this story, as it were. And that is: the body of the antifascist was found on the street wearing two shoes.

ARTIST: Mm, yes. And he wasn't a tri-ped… A tri-dexter…

CAPTAIN: But! That doesn't necessarily mean that we didn't grab another shoe…

CHIEF: …A third shoe?... For God's sake, man. Where did the other shoe come from??

CAPTAIN: Well, I don't know… Ask the wise man!

ARTIST: *(snaps)* WHAT.

OFFICER: *(drying his tears)* I know, sirs!

(the Artist gives focus, all give focus)

OFFICER: (cont.) What if… the antifascist had one foot that was smaller than the other foot, much smaller, and so, he always word a tiny shoe… inside of a bigger shoe?

ARTIST: …To make them look even?

OFFICER: To make them look even.

ARTIST: Well I mean… I like the imagination of it… but it just doesn't really sound like a thing that a person would do, does it? That's a good question for actors to ask themselves sometimes: would a person do that?

OFFICER: *(takes the note seriously; nods)* Thank you.

ARTIST: You bet.

CAPTAIN: *(suddenly)* Galoshes!!

(ALL): …What?

CAPTAIN: …He was wearing galoshes! …And we were all horsing around, and he fell out of the window, and it was an accident, and we tried to save him… by catching him by the galosh! And that's why he was still wearing… two shoes! *(beams)*

OFFICER: …Why wasn't he still wearing one galosh, then, on the street?

CAPTAIN: Because you grabbed them both. Or, after one came off in your hand and he fell, you raced down to the third-floor window, and you caught him by the other galosh

OFFICER: What, as he fell?

CAPTAIN: As he fell! And then, he fell again, from the third floor, and there you were, holding two galoshes, and he was still wearing… two shoes.

(beat)

OFFICER: What even is a galosh.

CAPTAIN: *(storms)* It's a flawless argument!

CHIEF: *(to the Officer)* It's a kind of a rubber overshoe you wear over your shoes to keep your shoes out of the rain.

OFFICER: So that's a galosh…

ARTIST: Galoshes date back to ancient times. They were originally made of wood. The galoshes of vulcanized rubber, as we know them now, can be attributed to none other than Charles Goodyear, of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company; a company named for, but not founded by him.

CHIEF: That's what I was going to say. Everyone knows that.

OFFICER: Well I don't know, but I don't think people really wear galoshes anymore…

(realizing and sharing) Hey! I ask you, Your Excellency: …Would a person do that?

ARTIST: *(impressed)* Well remembered and applied, officer!

(the Officer grins and bounces on the balls of his feet)

CAPTAIN: *(getting apoplectic)* Listen! Listen! I'm only going to say it one more time! The antifascist was wearing galoshes, we were horsing around, he accidentally fell out the window, we grabbed him by the galoshes—we tried to SAVE him—but he fell, out of his galoshes, to his death.

ARTIST: …Then… where are the galoshes?!

CHIEF: There are no galoshes!!

CAPTAIN: *(throwing a tantrum)* The case is closed!!

ARTIST: *(snaps)* NO! NO. …You are standing in the middle of this case's FCC Inquisition! I swear to God!

(getting out-of-control angry, scary) We're all bending over backwards to help you, risking our careers, our safety, our honor! And you… what, you don't want to sing?!

CAPTAIN: *(petulantly)* No! I don't wanna sing!

ARTIST: *(generally raging!)* JESUS CHRIST! It's like you people are so used to living with problems, you don't know what to do after they're solved! The Casablanca ending is PERFECT! It has everything! People will love it!

(to the Captain) YOU are the only problem left to solve here! YOU are endangering the mission! YOU are a liability to our collective PR!! And YOU can stop being our problem at any time! Got it?!

CAPTAIN: *(swallows)* I got it, I got it, I got it…

ARTIST: *(roars)* Places for the Casablanca ending!

(stares at the Captain until the Captain moves to retake his early singing position, then…)

ARTIST: (cont.) Good! We're going to take the Casablanca ending, once more, from the top. You better make it count. Because as soon as this story comes out, there are going to be questions. We have got to be… ready. We have got to be… perfect. —And, the press can never know this was rehearsed! Whatever happens, the press must never know what we're doing right now!

(deep breath, centers) Once more, from the top.

(They have all taken their early singing positions; Artist nods authoritatively to the booth; piano accompaniment begins for the German anthem; just before the Artist starts to sing, the phone rings. They all freeze. The Artist signals to cut the music. The phone continues to ring.)

ARTIST: *(to Chief)* ...It's your office.

CHIEF: *(picks up the phone)* Hello? This is the Chief. …I see. Just a moment.

(whispers to the Artist, panicked) It's the main desk downstairs. They say there's a reporter here!

ARTIST: *(whispers)* Mainstream legacy or independent media?

CHIEF: *(to the phone)* Which outlet are they with? …They're independent? A content creator?

ARTIST: *(whispers, horrified)* An independent content creator?? …Well what do they want?

CHIEF: *(to the phone)* Well, what do they want? …I see. Just a moment.

(whispers to the Captain) They want to see you, Captain.

CAPTAIN: *(whispers, remembering)* Is it Marie Felicity?

CHIEF: *(to the phone)* Is it Marie Felicity? …It's Marie Felicity.

OFFICER: *(whispers)* I love Marie Felicity. I follow her.

CHIEF: *(whispers)* Yes, nearly half a million people do. She shouldn't have access!!

(to the phone) No, nothing. Hold on.

ARTIST: *(whispers, to the Captain)* What does she want with you?

CAPTAIN: *(whispers)* She asked me for an interview. It's supposed to be now.

CHIEF: *(whispers, to the Captain)* Did you run this by the PIO?

CAPTAIN: *(whispers)* …PIO?

OFFICER: *(whispers)* Public Information Officer.

ARTIST: *(whispers)* No PIO would grant this interview. Independent journalists always complain about access because police PIO's never give it. Because only legacy news journalists are under MY FCC CONTROL.

CHIEF: *(whispers, to the Artist)* We should send her away!

ARTIST: *(whispers)* No! It's too late! We should let the interview happen!

(ALL): *(whisper incredulously)* What?

ARTIST: *(whispers)* We can't afford to raise further suspicion. She could start a conspiracy theory about us. The show must go on!

CHIEF: *(whispers)* But we're not ready!

ARTIST: *(whispers)* We have to be ready. If we had six months to rehearse, we would still want more time. So listen: I'll go disguise myself as someone else!

CHIEF: *(whispers)* What? Why?

ARTIST: *(whispers)* She can't know the FCC Inquisitor is here under a presidential directive, you fool! But don't worry. I'll still be with you, boys. Every step of the way! In disguise…

(phone makes noises, loud and frustrated: Hey! Hello? Sir??)

