

Constant State of Panic

by  
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Characters: (2m, 2w)

Dave Tamzah: a white guy in his 30s/40s. Afraid of everything.

Sonia Tamzah: married to Dave. A black woman in her 30s/40s. Not afraid of anything except of losing Dave.

Jim Willoughby: white man, 30-60s, various roles. An agent of the government.

Jenny Masterson: white woman, 20s-40s. A TV reporter.

Martha: offstage Bible lady, played by same actress as Jenny.

Offstage Voice: Can be read by actor who plays Jim.

Time: The Bush Years. (Or perhaps the very near future.)

Place: America.

Setting: Dave and Sonia's house.

## Constant State of Panic

### Act I

Setting: The living room and kitchen of a modest middle-class house. There should be a front door with a mail slot, a window, the usual kitchen appliances (esp. a large refrigerator), a couch, maybe a recliner, a telephone, a lamp or two, and the frame of a large television.

Rise: DAVE enters through the front door, closes it, breathing hard, as if he's been chased. He tries to calm himself with some deep breaths, but it doesn't work. He's a bundle of nervous energy. He tosses down his bag, paces, clicks on the television. (He's a white guy in his 30s/40s)

A slow and steady drip of mail starts to flow through the slot in the front door. Dave picks up and sorts through the mail, while also watching the television. He's in constant motion.

JENNY appears on the television (she should be live, standing in the frame of the TV. She should NOT be on video).

#### JENNY

Today on Nine News at Five: have terrorists stolen your identity, used it to buy deadly nerve gas on the internet, and poisoned the water supply in order to bring America to a standstill? It could happen, and it could happen to you. Find out how. And, in case you're just joining us, within the past hour a downtown office building has been gutted by a massive explosion. The crew of Chopper Nine is on its way to bring you live, undigested footage of the carnage. Is this an accident or an incident of fiendish domestic terrorism? You can count on Nine News to bring you the--

Dave turns off the TV.

He picks up the phone, starts to make a call, puts the phone back down.

It rings. He hesitates, then answers.

DAVE

Hello? Yes. No, we don't. You're right, crime is on... We just don't have any money to spare right now. The Police Benevolent Fund is very important, I realize, but... Sorry.

He hangs up. Back to the mail, which continues to flow in through the front door.

The phone rings again.

DAVE (cont'd)

Cancer? Right. Not today. No, we just don't have any... Sorry.

He hangs up. More mail.

The phone RINGS again.

DAVE (cont'd)

Orphans. Yes. Well... I wish we could, but...

Hangs up. It RINGS again.

DAVE (cont'd)

Yes. I mean, No. No, it's not. There's no David Tamzah here. I'm not him. They moved. He's not here.

Hangs up. It RINGS again. Keeps RINGING. The mail keeps flowing.

Dave reaches under the couch and pulls out a baseball bat and smashes the phone to little bits.

The mail keeps flowing.

Dave pushes the pieces of the phone into a little pile, and covers them with a pillow or something.

Dave finds a roll of duct tape. He tapes the mail slot shut, which takes a fair bit of effort on his part.

Dave exits with the baseball bat. We hear more smashing from off stage. He returns and returns the bat to its spot under the couch. Then he unplugs the fridge and any other appliances he can find, including the lamps.

He collects all the mail and puts it in a trash can.

Dave paces in the semi-darkness.

SONIA enters. She tries to turn on the lights but nothing happens.) (She's a black woman, in her 30s.)

SONIA  
Hello?

DAVE  
Hi.

SONIA  
Hi.

They embrace, with a fierceness that surprises them both.

SONIA (cont'd)  
Okay. Okay. What's wrong with the lights?

DAVE  
Nothing. I unplugged them.

SONIA  
Why?

DAVE  
I didn't think it was... safe, to be so connected, to everything out there. Not right this second. Not now.

SONIA  
It's kind of dark in here.

DAVE  
Your eyes will adjust. We have plenty of daylight left. I'll clean the windows. That should help. Cleaning.

Dave gets off the couch and finds some windex and paper towels and starts carefully cleaning the window.

Sonia opens the refrigerator.

SONIA  
(beat) Dave, the fridge is unplugged.

DAVE

I had to. If we use electricity, then it's obvious that we're here. If they know we're here, well, then, that could be a problem.

She plugs the fridge back in and takes out a soda.

SONIA

Where's the phone?

DAVE

Why?

SONIA

I need to check the voice mail. Where's the phone?

DAVE

Um.

Sonia exits. Dave unplugs the fridge.

Sonia returns and finds the pile of phone pieces.

SONIA

Dave. Explain.

DAVE

It just seemed... I had to.

SONIA

Did someone call?

DAVE

Not since I smashed it.

SONIA

But before?

DAVE

It wouldn't stop ringing. They all had very worthy causes. They want to help make things better, because things need to get better, Sonia. You know they do. The world is in a heap of trouble.

Sonia pulls out her cell phone to make a call. He approaches her.

SONIA

Don't even think about touching my cell phone.

DAVE

Sonia, this is an electronic free zone.

SONIA

Since when?

DAVE

Today.

SONIA

And why today?

DAVE

Because I... I want us to be safe.

SONIA

Our appliances are not going to come to life and kill us.

DAVE

They're killing us just the same. Noise pollution, freon, radio waves. Power generators cause global warming which causes the ocean levels to rise. The Maldives and Tuvalu are drowning. Something needs to be done.

SONIA

It doesn't need to be done by us, and it doesn't need to be done today.

