

AN INSTITUTION

By Daniel A. Takács

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“An Institution”
By Daniel A. Takacs

Cast:

Pandora: Sophomore BFA Acting Student, white, she/her/hers, Teens-20’s
Tamara: 2nd Year MFA Acting Student, Black, she/her/hers, 30
Cassie: Visiting Professor of Playwriting, white, she/her/hers 30’s
Cleta: Associate Professor of Acting, Black, she/her/hers, 40’s-60’s
Oz: Associate Professor of Acting, white, he/him/his, 40’s-60’s
Doc: Chair of the Drama Department, white, he/him/his, 40’s-60’s
Alma: Dean of the Institute of Fine Arts, she/her/hers, 40’s-60’s

Setting:

Time: A Thursday evening in April.
Place: A large, private university.

Premise:

“When a graduate student reports sexual misconduct to her professor, the theatre department scrambles to control the damage.”

Summary (Spoilers):

“MFA acting student, Tamara reports to her favorite professor, Cassie, an uncomfortable moment in class: her professor, Oz, has kissed a student while acting in a scene. Cassie, unsure of how to serve Tamara, brings some faculty friends in on the secret, and the rumor escalates until the head of the program (Doc), the dean (Alma), and the accused (Oz) all attempt to squash it. Tamara and Cassie’s plans are halted when Doc offers Cassie a permanent position, and Cassie sells out Tamara. The faculty leverages Tamara’s mental health issues to get her to drop any complaint. But at a board gala, Cassie writes and performs her rendition of the controversial event.”

Content Warning:

This play contains material that may be triggering for individuals who have experienced institutional abuse, racism, misogyny, or sexual violence.

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Scene 1:

(The Gala. Pandora alone on stage.)

Pandora

“O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!”

Shakespeare wrote those words 400 years ago.

And they remain just as true today.

Ladies and gentlemen. Donors. Members of the board. Thank you for coming tonight.

I’m Pandora Hester, and I will be your host tonight.

Thank you.

The mission of theatre is to be educational.

And to have fun!

So, in light of recent events, the University Players have been asked to prepare some dramatic scenes to present to you.

So get ready to have some fun:

And you *may* just learn something...

Scene 2:

(4:00pm. A cinderblock office, decorated with photographs, in a giant university. Cassie is writing. Tamara enters through the open door, agitated.)

Tamara

(*Pronounced: “TAM-uh-ruh”*)

Open, or closed?

Cassie

Up to you.

(Tamara closes the door.)

Cassie

How are you?

Tamara

You got a minute?

Cassie
Sure! I read that article you sent.

Tamara
Article?

Cassie
About the theatre in South Africa,

Tamara
Oh, yeah. That. Um. How long have you been here, like, in years?

Cassie
Oh, I'm a visiting professor. This is my second year. Of two.

(Beat.)

Tamara
Hm.
(*beat*)
I like your plays.

Cassie
Thank you.

Tamara
You have a way of speaking uncomfortable truths.

Cassie
What else is art for?

Tamara
Is that your thing?

Cassie
I hope so.

Tamara
So if I were to express an uncomfortable truth...

Cassie
I would be interested to hear it.

Tamara

Good. Okay.

Cassie
Sit.

(Tamara sits.)

Tamara
Have you — what do you know about the acting program?

Cassie
What do you mean?

Tamara
What do you know about Oz?

Cassie
Oh.

Tamara
Oh?

Cassie
Did something happen?

Tamara
Why? Did you hear something?

Cassie
I don't think so.

(Beat.)

Tamara
Yes, something happened.

(beat)
What — legally — what can I tell you, in confidence?

Cassie
Well I'm obligated to report — .

Tamara
— I see, I see.

Cassie
But only for something like Title Nine.

Tamara
Which is?

Cassie
Inappropriate contact with a student.

(Beat.)

Tamara
Hm.

(Cassie takes this as intended.)

Cassie
If you're telling me — .

Tamara
— I'm not telling anything.

Cassie
Because I would have to report — .

Tamara
— That's why I'm not telling.

(Beat.)

Cassie
Maybe we should take this to your advisor.

Tamara
Um, I'm not sure I want to do that. We're not close. Not like you and me.

Cassie
Okay. What *can* you tell me?

(Pause.)

Tamara
How well do we know each other?

Cassie
We know each other.

Tamara

(going)
Oh? Okay. You know what?

Cassie
Stay!

Tamara
I should go.

Cassie
I'm going to give you the number of the student mental health clinic — .

Tamara
— This was a mistake.

(Tamara opens the door.)

Cassie
Wait.
(pause)
Tell me.

(Tamara closes the door.)

Tamara
Are you sure?

Cassie
I insist.

(Tamara sits.)

Tamara
(a warning)
You will be Involved.

(A long pause: one last chance to stop.)

Tamara *(ct'd)*
We were doing scene work. Richard III. He jumped in to play Richard. The kiss scene.

Cassie
Stop.

(Pause.)

Tamara
I'm sorry.

(Pause.)

Cassie
I'm not sure I'm the right person...

Tamara
Okay...

Cassie
I'm just a visiting professor.

Tamara
Okay.

Cassie
So I don't know all of the... politics.

Tamara
So...

Cassie
I've never dealt with something like this... Maybe somebody more experienced?

Tamara
Like who?

Cassie
Cleta?

Tamara
Why her?

Cassie
(*Cleta is Black*)
You're both... actors.

Tamara
I'm not close with her. Not like with you.

(Beat.)

Cassie
So, I'm up for a tenure track job.

Tamara
You really want tenure *here*?

Cassie
I have relationships here.

Tamara
(*sigh*)
Alright. You're off the hook. I'll — I'll go to the dean — .

Cassie
— *Don't* go to the dean. There's an interim dean, and she's — I don't know her.
(*pause*)
Do you mind if I speak to Cleta? She's your advisor, isn't she?

Tamara
(*bitter*)
In name only.

Cassie
I'm not the right person for this. You need to go to your advisor, or Doc, or the dean.

Tamara
You said not to go to the dean.

Cassie
Then Doc. He'll want to hear about this.

Tamara
No one wants to hear about this. Listen. Just please, don't tell anyone about this. It's hard enough being Me in this department. I'm sick of making waves. I'm tired of being a "crazy bitch."

Cassie
I don't think you're crazy.

Tamara
Women who speak the truth are crazy bitches. Truth is unladylike.

Cassie
I tell the truth in my plays.

Tamara
Your characters tell the truth, but you can't.

(That hurts Cassie.)

Tamara (*ct'd.*)
Just stay out of it, okay. I'll handle it without your... *help*.

Cassie
Don't do anything... dangerous.

Tamara
I know things. One way or another, it's coming for me. I have moves to make.

Cassie
Just... be safe.

(Pause.)

Tamara
Goodbye professor.

(She leaves.)

Scene 3:

(4:30pm. Cleta is in her office, which is filled with keepsakes from a Life in the Theatre. She is in the early stages of grading a mountain of papers. Enter Cassie.)

Cassie
You busy?

Cleta
Extremely. But I hate grading.

Cassie
Can we chat for a minute?

Cleta
Oh, Lord, yes.

(Cleta puts down her work, Cassie enters and closes the door.)

Cleta
Something on your mind?

Cassie
Firstly, I wanted to say, you were amazing in Gem of the Ocean.

Cleta
(*the author*)

Give August the credit, not me.

Cassie
Just so, so forceful. And nuanced. Very impressive.

Cleta
Thank you.

(Pause.)

Cassie
So, I know we're not close. And I'm sorry about that. I've been trying to meet everybody but...

Cleta
It's hard.

Cassie
It's hard! Anyway, I'm applying for the playwriting job. And I wanted to get to know you better.

Cleta
Good luck.

Cassie
Thank you!

Cleta
We ladies have to stick together.

Cassie
Exactly! Exactly. So I had something come up and I wanted to know if I could ask your advice.

Cleta
I'm very wise.

Cassie
So I wanted to ask you about a Title Nine issue.
(*pause*)
I want to be very clear, I am only asking as a friend, not as a colleague.

Cleta
You make fast friends.

Cassie

Thank you. It's just... something's come up, and I don't know what to do.

Cleta
Oh, God.
(*beat*)
Are you okay?

Cassie
Oh, God! Not to me!

Cleta
'Cause I thought — .

Cassie
No.

(Pause.)

Cleta
You look... shaken.

Cassie
What do you know about Oz's teaching?

Cleta
Oh.

Cassie
Oh?

Cleta
Go on.

Cassie
Did you hear something?

(Beat.)

Cleta
So? What happened?

Cassie
Thing is, I promised a student I wouldn't talk about it.

Cleta
Oz did something to a student?

Cassie
As a *friend*, Cleta.

Cleta
Oh, my Lord.

Cassie
I have to — do something.

Cleta
Are you crazy? Do you know what will happen if you open up this can of worms?

Cassie
Oz could lose his job.

