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Product Code A0523-FC

All My Raisins in the Son

**A Comedy by
John Twomey**

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All My Raisins in the Son

by John Twomey

Characters

NORA O'REILLEY – *a charismatic, eccentric woman in her 40s*

VICTORIA TURNER – *an enthusiastic, idealistic woman in her early 20s*

SUSAN WAGNER – *a harsh, ruthless woman in her 30s*

SAL VINCENT – *a rakish, debonair man in his 40s*

FLORENCE GOLDBERG – *a frumpy, caustic woman in her 50s*

FELIX WHITE – *a meek, meticulous man in his 30s*

Setting

A teachers' lounge in an urban high school: two doors; one to the hall stage right and one to the bathroom stage left. The room contains items typically found in a teachers' lounge: lockers, a bulletin board, a refrigerator, a sink, a PA speaker, a coffee maker, file cabinets, books, teaching supplies, etc. There are also three tables: Florence uses the stage left table; Nora and Sal use the stage center table; Felix uses the stage right table. Victoria and Susan do not have established tables.

Time

September – December, the present

Etc

Winner – Neil Simon Festival 2013 New Play Contest

Winner – Theatre Conspiracy 2013 New Play Contest

Winner – Broadway World.com (Ft. Myers/Naples) 2013 Best Original/New Work

“**All My Raisins in the Son**” ripples with laughter whenever playwright John Twomey plucks the strings of public school paranoia...Funny, sharp, witty, and with a sextet of well-drawn characters in defined arcs, he's got something...It will have you rolling your eyes and laughing in your seat.”

-- The Naples Daily News

All My Raisins in the Son

by John Twomey

Scene One

AT RISE: FLORENCE GOLDBERG is sitting at the stage left table, reading a newspaper as she eats from a box of donuts. NORA O'REILLEY enters, carrying a package of construction paper.

NORA

Are you just going to sit there until your next class?

FLORENCE

I took a bathroom break.

NORA

I found some construction paper in the general office.

FLORENCE

Have a donut.

NORA

What color should I use for the bulletin board?

FLORENCE

What color was it before?

NORA

Gray. Dismal gray.

FLORENCE

It fit our decor.

NORA

I want something more cheerful. What about red?

NORA starts stapling red construction paper to the bulletin board.

FLORENCE

Red. The color of the failing grades I give my students.

NORA

What are you reading?

FLORENCE

My obituary.

NORA

Not that rag. It caters to the intellectually bankrupt.

FLORENCE

That's why I read it.

NORA

I wouldn't even let my students read that.

FLORENCE

There's an article about our school.

NORA

I hope it's positive.

FLORENCE

It's about Schwartz.

NORA

Let me see.

NORA takes the paper.

NORA

(Reading from paper) In Norman Schwartz's final year as English assistant principal at Lincoln High School, standardized test scores rose 10%.

FLORENCE

They don't mention that he spent a weekend locked in his office changing the students' answers.

NORA

(Reading from paper) At Schwartz's final graduation appearance, the entire senior class gave him a standing ovation.

FLORENCE

They don't mention that he mooned the entire senior class.

NORA

(Reading from paper) Over the summer Schwartz informed Principal Samuel Taft of his decision to retire.

FLORENCE

They don't mention that over the summer Principal Taft told Schwartz that he had better retire or else.

NORA returns the paper to FLORENCE.

NORA

It's a shame. Schwartz was a good man.

FLORENCE

He was alright for an administrator.

NORA

It's disheartening.

FLORENCE

He was going off the deep end.

NORA

All that pressure about getting better statistics, and when he gives them what they want, they throw him under the school bus.

FLORENCE

I'm not surprised.

NORA

I wish I could have done something.

FLORENCE

What? Help him change the answers?

NORA

But to just let this happen.

FLORENCE

You could have done nothing.

NORA

As a teacher, doesn't this make you feel inadequate?

FLORENCE

I don't need this job to make me feel inadequate.

NORA

This doesn't bode well for education.

FLORENCE

The school system is a sinking ship and we're all just waiting for the lifeboat of retirement.

NORA

We could try plugging the holes.

FLORENCE

You know I'm right. And I'm boarding that boat as soon as my son finishes school.

NORA

How much longer does he have?

FLORENCE

At the rate he's going he'll have to finish up with my death benefit.

NORA

Don't be so hard on him.

FLORENCE

Just wait until you have to pay for college.

PA ANNOUNCEMENT

Will Ms. Goldberg please call the main office. Will Ms. Goldberg please call the main office.

FLORENCE marches to the PA speaker and hits it with her newspaper.

FLORENCE

She's dead. Call someone else.

NORA

What's that all about?

FLORENCE

They want me to cover another one of Susan Wagner's classes.

NORA

I still can't believe it.

NORA starts to make a pot of coffee.

Believe it.
FLORENCE

NORA
Schwartz's job couldn't have gone to a less qualified person.

FLORENCE
When you're daddy's girl, you don't have to be qualified.

*VICTORIA TURNER enters, carrying a knapsack.
She passes NORA, who is preoccupied with the
coffee, and approaches FLORENCE.*

VICTORIA
Excuse me, Ms. Goldberg?

FLORENCE
What are you doing in here?

VICTORIA
I'm looking for Ms. Wagner.

FLORENCE
She's not here.

VICTORIA
It's about my program.

FLORENCE
Then go to the programming office.

VICTORIA
But I need to see Ms. Wagner.

FLORENCE
Or go see your guidance counselor.

NORA puts down the coffee pot.

NORA
The coffee maker is broken.

FLORENCE
Like everything else around here.

Ms. O'Reilley? VICTORIA

This room isn't for students, honey. NORA

So leave. FLORENCE

This is the teachers' lounge. NORA

I know. VICTORIA

She knows. Listen to her. She knows. Isn't anything sacred anymore? Where can we hide? FLORENCE

I'm not a student. At least not anymore. VICTORIA

Victoria? NORA

Ms. O'Reilley, do you remember me? VICTORIA

Victoria Turner. How could I not remember you? Florence, remember Victoria Turner? NORA

No. FLORENCE

She was valedictorian. NORA

Don't remember. FLORENCE

You must have graduated, my God, how many years ago? NORA

Five. VICTORIA

NORA

Five years. Where does the time go? Florence, Victoria was the star of my Advanced Placement class.

FLORENCE

Whoopy-do.

NORA

One of my best students ever.

VICTORIA

Only because you made me the best, Ms. O'Reilly.

NORA

Oh, it was all you, honey. You must have your bachelor's degree by now.

VICTORIA

And my master's.

NORA

I'm so proud of you.

VICTORIA

In education.

NORA

Education?

VICTORIA

You were my inspiration.

NORA

But I wanted you to follow your heart and fulfill your deepest dreams.

VICTORIA

And I did.

NORA

Are you teaching yet?

VICTORIA

I'm about to start.

NORA

Where?

Mr. Taft just hired me.

VICTORIA

Here?

NORA

I'm the new English teacher.

VICTORIA

I don't believe it.

NORA

You must be taking Ms. Wagner's classes.

FLORENCE

I don't know. He just told me to report to her.

VICTORIA

FLORENCE hands a folder to VICTORIA.

Here's the crap I've been giving your classes. Good riddance.

FLORENCE

So what do I do now?

VICTORIA

Have a seat and start counting the years to retirement.

FLORENCE

Shouldn't I have something to give out to the students?

VICTORIA

FLORENCE gives VICTORIA a paper.

Here's your union application. You have rights, no matter what anyone around here tries to tell you.

FLORENCE

What about books?

VICTORIA

Not on your first day.

NORA

Shouldn't the students start working?

VICTORIA

NORA hands VICTORIA a stack of index cards.

NORA

Give them index cards to fill out. Name, address, favorite books, things like that.

VICTORIA

This will take the entire period?

FLORENCE

Girly, they're not rocket scientists. If they finish early, tell them they screwed up and have to do them over.

VICTORIA

Do them over?

FLORENCE

It kills 40 minutes.

VICTORIA

What about tomorrow?

FLORENCE

Go over the school regulations sheet.

NORA

Assign them seats.

FLORENCE

Slowly.

VICTORIA

Isn't that wasting too much time on non-teaching tasks?

NORA guides VICTORIA to the stage right table.

NORA

Non-teaching tasks?

FLORENCE

Daddy's girl is going to love you.

NORA

Oh, honey. You've got a lot to learn.

SAL VINCENT enters, puts down his briefcase, and proceeds to the coffee maker without breaking his stride. He tries to pour a cup of coffee.

What the hell?
SAL

It's broken.
NORA

Shit.
SAL

SAL notices VICTORIA. He hands her some change.

Hey kiddo, run down to the teacher's cafeteria and get me some coffee.
SAL

But Mr. Vincent.
VICTORIA

And if that blue-haired bitch at the register hassles you, tell her she'll have to deal with me.
SAL

Don't you remember Victoria?
NORA

Remember her? She's in my drama class.
SAL

Was in your drama class.
VICTORIA

Last year?
SAL

I was in the class that did The Taming of the Shrew.
VICTORIA

That was years ago.
SAL

I'm the new English teacher.
VICTORIA

NORA
Makes you feel old, doesn't it, Sal?

SAL
Taming of the Shrew?

VICTORIA
I hope I can make my classes as exciting as you made drama, Mr. Vincent.

SAL
Did you play Kate or Bianca?

VICTORIA
Neither. I was on the stage crew.

SAL
Such a beautiful young lady, and I didn't cast you in a major role?

NORA
Don't forget, Sal. You're married.

SAL
Separated. And soon to be divorced.

NORA
She could be your daughter.

SAL
Younger sister.

NORA
Just back off.

FELIX WHITE enters. He walks with anal-retentive precision to the refrigerator, puts in his lunch, and walks to stage right table.

FELIX
Excuse me, young lady. I beg your pardon, but I believe that you may be in the wrong place. This room is for teachers.

FLORENCE
Ask her for her ID card.

FELIX
Do you think I should?

SAL
Felix, I think you forgot something at home.

FELIX
What?

SAL
Your spine. Tell me. How do you stand in front of a class for 45 minutes without a backbone?

