

PORK

a play by Tom Baum

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Characters (in order of appearance):

CHESTER (CHET) YARBRO, 30s-40s, white, an incumbent congressman
MELANIE YARBRO, Chet's wife, 30s-40s, white
JOAQUIN GUPTA, Chet's media consultant, 20s, mixed ethnicity
LLOYD YARBRO, Chet's dad, CEO of Yarbros Packing, early 60s, white
ARLISS YARBRO, Chet's twin brother, 30s-40s, white, an escaped convict
LATASHA BEALES, Arliss's girlfriend, 20s-30s, African-American

Four characters, a DEBATE MODERATOR, a FEMALE INTERVIEWER, a TV PUNDIT, and a FEMALE BOUNTY HUNTER, are heard offstage and can easily be voiced by the main actors.

The action takes place over five days. The main settings are Chet's campaign headquarters and Chet and Melanie's living room; plus a debate podium and a meeting room at a Ramada hotel. All can be minimally suggested.

Act 1

- Scene 1. Campaign headquarters. Friday night.
- Scene 2. The living room. Saturday, the next day.
- Scene 3. Headquarters. Sunday morning.
- Scene 4. A podium. That Sunday night.
- Scene 5. The living room. Sunday night, immediately after.

Act 2

- Scene 1. The living room. Sunday night, immediately after Act 1.
- Scene 2. The living room. Monday night, Election Eve.
- Scene 3. Headquarters. Tuesday, Election Day.
- Scene 4. The living room. Election Night.
- Scene 5. The Ramada. Election Night.
- Scene 6. A prison visiting room. Some months later.

ACT 1**Scene 1**

(CHET YARBRO's campaign headquarters shares the stage with CHET and MELANIE's living room.

In the living room, a wet bar, several piggy banks on shelves, and a TV. The TV screen is not visible to the audience. Everything on the TV is audio only.

There are two exits in the living room, one to a foyer leading to the front door, and an additional exit to an unseen hallway. One window facing the fourth wall.

In campaign headquarters, a poster of CHET YARBRO on the wall of the headquarters, along with a poster advertising a Piggy Bank Museum and a poster showing the cuts of meat obtainable from a pig.

There's an exit that leads to the street and an additional exit to an unseen room. One window facing the fourth wall.

Lights up on CHET YARBRO and MELANIE YARBRO in campaign headquarters. MELANIE is visibly pregnant. It's a Friday night in early November.)

CHET: I don't recognize this hand.

MELANIE: Darling, what now.

CHET: I'm serious. This doesn't look like my hand.

MELANIE: It's your hand, Chet.

CHET: It's got a hair growing out of it I never saw before.

MELANIE: That happens.

CHET: Not to men my age. I'm getting prematurely ugly.

MELANIE: Chet, for heaven's sake give it a rest. We're in the home stretch here.

CHET: The voters are sick of the sight of me.

MELANIE: Chet...seriously...this is your misery talking.

CHET: You bet I'm miserable! If I get any more miserable I'm liable to grow a brain tumor!

MELANIE: *(opens handbag)* Here. Sweetheart. Take this.

CHET: What is it?

(JOAQUIN enters, unseen at first, wearing a heavy coat.)

MELANIE: It's an Ativan.

CHET: For God's sake, Melanie, when are you gonna understand the concept? I'm on the program. I don't drink, I don't take drugs. Not for a headache, not for hypochondria. And now my peehole is stinging.

MELANIE: I'm five months pregnant, and you're the one having symptoms?

CHET: I'm supposed to feel your pain! I'm supposed to feel everybody's pain! Otherwise why am I running for office? *(sees JOAQUIN)* Joaquin, I'm sorry. You didn't need to hear all that.

JOAQUIN: I liked what I heard.

CHET: What do you mean, you liked it?

JOAQUIN: Passion. Vulnerability. Humanity. That's what the focus groups are missing.

(JOAQUIN cues up the TV. We hear CHET's voice.)

DEBATE MODERATOR: *(over, on TV)* Mr. Yarbro, you have one minute for your summation.

(Long awkward pause. CHET speaks from the TV.)

CHET: (*on TV; over*) What is there to say...that hasn't been said already. What is my Democrat opponent saying, that I haven't said...and accomplished....as CEO of Yarbrow Packing, the number one employer in the district...

JOAQUIN: (*pauses TV*) Latinos liked that...whites didn't.

CHET: (*on TV; over*) —And then my Democrat opponent, he brings up immigration reform...as if the fight against undocumented workers hasn't been one of my dad's top priorities as your faithful representative in Congress—

JOAQUIN: Whites liked that...Latinos didn't.

CHET: (*on TV; over*) —Finally, he holds up to ridicule my late mother's Piggy Bank Museum, which has brought so much joy to visitors, not to mention revenue to our hoteliers and restaurateurs.

JOAQUIN: Everybody hated that. Sounded way too French.

CHET: It is French. There's no "n" in "restaurateur." Can I help that?

JOAQUIN: You could say it wrong. That would help.

CHET: (*on TV; over*) —He insults the beloved memory of my mom, and my dad's tireless efforts in Congress... on behalf of the people of this district...Whoa, what's that red light? Have I been talking for a whole minute? Who's timing this debate?

MELANIE: Joaquin, we've seen enough.

(JOAQUIN *pauses the TV.*)

JOAQUIN: And they wish you'd shave off your mustache.

CHET: Come on, who said that? I'm famous for my mustache. My mustache is my signature.

JOAQUIN: Is that why you're always touching it?

CHET: Do I? Mel, do I do that?

JOAQUIN: Like you're wondering if it's still there. Keep your hands in your lap for the interview tomorrow. This woman is going to ask you some really lame questions. What's your favorite sport, what's your favorite movie, what's your favorite snack.

CHET: Golf, *The Green Mile*, edamame.

JOAQUIN: Edamame.

CHET: Those bean pods you get with sushi.

JOAQUIN: I know what edamame is. What you're saying with that is, you're totally green. Green across the board. See, but you're not Green. I hope you see the contradiction?

MELANIE: Don't badger him, Joaquin.

CHET: Cancel the interview.

JOAQUIN: You can't cancel on this woman. She'll tear you a new orifice.

CHET: I could use a new orifice. All seven of mine are on fire.

MELANIE: Joaquin doesn't need to hear that.

JOAQUIN: How do you get seven? Oh right, the nostrils.

(Sound of a car door slamming.)

CHET: Who's that? Who's here? Oh Lord, it's him, isn't it.

MELANIE: *(at window)* Yes, it's him.

CHET: Make him go away. I can't deal with him today.

MELANIE: Today or any day. I'll handle it, hon.

(LLOYD enters, in a heavy coat.)

LLOYD: Whoa, it's cold out there. I'm chilled to the bone. Alpaca's not what it's cracked up to be. How you doing, Chet.

CHET: I've been better, Poppa.

MELANIE: Lloyd, we're in a meeting.

LLOYD: (*to MELANIE*) And you, you're looking beautiful as ever. Such a shame you had to give up dancing. If I had a body like yours I'd never wear clothes. How's Little Lloyd doing? Kicking up a storm, I hope?

MELANIE: Yes, he's kicking. But Lloyd's not his name and never will be.

LLOYD: (*to CHET*) We'll see about that. I'm feeling parched! Time to fire the sunset gun. (*to JOAQUIN*) Hello there, what's your name again?

JOAQUIN: Joaquin.

LLOYD: Joaquin what?

JOAQUIN: Joaquin Gupta.

LLOYD: Do me a favor, Joaquin Gupta, get me a Jim Beam on the rocks.

MELANIE: Joaquin, no. (*to LLOYD*) Lloyd, for once have some consideration.

LLOYD: Oh right, I forgot. I'm not supposed to drink in front of my "recovering" son. (*to JOAQUIN*) Fill me in, where are we?

MELANIE: We are having a strategy conference. If you want to drink bourbon, take it in the kitchen.

LLOYD: Sweetheart, you obviously need my input here. I saw the debate. I just thank God Mother Yarbrow isn't alive to see it. (*to CHET*) You let that Democrat trash the Piggy Bank Museum. My number one legislative accomplishment!

CHET: I answered him, Poppa. In my summation.

LLOYD: I heard your summation. It was worse than your answers. Tell me, son. What if Melanie, your gorgeous pregnant wife, was raped by a band of Al Qaedas? Don't think about it, just answer.

CHET: I don't deal in hypotheticals. I prefer to address real problems.

LLOYD: That's a puny-ass response. Am I right, Joaquin?

JOAQUIN: It's a sign of alexithymia. Inability to verbalize emotion.

LLOYD: Never mind the wonky horseshit. Gupta, what kind of name is that? You don't come from a terrorist country, do you?

JOAQUIN: Not unless you count America.

LLOYD: Oho. You're kind of a smart-ass, aren't you, Joaquin? You're part Mexican, aren't you?

JOAQUIN: Not in the slightest. My mom is Colombian.

LLOYD: Like there's a difference. You got a little Arab in you too? Paki, maybe? Any Muslims in the woodpile? You eat pig?

JOAQUIN: On occasion, yes, I eat pig.

LLOYD: Then I won't have to fire you. So...Chet my boy...how do you plan to support a child, once you blow this damn election?

MELANIE: Lloyd, if you're going to threaten my husband, you can leave now.

LLOYD: He was my son before he was your husband.

MELANIE: Yeah, well, maybe you should have had another son.

(LLOYD and CHET exchange a quick look.)

LLOYD: What are you implying?

CHET: Yes, what did you mean by that?

MELANIE: I'm saying, lighten up on your only child. He's doing the best he can in a high-pressure situation.

CHET: *(to LLOYD)* That's what she meant.

LLOYD: *(to CHET)* That's what she meant.

MELANIE: Lay off him for once in your life.

LLOYD: Melanie...sweetheart...all I'm asking of my son...my only son...is to hold onto the seat I've held since the first George Bush. Is that too much to ask? In a Republican district? Now let us have the room. Or are you afraid to leave me alone with my son?

CHET: *(miserably)* Mel, it's OK. I can deal.

MELANIE: Well, make it snappy, both of you. Joaquin, we'll compare notes before the interview tomorrow.

(MELANIE exits toward the hallway, JOAQUIN toward the front door.)

LLOYD: *(to JOAQUIN, as he goes)* So long, *amigo*. No hard feelings?

JOAQUIN: No feelings at all, as far as I'm concerned.

(JOAQUIN exits.)

LLOYD: How can that boy lead a focus group? They're all focusing on him. Wondering if he's got a bomb inside his pants. *(sees CHET wince)* What's wrong now? What's the matter with you, son?

CHET: My peehole is stinging.

LLOYD: Whoa, you didn't pick up an STD, did you?

CHET: Don't be ridiculous. The only woman in my life is Melanie.

LLOYD: That might be your peehole problem right there. Ask you again: have you given any thought to what happens if we lose?

CHET: I'm still the face of Yarbrow Meat Packing.

LLOYD: No, son. Whatever happens, I intend to take back the reins.

CHET: Poppa, you can't mean that.

LLOYD: I couldn't be more serious. Profits are down. The *amigos* are threatening to unionize. Do you have the *cojones* to cut the payroll? No, you're much too tender-hearted.

CHET: Poppa, please, I can be tougher. You're proposing to take away my livelihood.

LLOYD: No, Chet, I'm giving you a chance to prove your worth. Face it, what do you really know about pork? At the age you were getting blitzed in prep school I was blowing pig brains for six bucks an hour. Forget the family business, I need you in D.C. So let's focus on this TV interview. The woman's got a gay son, so she's gonna ask about gay marriage. This is what you say: Do we want more broken homes in America? 'Cause that's what gay marriage is gonna lead to: gay divorce. You following me, son?

