

Shakespeare Goes to War
By John Fisher
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Originally produced at Thick House, San Francisco, November 4-30, 2015. The original cast was Kevin Capps, John Fisher, Sean Keehan, Gabriel Ross, and Jesse Vaughn; Directed by the author; Lighting, Scenic and Prop Design by Jon Wai-keung Lowe; Stage Management by JinAh Lee.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

All characters are played by five actors.

Actor 1 (20s): JACK, a high school student/*HARRY*, Harry Smith at 21, an American Army Officer

Actor 2 (50s): *HARRY*, Harry Smith in his mid-Fifties/*KLAMBACH*, German Army Officer/*DAD*, Jack's father

Actor 3 (50s): *BACHMAN*, a high school teacher/*MAITLAND*, British Army Officer/*BRIGGS*, California State Politician/*RAISNOVSKY*, Russian Army Officer/*THOMPSON*, a high school teacher/*REAGAN*, Governor of California

Actor 4 (20s): *RYKER*, a high school student/*CONROY*, an American Army officer/*THOMAS WALSINGHAM*

Actor 5 (20s): *JEREMIAH*, a high school student/*DOUGLAS*, an American Army Officer (*JEREMIAH* and *DOUGLAS* are African-American)

Setting: The play is set at a suburban high school and in Germany.

Set: The action is continuous, the scenes flowing one into the next without break. The set should be institutional but quickly adaptable to the quick changes of location.

Music/Sound: All music and sound is made live by the actors.

Act One

Scene 1

(JACK, eighteen years old, steps forward, wearing HARRY's jacket, and intones a speech from *Richard II*.)

JACK: "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings."

(Sentimental Seventies tune: "Daniel." All sound and music is performed live by the actors. This device will be explained later. Lights up on HARRY SMITH in tennis whites playing tennis. He is in his sixties. We hear the tennis ball bouncing off his racket. He continues to play as the music fades. JACK removes his HARRY coat and talks to the audience.)

JACK: Mr. Smith was my English teacher when I came to high school in the fall of 1975. He was a gentleman. And he fascinated me. Years later I found out he was a tennis player. Which made sense. He was so elegant and in shape. It was a different era. The Seventies. Being a public high school English teacher was... well, it was an envied job, a fun job, a job where a hard working, focused man could have an influence. Harry, Mr. Smith, was like that. Hard working, focused, influential. He was also gay. That too was important. Though you wouldn't know it. No one really "knew" it. Officially. (JACK sheds his outfit to reveal pajamas. He lies on the stage as he talks.) I lived in a small town that was just three miles from my high school. Every morning my father, who was the same age, the same era as Harry Smith but a completely different character, *a completely different character*, a different *species* even, would come jogging into my room. He was on a health kick.

(HARRY removes his tennis shorts to reveal boxers and his tennis shirt to reveal a t-shirt. He jogs in place now as DAD, fifty years old.)

JACK: I would be lying in bed and the first thing I heard every morning was Daddy jogging in place. It was my signal to get up and run around the house with him. In our underwear.

(The song changes to Sinatra's "Nice and Easy" sung by DAD as he and JACK jog around the house in their underwear.)

JACK: Then we would dress, have breakfast and drive me to school before he caught the Ferry.

DAD: Get the lead out, son. There's only one chocolate donut on that ferryboat and my name is on it.

(DAD exits jogging. JACK talks to audience as he dresses – jeans, short sleeve shirt, very non-descript.)

Scene 2

JACK: High school terrified me. It was huge. A huge building full of lockers and people taller than me. It seems there should be sound doesn't it? Ok, lockers!

(OTHER ACTORS make the sound of slamming lockers and background noises.)

JACK: Harry always said, "Make the noises yourself." That's what we'll do. So I had to find my first class. In that building the size of a prison. (JACK moves about the space

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looking for the classroom. The ACTORS make the sounds of a very confusing first day of class. It takes JACK a while to find his classroom. He looks afraid.)

JACK: The first class of the day, the first class of my freshman year. First year English. With Harry Smith. (Boom – suddenly clarity where there was confusion. All sound stops, spotlight isolation on HARRY, very well dressed in his jacket and tie – the ones we will identify with him, the jacket just like the one JACK wore in the beginning. JACK sits with audience looking up at HARRY on stage. HARRY speaks:)

HARRY: William Shakespeare is important for what reason? Does anybody know?

RYKER: (From the audience) Because he's a fucking good writer.

HARRY: (Consulting roll sheet) Mr. Flek. Ryker. If you swear in here again you'll go to the office. Is that understood?

RYKER: Yes, Mr. Smith.

HARRY: Thank you. The f-word notwithstanding, Ryker is quite correct. Shakespeare is a superlative writer. His expression of thoughts and emotions is unparalleled in human language. He is the embodiment of Renaissance England's confidence and enlightenment. This term we will begin by reading his immortal tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

(JACK, RYKER, a teenage jock, and JEREMIAH, an African-American student, all mount the stage.)

JACK: (To audience) The classroom was very odd because right there, next to his podium, was a stage, a wooden stage. And he made us get up there and enact the scenes. He even played music. (HARRY puts a record on a portable record player, the love theme from the Zeffereilli movie is heard.) We were supposed to read an act a night and be ready to play any role assigned the next day. Ryker and I, and another guy Jerry, Jeremiah – well, more on him later but – we were assigned the first scene. Mr. Smith always read the prologues and authority figures.)

HARRY: (Reading) "Act I. Prologue. Chorus:

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

SCENE I. Verona. A public place. Enter Sampson and Gregory, of the house of Capulet, armed with swords and bucklers."

(JACK, RYKER and JEREMIAH have gotten onstage with their *Romeo and Juliet* books.)

HARRY: All right, Mr. Fletcher. You're Sampson. Be a stud.

JACK: What?

HARRY: A stud, Mr. Fletcher, a stud. Sampson is studly so you must become a stud.

JACK: How?

HARRY: Act, Mr. Fletcher. Act it.

JACK: I can't. I'm too shy.

HARRY: There is no shyness here, students. This is a stage. Do not mount it unless you are willing to pretend. It is like a horse, you must command it and only then will it be your mistress.

JACK: I don't understand.

HARRY: Well, there's no reason you should. It was a hopelessly twisted metaphor.

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JACK: (Now really confused) Huh?

HARRY: Act, Mr. Fletcher, act. L'audace. Toujours l'audace. Access your inner stud and command Sampson.

(JACK rolls up book like a sword and acts like a stud.)

RYKER: (Laughing) Dude.

HARRY: "Enter Abraham and Balthasar." You too, Mr. Flek. Stud.

RYKER: Easy. (RYKER is a jock so it is easy.)

RYKER: (Reading) "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?"

JACK: (Reading) "I do bite my thumb, sir."

HARRY: Well bite your thumb, Mr. Fletcher.

JACK: Bite my thumb?

HARRY: It's a sign of disrespect to bite your thumb at someone.

RYKER: Oh, you mean like giving someone the finger?

HARRY: Mr. Flek.

RYKER: What? I didn't swear.

HARRY: Yes, it's like giving someone the finger. Go ahead.

RYKER: "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?"

JACK (Aside to GREGORY): Is the law of our side, if I say aye?

JEREMIAH: No."

HARRY: (Impatient) Mr. Danby! (HARRY indicates JEREMIAH should be a stud as well. JEREMIAH becomes an instant stud.)

JEREMIAH: "No!!!

JACK: No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my thumb, sir.

JEREMIAH: Do you quarrel, sir?

RYKER: Quarrel sir! No, sir.

JACK: But if you do, sir, I am for you: I serve as good a man as you.

RYKER: No better.

JACK: Well, sir.

JEREMIAH: Say 'better:' here comes one of my master's kinsmen.

JACK: Yes, better, sir.

RYKER: You lie.

JACK: Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing blow.

HARRY: *They fight.* "Well? Fight.

RYKER: Fight?

HARRY: Yes.

RYKER: You want us to fight?

HARRY: That's what it says.

(RYKER, JACK and JEREMIAH roll up their books as weapons.)

JACK: "Draw if you be men!!!!"

(They fight, a wild joyous sword fight with rolled up books.)

HARRY: Sound gentlemen! There should be sound!

RYKER: Where does that come from?

HARRY: Make it yourself. It's a play so play! Make the sounds! Make the music!

Command the stage!

(They make the clinking sound of crossed swords and continue their joyous yelling. Suddenly HARRY cuts in with the PRINCE's lines.)

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HARRY: "What, ho! you men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground,
And hear the sentence of your moved prince.
Once more, on pain of death, all men depart"
(RYKER, JACK and JEREMIAH are stunned into silence.)

HARRY: Excellent gentlemen. Excellent.

RYKER: Damn, you scared me. I thought you were actually pissed.

HARRY: As Ryker and his cohorts have demonstrated, Shakespeare is full of action and brawling. It's just like high school. It is also full of issues, social and political issues. In this play we are confronted with the desires of the individual vs. the capricity of the social structure.

JACK: Excuse me Mr. Smith, what does capricity mean?

HARRY: It means to be capricious. To fluctuate arbitrarily. Governments, polities have a tendency to do that.

JACK: (Only slightly getting it) Oh, thanks. (To audience) We also had writing assignments. We had to write stories. Mine were always adventures. (Reading to class) "I dangled from the cliff, Schmeisser in one hand, walkie-talkie in the other. 'In thirty seconds the entire castle is going to blow up,' I said into the walkie-talkie. 'The detonators are set for noon.'"

RYKER: What's a Schmeisser?

HARRY: It's a German machine gun. If you have a question please raise your hand, Mr. Flek.

(RYKER does so.)

HARRY: Mr. Flek.

RYKER: What's a Schmeisser?

HARRY: I just answered that question, Mr. Flek. Please don't waste time. Keep reading, Mr. Fletcher.

JACK: (Reading) "Realizing the explosives would detonate in two seconds I released my piton and committed myself to a free fall to the base of the valley, three thousand feet below. I would just have to get lucky in finding something to break my fall. As I fell away from my rope the hillside above me exploded with a deafening CRACK! The force of the blast actually propelled me downwards, huge boulders hurtling in my wake." To be continued.

HARRY: Very exciting, Mr. Fletcher. A cliffhanger. Literally. Your story of a soldier blowing up a German castle is of course a metaphor for the individual's struggle with a predominant and fortified society.

RYKER: I think it's just a war story.

HARRY: That's because you refuse to look beyond entertainment to the social underpinnings of representation, Mr. Flek.

JEREMIAH: Everything means something else, Ryker.

RYKER: Not in my world. A thing's a thing. Super simple.

HARRY: You live in a blessed world, Mr. Flek.

Scene 3

JACK: (To audience) It was hard to know what Harry was talking about all the time. But he was working towards something through metaphor, trying to get us to apply all stories to a larger view of a complex world. The complexity of the world was always at hand back then. It was the era of the Briggs Initiative. This is Briggs. (SEANTOR BRIGGS appears and speaks to audience.)

BRIGGS: The good work Miss Anita Bryant is doing in Florida is the good work we need to implement out here in our own fine state. We grow oranges too. And we also grow young people. And just as the sun feeds an orange, teachers feed students. And the homosexual teacher is a teacher who feeds in the wrong way. He's going to turn our citrus into the wrong kind of fruit. Let's protect our oranges.

JACK: (To audience) We learned about the Brigg's Initiative from Mr. Bachman. Mr. Bachman was the opposite of cryptic or metaphorical. You always knew what he was talking about.

(BRIGGS removes tie and unbuttons shirt to reveal colorful scarf tied around his neck. He is now BACHMAN, a very queer teacher.)

BACHMAN: (In a Southern accent) My name is Mr. Bachman and as you see my scarf is tied to the right. That means I'm available. To anyone. (He smiles flirtatiously.)

JACK: (To audience) Mr. Bachman told us what we should think, about everything.

BUCHMAN: (Suddenly on a rant) This school doesn't care a monkey's pink bottom about women. It doesn't. You can tell by how little money it gives to all the girls' teams. Nothing. It gives nothing.

JACK: (To audience) And Ryker always confronted him.

RYKER: The girls' teams get as much money as the mens'.

BACHMAN: Ryker, I coach girls' tennis. Let me show you something. (He takes a Girl's Tennis jersey from offstage) This is a girls' tennis jacket. With not much effort I could tear this in two with my bare hands. Right now. Would you like me to do that? Would you? Now could I do that with your football uniform?

RYKER: Forget it.

JACK: (To audience) They always got into these things.

BACHMAN: The Brigg's Initiative is just a witch hunt. A witch hunt. It's McCarthyism.

RYKER: It's not. It's meant to protect young people.

BACHMAN: How? By hunting down teachers who are homosexuals? How would you even prove something like that? Quite aside from the fact that it's illegal because it's not a crime to be gay in this country, how would you even establish that someone is gay? A witch hunt.

RYKER: I think it's supposed to get people to swear on oath that they're not gay.

BACHMAN: So you make all the gay teachers lie? To keep their jobs? You'd rather have liars teaching you than homosexuals? How about this Ryker, if you vote in the Briggs Initiative I'm going to say that I'm not gay and then you're going to have to prove that I actually am. How does that sound? Perverse enough for you?

RYKER: I'm not even registered.

BACHMAN: Good.

RYKER: What a dick.

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BACHMAN: (Handing him a pink slip) Here you go, Ryker. Take that down to the office. Detention. Again. Get going. Out!

RYKER: You rant about fascism and then you act like a Nazi.

BACHMAN: Not a Nazi, a dick. I'm acting like a dick. This is how a big ole' swingin' dick behaves. Allons-y. Out!

JACK: (To audience) I used to ask my father about these things at the breakfast table. He was a lawyer so he wasn't much help.

(JACK has sat at breakfast table with DAD, who sips coffee and reads the paper.)

DAD: The Brigg's Initiative? It's criminal. Just criminal.

JACK: Because it persecutes homosexuals?

DAD: No, because it takes the law out of the government's hands. Initiatives, propositions, they're all stupid, just stupid. The government's job is to legislate, that's why we pay them, that's why we have elections and pay them too much money: to sit around on their fat asses and legislate. Then we spend all this extra money on initiatives to decide how they should legislate which we're already paying them to do! Jesus, as if there wasn't enough government we have to create more.

JACK: But do you think homosexuals should be teachers?

DAD: That's immaterial. All teachers are pederasts by nature but that's immaterial. What am I always telling you - look at the bottom line. This is about government. And there's too much of it in this country.

JACK: *Time Magazine* says there are too many attorneys in this country.

DAD: Well, this attorney just bought you a new bicycle and he has to get to work. So can we stop talking about fairies and get me to the ferry. (Pause.) That was a joke. Pretty funny, huh?

JACK: Not really.

DAD: Did I offend you?

JACK: No, I just don't think it was that funny.

DAD: It wasn't that funny but it was funny. It was funny. (They exit and JACK immediately returns.)

Scene 4

JACK: (To audience) But I'm getting ahead of myself. That was Senior year, back to Freshman. On the strength of Harry's personality I joined the film society. We studied film at lunch time. I actually signed on for an extra class just to be with Harry. The first film we studied: *The Sterile Cuckoo* with Liza Minnelli. (Two of the actors imitate Liza and her co-star in the big phone scene; then they sing the "Come Saturday Morning" theme song. HARRY just stares at the screen mouthing the words, entranced with Liza. JACK looks at him.) I guess that should have been a clue. (Film ends. HARRY talks to JACK.)

HARRY: Did you like that?

JACK: Kinda. She seemed like she was actually that person.

HARRY: Conviction. She has conviction.

JACK: It was weird.

HARRY: Do you like acting?

JACK: Sure. I like pretending. But more action type stuff.

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HARRY: I was that way.

JACK: In high school?

HARRY: No, after that.

JACK: When?

HARRY: (Ignoring the question) What do you want to be when you finish high school?

JACK: I don't know. I've thought of being a teacher.

HARRY: Why?

JACK: It seems fun.

HARRY: It is fun.

JACK: Did you know you wanted to be a teacher when you were in high school?

HARRY: I don't know. That's funny, I just asked you that question and now I realize I have no idea what I wanted to be when I was your age.

JACK: Is that when you got interested in Shakespeare and drama and that stuff?

HARRY: No. It isn't.

(Pause.)

JACK: Where did you get interested in drama?

HARRY: Well... I was kind of ordered to become an actor at one point.

JACK: You were ordered?

HARRY: In a way.

(Pause.)

HARRY: I was in a prison camp during the war. We used to put on plays to keep from getting bored.

JACK: Wow. A German prison camp?

HARRY: Yep.

JACK: You were captured by the Germans?

HARRY: Yes.

JACK: Big wow. (To the audience) He was suddenly my most favorite person in the world. My favorite TV show – *Hogan's Heroes*. (We hear *Hogan's Heroes* theme, done by two actors – one on snare drum, the other on melody.) My favorite movie – *The Great Escape*. (We hear *The Great Escape* theme – same arrangement.) I couldn't believe this elegant English teacher had been a prisoner of the Germans. (To HARRY) Did you try to escape?

