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DRAFT #17

THE ABSENCE OF WEATHER
By
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CHARACTERS

FORRESTAL, the first Secretary of Defense (1947-1949), serving under President Truman, who commits suicide at the age of 57.

A fellow PATIENT in the hospital.

And a CHORUS of THREE who play the following roles:

Ferdinand EBERSTADT, Forrestal's close friend.
An ORDERLY, male.

A YOUNG WOMAN, one of the many.
JOSEPHINE, Forrestal's wife.

George KENNAN, a career foreign service officer.
A NURSE, male.
A YOUNG MAN, a fellow Princeton student.
A REPUBLICAN AIDE who works for Dewey.

PLACE

Forrestal's hospital room, Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland.

TIME

From dusk to dawn.
May 1949, the Recent Past, and the Distant Present.
All at the same time.

TEXT NOTES

All punctuation and spacing is intentional and gives a sense of the line's delivery.

An / indicates that the following lines begin to overlap at that point.

When set aside as a line, an ... is a pregnant pause, a moment where the character gets to the next place. It can be filled with sound or silence, whichever seems appropriate.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Primary biographical material on James Forrestal's life comes from Townsend Hopes and Douglas Brinkley's *Driven Patriot*, Arnold A. Rogow's *James Forrestal* and Jeffrey M. Dorwart's *Eberstadt and Forrestal*. Material from Sophocles's *Ajax* is adapted from both John Moore's and John Tipton's translations.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is performed by an ensemble of 5 actors (4 men, 1 woman):

Forrestal: Man, late 50s.
James/Patient: Man, late 20s-early 30s.

The CHORUS roles should be divided as follows:

Eberstadt/Orderly: Man, 30s-40s.
Young Man/Nurse/Kennan/Republican Aide: Man, early 30s.
Josephine/Young Woman: Woman, 30s.

The VOICES from the radio should ideally come from actors from outside of the cast.

Even with all of the shifts of place and time, the play is always set in Forrestal's hospital room. The items in that room are transformed into the various locations. Video projections could be beneficial in achieving those transitions.

This play was developed at the Annex Theatre (Seattle, WA), Moving Arts (Los Angeles, CA – winner of the 2004 Moving Arts One-Act Competition) and the Lincoln Center Director's Lab (NYC). My thanks to all of the actors and directors who worked on this play.

The play, while rooted in fact, is a work of fiction.

The play should be performed without an intermission.

“The poor cattle,” he said to himself, “killed to no purpose by my hand! And I stand here alone, hateful to men and to gods. In such a state only a coward clings to life. A man if he cannot live nobly can die nobly.” And thus, Ajax drew his sword and killed himself.

– Edith Hamilton, *Mythology*

ONE: DUSK

(A hospital room on the sixteenth floor: two beds, a small couch and chair, and a large window that looks onto the field below. The sun is setting. There is a radio circa-1940s and a TV circa-now. The room is a mix of old and new. Forrestal looks out the window, dressed in monochrome pajamas. His wrists are bandaged. His fellow patient, a young man, sleeps in one of the beds. Only his head is visible from under the covers. The radio is playing a tune: “Riders in the Sky” by Vaughn Monroe or “Baby, It’s Cold Outside” by Dinah Shore and Buddy Clark. The tune is interrupted as the dial turns. Snatches of other songs and static. Out of the static come voices.)

VOICES

(Overlapping)

The annals of our country will be searched in vain to find anyone who devoted his time and talents more unselfishly than you, Mr. Forrestal

Let us pray that all of us fight as good and as long a fight as did Jim

In that Great Cause of Good Government

The lessons of history will prove this fact

The shocking state of a man unhinged

The deadliest suicide attacks in months killing at least 56 people

“No quiet murmur like the tremulous wail
Of the lone bird, the querulous nightingale”

A permanent state of war, a cold war

It appears that nineteen hijackers have taken control of four commercial airplanes

Alone, persecuted and on the defensive, without cause, without reason, without

(The voices dissolve into static. The radio goes dead.)

(Silence.)

FORRESTAL

I am a monster and I have eaten worlds whole.

The name's Forrestal. First name's James. Most everyone calls me Forrestal.

I am wearing Brooks Brothers.

I am not wearing Brooks Brothers.

I am wearing Anderson and Shepherd.

I am not wearing my shoes from Peale.

The year is 1949.

The year is not 1949.

The year is now.

Man most likely to succeed

Biggest bluffer

Man nobody knows

For any more accolades such as these could one ask?