FELIX
Young lady, may I see your ID card?

VICTORIA
Mr. White, I don't think you remember me.

NORA
Victoria Turner, Felix.

FELIX
Ms. Turner, this room is for teachers.

VICTORIA
But I'm a teacher now.

FELIX
You must leave at once.

VICTORIA
Mr. Taft just hired me.

FELIX
Oh. Then you're in my chair. Please get up.

NORA
There are plenty of other chairs.

FELIX
But that's my chair. I always sit in that chair. Without exception. Everyone knows that. Right?

NORA
Does it really matter?

FELIX

I cannot function properly if I am not in my traditional seat.

SAL

You can't function properly period.

FELIX

(Manic) Please get out of my seat.

NORA gestures for VICTORIA to sit at the stage center table.

NORA

Over here, honey.

FELIX

Thank you very much.

FELIX takes out a handkerchief, wipes the seat and table, and sits. He then takes a laptop and office supplies from his briefcase and arranges them.

NORA

Is that a new tie, Felix?

FELIX

Yes. My mother bought it. Do you like it?

NORA

Oh yes. It's very becoming on you.

FELIX

Thank you.

NORA

You look very professional.

FELIX

I always wear a tie. My mother says that no matter how uncomfortable the weather might get, always wear a tie. And I always do. And I always make a good impression.

NORA

Maybe if Mr. Taft had seen you in that tie, you'd have made a good impression and he would have made you the new assistant principal.

FELIX

That's what my mother said.

SAL

You must be pissed-off, losing out to daddy's girl.

FELIX

I'm not a sore loser.

SAL

Not the least bit mad? Come on.

FELIX

If Mr. Taft thought that Ms. Wagner was a better choice than I, that's Mr. Taft's problem, not mine.

SAL

I think the problem is the tie.

SUSAN WAGNER enters, carrying a stack of booklets.

SUSAN

Good morning, one and all.

SAL

Not anymore.

SUSAN

I have exciting news to share with everyone.

The others ignore SUSAN.

SUSAN

I attended a very enlightening education workshop.

FELIX

What was the topic?

FLORENCE

Don't encourage her.

SUSAN notices VICTORIA.

SUSAN

Who let a student enter the teachers' lounge?

NORA

This is Victoria Turner.

SUSAN

You must leave, Ms. Turner. Immediately.

NORA

She's been looking for you.

SUSAN

I'm too busy for any students today.

VICTORIA

You don't understand.

SUSAN

I'm an assistant principal. What do you mean, I don't understand?

VICTORIA

I'm not a student.

SUSAN

You were in my class.

VICTORIA

When I was a sophomore.

SUSAN

What are you now?

VICTORIA

A teacher.

SUSAN

A teacher?

VICTORIA

I'm the new English teacher.

SUSAN

This is another one of their silly jokes.

VICTORIA

But I am the new teacher.

SUSAN

You're a senior. Who put you up to this?

FLORENCE

Taft just hired her.

SUSAN
Without consulting me?

FLORENCE
He didn't consult us when he made you assistant principal.

NORA
Aren't you going to welcome her?

SUSAN hands VICTORIA the stack of booklets.

SUSAN
Here. You can distribute these.

VICTORIA distributes the booklets to the others.

FLORENCE
What's this?

SUSAN
The English Department handbook.

NORA
Since when do we have a handbook?

SUSAN
Since I became assistant principal.

SAL
You're kidding. Who's going to follow it?

SUSAN
Everybody.

FLORENCE
This is in violation of the teachers' contract.

SUSAN
Then take it up with Mr. Taft.

FLORENCE
I will.

SUSAN
He gave me the authorization.

NORA
We don't need a handbook.

SUSAN

I see this as an opportunity to renew our commitment to education, to our school, and especially to our students.

FLORENCE

Ain't nothing for me to renew.

SUSAN

No doubt you've all noticed, as I have, a decline in our school and our department over the last few years.

NORA

No, actually. I haven't.

FLORENCE

What are you getting at?

SAL

You telling us we're not doing our jobs?

NORA

I find that offensive.

SUSAN

Not at all. Nothing could be further from the truth. All I'm saying is that we have to raise the bar.

NORA

How so?

SUSAN

How so? Test scores. Graduation rates. College admissions.

FLORENCE

These kids are morons. Don't blame us for rotten statistics.

SUSAN

Then who is to be held accountable? Are we not teachers? Are we not educators?

The bell rings.

SUSAN

And now, I believe you all have classes to teach. Our students are waiting. Please don't be tardy.

SUSAN exits.

SAL

(Mimicking) Are we not teachers? Are we not educators?

FLORENCE

I'm holding you accountable.

SAL

No, I'm holding you accountable.

FELIX

Ms. Wagner is looking to improve our school, and I think she deserves our support.

NORA

My, aren't we the gracious loser?

FELIX

I hope there's a homework policy in the handbook. We really need a good homework policy.

FELIX tries to read the booklet as he exits. He bumps into the door.

FLORENCE

I don't read student homework. Does she really think I'm going to read this?

FLORENCE throws the booklet in the trash as she exits.

SAL

Daddy's girl has got to be kidding.

SAL tears the booklet and throws it in the trash as he exits.

NORA

Not what you expected, is it, honey?

VICTORIA

Not exactly.

NORA

Having second thoughts?

VICTORIA

No.

NORA

Are you sure?

Not at all. VICTORIA

Good. NORA

Everyone looks the same. VICTORIA

It's like we're frozen in time, isn't it? NORA

All the faces, just the same. VICTORIA

Maybe a little more wrinkled. NORA

Not you, Ms. O' Reilley. VICTORIA

Oh, they're there. Just don't look too closely. My son is starting high school. NORA

He was in elementary school when I was in your class. VICTORIA

I can't believe it. NORA

I'm sure he's a very good student. VICTORIA

My little Wallace is intellectually gifted. NORA

Is he a student here? VICTORIA

Oh, no. Private school. NORA

Next thing you know, he'll be in college. VICTORIA

Ivy League, if I have anything to say. My, how the time flies NORA

VICTORIA

I can't believe Ms. Goldberg is still here.

NORA

I don't think she can either.

VICTORIA

Does she ever smile?

NORA

On the last day of school. She smiled a bit when she heard that Mr. Schwartz was leaving, but it turned back into a frown when she heard Ms. Wagner was getting his job.

VICTORIA

I don't know if I should say this, but Ms. Wagner was the worst teacher I had in this school.

NORA

You wouldn't be the first.

VICTORIA

What about Mr. White? Do the kids still steal his chalk and erasers?

NORA

Now they pull the plug on his electronic blackboard.

VICTORIA

I always felt a little sorry for him.

NORA

I guess you can call it technological progress.

VICTORIA

Mr. Vincent's class was fun.

NORA

The kids like him.

VICTORIA

He was more like an actor than a teacher.

NORA

He would certainly agree with you about that.

VICTORIA

He told us he was offered a role on a TV show but turned it down because he would have to give up teaching and would miss his classes too much.

NORA

That sounds like something he would say.

VICTORIA

No one really believed him.

NORA

He has his dreams.

VICTORIA

Ms. O'Reilley, I really meant it when I said you were my inspiration.

NORA

That's very kind of you to say.

VICTORIA

It's the truth.

NORA

I wish my current crop of students felt the same way.

VICTORIA

Even in college, I never had a better teacher.

NORA

Oh, there are better.

VICTORIA

I'd be happy to be a fraction as good as you.

NORA

The gauzy haze of nostalgia.

VICTORIA

I really mean it.

NORA

I know. And it's very sweet.

VICTORIA

But I really do.

NORA

I'd better get to class.

NORA tries to toss the booklet in the trash as she exits but misses.

NORA

I wouldn't want to be late and get Ms. Wagner all bent out of shape.

VICTORIA picks up the booklet and starts reading.

Scene Two

FLORENCE is at the stage left table, writing grades on papers.

FLORENCE

Seventy-five. Fifty-five. Zero.

VICTORIA enters, carrying a large stack of books and folders.

FLORENCE

You shouldn't be carrying all that crap.

VICTORIA

I don't have any place to keep it.

FLORENCE

Daddy's girl should have given you a place.

FLORENCE opens a file drawer and returns to her seat.

FLORENCE

Take her old drawer. It's empty.

VICTORIA puts all but a folder into the drawer.

VICTORIA

I gave my classes a writing assignment based on the short story unit we've been studying.

VICTORIA sits at the stage left table and takes a paper from the folder.

VICTORIA

I have some questions about grading them. Maybe you can help me.

FLORENCE

I'm busy.

VICTORIA hands FLORENCE the paper.

VICTORIA

I tried to use the grading rubric from Ms. Wagner's handbook, but I don't understand what any of it means.

FLORENCE writes a grade on the paper and returns it.

FLORENCE

Seventy-five.

VICTORIA

You didn't even look at it. How can you tell?

FLORENCE takes the paper, writes on it again, and returns it.

FLORENCE

Ok, fifty-five.

VICTORIA

Fifty-five?

FLORENCE

Tell him he didn't read the book.

VICTORIA

But what if he did?

FLORENCE

Is this a remedial class?

VICTORIA

Yes.

FLORENCE

Then he didn't read the book.

VICTORIA

Is that a fair characterization?

FLORENCE

If he did his reading assignments he wouldn't be in remedial.

VICTORIA

Remedial students can be motivated.

FLORENCE

Did that essay make any sense to you?

Not really. VICTORIA

Then fifty-five is a gift. FLORENCE

FELIX enters from the bathroom and scurries to the sink.

Mr. White, would you— VICTORIA

FELIX takes a roll of toilet paper from under the sink, looks up at VICTORIA and then towards the bathroom.

Never mind. VICTORIA

FELIX scurries back to the bathroom.

There's something I don't understand. FLORENCE

Yes? VICTORIA

Why, girl, why? FLORENCE

I have to grade them. VICTORIA

Get out while you can. FLORENCE

Excuse me? VICTORIA

It might look good now. Out by three, holidays off, summer vacation with pay. FLORENCE

That's not why I went into teaching. VICTORIA

I know. The help the children thing. But one of these days you'll wake up and ask yourself, "why?" Trust me. FLORENCE

VICTORIA

That won't be the case with me.