HARRY: No, but I was involved in an escape.

JACK: You were? Major wow, holy wow, tell me everything, absolutely everything about it. (To the audience) He must have sensed my interest.

HARRY: I was captured during the Battle of the Bulge.

JACK: Total wowzer, I just read a book about it, my favorite book ever, *The Ghost Front*.

HARRY: It was very scary. I was out in the woods, in the snow, alone and terrified.

JACK: Oh, my God, oh, my fucking God – sorry - whenever my parents take me skiing in Tahoe I imagine I'm behind German lines, in the snow, in the Battle of the Bulge.

HARRY: Well, it was... It was...

JACK: Tell me about it. Just tell me.

HARRY: (Reluctantly) It was certainly an education, I'll say that. Some men, one man in particular, exerted an enormous influence on me. (JACK is wide-eyed with

interest.) Ok... I was an officer, in the US 70th Infantry Division, the Trailblazers we were called. I'd grown up in suburban Seattle, trained in the Oregon hills, and there I was, suddenly, in December 1944. And I was twenty-one.

HARRY/JACK: (Together) Behind enemy lines.

Scene 5

(HARRY exits. JACK is now HARRY, the twenty-one year old version. He narrates to the audience his adventures, moving about the space recreating them physically.

The other ACTORS make appropriate environmental sounds.)

JACK (As HARRY – from here to the end of the Act): My unit had been overrun by Germans tanks. I was out of ammo, out of food. And when the Panthers came I'd run the wrong direction, I'd run towards the Germans, not away from them. Stupid. Stupid. I surrendered to a German field kitchen. They gave me some soup and then told me to walk towards the railway, with my hands up. Soon I was in a clump of Americans all walking east. And then I was on a train freezing to death, and hungry. And then I was standing in the mud of Stalag 4 outside of Leipzig and a German officer was addressing us.

(KLAMBACH, a German Colonel, appears and addresses audience. He is played by the same actor who play older HARRY. HARRY [JACK] stands to the side listening.)

KLAMBACH: Welcome to Stalag 4. I am Oberst Klambach. You will address me as Herr Oberst. I am a hero of the Russian Front, where all the real fighting has happened. You are all cowards of decadent Western culture. The German culture is infinitely superior. This we know. The best evidence is I speak your language, you do not speak mine. This is because you are all poorly educated, lazy and masturbatory. While you are here it is best that you reflect on your inferiority and continue to masturbate. Do not be afraid of depression - it is your lot in life as lazy wankers. This we know. Your commanding officer is Colonel Maitland of the decadent, imperialist British Army. I refer to him as the head wanker. Head wanker? You see, my little joke. Even in your language I am witty. Colonel.

MAITLAND: (Stepping forward) Thank you for that charming introduction, Herr Oberst. Right. I'm Colonel Parker Maitland, Royal Fussiliers. I am your commanding officer. I will talk to each and every one of you Yanks over the next few days and give you assignments. The British Army does not encourage or discourage masturbation. It is a subject of indifference to us. Back to you, Herr Oberst.

KLAMBACH: "Back to me" I assume is a reference to your preferred position in sexual intercourse with your superiors. You see, I am very clever. Here is more cleverness. This is a sound you will never hear. (He gestures and we hear a loud siren.) It is the siren sounded when prisoners escape. Prisoners do not escape here. This is a sound you will hear instead. (He gestures and we hear machine guns.) It is the sound of prisoners being gunned down by Schmeissers as they try to escape. Do not try to escape. It is very tiresome. Stay here and wank off. Be sad. Masturbate. Good morning.

Scene 6

(Lights change to MAITLAND at a desk interviewing HARRY.)

MAITLAND: Lieutenant Smith. You studied English at University.

HARRY: Yessir.

MAITLAND: You had some time in London before shipping out to Marseilles.

HARRY: How did you know?

MAITLAND: I have my sources. What did you do in London other than seduce our women and give them syphilis and gonorrhoea? (Pause.) I'm joking, lad. I'm joking. (Suddenly serious) Not really. (Friendly again) No, I am. What did you do in London? Other than sleep with our women?

HARRY: I didn't sleep with any women.

MAITLAND: Course you did. We're happy to provide you Yanks hospitality. You're helping us win this war against the Jerrys. So long as you wore a contraceptive device. Better you than some enlisted man with a shriveled disease ridden penis. You did wear a contraceptive device?

HARRY: Actually I didn't-

MAITLAND: You didn't wear a contraceptive? How rude.

HARRY: No, I didn't sleep with...

(MAITLAND is eyeing him suspiciously.)

HARRY: Well, yes, I did sleep with your women and I did wear a condom when I did it. Sleep with your women, your wife, your daughters... I plowed your daughters! (In ridiculous English accent) Sorry, old chap. Old Bean. Sorry. (He laughs nervously.)

MAITLAND: Old Bean?

HARRY: I imitate people when I'm nervous. Bad habit. Drives my mother crazy. (As his mother) "Harry, don't pick your nose! Harry, stand up straight!" (He laughs nervously.)

MAITLAND: You're kind of an odd bird, aren't you?

HARRY: Odd bird?

MAITLAND: Square fish?

HARRY: Square fish?

MAITLAND: Maybe you should just tell me what you did in London rather than roger our women?

HARRY: I went to the theatre. Every night.

MAITLAND: The theatre!

HARRY: Yes.

MAITLAND: You're an actor!

HARRY: Not really.

MAITLAND: Course you are! Splendid! That explains it. All actors are odd birds. Too much make believe. Lose all touch with reality. I love that about actors. They live in Cloud Cuckooland. Well, you'll fit in beautifully with our dramatic society. We're putting on *Romeo and Juliet* in one week and we've just lost our Juliet.

HARRY: Where did she go?

MAITLAND: *He*. He didn't go anywhere. He died. Dysentery. I begged him to hang on till opening night. I said he could expire in the tomb scene. It would make theatrical

history. Juliet actually drops dead when Juliet actually drops dead. He didn't see it that way. He just wanted to drop dead. So I let him.

(HARRY looks confused – is MAITLAND joking?)

MAITLAND: Don't let it worry you, old chap. Gallows humor. Klambach killed him, the swine. Like he's killing all of us, slowly but surely. Starvation, you know. Not really his fault, I daresay. But that's another story. Keep your mind on activities, keep it off of hunger, depression, etc. You'll do splendidly in our dramatic society. Not much use I daresay in our other departments.

HARRY: What are those?

MAITLAND: (Not answering the question) Juliet, fair Juliet. We're restoring Shakespeare to his ancient traditions: all male productions, of necessity. But it's really quite illuminating. Works much better than our productions of Noel Coward and Eugene O'Neill. Somehow two men arguing about divorce doesn't quite resonate. Though I daresay it will one day. Ha ha.

Scene 7

(MAITLAND exits as CALEB CONROY enters. He is an American Army Captain, from the South. He is played by the actor who plays RYKER. He hands HARRY a script.)

CONROY: I'm Conroy. Dramatic Society. We only have a week so we better get started. I'm Romeo:

"What light through yonder window breaks..."

HARRY: Where do I stand?

CONROY: I don't know. You're the director.

HARRY: I'm the director?

CONROY: Colonel Maitland said you're a director so direct.

HARRY: Well where's the balcony?

CONROY: Wherever you want it. We don't have one.

HARRY: How can we do the balcony scene without a balcony?

CONROY: Building supplies go to other departments.

HARRY: What other departments? What other departments need building supplies, Captain?

CONROY: Stand over there and act feminine. Here's a wig. (He throws HARRY a mop head, which HARRY puts on his head.)

HARRY: "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art though Romeo..."

GERMANIC VOICE (Off): Achtung!

(KLAMBACH enters, holding a book.)

KLAMBACH: I will watch rehearsals.

CONROY: Beggin' the Colonel's pardon but we just started rehearsing this scene. It's not very good.

KLAMBACH: Then I will make suggestions. I am a cultured European and I am full of advice. Proceed.

CONROY: Colonel, this rehearsal is not open to the public.

KLAMBACH: I wish I had the leisure to put on tights and perform love scenes.

Unfortunately the German army is too busy winning the war. So I will observe and

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soak up the beauties of the English language. Soon you will all be underlings of the German empire so you had better get used to entertaining us. Proceed.

HARRY: (In ridiculous German accent) Javohl, Herr Oberst Feld-Marhsall!

KLAMBACH: You are making fun of me. I am not amused.

HARRY: I'm sorry, sir. Nervous habit.

KLAMBACH: Put your nervous energy into your performance of the decadent degenerate hot-pants virgin Juliet. Proceed.

CONROY: "But soft, what light through yonder..."

KLAMBACH: Skip to the sexy part.

CONROY: The sexy part?

KLAMBACH: Where they smook.

CONROY: Where they smook?

KLAMBACH: It is common American idiom. Smook. Kissy-kissy?

CONROY: Smooch.

KLAMBACH: Smooch? Ah, yes, thank you. Skip to the sexy-sexy, smooch-kissy part.

HARRY: "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,

My Love as deep; the more I give to thee,

The more I have, for both are infinite."

KLAMBACH: Stop. Romeo.

CONROY: What is it, Herr Oberst?

KLAMBACH: Do you love Juliet?

CONROY: Of course, Herr Oberst.

KLAMBACH: You're acting like she has bad breath.

CONROY: Well, sir, she does.

HARRY: Sorry.

KLAMBACH: I will tell Sergeant Shaffer to give you some toothpaste. Where's your set?

HARRY: We don't have one.

KLAMBACH: He will also give you building supplies. (Handing HARRY book.) And here is a textbook on theatre in English. It will help. You see, I have everything.

HARRY: Wow.

KLAMBACH: Yes, wow. We must make this a stunning Shakespeare. I will not have you going home to your philistine country of origin and telling people that we underfund the arts. Good morning. (He starts to leave, stops.) Herr Captain Conroy!

CONROY: Yes, Herr Oberst.

KLAMBACH: Show me your hands!

(CONROY steps forward, shows KLAMBACH his hands.)

KLAMBACH: Other side.

(CONROY flips hands.)

KLAMBACH: (To HARRY) Captain Conroy is a digger. A mole. Show him your neck.

(CONROY reveals a scar.) This is what happens to moles. They get shot in the neck. Now he acts instead of digs. And he learns his lines word perfect to show he has no time for digging. Right, Herr Conroy?

CONROY: Yessir.

KLAMBACH: And he demonstrates that even an ignorant Southern Boy from Louisiana can perform Shakespeare sexy-sexy. Right, Herr Conroy?

CONROY: Yessir.

KLAMBACH: Good morning. (KLAMBACH exits.)

CONROY: Motherfucker.

HARRY: What do you dig?

CONROY: What do you think? At least I used to.

HARRY: Here, let's run the scene.

CONROY: (Throwing down his script) Fuck this.

HARRY: (Kindly picking up script and handing it to CONROY) We only have a week.

Scene 8

(MATLAND and KLAMBACH enter the audience area.)

MAITLAND: You're honoring me and my officers with your presence on opening night, Herr Oberst?

KLAMBACH: I'm celebrating. The German Fifth Panzer Army has broken through to the Meuse. Soon it will divide Field Marshal Montgomery from General Patton and the Allied armies with collapse. Most exciting.

MAITLAND: Then those must have been celebratory fireworks I heard in Leipzig this morning. And I thought they were American bombers. Silly me.

KLAMBACH: Sit down and shut up. (To audience) Good evening officers of the losing side in this war. A special preshow announcement: Tomorrow morning we will examine your genitalia. This is not out of any prurient interest in your scrota. There are no homosexuals in the Third Reich. This we know. It is to pull back your foreskin and determine whether or not you are diseased. Please cooperate. On with the show.

(Suddenly we are backstage and HARRY and CONROY are dressing for opening night.)

HARRY: All set? We're starting.

CONROY: Yes.

HARRY: So tonight remember to keep your volume up.

CONROY: Yes, ok.

HARRY: And don't be afraid of holding me tight.

CONROY: Yes.

HARRY: And kiss me. Really kiss me. Like you mean it.

CONROY: Ok.

HARRY: Is that all right? Does that still make you uncomfortable?

CONROY: No, it's fine.

HARRY: It's just acting.

CONROY: I know.

HARRY: And when you stab yourself at the end.

CONROY: I know, I know, "Pain, pain, pain, feel the dagger going in."

HARRY: Did I say that too many times?

CONROY: No. No, you're a good director. Thanks.

HARRY: Break a leg.

CONROY: Is that one of your theatrical expressions? From your book?

HARRY: Yes, it means... well, it means "break a leg." I can't say what it means because to say what it means backstage is bad.

CONROY: Ok. Break your legs too.

HARRY: You look very handsome.

CONROY: Is he going to be here? Klambach?

HARRY: I invited him. He gave us all this extra stuff. It'll be ok.

CONROY: No, it won't.

HARRY: It will. He wants to believe. He wants us to succeed. (CONROY smiles.) One more thing, one more piece of direction. (He hands CONROY some rolled up socks.)

CONROY: What? Oh, yes, of course.

(Blackout. Music – A Renaissance Song. Lights up on CONROY in his tights, which are stuffed, badly but prominently with the socks. Balcony scene repeat.)

HARRY: "If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

CONROY: Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords: look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity.

JULIET: I would not for the world they saw thee here.

CONROY: I have night's cloak to hide me from their sight;
And but thou love me, let them find me here:

My life were better ended by their hate,
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love."

KLAMBACH: (From the audience) Love her, Romeo! Love her! It's Shakespeare for God's sake, show more ardor!

(It takes HARRY and CONROT a second to recover from this outburst.)

HARRY: By whose direction found'st thou out this place?

CONROY: By love, who first did prompt me to inquire;
He lent me counsel and I lent him eyes."

KLAMBACH: Love her!

CONROY: (Grabbing JULIET desperately) "I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise."

(Blackout. Music. Lights up on tomb scene, CONROY over HARRY's body holding vial of poison, about to drink it.)

CONROY: "Come bitter conduct, come unsavory guide!
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks they sea-sick weary bark.
Here's to my love!"

KLAMBACH: It's not moonshine, you hillbilly! You're toasting your love!

CONROY: (After drinking it down) "O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick."

KLAMBACH: You're performing for soldiers, schweinhunt! Make your death convincing! Conviction!

CONROY: "Thus with a kiss I die."

(Romeo dies. HARRY as JULIET awakens and sees dead body.)

HARRY: "What's here? a cup, closed in my true love's hand?
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:

John Fisher

O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop
To help me after? I will kiss thy lips;
Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,
To make me die with a restorative.
(HARRY kisses CONROY's lips.) Thy lips are warm.
(We hear feet running in the distance.)
Yea, noise? then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!
(Snatching CONROY's dagger.)
This is thy sheath;
(Stabs herself.)
There rust, and let me die."

(Falls on CONROY's body, and dies. Blackout. Lights up.)

KLAMBACH: (Crossing onstage) Excellent work, Juliet. You moved me to tears. Herr Conroy, your performance was evidence of the Louisiana's particular ignorance in the world of Western decadence. (In southern drawl) Not very convincing, Massah Conroy. (CONROY exits. To MAITLAND) Jolly good evening in the theatre, Colonel. Righto! Chip-chip! Good show!

MAITLAND: Thank you, Colonel. I thought my officers did very well.

KLAMBACH: Of course they did, Colonel. I fed them, they received extra food. Actors are like Panzers, Colonel, you give them fuel they win battles. Or like pets. If you feed a cat it loves you, entertains you.

MAITLAND: You always know the most sensitive way to put things, Colonel.

KLAMBACH: Tomorrow you will receive a new officer. A very interesting young man. Apparently there is a manpower shortage amongst the allies. Good evening.

Scene 9

(Lights shift to MAITLAND standing with DOUGLAS, an African-American US Army Lieutenant, and CONROY.)

MAITLAND: Your name's Douglas Washington?

DOUGLAS: Yessir.

MAITLAND: I daresay you've had a rough time of it.

DOUGLAS: I have. I was in a boxcar for three days, in the snow.

MAITLAND: That's not what I meant. Forgive me young man, but how on earth were you made an officer?

DOUGLAS: Because I'm a Negro?

CONROY: Answer the Colonel's question, Lieutenant.

DOUGLAS: The army felt black soldiers should be commanded by a black officer. Before me, my squad was commanded by a white officer. They broke and ran under his leadership.

CONROY: Looks like you broke and ran all on your own.

DOUGLAS: Yeah, I broke and ran towards the Germans, asshole.

CONROY: Fuck you, Lieutenant.

MAITLAND: Gentleman.

CONROY: You know why you're here?

DOUGLAS: No, sir, I don't.

John Fisher

CONROY: You're here because Oberst Klambach wants to spread discord amongst the prisoners. You should be incarcerated with the Negro enlisted men.

DOUGLAS: But I'm not an enlisted man, I'm an officer.

CONROY: Don't talk back to me, boy.

DOUGLAS: Don't call me Boy, Sir.

MAITLAND: Gentlemen. It seems we've been presented with another one of Klambach's little games and we must play it and win, like all the others. If we squabble we're just giving in to his Teutonic tricks.