DAVE

Don't you ever sometimes just... feel... an overwhelming urge to take action?

SONIA

Then join Greenpeace or something. Don't unplug the damn refrigerator.

She plugs it back in.

DAVE

Electric toothbrushes have electrocuted four people so far this year. I could be next.

SONIA

Throw it out.

DAVE

But I like the way it cleans my teeth. All smooth, like I've just been to the dentist.

SONIA

So keep it. Live dangerously.

DAVE

Carjackers yanked a guy from his car at gunpoint yesterday. Kicked him in the head and stole his car. Broad daylight. Lucky he wasn't killed.

SONIA

Take the subway.

DAVE

The city took all the trash cans off the subway platforms. So nobody drops a bomb into one. It happened in Madrid, Moscow, Tel Aviv. It could happen here. We're at code orange. We need to stay one step ahead of them, because they're looking for our weak spots, probing for the soft underbelly.

SONIA

And trash cans were our weak spot?

DAVE

One of many. There's still the nuclear power plants. The harbors. Rogue nukes. The world is teetering on the edge, waiting for a push in the wrong direction.

SONIA

Maybe it's already been pushed. You don't... What do you see, Dave? Look at me. Do you see me standing here? Am I a danger to you?

DAVE

No. You're the one thing.

SONIA

Did you have a bad day today?

DAVE

That would be an understatement. We should really--

SONIA

Well, you're not the only one. I had day with just too much... everything. A monumental day. And I need you to keep it together for the rest of the night. Please?

DAVE

I'm together.

SONIA

I'm serious. Bottle it in, clamp it down. Whatever it takes. Nothing in this house is going to hurt you. Take a deep breath. You'll be fine. I'll be fine. We'll be fine. Breathe. Let's take a few deep breaths, all right? Come on.

They both do some deep breathing.



SONIA (cont'd)  
Good. We're okay, now, right?

DAVE  
Right.

SONIA  
I need to get changed. What should we do for dinner?

Sonia exits.

DAVE  
No delivery. They don't keep the food hot enough to kill bacteria.

A loud knock at the door. Dave looks at it suspiciously.

More knocking.

SONIA  
(from offstage)  
Dave, can you answer the door?

Dave gets his baseball bat and stares at the door.

More knocking.

SONIA (cont'd)  
Dave! There's someone at the door.

DAVE  
I've got it. (to door) Who is it?

VOICE  
Government business. Open the door.

Dave takes a deep breath and cautiously opens the door. JIM stands there in white coveralls, bristling with tools and meters.

JIM  
David Tamzah?

DAVE  
Yes.

JIM  
Tamzah. What kind of name is that anyway?



JIM

If we tell you we're coming, then we can't assess your normal state of readiness.

DAVE

Readiness for what?

Jim checks off something on his clipboard.

JIM

It's a sad commentary on the state of our citizenry and media that you would feel comfortable asking such a question.

DAVE

I try to keep up.

JIM

We're at war, man. Terrorism. Iraq. Afghanistan. Drugs. Obesity. Poverty. Ignorance. Immorality. We're at war with them all, and they're at war with YOU.

Jim examines the door.

JIM (cont'd)

You need a peephole. And a better lock. Never let a stranger inside your house. Absolute rule there. You never know who a stranger might be, or where he's from, or what he might do.

DAVE

Hence the term.

JIM

Exactly.

DAVE

What's your name again?

JIM

Jim Willoughby, Special Agent, Fourth Class.

Jim starts poking a detector in the electrical outlets.

DAVE

What's that?

JIM

These outlets aren't properly grounded. One short circuit, and poof! Your whole house goes up in flames. How do you sleep at night?

DAVE

I don't. Not much. But I've unplugged everything electrical. Except the fridge.

JIM

With your wiring, that's a good idea. You work at Cyplex Software, right?

DAVE

How would you know where--

JIM

If you use computers at home, you need to be grounded. Do you look things up on the internet? Recipes, plans, schemes?

DAVE

Maybe.

JIM

Grounding. Critical. Otherwise everything is fried. You are ungrounded.

DAVE

I never thought--

Jim breaks out a roll of tape and starts sealing the windows.

JIM

Why aren't these windows sealed?

DAVE

Should they be?

Jim waves an electronic device in the air.

JIM

I'm checking for contaminants. Ever have explosives in here?

DAVE

Of course not.

JIM

It's in the air. Don't you read the papers? What if they use poison gas? Where's your air purifier?

DAVE

We don't have one yet.

JIM

Why don't you just take this taser and give yourself a jolt, since you don't seem to fear pain and suffering.

DAVE

Oh, I have plenty of fear.

JIM

That's what they all say. "We're careful. We worry. We obsess." As if you can have enough safety, enough fear. You only get one life in this world, pal. If you want to waste yours, go ahead. But your president and your government are here to protect you and the rest of America from the Forces of Evil.

DAVE

You're my guardian angel?

JIM

Exactly. We're the angels. They're the devils. Simple as that. Black and white. Do you have a safe room?

DAVE

Not yet. I started digging a shelter in the back yard.

JIM

Just make sure you get a radon test before you get all nice and cozy in there. You can't see it, smell it, taste it, or sense it in any way, but it'll kill you.

Sonia enters.

JIM (cont'd)

Holy, mother of Jesus!

Jim dives for cover.

SONIA

Dave?

Jim emerges with taser drawn.

JIM

Freeze!

Sonia and Dave quickly raise their hands in the air.

SONIA

What the hell?

JIM

Don't make a move, sister. Sir, did you know there's a black woman in your home?

