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The Journey to "Paipet City, ND"

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by

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THE JOURNEY TO *PAIPET CITY, ND*

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3 Minutes Until Midnight: Pre-Production Process

*Please note that this will be included in the thesis to be published by Salisbury University.
Every change will be documented to maintain record of the playwriting process.*

The premise of this play is to tell a story that spans the course of three minutes.

Each act will be a minute. Midnight is the end of the world.

The play is to take place in one room, with a group of 7 people.

One person is the Chief of Staff.

The rest of the people are private citizens on The Committee to Decide the End of the World.

They have been brought into an undisclosed location for an undisclosed reason. They each bring different points of view. They must reach a unanimous verdict in favor of the destruction of the world. There is no room for reasonable doubt.

The Characters

The Chief of Staff acts as moderator, time-keeper, and liaison to The President. The Chief of Staff has the ability to stop time. He is also the Master of Ceremonies.

Member 1: Is on the far left.

Member 2: Is on the far right.

Member 3: Is a criminal.

Member 4: Is a religious nut.

Member 5: Is a politician.

Member 6: Is a teenager.

Member 7: Is apathetic.

- *The adjectives used to describe the rest of the characters (listed above) are weak. They must be changed to specific, actionable **wants**. For now, they are placeholders.*

Time Factor:

- In this word—in this room—time does not operate as it does. This is the case for two reasons. First, it allows the play's title to be symbolic and literal at the same time. Second, it takes the play out of reality and places it in surreality, almost absurdity. The latter allows for greater objectivity from the audience as it attempts to prevent direct-link connections to current events.

The Chief of Staff

- The Chief of Staff serves as the master of ceremonies, narrator, facilitator, and connection to the deistic (as well as unseen and unheard) President. I shall use the pronouns *he/him* in my writing; the Chief of Staff may be played anywhere on the gender spectrum.
- The Chief of Staff works as much as a Greek chorus as he does a referee; he has the power of direct address to the audience.
- The Chief of Staff will take a vote at the beginning and end of each act (subject to change). He can only adjourn the session if the vote is unanimous.
- The Chief of Staff is an unbiased manipulator. He will take people aside and plant the seed of doubt in them in order to generate discourse and to bring to light the real issues.

The Issues, or, Questions to Answer

- Why should we decide the fate of the world?
- What gives us the right to pick who dies, and who lives?
- Do we have to do this?
- Is there another option?

I have discovered a serious issue with the basic premise of the play. I don't believe that "The Committee to Decide the End of the World" will survive for three acts. I believe that, when pushed, people would rather not destroy the world. That would mean that the play would end before it starts. Therefore, I must redefine the purpose of the committee. For instance, it could be renamed to "The Committee to Decide the Beginning of a Nuclear War," or CDBNW for short. In that case, the question would be: "why would the President choose seven regular people to decide what ought to be decided by military and political leaders?" That would also conclude the play prematurely.

It might help to go back to the source. This project is intended to shed light and generate discourse over difficult subjects by putting people with different perspectives on

a task that forces them to express their true beliefs in order to complete it. In that case, it may be necessary to see the whole play from a different angle in order to get started. Instead of the play's action dealing with the decision to press a button and destroy the world, the action of the play should be the people—the jury's—judgment on the morality of being the INSTIGATOR of that act. In that iteration, the committee (or the jury, the terms can be used interchangeably in this particular instance) will act as a group of lawyers for The President, who is determining the morality of a preemptive strike. Looking through that lens, the issues may have changed.

The New Issues

- Will a preemptive strike really do anything to deter a response from an enemy?
- How can a preemptive strike be viewed as anything but an act of war?
- How can one nation justify a preemptive strike that may launch the planet into a self-destructive frenzy?
- Is it selfish to launch a preemptive strike?
- What happens if they shoot first?
- What happens if you skip the preemptive strike and launch enough nukes to level the entire enemy state, thereby making the issue obsolete?
- Can you see past the "enemy state" and put yourself in the shoes of the individuals you will be murdering?
- Would you want your children to die for a cause?
- Could you live with yourself if you influenced the killing of millions?

Structure:

Act 1 Must:

- Introduce all of the players
- Introduce the main question
- Introduce the conventions of the play
 - *Conventions: how time works, the role of the Chief of Staff, the existence of The President*
- There must be a vote at the beginning, and a vote at the end of the act
- There must be a sense of urgency established at the beginning of the act
- The characters must begin together
- One character must separate from the group as Act 2 begins
- The clock must tick to two minutes until midnight

Act 2 Must:

- Begin with a vote, where one person will have changed their vote to "NO"
- The Chief of Staff must introduce a complication that raises the stakes
 - This could be the fact that the enemy state has launched a missile already, and now the argument is changed to whether or not they should strike back if the missile hits

- Infighting must occur within the characters, at the climax they will be at each other's throats
 - They must question their power, the entity forcing them to make these choices, their lives, their futures
- The Chief of Staff has the final line of the act. He announces that Washington D.C. and the surrounding areas were destroyed; The President is dead.
- The clock must tick to one minute until midnight

Act 3 Must:

- Finalize every character's arc
 - At the end, every character will have seen themselves in the shoes of their would-be victims
- Nobody is in control now. The characters hold the fate of the world in their hands.
- The final vote is to fulfill the promise of Mutually Assured Destruction
- The act ends with the characters coming together in a unanimous "NO" vote
- The Chief of Staff's final monologue, as the stage dissolves, highlights that choosing life over death, and opting for peace instead of war is the highest honor.

The Treatment:

Act One

Act One opens to an empty stage. The Chief of Staff appears; this is ritualistic. He stands alone CS (center-stage) in a strict posture, lit by a single spotlight. He announces the current date, and introduces the main question of the play. Possibly: **“Ladies and Gentlemen, the date is the fifth of February, 2017 (the year to be pronounced “two-thousand and seventeen.”** This date will change depending on what the current day is in reality). He will proceed to introduce the following given circumstances (except the location): that the fate of humanity rests on the people who are about to enter, the unusual nature of elapsed time, and a vague introduction to The President. It is key that the audience comprehend The President’s similarity to YWHW; that include’s YWHW’s omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent nature. The entire opening, along with every interaction with the Chief of Staff, must be ceremonial or ritualistic in nature. He represents the only tangible connection to the extraordinary circumstances of the play. Following the introduction of the given circumstances, the Chief of Staff shall introduce the characters. One by one, the Chief of Staff will introduce the characters using the following formula: **“Committee Member 4, [city, state of birth], age.”** The characters will line up US (upstage) of him in a chorus line; their silhouettes will be barely visible behind the stark lighting of the Chief of Staff. Finally, the Chief of Staff will introduce the setting (**“a bunker, undisclosed location, three miles below sea level”**). As the Chief of Staff introduces the setting, the characters will break rank and scurry offstage to bring on the set pieces. One long table, a chair for each character. As this happens, the Chief of Staff will disappear from the stage (the audience should not see him leave). Still in darkness, the characters will stand in their places around the table, holding their chairs. As one—and at the precise moment when the full lights will dazzle on—they will place their chairs sharply on the ground and begin.

As the characters break into action, the pomp and circumstance of the opening is gone. It is replaced by fast-paced, frenetic dialogue. The characters have no idea where they are - it’s as if they had been drugged and woke up in a strange room surrounded by strangers. The first discussion is about the latest news headline: **“communications cease between United States and the Soviet Union** (this is a place holder. I would prefer to have an unnamed enemy state to give the play the flexibility of timelessness). **Reports of unusual activity at multiple Minuteman missile silos. War at hand?”** Frantic confusion whirls in the room until one of the characters (possibly Member 5, the politician) discovers an envelope on the table. He reads the situation of the moment aloud to the others (what we have already heard: that the end of the world is nigh, and it’s up to the Committee Members to decide what to do). The final piece of instructions is for there to be an anonymous vote by paper ballot. Five (as in, Committee Member Five) hands out six slips of paper and six small pencils, he keeps the seventh of each. This is the

moment when fear reigns and the members vote with their survival instinct instead of their hearts and minds. If the vote were to be counted, it would be unanimous in favor of being the first to strike and obliterating the enemy state. The moment the last member (as in, committee member) is about to put his vote into the envelope, the lights once again shift (not gradual, it must be jarring and instant) and the characters freeze in time. The Chief of Staff steps out of the darkness, illuminated by his spotlight. He addresses the audience and explains that if the votes were counted right now, it would be unanimous in favor of destruction. He explains that such decisions cannot be made in haste, and proceeds to take the final member's slip of paper from his hands. The Chief of Staff gently erases the 'Yay' vote, and writes in the opposite. He places it back in the member's hand exactly as it was, lays a new (unopened) envelope on the table where the first one was found, and leaves. The lights crash on again. As if nothing had happened, the committee member places his slip in the envelope. Member 5 takes the votes, shuffles them, and counts. Discord ensues as the characters react to the unexpected results, violence threatens, someone tries to break open the door to escape; desperation abounds. Finally, the second envelope is discovered. Composure is lost. Another committee member reads this time (the envelope contains what the Chief of Staff already told us). The oldest committee member sits, massaging his chest (reminder: gender of the committee members is to be decided at a later point. Some will be flexible, others necessary.)

At this point, one leader will emerge. He will take control and attempt to reason with the anonymous swing voter; when reason fails, fingers will be pointed and accusations will be thrown. The bigger picture is replaced by petty infighting until a physical altercation occurs and requires a forced cool-down. At that point, another committee member suggests that a change of perspective may be necessary. This is the first time the idea of not firing first is brought up, only to be shut down loudly as weak and foolish. (Note: This whole time, the enemy must be referred to as "they, them, those people, etc." The enemy must be "other-ed" to an extreme degree). Another vote is called for, this time by a show of hands. Every hand goes up, except for one: the hand of the oldest committee member (this member is at least in his eighties). Violence erupts and the group splinters as one of the committee members punches the old man in the face. That act defines the attacker as an "instigator." As tension simmers into forced calm, the old man explains his reasoning. He is a veteran, has seen death of the innocent—or dealt it—first hand. Perspective is once again brought into the room, the bigger picture becomes the biggest it's been. The question is: **"is striking first worth it, in the end?"** Morals, religion, politics, and prejudices come to fruition as debate is established. Right as the situation seems under control and organized, the Chief of Staff's voice is heard throughout the room in an emotionless drone: **"Missiles incoming. Destinations unknown. Time until impact: two minutes."**

Proposed Schedule

February 1-14th:

Preproduction (logistics, treatment, dramaturgical research, etc.)

February 15-March 28:

Rough draft.

April 3rd:

Auditions.

April 7th:

Table read (advisor and readers welcome to attend).

April 8th-25:

Rehearsal whenever possible, incorporating changes to script (workshop segment).

April 30:

Locked script due.

May 1-4:

Tech week.

May 5 or 6:

Staged reading, final performance.

Schedule Note:

I am undertaking this writing and directing venture as an on-going workshop, as I think the actors will provide useful critiques and suggestions until the date the script is locked.

UPDATE: 19 February 2017

This week I met with my advisor to discuss some issues he had with the essence of “3 Minutes Until Midnight,” and have radically changed my plan. There were fatal flaws in my original premise that I attempted to fix, but now know that it would take much more time than I have to truly erase the holes in the ideas. One of the biggest problems my advisor discovered is that I was trying to force a combination of reality and surreality, something that can be done but not often works. He mentioned the idea of simplifying and perhaps avoiding the “nuclear option,” and I agreed.

I went back to the drawing board to find the *essence* of my play, the *truth* that I was trying to uncover. I was unable to verbalize one for “3 Minutes,” which I realize is a big problem. If there is no truth - or core - the play will fizzle out fairly quickly and most audience members will wonder what the point of it all is. With that said, I re-thought the parameters of my play to forgo the flashy, complicated, and gimmicky conventions of nuclear war and magical rooms. My new goal is to put characters together in a space where they can discover if, when faced with a critical decision, they will stick to their morals or give in to fear.

The New Question:

- What happens when the mayor of a small town decides to defy the federal government?

Other Questions:

- Will others see past their prejudices?
- Are morals stronger than fear?

The Essence:

- The essence of this play is that the moment someone really sees another person as an Individual, all pre-held beliefs and stereotypes will disappear.
- When faced with deciding someone else’s fate, a majority of people will do the right thing a majority of the time.

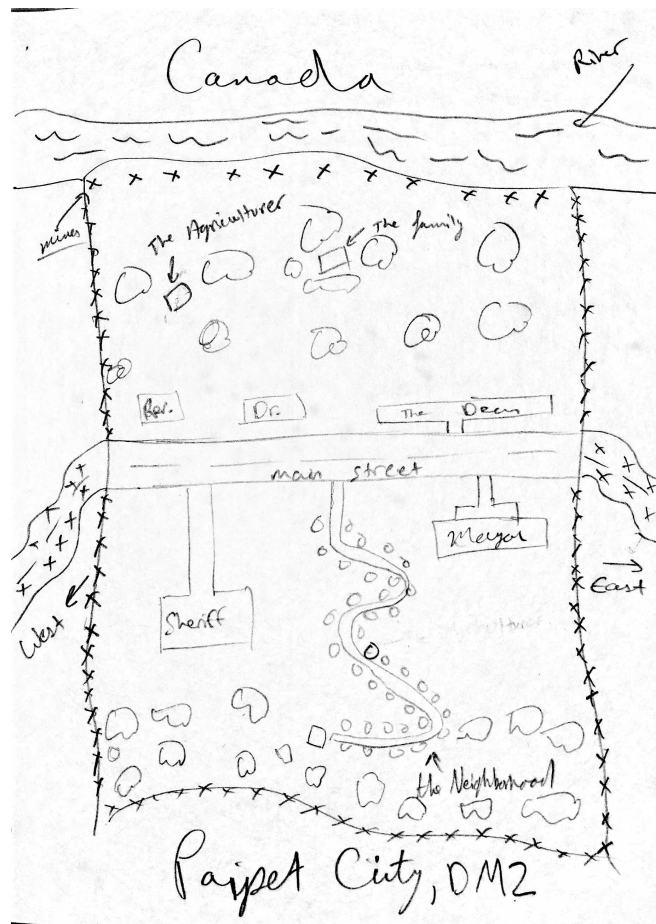
The Premise:

- Immigration is illegal. The harboring or transporting of non-Americans is punishable by death. In the small town of Paipet City, North Dakota, the amor calls an emergency vote to decide the fate of an immigrant family that was discovered half-frozen to death in a hunter’s cabin. If the leaders of the town - the Mayor, the Doctor, the Sheriff, the Reverend, the Professor, and the Agriculturer - follow the law, they will receive a bounty of \$25,000 per immigrant. Nobody talks about what happens to the immigrants after they are turned in. If the leaders do not turn the Family in, they will face death by firing squad.

Paipet City, North Dakota

Paipet City, population 107, is on the very border between North Dakota and Canada. Before the “Only America” movement took power in the late mid-21st century, Paipet City was a slowly growing town that reached a maximum population of 894. When the order came in and immigrants and non-citizens were rounded up by The Olde Guard (in the past, it was called “the National Guard”), the population dropped to 300. When the area within 50 miles of Canada was unincorporated and demilitarized, the name ‘Paipet City’ was take off the books and renamed as the ‘DMZ.’ The population dropped to 150: some moved north to escape the “Only America” movement, others moved elsewhere. Soon, only 107 remained. Some kids, a few teenagers, more adults, and a great number of seniors.