Cleta
No, darling. There'll be an investigation. They'll go poking around in every nook for more of this Title Nine shit.

Cassie
Good.

Cleta
No, not good. Because it won't just be Oz, will it? It'll be Tommy and Paul. It'll be Helen. Who *knows* what Darius gets up to? It'll be a firing squad. The old boys will stick together.

Cassie
Doc would do the right thing.

Cleta
(*metaphorically*)
Oh, Cassie, how can you be so young?

(Pause.)

Cassie
So what do I do?

Cleta
This student. Can you just tell him — .

Cassie
— Her.

Cleta

But Oz is gay.

Cassie
I don't think that stops him from being a prick.

Cleta
Just tell her you took the appropriate steps, and it's being dealt with.

Cassie
But it won't be dealt with.

Cleta
But she won't know that.

Cassie
Yes. She will.

(Cleta sighs.)

Cleta
Why don't you tell me what's going on? "As a friend."

(Beat.)

Cassie
Oz kissed her. In a scene.

Cleta
That's not too bad.

Cassie
Is that what education is supposed to be? Not too bad? What if she gets PTSD or something?

Cleta
What are you doing?

Cassie
What?

Cleta
This is a molehill. Why can't you let it be a molehill?

Cassie
We can't let him just get away with it.

(Pause.)

Cleta

I was touched. In conservatory. By my director. It was a lot worse than a kiss in a scene.

Cassie

Jesus, Cleta.

Cleta

That's the industry. This is what men are like.

Cassie

(*supportive*)

What happened?

Cleta

Oh, don't get all supportive. I had one professor feel me up. Didn't that ever happen to you in grad school?

Cassie

I was a playwright. We wore sweaters.

Cleta

Smart.

Cassie

Did you... go to the police?

Cleta

The police! Who are they going to believe? Me? Or a white man with power?

Cassie

So, what did you do?

Cleta

I got his letter of recommendation.

Cassie

That's... *ugh*.

Cleta

Cassie, I'm sorry that life can't be fair. Believe me I know. But this is just one of those things, you know?

(Long pause. Cassie has a faraway look.)

Cleta (*ct'd*)

You're going to stick your neck out.

Cassie
What are necks for, if not sticking out?

Cleta
You beautiful, beautiful idiot.
(*beat*)
Let's bring Doc in on this.

Cassie
You know him well?

Cleta
He's a decent guy.

Cassie
I think we have to go to the dean. That's the protocol.

Cleta
We?

Cassie
I would never ask you — .

Cleta
Good, because I don't have a death wish.

Cassie
I can't believe you! You started a feminist theatre company!

Cleta
As a feminist, I can't let you ruin your career over some — man!
(*pause*)
I'm calling Doc.

Cassie
Don't.

Cleta
Maybe he has a way of fixing this without going to the dean.

Cassie
I'm trying to protect a vulnerable student.

Cleta

(suspicious)
What student?

Cassie
I'd rather not say.

Cleta
Female BFA?

Cassie
No.

Cleta
Tamara?!

Cassie
I did not say that!

Cleta
Be careful with her, she... comes from hardship. She's sensitive. And she thinks she's smart. Dangerous. Kids like that make it harder for all of us. Tamara told Doc he was a white-supremacist after his Mikado.

Cassie
That production sucked.

Cleta
So if it is her, just know, you have to be careful. She needs to learn to keep her head down.

Cassie
I'm not saying it's her.

Cleta
But if it *is*. So this is something with Oz. Whose bright idea was it to put them in the same room?

Cassie
Aren't you her advisor?

Cleta
Damn.

Cassie
Has this happened before?

(Beat.)

Cleta

You have to understand, Oz and I came up at the same time. So I know him. He's a friend. It was different then.

Cassie

Well, it's different now.

Cleta

And he's into Meisner — very confrontational.

Cassie

I don't believe in that.

Cleta

He swears by it. If you're going to take on Oz, just know: he's an institution. That's why he directs all over town. He's well connected — and well liked! And in his defense, he's been doing this for twenty-five years.

Cassie

Well, I don't see what that has to do with anything. Maybe he sucked for twenty-five years. Maybe he's been a creep for twenty-five years.

Cleta

But the thing is, he doesn't suck. Sometimes he pushes the students too hard. Was this something that happened in an acting exercise?

(Beat.)

Cleta (*ct'd.*)

See, that's his thing.

Cassie

To molest the students during scenes?

Cleta

I was expecting worse.

Cassie

Worse!

Cleta

Kissing in a scene? Arguably educational.

Cassie

If you're a shitty educator.

Cleta

I know, and I would never, but Oz can argue — *will* argue — that he was just pushing her.

Cassie

This crosses a line. Other students saw it too. They'll vouch.

Cleta

But they won't. They love it here. And they're scared.

Cassie

(*realizing*)

They don't know any other way.

(Beat.)

Cleta

You can still do it, just know that it would be war. Before this is over the whole town will know about the "witch hunt" against him. You'll need friends.

Cassie

Is that an offer?

Cleta

I don't take sides. That's why I'm still here.

(Pause.)

Cleta (*ct'd.*)

There was another scandal. In the nineties. Jonathan, do you remember him? Before your time, I suppose. He was dating a student. She was his Goody Proctor in *The Crucible*. Big scandal. You know what happened to him? Nothing. Student got expelled.

You're not fighting one person, you're fighting the whole damn world.

Cassie

(*"adjourned"*)

Alright. Thank you.

Cleta

Did I answer all your questions?

Cassie

Yes, thank you.

Cleta

Well, what about — ?

Cassie
— I said I'd think about it.

(Pause.)

Cleta
Will you let me know if you decide to do anything?

Cassie
Yes. Absolutely.

Cleta
Cassie — .

Cassie
— Thank you, Cleta.
(Beat.)
It was a pleasure to meet you. Properly.

Cleta
Likewise.

(Cassie exits, closing the door.)

Scene 4:

(5:00pm. Another office, bigger, with diplomas and awards. Doc is eating a hasty dinner in front of his emails. Enter Cleta.)

Cleta
I'm going to close the door.

(She does.)

Doc
(*concerned*)
What's up?

Cleta
How's the show going?

Doc
More relevant every day. What's up?

Cleta
(*sigh*)
You got anything to drink?

(Doc produces a bottle of liquor. Cleta pours herself a drink.)

Cleta
Have some.

(Doc pours himself a drink.)

Cleta (*ct'd*)
You once told me you valued loyalty above anything else. Huzzah.

Doc
Huzzah.

(They drink.)

Cleta
Is that true?

Doc
I don't think I said that.

Cleta
You did.

Doc
Well, I must have been drunk.

Cleta
Bingo. But is it true?

Doc
...Sure.

(Beat.)

Cleta
It's Oz. His usual shit.

Doc
Is it something...?

Cleta
Kissed a student. In a scene.

Doc
Oh. That's not so bad.

Cleta
That's what *I* said.

Doc
And the student came to you?

Cleta
To Cassie.

Doc
Who the hell talks to Cassie?

Cleta
Tamara.

(Doc drinks.)

Cleta
Anyway I thought you should know.

Doc
But... he's gay.

Cleta
He pushes the kids past their limits.

Doc
That's one of the things we used to value about him.

Cleta
Used to.

Doc
I guess what I'm wondering is: is this some sort of teaching technique? Is it just some class gone wrong? We've all been there. One time I had this girl who just could not understand what a *syllable* was. Can you imagine? I got halfway through pentameter before I figured it out.

Cleta
I've made so many kids cry.

Doc

When I went to conservatory it was an honor to be picked out by the master. So much *character*.
Not like today.

Cleta

All that pussy-footing. All that leaving the office door open.

Doc

Using the gender neutral form.

Cleta

Being het-cis — whatever the hell that is.

Doc

Trigger warnings.

Cleta

Trigger warnings!

Doc

What use is art, if it doesn't trigger something?

Cleta

"I have a learning disability!"

Doc

"I'd like to be referred to as 'Zim-Zem-Zer LGBTQXYZ!'"

Cleta

(*mock crying*)

"I have an eating disorder!"

Doc

"Will you be my daddy?"

(They laugh.)

Doc (*ct'd.*)

Things used to be simpler.

Cleta

I guess that was always the illusion.

(Pause.)

Cleta (*ct'd*)

I'm worried this time. Cassie's on the march. And from what it sounds like, by today's standards, he may have crossed a line.

(Beat.)

Doc
How old is Oz?

Cleta
Sixties.

Doc
Doesn't he have a sabbatical coming up?

Cleta
He just had one. *I* have a sabbatical coming up. You thinking about that deal?

Doc
You think he'd take it?

Cleta
Hell, I almost took it.

Doc
Me too. Maybe it's his time, you know? He's been here, what?

Cleta
Twenty-six years.

(Doc whistles.)

Doc
I just feel like every couple of years we have one of these — flare-ups — and my main duty is to protect the University from litigation. (*Beat.*) Would you be willing to talk to him? Do you know where he stands on this?

