

ENDWATERS

By Scott Dixon

DRAFT

Scott Dixon
505 Calhoun Ave S
Lanesboro, MN 55949
507-696-5293
inbox@srdixon.net

Cast of Characters

ROBERT COLLIER, male, mid 30's, a developer

DEVON COLLIER, female, early 30's, silent partner in her family's business

KAREN HUNTLEY, female, 40's, a community activist

LARSON, Karen's lieutenant

HARROW, a County Commissioner

PROTESTERS 1, 2, 3, & 4

Author's Note: The four PROTESTORS will play a variety of speaking roles throughout the story, and are meant to cross any (real or perceived) age, gender, or racial lines. The precise assignment of these roles is left in the purview of the creative team producing the script, but I offer the following chart as a suggested guide:

PROTESTOR 1	PROTESTOR 2	PROTESTOR 3	PROTESTOR 4
Banker	Worker	Server	D'Addario
Museum Guest #2	Tour Guide	Museum Guest #1	River Rat
Sheriff	Exec Director	Kohl	Dance Instructor

Likewise, the song selections should be considered suggestions, and I encourage artists with greater musical literacy than mine (which is almost everyone) to replace any and all songs with those of their own choosing if they feel inspired to do so.

Setting

Winona, MN

Time

The Not Too Distant Future

ACT ONEScene One

SETTING:

A mostly bare performance space.
Specific locales ought to be defined more
by lights and actor-storytelling than hard
scenery in order to facilitate seamless
transitions.

AT RISE:

Four PROTESTERS stand downstage.

They're waging war on the river!

PROTESTER #1

They're waging war on you!

PROTESTER #2

Where will you stand?

PROTESTER #1 and #2

The fate of Winona rests in your hands!

PROTESTER #3

God gave us the river!

PROTESTER #4

The river gave us our city!

PROTESTER #3

ALL PROTESTERS
Winona, MN – where the Mississippi goes to die!

Scene Two

(ROBERT and DEVON enter, siblings in their 30s. Both are dressed in formal mourning attire.)

Bastards, bastards, bastards!

ROBERT

Robert, calm down...

DEVON

Not one day. They couldn't let up for one day!

ROBERT

Mom's waiting for us at the house.

DEVON

Dad didn't deserve that. Our family didn't deserve that.

ROBERT

People are upset.

DEVON

They're upset? What about us?

ROBERT

I'm just saying –

DEVON

Don't you do that. Today is not supposed to be about anything except Dad.

ROBERT

You don't have to tell me that.

DEVON

ROBERT

I'm sorry. I'm just so...

DEVON

Me too. But we need to shake it off. Mom needs us. (ROBERT doesn't move.) Is it sinking in?

ROBERT

What?

DEVON

That you're the boss now?

ROBERT

We're the boss.

DEVON

Oh no. I said "silent partner", and I meant it.

ROBERT

I've had four voicemails from contractors already this morning.

DEVON

Don't do anything with them today. Don't even listen to them.

ROBERT

I have to. The rest of the world isn't taking the day off. Karen Huntley and her thugs.

DEVON

Karen had nothing to do with that.

ROBERT

Oh no?

DEVON

She would never...besides, she wasn't even there.

ROBERT

So you looked?

DEVON

What?

ROBERT

At the protestors. To see if she was there.

DEVON

Yes, I looked, but that doesn't mean I thought...Do you want a drink?

ROBERT

Oh yeah. But no...not right now.

When you think about Dad, how do you remember him?

DEVON

How do you mean?

ROBERT

Every time I think of him, it's like I'm always a twelve year old stick-boy and he's this...giant. You remember his first campaign for city council? How he walked us up and down the street, stopping at every door?

DEVON

He wanted to shake everybody's hand, look everybody in the eye.

ROBERT

Even if they weren't going to vote for him, he wanted them to know he'd be their guy when he got elected. "When" he got elected, right? Not "if".

DEVON

He had a name for it...

ROBERT

“FOSTMAG”.

DEVON

That’s right!

DEVON & ROBERT

“Feet On the Street To Meet And Greet”!

DEVON

“I might not agree with you, but I’ll always listen to you”.

ROBERT

Not enough for some people, I guess. Babies have to have their bottles.

DEVON

C’mon. Mom’s waiting for us.

ROBERT

I have to check these messages first.

DEVON

Actually you don’t have to. Unplug.

ROBERT

Like you said, I’m the boss now.

DEVON

Mom’s waiting.

ROBERT

I'll be right there. (DEVON doesn't move.) I'll be right there.

(The PROTESTERS enter.)

PROTESTER #3

Headline! August 5th, 2016. Minnesota Drought Affects River Travel. Mississippi Water Levels Drop Below Six Feet.

PROTESTER #2

Headline! January 15th, 2020. Mayor And New City Council Make Downtown Development #1 Priority.

