

THE GREAT POTATO CONSPIRACY

By Brandon Bruce

CHARACTERS

Possible Doubling

ACTOR 1: JEFFREY JEFFERSON – white man, 30s to 40s

ACTOR 2: MASIKA ROBINETTE, TAMARA – Black woman, 20s to 30s

ACTOR 3: BROOKE, DR. CHATTERTON, AMY BLANKENSHIP – white woman, 20s to 30s

ACTOR 4: JD FARNSWORTH, KEVIN KENDALL, CHRIS – man, 30s to 50s, any ethnicity

ACTOR 5: PERCY DEE, POTATO, BURNS – woman, 30s to 50s, any ethnicity

ACTOR 6: THE ARTIST, TETTLETON – man, 30s to 50s, any ethnicity

Synopsis: Jeffrey Jefferson is on a mission to spread the truth about a terrible conspiracy plaguing America. In the midst of his fervor, it becomes clear that he, himself, is playing into an entirely separate conspiracy. A satire about being certain about uncertain things, this play is one part tragedy of a divided America and one part comedy of a divided America trying to come back together.

For Jason Scott Campbell (1976 to 2020)

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PROLOGUE

About 40 years in the past. An overly coiffed woman wearing an excessive (almost clownish) amount of makeup enters.

PERCY DEE

Thank you all for coming to this event. My, look at all of these beautiful people. At a time when so much is in shadow, it is nice to see so many wonderful patriots seeking the light.

You know, when I look at all of you, I really see myself. I see someone who is afraid. I see someone who was afraid to even come here today. If you're experiencing doubts, just know that you're not alone. It's OK to feel doubt. It's OK to even feel a bit foolish. I'm sure you have family and friends saying to you "Percy Dee, you need to stop believing in that mess!" Well, of course, they wouldn't call you Percy Dee - unless you have the same name as me. *(she has a nice laugh at this)*

But I have the cure for those doubts. I want to introduce a man right now who will be the magic elixir of courage in such uncertain times. This is the man who continues to be a beacon of hope when I feel the most lost. This is the man who is the fuel for our movement. He is the reason you all came here to this VFW tonight. Please welcome our tireless leader, and my husband, J.D. Farnsworth III.

JD FARNSWORTH enters. His clothing, impeccable and clean, are in direct contrast to his face, hair, and demeanor, which are wild and unkempt.

JD

Thank you so much, Percy Dee, for that warm welcome. Why don't we all give a big hand to Percy Dee. Isn't she just lovely? *(leads applause)*. You are my muse, Percy Dee. My reason to wake up every day. She is, indeed, a vision and an inspiration. However, she is a bald-faced liar. Yes, friends, she is a liar. Aren't you, dear?

PERCY DEE

(smiling through the confusion) Well, sweetie, I'm afraid I don't know what you mean.

JD

Just admit it, my dear Percy Dee.

PERCY DEE

I'm not sure I --

JD

It's not hard to do, my darling, my beautiful angel, my Athena. Just say: "I am a liar."

PERCY DEE

I am a liar.

JD

Indeed you are. Because when I look out at this group, I don't see good-looking people. I see ugly people. Now, wouldn't you say it's a lie to call them beautiful?

PERCY DEE

Why no, it's not a lie, JD. I don't find them ugly.

JD

Well, I do find them ugly. Because I see people who have come to this event dressed shamefully. Some of you are wearing t-shirts and blue jeans. Worse yet, *(feel free to change the following to whatever the actor sees in the audience at the time)* I even see a few of you wearing ballcaps with logos for professional sports teams. T-shirts with Snickers on the front, hats with the Dallas Cowboys, and sneakers with a Nike swish. Why, you're all walking advertisements. You stand for nothing. You only stand for someone else's vision, for someone else's intentions. I don't see patriots when I look out upon you, I see tattooed and branded livestock. Now, I ask you, Percy Dee, where is the beauty in that?

PERCY DEE

Well, JD, I...

JD

But I didn't come here to berate you for your fashion mistakes. I came here to share the truth. I came here to illuminate and elucidate, to reveal and incite. And, hopefully, by the time I leave here today, you will know not to dress like that again and make my lovely Percy Dee a liar.

