

Murderabilia

By Phil Blechman

Phil Blechman
21-58 35th Street
Apt. 1C
Astoria, NY
11105

Copyright 2020

INT. JACK CANTELL'S OFFICE - THE NEXT MORNING

Lights up on WGAF news editor Jack Cantell's office. Documents, photographs, coffee mugs, filing cabinets, etc, clutter the room. A muted TV upstage airs the news. BOBBY; the unimposing assistant, paces around nervously. After some time, JACK CANTELL walks in with his sleeves rolled up; holding a newspaper with the headline "The Blood Artist's Latest Portrait".

JACK CANTELL

You see this, Bobby?!

Jack points to the TV.
Every network is currently covering the blood artist!

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

It's not great.

JACK CANTELL

The blood artist stuff performs better than any other story we've ever run!

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

They should be covering the nightclub shooting.

Jack pulls out a cigarette.

JACK CANTELL

So the audience will change the channel? Absolutely not. Generic shootings are stories for the crawler.

He lights it.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

This story is a distraction.

JACK CANTELL

The story has legs! A blood artist *and* a clown killing bad guys?! Have you seen the traffic we're getting?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

We got the scoop on the blood artist and the portraits, not this clown guy.

JACK CANTELL

That clown is the best thing that has ever happened, Bobby. I hope he pulls up in his little itty bitty tie-dye colored smart car with a hundred of his clown friends and open up an entire gallery of death paintings that we could cover until the next politician gets caught shipping dick pics to his mistress.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

That's not what we're supposed to cover.

JACK CANTELL

What would you know about what we're supposed to cover? You're my assistant and I need you to assist me making sure the talking heads in that box stay on this story until something better comes along or we die.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

I don't think I should work undercover anymore.

Beat. Jack mutes the TV.

JACK CANTELL

Okay, Bobby. What do you want?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

I don't think I...

JACK CANTELL

(cutting him off)

You want me to cover kids getting shot up at school again?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

I mean...

JACK CANTELL

You're a smart guy, do you know what happens to gun sales after a shooting?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

I do, but...

JACK CANTELL

What happens to gun sales after a shooting, Bobby?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

They go up.

JACK CANTELL

They go up by 20 to 62 percent depending on the state. Do you know why that is?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

Because people worry congress will pass legislation to take guns away.

JACK CANTELL

If kids getting shot between nap time and finger paints isn't enough to move the needle on the senate floor, another shooting in some nightclub in some city sure as fuck isn't either. So staying on the blood artist story is serving both our interests.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

Is it, though?

JACK CANTELL

I get to keep the lights on and you get to not assist boosting the NRA's bottom line. Now, I humbly ask that you stay undercover for as long as it bears fruit. And who knows, maybe you become the next Sydney Spata.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

Ms. Spata was Pulitzer Prize finalist for investigative journalism. I have a B.F.A. in dramatic theater.

JACK CANTELL

(turns the TV back on)

And your acting chops landed a story that currently has a national audience.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

You're neglecting the severity of the circumstances! Mikey "The Madman" Martelli was killed!

JACK CANTELL

Why are you mad now?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

This is my normal emotional state!

JACK CANTELL

Where was this outrage a year ago when Conor Mitcheletti was snuffed?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

You don't think that we've maybe lost any control we had on this situation?

JACK CANTELL

You're acting against your own interests, Bobby.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

This story headlining the news is against my own interests, Mr. Cantell.

JACK CANTELL

Do you know what the most influential factor in a person behaving against their own interests is?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

Economic anxiety?

JACK CANTELL

No.

Misinformation? BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

No. JACK CANTELL

An obstinate superior? BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

Fear. JACK CANTELL

Fear? BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

JACK CANTELL
You can talk yourself into all kinds of stupidity when you're scared and I'm getting the sense that you may be just that,

Jack points to the TV.
but look at where we are! We broke that story! We're ahead of the news cycle.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
We're not ahead of the news cycle, we're caught in it! Speculating about possible stories that *could* happen and theorizing about reactions to events that *may not ever even occur!* It's constant propaganda on an endless loop at all hours of the day and it's going to be the death of me.

