

AMERICAN 60s IN THREE AX

by Y York
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A note on performing AMERICAN 60s IN THREE AX: Although these characters exist near or in the midst of historical events, their awareness of anything outside of themselves is minimal. They are intensely interested in the details of their own lives. Big emotions, such as horror, shock, indignation, or irony, are for the viewer, not the character.

1963

A bedroom. Dorine takes clothes from the closet and puts them on the bed. Enter Josephine.

JO Quit messing up the closet.

DOR I'm looking for something to wear.

JO Wear what you have on.

DOR Nooo. I want to look nice.

JO You look alright. Wear what you have on.

DOR I'm not wearing what I have on. I want to look nice. I'm going to wear these (*high heels.*) for sure.

JO You're going to be standing for hours.

DOR They make my legs look good. Do you like this dress?

JO Of course I like it, it's mine.

DOR I mean do you like it for me?

JO No, I don't like it for you; I like it for me, it's mine.

DOR Any other time it's okay we swap clothes. I ask you again, is this particular dress of yours nice for me?

JO We don't *swap* clothes, you wear my clothes when you want to wear something that's ironed, that's not swapping.

DOR You are such a party pooper.

JO That's what I mean. This isn't a party.

DOR All right, Jo, it's not a *party*. But it's an *event*. It's big, Jo, and I want to look *nice* for it. And I want to wear your dress.

JO That's what I don't understand, Dorine. Why do you want to look nice for it? Why don't you go and be sad. Why do you have to dress up? Why are you going to wear high heels? What difference does it make if your legs are looking nice? What do you think this is?

DOR Sometimes you make me so sick. (*Explaining.*) All right. All right. I am going to put on those shoes and that dress—if you let me, if you don't get some big OPINION about it—walk, walk mind you because traffic in this town today is going NOWHERE, a MILE, one MILE to the capital building, stand in line for probably hours in what you have already pointed out to me are very tall shoes, to pass *by*, and say *farewell* to the president. And when I pass, when I look into his coffin and see his face, I anticipate an enormous pile of grief to well-up in me. And when that happens I want to be looking nice. (*Beat.*) What if somebody takes my picture?

JO (*Pause.*) The coffin's closed.

DOR (*Sarcastic.*) Oh, sure. The president; they're gonna close the lid.

JO It's closed. They shot him in the head. They're not going to have an open coffin.

DOR Well, I'm going anyway. (*beat.*) Can I wear your dress or not?

JO Yes, you can wear my dress.

(*Dorine puts on dress.*)

DOR Thank you. What are you going to do?

JO I'll watch on tv.

DOR Tv? It's going to be on tv?!

JO Well, I guess.

DOR Jo! (*Pause, then quietly.*) You could be on tv.

JO I don't care.

DOR You do, you do. A chance like this doesn't come around again, Jo. Think of your parents.

JO My parents?

DOR Think what it would mean to your parents to see you on tv.

JO Oh.

DOR Yeah.

JO But I'm not wearing high heels.

DOR Okay.

JO My hair look alright?

DOR Yeah, looks good.

freeze, end.

1965

March, 1965

A motel suite, living room. Tv. Arnold and Cliff. Blueprints, maps. Cliff looks at tv as

LYNDON JOHNSON (*Civil rights speech, March 15, 1965.*) My fellow Americans, At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. (*//Arnold's first line.*) So it was, at Lexington and Concord. (*//Cliff's first line.*) So it was, a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Semla, Alabama. (*///Arnold's turns down sound.*)

(*Over the speech, Arnold enters.*)

ARNOLD /What's that?

CLIFF //The president.

(*///Arnold turns down the sound. Looks at the soundless tv for a second.*)

ARNOLD What a guy. (*Refers to blueprints and maps.*) Okay, you know it by heart now? You should know it by heart.

CLIFF I know it, Arnold, I know it. I just don't see why *you* can't do it.

ARNOLD Me, me? look at me. No. YOU are the right choice. There's gonna be cameras, tv maybe. YOU are the right guy. No, they were right when they decided on YOU. Just as they were right when they decided on ME to coach, I mean, *I* know this stuff.

CLIFF Well, I know it too, Arnold.

ARNOLD You? You? Yeah, but I KNOW it. I was at Los Alamos. I was there. I was *with* them.

CLIFF I know you were with them, Arnold, which is why I think you should talk to congress, not me. Who am I?

ARNOLD No, Cliff, no. We don't want *confusion* here. Congress should not be thinking of Los Alamos tomorrow. We want them thinking about lighting American homes *cleanly* and *cheaply*. You're the right guy. So. Let's hear it. How's it go?

CLIFF (*Sigh.*) This nuclear power plant will—

ARNOLD Don't say nuclear power.

CLIFF This .. plant will power homes in a two hundred-mile radius—

ARNOLD Cleanly and cheaply. Clean and cheap. Clean and cheap. That's the point, Cliff. Don't forget the point of this. "This plant will *cleanly and cheaply* power homes within a two-hundred-mile radius."

