

Town X Script

(We open on a sparse stage. There is a small table stage left, a first aid kit on top of the table. Stage right sits a small cart, with an old-fashioned radio on top of it, playing old country music. There is a lectern in the center. On the lectern is a sign showing a non-descript town seal. The town slogan reads: "Everything is normal here!" There is a dusty box, covered with outdated Christmas wrapping paper, off to one side, with a sign on it that reads "TOY DONATION, TOYS FOR TOTS, PLEASE DONATE" SARAH SWANSON enters, shuffles some papers, and then nervously goes over to change the radio station. She finds a clear station for a moment, with a news report - you can just barely make out the word "disturbance". She fusses with the radio as the station turns to static, but can't find the report again. There's just music.)

SARAH: Please, come in, and sit down as quietly and quickly as you can. No need for alarm, not at this very early stage. It's far too early for alarm. A reminder: this is an obligatory town meeting. All citizens must be present. If you know of any citizen who is not present, please get in touch with now. We are not sure how long the phones will be active, and we don't want anyone roaming the streets. Look to your right, look to your left. Be smart. We are waiting for the mayor, when she gets here, we will officially begin the meeting, and I will be able to...well, she'll be able to tell you...well, we'll just have to wait for her to get here. I can't think what's keeping her. Thank you for -

(MAX enters with the clang of the door.)

SARAH: Thank goodness, we're all *(Catches sight of Max, who enters with a large manila file.)*...hello?

MAX: Hi, there.

SARAH: Hi, there.

MAX: Um...

SARAH: You must be-

MAX: Maxwell.

SARAH: Maxwell.

MAX: Max. *(He extends his hand, she doesn't take it.)* Deputy Assistant Secretary to the City Planner.

SARAH: Max.

MAX: *(Looks through his file.)* And you are?

SARAH: Sarah.

MAX: Sarah...

SARAH: Sarah Swanson.

MAX: Sarah Swanson.

SARAH: I'm filling in. *(She steps forward, hand extended for him to shake.)*

MAX: Oh...right.

SARAH: And you're late.

MAX: Right, sorry I'm late. *(Crosses to table and puts down file, starts looking through his papers.)*

SARAH: Car trouble?

MAX: Yeah.

SARAH: Terrible car trouble?

MAX: *Terrible* car trouble.

SARAH: Engine wouldn't start?

MAX: That's right, the engine wouldn't start, my car just stopped in the middle of the road. There was some disturbance.

SARAH: Disturbance?

MAX: Yes, but perhaps I shouldn't...*(indicates the audience)*. You know. Keep calm and everything.

SARAH: Of course. Keep calm. Excellent advice.

MAX: Hard to follow.

SARAH: Sometimes, yes.

MAX: I had to hitch a ride with an old man who just couldn't drive any slower if he tried, you know, and then I knew I might be late for the zoning meeting *(catches sight of the audience)*. Wow. There have never been this many people here for a zoning meeting -

SARAH: Oh, it's not a zoning meeting. It's an emergency town meeting, and we're waiting for the mayor.

MAX: Oh! The mayor! You don't say.

SARAH: I do.

MAX: *(Crosses behind her to lean on radio.)* An emergency town meeting? Well, then that makes more sense. That's very exciting.

SARAH: Is it?

MAX: Of course. But...uh....it's not on the schedule, I didn't see it on the calendar.

SARAH: Well, there's no such thing as a scheduled emergency.

MAX: No, no, I guess not.

SARAH: And, it's not exciting, it's terrifying. Have you ever seen an emergency? It's completely unplanned, people running through the streets, fires, sirens, all kinds of things like that -

MAX: Right, right, of course, of course. It's a good thing everyone's here.

SARAH: Yeah!

MAX: And it's a good thing I always carry the emergency protocol with me.

SARAH: Yeah! What?

MAX: Yeah, I never leave home without it. Just in case.

SARAH: You don't?