DAVE

This is my wife. You'd better put that down right this second.

Jim lowers his weapon and makes a note on his clipboard.

SONIA

David, why is there a strange white man with a weapon in our living room? (to Jim) How dare you raise a weapon to me. Who are you?

JIM

Jim Willoughby, office of Homeland Security, Inspections Division, Urban Homedweller Pod, Mid-Atlantic Branch.

SONIA

What are you doing here?

JIM

I'm inspecting your house, ma'am.

Jim takes a device off his toolbelt and starts passing it over the couch and television and elsewhere.

SONIA

(to Dave) What is he doing here?

DAVE

Assessing our readiness.

JIM

In case of attack, it is the legal duty of every American to be prepared and protected. Our department is assessing every home in America to ensure we are not caught unawares.

SONIA

Unaware of what?

JIM

Exactly. See. You are unaware.

DAVE

Mr. Willoughby. I think you should go now.

JIM

Our citizens are exposed to a huge variety of hazards, but ignorance and complacency are the most deadly.

Jim exits to the bedroom.

SONIA

Did you arrange this?

DAVE

Absolutely not. He just--

SONIA

Oh, good lord. What is he...

She storms off. Dave uses the leftover tape and starts sealing the window. Sonia enters pushing Jim in front of her.

SONIA (cont'd)

Get out of my bedroom.

JIM

You have so many books on your shelves, but I didn't see a copy of the Bible. Do you have a copy of the Bible in your home? (to Dave) Do you have a manifesto?

SONIA

It's time for you to go.

Sonia starts pushing him out.

JIM

I'm just getting started.

SONIA

No, you're finished.

JIM

You're not ready, you're not afraid.

SONIA

That's right. I'm not.

Jim sees that she's deadly serious. Perhaps makes a note on his clipboard.

JIM

Ma'am, that will have to change.

SONIA

Get out of my house.

JIM

This is urgent government business. Mr. Tamzah and I should have a little heart-to heart. I need to--

SONIA  
Out you go.

Together, Dave and Sonia push Jim out and lock the door. Dave goes back to sealing the cracks around the window and door.

SONIA (cont'd)  
What are you doing?

DAVE  
Sealing up the cracks. We need to get a better lock. And a peephole.

SONIA  
Don't listen to that lunatic.

DAVE  
He was just doing his job.

SONIA  
A little too well, I think.

DAVE  
We need to be more prepared.

SONIA  
Don't let him in again.

DAVE  
I won't.

SONIA  
I'm serious. He'll be back.

DAVE  
You think so? What does he know?

SONIA  
He's not trying to help us.

DAVE  
Help might not even be possible.

SONIA  
Don't let them in.

A loud knocking at the door. They don't move.

A tremendous BANGING on the door.



MARTHA

Hellooooo. Hellooooooo?

A REALLY LOUD BANGING at the door,  
followed by a woman's voice (can be  
played by the same actress as Jenny).

MARTHA (cont'd)

(sweetly)

Anyone home? Hello! I understand you don't have a Bible in  
your home.

SONIA

Go away.

MARTHA

I just wanted to ensure you have a copy of the Holy Book.  
It's completely free, 100% government certified. Everyone  
needs to have one. By law. So if you'll just open the door.

Knock on the door again.

SONIA

Don't open it.

Dave heads towards the door. Banging  
on door grows louder.

DAVE

I suppose she could be a religious terrorist.

SONIA

Exactly. Who knows what she's got strapped underneath her  
skirts. (to door) Go away.

MARTHA

We're just trying to provide comfort in this time of peril.

DAVE

Sorry, we're not interested.

Martha pushes the duct tape away from  
the mail slot and pushes through a  
Bible. Martha presses her mouth up  
against the slot.

MARTHA

You can let me in. I won't do you any harm.

DAVE

(to Sonia) You have to admire her courage.

MARTHA

I just want to talk to you about the Good Word.

DAVE

(to Martha) You're taking quite a risk, you know. Going from house to house, strangers at every door.

MARTHA

The Lord is my shepherd. I walk in comfort and safety, knowing He is with me. The Lord watches over every sparrow.

DAVE

But what if He stops paying attention for a second, and you end up in the house of some whacko?

Did you ever see a sparrow get eaten by a hawk? Suddenly out of the sky, POW! Now the sparrow is just a little puff of feathers. Squirming, warm hawk food.

The Lord was watching out for the sparrow, but apparently He was also giving a hand to the hawk. Which are you? Hawk or sparrow?

MARTHA

I'm a sparrow, just like you.

DAVE

Most of the time I think I'm a sparrow. But does the hawk even recognize himself? Maybe that's me but I don't even know it. Or won't admit it.

MARTHA

Open up and we can read psalms together. The word of the Lord is just what you need in these troubled times. "Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will extend peace like a river."

SONIA

Take your river somewhere else, lady.

Sonia shoves the Bible back through the mail slot and grabs the tape and tapes it more securely this time. As she does this, Martha screams the following:

MARTHA

Behold the Lord will come in fire, with his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire! For the Lord will execute judgment by fire and his sword on all flesh, and those slain by the Lord shall be many.

Sudden quiet from behind the door.

DAVE

Not exactly comforting.

SONIA

Yeah.

DAVE

And today, comfort would have been... I need to tell you something... Sonia, I got fired today.

SONIA

Oh, Dave.

DAVE

There's more. And this is... I...

SONIA

Fired as in, they laid off half the IT department, or fired as in you didn't keep the things in your head that are supposed to stay in your head?