Sydney barges in holding a folder labeled "Classified". It is filled with different colored papers and organizer tabs sticking out. She storms right up to Jack and drops the folder on his desk.

Ya got a minute? SYDNEY SPATA

She slaps the cigarette out of Jack's mouth. Jack quickly moves to stomp it out.

SYDNEY SPATA (CONT'D)
(to Bobby)
I'm gonna need a moment alone with this asshole if you don't mind.

Of course, Ms. Spata. BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

Bobby exits.

JACK CANTELL
Good morning to you, too.

SYDNEY SPATA

I walk into my office and the first thing I see greeting me at my desk is the case-file for a case that the police already closed two goddamn months ago.

JACK CANTELL

Another painting was auctioned off for six figures last night, Syd. People are still being kidnapped, murdered, and used to facilitate these grotesque art projects.

SYDNEY SPATA

And while you're doing your best to get off on conspiracy theories about a weirdo-freak playing finger paints...

JACK CANTELL

(cutting her off)

Conspiracy theory?! You were nominated for a Pulitzer covering this story!

SYDNEY SPATA

That doesn't mean we just stop covering the stories of actual consequence.

JACK CANTELL

For fuck's sake, should I get Bobby back in here so you two can wax poetic about your Robin Hood journalism fantasies?

SYDNEY SPATA

Should I leak the story that you're having an affair with a congresswoman?

JACK CANTELL

I refute your mischaracterization.

SYDNEY SPATA

Mischaracterization?

JACK CANTELL

She's having an affair with me.

SYDNEY SPATA

You're a pig.

JACK CANTELL

You should be begging me to cover the Martelli story.

SYDNEY SPATA

I should be begging you?

JACK CANTELL

This new blood portrait undermines your original reporting.

SYDNEY SPATA

If you read my original reporting, you'd know there is no blood artist!

JACK CANTELL

(looking to the TV)

Are we living in the same world?

SYDNEY SPATA

That is a channel of propagandists willing to spew whatever fake news provokes outrage.

JACK CANTELL

A potentially innocent man is wasting away in prison because of your reporting.

SYDNEY SPATA

Gabe Orlando is wasting away in prison because he was radicalized by the alt-right and murdered eight people.

JACK CANTELL

Then how do you explain the new painting, huh? This Victoria Ire.

SYDNEY SPATA

A hit job on a despicable criminal being covered up under the pretense that the big bad blood artist is still at large is not news.

JACK CANTELL

And you think I'm the conspiracy theorist?

SYDNEY SPATA

You are playing into this trash instead of focusing on the story that can pressure congress to make real change.

JACK CANTELL

Oh my god, again with the shooting. The blood artist is a bigger problem!

SYDNEY SPATA

In whose reality?!

JACK CANTELL

(holding up the newspaper/pointing to the tv)

In everyone's reality! The blood artist is what the media cares about. That means the blood artist is what the public cares about, and we are public servants.

SYDNEY SPATA

Journalism is about exposing the truth and holding those in power accountable, not entertaining the public.

JACK CANTELL

This story grabs peoples' attention.

SYDNEY SPATA

So it's perfect for the tabloids.

JACK CANTELL

It's good for ratings.

SYDNEY SPATA

Fuck ratings.

JACK CANTELL

A serial murderer *and a clown* targeting wanted felons and turning them into blood portraits for auction isn't the story you want?!

SYDNEY SPATA

It's internet forum tinfoil hat bullshit, Cantell!

JACK CANTELL

It gets the headlines!

SYDNEY SPATA

You need to stop paying so much attention to cable news and recognize that if you don't stop the criminal...

SYDNEY & JACK

...you are the criminal.

The door flings open and Bobby awkwardly shambles in with a tall stack of documents and drops them on Jack's desk.

SYDNEY SPATA

What the hell is all this?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

Research.

