

TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND THE FOUR-COLOR WAY

by

Lance Arthur Smith

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NINE ACTORS TO PLAY THE FOLLOWING:

1. EMILE BRERETON, Asian-American
-early 30s, Deputy for the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency
2. GRACE BRERETON, any ethnicity
-late 20s-early 30s, Emile's wife, former Army nurse
3. HECTOR, any ethnicity, mother is of Asian descent
-10, the Breretons' perfectly normal nephew
4. ESTES KEFAUVER, Caucasian
-40s, Tennessee Senator and Presidential aspirant
5. WILLIAM M. GAINES, Caucasian
-30s, comic book publisher/writer and rascal
6. DR. FREDRIC WERTHAM, Caucasian
-40s-60s, defender of decency and head of a Harlem psychiatric clinic
7. ROBERT HENDRICKSON/LYLE STUART/DECENCY CRUSADER #1, Any ethnicity
Hendrickson- Senator and current Chair of Kefauver's subcommittee
Stuart- publisher and business manager for EC Comics
Decency Crusader- a concerned citizen
8. HERBERT J. HANNOCH/AL FELDSTEIN/DECENCY CRUSADER #2/POLICEMAN, Any ethnicity
Hannoch- the subcommittee's Chief Counsel
Feldstein- Gaines' right hand man, brilliant artist/story writer
Decency Crusader- another concerned citizen
Policeman- one of NYC's finest
9. NANCY SIEGEL/DECENCY CRUSADER #3/RAMONA FRADON Any ethnicity
Nancy- EC's do-everything woman
DC- another concerned citizen
Ramona- famed comic book artist

1950s Postwar America. Reeling from the shock of World War II, popular culture was forced to abandon darker stories in favor of light fare. Television icons like Lucy reinforced our innocence, as did the ever-popular comic book: Walt Disney's animal line, Funnies on Parade, and those wholesome superheroes fighting for right and the American way. But springing from fear of the bomb and The Red Scare, juvenile delinquency reached record levels and a desperate public called for its representatives to find a tangible culprit. A handy scapegoat arose in a small contingency of daring, edgy, comic book talent aggressively challenging the flow.

Truth, Justice, and the Four-Color Way explores the trials of parenthood in the face of an apparently uncontrollable media influence, and the near-obliteration of the comic book industry due to the televised 1954 Senate Subcommittee hearings.

The action of the play takes place between November 1953 and June 1954 in NYC.

I-1. THE AIRWAVES

I-2. BRERETON RESIDENCE, DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING, 1953

I-3. SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM, NYC- THANKSGIVING WEEKEND '53

I-4. ENTERTAINING COMICS OFFICES, NEW YORK CITY

I-5. FREDRIC WERTHAM'S "HOOKY CLUB"- LAFARGUE CLINIC, NYC

I-6. POPS' SODA FOUNTAIN AND NEWSSTAND

I-7. BRERETON LIVING ROOM AND FRONT YARD, SIMULTANEOUSLY

I-8. WAITING AREA, HOSPITAL NURSERY

II-1. ENTERTAINING COMICS OFFICES, NYC

II-2. BRERETON HOUSE- MID-APRIL 1954

II-3. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE INVESTIGATION HEARING ROOM 110, FOLEY SQUARE COURTHOUSE, NYC- MORNING OF APRIL 21, 1954

II-4. BUS INTERIOR- DAY

II-5. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE INVESTIGATION HEARING ROOM, NYC

II-6. OUTSIDE HEARING ROOM

II-7. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE INVESTIGATION HEARING ROOM, NYC- AFTERNOON SESSION

II-8. SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM, NYC- IMMEDIATELY AFTER 2ND DAY OF HEARINGS

II-9. LAFARGUE CLINIC, HARLEM- MID JUNE, 1954

II-10. BRERETON HOUSE

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And finally to my father Manny Smith, for insisting I write, write, write...

1-1. THE AIRWAVES

Projected on a giant screen, similar in shape to a television set. A calm, middle-aged man appears, holds up a comic book with a gruesome cover, and begins:

ANNOUNCER

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. In this comic book is a love story. A boy and girl in love. They get married, and after an offensively lurid description, illustrated of course, of the couple's wedding night, the book shows how the bride murders her husband by chopping his head off with an axe.