Cleta
On the deal?

Doc
Just feel him out for me.

Cleta
Because he's going to ask questions, and you know what I'm going to tell him? "Ask Doc."

Doc

Don't suggest anything, just feel him out.

Cleta

I feel uncomfortable doing that. Do I need a rep to come in here to explain my rights?

Doc

Come on, Cleta, don't do this to me.

Cleta

I don't know, Doc, it seems like you're trying to leverage my friendship with a fellow teacher —

Doc

If I talk to him it's *official*, we'll have to start writing things down, we'll have to call the lawyers. If you talk to him it's just friends talking.

Cleta

If I say no, am I fired?

(Beat.)

Doc

I think we need to calm things down — ...

Cleta

Because, if that's what you're asking, I would like my objection — .

Doc

(*over her*)

— Cleta, you're not going to get anywhere by shouting — !

Cleta

(*never shouted*)

— I'm not shouting, you're shouting.

Doc

(*sigh*)

No. You're right. I'll do it.

Cleta

That was unfair.

Doc

Alright, Cleta, I'll talk to him.

Cleta

Good.

(*beat*)
I don't like being in the middle of your fights.

Doc
Then why did you bring it to me?

Cleta
(*hurt*)
You're my friend.

(She stands.)

Cleta (*ct'd*)
He responds well to compliments.

Doc
Thanks.

Cleta
And, be careful, he's the best actor I know.

Doc
Cleta...
Thank you.

(Beat.)

Cleta
You never got me that class...

Doc
Dramatic Literature of the African Diaspora. I haven't forgotten.

Cleta
Loyalty, Doc. It's priceless.

(Cleta goes to the door.)

Cleta (*ct'd.*)
Open or closed?

Scene 5:

(5:30pm. Cassie's office.)

Cassie
Thanks for seeing me.

Tamara
What happened?

Cassie
I wanted to tell you I'm sorry: . . .
I'm sorry. I wasn't a good advocate for you. I wasn't a good friend. I wasn't a good teacher. My job is to open up a place of trust between us, and you trusted me. And I failed you. I'm sorry. I'm here to listen.

Tamara
Okay.

Cassie
I'm ready to listen. Tell me everything. I want to hear your story.

Tamara
Are you sure? Are you sure you're not going to run away? Like . . .

Cassie
Like before? No. I'm ready. You deserve to be heard. You are a human being. And I Am Here For You.

Tamara
I . . . don't believe you.

Cassie
Okay, I get that. What can I say, what can I do to show you you can trust me?

(Pause.)

Tamara
What's the worst thing that's ever happened to you?

Cassie
I was in my twenties. I was hustling — you remember — gigging for a living, working nine jobs. And I was stopped at a red light. And this car just hits me going full speed.

I blacked out. And when I woke up, there was a very drunk man at my window. And he says, "Sorry I just really had to pee. Do y'all know a place where I can pee?" I wish I had said something clever, but what I said was, "Uh, no." So he says, "Then y'all better look away." And he pees on my car.

And of course this drunk doesn't have insurance, so I have to sue my own insurance company for the medical costs.

So the lawsuit takes about two years, and as a part of it I have to release my medical records to my insurance, and I guess this includes my therapy notes. So I have to go in and be deposed, and the insurance lawyer spends the whole time combing through my psych notes, while I'm under oath: "It says here you have depression." "It says here you were abused by your mother." "It says here you contemplated suicide."

It may not be as bad as some people have it, but that deposition really stuck with me. Like... a trauma. It might not make sense but I felt...

Tamara
Violated.

Cassie
Yeah.

(Tamara lets out a breath.)

Tamara
I... don't know how to start.

Cassie
Breathe. Just start wherever.

(Tamara breathes.)

Tamara
Thank you.
We were running scenes. I was taking notes. That's what he has me doing, taking notes. Like, why the fuck am I even there? So we're running scenes. He's got this insane game where they have to switch chairs all the time. To distract them. To throw them off, mess with their habits. So one girl is in the scene — Richard III, the casket — and I guess he's happy with the guy, (he's always happy with the guys)... but Pandora...

Cassie
Pandora Hester?

Tamara
You know her?

Cassie
She's in my playwriting class... she's...

Tamara

A sweetheart.

Cassie
Yes. Go on.

Tamara
So he's making her start over. And over. She's getting frazzled, starting to cry a little. He's getting... frustrated. He jumps into the scene. It's... an intimate scene. There's a kiss.

(Cassie takes this in.)

Cassie
He kissed Pandora?

(Long pause.)

Tamara
He ran it several times. She was asking to stop. Take a break. So Many Times. I talked to her after. She was... heartbroken.

(Pause.)

Cassie
I thought he kissed *you*.

Tamara
Why?

Cassie
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't know what I'm doing.
We should get Doc in here.

Tamara
No.

(Beat.)

Cassie
Eventually we'll have to — .

Tamara
—We?

(Beat.)

Cassie
(*"I'm involved"*)
We.

(Long pause.)

Tamara
(*"thank you"*)
I wasn't sure anyone would believe me.

Cassie
You're welcome.

(Pause.)

Cassie (*ct'd.*)
So, you want to do something?

Tamara
I have a responsibility.

Cassie
You don't want to?

Tamara
Of course I don't want to. I have a responsibility. People are getting hurt. How many years? How many more years? A person has a responsibility.

Cassie
So, what do you need me for?

(Pause.)

Tamara
I don't know. I don't know. What do I do?

Cassie
You have to talk with someone.

Tamara
I thought I was.

Cassie
Somebody trained in... this kind of thing.

Tamara
Like who?

Cassie
A counselor? A lawyer?

Tamara
I thought you said — *you* were here for me.

Cassie
I am! I just want you to be — safe. People could get hurt.

Tamara
People are getting hurt. Women.

Cassie
I don't want you to make it harder on yourself. Do you think you'll get away from this clean? Do you think *I* will? They'll call you a liar. They'll call you crazy. This — thing — didn't even happen to you.

Tamara
It has happened to me. But this is time there are witnesses. So...

(Pause.)

Cassie
So what's the plan?

Tamara
I thought you had one. Because you called me here.

Cassie
I just wanted to support you. To hear your story.

Tamara
So I have to make the plan. Aren't you supposed to, like, help me?

Cassie
All I know how to write plays...
But, okay. We all had to take a training. I mean, nobody went, but we were all supposed to take Title Nine training. If you report a Title Nine offense, it goes to a person in the student affairs office. A grievance officer.

Tamara
It's not a grievance. It's just the facts.

Cassie

I don't know why they call it that. This person — Maura, maybe? — if she gets a report, she has to investigate. She has no choice. She will interview you, Oz, and probably the whole acting class. And maybe me. Do you have any mental health records?

Tamara

Yes.

Cassie

Okay. Scrub that if you can. All that stuff will probably come out. You'll need witnesses other than you. You have to make sure the other kids are with you, or it won't work.

Tamara

I can get you witnesses.

Cassie

And I'll ask around about Oz. See if there's a pattern of behavior. Character witnesses.

Tamara

Sounds dangerous.

Cassie

We both need to be careful. Keep this circle small. No risks. Have you told anyone about this?

Tamara

No.

Tamara

Good. Me neither.

(Beat.)

Cassie

What if he doesn't go... gracefully?

Tamara

...He won't.

(They share an understanding.)

Cassie

Can we eat first?

Tamara

Self-care is a form of activism.

(Pause.)

Cassie & Tamara
Taco Loco?

Scene 6:

(6:00pm. Oz and Doc are drinking in Doc's office.)

Oz
Gielgud puts the hat back on his head.
(*he demonstrates*)
Winks at the girl, and says, "It's called *acting*, love."

(They laugh.)

Doc
Do you miss it?

Oz
Christ no. Nobody tells you, but Londoners have terrible breath.

Doc
Ever want to go back?

Oz
Never. You?

Doc
Rather die.

Oz
To death!

Doc
(*"to life"*)
L'cha-im!

(They drink.)

Doc
You thinking about taking that deal?

Oz

I always assumed I'd teach until I died. My sincerest hope is to die onstage on closing night of Lear:

“Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there!”

(He dies.)

That's the life.

Doc
I want to die fat, in the arms of an ingenue.

Oz
You're halfway there.

Doc
So are you thinking about it?

Oz
Hm?

Doc
The deal?

Oz
What are you playing at, Doc?

Doc
It's a good deal. A full year's salary? Edmond's doing it. And Nancy. When are we going to get this chance again?

Oz
But you're not leaving.

Doc
(sigh)
No, I've got *ambitions* for this place.

Oz
At your age?

Doc
I'm young.

(Oz laughs.)

Oz
And I'm the Dalai Lama. What's this about, Doc? Do I need to start carving my tombstone?

Doc
No, no, no, I'm just looking at the big picture. I want to take on a dramaturgy person.

Oz
You want me to retire, and then eliminate my position? Are you firing me, Doc?