MAX: Never. *(MAX takes out the emergency protocol booklet from his pocket).*

SARAH: What's in that?

MAX: *(Crosses SR.)* Oh, it's the instructions, you know, what we're supposed to say and do, and how to contact the army, and the navy, and the reserves, or whatever.

SARAH: You think we need help?

MAX: Well, we might. You never know.

SARAH: Oh. Well, that's lucky then, that'll tell us exactly what to do *(tries to grab the book away, he blocks her)*. Let me just turn down the radio, I was waiting for the news report.

(As SARAH turns off the radio, the booklet disappears.)

SARAH: What's the matter?

MAX: *(Turning back.)* On second thought, um, we don't need the protocol..

SARAH: We don't?

MAX: Right, yes, because you're always so in control, so organized.

SARAH: Thank you *(MAX gestures SARAH back towards the podium and sits)*. I try. How would you know that, though, we just met-

(The radio clicks on.)

RADIO ANNOUNCEMENT: Good evening, citizens of *(blurred sound here, some static)*. This is The Mayor. I have some grave news tonight. There is a threat in our town. Something has *(blurred sound again, sounds like "landed")* near our borders. I am at work at the moment, securing some help from our armed forces. I must be brief with this message. Please. Stay inside. Do not look at the sky. Do not look at the windows. Stay where you are. It is imperative that you stay where you are and stay together. Follow the instructions of all governmental officials, no matter how low level and unimportant they may appear. Follow all instructions *(screeching noise is heard, radio clicks off)*.

MAX: *(Standing, crossing SR, to radio.)* Oh my God. Did that say *landed*? What does that mean?

SARAH: *(Crosses to chair and sits.)* I don't know.

(Pause.)

MAX: Well, I watched a lot of sci-fi movies and stuff as a kid, and I think...*(trails off)*...well, you know.

SARAH: *(Stands.)* What?

MAX: Nothing.

SARAH: Okay, you heard what the radio said. *(Moves back to the podium.)* We need to stay calm. Take control.

MAX: You're right! Of course you're right.

SARAH: I am, yes. *(Sirens are heard.)*

MAX: But do you really think everyone should stay in here?

SARAH: You don't?

MAX: I mean, shouldn't they go warn their friends, family members? That's what I would do. Should do. If I had any.

SARAH: I think we should follow the directions.

MAX: But if your mother were out there, your child...

SARAH: Maybe you're right.

MAX: As long as no one looks at the sky...

SARAH: Yes, of course.

MAX: Or the windows.

SARAH: Right.

MAX: *(Crossing to table SL and taking off jacket.)* I'm not prepared for this kind of thing. Now, if it was a case of cow tipping, or a fence dispute, or something, see, that's the kind of thing they teach us. Not about how to control the crowd at some kind of invasion-

SARAH: *(Backs away from him.)* Invasion?

MAX: *(Turning to face her.)* What?

SARAH: How do you know it's an invasion? It could be anything.

MAX: I don't. I didn't say that.

SARAH: Yes, you did *(gives him an odd look, MAX takes a deep breath).*

MAX: I just wish I could find my book. I know it would tell us what to do, give us someone to contact, at least. Someone in charge. I mean *really* in charge. You know.

SARAH: Okay, then, why don't you look for that. You probably just misplaced it. *(He begins to look through his jacket.)*

MAX: What are you going to do?

SARAH: I'm...going to make...a brief announcement.

MAX: Okay. *(Beat.)* Really?

SARAH: Yes.

MAX: Are you sure you're qualified for that?

SARAH: Yes.

MAX: I'm impressed. May I watch?

SARAH: Just look for the protocol, please.

(MAX continues to look through his clothing for his book, SARAH readies herself at the lectern.)

SARAH: May I have your attention for this...brief...announcement. *(Shuffles papers.)*
Citizens of -

MAX: Don't forget to tell them to hydrate. *(SARAH gives him a look.)* What?
Hydration is very important! *(He turns back, the first aid kit has disappeared, he makes a startled noise.)*

SARAH: What's the matter?