CHET: I'm trying to, Poppa.

LLOYD: OK, and when she brings up organic farming: You say, guess who does organic farming. Poor black Africans, that's who. They're local. They don't use pesticides. Should America pattern itself after Africa? Not if we want this great country to survive. Now what about big government?

CHET: (*what else?*) I hate it.

LLOYD: With a passion. The P word has always been my keyword. Now as far as your peehole problem: Did you ever wonder why I went to all those conventions?

CHET: To get laid.

LLOYD: OK. So you knew that.

CHET: And so did mom.

LLOYD: How do you know she did?

CHET: She told me.

LLOYD: She never shoulda done that. Didn't do your manhood any favors. Your momma had her Piggy Bank Museum, that was part of our arrangement...I'll never forget this one woman—Charity. She owned an egg factory. Used to call me "big underpants." Her hubby caught us in the sack. I shot him in self-defense.

CHET: Shut up.

LLOYD: Why are you talking like a girl? It's true. She took the rap for me.

CHET: I don't believe it. That never happened.

LLOYD: But it's turning you on, isn't it.

CHET: No, Poppa. It's disgusting me.

LLOYD: Chet, I'm trying to grow you a pair. You took Melanie away from a dancing career. You lose this election, she'll leave you in a heartbeat. How many times a week do you do it?

CHET: Poppa, she's five months' pregnant.

LLOYD: Never stopped me. She's gone cold on you, son. Like the voters. You need to bust a nut somehow.

CHET: Before the Election.

LLOYD: Of course not before the Election! I'm talking about when you get to Washington.

(MELANIE *enters.*)

LLOYD: Melanie, we're not finished here.

MELANIE: You are, Lloyd. We've heard all we need to hear from you today.

LLOYD: Fine, be like that. Doesn't change the situation. This idiot Democrat wins, goodbye Piggy Bank Museum, goodbye half our labor force, goodbye everything I've worked for in Congress, goodbye to your CEO lifestyle. So get your asses in gear, crank it up as far as it'll go, and get this boy elected. (*starts out*) Another son? No thank you. Once was more than enough.

(LLOYD *exits. Blackout.*)

Scene 2

(Lights up on Chet and Melanie's living room. MELANIE is watching TV—we hear the voices. It's the next day—Saturday.)

FEMALE INTERVIEWER: *(on TV; over)* I heard edamame was your favorite snack. That's why I had them waiting for you.

CHET: *(on TV; over)* I have nothing against those furry little beans. But my favorite snack is bacon. Bacon's the new butter. I even have it for dessert.

FEMALE INTERVIEWER: *(on TV; over)* You probably ate a lot of bacon growing up.

CHET: *(on TV; over)* Seven days a week. Twice on Sundays.

FEMALE INTERVIEWER: *(on TV; over)* Which begs my next question—how do you feel about having Mother Yarbrow's Piggy Bank Museum listed along with the Bridge to Nowhere as a useless boondoggle?

MELANIE: *(to the TV)* Hang in there, darling.

(Sound of a car pulling up outside.)

CHET: *(on TV; over)* OK. First I'd like to correct a general impression.

MELANIE: *(to herself)* Oh no. Here comes the grammar Nazi.

CHET: *(on TV; over)* Why does the king have absolute power? If you say, "Because he's royal," that's begging the question. What you did was to raise a question.

FEMALE INTERVIEWER: *(on TV; over)* We'll Google that and check. Now, as a husband and expectant father, I want you to talk about your stand on gay marriage—

CHET: *(on TV; over)* Let me stop you again—

(Doorbell rings. MELANIE pauses the recorded interview, exits in the direction of the front door. An instant later, she enters with Chet's twin brother, ARLISS YARBRO—Chet without the mustache, wearing a ratty fur-collared leather jacket. MELANIE has no knowledge of this person, and thinks he's Chet.)

MELANIE: Wondered where you were. I was just catching up on the interview. Why did you ring the bell?

ARLISS: Yeah, sorry about that. Forgot my key.

MELANIE: What do you mean, you forgot your key? Chet, you know where the hide-a-key is. *(pause; stares)* Ohmigod.

ARLISS: What? What's the matter?

MELANIE: You shaved it off.

ARLISS: *(thinks)* Yeah, I shaved it off.

MELANIE: And where did you get that jacket?

ARLISS: Second-hand store. Why?

MELANIE: I like it. It's a good look for you. Middle of the campaign, but hey, that took guts. Whoa, what are you doing?

(ARLISS has gone over to the wet bar and is pouring himself a drink.)

ARLISS: I'm getting myself a drink, you want one?

MELANIE: Chet, I know your stress level's through the roof. But please don't start drinking again.

ARLISS: Relax, I know what I'm doing. So did we decide on a baby name? I was thinking Yolanda. Yolanda Yarbrow! I like the sound of that.

MELANIE: Yolanda. For a boy.

ARLISS: Oh is that what we're having? Too bad. Political daughters are all the rage.

MELANIE: Are you being sarcastic? What's gotten into you? Suddenly I don't know you.

ARLISS: That makes two of us. Lovely place you got here, Melanie.
Lloyd buy it for you? Stupid question. Of course he did. Lloyd's got you by the short hairs, doesn't he?

MELANIE: Chet, have you totally lost your mind?

ARLISS: No, but I'm betting my brother's freaking out.

MELANIE: What are you talking about? What brother?

ARLISS: My brother Chet.

MELANIE: Your brother Chet....

ARLISS: You heard me.

MELANIE: ...Ohmigod.

ARLISS: They never told you about me, did they? Hey, I'm not surprised. No love lost on either side. Pleased to meet you, Melanie. I'm Arliss. Arliss Yarbrow. Your brother-in-law.

MELANIE: I have to sit down.

ARLISS: So tell me, how's my dad doing? He must really be sweating this election. Can't be easy on your marriage, either.

MELANIE: This isn't happening.

ARLISS: Deep breaths, sweetheart.

MELANIE: Nobody mentioned you.

ARLISS: Yeah, folks around here don't know I exist. By the time Lloyd moved the packing plant here, I was long gone. Goodbye to Lloyd's rages, the family business, the whole wretched enterprise. I can't look at a rasher of bacon without wanting to puke. And those summer jobs, mopping up the blood and guts. Plus the shabby way he treated mom.

MELANIE: But you're here now.

ARLISS: I'm here now.

MELANIE: (*uneasily*) You'll probably want to talk to Chet.

ARLISS: No, and he won't want to talk to me. So where did you meet my celebrated brother? Yale? Vanderbilt Law?

MELANIE: Las Vegas.

ARLISS: Waitress? Croupier?

MELANIE: Showgirl.

ARLISS: You miss the life?

MELANIE: Of course not. We've been very happy.

ARLISS: Until this election. Twenty point drop since October. Can't afford to lose any more votes, can you? Or you'll both be out on your keesters. (*re TV*) Whoa, he really looks stressed-out, doesn't he.

(ARLISS *unpauses the TV.*)

CHET: (*on TV; over*) —Gay marriage will only hasten the decline in American morals. What does gay marriage lead to? Gay divorce. Gays don't want that. Ask your son.

(ARLISS *mutes the TV.*)

ARLISS: Who coached him to say that?

MELANIE: Three guesses.

ARLISS: It's as idiotic as his mustache. Gay Jim Crow is over. What am I doing here, that's what you want to know.

MELANIE: I wish you'd tell me.

ARLISS: Well, it's not to make trouble, if that's what you're thinking. I'm only showing my face to you and you alone.

MELANIE: Why me?

ARLISS: Well...if I know my brother...you're the one who handles the money.

MELANIE: I see where you're going.

ARLISS: That's right.

MELANIE: How much money?

ARLISS: Let's say five thousand dollars?

MELANIE: To go away.

ARLISS: Correct.

MELANIE: And stay gone.

ARLISS: Five thousand in cash. You'll never hear from me again.

(MELANIE *considers.*)

MELANIE: I might be able to manage that.

ARLISS: No, this has to happen now.

MELANIE: The bank closed at four.

ARLISS: I can't help that. We have to get this done.

MELANIE: What's your rush, Arliss?

ARLISS: A lot can happen over a weekend. Anybody spots me, you've got a ton of explaining to do.

MELANIE: And you're out five thousand dollars. Sorry, you're just gonna have to wait till Monday.

ARLISS: In that case, I'd better check in at the Piggy Bank Motel.

MELANIE: You're kidding.

ARLISS: I don't see a better option.

MELANIE: What do you propose to tell the desk clerk?

ARLISS: "Hi, my wife Melanie kicked me out, I'll be sleeping here from now on."

MELANIE: You'd do that to your brother. Cost him the Election.

ARLISS: Oh I hope it won't come to that.

(Pause.)

MELANIE: All right. Listen to me. On the corner of Grand Street and Holcomb there's a storefront. It's our campaign headquarters. There's a room in the back, locks from the inside. It's got a cot and a fridge and enough snacks to keep you fed till Monday.

ARLISS: Sounds good. How do I get in?

MELANIE: The front door opens with a keypad. Here's the code, can you remember this? 2-5-8-0-4-5-6.

ARLISS: 2-5-8-0-4-5-6—

MELANIE: It's the sign of the cross. Bolt the door so nobody walks in on you. Come nine o'clock Monday morning, I'll have your five thousand dollars.

(Sound of a car approaching. MELANIE hears it, goes to the window.)

ARLISS: Who is it?

MELANIE: It's Chet. He's back from the interview.

ARLISS: *(joins her at window)* Whoa, is that his truck? Looks like he bought it yesterday. You know what? Maybe I'll stick around and say hello.

MELANIE: You'd better be messing with me, Arliss. *(points to hallway exit)* That way. Out the back. Now!

ARLISS: Aye aye, captain. Hey, at least he had the sense to marry a brainy woman. Beautiful too.

MELANIE: Never mind the flattery, just go!

ARLISS: No flattery intended. Just stating the facts.

MELANIE: Stop flirting with your brother's wife! Grand Street and Holcomb! You go straight there, anybody sees you, say hello and goodbye and keep right on going till you get to headquarters.

(MELANIE hustles ARLISS out the hallway exit. Pauses a moment to cool down. Unmutes the TV.)

CHET: *(on TV; over)* —Who are the number one organic farmers in the world? Poor black Africans. Totally local. Totally sustainable. Is that the model we want Americans to follow?

(CHET enters, looking shell-shocked from the TV interview, shivering in his overcoat. Stares at the TV screen.)

CHET: Please turn it off.

MELANIE: I haven't finished watching.

(CHET grabs the remote, turns off the TV, sniffs the unfinished liquor glass ARLISS left behind.)

CHET: I was horrible, wasn't I? Are you totally bummed?

MELANIE: I've felt better.

CHET: Is that why you're drinking Scotch?

MELANIE: Oh. Yeah. Sorry, darling, I couldn't help myself. Suddenly I saw my whole life going south.

CHET: Your life? What about my life? This election is killing us, Mel. You, me, and...and Little Lloyd.

MELANIE: We are not naming him Lloyd! Over my dead bloated body! You'd better make that clear to your dad!

CHET: There's no reasoning with that man! I'm sick of trying! And I'm canceling the last debate.

MELANIE: That's absurd, you can't do that. We signed on for three.

CHET: I don't give a damn what we signed on for. I should never have agreed to run.

MELANIE: Chet, there's no backing out on this deal. It's D.C. or nothing. Lloyd's not gonna let you run the factory any more. And I sure as hell didn't leave Vegas to end up on Skid Row.

CHET: You'd go back to dancing?