Paipet City is surrounded by dense forest and denser minefields. Their only source of fresh water is a man-made river on the border with Canada. Only the Richard the Agriculturer and the Sheriff know the way through the minefield to the water’s edge.



The People

- Dr. Maxwell Edgewood has lived in Paipet City for 67 years. He has been Mayor for 40 years, and ran unopposed in the last 37 elections. He is the father of Timothy, Nicholas, and Tristan (all deceased), and the widower of Amelia Love. He has been living in the house his great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather was born in. He enjoys black coffee, working from 9 to 5, observing the Sabbath, and hunting on Sundays.

He calls the vote after the Sheriff alerts him to the plight of the Family.

- Doctor Evelyn Wood took over for her father before he died. She was attending medical school at the University of British Columbia when she heard of his death. She attended his funeral and when she began her journey north, she discovered the newly-planted minefields. She went back to her father's house and opened a practice, finishing her education by herself using her father's books and with the help of the Professor. Her family has lived in Paipet City for eight generations - all doctors. The first Monday per month, at dawn, Evelyn goes to the very edge of the border with the Sheriff and Richard the Agriculturer to retrieve medical supplies her contact at the University of British Columbia arranges. If the weather is bad, there are no medical supplies.

She treated the Family for exposure and amputated David's frost-bitten foot.

- Joshua Trumble left the Olde Guard after two years. He deserted after a carpet-bombing of an immigrant camp. He was the pilot and he dropped the bombs - he was low enough to see small children running out, ablaze. Joshua ended up in Paipet City after the group of resistance fighters that took him in was ambushed. He managed to escape, and has been Sheriff ever since. Joshua can shoot a squirrel out of a tree at a hundred yards, with his left hand. Joshua is not his real name.

He found the Family and called the mayor. He carried David on his back for two miles, no sweat.

- Reverend Fatima is not a reverend at all. Officially practicing any religion is punishable by forced labor, and claiming to preach any religion is punishable by death. She is fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Latin, and has been Paipet City's only connection to the classic religions, like her mother and father before her, and her

grandparents. It is believed that her great, great, great grandfather studied at the Vatican before the Twelve Hour War. Her parents were disappeared by the Only America Movement during a rebel mission when she was seventeen. She sometimes teaches at the College, home of her mentor.

She has no idea why the Mayor called her in at 4am.

- Professor Williams teaches every student in Paipet City. He lives in the old college building, and single-handedly restored the literacy rate in Paipet City to 45%, the highest since before the bombs dropped. There are only 25 students enrolled above an 8th grade level, as they are the sole survivors of their time as forced conscripts in The Olde Guard. Professor Williams lost both of his children during the Second Immigrant Uprising in the ruins of California.

He was on his third whisky - neat - when the mayor called.

- Richard (surname redacted) was 13 when his father stepped on a land mine during their family's bid to escape south to the nearest Olde Guard strongpoint. He was 16 when he saw the Sheriff kill his brother after he tried to strangle Reverend Fatima's father during a service. He was 18 when he buried his mother at 4am, then went to work in the fields. He is the only source of fresh produce in Paipet City, and he hasn't been paid in 37 years. He sometimes trades with the Canadians, when the Mayor forces him to. Richard left the Neighborhood and moved to a cabin in the woods after his mother died.

If he had accompanied the Sheriff, as he normally does, to the water's edge, he would have found the Family. He would have shot them on sight.

- Edwardo Villegas, 45, father of Monica, Samuel (deceased), and David, husband of Ruth, has been traveling for months. They escaped their war-torn town in Colombia days after El Terremoto destroyed the capital and plunged the blooming country into chaos. They traveled using whatever means they could with one destination in mind: Canada. Canada is the only country this side of an ocean that remains democratic, and 'free.' Ever since the E.U. dissolved, NATO disbanded, North Korea annexed a majority of Asia, and the United States became an isolated dictatorship, Canada has stood proud as the promised land. Two days before finding lodging in the hunter's cabin on the edge of Paipet City, Samuel drowned as he tried to save their remaining food supplies that had fallen into the river. Ruth is six months pregnant, Monica lost an eye to a fungal infection she contracted as they crossed the jungle.

Paipet City, North Dakota

DRAFT 1

The Town Council

THE MAYOR

Dr. Maxwell Edgewood has lived in Paipet City for 70 years. He has been Mayor for 40 years, and has run unopposed since he inherited the position from his father forty-five years ago. He was the father of Timothy (deceased), Nicholas (deceased), and Tristan (deceased), and the widower of Amelia Love. The Mayor's family owns every property in Paipet City, North Dakota.

THE SHERIFF

Joshua Trumble inherited his position as sheriff from his older brother. Joshua is unmarried but takes care of his brother's three kids, all boys. Joshua's brother was killed in a shoot-out in Chihuahua, Mexico; he was a Customs and Border Patrol agent.

THE DOCTOR

Doctor Evelyn Wood, mid-30s, took over for her father as the town's only doctor. Before his death, she was attending medical school at the University of British Columbia; she dropped out of school to help the town during the flu outbreak of 2075. When federal medical aid stopped coming out of the blue in 2080, Dr. Wood reached out to her Canadian contacts. She accompanies Richard and Joshua on the first day of the month when they go hunting to retrieve the medical supplies. Her family has lived in Paipet City since 1922.

THE PROFESSOR

Professor Williams was born in Washington, D.C., and moved to Paipet City at the age of 25. He teaches every student in Paipet City.

THE REVEREND

Reverend Fatima is fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Latin. She was born in Paipet City, but left at the age of 22 to "see the world."

THE AGRICULTURER

Richard was 13 when he took over for his grandfather at the family farm. After his mother died during the flu outbreak, he took over tending to every scrap of land in the town. Richard has worked from 4am to 10pm for twenty years, and has never seen a nickel.

SETTING

Paipet City, North Dakota. Population 107, the town is on the border between North Dakota and Canada. After its founding in 1895, the town saw an economic boom in the 1950s thanks to its exportation of crude oil. In 2056, the last of North Dakota's oil ran dry and a majority of settlers left. Those who stayed had nowhere else to go, and were left to resurrect the town. In 2070, a flu outbreak lowered the population from 300 to 150—young children, seniors, even healthy adults lost their lives in the largest outbreak since 1918—and now there are only 107 people left. The town depends on cash from the Federal Government to trade with Canadian citizens: medicine, textiles, food, etc. Paipet City is hundreds of miles away from any other settlement in the United States, so this lifeline is the only thing keeping it afloat.

TIME

The action of the play begins at 4am on Thursday, December 31st, 2099.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(A quiet room, illuminated by a bare lightbulb that sways in a pendulum motion. It is pitch-black outside the room, and the howl of the wind echoes dully throughout the room.)

(A door bursts open and THE MAYOR and THE SHERIFF enter, talking.)

THE MAYOR

...but I just don't know what we can do about them! Today, of all days.

THE SHERIFF

I know Max, which is why I called you.

THE MAYOR

And boy I'm glad you did! Can you imagine the commotion this could've caused if old Mrs. Thompson had found them when she put her cat out? My goodness.

THE SHERIFF

Yes, yes.

(THE MAYOR sits heavily-his hair is tousled, his outfit not quite impeccable. THE SHERIFF shakes off his heavy coat and throws it onto a dilapidated couch.)

THE SHERIFF

So, what now? Should we call the council?

THE MAYOR

I don't know if we have any other choice! Today, of all days! Are the phones working?

(THE SHERIFF crosses to a single phone next to the couch.)

THE SHERIFF

This one is, at least. Who first?

THE MAYOR

Ah, jeez. I'm not sure Josh. Maybe Richard?

THE SHERIFF

See if we catch him before he leaves.

THE MAYOR

Good thinking.

(THE SHERIFF dials, waits. THE MAYOR mutters "today of all days" as he shakes snow out of his hair.)

THE SHERIFF

Richard? Richard? Damn, damn.

THE MAYOR

He left?

THE SHERIFF

Looks like it.

THE MAYOR

Today, of all days. Alright, try Evelyn. She should be finished with them by now, yes?

THE SHERIFF

Unless something went wrong. We'll see.

(The moment THE SHERIFF puts the phone to his ear, the door crashes open again.)

THE AGRICULTURER

MAXWELL!

THE MAYOR

Oh, dear.

THE AGRICULTURER

MAXWELL!

(THE AGRICULTURER enters, and throws off his coat. He holds a double-barreled shotgun loosely in his right hand, a dead rabbit in his left.)

THE AGRICULTURER

What do you think you're doing? Are you insane?

THE SHERIFF

Alright now, Rich, calm down. We just tried call—

THE AGRICULTURER

I saw Wood wheeling them into the hospital! Don't you pretend, Mr. Mayor.

THE MAYOR

I am not pretending, Richard! If you would just calm down for one second we could explain—

THE AGRICULTURER

Don't you tell me to calm down, you son of a bitch. You know what'll happen if they see those people here.

THE DOCTOR

That's why we're here, Richard.

(THE DOCTOR shuts the door behind her and enters the room. She is weary, her hair in a tight bun.)

THE MAYOR

Ah, Evelyn. Thank you for coming. How are they doing?

THE AGRICULTURER

What does it matter how *they're* doing? It's us we've gotta—

THE DOCTOR

They're alright, Mr. Mayor. The father is asleep, he wasn't in too bad a shape. His son, though...

THE SHERIFF

I'll phone Williams and Fatima, then. Rich, why don't you make some coffee?

THE AGRICULTURER

Coffee? COFFEE?

THE DOCTOR

Yes, Richard, coffee.

THE AGRICULTURER

Now listen here, bi—

THE MAYOR

Goodness gracious just make the coffee! It's too early for this. You can yell later; save it for when we're all here.

(Grumbling, THE AGRICULTURER exits through a side door.)

THE MAYOR

So, Evelyn. They're alright?

THE DOCTOR

For the most part. I'm not certain how they survived this long with the clothes on their back, but at least now they're warm.

THE SHERIFF

And the boy's foot? Any chance of saving it?

THE MAYOR

Saving it? Why, what happened to his foot?

THE DOCTOR

No, no. We had to take it.

THE MAYOR

You cut off his foot?

THE SHERIFF

Frostbite, Max. When we found them - I mean, I'd never seen anything like it. How much did you have to take?

THE DOCTOR

Quite a bit. But he should be alright, as long as we can prevent an infection.

THE MAYOR

Yes, well. And you said the father—

THE DOCTOR

—Is going to be alright, yes.

THE MAYOR

Good, good.

(There is a knock at the door.)

THE MAYOR

My goodness you don't think—

THE SHERIFF

—No, no. It's too early. They're not supposed to be here for hours. I'll bet it's Williams, he's always quick to the draw.

(THE SHERIFF opens the door to reveal THE PROFESSOR supporting THE REVEREND.)

THE DOCTOR

Fatima? What is it, your leg?

THE REVEREND

It is nothing, it is nothing. If I could just sit, thank you, professor.

THE PROFESSOR

No problem. I'm glad I ran into you, it's not a very nice morning to dawdle out there.

THE DOCTOR

Did the painkillers do anything, Fatima? I'm sure we could get some more on tomorrow's run.

THE REVEREND

Stop fretting, Dr. Wood. It always hurts when it's cold. And it's cold today.

THE PROFESSOR

Yes, yes. Coldest it's been all year.

THE MAYOR

Today, of all days...

THE PROFESSOR

Are we all here? Where's —

THE AGRICULTURER

Coffee's done, your majesty.

(Richard sees the new arrivals, and freezes.)

THE PROFESSOR

Hello, Richard.

THE AGRICULTURER

Yeah. What's with her?

THE REVEREND

Nothing, simply testing the upholstery. Coffee is done then?

(THE REVEREND goes to stand but is shouted down.)

THE REVEREND

Alright, alright. Two creams and a sugar, please.

THE MAYOR

Of course, my dear. Be right back.

(He exits, leaving the group in silence.)

THE SHERIFF

So, Rich. Any catches today?

THE AGRICULTURER

Just the rabbit.

THE PROFESSOR

Ah, well. It is still early. Perhaps you can go back out there!

(THE AGRICULTURER stares at THE PROFESSOR.)

THE AGRICULTURER

Yeah, you think?

THE PROFESSOR

Well, I'm no expert on hunting techniques but—

THE AGRICULTURER

—Then you better hush up, right?

THE SHERIFF

Rich—

THE PROFESSOR

I'm sorry, I did not mean to insult you.

THE AGRICULTURER

I just caught the one rabbit and by now any others are just frozen dinner for a bear or a wolf. But maybe I can go back out there, since I have nothing better to do!

THE DOCTOR

Richard—

THE AGRICULTURER

Except I'm stuck here because of you stupid people!

THE REVEREND

Yes you are. And we are stuck with you.

(THE AGRICULTURER stops short.)

THE AGRICULTURER

And what is that supposed to mean?

THE SHERIFF

Alright! That's enough, Richard.

(THE MAYOR enters, he carries two cups.)

THE MAYOR

Coffee, Fatima! Drink it while it's still—oh dear. Is everything alright?

THE DOCTOR

Yes, everything is fine. Sorry, Maxwell but could we begin? I have to get back to my patients.

THE MAYOR

Yes, yes. What time is it, Josh?

THE SHERIFF

Twenty after.

THE MAYOR

Oh my goodness! Yes, yes we must begin. They said they'd arrive at noon?

THE PROFESSOR

That's what we heard last.

THE MAYOR

Good. Right, let us come to order.

THE REVEREND

I will stay here, Mr. Mayor. I apologize, but my leg...

THE MAYOR

Not to worry, not to worry. Professor, start us off.

THE PROFESSOR

Yes. Right.

(THE PROFESSOR clears his throat and sifts
through a thick binder.)

THE PROFESSOR

Where is it, ah. Dr. Maxwell Edgewood, Mayor, has called an emergency council meeting. I will now take roll. Dr. Edgewood?

THE MAYOR

Present!

THE PROFESSOR

Sheriff Trumble?

THE SHERIFF

Present.

THE PROFESSOR

Doctor Evelyn Wood?

THE DOCTOR

Present.

THE PROFESSOR

Reverend Fatima?

THE REVEREND

I am here.

THE PROFESSOR

Richard?

THE AGRICULTURER

Yeah.

THE PROFESSOR

And I, Professor Williams, am also here. Roll complete, Mr. Sheriff?

THE SHERIFF

Thank you, professor. Everybody know why we're all here?

(General mutters of assent from all except THE PROFESSOR and THE REVEREND.)

THE REVEREND

Why are we here so early, Mr. Trumble?

THE PROFESSOR

I'd quite like to know, as well.

THE AGRICULTURER

I'll tell you! These bleeding-hearts decided to—

THE MAYOR

Richard!

THE SHERIFF

I will tell them, Richard. Professor, Reverend, this morning at about 3am, I was doing my last foot patrol around the outskirts. Everything was quiet, but on my way back I saw a light in one of the old cabins by Richard's house. You know them?