FLORENCE

That's what you say now.

VICTORIA

I went into teaching to make a difference.

FLORENCE

All of a sudden you're hitting 40; you have tenure and decide making a change would be too great a risk. The young teachers who get out fast are the smart ones.

VICTORIA

The smart ones?

FLORENCE

But until you come to your senses, there's one golden rule to always follow.

VICTORIA

Golden rule? What?

FLORENCE

Never give out the bathroom pass. Never.

VICTORIA

But what if—

FLORENCE

Never. And never, ever park near the school.

VICTORIA

I take the bus.

FLORENCE

Good. Because they'll get your car if you do.

VICTORIA

I don't think my students would.

FLORENCE

You can't be too careful.

VICTORIA

I'll keep that in mind.

FLORENCE

And try to find your niche.

VICTORIA

My niche?

FLORENCE

Grade advisor, dean, union rep. Something to get you out of the classroom.

VICTORIA

But I want to be in the classroom.

FLORENCE

If you want to be in a classroom, go back to school and study something else.

VICTORIA

I don't want to study something else.

FLORENCE

I tell my son, study business, law, something that will get you somewhere.

VICTORIA

But I don't like business or law.

FLORENCE

Neither does my son.

VICTORIA

What does he like?

FLORENCE

Spring break and frat parties.

VICTORIA

And I like teaching.

FLORENCE

In that case, stick with remedial. Nobody has any expectations so you are not expected to do much.

FELIX enters from the bathroom, wiping his hands on a paper towel, and walks to the stage right table.

FELIX

Grading essays, Ms. Turner? How wonderful. There's nothing more exciting than sinking your teeth into a well-written student essay.

FLORENCE

Don't get too excited, Felix.

FELIX

Come join me at my table. Let's have a look.

VICTORIA sits at the stage right table and hands Felix the paper.

VICTORIA

I tried using Ms. Wagner's rubric.

FELIX

This student didn't use the proper school heading.

VICTORIA

The paper has a heading.

FELIX

He put the date where the class should be and he didn't even include your name. What if the paper were misplaced? How would it be returned to you?

VICTORIA

I never thought of that.

FELIX

And the student wrote in pencil.

VICTORIA

He didn't have a pen.

FELIX

There is no excuse for being unprepared. Students must always carry two blue or black pens.

VICTORIA

I'll remind them.

FELIX starts reading the essay.

FELIX

The commas are all wrong. And the student clearly does not understand how to use a semicolon.

FELIX returns the paper to VICTORIA.

FELIX

Proper punctuation is the student writer's best friend, Ms. Turner.

VICTORIA

I'll work on it with them.

FELIX

Until you do, I cannot be of any assistance.

VICTORIA gets up as SAL enters.

VICTORIA

Mr. Vincent, maybe you can help me?

SAL

Felix, stop annoying Victoria.

VICTORIA

I'm having trouble with some student essays.

SAL

Student essays are one damn pain in the ass.

VICTORIA

The rubric from the handbook doesn't make any sense.

SAL takes the paper and glances at it.

SAL

Seventy-five.

VICTORIA

Seventy-five? You didn't even read it.

SAL

I didn't have to.

VICTORIA

Then how do you know?

SAL

It's the rule of seventy-five.

VICTORIA

What rule is that?

SAL

Seventy-five is the utilitarian, all-purpose grade. It's low enough to tell the motivated students that they need to do better, but high enough to make the slow students think that they are smarter than they are.

VICTORIA

You made that up.

SAL

In a nutshell, everyone's happy, no one complains, and no one's on your back.

VICTORIA

What about comments? Suggestions for improvement?

SAL

Students don't read comments. All they care about is the grade.

VICTORIA

Then how do they learn?

SAL

The learning is in the process. They learn by doing, or they don't learn. Whether you spend five seconds or five hours looking at their shit isn't going to change that.

SAL returns the paper to VICTORIA, who retreats to the stage center table. SAL joins FLORENCE at the stage left table.

SAL

Another mental health day?

FLORENCE

I needed it.

SAL

You have any more coming to you?

FLORENCE

Used them all.

SAL

There's always next month.

FLORENCE

How do they expect us to get by on just one sick day a month?

SAL

It's rough.

FLORENCE

And we sure got screwed with the holidays this year.

SAL

Tell me about it.

FLORENCE

Even Rosh Hashanah fell on a weekend. I'm Jewish and I couldn't even enjoy it.

SAL

I have to use my days to meet with my lawyer. My soon to be ex wants to cut me off from my daughter.

FLORENCE

I'd like to be cut off from my son. And my husband for that matter.

SAL

Want my lawyer's number?

FLORENCE

At this point, divorce isn't worth the bother.

FELIX

I've never taken a sick day.

SAL

Aren't you the school system poster boy?

FELIX

But I have been called for jury duty.

FLORENCE

Jury duty!

SAL

You struck gold.

FELIX

Of course, I had it deferred until summer vacation.

SAL

Summer vacation?

FLORENCE

Are you nuts?

FELIX

I couldn't do that to my students.

SAL

I could.

FELIX

They'd be terribly disappointed.

SAL
That they will.

FELIX
They're preparing for state examinations, after all.

SUSAN storms in holding some folders.

SUSAN
Ms. Goldberg, back from your illness, I see. Here.

FLORENCE
What's this?

SUSAN
The assignments I gave your classes.

FLORENCE
I don't want them.

SUSAN drops the folders on the stage left table.

SUSAN
You didn't leave substitute lesson plans.

FLORENCE
What do you expect me to do with them?

SUSAN
I told your classes that they would be marked and counted towards the report card grade.

FLORENCE
You gave the assignments, you mark them.

SUSAN
That is not my responsibility.

FLORENCE
What's the point of calling in sick if it creates more work?

FLORENCE drops the folders in the trash.

SUSAN
That was a blatant act of insubordination.

SAL
Doesn't someone have to be a figure of authority for it to be insubordination?

SUSAN

You all will regret your attitudes.

SAL

Put a letter in my file.

SUSAN does a quick perusal of the room.

SUSAN

Things are getting a bit untidy in here.

FELIX

My table is very tidy, Ms. Wagner.

FELIX starts to put his supplies and papers in his briefcase.

SUSAN

A lot of changes need to be made.

SAL

Then leave.

SUSAN

Mr. Schwartz was a little too lenient with you people. This is a room for professional activities.

FELIX

I always behave in a professional manner.

SUSAN

It should have a professional appearance.

FLORENCE

What about getting us an air conditioner and a copy machine that works?

SUSAN

Only work related activities should be conducted in here. No eating, no newspaper reading.

SUSAN takes a newspaper off the stage left table and tosses it in the trash.

FLORENCE

I didn't finish reading that.

SUSAN

You shouldn't have been reading it in the first place.

FELIX

I only read educational journals in this room.

FELIX exits.

SUSAN

I have a good mind to have that refrigerator removed.

SAL

You want us to starve?

SUSAN

The teachers' cafeteria is perfectly fine.

SAL

I don't see you eating down there.

SUSAN

Ms. Turner, you can be assured that the unprofessional tone in this room is about to change. If my father ever saw what went on in this school.

FLORENCE

Oh God.

SAL

Please, not the father stories.

SUSAN

I'm a third-generation educator, you know.

FLORENCE

That's frightening.

SAL

You'd figure one generation would warn the next.

SUSAN

It's in the blood.

FLORENCE

Blood is the only reason you got that job.

SUSAN

The principal would not tolerate such shenanigans.

SAL

She calls her father "the principal."

SUSAN

Well that's what he is. Or was. He's retired.

SAL

Was told to retire.

SUSAN

That's not true.

FLORENCE

In his final years he wore spats and played military marching music over the PA during the change of classes.

SUSAN

The principal was trying to instill a sense of discipline.

SAL

Like father, like daughter.

SUSAN

When I was growing up, the principal ran the household just as if it were a classroom.

FLORENCE

Beware, Victoria.

FLORENCE exits without SUSAN noticing.

SUSAN

I had an assigned seat at the dinner table.

SAL

These people are running the schools.

SAL exits without SUSAN noticing.

SUSAN

Whenever I was late, which was very rarely I assure you, I received a tardy in his attendance book. He always carried his attendance book with him. Still does.

SUSAN realizes that only VICTORIA remains. She now focuses on her.

SUSAN

Most fathers take away privileges when their children are bad and reward them when they are good. The principal gave us report cards. He always gave me excellent report cards. I was always an excellent student.

VICTORIA

I'm sure you were, Ms. Wagner.

SUSAN

The principal would expect nothing less. He was very proud of me.

VICTORIA

I'm sure he was. And I'm sure that he still is.

SUSAN

What are you suggesting, Ms. Turner?

VICTORIA

I mean, I'm sure that he's proud you are an assistant principal.

SUSAN

Of course he is. Why wouldn't he be?

VICTORIA

I don't know.

SUSAN

I won't let him down.

VICTORIA

I'm sure you won't.

SUSAN

I trust all is going well with your classes, Ms. Turner.

VICTORIA

I've been having a bit of trouble grading some papers.

SUSAN

If I can be of any assistance at all, please don't hesitate to ask.

VICTORIA

I don't quite understand your grading rubric.

SUSAN

I hope those malcontents aren't having a negative influence on you.

VICTORIA

Not at all.

SUSAN

You don't want to become one of their ilk.

VICTORIA

No, Ms. Wagner.

SUSAN

Don't believe all that union propaganda Ms. Goldberg will try to push on you.

VICTORIA

I won't.

SUSAN

All this talk of teachers' rights. It's just an attempt to get out of doing their jobs.

VICTORIA

I'll keep that in mind.

SUSAN

Mr. White is harmless enough. He's probably the most qualified educator in the department, next to myself, of course. If you need help and I'm not around, go to him.

VICTORIA

About that help.

SUSAN

But he's just so milquetoast. The principal would never put up with such spinelessness. As for Mr. Vincent, he still thinks he's going to be a movie star. What a laugh. You know, he even took a leave one year to go to Hollywood.

VICTORIA

He's a very good drama teacher.

