

Never Again

a fantasy play

by Adam Szymkowicz

CAST OF CHARACTERS

REPORTER 1/HANK/SECRET SERVICE
REPORTER 2/JONES/SECRET SERVICE
REPORTER 3/SARAH/SECRET SERVICE
PRESIDENT
CHENEY/BARBARA/PRISONER

SETTING

The White House
The Afghan Desert

/ indicated in speech means the following character begins to speak

(The PRESIDENT is at a podium giving a press conference.)

PRESIDENT

We are a country that stands up and says “no.” We say “no” and “no sir” and “no way” and “I don’t think so.” We do not sit quietly in the corner while other countries are stockpiling weapons. Remember our forefathers who took up arms because they did not want other countries telling them what to do? We are a country that does not require training wheels, that does not need to look at the instruction manual. We follow our hearts. We pray to God and we go out and do what He tells us. We do not rely on the approval of others. We do not depend on other people’s opinions of us. We are a country of individuals who prosper. We are the most powerful nation in the world. And we are so mighty because we do not take threats sitting down. We are so powerful because of the American character, the rugged individual who works hard all day long to make a better life for his children and his children’s children. We are a country blessed by God, constructed in liberty, created out of the fabric of freedom. And this is a freedom we will spread to the world like a disease until everyone has it.

CHENEY

The president will now take some questions.

REPORTERS

Mr. President. Mr. President.

PRESIDENT

You.

REPORTER 1

Mr. President, the disease you speak of that you want the whole world to have, is that the AIDS virus?

PRESIDENT

(Sarcasm)

Yeah, Reporter 1, that’s what I meant. I meant the world should get AIDS. It’s a metaphor. Right, that’s what it is, right? I want freedom to spread *like* the AIDS virus. I don’t want people to actually get AIDS.

REPORTER 2

What are you doing about the spread of the AIDS virus?

PRESIDENT

Why don't you ask me a question that actually has to do with my speech?

REPORTER 2

I would, sir but you weren't really saying anything in your speech.

PRESIDENT

Now, that's just not true. Weren't you listening? Didn't you hear the part about the fabric of freedom? You know there is a reason why no one trusts the press anymore. You just don't listen, do you? And then you just ask asinine questions that have nothing to do with what I'm talking about. *(to CHENEY)* I don't want to talk to these people.

CHENEY

Sir, we need to make it look like you are open to discussing things. Our polls.

PRESIDENT

All right. All right. Who has a question that's relevant?

REPORTER 3

Mr. President, when will we stop the Iraqi occupation? Ten years? Twenty years?

PRESIDENT

Now, you're just being hostile. This is a question I've answered over and over. We'll get out of Iraq when it's time to get out of Iraq. We can't just run away when it gets hard. It's hard work. People are dying. Lots of people.

CHENEY

Sir.

PRESIDENT

Not that many people.

CHENEY

One more question. Then we gotta go.

REPORTER 1

Mr. President, where is Osama Bin Laden?

CHENEY

That's enough questions.

PRESIDENT

Wait, I'll take this one. You can't scare me, you reporters. Listen, we're doing the best we can and I think you people should understand that. It just so happens that we have our best people working hard to track down Osama. And every day we're getting closer. It's

hard in the desert because the sand blows and if you're following some footsteps, the sand blows them away and you say "where did they go?" and you look but they're gone. So it's hard. But I assure you we are doing our best to find Osama and we will find him and kill him. Violently. Thank you.

2

(CHENEY and the PRESIDENT rush off. The podium is pushed away. The REPORTERS remove their reporting clothes and underneath they wear desert fatigues. They carry machineguns and are marching through the desert.)

SARAH

I just don't understand. Why are we the only people looking for Osama?

HANK

We don't know that.

SARAH

Well, is someone else looking for him too because if so we should talk to those people and then maybe we could do this in a more systematic way.

HANK

Let's just do our job, OK?

JONES

Why is this even my job? I am a radiologist.

SARAH

This wind is killing me. Do we know where we are?

HANK

We're in the desert.

SARAH

Sure, but as compared to where we were yesterday.

JONES

I am a radiologist.

HANK

We're north of there.

