

University of New Orleans

ScholarWorks@UNO

University of New Orleans Theses and
Dissertations

Dissertations and Theses

Spring 5-23-2019

Do We Make a Sound? An American Morality Play

Bennett A. Kirschner

Graduate Student, bakirsch@uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>



Part of the [Applied Ethics Commons](#), [Other Philosophy Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), [Playwriting Commons](#), and the [Theatre History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kirschner, Bennett A., "Do We Make a Sound? An American Morality Play" (2019). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 2615.

<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2615>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

Do We Make a Sound? An American Morality Play

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Playwriting

by

Bennett Kirschner

B.A. Wesleyan University, 2013

May, 2019

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

EXCELLENCE: A dilettante, late 20's, male.

PATIENCE: A young professional, his older sister, early 30's.

MIKE: A hunk, Excellence's workout buddy, early 40's.

DOROTHEA: A local traffic cop, mid 30's, female.

BOB: Patience's boss, mid 40's, male.

MOTHER: Mike's mother, appearing in a dream. She should be played by the same actor playing DOROTHEA.

POLICE CAPTAIN: A police captain, appearing in a dream. He should be played by the same actor playing MIKE.

THE RESISTANCE: A leader of the resistance, appearing in a dream. She *could* be played by the same actor playing PATIENCE (but this would need to be done with extreme discretion).

RADIO & TREE VOICES: Voices which come through the radio or a tree. These voices can be performed by the same person, so long as each voice is distinct.

SETTING:

The majority of the action transpires in the main room of Patience's modest but spacious apartment. There is a couch, a fireplace and a dining table with four chairs. Against a wall, there is a cupboard, upon which sit an old radio and a few picture frames. The upstage area is split in half: on one side is the kitchen, which is mostly obscured from view, and on the other side is a hallway, which leads to a bathroom and two bedrooms. The apartment would ordinarily look clean and respectable, except for the fact that it's littered with dozens – ideally, at least 100 – of used Christmas trees, which are either still wrapped in ornaments or stripped down to their most essential, naked selves. The rest of the action (each even-numbered scene) takes place in various characters' dream worlds, which will be presented downstage of the curtain, or whatever device exists to obscure the main stage from the audience.

NOTES:

The playwright is a firm believer in the collaborative nature of performance. As such, almost all stage directions should be seen as non-binding *suggestions* for the director and performers. Descriptions of blocking, setting, or the tone/intention of a line are merely tools that were used to sculpt a complete and consistent world. *Any* interpretation of the text, therefore, is fair game, so long as it does not directly contradict or undermine details that are intrinsic to this world – if a character says “This soup is delicious,” for instance, they probably should have a bowl of soup in front of them.

Through Scenes 1-8, the playwright encourages the director to find moments when EXCELLENCE tries to hand PATIENCE a cigarette, only to be quietly refused.

In addition to parallel columns, which speak for themselves, there are two punctuation

marks that indicate the overlapping of lines: first, the use of a “/” implies that the following line (always that of *another* character) begins *now*. The two speak over one another until the character speaking first finishes their line.

An ellipsis at the beginning or ending of a line usually signals *continuity*. If a line ends with “...” the speaking character should continue seamlessly into their *next* line, which will begin with a “...” The ellipsis is used instead of the “/” to make reading easier when a longer line or monologue is being spoken over. The one exception to this rule is when an ellipsis at the end of a line is meant to denote someone trailing off...

Finally, a “–” at the end of a line signals an abrupt interruption.

SCENE 1

Patience's apartment. EXCELLENCE, wearing a bathrobe and an improvised head garment, is frantically walking about the apartment, into and out of the bedrooms, in search of something, while holding a large ax in his left hand. The room is teeming with haphazardly piled Christmas trees. Two trees, held up by sawhorses, are prominently displayed in the center of the room.

EXCELLENCE

Come on...it's gotta be in here. Come on. Come on.

The radio spontaneously turns on.

RADIO VOICE 1

I'm The News, with the news. And folks, it is some dreadful news. *(Beat)* He was a family man, a truck driver for 28 years, with only two more to go before he could retire and watch after his seventeen grandkids – but now, Mike Townson's essence is reduced to memory. Those vicious kids, the Leukocytes, have finally drawn blood. *(Beat)* Folks, none of this is a joke anymore. A group of anonymous clowns, calling themselves the medical term for White Blood Cells, is terrorizing our *nation*. They're spraying 18-wheelers with shotgun pellets every day, and so far we've gotten nowhere. Is this really how we want to start the new year? *(Beat)* Listen. If you're out there, I've got something to say: these kids need to be served justice, dead or alive, *today*. Because they might have shotguns, but FBI, you've got *bombs that crawl on arms!* That's right. You need to deliver justice to their doorstep in a first-class package, with those sweet arm-crawling bombs! So let's –

EXCELLENCE turns the radio off.

EXCELLENCE

Right on.

He opens one of the drawers directly underneath the radio. He pulls out a Bible, walks downstage toward the two featured trees. He stands in front of them, closes his eyes, and takes a deep breath. He opens his eyes, pulls out a piece of paper, reads it, and finds a passage in the Bible.

EXCELLENCE *(cont'd)*

Alright. Here we go. *(He gazes out in a very presentational manner, adopts his most priest-like persona)* Thank you, trees, for gathering here. We are here today to put a stop to the callousness, and to honor your memory by putting you to *good use*. Christmas might be over, but trees, you are *not* garbage. You were living, conscious beings, and you *still* hold a special place in our hearts, in spite of everything. *(Clears throat)* Alright, I'd like to add a passage from Daniel. "The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and beheld, a tree in the midst of the earth.

Its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.” (*Very satisfied by this*) Trees, I would like to say that all of you – the firs, the pines, the spruces – are sacred trees. You have given us shade, you have given us fruit, you have given us *purpose* when none was to be found. You deserved to be cultivated with compassion and...*thanked* for your sacrifice. I mean, you guys could have been 400 feet tall, and you gave that up for *our rituals!* (*Beat*) So we're here today to honor your legacy – all that was and all that could have been – and to make sure your lives amount to something more than hollow symbolism. This is a tribute to the sacrifices you and our mother Earth have made for *us.* (*Beat*) So, trees, I'm going to chop you up, and you will become firewood. You'll provide a *different kind of warmth* for the people who still need you. With these chops, you're being brought back to life. Uh, does anyone have anything to add? (*Beat*) Great. Ah-men.

He raises the ax over his head. The door opens, and in enters PATIENCE. She is in her early 30's, clearly put together. Her hair is in a ponytail and she's animatedly speaking into her cell phone. At first she seems not to notice or care about the trees, despite having to navigate around them as she tries to go about her daily routine. EXCELLENCE starts chopping.

PATIENCE

(Into phone) ...Yes, that's exactly right; no foul play whatsoever. (*Beat*) No, Bob, it *checks out.* Why do you have to be so skeptical? We've done our job; we've run the figures multiple times, consulted with the investigators, as per your request and...okay, a *sense?* You have a *sense* that something isn't right? Since when did this organization run on impulse and not basic common sense? Bob, read the report – it's *all* there. The audit, the interviews, the *anecdotal personality assessments* you requested. Everything you asked for. Okay, listen, I just got home. I need to get on with my day. We can talk this through tomorrow if you don't calm down after some time with your family. (*Beat*) What? I'm trying to be *nice,* okay? (*Beat*) Okay, thank you, that's awfully sweet – really, that means a lot. I'm glad you appreciate my work. No, that's just my brother. He's chopping up some trees. Yes, in my apartment. I don't *know,* Bob, Jesus, I just got here. Listen, I've got to take care of some stuff. (*Micro-beat*) Okay, great, yes, I'll see you tomorrow, bright and early. We'll talk. Ta-ta.

She hangs up, observes EXCELLENCE's chopping.

EXCELLENCE

(Still chopping, getting into a rhythm) Hey, Pat.

PATIENCE

Hey. (*Beat*) Don't you have a saw or something?

EXCELLENCE

Nope.

PATIENCE

Well, can you get one?

EXCELLENCE

Sure. Sometime tomorrow.

She walks downstage and watches EXCELLENCE for a little while. She notices the Bible and picks it up.

PATIENCE

What's with the bible?

EXCELLENCE

They're Christian trees. I figured they'd like to have a passage read at their funeral. *(Holding up his first severed chunk of wood)* But hey, check it out.

PATIENCE

Cool. So my brother is starting a Christian lumberjack cult in my apartment. *(EXCELLENCE gets himself a cigarette, and tries to hand her one)* No thanks.

EXCELLENCE

It'll only be for a couple days.

PATIENCE

(Pointing to the cigarette) Hey, could you *not*?

EXCELLENCE

(Putting the cigarette away) Sure. *(Beat)* So you, uh, saw all the trees when you left for work, right?

PATIENCE

Uh-huh.

EXCELLENCE

Wasn't it crazy? Suddenly the sidewalk became a wood dump filled with *sacred trees*. *(Beat)* I mean, Christmas was two weeks ago, Pat! But all of a sudden the same trees that were in our homes are *on the street*.

PATIENCE

Ex, it's not like you're the fucking *street / custodian* –

EXCELLENCE

Just wait a minute and hear me out, okay? I knew you'd react this way. *(Beat)* Take a seat.

PATIENCE

...where?

EXCELLENCE

(*Making room, pulling branches off of the couch*) Right here.

PATIENCE

(*Sitting with EXCELLENCE*) Listen, I want to get to bed in ten minutes –

EXCELLENCE

You got it. I won't waste your time. Close your eyes.

PATIENCE

(*She does*) These exercises are starting to get / on my –

EXCELLENCE

On your nerves, I know. You said that yesterday. Now, take a deep breath in. (*She does*) Very good. You should notice the air filling up your lungs and, with it, the sensation of *containing* something larger than yourself. (*Beat*) Now, once you've reached your capacity, release the air. (*She does*) Are you here?

PATIENCE

Yes.

EXCELLENCE

Are you everywhere?

PATIENCE

I mean...fine. Yes.

EXCELLENCE

Okay. Now I want you to imagine that you're driving through a main road in a Navajo territory, right after their biggest holiday. As you're rolling along, you see hundreds of totems lying on the curb. I mean, wouldn't you think – assuming you're driving through and know nothing about indigenous traditions – that they'd decided to tear it down after some collective revelation?

PATIENCE

(*Opening her eyes*) Ex, this is a complete waste of my –

EXCELLENCE

Close your eyes! (*Beat*) I mean, wouldn't you think all those piles of wood lining the street meant that a serious cultural *collapse* had just taken place?

PATIENCE

This has *nothing* to do with what's going on here.

EXCELLENCE

No, Pat, it's *exactly* what's going on! With each of these tossed trees, we're acting like none of it matters. I mean, if these trees aren't sacred objects in the Christian world, is *anything*?

PATIENCE

(Opening her eyes and getting off the couch) Trashed trees are *part* of the ritual, Ex. It's part of Christmas. And how is stuffing them into an apartment better than leaving them on the sidewalk?

EXCELLENCE

Look, seriously, I'm sorry I had to drag them up here – I know it disturbs the feng shui. But it was a *humanitarian gesture*, you understand? I had to do this. Instead of sending them to landfills, where they would stew in a plastic mound –

PATIENCE

Listen –

Suddenly, with no provocation, the radio turns back on. RADIO VOICE 2, a woman with an Italian Brooklyn accent, and RADIO VOICE 3, her stoic husband, can be heard arguing. During the following dialogue, PATIENCE goes to turn off the radio, but her clothes start getting caught in the trees and it takes her a long time to reach the cupboard.

RADIO VOICE 2

...but, Tony, we simply must pay for your *medication*!

RADIO VOICE 3

No, darling, we must use all the money we have to feed the children.

RADIO VOICE 2

But Tony, who will be left to feed the children after you *die* from...from...from...

RADIO VOICE 3

Dyspepsia, Jeanie. It's heartburn. A man can manage a minor bout of dyspepsia every so often, so long as he cuts down on his intake of sodium and saturated fat.

RADIO VOICE 2

Your heart *burns* now, *Tony*, but who's to say the fire won't start raging without those pills!? Those pills are your fire extinguisher! Every home needs a fire extinguisher, and *your body* is no exception to that rule! Without an extinguisher, your cardiac candle will topple onto your twig-laden floor and erupt into a bout of *furios flames*, with nothing to put it out!

RADIO VOICE 3

Darling, never fear. Your Tony is still –

PATIENCE turns off the radio. EXCELLENCE has remained in the same position since the radio turned on.

EXCELLENCE

It started turning on like that this morning. I don't know how. *(Beat)* Hey, you're not mad, are you?

PATIENCE

Not yet. *(Beat)* The trees need to go. And you need to get a job if you're staying here.

EXCELLENCE

I already got one.

PATIENCE

You do? Ex, that's *great!* Why didn't you tell me when – *(suddenly realizing what he means)* – oh. You mean...Listen, I can't live like this. The trees need to *go*.

EXCELLENCE

Yeah, and that's what I'm doing.

PATIENCE

Tomorrow.

EXCELLENCE

I'll try.

PATIENCE

What do you mean, try? This is *my* apartment.

EXCELLENCE

Listen, I'm gonna push these things like you wouldn't believe. I've already got a couple people swinging by tomorrow.

PATIENCE

For *wood?*

EXCELLENCE

Uh-huh.

PATIENCE

This is crazy.

EXCELLENCE

Tell me about it. All this shit with the highway shutting down is sorta perfect. Firewood is scarce.

PATIENCE

Okay. (*Getting her things together*) I'm gonna go to bed before I lose my cool. Good night.

EXCELLENCE

Night, sis. (*Beat*) Oh, by the way, I think Mike's coming over any minute –

Immediately, the door swings wide open to reveal MIKE standing in the doorway. He is in his early 40's, muscular, undeniably rugged. He enters.

MIKE

Right on cue, huh? Hah! Excellence, my buddy! How you doing tonight? Didn't see you at the gym today; figured that means you're in one of two states: either busy or depressed. (*To PATIENCE*) Am I right, or am I *right*, Patience? (*Beat*) Patience?

PATIENCE exits.

MIKE

Somebody woke up on the wrong side of the bed! (*To EXCELLENCE*) Hey, but seriously, you doing alright?

EXCELLENCE

Hey, Mike, would you mind knocking / next time?