SUSAN

They sent that no-talent back fast. Over-the-hill washout. He still thinks he's a kid. Look closely at that hair. He thinks no one notices that it's dyed.

VICTORIA

It looks natural to me.

SUSAN

And Ms. O'Reilley. Hah. She thinks she's smarter than everyone else with her fancy Ivy League degrees.

VICTORIA

Ms. O'Reilley is very smart.

SUSAN

Oh, she puts on a good act. But I know better, and she knows that I know better.

VICTORIA

Ms. O' Reilley was my best teacher.

SUSAN

And this phoniness about caring for the students.

VICTORIA

She does care.

SUSAN

She can't stand the students.

VICTORIA

That's not true.

SUSAN

Then why doesn't she let her son go to this school?

VICTORIA

I'm sure she has her reasons.

SUSAN

I'm sure she does. Don't let them fool you.

VICTORIA

They won't, Ms. Wagner.

SUSAN

Everyone around here is out for themselves.

VICTORIA

I'm starting to see that.

SUSAN

The principal warned me about envious, conniving colleagues.

VICTORIA

One has to be careful.

SUSAN

There's a conspiracy afoot. Don't let yourself be drawn in.

VICTORIA

I won't, Ms. Wagner.

SUSAN

New teachers are especially vulnerable.

VICTORIA

I'll be careful.

SUSAN

You don't want to be sucked into the machination.

SUSAN exits. Exasperated, VICTORIA returns to her papers.

Scene Three

SAL is at the stage center table, engrossed in a magazine. FELIX is at the stage right table, also reading a magazine.

FELIX

Is that an educational journal you're reading?

SAL

Yeah, it's very educational.

FELIX

I love to keep abreast of educational issues.

SAL

It's one of my hobbies.

FELIX

What's the topic?

SAL

The best places to meet women.

FELIX

I'm reading about the reintroduction of punctuation into the high school English class.

SAL

Keep reading.

FELIX

Punctuation is my passion.

SAL

Wine and women are mine.

FELIX

I'm preparing a professional development workshop on the teaching of punctuation.

SAL

Save me a front row seat.

FELIX

Can I share something with you?

SAL

About punctuation? I don't think so.

FELIX

I'm on the prowl.

SAL

The prowl?

FELIX

For a lady.

SAL

Is that so, Felix?

FELIX

I thought maybe you could offer me a few tips.

SAL

Tips?

FELIX

I'm looking for Ms. Right.

SAL

Ms. Right for what?

FELIX

Ms. Right to be Mrs. White.

SAL

I wouldn't know where to start.

FELIX

Maybe you have a friend, or have a friend who knows somebody.

SAL

I'd like to keep the few friends that I have.

FELIX

My mother says that any girl who lands me should count her blessings.

SAL

Because you're such a blessing, Felix.

FELIX

I won't just settle for anyone, you know.

SAL

You wouldn't be the one settling.

FELIX

Do you have any advice you could offer me?

SAL

Settle.

FELIX

Settle?

SAL

Hey. Maybe you can woo someone at your punctuation workshop.

FELIX

Do you really think so?

SAL

You'll make them swoon, Felix.

FELIX

Proper punctuation will do that.

SAL

It does it to me.

FELIX

And me too.

SAL

They'll be begging you to get between their parentheses.

FELIX

That's obscene.

SAL

Of course it's obscene. Who gets excited over punctuation?

FELIX

One day you will regret your disdain of punctuation.

SAL

You're the only one who gives a damn about punctuation.

NORA enters wearing a full-length plain black dress with a scarlet "A" across the chest.

NORA

Pearl? Pearl? Where is my Pearl?

SAL approaches NORA from behind and puts his hands around her waist.

SAL

Ravishing Hester, if I were Arthur Dimmesdale, I'd have grabbed you in the forest too.

FELIX

Punctuation is very important.

NORA

Have you seen my Pearl?

SAL

No, but he's seen a few misplaced commas.

NORA

Oh my. Call the punctuation police.

SAL

He might have us arrested and sent to professional development.

NORA

Give me a long jail sentence over professional development.

FELIX

I call my workshop "pertinent punctuation pointers."

NORA

Alliterative. How exciting.

FELIX

It happens to be very beneficial to the students. And interesting.

NORA

I bet.

SAL

Hey wait. Felix may be right.

FELIX

Of course I'm right.

SAL

Two students in my drama class were arguing about the period.

FELIX

See? Students are concerned about the proper use of punctuation. What specifically was the argument over?

SAL

Can a girl get pregnant when she's having her period?

FELIX

Laugh now. We'll see who has the last laugh at exam time. (*FELIX returns to his magazine.*)

SAL

So Nora, aren't you bringing out Hester a bit early?

NORA

What can I do? They're a rough group this year.

SAL

My drama class is the only one I can stand.

FELIX

I enjoy all my students. Each and every one.

SAL

They sure don't enjoy you.

NORA

I can't get them to read.

SAL

The teacher who can figure that one out should be given a million dollars.

FELIX

Pop quizzes. An oldie but a goodie.

NORA

I don't want to just make them read. I want to make them want to read.

SAL

Then don't teach The Scarlet Letter.

NORA

High school students should be exposed to the classics.

SAL

Should be, yes. Are willing to be, no.

FELIX

Gimmicks have no place in the high school classroom.

NORA

I don't partake in shtick. But I have to keep the interest up.

SAL

Yours or theirs?

NORA

Hey.

SAL

After so many years this can get a bit tedious.

FELIX

Not for me.

NORA

They seem so much harder to motivate.

SAL

That they are.

NORA

They're not exactly the most academically inclined group we've ever had.

SAL

No, they're not.

VICTORIA enters.

PA ANNOUNCEMENT

May I have your attention. The eagle has landed. I repeat, the eagle has landed.

SAL and FELIX stampede out of the lounge, practically knocking VICTORIA over. A few moments later, FLORENCE stampedes out of the bathroom, also almost knocking her over.

NORA

Why don't you get your check, honey?

VICTORIA

It's not there.

NORA

Why not?

VICTORIA

I'm not on the payroll.

NORA

Not yet? It's been over a month.

VICTORIA

Somebody at the district office entered my social security number incorrectly into the computer system.

NORA

Oh boy. An education bureaucrat plus a computer equals disaster.

VICTORIA

I talked to the payroll secretary. She told me to call the personnel director at the district office. She wouldn't talk to me, but her assistant told me to call the assistant to the director of the Office of Salary Status. He told me to call the head of the High School Staffing Unit, who told me not to believe what assistants say and to talk to the director of the Office of Salary Status. She told me to call the Office of Human Resources, who told me that I'd passed away on the 30th of August and should contact the state pension system about collecting my death benefit.

NORA

How typical.

VICTORIA

What do I do now? My student loans are starting to come due.

NORA

Did you talk to Florence? The union should be able to do something about this.

VICTORIA

She said that I should collect my death benefit and spend it before they figure out that they made a mistake.

NORA

Can't your parents help you?

VICTORIA
They've done enough for me already.

NORA
But you're their daughter.

VICTORIA
They can barely pay their own bills.

NORA
There's got to be a way.

VICTORIA
I guess I could ask my boyfriend.

NORA
So there is a way.

VICTORIA
I suppose.

NORA
What's your boyfriend's name?

VICTORIA
Thomas.

NORA
Is Thomas a teacher too?

VICTORIA
An electrician. He works for his father.

NORA
He must be very proud of you.

VICTORIA
He's not too happy about all the time I have to put into marking and prepping.

NORA
I've forgotten how time consuming those first years can be.

VICTORIA
When he leaves his job he actually leaves it. It seems like I'm a teacher 24/7.

NORA
That will change.

VICTORIA

Being a teacher means everything to me. It's all I ever wanted. I don't think Thomas understands that.

NORA

My God, I remember my first years.

VICTORIA

Was your stomach always in a knot?

NORA

With excitement. I was so excited. Young and excited. Just like you.

VICTORIA

In college the professors made teaching seem so noble.

NORA

When I was your age I believed that I could make the world a better place.

VICTORIA

You mean like they did in the 1960s?

NORA

How old do you think I am?

VICTORIA

You did a unit on 1960s American literature with my class.

NORA

You remember that unit?

VICTORIA

You made it seem like such a vibrant time.

NORA

You were in a vibrant class.

VICTORIA

And what about now?

NORA

Now?

VICTORIA

Do you still believe that you can make the world a better place?

NORA

Time isn't always so kind.

VICTORIA

Ms. O'Reilley, can I ask you something?

NORA

Of course, honey.

VICTORIA

Why are you dressed like Hester Prynne?

NORA

Wild, isn't it? I'm teaching The Scarlet Letter.

VICTORIA

But a costume?

NORA

I'm trying to bring the book alive for the kids. They don't want to talk about a bunch of anal-retentive Puritans. But if I can show them that Hester was a sensuous, passionate woman who was made to suffer, maybe—

VICTORIA

Maybe what?

NORA

Maybe I can hold their attention for a few fleeting moments.

VICTORIA

You never resorted to wearing costumes when you were teaching my class.

NORA

Your class was another breed. You were on a higher level.

VICTORIA

I don't think we were any different.

NORA

There's a world of difference.

VICTORIA

Is dressing as Hester Prynne acceptable educational methodology?

NORA

Acceptable educational methodology? Oh, honey.

VICTORIA

What's so funny?

NORA

Victoria, forget all those mumbo-jumbo theories you learned in your education classes.

VICTORIA

Mumbo-jumbo?

NORA

They're all meaningless.

VICTORIA

Is everything meaningless around here?

NORA

Of course not.

VICTORIA

It sure seems that way.

NORA

A lot around here is not what it seems.

VICTORIA

Does anyone in this school take teaching seriously?

NORA

We wouldn't be here if we didn't.

VICTORIA

It wasn't like this when I was a student.

NORA

You're just seeing things from a different perspective.

VICTORIA

Am I?

NORA

You need time to adjust.

VICTORIA

I've been teaching for almost two months.

NORA

It takes a lot longer than two months.

VICTORIA

Maybe it does.

