

I'M NOT AT LIBERTY TO SAY

A play

by

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I'M NOT AT LIBERTY TO SAY

CHARACTERS

CYNTHIA SPALDING, a woman, Latina/white, in her late thirties

JAMES SPALDING, her husband, white, forties

LEWIS, an investigator

GABI RICA, an artist, Latina, twenties

TIME

The present

PLACE

The principal action of the play takes place in the homes of two neighbors, the Spaldings and Gabi Rica, in Boston, Massachusetts.

ACT ONESCENE ONE

A dark stage. We hear a faint whooshing and crackling sound that grows steadily louder and more powerful. It is the sound of a raging fire. As the sound reaches a crescendo, the stage is suddenly filled with bright orange light. In silhouette is the lone figure of a woman standing upright and still. The sound fades to silence and the light to black. A moment.

The lights come up on the SPALDINGS' living room. The room is tidy and elegantly furnished. There's a small dining room table with two chairs, a dresser, a framed photograph of an infant prominently displayed, a state-of-the-art audio system, and some Boston Red Sox memorabilia. On the floor is an Oriental rug. The room has two exits: one leads to the kitchen and the front door, the other leads to the bedroom.

JAMES, dressed in a conservative business suit, is seated in a chair, sipping coffee. There is a briefcase at his side. He is studying a bound report. CYNTHIA SPALDING is looking out of a window onto the street.

CYNTHIA

Do you think it was electrical?

JAMES

(Vaguely, absorbed in his reading)
Probably.

CYNTHIA

God, what a mess. It's like a crime scene out there. All that yellow tape.
What are they doing?

(Slight pause.)

I'll call the rental car place.

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Make a reservation for when we get back. The insurance will pay for it,
right?

(He does not respond. Beat)

At least it happened now. I mean, if it had to happen. Can you
imagine....God.

(Beat)

Are you packed?

JAMES

Not yet.

CYNTHIA

James!

JAMES

I'll do it tonight, before the game.

CYNTHIA

You're not still going to the game?

(He gives her a look)

Honey, we were already cutting it tight. And now, with this?

JAMES

Our flight isn't until tomorrow night.

CYNTHIA

But we've got a lot to do. Did you find it?

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Our marriage certificate.

JAMES

Yes.

CYNTHIA

And it has the seal?

JAMES

It has the seal.

CYNTHIA

And it's raised, right? It's a raised seal?

JAMES

Yes. Honey, I need to do this, okay?

CYNTHIA

More coffee?

(He shakes his head, returns to his reading. Beat)

We're seeing Mrs. Wilson at three fifteen.

JAMES

(Testily)

I know.

(Evenly)

I'm sorry, it's just that...

(Glancing at his watch)

I've got to get going.

CYNTHIA

Shit, the toast!

She runs out to the kitchen, as JAMES' cell phone rings. He answers it. While he talks, he places the report in his briefcase and puts on his coat.

JAMES

This is James. Oh hi, Andy...I've been better. The car caught fire last night. Well, two o'clock this morning.

CYNTHIA returns.

CYNTHIA

(Wearily but cheerfully)

Why is everything BURNING?

JAMES

It's totaled. What?

The doorbell rings.

CYNTHIA

Oh God. Who the hell is that?

CYNTHIA exits.

JAMES

No, no, we're fine, it was parked on the street... No idea. Listen, I got to run, we'll talk tonight, okay? I'll be a little late—second inning, something like that. I know it's the Yankees, but I've got a hell of a day at work and there's this car thing, and then tomorrow we fly to Guatemala.... Yes, it sure is. Thanks. Look, I'll see you later. Have that beer waiting.

CYNTHIA enters followed by LEWIS.
LEWIS is loud in dress and manner, and irrepressibly affable. His accent is distinctively West Texan.

No, you cheapskate, it's *your* turn.

He ends the call.

CYNTHIA

Honey, this is...

LEWIS

(Flashing an I.D., offering a handshake)
Lewis, Department of Homeland Defense.

JAMES

Hi.

LEWIS

It's a pleasure, sir.

CYNTHIA

I've told Mr. Lewis that we're about to—

LEWIS

I'm here about the fire. Beautiful place you got here. Whoa! Will you look at that! That is one gorgeous rug. Class—y. Where's it from?

JAMES

What?

LEWIS
The rug. Where was it made?

JAMES
It's Persian.

LEWIS
Persian. Is that right?

JAMES
Mr. Lewis, we're just on our way out...

LEWIS
(Sitting down, pulling out a notebook and pen)
This won't take long.

JAMES
I'm sorry, I have a meeting.

LEWIS
It'll have to wait.

JAMES
Excuse me?

LEWIS
This is important, sir.

JAMES
Look, we told the police everything.

LEWIS
Everything?

JAMES
Have you talked to them? They were here for...

CYNTHIA
Two hours.

JAMES
They know everything we know, okay?

LEWIS
I still need to talk to you.

CYNTHIA

I don't understand...why are *you* here?

LEWIS

Why is any of us here? God's big joke, if you ask me!
(He laughs.)

CYNTHIA

No, I mean—

LEWIS

I know what you mean, ma'am. This is a separate investigation.

CYNTHIA

But this can't have anything to do with homeland defense.

LEWIS

What do you think?

CYNTHIA

What do *I* think?

JAMES

It was an accident.

LEWIS

An accident?

JAMES

Something electrical.

LEWIS

Says who?

JAMES

The police.

LEWIS

That's what they told you.

JAMES

In so many words, yes, I mean—

CYNTHIA

You think it was something else?

LEWIS
It was something else.

JAMES
(Flippantly)
Don't tell me, a suicide bomber.

LEWIS
No.

JAMES
Thank God for that.

LEWIS
But there was a bomb.

CYNTHIA
A bomb?

LEWIS
Yes.

JAMES
(Disbelieving)
Oh, for Chrissakes!

CYNTHIA
You're not serious?

LEWIS
Yes, ma'am, I'm afraid so.

CYNTHIA
They blew up our car?

LEWIS
Yes.

JAMES
Oh, come on!

CYNTHIA
Why? Why would anyone do that?

LEWIS
That's what we're trying to find out.