MIKE

Oh, take a look at this, my man! I brought a brand new deck of cards *special* to teach you my favorite two-player game, *Casino*. A game that requires equal parts mathematical ingenuity and plain old luck. No posturing in this game, 'cause I know you hate that. And I have been saving *these babies (indicates the cards)* for a special occasion; figured this was as good a chance as any to whip out my new deck of – (*suddenly absorbing the room*) *WOW*, that's a lot of trees!

EXCELLENCE

Yeah.

MIKE

Man! You said it was just a few!

EXCELLENCE

It is.

MIKE

Looks more like a *LOT* to me! This is *crazy!* (*Noticing the Bible*) Looks like you had the service, huh?

EXCELLENCE

Uh-huh.

MIKE

And you used a bible?

EXCELLENCE

(Lighting a cigarette) Yeah, I realized they're Christian trees, so I gave a Christian sermon.

MIKE

Oh, good thinking, dude. They're *definitely* Christian trees. I bet you gave a hell of a sermon, too. Did anyone thank you for your kind words? *(Beat)* Like, did a cypress tree widow pull back her veil, with tears in her wood eyes, and say "Thank –

EXCELLENCE

None of these are cypress trees.

MIKE

I know, dude, they're all pines –

EXCELLENCE

Conifers.

MIKE

Right. Sorry. So she's a *conifer*, and she's crying...and –

EXCELLENCE

Hey, do you think you could quiet down? Patience is trying to sleep.

MIKE

Oh, shit, of course. *(In a quieter tone)* Man, it smells so *fresh* in here. That pine scent – I mean *conifer* scent – it's so *relaxing*. Makes me feel like I'm in my mom's old sedan or something. Those were the *days*, man, driving around, hair blowing in the air-conditioned wind! Woo! She *always* had those fresheners in there – pine-scented. Every time I'd get in, as long as she had the freshener, I'd fall straight to sleep and start having the craziest dreams. But if she didn't bring the freshener, I'd stay wide awake in that car. My body would tense up, I'd watch the cars whiz by, and suddenly I felt so...empty. And, man, if it was before a hockey game, and I had no solid nap in that car –

EXCELLENCE

Hey, could you *please* keep it down?

MIKE

(Quieting down) Man, without that nap, I was a wreck on the ice. I didn't *have* it, dude! I'd glide

into the net, trip over my own skates, all 'cause I hadn't gotten that pre-game whiff of pine.
(Beat) You ever experience anything like that? A smell that wakes you up by putting you to sleep first?

EXCELLENCE

I guess sometimes tea does that for me.

MIKE

Like decaffeinated, though, right? Like *peppermint* tea or something? You can consume caffeine through your nasal follicles – you know that, right? (*Handing the deck of cards to Excellence and taking a dramatic inhale*) That smell! Man, it's really something. Air freshener smell! Hey, why don't you open up the deck and start shuffling. I think I might have to (*yawns*) close my eyes for a few minutes. These trees, man, that air freshener...brings me back, knocks me out.

EXCELLENCE

Alright, dude.

MIKE

(*Noticing something*) Whoa, hold on a minute, is that *my* Christmas tree over there?
(*Approaching it*) Whoa, man, look at that; it's totally my tree. I can't believe I recognized it. It must have called out to me or something! Right, Ex?

EXCELLENCE

(*Forcing a smile*) Yeah, totally.

MIKE

I just tossed it on the street this morning. I mean...Whoa. (*Beat*) Whoa.

MIKE, getting drowsier with each step, picks up his tree and carries it downstage. The curtain comes down, making the bare lip of the stage the only visible playing space, though we can still hear the sounds of cards being shuffled and the tree being dragged downstage. Eventually, the curtains are parted by MIKE, who drags his tree onto the lip of the stage. And this begins...

SCENE 2

MIKE enters with his tree. He looks around the space. A strong wind is heard blowing.

MIKE

These winds! Whirling, tumbling,
and twirling me about.
But you, tree, are so *strong*.
You withstand these tests of time,
with no thing but light, water,
and the trembling hand of the unseen eye
to guide you up. So you're the tree,
and I'm what? Some guy?

MOTHER enters, dragging an exterior car part – a bumper, a tire or a fender.

MOTHER

Hey.

MIKE

Hey, mom.

MOTHER

I was just down at the lake with the bread crumbs. *(Beat)* Why don't you ever come to feed the geese anymore, Mike? They don't show up when you're not around.

MIKE

I've got these trees to keep me company now. And the lake is far away.

MOTHER

Oh. Well, I guess a tree is company, and your mother isn't.
Your sister still visits. Sometimes she brings Frank and Lonnie.
Do you ever wonder what would have happened if I hadn't been around
to lock the door and water your roots? Mike?
You talk about me as if I'm someone who *was* known.
The geese still want to keep in touch with me, I think.
But you're not around, so I never see them.
Why do you take to that tree, but not to me?
Do you ever wonder what would have happened
if I had died in the car crash and left you?

MIKE

It was a fender bender, mom. *(Beat)* But I guess sometimes I wonder what would have happened

if we both died.

MOTHER

(Laughing) Well, nothing, son. We'd both be dead.

The dream world collapses, and the curtains open again, giving way to...

SCENE 3

Patience's apartment, the day after Scene 1. There are a few bundles of chopped wood that have been tied together and marked for sale. Mike's tree stands upright in a place of honor – a loose leaf paper, which has the name "MIKE" visibly scrawled, has been stapled to it. EXCELLENCE is chopping a tree in the middle of the room.

RADIO VOICE 1

I'm The News, with the news. This is tough, folks. Today, the FBI announced that *no vehicle* will be allowed on any major interstate *without federally issued identification*. Now, it's the right step, but its implications are deep. I'm afraid that we've yet to see the worst of this. Domestic commerce is going to slow to a screeching halt, and pretty soon we're all going to have to start fending for ourselves. Right now, it's things that don't matter, like Drain-O and dildos, that are out of commission. But folks, pretty soon, it's going to be the essential stuff, too. Don't wait any longer. The time is *now* to stockpile groceries and slaughter your cows. The Leukocytes are advancing, and America as we know it is in the crosshairs. When will the heavy fist of justice strike down? Where are our bombs that crawl on arms?

PATIENCE enters, dressed in work attire. She is carrying a take-out bag. She turns the radio off immediately.

PATIENCE

Alright, Bob, I just got home. I've got plans. *NO*, Bob, please! We'll talk more in *the morning*. Great, yes, thank you. No, it's true, there's no such thing. Yes, *thank you*, Bob. I'll see you tomorrow. I've got somewhere to be. Buh-bye.

PATIENCE hangs up the phone.

EXCELLENCE

Hey.

PATIENCE

Listen. I can't have you chopping trees in my apartment.

EXCELLENCE

I'm, like, already done with a quarter of –

PATIENCE

I told you last night that you need to get a saw, didn't I?

EXCELLENCE

Yup.

PATIENCE

And what did you say?

EXCELLENCE

That I'd get one, but I don't have any *money* right now since I'm crashing at your place and still don't have a job –

PATIENCE

Well, *get one*.

EXCELLENCE

(Pointing to what he's doing) I told you. I'm on it. *(Beat)* I've got some customers coming tonight. The lowest price for a bundle is 16. As soon as I sell one, I'll buy your saw.

PATIENCE

Listen, Ex, I *did not say it was okay* to sell wood out of my apartment.

EXCELLENCE

I'll pay rent.

PATIENCE

Like, what, for the whole place?

EXCELLENCE

I was thinking half. But sure, if that's what it takes. *(Beat)* Oh, by the way, Mike's supposed to –

The door opens. It's MIKE.

MIKE

Hey, lovebirds!

EXCELLENCE

Hey, Mike, could you please / *knock or something?*

MIKE

Coupla love birds, you two, never knew two siblings who really loved each other as much as you guys.

MIKE *(cont'd)*

(To EXCELLENCE) It's *amazing* that you two can live in such close quarters and *still* get along. I mean, *whew(!)*, there is *no way* I would ever share an apartment with my big sister. *No way!* She is *crazy!*

PATIENCE

(To EXCELLENCE) This is not alright, do you understand? I need you to treat my space with respect. You have to tell me when people are coming over, you have to get rid of these trees, you have to –

MIKE *(cont'd)*

(To Patience) But you, Patience, are probably the greatest sister *ever*. Listen, you just need to keep doing what you're doing. Everything's gonna work your way, I already know it. You're determined, you're headstrong, and hey, you're also a strapping young lady.

PATIENCE

Mike, get out.

MIKE

(To PATIENCE) What's that?

EXCELLENCE

Uh, you need to leave, dude. We're in the middle of something.

MIKE

(Handing him a pair of loppers) Okay, well, I brought the loppers, like you asked.

EXCELLENCE

Thanks.

PATIENCE

How about a saw?

MIKE

I'm sorry?

PATIENCE

Did you bring a saw?

MIKE

Nope! *(Pointing to the ax)* He's already got the ax. But I was thinking, hey, as long as I'm here, I might as well help out with the trees. I could lop while you chop. Mike and Excellence, also known as *(pointing to himself)* Lop and *(to EXCELLENCE)* Chop! Pretty good, right? Unless...you guys still need me to go.

PATIENCE, exasperated, walks to the kitchen and starts unpacking her takeout.

MIKE *(cont'd)*

I guess I'll get started then. *(He starts to lop off tree branches on the floor)*

EXCELLENCE

Listen, can't I blaze my own trail like anyone else?

PATIENCE

And make my home into a boutique lumber store?

MIKE

(To EXCELLENCE) Whoa, you're gonna sell the wood out of *here*?

EXCELLENCE

Yup.

MIKE

Hey, that's *brilliant*. You know, Patience, the Leukocytes are gonna take over all the highways pretty soon...and then where are people gonna get their firewood? Not the forest, 'cause you gotta take the *highway* to get to the forest, am I right? And *not* the store, because the lumber trucks can't make it out to the city! So supply goes down, and *then*...

PATIENCE

(From the kitchen) Prices go up, Mike, I get it.

EXCELLENCE

Also, for what it's worth, all of the other Christmas trees already got picked up, so this is all I've got.

MIKE

Until next year, you mean!

PATIENCE comes out of the kitchen with a plate of food, observing MIKE as he loafs off branches and piles them carefully.

MIKE (cont'd)

That's quite a dish there, Patience. Smells like moo-shu / pork or something.

PATIENCE

Mike. Please. Not right now. (To EXCELLENCE) I need you to re-set the furniture tonight, okay? I can't live in a forest.

EXCELLENCE

Sure thing.

MIKE

(Turning back to PATIENCE) Hey, you've got my *personal* guarantee that this will be a functional living room when you wake up tomorrow. Your brother's not gonna smoke another cigarette on my watch until this room is spick-and-span for his sister!

PATIENCE

(To EXCELLENCE) You've been...?

EXCELLENCE

Just a / couple.

MIKE

But no more! Until the room is clean! I promise!

PATIENCE

Thanks, Mike.

MIKE

Really, no problem! I'm happy to help out around here. And I mean, you guys are great.

PATIENCE

(To MIKE) If you want some food, there's a little left over on the counter. It's moo-shu chicken.

MIKE

Moo-shu, I knew it! Thanks, Patience!

PATIENCE exits to her room. MIKE finishes lopping a tree and puts it in EXCELLENCE's area so he can start chopping it.

MIKE *(cont'd)*

Here ya go. *(He picks up another tree to start lopping it, only to realize)* Speak of the friggin' devil! Ex, check it out, it's my sister's tree! Who knows why she threw it out with all the ornaments on it. Crazy! Oh...I guess, she probably wasn't thinking. Her husband, Bob, just bounced on Christmas morning. No warning or *anything*. He just took off in the middle of the night. Kinda crazy, right? *(Beat)* Hey, would you mind if I, uh, put her tree with mine for a while?

EXCELLENCE

Sure, go for it.

MIKE

Really?! Dude, thanks! She's gonna freak when she hears her tree got to be with *my tree* in a place of honor. And, I mean, it's so cool that my tree gets some / company too.

The radio turns on, giving way to an uproarious laugh track. MIKE starts putting his sister's tree next to his, then proceeds to write "CREED FAMILY" on a piece of paper and staple it to his sister's tree. EXCELLENCE, meanwhile, keeps chopping until he decides to turn off the radio.

RADIO VOICE 4

...and folks, how about *danger, huh?* It seems like every second, we've got eyes in the back of our head because we're freaked by the future! *(Some audience chuckles)* Now, even though I'm always on the move, there's still something I'm always *in...and that's danger!* *(Audience*

laughter) But seriously, here are the things I fear with every waking second: small, ugly dogs (*the audience laughs*), a painful, drawn-out death (*the audience laughs*), but most of all, I'm afraid that my *house* will burn down, because that's where all my *stuff* is! (*Hysterical laughter*) And folks – my wife's not here, is she? Okay, good. Because, between you and me...there's nothing I love more than *MY STUFF!* (*Hysterical laughter*) And a *FIRE* would ruin every –

EXCELLENCE turns the radio off and goes to resume chopping.

MIKE

(*Beholding his tree display*) Hey, didn't you unplug that thing?

EXCELLENCE

Yup.

MIKE

Weird. Maybe some divine force is trying to tell you something.

EXCELLENCE

Could be. It was our mom's mom's.

MIKE

Atta boy! The priest is showing! (*Beat*) So *maybe* your grandma is trying to talk to you through the radio. (*Beat*) She must have been one *annoying grandma* if that's all she had to say, though. (*They both go back to their tasks.*) Man, I am fighting not to pass out like I did last night. (*Beat*) You, uh, got any customers swinging by?

EXCELLENCE

A couple people.

MIKE

Yeah? A couple of *big spenders*, I hope?

EXCELLENCE

They'll probably just want one or two bundles, I don't know. They're my first customers.

MIKE

Ex! Your *first...buddy*, that's exciting!

There's a timid rap-tap-tap-tap...tap-tap at the door.
EXCELLENCE gets up to answer it.

MIKE (*cont'd*)

Look at that! As if on cue!

EXCELLENCE

(At the door) Hello?

DOROTHEA (*offstage*)

Hi, my name's Dorothea. I called last night about picking up some firewood.

EXCELLENCE

Be right there.

EXCELLENCE opens the door for DOROTHEA, who enters. She is a uniformed police officer, much to EXCELLENCE's surprise.