DAVE

I've been raising a few safety concerns about our building, which is a firetrap, full of microwaves and computers and a cafeteria crawling with bacteria. The security guards are half asleep at the doors, where someone with a gun could walk in pick off the guards, then move on to the employees like target practice, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. I raised these issues, but no one paid attention. They're all part of the system. They just put in a bottled water machine. In the bottle factories, there are chemicals added to the plastic, possibly late at night, by shadowy figures, and we all just become more and more passive. We crave comfort, even at work, all while we tighten the nooses around our necks.

SONIA

You said this?

DAVE

Calmly. I said it very calmly. I'm speaking fast now, because I'm telling you, and I'm agitated. And I've been informing them by e-mail, with links to articles, attachments. For months and months I've been warning them. But without capitals, because I don't want to ALARM people. Inform. Inspire. But not necessarily ALARM.

SONIA

Was it a graceful exit?

DAVE

Well, that's part of the problem. I've worked there for seven years. I deserve a better hearing when I bring up issues of safety.

(MORE)

DAVE (cont'd)

If these warnings are ignored, something could happen. Something very bad. You'd think they'd offer some sort of commendation, right? It's like that guy said, Willoughby--I wanted to do my civic duty. I'm a good citizen. I wanted to protect people.

SONIA

I know that.

DAVE

They refused to listen. Denial, denial, denial.

SONIA

Maybe if you had used a different tone, or tactics. It doesn't matter, if you just go back and--

DAVE

Not just ignorance, but aggressive ignorance. Because if they paid attention, that would bring a level of responsibility, and responsibility requires action. Action can be scary.

SONIA

Did you scare the people at work, Dave?

DAVE

That's what we need to talk about.

SONIA

Whatever you said, it can be retracted.

DAVE

Not this time.

SONIA

Let things cool off. They need you, right? You're indispensable. Shit, Dave. You're supposed to let that stuff come out at home, not at work. We've discussed this.

DAVE

I'm sorry.

SONIA

After last time, you promised you'd--

DAVE

I know. And I messed up. Big time.

SONIA

I am not happy with you, Dave.

DAVE

I know. I understand. But listen--

SONIA

Of all the.... This is not the right day. Not today.

DAVE

I need to tell you what-- [I've done]

SONIA

Shhh.

She puts a hand to his lips.

SONIA (cont'd)

Don't. Not right now. Okay? Let's just...

She puts her arms around him and they hold each other.

SONIA (cont'd)

We can... I don't know. I can't think. My brain has turned to mush. I have so much... I don't feel good. My stomach. I need food. That's what it is. I'm going to order Chinese.

DAVE

Sonia. Please listen. At work today...

SONIA

No. I'm in no condition to talk about this right now. Okay? Please. You're not the only one who had a hard day. I came home hoping we could talk about... But that's all right, life is complicated. But I need a clear head. If I eat, I will be able to think. And we will craft a solution.

Sonia pulls out her cell phone and dials.

SONIA (cont'd)

Hello? Yes. An order of Kung Pao chicken, and?

DAVE

Vegetarian chow foon. No MSG.

SONIA

Vegetable chow foon noodles. No MSG. No. No MSG. No. No MSG. Right. None. 19 Parkway. Fine. (she hangs up)  
Twenty minutes.

DAVE

Okay.

SONIA

Until then, don't talk to me. Okay.

Okay.

DAVE

Sonia exits.

Dave watches her go, considers going after her, but thinks better of it. He plugs in and switches on the television. He sits on the couch to watch.

Jenny, as a news anchor, appears at the tv screen.

JENNY

Coming up at eleven, life and death in the kitchen--hidden bacteria that can kill you. And this afternoon our city saw yet another incident of workplace violence. Is it still safe to go to work, school, church, or shopping?

DAVE

Is it?

JENNY

Stay tuned.

DAVE

I know the answer.

JENNY

After the commercials, I'll tell everyone. Then they'll know. They'll know, Dave. They'll know. They'll know. They'll know. Need to Know News on Nine. Has a nice ring, doesn't it?

DAVE

It's kind of long.

JENNY

The news director wanted "Always Apocalypse." But "apocalypse" is a long word and who can spell it anyway.

DAVE

Do you sleep at night?

JENNY

Like a baby.

DAVE

I don't sleep. Not so well.

JENNY

Sleeplessness on the rise--are you at risk from an industrial accident? Bus drivers, crane operators, airline pilots--all short on critical sleep. Could a sleepy driver end your life? Don't worry, we'll have a human interest story later in the show: a three-legged dog who's nursing a litter of kittens. And Marty's going to do the weather from the garden show, dressed as a daffodil. (to Dave) I started in weather--for most people it's either up or out--not many can stomach the constant humiliation.

DAVE

So you moved up.

JENNY

Sky high.

DAVE

You handle humiliation better than I do.

JENNY

That's putting it mildly. Someone took a giant leap up the food chain today, didn't he?

Jenny crawls out of the television and over to Dave. He brandishes the remote control like a weapon, but she ignores it and sits next to him on the couch.

DAVE

Get back. Go... back in there. Go on.

JENNY

You don't really mean that. See, I possess a down-to-earth friendliness that encourages people to welcome me into their living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms. The women see me as a slightly better-looking, thinner version of their friends. And the men, well, I appear chaste, but not so much that you can't imagine us...

She's snuggled next to Dave and is nibbling at his ear.

JENNY (cont'd)

It's time for you to show me a proper welcome, Dave.