JACK CANTELL

(flipping through the documents)

Bobby's researching anyone who may or may not have ties to the mob about what they may or may not know about the blood artist.

Jack pulls a picture of a female mime from the top of the pile.

Who's this?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT

I kept coming across references to a female mime.

JACK CANTELL
Who's this mime?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
That's Miranda.

JACK CANTELL
Miranda?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
Yeah, Miranda the mime.

JACK CANTELL
Who's Miranda the mime?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
I don't know, that's just the first image from google when you type in "female mime".

JACK CANTELL
Why are you pulling random pictures?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
I don't mean to be rude, but I could literally forge any document or photo to be entirely indistinguishable from an original but that takes time and I figured that picture would be sufficient to convey that a female mime might somehow be relevant.

SYDNEY SPATA
Are you having him wade into conspiracy theories on the internet?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
Don't worry, Ms. Spata, I can discern what's true and false on the internet.

Jack pulls out another picture of Miranda the mime.

JACK CANTELL
Are you kidding me?

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
You have the right to remain silent!

Beat.
Get it? Miranda rights? Miranda the mime?

JACK CANTELL
Get the fuck outta my office, Bobby.

BOBBY THE ASSISTANT
Right away, Mr. Cantell.

Bobby exits.

SYDNEY SPATA
(referring to the volume of
Bobby's research)
How long have you had him doing this?

JACK CANTELL
Since you decided you no longer wanted to work undercover.

SYDNEY SPATA
The case was closed!

JACK CANTELL
Your work scored a conviction, not a confession! Blood
portraits are still being sold in auctions.

SYDNEY SPATA
Who gives a shit about the murderabilia?

JACK CANTELL
Because ***what if you got it wrong?***

Beat.
What if the killer, this Victoria Ire, is still out there
producing a painting for each victim? We may disagree on
priorities, but you cannot ignore the fact that this story is
still very, very live. I understand you're hyper skeptical,
but whether you like it or not, *your credibility lives or
dies by this story now.*

Beat.
We've already got several leads on the whereabouts of the
blood artist.

SYDNEY SPATA
From who?

JACK CANTELL
Friends on the inside.

SYDNEY SPATA
Which friends?

JACK CANTELL
(pulling mugshots out of pile
of research and/or pointing
to pictures on a pin-board on
the wall)
Orio "Old Guy" Winslow tipped off that she might be using the
abandoned warehouse on pier 49 as an art studio. Jasper "The
Dentist" Legatti whispered she's using the rundown gymnasium
at PS 86 in the south district.

Vinny "The Gnat" Calcutti alluded to her using one the large sheds in the back half of Ricky "The Cloth" Pasquale's textile factory on the west side. And Ernest "The Undertaker" Lorello disclosed that one of his boys saw her pass through the basement of Dante "Al Dente" Donato's funeral home.

SYDNEY SPATA

Cantell, wanted felons are not sources.

JACK CANTELL

They're our means of information.

SYDNEY SPATA

Criminals in the mob are not our friends.

JACK CANTELL

The only known variable connecting all the victims is their criminality. If that's actually what matters, why would this Victoria Ire become the thing she is actively seeking to eliminate? Why wouldn't she work with authorities to convict them instead?

SYDNEY SPATA

Because there is no Victoria Ire!

JACK CANTELL

Humor me.

Beat.

SYDNEY SPATA

I don't know, she's a sicko that likes painting with human blood.

JACK CANTELL

If all she wanted was the blood, even if specifically human blood, why wouldn't she just use her own?

SYDNEY SPATA

You're trying to rationalize a fictitious character, Cantell. Sometimes, with bad people, the cruelty is the point.

JACK CANTELL

Not without incentives! I am unwilling to accept serial murders that coincide with underground murderabilia auctions are bad just because - or fake news because you want it to be. Drop the elitist high-and-mighty bullshit and prove to the world that you got it right!

SYDNEY SPATA

We need to cover the shooting.