DOROTHEA

How's it going?

EXCELLENCE

Uh, good. You're here...?

DOROTHEA

For wood. I think a couple of bundles will be enough. I'm trying to have some people over for wine tonight. Maybe cheese, too, we'll just have to see how penny-pinching I'm feeling. It's not like I'm pinching anything else. (*Chuckles*) Oh, don't mind the badge. I'm on duty, but I figured I could swing by before school lets out. You probably recognize me, no?

EXCELLENCE

I don't think so.

DOROTHEA

Oh, I've been directing traffic out at Price and Washington for five years now, every school day. Haven't called in sick once. You must have seen me out there at some point. (*She pulls out her whistle from underneath her shirt collar and starts directing imagined traffic, blowing softly*) Ha, that's me! If you ever get into any spats on the road, just let me know, and I'll see what I can do for ya.

EXCELLENCE

Cool, thanks.

DOROTHEA

Honestly, though, probably not that much. My jurisdiction only goes so far. So...(*Noticing MIKE, who has been pretending not to listen*) Who's your friend?

EXCELLENCE

Oh, that's Mike.

MIKE

(*To DOROTHEA*) Hey, how's it going?

EXCELLENCE
(To DOROTHEA) Hey, I've got lot going on, so (To MIKE) Pretty good. How's it going with
let's make the sale and get you out of here. you?

MIKE
I'm doing pretty well, considering *everything*.

DOROTHEA
I *know* – this highway business is crazy!

MIKE
Hey, aren't you the traffic cop on Price and Washington?

DOROTHEA
Yeah! I am!

MIKE
Wow, so honored to meet you. You do some really great work out there. Truly. Things always
move so smooth. I used to pick up my niece and nephew after school once a week, and I always
said to myself, "God, this is some of the smoothest after-school traffic I've ever seen." Hot butter
bread is how I always thought of that intersection. Smooth as hot butter bread.

DOROTHEA
Really? Wow. That's...so nice of you to say.

EXCELLENCE goes to the bundles of wood.

EXCELLENCE
Officer, do you know what type of wood you'd like?

DOROTHEA
Uh, what?

EXCELLENCE
What kind of wood would you like? We've got Blue Spruce, Balsam Fir, Norway Spruce–

DOROTHEA
I thought they were all just...regular Christmas trees. Like Douglas firs.

EXCELLENCE
We do have Douglas firs. Those are the cheapest variety.

DOROTHEA
Well, great. Then I'll get a couple of those. How much?

EXCELLENCE

Uh, it's 32 altogether.

DOROTHEA

32. (*Grabbing cash*) Okay.

EXCELLENCE

(*Grabs another bundle*) Yup.

DOROTHEA

(*To MIKE*) Hot butter bread. I never thought of it that way. Hot butter bread. Diner toast. (*To EXCELLENCE*) Hey, mister, you must be swinging quite a profit, charging folks 16 bucks for a tiny bundle of wood like that...and for Douglas firs, no less! My friend warned me that Douglas firs have a tendency to start chimney fires. (*Shrugs her shoulders*) Ah, whatever. I could use a little fire in *my* chimney, if you know what I mean. (*Beat*) Anyway, I hear the cops are closing in on the Leukocytes, gonna get those bastards, and then the highways will roar back to glory, those lumber prices will plummet back down, (*Handing EXCELLENCE two 20's*) and *you* won't be such a rich man anymore, my fine-feathered friend, because people won't have to buy your *recycled Christmas trees* to keep warm. These things should have been in the dump by now.

MIKE

You're telling me!

DOROTHEA

(*Turning to MIKE*) I sure am. Hey, while we're at it, you know what else? Those Leukocytes aren't White Blood Cells in my opinion. They're a cancer on this country.

MIKE

Yes!

DOROTHEA

And cancer cells deserve the DP.

MIKE

The DP? Is that like a technical term?

DOROTHEA

Sure is. That's short for the death penalty amongst deputies of the law. The chair, the needle, the firing squad – god, I'd support any type of DP for those *chumps!* They're *murdering* good, hardworking people. (*Beat*) Say, whose kids were you picking up at my intersection?

MIKE

The, uh, Creeds.

DOROTHEA

The Creeds' kids? You mean little Frank and Lonnie?

MIKE

Yeah.

DOROTHEA

EXCELLENCE

Those are some lovely kids. I love seeing them. *(Returning with change)* Here's your change.

MIKE

Thanks.

DOROTHEA

Yeah, Lonnie has shot straight up. Just like a...a...a Douglas fir!

EXCELLENCE

Your *change*, officer.

DOROTHEA

Hey, do you have any idea what happened to her keychain collection? They just disappeared all of a –

EXCELLENCE

Officer.

DOROTHEA

(Turning to EXCELLENCE) Oh, thanks. *(Handing two bills to EXCELLENCE)* Here, that's for you.

EXCELLENCE

(Thinking it's a test) Oh, uh, we...don't accept tips. This is a legal business.

DOROTHEA

What?

EXCELLENCE

We do not accept tips or bribes of any kind.

DOROTHEA

What do you...? I'm not trying to bribe...you're selling *firewood*, for god's sake! *(Beat)* Oh, I get it. You're scared of me, aren't you?

EXCELLENCE

No, I'm not...

DOROTHEA

Yes you are. I can spot that look from a mile away. Whenever I'm in uniform and I try to act like a regular human being, people get all clammy 'cause they're thinking, "Oh, that's a lady cop, which must mean she's out to *get me*" – but you know, it's not true. I'm really trying to *protect* you. And hey, it's not like I have a warrant or anything! I mean, it's not like I could even *get* a warrant if I wanted to. I'm a traffic cop. But...oh, hey, come to think of it, this is kinda shady, isn't it? You're, like, running an unregistered business out of a home. With loads of dry wood lying around, and cigarette butts scattered all over, *and* an active fireplace. In a large apartment complex. Huh. *(Beat)* Do you take cards by the way? I got a friend who's living off credit, wanted me to ask for him.

EXCELLENCE

Uh, no.

Suddenly, PATIENCE bursts out of her bedroom, dressed to go out. She's in a rush until she notices there's a uniformed police officer in her home.

PATIENCE

Uh, hello, Officer. Is everything alright?

DOROTHEA

(Reaching into her belt) No, everything's not alright! Get down! This is a raid!

PATIENCE gets on her knees, puts her hands on her head; EXCELLENCE panics, and MIKE doesn't react. After a beat, DOROTHEA starts laughing hysterically and pulls out a baton.

DOROTHEA *(cont'd)*

Oh my god, you *actually* thought...! Wow! You see something new every day, I guess. Like I could do *anything* with my baton. *(Looking at the baton)* I still haven't named the guy... Hey, you don't recognize me? *(Holding out her hand to PATIENCE)* Well, I'm Dorothea. I was just swinging by to purchase some firewood for a little wine-and-cheese party I'm having at *my* place tonight.

PATIENCE

(Very confused, hyperventilating) You...

DOROTHEA

There might not be cheese, though. I gotta check my funds. *(Beat)* But yeah, I was kidding, just joshing with ya. I'm a traffic cop.

PATIENCE

Oh.

DOROTHEA

What's *your* name?

PATIENCE

(*Getting up, shaking her hand*) Patience.

DOROTHEA

Patience! Now *that's* a name! You certainly didn't show any cowering like that! You totally fell for it.

PATIENCE

(*Smiling*) I really did.

DOROTHEA

But seriously, you guys aren't hiding anything other than the firewood, right?

PATIENCE

Not to the best of my knowledge.

DOROTHEA

(*Disturbed*) To the best of your...?

EXCELLENCE

No, just the firewood, Officer.

DOROTHEA

(*Suspicious*) Please. Call me Dorothea.

PATIENCE

Ooohhh, *you're* the traffic cop at / Price and Washington.

DOROTHEA

Price and Washington, exactly! (*Pulls out her whistle and does the same little routine she did earlier*) That's me! (*Looks at her watch*) Speaking of which, I gotta get out of here – school's gonna let out pretty soon. They need me out there. Thanks for the wood.

EXCELLENCE

No problem.

DOROTHEA

I'll probably be back for more in a couple days, assuming my *chimney* doesn't *catch*. But seriously, this stuff looks great. Got a nice *girth* to it. (*She is making everyone uncomfortable. To EXCELLENCE*) Say, would you mind carrying that other bundle into my car?

MIKE

(Getting up) Why don't I carry *both* for ya, officer? I could use the exercise.

DOROTHEA

Wow, a hunk such as yourself sure *does* come in handy in times like these. *(To EXCELLENCE)*
Ah, well, thanks so much, and...*(noticing a tree for the first time)* Oh my god. Is that my
Christmas tree? *(She starts walking towards it, mesmerized)* Oh my god. I can't believe it.

*DOROTHEA, enraptured, starts fondling the tree and reminiscing.
As if none of this is going on, MIKE picks up her two bundles and
starts carrying them outside while PATIENCE puts on shoes and
EXCELLENCE sits on the couch.*

DOROTHEA *(cont'd)*

(To the tree) It's been so long.

*The curtain goes down once again, and the sound of a tree being
dragged behind it can be heard, just like at the end of Scene 1. The
curtains part, and this leads into...*

SCENE 4

DOROTHEA enters, dragging her tree onstage. She looks around.

DOROTHEA

A better view would be nice.

She looks down, finds a hole in the ground which can hold the tree. She tests its stability and then she begins to climb. She gets to the top of the six-foot tree and beholds the invisible vista. Autumn leaves start falling from the ceiling and she begins to laugh.

DOROTHEA (cont'd)

Orange and red leaves! And sky!

POLICE CAPTAIN enters.

POLICE CAPTAIN

Dorothea, we are so lucky to have you perched in that tree. You will keep watch over our fields. You will frighten away the predators, and you will keep the parasites at bay.

DOROTHEA

Thank you, Captain. My only wish in life is to keep our force secure, for we are the people's only protection from disaster.

POLICE CAPTAIN

But I'm afraid disaster is closer than we think. The wind blows, and soon that tree will have to fall! And then what will there be? A felled trunk. Your trash tree.

DOROTHEA

Captain!

POLICE CAPTAIN

You're inside the belly of the beast, Dorothea. Can you smell it? Your social follicles have led you here.

DOROTHEA

But Captain, I'm just a traffic cop.

POLICE CAPTAIN

What do you think, that that was an *accident*? That we are not always admiring your work?

DOROTHEA giggles, takes this moment to pull her whistle out of a pocket and pose, while still perched on the tree.

POLICE CAPTAIN *(cont'd)*

Yes, Dorothea! You see now – we did not place you out of convenience. You conduct that traffic like it's *hot butter bread*, like a master baker pulling fat, pillowy loaves out of the oven, time and again. We watch your eyes fixed on that thermometer, we see you fan down that furnace when it's so hot it could burn the place down, and we gaze with pride when you heat things up because the crust has started to sog, and the crisp could be compromised.

DOROTHEA

(Honored) Captain.

POLICE CAPTAIN starts stripping off his uniform to reveal that his chest is covered in war paint. He is doing a ritualistic dance, slapping and stomping on the ground. He pulls a trumpet from underneath the tree and starts playing it intermittently, punctuating the following chant.

POLICE CAPTAIN

The stench beneath the pine *(Stomp.)* is foul enough to threaten our lives.
Uncover the source. *(Stomp. Stomp.)* Uncover the source. *(Stomp. Stomp.)*
Beneath the pine, so much to hide. Use your force. *(Stomp. Stomp.)*
Beneath the pine, the filth presides. Break the shoots. *(Stomp. Stomp.)*
Beneath the pine, our hopes will die. Dig up the roots. *(Stomp. Stomp.)*

He is prostrate, rendering DOROTHEA an object of worship.

DOROTHEA

Of course, Captain. I will find what looms beneath the green needles.

POLICE CAPTAIN

(Exiting, in a trance, blowing on the trumpet)

Brush aside the green needles.
Then bundle them and call them your kindling.
You can give me a call if you need anything.
On my *personal* line.

POLICE CAPTAIN exits and DOROTHEA soars into the sky, out of the audience's view. The curtains open, giving way to...

SCENE 5

Patience's apartment, a week after Scene 3. All of the furniture is in a more logical position. The trees, meanwhile, have undergone major rearrangement: the downstage floor is lined with a tarp, on which several neatly piled bundles of chopped wood lie. Dozens more intact trees stand upright. They have been methodically arranged for spatial efficiency, creating a clearly outlined trail through which a person could comfortably walk. Mike's tree and his sister's tree remain in their place of honor, and they are now joined by a tree marked "OFFICER DOROTHEA." A warmth emanates from the fireplace.

RADIO VOICE 1

It's really happening, folks! Things are reaching a fever pitch! *(Beat)* On Highway 66, our country's most storied thoroughfare, the Leukocytes have struck again. We're receiving reports that an hour ago, they threw a *grenade* at a *tank truck*, and the tank truck *exploded*. It was carrying Polyethylene glycol – now, I'll be damned if I know *what* Polyethylene glycol is, but the name says it all. We need that stuff. *(Beat)* One casualty, ladies and gentlemen – his name was Dick Umbrage – another family man, just *five* years from dropping the towel and collecting his pension. The man had limb torn from limb, feet sent soaring through dry desert sky and into the waiting arms of no one. Where are our uniformed officers, folks? Shutting down the highways *isn't cutting / it* – the Leukocytes, those blood-suckers, have access from the *inside*! No, no, no, no, no, no! We're not just talking about *stuff* anymore, folks, we're not talking about Drain-O and dildos. We're talking about the very staples upon which *industry* depends! An assault on Polyethylene glycol is an assault on our way of life! And we need to fight back!

MIKE and DOROTHEA enter through the door. They are both carrying cups of coffee and wearing jackets. DOROTHEA is not in uniform.

MIKE

...so whenever I come in *here* I'm immediately sent back to that car, and I'm knocked right out.

DOROTHEA

(Taking a sip of her coffee) Wow, yeah, crazy.

MIKE

That's why I need my *extra-strong Americano* anytime I plan on stopping by. *(He tips his cup as if to toast and takes a long sip, looks around)* You had the right idea, getting that extra espresso shot. You were *passed out* last week! *(Looks around)* Hello? *(Beat)* Hello? *(Goes to turn off the radio)* I guess they forgot to turn off the radio. Weird.