CHIEF: *(whispers, to the Artist)* Tell me what to say!

ARTIST: *(whispers)* Send up the reporter!

CHIEF: *(whispers)* Are you sure??

ARTIST: *(whispers)* Here's our chance to get her on our side. …We don't want her against us. Do you get it?

CHIEF: Oh, I get it.

ARTIST: Oh, I knew you would. …So tell them to send her up!

(from the phone: hello??? Sir???)

CHIEF: *(to the phone)* Listen, I…What was that? …You keep a civil tongue in your head. …Or try it and find out, that's what! Send up the reporter.

(hangs up the phone) Here we go. God help us all. I wish we'd had more time to rehearse!...

(The Artist starts to exit)

CHIEF: (cont.) Wait, you're leaving us?

OFFICER: Please, don't leave us!

ARTIST: I told you I wouldn't leave you. I've just got to make a quick change, so to speak.

CHIEF: Oh, thank you, Your Excellency!

OFFICER: Yes, thanks, Your Excellency!

ARTIST: Sh-SH! Don't call me "Your Excellency"!! From now on, call me Timothy Stone, Special Agent in Charge of Intelligence with the FBI.

CHIEF: But there really is a Timothy Stone, Special Agent in Charge of Intelligence with the FBI.

ARTIST: Precisely! If Marie Felicity writes anything about us that we don't like, we can say she made up the whole story, because Timothy Stone was never here, and we can prove it! We can get Timothy Stone to swear under oath that he was never here! I mean… if I can, I'll even try to get her to quote me as Timothy Stone… It'll be a cinch to undermine her then! We'll discredit her whole reputation! Ruin her entire career! Ha ha ha!

(police ad lib, ha ha ha ha, it's genius, genius!)

ARTIST: Well, there's a reason I work in Intelligence with the FBI, you know.

(A knock on one door.)

ARTIST: (cont.) I was never here.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO.

Or, "The final push." Or, "The final fall."

(The Artist exits the second door, as the Press lets herself in the first door. The police all whirl around.)

CHIEF: AHA, you must be the reporter!

PRESS: …AHA, and you must be the Chief! Hello. Good to meet you at last. I'm Marie Felicity.

OFFICER: *(stepping towards her)* That's a lovely name.

CHIEF: *(stepping in front of the Officer to greet her)* Hello, hello.

PRESS: Is… everything alright up here?

CHIEF: Alright? Of course. Why wouldn't we be alright?

OFFICER: *(from behind the Chief)* We're the police, you know. We've got things handled.

PRESS: Yes. I wasn't implying anything. It's just that the man at the front desk seemed to be having some difficulties on the phone with you. …Now that I think about it, there's a phone on the sidewalk out there!...

(seeing) ...that's identical to the phone on your desk there, Chief. Could it be that the phone on the street was thrown out of one of these windows because—

CAPTAIN: —No, it must have jumped!!

PRESS: …because technical problems make me crazy, too. I'd love to throw a phone out of a window someday. Just… free myself of it and let it fall. Must be some feeling?

CHIEF: *(offers the phone to throw)* Please: be my guest.

PRESS: No thanks. I wouldn't want to hurt somebody… accidentally.

(Chief is unnerved for a beat. A knock on the second door.)

ARTIST: Knock knock knock! Who's in here?

(the Artist enters with a false moustache, a patch eye, and a leather work glove on his right hand. He beams at the Press and introduces himself, shaking hands)

Madam. You must be Marie Felicity. Forgive the hand. It's made of wood. A keepsake from my last campaign.

PRESS: Oh! Thank you for your service, Mr….

ARTIST: Stone. Timothy Stone. Forgive me for barging in like this; it's just, I heard you'd be here, and I'm a huge fan of your work.

PRESS: Oh yes?

ARTIST: Oh yes. Oh yes. Very much so. It's so refreshing to see a real journalist at work these days. None of that "both sidesism" reporting from you!

PRESS: No, sir!

ARTIST: No, madam! Have I said that right? "Both sidesism?"

PRESS: That's right. That's when the press fob off this-side's and that-side's self-stylings of facts as the news. Tell "both sides" like that makes it the truth. "Fair and balanced."

(removing her coat) It completely sloughs off the responsibility of actual, fact-based reporting.

OFFICER: *(hedging in to get closer to the Press)* You know, I just learned recently that legacy news outlets can't legally call what they put out "the news." Legally speaking, they're "news stories." Is that right?

PRESS: That's more than right, that's a fact.

ARTIST: But you tell the news.

PRESS: That is what I do.

ARTIST: You get the facts, and tell objective truths.

PRESS: ...I'm sorry to stare, it's just… Timonthy Stone… Sounds so familiar… Don't you… do you work for the FBI?

ARTIST: You're right, I do work for the FBI. And it's just as well you didn't recognize me. It's useful to keep a low profile in intelligence, you know? And I stick out enough as it is. Wooden hand, eye patch and all.

PRESS: I didn't say I didn't recognize you...

(Does the Press recognize the Artist?... A moment of danger for all)

PRESS: (cont.) May I ask what you're doing here in {State}?

ARTIST: Gathering intelligence. …There's none in D.C.!

PRESS: *(laughs, breaking the moment of danger)* That's very good. Very funny.

(pointedly, to catch an imposter off-guard) Do you mind if I quote you?

ARTIST: No, no, not at all.

(as the Press makes a note, the Artist grins reassuringly at the cops)

PRESS: Thanks. …Well, it's very nice to meet you, Mr. Stone.

ARTIST: Call me Tim, please. The pleasure's mine. …Don't let me get in your way. I just heard you'd be coming here to interview the Captain… because he's been talking about it all day, hasn't he; been really looking forward to it, haven't you?

CAPTAIN: Well.

ARTIST: Of course you have, you can't fool me. I work in intelligence you know! Ah-ha-ha. And you can't fool Ms. Felicity any more than you can fool me, because she's a real investigative journalist! It's just so thrilling… I wonder… would either of you mind if I stay for your interview here?

(sincerely) I'd be so happy and honored to watch you work, Ms. Felicity. But if I'd be in the way, please just say.

PRESS: I don't mind. Do you mind, Captain? I'd understand if you preferred this interview be private…

CAPTAIN: Well.

ARTIST: …Of course he doesn't mind. He's the most transparent man I know.

OFFICER: That's true. You can see right through him!

ARTIST: Yes, AND, we'll read all about your interview with him soon! So, why don't we all stay? Together.

CHIEF: *(innocently)* Why not? I have a little time to spare.

PRESS: …Well, good that's settled, then.

(to the Captain) So, shall we push on?

ARTIST: *(to the Captain)* Jump in?

CAPTAIN: Well.

PRESS: I have several questions for you, Captain. Do you mind if I record this?

CAPTAIN: …Well.