My claim to history is that I am the first Secretary of Defense, serving under Harry Truman. More than a name change, from War to Defense, but a change of purpose. I am the head architect of this new world. But I am remembered, if at all, for things far less grand.

I am losing my mind

Time's unhinged

Belief has led me here.

(The patient bolts up in bed with a start. Forrestal turns to him.)

FORRESTAL

Hello?

PATIENT

(Laughs.)

FORRESTAL

You mocking me?

PATIENT

Hello, Forrestal.

FORRESTAL

It's Secretary Forrestal to you, son.

PATIENT

It's, it's almost dark.

FORRESTAL

They brought you in here last night. What's your malady?
You some kind of nut job?

PATIENT

(Smiles.)

FORRESTAL

Yes, well I do not associate with the insane, under normal circumstances.
But I could.
Could use someone. To talk to. You look like Peter. One of my boys.
He looks like his old man. Not that you do, mind you.
In any case.
What is your name?

(An Orderly from the hospital watches Forrestal.)

ORDERLY

Who you talkin to, old man?

FORRESTAL

You, you startled me.
Eberstadt?

ORDERLY

What'd you call me?

FORRESTAL

No.
Starting to get dark. I should sleep.

ORDERLY

Doin my rounds and I heard you talkin. Who you talking to?
You talkin to him?

(The patient is lying down, his back to the men.)

FORRESTAL

No, no. I was. Just thinking aloud. You wouldn't understand.

ORDERLY

Don't talk to myself, know that much.

FORRESTAL

Yes, well, as you say, I'm old. Now go. I want to sleep.

ORDERLY

I'll be back with the nurse later. You need your medication, that's what you need.

FORRESTAL

Go, please. I want peace.

(The orderly goes. Forrestal waits a moment.)

FORRESTAL

You awake, son?

PATIENT

I don't like him.

FORRESTAL

The orderly? Ah, he's harmless.

PATIENT

It's almost dark. There's a chill.

FORRESTAL

You're speaking, right? You're speaking to me?

PATIENT

Yes, Forrestal.

FORRESTAL

Look, the problem of madness is not that you don't know what you're doing, but that you know all-too-well and still you cannot stop yourself.

PATIENT

You mad, James?

FORRESTAL

We're all a bit mad this century I think.

Maybe it was wrong to tear it all up. How will anyone know? My legacy. The lies they'll tell. No, I must get it down. The events. The strategies.

My only chance to make sense of it.

For now and for the ages. Yes.

Look. There's something I want to show you.

(Forrestal takes out a journal from underneath the mattress.)

FORRESTAL

My memoirs. That's what this will be. My story.
I shouldn't have gone and destroyed them. I wasn't thinking.
You see, I tore them all up before. My journals. But now.
I've been re-creating them. For posterity. I must.
You can help me.

(The young man emerges from the bed. He wears a suit and tie. He takes a pile of index cards from his suit pocket.)

PATIENT

Where should we start? Princeton, Forrestal?

FORRESTAL

Yes.
Yes.
What is your name, son?

PATIENT

It's James.

FORRESTAL

No, what is your name?

PATIENT

It's James
And it is fall

FORRESTAL

It is fall, yes.
There's frost on the ground of the courtyard.
My first term at Princeton.
We can start there.
Yes.

(The hospital room becomes a courtyard at Princeton University. Fall 1912. The patient goes through the cards over and over.)

PATIENT

(Reading from note cards)

Name: Martin COMMA Thomas.

Father: Harold. Grandfather: Harold Senior.
 Gross estimated income of Martin estate: exact number uncertain, but clearly exceeds twelve million.

(A young man enters.)

PATIENT

Thomas. Hello.
 (Extending his hand.) I'm Jim. Jim Forrestal.

YOUNG MAN

I know who you are.
 You're that transfer from Dartmouth.

PATIENT

Your father, Harold Senior—

YOUNG MAN

Don't get too familiar yet.
 What of my father?

PATIENT

Just that his work in the investment firm—

YOUNG MAN

You,
 Groton?
 St. Paul's?
 Andover?
 Exeter?
 Lawrenceville?

PATIENT

No.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, I see.
 A public school boy.
 Good day.

(The young man leaves.)

FORRESTAL

No wonder many thought I was a young man on the make. Because I was. I left that school for poor ambitious Micks known as Dartmouth for the hallowed grounds of Princeton back in 1912, for Princeton does not make common men.

And I wasn't to be a common man like my father before me was. I was to be a Good Man.