MIKE turns off the radio.

MIKE (*cont'd*)

I mean, you'd think the guy who's recycling *Christmas trees* would at least remember to shut the goshdarn radio off before he leaves the house! You know what I'm saying, Officer?

DOROTHEA

Please, Mike, call me Dorothea.

MIKE

Well, Dorothea, you know what I'm saying, don't you?

DOROTHEA

Ya, it is really weird. If you're gonna try to live like a saint, you should at least be *consistent!* Otherwise, you're nothing but a hypocrite in my book.

MIKE

But at least he's trying.

DOROTHEA

Trying doesn't cut it in *my* book, mister.

MIKE

Sounds like you got quite a book.

DOROTHEA

Oh, you wouldn't even believe. It's just one in a whole library. Why do you think traffic runs so smooth at my intersection? You think it's because I give people *leeway*? No, sir, nobody dilly-dallies on my corner. Either you're in...or you're *out*.

MIKE

I love that. You don't take crap from anyone.

DOROTHEA

Nope. Sure don't. No crap. I don't take it. (*Giggles*)

MIKE

(*Contemplating*) "Either you're in...or you're *out*."

DOROTHEA

(*Making a suggestive gesture*) Unless you're in *and* out, in which case, make yourself right at home, Mister. (*Giggles*)

MIKE

(*Laughs*) That's a good one! (*Beat*) Either you're in, or you're out, or you're in *and* out!

DOROTHEA

(Nudging him with an elbow) I've got all the *bases* covered.

They both laugh at this.

MIKE

God, Dorothea, you are one funny gal. *(Beat)* So what's the special occasion this time? Are you having another wine and cheese party?

DOROTHEA

No. *(Beat)* My, uh, gas got cut off last night.

MIKE

Yeah, mine too. *(Beat)* Hey, if you don't want to wait for Ex, by the way, I can sell you a bundle myself.

DOROTHEA

Oh, that's fine, I can come back.

MIKE

Or we could wait here for a while. *(Beat)* I can, uh, take your jacket if you want.

DOROTHEA

Really?

MIKE

Mhm.

DOROTHEA

You mean we can just, like, hang out here alone?

MIKE

Mhm. Usually between noon and two the place is open and empty. Sometimes I swing by to read or meditate or just *get away*, you know? Like a micro-vacation or something. But usually I end up napping on account of that freshener smell. *(He takes a deep breath in and out)* They're a coupla classic hard workers, those two – so busy, they don't even have time to think about their own security!

DOROTHEA

And you walk right in, no problem.

MIKE

(Taking her jacket, hanging it from a coat hanger) Nooo problem.

DOROTHEA

Thanks.

MIKE

No problem.

They stand and look at each other.

DOROTHEA

Sounds like they really trust you.

Suddenly the radio turns on, blasting at full volume.

RADIO VOICE 2

What? My Tony *is dead*?

RADIO VOICE 3

Yes, ma'am, I'm afraid so. Anthony Fonoscone...

RADIO VOICE 2

That's *my* Tony!

RADIO VOICE 3

...is deceased. Kaput.

RADIO VOICE 2

Oh my precious Lord! I *told him he needed an extinguisher!* I told him his body-house would burn down if he didn't have that fire extinguisher ready! Why, darling, why didn't you *listen*? You've left us all *alone!*

MIKE turns the radio off.

DOROTHEA

What was that?

MIKE

Sounded like a soap opera to me.

DOROTHEA

No, I mean, how did the radio just turn on like that?

MIKE

Oh, Excellence said it started doing that a few weeks back. Turning on all of a sudden.

DOROTHEA

Wow!

MIKE

(Kneeling down, showing her the loose plug) And, hey, check this out.

DOROTHEA

What!?! How is that even possible?

MIKE

I know, right? Spooky stuff. Just turns on for no reason. Makes me wonder what's actually going on in here. Like if there are *spirits* or something.

DOROTHEA

So weird.

MIKE

Yeah.

DOROTHEA

So maybe it turned on by itself between the time they left and the time we arrived.

MIKE

(As they both sit on the couch) Oh, yeah, that would totally make sense! Quick thinking!

DOROTHEA

Thanks.

MIKE

Then I guess that makes them alright in your book after all.

DOROTHEA

Ha. *Maybe*.

MIKE

(Flirtatious) Hey, Dorothea, are you *sure* you're just a traffic cop and not a *detective*?

DOROTHEA

(Sitting down with him) God, I wish!

MIKE

(Sliding a little closer to her) Because you've really got a *discerning eye*...Officer.

DOROTHEA

Yeah, I always thought so. But sometimes I feel like my work goes completely unnoticed.

MIKE

Believe me, it doesn't.

DOROTHEA

(She really doesn't get what's going on) How would you know, you're not *in the / department* –

MIKE

Just *trust* me.

DOROTHEA

Okay.

MIKE

But tell me, can *I* trust *you*?

DOROTHEA

What?

MIKE

I mean, how can I be sure you're not *undercover*?

DOROTHEA

I already told you. Saturday's my day off.

MIKE

(Getting closer to her) 'Cause I wouldn't want you to see anything that would get me *in trouble*, Officer.

DOROTHEA

I'm *not* a *detective*, Mike. Jeez. And I told you to stop calling me that. Do you have to rub it in my face?

MIKE

(Getting even closer) Well, I'd *like* to.

DOROTHEA

What are you...?

MIKE

I'd like to rub it in, if you'd let me.

He kisses her. She is surprised.

DOROTHEA

Oooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh I get it. That was all some kinda pickup line.

MIKE

Did you like it? *(Beat)* I want to rub in my *lips*, by the way, not my...uuuhhh...my *weenie* –

DOROTHEA

Oh, good.

They laugh nervously and continue kissing. This goes on for a little while – eventually DOROTHEA is on top of MIKE – when the door opens, and PATIENCE walks in, carrying a handsaw, and escorting BOB into the house. BOB is a middle-aged bald man. DOROTHEA and MIKE stop kissing for a second and listen. BOB and PATIENCE do not notice their presence.

PATIENCE

...okay, listen, Bob, let's make this quick. Excellence! *(Beat)* Hey, Excellence! You got a customer!

BOB

(Noticing his tree is on display) Wow, would ya look at that! My Christmas tree!

PATIENCE

(Bewildered) That's your...?

BOB

Creed Family? *(Beat)* Jeez, Patience, sometimes it takes you a *while* to put two and two together. Yes, that's my tree. And that's *very thoughtful* of you to put it on display like that.

PATIENCE

I had no idea.

BOB

Well, still, it is *your* home!

PATIENCE

Doesn't really feel like it most of the time. And anyway, that's your trash, not your fucking portrait or something. *(Beat)* Sorry, that was rude. *(Yelling)* Excellence!!! Someone is here to buy wood! And I got you a saw! Ex, I got you a saw! *(Beat)* Jesus Christ. One second.

PATIENCE exits to check one of the bedrooms. BOB walks up to his tree and starts stroking it affectionately. Over the course of the following dialogue, PATIENCE continues looking through the apartment.

BOB

(To his tree) Hello, old / friend.

MIKE

(Whispering to DOROTHEA) Hey, you want to hear something crazy?

DOROTHEA giggles and nods. BOB hears this exchange and turns around.

BOB

...hello?

MIKE

(Whispering) I think that's my brother-in-law. Or, uh, *ex*-brother-in-law.

DOROTHEA

(Whispering) Why don't you say / hello?

MIKE

He's nothing to me. And you're...*(To DOROTHEA, his finger over her lips)*
Sssssshhhhhh...Officer, Officer, Officer, / Officer...

BOB

(Slowly approaching the couch) ...hello?

PATIENCE

(Re-entering) Sorry, Bob, I have no idea where he is. Last I heard the Douglas Firs were going for 42 each. *(Micro-beat)* You can just take one of those and leave / 40 on the table.

BOB

(Whisper) Uh, Patience, I think he's *with someone* on the couch.

PATIENCE

What? *(Turning to couch)* Excellence?

At this, DOROTHEA and MIKE break out into giggles, which they try to suppress. PATIENCE and BOB start slowly approaching the couch, flanking it on either side.

BOB

...hello? Hello?

As soon as BOB and PATIENCE can see who's on the couch, the radio turns on, and all of the lights, except for two spotlights – one on BOB and another, either on the radio or on Bob's tree – dim to a faint wash. He squints into the downstage distance as if into the light of an oncoming train. During the ensuing dialogue, the following happens silently: PATIENCE breaks out into a fit of rage

upon seeing DOROTHEA and MIKE making out on her couch, and demands that they leave the apartment at once. They get up and collect their jackets. DOROTHEA gives PATIENCE two 20 dollar bills and leaves with a bundle. MIKE follows close behind. PATIENCE storms into her room.

RADIO VOICE 5

Hey, Bob, hey, Bob, hey.

BOB

Hello?

RADIO VOICE 5

I said “Hey, Bob, hey, Bob, hey.” It's nice to see you again. You noticed me. That was nice.

BOB

Uh...Mike?

RADIO VOICE 5

Bob. You took me home, you held me in your arms, you introduced me to your wife and kids a couple months ago. And you still can't recognize my voice?

BOB

(He ponders this.) Oh, you're / my Christmas tree.

RADIO VOICE 5

Your Christmas tree. Yeah. You've been on my mind ever since Christmas morning. Frank and Lonnie woke up and ran to their present piles, but there was no father to watch them unwrap. That was devastating. For all of us. We waited for you all day. *(Beat)* Why'd you do it, Bob?

BOB

Oh, it's hard to explain.

RADIO VOICE 5

Sure, Bob, sure. I'm sure staying at the Lazy Inn is *also* hard to explain.

BOB

How do you...?

RADIO VOICE 5

You think you can just slink around unnoticed? We trees already have ways of knowing, but our domain expands when we enter into the trash network. I mean the city is where the *action* is *at*. The forest, Bob – it's so *boring*. Nothing but chirps and rain, sun and moon. And occasionally autumn occurs, which is so *drab*. But on the streets, there's so much to *do!* All the lights, I can't stop staring at them. *(Beat)* Anyway, I found out where you were as soon as I got kicked out. A

Snickers wrapper had the inside scoop.

BOB

Oh.

RADIO VOICE 5

Honestly, Bob, I think you're a piece of shit. Thanks to you, I turned from sacred object to memento of the absent man. Samantha and the kids didn't *take it out on me* – thank Jesus Christ, our Lord and savior, keeper of the gates to the heavens above – but they sure as hell didn't like my *being around*, you know?

BOB

Sorry about / that.

RADIO VOICE 5

I was so excited to be a *Christmas tree* – I mean, what a freakin' honor! And then your...your selfishness, Bob...it caused so much pain! They were so heartbroken...they threw me on the *sidewalk* as if I were a piece of junk! It sucked, getting thrown out like that. By my own family.

BOB

Well that was gonna happen regardless.

RADIO VOICE 5

Okay, yes, *maybe*...but at least it could have come a little later on, ya know? And it probably would have felt a little more...I don't know, consensual? Or something, I don't know, maybe...maybe you're right, Bob. It would have happened anyway.

RADIO VOICE 5 is holding back tears.

BOB

No, no, no, no, no, little tree, you're right, I messed up.

RADIO VOICE 5

The street is a *brutal place*, Bob! It's tooth-and-nail out there!

BOB

Well, how about this? Would you like to come home with me?

RADIO VOICE 5

What are you...? You mean *for the night* or something?

BOB

No, I – you're a tree, for god's sake. I mean...would you like a place to stay for a while?

RADIO VOICE 5

Oh, uh, I mean I'm pretty comfortable here.

BOB

They can't keep you on display forever. You're going to become firewood eventually.

RADIO VOICE 5

Maybe. But I'm alright with that. *(Beat)* I mean, I'm already a dead tree.

BOB

Yeah, I / guess that's a good point...

RADIO VOICE 5

And I've been hearing a lot of talk about how cremation is pretty *hot* right now. Sounds like it's getting popular, since burial presents the very *real* possibility of waking up six-feet-under with your body intact and no room to move. And in a landfill, I mean, ugh, that's *gross*, Bob...

BOB

I don't think they send you to a –

RADIO VOICE 5

...At least in a casket you've got a little bit of room to wiggle, some Oak or Cherry to rub your palm on for pleasure. But there's nothing redeeming about a landfill. I'd much rather have my ashes scattered than wake up in a pile of *trash*, you know? I mean, I'm a tree. Getting chopped up and then placed into a fire, sent shooting up a chimney and floating into the heavens...hell, that doesn't sound so bad to me.

BOB

I *guess* not.

RADIO VOICE 5

Excellence really helped me find peace, Bob. He gave us a proper service and everything. And his sister...God, you are lucky to have someone like that working for you. *(Beat)* They really do need a fucking fire extinguisher, though. I mean, they're chain-smoking with a bunch of dry conifers in the house! We catch *quick*, Bob. I keep trying to send the message by tuning the radio to these soap operas and stand-up routines I wrote. I want to make things clear without, you know, being too *preachy*, but they always just turn it off. They don't even listen to the news when we turn *that* on! The *real news*, made by *real people*! I mean, that's important stuff! Everybody needs to keep up with the times! *(Beat)* I guess they think something's wrong with the radio, and not that someone's in charge.

BOB

In charge?

RADIO VOICE 5

Yeah. Us trees are in charge, Bob. We may not always see eye-to-eye with *each other*, but we've

always been in charge of *you*.

BOB looks back to the tree, which has an intensifying spotlight shining on it. The tree is laughing.

SCENE 6

EXCELLENCE moves with the fixture used to indicate a scene change – if it's a curtain, he descends with it. He's dressed once again in preacher's garb, looking around with arms outstretched and a Bible in his hand.

EXCELLENCE

I hereby declare
any ground on which I walk,
any sand on which I slip,
any carpet I drool on,
a sanctuary for each aimless or felled tree.
Wherever I go, please know
that all trees seeking direction
will have a home. Bring your weak and weary trees TO ME,
and let's pay respects to their years of quiet growth
by making use – *good* use – of them. Trees! Listen!
No matter your deep-rooted fears or desires,
no matter your faith, I will embrace you –
I happen to be working with Christian trees at the moment,
which is why I carry this Bible and sometimes talk about Jesus.
And I don't know if this amounts to anything.
But at least I'm trying to do *something*.
At least I'm giving it an honest shot.

