

SO MIDDLE CLASS

— a one-act play

[First Prize Winner in the One-Act Marathon Competition
Attic Theatre Ensemble of Los Angeles, 1998]

THE PLAYERS:

THOMAS: A man in his late thirties, forties, fifties, or sixties, average looks. He wears a suit or a sport coat, perhaps has glasses. There is a weariness to his soul.

TOBEY: A man in his thirties or forties, not so much shabbily dressed from genuine poverty as from carelessness. There is something about him that makes you feel strongly that you wouldn't want to be this man.

THE SCENE: Central Park, a Sunday afternoon. There are two park benches facing the audience.

(At rise THOMAS is seated on a bench reading a book.)

(TOBEY enters.)

TOBEY I've been to the zoo. (THOMAS does not acknowledge this remark.) I said I've been to the zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE GODDAMN ZOO!

THOMAS Excuse me, I'm trying to read.

TOBEY It must be nice to own a book — and a hardback too. All that knowledge in such a small space. All those words.

THOMAS (about his reading) If you don't mind.

TOBEY I like words. Words are nice.

THOMAS Leave me alone.

TOBEY I went to the zoo, and then I walked until I came here.

THOMAS Sir! (Tries to read his book.)

TOBEY Is that the ritzy part of town over there? (Points off.) You look like you ought to know.

THOMAS I don't know.

TOBEY Surely you didn't walk here, like I had to! I bet you drove. You look like you'd have a car — a nice car, a big car. . . . Want me to look after your car? Your nice car, your big car?

THOMAS No thanks.

TOBEY (threateningly) Oh, come on. Where's it parked? You need someone to look after that car. You never know what could happen to it.

THOMAS I'm not telling you again.

TOBEY (too chirpy) So how are you today? Nice day, don't you think?

THOMAS Not really.

TOBEY Jesus, can't I even talk to you?

THOMAS No. (Tries to read his book again, peeks at TOBEY.)

TOBEY People have gotten so hard-hearted.

THOMAS Because of you.

TOBEY Because of me?

THOMAS People like you.

TOBEY What do you mean? I haven't asked you for anything.

THOMAS You will.

TOBEY How do you know that? You don't know that.

THOMAS Yes, I do! Go away before I . . .

TOBEY (slightly sneering) You're going to hurt me? You? You? (Laughs.)

THOMAS (Tries to ignore TOBEY, turns away, reads.)

TOBEY You're ignoring me? What you reading that's so interesting? Can I see it?

THOMAS Would you *please* go away!

TOBEY This isn't a free country anymore? I can't sit near you. I can't share your book? What is it — the Middle Ages, when they chained up the books and only the snooty people had access to them. (Reaches for THOMAS's book, touches it.)

THOMAS Get your hand off that! Stay away from me!

TOBEY Jesus, I can't even reach out my hand? What's the world coming to?

THOMAS Exactly my point.

TOBEY People are so goddamned insensitive these days. I'm just walking in the park. I'm a walker.

THOMAS Like fuck you are!

TOBEY What kind of talk is that? Did I say anything bad to you? Huh? Did I?

THOMAS You're threatening me.

TOBEY Man, you are uptight. Like this. (Shows his fingers in a tight little circle.) It's pathetic.

THOMAS Goddamn it! Every time I try to sit here, somebody like you comes along! (Gets up, starts to leave.)

TOBEY You leavin'?

THOMAS I am.

TOBEY Hey, don't leave! I'll leave.

THOMAS You will?

TOBEY Of course. You were here first. Would I want to spoil your day in the park? I'm not that kind of guy.

THOMAS (hesitating) I didn't mean to be too . . . you know.

TOBEY It's okay. I understand. Some of the weirdoes around here nowadays! (Gestures vaguely.) So what are you, a professional man or something? (Sits on the bench.) You look very professional.

THOMAS (still standing) I thought you were going to leave.

TOBEY Oh, I am . . . in a minute. Sit down.

THOMAS No thanks. If I have to, I can stand and read. (Starts to read while standing.)