PROTESTER #1

June 10th, 2028. Business Flight Primary Concern for Winona. Lack of Space to Build Cited as #1 Concern.

PROTESTER #4

December 26th, 2036. River Traffic Drying Up. Water Levels Continue at Historic Low.

PROTESTER #3

Headline! July 17th, 2040. Need For Land Drives Winona City Council. Mayor Weston Collier Says All Ideas On The Table.

PROTESTER #2

May 1st, 2048. Groundbreaking Set to Begin On New Wapasha Dam Despite Community Protests.

(The PROTESTERS join together to sing a couple of verses of "Gather Us In" by Marty Haugen.)

Scene Three - A

(Two PROTESTERS become the BANKER and D'ADDARIO, the owner of a small family restaurant.)

BANKER

I'm sorry, but we have to say no to your loan application.

D'ADDARIO

But why?

BANKER

You don't have the collateral.

D'ADDARIO

The equity in my building –

BANKER

You don't have any equity.

D'ADDARIO

That can't be right.

BANKER

All the properties along 2nd Street are being reassessed. I'm afraid your restaurant's gone down about 30%. Technically speaking, you're actually underwater on your mortgage.

D'ADDARIO

How is that possible? We're practically riverfront property.

BANKER

Because it won't be practically riverfront property once the new dam comes online and they start dredging the banks. The new riverfront will be two blocks from where you are now.

D'ADDARIO

They won't be done with that for years.

BANKER

The bank has to look ahead. That's how we protect everyone's interests. I'm sure you understand.

D'ADDARIO

I don't understand a thing.

Scene Three - B

(Two PROTESTERS become WORKER and SERVER.)

WORKER

It'll be two years of solid work, maybe more!

SERVER

When? We're broke now.

WORKER

Mr. Pludek is telling all the crews he expects the contracts to be signed any day now.

SERVER

And then?

WORKER

And then he says every contractor in Winona will have all the work they can handle.

SERVER

There's a lot of "if"s and "maybe"s in that scenario.

WORKER

The Collier family is going to make it happen. I heard that the son promised his father on his deathbed.

SERVER

But when? And what do we do until then?

WORKER

You have your job. And our credit's good.

SERVER

It makes me nervous.

WORKER

I know. I love that about you – how you're always careful. But how can I help you understand there's nothing to worry about?

SERVER

I can't understand that.

Scene Three - C

(D'Addario's – a family restaurant on 2nd St. A table set for two is available. The SERVER and the D'ADDARIO are talking.)

D'ADDARIO

I'm very sorry.

SERVER

Please, this can't happen right now.

D'ADDARIO

I have to.

SERVER

I'll work for tips.

D'ADDARIO

You know this isn't about you. You're one of the best servers I've ever had. I'll write you a fabulous recommendation.

SERVER

For who? Culvers? Dairy Queen? Every good restaurant in town is laying off staff.

D'ADDARIO

I can't afford it right now. I can't even afford to close. You have to understand.

SERVER

Yes. I understand.

(The SERVER exits as KAREN HUNTLEY, a powerhouse community activist, and LARSON, her assistant, enter and take seats.)

D'ADDARIO

Karen! Welcome to the end of my life!

KAREN

Don't exaggerate.

D'ADDARIO

I'm not. I'm now a one-person show: cook, waiter, and maitre d'. What will you have?

KAREN

I can't stay long. A bowl of your tomato-garlic soup. And whatever Larson wants – we're on the same check.

D'ADDARIO

Can I offer you the lobster?

LARSON

You have lobster?

D'ADDARIO

No, but I would have had some ready if I'd known she was picking up the tab.

LARSON

Bowl of soup for me too.

KAREN

Listen, while I'm here –

D'ADDARIO

Let me stop you right there. I can't.

KAREN

It's for the Festival.

D'ADDARIO

Wonderful thing. I almost go every year. But I can't afford an ad right now.

KAREN

Well, if you can't, then you can't. But I've always heard you say you get more business because of the Festival than anything else.

D'ADDARIO

Yes, but no. I don't have the cash for it.

KAREN

Could you do a trade? We'll run the same ad as last year, and you give us the cash equivalent in catering services for a couple of events. They won't be for a while yet, and they'll be spread out over a couple of months.

D'ADDARIO

Would that work for you?

KAREN

If it works for you.

D'ADDARIO

I think I could do that. Sure. Deal. But I'm still going to see if I can find some lobster back in the kitchen. (He exits.)

KAREN

I don't know what makes him think I have all this money.

LARSON

Must be the family name.

KAREN

Old name and old money don't always go together.

LARSON

Now "Collier" on the other hand...

KAREN

Speaking of which, why were there pickets at Weston Collier's funeral?

LARSON

You like that?

KAREN

That crossed a line.

LARSON

It's because of Weston Collier that we've got this mess.

KAREN

Think twice.