SARAH

I know, but . . . Are we getting any closer? Are we making any progress?

HANK

No one shot at us today yet.

SARAH

Is that progress?

HANK

Well, I'm happy about it.

JONES

I am a specialist. I have a degree. Why did they send me?

SARAH

I'm a helicopter pilot.

HANK

Can you both be a little more positive? We have a job to do and I can't stand to hear you complaining all the time.

SARAH

Sorry, Hank.

JONES

I'm sorry too.

JONES and SARAH

We're sorry.

(Pause)

JONES

I wish we were back guarding the oil fields. At least then I knew what the fuck I was doing.

SARAH

Hey, what did he just say?

HANK

It's OK, Sarah.

JONES

I'm sorry. Sorry.

HANK

Let's stop here.

(Pause)

JONES

Maybe we should go back to those caves.

SARAH

Are we going to start going in a different direction again?

HANK

Shut up for a second will you? Let me think.

(A shift in light. Perhaps the sound of wind.)

SARAH

(looking at HANK)

I like to watch his eyelashes flutter while he thinks. What is it about him? The way he stands, the commanding presence? The little specks of gray in his eye? Sometimes when I close my eyes I feel his hand on me, on my toes, on my legs, on my waist, on my back. I feel him on the back of my neck and it makes me feel tiny. Like he could hold me in his hand. Sometimes I imagine him reaching in and pushing aside my ribs like a waterfall to grasp my beating heart. If it's beating too fast he can squeeze it and release, squeeze it and release until it beats at whatever pace he wants. It will beat for him, because of him. I think it's beating for him now. Thump thump. Thump thump. Oh, if I could only have his lips on me. His eyes on me. His hands. /His hands his hands his hands his hands his hands.

JONES

I like to watch her eyelashes flutter when she thinks. I imagine she's thinking of me. She doesn't dare to look at me. How could she? She's too embarrassed. Her feelings for me run too deep. Should I tell her? Should I let her know that it's not just her who feels this way but I too am hiding deep feelings? It's funny and indescribable, but I know it as soon as I see it. This is only the second time I've been in love and the first time burned with the same intensity. Sometimes in the desert I think she's a mirage but then she coughs or spits and I remember that she is not a mirage but my second serious love. Soon, I'll tell her. I'll tell her soon. Those eyes. Ow. Physical pain from those eyes, those lips, those hands, those hands, those hands / those hands.

(Shift)

HANK
(To SARAH)

Why are you looking at me like that?

SARAH
I'm not. *(To JONES)* Why are you looking at me like that?

JONES
I'm not.

(Pause)

HANK
Let's go this way.

3

(Back in the White House the PRESIDENT and CHENEY. The PRESIDENT is at an easel painting.)

PRESIDENT
What do you think, Cheney? It's the desert.

CHENEY
It's very nice.

PRESIDENT
Maybe the gallery will take this one. What do you think?

CHENEY
They'd be crazy not to.

PRESIDENT
I got the idea from Camus. Have you read Camus?

CHENEY
Maybe in high school.

PRESIDENT

You should read Camus. What are you doing tonight?

CHENEY

Well, me and the wife and Halliburton were gonna go out and catch that new superhero film. That OK?

PRESIDENT

Sure sure.

CHENEY

You'll be OK in the White House without me for a couple hours?

PRESIDENT

Oh, sure. Sure. You know last night Halliburton and I were having a beer and he said the darnest thing. Oh, I shouldn't tell you. Oh, you'd hate this. Oh, I gotta tell you. Promise to laugh. You got to promise to laugh.

CHENEY

OK.

PRESIDENT

You promise?

CHENEY

I promise.

PRESIDENT

He said you look like the good year tire man. That's what he said. Heh heh. You know. Heh. The mummy guy? Heh hee.

CHENEY

I will shoot him in the face. I will blast him the fuck away, that fucking bastard who does he think he is?

PRESIDENT

Now, don't get upset. Take a breath.

CHENEY

I'm breathing.

PRESIDENT

You promised you would laugh.

CHENEY

I'm laughing.

PRESIDENT

You're turning red.

CHENEY

I'm OK. I'm fine. It's sorta funny.

PRESIDENT

Yeah, right?

