

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

or what happens when expediency and morality collide

by Phillip W. Weiss

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This is a one act play consisting of a prologue, nine scenes, and an epilogue.

This play is set in 1945 during the final weeks of World War Two.

Cast of characters

Harry S. Truman – President of the United States

Donald – Truman’s personal secretary

Henry L. Stimson – Secretary of State

George C. Marshall – Secretary of the Army

Hideki Tojo – Generalissimo and Prime Minister of Japan

Bess Truman – First Lady

Sal De Martino – bar patron

Louise De Martino – Sal’s wife

Gregory – an elderly man

Yoko Watanabe – resident of Hiroshima

O’Neil – a secret service agent

Bartender

Messenger

Men and Women

The playwright Robert E. Sherwood, author of Abe Lincoln in Illinois, wrote that the playwright’s chief stock in trade is feelings, not facts. This play is set in World War Two; the characters of Harry S. Truman, Bess Truman, Henry Stimson, George C. Marshall and Hideki Tojo were real people and the decision to use the atomic bomb did occur. However, this play is a work of fiction. The dialog and actions depicted in this play is a product of the author’s imagination and is not a historical record and should not be construed as such.

Prologue

Time: April 12, 1945

Place: A street located anywhere in the United States.

NEWS VENDOR

(excitedly displaying a newspaper in his hand)

Extra! Extra! Read all about it! President Roosevelt is dead! The president is dead!

Four men and one woman enter.

MAN 1

(to the vendor)

Let me see that paper. *(He grabs the paper from the vendor)* *(Excited)*
The president is dead! Oh no!

MAN 2

(to Man 1)

What's that? Did you say Roosevelt is dead! *(to Woman 1)* Did you hear that? The president is dead!

WOMAN 1

(incredulous)

What? The president is dead? *(to Man 2)* Did you hear that? The president is dead!

MAN 2

(alarmed)

Then who's president now? *(to Man 4)* Hey fella! Did you hear that? Roosevelt's dead! Now who's in charge?

MAN 4

(alarmed)

I don't know but we better find out soon. *(to Man 3)* Do you know who's in charge now?

MAN 3

In charge of what?

MAN 4

Didn't you hear? The president is dead!

Scene 1

Date: April 12, 1945

*Place: Washington, D. C. An office in the United States Senate building.
Harry S. Truman, Vice-President of the United States, is seated at a desk
reading a newspaper. There's a knock at the door.*

TRUMAN

(still reading the newspaper)

Come on in. The door's open.

A young man enters.

TRUMAN

Good morning, Donald, What can I do for you?

DONALD

Mister Vice President. Have you heard the news?

TRUMAN

What news?

DONALD

President Roosevelt is dead. He died this morning.

Truman puts down the paper.

TRUMAN

Oh my.

DONALD

I've also been instructed to inform you that you are wanted at the White House.

TRUMAN

At the White House?

DONALD

Yes, sir.

TRUMAN

I have to call Bess.

DONALD

Sir, there's no time for that. You have to report to the White House now. Mrs. Roosevelt wants to speak with you personally.

TRUMAN

If the first lady wants to speak with me, it must be about something very important.

DONALD

That may be true, but she was insistent that she speak with you.

TRUMAN

What could I say to her?

DONALD

Sir, time is of the essence. The press will be there waiting for you.

TRUMAN

What will I tell the press? (*Truman picks up the phone.*) Hello ... yes I heard ... thank you, your very kind ... please put me through to my wife. ... Hello, Bess? ... So you know. ... I've been summoned to the White House ... thank you, dear ... I'm going to need all the help I can get.

Truman gets up and puts on his jacket and hat.

Okay, Donald, let's go.

Another man enters.

O'NEIL

My name is agent Delbert O'Neil from the secret service and I will be escorting you to the White House.

TRUMAN

It's a pleasure meeting you.

Are you ready, sir?

O'NEIL

Yes, I am. Let's go.

TRUMAN

End of scene 1

Scene 2

Time: One week later

Place: The Oval Office, The White House, Washington, D.C.

Truman is sitting behind the desk reading a newspaper. From off stage comes a sound of knocking at the door.

TRUMAN

Come on in. The door's open.

A distinguished looking man enters.

TRUMAN

Ah, Secretary Stimson. Good morning. I'm glad to see you.

STIMSON

Thank you , Mister President, and a good morning to you.

TRUMAN

Take a seat.

Stimson sits down in a chair opposite the president. (Note: from here on, all visitors in the Oval Office sit opposite the President.)

TRUMAN

So what can I do for you?

STIMSON

Mister President, the question is: what can I do for YOU?

TRUMAN

Yes, I know. I'm still getting use to the idea of being president. President Roosevelt's death was so unexpected and he was such a great man. Now here I am, a small-town fellow from Missouri, sitting in his office and in his chair. I feel like an imposter.

STIMSON

Mister President, let me assure you have my full support and will continue to serve in your administration for as long as my services are desired.

TRUMAN

That's really appreciated. I just hope that I can do justice to this office.

STIMSON

You'll do just fine, Mister President, I'm sure of it.

TRUMAN

Okay, now that we've gotten these pleasantries out of the way, what's on your mind?

STIMSON

Mister President, I want to inform you about a top secret program to develop a new weapon.

TRUMAN

A new weapon? What new weapon?

STIMSON

Well, sir, for the past two years scientists in Tennessee and Chicago have been working a project to build a new type of bomb.

