

(Lights up on a narrow teachers' office in a public school. Industrial-issue metal furniture – two desks, two chairs. One desk is a mess – stacks of papers everywhere – but no personal touches. It also contains an office phone. The other desk is organized, in and out bins, but has lots of personal touches – family pictures, a brightly-colored world map over the desk, a UVM mug full of pens and pencils, a potted plant, a banner from the school newspaper, etc. A door to the hall on one side of the stage. A window on the opposite side, through which a pale blue pre-dawn light seeps in. If possible, there should be some indication that the “fourth wall” is completely covered in bookshelves.

The door opens, and JASON enters. He wears a coat suitable for early spring, khakis, shirt sleeves and a tie. He carries a courier bag over his shoulder and a large brown paper bag in one hand. He puts the paper bag on the neater desk (his), then approaches the window without going all the way up to it. He reaches up and lowers the blind. Only then does he cross back to the door and turn on the light. He puts down his courier bag, and starts to take off his coat, draping it over the back of his chair. He takes a pad of construction paper out of a desk drawer, takes out a pair of scissors, and starts making cartoonish props and costume pieces.

PAM enters. She is dressed in a no-nonsense manner, as befits a principal, which she is. Seeing JASON, she comes quickly all the way into the room and closes the door behind her.)

PAM

What are you doing here?

JASON

Lesson plans. I'm having ninth grade reenact the trial of Galileo.

PAM

But, all those people, camped out in front –

JASON

Phil let me in the kitchen door.

PAM

What did you do, come in through the woods? With Beth in her condition?

JASON

Beth is staying with my parents until this blows over. Mom will give her a ride in.

PAM

Until this blows over. As soon as possible.

JASON

Really, Pam? Admit it, isn't the drama a little bit thrilling?

PAM

I'm a principal. I get enough drama when the budget comes out.

(JASON laughs.)

It's not funny, Jason. You're a good teacher. These kids, you'd think high school is a prison sentence, but somehow, with you... I don't want to lose you. Especially when you've just gotten tenure.

JASON

Thank you. Really, thank you. You know I love those kids. They're just, these half-formed bundles of potential, and if you can set it loose... You aren't going to lose me.

PAM

You came in the back, Jason. You didn't see them out there.

JASON

I saw them. That's why I went around back. They think they're serious, don't they?

PAM

They are serious. Some of them want your head on a platter.

JASON

(Placing a construction paper crown on her head.)

And you? Will you play Herod to my John the Baptist? Just because some second-home owner heard a rumor and called the ADL?

PAM

(Taking the crown off.)

For the love of Mike, don't let anybody hear you like that.

JASON

Come on, Pam –

PAM

And it's not only out-of-towners out there, and it's not only Jews. Our Lady of Mercy is holding a prayer vigil.

JASON

Really? Father Reiner didn't call me.

PAM

The PTA is out there.

JASON

They think teaching is easy just because –

PAM

Jason. Corey's out there.

JASON

(Looks at PAM sharply, then down at his hands.)

Corey?

PAM

Yes.

JASON

(A pause. Then he shrugs.)

Wait till she realizes she's on the same side as everyone else. Trust me, she'll be organizing the counter-protest by lunchtime. Any media?

PAM

Just local. Small favors. We need to figure out what you'll say when you talk to them.

JASON

There's nothing to say, Pam.

PAM

Of course there is! You have to tell them it isn't true. Your students misunderstood you.

JASON

They didn't misunderstand. It's true.

PAM

It's true?!

JASON

Yup.

PAM

You told your eleventh-grade modern world history class the Holocaust didn't happen.

JASON

Yes, I did.

PAM

Jason... how could you?

JASON

We were studying World War II. It kind of came up.

PAM

Be serious, Jason! This is a big deal.

JASON

Yes, it is. How much of each class graduates in four years?

PAM

What does that have to do with –

JASON

I'm trying to explain this to you. What's our graduation rate?

PAM

We've been holding steady in the mid seventies. But –

JASON

And how many start college in the fall? Bachelors and associate?

