

THE BIOGRAPHER

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Transl. Marc Gómez Domènech

Dramatis personae

Simon

J. K. Burrows

Diane

Zeus

(STAGING AND TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS: THE BIOGRAPHER is a multidimedia performance that combines theater and audio-visual elements. The scene is situated in a control room called "Documentation Center", a place full of screens showing images of security cameras, GPS tracking, emails, social networks, text files, etc. The audience must be able to see what the screens show, at least, the one called "main screen" or "ms", the biographer's focal point.)

PLUTARCH EDITIONS is dedicated to publishing the biographies of the most important characters.

PLUTARCH EDITIONS guarantees that its biographies are the most profound, extensive and precise, because...

PLUTARCH EDITIONS has the best documentation services.

PLUTARCH EDITIONS's sole demands are:

1. The identity of the Caesar -generic name given to the "biographed" person- can never be revealed to friends or relatives, or other biographers.
2. The biographer can never intervene in the life of his or her Caesar.
3. This contract is for life. Only the death of the Caesar (at which point the biography will be published) or of the biographer may break it.

PLUTARCH EDITIONS warns that breaching any of these rules will have severe consequences.

PLUTARCH EDITIONS, above all, offers writers a well-remunerated job for life.

Signature

.....

ACT 1

SIMON: Open session.

(We hear a computer voice, quite humanized)

COMPUTER: Username.

SIMON: Alexander the Great.

COMPUTER: Code.

SIMON: Leonidas 69.

(The screens are turned on and their brightness lights up the place. SIMON, the biographer, appears. He is 30 or so. He looks like he just woke up; he wears a dressing gown and holds a coffee mug in his hand. He is sleepy. He performs his actions very mechanically and without much enthusiasm)

COMPUTER: Good morning, Simon.

SIMON: Yeah, yeah... Morning...

(He sits on his chair)

SIMON: Check mail.

(An email account appears on the "main screen")

SIMON: No. Not his. Open *my* mail.

(Another email account appears on the "main screen")

COMPUTER: You have 3 new messages.

SIMON: List.

COMPUTER: Free Viagra for—

SIMON: Delete.

COMPUTER: Phone deals—

SIMON: Delete.

COMPUTER: Globe Publisher.

SIMON: *(pause)* Open.

(An open mail appears on the "main screen")

SIMON: Read.

COMPUTER: Sir, we regret that your novel "Atypical reactions" has been rejected. Although it has some interesting features, the narrative is quite hasty, lacking in logical and dramatic continuity and there are no clear narrative referents. Other—

SIMON: Delete. *(Pause. He takes a sip of coffee. Sigh)* Go to date.

COMPUTER: Four. Slash. Ten. Slash. Two thousand and two.

SIMON: Latest Caesar position?

(We see a map with a blinking red dot on the "main screen", or "ms")

SIMON: No movement at night?

COMPUTER: No.

SIMON: Go to eight A.M.

COMPUTER: Caesar moving.

SIMON: Signal from mobile phone GPS?

(The same red dot now is moving on the "ms")

SIMON: *(to himself)* Leaving home-sweet-home ... *(To computer)* Show camera from Franklin Avenue.

(On "ms", the image of a security camera showing a crowded street)

SIMON: Starbucks, security camera.

(On “ms”, the image from a camera inside a café. Among the people, we see a man of about thirty years old walking down the street. We recognize him from the previous screen. He is quite well-dressed. At one point, the camera cannot follow him, as he disappears from the screen)

SIMON: Barclays Bank.

(On “ms”, the image from a security camera of a bank. Now we see this man –which seems to be the one Simon is following— walking on his own)

SIMON: Philips Avenue? *(To computer)* Traffic lights of McPherson and Fifth...? Where are you going...?

(On “ms”, the man is waiting under the traffic lights to cross. To Simon’s right, a screen is turned on and we see a face. It is DIANE, about 30 years old. Opera in the background. She will always be listening to opera)

DIANE: Synonym for wonderful?

SIMON: *(still looking at the man under the traffic lights)* Hi.

DIANE: Hi!

SIMON: *(still looking at the man under the traffic lights)* Sublime, imposing, superb, magnificent.

DIANE: Too wordy! Can’t you think of another?

SIMON: *(sharp)* Can’t you?

DIANE: Ok...

(SIMON pushes a button and Diane’s screen turns off. The image of a man withdrawing money from an ATM appears on the “ms”)

SIMON: ATM from Fifth Avenue. *(To himself)* How much dough is he taking out? *(To computer)* Show bank transactions of personal account. Date of movement: March.

Slash. Ten. Slash. Two thousand and two. Hour: *(he looks at a corner of the screen, where the hour appears)* Eight fifteen AM.

(On "ms", a bank statement)

SIMON: *(To himself)* 800 bucks? *(Pause)* Not for a coffee...

(DIANE appears in another screen)

DIANE: Hey, how do you—

SIMON: Hasty, illogical and with no clear narrative referents.

(Another screen turns on. ZEUS, a man of the same generation as Simon and Diane. A little chubby, badly shaved, wearing a torn and dirty shirt and eating Doritos)

ZEUS: Your novel's been rejected?

DIANE: Again?

SIMON: How can you always be so timely?!

ZEUS: From the Olympus I don't miss a thing, dude!

DIANE: But how many publishers have rejected it already?

SIMON: Seven. Leave me alone, please—

ZEUS: Eight. Considering that "Oliviers" has rejected it twice. I told you: changing the title of the novel won't work!

SIMON: The first time they didn't even read it!

ZEUS: Lucky you. Your best review ever!

DIANE: Zeus!

SIMON: Piss off! *(He turns Zeus's screen off)*

DIANE: Simon. Simon...

SIMON: *(to Diane)* Will you?

DIANE: Fine. *(DIANE turns her screen off)*

SIMON: *(to computer)* Where is he going?

COMPUTER: Madison and Boulevard.

SIMON: *(to computer)* Any camera there?

COMPUTER: No. Caesar is making a call.

SIMON: Number?

COMPUTER: Five five five three four three—

SIMON: *(to himself)* Ok! I know... *(To computer)* Audio.

(We can hear the phone conversation)

MALE PHONE VOICE: "Lucy"

FEMALE PHONE WOMAN: "Hey!"

MALE PHONE VOICE: "Are you doing something tonight?"

FEMALE PHONE WOMAN: "Any plans?"

MALE PHONE VOICE: "Valentino's?"

FEMALE PHONE WOMAN: "Are we celebrating anything?"

MALE PHONE VOICE: "At twelve?"

FEMALE PHONE WOMAN: "So mysterious... I'll be there. Where are you?"

FEMALE PHONE WOMAN: "On my way to the office."

SIMON: Liar... Liar...

MALE PHONE VOICE: "See you later!"

(Sound of a call cut off)

SIMON: *(to computer)* Position.

COMPUTER: He entered Fifth.

SIMON: Show cameras fourteen *(on the "ms", we see the man walking)*, seventeen ... *(on the "ms", we see the man walking)* Oh... I got it. Open folder "Lucy". *(A typical "Windows" screen with folders and subfolders opens under Simon's orders)* This one. Subfolder "Dates." This one. Subfolder "April." *(We see a series of small photos. SIMON chooses one. It is a video of the man in the company of a woman, walking)* Fast forward. *(Image reproduced in high speed. When the couple is walking and passes by a window:)* Stop! Play. *(We see the woman pointing her finger at a ring)* Zoom in on ring. *(We see her pointing towards a ring with a stone in the middle. He looks at her and smiles)* Ah! I know what you want to— Position. Security camera from jewelry store. *(Image from a security camera inside a jewelry store, which the man enters. We see the same rings we saw in the recording. To himself)* Got you!

(Now we see the man and an employee approaching the ring, but then he points towards the ring next to the one his partner had pointed out. We see a hand taking up another ring, and the one she wanted is left in the store)

SIMON: Not this one, you idiot! Not this one! *(To computer)* Open file "Love". Write.