ARTIST: Look how shy he's become all of a sudden! After all that talk, "Marie Felicity's coming" all morning. Good gracious. I think you have another fan here, Ms. Felicity…

(the Artist is watching her, smiling)

PRESS: *(smiling back at the Artist, with curiosity)* You're very kind…

ARTIST: *(to the Captain, smiling)* You don't mind if she records this. Do you?

CAPTAIN: Well.

ARTIST: *(to the Press smiling)* He doesn't mind.

CHIEF: Ah… He doesn't mind? Are you sure?

ARTIST: Yes.

PRESS: …Alright! Then let's jump in. *(she brings out a small camera and tripod)*

ARTIST: Push on!

PRESS: *(half to herself as she sets up)* This is really amazing. I didn't think I'd really even get into this room. I'll have to stop complaining about not having access like legacy media.

(police and Artist share a look)

Now let me just get my notes here and my copy of the files.

(police and Artist share another look)

CHIEF: …How did you get access to the files?

PRESS: FOIA.

(ALL): *(drat)* FOIA.

PRESS: Captain, first question for you: Why do they call you “the window pain man”?

CAPTAIN: —“The window pain man”?

PRESS: Pain spelt p-a-i-n.

ARTIST: Aha, it’s a pun.

PRESS: Yes, but not a funny one.

ARTIST: No.

CHIEF: No! This is serious. Who calls him “the window pain man”?...

ARTIST: Classic Antifa pun…

PRESS: Several kids who were brought in here for questioning. They had Guy Fawkes masks and towels for capes… Do you remember them, Captain?

CAPTAIN: *(evades)* ...How would you know if they’d called me “the window pain man?”

ARTIST: Classic towel-cape kid behavior…

PRESS: They sent me a message. From prison. Those kids were sent to prison the same night that the alleged “Antifa terrorist” fell to his death. I have the message here.

CHIEF: What does it say?

PRESS: *(reads)* The Captain grabbed me by the neck and slammed me against the window, multiple times. He opened the window and dared me to jump saying—

CAPTAIN: Let me stop you right there. I remember those kids. They can’t be believed. This message is just another example of Antifa’s relentless and unprovoked assault against the police! This is the behavior of all core Antifa member militants!

PRESS: The towel-cape kids are “militants”? Captain—

CAPTAIN: —Next, you’ll ask if I threw that Antifa male dancer out of a window for no real reason.

(getting angry) Do you really think these claims sound credible??

ARTIST: *(mock outrage)* These claims against the police in the form of puns?? ‘The window pain man?’ Such a bad joke should be put pun-der arrest!

PRESS: *(smiles at the unexpected)* You certainly do have a way with words!

ARTIST: I’m just saying, these anti-fascist bad actors are always making quips. Have you seen some of the signs they make for their protests? …They quip it. Quip it good. I saw one that read {‘I’d call the president a cunt but he lacks warmth and depth’…} All I’m saying is, could it be,

that the message you've brought here today, from the Guy Fawkes towel-cape kids… could this message be some new form of… radical Antifa prank? Some new kind of extremist joke?… some new stand, or stand-up comedy, against the abuse of police power that's happening here?

PRESS: —Are you saying there IS an abuse of police power happening here?!

(beat; all look at the Artist; beat)

ARTIST: *(slaps his hand to his face)* Oh, my eye! My glass eye! Oh it pinched me terribly! Oh, I'm so sorry! Oh God, it's fallen out now! It's fallen out onto the floor! Oh no, oh no—

(all search for the glass eye)

ARTIST: (cont.) Oh, watch out for my hand!! Watch out for my hand where you're stepping, it's wooden! My hand! …Pick your feet up one at a time! …Oh god, oh, my eye! My glass eye! …Oh, there it is. There we are. There we go… Where were we?

(The Press straightens herself up, and calmly begins again. She, is perhaps disappointed that the Artist obviously tried to distract her. The Artist, perhaps feels warmly toward her, because she obviously wasn't distracted.)

PRESS: Captain, I really only have one big question for you. …Amazed I even get to ask you this… Please answer with a simple yes or no. It's about the antifascist who, while under questioning by you, somehow went out of a window. For some reason, all of his forensic files are missing. All the records from his autopsy are gone, so we can't determine if any of his injuries were sustained before he fell. And, I have multiple sources, who tell me they call you, "the window pain man." So, my one big question for you is: Did you push a person under questioning out of that window? Did you murder the alleged "Antifa terrorist"? Yes or no.

(beat.)

ARTIST: *(coming to the rescue, incredulous)* —Sorry, did you say murder? Murder? …Murder? That's what this is all about? But this is crazy!

PRESS: 'Crazy?' With this evidence?

OFFICER: *(helpfully)* And lack thereof!

ARTIST: Yes, I think this is crazy! I think this is crazy. …I mean, I absolutely believe that police brutality exists. Sure. I believe things may get… out of hand sometimes. I can imagine a police officer who's had a hard day, who's had a long day, who was tired… who was getting laughed at, by some kid, in a Guy Fawkes mask… I can see how that police officer… might eventually just

(slaps the air)

just give them a slap! Or

(bangs an invisible kid into the window)

just bang them against a windowpane. I can see that happening. I'm sure that happens… more than we'd like to admit… and maybe we should spend some time, together, trying to help make that… not happen so much. But murder? Murder? That's impossible. That's CRAZY.

Because how could he ever get away with it? How? …Because a murderous cop would always be surrounded by other cops at work… Who all uphold the law… Who are all good, highly-trained cops. Who would doubtlessly discover the murderous cop's actions, and take him, immediately, off of the streets!... Not just because he murdered a person, but because he betrayed the trust of all good people… including all good cops… and people's trust in good cops. That's why the good cops would catch the bad cop right away. And then we would all be living in a safer and more just society!

That's what WOULD happen if a cop ever murdered someone in this country. Let alone if a cop murdered someone for a totally nonsensical reason… like dancing. Or just thinking, 'fascism is bad; fascism opposes a foundation of democracy, a self-evident truth that all people are created equal.' CONK! Bang them on the head, you're dead for thinking that!

(getting increasingly angry about it) The irony is, of course, only a fascist would do that. 'Bang on the head, you're dead,' because only a fascist would believe that they have the right to do whatever they want, so therefore, no one else can have any rights that could ever equal theirs! It's the definition of unjust and unfair! It's the definition of un-American! It's hypocrisy to an existential degree! It dehumanizes the world! That's fascism!

(mock incredulous) And here you are, suggesting that the captain here is a murderous fascist? And if he is, that all these officers are engaged in a coverup?? That they're all lying right to our faces right now to protect a murderous fascist??? That's what you're suggesting??? Of these, our public servants??? Yes. I think this is crazy! I think it's insane.

