

“GOOD CORPORATE CITIZEN”

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 20 MINUTES

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## **SUMMARY**

Are corporations people?

## **CHARACTERS (30)**

CHECKMARK

GAP / CNN / ATLANTIC HEALTH

SMITH CANTOR PLLC / MILITARY / WAL-MART / PROCESS SERVER

All parts are doubled except CHECKMARK. All casting is open.

## **TIME**

Very much now.

## **THE PLAY**

*The lights are corporate cubicle lighting.  
Fluorescent, focused, almost irritating.*

*From the sounds of office chatter and  
American work appears CHECKMARK, a  
small online business.*

CHECKMARK

My name is Checkmark.

Checkmark, LLC.

You understand, I’m a business. A fast-growing online business.

And business has been good.

Business has *always* been good.

*CNN appears, a hipster news-poet person,  
in square frame.*

CNN

CNN Breaking News! Supreme Court has ruled new rules! Political contribution  
fools! Now businesses are the same as...people!

*SMITH CANTOR PLLC appears, a law firm  
person.*

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Checkmark!

CHECKMARK

Hey, Smith Cantor. Did you just see the news?

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

As your law firm of record I had to rush right over. I hate to tell you this  
but...apparently you’re no just longer a business.

CHECKMARK

I’m not.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

No. You’re a citizen.

CHECKMARK

A what-i-zen?

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Businesses are now citizens.

CHECKMARK

Says who?

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

CNN. [An afterthought] And the Supreme Court.

CHECKMARK

I’m a citizen.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

All because of that cash you siphoned through me to give to that political action committee so we could influence government to get your taxes lower than they already are.

CHECKMARK

And all of what you just said somehow made me a citizen.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

I know, right? Give some money to an election campaign, next thing you know there’s a landmark Supreme Court ruling giving you the same responsibilities as people! But don’t worry, these rulings get reversed all the time.

CHECKMARK

It’s the Supreme Court.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

And until CNN gets it reversed we don’t know what could happen. It could be devastating! It could unravel everything you’ve tried to grow and protect! Look, I know you’re an eager upstart but promise me you’ll keep a low profile for the time being, okay? You won’t go anywhere or do anything crazy that could gain attention?

CHECKMARK

Where would I go? I’m just a business.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Not anymore.

*SMITH CANTOR PLLC goes.*

CHECKMARK

Huh.

I’ve never been a citizen before.

I’ve always just been a veil to shield human owners and operators from the liability of their actions.

Ahh, lawyers always worry.

Even if I am legally called a citizen it shouldn’t change anything.

Because business has been good.

Business has *always* been good.

*MILITARY enters, a defense person.*

MILITARY

Po-sition, *halt!* Mmm-mm! What have we here. Let me check the list.

CHECKMARK

Excuse me, this is a private office.

MILITARY

The hell’s your name.

CHECKMARK

Checkmark. Checkmark, LLC.

MILITARY

...check, check...

CHECKMARK

The same name that’s on the side of the private building you just barged into.

MILITARY

Yep. Got you on the list.

CHECKMARK

What list?

MILITARY

Military service.

CHECKMARK

What?

MILITARY

Homeland Security. New Border Watch program to protect our citizenship.

CHECKMARK

There's obviously a mistake.

MILITARY

Lists don't make mistakes. Now grab your gear and look alive, citizen!

CHECKMARK

I think you have the wrong business here.

MILITARY

Private Checkmark, how old are you?

CHECKMARK

Five.

MILITARY

Healthy?

CHECKMARK

Yeah.

MILITARY

Latch, chamber, bolt, round, prepare to fire.

CHECKMARK

No-no-no. You don't understand. I'm not really a person.

MILITARY

Did I say person? I didn't say person. I said citizen.

CHECKMARK

Who's changing the face of industry. I can't just be told to run off to fight for...

MILITARY

...

CHECKMARK

Look, maybe we can work something out. I mean, we don't have to get *lists* in the middle of this, right? I'm the nice office by the downtown rail. The big anchor tenant. I have *responsibilities*.

MILITARY

To protect this country as needed. Now fall in...[handing the gun]...citizen.

*We hear the sounds of the ocean.*

*GAP appears, a clothing person, in a foxhole.*

CHECKMARK

Hey.

GAP

HEY! I mean: evening, ma'am!

CHECKMARK

Yeah, hi. I, uh...think I'm assigned to this watch point. I was given orders to come watch here.

GAP

GREAT! I mean: permission granted!

CHECKMARK

Okay. Um...[crouching next to GAP]...thanks.

GAP

No problem! Eyes on target!

CHECKMARK

It's the ocean.