(On "ms", a blank page. While SIMON speaks, his words appear on the page and we hear the clanking of an old typewriter)

SIMON: J.K. Burrows was as skilled in his political relations as clumsy in his love relations. Period. Without going any further, comma, the engagement ring he gave to his wife was far from the one she expected.

(DIANE appears on a side screen. Turandot blares in the background)

DIANE: Synonym for boring?

SIMON: Dreary.

DIANE: Well, listen, Mr... Dreary. Are you coming with us for a drink tonight?

(On Diane's screen a little boy, NICK, about 6 years old, appears)

DIANE: Nick, you know to leave mum alone when she's working!

NICK: Hey, Simon!

DIANE: Go, hurry, to the kitchen!

NICK: Please! *(He goes away)*

SIMON: I can't tonight.

DIANE: You can't, or you don't want to?

SIMON: I'm not in the mood, Diane.

(Phone rings)

DIANE: You've been in this mood for two whole months! You need your head seen to. When did you last go out?

SIMON: "His obsession with war kept Alexander the Great awake at night. *(Phone rings)* He tossed and turned in bed preparing the battle which always had to be his last." Now I have to—

DIANE: You see... Chesterton was a little over the top with his rhetoric. We'll never know if this stuff was true or not. Anyway, remember you're Chesterton, not Alexander the Great. *(Phone rings)*

SIMON: Gotta answer!

DIANE: Moron.

(DIANE turns off her screen)

SIMON: Pick up.

(We hear the voice of a mature man, MR.SMITH. We will never see Mr. Smith, just hear him)

MR. SMITH: Ready?

SIMON: Mr. Smith! Ready for...?

MR. SMITH: Primaries? New Hampshire?

SIMON: Oh, yeah! He can't lose! The three other candidates are either ex-alcoholics or addicted to sex for money or compulsive buyers with three illegitimate children!

MR. SMITH: *You* have that information, but that's because we've given you the tools. All this hasn't been leaked to the media—

SIMON: God... With this information I could—

MR. SMITH: You could nothing! You know the rules! What you get from our documentation services, you can use it for nothing more than your biography of your Caesar!

SIMON: Mr. Smith, I'd like to send my novel to you to—

MR. SMITH: Boy, I've never read a book in my whole life, only the TV guide once in a while. And remember, Plutarch Editions has been publishing for over 120 years *(SIMON repeats Mr. Smith's words in a low voice)* the most profound, serious and documented biographies from—

SIMON: Franklin Roosevelt...

MR. SMITH: to J. Edgar Hoover. Right, boy! You know that, don't you?

SIMON: Yeah, but—

MR. SMITH: New Hampshire, boy!

SIMON: Are the other candidates being biographed?

MR. SMITH: Let's talk tomorrow.

SIMON: (*deep in thought*) Diane? (*No answer*) Hey— I'm sorry. Sorry. Diane— I guess being locked in here eight hours a day isn't the best for my humor. I'm sorry.

(*ZEUS appears on another screen*)

ZEUS: Lovely... I'll start to cry... C'mon, dude. Apologizing won't atone for your sin of pride. Especially when apologizing disguises a sin even greater: curiosity.

SIMON: (*laughs with sarcasm*)

ZEUS: (*laughs*)

SIMON: Now, tell me *a little* about whom you're writing on—

ZEUS: You're a pain in the ass!

SIMON: Just a little!

ZEUS: I'm not telling you whom I'm writing about, moron! We can't! True, I'm in the Olympus. But there's sky over me. You know what I mean, huh?

SIMON: And what about doing something else, something different—

ZEUS: Are you nuts? Look. Good money, relaxation and the technology to download all the porn I want, dude. And I want a shitload of porn.

(*DIANE appears on the screen*)

DIANE: You're a horndog!

SIMON: Diane!

ZEUS: Whatever, but I love the life I lead. I'm reasonably happy!

SIMON: You've published nothing!

ZEUS: Ha... I'm not like you.

SIMON: Like me?

ZEUS: I tell history, I don't want to *be* history.

SIMON: They have us bound hand and foot.

DIANE: You signed the contract. You knew the terms. And, what the hell, Simon... You live well!

SIMON: I know! And I like it! I really don't want to complain... My Caesar is about to—

(DIANE and ZEUS talk and sing as to not to hear SIMON)

SIMON: He will win a—

DIANE: Shut up, Simon, Simon—

ZEUS: Can't hear you, can't hear you...

SIMON: Why can't I say that my Caesar is— *(Pause)* brilliant!

ZEUS: Can't hear you, can't hear you...

DIANE: Ok, ok. Zeus...

SIMON: He's an ace. He'll do great things, I'm sure.

ZEUS: Ah. We love meaningless expressions! Thank you.

SIMON: Fucking clauses! I don't get why we can't reveal the identity of our Caesars to each other...

DIANE: Stop complaining and remember that—

(DIANE stops. We hear some voices from Diane's screen)

SIMON: Diane? Da—

DIANE: *(to her computer)* Show frequency from Emergency!

EMERGENCY RADIO: Accident at 17th and Pinneworth, come quick!

DIANE: *(to her computer)* Frequency from the Police?

POLICE RADIO: We have a "three fourteen" in the 17th and Pinneworth. Possible fatality.

SIMON: Your Caesar?

DIANE: Guys, guys, guys... I think I must leave... I have a biography to publish.

(Lights out.)

ACT 2

(One year later. Same room. We see SIMON sitting in his chair. On the main screen, his Caesar sits alone in a perron. He's silent)

SIMON: *(watching his Caesar and murmuring)* "Alexander the Great sat on the stairs of the Temple with his eyes closed and contemplating the realization of his vision. Like the great men of antiquity, he never doubted that everything he would do, everything he would become, would transcend himself, to get to be bigger than all of us..."

(His Caesar takes from his raincoat a hip flask of what it seems to be an alcoholic beverage, and he takes a sip)

SIMON: Transcending oneself ... *(To computer)* With Plutarch Editions.

MR. SIMTH Simon!

SIMON: Mr. Smith?

MR. SIMTH: Did you call?

SIMON: It's about my Caesar. I—

MR. SIMTH: Not again! You have a contract, boy.

(DIANE appears on screen)

DIANE: Hey, Simon!

SIMON: *(To Diane)* Not now, Diane!

DIANE: I'm sorry, sorry.

MR. SIMTH: *(To Diane)* Diane...

DIANE: *(To Mr. Smith)* Good morning, Mr. Smith.

(DIANE turns her screen off)

SIMON: I know! And I want to fulfill it! It's just that I think that— you're wrong. We're wasting time and money on someone who isn't worth it. Believe me, he isn't worth it. I want to change my Caesar.

MR.SMITH: Boy, boy—

SIMON: He's a loser! I can't see what's the point of narrating the life of a mentally lame and frustrated man! Of a man that once, yes, ok, was a pre-candidate with some prospects... but who, after his failure, is now crawling pitifully across dark dives asking for a last shot to bartenders who look at him over their shoulders!

MR. SMITH: *(pause)* I like it, write it!

SIMON: Mr. Smith, I'm trying to be honest and tell you—

MR. SMITH: Your contract is clear. You get a considerable salary. Only the death of your Caesar or yourself can let you leave what you're doing. You get it, right? If you want to quit, blow your head off, son, because otherwise I assure you no publisher will ever publish anything of yours, no matter how many novels you write or how many pseudonyms you make up. Have I been clear enough? *(Pause)* I'm hanging up.

(DIANE appears. Although we can't see it clearly, we know that Diane is breastfeeding a baby while listening to The Magic Flute)

DIANE: Synonym for success?

SIMON: Failure!

DIANE: Synonym! Not ant—!

SIMON: A Nobel Prize. Fuck! You wrote the biography of a Nobel Prize! Fuck. *This* is important. The biography of the guy —which, by the way, I think it was awesome—

DIANE: Thank you.

SIMON: ... the guy who wrote perhaps the best novel of the twentieth century!

DIANE: *(looking at the baby)* He's hungry, today!

SIMON: And here I am, doing documentation research every day about a...

DIANE: You can't tell me!

SIMON: ... damned looser!

