

Portraits

Higgs Boson

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The action takes place in a prestigious law firm, in a church, and in the basement of a church.

Characters

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO—the host of the play

BERNIE (Bernard Geldmann)—one of the named partners in the firm, he is referred to as Bernie, Mr. Geldmann, or simply Geldmann. A portrait of him hangs in the firm.

BEAU (BEAUREGARD MAGUIRE)—one of the named partners in the firm, he is referred to as Beau, Mr. Maguire, or simply Maguire. He is represented only by a portrait of him that hangs in the firm.

KARA—Mr. Geldmann's secretary

RICHIE—serves food and drinks

ARCHIBALD—an associate in the law firm

CHAR—a female partner in the law firm

FRANK—an associate in the law firm

FIRST JOHN—a partner in the law firm

SECOND JOHN—a partner in the law firm

OTTO—a partner in the law firm and Bernie's primary assistant

THE PRIEST

JANE—Beau's sister

THE JANITOR

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR

ACT I
SCENE I

(The stage curtain is closed. The curtain has the appearance of being an immense wall of mahogany flanked with what appear to be marble columns. From stage right THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO walks onto the stage in silence. He is a little more than four feet tall and is wearing a black velveteen tuxedo with a bright-red bow tie. There is no cummerbund, and the pants are sewn to a white shirt and rise high on his stomach. The pants do not cover any part of his blue plastic shoes, and his white socks show. The man's red hair is combed straight back. His ears are large.

The man looks the curtain up and down as he slowly walks toward center stage. He stops center stage, turns around, and looks up at the curtain several times. For about fifteen seconds, he gazes in awe at the curtain. He touches the curtain gingerly, as though he were touching something very important. The man notices the curtain's column-like borders. From center stage he runs enthusiastically to one of them and extends his arm to touch it. But he stops himself—it's as though he were afraid to touch it. He extends his arm once more but stops himself again. He begins to walk back to the center of the stage, examining the curtain at about the level where one would find a doorknob. He stops. He extends his hand as if he has found the doorknob he was looking for. He appears to be turning the doorknob. But he stops. He turns and looks directly at the audience. After looking straight at the audience for a few seconds, he speaks.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO.

Welcome, my audience.

I bid you good play.

You are being invited into a law firm
to witness the events of a special day.

Geldmann and Maguire is the name of the firm,
though some call the partners Bernie and Beau to make them sound human.

Obviously, the names have been changed,
but the events are the same.

The walls are all paneled.
The portraits are large.
The people are puppets.
The place is a tomb.

But we are not here to judge and decide,
about what's going on right inside.
They are people like us with struggles and fear,
and cannot escape from a life that's not clear.

(After speaking the last line, THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO bows, and as he turns toward the curtain he extends his right arm. The curtain opens to reveal a room with a large, rectangular conference table in its center. THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO exits stage right as the curtain is pulled back.

There are Chippendale chairs on both sides of the table. The chair at the head of the table has a back at least a foot higher than those of the other chairs. There is no chair at the opposite end of the table.

The walls appear to be mahogany. Upstage, two portraits hang on the wall. One portrait, in a 3' × 3' gray frame, is of an elderly man. He looks to be about eighty years old and is sitting in a chair with his hands folded in his lap. He has on a tweed sport coat, a white shirt, a soft-blue tie, and gray pants. The man has large, bright-blue eyes, puffed cheeks, and some creases in his forehead. He has a kind face, and his smile suggests he is content with his life. Underneath the portrait is a brass plaque with the inscription, "Beau Maguire."

The second portrait is in a 5'×3½' gold frame. It shows a tall, very slender man standing

at the side of an ornate desk. Using the desk in the portrait for scale, one would estimate the man pictured to be well over six feet tall. The man, who appears to be about forty years old, has black hair and soft features. There are no creases in his forehead. He has a small nose and a pleasant smile. A pair of horn-rimmed glasses further softens his look. He is depicted with an extended hand, as if he were reaching out to offer help to anyone who might need it. He is wearing a dark-blue suit, a white shirt, and a red-and-blue, thin-striped tie. Underneath the portrait is a brass plaque with the inscription, “Bernard Geldmann—a lifetime of service, sharing, fairness, and concern.”

Below the portraits is a table with a telephone on it.

The room is filled with red, white, and blue balloons. There is a large sign hanging on the wall: “Happy birthday, Bernie!”

Staring at the larger portrait is BERNIE, a man who is no more than five foot two and weighs at least two hundred fifty pounds. He is wearing a green sport coat that does not fit around his protruding stomach. He has on checkered pants and a blue shirt with a dark tie. His skin is tanned. Black, thick-rimmed plastic glasses sit atop his bulbous nose.

Into the room, from stage right, walks an attractive young woman, KARA. She is a little taller than BERNIE. She is wearing an expensive-looking long dress and tasteful jewelry. She has a wide smile and presents herself in a cheerful, professional manner.)

KARA, *cheerfully*. Good morning, Mr. Geldmann. Happy birthday! You must be so excited to celebrate your sixty-eighth birthday. We have a big celebration planned. Everyone in the firm has been notified twice. Everyone is excited! They will all be here.

BERNIE, *gestures in the direction of the portrait in the gray frame*. Even Beau Maguire?

KARA. Mr. Maguire always comes. He attends all firm functions. This firm is his family.

BERNIE *points to the portrait in the gold frame.* It needs to be reframed. (*With a look of irritation.*) It has been years since it was last reframed.

KARA, *walks up to BERNIE and, gently touching his shoulder, replies in a cheerful tone.* Oh, I really tried to have it reframed this year, but you know it's hard to get people to work these days. I begged. I pleaded. I really did, Mr. Geldmann. You would think that people would jump at the chance to reframe it, considering what the firm was offering to pay.

BERNIE, *still irritated, facing KARA.* Nobody jumps today! Everyone has forgotten the meaning of service. Service is what we are here for. All I ever do is serve. My clients call, and I jump. I can't even get our office-cleaning people to jump. Even the other lawyers in this firm don't know the value of service. (*Pauses, and then reads aloud the inscription under his portrait as if it were an immutable truth.*) "Bernard Geldmann—a lifetime of service, sharing, fairness, and concern." That's what we are all about.

KARA. Oh, they try. They really do. They are good people. They are good lawyers. They all graduated from good schools. They are all respected in their communities.

BERNIE *rolls his eyes in disbelief and speaks in a nasty tone.* Trying is not good enough. They need to remember that I bring in the work. They need to provide service to me. They need to learn to jump. They need to learn to be loyal. I jump for my clients. The people in this firm need to jump for me.

KARA, *in a lighthearted tone, moving back a few steps.* Oh, Mr. Geldmann, they are loyal in their own way. They jump in their own way. The other lawyers are just not the lawyer you are. Just look at their practices. Pitiful! You need to see the humor in their efforts. They really do try, though. They will all be here for your birthday; they know when honor is due.

BERNIE, *without a pause, sulking.* I give them so much. They would be nothing without

me. They get good compensation. I'm more than an employer. I'm fair with them to the point of hurting myself. Why, do you know I take out less money, compared to what I contribute, than anyone else in the firm? Everyone wants to take, and I alone am stupid enough to give. For all that I give them; I just can't understand why they fall all over Maguire's every word.

(Through the door stage right enters RICHIE, a young, handsome man wearing business casual clothes. He is holding a piece of paper as if it were a very important document.)

RICHIE. Good morning, Mr. Geldmann, and happy birthday! Your cakes have arrived. They are in the kitchen. A white, a chocolate, and an ice-cream cake. No one should have an excuse for not eating cake today.

BERNIE. Do you have all the instructions?

RICHIE, *with a big smile, holds the paper in the air.* Same as last year, Mr. Geldmann? I have 'em right here in my hand, Mr. Geldmann. Do you want to see 'em?

BERNIE, *in a questioning tone.* What kind of a comment is that, "same as last year"? Are you saying we don't have the imagination to do things differently, even for my birthday party?

RICHIE, *sounding nervous.* No sir, not at all. I just know you like things done in a certain way. I thought—

BERNIE, *interrupts.* You thought? You should just listen, and you would learn. There are ways to add dignity to a birthday party. We need to have class. Everything we do must have class. Do you understand?

RICHIE. What would you like me to do, sir? Maybe I am a little confused.

BERNIE, *frustrated*. I want the three cakes placed right in front of me. I want a separate serving knife for each cake. Use the crystal for the champagne. Use the china and silver. Serve tea and coffee in the antique serving set. I paid a great deal of money for that set. It belonged to the Carroll family of Baltimore. It's very old, very valuable. This is the type of occasion to use things of value, even if those attending do not appreciate it.

Kara will serve the white cake. Martha will serve the chocolate cake. Jan will serve the ice-cream cake. They will all be standing by the cakes as the people come into the room. Nothing is to be served until everyone sings "Happy Birthday" to me. (*BERNIE stares into space for a few seconds.*) The secretaries will be called first at five minutes to three, then the associates at two minutes to three, and then the partners at one minute to three. When everyone is here—and I mean everyone—Kara will call me on the telephone to come down. Remember, don't let anyone sit in the chair at the head of the table. No one sits in that chair other than me. It's only nine thirty in the morning; you should have no problem making sure everything is right.

KARA, *confidently*. I'll work with Richie. We'll make sure it's perfect.

BERNIE. It doesn't have to be perfect; I don't expect perfection. I'm reasonable. More than reasonable, in fact. If I were unreasonable, I would expect my portrait to be reframed before my party. Instead, I tolerate it. I've wanted it reframed for years and have had to live with it as it is. I am used to living with adversity.

KARA, *offering a cheerful apology*. We tried, but you wanted some other alterations to the portrait, and we couldn't find anyone to do them until yesterday. The artist is coming in tonight after the party. He said he could make the changes immediately, but we did not want the portrait moved until after your birthday party. (*Pauses and looks at RICHIE.*) Can you imagine Mr. Geldmann's birthday party without his portrait? I sure can't!

RICHIE, *supportive*. Sir, we tried. We asked many artists to give us estimates. None of them wanted to do the work. Really, sir, none of them seemed to understand it. But we

finally got one, sir, so don't worry. This one will do a great job, sir—a great job.

KARA. Mr. Geldmann, we—

(BERNIE stares at KARA; she stops talking.)

BERNIE, *his head moving back and forth*. Excuse me, but I was speaking. Can't you give me the courtesy to listen to my thoughts? Don't you think my thoughts have any value? I guess you know everything. If you know so much, why can't you put on this party without bothering me?

RICHIE, *mumbles*. Excuse me. *(Walks quietly, stage right, out of the room.)*

BERNIE, *pointing to the door RICHIE just walked through*. I guess he's got no interest in getting this party right. Why should he care? He gets paid whether we make money or lose money. There's no pressure on him; he just does as he's told and nothing more.

KARA, *frustrated, her smile disappearing*. Mr. Geldmann, Richie cares. He tries. He's just leaving to work on other arrangements for the party. He really is a good man. He is loyal to this firm; he really is.

BERNIE. He doesn't listen. He's more concerned about what he wants to do. He really doesn't listen. I told him about the portrait several times. Just look at me up there. No, scratch that—look at Maguire's portrait. It crowds me; it shouldn't be in this room. Why does it have to be in this room? He doesn't add anything to this firm. He's an old fool. People think he's kind and helpful because he gives them advice or tells them stories about how the firm used to be. Let me tell you how it used to be. This firm was a dinky-ass place. We rented space in a two-story townhouse, and you could hear conversations from the conference room anywhere in the office. If you sat on the toilet, you could hear all the conversations going on in the firm.

(Pauses.)

We had five lawyers and a few secretaries. Sometimes we didn't even generate enough money to to pay ourselves. It was tough, and all through that time, Maguire worked with the young guys. He always told me that we had an obligation to teach, to train, to make an associate the best lawyer possible. But you know he worked with them so much, at times I thought he was gay. He was always with them, morning, noon, and night. He even gave them a few of his clients when he retired.

(KARA, distressed by the situation, moves hesitantly toward the door on stage right; then, fearful, she stops at the door.)

KARA. Mr. Geldmann, everyone knows that you built this firm; everyone knows that everyone works for you. When others wanted to rest by calling their efforts "training," or when they tried to use ethics as an excuse for inaction, you had the perseverance to continue and the drive to generate business.

(Long pause.)

Mr. Maguire is just a nice old man. People like him because he is a nice old man. He's no threat to anyone. He just sits in his office and tells stories.

BERNIE, *meanly*. No! He's a threat to me. He's a threat to the firm. I have to keep the firm operating; Maguire does not have that worry. I have to make decisions; Maguire can be pleasant. These are big differences and his actions threaten my ability to run the firm with the respect of the other partners.

KARA, *fidgiting as she enters the doorway on stage right, turns to BERNIE, speaks cheerfully*. Mr. Geldmann, I just love listening to you, but I really need to use the bathroom. You know how bathroom things go; they just happen. I just don't want it to happen in the conference room. Is there anything else you want done?

(BERNIE motions with his hand for her to leave, turns around, and stares at his portrait. After a few seconds, he walks over to the portrait of BEAU MAGUIRE and starts talking to it.)

BERNIE. Even your frame is tacky! You don't even have enough pride to want a new one. You just sit in that chair with that stupid-ass smile. Is there nothing in your head? That smile is a fake. Why do people like you? I do everything for them. I put the food on their tables. I pay them good wages. I listen to their stupid-ass problems. I listen to these dumb, jackass clients and wonder how such stupid people can even survive. You don't know what a motion to dismiss is. You've never drafted a subpoena. You couldn't even file an objection letter if your life depended on it. You haven't talked to a high-level government official in years. What can you do? You can't do shit, Maguire. Yet you just sit up there like you're an equal to me.

(From stage right, two lawyers walk through the door into the conference room as BERNIE is talking to the portrait. ARCHIBALD, a thirty-year-old associate in the firm, wears a three-piece suit. CHAR, a partner, about forty-five years old, wears her hair short and has on a business suit with a tie. CHAR observes BERNIE talking to Maguire's portrait.)

CHAR, *sarcastically*. Don't you know talking to yourself isn't a good sign? You know what some people say.

(BERNIE, clearly startled, turns toward CHAR.)

BERNIE, *walking toward his portrait, gestures to the frame*. No one seems interested in having my portrait updated. It doesn't really look as distinguished as I have become. No one around here seems interested in my problems. Everyone around here wants only for himself. *(Pauses. Places his arms on the back of a chair.)*

I suppose you're here to ask for something. Let me guess—more money and another bonus. Well, we don't have the money right now. Even I'm not getting my due. I'm always making the sacrifices. It's someone else's turn; I'm tired of sacrificing for this place. It's my turn to take a breather. After all, I don't have many years left here.

CHAR, *in a sarcastic tone, with a big smile*. I just wanted to say, "Happy birthday!" That's all.

ARCHIBALD, *standing behind CHAR, begins speaking in a solicitous tone*. Yes, happy birthday, Mr. Geldmann!

BERNIE. It's really not so happy. It's generally a pain in the ass to have this party. It's a lot of work. But everyone insists on having it, so I show. It gives everyone a chance to see me when I'm not so rushed. That's the one great thing about this place; it's real human. Everyone is accessible from top to bottom. Everyone has a good life here. No place could be fairer or kinder than Geldmann and Maguire. I've worked my entire life to ensure fairness for those on the bottom.

CHAR, *wrinkling her forehead, smiling*. Well then, if we are going to talk about fairness, I would like to talk to you about my situation. I believe I'm significantly undercompensated, considering the money I bring in to this firm.

BERNIE, *sounding disgusted*. I just knew you wanted to ask for more money. That's all you ever do. This isn't the time to talk about your problems; it's my birthday. Today should be a happy day. Give me one day without stress. It's my birthday, and my knee hurts. That's enough of a problem for today.

(BERNIE, annoyed that ARCHIBALD is still standing in the room, stares at him with a condescending look. BERNIE moves in a friendly manner toward CHAR and gestures as if to say, "Sit down. We need to talk.")

CHAR, *moving stage right, toward the door*. Well, I really need to use the bathroom. I'll be back, but we don't need to talk today. It's your birthday.

BERNIE, *in a raised voice*. You raised the issue; we need to talk.

CHAR, *faking bewilderment*. Issue? What issue?

BERNIE, *continuing in a raised voice*. Fairness—or any other issue that's bothering you. I'm always available.

(CHAR's face is tense, almost frozen. She glares at Bernie with disgust.)

CHAR, *as she exits the room stage right*. I'll be back.

BERNIE *looks directly at ARCHIBALD, speaks in a dismissive voice*. She doesn't have to go to the bathroom. It's an excuse. She knows she's not being treated unfairly. She just wants to complain, knowing of my soft heart. We just can't do more for her. She does really well. I don't know why she needs more money. Who will she spend it on? She doesn't have a family. All she has is a girlfriend, and she works. I just don't know what her problem is.

ARCHIBALD, *looking extremely uncomfortable*. I'm just an associate. I really don't know about these types of things.

BERNIE. I'm not talking about partnership matters. I would never do that. I'm talking about greed. She's just never happy; everybody knows that. It's frustrating trying to run this place.

ARCHIBALD, *in a shaky voice while backing toward the door*. She's never seemed greedy to me. She's always been helpful to me. I just do my work; that's all I do. I don't get involved in the firm's politics.

BERNIE. That is a good attitude. Surely you realize—but maybe you don't. Let me give you some of the history of this place. You know I call it like I see it. I shoot straight and tell it like it is. Sometimes people get offended. There is not much I can do about that.

ARCHIBALD. You surely do tell it like you see it!

BERNIE. That's important in life. There are so many candy-asses out there. Someone's got to have the guts to speak the truth. I don't care what anyone thinks about me; I don't have any ego. I'm not easily offended. I just shoot straight. I put reality on the table.

(CHAR appears just outside the door on stage right, listens to BERNIE and ARCHIBALD talking.)

ARCHIBALD, *responds in a slow, clear, confident voice.* But everyone can't take reality in the face. Sometimes it's difficult. I like to think I'm a realist, but reality is hard to take sometimes. Sometimes I wish somebody would sugarcoat it just so that I could have an easy day once in a while. There are days I just don't want to be bothered by it. *(Looks down at the floor, lifts his head quickly, and looks at BERNIE.)*

Sometimes I just wish my father were alive to help. He never helped me much when he was alive, but now and then he did. I guess what was important wasn't that he helped me, but that I always thought I could count on him if I needed it. It was nice to believe someone was around to help. Of course, I'll never know whether he really would have helped. It was just a feeling. Some days I wish I had that again. Someone to count on. *(Pauses.)* It's tough to live every day of your life without help. Just believing you can get help if you need it is a very comforting feeling, even if the belief is more hope than reality.

BERNIE, *in a serious, reflective voice.* Wait until you have my responsibility. I have to make money for everyone. That's what's so tough. I can never stop making it. I can't

imagine what would happen if I stopped working my ass off every day. No one believes how hard I work. I work here. I work when I'm in Florida. I work at three a.m. I work at seven p.m. I never stop. I am responsible for it all, and no one really appreciates it. They think Maguire helped start this firm. He was never anything but a slow-witted old man who had big-deal government connections.

