

THE RETURN

by R. T. Bowersox

Draft 13
January, 2025

R. T. Bowersox
229 Gaskill Street
Philadelphia, PA 19147
302-540-6102
RTBowersox@gmail.com
bobbowersoxwriter.com

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(CAST OF CHARACTERS)

(DAVID STEELE...60's; Americanized British; Primary Anchor of the World News Network, revered as was Murrow, Cronkite, Brinkley, Brokaw.)

(WALTER PULLEN...late 50s; Division Head of World News Network's New York News Division. Was once a newsman, but went over to the business side a while back.)

(CHARLIE NIMS...60s; Executive Producer for the News Division and of David Steele's nightly broadcast; David Steele's lifelong friend and colleague.)

(AMANDA RICHARDS...40s; corporate "fixer" of Conrad Communications, the conglomerate that owns WNN.)

(PATRICIA STEELE...60s; Americanized British, David Steele's wife.)

(FATHER JOHN COVANT...50s; Catholic priest who also happens to be a board-certified psychiatrist.)

(ACT 1)

(Scene 1)

(Charlie leans on bookcase, UCS, on a cell phone.)

CHARLIE

(on phone)

So get to the point, Doc. I've got a broadcast in...

(checking watch)

...Yeah, okay, so...Well, how far has it gone?...Yes, I know what metastasized means, but that doesn't tell me shit.

Where is it? Exactly.

(he sags)

Ah, Christ...

(beat)

How long?...Jesus, Ben, how many years I been coming to you?! Cut the bedside manner! How long!?!...

(Charlie lets the phone drop. He looses a shuddered sigh. Then slowly back to the call.)

CHARLIE

Yes, I'm here...All right...Yes, I'll call you tomorrow...Yes.

(Charlie cuts the call and sits shell-shocked a moment before a sudden pain in his abdomen doubles him over. He hides it quickly as WALTER PULLEN blusters into the room, a stack of files in his hand.)

WALTER

Sorry, Charlie, sorry, I know I'm late. Damned accountants want you to look at every entry in every column. Drives me nuts.

CHARLIE

Goes with the shoes you're walking in, doesn't it?

WALTER

How 'bout we trade shoes for awhile?

CHARLIE

Not on your life.

WALTER

Coward. David's content for tonight set?

CHARLIE

Yes, we're fine. Unless something earth-shattering happens in the next hour.

WALTER
God forbid. Script in the prompter?

CHARLIE
An hour ago.

*(Walter tosses the files on his desk,
flops into his chair, presses the
heels of his hands into his eyes.)*

WALTER
I'm getting too old for this.

CHARLIE
(indicating files)
Those the new numbers?

WALTER
Yes.

CHARLIE
And...?

WALTER
They're shitty.

CHARLIE
That's definitive.

WALTER
Okay. They're *really* shitty.

CHARLIE
Much clearer.

(Walter picks up one of the files.)

WALTER
It says here that overall viewership is down another seven percent in the last quarter.

CHARLIE
(sitting CS chair)
Uh-huh.

(Walter picks up another file.)

WALTER
Says *here* that because of that continuing trend, cumulative revenues year-to-date are down *thirty-five* percent.

CHARLIE
Nasty.

WALTER

Very.

(Walter picks up a third file.)

WALTER

Says *here* that "World News with David Steele" is off forty percent in the same time frame.

(Charlie shifts in his chair. This suddenly matters.)

WALTER

(opens same file)

And it says back *here* that in the opinion of the adolescent MBA's upstairs that it is, and I quote, "the poor performance of David Steele's newscast -- situated as it is in the network's prime-time entry slot -- that is the most likely downward drag on the entire night's programming".

CHARLIE

They say which night?

WALTER

ALL of them, Charlie.

(Charlie rises, goes to the bar, puts ice in a glass as...)

CHARLIE

Bullshit. If anybody's watching, they're watching David.

WALTER

Not according to--

CHARLIE

His show is the only *real* news show this network has left!

WALTER

In their opinion, that's the problem.

CHARLIE

What is?

WALTER

It's real news.

CHARLIE

And how do those *children* upstairs see that as a negative?

WALTER
(*Walter rises, moves
CS*)

Times have changed, Charlie. To them, you're producing a dinosaur. Nobody wants in-depth reports on major issues anymore. They won't pay attention. They AREN'T paying attention.

CHARLIE
(*hands Walter drink*)
Murrow just flipped over in his grave, you know.

WALTER
(*indicates files*)
Murrow didn't have to deal with that crap.

CHARLIE
The hell with 'em. You were a newsman once...until you...
(*waves his hand at
Walter's desk*)
This is supposed to be a "News Network", isn't it?

WALTER
That's what's on the letterhead. But what the audience *thinks* is news has morphed. And they're telling us that David's not what they want.

CHARLIE
David Steele's been in that anchor chair thirty-five years -- the most authoritative voice in television news, for Christ's sake.

WALTER
Maybe so. But we're getting slaughtered by the other networks--

CHARLIE
Who think the color of Kim Kardashian's new thong is a better lead than definitive evidence of global warming.

WALTER
They don't want to hear about global warming, Charlie! It makes them think they're going to die!

CHARLIE
They ARE, Walter, unless someone tells them--

WALTER
And then they turn the channel, to our competitors, who are unafraid to show Kim's ass.

CHARLIE
I will not produce a show that--

WALTER

And *that's* what Mr. Conrad wants to see.

(This stops Charlie.)

CHARLIE

Conrad's behind this flap?

WALTER

Called while I was upstairs. "Prurient interest news" is the way he put it. Said we're to lead tonight with those actors on strike in Hollywood.

CHARLIE

You're kidding me.

WALTER

"Put the pretty people up front". That's what he said.

CHARLIE

Jesus, Walter...you can't let--

WALTER

Out of my hands, Charlie. It's Conrad's network. You're the show's producer. A content shift *is* going to happen and it's your job to see that it does.

CHARLIE

And when is this pig supposed to fly?

WALTER

Conrad wants to see a new approach immediately. Hire a couple new writers...younger, of course, and--

CHARLIE

I won't do it. *David* won't do it.

WALTER

You will -- and *he* will -- or none of us will work here next week.

(Charlie gazes into his drink a moment, then...)

CHARLIE

Do it or die. That it?

WALTER

Line's been drawn in the sand, Charlie. Conrad's not playing Chutes and Ladders here.

CHARLIE

And David? You going to tell him? Because I sure as shit don't want to.

WALTER

We'll do it together. I'll take the heat, if it will make it easier.

CHARLIE

(accepting)

No. No, it's my job. He'll take it better from me.

(Charlie walks to the window, gazes out.)

CHARLIE

Jesus, Walter. Never thought this day would come. Thought the news was bulletproof.

WALTER

Time marches on.

(glances at watch)

Speaking of which, it's nearly five. Where is he?

CHARLIE

Make-up, I suppose.

WALTER

Better get him up here, let him know about the changes for tonight.

(Charlie picks up the phone on Walter's desk.)

CHARLIE

He's not going to like this.

(Walter shrugs, sits.)

WALTER

I don't like Miralax, but I drink it because the alternative is worse.

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

Hell of an image, under the circumstances.

(into phone)

Yeah, it's Charlie Nims. David down there?...Where is he?...Where?

(Charlie goes to the windows, looks down.)

CHARLIE

What the hell is doing out there?

(Walter joins Charlie at the windows.)

WALTER

Is he on his knees?

CHARLIE

(into phone)

He's what?!

(looks at Walter)

For God's sake...get him out of the goddamned courtyard!
Send him up here, now!

(Charlie hangs up the phone.)

WALTER

What?

CHARLIE

He told them he needed a quiet place to pray.

Scene 2

(Charlie leans on bookcase. Walter is pouring another drink for himself.)

(DAVID STEELE enters in suit and tie, papers in his hand. He's animated, focused.)

DAVID

Good evening, Gentlemen.

CHARLIE

David...

(David sits in CS chair.)

DAVID

Hell of a day! Wish we had a full hour to really get into--

CHARLIE

Listen, David...if you don't mind my asking...what the hell were you doing out there just now?

DAVID

Praying. Wasn't it obvious?

WALTER

Praying to what?

DAVID

"The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray." First Peter, Four, Seven.

(Walter and Charlie exchange a glance.)

DAVID
(*organizing pages*)
Just needed to touch base a second.

WALTER
Which "base" is that?

(*David just smiles at Walter, then
turns to Charlie.*)

DAVID
So, Charlie...

CHARLIE
(*quietly, to David*)
You all right?

DAVID
Of course I am.
(*hands papers to
Charlie*)
So. Here's what I'm going to lead with this evening.

CHARLIE
We might want to talk about that--

(*David ignores him, goes to the bar.*)

DAVID
Going with the famine in East Africa. No one anywhere's
paying attention.
(*points to pages*)
Just banged that out. Got the boys pulling some video to
roll over. Dire situation, that.

WALTER
(*reaching for pages*)
Let me see those.

CHARLIE
Little late for changes, isn't it? You're on in thirty
minutes.

DAVID
Oh, come on, Charlie! We used to wing it cold back in the
day! Wrote it as we spoke it! Remember?

CHARLIE
We're not exactly reporting from the field under fire anymore,
David. We're both sitting at big desks in air conditioning
now.

DAVID

So we'll make it a special report, like Murrow and Cronkite use to do. Deep dive.

CHARLIE

I'm thinking we ought to take a look at that strike in Hollywood--

DAVID

Come on, Charlie! The world turning its back and allowing thousands to starve has a little more weight than a few self-important actors walking a picket line--

WALTER

(reading pages)

Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. No way!

DAVID

What do you mean "no"?

WALTER

I mean, no, you're not leading with this. It's depressing as hell. In fact, we're not touching this at all.

DAVID

It's happening right now, Walter! Women and children are dying!

WALTER

Just what I want to see on my TV while I'm eating my Salisbury Steak.

DAVID

Not your call, Walter. Charlie and I make--

WALTER

Not any more.

(to Charlie)

Lead with the Hollywood thing--

DAVID

That Hollywood bullshit will not come out of my mouth!

WALTER

It will. And more. And since you like to do things

(to David)

"on the fly"...

(to Charlie)

...Check the wires for any breaking stories along the lines we've been talking about--

DAVID

The hell you say!

WALTER
Rebuild the entire broadcast--

CHARLIE
In thirty minutes?!

WALTER
(eyeing David)
"Wing it", if you have to.

DAVID
What the hell is this!?

CHARLIE
Calm down, both of you.
(quietly to Walter)
Give us a minute, will you?

WALTER
That's about all you have.

CHARLIE
I'll take care of it. Just give us the room.

WALTER
We don't have a choice, Charlie. There are consequences.

DAVID
Consequences? What is he--?

(Charlie shows his hand to David in a quieting motion.)

CHARLIE
(to Walter)
Yes. I know.
(indicates the door)
Please.

(Walter moves toward the door.)

WALTER
Five minutes.

(He exits.)

DAVID
What in blazes is he talking about -- consequences?

CHARLIE
Sit down a minute, David.

DAVID

And since when does he have a single thing to say about our broadcast? He's a pencil pusher now--

CHARLIE

David, please.

(David acquiesces, sits, makes a "go ahead" gesture.)

CHARLIE

(diplomatically)

We've got a little bit of...pressure...coming from--

DAVID

So what? We've always had pressure. We thrive on it. We're newsmen--

CHARLIE

Corporate pressure, David.

DAVID

Corporate?

CHARLIE

Conrad.

DAVID

Michael Conrad?

CHARLIE

Conrad Communications himself. God around here, if you will.

DAVID

Not my God. And so what? Man's never set foot in a newsroom. He runs an amorphous conglomerate that happens to own us. What would he know about what's news and what isn't?

CHARLIE

David, you need to listen to me now and--

(A sudden sharp pain in his abdomen doubles Charlie over. David catches him, eases him into the chair.)

DAVID

Charlie...what is it?

CHARLIE

(between gasps)

It's...nothing...

DAVID

That wasn't "nothing".

CHARLIE
A little indigestion. Forget it. We need to talk about--

DAVID
Not until you tell me what that was.

CHARLIE
You need to go downstairs--

DAVID
I go nowhere until you talk to me!

