

# ***Tilting***

**by Jennie Webb**

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# Tilting

## CHARACTERS:

**A**, "a capable-looking woman," is all in America that is good and conservatively compassionate and blind. She sees only what she wants to see, and will not be convinced that there is more or less than there seems to be. In her view. Because things are nicer and more manageable that way. She likes words, especially interpreting them. This empowers her. She can turn on a dime, but is America and all its value and ethics. And since America is the only thing *with* value ...

**B**, "a reluctant man," prides himself on seeing all and hearing all and knowing enough about everything to tell you what's wrong with it. He is quite comfortable wearing his discomfort with the country and the world on his expensive, tailored sleeve, pointing out what is unjust and what should have been done. By somebody else. In theory. Think intellectuals who write in journals and prophesy doom to their inner circles over single malt scotch, all the while enjoying their money and holding their purse strings.

**C**, "a worn and wary woman," has worked all her life and will probably work until the day she dies. But she's strangely invisible. Despite the fact that her skin color or her cultural or religious practices, or her lack of an education, make her quite different from the people who hire her. She may be one of America's disadvantaged, but feels it's to her advantage to provide—it's her job—with the hope that something, some day, will come trickling down.

**X**, "a somewhat vacant man who doesn't take up much space," is an empty vessel created in America's image. Raised in the public's eye, he has learned to tell people what they want to hear. To the best of his abilities, anyway. Since he has absolutely nothing to say. Although this makes him very wrong for the role he's been cast in, he's surrounded by people who tell him he's perfect in the part and he's just stupid enough to believe them. As a result of his impressively steel-clad ignorance of his vacuousness, he is difficult to stop once he sets his small mind to something, and ultimately very dangerous.

**Y**, "a loud and bright girl," appears to have multiple personalities. She is pleased as punch with herself and what she does, because she's damn good at it. Manipulating all facets of public perception, she skillfully handles, spins or embroiders whatever material she has to work with. She pulls the wool over the eyes of a grateful America; what's black she can color white, and vice versa. By making up the rules as she goes along, she can turn anything into gold. She's so good at playing the game that she forgets it is a game, and sees nothing wrong with switching teams at half time.

**Z**, "a confrontational young woman," is a member of a disaffected generation; she's disgusted with the country the way it's been left to her, but doesn't have enough confidence to think she can change it. It pisses her off to see people getting away with shit, because she can't. She feels like she's all alone, wants to belong to something and be worth noticing. But what she does or says to get noticed generally makes everyone close their car windows. It seems like maybe she's very, very close to giving up because it's all too hard.

**LOUDSPEAKER** reports the news.

## SETTING:

Anyplace in America where there is a table to which things are brought, around which things are decided, or on which things are set, served, lain out.

## Tilting

*A capable-looking woman, called A, sits alone at a long table which runs across the width of the stage. Placed along the upstage side of the table are three chairs; the woman sits in the center chair; in front of her is a bell. She holds a letter and is beaming, obviously pleased with herself and the world around her. She speaks directly to the audience.*

A:

Do I seem as if I'm about to explode?

Because that's certainly the way I feel. Now that I've got *this ... (indicating the letter)* it's as if I'm bursting from the seams!

No. That's not right. It's not ... Bursting *at* the seams! Yes. Almost ready to pop. To take off. Well, not really to take off, that gives rather a mixed message. Implying removal. And has nothing to do with seams.

But you know that feeling inside when just *everything* couldn't be more right, because an *emptiness* is about to be *filled*? It's an extraordinary feeling, let me tell you. One which makes our country look a whole lot better, especially to those of us who didn't even know we were empty! Ha ha!

To be honest, I suppose I've been waiting for a moment like this my entire life. Hoping for it. Dreaming of it. Even working toward it, as funny as that sounds. Because this is a rare moment of *absolute certainty*! The kind of moment you simply must share!

*She looks around her at the empty stage, then back at the audience.*

But *you* all know exactly what I'm talking about. Because each and every day, if we wake up with the least bit of doubt about the gentle nature of the world and our supreme place in it, we've only to look down at our doorsteps and there it is, sharing with *us*, providing proof irrefutable: *(reverently) the paper.*

I might as well admit it. I can't start my day without the paper. It's not that it's my guide, but rather ... my meter. Something to tell me that everything's just so, and this is what's what, and who's who, and where it is to be. That's an important ... measurement for me. As a matter of fact, it's imperative. To read, in black and white, the way things are.