JAMES
You're saying this was a terrorist attack?

LEWIS
It has all the hallmarks.

JAMES
Like what?

LEWIS
I'm not at liberty to discuss that, sir.

JAMES
But what are they attacking?

LEWIS
What do you mean?

JAMES
Well, there's nothing here.

LEWIS
Nothing?

JAMES
Nothing of, you know... strategic importance.

LEWIS
How do you mean?

JAMES
This is a residential neighborhood.

CYNTHIA
You don't think...?

LEWIS
What?

CYNTHIA
No, no, it's okay, it's—

LEWIS
No, go ahead, please.

CYNTHIA

It's stupid, forget it.

LEWIS

Nothing is stupid in a situation like this.

CYNTHIA

Well, I was going to say, maybe we....no, that's—

LEWIS

What?

CYNTHIA

Maybe we were the targets.

JAMES

What!

CYNTHIA

I know, I know, it's absurd, it's—

LEWIS

It's possible.

CYNTHIA

It is? But why, I mean, it's not like we have enemies.

JAMES

Honey, we don't know anything yet.

CYNTHIA

We know a bomb exploded in our car.

JAMES

Do we? I mean, I didn't hear anything, did you? If there'd been a bomb, we'd have heard an explosion.

CYNTHIA

That's right. It would have woken us up.

LEWIS

But you did wake up?

CYNTHIA

Yes, but it was the sirens, the fire trucks.

LEWIS

You folks must sleep very soundly.

CYNTHIA

No, no, that's the point, I don't, not lately.

JAMES

Is this some kind of prank?

LEWIS

Prank? You think a car bomb is a prank?

JAMES

No, of course not, no, it's just that...It doesn't make sense, that's all.

CYNTHIA

Unless...

LEWIS

What?

CYNTHIA

Liz Markham heard something.

JAMES

(Sarcastically)

Now there's a reliable source.

LEWIS

The old lady across the street?

JAMES

She's nuts.

CYNTHIA

Half the time she thinks she's Isadora Duncan. She prances around her garden in this kaftan. It's quite sweet really. The other half she's—well, it varies. Last week it was Emily Dickinson. Or was that the week before...?

LEWIS

But she heard something?

CYNTHIA

Yes. Well, she said she heard—I mean, we were standing there in our robes, watching the firefighters, and she said she heard a kind of muffled boom.

LEWIS

(Savoring the phrase)
Muffled boom.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

Muffled. Boom. Oh man, that is so sweet. What do they call that—you know, when a word sounds like what it means?

CYNTHIA

Onomatopoeic.

LEWIS

That's it. Like Chickadee. Or crunch. Or, or... gobsmacked! Now there's a great word. You heard of that? Gobsmacked? It's British. Means blown away, totally surprised. Like the other day I was reading in the newspaper that story about the linebacker with the Cowboys? Oh, you don't know about this? Oh, man. This guy, okay, he's a big mother, three hundred and fifty pounds, built like a Hummer on steroids, and he's born-again, a soldier for the Lord. Well, turns out the guy's a flaming-ass faggot! Even owns a gay bar! I kid you not. I mean, I was gobsmacked.

(Beat. They are gobsmacked.)

See? In't a great word!?

JAMES

What are you talking about?

LEWIS

Don't you just love language!

JAMES

Mr. Lewis, we were talking about a bomb. About terrorism.

LEWIS

And that is another kind of language entirely.

CYNTHIA

But we don't know it was a bomb—the muffled boom, I mean. It could have been anything—a window blowing out. Or, or...the gas tank exploding. Doesn't it happen like that? A big popping booming sound?

LEWIS

We have evidence.

JAMES

What evidence?

LEWIS

Forensic evidence. It is conclusive.

CYNTHIA

No. No, no, this is not happening. This cannot be happening.

JAMES

Honey—

CYNTHIA

Shit. SHIT!

JAMES

Let's try to stay calm.

CYNTHIA

Calm! What, do you mean, calm?! We're thirty-six hours away!

LEWIS

What's happening in thirty-six hours?

CYNTHIA

We're going to Guatemala to pick up our daughter. I can't believe this. It is so unfair, my God...

(To JAMES)

Do you believe this?

(Composing herself)

Go ahead, Mr. Lewis. No, no, it's fine. Go ahead, please, ask your questions.

LEWIS

You sure now?

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

You quite sure, because, you know, I can...

CYNTHIA

Positive.

LEWIS

Ok-ay.

(He opens a folder and a takes out a pen)

Let's see. First off, I need to verify some personal information. Mr. Spalding, you are forty-five years old and an insurance company executive.

JAMES

Yes.

LEWIS

What is your actual job?

JAMES

I'm an actuary.

LEWIS

(Savoring the words)

Actually an actuary. Oh man, don't you just love that illiteration!

CYNTHIA

A-lliteration.

LEWIS

Excuse me?

CYNTHIA

A-lliteration. With an A. As in...er..

LEWIS

Asshole. Come on now, that's what you were thinking, right?

CYNTHIA

No, actually, I...

LEWIS

Sometimes I say to myself, Larry, you have the heart of a lion, you're hung like a horse, but man, you are brain-dead as a turkey on Thanksgiving.

JAMES

Show me your I.D.

LEWIS

Excuse me?

JAMES
Show me your I.D.

LEWIS
I already did.

JAMES
Show it to me. Please.

LEWIS
(Handing over his I.D. to JAMES)
Sure. Hey, if I was you, I'd wonder about me, too.

JAMES
You think this is funny?

LEWIS
Sir, I couldn't be more serious.

JAMES
I'd never have guessed.

LEWIS
The good Lord gave me a funny bone that tickles easy, that's all. Don't you worry, sir, I get the job done.

JAMES
We're counting on it.
(Beat. He examines the I.D., then hands it back)

LEWIS
Look, I know this is tough, with the baby and all. Couldn't have come at a worse time—not that there's a good time for something like this. Anyways, I'm sure you're in good hands with Mrs. Wilson.

CYNTHIA
Yes. Yes, we are.

JAMES
How do you know about Mrs. Wilson?

LEWIS
How do I know about her?

