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SF PERUSALS

Cat's-Paw

by William Mastrosimone

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
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(Name of Producer)
presents

CAT'S-PAW (100%)
by
William Mastrosimone (50%)

First produced by the SEATTLE REPERTORY THEATRE (25%)

CAT'S-PAW premiered at the Seattle Repertory Theatre in Seattle, Washington and ran from February 19 to March 2, 1986. The production was directed by Daniel Sullivan, with scenic design by Thomas Fichter; costume design by Sally Richardson; lighting design by Rick Paulsen; and sound design by Michael Holten. The Stage Manager was Anna Jo Gender. The cast was as follows:

VICTOR . . . . . John Procaccino
DAVID DARLING . . . . . Mark Jenkins
CATHY . . . . . Amy Caton-Ford
JESSICA LYONS. . . . . Kit Flanagan

CHARACTERS

DAVID DARLING
VICTOR
CATHY
JESSICA LYONS

TIME

Now

PLACE

Washington, D.C.

SET

A warehouse.

Windows up high only show sky.

Stacks of munitions. Boxes of grenades, rifles, land mines, gas masks, army rations, water bottles. Fifty gallon drums of various chemicals. On top of the pile, a Stinger missile. A wire connects to barrels and munitions, runs up walls, disappears, reappears, held by globs of C-4.

Two doors – one to the right and one to the left. One of the doors is ajar. Sound of several televisions on different stations. From time to time we recognize the themes of various network news stations.

Angled at a wooden table is a state-of-the-art minicam on a tripod and a camera. Several suit bags hang from nails.

An enormous map of Washington, D.C., showing all the major attractions (e.g. The White House, etc.)

Over it all hangs a flag: green background, blue and white earth at the center with red letters...EARTH NOW!

NOTE

Cat's-Paw is performed without intermission.

NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

I wrote *Cat's-Paw* in 1984. It was a time when I could not help but admire the sheer nerve of the environmentalists who confronted the seal pub harvesters on the Arctic ice floes. Many of these unsung heroes felt the blunt force of the hunters' clubs. Other environmental group pounded 12 inch nails into trees, nails that would fragment loggers' chainsaw blades sending shrapnel through the air. Many loggers were injured. One lost an eye. That's when I took a step back. Not long after, a pipe-bomb injured two environmentalists before they could deliver it. Bulldozers were burned at a construction site on a mountain top where a ski resort was planned. A splinter group of Greenpeace filled the hull of an old freighter with cement and sailed the seas ramming, and sometimes sinking, whaling ships. There was a clear escalation, from the need to bear witness to the willingness to destroy property, to the willingness to die for a cause. Next stop on that track was the willingness to kill for a cause. What were some thinking when they took as their mottoes: "Back to the Pleistocene!" and "Visualize industrial collapse!" Why, in an open society, where change is possible, were activists resorting to violence? What makes a good cause go bad?

What if there were a cause so vital to human existence that no one could deny support? If these remarkable activists held such a universally supported cause, say, clean water, and had exhausted all peaceful possibilities for change, would terrorism be justified in that case? That's how the play began.

But that is only a third of the story. Fast forward—past 9/11, past the Spanish and London train bombings—to April 2007 at Virginia Tech University. A student went on a rampage killing 32 people before taking his own life.

The next day NBC network received a package—a video tape made by the killer. The video consisted of a self-glorifying killer who chose a power costume—a tight black T-shirt and double shoulder holsters—that might have been borrowed from some Hollywood body-bag movie. Turning his face into a mask of blind rage the killer screamed threats at the camera. It wasn't enough to take revenge on the world; he needed to be understood by the world.

Experts warned that showing the tape might result in copycat incidents. NBC faced the choice: be exclusive or be responsible. NBC chose to be exclusive claiming free speech and the public's right to know. In truth, they showed the tape because that's how ratings are achieved, and the higher the ratings as per the standards of the Federal Communications Commission, the more an entity is allowed to charge for advertising.

And what does it say about the media that the killer entrusted them with his last will and testament, his video, his claim to immortality? He knew they could be counted upon to show it over and over and over again. It's a perfect symbiosis. Both parties benefit from terror. The terrorist gets publicity, the media gets viewership.

But that's only two thirds of the story. What does that say about us that we need to see the video? Information is what enables us to make good decisions in a democracy – right? But the truth is most of information is repetitive or useless; truth is most of us have a morbid curiosity that needs to be satisfied. By giving in to our need to see mayhem, we give more power to the terrorists. We are all part of this deadly triangulation between the act of terror, the media coverage, and the viewing.

During her tenure as P.M., Margaret Thatcher advanced a thought that we have not heeded: "Democratic nations must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend."