(Charlie looks at David a beat, straightens up in the chair, then he rises, gingerly, takes his empty glass to the bar, refills it as he talks.)

CHARLIE
It's cancer.

DAVID
No.

CHARLIE
Pancreatic.

DAVID
Oh, no. How bad?

CHARLIE
Bad enough. Pancreas pretty well shot. In the lungs. Liver. Kidney. Just showed up in, uh...
(taps his head)
I'm pretty well screwed.

(This silences David. It's devastating news...his best friend...)

(Charlie takes a slug of scotch, moves to David, sits.)

DAVID
What can I do?

CHARLIE
Nothing right now.

DAVID
Charlie --

CHARLIE
We'll talk later. But you're due on set and I need you to understand the situation before you go on.

DAVID

What situation?

CHARLIE

Ratings -- and revenues -- are in the toilet and now it's become quite simple: report what they give us and be professional about it, or be replaced immediately.

DAVID

They can't do tha--

CHARLIE

They can. And they will. Dollars trump all, including integrity, it appears.

DAVID

Damn money! It's always about the damn money!

CHARLIE

They want to see something different, that's all.

DAVID

So it's don't make them think! Don't make them aware of the very real dangers out there that will affect their lives and the lives of their children! Just feed them pablum, keep them electronically sedated so the ads can sell them shit they don't need.

CHARLIE

We've been in this business a long time, David. Maybe our time is passing, like it did for Murrow, Cronkite, Brinkley.

(smiles)

I'm pretty sure mine is.

*(David touches his friend's shoulder,
then goes to the window.)*

DAVID

Oh, I'm not afraid of the ride ending, Charlie. You know that. No...I fear for us. For mankind. For the world. It's out of control. Famine, war, terrorism, disease, a collapsing environment -- all on massive scales.

(turns to Charlie)

We're the last sane men with a voice and a pulpit. We need to use it. Make them hear. Before it's too late.

CHARLIE

We're just newsmen, David. It's not our job to make them listen. Just report the news, no matter who decides whatever it is.

DAVID

Serve it up and forget it.

CHARLIE
That's about it. Can you do that?
(Charlie rises)
We'd better head downstairs.

DAVID
In a minute. Want to gather my thoughts.

CHARLIE
Well...don't be long.

DAVID
Right behind you.

(Charlie exits. David muses a beat, then moves to the window, looks out, then up into the bright light of the night sky...the moon, or...?)

DAVID
What the hell do I do now?

(He stands for a moment, looking up into the light. Then he nods.)

DAVID
Yes. Alright.

(David slowly turns back to the room. Charlie enters.)

CHARLIE
Time to go, David. Makeup wants a last look.

DAVID
I'm fine. Won't need 'em.

CHARLIE
I know. But indulge them. ALL of them.

(Charlie holds the door as David begins to cross to him.)

CHARLIE
Just read what's on the prompter with that authority of yours.

DAVID
That's what David Steele, professional newsman, would do, isn't it?

CHARLIE
Always has.

DAVID
Stay out of it. Just *report* the news, don't *be* the news.

CHARLIE
Right.

(Beat.)

DAVID
What if I can't do that anymore?

CHARLIE
Do what?

DAVID
Stay out of it.

(David exits.)

CHARLIE
(to now empty door)
David. What are you talking about?

(Charlie feels another hard shot of pain in his gut, holds his breath a moment, then straightens and moves to the bar, pours himself another stiff one.)

(Walter returns.)

(Through the following, David Steele can be seen entering the "Broadcast Set" stage right and preparing himself to go on -- straightening his tie, sitting on his coattails, arranging papers he holds, etc.)

(Walter looks at the TV monitor on the "4th Wall".)

WALTER
He all right?

CHARLIE
He'll be fine. He's David Steele, for God's sake. Would anyone have asked if Ed Murrow was "okay"?

(Walter goes to bar, pours himself a drink.)

WALTER
I'm sure Paley did when Murrow was going after McCarthy and putting all of CBS on the line.

CHARLIE

But Paley let him do it, didn't he? And we beat Fascism back a bit.

WALTER

Maybe. Anyway, I was just wondering...

*(They both walk downstage center,
looking at the 4th wall TV monitor.)*

WALTER

...Wasn't aware David was a religious man.

CHARLIE

Never known him to be. He's never shown a liking for organized religion.

WALTER

Hmm.

*(pointing to 4th
Wall TV)*

Well...Here we go.

(News show music open plays as...)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

*(authoritative male
voice)*

And now, World News with David Steele. Here is...David Steele.

*(Bright TV lights come up and wash
David on the Broadcast Set. Lights
dim slightly in Walter's office.)*

DAVID

Good evening. Tonight...

*(David stops, looking at the camera.
He takes a deep breath, then
proceeds...)*

DAVID

(almost bored)

Tonight the film cameras across Hollywood have gone blind, the result of a job action on the part of union...ac...tors...

*(David stops again, staring, then
his head suddenly drops down, though
he doesn't slump.)*

CHARLIE

What the hell?

(David sits motionless a moment...)

CHARLIE

What...?!

(David takes a sudden breath and his head snaps up, he looks straight at the camera. And smiles.)

DAVID

Sorry. I know the movies are probably very important to you. And though I could report on that...Or the twelve million men, women, and children starving to death in East Africa...

WALTER

Oh, shit.

DAVID

...or on the symposium of top scientists that has determined the rate of global warming is increasing at twice the predicted rate of just a year ago...

WALTER

I'm going to kill him.

CHARLIE

Give him a chance.

DAVID

...or that evidence is showing that radiation from the constant bombardment of satellite communications may be responsible for a rise in human cancers...

WALTER

I'll strangle him.

DAVID

But I won't be going into any of that...though not because I don't think it important that you know these things. And certainly not because the communications conglomerate that owns this broadcasting network thinks it more important that you be alerted to the fact that the beautiful children of Hollywood are throwing a temper tantrum. No...

WALTER

What's he doing?

(Charlie picks up a phone, dials a three-digit extension.)

DAVID

...I have something I feel more important than any of that to talk with you about tonight.

CHARLIE
(into phone)
It's Nims. Is the prompter down?

DAVID
So please hear me out.

CHARLIE
(into phone)
Well, get him back on script!

(Charlie hangs up.)

DAVID
We need to talk about you. Each and every one of you. All of us. And our future.

CHARLIE
You told him to wing it. I guess he's winging it.

DAVID
But before we do, I have something I need to tell you.

(Walter crosses to bar, refreshes his drink.)

WALTER
Aw, jeez...

DAVID
I know it will come as a shock to you, but there's no simpler way to do this but to just say it: while you have known me publicly the better part of the last forty years as David Steele, that is, in fact, not who I am.

WALTER
What the...

(Walter's eyes are riveted to the TV as he takes a big sip of scotch.)

(David takes a deep breath, looks directly at the camera.)

DAVID
I am, in fact, the returned Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

(Walter spit-takes the scotch.)

DAVID
Yes, *that* Jesus Christ.

CHARLIE
Oh, my God...

*(Charlie immediately grabs the phone,
dials.)*

DAVID

Now, I know many of you have been waiting a long time for me to return, and were certainly not expecting me to show up like this. Rather, you faithful figured me to arrive with flowing hair, wearing sackcloth and sandals, riding in a flaming chariot swinging a millennial sword. Sorry to disappoint you, but I wear Hugo Boss off the rack, drive a Mercedes CLS, and the closest thing I have to a sword is a filleting knife in a block on my kitchen counter, where it shall remain.

CHARLIE

(into phone)

Shut it down!

DAVID

Frankly, I'd have been perfectly happy to continue bidding my time here in this chair, watching to see if you'd ever get your shit together.

WALTER

He just said "shit" on world-wide TV!

DAVID

But that doesn't appear to be the case, and with things now getting so perilously close to going to hell in a handbasket, I didn't think I had much choice but to get directly involved again. You've forced my hand, so here I am, back for another go.

CHARLIE

(into phone)

Go to black, if you have to!

DAVID

So let me begin with...

*(And the lights on the Broadcast Set
suddenly go dark. Lights in office
return to full.)*

DAVID

Wait a minute! What's going on? Charlie?! Why are we stopping? Charlie!!

(David rises, bolts from the set.)

CHARLIE

(into phone)

Bring him up here. Yes, now!

(Charlie slams down the phone. Walter heads to the bar.)

WALTER
What in God's name was he doing?

(They stop and look at each other.)

WALTER
I mean...you know...

CHARLIE
Yeah. I get it.
(points to drink)
Give me one of those.

Scene 3

(David sits in CS chair...almost like a boy in the principal's office. Charlie leans on the US bookcase.)

(Walter paces back and forth in front of his desk. He looks about to explode. Finally he does.)

WALTER
SHIT!
(beat)
SHIT!!

DAVID
Walter, if you'll allow me...

(Walter sticks a finger in David's face.)

WALTER
Don't say a word! Not. One. Word. Do you know what you've done? To this division? The network? To your career, for Christ's sake?!

DAVID
My sake? I didn't do it for *my* sake.

WALTER
What...?!

DAVID
I've returned for *your* sake...for *all* of your sakes.

WALTER
(pulling at his
hair)

Jesus!

DAVID

Yes?

WALTER
(disbelievingly)

Oh, my God.

DAVID

Yes. Yours and everyone's. Now, if I may--

CHARLIE
(to David)

Hold on a second.

DAVID

But I think it's important that I--

CHARLIE

Yes, I know. But right this instant might not be the best time.

(moves to Walter)

I think we should get him out of here --

WALTER

You think? Every other news outlet in the city...the entire country!...is no doubt on the way over here.

DAVID

Good! Let me talk to the masses. A new parable, maybe--

WALTER

CHRIST!

DAVID

You needn't be so formal. Call me Jesus.

WALTER

(almost desperate)

Charlie, please! Get...whoever he is...out of here!

CHARLIE

Yeah. Probably should.

DAVID

I can't leave now! I need to talk with--

WALTER
(to Charlie)

I don't want him talking to *anyone* until we've had a chance to sort out how we're going to handle this.

CHARLIE
I'll take him home. We'll go out the back.

WALTER
And I want him checked out...by a doctor...a *shrink*, for Go-
...for Chris-...shit! For MY sake!

CHARLIE
Of course.

WALTER
Someone must have weekend hours.

(The intercom beeps.)

VOICE ON INTERCOM (O.S.)
Mr. Pullen. Security has two reporters from the Times at the front entrance.

WALTER
What did I tell you?
(touches intercom)
Tell Security I'll be right there. No one gets past the lobby. Understand?

VOICE ON INTERCOM (O.S.)
Yes, sir.

(Walter moves to the door, turns to David.)

WALTER
(to David)
Why the hell didn't you resurrect Walter Cronkite or somebody that has a chance of giving us some goddamned ratings?

(Walter exits.)

(David looks at Charlie.)

DAVID
The Son of God's not enough for him? He wants Cronkite?

(Charlie drags the DS chair next to David, sits. An awkward beat.)

CHARLIE
I'm...uh...not really sure how to ask this...

DAVID

You want to know if it's true.

CHARLIE

Kind of puts a different perspective on who I've been hanging out with the last thirty-five years if it is.

DAVID

And if it isn't?

CHARLIE

I'd be concerned.

(beat)

I'm concerned either way, I guess.

(David rises.)

DAVID

Then you shouldn't worry about it. You have more pressing things to be concerned with.

CHARLIE

That's going to take care of itself in the near future. Unless...you want to do something about it, if you're...you know...who you say you are.

DAVID

You looking to be another Lazarus, are you?

CHARLIE

Lazarus had been in the ground a few days before being reanimated, if I remember my catechism. I'd rather skip that part if it's all the same to you.

DAVID

(amused)

Understandable. But you're far from in the ground, my friend. Give it some time. You never know.

*(Charlie's not sure how to take that.
They look at one another a long
beat. Charlie rises.)*

CHARLIE

Come on. I'll drop you at home. I'm sure you could use that scotch Patricia always has ready for you.

DAVID

Maybe a little wine tonight.

CHARLIE

Thought all you two ever drink is scotch. You even have wine in the house?

DAVID
(*striding out door*)
Just give me a glass of water. It won't be a problem.

