

<Title>

an original screenplay by

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Scene 1

Charlie stands in front of the windows, on the phone. He glances at his watch.

CHARLIE

(on phone)

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

(checking watch)

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

Charlie sags against the windowsill.

CHARLIE

Ah, Christ...

(long beat)

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

Charlie lets the phone drop to his lap. He loses a shuddered sigh. Then slowly back to the call.

CHARLIE

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

Charlie beeps off his phone and sits shell-shocked before WALTER PULLEN blusters into the room, a stack of files in his hand.

Charlie instinctively stands, doing his best to act as if the call never happened. A sudden pain in his abdomen almost doubles him over, but he hides it quickly.

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

How 'bout we trade shoes for awhile?

CHARLIE

Not on your life.

WALTER

Coward.

(glances at watch)

David's content for tonight set?

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

God forbid. Script in the prompter?

CHARLIE

An hour ago.

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

WALTER

I'm getting too old for this.

CHARLIE

(indicating files)

Those the new numbers?

WALTER

Yes.

CHARLIE

And...?

WALTER

They're shitty.

CHARLIE

That's definitive.

WALTER

Okay. They're *really* shitty.

CHARLIE

Much clearer.

Walter picks up one of the files.

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

(sitting)

Uh-huh.

Walter picks up another file.

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

Nasty.

WALTER

Very.

Walter picks up a third file.

WALTER

(more somber tone)

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

Charlie shifts in his chair. This suddenly matters.

WALTER

(opens same file)

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

CHARLIE

They say which night?

WALTER

ALL of them, Charlie.

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

(holds up file)

Not according to--

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

In their opinion, that's the problem.

CHARLIE

What is?

WALTER

It's real news.

CHARLIE

(pouring scotch)

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

(sipping scotch)

Murrow just flipped over in his grave, you know.

Walter rises, throws the files on his desk.

WALTER

Murrow didn't have to deal with this shit!

CHARLIE

Fuck 'em. You were a newsman once...until you...

(waves his hand at
Walter's desk)

This is supposed to be a "News Network", isn't it?

Charlie hands Walter a drink.

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

They ARE, Walter, unless someone
tells them--

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

I will not produce a show that--

WALTER

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

This stops Charlie.

CHARLIE

Conrad's behind this flap?

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

You're kidding me.

WALTER

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

Walter looks Charlie straight in the eye, doesn't flinch.

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

And when is this pig supposed to fly?

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

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

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

CHARLIE

Do it or die. That it?

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

(accepting)

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

Charlie walks to the window, gazes out.

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

Time marches on.

(glances at watch)

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

CHARLIE

(back to the room)

Make-up, I suppose.

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

Walter goes back to his desk. Charlie picks up a phone.

CHARLIE
He's not going to like this.

Walter shrugs, sits.

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

CHARLIE
(to Walter)
Hell of an image, under the
circumstances.
(into phone)
Yeah, it's Charlie Nims. David
down there?...Where is he?...*Where?*

Charlie goes to the windows, looks down.

CHARLIE
What the hell is doing out there?

Walter joins Charlie at the windows, peers out.

WALTER
Is he on his knees?

CHARLIE
(into phone)
He's what?!
(looks at Walter)
For fuck's sake...get him out of
the goddamned courtyard! Send him
up here, now!

Charlie hangs up the phone.

WALTER
What?

CHARLIE
(looks at Walter)
He told them he needed a quiet
place to *pray*.

Scene 2

Charlie sits sipping his scotch. Walter is pouring one for himself.

DAVID STEELE enters in suit and tie, make-up tissues stuffed into his collar, papers in his hand. He's animated, focused.

DAVID
Good evening, Gentlemen.

CHARLIE
(cordially)
David...

David sits next to Charlie.

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

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

DAVID
Praying. Wasn't it obvious?

WALTER
Praying to what? Since when--?

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

Walter and Charlie exchange a glance.

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

WALTER
Which "base" is that?

David just smiles at Walter, then turns to Charlie.

DAVID
So, Charlie...

Charlie leans into his friend.

CHARLIE
You all right?

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

CHARLIE

We might want to talk about that--

David ignores him, goes to the bar.

DAVID

Going with the famine in East Africa. No one anywhere's paying attention.

(points to pages)

Just banged it out. Got the boys pulling some video to roll over. Dire situation, that.

WALTER

(reaching for pages)

Let me see those.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

For God's sake, Charlie! The world turning its back and allowing thousands to starve has a little more weight than a few self-important actors walking a picket line--

WALTER

(reading through pages)

Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. No way in hell.

David pours a little bit of scotch.

DAVID

What do you mean "no"?

WALTER

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

DAVID

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

WALTER

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

DAVID

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

WALTER

Not any more.
(hands pages to
Charlie)
Lead with the Hollywood thing--

DAVID

That Hollywood bullshit will not come out of my mouth!

WALTER

It will. And more. And since you like to do things
(to David)
"on the fly"...
(to Charlie)
Check the wires for any breaking stories along the lines we've been talking about--

DAVID

The hell you say!

WALTER

Rebuild the entire broadcast--

CHARLIE

In thirty minutes?!

WALTER

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

DAVID

What the hell is this!?

Charlie rises, steps between David and Walter.

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

WALTER
(glancing at his
watch)
That's about all you have.

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

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

DAVID
Consequences? What in God's name--

Charlie shows his hand to David in a quieting motion.

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

Walter looks from Charlie to David and back, then moves
toward the door.

WALTER
Five minutes.

He exits.

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

CHARLIE
Sit down a minute, David.

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

CHARLIE
David, please.

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

CHARLIE
(trying to be
diplomatic)
We've got a little bit
of...pressure...coming from--

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Corporate pressure, David.

DAVID

Corporate?

CHARLIE

Conrad.

DAVID

Michael Conrad?

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

Charlie moves to get up, but a sudden sharp pain in his
abdomen doubles him over. David catches him, eases him
back into the chair.

DAVID

Charlie...what is it?

CHARLIE

(between gasps)
It's...nothing...

DAVID

That wasn't "nothing".

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

Not until you tell me what that
was.

CHARLIE

You need to go downstairs--

DAVID

I go nowhere until you talk to me!
I'm your oldest friend, for God's
sake!

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

CHARLIE

It's cancer.

DAVID

No.

CHARLIE

Pancreatic.

DAVID

Oh, God. How bad?

CHARLIE

(beat)

Bad enough. Pancreas pretty well
shot. In the lungs. Liver.
Kidney.

(beat)

Just showed up in, uh...

(taps his head)

I'm pretty well fucked.

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

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

DAVID

What can I do?

CHARLIE

Nothing right now.

DAVID

Charlie --

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

What situation?