PAM

A little less than half.

JASON

And how many come back with their tails between their legs in a year or two?

PAM

We don't keep tabs on –

JASON

But you know. How many?

PAM

...Most of them.

JASON

We aren't doing our jobs, Pam. We aren't preparing these kids to go out into the world and make something of themselves. Everyone from my class still lives here.

PAM

Jason, you still –

JASON

(Continuing straight through.)

Pouring the coffee, and plowing the snow, and building the vacation homes, like their parents before them, and their parents before them. My father worked himself to death at Chalet Village, and my brother's doing it too, and I don't think a single one of those second-home-owners knows their names. But what else can they do? Even the old mill is a museum for tourists. We won't survive like this. We'll just be bones for rich people from Connecticut to pick over, until there's nothing left. These kids, they're who's going to rebuild this town. If we can teach them to do it. To think. And sometimes, that means challenging what's in the textbook.

PAM

But Holocaust denial? You don't believe in it, you can't, so why that? Why something so... shocking?

JASON

Because it's shocking. That's the whole point. Here, let me... Zyklon B. A hydrocyanic acid, an insecticide. At Auschwitz, they used to delouse clothing, and allegedly to gas people. Separate rooms. But here's the thing. In the delousing chambers, to this day there are enormous residues of hydrocyanic acid. But in the extermination chambers? The barest traces, and sometimes they don't even find that. Can you explain that?

PAM

I... Is that even true? I mean, I used to be a French teacher, I don't know about... But I'm sure there's an answer.

JASON

And if one of those eleventh graders, just one, is "shocked" enough to go and find that answer, this whole thing will be worth it.

PAM

Even if you lose your job over it?

JASON

That isn't going to happen.

PAM

What makes you so sure?

JASON

My principal has my back.

PAM

I'll do what I can for you, Jason. But if this gets to be bigger than me...

JASON

We'll make sure it doesn't.

PAM

Right. Okay. So. First thing, let's put you in my office.

JASON

Why?

PAM

The idea is to keep the peace. When Natalie Levine gets here –

JASON

It's taken care of. Office-mates can forgive anything over breakfast.

(Reaching into the brown paper bag.)

Want one?

(He tosses PAM a bagel.)

PAM

A ba... Are you joking?

JASON

What?

PAM

Is this your idea of a joke?

JASON

Why would... Oh!

(He chuckles, starts halving a bagel and spreading cream cheese on it.)

I didn't think of that. Bagels aren't Jewish anymore, Pam. They've been nationalized.

PAM

And stop saying things like that! These Holocaust deniers – the real ones – I looked them up. They're scary people. Neo-fascists, white supremacists, you can't even imply that you –

JASON

You know I don't mean it that way. Besides, what happened to freedom of speech?

PAM

Please. Don't make my job harder.

JASON

All right, Pam. For you. I'll censor myself. But I won't run away from my office. How would Tom know where to find me?

(The door opens. TOM stands there, a shy, nervous, undersized 17-year-old.)

TOM

How did you know I was there, Mr. Efheim?

JASON

Educated guess.

PAM

Good morning, Tommy.

TOM

Please, Mrs. McGarry...

PAM

Tom, right. I'm sorry. You've been Tommy your whole life, you have to give us time to get used to it.

JASON

What can I do for you, Tom?

TOM

Well, I saw those reporters out there... and if they think it's a story, and it's happening right here, and I thought... well, maybe... could I... interview you? For the Recorder?

PAM

Oh, Tom, I don't think that's the best –

JASON

I'd be honored. Shut the door, have a seat.

TOM

Oh! But I don't... I mean, I wanted to get your permission before I... before I –

JASON

Prepared your questions?

(TOM looks at the floor, nods.)

We've talked about this in Recorder meetings. What if this was the only time I had to talk to you?

TOM

Sorry, Mr. Efheim.

JASON

I'll tell you what. We have about an hour before homeroom. Put together your questions, and we'll talk at seven.

TOM

Really? You mean it?