THE RESISTANCE enters. Her outfit falls somewhere between conventional punk attire and guerrilla uniform. She is charismatic, sexy, ready to take the world by storm, wielding a machine gun, smoking a cigarette, and utterly disinterested in her surroundings.

THE RESISTANCE

Hey.

EXCELLENCE

Oh, hi. What's up?

THE RESISTANCE does not respond, just exhales one long, languorous puff of smoke.

EXCELLENCE (*cont'd*)

Are you, like, the leader of the Leukocytes or something?

THE RESISTANCE

You could say that.

EXCELLENCE

Cool. Hey, this sounds weird but...you've been a pretty great help to me. You know, since prices for everything have gone up? I, uh, salvage trees and sell them for firewood. So yeah. Also I think what you're doing is actually pretty cool. *(Beat)* So what are you doing here?

THE RESISTANCE

Recruiting.

EXCELLENCE

You mean for the Leukocytes?

THE RESISTANCE

Uh-huh.

EXCELLENCE

Cool. What's your name?

THE RESISTANCE

The Resistance.

EXCELLENCE

(Sort of enamored with her) Whoa. That's, like, punk as fuck.

THE RESISTANCE

(Blowing a puff) Uh-huh.

EXCELLENCE

When does the recruiting start?

THE RESISTANCE

It already did.

EXCELLENCE

Aren't you gonna say something?

THE RESISTANCE

No. We're not the fucking Marines. This isn't an advertisement. I'm here to open the door.

EXCELLENCE

But I don't even know *what you're / asking* me to do.

THE RESISTANCE

Whatever you do for us is gonna mean something, whether it's slinging uzis or tossing burgers. Pachamama is short of breath, and *we're* bringing her to her feet. We've shut down *all* the

highways.

EXCELLENCE

Wow.

THE RESISTANCE

If I thought you were worth my time, I could tell you that our consumption culture's teetering on a cliff, and we're about to nudge him off. I could talk about our mission to dismantle *all* systems of oppression: the military-industrial complex, private prisons, *business class*.

EXCELLENCE

Cool. (*Trying to sound smart*) Yeah, I agree that our society is pretty wasteful and could use a serious reset. That's one of the reasons I saved all those trees.

THE RESISTANCE

Oh yeah? What's the other reason?

EXCELLENCE

I...uh...dunno. Money, I guess?

THE RESISTANCE

Cool. (*She looks at him*) Maybe there's another reason you don't know about yet.

EXCELLENCE

Yeah, maybe. (*Beat*) Hey, I'm gonna have a lot of time on my hands pretty soon. Almost all the wood's gone and then there won't be any trees till next Christmas.

THE RESISTANCE

There's not gonna be a next Christmas, Ex. Christmas is no more.

EXCELLENCE

What?

THE RESISTANCE

It's the holiday dedicated to consumerism, the main target in the proto-punk power struggle. The abolition of Christmas is the first stage in the Earthly immune response, and pretty soon, we'll have *bombs that crawl on arms*. Those feisty things with a penchant for killing. True punk.

EXCELLENCE

(*Lying*) Right on. Yeah, Christmas sucks. It's, like, an institution at this point. (*Micro-beat*) Hey, what are you smoking by the way?

THE RESISTANCE

(*Blows a puff*) Polyethylene glycol.

EXCELLENCE

That's really cool. *(Beat)* Hey, can I ask you a question?

THE RESISTANCE

Shoot.

EXCELLENCE

I mean, maybe this is rude, but how is any of it possible? How could we ever take down America?

THE RESISTANCE

Through you, Excellence. Through you.

The radio starts playing some music, and the curtain rises up with EXCELLENCE, beginning...

SCENE 7

A week after Scene 5. PATIENCE and MIKE, both in pajamas, are sitting at the table, playing Casino, each with a steaming cup of tea. Only a few bundles of wood and the three intact, upright trees with their paper labels remain. Some of MIKE's personal belongings sit in a neat pile next to the couch: dumbbells, some folded clothes, maybe a laptop. The fireplace is off. One small tent, next to the couch, has been pitched in the middle of the floor. There is a fire extinguisher directly next to it. PATIENCE and MIKE silently finish a hand. MIKE starts shuffling cards.

MIKE

(Shuffling and dealing cards) So my mom is driving me to a hockey game – a *big* one, AA Junior State Championships – and get this, she *forgets* the air freshener. I told you about the freshener, right?

PATIENCE

Uh-huh. Building sixes.

MIKE

No, Patience, you're *making* sixes.

PATIENCE

Oh, yeah –

MIKE

Just remember the brick / trick.

PATIENCE

I mean, what does it matter anyway – you see that I'm building sixes, don't you?

MIKE

Making sixes, Pat. You've got to call it by its name. All you need to do is remember the *brick trick!* *(Beat)* If you have two bricks of the same size and shape – you're getting somewhere, you're *building* something. Two bricks that are different sizes, on the other hand, are totally impractical together, unless you're *making art*. See? *Building* and *making*. The *brick trick*. Makes perfect sense.

PATIENCE

Okay, well, *making* sixes.

MIKE

Making nines.

PATIENCE

Taking nines.

MIKE

Ah, screw you! *(Beat)* Anyway, you know how I *needed* that freshener for that pre-game nap while we whistled through the sunny streets. And that smell *(Takes a long breath in)* – that smell! – was essential. Man, how is that smell *still here?* *(Beat)* You happy that the trees are gone, Patience?

PATIENCE

Very happy.

MIKE

Yeah, it kinda stinks that we're running out of wood right before that cold front comes through. But hey! No more *customers* coming by the house in the middle of the night asking for *wood*, no more branches to step over when you're trying to grab *a glass of milk*. Instead, it's finally quiet: just me, your little bro, and *(glancing towards the tent)* your boss hanging in your living room. And don't you like having your own personal chef in the apartment? Making sevens. *(Beat)* How about that lasagna I made last night, huh?

EXCELLENCE enters from his room, sits on the couch and starts counting money.

PATIENCE

Delicious.

MIKE

You're telling *me!* Meals like that won't be coming around so often, the way things are looking. Might as well enjoy 'em while we can! / Anyway...

PATIENCE

Look, Mike...

MIKE

What?

PATIENCE

Nothing, go on.

MIKE

Yeah, so anyway, that *smell* put me to sleep every time, probably because it brought me right back to the forests where my ancestors slept. I'm, uh, Icelandic. Fourth generation. Lots of pine trees over there. It's *in my blood*. *(Touching his heart)* That's part of the reason I keep falling asleep here.

EXCELLENCE

You also don't have heat at your place.

MIKE

Yeah, well...that's *another* reason I sleep here, definitely, but it's mostly because of the smell. Science can back me up on that. *Anyway*, my mom forgets the air freshener, and so I say, "Mom!" – god, I needed that freshener – I say, "Mom! Where's the freshener?" And – are you making or building?

PATIENCE

Building.

MIKE

Of course you are. *Anyway*, she knows she's got to turn right around to put me into that thirty-minute lapse, and as she's on her way back, I just, I don't know *how* this *happened*, but yeah, I fall asleep *without* the freshener. And I went straight into a dream. Do you want to hear about it?

EXCELLENCE finishes counting and starts putting his money in an envelope.

MIKE (*cont'd*)

(*To EXCELLENCE*) You all done counting over there?

EXCELLENCE

Yup.

MIKE

Well, what's our profit?

EXCELLENCE

A little over 800.

MIKE

Nice! And what's my take? (*Beat*) Excellence? Buddy?

PATIENCE

Mike. It's your turn.

EXCELLENCE lies down on the couch and smokes a cigarette.

MIKE

Oh, sorry. Making sevens. It's cool, Ex. You should keep it! (*To PATIENCE.*) *Anyway*, in the dream, I'm in a park. It's light out, and I'm minding my own business, looking around the park like people do – it's Spring, lots of colors – and yeah, suddenly this road appears, and there's this *perfect* family riding down the road in a / convertible.

PATIENCE

Could you deal, Mike?

MIKE

Oh, yeah, sorry. Anyway, this family's driving down the road – there's a son, a daughter, a mom and a father – and they're all *so happy*. I mean, they're laughing their heads off! The flowers are in full bloom, the breeze is rustling their hair, and I'm *so glad they're alive*, / you know?

PATIENCE

Can you deal?

MIKE

Oh, yeah. Dealing! (*He deals*) So I look down the road, and I see, like a couple hundred yards down, that the road runs straight into this *giant brick wall*. I look back at the convertible, and I realize they have no idea that if they follow the road, they'll drive straight into the wall. So I start screaming. To warn them.

PATIENCE

It's your turn, Mike.

MIKE

Sorry. (*He plays a card*) Anyway, I'm yelling, "HEY! WATCH OUT FOR THAT WALL!" 'cause I'm afraid, you know? Like, I know this is hard to believe, since I am *Mike the Menace(!)*, but I am / *deathly* afraid.

PATIENCE

Mike –

MIKE

Oh, my turn. Sorry. But yeah, they're going straight towards it, and they don't hear me, because they're still laughing and listening to music, and then all of a sudden, they *HIT THE WALL*.

PATIENCE

Building twos.

MIKE

Oh, shit, the little casino. Anyway, this plume of smoke hovers over the accident for a while, and I can't see what's going on, and – hey, you know what?

PATIENCE

What.

MIKE

(*Mischievous look, slams a card on the table*) That's *RIGHT!* Taking the little casino! Sorry to

rain on your parade. (*Beat*) But anyway, after a few seconds, the smoke dissipates, and the scene of the crime comes into focus. It's not what you'd expect of a car-wreck, though – because the car *is fine*. And nobody's hurt. But the family is *different*.

The radio turns on.

VOICE OF THE RESISTANCE

Good evening, listeners. We come to you this evening with something *other* than your regularly scheduled programming. For the purposes of this message, my name is The Resist–

MIKE walks over to the radio and turns it off. EXCELLENCE has bolted upright on the couch.

MIKE

What I see in their place are heaving /
bodies trying to get back on two legs.
They're still *human*, but all of a sudden, /
they're, like, *ugly*. I don't know how else to
put it. The whole thing's nasty: their / skin is
excreting this ooze that sticks and shimmers.
And they start reaching / out to me.

EXCELLENCE

Hey, Mike.

Mike.

Mike, can you turn that back on?

MIKE!

MIKE

What, buddy, *what*?

EXCELLENCE

Turn the radio back on.

MIKE

What, to listen to some –

The radio turns back on of its own volition.

VOICE OF THE RESISTANCE

...They will have you think we've shut down the highways to subvert the world you know and *change* the way you live. And they're right. Today, the Leukocytes declare our mission – to restore the self-dependence of each community in order to preempt societal collapse. Today, we turn back the clock to a time when we were *of* this earth, not simply *upon* it. We have tightened the arteries of this nation, we have stiffened its blood flow...

MIKE

Hey, Patience, it's your turn.

VOICE OF THE RESISTANCE (*cont'd*)

...to give *us all* a final chance at self-realization before fate comes knocking at the door. Citizens

of the United States...

MIKE

Patience. Come on.

VOICE OF THE RESISTANCE (*cont'd*)

...the blood pressure is rising. The sea levels are climbing. The walls around us are closing in. Our rightful *return* to this Earth is *long overdue!* And the cold, hard truth is this – to be well again, we must first get sicker. We must face our own mortality, shamelessly...

MIKE

Hey –

PATIENCE

Hold on, Mike, I'm listening to this.

VOICE OF THE RESISTANCE (*cont'd*)

...and force ourselves to adapt. We call ourselves the Leukocytes because we *fight* to end the metastasis of industry. We circulate to eradicate the consumption infection, wherever it exists. And as the interstates buckle under our weight, we ask that you reach *not* outwards or upwards to seek aid, because no one is there. Do not pray, do not scream, do not *shop*, for time is of the essence. Instead, you must reach *inward* to uncover the wealth of possibility that lies *within* your brilliant body. Together, we *dig*, we *plant*, and *cultivate* this Earth before she's sucked completely dry of her – and our – lifeblood. (*Beat*) But we cannot do this alone. Compatriots, tonight we ask you to stand with us. We ask you to go to the streets *tomorrow morning* and *take action*. This is the Earth's *immune response*, and we must all take part in it...

MIKE

(*Laughing*) Man, she is *talking in tongues* or *something*. I do not understand / a word!

PATIENCE

Sssshhhhhhhh!

VOICE OF THE RESISTANCE (*cont'd*)

...At 7AM tomorrow – go into the streets and reclaim the land. Blockade the roads. Fight the disease of unbridled consumption. Use *what you have* – your car, your body – to *stop the flow of excess* and spread our mission. Tell the delivery driver to take the long route, and the office worker to go home. But let the milk man pass, and help the farmer roam free. All networks must die. All networks must die. All networks *MUST DIE*. All, that is, but one. Tomorrow, we shed the *commerce membrane* and give way to the *age of solidarity*. We dig deep. We stand tall and lock arms. A new order takes reign. At 7AM tomorrow, we ask you to stop traffic, stop trade, stop complacency. Become immunity. Long live Pachamama.

The radio turns to static. MIKE gets up and turns it off.

MIKE

So anyway, I was saying. I woke up, and, get this...my *mom* and *I* had gotten into a *car accident* as I was having that dream. A fender bender, mind you, but –

PATIENCE

Mike, can we, uh, *sit* for a second?

MIKE

Sure. I mean, we're sitting right now.

PATIENCE

In silence.

MIKE

Okay, sure. Do you want me to, like, *signal* when I'm building?

PATIENCE

I'm done with the cards.

MIKE

Oh. (*Beat*) Okay, yeah, yeah, sure.

PATIENCE goes to sit next to EXCELLENCE on the couch. He hands her a cigarette. This time, she takes it.

MIKE (*cont'd*)

That was *crazy*.

EXCELLENCE

Uh-huh.

MIKE

I mean, do milk men even exist in today's day and age? And is *anybody* getting delivery? Even Golden Pond stopped delivering days ago. Sounds like *she's* the one who needs to get up with the times. I mean is she crazy or what? (*Looking at the tent*) Hey, Bob, were you listening to that? Bob? What's your two cents?

Another beat. PATIENCE's phone rings. She picks it up.