TRUMAN

(becoming alarmed)

A new type of bomb? What is it, and come to the point.

STIMSON

You've heard of the Manhattan Project?

TRUMAN

Yes, I have. Does this new bomb have anything to do with the Manhattan Project?

STIMSON

Yes, it does. Manhattan Project is the code name for the program to develop and build something called an atomic bomb.

TRUMAN

Was Congress informed of this, because I wasn't.

STIMSON

Sir, this project was approved by President Roosevelt and ...

TRUMAN

He never mentioned it to me, that is, the real purpose of the project. All I knew about the Manhattan Project was that it was some kind of Army program to build some kind of advanced weapon. That's it.

STIMSON

And I'm here now, Mister President, to inform you on the actual nature of this advanced weapon.

TRUMAN

Go on. I'm all ears.

STIMSON

Sir, as I already said, the goal of the project is to build an atomic bomb.

TRUMAN

What is an atomic bomb?

STIMSON

Well, I'm not a scientist or a military man, but I think I can explain what it is. An atomic bomb is a bomb that will release a huge amount of energy through a chemical process called nuclear fission.

TRUMAN

Nuclear fission? I never heard of that. Explain it to me.

STIMSON

Nuclear fission, if I understand it correctly, is a process whereby atoms, in this case, atoms of uranium are split open thereby releasing a tremendous amount of energy. This bomb will house the uranium that will be split.

TRUMAN

So the bomb would be fueled by uranium?

STIMSON

Yes, sir.

TRUMAN

Where would we get the uranium?

STIMSON

From uranium ore imported from Canada.

TRUMAN

So the Canadians are in on this project too?

STIMSON

No, Mister President. This is an entirely American project.

TRUMAN

Has Churchill been informed?

STIMSON

Mister Churchill was informed that we were working on a secret project but was not provided details.

TRUMAN

What about Marshall Stalin?

STIMSON

That Commie! Absolutely not! This program is top secret.

TRUMAN

How powerful is this bomb?

STIMSON

Nobody knows yet, but it is estimated that it could produce a blast strong enough to destroy an entire city.

TRUMAN
(incredulous)

One bomb that could destroy an entire city? That's unbelievable. How much will the bomb weigh?

STIMSON

That's a problem that's still being worked on. The actual bomb may weigh several tons, and it still has to be tested.

TRUMAN

Who else in the government know about this new bomb?

STIMSON

The scientists working on the project and the senior army commanders in charge of the project, plus me, of course.

TRUMAN

So, from what you're telling me, we may be on the way to having a new kind of weapon powered by something called nuclear fission that can destroy an entire city with one blast.

STIMSON

That's about the size of it, sir.

TRUMAN

This could change the way wars are fought. Who needs armies and fleets of planes dropping bombs when one bomb could do the trick?

STIMSON

I'm not a military man, sir, but the implications seem obvious.

TRUMAN

This news couldn't come at a better time. We could knock the Germans out of the war with one punch. *(pause)* Wait a minute. Have the Germans been working on a new type of bomb too?

STIMSON

According to our intelligence sources, the Germans were working on a similar project.

TRUMAN

How far along are they?

STIMSON

We're not sure, but from papers captured in Strasbourg, France, where they had their laboratories, it seems that they weren't close to building a bomb.

TRUMAN

That's a relief, but I don't want to take any chances. While the Nazis are still fighting, we can't let them get the bomb first. Hitler having such a weapon would be catastrophic for us. Look at all the damage he caused with those V 2 rockets.

STIMSON

I agree with you wholeheartedly, Mister President.

TRUMAN

What was President Roosevelt's plan for this new bomb?

STIMSON

He never discussed that, at least not with me. However, he was in favor of developing such a weapon.

TRUMAN

I wish I had been informed of this earlier but I'm glad you informed me now. Between dealing with the Japs and the Nazis, I have my hands full. I feel like a man with a blind fold feeling his way through a maze in the dark. I know there's a correct path somewhere but I don't know exactly where. You understand?

STIMSON

Yes sir, I understand, and we at the State Department are behind you.

TRUMAN

Okay. Keep me informed on the status of this project, especially when the bomb will be scheduled for testing.

STIMSON

Yes, Mister President, I will. Have a good day.

Stimson gets up and exits.

Truman picks up the phone.

TRUMAN

Get me General Marshall. (*pause*) Hello, General Marshall, this is President Truman ... I'm fine, thank you ... yes, we all miss President Roosevelt ... yes, he was a great man ... thank you for the kind words ... do you know anything about us building something called an atomic bomb? ... you do? ... it looks like I'm the last one to know ... don't worry about it. I'm not faulting you ... I just want you to keep me fully informed of how the project is proceeding. Will you do that? ... fine ... say hello to your wife for me ... you're welcome.

Truman hangs up the phone.

Muttering aloud to himself.

Sons of bitches. They're treating me like I'm a child. Maybe I gotta start kicking some butt.

Scene 3

Date: May 8, 1945

Place: The Oval Office.

President Truman is sitting at his desk, reading a newspaper. From off-stage comes the sound of knocking on the door.

TRUMAN
C'mon in.

(Truman puts down the newspaper.)

Donald enters.

DONALD
Mister President, General Marshall is here to see you.

TRUMAN
Does he have an appointment?

DONALD
No, sir, but he told me that it was urgent.

TRUMAN
(annoyed)
You know that I normally don't like meeting anyone without an appointment.