MELANIE: One working parent is better than none.

CHET: I don't think I could live in Vegas.

MELANIE: Nobody's asking you to.

CHET: Single motherhood? We've always campaigned against that.

MELANIE: Chet, can you please get a grip? I'm not asking for a divorce.

CHET: You will if I lose. Let them call me a quitter, I don't care. Oh God, here goes my peehole again. Don't make me do it, please.

(Pause.)

MELANIE: OK, I won't. No more appearances.

CHET: You mean that?

MELANIE: Yes.

CHET: You won't hate me for it?

MELANIE: Quit your whining and I won't.

CHET: You're right. Nobody loves a whiner.

MELANIE: What you need is a rest.

CHET: I knew you'd understand.

MELANIE: Tell you what. Why don't you spend this weekend at the cabin. So you'll be fresh for Election Day. You don't mind showing up to vote, do you, hon?

CHET: Do I have to give a speech?

MELANIE: Nope. Just to be photographed.

CHET: Mel, I love you.

MELANIE: I know you do, hon.

CHET: We have good times at the cabin.

MELANIE: I know we do. But I'm not gonna be there.

CHET: Where are you gonna be?

MELANIE: Here. Minding the store. Why not go duck hunting? That always calms you down.

CHET: I wouldn't mind bagging a bird or two.

MELANIE: Do you a world of good.

CHET: Lloyd's got my .410 though. I can't ask for it back, he'll get suspicious. He might think I'm contemplating suicide.

MELANIE: You've still got your 20 gauge.

CHET: Aren't you afraid I'll shoot myself?

MELANIE: No, sweetheart. Because once you get to the cabin, you're gonna stop feeling sorry for yourself. Leave your truck, take my Range Rover, and stay there till Election Day.

CHET: I'd better clear this with Joaquin.

MELANIE: No! Not a word to Joaquin.

CHET: Right. I get it.

MELANIE: Or anybody else. This is our little secret.

CHET: You know what, Mel? You look very old to me right now. Is that because you're pregnant?

MELANIE: No, because you're acting like a child. Are we clear now? The cabin till Election Day.

CHET: Absolutely. Just what the doctor ordered.

MELANIE: Everything's gonna be fine now.

CHET: It's Lloyd. Lloyd's the one making me sick. He's like a worm in my brain, telling me what to do and say. Where does that leave me? Who am I? What do I believe? I don't know anymore. *(as he goes)* Brain surgery, that's what I need. Brain surgery...

(CHET exits toward the unseen stairway. MELANIE contemplates the liquor glass, then knocks it back in one long gulp. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Lights up on campaign headquarters. It's early Sunday morning, the next day. A pounding on the door. Arliss enters sleepily from the back room, pulling on his pants.)

LATASHA: *(off)* It's me, Arliss. Open up.

ARLISS: Melanie?

LATASHA: *(off)* Hurry up, open the door, it's freezing out here.

(ARLISS exits toward the front door.)

ARLISS: *(off)* You're not Melanie.

(ARLISS enters with LATASHA, African-American. She's wearing a winter coat. ARLISS bolts the door.)

ARLISS: I was expecting Melanie.

LATASHA: Arliss, I don't have time for your nonsense. We're in the deepest possible shit here.

ARLISS: Yeah, so why did you run off so fast? I left my brother's house and the car was gone. I looked everywhere.

LATASHA: You were taking forever. This patrol car was checking me out.

ARLISS: Racial profiling, that's all that was. They have no idea what car we're driving. For all they know I'm still in the back of that panel truck, buried under a pile of prison laundry.

LATASHA: The cops aren't that stupid. They'll know you switched vehicles.

ARLISS: Yeah, but from your tweets they think we're heading west. Let's not panic, Latasha, OK? We're right on track. I've bought us a year in Mexico.

LATASHA: How much did she agree to pay?

ARLISS: Five large.

LATASHA: You said five thousand dollars and she said yes right away.

ARLISS: That's right.

LATASHA: You should have asked for ten. When does she get here?

ARLISS: Bank opens at nine.

LATASHA: So what's she like?

ARLISS: Melanie? She's all right. Good head on her shoulders. Way more than my brother deserves.

LATASHA: Meaning she's cute?

ARLISS: She's cute enough. She's five months pregnant.

LATASHA: Should I be jealous?

ARLISS: Of what, her pregnancy? Hey, there's a bed in back, if you're in a rush.

LATASHA: I prefer it when we take our time.

ARLISS: Yeah, those conjugal visits, they didn't allow for much foreplay.

LATASHA: And with the guards watching.

ARLISS: We kind of got used to that, didn't we. We'll get back to normal in Mexico, don't worry.

(ARLISS *kisses her. Knock on door.*)

MELANIE: (*off*) Arliss, you up? It's Melanie. Let me in.

LATASHA: What's she doing here? The bank's not open yet.

ARLISS: You gotta get out of here. There's a back door to the alley.
Go.

(LATASHA *exits toward the back room.* ARLISS *exits, returns with MELANIE, in a fur coat.*)

ARLISS: Why so early? I thought the bank didn't open till nine.
What's the matter?

(MELANIE's *sniffing the air.*)

MELANIE: Who'd you let in here?

ARLISS: Nobody. You told me to bolt the door.

MELANIE: This pregnant nose of mine is picking up something.

ARLISS: Probably my after-shave.

MELANIE: You haven't shaved yet. Are you sure nobody else was
here?

ARLISS: Yeah, I'm sure. So when do I get my money?

MELANIE: That's what I want to talk to you about.

ARLISS: Melanie, we have a deal.

MELANIE: We do have a deal. I'd like to improve it. Tell me, Arliss,
what are your politics?

ARLISS: I'm a Libertarian Socialist. What has that got to do with anything?

MELANIE: Isn't Libertarian Socialist an oxymoron?

ARLISS: No, it just means I never vote. Anyhow, it's not an
oxymoron. Cruel kindness, that's an oxymoron. Where the
contradiction actually means something.

MELANIE: I stand corrected. You're more like your brother than you
think you are.

ARLISS: Never mind the sweet talk. I'll give you exactly 45 minutes to bring my money, or Chet's political future goes belly up.

MELANIE: You really are in a hurry, aren't you?

ARLISS: Just get me what we agreed on.

(Pause.)

MELANIE: If you're willing to wait another 24 hours....I can get you a great deal more.

ARLISS: How much more?

MELANIE: Let's say, six times more?

ARLISS: Yeah, what's the catch?

MELANIE: I'll pay you 30 thousand dollars if you go on TV and debate the Democrat candidate.

ARLISS: You're out of your goddamn mind.

MELANIE: No, that's your brother Chet. He's having a pre-election slash pregnancy freakout. Arliss, I know you have zero family feeling, but I desperately need your help.

ARLISS: You really have 30 grand to spare?

MELANIE: In our war chest, yes, we do.

ARLISS: I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't have a mustache.

MELANIE: You shaved it off. In response to popular demand. The final debate is tonight. Plus an Election Eve speech on Monday. After that, you're out of here.

ARLISS: You cleared this with Chet?

MELANIE: Are you kidding? Of course I didn't. He went duck hunting for the weekend, won't be back till Election Day.

ARLISS: Lloyd doesn't know I'm here?

MELANIE: Oh God, no. No one else will know.

ARLISS: Until Election Day, I'm Chet.

MELANIE: Until Election Day, you're Chet.

ARLISS: Do I substitute in all capacities?

MELANIE: You mean rub my belly with baby oil? You do not.

ARLISS: Just thought I'd ask.

MELANIE: Or anything else you might have in mind.

ARLISS: And for these two appearances, you're paying me 50 thousand dollars.

MELANIE: I said 30.

ARLISS: And I'm saying 50.

MELANIE: Let's say 40.

ARLISS: You can say 40. I'm saying 50. Plus a ten thousand dollar bonus if my brother wins the election. Twenty grand up front.

MELANIE: I'm not that liquid and I'm not that trusting.

ARLISS: So why should I trust you?

MELANIE: You can blow the whistle any time. Embarrass us all. You may be itching to do that anyway. That's the chance I'm taking.

ARLISS: Ballsy move, sweetheart. Chet's a very lucky man.

MELANIE: So do we have a deal or not?

ARLISS: *(pause)* Yeah. We have a deal.

MELANIE: Then get your head ready. I'm gonna go fetch Joaquin.

ARLISS: Who's Joaquin?

MELANIE: Our media consultant. He's about the smartest thing around, so don't go running your mouth. Listen to what he says and then do exactly what we tell you to, OK?

ARLISS: OK, Melanie. I'm putty in your hands.

(MELANIE *exits*. ARLISS *exits to bolt the door*. LATASHA *enters*. ARLISS *returns*.)

ARLISS: What are you doing here? I told you to leave.

LATASHA: Good thing I didn't. What am I gonna do with you, Arliss?

ARLISS: Hey. You know how long we can live in Mexico on 60 thousand dollars?

LATASHA: What if this Melanie chick is playing you? Your brother loses, what leverage do you have to collect?

ARLISS: He's not gonna lose.

LATASHA: Oh here we go.

ARLISS: I'm gonna win this election for him.

LATASHA: Ohmigod, you're like every con I ever dated—too much self-esteem. Arliss, there's no way we can last the weekend. Some bounty hunter's bound to come knocking at your brother's door.

ARLISS: Why assume that?

LATASHA: Where do most dumb criminals go when they escape? To their families.

ARLISS: I resent the word "criminal."

LATASHA: Resent it all you want, that's what you are.

ARLISS: In my book, marijuana possession was never a crime. And now I have a chance to change Federal law.

LATASHA: Oh Lord, here we go. Give me your wallet.

ARLISS: What do you want with my wallet?

LATASHA: Arliss, you're a loose cannon. What if somebody picks you up and frisks you? They're gonna see your I.D. and know you're not Chet.

ARLISS: (*handing it over*) Fine, but could you show the candidate a little more respect?

LATASHA: Candidate. What do you know about speechmaking?

ARLISS: What about my speech to the parole board?

LATASHA: You told them to paint the walls blue instead of institutional green. They threw you out the damn door.

ARLISS: OK, but what about those concessions I got from the warden?

LATASHA: What concessions?

ARLISS: Monthly movies....low-cal desserts....

LATASHA: Oh, awesome.

ARLISS: It was awesome. All that sugar was making people ornery.

LATASHA: And what about me? What am I supposed to do while you're risking every last thing we planned for?

ARLISS: You stay in a motel. It's just for two nights. There's one across from the Piggy Bank Museum.

LATASHA: Meanwhile you'll be in Melanie's bed.

ARLISS: No way. (*lightly*) I'm not into pregnancy porn.

LATASHA: You offered to sleep with her. I heard every word.

ARLISS: I was working her. Come on, she's my sister-in-law.

LATASHA: Oh like that would ever stop you. I bet you did each other's girlfriends, growing up.

ARLISS: I did Chet's. He never did mine. Listen...Latasha... sweetheart...you want to go back to the perfume counter, that's your prerogative. I left prison to be with you. If you desert me now, that's where I'm gonna end up. And that means no more conjugals, because they won't let you have sex with a dead man. You think I'm joking? I'll hang myself in my cell. I don't believe I can live a life without you. In fact I'm sure I can't.

LATASHA: That's a fairly pretty speech right there.

ARLISS: And the extra fifty grand? It's all yours, every penny.

LATASHA: Well. Maybe you are a politician.

ARLISS: And then I'll marry you for your money.

LATASHA: You're full of campaign promises, aren't you?

(ARLISS and LATASHA start to nuzzle. The door rattles.)