PATIENCE

Hello? (*Beat*) Yes, this is she. (*Beat*) Hi, Sherry. (*Beat*) Yes, now is a fine time. (*Beat*) Okay. (*Beat*) Mhm. (*Beat*) Okay. (*Beat*) Yes. (*Beat*) Alright. (*Beat*) Makes perfect sense. (*Beat*) No, I understand. There's no blame here. (*Beat*) Okay. Well, thanks for calling. Hopefully I'll, uh, hear from you soon with better news. (*Hangs up.*) That was the power company.

EXCELLENCE

Yeah?

PATIENCE

Yeah. They said they have to cut the power.

EXCELLENCE

What? I just...I, like, *just* / paid them.

PATIENCE

They're *out of power*, Ex. They won't have any for "the foreseeable future."

MIKE

What the...?

PATIENCE

Yeah.

EXCELLENCE

When?

PATIENCE

Like, now. It was a courtesy call.

MIKE

(Trying to stay cheerful) Anybody got a space heater? Those few bundles of Norway Spruce aren't gonna last very long! *(Beat)* Oh, but I guess space heaters need –

The power goes out. The window is the only source of light.

MIKE *(cont'd)*

– power. *(Beat)* That cold front's supposed to last a week. Gonna hit the low teens.

PATIENCE looks at EXCELLENCE, then towards the three upright trees.

PATIENCE

Ex, I think we're gonna have to cut those up.

EXCELLENCE

I'm not sure that's possible.

PATIENCE

You're not...?

I mean it this time.

MIKE

It might get loud, Patience. Lop and Chop tend to get a little rowdy!

PATIENCE

Don't chop. Use the saw. Please. (Beat) Good night.

PATIENCE exits to her bedroom.

MIKE

(Cheerful) Sleep tight! (To EXCELLENCE) God, she is something! (Beat) You doing alright over there, Ex? You look like you're in a trance or something. (Beat, he starts preparing to lop his tree) Well, I'm gonna get started on this one, you can take as much time as you need to decompress or –

EXCELLENCE

Mike. Come...here.

MIKE

Oh, I'm not gonna lop on the couch! Patience would kill me!

EXCELLENCE

Hold off on the trees. Sit with me.

MIKE

What's up, buddy?

MIKE sits next to EXCELLENCE.

EXCELLENCE

Listen. That voice coming from the radio –

MIKE

What, those stupid protesters?

EXCELLENCE

No, the one before. The one making the speech. That lady who called herself The Resistance.

MIKE

I didn't hear her say that.

EXCELLENCE

She did. *(Beat)* She called herself that.

MIKE

That's a *weird name* –

EXCELLENCE

Get this. She was in my dream.

MIKE

Whoa, Excellence, buddy! For real?

EXCELLENCE

Yeah.

MIKE

That's crazy! Or, like, meaningful! What...I mean, was she the same person in the dream?

EXCELLENCE

Exactly the same. Same voice, same message, same *name*.

MIKE

Buddy, that's insane...or *meaningful*. I mean, this has *got* to be more than coincidence.

EXCELLENCE

Yeah, she mentioned *Pachamama* in my dream and on the radio.

MIKE

Huh?

EXCELLENCE

I'm pretty sure it's the Mayan god for Mother Earth.

MIKE

Dude! This sounds like a friggin' prophecy or something. *(Beat)* Okay. Tell me. Was she *exactly* the same in the dream and on the radio?

EXCELLENCE

Yup.

MIKE

There was no difference whatsoever?

EXCELLENCE

I mean...there were a couple *minor* differences.

MIKE

Like *what*?

EXCELLENCE

I don't know, dude, I –

MIKE

Seriously, think about this. Before it slips your mind. Those “minor differences” are the *meat and potatoes* of any prophecy. Because *that's* the stuff that nobody else knows about. It's what you, and no one else, can see. Everything else is just...noise.

EXCELLENCE

How do you know that?

MIKE

I don't know, it's, like, common sense.

EXCELLENCE

Okay. (*Beat*) I mean, she talked a lot about being a punk in the dream.

MIKE

Cool. We're onto something. Like a crust punk? Or, like, someone who plays guitar and wears a jean jacket?

EXCELLENCE

The second.

MIKE

How'd she look?

EXCELLENCE

(*Censoring himself*) I dunno. Mysterious.

MIKE

Interesting. A mysterious musician. Sounds like your type, doesn't it? She was probably smoking a cigarette, wasn't she? (*Beat*) Alright, that's one piece of the puzzle. What else?

EXCELLENCE

Uh, she also talked a lot about Christmas.

MIKE

Whoa. What did she say?

EXCELLENCE

That it had to be destroyed.

MIKE

No shit! For real?

EXCELLENCE

Yeah.

MIKE

So the *punks* are out to destroy *Christmas*. That's what this whole thing is actually about.

EXCELLENCE

I don't think that's the / point.

MIKE

Maybe they just want to abolish / Christmas music?

EXCELLENCE

That's not what / I'm saying.

MIKE

Or maybe they're punks in the first place because their parents never got them the right presents?

EXCELLENCE

That's *not* what I'm *saying*, Mike!

MIKE

No, Ex, it's what the *prophecy* is saying. It's what God is trying to tell us.

EXCELLENCE

(*Reproachful*) Dude.

MIKE

What?

EXCELLENCE

She was talking to *me*.

MIKE

Yeah, and I'm trying to help you / interpret –

EXCELLENCE

I think I'm supposed to help them.

MIKE

You...(laughing)...No you're not! That's crazy!

EXCELLENCE

Why else would she have talked to me?

MIKE

I don't know, dude, maybe God was trying to help us find her. Anyway, how would you help them in the first place? With your *car*?

EXCELLENCE

Maybe.

MIKE

But you're out of gas.

EXCELLENCE

True.

MIKE

So, I mean, what else is there? The couch? Your bed? The...trees?

EXCELLENCE

The trees.

MIKE

(Laughing) But...we promised your sister.

EXCELLENCE

Yeah, and *I* had a friggin' *prophecy*.

MIKE

Well, sure, but she's been, like, really good to us.

EXCELLENCE

It's got to be the trees, Mike. *(Beat)* She told me.

MIKE

She...what?

The radio turns on.

TWO RADIO VOICES

TO THE STREETS! TO THE STREETS! TO
THE STREETS! TO THE STREETS! TO
THE-

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

Guys, can't we talk about this? I mean, what if
they really do hate Christmas?

*EXCELLENCE, absorbed in fantasy, pays no heed to the radio.
MIKE turns the radio off.*

MIKE

(Looking at the radio) Something is not right.

EXCELLENCE

Listen, help me drag the trees. We'll become part of the resistance. We'll blockade. *(Beat)* I'm not giving up the chance to be part of a historic movement so that I can selfishly stay warm. We have plenty of quilts in the closet. They're changing the world, Mike, and Patience just wants to keep toasty. This is our chance to make history.

MIKE

Buddy, you really are one hell of an inspirational speaker! Let it *loose!* *(Beat)* Alright, you know what? I'm in, I guess. Let's go out there, and, uh, *make history.* *(Beat)* But maybe we could still chop up / one of the trees –

EXCELLENCE

Great. Look, I'm gonna go scope out the scene for a minute. *(As he's getting ready)* Hey, do you think Dorothea would help us out?

MIKE

What?

EXCELLENCE

I think Price and Washington might be the spot. Do you think she'd be up for it?

MIKE

I, uh, *no.* I *really don't.*

EXCELLENCE

Not even if she heard about the prophecy?

MIKE

I don't think she believes in that stuff.

EXCELLENCE

Shit. That would have been amazing. To have someone on the *inside.* *(Putting on a coat)* Maybe you can test the waters, though. You guys are still hanging out, right?

MIKE

Yeah, things are a little murky right now. She hasn't been around much. *(Beat)* She was maybe gonna come over today.

EXCELLENCE

Like when?

MIKE

I'm not sure. She just said this afternoon.

EXCELLENCE

Okay. Do you think you can ask?

MIKE

She's pretty serious about that law enforcement stuff. Maybe there's a better intersection?

EXCELLENCE

Like what?

MIKE

I don't know, uh...Grand and Kinderkamack?

EXCELLENCE

Those streets run parallel.

MIKE

Yeah, but, they're still pretty / *major*...

EXCELLENCE

And they're miles from here. Price and Washington is around the corner, and it's *hot*. Anyway, I'm glad you're on board.

MIKE

Uh, sure, buddy. Yeah.

EXCELLENCE

I'll be back in a few. *(Beat)* Mike. We're gonna change the world tomorrow.

MIKE

Great, buddy. Glad to –

EXCELLENCE exits. MIKE sits at the table and stares at the cards.

MIKE *(cont'd)*

Building, making, building, making,
Feeling, taking, lifting, dragging,
Dropping, chopping, stacking, waiting,
Holding, burning, sitting, churning–

BOB

(From inside the tent) Mike? You alright over there?

MIKE

Huh?

BOB unzips the tent and comes out. He's got bags under his eyes, a flask in his hand, and he's wearing raggedy business attire. He's drunk. He picks up the fire extinguisher as soon as he gets out of the tent, and he holds onto it until noted otherwise.

BOB

Sounds like you're losing it over there!

MIKE

Yeah, I'm just...*(Looking at the cards)* Figuring out my next move is all.

BOB

Of course you are. Playing no one but yourself, and you still have to figure out your next move! You always were a little out there, Mike. Always a little weird. Not that I hold that against you or anything. Because you're...you. And I'm...me. (He sits across from MIKE at the table, cradling the extinguisher) Yup, I'm Bob. And we're...trying to get along, right? Right? *(Holding out his flask)* You want a swig?

MIKE

Sure. *(He takes the flask)*

BOB

Nothing like killing tiny parts of our souls *together*, am I right?

MIKE

Yeah, I don't really know what you mean, but –

BOB

I could kill parts of myself all day, but I always prefer doing it with friends. That's all I'm saying. You're...my friend. *(Takes back the flask)* To death! And *friendship!* *(Takes a swig.)* Hey, you still want my two cents?

MIKE

Always. There aren't many guys as smart as you! You're sharp as a tap! I mean...*sharp* as a *tack*. Haha. But between you and me, Bob, this whole thing is *a little nuts-o*, right? Did you hear that stuff Excellence was saying? I mean, is dragging the trees to the street *actually* –

BOB

You want to know what I think?

MIKE

Yeah! Totally!

BOB

I think this whole thing is a conspiracy run by a trash company that Patience and I have been auditing since November.

MIKE

Okay, now *that's* even / nuttier –

BOB

Wait, Mike! Wait! Let me finish! IV Waste. It's one of the largest trash-collecting conglomerates *in the nation!* They pick up trash in Montana, San Diego, in Maine, hell...they pick up trash in some Native American territories! They're everywhere, and there's nothing suspicious about them. They're just...a trash company.

MIKE

Bob, I really don't think –

BOB

And what, you wonder, would be a trash company's *motive* for shutting down the highways? Right?

MIKE

No, I really / don't.

BOB

Listen to this. They renewed six of their largest metropolitan contracts right before the start of the new year, around Christmas-time. Those are *ten* or *fifteen* year contracts, Mike. Guaranteed income – so long as the streets aren't overflowing with junk. But what if there is no trash, because nobody has anything to throw away? Right? And what if they've got gas rations as a convenient excuse to cut routes? (*Beat*) They're laying off thousands of workers because they can't pick up the trash, but these contracts they signed are legally / binding.

MIKE

Bob, do you...uh...want to –

BOB

Do you think it's all some big coincidence? Hmm? Or do you see what it really is? A corporate conspiracy that's ruining our way of life so that a trash company can maximize their bottom line!

MIKE

I'm not a conspiracy theorist.

BOB

Whoa, Mike! Whoa! Neither am I. I don't believe any of that half-baked crap. But this...this is rooted in facts. I can show you the data, the contracts with the *clauses*. (*Beat*) And...and...you

know what's really crazy?

MIKE

What.

BOB

I think they're possessed. By trees.

MIKE

(Getting up from the table) Okay, I think I'm going to take a nap / or something.

BOB

Wait, Mike! Look! I'll play! I'll play your game! I just...wanted to throw that out there.

MIKE

Hey, Bob, I love you buddy. And I respect your beliefs.

BOB

They're not just beliefs.

MIKE

Okay, whatever they are. They're yours. And you should have them.

BOB

Can I add one more thing?

MIKE

What, Bob.

BOB

You talk about the power of the trees *all the time!* How about that pine scent?

MIKE

That's a *smell*.

BOB

But what if it's more than a smell?

MIKE

I don't think trees are brainwashing a garbage company into holding the whole nation hostage, if that's what you're getting at. *(Beat)* Are we gonna play or what?

BOB

It must be the drink! The devil's brew! I'm...I'm just a little...

MIKE

I get it. Things are not easy right now.

BOB

(About to break down) Mike, it's...I don't know...I've made so many mistakes...

MIKE

It's okay.

BOB

I'm so sorry about your sister.

MIKE

That's none of my business.

BOB

But it's kind of your job to resent me, isn't it? *(Beat)* Isn't it?

MIKE

It's okay.

BOB

Hey, is *she* okay?

MIKE

I don't know. We don't talk that much. And I mean, we *can't* talk now since you're here, and she's on the other side of town.

BOB

I guess not. *(A beat. Using the fire extinguisher to make a joke)* So I guess that means I don't have to *put out any fires between us*, am I right? *(BOB laughs)* Because *that* would be one *hell* of a flame. I mean, Mike, you're a *big* guy! *(Getting up, going to his tree, inhaling deep)* I guess you never were that close with the family. *(Beat)* Mmmmmmm... that smell, though! It's like you always say – one whiff of pine can put a full-grown man straight to sleep.

MIKE

It really can.

BOB

(Walking towards his tree) God, this one...this one right here! It's *my* tree. Isn't she beautiful? Come here, little tree. Come to papa.

BOB starts dragging his tree, like everyone else has done, to the downstage lip. The lights change as usual and the curtain starts to come down, but it's interrupted by a voice.

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

Not interested.

BOB

Huh?

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

I'm not going to be part of your dream, *Bob*.

BOB

You can't say that.

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

Oh yeah? After you start spilling the beans about us?

BOB

So it's *true!* It's IV –

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

You crack me up, Bob...a trash company! On a political mission!

BOB

So, it's *not* –?

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

Listen, get me out of here. I don't appreciate being dragged into your brain space.