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

They can't do tha--

CHARLIE

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

David jumps up.

DAVID

Fucking money! It's always about the fucking money!

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

(smiles)

I'm pretty sure mine is.

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

DAVID

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

(turns to Charlie)

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

Serve it up and forget it.

Charlie rises, glancing at his watch.

CHARLIE

That's about it. Can you do that?

(no answer)

We'd better head downstairs.

DAVID

(staring straight
ahead)

In a minute. Want to finish my
drink.

CHARLIE

Well...don't be long.

DAVID

Right behind you.

Charlie exits. David turns and gazes out the window again.

The lights dim on all but David, who seems silhouetted in
brighter light coming through the window. The moon...?

DAVID

(looks slightly up
to the sky)

What the hell do I do now?

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

DAVID

Yes. Alright.

David slowly turns back to the room. The dimmed lights
rise as the door opens, Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

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

David pulls his makeup tissues from his neck, moves toward
the door.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

I know. But indulge them. ALL of
them.

Charlie holds the door as David moves into it. David
glances back at the window, then looks at Charlie.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Always has.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Right.

David looks at this friend.

DAVID

What if I can't do that anymore?

CHARLIE

Do what?

DAVID

Stay out of it.

CHARLIE

What are you talking about?

But David turns and exits.

Charlie feels another pang of pain in his gut, holds his
breath a moment, then straightens and moves to the bar,
pours himself another stiff one, but doesn't drink it.

Walter returns.

(Through the following, David Steele can be seen entering
the "Broadcast Set" stage right and preparing himself to
go on -- micing, last make-up touches, etc).

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

WALTER

He all right?

CHARLIE

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

Walter goes to bar, pours himself a drink.

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

Maybe. Anyway, I was just wondering...

They both walk downstage center, looking at the TV monitor.

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

Hmm.
(pointing to TV)
Well...Here we go.

News show music open plays as...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

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

Bright TV lights up on David on the Broadcast Set. Lights remain up on Walter's office, though dim in comparison.

DAVID

Good evening. Tonight...

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

DAVID

(almost bored)
Tonight the film cameras across Hollywood have gone blind, the result of a job action on the part of union...actors...

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

CHARLIE

What the hell?

David sits motionless a moment...

CHARLIE

What...?!

David takes a sudden breath and his head snaps up, his eyes unfocused, but an instant later, he looks straight at the camera. And smiles.

DAVID

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

WALTER

Oh, shit...

DAVID

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

WALTER

I'm going to kill him...

CHARLIE

Give him a chance.

DAVID

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

WALTER

I'll strangle him...

DAVID

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

WALTER

What's he doing?

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

It's Nims. Is the prompter down?...

DAVID

So please hear me out.

CHARLIE

Well, get him back on script!

Charlie hangs up.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

WALTER

Fuck me.

DAVID

I know it will come as a shock to you, but there's no simpler way to do this but to just say it: while you have known me publicly the better part of the last 40 years as David Steele, that is, in fact, not who I am.

WALTER

What the...

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

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

DAVID

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

Walter spit-takes the scotch.

DAVID

Yes, *that* Jesus Christ.

CHARLIE

Oh, my God...

Charlie immediately grabs the phone, dials.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

(into phone)

Shut it down...I don't know!

DAVID

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

WALTER

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

Walter takes another gulp of scotch.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

(into phone)

Go to commercial! Go to black, if you have to!

DAVID

So let me begin with...

And the lights on the Broadcast Set suddenly go dark. A commercial can be heard under and then fading out.

DAVID

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

David rises, bolts from the set.

CHARLIE

(into phone)
Bring him up here. Yes, now!

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

WALTER

What in God's name was he doing?

They stop and look at each other.

WALTER

I mean...you know...

CHARLIE

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

Scene 3

David sits in a chair, his demeanor quite different than before...almost like a boy in the principal's office. Charlie leans on the window sill, arms crossed.

Walter, jacketless now, paces back and forth in front of his desk. He looks about to explode. Finally he does.

WALTER

SHIT!
(beat)
SHIT!!

More pacing. David looks up at Walter.

DAVID

Walter, if you'll allow me...

Walter sticks a finger in David's face.

WALTER

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

DAVID

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

WALTER

What...?!

DAVID

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

(aside to Charlie)

That's proper grammatically, yes?

Charlie just smiles at his friend.

WALTER

(pulling at his
hair)

Jesus!

DAVID

Yes?

Walter stares at David disbelievingly, then sits back on the edge of his desk.

WALTER

Oh, my God.

DAVID

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

Charlie rises, puts a hand on David's shoulder.

CHARLIE

(to David)

Hold on a second.

DAVID

But I think it's important that I--

CHARLIE

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

(moves to Walter)

I think we should get him out of
here --

WALTER

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

DAVID

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

WALTER

CHRIST!

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

WALTER
(almost desperate)
Charlie, please! Get...whoever he
is...out of here!

CHARLIE
Yeah. Probably should.

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

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

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

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

CHARLIE
Of course.

WALTER
Someone must have weekend hours.

The intercom beeps.

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

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

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

Walter moves to the door, turns to David.

WALTER

(to David)

Why the hell didn't you resurrect
Walter flipping Cronkite or somebody
that has a chance of giving us
some goddamned ratings?

Walter exits.

David looks at Charlie.

DAVID

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

Charlie sits next to David. An awkward beat.

CHARLIE

Not really sure how to ask this...

DAVID

You want to know if it's true.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

And if it isn't?

CHARLIE

I'd be concerned.

(beat)

I'm concerned either way, I guess.

David rises, puts on his coat.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

You looking to be another Lazarus,
are you?

CHARLIE

Lazarus had been in the ground a
few days before being reanimated,
(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
if I remember my catechism. I'd
rather skip that part if it's all
the same to you.

This makes David laugh.

DAVID
Understandable. But you're far
from in the ground, my friend.

David reaches out and touches Charlie's knee.

DAVID
Give it some time. You never know.

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

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

DAVID
Maybe a little wine tonight.

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

DAVID
Just give me a glass of water. It
won't be a problem.

David winks at Charlie, who watches him go out the door
before following him.

Scene 4

David sits on the couch. His wife, PATRICIA STEELE, stands
near him.

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

They laugh.

DAVID
Just slipped out.

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

Patricia rises.

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

Which 'truth' is that, again?

Beat, as David ignores the question, then...

DAVID

How about a drink, love?

Patricia goes to a nearby liquor cart.

PATRICIA

You want that glass of wine you mentioned?

DAVID

(laughs)

Scotch will be fine.

She pours the scotch, hands it to him as she sits on the couch arm near him.

PATRICIA

You starting something here I should know about?