THE PROFESSOR

No, I'm not familiar.

THE SHERIFF

They're for hunters, doors unlocked, anyone can get in. Considering that we haven't had hunters for years, I figured I'd check it out. Good thing, too. I found a father and son, half-frozen to death. I'd never seen them around, so I figured they'd gotten lost or something. The kid was in a bad way. I carried him back to Doc's and she took care of them after that.

THE REVEREND

You carried him for two miles? On your back?

THE SHERIFF

Well, it was easy. I don't think either of them has had much to eat.

THE DOCTOR

No, they haven't. Like I said, it's a miracle they made it all the way here.

THE PROFESSOR

From where?

THE SHERIFF

Sorry?

THE PROFESSOR

All the way here, from where?

THE MAYOR

Ah, yes. That is...that's why we're all here so early. It looks like, well, they don't...they weren't carrying any sort of identification.

THE REVEREND

You said they were lost, Sheriff?

THE SHERIFF

We assume so. We haven't been able to speak to them much.

THE REVEREND

And why not? Are they in shock? Is it hypothermia?

THE DOCTOR

No, and yes, but no. That's not why...

THE AGRICULTURER

It's because they don't speak English.

(Everyone turns to look at THE
AGRICULTURER.)

THE SHERIFF

Yes. They don't speak English.

THE PROFESSOR

No English? What, are they French? Hard to believe that they got lost if they came from up North—

THE MAYOR

Well we don't think they came from Canada. They're, well, they're more, they are a little darker.

THE PROFESSOR

Ah.

THE REVEREND

I don't see the issue. Why did you call a council meeting for this?

THE SHERIFF

Well, Fatima, it's a bit more complicated than--

THE AGRICULTURER

No, it isn't.

THE DOCTOR

Richard, please.

THE MAYOR

It's in the books. I'm required to call a council meeting when taking action that could jeopardize the town.

THE REVEREND

Yes but what could possibly happen if we help these people?

THE MAYOR

Normally, nothing. But if you remember the date, that's why we have a problem.

THE PROFESSOR

New Year's Eve, of course.

THE REVEREND

I am sorry, I am still not seeing the issue here.

THE PROFESSOR

New Year's Eve. Fatima, what happens every last day of the year?

THE REVEREND

The service? What does that have anything to do with--

THE AGRICULTURER

Not the service! The Feds, woman. The one day they come to "check up on us."

THE SHERIFF

Which also happens to be the one day they use to judge whether or not we're--what's the term, Max?

THE MAYOR

Eligible for federal aid.

(THE REVEREND leans back in her seat, eyes closed.)

THE REVEREND

Oh.

THE AGRICULTURER

Oh, yes. You see? You see how insane it is?

THE PROFESSOR

What exactly is insane, Richard?

THE AGRICULTURER

You're gonna make me say it? Really?

(beat)

You're going to fuck us all over to save a couple of illegals. That's what's insane—

THE DOCTOR

Richard it's not that simple—

THE AGRICULTURER

But it is! It's them or us. You work for this town, do your jobs!

THE SHERIFF

That's what we're trying to do. Now, the first step is to call a vote—

THE AGRICULTURER

A vote? A VOTE?

THE MAYOR

Yes! A vote! It says here: we must do a preliminary vote. If it's unanimous either way, we can end the session and do whatever is needed.

THE REVEREND

What type of vote does it say?

THE MAYOR

Ah, it — doesn't specify. But perhaps an anonymous vote would be best? At least for this first one?

THE AGRICULTURER

No. I want to see who thinks we should risk—

THE PROFESSOR

We'll use ballots, Mr. Mayor. I have some blank scantron sheets in my briefcase, give me one second.

(THE PROFESSOR disappears into the other room.)

THE SHERIFF

Please sit, Richard. Everyone have pens?

(Nods and mutters of assent)

THE AGRICULTURER

I only have a pencil. Guess I can't vote.

THE SHERIFF

That'll work just fine, Dick.

(An uncomfortable silence fills the room as the wind rattles the window. THE PROFESSOR enters.)

THE PROFESSOR

Alright, got em. Mr. Mayor –

THE MAYOR

Thank you. If you'll each take your ballot now, here you go – and there's the last one. Alright, let's see. All in favor of reporting the – uh – the...

THE REVEREND

Let's call them the family.

THE MAYOR

Yes, thank you Fatima. All in favor of reporting the family today, please bubble in A on your scantrons. All in favor of granting them asylum, please bubble B. When you're done you can put the sheets on the table and we'll shuffle them before we tally.

(Richard is done first, he steps confidently towards the table and slams his vote down. Everyone else takes care to avoid his gaze as they fill in their sheets. Finally, THE REVEREND is the last to settle back down in her chair.)

THE SHERIFF

All done? Alright, I'll count Mr. Mayor.

(THE SHERIFF walks to the table and shuffles the ballots.)

THE SHERIFF

That is – one, two, three, four, five votes in favor of reporting the family, and one in favor of asylum.

(beat)

THE AGRICULTURER

Well, well, well. Isn't that something?

THE SHERIFF

What's the next move, Mr. Mayor?

THE MAYOR

Ah, jeez. I don't –

(Offstage, a phone rings shrilly.)

THE MAYOR

I'll get it!

(He scampers from the room, leaving a layer of viscous tension in his wake. The wind gusts harder than ever. A very long moment passes.)

THE AGRICULTURER

Do we need to wait for him? We voted, didn't we? I'll be leaving now.

THE PROFESSOR

You can't, Richard. The law is clear, it has to be unanimous.

THE AGRICULTURER

Then we'll just change that vote to make it unanimous! I've got things to do –

(THE MAYOR bursts through the door, his hair disheveled, just as the window rattles ominously.)

THE MAYOR

Nobody's leaving. The situation has changed.

(THE SHERIFF hurries to THE MAYOR's side,
everyone else begins to rise except THE
AGRICULTURER and THE REVEREND.)

THE REVEREND

What has happened, Maxwell?

(THE MAYOR looks directly to THE SHERIFF
and THE DOCTOR.)

THE MAYOR

That was the hospital. The father died in his sleep.

CURTAIN

ACT 2

SCENE 1

(The sun has risen, but it is still early. Snow falls steadily outside; the light bulb has gone out. THE PROFESSOR sits on the couch next to THE REVEREND, who leans back with her eyes closed. THE AGRICULTURER paces the room.)

THE AGRICULTURER

What a waste of time this is. Where did they even go? I thought we weren't allowed to leave until -- this is stupid. What a waste of time! They said this was important and that we had to settle -- what a waste of my damn time.

THE PROFESSOR

Can you stop?

THE AGRICULTURER

Excuse me?

THE PROFESSOR

Pacing. Please stop pacing. It's creepy.

THE AGRICULTURER

Creepy, am I?

THE PROFESSOR

That's not what I said –

THE AGRICULTURER

You sure? Sure as hell sounded like it.

THE PROFESSOR

Alright, look! I didn't say anything –

THE REVEREND

Gentlemen, I have an idea. Why don't we have a little contest. I'll be the judge, and here are the rules: you have to be quiet, and you have to stay still. The first one to start sweating wins. Sound good?

(Silence.)

THE REVEREND

Good start. Now, how long have they been gone?

THE PROFESSOR

Er – about an hour, I think?

(THE AGRICULTURER glances out the window.)

THE AGRICULTURER

Sounds about right.

THE REVEREND

Alright. Can we try calling the hospital again?

THE PROFESSOR

Yes, good idea. I can –

THE AGRICULTURER

I'll do it. You dither too much.

THE PROFESSOR

I do not di –

THE REVEREND

Go ahead, you know where the phone is.

(THE AGRICULTURER smirks at THE PROFESSOR and exits. THE PROFESSOR and THE REVEREND sit in silence for a moment.)

THE REVEREND

How are your classes going?

THE PROFESSOR

(offhand)

Classes? That's a tad generous.

THE REVEREND

I don't understand.

THE PROFESSOR

I don't think you can call seven kids a whole class. And they're not even at the same level...

THE REVEREND

Ah, you too?

THE PROFESSOR

I'm sorry?

THE REVEREND

Low attendance. It's not just in academia, believe me. Paipet City does not have as many devotees as it once did.

THE PROFESSOR

Really?

THE REVEREND

Really. It is rather sad, actually.

THE PROFESSOR

What are your numbers like?

THE REVEREND

(with a laugh)

This year? Or last year, I guess? About ten people.

THE PROFESSOR

Every Sunday?

THE REVEREND

Total.

THE PROFESSOR

Oh.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

THE REVEREND

It is no matter. For those ten people, I would do anything.

THE PROFESSOR

If you don't mind my asking – how do you make any money?

THE REVEREND

You will be the first to know if I ever do!

THE PROFESSOR

You don't – get paid? At all?

THE REVEREND

By whom? The ten people who attend a service a few times per year? My boy, they cannot afford to feed their own families. How are they supposed to pay me?

THE PROFESSOR

I just thought, surely you must have some income...

THE REVEREND

And for what? I am an old woman, I am alone. I have nothing to covet, and no one to shop for.

THE PROFESSOR

But yourself! You can buy things for yourself!

THE REVEREND

I could.

(A pause.)

THE PROFESSOR

Er – why don't you?

THE REVEREND

Why do you?

ACT [2]

SCENE [2]

(Before THE PROFESSOR can answer, THE AGRICULTURER throws the door open. THE REVEREND smiles warmly at THE PROFESSOR, who seems uncomfortable.)

THE AGRICULTURER

Couldn't reach 'em. Went through the receptionist twice – apparently they left a while ago. Should be here very soon.

(As if on cue, the front door bursts open to reveal THE MAYOR, THE SHERIFF, and THE DOCTOR.)

THE MAYOR

Today, of all days.

THE REVEREND

Sounds like good news.

THE MAYOR

Oh yes, the best. I didn't think I'd be dealing with the placement of an illegal orphan and the imminent threat of losing everything Paipet has worked for in the last few decades, all in one day! If my father were alive...

THE SHERIFF

I think you're handling the situation admirably, Mr. Mayor.

THE AGRICULTURER

I don't.

THE MAYOR

Yes, well, it doesn't matter. It will be out of our hands soon.

THE REVEREND

Why is that, sir?

THE MAYOR

Well when the Feds come, we're going to have to turn the kid over! They'll know what to do with him.

THE REVEREND

What about the vote?

THE SHERIFF

Well, we all understand that the situation has changed. I don't think we can go by the rulebook anymore.

THE REVEREND

So, is that it?

(A pause.)

THE MAYOR

I'm sorry?

THE REVEREND

I said: Is. That. It?

(THE MAYOR is taken aback by the sudden coldness, and looks around for help.)

THE MAYOR

I – guess it is. I mean...wait, am I missing something?

THE AGRICULTURER

So we're done?

THE SHERIFF

Yes. We're done.

THE PROFESSOR

I don't understand.

THE DOCTOR

What don't you understand?

THE PROFESSOR

If we're done, just like that – I mean, what was the point of this?

THE MAYOR

We had to do it! It's in the rule book!

THE AGRICULTURER

Forget the damn rulebook. We've been here for hours and now you just tell us that it was a waste of time?

THE MAYOR

Now see here, it was not a waste of time! The situation's changed!

THE REVEREND

No, it has not.

THE DOCTOR

Yes it has! Don't you listen?

(THE REVEREND stops, stares at THE DOCTOR.)

THE REVEREND

Yes, I do.

THE DOCTOR

Then you'll know that there's nothing we can do.

THE REVEREND

You are wrong.

THE AGRICULTURER

The hell she is! I say we dump the kid back where we found him.

THE SHERIFF

Well we won't be doing that, obviously.

THE PROFESSOR

So we're just going to hand him to the Feds?

THE MAYOR

Yes! It's the best option --

THE REVEREND

You are a coward.

(Absolute silence.)

THE MAYOR

What did you say?

(THE REVEREND begins to stand. It is laborious, difficult, a mountain to summit. She stands at her full height, and walks to stand in front of THE MAYOR.)

THE REVEREND

You are a coward.

THE MAYOR

Now listen here, lady, you couldn't even begin to understand --

THE REVEREND

Coward.

THE MAYOR

I suggest you sit back down before you force me to do something --

THE REVEREND

Coward.

THE SHERIFF

Alright, let's all calm --

THE REVEREND

COWARD.

(THE MAYOR strikes her across the face, and THE REVEREND crashes to the floor. Immediately, chaos erupts. THE PROFESSOR shouts, lunges forward and tackles THE MAYOR, who stumbles back into THE AGRICULTURER. THE SHERIFF throws his body into the scuffle, THE DOCTOR goes to THE REVEREND.)

THE SHERIFF

STOP! EVERYBODY STOP!

(THE SHERIFF succeeds in breaking apart the scuffle, THE REVEREND stands shakily, supported by THE DOCTOR.)

THE SHERIFF

Please sit her down. Are you alright?

THE REVEREND

I'm fine, please get your hands off of me. I said OFF!

(THE REVEREND stumbles onto the couch ungracefully, THE DOCTOR freezes.)

THE SHERIFF

Are you done?

THE PROFESSOR

Whatever.

(He goes to sit with THE REVEREND, who dabs at her eyes.)

THE SHERIFF

Mr. Mayor?

THE MAYOR

I'm fine, fine. Are you alright?

THE AGRICULTURER

Shut up.

THE SHERIFF

Alright that's enough. If you're not going to be civil, you can leave.

THE AGRICULTURER

CIVIL? I'm a victim here!

THE PROFESSOR

Oh yeah, poor you.

THE AGRICULTURER

Okay, here we go. Stand up, let's go. Now. Come on. I dare you.

THE PROFESSOR

I'm not fighting you.

THE SHERIFF

Thank you –

THE PROFESSOR

You're not worth it.

THE AGRICULTURER

Oh I'm not, am I? Let me show you how much I'm worth –

THE SHERIFF

ENOUGH. Sit down. All of you.

(Grudgingly, THE MAYOR, THE
AGRICULTURER, and THE DOCTOR sit.)

THE SHERIFF

Thank you. Now, if you hear the whole story you'll see why we can't help
anymore. Doctor?

THE DOCTOR

What?

THE SHERIFF

Can you please tell them?

THE DOCTOR

What is there to tell?

THE PROFESSOR

Oh, who knows? Do you have any fun stories?

THE SHERIFF

Just explain the current situation, please. What happened, the status of the
child, you know. Please.

THE DOCTOR

Well, it looks like the father had an aneurysm or a stroke. We can't know
for sure?

THE PROFESSOR

And why not?

THE SHERIFF

Please –

THE DOCTOR

We are not equipped for that. Haven't been for a long time. So I can only
guess. The fact is, the boy is alone now. He's recovering all right, but once
the Feds find out – well, it would be better if he were not at the hospital
when they come calling.

THE REVEREND

You are not seriously considering leaving him in the forest, are you?

THE MAYOR

Of course not.

THE PROFESSOR

But you're handing him to the Feds?

THE MAYOR

Yes.

THE PROFESSOR

Isn't that the same thing?

THE MAYOR

What? Of course it's not!

