

The Electathon

(with thanks to Julie Lyrek)

There's the sucking sound of a vacuum cleaner as lights come up.

SCENE 1: A HOTEL SUITE

RON BONNER (late 40's/50) a candidate for governor, wears a frilly apron over slacks, white shirt, and rust-red tie. He is vacuuming rapidly, his hands in yellow rubber gloves. CAMERAMAN in hooded sweatshirt videotapes him. BONNER shuts off the vacuum cleaner, wipes sweaty forehead, pulls electric cord, rolls the machine. CAMERAMAN backs away. BONNER scans the space, checking his job. He removes gloves, unties apron, let's out a weary exhale as he and CAMERAMAN exit.

The stage goes dark for time required, then lights up on:

SCENE 2: BONNER'S OFFICE

Minimal furnishings: a desk, a chair, a couch. BONNER for GOVERNOR signs lean against the desk.

REX, (late 30's/40) BONNER'S campaign manager, paces, talking on headset.

REX

No! No! That was *not* what he said. You took his words totally out of context!

SHEILA (40's/50) BONNER'S wife, enters. She speaks with a low, demanding tone.

SHEILA

Where is he?

REX closes call.

REX

Sheila! I thought you weren't coming until ...

SHEILA

Where's my husband?

REX

He's on his way. They just wrapped the hotel event.

SHEILA

This Electathon farce has to stop! Did you put him up to it? Why the hell ...

REX

(defensive)

Hey, we had no choice given the I.P.V.

SHEILA

The what?

REX

The Indelible Perception Value. If he refused to participate, the working class voters would feel invisible, snubbed, their jobs beneath him.

SHEILA

So instead, he's 'perceived' as an incompetent buffoon. Of *no* value. It's an embarrassment. And that reflects on me.

REX

Sheila, you promised you'd stick with him, however detached, until after the election.

SHEILA steps to couch, sets handbag on it.

SHEILA

How many of these silly Electathon events are there?

REX

The candidates do ten everyday jobs. Like the decathlon in the Olympics, only ...

SHEILA

I married a fool.

REX taps keyboard on tablet. Tilts it for her to see.

REX

He just completed the housekeeping gig at the Hilton. He did the meat plant, the restaurant, the garbage collection route. After that he assisted a triage nurse at Regents ...

SHEILA

I saw that video. Made him look weak.

REX

Who knew he faints at the sight of blood?

SHEILA

I also saw his ride-along in the police car. Stupid, stupid questions. Spilled coffee all over. The putz!

BONNER enters from audience, looking worn.

SHEILA

There you are.

BONNER
(murmurs)

Thought you were in Florida.

SHEILA removes expensive coat, lays it across couch.

SHEILA

How could I stay away when I'm needed for *disaster relief!*

BONNER collapses in chair, not listening.

BONNER

Can't believe how messy people are. I got 45 minutes to change sheets and pillow cases, replace towels, clean the bath, vacuum, wipe down. And these *pigs*, they leave open pizza boxes on the floor and all kinds of crap and condoms strewn around.

SHEILA

What swelling of the brain made you agree to this?

BONNER

People are slobs.

SHEILA

Some kind of phallic man dare? Whatever it was, you look like a loser. And me along with you.

REX takes call.

REX

It's Rex. Hang on. *(clicks link on tablet)* Yeah-yeah, I see it.

SHEILA

See what?

REX

Nothing.

SHEILA

What!

REX

They're showing the maid redoing a couple beds he did. No big. It was expected.

BONNER

I got better. *(points at REX)* Rex, I got a lot better! They're editing out the best stuff! You call that committee. Tell them I'm going to sue their ass!

The desk phone rings. REX lifts receiver and hangs it up.

REX

Hey, take it easy. You don't have much time before the next event.

SHEILA

There's not going to be a next event.

REX

He can't back out. He'd be a quitter.

BONNER

I am not a quitter.

SHEILA

No, you're a fool. I married a ... Jesus! Why didn't you say, "No thanks, this Electathon is a game show. And I don't play contrived games, I do reality. I call for real policy decisions people believe will better their lives."

REX

(on phone)

What vacuum cleaner?

SHEILA

Stick to what you do well. The shiny confidence. Your slick delivery.

REX clicks tablet. BONNER'S voice on tablet sped up: "How do I turn it on? How do I turn it on? How do I turn it on?"

SHEILA

Let me see that.

REX

It's just a meme.

SHEILA

How amusing. The social media savages are ripping you apart.

REX

They're doing it to the other candidates.