TOBEY You can get pretty tired standing like that. You'll develop bone spurs.

THOMAS (irritated) I don't think so.

TOBEY You're a bone specialist then?

THOMAS Are you leaving yet?

TOBEY Yeah, I'm leaving right now. (Pretends to get up but doesn't.) I'm gone! (He's still there.)

THOMAS Well, come to think of it, for once, I'm not leaving either. (He goes to the other bench, sits pointedly.)

TOBEY Boy, the park sure is restful, ain't it? Pardon me — *isn't* it?

THOMAS Used to be.

TOBEY Yeah? When was that?

THOMAS In halcyon days of yesteryear.

TOBEY Halcyon? Hey, you've got a vocabulary! I'm impressed.

THOMAS Yes, there was a time when every other word out of my mouth didn't have to be: "Fuck you!"

TOBEY No reason it has to be now. You should talk to people sometimes. You might even get to know them. Even like them.

THOMAS (not convinced) Yeah, sure.

TOBEY I know what you mean. That's why I came over to this side of the park. Did you see who's over there today? (Points.)

THOMAS Even you can't stand them?

TOBEY Do I look that awful? Gosh! I must not see myself as others see me, must I? That's why I seek out people like you. They're much nicer, much, much easier to talk to. But if you don't want to talk to me, I understand. (Takes out a book of his own and starts to read.)

THOMAS You read?

TOBEY That's extremely condescending, but I'll let it pass. Because it's such. A nice day. And I'm such a nice guy.

THOMAS (torn between leaving and not wanting to be unkind, intrigued by TOBEY but also a bit afraid of him) Yes, it is a nice day. I'm sorry if I seemed . . .

TOBEY (tauntingly) I've been to the zoo.

THOMAS Oh, God! (Starts to leave again.)

TOBEY You'll read about it tomorrow. You'll be in it.

THOMAS (stopping) I'll be in it?

TOBEY Maybe even on TV tonight. You watch TV, don't you? Oh, I know you don't do it a lot, but you do take a little peek once in a while, right? Me you can tell.

THOMAS I don't think it's any of your business.

TOBEY But mankind is my business. . . . Who said that?

THOMAS Scrooge.

TOBEY Yeah, you'd know, wouldn't you.

THOMAS What is that supposed to mean?

TOBEY He's one of your heroes, isn't he? The Before-Scrooge, not the After-Scrooge.

THOMAS The Before-Scrooge?

TOBEY The old sourpuss — cranky, selfish, won't talk to anybody. As opposed to the other Scrooge — the syrupy, sappy one who gives perfectly good turkeys to undeserving little boys on Christmas morning.

THOMAS I'm not that bad.

TOBEY You aren't? Excuse me, I've got to read this paragraph. (Looks at his book.)

THOMAS (seeing the parallel to himself) It's just that I've been burned by people around here. Everywhere!

TOBEY (mildly mockingly) Oh, I know. It's so hard to be left alone anymore. I try to read and this guy keeps talking to me. (suddenly as THOMAS gets up) Hey, you're married, aren't you!

THOMAS Why, yes. How did . . . ?

TOBEY It shows.

THOMAS What are you talking about?

TOBEY You've got that I-must-get-out-of-the-house-or-I'll scream look. Lots of folks have it, but especially married ones.

THOMAS I don't believe that.

TOBEY Then don't. (suddenly) You have two kids too, right?

THOMAS Yes.

TOBEY Two girls.

THOMAS Yes!

TOBEY But you wanted boys.

THOMAS No, I didn't! That's very sexist.

TOBEY I know, but that doesn't change the fact that you wanted at least one boy. Maybe you'll be lucky and one of your girls will be — you know — butch. It'll be almost like having a boy.

THOMAS How dare you! You don't know anything at all about my family!

TOBEY Well, it's not from not trying! It's you who are being so distant.

THOMAS I shouldn't stay here.

TOBEY What's keeping you then?

THOMAS I don't know.

TOBEY Your common sense tells you to go?

THOMAS It does.