She whispers a suggestion in his ear.

DAVE

I don't think that would be a very good idea.

JENNY

Completely off the record, of course.

DAVE

No, thanks.

JENNY

But I'm lively. Didn't you see me cooking fried clams at the diner? Or sliding down the pole at the fire house? Running the 10K for breast cancer? Dog grooming? I'm fun, fun, fun. You think it's easy to tell people bad news all the time? Evil and danger are lined up around the block. We just give you the teeniest, tiniest, itsy bitsy, little taste of the crushing wall of pain that's about to fall on you.

DAVE

You should go back now. I don't want you here. I didn't--

She crawls on top of him and straddles him.

JENNY

That's what they all say. You want a harmless little flirtation, maybe even a brush of lips to lips, our breath intermingling, a hand in my hair. But it's not harmless, is it? Harm has been done. You don't understand--once I'm here, I want to go for a RIDE.

She pulls his face close to hers.

JENNY (cont'd)

And once I'm on board, we are going for that ride until I'm satisfied. And I'm not satisfied until you beg for mercy.

DAVE

Get off.

He tries to push her off--they roll onto the floor. She has a strong grip on his ankle and during the following she tries to drag him into the TV with her.

JENNY

Feisty. I like that. But also unrealistic, disrespectful and elitist. Too good for me? You don't get to make the rules, see? Once you're in the game, you play by my rules. Got it?

DAVE

I'm not in the game.

JENNY

Oh, we're all in the game. And especially someone like you. Sweetie. Lover. You like it rough, don't you? Oh, no, come back here. I don't let go easily.

(MORE)



JENNY (cont'd)

On TV, they look like fingers, but they're claws. Ask anyone. There are plenty out there with scars to prove it. Come on, sugar bear, it's time to get you in front of the cameras.

DAVE

Go back where you came from. I didn't seek you out. I made a mistake, that's all.

JENNY

Which is it? You want me, you listen to me, you disown me? Which is it? Which is it? Do you love me?

DAVE

No. I love Sonia.

JENNY

That's what they say. I love my wife. The other stuff was just--what? Physical? Meta-physical? Media? The rest was just the news-cycle, honey. Cast me off like a ten-dollar crack whore. But when the storm blows in, and it is coming, don't kid yourself, loverboy, when it comes you're going to try to have it both ways--you're going to ignore me and blame me. "It wasn't me. It wasn't my fault. It was Jenny. Big, scary, Jenny. Jenny with her non-stop gloom and doom, her litany of murder, rape, degradation, danger, danger, danger." YOU ARE THE ROOT OF HORRIBLE CATASTROPHE. (belches a huge belch) Sorry. Remnants of the last poor sap I ate for breakfast.

The doorbell RINGS.

DAVE

You need to go, now.

JENNY

Destiny's calling.

DAVE

It's just the Chinese.

JENNY

Oh, no. It's much more than that. You've been a bad boy, Dave.

Dave frees himself from Jenny's grip. During the following exchange, they should have a full-blown wrestling match, as he tries to get her back in the television.

The doorbell keeps ringing throughout the fight.

DAVE

You need to go back where you came from.

JENNY

Not likely.

DAVE

I don't want you here.

JENNY

Not consciously.

DAVE

Not subconsciously, unconsciously, or in any other way.

JENNY

I'm coming, whether you want me or not.

DAVE

Leave us alone.

JENNY

Don't blame this on me. You acted of your own free will.  
What did you expect?

DAVE

I didn't expect anything.

JENNY

Actions have consequences, Dave.

DAVE

I know that.

JENNY

I'm a consequence.

DAVE

You're going back.

JENNY

Staying.

DAVE

No. You. Are. Going. Away. Now.

He finally succeeds in tossing her back through the TV screen. He's breathing hard. Jenny straightens her hair and adjusts her clothes.

JENNY

I'm not done with you. Not even close. Enjoy your dinner.

Dave turns off the television and Jenny exits.

Sonia enters, confused by the chaos of the living room.

SONIA  
Dinner's here. Why aren't you answering the door?

DAVE  
Don't open it.

SONIA  
It's the Chinese. What happened in here?

DAVE  
Nothing. Nothing. Just... the door. Don't.

SONIA  
I'm starving. The food is here. I'm going to open the door.

Dave watches her, paralyzed with fear. Sonia unlocks the door. Jim Willoughby stands there, dressed as a delivery guy (over his agent clothes). He takes a long look inside and stares at Dave.

JIM  
Eighteen dollars.

Sonia hands him money and takes the dinner. As Sonia turns, Jim flashes Dave an "I'm watching you" hand sign, just before the door closes.

SONIA  
Thank God. I thought I was going to die.

She takes their dinner over to a coffee table by the couch. Dave is still standing, staring at the door.

SONIA (cont'd)  
Come eat.

DAVE  
I think they put MSG in it.

SONIA  
No. You heard me. I was very specific. Vividly clear. No MSG.

DAVE

Sometimes people don't listen. You tell them, clearly, specifically, but they don't listen. And bad things happen.

SONIA

Not this time. Come eat your noodles. We will eat, and then we will figure out how to solve all our problems. Jobs, the future, the health and safety of the world.

DAVE

Don't mock.

SONIA

I'm not mocking. I'm hungry. I just want to be fed. I want to be fed.

She starts eating. He joins her at the couch and looks at the noodles very cautiously.

Rather than eating his own dinner, he picks up his chopsticks (or fork) and starts to feed Sonia her dinner, gracefully, with the intimacy of people who have known each other a very long time.