THE PROFESSOR

I mean you're not leaving him in the forest, but it really kind of is the same thing if you just hand him to the Feds. What are they going to do with him?

THE MAYOR

I don't know, that isn't our problem. We have to focus on the wellbeing of the City.

THE REVEREND

And leave that child to fend for himself? Didn't you say he doesn't speak any English?

THE DOCTOR

Yes.

THE REVEREND

Surely you see how wrong this is.

THE MAYOR

I wish I didn't have to do it, but it's a done deal.

THE AGRICULTURER

Good. So now we can get out of here? I have things to do before they get here.

(THE AGRICULTURER stands and heads for the door.)

THE PROFESSOR

Stop! You can't just leave.

THE AGRICULTURER

I think I can. We're done, aren't we, Mr. Mayor?

THE MAYOR

There's nothing we can do for the boy.

THE AGRICULTURER

Told ya.

THE PROFESSOR

We're don't have a say in this? Aren't we all part of the council?

THE SHERIFF

Technically.

THE PROFESSOR

What does that even mean?

THE REVEREND

So our opinions don't count?

THE MAYOR

Of course they count, but I have to be the one to tell the Feds. I sign-off on what we decide, and this is the only way.

THE AGRICULTURER

Sounds good. Let's go.

THE REVEREND

Wait! Think of the boy!

THE MAYOR

What about him?

THE REVEREND

Can't you even spare a moment for him?

THE MAYOR

And why would I want to do that?

THE PROFESSOR

What if he was your son?

(THE MAYOR freezes. After a moment, he turns to THE PROFESSOR.)

THE MAYOR

He is not my son.

THE PROFESSOR

But what if he was?

THE MAYOR

He isn't.

THE PROFESSOR

But just think about it! Wouldn't you reconsider if you even knew the boy a little bit? If you had children, you would understand.

(THE MAYOR stands suddenly, and goes into the side room. THE PROFESSOR stares after him, confused.)

THE AGRICULTURER

Good one.

THE DOCTOR

That was tactless.

THE SHERIFF

I'll go see if he's alright.

(THE SHERIFF goes to leave, but THE REVEREND raises a hand.)

THE REVEREND

No, give him a moment.

THE PROFESSOR

What did I say?

THE REVEREND

It's alright, you didn't know.

THE AGRICULTURER

Surprise, surprise.

THE PROFESSOR

Know what?

(Everyone but THE PROFESSOR exchange a quick glance.)

THE SHERIFF

The Mayor lost his family years ago. Before you got here.

(Silence.)

THE PROFESSOR

I had no idea.

THE AGRICULTURER

That'll teach you to run your mouth. You don't know us, you never will. You shouldn't even be on this council.

THE PROFESSOR

I'm sorry, I – I really didn't mean to offend him.

THE REVEREND

Don't worry, it was an honest mistake.

THE AGRICULTURER

How can you say that? How can you side with him?

THE REVEREND

I'm not siding with him.

THE AGRICULTURER

Sounds to me like you were. You have just as much to lose as I do if the Feds catch us with an illegal kid.

THE REVEREND

But it's more complicated than that, you must know that.

THE AGRICULTURER

It really isn't! It's never been. It's the kid, or the town. For me, it's pretty simple. And if you don't see that, then maybe you should leave.

THE REVEREND

And what would that solve?

THE DOCTOR

Well, look at it logically. You don't know this – of course you don't – but if the Feds decide to write Paipet off, we're done.

THE AGRICULTURER

Thank you.

THE DOCTOR

We can't live if they cut off our funding. As it is, we barely have enough to keep a single operating room running. And even then, we're not equipped to handle anything major.

THE REVEREND

But that's just money. Don't you get supplies from the Canadians anyway?

THE DOCTOR

Just the basics. Whatever they can throw in a box or a cooler or whatever. And that's not guaranteed. If that ever stops, well – I don't know what we'll do.

THE PROFESSOR

You could just find another way to get money.

THE AGRICULTURER

Oh my God, shut up. You don't understand.

THE PROFESSOR

What don't I understand. Please, explain.

THE AGRICULTURER

Alright, alright. What do you do every day?

THE PROFESSOR

I don't –

THE AGRICULTURER

What do you do every day? What's your job?

THE PROFESSOR

I teach. I – you know what I do.

THE AGRICULTURER

You teach. Is it easy? Do you enjoy it?

THE PROFESSOR

I mean, sure.

THE AGRICULTURER

Do you get paid?

THE PROFESSOR

Yes, of course.

THE AGRICULTURER

Of course. Do you ever worry you'll be completely broke? What would you do if every student dropped out and you were out of a job?

THE PROFESSOR

What are you getting at –

THE AGRICULTURER

Just answer the question.

THE PROFESSOR

I guess I would move back home, or something. Maybe write a book, I don't know.

THE AGRICULTURER

There it is.

THE PROFESSOR

There what is?

THE AGRICULTURER

The reason why you'll never understand why we do things the way we do them here.

THE PROFESSOR

What? What are you talking about?

THE DOCTOR

You have somewhere to go. If things get really bad, you can pack up and leave. We can't. If the Feds come–

THE AGRICULTURER

Which they will.

THE DOCTOR

–If the Feds come and take away our money, the town will die. It may take a few years, but it will die. And where can we go? We can't pack up and leave, like you. Even today, the life of the town is bleeding and we are the only things keeping it from running dry. That money is like a year's worth of O-negative; it's a little, but it's enough.

(A long pause.)

THE PROFESSOR

But the boy will die, won't he?

THE AGRICULTURER

So what? That's life.

THE DOCTOR

We don't know that he will, for sure. But it's his only hope.

THE PROFESSOR

Turning him in?

THE DOCTOR

I didn't say I liked it. But it is what it is.

THE PROFESSOR

That's stupid.

THE DOCTOR

Yes, it is.

(THE MAYOR enters from the side room.
Everyone turns to watch him. An awkward moment
passes.)

THE PROFESSOR

Ah - Mr. Mayor, I apologize.

THE MAYOR

No need.

THE PROFESSOR

No, really. I didn't know –

THE MAYOR

I would rather forget, thank you. Sheriff, are we done here.

THE SHERIFF

Just about.

THE AGRICULTURER

Good! It's been a great time. Can't wait for the next one!

(Everyone stands, except THE REVEREND.)

THE MAYOR

Yes, yes. That should give you enough time to check a few of the traps before they get here? And Doc, it would be better that the father's body was in the morgue. Tag him as a John Doe, we'll think of what to do later.

THE DOCTOR

Will do.

THE MAYOR

Professor? Are you squared away?

THE PROFESSOR

Uh...

(He glances at THE REVEREND.)

Yes. Yes, I am.

THE MAYOR

Good, good. Sheriff, you'll accompany me to greet them? We should have time to get the books in order and grab some food before hand.

THE SHERIFF

Sounds good, Mr. Mayor.

THE MAYOR

Excellent. Alright, everyone. I don't think we need to meet in the coming days. Have a very happy New Year, and keep your fingers crossed. Maybe we'll get lucky this year and they'll but the zeroes on the left side...

(THE MAYOR, THE SHERIFF, THE AGRICULTURER, and THE DOCTOR gather their things and prepare to leave, talking quietly amongst themselves. THE PROFESSOR stands near THE REVEREND, who does not move. Suddenly, the phone rings. THE MAYOR exits into the other room.)

THE DOCTOR

Reverend, are you coming?

(THE REVEREND does not answer. THE PROFESSOR kneels next to her.)

THE PROFESSOR

Are you alright?

(Silence. THE MAYOR's voice rings clearly from the other room.)

THE MAYOR

(offstage)

Good! We actually just finished our final council meeting of the year. Actually, I'm happy to say that we managed to catch an illegal trying to escape into Canada. So let it be known that Paipet City is a proud supporter of Federal policy!

THE PROFESSOR

Let's get out of here.

THE REVEREND

Give me a moment.

(THE MAYOR finishes the call and enters the room.)

THE MAYOR

Good news! It looks like the Feds shifted their schedule because of the weather and will be here in about twenty minutes.

THE AGRICULTURER

They probably want to beat the worst part of the storm.

THE MAYOR

Probably. At least it'll be over with quickly. Doc, Sheriff, shall we?

(They begin to exit.)

THE REVEREND

I will take the boy.

(They freeze. THE MAYOR turns to THE REVEREND, who stands once more. She does not shake.)

THE MAYOR

What?

THE REVEREND

I will take the boy, I will leave Paipet and head North.

THE PROFESSOR

Think of what you're saying –

THE REVEREND

I have. I don't have anything to pack. I will leave now. You can blame me. If we don't make it, we don't make it. But I will not stand by – I will not hand over the child. I will take the boy.

THE MAYOR

Now, Reverend, don't be silly. We've made a decision already.

THE REVEREND

Then let us vote on it.

THE AGRICULTURER

Oh, come on.

THE REVEREND

Please. Just a show of hands. I will sit out so we don't have a tie. If everyone agrees –

(beat)

If everyone agrees, then so shall I. But please, spare one vote for one life.

(A moment.)

THE MAYOR

I don't know –

THE PROFESSOR

It's only fair, Mr. Mayor. Let's vote.

THE DOCTOR

Whatever it is, we have to do it fast.

THE AGRICULTURER

Whatever.

THE MAYOR

Fine, fine. Since you're sitting out, Reverend, you lead.

THE REVEREND

Thank you. But can we agree that it has to be unanimous?

THE AGRICULTURER

Seriously, lady, isn't it enough that we're voting?

THE REVEREND

Not when the consequence is someone's life. Even if you care nothing for them, you have to consider how precious their life is. You have to consider what will happen if we let the boy go. Don't kid yourselves, you know he will die. You know what they do to people like him. You know they will work him to the bone, and you know that he will die alone, hungry, and afraid. If I can spare that little boy – or even delay – any of that, I am willing to die.

THE DOCTOR

But the town –

THE REVEREND

Yes, the town. I know. That is why this is the best option. You can tell the Feds that I kidnapped the boy, I don't care.

THE MAYOR

They will hunt you down!

THE REVEREND

I doesn't matter! It is better to die trying than to just give up. Please. Think of your own children. Wouldn't you hope that – if you were dead – they would have someone fighting for them? Even if it's just to hold their hand while they freeze, isn't that small comfort enough?

THE DOCTOR

You'll die.

THE REVEREND

Maybe. Probably.

THE MAYOR

And you don't care that your death will be a blemish on our souls? A mark on our consciences?

THE REVEREND

Only if you think it would be a blemish to try to save a little boy who is alone in the world, thousands of miles from anything he's ever known. If that leaves a mark on your conscious, Mr. Mayor, I would hope that it would be a positive one.

(THE MAYOR considers THE REVEREND for a long moment before answering.)

THE MAYOR

Fine. A vote. It must go five for, or five against. If there is doubt –

THE REVEREND

If there is doubt, then we will know that it is not so black and white. If even one person votes against turning the boy over, we must hear them out.

THE MAYOR

Yes, yes. Let's vote then.

THE REVEREND

Thank you. Alright. Those in favor of turning the boy in to the Feds, please raise your hands.

(Nobody moves for a moment. Then, THE DOCTOR raises her hand, followed by THE SHERIFF, THE MAYOR, and THE PROFESSOR. With their hands raised, they stare at THE AGRICULTURER.)

THE REVEREND

Your vote, please.

(A long, long pause. The weight of the boy's life is tangible.)

THE AGRICULTURER

I abstain.

CURTAIN

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS INCOMPLETE. ACT 3 WILL BE THE RESOLUTION/FALLING ACTION. ALSO, I INTEND TO GO BACK THROUGH ACT ONE TO INCORPORATE MORE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT (IN THE FORM OF AN EXTRA SCENE OR SOMETHING OF THE SORT)

Paipet City, North Dakota

DRAFT 2

Dramatis Personae

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Dr. Maxwell Edgewood has lived in Paipet City for 70 years. He has been Mayor for 40 years, and has run unopposed since he inherited the position from his father forty-five years ago. He was the father of Timothy (deceased), Nicholas (deceased), and Tristan (deceased), and the widower of Amelia Love. The Mayor's family owns every property in Paipet City, North Dakota.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Joshua Trumble inherited his position as sheriff from his older brother. Joshua is unmarried but takes care of his brother's three kids, all boys. Joshua's brother was killed in a shoot-out in Chihuahua, Mexico; he was a Customs and Border Patrol agent.

DR. WOOD

Doctor Rita Wood, mid-30s, took over for her father as the town's only doctor. Before his death, she was attending medical school at the University of British Columbia; she dropped out of school to help the town during the flu outbreak of 2075. When federal medical aid stopped coming out of the blue in 2080, Dr. Wood reached out to her Canadian contacts. She accompanies Richard and Joshua on the first day of the month when they go hunting to retrieve the medical supplies. Her family has lived in Paipet City since 1922.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Professor Williams was born in Washington, D.C., and moved to Paipet City at the age of 25. He teaches every student in Paipet City.

REV. FATIMA

Reverend Fatima is fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Latin. She was born in Paipet City, but left at the age of 22 to "see the world."

FARMER RICHARD

Richard was 13 when he took over for his grandfather at the family farm. After his mother died during the flu outbreak, he took over tending to every scrap of land in the town. Richard has worked from 4am to 10pm for twenty years, and has never seen a nickel.

THE WORLD

Following a turbulent political climate -- started by the unprecedented rise of the "Alt. Right" in the early 2010s -- the United States has found itself isolated from other major powers. With no oversight and dwindling funds, the Federal Government devolved from a democratic institution to a ruthless autocratic regime.

PAIPET CITY, ND

Paipet City, North Dakota, Population 107. The town is on the border between North Dakota and Canada. After its founding in 1895, the town saw an economic boom in the 1950s thanks to its exportation of crude oil. In 2056, the last of North Dakota's oil ran dry and a majority of settlers left. Those who stayed had nowhere else to go, and were left to resurrect the town. In 2070, a flu outbreak lowered the population from 300 to 150—young children, seniors, even healthy adults lost their lives in the largest outbreak since 1918—and now there are only 107 people left.

TIME

The action of the play begins at 4am on Thursday, December 31st, 2099.

ACT 1

(A quiet room, illuminated by a bare lightbulb that sways in a pendulum motion. A single window is covered by thin, dull-white curtain. It is pitch-black outside the room, and the howl of the wind echoes dully throughout the room. The room is decorated with mismatched furniture: some chairs, a couch, a table, a phone, a coat rack.)

(A door bursts open, MAYOR EDGEWOOD enters just as the phone rings. He crosses, removing layers of clothing.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Coming, coming...Yes? No, I know. I just heard from Richard. Yes, yes, he's on his way -- I don't know, he just said he was with the Sheriff when he found them. Well could you get over here as soon as you can? I'm calling a meeting -- yes, with everyone. I already called them, yes. Just -- just get over here. Right, thank you.

(MAYOR EDGEWOOD hangs up and sits heavily. A moment passes, then the door bursts open again. FARMER RICHARD and SHERIFF TRUMBLE enter. Richard carries a dilapidated-looking rifle over his shoulder, the Sheriff a shotgun in the same state.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And you brought guns, great. Hello, Sheriff. Richard.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

I apologize, Mr. Mayor. Given the circumstances, we didn't have time to stop.

