

Naked Bigport

A comedy by C. David Vale

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Draft October 28, 2019

FIRST 6 SCENES

Cast

Narrator	An onstage presence to open the story. Can be doubled by an actor.
Beatrice Martin	President of the Chamber of Commerce and owner of Beads by Beatrice
Garrett Reese	A Fusilero and avid collector of old firearms and explosives
Peter Baird	A local real estate developer and president of the FIB
Mark McMasters	A local merchant, considers Garrett a menace to society
Dottie Wilson	Beatrice's friend and handler
Patrick Corman	Chamber board member and realtor with PR connections
Arnie Jacobsen	Conspiracy theorist, terrorist hunter
Don Wagner	Board member, moose hunter, explosives expert, and Garrett's sidekick
Martha "Marty" Miller	Consultant and parade chair
Mr. Smith	Mysterious man in a black suit
Mr. Jones	Another mysterious man in a black suit

Setting

The play uses a single set representing Main Street of the quaint town of Bigport. A bead store, Beads By Beatrice is on Stage Right. The office of the Federation for the Improvement of Bigport is on stage Left. Main street passes down center stage between the store and the office, which sit at Main Street's intersection with Market Street at the front of the stage.

There are many scenes, some of them relatively short. In most cases, there is little resetting done between the scenes and the scene demarcation should be accomplished by selective dimming of the lights. Day vs. night can be indicated by

light on the far end of Main Street. Other than this light, the room lights can be dimmed or brought up to indicate the focus of the scene. At no point in the play does the action take place on both sides of the street at once.

Prologue

As the onstage narrator begins, members of the Bigport Chamber of Commerce begin to filter into the stringing room of Beatrice Martin's bead factory, Beads by Beatrice. Convenient to downtown Bigport, the Chamber Board generally meets there. As we open, Beatrice is moving beading materials from the two identical square work tables that will become the conference table. By the end of the narration, all of the Chamber board is seated. A Board member, preferably Patrick Corman, can double as the narrator, in which case he takes a seat at the table at the end of his monologue.

Narrator: Welcome to Bigport. Bigport is a small town in Northwestern Montana. Well, it's not really a town. Or a city. Or a village. Or any of the usual designations for a group of businesses and residents. It's formally a CDP, a Census Defined Place. That means that the federal government, when it came to counting the inhabitants, didn't know what to call it either. So they just called it a "Place" and got on with their business.

But the people of Bigport don't let the fact that they're nothing in the eyes of the government keep them from going about their daily activities. In fact, they seem to thrive in the absence of government, creating their own quasi-governmental organizations to provide the necessary services, and developing a political pecking order of power elite and interlocking directorates that, in spite of the protestations of the disenfranchised, seem to keep the quaint little CDP operating.

As the story opens, we drop in on a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is perhaps the most visible of the groups that run the town, primarily because its main purpose is publicizing what goes on in town. The Federation for the Improvement of Bigport (or FIB), on the other hand, is a real-estate advisory organization whose mission it is to preserve the quaint, frontier nature of Bigport. It's first foray into actual real estate development is currently in the approval process: A forty-foot observation tower to be built on the library lawn.

It's been suggested that you can't be a real Montanan unless you have Montana on your birth certificate. Beatrice Martin, the current President of the Chamber of Commerce, tracks her roots back several generations further. She would probably claim to have arrived on the Mayflower, except for the fact that the Mayflower never made it as far inland as Bigport. Anyway, as we look in on a monthly meeting of

the Bigport Chamber of Commerce, we find Beatrice in her place, always at the head of the table.

Act I

Scene 1

Monday, Early Morning

Beatrice Martin, Garrett Reese, Peter Baird, Mark McMasters, Dottie Wilson, Arnie Jacobsen, Don Wagner, Patrick Corman.

In this initial Chamber of Commerce Meeting, Beatrice is at the US end of the table and the Board members (Peter , Mark, Dottie, Don, and Garrett) sit on the SR side of the table. Patrick sits in a chair against the wall, but near Beatrice. Arnie sits next to Patrick.

Beatrice: Good morning. I think we might as well get started here. Let the record show it's 8:17 a.m. I'd like to start by opening this meeting for general comment. Are there any members who would like to coment?

Garrett: Yes, I'd like ...

Cutting him off, and speaking like a first-grade teacher.

Beatrice: Garrett, please raise your hand and I'll recognize you.

Garrett raises his hand, as do several others. Beatrice stares at Garrett with a "next time you should be more polite" look.

Beatrice: Peter, would you like to tell us what's happening at the F.I.B.?

Peter Baird stands as he speaks. (He does NOT have his model tower with him.)

Peter: Yes. Thank you, Beatrice. I wanted to give an update on the Bigport Tower project by the Federation for the Improvement of Bigport. I presented it to the county commissioners last week and got a generally positive response. Recall that the plan is to build a forty-foot observation tower in front of the library building on Main Street. It's modeled after the forest service fire-watch towers, and once erected, it should be a tourist attraction as well as a good vantage point for viewing parades and other activities in Bigport.

Beatrice: Thank you, Peter. Are there other general comments?

Garrett's hand is prominent among others.

Beatrice: Yes, Mark.

Mark McMasters stands and pulls up his sleeve to proudly show everyone his new wristwatch.