DONALD
I know, sir, but he told me that he rushed over to see you about a matter of utmost importance.

TRUMAN
All right. Show him in.

General Marshall enters. Donald turns to exit.

TRUMAN
(to Donald)
You stay.

(Donald turns and faces the president.)

DONALD

Yes, sir.

Donald moves stage left.

TRUMAN

General Marshall, what can I do for you?

MARSHALL

(excited)

Mister President, have you heard the news?

TRUMAN

What news?

MARSHALL

Germany surrendered today. It's official. The war is over!

TRUMAN

It's about time those sons of bitches surrendered. But the war still isn't over. We still have to deal with the Japs.

MARSHALL

That's true, Mister President, but once they learn that the Germans have folded, then maybe they'll follow suit.

TRUMAN

Yes, maybe, but for some reason I doubt that. They just seem too pig-headed to think clearly.

MARSHALL

Now that the Germans are out, now we can transfer troops to the Pacific and finish off the Japs.

TRUMAN

I don't think the American public will be too happy about that. Millions of our soldiers have been away from home for two and even three years.

MARSHALL

I'm aware of that, Mister President, but if we send the troops over to the Pacific now, then we'll bring this war to a rapid conclusion.

TRUMAN

You think so? The Japs don't seem like they're ready to quit. How many men have we lost so far at Okinawa?

MARSHALL

Quite a lot, but all within acceptable limits, Mister President.

TRUMAN

Acceptable limits? That sounds good on paper but not to those families who've lost a son or a daughter, or a father.

MARSHALL

We're at the verge of winning; it's just a matter of time, Mister President.

TRUMAN

But when? No matter how much damage we inflict on them, the Japs won't stop fighting. (pause) You know anything about these kamikazes?

MARSHALL

Yes, Mister President. They're Jap suicide bombers.

TRUMAN

Do you think that an enemy willing to kill themselves is going to surrender?

MARSHALL

They can throw all the kamikazes they want at us, that won't stop us from winning.

TRUMAN

I know that, general. The problem is that our casualty figures are increasing rapidly, which is giving me a lot of cause for concern. But if the Japs think that they're going to bleed us until we throw in the towel, then they have something else coming to them. I'll tell you that right now.

MARSHALL

Mister President, let me state this categorically: we're not going to lose this war.

TRUMAN

Who said anything about losing? But this war cannot go on indefinitely. I have to think about the American people, and right now I can't tell them when the war will end, and that's a problem!

MARSHALL

Then that is why we need to transfer the troops from Europe to the Pacific as soon as possible.

TRUMAN

Have you not understood anything I have said? The people are getting tired of the war. It's costing us a lot of lives. We need to get this war finished quickly. By the way, if we do reduce the number of troops from Europe, what will the Russians do?

MARSHALL

I presume that they will abide by their agreements made at Yalta.

TRUMAN

But still, how can I be certain that the Russians won't try to grab all of Germany?

MARSHALL

The Russians took heavy losses at Berlin, so they're probably in no shape to pick a fight with us.

TRUMAN

The same thing is being said about the Japs at Okinawa, yet we're still fighting, and for what?

MARSHALL

I don't quite understand your question, sir.

TRUMAN

Why are we fighting with the Japs in the first place?

MARSHALL
(patronizing)

Because the Japs attacked us at Pearl Harbor, Mister President.

TRUMAN
(annoyed)

Don't sass me, General. I have no patience for that.

MARSHALL

Sir, please accept my apology but I did not mean to offend. You posed a question to me and I replied.

TRUMAN

Well, I didn't like the tone of your reply.

MARSHALL
(unflustered)

Then, with all due respect sir, could you kindly explain what it is you're driving at?

TRUMAN

Look, General, it's like this. Remember when the Japs started the war with China in 1937?

MARSHALL

Of course, sir.

TRUMAN

Well, everybody got on Japs, including us, but what I could never understand is why we were so hot and bothered over the Japs going into China in the first place.

MARSHALL

Probably because the Japs were flagrantly violating the Open Door Policy.

TRUMAN

Yes, I know that, General. I'm not completely ignorant. But was that enough of a reason for us to want to risk a war with the Japs?

MARSHALL

I would say yes.

TRUMAN

And that's because ...

MARSHALL

Because the United States had vital interests in China and the Pacific which had to be defended.

TRUMAN

What vital interests?

MARSHALL

(changing the subject)

Mister President, I'm a military man, not a diplomat, and the issues you are raising are a bit outside of my area of authority or expertise.

TRUMAN

I'm just trying to make heads and tails of why we got into this war in the first place. Sometimes I think it would have better if we'd had left the Japs alone and let them deal with China, you know, let China become their problem and save ourselves a lot of grief, such as Pearl Harbor, Wake Island and Bataan.

MARSHALL

Mister President, what you are talking about is called appeasement and Neville Chamberlain tried that with Hitler and it did not work, and there is no reason to believe that it would have worked with the Japanese. The Japs were bent on conquest and would not listen to reason.

TRUMAN

Well said, General. But still, I have to find some way to explain to all those mothers out there why their sons are still dying on the battlefield.

MARSHALL

Let me assure you Mister President that you have my full support, and once again thank you for meeting me on such short notice.

TRUMAN

And thank you, too, General, for informing me about that new weapon.

MARSHALL

My pleasure, Mister President.

General Marshall gets up and exits.