The screen raises, and the image fades. But the audio continues to play through transition to:

I-2. BRERETON RESIDENCE, DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING, 1953

Thanksgiving leftovers. A large oval coffee table. Papers stacked and strewn. File folders. And mounds of comic books. EMILE BRERETON, white shirt, loosened tie, and sleeves rolled up cuts his dinner in one hand and peruses a weighty document in the other. His wife, GRACE, rocks in her chair, pillows piled on her lap.

The television plays at a low volume.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

This comic book describes a sexual aberration so shocking that I couldn't mention even the scientific term on television. I think there ought to be a law against them. Tonight I'm going to show you why.

GRACE

That's enough. I can't watch this again.

She gets up, revealing a round stomach.

EMILE

I'll get it.

GRACE

I'm not an invalid.

Turns the tv off and sits back down. She starts to fish through the papers.

EMILE
 (deep in work)
 Go ahead and say it.

GRACE
 I'd rather not have another disagreement about this, thanks.
 Have you seen my book?

EMILE
 Hm?

GRACE
 (still searching the pile,
 mutters the Announcer's line)
 "A sexual aberration so shocking..."

EMILE
 (looking up)
 Hm?

Grace points to the tv.

EMILE (cont'd)
 Oh. Senator Kefauver wanted them to air it again. Nielsen's
 got his rating system tracking it high.

GRACE
 Probably because it aired after Lucy.

EMILE
 (sighing)
 Probably.

Beat. A few more bites of food.

GRACE
 Are you going to work through the entire Thanksgiving
 weekend?

No answer from Emile. Just another
 bite, and back to his papers. Grace
 gives up the search for her book and
 settles into her chair. She eats a bit.
 Then:

GRACE (cont'd)
 Tomorrow's agenda is--?

EMILE
 (chomping)
 Undecided. Senator Kefauver and I are pleading with the
 committee to reinstitute the hearings. We might film another
 spot. Kids burning comics.

GRACE

Hm.

(bite)

That's interesting.

EMILE

(off her comment)

I love it when people say 'interesting.' It means "that sounds like a load of shit."

GRACE

You know, our baby is gonna come out saying that.

EMILE

(directly to her stomach)

Sorry baby. I don't agree with our methods.

GRACE

I'm glad. They're... atrocious.

EMILE

I believe in Senator Kefauver and what he's trying to do.

GRACE

You do?

EMILE

Yes.

GRACE

What's he trying to do? Burn or destroy what we don't like?

EMILE

What's your solution?

She starts to speak, but he steamrolls through.

EMILE (cont'd)

You and I wanted to change the world, right? Well I'm in a position to do it, to actually do it. I CAN do it.

GRACE

You love it when people say 'interesting' and I love it when someone asks me a question but doesn't let me answer. And I love sarcasm.

EMILE

I'm... you're right. I'm sorry. I need to get back to this.

(lighter)

I love you.

GRACE

Yep. Back at you.

They make an extra effort to return to their tasks- Emile marking notes on the page, Grace munching her dinner.

EMILE

Look, you think you and I have been feeling indecision, uncertainty, since the war ended? Everyone has. Worldwide. But the kids in this country are feeling it far more than any of us.

GRACE

(attempting a truce)

Honey, I didn't-

EMILE

That's what Kefauver's trying to lead us through.

GRACE

I know. You explained that to me when you joined him.

EMILE

You didn't agree with his methods.

GRACE

No, and I still don't. See my thoughts a minute ago regarding the book burning.

EMILE

Some of our methods are dubious, and I don't believe it's entirely Machiavellian, but we have to proceed this way if we're to help these juvenile delinquents.

GRACE

Emile, if you believe it, and believe him, then that's enough for me. And you do believe it, right? Truly?

Work continues, as does the silence,
for a bit.

GRACE (cont'd)

You know, you promised Hector-

EMILE

-we'd put up the Christmas decorations. Shit.

(she furrows her brow)

Ignore that, baby. I know. But I can't-

Grace avoids looking at him and takes a big bite of gravied turkey.

GRACE

Uh-huh.

EMILE

(sighing)

Hector! Get down here.

(off Grace)

I can't do it tonight. Too much to prep.

GRACE

You can compromise.