CONROY (To MAITLAND): How the hell am I supposed to have this man in my barracks? I have officers from the South. Hell, I'm from the South.

DOUGLAS: I grew up with crackers, I know how to live with them.

CONROY: You shut your damn-

MAITLAND: Captain. The lieutenant will be assigned to my barracks. My officers have experience of... officers from India and Burma. I daresay they are... accustomed.

(HARRY enters.)

MAITLAND: Ah, Lieutenant Smith. How are you? Meet Lieutenant Washington.

HARRY: Oh, hi. (WASHINGTON and HARRY shake.) You're black.

(Awkward pause.)

MAITLAND: Yes, well, very succinctly put, Smith. I think that sums things up nicely. Chin-chin. (Starts to leave.) Oh, Smith. Good show last night, jolly good.

HARRY: Thank you, sir.

CONROY: (Pointedly) Thank you, sir.

MAITLAND: Oh, yes, of course, you too Captain. You stuffed your tights I presume.

HARRY: That was my idea.

MAITLAND: Most impressive. A most brilliant piece of direction. Where on earth did you find all those materials? The sets?

HARRY: Well...

CONROY: Oberst Klambach provided them. He also gave us extra food. To make the other men jealous.

MAITLAND: Oh well, that's all right. We're all adults here. We don't hate each other for silly things like that. Put on another production, Lieutenant. Keep the men busy. Distracted. Keeps up morale. Maybe sneak in a message about contraception and penile health along the way. Oh, a request from the Old Oberst. He wants to see you. I approve. Go see him. Make him happy.

HARRY; Make him happy?

MAITLAND: Humor him. Now let's tear down your set. Don't want that lumber to go to waste. (MAITLAND exits with HARRY.)

CONROY: (To DOUGLAS) Come with me. I'll set you up.

DOUGLAS: I thought-

CONROY: Well you thought wrong. Can't have Colonel Maitland showing he's more tolerant than the Americans. You'll bunk with us. And it will be fine.

DOUGLAS: I don't believe you.

CONROY: Well, you'll just have to. You're not the only... We have other people who are different in our barracks. But that's a secret. Can you keep a secret?

DOUGLAS: Yes.

John Fisher

CONROY: Good. (They exit.)

Scene 10

(KLAMBACH enters, puts on a record – it is the Overture to Wagner’s *Das Liebesverbot*. He pretends to conduct the orchestra. We hear a knock.)

KLAMBACH: Come in, come in. (HARRY enters shyly.) Don’t be afraid. (KLAMBACH sits, HARRY starts to sit.) Remain standing. (KLAMBACH pours Schnapps and hands one to HARRY.) Go on sip it. It’s delicious. (HARRY sips.) You must use this new officer in your next production. Perhaps do *Romeo and Juliet* again with him as Romeo.

HARRY: Begging Herr Oberst’s pardon, I don’t think that would be well received.

KLAMBACH: Americans are so challenged by things. Living with people of a different color.

HARRY: With all due respect, sir, if word gets around that I was sipping Schnapps with the commandant it will be very bad for me.

KLAMBACH: Of course. I’ll finish it. (He takes the glass and downs it.) Your *Romeo and Juliet* was not bold. Your next production must be bold. Somehow. And hurry. Time is of the essence.

HARRY: Why the rush?

KLAMBACH: Oh, creativity does best under pressure. Believe me. The Blitzkrieg approach to art. Take no prisoners. I joke but do hurry. Keep the men active. Animated. And be bold. L’audace. Toujours l’audace.

HARRY: Thank you for the book, Herr Oberst. I’ve found it fascinating.

KLAMBACH: You’re welcome. A young man brought it here last year. It was in his pocket when he was captured.

HARRY: What happened to him?

KLAMBACH: He died. Disease. Of course everyone blames me but all of Germany is starving, dying of disease. Your American air force has made it so. With its bombs. This we know.

HARRY: Begging Herr Oberst’s pardon, but how did you get so interested in Shakespeare?

KLAMBACH: All Germans love Shakespeare. The German translation of *Hamlet* is better than the original. Everybody knows this.

HARRY: But you seem intimately interested?

KLAMBACH: Oh, well, I was unemployed between the wars. The German army was reduced to 100,000 by the Versailles Treaty and I lost my commission. I determined I might as well be actor. All professions were low paying and I realized it was my one opportunity to be an actor and to make as much as everyone else. Also there was rampant promiscuity in the theatre, as we know, and I required a lot of sex. It was easy decision.

HARRY: So you went from war to theatre, that seems strange.

KLAMBACH: Strange? How strange? War is spectacle, drama, conflict. All the tenants of drama.

HARRY: Were you self-taught.

KLAMBACH: Self-taught?

HARRY: Did you teach yourself how to act?

KLAMBACH: Teach myself? An American concept. I suppose it is like “self-made.” Americans are so arrogant. No, I studied with the greats, naturally, as one must if one takes anything seriously. I studied with Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin. He directed like a general, barking orders, demanding results; he was a man who could lead armies, he just led them onstage. Reinhardt believed in spectacle. He thought that spectacle captured what was in the human spirit, the Germans, onstage. Only if there were a lot of people onstage would the audience understand. Because that’s what they saw in their lives, crowds. The crowd rules the people. Of course Reichschancellor Hitler has proved that; if you can control the mass, the crowd, you can control the world. Almost. At least he’s almost proved it. Perhaps he hasn’t in the end. I don’t know. But Max Reinhardt wanted to put everybody onstage, spectacle. Of course, he ended up in America, like so many great Germans. That’s the tragedy of Herr Hitler. Well... one of the only tragedies. That so many great Germans have had to go to America.

HARRY: Did you study with Brecht?

KLAMBACH: Bertolt Brecht? He was not taken seriously. He was considered a rabble rouser. He was always in trouble. I did work with Brecht once. It wasn’t one of his best projects, but there was an aura about him even then, that you needed to work with him. You needed to understand him. I didn’t take it seriously, I was very foolish. When I think of all the questions I might have asked him, the things I might have learned from him. What amazed me about Brecht was he never thought it was good enough to put on a production of say... *Coriolanus*; one needed to interpret it. He did that with many plays by Shakespeare, *Richard II*, *Coriolanus*, he reinterpreted them. Wagner had done much the same with *Measure for Measure*, a very important play by Shakespeare, he reinterpreted it. (Indicating the record) *Das Liebes Verbot*. Wagner’s first opera, nobody knows it. It was a reinterpretation. These men saw in the great man, Shakespeare, an allegory for the complexity of German life. There are no heroes and villains as there are in *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*; they saw that the hero is very complex, that was *Coriolanus* or *Richard II*, and Brecht would take that and interpret it, turn it into a story about Germany in the nineteen-thirties. Much as Wagner had turned *Measure for Measure* into an allegory for the death of Romanticism – *Das Liebes Verbot* – love is forbidden. Wagner saw Nationalism would kill Romanticism just as Brecht saw that the true hero of the nineteen-thirties was very close to being a villain, that’s what it took to be a great man Germany, near villainy. Perhaps total villainy. It’s fascinating. Brecht thought of Max Rheinhardt, he got the spectacle, that was right. If you do Shakespeare it must be large, it must be big, it must be everywhere. But Brecht said, “That’s only part of it,” that Max Reinhardt didn’t go far enough, one needed to readdress the script, rewrite it, reinterpret the script for the now. That’s what Brecht did – he rewrote Shakespeare for the now, so the audience could not get lost in history or metaphor. He was that way, he was arrogant. Like an American. He rewrote Shakespeare. Magnificent. It’s nice to sit and talk about such things. There’s so much beauty in the world. Germany used to create so much beauty: culture, theatre, playwrights, masterpieces, Berlin seethed with energy and excitement in the nineteen-twenties.

HARRY: But wasn’t there...

KLAMBACH: Yes, yes, yes, there was impoverishment, there was inflation, there was unemployment, but it didn't need to go this route, it didn't need to end up like this. The problems of the twenties corrected, over corrected in the nineteen-thirties. With a war. Incredible.

HARRY: But you're a soldier. You spend your life looking at things like this.

KLAMBACH: Well... Even if you're a soldier it doesn't mean you can't see beauty or miss it when it's no longer in front of you. When we got to Russia... I saw so much magic... Magic, magical land, stretching forever. Everybody complained, they said, "The Steppes, the Steppes are so ugly, so boring." I thought they were beautiful. All that wheat. I'd never seen so much nature, exposed, laid out in front of me, swamps and waterways and creeks and wheat, stretching for miles. They say the great plains of America are like this. Amazing. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, a city... The cities, architecture like I'd never seen it before. Beautiful. Specific. The Russian people, completely unique. And it was all destroyed. Not only did I see it as great beauty, but I saw it burn. Burn, burn, burn, burn, everything burns, even concrete, if you get it hot enough, burns. That's what I learned in Russia. Crowds, crowds of people. You know a crowd doesn't look so much like a crowd when you watch it die. You can't kill a crowd as a crowd. You have to kill as individuals, one at a time. In other words, you look at a clump of people, it seems indestructible: people screaming, people "Sieg Heiling" for somebody like Hitler, it looks so powerful. But you really can take a gun and eliminate that crowd, one at a time. One, two. And when it dies it dies not as a crowd, but as individuals, one at a time. One at a time. You realize they are individuals. That's something Max Reinhardt never put onstage. He put crowds onstage but he never saw them dissipate, he never saw them destroyed, he never saw them fall one at a time. Brecht would have done that. He would have seen that. I once saw a production of Brecht's and the people all died, they were all dead on the stage, but they kept rolling across the stage. In other words, once they were dead, you thought they were just bodies and you thought, like at every other production you saw, that they were just dead bodies, but then the bodies started to roll across the stage, back and forth across the stage, and the actors who had survived, the actors who had killed the dead bodies, they had to keep interacting with the bodies, they had to keep stepping over them, because of course they kept rolling back and forth across the stage, back and forth... In other words, they did not become inanimate, the dead remain animate, they don't leave us, they become part of us, part of our psychology. That was something to put onstage. Something that Max Reinhardt would never have thought of. One should always be adventurous in art, one should always portray the extremities of what art can portray because, of course, art is competing with the military, with politics and politics always goes to the extreme, the military, always: how many can we destroy? How many can we kill? So art must always think, how much can it enlighten, how much can it stir up? That was the lesson of Brecht. You must put on another production and it must be bold and you must be encouraged. Just doing theatre at all in this environment is good, it will inspire people. It's an important time for art. And you must be encouraged. But you must use your theatre to bring about change, to excite debate, to help the downtrodden, to enfranchise the weak. That's what Brecht did: he encouraged the

weak and attacked the strong. That's why he was persecuted. I will not persecute you. I will only applaud you. (KLAMBACH enters.)

Scene 11

(MAITLAND enters.)

MAITLAND: That's what he said, eh?

KLAMBACH: Yes.

MAITLAND: Go on. Do it. Put on a corker of a show. The more disruptive the better. Give him exactly what he asked for. And get as much lumber as possible out of him. Understand?

HARRY: Yessir.

MAITLAND: But do it. Do it. Bring down the house.

HARRY: I have an idea for a production-

MAITLAND: Oh, don't tell me. Don't spoil the fun. Part of provocation is surprise. Imagine being a flasher and announcing you're going to show your John Thomas to everyone. No fun there. Think of yourself as a flasher. Flash, flash, flash. (MAITLAND exits.)

Scene 12

(DOUGLAS enters angry and sits down. HARRY crosses to him.)

HARRY: Hi.

DOUGLAS: Hi.

HARRY: Ummm.

DOUGLAS: Yes?

HARRY: Just wanted to say hi. How are you?

DOUGLAS: How am I?

HARRY: Yeah?

DOUGLAS: Not so good. Between my hunger and the Germans who hate me because I'm an "African" and the Americans who hate me because I'm a Negro I'm not so good. Why do you think I'm sitting over here? Huh? Why do you think that?

HARRY: You like to be alone?

DOUGLAS: (Sarcastic) Yes, I like to be alone.

HARRY: I have something that might cheer you up.

DOUGLAS: What's that?

HARRY: I want to offer you a role.

DOUGLAS: A role?

HARRY: Yes.

DOUGLAS: (Eager) Ok.

HARRY: You seem excited.

DOUGLAS: I am. Why wouldn't I be?

HARRY: Wonderful. That's wonderful.

(Pause.)

DOUGLAS: So where is it?

HARRY: Oh, no, not that kind of roll. Not like a bun. No, it's a role in a play. You can't eat it.

DOUGLAS: What's wrong with you?

HARRY: Did you see my production of *Romeo and Juliet*?

DOUGLAS: No.

HARRY: No? Well, it was brilliant. Brilliant. I mean, I was brilliant. Romeo was a little stiff. I had this wonderful idea for it, that Romeo would be German and Juliet would be American but I was afraid to put it on.

DOUGLAS: Leave me alone.

HARRY: If you played this role, in the play, there would be extra food. There's extra food for us.

DOUGLAS: Why is that?

HARRY: The commandant... Herr Oberst likes to encourage these activities. It keeps us animated.

DOUGLAS: Animated?

HARRY: It keeps us healthy.

DOUGLAS: You talk to the commandant?

HARRY: Oh, yeah, he's a very... well, anyway he encourages us.

DOUGLAS: What is the role?

HARRY: It's a man called Othello. I play his wife Desdemona.

DOUGLAS: You play my wife?

HARRY: There are no women here so I have to play the wife.

DOUGLAS: That's not what I meant.

HARRY: It's acting. When we kiss it's just acting.

DOUGLAS: That's not what I meant. (Pause.) Do you wear make-up?

HARRY: Of course, I'm playing a woman. Women wear make-up.

DOUGLAS: Do you wear dark make-up?

HARRY: You mean like shadow? Of course. And rouge. (Pause.) Oh. Oh. I see what you mean... Oh, well, Othello is black. He's a black general who marries a white woman who's the daughter of a senator.

DOUGLAS: Black general who marries a white woman who's the daughter of a senator?

(DOUGLAS laughs.)

HARRY: Why are you laughing?

DOUGLAS: This sounds like a fairy tale. Or a nightmare.

HARRY: No, it's a real story. I mean, it's a play that's been around a long time.

DOUGLAS: Leave me alone.

HARRY: Please... I'd like you to do this, I'd like us to do it...

DOUGLAS: Who do you think you are? I mean, excuse me for talking that way to white man but who do you think you are? I got stuck in here to piss people like you off. That's why the Krauts put me here, rather than segregate me.

HARRY: Well, I need a black actor and you're all I've got so you have to do it.

DOUGLAS: Oh, I have to?

HARRY: Yes, I'm ordering you to do it. I think I have seniority. I was commissioned in November.

DOUGLAS: I was commissioned in August. Ha ha.

John Fisher

HARRY: I'll show you how to do it. You don't have to be afraid.

DOUGLAS: Afraid? (He grabs the book and reads a few lines, beautifully.)

"Then must you speak

Of one that loved not wisely but too well,

Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,

Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,

Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away."

(He throws it back.)

HARRY: That was great.

DOUGLAS: Thanks.

HARRY: Just read the scene with me. Please.

DOUGLAS: I don't want to.

HARRY: Look. I'm the only person who talks to you so you should be nice to me. I'm a totally nice person. And I'm shy like you.

DOUGLAS: I'm not shy.

HARRY: Then you're perfect to play Othello! Here, read this scene with me.

(They read and begin to enact the smothering scene – DOUGLAS as OTHELLO, HARRY as DESDEMONA. At first they read, then they are acting it as if in performance.)

OTHELLO: "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,--

Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!--

It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood;

Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,

And smooth as monumental alabaster.

Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.

Put out the light, and then put out the light:

If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,

I can again thy former light restore,

Should I repent me: but once put out thy light,

Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,

I know not where is that Promethean heat

That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose,

I cannot give it vital growth again.

It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree.

(Kissing sleeping DESDEMONA) Ah balmy breath, that dost almost persuade

Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.

Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,

And love thee after. One more, and this the last:

So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,

But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;

It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

DESDEMONA (HARRY): Who's there? Othello?

OTHELLO (DOUGLAS): Ay. Desdemona.

DESDEMONA: Will you come to bed, my lord?

OTHELLO: Have you pray'd to-night, Desdemona?

DESDEMONA: Ay, my lord.

John Fisher

OTHELLO: If you bethink yourself of any crime
Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace,
Solicit for it straight.

DESDEMONA: Alas, my lord, what do you mean by that?

OTHELLO: Well, do it, and be brief; I will walk by:

I would not kill thy unprepared spirit;

No; heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul.

DESDEMONA: Talk you of killing?

OTHELLO: Ay, I do.

DESDEMONA: Then heaven

Have mercy on me!

OTHELLO: Amen, with all my heart!

DESDEMONA: If you say so, I hope you will not kill me.

OTHELLO: Hum!

DESDEMONA: And yet I fear you; for you are fatal then

When your eyes roll so: why I should fear I know not,

Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel I fear.

OTHELLO: Think on thy sins.