JAMES
We never mentioned her.

LEWIS

No, I don't believe you did.

JAMES

Or the adoption. How do you know about the adoption?

LEWIS

It's my job to know.

JAMES

It's your job to know our private business?

LEWIS

Sir, this is a national security investigation.

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis, we're adopting a child. An infant.

LEWIS

From a foreign country.

CYNTHIA

(Laughing, in spite of herself)

You're not serious?

LEWIS

Guatemala has a history of terrorist activity.

CYNTHIA

And what? The babies are terrorists?

LEWIS

Ma'am, these days we can't afford to leave a single stone unturned.

CYNTHIA

Well, no, of course not. Absolutely. I mean, you never know what you might find. Bombs in cribs. Bottles of mass destruction.

JAMES

How do you know about our adoption?

LEWIS

How do you mean?

JAMES

What was it? The visa applications? What?

LEWIS

Sir, I can't tell you that.

JAMES

What do you mean, you can't tell me?

LEWIS

It's classified.

JAMES

Classified?

CYNTHIA

You're investigating them. Oh my God, that's it. You're investigating the agency.

LEWIS

Mrs. Spalding—

CYNTHIA

Are you?

LEWIS

Ma'am, it's early in the investigation.

CYNTHIA

Are you investigating the agency?

LEWIS

I can't comment, ma'am.

CYNTHIA

Oh, come on, you can't just say something like that!

LEWIS

It is unfortunate.

CYNTHIA

What? What's unfortunate?

LEWIS

I'm not at liberty to say.

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis, please.

LEWIS

I'm sorry, ma'am.

CYNTHIA

You have to tell me, you can't just...I mean, Jesus...Okay, okay, answer me this.

LEWIS

Ma'am, like I said—

CYNTHIA

If you were in our position, and knowing what you know, about Mrs. Wilson and her agency, would you feel comfortable going ahead with the adoption? Yes or no.

LEWIS

Mrs. Spalding, I—

CYNTHIA

Yes or no?

LEWIS

I wish I could—

CYNTHIA

Yes or no!
(Beat.)

LEWIS

Yes.

CYNTHIA

Oh God, thank God. Why did you do that? You had me scared me to death for a moment.

LEWIS

That was not my intention, ma'am, I can assure you.

CYNTHIA

Well, don't do it again. Okay? Christ, I sound like a mother already!
(She laughs nervously, LEWIS laughs with her.)

LEWIS

You're gonna be a great Mom. Kids are a blast.

JAMES

Mr. Lewis. Do you have other questions?

LEWIS

I sure do.

JAMES

Well, could you make it quick? Please. We have a lot to do.

LEWIS

I understand, sir. I'll do my best. Mrs. Spalding, you are a teacher.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

Eighth and ninth grades, right?

CYNTHIA

Yes.

LEWIS

Oh boy, you are doing God's work. All them raging hormones? Whoa! My eldest, Jasmine, she's fourteen—talk about a rollercoaster ride! Man! Then we got the twins, Max and Elly-May, they're right on the cusp, so to speak, bright as pole stars, ready to set the world on fire. But no cars, right?!

(He roars with laughter)

You had this kind of thing before? On Arcadia Avenue?

CYNTHIA

You mean, bombs?

LEWIS

Cars burning up. Mysterious conflagrations.

JAMES

(Overlapping)

No.

CYNTHIA

(Overlapping)

Yes.

(To JAMES)

I was thinking of the...you know...

JAMES

That was ten years ago.

LEWIS

What was?

JAMES

It was nothing.

LEWIS

What was it?

CYNTHIA

The scams.

LEWIS

Scams?

JAMES

A couple of guys torched their cars for the insurance. It was no big deal.

CYNTHIA

The neighborhood was very different back then.

LEWIS

Oh yeah?

CYNTHIA

It was rough. Boy, was it rough! It looked like Beirut.

LEWIS

Beirut?

CYNTHIA

Like a war zone.

LEWIS

Like Beirut.

Yes. CYNTHIA

But why Beirut? LEWIS

What? CYNTHIA

Why not Afghanistan? Eye-rack? LEWIS

I don't know, I— CYNTHIA

They're war zones. LEWIS

Well, yes. CYNTHIA

But you said Beirut. Beirut was a war zone twenty years ago. LEWIS

So? CYNTHIA

So why Beirut? LEWIS

I don't know, it just popped into my head. CYNTHIA

Popped into you head? LEWIS

I was just giving an example. CYNTHIA

What the hell is this? JAMES

You ever been to Beirut? LEWIS

CYNTHIA

No, I—

LEWIS

You have friends in Beirut?

JAMES

Wait a minute, wait a minute. What are you doing? Why are you asking her all this?

LEWIS

It's just routine, sir.

JAMES

You're interrogating her.

LEWIS

Sir, I can assure you—

JAMES

You think she had something to do with this.

LEWIS

Did I say that?

JAMES

You're implying it.

LEWIS

Am I?

JAMES

Yes. Yes you are.

LEWIS

Mr. Spalding—

JAMES

You're implying that she has some sinister connection to the Middle East.

LEWIS

Does she?

(Beat)

JAMES

My God.

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis, you—

JAMES

You think my wife is a terrorist? Is that what you think?

LEWIS

Sir, let's not make any hasty judgments here—

JAMES

Who the hell do you think you are? You come in here, you insinuate things, you ask these ridiculous, off-the-wall questions that have nothing to do with anything, and meanwhile someone out there is trying to kill us!

LEWIS

Your wife does have a friend in Beirut.

(Beat)

CYNTHIA

Mary Gallagher from junior high. Oh my God. It never occurred to me. All that time we were on the softball team together. But now, yes, yes, of course, it makes perfect sense. I mean, a nice corn-fed Catholic girl from the Midwest who liked hummus. Hummus! I mean, God, how weird is that! We thought she ate from the compost pile. Oh, and let's not forget the Christmas pageant. She always played one of the three wise men, you know, with the Ay-rab headdress? Duh! Lucky we have people like you, Mr. Lewis. I don't know what we'd do, I really don't. But that's what you get paid for, right? That's your job.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry, I don't mean to....I'm feeling a little...