Ah, Princeton. That country club with modest pretenses to intellectual activity. It was a place where I could escape the embarrassment of my Matteawan roots, with its nuns and working class coarseness.

Now now.

Don't think I'm a prick. Truth is, I am not prick enough. I am cursed with an intellectual sensitivity. I read Marx, dabbled as a materialist thinker, was even a Democrat, not that that means much I suppose these days. But I was still suspicious of those Princeton boys even once they accepted me as one of their own.

Oh, the ironies and contradictions of life.

(Another young man, Eberstadt, enters.)

FORRESTAL and PATIENT

Eberstadt.

PATIENT

(Reading from note cards)

Name: Eberstadt COMMA Ferdinand

Father: Edward Frederick works for A.D. Strauss and Company

Gross estimated income—

EBERSTADT

Hello.

PATIENT

Hello, Ferdinand.

EBERSTADT

I don't think we've spoken before—

PATIENT

I'm James. James Forrestal. Jim—

EBERSTADT

A new underclassman, transfer, right?

FORRESTAL

When Eberstadt dies in 1969, he's worth about 50 million dollars.

PATIENT

Yes.

EBERSTADT

I've heard about you.

FORRESTAL

Even then I saw the dollar signs in Eberstadt's eyes.

PATIENT

Good things, I hope.

FORRESTAL

And dollar signs, like bad cases of VD, are highly
Infectious.

EBERSTADT

The shy one?
Irish, right?

PATIENT

I don't know
I suppose.

FORRESTAL

Unremittingly serious
Somewhat obscure
Hard to know
An actor

EBERSTADT

You should stop by the dining club sometime.
Here.

(He hands the patient a card.)

EBERSTADT

My address here on campus
The associations with which I associate
And my family's addresses
In New York
And in Europe
My mother's Venezuelan, and my father's German
I'm, thankfully, neither.

Just a joke, old boy.

No need to be so serious.
Stop by, you interest me.

PATIENT

Yes, I will.

(Eberstadt leaves. The hospital room returns.)

FORRESTAL

Unremittingly serious
Somewhat obscure
Hard to know
An actor

These are the ways people describe me throughout my life.
The rich have a hard time understanding that erasing your history requires a certain amount of diligent coldness.
They would, of course.
For they live through their history.
It's what makes them rich in the first place.

We became inseparable, Eberstadt and me. Even though we lose touch after school, the bond of Princeton men was bound to bring us together again.
And it did.

(An explosion of jazz music. Eberstadt enters and the hospital room becomes a ballroom. Eberstadt and the patient dance with great alcohol-induced vigor. Forrestal watches. A young woman enters and dances with the men. First, the men share her, but the dance becomes competitive. The two men fight for her attention. As the music builds, James is the victor. Eberstadt bows out. The dance ends and the threesome enjoy a drink.)

FORRESTAL

Yes, yes, that's the stuff.
Eb and me, we're inseparable in the '20s. These are the decades my cynical socialism gives way to an uncanny ability to sell bonds. I amassed a fortune and snagged myself a great deal of pussy. Don't forget: This was a time when conquering cunt and procuring profit were still completely gentlemanly enterprises. If you pardon the expression.
Wall Street.
Dillon, Read.
The Long Island Set.

Me.
 Those were the years.
 There were the occasional bumps, like the little crash of '29. But for people like
 Eb and me, we barely noticed.
 But by 1933. Suddenly—

PATIENT

Mister Forrestal, what had you heard about the advantages of organizing a
 company in Canada with respect to tax matters?

FORRESTAL

Roosevelt
 Infernal reformers

YOUNG WOMAN

He has become
 Unhinged

PATIENT

Mister Forrestal, as sole beneficiary of both companies, you were, in essence,
 switching money from one pocket to another, avoiding any tax—

FORRESTAL

It is natural to desire to pay the minimum tax.
 Fucking socialist
 Some Senate committee accusing me—

YOUNG WOMAN

He must be watched
 I don't know what he might do

FORRESTAL

No.

(The nurse enters.)

NURSE

How long?

(The room splits in two.)

(An office at Dillon, Read. Eberstadt hands the
 patient another drink. Winter 1933. It is snowing.)

(The admissions room. Forrestal sits with a nurse and the young woman, Josephine. The nurse takes notes on a clipboard. Spring 1949.)

PATIENT

I didn't say much
I testified to the Senate because I had to
They are acting as if making money is
Immoral

EBERSTADT

You're cursed, James
Compelled to honesty.