LARSON

I know you have an old friendship there, but you have to admit that family has a lot to gain. They're the ones who think up the whole idea for a dam in the first place, so they're first in line for the gift baskets full on sweet construction contracts and real estate grabs.

KAREN

And dancing on Weston Collier's grave is gonna change any of that?

LARSON

They need to know this isn't over. People are angry about what they want to do to the river, and we both know the damage isn't done yet.

KAREN

The Colliers have done a lot of good for Winona.

LARSON

Spoken like the Festival fundraiser.

KAREN

Remember our first community meeting and the principles we laid out? Solutions, not just arguments. We're about the problem, not the people. If we forget that, then we're just another mob trying to tear down Frankenstein's castle with torches and pitchforks.

LARSON

But the people are the problem. There's so much money on the table – more than even the Colliers can gobble up. And none of it is in our reach.

KAREN

Can't fight the money. God, I hate to admit that, but –

LARSON

I might have an idea about that. We've tried to stop them because it was the right thing to do. Maybe we make them stop because it's the economical thing to do.

KAREN

How do you mean?

LARSON

You're not the only one with schoolyard connections. I had an Intro to Chemistry Lab with one of Collier's sub-contractors. He told me that they accepted a bid from a new supplier for the concrete they're going to use for the dam. Now this new supplier gets their concrete from a Chinese company.

KAREN

So?

LARSON

A Chinese company cited last year for illegal amounts of asbestos content in their materials.

KAREN

Oh really?

LARSON

And that's not all. Look at these spreadsheets. (pulling out a bundle of papers) Here's the proposed dam budget when they went to the County Commissioners. And then here's a profit-and-loss statement from last quarter.

KAREN

Where did you get these?

LARSON

I told you – I went to school with a guy. But look at the line items I circled here.

KAREN

They're almost 50% under expense in their materials budget.

LARSON

They're getting concrete from a Chinese company with a reputation for cutting corners, and they're getting it for cheap. Put two and two together...

KAREN

You still don't get anything we can really use.

LARSON

We can push for a new environmental impact study.

KAREN

Based on this?

LARSON

Yes! They're gonna build that dam with poisonous materials that will affect everything downriver.

KAREN

We tried to stop them with an E.I.S. three years ago.

LARSON

Based on what they reported at the time. If they're changing their plans, we have every right to go back and ask for a new look.

KAREN

And if the subcontractors are using materials that violate environmental regulations –

LARSON

They'll have to stop immediately.

KAREN

You realize that if this flies – if – then this changes the game entirely. This hits them in their wallets. They're going to come after us like it's the end of the world.

LARSON

I say let 'em. Let 'em throw gobs of their own money at the problem until they realize it's just going down the drain. We can draw this out.

Scene Four

(The PROTESTORS wheel out one of their own on a platform, dressed and posed like a statue of a classic Mississippi River Rat – full, scraggly beard, floppy hat, barn coat, mud boots.)

TOUR GUIDE

Welcome to the Winona Maritime Museum, sponsored by Quick-And-Go. The first exhibit on our tour is all about Wildlife on the Old Mississippi. You'll meet foxes and beavers, eagles and herons, but our first stop is our display of Rattus Sapien, or "River Rat". We call ours, "Olaf". Wave hello to the nice folks, Olaf! Of course, Olaf can't move because he's been embalmed for

our museum. The Mississippi River Rats were once a prolific, invasive species living up and down the river from the Twin Cities all the way to New Orleans, but Olaf here was the last of his kind. Notice one of the most distinguishing features of the river rat – the abnormal and almost comical amount of facial hair. This was useful as a sort of camouflage to blend in with its woodland habitat. Yes, do you have a question?

MUSEUM GUEST 1

How could they eat with all that hair in the way?

TOUR GUIDE

Ah! Scientists believe the facial hair served as a fishing net of sorts. Once the beard had become long enough and tangled enough, the river rat could just lower it into the water and snag crawfish, creek minnows, and even perch in the hairs.

MUSEUM GUEST 2

You mean they ate pre-processed foods?

TOUR GUIDE

Oh yes. And not just fish, but deer, muskrat, rabbit, and even squirrel.

MUSEUM GUEST 2

But how did they know if they were consuming the government-recommended daily allowance of vitamins and minerals?

TOUR GUIDE

They didn't! That's just one example of how wild and chaotic their lives were.

MUSEUM GUEST 1

Is that really the last living river rat?

TOUR GUIDE

He was when the DNR found him, yeah. Any other questions?

MUSEUM GUEST 2

You said they used to be all over the river. What happened?

TOUR GUIDE

An industrial phenomenon known as natural resource reallocation, or NRR, which had its roots in the counter-environmentalism movement of the early 21st century. As commercial and industrial interests took precedence, key attributes of the river rat's habitat had to be relocated, and they dwindled in number. It's just the same as Nature would have intended, although over a much, much longer timeframe.