MELANIE: *(off)* Chet? Honey? Open up, it's me, Melanie.

ARLISS: *(to LATASHA)* There's a door at the back. Go check in at the Piggy Bank Motel.

LATASHA: Promise you won't sleep at her house?

ARLISS: I'll be at the house. But I won't get much sleep. Kidding. I had my fill of white girls in middle school.

(Quick kiss. LATASHA exits out the hallway. ARLISS exits to unlock the front door.)

ARLISS: *(off)* Hey, Melanie.

MELANIE: *(off)* Hello, Chet.

(ARLISS re-enters, with MELANE and JOAQUIN.)

JOAQUIN: Why was the door locked?

ARLISS: Yeah, just needed some time to myself. Away from the rigors of the campaign trail.

(JOAQUIN *is studying* ARLISS—the *no-mustache*.)

JOAQUIN: (*to MELANIE*) You're right. It's more honest without the 'stache. All right, let's go over the core issues. I really hate to admit it, but your dad was right about the Piggy Bank Museum..

ARLISS: Right in what sense?

JOAQUIN: Hello. He attacked it, and you didn't deal on time.

ARLISS: What can anybody say? It's pork.

JOAQUIN: Yes, your opponent is bound to make that joke. Don't make it for him.

ARLISS: It's good pork. It's our pork. We benefit. That's what pork is.

JOAQUIN: Yes, but the Museum hasn't brought in the tourists.

ARLISS: OK, let's be pre-emptive. Keep the Museum if we have to, but no more government funding.

JOAQUIN: The Museum won't survive.

ARLISS: Then let my dad pay for it. If I know Dad, he built it to distract my mom from his adulteries.

JOAQUIN: I didn't need to know that. But I'm glad I do.

ARLISS: And I'd like to say something about marijuana.

JOAQUIN: What about marijuana?

ARLISS: Let's be for it. Take on the bar owners.

MELANIE: Hon, you don't mean that. (to JOAQUIN) He's just trying that on for size.

JOAQUIN: Bar owners would include your dad. He owns Vern's Nostalgic and half a dozen beer joints.

ARLISS: Bite the hand that feeds you.

JOAQUIN: Well, amen to that.

MELANIE: Chet...darling...need I remind you? The voters in this district are anti-drug, anti-union, pro-life, and anti-government.

ARLISS: Maybe they are. And maybe they just think they are. See, back in the 60s, everybody was gonna get enlightened. Turned out, only the strong survived. The rest of them became wingnuts.

JOAQUIN: That's a superficial reading.

ARLISS: I'll tell you what's superficial. Their convictions. Shallow as piss on a flat rock.

JOAQUIN: Well, we can't change them overnight, much as we might want to. Now one of the questioners is Reverend Spalding, so expect a question about church and state.

ARLISS: Keep the church out of the state and the state out of the church. And let the atheists have their own holiday.

JOAQUIN: You're joking.

MELANIE: Of course he's joking.

ARLISS: Atheists are kinder, gentler people. Well, except for Stalin and Hitler. Christians, Jews, Muslims—they all think they own the Holy Land. Maybe they do, maybe they don't, but why kill each other over a piece of real estate? No atheist ever laid claim to Jerusalem.

MELANIE: Chet...you're a Family Firster.

ARLISS: Right, I'm a Family Firster. Bibles in every bathroom. Christian Rock on every stereo. Let's talk about something meaningful. Let's talk about the slaughterhouse.

JOAQUIN: We never want to use that term.

MELANIE: We definitely don't.

JOAQUIN: And he's bound to bring up the illegals issue.

ARLISS: The illegals. At Yarbrow Packing.

JOAQUIN: We've been over this.

ARLISS: Of course. Of course we have. (*experimentally*) What is it up to now, about half the work force?

JOAQUIN: I don't have the statistics. Just say you're aware of the problem.

ARLISS: (*testing again*) The union-busting. The forged papers. The kickbacks to Immigration.

JOAQUIN: What kickbacks? What's he talking about?

MELANIE: (*lying*) I haven't the least idea.

ARLISS: Melanie, please. We have no secrets from our media consultant.

MELANIE: All right, fine, but certainly don't go there.

ARLISS: Hey, no worries. He attacks Yarbrow Packing, I'll call him an anti-business Socialist.

JOAQUIN: That might play. Now if he brings up gun control—

ARLISS: I'm for it.

JOAQUIN: Since when?

ARLISS: For lunatics, terrorists, and guys with little dicks. Forget the right to “bear arms.” What we need to do is roll up our sleeves and “bare our arms.” Buckle down. Use our God-given muscle. American grit will carry the day.

JOAQUIN: (*to MELANIE; suspiciously*) What’s going on here?

ARLISS: What do you mean, what’s going on?

MELANIE: (*uneasily*) Nothing’s going on, Joaquin. We’re hashing things out.

JOAQUIN: No. Sorry. I won’t be party to a fraud.

MELANIE: (*alarmed*) What fraud?

ARLISS: (*alarmed*) What fraud?

JOAQUIN: I hate the gun lobby. I believe in a firewall between church and state. But why does he suddenly believe it? No no, this is very very suspect.

MELANIE: Joaquin, please just go with it, OK?

JOAQUIN: (*to ARLISS*) You’ll be laughed off the platform. And I’ll get the blame. I’ll never work in this state again.

ARLISS: Dude, calm down. You’re having an attack of principle. I respect that, but let’s keep our eyes on the prize. Are we done here, guys?

JOAQUIN: I’m afraid so, yes.

ARLISS: Outstanding. I’ll see you over there, dude.

JOAQUIN: (*going*) I’ve got a very bad feeling about this.

ARLISS: That will pass, once I get up before the people.

(JOAQUIN *gives ARLISS a hard look, and exits.*)

ARLISS: What’s the matter, Melanie? Say something.

(MELANIE *sits stunned*. ARLISS *sits down next to her*.)

ARLISS: Come on, he was enjoying it. He hates my dad's guts. When I said "Bite the hand that feeds you," he practically had an orgasm.

MELANIE: He knows.

ARLISS: Knows what! I was Chet!

MELANIE: Then you don't know your brother.

ARLISS: I am my brother. I'm Chet with balls.

MELANIE: Fine, you're Chet with balls.

ARLISS: And that's why I'm gonna win on Tuesday. (*flirting*)
Otherwise, what are we doing here?

MELANIE: I am trying to get my husband elected to Congress. You had your fun, now do what you're being paid to do. And for heaven's sake don't get trapped into defending the illegals.

ARLISS: Melanie, you have given me a mission, and I intend to deliver. Now go call your stockbroker.

MELANIE: He won't be in till tomorrow.

ARLISS: I can be patient. I'm enjoying this. I'm rising to the occasion.

(*Pause. Suddenly MELANIE grabs ARLISS and kisses him.*)

MELANIE: I'm sorry. I don't know why I did that.

ARLISS: Hey, no problem.

MELANIE: I'm an expectant mother. I love my husband.

ARLISS: I hope you do.

MELANIE: I swear for a second I thought you were Chet.

ARLISS: I'm gonna take that as a compliment. See you at the house.

MELANIE: (*going*) Yes. I'll see you at the house.

ARLISS: Don't worry! We'll both be fine!

(*MELANIE exits in hasty embarrassment. Blackout. In darkness:*)

DEBATE MODERATOR: (*over*) Congressman Yarbrow, you have two minutes for summation.

Scene 4

(Lights up on ARLISS, at a podium.)

ARLISS:My Democrat opponent just made some serious allegations. He's saying I shaved off my mustache in desperation. Sorry, no. It was time to come clean, and I wish he would too. He says he's for organic farming. Well, I'll tell you one organic crop I do endorse, and that's marijuana. Pot's gonna be legal everywhere else, why should we come in dead last? Of course the bar owners, they don't want to lose the business, so they prosecute the war on drugs. Gays in the military? Done deal. Bigger problem is, gays in the penitentiary. That's where the HIV gets spread. Abortion? Abortion should be illegal. And totally available. Gun control? Let's eliminate it. If we're gonna let lunatics and terrorists have guns, let's go all the way, why not nuclear bombs and rocket launchers? And no more foreign wars. You think terrorists are happy in their work? Pay them enough and they'll drop their fanatical beliefs. People, these are not things to argue about! Enough arguing! You'd think we were Israel and Palestine, the way our elected idiots go at each other's throats. Quit listening to the idiots! Down with the assclowns! Let's hear about it! Down with the assclowns!...

(Blackout.)

Scene 5

(Lights up on Chet and Melanie's living room, immediately after.. LLOYD and MELANIE are watching TV. We hear ARLISS.)

ARLISS: *(on TV, continuing from above)* ...Down with the assclowns!

DEBATE AUDIENCE: *(over)* Down with the assclowns!

LLOYD: Thank you, Melanie, I've seen enough.

(MELANIE turns off the TV.)

LLOYD: Kind of a mixed message, wasn't it?

MELANIE: *(stunned)* We were trying a new approach.

(MELANIE has gone to the bar and is pouring herself a drink.)

LLOYD: What are you doing, it's not five o'clock yet.

MELANIE: In D.C. it is.

LLOYD: Don't let me judge you. Mother Yarbrow, she drank and smoked all through her pregnancy. You know who dies young? Teetotalers. Pour me a Jim Beam while you're at it. What was all that about "gays in the penitentiary"? You didn't coach him to say that, did you?

MELANIE: No, he was winging it.

LLOYD: And marijuana, suddenly he's for that. Sure, tax the potheads, that could win us a few votes. My employees smoke weed, otherwise they couldn't get through the day. That was gratuitous, though, bringing Vern's Nostalgic into it.

MELANIE: He didn't mention Vern's by name.

LLOYD: Come on, my portrait's right over the bar. And who told him to shave off his mustache?

MELANIE: Nobody. His decision.

LLOYD: The hoops we gotta jump through in this racket. It's unnatural, the whole system. Cave men, they didn't have elections. I'm all for democracy, but it's a clumsy way of doing business.

(Door opens. JOAQUIN enters. Staring. Stunned.)

LLOYD: You know what the natural system of politics is? Subordination. The submission of many to the rule of one. Father Knows Best.

MELANIE: Lloyd, for heaven's sake be quiet. What is it, Joaquin? What's wrong?

JOAQUIN: They like him.

LLOYD: Of course they like him. He's my son.

MELANIE: What did the focus group say?

(JOAQUIN opens his laptop, shows them.)

JOAQUIN: See where the graph spikes up?

MELANIE: "Abortion should be illegal"... "No more foreign wars"... "Down with the assclowns."

JOAQUIN: All they heard was the buzzwords. And they don't miss the mustache. I got a ton of positives on that. He went from "educated smoothie" to "beer-drinking buddy" overnight.

LLOYD: So where is Chet now? Why isn't he here?

(Sound of a car braking. MELANIE hears it, goes to the window.)

JOAQUIN: He stayed behind to press the flesh. Seemed to be enjoying it for a change.

LLOYD: Well, get him over here. I can't believe he's sincere about these new positions.

JOAQUIN: Unfortunately, you're right.

LLOYD: Why "unfortunately"? Don't tell me you're pro-drug.

JOAQUIN: What if I am? It's no concern of yours. Your son was just playing to white ignorance.

LLOYD: Are you calling the white people in this district dumb?

JOAQUIN: Dumb as bricks. And you can thank your lucky stars for that!

LLOYD: Boy, I may agree with what you say. But I'll fight to the death your right to say it to my face. If you were born in this country, I might feel different.

JOAQUIN: For your information, I was born twenty miles from here.

LLOYD: I could give a shit less. You're absolutely right, your opinions don't count in the least. You live off the sweat of our ambition, and you better not forget it.