Mark: I'd like everyone to know that I've just added a line of Presidential watches to the offerings at my gift shop. They have a character that looks like the president on the face and his two hands point to the time.

Peter: Does he have little hands and a tail?

Mark: No, he does not have small hands. ... Well, one is the big hand, so I guess the other one is small.

Beatrice: Thank you, Mark. OK, Arnie. You had your hand up.

No response, as Arnie isn't paying attention.

Mark: Oh, and by the way. The bezel has raised edge just below 6:00 that looks like a wall.

Beatrice: Thank you Mark. Arnie?

Patrick Corman, sitting beside Arnie, shakes his arm.

Patrick: Arnie, wake up. It's your turn.

Arnie: Oh, yeah.

Looking a little surprised, comes to attention.

Arnie: I just wanted to wanted to say that I've completed my review of the public records of the Winter Carnival finances and noted some discrepancies. As the Carnival operates under the auspices of the Chamber, I'm here to suggest that the books need to be audited.

Beatrice: Arnie, the Winter Carnival is promoted by the Chamber but has it's own organization and board of directors.

Arnie: And who chairs that board?

Beatrice: Well, I do.

Arnie: Then I'm raising the concern with the right person.

Beatrice: Yes, but not in the right place.

Arnie: So where is the right place?

Beatrice notices Garret's hand sort of raised and uses it to change the topic.

Beatrice: OK, Garrett. It's your turn now. But keep it short. We have a big agenda today.

With grudging gratitude:

Garrett: Thank you, Beatrice. As you all know, I'm a member of the Bigport Fusileros and last year we had a gun show at the museum. We're planning to have another one this year.

Beatrice: Garrett, I think you know my feelings about guns and the Fusileros. Bigport is a quaint tourist community and we don't think cowboys riding roughshod over the town is consistent with that idea. But fact of the matter is that a gun show at the museum is between you and the museum and there's not much I can do about it.

Garrett: Well, Beatrice, thank you for that vote of confidence. But, you see, last year we had this 50-caliber machine gun and it was really popular. We were thinking this year, maybe some bigger guns. We'd like to have a Sherman tank, but ...

Beatrice: No tanks, Garrett. We're certainly not going to allow tanks into our town. I can't imagine how you ever thought we would.

Garrett: Well, Beatrice, that's because you have a mind like a steel trap.

Beatrice: Well, thank you, Garrett.

Garrett: Yeah, I mean, ideas get into it but nothing ever gets out.

Beatrice: Hey!

Garrett: Anyway, we're not planning a tank. We're pretty sure the road department wouldn't go for it. So we were thinking maybe some Howitzer cannons. And maybe some armored vehicles.

Beatrice: I don't think so, Garrett.

Garrett: Beatrice, it's a county decision. You have nothing to say about it.

Beatrice: Well, we'll certainly see about that. Just how far do you think you'll get with the commissioners once I put my foot down?

Don Wagner speaks for the first time. Don is a Board member with a penchant for things that go bang. Or boom.

Don: Hold on a minute, Beatrice. I think we need to let Garrett explain a little more about what he's thinking. Garrett?

Garrett: Thank you, Don. I was really hoping that we could set our differences aside and maybe collaborate on this thing. Make it a win-win for both the residents, the merchants, and the Fusileros.

Don: Are you going to shoot the guns?

Garrett: Huh? Oh, yeah. I suppose we could. The smaller ones, anyway. The Howitzers'd probably break windows though.

Don: Explosions are always fun. Remember when I proposed Dynamite Days for the fall festival? Got anything that blows up?

Garrett: No, but we could have some live gunfights.

Don: Maybe with old-style six-shooters?

Righteous and incensed:

Beatrice: Over my dead body.

Ignoring Beatrice, despite the fitting response:

Garrett: Yeah, that'd be good. ... Hey, we could do quick-draw contests: Merchants vs. gunfighters.

Beatrice: You expect me to participate in a quickdraw contest?

Paying attention to Beatrice again:

Garrett: Well, you'd most likely get shot. But we wouldn't use real bullets. Probably.

Don: Were you thinking of a static display?

Garrett: Well, I was. But I like your idea of live action. How about we put the downtown merchants up on the rooftops with rifles, sort of like they're protecting the town. Then we could have the Fusileros ride into town on horseback, shooting the hell out of the place. The merchants on top, the Fusileros on the street, and the public running for cover. It'd be a great show.

Beatrice: Oh, my God!

Don: Yeah, and on their way down the street the Fusileros could rob the bank. Hey, we could blow the safe. Hell, we could blow the whole damned building.

Swatting him on the back of the head:

Dottie: Cut it, Don! Just cut it.

Somewhat contritely:

Don: Maybe we could just pretend to blow the building.

Hissing, with teeth barred:

Dottie: Cut!

Beatrice: Garrett, if you keep your little gun show in the museum, it'll be OK. But if you bring a convoy of tanks into town or all your crazy friends for some kind of a shootout ... Well, you know, you'd just better not do it.

To Don:

Dottie: She's right, you know.

Don: Garrett, let's talk afterwards. Any of the guys powder men?

Dottie and Beatrice roll their eyes. Garrett doesn't respond, but shrugs and nods, kind of a yeah-sure shrug.

Beatrice: Let's move along here. Patrick, you wanted to talk this morning, right?