SONIA (cont'd)

It's good. You should try it.

DAVE

I'm saving room for my noodles. But I'm not hungry. Not now.

SONIA

It'll be all right.

DAVE

That's your stomach talking. You're feeling better.

SONIA

I am. A little. Maybe still a little queasy. But it'll be all right. It'll be all right. It'll be all right.

DAVE

Your new mantra?

SONIA

It'll do, for now. (beat) Dave. I need to talk to you about... But. Is something... Lately, you've been, more than just distracted. And I... Do you even... Have you noticed anything, about me?

DAVE

What? I don't know. I mean...

SONIA

It's just... Lately. You don't look at me anymore.

DAVE

Of course I do.

SONIA

It's not just you. It's everyone. I'm invisible.

DAVE

Sonia.

SONIA

And not just because you're white. Black men don't have a very different concept of beauty. I'm not saying you don't love me. But do you see me?

DAVE

I see you.

SONIA

I don't know. I'm getting... older? I know I'm no covergirl, but sometimes I just wish...

DAVE

Have I ever asked you to look like you belong in a magazine?

SONIA

No.

DAVE

Do I close my eyes when we make love? No. I do look out the window every day after I get home from work, waiting for you to turn onto our street. My heart beats faster at the sight of you. At the thought of you.

SONIA

If we weren't already together, and you saw me, would you say, "Oh, man, what a beauty. That's the woman for me." Would you?

DAVE

I would. I am drawn to you. Always have been. Is that what's missing in your life? You want to turn heads? You don't think you're turning *my* head? I see you.

SONIA

No. That's not it.

DAVE  
No.  
SONIA  
I'm here for you. Can you be here for me? With me?

DAVE  
I'm here.

She looks at him long and hard,  
assessing.

There is a loud RUMBLING from outside.

SONIA  
Thunder.

Dave looks nervous. More RUMBLING.

SONIA (cont'd)  
I didn't know we were expecting a storm.

DAVE  
That's the thing, isn't it? The unexpectedness.

SONIA  
Sometimes we get surprised. That's the way life works,  
right? Just when you think you know what's happening.

DAVE  
Often. People aren't on guard.

SONIA  
No.

DAVE  
Not like they should be.

SONIA  
Dave. I'm pregnant.

DAVE  
What?

SONIA  
I saw the doctor today.

DAVE  
I thought your ovaries...

SONIA  
Apparently they do work every once in a while.

DAVE  
You're sure?

SONIA  
Yes. Which helps explain the moodiness, insatiable hunger, queasiness. All of it.

DAVE  
Wow.

SONIA  
Yeah.

DAVE  
That really... It just wasn't part of my thinking.

SONIA  
I know. Me neither.

DAVE  
Oh, man. I don't know what to...

Long silence.

SONIA  
I've been... When I think about everything that we've...  
It's just... I'm not sure that we should... have it.

DAVE  
No?

SONIA  
I don't know. The timing. Our lives. It just...

DAVE  
Childbirth comes with a lot of risk.

SONIA  
That occurred to me. And that you might mention it.

DAVE  
It used to be the leading cause of death for women.

SONIA  
Not anymore.

DAVE  
And then infancy. Talk about peril. Disease, drapery cords,  
dog bites. Autism is on the rise--no one knows why.

SONIA  
We could be careful.

DAVE

We could try. Lead paint on toys, mercury in the groundwater. Stuff they don't even tell us about. They hide it.

SONIA

And then there's you.

DAVE

Yes. Yes.

SONIA

I know you're not dangerous to anyone. Especially not to a baby.

DAVE

Not intentionally. Not purposefully. Not to a baby. I mean, mistakes can be made. Have been made. People get carried away.

SONIA

But keeping you... together. That's not always simple, Dave. And I don't complain, because I know you. I love you. We've always had... But how do we add... to the mix? And now. With you getting fired. You can find a new job, but until then we'll struggle. I'm up for the general manager position, but corporate has to be convinced that a penis and white skin are not required to run a major supermarket.

DAVE

You'll get it.

SONIA

A promotion would mean more money, but also more hours, less flexibility. Even if it was just you and me, it would be a challenge. But if...

DAVE

Poisonings, drownings, leukemia, sudden infant death syndrome. One minute they're fine, the next second, they're stiff in their cribs.

SONIA

Nothing like that would happen.

DAVE

It's a potential. Potentials do happen. People think everything is fine, and suddenly, WHAMMO!

More RUMBLING again. Distant sirens are heard from this point forward.



SONIA

What if this is our only chance?

DAVE

If it can happen once, maybe it could--

SONIA

What if it was just dumb luck?

DAVE

It could happen again. And we'd be ready.

SONIA

What if we're never ready?

DAVE

More ready. We could certainly be more ready. I don't know if we could be less ready.

SONIA

We've got seven or eight months. That's enough time for you to find a new job. Time for us to get our heads on straight.

DAVE

Not enough time for the world to transform into a place of peaceful sanity.

SONIA

The baby wouldn't be born in the world, Dave. It would be with us, here in our little nest.

DAVE

Our nest of meek sparrows.

SONIA

You know all the risks. You know what to watch out for. Who could better protect a child than you?

DAVE

Protect our fledgling from the hawks? The hawks never go hungry, Sonia.

SONIA

We could do it together. That's the thing, isn't it? It's a team effort. Together.

DAVE

What if I'm not here? What if something happens to me?

SONIA

Don't even talk like that.