MAX: Nothing.

SARAH: *(Crosses SL to him.)* No, what?

MAX: Nothing.

SARAH: *(Grabs jacket from him)* Where's the first aid kit?

MAX: *(Grabbing his jacket and crossing back towards the radio.)* I don't know, it's gone.

SARAH: What are you talking about?

MAX: Okay, that's it. *(Hangs coat on coat rack and steps up to lectern.)* We need to take control of this situation, immediately.

SARAH: *(Struggling with him at the lectern.)* I thought that's what we were doing.

MAX: *(Stops and gestures SARAH toward him, they are both behind the lectern, facing one another.)* There's something weird going on.

SARAH: That's true.

MAX: But the thing is, what if it's not out there? *(HVAC kicks on.)*

SARAH: What if what's not out there?

MAX: You know. The thing. Something weird. What if it's in here? I think the radio was right. No one in, no one out. At least until we can figure this out. I think we need to figure out if everyone here is...you know.

SARAH: What?

MAX: *Supposed* to be in here.

SARAH: I don't know everyone in this town, do you?

MAX: No, of course not. That's what I'm saying.

SARAH: So, maybe we should just make sure that nothing...else...slipped in here.

MAX: *(Crosses SL to table.)* You've got it. Think about it. My book, your kit. Not normal.

SARAH: Let's not lose our heads, Max, everything is normal here.

MAX: I know. I know that. All I'm saying is, it could be anyone. *(HVAC kicks on.)*

SARAH: I guess you're right. *(Turns and looks out at audience, moving DR above the lectern.)* That's creepy.

MAX: *(Moves DL towards audience.)* It is.

SARAH: Mmmm.

MAX: Mmmm.

SARAH: *(Turning back to MAX.)* So what do we do now?

MAX: I suppose we conduct an investigation. *(He goes back to check the file, opens it, closes it, and crosses to his coat on the coat rack SR.)*

SARAH: An investigation. Right.

(SARAH crosses to the file and idly flips it open.)

MAX: If I could only find –

SARAH: Your book!

(She holds it out to him, MAX takes it, reluctantly.)

MAX: But how did that –

SARAH: What does it say?

MAX: *(Begins to flip through.)* Fish and Game Licensing, State Park and Tributary Topographic Maps, Sewer Dos and Don'ts, and pretty much everything's a "don't" when it comes to sewers...

SARAH: Let me see *(takes the book)*. What about this *(shows him)*?

MAX: *(Reads from the book)*. Emergency Protocol: Tests to Determine the Humanity of Citizens.

SARAH: The *Humanity of Citizens*.

MAX: I don't remember that being in here.

SARAH: Maybe you just never noticed it before.

MAX: That's not like me.

SARAH: What does it say?

MAX: It says we need some...scientific equipment.

SARAH: Like what?

MAX: Beakers?

SARAH: No.

MAX: Flasks?

SARAH: No. *(Gets the toy donation box and sets it on the US edge of the table.)* What about this?

MAX: *(Comes over to look.)* That's...a box of junk.

SARAH: Don't discount my ideas just because you didn't think of them yourself, that's really unattractive.

MAX: Alright, alright. Let's see. *(Begins taking some of the toys out.)* Some of this might be workable.

SARAH: What's the next step, after you set up the test?

MAX: We need to choose the most likely citizens, to save time.

(They both move downstage, and peer out at audience.)

SARAH: They all look really weird. How do we choose?

MAX: *(Turns page.)* Ah, here it is. "A Guide to Choosing the Most Likely Citizens in an Almost Random Way Or At Least In a Way That It Will Seem Random To Them, but Is Actually Sort of Profiling." I don't think I was meant to read that last part out loud.

SARAH; Most likely not. Give it here. *(Takes the book.)* This doesn't look too hard. You set that up, I'll manage this first part.

MAX: Probably wise.