DAVID

Not sure. Came up all of a moment.

PATRICIA

Not like you to be impulsive.

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

And on the next twenty, if I remember.

DAVID

You were playing hard to get.

PATRICIA

Wanted to make sure you were serious was all.

DAVID

I'm serious about most things.

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

(pats her hand,
smiles)

Yes. Of course. Wouldn't have made it this far without your counsel. Said it many times.

PATRICIA

So...?

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

How so?

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

I may have been too straightforward.

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

You're baiting me now.

PATRICIA

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

The both begin to giggle.

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

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

David smiles, touches her cheek.

DAVID

God, I love you.

PATRICIA

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

They both explode in laughter. Then Patricia rises.

PATRICIA

I'll get dinner started.

DAVID

Thank you, darling.

She exits. David watches her go, is silent a moment, then leans forward, elbows on knees, hands folded, looking at the ceiling.

DAVID

This may be more difficult than I thought.

Scene 5

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

WALTER

Amazing.

CHARLIE

What's that?

WALTER

Nobody gave a shit.

CHARLIE

What do you mean?

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

The beauty of low ratings: no one was watching.

Walter rises, looks out the window.

WALTER

Someone was watching.

CHARLIE

Conrad?

WALTER

(turns to Charlie)

Got word this morning from his office. He's sending a fixer.

CHARLIE

That was quick.

WALTER

Amanda Richards.

CHARLIE

Should I know the name?

WALTER

San Francisco last year? The pot thing?

CHARLIE

Oh, Jesus--

WALTER

Please...Don't use that name.

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

Everyone. Top down.

CHARLIE

Todd Mitchell was one of them -- you remember him...we were at CBS with him back in...

(off Walter's nod)

Said she was "tough as nails"...among other descriptive phrases.

WALTER

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

They laugh.

CHARLIE

And Conrad's sending her here?

WALTER

Arrives today. Her team's right behind her.

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

How's that?

CHARLIE

The shrink also happens to be a Rabbi.

WALTER

You're kidding.

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

When's he talking to David?

CHARLIE

At his house right now.

Scene 6

David's living room. David's on the couch. Psychiatrist/Rabbi AVNER COVANT sits near him.

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

"I" being...

DAVID

Me.

COVANT

You, David, or you--

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

You've been watching for a while,
then.

DAVID

Quite a while.

COVANT

(with humor)

Like...a couple thousand years?

This makes David laugh.

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

When did you first discover that
you were you?

Covant pauses, smiles.

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

The chicken or the egg?

DAVID

In a manner of speaking.

COVANT

I'm more linear, I guess.

DAVID

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

COVANT

Mm-hmm.

(beat)

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

That so?

DAVID

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

COVANT

Agreed. Object lessons--

DAVID

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

COVANT

So God doesn't exist?

DAVID

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

COVANT

Okay. So you're not here for Armageddon.

DAVID

Quite the opposite.

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

Well, to be completely honest, I don't believe in "divinity", period. Mine, or yours.

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

Maybe not the same man. Same entity.

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

COVANT

Well, that's a relief.

DAVID

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

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

(beat)

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

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

COVANT

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

DAVID

They can handle it.

COVANT

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

DAVID

How so?

COVANT

I mean, on a religious plane alone, you have to admit it didn't go over so well last time.

DAVID

That was different...it was political. And they weren't so cynical.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

The ethereal frightened them.
Probably should have cut back on
the smoke and mirrors.

COVANT

So no miracles this time around?

DAVID

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

COVANT

An odd twist on the loaves and
fishes -- information instead of
food.

DAVID

Modern times...

COVANT

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

DAVID

Good. Then--

COVANT

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

David reaches out and touches the Rabbi's knee, looks him
directly in the eye.

DAVID
Certainly you can.

Beat, as Covant stares into David's eyes, then...

COVANT
Certainly I can.

They smile at one another, then...

DAVID
(emphatic)
So.

Covant rises, offers his hand. David takes it.

COVANT
Well. Nice talking with you.

DAVID
You too. I enjoyed it.

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

They laugh.

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

DAVID
Goodbye, Doctor.

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

PATRICIA
So? How'd it go?

DAVID
Fine. Nice man.

PATRICIA
Did you, um...

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

PATRICIA
David...

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

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

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

PATRICIA
 (rising to leave)
 May take a miracle, darling.

David considers this a moment.

DAVID
 Yes. It might.

Patricia stops and looks back at David.

Scene 7

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

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

Charlie touches off the call, dials four digits.

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

Charlie hangs up. He stands, but a sharp pain in his abdomen hits him hard. He staggers, trying to get a breath. He pulls a bottle of pills from his pocket, swallows one, then decides to take another as he heads to the bar.

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

AMANDA
 I want the entire team assembled in half an hour. Everyone, no exceptions.
 (looks up at Walter)
 That means everyone.

WALTER

O-o-o-kay.

She sees Charlie at the bar.

AMANDA

You're Nims?

CHARLIE

That I am.

AMANDA

Good. Where's Steele?

CHARLIE

He's on his way.

AMANDA

Too bad. You could have saved him the trip.

CHARLIE

Why's that?

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

(looks from Amanda
to Walter and back)

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

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

I wasn't aware any decisions had been made.

WALTER

Well--

AMANDA

I just made them. That's all you need to be aware of.

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

Will be made by me as of right
now.

CHARLIE

Says who?

Amanda holds her phone out to Charlie.

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

Walter? Say something.

WALTER

I, uh...Ms. Richards...uh...perhaps
we shouldn't be too rash here.

AMANDA

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

WALTER

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

AMANDA

Is that so? How, exactly?

WALTER

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

AMANDA

Convenient. They discuss aberrant
theology too?

(off their blank
looks)

Never mind. And?

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

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

WALTER

That may be a little strong.

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

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

(checks watch)

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

CHARLIE

The hell he is!

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

WALTER

Charlie?

The door bursts open. David enters, quite animated, drawing
attention away from Charlie.

DAVID

Hello, everyone. How are we today?

AMANDA

(icily)

How would you expect us to be?

David moves to Amanda, extends his hand.

DAVID

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

Amanda doesn't take his hand.

AMANDA

I know who you are. Were.
Whatever.

WALTER

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

DAVID

Ah.

AMANDA

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

DAVID

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

(to Walter)

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

AMANDA

Questionable.

DAVID

I'm sorry?

AMANDA

Good word, questionable. Perfectly describes the situation you've put us in, Mr. Steele...that *is*, I'm assuming, what you're calling yourself this morning.

DAVID

(cooly)

It's fine.

AMANDA

(nicely)

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

DAVID

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

AMANDA

(directly)

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

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

You're not serious.