NURSE

How long?

JOSEPHINE

Days
Months
I don't know
I've been away

FORRESTAL

They're listening
Can't speak

NURSE

Who?

PATIENT

We created foreign subsidiaries, moved some cash, avoiding the federal tax's not illegal
Least not in that way
We're not criminals.

NURSE

Mister Forrestal?
Who? Who's listening?

JOSEPHINE

He sees things
Men
Soldiers
Reds

PATIENT

Roosevelt's administration's after us like a pit bull after a 3-legged cat
 We keep the country fed
 Why us?

EBERSTADT

Unsuccessful people hate successful ones
 FDR knows who keeps the wheelchair well greased
 Their hatred is rather complimentary

PATIENT and FORRESTAL

Fucking socialists

EBERSTADT

My, my, those are your people you're talking about

PATIENT

I was never a socialist
 I'm a conservative Democrat
 A very different beast.

FORRESTAL

Check the window

JOSEPHINE

There's no one there

NURSE

Window?

FORRESTAL

For them.

EBERSTADT

Time to get out
 They're recruiting

PATIENT

The government?
 Eb, you can't be serious

EBERSTADT

"Well-off business civilians needed for high-ranking offices
 Placement immediate."

Where do I sign?

JOSEPHINE

Bastard Jews
Fucking Commies

FORRESTAL

Castrate us, then offer us a job?
Fuck if I understand that

PATIENT

Keep the enemy close at hand
And use their skills to make things run better higher up
It's noble.

EBERSTADT

Where do I sign?

JOSEPHINE

Has he tried?

NURSE

Only once
Razor
Quite a mess

JOSEPHINE

Bastard Jews
Fucking Commies
Have the room searched
Have the room searched.

FORRESTAL

Join the enemy, Eberstadt?

PATIENT

When you're one of them
They don't come after you

EBERSTADT

Daft logic

PATIENT

When a cunt's given you all it's got to give
Time to pull out and find another cunt to plow

EBERSTADT

PATIENT

I don't know, Eb,
I don't know.

EBERSTADT

Listen, James
We have done very well
But that moment is passing
It has become unseemly
If you can believe it
Unseemly to acquire wealth at any means
When most of the country is struggling to survive
Shocking, I know, but service
Service is the new order of the day
We can do that
Maintain the lifestyles we've grown accustomed to
But not on Walk Street
No
DC
We go to DC
Join Roosevelt
It's a New Day
A New Deal
And all that
It's time.
And what do we have to lose?
And think of all we have to gain.

(Eberstadt leaves.)

NURSE

Please sign, Mrs. Forrestal.

(Josephine signs the form.)

NURSE

We will take care of your husband.

JOSEPHINE

I must go.
Make sure and watch him.

NURSE

Of course.

(Josephine leaves.)

NURSE

We will take care of you Mister Forrestal
Just like you have taken care of this country.

FORRESTAL

Where am I?

NURSE

Mister Forrestal, you are at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Baltimore.

FORRESTAL

Where's Jo?

NURSE

She will be back tomorrow.

FORRESTAL

My sons—

NURSE

Visitors tomorrow.
Now, you must rest now.

FORRESTAL

What's happened?

NURSE

You tried to hurt yourself.

FORRESTAL

Oh.
Um.
Where am I?

NURSE

What year is it, sir?

FORRESTAL

It is, ah
It is
1933
No, '49
1949, yes.
It's cold. It's snowing.

NURSE

It's May, Mister Forrestal. It's not snowing.

FORRESTAL

It's cold.

NURSE

The doctor will be here soon.
This is your room.

FORRESTAL

Yes, thank you.

(The nurse leaves.)

FORRESTAL

Check the room
All closets searched
Bedsheets must be scoured.

A life wasted
Infiltrated all ranks
Nothing remains unsoiled by shit.

(The sound of marching. An army of Russian soldiers marches on the ledge outside the window. Forrestal turns and sees the figures. He screams and hides under the bed. The soldiers disappear.)

(Forrestal emerges.)

(Forrestal looks at the patient.)

FORRESTAL

(Laughs.)
Just the trick of the light that's all.
There's no one there.

PATIENT

Do you want to stop?

FORRESTAL

No, just give me a moment.
We have to get it all down. My life.
Time's running out.

PATIENT

Why is time running out?

FORRESTAL

Mind your manners, son. You know how this ends.

PATIENT

You leave Wall Street, you go to Washington.

