

GREEN BOOTS

by Rachael Carnes

CHARACTERS

Randy Shilts	A writer in his mid-30's, he wears wire-rim glasses, a button-down striped shirt, a wide tie and suspenders. He sports a trim beard.
Ronald Reagan	A Politician in his mid-70's, he wears a dark blue suit and polished business shoes, with hair slicked with pomade. He's tan.

SETTING

At Green Boots, the name given to the unidentified corpse of a climber that's become a landmark on the main Northwest Ridge route of Mount Everest. The term Green Boots originates from the green mountaineering boots the body still wears. All expeditions from the north side encounter the body curled in the limestone alcove cave, at 27,900 ft. At this altitude, there is not enough oxygen for humans to breathe. Climbers call it the Death Zone.

TIME

1987/2014

RANDY and RONALD, move over, under, around and through a 10-ft ladder, never touching the floor. As the action progresses, RANDY succumbs to hypothermia — cramping, exhaustion, slurred speech, paradoxical undressing — eventually losing rationality, he strips off his clothes to cool himself, as he freezes to death.

RANDY

How very American to look at a disease as homosexual or heterosexual —

RONALD

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope Elizabeth won't mind, but some years ago when I was doing a television show, "General Electric Theater," part of my work required visiting the General Electric plants, 139 of them, and meeting all the employees. And knowing better than to have a canned speech for them, I would go and suggest that they might ask questions. And every place I went, the first question was "Is Elizabeth Taylor really that pretty?" And being the soul of honesty, I would say, "You bet."

RANDY

Society judges not the severity of the disease but the social acceptability of the individuals affected —

RONALD

But you know, fundraisers always remind me of one of my favorite but most well-worn stories. I've been telling it for years, so if you've heard it, please indulge me.

RANDY

The primary cause of death listed — pneumonia —

RONALD

Well, I do want to thank each of you for giving to the fight against AIDS. Koop is what every surgeon general should be.

RANDY

The KS lesions, it turns out, cover not only his skin but also his lungs, bronchi, spleen, bladder, lymph nodes, mouth, and adrenal glands. It's the first time the pathologist could recall seeing the protozoa infect a person's eye.

RONALD

I want to talk tonight about the disease that has brought us all together.

RANDY

Ken's mother claims his body from the hospital the day after he dies. By the afternoon, Ken's remains are cremated and tucked into a small —

RONALD

The poet W.H. Auden said that true men of action in our times are not the politicians and statesmen but the *scientists*.

RANDY

His sarcoma leads to the discovery in San Francisco of the epidemic —

RONALD

Those of us in government can educate our citizens about the dangers. We've made remarkable progress, as you've heard.

RANDY

He is the first case in the country — Centers for Disease Control.

RONALD

Spending on AIDS has been one of the fastest growing parts of the budget, and, ladies and gentlemen, they deserve it.

RANDY

Now, he's one of eighteen stricken people in San Francisco and the fourth man in the city to die in the epidemic, the seventy-fourth to die in the United —

RONALD

We're tearing down regulatory barriers to move AIDS to the marketplace —

RANDY

The impediments to progress — not heterosexual bigots but closeted —

RONALD

Science is clearly capable of breathtaking advances, but it's not capable of miracles!

RANDY

— less likely to demand — fair or just treatment — for his kind — to do so would call attention to himself.

RONALD

What can we do to defend Americans not infected with the virus? How can we best care for those who are ill and dying?

RANDY

The statement infuriates organizers from AIDS groups who consider AIDS already an “overwhelming problem” —

RONALD

Final judgment is up to God; our part is to ease the suffering and to find a cure. This is a battle against disease, not against our fellow Americans. We mustn't allow those with the AIDS virus to suffer discrimination.

RANDY

Stop the scourge "before it affects the heterosexual population."

RONALD

I was told of a newspaper photo of a baby in a hospital crib with a sign that said, "AIDS -- Do Not Touch." I read of one man with AIDS who returned to work to find anonymous notes on his desk with such messages as, "Don't use our water fountain." I was told of a situation in Florida where 3 young brothers -- ages 10, 9, and 7 -- were all hemophiliacs carrying the AIDS virus. The pastor asked the entire family not to come back to their church. Ladies and gentlemen, this is old-fashioned fear, and it has no place in the home of the brave.

RANDY

I have no idea what's awaiting me, or what will happen when this all ends.

RONALD

The Public Health Service has stated that there's no medical reason for barring a person with the virus from any routine school or work activity.

RANDY

I know that man is capable of great deeds. But if he isn't capable of great emotion —

RONALD

And wherever you have self-respect and mutual respect, you don't have drug abuse and sexual promiscuity, which of course are the two major causes of AIDS. Nancy, too, has found from her work that self-esteem is the best defense against drug abuse.

He pulls a bottle of Giorgio for Women Eau de Toilette out of his parka, and sprays 3-4 pumps into the atmosphere.

RANDY

What other choice did you have?

RONALD

Now, we know there will be those who will go right ahead. So, yes, after there is a moral base, then you can discuss preventives and other scientific measures. And there's another aspect of teaching values that needs to be mentioned here.

RANDY

I feel more fellowship with the defeated than with saints.

RONALD

Let me tell you a story about innocent, unknowing people. A doctor in a rural county in Kentucky treated a woman who caught the AIDS virus from her husband, who was an IV-drug user. They later got divorced, neither knowing that they were infected. They remarried other people, and now one of them has already transmitted the disease to her new husband. Just as most individuals don't know they carry the virus, no one knows to what extent the virus has infected our entire society. AIDS is surreptitiously spreading throughout our population, and yet we have no accurate measure of its scope. It's time we knew exactly what we were facing, and that's why I support some routine testing.

RANDY

If there is one thing one can always yearn for, and sometimes attain, it is —

RONALD

I've asked the Department of Health and Human Services to determine as soon as possible —

RANDY

I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

RONALD

I've also asked to the list of contagious diseases for which immigrants and aliens seeking permanent residence in the United States can be denied entry. If there is one thing one can always yearn for, and sometimes attain, it is —

RANDY

I can't breathe.

RONALD

I've asked the Department of Justice to plan for testing all federal prisoners —

RANDY

The evil in the world comes almost always from ignorance —

RONALD

In addition, I've asked for a review of other federal responsibilities, such as veterans hospitals — our military — foreign service.

RANDY

I can't breathe.

RONALD

Now let me turn to what the states can do. — individual's choice— marriage licenses —drug abuse clinics.

RANDY

I can't breathe.

RONALD

Not only will testing give us more information on which to make decisions, but in the case of marriage licenses, it might prevent at least some babies from being born with AIDS.

RANDY

I can't breathe.

RONALD

I should think that everyone getting married would want to be tested. You know, it's been said that when the night is darkest, we see the stars.

RANDY

Every time you see me, you want to mess with me. I'm tired of it. It stops today.

RONALD

The best tradition of caring! And I encourage Americans to follow that example —

RANDY

Everyone standing here will tell you I didn't do nothing. I did not sell nothing. Because every time you see me, you want to harass me. You want to stop me (*garbled*) Selling cigarettes. I'm minding my business, officer, I'm minding my business. Please just leave me alone.

RONALD

In closing, let me read to you something I saw in the paper that also embodies the American spirit —

RANDY

I told you the last time, please just leave me alone! Do not touch me!

RONALD

Something a young man recently said. He said: "While I do accept death, I think the fight for life is important, and I'm going to fight the disease with every breath I have."

RANDY

Please, please, don't touch me.

RONALD

Ladies and gentlemen, so must we. Thank you.

RANDY

I can't breathe.

(lights out.)