DESDEMONA: They are loves I bear to you.

OTHELLO: Ay, and for that thou diest.

DESDEMONA: That death's unnatural that kills for loving.

Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip?

Some bloody passion shakes your very frame:

These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,

They do not point on me.

OTHELLO: Peace, and be still!

DESDEMONA: I will so. What's the matter?

OTHELLO: That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee

Thou gavest to Cassio.

DESDEMONA: No, by my life and soul!

Send for the man, and ask him.

OTHELLO: Sweet soul, take heed,

Take heed of perjury; thou art on thy deathbed.

DESDEMONA: Ay, but not yet to die.

OTHELLO: Yes, presently:

Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin;

For to deny each article with oath

Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception

That I do groan withal. Thou art to die.

DESDEMONA: Then Lord have mercy on me!

OTHELLO: I say, amen.

DESDEMONA: And have you mercy too! I never did

Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio

But with such general warranty of heaven

As I might love: I never gave him token.

OTHELLO: By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.

John Fisher

O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart,
And makest me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice:
I saw the handkerchief.

DESDEMONA: He found it then;
I never gave it him: send for him hither;
Let him confess a truth.

OTHELLO: He hath confess'd.

DESDEMONA: What, my lord?

OTHELLO: That he hath used thee.

DESDEMONA: How? unlawfully?

OTHELLO: Ay.

DESDEMONA: He will not say so.

OTHELLO: No, his mouth is stopp'd;

Honest Iago hath ta'en order for't.

DESDEMONA: O! my fear interprets: what, is he dead?

OTHELLO: Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge
Had stomach for them all.

DESDEMONA: Alas! he is betray'd and I undone.

OTHELLO: Out, strumpet! weep'st thou for him to my face?

DESDEMONA: O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

OTHELLO: Down, strumpet!

DESDEMONA: Kill me to-morrow: let me live to-night!

OTHELLO: Nay, if you strive--

DESDEMONA: But half an hour!

OTHELLO: Being done, there is no pause.

DESDEMONA: But while I say one prayer!

OTHELLO: It is too late.

(It's been very physical up to this point but DOUGLAS doesn't follow through on the smothering action.)

HARRY: (Breaking character) Ok, so do it.

DOUGLAS: Do what?

HARRY: Smother me.

DOUGLAS: Smother you?

HARRY: With the pillow.

DOUGLAS: Oh, come on.

HARRY: No, do it.

DOUGLAS: I'm supposed to smother you?

HARRY: That's what the script says.

DOUGLAS: I don't know.

HARRY: Put the pillow over my face and press.

DOUGLAS: You'll suffocate.

HARRY: Well, don't press hard.

DOUGLAS: How will you breath?

HARRY: I'll turn my head to the side. Go ahead.

(DOUGLAS gets pillow and continues with scene.)

DOUGLAS: "Nay, if you die."

(DOUGLAS covers HARRY with pillow. HARRY struggles and screams.)

DOUGLAS: Wait, wait, are you all right?

HARRY: Of course I'm all right. That was acting.

DOUGLAS: Ok, so how am I going to know if I'm accidentally strangling you? That was pretty convincing.

HARRY: Don't worry about it.

DOUGLAS: Oh, I do worry about it. How will I know?

HARRY: I'll have a word to shout.

DOUGLAS: A word?

HARRY: Yeah, if I say this word, you stop killing me. It means you actually are killing me, so stop.

DOUGLAS: What's the word?

HARRY: Westinghouse.

DOUGLAS: Westinghouse?

HARRY: Yeah.

DOUGLAS: Well, that's just stupid.

HARRY: Why?

DOUGLAS: Why would someone in the 16th century be saying Westinghouse?

HARRY: What does that matter?

DOUGLAS: We don't want to break the illusion. Even if I'm getting carried away and you're in danger of suffocating we'll want to maintain the illusion.

HARRY: I think it's more important to stop me suffocating.

DOUGLAS: Yes, but after I've stopped smothering you we'll want to go on. With the illusion.

HARRY: Ok. Makes sense. Why don't you say "Zounds!" That's an Elizabethan word.

DOUGLAS: Ok. Let's try it.

(They resume, it is intense, HARRY is shouting "ZOUNDS" but DOUGLAS doesn't stop.)

HARRY: (Breaking free): Stop! Stop!

DOUGLAS: What?

HARRY: You need to stop when I say Zounds.

DOUGLAS: It didn't sound like Zounds. It sounded like Bounds.

HARRY: Are you crazy?

DOUGLAS: You need to articulate better.

HARRY: If I say anything that even sounds remotely like Zounds stop. Ok?

DOUGLAS: All right.

HARRY: All right. Good. Let's run the romance scene.

(Blackout. Lights up. They are in the middle of the romance scene:)

HARRY: "The heavens forbid

But that our loves and comforts should increase,

Even as our days do grow!

DOUGLAS: Amen to that, sweet powers!

I cannot speak enough of this content;

It stops me here; it is too much of joy:

And this, and this, the greatest discords be

That e'er our hearts shall make!"

HARRY: So we kiss here.

DOUGLAS: Who does?

HARRY: You kiss me.

DOUGLAS: (Refusing) Uh-uh.

HARRY: Oh, come on.

DOUGLAS: Nope.

HARRY: Why does everyone have such a hard time with the reality of the kissing?

DOUGLAS: I'm not kissing you in front of an audience.

HARRY: (Smiling) You mean you'd kiss me without an audience?

DOUGLAS: What's that mean?

HARRY: It was a joke.

DOUGLAS: Well, I'm not doing it.

HARRY: You're not kissing a man, you're kissing a girl. I'm a girl so it's ok.

DOUGLAS: That's exactly the problem. I'm not kissing a Caucasian girl in front of a Caucasian audience.

HARRY: But I'm not really a girl, I'm a guy so it's ok.

DOUGLAS: But you just said you're not a guy.

HARRY: Well, I am but I'm not.

DOUGLAS: I'm confused.

HARRY: It's a theatre thing. It's complex.

DOUGLAS: Well, I'm not kissing a guy and I'm not kissing a girl. Nope.

HARRY: So where does that leave us?

DOUGLAS: I'll take your handkerchief.

HARRY: My handkerchief?

DOUGLAS: Yes. I'll take it.

HARRY: Do you have a runny nose?

DOUGLAS: No. Instead of kissing you I'll take your handkerchief.

HARRY: Well, that's just dumb.

DOUGLAS: It's not dumb. It's a play about a handkerchief so it's a gesture pregnant with significance.

HARRY: Pregnant with significance?

DOUGLAS: Yes, pregnant with significance.

DOUGLAS: Have you ever taken a girl's handkerchief instead of kissing her?

DOUGLAS: No. Have you?

HARRY: No.

DOUGLAS: Have you ever kissed a girl?

HARRY: No.

DOUGLAS: I didn't think so.

HARRY: Why do you say that?

DOUGLAS: Never mind.

HARRY: So kiss me.

DOUGLAS: I am not kissing you, Lieutenant. You can tell me to do that for the rest of the day I am not kissing you.

HARRY: Well, you're not taking my handkerchief. That's ridiculous.

DOUGLAS: How about if I do this?

(DOUGLAS very tenderly brushes HARRY's cheek and chin. It is intense. HARRY clearly enjoys it.)

HARRY: Ok, that works.

DOUGLAS: Ok.

HARRY: Tomorrow, Herr Oberst comes and watches.

DOUGLAS: What's that like?

HARRY: Like performing for a firing squad.

(Blackout. Light up at the end of the smothering scene.)

DESDEMONA: "Alas! he is betray'd and I undone.

OTHELLO: Out, strumpet! weep'st thou for him to my face?

DESDEMONA: O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

OTHELLO: Down, strumpet!

DESDEMONA: Kill me to-morrow: let me live to-night!

OTHELLO: Nay, if you strive--

DESDEMONA: But half an hour!

OTHELLO: Being done, there is no pause.

DESDEMONA: But while I say one prayer!

OTHELLO: It is too late."

(DOUGLAS starts to smother HARRY. He suddenly stops.)

DOUGLAS: I heard Zounds.

HARRY: I didn't say it. I swear.

DOUGLAS: Nope. I heard Zounds. I did.

HARRY: I screamed. All vowel sounds.

DOUGLAS: Did you say something like it?

HARRY: No.

DOUGLAS: Well, now I'm nervous.

HARRY: Go ahead.

(They resume smothering. DOUGLAS is very careful, barely putting the pillow on HARRY's face.)

KLAMBACH: (From the back, furious) Kill her. Kill the bitch! Smother her! You must play the scene with conviction! Put the pillow over her face and do her in. Don't you understand the text, don't you understand what is required?!

DOUGLAS: Sir, with all due respect, I have difficulty with this scene.

KLAMBACH: Othello has no difficulty. His wife is a whore, a proven whore and she must die. You are Othello. She must die. The bitch must die! Conviction. (Calming) I'm not angry at you. (To HARRY) I'm angry at you. I'm angry at the director. You ask about Brecht. You ask about Reinhardt. They understood text, they understood passion onstage. If the play called for slaughter, they did it. They slaughtered. Direct him to kill you.

HARRY: Go ahead. Remember-

DOUGLAS: I will. And you remember to articulate if-

HARRY: I was.

DOUGLAS: No, you-

KLAMBACH: Kill her!!

(DOUGLAS smothers HARRY. HARRY plays up the death. It is intense. KLAMBACH is clearly impressed. When they are done, HARRY and DOUGLAS look to him for approval.)

KLAMBACH: Yes. That is correct. (Pause.) Your choice of play is excellent. Excellent. A truly complex Shakespearean hero in an impossible situation. (Referring to DOUGLAS) And this man. A natural. You are a natural.

DOUGLAS: Thank you, Sir.

KLAMBACH: (TO HARRY) But you must execute this death scene. You must convince. You must. To fail in war is tragedy. To fail in art, cataclysm.

(He exits.)

HARRY: He's right. Do it that way.

DOUGLAS: Ok. Can we work on the lovey-dovey scene? I like that one better.

(DOUGLAS exits with a smirk.)

Scene 12

(MAITLAND enters from opposite direction.)

MAITLAND: How is *Macbeth* going, Mr. Smith?

HARRY: (With obvious enthusiasm) We're doing *Othello* not *Macbeth* and you're not supposed to say *Macbeth*, it's bad luck. You say either *The Scottish Play* or *The Scots Tragedy*. And we could use more wood for the castle in Cyprus. And I need a few more lieutenants for the Venetian Senate. They don't need to speak but they should be able to grumble loudly and they'll have to sew their own costumes.

MAITLAND: Yes, yes, and yes. You've certainly got the bit in your teeth, young man.

HARRY: And try to get all the officers to attend the performance. If you made it an order they would come.

MAITLAND: Is Herr Oberst coming?

HARRY: Yes, he comes to all the rehearsals.

MAITLAND: Is he bringing his men?

HARRY: I don't know.

MAITLAND: Suggest it to him. I think they should see it.

HARRY: Thank you, sir.

MAITLAND: And don't mention me. Make it your request. He listens to you.

HARRY: Yessir. Oh, sir.

MAITLAND: Yes, Lieutenant.

HARRY: Thank you for putting me in charge of the dramatic society. I like being an entrepreneur du theatre.

MAITLAND: I think the word is Impresario. Yes, that's what you are. An impresario. (They exit.)

Scene 13

(KLAMBACH, MAITLAND and CONROY enter.)

KLAMBACH: Good evening, Colonel. Opening night, most exciting. (Scanning the audience) Some of your officers are missing.

MAITLAND: Only two, they're sick.

KLAMBACH: Quel dommage. I have invited most of my men, as you see. I'm hoping for a most edifying evening in the theatre. Western Culture at its pinnacle.

MAITLAND: *Othello* is not *Hamlet*.

KLAMBACH: No, it is greater, truer. Its hero is a villain. That is truth. And it raises many issues of importance to both our societies. I hope it will be most instructive to my men.

MAITLAND: We shall see.

(They all sit. Blackout. Music. Lights up on smothering scene but DOUGLAS and HARRY are now in costume as OTHELLO and DESDEMONA.)

OTHELLO: "He hath confess'd.

DESDEMONA: What, my lord?

OTHELLO: That he hath used thee.

DESDEMONA: How? unlawfully?

OTHELLO: Ay.

DESDEMONA: He will not say so.

OTHELLO: No, his mouth is stopp'd;

Honest Iago hath ta'en order for't.

DESDEMONA: O! my fear interprets: what, is he dead?

OTHELLO: Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge
Had stomach for them all.

DESDEMONA: Alas! he is betray'd and I undone.

OTHELLO: Out, strumpet! weep'st thou for him to my face?

DESDEMONA: O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

OTHELLO: Down, strumpet!

DESDEMONA: Kill me to-morrow: let me live to-night!

OTHELLO: Nay, if you strive--

DESDEMONA: But half an hour!

OTHELLO: Being done, there is no pause.

DESDEMONA: But while I say one prayer!

OTHELLO: It is too late." (He is smothering her. It is intense.)

CONROY (Suddenly standing up in the audience): I've had enough of this... (To DOUGLAS) Stop that right now... Take your hands off of her, him... Take your hands off of it!

KLAMBACH: Sit down, Captain.

CONROY: (To KLAMBACH) No, I will not sit down. I've had enough of this. (To audience, indicating KLAMBACH) This man's playing us like a bow fiddle. He's laughing at us. Expects us to sit here and watch a black man strangle a white woman.

KLAMBACH: Shut your mouth, Captain.

CONROY: No! I will not shut my mouth, sir! Would you sit and watch a Jew strangle a German woman? Well would you? I've had enough of this. This is not just a play. It's an assault on me, a violation. A play is a thing that you sit and enjoy. It's not a thing that spits in your face, makes fun of you, makes fun of who you are and your background. That's just mean. (To HARRY) You're a collaborator, Smith. Puttin' on this production. Making us watch it. (To KLAMBACH) And you're nothing but a Nazi! German Army officer, horseshit! You're just a Nazi. Another sadistic, blood thirsty,

John Fisher

Nazi bully like that little twerp with the weird mustache that you work for. Fuck you! Fuck you!

MAITLAND: Captain.

CONROY: What?

MAITLAND: This is in extremely poor taste.

CONROY: Poor taste?!

MAITLAND: It's Shakespeare, old boy. Take a deep breath and have a seat.

CONROY: Fuck that!

KLAMBACH: Captain, sit down or I'll have the sergeant shoot you down. Sergeant, point your schmeisser at him. (We hear a machine gun cocked.) This performance is more important than your life, Captain. I'm quite serious. (CONROY sits. KLAMBACH talks to the audience.) You see men, American culture at its most sophisticated. Like children, they cannot tell fiction from reality. Now watch. You might learn something. (To the actors) Proceed, Lieutenants.

(OTHELLO starts to strangle her again. Suddenly we hear the escape siren. It blares. For a moment the action continues, then the actors stop and everyone looks around confused. KLAMBACH stands up, looking furious. He shouts in German. We hear other German voices offstage. There is pandemonium. KLAMBACH stares at MAITLAND. MAITLAND himself stands and smiles. KLAMBACH grabs CONROY'S hands and flips them over. They are covered in dirt. KLAMBACH runs out of the room. Blackout.)

Scene 14

(Siren wails. Lights up. KLAMBACH stands confronting MAITLAND and CONROY, DOUGLAS and HARRY stand in the background, still in costume.)

KLAMBACH: You deliberately put on that production to distract me and the guards from your escape attempt.

MAITLAND: You put on the production, Herr Oberst. And it wasn't an attempt. Two men got out.

KLAMNBACH: You deliberately timed the escape for the production. (Including HARRY and CONROY) All of you.

MAITLAND: The Lieutenant knew nothing about it. Neither did the Captain.

KLAMBACH: I don't believe that.

MAIYLAND: I needed an authentic outburst from the Captain. I knew you wouldn't believe his acting.

KLAMBACH: His hands are filthy with dirt.

MAITLAND: (Slyly) I didn't say he didn't help with the digging.

KLAMBACH: This is disgraceful!

MAITLAND: Herr Oberst, it is the duty of every captured soldier to attempt escape just as you saw it was your duty to break our morale.

KLAMBACH: I could say you were trying to escape. I could shoot you right now. Don't play with me, Colonel.

MAITLAND: Don't play with me, Colonel. You encouraged this young man to put on a racially provocative production as a deliberate means of exciting the basest

emotions of my officers. You did that quite deliberately. If I made other uses of your attempt at subterfuge than it is merely me outflanking your flagrant assault.

KLAMBACH: How dare you?

MAITLAND: There are many tactics for defeating Blitzkrieg, Colonel. It's been many years since the Wehrmacht was on the offensive. You should be cultivating your defensive strategies, like the rest of your army.

KLAMBACH: We might be losing this war, Colonel. But you're the one who's in jail. I'll have you both locked up, in the stockade. No heat, no food, nothing.

MAITLAND: Is this the vaunted German culture you've been filling this young man's head with? Is it? Is this the best you can do? Starve your prisoners, deny them heat?

