

THE THIRD CHAIR

Scene Overview

Scene 1: The Setup

Ms. Chen explains the mediation agreement: complete the session by 6:00 PM or face trial tomorrow. The mediator has a family emergency and won't be coming. They're alone. Seventy minutes. Both need this to work.

Scene 2: The Trap

They acknowledge their shared predicament. Both hired lawyers who said this never works. Sam loses his concealed carry permit with a conviction. Alex loses his job. They attempt a generic statement. Both refuse. The battle begins.

Scene 3: The Board Meeting Fight

They reconstruct what happened. Sam called Alex a traitor. Alex called Sam a fascist. The argument escalated. Their children were in the room. Both are ashamed.

Scene 4: Personal Stakes & The Counter-Attack

Sam: retired Army, raising his grandson, lost his gay son Michael fifteen years ago. Alex: professor, terrified for his seven-year-old son. Alex exposes Sam: "So you chose your belief over your son." Sam devastates Alex in return: "You're raising your son to be terrified. Every day. Of me. Of people like me. He's seven years old and you've taught him the world is full of monsters. And I'm one of them. Which one of us is the better father?" Both men are shaking. Both exposed.

Scene 5: Immigration

Sam wants deportations and enforcement. Alex sees families torn apart. Both children made viscerally real: Alex's colleague's nine-year-old daughter asking "If my mom gets taken away, will you tell her I love her?" Sam's worker Jose, whose six-year-old daughter was killed. Sam argues: "She gets to stay because she successfully avoided consequences long enough? That's rewarding the successful lawbreaker. How is that fair to people waiting legally?" Alex: "So we deport her and put her American children in foster care?" Both barely holding it together. No resolution.

Scene 6: Elections

Sam establishes his epistemic worldview: "You trust institutions. Courts. Officials. The people who decide what gets called 'evidence.' I don't." Then argues voter ID through personal example: "Tyler's teacher can't name the three branches of government. But her vote counts as much as mine. I fought for this country for twenty-two years. Our votes are worth the same." Reveals: "Someone has to" decide who's worthy to vote. Alex: "You don't actually believe in democracy, do you? You believe in rule by people you consider worthy."

Scene 7: Gun Control & Private Doubts

Alex's son came home crying after active shooter drill. Sam defends the Second Amendment. AR-15s versus children's lives. Maximum intensity. Then private cracks appear: Sam admits Michael was afraid of him after Parkland, "looked at me like I might..." Alex admits he bought a gun after his son's drill, keeps it locked in his office, doesn't know why. Sam: "You're terrified. You're exactly like me." Neither changes position. Both certainties fractured.

Scene 8: Federal Force

Sam sees federal immigration agents restoring order. Alex sees unmarked vans and police state. Emergency powers that never end. "That's fascism" versus "That's leadership." No middle ground.

Scene 9: Who Rules?

The empty third chair. Someone will sit there eventually. Alex is terrified Sam's vision will win. Sam is terrified no one will enforce order. Sam reveals: "Your family can exist. Just not as equals."

Scene 10: The Humanity

After all the brutality, they ask directly: "Do you think I'm evil?" Both say no. Dangerous, yes. Wrong, yes. But not evil. They can write something true.

Scene 11: The Document

"We do not agree on matters of moral authority, governance, or national identity. We believe the other's political positions are harmful to the country. This is not reconciliation. This is compliance with a court order. We remain in fundamental moral conflict. That is the full extent of our agreement." They sign.

Scene 12: The Devastated Exit

Sam: "I still believe what I believe. Nothing you said changed that. But... I think maybe you're right about me. And I can't live with that. But I can't change it either." Alex: "I'm going home and my son is going to ask if we're safe. And I'm going to lie to him. I'm going to check the locks. Think about the gun in my office. And I'm going to hate you. And I'm going to hate myself for hating you." Sam's hands shake as he grips the doorknob. Alex sits alone, breathing ragged. Straightens the empty chair—white-knuckled. Walks to the door like a man leaving a funeral. Both men destroyed.

Scene 13: The Empty Chair

The stage is empty. Three chairs remain. The document. Silence. The terrible silence of irreconcilable difference. The third chair sits neutral. Waiting for whoever will eventually have enough certainty to sit there and impose their vision on everyone else. Very slow fade to black.