CLIFF (*Pause.*) What if they ask me about radioactive waste?

ARNOLD Nobody will.

CLIFF Somebody might.

ARNOLD Tell them about the barrels—nobody's going to ask about waste! They WANT this plant, they're not going to bring up waste. Don't worry about it.

CLIFF I think I should have an answer ready. In case they ask.

ARNOLD Tell them (*thinking it up.*)... before it's a *problem* the *technology* will know how to deal with it—tell them we're going to stick it on the freaking moon, Cliff! it's not going to come up.

CLIFF Or wind. They might ask about wind.

ARNOLD (*Exasperated, at map.*) Look at this, look at this, look at this. What is this, Cliff? What's there?

CLIFF What's there?

ARNOLD Do you see a town? Is there a town there? Do you see a town?

CLIFF No.

ARNOLD There's no town. There's *nothing* there. Nothing for radioactivity to harm. Wind doesn't matter. It's *fine*.

(Arnold looks at the tv. Turns up the sound to focus on something besides Cliff. Cliff continues to look at map.)

Lyndon Johnson: *(end of speech.)* but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.
And, we *shall* overcome.

(Arnold turns off tv. Pause. Cliff at map. Arnold stares at blank tv.)

CLIFF *(At map, points.)* What's that?

ARNOLD *(Mad.)* What?!

CLIFF *(points on map.)* That. That.

ARNOLD *(Pause as he looks at map.)* Nothing. It's an Indian reservation.

freeze, end.

1969

Night, July 1969, a street corner, Joey hidden, then Herbie.

JOEY Hey!

HERBIE Jesus! Man.

JOEY *(Laughs.)* What? You nervous, or something?

HERBIE Jesus. Out of no where. What's *with* you? Jesus, man.

JOEY What? I should stand in the lights?

HERBIE ...Have you got it?

JOEY Have I got it? Have I got it? Isn't the question, have *you* got it? Have *you* got it, Herbie? Because I *always* have it, but I recall the question lately is has *Herbie* got it?

HERBIE I got...I got something worth—

JOEY Worth. Worth? What? Am I a fence, now? Is that what you think I do? Peddle trinkets? Don't talk to me about worth. Thirty-five dollars, that's what you talk to me about. You hand me thirty-five dollars, and I hand you your item. Don't say worth to me, Herbie.

HERBIE (*Grasping for dignity.*) People call me Herb, now.

JOEY Who? Who are these people? Who are these people that call you Herb?

HERBIE You're not around anymore. They call me Herb.

JOEY I'm around. I'm around a lot. Now, for example. I am around. I am here, and I don't hear anybody call you Herb. But, if you like, I myself will call you Herb. I will call you Herb as I say good bye to you. Good bye, Herb.

HERBIE Wait, Joey, no. I got something. It's good. Please.

JOEY Well, since you asked so nice, I will look at your object.

(*Herbie takes a ring from his pocket and gives it to Joey.*)

JOEY Oh *yes*. This *is* good, Herbie. This is *very* good.

HERBIE It's worth a thousand, anyway.

JOEY I think if some person will be looking for this object, then this object is worth thirty-five dollars.

(*A pause.*)

HERBIE Okay.

(*Joey hands Herbie a bag of heroin. Herbie kneels and cooks a dose.*)

JOEY I wish they could see you now, these people who call you Herb. Or maybe that's some dream you have, Herbie. Some dream you have that people respect you in. You should wash that needle sometime, Herbie, you gonna get an infection in your arm there. (*Laughs.*) Then you'll die and it won't even be from drugs. Guess that would cheer up your old mom.

(*Herbie stands. He is cooked, and happy in the manner of the stoned.*)

HERBIE (*Looks up.*) Lookatit, Joey. Look at the moon.

JOEY Big deal.

HERBIE There's guys up there is why.

JOEY What are you talking about?

HERBIE No, this is real. They put guys on the moon. (*Looks at Joey, laughs.*) You dummy. They put guys on the moon, it's real.

(Joey grabs Herbie by the collar.)

JOEY What did you call me?

HERBIE Hey, it's real. Guys on the moon.

(Joey pulls Joey's face close to his.)

JOEY Shut up.

HERBIE Hey.

JOEY Shut up, you junkie-garbage, shut up.

HERBIE It's real, man.

JOEY I said shut up!

HERBIE Okay, okay, take it easy, Joey. Let me go.

JOEY Yeah, I'll let you go. Right.

HERBIE Joey, easy.

JOEY First you say, "I am a stupid junkie." Say it!

HERBIE I am a stupid junkie.

JOEY "And there's no guys on the moon."

HERBIE And there's no guys on the moon.

(Joey lets Herbie go.)

JOEY Guys on the moon! Stupid junkie.

freeze, end.