(Artist stares at the window blankly)

PRESS: *(watching the Artist)* Well. …I think that's a wide-eyed attitude from someone who works in intelligence…

ARTIST: *(stares at the window still. Then, returning, softening)* No, it's a clear-eyed attitude, madam. Au contraire. But if anyone can convince me otherwise, it's you. Go on, and convince me that this kind of evil exists in our midst. And, Ms. Felicity, remember... It is you who will have to convince me. Because surely, if this man is guilty of what you say, he will adamantly deny it! Just as if he were innocent.

(to the Captain) Right? Don't you deny it?

CAPTAIN: Well.

ARTIST: There, you see! He's outraged at the mere suggestion, just as if he were innocent! So, Ms. Felicity, can you convince me, that this man is guilty of abusing his power to the point of covering up a murder? Because I find that pretty hard to believe.

(Artist crosses his arms and faces the Captain).

CAPTAIN: …Are you turning on me?

ARTIST: *(eyebrows raised in warning)* "Turning on you?" Whatever do you mean? I'm saying I think you're innocent.

CAPTAIN: …It just seems like maybe you're on her side now…

PRESS: *(to the Captain suspiciously, about the Artist)* Was he on your side before?...

ARTIST: I'm on the side of objective truth because it can't be beat. But then, *(pointedly to distract the Press)* you would know best, Madam press: do people still BELIEVE in objective truth in our post…postmodern world?

PRESS: *(pleasantly surprised!)* Yes, people do! And I do! And, may I say, it's just hugely refreshing to hear someone else refer to our current artistic movement as "post" postmodernist!

ARTIST: *(stepping between the Press and the Captain to capture her full focus)* Well, I mean, we haven't even tried to define an artistic movement since post-modernism!... Isn't it time we did?

PRESS: *(captured)* Yes! YES. To be fair, I think we needed the postmodern movement to happen… to test reality itself… and our relationship to it. What I mean is, the postmodernist movement said: all truth is realized in a personal way, and therefore, all truth is subjective… and to claim there's anything that's objectively true is elitist, and naïve and wrong. And in a world where nothing's objectively true, opinions reign supreme. And, none of the opinions can even be objectively good or bad. About anything. Politics, science, faith, art…

OFFICER: So THAT explains modern art. A child could make some of that stuff.

PRESS: Mm. Speaking for myself, subjectively, I'm proud of humanity for exploring such an extreme mental position as postmodernism; we've deeply explored a world where no objective reality is acknowledged even when WE'RE LOOKING RIGHT AT IT. But now the time has come, I think, when the pendulum is swinging away from that extreme toward a new renaissance of ideas from facts, of action from understanding, and understanding from investigation.

…So, let's get back to the interview at hand!

ARTIST: *(entirely taken by her, he takes her hand)* Yes, to discover the objective reality here. You know, *(meaningfully, a covert confession that he is "undercover")* I'm afraid, I've often found, I've had to lie, to get the truth…

PRESS: Oh? *(catching on to why the Artist may be here)* …O-oh! Like going undercover?

ARTIST: Yes, well—you… wouldn't need to be undercover, to be part of a "play." *(looks meaningfully at her, then lightly)* I mean, I, me, I wouldn't be undercover. The FBI can do better.

PRESS: *(she understands she's walked into some kind of "op" or "play")* …Well, I think that you're rather wonderful, Tim…

ARTIST: You're not so bad yourself, madam. Oh pardon, my hand…

(she has held onto his glove; on the Artist, an empty sleeve remains)

PRESS: Oh my, your hand has come off in my hand! I'm terribly sorry.

ARTIST: Never mind, I have another. Look!

(his real hand comes through the sleeve)

As good as new!...

(Beat. But then—they all have an interest in covering up the Artist's lie now…)

OFFICER: It looks so real!

ARTIST: It's amazing what they can do these days.

CHIEF: It's unbelievable.

PRESS: We live in the future.

CAPTAIN: It's true.

ARTIST: *(glances at 'true')* Shall we get back to this interview, madam? See how this plays out?

PRESS: Yes, let's shall, let's see.

(to the Captain) So. Tell us all what happened, in your own words, Captain.

CAPTAIN: …Alright. Here goes.

(takes a breath, then, a bit 'memorized') I had the Antifa terrorist in here for questioning…

PRESS: Why? Did you bring him in for questioning?

CAPTAIN: Because he was dancing satirically at a protest.

PRESS: Dancing… satirically?

ARTIST: *(bolstering the argument)* Yes of course. Humor and satire are powerful weapons of Antifa militant members… satire must be curbed at all costs…

PRESS: *(seeing the Artist wants to play it this way, the Press plays along)* I see, of course, yes. So you brought the antifascist in here on a charge of satire.

CAPTAIN: That's right.

PRESS: And you were questioning him.

CAPTAIN: Well yes. I questioned him.

PRESS: Yes? And?

CAPTAIN: And he laughed at me.

PRESS: Laughed at you?

OFFICER: Smiled and laughed.

CHIEF: Incredulously.

ARTIST: *(to Chief)* Show her.

CHIEF: Like this. *(he smiles and laughs incredulously)*

ARTIST: *(to Chief)* That's so good.

(to the Press) Isn't that good?

PRESS: Yes, very good.

ARTIST: *(to the Press)* He's a very good actor.

(the Artist and Press share a look)

PRESS: *(advancing)* Yes, so this Antifa terrorist is brought in on a charge of satire, and he laughed at you…

OFFICER: Smiled and laughed

PRESS: Smiled and laughed

ARTIST: Incredulously

CHIEF: Like this. *(he smiles and laughs incredulously)*

PRESS: Yes. Then what happened?

(the Artist, Chief, and Officer hold their breaths—what story will the Captain give??)

CAPTAIN: Well… …Then we were just sort of horsing around and he fell out the window… but we tried to save him by grabbing him by the galosh. But he fell out of the galoshes to his death. We tried to save him.

(the Artist, Chief, and Officer sigh—this was not their story of choice.)

PRESS: …Galoshes? I didn't see them mentioned anywhere in all these files. Are the galoshes in the evidence?

ARTIST: *(gives the officers a look; ...he's got this spin)* Well. I think the real question for you, as a member of the press, is: which political party is more associated with the wearing of galoshes? Because it all comes down to politics these days, I mean, doesn't it? In the news? Are galoshes more of a Republican or Democratic overshoe… Which camp was this antifascist in, you know? What do the galoshes signify?...

PRESS: You know, now that I think about it, galoshes may be one of the last remaining vestiges of non-partisan goods… But I would still like to know, where are the galoshes?

CHIEF: *(to the Heavens)* There are no galoshes!

OFFICER: *(helpfully, to the Captain)* Sir, with respect, I think you may be… mixed up?…

CHIEF: *(recovering; to the rescue now)* Yes, he works so many cases. He works so hard.