Doc
I'm trying to plan ahead. The burden of the chair: eyes always on the horizon.

Oz
Don't look too far, you'll go blind.

(Doc drinks.)

Doc
I'm feeling out the staff. The deal's only on the table for one year. They want to thin the herd — new blood — and I agree. We're old men.

Oz
You *are* firing me!

Doc
I'm not.

Oz
Come on, something's afoot.

Doc
There's nothing "afoot," Oz, I'm asking everyone.

Oz
Then why did you get me drunk?

(Pause.)

Doc
How was class today?

Oz

Good, good. Richard III. Is that what this is about? Christ, is it that — that girl — ?

Doc

— Tamara.

Oz

Tamara?

(beat)

And what did she say?

Doc

Tamara says you kissed her.

Oz

I didn't. Doc, this is crazy. Please, believe me, I'm only trying to teach.

Doc

So what happened in class?

Oz

Nothing. This is the problem Doc, these kids: stuck in adolescence; whatever happened to devoting oneself to one's craft? I was a featured player for ten years, but they want to be coddled, and told, "good boy, good girl, you're so talented," instead of admitting that they're fucking awful, and could stand to learn something!

I told them they could come to me. Why didn't she come to me?

Doc

She came to Cassie.

Oz

Ah, the girls club.

Doc

They stick together.

Oz

If only we were the same.

Doc

...So will you think about the deal?

Oz

Over this? Fuck off, Doc, really.

Doc

I'm not even supposed to know about this, what if she goes over my head?

Oz

No need to fear *Alma*.

Doc

Please take this seriously. People sue people all the time. We have to be careful.

Oz

How many shows have we done together?

(Beat.)

Doc

Twenty? Thirty?

Oz

Theatre folk. We aren't like other people. For us, a drink at the pub is work, and a day hard at work is play. A kiss is different from a stage kiss. I didn't do anything wrong. Doesn't that count for anything?

Doc

I'm trying to protect you.

(Oz goes to leave.)

Oz

I miss the days when teaching was teaching. When none of us knew what we were doing but we figured it out. I miss being that young and irresponsible. When we imagined that was all we needed to be happy. You remember?

(Doc remembers.)

Oz (*ct'd.*)

No hard feelings, Doc?

(Beat. Doc stands.)

Doc

"If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly."

(*silence*)

I need your answer in the morning.

(Doc exits.)

Doc
Close it behind you.

Scene 7:

(6:30pm. Oz interrupts Cleta on the roof of a concrete building. Cleta is smoking an e-cigarette.)

Oz
Still a smoker.

Cleta
You scared me. What are you doing up here?

Oz
My hands are shaking. Needed some air.

Cleta
You okay?

Oz
I think I might be fired. You hear about all this with Tamara?

Cleta
Unfortunately, yes.

Oz
You know, I try not to hate the students, but her...

Cleta
I'm not taking sides.

Oz
Sides!... Is that what it's come to? You believe I molested this girl?

(Beat.)

Cleta
Of course not.

Oz
You never were a very good actor.

Cleta

I've been in the rehearsal room with you, Oz, you get very personal.

Oz
Acting is personal!

Cleta
No it isn't! That's what is so great about acting, you get to stop pretending to be *you* for a while, and pretend to be someone else.

Oz
Acting is about exposing your inner self to the audience, in all your honesty and ugliness.

Cleta
Sounds like torture.

Oz
It is. But vulnerability is everything. That act of sharing lets the audience see themselves in you. That's the whole ballgame.

Cleta
And I've spent all these years pretending to be the character.

Oz
You want art to be easy.

Cleta
I want to take joy in my art.

Oz
Ah. Well. There it is.

Cleta
Hm?

Oz
You're selfish. Your acting is all about you.

Cleta
My acting is all about process, because my life is mostly rehearsals. I want to have a good clean process.

Oz
Well, you never were a very good actor.

(Beat.)

Cleta
(*over-dramatic*)
“Romeo, Romeo, where are you, Romeo?”

Oz
Now, *this* is torture.

(Cleta smokes.)

Oz (ct’d)
I thought you quit.

Cleta
I did quit.

Oz
You’ve just switched from coffee to earl grey. May I try?

(Cleta passes him the e-cig.)

Oz (*ct’d.*)
Tastes awful. How can you take a romantic pull on something like this?

Cleta
(*romantic pull*)
Have you tried, acting?

(Beat.)

Oz
You’re avoiding eye contact. That’s your tell. Go on. What do you need to say?

Cleta
Have you considered the retirement package?

Oz
Not you, too.

Cleta
I think you should take it. These aren’t our times any more. We should get out while they still think we’re gods.

Oz
We?

Cleta

We could do it together. Doc too. Make art again. I liked it when it was all teaching, but now it's committees and papers and meetings and handshakes, and, Jesus, I don't even have time to *care* any more. Let's move on and do summer stock in Poughkeepsie, and just die out in the woods where we still matter.

Oz

"Most everybody's asleep in Grover's Corners. There are a few lights on. Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the Albany train go by. And at the livery stable somebody's setting up late and talking. Yes, it's clearing up. There are the stars doing their old, old crisscross journeys in the sky. Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. Just chalk...or fire. Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain's so bad that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest. Hm...Eleven o'clock in Grover's Corners...You get a good rest, too."

Cleta & Oz

"Good night."

(Pause.)

Cleta

I worry about you.

Oz

I've been miserable for twenty years, and now you worry? Worry about me when Steven died. Worry about me when I published my book. *Now* you worry?

Cleta

You kissed a student!

Oz

I stage-kissed a student.

Cleta

Well, excuse my confusion!

(Beat. Oz laughs.)

Oz

Of course, Cleta, the beacon of decency. And you've never kissed a student?

Cleta

That was different.

Oz

How?

Cleta
It was in a show!

Oz
And who chose the show?

Cleta
So we're never supposed to do Albee?

Oz
You did. Or got some really juicy story from their past, and then sprung it on them right at that juicy moment in the scene?

Cleta
How would I even do that?

Oz
What the hell are you teaching them?

Cleta
Oh, I see. You need to be a diva to do your work, because you're not like the rest of us.

Oz
Tell me about it. I'm a goddamn actor! Alan Arkin was my Claudius! I should be in Berlin doing Vanya.

Cleta
Berlin?

Oz
(*a long spiel*)
Germany is the *birthplace* of theatrical —

Cleta
— All right, I'm sorry I asked.

Oz
I — can't change now, Cleta. Let me have my tools. I'm too old to learn new tricks. This is how I learned it, this is how it makes sense to me. And in a few years I'll be dead, and this whole political mess will be someone else's problem.

Cleta
So retire.

Oz
And do what?

Cleta
Something you enjoy.

Oz
I do miss... acting.

Cleta
No shame in admitting defeat.

(Pause.)

Oz
I'm not leaving. I'm just hitting my stride. I'm not going to let this become *Tamara's* department.
Not yet.

Cleta
It's Tamara's world.

Oz
I'm not afraid of her.

Cleta
You're not as good an actor as you think.

Oz
What happened to us? We used to love this.

Cleta
It became work.

Oz
Work is how I make my living.

Cleta
But you're not really living, are you?

(Pause.)

Oz
Is she right about me? Was I wrong?

Cleta
You're my friend. And I'm a good judge of character.

(Pause.)

Oz
No matter what?

Cleta
What are you planning to do?

Oz
Survive.

(Cello solo. Dissonant.)

Scene 8:

(7:00pm. A bigger office, lots of books, hardwood, upholstery: a room for entertaining. Alma is practicing cello. Enter Oz.)

Oz
Alma.

Alma
Oz! I didn't hear you.

Oz
I hope I'm not interrupting.

Alma
No, no. I was just practicing.

Oz
It's been ages.

Alma
It's been busy.

Oz
I wanted to pop on by, to congratulate you.

Alma
Thank you.

Oz
Must have been unexpected!

Alma
Unexpected and Interim.

Oz
You don't like it?

Alma
I like it too much, I want it permanent.

Oz
My girl. You're coming up in the world!

Alma
I hope we can still be friends, now that I'm your boss.

Oz
Ha! I hope so.

Alma
How are you?

Oz
Excellent. Will I see you at The Tempest?

Alma
It's a mainstage show: I think it's in my contract.

Oz
(*exhale*)
We'll have to grab a drink. After.

(Beat.)

Alma
Something on your mind?

Oz
You remember when we did The Ring Cycle way back when?

Alma
What were we thinking?

Oz
I couldn't have done it without you.

Alma

You're telling me.

Oz
You remember that boy, Robin?

Alma
No.

Oz
He was the lead.

Alma
I don't remember.

Oz
Siegmond!

Alma
The blond?

Oz
The blondest.

Alma
(*laughing*)
The one who had the lisp when he sang, but not when he // talked

Oz
(*simultaneously*)
// he was talking —

Alma
— Yes! What made you think of that show?

Oz
He offered himself to me. You remember how dashing I was back then. Yes, well, I had to turn him down.