TOBEY Well, don't be held back by middle-class values. Run along. Your daughters need you. A role model. Or is it your wife that's the role model?

THOMAS What are you implying?

TOBEY (innocently) Why, nothing. Nothing at all.

THOMAS You are too! And I don't like it.

TOBEY Oh, chill out. And I'll tell you about the zoo.

THOMAS I don't want to hear about the zoo. I don't give a damn about your zoo.

TOBEY No? And you look like such an ecology type too! You know, save that rainforest, send those poor toothless elephants to the dentist. I bet you even recycle.

THOMAS And what if I do? You want to make something of it? (Makes fists.)

TOBEY Hey, hey! Soothe that fevered brow, pal! . . . (noticing it's hard to say) Say that three times: (fast, perhaps even singing some of it) "Soothe that fevered brow, pal. Soothe that fevered brow, pal. Soothe — "

THOMAS (cutting him off) I don't want to talk to you anymore. Have you got that? Have you?

TOBEY But gee, mister, there's such a lack of communication these days.

THOMAS Am I your guinea pig for today? You're going to "communicate" with me? Is that what you think? Whether I want to or not?

TOBEY Who better than an uptight married asshole with two daughters and . . . uh, a cat?

THOMAS Dogs! I have dogs.

TOBEY Really? What kind?

THOMAS Big ones. Not little yappy ones. Big, manly ones that eat intruders.

TOBEY You can get sued for that, you know. I had a friend who —

THOMAS I don't care about your friend.

TOBEY Sure you do.

THOMAS No, I don't!

TOBEY Now tell me about your birds.

THOMAS What birds?

TOBEY Your parakeets. Your daughters have parakeets. I've got your number.

THOMAS My daughters have geckos! Had!

TOBEY No, they don't!

THOMAS You're telling me what my daughters have and what they don't? I'm telling you they had geckos — four of them — and two boa constrictors!

TOBEY Well, you ought to know!

THOMAS I do know! . . . This is ridiculous.

TOBEY You're right. How much do you make a year?

THOMAS (incensed) What?!

TOBEY Come on, how much?

THOMAS More than you do.

TOBEY Because of virtue or luck?

THOMAS Both.

TOBEY How much are you carrying on you right now?

THOMAS I gave at the last bench. At several.

TOBEY You serious?

THOMAS As a heart attack! This is the third bench I've been to in the last hour.

TOBEY I'm not asking for a handout.

THOMAS Good, because you're not going to get one. And you're not going to rob me either!

TOBEY You should see the expression on your face.

THOMAS You put it there.

TOBEY Oh my, these are hard times! How you must suffer! Well, let me tell you, buddy, you haven't got a clue about suffering.

THOMAS I know something about hard times. You see, we middle-class assholes are having hard times because we have to support non-middle-class assholes like you. Now which are you — merely an alcoholic or do you abuse drugs as well? Or are you simply incompetent? Hey, buddy, now I've got it — low gene pool?

TOBEY Borderline schizophrenic.

THOMAS Paranoid or regular?

TOBEY You don't sound very sympathetic.

THOMAS If you're really sick, get treatment. There's a clinic on the next block. It's even free!

TOBEY I know. Jeez, next you'll tell me to take my medication.

THOMAS You don't? Why don't you take your medication?

TOBEY I don't want to. Are you being patronizing?

THOMAS (ironic) I'm sorry, but I don't express myself too well at times. I didn't mean to be patronizing.

TOBEY Well, good.

THOMAS I meant to be insulting.

TOBEY What?

THOMAS I meant for you to get up off your lazy, sick, drugged-out, drunken or fucked-up ass and get out of my face before I —

TOBEY I think we're communicating! . . . Who are your favorite writers?

THOMAS I somehow doubt that you care who my favorite writers are.

TOBEY I'm simply trying to have a conversation with a stranger. Why are you making it so difficult, man?

THOMAS Because I don't want to have a conversation with you. I don't like you.

TOBEY You don't like me? Is it my lack of color coordination? My untrimmed fingernails?