MELANIE: Lloyd, leave him alone! Joaquin, please go in the kitchen and get me a Fresca.

(JOAQUIN heads for the exit to the hallway.)

JOAQUIN: *(going)* I believe in the will of the people.

LLOYD: *(going)* What will. These hanyockers go where they're kicked. It's a doggy dog world out there. Where are you going, I'm not finished with you yet!

(JOAQUIN exits, LLOYD following. During this, MELANIE has gone to open the front door.)

MELANIE: *(off)* Ohmigod, no. What are you doing here?

(The mustached CHET enters in a an orange hunting jacket, shotgun under his arm, holding a brace of ducks.)

CHET: Melanie, oh God, you've gotta help me! I think I just killed somebody.

(Blackout. END OF ACT 1.)

ACT 2**Scene 1**

(Same as the end of Act 1. The living room, immediately after.)

CHET: —I was driving along Grand Street and I made a right turn and I didn't see this woman on a bicycle and I almost hit her broadside.

MELANIE: You almost hit her.

CHET: Came this close.

MELANIE: You didn't hit her.

CHET: Just missed her.

MELANIE: The woman's OK.

CHET: In this universe. In another universe she's dead. She's dead and I killed her.

MELANIE: No, sweetheart, you killed these ducks. By any chance have you been drinking?

CHET: I might as well be. I didn't even kill these mallards.

MELANIE: Then what are you doing with them?

CHET: I bought them off another hunter. Couldn't be bothered with the hunting. I got to the cabin, all that quiet around me, I had ample time to ponder. And Mel, I've had a true epiphany.

MELANIE: Come with me.

CHET: Why? I'm trying to tell you something.

MELANIE: I'm gonna tell you exactly why. And then you're gonna do exactly as I say.

(MELANIE hustles CHET out of the room. LLOYD and JOAQUIN re-enter, still squabbling, JOAQUIN holding a can of Fresca.)

LLOYD: —Of course white people are smarter. Every study proves it. What Latino ever won a Nobel Prize?

JOAQUIN: Alfonso Robles. Nobel Peace Prize, 1982.

LLOYD: Oh, you mean the P.C. Prize? The one they gave to that Muslim from Kenya?

JOAQUIN: Octavio Paz, Literature. Mario Molina, Chemistry. Gabriel Marquez, Literature. And it's not a doggy dog world, it's dog eat dog world!

LLOYD: You bet your beaner ass it is. *(to MELANIE, as she enters)* Did I hear my son come in?

MELANIE: *(takes Fresca)* Yes, Chet's here.

(SOUND of an electric razor, off.)

LLOYD: *(calling)* Chet? What are you doing? Get down here, son, I need to talk to you!

MELANIE: Lloyd, tell you what. Why don't you swing by Vern's Nostalgic, take a straw poll of your friends. See how they feel about Chet's new policy statements.

LLOYD: I might just do that. Chet, I'm waiting!

MELANIE: Why don't you go with him, Joaquin? Might be educational.

JOAQUIN: Sorry, I have karate class. I'll see you later, Melanie.

LLOYD: Karate class. What are you, a pink belt?

JOAQUIN: Try me, you'll find out.

(JOAQUIN exits by the front door. CHET enters from the hallway door, minus his orange hunting jacket, fingering his just-shaved upper lip.)

LLOYD: You did it, son. You made a decent showing today.

CHET: (*dazed*) It was nothing, Poppa.

LLOYD: You woke them up, and that's a good thing. But illegal abortions for all? I wouldn't put that bumper sticker on my car, not with Little Lloyd on the way. Here's a better one: Oil Is All There Is. How are planes gonna fly, on wind power? Try and work that in tomorrow.

MELANIE: Lloyd, weren't you about to leave?

LLOYD: I'm talking to my son. We need to cover all the bases.

CHET: They're covered, Poppa. (*darkly*) Melanie's seen to that. I'd like to be with my wife now.

LLOYD: I get it. To the victor go the spoils. Go for it, son. I'll be at Vern's Nostalgic if you need me.

(LLOYD *exits out the front door. When he's gone:*)

CHET: What in God's name possessed you? Have you gone completely nuts?

MELANIE: Why didn't you tell me you had a brother?

CHET: Because Arliss is dead to me, that's why. As soon as he bailed on the family, I put him clear out of my mind.

MELANIE: That's ridiculous. Twins don't write each other off so fast.

CHET: How do you know, were you ever a twin? The non-dominant twin? It's hell on earth. When the other one's away, you feel like you don't exist and when he's there you feel inferior. How long has Arliss been in town?

MELANIE: Since yesterday.

CHET: You've known him one day, and you put our whole future in his hands? He must be quite a man.

MELANIE: Let's hope so, for both our sakes.

CHET: Maybe you'd rather be married to him.

MELANIE: Chet. Darling. You're going to be a great husband, and a great father, and a true servant of the people, the man you were always meant to be.

CHET: Ohmigod, Melanie! That's exactly what I realized at the cabin! I'm not my father's son, I'm not my brother's twin, I'm me!

MELANIE: Sweetheart, that's music to my ears.

CHET: So did you sleep with him?

MELANIE: Of course I didn't sleep with him. I'm pregnant.

CHET: Is that all that's stopping you?

MELANIE: Please don't put words in mouth.

CHET: Are you paying him?

MELANIE: Well of course I'm paying him. He's not doing this out of the goodness of his heart.

CHET: How much?

MELANIE: *(pause; lying)* A thousand dollars.

CHET: That's all he asked for.

MELANIE: Best deal I ever made.

CHET: No! It's a terrible deal! He's gonna sabotage me! That's why he came back, to mess up my life. Oh yeah. That was always his M.O. Every girl I had a crush on, he'd follow them home from school, make out in their bedrooms, then come home and tell me all about it. Every horny detail. He's a dooper, too, I bet he left that out. Since he was twelve years old. Tried to get me hooked, but I never bit. He's a total wild card. Voters are gonna sense it.

MELANIE: The focus group loved him.

CHET: Focus groups are fickle. What about you?

MELANIE: What about me what?

CHET: Are you attracted to him? Apart from his good looks, of course. His bad-boy qualities, am I right? Did you flirt with him?

MELANIE: Sweetheart, please try and focus. After Tuesday Arliss is gone. Vanished. Out of your hair forever.

CHET: My hair but not your hair.

MELANIE: Chet, you're not hearing me. I'm paying him to disappear!

CHET: Until he runs out of money. Arliss never saved a dime. I was the one with the Christmas Club account.

(Phone rings.)

MELANIE: I'll get it.

(CHET moves toward the ringing phone.)

MELANIE: Chet, no, I said I'd get it—

(CHET picks up the phone.)

CHET: *(into phone)* Hello?... Never mind who this is. Who's calling?... *(cups phone, to MELANIE)* It's him. It's Arliss. He didn't recognize his own voice. *(into phone)* Who did you want to speak to? Melanie? I'll see if she's here.

(MELANIE grabs the phone away.)

MELANIE: Hi...Yeah, Joaquin was just here. He said the feedback couldn't be better....Really? That's sweet of you to say that.

(CHET lunges for the phone, puts it on speaker. We hear Arliss's voice on the phone.)

ARLISS: *(over, on phone)* —Absolutely. I had your lovely face in front of me the whole time. What can I bring home for dinner? I can't wait to kick back with you tonight—

(MELANIE lunges for the phone, mutes it again.)

MELANIE: No no no. You can't come here. Too risky. Stay at headquarters....Yes, I haven't forgotten, I'm calling my broker tomorrow...I have to go now! Bye!

(MELANIE hangs up.)

CHET: You slept with him.

MELANIE: Chet, stop it!

CHET: He said you had a lovely face.

MELANIE: Well, I can't help having one, can I.

CHET: In other words, you did sleep with him.

MELANIE: For the last time, no!

CHET: But you're planning to. (*wildly*;) You have to, to keep up the ruse.

MELANIE: That's idiotic. Arliss knows who he is.

CHET: And I still don't. You're right. I'm not there yet. But I will be.

MELANIE: I know you will, darling. I have faith.

CHET: But why do you have to call our broker? A thousand dollars? Pay him out of petty cash. I can carry the ball from here.

MELANIE: We're not giving you the ball, Chet. Not till we're in Washington. Now go upstairs, pull down the shades, and don't answer the door to anyone. And that includes your dad.

CHET: He's the last person I ever want to see.

MELANIE: Then do what I just told you. Now.

(Pause. CHET heads out, stops.)

CHET: How long did Arliss last in the sack?

MELANIE: I said go!

CHET: I was kidding! That's a good sign, right?

MELANIE: Yes, hon, that's a very good sign.

(CHET blows her a kiss and exits. MELANIE sinks into a chair. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights up on the empty living room. It's the next night, Election Eve. CHET, in wife-beaters and boxer shorts, is asleep on the couch. The rest of his clothes are on the floor. A Beethoven piano sonata is playing on the stereo. Doorbell rings.)

LATASHA: *(off)* Arliss? Are you there? Arliss!

(CHET doesn't stir. Doorbell again.)

LATASHA: Arliss, open up!

(CHET's eyes open.)

CHET: Melanie?

LATASHA: *(off)* Hurry up, let me in!

CHET: *(calling)* Melanie?

LATASHA: *(off)* Arliss, you freak, open the goddamn door!

(CHET exits toward the front door, re-enters with LATASHA.)

LATASHA: What are you doing, sleeping? You're supposed to be out dissing liberals and kissing babies!

CHET: I was, uh, kicking back for a bit. Resting up, you know, for the speech tonight. Um, where did you come from?

LATASHA: What do you mean, where did I come from? I've been at that Piggy Bank Motel. It's insane. Piggy wallpaper. Piggy lamps. The damn doorbell oinks when you press it. So where the hell is she?

CHET: Where is who? Oh, you mean Melanie? Out canvassing, I guess. It's um, good to see you again. How long has it been?

LATASHA: How long has it been?

CHET: I'm kidding. I know how long it's been. Why are you here now?

LATASHA: I went to headquarters, the place was locked. I was freaking out, thinking you were here with Melanie, hoping you weren't, and here you are. Those are Chet's clothes, aren't they.

CHET: Yeah, uh-huh, they're definitely Chet's clothes.

LATASHA: You wear his pajamas too? Or just the bottom half, and she wears the tops? I have half a mind to send you back to the crowbar hotel.

CHET: The crowbar hotel?

LATASHA: That's right. And this time I won't be there to bust your ass out. What in holy hell are you listening to?

CHET: Beethoven.

LATASHA: (*warily*) Beethoven?

CHET: Yeah, the Pathétique Sonata?

LATASHA: You listen to Beethoven.

CHET: Um, I acquired the taste.

LATASHA: In prison.

CHET: Yeah, in prison. Just before you busted me out.

LATASHA: (*improvising*) Beethoven used to bore your ass off.

CHET: Did he? Oh yeah, I guess he did.

LATASHA: (*improvising*) Remember we went to Cuyahoga?

CHET: Cuyahoga?

LATASHA: You don't remember? All-Beethoven program. You fell asleep.

CHET: Sure, yeah, how could I forget.

LATASHA: (*cozies up*) But you were a tiger that night.

CHET: We'll always have Cuyahoga.

LATASHA: (*nuzzling him*) You didn't really have sex with Melanie, did you, baby?

CHET: No! Of course I didn't.

LATASHA: What's their bed like?

CHET: Oh, their bed is beautiful. A beautiful four-poster bed.

LATASHA: Is that right. We never did it in a four-poster. Why don't you get yourself ready?

CHET: Ready for what?