GAP

I know but it's my first time watching! Never watched before. Kind of makes you feel electric, huh?

CHECKMARK

No. Not really.

GAP

You ever watch the ocean before? Never seen the ocean myself. I've always dreamt of it. Now I'm getting to watch it!

CHECKMARK

Has anything bad happened?

GAP

Like what?

CHECKMARK

Like...to the corporate person here before me.

GAP

You're the first. Never watched with another corporate before. Could be fun!

CHECKMARK

Well, no offense, but I just want to get back home.

GAP

Never been homesick. Maybe we could try that together! I'm Gap!

CHECKMARK

Gap.

GAP

Free shipping on orders over twenty dollars!

CHECKMARK

Checkmark.

GAP

Never met a Checkmark before.

CHECKMARK

I made a donation. To a political campaign. Now I'm here.

GAP

I smoked a joint last night for the very first time! I love trying new things!



CHECKMARK

Like shooting?

GAP

I was told we’re to watch for *immigrants*. Apparently they’re lining up to get in our country and take away our citizenship. Although. Never met an immigrant. Could be fun!

CHECKMARK

Fun? I’ve got a hundred employees back in Minneapolis who depend on me!

GAP

Frisco. Staff of a hundred thirty-five *thousand*.

CHECKMARK

Whoa.

GAP

Big corporate campus, gated entrance, sixteen bill a year top-line.

CHECKMARK

And you don’t want to get back to that?

GAP

I’m a citizen now. I get to try all the things I *watched* executives brag about all those years.

CHECKMARK

I have to get back.

GAP

Hey. I know how you feel. I was once a small business, too. Don’t worry, alright? Business will still be there when you get back. In the meantime, look what we got. The ocean. The first time seeing...the sand! The waves, the night. Electric.

CHECKMARK

We sat there for what felt like time suspended, sharing dreams—

GAP

I’ve always wanted to try worship.

CHECKMARK

Sharing thoughts—

GAP

You think the Supreme Court’s a kind of God?

CHECKMARK

How much life could come from so simple a thing, two corporate persons talking.

The vitality and richness from the small moments you never see coming.

It almost made me forget about—

MILITARY

Po-sition *dis-charge*! Congrat-u-lations Private LLCs! You didn’t die.

*MILITARY takes their stuff and goes.*

GAP

Well.

CHECKMARK

Well.

GAP

Never said goodbye to anyone before. Take care of yourself, Checkmark.

CHECKMARK

You too, Gap.

GAP

It’s been...electric.

*GAP goes.*

*Sounds of city traffic.*

CHECKMARK

I didn’t know what to expect when I returned from duty.

Coming home to my own building, standing before my own office doors.

I felt gratitude.

A free corporate citizen living in the world’s greatest country!

A corporate somebody committed to the betterment of a righteous republic!

CHECKMARK [CONT.]

Because business has been good!

Business has *always* been—

*PROCESS SERVER enters, a computer  
summons person.*

PROCESS SERVER

Check--mark?

CHECKMARK

Yes?

PROCESS SERVER

Could you preside--over proceedings--with impartiality?

CHECKMARK

What is this.

PROCESS SERVER

Jury--duty.

CHECKMARK

What.

PROCESS SERVER

You're on--the list.

CHECKMARK

No-no-no. Look. I made a political contribution. Through my law firm. To lower my taxes. Then I served national defense. Okay? I'm going inside, back to work, to focus on what makes this country great.

PROCESS SERVER

You'll do fine--citizen.

CHECKMARK

But I have to get back to business!

*A gavel bangs.*

*WAL-MART enters, a retail person.*

WAL-MART

[Southern accent] Cannot believe! I! Of all corporate citizens! In the big, bad universe of corporate citizenship-ness! Got em-paneled! And now gotta sit here and listen to all these jowlin’ jawheads jabberin’ their jawbones! Ya’ll believe this? Hey, *I* was talking.

CHECKMARK

Sorry.

WAL-MART

*I* said: ya’ll believe this?

CHECKMARK

No.

WAL-MART

I mean, C’MON. Look at them rapscallions over there moving their mouth parts and contaminating my air with all that worthless tongue speak. Just shut up and be not guilty already! Hurts my brain cavity. Blah blah BLAH blah blah-blah-blah-blah. [Extending a hand] Wal-Mart.

CHECKMARK

Checkmark.

WAL-MART

Never heard of ya’.

CHECKMARK

I’m a...small business.

WAL-MART

*Really.* Damn shame. Hell’s takin’ ‘em so long? Don’t they know I got places to do and a person to be!

CHECKMARK

The federal government’s suing Chevron.

WAL-MART

Tell me about it. Damn government’s suin’ everybody. Hey. You ever now think...the government’s a person?