CHENEY

Anyway, I can't stay mad at Halliburton.

PRESIDENT

No. No, no one can.

CHENEY

Listen, I know people have been kind of down on you because of the war and all.

PRESIDENT

They have been.

CHENEY

And I know that's hard.

PRESIDENT

It is.

CHENEY

But we know we're doing the right thing. I know it and you know it and Halliburton knows it and history will show that this is the right war at the right time.

PRESIDENT

I know. It's just so hard. Everyone is so critical. I'm not used to all this public criticism.

CHENEY

Yes, mostly we've managed to shield you from it.

PRESIDENT

Let's do that again some more. I just don't like all the talk.

CHENEY

No one does. Listen, I know there's a lot of pressure to pull out of Iraq. Let me be honest with you, Halliburton wanted me to talk to you.

PRESIDENT

About what?

CHENEY

He just wants to make sure you'll stay strong.

PRESIDENT

He doesn't have to worry about me.

CHENEY

That's what I said. He just wanted to make sure.

PRESIDENT

Tell Halliburton not to worry.

CHENEY

Good, yes, I will.

PRESIDENT

Let's pray a minute.

CHENEY

Well, I should be going.

PRESIDENT

PRAY!

CHENEY

Ok, OK.

PRESIDENT

Dear God, Sweet baby Jesus. Please give us the strength to continue this most important war. Please be with our soldiers as they are bombed on the side of the road and blown into smithereens. Please ride beside them. And please let the American people know that you stand beside me. Maybe you could give them a disease. Heh heh. Those bastards. We'll show them. And please fill me with your mercy so I can stop hating Cheney all the time. Please prevent me from telling the secret service that he is an enemy of the state who must be waterboarded. Please let him laugh at my jokes more and appreciate me and not give me more flak about the war and Halliburton. Also please help him to protect me from criticism that does no one good at all. Amen.

CHENEY

Amen.

PRESIDENT

Well, you've got a movie to go to.

CHENEY

Oh, right. I mean unless you'd rather I stay here. I can go to a movie another night.

PRESIDENT

Oh, whichever.

CHENEY

Maybe I'll go back to my office and think up more ways to silence your critics.

PRESIDENT

Oh, yes. That might be good. But whatever you want, really. No pressure. I just want what's best for the country.

CHENEY

Yes, the country.

4

HANK

Where's Sarah gone to?

JONES

Over there to squat in the sand.

HANK

Ah.

JONES

Yup.

HANK

We don't have much to say to one another, do we?

JONES

We've said everything by now.

HANK

That's not true.

(Shift)

HANK

There's something I haven't said, can't bear to think even. Something on the periphery of my mind. I turn to look but it's not there. Then I think I see it but it's not there. Then I snatch it up and push it away and it comes back for more. Always a little out of reach, nagging, nagging.

It is not allowed. Anyway, that's not who I am. I've never known a man like him though. No, I am not some sort of homosexual. I'm just upset because they're telling me there's something I shouldn't do so I want to do it. No, I don't want to do it.

I like the ways his eyelashes flutter when he thinks I'm not looking. No I don't. No I don't like that. I like the way he sighs after eating a meal. No, I don't. I don't care about that.

Sometimes he will say

JONES

Well, I'm plum tuckered out.

HANK

Or

JONES

Let me take a look at that leg.

HANK

Or

JONES

I am being sincere.

HANK

And I will just melt inside. I am liquid in my boots. And I will think, well that was completely charming. No. Or he will stretch upon getting up and I will have to look away. I am not a gay American. I am a soldier. I am without emotion. I am a man. Don't talk to me. Don't talk to me. I don't do things like that.

*(During this, the PRESIDENT has arrived. He has sock puppets on either hand and he is talking for both of them—one is himself (in **bold**), one is a*

critical liberal. The president is physically rough with the liberal. CHENEY lurks behind the president, watching.)