LEWIS

I quite understand.

CYNTHIA

Okay. A few weeks back I was sorting through a box of old photos—

JAMES

Cyn, you don't have to do this, this is absurd—

CYNTHIA

No, no, Mr. Lewis wants to know, I'll tell him. I was looking at these old pictures, and I come across this one of Mary and me—all smiling and happy and awkward, mouths full of metal. In eighth grade. Or was it ninth? Anyway, I say to myself, I wonder what happened to old Mary Gallagher. So I Google her and I get her e-mail address and we re-connect and I find out that she married this Syrian guy she met in a video store in Milwaukee, and he runs some import/export business, and now they live in Beirut and she has these three very cute kids—kind of chubby and cheerful with big teeth like her—and I know this because she sends me a picture over the Internet.

LEWIS

And did she tell you where she works?

CYNTHIA

At the American Embassy. Some part-time job or other.

LEWIS

In the visa section.
(Beat.)

JAMES

Are we being investigated?

LEWIS

Excuse me?

JAMES

You heard me. Are we being investigated?

CYNTHIA

James—

LEWIS

Sir, we are casting a very wide net.

JAMES

We have a right to know.

LEWIS

Sir, we're talking national security here.

JAMES

I'm calling my lawyer.

CYNTHIA

Honey, do you really think that's necessary? I mean—

JAMES

(Standing up, pulling out his cell phone)

Say nothing. Not a word. Not one word.

JAMES heads for the bedroom.

CYNTHIA

James!

JAMES exits to the bedroom. A pause.

LEWIS

Some folks these days. They jump at shadows.

(Slight pause.)

CYNTHIA

You don't really believe...? I mean, I haven't seen her in twenty years.

(Beat.)

LEWIS

What's her name?

CYNTHIA

Who?

LEWIS

Your daughter.

(Beat.)

CYNTHIA

Rosa.

LEWIS

Rosa. Say, that is pretty. Ro—sa. Ros-eeeta. Cute as a button, I bet. Is this her?

He indicates the framed picture on the dresser. She nods. He picks it up and looks at it.

Oh yeah. Will you look at that. What a little angel! She is precious.

Yes. CYNTHIA

You must be so excited. LEWIS

And a little nervous. CYNTHIA

JAMES enters.

He's in a meeting.
(To LEWIS)
I'd like you to leave. JAMES

Mr. Spalding— LEWIS

Now. JAMES

You sure? 'Cos I'm going to have to come back and bother you good folks again. LEWIS

Go. JAMES

Okey-dokey.
(He rises to leave)
Oops! Don't want to run off with the family silver!
(He leans across and hands the photo back to CYNTHIA)
I'll give your best to Mrs. Wilson. LEWIS

Mrs. Wilson? CYNTHIA

My next port of call. LEWIS

But I thought you said— CYNTHIA

LEWIS

It's just routine.

CYNTHIA

You can't do that.

LEWIS

Excuse me?

CYNTHIA

You can't see Mrs. Wilson now, you can't, not now.

LEWIS

Well, I—

CYNTHIA

She doesn't know yet, right? About the bomb?

LEWIS

Not that I'm aware of.

CYNTHIA

And she can't, I mean, she'd freak out. She would. Or maybe she wouldn't, but she'd cancel on us. She would, I know it. She'd get scared and she'd cancel on us.

LEWIS

My problem is—

CYNTHIA

And we'd lose Rosa.

LEWIS

Mrs. Spalding—

CYNTHIA

We'd lose our child!

LEWIS

I don't think that's necessarily—

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis, please, please. Go see her in a week or two. Okay? I mean, by then, you'll probably have found whoever did it and it won't matter anyway.

LEWIS

Oh, man, this is a tricky one.

CYNTHIA

I mean, what's the difference? It's just routine, right?

LEWIS

Yes, but—

CYNTHIA

Our daughter is not routine.

LEWIS

Of course not, but we do have our procedures.

CYNTHIA

Procedures!

(Beat, she collects herself, then quietly)
Rosa is precious. An angel. Right?

LEWIS

She is. And, you know, if were up to me—

CYNTHIA

We'll answer your questions.

JAMES

No!

CYNTHIA

(To LEWIS)
If you hold off with Mrs. Wilson.

JAMES

Cynthia, no!

CYNTHIA signals him to be quiet.

CYNTHIA

You will have our full co-operation.

LEWIS

I thought I was getting that now.

JAMES

Jesus!

CYNTHIA
You know what I mean.

A slight pause.

LEWIS
I'm sticking my neck out. Way out.

JAMES
Cyn, we are not doing this.

CYNTHIA
(To LEWIS)
Thank you. Thank you.

JAMES
(To CYNTHIA)
He's manipulating you.

CYNTHIA
Of course he is. And with great wit and charm. Did you go to charm school, Mr. Lewis, was that part of your training?

JAMES
Honey, we need to talk.

CYNTHIA
I'm listening.

JAMES
In private.

CYNTHIA
We've got nothing to hide from Mr. Lewis. Do we?

JAMES
He's as good as accused you of being a terrorist!

LEWIS
No, sir, you're mistaken there.

JAMES

I am talking to my wife.

(To CYNTHIA)

How comes he knows all this stuff? The adoption, it's private, a private matter, he has no business knowing that. And Mary Gallagher in Beirut? We are being spied on.

CYNTHIA

So?

JAMES

So it's illegal! That's what going on here. Right Mr. Lewis?

CYNTHIA

Honey—

JAMES

Not that he'll admit it. It's classified.

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis is just doing his job.

JAMES

Why us? Why? My God. I mean, I've read about this stuff but—

CYNTHIA

It's necessary.

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Whatever it takes to catch the bastards.

JAMES

Cyn—

CYNTHIA

All those phone records and e-mails and social media posts—they're bound to make a few mistakes. Who cares, just as long they get 'em.

JAMES

We need legal advice.

CYNTHIA

We need to be on that plane tomorrow.

(To LEWIS)

Next question.

JAMES

(To LEWIS)

Don't open your mouth.

CYNTHIA

Go ahead, Mr. Lewis. Fire away.

(Beat.)