Alma
Obviously.

Oz
With some difficulty. He was attracted to my authority, and I was attracted to his awe. But I made a choice. Such is the life of the master teacher.

Alma

Are you alright?

(Beat.)

Oz

I'm having trouble with something. It's — agh — it's embarrassing.

Alma

It's me, Oz.

Oz

It's a damn student. I've gotten myself in a row and it's — escalating.

Alma

What happened?

Oz

One of the MFA Actors, *Tamara*. I'm surprised you haven't heard of her. She's one of those "woke" ones. I thought you should know she's been spreading some rumors. I can't believe I'm telling you this.

Alma

How haven't I heard?

Oz

That's why I came.

Alma

Did she say something about... you?

Oz

Says I *kissed* her.

Alma

Did you?

Oz

No, Alma! And, I'm not going to let some coed take me down over something I didn't even do. I'm starting to wish I had, just so that this — vendetta would make sense.

(beat)

What would you do?

Alma

How did you let this happen? This is why we all have to be so careful.

Oz

You don't know what it's like, being a man nowadays. It's so much more than being careful. No touching on the lower back, no private coaching, no telling them to shave their damn armpit hair. There's no way to stop them getting offended any more. No matter how careful you are you'll slip up, or say the wrong thing, or they'll misconstrue. It's impossible to keep up. The only thing to do, is to do my job as best I can, and deal with their opinions when they come.

Alma

That may fly for you, but not for me. I can't have a student going around, saying — things like that. Even if she's lying, it could be a nightmare, like —

(terror)

Mattress Girl.

Oz

I don't know Alma, but I think we should nip it in the bud. Isn't there something you can do?

Alma

Something *I* can do?

Oz

You must be able to — smooth this out.

Alma

Hell, Oz, what are you asking?

Oz

You know me, Alma! I'm a teacher! You think I would devote my life to this work if I didn't care about the students?

Alma

Maybe if this was the first time, but Oz, we've had this conversation before.

Oz

But I'm innocent.

Alma

— I can't — take sides in a Title Nine case.

Oz

There is no case yet, only whispers. So this is the perfect time to take swift and surgical action.

Alma

This is a breach of protocol.

Oz

What the hell are you talking about? You've changed. How many times have you come into my office with your problems? Should I have told you to "fuck off, I'm on the clock?" Should I have left you alone to schmooze at all those parties?

Alma

As a female administrator, I have a responsibility — a duty! —

Oz

— Fine. I'm sorry I confided in you, you obviously have — *administering* — to do.

(*beat*)

I guess the ball is in her court. For better or worse.

(Alma is trapped.)

Alma

Ugh! Now I'm not going to be able to practice! You did this on purpose.

Oz

I wanted advice from an *old friend*.

Alma

Not old enough to take a fall for you.

Oz

I didn't come here to fight. You think I like this? I didn't even *do* it.

(Beat.)

Please. Alms. What is the point of being friends for all these years, if we don't help each other out?

Alma

Is that what I am to you?

Oz

...A friend?

(Pause. Alma plays an ominous lick on her cello..)

Alma

I'll handle it.

(Alma plays. Oz takes his cue, and exits.)

Scene 9:

(The Gala. Alma on a stage, holding a flute of champagne.)

Alma

Given the events of last spring, it is an opportune time to state emphatically, as we have done on several other occasions, that sexual misconduct has no place here, where we value the dignity of each person, and pride ourselves on being a Community who Cares.

We know that we are not immune to sexual harassment. Most often, instances of misconduct involve people who are not strangers, but who know each other, and are part of this community. We must acknowledge this reality as we strive to eliminate all forms of violence from our campuses.

That is why I want to show you what your contributions have made possible. We have expanded the resources in place for sexual assault prevention, education, reporting, investigation, adjudication, and support. Let us each commit to doing our part and moving forward together.

But we couldn't do any of these things with tuition funds alone.

(a favorite datum)

Tuition accounts for only sixty percent of our total education costs! Our ambition is to be the most progressive school in the country, on issues of sexual misconduct. So please give generously tonight.

Our endowment took a big hit, as you know, in the recession, and it has been your generosity that has kept the University the safe and welcoming environment we have all come to love.

And now, for your viewing pleasure, the University Players have prepared some dramatic scenes for us tonight, and please remember, none of this would be possible without your generous support.

Scene 10:

(7:30pm. Doc's office. Alma enters, closes the door, and glares at Doc.)

Doc

You look ominous. *(Beat.)* Something I can help with?

Alma

You've done enough.

Doc

Someone told you.

Alma

Someone! It scares me that there are multiple someones who know about this.

Doc
I'm as concerned as you are.

Alma
You don't look concerned. *Especially* after last spring. That's why I'm the dean, and not you, so that what happened last year can't happen again. I will not have a scandal in my first year.

Doc
I asked Oz to consider the retirement package. He hasn't made a final decision.

Alma
Yes he has. Who is the student?

Doc
Tamara. She's an MFA actor.

Alma
And?

Doc
She's talented. She's sensitive. She's talented *because* she's sensitive. And, she's Black.

Alma
That's so much worse!

Doc
We were trying to give her a leg up.

Alma
"No good deed," Doc. Is she the litigious type?

Doc
Like I said, she's sensitive. But I don't think she comes from money, if that's what you mean.

Alma
So did he kiss her or didn't he?

(Pause.)

Doc
That's what she says. She also says I'm a fascist.

Alma

So she's bright, too? This is why we have a protocol, Doc. All Title Nine matters pass up the chain to the Dean; we certainly do *not* inform the *teacher* of the Allegation.

Doc

So. Oz told you. The department is small, we talk. And he's a friend. Can you blame us for trying to handle this in-house?

Alma

You call this in-house? How many people know about this? I'm going to have to call a press conference. I'm going to have to make a *determination*.

Doc

Alma, your emotions have gotten the best of you.

Alma

My *emotions*? Doc, I swear to God, if you don't wipe that sexism out of your voice, my emotions will get the best of *you*. I want you to fix this, Doc. Oz needs to go.

(Pause.)

Doc

I've been in academia for forty years. This sort of thing happens. A teacher crosses a line, a student takes it personally. Maybe they should! But they never sue the school because they want their diplomas.

You know how I met Beth? She was my Carol in Oleanna. When she graduated — you know how talented she is — I kept on casting her. This woman is the love of my life, and I would never have met her if she wasn't a student here.

Alma

She wasn't *your* student.

Doc

And things were different then; but these lines are blurrier than we care to admit. These students are adults. Tamara is thirty!

Alma

Times have changed, Doc. Those lines are stark now.

Doc

Let me try to resolve this amicably.

Alma

It's too late for that.

(Beat.)

Doc
Oz has tenure. He can't be fired.

Alma
But he can choose to resign. He will choose to resign.

Doc
He's a friend.

Alma
He's a liability. We protect the institution.

Doc
It would destroy the faculty's trust in my leadership.

Alma
Trust can be rebuilt.

(Beat.)

Doc
Do I have a choice...?

Alma
Sure you have a choice: him or you.

(Beat.)

Doc
I'll tell him tomorrow.

(Beat.)

Alma
(*release*)
Good.

Doc
See you at the gala?

Alma
Is there an open bar?... Then we'll be there...
My heart is racing. I won't be able to sleep now.

Doc

You'll learn.

Scene 11:

(10:00pm. Outside an ivy-covered building. Oz is smoking a cigarette as Doc hurries outside. Doc sees Oz and realizes he is trapped.)

Doc
Hey, Oz.

Oz
What's up, Doc?

Doc
Just headed home. (*Beat.*) Long night.

Oz
You didn't have to bring Clea into it.

Doc
She brought me in.

Oz
Well she should have brought it to me. I didn't even do it this time!

Doc
(*sigh*)
Can we talk about this in the morning?

Oz
Oh, in the morning? Before or after Marla gets in?

Doc
It's late. What do you propose?

Oz
Cassie's up.

Doc
I don't know what to tell you, Oz.

Oz
Then let me spell it for you: I am not retiring, fat man, not for this girl, not for Cassie, and certainly not for you. You think, if you were in trouble, I wouldn't have been there for you?

Doc

Then let me be clear, *Professor*. You have put all of us in jeopardy. If I can't clean this up, then retirement will be the least of your worries.

Oz

So go up there and clean this up.

Doc

How!

Oz

She's a visiting professor. Throw some weight around.

Doc

Who *are* you tonight?

Oz

I am innocent!

(Pause.)

Doc

This is — unfair. Unethical, maybe. I'll see you in the morning.

Oz

Well, I'm not taking the deal.

(*beat*)

So it looks like you'd better hope tomorrow morning isn't too late.

Doc

I've seen this side of you, Oz. But I never thought I'd be on the other end.

Oz

I'm fighting for my life, Doc.

Doc

We all are.

Oz

Then let's help each other!

Doc

...It wouldn't be right.

(Beat.)

Oz
Please. If our friendship means anything to you...