Patrick Corman, big, imposing, and always wearing a black cowboy hat, is the Board member most interested in PR and publicity. He stands at the corner of the table near Beatrice.

Patrick: Thanks, Beatrice. I have an announcement that may move us away from the Wild West.

Beatrice: Then by all means, ...

Patrick: Some of you may remember John Casey. He was an actor of some note in the Children's Theater a few years ago. Anyway, he moved to New York to become a serious actor. I guess that was a slow start, but while he was trying to land a role, he wrote a book and a big publishing house picked it up. Anyway, he's written this book and it's about to have its debut. The debut of a book is a big thing. Lots of publicity and famous people. And, of course, lots of critics clambering to see the book and comment on it. The point is, he wants to debut the book here. Here in Bigport.

Patrick now has everyone's attention.

- Beatrice: So John, with his New York publisher and all his entourage and all the critics, they want to come here? Why?
- Patrick: Well, his agent wasn't real clear on that. But I think John may feel Bigport is his home town. And maybe he just wants to spread his good fortune among his friends. You know, share a little bit of the wealth with his high-school buddies. Clearly, Bigport could use the publicity.
- Peter: And if the Tower were erected, we could fly a banner for his book from it.
- Beatrice: I've never been to a book debut. What's it like? What does he expect us to do?
- Patrick: I don't know, but maybe we could get the theater for a day. Let John give a speech. Do a book signing. Do a reading from his book.
- Beatrice: Do we have money in the budget to rent the theater?
- Patrick: Don't worry about that, Bea. My company, Backwater Montana Properties, will be happy to spring for the theater. It's not everyday we have a publicity opportunity like this dropped in our laps. I think we should pull out all the stops and make this an event that the whole country is talking about.
- Dottie: That may be a little grand, Patrick, but I think we should at least have a parade. Everyone likes a parade.
- Don: Hey, yeah. Maybe we could get the Army to send a color guard. And maybe a tank.
- Dottie: I think we should have a real ceremony along with the parade. We could have the mayor present John with the key to the city.
- Patrick: What about the program at the theater?
- Dottie: I don't think anyone wants to hear speeches, Patrick. And it's the middle of summer. Who'd want to spend it in a theater? A good, old fashioned parade. That's the ticket.
- Mark: Hey, let's slow down here for a minute. This ceremony, this parade. You're going to close down downtown for the better part of a day. You have to think about the impact on business. I have ten weekends a year when I can sell my stuff. An event like this could easily cost me five thousand in lost sales.

Ignoring Mark and sounding a little affronted:

Beatrice: You know, we don't really have a mayor.

Dottie: Oh, you know I was just being figurative, Beatrice. Of course, it would be you and me presenting the key. Anyway, Patrick, does the book have a title?

Patrick: I'm sure it does, but I think they're keeping that quiet. Some part of the publicity strategy. Build a little suspense and intrigue for the debut, I guess. Hey, the announcement of the title could be part of John Casey's speech.

Dottie: No speeches, Patrick. Now just cut it!

Beatrice: Well, if John Casey has written a book, we should support it. I think Dottie's idea of a parade is a good one. Does everyone agree?

There is general agreement, signified by the nodding of heads, except Patrick and Mark, but no formal vote. The scene then degenerates into a number of side conversations. Beatrice, Patrick, and Dottie talk about how they'll present the key to the city. Don and Garrett talk about how they'll blow the place up. And Mark complains at length to Arnie, who just sits and smiles. The lights fade. The Star Spangled Banner plays in the background.

Scene 2

Monday, Mid Morning

Beatrice Martin, Garrett Reese, Don Wagner, Dottie Wilson, Mark McMasters.

The meeting is over but we're still at Beads by Beatrice. Beatrice is moving beading materials onto one of the tables. She then quietly goes about her work, sweeping her shop with a broom. Garrett Reese has built a Civil War era mortar, which he drags onto Market Street SL. Don Wagner is with him. Garrett situates the mortar pointing high and over the audience, presumably toward the lake.

Garrett busies himself pouring gunpowder from a bag, without measuring, into the mortar.

Don Wagner: How do you know how much to put in, Garrett?

Garrett Reese: Well, Don, these things didn't exactly come with a manual. Most folks of the time couldn't read anyway. So I'm pretty sure they just filled 'em, leavin' a little room for the ball.

Don: So, what're you using for the ball?

Garrett: I wanted to use a bowling ball, but it didn't quite fit the bore. So I'm just using a three-pound coffee can filled with concrete.

Garret produces a coffee can, apparently filled with cement, from his cart and drops it into the barrel of the mortar.

Don: And enough gunpowder to blow us all to hell.

Garrett: Don't worry. It's black powder. All flash and no boom.

Beatrice stops what she's doing and begins to listen.

Don: So you're hoping to shoot it into the bay?

Garrett: Yeah, I don't know how far it'll go, so I've aimed it pretty high. I certainly don't want to lob it across the bay into the Saddlebrook building.

Don: How'd you figure the angle, Garrett? Was there a geometric solution involved?

Garrett: Nope. I suppose there is some math behind the angle, but I just set it to what feels right. You know, when you done this sort of thing long enough, you just develop a feel.

Don: So you've done this before.

Garrett: Well, not this exactly. But I've been shooting black powder weapons for 30 years and this is just another black powder weapon. Are we ready?