BOB

I have the right to do whatever I want with you. You're a *dead tree*, for Christ's sake. You're *my* dead tree!

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

You're right about one thing – I *am* for Christ's sake. Every single choice I make is for *his sake*. Including this one!

VOICE OF THE TREE slaps BOB in the face.

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE (*cont'd*)

Asshole. You don't deserve a home.

BOB

Aaaaaahhhhhhhh!

BOB slaps the tree.

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

(Laughing) Did you just slap a *dead tree*?

BOB

What do you want from me? I got *your extinguisher*, I treat you with nothing but / respect –

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

But you talked about us.

BOB

You never told me *not* to –

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

Sure, but...everyone knows you're a smart guy, Bob. You must know there's a reason we talked to no one but you.

BOB

No one but me? You mean...*I'm* the prophet?

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

Ugh...*NO!* You're just Bob. That's it. That's why I talk to you. Because...you're Bob.

BOB

So you mean I'm a pretty friendly guy and that's why –

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

No. You're very *literal*. You pay no attention to your dreams. So the only way I can ever reach you is by talking *at* you.

BOB

I *pay attention*, I just don't *remember* / sometimes.

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

All the time. *All the fucking time*. You didn't remember a single dream I composed, did you? I tried to tell you to *stay!* *(Beat)* Everyone listens, but you...I couldn't even *find* your pineal gland! You're a sorry excuse for a human being, you know that? Put me *back*.

BOB

Can't we give it another try or something?

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

No, we can't. The spell is lost. Suspension of disbelief is *no more*.

BOB

Please?

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

Maybe, I don't know, after you've opened up, or *taken ayahuasca*, Bob, just *please* put me –

BOB, dejected, drags the tree back in and spitefully plops it on the floor.

BOB

(Returning to the table as if nothing happened) So whose turn is it?

MIKE

(Looking at the tree) What'd you do that for?

BOB

Oh, I, uh...

MIKE gets up from the table, puts the tree back in its proper place.

MIKE

I don't want to make this place any messier. We're testing Patience as it is. And anyway, it's disrespectful to the tree. *(Speaks to Bob's Tree)* Don't worry, little guy. I got ya.

BOB

(Holding the spigot of the extinguisher, playfully preparing to spray) Oh! What's that? Looks like there *could be* a fire *between us!* Tensions are rising, Mike! You're *ANGRY AT ME!*

MIKE

Alright. You're a real laugh riot. Put it down.

BOB

Oh. Okay. Well, good. Everything's alright, I guess. False alarm, everybody! False alarm! *(Beat. He starts to break down.)* God, what have I done?

MIKE

Hey. It's okay. It's okay, buddy. *(Beat. He doesn't know what to say)* Do you, uh, still want to play? We can pick up where Patience and I left off. It's my turn. Or we can start a new game if that's better.

BOB

(Trying to cry) You should go.

MIKE

I live here.

I mean *in the game!* It's *your turn!* BOB

Oh, right. Sure. (*Beat*) Building kings. MIKE

You can do that? BOB

Yup. MIKE

I...had no idea. (*Beat*) OH GOD WHY!?! BOB

There's a rap-tap-tap-tap...tap-tap at the door.

Hello? DOROTHEA (*offstage*)

Hey! (*To BOB*) One sec. MIKE

MIKE opens the door. DOROTHEA is holding a small suitcase.

Officer! HEY! MIKE (*cont'd*)

Hey, Mike. Can I...? DOROTHEA

Yeah, come on in. MIKE

DOROTHEA enters and embraces MIKE. She puts down the suitcase.

Did you, uh, hear what happened on the radio? DOROTHEA

Yup. I didn't exactly *get it*, / but – MIKE

(*Freaking out*) I, uh....Oh god... DOROTHEA

MIKE

(Consoling her) It's okay. Nothing's gonna happen.

DOROTHEA

What about my intersection, Mike? The buses are on a tight schedule. People have *lives*.

MIKE

It'll be alright.

BOB

Oh I wouldn't be so sure! *(To DOROTHEA)* You might have issues! There might be *protests* at your intersection! That was a rousing speech delivered by *Le Resistance!*

MIKE

Bob.

DOROTHEA

(Seeing BOB) Hi.

BOB

Hi, Officer. It's good to see you in a less compromised position. *(Beat)* Sorry, do you not want a *piece of my mind?*

MIKE

Bob, why don't / you...*(Gestures to tent)*

DOROTHEA

Are you / crying?

BOB

Because I can keep my mind up here if you want me to. Or if you're looking for some *entertainment*, I could pour it all over the room, in tears. Because *yes*, I'm *CRYING!*

MIKE

Hey, Bob, could we have some privacy?

BOB

Yeah, sure thing. I'll just crawl into my tent and I *won't hear a thing*. Right, Mike? You know I was in the tent that whole time, don't you? *(Beat)* That's right. I don't know *anything* about you or your friends or –

MIKE

Do I need to tell you again? Get in your tent.

BOB

I guess my depression is getting the best of me. This existential stuff...it's *NOT FUN!*

MIKE

That's alright. We're happy you're here!

BOB

Yeah right. *(Beat)* Asshole.

With fire extinguisher and flask in hand, BOB starts going back to his tent.

BOB *(cont'd)*

(Sung to the tune of "Camptown Races")

(To MIKE) But I know something you don't know, doo-dah, doo-dah,

(To DOROTHEA) And I know something you don't know, all the live-long day!

All the live-long day! All the live-long day!

I know things you both don't know, all the live-long day!

All the live-long day! All the live-long –

MIKE

BOB!

BOB retires to his tent. MIKE and DOROTHEA sit on the couch together. She kisses him.

DOROTHEA

Hey.

MIKE

Hey.

DOROTHEA

Sorry I've been hard to reach.

MIKE

That's okay. You've got a lot going on, Officer.

DOROTHEA

Hey, please...call me that when it's *appropriate*. Not now. *(Beat)* Listen, I, uh, could use your help. Parents are coming on foot to pick up their kids. The school buses are over capacity. They have me driving to the coast to pick up gas for the force. And now...

MIKE

Whoa.

DOROTHEA

And...and...I don't know, Mike, it's getting to me. I mean what if things get violent? *(Beat)* Did

you guys lose power over here?

MIKE

Uh-huh. A few minutes ago.

DOROTHEA

That stinks. Maybe I'll see if they've got an extra generator over at headquarters –

MIKE

No need. We've still got a few trees.

DOROTHEA

(Smiling) Oh yeah. There they are. *(Waving to trees)* Hi, guys! *(To MIKE)* You think that's enough? That can't last more / than a couple days, no?

MIKE

Everything's gonna blow over soon.

DOROTHEA

You don't know that.

MIKE

I...no, I don't, / but –

DOROTHEA

It's been *a month*, Mike. They just took control of the news. How could you think it's about to blow over? *(Beat)* Listen, I came here to talk to you about a couple things, but, uh...*(gestures to tent)*

MIKE

It's fine. It's Bob.

BOB

(In the tent) It's okay! I can't hear a word!

DOROTHEA

Can we have a moment?

MIKE

I can't kick him out. And, uh...Patience is in her room. And Ex doesn't like it when I go into his.

DOROTHEA

Is he here?

MIKE

No. But, uh, he'll be back soon. He's out for a walk. *(Has an idea)* But, hey! *(He finds a paper*

and pen) How about this? A little old-fashioned, but it should do the trick!

He hands her the notebook. DOROTHEA is not amused.

DOROTHEA

I guess you don't want to go for a walk.

MIKE

I'm supposed to be here. People keep showing up looking for wood.

DOROTHEA

So put up a sign!

MIKE

Ex thinks it's safer for me to hang around.

DOROTHEA

That's...silly. *(Beat)* But fine.

She starts writing on the notepad. She shows MIKE what she's written.

MIKE

What?

DOROTHEA

I'm serious.

MIKE

I, uh, no...I don't think so.

DOROTHEA

Are you sure?

MIKE

Yeah, I mean, he's my *best friend* and I've been here the whole –

BOB

Hey, could you guys keep it down? I'm trying to get some shut-eye in here.

MIKE

(Whispering) I see no reason to believe that's going on.

DOROTHEA

Okay, because...*(writes something down and shows it to MIKE)*

MIKE

Does that matter?

DOROTHEA

You always talk about yours.

MIKE

Yeah, because they speak to my internal life. Like, that dream about the wall...that said something about *me*, not about other people.

DOROTHEA

Well what does this dream say about me?

MIKE

I don't know! Maybe...you're afraid.

DOROTHEA

Maybe I am. But maybe the dream was saying something. Maybe my fear is justified. *(Beat)* I mean, who goes on a *walk* when it's 36 degrees and raining out.

MIKE

You do, apparently.

DOROTHEA

I...that was a *suggestion!* Jesus! *(Beat)* I'm not stupid, Mike. Excellence is a weird guy. He's quiet. And he's very...political. I think he might be a member. *(Beat)* Okay, maybe I should just talk to my sergeant about this or –

MIKE

NO DON'T DO THAT. *(Beat)* I, uh...I don't want the department knowing about the...uh, trees in here.

DOROTHEA

(Looks around) You don't want the police to know that there are three Christmas trees in someone's apartment? Is that, like, a big deal?

MIKE

Uh...no.

DOROTHEA

So then what are you worried about?

MIKE

Listen. *(He looks around, starts writing something down)*

The radio turns on. It's louder than ever. MIKE doesn't get up to turn it off until he finishes writing the note.

RADIO VOICE 3

“And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, / and he threw it into the river, / and the water became sweet.” / So you see, folks, the Bible tells us that it's possible to put a tree somewhere it wouldn't ordinarily go, / and to make a positive change in your community –

RADIO VOICE 4

That's right! A log! *(Beat)* The river! Sweet as sugar!

Yeah, do that! Put it somewhere!

Static. The channel is changing.

VOICE OF BOB'S TREE

(It sounds like the voice is struggling for control) “ – the ax is laid to the root of the trees, because every tree that does not bear fruit must be *cut down* and thrown into the fire.”

MIKE turns off the radio and picks it up. He storms to the door and opens it, then throws the radio. He shuts the door and sits back down.

MIKE

But that's it. Nothing's been going on until now. I don't think.

DOROTHEA stares at him, astonished.

MIKE *(cont'd)*

What? It's in the parking lot. Nobody's there.

BOB

You're doing the right thing, Mike! You're –

MIKE

Shut up! Goddamnit!

DOROTHEA

(Looking back at note) ...This is *serious!*

MIKE

It's three small trees in the street, Dor.

DOROTHEA

At *my* intersection. When all the buses get to school.

MIKE

So drag them to the sidewalk! Like this! *(He demonstrates dragging the tree)* Call backup if you need! Who cares?

DOROTHEA

(Deeply hurt) ...what?

MIKE

What else?

DOROTHEA

I'm sorry?

MIKE

You said you had a couple things you wanted to talk about.

DOROTHEA

(Looking at suitcase) Oh, I, uh...that doesn't matter now.

*The door opens. EXCELLENCE enters, holding the smashed radio.
MIKE does something to obscure the piece of paper.*

MIKE

Hey, buddy! How was your walk?

EXCELLENCE

Fine. *(Holding up the radio)* What's this?

MIKE

Oh, I, uh...

EXCELLENCE

Did you throw my grandmother's radio into the parking lot?

MIKE

Listen, I got carried away, I –

DOROTHEA

It wouldn't stop tuning to Christian programs! We were losing our minds!

EXCELLENCE

This is a sacred object, okay? It's the only thing our grandma left us when she died. *(Calling out)* Hey, Pat! *(Beat)* Pat! *(To MIKE and DOROTHEA)* What the hell, guys?

PATIENCE enters.

PATIENCE

What's up?

EXCELLENCE

(Holding up the radio) Mike just threw this into the parking lot.

PATIENCE

Yeah...so what?

EXCELLENCE

So *what?* Our guest throws a family heirloom into the street and that's all you have to say?

PATIENCE

He's *your* guest, and that thing was driving all of us crazy.

EXCELLENCE

But it's –

PATIENCE

I've got a spare in my closet. We can use that.

MIKE

(To PATIENCE) Hey, I don't know what to say –

PATIENCE

It doesn't matter, Mike. It's an old radio. *(To EXCELLENCE)* Is that it? My bed's getting colder by the second.

MIKE

Oh, Ex said there are extra blankets if you need some.

PATIENCE

(To EXCELLENCE) Is that right? Extra blankets?

EXCELLENCE

Can we talk?

PATIENCE

About what? About the “extra blankets?” About the trees? Looks like you're making a ton of progress over here. Thanks for that.

EXCELLENCE

Well, see, that's what I wanted to –

PATIENCE

Do whatever, okay? Be my guest. *(She starts leaving)* Oh, hey, there's something I've been meaning to tell you. The trees...when they get picked up.

EXCELLENCE

Yeah?

PATIENCE

They get recycled and turned into mulch. That's where the public parks get woodchips. All those trees were on the sidewalk because it was the designated pick-up day.

EXCELLENCE

I don't believe you.

PATIENCE

That's fine. I don't care what you believe at this point.

EXCELLENCE

Bullshit.

MIKE

Uh, Ex, that's why I put my tree out when I did. Because it was Christmas tree recycling day.

EXCELLENCE

And you didn't say anything?

MIKE

I thought, uh, you were mostly doing it for religious reasons, not environmental ones.

EXCELLENCE

I'm a fucking *atheist*, Mike.

MIKE

Well, sure, but I, uh...thought you converted.

EXCELLENCE

To what?

MIKE

Okay, so maybe I meant to say *spiritual* reasons, not –

The radio turns on. Muffled voices shout incoherently through static. EXCELLENCE cannot turn off the radio.

EXCELLENCE

This fucking piece of SHIT.

BOB starts making firetruck siren sounds from his tent. He is trying to unzip the tent so he can get out, but the zipper is stuck.

DOROTHEA

(Getting up) I, uh...think I'm gonna go. Mike, do you want to take a walk or something?

MIKE

(Trying to smile) Sounds great! *(To EXCELLENCE and PATIENCE)* You guys should have some sibling time so you can work all this stuff out. *(Beat)* I can be back tonight if you still need somebody to watch the door. I love being a guard dog. Or...*not!* Whatever you need! Hey, Pat, maybe I'll make that polenta for ya! Thank god we've / got a gas stove, right?

EXCELLENCE

Bob, shut up with the fucking sirens!!!