(Pause.)

Doc
It's too late. Alma came to me. Oz, I'm sorry... it's already over.

Oz
Then...

Doc
Goodnight.

(Doc goes to leave.)

Oz
And you're just going to let her walk all over you?

Doc
It's her call.

Oz
After everything. All those drinks. All those shows. I mean nothing to you.

Doc
We can still be friends.

Oz
Friends help each other! Or don't you believe in loyalty?

Doc
I fought for you! But it's not my call.
I'm sorry.

(Doc goes to exit.)

Oz
I'll take you down with me.

Doc
Oh?

Oz

You broke protocol. You told the alleged perpetrator. The old boys club is run rampant around here. You should have been more careful. As the face of the department.

Doc

This is your mess. Your funeral.

Oz

What about Directors' Rep?

Doc

What about them?

Oz

I'm the reason the kids get cast there. What is the Institute without a pipeline to the professional theatre? That's your whole thing.

Doc

I think Directors' Rep will stick with us.

Oz

I'll make sure they don't. Don't you share a development team with them? That's a lot of grant money down the pipes.

Doc

Don't fuck with my donors, Oz.

Oz

Not to mention the scandal when this all comes out. Seems like an awful risk to take with your *legacy*. The safest path — for you — is to keep this quiet. And I won't be kept quiet. We all have secrets, Doc. And I bet there are some ingenues with secrets, too.

(Beat.)

Doc

Okay, Oz.

But after this... We will be colleagues. That's it.

Oz

If that's what it takes.

(Doc heads back inside.)

Doc (*ct'd.*)

I can't believe I held your hand through Steven's illness, to be treated like this.

Oz

We've been through a lot together.

Doc
I don't want to see you when I come back out.

Oz
Then use the back door.

Scene 12:

(10:30pm. Cassie's office. Cassie is typing something long on her phone. Doc wanders in.)

Doc
Small. I forgot how small.

(Cassie stashes her phone.)

Cassie
Hi Doc, yes, cozy.

Doc
We'll have to do something about that. Have a seat.

(Cassie sits.)

Doc (*ct'd.*)
Been getting nothing but raves about you.

Cassie
That's good to hear.

Doc
Kids like you.

Cassie
Ugh, I'm trying not to be so likable.

Doc
I notice you applied for the tenure-track job?

Cassie
I like it here.

Doc
Do you direct at all?

Cassie
My BA was in directing.

Doc
Really? Hm.

Cassie
I also have an administration certificate.

Doc
So you wouldn't mind taking down minutes?

Cassie
And I can bake.

Doc
Careful, that could be considered a bribe.
(*beat*)
Tell me about Tamara.
(*beat*)
Cleta told me. Obviously I'm taking this very seriously.

Cassie
I don't know that it's my place to say.

Doc
Really? I thought we could talk — frankly.

Cassie
It's just — that —

Doc
I need your help on this...

Cassie
I'm sorry...

Doc
Right, right, I understand. But how is she doing?

Cassie
She's shaken. She's angry. You would be angry too.

Doc
Is she telling the truth?

Cassie
Yes.

Doc
And... is it bad?

Cassie
I don't know that it's my place...

Doc
Ah. You know, next year you're going to have to open up a bit more, if this is going to work out.

Cassie
Next year?

Doc
Of course, Cassandra, you're a shoe-in. Obviously I couldn't tell you that, but I've been trying to communicate my *investment* in you. The students like you. It's *you*, Cassie.

Cassie
Does that mean...?

Doc
Well, it's obviously not official, but yes, you can tell your husband.

Cassie
No more adjuncting?

Doc
No.

Cassie
I won't have to move across the country again!

Doc
And we're happy to give you a leg up. You're a gifted professor.

Cassie
Thank you.

Doc
And we need a new Playwright in Residence, so —

Cassie
I'll do it. I can do it.

Doc
So, Tamara.

Cassie
Tamara...

Doc
What are we going to do about this?

(Pause.)

Cassie
I don't know that —

Doc
— Cassie. I am being serious now. This is a real problem for the Institute. This either needs to go through proper channels or it needs to go away. Tonight.

Cassie
I don't think she'll back down.

Doc
But she trusts you, yeah? If anyone can get through to her, it will be you.

Cassie
Cleta told you *everything*?

Doc
We are all in this together, now.

Cassie
Doc, I — I think she might be right. I think she may have seen something — wrong.

Doc
And we can deal with that as well. I will personally deal with that. If you can deal with this.

Cassie
I can talk to her. But — the choice is hers.

Doc
Of course! We're not monsters!

Cassie

No!

Doc
Christ, Cassie, you act like I don't have feelings.

Cassie
I'm sorry. I think emotions are running high.

Doc
Well, they should be. Can you handle this, Cassie? For the Institute?

Cassie
Okay.

Doc
And think about classes you want to teach next year.

Cassie
Right.

Doc
(*sincere*)
And good luck.

Cassie.
...Thank you.

(Doc goes to leave.)

Cassie
And if I can't handle it?

(Doc winks, and exits. Cassie has a standoff with her phone.)

Scene 13:

(11:00pm. Tamara enters Cassie's office.)

Cassie
Come in.

(Tamara enters, Cassie closes the door.)

Tamara

Did you find people?

Cassie
People?

Tamara
Character witnesses.

Cassie
...Sort of...

Tamara
I spoke to at least five kids. They remember. They thought it was just Oz being Oz, but they'll testify. They remember.

Cassie
Good.

Tamara
They're scared. But excited? They thought they just had to live with it, but now they're realizing: they have power.

Cassie
That's amazing.

Tamara
I think we're actually doing something — Important. We're showing these girls they don't have to submit.

Cassie
...Have a seat.

(That doesn't bode well. Tamara sits.)

Cassie (ct'd)
Want some tea?

Tamara
What do you have?

Cassie
Lemon, or chamomile.

Tamara
No thanks.

(Pause.)

Cassie

So. I've looked into it.

... You sure, no tea?

I might have something else.

Earl grey...

I'm so excited for what you've done. It's really great.

And I've been making inquiries too.

(*beat*)

The school is not going to listen.

I spoke to Doc.

I thought it was best.

He told me, in no uncertain terms, that if any *formal* complaint is made, it will be taken very seriously. But there isn't enough... there isn't enough to *get* him.

It will be a big scandal, but he'll walk, and you'll... what will you get?

(Tamara points to the tissue box. Cassie hands her a tissue. Tamara points to the box. Cassie hands her the box. Tamara blows her nose, crumples the tissue, drops it on the floor.)

Cassie (*ct'd*)

Have you talked to Oz? I don't think, if you talked to him, he meant anything bad. He might be happy to hear your — perspective.

(Tamara blows her nose and throws the tissue on the floor.)

Cassie (*ct'd*)

Or you can still do something. I'm just here to tell you, it's going to be hard, and it's not going to work.

Maybe you could switch classes. I could call and explain... you could TA for *me*.

It would be great to have an actor in the class, a reader, someone to make the texts come alive.

And next year — .

Tamara

— Next year?

(Beat.)

Cassie

Sure.

(Beat.)

Tamara

I — I can't believe you. You sold me out? For them?

Cassie
I know you're very upset. And you have a right to be.

Tamara
Don't tell me how I feel.

Cassie
Okay.

(Tamara tears the tissue box in half.)

Tamara
I can't believe you. I can't believe you told him. And I can't believe — nothing would have been done.

Cassie
It's okay. It's just a kiss.

Tamara
It is not just a kiss. This is just a clear — incident. This is every Tuesday and Thursday some new game, some new humiliation. And finally, something — tangible. And no one cares.

Cassie
I care.

Tamara
What did he give you, a world premier? A promotion?
(*off her look*)
Tenure. Doc didn't say no, *you're* saying no.

Cassie
This has been, and will always be, *your* decision.

(Tamara laughs.)

Tamara
I'm just a fly, crushed against a cog in this giant machine. You're the cog.

Cassie
We all have professional considerations. Even you.

Tamara
Well, thanks for making that call for me, you're a real Susan B. Anthony.

Cassie

Good girls go far. Squeaky wheels just get chunked. It's not fair, but in this industry, women have to be perfect. We have to be talented and graceful and sane, and we have to rise to every occasion: we are held to a higher standard. And yes, it hurts not to get what you want. But you can take it. I know you can.

Tamara
You don't even know about unfair.

(Beat.)

Cassie
We aren't going to bring down the system from the bottom. We need to climb the ladder first. Then we can make change.

Tamara
Coward.

Cassie
Excuse me?

Tamara
Don't pretend you're weak. They gave you a choice, and you made it.

Cassie
And you're naive. You think you're going to be a professional actor without their help? Grow up.

Tamara
I've been the adult in my house since I was ten. I grew up a long time ago. I'm not powerless, I am a force of nature. And the only justice you get is the justice you make.

Cassie
I know it feels like shit. But this is the smart thing. I'm thinking of you.

Tamara
What about the other girls?