PRESS: *(to the Chief)* Of course he does.

(to the Officer) And you think there weren't galoshes?

OFFICER: Well, as I recall, in this case, one of the antifascist's feet was much smaller than the other so—

(Chief gives him a meaningful look: NO.)

OFFICER: (cont.) You know, I don't remember. Sorry.

PRESS: *(generally)* It's a simple question, I think. Were there, or were there not galoshes?

OFFICER: I don't think we ever decided…

PRESS: Decided?

ARTIST: *(interceding, to the Press)* Do you think we could just hear that story again? From the Captain? He'll put us all straight, I'm sure…

CAPTAIN: *(defensively)* …It feels like you're ganging up on me.

PRESS: Oh?

CAPTAIN: There oughta be a law…

PRESS: You oughta know.

CAPTAIN: *(to the police)* Are these two in league against me now??

(ARTIST AND PRESS): "In league?"

ARTIST: What is this, a superhero movie? This is real life!

PRESS: I never knew that Timothy Stone would be here. We can't possibly be "in league" against you. This isn't a coordinated plan.

ARTIST: It's just that we're both interested to know what's going on here, in the interest of truth and justice. …Just like you, Captain. For you must share these interests, too. Just think of us, as one of you.

PRESS: Please continue.

CAPTAIN: …We were… well, I'm pretty sure he was wearing galoshes… But we were horsing around, like I said, and he fell. We tried to save him. …It was an accident.

ARTIST: *(sotto to the Press, as if consulting behind the director's table)* That's as far as we've got.

PRESS: I see. …Could I give just one note and see if it plays?

ARTIST: *(happy to see the Press playing along!)* Please do!

(to the officers) Listen up, now.

PRESS: *(takes over directing)* It's just that these vague memories you all seem to share… they're coming across to me as a little… suspicious. They're raising some red flags for me, you know?

(they all hear this, 'mm' 'mm-hm' 'that's fair')

PRESS: (cont.) *(paints the picture)*…A man falls to his death right in front of your eyes… You run to the window. You see him sprawled on the street. Wouldn't that image be seared in your mind? I mean, wouldn't you remember a thing like that? I just feel like I would.

ARTIST: *(agrees)* I think anyone would. Yes, you're right. That's a great observation. Thank you. You know, I'm starting to look at this whole story differently now… In fact I'm starting to ask myself here… Chief… Is this place entirely honest?

CHIEF: Honest? Honest as the day is long!

ARTIST: See, I believe that…

(to the Press) I always believe him, no matter how outlandish the circumstances are, he just always commits. Do you think so, too?

PRESS: From what I've seen of his work, yes, I do. He's very good.

(The Chief is very pleased.)

ARTIST: So what I'm wondering now is… maybe… Maybe it's just the way the story's being told? Maybe it's the Captain's tone? Because… just for instance… would I believe this story if he said it folksier?…

(to the Press) Would you like to hear him do it folksier?

PRESS: Yes! You know… I think I would like that, very much…

ARTIST: Alright! Then, take it away, Captain. Folksy as you can.

CAPTAIN: *(consternated; gathers himself, prepares, then)* Nothin' bad happened. That dancer fella just got too rowdy, that's all. He was makin' fun o' the President. We couldn't just let that slide. So we brought him in real gentle-like. He laughed at us, sure, but we was all jokin' around… nobody meant for him to go a'sailin' outer that winder… And if anyone tells you different? Like some towel-cape kids? Real serious witnesses, am I right? Well, I say them towel cape kids was never there… 'coz if they was, they'd know how slippery them galoshes can be…

ARTIST: No! I don't like that. I don't like the menace at the end.

PRESS: Really? People might think that he was projecting strength.

ARTIST: They might. But I'd still like to hear it again without the menace. Captain?

CAPTAIN: *(rote, like he's said this many times)* We was just gettin' a little too rowdy and he went a'sailin' outer the winder.

ARTIST: Now it feels like a talking point. Like a speech he's practiced….

PRESS: What if we just go for a soundbite.

ARTIST: Yes! What's the soundbite they'll be playing and quoting everywhere…

PRESS: 'He went a'sailin' outer the winder…'?

ARTIST: *(to the Press)* What about… How did the Captain FEEL when the suspect went a'sailin' outer the winder?...

PRESS: I'm sure the Captain was… horrified?…

ARTIST: Yes. 'I was horrified when he went a'sailin' outer that winder.' I buy that! It clearly shows, without making it too specific, that it was an accident. And, by saying that he was 'horrified,' it makes the Captain into the victim here. We are forced to consider things from his perspective, not the victim's. It's a masterpiece of understatement.

PRESS: You can say that again.

ARTIST: *(to the Captain)* You try it, Captain?

CAPTAIN: *(this is so stupid)* 'I was horrified when he went a'sailin' outer that winder.'

ARTIST: *(considers, sighs, then)*…No. Just not buying it.

(to the Press) Are you buying it?

PRESS: *(sarcastic)* Oh, I'm buying it all…

ARTIST: *(sarcastic)* ...Oh you are?..

CAPTAIN…Are you being sarcastic?

PRESS: *(sarcastic)* Oh noo.

CAPTAIN: Is she being sarcastic?? Don't laugh at me!

(the Captain stands aggressively)

ARTIST: *(intercedes quickly, pushing the Captain back into the chair, like telling a dog)* SIT.

(addressing the rest cheerfully) Chief, Madam, policeman, lend me your ears… Here's my hypothesis now help me test it… If any one of us can get this messaging to "play," the rest of us can just say the same exact thing, in the same exact way, over and over and over again … In other words, we'll just follow the winning messaging out of the woods, and we'll be in the clear! Is that good logic, Ms. Felicity?

PRESS: Well, it seems to be popular logic these days… Personally, I think it's a little obvious…

ARTIST: Yes, me too. But you know… all those politicians must keep doing it for some reason! It must be fooling someone! Right? And the more we reinforce that strategy, the more people will come to accept it's just a normal thing we do… It'll be normalized, normalized, normalized.

So, Chief, let's have YOU take the story, please, from the top, and make it just as folksy as you can. …Be folksy… like your life depends on it… because it does.

(the Chief starts centering himself with great seriousness)

ARTIST: (cont.) *(sotto to the Press, about the Chief)* He's just marvelous.

PRESS: *(sotto to the Artist, as Chief prepares)* Mm. Watching them work, I think to myself, 'How can anyone ever think of satirizing this kind of vital police business?'

ARTIST: It's scandalous, isn't it?

PRESS: Scandalous to even think of, yes.

ARTIST: Yes. It's all so insane. It's hard to accept.

PRESS: Then don't accept it.