CHARLIE

The only person who can return some semblance of that "credibility" you think we've lost is David Steele. His sudden disappearance would be an admission that he's impaired and implies that the network is incompetent. But put him back on--

AMANDA

That's not going to happen--

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

A little late for that.

DAVID

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

AMANDA

Absolutely not.

DAVID

There are things I'd--

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

You want to take him off the air, fine.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

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

AMANDA

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

(sweeps a finger at them)

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

CHARLIE

You can't do that--

AMANDA

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

Amanda goes back to her computer.

David watches Charlie move to the bar, then gazes at the focused Amanda, then wanders to the windows, looks out. He turns his eyes up into the sky, stares intently for a moment, then turns back to the room.

CHARLIE

(to Amanda)

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

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

Who's going to run the teleprompter?

AMANDA

Excuse me?

CHARLIE

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

WALTER

(realizing)

Charlie's right.

AMANDA

About?

WALTER

This is a union house.

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

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

David pulls his wallet.

DAVID

Certainly am.
(finds card)
Yes. Here it is.

AMANDA

What name's on that card?
(beat)
Never mind. None of this means
anything. I'm still--

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

They wouldn't--

WALTER

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

AMANDA

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

Amanda's cell phone chirps. She instantly answers.

AMANDA

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

During this call, David wanders across the room, eyeing
Amanda. There's a slight smile on his face.

AMANDA

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

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

Amanda clicks off her phone.

AMANDA

Unbelievable!

DAVID

Problem?

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

AMANDA

Blizzards.

DAVID

Blizzards?

AMANDA

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

DAVID

Hmm. Bit unusual, that.

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

You're kidding.

AMANDA

I don't kid, Mr. Nims.

WALTER

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

AMANDA

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

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

A staring stand-off between Amanda and David for several
beats. Then...

AMANDA
I want to ask--

DAVID
(to Charlie)
Okay with you, Charlie?

CHARLIE
(to David)
You'll behave yourself?

DAVID
Yes. Absolutely.

AMANDA
No way is--

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

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

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

DAVID
Agreed. Explain, news, sayanora.

AMANDA
You are not--

CHARLIE
Works for me. Walter?

WALTER
I'm good with it.

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

Amanda stands stock still, considers a long moment, then
she breaks, shuts her computer, slides it into her bag.

AMANDA

Not much choice, is there?
 (picks up her bag)
 But know this: if he uses the
 word "God" or "holy" or "blessed"
 or anything else remotely Biblical,
 I will incinerate this place.

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

AMANDA

I kid you not. Scorched earth.

And she's gone.

David drops into a chair.

DAVID

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

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

Scene 8

David is sitting at the low-lit broadcast desk SR, preparing for air.

In Walter's office, Walter stands at his desk thumbing through papers. Charlie sits, in obvious discomfort. He quietly pulls out his pills, slips one into his mouth. Walter notices.

WALTER

You alright?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

WALTER

You're sure? This morning--

CHARLIE

(dismissively)
 Yeah, yeah. A little indigestion.
 I'm alright.

Walter moves to in front of the TV monitor (4th wall).

WALTER

He alright?

CHARLIE
 (rising, moving to
 bar)
 He'll be fine.
 (pours drinks)
 How about you?

WALTER
 I really expected to be at home
 unemployed tonight.

Charlie hands Walter the drink.

CHARLIE
 You may still be if the weather
 clears in LA.

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

CHARLIE
 Don't you go all evangelical on me
 too. Nothing miraculous about it.
 (he walks to Walter)
 The weather's fucked everywhere,
 that's all.

They stand and watch David prepare.

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

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

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

And he walks out. I don't think he's been to so much as a wedding since.

WALTER

So what's all this, then?

CHARLIE

No idea.

(empties his glass)

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

(rattles glass)

You want another?

WALTER

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

As Charlie moves to the bar and begins pouring, Amanda Richards strides into the room, cell phone to her ear.

AMANDA

Yes, I'm here now...

(checks watch)

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

She punches off the call.

CHARLIE

All eyes in California on David, are they?

AMANDA

The only ones that count.

WALTER

Still snowing out there?

AMANDA

Three feet and counting.

CHARLIE

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

Amanda walks to Walter, looks at David on the monitor.

AMANDA

What's he leading with?

CHARLIE

Oddly enough, Los Angeles getting the Olympics in twenty...something

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
or other. Leads perfectly into
the snow thing, I think.

AMANDA
(looking again at
David)
He okay with that?

CHARLIE
He knows the deal, Ms. Richards.

AMANDA
He'd better.

The work lights go down on the Broadcast Set, the opening
music plays.

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

AMANDA
You might want to keep things clear.

WALTER
Right. Vodka, then.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And now, World News with David
Steele. Here is...David Steele.

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

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

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

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

WALTER
Uh-oh.

CHARLIE
Come on, David.

Five seconds...then...

DAVID
Speaking of angels...

CHARLIE
Oh, shit.

AMANDA

Get him off! Now!

DAVID

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

AMANDA

Get him the fuck off!

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

DAVID

I can understand that, especially for you atheists and agnostics out there. I debated remaining anonymous...I wanted to give you a chance to right your own ship without my interfering again.

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

AMANDA

PULLEN!!

DAVID

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

AMANDA

Pull the plug on him!

Walter takes a slug, picks up the phone on the bar and dials during...

DAVID

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

WALTER

(into phone)

Go to dead air if you have to!

DAVID

I think we need to have a new dialogue about what Dad and I want from you and hope for you.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

And first and foremost, I think it's time that I reiterate the need for some brotherly love. Now, to begin, let me offer a parable--

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

DAVID

Oh, now...!

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

"Due to technical difficulties, this live broadcast has been interrupted. We take you now to our affiliate in Hollywood, where the weather..."

DAVID

Come on! I thought I had--

Charlie appears on the set.

DAVID

Charlie. What's going on?

CHARLIE

Had to do it, didn't you?

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Time to go, David.

DAVID

Charlie--

CHARLIE

Please.

DAVID

No. You said I could have a final--

CHARLIE

You need to leave here. Now.

DAVID

I would think that you, above all people...You are my Peter! Together we can--

David tries to face the camera.

DAVID
Turn it back on! This is my church
and I will not leave until I--

Charlie grabs David's shoulder and slaps him across the face.

CHARLIE
David!

David is shocked at Charlie's slap.

DAVID
You would strike your Lord?!?

As Charlie wrestles David to his feet...

CHARLIE
We need to go. Right now.

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

Charlie grabs David's face with both hands and looks directly into his eyes.

CHARLIE
(melodramatically)
Jesus. My Lord. The Philistines
are coming for you. I must get
you to safety.