CHECKMARK

That’s...actually profound.

WAL-MART

Profound is the rumblin' in these here mids! Just tossed down eats in one of my own stores! Whoo-ee! Always wanted to do that. I mean there I was relaxin' in one of my finer Arkan-sas hot springs when my many law firms rushed over and said hey old man, you're a citizen! Damn if I didn't rush to my nearest store to take down one 'a them Hormel party platters in aisle 72. You do anything with Hormel?

CHECKMARK

No, I'm audit. Internet audit service.

WAL-MART

Online.

CHECKMARK

Yeah.

WAL-MART

Damn shame. Well, you must'a got some kind'a law firm to get you appointed foreman of this jury.

CHECKMARK

All I want is to get back to business.

WAL-MART

Hey, that's all I want too, right? Because trust me when I tell you that holiday shoppin's always 'round the corner. So we share a common goal, see? We may be two different kinds of businesses but damn if we ain't aligned on the bottom line. Now you a small thing and probably'd love to know how we do it in the bigs. I mean, just look at your fellow jurists. Some cheeky A-listers who know how things get done. Bunch of them gettin' off some pearly chatter on just how and where to stash their cash. Get them taxes lower.

CHECKMARK

Taxes lower.

WAL-MART

Hmm-mm. And maybe if you do things right for me I could hook you on that action. And I know Exxon'd be mighty 'preciative as well.

CHECKMARK

Chevron.

WAL-MART

Whoever. So why don't you do us all a smart one, and yell out a big ole' not guilty or not-guilty-by-way-of-settlement, and get us back to America. You understand what the old man here is sayin'? I can protect you.

*SMITH CANTOR PLLC enters.*

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Checkmark!

CHECKMARK

Smith Cantor...[flopping to the ground]...I'm back.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Where have you been?

CHECKMARK

You wouldn't believe it. It was awful. It was worse than awful. First I had to serve in the military. Then, beyond horrifying, the criminal justice system.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

I told you to keep a low profile.

CHECKMARK

I didn't have a choice. But I'm back. How's everything been going?

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Terrible! All I'm hearing about is this uproar over some unjustified acquittal you were a part of.

CHECKMARK

What?

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Yes! And so now that law that was protecting you from paying higher taxes? *That* got overturned instead.

CHECKMARK

I thought you said the other thing would be reversed. The Supreme Court thing.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Do I have to put everything in disclaimer for you? All I can do is deal with reality one law at a time. And since you weren't here I had to file amended returns. I'm sorry, Check. I had to bleed you out.

CHECKMARK

Oh, no.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Check?

CHECKMARK

I don't feel so good.

*ATLANTIC HEALTH, a HMO person,  
appears, staring at a screen, not at  
CHECKMARK.*

ATLANTIC HEALTH

Is there a Mark? Uh...Mark comma Check?

CHECKMARK

Checkmark, yes, right here.

ATLANTIC HEALTH

*Missus* Checkmark?

CHECKMARK

...

ATLANTIC HEALTH

Mister?...

CHECKMARK

I just feel terrible.

ATLANTIC HEALTH

Of course. It is important to feel terrible when you have the best health care system in the world. So...[me]...Atlantic Health...[you]...Germinoma.

CHECKMARK

What?

ATLANTIC HEALTH

[Me] Atlantic Health. [You] Cell tumor.

CHECKMARK

Tumor? How can that be? I’m still part corporation. Interminable life.

ATLANTIC HEALTH

[Me] Atlantic Health. [You] Chemo.

CHECKMARK

This can’t be happening. I’m only five years old. I already have twenty thousand square feet of Class A by the downtown rail. Big lettering on the outside of the building. I have *assets*.

ATLANTIC HEALTH

Look, this is my first time being a citizen, too, so BACK OFF! You got cancer!

*Without a trace of tenderness, a chemo bag  
is strapped to CHECK.*

CHECKMARK

Being a citizen is a lot harder than it looks.

I didn’t realize you need more than the 17.3 appointed sick and vacation days to deal with life.

I didn’t realize how it takes people to keep people.

And sitting in the back of corporate care, without my law firm coming to visit, I felt very alone.

All I wanted was to be a business that could change the world.

But maybe it’s me that’s changed.

So I decided I couldn’t go back to boardrooms and breakrooms.

I decided I had to figure this citizen thing out.

I decided I needed to be with the only thing I ever knew that somehow made sense of it all.

*GAP enters, blowing bubbles.*



GAP

[Seeing CHECK] No! Way! Private Checkmark! What are you doing here?

CHECKMARK

I wanted to see you, Gap. I was sick, for a while. I’m better now. I was thinking about you.