DIANE: When I started to write the biography of my old Caesar—

SIMON: A biography that has already sold two million copies!

DIANE: But listen to what—

SIMON: And you don't even see a dollar!

DIANE: It was in the contract! Can I finish—?

SIMON: Fucking contract! You can't even sign your own biography!

DIANE: We can't, true... Can I finish what I was saying? You see, my Caesar went through some very hard times. A tumor nearly killed him, the death of her youngest daughter, three divorces... His life could've been like any other, like—

SIMON: Like any of ours. Say it!

(SIMON sits sulks in his chair. Pause)

DIANE: Come on, Simon ... *(Silence)* Hey!

SIMON: And why?

DIANE: Why what?

SIMON: Why starting to write the biography of someone who hasn't done anything?

DIANE: You ask too many questions.

SIMON: Don't you think it's strange, starting to write the biography of someone who is no one yet?

DIANE: We're all someone!

(ZEUS appears on the screen)

ZEUS: Rephrase the question and I'll help you!

SIMON: How can an anonym person become someone important? And here, the crux of the matter: ...

ZEUS: Ah, warmer, warmer!

SIMON: How do *they* know it before that happens?

ZEUS: *(imitating Yoda from "Star Wars")* Big questions, obscure answers require...

SIMON: When did you start writing your latest biography?

DIANE: He was already sixty.

ZEUS But...?

DIANE: But a former biographer had been doing documentation research for more than thirty years! And when that biographer kicked the bucket, I was given the documentation—

SIMON: I started the research five years ago. My Caesar had just started his career! I began to follow a simple law student who in few years became...

DIANE: You can't say it!

SIMON: ...important! And now he's only a—

DIANE: But think that if Plutarch has a sixth sense for detecting success, sooner or later he'll become someone big!

SIMON: I need him to become that right now!

ZEUS: What if—?

DIANE: What if what?

ZEUS: What if not all Caesars can become... Caesars? You know what I mean.

SIMON: Did you read the last twenty biographies published by Plutarch? The most stupid of the Caesars had won thirteen Oscars!

DIANE: Perhaps there are biographies that never see the light because they're not interesting enough.

SIMON: What?

ZEUS: That's possible...

SIMON: *(laughs)* No... Not for me...

ZEUS: We have two options:

DIANE: Shoot.

ZEUS: Option A: Plutarch knows something we don't and can predict success.

SIMON: Or B?

ZEUS: Half the world is biographing the other half without knowing it, and only the worthy lives are published!

DIANE: In any case, both assumptions are quite worrying!

SIMON: But there's one that I fear the most.

DIANE: Which one?

SIMON: The one that doesn't guarantee my publishing. Do you know any other biographer of Plutarch?

ZEUS: Mm... Nope.

SIMON: Diane?

DIANE: No.

SIMON: Isn't it strange, just the three of us?

ZEUS: Maybe Plutarch has a master plan for us...

SIMON: *(pause)* Just say it's A.

ZEUS: Er... "Plutarch knows something we don't and can predict triumph."

DIANE: Strange hypothesis, yes...

ZEUS: Don't think so!

SIMON: How the hell can they know the importance of a life not yet lived?

ZEUS: Success is predictable!

DIANE: Yeah! I agree!

SIMON: How?

ZEUS: When a kid is eight or nine, you can tell if he will play in the professional leagues or not.

DIANE: In the high school yearbook, I was voted as a possible successful writer and a potential single mother!

SIMON: I see...

DIANE: Well, if a gang of teenagers can hit it like this...

SIMON: ... is it impossible for us, having all the information?

ZEUS: And: "Plutarch has been publishing for over 120 years the most profound and...

ZEUS and DIANE: ...documented biographies...

ZEUS: ...from Franklin Roosevelt...

SIMON and DIANE: ...to J. Edgar Hoover."

SIMON: Yeah...

DIANE: Yeah. And there are also a number of factors. Such as—

ZEUS: The gene of success.

DIANE: No, no, no. Education.

ZEUS: The breakfast of champions.

DIANE: DNA.

ZEUS: Midi-chlorians.

DIANE: Social class.

ZEUS: Karma.

DIANE: IQ tests.

ZEUS: Aura.

DIANE: Personality tests, check-ups...

ZEUS: I Ching!

SIMON: Destiny on a mathematical formula!

DIANE: Life is the result of a calculation of probabilities!

ZEUS: And God, a calculator!

(They laugh)

SIMON: And luck, coincidences, accidents, the unexpected?

DIANE: Probabilities. They're all part of the equation.

SIMON: But in this equation, Plutarch seems to be the only one who knows the value of X! *(To Diane)* Do you have to breastfeed him while we speak?!

ZEUS: I love it!

DIANE: Luckily I can't see what you're doing under the table!

(In all screens a lightning suddenly appears.)

ZEUS: *(laughs)*

SIMON: How did you do that?!

ZEUS: I'm, Zeus, dude. If I don't like what you're doing, I throw a thunderbolt from the Olympus!

SIMON: Yeah... Listen, I was thinking—

ZEUS: Aha?

SIMON: Who are you biographing now?

DIANE: *(laughs)* Hey! You won't stop trying, won't you?

SIMON: I won't.

DIANE: Wait until the death of his Caesar and you'll find out!

ZEUS: At least, your Caesars die! Lucky girl!

SIMON: You're brutal!

ZEUS: I fucking hate having to wait 'til my Caesar dies to write!

DIANE: Death gives us an overview of life!

SIMON: I have the clearest overview of my Caesar.

DIANE: I bet you don't!

ZEUS: How much do you have written?

SIMON: Some 1,200 pages in the rough.

ZEUS: Usable?

SIMON: 300!

ZEUS: Take them!

DIANE: What are you going to do?

ZEUS: Take all your usable pages. You too, Diane! Come on!

(They all prepare their keyboards and start writing the words proposed in the scene)

ZEUS: Ask the computer how many times you wrote the word ... "Mother", for example!

DIANE: I never did this before!

SIMON: I have 54!

DIANE: Me, 17!

ZEUS: Mummy kicked it soon, huh?

DIANE: How do you know that?

SIMON: What do you have against orphans?

ZEUS: How many times "love"?

SIMON: Wait!

SIMON: 29!

ZEUS: 12!

DIANE: Only?

SIMON: Yep!

ZEUS: You, Diane?

DIANE: So little, don't you?

ZEUS: How many?

DIANE: 54!

SIMON: *(laughs)*

ZEUS: We're writing biographies, no romances!

SIMON: Now I see why you're always asking for synonyms!

DIANE: Moron!

ZEUS: How many the word "sex"?

DIANE: Uhhhh!

DIANE: 20!

SIMON: 10!

ZEUS: 167!

DIANE: You're kidding!

ZEUS: What?

DIANE: You're so sick!

SIMON: Unless you're doing the biography of Tracy Lords!

DIANE: Who?

SIMON: An actress...

ZEUS: ... of the Method school!

DIANE: You're obsessed, Zeus!

ZEUS: Now... "Commitment"?

DIANE: 19!

SIMON: 25!

ZEUS: 3!

SIMON: Definitely! It's Tracy Lords!

DIANE: Hey, come on. Look for "Luck"!

ZEUS: 16!

DIANE: 14!

SIMON: 2!

ZEUS: Really?

SIMON: Yes. Only two!

ZEUS: This is a good one: "Official version"!

(They laugh)

ZEUS: 90!

SIMON: 125!

DIANE: 104!

ZEUS: Damned Plutarch!

DIANE: "Providence"

ZEUS: Playing hard!

DIANE: 104!

ZEUS: 104, too!

SIMON: Zero!

ZEUS: "Destiny"!

DIANE: Oh, oh! I love this one!

ZEUS: 12!

DIANE: 19!

SIMON: Zero!

DIANE: Simon!

SIMON: What?

ZEUS: Zero!?

SIMON: I told you! Something's wrong with my Caesar!

ZEUS: Or with you!

DIANE: Maybe it's not his time yet!

SIMON: I need it to be now.

DIANE: It's not up to you...