KLAMBACH: I can do much worse. I have done much worse.

MAITLAND: What exactly does that mean, Colonel?

KLAMBACH: It means don't tell a man who's country has been bombed into sand about culture. The RAF has made a desert of Germany. That's the culture you teach.

MAITLAND: Only after you made a desert of London.

KLAMBACH: I don't think Shakespeare intended his words to be used in such a way. As a mere distraction.

MAITLAND: No, but he would be proud that his words *could* be used in such a way. I know Shaw would.

KLAMBACH: A polemicist. No better than Hitler.

MAITLAND: Yes, but Shaw did it with a pen, not machine pistols and gas chambers.

KLAMBACH: (Calmly) In a few months the war will be over. This we know. Why would you plan an escape now? Why?

CONROY: There were men in my barracks who needed to leave as quickly as possible.

KLAMBACH: Why?

MAILAND: You know why? They needed to leave before you could transfer them to a death camp.

KLAMBACH: That is outrageous.

MAITLAND: Is it? You had Dr. Schmidt examine their genitals. Was that just idle curiosity? You've been sniffing around them for weeks.

KLAMBACH: What are you accusing me of?

MAITLAND: I'm not *accusing* of anything. You've been actively looking for Jews amongst my men. I wasn't going to wait around to see them transferred.

KLAMBACH: That is outrageous. I am not a member of the Gestapo.

MAITLAND: The why are you behaving like one?

KLAMBACH: I am an officer in the German Army.

MAITLAND: No, you're just an ordinary Jew-hater.

KLAMBACH (Shouting off): Herr Sergeant. Lock these men up. Stockade.

(MAITLAND and CONROY exit. CONROY smirks as he goes.)

KLAMBACH: (To HARRY) I believe you knew nothing about this.

HARRY: Still, I'd like to be punished. Same as the Colonel.

KLAMBACH: Don't be a hero. The Colonel and I are adults. It is our privilege to suffer. Enjoy being a pawn for a while longer. There will be plenty of time for shallow heroics later.

HARRY: There is nothing enjoyable about this.

KLAMBACH: Don't be absurd. I saw you onstage. You enjoyed every minute of it. You were completely innocent of what was happening offstage. A performer must be.

HARRY: I hate what happened.

KLAMBACH: And yet you went on with the show. That's what's important. (To DOUGLAS) And you – magnificent. A completely successful performance. Good evening. (He exits.)

HARRY: You knew about this.

DOUGLAS: I knew about Johnson and Davis. I mean Stein and Shapiro. Nice thing about being Jewish, you can pass. Sometimes. It was fun smothering you.

HARRY: Thanks.

DOUGLAS: It would have been more fun kissing you. (He smirks and exits.)

Scene 15

HARRY: (To the audience) Was it true? Was he searching for Jews? I could never get out of my head the idea of those two men, in the final days of the war, desperately trying to get back to the American lines before the Germans could find them.

(CONROY has entered. HARRY faces him.)

HARRY: (To CONROY) You're Stein. I'm Shapiro.

CONROY: (Correcting him) Johnson and Davis.

HARRY: Johnson and Davis.

(They move about the space, as JOHNSON and DAVIS, desperately fleeing the Germans. Music is provided. We also hear German voices and dogs barking, as if in pursuit.)

HARRY: (To audience) I wonder if they made it.

Scene 16

(RAISNOVSKY enters and sits at desk, indicating HARRY should sit.)

RAISNOVSKY: I am Major Anatoly Raisnovsky. Congratulations on your liberation by the Red Army.

HARRY: Lieutenant Harold Smith, United States Army. Thank you.

RAISNOVSKY: You're welcome, Yank.

HARRY: Pleasure to meet you, Ivan.

(They laugh at their joke.)

RAISNOVSKY: You will be processed soon and then sent West to be repatriated to your own army. I have some questions to ask you about your commandant, Colonel Klambach. I understand you were intimate with him.

HARRY: Intimate?

RAISNOVSKY: I use the wrong word.

HARRY: Your English is excellent.

RAISNOVSKY: Thank you. I studied English in Moscow.

HARRY: I didn't know they taught English in Moscow.

RAISNOVSKY: Of course. One day I will be smuggled into the United States by submarine to foment revolution and civil strife.

(They laugh.)

John Fisher

HARRY: Well, I'll keep my eye out for you.

RAISNOVSKY: That won't be necessary. I'll seek you out and convert you to dissidence as a part of the universal struggle.

(They both laugh.)

HARRY: (Silly Russian accent) Da, da, do that. Da! Das vidanya.

(They laugh.)

HARRY: Yes, I did speak to him, on a number of occasions. He was a decent man. In my view.

RAISNOVSKY: Did he ever beat prisoners or execute internees unjustly?

HARRY: No. Never.

RAISNOVSKY: Did he deliberately starve prisoners to death or machine gun prisoners in a ditch?

HARRY: No. There was very little food but that wasn't his fault.

RAISNOVSKY: Did he ever make any anti-Semitic remarks or talk about his war service prior to running this prison camp?

HARRY: No.

RAISNOVSKY: I can see you're not going to be much help.

HARRY: Oh, you want me to make stuff up about him.

RAISNOVSKY: Make stuff up?

HARRY: It's an expression. It means lie. Make up lies.

RAISNOVSKY: Why would I want you to make up lies?

HARRY: He was not a liked man. But he was in an impossible situation. He had to run a prison camp with limited resources. Many of my officers blamed him for things he couldn't help.

RAISNOVSKY: He was on the Eastern Front. Did you know that?

HARRY: He told me something about it.

RAISNOVSKY: He rounded up Jews. Shot Russian prisoners.

HARRY: I don't believe that. He was in the army.

RAISNOVSKY: You think that makes a difference?

HARRY: He was a soldier.

RAISNOVSKY: Nevertheless.

HARRY: He was cultured. He was a civilized man.

RAISNOVSKY: Yes. I've read about that. He played games with his civility.

HARRY: They were harmless games. For the most part.

RAISNOVSKY: One story from Riga when he had captured many Russian prisoners: (KLAMBACH appears, dressed for combat, holding a book. He talks as if to a large group of men.)

KLAMBACH: Every Russian prisoner will read aloud from this book. Those who can read to this side, those who cannot to this side.

RAISNOVSKY: Only one in ten men could read. Most of them were peasants.

KLAMBACH: (Handing it offstage) It is a classic of Russian literature. *Boris Gudonov*. By the great Pushkin. Read!

(Russian voices are heard reading.)

HARRY: He would never do that. He would never kill a man because he was ignorant.

RAISNOVSKY: No.

KLAMBACH: (To someone off) Herr Captain, take the ignorant peasants away to the rail yard. Put them to work. (We hear them moving away.) Herr Lieutenant, the readers, shoot them, they are the intellectuals, they are the future of the Slavs, the Bolsheviks, they must die.

(We hear machine guns. KLAMBACH exits.)

HARRY: That didn't happen.

RAISNOVSKY: An ideological army? Why is it Americans think the Russian army is the only army with an ideology. Your army has one: capitalism. His army had one: Teutonic Supremacy. It's not just intellectuals. He rounded up Jews, Armenians, Asians from Khazakstan. All manner of what he called Untermensch. He was a very busy officer in Russia. I only tell you the story of the intellectuals because I knew it would offend you most. You with your fancy college education. If you were a Russian with that education you'd be dead now. Like Colonel Maitland. And Captain Conroy.

HARRY: They're dead?

KLAMBACH: (Enters, speaking over his shoulder as he removes his jacket) Shoot them, in the head. Make sure they know you're doing it. Go quickly. (He watches whomever he is speaking to leave. He looks around, picks up the Desdemona dress and wig, throws down his coat and exits quickly.)

RAISNOVSKY: He has disappeared. We think in a dress. He disguised himself as a woman. To escape. We will find him. (RAISNOVSKY smiles.) I'm sorry. He was an inspiration to you, a mentor.

HARRY: No. Of course not.

OLDER HARRY: (Entering wearing his jacket and tie, he speaks to JACK who is now again JACK as he is now again HARRY): I worshipped that man. Worshipped him. His wit, his determination, his culture, the way he talked. He was an inspiration, a mentor. And he was wrong. And devious.

JACK: You don't know those things happened.

HARRY: Yes, I do. I went to the stockade. I saw Maitland and Conroy. (MAITLAND and CONROY enter and lie down dead, in contorted positions.) They hadn't even buried them. I think he wanted me to see. (They stand and exit.) Who was he? How tortured? How could a man like that, so fascinated by art and the manner of art, the correct way it must be done, the discipline, the passion of art - who was he to do those things? Monstrous. It made me fear art in a way. To actually be frightened of it, what it can do, what the passion that fuels it, when redirected, can do otherwise, in violence, in hate. He did those things. He did them. I know he did. I saw him in his trance of art. It was also the trance of cruelty. And I admired him. It is... humiliating. (He smiles.) At any rate, be careful whom you admire. They inevitably let you down. A mentor can be dangerous. (Lights out.)

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 1

(JACK enters and speaks to the audience. As he speaks THOMPSON enters and sits. THOMPSON moves slowly, has girth.)

JACK: In my junior year I took Intermediate Shakespeare with Lyle Thompson. I'd loved Harry's class so much that I wanted to take another class on the great playwright. Mr. Thompson was... Well, put it this way... He sat the whole semester. And we sat the whole semester. Each day we sat in his class and read the scenes aloud. He read the stage directions, we read the characters, we all sat, and that was class.

THOMPSON: (Reading) "Act II, Scene 4: Eastcheap, the Boar's-Head Tavern."

JACK: When we reached the end of the scene he would give us a quiz on the words, the Olde English words and what they meant. We turned in the quiz, then read another scene, from our seats. There was a rumor about him. That his wife was nineteen. That she was his former student. Just as I knew Harry was gay, I knew this was true of Mr. Thompson. The only tiem he showed any passion, any emotion was when he got pissed off.

THOMPSON: (Shouting) If you can't sit down and shut up you can go to the office. Shut up!

JACK: There were eight students in his class. Eight. In Harry's there had been thirty. (THOMPSON exits.)

Scene 2

JACK: So I decided to reward myself in my senior year by signing up for Harry's Advanced Shakespeare. This time the tough stuff. No more *Romeo and Juliet*.

HARRY (At his podium): This term we will start with two of the greatest plays in the Shakespeare canon.

RYKER (From the back of the class): *Porky's? Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke?*

HARRY: No, not *Porky's*. What is *Porky's*?

RYKER: It's friggin' kings, man. It's hysterical.

JACK: (To the audience) It was like a reunion. I felt blessed.

HARRY: But what is *Porky's*?

JACK: (To HARRY) It's a stupid movie about spying on naked girls.

RYKER: Stupid to you because you don't like girls.

JACK: Why don't you shut up, Ryker?

RYKER: You shut up, Pee-Wee.

HARRY: Gentlemen. Ok, well *Porky's* didn't invent Peeping Tomdom so at least it falls into an ancient literary tradition.

RYKER: Is that true?

HARRY: Yes, it is Ryker. There are Peeping Toms in the Bible.

RYKER: No way, Dude.

HARRY: The Story of Susannah and the Elders.

RYKER: Go Bible. I have to check that out. In *Porky's* it's a girl's shower.

John Fisher

HARRY: Susannah is spied on in her bath as well. It's a very old story.

RYKER: Where in the Bible?

HARRY: The Old Testament. All the naughty things are in the Old Testament.

RYKER: Rock on, Old Testament.

HARRY: Indeed.

RYKER: Way to go Mr. S., you know where all the good sh... stuff is. Who are the Elders? Are they like a Gang?

HARRY: They're older. They're like seniors.

RYKER: Oh, and Susannah's like a Sophomore. That's hot.

JACK: Oh, my God, could you be stupider?

HARRY: At any rate, the next plays are not stories from the Old Testament, though one of them is from a time older than the Bible. And as I said, they are two of Shakespeare's greatest. The plays are *Coriolanus* and *Richard II*.

RYKER: I've never even heard of those.

HARRY: (Mock shocked) My goodness, Ryker, you never heard of them? You haven't? *You?* I can't believe it.

RYKER: (Hurt) Dude, don't make fun of me.

HARRY: I'm sorry, Ryker. Just because your behavior is childish doesn't mean mine needs to be.

RYKER: I have feelings too.

HARRY: And I'm fucking sorry to abuse them. Mea culpa.

RYKER: What does that mean?

HARRY: It means "I'm guilty."

RYKER: It's ok, no biggie.

HARRY: Thank you.

RYKER: And don't swear.

HARRY: Mea culpa. Later in the term we will be staging these plays and I think Ryker will make an excellent *Coriolanus* and I know Jack will be an excellent *Richard II*.

JACK: *Coriolanus* must be a Neanderthal.

HARRY: Some people have said that.

RYKER: *Richard the Second* must be a wimp.

HARRY: And some people have said that.

JACK (To the audience): And after that first class Harry asked me to talk with him.

HARRY: I was happy to see you on the role sheet, Jack.

JACK: I'm happy you had a place for me, Mr. Smith.

HARRY: I'll be Harry this semester. It's more of a drama class than an English class and first names are more appropriate in the theatre.

JACK: Ok, feels weird calling you Harry but ok. Thanks.

HARRY: You haven't asked me for a college recommendation.

JACK: Oh, no, would you write me one?

HARRY: Of course. You might consider Yale. Excellent for history and theatre.

JACK: Wow.

HARRY: You should talk to Jeremiah about it. He's been very focused in the college department. He might be able to give you some pointers.

(HARRY exits.)

Scene 3

JACK (To audience): Jeremiah. Jerry. I told you more about him later. Well, this is later. I tracked down Jerry, who was hard to avoid. He was now Mr. Advanced Placement, straight As, Varsity and all that. Super smart, super outgoing. He scared me. For a lot of reasons. He was everywhere, all the time. He too was in our class but he was also campaigning hard, constantly. It was election time. (To JERRY, who has entered) Hey.

JERRRY: Hey. Are you registered to vote?

JACK: How you doing?

JERRY: Great. Are you registered to vote? Election's coming up.

JACK: Um... No. I wanted to ask you about...

JERRY: You're eighteen, you should be registered. (Handing him pen and clipboard) All you have to do is fill this out.

JACK: (Filling it out) Ok.

JERRY: How are you voting?

JACK: Are you allowed to do that? Ask how I'm voting while your registering me?

JERRY: No, I'm not. How are you voting?

JACK: I don't know. I don't really follow all that.

JERRY: You don't really follow all what?

JACK: News.

JERRY: That means you're voting for Reagan. Everyone at this school is voting for Reagan.

JACK: Why is that?

JERRY: Because their parents are voting for Reagan.

JACK: You think I should vote for Carter?

JERRY: I support John Anderson.

JACK: Isn't he like all "Save the Whales."

JERRY: There's a lot more to Anderson than "Save the Whales." And we have to defeat the Brigg's Initiative.

JACK: Why?

JERRY: We have to protect our teachers. People like Harry Smith and Shelby Bachman. It's going to pass if we don't stop it. People are falling for it.

JACK: Mr. Smith is really gay? That's true?

JERRY: What are you crazy? Of course he is.

JACK: Wow, I never thought of that.

JERRY: Fifty-year old who's single? Get a clue.

JACK: Wow.

JERRY: (Taking back the form) Thank you. Vote for Anderson and Vote against the Brigg's Initiative. Otherwise witch hunts and nuclear war. And come see me in *The Crucible*. I play the lead. It's all about witch hunts and nuclear war.

JACK: I thought it took place in the 1600s.

JERRY: It's metaphorical. (JERRY exits.)

Scene 4

JACK: (To audience) Mornings with my father had gotten stranger. We'd stopped running.

(DAD appears at breakfast table reading paper. JACK joins him.)

DAD: Look at this. It's criminal. Just criminal. The man's the President of the United States and he couldn't get five helicopters off the ground. What an idiot. My God, those hostages have been in Tehran for six months. It's criminal!

JACK: I guess this means you're voting for Reagan.

DAD: I know. I don't like Reagan any more than you do. The man's got orange hair.

JACK: But you're voting for him.

DAD: Don't have much choice, do I?

JACK: I'm voting for Carter.

DAD: You're voting?

JACK: I'm eighteen. Remember?

DAD: Are you registered?

JACK: Yep. All set to go.

DAD: (Sincere) That's great, son. I'm proud of you. Getting all registered and ready to vote.

JACK: It wasn't that difficult.

DAD: Still you had to do it.

JACK: Like sixteen people asked me if I was registered and shoved stuff in my hands. It was easy.

DAD: Well, good for you.

JACK: Aren't you annoyed I'll cancel out your vote?

DAD: No, Anderson's perfect. He's going to undermine Carter. A vote for Anderson's a vote for Reagan.

JACK: You really think that?

DAD: Of course. But do it, do it. Voting doesn't count anyway. Every rich Republican knows that. It's all fixed.

JACK: How do you know that?

DAD: I'm a member of the Bohemian Club, son.

JACK: So why do you vote?