FORRESTAL

Yes
Under Secretary of the Navy
The first, in fact
Then Secretary of the Navy
Then
The first Secretary of Defense
The very first
Not bad, eh, son?

PATIENT

First things first
Who was that woman?

FORRESTAL

Ah yes
The bitch who signed away my life
Time to talk about my wife.

(Eberstadt appears. He reads a letter. Fall 1926.)

EBERSTADT

“12 October 1926.
Dear Frederick— I am committing the mistake called matrimony. Name of
unfortunate victim, Ogden COMMA Josephine. Will be back on Monday. Tried
to see you to advise, but you were out. Yours, James.”
That bastard.
Which one’s Josephine?

(String music. Flowers fall on the patient and Josephine as they walk down the aisle. Josephine tries to catch the flowers in her hand. She laughs and laughs. The patient kisses Josephine. The kiss is frozen in time. The music stops. We hear the couple’s thoughts.)

PATIENT

(Voice-over)

When I saw her, such dark dark eyes
They said she works for Vogue.

JOSEPHINE

(V.O.)

His clothes: Peale, Brooks Brothers, Anderson and Shepherd
Meticulous.

PATIENT

(V.O.)

I was going to leave but I couldn't, not now.

JOSEPHINE

(V.O.)

His lips, when he wasn't speaking, would nearly disappear, both the top and
bottom, they'd just disappear inside his mouth.
A grimace and a smile. I found that extraordinarily appealing.

PATIENT

(V.O.)

Flustered, I was going to ask—

(The patient ends the kiss.)

PATIENT

I know you're here with Ted but—

JOSEPHINE

That's the least of your worries.
I'm already divorced, what would your Catholic mother say?

PATIENT

I look that much a Mick, eh?

JOSEPHINE

I think you look wonderfully smart, that's what I think.
They tell me you have interesting views on women and marriage.

PATIENT

"I know all your tricks, don't try and fool me."

JOSEPHINE

Is that Shaw?

PATIENT

George Bernard Shaw, that's right.
You're good.

JOSEPHINE

A man of the theatre.
And yes, I know
I am good.

PATIENT

My views on women and children.
I believe children are a distraction and that a wife and husband are fully entitled to live separate lives, and do as they wish.
Why do you ask?

JOSEPHINE

Perfect.
I do.

PATIENT

That was awful quick

JOSEPHINE

Patience is an overrated virtue.
Go on, say it.

PATIENT

I do.

(Church bells ring. The flowers begin to wilt.)

(Eberstadt appears by the window. He reads a letter.
Summer 1940.)

EBERSTADT

"July 12, 1940.

Dear Eb, We're an unlikely pair, you and I. I envy the way your people manage affairs so effortlessly. Perhaps it is the curse of my class, our general inability to maintain illusion. It is not for lack of trying. Perhaps after more than a decade together it's inevitable. Honeymoons, they must end, dear Eberstadt. Any advice for this beleaguered husband? Come visit us at the estate. Summers on Long Island are beautiful, and the heat makes the gin go down smoother than usual.
Yours, Jim."

(Living room, an estate on Long Island. Summer 1940. The patient writes in his notebook, while Josephine watches.)

JOSEPHINE

I've asked Phillip and Ellen to drinks on the weekend.

PATIENT

Fine.

JOSEPHINE

While you were away, I was asked to the Caulkins place again—

PATIENT

You went or you were asked?

JOSEPHINE

What's that supposed to mean?

PATIENT

Nothing.
Fun?

JOSEPHINE

Boring. They're always going on about how they give money to charity. I told them there's far too much displaced sympathy on the poor. There's far too much opportunity for them to succeed.

PATIENT

Jo, you shouldn't say / things like—

JOSEPHINE

Don't pretend you like the poor, James. Don't even dare.

PATIENT

Don't make scenes.

JOSEPHINE

Scenes?
Phyllis called while you were away.
Did you hear me?

PATIENT

Don't do this.

(She produces a pair of women's underwear.)

JOSEPHINE

I also found these.
 I know they are not mine.
 So I brought them to the Caulkins
 To see if anyone there knew to whom they belonged.
 I'm sorry to say
 Nobody did.

PATIENT

You've made your point.

JOSEPHINE

James, please. Let's not—
 Look at me. I came here willingly, I came here and left everything behind,
 everything I had in the city. My friends, my job. I came here because that is what
 I wanted. To be here. With my husband. But when you—
 James. What am I to do?
 Practically driven mad, just left to my own devices, and you, you just sit there.
 The least you could do is look at me. Is even that too much to ask?