Until we figure out how to stay free and still report the news, terrorist acts will involve two explosions. The primary explosion kills innocent people in the street. The secondary explosion occurs in the viewer's mind, over and over again, as a neural pathway is created. Ring bell. Bring food. Dog salivate. News is not just reported anymore; it is designed for effect. The story is edited, parts subtracted, associations established with editing in other stories and/or expert opinions or carefully chosen public reaction. The fear we felt when we first saw the event on television can be conjured again and again, at will, in video replay, as news and entertainment slowly merge. Fear is reinforced. Fear makes us malleable, and caught between the act of terror and media coverage, we exist for a time in a state of impaired judgment.

The terrorist thinks and acts in symbols, and the media appreciates the economy of image. It's not just the Twin Towers that fell but America's economic power; not the Pentagon, but American's military power; not just London trains, but Britain's sense of order and peace. Terrorism and the media share a capacity to inflate or flatten people. On the television screen, the fruit-fly is magnified into an eagle; the mindless thug becomes a martyr; the crime becomes a myth. And so the collaboration goes. The terrorist sitting in his faraway cave can rest assured there are eager unwitting allies waiting to put the finishing touches on the event.

Ring bell. Dog salivate.

-William Mastrosimone

This play is dedicated to Dan Sullivan.

(Darkness. Sounds of several televisions rise. Lights up slowly. **DAVID DARLING** *is seated at the table in sweat pants, T-shirt, barefoot. His hands are in his lap, unseen by the audience. On the table: a glass of water and two small jars of bouillon. Enter* **VICTOR** *with a small tray of raw vegetables in one hand, a shoulder holster holding a 9mm pistol in the other. He puts the tray in front of* **DARLING**, *reaches for a jar of bouillon.)*

DARLING. Excuse me…May I ask a question?

VICTOR. What?

DARLING. If it's all the same to you, might I have a beef bouillon today? I'm really tired of chicken.

*(***VICTOR** *reaches for the other jar.)*

Thank you. Excuse me…You left your gun over here.

VICTOR. Oh.

DARLING. May I ask a question?

VICTOR. What?

DARLING. Are you testing me?

VICTOR. In what way?

DARLING. To see if I'll pick it up.

VICTOR. Pick it up if you like.

DARLING. No.

VICTOR. What's the problem?

DARLING. Nothing…It just makes me nervous.

VICTOR. Tempts you?

DARLING. Not at all.

VICTOR. Would you like to blow my brains out?

DARLING. No, no, no.

*(***VICTOR** *unlocks the handcuffs which we see for the first time.)*

Or is it not loaded?

VICTOR. See for yourself. Or don't you know how?

DARLING. I know. Two years in the army.

VICTOR. Satisfy your curiosity.

DARLING. It doesn't concern me.

VICTOR. Then why give it so much thought?

DARLING. I won't anymore.

*(***VICTOR** *puts on the holster.)*

VICTOR. Finish eating now.

DARLING. Cathy and Martin usually give me vitamins, too.

*(***VICTOR** *goes to get the vitamins.)*

And what about my cigarette?

VICTOR. You've had it already.

DARLING. When?

VICTOR. This morning.

DARLING. Did I?

VICTOR. After your first bathroom privilege.

DARLING. Wasn't that yesterday?

VICTOR. No.

DARLING. I'm sure it was yesterday.

VICTOR. You're wrong. Finish your broth.

DARLING. Okay. May I ask a question?

VICTOR. Yes.

DARLING. Might I have tomorrow's cigarette today?

VICTOR. No. Why don't you quit?

DARLING. It's tough after twenty-five years.

VICTOR. You know what's tough? Cancer. That's tough. What's the upside?

DARLING. I like it.

VICTOR. You like it. You like it. It's totally devoid of benefits, costs money, ruins health, but you like it.

DARLING. I made a little side-deal with life: Let me have my little indulgence and I'll give you a few useless years off the back end.

VICTOR. Dabbling in irrational behavior carries over into other areas of mental life and leads you, by baby steps, outside the pale of reason.

DARLING. What do you mean?

VICTOR. What do I mean? No more cigarettes.

DARLING. Alright…But I don't know what the effects will be!

*(***VICTOR** *gives a look.)*

But I'll handle it. I hope. I was a two-packer. Forty a day. Down to one a day.

VICTOR. The secondary smoke of a cigarette is ten times worse for us than the smoke you inhale!

DARLING. I read where it's easier to get off heroin than nicotine.

VICTOR. I read where one is better than none.

DARLING. Okay, I mis-spoke myself. I will handle it. Somehow.

(Sound of a distant helicopter. It passes over then fades out. **VICTOR** *gets a suit in cleaner's plastic.)*

VICTOR. Put on your suit.