(Scene 4)

(*The Steele living room. David sits on the couch. His wife, PATRICIA STEELE, stands near him.*)

PATRICIA
That's what you told him? "Just give me a glass of water?"

(*They laugh.*)

DAVID
Just slipped out.

PATRICIA
You shouldn't kid him like that. He's your best friend. And probably your only ally at the moment.

DAVID
I'm sure you're right, darling. I should have told him the truth right from the beginning.

PATRICIA
Which 'truth' is that, again?

(*Beat, as David ignores the question, then...*)

DAVID
How about a drink, love?

(*Patricia goes to a nearby liquor cart.*)

PATRICIA
You want that glass of wine you mentioned?

DAVID
(*laughs*)
Scotch will be fine.

(*She hands him the drink as she sits with him.*)

PATRICIA
You starting something here I should know about?

DAVID
Not sure. Came up all of a moment.

PATRICIA
Not like you to be impulsive.

DAVID
What do you mean? Asked you to marry me on our first date.

PATRICIA
And on the next twenty, if I remember.

DAVID
You were playing hard to get.

PATRICIA
Wanted to make sure you were serious was all.

DAVID
I'm serious about most things.

PATRICIA
And we've always talked about those things, yes?

DAVID
(*pats her hand*)
Yes. Of course. Wouldn't have made it this far without your counsel. Said it many times.

PATRICIA
So...?

DAVID
This may be different, darling. Could get a little more sticky than we've been used to.

PATRICIA
How so?

DAVID
Well, it appears one doesn't resurrect a deity without someone, somewhere, taking umbrage.

PATRICIA
Look. So you went on the telly tonight and said you're the Son of God. So what?

DAVID
So what?! The man in that chair is supposed to have a modicum of credibility, otherwise, who's going to listen to him?

PATRICIA
You don't think the Son of God has credibility?

DAVID
I may have been too straightforward.

PATRICIA

Seriously. Who would have more credibility than the Son of God?

DAVID

Now you're baiting me.

PATRICIA

(good-naturedly)

Perhaps a little. But I'll tell you this: you have always done your best, no matter what it was. I once saw you give the best kitten-up-a-tree report I'd ever seen. You remember that?

(They both giggle.)

DAVID

Hampstead. I was nineteen or thereabouts. Thought it was the best bit of reporting anyone had ever done.

PATRICIA

It was, darling! So what's so different? Now you're doing the Son of God.

DAVID

Pat -- it's important that you understand that I'm --

PATRICIA

So do it! If you're going to act the Son of God, do it with the same commitment you did the kitty thing. Don't bugger it up with worries about what others will think. That's not my David.

DAVID

Doesn't bother you that they'll probably bang me up on a cross like they did before?

PATRICIA

Don't be ridiculous. Oh...but if they do, I'll be right there looking up at you. Just call me Magdalene.

(David laughs, touches her cheek.)

DAVID

God, I love you.

PATRICIA

(jovially)

Don't take your father's name in vain.

(They both explode in laughter as Patricia rises.)

PATRICIA
I'll get dinner started.

DAVID
Thank you, darling.

*(She exits. David watches her go,
is silent a moment, then...)*

DAVID
This may be more difficult than I thought.

(Scene 5)

*(The next morning. Charlie sits in
a chair, Walter's behind his desk,
just hanging up the phone.)*

WALTER
Amazing.

CHARLIE
What's that?

WALTER
Nobody gave a shit.

CHARLIE
What do you mean?

WALTER
Hardly a fart. Fifteen second mention on the local station
before their sign-off, page thirteen below the fold in The
Times.

CHARLIE
The beauty of low ratings: no one was watching.

(Walter rises, looks out the window.)

WALTER
Someone was watching.

CHARLIE
Conrad?

WALTER
(turns to Charlie)
Got word this morning from his office. He's sending a fixer.

CHARLIE
That was quick.

WALTER
Amanda Richards.

CHARLIE
Should I know the name?

WALTER
San Francisco last year? The pot thing?

CHARLIE
Oh, Jesus--

WALTER
Please...Don't use that name.

CHARLIE
Sorry. Richards brought in a whole new team, didn't she?
Cleaned out the entire house?

WALTER
Everyone. Top down.

CHARLIE
Todd Mitchell was one of them -- you remember him...we were
at CBS with him back in...
(*off Walter's nod*)
Said she was "tough as nails"...among other descriptive
phrases.

WALTER
Medusa in a two-piece suit, I hear. You see her, you're
history.

CHARLIE
And Conrad's sending her here?

WALTER
Arrives today. Her team's right behind her.

CHARLIE
All they did in Frisco was softly advocate legalization in
an editorial.

WALTER
Uh-huh. So what do you think she'll do with a news division
that's allowed an obviously unbalanced man to announce live
on the air that he's the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior?

CHARLIE
Don't jump to conclusions, Walter. We can spin it -- he was
over-tired, a touch of flu, dehydration, constipation,
whatever. It'll blow over.

WALTER

Richards is a black widow, Charlie. Has no problem eating her young. Going to have to be some serious spin to deflect her. You lined up a shrink yet?

CHARLIE

Found a guy last night. Went you one better than a shrink, though.

WALTER

How's that?

CHARLIE

The shrink also happens to be a priest.

WALTER

You're kidding.

CHARLIE

Stroke of luck. Might as well have a ringer on our side, right?

WALTER

When's he talking to David?

CHARLIE

At his house right now.

(Scene 6)

(David's living room. David's on the couch. Psychiatrist/Priest FATHER JOHN COVANT sits near him.)

COVANT

Okay...so if I heard you right, you just felt the urge, so to speak?

DAVID

I didn't say that. I said I felt I couldn't sit by idly any longer.

COVANT

"I" being...

DAVID

Me.

COVANT

You, David, or you...you know--

DAVID

Doesn't matter. One and the same. Me.

COVANT

Mm-hmm. All right, so you couldn't sit by any longer.
Meaning...?

DAVID

Things are pretty much in the shitter, you have to admit.

COVANT

You've been watching a while, then.

DAVID

Quite a while.

COVANT

(with humor)

Like...a couple thousand years?

DAVID

(laughing)

A little less than that. I'm only sixty-eight.

COVANT

Mm-hmm. And you've felt like Christ how much of that time?

DAVID

I don't *feel* like him. I AM him.

COVANT

Right, right. When did you first discover that you were him
... Jesus Christ?

DAVID

When did you first discover that you were you?

(Covant pauses, smiles.)

COVANT

I guess what I'm trying to ascertain is whether this awareness
of being Christ is a recent manifestation, or has it always
been with you?

DAVID

One does not exclude the possibility of the other, does it?

COVANT

The chicken or the egg?

DAVID

In a manner of speaking.

COVANT

That's too circular for me. I'm more linear, I guess.

DAVID

Most people are, unfortunately, which is why seeing a global picture is difficult for them.

COVANT

Mm-hmm.

(beat)

What's it like? To be Christ, I mean? I'm just curious.

DAVID

No different than you. It's just a name.

COVANT

No, it's not, and you know it.

DAVID

All right. But the name has power only because man and history have given it such.

COVANT

Oh, but that name has the power of God standing behind it, doesn't it? Pretty formidable stuff.

DAVID

That's irrelevant. I'm not here to rain down the fire and brimstone of the Old Testament. Most of that is bullshit, anyway.

COVANT

Is that so?

DAVID

Come on Father. Burning bushes, the Red Sea, Lot's wife, the Flood? All fiction. Hollywood.

COVANT

Object lessons--

DAVID

Fear-based crap created by man to control other men.

COVANT

Mm-hmm. So God doesn't exist?

DAVID

Didn't say that. But certainly not as a vindictive thunderbolt hurler. Think more like a little old man in a workshop tinkering with parts and pieces. Thomas Edison on steroids.

COVANT

Okay. So you're not here for Armageddon.

DAVID

Quite the opposite.

COVANT

(*suddenly serious*)

Why, then? You chose to be Jesus Christ for a reason, yes?

DAVID

You keep trying to imply that I've "adopted" a persona. I AM Jesus Christ.

COVANT

Okay. Are you the historic Christ or the divine Christ?

DAVID

There are those that believe we're all divine. You're not one of them?

COVANT

I've not yet become aware of any divine aspect to myself.

DAVID

That's unfortunate. It's there, believe me.

COVANT

Well, to be completely honest, I'm not sure I believe in "divinity", period. Certainly not mine, or yours.

DAVID

So you find it hard to believe I'm who I say I am.

COVANT

Oh, I believe Christ lived once. There are historical documents. But do I believe you're the same man? Hardly.

DAVID

Maybe not the same *man*. Same entity.

COVANT

You implying a possession, then? Am I speaking to a spirit that's taken over David Steele?

DAVID

Meaning is my head going to start spinning around, puking pea soup? No.

COVANT

Well, that's a relief.

DAVID

Come on, Father. You're a doctor. Let's cut to the chase here. Do I look unbalanced to you? Do I sound it? Have I done anything at all to imply I'm a danger to myself or anyone else? No. All I've done is identify myself and try to make sense of things.

COVANT

It's who you identified yourself as that's got people concerned. All I want to understand is why.

DAVID

I've already explained that. Because things are out of control. I didn't feel I had any choice but to reveal myself and do whatever I can to turn it around.

(beat)

So let me do it. At least don't stop me from trying.

*(Covant considers a few moments,
looking intently at David.
Finally...)*

COVANT

Look, even if I said you don't seem to have a problem, the network does because of what you've chosen to do.

DAVID

They can handle it.

COVANT

Yes, but will they? And I must say this: if you continue, it might -- no, it most likely *will* -- produce negative consequences.

DAVID

How so?

COVANT

Well, on a religious plane alone, you have to admit it didn't work out so well last time.

DAVID

That was different...it was political. And they weren't so cynical. The ethereal frightened them. Probably should have cut back on the smoke and mirrors.

COVANT

So no miracles this time around?

DAVID

What do you mean? I sit in a small room on the fifth floor of a relatively nondescript building in New York City. Each night I take a single thought, spin a picture around that thought and place the same exact picture into the minds of two billion people around the world in the same instant. I repeat that process a dozen times in thirty minutes each night. That's not miracle enough?

COVANT

An odd twist on the loaves and fishes, isn't it? Information instead of food.

DAVID

Modern times...

(Covant contemplates a moment, then...)

COVANT

I honestly can't say what's going on here. You seem a nice man...calm, intelligent. But you'll have to admit that in our day and age, this is certainly not what we'd call "normal behavior". You obviously want us to believe you are Jesus Christ returned. That David Steele has been a...a "cover", if you will. Does that frighten me? Not really. I mean, I'm a priest, but I want people to believe I'm a pretty good psychiatrist too. Completely different disciplines, yes? Could one be a cover for the other? Maybe. But does that make *me* dangerous? I don't think so.

DAVID

Good. Then--

COVANT

BUT....can I recommend you going back on the air?

(David reaches out and touches Covant's knee, looks him directly in the eye, his head nodding.)

DAVID

Certainly you can.

(Beat, as Covant stares into David's eyes, his head begins nodding in unison with David's, then...)

COVANT

Certainly I can.

(They smile at one another, then...)

DAVID
(*emphatic*)

So.

COVANT
Well. That's it, I guess. I don't have any more questions.
Nice talking with you.

DAVID
You too. I enjoyed it.

COVANT
At my parish, we always part with "May God go with you," but
that may be a bit redundant in this case...

(*They laugh. Covant rises, offers
his hand. David takes it.*)

COVANT
So I'll just say good luck. I'll see my way out.

DAVID
Goodbye, Doctor.

(*Covant exits. David sits on the
couch, considering. Patricia enters.*)

PATRICIA
So? How'd it go?

DAVID
Fine. Nice man.

PATRICIA
Did you, um...

DAVID
What? Speak in tongues? Take him for a walk on the pool?

PATRICIA
David...

DAVID
(*patting her hand*)
It was fine, darling. We had a nice chat, that's all.

PATRICIA
They're going to try to keep you off the air, you know. No
matter what the nice man tells them.

DAVID
Well, we'll just have to not let them, won't we?

PATRICIA

(begins to leave)

May take a miracle, darling.

(David considers a moment, then...)