EMILE

Honey, I don't think-

GRACE

Emile.

HECTOR JAY scurries down the stairs. 10 years old. He's in an authentic (plastic) spaceman helmet and a homemade radiation suit.

HECTOR

(yelling)

Uncle Emile! Why are you yelling?

EMILE

Don't you get tired of wearing that thing?

HECTOR

What happens when the Reds attack?

EMILE

When they attack, I don't think-

HECTOR

Turn on the tv, they're showing stuff about the DMZ.

He flops down on the couch. Emile and Grace exchange a look. Emile puts his papers down and turns on the tv.

HECTOR (cont'd)

It's so nifty that you have two tvs. I can't believe it. I used to have to lug our one tv upstairs to my room and it...

Nobody listens. Hector shrugs.

TV ANCHOR (V.O.)

-gathered at the demilitarized zone today to examine the aftermath of the war with Korea. Despite the armistice agreement having been signed a mere four months ago, the communist agenda continues to find supporters, foreign and domestic, who-

GRACE

Ugh, you can watch it, just turn the volume off, please. My stomach is in knots as it is.

Emile nods to Hector. Hector huffs.

HECTOR

Why is it taking so long to get the news? This stuff happened last week. I don't even know what the point is of having tv when I can just read a newspaper.

GRACE

Well, it's not like they can just, I don't know a word, "beam", I suppose. Beam it over here like (snaps) that.

HECTOR

Well, it beats the newsreels, but still...

EMILE

(going through papers)

I can't find my-

HECTOR

I can help-

EMILE

-file on-

HECTOR

-You doodle?

He pulls up a notepad.

EMILE

Yeah. On breaks. Mostly.

HECTOR

You're a great artist. This is Flash!

EMILE

No, that's Hermes.

HECTOR

That's Flash.

EMILE

I don't know him. But this is Hermes.

(beat)

Messenger of the gods?

Hector shrugs.

EMILE (cont'd)

It's autobiographical.

Hector sees comics under the files and explodes. Grace and Emile jump.

HECTOR

Whoa! Uncle Emile! That's- Shock Suspenstories number two! This is a classic! I used to have it.

He grabs the comic and starts flipping through.

EMILE

Hold on, buddy. These aren't for you to read. This is for work.

HECTOR

But they're right here.

EMILE

I work from home a lot.

GRACE

He does.

EMILE

Your mother and father don't let you read these, do they?

HECTOR

Mom says-

EMILE

Hey, I know your Mom. Very well. She'd never allow it. And I can't either.

GRACE

(gesturing to a box of ornaments)

I've an idea of what you can do instead.

Hector ignores her and rummages through the stack of comics.

HECTOR

Crime Does Not Pay #8! Some of these are over ten years old! How did you get 'em?

EMILE

I know people. Hector, just-

HECTOR

Are you burning these? Cause if so, I'll stockpile 'em. They may be worth quite a bit someday.

(muttering)

Can't believe you'd burn a classic...

EMILE

Classic? They're absolutely worthless.

HECTOR

They're not worthless to me. They're nifty. If you know me, you know-

EMILE

That's just it. It's been a month and I feel we...

HECTOR

Yes?

Grace nods "go on."

EMILE

I want to spend more time with you. Get to know you. We may be together for quite a bit longer, you know.

HECTOR

I do know that.

EMILE

So why do you like this filth?

GRACE

Oh Emile, they're not all filth.

EMILE

Most of them are.

HECTOR

Uncle Emile, I disagree. They're my hobby and I still play baseball, so I'm really well-rounded.

(to Emile)

Glad you want to get to know me. Plus knowing me helps with your work, right?

EMILE

(patting Hector's head, albeit
on top of his helmet)

You're quite bright.

HECTOR

Yeah, I'm not a delinquent.

(beat)

We don't have to put up decorations tonight.

Emile looks to Grace.

HECTOR (cont'd)

I overheard you.

(beat)

And I'm quite bright.

EMILE

Yes you are.

HECTOR

So are you. You know a lot about... a lot.

EMILE

I know a little about a lot. Big difference.
(grabs the comic, makes a mild effort)
So what makes this one a classic?

HECTOR

Oh, come on! Look at this!

He flips through and finds his argument. Emile takes it from him.

EMILE

This guy getting his limbs pulled off by a giant plant?