Cassie
In what sense?

Tamara
The past girls, the future girls, the girl today. All the other girls.

The way he gets, when it gets beyonds teaching. He gets angry, you can feel it. The whole room gets quiet. Who's it going to be? Better do that scene perfectly so it's not you. But then you're nervous, you mess up. And there he is, with some little... comment... perfectly cruel. And it throws you. And then he says "again," and you try to put it aside, but you can't because he stops

you, and now it's harsher, and it *gets* harsher 'til you're sweating, and cotton-mouthed and angry, and you do it again and again, and it's not getting any better, and you know it, and now he's having fun coming up with that perfect insult, "it's like you're bowlegged," "why are you choosing to cry right now?" — and then, if you disobey, there is a punishment, some clever little game that exposes you perfectly, but not Acting You, Real You, and when you're exhausted, angry, tired, ready to obey, anything to make it stop, make him pick on someone else, he tells the class all about how much progress you've made, and how this is what great acting is all about.

And they nod. All of them. They think art is cruel.

(Pause.)

Cassie

I can't tell you what to do. But if you go forward, there will be a cost to me.

Tamara

Just so long as there's a cost to him.

(Shift.)

Cassie

You're angry. Sleep. We'll do it in the morning. We'll go to the dean together.

Tamara

You said you didn't know the dean.

Cassie

She can't ignore us both.

Tamara

Okay.

Cassie

I have a class at 10:15, so...

Tamara

8AM? No, fuck that. 9AM? Can we meet at 9? Before we go?

Cassie

Of course.

Tamara

How late is it?

Cassie

Rehearsals are over. Everyone's gone.

(Pause. Tamara slowly releases her sadness. It's a great relief.)

Tamara
(*tearfully*)
I can finally cry.

(She uses a tissue from the floor. Cassie holds her)

Scene 14:

(9:00am. In a classroom. Doc is typing on his phone. Oz is examining framed playbills on the wall. Tamara enters.)

Tamara
(*seeing Doc, then Oz*)
Um — oh.

Doc
Good morning, Tamara, you're right where you're supposed to be.

Tamara
I was told I would find Cassie here?

Doc
You're right where you're supposed to be. Have a seat.

Tamara
I have a meeting with Cassie right now.

Doc
We know. Please. Sit.

(They all sit.)

Oz
Splendid morning, isn't it?

Doc
Yes. So. Tamara, we understand that you want to make a formal — report, and I just thought, let's try one more time to see if we can't resolve this amicably.
(*beat*)
So. Oz, I guess you have something to say.

Oz

Now Tamara, I know I upset you in class. It's funny, I thought nothing of it. But you did, and I understand that. We're all trying to learn these days. I promise you, everything I do, I do for the student. I'm teaching. Sometimes I push too hard, I know that, but my intention isn't to — torture these kids! For me to do that — I'd have to be a real piece of work.

(Tamara thinks he is a real piece of work.)

Oz (*ct'd*)

So, I want you to know, I'm sorry, and I hope we can move past this.

(Silence.)

Oz (*ct'd*)

Doc?

Doc

I think what Oz is trying to say is that he's sorry, and he hopes we can move past this.

(Silence.)

Oz

Well, I've said my piece. Do you want to say anything?

Tamara

No.

(Beat.)

Doc

Tamara, I was hoping we could have a dialogue.

Tamara

I don't want a dialogue. I want to file a formal complaint.

Doc

Now hold on, let's at least give this a fair hearing.

Oz

Tamara, if you could just articulate... why?

Tamara

Because you're a bully.

Oz

I see.

Doc
Wow. Those are... strong words.

Tamara
I'm not going to let you gang up on me.

Doc
I'm here to mediate. I'm a mediator. I'm mediating.

Oz
I know you don't like me, that's alright, it happens from time to time. But why make this formal? What do you want? Maybe we can do something to help you excel.

Doc
Perhaps you've been unsatisfied with your teaching assignments.

Oz
Or maybe our casting choices haven't been sensitive to your... considerable talent.

Tamara
No.

Doc
I know the AD at Directors' Rep is looking for an assistant. Have you thought about directing?

Oz
You'll only be dredging up bad memories, and for what? What does it get you? Honestly, what is so important?

(Tamara laughs.)

Tamara
This. It's this. It's this weird old-boys-club you're running here, with your weird cult of personalities. And your weird, exhausting schedule, and your weird personal critiques, and your weird unexplainable teaching pedagogy and your weird conferences where you gang up on students to make them feel like they don't have choices, well I do!

Oz
Ouch. Sounds like... sounds like maybe this program isn't a good fit for you.

Tamara
Maybe not.

Doc
Be honest. Do you even want to be here?

Tamara
Of course.

Doc
But you have these concerns; how come you haven't brought these to me before?

Tamara
I didn't want to be the squeaky wheel.

Doc
Tamara, we expect our students to bring their concerns to the faculty if they are having difficulty.

Tamara
Well, I'm here.

Oz
But are you really *here*?

Doc
(*referring to himself and Oz*)
As a Jewish man — and a gay man — we know what it's like to feel — out of place. Believe me, we know.

Oz
Perhaps you're just not cut out for the graduate school experience.

Tamara
You selected me out of a pool of hundreds. I won the full scholarship. I deserve to be here.

Oz
You're here on scholarship?

(Pause.)

Doc
Tamara is one of our fully-funded students.

Oz
Shouldn't that funding go to someone more... a better fit for the program? I mean, it sounds like Tamara has real problems with the institution. Maybe you should transfer.

Doc
He has a point, Tamara. Do you even want to be here?

Tamara

I'm half way through an MFA!

Doc
But do you *want* to be here?

Oz
A full scholarship, how many of those do we give away?

Doc
Two.

Oz
That money could be better spent on a student who really needs to be here. Needs to be *here*.

Tamara
I need that money.

Doc
Sometimes financial reasons are the worst reasons to make a decision.

Tamara
I *need* that money. None of these other kids need that money, *I* need that money.

Oz
Well, that is a passionate defense. Doc, what do you say we give Tamara a second chance?

Doc
Agreed. What do you say, Tamara, do you want to continue as a fully-funded student?

(Silence.)

Tamara
Yes, sir.

Doc
Good! And, Tamara, I hope we've put some of your reservations to rest?

Tamara
Yes, sir.

Oz
And no hard feelings, of course!

Doc
Of course!

Oz

You should continue to come to us in the future. I think this was really productive.

Tamara

Yes.

(They stand to leave.)

Oz

I'm a hugger.

(He hugs Tamara.)

Oz (*ct'd*)

See you in class.

(Tamara leaves.)

Doc

That went well.

Scene 15:

(The Gala.)

Cleta

When I first joined this department, I had a mission: to change the world, one student at a time. Theatre is about telling the stories of those who do not have a voice. Putting them in front of you so that you have to listen. By choosing just the right story at just the right moment, we can open up a new perspective into the world. We can change the way you see others, the way you see yourselves. These student actors are at the very beginning of their stories, but their voices are no less powerful.

I came to the Institute at a time when there were no female artists on the drama faculty, and I am proud to stand here today as a member of a diverse coalition of teachers, and as the teacher of the University's first Literature of the African Diaspora course.

We have truly come a long way. And the person most directly responsible for that change is right here in this room. Ladies and gentlemen, please open your hearts (and your checkbooks!) to my friend, and a true educator, Doctor Arthur Rheingold,

Scene 16:

(9:30am. Tamara peeks into Alma's office, Alma is on her way out the door.)

Tamara
Your assistant said you were in?

Alma
She is not my assistant, she is the Vice Dean of the Institute of Fine Arts.

Tamara
Sorry. Do you have a minute?

Alma
Actually I'm on my way to a meeting.

Tamara
Okay, I just really need to talk to somebody.

Alma
If you make an appointment with Erin, I can talk to you sometime next week.

Tamara
So she is your secretary?

Alma
...What's your name, Miss?

Tamara
Tamara.

Alma
I see. I'm sorry I don't have time right now.

Tamara
(*emotional*)
Do you have time later today? This, just, can't wait.

(Alma makes an annoyed sigh. Tamara starts to cry, big sobs.)

Alma
(*resigned sigh.*)
Erin, tell them I'll be late.

(She closes the door.)

Alma

You want to sit down?

(Tamara sits on the floor. Alma sits in a chair.)

Tamara
I need to report something.

Alma
Do you want to make a formal report?

Tamara
Um.

Alma
Before you —

Tamara
Yes.

Alma
Before you decide, you should know that I'm a mandatory reporter.

Tamara
Yes.

Alma
So if you want to report something, I would be obligated to... make further inquiries.

Tamara
I understand.

Alma
So if you want to continue —

Tamara
— Yes —

Alma
You should know that.

Tamara
Yes. (Beat.) What have you heard?

Alma
What do you mean?

Tamara
You seem...?

Alma
Tell me what you need to tell me.

Tamara
I'd like to report sexual misconduct.

Alma
I see.