LEWIS

I want to ask you about your vanity plate.

CYNTHIA

What?

LEWIS

The vanity plate on the car.

CYNTHIA

Oh that!

LEWIS

B-L-A-T-I-N-A. What is that?

CYNTHIA

Be Latina.

LEWIS

Be Latina?

CYNTHIA

It's kind of an in-joke.

JAMES

It's personal. Private.

LEWIS

A vanity plate is pretty public.

CYNTHIA

Oh God, this is embarrassing. Well, it's not, it's just... Okay, so I'm half-Dominican, my Mom's from the Dominican Republic, my Dad's from Wisconsin. But I didn't tell James when we first started dating—you know, about my Latin roots—and when he found out, he kinda got on my case.

JAMES

I did not get on your case.

CYNTHIA

He wanted me to be more Latina.

LEWIS

More Latina? What does that mean? Or shouldn't I ask!

CYNTHIA

Ethnic pride, heritage, you know. So we came up with this cute idea.

LEWIS

The vanity plate.

CYNTHIA

Be Latina.

LEWIS

That is cute. Very cute. And creative. Yeah. You guys play Scrabble? I'm addicted myself, I mean big surprise, right?— a word buff like me. You know what I like the best? The fifty point bonus play when you use all seven letters. And you've got it right there, with B-L-A-T-I-N-A.

CYNTHIA

Really?

LEWIS

Mix 'em around and whaddya get? Mrs. Spalding?

CYNTHIA

I've no idea.

LEWIS

Mr. Spalding?

(Beat. He does not respond)

T-A-L-I-B-A-N. Taliban.

JAMES

Taliban.

LEWIS

Yep.

JAMES

This is how you spend your time at the Department of Homeland Defense?

LEWIS

You're a stats man, Mr. Spalding. What are the odds against choosing a vanity plate that just happens to be an anagram for Taliban? What do you reckon, ballpark? Fifty thousand to one?

(Beat. JAMES resists engaging him)

Five hundred thousand?

(Beat.)

Come on now, I know you don't have your actuarial tables handy but take an educated guess. A million to one? Five million? Ten?

CYNTHIA

Keep going.

LEWIS

Twenty million?

CYNTHIA

Keep going.

LEWIS

Wow! Really? Like what? Fifty million? A hundred million?

CYNTHIA

It's huge.

LEWIS

How huge?

CYNTHIA

About as huge as the chances of us thinking up the idea in the first place.

LEWIS

(Laughing)

Oh, I walked right into that! Oh, boy, that is a good one. Slam, bam, thank you ma'am! My oh my... Yeah. So it is just a coincidence.

CYNTHIA

What?

LEWIS

That BLATINA spells TALIBAN.

JAMES

One of God's big jokes.

LEWIS

You think I'm being frivolous. No, sir. I'm being thorough. Gotta be in my line of work, too much at stake. And you know what? It's always the little things—you begin to see patterns, pieces of the puzzle fitting together. I mean, let's look at what we have here. We have a vehicle destroyed by a bomb. We have a foreign adoption in process. We have the name Taliban disguised on the license plate. We have a Persian—as in Eye-ranian—rug right here on the floor. We have the Syrian connection in Beirut. Put it all together and what do we have? Something, that's for sure. I don't know what. But we sure as hell got something.

JAMES

We don't have any WMDs.

LEWIS

Not yet.

JAMES

You know, for a special investigator, you are stupendously stupid.

CYNTHIA

James—

JAMES

Like that, do you? Stupendously stupid.

CYNTHIA

Mr. Lewis is not done with his questions.

JAMES

You take a bunch of random facts, things that have nothing to do with each other, you stick them together, and suddenly—bingo!—I'm a terrorist! She's a terrorist! The whole of Arcadia Avenue is one big terrorist cell!

LEWIS

I'm being logical.

JAMES

LOGICAL! I know fifth graders with better deductive reasoning. The things you talk about—the vanity plate, the Persian rug, the foreign adoption, Beirut. Where’s the logical connection? Where is it? Where?

LEWIS

Terrorism is illogical.

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

(To JAMES)

He’s right. I mean—

JAMES

(To LEWIS, in a more restrained tone)

Suppose we are supporters of the Taliban.

LEWIS

Are you?

JAMES

No, I’m just saying, hypothetically, suppose we are.

LEWIS

Okay.

JAMES

Why on earth would we advertise the fact, *in code*, on the vanity plate of our car?

LEWIS

I don’t know. Why would you?

JAMES

We wouldn’t! It’s crazy, it makes no sense, no logical sense. That’s number one. Number two, the Taliban are Muslim fundamentalists.

LEWIS

So?

JAMES

(Triumphantly)

We’re not Muslim! Hell, we’re not even Christian.

You're not Christian? LEWIS

No, as it happens, we're not. JAMES

What are you? Jews? LEWIS

Blackout.

ACT ONESCENE TWO

The same. The following day. CYNTHIA is seated on the floor, struggling with a new infant car seat. She alternates between reading a set of instructions, and fiddling with the straps. She looks puzzled, frustrated. The phone rings. She ignores it. After several rings, it stops. She continues to read. The phone rings again.

CYNTHIA

Shit!

Impulsively, she goes to the phone and yanks the receiver off the hook, then returns to her task. JAMES enters. He is breathless and shaken.

JAMES

Have you seen them out there? Jesus! They're animals!

CYNTHIA

Honey—

JAMES

Yelling and shoving, sticking microphones in my face.

CYNTHIA

I need your help with this.

JAMES

The police just stood there. I couldn't believe it. I was mauled. Mauled! And they just stood and watched.

CYNTHIA

It's these straps. I can't tighten them in back. Here.

JAMES

Did you hear what I said?

CYNTHIA

You're good at this kind of thing.

JAMES

Cyn—

CYNTHIA

I'll read you the instructions in Spanish. Good practice.
(She offers the doll to JAMES. He looks at her.)

JAMES

Cyn, we can't do this.

CYNTHIA

This is a man's job. Come on.

JAMES

There's a mob of reporters and camera crews outside.