DARLING. Alright. You got it cleaned.

VICTOR. Throw your clothes away.

DARLING. Alright.

(He begins to change his clothes.)

May I ask a question?

VICTOR. What?

DARLING. Am I being released?

(silence)

May I ask what's happening? I haven't seen Cathy or Martin all day.

(silence)

I don't suppose you'd let me watch the newscast?

VICTOR. No.

DARLING. I'd be willing to trade one of my bathroom privileges to see it.

VICTOR. Don't take advantage of my generosity.

DARLING. I'm sorry – I wasn't – That was not my intention.

(Sound of helicopter passes overhead.)

Did something happen?

VICTOR. We have to move along.

DARLING. Hey, my pants are loose! Wait till my wife sees I lost my spare tire.

VICTOR. A reporter might be here.

DARLING. For what?

VICTOR. Interview.

DARLING. Interview me?

VICTOR. Yes.

DARLING. What about my shoes?

VICTOR. They'll shoot from the waist up.

DARLING. Did they give in to your demands?

VICTOR. Get dressed.

DARLING. Whatever happens, I just want you to know I appreciate all the little things you've done for me. The meals. The little talks. Cigarettes.

VICTOR. Quiet.

DARLING. Sorry.

VICTOR. We have another matter. We're going to administer an injection of scopolamine.

DARLING. What's that?

*(***VICTOR** *fills the syringe.)*

VICTOR. A truth drug.

DARLING. I don't have anything to hide!

VICTOR. Then what's the problem?

DARLING. I'm only too happy to tell you anything you want to know about anything. I don't know anything that isn't public knowledge.

VICTOR. The drug will have no effect upon you except it makes you sweat a lot.

*(***VICTOR** *hands* **DARLING** *a clean white handkerchief.)*

Sometimes it makes you talk too much. So don't blather. Just answer the reporter's questions. I don't want you talking about cigarettes. Nothing about cigarettes. Understand?

DARLING. Yes, yes, but I don't understand why I have to be under the influence of a drug that might be dangerous.

VICTOR. Roll up your sleeve.

DARLING. If I only understood why.

VICTOR. Roll up your sleeve.

DARLING. I mean, my God, to put some foreign substance in my veins –

VICTOR. Did I ever break my word to you?

DARLING. No.

*(***VICTOR** *dabs cotton to alcohol bottle, then to* **DARLING***'s arm.)*

Oh boy, oh boy. Oh boy, oh boy.

VICTOR. Shut up.

*(***VICTOR** *injects* **DARLING***.)*

DARLING. Oh boy oh boy oh boy…OH BOY!

VICTOR. Is it working yet?

DARLING. I don't feel any different.

VICTOR. It varies for different chemistries.

DARLING. Here we go.

*(***DARLING** *pats his forehead with the handkerchief.)*

Yup, it's working now.

VICTOR. What's your social security number?

DARLING. 193-62-5721.

VICTOR. Your son Ricky's birthday?

DARLING. July –

VICTOR. July what?

DARLING. I don't even know it without a truth drug.

VICTOR. What does Crystal River mean to you?

DARLING. Crystal River? – Crystal River…I handled that project.

VICTOR. When?

DARLING. When when when when when.

VICTOR. Don't fight the drug. You'll only hurt yourself.

DARLING. Must be ten years ago…Wow. This stuff kicks like a mule. What's it called?

VICTOR. Scopolamine. Souvenir.

*(***VICTOR** *hands* **DARLING** *the vial.)*

DARLING. May I ask a question?

VICTOR. Yes.

DARLING. Why'd you ask me about Crystal River?

(A phone rings twice and stops.)

VICTOR. Hands. Quick.

*(***DARLING** *puts his hands straight out.* **VICTOR** *puts on the handcuffs and gag, then a blindfold.* **DARLING** *tries to talk through the gag.)*

DARLING. May I ask a question?

VICTOR. No.

*(***VICTOR** *leads* **DARLING** *through a door, closes and locks it. He arms himself, looks through the glass window of a warehouse door, presses a button on the wall. We hear an industrial bell start to ring as an unseen garage door opens. We hear an unseen vehicle pull into the garage.* **VICTOR** *pushes the button on the wall. The door closes. The industrial bell ceases. A moment later,* **CATHY***'s face appears in the window.* **VICTOR** *lets her in, locks the door.* **CATHY** *removes black wig, glasses, and conservative business suit, puts on a jumpsuit and ski mask.)*

CATHY. We did it.

VICTOR. Two hours and sixteen minutes late.