ARCHIBALD, *uncomfortable, speaks reluctantly*. I have always heard that Mr. Maguire started this firm, and that all our main clients were his, and he handed them over to you and a few others in the firm.

BERNIE, *self-righteously*. You're all really blinded. Maguire did nothing. He got those clients simply because he existed. People just came to him with the work. He did nothing to earn it. The clients were nothing. I turned them into something over thirty-eight years—thirty-eight years of slaving. I worked my ass off for them. Service, service, service! Without me, Maguire would be nothing. Without me, the clients would be nothing. Can you imagine Ron Gold, the president of Esso Steel, making a decision? Yeah, he's a nice guy, but he can't decide anything. I made his big decisions. How many other biggies are like that? I'll tell you: many!

ARCHIBALD. You really need to tell others about your efforts. I'm sure they just don't know. They just hear all the stories Mr. Maguire tells at lunch or over drinks. What can you expect from an old man? He needs to justify his life. (*Pauses.*) I guess stories can't hurt. He is an awfully nice guy.

BERNIE *angrily puts his face in front of ARCHIBALD's*. It's irritating as hell. He sits around bullshitting and taking up everyone's time while I bust my ass to keep this place going. He even looks stupid in his portrait. I hate having it next to mine. Just look at how dignified my portrait is. Maguire isn't even wearing a suit.

(*CHAR, seeing ARCHIBALD looking pained at being alone with BERNIE, enters the room from stage right. She interrupts the conversation by hopping several times from the door*

to BERNIE.)

CHAR, *cheerfully*. Well, at least I did something important today! You know what they say—all you really need in life is a roof over your head, some food, a clean toilet, and—

BERNIE, *annoyed*. Maybe hopping and inane statements are OK for people like you, but you interrupted a serious conversation. If you don't mind, I would like to finish my conversation. Archibald is interested, and there are a few things he needs to know.

CHAR, *angrily*. What do you mean, “people like me”? Tell me what you meant by that. What is it that you think I am?

BERNIE, *in a conciliatory manner*. I didn't mean anything by it; I just thought your entrance was rude. I would never make a comment about your lifestyle.

CHAR, *sarcastically*. Oh, I'd love to see you hop up and down in a doorway and hop around a room. That would be quite a sight. We would have a moment of comic relief. Archibald, can you imagine the sight?

(CHAR starts hopping up and down and wiggling while pretending to hold a very large belly in place while it bounces.)

BERNIE. Don't be ridiculous. If you have something to say, say it directly. Be considerate to your partners.

CHAR. I'm not being ridiculous. We need a laugh around here. Archibald, don't we need a laugh around here?

ARCHIBALD, *wearing his discomfort on his face, moves stage right toward the door*. This is a conversation for partners; I should leave.

BERNIE. Don't be ridiculous. We are all partners. Even associates are partners. We are all in this firm together to achieve the same goals. I introduce all my associates as partners at meetings as a manner of speaking. We're partners; you need to stay.

CHAR *hurries over to ARCHIBALD, puts her hand on his shoulder to keep him in the room.* Please don't leave. We are not talking about partner matters. We're only discussing whether we need more laughs around here. Associate opinions are important on these matters. Wouldn't it be funny to see Bernie hopping up and down with his stomach bouncing and jiggling? Perhaps we could have a few of the firm's new clients come to a very important meeting with Bernie. They all know of his greeeeaaat reputation.

BERNIE *smiles appreciatively at Char.* That is a good idea. I should really let the new clients brought in by the other partners meet me. I am sure they would appreciate it.

CHAR. Oh, I wasn't finished yet. We would invite them to this serious meeting. Maybe we could even invite them to your birthday party.

BERNIE, *excited.* Great idea! I never thought of that. Maybe next year?

CHAR, *waving her arm to silence BERNIE, speaks rapidly.* No, I am not finished yet with my idea. We would invite them to your birthday. We would have a large box in the middle of the table. As they were sitting around the table, we would talk of all the great things you could do for them. We would tell them of all the things you did for them in the past and that now, at long last, they will get to meet you.

BERNIE, *excited.* You don't need to tell them; I am capable of speaking for myself. It would be rude not to let me speak. After all, they are coming to see me.

CHAR, *raising her hand to silence BERNIE.* Let me continue; you know I'm rude. Your partners will tell them of your accomplishments. We will decorate the entire room with your press clippings. You have had so many clippings from that magazine—*In the Bag* or

Bags Make It Possible. I forget. Anyway—

BERNIE, *smiling, in a very gracious tone and with a look of great pride.* It's *Bag-Making News*. It is the largest magazine in the bag industry. Anybody who is anybody in the bag industry reads it. That is why I have such a great reputation. There is really no article that can be written without the reporter needing my opinion. I just don't have the time to educate all those dumbasses before they write their stories. That is why I am not quoted more. I could be quoted all the time, in every issue.

CHAR, *finger to her lips to mimic a silent "shhh" sound.* Let me finish.

BERNIE. I wish we had thought of having the new clients invited to this year's party. Maybe we could have another birthday party for me next week.

CHAR, *shushing BERNIE.* There is more to my idea. Remember, as everyone is sitting around the table hearing about your legal genius, there is this huge box in the middle of the table. As the clients hear more about you; they will never guess what a surprise is in store for them. *(In the voice of a game-show host, yells.)* You, Bernie Geldmann, will be in the box and jump out screaming, "Here I am, Mr. Superlawyer!"

(ARCHIBALD laughs and finds it difficult to stop; he holds his face in his hands to keep his mouth shut.

BERNIE stares at ARCHIBALD for about five seconds.)

BERNIE, *positions himself by his portrait.* So you think making fun of someone is funny?

ARCHIBALD, *still holding his mouth shut.* No, no, I really don't. It just hit me; I am sorry. I didn't mean to laugh. I would never laugh at you, sir.

BERNIE, *coldly to CHAR.* You've embarrassed me in front of an associate. That is

reprehensible. I would never do that to you; I would never do it to anyone.

ARCHIBALD. You have my word, sir. I'll never tell a soul, sir. Never! (*Laughs again, puts his hand over his mouth to control himself.*) I want to stay in the firm, sir. What do you want me to do?

BERNIE. We'll talk after.

CHAR *to* BERNIE. You never embarrass anyone? Is that what I heard you say?

BERNIE. I have never embarrassed anyone!

ARCHIBALD, *uneasy, looks at the floor.* May I leave?

(*BERNIE and CHAR speak simultaneously.*)

BERNIE. Yes!

CHAR. No!

ARCHIBALD. What should I do?

BERNIE. Have the courage of your convictions. Leave. We can talk after.

CHAR. Stay!

ARCHIBALD. I really want to leave. I can't add to this discussion.

CHAR. You work for me, not him. You are going to stay and listen.

ARCHIBALD, *rubbing his hands, twitching and looking scared, just starts talking.* That's a

wonderful portrait of you, Mr. Geldmann. You look dignified.

BERNIE. Are you saying that only my portrait looks dignified and I don't? Is that what you're saying?

ARCHIBALD, *quickly*. No! Your portrait looks dignified. You look dignified!

BERNIE. It's more than looking dignified. Are you limiting your comments to my looks?

ARCHIBALD, *head down, silent for a few seconds*. No, you also act dignified; you are dignified. Everything about you is dignified. Everyone knows that.

CHAR, *angry, gets in ARCHIBALD's face*. Get off it, Archibald. Quit kissing his ass. Everyone does that. We have a whole firm of ass-kissers. We have more brown lips in this one place than anywhere in the world. The shit is so deep around here you need hip boots. You don't work for him. You work for me. How many asses can you kiss? You can only be loyal to one ass at one time. If you want to kiss his ass, I won't let you kiss mine. Otherwise, get some courage!

ARCHIBALD, *frightened and confused*. No, I really meant what I said about Mr. Geldmann's dignity, but you have also made many good points. I mean, the others in the firm do kiss his ass, but Mr. Geldmann does not expect it. They just do it to butter him up because they know how important he is.

CHAR. They certainly butter him up! Just look at him, a butterball with a big butterball sitting right in the middle of his body waiting to explode. You know, I used to think of Bernie as a beached whale, but butterball is a better description.

BERNIE, *face red with anger*. You asshole! I made you. I made you rich. I gave you your clients. You're nothing without me.

CHAR. You've never helped anyone other than yourself. You give when it's convenient and only when it allows you to manipulate partner against partner so you can take more. Nobody takes more than you. Some people spend time watching sunsets, or playing with kids, or just enjoying people. Your time is spent scheming so you can keep good people off-balance. When they falter, you step on them. You're very clever, Bernie. You search out people's flaws. Everyone has one. You search for the flaw, and as soon as you find it, you attack. People are usually too surprised to defend. And as the attack continues, they become weaker. You gain power over one good person at a time. Power, Bernie. You have gained power with your cleverness. And now you have to work every day to keep it; otherwise you will lose the only thing that makes you important to yourself!

BERNIE, *stuttering*. You...you...you...!

CHAR, *moves closer to BERNIE, points to the portrait of Beau Maguire*. You never had anything to give. Maguire gave it all. He gave us his clients. He helped our careers. He gave you your clients. He made you, and you hate him for it. You hate him because he helped you, and without him you know you would be nothing. You would be like all those associates who kiss your ass and keep on kissing because they are fearful. They lost their lives after a few years here. Now all they know is your ass. That is the limit of their vision, your ass. (*Moves face-to-face with BERNIE.*) Bernie, you proved that if you ain't the lead dog, the scenery is always the same. Not much of a perspective in the larger scheme of things. (*Turns, walks away from BERNIE, stops, and again looks at him.*)

Bernie, you were fortunate enough that Maguire did not expect to get his ass kissed in return for his generosity. All he expected was loyalty and decency. Because he was old, you knew you could take from him, and you didn't even need to give him anything in return, not even loyalty and decency.

BERNIE, *pointing at the portrait of BEAU MAGUIRE*. He gave me nothing. I took his poor-paying clients and turned them into something. I did it. I did it all.

ARCHIBALD, *steps between BERNIE and CHAR with his hands in the air, about shoulder level.* Don't say any more. Mr. Geldmann has dignity. Char, we need you here, you are very necessary. Please stop! Please!

CHAR, *poking her finger into ARCHIBALD's chest, pushes him back a step.* Man, is any reality acceptable to you? Can't you distinguish?

ARCHIBALD. I don't have to distinguish. Distinguishing only creates trouble. Just look what it's done.

KARA *walks through the door with a big smile, clearly in a cheerful mood.* Well, only five more hours until Mr. Geldmann's birthday party. I just can't wait. How exciting to sing "Happy Birthday" to Mr. Geldmann. Maybe we'll sing louder than last year. Richie's bringing the crystal, china, and silver. It's never too early to set up.

CHAR, *looking at KARA.* We need a large moving box, the tall kind that you move garments in.

KARA. What?

CHAR. We need a big—

BERNIE, *looking at CHAR intensely.* Get off it. You've said enough. Enough!

KARA. What's going on? Should I be here?

(RICHIE brings the crystal, china, and silver into the room and places it on the table. Before moving it to its proper place on the table, he notices that everyone has stopped talking. He looks at MR. GELDMANN, and then turns to look at CHAR, and then ARCHIBALD. He stands in silence.)

BERNIE, *looking at RICHIE*. Continue. We need to set up for the party.

RICHIE. Yes, sir. Yes, sir!

CHAR, *speaking to RICHIE*. Do you distinguish?

RICHIE. What? Distinguish what?

KARA, *cheerfully*. What's there to distinguish? What are you talking about? There's nothing to distinguish. All we need to do is set up for the party. That's the most important thing any of us can do. What could be more important today? That's distinguishing! I know what's important.

CHAR, *looking around the room, glances at ARCHIBALD, RICHIE, and KARA*. Is Mr. Geldmann's party the most important thing in your life?

KARA. Yes, if he thinks it is! Why wouldn't it be important? He pays me to think it's important.

CHAR. Can't you act like it's important but understand that it is not the most important thing in life? It's called perspective.

KARA. No, that would be too difficult. Anyway, if it's important to Mr. Geldmann, it's important to me. It should also be important to you. After all, he treats you pretty well. He gives you a good salary. Why aren't you grateful? You live well thanks to him.

(BERNIE looks pleased by KARA's defense of him.)

CHAR, *facing KARA*. Do you believe everything he says? Do you believe he is responsible for everything around here? Forget about my contributions; what about Maguire's contributions? Don't you think he had a major impact around here?

KARA. Why do you want to talk about such matters? Mr. Maguire doesn't care. He just wants to sit around and tell stories. He's a nice old man, very nice.

BERNIE, *full of pride*. As you can hear, I do have very strong supporters. Just—listen to me—listen to Kara; she knows the truth—it's all true what she says—

CHAR to KARA, *ignoring BERNIE*. Yes, he is a nice old man, but he's more than that. Geldmann wants to take credit for everything, and people like you let him. Geldmann believes his own lies, and so do so many others because that's all they hear. That gives him power. People are afraid to take him on. That's the only goddamn reason anyone attends his birthday party. It's amazing what people fear if they have no sense of worth. It's amazing what people believe if they hear it enough times—anything, just anything, even when they sense it might not be right. They believe it and tell others, and then those others tell yet more others. That's how false heroes get made. That's how fear is created. Then a person just puts his ass in front of another person's face and tells him to kiss it, and amazingly, it's kissed.

KARA, *no longer smiling, loudly*. That's not so. Mr. Geldmann is a great lawyer. He's distinguished. Look at that fine portrait of him. Such an imposing figure! Why, he towers over the other lawyers in this firm. He's one of the greats!

RICHIE *jumps into the fray, shouts*. He even gives us holidays off. He pays us well. What more can you expect? No one else does that for us. Just...no one else does it for us.

CHAR, *looking back and forth between KARA and RICHIE*. Don't you think all of the partners contribute something? Don't you think it's all of us collectively who make things work?

RICHIE. No. Mr. Geldmann tells us it's him, and I just can't fight about it.

BERNIE *calmly addresses CHAR*. See, people know the truth. The workers know who put the bread on the table. People like you are just jealous. You want to tear down great men. I can't stoop to your level. Today is my birthday. The firm will come to honor me, not you. Just that fact alone should be proof of my worth. Even Maguire will come. He knows what I've done for him and the firm.

CHAR. Do you really believe he comes to honor you? Do you really believe that?

BERNIE. He comes because he knows he must honor me! He wouldn't come otherwise. Just look around at how much people have because of me. Maybe I have to give Maguire some credit. He had the clients, but I built the business. Look, if he could have developed those clients, he would not have given them away. And he didn't just give them to me; he gave some to other lawyers. But no one has made as much of them as I have. He knows he must honor me so I'll keep his little boys well fed.

CHAR *to BERNIE, in a fast-paced and questioning tone*. Maguire gave his clients away? What are you talking about? You took them! You took them project by project, meeting by meeting. You undercut him every chance you got, and he gave you many chances since he was so busy finding more clients. You took as he gave, and now you would like to take away our memories of him so the lawyers in this firm will think you are as important as you think you are. *(Pauses, throws her hands in the air as if adoring an ancient deity, and then looks straight into BERNIE's eyes.)* There but for the grace of God...goes God!

BERNIE. You're right; to these people I *am* God. You may not realize that, but that is exactly how they think of me: a god. I do everything for them. Why, I can't imagine what they would do if they were not working here.

CHAR. I'm sure they would do perfectly well somewhere else. It's a big world out there with many things to do.

RICHIE. I don't want to try it. Jobs are tough to get. Let's not give Mr. Geldmann any ideas. I like it here just fine.

KARA, *pointing at CHAR*. Is this distinguishing? If it is, it's mean. It hurts people. It makes people fearful. No wonder Mr. Geldmann doesn't like you and thinks you and the other partners are stupid. All you seem to want to do is "distinguish." Real people don't have time to distinguish. It's not real. It's not important. And it doesn't matter. I have more than enough to do just working every day. I don't have time to distinguish.

CHAR *turns to ARCHIBALD*. Do you ever distinguish? Do you believe Mr. Maguire had any significant role in making this firm one of the leading firms in the nation?

ARCHIBALD. Sure he did; he started it. But so what? It's Mr. Geldmann's now, because—

CHAR. Because why? Because Mr. Maguire is too old? Too senile? Too nice? Too human? Too gracious? Are these the reasons that give Geldmann the right to take our souls from us? Does your fear give Geldmann the right to diminish others? (*Pauses while reflecting.*) Actually, it's not the taking that bothers me. What bothers me is that Geldmann takes and refuses to give anyone else credit, even those who have made substantial contributions. Giving credit requires so little, but Geldmann does not even have the decency to allow us to feel good about ourselves. Everyone has to be driven into the ground for him to feel good about himself. Actually, I doubt he feels good about himself. It just allows him to feel superior for the moment. (*Pauses.*) What has really happened over all these years is that Geldmann's hatred of Mr. Maguire has consumed his humanity. (*Pauses.*) Geldmann hates Mr. Maguire because he knows Mr. Maguire gave him the clients that made him a success. Geldmann knows he could never have gotten them on his own. It's like a man hating God because he knows he did not create himself. Instead of feeling lucky to be alive, he hates the gift of life because he did not create it. Therefore, he must diminish everything and everyone. That's Bernie Geldmann. There's nothing left inside of him but hate. That is why everyone has to be brought down. In Geldmann's world there is only one level for humanity—the bottom.

BERNIE, *red-faced with anger, yells.* You bitch!

(ARCHIBALD opens his mouth to reply, but nothing comes out. The telephone on the table underneath the portrait of Mr. Maguire rings. KARA goes to answer it.)

KARA *picks up the phone.* Good morning. Geldmann and Maguire. How can we help you?

KARA. Hello, Frank. We're in the conference room preparing for Mr. Geldmann's party. I'm sure you can't wait. Where are you? You should be here. The party will start in a few hours. You certainly don't want to miss it. Mr. Geldmann would be awfully disappointed if you did. *(Listens for a second.)* What are you doing at the hospital? Nothing serious, I hope. We would not want you to miss Mr. Geldmann's birthday party. You know it starts at three. *(Listens for a few seconds.)* Of course you can speak to Mr. Geldmann.

(KARA passes the telephone to BERNIE.)

BERNIE *takes the telephone, speaks in a gruff voice.* What's so important that you have to interrupt preparations for my birthday party? Quickly now. I don't have time for you today.

BERNIE. Stop your sniffing. Who's dead? *(Pauses.)* Maguire?

(Pauses.)

On my birthday? What about my party? *(Hangs up the telephone.)* Beau Maguire is dead. He died on my birthday. *(Pauses.)* What do we do now? We've already bought the cake, and I won't serve stale cake. *(Pauses.)* Today is my birthday! *(Pauses.)* Today is my birthday! Do we have to cancel the party? How could this happen? How could this happen today?

(The curtain falls slowly. The lights dim around everyone and everything, except the portraits of Beau Maguire and Bernie Geldmann. The curtain continues to slowly fall, eventually blocking out all light. As the curtain is almost touching the stage floor, from stage right, THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO scampers toward center stage. There is a soft light on him and he begins to speak.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO.

Without, I hope, offending you again,

I intrude into this interlude.

All men walk on and off the stage,
and when they're gone it's like they've never been.

Some are big, and some are small.

Some can distinguish; some cannot.

Some have perspective; some do not.

Some have courage; some have rot.

What is important, my dear audience,

is what we do when we are here.

So never think of *if* when thinking of your life,
for such a thought saps your spirit of delight.

ACT I
SCENE II

(BERNIE's office. The office is large enough to have two separate areas, a sitting area and the desk area.

The sitting area has a sofa, a coffee table, and two wingback chairs. The coffee table has on it a telephone and three books, all titled in brass letters, Who's Who of Lawyers for the Bag Industry. The three volumes are for the years 1996, 1997, and 1998. Hanging on the wall above the sofa, in a gold frame, is a certificate from the book's publisher which reads in large black letters:

BERNARD M. GELDMANN in recognition of your great contributions to the bag industry, you have been selected for inclusion in Who's Who in the Bag Industry. Next to the framed certificate is a wall-mounted shelf. It holds a trophy that is at least eighteen inches high. The trophy is of a handsome, athletic-looking man dressed in suit and tie, with his arms extended upward and holding a plastic bag in each hand. The inscription at the base of the trophy reads, "Bernard Geldmann—inducted into the Bag Industry Hall of Fame, 1997."

In the working area of the room there is a George Washington-style writing desk. Its brass drawer handles and toe caps are polished to a gleam. On a small table to the right of the desk is a brass-handled telephone hooked up to a taping device. Behind the desk is a high-backed swivel chair. Its headrest is at least two feet above where BERNIE's head would rest against the back of the chair. The chair's battery-powered seat can be raised or lowered at the touch of a button. Only the seat moves; the headrest is stationary.

BERNIE is sitting at his desk. The seat of his chair is low so that his head seems to be coming out of the desk, and he has to raise his arms slightly to write on the papers before him. He sits hunched over the desk with his face but inches from his work. Frowning, he sits and stares at the papers.)

KARA, from stage right walks into BERNIE's office, stands in front of his desk. Is there anything I can do for you?

(BERNIE just shakes his head.)

KARA. Are you sure? There must be something I can do. You have to decide about the party. We must tell the others in the firm that Mr. Maguire died. They will hear about it anyway, probably from Frank. You need to tell them. We can't go forward with the party today. Is there anything I can do? There must be something I can do.

BERNIE, *screaming*. John! John!

(Suddenly, there is a sound of hurried footsteps. FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN arrive simultaneously at the door to BERNIE's office, pushing and shouldering each other within the doorframe in a battle to be first inside.)

FIRST JOHN has on a blue striped shirt, a bow tie, blue-and-gold suspenders, and red-rimmed designer glasses. Every hair on his head is perfectly in place. SECOND JOHN has on a wrinkled blue shirt and a dull-colored tie with what appear to be food stains on it. His hair appears glued to his head.

After a few more pushes and shoves, FIRST JOHN squeezes past SECOND JOHN into the office. SECOND JOHN hustles after him so that the two make it to BERNIE's desk at the same time. They stand before BERNIE like a pair of mismatched tin soldiers. BERNIE raises his seat to its highest level to project the appearance of being very tall and in command.)

FIRST JOHN. I made it here first, Bernie. I made it here first.

SECOND JOHN. No, you didn't; I made it here first. You just shoved me out of the way at the door so you could beat me into the room. You always want Bernie to think you are more responsive than me. Or is it I? Me or I? I am as responsive as you are and Bernie

knows it.

FIRST JOHN, *looks at SECOND JOHN over the rims of his glasses.* Never, never! I practice at responsiveness; you don't.

BERNIE. Neither of you is quick enough. I have been sitting here waiting for you. I get tired of calling. Both of you should just know when I need you. You just don't think of others.

FIRST JOHN. I am sorry, truly. I do try. Every night for an hour after you leave I set my alarm clock to ring every ten minutes. As soon as it rings I run into your office. I have knocked three seconds off my time in the last several months. I know this because my alarm clock and my watch are electronically coordinated. When the alarm goes off, the second hand on my watch starts to keep time. From the moment you call until I get into your office is only eight seconds. This time I didn't hear you because of the hum from my computer. I lost a few seconds. Now that I know the noise from the computer muffles your call, I will engineer a way to compensate for it. I can hook up sound sensors. Or I can encase my computer in cork or I could buy one of those special hearing devices they advertise that lets people hear sounds from hundreds of feet away. I will solve the problem. After all, I am an engineer and a chemist as well as a lawyer.

SECOND JOHN. Everything in life cannot be engineered. Everything is not a calculation.

FIRST JOHN. Well, it's damn close. Anything I can't calculate isn't worth doing. Of course, you can't even get your hair straight.

SECOND JOHN. What's that supposed to mean?

FIRST JOHN. You know what I mean. You're jealous. You can't even get your hair combed. I don't want to discuss it with Bernie present.

BERNIE *to SECOND JOHN*. I know all about it.

SECOND JOHN. Who told you?

BERNIE. Otto. He tells me everything. That's his role. Without him I wouldn't know anything around here. Certainly I would not learn anything from you two guys. I can't even find either of you when I really need you.

SECOND JOHN, *looking at FIRST JOHN*. Did you learn about my hair from Otto?

FIRST JOHN. Everyone has learned about your hair from Otto. Didn't you know that?

KARA *to SECOND JOHN*. Otto only told me you had a partial hairpiece.

FIRST JOHN. Right! It's partial, movable, yet he wants you to believe it is living, breathing hair. Do you know what he does to try to fool everyone?

KARA. What is this, a quiz?

FIRST JOHN. Don't you see anything different about John's hair? Doesn't it look worse some days than others?

KARA. No, it always looks bad. Are you saying John has a cheap toupee?

BERNIE, *laughing*. You might say he has many cheap toupees.

FIRST JOHN, *laughing*. He has four. He changes toupees every week so it looks like his hair is growing. That's why on the last Friday of the month he always gets a haircut. John runs home and changes wigs.

SECOND JOHN. Does everyone know? Do the secretaries know? Who did Otto tell? Why

did he do it? That was mean. I never did anything to him.

KARA, *shouts*. That's vain!

FIRST JOHN. Of course it's vain. We all know it's vain. That's not the question. The question is whether people around here are too stupid to notice a movable wig that doesn't sit right on his head.

SECOND JOHN, *embarrassed*. I didn't do anything to Otto. Why would he do such a thing to me?

BERNIE. Of course you didn't do anything to Otto. It's his job to keep me informed and to spread enough negative information around the firm to keep everyone in their places. We can't have all these egomaniac lawyers running around imagining they're important. We would have chaos. We have too much work to do. We need to service our clients. That is all that is important. (*Sighs loudly.*) I'm sorry I called you guys in for advice. I need advice, but you two are not the ones I can get it from. You both were more helpful years ago. Thank God for Otto!

KARA, *cheering*. Otto, Otto, he's our man; if he can't do it, no one can! Right, Mr. Geldmann?

SECOND JOHN, *dismayed*. So Otto is a spy?

FIRST JOHN, *firmly*. No, he's not a spy. He's Bernie's assistant. Bernie needs all the help he can get. There are not many more important lawyers in the city, perhaps in the world, than Bernie Geldmann. What's the man to do with all that responsibility? How do you think he achieved all *this*? (*Points to the Who's Who books on the coffee table, walks over to the framed Who's Who certificate and reads aloud the certificate text and then the inscription on the base of the trophy, and then pauses.*) Not too many lawyers inducted into the Bag Industry Hall of Fame. (*Looks at SECOND JOHN.*) You'll never be

there! (*Stares in awe at the trophy.*)

SECOND JOHN, *loudly to anyone that will listen.* Otto's a spy!

FIRST JOHN, *disturbed by the loud statement.* If you say that one more time I am going to tell Otto what you said. I might even tell Bernie what you said if you get me really mad. And I can assure you, you are getting me really mad!

BERNIE. What are you going to tell me? Tell me! No, don't tell me. I called you two in to help me with a problem. You're not paying attention to me. There is a problem. You guys haven't even wished me a happy birthday.

FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN, *together.* Happy birthday, Bernie!

BERNIE. Thank you both, but you need not extend such a wish if you don't mean it.

FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN, *together.* Of course I mean it. Why wouldn't I mean it?

BERNIE, *calmly.* You two won't believe what happened to me today. You just won't believe it. It's even worse than when I had to have physical therapy for my knee, and you know how painful the recovery was—especially when getting in and out of cabs. Everything just happens to screw up my day. I'm sick of this shit, just sick of it!

FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN, *together in voices echoing deep concern.* What happened, Bernie? What happened? I apologize for not giving you the attention you deserve.

BERNIE. We're going to have to cancel my birthday party. Don't try to talk me out of it. It's the right thing to do. Beau died.

FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN, *together.* No kidding! Really? What happened?

BERNIE. I don't know. I can't worry about such details. We need to figure out what we're going to do about my party. I'm sure everyone is counting on it. I really don't want to disappoint everyone, but we need to postpone the party.

FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN, *together*. But not for long, I hope.

BERNIE. Indefinitely! I can wait. It's not as important to me as to the staff. They will be so disappointed. Let's just postpone it. How can we do it? (*Screaming.*) Otto! Otto!

(Into the office comes OTTO, a man roughly six feet tall. He is balding, but his long hair from the sides and back of his head is combed over his bald spots. He sports a large, thick, dark moustache and wears half-rimmed bifocals at the tip of his nose. He is wearing suspenders. A large comb sticks out of the pocket of his shirt.

He walks very erect, his head high and his shoulders thrown straight back. He has an air of being important. When not standing at attention in front of BERNIE, Otto walks, stands, and talks with his thumbs holding his suspenders away from his shirt.

He stops at the corner of BERNIE's desk and stands at attention.)

OTTO, *in a deep voice*. Yes sir!

BERNIE. I don't know if you have been told, but Beau died and we have to postpone my birthday party. That's just the way things go. I am reasonably sure Beau couldn't help it.

OTTO, *still standing at perfect attention*. Are you sure, sir? I mean, if he could have helped it, sir, he would have chosen to die today just to piss you off, sir.

BERNIE. You're right. You're probably right. No, I am sure you're right, but what should we do? No one would believe us, so why talk about it?

OTTO. We need to postpone it indefinitely, sir. That won't lock us into anything. We can have the party whenever you deem it appropriate. Whenever that might be will be welcomed by all. That way, sir, a dead man won't dictate your life.

BERNIE. Brilliant! How should we do it?

OTTO. Postpone it immediately. The sooner we do it, the sooner we can have your party. Kara, put out the message by e-mail to the firm. Everyone will get it in seconds. Tell them that the funeral service is tomorrow. Attendance is optional. Don't tell the support staff we'll pay for their time off, otherwise they'll go. Keep it confused. If they don't think they'll get paid, they will stay here and work. Even if they only get a little bit of work done, it's something. Only the lawyers should attend, and they can just work longer hours at night to make up their lost billings.

BERNIE. Brilliant! How can we be assured the funeral service will be tomorrow?

OTTO. We'll just make sure it happens. Beau only has a sister. I'm sure at her age she's deaf, dumb, and almost blind. She will let us take care of it. I'm sure she believes we love Beau as much as she does. She'll never question us.

SECOND JOHN, *staring at OTTO*. I can't believe you told everyone in the firm about my hair.

OTTO, *with a smirk*. It's not hair, John; it's a synthetic fiber.

SECOND JOHN. But it's embarrassing. Why did you do it?

OTTO, *no longer standing at attention, runs his hand over the hair from the sides of his head to cover his bald spots. He addresses SECOND JOHN in a very loud, offended tone of voice*. How dare you question my motives? Don't you know anything about truth? My job around here is to make sure we are all ethical and truthful and that everyone is aware

of what Bernie has done for them. Those synthetic fibers that you want people to believe are hair is a lie. Be honest with yourself. Be honest with us!

SECOND JOHN. Why—

OTTO, *takes the comb from his shirt pocket and combs his moustache.* Truth, John, truth! I can't spend any more time on synthetic fibers. We need to worry about Bernie's problem. Everyone gets told immediately that the funeral service is tomorrow. That should be more than enough time to make arrangements. After all, there's nothing to do. There's nothing to say. The guy is dead. People die. Shit happens! Someone dies, a few people are out of joint for a day, but then life goes on for the living.

SECOND JOHN. Is that your form of truth? Beau gave this firm almost forty years of his life. He gave most of us his clients. For free.

BERNIE, *interrupting.* He was a chump, wasn't he?

FIRST JOHN. Technically, he didn't add anything to the firm. After all, he couldn't have had the joy of giving away his clients if there hadn't been someone here to take them. He needed us. We actually did him a favor. We continued his work. If we hadn't done it, he would have had to look all over the city to find someone as good as us. Let's not forget what we did for him.

BERNIE, *to FIRST JOHN.* That is a great way to describe it. I always knew we helped him, but I couldn't quantify it. You're great, John, at cutting through the bull! That's the old John.

OTTO, *raises his voice to interrupt the conversation.* John is just speaking the truth. I started speaking the truth around here first. I work very hard at making sure everyone understands the truth, and I don't like it when someone copies me.

BERNIE, *comforting OTTO*. Otto, Otto, you have nothing to worry about. Why, you're like cream; you just float to the top of my list of trusted advisors.

SECOND JOHN, *angry, yells*. Yeah, Bernie. Cream floats to the top, but so does shit in the toilet.

BERNIE, *surprised at SECOND JOHN's outburst, looks at OTTO, who stands at attention without emotion*. Don't get sidetracked on those matters today. We have enough problems with Beau and postponing my birthday. Let's focus on the problem at hand.

OTTO, *at attention*. You're right, sir. I'll stay focused. The e-mail is being sent out as we speak. I'll call the church. There will be no viewing. The funeral service at the church will be tomorrow at ten a.m. Since we're paying for it, there will be only the standard, small-print obituary.

(OTTO places his hands on his hips, squints, and looks over his glasses directly at SECOND JOHN.)

SECOND JOHN. Don't we want to have a large write-up in the *City Dispatch*? It's good publicity for the firm. We could talk about how Beau wrote the nation's first law establishing a nationwide system for television and radio licensing. We could talk about how Beau pioneered the communications industry in this country.

FIRST JOHN. Maybe that's too much credit for a dead man. We need to refocus it so it reflects better on the living. We need to focus on Bernie.

BERNIE. Yes, it—

SECOND JOHN. Beau made contributions; something needs to be said.

OTTO, *standing in a pompous pose with his thumbs in his suspenders*. Something needs to

be said, but we can't overshadow Bernie.

BERNIE. After all, he did die on my birthday. Can you imagine that? And now some of you want to give him credit as some great lawyer. He was a chump, a real chump. He couldn't do anything. He knew a lot of people, and just because they liked him, people thought he was a great lawyer. He was nothing without me. That can't be forgotten. Nothing big can be in the paper. It would have to focus on Maguire, and if it does it will be wrong; it won't tell the whole story. That would be unfair to me. You know how those goddamn press people are. They screw up everything. I'd rather have nothing said than have the press write a wrong story.

OTTO, *standing at attention, turns to BERNIE*. If we don't do a press release, the paper will not pick it up. Not many obituary reporters are smart enough to look into someone's past. They figure if someone important dies, someone will care enough to put out a press release about the stiff's life.

SECOND JOHN. His sister will ask.

OTTO. That is why we will take care of it. She knows we will do it right. Nobody knows more about Maguire than Bernie. After thirty-eight years of practicing law with him, who could talk about Maguire's quote-unquote *greaaaatness* better than Bernie? No one, that's who.

BERNIE. Right. The story just needs to contain the whole truth, the whole truth. When we can get out the whole truth, we'll get it out. She'll understand. She knows we will always act in Beau's best interest.

SECOND JOHN. I heard rumors that in his will he was giving millions to the University of Somewhere. That makes a good story. We'll look good!

BERNIE, *surprised, looks at OTTO*. That true? (*Without waiting for a reply, continues.*)

Thank God we never paid him any more in retirement, if that's the best he could think of to do with his money.

SECOND JOHN. I don't want to fight about it, but Beau made substantial—

OTTO, *assumes his pompous pose, hands in his suspenders and looking over his glasses at John.* That's right; we are not fighting about it. The decisions are made. Anyway, I made a promise to my third wife that I would never fight with a man with synthetic hair.

(SECOND JOHN makes a fist and shakes it at OTTO.)

BERNIE, *slides off his chair, which is still raised to its highest position, walks over to SECOND JOHN, stares in his face.* The decisions are made. We need to get on with things. We can't spend our entire lives worrying about a stiff, especially a rich stiff who gave his money to a law school.

SECOND JOHN, *irritated, pushes himself up and down on his tiptoes, points his finger at OTTO.* I demand time to reply. He can't—

BERNIE, *cutting off SECOND JOHN.* Otto has everything under control. We can't waste any more time on this matter. Why, you would think we had nothing important to do.

SECOND JOHN, *in BERNIE's face, screaming.* Damn it, it's my turn. What about the priest? The priest! What about the priest?

BERNIE. What priest? What are you talking about?

SECOND JOHN. We need a priest to say the service. You should do the eulogy, Bernie.

BERNIE, *still squarely in front of SECOND JOHN, moves his head in all directions as he speaks in a farcical voice.* I don't do services, and I don't do eulogies. What am I going

to say about this guy? “Here lies a good fag”? Find a priest. I’m sure they know more about boys than I do. What could I say about—

SECOND JOHN, *gesturing wildly with his hands, stuttering*. Beau was...He was not a...You practiced law with him for...How can—

FIRST JOHN, *smiling, points at SECOND JOHN*. Are you always so articulate? Must be a trait of people with synthetic hair.

SECOND JOHN, *composes himself*. We need to say something about Beau. He was like a father to many of the young people in the firm. He helped us get started. He even helped you, Bernie. The people in the firm will want to hear about his life.

BERNIE, *standing proudly with his hands underneath his enormous belly*. Do you think his sister would take his portrait?

SECOND JOHN, *raises his voice*. Damn it! We need a priest! We need a eulogy!

BERNIE, *looking at OTTO*. Are you getting this mess straight?

OTTO. I’m going to call your speechwriter and have him do the standard obit. It won’t be much. Not much to say. Really, not much to say! Maybe Beau’s sister will take the portrait.

BERNIE, *looking at OTTO fondly*. That portrait does distract. You’ll get a bonus if you can figure out how to give it to his sister.

SECOND JOHN, *alternating his stares at BERNIE, FIRST JOHN, and OTTO*. Someone needs to do a eulogy. Beau founded this firm. Beau practiced with Bernie for decades. Beau was a great person and a good lawyer. Someone must do the eulogy.

OTTO, *stands, points at SECOND JOHN*. Are you saying you should do it?

SECOND JOHN. Yes, I'll do it if no one else will. It must be done.

OTTO, *pointing again at SECOND JOHN*. You don't run this firm. Bernie is the only one who can do the eulogy, or no one will do it.

SECOND JOHN, *looks at BERNIE*. Bernie, please will you do it? Beau deserves that much. The people in this firm love him. They need something said.

BERNIE. Whaaa—

OTTO. That's ridiculous! Bernie is a great man. Here's the proof. (*Points to the Who's Who books on the table, picks up one in either hand, and raises them high over his head like Moses holding up the Ten Commandments.*) *Who's Who in the Bag Industry*—how many living humans have ever had that honor? (*In a loud voice.*) You won't find Maguire in here. (*Pauses.*) Bernie does not have the time before tomorrow's funeral service to prepare the kind of speech that would be acceptable for a man of his stature.

SECOND JOHN. Are you saying that because Beau's gone, he's just gone and that's it?

OTTO, *places the books on the table, raises his arms with his palms facing forward as if he were exclaiming hallelujah*. He's gone, but that is not the point. The point is that unless the whole story can be told—which means telling the world how Bernie built this firm and made each and every one of us—we can't tell an incorrect story just because Maguire died.

BERNIE, *gazing at OTTO with admiration*. How do you do it, Otto? How do you cut to the core of reality so quickly?

FIRST JOHN. We need your decision, sir. How do you want to handle the eulogy?

BERNIE. Give some information to the priest.

(KARA walks into the room with a stack of tapes from BERNIE's tape recorder and a stack of papers. She hands the tapes and papers to BERNIE.)

KARA. Mr. Geldmann, I have finally completed transcribing all of your telephone conversations for the last three months. Shall I place them in your safe? It is just so fascinating to realize your every word is being recorded for history.

BERNIE, *fondling the tapes and papers*. Did you proofread them? Of course you did. Maybe Otto and John and John would like to read the transcripts so they are educated about what's going on. They make great reading. All that knowledge about the bag industry in one place! Now, I don't want to force you gentlemen to read these papers. Of course, you might just learn something, if it's not too much trouble. Just a suggestion.

KARA. I'll make copies.

(KARA extends her hands to receive the stack of papers from BERNIE for copying. She walks out of the room. As the curtain falls, the audience hears mumbling from BERNIE.)

BERNIE. My knee hurts. It always hurts. The cleaners didn't polish my desk last night. My doctor has me on this horrible diet. Nobody around here works as hard as I do and gets paid so little. That's going to change; we need fairness around here. I'm not given my due. I can't believe my birthday party is being canceled. Hopefully the balloons will keep their air. Now this guy expects me to feel sorry for him. It's enough I have to take tomorrow morning off to go to a funeral. Eulogy? What could I say? It's my day. He did it to me again. And they want me to praise him?

(When the curtain is completely down, THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO, from stage right runs to center stage and speaks.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO.

To some it's the end; to others it's intermission.

Life works that way.

We're all given cards for us to play.

We're all given opportunities every day.

Too few of us walk into the unknown.

Too few of us speak about the known.

Too many of us serve Bernie, not Beau.

We go through life right in tow.

When we die, we really do know,

we will disappear just like Beau.

Our life is an interlude, our death a disturbance.

When these points are known,

we will have a chance to make a difference.

ACT I
SCENE III

(There is no one onstage. At center stage is a large Christian cross. Beneath the cross is an altar draped in white linens. On top of the altar is a tabernacle. At stage left is a large wooden pulpit with three steps. From the pulpit the speaker would directly address the theater audience. Directly in front of the altar at center stage is a simple pine coffin. It is closed and contains the body of Beau Maguire. On the sides of the stage are stained glass windows. Light is shining through the windows. Folding seats have been set up at both ends of several rows where the audience sits. The folding seats are in pairs, each seat having a number. There are six folding seats on the rows facing stage right. Seats with numbers 1 and 2 are the front seats, 3 and 4 the middle row, and 5 and 6 the third row. The eight folding seats across the row and facing center stage are 7 and 8 in the first row of folding seats, 9 and 10 in the second row, 11 and 12 in the third row and 13 and 14 in the last row of folding seats.)

Unnamed members of the cast enter from a door on stage right and walk down steps going into the theater aisles, taking folding seats 4,5,7,9 and 14.

A few seconds after the unnamed cast members are seated, the characters, enter from the same door on stage right, walk down steps going into the theater aisles toward seats designated in dialogue and in the order set by dialogue.)

BERNIE, *to OTTO, while walking to take their seats.* Hopefully this guy won't make it too painful.

(BERNIE and OTTO take folding seats 1 and 2.)

OTTO, *as he sits.* He can't. He doesn't know enough about Maguire to go on for long.

BERNIE. You're sure?

(On the opposite side of the row, FRANK and ARCHIBALD talk while walking toward seats several rows back; facing center stage.)

FRANK. OK, crowd. He was a nice man. He always helped me.

ARCHIBALD. Yeah! He really tried to be helpful, unlike a certain other person we know.

FRANK, *pointing*. There are two seats. Let's take 'em; they're far enough away from Geldmann.

(FRANK and ARCHIBALD take their seats 11 and 12, continuing their conversation.)

ARCHIBALD. Can you imagine Geldmann's funeral? He would make attendance mandatory. He'll probably get professional mourners so people are impressed with his significance.

FRANK. No! His funeral will be a great day off. He'll make sure the office is closed, but no one will show. People will bet in death he can't get them.

ARCHIBALD. Tough bet! I don't know if I'd take it. He's one mean dude, and I'm not sure death will stop him. He'd want us to attend, and he'd do something if we didn't. There are even rumors going around the firm that he plans on having himself stuffed and placed in the head chair in the conference room, so none of the partners can ever replace him as chairman of the firm.

FRANK. I just want to see if he says something today. After all, Maguire was his partner since the beginning of the firm.

ARCHIBALD. Of course he'll say something—about himself.

(As the conversation between FRANK and ARCHIBALD dwindles to a murmur RICHIE, KARA, CHAR, FIRST JOHN, and SECOND JOHN look for seats. There do not appear to be any seats

together, and they separate to find a seat. As they take their respective seats, (RICHIE takes seat 3, KARA 6, CHAR 8, FIRST JOHN 10 and SECOND JOHN 14), they begin speaking to the unnamed cast members sitting in the seats next to them.)

CHAR, *to the unnamed cast member sitting next to her.* Wasn't Beau a great guy?

KARA, *to the unnamed cast member sitting next to her.* We'll really miss him. He really helped people, especially new associates. I'll always remember him coming to our Friday parties. He sat in a corner, ate peanuts, and told stories. He was in the city forever; he knew everything about it. Did you know him well?

(RICHIE begins to cry.)

CHAR, *without having received an answer to her first question, again speaks to the unnamed cast member sitting next to her.* Beau was a marvelous man. Did you know him well? He made everyone at the firm. He just gave us his clients. He even gave his clients to Geldmann. Well, maybe Geldmann took them, but Beau knew what was happening and let it go. Anything for the firm. He would help anyone, even someone like Geldmann. He made Geldmann, if you can believe it. I hope you're not a friend of Geldmann's?

(RICHIE has tears coming down his cheeks; his crying is noticeable. He turns to the unnamed cast member sitting next to him.)

RICHIE. Excuse me! Don't mind me. I'm just upset.

OTTO, *to BERNIE, as they sit.* Well, I can hear Richie. I could tell those sniffles anywhere.

BERNIE. Do you think he would cry for me?

OTTO. I'd make him. You bet your ass I'd make him. That's the least he can do for his pay.

BERNIE. We have to talk about that someday. We need to prepare. I don't think the firm could make it without me. It wouldn't be like Maguire dying. It would force people to shit or get off the pot. I'd like to see what happens without me.

OTTO. We'd have tough days, no doubt. It would be tough.

(FIRST JOHN, sitting quietly, looks to the unnamed cast member next to him and starts talking.)

FIRST JOHN. It's too bad about Beau's death. I wonder if people with less intelligence are less fearful of death. Death is difficult to calculate. Life is complicated enough, but at least I can control most days. Death just defies my calculations. I can't figure out how to control it.

RICHE, *still crying, speaks to the unnamed cast member sitting next to him.* He was a good man. You'll hear all about him. I'm sure Mr. Geldmann will give a moving eulogy. You know, they practiced law together for almost a lifetime. You must get to know someone very well over that much time. Mr. Maguire was a great lawyer. He was a great person. I can't wait to hear Mr. Geldmann eulogize him. The firm needs to be consoled. We need to be brought back together. We need to remember Mr. Maguire. We need to remember one another.

FRANK, *taps the shoulder of the unnamed cast member sitting in front of him in folding seat 9.* *The unnamed cast member turns and looks at FRANK.* Pardon me, but you look like someone who will listen. I was at the hospital on another matter the day Beau died. I heard some doctors talking about a Maguire. I just knew it had to be Mr. Maguire. Still, it was hard to believe. You have peanuts and a beer with the guy on Friday night, and he's dead on Monday. I couldn't even walk into the room to say good-bye. I just stood in the doorway and looked in. He was surrounded by doctors. He was hooked up to dozens of machines. The machines looked so cold. And that gray floor tile. *(Pauses.)*

Ultimately, the beeps and red lines from the machines are the only signs of man's control over the situation. *(Pauses.)*

Poor Mr. Maguire probably only wanted a hug and someone to tell him that whatever happened, everything would be all right. (*Pauses.*) It's really cold when a person is dying. It's cold, crisp, and mechanical. The person dying is so distant, even though you are only a few feet away from him. You can see life fade even from the doorway. You know when a man is going to die. He must know also. You can actually see his spirit leave the body before he dies. Even before the doctor pronounces him dead, you can see the person's soul taking a different form. It's perceptible. Death has more power than any force on earth.

BERNIE *to OTTO*. Have you made arrangements to have his office redecorated? I am sure we have several partners who think they have dibs on it.

OTTO. I've had several calls already. We can't get the construction crews in that quick. We also need to go over his papers and files.

BERNIE. He hasn't done anything in twenty years. Just throw them out. If we could only get rid of his portrait in the conference room, there wouldn't be anything left of him. Nothing in, nothing out.

OTTO. Oh, some of the partners and associates will remember him. You wouldn't get rid of him just because you got rid of that hideous portrait.

BERNIE. But the portrait helps them remember.

SECOND JOHN *speaks to the unnamed cast member sitting next to him*. Have you ever thought of what's really left of a person after he dies? Will the good be rewarded? (*Pauses.*)

(The unnamed cast member tries to ignore him.)

Listen, I want to talk. (*Pauses.*) I really hope there is more. If there isn't something after death, then all those bastards I had to deal with for the last thirty years will be the winners. Hell is my only hope for revenge. If we're just dirt, we lose. You know, I read about a lost

gospel and that Christ was only a prophet. Christ didn't become divine until several centuries after his death. Was Jesus Christ just a great salesman? (*Pauses.*)

Beau was a big believer. Can you imagine going a lifetime believing Christ is divine and being wrong? Talk about being wrong. You just wasted the only thing you ever get—your life—on some two-thousand-year-old story started by an egomaniac salesman who wanted the world to think him divine. Talk about a con job. (*Pauses.*)

For Beau's sake, I hope he was right. For our sake, too. I guess people have no other choice. We can't believe there is nothing more, because then we are really responsible for how things turn out. That may be more than humans can take.

Believing in God got Beau through life in the right way, so faith must have some value. I guess under that reasoning, God's existence is irrelevant. The mere belief is sufficient, and in the end, it may be the only reality that matters in our lives.

(THE PRIEST, dressed in a liturgical robe, enters stage right and walks to the altar. Everyone falls silent. He walks to the back of the coffin. Facing the audience, he begins mumbling what sounds like the Lord's Prayer. THE PRIEST finishes his mumbled prayer and walks slowly over to the pulpit and ascends the three steps. He takes papers from a pocket somewhere in the liturgical robe. He looks at the papers. He organizes them and places them on the pulpit so that they are directly in his line of vision. He clears his throat.)

THE PRIEST, *looking down at the papers, reads dispassionately from the script.* Friends and family of Beau Maguire, welcome to St. Anne's Church. We are here to mourn the death of your friend, Beau—(*glances at his notes*) Maguire. I did not know Beau Maguire very well, but from what I was told last night, he must have been a marvelous man. Good men are rewarded by acceptance into heaven. Therefore, this is really a joyous occasion, because we know Beau Maguire is sitting next to the right hand of God, Our Father.

Beau was good man. He was a good brother to his sister Jane. She is here today to say good-bye to Beau.

Beau Maguire was a prominent lawyer and a senior partner in a law firm. He was one of the firm's founders. Beau practiced law there for decades. His peers knew him as Beau. The younger lawyers knew him as Mr. Maguire. Beau Maguire had many interests other than law. He helped the homeless. He served on the board of directors of the Lawyers' Committee to Shelter the Homeless. In this capacity, he helped raise thousands of dollars to feed and shelter his fellow humans. When Beau was as a director of a homeless shelter I had the opportunity to meet him for a brief moment many years ago. Beau seemed like a warm man. His fellow board members always spoke highly of him and his efforts to help the less fortunate.

As I look out into your faces, I can tell there is great love and respect for Beau. Today we have prominent lawyers from the firm present, including Mr. Bernard Geldmann, who, by the account of lawyers in the firm, is not only the most prominent lawyer currently in the firm but also the most prominent lawyer ever in the firm. Mr. Geldmann, as we all know, is perhaps one of the most prominent lawyers in the nation. He has literally been in the forefront of the bag industry for half a century. I have been told by his partners he is a legend in the legal profession, an equal to the greats like Clarence Darrow and Edward Bennett Williams.

Mr. Geldmann is deeply moved by the loss of Beau. Last night I spoke with Mr. Geldmann about Beau. It was an intimate conversation. We discussed how Beau helped Mr. Geldmann build the law firm. We discussed how Beau always made time for the young lawyers coming up the ranks, while Mr. Geldmann generated the business to pay for Beau's graciousness. They were truly partners.

His sister, his community, and his law firm will feel the loss of Beau Maguire. But we must always remember that Beau is with God and that someday we will all be together again. Beau will be waiting for us. He will be watching us. And, as he did in life, he will be helping us. As Mr. Geldmann stated to me last night while I was preparing my comments, "When we arrive

in heaven, Beau will be waiting with all the stories of what happened before we got there. He likely will even have peanuts for us.”

Let us not say good-bye to Beau. Let us just say, “We will see you soon, Beau. Keep a bench warm for us. We can’t wait to hear your stories.”

(THE PRIEST steps down from the pulpit. He walks over to the casket and, with his back to the audience, begins to pray. He turns toward the audience. It appears that he is giving himself communion. THE PRIEST’s face contorts and, in a very deep voice that is radically different from his normal voice, he begins to speak. He looks and sounds like a man possessed.)

THE PRIEST. Take this, for it is the body of Christ. Take this, for it is the blood of Christ. *(Pauses, continues praying.)* Before concluding the mass I will give you my blessing. Refreshments will be served afterwards in the basement. Please join Jane, Beau’s friends, and me at the reception. *(THE PRIEST walks off the altar at stage right and continues down the stairs leading into the auditorium proper. Still mumbling a prayer as he goes, he walks around to the area where BERNIE, OTTO, FIRST JOHN, SECOND JOHN, RICHIE, KARA, CHAR, and the other cast members are sitting. He blesses the cast members and the audience. After giving the blessing, he turns and continues praying as he walks back up the stairs to the door. When THE PRIEST reaches the top of the stairs and exits stage right, the cast members in the audience stand up and slowly walk toward the stairs. The cast members begin to talk to one another.)*

BERNIE *looks at OTTO.* It was certainly worth talking to the good priest last night. His talk was right on point. He didn’t build Maguire up too much. He kept Maguire’s life in perspective.

OTTO. The sister asked me if we were putting anything in the newspaper.

BERNIE. Of course. I’d rather put it in than have her do it. She’ll really embellish the truth.

(In another part of the audience, FRANK and ARCHIBALD talk as they walk to the stairs.)

FRANK *to ARCHIBALD*. That priest didn't know much about Beau. What's this talk about Beau serving on a board for the homeless? That's only a second of the man's life. What about—

ARCHIBALD. Couldn't say too much. Wouldn't want to overshadow Geldmann! (*Pauses.*) Can you believe Geldmann didn't do the eulogy? After decades together, he says nothing. Nothing! Not one goddamn thing.

FRANK. Archibald, no one said anything. You had a priest who didn't even know Beau. He saw him one time for a few seconds one time in his life. Why didn't Bernie get the priest that was Beau's friend for decades?

ARCHIBALD, *in a strained and cracking voice*. I doubt that Father Pete even knows Beau is dead. Who would have told him, Geldmann? (*Pauses.*) It must be tough being a priest trying to find nice things to say about somebody you've never met. (*Shakes his head.*) It must be tough trying to sum up a stranger's entire life in a few minutes. Is that what it all comes down to, a few-minute talk by a stranger?

FRANK, *consoling ARCHIBALD, stops and takes hold of ARCHIBALD's shoulders*. Look at it this way: it's got to be tough being Geldmann and saying nothing kind about the man who made his career—the man who made him a multimillionaire! He couldn't even say, "Thanks, Beau. You really helped." How does he live with himself?

ARCHIBALD. It's because Geldmann really, really doesn't believe anybody ever helped him. He did it all himself. Anything beneficial anyone did for him he believes he earned and deserved. Somehow he believes he deserves everything. The good is all deserved. The bad that happens to him is unfair.

FRANK. Everybody gets help; there are no self-made men. Some of us just recognize the help and appreciate it.

ARCHIBALD. And others believe they created the sun, the stars, and the moon. (*Pauses, and a smile comes over his face.*) I just thought of it, but Geldmann probably believes God made a mistake when he left him out of the holy trinity.

FRANK, *letting go of ARCHIBALD's shoulders, motions to ARCHIBALD to go up the steps first, still talking as they ascend the stairs and stand in the area by the door.* Yeah! Then we could celebrate his birthday for eternity. Just Geldmann and God! What a pair. Hopefully God didn't make Geldmann in his image and likeness. If he did, we're all in for a real treat.

(BERNIE, OTTO, KARA, and the unnamed cast members walk up the stairs and stand in the area by the door and center stage. The cast improvises inaudible conversation as they stand.

CHAR follows them up the stairs but walks to center stage and stands in silence, looking out at the audience.

FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN have a conversation several feet from the bottom of the stairs, but the audience cannot hear what they are saying.)

KARA, *with a few tears running down her cheeks, puts her arm on BERNIE's shoulder.* I am really going to miss Mr. Maguire. I am really going to miss his smile and his stories.

BERNIE. I am sure his stories were interesting, but I've heard them more times than I care to and so have you. We need to get our respects over with so we can get some work done.

OTTO *to BERNIE.* I'll see you back at the office. I need to finish up a few things today. (*Waits to make sure they all move to the reception.*)

BERNIE *to OTTO.* I would like to leave, but how would it look if I didn't stop in at the reception? I'll see you in an hour.

FRANK *to ARCHIBALD.* Let's meet the sister. I need to talk with her about Mr. Maguire.

KARA to BERNIE. I'll escort you, Mr. Geldmann. You should be first to express condolences.

BERNIE to KARA. Were you able to have Maguire's portrait brought over for the reception?

KARA. It's already hanging up downstairs. It looks wonderful! I'm sure his sister will appreciate it.

BERNIE. Did you ask her if she wants to take it home?

KARA. You asked her. Didn't she say she thought it more important to keep it in the firm? After all, Mr. Maguire was the founder. She wants him to be remembered.

BERNIE, *sharply*. One of the founders! There was another one, you know—or (*sarcastically*) maybe you don't know.

KARA. I know, but today is Mr. Maguire's day.

BERNIE. How does he get two days in a year? We already celebrated his birthday, and now we celebrate his death. Next, people like you will want to remember the anniversary of his death. We need to get on with it. This reception is it. After all, the man is dead.

KARA. That's not the issue.

BERNIE. What's the issue?

KARA, *as BERNIE's jaw tightens, moving several steps away*. The issue is that Mr. Maguire contributed to the firm, and many of the lawyers in the firm had great respect for him. He deserves to be remembered.

(CHAR, hearing KARA, walks over to join in the conversation between BERNIE and KARA. CHAR grips BERNIE's shoulder so he cannot move away from her, and she looks him right in the eye.)

CHAR. Well, I guess your real threat is gone. You outlived him. You won! You buried your enemy. He is really dead! You are still alive. The earth is still on its axis, and I will never understand how people like you make all the money, get all the accolades, and are allowed to ruin so many lives. Someday, if there is a God, he will have to explain it to me. I'll never figure it out in my lifetime.

BERNIE, *pulling his shoulder away from CHAR's grip, in a loud, indignant tone.* Do you think I'm winning? You know nothing about winning. Winning will be when Maguire is not remembered. Maguire may be more alive now than when he was living. Now his little followers have that dumbass portrait and memories. When he was alive, at least he acted like a sympathetic old fool. People liked him because they felt sorry for him. They never knew him when he was forty-five. Maguire was a first-rate son of a bitch. He hated and humiliated those young shits. How do you think I learned? I learned from the master. He had the good luck of growing old and seeming wiser and kinder. He won. I'm still alive. I still have to run this firm. I have to live with people like you who somehow think Maguire is a saint. That's not winning.

KARA, *smiling, interrupts BERNIE.* Look what you have to live for. Look what you have built. We need you, desperately.

BERNIE *takes a few deep breaths, releases a deep sigh.* At what cost—hatred? Fear? Lost family? Perhaps I am too arrogant to believe anything I have ever done is a mistake. I can't question what I have done. It needed to be done. I just wish every decision didn't have a cost.

(FIRST JOHN and SECOND JOHN, hearing BERNIE's remorseful tone and seeing his sad look, scamper up the steps toward BERNIE. Each tries to get onstage before the other. SECOND JOHN almost knocks over KARA in an attempt to reach BERNIE before FIRST JOHN.)

SECOND JOHN *to KARA, in a patronizing manner.* Sorry. (*Looks at BERNIE, opens his mouth to speak but nothing comes out.*)

(*BERNIE looks at FIRST JOHN.*)

FIRST JOHN. Bernie. Bernie.

SECOND JOHN, *screaming.* Bernie!

(*Moving his head dramatically, BERNIE turns and looks at FIRST JOHN, and then turns back to SECOND JOHN.*)

BERNIE. Silence! We're still in the church, you know. It may not mean anything to me, but it does to others. Have some respect.

CHAR, *eyes opening wide, stands face-to-face with BERNIE.* Respect for others? Is that a New Year's resolution?

BERNIE. I always have respect for others; you should try it sometime.

CHAR. How do you define respect?

FIRST JOHN *interrupts the conversation between BERNIE and CHAR, sounds like a computerized voice.* Respect means "to show esteem for; to honor or to treat with deference or a willingness to show consideration." *Webster's*, third edition, nineteen ninety-two. You're welcome.

BERNIE. There you go—John defined it properly. I want us to show respect to those who believe in the church and all that "body and blood" crap. Did you hear that priest say those lines in that deep, affected voice? I must say I was convinced for a second he was inhabited by Christ. (*Twisting his mouth, mimics THE PRIEST's deep voice.*) "This is the body and blood of

Jesus Christ.” *(Returning to his regular voice.)* Can you imagine how busy that Christ guy must be, showing up at every service so the priest isn’t a liar?

CHAR, *grabbing the collar of BERNIE’s suit jacket.* That’s respect? That’s how you treat everyone: like shit. Just like shit.

BERNIE, *pushes CHAR away.* Shit is all over! Look at all these people—how many do you think would help you? Do you think Jesus Christ will really help you? Maybe the concept of a god and heaven makes you feel good so that after all this bullshit on earth you will be rewarded. I hope you don’t really believe that nonsense. If you do, you’re even dumber than I thought.

CHAR, *in a high-pitched scream.* You fool! You really believe you’ve done it yourself. You really believe you are worth more than others. You really believe that you can take from others because you deserve it more and others must give to you because they owe it to you.

BERNIE, *loudly.* I *have* done it myself. Believe me, the one thing I have learned in life is that no one will really ever help you—not your wife, not your kids, not your friends, and especially not your relatives. They’re either too busy or they want too much for their help. In the end, we pay for whatever we get. We pay for our money with our time. We pay for our help with our money. All money does is make things easier. In the end, money is our only friend. One can always rely on money. If you take care of it, it will always be there to take care of you. You can’t say that about a wife, a friend, a child, or a relative. Imagine bothering one of them when he has more important things to do. Just think back on all the effort you put into helping them without much in return. Love? Pah! Charity? Pah!

(BERNIE’s lecture has FIRST JOHN, SECOND JOHN, KARA, CHAR, and OTTO talking at one another, calling one another names, and pointing their fingers at one another. It is impossible to understand anything being said. The cast improvises the discussions.)

KARA, *screams*. Please! All of you be quiet. You must be quiet—if not out of respect for the church, then out of respect for me. I do believe in Jesus Christ. I believe in a hereafter. I treat each and every one of you as I would like to be treated myself. I listen to your bickering every day, and I take it in order to keep peace at the office. But I won't take it in my church. I won't let you attack my beliefs.

BERNIE. I'm sorry if I said something to offend you. I would never intentionally offend you.

KARA. You missed the point. It's about showing respect for people, all people, and not just pretending to show them respect when you think it will help you.

CHAR *puts her arm around KARA, pulls her close, whispers with a smirk*. No offense, Kara, but you are a phony. (*KARA grunts, pushing CHAR away.*) You assert these high Christian beliefs, but look at you. You are always manipulating. You use your niceness as a shield. It's not niceness behind the shield. It's sheer calculation. It's a sword. You want people to think that you must be a good person in some way because you espouse Christianity. You may believe that, but let's look at your actions. Think about how many careers you have ruined. Who is Bernie's spy when he needs personal information to destroy someone? I guess you think that's fine because you're among the faithful—you must be a nice person. If it benefits you, it's OK; it's good. You just go to church and pray. It's fine however you act; you just get forgiven. That's the great part about Christianity. Forgiveness is cheap and easy. You can do whatever you want because you know you will be forgiven. Great philosophy for instilling personal responsibility!

OTTO, *moves to within a few inches of KARA and CHAR, speaks firmly*. Damn it, we don't need this childish behavior here. No one is going to see this firm fight in public. (*Points to the door on stage right.*) Each of you needs to go downstairs and express your regrets to Beau's sister. She wants to hear good things about him, and you're going to tell her those things, even if they are made up.

KARA. Why would they be made up? Mr. Maguire was a very nice man. I liked his stories.

CHAR, *loudly*. Yeah, let's go tell her great things. I have only one question. Can Bernie control his ego for the ten minutes it will take to talk to her?

(BERNIE starts walking toward the door, stops suddenly, turns, looks at CHAR, and speaks in a smug voice.)

BERNIE. I am certainly glad to have had the opportunity to attend his funeral. There is an ancient saying: "The best way to get even with your enemies is to watch them being buried." Well, I'm here, and I'm watching.

(The lights begin to dim everywhere and for a few seconds there is darkness. When the dim light comes back on THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO appears as if from nowhere and speaks from center stage.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO.

What more can be said
than Beau is dead
and soon will be buried?
Unfortunately for us,
there but for the grace of God
go...many gods.

ACT II
SCENE I

(While the lights on the stage are out, THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO enters from stage right, runs across the stage, stopping at center stage, and yells.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO. An Irish wake it is not! *(He runs stage left.)*

(Silence for about ten seconds, and then THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO again runs to center stage, stops, and yells.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO. Can you imagine working with these people all day? *(Runs stage right.)*

(Silence for another ten seconds, and then THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO runs back to center stage and, looking directly at the audience, speaks in a low, calm voice.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO. Who are the living, and who are the dead? *(Walks offstage in a slow, confident manner.)*

(The lights on the stage come on one at a time. The first spotlight comes on gradually, focusing on the portrait of Beau, which is hanging upstage. This is the same portrait that hung in the conference room at the firm. Eventually the full power of the spotlight focuses on the portrait and remains the only light for ten seconds. The next spotlight comes on at full power, shining on a buffet table beneath the portrait. The table is stocked with inexpensive food: noodles, salads, breads, and some sliced meat. In the middle of the table is a large piggy bank with a sign propped up against it: "Donations for the Poor.")

The next spotlight comes on at full power and focuses on the cinder block walls. The room is in the basement of the church. The next spotlight focuses on the white tile floor. There's a coldness to the room. The lights brighten the entire space except for stage left, where JANE is

sitting stoically on a metal folding chair. The spotlight on her brightens very slowly as she continues to sit. When the spotlight is at full power, she gets up and walks behind the chair, placing her hands on its back.

JANE is a little over five feet tall and thin. She holds herself in a graceful manner and is well-dressed. Like Beau, she has a pleasant look about her. She looks as if she has had an easy life. Although she is at least in her seventies, the lines on her face are shallow and are further softened by her fine facial features.)

JANE, *continuing with her hands still placed on the chair, speaks to the empty room.* It is time to do my duty, to listen to the banalities. This is the same dress I wore when my husband died twelve years ago. I remember putting it on the night of the viewing. I remember being driven to the funeral home. I remember the receiving line. I remember the event like it was yesterday. I remember people flowing past me. I even remember some of the dumb things that were said. I guess people make such statements to make themselves feel better, or at least to feel like they have fulfilled their responsibility to the grieving.

One person tried to relate to me by bringing up the death of her infant grandson. *(Impersonates the person's voice.)* "I just never imagined a child in the family would die before I did." Are people really so detached from life and death that they do not realize living is only luck, and it's dying that's the certainty? I don't remember feeling anything at the funeral. It was like my soul was detached from my body and I was viewing the events from afar. Frankly, I just remember thinking how numb we are when we go through these events in our lives. But then I asked myself, "Why are some people so hysterical? Are these events significant or just regular events that occur on our way to death?" Oh, why bother myself with these thoughts now? I need to do my duty, and they need to do theirs.

(JANE walks to center stage. Voices are heard offstage. The attendees from the service come onstage, some line up to express their condolences to JANE, some enter inaudible conversations around the room. BERNIE is last in line.

RICHIE, FRANK, CHAR, and KARA are at the front of the line.)

RICHIE, *extending his hand.* Beau was a great man. We are so sorry to lose him.

JANE, *putting both her hands on his hand.* Thank you for all your kindness.

FRANK, *hugs her.* I am truly sorry. Everything will work out all right. Let me know if there is anything I can do.

JANE. You were so close to Beau. He praised your effort and loyalty. God bless you.

CHAR, *hand stiffly extended.* We loved Beau. He made the firm human. Now we only have Bernie. Beau will be in heaven, but I can assure you some of us will be in hell.

JANE, *shakes her hand quickly.* People make the hell they live in, and Bernie is proof. Luckily hell is a state of mind that only consumes individuals. No one has to be there. It is a personal decision. It has to be sought out, and there must be a desire to stay in it. You don't have that desire, so don't look for it by being obsessed with Bernie.

(CHAR walks stage left, entering into an inaudible conversation with ARCHIBALD.)

KARA, sobbing, hugs JANE for several seconds.)

JANE. Everything will be all right. I am so proud of Beau's life and the firm. Just take care of Bernie; he needs your help.

(THE PRIEST walks in and stands quietly near JANE.)

After expressing their condolences, RICHIE moves to the refreshments table. FRANK, and KARA step to the side after speaking with JANE. They wait for BERNIE to speak with JANE.)

BERNIE, *in front of JANE, looks irritated, blurts.* Beau looks great. They did a good job fixin' him up. Looks like the old Beau, just sleeping without his hair getting messed up.

JANE, *looking quizzical.* What?

BERNIE, *flustered, mumbles.* He looks good. They did a nice job of fixin' him up. Beau looks good. You know; he looks like Beau.

JANE, *reaches out and clasps BERNIE's hand in both her hands, looks coldly into his eyes, snickers.* Bernie, he looks dead. Beau never wore makeup in life. His hair was never that well combed. His body hasn't been that straight in forty years. It was bent from carrying people—even those he knew would never carry him if he were in trouble.

BERNIE, *watching the others in attendance watching him, extends his other hand and puts it over her hands, affects a sincere tone.* Jane, I can't tell you how sorry I am. We all loved him. He was our spiritual leader at the firm, and he will be greatly missed.

JANE, *dismissively.* Thank you. It was so nice of you and the others to come.

BERNIE, *hesitant.* But...Jane?

JANE. Is there something more?

BERNIE. The portrait. We had it brought here for you. We have a man here to pack it up. It is ready to be shipped to your home.

JANE. Why would it be shipped to my home? Beau's home was the law firm. I could never take the portrait. That would be stealing the firm's heritage.

BERNIE. No! Your home is where the portrait belongs.

(JANE pulls her hands away from BERNIE and briefly looks at FRANK, who is still listening in on their conversation, then turns to BERNIE.)

JANE to BERNIE. What curse do you believe is on that portrait? It is a portrait of a man of love. Why should it not hang in the firm? I hope you realize—

BERNIE, *defensively*. If you want me to answer, you need to stop talking.

JANE. I want you to listen.

FRANK, *attempting to interrupt but no one is listening to him*. I'll take the portrait. Beau was my friend.

(KARA injects herself into the conversation.)

KARA, *with a gracious smile*. Ms. Jane, we brought the portrait here for you because it is a beautiful portrait, one that we know you would want to keep in your family and pass down from generation to generation.

JANE. I am the last. I have no children. Beau had no children. There are no successors. I have outlived all my loved ones and my enemies. Beau is gone, and the only thing that will ever carry his name forward is the law firm. The portrait needs to stay there.

KARA, *starting to cry*. Maybe we need to keep the portrait, Mr. Geldmann.

FRANK, *again trying to interrupt but no one is listening to him*. Damn right!

BERNIE to KARA, *irritated*. Give me just one logical reason for keeping the portrait in the firm. Beau's name is on every piece of letterhead. It is on every memorandum sheet, on every bill sent to a client, and at the top of every e-mail. What more could anyone want? You want remembering? One is always remembered when his name is on a bill. If Beau wants anything,

he should want his name on the invoices. No, you don't want anything that rational; you want his portrait to hang in the firm.

JANE *to BERNIE, passionately.* I want his portrait to hang next to yours in the conference room. I want the other lawyers to know that in the beginning there were two of you. Just because you are living doesn't mean you did it all. I want lawyers a generation from now to ask about Beau. And I want some of the people here today to tell those lawyers what he was like. Yes, Bernie, I even want those same people to ask about you and to be told about you. That is why you hate the portrait. It forces an inquiry about you, something you have never tolerated.

FRANK, *with an abrupt gesture, tries again to interrupt, but no is one listening.* But Beau—

BERNIE, *furious, turns abruptly to FRANK and speaks rudely.* What knowledge do you have of any of these matters? What right do you have to be involved? You have nothing to add. You have no right to decide anything. Who are you? Who do you think you are?

FRANK, *agitated, hands shaking, speaks forcefully.* Mr. Maguire was the friend I needed. He was there when I needed help. When I needed advice, he was there to listen and help me work through my problems. That is all you can ever ask from another. That is all another can give.

BERNIE, *raising his voice, points at Frank.* How can someone like you, with no experience of any kind, discuss—

FRANK, *offended, ready to fight, yells.* Someone like what? What is this "someone like you" crap that is your favorite phrase? Everyone has something about them that you don't like, and it seems you don't like anything or anyone other than yourself. Who are you to treat people that way? Has anyone every asked you that before? Have you ever answered that question before? Give me an answer!

BERNIE. You crypto-moron! That's the answer to what "someone like you" means. That's what you are, a crypto-moron! I can throw you out of the firm in a second. Unfortunately for you, Maguire is no longer around to protect you.

FRANK, *moving his feet around like a boxer, looking ready to hit BERNIE.* Yeah, that's why you need to get rid of the portrait—so no one else knows there was another way of doing business. A decent way, a way you always hated because somehow it rendered you human. You're not so tough in human terms. You're only tough when everyone else is afraid. Why are so many people so afraid that they follow you? It can't be just money. How do people take such bullying?

(BERNIE backs up several steps.)

FRANK, *surprised.* You moved back! Are you afraid? You *are* afraid! You really are afraid of even a pissant like me. You're afraid of me. *(Pauses. Excited.)* Oh my God. It took so little.

BERNIE, *yells angrily.* You're out of my firm. Get out of here.

FRANK, *surprised.* It took so little. *(Yelling so all can hear.)* It took so little! It took so little!

BERNIE, *points to the door.* Get out! Get out of here! You are out of my firm. Get out!

FRANK. We are not in the firm, Bernie. We are in a church. We are in the basement of a church, to be exact. You always demanded exactness. Well, to be exact, this is the basement of a church. Not the firm.

BERNIE, *still in a loud and angry voice.* Did you hear me? Get out! I don't have to listen to you—get out!

FRANK. No, no—!

(Before FRANK can make any further statement, BERNIE starts yelling uncontrollably, but he is speaking so fast it is hard to understand him. THE PRIEST, standing nearby, quickly moves between BERNIE and FRANK.)

THE PRIEST, *arms extended between BERNIE and FRANK.* Gentlemen, gentlemen, we are in a house of God.

FRANK, *enthusiastically.* The basement of a house of God, to be exact. Bernie demands exactness.

BERNIE. We don't need your comments. You have nothing to add.

THE PRIEST. We are all equal in the eyes of God.

BERNIE. Maybe I am too arrogant, but that little pissant isn't equal to me.

FRANK, *boldly.* I am too equal. That fat fart is my equal.

THE PRIEST. Gentlemen, is this respect for Beau?

FRANK, *turns to THE PRIEST.* Bernie has no respect for anyone. And you did not even know Mr. Maguire. He is just another dead person that your job requires you to pray for.

BERNIE, *raises his fist, moves toward FRANK.* Get out! Get out!

FRANK, *defiant.* No! You do not control this space. In fact, the amount of space you control is almost nonexistent in the big picture. People treat you as if you have more influence and control out of fear.

(FRANK moves toward BERNIE, fists raised. BERNIE moves back quickly. All the characters stop talking.)

FRANK. You are really afraid. (*FRANK puts his hands up and shuffles his feet like a boxer, taking pretend punches at BERNIE and yelling in a shrill voice.*) Put up your dukes! Put up your dukes! Put 'em up, fat man.

(*BERNIE retreats a few more steps. THE PRIEST again moves between BERNIE and FRANK, and then takes BERNIE's arm and pulls him off to the side for a discussion. FRANK calms down and walks over to speak with JANE. KARA stands by herself in contemplation.*)

Only the conversation taking place in the spotlight, between THE PRIEST and BERNIE can be heard.)

BERNIE, *red-faced with anger to the PRIEST.* That little runt. Did you see how rude he was to me?

THE PRIEST, *hands extended and moving up and down, palms facing down.* Calm down! You need to stay away from him. When people have nothing to lose, they do crazy things.

BERNIE. I'll show him power—he's fired.

THE PRIEST. He knows that. That is why he is so dangerous; you have no more power over him.

BERNIE. I can crush him.

THE PRIEST. We are here for Beau.

BERNIE. Beau was a dumbass in life just like—(*Points at FRANK*).

THE PRIEST. Beau is dead. We are here to pray for him.

BERNIE. We need to get on with it. I have a firm to run.

THE PRIEST. Can't you give him the morning? Doesn't he deserve that much time?

BERNIE. His quirky way of being undermined my whole life. Now I am rid of him. We need to move on.

THE PRIEST, *resting his hand on BERNIE's shoulder*. Go back and talk to Jane again. She respects you. She loved Beau. Say something kind about Beau. You only have to say it once.

(THE PRIEST walks over to FRANK, who is still speaking with JANE. The spotlight shifts to their conversation. BERNIE moves into the dim light, having an inaudible conversation with KARA.)

FRANK *to JANE*. Mr. Maguire was an excellent lawyer. I remember when he represented Magnum Company. He was able to persuade the Federal Communications Commission to grant three exceptions to the rule. He saved Magnum thirty million. He took the six associates who worked on the case out to the best restaurant in town. We drank two-hundred-dollar bottles of wine and smoked great cigars. That was the worst hangover I ever had. Mr. Maguire had a bad one, too. Every time we won, he treated. The firm was fun in those days. We knew one another as people.

JANE. I remember Beau talking about some of those times. He really enjoyed himself. He loved the boys.

THE PRIEST, *impatient, interrupts the conversation, looks at FRANK*. It appears you really offended Bernie. You may think him arrogant, but you need to forgive him. From my very brief conversations with him last night and this morning, I have a good understanding of his soul—or lack of soul. He is like so many other people who think that, if they have power over others, that power extends far beyond the workplace. They want control over those people's entire lives. You must appreciate that Bernie no longer has any family or friends; he has no soul. So when he is outside of what he controls, he is truly alone. That emptiness is

frightening, and he searches for even more power over others. The search is endless because it's the wrong path. (*Pauses, puts his hands on FRANK's shoulders.*)

Look at his life. When you challenge his power, he has nothing left. His power over those in the firm gives him his reason for living. It gives him his sense of importance. Who outside the firm has respect for him or his ideas? Bernie pays greatly for his power over the people in the firm—so do those who work for him.

FRANK, *brushes THE PRIEST's hands off his shoulders.* I was talking with Jane; do we need to discuss Bernie now? I am not much interested.

JANE, *gently touching FRANK's arm.* Beau knew himself very well in life and would understand why we need to focus on Bernie's concerns. Bernie still doesn't know why Beau was so happy, or even why he himself is so miserable. Being poor and miserable may be understandable. But Bernie, he is rich and miserable. That he finds very hard to understand.

THE PRIEST, *to JANE.* He's upset.

JANE, *provoked.* So am I. It is my brother who is dead. Yet you want us to pay attention to Bernie. Why, because he demands it?

THE PRIEST. Yes, unfortunately, that is why the world pays attention to such people. Because they demand it.

JANE. What about Beau?

THE PRIEST. What *about* Beau? We can't pay attention to Beau until we pay attention to Bernie. Bernie won't let us.

FRANK, *amazed*. Who is this man? Who is Bernie Geldmann? Where does he think he gets this power? Has anyone ever asked him that question? Has he ever asked himself that question?

THE PRIEST. You need to understand that Bernie can't see value in himself unless he exerts power over others.

FRANK. Are you saying we need to obey him so he has a reason to live?

THE PRIEST. Yes, that is one way to look at it. You probably don't have the anger and the hate to take him on, so you either need to obey or leave. If you join him, you will be rewarded. If you fight him, you will be destroyed. I assure you, people like Bernie have the anger and the hate to destroy. They like destroying. They see it as justice.

FRANK. If I join and obey him, does it mean I won't be fired?

THE PRIEST. Bernie can endure a lot as long as you are subservient. Just believing you are subservient is sufficient for him to tolerate and reward you. He doesn't know what people think, nor does he care. He has no feeling outside of his body. If his body hurts, there is pain in the world. If children are being killed by land mines in some other part of the world, he feels no pain, nor does he believe there is any.

JANE to FRANK, *visibly upset, speaks in a cynical tone*. The Priest is right! All Bernie cares about is that you are subservient. You can hate him if you wish, but don't show it.

FRANK, *full of enthusiasm*. I will go back to the firm. I will be subservient and will persuade Bernie to let the portrait hang. I will be the keeper of the portrait.

THE PRIEST. Frank, my dear man, Bernie will do as he wishes with the portrait. You can't be subservient and at the same time be persuasive on anything that matters. That portrait is of great significance. Its mere presence in the firm means some other person has also contributed

to its building. That thought is unacceptable to Bernie and all his followers. If you want to be a follower, you must be satisfied with the rewards he gives you. Those rewards are your trade-off for your life. Treat them well, for you will have paid dearly for them.

JANE, *sternly*. Frank, tonight before you leave, look closely at Beau's portrait. Study his face. Look at his smile. Look at the lines in his face. Think about his contentment. Then look at the portrait of Bernie. Think about the comparison.

FRANK, *quickly*. Bernie's portrait doesn't look anything like Bernie. Who is the person in that portrait? Is it an imaginary person?

JANE. That is my point—I must talk to Bernie before he leaves.

(JANE walks over to BERNIE who is having an inaudible conversation KARA. The spotlight shines on ARCHIBALD and CHAR.)

CHAR, *sarcastically*. He's remarkable; he can screw up a one-car funeral.

ARCHIBALD. He's not even trying! It's him.

CHAR. He can't even give Beau credit on the day he's buried. Why couldn't he give a eulogy? A simple "Thanks, Beau, for all your help in building the firm. Thanks for giving me your clients when you had too many. Thanks for helping me for decades. I could not have built this firm without you"—that's all he had to say. Can you imagine what the other lawyers in the firm would have thought? They would have lined up behind him and followed him wherever he wanted to take the firm. Even partners who hate him would have followed. But he couldn't do it. He just couldn't do it.

ARCHIBALD, *shaking his head*. I know, but I don't know what to do.

CHAR, *disgusted*. There is nothing that can be done, other than leaving the firm. He's just a disgusting creature. No one in the firm can take him on. He will spend every waking minute destroying his perceived enemies.

ARCHIBALD, *smiling and almost ready to laugh*. You ought to see the men's room after he's done. Puddles at the urinal he uses. Big puddles! The next person can't use the urinal unless he wants to step in pee or spreads his legs. Not that Bernie cares. How do people get that way? Why do we tolerate them?

(CHAR is surprised at ARCHIBALD's comments. Before she can respond to ARCHIBALD, FIRST JOHN, from stage right, walks over to join the conversation.)

CHAR, to *FIRST JOHN*. The puddles are really that big? How do you do it—I mean, how far apart do you have to spread your legs? Must be quite a sight to see you guys hovering over pee puddles. And most people believe lawyers are important. You think Bernie ever notices he pees on the floor? When clients use the bathroom, what must they think when they see the puddles? Bet they don't think Bernie made the puddle. Obviously, they know *someone* made the puddle. But they'd never imagine that such a prominent lawyer as Bernie would pee all over the floor. They just wouldn't think it.

FIRST JOHN, *bewildered*. Why are you talking about pee puddles on the floor?

CHAR. Is it true?

FIRST JOHN. Is what true? We need to change the subject.

CHAR. Is it true? I want to know if Bernie pees on the floor. That is important to me.

FIRST JOHN. Why would that ever be important to anyone?

CHAR. Because if it's true, he has more contempt for us than I ever thought.

FIRST JOHN. He built this firm. You owe him. He made you. Every client you have comes from him.

CHAR, *angry, poking her finger into FIRST JOHN's chest.* I have heard that lie for the fifteen years I have been in this firm. Bernie tells it to anyone who will listen. He may believe it—you may believe it—but I don't. The clients came from Beau. Beau to Bernie, Bernie to me. Beau brought in the clients.

FIRST JOHN. Bernie didn't have to give you your clients. He could have kept them.

CHAR. And who would have worked them?

FIRST JOHN. He could have gotten millions of lawyers to work them. He picked you. You should consider yourself fortunate. You did nothing but exist, and you got the work. You got the money for the work. A lot of lawyers exist and don't get the work or the money. You got it. You were the lucky one. Be thankful and shut up.

CHAR, *screaming.* Shut up? You tell me to shut up? We have a senior partner who thinks so little of us that he pees on the floor, and you want me to shut up?

(The spotlight focuses on the area of the stage where BERNIE, JANE AND KARA are standing.)

BERNIE, *hears CHAR screaming, interrupts his conversation and, in a firm tone, yells across the room.* That is enough! John, go back to the firm. Kara pack up Beau's portrait.

BERNIE *to all characters in the room.* All of you, listen up. We need to wrap things up here. I've postponed my birthday party for an entire day because of Beau, and it's time to end this diversion. All of you be gone. Go back to the firm. Work on your clients' matters. You have time to make up.

CHAR, *mumbles*. You couldn't even close the firm for the day? We could make up the time.

BERNIE, *in a commanding voice*. If you have something to say, either speak so we can hear you or shut up.

(Silence for a few seconds. Everyone is confused. They want to stay and talk to JANE, but they have been instructed to leave. BERNIE corners JANE, preventing the others from talking to her as they leave. KARA simply stands there looking bewildered.)

BERNIE. The portrait. We will have it packed. You must take it.

JANE. I can't. I won't. It belongs in the firm. That is Beau's family. Taking the portrait out of the firm makes it seem like Beau never existed, like he was just some made-up name created for marketing purposes.

KARA, *crying*. Depending upon how you look at it, he had many children. He had a whole firm full of children. He was so proud of us. You could see him just beaming some days.

BERNIE, *looking straight at JANE*. Was he rich?

JANE, *in a very straightforward manner*. Yes, he left twenty million dollars to his alma mater.

BERNIE, *surprised, modulates voice to be serious*. If I had known he was that wealthy, we would have cut his draw in retirement. I thought he needed something, so I gave him something.

JANE, *sarcastically*. You gave him something? You gave Beau thirty thousand a year while you took a million. You're very kind, Mr. Geldmann. Very kind!

BERNIE. That's what I thought. How did he ever get that kind of money?

JANE. When our father was in World War I, he learned that in life, success and failure follow the same impostor. There is a very fine line between the two, and it wasn't until he sat freezing and without food in a foxhole, thousands of miles from home and with other human beings out there trying to kill him, that he came to know the impostor very well. Dad taught Beau that you spend half your money to enjoy life while you have it, and save half your money just in case you live until tomorrow. He also taught Beau that life must be more than maintenance; otherwise he would only be wasting a day at a time until he died.

KARA, *jumps into the conversation*. That's great if you can afford it, but for me, life is maintenance. I work every day so I can pay taxes, put food on the table, and give my kids whatever they want. *(In a happy voice.)* Frankly, I spend my whole life worrying about insubstantial matters. I just don't have time to think about important matters. I don't even know what an important matter is! Certainly it's not the nuances of all these laws the lawyers debate until they are blue in the face. I guess it's my kids.

BERNIE, *to KARA*. I went through those days. Kids. What a waste of time and money. You give them everything, and after age nine they couldn't give a damn. They wouldn't pick a weed or bring you a glass of water if you were dying. Best day of my life was when I got divorced. The wife wanted the kids. I gave her one check a month, and I didn't care how she spent it. She could buy food or trinkets for the kids; it was up to her. I gave her just so much and that was it. I couldn't be haunted anymore. The kids hated me. They thought I was robbing them because they all had to make decisions between food, education, and trinkets. Not a tough decision for me, but a very difficult decision for them. They hated me. Reality was imposed upon them, and they hated me for it.

KARA. But you had the money to walk away. Maintenance is different. You have no control. You save, and you could be wiped out by just a few weeks of bad luck. Most of us can be wiped out by very little. I am subject to everyone's control: my boss, my kids, the IRS, the economy, or just being sick. It's funny how we are all in such different positions in life. The human condition really is different from person to person. Reality is really different depending upon your status in life and the quality of your luck. *(Pauses.)*

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and think of the thirty monthly garage parking passes that hang on the rearview mirror of my car and wonder, how did I do it to myself? How do I keep doing the same thing every day? How can I change things? Then I think of my kids and know that what you call maintenance is the essence of my existence. Maintenance is my choice, because to do otherwise would harm too many people I love.

JANE to KARA *in a soft, somewhat resentful tone*. That's because most of us follow the same impostor. Beau followed himself. That's why he was happy. I learned from Beau, but it was too late. I also spent my whole life on details and insubstantial matters. I never broke loose of detail, nor did I ever submerge myself in details by having kids. There must be something of value in driving kids to basketball, soccer, swimming, tennis, parties, toy stores, and a million other places. At least you watch and can influence other human beings. That must be worth a lot—or at least something. It is more than a detail.

Beau was a free spirit. He never bogged himself down with things, or kids, or even work. He remained free and open. People just came into his openness. That's why the young associates loved him. In a sense, he had kids who could reason. He molded the bright ones. He never had to deal with the details, the dirty diapers, the food fights... Maybe he had the best of all worlds. Life certainly was not maintenance for him. It was a grand journey. He was never stopped by the details. He only accepted the responsibility he wanted. When Mother died, he didn't have time for the funeral. He was in Australia with one of his lovers. He could not be disturbed, but he sent beautiful flowers and set up a memorial. She never knew. When she was sick, she never expected him back because she didn't expect to die. She never faulted him for avoiding the details. No one ever faulted Beau for anything. They just loved his stories. Beau had the time to do the things that stories are made of, and the luck to live long enough to tell them. No, life was certainly not maintenance to him.

BERNIE, *in an angry tone*. So why do you want his portrait to hang in the firm forever? Why do you wish him more good luck? It seems like his good luck was your misfortune.

JANE, *in an emotional voice*. Because he has something to teach us.

BERNIE, *angrily*. What could a self-absorbed, traveling fruitcake teach us?

(JANE, *shocked, puts both hands over her face, begins to cry.*)

KARA, *Sobbing, confused, puts her hand on BERNIE's arm, pulling him to leave*. Please stop fighting. I can't stand it.

BERNIE, *forcefully pushing her away*. What should we do? Do we put the portrait back in the firm, or do we pack it up and send it with her? A person who lives her life for maintenance can't make such decisions. Maintenance does not allow for decisions. Maintenance only allows one to waste one's life, a day at a time.

KARA, *still crying*. You really are mean.

BERNIE to KARA, *condescendingly*. Yes, I am mean, and you waste your life. When we wake up tomorrow, I will still be mean and you will still be wasting your life. You can't even fight. You are afraid to fight. Fighting takes you out of maintenance. It gives you something to live for.

KARA. You call your life living? You were afraid when you thought Frank was going to punch you.

BERNIE. I call it conquering. I am too arrogant to believe I just live. I conquer, and you and the others in the firm are my conquests. There is little you can do about it. You're too afraid to even lose your job. How could anyone be so afraid to take so little risk? All just to maintain breathing and eating for a long enough period so you can die! Your life is the absolute risk! You get so little. I am not sure you were ever alive. And you people wonder why I have no respect for you. Just look at yourselves. Maintenance, details, call it what you want. It's—

JANE to *BERNIE*, *shouting*. The impostor! Bernie you follow the impostor; it is the only voice you hear.

BERNIE, *raising his arms in the air like a referee in a football game after a field goal*. Who is this bullshit impostor you keep talking about?

JANE, *holding back tears*. The impostor is the scorekeeper. It is that inner voice that speaks to every person. It tells us that we are always entitled to more. It hides death from us so that we never understand life. Most of us follow the impostor, but very few of us really get to understand it. All we know is that the impostor is charming and tells us what we want to hear.

BERNIE, *absolutely baffled, shaking his head sarcastically*. Is he short? Is he tall? Is he big? Is he small? Please tell us mere mortals more about this Greeeeaaat Impostor!

KARA, *yanks on BERNIE's arm*. This is getting silly. I don't understand what either of you is talking about. We need to leave.

(BERNIE pushes KARA down. FRANK rushes over to pick her up. FRANK dances around like a boxer throwing punches in the air, yelling.)

FRANK. Put up your dukes. Come on, fat man, put up your dukes. Just put 'em up for once in your life.

(BERNIE, shaking his head in disbelief, walks over to the food table and picks up a banana. He hands the banana to FRANK.)

FRANK, *stunned by BERNIE's cavalier attitude*. What is this for?

BERNIE. A monkey!

(FRANK walks over to the food table and picks up the piggy bank with the sign leaning against it that says, "Donations for the Poor." He holds it out to BERNIE.)

BERNIE. What is this for?

FRANK. A pig! A pig for a pig!

(BERNIE lunges at FRANK, who moves aside. BERNIE falls to the floor and looks up.)

BERNIE. My knee. I sprained my wrist. My—

(KARA rushes to BERNIE, who is still complaining, and helps him up. BERNIE stands and looks at FRANK.)

BERNIE. You are really finished at my law firm. Do you hear me? You are really, really finished. Finished!

FRANK. If you say "finished" one more time, maybe I will be really finished! Does it make you feel better, fat man?

BERNIE, *face flushed, looks at JANE and FRANK.* Now you know why I hate Beau. He humiliated me my entire life. Kara, take the goddamn portrait back to the firm. Get Otto. Tell him to put out an e-mail. We are having my birthday party this afternoon. I have waited long enough. It's my turn to be honored.

(The lights dim slowly, with the last light shining on KARA as she takes the portrait down. Several unnamed cast members with rolls of brown wrapping paper begin wrapping the portrait. As they work, THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO, from stage right, comes onstage.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO.

One time I asked Beau what he would do over,

if given the chance.

He said to me, "Nothing."

Puzzled and bewildered, I asked what he meant.

He gave me some wisdom that I cannot forget:

"The imposter has answers; the human does not.

We can't beg forgiveness, for we have created our lot.

So all we can ask is: what are we doing that we are not proud of?

Then do what we can that we would be more prouder of."

ACT II
SCENE II

(The room is a secretarial station: KARA's office. It has a very plain, L-shaped wood-veneer desk with the long part of the L-shape facing the audience and the short part of the L-shape perpendicular to the audience. On the long part of the L is a computer and a telephone. Some papers are stacked up on the short part of the L. Behind the desk are gray file cabinets. There are framed photographs of children on top of the file cabinets. The walls are unadorned. KARA is sitting behind the desk, facing the audience when she is using the computer and telephone. Piano music plays in the background: the Tarantella. It is heard faintly at first; however, it gets louder and faster as the scene progresses.)

KARA, typing on the computer, appears troubled. She finishes typing and then reads aloud from the screen.)

KARA. "Due to a change in schedule, we will celebrate Mr. Geldmann's birthday party today at four o'clock p.m. Please join us in the conference room promptly at four o'clock!" *(Pauses and then continues, speaking aloud to herself.)* I hope this message is all right. I hope I said it the right way. What if Mr. Geldmann doesn't like the way it reads? *(The telephone rings.)*

Good afternoon. Mr. Geldmann's office. *(Pauses.)* Hello, Mr. Geldmann. *(Pauses.)* Yes, the message is ready. I will e-mail it to everyone immediately. *(Pauses.)* Yes, I will call anyone who does not respond immediately. *(Pauses.)* Yes, I will make sure everyone is back from Mr. Maguire's funeral. *(Pauses.)* Yes, Mr. Geldmann, I will make sure everyone in the firm attends your birthday party. *(Pauses.)* Yes, Mr. Geldmann, we have plenty of time to get things ready. It is only ten after one, and the party is not scheduled to start until four. The cakes were delivered this morning. Actually, Mr. Geldmann, after Mr. Maguire died, since we did not know when we would have your birthday party, we arranged to have cakes delivered fresh every morning for a week, just in case you decided to have the party that day. *(Long pause.)*

Thank you, Mr. Geldmann. I knew you wanted fresh cake for you birthday party. *(Pauses.)* We arranged to have the day-old cakes cut up and sent out Federal Express to your clients. *(Pauses.)* No, Mr. Geldmann, there are no clients coming, but we sent every one of your clients a piece of cake so that they will feel like part of your team. *(Pauses.)* Thank you, Mr. Geldmann. I am glad you like my idea. Yes, we can do it again next year. *(Long pause.)*

Yes, it will become a tradition. *(Pauses.)* Good idea, Mr. Geldmann. Next year we can send a piece of cake to each of your clients the day before your party and hook them up by conference call during your party so they can sing “Happy Birthday” to you and eat cake at the same time as you. Wonderful idea, Mr. Geldmann! *(Long pause.)*

Yes, Mr. Geldmann, I will e-mail everyone now. Then I will get Carol and some others to walk from office to office to make sure everyone will be here for your birthday party. *(Pauses.)* I’m sorry to hear that, Mr. Geldmann. Cabs can be so difficult, especially when you are getting out. I am sure your knee will be all right. *(Pauses.)* Your shoulder, too? Oh my God, Mr. Geldmann. Are you sure we should have your party today? *(Long pause.)*

I’m sorry, Mr. Geldmann, I would never think of canceling your party. I know it has been delayed long enough. *(Pauses.)* I know it has been a terrible inconvenience. *(Pauses.)* No, Mr. Geldmann, no one even suggested canceling your party. I am sure, Mr. Geldmann. *(Pauses.)* Mr. Geldmann, I need to send out the e-mail. Everything will be perfect. *(Pauses.)* I will have everyone in the room on schedule so you can make your entrance at four o’clock. *(Pauses.)* Mr. Geldmann—Mr. Geldmann—could I—

(KARA puts down the telephone, taps a few keys on the computer keyboard, and pushes a button).

KARA, *excited.* It’s off. They have it. I’ve done it, and the party will be on. What a great day. *(Smiling.)* Mr. Geldmann’s birthday party.

(KARA bounces with a pleased look as the gentle bell rings throughout the firm. As each person receives the e-mail, she shouts out that person's name: ARCHIBALD, JOHN, JOHN, OTTO, CHAR, MARTHA, JAN. After she's called out each name on the list, the telephone rings.)

KARA, *still bouncing when the telephone rings, and with a giddy smile.* Hello. Mr. Geldmann's office. Today is a happy day, and I am sure you wish Mr. Geldmann a happy birthday! *(Pauses.)* Oh! Thank you. How did you do it? You only had overnight. *(Pauses. Gets so giddy she can't sit, so she stands and walks around, and the telephone cord gets tangled around her.)* It's really ready? You really made all the changes to the portrait? How did you do it so quickly? Do all the colors match? *(Pauses.)* They really match? *(Pauses.)* A new frame! *(Pauses.)* Yes, I know you needed to make a new frame once you made the modifications. *(Pauses; begins turning back around to untangle herself from the telephone cord.)*

You will have it here by two thirty today? Thank you, thank you! *(Pauses.)* It is really beautiful? *(Pauses.)* He looks better than ever? *(Pauses.)* You will hang it? Oh, thank you. I never told Mr. Geldmann we found an artist who could quickly capture his prominence. You know that Mr. Maguire died, so we had to postpone Mr. Geldmann's party. He insisted. How lucky can we get? Otherwise, we would never have had the portrait for his birthday party. *(Pauses.)* No, I don't mean lucky that Mr. Maguire died. He was a wonderful man. I meant lucky that, because of the delay, you were able to complete the portrait in time for the party. Oh, you know what I mean. *(Pauses.)* Yeah! He was buried today. Mr. Geldmann paid his last respects. *(Pauses.)* No, this is not an inappropriate time. Mr. Geldmann would really want his portrait for the party. You have no idea how thrilled he will be when he sees how you have restored the portrait and made those really needed changes. *(Long pause.)*

It was a big deal. You have no idea how many artists would not touch this difficult task. At least twenty refused. So much for starving artists! I guess we don't have any such animals around anymore. *(Pauses.)* Yes, just bring it up the service elevator and hang it in the conference room. Call me as soon as you arrive. I must see it. I can't tell you how excited Mr. Geldmann will be!

(She hangs up the phone, sits, and smiles. The telephone rings again.)

Good afternoon. Today is Mr. Geldmann's happy birthday. Please wish him a good day!

(Long pause.)

Hello, Mr. Geldmann. Everything is done, and we have a very special surprise for you.

(Pauses.) No, I can't tell you, otherwise it would not be a surprise. *(Pauses.)* Mr. Geldmann, a surprise is a surprise, and you must wait. *(Pauses.)* You must wait, Mr. Geldmann. *(Long pause.)*

Oh! Mr. Geldmann, it would not be a surprise if I told you. *(Pauses.)* No, Mr. Geldmann, no one else knows. I just found out about it, but it is wonderful. *(Pauses.)* No, I am not trying your patience. It's a wonderful surprise, and I want it to be a surprise. *(Pauses.)* Please, can't you wait? *(Pauses.)* What? Oh! I just e-mailed everyone, telling them the party is at four o'clock. *(Pauses.)* You must wait. *(Pauses.)* I'm truly sorry. I did not mean to tell you what to do. *(Pauses.)* OK, I will e-mail everyone and tell them the party is at three. *(Pauses.)* I know you are very busy and can't be inconvenienced.

(KARA hangs up the telephone and looks at the computer screen. She begins typing on the keyboard, and when she finishes, she reads the e-mail aloud again.)

KARA. "Please note that the time has changed for Mr. Geldmann's birthday celebration this afternoon. Join us in the conference room at three p.m. See you all there!"

(She pushes a button on the computer to send the e-mail, and a gentle bell rings as each person in the firm receives the message. As each person gets the message, she shouts out that person's name: ARCHIBALD, JOHN, JOHN, OTTO, CHAR, MARTHA, JAN.)

(Very nervous, jumpy.) Oh my God, I must call the artist to tell him the new time. He must not be late now that Mr. Geldmann wants to see his surprise early. Where is his number?

(Fumbles through a Rolodex.) Here it is. It's already ten to two. I can't imagine what will happen if Mr. Geldmann's portrait is not back now that he knows there is a surprise. Sending it out without his permission was bad enough. Not having it back—I can't even think what he would do. What happens if the artist messed up? Would he fire me? God, I need to call. *(She picks up the phone and dials.)*

(Screaming into the telephone.) Hello, it's been moved to three o'clock! Will you still be here by two thirty? Please! Please! *(Pauses.)* It can't be late. There is no room for error. *(Pauses.)* I will pay you a bonus for doing it quickly. *(Pauses.)* I don't care if you need help hanging it. *(Pauses.)* I know it's big. I am sure it is much bigger, but it must be hung before three. *(Pauses.)* Get anyone walking the street. I'll pay them an extra hundred if they help you hang it. Please just do it. I need my job. *(Pauses.)* Yes, I will have several people from here downstairs ready to help. I will make the calls right now. *(Pauses.)* You will load it into the truck now? Bless you! Bless you!

(Makes telephone calls around the firm to get people to help carry the portrait to the conference room and hang it. She is frantic.)

James, I need you to help carry up Mr. Geldmann's portrait from the lobby to the conference room. *(Pauses.)* What do you mean, "I may have to attend the party, but I don't have to help throw it or bring up the dumb portrait." *(Pauses.)* I need your help; it is for Mr. Geldmann. *(Pauses.)* I'm sorry, it is not for Mr. Geldmann; it's for me. I really need your help. *(Pauses.)* Thanks, you are wonderful.

(Puts down the telephone and immediately picks it up.) Otto, this is Kara, I need your help to carry Mr. Geldmann's portrait to the conference room. *(Pauses.)* Yes, I know you are a partner, but I need help. *(Pauses.)* I know you don't do moving work. *(Pauses.)* I know there are others in the firm, but I need help now. *(Pauses.)* I will find someone else to help.

(Slams down the phone; immediately picks it up and dials another number.) Martha, you get asked to help out with menial tasks all the time. Well, I have another one for you. Could you

go to the lobby and help James carry up the portrait of Mr. Geldmann to the conference room? Please, you can do more than serve cake. *(Pauses.)* I don't understand why you will not help? What a friend you turned out to be when I need your help.

(Pauses.) Oh shit! *(Slams down the phone and slowly picks it back up, dials, and speaks in a low voice.)* Ron, I need your help. *(Pauses.)* This is not for Mr. Geldmann, it's for me. I need a favor. *(Pauses.)* Really, it's for me. Please, Ron, I need help to carry Mr. Geldmann's portrait to the conference room, that's all. *(Pauses.)* I will never ask you for help again. You are just rude. I am telling you the truth; I need the help. I have to get the portrait to the conference room. Please! *(Pause.)* Thank you so much, thank you.

(KARA, finished with her calls, sits staring straight ahead. The telephone rings, startling her; she answers it nervously.) Hello, this is Kara. *(Pauses.)* You are down at the loading dock? Bless you! You have saved my life. James and Ron will be down to help you carry the portrait to the conference room. I can't tell you what would have happened if the portrait were not hung before Mr. Geldmann arrived at his birthday party. *(Pauses.)* I still have to e-mail everyone again and make sure every person in every office attends. After the e-mail, three of us have to walk the floors and check every office. *(Pauses.)* Yes, of course I am serious. You would not believe what some people do. I had one associate hide in a closet. Last year I had to get Peter to check the men's room, because three associates were not just hiding in the bathroom—they were crouching on the toilets in the stalls. We didn't know anyone was in there until we tried to open the stall doors. *(Long pause.)*

Yes, it is amazing how creative people are! *(Pauses.)* The worst was a partner who hid under my desk because he knew I would be looking for people hiding in their offices. One year, that same partner took off the ceiling tiles in his office and hid in the ceiling. He forgot to move the ladder. *(Pauses.)* Yeah! Sure gives your hiding place away. *(Pauses and then laughs.)*

Yeah! Another escapade involved a lawyer who brought in his bungee. He jumped from the atrium and was just hanging there upside down for almost thirty minutes. Mr. Geldmann had him pulled up in time for two pieces of cake. *(Pauses.)* OK. Let me get everyone.

(She hangs up and looks at the clock.)

What time is it? It's e-mail time! *(Begins typing on the computer, and after she finishes typing, reads aloud in a very stern voice.)* "Everyone—every associate, every partner, every secretary, every support staff person—everyone, make your way to the conference room. Secretaries must leave for the conference room by two fifty-five, associates by two fifty-eight, partners by two fifty-nine. Mr. Geldmann will be there at three. Everyone must be in place before three. There is a very special surprise today!" *(Hits the send button and sits back with a smile of great accomplishment, listening to the gentle bell ring as the message goes from office to office.)*

(Jumping up.) I did it. This will be Mr. Geldmann's best birthday party ever. I have six minutes.

(By this time the Tarantella is loud and fast.)

(Picking up the telephone.) Peter, check the men's rooms. *(Pauses, slams the phone down with great satisfaction. Picks it right back up.)* Martha, check the closets on six and seven. *(Pauses, slams the phone down again with great satisfaction. Picks it right back up.)* Jan, get Otto. Check your floors. *(Pauses, and then hangs up the telephone and runs out of her office.)*

(The curtain goes down. THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO runs, from stage right, across the stage just shaking his head.)

ACT II
SCENE III

(The conference room. The lights are very dim. All that can be seen is the large, rectangular conference table. The light is brighter at the head of the table. The head chair, stage left, has a higher back than the other chairs and is covered with a red velvet cloth that stretches from the top of the backrest to over the seat. Embroidered upon the cloth are the words, "Happy Birthday, Bernie." On the table are three large birthday cakes.

Upstage, where the portraits were hung in the initial scene, a drape covers the entire wall. At stage right, on the floor in the corner of the room and farthest away from the head chair, is a large package, at least 3'×3', wrapped in brown paper. On the wall above the package on the floor and facing the audience is a chiming wall clock.

Except for BERNIE, the entire cast is in the room. They are completely silent. Exactly as the clock chimes strike three, BERNIE walks through the door, stage right; the lights go on, dozens of balloons fall from the ceiling, and all the people in the room shout, "Happy birthday!" The group then sings "Happy Birthday" to BERNIE.

BERNIE stands with a very broad smile, listening to every word of the song. When the singing stops, he raises his arms and twirls his hands as if to demand that they sing the song again. The group sings it again. BERNIE is beaming.

After the singing stops, BERNIE inspects the cakes and looks around the room to see who is present.

KARA is very close to BERNIE. She walks over to him, puts her arm around him, and escorts him to the head chair, he remains standing.)

KARA. Happy birthday, Mr. Geldmann. This is our most special day. We have decorated your seat this year. What do you think? (*Interrupts before BERNIE can get a word out.*) We have a fantastic surprise for you. But first, as tradition demands, you must cut the first piece of cake.

(KARA hands BERNIE a knife, and BERNIE walks to the center of the table to cut the first cake. He cuts the first piece only and then hands the knife back to KARA. KARA begins cutting more pieces and two other women begin cutting the other cakes. Pops are heard throughout from the opening of the champagne bottles. Office staff serve champagne to all in attendance. People talk among themselves, and many of those in attendance come up to BERNIE and wish him a happy birthday.

The audience can hear comments like, "Happy birthday. May you have many more"; "Thank you so much for letting me work here"; "This is the most exciting party that I have ever been invited to"; and "It has been such a pleasure to work with you. You can't imagine how much you have added to my life." BERNIE accepts these remarks as sincere and thanks his colleagues for their kind words and, as applicable, agrees with them.

When everyone has been served cake and champagne, KARA taps the side of her champagne glass to get their attention. OTTO walks over and stands beside BERNIE.)

OTTO, *looking around the room.* We are greatly honored to celebrate Bernie's birthday with him. As many of you know, we had to reschedule it because of unforeseen events, but (*trying to be funny*) as they say, "better late than never." At least Bernie is still here. That is more than we can say of at least one of our partners. (*Some laughter.*) This is a serious event and the only event in the firm where we can honor our leader, the man who has made all our jobs possible. Bernie is the man who built this law firm from a small group of lawyers to one of the finest firms in the city. We have a lot to be proud of, but mostly we are proud of Mr. Geldmann: his dedication to our clients, his friendship with us, his generosity, and, most of all, the spirit he has instilled in all of us to be the best. We thank you, Mr. Geldmann. We would not be where we are today without you. We hope someday we can return all your kindness, help, and inspiration. You are truly a remarkable individual.

(Clapping, cheering, and whistling can be heard throughout the room. Shouts of “Thank you” come from all corners of the room. BERNIE appears as if he is going to speak, but before he can get a word out, SECOND JOHN, who was standing a few feet away, moves to the table so he can be seen.)

SECOND JOHN, *gesturing with his arms and with a loud whistle.* Before Bernie speaks, some of us also need to express our thanks. Many of us have been here our entire careers and have learned at your feet, Bernie. Sometimes others tried to take credit for building this firm, but those of us in the know always knew that you were—and are—its true leader. It is you, Bernie. *(Raises his glass for a toast; others follow with a slight raise of their glasses.)* Some of us never forgot. Now there will not be any divided loyalty. There will be no more discussions of how to run the firm. Our future is brighter than ever, and we thank you for staying the course. In a person’s life, he meets very few heroes, very few people of great personal strength. We were truly lucky to meet you, and our lives will be forever enriched because of it.

(Loud cheers, shouts of “Thank you,” and clapping can be heard. The group shouts, “Speech! Speech! Speech!” As they again raise their champagne glasses, BERNIE looks impatient, waiting to speak.)

BERNIE. I’m still here and others are not. That should tell you something. *(Cheers and laughter.)* I have had to wait a long time to make this speech, almost forty years. Even when it was my turn, I thought Otto and John were going to make it for me. I thought they would never stop speaking. I thought I was going to have to remind them it was my birthday, not theirs. *(Laughter.)*

This is a very special day. We not only honor me, but also my contributions to this firm. You are proof of what I have built. That is why you honor me. I know there was frustration as we had to delay my birthday party, but those things happen in life, and we need to be flexible and adjust. That is what we did, and we had this party just as soon as we could. I apologize for the delay. Just think of how the delay affected me. It disrupted my real birthday. But I deal with

troubles like that all the time, and you also need to figure out how to deal with disappointment. It does take work, but it can be done.

The problems of the last few days are being taken care of, and by next week they will seem like distant memories. The few billable hours we lost can be made up with an hour extra for a few nights or on a Sunday morning. We won't miss a beat. *(Smiling and chuckling.)* I guess Beau's little old heart missed a few beats. *(Some laughter.)* What more can I say? Thanks for coming to celebrate my birthday. I know how important it is to you, and just so you have something to look forward to, I'll have another one next year and the next and the next—hopefully, without any interruptions and on the real day. Why, even when I'm gone, I'll be back for my birthday.

(Laughter and cheers. Clapping and yells of, "We'll be waiting!")

OTTO, *tapping his glass with his fork.* Don't leave. We have an announcement, and then we have a very special present for Bernie.

BERNIE. It's about time. I thought you had changed your mind about giving me my present. I've been waiting over an hour and a half.

OTTO. Announcements first. Some of you have asked who gets Beau's office. Administration will develop a list of people who can move offices. Beau's furniture is also available to the partners. Again, administration will develop a list. Beau's files will be boxed and sent to storage. I doubt we will ever need them, and after five years they will be destroyed. If someone wants something from his files, get it now or it will be gone. Any other lawyer in the vicinity of his office can use the empty file space. Administration will transfer all billing and responsibility credit to the appropriate lawyers. That should take care of everything with regard to Beau Maguire. Now, we have a special gift for Mr. Geldmann. Kara, you were the one who worked so hard to have this done in such a short time, so you should do the honors.

KARA, *walking over and hugging BERNIE.* You'll love it. I just know you will. (*Looks at the group.*) Never before in my life have I ever undertaken such a challenge. Several years ago, Mr. Geldmann rightfully wanted some changes made to his wonderful portrait. He felt the frame was showing its age. He felt the colors were fading. He felt the overall portrait did not fit his stature in the firm, the legal community, and the nation.

I must say I was baffled as to what to do. I started contacting artists to ask if there was anything they could do. They all said no. One told me to go to a conservationist, but that would have only restored the color. Then, after several years of looking, I found this wonderful artist who told me he knew exactly what I was looking for and promised me he could make such changes literally overnight. So I gave it to him yesterday afternoon. It was very scary for me, you know, giving him Mr. Geldmann's portrait and not knowing if I would get it back today. But Mr. Geldmann deserved the changes, and the only way they would be done was for me to take the risk. After all, I know that Mr. Geldmann's portrait will hang in this conference room forever. For all Mr. Geldmann has done for me, I needed to take this risk for him. Other than the artist and James and Ron, who hung the portrait, I am the only one who has seen it. It is fantastic. This artist captured the real Mr. Geldmann, body and mind, heart and soul. Mr. Geldmann, please look at the wall while we pull back the curtains and unveil your portrait.

(Two employees pull back the curtains. The portrait has been enlarged to the size of seven feet high by four feet wide. It is in a bright-gold frame. It depicts a man standing in the same pose as the man in the original portrait. Now, however, it is a portrait of a man six feet six inches tall. He has dark hair with some gray at the temples, soft features, no creases in his forehead, a small nose, horn-rimmed glasses, and an extended hand. The man in the portrait still has a slender build but is a little heavier than the figure in the prior portrait. He is wearing a dark-blue suit with a very conservative, blue-striped tie. His hand is extended upward to a plaque that reads, "Creator of a Great Law Firm, Friend to all Partners and Associates, and a Dedicated Humanitarian.")

From the assembled group are comments: “Fabulous!” “Remarkable!” “It captures him,” and “Truly magnificent!” Someone close to the portrait reads the plaque out loud and shouts “Amen, brother.”)

BERNIE *looks almost like he is weeping.* Our offices are complete. We now have our permanent possession. We are complete. (*Pauses.*) There is no more we could want. I am home. (*Pauses.*) I will always be here. Everyone will always know who I was, what I looked like, and what I cherished.

(Over near the door at stage right, ARCHIBALD and the FIRST JOHN are talking, their conversation noticeable but inaudible to the audience.)

BERNIE, *staring at ARCHIBALD and FIRST JOHN.* If you need to say something important, please say it so we can all be enlightened by your brilliance. Otherwise, this is my day, and I intend to celebrate it.

ARCHIBALD, *mumbles.* Hideous!

BERNIE. What? Say it out loud so we can all hear your brilliance.

FIRST JOHN, *yelling.* He said, “Hideous.”

BERNIE, *angry.* Hideous! What does that mean? What is hideous? Me? The portrait? The party? Tell us, o brilliant one, so that we might share in your wisdom.

ARCHIBALD, *frightened, backs away, mumbling.* Nothing, I’m sorry, truly sorry. I would never do anything to offend you; truly, I would never... I recognize full well the great things you have done for this firm.

BERNIE, *angry.* Yes, everyone knows perfectly well all that I’ve done for this firm. I built it, after all. But what was hideous? What were you talking about? Tell us, o brilliant one.

ARCHIBALD. I'm sorry. We can talk later.

FIRST JOHN, *in a demeaning voice*. No, let's talk now. Now is a very good time. We thought about letting you go, but now you asked for it.

ARCHIBALD, *quickly*. Let me go where? Am I being fired? (*Flustered, he just starts talking.*) Things have been terrible, I know. I know my numbers have been down, but my life is back on track.

FIRST JOHN *fires back*. So you say. You're going downhill. Everything is going in the wrong direction. Your work, your life—all is downhill.

ARCHIBALD. No—I've turned it around. I have had lots of problems, but I'm over them. I really am.

FIRST JOHN *shakes his head*. You miss my point. Your billable hours are terrible.

ARCHIBALD. But I have tried very hard. Look at all the work I get from partners that I can't bill for: speeches, books, articles, background for client development. I do all this work so the partners can have all the billable time. All I ever wanted to do was cooperate, and every time I cooperated, someone found something wrong.

BERNIE *moves toward ARCHIBALD*. You don't give us enough. Look at Thomas Adams Calhoun Carbondale. Now there is an associate. AC does the speeches and articles, but look at his time. Magnificent, truly magnificent! When partners look at his time, all they think of is how much he contributes. He contributes. He gives. He knows his role. That is why you are lacking. You don't contribute. You need to learn to contribute.

ARCHIBALD, *stunned*. But he cheats. He doesn't really work all that time. He just writes it as if he worked it.

FIRST JOHN, *emphatically*. That is a contribution, a significant contribution to the bottom line. That is a contribution you have not made.

ARCHIBALD, *shocked*. My time is bad for last year. My God, my son was killed in an automobile accident. I was a basket case. I could not even think half the time. You didn't even come to the funeral. Not one of you. I know I wasn't much good. I may never be what you want, but I try. I'm a competent, honest lawyer. I try. You must know that.

FIRST JOHN, *coldly*. Everyone has problems, but they can't interfere with work at the firm. When Dexter's wife died suddenly several years ago, he was able to hit his old stride in several weeks. Your problem was only over a kid. Have another.

(ARCHIBALD walks slowly over to stand in front of the cakes, center stage, and places his hands on the table.)

BERNIE, *mockingly*. Have a piece of cake. You've earned that much. That may be all you have earned. *(The group laughs.)* If I had known I was that funny, I would have said something earlier. *(The group laughs, and BERNIE smiles a broad, beaming smile.)*

(ARCHIBALD picks up two cake knives, jumps on the conference room table, looks as if he is going to lunge at the portrait. BERNIE moves closer to ARCHIBALD and extends his hand, as if in friendship. ARCHIBALD wildly swings both knives through the air. BERNIE steps back.)

BERNIE, *with his hand out again*. Destroying my portrait will not do you any good.

(ARCHIBALD, holding the knives straight out like swords, looks poised to lunge at the portrait.)

CHAR, *stepping forward*. Archibald, destroying the portrait will only harm you. You will be arrested. Come down. No harm, no foul. *(Pauses.)* I know life is not perfect. You have had tough times, and we may not have been very helpful. But you can't unbundle your life. You

can't bring a kid back from the dead. Maybe that loss will be with you forever. Maybe you will be lucky enough to forget it. That does happen. *(Pauses.)*

You can't ever get a divorce from the facts of your life. The consequences continue to haunt you in some way. The facts just don't go away. Life is just a combination of events, emotions, and decisions that tie you to your past, frame your present, and limit your future. You can never unbundle these events. The best you can do is unload some baggage and use whatever mind you have left after these events are over to move forward. *(Pauses.)*

Archibald, put the knives down. Come down off the table. You have a long career ahead of you. Come down. Archibald, I know you have had more than your share of troubles, but I was with you. Come down for me.

(Tears in CHAR's eyes, voice shaking.) Archibald, life is such a long and winding road, with so many turns it's hard sometimes to find your way back to yourself. Don't make it any harder by doing something stupid. These people would like you to do something stupid. But doing something stupid would only reinforce their belief that they are perfect and you are not. Don't help them. Don't give them that pleasure.

(Everyone in the room pauses silently, as BERNIE shakes his head and bounces up and down with nervousness.)

BERNIE. Archibald, that portrait only reflects reality as it is today. I earned that portrait. I truly did support you. I gave you a paycheck; that is what you wanted. That's what you got. That was the deal. You traded your life for money. That was the deal. It was voluntary. You didn't add exceptions to the agreement, like time off for a dead kid. *(Pauses.)* You got plenty of time off to see your family. You went home nights. You saw your kid while I was here making sure that everything worked, that bills were paid, and that you got your paycheck. *(Walks closer to ARCHIBALD, his arms extended as if to help him off the table, looking in ARCHIBALD's eyes, using an emphatic voice.)* Damn it! I earned that portrait. That is what I get for my sacrifice. You got your salary, you spent it, and you got yours. That portrait is payment for my sacrifice.

(ARCHIBALD moves his body in a Kung Fu manner and jabs the knives at BERNIE. BERNIE moves back.)

BERNIE. You know, Archibald, I get tired of doing. I have no one to help me, either. When things go bad, I just keep trooping along. *(Pauses.)*

Like you, growing up my father did not help me much but he paid the bills, took me to school and sporting events. He even bought me an ice-cream cone once in a while. Not that he did much for me—far from it. But I always believed he would help me if I needed it. It was very reassuring to believe that there was one person that I could count on if I needed help. Now there is no one to help me. Do you know what it is like to be totally alone, to know there is absolutely no one in the world that can help you? Do you know how cold isolation can be?

(ARCHIBALD alternately shakes and nods his head, nods and shakes, shakes and nods.)

ARCHIBALD, *mumbling*. I guess not. I still have my wife.

BERNIE. Can you really count on her? Really? Will she really listen and offer advice, or does she have her own agenda and all decisions move in that direction? That's not help; it's manipulation.

(ARCHIBALD is still shaking and nodding his head—yes and no, no and yes, yes and no.)

BERNIE. Maybe you are as alone as I am. Is your aloneness cold? Is it like looking into a long, dark tunnel? Is your tunnel just endless darkness? I know there are two openings in the tunnel, but I don't know how I will ever make it to one. It's just cold and dark. *(Pauses.)*

My life has been a journey into that cold, dark tunnel for the last several decades. Someday... I honestly believe there is a limit to how much coldness and darkness a human being can bear.

I have tried to help. What you needed—at least, what you thought you needed—was a salary, and I gave it to you. When you received the salary, you later thought that it was an indignity because it had strings attached. But you never wanted to face the tunnel alone. You wanted support. The salary was your support. It allowed you to believe you were not in the tunnel. It kept your wife happy so she could pursue her agenda, whatever it was. Your salary allowed her to believe you were not in the tunnel.

Then your kid died, and suddenly your life changed. You reexamined things, what you were doing and where you were. Instantly, you were in the tunnel. You had always been in the tunnel; you just hadn't focused on it. This time, you didn't know how you got in there. You didn't know how to get out. You blamed me—or the firm. That's easy, but it won't get you out of the tunnel. You're there, and there is no one in the world in that tunnel with you. You're just stuck. Yes, stuck. You just need to have the courage to move, even if you don't know which opening is closer or what's outside.

ARCHIBALD. What's your point? You'll help me?

BERNIE. I helped when you needed it. Maybe, in retrospect, you didn't ask for the most important of things, but I gave you what you sought. I was there to pick you up when you needed it. The exchange, well, it was your time. All of your time. No time off, at least not much, even for death. If you needed more time, you needed to take it on your time, not time that I paid for.

(ARCHIBALD is at the center of the table with the knives still extended.)

BERNIE, *calmly*. Archibald, put down the knives. They are cake knives. They are not sharp enough to kill you or us. If you stab someone, it will only mess up the room and not accomplish your purpose.

(ARCHIBALD looks confused and comically scary as he stands on the table holding the cake knives.)

ARCHIBALD. I can still destroy the portrait.

BERNIE. Why? It won't hurt me!

ARCHIBALD. Won't it? Let's see. (*Lunges as if to jump off the table into the portrait with the knives.*)

(Gasps and shouts of "Oh my God!" are heard around the room. ARCHIBALD now looks deranged. FIRST JOHN, out of ARCHIBALD's line of vision, picks up a balloon from the floor and pops it with a fork. It sounds like a gunshot. ARCHIBALD falls to avoid being shot. He falls facedown into one of the cakes. He does not move. There is silence in the room.)

FIRST JOHN, *picking up several balloons and breaking them.* Looks like I have slain the would-be portrait killer.

(Laughter erupts. The cast begins to leave the room. A few of them pat ARCHIBALD on the head with comments like, "Better day tomorrow," "You fooled me. I thought you were going to do something," "This is humiliation," and "Talk about having egg on your face; this guy has the whole cake.")

BERNIE, *with a cold stare at ARCHIBALD, who is still facedown on the table.* Damn it, Archibald, how did you think you had the power to hurt me? You don't know how much effort and money I put into protecting myself from the riffraff in life. You're just one of life's chumps for believing in some way that I am vulnerable. Believe me, I'm not vulnerable to the likes of you. You should have known that. I would have let you exist if you had just stayed out of my space. But you couldn't stay out of it, and now you are destroyed. You destroyed yourself. You dumbass fool; you should have known that you can't win in my game. I can't imagine how cold and dark it must be in the tunnel now. (*Leaves the room.*)

(FIRST JOHN remains in the room. There are balloons all over, and ARCHIBALD is still lying facedown on the table. THE JANITOR and THE ASSISTANT JANITOR come into the room with a cleaning cart and walk over to FIRST JOHN.)

THE JANITOR. Is the party over? Can we clean up?

FIRST JOHN. Yes! Yes! Throw away everything on the table and the floor.

(FIRST JOHN leaves the room.)

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR moves over to the table and pours himself a glass of champagne. He raises the glass to the portrait.)

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. These rich folk sure know how to live. I ain't had none of this bubbly stuff in twenty years.

THE JANITOR, *pouring himself a glass of champagne and raising it in a toast to BERNIE's portrait.* Must be some important dude in that painting. Can't imagine how important one must be to have a monster painting done. Anyway, congratulations, dude! I'm sure you deserve it. People will sure remember you.

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR, *pointing to the cake.* Cake—look at all that cake. My kids would love it.

THE JANITOR, *just noticing ARCHIBALD.* Is he dead?

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. Don't know, but he sure had a hell of a party! Think they had a stripper or something dancing on the table, and he passed out from excitement?

THE JANITOR. These rich folk sure know how to party. I'd like their life for one day.

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. You'd never want to go back.

THE JANITOR. Someday I'm going to treat myself to one of these wild parties. I deserve one before I die.

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. Let's just take some cake home for our kids. They'll get a kick out of it. The big guy didn't ruin all of it. He must have had a hell of a time. One partying dude! Can't imagine what he did. Must have been a hell of a show!

THE JANITOR. Yeah! The man in charge said get rid of everything. Let's get going.

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. Does that big brown package go? (*Points to the large package that is wrapped up in the corner.*)

THE JANITOR. Must. The man said get rid of it all. These guys don't waste words.

THE JANITOR and THE ASSISTANT JANITOR, *simultaneously*. Let's see what it is. (*Unwrapping the package.*)

THE JANITOR. Painting of an old man.

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. Who'd want it?

THE JANITOR. Yeah, no beauty queen, but the frame has got to be worth twenty bucks.

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. Let's take it down to the shop and save the frame.

THE JANITOR. What a tip!

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR. Champagne, cake, and a tip. Enough to take the old lady out to celebrate. Just one of those great days!

(The two men begin to carry the partially unwrapped package out the door. They stop.)

THE ASSISTANT JANITOR, *pointing to ARCHIBALD on the table.* What about the wasted dude?

THE JANITOR. I'm sure that wild dude can take care of himself. He sure doesn't need no help from us.

(The lights dim on the stage, except for the spotlight on THE JANITOR and THE ASSISTANT JANITOR, who load the partially unwrapped package onto their cleaning cart. As they push it out the door, the lights go out. There is a fake cough that interrupts the silence. A spotlight shines on the stage and starts searching all around the conference room; there is no one onstage other than ARCHIBALD, who is still lying on the table. The cough is heard again. The light searches for the cough.)

From stage right THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO walks to center stage. He begins to speak, and throughout his final speech the spotlight on him gets dimmer and dimmer until he finishes his last word.)

THE LITTLE MAN IN THE TUXEDO.

Good night, my dear audience.

I bid you farewell!

Beau's in the garbage;

Bernie's on the wall.

Who's the winner?

Who's the loser? It's hard to say.

Each of us travels in his own special way.

Some fight the coldness by being able to pray.

Others are content with constant pay.

Some of us are honest;

some of us are not.
Some of us are mean;
some of us are not.

Some of us take, and
some of us give.
Some of us seek answers;
some of us do not.

We all have met people like Bernie and Beau,
and Otto and John, and Archibald,
Kara, and Frank.
Some people we like,
and others we don't.

Char will tell us we can't unbundle our lives,
and we certainly can't straighten it out with a knife.
Life is a journey of corners and lines,
with our end point limited always by time.
When we look back, it's tough to decide,
how we ended up on any one side.

But for all of our angles
and losses and gains,
death is an equalizer,
second to none.
Remember, however, death does not take life.
It gives.

The gods are a-many.
Death is but one.

Gods promise hope,
but death gives us time.

When we all leave here,
let us not pray.
Let us talk to death,
for it will show us the way.

Death tells us what matters,
before we must leave.
It lets us determine
how serious we are,
to find out who we are
and what are we after.

All that is important,
in this life and after,
is that we listen to death
and look at ourselves
with perspective and laughter.

(Pauses; then continues in a very loud voice.) For all the Bernies of the world, let's sing
"Happy Birthday!"

(Simultaneously with the announcement, the stage lights come on. All the characters come onstage and join in the singing. THE JANITOR is carrying the empty frame, and THE ASSISTANT JANITOR holds up the canvas portrait of Beau. Balloons fall from the ceiling as the piano plays "Happy Birthday, Bernie!")

About the Author

Born of dysfunctional parents in a coal town in the northeast, Higgs Boson lives in a large metropolitan area. He worked at everything from digging ditches, to delivering mail, to representing corporations, to lobbying those who believe they have power over us.

He is on a writing adventure to revive the Theater of the Absurd in a time when tweets are considered serious communication. Using strong characters and farcical humor, he makes us uncomfortable with the senselessness of existence centered on ego, obsession, money, and lives lived in maintenance, wasting a day at a time until we die. Within this context, he forces us to ask ourselves: Who are the winners and who are the losers?