PRESIDENT

No Child Left Behind is leaving children behind. **No, it's not. It's called "No Child Left Behind."** You're just making us buy tests from one of your friend's companies. **That's not true. You heard lies from the liberal press. All they do is lie.** There are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. **There might be.** There are weapons of mass destruction in North Korea. **So what? He's gonna be our friend.** You said he was part of the Axis of Evil. **He was.** Climate change! **Shut up!** New Orleans! **Shut up! Shut up! Shut Up! Shut Up SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP!!**

(The PRESIDENT throws down the puppet and stomps on it, telling it to shut up over and over. CHENEY watches and then there is a shift, the president calms down and CHENEY speaks.)

CHENEY

I asked my daughter how can you love a woman. She got very angry. I tried to convince her it's right to love a man. It's right to . . . I like the way his eyelashes look. I'd like to put them in my mouth. He's so strong and sure of himself. Sometimes I can't stand to be so close to him.

Sometimes he will say

PRESIDENT

I'm the decider.

CHENEY

Or

PRESIDENT

I will not withdraw, even if Laura and Barney are the only ones supporting me.

CHENEY

Or

PRESIDENT

I aim to be a competitive nation.

CHENEY

And I just melt inside. At night, sleeping beside the woman, I can't help but wish it was he in my bed. I would hold him, spooning maybe or nose to nose our noses gently

brushing on another, breathing in and out in unison, sucking in each other's bad breath and tasting the sweetness of it. To be so close to share each other's air. He is a man like no other—no other before him and no other after. (*Slow Shift the President gradually becomes aware of Cheney speaking*) If only he would let me love him. He has constrictions against it. He thinks it's wrong but if only he would let me, I would show him the truest love a citizen could show his president.

PRESIDENT

Cheney, are you talking to yourself again?

CHENEY

No, no, I was dictating.

PRESIDENT

To whom.

CHENEY

I have to go.

(*Exit CHENEY*)

PRESIDENT

Don't leave the house! (*to himself*) Talking to himself all the time. A liability is what he is. Liability. Li-a-Bil-ity. Liabiliby. Lah-bill-a-tee. Lal-la-bit-ah-tee. Lil-ah-ly. Jerk.

(*Enter BARBARA, played in drag by the actor who plays CHENEY.*)

PRESIDENT

Mother!

BARBARA

Georgie. I know that face. Do you need to be held?

PRESIDENT

Maybe a little.

BARBARA

Georgie, what's wrong. You can tell Mommie.

PRESIDENT

Mommie.

BARBARA

What is it, sweetheart?

It's Cheney.

PRESIDENT

What is it?

BARBARA

I want him to die.

PRESIDENT

You do? Well, let's put on our thinking caps and see what we can do about that.

BARBARA

(BARBARA mimes putting on a thinking cap. She thinks. The PRESIDENT refuses to think.)

Another heart attack maybe?

BARBARA

I don't know.

PRESIDENT

Now don't pout. No one likes a pouter.

BARBARA

I'm not pouting.

PRESIDENT
(pouting)

We'll solve your little problem, don't worry.

BARBARA

Yeah, I guess. Also, the painting, it's so hard.

PRESIDENT

I told you to never bring up your painting to me. Didn't I?

BARBARA
(threatening, dangerous)

I'm sorry, Mother. I forgot. Please forgive me. Can you? Can you forgive me?

PRESIDENT
(cowering)

There there. I can't stay mad at you.

BARBARA

I'm grumpy.

PRESIDENT

I know you are.

BARBARA

I'm fussy.

PRESIDENT

Yes.

BARBARA

My term will be up and then I won't be president anymore.

PRESIDENT

I know, honey sweetie but there's nothing we can do about that.

BARBARA

I want unlimited terms! (*temper tantrum*) Unlimited Terms! Unlimited Terms!

PRESIDENT

Honey.

BARBARA

Unlimited Terms!

PRESIDENT

GEORGE!

BARBARA

Sorry.

PRESIDENT

Maybe we can do something. I'll talk to Karl about it.

BARBARA

You will?

PRESIDENT

I can't promise anything.

BARBARA

I know. But you'll fix it, right?

PRESIDENT

BARBARA

I'll talk to Karl and see what we can do.

PRESIDENT

OK.

BARBARA

What do you say?

PRESIDENT

Thank you, Mommie.

BARBARA

You're welcome. Now come in for dinner.

If you want to read the rest of the play, please send me an email:

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