SIMON: What if he can't? What if my biography is one of those that go right to the trash, that aren't interesting at all?

DIANE: That is not the point—

SIMON: His last nine months are devoid of anything remarkable! It all comes down to simple tavern tales which wouldn't give even a decent paragraph!

DIANE: His last nine months, or yours, Simon?

ZEUS: "Touché!"

SIMON: This is not the point!

DIANE: A little bit, yes!

ZEUS: Damned pride, huh, dude?

SIMON: You know what's worse? I know what could I say to— I know exactly the words he needs to hear to believe in himself again. I know what to do to get him back to the top! I know it! But—

ZEUS: (*paraphrasing Plutarch rules*) "The biographer can NEVER intervene in the life of his or her Caesar!" Under no circumstances!

SIMON: Fucking rule!

DIANE: You can't move forward someone who doesn't want to walk, Simon!

ZEUS: You can't intervene in the lives of mortals! This is the rule of the Gods!

SIMON: As far as I know, Zeus broke this rule a few times... He dressed up as a swan...

DIANE: And impregnated Vestal Virgins...

ZEUS: (*overacting*) And here I am... This is my punishment! To be the silent observer of the turning of the world! We're gods, Simon! Non-interventionist gods, if you like! But from our ivory chair, we contemplate human existence!

SIMON: Would you stop saying nonsense? This isn't the Olympus, and we are some damned ghosts!

ZEUS: So much excitement is beyond me. Got work to do...

(ZEUS switches off)

DIANE: You said you wouldn't become emotionally involved!

SIMON: Can you do that?

DIANE: Yes.

SIMON: Are you interested in your Caesar?

DIANE: I don't like my Caesar. I don't care what he does.

SIMON: So what's your motivation to wake up every day and—?

DIANE: My life isn't defined by four screens and three poorly written paragraphs. I have a life. I have two children.

SIMON: You live alone.

DIANE: I chose to!

SIMON: You want nobody next to you, right?

DIANE: This is my life. The one I chose. The life of my Caesar, although I can empathize, is like... Dunno. Like the main character of a movie you can follow—

SIMON: But when you're watching the movie, you know there are rules.

DIANE: Narrative patterns.

SIMON: Yes! You know that if the guy wears a cloak and his underwear over his pants, after getting beaten up, he will eventually fly over the skyscrapers carrying a flag with stars and stripes.

DIANE: And if he wears a raincoat, smokes and drinks from a whiskey hip flask, he'll end up alone and cursing the opportunities he missed, Simon.

SIMON: Or if the guy rebels himself against a system way stronger than him, he'll eventually die, but his example will serve future generations.

DIANE: But life has no narrative patterns.

SIMON: Really? Are you sure? Biographies follow a pattern! Birth, remarkable facts and death! As you said: mathematics.

DIANE: This is not the point...

SIMON: Don't you think it's really simple to read someone's life from here? To have a wide and clear vision of your Caesar's life. It's so easy to see what he's missing...

DIANE: If your Caesar doesn't want to walk—

SIMON: I could push him into it!

DIANE: Live your life, Simon! *Your* life!

(DIANE turns off)

SIMON: Open folder “Alcoholic excesses”! *(We see a written page saying: “Every evening, Burrows attended his ethylic ritual along with other misfits who, like him, had lost the north of their lives and kept looking for a compass in the holes of the same pockets.”)*

COMPUTER: New mail.

SIMON: For him?

COMPUTER: No. For you, Simon.

SIMON: Open. *(We see a mail opened)*

COMPUTER: "Sir, we regret to inform you that we will not be publishing your third novel, “*Variations on the afterlife*”, either. Although its quality and lexical richness is clearly superior to that of its predecessors, it still lacks—”

(DIANE appears on screen)

SIMON: Delete.

DIANE: By the way, synonym for success?

SIMON: Not now!

DIANE: Simon!

SIMON: Not now!!!

(SIMON turns her screen off)

SIMON: *(to himself)* If he doesn't want to walk, I can push him into it... *(To computer)*
Show list of pre-candidates for the upcoming Democratic primaries.

(On “ms”, four faces: one woman and three men. SIMON stands up and looks at them)

SIMON: Jason Plummer, old Jason... you ran in the last primaries and you'd have to thank me for not making public some details concerning your private life. Sorry, this

time I won't be that discreet. *(To computer)* Print his dossier and the birth certificates of his three illegitimate children. *(We hear a printer)* Margaret Lindsay. She doesn't give up, either... Again, this isn't going to be your year, Margaret. *(To computer)* Open images of Margaret Lindsay out of a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and make a digital copy. From Mr. Davis and Mr. Pickett, we have no documentation, so we'll have to look for it... or, otherwise: create it. *(Sounds of recordings, computers, folders, printers. SIMON works in the center of the documentation room. He keeps on talking, giving commands to the computer. We hear single words accompanied by movements, images on the screen... We start to see images of one the candidates in a room with a prostitute, a list of bank transfers that Simon is circling...)* Bank transfers. Account numbers. Known addresses. Last 25 calls. Social Security Numbers. Bank details. Check SMS. Psychological profile. Sent mails! Facebook. Business reports. Criminal record. Property. Family tree. Friends. Check web pages. Twitter. Google Maps. Follow. Watch. Control. Copy. Remove. Change. Delete. Clear. Add. Circle. *(Finally)* I got you all! *(To computer)* Print. *(We hear a printer. To computer)* Caesar position?

(We see the image from the outside of the seedy bar in which we saw J.K. BURROWS getting in)

SIMON: I know where you're going...

(SIMON grabs a jacket, a cap and the folder he just printed, and gets out. The "ms" shows the still image from the outside of the bar. Suddenly, SIMON appears on the "ms": he wears the jacket and the cap. He carries the folder under his arm. He enters the bar. Lights out)

ACT 3

(One year later. Same room. On the screens we see different news bulletins reporting what it seems the night of presidential elections. Colored maps. American flags. The White House in the background. We see DIANE on another screen talking with SIMON, who keeps answering but is also watching the news).

CNN NEWS: The presidential election in the U.S. is tighter than ever.

<p>DIANE: I'd like to be as objective with my son as I am with my Caesar!</p> <p>SIMON: Nick, or—?</p> <p>DIANE: Yes, of course. With Nick.</p> <p>SIMON: There would be no emotional involvement!</p> <p>DIANE: The emotional involvement with a pre-teen's killing me!</p> <p>SIMON: Well, you <i>can</i> interfere with his life!</p> <p>DIANE: It's clear you have no children at all! A couple of months ago, I started the exercise of seeing him as a Caesar. I mean, trying to analyze his life from a distance.</p> <p>SIMON: With all that implies?</p> <p>DIANE: With all that implies... These devices (<i>referring to computers</i>) can reveal excessive truths!</p> <p>SIMON: What's an "excessive truth"?</p> <p>DIANE: Knowing that your son prefers</p>	<p>CNN NEWS: There is a technical tie between Republicans and Democrats, after knowing the result—</p> <p><i>(SIMON switches channels)</i></p> <p>ABC NEWS: — two presidential candidates, Republican John Dows and Democrat J.K. Burrows, have the same number of states and seats, and this means that everything is in the hands of New Ham—</p> <p><i>(SIMON switches channels)</i></p> <p>FOX TV NEWS: It may be a long night!</p> <p><i>(SIMON switches channels)</i></p> <p>CNN NEWS: —will know the name of the</p>
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“big tits mature mummies” and
“bukcakes” —

SIMON: “Bukkakes”? Ok, right. That’s an
excessive truth.

(ZEUS appears on screen)

ZEUS: I see Nick has very good taste,
yep!

DIANE: Zeus, please! Please, tell me you
didn’t hear that!

ZEUS: That kid knows how to choose!

DIANE: Whatever, look. If you add “big
tits mummies” to drugs, alcohol,
getting drunk...

SIMON: No kidding! Nick?

DIANE: Yes... I caught him...

ZEUS: That’s kids for you!

DIANE: He’s *my* kid, Zeus!