THOMAS No, it's the way you and your buddies urinate in doorways. The way you defecate in public. The animals in your goddamn zoo are cleaner than you are!

TOBEY Interesting that you should mention the zoo. I was there today. Did I tell you?

THOMAS Yes, you told me.

TOBEY I must have forgot. My mental state isn't what it should be, you have to realize.

THOMAS I don't have to realize anything.

TOBEY I took the subway down to the Village so that I could walk all the way up Fifth Avenue to the zoo. Sometimes a person has to go a very long distance to —

THOMAS To make a very big nuisance of himself.

TOBEY Hey, I'm hurting here. A person is hurting here!

THOMAS Yeah, who are you hurting?

TOBEY What are you trying to do? Make sense of things?

THOMAS I already know how things are.

TOBEY Well, lucky you.

THOMAS (ironic) Yeah, lucky me.

TOBEY Did I tell you I live in a rooming house on the upper West Side? Or maybe it's in Soho. I live in the basement.

THOMAS Like a troll?

TOBEY You're getting into this? I live in the basement in an embarrassingly small room.

THOMAS Joylessly.

TOBEY What?

THOMAS You live in a joylessly small room.

TOBEY How did you know?

THOMAS And there's a queen who lives next door. And he's always plucking his butt hairs.

TOBEY You've been to my place?

THOMAS Don't you remember?

TOBEY (bewildered) No . . . when was this?

THOMAS That time you had a birthday party for the queen who plucks his butt hairs. Don't you remember when you stopped feeling sorry for yourself long enough to have that party for somebody else?

TOBEY I don't recall this, no.

THOMAS Sure you do. And the Latin family who entertains a lot? And the other person who lives there, whom you've never seen. Never, never ever. Don't you remember when you invited them all over for ice cream and cake?

TOBEY I did?

THOMAS I guess you're more schizophrenic than you thought!

TOBEY Not everybody can afford ice cream and cake, you know. Or to live in a nice place like you do.

THOMAS My apartment in the East Seventies? With the doorman and the double locks. The triple locks. Make that quadruple locks! And why do you suppose we bourgeois fumble bunnies have so many locks, huh? Because we're not fools, that's why. Little lambs waiting for the hordes like you to break off the locks and rape my parakeets!

TOBEY You're angry.

THOMAS Who me? No way. I'm trying to empathize. I went to college. I was taught to feel for others. I have a goddamn liberal education!

TOBEY Are you sure it took?

THOMAS Oh, you should have heard me. I cried for this cause. I cried for that cause. I cried so much my eyes became closed from all the salt. And what's your cause? Let me guess — empty picture frames in your sad, lonely apartment in the big, bad city.

TOBEY Well, yes, as a matter of fact.

THOMAS No parents? No girlfriend?

TOBEY No.

THOMAS Good old Mom walked out on good old Pop when you were what — a fetus? And you couldn't cope. And then good old Pop ran into the side of a moving van, and that pretty well wiped you out, family-wise. Is that your story, Bunkie? Or have I left out some vital sociological detail?

TOBEY You don't care about my problems?

THOMAS I'm tired of your whining. It's deafening!

TOBEY I haven't whined once!

THOMAS You were about to!

TOBEY No I wasn't.

THOMAS Did I leave out something? Physical abuse? Sexual abuse? Good heavens, surely you're not an incest survivor!

TOBEY You dismissing my problems?

THOMAS Haven't you heard of the little boy who cried 'victim' one too many times?

TOBEY People do suffer.

THOMAS You poor little thing, how in the world did you make it this far? Let me take you in my arms and give you great big, nurturing hugs! (Goes toward TOBEY.)

TOBEY (retreating) Hey! Watch it now!

THOMAS But why? No one has suffered as much as you. Whereas I've never had a problem in my life because I'm male and middle-class. Please let me make it up to you! Oh, please! Oh, but how can I ever possibly make it up to you after what you've been through?

TOBEY That's a cheap shot.

THOMAS And it feels great! By the way, what's your name? How can I feel the full amount of sympathy unless I know your name?