Of course it does. NORA

Maybe you're right. VICTORIA

Of course I am. NORA

Maybe everything I learned is mumbo-jumbo. VICTORIA

What's wrong, honey? NORA

Nothing I do is working. VICTORIA

What's not working? NORA

I tried cooperative learning. VICTORIA

And? NORA

They don't cooperate. VICTORIA

Sounds like my classes too. NORA

I tried establishing class rules and enforcing them. VICTORIA

Classroom management is tough at the start. NORA

Then they realized that if I enforced the rules they'd all fail so they stopped following them. VICTORIA

They know the game. NORA

They don't pay attention. They don't do their homework. VICTORIA

Tell me about it. NORA

Maybe I've made a mistake becoming a teacher. VICTORIA

Don't say that. NORA

A big, big mistake. VICTORIA

You're being too hard on yourself. NORA

I should have gone into something else. VICTORIA

What else were you considering? NORA

I only considered teaching. VICTORIA

So you made the right choice. NORA

Everyone warned me. Don't go into teaching. VICTORIA

Who? NORA

Everybody. My friends. My family. VICTORIA

You can only listen to yourself. NORA

Last Friday after my final class I sat in the back of the room and closed my eyes. And I realized that after all this time in college—I don't know what I'm doing. VICTORIA

VICTORIA starts sobbing.

Oh, honey. NORA

What a mistake.

VICTORIA

It's all part of being a new teacher.

NORA

A big, big mistake.

VICTORIA

Everybody feels like that at the beginning. Everybody.

NORA

NORA embraces VICTORIA.

Scene Four

FLORENCE is at the stage left table, stapling together papers. FELIX is at the stage right table, working intently at his laptop.

Take a look at my union newsletter.

FLORENCE

I'm occupied.

FELIX

Doing what?

FLORENCE

Developing a lesson plan.

FELIX

Are you still developing those things?

FLORENCE

I like to keep my instruction fresh.

FELIX

Can't you just recycle the same shit like the rest of us?

FLORENCE

My lessons reflect the new standards.

FELIX

New standards? Haven't you heard, Felix? There's nothing new under the sun.

FLORENCE

FELIX

Oh, I beg to differ. These are exciting times in education.

FLORENCE

I'll try to contain my enthusiasm.

FELIX

Done! I've reached my instructional objective, included relevant core standards, and tied everything up neatly in my summary.

FLORENCE hands FELIX a newsletter.

FLORENCE

These are the issues we're going to discuss at this month's union meeting.

FELIX

I can't attend.

FLORENCE

Why not?

FELIX

I'm otherwise engaged.

FLORENCE

Doing what? You don't have a life outside of this job.

FELIX

If you must know, I don't approve of the union's agenda.

FLORENCE

What's wrong with it?

FELIX

It protects loafers and malcontents.

FLORENCE

If the union isn't going to protect us, who is?

FELIX

A teacher who is doing his or her job has no need for protection.

FELIX returns to his laptop.

FLORENCE

Just wait until they come gunning for you.

SAL enters. *FLORENCE* hands him a flyer.

FLORENCE

Sal, I know I can count on you for today's meeting.

SAL

Not this time.

FLORENCE

Why not?

SAL

I have to deal with the miserable shrew.

FLORENCE

First item on my agenda is Susan Wagner.

SAL

I mean my wife.

FLORENCE

Oh, that shrew.

SAL

I'm meeting with my lawyer. My divorce is final next week.

FLORENCE

Well it's about time.

SAL

I may be the actor, but she's the drama queen. She's made the divorce more difficult than the marriage.

FLORENCE

How bad?

SAL

Right now all I care about is my daughter.

FLORENCE

Your wife is getting custody?

SAL

My lawyer says there's not much I can do about that.

FLORENCE

How old is she now?

SAL

She'll be ten.

FLORENCE

Mine will be twenty-two. He's as useless as his father.

SAL

Twelve years of marriage hell.

FLORENCE

Twenty-nine for me.

SAL

How do you do it?

FLORENCE

Marty and I ignore each other.

SAL

I tried that.

FLORENCE

I'm a football widow.

SAL

It didn't work.

FLORENCE

I dread the end of football season.

FELIX

You two make a mockery of the marriage institution.

SAL

You try marriage and then see what you have to say.

FELIX

I most certainly intend to.

SAL looks over FELIX's shoulder.

SAL

What's that you're looking at, Felix?

FELIX

What I look at is private.

SAL

That doesn't look like an educational website to me.

FELIX

What I look at is my business, not yours.

SAL

Is that a dating website?

SAL tries to get a better look but FELIX closes the laptop.

FELIX

That's none of your business.

SAL

Does your mother know about this, Felix?

FELIX

My mother need not know everything I do.

NORA enters dressed as Daisy Buchanan from The Great Gatsby. She's carrying a portable CD player.

NORA

Is everyone here for my party?

SAL

I hope you have some bootleg gin.

NORA puts the CD player down and turns it on. Twenties jazz plays as she starts dancing the Charleston.

FLORENCE

Who the hell is she now?

FELIX

I believe that Ms. O'Reilley is a flapper.

NORA

Dance with me, Jay.

SAL starts dancing as well.

SAL

What happened to Hester?

NORA

Hester is my honors class.

Then who's Daisy?
SAL

Daisy is my non-honors class.
NORA

Ms. Wagner should not tolerate this behavior.
FELIX

That so, Felix?
SAL

NORA pulls FELIX out of his seat. SAL stops dancing and steps away.

You go, Felix.
SAL

FELIX stands motionless while NORA dances around him.

Come on, Felix. Shake that booty.
NORA

Go Felix. Go go go.
SAL

Stop it. Stop it. You two just stop it.
FELIX

FELIX returns to the stage right table.

Felix, your tie is crooked.
SAL

VICTORIA enters. NORA approaches her and dances a few Charleston steps.

I'm teaching Gatsby. Like?
NORA

VICTORIA turns off the music.

Mr. Taft came to visit my class today.
VICTORIA

Unannounced?
NORA

I don't like this. SAL

So what did he say? NORA

Nothing. VICTORIA

Nothing? NORA

He just sat in the back of the class and watched. VICTORIA

How long did he stay? SAL

For the whole period. He left just before the bell. VICTORIA

And he didn't even say anything when he left? NORA

No. But he wrote a lot on his clipboard. VICTORIA

His clipboard? NORA

He had his clipboard with him? SAL

Was it a formal observation? FELIX

Formal? I don't know. I guess. VICTORIA

Mr. Taft always brings his clipboard to formal observations. FELIX

So it was a formal observation? VICTORIA

Looks like it was. SAL

NORA

Taft should not be doing a surprise formal observation on a new teacher.

VICTORIA

Then why did he do one on me? Is something wrong?

FLORENCE

Don't worry too much about it.

VICTORIA

Should I be worried?

FLORENCE

You're a union member and you have rights.

VICTORIA

Rights?

FLORENCE

To protect you.

VICTORIA

Protect me from what?

NORA

Don't scare her, Florence.

FLORENCE

If more teachers stood up for their rights we wouldn't be the punching bags we've become.

NORA

For all we know, Taft thought it was a wonderful lesson.

VICTORIA exits to the bathroom.

SAL

Wonderful lesson? Taft eats new teachers for lunch.

NORA

Well not Victoria.

FLORENCE

Lunch?

NORA

I'm not going to let that happen.

FLORENCE

I'm starving. Anyone else want the lunch lady special?

SAL

What is she trying to pass off as food today?

FLORENCE

Meatball heroes with mashed potatoes.

NORA

How yummy.

FELIX

You mean slaughterhouse scraps and meat-by-products smothered in a chemically flavored brown sauce with reconstituted potato particles on the side.

FLORENCE

Who asked you?

FELIX

I have a nutritious lunch. Tuna fish, packed in water of course, with fat-free mayonnaise on oat bran bread. For dessert—

FLORENCE

For dessert I'm having one of those packaged goodies in which partially hydrogenated vegetable oil and high fructose corn syrup are the two best ingredients. I don't care what kind of fruit you brought with you today.

FELIX

An orange, for anyone who wants to know.

NORA

Florence, those school lunches will send you to the grave.

FLORENCE

If this job hasn't killed me by now, nothing will.

FLORENCE exits as SUSAN enters.

SUSAN

Mr. Vincent, you missed our meeting.

SAL

What meeting?

SUSAN

I put a memo in your mailbox.

SAL

Then it must be in the circular file.

SUSAN

We need to discuss your students' play.

SAL

I gave you a copy.

SUSAN

And I've read it.

SAL

Pretty good, isn't it?

SUSAN

Some of the situations and some of the subject matter are a bit inappropriate for our student body.

SAL

It's a play by teenagers about teenagers. What's inappropriate?

SUSAN

I'd like to meet with you and the two young ladies to discuss what needs modification.

SAL

Modification?

SUSAN

Yes, modification.

SAL

No way. Absolutely not.

SUSAN

Excuse me?

SAL

Those girls, my entire class, worked very hard on this play and you are not going to step in and ruin it for them.

SUSAN

If you'd done your job as a drama teacher, you'd have realized the inappropriateness of the play and required changes. Since you didn't, I'm forced to step in.

SAL

You're not changing a thing. As drama teacher, my job is to foster and protect creativity and self-expression. That is my responsibility.

SUSAN

The alternative is to cancel the production to prevent offending parents, school board members, and others, and casting a negative light on the school. As assistant principal, that is my responsibility.

SAL

You just try to cancel my students' play.

NORA steps between them and starts dancing the Charleston with SAL.

SUSAN

Another costume, I see.

NORA

I'm transporting my students back to the Roaring Twenties.

SUSAN

The Roaring Twenties? Don't forget, Ms. O'Reilly, that you teach English and not history.

NORA stops dancing.

NORA

I'm teaching The Great Gatsby.

FELIX

The Great Gatsby is a novel set in the 1920s, Ms. Wagner.

SUSAN

I knew that. Are you suggesting that I didn't know that?

FELIX

Of course not, Ms. Wagner.

VICTORIA enters from the bathroom.

SUSAN

Ms. Turner, I understand that Mr. Taft visited your class today. I need to discuss that visit with you.

NORA

What, exactly, do you need to discuss?

SUSAN

This is between Ms. Turner and myself.