Don: The bay looks clear. Are you ready?

Garrett: Yeah, here goes. Stand back. Fire in the hole!

As he lights the fuse and attempts to get away, he trips over the tongue of the cart, twisting the mortar in the general direction of Beatrice's shop.

Beatrice starts toward the window to watch. But before she can make it, there's a tremendous explosion. She stops cold, grasps her heart with a panicked look, and freezes in position as a cloud of white smoke drifts past.

Don: Wow! That sucker really took off. Looks like it went straight up.

Garrett: Yeah, maybe I did use a bit too much gunpowder. Sure made a bang, didn't it.

Don: I can't see it. You really blew it out of sight.

Garrett: I lost it, too. ... Oops, there it is. Just a tiny speck. See it?

Don: Yeah, I see it now. It's starting back down.

Garrett: Well, if I aimed it right, it should go kerplunk right out there in the bay. I may have bumped it, though.

Don: Oh, I don't know. Hey I think it's gonna come right back down here. Let's get under some cover. Here over on Beatrice's porch.

Beatrice has regained some composure and now, seeing the smoke and looking immensely annoyed, starts toward the door, holding her broom like a rifle, as if preparing to ward them off.

Garrett: No, wrong way. I think that's where it's comin' down. Run! It doesn't matter which direction. Just run! Beatrice... Take cover!

Beatrice stops her motion, flashes a deer-in-the-headlights look, looks at both tables, and dives under the one containing the bead materials. There is a whistling projectile sound followed by the sound of a crash, crunching wood, and breaking glass. The table that Beatrice is not under collapses with lots of noise and dust. We don't actually see the projectile, as it's moving too fast. But pieces of insulation from the ceiling, where the projectile came through, drift down.

Then there is silence. Dead silence.

Beatrice cautiously crawls out from under the table. She looks at the collapsed table, then the other table, then at herself as she takes inventory of body parts. She is on her knees beside the good table resting and sighing. She is not happy.

Garrett and Don burst through the door and attempt to see if Beatrice is all right..

Garrett: Beatrice, are you all right? Is everyone here OK? Jesus, I'm sorry Beatrice! I had no idea this would happen. I was sure it would land in the Bay. I never imagined it would hit your place.

Garrett helps Beatrice up and then turns to Don.

Garrett: Isn't that right Don? We had no idea this would happen.

Before Don can answer, he watches as Beatrice grabs her broom and whacks Garrett across the back several times.

Beatrice: Damn you, Garrett! What in the hell did you think you were doing?

Don watches without coming to Garrett's aid, possibly due to shock, fear, or just the feeling that Garrett is getting what he deserves.

Garrett: Beatrice, quit it. That hurts.

Regaining some composure, but retaining her anger.

Beatrice: Garrett, you stupid son of a bitch! How dumb does one have to be to shoot a loaded cannon off in the middle of Bigport. Christ, Garrett! You could have killed someone. *(Looking at the collapsed table.)* You could have killed me!

Garrett tries again to apologize, but can't get a word in.

Beatrice: This is exactly the reason I don't like the Fusileros and their damned toys around here. In addition to being a public nuisance, you're bad for business. How do you expect me to attract customers of any sort? Tourists, residents, anyone, if they're afraid they're going to get shot. Or blown up. I can't believe it. What a bunch of absolute idiots!

Mark McMasters bursts through the door.

Mark: Beatrice, I just heard the explosion and saw the dust. Is everyone OK over here?

Beatrice: No, I am not OK! And I want everyone to quit asking me that. These jackasses just scared the crap out of me, did God knows what damage to my shop, and now everyone wants to know if I'm OK. No, I am sure as hell not OK!

She grabs the broom and starts beating on Garrett again. Don and Mark watch for a couple of whacks and then Mark gently subdues her.

Dottie Wilson then bursts through the door.

Dottie: Beatrice. I heard the explosion and saw all the commotion. What happened? Are you OK?

Garrett: I wouldn't ask that, if I were you.

Beatrice grabs for the broom. Mark stops her.

Mark: It seems that Garrett and Don blew a hole in the roof of Beatrice's building and ...
(Pointing to table)

Dottie: Oh my God, Beatrice! Are you OK? Did anyone get hurt?

Mark: Only Garrett, it seems, who's taken something of a thrashing from Beatrice.

He says holding up the broom. Dottie grabs the broom and begins thrashing on Garrett anew. This time, Mark steps in to subdue her.

Mark: OK, enough of this. Garrett made a mistake. I'm sure he's sorry.

Mark looks at Garrett, who nods sheepishly.

Don: Now, I know Garrett will take care of whatever damage he's done to Beatrice's building and I'm sure he'll be much more careful in the future. Next time he does this, he'll aim more carefully.

Beatrice takes the broom and begins beating on Don. Mark subdues her after a couple of whacks.

Beatrice: Next time! Next time? You guys are all like a bunch of little kids with firecrackers. Jesus, it's a wonder you haven't already blown up the town.

Garrett and Don look at each other, their expressions appearing to fear someone has let the cat out of the bag.

Beatrice: What? Do you guys have something planned that you're not telling? Are you back to shooting from the rooftops and blowing up the bank? I thought we'd settled that.