DAD: I'm a good citizen. What else are you voting for?

JACK: I'm voting against the Brigg's Initiative. That's the main reason I registered.

DAD: The Brigg's Initiative?

JACK: Yes.

DAD: What's your interest in the Brigg's Initiative?

JACK: I don't think just because someone's gay he should be prevented from teaching. That's personal. It's got nothing to do with the way he teaches.

DAD: (Sincerely admiring JACK) Well, that's great, son. I didn't know you... I just didn't know you thought about things like this.

JACK: Like what?

DAD: The news.

JACK: Are you voting against it?

DAD: I think so... Yes... But why did I... oh, yes, well my reasons are different than yours.

JACK: Yeah, you said you didn't like us telling the government what to do.

DAD: It's worse than that. Persecutions cost too much damn money. Biggest waste of money of all time was McCarthyism. All those fucking hearings. Just criminal. Do you know how much attorneys cost? Witch-hunts are never fiscally prudent. This is what I never understand about things like the Holocaust. The most expensive undertaking of all time. Do you know how much something like that costs? In the middle of a war? People think Hitler was crazy. He was worse than crazy. He was fiscally imprudent. Persecutions never make sense financially.

JACK: So you think slavery was all right because it made sense financially.

DAD: Well, it wouldn't work now. Can you imagine slavery if you had to pay health benefits and retirement. Son, if you look at the bottom line it will always tell you what to think.

JACK: Follow the money?

DAD: It will always tell you how to vote. But why are you so interested in the Briggs Initiative?

JACK: What do you mean?

DAD: Well, is it a political interest or is it...

JACK: Some of my teachers are gay. You know some of them. And I think-

DAD: Ok, don't tell me their names. I don't want to know. If I'm dragged into court to name names I don't want to know anything.

JACK: (Laughing) Ok, ok. So you think it's a waste of time to vote?

DAD: Everyone knows that. But vote, vote. You got plenty of time to be cynical when you're my age. (Referring to the paper again) Look at this. Just criminal.

JACK: Dad. It's almost seven-thirty.

DAD: Oh, Jesus, you're right. (Handing him keys) Here, you drive. Take the car today. You can pick me up at six.

JACK: That's nice, Dad. Thanks.

DAD: It means I can get drunk on the boat home. Public Transportation's terrific - that ferryboat's got two bars. But pick me up at six. Ok?

JACK: Javohl. (DAD exits.)

Scene 5

JACK: (To audience) In Mr. Thompson's awful class we'd read *Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Hamlet*, three plays I'd totally loved in spite of Mr. Thompson. But Harry's plays totally frustrated me. They were cryptic and complicated and I didn't know who to root for.

(HARRY has entered.)

JACK: (To HARRY) Ok, I've read the plays.

HARRY: Magnificent aren't they? *Richard II* is his only play written entirely in verse.

JACK: Yes, I loved it. Loved it! And I watched the Derek Jacobi tape you recommended.

HARRY: Incroyable.

JACK: What's that mean?

HARRY: Incredible.

JACK: Oh, yeah, it was. I mean, I didn't know who the hero was...

HARRY: I know, it's complicated, like life.

JACK: Um... Ok. Yeah. I liked it well enough. But then I read *Coriolanus*.

HARRY: Amazing, one of Olivier's greatest roles.

JACK: Oh, yeah, I know him. *Marathon Man*.

HARRY: (Amused) Yes, *Marathon Man*.

JACK: But.

HARRY: But what?

JACK: It just doesn't make sense to me.

HARRY: Well, did you read it again?

JACK: No.

HARRY: Well, read it over again. Read it slowly. Don't move on to the next sentence until you understand the one you're reading.

JACK: It's so frustrating.

HARRY: It won't be once you understand. Did you get the plot, the story?

JACK: I think so. Yes.

HARRY: Good. Now you can read it again for the meaning, the individual meaning of each line.

JACK: I don't think I can. I've tried. Look, I loved *Hamlet*. Loved it. The same with *Twelfth Night*. I loved that. But this...

HARRY: What?

JACK: It's too complicated.

HARRY: Like life. This is real life. This play. And *Richard the Second*. There are no heroes or villains. The villains are heroes and the heroism is laced with selfishness and villainy. That's why Shakespeare at his best, as in *Hamlet*, is often not Shakespeare at his most honest, as in *Coriolanus*. Life is full of hidden signs, quiet signals, rich tapestries of intrigue and escape. *Coriolanus* is confused by the signals, made desperate by them. He's told he's good, but he's treated like he's bad. He trusts his mother, but should he?

JACK: But that's true of *Hamlet*. He's confused, he's challenged by events.

HARRY: Yes, but Hamlet gets answers in the end. He's proven right: Claudius is a villain, his father was murdered. *Coriolanus*, on the other hand, is never proven right. Who is proven right in the play?

JACK: I don't know.

HARRY: Who?

JACK: The State? The State is always right?

HARRY: I never thought of that. I was going to say no one, no one is proven right. But maybe that's correct. I think yes, it is. The State. The State is always right.

JACK: But how do I know that? I have no idea how I know that. I didn't think that when I read it.

HARRY: No, but you knew it when I asked the question. You intuited it. That's how a great play works. It gets under your skin. Like *Coriolanus*. It gets to where you don't know what you know. It speaks to that part of you.

(Pause. HARRY looks away.)

JACK: What is it?

HARRY: I just never thought of that. The State. The State is always right. I think that's correct. Even if the State is terribly wrong it is right. It's horrible.

JACK: Why do you say that?

HARRY: Was Nazi Germany right? Was Stalinist Russia right? There are even things going on now that are wrong, but because they are done by the government, they must be right.

JACK: Like the Brigg's Initiative.

HARRY: Why did you say that?

JACK: I don't know. I just think it's wrong. Jerry said it was wrong.

HARRY: But why do you say that to me?

JACK: Why do I say it to you?

HARRY: Did I... Just tell me why you think that, now, in this instance.

JACK: Jerry said it was wrong. I'd never heard someone say a law was wrong before, that it needed to be stopped. That surprised me. I didn't know a law could be wrong.

HARRY: It's not a law. Not yet. You know that.

JACK: It will be. He said it's going to pass.

HARRY: He did?

JACK: Yes, he reads the paper. I don't really do that... read the paper. So... I guess he knows.

HARRY: Anyway... If that's the point of *Coriolanus* then we're all in big trouble.

JACK: In what way?

HARRY: If the State can be wrong but must be right, well... there will be a lot of sacrifices. That's what I predict.

JACK: It's kind of the point of *Richard II* also. But in reverse.

HARRY: How so?

JACK: Well the King is supposed to be right, but he's wrong. Then he gets murdered, which is wrong, but it's right. It's *Coriolanus* turned on its head.

HARRY: Ok, well... thank you. You're doing very well.

JACK: I am.

HARRY: Yes.

JACK: I got it right?

HARRY: More than that, you just taught me something about these plays. And when the student is teaching the teacher then the teacher has taught his final lesson.

JACK: If this initiative passes will it really be acted upon? I mean will people really carry it out?

HARRY: I can't really talk to you about it.

JACK: Yes, you can. Of course you can.

HARRY: I'd rather not.

JACK: Please.

HARRY: A law is a thing that makes behavior all right. I've seen civilized people behave atrociously because the law made it all right, they couldn't help themselves. They knew better but they couldn't help themselves. If this thing passes, there will be hysteria. And some very rational people will behave very badly.

JACK: My father says it's fiscally imprudent.

HARRY: Not to refute your father, but do you honestly believe that will prevent people from supporting this very expensive thing and then unleashing the police on us if it passes.

JACK: Did you just come out to me?

HARRY (Smiles): If I did it was a mistake. I don't believe in coming out. Not to students. It's not a part of education. Education is received wisdom, it's in books. What you and I are talking about... this is life. We don't teach life here. We teach what is known. Life is felt. It's intuited. You have to find it on your own.

JACK: Mr. Bachman teaches life.

HARRY: Mr. Bachman has always lived openly. He has to. He had a very rough childhood. If he lived in the closet he'd be just another one of those people who persecuted him. I respect that in him. On the subject of Bachman, are you going to see *The Crucible* this afternoon?

JACK: Uh, yeah, sure... Jerry wanted me to see it.

HARRY: Did you know who directed it? Mr. Bachman.

JACK: You're kidding?

HARRY: No, he felt it was a message that ought to be heard. Shall we go together?

Scene 6

JACK: (To audience) So we went and saw *The Crucible*. (They move and sit as if in an audience facing the stage.) And during intermission Harry told me about his time in New York working as a publicist and assistant director at the Metropolitan Opera. He told me about seeing *The Crucible* in the fifties at the height of the McCarthy hearings and about how confused and scary New York could be at that time, when the government was searching for Communists and homosexuals.

(JERRY now stands before us performing as John Proctor a speech, in mime, from *The Crucible*.)

JACK: Jerry was his usual amazing. And there was something very subtle in the production. Mr. Bachman had cast Jerry and the student who played his wife as the only black actors in the show. So it had an added layer of race discrimination. It had other layers as well. Ones I didn't detect until afterwards.

(JERRY has stepped forward to meet HARRY and JACK.)

HARRY: Very nice work, Jerry. Excellent.

JERRY: Thank you Mr. Smith. Kind of relevant piece, isn't it?

HARRY: In what way?

JERRY: I mean the Brigg's Initiative and all.

HARRY: Oh, yes, of course.

(BACHMAN enters.)

BACHMAN: Harry, my God, do I need a drink. It still horrifies me watching something I directed. Good work, Jerry. But then you're perfect at everything. It's disgusting. You'll have to come see me perform next week. I'm in an all-gay review. In leather.

JERRY: I'd like that, Mr. Bachman.

BACHMAN: Don't you dare. We'll all end up in jail. For corrupting the youth of America! My God, it's only four-thirty. Harry, get me a drink!

John Fisher

(HARRY and BACHMAN exit.)

JACK: That was wonderful.

JERRY: Thank you.

JACK: You're like stunning at everything. It's intimidating.

JERRY: I've got to be.

JACK: Why is that?

JERRY: Simple. My mother wants me to go to Yale.

JACK: Where do you want to go?

JERRY: Yale.

JACK: What are your chances of that?

JERRY: Pretty good actually.

JACK: You must think I'm totally immature.

JERRY: You're old enough to vote.

JACK: But I watch you and all the stuff you do and I feel totally immature.

JERRY: You're just shy. You could go to Yale. You're smart enough, and talented enough.

JACK: Thanks. A place like Yale totally frightens me.

JERRY: You know what would make you a lot more mature?

JACK: What?

JERRY: If I kissed you right now.

JACK: Oh, wow.

JERRY: I can't believe I just said that.

JACK: No, that's ok. Really.

JERRY: Yeah?

JACK: Yeah.

JERRY: Oh, ok, should I just go for it?

JACK: Oh, wait, wow, you're like blowing my mind.

JERRY: I think you're adorable.

JACK: Thanks. This is so weird.

JERRY: Yeah?

JACK: I've never even had a girl friend.

JERRY: I have. They're overrated.

JACK: I mean, I have no experience.

JERRY: It's just a kiss. It's not the end of the world.

JACK: No, it might be the start of it.

JERRY: What's that mean?

JACK: Nothing, just corny movie dialogue.

JERRY: Look I'm going to kiss you, ok?

JACK: Ok. (JERRY moves in.) But don't touch me, with your hands.

JERRY: Ok...

JACK: I mean, I can deal with a kiss but hands are scary.

JERRY: Why's that?

JACK: They go places.

JERRY: What about my forehead?

JACK: What do you mean?

John Fisher

JERRY: I mean if I touched you with my forehead, like this... (He does so.) While I'm kissing you. Would that be ok?

JACK: Yeah, ok. I could deal with that.

JERRY: And my cheek, if it like brushed you, like this, while I kissed you.

JACK: Yeah, I think that might be ok.

JERRY: Ok, good, good to know boundaries.

JACK: Should I have a safe word?

JERRY: A safe word?

JACK: Yeah?

JERRY: Ok. How about "cunnilingus?"

JACK: Cunnilingus?

JERRY: Yeah.

JACK: That's my safe word?

JERRY: Yeah.

JACK: Ok, I say that and you'll stop whatever you're doing.

JERRY: Uh huh.

JACK: Ok, go ahead. (JERRY moves in.) Wait.

JERRY: What?

JACK: What's it mean?

JERRY: What's what mean?

JACK: Cunnilingus.

JERRY: It's... It's a dirty word.

JACK: Oh, ok. (JERRY moves in.) Wait. It's a little long.

JERRY: A little long?

JACK: I mean if I don't get the whole thing out will you still stop?

JERRY: Yes.

JACK: Ok. (JERRY moves in.) Wait.

JERRY: What?

JACK: Can we go somewhere more private?

JERRY: There's no one around.

JACK: It's the middle of a parking lot.

JERRY: Sorry. I didn't notice.

JACK: There's a Dairy Queen over there.

JERRY: You wanna come over?

JACK: To your place?

JERRY: Yeah. My Mom doesn't get home till six.

JACK: It's four thirty.

JERRY: So?

JACK: That's a long time alone together.

JERRY: We wouldn't get there till about five-fifteen.

JACK: Ok, that's like forty-five minutes. Ok. That sounds ok.

JERRY: We'll take the bus.

JACK: Ok.

JERRY: We can practice your safe word.

JACK: Ok.

JERRY: Now say it: "cunnilingus."

JACK: Cunnilinkus.
JERRY: No, lingus.
JACK: Lingus?
JERRY: Yeah, like the airline.
(They leave.)

Scene 7

(DAD enters and sits at breakfast table. JACK enters and joins him.)
JACK: What if I told you one of my teachers said he'd write me a recommendation and that I should apply to Yale.
DAD: Yale?
JACK: Yes.
DAD: You're kidding?
JACK: Nope. He said it. He thinks I should apply there.
DAD: Well, that's great, son. My God, that's incredible. Are you going to apply?
JACK: Thinking about it.
DAD: Spectacular. (Pause.) Yale's a private school.
JACK: Yep.
DAD: Well... If you could get into Yale you could probably get into Berkeley.
JACK: You just like Berkeley because it's cheaper.
DAD: It's also an incredible school. They have five elements named after them. There's a Berkelium. There's no Yalium.
JACK: Berkeley invented the atomic bomb.
DAD: Did they? I think that was more of a group effort.
JACK: I'd rather go to a school famous for its arts than a school famous for its innovations in destruction.
DAD: Hey, don't scoff at the atomic bomb. It made sound fiscal sense. Do you know how much that war was costing the taxpayers? It's incredible. The only good thing that idiot Truman ever did was drop those things on Japan. And it was good for the Japanese as well. They were going bankrupt until those bombs clarified things for them. Right after Nagasaki they surrendered and immediately they were back on track. Don't overlook Berkeley. Damn good school.
JACK: Can I ask you a personal question?
DAD: You can ask.
JACK: What does that mean?
DAD: It means I reserve the right to not answer it.
JACK: Ok... How do you know when you've found the right person?
DAD: For what?
JACK: What do you mean, for what?
DAD: For legal representation? Investment counseling?
JACK: For life, for a relationship.
DAD: Oh. (DAD squirms a bit.)
JACK: Are you not going to answer it?
DAD: No, I'll answer it.
JACK: You seem uncomfortable.

DAD: No, I'm embarrassed. I only get uncomfortable when you ask for money. Embarrassment's fine. It's part of being a parent. I forgot the question.

JACK: How do you know when you've found the right person?

DAD: Listen, what have I always told you?

JACK: Look for the bottom line.

DAD: Yes, it will always tell you what to do.

JACK: This is a relationship, Dad. It's not about money.

DAD: Wait a minute, there's always a bottom line. Think about it.

JACK: Well, this person doesn't have money so it's immaterial.

DAD: No, it's not. Think about it.

JACK: (Shocked) You're saying break it off because they don't have money?

DAD: I didn't say that.

JACK: Dad.

DAD: I never said that.

JACK: Jesus, Dad, you're such an attorney. That's what you meant.

DAD: Maybe but I didn't say it.

JACK: Well you didn't marry for money.

DAD: No, and it was the biggest mistake I ever made.

JACK: You mean you hate Mom because she doesn't have money?

DAD: No, I hate your mother for other reasons. If she had money it would make it all a lot easier to take.

JACK: I can't believe you're telling me this.

DAD: You asked the question.

JACK: If you hate Mom so much why don't you divorce her?

DAD: Believe me, I would in a second if it made financial sense. I've tried to figure it out but it just doesn't compute. She owns half my assets. She made a good marriage. I didn't.

JACK: Do you feel like you made a mistake marrying her?

DAD: Nope. I had to marry someone. But I'll tell you something, I made a mistake in dating her. I should have only dated rich women. You see, if you date someone and don't marry them because they don't have money that's prejudicial. But if you only date rich women then you're only going to marry a rich woman so it's not prejudicial.

JACK: It's still prejudicial, Dad. You're reducing people to types, maybe not as individuals but as groups.

DAD: I don't see the logic of that at all.