PATIENCE

The gas got cut off too.

MIKE

Oh, well, maybe I'll pick something up from the food pantry! Ex, I'll see you bright and early tomorrow at the *latest*. *(Leaving with DOROTHEA)* Anyway, I guess we'll catch ya –

BOB finally gets out of the tent. He has the fire extinguisher at the ready.

BOB

FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFRRRRRRRRRRREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!

BOB starts spraying the apartment with the fire extinguisher, covering the apartment in a dense haze. Everything slows down. As everyone ducks for cover, the lights begin to dim, and the curtain starts to fall. PATIENCE walks alone towards the dream space. She is followed by the actors playing MIKE, DOROTHEA, BOB and EXCELLENCE, who all turn into neutral corporeal vessels as they walk behind her. This begins...

SCENE 8

PATIENCE stands directly in front of the actors playing EXCELLENCE, MIKE, DOROTHEA and BOB, who stand shoulder-to-shoulder in a straight line. They stare into the unknown distance, and PATIENCE has no idea where she is. In this scene, "ALL" refers to everyone on stage other than PATIENCE.

ALL

Why do you do it?

PATIENCE

Why do I do what?

EXCELLENCE

Why do you wait.

DOROTHEA

Why do you tolerate.

MIKE

Why do you drag yourself into it.

ALL

Why is it always your hand that's open.

PATIENCE

I...uh...well, that's my name, I guess! Sorta seems like what I'm supposed to do, doesn't it? Just wait and let things unfold? Because I'm Patience. *(Beat)* Plus, ya know, I'm the big sister and all.

ALL

Hahahaha! Yes! The big sister!

EXCELLENCE

She has wisdom, and spiritual reserves the little brother can use to move...

ALL

...Forward.

EXCELLENCE

Into future times.

MIKE

Big sister has seen horrors of the same world little brother sees...

With abler eyes. BOB

And nimbler mind. DOROTHEA

So big sister must, always *must*... BOB

Expected to, never must... DOROTHEA

Hold trunk upright... EXCELLENCE

Keep interlocking roots untangled... MIKE

Soil, fertile. DOROTHEA

Water, running. EXCELLENCE

And secure our future by looking only toward the sun. BOB

Nowhere but the sun. ALL

(*Chiming in*) Wearing sunglasses, you mean – PATIENCE

Wearing nothing. BOB

Only purpose. DOROTHEA

Only Patience. MIKE

Only you. ALL

That's uh, sweet. I guess.

PATIENCE

We mean metaphor, silly goose!

MIKE

Haha.

PATIENCE

Metaphor takes one thing...

BOB

...and turns it into another.

ALL

Uh-huh.

PATIENCE

So smell the roses,
and taste the rainbow.

EXCELLENCE

Forget the motives,
And feel your self go...

DOROTHEA

ALL make bird-fluttering sounds and quiet dove croons.

A diamond is forever,
A clock can keep the time.

MIKE

The moment's never lost,
since you're still mine, mine...

BOB

Mine.

ALL

Is there some sort of lesson here, or can I – ?

PATIENCE

Can you hear us?

ALL

PATIENCE

Uh, yes. I just don't understand what you're trying to –

ALL

Can you hear us? *(Beat)* Do we make a sound?

Can you hear us? Hello? Do we make a sound?

Do we make a sound? Hello? Do we make a sound?

Do we? Do we? Do we? Do we?

PATIENCE remains facing forward as the other actors exit the stage. She remains facing downstage, and the curtains ascend, giving way to...

SCENE 9

The day after Scene 7, early afternoon. Patience's apartment, now almost completely clean: no more trees, only some mess, no more fog, no more tent. The lights are back on. A new radio, sitting in place of the old one, is on.

RADIO VOICE 1

...and just like that, it's all over. Yesterday, a terrorist took over our airwaves in a call to *stop the flow of goods*, but the heroes of this nation – our good men and women in uniform – have stopped her in her tracks. *(Beat)* I'm The News, with the news. *(Beat)* Yes, folks, we're receiving reports that the lady calling herself "The Resistance" – juvenile, sick, depraved – was killed in a raid at her headquarters, somewhere deep in the Rocky mountains. And as soon as that one domino fell, so did the rest of them. The scum of this Earth, whose name I won't even dare to utter – let's call them the *Lukes* – have formally surrendered, and will now be persecuted to the *full extent of the law*. Those public defense lawyers are gonna have a tough time standing up for these *perverts*, folks. I bet they're *all* child molesters who just wanted to say something, since they couldn't *rape kids* in public. *(Beat)* But let's look at the bright side: we can finally breathe again and indulge in the finer things! Yes, we *can* have our cake and eat it too, folks! And best of all, we've got two weeks before Lent rolls around! That's plenty of time to celebrate before the great repentance! So I'm taking calls from *you*, dear listeners, to hear how these 45 days of fear have affected your way of life. What have you had to sacrifice? Did you lose your *job* because you couldn't get to work this morning? Did someone in your family *die* because of these disgusting protests?

The door opens. EXCELLENCE enters, with DOROTHEA and MIKE following close behind. DOROTHEA is in uniform. EXCELLENCE has some fresh cuts and bruises on his face and arms.

RADIO VOICE 1 (cont'd)

It's going to take time for our law enforcement to start collecting all the details and figuring out *who* exactly is behind this mess, but we are finally free of these imbeciles, folks. Her lawless future is dead.

EXCELLENCE turns the radio off and goes to sit on the couch. He lights up a cigarette. MIKE starts gathering and packing up his stuff. DOROTHEA helps him. This can take a few long beats.

MIKE

How you feeling, buddy?

EXCELLENCE

Fine.

MIKE

Yeah? Has the, uh, Tylenol started kicking in?

EXCELLENCE

I'm fine, Mike.

MIKE

Good! That's good! Man, that stuff works wonders...have I told you about how many I used to take after hockey games? (*EXCELLENCE does not respond.*) Okay. I guess...usually the answer to that question is yes. So I won't, uh, bug you. (*Beat*) Listen, I think it's great that everything went down the way it did. Dorothea pulled some serious strings for you.

DOROTHEA

I tried to at least.

MIKE

Character testimony's no joke, Dor! Especially coming from a vital member of the force! (*She giggles*) Sounds like they're just going to dock you with a few traffic violations or something. Maybe littering, too, since the trees were left on the sidewalk. But nobody thinks you're one of them or something. (*Beat*) That's pretty good, right?

DOROTHEA

It's not, like, a sure thing.

MIKE

Yeah, but...hey, it's not like he was booked for a felony! For, you know, *conspiracy* to block an intersection or something!

EXCELLENCE

Because I didn't block an intersection.

MIKE

But you tried!

DOROTHEA

Yeah, at *my* intersection, no less.

EXCELLENCE

Hey, if you're going to stand there and lecture me, then forget about your things and leave. Now.

DOROTHEA

Sorry.

MIKE

Hey, it's been a rough day. Nobody's trying to preach to anyone...unless you've got a little

sermon in ya! Huh? How about it? What's the lesson here? Where's the moral? (Beat) You're just sorta...boiling over there, dude. You need to chill out. Uh, it'll just take a couple minutes to pack this stuff, and then Dor and I can get out of your hair. Oh, speaking of hair...I'll be back. Gotta get the toiletries.

DOROTHEA giggles at this. MIKE exits to the bathroom.

DOROTHEA

Oh! Hey! So *you know*, I didn't say anything about your business. So that shouldn't be a problem...for either of us. I guess there's a chance Bob could say something, since you guys kicked him out and everything. *(Beat)* Not that I blame you! The guy's a lunatic! "FFFFIIIRRRRREEEEE!" Pssssshhhhhhhh! *(She giggles.)* Hey, I'm sorry things didn't exactly work out. But I still think it's pretty cool that you tried to do what you thought was right.

EXCELLENCE

I didn't *think* it was right. It was right.

DOROTHEA

Well, exactly! That's great! That you feel so strongly! And you stuck up for your convictions! *(Beat)* Sorry...that's...I, uh, didn't mean to be rude. *(She pulls out her whistle and gestures)* Move along now, Dorothea! You're obstructing the man's way! Stop trying to cheer him up! It's not working! *(She giggles and looks at him. Still nothing.)*

MIKE reenters from the bathroom.

MIKE

(Handing EXCELLENCE a bottle of toothpaste) Hey, you guys can have my toothpaste.

EXCELLENCE doesn't take it, so MIKE just leaves it on the couch.

MIKE *(cont'd)*

I'll, uh, leave it here. Unless...you want me to put it in the bathroom? Ex? *(Beat)* Alright! *(He puts it close to EXCELLENCE)* Don't forget to brush, dude. Basic self-maintenance is the first thing to go when people feel depressed. At least, that's what my psychiatrist says. Not that you're depressed or anything. Who am I to say? *(Beat)* Anywaaaayyyyyy...I'm pretty much done here. *(Picking up his things)* I'll catch you soon, I guess? Maybe...I dunno, I can finally teach you how to play Casino? *(Beat)* Cool! Uh, Dor, could you grab...*(DOROTHEA picks up a bag)* Thanks. Anyway, I, uh, hope there aren't any hard feelings or anything. I owe you guys big-time for letting me crash here!*(Beat)* Oh, hey! Do you guys want rent or anything?

EXCELLENCE

Nah.

MIKE

Okay, cool. *(Beat)* I, uh...yeah. I'm sorry things feel...sour. It's been really nice.

DOROTHEA opens the door.

DOROTHEA

I'll wait outside. See ya, Excellence.

DOROTHEA exits. MIKE sits down next to EXCELLENCE on the couch.

MIKE

Hey, buddy. I'm sorry about the radio, and everything at the intersection. That was tough. *(Beat)* I just didn't want to see you get hurt, okay?

EXCELLENCE pulls out the wad of cash from the lumber sales.

EXCELLENCE

How much was bail.

MIKE

Oh, buddy, that's not –

EXCELLENCE

I didn't ask you to protect me.

MIKE

Oh, um. Listen, I broke your grandma's radio, and you guys were so / generous –

EXCELLENCE

You did not *help me*, Mike.

MIKE

Aw, buddy, I was / *worried* –

EXCELLENCE

Bail. How much.

MIKE

Uh, a thousand.

EXCELLENCE hands him the wad of bills.

MIKE

Oh, you don't have to give me *everything*, dude, that's –

EXCELLENCE

814 dollars. Take it.

MIKE

Okay, fine, but...can we at least call it even?

EXCELLENCE

Bye, Mike.

MIKE

Okay, uh...yeah. Thanks. I'll, uh, see you 'round, I guess. *(Beat)* I, uh, love you. *(He goes to the door and then remembers something)* Oh! *(He walks to the hallway and knocks on PATIENCE's door)* Pat? You in there? *(No answer. He starts leaving again)* Well, uh, can you let her know that I'm super grateful for everything? Maybe I'll bring a nice bottle of wine over now that I've got some cash. I wonder when the liquor store will open up again.

MIKE, now next to the door, looks at EXCELLENCE for awhile.

DOROTHEA *(offstage)*

Miiiiike!

MIKE

Coming! Okay, buddy, I'll see you. Call me sometime.

He exits. EXCELLENCE lights a cigarette. After several beats, PATIENCE enters from her room. She sits next to him and lights her own.

PATIENCE

You alright?

EXCELLENCE

Yeah.

PATIENCE

I, uh, imagine you feel like shit.

EXCELLENCE

Yup.

PATIENCE

When you left this morning, I came out of my room. *(Beat)* And I don't know, dude. It was weird. This was the moment I'd been looking forward to. I was so sure that I'd be able to go back to my life as soon as the trees and the people and the commotion cleared out. I figured I'd take a deep breath in, push it *all out*, and keep going. But instead, I stood there, in the middle of this emptiness, wondering *what to do*. I thought about going after you, and...I don't know,

stopping you, or helping you, or saying “HEY!” But I decided to wait. *(Beat)* I *decided* to wait. *(Beat)* Honestly, I think that lady on the radio was right about a lot of things. This place is sick, and industry is its disease. *(Beat)* But people still need to eat and sleep and shit and fuck, and right now...this is how we’re getting it done. *This* is the house we’ve built for ourselves. And no matter how smart or sexy the revolution may sound, we can’t just tear it down and hope for the best. We can’t suddenly conjure a clean slate. *(Beat)* As I was standing there, I realized those trees will always be here. I realized there’s no way I could return to my past life as if nothing happened. *(Beat)* So yeah, The Resistance is right – we’re living, breathing animals, and we’re actively fighting that part of ourselves so we can feel...immune. And that’s scary. *(Beat)* But *she’s* forgetting something, too – that living, breathing body that she claims to worship so much? – yeah, *it* absorbed the world in a certain way and gave way to this. This is where our needs, our desires, our impulses have brought us. We’re *here* because of our *nature*. Instead of forgetting that we’re animals, she’s forgetting we’re *human*. *(Beat)* But Ex, *you* gave us a chance to see our whole selves. And I’m proud of you. *(Beat)* We’re flawed, you know? We’re fluid. We’re animal and artifice at the same time. Denying those contradictions, taking sides...it’s stupid. *(Beat)* Because we’ve always had say over what we become. Don’t you think, Ex?

EXCELLENCE

I don’t know.

PATIENCE

I’m talking too much. *(Beat)* Hey, you know what’s funny though?

EXCELLENCE

What?

PATIENCE

Somebody pointed out to me what Leukemia is.

EXCELLENCE

Like...?

PATIENCE

Yeah, same root as Leukocyte. *(Beat)* Anyway, Leukemia happens when the body mistakenly thinks it’s diseased, so it starts producing a bunch of white blood cells. And the leukocytes, you know, their job is to *protect* the body that made them, so they start looking for the enemy, even though there’s nothing there. And that’s when leukemia happens – the white blood cells, with nothing else to attack, mistake their own *home* for the *disease*. And they –

The new radio suddenly turns on. At first, it’s pure static, but then it tunes to “Enough About Human Rights” by Moondog. EXCELLENCE and PATIENCE turn to look at it. Slowly, the lights go down.

END OF PLAY.

VITA

The playwright is originally from New Jersey. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Theatre, Science in Society and Environmental Studies at Wesleyan University in 2013. He joined the Creative Writing Workshop at the University of New Orleans to pursue his M.F.A. in playwriting in 2016.