Don: Take it easy Beatrice. I can assure you that no one is planing to blow up the bank. But everyone is enthusiastic about this John Casey book debut. And, well, I think the Fusileros were maybe thinking up some kind of a welcoming. You know, we had talked about a parade. I think that's all that's going on.

Dottie: Some kind of welcoming?

Garrett: Well, it was really Marty's idea. She's in charge of all the parades, you know. And, of course, we're always ready to help.

Dottie: Help with what?

Garrett: Marty's got all these connections with the military and she thought they could lead off the parade. And she got the ear of some retired general who talked to the local reserve commander. They had a pretty exciting lead off in the works.

Dottie: Define exciting, Garrett!

Garrett: Well, she'd asked for several things, including a fly-over. But apparently they had other commitments that day, so she couldn't arrange it.

Dottie: And, so?

Garrett: So they did have a few light artillery pieces available and they said they could bring them.

Dottie: Light artillery?

Garrett: Yeah, apparently they had a couple of Howitzer cannons and a World War II Ack-Ack gun battery.

Beatrice: Oh, my!

Garrett: Oh, and a missile.

Beatrice and Dottie, together: A missile?!

Garrett: Yeah, but just a little one. Anti-aircraft. Not ICBM class.

Beatrice: Well, it sounds like they have the whole arsenal. What do they need you guys for?

Garrett: Well, it wasn't so much their idea as ours, but Marty really liked it.

Beatrice: And what idea was that, Garrett?

Garrett: The Army, it seems isn't allowed to fire any of its weapons in a parade. We figured that seemed pretty lame, and Marty agreed.

Dottie: So you guys just figured that you'd follow along behind them with your blunderbusses and blast the hell out of downtown?

Garrett: No, that just didn't seem in keeping with the theme of Howitzers, Ack-ack, and missiles. It had to be something bigger.

Dottie: Like the cannon you guys were test firing here in the street. Right?

Garrett: Well, it's technically a mortar, not a cannon. But yeah.

Beatrice: (Shaking her head in mock surrender) Oh my God!

The lights fade. The cannon sequence of the 1812 Overture plays in the background.

Scene 3

Monday, Late Morning

Arnie Jacobsen, Garrett Reese.

The scene opens in the street outside Beatrice's shop, where Garrett is collecting the paraphernalia associated with the recent firing of his mortar. Arnie Jacobsen, today a man with a mission, stops to see what's going on.

Arnie: Hi Garrett. What's that, a cannon?

Garrett: Sort of, but technically it's a mortar. Shorter barrel. Intended for short range use.

Arnie: So what're you doing with it out here in the street. Jeez, you fire that thing here and folks would hear it all the way to the fire station.

Garrett: Yeah, most folks would probably hear it if I were to fire it. So what're you up to this morning, Arnie?

Arnie: I'm on my way to see Beatrice. You'll recall that I had some questions about the accounting of funds from the Winter Carnival. I was just going to drop in and see what I could find out.

Garrett: Might not be the best time.

Arnie: Huh? Not the best time?

Garrett: I think she's a little unglued right now.

Arnie: Oh, I'm used to her moods. I'm not worried. But what're you doing with the cannon?

Garrett: Mortar. I was thinking about putting it in the parade.

Arnie: The parade to honor John Casey when he comes here to debut his new book?

Garrett: Yep, the one Patrick told us about this morning. He's written a book and he's coming here to for it's release.

Arnie: Do you know what's it about? Does it have a title?

Garrett: I don't know. I guess that's still secret. But he wants to release it here. I'd guess it probably has something to do with Bigport.

Arnie: Bigport secrets. I've got a few of those to tell, myself. Man, if he'd ask me, I'd spill the beans about all the fiscal improprieties in this town. You have any idea how hard it's been for me to get an accounting of the Winter Carnival?

Garrett: Yeah, that's a pretty secretive operation. I've been on the committee since the beginning of time and I don't even know what's going on. I doubt anyone's stealing from the coffers, but I know there's a lot of participants wondering why they have to pay extra for electricity. I think the capacity argument is a crock.

Arnie: You're right. When there's secrecy, there's usually something crooked. And I'm going to get to the bottom of it. But you were about to tell me the title of the book.

Garrett: No, I don't know the title of the book, or even what it's about.

Arnie: It's that secrecy thing again. I'm not sure we should be letting him debut the book here. At least not if he's going to be secretive.

Garrett: Oh, I don't think we have to worry much about it. John's not the sort to cause any trouble.

Arnie: He'd left before I moved here, so I didn't know him. Trouble, though, you say?

Garrett: No, he's no trouble. And I'm sure his book won't be trouble, either. Probably something innocuous about the lake and Bigport.

Arnie: Naked Bigport?

Garrett: Naked Bigport?! How the hell did you come up with that? It'd be good for Bigport to get some exposure, but not that kind of exposure.

Arnie: Yeah, you're right. It's probably an expose'.

Garrett: Arnie, you're jumbling my words. I said "lake and Bigport," not Naked Bigport. And I said exposure, the good kind, not "expose'."

Arnie: Yeah, okay. So, you need some help hauling that cannon home?

Garrett: Mortar, Arnie. Mortar.

Arnie: What's that rocket-like thing on the back of the wagon, Gary?

Garrett: That would be a rocket, Arnie. Built it myself. It's basically a big skyrocket, but I made it the right bore to fit into my mortar.