CYNTHIA

Okay, we'll ask one of them. Because God forbid we leave it my sister the Ph.D. to figure this out. I do not want Alice picking us from the airport and then we spend hours futzing around with this damn thing in the parking lot when we're all exhausted and dying to get home.

JAMES

Cyn, we can't go. We have to postpone.

CYNTHIA

Don't be ridiculous.

JAMES

Honey. We are suspects in a terrorist bombing. The national media is camped on our doorstep.

CYNTHIA

We have done nothing wrong.

JAMES

That's not the point—

CYNTHIA

God, why is this so hard?

JAMES

Costello says it would be reckless.

CYNTHIA

He's a lawyer.

And—

JAMES

CYNTHIA
Lawyers think it's reckless to breathe.

JAMES
And provocative.

CYNTHIA
Provocative? To go get our new daughter?

JAMES
It would seem like we were fleeing the country.

CYNTHIA
Oh, and they'd arrest us.

JAMES
In all likelihood, yes.

CYNTHIA
For what? For adopting a foreign child?

JAMES
All I'm saying—

CYNTHIA
My God, you have bought into their paranoia.

JAMES
The best thing we can do right now is to lay low. Okay? That's what Costello says and I think he's right.

CYNTHIA
What are you afraid of?

JAMES
I know it's disappointing, honey, I know it's hard. But Rosa's not going anywhere. We'll call and re-schedule. Things happen all the time, well, not like this, but delays with visas, cancelled flights. They're used to it, they'll understand.

CYNTHIA
What are you afraid of?

JAMES

I'm being realistic.

CYNTHIA

You are scared shitless.

JAMES

Don't you see what's going on here?

CYNTHIA

I see a lot of hysteria. A lot of frantic people trying to look busy.

JAMES

They raided our house. They had a search warrant.

CYNTHIA

So they've gone a little overboard. These guys are under a lot of pressure. And anyway, it's not just us. They've interviewed all sorts of people, up and down the street. The Kleins, Dan and Debbie, that young artist—what's her name?—Liz Markham's tenant.

JAMES

Yes, but—

CYNTHIA

And it's Lewis, for Christ's sake! Lewis and his Keystone Kops. I'm sorry, I do not feel threatened. You may, but I don't. There's no reason we can't be on that plane tomorrow.

JAMES

I know you want to rationalize this, convince yourself—

CYNTHIA

I don't need convincing.

JAMES

The fact is—

CYNTHIA

The fact is that we are—

JAMES

WILL YOU SHUT UP AND LISTEN!

(Beat)

Please.

CYNTHIA

Try a little tenderness, why don't you.

JAMES

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Cyn, this is serious. Okay? They need a very good reason to get a search warrant.

CYNTHIA

Are you kidding? These days they hand them out like candy.

JAMES

They got one warrant. One. For this house. That's what Costello told me. And they took my computer.

CYNTHIA

It was a photo-op. That's why they chose us. A shot of the bombed-out car in the foreground and then a slow pan to...to...the intrepid grim-faced agents of the DHD emerging from the suspected terrorist lair with files and books. And a computer! Natalie, clearly progress is being made in this dramatic terror probe. Now back to you in the studio.

JAMES

There's sensitive information on my hard drive.

CYNTHIA

What have you got on there, porn?

JAMES

Oh, please.

CYNTHIA

(Amused, intrigued)

My God, you have.

JAMES

NO! Will you please...it's nothing like that.

(Beat.)

CYNTHIA

What is it?

JAMES

It's this project from work. I brought it home. God, it was so stupid. We're developing this new system, cutting edge, it's going to be huge. And it's high security, of course, limited access, and it does not leave the

JAMES

office. On pain of death. We have this deadline and I'd gotten way behind and I thought....shit, I don't know what I thought. I was panicked.

CYNTHIA

They are not going to care about some insurance software program.

JAMES

Honey, you don't understand. If it falls into the wrong hands—that's it, I'm outta there, I am gone.

CYNTHIA

The wrong hands? Lewis?

JAMES

I can't risk it. Costello is filing a motion tomorrow.

CYNTHIA

Tomorrow?

JAMES

I have to be there, in court.

CYNTHIA

No! You go to court when we get back.

JAMES

It could be too late by then.

CYNTHIA

So that's it. It's not about being reckless and risking arrest at the airport. It's about some file on your computer.

JAMES

No, it's about all of that—

CYNTHIA

Two years I've been filling out forms and getting documents and making calls and getting screened and interviewed. Two years!

JAMES

I know—

CYNTHIA

Not to mention the fact that I've been waiting my whole life for this child. Remember? Or did it just slip your mind?

Cyn—
 JAMES

CYNTHIA
 You are not going to do this to me. You are not going to do this to Rosa.

JAMES
 And what if I lose my job? What then? We're talking about our security, Cyn, about Rosa's future. You want to jeopardize all that because you won't wait another couple of weeks?

(Beat.)
 Costello says it looks good. They goofed on the warrant. Some technicality.

CYNTHIA
 You've never really wanted her, have you?

JAMES
 Oh God, not now, please.

CYNTHIA
 That's what's going on here.

JAMES
 How can you still think that?

CYNTHIA
 Because it's true. Whether you admit it or not.

JAMES
 It doesn't matter what I say, what I do—

CYNTHIA
 What have you done? What have you done to make this happen?

JAMES
 I'll never want her as much as you.
 (Slight pause.)
 Look, let's not—

CYNTHIA
 I'm going. You can go to court. I'm going to Guatemala.

JAMES
 Cyn—

CYNTHIA

Won't you for once in your life take a fucking risk?

Lights fade.

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

An outdoor café in Guatemala. Simple representation: a café table, two chairs. Bright tropical light. CYNTHIA and JAMES are sitting at the table sipping large tropical fruit drinks. She's wearing a straw hat, he sports a Boston Red Sox cap. His briefcase is at his side.

CYNTHIA

It's warm.

JAMES

Hot!

CYNTHIA

Something smells awful.

JAMES

It's a city.

CYNTHIA

Funny, I had this image.

(Beat.)

You know, last night, at the hotel, I had a panic attack.

JAMES

What about?

CYNTHIA

I started to think, what if Rosa doesn't take to us? You know, they hand her over and she takes one look at us, these total strangers, and starts bawling her head off. And keeps on and on and never stops. Ever.