CATHY. She changed her routine. She went to the FBI building and back home. I had to improvise the whole thing. I almost lost her. She was difficult. I had to get rough. The whole city's upside down. At every major intersection there's troops. Pulling people out of cars, seizing trucks, asking for i.d.'s. I got stuck in traffic. There was nothing I could do, Victor. One radio station said it was a "suicide" driver.

*(***CATHY** *goes to embrace* **VICTOR** *but he turns away.)*

VICTOR. Bring her in.

CATHY. Where's Martin?

(He turns and gives her a look that makes her snap into action. Exit **CATHY**. *A moment later,* **CATHY** *re-enters pushing* **JESSICA** *on a hand-truck, dressed in jeans, T-shirt and tennis shoes. She is handcuffed, gagged and blindfolded.* **CATHY** *seats* **JESSICA** *on a box of ammo, removes the blindfold, gag and cuffs.)*

VICTOR. Welcome to the advanced position of Earth Now! I'm Victor.

(pause)

Soldier, make some coffee as Ms. Lyons takes it. Very light, dash of cinnamon.

(exit **CATHY***)*

There's no reason to be afraid. Apologies for the inconvenience. What measures we took assure our mutual safety. The blindfold is for your own protection. When you leave here, the FBI will submit you to hypnosis. You can't tell them what you don't know.

*(***VICTOR** *pulls a tarp off a video-cam mounted on a tripod.)*

What other choice was there? Phone you? We have to assume, given your rep as persona non grata of press conferences, given your history of busting polluters and attacking poli-chickens, your phone is probably tapped. Big risk. Contact you in person? Bigger risk.

You might've insisted on a crew. Risk again. You'd have to tell your producer. Risk once more. Your husband. Risk unacceptable. Given your ties to the FBI, how could we be sure you wouldn't play good citizen and lead us into a SWAT team ambush? Risk unreasonable. Or worse yet, suppose you passed on the offer, for whatever reason, your child, whatever. That would be the risk of risks. Who else could we have gotten? Everybody else is a hack on this subject. Nobody is even in second place to you. You are the synapse in the national consciousness. Your whole career has led you to this place, this moment, to make history. This story is bigger than both of us. It transcends our time, our fears, our convenience.

(holds up a new cassette package still in cellophane)

VICTOR. *(cont.)* One cassette, just one simple cassette, rockets you to the next quantum in your life. Consider us the whale that has swallowed you up only to disgorge you on the shore of a once- in-a-career opportunity.

JESSICA. What I do is only valid when it's objective. How objective can a captive be? By kidnapping me you have invalidated what might've been the story of the decade. Now this can never be more than an info-mercial.

VICTOR. You found your way to Al-Qaeda's lair, to a mob boss' yacht, to the jungle hut of Columbian guerillas. Who's to say you couldn't find your way here. Your nose for a story is legendary. Where would Jessica Lyons NOT go? Isn't that the perception about you?

JESSICA. They'll polygraph me. I'll fail. So you want me to believe you want a real interview. Got a bridge for sale?

VICTOR. No. We have a used car. But it's not for sale. It's to be used in the next carbomb in D.C.

JESSICA. At what target this time?

VICTOR. Those are interview questions.

JESSICA. I get a full reveal on all questions?

VICTOR. The world would expect no less from a Jessica Lyons interview.

JESSICA. Do I have a choice?

VICTOR. Your safety's guaranteed.

JESSICA. You mean I can walk right now?

VICTOR. We don't need another hostage.

JESSICA. So David Darling's still alive?

VICTOR. That's another subject.

JESSICA. Didn't his deadline pass?

VICTOR. We can talk about it if and when the camera's on.

JESSICA. Can I interview David Darling?

VICTOR. The interview's me and you.

JESSICA. But it's discussable.

VICTOR. Yes.

JESSICA. He's hot news.

VICTOR. So hot "The Post" buried him on page 23 today.

JESSICA. What about just a visual of him?

VICTOR. Discussable.

JESSICA. So he is alive.

VICTOR. He's on a day-to-day reprieve.

JESSICA. But he's alright?

VICTOR. He's treated like any other war criminal.

JESSICA. What's that?

VICTOR. Ingredients for the next carbomb.

JESSICA. What's in the drums?

VICTOR. Nerve gas.

JESSICA. Jesus.

VICTOR. I was low bidder in an Army auction. And in the test tubes, you have your basic biological cultures. If you are clever and have a letterhead, you can purchase botulism, tetanus and cholera from just about any supply house in the country.

JESSICA. Is it safe in here?

VICTOR. I'd venture to say we're at ground zero. But Earth Now! would never use these weapons against terracides. This is only to show how your local activist with a checkbook can put together a poor man's atomic bomb. There's enough anti- life material in this room to take out greater D.C.

(She inspects the video-cam.)