Grace looks up from her meal.

GRACE

Good heavens.

HECTOR

Yup. It's great, because, see it's a warning.
(leaning in, flips back a couple pages)

This rocketman pulls petals off a daisy while they're flying past, I don't know, that looks like Jupiter. I don't know. Some far off planet, probably not even in our galaxy. Anyway. Then they land on this planet full of plants. And the plants use people like we use plants on Earth. They pluck us. They mow us. We're compost and stuff for them. So- there it is.
(beat)

Don't mistreat the plants. Is the moral.

EMILE

Or they'll rip our arms off.
(shakes head)
Moral aside, this is NOT appropriate for you.

HECTOR

What difference does it make, if you know I've already read it?

EMILE

All the difference in the world. If I allow-

GRACE

Why don't you read them with him? Then make an informed decision.

The boys whirl around, stunned.

HECTOR/EMILE

Really?

GRACE

Then he's not sneaking around reading them- read them with him and you can each make your case.

EMILE

I don't think that's-

HECTOR

That's a great idea, Aunt Grace.

GRACE

Thank you.

(baiting him)

What do you think, Emile?

EMILE

(considers, then:)

Far be it from me to argue with the pregnant woman.

GRACE

Pregnancy has nothing to do with it. Just don't argue with the woman.

HECTOR

I'll make my case. Look here. It's tasteful. You don't even see the arms ripping off part; it happens off panel. See the guy's shadow? He-

Hector starts coughing, but holds up a hand to his aunt and uncle.

HECTOR (cont'd)

It's this helmet. I'm okay.

(popping the helmet off)

I'm willing to choke to look like a spaceman.

GRACE

I thought you were protecting yourself from potential fallout.

HECTOR

Aunt Grace, I made this out of some aluminum foil and toilet paper rolls. I'm not dumb. But I like the suit. It looks like I'm repelling a Martian invasion or something.

EMILE

Now I can tell the committee that we have it all figured out. It boils down to the abuse of flora.

HECTOR

I'm not sure what you're trying to prove, but if I can help-

(He salutes.)

GRACE

Brilliant.

(cleaning up, grabs stomach)

I shouldn't have eaten so late.

(moving to kitchen)

I'm going to bed, dear.

(turns)

Way past time for you, fella.

HECTOR

Mom and Dad let me stay up if I'm in bed.

GRACE

Doing what?

HECTOR

(cagey)

Drawing.

GRACE

That's fine. Only for ten more minutes, though.

He starts to go, and makes it to the stairs before-

EMILE

I need that.

Hector slyly takes the comic out of his helmet. Tosses it to his uncle.

HECTOR

Yup. Maybe after you're done I can...

(beat, in defeat)

Uh-huh. You have to admit, the art is pretty nifty. That one's by Wally Wood. They call him the Dean of Science Fiction comics. He's...

(beat)

G'night.

EMILE

Hey buddy.

HECTOR

Yeah?

EMILE

It's a deal. No more sneaking around reading, though, okay?

HECTOR

Wow. That's- wow. All righty.

He bounds up the steps. Stops.

HECTOR (cont'd)

Soooo... I'll be completely honest with you. I'm drawing my own comic book. Good night!

He leaps out of view before they can respond.

EMILE

It's only until Carmen and Toby patch things up. Which could take some time. Carmen told me this particular fight was pretty bad.

GRACE

I didn't say anything. I like having him here. I'm sorry your sister and-

EMILE

I know it's tough on you.

GRACE

No-

EMILE

Especially now.

GRACE

He's family. And he's worth it.
(taking his hand)
You'll be glad.

EMILE

I already am. Oh, you mean "the deal"?
(she nods)

I shouldn't let him read any of them. He'll get ideas. You've seen our ads.

GRACE

Oh yes. And you know I don't buy any of them.

EMILE

And now he's drawing his own funnybook? I don't like that.

She starts up the steps.

GRACE

It's time for me, too.

EMILE

Let me say good night to her.

Him. GRACE

Sure. EMILE

He places a hand on her stomach.
Whispers to the baby.

GRACE
I'm waiting for something.

EMILE
What?
(with horrific realization)
I forgot the doctor. That's not-?

GRACE
-it's tomorrow.

EMILE
They're open on a holiday weekend?