(The Press and Artist look at each other. Beat. The Artist turns from the Press)

ARTIST: (cont.) Are you about ready, Chief? Because if you nail this, everyone else can just follow your lead, toe the line, bow the head, such my dick, and go home, in the clear. So tell us what really happened, Chief! Tell us…the truth! And make it folksy.

CHIEF: Well shoot, lemme tell ya somethin', friend… There was this fella, some kinda fool dancer, struttin' around like a peacock at the prize county fair.

PRESS: *(aside to the Artist)* What's a "prize county fair"?

ARTIST: *(aside to the Press)* It's something folksy, that's for sure.

CHIEF: (cont.) He was at an "I Hate America" rally. And what does he go and do there? Starts makin' fun o' the President of the You-nited States! …Our president!... Wigglin' and jigglin' to that "YMCA" song with his little fists a'pumpin'… like he's doin the devil's work… Now, I don't care what side o' the fence you're on… but that kinda carryin' on in public just don't sit right with me. Ain't proper. Oughter be a federal offense, if you ask me, makin' mock of the Commander-in-Chief in front o' God and everybody.

PRESS: *(watching the Chief)* That's very good. 'God and everybody's' very good.

ARTIST: *(watching her)* Very good, yes.

CHIEF: (cont.) These police boys, they done done their duty — hauled that fool dancer right in. And what did he do, but sit there, smirkin'… like he's too clever for the room… And then, the real kicker is: that male dancer had the gall to laugh right in the captain's face! Laugh in the face of a sworn officer of the law?… Well, he musta thought that the law was a joke… he musta hated his country.

PRESS: *(to the Artist)* I don't love that part in the past tense. It makes me remember his death.

ARTIST: *(to Chief)* Present tense, please?

CHIEF: *(strong)* He thinks the law is a joke and he hates his country.

ARTIST: That's MUCH stronger. Yes.

PRESS: Much better, yes.

ARTIST: *(to Chief)* Keep going in the present tense.

CHIEF: He laughs at the captain, and the captain, well, he laughs right back, because he's a big, strong man… so the captain's joshin*'* him back, givin' him a little roughhouse. Nothin' mean-spirited, mind you, just a little lesson in respect.

ARTIST: Respect.

PRESS: Respect is good.

ARTIST: *(to us)* Oh yes, respect is good.

CHIEF: But wouldn't ya know it?... in the middle o' this horseplay, the suspect up and tumbles out the dang window!

ARTIST: *(longing)* Folksier?…

CHIEF: *(striving to be as folksy as possible!!)* Plumb outter the winder! The boys tried ter catchm as he fell out, blessm!… They got erhold uh the dancer's galosh!...

> *// (under and through the Press/Artist)* Antifa can fight us. But they can't fight…gravity… If we were gone, they'd just find another monster. They'd have to. To justify their wages.
>
> //PRESS: I just thought… He was dancing in galoshes?
>
> //ARTIST: Honestly? We hadn't thought that far!… That's a great point. Put a pin in that.

(back to Chief following '…their wages') I think that last line was from Red Dead Redemption?

OFFICER: It was Dutch!

ARTIST: Well, let's bring it on home, Chief! Folksy, folksy! Patriotic!!

CHIEF: *(seated now and lit like the Stage Manager in Our Town)* So that's how it went. You mock the president, you mock the law, and sooner or later the good Lord or the fourth floor's gonna sort you out.

PRESS: *(eyebrows raised at that ending)*—Mm!

ARTIST: Mm...

(beat. The Chief is crushed by this non-reception.)

ARTIST: …No, it's not your performance, Chief. You were great. As always.

PRESS: No, it's the story.

ARTIST: It's the story.

PRESS: It just doesn't make sense.

CAPTAIN: *(exasperated)* Like everything here makes sense??

OFFICER: *(helpfully)* You know… I feel like I remember the story a little differently now...

ARTIST: *(interested, he gives the Officer full focus)* Do you?

OFFICER: Yes I do. I ah, I remember, that ah,

(checking around for support) after the antifascist smiled and laughed, incredulously, he ah… he started singing The Watch on the Rhein.

PRESS: *(non-judgmentally surprised)* —He started singing?

OFFICER: The song the Germans sing in Casablanca.

CHIEF: Oh yes. …Yes, of course. I remember that part very well…

ARTIST: *(explaining to the Press)* It was satirical singing of course. Anti-authoritarian satire. Classic Antifa.

PRESS: *(adjusting to this story)* No, of course, it makes total sense the antifascist would satirically sing The Watch on the Rhein while under questioning. It's just that I did…Nazi...that coming! 'Not see.'

(no one laughs, pointedly. The Press returns to the Watch on the Rhein) …The singing… It's a twist on our preconceived expectations for the story!

ARTIST: *(to the Press)* Exactly what we were thinking. It's so good to work with another professional! Isn't it, boys? The surprise turn was exactly what we were going for! The kind of turn that makes you think, that's so crazy, that might actually have happened!…And then, you see, after the antifascist started to satirically sing, the Chief started to…well, you should tell it, Chief, I'm sorry to step on your toes…

CHIEF: Not at all.

(taking character, masterfully) I was contemplating the antifascist at the time. The nature of anarchy itself, you understand. The state of this great country of ours. What was to be done… And I felt, that I wished I could take a real stand, at that moment. A stand for real good. So, when the antifascist started to sing the Nazi song from Casablanca, I, without even thinking, began to sing—over his singing—I began to sing La Marseillaise.

OFFICER: And I joined him. And so did the Captain there, too.

CHIEF: And we got so caught up in the singing

ARTIST: *(painting the picture)* There was even accompaniment, piano, horns…

CHIEF: We didn't notice the antifascist as he made his way from the chair where he was being questioned over to the window… where he jumped!

OFFICER: Maliciously jumped!

ARTIST: To protect his brothers and sisters in the Antifa terrorist underground… to protect their ongoing subversive plots!…

OFFICER: Domestic terrorism!

CHIEF: He jumped to give a finger to the police, which all Antifa hate for no reason!

OFFICER: No reason at all!

ARTIST: He jumped to raise awareness for his antiauthoritarian cause. And that's how the antifascist died.

PRESS: Wow! I mean wow! …I wish you had led with that version! People will love it! It has everything!

(sings La Marseillaise in English) Come, today we vanquish tyranny; The day of glory has arrived!

(ALL): Bravo, bravo!

PRESS: Thanks.

(a bit breathless) This is a wonderful story you've got here! Spun it all so you're real American heroes!

(Police all ad lib, thank you, thank you…)

ARTIST: *(turning suddenly cold and restless)* Yes. Yes. They tell it well… Every raconteur can tell a 'story'…

CHIEF: Raconteurs? What's this?

OFFICER: Are you alright… Mr. Stone?

ARTIST: I'm not alright! I've had it up to here!! And when a man has had it up to here, wading through bullshit like this every day… that's the time a man MUST hold his head up high!