You see, we live in a world of lies.

Let me repeat that - we live in a world of lies. You have been raised on lies so you can go to work to manufacture more lies. When you were children, you went to school and

you went to church...and you were fed lies. Now, you wake up every morning, read your morning lie-paper, go to work and come home and watch more lies on TV.

My friends, the truth has been painted over with lies so much that you'd need a butcher knife to cut through all the layers. Well, that's what I'm here to do tonight. I'm going to stab these lies in the heart. And let me tell you, it's going to be...messy.

Every day, we tell ourselves lies. We believe in the most absurd notions. Who among us believes we truly landed on the moon? Who believes Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone? Who believes those happy little trails behind those happy little airplanes are just a disruption in the atmosphere? If you believe the fluoride in our drinking water is there for your teeth, you have been duped. If you believe the masons are just some sweet old men enjoying cigars and golf, you have been duped. If you believe our government cares about you at all, you've been duped.

My friends, I am not afraid of naming my enemy. I hereby denounce the phony state of Idaho. I denounce this charade as the great lie, the source of all American deception. I ask you all - have you ever been to Idaho? Don't you find it suspicious that no one ever has? This conspiracy, the great mother of all lies, is the ultimate insult to us all. 50 nifty United States? Try 49. Extra electoral votes that we can't control? Extra Congressional seats for their filthy secret society members? And potatoes that only grow there? Do you know where potatoes grow? Everywhere!

This lie has been used to cover up everything from vaccines to oppressing our black and brown brethren to inviting unlawful immigration and so forth. The state of Idaho does not exist. DOWN WITH THE GREAT POTATO LIE!!!

SCENE 1

A convention of sorts. JEFFREY JEFFERSON, a white man in his 30s, sits alone at a folding table, surrounded by all sorts of swag and brochures. He wears a polo that reads "Have you ever been to Idaho?" Stillness for a bit.

A GIANT POTATO that may or may not look like a giant Potato Head toy slowly walks in front of JEFFREY and exits. Confounded by what he just saw, JEFFREY stares in the direction of the POTATO.

He is staring off in the distance as MASIKA ROBINETTE, a confident Black woman in her 20s or 30s, enters with BROOKE PARSONS, a college-age white woman who is constantly trying to hide. MASIKA is wearing the same polo JEFFREY is wearing.

MASIKA

OK, so here's our table. We're sort of the new kids on the block, so we have to take what we can get.

BROOKE

Yeah, it's facing a cinder-block wall.

MASIKA

Hey uh, did your professor tell you what you'd be doing with our organization?

BROOKE

Like, I'm not sure. She mentioned something along the lines of customer service.

MASIKA

I thought we sent her a more detailed description than that. Hey Jeffrey?

JEFFREY

(still lost in thought) Hmm?

MASIKA

When did you send the internship proposal to Brooke's professor?

JEFFREY

Who's Brooke?

MASIKA

This is Brooke.

JEFFREY

(Still mentally absent) Oh, hi.

MASIKA

So?

JEFFREY

So?

MASIKA

When did you send the internship proposal to Brooke's professor?

JEFFREY

Oh yeah...um, about 4 months ago.

MASIKA

Do you remember what was in the proposal?

JEFFREY

Not sure...something about customer service, I think.

MASIKA

You really think we need customer service help when we don't have any customers?

JEFFREY

Huh...yeah, I guess not.

BROOKE

So, this isn't a customer service gig?

MASIKA

No, not at all.

BROOKE

Oh thank God. Cuz I gotta be real with you – I have like the worst social anxiety disorder. I completely freeze up around the public.

MASIKA

Oh, well I'm sorry to say that might be a bit of a problem for us.

BROOKE

Aw man, I knew this was too good to be true.

MASIKA

Too good to be true?

BROOKE

Yeah, I mean, I was freaking out when I walked in and saw all these crazies at this conspiracy theory convention, but then when I saw your table, my blood pressure dropped like 20 points.

MASIKA

I thought you didn't like our table.

JEFFREY

(Still staring off) She doesn't. But she likes that we're the big losers here. She likes that we're the outcasts at a conspiracy theory convention filled with outcasts. She likes that we're facing a cinder block wall where no one can see us. It means she won't have to do much.