DAVE

Sometimes there are... repercussions, for who or what we are, for how we act. Consequences. Actions have reactions.

SONIA

You're not going anywhere.

DAVE

You've seen the news. People vanish. They're taken. Rendition. A guy is walking down the street, and suddenly a black van pulls up, he's blindfolded, and four months later, he's dumped on the streets of Cairo. This isn't just a paranoid fantasy--these things happen.

SONIA

Not to us.

DAVE

What happens to you and a child if I'm not here?

SONIA

That's not going to happen.

DAVE

Sonia... I... I'm not sure how to [explain this]

SONIA

You could talk to someone.

DAVE

About what?

SONIA

To help you feel less... I always thought I could help you, but if that's not enough... I can check to see what our health insurance covers.

DAVE

Is that what you think? That I'm sick?

SONIA

No. No. But if you could talk to someone, a professional--

DAVE

I thought you understood. The truth. The truth about what's out there. What's all around us.

SONIA

I do, but--

DAVE

Just turn on the news. I didn't make the world the way it is. Paying attention does not mean there is something...

(MORE)

DAVE (cont'd)  
off balance in me. Paying attention may make me appear to be off balance, because that's the way the world is. We're on a ship at sea, rocking in the waves. We sway with the ship, and it may even make us seasick... but the sea is rocking the boat, not us. Not me.

SONIA  
Most people survive childhood and become adults. Even in war zones, in famine and drought, people survive.

DAVE  
Is that the goal? Survival? I would want more than that for our child. We need to do better.

SONIA  
We can.

DAVE  
You really want this, don't you?

SONIA  
I don't know what I want. I don't... Yes. I do.

DAVE  
Even if it doesn't make sense, given the state of the world, the state of us, the state of me?

SONIA  
Making sense might not be my criteria anymore, for anything.

DAVE  
That might be very wise.

SONIA  
What do you want?

DAVE  
I want you to be safe. I want to say I'm sorry for all the times I've messed up. Especially for the big ones, for one that might make everything into one big pile of misery.

SONIA  
None of that matters. We can figure it out.

DAVE  
And I want you to be happy. Sometimes I lose track of that. There is so much going on in the world, I just lose track. I want us to do what will make you happy.

SONIA  
Do you really mean it? That we should...

DAVE

We have time to think about it. Maybe you'll change your mind. But yes, I mean it. Because I know you, and I know you're serious.

SONIA

I am.

DAVE

Lately it seems like I only manage to make mistakes. But maybe not this time. Maybe we'll find a way.

SONIA

We will. I know we will.

Dave looks at his noodles again and gives them a sniff.

DAVE

You really think they left out the MSG?

Sonia starts taking some deep breaths.

DAVE (cont'd)

You okay?

SONIA

Fine.

DAVE

Is it the baby?

SONIA

No. No. I don't know. I'm not sure Kung Pao chicken was the best choice.

DAVE

Want some noodles?

SONIA

No. No. I'm... The last few days, my stomach has been...

DAVE

I'm sorry. I should have noticed, I... Are you sure you're okay?

SONIA

Yes. Fine. No. No. I don't feel so... Sorry, I have to...

She jumps off the couch and exits.

We hear retching and vomiting from  
offstage.

DAVE

Are you okay?

SONIA

(offstage)  
Fine. Just throwing up. They say it happens.

DAVE

Isn't that a morning thing?

SONIA

(offstage)  
Not for everyone.

More puking sounds.

Sirens louder.

More rumbling sounds.

Dave sits nervously on the couch,  
poised to go help Sonia.

Suddenly the empty couch cushion next  
to Dave flies into the air and Jim  
Willoughly slithers up from a hole in  
the base of the couch. Dave jumps off  
the couch in surprise, scrambling for  
his baseball bat.

DAVE

What the--

JIM

Mr. Tamzah, we need to have a talk.

DAVE

You... what are you...

Jim's all the way out now, and Dave  
watches him warily, bat at the ready.  
Jim has his taser out, pointed right at  
Dave.

JIM

Let's put the bat down, all right?

DAVE

Drop the taser.

JIM

I'm not going to hurt you. Whether you deserve it or not.

DAVE

What are you doing here?

JIM

I just want to talk to you. Before things get out of hand. Especially now that you have the whole pregnancy situation to deal with.

DAVE

How do you--

JIM

We hear things. We listen. Always listening. To help us protect America. If we're not listening, then nothing gets heard, and there's no protection. Get it?

DAVE

Are you here to take me away?

JIM

I'm here to make you an offer. Because the ones who really do want to take you away will be here any minute. And the shitstorm they're bringing has no speck of mercy. They don't care that your wife is pregnant. They don't care that you've tried to be a good citizen, or that you love America.

DAVE

I made a mistake. A big mistake.

JIM

Don't we all. See, I'm man enough to admit it. WMD. Mistake. Sort of. The pictures in Abu Ghraib. Big mistake. How do you think I got demoted down to home inspection? Not what the doctor ordered. Didn't make the Iraqis look very scary, did it? Made us look scary. We're not the scary ones, we're the good guys. We're spreading democracy and freedom for everyone. See, we're afraid of terrorists, shark attacks, poisonous spiders. But not freedom. You're not afraid of freedom, are you, Dave?

DAVE

No.

JIM

If you love freedom for you and your family, you'd better get your ass out of here in a hurry.

DAVE

What if I believe in justice, too?

JIM

Look, my job is more than just readiness assessment. I'm like a human cattle prod. My job is to spread alertness, to open the eyes of America a little wider. With a jolt. Sometimes other people can provide that jolt better than I can. People like you.

