

***The Sovereign Statement
Excerpt***



Scene 1: The Plot

All scene titles are projected at the top of each scene, and then go away. In the theater, these are projected slides.

DARDAI sits on a bench stage right. The lights imply late evening. He wears a long raincoat and has a briefcase resting on his lap, as well as a document and a distinctive envelope. He holds up a small metal cylinder, then proceeds to take it apart and re-form it into a pen. He signs the document and places it in the envelope, then places the envelope into his raincoat. He speaks directly to the audience as he does this.

DARDAI

I'm not going to be President. *(Beat.)* To be President of the United States you must be a natural-born citizen, 35 or older, resident for 14 years, never impeached by the Senate, never part of a rebellion against said nation; I meet all of those requirements except one. *(Beat.)* I was born in Karachi, in Pakistan, and flown over from the other side of the world before my mind had any talent for memory. That nation, Pakistan, was founded in 1947 and this year, 2013, marked the first time in its history that any government administration has completed its term without being overthrown or collapsing in disgrace. I'm not going to be President of Pakistan, either, but nobody is allowed to be President of Pakistan. It's a title you're given and then dared to hold onto. *(Beat.)* There are two prepositions. There is "of" and there is "from." You can be of a place without being from it and you can be from a place without being of it. Sometimes you feel both. Other times you feel neither. *(Beat.)* I'm telling you this now because later on you're going to ask why I did it. And it will be too late to change it by then.

RIDARELLI enters, wearing a long raincoat, carrying a briefcase and a slip of paper in his hand. He walks over to DARDAI.

DARDAI

Hello, Phil.

RIDARELLI

Hello to you.

DARDAI

Have a seat. Thank you for meeting me.

RIDARELLI

(sits)

What's this about? All I was given was a stage direction. *(He reads from the slip of paper.)* "Ridarelli enters, wearing a long raincoat, carrying a briefcase and a slip of paper in his hand. He walks over to Dardai."

DARDAI

That's all it said?

RIDARELLI takes another look at the paper. He eats the slip of paper.

RIDARELLI

(doesn't eat the slip of paper)

Come on.

DARDAI

Is that all it says.

RIDARELLI

(doesn't eat the slip of paper)

“He eats the slip of paper.”

DARDAI

Indeed.

RIDARELLI

(doesn't eat the slip of paper)

Come on.

DARDAI

I need to know that I can trust you.

RIDARELLI

(doesn't eat the slip of paper)

How long have we known each other?

DARDAI

To follow directions, Phil. If I can't trust you to do that I will walk offstage right now and that will be the end of it.

RIDARELLI

(doesn't eat the slip of paper)

You wouldn't.

DARDAI

I will tell the stage manager to turn off all of the lights and I will leave you alone with a room full of people who feel profoundly cheated.

RIDARELLI

(doesn't eat the slip of paper)

But...

DARDAI

Amanda.

Stage lights begin going out, one by one.

DARDAI

(stands)

Good evening, Phil.

RIDARELLI

Hold on. Hold on! Okay. I'll eat the lousy stage directions.

DARDAI

Do not. Test me. *(He nods at the tech booth. The lights return to normal.)*

RIDARELLI eats the slip of paper.

DARDAI

Good man. *(He sits back down, opens his briefcase, and begins sorting through a stack of manila file folders.)*

RIDARELLI

(still chewing)

This is awful. You wouldn't think this would be awful but this is awful. I knew a kid in first grade. Tim McCarthy. Kid could eat anything. I don't know how he did that. This is awful.

DARDAI

Swallow.

RIDARELLI

(still chewing)

Hm?

DARDAI

Swallow. You can swallow now.

RIDARELLI

(swallows)

I'm a little surprised.

DARDAI

Surprised.

RIDARELLI

Yes.

DARDAI

By?

RIDARELLI

I thought I'd have to say something.

DARDAI

Such as...

RIDARELLI

"The Orioles looked good this year."

DARDAI

Did they?

RIDARELLI

No, I mean, I'd sit down and I'd say "The Orioles looked good this year."
And you'd say something in response to that. "Not as good as the Dodgers."

DARDAI

Did they?

RIDARELLI

That's not the point. (*Beat. Truthfully states how the Orioles and Dodgers looked this year.*) But that's not the point.

DARDAI

You were expecting a code.

RIDARELLI

Yes.

DARDAI

A code, in the form of a spoken phrase and counter-phrase, which would signify that we were each the people to whom the other was supposed to be speaking.

RIDARELLI

Right.

DARDAI

Phil. How long have you and I known each other?

RIDARELLI

Years.

DARDAI

I thought maybe I would say something literal and straightforward and you would respond with something literal and straightforward and we would do this back and forth until it established a dialogue.

RIDARELLI

That would also be fine.

DARDAI

Good. (*Beat.*) There is a country in the airspace above Evergreen Park, Illinois.