JESSICA. Where'd you get that, yard sale?

VICTOR. We like video.

JESSICA. I like digital.

VICTOR. This is what we have.

JESSICA. How do you know how I like my coffee?

VICTOR. We take pride in our homework.

JESSICA. Do we know each other?

VICTOR. I don't know. Do we?

JESSICA. I might reconsider if I could speak with Darling.

VICTOR. He won't interview well.

JESSICA. I'd like to decide that for myself.

VICTOR. I don't want a soap opera.

JESSICA. You won't be upstaged.

VICTOR. We can talk about it later.

JESSICA. Darling gives balance.

VICTOR. You can talk to Darling if things go well between us.

JESSICA. Define "if things go well."

VICTOR. It's a subjective judgment which I have to reserve until it's in the can.

JESSICA. I need something definite.

VICTOR. You can definitely talk to Darling if things go well between us.

JESSICA. No, look, what's your name? Victor? If this doesn't come off like my other stuff…I am only the spearhead of an organization of specialists. I don't do magic. I have a crew. Soundman, cameraman, lights, producer, researchers. You can't expect me to come in here alone and pull the rabbit out of the hat. I'm out of wardrobe. No make-up.

(He unzips a suit bag full of skirts, blouses, dresses, suits, all with the sales tags, and an array of shoes and boots.)

VICTOR. We tried to think of everything. You look good in a pants suit, but on the other hand, you're so very feminine in a dress. That contrasts nicely with the machismo of the hardware, don't you think? You look good in camou fatigues but of course that's inappropriate here. That Middle East piece was sublime. Your standup with the burning tank in the background. The sniper bullet cracked the air. You flinched but never blinked, and never skipped a syllable. That's what I love about you. You never blink. Just like a camera. It never blinks.

*(***JESSICA** *inspects the clothes.)*

JESSICA. My taste…And my size.

*(***VICTOR** *hands her a tray of cosmetics.)*

VICTOR. We weren't sure of your skin tone…So we got everything. We hope it's satisfactory.

(Enter **CATHY** *with coffee for* **JESSICA** *and tea for* **VICTOR**. *They drink.)*

Please let us know if there's anything else we can do.

JESSICA. There is. Two packs of Lucky Strikes.

VICTOR. That's a problem.

JESSICA. Damn right it is. You know the kind of mood I'll be in when I'm throwing a nicotine fit? You know my dress size and don't know I need my cancerettes? Somebody goofed. Somebody didn't do their homework.

VICTOR. We'll see what we can do.

JESSICA. Herbal tea?

VICTOR. Caffeine makes me nervous.

JESSICA. But not nerve gas. I need a place to prepare, some writing materials and some privacy.

VICTOR. Soldier, clothes and shoes in Ms. Lyon's dressing room. Remove all weapons and the telephone from the room.

*(***CATHY** *goes in the T.V. room.)*

JESSICA. My son can't get to sleep without a bedtime story. His nanny will answer the phone. Would it be possible –

VICTOR. No.

JESSICA. Nobody knows I'm missing yet. They won't know till I'm no-show for the six o'clock news.

VICTOR. I am alive because I believe assumption is the mother of all screw-ups.

JESSICA. Why'd you fetch me if you don't trust me?

VICTOR. You know as well as I do the call will register on the phone company computer. It'll be the first thing your FBI pals will look at. Nice try. Why'd you visit the FBI this morning?

JESSICA. I wanted to see if the FBI had anything new on Earth Now!

VICTOR. And what do they have?

JESSICA. That's an interview question. – Profile analysis. That's all they'd let me see.

VICTOR. What's their verdict?

JESSICA. Psychopath.

VICTOR. Of course. What else could I be? What'd they say about the bomb?

JESSICA. Your precision is chilling.

VICTOR. They said that?

JESSICA. Luck or expertise?

VICTOR. I can measure the height, width and depth of an explosion to a meter.

JESSICA. Who's your teacher?

VICTOR. Interview question. How is it the F.B.I. opens its files to you?

JESSICA. I know somebody.

VICTOR. Your old flame, Agent Brad Mathews?

JESSICA. How long have you been following me? That was years ago. Nobody knew about that.

VICTOR. I'm a big fan from way back when.

JESSICA. I'd like to get started to get this on the air.

VICTOR. Good.

JESSICA. How do you plan to get me back? A curfew will be in effect.

VICTOR. You can drive yourself. If you get stopped, you're famous. They'll let you pass.

(Enter **CATHY**. *She nods to* **VICTOR**.*)*

VICTOR. Your room is ready. Every means of ingress and egress for man or mouse is wired.

(shows her a remote control device)

This will vaporize this edifice and everything in it. We'll all be a beautiful ashen mushroom swaying over D.C.