David looks back at Charlie a moment, then a smile slowly crosses his face.

DAVID
All right. We'll do this later,
yes?

CHARLIE
Of course we will.

They exit the broadcast set.

In Pullen's office, Amanda watches them go, then pulls out her cell phone and dials. Walter watches, wobbling at the bar.

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

She punches off, looks over at Walter.

WALTER
Scorched earth barbeque?

Amanda strides to the door.

AMANDA
What do you think?

She exits.

Walter takes a slug.

WALTER
I think we're the marshmallows.

Scene 9

David and Patricia's living room. David on the couch, Patricia stands nearby. Charlie leans against the wall behind David, drink in hand.

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

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

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

DAVID
This what?

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

DAVID
The two are not incompatible, darling--

PATRICIA
Stop it!

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

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

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

(to Charlie)

Charlie, help me out here.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

(to Patricia)

Darling, please...

(to Charlie)

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

(looking around at
him)

Seriously?

CHARLIE

We'll know more tomorrow.

PATRICIA

What's tomorrow?

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

I'm coming with you.

CHARLIE

Not a good idea.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

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

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

DAVID
You tell them the truth--

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

David drops his head and sighs.

PATRICIA
I'm pretty sure they weren't
immaculately conceived.

DAVID
Pat--

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

DAVID
I can't stop it.

PATRICIA
Why the hell not?!

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

Patricia drops to the couch.

PATRICIA
Here? Back? What are you--

Charlie touches her shoulder, quiets her.

CHARLIE
Time, you said? Time for what?

DAVID
For the insanity to end.

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Armageddon, is it?

DAVID

(shrugs)
For want of a better word.

PATRICIA

(with sadness)
Oh, my God! You really *believe* that?

DAVID

I *know* it.

CHARLIE

Know it? How...?

DAVID

Alpha and Omega...all of that.

CHARLIE

Jesus.

DAVID

Yes, that too.

PATRICIA

Oh, David...

DAVID

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

Patricia jumps up, tears now in her eyes.

PATRICIA

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

CHARLIE

I'll stay with him.

Patricia nods, exits. Charlie slugs the last of his drink. A sudden pain in his abdomen hits him. He half-slumps against the wall, catching his breath a moment.

DAVID
(without looking at
him)
It's getting worse, isn't it?

Charlie looks at David. How did he...? He takes a pill, then picks up the bottle of scotch and his glass. He sits with David, pours.

CHARLIE
Yeah. It is.

DAVID
Time is short.

CHARLIE
I have a feeling.

DAVID
I'm sorry.

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

DAVID
That what you want?

CHARLIE
Just kidding around.

DAVID
I'm not. You want...
(rubs his hands
together)
...my help?

CHARLIE
Come on, David.

DAVID
It's not David offering.

Charlie looks at his friend a moment. Sadness crosses his face.

CHARLIE
I wish I could believe that was
even possible.

DAVID
What makes you so sure it isn't?

CHARLIE
David, please.

DAVID

What? What if it were possible?

CHARLIE

Stop it! You are not--

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

(giving up)

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

DAVID

Substantiation. You think that's needed?

CHARLIE

Couldn't hurt.

DAVID

Whatever became of faith?

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

(rising)

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

CHARLIE

Yes, but--

DAVID

Ever seen the Sufi Dervishes? They do the impossible -- the *miraculous* -- every time they dance.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

(turns to Charlie)

Man's become jaded to it all...lost his willingness to embrace the miraculous all around him. He's grown blind to it. Makes him take it all for granted.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Ever think he might not want it?

This may not have occurred to David. They sit in silence a few moments.

CHARLIE

I need to know, David.

David takes Charlie's glass.

CHARLIE

I don't want to walk into that meeting tomorrow morning without knowing the truth.

David takes the bottle, pours.

DAVID

You sure that's the only reason why you want to know?

They stare at one another. David takes a slug, passes the glass to Charlie.

Scene 10

Walter's office. The blinds are drawn...it's dim. Walter's behind the desk. David sits in a chair. Charlie leans on the window sill.

DAVID

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

WALTER

Helps me think.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Didn't seem an impediment two thousand years ago.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

What's different now?

DAVID

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

WALTER

It's comforting to me.

DAVID

It's depressing.

WALTER

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

DAVID

Well, if you wanted a talisman to remind you what you're here for, I'd suggest a cash register on the corner of your desk. Because it's not what we do on that damned tube anymore. What we *can* do.

WALTER

Fuck you.

David rises and walks to the windows, takes the far right blind pull in his hand.

DAVID

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

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

DAVID

I like to see who's bugging me.

WALTER

Christ, David!

DAVID

Right on both counts.

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

CHARLIE

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

(to Charlie)

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

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

Doing...?

WALTER

No idea.

CHARLIE

We still in control?

WALTER

My key still worked this morning,
but who knows?

CHARLIE

Conrad weighed in?

WALTER

He doesn't talk to me.

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

DAVID

Put me back on the air.

This is hilarious to Walter.

DAVID

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

WALTER

(to David)

Like you did last night?

(to Charlie)

He HAS lost his mind. He shouldn't even *be* here, Charlie.

CHARLIE

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

At that moment, the door opens and Amanda strides in, a huge bundle of files and papers in her arms.

AMANDA

Good. You're all here.

CHARLIE

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

For the first time, Amanda cracks a smile.

AMANDA

Good one. And no.

DAVID

Right onto the crosses, eh?

She moves to Walter's desk, drops the stack of files in front of him.

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

And now?

AMANDA

And now...the landscape's shifted.

(points to files)

These are the overnights. Nielsons, phones logs, telegrams. I take it you all came through the garage in back.

WALTER

I did.

CHARLIE

Us too.

AMANDA

So you haven't seen out front.

CHARLIE

What's...?

Amanda points to the windows still mostly blinded. Charlie turns, pulls open the remaining closed blinds, looks out.

CHARLIE

My God.

David and Walter move to the windows.

DAVID

What is it?

They all look a moment.

WALTER

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

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

You're kidding.

David moves for the door.

DAVID

I should get down there.

AMANDA

You're going nowhere.

DAVID

Those are my people. They came to see me.

AMANDA

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

DAVID

What something?

AMANDA

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

David glances at Charlie.

DAVID

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

AMANDA

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

DAVID

How dare you? Those people have
value--

Amanda picks up the top file.

AMANDA

Damn right they do! They're the
gold mine! The Nielsons are insane.
I've never seen a graph like this,
have you?

(hands paper to
Charlie)

Doubles every hour.

CHARLIE

This can't be right.

AMANDA

Trust me.

Walter reaches for the pages.

WALTER

Let me see those.