TOBEY Tobey.

THOMAS And I'm Thomas. You know, like . . . Christ's pal. Get it?

TOBEY What are you talking about?

THOMAS (too enthusiastically, almost manic, imitating TOBEY in the early part of the play, mind-fucking him the way he's been mind-fucked)) Let's just say: "Hello, Tobey! Hello! Hello! Hello!"

TOBEY Are you sure you're middle-class?

THOMAS How can you doubt it? Can't you see 'well-behaved sucker' written all over my face? Do you have any idea how many times I've been panhandled and pestered? And that's just today. Right in this spot. I used to be able to sit here and read, enjoy the sunshine, get a breath of air. I can't remember the last time I was able to do that.

TOBEY Sure you can. You just remembered.

THOMAS My point is: I don't want it just to be a memory. I want it to be a reality. But of course that's so very *selfish* of me! I'm so mean!

TOBEY But you've got a very soft core.

THOMAS Well, I'm working on it. By the end of summer I should be quite hard.

TOBEY Don't get too hard. You'll wind up like the very people you despise.

THOMAS I don't think so.

TOBEY So you are willing to listen to what happened at the zoo?

THOMAS (giving in a bit, weary, afraid to seem too hard) All right, what happened at the zoo?

TOBEY Let me tell you about my rooming house instead!

THOMAS You already told me.

TOBEY About the lady who lives on the top floor?

THOMAS Yeah, she cries all the time.

TOBEY Yes! Whenever I go out or come back in, I always hear her crying.

THOMAS Muffled, but unrelenting.

TOBEY Yes! How did you know?

THOMAS (not looking into his eyes) I can see it in your eyes.

TOBEY The pain?

THOMAS (apparently sincerely) Of course. How can I miss what a sensitive guy you are. Now tell me about your landlady, that fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, drunken bag of garbage.

TOBEY You've met her?

THOMAS That's what you think of her. It's right there in your face. She has a bow-wow.

TOBEY That's right.

THOMAS And she and her bow-wow are the infernal gatekeepers of your dwelling. She always waits for you, smelling of gin, and grabs hold of your coat and presses her appalling body up against you. And you, poor little Tobey, are the object of her ludicrous parody of sexual desire.

TOBEY I am!

THOMAS And do you know why?

TOBEY No. Although I —

THOMAS Because you're so non-judgmental, so open-hearted. No wonder that old woman can't resist you. But you've found a way to keep your landlady off. When she presses herself to your body and mumbles about how you should come to her

room, you say, "But, babe, wasn't yesterday enough for you?"
And she's so simple-minded, so unthinkably horrible, daring as she does to have sexual thoughts at her age, that she just giggles and moans, and thus you don't have to put your poor dick out even for the minute it would take to satisfy the old biddy!

TOBEY Nobody seems to understand when I . . .

THOMAS I understand. I can read hearts.

TOBEY Mine's a good one, isn't it?

THOMAS Do you have any doubts, Tobey? (deliberately changing the subject) Now tell me about the landlady's bow-wow! Who is God spelled backwards. Or is it sideways? And then finally you can tell me about the zoo. You want to tell me about the zoo in the worst way, don't you?

TOBEY You don't have to listen. Nobody is holding you here.

THOMAS (apparently sincerely) I wouldn't leave for the world. You're my brother now, Tobey.

TOBEY I am? . . . (uncertainly) Good.

THOMAS The landlady's dog is a black monster of a beast. Black, except for the bloodshot eyes. With an open sore on its thing. That's red too.

TOBEY I don't know the dog you're talking about. My landlady has a miniature pinscher.

THOMAS Sort of a little Nazi dog.

TOBEY Well, I guess . . .

THOMAS With a constant erection. You must get the details right.

TOBEY Yeah, now that you say that, I can see it.

THOMAS And how does this little Nazi dog treat you? He grabs your trouser leg, whenever you come in, right?

TOBEY No, he's very friendly.

THOMAS The landlady's dog?

TOBEY Yeah, who are we talking about?