Pause.

RIDARELLI

The...Orioles looked good this year.

DARDAI

(hands RIDARELLI a file folder)

The Nation of Celestial Space, often referred to simply as Celestia. Founded 1949 by James Thomas Mangan of Evergreen Park, claimed the entirety of outer space so that no other nation on earth would be able to establish a political hegemony therein.

RIDARELLI

Serious?

DARDAI

As meningitis. He minted coins. He produced postage stamps. Every time the United States or Soviet Union launched a rocket he'd send a letter to Kennedy and Khrushchev demanding that they stop encroaching on his territory.

RIDARELLI

Get off my lawn.

DARDAI

Manner of speaking.

RIDARELLI

Crackpot.

DARDAI

There was buy-in. People asked to be made citizens of Celestia and were welcomed into the nation with open arms.

RIDARELLI

Crackpot with a cult following.

DARDAI

And by 1960 the stated population of Celestia was 19,057 citizens.

RIDARELLI

Nineteen what?

DARDAI

Thousand, Phil. Nineteen thousand. About the size of a Seattle suburb.

RIDARELLI

That's...very specific.

DARDAI

(hands RIDARELLI another folder)

Tukwila, Washington. Just south of Seattle. Population 19,100 as of the 2010 census.

RIDARELLI

Why do you have this?

DARDAI

(takes the folder back)

We're getting off track.

RIDARELLI

There's a country.

DARDAI

The Nation of Celestial Space.

RIDARELLI

Above Evergreen Park. That's, what...20 miles south of here?

DARDAI

Twenty miles south. Twenty straight up.

RIDARELLI

Is it still there?

DARDAI

Are you asking me if outer space is still there?

RIDARELLI

No, I mean...

DARDAI

You mean "Is the Nation of Celestial Space still a functioning entity?"

RIDARELLI

Yes.

DARDAI

No. Celestia collapsed with the death of its founder, although his grandkids still hold honorary titles. I've met one of them. He owns a pizza place downtown and was anointed Duke of The Milky Way.

RIDARELLI

Which...?

DARDAI

I'm not telling you. I'm not advertising.

RIDARELLI

So if this country...

DARDAI

Celestia.

RIDARELLI

Celestia. If it's no longer around why are we talking about it?

DARDAI

(removes several manila file folders from his briefcase)

That hasn't been the only one, Phil. Freetown Christiana in Denmark, population 850. Filettino, inside Italy, population 554. The Republic of Molossia in Nevada, population 27. An entire separate *world* outside of our geography. A shadow globe the history teachers never tell you about. Nations the size of dimes.

RIDARELLI

Well. Let's be clear here. These aren't really nations we're talking about.

DARDAI

No? (*Beat.*) Why aren't they?

RIDARELLI

They're made up. Artificial. Invented.

DARDAI

How do you define a nation, Phil?

RIDARELLI

Long answer or short answer?

DARDAI

Short answer.

RIDARELLI

Essentially? A group of people who have agreed on a set of rules.

DARDAI

I see.

RIDARELLI

Why, how would you define it?

DARDAI

Long answer or short answer?

RIDARELLI

Short.

DARDAI

A narrative.

Pause.

RIDARELLI

Yeah. Okay. I'm gonna need the long answer.

DARDAI

(opening another folder)

You remember Newt Gingrich?

RIDARELLI

Speaker of the House.

DARDAI

Presidential candidate. Philanderer. Dinosaur enthusiast.

RIDARELLI

Sure, I remember him. Wait, what was—?

DARDAI

—during the Republican primary Gingrich is asked for comment on the situation in the Middle East. In the middle of his comment on the Middle East he dismisses the Palestinians as “an invented people.”

RIDARELLI

I recall.

DARDAI

Do you know who else are an invented people? The Israelis.

RIDARELLI

This is...

DARDAI

You know who else? The Americans.

RIDARELLI

This is a dangerous conversation we're having.

DARDAI

All nations are invented, Phil. They're moments of inspiration. Somebody speaks aloud the idea “This is how I would like us to live,” and then tells the story in present tense. “This is who we are.” “We declare.” “We state.” (Beat.) All nations are narratives, Phil. Why do you think a piece of land is called a plot?

Pause.

RIDARELLI

You still haven't told me what we're doing here.

DARDAI

That's true.

RIDARELLI

We've been out here for ten minutes.

DARDAI

Approximately.

Pause.

RIDARELLI

At some point you're going to have to—

DARDAI

—where would you like to die, Phil?

RIDARELLI

What?

DARDAI

If you had your choice. Where on this planet would you want to spend your last days?

RIDARELLI

Is this a threat?

DARDAI

A question.

RIDARELLI

Italy.

DARDAI

Where you're from.

RIDARELLI

I'm from Palatine.

DARDAI

But your *people*...

RIDARELLI

Yes.