TRUMAN

(to Donald)

Boy, what a stuff shirt he is. I wouldn't have wanted him as my company commander in the first war. *(pause)* Do me favor, will you?

DONALD

Yes sir?

TRUMAN

Could you please arrange to have the kitchen deliver a ham and cheese sandwich on white bread to the oval office?

DONALD

Of course, sir. Is there anything else you may need?

TRUMAN

No, that's it for now.

Donald exits. Truman picks up the newspaper and resumes reading.

End of scene 3.

Scene 4

Time: One week later, 11:00 PM

Place: A bar located a few blocks away from the White House. The lights are dim. Behind the bar is a bartender. Sitting at the bar is a middle-aged man named Sal De Martino who is sipping on a drink. A few feet to his left are President Truman and Donald who are dressed disguised as factory workers.

DONALD

(whispering)

Sir, I don't think this was a good idea to come here. If the secret service finds out they'll have a fit.

TRUMAN

Let me worry about the secret service.

The bartender approaches Truman and Donald.

BARTENDER

What will it be, gents?

DONALD

Nothing for me.

TRUMAN

(annoyed)

Oh, don't listen to him. Two beers.

BARTENDER

Okay, bub. Two beers coming up.

The bartender starts pouring two beers from a tap.

Would any you gents mind if I turned on the radio? Liven up the place a little?

TRUMAN

That's a good idea, my good man.

The bartender brings over the beers.

BARTENDER

Okay, fellas, here's your beers. That'll be four bits.

DONALD

I'll pay for it, sir.

TRUMAN

No. I'll take care of it.

Truman takes out five quarters from his jacket pocket and places them on the counter.

That fifth quarter is for you.

BARTENDER

Thanks. Every little bit helps. *(laughs)* You get it, every little "bit"?

TRUMAN

That's a good joke, very funny. *(To Donald)* Don't you think that's funny?

DONALD

Yes, sir, very funny.

The bartender walks over to the radio and turns it on. Light orchestral music can be heard.

DONALD

(to Truman)

Sir, I really think we should leave and get back to the White House before they find out that you're missing.

TRUMAN

Stop worrying.

DONALD

But, Mister President ...

TRUMAN

(alarmed)

Don't call me Mister President here. The last thing I need is for anyone to find out who I am. This is the only way I can make real contact with the people and find out what's really on the minds and what's really bugging them, and I can't do that from the Oval Office or while parading around in my official capacity. Do you understand?

DONALD

I do, mister ... I mean, sir, but what will your wife say when she finds out that you're gone?

TRUMAN

Not to worry. My wife's a sound sleeper.

DONALD

Whatever you say, sir.

TRUMAN

Good. Now stop pestering me and drink your beer.

The President and Donald start sipping on their beers. A frail elderly man named Gregory enters the bar. He glances around the bar and approaches Truman.

GREGORY

Why, hello, gentlemen. Mind if I join you?

TRUMAN

Please do. There's plenty of seats.

Gregory sits next to Truman.

GREGORY

Could you buy a guy a drink?

TRUMAN

Of course. What will you have?

GREGORY

A vodka and tonic.

TRUMAN

(to the bartender)

My good sir. This gentleman would like a vodka and tonic.

GREGORY

Why thank you. What's your name?

TRUMAN

My name's Harry and yours?

GREGORY

Gregory

TRUMAN

That's a great name and you look like a very nice man.

The bartender brings over the drink.

BARTENDER

That'll be fifty cents.

Truman hands the bartender a one-dollar bill.

TRUMAN

(to the bartender)

Keep the change.

BARTENDER

(happy)

Thanks, mac!

GREGORY

My, you're quite a big spender.

TRUMAN

Thank you, my dear man, but let me assure you that I do not spend money needlessly. We understand the value of money where I come from.

GREGORY

And where's that?

TRUMAN

Missouri. Have you ever been there?

GREGORY

No. The furthest I've ever traveled was to Akron, Ohio to attend my late wife's funeral and that was a bust. The old fuddy dud left me out of her will.

TRUMAN

Oh, that must have been disappointing.

GREGORY

It was, but what was I to do, and it was only through the help of friends that I was able to get back to Washington.

TRUMAN

You must have good friends. None of my friends are worth a dime.

GREGORY

Yes, they were good friends.

TRUMAN

A fine gentleman like you should have good friends.

(Truman, Donald and Gregory sip on their drinks.)

TRUMAN

What are you doing out now at this time of night?

GREGORY

I couldn't sleep so I thought I'd go for a walk and maybe meet a new pal.

TRUMAN

Well, I think you came to the right place.

GREGORY

I think I did, too.

TRUMAN

What kind of work do you do?

GREGORY

I'm retired, but right now I'm looking for a job just to keep busy.

TRUMAN

(to Donald)

You hear that? Gregory is looking for a job! Is there an opening on our staff?

DONALD

I don't know, sir, but I can find out.

TRUMAN

Good. Find out. *(to Gregory)* Tell me more about yourself.

GREGORY

I'm originally from Baltimore ...

The music from the radio is interrupted for the news.

NEWS REPORTER *(off stage)*

And here's this evening's top stories. Fighting continues to rage on Okinawa as the Japanese continue to put up stiff resistance. According to sources at the battle, the Japs have gone all out to push our soldiers off the island and have also started attacking our ships with suicide planes called kamikaze. Losses on both sides have been high. In other news ...