I'll conceal the truth no longer! The truth of my real identity…

(ALL TOGETHER)
OFFICER: Mr. Stone, what are you doing?
CHIEF: Are you thinking straight, Tim?...
CAPTAIN: Don't say it, Tim!!
PRESS: Your real identity? What is it, Tim??

ARTIST: The truth is… my name's not Tim!! Ms. Felicity, I am not really Timothy Stone! All this time I've really been

(tears off the eye patch and fake moustache, and retrieves his FCC eyeglasses to point with)

The FCC Inquisitor!!

(the police officers react with great confusion and despair; there will be a scandal in the press)

PRESS: I didn't know there was an FCC Inquisitor!

ARTIST: Nobody expects the FCC Inquisitor!

(a great disorder in the room)

ARTIST: (cont.) *(tells the Press)* I was sent here by the president of the United States himself. And all day, I've been with these police officers, acting as if I were just another corrupt authority

figure… To earn their trust. To show them that I was on their side. Make them believe that I was one of them, to help them…But the truth is that the truth has come for them at last! I'm using my position to take a stand against this bad behavior, and against the federal administration!

(all the cops are horrified)

CAPTAIN: *(snarling)* This is entrapment!! How dare you!? And anyway, your little scheme has failed! Despite your bad acting…

(the Artist gasps)

CAPTAIN: (cont.) ...we never told you what REALLY happened!

ARTIST: Come on, you don't need to tell us! We see through your flimsy excuses! Don't we?

(to us, about the Captain) We've known he did it all along, didn't we? Of course, we've all known, right from the start!... A question for the dramatic arc of this play?!... I think it holds?!...

(to the Captain) And WE WANT THE TRUTH FROM YOU NOW!

(to us) Don't we? Yes! We all do!

(to the Captain) So TELL US THE TRUTH! You detained a man for dancing at a protest, you hauled him into a van, you locked him in this room, you threatened him repeatedly, and you killed him for laughing at you! You all hate to be laughed at so much! You pushed him right out of that window, right there! You murdered him, didn't you? Murdered him, yes?? You pushed him, you pushed him, you pushed him, CONFESS!

CAPTAIN: *(glances at the Chief; defeated at last)* ...I confess, alright, I confess, I confess!...

ARTIST: *(roars)* WHAT do you confess? And state your name please when you tell us!

CAPTAIN: I, Captain Sue Porcini, pushed an innocent man out the window. I slammed him against the windowpane, I opened the window, I dared him to jump. He wouldn't… so I pushed him.

OFFICER: *(to Chief)* He's a man named Sue!

CHIEF: *(to the Officer)* That explains it.

ARTIST: But doesn't excuse it. Tell us more, Sue. Tell us how… after you murdered that presumed-innocent man… you used your authority as a public official to try to cover it up…to not be held accountable…to be above the laws of the land…which YOU are meant to uphold. Say you did it if you did it.

CAPTAIN: *(blankly)* Yes. I did it. Yes, I did.

(beat of Moment…)

ARTIST: …And, cut!

(the Artist goes to the Press's camera with a smile)

I think that was it; I think we've got it! What shall we do with this recorded admission of guilt now? Throw it out of the window?

(gasps!)

ARTIST: (cont.) Or trust the people with the truth?

(gasps!

the Artist holds the camera aloft… then the Artist hands the camera to the Press…

but the Press does not accept it)

ARTIST: (cont.) This is the truth: you must keep it and protect it, madam press. Thank God you're a good reporter. We need more of you; more than ever—with the things AI can do, and all the major media outlets owned by all the richest people in the world, because what could THEY have to coverup?—we need more, good, independent reporters right now.

(glaring at the police) And more good cops… We NEED them.

PRESS: *(refusing the camera with some hesitation)* ...I can't accept this confession.

ARTIST: What?

PRESS: It isn't… plausible.

ARTIST: …What?

PRESS: It just seems unrealistic that he would confess and be held accountable. I… I don't think the people will buy it.

ARTIST: …If we're not going to hold him accountable, what are we doing?

PRESS: I just don't think people would BUY that he'd been held accountable, even if he was.

ARTIST: …Not with that attitude!

PRESS: People are cynical.

ARTIST: Close-set-eyed suspicious hicks and looking-down-their-noses pricks are cynical. They're not the majority of people. You must give everyone a chance to get to know the truth!

(The Chief seizes the camera and throws it outer the winder.)

ARTIST: (cont.) Did you just throw the truth outer the winder?!?!

PRESS: See, I believe THAT. I never in a million years thought that I'd leave with the truth here today. I still can't believe that I got in this room!

ARTIST: …What?

CHIEF: *(to the Artist)* You said we needed more good cops. And more good reporters. Well, by throwing that recording away, I'm preserving the image of one… and the life of the other.

ARTIST: …What?

CHIEF: Every time people hear about bent cops and coverups, it undermines their trust in what we do.

ARTIST: Then stop undermining yourselves!

CHIEF: Every time an investigative journalist uncovers something like this they end up dead from a car crash, from a heart attack…

OFFICER: *(realizing)* From falling out of a window…

PRESS: *(this is why she wouldn't accept the recording)* …Yes. I don't want to die over this!

(the Press turns away from the Artist)

ARTIST: *(to the Chief)* Stop murdering journalists!

(generally rages) JESUS CHRIST! Have you all forgotten who you are?

CHIEF: Have you?? Or do I charge you with impersonating an agent of the FBI??

ARTIST: *(flummoxed and outraged)* Charge yourselves with impersonating yourselves!! I came here to get the real "story" of what's happening here, and I think I've got it straight now. You, all of you, are treating life like it's an entertainment! And not a good entertainment… a dumbed-down formulaic piece of pessimistic shit! You, all of you, are appropriating the mechanics of the storytellers for yourselves—SO POORLY!

(to the police) Your job is to protect people, not just act like you protect them.

(to the Press) Your job is to report the facts, not just tell the "stories" you think folks will buy.

(to us) And your job is to be more than spectators! They're watching you as much as you're watching them! You have influence on everything that happens! And I truly believe, deep down, that whatever side of the aisle we're on, we all really want the same thing! We all want these people to do their jobs! The cops aren't in the arts! The news isn't a "show"! Laws aren't only for the poor, facts aren't only for the rich! We all know what our jobs are, so let's DO THEM!

I too, have a job to do! And it's not FCC Inquisitor! The truth is that I am… a playwright!!

(The Artist sets aside his Inquisitor glasses. All gasp!)

CAPTAIN: What!

OFFICER: Hey, he's the writer from before!

CAPTAIN: What!

ARTIST: And now, we've all seen this entire Farce In Progress!

CAPTAIN: And now, it's about to enter the public domain!