GRACE
Your committee is. It's because we've rescheduled four times.

EMILE
Well can't your mother-?

GRACE
(up the stairs)
No. She and Dad are going to the farm in the morning.

EMILE
Your reading glasses. And your book.
(reading the title)
"Sexual Behavior in the Human Female"? Kinsey. What does
your reading group think of that one?

GRACE
(a smirk)
I'm the only one reading it.

EMILE
And you're only reading it behind closed doors, correct?

GRACE
You know, that's what I can't figure out. Why a man could
read Sexual Behavior in the Human Male in broad daylight, and
I'm verboten from even whispering about this one in public.

EMILE
If I had my way, it wouldn't be an issue. But you know the
neighborhood, heck, the world is up in arms about this book.

GRACE

Well, that's what your committee is all about. Making sure simple, fragile minds aren't influenced by-

EMILE

I didn't say that. It's on my list to read, too.

GRACE

For work.

EMILE

For me.

GRACE

Hm.

(offstage)

Tomorrow?

EMILE

I'll drop you off. Telephone your mother to pick you up, though. I think the committee will be running late again.

No response.

EMILE (cont'd)

Grace?

Sighing, Emile rubs his head. He places the reading glasses and book next to the phone.

Time to regroup. He gets up and clicks up the tv volume.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

So it looks like this, uh, conflict I believe is what we're calling it. This conflict, though seemingly concluded, will actually continue for some time. The Red Menace is still very real, then?

GUEST (V.O.)

Absolutely.

The television fades.

I-3. SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM, NYC- THANKSGIVING WEEKEND '53

A group of three men (ESTES KEFAUVER, ROBERT HENDRICKSON, HERBERT HANNOCH) sit with Emile around a small oval table. Files and various coffee mugs litter the tabletop. Hannoch and Kefauver heatedly debate, though somehow Kefauver remains slightly charming through it all.

Emile writes/doodles.

KEFAUVER

(angrily, to Hannoch)

Television will continue to be an important medium, Herbert. You must see that.

HANNOCH

Of course, Estes. I'm not an idiot.

HENDRICKSON

Whoa now. Nobody's calling anybody an idiot.

HANNOCH

He is.

HENDRICKSON

Are you?

KEFAUVER

I am.

HANNOCH

Anybody with a modicum of brainpower realizes the potential of the television set. But what I'm saying, when you-

KEFAUVER

We have to harness it a hell of a lot better than we did in '51. Take Senator McCarthy-

HANNOCH

Here we go-

KEFAUVER

The man scares the hell out of me, honestly, but he knows the medium. His committee's investigation into the army is going to be televised early next year. If we piggyback that with our own-

HANNOCH

I have contacts that say higher-ups, in both parties, aren't thrilled with the way McCarthy's going about this.

KEFAUVER

What did I just say? I'm not happy with his methods, either, but-

HENDRICKSON

Gentlemen, can we get back to-

KEFAUVER

My point is the power of the box. Costello came out of the hearings smelling like roses and we came out-

HANNOCH

Costello was brilliant, for a mob goon. Charming and classy. Why would you put someone like that on television if you want them to come across as a thug?

KEFAUVER

Despite the setbacks, we all know what that broadcast did for us.

HANNOCH

For you. They called us the Kefauver Crime Commission and it did wonders for you politically.

(switch, rabbit punch)

You sure eradicated organized crime, didn't you?

KEFAUVER

If I choose to run, it'll be on my own merits.

HANNOCH

But you can't win without exposure.

EMILE

Hannoch-

HANNOCH

Exposure from our televised hearings. Your overconfidence is aggravating-

KEFAUVER

You don't-

HANNOCH

-and your arrogance is pestilential.

KEFAUVER

Big word, but off point. That parallels your practice.

HANNOCH

I've been Chief Counsel this long. You're stuck with me.

HENDRICKSON

And I'm Chairman, with all this supposed power, and I can't do squat to keep you two calm.

EMILE

With all due respect, I agree with Senator Hendrickson. We need to stay on point.

KEFAUVER

Thanks, Emile.

(rubbing his eyes)

This is quite difficult without Langer and Hennings.

(to Hendrickson)

Where are our resident mediators?

HENDRICKSON

I tried to persuade them to stay in town, but it's exceedingly difficult to convince family men to work during Thanksgiving.