JASON

Have I ever said anything I don't mean?

(As TOM considers this, BETH appears in the door, followed by PHIL. BETH is dressed in business-maternity clothes, as she is very pregnant. PHIL wears janitors' scrubs. JASON springs out of his chair, to help BETH into it. Meanwhile, TOM sits in a corner, his back against the wall, and starts making notes on a piece of scrap paper.)

BETH

Hi, babe.

JASON

Hi. Is everything okay?

BETH

Thanks to Phil. My personal escort. Somebody could take lessons.

(She swats Jason's arm playfully.)

JASON

Thanks for helping her, Phil.

PHIL

Mrs. McGarry, I thought you should know, the TV guys are stopping the breakfast kids to ask if they're in Mr. Efheim's class.

PAM

Oh, for the love of Mike.

(As she makes to leave, to JASON.)

And don't you talk to any reporters before you clear it with me. Including that one.

(Meaning TOM.)

Understood?

JASON

Jawohl.

PAM

Jason!

JASON

Sorry. Self-censoring.

PAM

You'd better.

(She exits.)

PHIL

(To TOM.)

You ain't bothering Mr. Efheim, are you, kid?

TOM

No, Dad! I was just preparing my questions.

PHIL

In a corner?

TOM

Mr. Efheim told me to.

(To JASON.)

Didn't you?

PHIL

Jesus, kid, I'm sure he didn't mean... Go to the cafeteria or something. Don't you think he's got plenty to worry about already?

TOM

Yeah. Yes, sir. I'm on my way out now.

(He starts to exit.)

JASON

Hey, Tom.

(TOM turns back.)

Did you hear? Mrs. McGarry called you a reporter.

TOM

(Grins.)

Can I still come back at seven?

JASON

Don't be late.

TOM

Thanks, Mr. Efheim. See you, Dad.
(He runs out.)

PHIL

Christ almighty, that boy...

BETH

He's a good kid, Phil. He's trying hard, and that's more than I can say for most of my algebra class. He does what he's told.

PHIL

Does what he's... Don't get me wrong. I'd like one of my goddamn kids to finish college. But he's seventeen, for Chrissakes. A boy his age should have some swagger, y'know? You raise a kid from a speck, and just when he finally gets old enough to be interesting, you find yourself saying, where the hell did he come from? I never know what the heck he's gonna do.

(Waves a hand in the direction of Beth's belly.)

You'll see.

JASON

(Takes Beth's hand.)

We're looking forward to it.

PHIL

I should give the two of you some time. And I got bathrooms.

(He turns to go, then hesitates.)

JASON

You okay, Phil?

PHIL

Me? Fine. Fine. It's only... well, I mean... look, Jason. If Tommy came to you... told you anything about, about his, y'know... preferences... you'd tell me. Wouldn't you?

JASON

(As gently as possible.)

No, Phil. I wouldn't. If Tom took me into his confidence – if – if he chose to speak to me about that, and I came to you, after that he wouldn't talk to either of us.

BETH

Anyway, Phil, I don't think you need to worry.

PHIL

No?

JASON

Beth...

BETH

It's my own observation. It's not betraying anyone's confidence to tell him my own observation.

JASON

But it isn't our place.

PHIL

What? Aw, c'mon, you can't dangle it in front of me like that. What?

BETH

...Some time, when you get the chance, watch what happens to Tommy when Corey Carson walks into the room. That's all I'll say.

PHIL

Jason? That true?

JASON

...I can't say. I'm sorry. But look for yourself.

PHIL

Huh. I'll be damned. Can't say I think much of his taste, but... least it's a girl. Thanks. I'll stop by later. Got some shell casings to show you. Soviet.

JASON

Can't wait.

PHIL

And don't you let 'em tell you what to think. You just go right on telling the truth.

JASON

Thanks, Phil.

(PHIL exits.)

BETH

I'm sorry.

JASON

It's okay.

BETH

It's just, you know Phil's going to make life hard for Tommy if he even suspects something like that. How can we sit back and watch that happen, when it isn't even true?