ZEUS: Somehow I’ve also watched him
grow up!

SIMON: From the Olympus, you see
everything, don’t you?

DIANE: The other day I was thinking it’d
be fun if someone did watch him!

SIMON: What?

DIANE: Just like we do. You know... That
would mean that...

SIMON: I see... Your little boy will
become a Caesar!

ZEUS: Today, if you aren’t watched, if
your actions aren’t followed at
each moment, you’re dead!

president who will occupy the
White House for the next four—

(SIMON switches channels)

ABC NEWS: —give a significant
advantage to John Dows, but the
overwhelming personality of the
candidate Burrows has caused
voting intention to lean in favor
of the Democrat side until this
technical tie—

(SIMON switches channels)

CNN NEWS: —says that New Hampshire
is the cornerstone to decide the
name of the presi—

(SIMON switches channels)

FOX TV NEWS: —the 43 Legislatures in
New Hampshire voted for the
candidate who was finally
president 39 times—

(SIMON switches channels)

DIANE: Death to privacy!

SIMON: Long live exhibitionism!

ZEUS: Do you complain? Thanks to that, we have all the information we want. How the hell could “the big ones” do it? Chesterton, Brown... I can’t imagine how you can write about a guy that died over 50 years ago!

DIANE: Getting your ass off the chair and finding some information out there!

ZEUS: And getting what? Two letters that need to be interpreted? Three signed books showing that one evening of the eighteenth century poet Byron or president Washington signed a poem or a law? Where are the motivations, the personal reasons?

DIANE: Precisely! That’s why dozens of biographies have been written about these people! Possible speculations are infinite!

SIMON: While we’re left no room to the imagination!

ZEUS: I can calculate, without fear of being wrong, the inches of ass paper my Caesar needs in the toilet!

CNN NEWS: —Hampshire five years later. One more time, now-pre-candidate J.K. Burrows is walking the tightrope in the State that closed the doors to his election five years ago. After a meteoric rise, he’s today on the threshold of knowing if he will be the next president of the United—

(SIMON switches channels)

WP NEWS: —is the last State to show its results and there is a technical tie between the two candidates at the moment!

(SIMON switches channels)

FOX TV NEWS: —J.K. appeared after one of the biggest crisis in the Democratic party. Some corruption scandals were leaked to the press, as well as immoral affairs that damaged substantially the image of the party. But J.K. reappeared from his ashes. He spring-cleaned the core of the party, set up a new ethics code and, with a steady hand, led the Democratic Party to a situation not even the most optimistic analysts could have imagined three years ago!

(SIMON switches channels)

CNN NEWS: We are expecting the results. Within a few moments, the name of the next president will be announced.

SIMON: Guys, excuse me, I'm busy!

DIANE: Thanks for listening, Simon. See you!

(DIANE turns her screen off)

ZEUS: Call you later. I want a "man to man" conversation...

SIMON: Subject?

ZEUS: Later! *(laughs)*

(ZEUS turns his screen off. SIMON's left staring at the news images)

ABC NEWS: Ready! It seems we have a name!

(SIMON switches channels)

WP NEWS: The whole world paying attention to New Hampshire.

(SIMON switches channels)

CNN NEWS: No election had ever caused such tension.

(SIMON switches channels)

ABC NEWS: Now we are going to hear the name...

(SIMON switches channels)

FOX TV NEWS: And...

L pause)

SIMON: *(murmuring)* J.K! J.K.!

CNN NEWS: *(screaming explosion)* J.K. Burrows! J.K. Burrows!

(SIMON switches channels)

ABC NEWS: J.K. Burrows, new president!

(SIMON switches channels)

FOX TV NEWS: J.K. Burrows, president of the United States!

(SIMON switches channels)

W.P Newscast: J.K. Burrows!

(SIMON switches channels)

CNN Newscast: J.K. Burrows did it!

(SIMON switches channels)

(The room is filled with images from news giving the name and images of J.K.)

CNN NEWS: New president of the United States! Considered by many as the successor to Kennedy! <i>(We see images from a press conference)</i> First statements from the President!	ABC NEWS: A new era begins! Much is expected from the new President of the United States! We can now join our Washington correspondent. <i>(We see images from a press conference)</i>	FOX TV NEWS: The most promising president in history! It seems that a new stage is— We're told J.K. will take questions from the media. <i>(We see images from a press conference)</i>
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(On the CNN screen, we see J.K. BURROWS with his wife. He's smiling and ready to answer questions)

JOURNALISTS: Mr. President, Mr. President!

SIMON: First, humility...

J.K.BURROWS: I don't know if I'll get used to being called that... Before answering any questions, I want to congratulate my opponent for— *(applause)* for his wonderful campaign.

(Applause)

SIMON: Well done! Now, optimistic message.

J.K.BURROWS: Starting tomorrow, my team and I will put government to work! There is so much work to do and so much hopes laid on us!

JOURNALISTS: President, immediate economic measures?

SIMON: Patience, but with short-term results.

J.K.BURROWS: I have yet to meet with my advisers. Great measures require great reflection. But we already know that the American people want action, and soon. We will not disappoint them.

JOURNALISTS: Your first wish?

SIMON: Not disappointing the American people.

J.K.BURROWS: Not disappointing the American people.

(SIMON sits on the couch with bliss)

J.K.BURROWS: I want to send a message to all the Americans: They put in my hands a blank book that I hope to fill...

J.K.BURROWS and SIMON: *(SIMON, surprised, says the text at the same time as J.K.)*
...with the best written pages in the history of this country.

JOURNALIST: How do you feel, Mr. President?

J.K.BURROWS: Happy. Definitely happy.

(SIMON reclines on the couch with a smile. Suddenly, thunderbolts on the screens)

SIMON: Zeus, not now!

(ZEUS appears on screen. We see him with bad connection interferences)

ZEUS: Let's chat a bit, huh?

SIMON: Tomorrow!

ZEUS: Today is as good as any other day!

SIMON: Not for me. Also, my connection is bad!

ZEUS: Oh, by the way! Congratulations!

SIMON: *(pause)* Why?

ZEUS: Why... Your Caesar... He's become a Caesar at last.

SIMON: We can't know the identity of the Caesars—

ZEUS: I see everything from the Olympus!

SIMON: You know that these windows don't only show what's going on outside, do you? There's sky over you, Zeus. You said it yourself!

ZEUS: That's why your connection is bad! I'm masking the signal. This conversation will never have existed. Don't worry.

SIMON: Knowing the name of my Caesar can get you into a lot of trouble.

ZEUS: Knowing this isn't interesting at all. I've known it for a very long time. What's really interesting is knowing that I'm not the only one that likes dressing up as a swan, walking with the mortals and playing a little with their destiny.

SIMON: Zeus—

ZEUS: Simon... Look. I don't feel like wondering now. I don't want to investigate the boundaries of reality around me... Do you follow me? The "faceless" Mr. Smith, Plutarch's "information services" that FBI can just dream to have... And do you know why? Because when I tried to answer these questions, a wall of biblical proportions rose before me, Simon. Looking for answers, I only found more and more questions. This is so huge... What we're doing has so many implications, so many branches, so many bifurcations... that I was afraid, Simon. Panicked. I decided to stop, to close my eyes and tell myself again and again that ignorance is bliss. But when you're on the Olympus and can see all I can see, you can't just stay there twiddling your thumbs...

SIMON: What do you want?

ZEUS: Ask instead: what do I know? And the consequences of the information I have. In an hour, Buton Alley. Don't be late.

(ZEUS closes communication. Long pause)

SIMON: Log out.

(Lights out. We hear a door closing)

ACT 4

(One year later. Documentation center. On “ms”, J.K.BURROWS is alone in a room reading some papers. Occasionally he gazes to the camera from where SIMON observes him, as if he sensed somebody is watching him)

SIMON: Diane? Diane?

(DIANE appears on screen)

DIANE: Yes?

SIMON: Have you ever had the feeling that your Caesar knows you're there?

DIANE: What?

SIMON: I do not know... Sometimes when he's all alone... I see him uncomfortable. Like he suspects I'm watching!