EMILE

Gentlemen, Senator Kefauver's view on television-

HENDRICKSON

(quickly misdirecting)

Speaking of family men, did I hear you're expecting a baby, Emile?

EMILE

(a look to Kefauver)

Yes, Senator Hendrickson. Grace and I-

HANNOCH

Hey! That's swell, Brereton. Just swell.

HENDRICKSON

It's a big responsibility. But you're the type of man could be aces at parenting.

KEFAUVER

Yes, it's a wonderful thing. A great thing, Emile.

EMILE

... Thank you, really. We were hoping to wait a bit, but-

KEFAUVER

You don't wait with news like this, Emile. It's been months and I had to tell them.

HENDRICKSON

How far along is she?

EMILE

We should have a baby by the end of December.

KEFAUVER

(glancing over and pointing)

Hm. Is that your future child?

EMILE

...yes. Just a sketch.

KEFAUVER

Hm. Good drawing.

EMILE

(shuffling papers)

Back to the issue. I think Senator Kefauver and I would love to ascertain what good the committee can do going forward.

(MORE)

EMILE (CONT'D)

Why this time will be different. I know it'd make a difference to the taxpayers shelling out for our salaries.

KEFAUVER

Yes. Yes. See, Bob? This is why you screen through DC. Good man. Four years of working together and he still refers to both of us as 'Senator'.

(to Hannoch)

He hasn't yet latched on to the nickname I have for you, Herbert.

EMILE

Senator Kefauver, please.

KEFAUVER

(laughing, pats Emile on the back)

Good man.

He swigs some coffee, renews the attack.

KEFAUVER (cont'd)

Gentlemen, this country is at a true crossroads. We postulate what is to be done, keep our constituents happy and reap a small stipend. But do you care, truly care, about eradicating the affliction?

HENDRICKSON

That's an exceedingly naive viewpoint, Estes. Our committee, your earlier committee, is about continued research- fact finding.

HANNOCH

I've already spoken to Executive Director Clendenen. I'm advising we dismantle this subcommittee so we can each move on to-

KEFAUVER

Executive Director Clendenen. Fascinating how you hide behind titles.

(shifting)

We're not dismantling this committee, because we're not done. We need another Costello. But something more accessible, nearer to home. Emile?

Emile dips into his briefcase and produces numerous comic books.

KEFAUVER (cont'd)

You want tangible? Kids can't bring home their own personal mobster-

EMILE

(dryly)
Excluding Costello Jr.

KEFAUVER

But comic books? Most kids in America have one rolled up in their back pocket. The plague is rolling in through the screen door after playing stickball in the streets.

EMILE

Plague is a bit extreme, but-

HENDRICKSON

We looked into comic books before. Even with Wertham, nothing came of it.

KEFAUVER

Yes, but now Dr. Wertham is gaining steam.

EMILE

My wife's reading group studied his Ladies' Home Journal article and forbade their children from bringing home comics. He's securing a voice.

KEFAUVER

As a psychiatric consultant, he's one of the best. You gentlemen know. And we've been in contact with the good doctor. He's readying a book detailing the link between comic books and juvenile delinquency.

EMILE

Mass culture and juvenile delinquency, to be precise. But he predominately targets comic books.

HANNOCH

It doesn't work, and I'm fed up with rehashing this. Your little films you put out are questionable at best. I don't- I don't want to be locked into this till I'm slurping mashed peas through a-

KEFAUVER

Never happen. You'll have lost your mind well before-

HENDRICKSON

Alright now, Estes, that's-

HANNOCH

I can handle this, Bob, thanks. Besides Wertham and paranoid housewives, who's going to blame funnies for making our children into wild animals?

KEFAUVER

They're not so funny, anymore.

He grabs a stack of Crime Does Not Pay and EC New Direction books.

KEFAUVER (cont'd)

(quickly holding up covers)

Beheadings. Rape. Lawlessness and mania. We all know about crime comics from before, but look at them now! And with the advent of these horror comics, our youth are being taught a cycle of violence and hate, not to mention rampant sexuality, and it won't stop unless we stop it.

EMILE

Gentlemen, it's the cycle of violence in our youth that I'm most concerned about. You'll recall-

KEFAUVER

Yes. One of the first conversations we ever had.