He picks up the rocket, proudly showing it to Arnie.

Arnie: So how's it supposed to work?

Garrett: Well, it's got its own rocket engine so it's meant to fly under its own power. But I figured it'd be more exciting if I put a time delay fuse in it and shot it out of my mortar. Kind of like a first stage booster.

Garrett has the rocket pointed at the audience during this explanation.

Garrett: And when the rocket engine burns out, it's got a relatively big charge in it that will make a magnificent boom. I was going to shoot it on the Fourth last year, but then we had that fireworks ban.

Arnie: So, instead of a regular fuse it's got a time delay back here.

Arnie helps Garrett rotate the rocket so it's pointing to Beatrice's front door just as she opens the door, sweeping a pile of dirt onto the porch. Arnie's hand is at the back of the rocket, as if to light a fuse. Beatrice looks up, sees the rocket pointed at her, and flashes a look of terror. Then, realizing that they wouldn't dare, her look immediately melts into one of anger and disgust as storms back into her shop, slamming the front door.

Garrett: (Looking at Arnie.) Oops.

Arnie: Maybe this isn't such a good day to talk about the Carnival.

Garrett: Maybe not.

Arnie: So, you got that thing, or you need help hauling it?

Garrett: No, Arnie, I can get it home by myself. Thanks for the offer, though. You go ahead and have your talk with Beatrice.

Arnie: Maybe I'll go see Peter, instead. But keep a tight grip on that thing. There's nothing more dangerous than a loose cannon.

Arnie laughs at his intended joke. Garrett winces and gives Arnie a loose glance, realizing Arnie's pun is actually on Arnie. Garrett then leaves as Arnie watches and follows a few steps. Arnie stops as the lights fade. Music "As the Caissons go rolling along."

Scene 4

Monday, Early Afternoon

Patrick Corman, Peter Baird, Arnie Jacobsen.

This scene takes place in the office of Peter Baird, President of the FIB. While, like most Bigport “politicians” Peter has no official power, as President of Bigport’s best funded community not-for-profit, Peter enjoys at least the reputation as a person of some influence.

As the scene opens, Peter is playing with a model of Bigport. Amid the one- and two-story storefronts is his forty-foot observation tower, looking a bit like a ranger station, but towering over Bigport. Peter is fiddling with placement. Patrick Corman walks in unannounced.

Patrick: Hey, Peter. A minute of your time?

Peter: Well Patrick, I was just getting ready to ...

Eyeing the model:

Patrick: Yeah Peter, I know you’re a busy man, but this’ll only take a minute. I guess you’re up to speed on the Casey deal.

Peter: You mean John Casey and the book debut?

Patrick: Yeah, and the key to the city and the parade.

Peter: Key to the city?

Patrick: I was just being figurative. Anyway, it’s the parade I’m here about. Garrett Reese damn near killed Beatrice this morning with that cannon of his.

Peter: What? Killed her? Is she okay?

Patrick: Yeah, but you know Beatrice. She panics and digs her heels in at the slightest provocation. And now she’s got her panties in a knot over Marty’s idea to let Garrett shoot his cannon as part of the parade festivities.

Peter: So that was the explosion I heard earlier then.

Patrick: Yeah, probably. It’s not a big deal. Just makes a big noise.

Peter: So how’d he nearly kill Beatrice?

Patrick: Oh, Garrett wasn't satisfied to just make noise so he put a projectile in his cannon. Was trying to shoot across the lake, but missed. Took out one of Beatrice's beading tables.

Peter: Jesus! You can't really blame her for being pissed, can you? So the issue now is that Beatrice doesn't want Garrett to shoot his cannon in the parade? Fine. Tell him no.

Patrick: Yeah, it's not that simple. Marty has the local Army reserve marching in the parade, but she could only get them to come if she promised that Garrett would bring his cannon and they'd get to shoot it.

Peter: Huh? They want to shoot the toy cannon? Don't they have better things to shoot?

Patrick: Yeah, that's the thing. Since the big military retrenchment, they can't requisition ammunition for their big guns. And they're not allowed to deplete the ammo they have unless it's used for national defense. They're like teen-aged boys with a stack of girlie magazines: surrounded by temptation with no avenue of release. So giving them a toy cannon is like, ... well you get the idea.

Peter: So let them pull the cannon in the parade.

Patrick: Well, they're not allowed to do that either.

Peter: Hey, Garrett was in the Army, wasn't he?

Patrick: Yeah.

Peter: Well, have him put on his uniform. Beatrice doesn't have to know. It wouldn't be the first secret where Beatrice is concerned.

Arnie Jacobsen pops unexpectedly through the doorway.

Arnie: I knew it. Every time I hear the name Beatrice Martin, the word secrecy is right next to it.

Peter: Christ, Arnie. What're you doing here?

Arnie: The door was open. It's an office, isn't it.

Peter: Yes, it is, but like a home, it's not open to every tourist to walk into off the street and it should be afforded at least a modicum of privacy.

Arnie: I agree. If we've got terrorists walking the streets, someone should call the authorities.

Peter: Tourists, Arnie. I said tourists, not terrorists.

Arnie: Then you heard about Beatrice's beading room. Someone blew it up. I didn't know it was terrorists.