JACK: Well, in the money department you'll be happy to hear I'm also applying to Berkeley?

DAD: Well, that's good. You don't want to go to Yale anyway. A friend of mine told me it's a gay school.

JACK: What does that mean?

DAD: Apparently everyone who goes there becomes gay.

JACK: So you do believe that a school can make you gay.

DAD: Yale can.

JACK: Do you have something against gay people?

DAD: No. But it seems like an awful lot of money to spend to become gay. You can go to Berkeley and be gay for a lot less.

JACK: Which kind of brings me back to my original question. I'm not sure I'm dating the right person.

DAD: Oh, God... What? Because you're gay or something?

JACK: Not "or something."

DAD: Oh, son. You don't want to be gay.

JACK: Why not?

DAD: Gay people have no money. They're all broke.

JACK: Why do you say that?

DAD: Son, I work in the city. I see it every day.

JACK: See what?

DAD: Look, men who wear hot pants and have handle bar mustaches aren't making any money, ok? Think about it.

JACK: Gore Vidal has money. He's gay.

DAD: No, he's not.

JACK: Dad, he is. Why do you think William F. Buckley hates him?

DAD: William F. Buckley is an idiot.

JACK: Yes. And he hates Gore Vidal. Because he's gay.

DAD: Didn't Buckley go to Yale?

JACK: You're going to say he's gay now.

DAD: No, I just never thought about it. He really is an idiot. I mean if you go to Yale and you come out straight you must be missing one of the main things they have to offer. Or maybe they're just not very good at teaching one of their core curricula. Sounds like a rip-off to me. Good thing you're applying to Berkeley.

JACK: Why are you a Republican if you hate all Republicans?

DAD: I know. It's embarrassing. But life is full of embarrassments. It's a lot less embarrassing than being a parent. Don't have kids.

JACK: Why did you have kids?

DAD: Think about it.

JACK: You were already paying for the schools?

DAD: Something like that. Your mother had some reasons, I think. Where did you read all this stuff about Gore Vidal being gay?

JACK: It's in the paper.

DAD: What paper?

JACK: The same one you read.

DAD: Rumors.

JACK: He's fifty years old and he's never been married.

DAD: I know lots of guys who are fifty and not married. I wish I was fifty years old and not married.

JACK: They're divorced. Vidal's never been married.

DAD: Well... If you can get a date with Gore Vidal be gay. Otherwise it really doesn't make sense financially. Trust me. (Getting up.) I'll drop you at school.

JACK: Don't you want to get drunk on the boat?

DAD: Yeah, but I'll be all right.

JACK: You told me not to drink and drive.

DAD: You shouldn't. It's very dangerous.
JACK: You do it.
DAD: I've got a lot of experience, son.
(DAD exits.)

Scene 8

JACK (To audience): My life was total confusion. College, gay, not-gay, money, useless father. And then it got even more complicated.
(HARRY appears at podium.)
HARRY: For your next assignment you will put these plays on their feet. I want to see what you come up with. And I've chosen two impresarios: Ryker and Jack. Jack will helm *Richard II* and Ryker will helm *Coriolanus*.
RYKER: What does helm mean?
JACK: What does impresario mean?
HARRY: Ryker will direct *Coriolanus*, Jack will do the same for *Richard II*.
RYKER: Cool.
JACK: But I can't. I barely know how to say the lines let alone direct.
HARRY: Be bold. L'audace. Toujours l'audace.
(JACK crosses to HARRY.)
JACK: Mr. Smith.
HARRY: (Correcting him) Harry.
JACK: Harry, I can't do *Richard II*. It terrifies. I barely understand it.
HARRY: You understand it better than I do.
JACK: There's a lot going on in my life right now.
HARRY: Put all that into your interpretation.
JACK: And I don't have time to do it.
HARRY: It's an assignment.
JACK: But I'm too busy.
HARRY: If you want something to get done, give it to the busiest person.
JACK: But I can't.
HARRY: You must.
(BACHMAN enters.)
BACHMAN: Harry, do you have this naughty boy in your class?
HARRY: Yes.
BACHMAN: Is he any good?
HARRY: He's very good.
BACHMAN: Thank God, he has no future in Sociology. None. I thought we'd have to put him on the street to make a living. (To JACK) Prostitution, that's your future, I thought.
HARRY: Shelby.
BACHMAN: But if he can act he might be able to be a waiter or something.
HARRY: He's also a very good writer.
BACHMAN: I bet it's all smut. Just trash and smut.
HARRY: Mr. Bachman is nervous because tonight he has to perform.

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BACHMAN: In buttless chaps. It's an all leather revue. I could spew I'm so frightened. Oh, well, it's for a good cause. You should come. Harry's coming. I'm going to introduce him to some buttless chaps.

HARRY: Run along now, Jack. Mr. Bachman is for mature audiences.

JACK: Bye.

(JACK leaves but he doesn't. He sits outside the room and spies on the conversation.)

BACHMAN: Please come tonight, Harry. The stage terrifies me.

HARRY: Your friends terrify me.

BACHMAN: Harry, when on earth are you going to let your hair down? There's been a sexual revolution: people are fornicating in the street and and you're still masturbating in the shower. My God, they're going to start rounding us up soon and shoving us into boxcars. Might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb. Of course, it's best just to be hung.

HARRY: I'm shy. That's all.

BACHMAN: Shy? Shy just means you're a bottom, honey. That's all. It's a matter of changing your perspective.

HARRY: I'm just looking for romance.

BACHMAN: We're all looking for romance, sweetpea. But we're all settling for sex. The most romantic men I know I've met on their knees. Think of it as prayer.

HARRY: I'm just not cut out for the wild life.

BACHMAN: You were raised Catholic, right?

HARRY: No. Were you?

BACHMAN: Bachman? Wake up, Mary. Jewish. Yeah, I know. Can you imagine fleeing Germany and settling in the South? The South? But I got all that old world guilt stuff regardless. My father tried to shame me when I came out and I reminded him that the homosexuals were in the death camps also. You could always defeat him with logic. If the Nazis hated you, you were a friend of the family.

HARRY: What about your mother?

BACHMAN: Oh, please. She introduced me to musicals, for pity's sake. She might as well have taken me to my first bathhouse!

HARRY: How bad is it? This Brigg's thing?

BACHMAN: It's bad. People are falling for it. There's always some weird logic to people's hate: "You can be gay but you can't teach." Now how does that make sense? Voting. It's too fucking easy. Anyone can do it. Getting registered is like getting VD. It's easier, you don't even need to pull down your pants.

HARRY: It scares me.

BACHMAN: It scares all of us, precious. Hate is a slippery slope. First you can't do this, then you can't do that, then, well it just becomes easier if you can't live. Yeah, let's take that away from you while we're at it. Life. This lesbian PE teacher wants me to marry her. As mutual protection. I thought about it. But I just don't see myself living in Oakland. I don't even know where that is. God, that dooshbag Lyle Thompson. He shacked up with one of his students, got her pregnant, and married her. And nothing, nothing happens to him. And we're persecuted on an assumption. An assumption. Can you imagine sleeping with one of these kids? Can you? Honestly? They smell. Listen, hasn't there ever been anybody? Anybody?

HARRY: There have been. A couple. But they... none of them wanted to settle down.

BACHMAN: Yeah, I've been through that.

HARRY: (Surprised) You?

BACHMAN: Sure. (Realizes he's been misunderstood.) Oh, no, I mean I've been on the other end of it. I've been the heart breaker. It's fun, breaking hearts. No, I just don't see the point of settling down. I mean if I could have kids that might be fun. But to be married without the possibility of children. What's the point? I guess we could raise cats. But they're a different species. It seems strange to pretend something with fur is your child. And they can't speak. And you have to get them fixed. The whole thing about pets is très bizarre. Listen, come to the show tonight and tell me I was good. Even if I suck. Everything we raise will go to hiring an assassin to take out Anita Bryant.

HARRY: I don't think that's funny.

BACHMAN: I don't either. Do you know what assassins cost these days? And then she'd just be a martyr. But you'll be able to see my butt. I've been doing sit-ups for a month.

HARRY: That tightens your tummy not your buttom.

BACHMAN: I was wondering why it wasn't working. It teaches you not to trust the advice of lesbian PE teachers. Come tonight. I'd like you to. Show your support.

HARRY: You know I support you.

BACHMAN: For the cause. We have to do something.

HARRY: Preaching to the choir.

BACHMAN: Well, the choir needs to be motivated. They've gotten very bottom lately, sitting around waiting for someone else to take action. Sometimes the choir needs a little shot in the ass. To get it singing.

HARRY: It's not them that need convincing.

BACHMAN: Well, we can't convince the kids, that's exactly what we're not aloud to do. And the adults are all crazy. Come on. This is our "Once more unto the breach!" moment. We need to rally the troops.

HARRY: Why can't we? Why can't we convince the students? Isn't it our job?

BACHMAN: For once it's their job, they need to inspire themselves. If they don't appreciate us enough to get motivated... I don't know. I love these guys. I really do. And not in the wrong way. So they'll just have to put two and two together for once. And if they don't... Well, then I'll just wiggle my boney little butt in their face and open a hair salon. Come on.

(They leave.)

Scene 9

(JACK stands and talks to the audience.)

JACK: I had an inkling now of what I had to do. An inkling. But it meant commitment. A lot of commitment. It meant saying things about myself I wasn't sure about. Not yet. I was still too confused. I had to be sure. So I went to the Homecoming Dance. With my friend Jenny. I had to be sure first. Sure that I was or I wasn't... Anyway. It was very instructive.

(JERRY enters.)

JERRY: Hey.

JACK: Hi. (To audience) After the dance I decided it was time to talk to Jerry.

JERRY: So...

JACK: So... I asked my father what he thought about me being gay.

JERRY: What did he say?

JACK: He said it didn't make any sense. Financially.

JERRY: What does that mean?

JACK: It means he doesn't care. He doesn't really care about anything to do with me. That's all right. If he did care, he'd just say no.

JERRY: You're lucky to have a father who doesn't care. I don't even have one.

JACK: Yeah, I like him. He's amusing. That's enough parenting for me frankly.

JERRY: My mother's like that. She seems to have opinions but I think she's just being sarcastic about everything.

JACK: Romance scares me. My parents can't stand each other. And Mr. Smith might be persecuted by the government. And Jenny says she wishes I had more experience.

JERRY: When did she say that?

JACK: Homecoming Dance. I tried sticking my hand down her dress and I got it caught on something.

JERRY: Her bra?

JACK: No, something else. It might have been a necklace. Or her trachea. I'm not sure.

JERRY: Did anything else happen?

JACK: No. It was pretty humiliating. I didn't even want to do it. I just felt like I should do something.

JERRY: I don't know. She's pretty good looking.

JACK: Yeah, but she's right, I didn't even really know what to do. I knew we were supposed to start rubbing each other but I didn't want to rub her nice dress, it was really quite fetching - this lovely taffeta with a beautiful lace trim - and I was afraid of getting it dirty. So I sort of... plunged my hand down the front of it and next thing I knew it was caught and I was elbowing her in the eye.

JERRY: I think when they're wearing a nice dress you're supposed to stick your hand up it, not down it.

JACK: Really?

JERRY: Yeah, that way you don't mess up the fabric.

JACK: Wow.

JERRY: That's why they put that big opening at the bottom of dresses. For hands.

JACK: Hand up her dress... that means I'd be after her... that's just gross.

JERRY: Were you kissing?

JACK: Sort of.

JERRY: Tongue?

JACK: I guess.

JERRY: Did you like it?

JACK: Not really. I was pretty nervous.

JERRY: Why?

JACK: She'd had that boyfriend. The hippy. Remember him?

JERRY: Yeah. He was cute.

JACK: If you're into hippies.

JERRY: Exactly.

JACK: And I knew they'd done pretty much everything so I kept thinking I had to live up to the standards of... you know, a hippy horndog. I was just very nervous.

JERRY: And she called it off?

JACK: Pretty much. I don't feel that bad. I think she understood.

JERRY: Understood what?

(Awkward pause.)

JERRY: Listen...

JACK: No, look, I just wanted to say...

JERRY: What?

JACK: About that afternoon, when we made out, at your place.

JERRY: Uh-huh.

JACK: I'm sorry if I led you on or whatever. Not calling afterwards.

JERRY: I didn't feel that way.

JACK: You didn't?

JERRY: Well, maybe I did.

(They laugh.)

JACK: I just...

JERRY: You don't have any experience?

JACK: Yeah, it seems to be the bane of my existence.

JERRY: Yeah, me too.

JACK: Really?

JERRY: Yeah, I was just bluffing because I like you so much. It's ok. Maybe we should try just hanging out for a while, before we make out again.

JACK: That would be nice.

JERRY: Yeah, ok. I'm sorry if I rushed things along.

JACK: No, that's ok. Societal pressure to have sex. It's kind of overwhelming.

JERRY: Not in my house. My mother says the word sex like she's talking about pooping your pants. Whenever she sees something romantic on TV she says, "Yeah, right" and laughs.

JACK: I get totally embarrassed whenever I see something romantic or sexy on TV with my parents.

JERRY: Oh, my Mom just laughs and laughs. She thinks it's all hysterical. She just sits there smirking at the TV and says thing like: "Yeah, right!" And "Oh, really?" And "No way!" And "How dumb can you get?" She thinks people who have sex are clowns.

JACK: Anyway, I wanted to see, I wanted to see for once... As a test, though I kinda feel like I used Jenny, but she did understand, I wanted to see...

JERRY: Whether you liked making out with girls or making out with boys?

JACK: Yeah.

JERRY: What did you find out?

JACK: I like making out with you. That's what I found out.

(JERRY smiles and exits. JACK stands and talks to the audience.)

Scene 10

JACK: So, secure finally in my budding homosexuality, it was time to take action.

Richard II. We rehearsed, everyone thought I was a little crazy, but they did it, they

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actually did it. And then we were ready and, coincidentally, we performed one week before voting day. But first: Ryker's production of *Coriolanus* was performed. It was awful. Amateurish and terrible and awful. I was embarrassed just watching it. First off all, they laid out this huge tarp. (RYKER and JERRY – wearing bed sheet togas - lay out a tarp on which they will do all the action.) Why?

(RYKER steps forward and raises his sword.)

RYKER: "All the contagion of the south light on you,
You shames of Rome!"

JACK: The audience sat on four sides. They didn't even use Harry's stage. Why?

RYKER "Boils and plagues

Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorred

Farther than seen, and one infect another

Against the wind a mile!"

JACK: And everyone wore bed sheets for costumes. Bed sheets! Why?

RYKER: "Mend and charge home,
Or, by the fires of heaven, I'll leave the foe"

JACK: Because it was set in ancient Rome they wore bed sheets. Duh!

RYKER: "And make my wars on you. Look to't. Come on;"

JACK: And they had blood packs that were totally obvious under the bed sheets. They looked like saggy breasts.

RYKER: "If you stand fast we'll beat them to their wives,
As they us to our trenches followed."

JACK: And it was all battle scenes, almost no dialogue. All battles. The first battle with the Volsces:

(JERRY comes on in a toga. RYKER stabs him and he squirts blood all over the tarp and dies.)

JACK: The battle with Aufidius:

RYKER: "I'll fight with none but thee, for I do hate thee!"

(JERRY rises, they fight: First JERRY stabs RYKER, who squirts blood. Then RYKER stabs JERRY, who squirts blood, then flees.)

JACK: The battle with the plebeians:

RYKER: "No: I'll die here."

(RYKER draws his sword.)

JERRY: "Down with him, down with him!"

(RYKER punches JERRY and then stabs him. Blood. JERRY punches RYKER and then stabs him. Blood. JERRY runs off.)

JACK: The Conspirators' killing of Coriolanus:

(JERRY enters.)

JERRY: "Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!"

(JERRY stabs RYKER repeatedly. A ton of blood. RYKER dies.)

JACK: It was so stupid! And the audiences totally fell for it. Totally!

(Cheers.)

JACK: Harry actually found stuff to praise in it. I almost swooned I was so annoyed.

HARRY: Very good, Ryker. Very good. Not so much the costumes. The blood packs looked like mammaries and the togas looked like bedding you'd gotten tangled in after a night of ravishing cheerleaders.

RYKER: (Happy) I'll take that as a compliment, Mr. S.
HARRY: It wasn't intended as one. The verse work was egregious.
RYKER: (Smiles) What does that mean?
HARRY: It means it was shitty. In your parlance. One thing I did like about it and this quite a bit. You staged it in the round.
RYKER: In the round?
HARRY: You had the audience sit on four sides. How did you decide that?
RYKER: I just thought it would make it more exciting, like it was happening right there.
HARRY: It did. Most effective. I mean what happened was atrocious but it happened right there. Inspired. It was like watching a hockey game.
RYKER: Coolio.
HARRY: Tomorrow *Richard II*. (HARRY and RYKER exit.)