SAL

(yells)

Turn that damn thing off!

BARTENDER

Hey, take it easy. No need to yell.

Bartender switches off the radio.

SAL

Sorry, mac. My son's on Okinawa and that report upset me.

BARTENDER

Hey, that's rough.

SAL

I don't know if he's alive or what.

GREGORY

(to Truman)

You know, Harry, the world's in a real mess.

TRUMAN

I know, friend.

SAL

When will this war end?

GREGORY

(to Truman)

That's what a lot of people are wondering.

SAL

Roosevelt would have known what to do. But that new guy, Truman, is doing nothing. What good is he? Since he's become president we've lost more soldiers than during the entire previous two years. I thought the Japs were ready to surrender. What the hell is going on?

GREGORY

(to Truman)

I think he's upset with the president.

TRUMAN

I know that too, my friend. *(pause)* *(to Donald)* Well, I think it's about time for us to be going.

GRACE

Well, I hope to see you again.

TRUMAN

I have a feeling you will. And please give me an address where I can reach you.

Gregory takes out a pen from his jacket pocket and writes his address on a napkin and gives it to Truman.

GREGORY
(happy)

That's where you can find me.

Gregory gives the napkin to Truman who then gives it to Donald.

TRUMAN
(to Donald)

Time to leave.

Donald and Truman get up from their stools and are leaving. Before exiting Truman goes over to the man at the bar.

TRUMAN

I hope your son comes through it safe and sound. He's serving his country and for that you should be proud.

SAL

Thanks, Mac.

TRUMAN

What's your name?

SAL

Sal. Sal De Martino. And yours?

TRUMAN

My name is Harry. I'm glad to meet you.

Truman extends his hand and Sal takes it. They shake hands firmly.

TRUMAN

Take care.

Unnoticed by the others, Truman and Donald are exiting but right before they go off stage Truman signals Donald to stop. From off to the side, both stop, turn around and watch the action on stage.

SAL

(to the bartender)

You know, that guy looked kind of familiar.

BARTENDER

Now that you mention it, he did.

Pause.

SAL

Nah. no way.

BARTENDER

You're right. It couldn't have been.

GREGORY

(to Sal)

Hey, mister, care to talk?

SAL

(contemptuous)

Get lost, you bum!

BARTENDER

(to Grace)

That's right, creep. Scram!

GREGORY

(to Sal)

Hey, mister. I heard what you said about your son. My grandson's been missing in action since April and if we don't get word about him soon, then I don't know what we'll do. He's only nineteen.

Gregory starts crying.

Sal gets off his stool, goes over to Gregory and embraces him. Gregory continues to cry on Sal's shoulder. Truman and Donald saw and heard everything.

TRUMAN
(to Donald)

I've heard enough. Let's go. Also, make sure you contact Gregory first thing tomorrow and offer him a job, preferably on the White House staff so that you can look in on him. And if he refuses, you go to his home and tell him that he is directed to report to the White House by order of the President of the United States. We can't have old people going around crying.

DONALD

Yes ... mister President.

End of scene 4.

Scene 5

Date: July 16, 1945

Place: The Oval Office. Truman is sitting at his desk reading a newspaper. Donald enters.

DONALD

Mister President, Secretary Stimson and General Marshall wish to see you now. They say it's urgent.

Truman puts down the newspaper.

TRUMAN

Now what? With these fellas, it's never good news. Do me a favor: bring me some Pepto-Bismol because I know my stomach will be doing flip flops.

DONALD

Yes sir.

TRUMAN

Show the gents in.

Donald opens the door. Stimson and Marshall enter; Donald exits.

TRUMAN

Please sit down. *(Both sit)*. What is the purpose of your visit today?

MARSHALL

Mister President, we have great news! We have just been informed that the atomic bomb was tested this morning and the results were successful beyond our wildest expectations.

STIMSON

We now have a new weapon that can end this war.

MARSHALL

Not only did the bomb detonate without a hitch, it's now light enough that it can be delivered to a target by one B-29.

STIMSON

Sir, I would strongly recommend that we keep this under wraps for the time being.

TRUMAN

Why?

MARSHALL

We don't want to tip off the Japs because if we do, then we'll lose the element of surprise.

STIMSON

Precisely, Mister President.

TRUMAN

How powerful is this new weapon?

MARSHALL

According to scientific estimates, the blast is equivalent to twenty thousand tons of TNT.

TRUMAN

Oh, my. That can do a lot of damage.

STIMSON

It certainly can, Mister President, which is why it is most fortunate that we have this weapon and not somebody else.

TRUMAN

Yes, that is most fortunate.

MARSHALL

Now it's a question of when we will use it.

STIMSON

And where.

TRUMAN

(to Marshall)

Any suggestions?

MARSHALL

I can't answer that right now, Mister President, but I'll get back to you with a list of potential targets.

TRUMAN

Please do, soon.

MARSHAL

Yes, sir.

STIMSON

Of course, Mister President, none of this will be necessary if the Japs agree to surrender.

TRUMAN

Any word on whether the Japs are ready to surrender?

STIMSON

We've been sending out feelers through diplomatic intermediaries but so far nothing conclusive.

TRUMAN

Well, what is it that they want?

STIMSON

They want to keep the emperor.

MARSHALL

But they've been fighting in the name of the emperor, so I don't think that's acceptable, sir.

STIMSON

But the emperor, Mister President, is the symbol of their nation and for us to insist on them giving up the emperor may be too much for them to accept, which means more fighting.