FARMER RICHARD

Bullshit. I just thought you might need a little convincing. Hello, Edgewood.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Always a pleasure, Richard. So, you found them?

FARMER RICHARD

Yep. I found them. And I should've been allowed to deal with them --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yeah well you should've known better.

(FARMER RICHARD swings his rifle heavily.)

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Watch it now, Rich.

FARMER RICHARD

No worries, Sheriff. Just gonna hang it up where I can see it.

(FARMER RICHARD crosses to the coat rack and -- without taking his eyes off the Mayor -- hangs the rifle. SHERIFF TRUMBLE echoes him.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And their condition, Josh?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Not good, sir. They, ah -- there were three of them when we found them.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

There *were* three? What do you mean?

FARMER RICHARD

He means there's one less to worry about now, so don't you worry, *Mr. Mayor*.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Can you pretend -- just while we're here -- that you're not disgusting?

FARMER RICHARD

Oh, you don't get to speak to me like that. Not after everything, Edgewood. Come here and say that to my face you son of a --

(The door bursts open again, a flood of snow and noisy wind interrupts the action. DR. RITA WOOD enters. She wears a thick coat over her white coat.)

DR. WOOD

Good evening. Or morning, I guess. I'm not sure where we stand anymore.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Good, good, good -- Dr. Wood. An update, please.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Let's let her settle first, Mr. Mayor. It's a cold one today.

DR. WOOD

Coldest of the year. Figures -- saving the worst for last.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Yes, happy new year to us.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Doctor Wood, an update please.

(DR. WOOD sits heavily on the couch. FARMER RICHARD leans against a far wall, away from the Mayor and the Doctor.)

DR. WOOD

I would rather wait for everyone to get here, Mr. Mayor.

(The door bursts open one more time, revealing REV. FATIMA and PROFESSOR WILLIAMS. The Professor half-carries the Reverend through the door. DR. WOOD stands up hurriedly and crosses to the door. She and Professor Williams carry Fatima to the couch.)

DR. WOOD

Fatima! What's wrong?

REV. FATIMA

Oh it is nothing, nothing at all. Just my silly knee -- it hurts when it's cold. And it's cold today.

FARMER RICHARD

We've covered that already.

REV. FATIMA

Hello, Richard. I haven't seen you in a while. How have you been?

FARMER RICHARD

Never you mind.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Welcome, both of you.

(A moment.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

So, Rita, you were saying?

DR. WOOD

Right. Well, Richard and Josh showed up about an hour ago at the hospital. They were carrying three people, two males and a female. I'd say the older man and the woman are in their mid-40s, but it's hard to tell. Or at least the man is. The woman didn't make it.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

We believe they're a family, Mr. Mayor. Mother, Father, and Son.

REV. FATIMA

Any ideas where they may have come from?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Well -- we have a fairly solid guess.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Oh! They had papers on them?

DR. WOOD

They weren't carrying any, but they didn't need it.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

What do you mean? Are they talking?

DR. WOOD

No, no -- the man and the boy are unconscious. I don't know if they'll wake up, to be quite honest.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

So how did you ID them?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

They're tagged, Mr. Mayor.

DR. WOOD

Yes, Mr. Mayor. The smallest tags I've seen in a while, just visible to the naked eye -- that technology's really come along way.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And where were the tags?

FARMER RICHARD

Left ear.

DR. WOOD

Workers, Mr. Mayor.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

They must've made a run for it from whatever camp they escaped from. Those are warm-weather tags, so they may have stopped transmitting. But I'm sure that's not going to delay them for long, Max.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Which is why we're here. But it's too damn cold -- Sheriff, could you make a quick pot?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Sure thing, sir. Anybody else want some?

DR. WOOD

Please.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Rich, Professor?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm fine, thank you.

FARMER RICHARD

I'll take some, Sheriff. Oh wait -- Mr. Mayor, may I please have some coffee?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Hilarious. Can you see if you can kickstart the heat while you're at it, Josh?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Sure thing, I'll be right back.

(SHERIFF TRUMBLE exits.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Believe me, the heat is the least of our worries if we don't act fast.

REV. FATIMA

How do you mean, professor?

FARMER RICHARD

You don't need a fancy degree to find that out. If the feds see that we've got those people, we're dead.

REV. FATIMA

Is this true, Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

That's why the professor's here. It's been a while since we -- well, we've been running things differently in Paipet for so long I forgot what the actual laws say. So, professor?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yes -- well. I don't think there's anything in the books, but that doesn't matter. The government's been doing whatever it wants for quite a while now, and the precedent is clear.

REV. FATIMA

And what is that?

FARMER RICHARD

You really don't know?

REV. FATIMA

I tend to focus on issues closer to home, in case you haven't noticed.

FARMER RICHARD

Is this close enough for you?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Let's get back to it, please.

REV. FATIMA

Yes, thank you Mr. Mayor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

As I was saying, feds have a strict, no-immigrant stance, and that goes for anyone who's caught helping them. And if those people escaped from a work camp -- well, we're no less than accomplices in the eye of the law.

REV. FATIMA

Some law...

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Agreed.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

So that's where we stand, then. Alright. What's our next step? Anyone?

(FARMER RICHARD raises his hand disdainfully.)

FARMER RICHARD

How bout we put em' back where we found em'? Or better -- how bout you let me handle em'? I'll do the dirty work, as always. You can keep your hands clean.

(Everyone stares. SHERIFF TRUMBLE enters, carrying a filled pot of coffee and mugs.)

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Here you go, this ought to warm you up a bit. I tried the heat, but it's a no-go. I think we're on generator power again --

(He freezes.)

REV. FATIMA

Did you just volunteer to execute an innocent man and a child?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Oh boy.

FARMER RICHARD

Was I not clear? My mistake. Yes, I did. Is anyone else going to?

(A moment.)

Yeah, I didn't think so.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That's not on the table, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

It's the only option that keeps us on the right side of the law.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Oh ho ho! What a great place to be. Come on, Mr. Mayor -- you can't possibly be considering this!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Couldn't we call the Canadians? Maybe they'll trade?

DR. WOOD

Not an option.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

What's happening right now?

DR. WOOD

Richard wants to trade the man and the child --

REV. FATIMA

May we call them the Family?

FARMER RICHARD

Oh, please. If you name them it's going to be much harder to put them down.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Jesus Christ -- sorry, Reverend.

REV. FATIMA

No, it's alright. Richard, I think naming them is important. Would you like to know why?

FARMER RICHARD

Not really. And I don't want a lecture, so just do whatever you want. It's your loss.

REV. FATIMA

And yours. Dr. Wood, please.

DR. WOOD

Yes, thank you, Reverend. Richard wants to sell the Family for some medical supplies.

FARMER RICHARD

Are you saying we don't need those?

DR. WOOD

Of course not! But it's not that simple. We can't jeopardize that relationship! If the government gets wind of this -- and they will -- it's not like the secret police cares about borders. They'll go after the Family, and they'll deal with the Canadians however they want. And then what happens? We lose our only connection to medical supplies. So no, they won't deal.

FARMER RICHARD

What does it matter to the government if they're leaving? Wouldn't that be -- I don't know -- a *good* thing?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

It's all about appearances, Richard. If word gets out that the government won't go after sick, injured escapees, they're afraid it'll spark some sort of mass revolt. And there's also the fact that a lot of people would die here in Paipet if we mess up our connection to the North.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That's a bit hyperbolic. I'm sure we could get the stuff from somewhere else --

DR. WOOD

Are you, professor? Because I've never seen you swimming across a freezing river with the Sheriff and Richard the first of each month to get a tiny bit of penicillin, or medication. Don't you think if we had any other option that we would already be doing it?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Isn't there? We could try --

DR. WOOD

Nobody wants to deal with us! We're not even dealing with the Canadian government. As you well know, we're not exactly in any other country's good books. We get those supplies from a blackmarket dealer for a fraction of the price, and we can't lose that.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Fine, Canada's off the table. So that leaves, what?

REV. FATIMA

Hide them.

FARMER RICHARD

Are you crazy?

REV. FATIMA

Hide them, Mr. Mayor. We could do it.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Fatima, think about what you're saying. How can we hide them? They have tags!

REV. FATIMA

Take them out.

FARMER RICHARD

That's not possible!

DR. WOOD

Actually, it is. It's just complicated. It would be a minor procedure, but it has to be carefully done. And I don't know about these new tags, they may have counter-measures built in. It would take a few hours.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

We don't have that kind of time. The letter said -- Sheriff, what time were they coming?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

7am sir.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Less than three hours from now.

REV. FATIMA

Are you certain they're coming today? It's been a very long time since we've had anyone --

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

It's been a year, to be exact. Which is why they're coming today. To check up on us.

REV. FATIMA

Well, perhaps the tag stopped working! They were in the cold for a very long time, it could be worth the risk --

FARMER RICHARD

You don't know what you're saying, woman. If they find out, it's going to be all of our heads.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Fatima, didn't you hear about that town in Washington last month?

REV. FATIMA

No, I didn't.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Well they were caught hiding some escaped workers. The council was hanged. It was -- very public.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

The government always likes a spectacle. It keeps people in check. But that's what awaits us if we're caught, Fatima. And the worse thing is --

(The phone rings shrilly. MAYOR EDGEWOOD quickly crosses to answer it.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yes? Oh -- one second. Doc, it's for you.

(DR. WOOD crosses to the phone and listens, here face sobering as she listens. She hangs up.)

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

What is it?

DR. WOOD

The man -- the father -- he went into cardiac arrest.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Is he alright?

FARMER RICHARD

He's dead, isn't he?

DR. WOOD

They weren't able to bring him back, Mr. Mayor. The child -- he's an orphan now.

ACT 2

(The sun has risen, but it is still early. Snow falls steadily outside; the light bulb has gone out. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS sits on the couch next to REV. FATIMA, who leans back with her eyes closed. FARMER RICHARD paces the room.)

REV. FATIMA

How are your classes going?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

(offhand)

Classes? That's a tad generous.

REV. FATIMA

I don't understand.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I don't think you can call seven kids a whole class. And they're not even at the same level...

REV. FATIMA

Ah, you too?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm sorry?

REV. FATIMA

Low attendance. It's not just in academia, believe me. Paipet City does not have as many devotees as it once did.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Really?

REV. FATIMA

Really. It is rather sad, actually.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What are your numbers like?

REV. FATIMA

(with a laugh)

This year? Or last year, I guess? About ten people.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Every Sunday?

REV. FATIMA

Total.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Oh.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

REV. FATIMA

It's no matter. For those ten people, I would do anything.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

If you don't mind my asking – how do you make any money?

REV. FATIMA

You will be the first to know if I ever do!

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

You don't – get paid? At all?

REV. FATIMA

By whom? The ten people who attend a service a few times per year? My boy, they cannot afford to feed their own families. How are they supposed to pay me?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I just thought, surely you must have some income...

REV. FATIMA

And for what? I am an old woman, I am alone. I have nothing to covet, and no one to shop for.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

But yourself! You can buy things for yourself!

REV. FATIMA

I could.

(A pause.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Er – why don't you?

REV. FATIMA

Why do you?

(A long moment.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

So, Rich. Any catches today?

FARMER RICHARD

Remembered me, have you? I'm flattered.

(beat)

And no. I didn't catch anything. Well, I kind of did -- nothing edible though.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Ah, well. It is still early. Maybe you can go back out there!

(FARMER RICHARD stares at PROFESSOR WILLIAMS.)

FARMER RICHARD

Yeah, you think?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Well, I'm no expert on hunting techniques but--

FARMER RICHARD

--Then you better hush up, right?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to insult you.

FARMER RICHARD

I just caught the one rabbit and by now any others are just frozen dinner for a bear or a wolf. But maybe I can go back out there, since I have nothing better to do. Oh wait -- I'm stuck here.

REV. FATIMA

Nobody is making you stay, Richard. You're free to go at any time.

FARMER RICHARD

Yeah, and let you people ruin this town. No thank you.

REV. FATIMA

Suit yourself.

FARMER RICHARD

What a waste of time. Where did they even go? I thought we weren't allowed to leave until -- this is stupid. What a waste of time! They said this was important and that we had to settle -- what a waste of my damn time.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Can you stop?

FARMER RICHARD

Excuse me?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Pacing. Please. It's making me anxious.

FARMER RICHARD

Oh poor you. What could you have to be anxious about?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Are you serious?

FARMER RICHARD

Yes, tell me, *Professor*. What keeps you up at night? Is it how many papers you have to grade, huh? Or wait -- is it trying to find which pair of khaki pants to wear to class?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Shut up, man.

FARMER RICHARD

Don't tell me to shut up.

REV. FATIMA

Gentlemen, I have an idea. Why don't we have a little contest. I'll be the judge, and here are the rules: you have to be quiet, and you have to stay still. The first one to start sweating wins. Sound good?

(Silence.)

REV. FATIMA

Good start. Now, how long have they been gone?

FARMER RICHARD

An hour.

REV. FATIMA

Yes, by my watch too. Which means --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

-- Which means that we have less than two hours before the feds get here. I'm surprised it's taken them this long to go check on the kid.

FARMER RICHARD

Bleeding' hearts, all of them.

REV. FATIMA

Is that a bad thing?

FARMER RICHARD

It sure as hell isn't a good thing, let me tell you!

(The front door opens again. MAYOR EDGEWOOD, SHERIFF TRUMBLE, and DR. WOOD enter quickly.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Any news?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

You want to fill them in, Josh? I need a drink.

(MAYOR EDGEWOOD exits to the side room.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

It's 5am...

DR. WOOD

You may want to drink after this, so listen.

REV. FATIMA

This doesn't sound good. What else has gone wrong?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

The kid is fine, thankfully he's still unconscious. The dad -- well, he was as comfortable as we could make him.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Comforting.

REV. FATIMA

It should be, Professor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yes, well. What else happened, Sheriff?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

We were on the way back here when the Mayor got an urgent call. It looks like they're expecting a storm to come in from the North, so the feds are moving up the timeline on their visit.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

How long do we have?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

At this rate -- probably less than an hour.

FARMER RICHARD

Well that settles it, I'm out.

(FARMER RICHARD crosses swiftly to the coat rack, grabs his jacket and his rifle, and starts towards the door. MAYOR EDGEWOOD re-enters.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Sit down, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

No sir. I'm done. I don't care what you people want to do, but I'm not having it. I told you at the beginning what I thought we should've done with those -- people.

REV. FATIMA

And we told you -- execution was not an option. We don't work like that.

FARMER RICHARD

Like hell we don't! It's them, or us. Maybe it's time we take lead out of the government's book.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Calm down, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

Oh be quiet, Trumble. I'm a member of this council, and I say we're done here.

DR. WOOD

That's not how it works.

FARMER RICHARD

What the hell do I care? None of that's gonna matter when we're strung up from the damn light posts!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

That's not going to happen, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

Well I don't see you doing shit to keep it from happening, Maxwell.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

That's why we're here! Now sit your ass down and listen.

(FARMER RICHARD stops moving. He turns very slowly to the Mayor, who doesn't back down.)