DIANE: Paranoid...

SIMON: He?

DIANE: Or you... *(Pause)* It's been one year today.

SIMON: Since?

DIANE: Since Zeus— Since they found—

SIMON: Yeah... Any news about that?

DIANE: No. The police have no clues. They're still looking for the murder weapon.

SIMON: Hope they find it.

(On Diane's screen, we hear the voice of a child in the background)

DIANE: Time to put the beast to sleep! Wait!

(SIMON looks for a while at Burrows)

SIMON: *(J.K. stares at the camera)* Zoom in on President. *(The screen zooms in)* Open today's press.

(We see front pages of newspapers crossing the screen. "J.K. faces his big decision.", "USA at war?", "J.K. meditates on how to respond to China", "J.K. Burrows: I am not sending the country into a senseless war.", "The Cold War of the twentieth century", "China, new global enemy.", "What will J.K. do?")

SIMON: I'll read that later. Close news.

(The newspapers disappear. On another screen, DIANE returns)

SIMON: Sleeping?

DIANE: My kid? Yes. Fairy tales never fail. Nick, however, has locked himself in his room and I don't dare to think what he might be doing ...

SIMON: What tale?

DIANE: What?

SIMON: Which one do you tell him?

DIANE: *(laughs)* "A brief biographical note in 120 words!"

SIMON: What?

DIANE: Do you remember?

SIMON: *(laughing)* No way!

DIANE: Yes!

SIMON: You also did this test to enter Plutarch?

DIANE: We all did!

SIMON: What version do you tell him?

DIANE: I don't even remember what I wrote on that test.

SIMON: I do!

DIANE: You're kidding!

SIMON: I think I remember!

DIANE: Impossible!

SIMON: "Girl, daughter of depression.

DIANE: 4 words! *(She counts the words on her fingers)*

SIMON: Grew up in a small farming village. Presumably an orphan.

DIANE: 14!

SIMON: Her mother suffered from constant attacks of gout...

DIANE: 22!

SIMON: ...that prevented her from tending to her chores, taken on by the girl...

DIANE: 35

SIMON: ...such as feeding her grandmother, also suffering from gout...

DIANE: 44

SIMON: ...and bed-ridden. Once, "Little Red Riding Hood"...

DIANE: Oh, it was time!

SIMON: ...provincial nickname earned by the particular item of clothing she always wore, ventured into the woods to grandmother's.

DIANE: 69!

SIMON: There she was attacked by –depending on contradicting versions—: a wild wolf, an anthropomorph, or a sadistic tramp.

DIANE: You're crazy!

SIMON: Consequences are equally confusing.

DIANE: 92! Few words left!

SIMON: The official version reports the disappearance of both relatives, while other versions...

DIANE: 104 ...

SIMON: ...suggest a *deus ex machina* in lumberjack shirt...

DIANE: 112...

SIMON: ...saving the two women...

DIANE: 116...!

SIMON: ...from a tragic end."

DIANE: 120!

SIMON: Nailed it!

DIANE: Nailed it!

SIMON: Only a twisted mind can ask for a brief biographical sketch of Little Red Riding Hood in 120 words.

DIANE: Yeah... Have you ever done the exercise in reverse?

SIMON: What?

DIANE: Explaining the life of your Caesar as a tale, in 120 words.

SIMON: I think today my tale would have a happy ending!

DIANE: Congratulations! And yours?

SIMON: Mine?

DIANE: Your tale. Explaining your life.

SIMON: I've never done it.

DIANE: Well, do it! And write an ending... Night, Simon.

SIMON: Night, Diane ...

(SIMON stays thoughtful. He sits on his chair and takes off his glasses.)

SIMON: Once upon a time, there was a not-so-young writer... called Simon. *(He laughs. He closes his eyes and falls half-asleep)*

(Suddenly one of the screens starts to change. It shows images of a kid who seems Simon; kid's drawings with the name Simon on them; Super 9 films showing a family playing. We see now the typical class graduation photo, handwritten texts. We see moments of Simon's life in photos and home taped. All at once, we see Simon entering the bar where J.K. Burrows was, with a folder under his arm. SIMON stands up and watches. He rubs his eyes. He doesn't understand what he is seeing)

SIMON: What's—? Computer? What's this?

(SIMON puts his glasses on just when we see him on screen entering an alley. Zeus appears. They both keep a tense conversation we cannot hear. We just see. Zeus takes a gun. They fight. Simon gets the gun and points at Zeus. He laughs and insults at him. Simon shoots and Zeus drops dead. Simon runs away.)

SIMON: Computer. What the hell is going on?

(We see him entering the Documentation Centre and leaving the gun under the seat where he is now. SIMON doesn't understand what he is seeing on the screens. He looks under the chair, picks the gun up, and puts it away, contrite.)

SIMON: Computer, shut down! Log out!

(Lights out. Images disappear)

SIMON: Re-start.

COMPUTER: Username.

SIMON: Alexander the Great.

COMPUTER: Code.

SIMON: Leonidas 69.

COMPUTER: Good morning, Simon.

(Screens light up and illuminate the documentation room. But we realize that SIMON is not alone. A figure, back to Simon, stands in the room. He wears a long coat. He turns slowly. It's J.K.BURROWS.)

SIMON: How did you—?

J.K.BURROWS: Through the door.

SIMON: It's closed.

J.K.BURROWS: I have all doors opened for me. *(Pause)* I see you're calm.

SIMON: I knew you'd come sooner or later.

J.K.BURROWS: Did you *know*?

SIMON: You've known about me for a long time. All you had to do is ask a few questions...

J.K.BURROWS: And finding Plutarch.

SIMON: Not easy.

J.K.BURROWS: Finding Plutarch? No. It's not. You are the eyes—

SIMON: I don't understand.

J.K.BURROWS: You watch me—

SIMON: I write about—

J.K.BURROWS: About me.

SIMON: Yes.

J.K.BURROWS: I thought you would deny it.

SIMON: Why?

J.K.BURROWS: Strange hobby.

SIMON: I'm paid to do it.

J.K.BURROWS: Strange job, then...

SIMON: Not more so than yours.

J.K.BURROWS: You're not the only one, you know, to write about me.

SIMON: I'm the first one.

J.K.BURROWS: Yeah. I see... So here I am. Any question? Any doubt? Without watching those screens. I can answer any question. Come on. It will be fun. I'm right in front of you.

SIMON: Well— I— I don't—

J.K.BURROWS: Hey! You're not frightened, are you? You can ask me about personal issues. Go ahead, I'll be honest.

SIMON: No.

J.K.BURROWS: No, what?

SIMON: I'm not frightened, you won't be honest, and I don't need to ask. I know everything about you.

(Pause)

J.K.BURROWS: Everything?

SIMON: ...

J.K.BURROWS: How old are you?

SIMON: Thirty-seven.

J.K.BURROWS: *I'm* thirty-seven.

SIMON: I mean, thirty four...

J.K.BURROWS: Aha. Don't you think it's odd, having me here?

SIMON: I've always had you here. You *are* this room.

J.K.BURROWS: And that makes you what? My guardian angel?

SIMON: No. I just watch. Just look.

J.K.BURROWS: It's funny. You're face looks familiar.

SIMON: You must be mistaken.

J.K.BURROWS: I'm not. I never forget a face.

(J.K. looks at the devices)

J.K.BURROWS: And how does it work?

SIMON: I have access to everything.

J.K.BURROWS: Everything?

SIMON: Mail, phone, cameras, bank details, connections with friends, former friends, teachers, relatives...

J.K.BURROWS: Everything? *(He points to his head)*

SIMON:...

J.K.BURROWS: Good. For example... If I want to see old photos from—

SIMON: School. *(To computer)* Open folders “School times”.

(We see photos of Burrows as a kid. J.K. sits on the chair while watching the pictures)

J.K.BURROWS: Well, that was easy. And if I want to see my first—

SIMON: Date with Lucy?

J.K.BURROWS: Can I?

SIMON: Open file “Love”. Subfolder “Dates”. First subfolder.