AMANDA

Clips of Friday night's broadcast
have gone viral... seventy million
hits already.

WALTER

Did you say 'million'?

AMANDA

Million.

WALTER

Holy shit.

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

Walter...!

WALTER
Hold on, Charlie...

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

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

AMANDA
I'm thinking prime-time special.

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

Walter's still looking at the Neilsons.

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

AMANDA
Combined.

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

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

CHARLIE
Infected is more like it.

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

(Beat. Charlie realizes.)

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

AMANDA

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

DAVID

What's that?

AMANDA

(still to Charlie)

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

CHARLIE

You can't do this.

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

What?!

AMANDA

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

Charlie looks to Walter.

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

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

WALTER

(helplessly)

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

CHARLIE

Walter--

WALTER

Maybe Amanda's on to something, Charlie.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

When?

CHARLIE

When what?

DAVID

When can I go back on?

AMANDA

(before Charlie can
answer)

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

CHARLIE

Stop this!

AMANDA

What?

CHARLIE

This insanity. Ten hours ago, you were going to --

(to Walter)

What was the word she used?

WALTER

I believe it was incinerate.

CHARLIE

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

AMANDA

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

DAVID

Nice metaphor.

CHARLIE

I won't allow it.

WALTER

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

DAVID

Charlie--

CHARLIE

(to Walter)

No!

(to Amanda)

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

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

The hell it isn't!

DAVID

Charlie, please--

CHARLIE

(to David)

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

David looks at this friend a beat, then...

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

(frustrated)

Which "I" is that?

DAVID

(smiles, calmly)

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

CHARLIE

You can't do this.

DAVID

I have to.

AMANDA

And he's *going* to.

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

AMANDA

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

(points to Walter)

You with me on this?

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

WALTER
It's business, Charlie.

CHARLIE
Yeah.

Walter joins Amanda at the door.

AMANDA
(to Charlie)
You two stay here. We'll be back
in twenty.

They exit, and the second they're gone, Charlie turns, leans heavily on the window sill, hand on abdomen, obviously in great pain.

DAVID
Charlie?

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

DAVID
Drink this.
(Charlie sips)
You shouldn't be here.

CHARLIE
Neither should you.

DAVID
Where else would David Steele be?

CHARLIE
(moves to chair,
sits)
I wasn't speaking to David.

DAVID
Ah.
(beat)
So...you accept who I say I am,
then?

Charlie takes several pills, washes them down with the drink as he sits.

CHARLIE
Of course not.
(beat)
I honestly don't know what to think.
I'm lucky I can think at all.

David comes to his friend, kneels in front of him.

DAVID
(quietly)
I have to do this. You know that,
yes?

A long beat.

CHARLIE
You always were the first one
through the door.

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

Charlie sighs heavily, smiles weakly at David.

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

DAVID
(touching Charlie's
hand)
What's coming is nothing to be
afraid of.

CHARLIE
Says the man claiming familiarity
with life everlasting.

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

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

DAVID
You know David would tell you the
same thing.

CHARLIE
Isn't he?

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

CHARLIE
Cut the bullshit, David!
(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Just admit the truth and be done with it.

DAVID

I have been, Charlie.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

No. Certainly not a game.

Charlie tries to rise...

CHARLIE

Then what...WHO...?!

But a stabbing pain hits him again, he drops back onto the chair, breathing hard. He looks at David.

CHARLIE

Tell me. Please.

David considers a moment, then...

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

I thought you said you were Jesus Christ.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

This is all too Hare Krishna for me.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Not so sure it was.

Beat.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

(a little laugh)

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

CHARLIE

Do you have the slightest idea how insane that sounds?

DAVID

Why? Why should it?

CHARLIE

David--

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

It isn't a--

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

I don't know, Charlie.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

Who?

DAVID

The world.

CHARLIE

(giving up)
Right.

Long beat.

CHARLIE

You know...I almost wish I could.

DAVID

Could what?

CHARLIE

Believe in all this.

DAVID

You can.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

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

DAVID

Charlie!
(leaning over him)
Charlie!

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

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

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

DAVID
Charlie. Charlie!

David looks at his friend. Then he looks straight up to the ceiling for a beat or three. He looks back to Charlie.

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

David takes his friend's hand and holds it, waiting.

Scene 11

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

AMANDA
Any word?

WALTER
No.

AMANDA
And Steele?

Walter shakes his head.

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

WALTER
Maybe.

AMANDA
Maybe what?

WALTER
Maybe God does know, if David is actually--

AMANDA
Oh, for fuck's sake! Wake up!
(MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Whoever the hell he thinks he is, David Steele is the biggest story on the planet and we own every inch of it! Three quarters of the world will be watching US tonight...and for the foreseeable future. Having him loose out there endangers all of that. We can't risk over-exposure--

WALTER

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

AMANDA

Genie?

WALTER

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

AMANDA

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

WALTER

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

AMANDA

(fiddling with papers)
Yes? And what's that?

WALTER

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

AMANDA

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

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

WALTER

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

AMANDA

David Steele is the story.

WALTER

No. No, he's not.

(sips his drink)

He is *not* the story. And he is most definitely *not* who the story's about.

AMANDA

You're drunk.

WALTER

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

AMANDA

Uh-huh.

WALTER

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

AMANDA

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

WALTER

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

Amanda rises, comes around the desk.

AMANDA

What are you babbling about?

WALTER

History, Ms. Richards! History! It comes in here as the manifesting future, becomes the observed present, and leaves as the reported past. It marches in a straight line right through this room! But there's only one part of that journey that we can touch: the moment we're seeing it. A true journalist knows what he's looking at in that moment, and he knows how to grab it. He knows the difference between story and subject and more importantly, he knows the import of what he's observing. And that's what he writes. Those on the business side -- people like you, and, I guess, me lately -- see only the future.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

Or how much we think we can take out of the future. And that, Ms. Richards, is why you miss the story *and* what the story's about. You're looking in the wrong direction.

AMANDA

Mm-hmm. So who's it about? As you see it, I mean.

WALTER

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

AMANDA

And the story?

WALTER

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

AMANDA

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

WALTER

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

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

AMANDA

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

WALTER

That so?

AMANDA

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

WALTER
 (indicating the TV)
 Then how can you allow--

AMANDA
 Because I fix broken things, Mr.
 Pullen.

WALTER
 How are you fixing David Steele by
 perpetuating his delusion?

AMANDA
 It's not David Steele I was sent
 here to fix. But his delusion
 gave me exactly what I needed to
 repair what I was. At least in
 the short term.

Beat.

WALTER
 And what of the man?

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

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

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

Walter shakes his head slightly.