Well, we need to move along. Hang in there, Olaf! And while you're posting about your visit to the museum today, encourage your friends to come in and see Olaf for themselves before the exhibit and the museum close for good here in Winona and move downriver to our new home in Hannibal, Missouri. And don't forget to tell everyone to shop at Quick-And-Go, your one-stop shop for all your daily needs. We're "Quick" so you can "Go". Follow me, everyone!

Scene Five

(A cell phone rings. Then another, and another. For a moment, there's a cacophony of ringtones, and then ROBERT stands behind the desk in his office. A PROTESTOR, now as County Commissioner HARROW, is with him.)

HARROW

There's nothing in it that'd be binding, per se, but it would give the other side a lot of ammunition. And the state would probably take notice.

ROBERT

I just don't understand what anybody hopes to gain out of this.

HARROW

Not a thing. Some people just love the sound of their own voice.

ROBERT

How could she even get this on the agenda?

HARROW

McCall is her district commissioner, and he'll bring up any damn thing for discussion. He hates the idea that somebody might not be "heard".

ROBERT

I just want this woman to go away. Really – would that be too much to ask for?

DEVON

(entering) Oh, excuse me. Your secretary didn't say anything about a meeting.

HARROW

No, no, excuse me. I was just on my way out.

ROBERT

Dev, you remember Commissioner Harrow.

DEVON

Nice to see you again.

ROBERT

Harrow was just brightening my day with tidings of great joy.

HARROW

Don't shoot the messenger.

DEVON

Oh? What's going on?

ROBERT

People seem to be under the impression that we're planning to build the dam using environmentally-unsafe concrete.

DEVON

We didn't, did we?

HARROW

It's just a lot of rabble-rousing.

ROBERT

But there may be a call for an environmental impact study at the next commissioners meeting.

DEVON

Didn't the county do oone three years ago?

HARROW

Yes, we did.

ROBERT

And we passed.

DEVON

Seems like a waste to have to do another one now.

HARROW

Exactly what I've been saying. I'm sure everyone will see it that way too. Well, I don't want to take up any more of your time.

ROBERT

Thanks for stopping by.

HARROW

Ms. Collier. (HARROW exits.)

DEVON

He was in the neighborhood?

ROBERT

He just wanted to give me a heads-up about your old roommate getting up to no good again. Can't you do something about her?

DEVON

Like what? She's not a Labrador. She can have her own opinions.

ROBERT

Is this what a silent partner is good for? Shrugging and throwing your arms in the air?

DEVON

Hey, I can understand if you're upset with Karen, but don't take it out on me.

ROBERT

This is one more splinter in my ass I really don't need.

DEVON

Is an E.I.S. really that big a deal?

ROBERT

No, but it's what's behind it. The hostility. I mean, this is a done deal. We're going to break ground next month. The deal for development of the old riverbed is done. The only thing those people are doing now is howling at the moon.

DEVON

Is there a problem with the concrete?

ROBERT

No.

DEVON

You're sure?

ROBERT

One of the contractors had to switch suppliers, and they're seizing that as an excuse to bog us down in bureaucracy. It's desperation – a Hail Mary pass at the end of the fourth quarter.

DEVON

Tell me more over lunch. I'm starving.

ROBERT

I can't go. Sorry. I'm swamped here.

DEVON

I think that's usually the time when you need to go to lunch the most.

ROBERT

I'm serious, Dev. I'm trying to manage a dozen contractors who are either unwilling or incapable of talking to each other to coordinate their work schedules, and every time I make a decision somebody wants to talk it to death first. I can't fart around here without getting committee approval. And that's just the treatment I get from the people on my own side.

DEVON

Dad always said this wasn't going to be like anything we've ever done before. It involves public land, public resources. People get territorial.

ROBERT

People need to get over it. You, me, Dad – we all saw what was happening with the river. We saw it ten years ago. It's like we're the ones with the view from the top of the watchtower, and we know the barbarians are on the horizon, but the ground troops won't listen to us just because they can't see the problem for themselves.

DEVON

Maybe we've never looked closely enough at this part of the project. Public relations.

ROBERT

I need people to jump when I say "jump". I know that sounds awful to say out loud, but it's the truth. I know what I'm doing.

DEVON

That's all well and good for employees, but you can't expect a whole city to do that.

ROBERT

Why not? If what we're doing is so obviously the right thing to do.

DEVON

Let's get out of here. Staying cooped up in your office is just going to give you cabin fever.

ROBERT

I told you, I can't.

DEVON

We'll go to D'Addario's. Look me in the eye and tell me you can refuse their lasagna.

ROBERT

You are an evil temptress.

DEVON

Only on my good days. (They exit.)

Scene Six

(A PROTESTOR sits at a desk as EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of the Festival.
KAREN stands apart at first to read her letter.)