(Exit **JESSICA** *as* **CATHY** *enters. They brush up against each other in the doorway.* **VICTOR** *finds a carton of cigarettes.)*

CATHY. They keep saying it was a suicide driver.

VICTOR. Let's run a sound check.

(Hands her a battery pack with a clip-on microphone while he looks over the built-in sound meter on the video tape recorder.)

Speak normally.

CATHY. Where's Martin?

VICTOR. You had a mission. Martin had his. You returned. He didn't. That's all.

CATHY. Don't you trust me?

VICTOR. Absurd question.

CATHY. Why can't you just tell if it's true or not?

VICTOR. Because you'll make a meal of it and there's no time for that.

CATHY. What are my orders?

VICTOR. In a few hours we'll be old news.

CATHY. What are my orders?

VICTOR. Martin wanted it that way.

CATHY. He volunteered?

VICTOR. Yes.

CATHY. For a suicide mission?

VICTOR. Yes.

CATHY. Why couldn't the bomb be planted?

VICTOR. Risky, dangerous and ineffective. My choice.

CATHY. Well what can I say?

VICTOR. That you're proud of him. That's what he wanted.

CATHY. My two best friends exclude me – from a major operation. We always discuss operations.

VICTOR. Martin insisted upon secrecy.

CATHY. Why?

VICTOR. He knew you'd object.

CATHY. He knew me well! We never even said goodbye.

VICTOR. He felt that would distract him. Cathy…

(takes her in his arms)

Be a soldier for now. When the smoke clears we'll have time for this. It's a triumph. Finally. It's beyond what we hoped for. The stars have all configured for us. We own this town – for a day. We'll mourn later. Properly. He wanted you to have this.

CATHY. It should've been me, not him.

(He hands her Martin's shoulder holster and .357 Magnum. She takes it and embraces him. Enter **JESSICA** *in her perfect-fitting new clothes, catching* **VICTOR** *and* **CATHY** *in each others' arms.)*

VICTOR. *(to* **CATHY***)* Stay on the coverage. Keep me informed.

(exit **CATHY***)*

JESSICA. Ready.

(She checks the equipment. **VICTOR** *hands her the carton of cigarettes.)*

JESSICA. *(cont.)* Thank you. Let's tear it up.

VICTOR. I want the hardware in the background.

JESSICA. Good.

(They sit at the table. She touches up her makeup and hair while smoking. **VICTOR** *waves the smoke out of his face. She flips through her note pad.)*

Ready?

VICTOR. What are your questions?

JESSICA. You show me yours, I'll show you mine. Ready?

VICTOR. Change seats.

JESSICA. I'd like to sit here, if you don't mind.

VICTOR. Why?

JESSICA. It's my best side. Thank you. Ready?

VICTOR. What's my best side?

JESSICA. I'll keep an eye out for it. Ready?

VICTOR. Let's do it.

(She turns on the camera.)

JESSICA. I am in a warehouse somewhere in the vicinity of Washington, D.C., having been taken blindfolded to the headquarters of Earth Now!, an underground organization which five weeks ago abducted David Darling, an EPA official. At that time, a demand was made to twelve major U.S. newspapers to publish on the front page, a rambling tract regarding the evils of water pollution. None of the papers complied. Earth Now! responded this morning with a suicide driver in a car packed with explosives detonated near the Senate building on Pennsylvania Avenue. On the day the cherry blossoms opened in full, incredible bloom, eleven senators were killed in the blast along with scores citizens. The FBI was baffled. The city, shaken. Dow Jones fell. Schools and businesses closed. Troops from the Third Infantry were brought into Washington, D.C., with tanks and APC's in saw-tooth formation up and down Pennsylvania Avenue. The White House was surrounded by dump trucks full of sand and concrete dividers. On its roof, batteries of sharpshooters and Stinger missiles. Earth Now! contacted me to tell their story. This is Jessica Lyons and I'm sitting here with the terrorist leader –

VICTOR. No.

JESSICA. Excuse me?

VICTOR. Stop.

JESSICA. What's the matter?

VICTOR. The term "terrorist" – you can't say that.

JESSICA. Why not?

VICTOR. I am not a terrorist! I will not be called a terrorist! Why not monster? Why not Anti-Christ? It all means the same thing. "Terrorist" is not a word. It's a smokescreen. It doesn't define or circumscribe. It obfuscates. It lumps Earth Now! into a twine-ball of historical miscreants. And I remind you – by U.N. Resolve, oppressed peoples committing violent acts are not terrorists.

JESSICA. What is it then?

VICTOR. Defense Department experts call it proxy low-level guerilla warfare.