DARDAI

You've been?

RIDARELLI

Many times.

DARDAI

You liked, what, the food.

RIDARELLI

Yes.

DARDAI

The culture.

RIDARELLI

Of course.

DARDAI

The landscape, the people.

RIDARELLI

All of it.

DARDAI

You liked it so much that you'd prefer to die there.

RIDARELLI

If I had the choice. Since you ask. *(Beat.)* Why did you ask?

Pause.

DARDAI

It's nice that you have an answer, is all. *(Beat. He opens another folder and hands it to RIDARELLI.)* There are three islands in the Pacific that have been claimed by the Dominion of Melchizedek. It's been in existence since 1986 and its chief export is the facilitation of international banking fraud. *(Beat.)* I'd like to think we could do better.

RIDARELLI

"We" as in "humanity."

DARDAI

No.

RIDARELLI

As in "Americans."

DARDAI

Yes, because if there's one thing America does well, it's discourage unethical banking practices.

RIDARELLI

Then...?

DARDAI

I mean “we,” Phil, as in “you and I.”

RIDARELLI

Us? What are you talking about?

DARDAI

I’m proposing that we establish this theater as an independent nation.

RIDARELLI

WHAT?!

DARDAI

Don’t act so surprised.

RIDARELLI

BUT YOU CAN’T JUST—

DARDAI

—no. Hold on. I’m giving you a note. Don’t “act” so surprised.

RIDARELLI

Oh.

DARDAI

Let’s try that again. (*Beat.*) I’m proposing that we establish this theater as an independent nation.

RIDARELLI

What?

DARDAI

Don’t act so surprised.

RIDARELLI

But you can’t just—

DARDAI

—actually I *can*, just. Haven’t I told you how easy it is? (*He produces more folders.*) The Republic of Minerva. The Principality of Sealand. The Crown Dependency of Forvik.

RIDARELLI

But that doesn't mean—

DARDAI

—Seborga. Kugelmugel. Whangamomona.

RIDARELLI

You're making up words.

DARDAI

Why *not* this theater, Phil?

RIDARELLI

We don't own it, for one thing.

DARDAI

Doesn't matter.

RIDARELLI

It's a room.

DARDAI

Several only exist as websites.

RIDARELLI

Listen. What you're talking about here. Founding a separate nation. I mean. This is what the ancient Greeks referred to as hubris.

DARDAI

I'm pretty sure we still call it that.

RIDARELLI

We can't just say we're a nation and boom, nation. There's...there's other *stuff*. Laws. Agencies and departments and whatever. They're important. You don't have a nation without—

DARDAI

—when was the Declaration of Independence signed?

RIDARELLI

July 4th.

DARDAI

And when was the Constitution first written?

RIDARELLI

Um.

DARDAI

September 17, 1787. It was ratified on a June 21st, and went into effect on a March 4th. But you don't get parades and fireworks and Happy Birthday America every September, June, or March, do you. (*Beat.*) You're right, though. It takes more than a single statement.

RIDARELLI

It takes a narrative. Like you said.

DARDAI

Like I said. (*He reaches into the briefcase and produces a large, official-looking envelope, which contains a script for this play.*) Which is why I went ahead and wrote one. That's where you come in.

RIDARELLI

Me?

DARDAI

I wrote a play in which the theater is to be declared an independent nation, in which the play itself was also the principal guiding document of the nation, and then I handed the play over to you. (*He hands the envelope to RIDARELLI.*) Like so.

RIDARELLI

(*opens the envelope and produces a hard-bound script*)

What do I do with this?

DARDAI

This? Nothing. This is a prop. The real play is something you memorized and rehearsed several days ago.

RIDARELLI

I recall that.

DARDAI

Good. Because now you're its protagonist.

RIDARELLI

Protagonist.

DARDAI

Yes.

RIDARELLI

That means...

DARDAI

You'll have most of the lines. Also a dance number.

RIDARELLI

What happens to you?

DARDAI

I'll be elsewhere. I'll be around. I'll be back. Understand me here, Phil: There are strings attached to this arrangement.

RIDARELLI

What sort of strings?

DARDAI

The standard sort. I make you the protagonist of the play, and when the time comes, you remember who it was who wrote you in the first place.

RIDARELLI

What if I don't want to be the protagonist?

DARDAI

(begins to exit)

Phil. I think we both know it's far too late for that. *(He turns back for a moment.)* "A group of people."

RIDARELLI

What?

DARDAI

"A set of rules." You said, "A nation is a group of people who have agreed on a set of rules."

RIDARELLI

Essentially.

DARDAI

That's also how you'd define a competitive sport.

RIDARELLI

I suppose it is.

DARDAI

(exiting)

The Orioles looked good this year.

RIDARELLI is left alone onstage. He gathers the miscellaneous folders he's been handed and puts them in his briefcase. He looks over the script.