NORA

I'm concerned about Ms. Turner.

SUSAN

Your concern is duly noted, but I'm the supervisor.

VICTORIA sits at the stage left table as SUSAN glances at her clipboard.

SUSAN

According to Mr. Taft, you need a lot of help, and I'm going to provide that help. I'm going to observe some of your classes so I can see what you're doing wrong.

VICTORIA

Wrong?

NORA

What about what she's doing right?

SUSAN

Do you mind, Ms. O'Reilley?

NORA

Yes, I do mind. I mind the negativity.

SUSAN

There's nothing negative about constructive administrative intervention.

NORA

Constructive administrative intervention. An oxymoron if I ever heard one.

SAL

Straight from the mouth of a moron.

FELIX

Is that an appropriate comment to make to Ms. Wagner?

SAL

Don't you have your mother's nutritious lunch to eat?

FELIX

It's not twelve-thirty yet.

SUSAN

And then, Ms. Turner, I'm going to model some instructional techniques in your classes so you can see how a master teacher performs.

Master teacher? NORA

You? SAL

Do you think all this interference on your part is really necessary? NORA

Interference? SUSAN

Intervention. NORA

Intervention on behalf of new teachers is one of my functions. SUSAN

With all the new responsibilities you have, do you really need one more thing to worry about? NORA

Are you suggesting that I ignore my responsibility? SUSAN

Not at all. NORA

What greater responsibility can I assume than the guidance of an inexperienced new teacher? SUSAN

I can mentor Victoria. NORA

I don't know if that's feasible. SUSAN

I can find the time. NORA

You, or this Great Gatsby woman, or that woman who wears the "A", or whatever character you dress up as next time. SUSAN

Hester Prynne and Daisy Buchanan. NORA

Whoever. SUSAN

At least know their names. NORA

I can't keep track of everything. SUSAN

So leave Victoria to me. NORA

Ms. O'Reilley, in all good conscience, I can't do that. SUSAN

And why not? NORA

You haven't exactly been engaging in proper pedagogical practice. SUSAN

Proper pedagogical practice? NORA

Try saying that fast five times. SAL

The rest of the school thinks you've lost your marbles. SUSAN

I don't care what they think. NORA

And parents have complained. SUSAN

That's nonsense. You're making that up. NORA

Both Mr. Taft and myself have received complaints from irate parents. SUSAN

Whose parents? NORA

Parents. I don't remember their names. SUSAN

NORA

Well you should remember their names if you're going to take heed of their complaints.

SUSAN

Ms. Turner, we'll finish this discussion in my office. Now.

SUSAN marches out.

VICTORIA

Now what do I do, Ms. O'Reilley?

NORA

You're certainly not going to take anything she says seriously.

VICTORIA

I can't just defy her.

NORA

Pay her lip service. Listen to what she says and thank her for the advice.

VICTORIA

But her advice is never of any help.

NORA

You come to me for help.

SAL

Or me.

NORA

Now go. Listen. Play the game.

VICTORIA exits.

FELIX

Education is not a game, Ms. O'Reilley.

SAL

Around here it's a joke.

NORA

I have a bad feeling about this.

Scene Five

FLORENCE is at the stage left table unwrapping a sandwich. NORA, dressed in her regular clothes, enters.

NORA
Another lunch lady special?

FLORENCE
Pigeon posing as turkey.

NORA
How scrumptious.

FLORENCE
Can I offer a bite?

NORA
I'd rather eat the rats scurrying about the cafeteria kitchen.

FLORENCE
Who are you supposed to be today?

NORA
Myself. I'm between books.

FLORENCE
What if your classes don't recognize you?

NORA
I noticed you had a visitor in your 3rd period class.

FLORENCE
Intruder is more like it.

NORA
She had her clipboard too.

FLORENCE
Surprise observation. The hutzpah.

NORA
How did it go?

FLORENCE
Harassment by observation. She figures if she takes out the union rep she'll neutralize everyone else.

As if we're the enemy. NORA

Does she know who she's dealing with? FLORENCE

Better you than Victoria. NORA

The day you were absent, Victoria bugged me with question after question. FLORENCE

I hope you were helpful. NORA

Even during lunch. FLORENCE

You weren't grouchy with her? NORA

She wouldn't leave me alone. FLORENCE

She's inexperienced. NORA

Is that my problem? FLORENCE

She's looking for guidance. NORA

She actually thought I could help her. FLORENCE

What an unrealistic thing to expect from a teacher. NORA

She should have gone to Sal. FLORENCE

You could have at least made an effort. NORA

I tried to answer her questions. FLORENCE

NORA
You should have tried harder.

FLORENCE
What do you expect?

NORA
She needs confidence. She wants people to believe in her. Is that too much to ask?

FLORENCE
She gets that from you.

NORA
She should get it from everybody.

FLORENCE
I don't know why you bother.

NORA
Bother?

FLORENCE
You're wasting your time.

NORA
Helping a bright and eager young teacher is not a waste of time.

FLORENCE
If she's really bright and you really want to help her, tell her to quit and find a better profession.

NORA
This is the profession she wants. She wants to have an impact. She wants to make a difference.

FLORENCE
Hey look, you and I both know that no one around here makes one damn bit of difference.

NORA
Speak for yourself.

FLORENCE
I speak for everyone.

NORA
You don't speak for me.

FLORENCE

Sure I do. You just won't admit it. We have no impact and we make no difference.

NORA

I most certainly do.

FLORENCE

You don't think these kids can be educated.

NORA

That's not true.

FLORENCE

Sure it is. That's why instead of teaching them you dress like a clown and put on a freak show.

NORA

Freak show?

FLORENCE

Keep them amused and the time will go faster.

NORA

You can go to hell.

VICTORIA enters holding some booklets.

VICTORIA

Ms. O' Reilley, are you busy?

NORA

For you, never.

VICTORIA

Everything OK?

NORA

I'm fine. Just tired.

VICTORIA

Ms. Wagner gave me more teaching guides. Like all the others she's given me, they make no sense at all.

NORA

When they make sense, that's when you should worry.

NORA takes the booklets and looks at them one by one.

NORA

Written by someone who never set foot in a classroom. Put out by a publisher with a big school contract. Developed at an educational think tank.

NORA tosses them into the trash.

NORA

Rubbish, all of it.

VICTORIA

Ms. Wagner says that I should be using data based instruction. Based on my assessments and prior standardized assessments given by the state, I should find appropriate instructional objectives from the core standards, being sure to vary my methodology so as to incorporate differentiated instruction so as to reach every student in the class.

NORA

She said all that without stopping to breathe?

VICTORIA

This language made no sense in grad school. What does it all mean?

NORA

I haven't a clue.

VICTORIA

I'll have to do this over the weekend.

NORA

I'm sure your boyfriend won't be happy about that.

VICTORIA

No, he won't. He's getting madder and madder about how little time I've been spending with him.

FLORENCE

Look Victoria, I'm sure your intentions are good, but don't waste your weekend.

VICTORIA

I don't have much choice, do I?

FLORENCE

The kids aren't worth the effort. They don't appreciate it.

NORA

Maybe in your case there's nothing to appreciate.

FLORENCE

These kids don't appreciate anything. What's the point of wearing yourself out for them?

She cares. NORA

Victoria, you want some real advice? FLORENCE

Haven't you said enough? NORA

Teach gym. FLORENCE

Gym? VICTORIA

You don't have to work. FLORENCE

I was an English major. I don't think I'm qualified. VICTORIA

Can you scratch your butt and burp at the same time? FLORENCE

Good thing you never became a gym teacher, Florence. The kids would walk out on crutches. NORA

More sit-ups. One thousand one, one thousand two. FLORENCE

I don't understand why my dream of being a teacher is such a joke to you. VICTORIA

I've been doing this job a long time. I know what I'm talking about. FLORENCE

When I was a student I thought your anger and indifference were an act. VICTORIA

Oh, they're real. NORA

Why are you still a teacher? VICTORIA

FLORENCE

I know I come across as this burnt out, cynical timecard puncher counting the minutes to retirement.

NORA

Well that's what you are.

FLORENCE

Maybe. But I ask you. If kids cared about being educated—If teachers were treated with respect—If our rights and benefits weren't being chipped away bit by bit—Don't you think I'd be different?

NORA

No.

VICTORIA

Why did you become a teacher?

NORA

Yeah Florence, why?

VICTORIA

I picture you as something else.

FLORENCE

Like a doctor or a lawyer?

VICTORIA

Maybe a prison matron.

FLORENCE

I took a vocational aptitude test.

VICTORIA

And the result was teacher?

FLORENCE

Who'd have thought you could fail a vocational aptitude test?

VICTORIA

You should have taken the test again.

FLORENCE

I wanted to be a lawyer.

NORA

I never knew that.

VICTORIA

Then you should have gone to law school.

FLORENCE

Easier said than done.

VICTORIA

What happened?

FLORENCE

I didn't have the grades and my parents didn't have the money.

VICTORIA

I'm sorry.

FLORENCE

I had to be practical.

SUSAN enters carrying a folder.

SUSAN

Ms. Turner, I need to see you right away.

FLORENCE

Not so fast.

SUSAN

This doesn't concern you, Ms. Goldberg.

FLORENCE

What the hell were you doing in my class?

SUSAN

This isn't the time.

FLORENCE

Then make it the time.

SUSAN

What was I doing? My job, Ms. Goldberg. My job.

FLORENCE

Unannounced?

SUSAN

I don't need an appointment.

FLORENCE

No one walks in unannounced on me.

SUSAN

As assistant principal, it's my right and obligation. And the question should be, "What were you doing in your class?" Certainly not your job.

FLORENCE

You're targeting the wrong teacher.

SUSAN

We'll discuss this at your post-observation conference.

FLORENCE

I want to discuss it now.

SUSAN

I have a professional responsibility to maintain teaching standards in this department.

FLORENCE

Don't pull that professional responsibility crap with me.

SUSAN

You did not have a properly planned lesson.

FLORENCE

Of course I did.

SUSAN

Your class was watching a movie.

FLORENCE

Of the book they were reading.

SUSAN

Where was the student engagement in the lesson?