DAVID

Yes. It might.

(Patricia stops and looks worriedly back at David.)

Scene 7

(Charlie's on the phone in Walter's office.)

CHARLIE

You're sure, Father?...That your clinical opinion?...Okay...Yes, he's due in shortly...No, no decision, yet...Yes, thank you.

(Charlie touches off the call, dials four digits.)

CHARLIE

Security? Charlie Nims. David Steele will be arriving any minute. Escort him to Walter Pullen's office the second he does. Do NOT let him go anywhere else.

(Charlie hangs up. He stands, but a heavy pain in his abdomen hits him hard. He staggers, trying to get a breath. He heads to the bar.)

(Walter and AMANDA RICHARDS enter. She strides in like a general, goes straight to Walter's desk, pulls a laptop from her bag, speaks as she leans over it, firing it up.)

AMANDA

I want the entire team assembled in half an hour.

WALTER

Shouldn't be a problem. Most of them are here, prepping for Monday's broadcast.

AMANDA

Forget that. I want them in the conference room in thirty.

WALTER

But what about--?

AMANDA
(sees Charlie)

You're Nims?

CHARLIE

That I am.

AMANDA

Good. Where's Steele?

CHARLIE

He's on his way.

AMANDA

Too bad. You could have saved him the trip.

CHARLIE

Why's that?

AMANDA

If you have to ask, maybe you should go with him. In fact, that's probably a good idea.

CHARLIE

What do you mean, "go"? David's not--

AMANDA

Seriously? You think Mr. Conrad sent me here to bring him back some Broadway deli? That nutcase is going nowhere near a camera.

CHARLIE

I wasn't aware any decisions had been made. Walter?

WALTER

Nothing's crossed my desk.

AMANDA

I'm standing at your desk now. That's all you need to know.

CHARLIE

Last time I looked, Ms. Richards, this was still an independent news division with Walter here as division head, myself as executive producer. Any decisions--

AMANDA

Will be made by me as of right now.

CHARLIE AND WALTER

Says who?

(Amanda holds out her phone.)

AMANDA

Punch "one". It's a direct line to Mr. Conrad's home in California. He's an early riser -- should be having his morning coffee about now.

WALTER

(nervously)

I...uh...I don't think we need to bother Mr. Conrad, Ms. Richards. But Charlie's right. We shouldn't be too rash here.

AMANDA

This has gone far beyond a rash, Pullen. This is a damn third degree burn.

WALTER

Yes, well...We're addressing it...

AMANDA

How, exactly?

WALTER

We've had David Steele evaluated by one of the leading psychiatrists in New York...also happens to be a priest--

AMANDA

Convenient. They discuss aberrant theology too?

(off their blank looks)

Never mind. And?

CHARLIE

And he doesn't feel that David is unbalanced. Maybe a little stressed, in need of a rest--

AMANDA

Not unbalanced?! What part of declaring yourself the resurrected Jesus Christ on worldwide television would you not characterize as "unbalanced"?

WALTER

That may be a little strong.

AMANDA

Well, then, let me soften it a bit: He's batshit crazy.

CHARLIE

Why don't you talk to him? Should be here any moment.

AMANDA

I don't need to talk to him. I've seen the tapes. The man's a loon. He's finished. And until I get things straightened out, so is everyone else here. My team should be wheels-up out of Cali in...

(checks watch)

...an hour. And Roger Hollenbeck's flying in from Cincinnati. He's taking over as anchor.

CHARLIE

The hell he is!

(This explosion from Charlie triggers another intense abdominal pain. He turns away, trying to hide it. Walter sees it.)

WALTER

Charlie?

(The door bursts open. David enters, quite animated.)

DAVID

Hello, everyone. How are we today?

AMANDA

(icily)

How would you expect us to be?

(David moves to Amanda, extends his hand.)

DAVID

Beg pardon. Haven't had the pleasure. David Steele.

(Amanda doesn't take his hand.)

AMANDA

I know who you are. Were. Whatever.

WALTER

This is Amanda Richards, David... from corporate in Los Angeles.

DAVID

(sitting CS)

Ah.

AMANDA

To be correct, I just flew in from Dubai, but that's irrelevant. I handle problems for Michael Conrad's interests, Mr. Steele. I'm here to flush the vat of shit you've thrown this network -- *his* network -- into.

DAVID

Yes, well, I'd like to address that, if I may.

(to Walter)

I realize my actions Friday night may have been a bit questionable, but I'm hoping--

AMANDA

Questionable.

DAVID

I'm sorry?

AMANDA

Good word, questionable. Perfectly describes the situation you've put us in, Mr. Steele...that is, I'm assuming, what you'll continue calling yourself for the time being.

DAVID

(cooly)

It's fine.

AMANDA

(nicely)

Good. Now follow me here: The one currency that any news organization HAS to have is credibility, you agree?

DAVID

Of course, and that's why I think--

AMANDA

(directly)

Questionable is *not* credible, is it, Mr. Steele?

CHARLIE

Which is why we need to put David back in that chair tonight.

AMANDA

You're not serious.

CHARLIE

The only person who can return some semblance of that "credibility" you think we've lost is David Steele. His sudden disappearance would be an admission that he's impaired.

WALTER

It would also imply that the network is incompetent. I don't think Mr. Conrad would want that.

CHARLIE

Right. But put him back on--

AMANDA

That's not going to happen--

CHARLIE

Put him back on, we can make a seamless transition. We don't look like idiots.

AMANDA

A little late for that.

DAVID

I *would* like the opportunity to explain myself--

AMANDA

Absolutely not.

DAVID

There are things I'd--

AMANDA

No! How many ways do you want me to say it?

CHARLIE

We have a psychiatrist who says he's fine--

AMANDA

And I can get ten that say he isn't. It doesn't matter--

CHARLIE

He's earned it, goddamn it! With thirty-five years of journalistic excellence! Since before you were born, in fact.

AMANDA

Citing his geriatrics is not helping your cause, Mr. Nims.

WALTER

Charlie, let's not fly off the handle here. Maybe we can find some middle ground--

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

No, Walter!

(to Amanda)

You want to take him off the air, fine. He can announce his retirement on tonight's broadcast, but he at least deserves the opportunity to go out with some dignity. And leave us with some.

AMANDA

I can see I've not made myself clear here.

(sweeps a finger at them)

You. Are all. Fired. As of right now. When my team gets here, they take over. Period. Does that clarify things?

CHARLIE

You can't do that--

AMANDA

I can, and I just did. End of discussion.

(Amanda goes back to her computer.)

(David gazes at the focused Amanda, then wanders to the windows, looks out. He turns his eyes up into the sky, staring intently.)

(Walter and Charlie huddle SR.)

WALTER

(quietly)

Todd Mitchell was too kind. Medusa was an amateur compared to her. What do we do now?

CHARLIE

I don't know. Let me think.

(Beat, then Charlie turns to Amanda.)

CHARLIE

(to Amanda)

Okay. We're fired. So who's going to run the network tonight?

AMANDA

I told you. I have a team flying in. But how hard is it to put someone in a chair and have them read what's put on a teleprompter for them?

CHARLIE

Who's going to run the teleprompter?

AMANDA

Excuse me?

CHARLIE

Or the camera? Who's going to write the copy? Who's going to punch the shots? You?

WALTER

(realizing)

Charlie's right.

AMANDA

About?

WALTER

This is a union house.

AMANDA

All of Mr. Conrad's interests are. So what?

CHARLIE

You're a card-carrying member of SAG/AFTRA, aren't you, David?

(David looks away from the sky, back to the room, a slight smile on his lips.)

DAVID

Certainly am.

AMANDA

None of this means anything. I'm still--

CHARLIE

What it means is that if you try to pull David without due process, we'll call the union. What do you think Mr. Conrad will do if every union member of every affiliation at every Conrad facility suddenly walks off the job?

AMANDA

They wouldn't--

WALTER

Oh, they would. They wanted to shut me down a day last year just because the water coolers weren't cold enough. But *this...* a high-profile execution of one of their own without their input...?

AMANDA

This is a moot point. My team is union, so--

(Amanda's cell phone chirps. She instantly answers.)

AMANDA

Richards...WHAT?!...In Los Angeles?!...

(During this call, David wanders slowly across the room, eyeing Amanda.)

AMANDA

Well, how long do they think it will...For Christ's sake,
(she glances at David)

I need them here tonight!...What's the forecast?...Goddamn it. Well, at least we've got Hollenbeck... What do you mean?!...Seriously?! In May?!...Well, drive them somewhere they CAN get out!...Call me when you know something.

(Amanda clicks off her phone.)

Unbelievable!
AMANDA

Problem?
DAVID

*(Amanda looks up at David. They
stare at one another a long beat.)*

Blizzards.
AMANDA

Blizzards?
DAVID

White outs. Nothing moving in or out of LAX or Cincinnati.
AMANDA

Hmm. Bit unusual, that.
DAVID

A bit never happened in history, that. My team's parked on
the tarmac indefinitely. No way they'll be here tonight.
AMANDA

You're kidding.
CHARLIE
(laughing)

I don't kid, Mr. Nims.
AMANDA

Maybe we should have gone with that global weather thing
after all, Charlie...
WALTER

The rest of the country's enjoying cherry blossom springs
and--
AMANDA

Well, we'll be glad to stick around and handle business until
things sort out.
DAVID
(to Amanda)

Okay with you, Charlie?
(to Charlie)

You'll behave yourself?
CHARLIE
(to David)

Yes. Absolutely.
DAVID

AMANDA

No way is he--

CHARLIE

You'll make your apologies and read the news. Period. No funny business.

DAVID

I haven't seen anything funny about this from the beginning, Charlie.

CHARLIE

You know what I mean. You explain things, you give them the news, you say goodbye. Agreed?

DAVID

Agreed. Explain, news, sayanora.

AMANDA

You are not--

CHARLIE

Works for me. Walter?

WALTER

I'm good with it.

CHARLIE

What do you say, Ms. Richards? David Steele or reruns of "Happy Days"?

(Amanda stands stock still, staring at Charlie, then she breaks, shuts her computer.)

AMANDA

Not much choice, is there?

(moves to David)

But know this: if he uses the word "God" or "holy" or "blessed" or anything else remotely Biblical, I will incinerate this place.

(She strides to the door. As she's about to exit, she turns back.)

AMANDA

I kid you not. Scorched earth.

(And she's gone. David rises.)

DAVID

Seems to me I met that person as I wandered in the Judean desert once. About day twenty-seven, if memory serves. Was rather unpleasant then too.

(Charlie and Walter stare at the back of David's head a moment, then worriedly look up at one another.)

Scene 8

(Walter stands at his desk thumbing through papers. Charlie sits CS, in obvious discomfort. He quietly pulls out a pill bottle, slips one into his mouth. Walter notices.)

WALTER

You alright?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

WALTER

You're sure? This morning--

CHARLIE

(dismissively)

Yeah, yeah. A little indigestion. I'm alright.

WALTER

David alright?

CHARLIE

(rising, moving to bar)

He'll be fine.

(pours drinks)

How about you?

WALTER

I really expected to be at home unemployed tonight.

CHARLIE

(hands drink to Walter)

You may still be if the weather clears in LA.

WALTER

Hah! There's a miracle, if you ask me.

CHARLIE

Don't you go all evangelical on me too. Nothing miraculous about it. The weather's screwy everywhere, that's all.

WALTER

You've known him a long time. Been through all kind of shit with him. He ever...you know...seem religious to you?

CHARLIE

No. Just the opposite, in fact. I remember one time...Croatia. '91 I think. We were on the ground for CBS, embedded with a U.N. group monitoring Milosovic's war. Came across a bombed out church...Roman Catholic...took a break for an hour. David and I walked through what was left of the building, came to the altar. It was pretty much destroyed, though the crucifix was still hanging on the back wall. David stared at it for a long time, then he says, "You ever wonder how many human beings have died because of organized religion? How much misery has been caused?" I didn't answer...had nothing to say about it, and then he says "Such bullshit. It was never meant for that to...aw, never mind." And he walks out. I don't think he's been to so much as a wedding since.

WALTER

So what's all this, then?

CHARLIE

No idea.

