

DEADLINE

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

BY

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CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

VOICE OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENT ROMOV, unpopular sitting Russian President.

VOICE OF U.S. PRESIDENT SIMPSON, unpopular sitting American President.

PETER ERIKSON, Indecisive, but competent news editor for the Boston Times.

JOE DOWNING, Sports reporter for the Boston Times.

MARK CLIFFS, Political reporter for the Boston Times. He is engaged to Tracy Kaplan.

TRACY KAPLAN, Copy editor who is quickly promoted to Sports Reporter, engaged to Mark Cliffs.

REBECCA BENNETT. 10 year old union negotiator for the delivery union.

VOICE OF SEAN, College student.

MAGGIE SCHILLINGSWORTH, Nurse at Massachusetts General Hospital

VOICE OF RON JAMES, Chief of RADAR Operations, FAA, Nashua, NH

VOICE OF JOHN OSWALD, Tower chief at Logan International Airport

STEPAN OSTERVITCH, Russian Chess Champion.

HALEY SAISI, American and World Chess champion

CAPTAIN LYNDA O'TOOLE, Air Force UFO Public Relations specialist.

GUARDS, REPORTERS, GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

TIME: AN ELECTION YEAR SOMETIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

PLACE: BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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PROLOGUE

SCENE

The lights slowly come up. The audience hears the tone of the "hot line" between Russia and the United States.

VOICE OF ROMOV

Mr. President, this is Romov. I have decided that your plan is too risky.

VOICE OF SIMPSON

It's the only way. Do you remember life before Peristroyka? The hard-liners are making a resurgence. Your economy is in danger of collapse. No one can afford another cold war.

VOICE OF ROMOV

President Simpson, thousands will die.

VOICE OF SIMPSON

We need to make people believe. Billions will be saved.

VOICE OF ROMOV

I agree your plan would work if all went well, but what about your press? What if they find out?

VOICE OF SIMPSON

The press won't find out. Mr. President, we are left with little choice.

VOICE OF ROMOV

I'm afraid you're right. No one has lost an election in time of crisis.

VOICE OF SIMPSON

Are we in agreement?

VOICE OF ROMOV

It is agreed.

(Fade)

DEADLINE, ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: The scene changes to the city room of the Boston Times, Boston's leading newspaper. PETER ERIKSON, the editor, is seen in his office, separated from the others by glass, looking through that morning's newspaper.

Date: May 1

ERIKSON

Mark, not here. Not here. What to do. Cards.

(He takes out a deck of cards and deals two poker hands, face up.) Yes. *(Points to the one on the right.)* No. *(Points to the one on the left.)* Should I talk to Mark? *(Turns over the first pile.)* Four-queen-queen-two-four, Two pair. *(Turns over the second pile.)* four-Jack-three-seven-ten-deuce, bust. I'll talk to him.

(TRACY KAPLAN enters. She waves to Erikson, who waves back. She sees a flower on Mark's desk, gets it, reads the note, and then EXITS.)

What do you mean we're going to have a woman sportswriter? Good for our image? Good point. Can she write? Who is she? *(The other line rings.)* Good choice -- I'll call you back.

(MARK CLIFFS and JOE DOWNING enter.)

JOE

A female in the sports department. Please, let's get real.

MARK

Come on Joe, it's not that bad. There must be some good reason why they're making the move.

JOE

Come on. Wait for Erikson to get off the phone.

(TRACY enters)

TRACY

Hey guys. Have I got news for you.

MARK

Hold on. Joe's moping.

TRACY

What about this time?

JOE

They're hiring a woman do be a sportswriter for some idiotic reason. She's going to be working here, in my newsroom. What if I want to belch, or have my shirt untucked or scratch my—

MARK

Okay – I think I get the picture.

JOE

No offense Tracy, but your gender is physically unable to cover real sports -- well, maybe shopping.

MARK

By the way Trace, I'll email you my story by 10:00.

TRACY

I'll download it after a meeting with your boss.

MARK

Let me check the Drudge Report for breaking news. Nothing. Here's something. H.R. 56 is being put up for a vote today.

JOE

Boring

MARK

How 'bout gun control?

JOE

Boring.

MARK

Crime?

JOE

Boring.

TRACY

This is an election year, aren't there any good scandals or something?

MARK

Did you hear that President Simpson got booed off the podium during a speech to Congress yesterday?

JOE

Our fearless leader? Love it.

MARK

He started ranting and raving about all these little countries getting nuclear weapons. He said that Pakistan and India are just the beginning.

TRACY

He's right, too. Lots of little countries have them.

JOE

There's no way they'd be stupid enough to touch us.

TRACY

Isn't it bad enough that they'd blow up each other?

JOE

Normal people don't have anything to worry about.

(Mark picks up the note left to him by Erikson.)

MARK

I wonder what Erikson wants now?

TRACY

I know he's only been here a couple of days, but I've heard he's eccentric -- always playing cards.

MARK

No. He's just a little indecisive.

JOE

He's weird.

TRACY

What's with the cards?

MARK

Well, you see, when he has to make a decision, he picks a card --

JOE

Or rolls dice, or flips a coin, or guesses the serial number on his money.

