

AMERICA'S FAVORITE NEWSCASTER

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A New Musical

Book & Lyrics By Tom Attea

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

EVAN FURY, a young but leading newscaster, ever striving to remain calm

CHERYL FURY, Evan's wife

BRENT, chief White House correspondent

RICHARD, president of the news division

FRED, chairman of the network

PRESIDENT, Evan's forever-unnamed nemesis-in-chief

NED, a bartender

MADELYN, a single woman

OSCAR, an attorney

CHORUS, taking the roles of Secretary, Ned, Madelyn, Fred, and Oscar.

## SETTINGS

TV News set  
Hotel bar  
Roger's office  
Emmy Awards  
Party  
Evan's condo  
Beach  
Evan's home office  
Editorial room

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Time is the present.

At no time during the performance is the current President's name to be mentioned or to appear in any way.

## SONGS

REMEMBER?.....	Evan & Brent
STRANGE HOW EVEN A LITTLE THING.....	Evan
WHETHER WE'RE TOGETHER.....	Evan
FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS.....	The President
DON'T CALL HIM A SUCKER.....	Evan
COME BACK, MR. FURY.....	Chorus
MAYBE NEXT TIME.....	Cheryl
CLOSER TO MY DREAMS.....	Evan
MIDDLE MANAGEMENT.....	Roger
WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME?.....	Evan
HOW DO YOU DO THAT?.....	Cheryl
REPRISE: WELCOME BACK, MR. FURY.....	Chorus.

SCENE 1

Network evening newscast. Evan Fury as the anchor.

EVAN

Welcome to America's favorite newscast. I'm Evan Fury. It's time to bring in Brent Wiley, our chief White House correspondent, who just completed an exclusive interview with the President.

Brent enters, with arm in a cast and bandages on his head.

EVAN

That bad, huh?

BRENT

(attempts to straighten jaw with hand)

What can I tell you? I ran into some of the President's supporters on way out. You know how it is. How's your black eye doing?

EVAN

(turns to him and points)

Almost gone, thankfully.

(to audience)

As you can see, these are far from usual times for journalism.

(to Brent)

Can you sit?

BRENT

Maybe.

Attempts to ease himself into chair. Plunks himself down suddenly. Almost tilts the chair over.

EVAN

(reacting to prevent Brent's fall)

We'll be right back with Brent after this break.

(to Brent)

All you all right?

BRENT

Yeah. But let me be frank. I'm not certain I can continue in my present role.

EVAN

I suspect that at times the same thought crosses all our minds.

BRENT

Even you, Evan? I thought you could calmly soldier on through just about anything.

EVAN

I thought so, too. But my imperturbability hasn't quite been what it used to be, particularly since he insulted my wife for being misguided enough to marry me. But you and I can hardly abdicate our responsibility to hold him accountable. The viability of the free press is at stake.

BRENT

I'm not sure the forefathers had what we're facing in mind when they wrote the first amendment. Sometimes I wish I was doing the show's human-interest tag. I know the vituperative present makes me long for the old days, when presidents were at least moderately informed and somewhat predictably sane.

EVAN

We all do, Brent.

BRENT

(sings)

REMEMBER THE TIME  
WHEN REPORTING A FACT  
WOULD SELDOM RESULT  
IN BEING ATTACKED?

EVAN

AND WHEN A FACT WAS FACT,  
A REALITY,  
ON WHICH MOST OF  
US WOULD AGREE?

BOTH

OH, WHERE ARE THOSE HALCYON DAYS  
WHEN NEWS WE MADE CERTAIN IS TRUE,  
THE PRESIDENT MIGHT COMMEND,

INSTEAD OF MISCONSTRUE.

YES, WHERE ARE THOSE GLORIOUS DAYS  
WHEN CALLING THE ENEMY  
OF AMERICA THE FREE PRESS  
IS A LOW WE'D NEVER SEE?

OH, REMEMBER WHEN  
CALLING OUR NEWS FAKE  
WOULD MAKE MOST PEOPLE SAY,  
NOW THAT'S A MISTAKE?  
OH, HOW WE MISS THOSE HALCYON DAYS!  
WHEN A FACT WAS A FACT,  
NOT TO BE ATTACKED.  
OH, HOW WE MISS THOSE GLORIOUS, HALCYON DAYS!

On-Air warning tone. They scurry back to their  
seats.

EVAN

Now, Brent, returning to your interview with the President. How did it go?

BRENT

Pretty much as expected. Every time I attempted to nail down the truth, he changed the  
subject.

Evan grimaces, as if he knows all too well what Brent  
experiences. Brent sighs with pain.

SCENE 2

Richard's office. Fred is with him.

FRED

I don't like the rumblings of malcontent I'm hearing about Brent. We've got to do all we  
can to keep him at his post, hopefully without having to give him a raise.

RICHARD

Of course, Fred. He's an American institution.

FRED

Which makes it even more important to mollify him. If we lose him, the stockholders will put the squeeze on me like a band of silverback gorillas.

RICHARD

As soon as the crisis is over, you'll be the second to know.

FRED

Why not the first?

RICHARD

I'll inform you as soon as I know.

(phone rings; answers)

Good.

(to Fred)

They're here.

FRED

I'll be in my office, waiting to be the second one to know. I've got a lot on my table, as usual.

(exits; off)

Good morning, Evan. Brent. Richard has been awaiting your arrival. Sorry I can't attend.

EVAN

Thanks, Fred.

BRENT

Yeah, thanks.

Evan and Brent enter. Richard stands.

RICHARD

Good morning, gentlemen.

EVAN

Good morning, Richard. Thanks for setting aside some time.

RICHARD

My pleasure.

(to Brent)



I'm truly sorry about what the mistreatment got received yesterday. Needless to say, it's totally inexcusable.

BRENT

Thanks. At times like this, I'm glad I don't have to depend on the Affordable Care Act.

RICHARD

Have a seat.

Brent and Evan sit.

RICHARD

Either of you like some coffee?

EVAN

No, thank you.

BRENT

(points to jaw)

Maybe later, if you have a straw.

RICHARD

Now, what can I do to help make up for this regrettable incident?

EVAN

I think it's time to provide Brent with a security detail.

RICHARD

At the White House? How do you feel about that?

BRENT

To and from there. Either that or reassign me to something safer, like the war in Syria. In any event, I'm not sure I still have what it takes to continue.

RICHARD

(to Evan)

Let's not go there, Brent. You're the most respected White House correspondent on network news. How many Presidents have you covered by now?

BRENT

Nine, going back to Nixon, whose shenanigans now don't seem quite as reprehensible, even given Watergate.

(to Evan)

You weren't even born then.

(to RICHARD)

How old were you in 1974?

RICHARD

Ten. Which only lends credence to my statement. What can possibly persuade you to call it quits now?

BRENT

Self-preservation. Oddly enough, it's still a consideration, even in my decrepit old age.

RICHARD

I admit it's a tough time for journalists. Not to mention a tough time to run a news division. But you don't see me giving up.

BRENT

Or bandaged up. You have no idea what it's like on the front lines. I feel like the guy in the Revolutionary War painting with the bandaged head, only I don't know how to play the flute.

RICHARD

I feel your pain.

BRENT

Wanna bet?

RICHARD

(to Evan)

Who does this President think he is, inciting his supporters to inflict this sort of physical abuse on reporters just trying to do their jobs?

EVAN

He is, unfortunately, the President we're obligated to cover.

(collusive look at Brent)

But with no obligation whatever to mention him by name. As we agreed, ever since he insulted my wife, he is to be referred to only as the President, Mr. President, or 45.

RICHARD

I agreed to the condition, didn't I? Thankfully, so far relatively few of your viewers seem to have noticed .

BRENT

I'm sure the President has. And can a tweet be far behind?

RICHARD

No doubt it's on the horizon.

(to Evan)

But you may continue, until such time as your peculiar preference becomes unsustainable.

EVAN

Thank you. Selective reticence has its consolations.

(to Brent)

One of the unfortunate aspects of the profession is that we do not get to choose our subject matter. Nevertheless, what do you say, Brent? Will you gut it out with me?

BRENT

Let me ask you a question before I answer. Do you yourself plan to continue?

EVAN

I actually have no idea. If the truth be told, there are occasions when I question my own ability to go on.

RICHARD

Please, gentlemen, not both of you?

(grips his own chest)

EVAN

You all right?

RICHARD

Don't worry. It'll pass. Or I will.

(takes pill with glass of water)

Now, where were we?

BRENT

We were both talking about giving up.

RICHARD

Will you two stop going on about such nonsense? You're both pillars of your profession. And you have the top-rated evening news program in America.

EVAN

At this particular moment, I'm not going anywhere, although I do occasionally wonder if continuing indicates a touch of masochism.

(to Brent)

Maybe you and I should become narcissists.

BRENT

I have no idea how to do that.

RICHARD

You can't become a narcissist. It's an aspect of your personality or it isn't.

EVAN

Who says so?

(to Brent)

Given the distinguished service we labor to render to the public, even if at times we fall short, it seems to me that we deserve to love ourselves at least as much as the jackanapes who is currently ensconced in the White House.

BRENT

I agree, Evan. Alternately, we can both decide we're just flat-out cowards.

RICHARD

Nonsense . You know as well as I do that it's up to reporters like you to stand up to the current avalanche of logically suspect conduct that has engulfed the national discourse.

BRENT

I'm not certain I have a big fund of information on how hold an irrational person accountable.

EVAN

Exactly. May I give up for a moment on my lifelong struggle to conduct myself calmly or, as I often admonish myself ...

(holds up hands to put phrase in  
quotation marks with forefingers and  
middle fingers)

... without becoming "furious"?

EVAN (CONT'D)

We currently have, in charge of this great nation but divided nation, a self-interested, semiliterate twit, who spends 3-million in tax-payer dollars to play a weekend of golf at his resort in Palm Beach while he enables cuts in education, even in school-lunch programs for disadvantaged children, denies the children of illegal immigrants residence in the country they grew up in, puts healthcare beyond the reach of millions, gleefully enables degradation of the environment, and celebrates higher taxes on the very people who make up his base. A preening Narcissus who so meticulously patrols the borders of his ever-threatened ego that he feels compelled to unleash needling tweets at anyone who fails to stroke his porcupine-like exterior; in summary, a self-deluding, rumbustious man-child who is conspicuously unfit to be the President of the United States and a grave danger to the nation and the world at large. Sorry, but at times the volcanic influence my last name has had on my own development erupts to the surface.

RICHARD

Much of what you say about him may be true, Evan, but you and Brent both have a higher trust profile than he does. That's an effective tool, as well as a bit of a recompense.

EVAN

But hardly a stupendous achievement. The truth is, I suspect we all have our limits, Richard.

BRENT

I draw the line at the very real possibility of death.