PATIENT

There's talk Jo of a promotion
 Under Secretary of the Navy.
 No longer a mere assistant to FDR.
 No, things are happening for me.

JOSEPHINE

How does this affect me?

PATIENT

It doesn't I suppose.

JOSEPHINE

Then congratulations.

(The patient looks at Josephine.)

PATIENT

Jo.
 This war's heating up.
 American involvement seems imminent.
 It's unlikely we won't be drawn in.

JOSEPHINE

I read the papers too, James.

PATIENT

I am frightened. Genuinely frightened.
Decisions will need to be made. And the weight of them—

JOSEPHINE

But this is what you wanted.
I know you.
You won't be happy until you are Secretary of the Navy.
You cannot turn away now.
You won't.

PATIENT

Perhaps, you're right.

(Pause.)

PATIENT

I won't bring her here anymore.

JOSEPHINE

Do what you want.
Just don't leave the evidence behind.
It's tacky.

(Josephine leaves.)

FORRESTAL

Plucked from a career to become a matron
Forced to manage the estate
I was never there
The endless affairs
What could I have expected?

PATIENT

(Reading from his notebook)

“It is sad, I think, that Americans have so little time for love. Their men have no time for their wives and children. Their father goes to work, the children go to school, and they reunite only in those hours when / exhaustion forces them to sleep.”

FORRESTAL

“Exhaustion forces them to sleep.”

(There is a loud crash from the other room.)

PATIENT

Jo?

Jo? Jo, are you all right?

(A bright light from the other room. Forrestal averts his eyes. The patient walks toward the light.)

FORRESTAL

It cannot all be for naught
I am not a monster
I haven't eaten worlds whole.
No.

(The patient stops.)

FORRESTAL

No, not yet.

PATIENT

Jo needs me.

FORRESTAL

She can wait. There was nothing you can do.

PATIENT

But Forrestal—

FORRESTAL

She was right.
By '44, I was Secretary of the Navy, right through the final year of the war.
My finest hour
On that world stage
But my finest was that day on the beach of Iwo Jima.

(The beach of Iwo Jima. Planes fly overhead.
February 1945.)

FORRESTAL

Up the precipitous side of a 600-foot extinct volcano / so precipitous

PATIENT

so precipitous that it seemed almost vertical

FORRESTAL

went a platoon of American Marines

PATIENT

Even through a glass they seemed tiny figures

FORRESTAL

tiny figures / scrambling skyward

PATIENT

scrambling skyward against a background of blue
And then a few minutes later, from the thousands of throats, upon ships, on land
and on the sea came the sudden cry

PATIENT and FORRESTAL

THERE GOES THE FLAG

FORRESTAL

THERE GOES THE FLAG

PATIENT

Men, this was a fierce battle. But our victory is decisive. We cannot fail. We will
win this war against the forces of evil, against those opposed to our way of life.

We will be digging dead Japs, even some live ones, out of Iwo for weeks to come,
but in spite of all the skill of the Japanese defense, the Marines went ashore, and
they have exacted a 4-to-1 toll.

You can be confident of them
And you can be confident of their leaders.

(Midday sun reveals the patient standing in
thousands of corpses. He is up to his waist in blood
and gore. Forrestal claps.)

FORRESTAL

The best speech of my career.
Best speech any Secretary of the Navy ever made.
And that's a fact.
Oh that day, on the beaches of Iwo Jima, the tide began to turn
Victory.

PATIENT

But Forrestal can't you see
We stand
Up to the waist
In the blood and gore
Of boys and
Men

FORRESTAL

You can go fuck yourself if you think you can take that away from me. What have you ever seen? What has ever happened in your lifetime that equals that? One of you may have stumbled over your grandmother's corpse in the bathroom when you were seven or seen pictures on a screen of a mass grave in some foreign land But that's nothing. You can save your lectures on the horrors of war for someone else.

I saw the horrors of war. I fought in WWI when I was kid like them
And that day I saw things
On that beach
Things

This is me talking
not some madman
me.

The things a weapon can do to a body
These young men
Irish boys and Poles with faces like my brothers
Scattered and split
Like rotten fruit burst on the ground

...

I'm not going to tell you what I saw
It's written, here, on my face
See.

After that day I knew the U.S. should do everything it could so this never happened again
No more wars
We cannot go from Iwo to Iwo.

We won victory
But peace took it from us
FDR and Truman, they didn't understand the true threat of the Soviets
That a new war was about to begin
But it wasn't to be like any war before.