AMANDA
 Because of your march of history.
 The next story...the next
 "who"...will appear, and David
 Steele and his Jesus thing simply
 won't matter anymore. Oh, the
 faithful may try to hold on to
 some remnant of the hope they tried
 to pull from him, but the rest
 will move on to the next hot thing.
 (she laughs with
 realization)
 They'll "crucify" him on the cross
 of ratings, and he'll fade away
 into that reported past of yours,
 (MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)
nothing more than a footnote in
the annals of broadcasting.

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

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

She shrugs.

WALTER
I'm not sure I can do that.

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

Amanda gathers her computer and a few files, stuffs them
in her briefcase. She moves toward the door.

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

Walter drunkenly snaps to attention, clicks his heels, and
salutes. Amanda smiles, shakes her head, and exits.

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

As he pours another drink, the door opens and David Steele
enters. Walter immediately sets the glass down and steps
to David.

WALTER
How's Charlie?

DAVID
They're still evaluating. But not
good.

WALTER
Shit.

DAVID
Yes. Very.
(beat)
That harpy still here?

WALTER

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

DAVID

So I understand.

WALTER

What was it? With Charlie. Heart?

DAVID

He hadn't told you?
(off Walter's head
shake)
Cancer. End-stage Pancreatic.

WALTER

Oh, my God.

Walter realizes what he just said, but David just smiles,
lets it go.

WALTER

Is he...uh...

DAVID

Going to die?
(off Walter's nod)
Yes.

WALTER

You couldn't...you know...?

David ignores the implication, points at Walter's drink.

DAVID

Mind if I have one of those?

WALTER

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

DAVID

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

WALTER

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

As David pours himself a drink, Walter considers him a
moment, then...

WALTER

Mind if I ask you a question?

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

WALTER
 Yes.

DAVID
 Not sure.

WALTER
 Richards may have something to say
 about it.

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

WALTER
 Shoot.

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

Walter considers a moment.

WALTER
 Fuck her. Give 'em hell.
 (realizing)
 Well...not literally, but...

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

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

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

WALTER
 Absolutely.

David exits. Walter smiles to himself, sets his glass
 down, then moves to his desk. He sits, picks up the phone
 and dials.

WALTER
 Yes.
 (MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)
 Jefferson Hospital?...I'm calling
 to inquire about the condition of
 a patient...Charlie
 Nims...N.I.M.S....Yes, I'll wait...
 (long beat)
 Yes...Charlie Nims, yes...
 (stunned)
 He did? How long ago?

Walter slumps back in his chair.

Scene 12

David and Patricia sit at opposite ends of their couch at home.

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

DAVID
 You almost didn't.

PATRICIA
 Horde of converts, was there?

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

PATRICIA
 (disparagingly)
 Like a wastrel rock star.

DAVID
 Hardly.
 (turns, reaches for
 her hand)
 But I wanted to see you before--

Patricia rises quickly, avoiding his touch.

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

DAVID
 I never meant--

PATRICIA
 Do you know a woman at the market
 yesterday called me Mary Magdelene?
 Went on and on about how blessed
 it must be to live with "the Lord".
 (MORE)

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Followed me all the way out to the car wanting to pray with me. Nearly had to run her over to get out of the lot.

Beat.

DAVID

I'm so sorry, Patricia.

PATRICIA

(turns to look at him)

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

DAVID

Not much choice on that.

PATRICIA

Oh, bollocks!

DAVID

Something had to be done and--

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

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

PATRICIA

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

DAVID

Pat--

PATRICIA
 (frustrated, but
 not angry)
 I WANT MY DAVID BACK! I want my
 life -- *our* lives -- back the way
 they were!

She sits next to him. He puts his arm around her.

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

DAVID
 I know, I know.

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

David holds her tighter as she clings to him. His eyes
 drift upward and he stares at the ceiling.

Scene 13

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

Walter appears from behind the news set backdrop.

WALTER
 All set? Couple of minutes, now.

DAVID
 Little nervous, actually.

WALTER
 Yeah. Me too.

David smiles up at Walter.

DAVID
 Don't worry. No hellfire tonight.

WALTER
 Oh, good.
 (MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

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

DAVID

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

WALTER

I did what you asked. Everyone's
on board.

DAVID

Then it's going to be fine.

WALTER

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

DAVID

Yes...I swung by there on my way
in from home. And you're
right...this isn't the appropriate
time. How about after the broadcast
when we can address it properly?

WALTER

Sure. Sure. I'll be upstairs.

David turns to Walter as he slips on his jacket.

DAVID

And Walter...thank you for
everything.
(beat)
We're both grateful.

Walter stares worriedly and mouths "Both?" as a smiling
David turns around to face the camera. Walter then exits.

In the office, Amanda looks at her watch, then slowly walks
to the TV monitor. She stands with arms crossed, then
pulls out her smartphone, punches and studies.

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

WALTER

Big night for you.

AMANDA

For Conrad Communications, you mean.

WALTER

Sure. He going to be watching Conrad?

AMANDA

He's always watching.

Walter looks at her, then glances nervously around the room, takes a long pull of his drink.

WALTER

Is he?

AMANDA

(indicating David)
How's our boy?

WALTER

Which one?
(off Amanda's
withering look)
He's fine.

AMANDA

He better be.
(looks at her phone)
Real-time Neilsons are showing a ninety share with five minutes to go. We have nearly every pair of eyes on the planet. Talk about your history.

Walter sits on a side chair.

WALTER

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

AMANDA

How can a ninety share and million-dollar thirties be a mistake?

WALTER

Because while you have control of what happens in here -- the metrics and the money and the spin -- you have absolutely no control over what happens...
(indicates David)
...out there. And it's out there the real power resides.

Amanda picks up a radio intercom handset.

AMANDA

This is where the power sits, Pullen. In my hand. He goes one millimeter off that prompter script and I radio the control room to the pull the plug. Hollenbeck's in the green room.

WALTER

Hollenbeck? I thought he was stuck in Cincinnati...

AMANDA

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

(off Walter's stare)

I don't know which is sadder:

(indicating David)

His delusion or you under-estimating me.

(beat, then adamantly)

Steele runs my program or we yank him. Forever.

Walter smiles and sips his drink.

WALTER

So smart and yet so naive...

Amanda looks at him, about to speak, when...

News show music open plays, but it's a little different...perhaps more insistent, perhaps played on a church organ...

ANNOUNCE (V.O.)

And now, World News with Christ the Lord. Here is...Jesus Christ.

The lights come up full on David, who looks up into the camera.

DAVID

My apologies for that bit. Not my doing. I do think, however, that it is, in some odd way, indicative of the problem...why I identified myself as I did in the first place.

Amanda speaks into the radio.

AMANDA

Get him on the damn script!