RICHARD

What? Limits? You, Evan?

(to Evan)

And how did you rise to the position of anchor at such a young age? I'll tell you. Illimitable dedication. And it has paid off very handsomely for you.

EVAN

Let me tell you about one of the surprising benefits. Last week, my wife asked me to leave our happy home.

RICHARD

I'm extremely sorry to hear that. Why? The way the President insulted her?

EVAN

No. She seems to have put that behind her. She said I should leave, because I'm never home anyway. I'm either at the network or on assignment.

RICHARD

But she certainly must appreciate your extraordinary achievements?

EVAN

I think she's fed up with appreciating them.

RICHARD

I'm sure you'll find a way to work out your domestic life. For heaven's sake, you're America's favorite newscaster. That's remarkably good for the network -- and remarkably good for you! Now, I want both of you to stop this nonsense about allowing this rascal of a President, and very likely a one-term President, to have an adverse impact on your distinguished careers. Are we all on the same page now?

BRENT

What about my security detail?

RICHARD

You'll have it to and from the White House, as requested.

BRENT

What about when I'm in the White House?

RICHARD

Please, don't exaggerate. Regrettable as things can get, you don't need one there.

BRENT

Yet.

RICHARD

Please, no more counterproductive talk. And look on the bright side. Tomorrow is shaping up to be another big night for the newscast at the Emmy Awards.

BRENT

I may not go this year.

RICHARD

Why? The President isn't expected to attend.

(to Evan)

I trust you'll be there. Or have you already won enough Emmys?

## SCENE 3

Hotel bar. Madelyn is there alone.

MADELYN

(holds up glass)

May I have another bloody Mary, Ned.

NED

Comin' right up, Madelyn.

MADELYN

(as he mixes it)

You have a very sexy way of mixing drinks. Do you know that?

NED

Thanks. It comes naturally.

Evan enters. Sits at bar.

EVAN

Hi, Ned. Stoli on the rocks with lime, please.

BARTENDER

Coming right up, Mr. Fury.

(gives Madelyn her drink; goes to make Evan's)

How's the news racket?

EVAN

I've seen more propitious days.

MADELYN

Oh, I recognize you now. You're the famous TV newsman, Evan Fury.

EVAN

Thank you.

MADELYN

(puts hand out)

It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm a fan. Madelyn Logan.

EVAN

Thank you, Madelyn. Very nice to meet you.

Bartender puts down drink. Evan picks it up.

EVAN (CONT'D)

(toasts Madelyn)

Here's to you, Madelyn. We mere reporters wouldn't exist without your attentive indulgence.

MADELYN

Thanks.

(toasts)

Evan.

BARTENDER

(eyeing Madelyn, as if to say lay off)

How's the wife? Still on the outs?

EVAN

What other reason would bring me at this late hour to this haven of solitary remorse?

MADELYN

Oh, just my luck. Maybe we can meet when you're between marriages.

EVAN

Actually, I'm hoping to patch things up. Excuse me.

Goes to side and dials on smartphone. Lights come up on Cheryl at home, sipping orange juice. It's obvious she's pregnant.

EVAN

Hi, Cheryl.

CHERYL

Hello.

EVAN

I'd like to come home.



CHERYL

Why?

EVAN

I miss you.

CHERYL

Really?

EVAN

Of course. You know I love you.

CHERYL

I have had no recent evidence of that.

EVAN

I'm thinking of changing.

CHERYL

You're who you are, Evan. So it's better this way.

EVAN

How can never being together be better, especially when we're expecting our first child?

CHERYL

Because this way I'm not always wondering when you'll be home. I can simply sit here and enjoy a nonalcoholic drink all by my disconsolate self.

EVAN

Then at least let me ask you something. As you know, the Emmy Awards are tomorrow evening. May I ask if you'll grace me with your lovely and distinguished company?

CHERYL

The Emmys are part of the problem, Evan. You love winning them, apparently, even more than you love me and the child you will soon be the conspicuously neglectful father of.

EVAN

That's simply not true.

CHERYL

Then why do you spend your entire life overachieving on behalf of the network?

EVAN

I'm just doing my job, sweetheart. I do have a contract.

CHERYL

Then maybe you need to rethink your job, if by some as-yet-unrevealed resource you have the capacity to do so. Meanwhile, good luck at the awards show.

(hangs up)

EVAN

(reacts and ends call; sings)

STRANGE HOW EVEN A LITTLE THING  
CAN RUIN SOMETHING AS BIG AS LOVE.  
YOU'D THINK WE'D HOLD IT HIGH ABOVE  
THE LITTLE THINGS TO WHICH WE CLING.

STRANGE HOW EVEN A LITTLE THING,  
LIKE THE PRICK OF A PIN  
CAN DEFLATE A BALLOON  
OR SEND A BLIMP  
INTO A SWOON.

STRANGE HOW EVEN A LITTLE THING,  
LIKE A PAPER MATCH  
CAN MAKE AN OAK  
OR A GIANT REDWOOD  
GO UP IN SMOKE.

THEY'RE LIKE THE LITTLE WOUND  
ROMEO'S RAPIER MADE  
IN MERCUTIO, WHO SAID,  
"MARRY, 'TIS NOT SO DEEP AS A WELL,  
NOR SO WIDE AS A CHURCH-DOOR,  
BUT 'TIS ENOUGH, 'T WILL SERVE."  
AND, SMALL AS IT WAS,  
HE'D SOON BE DEAD.

STRANGE HOW EVEN A LITTLE THING,  
LIKE A DROP OF RAIN,  
WHEN THERE'S A DOWNPOUR,  
CAN MAKE A MOUNTAIN SLIDE

TO THE VALLEY FLOOR.

YES, IT'S STRANGE HOW EVEN A LITTLE THING  
CAN RUIN SOMETHING AS BIG AS LOVE.  
YOU'D THINK WE'D HOLD IT HIGH ABOVE  
THE LITTLE THINGS TO WHICH WE CLING --  
THE DAMN LITTLE THINGS TO WHICH WE CLING!

He heads back to bar. Picks up drink.

EVAN

(to bartender)

I think I'll take this insufficient anodyne to my room.

(raising glass, to Madelyn)

A pleasure to have met you, Madelyn.

MADELYN

(clinks his glass)

You, too, Evan. I'll be watching you on TV and remembering the night we met.

EVAN

Thank you. I appreciate that.

BARTENDER

(puts check in front of him)

Good night, Mr. Fury.

EVAN

(signing and writing tip)

Good night, Ned. By the way, what would you think if I were to resign?

NED

From your job?

EVAN

Where else does one resign from?

NED

Why would you do such a thing?

EVAN

Oh, pretty much the world I'm condemned to chronicle. The malignant dishonesty and divisiveness in Washington and the ignorant brutality afoot in much of the rest of the world -- murder, championed as religion, the insufficiently heeded decline of the ecosystem, the ease with which the developed world could assuage the suffering of the impoverished portion yet declines to do so, the apparent inability of our species to understand we're all on this life-graced globe together and should direct our resources to remediating our real enemies, such as disease, hunger, and natural disasters. In fact, an observation by George Bernard Shaw, and later by Albert Einstein, seems particularly timely -- that the earth must be an insane asylum for the rest of the universe. But now let's go back to what you think about my flirtation with resignation.

NED

I'd think you'd be either very stupid or very smart.

EVAN

The question is, which one?

NED

Maybe a little bit of both. Life is like that, right? Stupid, smart; smart, stupid. Sometimes, it's a fine line. I know it is for me.

MADELYN

Sometimes, it's a fine line for me, too.

EVAN

Yeah, apparently the difference can be a confoundingly fine line, as well as one that tends to wiggle back and forth. Good night to you both. May all your decisions be easy ones.

SCENE 4

Emmy Awards.

HOST

Now the Emmy for Outstanding Continuing Coverage of a News Story in a Regularly Scheduled Broadcast -- and it goes to Evan Fury for his unwavering coverage of the troublesome discrepancies between Republican policies and their representations of them to their supporters ...

(with deference to Evan)

... and his cautionary reminders that we must be concerned about how they may react when they realize they've been misled.

Evan comes forward and accepts the award, the third one of the evening the network's news program has won.

HOST

Three Emmys in one night. That's a remarkable achievement, Mr. Fury.

EVAN

(overcome with emotion)

Thank you.

(to audience)

Thank you all very much. What can I say, except I'd like once again to express my appreciation to the truly deserving winners of tonight's awards, our entire news team, here and around the world, for their exemplary work and unflagging dedication.

(holds it up)

This belongs to all of you!

Lights go up in Evan's condo. Cheryl is watching TV.

EVAN (CONT'D)

(looks at award)

Let me just add that I am humbled, humbled for the third time, by your generous recognition of our efforts. But then, given the vituperative state of politics in today's America, let me also say that I have grown accustomed to being humbled. And I know that many of you, my distinguished colleagues, have experienced similar unmerited affronts to the dedication and talent you bring to your work. I encourage you to persevere. But now I must apologize for disappointing you. I've decided I've had enough. Not only with the nettlesome antics emanating from Washington, which would be laughable if they weren't so fearsomely consequential for the nation, but also with the proudly misguided intolerance of much of our citizenry and the tragedies ignorance and indifference are inflicting globally. In short, these are simply no longer the times I always dreamed of covering. On a positive note, I've decided it's time to rebuild what remains of my foolishly neglected personal life, and I do hope my dear wife, Cheryl, is listening.

Cheryl reacts.

EVAN (CONT'D)

(holds up Emmy)

Thanks again. And good night.

Weak applause. Hubbub. Heads off the podium.

Cheryl picks up her cell phone and calls him. Evan answers.

CHERYL

Evan, sweetheart, tell me , do you actually mean what you just announced?

EVAN

Yes, I do. I seem to have lapsed into sanity. I only regret that I took so long. Do I have your permission to come home again?

CHERYL

Of course, you do.

EVAN

Great, sweetheart. I just have to answer what will undoubtedly be a plethora of questions about my decision. I'll call when I'm on my way. Love you forever and see you soon.

CHERYL

Love you forever, too, dear.

They hang up. Brent enters hurriedly.

BRENT

What the hell is going on, Evan? You can't resign. You're the one who persuaded me to stay on.

EVAN

I'm sorry, Brent. Did you see the President's malignant tweet when the newscast won its second Emmy -- and all because I won't mention his name on the air anymore?

BRENT

Everybody saw it. So what? We all know it's just a product of his petulant insecurity.

EVAN

I'm sorry, Brent. It just drove me over the line. Call me a double-crosser. Call me a coward. Even call me today's most pejorative derogation -- a narcissist. I've had it.

Richard enters.

RICHARD

You mean, call you an irresponsible lunatic.

EVAN

I apologize, Richard. If I had known what I was going to do before I did it, I would have informed you.