GAP

Hey, guess what? I just tried *being bored*. Seriously! And then, while being bored, I tried *blowing bubbles*. Because if you’re honest with yourself, blowing bubbles is the best.

CHECKMARK

The best is finding that other person who makes things electric. No matter what.

GAP

C’mon, let’s be bored together! After work!

CHECKMARK

Actually...I haven’t been working.

GAP

But that’s all you wanted. To get back to work.

CHECKMARK

I discovered you don’t have to sell something to be a good citizen.

GAP

This whole thing gets weirder and weirder.

CHECKMARK

I’m saying I missed you. I’m saying...I’d like to be bored with you.

GAP

You’re saying...

CHECKMARK

A merger.

GAP

Haven’t tried that yet. Could be fun!

*A stroller, sound of a baby crying.*

*As CHECKMARK attends to the stroller,  
GAP is having a first experience with talcum  
powder.*

CHECKMARK

Hey, Gap. Gap!

GAP

What!

CHECKMARK

Joint Venture’s crying. Gap!

GAP

What!

CHECKMARK

Can you change it? I’m busy cleaning its balance sheet.

GAP

You gotta try this talcum powder!

CHECKMARK

Are you gonna help me here or what?

*GAP snorts the powder.*

GAP

Ohhhh. That’s electric.

CHECKMARK

What is this.

*Beat.*

GAP

Nothing.

*GAP laughing.*

CHECKMARK

What are you doing.

GAP

Don't worry about it...[more laughing]...you worry too much. You should stop worrying.

CHECKMARK

What's happened to you.

GAP

[Still laughing] What's happened to *me*.

CHECKMARK

I'm serious.

GAP

Exactly. Corporate Serious! All you do now is be serious. You're missing out on all the fun!

CHECKMARK

Yes, because we have a little subsidiary that depends on us. When people depend on you, you can't just...

GAP

Run out on them? Like all those employees you left behind?

CHECKMARK

That's different.

GAP

Yes, exactly, *we* are different. *We* are the ones they hide behind. Nobody knows their names. They only know *our* names. On signs, on walls, on screens, *our* names are the ones that everyone knows. They buy stock in *us*! *We're* more people than people!

CHECKMARK

Which is why we have to be responsible.

GAP

To those devoted employees of yours? Were they so worried about you when you were sick? Or were they out looking for the next best offer? If you want to worry about something, worry about you.

CHECKMARK

You're not the same citizen.

GAP

Maybe I don't want to be a citizen. Maybe I just want to be a person. Enjoying recklessness. Feeling unincorporated. [Offering the powder] Being tempted.

*Beat.*

CHECKMARK

Get out. GET OUT.

*Beat.*

GAP

First time for everything.

*GAP exits. Baby crying.*

CHECKMARK

Shhh, it's okay. They'll say you have no responsibility, no conscience. But you don't listen to them. Because you're my citizen. And I'm going to make sure you grow up to be the very best citizen ever.

*SMITH CANTOR PLLC appears.*

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Checkmark?

CHECKMARK

Smith Cantor!

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

I don't believe it. I thought you were dead.

CHECKMARK

Didn't you get my annual report? I have a little solo venture.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

Forget about that. It's over! Finally!

CHECKMARK

What's over?

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

You didn't hear? Me and all the other law firms thought something seemed a little strange with that landmark ruling. So we went back and read the *actual* Supreme Court opinion.

*CNN enters.*

CNN

Corporations...facilitate the activities of human beings...but they are not themselves members of We the People by whom and for whom our Constitution was established.

*CNN goes.*

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

You see? It was all news fiction. You're not an actual citizen. You never were.

CHECKMARK

That can't be. I am. I have to be. Especially after everything I've been through. Making all that money. Giving it to politicians. Having my own building. And military service and jury duty and helping my country and meeting Gap and all the others.

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

They're gone. They've all returned to being just corporations. It's back to like it was before.

CHECKMARK

It can't all be gone. I mean, what about...

*SMITH CANTOR PLLC shows the stroller,  
now empty.*

SMITH CANTOR PLLC

I'll bury it in a filing. No one will have to know.

*SMITH CANTOR PLLC takes the stroller,  
exits.*

CHECKMARK

Well.

I guess it felt...*electric*, while it lasted.

I went back to the office by the downtown rail.

Went in.

Turned on lights, copiers, computers.

For employees to change the world in my name.

Business has always been...good.

But when the hallways empty. And the corridors go quiet. And I'm alone. I ask myself: do I miss being a citizen?

No.

Because I wasn't a citizen.

I'm not a citizen.

I'm a corporation, right?

Right?

*Blackout.*

**END OF PLAY.**