DAVID

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

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

DAVID

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

As David turns back to the prompter...

AMANDA

(into radio)

Goddamn it! Cut him off! Go to commercial, NOW! Get Hollenbeck.

But David continues...as does the broadcast.

DAVID

Since my announcement last Friday--

AMANDA

I said cut it off!

DAVID

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

AMANDA

(turning to Walter,
still into the
radio)

What the hell are you guys doing down there?!? Cut him off!

DAVID

Or if David Steele has lost his mind.

WALTER

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

DAVID

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

AMANDA

Goddamn it! I'll drag him off myself!

Amanda throws the radio to the floor and marches out of the room. Walter sips his drink, and looks at the monitor, smiling broadly.

WALTER

Good luck.

DAVID

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

(beat)

But why is that true only if you can fall on your knees and worship even the hint of a presence such as I claimed...if you build statues and paint works of art, or capture my image on stained glass windows at the First Church of David Steele? The truth is, it isn't. Because you see, that would be worshipping the medium, not the message...the form, not the substance. And that's the mistake we've already made. We've been bowing down to the messenger, not the message. And the message here is not that I am Jesus Christ, or God...David Steele is only the medium. The message is that I am nothing more than you, and we are our neighbors, and all of US -- interlocked and interdependent -- are this world. You think you need a Savior, but you fail to see that YOU are the Saviors...YOU have the power to make the difference. You just have to come to your senses, drop your petty distractions -- including me -- and decide that enough is enough, that there very clearly is a right and a wrong, and there is a benefit and a detriment to everything we do and you must work toward spreading the benefit side of that equation to the broadest and deepest effect.

(beat)

I am not the answer. I never was. I'm just an old newsman who, after thirty-five years of sitting in this chair and watching the endless and increasing unraveling of just about everything, felt he had to do something -- anything -- to try

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

and make a difference. I announced my divinity only to get your attention. To wake you up. I hope, now that you are at least *aware*, that will be enough. So now, I will take my leave. Forget me. You don't need a "me" anymore. Where we all go from here is up to all of us. Do not fear being alone, for you are not. We all have each other. Let's put our faith in *that*, in *ourselves*. I promise you...together, we can accomplish anything.

(beat)

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

(beat)

This is...David Steele. Good night and goodbye.

David smiles into the camera, then his head suddenly drops and hangs a moment. When he raises it, he smiles, stands, and exits.

In his office, Walter stares at the TV monitor.

WALTER

Well, son of a bitch.
(raises his glass)
Way to go, sir.

Walter quaffs the rest of his drink, rises and moves to the bar to refill it, laughing to himself all the way.

As he reaches the bar, Amanda storms in.

AMANDA

I'm going to kill him!

WALTER

Uh-huh.

AMANDA

That bastard just blew the biggest broadcast bonanza in history.

WALTER

What he did was give us back our credibility.

AMANDA

He wants to exit being Jesus?
Fine.

(MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)

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

David enters.

WALTER

(quickly)
Uh...now's not a good time, David.

DAVID

Oh. Shall I...?

AMANDA

No. Come right on in.

DAVID

I assumed you'd want to see me.

AMANDA

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

David turns to Walter at the bar.

DAVID

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

WALTER

Scotch?

DAVID

Perfect.

Walter pours. David slips out of his jacket, sets it on
the back of a chair.

DAVID

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

Amanda's frustration seems to overwhelm her to the point
that words won't come. She kind of deflates in the face
of David's calmness. She leans against Walter's desk.

AMANDA

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

DAVID

The world didn't need us telling
it what to do, what to believe.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

They just needed someone to remind them of who they are. They'll be fine without you and me meddling in things any further.

AMANDA

It wasn't your call.

DAVID

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

WALTER

How did you know tha--?

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

AMANDA

Richards.

(she stands up)

Yes sir...I know, sir. He...Yes, it was. Highest ratings ever...Thank you, sir...I will, sir, I'll tell him... Immediately, yes, first flight.

Amanda slowly drops the phone, punches off the call. She looks at David.

AMANDA

(to David)

Mr. Conrad said "slick move".

DAVID

Really.

AMANDA

And you're fired.

WALTER

Now, wait a minute--

DAVID

Actually, I was going to resign.

WALTER

Don't be stupid, David.

DAVID

No. It's time for me to exit.

WALTER

So retire, but at least do it so
you can get the severance. You
have a hell of a parachute.

David shrugs. Amanda begins to gather her things.

DAVID

So...what now?

AMANDA

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

(to Walter)

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

DAVID

Good for you, Walter.

AMANDA

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

DAVID

And you?

AMAND

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

WALTER

You'll fit right in down there.

AMANDA

That's what Mr. Conrad said.

As Amanda reaches the door, she turns...

AMANDA

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

Charlie Nims suddenly appears behind Amanda in the doorway.

CHARLIE

Thank you. I think.

WALTER

Charlie!

AMANDA

My God! You're alive? I was under
the impression...

WALTER

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

CHARLIE

Not feeding the worms just yet.

AMANDA

Obviously.

Charlie steps into the room. Walter grabs him in a bear
hug.

WALTER

Goddamn, it's good to see you
vertical!

DAVID

Yes. Welcome back, old friend.

WALTER

How do you feel?

CHARLIE

I...feel fine, actually. A little
strange...

AMANDA

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

CHARLIE

Leaving us so soon, are you?

Amanda gives a weary smile.

AMANDA

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

And Amanda exits.

DAVID

Good riddance.

WALTER

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

Walter exits.

CHARLIE

I missed a few things, I take it.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

You went back on the air?

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

(smiles)

Fessed up, did you?

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

So it was all a game.

David just smiles, picks up his jacket to go.

CHARLIE

(indicating the bar)

Join me for a cocktail before you go?

DAVID

No. Thanks. I promised Patricia I'd come home directly after the broadcast. Already late. She'll be worried.

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

CHARLIE

You think you made a difference with all this?

DAVID

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

David moves to the door.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

Not at all.

(Beat)

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

Mm-hmm.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

No explanation?

CHARLIE

Nope.
(beat)
There's more.

DAVID

Yes?

CHARLIE

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

David remains silent, looking at Charlie.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

An egregious error, it seems.

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

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

DAVID

Interesting story.

CHARLIE

It is, isn't it?

(beat)

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

A long beat. David looks at the floor while considering, then his eyes rise to meet Charlie's.

DAVID

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

CHARLIE

What's that?

DAVID

Always good to have friends in high places.

David smiles and shrugs, opening his hands to the sky. He then turns and exits, leaving Charlie staring at the empty door.

CHARLIE

(disbelievingly)

Oh...My...Lord...

BLACK OUT

THE END