My strategy:
Identify the enemy

PATIENT

The Soviets

FORRESTAL

Make the country always on guard against that enemy

PATIENT

Yes

FORRESTAL

Amass more weapons than that enemy

Always be fighting a war behind the scenes so that one doesn't occur in public.

PATIENT

Sound logic.

FORRESTAL

When we shifted from a policy of war to a policy of defense, I was the man for the job. I would be the first Secretary of Defense.

(Josephine returns. Her once beautiful features have given way to a cold stare.)

PATIENT

Jo.

(The room splits in two.)

(Forrestal's office. Washington, DC. Forrestal speaks with George Kennan. Fall 1946.)

(The estate on Long Island. The patient speaks with Josephine. Fall 1940.)

FORRESTAL

Kennan, in your opinion

KENNAN

The probability is high

FORRESTAL

That Europe could go Communist?

KENNAN

Yes

I agree **FORRESTAL**

It's a nightmare. **KENNAN**

What were you thinking, Jo? **PATIENT**

Don't go on about it, James **JOSEPHINE**

PATIENT
If I hadn't gotten him there in enough time
You'd be in cuffs down at the station right now

JOSEPHINE
I kicked some bastard child on the street
What does it matter?
He was in the way.

KENNAN
A fanatical religion, headed by that Caucasian threat

FORRESTAL
Stalin

KENNAN
Yes
Stalin

FORRESTAL
Democratic Capitalism is under siege, Kennan

KENNAN
That Secretary of State, Byrnes, he wants to talk to Stalin without preconditions
You do not sit down with terrorists

FORRESTAL
It's time for a new policy

KENNAN
Yes.

PATIENT
Do I need you to be monitored all the time?

JOSEPHINE

Too busy licking some twat to look after your old wife, huh?
 Got your fingers in too many honey pots to see what the old bitch is up to, huh,
 Jim?

PATIENT

Jo, stop this.

KENNAN

The Russians are like the Japs
 Oriental thinkers
 And not to be trusted

FORRESTAL

Just like intellectuals with their false readings of history

KENNAN

They've become polluted by the Reds

FORRESTAL

This dialectical materialism they espouse

KENNAN

Horrifying.

JOSEPHINE

The children
 Peter
 Michael
 Every time I close my eyes
 I see bastard soldiers holding them down and ramming knives up our boys' assholes

PATIENT

Shut the fuck up, Josephine
 This is nonsense

JOSEPHINE

Reds, Jim, Reds
 I can see them

PATIENT

Stop it
 That's not real
 That's not real

JOSPEHINE

And that Jap you hired to watch me
 He's in on it
 I hear him whispering
 Planning

PATIENT

Thomas's not Japanese
 He's Filipino.

FORRESTAL

The threat must be contained

KENNAN

That's exactly the word I use,
 Exactly what I say in my paper: "The Sources of Soviet Conduct"

FORRESTAL

I know
 I've read the piece and we're on the same page.
 This is what I've been waiting for
 You crystallize all I've been thinking
 The Communist threat
 It's not a form of government
 It's a religion, not bound by reason

KENNAN

A red amoeba
 Absorbing everything around it

FORRESTAL

Action must be taken to contain them

KENNAN

It's a new kind of war

FORRESTAL

Yes.
 And the American people will be on the same page
 Once they read your article.
 Because you spell it all out here
 In language that every man and woman can understand

KENNAN

I know. But Forrestal since it was written for the government—

FORRESTAL

Official clearance came this morning from the State Department
 And Hamilton over at *Foreign Affairs* wants it.
 The only condition: it must be anonymous.

KENNAN

Of course. We wouldn't want our position to be confused with the White House's.
 Though if you ask me, I think Truman's men are a bit soft, present company
 excluded, of course.

FORRESTAL

Then we agree.
 Congratulations, Mister X.

KENNAN

Mister X?

FORRESTAL

Your *nom de plume*

KENNAN

Mister X.
 But you must promise Forrestal
 The press cannot find out it's me
 As deputy head—

FORRESTAL

They will not learn it's you

KENNAN

Truman, he, he'd never forgive me
 He'd think we were forcing his hand

FORRESTAL

Which we are

KENNAN

But I can't
 I don't have your status

FORRESTAL

Mister X is not you
 Kennan.

(Kennan leaves.)

JOSEPHINE

Do you wanna lick some cunt, Jim?

Lick my cunt Jim

Lick my cunt

(Hysterical laugh.)

...