MARSHALL

But, Mister President, if we let them keep the emperor they may take that as a sign of weakness on our part and not surrender, at least not now, and if we have to invade the Japanese home islands, the casualty figures could exceed one million killed and injured on the American side and who knows how many millions on the Japanese side.

TRUMAN

Are you certain about those figures?

MARSHALL

Yes sir, and those figures are conservative estimates.

STIMSON

And after Okinawa, would the American people be willing to sustain those kind of losses?

TRUMAN

Both you fellas make good points. When will this bomb be ready for use in the field?

MARSHALL

We should have two bombs ready for deployment within the next two weeks.

TRUMAN

Now, can we use this bomb without causing civilian casualties?

MARSHALL

Mister President, given the nature and power of this weapon, it is highly unlikely that civilian casualties could be completely avoided, but perhaps they could be kept to a minimum, depending on where we decide to use the weapon.

TRUMAN

What about inviting the Japs to watch a demonstration of the bomb somewhere in the ocean?

MARSHALL

The Japs wouldn't go for that. They'd just see it as a ploy. And if the demonstration fails, then the military consequences would be disastrous. We'd lose all credibility with the enemy. Mister President, either we use the bomb or we don't. The decision is yours.

TRUMAN

Before I make a decision, maybe I ought to discuss this matter with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

STIMSON and MARSHALL

(alarmed)

No! No!

STIMSON

I urge you not to do that, sir. As the President of the United States you are the commander in chief of the armed forces and have final operational authority over this entire project. The decision is yours and yours alone to make. To punt it over to the Senate now would constitute a serious abrogation of presidential power. It would also cause others around the world to perceive the chief executive of the United States as being indecisive and weak, and lead to undue delay in the prosecution of the war, which we all agree needs to be concluded as quickly as possible.

TRUMAN

You fellas have dropped a real hot potato on my lap. But, as that placard says on my desk, the buck stops here, so I guess it's up to me now.

Stimson and Marshall exit.

Donald enters with a glass of Pepto-Bismol.

DONALD

Here's your Pepto-Bismol, sir.

TRUMAN

(takes the glass)

Thank you, I knew I'd need it.

End of scene 5

Scene 6

Time: Same date, 9:00 PM.

Place: The living room inside the private quarters of the White House. President Truman and his wife, Bess, are sitting in separate chairs. Truman is reading a newspaper and Bess is reading a book.

TRUMAN
What are you reading?

BESS
Readers' Digest.

TRUMAN
Anything in there interesting?

BESS
Somebody wrote a short story about a world without war.

TRUMAN
That'll be the day.

BESS
You have to be more optimistic, Harry.

TRUMAN
I try, Bess, but it's hard. Everyday it's something else. If it's not the war, then it's some labor strike or crime problem or race riot or some other problems that just seem to defy solution.

BESS
But you're the president, so you're a position to do something about them.

TRUMAN
It's not quite as simple as that. No amount of training can ever fully prepare anyone for the job of president. It's like no other job in the world.

BESS
You sound a little down. What's the matter?

TRUMAN

Today Secretary Stimson and General Marshall brought me some momentous news.

BESS

Do you want to discuss it?

TRUMAN

Oh, I don't want to burden you. You're burdened enough already, with you being the first lady and having to put up with me and my moodiness.

BESS

(laughs)

You have your job and I have mine. Now, what's the problem?

TRUMAN

Today I was told that we have a bomb with the strength equal to twenty-thousand tons of TNT.

BESS

That's a pretty powerful bomb.

TRUMAN

That's what I said too.

BESS

So, what's the issue?

TRUMAN

The war is dragging on and even though we've pounded just about every Jap city into rubble, they're still refusing to surrender, which means that we may have to invade their islands, an action which may cost us over a million casualties, which is something that I doubt the American public would be willing to support, especially if we have a weapon, meaning this new bomb, that could make such an invasion unnecessary.

BESS

So, your choices are either to invade or use this new weapon.

TRUMAN

That is correct.

BESS

So what's the problem?

TRUMAN

The problem is that this weapon could probably wipe out an entire city with one blast, meaning that a whole lot of civilians would be killed, and I'm not too comfortable with that.

BESS

But why use it on a city?

TRUMAN

That's where the Jap military targets are located.

BESS

I understand. What about the Japanese being given a demonstration or a warning?

TRUMAN

I asked about that too and I was told that those options are off the table. Either we use it with no prior warning or not; the decision is mine, and this is an awful decision to make.

BESS

Have you considered discussing this matter with some of your friends in the Senate?

TRUMAN

Both Stimson and Marshall warned me not to do that, and I'm inclined to agree with them.

BESS

Why?

TRUMAN

This is a military operation and, therefore, as commander in chief of the armed forces, the decision is mine.

BESS

Well, I have complete confidence that you will make the correct decision, one that will take into consideration the best interest of the country.

TRUMAN

Thank you, dear. I don't know what I would have ever done without you.

End of scene 6

Scene 7

Date: August 2, 1945

Time: 6:00 PM

Place: The living room in a house in Falls Church, Virginia. Sal De Martino is sitting in the living room with his wife Louise. There's a knock on the door.

LOUISE

I'll see who it is.

Louise opens the door. There's a messenger with a telegram.

MESSENGER

A telegram for you. *(The messenger presents a receipt form)* Just sign here.