SHEILA

Did Rex put you up to this fiasco?

REX

Hey, you knew about the Electathon.

SHEILA

It wasn't called that.

REX

Okay, "Candidate Immersion."

SHEILA

Some socialist media influencer ...

REX

Yeah, well she was spot on about voters wanting to see politicians dip their hands in dirty dishwater.

SHEILA

It was dead on delivery. How it ever got ...?

REX

How? Governor Wadley...

SHEILA

That excrescence.

REX

... selected a bi-partisan committee to oversee it. That's how.

SHEILA

His farting gift.

BONNER

I need a drink.

SHEILA

What happened to talking your way into the ballot box? Taking the congenial photo op? Shaking hands with a hard hat? “As Governor of this great state, I’ll see to it that blah blah. I’m Ron Bonner and I approve this message.”

BONNER rises, goes to desk.

BONNER

I’m Ron Bonner and I need a drink.

BONNER plucks a pint of amber liquid from drawer.

REX

(into head set)

You’re joking.

BONNER pours a drink, sits.

BONNER

No, I’m not joking.

SHEILA

That’s how candidates get elected. They make promises, negotiate corporate deals, host fundraising parties and get *THE MONEY!*

REX

Oh my god. *(taps on tablet)* It’s gone national. The news networks picked it up. The whole country is watching the videos. *(takes another call)* I know. I got it! I got it! *(to BONNER)* Twitter’s on fire.

CASSIE an intern, enters. She carries a hanger of clothes and a pair of rubber soled shoes. She ignores Sheila and Rex, approaches BONNER.

SHEILA glares at BONNER.

SHEILA

Happy? You’re now a pathetic spectacle.

CASSIE

Here. See if these fit.

BONNER

What are they for?

CASSIE

Your next gig. The soup kitchen.

SHEILA

A soup kitchen. Oh, that's rich. Watch Mr. Silver-Spoon-in-Mouth fork over food to the homeless and downtrodden. They'll throw it back in your face.

CASSIE

You'll be on your feet for three-plus hours. *(gestures to BONNER'S loafers)*
Come on. Get'em off.

BONNER slips off loafers.

BONNER

Fine. I'm a server. Ladle beans and Jell-O onto a tray.

CASSIE

And clean up after.

SHEILA

He'll need lessons how to hold a broom.

BONNER sticks a foot in one of the shoes.

CASSIE

They've got a thick, resilient sole.

SHEILA

(to CASSIE)

Stop with the sole! Whatever your name is, *intern*, get down to campaign headquarters and tell them he doesn't have time for it.

CASSIE

It's Cassie.

SHEILA

He's got a keynote speech to give. A death in the family. Make something up. Something urgent.

BONNER

I'm hungry.

REX

(into headset)

Got it. *(to BONNER)* Your poll numbers have slipped. But so has Bob Perez's.

SHEILA

Do you have video of Perez?

REX clicks on a link, shows SHEILA.

CASSIE

(to BONNER)

I'm not going to make up something.

SHEILA

At least Perez acts like he's into it.

BONNER ignores CASSIE.

BONNER

Like any plaintiff's attorney.

SHEILA

No scowl on his face like it's a big bother.

BONNER

With his colitis, I bet he had help pushing that housekeeping cart.

Desk phone rings. REX immediately lifts and drops the receiver.

REX

Perez is not the problem. It's the Independent, Camerlaine.

BONNER

She was raised on a farm!

REX

A reservation. *(takes another call)* Yeah? Oh, that. No worries.

BONNER

What worries?

REX

One of the diners who saw the incident at the restaurant.

SHEILA

Incident?

REX

The Waiting Tables Event.

BONNER

It was nothing. No video.

REX

Got lucky there. The cameraman came late.

SHEILA points to BONNER.

SHEILA

What'd he do?

REX

Got into an argument with a patron over the TK pipeline. Nearly came to blows.

BONNER

Fat ass grabbed my collar.

REX

So he dumped the dinner plate on the man.

SHEILA

How gubernatorial.

BONNER

(to REX)

Tell her the upside.

REX

The restaurant is thinking of renaming the dish: The Pipeline Platter.

BONNER stands in new shoes.

BONNER

And if I win?

REX

The Bonner Brisket.

BONNER struts around.

BONNER

Hey these are cushy.

CASSIE holds up shirt and pants.

CASSIE

Okay. Now for wardrobe.

BONNER

I'm not wearing no tan clothes.

CASSIE

It will help you look the part. Not stand out.

BONNER

I *want* to stand out.