RICHARD

But it's so unlike you, Evan. You're generally the very soul of prudence. What set you off? The President's latest deranged tweet? Everyone dismissed it as a mockery of his office. Take it from me, refusing to mention his name on the air does not qualify you as America's public enemy number one.

EVAN

Thank you. I appreciate your condolences. But I'm afraid the fuse reached the dynamite.

RICHARD

Reason with him, Brent.

BRENT

Why? If he's out, so am I.

RICHARD

What are you saying? You have your security detail.

(to Evan)

I don't understand, Evan. Where is your usual admirable placidity in the face of a world of perplexing perturbations?

EVAN

I have no idea. The top of the mountain just seems to have blown off my long-inactive volcano. And in the heat of it, I have forged an inalterable resolution.

RICHARD

What? Professional suicide?

EVAN

Very likely, I suppose. What I have actually decided is that I love my wife and, yes, even my egregiously undeserving self, too much to continue.

RICHARD

What about me? Send a little love in my direction.

EVAN

Oh, Richard, you'll be fine. You're a survivor.

RICHARD

You wouldn't think that if you saw how "furious" Fred is. He wants to know how I could let such a thing happen. He also said I damn well better get you to reconsider.

EVAN

Fred knows you've built the news division into a powerhouse. You'll be fine. And so will the network.

RICHARD

Share your optimism with him. He has to answer to the board of directors and the stockholders. And his cell phone is already ringing like the stock price just tumbled off Mt. Rushmore.

EVAN

I notice yours isn't ringing at all.

RICHARD

That's because I turned off the volume.

EVAN

You'll find a replacement in no time, Richard. We've got a deep bench.

RICHARD

But you're the star quarterback, Evan. You don't walk off the field, especially when the team is number one. Think of it! The newscast just won, not one, not two, but three Emmys in one night -- a new record, even for you. In addition, you do have a contract. Don't force me to enforce it.

EVAN

So take me to court. I'm sorry, Richard. It has become apparent to me that, as long as I remain at the network and, as banal as it may sound, I'll be unable to balance my work life and my personal life.

RICHARD

Of course, you can do it.



EVAN

Even if I were capable of such an elusive feat, I simply can no longer allow myself or my long-suffering wife to be a favorite target of the unfeeling oaf who, through baseless campaign promises to a long-needy and otherwise neglected base, now occupies the Oval Office.

RICHARD

What about the millions of people who depend on you to keep them responsibly informed? What about your news team -- and your many other colleagues in journalism. Look at the accolades they've just accorded you!

EVAN

Thank you, Richard. But, frankly, it's time for me to pass the ulcer. Forgive me. I mean, to pass the baton and give someone else the distinguished responsibility of anchoring the broadcast.

RICHARD

But you're still a young man, Evan, and this president can't last long. He's like a maniacal driver careening down the highway, bouncing off of one guardrail after another, and it's only a matter of time before he goes flying off a cliff.

EVAN

Call me the instant it happens. I may reconsider.

RICHARD

I'll call you tomorrow.

EVAN

Make it in the afternoon, please. For once in my life, I plan to sleep late.

SCENE 5

Fury living room. Cheryl is on the phone. Presses her back to ease the strain of her pregnancy.

CHERYL

I know, Mother, but he's not a tiger. So the admonition that he can't change his stripes doesn't apply.... Yes, I agree.... If he undergoes a relapse, out the door he goes again.

(hears sound at door)

He's here now, Mom. Gotta go.

Hangs up and sits down on couch quickly. Picks up book and pretends to be reading. Evan enters partway.

EVAN

Mind if I come in?

CHERYL

Coming in has not been the problem, Evan. It's going out for interminable periods.  
(moves toward him)

Welcome back, sweetheart.

EVAN

Thanks.

(closes door and meets her)

It feels good to be home again.

They embrace.

CHERYL

I hope the feeling continues.

EVAN

Oh, don't concern yourself about that, Cheryl. I just had my last big realization. My career is not the number one thing. You are.

(points to her abdomen)

And the mysterious stranger who's about to join us.

CHERYL

It's not the first time you talked about your last big realization. How many more do you expect to have?

EVAN

I know. What a quandary! Just when I think I've had the last big one, along comes another big one. Like the night five years ago when we were walking home after seeing a play and I had the big realization that I love you. I was so happy I almost did a backward somersault. I expected the moon and stars to shine with unprecedented splendor. But I noticed they didn't light up any brighter.

CHERYL

They don't seem to be on call for individual events.

EVAN

Nope. So, given only the general support system of a universe, which is, by the way, far more reliable than human behavior, it appears that the most important thing on terra firma is what's between us.

(sings)

I HAVEN'T NOTICED THE SUN  
 APPEAR WHEN I'M IN LOVE  
 OR CLOUDS ROLL IN WHEN I'M NOT.  
 I'VE LEARNED, MORE THAN SKIES ABOVE,  
 WHAT MATTERS IS SIMPLY WHETHER  
 YOU AND I ARE TOGETHER.

I HAVEN'T SEEN THE MOON  
 SHINE BRIGHTLY WHEN I'M HAPPY  
 OR THE STARS DISAPPEAR WHEN I'M SAD.  
 SUCH THINGS ALL SEEM KIND OF SAPPY.  
 WHAT MATTERS IS SIMPLY WHETHER  
 YOU AND I ARE TOGETHER.

I CAN BASK IN THE NOURISHING WARMTH OF THE SUN  
 AND NOTICE THE MOON TUG ON THE TIDE.  
 A SKY ALIGHT WITH STARS SEEMS A SIGN  
 WE'RE NOT ALL ALONE BUT MAY RESIDE  
 IN A VAST COMMUNITY OF LIFE.  
 A RAINBOW IS A LOVELY SIGHT  
 AND RAIN A GIFT OF LIFE SUPPORT.  
 ALL THESE PERCEPTIONS SEEM QUITE RIGHT.  
 BUT WHY WOULD I DESCRIBE OUR LOVE,  
 WHICH MEANS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE TO ME ,  
 SO LIGHTLY THAT I'D SETTLE FOR  
 A SYMPATHETIC FALLACY.

I HAVE YET TO WITNESS A RAINBOW APPEAR  
 WHEN YOU AND I EMBRACE  
 OR THE RAIN POUR DOWN IF YOU SAY  
 IT'S TIME TO PACK YOUR SUITCASE.  
 WHAT REALLY MATTERS IS WHETHER  
 YOU AND I ARE TOGETHER.  
 SIMPLY WHETHER  
 WE'RE TOGETHER!

(spoken)

There is only one thing I ask in return for my perpetually happy presence.

CHERYL

What's that, may I ask?

EVAN

The same thing we agreed to do when what's his name insulted you. Although we will be surrounded by its troublesome resonance, let's never again mention the name of the President to each other.

CHERYL

Not only easy to comply with, but a resounding mutual delight.

(opens arms)

Welcome home. Long time no see.

EVAN

(hugs her and they kiss)

Wow, just like former times. And talk about being better off. Just think. No more insults hurled at you and no more black eyes for me. I do, however, dread how much less my colleagues are going to think of me for retreating into a world of personal bliss.

SCENE 6

Later. Bedroom. He and his wife are asleep. He seems agitated. Dream begins. The President enters in a business suit, with a red tie, and goes up to him. Touches his arm to awaken him.

PRESIDENT

Hi, loser.

EVAN

(appears to wake up)

Mr. President! What are you doing here?

PRESIDENT

I want to tell you something.

EVAN

Well, not here. You'll wake up my wife.

(gets up)

Come with me.

PRESIDENT

Lead the way .

As they go.

EVAN

You can stay, ever so briefly, on one condition.

PRESIDENT

What condition?

EVAN

Don't mention your name.

PRESIDENT

The same as on your former failing news program? Why here, too?

EVAN

So you can stay .

PRESIDENT

But you know I just love hearing my name -- and seeing it displayed on buildings, in lights, on steaks and wine, and even on adopt-a-highway signs.

EVAN

It's my one inviolable condition.

PRESIDENT

Oh, you mean like don't violate?

EVAN

Precisely. Do I have your agreement?

PRESIDENT

Tonight only .

EVAN

I appreciate your transient sacrifice.

(as they go, notices something on  
President's lapel)

By the way, what's that extra pin on your lapel?

PRESIDENT

What extra pin?

EVAN

The one under the American flag.

(looks at it closely; aghast)

It's the face of Vladimir Putin!

PRESIDENT

Why not? We're like family.

(points to his own head)

We even have the same color hair.

Evan reacts. Continues to lead him into the living  
room. Turns on light.

EVAN

Now, using the term loosely, tell me what's on your mind.

PRESIDENT

I'm going to miss you.

EVAN

Me? Why on earth would you?

PRESIDENT

You're such an easy target -- and I get so much press every time I tweet about your fake,  
fake, fake news program.

EVAN

How can you misrepresent the mainstream press that way? Have you no respect for the  
First Amendment? Do you even know what it says?

PRESIDENT

Of course, I know what it says.

EVAN

Tell me.

PRESIDENT

I don't like the amendment, that's all.

EVAN

The germane passage is about not abridging freedom of speech, or of the press ... Did you hear that -- "or of the press"?

PRESIDENT

What can I say? The Founding Fathers weren't perfect. Not perfect, a long way from perfect.

EVAN

I will never understand how you were elected.

PRESIDENT

I'll tell you how. Whatever crowd I address, I use a version of the famous ad for Arpege perfume. Remember? "Promise her anything but give her Arpege." In my case, promise them anything but give them the shaft."

EVAN

Do you realize how much such talk demeans your Presidency?

PRESIDENT

It got me elected, didn't it? I'm the President, and you're not.

EVAN

Yes, you are. So, just as an experiment, why not consider behaving in a way that is worthy of the office -- the office of Washington, Lincoln, FDR.

PRESIDENT

The fact is, one day they'll be carving my face on Mt. Rushmore. Or I'll build a hotel on top of it and put my name there in gold letters, with spotlights on timers. Now, just for you, Evan -- and notice I mentioned your name, even though you won't mention mine -- only for you, I'm going to tell you about how well I'm doing as your President.

(to musicians)

Hit it!

Evan ducks.

## PRESIDENT

(sings)

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT YOU THINK  
MY ADMINISTRATION IS A MESS  
AND I MAY BE ON THE BRINK  
OF ACHIEVING EVEN LESS.  
BUT YOU'RE ENTIRELY WRONG,  
AND I'LL TELL YOU IN THIS SONG  
WHY MY PRESIDENCY'S A GREAT SUCCESS.

(dances, soft shoe)

FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS,  
I'M JUST FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS.  
AND WHO NEEDS FACTS --  
THOSE INCOMPREHENSIBLE  
AND DELIGHTFULLY DISPENSABLE  
THINGS CALLED FACTS --  
WHEN I CAN PROMISE ANYTHING  
AND GIVE IT A TRUTHFUL RING  
AND ACHIEVE EVERY ONE OF MY GOALS  
WITHOUT FACTS TO REVEAL ANY HOLES?