(empties his glass)

But I'll stand behind him. Only real friend I've ever had. We go down together, if it comes to that.

(rattles glass)

You want another?

WALTER

Absolutely. Anything happens tonight, I want to be thoroughly shitfaced when it does.

(As Charlie moves to the bar, David enters the low-lit broadcast desk SR, preparing for air.)

(Amanda Richards strides into the office, cell phone to her ear.)

AMANDA

Yes, sir, I'm here now...

(checks watch)

...about five minutes...I will...immediately, yes.

(She punches off the call.)

CHARLIE

All eyes in California on David, are they?

AMANDA

The only ones that count.

WALTER

Still snowing out there?

AMANDA

Three feet and counting.

CHARLIE

We're putting together a package on that. Second item in the lineup.

(Amanda walks to Walter, looks at David on the 4th wall "monitor".)

AMANDA

What's he leading with?

CHARLIE

Oddly enough, Los Angeles getting the Olympics in twenty...something or other. Leads perfectly into the snow thing, I think.

AMANDA

(looking again at David)

He okay with that?

CHARLIE

He knows the deal, Ms. Richards.

AMANDA

He'd better.

(Walter drains his glass, heads to the bar for a refill.)

AMANDA

(to Walter)

You might want to keep things clear.

WALTER

Right. Vodka, then.

(The opening theme music plays.)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(authoritative male voice)

And now, World News with David Steele. Here is...David Steele.

(The lights come up on David. His eyes come up to the camera.)

DAVID

Good evening. The spotlight of the sporting world will shine on Los Angeles in a few years time, as the International Olympic Committee today designated the City of Angels an Olympic city.

(David pauses, staring directly at the camera. He swallows.)

(Walter slowly walks to Charlie and Amanda as the dead air draws out...a second, two seconds, three...)

WALTER

Uh-oh.

CHARLIE

Come on, David.

(Five seconds...then...)

DAVID

Speaking of angels...

CHARLIE

Oh, shit.

AMANDA

Get him off! Now!

DAVID

I know a lot of you were disturbed by my revealing who I really am on my last broadcast.

AMANDA

Get him off!

(Charlie quickly exits the room. Walter downs his drink, heads to the bar.)

DAVID

I can understand that, especially for you atheists and agnostics out there. I debated remaining anonymous...I had hoped you would right your own ship without my interfering again.

(Amanda turns to Walter, sees him pouring himself a huge glass of Vodka. She throws her hands to the sky in frustration.)

AMANDA

PULLEN!!

DAVID

I suppose I could have stayed at home...but I do like it here, and sitting in this chair gives me a ringside seat to everything going on.

AMANDA

Pull the plug on him!

(Walter takes a slug, picks up the phone and dials during...)

DAVID

And, of course, being in this seat also affords me a worldwide reach now that it's become obvious I have to get involved again. I can speak to pretty much all of you at once, you see.

WALTER

(into phone)

It's Pullen. Go to dead air if you have to!

DAVID

I think we need to have a new dialogue about what Dad and I want *from* you and hope *for* you. And first and foremost, I think it's time that I reiterate the need for some brotherly love. Now, to begin, let me offer a parable--

(And the lights go out on the broadcast set. David slumps in his chair.)

DAVID

Oh, now...! Come on! I thought I had--

(Charlie appears on the set.)

DAVID

Charlie. What's going on?

CHARLIE

Had to do it, didn't you?

DAVID

What? You said "explain"...that's exactly what I--

CHARLIE

Time to go, David.

DAVID

Charlie--

CHARLIE

Please.

DAVID
No. You said I could have a final--

CHARLIE
You need to leave here. Now.

DAVID
I would think that you, above all people...You are my Peter!
Together we can--
(tries to face camera)
Turn it back on! This is my church and I will not leave
until I--

(Charlie slaps David across the face.)

CHARLIE
David!

DAVID
(shocked)
You would strike your Lord?!

CHARLIE
We need to go. Right now.

DAVID
(struggling, unhinged)
You...Judas!

(Charlie grabs David's face with both hands and looks directly into his eyes, his head nodding.)

CHARLIE
(melodramatically)
Jesus. My Lord. The Romans are coming for you. You cannot
remain here. It is too dangerous. I must get you to safety.

(David has been nodding his head in unison with Charlie's.)

DAVID
All right. Yes. Safety.
(beat)
We'll do this later, yes?

CHARLIE
(as if to a child)
Of course we will.

(They exit the broadcast set.)

(In Pullen's office, Amanda pulls out her cell phone and dials.)

(Walter watches, wobbling at the bar.)

AMANDA
(into phone)
You saw?...Obviously...Yes sir, Right away.

(She punches off, looks at Walter.)

WALTER
Scorched earth barbeque?

AMANDA
(striding to door)
What do you think?

(She exits.)

(Walter takes a slug.)

WALTER
I think we're the marshmallows.

Scene 9

(David and Patricia's living room. David on the couch, Patricia stands nearby. Charlie leans against the wall nearby.)

PATRICIA
What the hell did you think you were doing, David? Or can I still call you that?

DAVID
Of course you can. It's what you're used to, and it's a fine Biblical name.

PATRICIA
Oh, for God's sake! Stop this...this...

DAVID
This what?

PATRICIA
This...*idiocy!* You are NOT Jesus Christ! You are David Steele. You've been David Steele all your life.

DAVID
The two are not incompatible, darling--

PATRICIA
Stop it!

DAVID

Didn't you tell me the other night that if I'm going to be the Son of God, to do it with --

PATRICIA

You are NOT the Son of God! I thought we were just having a spot of fun! I didn't think you would...

(to Charlie)

Charlie, help me out here.

CHARLIE

I've got a call into the shrink. Not much more we can do.

DAVID

You can put me back on the air, let me do what I returned here to do.

PATRICIA

You didn't "return" from anywhere, damn it!

DAVID

(to Patricia)

Darling, please...

(to Charlie)

Why can't I just go back on and say what I have to say--

CHARLIE

We're not allowed in the building, David. I think Richards has even armed the guards.

DAVID

Ridiculous.

CHARLIE

We'll know more tomorrow.

PATRICIA

What's tomorrow?

CHARLIE

Got a call from Walter to be in his office at ten.

DAVID

I'm coming with you.

CHARLIE

Not a good idea.

DAVID

This is about me, I'm going to be there.

CHARLIE

Richards is on the warpath, David. It's best you stay out of her sights if--

DAVID
Bollocks! Didn't hide before, won't hide now!

PATRICIA
Oh, God! What am I to tell the children?

DAVID
You tell them the truth--

PATRICIA
And what is that? That they're the sons of the Son of God,
divine by extension?

(beat)
I'm pretty sure they weren't immaculately conceived.

DAVID
Pat--

PATRICIA
Don't! Just don't! All I want to hear from you is that
you'll stop this ludicrous--

DAVID
I can't stop it.

PATRICIA
Why the hell not?!

DAVID
Because it's too late. I'm here now. I'm back. It's time.

PATRICIA
Here? Back? What are you--

(Charlie touches her shoulder, quiets
her.)

CHARLIE
Time, you said? Time for what?

DAVID
For the insanity to end.

CHARLIE
End how? You talking Revelations here? The Four Horsemen?

DAVID
I certainly hope not. Awfully messy, that. No, I mean that
Mankind has to come to grips with his own problems, Charlie.
Problems that, if not addressed, will lead, quite literally,
to his end...to the end of *all* of this.

CHARLIE
Armageddon, is it?

DAVID

(shrugs)

For want of a better word.

PATRICIA

(with sadness)

Oh, my God! You really believe that?

DAVID

I know it.

CHARLIE

Know it? How...?

DAVID

Alpha and Omega...all of that.

CHARLIE

Jesus.

DAVID

Yes, that too.

PATRICIA

Oh, David...

DAVID

What people don't understand is that *they* have the ability to turn it all around. It's a choice, darling. I just want to help them make it. They can have Eden again...

(Patricia jumps up, tears now in her eyes.)

PATRICIA

I can't listen to anymore of this, Charlie. I'm sorry...

CHARLIE

I'll stay with him.

(Patricia nods, exits. A sudden pain in his abdomen hits Charlie hard. He drops onto the couch next to David, doubled over.)

DAVID

It's getting worse, isn't it?

CHARLIE

(between gasps)

Yeah. It is.

DAVID

Time is short.

CHARLIE
I have a feeling.

DAVID
I'm sorry.

CHARLIE
Not your fault. But...
(*feigning joviality*)
...if you were thinking of intervening in some way...

DAVID
That what you want?

CHARLIE
Just kidding around.

DAVID
I'm not. You want my help?

CHARLIE
Come on, David.

DAVID
It's not David offering.

(*Charlie looks at his friend a moment.
Sadness crosses his face.*)

CHARLIE
You know...I wish I could believe that was even possible.

DAVID
What makes you so sure it isn't?

CHARLIE
David, please.

DAVID
What? What if it were possible?

CHARLIE
Stop it! You are not--

DAVID
Humor me. What if a miracle like that were possible?

(*Charlie gives up...he doesn't have
the energy.*)

CHARLIE
All right, all right. Well...it would offer a bit of
substantiation to your claims, wouldn't it?

DAVID
Substantiation. You think that's needed?

CHARLIE
Couldn't hurt.

DAVID
Whatever became of faith?

CHARLIE
Faith's okay, but we're newsmen. Cold, hard proof'll trump
faith every time.

DAVID
Proof. So you think a miracle or two will do it, then, do
you?

CHARLIE
Speaking hypothetically? Sure. A few bonafide whizbang
miracles might help.

DAVID
(*rising*)
Why does everyone always want the sleight of hand? The
sideshow bullshit? You're surrounded by the miraculous every
day, Charlie. It's right in front of you. Birth. Love.
Touch, for God's sake.

CHARLIE
Yes, but--

DAVID
Ever seen the Sufi Dervishes? They do the impossible -- the
miraculous -- every time they dance. Man's become jaded to
it all...lost his willingness to embrace the miraculous all
around him. He's grown blind to it, takes it all for granted.

CHARLIE
I'm not sure this fantasy of yours is the way to go about
changing things.

DAVID
A dervish isn't a dervish until he gets up and dances. Maybe
that's all I'm going, Charlie. Dancing for them, hoping
they'll take notice.

CHARLIE
But maybe a little magic wouldn't hurt, either.

DAVID

The power I want to give Man will not come from magic. It can only come from faith. And not church faith, either, and certainly not faith in me. I never wanted to be worshipped. Still don't. I'm talking about man's faith in *himself*. All I want to do is give that back to him.

CHARLIE

Ever think he might not want it?

*(This may not have occurred to David.
He slowly sits, a troubled look on
his face.)*

CHARLIE

I need to know, David. Now. I don't want to walk into that meeting tomorrow morning without knowing the truth. One way or the other.

(BLACKOUT)

(END ACT 1)

(INTERMISSION)

(ACT 2)

(Scene 1)

*(Walter's office. The blinds are
drawn...it's dim. Walter's behind
the desk. David sits in CS chair.
Charlie leans on the bar.)*

DAVID

Why is it so dark in here? It's mid-morning.

WALTER

Helps me think.

DAVID

Like a tomb. I've got a bad taste for tombs.

CHARLIE

Didn't seem an impediment two thousand years ago.

DAVID

That was different -- I was trying to illustrate a point.

CHARLIE

What's different now?

DAVID

Different point. And I'd prefer to make it without involving dark tombs, if you don't mind.

WALTER

It's comforting to me.

DAVID

It's depressing.

WALTER

Not to me. It makes the television screen the brightest thing in the room. Keeps me focused on what I'm supposed to be doing here.

DAVID

Well, if you wanted a talisman to remind you what you're doing here, I'd suggest a cash register on the corner of your desk. Because that's all you seem to be focused on.

WALTER

Screw you.

(David rises and walks to the windows.)

DAVID

Well, if that's what you want, you best know I only do it in the light!

(David snaps open the blind. Light pours into the room.)

DAVID

I like to see who's bugging me.

WALTER

Christ, David!

DAVID

Right on both counts!

(Charlie stands, holding his side, hiding the pain as best he can.)

CHARLIE

Stop it. Both of you. Going for each other's throats is not going to help our situation.

(to Walter)

Where's Richards? What's this meeting about?