Louise signs the receipt; the messenger gives Louise the telegram and exits. Louise opens the telegram.

LOUISE
(Screams)

NO!

Sal rushes over to Louise.

SAL
(alarmed)

What is it?

Louise gives the telegram to Sal who starts reading it aloud.

SAL
(somber)

Dear Mr. and Mrs. De Martino, it is our sad duty to inform you that your son, Sergeant Joseph De Martino, was killed in action on Okinawa.

Sal stops reading.

LOUISE
(distraught)

Our boy is dead! Our little boy is dead!

SAL
(dazed)

I know.

LOUISE
(wailing)

Oh, God! NO, NO, NO, NO!

SAL
(fighting back tears)

He was a good boy. *(pause)* When will this damn war end?

Louise and Sal face each other and embrace, each one crying on the other's shoulder.

Hideki Tojo, dressed in a military uniform, enters the scene and faces the audience.

TOJO
(somber and indignant)

That this woman, a loving mother, and this man, who is a good and caring father, are feeling such anguish is regrettable. As a parent myself I can commiserate with them. Their son is dead. Such a grievous loss is like a gaping wound that will never completely heal. Yet all of this fighting and suffering could have been avoided if the United States government had not been so obstinate in its demands and had adopted a more understanding and conciliatory attitude. While America was pursuing outdated policies, Japan wanted to bring peace, order and prosperity to East Asia, which is Japan's neighborhood, not America's. Japan wanted to work with America, not against America. Yet America opposed Japan, their faithful ally in the First War, leaving the emperor no choice but to defend his people against the kind of encroachment that no nation could be expected to tolerate. Now the fighting continues; more mothers and fathers will be weeping, and more brave soldiers will die. *(Tojo turns and faces Louise and Sal and slowly bows.)*

NARRATOR *(off stage)*

On Okinawa American losses totaled over sixty thousand killed and injured; Japanese losses exceeded one hundred thousand.

End of scene 7

Scene 8

YOKO

(speaking to the audience)

The time: August 6, 1945. The place: the kitchen in my house in Hiroshima, Japan. My name is Yoko Watanabe. I am washing dishes in a sink. My two children, a girl aged nine and a boy aged six, are playing in the yard outside. Suddenly, there is a bright flash of light followed by intense heat and a blast which smashes the windows, sending glass flying and throwing me to the floor. As the smoke clears, I struggle to get to my feet. I am bleeding profusely from my nose, ears and mouth. I stagger to the window, look out at the scene and am horrified.

(screaming hysterically)

My children! My children! Please, God, not my children! NOT MY CHILDREN!

*Yoko collapses.**Tojo enters the scene and speaks to Yoko lying prostrate on the ground.*

TOJO

Stop your crying. Remember: you are Japanese and we are at war. There is work to be done. We must prepare to defend the homeland against the barbarian invaders. That the enemy is now resorting to horrible super weapons is proof of their weakness, not ours. Japan will never surrender!

Yoko stops crying, stands up and speaks to Tojo.

YOKO

(indignant and outraged)

Get up, you say? Prepare to defend ourselves, you say? Are you serious? My children are dead! My future is dead! And for what? *(Tojo is silent.)*
(screams) FOR WHAT!?

TOJO

It is the will of the emperor.

NARRATOR *(off stage)*

Three days later, on August 9, a second atomic bomb would be dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki. Both bombs together killed over two hundred thousand people.

End of scene 8

Scene 9

Date: August 14, 1945

Place: The Oval Office. President Truman is sitting behind the desk reading a newspaper. Donald enters.

DONALD

Secretary Stimson is waiting outside and would like to meet with you.

Truman puts down the newspaper.

TRUMAN

Show him in.

Donald opens the door.

DONALD

(to Stimson)

The president will see you.

Stimson enters; Donald exits.

TRUMAN

Have a seat.

STIMSON

Thank you, Mister President. *(Stimson sits.)* I have great news, sir! We've just received word that the Japs have agreed to surrender.

TRUMAN

It's about time.

STIMSON

Mister President, it was very astute of you to agree to let them keep the emperor.

TRUMAN

Astute, nothing. I wanted to end this war and if it took letting that warmongering fool have his throne, then let him have it. It wasn't worth sacrificing any more American lives. For the life of me, I will never figure out why it took two atomic bombs to get the Japs to surrender.

STIMSON

It was their fanaticism that got them into trouble in the first place.

TRUMAN

Yes, maybe you're right, but whatever the case, I'm glad that they finally came to their senses.

STIMSON

I've been in contact with General MacArthur. He will oversee the formal surrender in Tokyo.

TRUMAN

That's fine.

STIMSON

I also want to congratulate you on your decision to use the atomic bombs, Mister President. It was a courageous decision for which you deserve full credit.

TRUMAN

The Japs left me no choice; they wouldn't surrender. But what gets me is how some of those scientists who actually built those bombs are now expressing regrets that we used them. That bothers me.

STIMSON

Maybe they don't understand the entire picture, sir.

TRUMAN

What's there not to understand? We were at war and we had a means of ending it quickly. I know those bombs killed a lot of people but they saved a lot of lives too, both American and Japanese. It's just too bad that the Jap leaders were too pigheaded to heed our warnings and because of that they only have themselves to blame for the damage they caused to their own people.

STIMSON

Mister President, I completely concur.

TRUMAN

And besides, why would anybody even bother to question my decision? After all, we won, didn't we?