JESSICA. Journalists call it bullshit. You turned eleven senators into body parts. A premeditated random act of violence against innocent people is called terrorism.

VICTOR. Innocent senators? Really? They gutted the clean water act!

JESSICA. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's premeditated random act of violence against innocent people.

VICTOR. You say a carbomb is terror. I say it's turning on the tap for what I can't do without, filling my glass with malignant industrial miasma.

JESSICA. Terrific. Linda, I wanna use that for openers.

VICTOR. Who's Linda?

JESSICA. My editor. Dog eat your homework? What can I call you? We're losing time here.

VICTOR. Take your choice: Guerilla, commando, liberator, freedom fighter.

JESSICA. Sir, I have no intention of doing an infommercial for your brand of violence, whatever it's called.

VICTOR. I want a guarantee "terrorist" will never be used, neither in your questions nor in any commentaries before, during, or after the tape is run.

JESSICA. You know I can't guarantee that. I wish I had the power you think I have.

VICTOR. Your news organization calls suicide drivers "commandoes" and "insurgents." I want the same thing. And don't give me this no-power shit. You write your own copy.

JESSICA. Alright. But I get exclusive interviews if you are captured.

VICTOR. I'm a dead man. This is my last will and testament. So I care how this turns out. Deeply.

JESSICA. I got no crew, so don't fault the camera work.

VICTOR. I'm not talking aesthetics. I'm talking impact.

JESSICA. Are you kidding? Give me some good stuff like the drums and the cultures, you'll be a household word by nine p.m. You will be in every living room around the world.

VICTOR. Let's go.

JESSICA. So, what's the deal? Terrorist is out. I get exclusives and the Darling interview.

VICTOR. I didn't say the Darling interview.

JESSICA. Can't you throw it in?

VICTOR. We'll talk about it.

JESSICA. When?

VICTOR. Later.

JESSICA. But now is the later we talked about before.

VICTOR. I need to think it through.

JESSICA. But you're favorably disposed?

VICTOR. We'll talk about it later which means we won't talk about it now.

JESSICA. Where was I?

VICTOR. This is Jessica Lyons.

JESSICA. This is Jessica Lyons and I'm sitting here with the freedom fighter…Linda, cut that. Ready? I'm sitting

here with the commando who masterminded…Cut that. Could we strike a compromise term that represents you and keeps my colleagues from lynching me?

VICTOR. Eco-warrior.

JESSICA. *(after mouthing the words to herself)* That works.

VICTOR. But it depends on how you say it. It could be derisive. Inflection is everything.

JESSICA. Let's give it a shot.

VICTOR. I'll stop this thing if the inflection isn't right.

JESSICA. Fine. Let's go.

VICTOR. Wait.

JESSICA. What?

VICTOR. Refer to the group, not to me personally.

JESSICA. This is Jessica Lyons and I'm sitting here with the man who calls himself the leader of the eco-warriors known as Earth Now! Let's talk about Earth Now! What does it want?

VICTOR. Pure water.

(an uncomfortably long pause)

JESSICA. Could you be more expansive?

VICTOR. That was a pause. I was about to speak.

JESSICA. Pause? I thought it was a coffee break.

VICTOR. Rewind the tape.

JESSICA. Oh, please. Look, Victor, you're trying to direct the piece. You're not a director. Don't watch yourself. You're driving yourself nuts. Relax. Let's dish.

VICTOR. Ask me again.

JESSICA. Ready? What does Earth Now! want?

VICTOR. Pure water. The earth is three quarters water. Only three percent of that is fresh – and most of that's locked in the polar caps. The whole world survives on one percent. And that is all the water we will ever have because we live in a closed system. The same water is used and reused. It rains, evaporates, condenses, and rains again. A system so perfect it worked for millions

of years. Until now. Until in the dark ages of the twenty-first century when millions of tons of chemical and radioactive poisons are dumped into our air, our food, our water. We know the names, addresses and phone numbers of the polluters. But these terracides are protected by a lax, effete and corrupt government. We want no more compromises with our health and our planet.

JESSICA. Other people feel the same and run for office.

VICTOR. In the time of my innocence I have worked for clean water candidates and I have seen legislation with fangs come out the other end of Congress toothless. The fact remains – the earth is dying. The beautiful earth is dying. By the ecosystem clock it's eleven fifty-nine. There's no more time to write our congressmen. No more time for studies and debates and committees. Chemical companies have run amok. Our source waters are being impacted. It's time for wrath. It's time for bombs. It's time for certain unequivocal action. This doesn't feel right.

JESSICA. Take it from me, you got the chops.

VICTOR. I don't like this angle.