FARMER RICHARD

You have five minutes.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

If I may, I have an idea.

FARMER RICHARD

Oh, good.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Please.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

There's nothing in the books for how to handle a situation like this, but that doesn't matter. We've never really abided by the law of the land anyways.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

At least not since the law of the land became more barbaric than Hammurabi's Code.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

My thoughts exactly. So -- how about a vote?

(A moment.)

FARMER RICHARD

Very funny.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That'll be the first time a vote has actually mattered in this country for about -- well, too many years. I think it's a good idea.

FARMER RICHARD

Of course you do, Professor. Let's solve everything by *thinking*.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That's usually how it's done, yes.

REV. FATIMA

I agree. What are the options, Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Well, we either hide the boy --

FARMER RICHARD

-- And get killed for it --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

-- Or we turn him in.

REV. FATIMA

What'll happen if we turn him in?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

I can't say for sure. I don't know if -- Josh?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Well, Reverend, usually the men would be sent to the labor camps. We're pretty sure that's where they came from, at least. But this kid, I'm not so sure.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What makes you doubt it, Sheriff?

DR. WOOD

His injuries, professor.

REV. FATIMA

I thought you said he was fine, but unconscious.

DR. WOOD

Well, yes. I guess we forgot to mention that, what with everything --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What's wrong with him?

DR. WOOD

The boy is blind, Professor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Good, God.

REV. FATIMA

That is a sizable omission, Doctor.

DR. WOOD

I know -- it just wasn't the most pressing injury. We think -- well, it looks like the child got an infection at some point. Nothing around here could've done that, so they must've traveled a long way before they were captured. But it does change his chances, and not for the better.

FARMER RICHARD

Thought wrong, didn't you?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

We have to decide now, people. They're forty minutes out -- at most.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

I say we vote.

DR. WOOD

I second it.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I agree.

REV. FATIMA

Yes.

DR. WOOD

Yes, but quickly.

(They all turn to look at FARMER RICHARD.)

FARMER RICHARD

Fine. But on one condition.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Seriously?

DR. WOOD

Richard, we don't have time --

FARMER RICHARD

I am a member of this council and I have a right to speak!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Fine, Richard, what's the condition.

FARMER RICHARD

The vote has to be unanimous. All in.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

And how is that democratic? You'll just oppose us for spite.

FARMER RICHARD

Why do you think I'm going to be the only opposing vote?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

You're not exactly trying hard to dissuade me, Richard.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Mayor, the time --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yes, yes. We'll take it, damn it. Does anybody have papers or anything? I swear we're worse equipped out here than -- well, than somewhere less equipped than us.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I've got some scraps in my bag, I think.

(PROFESSOR WILLIAMS crosses to the coat rack and reaches in. He pulls out several pieces of paper, and three pencils.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

We'll have to share pencils.

DR. WOOD

That's fine, let's do this quick.

(PROFESSOR WILLIAMS hands out the ballots.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Let's say -- write an 'A' if you want to hide the boy, and 'B' if you want to turn him in.

REV. FATIMA

That's blunt...

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yeah well, brevity seemed appropriate. And here you go, Mr. Mayor.

(PROFESSOR WILLIAMS hands the final ballot to MAYOR EDGEWOOD, and the council members write their votes. Some are slow and methodical, others scribble a letter down quickly. Finally, each council member places their ballot in the middle of the table.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Alright, everyone in? Here -- someone else read them.

DR. WOOD

I can do it.

(She counts.)

DR. WOOD

We have four Bs, and two As.

(A long moment.)

FARMER RICHARD

Well, well, well.

ACT 3

(Everybody is still, the tension is thicker than honey.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Wow.

FARMER RICHARD

I told you, professor. It isn't just me.

REV. FATIMA

Rita? Mr. Mayor? Really?

DR. WOOD

I'm sorry, I don't like it --

REV. FATIMA

-- Then why do it?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Because we have to consider the greater good here, Reverend.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Greater good my ass. You're all cowards.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

You don't know what you're talking about, professor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Then explain! You're just -- you're condemning this boy.

DR. WOOD

You don't know that --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

-- Yes, I do. Let's not beat around the bush here. We all know what's going to happen to the kid. He's going to die.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And what about us, professor? He's one person. I -- we have to consider the good of the entire town here!

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I can't believe I'm hearing this.

FARMER RICHARD

I've had enough of this. We voted, we're done here.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

No we're not!

FARMER RICHARD

Yes, we are!

REV. FATIMA

I thought we said execution wasn't an option.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

And it isn't --

REV. FATIMA

But it is, and you all know it. What if he was your son? Wouldn't you do everything in your power to protect him?

FARMER RICHARD

Well he's not, so we don't have to think about that.

REV. FATIMA

But he was somebody's son! And there's no one left -- we're his last hope.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Listen, we voted. It's over.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

We decided the vote had to be unanimous!

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Does it really matter? It was a majority. I'm sorry professor, but I don't think you have the right to say much here.

FARMER RICHARD

Yeah, shut up.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

If he has a right to speak, then so do I! What was the point of voting? I thought you were all proud that you didn't do things like the government. What happened to "we've never really abided by the law of the land?"

DR. WOOD

Come on, professor. You have to consider it from our point of view! You're not really from here, so it's not a surprise that you don't understand.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

She's right. You're basically a visitor here --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

-- I've been here for years! How can you --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yes but you can leave! That's the point. You can get out of here if things get bad. We can't do that.

REV. FATIMA

I can't believe it.

FARMER RICHARD

Well you better believe it, lady.

REV. FATIMA

Can't you see that this is bigger than we are --

FARMER RICHARD

Oh don't get all high-and-mighty on me. You're not even a real reverend, and if you think you're different than he is, you're wrong as hell. When was the last time you did anything productive for the town?

REV. FATIMA

What I do is productive, Richard. I heal people --

FARMER RICHARD

No, you really don't. If anyone heals people, it's doc over here. You talk about feelings and ideas and things, but you don't actually do anything! I bet if you left, people would get along just fine.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Alright, Richard.

REV. FATIMA

Fine.

FARMER RICHARD

Fine what?

REV. FATIMA

I'll leave.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Come on now, Reverend. Don't be stupid --

FARMER RICHARD

She's bluffing.

REV. FATIMA

I'm not.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

You'll leave and do what?

REV. FATIMA

I'll leave, and I'll take the boy with me.

DR. WOOD

You can't do that. Mr. Mayor, she won't make it a hundred feet with that kid.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yes she will, because I'm going with her.

REV. FATIMA

Professor, I can't allow that. You're too valuable --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm as valuable as you are, Reverend. And you also don't have much of a choice, because I'm going with you whether you like it or not.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Can you think about this for a second please? You can't leave, it's suicide.

REV. FATIMA

I have thought about it. I don't have anything to pack. I'll leave now -- alone. If we don't make it, we don't make it. But I won't -- I can't stand by and watch you kill this child.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Neither can I --

REV. FATIMA

No, professor. You have to stay, the children need you here.

FARMER RICHARD

I'd listen to her if I were you, Einstein. You wouldn't last an hour out there.
Not that she's going to last much either --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

He's right, Reverend. If you leave, you're going to die.

REV. FATIMA

You don't know that.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

But we do!

REV. FATIMA

And what does it matter to you? You've shown that you don't really care
about human life --

DR. WOOD

That's not fair. We're thinking about --

REV. FATIMA

-- The greater good, I know. And this is the best option for the greater
good, isn't it? You get rid of the boy, and you can't blame it on me.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

And when the feds go after you?

REV. FATIMA

Then I will fight them.

FARMER RICHARD

That's hilarious.

REV. FATIMA

I admit, it won't be much of a fight, but I will fight.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And what if we don't let you leave?

REV. FATIMA

Well, then I guess I'll fight you too.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And you don't care that your death will be on us? If we let you leave, and you die -- which you will -- don't you think that's going to be a stain on our consciences?

REV. FATIMA

That depends. Would it be a stain on your consciences if I die trying to save a little boy who is alone in the world, thousands of miles from anything he's ever known? If that leaves any mark on your consciences, Mr. Mayor, I would hope that it would be a positive one.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

All of this for a boy you don't even know?

REV. FATIMA

It doesn't matter that I don't know him. He was someone's child, and that is enough for me.

(A moment.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Fine, do what you will.

DR. WOOD

Mr. Mayor! She's going to die!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

It's her choice. And -- well, she's not wrong. It is the best choice for the town.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Reverend please, let me come with you --

REV. FATIMA

No, professor. Thank you, but no.

(beat)

REV. FATIMA

So, I believe that's all.

(REV. FATIMA pauses, looks at every person in turn. She starts to cross to the door.)

REV. FATIMA

I will go to the hospital --

DR. WOOD

I'll call them. I'll tell them -- something.

REV. FATIMA

Thank you, Rita.

DR. WOOD

Fatima, I'm sorry.

REV. FATIMA

Don't be. I understand. Thank you for everything.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Goodbye, Reverend.

REV. FATIMA

Sheriff.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Be safe, Reverend.

REV. FATIMA

I will try. Goodbye, now. Mr. Mayor, thank you for everything.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Please, don't. I don't like this --

REV. FATIMA

You don't have to. Goodbye, all.

(REV. FATIMA opens the door. It is lighter now, the snow has stopped.)

FARMER RICHARD

Take my rifle.

(REV. FATIMA freezes, one foot out the door.
FARMER RICHARD gets up, crosses to the coat rack, and takes the rifle to the Reverend.)

REV. FATIMA

Richard, I can't accept --

FARMER RICHARD

Just take the damn rifle. Use it to blow your own head off, I don't care. I just can't imagine -- just take it.

REV. FATIMA

Thank you. Goodbye.

(She exits. Everyone is still for a long moment.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Well, I guess that's that. Dr. Wood, please go to the hospital now. Put the father's body somewhere -- call him a John Doe. Just hide him.

DR. WOOD

Yes sir.

(She exits.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Sheriff, we should go get ready to meet them. They'll probably want food of some sort --

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

I can set it up at your office. I'll see you there.

(He exits. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS, FARMER RICHARD, and MAYOR EDGEWOOD remain.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And -- well, I should be going. Professor, please stay. It's -- well, just stay.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Fine.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Alright. Thank you. I should go as well. I -- goodbye.

(He exits. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS and FARMER RICHARD consider each other.)

FARMER RICHARD

She's crazy, you know that?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I don't think so.

(A moment.)

FARMER RICHARD

Whatever. I have to go.

(He starts to cross and is at the door before he stops and looks back.)

FARMER RICHARD

I won't tell them that you left. Not until tomorrow, at least.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Thank you.

FARMER RICHARD

If you die on this side of the border, I'll bury you near the school.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Great.

FARMER RICHARD

But I hope I don't have to do that.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Sure --

FARMER RICHARD

-- Really. I do.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Thank you, Richard.

(FARMER RICHARD exits, and closes the door behind him. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS is alone. He puts on his coat and glances around the room. He takes a deep breath and exits, shutting the door lightly behind him.)

All are welcome to the first reading of

Paipet City, ND

An original short play.

New Year's Eve, 2099 – a town council is faced with a brutal choice:

Sacrifice their humanity to preserve the greater good, or sacrifice everything to save an innocent victim from the brutal, authoritarian government of the United States.

**May 17th, 2017 from 4 to 6pm
Fulton Hall 111**

A brief talkback will follow the reading.

Featuring

Dan Frana, Lisa Compo, Alli Payne, Brandon Maher, Michael Mitchell,
and Dillan Taylor

Written as an Honors Thesis by Andres F. Roa

Paipet City, North Dakota

DRAFT 3

This is the draft to be performed at the reading on 17 May, 2017. It contains edits made in collaboration with the cast following a rehearsal for the reading.

Dramatis Personæ

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Dr. Maxwell Edgewood has lived in Paipet City for 70 years. He has been Mayor since he inherited the position from his father forty-five years ago. The Mayor's family owns every property in Paipet City, North Dakota.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Joshua Trumble inherited his position as sheriff from his older brother. Joshua is unmarried but takes care of his brother's three kids, all boys. Joshua's brother was killed in a shoot-out in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; he was a Customs and Border Patrol agent.

DR. WOOD

Doctor Rita Wood, mid-30s, took over for her father as the town's only doctor. Before his death, she was attending medical school at the University of British Columbia; she dropped out of school to help the town during the flu outbreak of 2075. When federal medical aid stopped coming out of the blue in 2080, Dr. Wood reached out to her Canadian contacts. She accompanies Richard and Joshua on the first day of the month when they go hunting to retrieve the medical supplies. Her family has lived in Paipet City since 1922.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Professor Williams was born in Washington, D.C., and moved to Paipet City at the age of 25. He teaches every student in Paipet City.

REV. FATIMA

Reverend Fatima is fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Latin. She was born in Paipet City, but left at the age of 22 to "see the world."

FARMER RICHARD

Richard was 13 when he took over for his grandfather at the family farm. After his mother died during the flu outbreak, he took over tending to every scrap of land in the town. Richard has worked from 4am to 10pm for twenty years, and has never seen a nickel.

THE WORLD

Following a turbulent political climate — started by the unprecedented rise of the so-called “Alt. Right” in the early 2010s — the United States finds itself isolated from other major powers. With no oversight and dwindling funds, the Federal Government devolves from a democratic institution to a ruthless, autocratic regime.

PAIPET CITY, ND

Paipet City, North Dakota, Population 107. The town is on the border between North Dakota and Canada. After its founding in 1895, the town saw an economic boom in the 1950s thanks to its exportation of crude oil. In 2056, the last of North Dakota’s oil ran dry and a majority of settlers left. Those who stayed had nowhere else to go, and were left to resurrect the town. In 2070, a flu outbreak lowered the population from 300 to 150—young children, seniors, even healthy adults lost their lives in the largest outbreak since 1918—and now there are only 107 people left.

TIME

The action of the play begins at 4am on Thursday, December 31st, 2099.

ACT 1

(A quiet room, illuminated by a bare lightbulb that sways in a pendulum motion. A single window is covered by thin, dull-white curtain. It is pitch-black outside the room, and the howl of the wind echoes dully throughout the room. The room is decorated with mismatched furniture: some chairs, a couch, a table, a phone, a coat rack.)

(A door bursts open, MAYOR EDGEWOOD enters just as the phone rings. He crosses, removing layers of clothing.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Coming, coming...Yes? No, I know. I just heard from Richard. Yes, yes, he's on his way -- I don't know, he just said he was with the Sheriff when he found them. Well could you get over here as soon as you can? I'm calling a meeting -- yes, with everyone. I already called them, yes. Just -- just get over here. Right, thank you.

(MAYOR EDGEWOOD hangs up and sits heavily. A moment passes, then the door bursts open again. FARMER RICHARD and SHERIFF TRUMBLE enter. Richard carries a dilapidated-looking rifle over his shoulder, the Sheriff a shotgun in the same state.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And you brought guns, great. Hello, Sheriff. Richard.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

I apologize, Mr. Mayor. Given the circumstances, we didn't have time to stop.

FARMER RICHARD

Bullshit. I just thought you might need a little convincing. Hello, Edgewood.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Always a pleasure, Richard. So, you found them?

