

TYRANT

A Full-Length Play

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Excerpt from the full-length play

SCENE 13

LIVE BROADCAST. CONTROL ROOM AND STUDIO INTERCUT.

MARIE

Quiet on set. Mikey, be prepared to go to bars on my word.

MIKEY

What do you mean bars?

MARIE

We may have to throw to art. Is someone on the dump?

EVELYN

On it. P-nut?

MIKE P

Just say when.

(PHONE LIGHTS are flashing. Mikey answers...he holds the receiver toward Marie.

MIKEY

It's Michelle.

MARIE

Not now.

MIKEY

She sounds serious.

EVELYN

I'll get it.

Marie takes the phone from Mikey before Evie can grab it. Marie hangs up the receiver.

EVELYN

What the hell?

EVELYN

Not now.

JACK (ON AIR)

I remember a time when the news was neutral.

Maybe you remember it too. I don't know when it happened, but one morning I woke up and something had shifted. The news became political. The truth became political. Reality became something we could disagree about.

Your world and mine stopped matching at the seams.

I don't want to talk to you about politics.

I want to talk to you honestly.

But I can't.

Because I'm bound by a restrictive covenant that feels of another time. Meanwhile, the president-elect has figured out how to break the system. He knows the cheat codes.

Lie.

Say whatever you want.

Throw enough shit into the fire.

EVELYN

Dump.

MIKE P

Copy.

MARIE

Jack—

JACK

I wrestled with whether to respond. I told myself I am not the story. That there are greater forces at work than my ego.

But then it got personal.

I never wanted to explain politics to you. I wanted to explain facts. But that world is gone. Reality is now a debate. And while we argue about tweets—

(Beat.)

—a judge in Laredo is signing a warrant to keep a three-year-old in a cage indefinitely.

You don't know his name.

You don't even know he exists.

You're too busy being entertained.

(Control room tightens.)

EVELYN

Stand by.

MIKEY

Legal's calling.

MARIE

Shhh.

JACK

You care deeply about a war fueled by thousands of black and brown bodies, burned skin, stolen limbs—
but you don't realize the war is already over.

It ended when a white, Christian man walked into an elementary school with an automatic rifle and killed twenty children.

Sandy Hook.

Connecticut.

Not Fallujah. Not Kabul.

Connecticut.

I was in Iraq when it happened. I had to double-check the byline to make sure it wasn't Tora Bora.

It wasn't.

That's when I knew Al Qaeda had won.

EVELYN

Dump.

MIKE P

Dumping.

JACK

I didn't fight in a war. Most of you didn't either.
But I covered four.

And the enemy I saw didn't share a face or a flag or a God.
It was a virus. It crossed borders through cables and
satellites into the black boxes that replaced the hearth in
every home in this country.

The Taliban kills children in schools.
Places God above country.
Threatens violence to control the vote.
Controls women's bodies.
Enforces belief with guns.

And now they live here.

You call yourselves soldiers for Christ, but you've locked
yourselves inside panic rooms with cameras on the doors. You
armed yourselves to protect freedom—and strangled it instead.

You became the eight-hundred-pound gorilla who crushes her
newborn in an embrace.

Osama Bin Laden didn't win overseas.
He won here.

EVELYN

Dump.

MIKE P

I missed it!

JACK

You think I hate you.
I don't.

I hate what we've let ourselves become.

I will not genuflect.
I will not apologize.

May God save His mercy for those who merit it.
And may God have mercy on these—
your once United States.

(RED LIGHT CUTS. A BEAT TOO LATE.)

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 14

CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

(Silence. The monitors are black or showing color bars. Marie stares at the screen. Evelyn is frozen. Mikey is looking at his shoes.)

MIKEY

Did we... did we get cut?

MARIE

We got cut.

EVELYN

He said Taliban.

MARIE

I heard him.

MIKEY

He said Laredo.

EVELYN

Michelle is calling the booth line.

MARIE

Don't answer it.

EVELYN

It's blinking red.

MARIE

Let it blink.

(Jack walks into the control room. He looks electric. Alive.)

JACK

Well. That happened.

MARIE

Jack.

JACK

Don't say it was too much. It was exactly enough.

MARIE

You just compared half the country to terrorists.

JACK

I compared their behavior to terrorists. Nuance, Marie.

MICHELLE

(Entering. Ice cold.)

There is no nuance in breach of contract, Jack.

(Michelle stands in the doorway. Tony is behind her, looking ill.)

JACK

Michelle. Good evening.

MICHELLE

Get your things.

JACK

I have a post-show meeting.

MICHELLE

Not here you don't. Security will escort you to the lobby.

JACK

Am I fired?

MICHELLE

Suspended. Pending investigation.

JACK

Investigation into what? Telling the truth?

MICHELLE

Into inciting panic. Get out.

JACK

(Looking at Marie)

You coming?

MARIE

(Looks at Michelle, then Jack)

I have to cut the West Coast feed.

JACK

(A beat of betrayal)

Right. The feed.

(Jack walks out. Alone.)

END OF SCENE.

SCENE 15

LOBBY - NIGHT.

(Jack walks through the lobby. A security guard shadows him.)

GUARD

Mr. Harper. I need your badge.

JACK

Really, Earl?

GUARD

Sorry, sir. Orders.

(Jack hands over his badge. He walks out the revolving doors into the night. FLASHBULBS POP. Paparazzi are already there.)

REPORTER 1

Jack! Did you call the next President of the United States the Taliban?

REPORTER 2

Jack! Are you resigning?

(Jack stops. He looks at them. He smiles.)

JACK

I'm just getting started.

BLACKOUT.