LATASHA: Baby, don't be coy. Go jump in the shower, you smell a little skunky. I'll be up in a minute.

CHET: Gee, I don't think I can do this.

LATASHA: (*dissembling*) Arliss, this isn't like you at all.

CHET: Because of Melanie.

LATASHA: Oh what do you owe Melanie?

CHET: I mean what if she comes back?

LATASHA: Arliss, I find your reluctance very insulting. Here, baby, take the liquor bottle, I'll meet you upstairs. Go.

(LATASHA hands him the bottle. Having succeeded in getting Chet out of the room, LATASHA starts rummaging through his clothes. Finds Chet's wallet. Takes out several bills.

Sound of a vehicle pulling up outside.

LATASHA *drops Chet's wallet into her bag, takes Arliss's wallet out of the bag, and puts it in Chet's pants.*

LLOYD *enters.*)

LLOYD: Well, hello there, honeybun. Didn't mean to startle you.

LATASHA: That's OK. Hi.

LLOYD: Ask you what you're doing here?

LATASHA: Me? I'm part of your son's campaign.

LLOYD: Getting out the minority vote, is that the idea?

LATASHA: That's exactly right.

LLOYD: So how'd you get in the house?

LATASHA: What do you mean, how? Chet let me in.

LLOYD: What's Chet doing at home? Isn't he supposed to be giving a speech?

(Sound of water running.)

LATASHA: I believe he's taking a shower.

LLOYD: Then what are you doing down here?

LATASHA: I can't imagine what you're implying.

LLOYD: Great green Jesus. He took me up on it, the fool. How much are they paying you?

LATASHA: I don't know who "they" is. It's the last day of the campaign, and I have crucial work to do. So I'll be saying goodbye to you now.

(LATASHA starts out. LLOYD bars the way.)

LLOYD: Whatever the Democrats are paying for this sexual sabotage...I'll pay you double.

(LLOYD *takes out his checkbook and a pen.*)

LLOYD: Name your price. I'm a reasonable man.

(*Pause.*)

LATASHA: Three thousand dollars.

LLOYD: Can't cover that much. Let's make it five hundred. What name?

LATASHA: Make it out to L. Beales.

LLOYD: (*writing*) L. Beales, five hundred dollars. And you know what happens if you welch to the tabs. 'Cause I think you know who I am.

LATASHA: I have a pretty good idea, uh-huh.

(CHET *enters, unshowered, carrying the liquor bottle.*)

CHET: (*off and on*) Listen, I'm sorry, I can't go through with this, the Melanie factor, it's spooking me— (*sees LLOYD*) Ohmigod, Poppa? What's going on?

LLOYD: I'll tell you what's going on. I just saved you from a story in the *National Enquirer*.

CHET: Oh! No, don't worry, we're...we're old friends. She's on my team.

LLOYD: Sure she is. That's why she hit me up for five hundred bucks. (*to LATASHA*) Get out of here, you damn homewrecker. Next time stick to the hood.

LATASHA: Don't worry, I'm gone. (*as she goes*) Nice seeing you, Chet. (*to LLOYD*) Pleasure meeting you too.

(LATASHA *exits in a hurry.* CHET *sinks into a chair with the liquor bottle.*)

LLOYD: You picked a fine time to walk the edge, son. Now get some proper clothes on, you're already an hour late for the appearance.

CHET: You don't want me there, Poppa.

LLOYD: What do you mean, I don't want you there? And why is the TV going?

CHET: What are you talking about? The TV's not on.

LLOYD: The blue light's on. Something's being recorded. Seriously, what the devil is happening here?

(LLOYD *turns on the TV. We hear ARLISS.*)

ARLISS: (*on TV; over*) ...So don't elect me because you think I've got your best interests at heart. That kind of politician, you wanta count the forks. You send me to Congress, I'm gonna represent what I think is best for this district, not what these phony polls are telling me...Conviction politics, that's what Chet Yarbrow's all about...

(LLOYD *pauses the TV.*)

LLOYD: OK. I see what's going on.

CHET: Yeah. I know. I'm sorry.

LLOYD: You came back.

CHET: Oh. Yeah. I came back.

LLOYD: Why? What's your deal? Never mind. I know what you're up to. Where the hell have you been, Arliss?

CHET: Not sure I can tell you that.

LLOYD: You'd better tell me, boy.

CHET: You're not gonna like it. I've been living in the crowbar hotel.

LLOYD: Is that a fact.

CHET: Yep. I went to prison, Poppa. I'm the bad seed. Chet there on TV, he's the good seed.

LLOYD: Boy, it's the same damn seed, don't confuse the issue. What were you in for? Stealing? Fighting? Drugs?

CHET: Yup. All of the above.

LLOYD: I knew it. I knew you'd turn out to be a failure. That's why I didn't try to find you. You can see what your brother Chet has made of himself.

CHET: Yeah, Chet's done real well. In spite of what you did to him.

LLOYD: What do you mean, what I did to him?

CHET: Insulting the way he talked. Calling him a knock-kneed pipsqueak. When you couldn't tame me, you whipped Chet into shape instead.

LLOYD: Yes, I whipped him into shape, and that's gonna make his career. Meantime look what your defiance got you—a prison term. You're here for a handout, aren't you?

CHET: I'll take whatever I can get.

LLOYD: I'll tell you what you're gonna get. The \$500 I gave your girlfriend, and not one penny more.

CHET: We were kinda hoping for a thousand.

LLOYD: Do I hear a threat in your voice?

CHET: Yes you do.

LLOYD: Same old Arliss. All right. I'm gonna write you a check and you're gonna walk out that door and stay gone until I call for you. Until Chet needs the publicity of a no-account brother.

CHET: Jesus, Poppa. Why don't you quit trying to run his life?

LLOYD: What did you say?

CHET: You heard me. He's got Melanie, he doesn't need you at all.

(Pause. LLOYD eyes CHET suspiciously.)

LLOYD: Tell me...Arliss...where did you do your time?

CHET: Dayton Correctional?

LLOYD: Are you asking me or telling me? Are you on parole?

CHET: Yeah. No.

LLOYD: Which is it?

CHET: Yes. I'm on parole.

LLOYD: Look me in the eye. Did you escape from prison?

CHET: OK, yeah, I escaped.

LLOYD: How did you manage that?

CHET: Don't make me go into it. Just write me that check and I'm out of here.

LLOYD: Sit down, boy.

CHET: I'm in a hurry, Poppa.

LLOYD: I said sit down. Seen any of the debates?

CHET: Yeah. No. I've been on the road.

LLOYD: He's making quite a comeback, your brother. He's really showed some balls the last couple of days.

CHET: Yeah....he has....and I'm just an arrogant pothead. So...can I have my money now?

LLOYD: Who do I make it out to?

CHET: Arliss Yarbro.

LLOYD: Then how the hell are you gonna cash it?

CHET: What do you mean? At a bank. At a check-cashing store.

LLOYD: Won't you need some I.D.?

CHET: Yeah, well, I have I.D. You're not making any sense, Poppa.

LLOYD: Since when do you call me Poppa?

CHET: I've always called you Poppa.

LLOYD: Arliss never did.

(LLOYD *unpauses the TV.*)

ARLISS: (*on TV; over*) ...As far as big government goes, I know you hate it with a passion. But some of you folks think we need it. Big government for war, war on heroin, war on Muslims, big government for bailing out banks too stupid to fail. And small government for helping out the poor. But what if it was the other way around? Instead of bailing out Wall Street, bail out you people. Rich folks, how much more money do they need? And why do they need it? Because...they're chasing the phantom of happiness. Money doesn't buy happiness, you know why? Take a little baby. Little baby doesn't want money. Little baby doesn't buy his pleasures. Little baby's a natural enjoyer....

(LLOYD *pauses the TV.*)

LLOYD: So tell me, Chet: How long ago did Arliss show up?

CHET: Coupla days ago.

LLOYD: And where have you been in the meantime?

CHET: Duck-hunting.

LLOYD: What were you using?

CHET: My 20 gauge.

LLOYD: Whose idea was it to leave town?

CHET: I needed a rest. I needed time to think.

LLOYD: You're lying. You never hunted any ducks. She pussywhipped you into going.

CHET: Leave Melanie out of this. And please don't call me a liar.

LLOYD: You never lied to me.

CHET: Never.

LLOYD: Not even as a kid.

CHET: Not even as a kid.

LLOYD: Well, that computes. Kid can't lie to his dad, how's he gonna make his way through life?

CHET: That's not my problem.

LLOYD: Oh? Then what is your problem?

CHET: (*gulp*) You. You're my problem.

LLOYD: Whoa. That's better.

CHET: From the day I was born you treated me like your puppet.

LLOYD: You'd like to hit me now, wouldn't you.

CHET: I wouldn't give you the satisfaction.

LLOYD: Well that's too bad. For a second I thought I raised two ballsy sons. Go on, do it. Do it!

(LLOYD *offers his stomach*. CHET *punches him weakly*.)

LLOYD: Harder!

CHET: You didn't raise anybody. You just screamed at us from morning to night.

LLOYD: Quit your noise. Hit me again.

CHET: Sorry, that's it. I can't take any more orders.

LLOYD: Son, do you want to go to Washington?

CHET: I don't know, Poppa. Do I?

LLOYD: Put it another way. Are you interested in saving your marriage, which at the present time is hanging by a thread?

CHET: Yes, I want to save my marriage.

LLOYD: Then go upstairs, close the door, and don't show your face till after the results are in. Until tomorrow, you're Arliss, you understand?

CHET: Yes, Poppa, I understand.

LLOYD: Who are you?

CHET: Arliss. I'm Arliss.

LLOYD: Say it again.

CHET: I'm Arliss. (as he goes) I'm Arliss...I'm Arliss...

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Lights up on campaign headquarters. It's the next day, Tuesday, Election Day. LATASHA is pacing, holding the five hundred dollar check Lloyd gave her. ARLISS is in his underwear.)

ARLISS: Yeah, that's Lloyd's signature, all right. Why did he give you five hundred dollars?

LATASHA: To shut me up. He thought I was there to run a game on Chet.

ARLISS: And why were you there, by the way?

LATASHA: Why else? I came to see you.

ARLISS: You were checking up on me.

LATASHA: Yeah, OK, do you blame me?

ARLISS: Sweetheart, I love it that you're jealous, but let's try and keep our eye on the ball.

LATASHA: That's wonderful, coming from you. I think we should settle for what we've got.

ARLISS: Come on. There's fifty K on the line. Our whole damn future. Plus the ten thousand bonus when I win.

LATASHA: Oh give me strength.

ARLISS: Polls are looking good.

LATASHA: "Polls are looking good." Arliss, you've gone native.

ARLISS: No, I think I've found my true calling. And now you want to crap out on everything?

LATASHA: No, of course I don't want to.

ARLISS: But what?

LATASHA: I didn't say "but." *(pause)* Arliss, Chet's back.

ARLISS: What do you mean, he's back? He's supposed to be duck hunting.

LATASHA: Well, he's not. He's there at the house. (*fishes in her bag*) Here's his wallet to prove it.

ARLISS: Wow, good job. Now I don't have to worry about getting frisked.

LATASHA: Yeah, but now there's a reason to stop you.

ARLISS: What reason?

LATASHA: Chet knows you escaped from prison.

ARLISS: How does he know that?

LATASHA: OK. I told him.

ARLISS: You told him?!

LATASHA: For a time I thought he was you. It just slipped out.

ARLISS: How could you think he was me?!

LATASHA: Don't you dare bark at me, Arliss Yarbro!

ARLISS: What about Lloyd? Does Lloyd know I'm back?