I CAN CHAMPION A HEALTHCARE BILL  
AND CALL IN REPUBLICANS FROM THE HILL  
TO TELL THEM HOW MUCH AMERICANS NEED IT  
AND I NEVER EVEN HAVE TO READ IT.

I STOPPED RUSSIAN MEDDLING IN THE ELECTION  
AND SECURED OUR DEMOCRACY'S PROTECTION  
BY INVITING VLADIMIR PUTIN TO BE  
MY PARTNER IN CYBER SECURITY.

I SOLVED THE PROBLEM OF CLIMATE CHANGE  
AND ALL I HAD TO DO IS ARRANGE  
A PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE PARIS ACCORD  
TO ANNOUNCE THE U. S. WAS NO LONGER ON BOARD.

AND TO ANY TRUTHFUL PERSON IT'S PLAIN  
I LIVED UP TO THE PROMISES OF MY CAMPAIGN.  
BECAUSE THE GOAL OF MY STATECRAFT  
IS TO GIVE MY ADORING VOTERS THE SHAFT.



SO, AS YOU CAN SEE, FAR FROM A MESS  
 MY PRESIDENCY'S A COMPLETE SUCCESS.  
 I'VE ALREADY ACHIEVED MUCH MORE  
 THAN ANY PRESIDENT HAS BEFORE.

YES, WITHOUT RELYING ON A SINGLE FACT  
 FOR THE INCOMPARABLE WAY I ACT,  
 SOME PEOPLE ARE SAYING I'M GREATER BY FAR  
 THAN WASHINGTON, LINCOLN OR F. D. R.

FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS,  
 I'M JUST FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS.  
 AND WHO NEEDS FACTS --  
 THOSE INCOMPREHENSIBLE  
 AND DELIGHTFULLY DISPENSABLE  
 THINGS CALLED FACTS --  
 WHEN I CAN PROMISE ANYTHING  
 AND GIVE IT A TRUTHFUL RING  
 AND ACHIEVE EVERY ONE OF MY GOALS  
 WITHOUT FACTS TO REVEAL ANY HOLES?  
 YES, I'M FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS,  
 JUST FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS,  
 FLOATING, FLOATING, FLOATING ABOVE THE FACTS!

(spoken)

Beautiful, incredibly beautiful, right?

EVAN

On the contrary, I'm aghast at your indifference to genuine policy achievements.

PRESIDENT

Who cares? As a member of the wealthy class, I demand that you kiss my ass. And guess how I'll repay you? I'll do something that rhymes with my name. That's the true art of the deal.

EVAN

You mean, as an embarrassment to the wealthy class. Think of the social awareness and generosity of people like Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. They've signed up to give their fortunes to charity, while you want to repeal the estate tax.

PRESIDENT

If they had as many kids as I do, they wouldn't be so careless.

EVAN

Do you know that the estate tax has been one of the principal ways income inequality in this country has been moderated?

PRESIDENT

Who wants to moderate it? I love income inequality!

EVAN

And you're the man who went to Washington, promising to drain the swamp.

PRESIDENT

Yes, I did, and I'm off to an outstanding start.

EVAN

(points to his own head)

The question is, where is the swamp located? Do you realize the Republican tax plan reverses the purpose of democracy, which is to protect the average citizen from the wealthy, not the wealthy from the average citizen?

PRESIDENT

Now I have to listen to fake history! Too bad you won't come around, Evan. But I will miss you, especially the way my name sounded when you said it with you distinctive voice. So come on. Say it. One more time.

EVAN

When -- and only when -- I decide you merit it.

PRESIDENT

(as he backs away)

OK. Adios, loser. But music to my ears, it was pure music to my ears. I'll miss you. You were such an easy target -- and I got so much publicity from every beautifully insulting tweet.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 7

Dining table. Evan and his wife are having breakfast.

CHERYL

Did you have a good night's sleep, dear?

EVAN

I wouldn't exactly describe it in those terms.

CHERYL

Want to tell me about it?

EVAN

I can't possibly bear to replay it. But I will tell you this. When I'm asleep, sometimes my usual sense of propriety seems to be like a night watchman who's sleeping on the job, and the unguarded gateway of my mind can allow the entry of the most unwelcome intruders. Oh, how low the mind asleep can go. The only relief is waking up and realizing that what transpired was, thankfully, but a dream. An involuntary dark of the night excursion into what can only be described as a mental recycling dump.

His smartphone rings.

CHERYL

Please, don't answer it.

EVAN

It's Richard. I can't be reduced to impoliteness by my malcontent with 45. I won't allow anyone, even the President, to so inordinately diminish me, especially when he even dares to trouble my dreams.

(answers phone)

Hi, Richard.

Lights come up on other side of stage. Richard on smartphone in office. Fred is sitting with him.

RICHARD

Good morning, Evan. I miss you.

EVAN

Thanks. Can you please find another way to express that wistful sentiment?

FRED  
(softly)

Turn on the speaker.

Richard presses screen of phone. Both he and Fred can now hear Evan.

RICHARD

The whole news team and top management want you back -- from the CEO right down through the editorial team.

Fred gives him a raised fist. Responds to comments with gestures as the conversation goes on.

EVAN

I'm sorry, Richard. I'm mentally and spiritually incapable of reconsidering my decision. If my mind was a fuse box, all the switches that power my interest in exposing myself to the insults and other indecencies of the current political climate have flipped off, if not gone up in smoke. Appoint John or Ray in my place. Either would make an excellent anchor.

RICHARD

What if I create another prime-time spot for you to do something that would appeal to you?

EVAN

How about a program called "News without the President?" There must be an audience for such a lark, disreputable as it may seem for a once-respected journalist to anchor it.

RICHARD

I'll consider any request, as long as you return to your usual role?

EVAN

Would a man who just crawled up onto the beach after being mauled by a great white shark turn around and crawl back into its toothy jaws?

RICHARD

Don't be melodramatic, Evan. I need to refute the news that you've quit. It's all over the media. Did you see the headline in this morning's Daily News? "Anchor's Away!"

EVAN

The hullabaloo will quiet down. Today, even stories of consequence appear as mere flotsam, quickly carried away by the tsunami of inauspicious behavior that has perforce inundated the Fourth Estate.

RICHARD

So what? You still have the power to stand against it. I will even continue to permit your proclivity of refusing to mention what's-his-name. Just as long as you return.

EVAN

It's utterly beyond my capacities, Richard, at least, for the foreseeable future. Besides, I owe my wife a vacation.

RICHARD

Take one. For the next two weeks, we'll simply announce that you're on vacation.

EVAN

Richard, I know the current fashion is to evade the truth, but --

RICHARD

-- I'll give you two weeks. Then I will be forced to begin my search for a replacement.

Fred waves hands as if that's a mistake.

RICHARD

All right. Three weeks.

EVAN

Thank you. Now, if I may, I'd like to spend some time with my lovely and formerly neglected wife.

RICHARD

Please, do. But remember -- three weeks! Three weeks, tops!

(hangs up)

What do you think, Fred?

FRED

I think he'll be back.

RICHARD

You do?

FRED

When anybody I know who's dedicated decides he's had enough and wants out, I always suggest that he take a long vacation instead. Nine out of ten times, he flees back to his job like a pin to a magnet. The question is, how long a vacation does this pinhead need?

Lights fade down on Richard and Fred.

CHERYL

Good for you, Evan. You might actually have, as my mother says, changed your stripes.

EVAN

Thanks. I must admit, though, I'm a bit discombobulated by everything that has transpired.

CHERYL

You need something to take your mind off the call. Would you like to watch "Morning Joe"?

EVAN

Please, Cheryl. Spare me. No television, at least until I have, like a lobster that has recently shed its old shell, time to develop a new one -- as impenetrable a shell as I can manage.

CHERYL

No television, at all?

EVAN

Oh, go ahead and watch as much as you want, dear. Just let me know when you're turning it on, so I can retreat to my den.

CHERYL

All right. I understand. The more I watch it, the more I wonder how he could ever have been elected.

EVAN

I'll tell you what I think.

(sings)

WHEN A VOTER'S CONVINCED HE'S DROWNING  
AND EVERYONE STANDS ON THE SHORE,  
DESPITE HIS CRIES FOR HELP,  
AND NO LIFEGUARD PLIES AN OAR --

DON'T CALL HIM A SUCKER  
 IF SOMEONE TOSSES HIM A SCRAP OF WOOD  
 AND HE GRABS ONTO IT,  
 EVEN IF HE KNOWS IT'S ROTTEN,  
 AND HE HANGS ONTO IT  
 WHILE IT SHREDS IN HIS HANDS LIKE COTTON.

AND DON'T CALL HIM A SUCKER  
 IF SOMEONE THROWS A LIFE RAFT TO HIM,  
 AND HE HANGS ONTO IT,  
 EVEN IF HE'S AWARE IT HAS LEAKS,  
 TILL THE AIR'S OUT OF IT  
 AND DOWN SINKS THE HELP HE SEEKS.

BECAUSE ALL THIS MAN EVER NEEDED  
 WAS SOMEONE WHO FINALLY THROWS  
 HIM A SEAWORTHY LIFESAVER.  
 AND THE PERSON WHO DOES  
 WILL WIN HIS VOTE FOREVER.

SO DON'T CALL HIM A SUCKER  
 IF SOMEONE SHOUTS HE'LL RESCUE HIM,  
 AND HE HOPES HE'LL DO IT,  
 EVEN IF HIS SAVIOR PLAYS  
 SOME GOLF BEFORE HE'LL DO IT,  
 BUT THEN ALL HIS HOPES BETRAYS.  
 NO, DON'T CALL HIM A SUCKER.  
 JUST DON'T CALL HIM A SUCKER.

CHERYL

You have a point, dear.

EVAN

Ah, ha, and speaking of a point, during my recent lassitude, my classical education is coming back to me. I mean, America was sort of like Hector, with a small opening in a fateful hinge of his breastplate near his neck. Our ersatz Achilles spotted it and thrust in his spear. Now, he has pierced Hector's ankles, threaded them with rope, and is dragging him around behind his chariot, while the inhabitants of Troy can only stand by and observe the disgraceful behavior with consternation.

CHERYL

Ugh, I get it, dear. Would you like a cup of coffee?

EVAN

I would love one! Hey, what if we take a vacation to an island, recent hurricane damage or not? Say a return trip to Provo or Anguilla?

CHERYL

Oh, I love the beach at Grace Bay. But I absolutely adore Cap Juluca.

EVAN

Say no more. I'll book the trip now. We both need a break in a beautifully sunny and blessedly remote sanctuary.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 8

Hotel bar. Ned and Madelyn.

