

#8 DECLARATION OF WAR *with* OVER THERE

In the darkness, we hear a cadence of “war drums” for a few seconds before a single light illuminates President WOODROW WILSON standing alone. He is holding a speech in his hands and reads before Congress. Drums continue throughout his speech.

WOODROW WILSON

In what I deem my constitutional duty, I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the Imperial German government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States. The world must be made safe for democracy. There are many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us. We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for to such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.

SCENE 7 – that same afternoon, Office of the Council of National Defense

A large government office in Washington, D.C. The room looks important and official. There is a conference table with six members of the President's Cabinet seated. Other "titans of industry" are standing by, and A.C. GILBERT stands before them.

BAKER

Thank you, Mr. Gilbert for agreeing to meet with us on such short notice.

A.C.

Of course. I'm honored by the invitation.

BAKER

Before we begin, I'd like to introduce the members of the Council of National Defense. I am Newton Baker, and as Secretary of War, the President has asked me to be the chairman.

(The men each nod as they are introduced. All are serious in tone.)

This is the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels. Seated next to him is the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin Lane. Secretary of Labor, William B. Wilson, is next to him. This is the Secretary of Agriculture, David F. Houston, and finally, Secretary of Commerce, William Redfield.

These other gentlemen here today are advisors from leaders in industry, like yourself, who help us make critical decisions on how to best manage the war here at home.

These men represent the best and the brightest minds in the country as we face these unprecedented times. The President has given us a mission to coordinate government, business, agriculture, labor, and transportation so that all systems can work together in an effective national defense.

A.C.

(Seeking to lighten the mood a bit . . .)

And here, all this time - I thought that's what the Constitution was for.

(HE chuckles - this is met with stony silence.)

BAKER

Now, Mr. Gilbert, I'm sure you don't want to be one of those people who question our knowledge and expertise. Conformity, at this time, is a strength. The President has had quite a lot to say about that.

A.C.

Yes, I read the papers.

REDFIELD

Secretary Newton, I happen to know that the A.C. Gilbert Company has been very helpful in manufacturing ammunition and gas masks for the war - in addition to his toy business. He is certainly a patriotic American.

A.C.

Thank you.

REDFIELD

We know that you serve as the President of the Toy Manufacturers of America and that you are considered America's leading toymaker. That carries with it a great deal of influence . . . and, I may add . . . responsibility. That's what we'd like to talk with you about.

BAKER

Let me get right to the point. Here on the council, we have been asking ourselves this question: Isn't it unpatriotic for America to allow something as unimportant as toys to be manufactured in the middle of a war?

A.C.

Secretary Baker, we've already cut back significantly to fulfill our war contracts. I hope to have a viable toy business left when this war ends.

REDFIELD

We don't want you to stop making toys permanently. Our idea is to ask all Americans, with the support of all the toy makers you represent, to encourage everyone to buy war bonds instead of toys this Christmas.

A.C.

Toy manufacturers depend on Christmas sales every year.

BAKER

Yes, but toys aren't really essential, now are they?

A.C.

They're essential to me . . . and my employees.

REDFIELD

Isn't the war work enough for now? We could send you more.

A.C.

It's not only that, I just –

BAKER

(Interrupting)

We are losing thousands of men a day over there, Mr. Gilbert.

REDFIELD

Let me try to explain. We've studied the numbers. If parents spent the same amount of money buying bonds that they would normally spend buying toys . . . it would be a significant help to the war. Your leadership with the other toy manufacturers is critical.

BAKER

And we can do a bang-up job of getting the word out that A.C. Gilbert is leading the way. Why, we can have beautiful posters in every city in America with your picture on them. "Buy Liberty Bonds instead of Toys!" I can see it now - very patriotic. Our public relations campaigns are very effective. Of course, in the end it's up to you. We can't make you do this. But I would hate for the public to get the wrong idea about the kind of man you are should they somehow learn you turned this opportunity down.

A.C.

Mr. Baker, I love our country as much as anyone, but I'm not sure that – in the end - this is a good idea . . .

(Music begins)

12 WE KNOW BETTER

SCENE 3 – that same evening, Dining Room of A.C. Gilbert's home

The Dining Room is well-appointed – reflecting the success of A.C. Gilbert. Dinner has ended as A.C., MARY, JUNIOR and ROBERT are seated around the table.

JUNIOR

Uncle Robert, Mother told me a secret about you!

ROBERT

She did?

JUNIOR

Yes. You are going to marry Anna!

ROBERT

I guess it's no longer a secret.

A.C.

It's never been a secret! We have all just been waiting for you to decide. You two are made for each other as far as I can see.

MARY

I agree. Although, I was curious about the timing, given all the war talk.

A.C.

Oh, let's not start that tonight – so close to Christmas. Just keep singing that song you like so much -

(HE sings)

I DIDN'T RAISE MY BOY TO BE A SOLDIER!

JUNIOR

But mother, what if I want to be a soldier? Soldiers are brave and strong!

A.C.

Yes, they are! But soldiers also need their sleep. Go prepare for bed and Mother and I will be up soon to tuck you in.

JUNIOR

Yes, Father. Mother, I am going to add toy soldiers to my list for Santa!

(JUNIOR excitedly exits. After a moment, ROBERT speaks.)

ROBERT

It seems even Junior understands what's going on in the world.

MARY

Sadly, yes. It's awful and it needs to end immediately.

ROBERT

I'm afraid that for us, it may be just beginning.

MARY

Then why did you propose to Anna now? It seems impossible to plan anything with these war drums getting louder every day.

ROBERT

For the very reason that I don't feel I should wait. I want Anna to know that I am committed to her no matter what may happen with the war.

A.C.

I am confident we will be fine. President Wilson won the election precisely because he kept us out of the war.

MARY

You mean the election that only men were allowed to vote in?

A.C.

Yes. That one. But - our profits have never been higher with all of the German toys off the market. The war is good business!

MARY

A.C., you know I hate it when you talk like that. There's nothing good about war.

A.C.

That's why staying out of it is so important. Every nation at war in Europe is represented by the employees on the floor of our factory. Tensions are high enough already – I cannot imagine what it would be like between them if America joins the fight.

ROBERT

But what if we have no choice? The evil atrocities we read about every day in the paper cannot continue. Poison gas? I don't believe the Germans will stop unless they are stopped by force.

MARY

We must pray and work for peace. God is not dead, nor doth He sleep.

A.C.

This conversation is upsetting my stomach!

(Music begins)

Can we at least put it off until New Year's Day?!

#7 THE MIDDLE