Arnie becomes fascinated with Peter's tower and reaches for it. Peter grabs the tower and moves it out of Arnie's reach.

Peter: Tourists, Arnie. Not Terrorists.

Arnie: Tourists. Oh my God. Now the tourists are blowing things up too.

Peter: No, Arnie. It wasn't a tourist that blew it up. It was Garrett Reese.

Patrick: Garrett Reese a terrorist? I don't think so. He's as patriotic as you and me.

Peter: Yes, he's no terrorist.

Arnie: Really! Well I'd never have suspected. But then he does have all those guns. And a cannon. Someone should call ... Who do you call about terrorists?

Patrick: Homeland Security.

Peter: Dammit Patrick, don't give him ideas. You're going to blow this whole thing way out of proportion.

Arnie: Really? That big. Well, someone should call Homeland Security. Do you have a phone book?

Patrick: There's one down stairs, by the phone.

Peter: Patrick, knock it off. There are no terrorists, nothing has been blown up, and we don't need Arnie to call Homeland Security.

Arnie: Thanks Peter. You know you can count on me to do the right thing.

Arnie leaves. Peter scowls at Patrick, who is grinning.

Patrick: Do you think he'll actually call Homeland Security?

Peter has had quite enough of Arnie.

Peter: More likely he'll connect with the Humane Society by mistake. But with Arnie, who knows? Jesus, Patrick, don't you know better than to try to communicate sensitive information to Arnie. It's like playing Telephone with a first grader. Homeland Security, my ass!

Fade to black.

Scene 5

Monday, Mid Afternoon

Beatrice Martin, Arnie Jacobsen

This scene occurs in Beatrice's shop. Although the conversation is probably better suited to a more secluded office, Beatrice's office is a sanctuary, a place where she can seclude herself from th.

We find Beatrice tolerating Arnie in her beading room, the destroyed table still in place. The projectile that Garrett shot into Beatrice's shop is prominently displayed on the intact table.

Beatrice: Arnie, don't even start with me on the Carnival accounting. I've already told you the all the information is at the Chamber and I don't want to discuss it any further.

Arnie: Forget the accounting, Beatrice. This is a much bigger deal. We've got terrorists here in Bigport.

Beatrice: Of course we've got tourists, Arnie. It's a tourist town. The more the merrier.

Arnie: I said terrorists, Beatrice. This is serious. Are you hard of hearing?

Beatrice: Calm down Arnie. I think you're blowing this all out of proportion. The closest thing we have to a terrorist around here is Garrett Reese. Look what he did to my shop.

Arnie: Yeah, I heard about that. I didn't realize it was so serious until I talked with Peter and Patrick. I had no idea it was the result of terrorist activity.

Beatrice: No, Arnie. I'm pretty sure Garrett Reese was working on his own this time. Personally, I think he should be locked up. But I doubt his recent "acts of terrorism" rise to that level.

Arnie: I would never have suspected Garrett of terrorism either. He's always seemed a pleasant enough fellow. But that's how they are. Terrorists. On the surface, they just seem so normal. But, you know, we should probably have suspected there was something more to his interest in weaponry. Did you see that cannon of his? I wouldn't be surprised to learn that he has a whole factory capable of turning those things out by the dozen.

Beatrice: I think you give him too much credit. If he tried to operate something as complex as a weapons factory, I'm sure he'd have blown up the whole town by now.

Arnie: That would be a real shame, to blow up the whole town of Bigport. We'd get the national attention we've wanted, but there'd be nothing left to visit.

Beatrice: You're right. Our little tourist dell would be obliterated.

Arnie: Yes, Garrett Reese could find his little terrorist cell eliminated.

Beatrice: Don't get carried away, Arnie. Garrett is a pain in the butt, but I'm pretty sure he's not a terrorist.

Arnie: Yeah, I'm willing to bet on it. A terrorist. No ifs, ands, or buts. Add that's what I told them.

Beatrice: Told who? What?

Arnie: I think it was the Homeland Security Department. I found them in the phone book. I didn't read the fine print, but I remember the initials were H.U.D. Or something like that.

Beatrice: You reported Garrett to the Feds?

Arnie: Well, no. But I did suggest there were some strange goings on in the town of Bigport and if they wanted to avert another 9/11, they might want to look into it.

Beatrice: And what'd they say, Arnie.

Arnie: We had a bad connection. And it may have been a recording.

Beatrice: You should be careful about bringing the Feds into Montana, Arnie. That usually doesn't turn out well.

Arnie: So you've got a big parade planned for John Casey, I hear.

Beatrice: Oh, yes. We're very proud of John and we want to show it. He's the hometown boy made good.

Arnie: Going to be a real bang-up affair, I guess.

Beatrice: Oh, yes. We're pulling out all the stops.

Arnie: And bringing the Army too, huh?

Beatrice: Huh?

Arnie: Yeah. The color guard, the artillery division, tanks, cannons.

Beatrice: No, Arnie. Just the color guard and the band.

Arnie: Going to have a flyover?

Beatrice: We tried, but couldn't get them.

Arnie: Well anyway, the tanks and cannons will be pretty exciting. Especially when they shoot them.

Beatrice: No, Arnie. the Army is far too responsible to shoot artillery in downtown Bigport.

Arnie: Maybe they'll get Garrett to shoot his.