NED

Did you read the news about Evan Fury?

MADELYN

Heartbroken. All I can say is, I'm heartbroken.

NED

I'll miss the guy, too. You know, Madelyn, your life is gonna turn around one of these days. You just need to meet Mr. Right. Maybe you should go on one of the dating sites. That's how I met my wife, Patty.

MADELYN

Really?

NED

Yeah. OK, Cupid.

MADELYN

I'm already on it. Plus Match, Chemistry, Eharmony, Tinder, and even Plenty of Fish.



NED

So?

MADELYN

I need to meet a man who isn't all hands. A man with a heart, who will love me forever. You know that hashtag "metoo"? My personal one would be "metwo times at least twenty."

NED

I don't know what's wrong with some men. Me? I guess I'm just a handsome, spoiled guy. I can't even make love to a woman who doesn't want to make love to me, too. Otherwise, nothing happens, if you get what I mean.

MADELYN

May I just say you have a very rare condition. May it spread far and wide.

NED

Thanks. Well, just don't give up hope. I can't tell you how many miles of broken class I had to crawl over to meet my current wife.

MADELYN

I know what that's like. How many times have you been married, Ned?

NED

Only twice. And may there never be a third! And guess what? I told my two kids, by a former marriage, that I was going to give up, and the very next week, I met "Patricia." Do you know what the moral of the story is?

MADELYN

What?

NED

Never give up.

MADELYN

I guess. Returning to Evan Fury, he would have been perfect for me. To think! He loves his wife so much he gave up his career for her. It's a great love story in the making.

NED

Well, I guess maybe he's made enough money to do that. Me? So far no such luck.

MADELYN

Maybe one day your ship will come in, Ned.

(lifts drink in toast)

Who knows? Maybe one day mine will come in, too, with a truly handsome, smiling sailor on the deck.

SCENE 9

Beach. Sound of waves. Evan and Cheryl on beach chairs, sipping drinks that are almost gone. Her's looks like a screwdriver. She's looking at her cell phone.

EVAN

(sighs)

Darling, I haven't been this relaxed since our honeymoon.

CHERYL

Good, sweetheart. I feel that way, too.

(holds cell phone toward him)

You won't believe what just happened. The President said --

EVAN

(overlaps)

-- just don't say it. Cheryl, how can you introduce such a disturbing impropriety into our lives at this lovely, relaxing moment? Is there no escape from our national cartoon strip?

CHERYL

(insulted)

I'm sorry, Evan. I did not mention his name. Come on, sweetheart. Don't you think you're being overly sensitive?

EVAN

I would think the question is, why can't you be more considerate? Here we are, attempting to get away from it all and just beginning to decompress when you introduce the news. And not only the news, but the most offensive topic of all to me. President Piccolo -- a smaller man than even Jonathan Swift imagined in the six-inch inhabitants of Lilliput. You know I'm like a man with a brush burn. Just touch it with news content, and I recoil with pain.

CHERYL

That's no reason to be suddenly irascible with me.

EVAN

I'm sorry. Please, just no more mention of the news for the rest of the trip, OK?

CHERYL

What am I supposed to do, retreat from the world entirely?

EVAN

At least, for the duration of our vacation. I mean it. For the next two weeks, no news is good news.

CHERYL

You're impossible!

EVAN

No, I'm a recuperating news junkie at an intolerable time in our history. There's such a disconcerting discrepancy between the world as it might be and the world as it presently is.

(sings)

CLOSER TO MY DREAMS,  
I WISH THE WORLD I SEE  
WERE CLOSER TO MY DREAMS  
AND WONDER IF IT COULD BE --  
LIKE AMERICANS INFORMED ENOUGH  
TO ELECT LEADERS WORTHY OF  
THE PROMISE OF THE COUNTRY  
THEY ALL SAY THAT THEY LOVE.

CLOSER TO MY DREAMS,  
I WISH THE WORLD I SEE  
WERE CLOSER TO MY DREAMS  
AND WONDER IF IT COULD BE --  
LIKE SPENDING OUR RESOURCES  
TO BUILD OUR DEMOCRACY  
INTO A SHINING EXAMPLE  
OF HOW A PEOPLE CAN LIVE WHEN THEY'RE FREE.

HOW I WISH ENLIGHTENMENT IDEALS --  
LIKE REASON AND FRATERNITY,  
PERPETUAL PEACE AND PROGRESS,  
LIBERTY AND EQUALITY,

ALL DIDN'T SEEM SO FAR AWAY,  
BECAUSE THEY'D BE GOOD GUIDES TODAY.

CLOSER TO MY DREAMS,  
I WISH THE WORLD I SEE  
WERE CLOSER TO MY DREAMS  
AND WONDER IF IT COULD BE.  
WILL I EVER WITNESS A WORLD  
AT PEACE AND WITH AIR THAT'S PURE  
ENOUGH FOR HUMANS TO FEEL  
WE'RE WISE ENOUGH TO ENDURE?

CLOSER TO MY DREAMS,  
YES, I WISH THE WORLD I SEE  
WERE CLOSER TO MY DREAMS  
AND IF IT EVER SHOULD BE  
I'LL GO BACK TO BEING ME,  
BACK TO WORK AND BEING ME.

(spoken)

Do you understand, Cheryl?

CHERYL

Yes, dear. But --

EVAN

-- But give me a break. Until that unlikely world dawns, please, put your smart phone back in your beach bag. And use the adjective "smart" with conspicuous disregard of exactitude.

CHERYL

I just won't share what I'm seeing.

EVAN

Fine. I need another stoli on the rocks with lime. Want another screwdriver without vodka?

CHERYL

You mean, orange juice on the rocks? Yes, please.

EVAN

In about 3 months, junior will join us, and you'll be able to drink again.

(calls)

CHERYL

I can't wait.

EVAN

Beach boy! Over here!

SCENE 10

Evening. Cheryl and Evan are asleep in their hotel room. The President sits up in bed between them.

PRESIDENT

(looks at Evan; to audience)

He looks so harmless when he's asleep.

(touches his shoulder)

EVAN

(opens eyes)

You, even here?

PRESIDENT

I just thought I'd drop down for a visit. I own the golf course.

EVAN

Please, I'm on vacation. Go ride around in your golf cart and pretend it's healthy exercise.

PRESIDENT

I came to pick you up to play a round with me.

EVAN

You even play at night?

PRESIDENT

I had night lights installed just for you. The entire course is light up like Yankee Stadium.

EVAN

No, thanks. I need to reconstitute my discombobulated spirit. Now, please, depart.

PRESIDENT

You're asking me to leave? What about our round of golf?

EVAN

Forget it. Now, please, just go away.

PRESIDENT

What are you talking about, Evan? You're the one who called me and asked if we could play a round of golf together.

EVAN

I asked you?

PRESIDENT

Twice. Naturally, I said no both times.

EVAN

How can you utter such a flagrant untruth? Like so many of your other pronouncements, it's precisely the reverse of what actually happened.

PRESIDENT

What pronouncement, Evan? Remember, I was never here.

(turns to go)

Such an easy target! Before I leave, give me the satisfaction -- just for old time's sake, say my name once. Come on, say it, just once.

EVAN

Never! You little, little, little man -- you President Piccolo!

PRESIDENT

Piccolo? Ha! Talk about fake news! What is the first syllable of "trumpet"? Come on, say it!

EVAN

I haven't got a clue. I'm not a piccolo! Not like a piccolo at all. I'm more like a trumpet, a trumpet announcing the entrance of the one man this entire world and even the whole universe is all about. And my name proves it.

(as he departs)

But such an easy target. I can't tell you how much I miss tweeting about you. Ah, with every tweet, another enemy's defeat.

SCENE 11

Richard's office. Mailbags piled near his desk.

RICHARD

I knew Evan was popular, but I never realized how incredibly loyal his fan base is.

FRED

Judging by the mountain of fan mail, they love the guy. We probably should find a way to convince him to return, although I think we shouldn't wait forever to start negotiations for a replacement.

(snaps fingers)

I've got it! As soon as he gets back from his vacation, messenger him this entire pile of remorseful pleading. If anything can rekindle his dedication, it's the voice of his listeners.

RICHARD

Great idea, Fred. I'll alert him of its impending arrival the moment he's back.

FRED

I trust you marked the day in your calendar.

RICHARD

Of course. Not to worry. The morning he's back, his fans attack.

SCENE 12

Evan and Cheryl enter their condo with luggage.

CHERYL

I just loved being at Cap Juluca. But it feels good to be home, doesn't it?

EVAN

Yes, it does, my dear. But what a welcome break it was! I feel like a new man.

CHERYL

Good, sweetheart. Maybe someday you'll even be able to watch the news with me.

EVAN

Don't bet on it.

Cell phone rings. Lights come up on Richard on phone.

RICHARD

Welcome back, Evan.

EVAN

Thank you, Richard.

RICHARD

I trust you had a wonderfully rejuvenating vacation.

EVAN

Yes, I did.

RICHARD

Then I assume you're well rested and ready to return.

EVAN

I did, thank you. But not just yet, although I do appreciate that you called to check.

RICHARD

I spared contacting you while you're away, but I have bags and bags of mail here from your loyal listeners, urging you to return.

EVAN

Really?

RICHARD

A veritable landslide of them, which I've arranged to have messengered to your condo this morning.

EVAN

Please, refrain from doing that, Richard. I couldn't bear to confront them.

RICHARD

That's exactly why I'm sending them. Your effusively loyal fans deserve your immediate attention. And I hope they make you feel guilty as hell! Please, get back to me after you have a chance to peruse them!

(hangs up with mischievous satisfaction)

CHERYL

What did he want?

EVAN

It seems we're going to have an unexpected mail delivery. Apparently, my absence has precipitated a response from the newscast's viewership.



CHERYL

I'm sure they miss you, dear. I'm also sure Richard is just trying to tap into your publicly sequestered sentimental soul. You can't go back to the compulsive grind you were in.

EVAN

Don't concern yourself, Cheryl. Now that we're back from our island respite, I intend to inhabit an island of the mind, a veritable paradise of contentment, from which I can observe the great barge of passing events drifting by, crowded to the rails with jostling politicians, nonsensical celebrities, painfully ineloquent common folk, precipitated to the forefront by a natural disaster or an astounding act of kindness, and other transient participants in the top-line version of the world's activities that I used to present as the evening news, while I occasionally dip my toe into the water to take the temperature and then, rather gleefully, turn my back and walk back up the beach and into your welcoming arms.

CHERYL

Good. You seem to be, as my mother refused to believe, changing your stripes. Never go back to that all-consuming grind, sweetheart.

EVAN

Don't fret about that, Cheryl. I've made my decision. And, once I do, I'm like a rock in the current -- immovable, regardless of the urgent press of the water.