FARMER RICHARD

Yep. I found them. And I should've been allowed to deal with them --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yeah well you should've known better.

(FARMER RICHARD swings his rifle heavily.)

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Watch it now, Rich.

FARMER RICHARD

No worries, Sheriff. Just gonna hang it up where I can see it.

(FARMER RICHARD crosses to the coat rack and — without taking his eyes off the Mayor — hangs the rifle. SHERIFF TRUMBLE echoes him.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And their condition, Josh?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Not good, sir. They, ah -- there were three of them when we found them.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

There *were* three? What do you mean?

FARMER RICHARD

He means there's one less to worry about now, so don't you worry, *Mr. Mayor*.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Can you pretend -- just while we're here -- that you're not disgusting?

FARMER RICHARD

Oh, you don't get to speak to me like that. Not after everything, Edgewood. Come here and say that to my face you son of a --

(The door bursts open again, a flood of snow and noisy wind interrupts the action. DR. RITA WOOD enters. She wears a thick jacket over her white coat.)

DR. WOOD

Good evening. Or morning, I guess. I'm not sure where we stand anymore.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Good, good, good -- Dr. Wood. An update, please.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Let's let her settle first, Mr. Mayor. It's a cold one today.

DR. WOOD

Coldest of the year. Figures -- saving the worst for last.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Yes, happy new year to us.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Doctor Wood, an update please.

(DR. WOOD sits heavily on the couch. FARMER RICHARD leans against a far wall, away from the Mayor and the Doctor.)

DR. WOOD

I would rather wait for everyone to get here, Mr. Mayor.

(The door bursts open one more time, revealing REV. FATIMA and PROFESSOR WILLIAMS. The Professor half-carries the Reverend through the door. DR. WOOD stands up hurriedly and crosses to the door. She and Professor Williams carry Fatima to the couch.)

DR. WOOD

Fatima! What's wrong?

REV. FATIMA

Oh it is nothing, nothing at all. Just my silly knee -- it hurts when it's cold. And it's cold today.

FARMER RICHARD

We've covered that already.

REV. FATIMA

Hello, Richard. I haven't seen you in a while. How have you been?

FARMER RICHARD

Never you mind.

DR. WOOD

We're going to the border tomorrow for a supply run, Reverend. I'm sure we could get some painkillers--

REV. FATIMA

Not to worry, not to worry. If I could just sit--thank you, professor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

No problem. I gotta say I'm glad I ran into you, it's not a great morning to dawdle out there.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Welcome, both of you.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

So, Rita, you were saying?

DR. WOOD

Right. Well, Richard and Josh showed up about an hour ago at the hospital. They were carrying three people, two males and a female. I'd say the older man and the woman are in their mid-40s, but it's hard to tell. Or at least the man is. The woman didn't make it.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

We believe they're a family, Mr. Mayor. Mother, Father, and Son.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

And what makes you think that, Sheriff?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Well, we --

FARMER RICHARD

They were sleeping together when we found em' -- in a lean-to near my house, all huddled together. You don't sleep that close together unless you're family, Professor.

REV. FATIMA

That is very beautiful, Richard. Any ideas where they may have come from?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Well -- we have a fairly solid guess.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Oh! They had papers on them?

DR. WOOD

They weren't carrying any, but they didn't need them.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

What do you mean? Are they talking?

DR. WOOD

No, no -- the man and the boy are unconscious. I don't know if they'll wake up, to be quite honest.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

So how did you ID them?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

They're tagged, Mr. Mayor.

DR. WOOD

Yes, Mr. Mayor. The smallest tags I've seen in a while -- that technology's really come along way.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And where were the tags?

FARMER RICHARD

Left ear.

DR. WOOD

Workers, Mr. Mayor.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

They must've made a run for it from whatever camp they escaped from. Those are warm-weather tags, so they may have stopped transmitting. But I'm sure that's not going to delay them for long, Max.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Which is why we're all here so early. But it's too damn cold -- Sheriff, could you make a quick pot?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Sure thing, sir. Anybody else want some?

DR. WOOD

Please.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Rich, Professor?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm fine, thank you.

FARMER RICHARD

I'll take some, Sheriff. Oh wait -- Mr. Mayor, may I please have some coffee?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Hilarious. Can you see if you can kickstart the heat while you're at it, Josh?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Sure thing, I'll be right back.

(SHERIFF TRUMBLE exits.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Believe me, the heat is the least of our worries if we don't act fast.

REV. FATIMA

How do you mean, professor?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Well correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure this is the only time we get any supplies from the feds. Right, Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Quite right, professor. They basically use today to make sure we're doing everything we should be doing, and at the end of the day they dump a couple of crates of stuff in my office. Not that those crates last long, mind you.

DR. WOOD

But they also give us some money, which goes a long way with our Canadian friends.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

That's right. Our own Dr. Wood turned out to be quite the dealmaker -- and it helps that all of those doctor friends you made across the border have connections.

DR. WOOD

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I don't particularly like it, but the Canadian black market is really, really good. And cheap.

REV. FATIMA

So it's purely economic, then? What do those poor people in the hospital have to do with that?

FARMER RICHARD

You don't need a fancy degree to find that out. If the feds see that we've got those people, we're dead.

REV. FATIMA

Is this true, Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

That's why the professor's here. It's been a while since we -- well, we've been running things differently in Paipet for so long I forgot what the actual laws say. So, professor?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yes -- well. I don't think there's anything in the books, but that doesn't matter. The government's been doing whatever it wants for quite a while now, and the precedent is clear.

REV. FATIMA

And what is that?

FARMER RICHARD

You really don't know?

REV. FATIMA

I tend to focus on issues closer to home, in case you haven't noticed.

FARMER RICHARD

Is this close enough for you?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Let's get back to it, please.

REV. FATIMA

Yes, thank you Mr. Mayor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

As I was saying, feds have a strict, no-immigrant stance, and that goes for anyone who's caught helping them. And if those people escaped from a work camp -- well, we're no less than accomplices in the eye of the law.

REV. FATIMA

Some law...

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Agreed.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

So that's where we stand, then. Alright. What's our next step? Anyone?

(FARMER RICHARD raises his hand disdainfully.)

FARMER RICHARD

How bout we put em' back where we found em'? Or better -- how bout you let me handle em'? I'll do the dirty work, as always. You can keep your hands clean.

(Everyone stares. SHERIFF TRUMBLE enters, carrying a filled pot of coffee and mugs.)

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Here you go, this ought to warm you up a bit. I tried the heat, but it's a no-go. I think we're on generator power again --

(He freezes.)

REV. FATIMA

Did you just volunteer to execute an innocent man and a child?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Oh boy.

FARMER RICHARD

Was I not clear? My mistake. Yes, I did. Is anyone else going to? Yeah, I didn't think so.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That's not on the table, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

It's the only option that keeps us on the right side of the law.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Oh ho ho! What a great place to be. Come on, Mr. Mayor -- you can't possibly be considering this!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Couldn't we call the Canadians? Maybe they'll trade?

DR. WOOD

Not an option.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

What's happening right now?

DR. WOOD

Richard wants to trade the man and the child --

REV. FATIMA

May we call them the Family?

FARMER RICHARD

Oh, please. If you name them it's going to be much harder to put them down.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Jesus Christ -- sorry, Reverend.

REV. FATIMA

No, it's alright. Richard, I think naming them is important. Would you like to know why?

FARMER RICHARD

Not really. And I don't want a lecture, so just do whatever you want. It's your loss.

REV. FATIMA

And yours. Dr. Wood, please.

DR. WOOD

Yes, thank you, Reverend. Richard wants to sell the Family for some medical supplies.

FARMER RICHARD

Are you saying we don't need those?

DR. WOOD

Of course not! But it's not that simple. We can't jeopardize that relationship! If the government gets wind of this -- and they will -- it's not like the secret police cares about borders. They'll go after the Family, and they'll deal with the Canadians however they want. And then what happens? We lose our only connection to medical supplies. So no, they won't deal.

FARMER RICHARD

What does it matter to the government if they're leaving? Wouldn't that be -- I don't know -- a *good* thing?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

It's all about appearances, Richard. If word gets out that the government won't go after sick, injured escapees, they're afraid it'll spark some sort of mass revolt. And there's also the fact that a lot of people would die here in Paipet if we mess up our connection to the North.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That's a bit hyperbolic. I'm sure we could get the stuff from somewhere else --

DR. WOOD

Are you, professor? Because I've never seen you swimming across a freezing river with the Sheriff and Richard the first of each month to get a

tiny bit of penicillin, or medication. Don't you think if we had any other option that we would already be doing it?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Isn't there? We could try --

DR. WOOD

Nobody wants to deal with us! We're not even dealing with the Canadian government. As you well know, we're not exactly in any other country's good books. We get those supplies from a blackmarket dealer for a fraction of the price, and we can't lose that.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Fine, Canada's off the table. So that leaves, what?

REV. FATIMA

Hide them.

FARMER RICHARD

Are you crazy?

REV. FATIMA

Hide them, Mr. Mayor. We could do it.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Fatima, think about what you're saying. How can we hide them? They have tags!

REV. FATIMA

Take them out.

FARMER RICHARD

That's not possible!

DR. WOOD

Actually, it is. It's just complicated. It would be a minor procedure, but it has to be carefully done. And I don't know about these new tags, they may have counter-measures built in. It would take a few hours.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

We don't have that kind of time. The letter said -- Sheriff, what time were they coming?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

7am sir.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Less than three hours from now.

REV. FATIMA

Are you certain they're coming today? It's been a very long time since we've had anyone --

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

It's been a year, to be exact. Which is why they're coming today. To check up on us.

REV. FATIMA

Well, perhaps the tag stopped working! They were in the cold for a very long time, it could be worth the risk --

FARMER RICHARD

You don't know what you're saying, woman. If they find out, it's going to be all of our heads.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Fatima, didn't you hear about that town in Washington last month?

REV. FATIMA

No, I didn't.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Well they were caught hiding some escaped workers. The council was hanged. It was -- very public.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

The government always likes a spectacle. It keeps people in check. But that's us if we're caught, Fatima. And the worse thing is --

(The phone rings shrilly. MAYOR EDGEWOOD quickly crosses to answer it.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yes? Oh -- one second. Doc, it's for you.

(DR. WOOD crosses to the phone and listens, her face sobering as she listens. She hangs up.)

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

What is it?

DR. WOOD

The man -- the father -- he went into cardiac arrest.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Is he alright?

FARMER RICHARD

He's dead, isn't he?

DR. WOOD

They weren't able to bring him back, Mr. Mayor. The child -- he's an orphan now.

ACT 2

(The sun has risen, but it is still early. Snow falls steadily outside; the light bulb has gone out. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS sits on the couch next to REV. FATIMA, who leans back with her eyes closed. A moment passes, then the door bursts open and FARMER RICHARD enters.)

FARMER RICHARD

I still can't see them. Why the hell did they have to leave? I thought this was supposed to be an important meeting --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I told you, they had to go check on the boy. And I'm sure they're trying to decide what to do with the two bodies.

REV. FATIMA

They are piling up, aren't they? That poor child...

FARMER RICHARD

I'm going back out there.

REV. FATIMA

No, Richard, you'll catch your death. Stay inside, have some coffee. They'll be back soon.

(FARMER RICHARD glares at her, but doesn't leave. He paces the room, muttering to himself. The Rev. Fatima and Professor Williams watch for a moment.)

REV. FATIMA

How are your classes going?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

(offhand)

Classes? That's a tad generous.

REV. FATIMA

I don't understand.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I don't think you can call seven kids a whole class. And they're not even at the same level...

REV. FATIMA

Ah, you too?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm sorry?

REV. FATIMA

Low attendance. It's not just in academia, believe me. Paipet City does not have as many devotees as it once did.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Really?

REV. FATIMA

Really. It is rather sad, actually.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What are your numbers like?

REV. FATIMA

(with a laugh)

This year? Or last year, I guess? About ten people.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Every Sunday?

REV. FATIMA

Total.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Oh.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

REV. FATIMA

It's no matter. For those ten people, I would do anything.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

If you don't mind my asking – how do you make any money?

REV. FATIMA

You will be the first to know if I ever do!

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

You don't – get paid? At all?

REV. FATIMA

By whom? The ten people who attend a service a few times per year? My boy, they cannot afford to feed their own families. How are they supposed to pay me?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I just thought, surely you must have some income...

REV. FATIMA

And for what? I am an old woman, I am alone. I have nothing to covet, and no one to shop for.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

But yourself! You can buy things for yourself!

REV. FATIMA

I could.

(A pause.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Er – why don't you?

REV. FATIMA

Why do you?

(A long moment.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

So, Rich. Any catches today?

FARMER RICHARD

Remembered me, have you? I'm flattered.

(beat)

And no. I didn't catch anything. Well, I kind of did -- nothing edible though.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Ah, well. It is still early. Maybe you can go back out there!

(FARMER RICHARD stares at PROFESSOR WILLIAMS.)

FARMER RICHARD

Yeah, you think?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Well, I'm no expert on hunting techniques but–

FARMER RICHARD

—Then you better hush up, right?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to insult you.

FARMER RICHARD

I just caught the one rabbit and by now any others are just frozen dinner for a bear or a wolf. But maybe I can go back out there, since I have nothing better to do. Oh wait -- I'm stuck here.

REV. FATIMA

Nobody is making you stay, Richard. You're free to go at any time.

FARMER RICHARD

Yeah, and let you people ruin this town. No thank you.

REV. FATIMA

Suit yourself.

FARMER RICHARD

What a waste of time. Where did they even go? I thought we weren't allowed to leave until -- this is stupid. What a waste of time! They said this was important and that we had to settle -- what a waste of my damn time.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Can you stop?

FARMER RICHARD

Excuse me?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Pacing. Please. It's making me anxious.

FARMER RICHARD

Oh poor you. What could you have to be anxious about?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Are you serious?

FARMER RICHARD

Yes, tell me, *Professor*. What keeps you up at night? Is it how many papers you have to grade, huh? Or wait -- is it trying to find which pair of khaki pants to wear to class?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Shut up, man.

FARMER RICHARD

Don't tell me to shut up.

REV. FATIMA

Gentlemen, I have an idea. Why don't we have a little contest. I'll be the judge, and here are the rules: you have to be quiet, and you have to stay still. The first one to start sweating wins. Sound good?

(Silence.)

REV. FATIMA

Good start. Now, how long have they been gone?

FARMER RICHARD

An hour.

REV. FATIMA

Yes, by my watch too. Which means --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

-- Which means that we have less than two hours before the feds get here. I'm surprised it's taken them this long to go check on the kid.

FARMER RICHARD

Bleeding' hearts, all of them.

REV. FATIMA

Is that a bad thing?

FARMER RICHARD

It sure as hell isn't a good thing, let me tell you!

(The front door opens again. MAYOR EDGEWOOD, SHERIFF TRUMBLE, and DR. WOOD enter quickly.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Any news?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

You want to fill them in, Josh? I need a drink.

(MAYOR EDGEWOOD exits to the side room.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

It's 5am...

DR. WOOD

You may want to drink after this, so listen.