(We see a camera from a park focusing from a distance a young couple kissing in a bank. She has short hair)

J.K.BURROWS: You have our first kiss! *(He contemplates their first kiss)* I didn't remember it like that...

SIMON: Like what?

J.K.BURROWS: *(surprised)* Like that... It's pathetic... *(He laughs)* When I think of that moment, I remember me stroking her hair and she... had longer hair. I didn't remember we were under a tree... Her hair... Her hair band... *(A dog comes and leaps on them. Some pedestrians cross by.)*

J.K.BURROWS: Elvis Motel... *(He laughs. Suddenly he stares at Simon)* Did you realize? You finished the sentence for me.

SIMON: I'm sorry.

J.K.BURROWS: This is the third time you've done that.

SIMON: I didn't want to—

J.K.BURROWS: And every time, you said precisely what I wanted to say. Maybe it's true...

SIMON: What?

J.K.BURROWS: Maybe you do have access to everything. *(He laughs)*

SIMON: ...

J.K.BURROWS: If you know me so well, you surely know what I'm doing here.

SIMON: Yes.

J.K.BURROWS: And?

SIMON: I can't. It's my job.

J.K.BURROWS: I can give you money. I know how much Plutarch is offering. I'll offer you twice.

SIMON: I'm not doing it for the money anymore. It's my life.

J.K.BURROWS: It's *my* life, and I don't want you to watch me.

SIMON: I don't watch you. I observe you.

J.K.BURROWS: You judge me.

SIMON: I explain you.

J.K.BURROWS: Why?

SIMON: You can't ask me to quit.

J.K.BURROWS: I'm the most powerful man on the planet.

SIMON: We both know that isn't true.

J.K.BURROWS: I will be the most powerful man on the planet, and we both know *that* can be true.

SIMON: I have orders.

J.K.BURROWS: I have a life.

SIMON: And that is my job.

J.K.BURROWS: Then I'll force you to quit.

SIMON: You won't. You can't.

J.K.BURROWS: Simon says I won't.

SIMON: How do you know my name's—?

J.K.BURROWS: Everyone has a paper trail. Everyone. Forget it. Now. I constantly feel you're watching. I feel it. I know a lot of people's watching me and observing me. But... You're different. Your eyes lie heavy upon me.

SIMON: I can't quit.

J.K.BURROWS: Why?

SIMON: You're my work.

J.K.BURROWS: What?

SIMON: *(pause)* I've created you.

J.K.BURROWS: You're nuts. I'll contact Plutarch and—

SIMON: "You have in your hands a blank book that I hope to fill...

J.K.BURROWS and SIMON: ...with the best written pages in the history of this country."

J.K.BURROWS: You...

SIMON: I whispered these words in the ear of a drunkard, a defeated man, who sat alone in a seedy bar. Nobody looked at you because you were nobody. Nobody believed in you, because you didn't yourself! I whispered these words and you stood up, took a folder full of crap that I, I left for you, and you used it to open up your way. You didn't want to walk, but I pushed you into it!

J.K.BURROWS: A damned folder doesn't allow you to—

SIMON: A damned folder? You think anyone can become president because of a folder? I did more than that... *(Photo of a Playmate)* Julie Sagan... Miss October... Two weeks after your nomination as a candidate, she was about to make public your Tuesday visits at the Hilton. She disappeared before she could say a word... *(Photo of a journalist)* Michael Lomberg. Journalist from the *Post*. He was going to publish an interesting article on the awarding of contracts to certain weaponry companies with which you have contacts... But he didn't publish it... Nobody knew anything about him... Or about his piece... *(An ultrasound scan appears)*

J.K.BURROWS: What is this?

SIMON: I think this is the head... And this... Don't you recognize it? This was Michael or Angie Burrows. These are the names Lucy would like for her children, right? But this one came too early, huh? Right in the middle of the campaign. 'J.K., why don't you withdraw? Let's have our children and in 4 years you stand for it again. This pressure is no good for me or for our child', your wife asked you. And you automatically said: 'Get an abortion, Lucy! I can't wait that long.' God... I felt so proud of you... But Lucy was unwilling to do so. She wanted the child; she wanted you to withdraw... But everything can be fixed with a pill in a cup of herbal tea at a café in Washington. Clean and fast... A damned folder, you say... You need me. Your life and your biography go together. One is meaningless without the other. You're my character —

J.K.BURROWS: Your—!

SIMON: And what's best: I know the ending! I know your future decisions, and I agree with them, and—

J.K.BURROWS: You know nothing. You know nothing. My decisions come from me.

SIMON: You're wrong. They come from us.

J.K.BURROWS: You're crazy. You can't know my thoughts. You can't know what I'm going to do.

SIMON: I describe your life, right... But sometimes... sometimes I create it! I could write down your entire next year right now and I wouldn't have to rectify a single comma.

J.K.BURROWS: You're wrong.

SIMON: I'm not.

J.K.BURROWS: You're wrong!

SIMON: I know you want to reach an agreement with the government of—

J.K.BURROWS: How—?

SIMON: That you don't want a war. I know you'll try to pass the health care reforms agreeing with—

J.K.BURROWS: I haven't told anybody. Not even —

SIMON: Lucy? I know you want to leave her.

J.K.BURROWS:...

SIMON: You decided to leave her two years and three months ago. But you're afraid of repercussions. Never has a president divorced in the middle of his term!

J.K.BURROWS: How do you—?

SIMON: That's what I would do. Don't you understand? We are one. Say that I'm wrong. Say that I'm wrong and I won't write about you anymore! Oh!

(SIMON shuts him up with a gesture.)

J.K.BURROWS What?

SIMON: Don't say a word, please!

J.K.BURROWS: Now, I can't talk...?

SIMON: Shush! Just a second!

(SIMON takes his keyboard and types something quickly)

SIMON: Now you can!

J.K.BURROWS: ...

SIMON: Talk! Now you can!

J.K.BURROWS: I can talk whenever I want. I don't need your permission. You're going to stop everything. You will get help. No one right in his mind would talk such nonsense. I'm not a character of your idiotic invention. You won't follow me. You won't analyze me or hear me. Is it clear?

SIMON:...

J.K.BURROWS: *(shouting)* Is it clear?! *(SIMON is physically threatened and violently grabbed by him)*

SIMON: Computer, read what I wrote.

COMPUTER: Simon said in a trembling voice: 'Now you can!' The president, not understanding the situation, attacked his biographer: 'I can talk whenever I want.' He said. 'I don't need your permission. You're going to stop everything. You will get help. No one right in his mind would talk such nonsense. I'm not a character of your idiotic invention.' Given the insults from the President, Simon remained quiet. Immobile. J.K. went on: 'You will stop following me. You will stop analyzing or hearing me. Is it clear?'. The silence made feel the president so uncomfortable that he violently grabbed his biographer while shouting: 'Is it clear?!'

(Long pause. J.K. seems really upset)

SIMON: Is it clear for you? Don't be afraid. I'm writing a great story for you! With a great ending! You are the best book I've ever written! Don't be afraid!

(J.K. leaves. Lights out)

ACT 5

(One year later. Documentation center. Simon sits on his chair with his eyes fixed on the screen. A hidden camera shows J.K. Burrows in his room staring at the TV. Sitting on the side of the bed, his wife is crying, her back turned)

SIMON: Write. *(We hear the clanking of a typewriter)* J.K. Burrows sat alone in his room, comma, while the only person in the world who could forgive him turned her back on him, too, period. Everything was broken between them, period. Everything was broken between his people and him, comma, too. She, who always had been aware of the visits of the President to Hilton Hotel, now had to bear her husband's character growing bitter and twisted. The whole country was shocked, experiencing an inexplicable change of unforeseeable consequences. In his last year of office, J.K. took the most unexpected and incomprehensible decisions ever taken by a president. Now he was sitting on the presidential bed. A quiz show was on the television Meanwhile, three channels down the remote, bombs were falling and screams were echoing among the inhabitants of a country of unpronounceable name who did not understand how someone who did not even know what was going on in his own home believed to be entitled to conquer foreign nations. The great white hope was fading with the same strange ease with which it was created. Zoom in.