FLORENCE

They had a worksheet.

SUSAN

In this day and age, a worksheet just doesn't cut it.

FLORENCE

There's nothing wrong with a worksheet.

SUSAN

Which is why your lesson will be rated unsatisfactory.

FLORENCE

You check the teacher contract.

SUSAN

The teacher contract?

FLORENCE

My lesson had everything that is required.

SUSAN

I answer to a higher standard than the teacher contract.

FLORENCE

The union won't stand for this.

SUSAN

Your toothless union can't defend teacher incompetence.

FLORENCE

You picked the wrong battle.

FLORENCE storms out. SUSAN turns to VICTORIA and hands her a paper from her folder.

SUSAN

Does this essay look familiar, Ms. Turner?

VICTORIA

This is James Dylan's essay. I graded it and returned it last week.

NORA takes the essay and starts reading it.

SUSAN

And what grade did you give that essay?

VICTORIA

A failing grade.

SUSAN

What kind of a message does a failing grade send to a student?

VICTORIA

He didn't read the book.

SUSAN

I was on the phone with James's mother for almost an hour. Do you know who James's mother is?

VICTORIA

No.

SUSAN

She's Mrs. Dylan, president of the parents association. She was very upset with that grade. The grade will have to be changed.

NORA

You're letting a parent tell you how to do your job?

SUSAN

I'm listening to the concerns of an apprehensive parent.

NORA

Did you read this essay?

SUSAN

Of course I read the essay.

NORA

And you don't think it deserves to fail?

SUSAN

According to the departmental rubric, this is an excellent literary essay.

NORA

His chosen book is "All My Raisins in the Son."

SUSAN

An appropriate choice for this essay.

NORA

"All My Raisins in the Son?"

SUSAN

"All My Raisins in the Son" is the beautiful yet heartbreaking story of an African American family, of color, whose son's plane is shot down over Vietnam.

NORA

There's no such book as "All My Raisins in the Son."

SUSAN

Ms. Turner taught that book. It's a wonderful book.

VICTORIA

I taught All My Sons and A Raisin in the Sun.

SUSAN

He got the titles mixed up.

NORA

How can you expect Ms. Turner to pass the student if he wrote about a nonexistent book?

SUSAN

He followed the rubric. He demonstrated mastery of the core standards for the English curriculum. Whether the book he wrote about actually exists is irrelevant.

NORA

What kind of standards would make the literature in a literary essay irrelevant?

SUSAN

Obviously you are not familiar with the latest in educational theory and policy.

SUSAN exits.

NORA

Obviously.

NORA tears the essay and throws it away.

Scene Six

FLORENCE is at the stage left table going through a folder. SAL enters, enraged.

SAL

This is outrageous.

FLORENCE

It takes a lot to be outrageous around here.

SAL

Susan Wagner has pushed me too far.

FLORENCE

You and everyone else.

SAL

I want to file a grievance.

FLORENCE hands SAL a paper.

Fill it out and put it in my mailbox. FLORENCE

Your mailbox? SAL

What more do you want? FLORENCE

I want something done. SAL

Grievances take time. FLORENCE

I don't have time. SAL

That's the way the system works. FLORENCE

Some system. SAL

I didn't create it. FLORENCE

How long will this take? SAL

The union is still handling grievances from last year. FLORENCE

Last year? SAL

Justice takes time. FLORENCE

What kind of a union is this? SAL

We live in an anti-union world. FLORENCE

What are we paying dues for? SAL

FLORENCE

You think you can do a better job, you run for union rep after I retire.

SAL

Maybe I will.

FLORENCE

You'll see it's not so easy.

NORA enters dressed as Blanche Dubois from A Streetcar Named Desire.

NORA

They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, but I ended up at this godforsaken school.

FLORENCE

Who the hell are you today?

NORA

Why, Mr. Kowalski, is my acting off today? Ms. Goldberg knows not who I am.

NORA drops into a seat at the stage center table.

NORA

My God, I'm exhausted.

SAL

Rough day?

NORA

I don't know what's gotten into these kids.

FLORENCE

I'm sure a lot of it is illegal.

NORA

Maybe they're too immature for Streetcar.

SAL

They're juniors, aren't they?

NORA

They might as well be junior high school.

FLORENCE

You give these kids too much credit.

NORA

You should have heard them hooting and howling like a bunch of Stanley Kowalskis.

FLORENCE

What do you expect, dressed like that?

SAL

What happened?

NORA

We were discussing Blanche and her past. The way they reacted you'd have thought I'd stripped naked.

FLORENCE

The union couldn't help you if did that.

SAL

The union couldn't help you if you had a hangnail.

NORA

I had to stop the class. I never had to stop a class before.

SAL

Teachers have bad days. Even the best of us.

NORA

Not I. Or at least until recently, not I.

NORA exits to the bathroom. VICTORIA enters.

VICTORIA

I've never seen this much commotion in the hall.

FLORENCE

I try not to walk in the hall during the change of classes.

VICTORIA

I almost got knocked over.

SAL

Put your stuff down. Relax.

SAL guides VICTORIA to the center table.

VICTORIA

I'm looking forward to your class's play, Mr. Vincent.

SAL

There's nothing to look forward to.

VICTORIA

I told my students that if they attend they'll get extra-credit.

SAL

There isn't going to be a play.

VICTORIA

Why not?

SAL

Susan Wagner cancelled it.

FLORENCE

She did what?

SAL

Hence my grievance.

FLORENCE

I'll talk to Taft.

SAL

He already told me he must defer to Ms. Wagner's decision.

VICTORIA

But your class worked so hard. I saw them rehearse. They were very good.

SAL

My daughter was coming to the show. She wanted to see what Daddy does.

FLORENCE

Better she not know.

VICTORIA

Does she want to be an actress?

SAL

Not if she wants heartbreak and rejection and total humiliation.

FLORENCE

Tell her not to become a teacher either.

SAL

I don't get to tell her much of anything anymore. My time with my daughter is becoming more and more fleeting.

SUSAN enters.

Where is Ms. O'Reilley?
SUSAN

We have to talk.
SAL

Make an appointment.
SUSAN

We have to talk now. About my play.
SAL

I have more pressing matters on my mind.
SUSAN

You can't cancel my students' play.
SAL

We'll discuss this another time, Mr. Vincent.
SUSAN

We'll discuss this now. Why the hell did you cancel my students' play?
SAL

Assistant principal's prerogative.
SUSAN

Bullshit. My kids made all the changes you asked for.
SAL

Very reluctantly.
SUSAN

You had no right.
SAL

I had every right.
SUSAN

On what grounds?
SAL

Things were getting out of hand.
SUSAN

SAL

What things?

SUSAN

The noise and commotion coming from the auditorium?

SAL

What? Rehearse in silence?

SUSAN

The lack of any real work in that class?

SAL

My kids are the hardest working students in the school.

SUSAN

It's all just playtime. For the students and the teacher.

SAL

I bust my ass in that class.

SUSAN

What about the core standards? What about student achievement expectations? What about upcoming standardized tests?

SAL

What about all that crap?

SUSAN

Crap? Your students' low scores will ruin our data.

SAL

My students will outperform everyone else.

SUSAN

I doubt that very much.

SAL

You'll see.

SUSAN

That's why I'm reevaluating the relevance of a drama program to this department's goals and objectives.

SAL

You won't be getting rid of the drama program so long as I'm around.

SUSAN

As the drama program goes, so goes the drama teacher.

SAL

I hope you've been listening, Florence. I want that grievance fast-tracked.

NORA enters from the bathroom.

NORA

Victoria, did your class like the poem I suggested?

VICTORIA

Not only did they like the poem, they got the poem. Thank you.

SUSAN

Ms. O'Reilley, I need to see you in my office.

NORA

I just got out of class.

SUSAN

Right away.

NORA

It can wait.

SUSAN

I've just received the most disturbing report.

NORA

More data-driven drivel?

SUSAN

I've been told that you exposed yourself to your third period class.

NORA

I what?

SUSAN

Word is that you tore off your blouse and thrust out your chest for all to admire.

FLORENCE

This the latest in motivation?

NORA

I most certainly did not.

SUSAN

Three students have already written witness statements attesting that you did.

NORA

Students? Who?

SUSAN

I promised that they'd remain anonymous.

FLORENCE

Don't say a word without proper union representation.

NORA

I don't need representation.

SAL

This must be a joke.

SUSAN

I don't joke when it comes to matters of lewdness in the classroom.

NORA

Lewdness?

FLORENCE

Don't say anything to her.

FELIX enters, sits at the stage right table, and occupies himself with his papers.

NORA

You're making a big deal over nothing.

SUSAN

Nothing, Ms. O'Reilley?

NORA

We were having a class discussion of Blanche DuBois's past. I was demonstrating how she might have behaved in a class of young budding Brandos, teaching a passage of provocative poetry.

SUSAN

And you exposed your breasts.

NORA

I most certainly did not.

SUSAN

Then exactly what did you do?

NORA

I accidentally dropped my book and bent to pick it up. Maybe they saw a little cleavage.

SUSAN

So it's true!

NORA

Not the way you describe it.

SUSAN

There's proof.

NORA

Proof? A few coerced student statements?

SUSAN

One of the boys recorded it on his cell phone and posted it on the Internet.

FELIX opens his laptop.

NORA

For God's sake, what's the big deal anyway?

SUSAN

What's the big deal? Inappropriate teacher conduct is always a big deal.

NORA

They're just breasts. Some of the girls in this school walk around with their breasts about to pop out of their tops and nobody tells them to wear something else.

SAL

It's often the highlight of the day.

SUSAN

Breasts don't belong in school.

NORA

Should we just leave them at home?

SAL

If more teachers showed their hooters there'd be fewer dropouts.

SUSAN

That's right, Mr. Vincent. Make light of her dirty deed.

Oh my goodness. FELIX

Found it, Felix? SAL

SAL, FLORENCE and SUSAN stand behind FELIX.