THOMAS The dog is a symbol. He's not real. You fed him hamburgers. Don't you remember? And he gobbled them up. He'd eat all your hamburgers and he still hated you. And so you decided you had to kill him.

TOBEY No, I took him for a walk in the park.

THOMAS (cutting him off) No, Tobey, no! You mixed poison in the hamburgers, and the dog sickened, as you tried, oh so hard, to make contact, if not with people, then with an animal, because you think poisoning a dog is making contact. And next you got rid of all the locks, and you kissed the queen who plucks his butt hairs, and you dried the tears of the woman who cries behind her closed door. And at last you and the landlady's dog have reached a compromise and you call it love because you're so much more aware and humane and deeply feeling than the rest of us barricaded shits (letting go of the apparent sincerity) who just happen to keep the world from falling to pieces because of parasites like you!

(There is silence.)

So, Tobey, what do you think? Can I sell it to *Reader's Digest* — this blessed bow-wow moment between us?

TOBEY I don't understand you.

THOMAS Oh, but you do. Somewhere in that handsome brain of yours, you do.

TOBEY I couldn't follow anything you said.

THOMAS I tried to explain it as I went along. Think about it. Think about it!

TOBEY I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE!

THOMAS But why not, Tobey? You want to talk. You want to converse.

TOBEY I want a little sympathy. Is that so hard to give?

THOMAS You don't want sympathy. You want to fuck with my mind. You want to put me down, because I'm married and you're not, because I have two daughters and you don't, because I have a home and you're a permanent transient bottom feeder with no friends. You don't want to get to know me. You wanted to crap all over my life.

TOBEY This isn't the kind of afternoon I anticipated.

THOMAS I'm not the gentleman you were expecting? Who were you expecting then? Someone to massage your ego? Here let me massage it! (He starts massaging TOBEY but in an unpleasant way.) How's that?

TOBEY (being massaged, exaggerating the pain) Ouch, that hurts! Ouch! Hey!

THOMAS Can't you take a little personal involvement, *Tobe*?

TOBEY Think you're cute, huh? Yeah, you're real cute.

THOMAS How did you like your massage? I don't accept tips.

TOBEY I wasn't planning to —

THOMAS No, no! No tips I said!

TOBEY I'm not giving you a tip!

THOMAS Good! Because that's what I don't want. . . . Now shall I tell *you* why you went to your zoo today?

TOBEY I thought I was going to tell you.

THOMAS No, it's my turn, Tobey. My turn. You went to your zoo to find out the way animals have to exist with each other — all those bars. Get it? (Swipes at him.) Sorry! Am I taking up your space? You saw all those animals at the zoo, separated from one another, and you thought, 'Gee, people are separated too. Isn't that a shame. They ought to get together more.' (Shoves TOBEY.) Am I taking up too much of your space? But no bars, did you notice? No bars between us!

TOBEY Hey, watch that!

THOMAS I'm standing here minding my own business. I'm reading a book because I don't believe in violence to solve problems.

TOBEY You're nuts.

THOMAS Oh, but you made me what I am today, pal. Now don't you want to hear the story of my zoo?

TOBEY NO!

THOMAS Sure you do. (ordering TOBEY) Sit on that bench!

TOBEY I don't want to! You're very amusing, do you know that?

THOMAS You — go sit on that bench.

TOBEY No!

THOMAS Sit on that bench, and I'm going to tell you the story of my goddamn zoo!

TOBEY I'm not sitting there! (not totally convinced) I'm not afraid of you.

THOMAS Oh yes, you are! And I'm going to make you sit there.

TOBEY You'll never make me sit there in a thousand years!

THOMAS But, Tobey, it's your bench.

TOBEY I'm telling you I don't want anything to do with the bench!

THOMAS You do. You want to carve it with a knife. Or steal it so nobody else can sit on it. Oh, I know! You want to piss all over it, from one side to the other, so

that no human can sit on it. But no, no, no, I'm still wrong! You want to shit on it! You want to take one of your great big shits and leave it right in the middle where the rest of the world can see just how much you've accomplished with your life! And not just one bench. Every bench in the whole goddamned world!