LATASHA: Well, yeah. There's two of you now, isn't there. One at the house, one on the campaign trail.

ARLISS: Yeah, but does he know which is which?

LATASHA: Maybe he does, maybe he doesn't. Is it worth hanging around to find out? Arliss, your daddy's super scary. If you died tomorrow, I don't believe he'd shed a single tear.

ARLISS: Yeah, tell me about it. Whoa, what are you doing?

(LATASHA *has taken a joint out of her purse, lights it.*)

LATASHA: We're gonna do like the ancient Goths. Make every decision twice. Once sober, once stoned.

ARLISS: How do you know about the ancient Goths?

LATASHA: What, you think a black girl doesn't know about white men's history?

(LATASHA passes the joint to ARLISS.)

ARLISS: Wait. We didn't make our sober decision.

LATASHA: Sober I say we leave now.

(ARLISS takes a deep hit. The door rattles.)

MELANIE: *(off)* Arliss? Are you there? Open up!

ARLISS: It's Melanie.

LATASHA: So what did we decide?

(ARLISS takes another deep hit.)

ARLISS: We're staying.

LATASHA: You're sure about this.

ARLISS: How can I be sure of anything? Whoa, it's getting time for me to vote.

LATASHA: I suggest you put your pants on first.

(LATASHA stubs out the joint, starts for the back room. ARLISS starts for the door.)

LATASHA: *(whisper)* Wait!

(LATASHA takes a can of deodorant out of her bag, sprays the air, takes Chet's wallet, and exits. ARLISS exits to unbolt the door, re-enters with MELANIE.)

MELANIE: Did I wake you?

ARLISS: No no, I've been up for a while.

MELANIE: That speech was fantastic last night! Everything's trending our way. Well, except for the Dope Kills, God Hates Fags contingent. They think you're a liberal in wolf's clothing. (*sniffs air*) Hmm, my pregnant nose is acting up again.

ARLISS: That's my deodorant.

MELANIE: Smells pretty floral to me.

ARLISS: We all have our feminine side.

MELANIE: Who bought you those shorts?

ARLISS: Nobody. I did.

MELANIE: I kinda like how you look in those.

ARLISS: Yeah, I really should get to the polling place.

MELANIE: How can I ever thank you, Arliss?

ARLISS: Hey. So long as your money's good, I'm thanked.

MELANIE: I can't help wondering...what if we'd met sooner?

ARLISS: Before you met Chet, you mean.

MELANIE: Yes. Did you ever go to Vegas?

ARLISS: Listen...if you're thinking what I think you're thinking...I can't do that to Chet.

MELANIE: A girl can dream. A lot you care about him anyhow.

ARLISS: There's some brotherly love left. You'd be surprised. I can't speak for marital love, of course.

MELANIE: Not for months.

ARLISS: That's one problem I can't solve. That's between you and Chet.

(LATASHA enters with ARLISS's pants.)

LATASHA: Uh, Chet's wife? Arliss is gonna be late to the polls.

MELANIE: *(stunned)* Who in heaven's name are you?

LATASHA: Never mind who I am. Where's our money?

MELANIE: "Our" money?

LATASHA: I asked you a question.

ARLISS: She asked you a question.

MELANIE: I sold some stock. The money's being held in escrow.

LATASHA: You're a lying skank.

MELANIE: Whoa. Nobody talks to me like that.

LATASHA: I knew it. She's trying to screw us.

MELANIE: I am not trying to screw you and I suggest you chill.

LATASHA: Chill? Is that what you said?

(LATASHA starts for MELANIE.)

LATASHA: Take out your checkbook, bitch.

(Sound of a car door slamming. ARLISS steps between LATASHA and MELANIE.)

ARLISS: Both of you, back off! *(at window)* Damn, it's Lloyd.

(LATASHA quickly exits for the back room. LLOYD enters.)

LLOYD: What's going on here? What are you doing in your underwear?

ARLISS: Nothing, Poppa. Just waiting to hear the results. Wondering how the exit polls are going.

MELANIE: Fingers crossed.

LLOYD: Fingers crossed, you bet. We've got a brand-new problem.

ARLISS: What's that, Poppa?

LLOYD: Your brother is back in town.

MELANIE: (*dissembling*) Brother? What brother?

ARLISS: Arliss is back?

MELANIE: Who's Arliss?

LLOYD: He never told you he had a brother?

MELANIE: No, he never told me. Older or younger?

LLOYD: Identical twin.

MELANIE: Wow. Imagine that.

LLOYD: Pretty surprising, isn't it?

MELANIE: Oh yeah. Totally surprising.

LLOYD: (*to MELANIE*) Never expected to see that boy again. I remember the time he forced Chet to climb a tree. Poor Chet, he spent two nights in the hospital. Did Arliss show any remorse? Not a shred. The only thing Arliss ever felt guilty about was masturbation. Used to keep a masturbation calendar. Gave himself a gold star for every day he didn't jerk off. That was one empty calendar. Or wait, am I thinking of you, "Chet"?

ARLISS: All right, Lloyd, you can cut the crap.

LLOYD: Listen to that. He called me Lloyd instead of Poppa. I'm getting confused.

ARLISS: You know damn well who I am.

LLOYD: I don't know who anybody is. On TV you sound like a damn Democrat. Tell me, did you vote Democrat the last election? Oh, excuse me, they don't have voting machines in prison.

MELANIE: Prison?!

LLOYD: Yeah, your brother-in-law owes the state some time.
(*calling*) You can come out now, honeybun.

(LATASHA *emerges slowly from the back room.*)

LLOYD: And here's the little lady who helped spring him.

MELANIE: Ohmigod. (*to ARLISS*) What were you in prison for?

ARLISS: Possession with intent to share.

LLOYD: Yeah, that figures. You been harping on the marijuana issue. Give me one reason I shouldn't send you back to the pen.

ARLISS: Because not everybody has voted yet.

LLOYD: Boy, you are slicker than cum on a gold tooth. How short were you?

ARLISS: Six months.

LLOYD: (*re LATASHA*) Couldn't wait to see this one again. I understand. I felt that way about your mom.

ARLISS: That's bullshit and you know it's bullshit.

LLOYD: I'm sorry?

ARLISS: You drove mom into an early grave. You fed her alcohol and fatback and sleeping pills. Kept her totally stupefied while you traveled the country screwing anything with a pulse.

LLOYD: To the screwing I plead guilty. But I loved your momma with all my heart. And I'm just grateful to God she didn't live to see you in the big house. How many times you take it in the butt?

LATASHA: Never.

LLOYD: I'm asking Arliss.

ARLISS: I presided at a couple of weddings. But right here is where the rapes happened.

LLOYD: What are you talking about. I never interfered with you.

ARLISS: I'm talking about the brainwashing. Mocking Chet's deficiencies. Bending him to your will. Beating me with a belt when I tried to get between you.

LLOYD: I never raised a hand to you. You're the one who tortured your brother.

ARLISS: Have it your way. Crazy old coot.

LLOYD: What did you say?

ARLISS: You heard me.

LLOYD: No, I want to hear it again.

ARLISS: No more. I'm finished with you.

LLOYD: Goddamn blackmailer. I oughta put you over my knee again.

(LLOYD and ARLISS start pushing and shoving. The door opens. JOAQUIN bursts in, excited. Hasty rearrangement.)

JOAQUIN: I've got good news and better news! Record turnout and the Democratic vote is split! *(to LATASHA)* I'm sorry, who are you?

ARLISS: This is Latasha.

LATASHA: I've been helping out with the campaign.

JOAQUIN: Well, good job. You really flushed those Independents out of hiding. Gotta hand it to you, Chet. You're a real man of the people!

LLOYD: Yeah, yeah, that's fine. Get your wonky ass out of here.
We're having a family conference.

JOAQUIN: I don't take instructions from you.

ARLISS: That's right, Joaquin, you don't. But I do need you to leave.

JOAQUIN: Are you sure?

MELANIE: We're sure.

JOAQUIN: All right. *(to ARLISS)* But please get to the polls before they close. Everybody's dying to take pictures of you voting.

ARLISS: You bet, Joaquin. Onward and upward, dude.

(JOAQUIN exits. ARLISS starts pulling on his pants.)

ARLISS: *(to LLOYD)* This has been fun, but duty calls.

LLOYD: How much did you think you were getting paid?

ARLISS: All depends on the results.

LLOYD: Well, I'm sorry to tell you: You won't be around for the results, and you won't be around to collect what my daughter-in-law promised you. If I see your face after the polls have closed, you'll be lucky to leave town in handcuffs. Is everybody clear on that?

MELANIE: Yes, Lloyd, we're clear.

LLOYD: *(to ARLISS)* I hope so, for your sake. *(to LATASHA)*
And yours.

(LLOYD exits.)

MELANIE: That wasn't an idle threat. He meant every word.

ARLISS: I know he meant it. The question is, what are you gonna do about it?

LATASHA: She's going for our money, aren't you, Melanie? (*no answer*) Whoa, you're not getting cold feet, are you? Because if we don't get our money, Arliss posts a tell-all video on YouTube.

MELANIE: Don't you start making threats. (*pause*) I'll get you your fifty thousand.

ARLISS: Sixty.

MELANIE: You haven't won yet.

LATASHA: Sixty thousand dollars. Get it now. Deliver it here to me.

MELANIE: All right.

LATASHA: And hurry up.

MELANIE: (*to ARLISS*) Am I ever gonna see you again?

ARLISS: Never say never.

LATASHA: Not a chance.

(*Pause. MELANIE gives ARLISS a flustered kiss and hurries out the door. ARLISS finishes buckling up.*)

ARLISS: I can't help it if she wishes I was Chet.

LATASHA: Yeah, don't flatter yourself. Go vote, I'll meet you over there.

ARLISS: And then what?

LATASHA: Next stop, Mexico.

ARLISS: What about a victory speech?

LATASHA: Let your brother worry about a victory speech.

ARLISS: What if Chet doesn't show up?

LATASHA: That's his problem, isn't it?

ARLISS: What if he doesn't want to go to Washington? What happens to all we've accomplished?

LATASHA: Arliss. You bailed out your brother, you're getting paid for it. That's what we accomplished.

ARLISS: Maybe this is our Mexico.

LATASHA: Oh kill me now. You heard what your dad said.

ARLISS: Yeah, I heard him.

LATASHA: He's fixing to hurt you. You could end up in a shoebox.

ARLISS: I certainly could.

LATASHA: I say go pull that lever, I'll collect the money, and we're on our way to Juarez.

ARLISS: What if Melanie reneges?

LATASHA: Then we go viral. We blow up the whole damn election.

ARLISS: Is that your sober decision?

LATASHA: That's my sober decision.

(ARLISS opens LATASHA's bag, takes out a joint.)

ARLISS: Well then I say...we still have some thinking to do.

(ARLISS lights the joint. Takes a hit. Passes it to LATASHA. She hesitates...then takes a hit. Blackout. In darkness:)

TV PUNDIT: *(over, on TV)* Mike, I don't think I've ever seen a comeback quite as dramatic as this one...

Scene 4

(Lights up on the living room. It's that night. LLOYD is watching the election coverage. We hear the TV PUNDIT:)

TV PUNDIT: *(on TV; over)*After a very rocky campaign, the candidate made a sharp correction in the last three days. He pulled a number of Democratic votes, which more than offset his losses among the hard-core Republican base. We take you now to the Fairlawn Hotel, and a very disappointed crowd of Democrats....

(LLOYD enters, mutes the TV.)

LLOYD: *(calling)* Chet, where are you? Time to rise and shine your light!

(CHET enters.)