*Pause.*

So where is it? *(shouting offstage)* And where are you? What could you possibly be doing? I'm ready to share, I can't find the paper, and you won't even sit down at the table when I'm talking to you? How come—?

B:

*(interrupting)* You're not talking to me.

*A reluctant man, called B, has appeared.*

A:

I could be talking to you. If you were here. If you were with me at the table, I could be talking to you. I would be talking to you. We two would be talking. And sharing. But no.

B:

No.

*Pause.*

A:

*(patting the chair beside her)* Please?

B:

No.

A:

Pretty please.

B:

No.

A:

But—

B:

*(interrupting)* Why should I come to the table?

A:

The *mail* came!

B:

Before. The mail came before.

A:

Yes. The mail came and it brought something very ... Well, if you were here with me we could have read it together!

B:

At the table.

A:

Yes!

B:

But now?

A:  
Now?

B:  
Why should I sit down now? There's absolutely no reason. The only reason would be if there was, say, *food* at the table ...

A:  
Please! It's not even dinner time!

B:  
It never is.

A:  
What?

B:  
How long has it been since dinner?

A:  
Since dinner?

B:  
Since the last dinner. The last time we had dinner.

A:  
I don't know why you're getting upset.

B:  
I'm getting hungry, is what I'm getting.

A:  
Did I mention that the mail came?

B:  
Yes.

A:  
Yes?

B:  
Yes.

A:  
Yes!

*Pause.*

A:  
And that doesn't pique your interest?

B:  
No!

*Pause.*

A:  
Well then ...

*She rings the bell. A worn and wary woman, called C, appears.*

C:  
Yes?

A:  
Celeste!

C:  
No.

A:  
I— What?

C:  
It's not Celeste.

A:  
Oh. Cherise.

C:  
No.

A:  
Carol.

C:  
No.

A:  
Carla.

C:  
N—

A:  
*(interrupting)* The paper! Have you seen the paper?!

*Pause.*

C:  
No.

A:  
No?

C:  
No. I haven't seen the paper.

A:  
No.

*Pause.*

I thought not. Thank you ... *(waiting for a name to come to her—it doesn't)*  
Thank you.

*The woman called C nods and disappears. The man called B noisily turns a page of the newspaper he's reading which catches the woman called A's attention.*

Oh.

*She turns back to face the audience.*

If you would come to the table, we could both read it.

*Pause.*

If you would sit down—

B:  
*(interrupting)* I don't know why I pay for this. There's absolutely nothing in it.

*He throws the newspaper onto the table, and disappears.*

A:  
*(stroking the newspaper like it's a cat)* Nothing in it ... *(loudly)* **The paper!**

Y:  
**The paper!**

*A loud and bright girl, called Y, has appeared.*

*The woman called A hands her the newspaper, and as she opens it we hear a voice from the audience through a loudspeaker.*

LOUDSPEAKER:

“June 8, 2001. President Signs Tax Cut Into Law.”

A:

Yes!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Touting advance ‘relief payments’ in the form of checks for individual taxpayers...”

A:

Relief! That’s the word!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“...the White House calls the legislation ‘an historic move toward government responsibility.’”

A:

At last!!

LOUDSPEAKER:

“However, this effort to revive a sagging economy has been widely condemned by officials...”

A:

What?

LOUDSPEAKER:

*(continuing)* “...as disproportionately benefitting the wealthiest few.”

A:

What on earth is going on here?

*She looks to the man called B who is of no help, then to the girl called Y.*

LOUDSPEAKER:

“Many say the cuts are of such an enormous and unwieldy scope ...”

A:

*(to the girl called Y)* Hello?

LOUDSPEAKER:

*(continuing)* “... that the budget’s ability to meet spending priorities such as Social Security and Medicare will be—“

Y:

*(interrupting, reading from the newspaper)* “Rejoice and welcome ye all to prosperity!”

A:

Ah!

Y:

“Citizens across this great land of ours can now march into a future which smells distinctly of financial freedom!”

A:

*(sniffing)* Why, yes! It does!

Y:

“Our chosen one will be remembered in years to come as the shining force who ushered in economic justice!”