SCENE 13

The next day. Evan is sitting in his office, reading a letter. Open letters abound. Bags of unopened mail, piled beside him.

Chorus appears as fans, pleading with him to return.

CHORUS

We miss you, Mr. Fury! Nobody else presents the news the way you do! You're so fearlessly insightful yet so calmly reassuring!

(sing)

OH, COME BACK, MR. FURY!

PLEASE, COME BACK, EVAN FURY!

WE UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH IT HURTS

WHEN THE PRESIDENT FIRES OFF TWEETS TO DISPLAY  
HOW UPSET HE IS, BUT WHATEVER HE BLURTS  
ONLY MAKES US MISS YOU MORE EVERY DAY

OH, COME BACK, MR. FURY!  
PLEASE, COME BACK, EVAN FURY!  
WE KNOW THE PRESIDENT'S OFTEN UNCOOUTH.  
BUT NO ONE ELSE BUT YOU CAN SAY  
A THRILLING, PENETRATING TRUTH,  
IN SUCH AN ADMIRABLY TASTEFUL WAY.

WE NEED YOUR REASSURING VOICE.  
OH, WHAT WILL WE EVER DO WITHOUT  
THE CALMLY DEVASTATING CHOICE  
OF WORDS YOU NEVER STOOP TO SHOUT?

OH, COME BACK, MR. FURY!  
PLEASE, COME BACK, EVAN FURY!  
WE REALIZE HE INSULTED YOUR WIFE  
AS WELL, BUT COME BACK WITHOUT DELAY.  
THE TROUBLES WITH WHICH THE WORLD IS RIFE  
CRY OUT FOR YOU TO REJOIN THE FRAY.  
SO COME BACK, MR. FURY!!  
PLEASE, COME BACK, EVAN FURY!  
PLEASE. COME BACK --  
AND COME BACK TO STAY!

Phone rings. He answers it. Lights come up on the  
side of the stage, revealing RICHARD in his office.

RICHARD

Good afternoon, my good man.

EVAN

Good afternoon, Richard.

RICHARD

Have you had time to peruse the pleas of your many fans for your immediate return?

EVAN

Yes, I have. Their importunities are extremely touching.

RICHARD

Outstanding! Then I assume you're eager to resume your duties?

EVAN

How can I do that?

RICHARD

Read more of the letters. You have the most loyal fan base of any newscaster I've ever seen. You'd think you were a rock star.

EVAN

Please, Richard. Being a rock star does not fit into my universe of flattering comparisons. I would never allow myself to wail semi-literately about flat-footed variations on the theme of "I love you, baby." I prefer invitingly innovative imagery, graced with an evocative melody.

RICHARD

Well, good luck with that. It's of another age.

EVAN

Well, as Walt Whitman effused, "I am large, I contain multitudes."

RICHARD

Then find a place within your multitudes for anchoring the broadcast. Let me talk out of school for a moment, and this cup of kindness is shared in strict confidentiality. Not one, but both Edward Weeks and Ralph Jamison have expressed interest in your very highly coveted position.

EVAN

Both of them?

RICHARD

Of course, your former rivals have. After all, we are the network news organization with the most distinguished history, and it's time you got back to appreciating the unique privilege of anchoring it.

EVAN

I always did appreciate it, but lately it's become somewhat like being the frequently targeted sentinel of a besieged fort --

RICHARD

-- who deserts his position.

EVAN

But not until his uniform is a tatter of bullet holes and blood stains.

RICHARD

Oh, poor sweetheart. Look, it's not entirely the President's fault that he finds himself in the unlikely office he holds. As you yourself have reported, the Russians did their part. But so did the Democrats. Where in the campaign of the first woman for President was there any mention of the unique contributions a woman brings to leadership? Think of her unimaginably misguided ad campaigns: "Fighting for you," and then "Stronger together." "Fighting" and "stronger"? They actually sound like slogans more suitable to you-know-who. Where were such thoughts as "nourishing the best in all of us," or "sensitivity to your needs?" Maybe even "I have a great love for every man, woman, and child in this country?" Where was even simply "Caring about you?" But in the end, like it or not, the President of the United States is still Ronald McDonald. And it's your duty to report on him as only you can. Here's the bottom line. You've had three weeks of R & R, and I need you back at the battlements now, pronto!

EVAN

Richard, I'm draped over the thorn-sharp log tops of the fort, bleeding. Have mercy.

RICHARD

OK. You want mercy. Your competitors are salivating like wolves observing a crippled lamb, and I'm being pressed to hire your replacement. Get back here within the week, or I throw open the gates to them.

EVAN

I'll see what I can manage, Richard.

RICHARD

Ah, out of this category-five hurricane, finally a glint of sunlight. Get your storm of tears over with and show up back here with your usually sunny disposition *mucho rapido*. Or you may decide to return when it's too late!

(hangs up)

EVAN

(puts down cell phone from ear and eyes  
bags of mail. Continues to read them.

Smiles. Picks up another letter. Wipes a tear. Cheryl enters.

CHERYL

I thought you couldn't bear to read them, dear.

EVAN

Oh, I just decided to glance at one or two.

CHERYL

Please, don't let sentiment overrule sanity.

EVAN

No worries about that, dear, although Richard just mentioned he's being pressed to hire my replacement.

CHERYL

Good. Let someone else slave away the way you have. Promise me you won't go back.

EVAN

I view the possibility of return as Charybdis, the whirlpool that gaped at Odysseus, and I shall navigate past it. I have made up my mind about one thing, though.

CHERYL

What's that?

EVAN

I've steeled myself and am prepared to watch the evening news with you.

CHERYL

Really?

EVAN

Yes, I've decided it's time to normalize my relationship with current events.

CHERYL

Remember the word "normalize."

EVAN

What can I say? I'm working on it.

## SCENE 14

He's sitting in his office in his bathrobe, viewing four TV screens at once. He has a remote in his hands.

Cheryl enters.

CHERYL

Sweetheart, would you like to have dinner at home or go out?

(no response)

I said , sweetheart, what about dinner!

EVAN

(becomes aware of her presence)

Oh, hi, Cheryl. Sorry. What did you say?

CHERYL

Dinner. I mentioned dinner.

EVAN

Oh, sure. What about it?

CHERYL

Darling, you've been huddled up in your office, surfing the news for three days now and, frankly, you've become increasingly oblivious to anything else, including me.

EVAN

I have?

CHERYL

You certainly have -- and no wonder. Four TV's going continuously. Obviously, you miss your life at the network.

EVAN

Sad to say, I do.

CHERYL

I should have never asked to watch a newscast. You're like an alcoholic. One sip, and you binge watch.

EVAN

I know. Frankly, I'm disappointed in myself. I'm a helpless addict, on intravenous news.

CHERYL

But all day, every day, Evan? What good is having you at home if you're always mentally at work -- and unhappy that you're not actually there?

EVAN

You're right, dear. It seems I've had another last big realization.

CHERYL

Here we go again. What?

EVAN

Like it or not, I seem to be afflicted with an irrepressible longing to be involved in news as it unfolds. The need permeates my being, like a dye that can't be washed out even by soaking my remorseful self in the salty transparency of the Caribbean. Dear me. Like Captain Ahab, obsessed with pursuit of the great white whale, I can't escape my desire to pursue the latest scoop.

CHERYL

You just need to find a happy medium, Evan.

EVAN

Ah, yes, the elusive Golden Mean. Nothing in excess. Back I go again to my college days and the Nicomachean Ethics, a book that has actually had a lasting influence on me, with only one exception. When it comes to reporting the news, I seem to be the very soul of immoderation. But, as you know, part of the reason I put in the hours I did is merely behaving responsibly toward the onerous terms of my contract.

CHERYL

May I make an overdue suggestion?

EVAN

Sure.

CHERYL

I never thought I'd say this, but maybe the best thing is for you to go back.

EVAN

Good golly, Miss Molly. I didn't think I'd ever hear you say that.

CHERYL

Neither did I. So you know I'm at my wit's end. All I ask is that you promise me you'll do your very best to achieve some sort of intelligent balance between your work life and your home life.

EVAN

But if I can't even limit my involvement at home, how can I do it at the network?

CHERYL

Because, if you don't, you're going to end up back in a hotel room.

EVAN

Please, anything but that. I love our lives together.

CHERYL

What lives together? Having you here as if you're in your office at the network, turning up the volume here and turning it down there, while you can't even hear me when I attempt to speak with you? Threatening you with terminal expulsion is the only leverage I have.

EVAN

What if I just take a shower and try to restart my life of abstinence -- never again to watch a newscast?

CHERYL

Yes, and next tell me how you can cross the Hudson River doing cartwheels on the waves. Trust me. The only possible solution is, you go back to work but on terms you yourself define. You can be super-dedicated and still make room for your family life.

EVAN

Do you really think so?

CHERYL

What other hope is there for a happy life together? So, please, Evan, make an appointment with Richard and tell him, as resolutely as you can, your conditions for returning.

EVAN

You may be right, Cheryl. I need my network fix. I just dread exposing us again to what's-his-name. You know he's out there, being his meticulously defensive self, like a surly male orangutang, patrolling the border of his territory.



CHERYL

Well, we certainly can't change his behavior. But we can change ours -- while we look longingly toward the next Presidential election.

EVAN

Well, let's see if we can manage those two not-inconsiderable feats, which are sort of like saying, "First, climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, and, when you're done, head on over to Mt. Everest and climb that, too." Yet, the fact is, darling, your insight helps rejuvenate my wilted hopes for a world more aligned with them.

CHERYL

What else do we have now but hope for a better future?

(sings)

MAYBE NEXT TIME  
WE HOPE FOR A SUNNY DAY  
THE MORNING SKY WILL TURN BLUE,  
AND WE'LL KNOW THINGS ARE GOING OUR WAY.

EVAN

(sings)

MAYBE NEXT TIME  
WHEN WE REACH THE TOP  
OF THE HILL WE'LL SEE  
THE MEADOW WE READ  
WAS JUST AHEAD.

CHERYL

WHAT IF JUST BEING A HUMAN BEING  
COUNTED MORE THAN LIVING IN A RED OR BLUE STATE?

EVAN

AND BEING BLACK OR WHITE DIDN'T MATTER?  
WOULDN'T THAT HELP MAKE AMERICA GREAT?

BOTH

MAYBE NEXT TIME  
WE'LL KNOW TO BUILD  
OUR CASTLES OF SAND  
ON PART OF THE BEACH  
WHERE THE TIDE CAN'T REACH.

MAYBE NEXT TIME.  
MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, NEXT TIME.  
MAYBE NEXT TIME!

EVAN

I've got it, Cheryl. I'm going to demand an entirely new contract -- one with much more reasonable demands.

CHERYL

Great, Even, but can you do that?