Scene 11

JACK: (To the audience) Yes, my *Richard II*. Which was brilliant. Brilliant. Well, I thought so. I tried to let everything that was happening inspire me, everything Harry had told me, everything that was happening in the news, everything. I did my research and found out that Richard II was gay. Which shocked me. Up till then I thought homosexuality was discovered in the 70s. Well, maybe the late Sixties. Richard had been married twice and had never had any children. Evidence of something. He'd had affairs with a bunch of men, one of them was Robert de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. A contemporary of theirs Thomas Walsingham said their relationship was:
RYKER: (Appears as WALSINGHAM) "Obscene, and not without a degree of improper intimacy."
JACK: I had the great idea to cast Mr. Bachman in the role of Robert de Vere, Richard's lover.
BACHMAN: (Entering) No way.
RYKER: It's only for one show. Please, please, please, please.
BACHMAN: Ok.
JACK: Can you wear your buttless chaps?
BACHMAN: What!?
JACK: Please, please, please, please...
BACHMAN: You are a naughty boy. We'll see. (BACHMAN exits.)
JACK: (To audience) Then I took a Brechtian approach and reassigned a lot of the dialogue and even added some from other plays.
JACK (As Richard II): "The heavens forbid
But that our loves and comforts should increase,
Even as our days do grow!
BACHMAN (Entering as Robert): Amen to that, sweet powers!
I cannot speak enough of this content;
It stops me here; it is too much of joy:
And this, and this, the greatest discords be
That e'er our hearts shall make!"

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(JACK kisses BACHMAN on mouth. BACHMAN looks concerned that this is being performed in front of audience, but then decides to go with it. He then exits.)

JACK: (To the audience) I made Richard the oppressed gay man unfairly persecuted by the homophobe Bolingbroke. I asked Ryker to play Bolingbroke.

RYKER: Cool.

JACK: I had him use a lot of his lines from *Coriolanus* since he already had them memorized.

RYKER: (Entering dressed as BRIGGS) "I'll fight with none but thee, for I do hate thee!"

JACK: When Richard meets his queen the final time and there's all that lovey dovey we're going to die talk I had it between me and Robert de Vere, the gay men persecuted for their love:

BACHMAN: (Entering in buttlless chaps, leatherman vest and hat)

"Thou map of honour, thou King Richard's tomb,
And not King Richard; thou most beauteous inn,
Why should hard-favour'd grief be lodged in thee,
When triumph is become an alehouse guest?

JACK: Join not with grief, fair husband, do not so,
To make my end too sudden: learn, good soul,
To think our former state a happy dream;
From which awaked, the truth of what we are
Shows us but this: I am sworn brother, sweet,
To grim Necessity, and he and I
Will keep a league till death.

(The scene continues, played affectionately and intimately with many kisses and fond caresses.)

BACHMAN: What, is my Richard both in shape and mind
Transform'd and weaken'd? Hath Bolingbroke deposed
Thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart?
The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw,
And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage
To be o'erpower'd; and wilt thou, pupil-like,
Take thy correction mildly, kiss the rod,
And fawn on rage with base humility,
Which art a lion and a king of beasts?

JACK: A king of beasts, indeed; if aught but beasts,
I had been still a happy king of men.

Good sometime queen, prepare thee hence for France:
Think I am dead and that even here thou takest,
As from my death-bed, thy last living leave.
In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
With good old folks and let them tell thee tales
Of woeful ages long ago betid;
And ere thou bid good night, to quit their griefs,
Tell thou the lamentable tale of me
And send the hearers weeping to their beds:

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For why, the senseless brands will sympathize
The heavy accent of thy moving tongue

And in compassion weep the fire out;

And some will mourn in ashes, some coal-black,

(To RYKER) For the deposing of a rightful king.

RYKER: My guilt be on my head, and there an end!

Take leave and part, for you must part forthwith.

BACHMAN: And must we be divided? Must we part?

JACK: Ay, hand from hand, my love, and heart from heart.

BACHMAN: (To RYKER) Banish us both and send the king with me.

RYKER: That were some love but little policy.

BACHMAN: Then whither he goes, thither let me go.

JACK: So two, together weeping, make one woe.

Weep thou for me in France, I for thee here;

Better far off than near, be ne'er the near.

Go, count thy way with sighs; I mine with groans.

BACHMAN: So longest way shall have the longest moans.

JACK: Twice for one step I'll groan, the way being short,

And piece the way out with a heavy heart.

Come, come, in wooing sorrow let's be brief,

Since, wedding it, there is such length in grief;

One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part;

Thus give I mine, and thus take I thy heart.

BACHMAN: Give me mine own again; 'twere no good part

To take on me to keep and kill thy heart.

So, now I have mine own again, be gone,

That I might strive to kill it with a groan.

JACK: We make woe wanton with this fond delay:

Once more, adieu; the rest let sorrow say."

JACK: (To the audience) And then, to make the point as clear as possible, I dressed like Harry for the show. (He put on replicas of HARRY's jacket and tie.) I wore his same jacket and tie. And I changed one of the words for his big speech.

"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground

And tell sad stories of the death of queens!"

JACK: (To the audience) I wanted Ryker to play the villain as somewhat sympathetic, so it would make him more reasonable, less villainous, someone like Briggs, a persuasive man. But he went a little crazy with it in performance. This is the assassination scene.

RYKER: (Stabbing JACK) "Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!" (RYKER even adds a blood pack to the murder. JACK rolls his eyes.)

JACK: "Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high;

Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die."

JACK: (To the audience) The class was stunned into silence. Especially by the site of Bachman in his buttless chaps. Big deal. What's a little cheek?

(BACHMAN now exits backwards, wiggling his ass provocatively to audience.)

Scene 12

(HARRY enters and crosses to JACK.)

HARRY: (To JACK) I'd like to talk to you.

RYKER: (To JACK) So would I.

HARRY: (TO RYKER) Please excuse us. Mr. Flek.

(RYKER exits reluctantly.)

HARRY: (Referring to JACK's jacket and tie) Interesting costume.

JACK: Thank you.

HARRY: A long time ago I was used by two men very much older than me. It was a meretricious experience. Awful. I felt manipulated. But whatever they did they never made any assumptions about me. I was a tool. Today I felt violated. Like I was accused of something and then forgiven for that something by someone who has neither the right to accuse nor forgive.

JACK: That wasn't my intention.

HARRY: What was your intention?

JACK: To instruct.

HARRY: You made me look ridiculous. How dare you?

JACK: I'm sorry.

HARRY: I asked you a question. How dare you? (Pause.) Please answer it.

JACK: How dare I not? People needed to see. They needed to see what was happening. What we would lose in this witch-hunt: you.

HARRY: There are forums for that. My classroom is not one of them.

JACK: What are the forums?

HARRY: Student groups. Informational meetings.

JACK: People ignore the student groups, they don't go to the informational meetings.

HARRY: So you have a captive audience, an audience you treated like prisoners for your propaganda.

JACK: That's how I feel when I'm watching *The Brady Bunch* and there's a commercial promoting the Briggs Initiative. A commercial telling me I'm supposed to hate my teacher. I feel like a captive. Violated.

HARRY: *Richard II* is not *The Brady Bunch* and you weren't playing your teacher today. You know nothing about me.

JACK: Then I made an assumption.

HARRY: An accusation.

JACK: Not yet. If we don't fight this thing it will be an accusation.

HARRY: It might as well be one. If the Brigg's Initiative passes this play of yours could be used as evidence.

JACK: So we should live in the closet? Try to pass? Disappear in the masses?

HARRY: This wasn't about we it was about me.

JACK: It was about we.

HARRY: Well, you know a lot more about yourself than I did at your age.

JACK: I also know to make a statement with my art or someone else will. You taught me that.

HARRY: Ok.

JACK: You're my favorite teacher. Ever. I know that's a cliché to you. But it isn't to me. I had to show you the depth of your impact on me. That a gay teacher isn't just a threat, he's an inspiration. I was terrified to do this. Terrified. But I did it. I know this career I've embarked on, theatre, will have plenty of terrors. I wanted to start facing them. To stop, before I even started, playing it safe.

HARRY: (Looking at notes) The verse work was atrocious. Only marginally better than *Coriolanus*. The staging was worse. Everyone stood in a line. In that regard *Coriolanus* was much better. The pace was good, exciting. Passionate. And the emotional commitment. I couldn't take my eyes off of it. Still... I can't in my wildest dreams imagine you converted anyone to your point of view. I... admire you. But I don't respect you. It was scandalous.

RYKER: (Entering) Hey.

HARRY: Excuse us. We're having a private conversation.

RYKER: I just wanted to talk to Jack quick. I have basketball practice.

HARRY: Please leave and come back later.

RYKER: I was really pissed off today when I realized what was happening, what I was being asked to do.

JACK: You gave a brilliant performance.

RYKER: Because I was pissed off. I went with it. Like Brando would.

HARRY: Don't flatter yourself, Mr. Flek.

RYKER: I went with it because I realized that's what you would want me to do.

JACK: It was.

RYKER: You're very clever.

JACK: Thanks.

RYKER: As to the message. That kind of really pissed me off too. (Pause.) It kinda made me incredibly angry, like I wanted to slug someone.

HARRY: Thank you, Mr. Flek, that's enough.

RYKER: I don't like that my character was supposed to be sympathetic. I hated him. He was persecuting Richard unjustly, for his sexuality, and he doesn't deserve our sympathy. So I ignored your direction and made him a hotheaded ignoramus. Because that's what he is. I refused to make him sympathetic. I'm sure Hitler loved his wife and children. Who gives a shit?

JACK: He didn't love his wife and children.

RYKER: You see. He wasn't even that sympathetic.

JACK: He didn't have any, you idiot.

RYKER: Well, maybe he should have gotten some, asshole. It might have calmed his down.

HARRY: Actually he did marry Eva Braun, at the very end.

JACK: I never really bought that. I've always thought he was gay.

HARRY: Jack, that isn't going to help our cause at all.

JACK: Our cause?

RYKER: Anyway, I want to thank you for including me. I'm impressed you went with your concept. I thought of making *Coriolanus* into the Bobby Knight story and doing my show as a basketball tournament but I chickened out. I wish I had.

JACK/HARRY: Who's Bobby Knight?

RYKER: Man, he's a genius. He is the Shakespeare of college basketball. Anyway, that's why it was in the round. Originally it was supposed to be a basketball court, fans on four sides.

HARRY: Brilliant, Ryker. Absolutely brilliant.

RYKER: Yeah, I'm pretty clever, it's true. (To JACK) Clever enough to be converted. Yep, you've made me see the light. Playing a villain and abusing a man like Harry made me realize how stupid the whole thing is. You definitely changed my vote. Later. (RYKER exits. HARRY just smiles at JACK and exits.)

Scene 13

JACK (To audience): The next morning: I voted. Then to class. Bachman's class. Bright and early. Always an eye opener.

(The morning of the Brigg's Initiative vote. BACHMAN is talking to his class. He is clearly drunk.)

BACHMAN: Well, some of you are old enough to vote this morning and I know all of you hate me so I expect the same ignorance and fucked up behavior at the polling stations as I receive in this class. How are you voting, Mr. Flek?

RYKER: I'm voting with the Governor of our State, Mr. Bachman.

BACHMAN: You're voting with Ronald fucking Reagan? He hates us.

RYKER: Please don't swear, Mr. Bachman. You might be comfortable saying it but many people in the class aren't comfortable listening to it.

BACHMAN: It's not swearing, Ryker. "Fucking" is his middle name. It is.

RYKER: He's very persuasive on the Brigg's Initiative, Mr. Bachman. Did you see him on TV last night?

BACHMAN: I don't watch pornography, Mr. Flek. I mean I do watch pornography, lots of it. But it's usually gay porn not political porn. Oooo, sorry. Am I influencing y'all?

JACK: (Standing) Mr. Bachman. May I speak to you?

BACHMAN: No, you may not speak to me.

JACK: I have something important to tell you and I can't do it in class. Please.

BACHMAN: Please excuse me class while I deal with this naughty young delinquent. What is it, you little flirt?

JACK: Please follow me, I want to show you something.

BACHMAN: Ooooo... Big mystery.

(They "step outside.")

JACK: I'll be right back. (JACK exits.)

(BACHMAN leans drunkenly against the wall, singing to himself. JACK reenters with HARRY who immediately sees what is wrong.)

HARRY: Thank you, Jack. Please ask your class to come to my classroom. I'll take his class for today. (JACK leaves.)

HARRY: Hello, Shelby.

BACHMAN: Hello, Harry. I fucked up.

HARRY: It's all right, Shelby.

John Fisher

BACHMAN: I just couldn't face them. Not without a bottle of Scotch in me. Some of them get to vote today. And I knew they'd vote against me. I felt like I was back in high school myself. Still facing those fuckers in the hall. Those bullies. Those idiots.

HARRY: We are still in high school, Shelby.

BACHMAN: Yes, so I couldn't face them. They're sheep. And they'll do what the shepherd tells them.

HARRY: Come on. You can sleep it off in my car. I'll drive you home at lunch.

BACHMAN: Thanks, precious.

(HARRY and BACHMAN leave. JACK and RYKER are talking.)

JACK: I thought you said you were converted. That you'd seen the light.

RYKER: I did. That doesn't mean I can't vote with the governor.

JACK: The man's a Nazi, he's a fascist.

RYKER: Did you see his speech on TV last night?

JACK: I hate him.

RYKER: Did you see his speech on TV? This is what Reagan said:

(REAGAN appears.)

REAGAN: There is no evidence that teachers influence students sexually and there is no evidence that homosexuality is anything other than biological. The Brigg's Initiative is just another waste of tax-payers money. An insupportable law that is expensive to implement and prejudicial. Follow the bottom line – this is prejudice and prejudice is something we can't afford, fiscally.

JACK: You don't mean that that's what changed your mind.

RYKER: No, the play did. But it was nice to know I was making a judgment based on sound financial considerations. My old man told me always to look for the bottom line.

(RYKER exits.)

Scene 14

JACK: (To audience) And that was high school. It didn't pass. Mr. Smith and Mr. Bachman were safe. We all graduated. Ryker went off to college, became a color man on sports TV. Too short for basketball but he could certainly comment. Jerry went to Yale. He was already gay but he still learned a lot. We made out all summer. Never had the guts to go the whole way but... I still think about him. And I went into theatre. I just couldn't stop playing. And I saw Harry one last time.

(HARRY appears, visibly older but the same.)

JACK: Years later. He showed up backstage one night. After a play of mine. He was very complimentary. He was older, smaller, but still fit. At first I was shocked by his appearance. And then he started to speak and it was all ok. He was still Mr. Smith. And I asked him... (To HARRY) Getting ready for a new semester?

HARRY: No, I retired. The year after you graduated.

JACK: Really?

HARRY: Yes. I had money from my family, and savings, so I retired early. I'd had enough.

JACK: Of teaching?

HARRY: No, I loved teaching. Loved it. You know that. No I'd had enough of fear. Somehow I ended up fifty-five years old and as terrified as I was when I was twenty-one in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge. Unable to sleep at night, wondering when the axe would fall. I said to myself one night, as I lay in bed, bathed in sweat because I'd eaten too much dinner, drunken too much wine the night before, a thing I'd never done, not in my whole life, never. I said to myself, if this law doesn't pass, if it fails as it should, as it must, because it is evil, because it is bad. If I "luck out," as the kids say, if I luck out one last time and the Germans and the starvation and the Briggs of this world don't get me, I'm going to go away somewhere and do something that cannot be taken away from me, ever. Where there's no threat. Where nobody cares who or what I am. I decided in bed that night, that I'm a good person. And I'm the only person I have to prove that to. I am Harry Samuel Smith. So when the initiative didn't pass, the morning after, I went into the principal's office and told him that the next year would be my last year. And I thanked him for the job, and his support, and his kindness. He smiled. He said he understood. And he said his main regret was that his kids, his own kids would be coming to high school soon, in just a couple of years, and that they would not have the privilege of studying under me. That was nice. (He exits.)

JACK (To the audience): Mr. Smith once said that heroism in the most honest Shakespeare plays was laced with villainy, with selfishness. He thought that was an honest portrayal of a hero. He convinced me of that, with this stories, with his lessons. But when I read of his death, in an obit, years later, years after I'd seen him for the last time, I realized I vehemently disagreed. I realized that Shakespeare's best plays, his most honest were plays like *Hamlet* because they captured the complexity of the hero without tilting him into villainy. Mr. Smith was that kind of hero: flawed but so mildly, so subtlety, that it really didn't matter. His flaws were blemishes, not villainies. He changed lives, he changed his own life, without destroying, without manipulating. And when he could help no more he moved on: from Seattle, to the Bulge, to a Stalag in Germany, to New York, all the way to my high school and then to Palm Springs, where he found peace. And tennis. I never saw him play. But when I think of him, now, I see him on a court, so handsome in his tennis shorts, hitting a ball back and forth, confident, determined, obeying the rules but playing to win: a gentleman, a teacher, a hero.

(We see HARRY once again playing tennis, hitting the ball smooth and sure. The music is "We Open in Venice" from *Kiss Me Kate*.)

End of Act Two

End of Play