CASSIE

No. Better you blend in with the other servers.

BONNER bats away shirt.

BONNER

I don't do tan!

SHEILA

It washes him out.

BONNER

Anybody else getting hungry?

REX

(into headset)

Wait. *(to CASSIE)* Do you mind picking us up some sandwiches?

BONNER

No chicken. *Anything* but chicken.

REX

(to SHEILA)

The Packing Plant Event. He worked the line.

CASSIE

Swamped in sweat.

SHEILA throws her hands up.

SHEILA

That's it.

BONNER

How can they go through that every day?

CASSIE

To survive.

SHEILA lifts coat off couch. REX takes her aside.

REX

Sheila, wait. He just needs to nail these last three events. The voters will forget the earlier ones, like always.

SHEILA

Oh, aren't you forgetting the Indelible Perception Value.

REX

He can do this.

SHEILA

They're laughing at him.

REX

Not all, not all. (*shows SHEILA some stats*) Look, six percent actually feel sorry for him. 18% admit they couldn't do any better and ...

SHEILA

What are the last three events?

REX

The soup kitchen. Then road work of some kind...

SHEILA

Road work, okay, prep him. Hire a highway engineer to give him the lingo so he doesn't sound dumb as a donkey.

REX

No outside help allowed.

SHEILA

Figures. And the last one?

REX

They keep the 10th a mystery.

SHEILA

Don't tell me. Viewership?

REX

(nods)

The finale.

SHEILA picks up handbag, turns to exit downstage.

SHEILA

I'm done here.

REX

What? No, wait. Listen. We're editing the best clips into a strong, 30-second spot that will turn the campaign around. Where are you going?

SHEILA

Back to my maiden name.

SHEILA exits.

Stage goes dark for wardrobe change. Desk phone rings during this time.

SCENE 3: BONNER'S OFFICE – THAT EVENING

Lights come up on REX talking on headset.

REX

I'm listening. *(walks to desk, hangs up desk phone, pulls pills from bottle, downs them dry.)* No, we agreed to the earlier time slot. *(hears sound of elevator doors)* Yeah, well that's your problem. So, FUCKIN' FIX IT!

BONNER enters. CASSIE follows.

BONNER

My arms are going to fall off. That thing is powerful.

CASSIE

We didn't know cleaning up the kitchen would mean him working a floor polisher.

BONNER

The torque on that puppy. Whoa. *(acts it out.)* But once I got the feel of it, me and that machine—we were in a zone!

REX

(into headset)

What? They already posted it? *(clicks tablet)* Oh God.

BONNER

Let me see.

REX

They're only showing the start, when the thing jumped out of your hands. *(into mic)* Yeah-yeah, I can see it's on a loop!

BONNER

Those bastards! I handled it fine! When I finished, that floor, it shone like the sun! The *sun!*

Stage goes dark to change wardrobe.

SCENE 4: NEXT DAY

Lights comes up on REX on headset. His hair's a mess, shirt tail hanging out.

REX

Come on ... pick up ... Sheila, this is Rex. Call me. We need you next to him for the interview tomorrow.

BONNER, filthy, stumbles in with another man, OLLIE, a truckdriver. Obviously, they've been drinking.

BONNER

I drove a dump truck! It was fantastic! We laid that class... uh...

OLLIE

Class five.

BONNER

Class five, yeah.

OLLIE

Limestone.

BONNER

This here's Ollie.

OLLIE

We done goo-ood.

BONNER

We done real goo-ood! Wait 'til you see the video! No way can they distort *that*.

OLLIE

Got a new slogan even.

BONNER and OLLIE look at each other.

BONNER & OLLIE

Let's pave your pathway to the future!

REX

Ollie ...

OLLIE

He was awesome.

BONNER

Ollie wants to take me pheasant huntin'.

REX

Great, that's great. But now Ollie, you got to go. We need to have a private conference.

OLLIE

Oh, sure-sure.

BONNER

Hey, I'll circle back. Thanks, buddy.

OLLIE

You got my vote, brother!

OLLIE and BONNER fist bump. OLLIE exits.

BONNER

What's up?

REX

Nothing's up, it's all down. But we have a way to get momentum back.

BONNER

I'm going to wash up. Then we talk.

BONNER exits. REX punches phone.

REX

No, I didn't see it. Where? *(closes call, pecks at tablet)* Oh my God. *(makes a call)*. Hey, it's Rex. Did you hear 19 states are considering an Electathon as part of their political races. No shit. 19! Anyway, where are we at with the TV spot? Well don't let me keep you. *(kills call, makes another)* Sheila, it's Rex again. Pick up. It's urgent, like a coronary.