(The woman runs out of the room. J.K. stretches out in bed. He stares into the camera that is recording him)

J.K.BURROWS: Simon... You're here, right? *(He laughs)* Always here... How will we call this chapter? "J.K. Burrows in his darker paragraph"? You didn't expect this, did you? *(Pause)* You know, Simon. I can't go on like this. I want to put a full stop to this damn book of yours.

SIMON: *(to computer)* Write. He had it everything to be big.

J.K.BURROWS: I had it everything to be big!

SIMON: Everyone trusted him.

J.K.BURROWS: Everyone trusted me.

SIMON: And he failed.

J.K.BURROWS: And I failed.

SIMON: We failed.

J.K.BURROWS: You failed, Simon. You are as responsible as I am. As responsible as I am, Simon.

SIMON: Cut connection. *(He looks at a screen)* Diane, are you there?

(DIANE appears on the screen)

DIANE: Always.

SIMON: Diane, I want to talk to you.

DIANE: No, Simon!

SIMON: My Caesar's no longer a Caesar.

DIANE: I do not want to know—

SIMON: My Hamlet doesn't doubt! Peter Pan wants to grow up! He's no longer my character! And now my work hasn't meaning! Nothing I write has!

DIANE: I don't want you to tell me a word.

SIMON: I need to!

DIANE: Don't, Simon!

SIMON: There are things I haven't done well!

DIANE: We all make mistakes.

SIMON: Not like mine...

DIANE: Simon!

SIMON: I know I had no permission. Only you can understand me, Diane!

DIANE: I don't want to understand anything, I said!

SIMON: I intervened!

DIANE: *(pause)* Shit! I said I didn't want—

SIMON: I got involved and I fucked up! I wasn't ready at all! I wasn't! Listen to me. Help me, please! I'm guilty of each and every mistake my Caesar has done! I could've let his life consume him, see how slowly he disappeared to become a second-class civil servant who beat his wife when he came back home.

DIANE: Shit!

SIMON: Anything but the monster he's become! J.K. Burrows, biography of a civil servant that could have been guilty of genocide! (*Long pause*) Diane... I want to get out of here.

DIANE: You can't.

SIMON: I need to get away!

DIANE: You can't. You know you can't. Only if you or your Caesar—

SIMON: (*slowly*)... die. I could end this madness... What do I do?

DIANE: I can't!

SIMON: You can't what?!

DIANE: I can't help you, I can't.

SIMON: Why not?

DIANE: You asked me why I didn't look for someone to come with me on my journey. Do you remember? And I said that there wasn't anyone good enough for me. I lied. I found him. I found *you*, and—

SIMON: Diane—

DIANE: Shush! I know what you're going to say. 'Diane I didn't know that.' And I'll say: 'It was obvious.'

SIMON: Maybe—

DIANE: And you'll say: 'I was too busy with my Caesar. Why didn't you tell me? Maybe, if I had known—' I would have made you be quiet, and I'll answer: 'We all fall in love with our creations, we can't help it'

SIMON: With our—?

DIANE: Your voice will break. And you'll realize why I can't help you. Because I can't get involved, Simon. (*Long pause*) We're all characters. You know what to do... Only if you or your Caesar...

SIMON: Die.

DIANE: I beg you, please: don't do it! Don't do it!

<p>SIMON: Caesar position! <i>(We see a GPS with a red dot)</i></p> <p>COMPUTER: No movement for the last half hour.</p> <p>SIMON: Show me pictures of the room. Phone GPS signal? <i>(To Diane)</i> Diane, I understand! Now I understand!</p> <p><i>(Nobody is in the room. We only see a cell phone on the bed)</i></p>	<p>DIANE: Simon, listen! Simon, don't! Don't do it! Simon, stop! Simon, fuck, look at me! I can't help you. I can't, Simon! But don't do it! Don't finish the book!</p>
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SIMON: Shit! Today's date?

COMPUTER: Tuesday—

SIMON: I know where he is.

DIANE: Simon!

(SIMON picks up the gun he hid under his seat when he killed Zeus. He takes his jacket and runs out. The chair turns around and DIANE appears seated there. She is in her "documentation center." She looks at the screen. There we see SIMON a few seconds before leaving his room. They play the last lines again, but in this new space. She is present and Simon is on the screen.)

<p>SIMON: Caesar position! <i>(We see a GPS with a red dot)</i> COMPUTER: No movement for the last half hour. SIMON: Show me pictures of the room. Phone GPS signal? <i>(To Diane)</i> Diane, I understand! Now I understand! <i>(Nobody is in the room. We only see a cell phone on the bed)</i> SIMON: Shit! Today's date? COMPUTER: Tuesday— SIMON: I know where he is.</p>	<p>DIANE: Simon, listen! Simon, don't! Don't do it! Simon, stop! Simon, fuck, look at me! I can't help you. I can't, Simon! But don't do it! Don't finish the book!</p>
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(SIMON picks up the gun he hid under his seat when he killed Zeus. He takes his jacket and runs out.)

DIANE: Simon! *(Simon is gone)*

DIANE COMPUTER: Call.

DIANE: Answer.

MR. SMITH: Diane.

DIANE: Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: Simon's—

DIANE: I know.

MR. SMITH: Ready?

DIANE: Ready.

MR. SMITH: I want the biography on my table this very night. *(He hangs up)*

DIANE: Caesar position.

COMPUTER DIANE: Leicester and Marion.

(We see Simon running down the street)

DIANE: President position?

MR. SMITH: Hilton Hotel. Room five-five-five.

DIANE: Is he alone?

MR. SMITH: Yes.

DIANE: Write. *(Clacking of a typewriter)* Simon held in his hands the weapon that would end the president's life, period. Perhaps his own life too, period. Killing his creation, comma, or creating a last chapter both tragic and brilliant, period. Show me the Hilton's security camera, service entrance. Print first chapter. "Simon's childhood." *(We see Simon entering the hotel and running down the hall)* He and only he had a date with destiny. And destiny awaited him seated in a cold hotel room wanting to be sacrificed. Camera from stairs. Print: "Simon in his teens and first traumas." *(We see the camera from stairs)* November seventeenth. Wet streets. A city that is never silent, a broken country and a man who knew what to do. Print: "Simon and literature." Simon's webcam. *(Now we see from Simon's point of view due to a camera in his cap. He walks down a corridor)* Corridor three? *(Shot from the corridor)* Automatic monitoring. *(We see Simon moving forward from different cameras)* The man in front of his alter ego. The creator in front of his work. The writer in front of the character. The biographer in front of his desk. An action to describe it. A shot to kill him. There was no doubt in his eyes. No fear in the face of his victim. Print the other chapters! Room five-five-five. *(Simon enters the room)* The last gate to cross. He opened and realized that everything would be easy. His victim was seated, waiting for his shot of grace. *(Simon aims the gun at Burrows, who is sitting)* And they both knew that was the fullstop for their "Parallel Lives."

(Simon shoots the President in cold blood. He falls down on the bed. Simon looks at the camera. Camera zooms in on Simon's face.)

SIMON: A synonym for this, Diane?

(Simon blows his head off)

DIANE: End.

(The sound of a typewriter types three letters)

COMPUTER: Call.

DIANE: Answer.

MR. SMITH: Done?

DIANE: *(pause)* Yes. Mr. Smith—

MR. SMITH: What?

DIANE: *(pause)* How—?

MR. SMITH: We merely place Moby Dick in front of Ahab, create the ghost for Hamlet, write the label “Drink me” in Alice’s cup of tea. The rest just happens... We don’t publish biographies, Diane. We create great characters. And you tell their adventures. I’ll wait for the manuscript. Tomorrow I’ll tell you who your next Caesar will be.

(He cuts communication)

DIANE: Bind papers and send to Plutarch.

COMPUTER DIANE: Title missing.

(Pause)

DIANE: The biographer.

(We hear a printer)

DIANE: Sign out.

(Lights out)