LOUDSPEAKER:

“But top leaders call the tax plan ‘ill-conceived’ and even ‘criminal,’ warning that the cuts will bring disastrous consequences nationwide with global—!”

*The loudspeaker is interrupted by the girl called Y abruptly closing the newspaper.*

Y:

“And any nay-sayers can look with envy at the rest of America, cocooning in a secure safety net of fiscal fidelity!”

A:

Well! What did I tell you! Isn’t that wonderful! *(to the girl called Y)* But my horoscope! What about my horoscope?

Y:

I’m looking ...

Z:

For what? What is she looking for?

*A confrontational young woman, called Z, has appeared.*

A:

Hello, darling. If it isn’t my favorite daughter!

Z:

I’m your only daughter.

A:

My favorite and my only daughter.

*The girl called Y folds up the newspaper.*

Z:

Can I ask you something—why do you act surprised to see me? Every day it's the same, "Hello, darling!" Like I'm your long-lost—

A:

*(harshly, interrupting)* And now you're found. Sit down.

*She sits.*

*(turning to the girl called Y)* Well?

Y:

*(without looking at the newspaper; her tone and demeanor have distinctly changed)* "Today is your lucky day. As the Moon makes a beeline through Aires, fortune smiles upon you! You may be bristling at the unexpected, but take it all in stride. Nothing is what it seems. More and more comes your way, and you handle it in style."

*The girl called Y places the folded-up newspaper underneath the stage right legs of the table, and disappears. The table has begun to tilt.*

A:

Well!

*Posing herself stylishly, the woman called A considers the young woman called Z.*

I am now going to share something with you. *(producing her letter with great flourish)* Do you know what this is?

Z:

A letter?

A:

No! Well, yes. But this ... *this...* also *sig-ni-fies* something. Something immediate and direct. And at the same time, it's also a broad, sweeping gesture that makes me part of a larger picture, something long-term and all-inclusive. It's not only a ...

*(shouting offstage)* What did it say it was?

Y's VOICE:

A "notice of status."

A:

Yes! A "notice of status!" See! A "notice of status," personalized to me ... *(again offstage)* To me?

Y's VOICE:

To "Taxpayer." It says, "Dear Taxpayer."

A:

Yes! "Taxpayer!" That's me. "*Dear Taxpayer!*" But it's more than that, really. What this is, in my hand, is an acknowledgment of my need for ... "reconciliation," and a promise. A promise born out of ...

*Pause.*

Y's VOICE:

"Economic growth."

A:

Yes! (*smiling a very broad smile, and speaking again directly to the audience*) "Economic growth." I can't tell you how that makes me feel.

*Pause. Perhaps a patriotic song begins to swell in the background*

Sure I can! Safe! That's how I feel. (*short pause*) But I know you feel the same. We all do. All Americans.

*Pause.*

All Americans who pay income taxes. Who have incomes. Who work.

*Pause.*

Americans who work! Working Americans. Americans, together, working for America. That's how I like to think.

*Pause.*

And together we're getting taxed for it!

*Silence.*

Well. (*short pause*) I feel as if I need something.

Z:

I feel as if I need something.

A:

But I feel as if I need something real. A real thing. A real something.

Z:

I can think of something real.

A:

I need some money!

*She rings the bell. The woman called C appears.*

C:  
Yes?

A:  
I need some money. Will you please bring me some money?

*The woman called C seems confused.*

Is there a problem?

C:  
No. I mean ... You just asked me to bring you some money ...

A:  
Is that a question? Are you asking me whether I just asked you, or are you stating that I just asked you? In either case, the answer is "Yes!" It's either an answer to your question, or a validation of your statement. "Yes."

*Pause.*

Yes. Yes!

*Pause.*

Well?

C:  
I'll have to ask ... (*pointing offstage after the man called B*)

A:  
Oh. Him. Never mind, then.

*Pause.*

Thank you. That'll be all ...

*The woman called C disappears.*

A:  
... Christine.

Z:  
"Christine?"

A:  
Yes! Christine.

Z:

That's not—

A:

*(interrupting)* Have you seen your brother?

Z:

My brother.

A:

Your brother. Have you seen your brother? It's not a trick question.

Z:

I don't know about that.

A:

What? What don't you know about?

Z:

"My brother." No, I haven't seen him. Ring a bell or something.