MARK

Say it's an easy one --

JOE

Should I go to the bathroom? Then the odds would be even. For more difficult decisions, he'll increase the odds.

TRACY

That doesn't sound so bad.

MARK

It will.

TRACY

When?

JOE

You'll see.

TRACY

How old is he?

MARK

Guess.

TRACY

I don't know. Seventy-three?

MARK

Forty-six next month. Wonder what I did?

JOE

Who knows? The graphic designers. I'd better get my notebook?

TRACY

Quotes?

JOE

Phone numbers.

TRACY

I've got to warn these poor girls.

MARK

Should I drop by and casually mention barely within listening distance that you won New England investigative reporter of the year last year, or that your column is nationally syndicated, you have a cool car, a cool apartment, are nice to your mother, and that you actually like cats.

JOE

No, but if you could casually mention my 179 bowling average and that despite my gruff exterior, I am actually the macho sensitive type who likes walks on the beach and crap like that. . I've decided to take a big step -- I may break the 6 month rule.

TRACY

The what?

JOE

I'm not ready for the whole relationship "thing." So the longest I'll date any woman is 6 months. But, I've decided that's superficial, so I'm going to extend it to a year. No, offense, guys, but the thought of being with the same woman, day after day, year after year, decade after decade, well, makes me want to throw up.

MARK

It doesn't seem that bad to me.

TRACY

Good answer.

JOE

Yuh. That's 'cause you're marrying Tracy Kaplan in (looks at his watch) 16 days. You don't have to lead a depraved life like mine. By the way, Mark requested, insisted, that his bachelor party be at the 406 Club at Fenway -- let your father and brothers know to show up around 6:00 -- they can use VIP parking at Gate B -- I'll email them the specifics. The Yankees are in town so they might want to leave early.

(TRACY and JOE exit.)

MARK

Good morning.

ERIKSON

Mark, what's happened to your writing? Have you seen this morning's story?

MARK

Didn't you like it?

ERIKSON

It wasn't there. Do you have something against newspapers containing articles?

MARK

I wrote one. It'll be in for this afternoon for the online edition.

ERIKSON

We don't make money on the online edition. It's not your fault. All those nice pols [Author's note: "pols" is short for politicians and rhymes with "falls".] out there aren't providing any news. Mark, not only are you writing zilcho, but the stories you are writing are, are --

MARK

Are what?

ERIKSON

Weird.

MARK

Weird?

ERIKSON

Bizarre? The crazy lady with 250 bunnies hopping around her living room should be made police chief?

MARK

All right. I'll give you that one.

ERIKSON

When I was a reporter, I'd have been hanged for a story like that. Tergiversate?

MARK

It's a nice word.

ERIKSON

This ain't the Readers Digest. *(Takes out cards.)* If it comes up nine or above, you're off city.

MARK

Come on, Peter, buddy, let's be fair.

ERIKSON

What could be more fair? The odds are in your favor. Pick.

MARK

Oh, come on. Okay.

ERIKSON

Jack of diamonds. You lose. I'll have to give you something really bad. *(Laughs)* See me later. Wait, see me now.

MARK

How about two out of three?

ERIKSON

You can have the UFO beat. You're our man. Anything that comes in is yours -- for the next six glorious months.

MARK

I am?

ERIKSON

Consider it your greatest challenge.

MARK

Anything but that.

ERIKSON

Okay, one more chance. (*Flips a coin*) Call it.

MARK

Tails.

ERIKSON

Nope. Heads. Have fun.

(TRACY and JOE enter, JOE is flaunting a piece of paper.)

JOE

555-2354. Kendra, my lovely Kendra.

TRACY

Not Kendra Devlin – daughter of Rich Devlin?

MARK

The treasurer?

TRACY

Yup. Joe, don't be surprised if your check's a little late.

JOE

Oh, well. Oh, Mark, I almost forgot. I heard that Mayor Jordan is going to make a big statement today about something?

MARK

Who cares. I'm not covering that beat anymore.

JOE

You're working with me at the State House? Great.

MARK

Not exactly.

JOE

As long as it's not UFO's, you're okay.

TRACY

I heard in copy that's where they put you before, CR...ash.

JOE

The real losers. Remember Speroni? I heard that his boss took off the "b" and "y" keys from his computer so he couldn't have any more by lines.

ERIKSON

Tracy. Good news, you're getting a promotion. As of today, you're our first woman sportswriter. You'll be a beat writer covering the four major teams. I'll tell you up front, I admire you for breaking new ground, but it's going to be tough doing sports in this town.

TRACY

I'm going to be a sportswriter?!!

(MARK exits)

Aren't you happy for me?

ERIKSON

He's just mad I put him on UFO's --just temporarily. He's cruising on reputation and is slumping. The publisher said this has been going on for a while. The suits wanted me to fire him, but I refused. I just want to catch his attention. This better do it!

(Phone rings)

Erikson. Could you hold? Joe, you've got a 10:15 with the Governor. Tracy, the Celtics are holding a press conference at the Fleet Center. Joe, cover the Mayor's statement -- sorry to put you on double duty, but we're short. Oh, tell Mark that a lady on Harrison Ave saw five little green men watering the lawn. Hurry. Don't look at me that way. No, not you --- Senator

(BLACKOUT)