JESSICA. It's not the angle. It's you. You're lecturing the camera. You'll come off like a lug-head on a Wide World of Wrestling smack-down. Okay? Don't look at the lens. Look at me. Talk to me. I'll give you what you need. I'll make you look good. Relax. Just pretend we're two guys in a bar.

VICTOR. A bar?

JESSICA. A juice bar. Ready? I can show you lists of chemical companies who paid enormous fines for such dumping.

VICTOR. That's right, and it's just so much overhead which they pass on to the consumer. They're happy to pay fines. It would cost much more to dispose of waste properly.

JESSICA. So let's close 'em down, right? Lock the doors and send the workers home.

VICTOR. Let's put people first.

JESSICA. People first – as in carbombs.

VICTOR. A carbomb is a profoundly moral entity. It makes no compromise.

JESSICA. You must've heard the T.V. coverage, the reactions of people in the street. You are, perhaps, the most hated man on the planet tonight.

VICTOR. That means the bomb exploded apathy. The bomb created political beings. That means they have an opinion.

JESSICA. But not in your favor.

VICTOR I'm not running for office.

JESSICA But can any movement afford to lose public support?

VICTOR Who is not in favor of pure water? The American Revolution was not a popular war. Only a third of the people supported it. And I believe when the American people learn the extent to which their elected officials allow them to be poisoned by profiteers, the people will not only support us but join us. Earth Now! doesn't have to count noses to feel justified. We stand on the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence. Liberty and the pursuit of happiness are meaningless rights unless life itself is held sacred. And I quote, "…whenever any government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it."

JESSICA. So you're the George Washington of ecology.

VICTOR. Stop the camera.

JESSICA. What's the matter now?

VICTOR. You're using sex to undermine every point I score.

JESSICA. Sex?

VICTOR. As I make a crucial point, you cross your legs knowing that sex will show up on tape a hundred times bigger than an idea.

JESSICA. Anything to get you off your stump speech.

VICTOR. Calling me the George Washington of ecology accompanied by a little condescending smile is dismissive. Makes me look foolish.

JESSICA. Got a handy burqa?

VICTOR. No smiles or any other of your stock-in-trade gestures that telegraph non-verbal messages to the peanut gallery, or this interview's over.

JESSICA. You're fucking right it's over if I can't be myself. C'mon, pal, I smiled not to belly laugh when you said a carbomb is a moral position. Victor, look, I'm sorry I threw you off. I think it calls for a bit more discipline on my part. What can I say? I'm half Pit Bull. Why don't we go on?

VICTOR. It was such a perfect moment. Ruined.

JESSICA. We can edit it out.

VICTOR. Unless Linda likes it.

JESSICA. I have final cut. I give you my word the smile is out.

VICTOR. With my best moment.

JESSICA. Moment, schmoment. Victor, all this is only raw material. This tape's gonna be cut into little pieces, intercut with shots of the bombing, live interviews with experts, spin doctors, bomb survivors, victims' families.

(Sound of a helicopter very close. **VICTOR** *hits a button on his remote control device.)*

JESSICA. *(cont.)* What are you doing?

VICTOR. The system is activated. They'll never take me alive.

(He takes a rifle and puts on a gas mask, throws one to **JESSICA**.*)*

JESSICA. Let me out.

VICTOR. Too late. All exits are activated now.

*(***CATHY** *enters wearing a gas mask.)*

CATHY. It's a news chopper!

VICTOR. It might've been Feds in a news chopper.

CATHY. I saw them. They had a camera aimed at D.C. Their back was towards us. I'm positive it was a news chopper trying for a panorama shot.

VICTOR. They come back, I want you on the roof with a Stinger. Bring up a dozen rockets after I deactivate the system.

(He hits a button on the remote control device.)

Go.

JESSICA. I'm not here to die for your cause.

VICTOR. Let's work.

JESSICA. I need a cigarette.

VICTOR. We don't have much time.

JESSICA. Okay. Let's hit it.

VICTOR. I want to be up here alone.

JESSICA. Alone?

VICTOR. Just me. Close up.

JESSICA. It's a trap, close up shots. Once you go in close, it's all about nuance. You don't have the face for it, believe me. Don't take it personally. Some do, some don't. Let's try this.

(She shoulders the video-cam and moves around the room during the interview to shoot different angles.)

Talk about the hardware. What's that?

VICTOR. Stinger missile. Shoulder fired. Twenty-nine pounds. General Dynamics. Good product. From a parked car on Constitution Avenue, a man could take out the President's helicopter as it lifts off the South Lawn of the White House.

JESSICA. How'd you get it?

VICTOR. I buy American.

JESSICA. Who funds Earth Now!

VICTOR. We have a myriad of benefactors who, out of modesty, prefer to remain anonymous.

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