Beatrice: No, I think Garrett's little toy has been fired for the last time. Fired as in terminated.

Arnie lifts the projectile from the table.

Arnie: Not what I hear. So this is the little culprit, huh?

Beatrice: Yes, that's the shell Garrett lobbed into my shop this morning. Smashed that beading table. Fortunately it was all empty. And I wasn't under it.

Arnie: Pretty heavy. He actually shot this out of a cannon and hit your shop with it.

Beatrice: Yes, and damned near killed me in the process. The man is a terror and ought to be locked up. Now put that thing down. It makes me nervous.

Arnie: Yeah if he's a terrorist, I agree.

Beatrice: No, I didn't say ...

Noting that Arnie is about to set the shell on a display.

Beatrice: No, Arnie! Not there. That shelf isn't built to hold ...

Too late. Unable to bear the added weight of the shell, the display collapses with a grand crash of breaking glass. The lights fade to black as Beatrice sighs in resignation.

Beatrice: Oh, damn it all to hell!

Scene 6

Tuesday, Late Afternoon

Patrick Corman, Peter Baird, Marty Miller

This scene takes place in the Peter Baird's office. Patrick Corman and Peter Baird are meeting with Marty Miller. Marty has taken on the role of parade chair and technically works for the Chamber of Commerce, rather than the FIB. But in Bigport, where the positions are voluntary and the reporting relationships are dotted line, no one really cares.

Patrick: Thanks for meeting with us, Marty. I know you've just been brought up to speed on this morning's happenings and clearly none of it is your fault.

Peter: Yes, Marty, this petty positioning regarding the parade was not part of what you bargained for, but this is Bigport, and this sort of thing happens.

Patrick: And we don't really mean to dump the whole problem on you. In fact, we've pretty well got it worked out already. Clearly the cannon has become an issue of more significance than it deserves.

Peter: But with Garrett Reese in uniform and the Army Reserve pulling the strings, we seem to have it in hand. So we're thinking maybe the whole parade should be about an hour.

Marty: Thirty-five minutes.

Patrick: Thirty-five minutes. Doesn't that seem a bit short?

Marty: It's because of the altitude.

Peter: The thin air?

Marty: And it needs to be about 25 degrees hotter.

Patrick: That'd put it well over 100 degrees.

Marty: Yes, but otherwise we'd have a fall, and we don't want that.

Peter: No, that would be too late.

Marty: So it's clear, then. Thirty-five minutes at 350 and then cool it on the rack. Good luck. Bye.

Clicks off her Bluetooth-enabled cell phone earpiece.

Marty: Excuse me, gentlemen. Where were we?

Patrick and Peter stare at her in confusion. She catches their gaze. Taps her earpiece.

Marty: I'm sorry. Coconut cake. Very delicate.

Patrick: We were talking about how we were going to get Garrett Reese's cannon into the parade.

Marty: Yes, I'm all for that. But, technically, it's a mortar.

Patrick and Peter stare at her. She meets their gaze. Matter of fact:

Marty: Shorter barrel, shorter range.

Patrick: Ok, mortar. But that's not the issue. Beatrice will oppose the parade if Garrett is in it. But he has to be in it to pull the cannon. ... Mortar.

Peter: So we're going to put Garrett in uniform so he can blend in with the army.

Marty: You've got a uniform for Garrett? You know he can't just impersonate a soldier.

Peter: Garrett's got his old uniform from when he was in the Army. He'll wear that.

Marty: We're talking about the same Garrett? The 60-something from the sixties who looks as military issue as Willy Nelson? And you think Beatrice won't notice?

Patrick: That's what we're thinking.

Marty: You don't suppose his 25-year-old uniform or the non-regulation hairstyle will be a clue?

Peter: We'll get him a haircut.

Marty: Or the fact that he looks like Garrett?

Peter: We'll, we were hoping. ...

Marty: Is the military particularly fond of Garrett's mortar? Or do they just want to make noise? Can't we buy another one?

Patrick: Not easily. I guess he made this one himself. You can buy them, but they're toys. This one's big enough to do some serious damage.

Marty: Hence Beatrice's concern.

Peter: Right.

Marty: OK, so the deal is that the Army Reserve won't be in the parade unless they get to shoot the mortar. But they can't own the mortar because then they'd be violating orders to not fire their weapons in peacetime. And they can't physically move a weapon they don't own, even in a parade, except as an act of war.

Patrick: Right.

Marty: OK, let me make a call.

She dials her phone.

Marty: Ed? Marty. ... Hey, want to be in a parade? ... No, not the Grand Marshal. But you do get to carry a gun. Well, actually you get to pull a mortar. ... No, you don't get to shoot it. You just get to pull it. ... Sorry, the Army already called dibs. ... No, some bureaucratic Army bullshit. ... Yeah, I know. Anyway, can I count you in? ... Thanks, Ed. I'll remember this. ... (A bit sultry) Yeah, I know. OK. Bye, Ed.

Peter & Patrick: So?

Marty: OK, Garrett's going to rent, sell, or loan the cannon ... mortar to Ed, who heads the VFW. Ed'll pull it in the parade until it's time for the Army to touch it off. One blast and Ed gives it back to Garrett. Beatrice is happy, the Army's happy, and the attendees are happy.

Patrick: And Garrett?

Marty: Oh, who gives a shit?!