TOBEY I'm going to call the police!

THOMAS Pish! The police don't care about you and me. They're off arresting people for marijuana! Now sit on that bench before I beat your stupid-fuck head in!

TOBEY I'm leaving.

THOMAS (blocking his way) But, Tobe, you haven't shat on the bench yet. Someone's got to do it. And I haven't told you the moral of our zoo story either.

TOBEY (not convinced that THOMAS is dangerous) Are you for real or are — ?

THOMAS Tobey, Tobey, Tobey, these are the things men fight for? You can't surrender that right. What will happen to civilization? Your honor demands that you stay here and shit on that bench! It's guaranteed by the Constitution!

TOBEY I will not!

THOMAS You have a certain amount of dignity. I've been so blinded by prejudice I had no idea you people could have dignity. I've been so blinded by the seat slashers and the graffiti scribblers and the extortionists with paper cups following me and the bullies with attitude and the roving gangs of sneering, ruthless, public-telephone-breaking losers who make this city such a pleasure to live in!

TOBEY You can't blame me for everybody else.

THOMAS Yes I can!

TOBEY I will not take this! You — You —

THOMAS Then you leave me no choice but this. (He takes out a knife.)

TOBEY What's that?

THOMAS A knife. A middle-class knife. Want to try it on for size?

TOBEY No.

THOMAS Come on, you'll like it.

TOBEY I've got a knife too. (Takes it out.) And mine's bigger.

THOMAS I figured as much. That's why I brought this along. (Takes out an even larger knife.) What do you think of this one? (Grabs TOBEY, puts the knife to his throat, and disarms him.) Now will you sit on the bench?

TOBEY I guess so. (He sits on the bench, intimidated.) I . . .

THOMAS I knew you'd catch on eventually.

TOBEY So what's your zoo story?

THOMAS It's our story, Tobey. Yours and mine. We're the zoo. We're the animals.

TOBEY I just wanted to tell you — to tell somebody — that they have a new baby panda at the zoo.

THOMAS I'm sure you did, bubie. I'm sure you're just as innocent as all get-out. But you didn't count on me, Tobey. You didn't count on running into the one guy who's taken all he can. You didn't count on the one asshole who's going to set things right again.

TOBEY You can't do that!

THOMAS What's to stop me? Law and order? Self-restraint? Those old things? How middle-class!

TOBEY Now those things aren't so bad. Really.

THOMAS Oh, but they are, Tobey! Very bad. Very dead. Just as you're going to be very dead when you hear this zoo story.

TOBEY Now, now!

THOMAS Yes, now. Extremely soon, in fact. I'm going to stick this knife into you and twist it three times for good luck. And then the world will begin to appreciate the value of good citizenship.

TOBEY It will?

THOMAS Well, maybe not. You could be right. What a shame. You will have died in vain.

TOBEY Listen, I promise not to come back here anymore. I promise not to take a crap on any benches. I promise —

THOMAS Ah, Tobey, you're so full of . . . promise. How can I bring myself to do this? But I must. (Begins to cry.)

TOBEY No, you mustn't do this!

THOMAS Oh, Tobey dear, it's much too late to think of things like that. (crying throughout) And I sincerely want to thank you and all your pals for turning me into you. How can I say this politely? Without you I'd just be the same old middle-class, overly civilized, nothing-but-a-joke Thomas I used to be!

(THOMAS stabs TOBEY in the spine from behind.)

TOBEY (falling to the floor) OH, MY GOD! . . . I didn't think you're really do it!

THOMAS (looking at TOBEY'S dying body) Well, you were wrong, Tobey. Very wrong. . . . Excuse me. I seem to have lost my knife. (Retrieves it from behind the bench.) Ah, here it is.

TOBEY Thomas, help me! Oh, my God!

THOMAS Help you? Help you? Why in the world would I do that? My word, Tobey, you're such a bad, bad judge of character. . . .

SLOW FADE

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