WALTER

Not sure. I'm told she was here all night.

Doing...? CHARLIE

No idea. WALTER

We still in control? CHARLIE

My key worked this morning, but who knows? WALTER

Conrad weighed in? CHARLIE

He doesn't talk to me. WALTER

(A beat. David rises, walks to the 4th wall television, looks at it a moment, then turns to Charlie and Walter.)

Put me back on the air. DAVID

(This is hilarious to Walter.)

I'm serious. Do a break-in right now...special report or whatever. Before she can interfere. I'll clear all this up. DAVID

Like you did last night? WALTER
(to David)
He HAS lost his mind. He shouldn't even be here, Charlie.
(to Charlie)

Why not? He's at the center of it. He should-- CHARLIE

(Amanda strides in, a bundle of files and papers in her arms.)

Good. You're all here. AMANDA

Do we get a last cigarette before lining up against the wall? CHARLIE

AMANDA
(*cracking a rare
smile*)

Good one. And no.

DAVID
Right onto the crosses, eh?

(*She drops the stack of files on
Walter's desk.*)

AMANDA
Six o'clock last night, I'd have hammered the nails myself.

CHARLIE
And now?

AMANDA
And now...the landscape's shifted.
(*points to files*)
These are the overnights. Nielsons, phone logs, telegrams.
I take it you all came through the garage in back.

WALTER
I did.

CHARLIE
Us too.

AMANDA
So you haven't seen out front.

CHARLIE
What's...?

(*Charlie and Walter move to the
windows, look out.*)

CHARLIE
My God.

DAVID
Yes, what is it?

WALTER
Who the hell are they? Where did they all come from?

AMANDA
They've been there all night. More each hour. Chanting,
praying. Some guy was even passing out communion.

CHARLIE
You're kidding.

(David moves for the door.)

DAVID

I should get down there.

AMANDA

You're going nowhere.

DAVID

Those are my people. They came to see me.

AMANDA

They came to get something *from* whoever they think you are. Nothing more.

DAVID

What something?

AMANDA

What does that kind always come to religion for? Someone to tell them their empty lives have meaning. A blessing on their lottery ticket. The healing of an incurable disease...

DAVID

That's a bit of a cold outlook, isn't it?

AMANDA

There's a good reason the Bible refers to Christ as a "shepherd" and everyone else as "sheep".

DAVID

How dare you? Those people have value--

AMANDA

Damn right they do! They're the gold mine! The Nielsons are insane.

(picks up file page)

I've never seen a graph like this, have you?

*(takes page to
Charlie)*

Doubles every hour.

CHARLIE

(looking at page)

This can't be right.

AMANDA

Trust me.

WALTER

Let me see those.

AMANDA
(handing page to
Walter)

Clips of Friday night's broadcast have gone viral... a hundred and forty million hits already.

WALTER
Did you say 'million'?

AMANDA
Million.

WALTER
Holy shit.

AMANDA
Holy is right. We can't *buy* publicity like that.

CHARLIE
Walter...!

WALTER
Hold on, Charlie...

AMANDA
(pulls out a telegram)
And then there's *this*...A personal request from the Vatican.
Guess who wants to meet with our boy here?

CHARLIE
(almost to himself)
This is out of control.

AMANDA
I'm thinking prime-time special.

CHARLIE
(to Walter)
Walter, you've got to stop this!

(Walter's still looking at the
Nielsons.)

WALTER
(to Charlie)
Let's not be hasty here...
(to Amanda)
I've never seen numbers like these. Double anyone else out there.

AMANDA
Combined.

CHARLIE

David's show isn't worth losing all respect for--!

AMANDA

(to Charlie)

It's not just his slot. It's across the board, all day-parts. His little speech, short as it was, affected the entire network.

CHARLIE

Infected is more like it.

AMANDA

That's a fever I want. Viewership is up a factor of twenty overnight. It's unprecedented. I'm waiting on a call from Mr. Conrad as we speak.

CHARLIE

(realizing)

You're actually going to put him back on the air.

AMANDA

With numbers like these? Damn right I am. I want to rebuild the network around him.

DAVID

What's that?

AMANDA

The phones in advertising started ringing the minute he left the air. I've already quadrupled spot rates, and they're still begging for more. We've hit the motherlode!

CHARLIE

You can't do this.

AMANDA

I'm even going to recommend we change our name.

CHARLIE

What?!

AMANDA

WNN...World News Network...So analog. Things have changed, so we will too. I'm going to suggest the G.O.D. network...God On Demand.

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

This is insane. You're division head. Do something.

WALTER

I don't know, Charlie...this is not something to reject out of hand. It's been a long time since we've been on top.

CHARLIE

Walter--!

WALTER

Maybe Amanda's on to something, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I won't be a party to this insanity. I'll--

DAVID

(to Amanda)

When?

CHARLIE

When what?!

DAVID

When can I go back on?

AMANDA

*(before Charlie can
answer)*

I'm thinking we promote it all day, then you do your regular broadcast tonight. We play up the God angle, you do your Christ thing--how are you at healings?

CHARLIE

Stop this!

AMANDA

What?

CHARLIE

This insanity. Twenty-four hours ago, you were going to --
(to Walter)
What was the word she used?

WALTER

I believe it was incinerate.

CHARLIE

Right...incinerate...this place. Now you want David to do his "Christ thing" so you can make him a sideshow and turn on the cash machine?

AMANDA

Twenty-four hours ago, this place was a dying animal. Now, thanks to our Savior here, it's been resurrected.

DAVID

Nice metaphor.

CHARLIE

I won't allow it.

WALTER

Charlie, I think maybe we ought to give it a try--

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

No, Walter!

(to Amanda)

I won't let you make a fool of my friend just so you can grind out a few more dollars in ad revenue.

AMANDA

A SHITLOAD more dollars. And it's not your call, Nims.

CHARLIE

The hell it isn't!

DAVID

Charlie, please--

CHARLIE

(to David)

No, David. Enough's enough. Whatever it is you think you're doing, I won't let you destroy what's left of your reputation.

DAVID

What if it's what *I* want, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(frustrated)

Which "I" is that?

DAVID

(smiles, calmly)

Does it matter? Would you listen more to David or to Jesus Christ?

CHARLIE

You can't do this.

DAVID

I have to.

AMANDA

And he's *going* to.

(She gathers a couple of files,
strides toward the door.)

AMANDA

I have a conference call with Mr. Conrad in ten minutes.

(points to Walter)

You with me on this, Pullen?

*(Walter looks from Amanda to Charlie.
He gives Charlie a "sorry" shrug.)*

WALTER

It's business, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

AMANDA

(to Charlie)

You two stay here. We'll be back in twenty.

(They exit, and the second they're gone, Charlie doubles over, unable to hide the pain any longer. He drops into the CS chair.)

DAVID

Charlie?

(David moves quickly to the bar, pours a drink, takes it to Charlie.)

DAVID

Drink this.

(Charlie sips)

You shouldn't be here.

CHARLIE

Neither should you.

DAVID

Where else would David Steele be?

CHARLIE

I wasn't speaking to David.

DAVID

Ah. So you accept who I say I am, then?

CHARLIE

Of course not.

(beat)

I honestly don't know what to think. I'm lucky I can think at all.

(David kneels in front of his friend.)

DAVID

(quietly)

I have to do this. You know that, yes?

(A long beat.)

CHARLIE

You always were the first one through the door.

DAVID

And you were always right behind me. I need you there now.

(Charlie sighs heavily.)

CHARLIE

(quietly)

For the first time in my life, I'm afraid, and I don't know what to do with it. I've been in tight spots before -- wars, disasters, well, you know...you were there.

(touches his abdomen)

But *this*...this is...

DAVID

(touching Charlie's hand)

What's coming is nothing to be afraid of.

CHARLIE

Says the man claiming familiarity with life everlasting.

(David rises, leans on desk.)

DAVID

That may be more true than you think. Immortality comes in many forms.

CHARLIE

Right. So I'm just supposed to take it on faith, is that it?

DAVID

You know David would tell you the same thing.

CHARLIE

Isn't he?

DAVID

In a sense. I am everything he is, and vice-versa.

CHARLIE

Cut the bullshit, David! Just admit the truth and be done with it.

DAVID

I have been, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Really? Then maybe I need you to spell it out. Because this all feels like some game you're playing.

DAVID

No. Certainly not a game.

(Charlie tries to rise...)

CHARLIE

Then WHAT...WHO...?!

(But a stabbing pain in his head hits him hard, he drops back onto the chair. He looks up at David.)

CHARLIE

Tell me. Please.

(David considers a moment, then...)

DAVID

How about I put it this way...what if we just say that I am the divine aspect of David Steele.

CHARLIE

I thought you said you were Jesus Christ.

DAVID

Jesus, Allah, Buddha, God, the spark of life in the universe...whatever you want to call it. It's all the same.

CHARLIE

Come on, David. You're telling me you're a heavenly frat house now?

DAVID

I'm telling you that beneath our ego and our desires and our self-image and what's for dinner, I believe there exists something transcendent. In all of us. Those names in history were just men through whom, for some reason, at some moment, the transcendent...the divine...got expressed.

CHARLIE

This is all too Hare Krishna for me.

DAVID

Try this, then: one second I'm David Steele, delivering the news, and the next I feel like I'm the expression of God wrapped in this skin.

CHARLIE

You just got a notion you felt like God, so you went with it?

DAVID

What's happening in the world forced it. I couldn't stand by any longer.

CHARLIE

If you felt this...let's call it anxiety...coming on, why didn't you say something to me?

DAVID

Say what? Take me off the air, I think I'm going nuts?

CHARLIE

So instead you go on television and tell the entire planet you're Jesus Christ, back for a visit? That's not nuts?

DAVID

I thought it might be more influential for saying what I had to say. Seemed a sensible way to try.

CHARLIE

Not so sure it was.

DAVID

Look.. Just because you see David standing here doesn't mean that Jesus couldn't be as well.

CHARLIE

So you're saying you're possessed? Taken over by the most iconic personage in history?

DAVID

(a little laugh)

The shrink asked me the same question. And the answer is no. I'm just expressing what I think is already there, that I've come to believe is in everyone. It's there, waiting. All one must do is acknowledge it -- like I did -- have a little faith in it. If we can do that, then...*then* I don't think there's a thing in this universe that we, as the divine beings we all are, couldn't accomplish.

CHARLIE

Do you have the slightest idea how insane that sounds?

DAVID

Why? Why should it?

CHARLIE

David--

DAVID

You make my point for me! The fact that what I just said sounds insane to you is *exactly* why a return was required. David just got out of the way.

CHARLIE

What if no one listens? What happens when they get tired of Amanda Richards' little side show, of you -- and believe me, they *will* tire of it -- what happens when you have to give up this charade?

DAVID

It isn't a char--

CHARLIE

Does that part of this split personality you claim is Jesus Christ just disappear? Take his marbles and go home? Is the David part left holding the empty bag?

DAVID

(after a beat)

I don't know, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Damn it! You need to stop this lunacy! This is not going to end well for you and you know it, David! Not for any of us!

DAVID

We'll just have to hope that they'll listen, won't we? That they'll believe.

CHARLIE

Who?

DAVID

The world.

CHARLIE

(giving up)

Right.

(long beat)

You know...I almost wish I could.

DAVID

Could what?

CHARLIE

Believe in all this.

DAVID

You can.

CHARLIE

No. I can't. Trust me, I want to. I'm a dying man, afraid of what's coming, and God, how I want to believe, but it's not going to happen.

DAVID

Why is it so hard? It's a simple--

CHARLIE

Yes, it IS simple! We aren't who you think we are anymore! Your faith in us will never be returned! Most men no longer believe in God beyond an irrational fear because we want to think WE'RE the Gods of this earth. We use religion as a *weapon* now...to control, to justify...to kill. You know this, David! You--

(Charlie suddenly grabs his gut, then his head, with an ugly grunt. He can't catch a breath. He lurches sideways, falls to the floor.)

DAVID

Charlie!

(leaning over him)

Charlie!

(No response...Charlie's unconscious. David moves quickly to the phone on the desk, punches in four numbers.)

DAVID

Security? We need paramedics up here immediately. Charlie Nims has collapsed.