KAREN

Dear Editor: I am writing to call the public's attention to a potentially dangerous situation which sprung up under our noses. In the run-up to the construction of the Wapasha Dam, Wojec Construction changed suppliers for their materials. The new supplier, Anizhem Concrete Group, has a documented history of using unsafe materials to make their concrete mixes, including sea sand and high levels of asbestos. If this is true, we are presented with a truly terrifying scenario where a dam collapse is not only likely, but which would poison thousands of people and acres of land on top whatever damage that would happen from the flood.

As a matter of public safety, I am calling upon the County Commissioners to approve an Environmental Impact Study on Wapasha Dam, to evaluate the potential short and long term impact of possibly suspect construction practices. This is so much more than just being for or against the dam project itself. This is literally a matter of life and death for the City of Winona.

Thank you.

(walking into the EXEC DIRECTOR's office) Good. You're here.

EXEC DIRECTOR

In all my glory.

KAREN

Am I seeing this right on the calendar? You're lunching with a donor tomorrow?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Yes.

KAREN

Is there some reason you don't want your Development Director taking that meeting?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Do you think it's wrong for the Executive Director to sit down with a major donor of the Festival?

KAREN

Oh, it's a major donor now?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Karen...

KAREN

I don't mean to seem paranoid, but I'm starting to feel like there's a lot of stuff going around me these days.

EXEC DIRECTOR

Yeah, we really should talk about that.

KAREN

Oh my gosh.

EXEC DIRECTOR

Just wait a minute –

KAREN

The only thing worse than feeling paranoid is finding out that you were right.

EXEC DIRECTOR

Things are not "going around you". But yes, I have been running interference for you lately.

KAREN

In what way?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Can you tell me more about the environmental impact study you're going for?

KAREN

We think there might be some issues with the construction of the Wapasha Dam.

EXEC DIRECTOR

You think there might be.

KAREN

The potential is there. I just want there to be some oversight, especially if some of the contractors are going to be tempted to cut corners.

EXEC DIRECTOR

And by "contractors", you mean Collier Construction?

KAREN

No. I mean anyone who's compromising public safety.

EXEC DIRECTOR

You know how public perception works as well as I do.

KAREN

I feel like there's something you want to say to me.

EXEC DIRECTOR

I have no problem with you, or anyone else on staff here, getting involved in causes. It's a free country. But you do represent the Festival.

KAREN

I have never said that I was speaking on behalf of the Festival.

EXEC DIRECTOR

But in their own minds, people link us very closely.

KAREN

And more than a few of those people are friends of Robert Collier, who think that not only am I personally opposing his divine wishes, but spitting on his father's grave to boot. Who's this lunch with tomorrow?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Robert Collier.

KAREN

Is this the first step to me being fired?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Good gosh, no. Don't even think that.

KAREN

Then what do you want me to do here? And don't give me some well-crafted diplomatic answer. We've known each other long enough to be blunt.

EXEC DIRECTOR

They're ready to start building. If an E.I.S. gets ordered now, everything grinds to a halt, and nobody wins.

KAREN

I'm not trying to "win" anything. This is about saving lives. Literally.

EXEC DIRECTOR

Do you really believe that the dam would crumble like a sand castle after the first good rain, wash away half of Winona and give cancer to the other half?

KAREN

That's what an E.I.S. will tell us.

EXEC DIRECTOR

But what do you think?

KAREN

I don't know. I'm not an engineer.

EXEC DIRECTOR

In your gut, I mean. Is the dam unsafe?

KAREN

I don't know.

EXEC DIRECTOR

The Colliers are not some fly-by-night carpetbaggers. They've done a lot for Winona, and for the Festival.

KAREN

I was reminding somebody of that just last week.

EXEC DIRECTOR

I don't like the dam either. I understand why some people wanted to build it, but Winona is a river town. Always has been since Zebulon Pike first came tromping through. What are we now? What will we be? I don't know.

KAREN

Every time I see a business or an organization with the words "Great River" in the name, I think it's a bad joke. A generation from now, people around here won't have any idea what those words meant.

EXEC DIRECTOR

It's change, Karen, and that tends to freak people out.

KAREN

You think I'm still fighting the fight because I'm scared and I don't know what else to do?

EXEC DIRECTOR

I didn't say that.

KAREN

Well, I've already put it out there. And I think at least two of the commissioners will vote for it right now. What should I do?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Leave it alone. The furor will die out on its own. And then, just let things run their course from there. Que sera sera.

KAREN

You're very deep, you know that?

EXEC DIRECTOR

I run a non-profit arts organization. "Deep" kinda rubs off on you after a while.

Scene Seven

(The PROTESTORS take the stage.)

PROTESTOR #1

Letters to the Editor.