JAMES

It'll be fine.

CYNTHIA

How do you know?

JAMES

They get attached.

CYNTHIA

She might not.

JAMES

She'll feel all that love.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

(Beat.)

God, I can hear my heart beating. Like some old oil rig in Oklahoma.
Bonk, bonk, bonk. Here.

(She takes his hand and presses it to her chest.)

Can you feel it?

JAMES

It's strong.

(He raises her hand in his and gently kisses it.)

CYNTHIA

(Clasping her other hand over his)

I love you.

JAMES

I love you, too.

(Beat.)

CYNTHIA

(Drawing back, glancing nervously at her watch)

Twenty-eight minutes. Let's not be late. Or early for that matter. I mean,
you know, in case they... in case she's not ready.

JAMES

We'll be right on time.

CYNTHIA

Like at great-aunt Jenny's. Those infamous Sunday brunches. Remember?

JAMES

How could I forget.

CYNTHIA

The witch of Waldenville. She'd yell at you if you were a minute late, and she'd yell at you if you were a minute early. You had to be there on the dot.

(Imitating her, in a raspy Scots brogue)

When I say twelve-thirty, I mean twelve-thirty. Canna you not tell the time? Canna you not? Now git to yer seats before I give all this food to the starving children in Africa.

(Reverting to normal voice)

Poor Uncle Angus. No wonder he checked out early. Heaven or hell, I don't think he cared. He just wanted to get away.

(Beat. She looks at him)

Are you okay?

JAMES

Fine.

CYNTHIA

Are you sure?

JAMES

Yes.

CYNTHIA

You're sweating.

JAMES

It's hot.

CYNTHIA

You have that look.

JAMES

What look?

CYNTHIA

It doesn't matter.

JAMES

No, what, tell me.

CYNTHIA

You look like you did at the compound.

JAMES

In Santa Domingo?

CYNTHIA

That first time with la familia. They were so curious to meet my yanqui man. And we had that big barbecue in the backyard. Remember? Kids everywhere, my first cousins, and second cousins, and all my little nieces and nephews, the whole tribe. And at one point I looked over and I saw you sitting on your own under the old shade tree. You were watching the kids playing games and running around. Just observing. And you had this look. Like you do now. Kind of sad and wistful and far away.

JAMES

The lonely gringo.

CYNTHIA

You're not lonely. Are you?

JAMES

What makes you think that?

CYNTHIA

Distant. That's it. It's your distance. From everything.

(Beat)

You do want this?

JAMES

This is your stuff.

CYNTHIA

I don't think so.

JAMES

You gotta deal with it.

CYNTHIA

I have this feeling that you're just....

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Placating me.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean that.

JAMES

Yes, you did.

A waiter enters with a tray. It is clearly LEWIS, although he has a mustache and his hair is slicked back. He speaks English with an exaggerated—and terrible—Spanish accent.

LEWIS

How we doing here? You like the Gobsmackers? Good, er? Very refreshing. All fruit, all natural, fat free, no coloring, no preservatives, no crapola. Uno mas?

CYNTHIA

No, thank you. They're very good.

LEWIS

I fix them myself. Special ingredient. Secret.

CYNTHIA

Really?

LEWIS

Yeah. But I tell you. You keep secret, no?

CYNTHIA

Sure.

LEWIS

It is a local herb. We call it Talibano.

CYNTHIA

Is that right?

LEWIS

(laughing)
No, no, I make joke! I fool you! It's a good one, yeah? Funny, funny, funny! You hungry? We have special snack. Gourmet guacamole. Is good, all natural, no crapola.

During this exchange, JAMES slips away, unseen by CYNTHIA, and exits.

CYNTHIA

(Looking round)
James?
(to LEWIS)
Did you see where my husband went?

LEWIS

Gourmet Guatemalan guacamole!

CYNTHIA

James! Where did he go? Did you see?

LEWIS

With chips. You want chips?

CYNTHIA

James! Where are you?

LEWIS

He's gone.

CYNTHIA

Gone? What do you mean, gone? Where?

LEWIS

(Leering)
I bring you another gorgeous Gobsmacker. On the house.

He exits.

CYNTHIA

(Panicking)
James! Where are you? JAMES! COME BACK! JAMES!

The lights fade. At black, we still hear
CYNTHIA'S scared and imploring voice. It
becomes an echo—as in a cave—and it
melds into the sound of some Guatemalan
indigenous music.

WHERE ARE YOU? TALK TO ME! JAMES!

ACT ONE

SCENE FOUR

Slowly, the sound from the end of the previous scene fades, and the lights come up on the SPALDINGS' living room. CYNTHIA is stretched out on the couch. She awakes, disoriented, from her vivid dream. She sits up, looks around. Slowly, she rises and crosses down center. She gazes out of the "fourth wall" window. A pause. JAMES enters. He looks weary and drawn.

JAMES

Hi.

CYNTHIA

(Without turning round)

You came back.

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Nothing.

(Beat.)

JAMES

They got another continuance.

CYNTHIA

Really?

JAMES

But the judge was pissed. He gave them an ultimatum. Either charge us or he'll order everything returned, the computer, everything. How are you?

CYNTHIA

I'm hanging in there.

(Beat.)

What's up? Are you okay?

JAMES

I've been fired.

CYNTHIA

Oh God.

JAMES

Big surprise.

CYNTHIA

Oh sweetie, I am so sorry.

(She goes to comfort him.)

So they found out.

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

About the files, your computer.

JAMES

No, well, I don't know. They just don't want a terrorist on the payroll.

CYNTHIA

Fourteen years and they just dump you?

JAMES

It's not personal.

CYNTHIA

Of course it's personal. What kind of severance did you get?

JAMES

I didn't.

CYNTHIA

What do you mean? You had a contract.

JAMES

Null and void in the circumstances.

CYNTHIA

(Erupts in ironic laughter, then catches herself)

I'm sorry. It's just that... it's what my union rep said to me three hours ago. Those exact words.

JAMES

No.

CYNTHIA

Right after I was summoned to the principal's office.