Very interesting. Very interesting indeed. SUSAN

I don't see anything. SAL

I'm sure Mr. Taft will want to see this. SUSAN

See what? SAL

Can you play that part again, Mr. White? SUSAN

What are we looking at? FLORENCE

That. SUSAN

It's a disgrace that Ms. O'Reilley would show her br... Her...br...her...br... FELIX

Breasts, Felix. Breasts. They're called breasts. SAL

That's not a breast. FLORENCE

Of course it is. Are you blind? SUSAN

It's somebody's thumb. FLORENCE

Florence is right. It is a thumb. SAL

SUSAN

I think we should leave it to the proper authorities to determine what is a breast and what is a thumb.

PA ANNOUNCEMENT

Will Ms. O'Reilley please report to the principal's office. Will Ms. O'Reilley please report to the principal's office.

SUSAN

I'm sure that Mr. Taft will have plenty to say.

NORA

I'll have plenty to say as well.

NORA exits.

SUSAN

Whatever she may have to say, I'm sure that it will not be enough. Evidence is evidence.

SAL

Evidence for what?

SUSAN

I think it's evident. Ms. O'Reilley's days as a teacher may be coming to an end.

VICTORIA

An end?

SUSAN

This behavior cannot be tolerated.

VICTORIA

You can't get rid of Ms. O'Reilley.

SUSAN

With her bizarre classroom antics, something like this was bound to happen. An educator she is not.

VICTORIA

She's the best teacher in the school.

SUSAN

How would you know?

VICTORIA

Ms. Goldberg, Mr. Vincent, something has to be done.

SUSAN

You're becoming very vocal for somebody who's still on probation.

FLORENCE

The union will fight this. I can promise you that.

SUSAN

The union can fight all it wants.

SAL

It's very difficult to get rid of a tenured teacher.

SUSAN

Not necessarily.

SUSAN exits.

Scene Seven

NORA, dressed in regular clothing, is sitting at the center table, sipping from a coffee mug. SAL enters, humming a Christmas carol and holding a paper bag.

SAL

Have some Christmas cheer.

SAL takes a Scotch bottle out of the bag.

NORA

Maybe when the meeting is over.

SAL takes a coffee mug from the cabinet. He joins NORA at the center table.

SAL

Don't worry. Daddy's girl won't get away with this.

NORA

The representative from the Office of Investigations seemed very impressed by her. Not only did she have those student witness statements she coerced, she had letters from parents asking for my removal.

SAL

All the parents want their kids in your classes.

NORA

Daddy's girl seems to have talked a few into wanting otherwise.

SAL

What about the union lawyer?

NORA

He spoke legalize. I couldn't quite understand what he was saying, though I do think he was trying to suggest that mental distress on my part was a factor.

SAL

This job causes mental distress. Thank God for Christmas vacation.

NORA

I bet you can't wait to see your daughter.

SAL

It's not going to happen.

NORA

What happened to your plans?

SAL

My ex-wife is taking her to Florida to visit her parents.

NORA

Can't you still see her?

SAL

It would take a miracle for that to happen.

NORA

Miracles can happen.

SAL

Tell that to the judge who set the custody and visitation conditions.

NORA

But it's Christmas. Can't you join them?

SAL

My ex and I in the same room do not a holiday make.

NORA

So what will you do?

SAL

Memorize my lines. And rehearse.

You're acting again?
NORA

My wife made me stop. But now that there's no wife, why not start again?
SAL

Good for you.
NORA

I got a part on my first audition.
SAL

Maybe this is a harbinger of better things to come.
NORA

At my age?
SAL

You never know.
NORA

Wouldn't that be something.
SAL

FELIX enters and proceeds to the file cabinet to retrieve some papers.

Am I having a flashback, or do I smell rexograph fluid?
FELIX

Want some Scotch, Felix?
SAL

I will not be corrupted.
FELIX

No Christmas cheer?
SAL

Alcohol kills brain cells.
FELIX

Thank God there isn't some poor woman whose Christmas you can ruin.
NORA

There will be.
FELIX

Don't get your hopes too high.

SAL

I have a date.

FELIX

With a woman?

SAL

Good for you, Felix.

NORA

She's a nice girl.

FELIX

I'm sorry to hear that.

SAL

She won't let alcohol eat away at her insides.

FELIX

I'm sure you'll give her a reason to start.

NORA

Alcohol consumption in school is in direct violation of the pedagogical code of conduct.

FELIX

So go rat me out to daddy's girl.

SAL

I have no need to.

FELIX

FELIX exits as VICTORIA enters, holding a card and small present.

I'm not dead anymore. I finally got paid.

VICTORIA

(To SAL) And you don't believe in miracles.

NORA

Eight paychecks rolled into one. Now I can start my Christmas shopping.

VICTORIA

Maybe you'll be getting a special present.

NORA

Special? VICTORIA

From Thomas? NORA

Oh, no. There won't be a ring. VICTORIA

No ring? NORA

We broke up after Thanksgiving. VICTORIA

I'm sorry. NORA

Too many fights. I think he was becoming jealous of my job. VICTORIA

His loss. Who's the present for? NORA

Me. It's from my last class. VICTORIA

The one that was giving you such a hard time? NORA

That's the class. VICTORIA

Open it. NORA

VICTORIA unwraps the present. It's a mug.

(Reading) World's greatest teacher. VICTORIA

Read the card. NORA

VICTORIA

(Reading) Dear Ms. Turner. Merry Christmas. Anybody who can put up with us and still remain cool has to be a good teacher. Your favorite class."

Sal pours a shot into Victoria's mug.

SAL

Things are starting to work out for you. All you had to do was hang in there a little while.

FLORENCE enters.

FLORENCE

The Queen is dead.

NORA

I never thought myself a queen.

FLORENCE

Not you. You've been exonerated.

SAL

Hey! Merry Christmas.

SAL hugs NORA and pours her a shot.

FLORENCE

The investigator's office said Susan's accusations could not be substantiated and did not warrant further investigation. Taft happily concurred.

NORA

So who's the queen?

FLORENCE

Daddy's girl.

NORA

Susan?

FLORENCE

She's been beheaded.

NORA

How so?

FLORENCE

Taft removed her as assistant principal.

He fired her?
NORA

Tyranny is dead.
SAL

SAL kisses NORA.

I'm going to give Taft a big kiss too.
SAL

FLORENCE takes the Scotch bottle from SAL.

I don't need another teacher investigation.
FLORENCE

SAL and FLORENCE exit.

Ms. O'Reilley, congratulations.
VICTORIA

Funny, I don't feel much like congratulations.
NORA

Why? You beat Ms. Wagner's charges.
VICTORIA

A hollow victory.
NORA

You should be elated.
VICTORIA

Maybe I should. But this is a battle I shouldn't have had to fight.
NORA

You won. Ms. Wagner lost.
VICTORIA

I won the battle. But what about the war?
NORA

What war?
VICTORIA

This has been a portentous sign.
NORA

VICTORIA

A portentous sign? How?

NORA

Maybe Florence is right about me. There are days I wake up and wonder why I should bother getting out of bed and coming to work. There aren't many of them, mind you, but sometimes.

VICTORIA

Everybody feels like that.

NORA

You want to hear something funny?

VICTORIA

Sure.

NORA

Remember when you asked Florence why she was still a teacher and she couldn't give you an answer?

VICTORIA

Yes.

NORA

Well I was so scared you'd ask me next.

SUSAN enters.

SUSAN

Gloating over your little victory, Ms. O'Reilley?

NORA

It's not much of a victory.

SUSAN

It was a conspiracy.

NORA

And I suppose I was the leader.

SUSAN

You were all in cahoots from the get-go. Out to undermine my authority.

NORA

Authority has to be earned.

SUSAN

You've always resented my aspirations.

NORA

Resented your aspirations? I could just never fathom.

SUSAN

Sabotage and subversion.

NORA

Why this demented desire to dominate?

SUSAN

I strive to raise the caliber of education, and this is what I get.

NORA

Raise the caliber?

SUSAN

Obviously you don't understand.

NORA

What makes you want to be in control? As a means to an end, maybe I could understand. But as an end?

SUSAN

Bitter and envious.

NORA

My God. What goes through your mind? Lucky thing we won't have to put up with your ignorance and delusions of grandeur any longer. And especially lucky that Victoria won't either.

SAL and FLORENCE enter. FLORENCE is eating from a box of donuts.

SUSAN

No, Victoria won't have to put up with my ignorance and delusions of grandeur. And she won't have to put up with my replacement either.

NORA

What are you talking about?

SUSAN

Your little protégé is out of a job.

VICTORIA

Ms. O'Reilley?

Taft fired her? NORA

He will. SUSAN

On the last day before Christmas? SAL

He wouldn't dare. NORA

Since I'm returning to the classroom, she's no longer needed. SUSAN

Florence, that can't be true? NORA

Remember, she was hired to replace me. SUSAN

I'm afraid it could. FLORENCE

This isn't right. What can the union do? NORA

Not much. Budgets are budgets. FLORENCE

We'll see about that. NORA

NORA exits.

What do I do now? VICTORIA

You can start by cleaning out your file drawer. I'll need it back. SUSAN

Can the union help me? VICTORIA

Finding a position midway is rough. You could substitute. FLORENCE

But I want to teach. VICTORIA

There's always September. FLORENCE

Next September? VICTORIA

I'm sorry, Victoria. SAL

SAL hugs VICTORIA

I'm going to miss it here. VICTORIA

SAL
I know this is hard. But let me tell you something from one who's been around a while. You're too good for this job. There are better opportunities out there for you.

Don't get too teary over this. SUSAN

FELIX enters.

May I have everyone's attention? FELIX

You really aren't cut out for teaching anyway. SUSAN

You'll find something better than this. SAL

I said, may I have everyone's attention. FELIX

Stop annoying us. SAL

But I have something special to share with everyone. FELIX

Whatever it is, Felix, none of us give a damn. SAL

FELIX
You're going to wish you hadn't said that.

SAL
Is that so?

FELIX
Yes it is.

SAL
Really?

FELIX
I've just been chosen as the new English Assistant Principal.

SUSAN
What?

SAL
You?

FLORENCE
The new assistant principal?

SUSAN
There has to be a mistake. This can't be. This has to be a joke.

FELIX
I don't participate in jokes.

SUSAN
Who put you up to this?

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes