

STUCK

CHARACTERS: (5)

BORIS ZILCH, a student, college age

IONIA HEFFERNAN, a feminist full-timer in her thirties
or forties

JOE FIREMAN, a white, straight part-time college instructor
in his thirties

HERM MESSENGER, a gay full-timer in his thirties
or forties

LEO SUES, the chair of the Humanities Department, over forty

SET: The interior and immediate vicinity of the main character's (JOE's) shared office on the campus at a community college in San Francisco. Officemate IONIA's desk, on the other side of the office, is unoccupied at the moment. At least part of HERM's office, which is next to the central one, should likewise be revealed. There is a window frame upstage or possibly downstage, in JOE's office.

TIME: 1987

ACT I. SCENE 1

(BORIS knocks on JOE's office door. There is no answer. He knocks again, then tries the door, stepping just inside.)

BORIS Dr. Fireman? Are you here? (When he sees that no one is present, BORIS flips through some papers on JOE's desk, just to see what might be available for stealing or copying. He starts copying something into his notebook, but he stops as soon as he hears JOE.)

JOE (hurrying toward office) I'm coming! I'm coming. (Gets to the door) Sorry, I'm late, Mr. Zilch. . . . How did you get in my office?

BORIS I thought you was inside.

JOE Oh? (sees cat through upstage window) ~here's that evil cat again! (about the door) I must have left it unlocked again. I've got to learn! There's been a rash of thefts in the Humanities Department lately. I lost a typewriter and my notes on Gothic architecture.

BORIS (obsequious) That's terrible, Dr. Fireman.

JOE (about the cat) He's after those dov4s again. He's killed two already. (registering BORIS's insincerity) It's my fault — about the door. I should know better than to trust humanity in the Humanities Department. (picking up the paper BORIS was copying earlier) And here's the upcoming test for your class. Wouldn't want that to fall into the wrong hands, would we? . . . So what can I do for you, Mr. Zilch . . . Boris, right?

BORIS (nods) Do you got time to go over my next paper with me maybe?

JOE Again?

BORIS Please! I need just a little more extra help!

JOE I missed my office hour on Wednesday, so I'm having two today.

BORIS (getting his paper out) Maybe you can help me write a better one this time.

JOE Of course I can't write your paper for you, as I've said before, only give you some pointers.

BORIS I really appreciate all the help you've given me this semester, pro Fireman.

JOE How many times does this make, Mr. Zilch?

BORIS Nine. I think.

JOE And it's only the third last week of class. You're certainly an industrious student, Mr. Zilch . . . Boris.

BORIS I've just got to pass this course so I can go to State next term. I'm gonna major in computers. Your course is a requirement.

JOE Humanities a requirement! What will they think of next.

BORIS I like it myself. Only some of the students . . .

JOE Yes?

BORIS Well, they say we have to study too many dead white males.

JOE Yes, such a burden, those Greeks. Didn't have much going for them. But don't get me started. . . . So I'm more than happy to help you, but I may have to leave in the middle for a job interview.

BORIS Oh? Where's that?

JOE Up on the fifth floor. They're running! behind, but the department is actually holding interviews for a job here! Only my fourth interview in the last five years. I wasn't, alas, hired as a long-term substitute. But now at last — wow! —someone is going to be hired full-time in this department. Do you believe that, Mr. Zilch!

BORIS Aren't you full-time?

JOE No, merely a lowly part-timer, with one third the salary of my peers who got in before the Administration, in its infinite wisdom, decided to be 'cost effective' and screw the rest of us. But don't get me started!

BORIS Why aren't you full time? Will I get credit for my course if you teach it?

JOE Don't fret, Mr. Zilch. The distinction is merely academic. (in one long breath jokingly) I teach only one class less than my esteemed full-time colleagues, but do I have medical benefits, do I have a desk I don't share with four other part-timers, do I have a paycheck I can live on, do I have any hope of retiring to something more inspiring than a transient hotel full of junkies and former part-time college teachers! But don't get me started!

BORIS It sounds real bad.

JOE It is bad, Mr. Zilch. And it's getting badder. Worse. For there is a nasty rumor going around these hallowed halls that if somebody is hired full-time, finally, then somebody else is going to be laid off, finally.

BORIS It won't be you, will it?

JOE A white, heterosexual male with a Ph.D. — plus seven years of experience in this pit. I mean this respected community college. A man with nine published articles in such places as *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* — can you stand it — available naturally at your local Safeway store — and the proud owner of two — count 'em — two testicles the size of Gibraltar — I haven't got a chance for this job, Mr. Z, not a chance!

BORIS What do you mean?

JOE (dryly) The chair of my department has been under a lot of pressure to hire "minorities."

BORIS Well, that's a good idea, isn't it?

JOE A wondrous idea, Mr. Z. There's even a list of the approved minorities. But men with large testicles are not on that list. I wonder if I can claim my Eskimo grandmother.

BORIS I didn't know you was Eskimo.

JOE I have the whole Aleutian Islands in my veins, Mr. Zilch. But no, I'm not Eskimo. Nor am I black, Hispanic, Asian, or female. Those are the official 'minorities.' No more, no less. Very tidy — like the nine choirs of angels. Of course the department is already exactly half women and the rest dead white males, so I have about as much chance as a snowball — you should pardon the expression — in the proverbial hellhole. Speaking of which, shall we look at your paper on *Prometheus Bound*?

BORIS Sure. (showing his notes) What I don't understand is why Prometheus stays where he is, you know, bound to that rock and everything.

JOE Because Power and Force and Hephaestus chain him there — with an adamantine wedge through his breast besides, that's why.

BORIS That's another thing. Why don't he die — if he has that wedge through his chest?

JOE Because he's a Titan, Mr. Z. And Titans can take a lot, even sharing a desk with four other people.

BORIS Why don't he break loose, you know, like a hero and get them bad guys?

JOE A good point, Mr. Zilch — Boris. But you see the bad guy is named Zeus. Does that name mean anything to you?

BORIS He's somebody big, right?

JOE Very much somebody big. Mr. Big, you might say.

BORIS But it seems sort of wimpy to just lay there and take it.

JOE You've hit on a great truth I hadn't noticed before, although I've taught this play many times. Ah, but you see Prometheus, bound to his office — to his rock — as he is, lives with the hope — no doubt the illusion — that he one day will overthrow the system that holds him down. Thus we see — don't we, Mr. Z? — that all men, even Titans, put up with incredible humiliations and hardships because they yearn and wait — wait and yearn — for deliverance.

(The telephone rings. JOE answers it.)

JOE Hello . . . Another hour? Okay, I'll be here, waiting. I'm seeing students. Just let me know when . . . Yes, I'll wear it. I promise. I promise! {Hangs up.} (to BORIS) That's my one hope, Mr. Zilch. Ted Waters is on the hiring committee and he likes me, although he thinks I grade too easily. He would like me to get the job in fact. He's almost like my mother. He nags me to dress "properly", that is, to wear the suit coat of submission. (Takes his suit coat from a hanger on the office wall.) It's amazing how much people judge others by their clothing, have you noticed, Mr. Z? Now this is not too much to ask in return for full time and tenure, is it? (Puts on the coat.) Even this! (Pulls tie out of pocket of suit coat.) I am so desperate — a real job, Mr. Zilch . . . Boris, that I will submit my neck to the ritual torture of the necktie. (Shows him the tie.) For a place in society I will consent — and gladly — to this piece of cloth being tied around my neck, knotted across my Adam's apple, and then pulled until it is as close to the windpipe as propriety, in its infinite wisdom, deems suitable. What though I strangle What though a piece of cloth around my neck makes me sweat and strain, body all achin' and racked with pain. I'll do it! Of course I'll do it. (Holding the end of the necktie out like a leash.) Here, take me, use me, beat me, make me grade papers harder, make me hold office hours. I'm yours! I give in! I submit Just give me the fucking job!

BORIS Do you think . . . do you think you could look at my paper now? I've got to get to work.

JOE Of course! Forgive me, Boris. I forget myself.

BORIS We all like it when you do that kind of stuff in class.

JOE I'll bet you do. Maybe I should go into show business. Now about your paper.

BORIS I was wondering if you could help me outline it.

JOE You're very clever, Mr. Zilch, do you know that?

BORIS Am I? I'm real good in computers.

JOE No, but you're real good with people too. Most students who were having difficulties with their courses would plagiarize — don't deny it; yes they would or seek out friends to help them, perhaps even hire a tutor or buy a term paper. But you, Mr. Z — may I call you Boris? — come directly to the source and get me to write your papers for you. That's really god, the more I think about t. Really quite, quite intelligent.

BORIS (pleased with himself) Is it? Gee, thanks.

JOE Think nothing of it, Mr. Zilch. (opening a copy of *Prometheus Bound*) If I recall correctly, this time I asked the class to write a paper on the relevance of *Prometheus Bound* to their own lives. True?

BORIS Isn't that sort of a hard assignment?

JOE No doubt. No doubt. There's obviously no relevance in an old Greek play to anyone's life — even old Greeks'.

BORIS That's what I thought!

JOE Boris . . . May I call you Mr. Zilch?

BORIS Sure.

JOE (ironically) Thank you. Mr. Zilch, this is a play about — let's say a man, a man who pisses off the head god — his boss, let's say.

BORIS (echoing) . . . His boss.

JOE This man must be punished for bringing fire to mankind. (going to window) Let me check on that cat again.

BORIS That's another thing I don't understand. Why would his boss care if this guy brings fire to mankind? It's no skin off his butt, is it?

JOE (seeing the cat outside) There he is! Go on, get away! Leave those doves alone! Ah, but it is skin off his butt, Mr. Z. Because the fire gives mankind

power. It no longer has to live in caves eating raw meat and scratching itself. It can cook its food and wash its animal skins and not pray so much for assistance from on high and thus maybe, just maybe, have a few minutes left over to write a book.

BORIS (frowning) A book?

JOE Okay, let's change the metaphor. A few minutes left over to write a computer program.

BORIS Oh, I can see that!

JOE Very good, Mr. Z.

BORIS And once mankind has a computer program, then his boss —

JOE — Zeus.

BORIS — won't have no power over mankind anymore, 'cause now he can write his own programs.

JOE You've taken the ball, Mr. Z, and run with it.

BORIS You're a good teacher, doctor.

JOE Just bringing light to mankind. As it says here in the text (Points to the book.) On page 22. "I taught men to observe the smooth plumpness of entrails."

BORIS Really?

(Suddenly there is a loud blast of heavy metal music from outside the office. Somebody has turned on a boom box.)

JOE Oh, Jesus! Not again!

BORIS What?

JOE That fool with a boom box is out there again. I can't believe this. (Goes to upstage window, yells) Is this a college or is this a fucking high school annex?! I'm trying to have an office hour here! People are trying to learn something on this campus! (The music gets louder) I've got a gun! (Points his finger.) Don't make me do this! I carry Mace! (Shows it in his jacket pocket.)

BORIS Who is it?

JOE (yelling to noisemaker) Just what is your I.Q. anyway? At the very top it's got to be forty! The top forty!

(The music continues.)

BORIS You'd better do something.

JOE What can I do, Mr. Z? My hands are tied. The culprit out there is a member of a “minority,” and so I have to watch what I say. (Suddenly the music stops.) (yelling but “sweetly”) Thank you!

BORIS You handled that well. Was it a you know who?

JOE We don’ t use those words anymore, Mr. Z. I’ m surprised at you. It certainly was not a “you know who. It was a “we can’ t say.”

BORIS You seem sort of jumpy.

JOE Last semester not one but two faculty members were shot to death in their offices. I personally have nothing to fear, for I personally am always diplomatic with students. (Jumps.)

BORIS Really? I never heard that.

JOE That I’ m diplomatic?

BORIS No, about the shootings.

JOE We don’ t like it to get out. I’ m sure you can appreciate why.

BORIS Why?

JOE . . . About your paper, Mr. Zilch. (Comes back to desk.) Do you think you could come back some other time? I’ m under an awful lot of pressure today, what with the job interview and the threatened layoff and everything. And don’ t forget gun shy.

BORIS I suppose I could, if you really want me to.

JOE Would you mind?

BORIS Okay. When would be a good time?

JOE How about six years from tomorrow? Just joking! How about next week, same time?

BORIS But the paper’ s due on Tuesday.

JOE I’ ll give you a special dispensation. All right? You turn it in whenever you feel like it. But the catch is: you have to outline it yourself and write it yourself and turn it in yourself. Is that fair or is that fair?

BORIS So you’ re not gonna help me with it this time at all?

JOE I think it’ s time you became like a little eaglet and sat on the edge of the nest and flapped your wings and soared into the empyrean!

BORIS Where?

JOE To the highest heights you can reach, Mr. Z.

BORIS (sullenly) Okay, if you say so.

JOE I'll bet once you get finished with *Prometheus Bound* — on your own — it'll never be the same again.

BORIS Gee thanks, doctor. I always like talking to you. You make me feel pretty smart. Some of the other teachers make me feel dumb.

JOE Do they? (a moment of feeling guilty for having twitted the dumbness before him) That's very insensitive of them. Goodbye for now, Mr. Zilch. See you in class.

BORIS Bye! (Leaves, with a wave.)

(JOE grabs the telephone and starts to push the buttons.)

JOE (waiting for it to answer, impatient) Where are you (Waits through more Ringing.) Darling! Honey! I Baby! (checking on the cat at the window) I know you're lurking out there somewhere! Those dumb doves keep coming back. (to telephone) Where are you? (Someone answers.) Hello? Carole, is that you? . . . You sound funny . . . What? . . . I called to see how you're doing. . . . I'm sort of nervous today because of the — . . . You did what? . . . Where are you now? . . . On the dining room floor . . . Why don't you get up? . . . Because you're paralyzed. Are you joking? . . . You're not joking. . . . You can't move. How long have you been there? All morning. I see. Carole, why didn't you call me? You thought it would pass. Honey, you're my wife. Of course I care if you're paralyzed . . . You didn't want to be a nuisance. You're so wonderful, Carole, but you can't go on lying on the dining room floor. Can you try to get up? Can you move your legs? No? . . . How about dragging yourself into the living room — get on the couch. You'll be more comfortable at least. . . . I'll be right there . . . Yes. Yes . . . But you're more important than the job interview. They can re-schedule me. . . . No, you're right — this is the last day for the interviews. Do you think you could wait there another hour or two? . . . I'll call an ambulance. . . . What? You're starting to get some feeling back in your legs. Oh, good! They're tingling. Oh, that's great, honey! Can you stand up now? . . . You're grabbing the leg of the dining room table. You're pulling yourself up. . . Carole? What happened? . . . You pulled on the tablecloth and the bowl of flowers fell on top of you. Are you all right? . . . You're standing up now? That's wonderful, honey! . . . You're taking a step. . . . You can walk! She can walk! . . . You're all right now? You're sure . . . Must have been a pinched nerve? Carole, do you think the gods have it in for us? . . . Never mind. You're sure you're okay? . . . I'll see you after my interview. Bye. Pray for me! (Hangs up.) (Picks it up again.) I'll pray for you too! Bye! I love you! (Hangs up again.)

(Enter BORIS to office.)

BORIS I hate to bother you again, doctor, but is it okay if I turn my paper in on Wednesday instead of Tuesday?

JOE I guess you didn't understand me. You can turn it in any time you like. Just make it good, Mr. Zilch. I like nothing better than a good read.

BORIS Oh, thank you, doctor. Thank you! I really appreciate this. (Grabs JOE's hand in gratitude)

JOE (shaking his hand, then putting his arm around BORIS's shoulders) Don't worry so much about it, Boris. You'll get yourself all upset. (JOE closes the door and they walk a few steps from the office together) Believe me, after what we've been through together, I'm sure you'll do fine. (Gives BORIS's shoulders a final squeeze.) Fine. Boris, I've never enjoyed an office hour more!

(Enter IONIA, her office key out, overhearing this conversation. She unlocks the door and goes to her side of the office. She is dressed formally in female professor attire. She doesn't see JOE because there is a tall bookcase between the two sides of the office and he is downstage. After a moment, she throws her briefcase at her chair hard and begins to sob.)

IONIA (quite upset) Oh, fuck! Oh, fuck!

JOE (outside the office, reacting to her outburst, not quite sure if he should say something or keep quiet.

IONIA Oh, fuck! Fuck, fuck, fuck! (She puts her head down on her desk)

JOE (finally) Ionia?

IONIA (sitting up) Who's there?

JOE Joe.

IONIA Joe who?

JOE Your officemate. I locked my key inside.

IONIA (opening the door) I have an officemate named Joe?

JOE (entering) Dr. Fireman.

IONIA Oh, you mean one of the part-timers?

JOE (JOE does a take on this subtle put-down) Yes, just one of the army of part-timers who share your office. (coming around to her side) How are you?

IONIA What are you doing here now?

JOE I'm holding an extra office hour.

IONIA You startled me. You don't usually come *in* till after I'm gone, isn't that so?

JOE Sorry. Are you all right?

IONIA I'm fine. Why do you ask?

JOE Well. . . I couldn't help overhearing your. . . (gestures about her tears)

IONIA (brittle) I'm perfectly fine.

JOE . . . Good.

IONIA Except I got my revised schedule for next term, and it's terrible!

JOE Really? That's why you were crying?

IONIA He's got me down for a class at one o'clock! I told him I've got to be out of here by noon! I always have my classes finished by noon! Can you imagine him trying to give me a schedule like this! (She shows JOE the paper.)

JOE Classes at nine, ten eleven and one four days a week. Yes, I guess that's pretty terrible.

IONIA I will not hang around this place for hours and hours every day! He only gave me this schedule because I'm a woman! Well, he's not going to get away with it.

JOE (quoting) "I saw a woman flayed last week, and you will hardly believe how it altered her appearance for the worse."

IONIA (outraged) What! What did you say?

JOE (nervously) Swift! Jonathan Swift!

IONIA Swift said that? You sure? (relenting but reluctantly) Well, I guess it's okay if Swift said it.

JOE (ironically) Thank you.

IONIA What kind of schedule did you get?

JOE I have a tentative one, but I'm interviewing for the full-time job. If I get that then —

IONIA There's a full-time job advertised? First I've heard of it.

JOE I believe there have been notices up for the past several months.

IONIA I could have been on the hiring committee. But, no, do I ever get elected? Not on your sweet ass, I don't! And do you know why?

JOE No.

IONIA Because they're afraid of strong women in this department, that's why!

JOE I thought half the department was strong women.

IONIA Oh sure, maybe that's how it looks on paper, but the chair is a man. The heads of all the major committees are men.

JOE I don't think that's true.

IONIA I was the last woman hired here. Not a single new one has come in since me.

JOE Well, actually, nobody's been hired.

IONIA How well I know. The seven before me were women, but that only brought us up to half the department. There's a history of discrimination at this school. In the outside world, women make up 53.6 percent of the population, but is that reflected here?

JOE Fifty-three point six?

IONIA Are you questioning my facts?

JOE No! I just —

IONIA How long have you been here?

JOE Today?

IONIA No, in the department.

JOE Seven years. In this office for the past year.

IONIA Are you sure?

JOE (being good-natured) Pretty sure.

IONIA There are so many part-timers around here anymore, I can't keep them straight. If you ask met they really should cut back.

JOE Are you aware of the school's policy of not hiring any full-timers, only part-THEY'RE "cost effective" and they can be dropped like that if fifteen bodies don't show up in a class.

IONIA Well, some of us have worked for our credentials. What can I say?

JOE (controlling his temper) I believe you have a Master's degree, Ms. Heffernan.

IONIA That's right.

JOE I have a Ph. D.

IONIA Really? Well, men have always been favored in the graduate programs anyway. Some of us had to earn our Master's degrees.

JOE (trying to smile) I'm sure you did. Some of us also had to earn our other degrees.

IONIA (dismissively) A white middle-class man like you, I bet you had it real hard!

JOE Uh . . . {false little laugh} Actually I come from working people, back in Pittsburgh. My father was illiterate, and my mother went to the fourth grade in Kentucky. They were —

IONIA (not caring) Will you be using that desk for long?

JOE I beg your pardon?

IONIA I have a student coming in to make up an essay. I usually use that desk for them to write on.

JOE But this is . . . (changes his mind about objecting) I'll be gone in a couple of hours. Sooner, if my job interview comes up.

IONIA I'll have the student wait then. Wouldn't want to inconvenience you.

JOE There's a cubicle down the hall your student can use.

IONIA I know, but it's more comfortable in here.

JOE Ah . . . I don't really think it's a good idea for students to use my desk.

IONIA You think your bourgeois possessions might be scratched, is that it?

JOE No, I'm afraid my bourgeois tests might be stolen.

IONIA (dismissively, waving at flies) Oh, these flies are back! (waving at them) Goddamn these things!

JOE What is causing those? I've noticed them too.

IONIA Have you part-timers been eating in here?

JOE I haven't.

IONIA I saw one leaving half a liver sandwich in that wastepaper basket. The janitor doesn't pick up over the weekend, don't they understand that? I come in here and have to put up with an office full of flies!

JOE I'm sorry. They probably eat here to save money. And, no, I don't mean the flies.

IONIA I really should have my own office by this time.

JOE Why don't you request one?

IONIA You think I haven't? I've asked for years, but I never get one. And do you know why? Because Dr. Sues won't assign me one, that's why!

JOE (meaning for himself) Yeah, a private office would be very nice.

IONIA When I first came here, Dr. Sues was chairman then, too. He promised me my own office. He promised me all kinds of things. He was separated from his wife then, and was always asking me out. What could I do? He was the power in the department. He controlled the office assignments, the class schedules. He had a very big say in who got sabbaticals when, who got promoted, who didn't. That man exploited me, and I took it. But he never gave me my own office! Because I didn't know as much then as I know now. He hasn't asked me for a date for years, and it's a good thing too. I'd have him up on sexual harassment charges so fast his slimy little head would spin!

JOE Now I know how a male black widow spider must feel when he makes his overtures.

IONIA What?

JOE Never mind.

IONIA Are you another one of these women-haters around here?

JOE No, I'm not, actually.

IONIA Half the men hate women/ like that "muskmelon" next door (Waves at HERM's empty office). And the other half think they can paw us any old time they feel like it.

JOE Are *you* married, Ionia?

IONIA I am not.

JOE Would you like to be married?

IONIA What business is that of yours?

JOE Just a friendly question. I'm trying to get to know my officemate better.

IONIA All these men around here with their eyes all over me. Like a bunch of flies! (She waves hard at the flies again) If I'm interested in a man, he'll know it. until such time, I just wish they'd leave me alone!

JOE I'm sorry it's so annoying.

IONIA God, sometimes I wish I could retire early!

JOE Yes, that'd be nice. . . . I mean, where would you go?

IONIA I've always wanted to *go* to the former Soviet Union. I've been interested in it for a long time. I'd like to visit Georgia, where Stalin was born.

JOE Stalin?

IONIA Yes, he was a great man.

JOE Josef Stalin?

IONIA He's received a very bad press in the West, but he was a man who wasn't afraid to implement his ideas. Stalin did what he had to do. I teach that in my classes.

JOE What Humanities course is that?

IONIA I work it into all of them.

JOE You're a Stalinist?

IONIA You bet your boots I am! Are you a Trotskyite?

JOE No, I'm a part-timer. I don't have opinions.

IONIA I'm not shy about my political opinions. I used to be, but not any longer!

JOE "I shudder beholding the lot of this maiden."

IONIA What?

JOE Another quotation. Aeschylus. Well, maybe I'd better check my mail. Nice talking to you. (Goes to his side of the office and picks up an envelope, opens it, reads) Jesus!

IONIA What's the matter?

JOE This memo from Dr. Sues.

IONIA What's it say?

JOE He's thinking of running for chair again. That would make nine years.

IONIA Doesn't surprise me. He's got a stranglehold on this department we're never going to break.

JOE Why don't you run for chair then?

IONIA Me? Nobody likes me.

JOE (not too sure) Sure they do.

IONIA Nobody would vote for me. Would you vote for me?

JOE . . . Sure.

IONIA Hah! What does Sues say? I haven't read one of the Almighty's memos since I got tenure.

JOE It's dated yesterday.

 (Enter LEO. He knocks on JOE's door.)

LEO Joe, there you are! Good to catch you in.

JOE Dr. Sues, I was just reading your memo.

LEO Yes, I've decided to run after all. I'm sorry I got it out so late, but we've been so busy with these interviews and a budget crisis and god knows what all! But I thought I'd take advantage of the little break we're taking upstairs from the interviews. Is anybody else here?

IONIA (behind the bookcase) I'm here.

LEO (going around to see her) Ionia! How nice to see you!

IONIA (grumbling) Yeah.

LEO (coming back) Listen, Joe. I've just got a minute. Could we talk?

JOE Sure. Have a seat.

LEO Could we step outside your office for a minute? What I have to say is . . . (He means Confidential.)

JOE Okay. Why not?

 (They step outside the office.)

LEO I just want to compliment you on the fine job you've been doing for us. I hear plenty of good things about your classroom techniques.

JOE Thank you.

LEO We really like having you on the staff.

JOE I really like being on the staff. In fact, I'd like to be on the staff even more — as a full-timer.

LEO Well, that's what I wanted to discuss with you, Joe. We're sort of up a creek, you might say.

JOE What sort of creek?

LEO We were counting on you to help us out.

JOE Me help you out?

LEO We were wondering if, in the best interests of the department and the school, you might help facilitate our Affirmative Action policy.

JOE Help it?

LEO By withdrawing from consideration for the full position so we can concentrate on the several fine candidates in the approved minority categories.

JOE Withdraw? Are you kidding?

LEO It would be a way to open up the department. Forty percent of the student population is Asian, and yet we have only two Asians on the Humanities staff.

JOE Wait a minute now. I'm not going to just step aside and watch my career go down the —

LEO I'll make it up to you.

JOE You will? How?

LEO I'll give you that Humanities 206 you've been asking for.

JOE That's it? A course?

LEO Well, part-timers never get to teach that. It's a plum and you'd be really great at it, I know.

JOE But if I'm hired for next year, I could teach it then — as a full timer.

LEO Joe, shall I be frank?

JOE Sure.

LEO We can't give you that full-time job.

JOE What do you mean you can't give it to me?

LEO You're qualified. There's no question about that. Maybe a little soft in your grading. There have been complaints about some of the students you've passed on.

JOE There were even more complaints — from the students — when I *didn't* pass them on.

LEO I understand. I understand. But we've been under investigation by the government about why we haven't hired more ethnic minorities.

JOE I presume you haven't hired them because they weren't as qualified as the one you did hire — who were women, weren't they, the last seven or so?

LEO Of course they were qualified or we wouldn't have hired them. But, let's face it, when it comes to who's qualified and who isn't, you have to make some close calls sometimes.

JOE Do the people you want to hire have Ph.D.s?

LEO One of them does.

JOE Does he or she have publications?

LEO Yeah, he's done several book reviews — published.

JOE I have nine articles and a book coming out.

LEO I know, I know. You're great. But the community colleges don't really care all that much about publication.

JOE My off-prints have been flashed at faculty fairs around here three times, and to the accreditation team last semester. And now you tell me publication doesn't matter?

LEO We've got to be forward-thinking about the criteria we use. I know you're lively in class and intellectually stimulating and all that. But . . .

JOE But?

LEO Look, Joe, I'm just saying we're in a pinch and you can help.

JOE What you're saying is I can wait. How long are you talking about?

LEO Next year. probably.

JOE Probably. But there's no guarantee, right?

LEO Well, we never know these things until the last minute. It's the way the legislature doles out the money. But, trust me, you'll be high — very high — on our list next time around.

JOE Unless you need to fill some other quota at that time, right? Just how do you distinguish — I hesitate to use the word 'discriminate,' of course — between the various approved groups? Does a black man count more than an Asian woman, for instance, or does a Spanish surname count twice for a Filipino as opposed to a Latino from Central America?

LEO Now, Joe, you're not going to be difficult, I hope.

JOE Why are you even asking me to withdraw? Why don't you just do what you've done every other time I've applied? Interview me, pass me over me and hire somebody from the approved groups, the way you always have?

LEO Now, now, you're not going to be like this, are you?

JOE All I'm asking is that you compare my teaching experience and my degrees and my qualifications with the other applicants' and see who's equal and who's not. That's what Affirmative Action is supposed to mean, isn't it? If we're *equal*, you can give the nod to the approved group, as the law says. But if we're not equal, if I'm clearly *better*, than you have no right to give my job to somebody else! The whole system has become corrupt! It's turning the academic world into a battle over fiefdoms. It's —

LEO Joe, Joe, don't get all excited! Please, Joe!

JOE This is my life you're talking about, not some theory. I don't have enough money to live on. I'm serious.

LEO You've got a wife. Doesn't she work?

JOE She's a part-timer too, at state. Between the two of us, we just scrape by. Why are you asking me this time? What's gone wrong? Have I got that right?

LEO Well, there has been a call from a watchdog committee for a little more explanation of who gets hired and why. We're just trying to ease things through.

JOE You mean somebody might actually notice that the minorities being hired *aren't* as qualified as the non-minorities who aren't being hired? And that might upset somebody's timetable, somebody's social agenda?

LEO I'm asking this as a special favor. A one-time thing, that's all. I'll make it up to you.

JOE Is that a definite promise I'll be hired for sure the next time?

LEO As much as I can promise something like that. I'm just the chair, not the whole hiring committee. But I can put in a good word — a decisive word — when the time is right. What do you say, Joe? Can't you help us out?

JOE Make sure I've got this. What you're saying is that *my* application is obviously superior to that of the person or persons you want to hire, but if I drop out of the picture, you won't have to show my application to this watchdog committee, and everybody be happy, is that it?

LEO It's time we hired more minorities! They're a big part of the population now. You'll be part of history, Joe.

JOE History is right!

LEO Traditionally mostly whites have had the teaching jobs here.

JOE And traditionally mostly whites have gone here too. Besides, there are umpteen black and Asian administrators here now.

LEO Well, we've got to reflect the percentages in the student population in the administration — and the faculty too.

JOE I don't buy that for one minute. You don't force basketball teams to have Asian players just to have Asian players! And you don't get talent spread out in some bureaucrat's ideological game plan either!

LEO Our students learn better if their teachers look like them.

JOE That's bullshit, and you know it. Our students don't do one whit better with people who look like them than with anybody else. How far do you want to carry this nonsense — whites can't learn from blacks, men can't learn from women, because they don't look like them?

IONIA (joining them) I couldn't help overhearing.

JOE Sorry. Didn't mean to get so loud.

IONIA My student doesn't seem to be showing 'up. I just want to say I think you are being hard-nosed about this.

JOE Who? Me? I'm being hard-nosed?

LEO Ionia's right.

IONIA (to LEO) I'm not doing you any favors, O Great Spirit. I just think it's time the department reflected the student population.

JOE The faculty should represent qualified people, not quotas. Just how many Illegal immigrants should we have on the faculty?

IONIA You're just protecting your ass.

JOE Not everybody's equally interested in the same jobs! And you don't parcel them out like —

IONIA You're standing in the way of oppressed people.

JOE No, I'm trying to avoid being ah oppressed people! Person!

IONIA You should be ashamed of yourself trying to finagle your way in when deserving minorities have been given the shitty end of the stick for years — for decades — for centuries.

JOE Some of them only started applying for these jobs in the last few years. They weren't even to be oppressed!

IONIA I don't know how you live with yourself. This is so selfish of you. So incredibly selfish.

JOE (feeling guilty) Believe me, I want minorities to do well. I'm a liberal, for god's sake I bend over backwards to help them. I blink a lot when it comes to their papers, as a matter of fact.

LEO Joe, I hope you aren't saying what I think you're saying — that you aren't scrupulously fair to all your students.

JOE What!

IONIA Our students are not asking for special treatment, though god knows they've been through hell to get to college, most of them.

LEO Equal opportunity is our middle name, Joe.

JOE All I'm saying, Dr. Sues, is that I'm a white liberal full of white liberal guilt, and I give minority students better grades than I give comparable white students.

LEO That's a pretty serious accusation you're making against yourself, Joe.

JOE What are you talking about? It's the very same thing you're trying to do on the faculty hiring level!

LEO I don't see that at all.

IONIA Another matter entirely. Two different issues.

LEO Yes, that is not the policy of this school. .

JOE But you want to reward people with my job to satisfy some lip service to the Zeitgeist.

IONIA Well, somebody's got to suffer for the sins of the past.

JOE I didn't commit the sins!

IONIA People like you did.

JOE So I'm supposed to suffer because other people did some bad things in the past?

IONIA It's never going to change if somebody doesn't change it.

JOE Then you do it. Give up *your* job!

IONIA Don't be ridiculous. Do you know that I used to be a secretary? I had a Master's degree and I had to be a secretary for two years! That's what you'd like me to be again, wouldn't you?

JOE Why do you always argue that way? I had to work in the post office, stuffing letters in little slots, hour after hour.

IONIA Maybe you should've stayed there.

JOE Listen, I came from a large family that thought going to *high school* was sissy, never mind college. We didn't have any magazines or books — none. My mother got conned into buying Collier's Encyclopedia by some fast-talking salesman one time — thank god — or I wouldn't have had any reading resources at all!

LEO We've all worked hard. My parents were well off, yes, but I barely had any spending money when I was at Yale. I had practically no clothes.

JOE Look, I'm not trying to out-sob story you here. I'm just saying I grew up in a bad environment and I was told that if I worked hard and kept my nose to the grindstone and made sacrifices and all the other clichés, then one day I'd be able to move up in society. And now it looks like I'm being screwed — not just royally but by all the classes!

IONIA Well, take it like a man.

JOE (at a loss for words) Take being screwed like a man? Do you hear what you're saying? Do you have a tin ear for irony?

IONIA All I know is that *you* are part *of* the enemy, and I'm going to do whatever I can to see that people like you are kept out of the system. Is that clear enough?

(She goes back into her office.)

LEO Now, Joe, I know you must feel you deserve a job here after all your hard work and patience, but a lot of people feel that way. San Francisco, after all, is a delightful city to live in.

JOE I've been waiting for seven years! It could be seven more. But the famine isn't supposed to follow the famine!

IONIA (calling) Oppressed peoples have been waiting for eternity!

JOE Can't you let one more oppressive sinner like me in before you slam the gates shut forever?

IONIA No!

JOE You know why you haven't been able to get any other approved minorities here? Because people like that with advanced degrees wouldn't *stand* for what I've been through. They would scream at the top of their lungs if they had to wade through four years of undergraduate school, two years for a Master's, four more years for a Ph.D. — only to be told at the end that they would earn ten thousand dollars a year and feel guilty because they want to use their office for a goddamn office hour!

LEO Now, Joe, there's no need for profanity.

JOE I'm sorry.

IONIA (coming back) No, you're not. You're not nearly sorry enough. I could tell *you* a tale of worry and woe that would make your scalp cringe, but I won't! All I want to say is that you will never — ever! — know what it feels like to be a: member of an oppressed group.

JOE I'm beginning to.

IONIA — Black people and brown people and Asian people have stood by and taken it from the likes of *you*, but now they're not going to take it any longer. White men like you control business in this country; you control property; you make all the decisions and get all the advantages, and you expect *us* to feel *sorry* for you? Well, you can just take your poor little problems and stick 'em up your poor little asshole, Mister! Just stick 'em up there and smoke 'em.

JOE I love your metaphors, but I'm talking about my life here. I've held on this long. I went through all this —

IONIA Maybe you went into the wrong profession at the wrong time. It's not too late, though. You're still fairly young. You can adjust.

JOE I don't want to adjust.

IONIA No, you just want to bitch and moan.

JOE Is that what I'm doing?

IONIA America is moving toward two societies — one white and affluent, the other minority and poor, just the way the President's Commission on civil Disorders predicted in 1968.

LEO That's right, Joe.

IONIA Racism and sexism are rampant in this society, from the corrupt top to the corrupt bottom. Census Bureau figures show that last year 32.4 million Americans were living below the poverty level, and who do you suppose most of those poor people were — people like you?

LEO That's right, Joe.

IONIA A higher and higher percentage of the American work force is made up of those who have been left out of the system, and people like you — white and male — are still trying to hang on and get all the plums for yourselves. Oh, no you don't!

LEO That's right, Joe.

IONIA I have a black friend who works in a laundromat — a laundromat — when she's smart enough to teach your Humanities courses any day of the week. Any day of the week!

LEO That's —

JOE (cutting him off before he can say "That's right, *Joe*" again) I know! I got it! . . . What am I supposed to do? There aren't enough jobs for all of us. And there aren't going to be.

IONIA Of course there is an alternative.

JOE What?

LEO Yeah? What?

IONIA Suicide. (Goes back into the office.)

JOE Thanks a lot. You're a big help.

LEO Now, Joe, we don't want you to commit suicide. Of course not.

JOE Yeah, you need all your part-timers to finish out the term, I know.

LEO Maybe I can get you a summer schedule,. Wouldn't that help?

JOE Maybe. I couldn't get unemployment last summer. And probably not this summer. But don't get me started.

LEO Things will work out. You wait and see. What d'you say? Will you withdraw from the interviews this time around? I'd really be grateful. The whole department would be. Please say you will. Please! For the school.

JOE Dr. Sues, you're making this very difficult for me.

LEO I know, Joe, I know. It's not easy for any of us. But that's what we're devoted to in this department, aren't we? Humanity. We want people to be wise and humane and decent and all those things that education stands for. I know I do. Won't you do something decent for a good cause?

(JOE is intimidated. He agonizes a bit, deciding what to do. At last he gives in.)

JOE Okay, Dr. Sues, you and Ionia win.

LEO You won't come for the interview?

JOE That's right. Cross my name off — this time.

LEO Oh, Joe, I don't know what to say. I didn't think you were going to do it.

JOE I didn't either. But I have.

(IONIA comes out of the office smiling.)

IONIA Well, well, well, what a surprise. Dr. Fireman, you have a heart after all.

JOE A liver. (kicking the waste basket) Like in the sandwich, remember.

IONIA Well, that's great. Congratulations.

LEO Yes, Joe, congratulations. I know it was a hard decision.

JOE Merely my life, that's all. But then it's rough up here in the *Caucasus*, they say.

LEO You won't regret this, Joe. You have my word on it. (He shakes JOE's hand.)

IONIA Yes, let me shake your hand too. (She shakes it. JOE is self-conscious.) Well, I'm leaving now. That student isn't coming, I guess. That's his tough luck. (Goes back for her briefcase.)

LEO And I'd better get back to the interviews upstairs — with the good news. I'll be in touch, Joe. Believe me, I'll be in touch. (Exits.)

JOE I guess I'll stay here for my regular office hour. You never know who might come. (Goes back into the office.)

IONIA (coming out of the office) See you, Joe. And thank you. (exiting) You did the right thing.

(JOE looks startled by his own decision, then picks up the telephone and dials.)

JOE Hi, honey. Are you all right? Is the paralysis gone? . . . Oh, great. . . Just a little bit on your left side? . . . Me? Oh, I'm fine. Couldn't be better. I just did the right thing. . . . The job? Oh, I'm not sure about that just yet. They haven't interviewed me. Uh, listen I'll tell you all about it when I get home. (looking out the window) Oh, that cat is eating one of the doves Oh, my god, its wings are still flapping. There's blood everywhere! Oh, Jesus Oh, Jesus, it's awful! (tapping on the window) Hey, stop that! stop that! Stop that! (banging louder) Stop it! Stop it! Stop it, I said!

(Lights out as he tries in vain to save the dove's life.)

ACT I. SCENE 2.

TIME: A week later

(The stage is empty. Enter HERM, reading a pamphlet, laughing to himself from time to time. He stops outside his office.)

HERM (reading aloud, mockingly) "The learning disabled student is NOT retarded. Learning disability is a general term for specific disabilities, including brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, dysgraphia, expressive dysphasia." Expressive dysphasia? "Aural receptive dysphasia, and sequential memory disorder. The college professor should keep in mind that the learning disabled student has trouble taking information in through the senses and bringing that information accurately to the brain." What is to distinguish him from the *regular* student then? . . . "Because the information does not reach the brain accurately, the brain often does not do a good job of storing the information with the result of poor memory. The learning disabled student will need assistance and support from professors in finding innovative ways of receiving and transmitting information and in being evaluated." . . . I'll bet they will!

(Enter JOE to his office, passing HERM, who is laughing.)

JOE Hi, Herm.

HERM Oh, just the man I want to see.

JOE Yeah? What can I do for you? (letting himself into his office)

HERM (coming to JOE's office) Do you mind if I look around in here? (He starts doing it before JOE answers.)

JOE Look around? Help yourself.

(HERM checks out the desk, the storage space, the view, etc. as they talk.)

JOE Anything in particular you're looking *for*?

HERM I'm thinking about perhaps switching offices.

JOE (not sure what's up) Oh?

HERM Have you seen this incredible pamphlet?

JOE Which one?

 (HERM holds it up.)

HERM The one on school cripples, mental and otherwise.

JOE (cringes at the words HERM used) Is there something wrong with it?

HERM Not if you think this so-called college is meant to reward people for tapping their little head styluses wherever they can manage, with whatever result. (demonstrating) Tap-tap! Tap-tap! Give me an A! Tap-tap! How absurd can we get!

JOE I'm sorry you don't like the pamphlet.

HERM Look at it. Go ahead.

JOE I've seen it. . . . I helped write it.

HERM (only slightly embarrassed) I'm sorry., I didn't know. The prose is really quite nice. (about the office) Yes, the view from here is much better. You can see that whole hill over there.

JOE Is Ionia thinking of leaving?

HERM Not that I know of. (still checking things: drawers, etc.)

JOE Is there something I don't know going on?

HERM Oh, you don't know?

JOE No, I guess I don't. Know what?

HERM Sorry, I thought you'd been told. I thought you were taking it awfully well.

JOE (smiling awkwardly) Am I being moved to another office?

HERM Maybe I should let Dr. Sues tell you. I just happened to know because I was on the hiring committee last week.

JOE Some decision has been made?

HERM A decision has been made. In fact, several decisions have been made. I was surprised you didn't show up for your interview. Didn't I see a preliminary application of yours?

JOE I decided not to interview. . . at the last minute.

HERM Well, you should've let us know.

JOE Didn't Dr. Sues tell you?

HERM No.

JOE He didn't mention the reason I didn't show up?

HERM He just said you weren't coming. You were too busy or something. I assumed you got another job somewhere.

JOE Another job? Is that what Dr. Sues is going to tell me? He's moving me — and all the other part-timers who use this desk — to other offices? We're getting promoted to full-time? Maybe, huh?

HERM (remembering that he forgot something) Oh, damn!

JOE What?

HERM I forgot to give you that memo from Leo. It's in my office. (Goes to get it.)

JOE A memo?

HERM (bringing it back) I'm really sorry about this. He gave it to me a couple of days ago to give to you. (Hands it to JOE.)

(JOE is afraid to take the envelope, but he does, openly it slowly. He reads it silently. After finishing it, he looks up, stunned.)

HERM Damn, I thought you knew.

JOE (his voice husky) No, this is the first I've heard of it.

HERM I wouldn't have asked to look at your office if I'd . . .

JOE (in shock) It's all right.

HERM He could have at least broken the news to you part-timers in person.

JOE Oh, a memo's much better. More professional. Cooler. Efficient. Cost effective. (smiling falsely): But don't get me started.

HERM (after a moment) Where will you go? Have you got another slot somewhere?

JOE Oh, I'll probably find something

HERM I hate to be the bearer of bad news like this.

JOE Not your fault.

HERM He should have spoken to you! Of course Dr. Sues has been very busy with the contracts for the new people and everything. In case you're interested, we decided to hire three — one black, one Asian, one Hispanic.

JOE Good for you. Good for them. . . I wish them well. Would you excuse me? I've got some final exams to grade. And, uh —

HERM Sure, I was just leaving anyway. I'll look at the office — when do you think you might be out of it? I'll be teaching summer school this year. Not to rush you or anything!

JOE Soon. I'll let you know soon, Herm.

HERM I appreciate it. You'll find something for next year, I'm sure. (HERM leaves JOE's office, gets his things, closes his own office door.)

(JOE stands unmoving, trying to control his emotions.)

HERM (as he passes by JOE's office) A student of yours came by earlier. He had a late paper and a card, I think. I told him to slide it all under the door. Did you get it?

(JOE turns his head and looks at the paper and card on the floor almost out of sight under his desk.)

JOE (about to break down) Yes, thanks. I see it.

HERM See you, Joe. Don't take it too hard. (Exits.)

JOE (nods slowly, then picks up the card, opens it, starts to read it) "To my Humanities teacher, for teaching me how to read the plumpness of entrails. Thank you for all time. Yours, Boris Zilch."

(JOE lets the card drop to his side he turns his back to the audience, his body starting to shake as he begins to sob quietly, trying to control himself but unable to.)

(Slow Fade.)

END OF ACT I

ACT II. SCENE 1

TIME: A week later. It's finals week.

(HERM is in his office grading essays furiously, grumbling, laughing at the mistakes, then literally slashing at a paper with his red pen. Finally he picks up a whole batch and throws them out of his office just as JOE walks by with two large boxes, narrowly missing him.)

JOE (looking into HERM's office) Hey, what's going on?

HERM Just grading finals.

JOE Must be exciting.

HERM (coming out to retrieve them) Try unbelievable. Essay question: "Name a European composer of distinction and discuss his style. Answer: Chopsticks. Him good."

JOE Chopsticks?

HERM I presume Chopin is the intended answer. And I love the discussion, don't you? "Him good!" What *are* we producing in our schools!

JOE (unlocking his office) Maybe you should read them later.

HERM I've tried reading them later. I've tried sideways. Upside down. With the lights *off*. Maybe underwater — I haven't tried that. Maybe the students should write them underwater. Ah, there's the solution.

JOE (starting to pack up his office things, including posters) Well, I turned in my own grades a few minutes *ago*.

HERM How were they?

JOE Not bad. I did fail Mr. Zilch, though, despite his nice card.

HERM Yeah?

JOE His paper was very, very had, as was his final. Besides, Dr. Sues has always wanted me to be tougher. So I was. Only too happy to accommodate Dr. Sues.

HERM (noticing JOE's packing) You leaving today?

JOE Might as well. My duties are done, as they say. Nothing to hold me here.

HERM Found a job yet?

JOE I hear there are some openings at some high schools in never mind. As a substitute.

HERM (Makes face.) Oh! You don't want to go there! (Makes worse face.) High school? As a substitute? They eat them alive there.

JOE It's a job.

HERM That's *like* teaching in a minimum-security prison — and I mean minimum-security for the teachers. Drugs. Violence. The students can't read or write. What do you want to go there for?

JOE I don't want to go there! My white liberal days are over. I have no choice.

HERM Have you talked to Leo about staying on? They always have last-minute sections — sometimes.

JOE Yes, I've talked to him. The Demi-Urge doesn't want me here. He said I should find something more suited to my qualifications. Can you believe that? Some place that's more suited to my "marvelous qualifications"!

HERM Leo is not always the most subtle guy, is he? But he does all right by us full-timers.

JOE (Gives HERM a quietly resentful look.)

HERM I suppose he wants you out of here because you're an embarrassment after the way he treated you. If you're *here*, you'll remind him.

JOE Out of sight, out of mind!

HERM You could grieve it through the union.

JOE Part-timers don't have any right to official grievances. I checked.

HERM Really? That doesn't seem fair.

JOE (Gives him another look) Only full-timers do. That's why the administration is trying to keep the staff mostly part-timers.

HERM God, I'm glad I got in when I did! Can't you demonstrate or something?

JOE . . . I'm not political. (Smiles, sort of.)

HERM How about going into Leo's office and blowing him away?

JOE It's crossed my mind.

HERM (jokingly) That's the way things seem to get settled around this country!

JOE There's a flaw in it somewhere. What is it? What *is* it? Something about the value of human life or one of those old, quaint beliefs. (He looks out the window) That dead dove's still out there.

HERM I don't care to see it.

JOE It's starting to rot. If you look hard you can see the maggots.

HERM (disgusted) Oh, come on! Why doesn't the custodian clean it up!

JOE (tongue in cheek) Staff cutbacks, I suppose. (Goes on packing his things.) Cost effective, I hear.

HERM (looking out the window) That's gross.

JOE Just life. "Nature, red in tooth and claw."

HERM I thought it was Nature, *raw* in tooth and claw. Tennyson, right?

JOE Yes, but it's "Nature red in tooth and claw." . . . (with double meaning) Believe me!

HERM I don't think it is.

JOE You can look it up.

HERM No, I'm sure it's "*raw* in tooth and claw." In fact, I'm positive.

JOE (handing HERM a book) Here's my Bartlett's. Look it up.

(HERM starts to look up the quotation.)

JOE You want this desk lamp? It's mine. Light for mankind!

HERM (still hunting for the quotation) "Nature." Let's see now. . . (about the lamp) You don't want it?

JOE Don't need it. It gets pretty dark in here sometimes, in the late afternoon. You'll be moving in here, right?

HERM (about the quotation) Here it is! "Nature, *red* in tooth and claw." *In Memoriam. Book I.* Damn, I guess you're right.

JOE Sorry!

HERM You think this book could have a misprint?

JOE Herm, lose gracefully.

HERM (after a beat) Like you?

JOE . . . Yeah, like me.

HERM If I were you . . . But never mind.

JOE If you were me, what?

HERM I wouldn't take it.

JOE Funny, that's what Mr. Zilch once said. My student.

HERM (about the quotation) Maybe it's listed differently under Tennyson. (searching the index again.) Tarbaby, Tedious, Temperamental, Tennis, anyone?" — I bet you didn't know that was Humphrey Bogart's only line in his first play, did you?

JOE (not caring) No, I didn't.

HERM (still searching) "Tennessee, Tennyson not Tennysonian — 800b." (Flips to 800b, searches with difficulty) . . . 800b. "Tennyson not Tennysonian . . . I can't seem to . . .

JOE (about the insistence of being right) It doesn't matter, Herm. Really.

HERM Of course it matters. Here it is! "The full, the monstrous demonstration that Tennyson was not Tennysonian." That's not it. Let's try one more place.

JOE Let's just say you won, okay?

HERM Oh, no! I want to win fair and square. (looking in index again) Here it is. "Tennysonianness of .speech: 989b." (Flips to that page.)

JOE (amused) Herm.

HERM Wait, I've got it! (Finds it) 989b. It's from Ezra Pound. A letter to Harriet Monroe, January/ 1915. "Objectivity and again objectivity, and expression; no hindsight-before-ness, no straddled adjectives (as "addled mosses dank"), no Tennysonianness of speech; nothing — nothing that you couldn't, in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say." . . . No, I guess that's not it either. What a windbag Pound was in his own way

JOE Do you give in?

HERM Nope.

JOE For Heaven's sake, let me have my little victory.

HERM . . . Well, maybe it is "red in tooth in claw. But only maybe. . . (good-naturedly) Asshole.

JOE (good-naturedly) I gloat in my moment of triumph!

HERM What's that from?

JOE Nowhere. I made it up.

HERM Sure? It sounds good.

JOE Thanks. I'll write Bartlett's. You may have the lamp if you want it. (about to toss it into the trash)

HERM Leave it.

JOE Give it to Ionia or a student or anybody if you find that you don't want it. (Goes on packing.) At least somebody, okay?

HERM God, I thought I knew Tennyson! I've been quoting that wrong for years.

JOE We live and learn.

HERM I feel like such an idiot.

JOE It's only a quotation!

HERM I know, but I'm forever chewing out my students for misquoting things. They hate my guts anyway. If they found out about this, they'd . . .

JOE I promise not to tell them. . . . For a price.

HERM What price?

JOE Just joking. I won't tell them if you don't tell anyone I didn't give final exams in two of my classes.

HERM You didn't? It's required.

JOE Fuck 'em. After I read Mr. Zilch's final, I said, "What am I *doing*? They're kicking me out and I'll only wind up screwing some poor kids' grade-point average if I give them what they deserve. So I went to my other classes and cancelled the finals.

HERM You could get into trouble over that. Dr. Sues has been very adamant about —

JOE Trouble? Let him sue me. Or Sues me. Or whatever they want. They can't touch me now. I'm old news around here. Be sure to put up a plaque. Right here. (Indicates a spot on the wall) "To Dr. Fireman — he stuck it out." And had it chopped off.

HERM By the way, I found your application in the waste basket in the room where we had the interviews. It looked pretty good.

JOE He threw it away in the waste paper basket?

HERM That's what it *looked* like.

JOE (with growing anger) Dr. Sues threw away my application in the *wastepaper basket*?

HERM You should have tried for the job. The three people we hired weren't anywhere close to you. One didn't even have his Master's degree yet. He'll finish up this summer.

JOE What? (under his breath) That son of a bitch. That sneaky, lying son of a bitch!

HERM We would've had to do some real hard explaining to the watchdog committee if we'd passed you over.

JOE Don't tell me these things.

HERM Of course these others have done a lot of community work — adult education, tutoring in prison. They were —

JOE (trying to calm himself) Don't *tell* me these things!

HERM I really thought you'd get in this time around. I remember how well you interviewed the other times.

JOE How did the other three who were hired interview?

HERM Okay. Not too bad. Some broken English, a little hard to understand at times, but that's a plus around here. Did you *see* their applications? If you think our students are bad, you should've seen the teachers' applications. On the order of "me want job."

JOE You *are* kidding, aren't you?

HERM Not completely. But minorities, especially double minorities, must be served, mustn't they? Give us your hordes yearning to breathe free. So you can't handle your own overpopulation? Give it to us. Let your problems be *our* problems. *Lebensraum* — isn't that the word?

JOE Herm, I've heard about some of your attitudes before, but I don't really . . .

HERM — want to hear them? Afraid they might ring a bell? Possibly disturb you? Here you are, an absolute victim of reverse discrimination and you don't want to hear about it. You don't want to upset your delicate little *liberal* sensibility.

JOE I don't want to hear bigotry!

HERM Kid, we're long past bigotry. We're heavily into war here. Power, position! My babies instead of your babies! Got it, white man?

JOE Herm, stop this.

HERM It's funny, you'll let feminist bullies like Ionia push you out of the way, like the gentleman you are. And why? Because she and her kind are on a roll. A C-minus mind like hers comes at the end of a great social idea — and what a great idea it was! Who could be against it? Those poor, downtrodden women. We've heard it for years! And we'll hear it for many more years. But it's gone from being a fresh idea brimming with social truth to a tired old cliché that even my dumbest student can quote as if it's Tennyson. Nature, *red* and raw in tooth and claw! You bet, kiddo. I can see the tooth marks all over you.

JOE I'd better be going. (Starts to leave with his boxes.)

HERM Afraid to hear? Afraid it might unleash something? . . . *In you?*

JOE What's kept this country going *is* not. . .

HERM Don't get me wrong, Joe. Don't put me in some box. I'm not prejudiced. I don't *pre-judge*. But I am an observer. And what I see is rank. Rank! Nice pun, Herm. Maybe it exists elsewhere — in fact, I know it exists *elsewhere* — but there's no discrimination against “minorities” around here! I've been on the hiring committee, remember? They're catered to and coddled and hugged and hired with open arms. Please, please take this job! What *else* can we do for you? You can almost talk and almost write English and the color of your creed is impeccable!

JOE Herm, this isn't —

HERM You don't have to believe me. . . . only you know it's the *truth!*

JOE Why are you so bitter? You're a minority too.

HERM A minority? I don't belong to a “minority.” Why do you suppose I stayed in the closet until I got tenure? Because *I* was terrified, that's why! Nobody ever gave me Affirmative Action! Not only didn't it count *for* Affirmative Action. It counted *against* me! We can't have any cocksuckers on our faculty! That's what I heard at San Jose State and umpteen other places when I even hinted at it in my letters of application. Affirmative Action? You should be fired, you goddamn queer! Even around here — in San Francisco! — I was ridiculed behind my back — sometimes to my face — by students and teachers alike. Because I was the campus fag, even though there is nothing — absolutely nothing — about me that says I'm gay. Believe me, I've made sure of that! But, *you* see, I wasn't married and I didn't make allusions to sports, and so naturally I was I “suspect.” The militant gays on campus tried to get me to come out, but I wouldn't. Not back then. I had too much to lose. So I kissed Leo's butt and worked on this committee and that committee. And when I finally got tenure, by god, I said I wasn't going to eat one more piece of ca-ca from anybody. Not anybody! Now I'll come out, yes, and does my heart go out to poor, oppressed “minorities” when it comes to hiring? . . . Do *you* know who some of the most bigoted, anti-gay people in the world are? Because they're so “family-oriented? Asians! Hispanics! Blacks! In fact, those people have a history of

oppressing my people, and I'm supposed to get all teary-eyed and give them my job because *they've* had a hard time? I wouldn't give them the pucker around my asshole to suck if they were dying of thirst. Oh, pardon me! I guess I forgot. We're all "minorities" together.

JOE You help hire them.

HERM Sure I do. They're going to take over anyway, eventually, especially the Asians, because they're smarter and they work harder. I tell myself I'm at least helping to select the best ones available at the moment. Someday I'm sure they'll even get better and may even really be equal to the whites we bypass now. Ah, now that's the kind of bypass surgery Ionia loves.

JOE You'd better say no more, Herm.

HERM Whatever happened to free speech? I'm supposed to be the sissy, the patsy — my function in society, no doubt — and yet you're letting the other tribes and their numerous offspring — how many kids have *you* got? None, right? — swarm in and take over — your job, my job. The country! "The old order changeth, yielding place to new. Now that's Tennyson, and this time I know I'm right!

JOE But only a small percentage of —

HERM Forty-seven-point-six? Sixty-eight-point-five? Ninety-two-point three? Yes, Ionia, give me the Stalinist statistics.

JOE This is . . . this is . . . you're —

HERM Go ahead, say it.

JOE Fascist.

HERM Hah! Please! Call it what you like. You would be fascist too if you had any guts. There are none so blind as those who will not see! I'm a realist, pal, a realist.

JOE (quietly) Shut up, Herm. Just shut: up.

HERM Are you a coward, Joe?

JOE You're a racist.

HERM No, I'm not! I resent that. I said don't box me. I never said there aren't bigotry and hatred against all these groups. I never said there aren't competent and wonderful people among them. But for god's sake they can do better than this pit. Let me tell you a little story. The other night I was trying to buy an apple fritter on Castro Street, and I accidental]y brushed against a "minority" woman — guess which one? — when I was making my selection. I don't think I even did or I would have apologized. But her

boyfriend — her man — starts sticking his jaw in my face and saying, “You hit my lady! You is gonna apologize to my lady” And I quote! I ignored it, and he got louder, more threatening, sticking his fist under my nose this time. “You hit my lady. Whatcha gonna do about it, *sucker*?” I left the shop, without my selection, as he continued to call me various unkind names — I won’t offend your ears by repeating them. We sissy cocksucking queer faggots wouldn’t want to hurt any sensibilities, would we? And then he and his “lady” (royal to the core) strode to the front of the line to dine on their high-class . . . apple fucking fritters! No, Joe, I am not a racist. But there is (deliberately) nigger . . . spic . . . chink. . . and cunt behavior, and when I see it, no matter where I see it or who tells me not to see it, I call it *what* it is.

JOE In public?

HERM Of course not in public Do you think I’m a fool? . . . But I’m getting to that point. We’re afraid to be called “racists” so much we don’t even spit out the shit when there’s fanny rubbed all over our faces.

JOE If I believed in the devil, I’d . . .

HERM Oh, please, you flatter me, Joe. I’m just amazed that people like you stand by and take what’s happening to you, that’s all. You’ve become chickenshit..

JOE You want me to indulge in a bloodbath?

HERM No, take an illegal alien — and his children, his many children born in the States — to lunch. . . I’ve got to get back to these so-called essays. (Starts back to his desk.)

JOE It’s people like you that bring about intolerance. We have to —

HERM Joe! Joe! I know all about the Huguenots and the Armenians and the Jews — and the Palestinians. And all the rest of them. But you know what? That doesn’t change a thing about what’s happening right this minute. I’m just watching !the pattern in reverse for a change. And you’re so — so understanding and so decent, Joe, that you are going to be — no, you’re already swamped. This isn’t something that’s going to happen in some vague future. The future is already here. And it’s got *your job*! (Goes into his office.) And you don’t even fight back.

JOE (following him) Some of these people !have been here in San Francisco longer than I have. Some of these people . . .

HERM (as if patting him on the head) Sure, Joe, sure.

JOE (JOE takes a beat, then throws the boxes hard on the floor.) I’m going to get Sues! I’m going to get him if it kills me!

HERM (contemptuously) You? You’re fortune’s wimp, Joe. . . I forget who said that.

JOE But I don't have any recourse! I don't even have a part-time job here anymore! I have no power! I have no — (He goes to his telephone and dials furiously.) Hello, Dr. Sues? This is Joe Fireman. I'm calling to tell you I'm not leaving . . . No, I'm not leaving the school. At all! . . . I don't care. . . . I don't care about that either. (just getting the plan straight in his head) In fact, I'm going on a hunger strike. Right here, in my office! . . . Oh, yeah? Just try and get me out! (Slams down the telephone.)

HERM Way to go, Joe. Why don't you send him a memo!

JOE A memo? . . . Yeah, that's good. Give him a taste of his own medicine.

HERM Make it official.

JOE Yeah, that's perfect! (Searches for a memo pad.) I can't find my memo pad.

HERM (getting his) Here, use mine.

JOE Thanks. What should I say?

HERM Give it to him. Use my back. (Turns around.)

JOE You're absolutely right. (Scribbles a sentence on the pad, using HERM's back.)

HERM Be creative.

JOE Oh, I will be! (Scribbles more.)

HERM This is America, the land of *free* speech! Or so they say.

JOE Right! (writing furiously, mumbling) . . . "Yours, Dr. Joseph Fireman."

HERM (reading the memo silently) You done good, Joe.

JOE (Starts unloading all the things he has loaded, starts putting his posters back, etc.) I'm going to make this a *cause celebre*! Hey, I've got it! I'll chain myself inside my office. (Finds the rope he meant to tie the boxes with.) It's just like *Prometheus Bound*! (tying himself to his desk) And the Mr. Zilches of the world think that literature isn't relevant to our lives! (Strikes a bound pose, somewhat self-consciously.)

HERM Nice!

JOE (dialing his telephone) I'll call the newspapers. They'll love it! . . . Hello, honey. Listen, I can't talk much, but I'm not leaving my office. . . It's a protest! About the job. Now, I have a phone, but it's possible Dr. Sues may have it cut off. I wouldn't put anything past him. If you can't get through to me, would you please call the press and the TV people and get them to cover this. . . . "Professor starves himself for job. Or something like that. And could

you bring me some water when you get a chance? . . . Yes. . . I'll be fine. I needed to lose a little weight anyway. . . I'll get back to you. Thanks, hon.
(As soon as he disconnects from his wife, he starts dialing again) (to HERM)
I'll be on the eleven o'clock news by ten!

(Enter LEO.)

LEO (barging into JOE's office) Just what do you think you're doing?

JOE I told you! (Ties himself tighter to his desk.) Here's a memo on it! (Thrusts the memo into LEO's hands.) You've saved me a trip!

LEO (taking the memo but not looking at it) This is the most adolescent thing I've ever heard of.

JOE So fire me!

LEO Need I point out that you no longer work for this community college, and therefore you must vacate these premises immediately.

JOE Need I point out to you that my contract does not officially expire until the day after tomorrow. By that time, the media will be crawling all over this place. There'll be an investigation, followed by my complete exoneration, not to mention tenure and full-time status, capped off with possible criminal charges against the school and *you* for violation of my rights! Leo, you've had it! You won't even win re-election as chair!

LEO What delusions of grandeur. Take those ropes off right this minute! (He starts yanking on the ropes.)

JOE Oh, no you don't! (Ties them again.) Stay away from me, Dr. Sues!

LEO This is incredible. Totally unprofessional Herm, help me throw this character out!

HERM (pretending ignorance) Who? What? When? Where? Why? Now? Me? What did you say, Dr. Sues?

LEO Oh, never mind I'll do it myself. (He tries a few more fruitless yanks on Joe's bonds and then gives up.) Joe, I never thought it would come to this.

JOE Neither did I.

LEO Listen, Joe, we can work this out. Why don't *you* come back next week and we'll meet in my office and —

JOE Oh, no you don't! How dumb do you think I am? You got me once with your oily charm. But not this time. Not *this* time, you utter slimeball!

LEO All right, Joe. You want to play hardball? I know how to play hardball.

(Starts to exit.)

JOE (calling) Whatcha you gonna do, almighty one? Turn me into a lower form of life? Turn me into a part-timer?

LEO You'll see soon enough. (smiling) By the way, I've already won re-election. (Exits, passing IONIA on her way in.)

JOE Oh, my god, what have I done!

HERM Don't chicken out now. This is the most exciting thing that's happened around this place since those two teachers got shot.

JOE Oh, Jesus!

(IONIA comes to the office, seeing JOE trussed.)

IONIA What's going on here?

HERM Joe is staging a protest.

IONIA About what?

HERM His job.

JOE On behalf of all part-timers everywhere. Oppressed people of the academic world cry out! I am indeed more oppressed than thou!

IONIA How come I didn't hear about this protest? It's not going to be in *my* office, is it?

JOE We'll try to be finished with the starvation by the time you return in the fall, Ionia. If we're still here by then, just brush the skeletons out of your way.

IONIA Well, pardon me! I told Leo not to let the part-timers use my office, but would he listen to me? Excuse me, I'm just here to pick up my grade book. (Gets it.) Don't let me stand in *your* way, for sure! (Leaves huffily.)

JOE (to HERM) Is that what will happen to me when at last I get mine?

HERM Probably. Unless you die a martyr beforehand, of course.

JOE What do I have to do to make an impact on people like that? Die in some particularly gruesome way, with my liver being eaten by an eagle?

HERM Where in the world did you ever get the idea that people care about other people's deaths? Don't you know, even now, that you're going to lose this fight with Sues and you'll be — if you're lucky — a little tidbit of gossip around here for a week, maybe two. That's all that's going to happen to you, Joe, that's all. Trust me. (Smiles.)

JOE No . . . That's not true.

(Slow fade as JOE looks apprehensively at HERM.)

ACT II. SCENE 2

TIME: Twenty-four hours later.

(JOE, alone, lying sprawled on his desk as if he's been there for a long time.
He lies very still.)

JOE (with a slight moan) Oh! Oh! . . . I'm hungry! Hungry! *Where* is the press?

(JOE gets up and looks outside his office.)

JOE (to the emptiness) It's twenty-four hours! See how thin I am! (He starts looking in the waste basket for some food) Where is that liver sandwich when I need it! (He comes up with papers but no food. He goes to IONIA's side of the office, rummaging through her things for food, finds nothing.) Damn! (He goes to the window and stares at the dove outside.) It's rotting even more. (Stares hungrily at it.) It could be worse. I don't see any maggots. (Finally shakes himself free of the temptation and goes to the telephone, dials.) Still busy! (to the telephone anyway in a singsong) Honey, what's wrong! Please! *Please* send some food. Or some water. (Starts licking his lips.) Oh, water! *Water!* (Hangs up the telephone, thinks of water in another way.) Water? (Realizes he has other physical needs *I* with a cry from the heart.) How did Prometheus bound go to the bathroom!? (Moves around in pain.) Hurry, media people, or, believe me, it's not going to be a pretty sight!

(The telephone rings.)

JOE (grabbing it) Hello? Oh, hi, Herm. . . . No, nobody's come . . . I can't reach her. The phone's been busy for hours. I tried to call out, but I couldn't get through to — (the thought dawning) Sues has done something to the phone, hasn't he! Oh, god! Could you call Carole and find out why she doesn't call me? . . . Thanks. I appreciate it. . . . No, I haven't vacated my office yet. (Hangs up, to the telephone.) Thanks, Herm.

(Enter IONIA, her key out. She is dressed in casual clothes.)

JOE (apprehensive) Who is it?

IONIA (entering the office) Just me. I came for a book I need. I've decided to go to Greece this summer. Are you still here?

JOE Looks that way.

IONIA I thought you'd be gone. You're in big trouble, you know.

JOE Depends on how you look at it.

IONIA Dr. Sues was quite upset when he called me.

JOE He called you?

IONIA He told me about this little prank.

JOE This little prank? (squirming because he is hungry, thirsty, and has to go to the bathroom) This little *prank*?

IONIA (gesturing at him) This . . . this. And the other thing.

JOE What other thing?

IONIA Frankly, Joe, I'm disappointed in you,; more than anything. You had a promising career ahead of you. (Starts waving again.) Oh, those dreadful flies are in here again! I told you not to eat in here! (Chases some flies, catches one.) Ah, got it! (to JOE) I got it!

JOE Don't eat in the office, Ionia.

IONIA (Gives him a very dirty look, crushing the fly ostentatiously.)

JOE *What* other thing? What are you talking about?

IONIA I told Dr. Sues I would discuss it with the authorities when the time came.

JOE When the time came? Why did he call you?

IONIA That's between him and I. (Discards the fly.)

JOE (twittering her about her grammar) Well, just between I and you, I'd like to know if he did something to my phone.

IONIA I wouldn't know. (Getting the book she wants, showing it to JOE prissily.) Edith Hamilton — myths.

JOE Is he going to do anything about my hunger strike, my little so-called prank?

IONIA I wouldn't know. I just told him what I knew.

JOE What you knew? What do you mean?

IONIA Never mind. You'll find out soon enough. Poor Mr. Kilch. (as she exits)
Poor Mr. Kilch.

JOE (running to office door) You mean Mr. Zilch? What happened to him? (No

answer; she is gone) (calling after her ironically) Have a lovely time in Greece with Edith Hamilton! Watch out for the flies!

(The telephone rings. JOE grabs it.)

JOE Honey? . . . Oh, Dr. Sues. . . No, I don't call *everybody* honey. . . . No, I haven't left the premises. . . *Call* them! I don't care. But how will it look when the TV cameras show the police carrying me off? . . . What do you mean? . . . Do I sound unreasonable? (Squirms from his many needs.) I'd say it's pretty unreasonable of you to have the switchboard block my outgoing calls. Not very sporting, Leo. May I call you Leo? . . . As long as I don't call you honey. Very funny. Why are you calling me? . . . To give me a chance to vindicate myself. Why don't you send me a memo? Your memos are memorable, Leo! . . . (serious) What? . . . What! . . . You're kidding. He said *what*? . . . You didn't believe him, did you? . . . There was a witness? Who? . . . You won't say. Leo, this is crazy. Do you know what you're accusing me of? (Squirms more.) It will go into my permanent file . . . in every letter of reference I ever ask for. . . I did it? I— This is some trumped-up charge, and you're not going to get away with it. . . Do I want to talk about it? (caving in) Oh sure, I want to talk about it. . . . Yes, I'll be here. . . No, I don't have any *weapons*. Only the students have those. . . . Right. See you in a minute. Oh, Dr. Sues, could I call out — one call, to my wife? . . . Thank you. (He waits for the phone to be connected, then dials) Carole? It's Joe. . . Yeah, I've been worried about you too. Why didn't — you had several dizzy spells? Carole, maybe you should see the doctor. First the paralysis and now. . . Good. Do that . . . What? . . . Nobody from the media was *interested*. I see. Not much of a story, I guess. I'm calling off the protest anyway. I'm supposed to talk to Dr. Sues . . . About getting my job back? Maybe. . . Don't worry about it. You take care of your health. I'll be home after while. . . Yeah. . . Bye. Love ya. (Hangs up) (after hanging up) Love ya.

(Enter LEO and BORIS.)

LEO (tentatively, from a distance) Are you going to be reasonable, Joe?

JOE (pounding a fist into his palm, trying! to defuse his anger) I said I would be. That makes one of us at least.

LEO That noise doesn't sound very reasonable, Joe!

JOE Come and say what you have to say.

LEO I didn't want it to come to this, Joe. (Motions for the somewhat reluctant BORIS to accompany him to JOE's office.)

JOE But it did. What do you have to say?

LEO You remember your student.

JOE (acknowledging him) Mr. Zilch.

BORIS Doctor.

LEO Mr. Zilch here has brought a very serious charge against you, Joe.

JOE That I failed him? You do know I failed you, right?

BORIS Yeah, I got my paper and final in the mail. Then I called —

LEO — That's irrelevant to this issue!

JOE Tell me again what I've supposedly done.

BORIS Well . . . (reluctant)

LEO Mr. Zilch says that you made certain —

JOE No, I want to hear Mr. Zilch — Boris — say it. What are you saying I did?

BORIS Well, you put your arm around me.

JOE I did?

BORIS When I was in your office. You put your arm around me . . . and I didn't want it there.

LEO Looks like sexual harassment, Joe. Not a light charge.

JOE You won't stoop to this, Leo. Please tell me you won't!

LEO Do you deny it?

JOE Around his shoulders, for crap's sake! I can't believe this. Yes, I can believe this! Boris, are you going to let him use your like this?

BORIS (obviously coached) Dr. Fireman put his hands on my body, without my consent, causing me grave mental anguish.

JOE (almost laughing) Grave mental anguish. . . (contemptuously) How *grave* or should I say how *mental*?

LEO You can see the seriousness of this, Joe.

JOE God, this is low. Low!

LEO I would hate for it to come out in the papers, Joe. It would look so bad for the school. To say nothing of you.

BORIS (more confidently) You took advantage of my age.

LEO That's right, Joe.

BORIS I never done nothing like that!

LEO That's right, Joe.

BORIS And you're gonna be real sorry you tried that.

LEO That's right, Joe.

JOE (almost down but not quite) There's *nothing* here. People will see through it in a minute, Leo.

LEO I wouldn't be too overconfident about that, Joe. The new dean is very student-oriented.

JOE I'm going to be prosecuted because I *comforted* a student?

LEO Well, we hope it won't come to that, Joe. I'm sure Mr. Zilch doesn't want any damages or anything like that. Do you, Mr. Zilch?

BORIS Oh, no, nothing like that.

JOE Just your grade improved?

BORIS Well . . .

JOE You little worm.