PROTESTOR #3

Our natural resources were given to us in a trust from God for the health, enjoyment, and well-being of all. Now we are faced with the news that not only is this Wapasha Dam going to choke off our great river, but it'll also be a time bomb waiting to drown us all. If we don't act now to stop this monstrosity when we can, then Mother Nature will take care of the problem for us and She won't care who's in the way.

PROTESTOR #1

All this talk about “Save the River”, “Save the Trees”, “Save the Land” – it makes me sick. It’s just another example of how kissing up to the Muslims is rotting away our great country.

PROTESTOR #2

Well, here we go again. After having suffered how many meetings and protests, some people just can’t understand why they can’t always get their way. Listen up all you people hating on the Wapasha Dam. You had your chance, you said your piece, and you lost. The rest of us don’t want to hear about it any more. But instead of taking the hint, these people are running around like Chicken Little trying to scare us. The people of Winona County have already spoken. Time for you to pick up your posters and your picket signs and go home!

PROTESTOR #4

As Winonans, we should all be proud and grateful to have someone like Karen Huntley keeping a watchful eye on corporate shenanigans going on in our city. All of my friends and neighbors have been concerned about the Wapasha Dam Project from the very beginning, and I know that Karen has been at every meeting and every public forum, asking the kinds of questions that sneaky people don’t want to answer. How often do we all say, “somebody ought to do something” and then stick our hands in our pockets? Karen Huntley is that somebody, and I will happily add my voice to hers, calling upon our County Commissioners to order an E.I.S. and fulfill their obligation as protectors of Winona County – its people, and its natural treasures.

PROTESTOR #3

The fiber of this country has never been lower at any point in the history of the world. Schools can’t discipline kids, so the children don’t learn anything, and this is what we get.

PROTESTOR #1

Some people don’t live in the same Winona County that I do. Some people live in a place where money grows on trees, and when they need eighty thousand dollars to run a report, they just go into the woods and pick the cash off the branches. But in the real world, when the county wants money for something, they come and get it out of my wallet. And your wallet. And the wallets of every taxpayer. The County Commissioners have more important work to do, and more important things to spend money on, than pandering to a bunch of Monday-morning quarterbacks. If there really are lots of people out there who want an E.I.S., then you pay for it. But in my experience, nothing good ever comes out of sticking your nose in where it don’t belong. As the great President Ronald Reagan said, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, ‘I’m from the government, and I’m here to help’.”

Scene Eight

(KAREN walks into D'Addario's restaurant where DEVON and ROBERT wait at a table.)

KAREN
Hello Dev, hello Robert.

DEVON
Karen!

KAREN
I haven't had a chance to tell you in person how sad I was to hear about your father's passing.

DEVON
Thank you.

KAREN
And just to clear the air, I apologize profusely for the demonstrators. That was done without my knowledge and definitely without my approval. I've let those people know exactly how intolerable that action was.

DEVON
We know that wasn't you.

ROBERT
That's in the past now. I believe we're here to talk about what's happening now.

KAREN
Yes, let's. And again, before we start, I want to say that none of this is meant personally.

DEVON
I don't see anything to be gained by that.

ROBERT
It's all well and good for you sit there and say that, and I'm sure part of you even believes it.

KAREN

Of course I believe it.

ROBERT

Because I have to say that it all feels personal. Do you even realize what you're accusing us of?

DEVON

Let's not – if I can interject here – why don't we take a moment to say out loud exactly what we're all talking about here.

KAREN

Okay. Well, I believe we're here because in less than a week, the County Commissioners will vote on authorizing an E.I.S. for Wapasha Dam.

DEVON

If it passes, all current work will come to a halt until the study is done.

KAREN

And if the E.I.S. shows that the construction materials will make the finished project structurally unsafe, or a hazard to the community in any way –

DEVON

The whole project will be shut down.

KAREN

Or sent back to the drawing board.

ROBERT

Either way, millions of dollars go down the drain. But if the study finds nothing wrong –

KAREN

Then the citizens of Winona will know for certain they have nothing to worry about.

ROBERT

And the various contractors and companies involved will lose only a couple hundred thousand dollars instead, while they wait around.

KAREN

I suppose so.

ROBERT

That might not be of any concern to you, but I think you would understand why some people would prefer it if you would withdraw your request for an E.I.S.

KAREN

I have been asked to turn down my volume, but I don't see any reason to withdraw a perfectly reasonable request.

ROBERT

What is so reasonable about demanding a study that's already been done?

KAREN

Because you've changed the specifics of the project.

ROBERT

We went with a different supplier. It's like buying your blender at Walmart instead of Shopko.

KAREN

I don't have to justify my request to you, and I don't appreciate being scolded and bullied into –

ROBERT

What did I do that was bullying? Name one thing I just said that was bullying.

DEVON

I thought you didn't want this to be personal.

KAREN

I'm trying.

ROBERT

So that makes me curious whether this study is really about x number of asbestos fibers per cubic centimeter. I mean, if it really is, then we could also talk about the level of radium in tap water that's considered "safe", or the allowable concentration of animal feces in breakfast cereals.