DAVE

People like me? No. It was--

JIM

An accident? An accident is when you spill your coffee or run over your neighbor's cat. That's not exactly what happened, is it?

DAVE

So it wasn't exactly an accident.

JIM

And now Sonia has a bun in the oven. Talk about accident.

DAVE

More of a surprise.

JIM

Is she going to keep it? She's up, she's down, she's all over town. Do you want the spotlight shining on that choice? Every life is precious. At least every American life. Not necessarily equally precious, especially if it's black and poor and in New Orleans. But that's not who died this time. Is it? So now the spotlight is swinging your way, Dave.

DAVE

That's not why I did it.

JIM

You and me, we both might get second chances here, see? It's not useful for us to have you and your family destroyed. And this early in a pregnancy... Sonia's not a kid, anymore -- stress and strain pose certain dangers. If you're here, the heat of the spotlight will burn more than just you. Don't fricassee your budding little family, Dave.

DAVE

What do you want from me?

JIM

It's not about me. It's about you. I'm here to offer a way out, an escape route.

DAVE

I can't just go. Not now.

JIM

Oh, you're going. One way or another. But this way, you help your family, and you help your country. One way, it looks like you were just another nutcase. A two-day blip on the evening news, and then we're back to crooked cops and politicians sleeping with call girls. But the other way, my way, is productive. People get caught up in the apparent solidity of facts, and they get complacent. And what is complacency?

DAVE

Danger.

JIM

Exactly. Complacency is three airliners lighting up firestorms of death and suffering over New York City and punching a flaming hole in the side of the Pentagon.

DAVE

You want me to disappear.

JIM

Not on your own. With me. It just... Here's an example. Take it as a hypothetical, if you like. Anthrax in the mail. Scary, right?

DAVE

Terrifying.

JIM

But let's say the bitter old lady sending out deadly envelopes from her home lab gets caught. Everyone goes back to their lives, and forgets all about it, right?

DAVE

It was a woman?

JIM

But if she can't be found, if there's no trace, then people just aren't sure. It could be anyone. Could be terrorists, or a neighbor, or a scientist. Anyone. When it works like that, people perk up and pay attention. They do as they're told. And that helps everyone. You want to help, don't you?

DAVE

I don't want everyone to feel afraid, I just want them to be safe.

JIM

Aren't you listening?

DAVE

Sonia's not afraid.



JIM

She will be.

DAVE

Let me think about it.

JIM

This is a limited time offer, Mr. Tamzah. Oh, they'll love that. "Tamzah." Hungarian? Yeah, see how that plays on the internet. Once "Tamzah" gets out, you might as well paint a big target on your living room window. Or hang a sign-- "bricks and molotov cocktails wanted. Insert here."

DAVE

If I... If Sonia's all on her own, then it'll be worse. If I'm here, then I can-- [help protect her]

JIM

No, no, no. See that's what you'd think. But there are ways to divert attention. The spotlight shines here for just a few minutes, but then we shift it away, over here, over there. But if you stay, they'll hang on to you like a dog with a bone, until they chew you to little bits. Then they'll run off and find the next bone. And what will you have accomplished? Nothing. And there'll be nothing left of you, or her. Nada. Think it over, Dave. But don't take too long.

With that, Jim crawls back through the hole in the couch and disappears. Dave stares after him.

Silence.

Followed by sounds of rumbling.

Sound of Sonia vomiting offstage.

Sound of a helicopter passing overhead.

A flicker of lights shine on the kitchen window and fade.

Dave enters the hole in the couch gingerly, but is promptly yanked down the hole and disappears. The couch cushion is quickly drawn back into place (by a rope or ribbon).

Sound of toilet flushing offstage.

Sonia enters.

SONIA

Let's hope this phase doesn't last long. Dave? Dave?

She looks all around. Nothing. Exits to the bedroom.

Sonia enters again.

SONIA (cont'd)

Dave? Not funny. David. Come out here. Dave?

Sonia is disturbed by the sound of the helicopters. She turns on the television.

Jenny appears at the TV screen. She holds a microphone.

JENNY

This is Jenny Masterson reporting live from downtown. Behind me you can see the building that housed the Cyplex Software company. Smoke is still billowing from what remains of the upper floors after a deadly explosion this afternoon killed five workers. Authorities say the explosion was not accidental and fear it may have been an act of terrorism. Police are searching for a disgruntled former Cyplex employee, David Tamzah.

SONIA

Oh, no. No, no, no.

Sound of helicopters very loud overhead now. Sonia watches the television in stunned disbelief.

JENNY

(overlapping what follows)

Chopper Nine is bringing us live footage of the police activity around Tamzah house. They've cordoned off traffic for blocks around. I don't know if I've seen this many police cars since OJ. There goes the SWAT team... and the bomb squad. The incident at Cyplex may be only the start of a crisis that could ripple through America, shattering the calm veneer that's hidden a vast network of terror lying in wait... We'll bring it all to you, live.

Sonia turns off the TV. Jenny exits.

Bright lights shine in from the windows and around the crack in the door.

There is a loud BANGING on the door.

VOICE

(offstage)  
Open up. We know you're in there, Tamzah. Come out, or  
we're coming in.

SONIA

He's not here.

Sound of sirens.

Banging.

Helicopter sounds even louder.

Sonia faces the door and raises her  
hands in surrender.

SONIA (cont'd)

He's not here. He's not here.

LIGHTS TO BLACK. SILENCE.

END OF ACT I.