EMILE

It's where our paths converged.

KEFAUVER

Indeed. Gentlemen, look at this.

He tosses Hannoch a Vault of Horror #32.

HANNOCH

Good God. Is that-?

Hannoch hands it off to Hendrickson.

HENDRICKSON

(dryly)

A man with a meat cleaver hacked into his forehead. Yes.

KEFAUVER

I don't care for censorship. But maybe there's a way to win this fight without resorting to government regulation, which I know we'd all like to avoid.

HENDRICKSON

We're a fact-finding entity, after all.

KEFAUVER

We can win if we televise it. In its entirety. No bits for the evening news. We do it right, this time. The entire proceedings. And regardless of how McCarthy's hearings turn out, we'll be attacking the enemy directly. We put Wertham on television and he'll make comics the face of the enemy.

(quickly, over their questions)

Televise it, use comic books as the catalyst, and this will be the last subcommittee on juvenile delinquency. Television is a direct pipeline to the people. We'll win in the highest court: the court of public opinion.

Silence as the men stare at several comic book covers. Hannotch flips through one, shaking his head.

All contemplate this for a beat.

HENDRICKSON

This comic book angle could work.

(beat, looking at the screen)

What do we know about Willam M. Gaines?

I-4. ENTERTAINING COMICS OFFICES, NEW YORK CITY

Lights up on the eyes of

WILLIAM M. GAINES, then full up on his flat top and horn-rimmed glasses. He looks out a window, pad in hand, thinking. Emile and Hector sit patiently off to the side. Hector doodles.

A man (LYLE STUART) pokes his head in to the office. Gaines continues scribbling notes.

GAINES

Nope.

Stuart reluctantly retreats. Gaines continues to work. He gets up, munches on a dish of pasta, walks around the office scribbling.

Hector opens his mouth to speak, but Emile waves him off.

Stuart pops back in.

LYLE STUART

Bill, we need to talk about Panic.

GAINES

(he looks up)

Who's panicked?

LYLE STUART

No, the-

Holds up sheets of comic book layouts.

GAINES

Oh, Panic, the comic book. Our Panic. That Panic.

(beat)

Panic's a funny word.

LYLE STUART

That's why you chose it.

GAINES

I don't think I did. It was Wally, or... Al, actually. Or-
(yelling)

HEY AL!

Beat. AL FELDSTEIN zips in.

AL FELDSTEIN

Working, working. Whaddaya need?

GAINES

The title "Panic". You or me?

AL FELDSTEIN

(not fully listening to the
question)

Nick Meglin.

He starts to leave, spins back around
on his heel.

AL FELDSTEIN (cont'd)

Nononono it's Harvey Kurtzman. Blame him.
(stops furiously sketching)
Wait, what was your question?

GAINES

The title "Panic".

AL FELDSTEIN

Me. Why is this important?

GAINES

Lyle's hounding me about the first issue.

LYLE STUART

(to Al)

I don't care who named it. I need to go through ads and
clearances with him.

GAINES

Epiphany. Put "the only authorized imitation of MAD" on the
cover. It'll sell like hotcakes.

AL FELDSTEIN

That's good.

LYLE STUART

(to Feldstein)

Either that or put some headlights on it.

Feldstein lifts up one of the many boards he's juggling. A buxom woman shrieking in horror as a shadow advances on her.

AL FELDSTEIN

Dunno where her headlights are gonna go, yet.

GAINES

Nice. Now everybody get the hell out of here so I can think.

LYLE STUART

You haven't seen these pages yet, and I need...

Gaines glares. Stuart and Feldstein bolt. Gaines picks up his pad, scribbles, stops.

GAINES

(looking down)

Somebody's still here.

Emile starts to speak, but Gaines holds up a hand.

GAINES (cont'd)

Sorry I forgot you.

EMILE

It happens.

GAINES

All the time to me. Things are fairly chaotic here.

EMILE

I understand. I'm-

GAINES

Brereton. Emile Brereton. Assistant to Estes Kefauver, Kefauver Crime Commission.

EMILE

Deputy for the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency.

GAINES

(snaps fingers)

Yep. And who is this diminutive fellow?

Hector salutes.

HECTOR

Hector.

GAINES

Of Troy?