

The Possible

Jarrett King

CHARACTERS:

JAY THEN - A Community Organizer and activist. Energized and confident.

JAY NOW - A Community Organizer and activist. Weary and broken. (Played by the same actor as JAY THEN)

MAYA ANGELOU - A vision.

SETTING:

THE INTERNET

- A desk in a home in an American city. 2016.
- A desk in a home in an American city. 2020.
- The San Francisco Opera House. 1995.

A COUPLE NOTES:

Underlined text should be emphasized however the actor sees fit.

(...) indicates text that is spoken by someone over the phone. The actor should allow the unseen characters they're listening to to really say whatever lines of dialogue have been made up to fill this moment. It takes more time than you think.

Lights up on the Internet.

There are two windows. Both windows hold the image of Jay at the same desk looking into a computer webcam. In one window, Jay is a static image. He is proud, confident, ready to speak at the push of a button. In this window, it is 2016.

In the other window, Jay is alive, but weary. Slumped in his chair, propping up his head with his hand. He can't remember the last time he got more than two hours of sleep. In this window, it is 2020.

Jay Now takes a breath, then measuredly presses the spacebar on his computer. The image of himself in the other window springs to life. Jay Then speaks with poetic and vigorous resolve.

JAY THEN

Friday July 29th, 2016.

I'm back again with more words
for my people on the frontlines.

On behalf of my organization,
and the many organizations
marching alongside you:

I see you.

Bent, but unbroken.

I see you.

You, with the world
kneeling its full weight into you.

I see you. And you matter.

This message is for you,
for your families,
for your children,
for your unborn—

because surely, we'll still be
on this same battlefield
five years from now.

Ten years from now.

When I'm long gone,
and all that's left of me
are these videos,
we'll still be—

Jay Now pauses the video. He's gotten a call on his cell phone, which he reluctantly answers. His voice is weary. It's clear he's spent a lot of 2020 yelling.

JAY NOW

Hello? (...) I'm on my way there now. I- (...) The big banner should be in storage, did you grab all three? (...) Just grab all three. (...) Yes. (...) I'm in the car right now. I promise.

He hangs up, breathes, blinks. He unpauses the video.

JAY THEN

–fighting this fight:

No more discussions.

We need bills.

No more press conferences.

We need laws.

No more empty gestures.

We need resolutions.

Or expect revolution.

Expect us to be at the front door of America

with mud on our boots

ready to kick in the door

and to stomp everything in sight.

Expect fire

this time,

and the next time,

and the next time.

We are done negotiating.

We are done debating.

Their time to act

has been up.

And now it's your time

to act up.

Jay Now pauses the video. Another phone call. He looks at the screen, but is too tired to even roll his eyes. He answers.

JAY NOW

Yeah? (...) I just talked to Deja. She's gonna get the banners. (...) No, I can't get them. (...) I'm— (...) I'm on the road right now. I'm too far away from the storage place to— (...) I'm about to turn on MLK. Just— (...) Just tell them I'll be a few minutes late. I got held up. (...) Okay.

He hangs up. A big, big breath. He knows he should leave, but there's something he still needs from Jay Then. Unpause.

JAY THEN

They think this is just a moment.
They think we're gonna let this rest,
and pack ourselves up,
and recycle our signs,
and let them keep us under their boots
for another 400 years.
They would rather see us dead
than free.
No.
It ends today.
It ends now.
We breathe,
for every name that we have to bury
on the other side of a hashtag.
We breathe,
for the family trees
they wanna throw their nooses over.
We breathe,
because breathing is revolutionary.

Pause. Jay Now gets another phone call. This time, he answers it with more momentum.

JAY NOW

Ma.

There is a long pause—a very long pause—while Jay Now listens to his mother. He listens so hard to her words, which appear to undo him completely.

JAY NOW

Ma...

More silence as Jay begins to sob. He gathers himself enough to respond to his mother.

JAY NOW

But I'm not, Ma. I'm not proud of myself. I can't take credit— (...) No, I can't take credit for anything. It's insanity to think I can change any of this. It's actually insane, Ma. To keep pushing and pushing against— (...) But what makes me the one to fix it? It's a knot that nobody can untie, Ma. I've been breaking my back for five years trying to make just an inch of progress and the only progress I've made is figuring out where the big banner is at for this rally that I'm already late to. So no, Ma, I can't say I'm proud. *(He gets a call on the other line.)* Hol— hold on, Ma. I have to let you go. It's work. (...) Love you too.

He quickly wipes his eyes and switches to the next call.

JAY NOW

I'm on my way. Actually on my way. I really promise. Did she find it? (...) Good.

He hangs up the phone and presses play on the video as he begins packing up his stuff. He tries to listen to Jay Then as he tosses a binder in his backpack and puts on his mask.

JAY THEN

Now I want you,
from wherever you are in this fight,
wherever you are in your souls
and in your spirits—
whether you're watching this five years from now
or a hundred years from now—
to open up your mouths,
and say it with me.

Jay Now leaves the room. The video continues to play.

JAY THEN

Say it with me loud enough
that I can hear you
from wherever in this world
that I may be:

Jay Then chants full-throated from the pulpit of his desk.

JAY THEN
What do we want?

Silence.

JAY THEN
When do we want it?

Silence.

JAY THEN
What do we want?

Silence.

JAY THEN
When do we want it?

Silence.

JAY THEN
What do we want?

Jay Then freezes, distorts. The connection drops. Blackout.

A beat.

Then, a new window. A new transmission.

It is Maya Angelou, onstage at the San Francisco Opera House in 1995. She is reading the last stanza of her poem "A Brave and Startling Truth". A poem written to commemorate the occasion: the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. A poem that was flown to space on the Orion spacecraft in 2014. Through the haze and distortion of time, she is undeniably regal and beautiful.

MAYA ANGELOU
When we come to it,
We must confess that we are the possible,

We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world,
That is when, and only when,
We come to it.

*She closes the poem, removes her glasses, and walks offstage. The crowd erupts in eternal
applause.*

END OF PLAY