EVAN

I don't know. Well, much as I respect the integrity of the network, perhaps I should retain a lawyer to represent me in whatever contract renegotiation I can manage.

CHERYL

I'm for anything that will extricate you from your previous enslavement.

EVAN

Let me sleep on it. I'll get on it first thing in the morning.

CHERYL

Excellent, Mr. Fury. Now, can you please get dressed, so we can have a civilized dinner together?

EVAN

What if we go out to celebrate our new resolutions?

CHERYL

Why don't we celebrate after we see how you do?

SCENE 15

Richard's office. Fred is there.

RICHARD

I don't understand why he thinks he needs a lawyer? We've bent over backwards to please him.

FRED

I don't care if he's bringing a team of attorneys. I'm ready to ink the deal with Edward Weeks.

RICHARD

I know. But he doesn't quite have the appeal to our key demographic that Evan does.

FRED

It may have to do. I find it extremely appealing that he agreed to take a salary cut and join the network at Evan's level of compensation.

RICHARD

I'd still rather have Evan return. How much are we willing to offer him?

FRED

Not a dime more than he was making.

RICHARD

With an attorney like Oscar Winthrop?

FRED

I was never a fan. Negotiating with him is like watching a lawn tractor mowing down our quarterly profits.

RICHARD

Maybe you should be here.

FRED

I've got more important things to do today. I'm leaving the matter entirely in your capable hands. Just do the best you can! Got it?

RICHARD

Not only do I have it, I can even take a hint.

FRED

Good. Report the outcome the instant you have one.

Fred exits.

RICHARD

(sings)

I'M SUPPOSEDLY IN UPPER MANAGEMENT,

AND, AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE NEWS DIVISION,  
I MIGHT ASSUME, AS YOU MIGHT, TOO, THAT I AM.  
BUT THAT INVOLVES A BIT OF IMPRECISION.

WHAT ARE YOU WHEN YOU'VE GOT  
RESPONSIBILITIES BELOW YOU  
AND THE CEO ABOVE YOU?  
LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU'RE IN A SPOT  
KNOWN AS MIDDLE MANAGEMENT.

NOW IF I WERE THE CEO,  
WOULD THAT QUALIFY AS UPPER?  
I'D HAVE MORE RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ABOVE ME.  
SO IT'S QUITE A BLOW EVEN THEN TO KNOW  
I'D STILL BE IN MIDDLE MANAGEMENT.

HARD AS IT IS TO ADMIT, THE RIDDLE  
IS NO MATTER HOW HIGH I GO IN BUSINESS  
I CAN LOOK FORWARD TO DUTIES BELOW ME  
AND SOMEONE I MUST ANSWER TO ABOVE ME.  
SO I'LL FIND MYSELF SMACK DAB IN THE MIDDLE,

WHY, AS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD  
WOULD I FINALLY QUALIFY AS UPPER!  
I'D HAVE MY RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND I'D ALSO HAVE STOCKHOLDERS TO PLEASE.  
EVEN ON THE BOARD, I'M SOMEWHAT FLOORED  
THAT I'D STILL BE IN MIDDLE MANAGEMENT.  
ALAS, IT SEEMS THERE'S NO ESCAPE  
FROM BEING IN MIDDLE MANAGEMENT!

Phone rings.

RICHARD  
(picks up)

Please, send them in.

Evan and Oscar enter.

RICHARD

Welcome back, Evan.

EVAN

Thank you. Actually, it feels good to be here.

(Oscar gives him an admonishing look)

RICHARD

Good afternoon, Oscar.

OSCAR

Good afternoon, Richard.

RICHARD

Have a seat.

They sit opposite him.

RICHARD

What's on your minds?

OSCAR

I looked at the numbers. His compensation package is nearly 35% below that of the anchors at the other two majors, even though his ratings are significantly higher. Obviously, a huge adjustment is in order.

RICHARD

There's a reason for the discrepancy. Evan rose to the top with unprecedented speed. The anchors at the other two majors have been in their positions far longer.

OSCAR

He still has better ratings, especially with the younger age demographic advertisers are throwing money at you to reach.

RICHARD

I assure you, he's on track to be appropriately rewarded.

OSCAR

Why not right now? He's earned it, particularly since he'll once again be exposing himself as the favorite target of ...

(defers to Evan's wish that the name  
never be mentioned)

... 45, who shall, in deference to Evan, go unnamed.

RICHARD

Let me be frank. The network is unwilling to increase his compensation.

OSCAR

What are you talking about? You know that position is a non-starter.

RICHARD

Let me tell you about nonstarters. The CEO is ready to sign an agreement for Evan's replacement.

EVAN

Excuse me, Oscar.

OSCAR

Relax. He's bluffing.

RICHARD

Am I? Remain inflexible and Evan's career, at least at this network, is over. I will confide in you. And this is off the record, OK?

OSCAR

Agreed.

RICHARD

Edward Weeks, who only trails Evan in the latest Nielsen sweep by 85,253 viewers, has agreed to come on board for a compensation package that is identical to Evan's current one.

EVAN

Interesting about Ed.

OSCAR

He still doesn't have your audience appeal or long-term potential. Now, listen to me, Richard.

RICHARD

No, you listen to me. Evan either comes back under the terms of his current contract or he's out of here. Done. *Finito!*

EVAN

You're serious about that?

RICHARD

I have to be. Because my boss, and your boss, is serious about it.

OSCAR

Certainly, there's some room for negotiation.

RICHARD

None, zip, zero. Do I make myself clear? If not, let's call the meeting right now.

OSCAR

But --

EVAN

-- Please, Oscar. Let me speak.

(to Richard)

You may find this somewhat difficult to believe. But I explained to Oscar when I retained him that, while a pay increase is an attractive prospect, it's not my primary concern.

RICHARD

Oh. Well, that's unusual for on-air talent. Then, what is? Avoiding the regrettable rants of "who knows?" Every other journalist of note is dealing with the difficulties, and I'm sure you can, too. As you know, many pundits have gone beyond astonishment at his antics to concerned amusement.

EVAN

Every other journalist has not been singled out as a target for his animus with the regularity that I have. Nor have their wives enjoyed the dubious privilege.

RICHARD

It's because you're fearless, Evan. Somehow you manage to be placidly yet relentlessly penetrating. I have no idea how you manage the unlikely combination but obviously it captivates your listeners. Unfortunately, it's just the probing authenticity that would make you an especially appealing object for his attempts to undermine the credibility of mainstream journalism.

OSCAR

Evan is the only news anchor I know who can nail the President for every instance of his misbehavior, at the same time he does it with impeccable propriety, a skill that we all know the public finds magnetic, at the same time it's ideally suited to the network's coveted prestige. Therefore, a humongous increase --

EVAN

-- Thanks, Oscar. But I would like to explain my most pressing issue.

RICHARD

I'm all ears.

EVAN

I can no longer be overworked.

RICHARD

Overworked, Evan?

EVAN

That's correct. My overriding concern is having the time to establish a healthy balance between work life and my personal life. But frequently I'm obliged to be here twelve to fourteen hours a day.

RICHARD

Anything else?

EVAN

As a matter of fact, there is. While I relish going on special assignments, especially when I'm reporting on an unusually newsworthy event, I can no longer be assigned three or four of them a month. As you know, I have a wife who's now pregnant with our first child, and I owe it to her to spend an appropriate amount of time at home with her.

RICHARD

I wholeheartedly agree.

OSCAR

(to Evan)

Then it appears that this is an opportune occasion to resolve all the issues that are on the table.



RICHARD

Except for what seems to be your obsessive top-of-mind topic, I expect we can. And part of the reason is, I have an appropriate question for Evan.

OSCAR

(to Evan)

Don't answer unless I give you the go-ahead.

EVAN

Sure.

(to RICHARD)

Just let me make it as clear as the very air in this office that I will never again allow myself to be "anchored" to my job, like one of the prisoners chained to the wall in Plato's allegory of the cave.

RICHARD

Which brings me back to my now even-more appropriate question. Just where does it say in your contract that you're obliged to work twelve to fourteen hours a day? Furthermore, where the hell does it say you have to go on assignment three or four times a month?

OSCAR

I read it carefully and ...

(falters; to Evan)

... His question is, I regret to say, not entirely without merit.

RICHARD

Thanks, Oscar. Come on, Evan. Tell me where it states these things?

EVAN

Well, actually, that's a startling question.

(gets up and paces around)

RICHARD

Certainly, you've read it.

EVAN

I read the part about the term of the contract, as well as the part about my compensation, but, I regret to admit, I merely scanned the remainder.

RICHARD

Then take it from me, young man. There are no such demands in it. Ask Oscar. I'm certain he read it till the ink was rising off the paper into his eyeballs. Tell him, Oscar.

OSCAR

I must say that, on these topics, he seems to be correct.

EVAN

(hits himself in the forehead)

Dear me! Can I have created my own enslavement?

RICHARD

We all have selective blind spots, Evan.

OSCAR

(suspiciously)

What exactly do you mean by that, Richard?

RICHARD

Evan is a confirmed workaholic. It's part of the reason he rose to the top of his profession at such a young age.

EVAN

I'm a workaholic?

RICHARD

Of course, you are.

EVAN

I'm my own slave-driver?

RICHARD

Don't look at me.

EVAN

Oh, no. Not another last big realization! I thought I had my last one when I realized my personal life has to be factored into my existence. Don't they ever stop coming?

RICHARD

Yeah. When you stop breathing.

EVAN

Why couldn't I see it before? I'm my own slave driver. Truly flabbergasted. I am overwhelmed by how my self-awareness has been subordinated by my overweening sense of dedication. How could I have been so blind? What can I say? It's an aporia to me!

(Sings)

WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME?  
WHY DO I NATURALLY CHOOSE  
TO BE MODERATE, EXCEPT  
WHEN IT COMES TO REPORTING THE NEWS?

WHATEVER IS WRONG WITH ME?  
WHY DOES GETTING A SCOOP  
IGNITE A FERVID DESIRE  
IN MY OTHERWISE CALMLY WISE MIND  
THAT SPREADS LIKE A FOREST FIRE?

AFTER ALL, I'M A PRUDENT MAN,  
WHO, I TRUST, IS OFTEN SEEN  
AS QUITE PHILOSOPHICAL  
AND A FAN OF THE GOLDEN MEAN.

SO WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME?  
DOES BEING A JOURNALIST  
WHO CAN MANAGE SOME RESTRAINT  
WHEN I'M DEALING WITH BREAKING NEWS  
REQUIRE ME TO BE A SAINT?  
IF THAT'S THE TASK,  
I'LL FOREVER ASK,  
WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME!  
WHAT IN THE WORLD IS WRONG WITH ME?

RICHARD

Trust me, Evan. We like you the way you are.

EVAN

(shakes Roger's hand)

Thanks, Richard, and do forgive me. I'm sorry I blamed the network.