(the Captain prowls toward the Artist, hedging him toward the window) It'll be a smash hit…

ARTIST: *(to save himself)* You are being recorded right now! This whole show, all this bad acting, has been recorded!

(about us) There are witnesses to your whole coverup!!

CHIEF: Wait. Let's be smart about this.

(the Chief stops the Captain from advancing on the Artist)

OFFICER: …We can't be engaged in a coverup if we've done the whole thing in plain sight. Right?

ARTIST: Wrong. *(to us)* Tell him! *(audience hopefully tells him he's wrong!)*

CAPTAIN: As if right and wrong mattered anymore. *(to us)* I have the power to find dirt on you, to blackmail you, to abduct you from your work, from your home; I can ruin your lives for no reason; I can take your children from you; I can kill you and your family, even your pets, and you can't stop me! No one serious will even investigate me, let alone hold me accountable!

ARTIST: *(to the Captain)* Of course we can stop you! Of course we'll investigate you! You work for us, we the people. And I think we the people are ALL agreed that the job of a public servant is serving the public—not violently harassing them. Because we are a nation of laws, not of men. The laws apply to us all, equally.

CAPTAIN: Ah, but the laws move much slower than me.

(The Captain pushes the Artist out the window. Beat. They all look down, outer the winder.)

CAPTAIN: (cont.) So that was the playwright from before...

(to the Officer) Run down and get me his hat and his coat… and his wallet. He stole them from me.

OFFICER: With respect, Captain, I must refuse your order, sir. I am taking you into custody.

(the Officer handcuffs the Captain)

CHIEF: *(assuming the role of an up-and-up, honest police chief)* That's quite right, Officer, thank you. Sue Porcini, you are under arrest, and you are dismissed from police service, effective immediately.

CAPTAIN: …What?

PRESS: Chief, with your permission, I would like to fully report on this incident, as well as your handling of it, immediately.

CHIEF: Of course. We shall make the entire recording of this incident available to you, immediately.

PRESS: Thank you.

CAPTAIN: Wait! Just wait! You were in on this too!

CHIEF: Not any more. It's gone too far. To murder a man right in front of our eyes. I cannot, we cannot, overlook this… And we can stop this kind of behavior…

(CHIEF, PRESS, and OFFICER): Immediately.

CHIEF: *(to the Officer)* Read him his rights and let's get to work. We have jobs to do.

OFFICER: *(reading from a small card in his pocket)* You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney one will be provided for you. Do you understand your rights as they have been read to you?

CAPTAIN: Yes, but I didn't murder the Antifa male dancer! I was covering up all along!

(to the police) You both know it! Don't let me take the fall for both these murders! I only murdered the— I was only covering up the coverup from before!—*(he's apoplectic, maniacal)*

PRESS: What's he talking about?

CHIEF: Who can say. He just murdered a man. He's raving.

PRESS: *(to the Captain)* Who murdered the Antifa male dancer?

CAPTAIN: *(glaring at the Officer and Chief)* It was—

CHIEF: Silence!

(the Chief rubs his right hand; the Captain sinks to his knees, undone)

CHIEF: (cont.) *(with finality)* It's all over now. The farce… is over!

(Light like the sun shines brightly through the window, across the stage, into the audience.

"Knock on wood" from Casablanca plays.

The light fades as if it's the end of the play. Just before it goes dark, the light springs back to normal.

And the Artist climbs back through the window.)

ARTIST: That was my formal ending! Now let's do a fun one!

(the cast applauds the Artist's death, ad libs yes, let's do a fun one, etc.)

Let's take it back a few pages? From "I too, have a job to do. And it's not FCC Inquisitor."

(they reset to that point good-naturedly)

ARTIST: (cont.) The truth is that I… have been a radicalized Antifa militant member all along! Stand back! I have… a ham sandwich!

(the Artist produces a wrapped up sandwich)

PRESS: I knew it! I recognized you as soon as I saw you! You're Captain Flurgel, the leader of the towel-cape kids!

ARTIST: I am Captain Flurgel, leader of the most terrifying domestic terrorist group. …The towel-cape kids in Guy Fawkes masks!

(the Artist sets down the sandwich to don a Guy Fawkes mask and towel cape, then picks up the sandwich again. Gasps!)

ARTIST: (cont.) I'm going to throw this sandwich at a cop! Because I hate the police! For no reason! It's all madness!

(the Artist laughs melodramatically, for a prolonged time, then throws the sandwich at the Captain, and jumps out of the window!

Ad libs of dismay and alarm, 'Save yourselves! It's a federal offense! A criminal act! Terrorist!

Lights start to fade, then come back up….)

ARTIST: (cont.) *(climbing back through the window)* Thanks for trying that! I had fun! Any other ideas you want to try for ending this farce?

CAPTAIN: I have something I'd just like to add.

ARTIST: Let's have it.

CAPTAIN: *(to us)* The current federal administration says that it's illegal to take pictures or video of law enforcement officers; that it's an act of "violence" toward them. But the fact is that you have a first amendment right to take pictures and videos of officers. Courts have ruled that documentation is a form of protected free speech. And studies have shown that in the best-case scenario, the very act of filming can change or stop an abusive behavior. In the worst-case

scenario, the film serves as an objective, unbiased record of events that cannot be contradicted by any authority. Anything you'd like to add, officer?

OFFICER: Yes. If it seems like there's a powerful corrupt influence on law enforcement, remember, it can be hard for GOOD officers to do the right thing. The good officers can get pressured and threatened every bit as much, or more, than some average citizens. So be kind to each other out there, and be sure to document ALL the bad police actions you see. Thank you.

(general applause for the Captain and Officer)

ARTIST: Thank you, Captain. Thank you, Officer. That was very important to say…Anyone got another ending?

CHIEF: I do. Let us close with the words of Thomas Paine. *(centers)* These are the times that try men's souls... Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

(all applaud, ad lib, he really is marvelous.)

OFFICER: Just one more ending? Just one more! I've got one. It's good. Take it from "the laws apply to us all, equally."

ARTIST: The laws apply to us all, equally.

CAPTAIN: Ah, but the laws move much slower than me.

(Captain pushes the Artist outer the winder. Officer leaps heroically toward the window!)

OFFICER: I'll save you!

(the Officer grapples at the window.) I've caught you!..

(after a moment of skirmish… all gasp as if the Artist has fallen! 'he's fallen!' 'god, he's fallen!'

Then the Officer turns, holding aloft a single galosh!)

(ALL AD LIB): It's the galosh! He tried to save him! Caught him by the shoe! That's a galosh!

(Artist climbs back through the window saying, with urgency, please)

ARTIST: *(to all)* The farce that's in progress WILL END somehow, my friends. And we'll all take a company bow.

(company bow..

La Marseillaise plays.)

THE END