CHET: Why, where do you think we're going?

LLOYD: The Democrat's ready to concede. Your supporters are waiting for you at the Ramada.

CHET: You're saying he won.

LLOYD: What do you mean, "he." Son, you're the candidate. Your name's on the ballot. You're the one who's been elected. Your beautiful pregnant wife is waiting to hear your victory speech.

CHET: Is it?

LLOYD: Is it what?

CHET: A victory.

LLOYD: Of course it's a victory. Why, does that scare you?

CHET: Oh everything scares me, Poppa. You know what I used to think? I used to think God was playing tricks on me. Everything was gonna work out in my life. That's was His basic plan for me. But for the rest of my days I was doomed to worry that nothing's gonna work out. That was God's little joke.

LLOYD: Son, I'm happy you're drinking again, but enough is enough.

CHET: But you know what? It wasn't God who turned me into a worrywart. Unh-unh. It was you, Poppa.

LLOYD: And if you had any sense, you'd thank me for it. Look how your brother's life turned out.

CHET: Yeah, I wonder who's had it worse. Remember when we had that tree-climbing contest? I got halfway up and I couldn't go any farther and I couldn't go down and Arliss had to climb up again and get me, and on the way back down I fell, you remember that?

LLOYD: He pushed you, son.

CHET: Yeah, that's what you accused him of. You practically beat him to death.

LLOYD: He never denied pushing you.

CHET: And maybe that's why he ended up in prison. Pleading guilty to something he didn't do.

LLOYD: No, son. He went to prison for selling dope. Now get the hell over to the Ramada. And keep it short and sweet. Don't retract any of your brother's positions. Wait till you get to Washington, then retract them, you hear?

CHET: I hear you loud and clear.

LLOYD: So what are you waiting for?

CHET: I guess I was waiting for an apology. But that's never gonna happen. So yeah, I'm outa here.

(CHET exits toward the front door. LLOYD starts to pour himself a drink. Turns back to the TV.)

TV PUNDIT: *(on TV; over)* —What remains to be seen is how faithfully the son will follow in his father's footsteps...considering how radically his views have changed in the last three days...

LLOYD: *(to the TV)* Don't worry about his views. He knows what he's got to do.

(CHET re-enters, a weirdly happy look on his face. LLOYD mutes the TV.)

LLOYD: What are you doing back? You gotta get down to the Ramada, get your lunatic brother off the platform.

CHET: *(pleasantly)* Afraid I can't do that, Poppa.

LLOYD: What do you mean, you can't?

CHET: I'm being arrested.

LLOYD: Arrested? Who's arresting you?

CHET: Gal with a warrant.

LLOYD: Oh Jesus, is that all.

CHET: And a stun gun and a taser.

LLOYD: That's a bounty hunter, son. She came for your brother. What did you tell her?

CHET: I didn't tell her anything. I showed her my I.D.

LLOYD: Yeah, so?

CHET: I'm Arliss!

LLOYD: What do you mean, you're Arliss. You're not Arliss.

(CHET shows him the wallet from his pocket.)

LLOYD: Oh God in heaven...Here's a picture of that black girl....This isn't even your wallet, is it?...That sneaky little slut....

(LLOYD heads out toward the unseen stairway.)

CHET: Poppa, leave it alone, where are you going?

(LLOYD *exits toward the unseen stairway.* CHET *unmutes the TV.*)

ARLISS: (*on TV; over*) —You take the Hasidic Jew and the Radical Muslim. Except for the headgear, I can't tell these dudes apart. Neither eats pork. Both subjugate their women. Plus they share a bloodline. The less the difference, the more they seem to hate each other...

(LLOYD *re-enters with Chet's shotgun.*)

LLOYD: Turn off the damn TV.

(CHET *mutes the TV.*)

A voice on a bullhorn:)

BOUNTY HUNTER VOICE: (*off*) Arliss Yarbrow, I'm giving you exactly thirty seconds to get your ass out here.

(LLOYD *throws open the door.*)

LLOYD: Screw your warrant. You don't know who you're looking for. Get off my property, bitch, before I blast you to everlasting hell!

CHET: Poppa, stop it, give me the gun.

(LLOYD *trains the shotgun on CHET.*)

LLOYD: Back off, boy.

CHET: Poppa, no.

(CHET *advances toward LLOYD.*)

LLOYD: I said sit your ass down. I'm dealing with this.

CHET: Too late, Poppa. Please get out of my way.

(LLOYD brandishes the shotgun. CHET suddenly kicks him in the groin and wrestles him to the floor, shoving the barrel of the shotgun across his throat. LLOYD sputters and chokes. CHET presses harder...harder...)

BOUNTY HUNTER VOICE: *(off)* Ten...nine...eight...seven...

(CHET lets go of LLOYD and the shotgun, rises, throws his hands in the air, and heads toward the front door.)

CHET: *(calls)* Here I come. Don't shoot. I'm all yours.

(CHET exits. LLOYD struggles to his feet, coughing and gasping. Unmutes the TV. Picks up the shotgun.)

ARLISS: *(on TV; over)* —This war of brother against brother, it's gotta stop. Us against Them only benefits the TV networks. So...here's what I propose to fight for. An all-gay volunteer army. Amnesty for drug offenders. Suspended sentences for all abortions. No more farm subsidies, except for marijuana growing—

(LLOYD shoots out the TV. Blackout. Sound of cheering, over.)

Scene 5

(The cheers continue. Lights up on ARLISS. He addresses the audience. It's some minutes later.)

ARLISS: ...Your average politicians, they claim to be just like you. Don't be fooled. They're not even human. They pretend to have normal lives. Not a chance. Everything they do is fake. Their adulteries, their nervous breakdowns, their parent-teacher conferences, all play-acting...

(LLOYD enters from the back of the hotel banquet room with his shotgun.)

ARLISS: ...So if you don't agree with my proposals, I really don't care. I'm going to follow my nose, wherever it leads me. And oh yeah, I nearly forgot. No more Piggy Bank Museum. Mom, if you're looking down on us, I'm sorry, but I figure the Museum was a shrine to infidelity. You had piggy banks like Dad had girlfriends...

(LLOYD pumps the shotgun. LATASHA suddenly enters from an aisle, MELANIE behind her.)

LATASHA: Look out! MELANIE: Ohmigod!

(LATASHA leaps in front of LLOYD.)

LLOYD: Get out of my way, pickpocket. I'll deal with you later.

(LLOYD shoves LATASHA out of the way, advances toward the platform. ARLISS meets his eye.)

ARLISS: ...So no more pork. In every sense of the word. I'm talking about pork on two feet. Greedy pigs who turn a profit by paying their workers a pittance...greedy pigs who forge their workers' papers, then fire them on a whim...greedy pigs who make it impossible for honest citizens to make their house payments or send their kids to college....

(Screams from the crowd. LLOYD fires a warning shot into the air. ARLISS hits the deck. Pandemonium. LLOYD pumps the shotgun again, raises it—

—as JOAQUIN enters, with a bloodcurdling yell—)

JOAQUIN: [bloodcurdling yell]

(LLOYD swings the shotgun around in the direction of the yell. With a blinding series of karate chops, JOAQUIN disarms LLOYD. He picks up the shotgun.)

LLOYD: Go on, boogie. Put the white man out of his misery. We're all of us doomed anyhow.

(JOAQUIN trains the shotgun on LLOYD.)

ARLISS: Joaquin, no!

(ARLISS leaps from the platform, grabs the shotgun away from JOAQUIN.)

ARLISS: Get up, old man.

LATASHA: Joaquin, I recommend you call the sheriff.

ARLISS: Hold on, Latasha. Give my poppa a chance to speak.

LLOYD: Don't be fooled by that Poppa business! This man is not the man you think he is! I have two sons, and this one's name isn't Chet!

(ARLISS takes Chet's wallet out of his pants. Hands his I.D. to LLOYD.)

ARLISS: See for yourself, Poppa.

(LLOYD stares helplessly at the I.D.)

ARLISS: You owe these people an apology. And a living wage. What's it gonna be, justice or a prison term? Tell you what. Why don't we ask the people? What do you want from this man?

CROWD: *(on TV; variously; over)* "Health coverage!"... "Move to Argentina!"... "Pension plan!"... "Hang yourself!"... "A Union!"...

ARLISS: The people have spoken. *(to LLOYD)* You think it over and you let me know, OK?

(ARLISS hands the shotgun back to JOAQUIN.)

ARLISS: Good job, Joaquin. Everybody? My press secretary, Joaquin Gupta. So glad you're part of my team, dude. Take this man away.

(JOAQUIN marches LLOYD back up the aisle, to the sound of boos and catcalls and further calls for justice.)

ARLISS: And now it's time to get my better half up here. Woman behind the man, come up and take a bow!

(MELANIE starts in confusion for the stage, then realizes what ARLISS means.)

ARLISS: Everybody, meet Latasha.

(LATASHA joins ARLISS on the platform. Gasps of shock from the crowd.)

LATASHA: Let's hear it for Congressman Chet Yarbrow!

JOAQUIN: *(from the back)* Up with the people! Down with the assclowns!

LATASHA: Down with the assclowns!

ARLISS: Down with the assclowns!

MELANIE: *(with a shrug)* Down with the assclowns!

(Blackout. The chant fades.)

Scene 6

(The chant dies with an echo. Lights up on a prison visiting room—the conjugal room. CHET and MELANIE sit across from each other at a bare table next to a cot. CHET is wearing an orange jump suit. It's some months later. There's a baby carrier at MELANIE's feet.)

MELANIE: —And I brought you something to decorate your cell.

(MELANIE opens her bag, takes out a piggy bank.)

CHET: Thanks, Mel. This was my special favorite.

MELANIE: I had to sell off all the others.

CHET: How's our bank account?

MELANIE: Down to zero. I might have to start dancing again.
Vern's Nostalgic is putting in a pole.

CHET: What do you hear from the owner?

MELANIE: Lloyd? He hasn't shown his face since the workers formed a union.

CHET: And my brother?

MELANIE: He's marrying Latasha.

CHET: How can "Chet Yarbrow" marry Latasha? He's still married to you.

MELANIE: I served him with papers. They're planning a September wedding.

CHET: I see. So where does that leave us?

MELANIE: We can't go much lower, can we?

(Pause. CHET eyes the baby.)

CHET: (*uncertainly*) Is Junior a sound sleeper?

MELANIE: Chet...honey....are you sure?

(*Pause.*)

MELANIE: Seriously, hon. We don't have to do this if you don't feel up to it.

(*CHET considers. Deep breath. CHET turns the baby carrier so it's facing the opposite way. The lights start to fade. MELANIE starts to undress.*)

MELANIE: Just so there's no comparisons. I never made it with Arliss.

CHET: I never thought you did.

MELANIE: I just wanted you to win so bad.

CHET: Yeah, and guess what? He left his pregnant wife for a black woman—in the middle of a campaign.

MELANIE: It's the talk of D.C.

CHET: I smell a recall.

MELANIE: Wow, you think?

CHET: And get this: I've discovered a whole new constituency.

MELANIE: Who?

CHET: Convicts.

MELANIE: Convicts?

CHET: Tax cheats. Mobsters. Wife beaters. Ponzi schemers. You have no idea how much they hate the government! (*pause; sadly*) If only they could vote. (*pause*) Anyway, it's nice to dream.

MELANIE: No...darling...I really think you're back.

(CHET has unzipped his jump suit. The stage has gone to black.)

CHET: Oh yeah. Oh Melanie. I'm definitely back.

(Music rises: Fleetwood Mac singing "Don't Stop (Thinking about Tomorrow)." END OF PLAY.)