REV. FATIMA

This doesn't sound good. What else has gone wrong?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

The kid is fine, thankfully he's still unconscious. The dad -- well, he was as comfortable as we could make him.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Comforting.

REV. FATIMA

It should be, Professor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yes, well. What else happened, Sheriff?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

We were on the way back here when the Mayor got an urgent call. It looks like they're expecting a storm to come in from the North, so the feds are moving up the timeline on their visit.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

How long do we have?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

At this rate -- probably less than an hour.

FARMER RICHARD

Well that settles it, I'm out.

(FARMER RICHARD crosses swiftly to the coat rack, grabs his jacket and his rifle, and starts towards the door. MAYOR EDGEWOOD re-enters.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Sit down, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

No sir. I'm done. I don't care what you people want to do, but I'm not having it. I told you at the beginning what I thought we should've done with those -- people.

REV. FATIMA

And we told you -- execution was not an option. We don't work like that.

FARMER RICHARD

Like hell we don't! It's them, or us. Maybe it's time we take leaf out of the government's book.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Calm down, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

Oh be quiet, Trumble. I'm a member of this council, and I say we're done here.

DR. WOOD

That's not how it works.

FARMER RICHARD

What the hell do I care? None of that's gonna matter when we're strung up from the damn light posts!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

That's not going to happen, Richard.

FARMER RICHARD

Well I don't see you doing shit to keep it from happening, Maxwell.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

That's why we're here! Now sit your ass down and listen.

(FARMER RICHARD stops moving. He turns very slowly to the Mayor, who doesn't back down.)

FARMER RICHARD

You have five minutes.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

If I may, I have an idea.

FARMER RICHARD

Oh, good.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Please.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

There's nothing in the books for how to handle a situation like this, but that doesn't matter. We've never really abided by the law of the land anyways.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

At least not since the law of the land became more barbaric than Hammurabi's Code.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

My thoughts exactly. So -- how about a vote?

(A moment.)

FARMER RICHARD

Very funny.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That'll be the first time a vote has actually mattered in this country for about -- well, too many years. I think it's a good idea.

FARMER RICHARD

Of course you do, Professor. Let's solve everything by *thinking*.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That's usually how it's done, yes.

REV. FATIMA

I agree. What are the options, Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Well, we either hide the boy --

FARMER RICHARD

-- And get killed for it --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

-- Or we turn him in.

REV. FATIMA

What'll happen if we turn him in?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

I can't say for sure. I don't know if -- Josh?

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Well, Reverend, usually the men would be sent to the labor camps. We're pretty sure that's where they came from, at least. But this kid, I'm not so sure.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What makes you doubt it, Sheriff?

DR. WOOD

His injuries, professor.

REV. FATIMA

I thought you said he was fine, but unconscious.

DR. WOOD

Well, yes. I guess we forgot to mention that, what with everything --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What's wrong with him?

DR. WOOD

The boy is blind, Professor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Good, God.

REV. FATIMA

That is a sizable omission, Doctor.

DR. WOOD

I know -- it just wasn't the most pressing injury. We think -- well, it looks like the child got an infection at some point. Nothing around here could've done that, so they must've traveled a long way before they were captured. But it does change his chances, and not for the better.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

We have to decide now, people. They're forty minutes out -- at most.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

I say we vote.

DR. WOOD

I second it.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I agree.

REV. FATIMA

Yes.

DR. WOOD

Yes, but quickly.

(They all turn to look at FARMER RICHARD.)

FARMER RICHARD

Fine. But on one condition.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Seriously?

DR. WOOD

Richard, we don't have time --

FARMER RICHARD

I am a member of this council and I have a right to speak!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Fine, Richard, what's the condition.

FARMER RICHARD

The vote has to be unanimous. All in.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

And how is that democratic? You'll oppose us just for spite.

FARMER RICHARD

Why do you think I'm going to be the only opposing vote?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

You're not exactly trying hard to dissuade me, Richard.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Mayor, the time --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yes, yes. We'll take it, damn it. Does anybody have papers or anything? I swear we're worse equipped out here than -- well, than somewhere less equipped than us.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I've got some scraps in my bag, I think.

(PROFESSOR WILLIAMS crosses to the coat rack and reaches in. He pulls out several pieces of paper, and three pencils.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

We'll have to share pencils.

DR. WOOD

That's fine, let's do this quick.

(PROFESSOR WILLIAMS hands out the ballots.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Let's say -- write an 'A' if you want to hide the boy, and 'B' if you want to turn him in.

REV. FATIMA

That's blunt...

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yeah well, brevity seemed appropriate. And here you go, Mr. Mayor.

(PROFESSOR WILLIAMS hands the final ballot to MAYOR EDGEWOOD, and the council members write their votes. Some are slow and methodical, others scribble a letter down quickly. Finally, each council member places their ballot in the middle of the table.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Alright, everyone in? Here -- someone else read them.

DR. WOOD

I can do it.

(She counts.)

DR. WOOD

We have four Bs, and two As.

(A long moment.)

FARMER RICHARD

Well, well, well.

ACT 3

(Everybody is still, the tension is thicker than honey.)

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Wow.

FARMER RICHARD

I told you, professor. It isn't just me.

REV. FATIMA

Rita? Mr. Mayor? Really?

DR. WOOD

I'm sorry, I don't like it --

REV. FATIMA

-- Then why do it?

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Because we have to consider the greater good here, Reverend.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Greater good my ass. You're all cowards.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

You don't know what you're talking about, professor.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Then explain! You're just -- you're condemning this boy.

DR. WOOD

You don't know that --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

-- Yes, I do. Let's not beat around the bush here. We all know what's going to happen to the kid. He's going to die.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And what about us, professor? He's one person. I -- we have to consider the good of the entire town here!

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I can't believe I'm hearing this.

FARMER RICHARD

I've had enough of this. We voted, we're done here.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

No we're not!

FARMER RICHARD

Yes, we are!

REV. FATIMA

I thought we said execution wasn't an option.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

And it isn't --

REV. FATIMA

But it is, and you all know it. What if he was your son? Wouldn't you do everything in your power to protect him?

FARMER RICHARD

Well he's not, so we don't have to think about that.

REV. FATIMA

But he was somebody's son! And there's no one left -- we're his last hope.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Listen, we voted. It's over.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

We decided the vote had to be unanimous!

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Does it really matter? It was a majority. I'm sorry professor, but I don't think you have the right to say much here.

FARMER RICHARD

Yeah, shut up.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

If he has a right to speak, then so do I! What was the point of voting? I thought you were all proud that you didn't do things like the government. What happened to "we've never really abided by the law of the land?"

DR. WOOD

Come on, professor. You have to consider it from our point of view! You're not really from here, so it's not a surprise that you don't understand.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What --

FARMER RICHARD

Answer me this, *professor*. What do you do every day?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What --

FARMER RICHARD

Just answer the damn question. What. Do. You. Do. Every. Day? What's your job, man?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

You know what I -- teach! I teach. You know that.

FARMER RICHARD

You teach, very good. And is it easy? Do you enjoy it?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I wouldn't say it's easy, but sure -- I like it. I don't understand --

FARMER RICHARD

Do you get paid?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yes, of course.

FARMER RICHARD

Of course. Do you every worry you'll be completely broke? What would you do if every student dropped out and you were out of a job?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What are you getting at --

FARMER RICHARD

Answer the question!

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I don't know! I guess I'd have to move back home --

FARMER RICHARD

-- Maybe write a book? A nice little autobiography about your stay in Paipet City, the town full of unimportant people? Maybe you'll do a tour, maybe even set up a charity?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

That's -- well, a book isn't out of the question.

FARMER RICHARD

Yeah, I thought so.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

What?

FARMER RICHARD

The reason why you'll never understand why we do things the way do them here.

FARMER RICHARD

What? What are you talking about?

DR. WOOD

He means -- you have somewhere to go. If things get really bad, you can pack up and get on a bus tomorrow.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

She's right. You're basically a visitor here --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

-- I've been here for years! How can you --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Yes but you can leave! That's the point.

REV. FATIMA

I can't believe it.

FARMER RICHARD

Well you better believe it, lady.

REV. FATIMA

Can't you see that this is bigger than we are --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Bigger than we are? Reverend, if the feds come and take away our money, the town will die. It may take a few years, but it *will* die. And where can we go? We can't pack up and leave, like you and the professor. Even today, the life of the town is bleeding and we are the only things keeping it from running dry.

REV. FATIMA

Sometimes we have to make difficult choices! Money isn't really important, if you think about it. Pieces of paper that tell us who to save and who to kill. None of that matters! What really matters is *people*. If we forget people, if we throw this child to the wolves, what happens to us? It doesn't matter how much money you lost when you die, Mr. Mayor. But if you lose your humanity? Well, may God save you all.

FARMER RICHARD

Oh don't get all high-and-mighty on us. You're not even a real reverend, and if you think you're different than he is, you're wrong as hell. When was the last time you did anything productive for the town?

REV. FATIMA

What I do is productive, Richard. I heal people --

FARMER RICHARD

No, you really don't. If anyone heals people, it's doc over here. You talk about feelings and ideas and things, but you don't actually do anything! I bet if you left, people would get along just fine.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Alright, Richard.

REV. FATIMA

Fine.

FARMER RICHARD

Fine what?

REV. FATIMA

I'll leave.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Come on now, Reverend. Don't be stupid --

FARMER RICHARD

She's bluffing.

REV. FATIMA

I'm not.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

You'll leave and do what?

REV. FATIMA

I'll leave, and I'll take the boy with me.

DR. WOOD

You can't do that. Mr. Mayor, she won't make it a hundred feet with that kid.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Yes she will, because I'm going with her.

REV. FATIMA

Professor, I can't allow that. You're too valuable --

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I'm as valuable as you are, Reverend. And you also don't have much of a choice, because I'm going with you whether you like it or not.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Can you think about this for a second please? You can't leave, it's suicide.

REV. FATIMA

I have thought about it. I don't have anything to pack. I'll leave now -- alone. If we don't make it, we don't make it. But I won't -- I can't stand by and watch you kill this child.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Neither can I --

REV. FATIMA

No, professor. You have to stay, the children need you here.

FARMER RICHARD

I'd listen to her if I were you, Einstein. You wouldn't last an hour out there. Not that she's going to last much either --

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

He's right, Reverend. If you leave, you're going to die.

REV. FATIMA

You don't know that.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

But we do!

REV. FATIMA

And what does it matter to you? You've shown that you don't really care about human life --

DR. WOOD

That's not fair. We're thinking about --

REV. FATIMA

-- The greater good, I know. And this is the best option for the greater good, isn't it? You get rid of the boy, and you can blame it on me.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

And when the feds go after you?

REV. FATIMA

Then I will fight them.

FARMER RICHARD

That's hilarious.

REV. FATIMA

I admit, it won't be much of a fight, but I will fight.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And what if we don't let you leave?

REV. FATIMA

Well, then I guess I'll fight you too.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And you don't care that your death will be on us? If we let you leave, and you die -- which you will -- don't you think that's going to be a stain on our souls?

REV. FATIMA

That depends. Would it be a stain on your souls if I die trying to save a little boy who is alone in the world, thousands of miles from anything he's ever known? If that leaves any mark on your soul, Mr. Mayor, I would hope that it would be a positive one.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

All of this for a boy you don't even know?

REV. FATIMA

It doesn't matter that I don't know him. He was someone's child, and people loved him enough to sacrifice themselves for the chance -- just the chance, not the guarantee -- that he would have a better life. And that is enough for me.

(A moment.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Fine, do what you will.

DR. WOOD

Mr. Mayor! She's going to die!

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

It's her choice. And -- well, she's not wrong. It is the best choice for the town.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Reverend please, let me come with you --

REV. FATIMA

No, professor. Thank you, but no.

(beat)

REV. FATIMA

So, I believe that's all.

(REV. FATIMA pauses, looks at every person in turn. She starts to cross to the door.)

REV. FATIMA

I will go to the hospital --

DR. WOOD

I'll call them. I'll tell them -- something.

REV. FATIMA

Thank you, Rita.

DR. WOOD

Fatima, I'm sorry.

REV. FATIMA

Don't be. I understand. Thank you for everything.

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

Goodbye, Reverend.

REV. FATIMA

Sheriff.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Be safe, Reverend.

REV. FATIMA

I will try. Goodbye, now. Mr. Mayor, thank you for everything.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Please, don't. I don't like this --

REV. FATIMA

You don't have to. Goodbye, all.

(REV. FATIMA opens the door. It is lighter now, the snow has stopped.)

FARMER RICHARD

Take my rifle.

(REV. FATIMA freezes, one foot out the door.
FARMER RICHARD gets up, crosses to the coat rack, and takes the rifle to the Reverend.)

REV. FATIMA

Richard, I can't accept --

FARMER RICHARD

Just take the damn rifle. Use it to blow your own head off, I don't care. I just can't imagine -- just take it.

REV. FATIMA

Thank you. Goodbye.

(She exits. Everyone is still for a long moment.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Well, I guess that's that. Dr. Wood, please go to the hospital now. Put the father's body somewhere -- call him a John Doe. Just hide him.

DR. WOOD

Yes sir.

(She exits.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Sheriff, we should go get ready to meet them. They'll probably want food of some sort --

SHERIFF TRUMBLE

I can set it up at your office. I'll see you there.

(He exits. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS, FARMER RICHARD, and MAYOR EDGEWOOD remain.)

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

And -- well, I should be going. Professor, please stay. It's -- well, just stay.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Fine.

MAYOR EDGEWOOD

Alright. Thank you. I should go as well. I -- goodbye.

(He exits. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS and FARMER RICHARD consider each other.)

FARMER RICHARD

She's crazy, you know that?

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

I don't think so.

(A moment.)

FARMER RICHARD

Whatever. I have to go.

(He starts to cross and is at the door before he stops and looks back.)

FARMER RICHARD

I won't tell them that you left. Not until tomorrow, at least.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Thank you.

FARMER RICHARD

If you die on this side of the border, I'll bury you near the school.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Great.

FARMER RICHARD

But I hope I don't have to do that.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Sure --

FARMER RICHARD

-- Really. I do.

PROFESSOR WILLIAMS

Thank you, Richard.

(FARMER RICHARD exits, and closes the door behind him. PROFESSOR WILLIAMS is alone. He puts on his coat and glances around the room. He takes a deep breath and exits, shutting the door lightly behind him.)

CURTAIN

Final Thoughts

First, some notes from the talkback that followed the performance:

- 1) **There was a good deal of exposition that was implanted naturally and effectively**
- 2) **The play had an air of being futuristic, but current**
- 3) **There was a great sense of isolation and claustrophobia**
- 4) **Perhaps there ought not to be a paper vote, as a “raise your hands” vote is much more visually gratifying**
- 5) **Since these are all professionals in their fields, there is a chance to raise the level of argument here**
- 6) **Finally, don’t forget to *find the humor*.**

This process began in a very different place than where it ended, and I can say with certainty that it is nowhere near finished. Three drafts later, I believe that there is a lot more story to tell here. Although it is slated as a play script right now, I wonder whether or not this story would be better suited for a screenplay. All things to consider, moving forward.

A film of the staged reading and talkback can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbJfk4xWquo>