A:

What?

Z:

Or call for him. He always comes when you call, doesn't he?

A:

Yes, he does, as a matter of fact. Bless his heart. Because he knows the way to my heart! He's my favorite—

Z:

*(interrupting)* Your favorite?

A:

My favorite son! He's my favorite son.

Z:

*(under her breath)* You don't have a son.

*A somewhat vacant man, called X, appears and doesn't take up much space. The woman called A doesn't notice him.*

A:

There are many women who would give their eye teeth for a son like him. Their eye teeth, I tell you!

*Pause.*

A:

I don't know about that, but I'd certainly give up plenty for him. For all of you.

Z:

*All of us?*

A:

All of us! All of us here! All of us now! All of us in this whole, huge, wonderful—

X:

*(interrupting)* I can't tell you how glad I am to be here and glad to tell you of my gladishness and to hear how telling it is that I am here and gladder ... I tell you.

A:

Oh! I didn't see you come in!

Z:

*(getting up from the table)* And I'm going out.

A:

You're not.

Z:

Huh? I am. I'm going out.

A:

You may think you're going out, but you're not. You're already here.

Z:

Well, if you want to look at it like that. I guess I'm already here, but let's just say, I'm going *there*. *Elsewhere*. Somewhere that's *NOT* here!

A:

You can call it what you like, but there's nowhere to go! *(short pause)* *You're already here!*

Z:

Uh huh. *(short pause)* See you, then.

*The young woman called Z disappears.*

A:

*(after the young woman called Z)* Darling?

X:

Yes?

A:  
Oh.

*Pause.*

So. (*short pause*) How has your day been? Did I tell you that the mail came? The paper came, too. I can't start my day without the paper. Today it had the most delightful horoscope in it, did I tell you that? I can't remember what it was, my horoscope—what it said—but I do remember that it was delightful all the same. It made my day, my horoscope.

Which is rather funny, really. Because that's the reverse of what should happen. If you look at the day backwards. From the end to the start. The horoscope predicted what did happen. Already. So your day makes your horoscope, after the fact, if you're a day ahead. A good thing to remember when traveling internationally.

X:  
Where did she go?

A:  
What? Oh. Nowhere.

X:  
Nowhere?

A:  
Nowhere. Not anywhere.

*Pause.*

Don't worry about it. Come. Sit with me.

*He sits to her left.*

Tell me all about your day. Every little thing.

*Pause.*

Or just the big things.

*Pause.*

Would you like me to start?

*She holds up the letter.*

A:  
Do you know what this is?

*Pause.*

Well, it's a letter, but a letter containing a message. To me— well, to us. And I mean a message in the largest sense of the word. A message to the individual—that's me—well, us—but also to our country. That we count and are counted. We count, we're counted, *and ... And we get relief!*

That's right! It says so right here. "*Immediate relief.*" No waiting around for this relief! But here's my favorite part. You want to know my favorite part of this? Not only of "this," as in the larger picture, but "this" as in this letter. My absolute, favorite part? Is ...

*Pause.*

*(shouting offstage)* My favorite part is ...?

Y's VOICE:  
"You need take no additional steps."

A:  
Yes! "You need take no additional steps." How do you like that! Which means ...  
*(whispering)* All we have to do is sit here!

*Pause.*

*(shouting offstage)* So sit down, will you? Didn't you hear that?

B:  
Oh, I heard you.

*The man called B has appeared.*

As a matter of fact, I can't imagine a day going by where I don't hear you. And I also read the letter.

A:  
You did!

B:  
I did. I read the mail, and I read the paper.

A:  
You did.

B:  
Like I do every day.

*Pause.*

A:  
And?

B:  
You said it yourself. There's nothing to do but wait!

A:  
I said that?

B:  
You said that! You delighted in saying that! It was your favorite part, is what you said.

A:  
No. That's not what I said.

B:  
In effect, that's what you said.

A:  
Ha! In *effect!* Which is not in reality.

B:  
It's the same thing.

A:  
It's not the same thing! Effect and reality are not at all the same thing! (*short pause*) I said to sit down! I said to sit down here with me right now! That's what I said! **Sit down!**

*Pause.*

B:  
No.

A:  
(*to the man called X*) Explain it to him.

X:  
Explain it to him?

A:  
Yes. Explain it to him.