I think

I need to lie down.

Something's not right with me James

For the last few months

Something's slipping

Please don't go back to D.C. tonight

Stay here

I need someone

I need you.

Voices people plotting close my eyes hear guard against my sons stolen no hope no

Jim. Please.

(Eberstadt enters. He sees Josephine's state.)

PATIENT

You should go lie down.

JOSEPHINE

Jim

please

...

(Josephine leaves.)

PATIENT

I need you to get me a doctor that can treat her discreetly.

EBERSTADT

Of course, James.

PATIENT

This needs to be taken care of immediately. And none of the press must find out.

My political career would be ruined if they learned my wife was—

This is imperative. Understand?

EBERSTADT

Of course, James.

PATIENT

Thank you.

EBERSTADT

Most unfortunate business, this.

PATIENT

We won't speak of it again.

(The patient returns to his bed.)

(Eberstadt turns to Forrestal.)

FORRESTAL

I need a favor, Eberstadt. You still have friends at the *Times*?

EBERSTADT

I'm offended you need to ask.

FORRESTAL

Let them know that next month's *Foreign Affairs* will feature an article called "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" written by one Mr. George Kennan.

EBERSTADT

Mr. X is going public?

FORRESTAL

He is. And remind them what this means, case they forget.

EBERSTADT

They'll think—

FORRESTAL

They'll think the article is an accurate reflection of U.S. policy. No matter what others say to the contrary.

This will be the reference point.

That's what we want.

They'll have no choice but to come to my side.

We can't wait for them to strike, we must be pre-emptive.

EBERSTADT

This isn't going to make you any friends, James.

FORRESTAL

I'm not after friends.

EBERSTADT

You're selling out Kennan.

FORRESTAL

I'll owe him. He'll need something down the road. He has a favor he can call in. He'll live.

More important, we get what we want. This will be taken as doctrine. Truman's. We cannot wait. The Reds, Eb, the reds. We must stop them.

EBERSTADT

Truman won't forget this.

FORRESTAL

There are larger fish to fry than Truman.

EBERSTADT

You sure about this?

FORRESTAL

Do you doubt me?

EBERSTADT

Never, my friend.

(The nurse is watching.)

NURSE

Mister Forrestal, who you talkin to?

(Forrestal turns to see him.)

FORRESTAL

Kennan, Kennan

Listen, you have to understand why I did—

NURSE

I am not Kennan.

You're at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, Mister Forrestal.

FORRESTAL

Yes yes yes I know I know

NURSE

Who are you talkin to?

FORRESTAL

I I I was just talking to—

(Forrestal turns back to Eberstadt. Eberstadt is gone.
The patient is asleep in his bed.)

NURSE

You were having a good old conversation. I've been listening
The Reds?

FORRESTAL

I was just, just, thinking—

NURSE

Thinking?

FORRESTAL

Yes. I was thinking.

NURSE

You're shaking there, Mister Forrestal.

FORRESTAL

It's, it's cold.

NURSE

It's not cold.

FORRESTAL

I thought, there was, uh

NURSE

You thought what?

FORRESTAL

Snow

NURSE

Look at you. Big man, shaking, talkin to himself in the dark

FORRESTAL

You, ah, you should leave me

NURSE

You see things, don't you?
What you see, huh?
Your wife said—

FORRESTAL

She's a liar. I don't, I don't, see things

(The nurse pulls Forrestal's arm behind his back.)

FORRESTAL

Please.
You're hurting me.

NURSE

C'mon, that's not true, Forrestal
You see things
Tell me
Go on

FORRESTAL

The Reds, the Reds

NURSE

Yes, the Reds
Go on, tell me

(The orderly has entered. The nurse sees him.
Forrestal does not.)

FORRESTAL

They are coming, they are coming
Everywhere

NURSE

And then what?

FORRESTAL

We must stop them

NURSE

Right

FORRESTAL

They hide in the bushes

Do they? **NURSE**

We must find them **FORRESTAL**

Yes, yes, we should
We should find them **NURSE**

Eradicate the threat **FORRESTAL**

Right you are
Eradicate them. **NURSE**

(The nurse gives the orderly a sign. The orderly prepares a hypodermic needle.)

They must be stopped
do you hear me
they are here
and they must be must be stopped stopped— **FORRESTAL**

(The orderly injects Forrestal.)

NO NO NO **FORRESTAL**

Nighty, nighty, Mister Forrestal. **NURSE**

(Blackout.)

To read the rest of the script, please contact the author's agent:

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