Fred enters.

FRED

My, such unexpected levity. Do we have a deal or don't we?

RICHARD

He's coming back.

FRED

Under what terms?

OSCAR

We have yet to agree on a significant increase in his compensation.

FRED

If that's still part of the case, case closed. What do you say Evan?

EVAN

Thanks for your persistence, Oscar. But maybe I should pay them for letting me come back.

OSCAR

Fine and dandy, Evan. But I will need you to sign an agreement, stating that you're making the decision of your own free will, not at my recommendation.

EVAN

Glad to do it, Oscar!

FRED

(to Oscar)

I shall always remember this day. It's the only time I've ever dealt with you and come out without the network's pockets turned inside out.

EVAN

(to Fred)

Glad I could help, Fred. I just realized that my burnout was entirely my own doing.  
(shaking their hands)

Great to be back. Only let me alert you right now -- I may only work ten or so hours a day and take only one assignment, tops two, a month. Are we all OK with that?

FRED

I don't know that we ever expected more, Evan.

RICHARD

Who would?

EVAN

Now, if I can only figure out how to explain all this to my wife.

SCENE 16

Evan's condo. Cheryl is reading. Evan enters.

CHERYL

How did you do?

EVAN

Astonishingly well.

CHERYL

Really?

EVAN

Yes, but not quite in the way you might think.

CHERYL

Then how, Evan? I assume they adjusted your compensation at least somewhat?

EVAN

No, they didn't. And it doesn't matter.

CHERYL

OK. Tell me about it.

EVAN

During the meeting, I had the most humbling last big realization I've ever experienced.

CHERYL

Not another one?

EVAN

You know me all too well, sweetheart. You're not going to believe this one. All of the overwork I've been subjected to, guess what?

CHERYL

What?

EVAN

It's all my own doing.

CHERYL

What about your contract?

EVAN

I never read it, except to take a quick glance at the length and compensation. I don't believe you did, either, dear.

CHERYL

No, I didn't. You mean to say all the time I've spent alone is entirely your fault?

EVAN

I am evidently the guilty party.

CHERYL

I can't tell you how upset that makes me.

EVAN

Trust me, dear. Now that I know who's to blame, it will never happen again. In fact, I'm going to spend the rest of my life being dumfounded by my own abysmal lack of self-awareness.

CHERYL

Then you mean if I ever again find myself spending way too much time alone, I'll know you're the one to blame.

EVAN

That appears to be the deeply embarrassing case. As a result, I'm putting myself on notice. You and junior are now top of mind with me forever. Prepare yourself, though. Tomorrow, I'll be back anchoring the 6 o'clock news.

CHERYL

The question is, my dear, what happens after the newscast?

EVAN

I'll be heading home to my sweetheart.

CHERYL

If it happens, I'll pop a bottle of champagne. What about special assignments? No more for at least a month!

EVAN

A month? But what if something enormously consequential needs to be covered?

CHERYL

I can see you are who you are, Evan.

EVAN

What does that mean?

CHERYL

It means maybe, within certain limits, I just have to accept you for who you are.

EVAN

Can you do that, Cheryl?

CHERYL

Actually, I don't have a clue.

(sings)

WHEN CONFRONTED WITH SOMETHING YOU CAN'T CHANGE,  
PSYCHOLOGISTS SAY THE WAY TO WORK THROUGH THAT  
IS TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT IT.  
THE QUESTION IS, HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

HOW DO YOU TAKE A WAY OF THINKING  
THAT YOU'RE CONVINCED IS TRUE  
AND REPLACE IT WITH ANOTHER  
PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW?  
HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

HOW DO YOU JUSTIFY THE BRUISING  
YOUR EGO IS CERTAIN TO TAKE  
WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU'RE SUBORDINATING  
IT TO GIVE SOMEONE ELSE A BREAK?  
HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

IN MY CASE, I GUESS IT COMES DOWN TO DECIDING  
IF I LOVE YOU ENOUGH TO CHANGE HOW I THINK,

SO YOU CAN BE THE PERSON YOU ARE  
AND I CAN STOP BEING ON THE BRINK  
OF HAVING TO SHOUT,  
WILL YOU PLEASE JUST GET OUT?

HOW DO YOU CONVINCING YOURSELF IT'S SMARTER,  
MORE INTELLIGENT BY FAR,  
TO LET SOMEONE YOU BELIEVE IS MISTAKEN  
LOOK MORE BRILLIANT THAN YOU ARE?  
HOW DO YOU DO THAT?  
HOW ON EARTH DO YOU DO THAT?  
(spoken)

Well, at least, I can try.

EVAN  
(embraces her)  
Thank you, dear! You're my brilliant sweetheart.

CHERYL  
I'm just admitting to myself that who you are is profoundly beyond your control.

EVAN  
Well, apparently, it's the secret of my success. But from now on I will do my absolute best to balance my life more intelligently.

CHERYL  
Whatever happens, Evan, what if we just concentrate on being happy?

EVAN  
Sounds like a plan, dear.  
(embraces her)  
A wonderfully inviting plan if I ever heard one!

#### SCENE 17

Editing room at network. Bank of screens, with two editors reviewing the footage. Evan is looking on.

FIRST EDITOR  
Oh, grab that shot of the dead bodies in the parking lot, George. It will kill the audience.



SECOND EDITOR

Got it, Frank. Hey, how about this truly gruesome footage of the double car-bomb attack? Talk about mayhem.

FIRST EDITOR

Nobody will take pee break while that's on the screen.

EVAN

Excuse me, gentlemen. I appreciate your enthusiasm, as always. But in my absence you seem to have forgotten that we are not The National Enquirer. We're America's premier news network.

FIRST EDITOR

I know, Evan. But how can you pass on these two amazing clips?

EVAN

Quite easily. It's sensationalist claptrap, and you both know it.

(leans forward)

Now, let's see if we can get back to commendable discernment.

SECOND EDITOR

But, Evan --

EVAN

-- Let's remember. Nothing is more exciting or rarer on television than insight, presented with tasteful restraint, so the audience knows we care about them, too. These clips are the usual fare -- murder and mayhem, front and center, with the newscaster's jaw flapping away while discretion has evidently vacated his or her mind, to the extent that he or she has a modicum of it. We're number one because we do something better than anyone else. To quote Robert Frost:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference

Got it, gentlemen?

FIRST EDITOR

Got it, Evan.

SECOND EDITOR

Whatever you say, my good man.

EVAN

Thanks. On the mass shooting, let's go with the photos of victims and then dissolve to the tearful mother's courageous lament. No footage of the perpetrator whatever. We shall grant him not a moment of recognition. On the terrorist attack, how can you pass on the British imam saying the murder of fellow human beings is not the skyway to paradise but the Tube to hell?" That's not only news. It's revelatory and potentially transformational.

FIRST EDITOR

Will do, Evan.

EVAN

Great. Now, let decide what Presidential hooliganism we're going to cover. Then I think we'll have a newscast.

SCENE 18

Fury Condo. Cheryl is having a bite. Phone rings.  
Picks up.

CHERYL

Oh, hi, Mother.... Yes, he went back to work.... I know you told me. A tiger can't change its stripes.... Well, you're right. Evan can't. But he seems to love me for who I am, and maybe I just have to do the same for him.... Oops, time for his newscast, Mom. Gotta go. Love you.

(hangs up; turns on TV with remote)

Lights come up on Evan, standing in a newsroom,  
holding his notes.

EVAN

Good evening and welcome to American's favorite newscast. I'm Evan Fury. Delighted to be back with you this evening, and may I say a special thank you to all of you who wrote to say you like what we do here. Now, here's what's happening in our brief sample of today's events here and around the world. Today, the President met with the top US nuclear commander, General John Walsh, who, as you may recall, said at the Halifax International Security Forum in Nova Scotia, Canada, that he would push back against an order from the President Donald for a nuclear strike if it was, in his words, "illegal." And guess what he's going to do," the General continued?

He's going to say, 'What would be legal?' Apparently, the President is not so sure of the general's authority, naturally, of his own docility, and it now appears that the General's job security may not be what it was before he made the welcome and reassuring statement.

Lights come up on the Madelyn and Ned, watching the newscast at the bar.

NED

What do you know, he went back?

MADELYN

Just listen to him. Why can't I meet a man like that? Here's to you, Evan.

NED

I'm sure there's another man out there for you.

MADELYN

Thanks. But the truly heartbreaking thing is there's only one Evan Fury. I could be hopelessly in love with him so easily!

Lights come up on President watching TV with his smartphone in his hand.

PRESIDENT

(interrupts)

Ah, ha! My all-time favorite loser newscaster is back! Are you kidding? I never ask what's legal. I'm the Commander-in-Chief. But forget that. Say my name, Evan. Come on, say it just once. And I'll actually tweet something sweet. You know I love to hear you say it.

EVAN

(aside)

I'll mention your name when you start to behave in a way that's worthy of the Presidency of the United States. And not a moment sooner.

PRESIDENT

Ouch! Time for a welcome-back tweet. Let's see. What rhymes with fake?

(starts to type on his smart phone)

Ah, ha! Take! As in, take that!

EVAN

(continues)

In other White House news, the President held a press conference in the Rose Garden to discuss how the Republican tax plan will benefit the middle class. Here's Brent Wiley to tell us more .

Turns. Brent enters without visible injury. Reports.

BRENT

The President continued to praise the tax bill, and I quote, as "the greatest tax break in history for America's middle class. When pressed about the repeal of the estate tax, he transitioned to discussion of the increase in the child tax credit, relating it somehow to the increase he can leave his own children as an inheritance.

EVAN

Now, I know I'm back.

BRENT

Great to have you, Evan.

EVAN

Thank you, Brent. We'll be right back after this.

Music. Chorus enters, singing.

CHORUS

(admonishing the President)

TWEETING, TWEETING, TWEETING --

IT'S ALL SELF-DEFEATING.

HOW CAN IT BE

THAT YOU DON'T SEE

IT'S ALL SELF-DEFEATING?

(to Evan)

WELCOME BACK, MR. FURY!

WELCOME BACK, EVAN FURY!

WE KNOW THE PRESIDENT'S OFTEN UNCOUTH.

BUT NO ONE ELSE BUT YOU CAN SAY

A THRILLING, PENETRATING TRUTH

IN SUCH AN ADMIRABLY TASTEFUL WAY.

WE NEED YOUR REASSURING VOICE.  
OH, WHAT WOULD WE EVER DO WITHOUT  
THE CALMLY DEVASTATING CHOICE  
OF WORDS YOU NEVER STOOP TO SHOUT?

SO WELCOME BACK, MR. FURY!  
WELCOME BACK, EVAN FURY!  
WELCOME BACK TO THE FRAY.  
WELCOME BACK TO STAY!  
WELCOME BACK TO STAY!

THE END