BONNER enters, rubbing his hands.

BONNER

Alright, where were we?

REX

Before I tell you, I need you to know, we're fine.

BONNER

How bad fine?

REX

The funding's dried up. Some heavies pulled out. You're 11 points down.

BONNER paces pensively.

BONNER

(oddly optimistic)

So we're tanking. Okay.

REX

Not so fast. We've got a state-wide town hall tour where you'll deliver a bold new vision that'll fire them up.

BONNER puts his arm around REX'S shoulder.

BONNER

That's great, but ya'know, I've been thinking things I never thought before.

REX

Things ...?

BONNER

And I don't want to wait.

REX breaks away from BONNER.

REX

Wait. What, what, what things?

BONNER

You're going to call a press conference right outside.

REX

For when?

BONNER

Now.

REX

Like, *now now*?

BONNER sets coat on chair.

BONNER

Yes. It's time to meet the moment head-on.

REX

You're scaring me.

BONNER rolls up sleeves.

BONNER

I'm going pre-emptive.

REX

You're not done! There's still the mystery event. We're nine days out. Come on! The campaign is on the launch pad. We need to prep you for the CNN interview ...

BONNER pulls paper out of pocket, unfolds it.

BONNER

It's not a concession speech.

REX

You wrote your own speech?

BONNER nods with a smile, clears throat, reads.

BONNER

This Electathon has been a real eye opener for me. I had no true sense of how hard people bust their hump to put bread on the table day after day. I know, I looked foolish doing their work. Probably lost a lot of loyal supporters. I get it. And I understand why this 'candidate immersion' was adopted. Many of those

running for office live far removed from the working folks. They're up in high towers, out of touch. Whereas this, this puts a real face on the very people we claim we're working for. The Inez's and Officer Rourke's, the Claudia's, Nguyen's, Roberto's and Ollie's. I'm a changed man because of them. Win or lose, I stand here a changed man.

REX
(nods)

All right. All right. Though, I would suggest ...

BONNER raises hand at REX, turns paper over.

BONNER

But the Electathon also made me see things I didn't want to see. Let me be candid. People are slob.

REX

Oh, God ...

BONNER

People are thoughtless and wasteful slob. Not all people. But plenty enough. A lot of good time is wasted cleaning up messes others make. I saw it firsthand at the hotel. I saw a waste of good food left on plates at the restaurant that could've gone to the hungry. Not to mention the mountains of waste we haul off in garbage trucks.

REX

You're going to piss'em off.

BONNER

We're a wasteful state.

REX

Stop, Ron, s-stop. I'm begging you. The press will clip your speech to three words: *People are slob.*

BONNER turns, speaks straight to audience.

BONNER

What I'm saying is, it's about time we valued each other's time. For the little time we have, we waste far too much doing wasteful things. The way I see it now, Time itself is a victim that needs our full attention, our respect, and our love. Time, my friends, is a precious gift. Let's stop wasting it!

REX

Oh Jeez, the wheels just spun off ...

BONNER

Now if you want a governor who will work tirelessly to eliminate wasteful behavior, wasteful spending, and the systemic abuse of Time, Ron Bonner's your man.

REX reaches for speech paper.

REX

Gimme that.

BONNER clamps the paper in his fist.

BONNER

Call the press.

CASSIE enters carrying an envelope. BONNER stuffs speech in shirt pocket, heads down stage.

BONNER

I'll be in the lobby.

REX

NO!!!

CASSIE
(to REX)

What just happened?

REX
(succumbs)

It's over.

CASSIE

What do you mean "over"?!

As CASSIE hurries down stage, REX carefully removes headset, sets it and tablet on desk, then bursts out an aching wail.

REX

I had this! GAHHHHHH!

He kicks the BONNER for GOVERNOR signs across the floor.

CASSIE catches up to BONNER, hands him envelope.

CASSIE

What happened? Where are we going?

BONNER opens unsealed envelope, plucks out two dollars.

BONNER

What's this? Two dollars?

CASSIE

It's from the Hilton Hotel event. Room 312.

BONNER

This some joke?

CASSIE

No. A guest left you a tip.

BONNER

Did you say 312?

CASSIE

Uh-huh.

BONNER

My last room. I cleaned that room. *I made* that bed. There was no re-do.

BONNER raises champion arms, wags the two one-dollar bills in the air.

BONNER

YES!

Stage lights dim.

END