BROOKE

Wow, dude...

MASIKA

Brooke, I'm sorry, it appears my colleague is a bit checked out today.

BROOKE

Oh, no, I wasn't offended. I was just amazed at how spot on he was.

MASIKA

Well, I'm sorry to say this, but perhaps an internship with our organization isn't right for you.

BROOKE

Aw come on dude, really?

MASIKA

We're looking for someone interested in effecting real change. Does that describe you, Brooke?

BROOKE

So, like, what kind of change are you going for? You really think these crazy people are gonna listen to someone like you?

MASIKA

Someone like me? Tell me – who is like me?

BROOKE

Oh come on dude, you know what I mean.

MASIKA

Do I?

BROOKE

You know...like someone who's you know...

JEFFREY

Not white?

BROOKE

Yeah!

MASIKA

That wasn't so hard to say, now, was it?

BROOKE

Well, um, I didn't say it.

MASIKA

No, you didn't.

JEFFREY

(Coming out of his stupor) Hey um...Brooke is it? *(BROOKE nods yes)* Hey, don't let Masika rattle you. She's sort of an old school activist – always looking for a fight. That's

why I invited her to be my partner. In all seriousness, you'll be fine with our organization. Sadly, we don't get a lot of traction with our ideas – even at a conspiracy theory convention. So, you'll get your wish.

BROOKE

So...um...why do it?

JEFFREY

You know, I'm not so sure some days.

MASIKA

Is this one of those days?

JEFFREY

What's that supposed to mean?

MASIKA

It means you've been staring off at some phantom 6-foot rabbit while I do all the legwork. Aren't we gonna walk around and try to make some in-roads here?

BROOKE

Walk around? Hey now –

MASIKA

I didn't come to this convention of paranoid, armed white men just to stare at a wall, Jeffrey. I'm here to reach out to those white people because I'm tired of preaching to my own choir. I'm here because if I'm with a white man like you, I might actually get through to these maniacs. So, are we going to walk around and do our jobs now, or what?

Pause. JEFFREY looks back in the direction of the POTATO.

BROOKE

Hey, um, is this type of conflict normal? 'Cause, like, I don't know that my anxiety can handle this kind of stress.

MASIKA

No, Brooke, it isn't normal. Lately, Jeffrey has been a little detached from our shared mission and talking to him has felt like trying to catch water in a wicker basket. So, no. This conflict isn't normal, but it probably should be.

Pause. A MAN has silently walked up to their table.

BROOKE

(accidentally backing into the MAN, startled) HOLY...wow, dude. Like seriously, where did you come from?

No response

MASIKA

May we help you, sir? *(still no response)* Brooke, here's your first assignment on this internship. Would you please help this gentleman?

BROOKE

Oh, um...yeah...you like, want some brochures or something? *(she begins to look around for some swag and literature).*

MAN

(to Jeffrey) What are you peddling here?

JEFFREY

I beg your pardon?

MAN

What outrageous concoction of lies are you spewing here?

JEFFREY

Sir, I can understand your cynicism, but our convictions are not lies.

MAN

Convictions? A decidedly appropriate word choice.

JEFFREY

Listen, I'm sure that you probably consider us nutjobs. I'm sure you see everyone at this convention as a little loony. But I can assure you we're not like these far-right crazies.

BROOKE

(rummaging around in some cardboard boxes) Ooh! Here's a cool water bottle. You want a free water bottle, sir?

MASIKA

Maybe another table has what you're looking for, sir.

MAN

Just how devoted are you to this cause? You don't seem to be actively networking here. All I see are three well-behaved people politely staring at a cinder block wall.

BROOKE

Well, I have social anxiety –

MAN

The conspiracy game doesn't give you any awards for simply showing up. You have to get out there and make a personal investment. Doing anything less is simply not going to work. Now, granted, you've got the most diverse staff in this entire convention, so that's going to help you considerably.

MASIKA

Careful.

MAN

You're checking a lot of boxes. I can see you're not like the rest. That's why I came over here.

JEFFREY

I'm sorry. Is there something I can help you with? I'm afraid I don't under--

MAN

I'd like to talk with you a little more - in private. I think you'll like what I have to offer.

MASIKA