(David moves back to Charlie. He shakes his shoulder, pats his face.)

DAVID

Charlie. Charlie!

(David looks at his friend. Then he covers his face with his hands.)

DAVID

I'm sorry, my old friend. I didn't mean to cause...I'm so sorry.

(Scene 2)

(Walter stands at the bar, nursing a drink. He's more than a little tipsy. Amanda enters, sits at Walter's desk.)

AMANDA

Any word?

WALTER

No.

AMANDA

And Steele?

(Walter shakes his head.)

AMANDA

You should never have let him leave the building, damn it! God knows what could happen.

WALTER

Maybe.

AMANDA

Maybe what?

WALTER

Maybe God does know, if David is actually--

AMANDA

Oh, for the love of...Wake up! Whoever the hell he thinks he is doesn't matter! What does is that David Steele is the biggest story on the planet and we own every inch of it! Three quarters of the world will be watching US tonight...and for the foreseeable future. Having him loose out there risks over-exposure--

WALTER

Don't know that you'll be able to keep that genie in the bottle.

AMANDA

Genie?

WALTER

Yeah, the genie...this whole thing...you know...what you were just...controlling it all...

AMANDA

Uh-huh. You don't know me very well, do you?

WALTER

(drunken musing)

Oh, maybe not *who* you are, but I have an idea *what* you are. Or what you're *not* would be more appropriate.

AMANDA

(fiddling with papers)

And what's that?

WALTER

A newsman. Oh...pardon me...a *journalist*, if you want to be properly gender nonspecific.

AMANDA

Oh, by all means, let's be proper.

*(Walter tops his drink, sips it as
he wanders unsteadily toward Amanda.)*

WALTER

You're smart, Ms. Richards, and you're very good at your job, that's apparent. But you're not a journalist. And because of that, I think you've missed the real story.

AMANDA

David Steele *is* the story.

WALTER

No. No, he's not. He is *not* the story. And he is most definitely *not* who the story's *about*.

AMANDA

You're drunk.

WALTER

Maybe a little. At this point, what does it matter? You're gonna can us all tonight anyway. But I'm a drunk *journalist* and I know what I'm talking about.

AMANDA

Uh-huh.

WALTER

You know what comes through this office every minute of every day?

AMANDA

I'm guessing you're not going to say money. Until now, anyway.

WALTER

The past, the present, and the future...but not in that order.

AMANDA

What are you babbling about?

WALTER

History, Ms. Richards! History! It comes in here as the manifesting future, becomes the observed present, and leaves as the reported past. It marches in a straight line right through this room! But there's only one part of that journey that we can touch: the moment we're seeing it. A true journalist --

(self-indictment)

if he's paying attention -- knows what he's looking at in that moment, and he knows how to grab it. He knows the difference between story and subject and more importantly, he knows the import of what he's observing. And that's what he writes. Those on the business side -- people like you,

(sadly)

and, I guess, me lately -- see only the future. Or how much we think we can take out of the future. We miss the story because we're looking in the wrong direction.

AMANDA

Mm-hmm. So who's it about?

WALTER

All of us. Everyone in *here*, out *there*, everywhere.

AMANDA

And the story?

WALTER

That we, as a species, have lost our way. So lost that our most trusted voices are forced to ridiculous lengths to try to wake us up.

AMANDA

Is that what you think this is-- this whole Christ thing? It's a bullshit desperate attempt to get our attention?

WALTER

Sadly, yes. And I think David's lost his way too. I think thirty-five years of watching what one human being can do to another -- the stupidity, the self-interest, the monumental disregard for future generations, the numbness to and acceptance of astonishing violence -- I think he finally just...broke. Like all the rest of us. He's...we're all...broken.

(Walter just stops, looks into his glass, then slugs what remains and teeters to the bar for a refill. Amanda watches him, silent. Then, quietly...)

AMANDA

This may surprise you, but I think you're right.

WALTER

That so?

AMANDA

I think he's broken. Worse. I think he's insane.
Functioning insane, but insane nonetheless.

WALTER

*(indicating the 4th
wall TV)*

Then how can you allow--

AMANDA

Because I fix broken things, Mr. Pullen.

WALTER

How are you fixing David Steele by perpetuating his delusion?

AMANDA

It's not David Steele I was sent here to fix. But his
delusion gave me exactly what I needed to repair what I was.

WALTER

And what of the man?

AMANDA

I suspect he'll give us a seventy share tonight, maybe even
an eighty, with a comparable come and a ninety percent
penetration.

WALTER

Sounds like pornography when you say it out loud like that.

AMANDA

He'll deliver those numbers for five, six weeks, then it
will begin to taper off, slowly at first, then a wicked drop.
And do you know why?

*(Walter shakes his
head)*

Because of your march of history. The next story...the next
"who"...will appear, and David Steele and his Jesus thing
simply won't matter anymore. Oh, the faithful may try to
hold on to some remnant of the hope they tried to pull from
him, but the rest will move on to the next hot thing.

*(she laughs with
realization)*

They'll "crucify" him on the cross of ratings, and he'll
fade away into that reported past of yours, nothing more
than a footnote in the annals of broadcasting.

WALTER

And you'll let them. Crucify him, I mean.

AMANDA

I have no control over what they do with what we give them.
I'm only responsible for the giving and what it gets us.
After that...

(She shrugs.)

WALTER

I'm not sure I can do that.

AMANDA

You don't have to. That's why I'm here.

(Amanda gathers a few files. She moves toward the door.)

AMANDA

I want to know the second you hear from David Steele. He has a broadcast tonight and I expect him front and center.

(Amanda exits. Walter drunkenly snaps to attention, clicks his heels, and salutes.)

(Walter takes a huge slug of his drink, then looks around the office, not knowing exactly what to do next. He notices his glass is empty, so he moves to the bar.)

(As he pours another drink, the door opens and David Steele enters.)

WALTER

How's Charlie?

DAVID

Not good.

WALTER

Shit.

DAVID

Yes. Very.

(beat)

That harpy still here?

WALTER

Upstairs. You just missed her. She's got big plans for you, you know.

DAVID

So I understand.

WALTER
What was it? With Charlie. Heart?

DAVID
He hadn't told you?

WALTER
No.

DAVID
Cancer. End-stage Pancreatic.

WALTER
Oh, my God. Is he going to...?

DAVID
Going to die? Yes.
*(points at Walter's
drink)*
Mind if I have one of those?

WALTER
Didn't know you drank. Or...the you...you know...

DAVID
Yes, well, let's just consider it a sacrament, then, shall we?

WALTER
(almost to himself)
Kind of the way I always looked at it.

WALTER
Mind if I ask you a question?

DAVID
(turning to him)
What am I going to do on the broadcast tonight?

WALTER
Yes.

DAVID
Not sure.

WALTER
Richards may have something to say about it.

DAVID
That I'm sure of. So let me ask you a question.

WALTER
Shoot.

DAVID

Will it matter to you what I say, Richards be damned? I don't want to cause you any more trouble than I already have.

WALTER

(considers a moment)

Nah. Give 'em hell.

(realizing)

Well...not literally, but...

DAVID

I get it. And I hope it doesn't come to that.

(David slugs back the last of his drink, sets the glass down and smiles at Walter.)

DAVID

I've got to stop at home. I'll see you later then? Once more into the breach?

WALTER

Absolutely.

(David exits. Walter smiles to himself, sets his glass down, then moves to his desk. He touches the intercom.)

WALTER

Dolores. Get me Jefferson Hospital.

(beat, picks up phone)

Yes. Jefferson Hospital?...I'm calling to inquire about the condition of a patient...Charlie Nims...N.I.M.S....Yes, I'll wait...

(long beat)

Yes...Charlie Nims, yes...

(stunned)

Oh, no...How long ago?

(Walter slumps back in his chair.)

Scene 3

(David sits on the couch at home. Patricia enters, surprised to see him.)

PATRICIA

(a bit cold)

Didn't think I'd see you before your broadcast this evening.

DAVID

You almost didn't.

PATRICIA

(sitting)

Horde of converts, was there?

DAVID

Thousands, I'd say. Had to hide in the back seat and be driven out the rear of the studio complex.

PATRICIA

(disparagingly)

Like a wastrel rock star.

DAVID

Hardly.

*(turns, reaches for
her hand)*

But I wanted to see you before--

*(Patricia rises quickly, avoiding
his touch.)*

PATRICIA

Phone hasn't stopped ringing here all day. Finally had to yank it from the wall. It's insane. I've become a prisoner in my own home.

DAVID

I never meant--

PATRICIA

Do you know a woman at the market yesterday actually called me Mary Magdelene? Went on and on about how blessed it must be to live with "the Lord". Followed me all the way out to the car wanting to pray with me. Nearly had to run her over to get out of the lot.

DAVID

I'm so sorry, Patricia.

PATRICIA

(sharply)

Not sorry enough to stop this foolishness, though, are you, David?

DAVID

Not much choice on that.

PATRICIA

Oh, bollocks!

DAVID

Something had to be done and--

PATRICIA

But why my David? Why couldn't it have been some carpenter somewhere, like last time? Some plumber? Why did you have to do it?

DAVID

Because I'm on worldwide television, darling. And what needs to be said has to be heard by as many as possible.

PATRICIA

And after it's said, what then?

(sits, faces him)

Do you really think we can go back to our lives? Like we've just returned from a weekend at a fancy spa that featured holy water saunas and ancient scripture wraps, and now we're cleansed inside and out? And what are you going to do after all this implodes? Wander the earth in sackcloth and poverty, preaching to the multitudes until someone decides you're a threat to their status quo and throws you up on a cross? Because I'll not be--

DAVID

Pat--

PATRICIA

(anguished)

I WANT MY DAVID BACK! I want my life -- our lives -- back the way they were!

(David slides to her, puts his arm around her.)

PATRICIA

I want to grow old with you, my love. I want to die in my lover's arms, peacefully, without the murmur of fanatics in the background.

DAVID

I know, I know.

PATRICIA

(despairingly now)

I'm not strong enough to do this. If there is a God, a Christ, I can wait until I'm gone -- until we're gone -- to meet them. Stop this pretension and just leave us in peace with whatever time we have left, David. That's all I ask. Just leave us be. Please. Please.

(David holds her tighter as she clings to him. He kisses her head, then...)

DAVID
Yes. Yes, all right, my love.

(Scene 4)

(David Steele sits on the broadcast set, readying himself. Amanda sits at Walter's desk in the office, flipping through files and papers.)

(Walter appears from behind the news set backdrop.)

WALTER
All set? Couple of minutes, now.

DAVID
Little nervous, actually.

WALTER
Yeah. Me too.

(David smiles up at Walter.)

DAVID
Don't worry. No hellfire tonight.

WALTER
Oh, good.
(beat, points)
Everything's on the prompter. Richards wrote it herself.

DAVID
I looked at it. It's drivel. Worse than a sitcom script.
(looks up at Walter)
Everything else in place?

WALTER
Yeah, I talked to the boys. Everyone's on board.

DAVID
Then it's going to be fine.

WALTER
(not really sure)
Uh-huh.
(then...)
Well, anyway, look...this may not be the appropriate time...but I thought you should know...Charlie...I phoned the hospital, and they let me know that he--

DAVID
Yes...you're right...this isn't the appropriate time. How about after the broadcast when we can address it properly?

WALTER

Sure. Sure. I'll be upstairs.

(Walter turns to go.)

DAVID

And Walter...thank you for everything.

(beat)

We're both grateful.

(David turns around to face the camera. Walter mouths "Both?", then exits.)

(In the office, Amanda looks at her watch, picks up the phone.)

AMANDA

This is Richards. I want no mistakes tonight. None. Understand? You heard me.

(She hangs up, then slowly walks to the 4th wall TV monitor. She pulls out her smartphone, punches and studies.)

(Walter enters, goes directly to the bar, pours a drink.)

WALTER

Big night for you.

AMANDA

For Conrad Communications, you mean.

WALTER

Sure. He going to be watching? Conrad?

AMANDA

He's always watching.

(Walter glances nervously around the room.)

WALTER

Is he?

AMANDA

(indicating David)

How's our boy?

WALTER

Which one?