LEO Joe, please let's not have any name-calling. Let's handle this professionally.

JOE Jesus, sweet Jesus, this is wonderful What do you want, Mr. Z? An A? Or can you be had for a B? How about a C-minus?

LEO That's irrelevant, Joe.

JOE Or do you just want revenge? Because you'd better be satisfied with revenge because I'm not going to change your grade — not in a million years, chum.

BORIS (looking to LEO) He's not going to change my —

LEO (to BORIS) Let me handle this. Let's not get off the issue here!

JOE Oh yes, let's get into the *issue!* Did I kiss you, Mr. Zilch? Wasn't it across my desk? Or was it on the floor? Did I fuck your butt or did you fuck mine? I forget. Remind me.

LEO Joe —

JOE How dare you! You think I'm so hard up I have to make overtures to a Zilch, a dumbass remedial creep like this?

BORIS Hey!

LEO Joe —

JOE I think I understand where Herm is coming from now.

LEO What has Herm got to do with this?

JOE It's a ring, Leo. A ring of Zilch-fuckers. We use them and pass them on to each other.

LEO So you admit it?

JOE (mocking him) That's right, Leo.

LEO You've done it with others too?

JOE (mocking him) That's right, Leo.

LEO Why are you admitting it so easily?

BORIS I don't think he means it.

JOE (to BORIS) That's right, Leo! Now get out of my office. Before I fuck you both. (coming at them) 'Cause I feel a great big hard-on big enough for two, and I may not be able to control myself, you assholes!

(BORIS and LEO back away.)

LEO Was it like this, Mr. Zilch? Is this what he did to you?

BORIS (not sure what he should say) Ah . . . yeah. This is the way it was. He —

JOE I won't *let* you do this! I will not be fortune's wimp!

LEO I've seen enough here with my own eyes to convict you of gross misconduct.

JOE (his voice low, barely controlling it) Get out of here. Now. . . now!

LEO You'd better get out too, Joe! Once you're gone, maybe Mr. Zilch will consider dropping the charge against you. What do you say, Joe? Is it a deal?

JOE No way!

LEO It's all going to come down on your head. You'd better get out while the getting's good. It won't even be in your file. Is it a deal?

BORIS (to LEO) Will I get my grade?

LEO Later, Mr. Zilch, later.

JOE If he doest give it to you, Boris, be sure to bring a mental anguish charge against him. (angrily, loudly) Get the fuck out of here, both of you!

LEO (almost gone but not quite) I just have one thing to add, Joe. (springing the news) Ionia saw you!

JOE She's got a bug up her butt, that's all. A fly!

LEO No, she signed a statement, before she left for Greece, that she saw you fondle Mr. Zilch. And she heard you say, "I've never enjoyed an office hour more."

JOE (stopped in his tracks) But I was being ironic.

LEO Funny, didn't look that way to Ionia.

JOE She wouldn't know irony if it fell on her. No, if irony fell on her, she'd sue it for sexual harassment.

LEO I have her statement in my office. Do you want to see it?

JOE I do not.

LEO It's time you faced the seriousness of this, Joe.

JOE How far are you prepared to take this?

LEO All the way.

JOE (not all that sure) You won't win, you know.

LEO I think I know my way around, Joe. What do you say? Is it a deal? Ionia actually volunteered to make the statement!

JOE (deliberately says nothing)

LEO We can work out the details. What do you say?

JOE (Looks at LEO, then looks at BORIS.)

LEO Well?

JOE (after a beat) I have to go to the bathroom. *That's* what I have to say. (Walks away toward exit.)

BORIS Does that mean he's giving up?

JOE Read the entrails, Boris. . . . They're right outside that window. (Points.)

BORIS (unsure) I . . . I don't want to.

JOE Don't you want to know the future, Mr. Zilch?

(BORIS looks at LEO, then goes to the window and looks out.)

LEO What is it?

BORIS I don't see nothing. Only a dead bird.

LEO (ironically to JOE) A dead pigeon?

(Enter HERM.)

HERM Oh! I didn't think there were other people here. I came to see if you were all right.

JOE I'm fine.

LEO I wouldn't say that if I were you, Joe.

JOE Well, you're not me! And would you stop using my name in every sentence! Where did you learn that — in some weekend seminar on public relations?

LEO Sorry . . . Joe.

HERM (to JOE) What's up?

JOE My student here says I made a pass at him.

HERM What! That can't be true.

JOE Thank you.

LEO This doesn't concern you, Herm.

HERM Sure it does.

JOE Yeah, Herm appreciates irony, don't you? He knows it could be him in my shoes instead of me, since he's gay and I'm not.

BORIS (to LEO) He's gay?

HERM (to JOE) Is it some misunderstanding?

JOE You might say that.

HERM I always leave the door open during conferences.

JOE Wise man.

LEO Well, Joe, we can't wait around here ail day. I have an appointment with a realtor at three. I'm buying a condo. What's it to be?

JOE I am going to go to the bathroom, and then I am going to have a long, cold drink of water, and then I am going to run up and down the stairs a few times, and then . . .

LEO Yes?

JOE And then I'm going back into my office and I'm going to stay there until my wife contacts the media, this is all cleared up, and I win reinstatement — and a full-time job. Put that in my permanent file, Leo, and then *die!* (Just about exits.)

HERM (applauding) Way to go, Joe!

JOE I thank you. (Exits.)

LEO I didn't want to bring up this other thing, but I guess I'll have to.

JOE (coming back) *What* other thing: There is no *other* thing! The final exams I didn't give? Poo! Fuck you!

LEO (taking the paper out of his pocket, holding it up) This memo you gave me earlier.

JOE What about it?

LEO It's in your handwriting. And it's signed.

JOE So?

LEO Didn't you read it?

JOE Yes, I read it! Was does it say?

LEO (reading) "Dear Dr. Sues, how dare you hire inferior Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and women! Yours, Dr. Joseph Fireman."

JOE I don't see what you're saying, Leo.

LEO Listen to it, Joe. Listen hard. "How dare you hire *inferior* Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and women." The *inferior* is even underlined. You're telling me you think these people are *inferior* and that we shouldn't hire them.

JOE But I obviously didn't mean that. You know I didn't mean it that way.

LEO You should say what you mean, Joe, especially when it's in a memo with your signature on it. Isn't that what you teach your students? People reading this could get the idea that you're bigoted.

JOE I'm not bigoted! That's absurd!

LEO These are ethnic and sexist slurs, Joe. Don't you even realize it?

JOE I was talking about Affirmative Action forcing you to hire people with lesser qualifications than mine, that's all.

LEO That's *not* what this says, Joe. I'm afraid it looks very bad. If Mr. Zilch's charge weren't bad enough, then this would surely . . .

JOE (somewhat scared) Herm knows what it means. I wrote it on his back.

LEO (with a raised eyebrow to HERM) Oh? On his back?

JOE (to HERM) Tell him what you were saying to me about the hiring committee.

(The other two turn to HERM.)

HERM (after a pause) Saying?

JOE All those things you said before.

HERM I don't know what you mean, Joe. I didn't say anything before.

JOE Herm! Give him the context in which I wrote that. (trying to make it seem amusing) Don't leave me hanging here, buddy.

HERM I'm sorry, Joe. You have to stand by your *own* decisions.

JOE . . . You're not going to . . . you're not. . . Do you really want my office *that* badly, Herm? Remember, you'll have to share it with Ionia! —

LEO Ionia is getting her own office in the fall, I'm happy to say.

JOE (looking from HERM to LEO and back again, helpless) But —

HERM I'm sorry you've tried to involve me in this, Joe. However, it's your affair, not mine . . . Well, I'd better be leaving. (Not sorry at all.) I'm just sorry this kind of thing had to happen to you, the bleeding-heart liberal, instead of to somebody else. (meaning himself)

JOE I think it's my liver that's bleeding. Herm, I thought we were friends.

HERM "Nature red in tooth and claw," Joe. Remember? You were right. Maybe you shouldn't have been quite so right. . . . I told you, Joe. Didn't I tell you? (a little 'guilty') I did try to tell you. (Exits.)

LEO (waving the memo at JOE) Well, now it seems we have settled things at last, haven't we?

BORIS (confused) Did we?

JOE Give me that memo.

LEO This? (Waves it tauntingly.)

(JOE lunges for the memo, but just as he gets to LEO, LEO rips it up right in front of JOE's face.)

LEO Is *this* what you want, Joe? (Throwing the pieces to the floor.)

JOE (kneeling, picking up the pieces) Why did you do that?

LEO It's a xerox, Dr. Fireman, that's why. You didn't think I'd be stupid enough to bring the original, do you?

JOE I guess not. How foolish of me to think so. (Still on his knees, ironically.)
"Now like a toy of the winds I hang, my anguish a joy to my foes."

BORIS Hey, that's from (still having trouble pronouncing it) *Prometheus Bound!*

JOE Good boy, Boris.

LEO Come, Mr. Zilch. I think Joe has some serious thinking to do. About his "memorable memo." Too bad you have such a fondness for cheap irony, Joe. Can we reasonably expect you to vacate the premises sometime this afternoon?

JOE (a pause, then he bows his head) Yes.

LEO Thank you. I'm sure we can arrange something mutually agreeable, all around, on this matter. I'm very good at that kind of thing. (Waits until he's enjoyed his victory.) Come, Mr. Zilch.

BORIS (as they leave) Did we win?

LEO I'll explain it to you when we get outside. (They exit.)

(JOE waits, head still bowed. The telephone rings. He gets up slowly, picks it up.)

JOE Yes? . . . Oh, hi, honey. . . No . . . No . . . No, it's not going to work out. . . It just didn't. How are you doing? . . . You did? What did he say? . . . Really? So that's why you were having the paralysis and the dizzy spells. . . How soon? . . . In seven months? . . . (flatly) That's wonderful, honey. Wonderful. I'm very happy. . . Sure, I'll find a job. Don't worry. I have an idea for a new course somewhere — Remedial Humanities. It should be a huge draw . . . So I'm unemployed and you're pregnant and I've just been humiliated to the bottom of my soul. We'll work something out. This is America, right? (near the window now, looking out. More and more frantic as he proceeds) Guess what I see outside: my window. That cat's out there again. And so are

the doves, those foolish doves. Wait! This time the doves are turning on the cat. They're pecking his eyes out! . . . No, I'm wrong. They're all lying down together, side by side. The cat is lying down with the doves, sharing seeds. No, I'm wrong. The doves have put their wings together, making a carpet of white feathers, and the cat is standing on their backs — yes, he is — and they're all flying — up! up! up! into the sky! Oh, my god, guess what! That's a rainbow they're flying toward! {Long pause as he stares out the window at the murder of the doves about to begin} Yes, I'm still here, honey. Still here. Just like the doves . . .

Slow fade

End of Play