Donald enters

DONALD

Mr. President, Mr and Mrs. De Martino are here to see you.

STIMSON

(surprised)

De Martino, Mr. President? I'm not familiar with that name.

TRUMAN

Yes. They're the parents of a soldier who was killed on Okinawa. They wrote me a letter that moved me almost to tears. Isn't that right, Donald?

DONALD

Yes, Mr. President, that is true.

TRUMAN

(to Stimson)

Would you like to hear the letter?

STIMSON

Yes, of course.

Truman opens up the top drawer of his desk, takes out an envelope and opens it.

TRUMAN

(reads the letter)

Dear Mr. President. We are writing to let you know that we agree with your decision to use the atomic bomb. We know that the decision to use such a horrible weapon must have been a difficult one for you to make, but we believe that it was the right thing to do. For a while it seemed that the war would never end, but after the use of that weapon the war finally stopped, and for that we have you to thank. In fact, we wish you had used it earlier. It may have saved our son's life. He was killed on Okinawa. We were devastated by the news about our son's death and are still in a state of shock. As a parent yourself, I'm sure you must understand how we must feel. Knowing that our son gave his life in the service of his country provides us a measure of comfort, but his absence has left a huge hole in our lives, leaving us with a feeling of profound emptiness that will not go away. He was our only child and our future. Now, all we have left are memories and sad thoughts of what may have been. Sincerely: Sal and Louise De Martino. *(Truman puts the letter down.)*

STIMSON

Mr. President, thank you for sharing that letter with me. I am honored.

TRUMAN

No problem, Mr. Secretary. They agree that what I did was the right thing to do. Now if you don't mind, I have to ask you to leave.

STIMSON

Of course, Mr. President.

Stimson exits

TRUMAN

(to Donald)

Please ask Mrs. Truman to join me in the Oval Office and then show the De Martino's in. And for goodness sake, keep the press out of here until I give you the word.

DONALD

Yes, Mr. President

Donald turns and starts to exit.

TRUMAN

Oh, before I forget, how's Gregory doing? I've been meaning to ask about him but I've been so busy lately that I just couldn't get around to it.

DONALD

He's doing fine, sir. His grandson was finally located in a Jap POW camp. He was in bad shape but is now recuperating.

TRUMAN

Well, that's a relief. Please convey my best wishes to him and his family. Now it's time to get back to work.

DONALD

Yes, sir. *(pause)* Mr. President, if you don't mind, may I ask you something?

TRUMAN

Go ahead.

DONALD

What happens if the Russians get the bomb?

TRUMAN

(emphatic)

That will never happen. Not on my watch.

DONALD

Thank you, Mr. President. That's very reassuring.

Donald exits.

End of scene 9.

Epilogue

NARRATOR

On August 29, 1949, during President Truman's second term as president, the Soviet Union successfully tests an atomic bomb. The nuclear arms race has begun. At Hiroshima, Yoko Watanabe begins writing a book entitled *The Day My Life Changed Forever* recounting her struggle as an atomic bomb survivor. The book becomes an international bestseller. Later, her life becomes the subject for a major dramatic motion picture, and she becomes a star.

Yoko, followed by a chorus, enters and faces the audience.

YOKO

(to the audience)

My friends, I wish to recite a poem.

My name is Watanabe,
A bomb was dropped on me,
It caused a lot of damage,
It killed my family.

CHORUS

The right and the wrong,
The right and the wrong,
Who is to judge
What is right and is wrong?

YOKO

For years I harbored grudges,
The bomb sure did its job.
It left me scarred and haggard,
And made me cringe and sob.

CHORUS

The right and the wrong,
The right and the wrong,
Who is to judge
What is right and is wrong?

YOKO

But time did bring some healing,
And so I wrote a book
With bold words and stark pictures
For those who need to look.

CHORUS

The right and the wrong,
The right and the wrong,
Who is to judge
What is right and is wrong?

YOKO

The book sold lots of copies
And earned me lots of cash,
But that gives little comfort
Each night I see that flash.

CHORUS

The right and the wrong,
The right and the wrong,
Who is to judge
What is right and is wrong?

Truman, Stimson and Marshall enter. They stand aside looking at Yoko.

TRUMAN

(to Stimson and Marshall)

Look, I did what I thought was the right thing to do. It was war.

MARSHALL

As a military man I cannot lightly condone the deaths of civilians, but in total war such losses are inevitable.

STIMSON

And besides, the Japs DID start the war, didn't they?

TRUMAN

That's right, gentlemen, they sure did. So, did I do the right thing?

MARSHALL

That's a hard question to answer, sir. It did end the war, but were civilians considered legitimate military targets?

TRUMAN

General, we didn't make the rules.

MARSHALL

But we did make the bomb, and used it.

STIMSON

General, I think you're splitting hairs.

MARSHALL

I beg to differ, Mr. Secretary. I am speaking plainly and to the point.

TRUMAN

(insistent)

So, please tell me, did I do the right thing? *(to Yoko)* Excuse me, miss. Maybe you can help me. Did I do the right thing?

Yoko faces Truman

YOKO

I don't know, sir. Only you can answer that question.

TRUMAN

(to Stimson and Marshall)

Can't you guys help me?

Stimson and Marshall do not reply.

DONALD

Is there anything I can do, sir?

TRUMAN

Yes, there is. Please bring me all the Pepto-Bismol you can find because I'm going to need it.

The end.