JAMES

They can't do this.

CYNTHIA

Mrs. Spalding, in the best interests of the students and the school community, we feel we have no alternative but to suspend you until further notice. Poor Mr. Parks. He was just the messenger boy. He was more upset than I was. Twitching. He was twitching, poor man! And staring at his shoes—he couldn't look me in the eye. He's had a crush on me for years. Did I tell you that?

(Beat. She is tearful. He goes to her, holds her.)

I didn't even have a chance to talk to my kids. What would I say anyway? What would I tell them?

(Beat. She recovers her composure.)

Why is this happening?

JAMES

I wish I knew.

CYNTHIA

You ask people, and they just look at you. Because you must be guilty. Why else would the DHD raid your house and plaster your picture all over the evening news? They try their best to hide it, and be all kind and sympathetic, but you can see them thinking: I'd never have guessed they'd be capable of something like this. And I want to grab them and shake them and yell: It's me! Remember me? Cynthia? Your friend? I like travel books and classic rock and the occasional joint. I used to do yoga in my backyard in the summer and embarrass the hell out of your kids, but I don't anymore because of my back. I'm a terrific cook. Right? You've had my moist apple cake and my cassoulet. Don't I make a great cassoulet? Don't I? He-llo! TALK TO ME!

There is a knock at the door. GABI RICA enters. She is a young Latina in her late twenties with a face older and wiser than her years. She speaks English with a slight accent. A beat.

JAMES

Who are you? How did you—?

GABI

I'm sorry, the front door was open, and—

JAMES
Who are you?

GABI
My name is Gabi Rica. I live across the street. Mrs. Markham's tenant?

CYNTHIA
Oh. Yes.

GABI
This is not a good time.

CYNTHIA
Is there something we can...?

GABI
No, no, I will come back. Sorry. Sorry to disturb you.

She starts to exit.

JAMES
Please close the door behind you.

GABI
Yes, of course.

JAMES
The front door.

GABI
Yes.

She exits.

CYNTHIA
What do you think she wanted?

JAMES
I talked with Costello.

CYNTHIA
Wait a minute. You always lock it.

JAMES
What?

CYNTHIA

The front door. She said it was open.

JAMES

Maybe it was, I don't know. Listen, Costello said that—

CYNTHIA

This is creepy.

JAMES

I was talking to him about our case, about suing the bastards—

CYNTHIA

Do you think someone's got it in for us? We're nice people, we're good people. Random acts of kindness, that's me, and honest, and law-abiding, and...I mean, God, I'm so squeaky clean, it's embarrassing. I pay my parking tickets, I give way at rotaries – in Boston!, I'm the only person I know who doesn't cheat on their taxes, for Chrissakes. At least we have one loyal friend left in the world, one person who still believes in us.

JAMES

Cynthia—

CYNTHIA

Well, two actually. Mrs. Wilson and Rosa. Rosa hasn't met us yet but when she does, she'll know instinctively that we'd never hurt a fly and that we care about people and human rights and the health of the planet, all of that, and...and Mrs. Wilson. I called her. She was great. Innocent until proven guilty, that's how we do it here in America, that's the American way. She said that. Seriously. Isn't that sweet? But she did say that they couldn't wait forever, that Rosa couldn't wait forever. And I said I understood, and that I appreciated her faith in us because, God knows, we don't get a lot of affirmation these days.

JAMES

Honey, we need to focus on what's in front of us right now.

CYNTHIA

There's always a silver lining. You don't see it right away, but it's there. No jobs, no distractions. Our time is our own. We can devote ourselves one hundred percent to our daughter. You know how rare that is? What a gift that is? To wake up in the morning and plan your entire day around

CYNTHIA (CONT.)

your child. Let's see, what shall we do today, Rosa? I know! How about we go get a donut for breakfast, no, a bagel and cream cheese, and then we'll go to the library, see if they've got any more of those George and Martha books that we love so much—

JAMES

(Ferociously)
WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP!

A pause. CYNTHIA is stunned by this uncharacteristic outburst.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Oh God.

(Beat.)

I want to be with Rosa, too. I do. But we can't, not yet, we don't have... we don't know where all this is going.

(Beat.)

CYNTHIA

You want some tea?

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Or coffee?

JAMES

No, thanks.

(Slight pause.)

I'm going to go.

CYNTHIA

Go? Where?

JAMES

To the game.

CYNTHIA

You're going to the ballgame?

JAMES

I always go.

CYNTHIA

Yes, you do.

JAMES

Hey, hey—

(He tries to embrace her, she backs away)
It's not you, Cyn. It's all of this. I just need to... think about something else.
(Beat)
Look, if—

CYNTHIA

Go.

JAMES

Cyn, I—

CYNTHIA

Go! Go to the game. I'll make some tea. I'll take some down to the reporters out there in the cold. The faithful few. Why are they still here? We're old news, aren't we, by now? God, I would hate that job. You stand around for hours in all weather, and for what? Ten seconds on the air. If you're lucky. And no one watches anyway or gives a damn, it's in one eye and out the other. And then what? You do it all over again the next day, and the next, and the next. Ten second clips, every one of them completely forgettable. What do you have at the end of the day? At the end of your life? I'm glad I don't have to do that.

JAMES exits to the bedroom. CYNTHIA gazes out of the window. After a few seconds, JAMES re-enters. He is wearing a Boston Red Sox cap and windbreaker.

JAMES

(Starting to leave)
I have my cell. Call me if you...

CYNTHIA

(Without turning round)
Wear shades.

JAMES

What?

CYNTHIA

Or a fake mustache. Something. If they recognize you at Fenway, they'll beat the crap out of you.

JAMES exits. CYNTHIA's cell phone rings. She answers it.

CYNTHIA

Hello. Oh hi, Mrs. Wilson, how are you?...No, no it's fine....What? But I thought you said...yes, but...Mrs. Wilson....please, listen to me for a moment, okay? We are committed to Rosa, totally committed, you couldn't possibly find two people more committed. And there have been no charges, and there won't be, the whole thing is a complete... No, I understand, it's just....it's hard to hear, that's all. I will. Sure. Thank you for calling.

The lights fade.