DEVON

Okay, let's reset. Let's go back ten years. The Mississippi River is drying up. Drought, climate change, what-have-you. The river isn't what it used to be. Probably isn't ever going to be again.

KAREN

Go on.

ROBERT

About the same time, our father sees another kind of trouble on the horizon. Our largest industries – Fastenal, Wincraft, Benchmark – they're all in danger of stagnating. They need room to expand, but Winona doesn't have any. Meanwhile, Winona State wants to continue to attract professors and researchers to stay a nationwide leader, but don't have the physical plants necessary to stay innovative.

KAREN

I've read your press kits.

ROBERT

Winona is at a crossroads. The world is changing, but the city struggles to. Leaving things just as they are because "that's how it's always been" is a road to nowhere.

KAREN

What I'm hearing is a kind of logic that says, "the world is going to hell anyway, why not break off a piece for ourselves"?

DEVON

Is that what you think we're doing?

KAREN

Your family has had the inside track on every construction contract, every real estate deal –

ROBERT

We're developers. We see potential and we make it real. And yes, we earn good money doing it, I won't deny that. It's a prejudice we've lived with our whole lives.

KAREN

I think you saw a massive business opportunity, and a way to wrap it up with silk ribbons of civil service. I think you rammed your plans through as many committees and boards as you could before anyone could get a close look at what was going on. You said, "Trust us". Then the plans for the dam started moving forward. Visitors stopped coming. And you said, "Trust us". Then businesses started closing, and foreclosed houses started toppling like dominoes. And you're still just saying, "Trust us". I don't trust you. I think you may have good intentions, but I don't think you really know what you're doing. Winona is a river city. You're changing the river.

ROBERT

The river was already changing. We're getting Winona ahead of the curve instead of lagging behind and letting it turn into a ghost town.

KAREN

That would never happen.

ROBERT

Those foreclosures you raise such a fuss about were already on the rise six years ago. Before the first proposal ever went before any committee, the business sector was grinding to a halt.

KAREN

There's more to Winona than the business sector. The river brought people in. The Festival is still here. The museum, the concert series –

ROBERT

Sure, those kinds of things go on as long as you have corporate partners. But the museum is already moving down river. And what percentage of the Festival's operating budget comes from contributed versus earned sources? 65%? 70? Talk about putting the "non" in "non-profit".

KAREN

The Festival exists because of what it does for people's lives. That's why they buy the tickets, and then go above and beyond to contribute a little more. It's a cultural, educational, and entertainment asset for the whole region.

ROBERT

I know, I've read your press kits too. But my point remains – if you have to double your ticket prices to make up for what you lose in sponsorships and advertising, then who's going to be able to come to your events?

I'm going to be blunt. You need Winona businesses more than the businesses need you. And so if the businesses need to change the river, then that's what's going to happen.

KAREN

And I'm going to be blunt with you. What you're describing is just a city, not a community. The infrastructure exists to serve the good of the people, not the other way around.

ROBERT

If there's no infrastructure, there's no community.

KAREN

I think we're back where we started. I'm just a hippie, tree-hugging socialist.

ROBERT

And I'm a voracious reptilian capitalist.

KAREN

Will you be at the commissioners' meeting?

ROBERT

Count on it.

KAREN

(on her way out) Then we have nothing more to talk about here.

ROBERT

You know, I had a professor once who told us that the best approval rating any business could get was 85%. No matter how good your product or service was, no matter how affordably you price it, no matter how how much people need it – there will always be at least 15% of your target demographic who will refuse to like it. For whatever real or imaginary reason they want to use.

KAREN

85% of the people in the world used to believe that the Earth was flat and balanced on the back of a giant turtle. So where does that leave us?

Scene Nine

(The PROTESTORS and KAREN are on stage. One PROTESTOR steps forward as DANCE INSTRUCTOR. Tango music plays softly in the background.)

DANCE INSTRUCTOR

Hello everybody! We're so glad you could join us tonight for our first Adult Ed Dance class. Who's ready to have fun? That's good, that's good. You're going to be amazed at how quickly and easily the stress of your day is just going to melt away once you hit the floor and start to feel the beat – wow!

Now I know some of you are probably feeling a little shy, so to show you how easy it is, I want to welcome one of our veteran students to the floor. Karen? Karen, where are you?

(KAREN steps forward.)

Karen Huntley took my class before and lived to tell about it. Just kidding! Anyway, just to show you how easy it's going to be, and how much fun you'll have once you learn a few basic steps, Karen is going to show you the dance she learned last year. Karen, are you ready? Is your partner ready?

(LARSON steps forward and a tango song begins to play as KAREN and LARSON dance.)

LARSON

There'll be the usual group going to the County Commissioners meeting next week.

KAREN

Uh-huh.