*(off Amanda's
withering look)*

He's fine.

AMANDA

He better be.

(looks at her phone)

Real-time Nielsons are showing a ninety share with five minutes to go. We have nearly every pair of eyes on the planet. Talk about your history.

(Walter sits on the downstage chair.)

WALTER

It's never occurred to you that this is a monumental mistake, has it?

AMANDA

How can a ninety share and twp-million-dollar thirties on a news show be a mistake?

WALTER

Because while you have control of what happens in here -- the metrics and the money and the spin -- you have absolutely no control over what happens...

(indicates the TV)

...out there. And it's out there the real power resides.

*(Amanda picks up a radio intercom
handset.)*

AMANDA

This is where the power resides tonight, Pullen. In my hand. He goes one millimeter off that prompter script and I radio the floor men to yank him. Hollenbeck's in the green room.

WALTER

Hollenbeck? I thought he was stuck in...

AMANDA

Trains don't mind snow. He's been in town since last night. You really didn't think I'd not have a Plan B, did you?

(off Walter's stare)

I don't know which is sadder:

(indicating David)

His delusion or you under-estimating me.

(beat, then adamantly)

Steele runs my program or he's gone. Forever.

(Walter smiles and sips his drink.)

WALTER

So smart and yet so naive...

*(Amanda looks at him, about to speak,
when...)*

*(News show music open plays, but
it's different...Bach's Kyrie Eleison
Chorus from his Mass in B Minor BWV
232.)*

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

*(worshipful female
voice)*

And now, World News with our Lord and Savior. Here is...Jesus Christ.

*(The lights come up full on David,
his head hanging and shaking back
and forth, appalled and embarrassed.
A beat after the music open ends,
he looks up into the camera.)*

DAVID

My apologies for that bit. Not my doing.

(beat)

I do think, however, that it is, in some odd way, indicative of the problem...why I identified myself as I did in the first place.

AMANDA

(into her radio)

Get him on the damn script!

DAVID

You see, so often today, we take that old adage of the medium being the message far too much to heart, which is...

*(David looks off from the camera,
obviously to a floor man.)*

DAVID

Stop waving at me. I'll not need the damned prompter. Turn it off. I'll say what I have to say to these people.

AMANDA

(into radio)

Cut him off! NOW! Get Hollenbeck.

*(But David continues...as does the
broadcast.)*

DAVID

Since my announcement last Friday--

AMANDA
(*into radio*)
I said get him off!

DAVID
--most of you have been trying to determine if what I said
is true...

AMANDA
(*turning to Walter,
still into the
radio*)
What the hell are you guys doing down there?!? Cut him off!

DAVID
Or if David Steele has lost his mind.

WALTER
Warned you about the unions...pretty tight bunch of guys...

DAVID
Well, let me answer you in the most direct way I can.

AMANDA
I'll drag him off myself!

(*Amanda marches out of the room.
Walter sips his drink, and looks at
the monitor, smiling broadly.*)

WALTER
Good luck.

DAVID

I know that the majority of you feel that if you accepted as truth my assertion that I am Jesus Christ returned, then everything in your lives --in the world -- will fall into place. That existence will be perfected. That life will somehow make sense and have meaning because I'm here now and will make it so.

(beat)

But why is that true only if you can fall on your knees and worship even the hint of a presence such as I claimed...if you build statues and paint works of art, or capture my image in stained glass windows at the First Church of David Steele? The truth is, it isn't. Because you see, that would be worshipping the medium, not the message...the form, not the substance. And that's the mistake we've already made. We've been bowing down to the messenger, not the message. And the message here is not that I am Jesus Christ, or God...David Steele is only the medium. The message is that I am nothing more than you, and we are our neighbors, and all of US -- interlocked and interdependent -- are this world.

(beat)

You think you need a Savior, but you fail to see that YOU are the Saviors...YOU have the power to make the difference. You just have to come to your senses, drop your petty distractions -- including me -- and decide that enough is enough, that there very clearly is a right and a wrong, and there is a benefit and a detriment to everything we do and we must work toward spreading the benefit side of that equation to its broadest and deepest effect.

(beat)

I am not the answer. I never was. I'm just an old newsman who, after thirty-five years of sitting in this chair and watching the endless and increasing unraveling of just about everything, felt he had to do *something* -- *anything* -- to try and make a difference. I announced my divinity only to get your attention. To wake you up. I hope, now that you are at least *aware*, that will be enough.

(beat)

So now, I will take my leave. Forget me. You don't need a *me*. Where we all go from here is up to all of *us*. Do not fear being alone, for you are not. We all have each other. Let us put our faith in *that*, in *ourselves*. If we can do that, I promise you...together, we can accomplish anything.

(beat)

I, for one, am going home now...to someone who means a great deal to me and who needs me. You'll see Patricia and I again, I'm sure. We'll be doing *our* part.

(beat)

This is...

(pointedly)

...David Steele. Good night and goodbye.

(David smiles into the camera, then
he exits the broadcast set.)

(In his office, Walter stares at the TV monitor.)

WALTER

Well, son of a bitch.

(stands, raises his glass)

Way to go, sir.

(Walter quaffs the rest of his drink, then moves to the bar to refill it, smiling all the way.)

(As he reaches the bar, Amanda storms in.)

AMANDA

I'm going to kill him!

WALTER

Uh-huh.

AMANDA

That bastard just blew the biggest broadcast bonanza in history.

WALTER

What he did was give us back our credibility.

AMANDA

He wants to exit being Jesus? Fine. Then I'll play in his little game. As Pontius Pilate. I'm going to crucify that son of a bitch! I'll have him hanging from--

(David enters.)

WALTER

(quickly)

Uh...now's not a good time, David.

DAVID

Oh. Shall I...?

AMANDA

No. Come right on in.

DAVID

(to Amanda)

I assumed you'd want to see me.

AMANDA

I want to string you up, to be perfectly honest.

DAVID
(to Amanda)
Then give me a moment, would you?
(to Walter)
I could really use a drink, Walter.

WALTER
Scotch?

DAVID
Perfect.

(Walter pours. David slips out of his jacket, sets it on the back of the CS chair, then sits.)

DAVID
(to Amanda)
I'm sorry. You were saying...?

(Amanda seems about to strangle David, but her frustration overwhelms her to the point that words won't come. She kind of deflates in the face of David's calmness.)

AMANDA
(bewildered)
Why?! We could have owned the broadcast world!

DAVID
Oh, the world didn't need us telling it what to do, what to believe. They just needed someone to remind them of who they are. They'll be fine without you and me meddling in things any further.

AMANDA
It wasn't your call.

DAVID
Oh, but it was. Didn't Walter here tell you that all we're supposed to do is observe the history marching through this room and report it. We're not supposed to *make* the history. I was just extricating myself from the story.

WALTER
How did you--?

(A cell phone rings. Amanda pulls her phone and answers.)

AMANDA

Richards.

(she stands straight)

Yes sir...I know, sir. He...Yes, it was. Highest ratings and revenues ever, yes...Thank you, sir...I will, sir, I'll tell him...Yes, sir, immediately. I'll catch the next available flight.

(Amanda punches off the call. She looks at David.)

AMANDA

(to David)

Mr. Conrad said "slick move".

DAVID

Really.

AMANDA

And you're fired.

WALTER

Now, wait a minute--

DAVID

Actually, I was going to resign.

WALTER

Don't be stupid, David.

DAVID

No. It's time for me to exit.

WALTER

Take your severance. You have a hell of a parachute.

(David shrugs. Amanda begins to gather her things.)

DAVID

So...what now?

AMANDA

So...Hollenbeck takes over tomorrow. History marches on, to use Walter's image.

(to Walter)

You'll be glad to hear you're to remain as head of the news division, by the way.

DAVID

Good for you, Walter.

AMANDA

For the time being. We'll see how well the ratings hold.
The division's back where it should be, at least.

DAVID

And you?

AMAND

I'm being sent to Washington. There are a few Senators Mr.
Conrad needs "persuaded" on some legislation he's interested
in.

WALTER

You'll fit right in down there.

AMANDA

That's what Mr. Conrad said.

*(As Amanda reaches the door, she
turns...)*

AMANDA

My condolences on Charlie Nims, by the way. He wasn't a bad
guy, as far as it went--

*(Charlie Nims suddenly appears behind
Amanda in the doorway.)*

CHARLIE

Thank you. I think.

WALTER

Charlie!

AMANDA

My God! You're alive?

WALTER

We were told that you had...you know...!

CHARLIE

Not feeding the worms just yet!

(Walter grabs him in a bear hug.)

WALTER

Goddamn, it's good to see you vertical!

DAVID

Yes. Welcome back, old friend.

WALTER

How do you feel?

CHARLIE
I...feel fine, believe it or not.

AMANDA
Well, gentlemen...I'd love to stick around for this happy
reunion, but I've got a plane to catch.

CHARLIE
Leaving us so soon, are you?

(Amanda gives a weary smile.)

AMANDA
They'll fill you in. I'd say it's been fun, but really...it
hasn't.

(And Amanda exits.)

DAVID
Dare I say it? Good riddance.

WALTER
I'd better make sure she gets through the faithful out there.
I'll be right back.

(Walter exits.)

CHARLIE
I missed a few things, I take it.

DAVID
A few. We're fired, if you haven't heard.

CHARLIE
You went back on the air?

DAVID
I did. It was a beautiful swan song. Emmy performance.

CHARLIE
(smiles)
Fessed up, did you?

DAVID
Divinity isn't all it's cracked up to be. I made my point.
Now I just want to go back to being good old David Steele,
ex-anchor, ex-Savior. That's about all I said.

CHARLIE
Had 'em all fooled, eh?

*(David just smiles, picks up his
jacket to go.)*

DAVID

Well, I promised Patricia I'd be home directly after the broadcast. Already late. She'll be worried.

(Charlie nods. As David slips on his jacket...)

CHARLIE

You think you made a difference with all this?

DAVID

Maybe.

(smiles at Charlie)

Where it really counts, I think I did. See you around.

(David moves to the door.)

CHARLIE

One thing before you leave, David, if you don't mind.

DAVID

Not at all.

CHARLIE

When I woke up a couple hours ago in the hospital, there were a bunch of doctors standing around me with charts and such, jabbering about CT scans, cancer screens, marker tests...

DAVID

Mm-hmm.

CHARLIE

They told me the tests showed that all sign of my cancer had disappeared. Not a trace anywhere.

DAVID

No explanation?

CHARLIE

Nope.

(beat)

There's more.

DAVID

Yes?

CHARLIE

Seems this afternoon, one Charles Nims expired, succumbing to complications related to pancreatic cancer.

(David remains silent, looking at Charlie.)

CHARLIE

'Course, I was quite surprised, given that I was standing there. But the doctors assured me that I had, indeed, coded, and they'd called it. Time of death: 2:14 pm. They said they pulled the sheet over my head and left me for the morgue boys to pick up.

DAVID

An egregious error, it seems.

CHARLIE

They had no explanation for my sudden reanimation, or the fact that I stood there in front of them, cured of an incurable cancer.

DAVID

Modern medicine isn't all-knowing, it appears.

CHARLIE

A good newsman would surmise that, wouldn't he? As I was signing out to come here, a nurse mentioned she was glad for my father, that he must be relieved. I asked her what she meant, being that my father's been dead twenty years. She said she'd seen an older gentleman go into the room I -- my body -- was in. Saw him leave about ten minutes later. Not long after that, the morgue boys got quite a shock.

DAVID

Interesting story.

CHARLIE

It is, isn't it?

(beat)

You, uh...you wouldn't know anything about that, would you?

(A long beat.)

DAVID

Well, let's leave it at this, shall we? It just goes to show you...

(David moves to the door.)

CHARLIE

What's that?

(David turns and smiles.)

DAVID

Always good...

(David raises his hands to the sky in a Christ pose.)

*(A bright light shines down upon him
from above...definitely not the
moon...)*

DAVID

...to have friends in high places.

*(David smiles, and without another
word, turns and exits)*

*(Charlie stares at the empty doorway,
then slowly turns and sits in the
CS chair, a look of amazement on
his face)*

CHARLIE

Oh...my...God....

(BLACK OUT)

(THE END)