LARSON

Do you want to carpool, or are you going on your own?

KAREN

I'm not going.

Do you have something else going on?
LARSON

No.
KAREN

Then why aren't you going?
LARSON

I don't need to be there. I've said my piece. People know where I stand.
KAREN

But if you're not there –
LARSON

Commissioner McCall said he would put it on the agenda, and I think Krege will vote for it.
KAREN

But if you're not there, the proposal won't get any steam.
LARSON

You speak for it. During public comments.
KAREN

It's not the same if I do it.
LARSON

Why not? You're intelligent, you're passionate, you've been in on this with me since day one.
KAREN

But I'm not you. I'm not a leader.
LARSON

KAREN

Neither am I.

LARSON

But –

KAREN

No. I'm letting things run their course.

(As the choreography allows, KAREN switches partners now with the PROTESTOR playing EXEC DIRECTOR.)

How was lunch with Robert Collier?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Fine.

KAREN

Has he pulled his family's giving?

EXEC DIRECTOR

No. But some others have.

KAREN

Oh God, like who?

EXEC DIRECTOR

It's not for you to worry about.

KAREN

Of course I'm worried about it.

EXEC DIRECTOR

It's not your problem.

KAREN

I appreciate you trying to shield me, but let me do my job.

EXEC DIRECTOR

It's not your job any more.

KAREN

What?

EXEC DIRECTOR

I couldn't hide it any longer. The Board –

KAREN

The Board?

EXEC DIRECTOR

Your campaign is having a negative impact on the Festival.

KAREN

It's not "mine" –

EXEC DIRECTOR

It's the way they see it.

KAREN

Am I fired?

EXEC DIRECTOR

They would like your resignation.

(As the choreography allows, KAREN switches partners now with the PROTESTOR playing HARROW. He slaps a piece of paper in her hand as they begin dancing.)

What's this? KAREN

Zoning violation. HARROW

For what? KAREN

Your cabin. HARROW

\$5,000! KAREN

It has modern outfittings not permitted under our zoning ordinances. HARROW

Such as? KAREN

The electrical hook-ups. HARROW

My great-great-grandfather put in those hookups, long before there were any such ordinances. KAREN

I don't know about that. HARROW

KAREN

Why am I getting cited now, seventy-five years after the fact?

HARROW

I respond to any inquiry that comes in?

KAREN

So who's ruffled by the fact that my cabin has electricity?

HARROW

I can't say. It's against the rules.

KAREN

This wouldn't have anything to do some recent letters to the editor?

HARROW

Of course not.

KAREN

My head is spinning.

HARROW

I bet it is.

KAREN

Excuse me?

HARROW

I've heard the stories.

KAREN

What stories?

HARROW

You had to be let go from the Festival.

KAREN

What do you know about that?

(HARROW slaps a flask in her hand.)

HARROW

I had an uncle with the same problem. Are you getting help?

KAREN

No!

HARROW

There's no shame in admitting it.

KAREN

I will sue your ass.

HARROW

I didn't say a thing. I've just heard about it around town.

(HARROW twirls KAREN off on her own and exits. The music stops before KAREN, and then she's all alone.)

KAREN

You know that moment when the music stops, and you realize you're the only one left on the dance floor? Yeah.

Scene Ten

(The PROTESTORS take the stage singing together a verse of "The Times They Are a Changin'" – for what it's worth I prefer the style of the Keb' Mo' cover – and it underscores the scene .)

PROTESTOR #2

Letters to the Editor: Online comments section.

PROTESTOR #4

Yes! By all means, let's spend more money to evaluate a project a second time. Those people never think about how much things cost, they'll just borrow from here and borrow from there and borrow from their own children. It never ends with them.

PROTESTOR #1

Unbelievable! I can't fathom the short-sightedness of some people who think that it's okay to live under the shadow of a cancer-causing time bomb just because they're afraid to spend money. Addressing health risks is what the County Commissioners are there for, ordering work to ensure the safety of people and property is what tax dollars are there for. Better safe than sorry.

PROTESTOR #3

I have never understood the environMENTALISTS who hate the Wapasha Dam. Dams provide many benefits including flood control, creating water supplies for irrigation, water recreation, and hydroelectricity. That's green energy in case you forgot, and isn't that supposed to be a good thing? Makes you wonder what's really going on.

PROTESTOR #2

Idiots never bother me. They're ignorant and they don't know any better. But a fool is someone who's supposed to be smart, but keeps doing dumb things. And they're a lot harder to deal with.

PROTESTOR #4

Every problem we have in our society comes from taking the simplest things and turning them backwards. The Good Lord put Man in charge of Nature. Go back to school and read your Bible. We have every right, and every duty, to use our God-given intelligence to make the river work for us the way we want it to work.

(The sound of "The Times They Are a Changin'" rise for one more verse until the lights fade out.)

End of ACT ONE