Tamara
On the part of a teacher.

(Alma hangs her head.)

Alma
Who is it?

Tamara
Professor McGrail.

(Alma hands her a notepad and pen.)

Alma
Write it down.
You came to the right person. I'll see you through this. You know, I was there when they invented feminism. I saw them burning bras on TV. I burned my mother's bra. It's true! She was so angry.

There was this idea that one day we could really be *anything*. The future was open. In those days I never dreamed of becoming a professor, let alone a dean. So when they offered me this job, I knew: the walls were finally coming down.

There was a catch, of course. I was the diversity hire. I was here to prove that the department wasn't sexist, after what Dean Acheron did. I was the Face of Feminism. And I knew, if I took the gig, it would be my job to make sure that the administration was shielded from any accusation of misogyny. That was my role.

I decided that, the only thing I could do, as a feminist, was take advantage of this moment to advance a woman's voice in the University. For once my responsibility as a feminist was to succeed.

I have succeeded. For us. For you. I will continue to succeed. We women, we need to seize our power when it is offered.

(Tamara stops writing.)

Tamara
What are you doing?

Alma
Talking about feminism.

Tamara
Ah, yes, feminism: “learning to thrive inside the patriarchy.”

Alma
I stand by the gains we made.

Tamara
What good are your gains, if I can’t report a man?

Alma
You can.

Tamara
Then what are you trying to tell me?

Alma
I’m not allowed to tell you, I have to be impartial. But. You have power. Right now. This is your moment.

Tamara
What moment?

Alma
The moment for your ask. You have the Institute by the balls, dear. That’s power. What do you want?

Tamara
I want to use my voice. I want to speak the truth.

Alma
Or. What if... you were a professor?

Tamara
Here?

Alma

Anywhere. You would have an enormous influence over your students. Over the culture of the institution. You would bring a new, and desperately needed perspective. I can build that future for you. For us. But I can't help you if I'm not in a position of power...

Tamara

So, the right thing to do aligns perfectly with your self-interest.

Alma

I'm just giving you the facts.

Tamara

I want to succeed, I really do. But, I think something's wrong with me: when I see something... evil... it makes me sick. I have to fight.

Alma

No one is evil, we're all just fuckups.

Tamara

I don't know how to stop fighting.

Alma

It's the easiest thing in the world. Lay down your burdens. Let me make a home for you. I am going to be president of this University some day, and then I am going to make real, lasting change. History is a long game. We play to win. If we flip the table, we lose.

Tamara

The game is rigged.

Alma

So help me un-rig it. Make your ask. Thrive!

Tamara

I just want what's right.

Alma

The best revenge is a life well-lived. Let me help you. Maybe there is something else I can do to make your life here... exceptional.

Tamara

You sound like them.

Alma

Who?

(Tamara signs her document.)

Alma (*ct'd*)

Tamara. I've heard about you. Strong. Talented. You have so much potential. Think carefully. Who knows if you'll get this chance again?

Tamara

You've heard about me?

(Beat.)

Alma

I have.

(Tamara offers up the completed form. Alma takes it. Alma opens the door.)

Alma

Erin, cancel my 10:00.

Scene 17:

(The next day. Cassie's new office. Enter Pandora, meekly.)

Pandora

Uh, Professor Dunbar?

Cassie

Hi, Pandora! How can I be of service? I loved your piece on Monday.

Pandora

Thanks. It's actually not about class.

Cassie

Okay. What's up?

Pandora

Do you know what happened to Tamara?

Cassie

What do you mean?

Pandora

I can't find her. Her desk is all cleaned out, and I can't find her anywhere.

Cassie
Are you okay?

Pandora
I just... Tamara said she would help me with something. She's my acting TA, and she was going to help me with something.

Cassie
Maybe I can help.

Pandora
No! it was — acting stuff. Anyway I know you two were close, and I was wondering, if something happened to her?

Cassie
I'm sure Tamara is fine, honey. Are you okay?

Pandora
It's just, like, I saw you two talking yesterday... I thought, if anyone would know...

Cassie
Tamara has been dealing with some... personal issues. I can't discuss it.

Pandora
Oh no! I hope it wasn't — was it... Oz?

Cassie
I really can't say.

Pandora
Because Oz is a great teacher. And I wouldn't want any conflict between them. She's my acting TA.

Cassie
You mentioned.

Pandora
So if you hear from her, would you tell her I'm looking for her?

Cassie
Of course.

Pandora
Just like tell her, I don't need her help anymore. I sorted it out on my own.

Cassie
I'll tell her.

Pandora
(*a secret*)
I'm going to be Antigone at Director's Rep this fall.

Cassie
Good!

Pandora
So I would never want her to cause conflict...

Cassie
Pandora, is there something you want to talk about?

Pandora
No. I don't want to make waves.

Cassie
Smart. This place does not abide... waves.

Pandora
Can I ask you a personal question?

Cassie
...Shoot.

Pandora
Do you like it? The theatre?

Cassie
I love it.

Pandora
What do you do when... you feel like quitting?

Cassie
Quitting the program?
(*beat*)
Do you enjoy the theatre?

Pandora
Sometimes.

Cassie

When?

Pandora
...When I'm onstage.

Cassie
I always hated performing.

Pandora
I love it. I feel so... me.

Cassie
And what about rehearsal.

Pandora
...I wish I could just skip to opening night.

Cassie
So: is it worth it, all the pain and heartache of rehearsal, to make it to opening night?

Pandora
I guess so.

Cassie
Rehearsal and performance are — twins. Without rehearsal there's no opening, and without opening, you're just screwing around. Life is difficult. Life is painful. At least you know what to do to get to your happiness.

Pandora
Thanks, but, what do you do with all these... feelings?

(Beat.)

Cassie
I write. I put all the feelings into my work, where they can be useful. Sometimes my characters can say the things I can't.

Pandora
Wow. You're a really good teacher.

Cassie
I'm not sure about that.

Pandora
You are. You always know what to do. Thanks, Professor.

Cassie
It's the least I can do.

Pandora
And tell Tamara, thanks, but she can let it go.

Cassie
If I see her.

Pandora
Thanks. And, Professor?

Cassie
Hm?

Pandora
My homework on Monday is going to be late.

Cassie
It's okay. I'm always willing to help a student in need.

Pandora
Thanks. You're the best.

(Exit Pandora.)

Scene 18:

(The Gala. Pandora alone on stage.)

Pandora
And, scene!

(Pandora acts.)

I do know what I am talking about! It is you who have lost your way and don't know what to say. I am too far away from you now, talking to you from a kingdom you can't get into, with your quick tongue and your hollow heart.

I laugh, Creon, because I see suddenly what a transparent hypocrite you are. Creon, the family man! Creon, the contented sitter on benches, in the evening, in his garden! Creon, desecrating the dead while he tries to fob me off with platitudes about happiness!

I spit on your happiness! I spit on your idea of life — that life that must go on, come what may. You are all like dogs that lick everything they smell. You with your promise of a humdrum happiness — provided a person doesn't ask too much of life.

I want everything of life, I do; and I want it now! I want it total, complete: otherwise I reject it! If life must be a thing of fear and lying and compromise; if life cannot be free, gallant, incorruptible — then, Creon, I choose death!

(Pandora is crying.)

(Oz goes onstage to comfort her. She recoils from his touch, and runs away.)

Oz
And, scene.

Scene 19:

(A week later. Tamara walks into a classroom with the full faculty arrayed behind a table, and a single chair for her on the other side.)

Doc
Tamara, take a seat.

(She does.)

Tamara
The whole gang's here.

Doc
It has come to my attention that you would feel more comfortable outside of your duties as a TA in Oz's class.

Tamara
That would be an understatement.

Doc
The problem is, on my end, that your fellowship is contingent on those duties. You are paid, quite well, to TA for us here.

Tamara
\$6,000 a year?

Doc
\$48,000 including the tuition we cover.

Tamara
Ah. The money you pay directly to yourselves.

Doc
So what are we to do?

Tamara
Fire the bastard.

Alma
That language may be appropriate — where you come from — but not here.

Tamara
Good to see you here, Dean Lee. How is my paperwork coming?

Alma
I am processing it.

Tamara
What about Mandatory Reporting? What about protocol?

Alma
There is a new protocol.

Doc
Cassie has made a very generous offer. You can transfer into the MA playwriting program, and she will be your advisor. Most of your classes would be in the English department. Wouldn't that be nice? You could keep your credits and graduate in two years. But, seeing as how you will not be continuing as a fellow, you would not be funded to remain in the Acting program. Do you understand?

Tamara
You're expelling me.

Doc
We are offering you an opportunity to transfer.

Tamara
For reporting the truth.

Cleta
Because this is not a good fit.

Tamara
And you want to make me into a playwright?

Doc
We want to give you a path to graduation.

Tamara
And if I don't want your charity?

Doc
I would not feel comfortable signing your class registration forms for next semester. You have said things that would seem to indicate a lack of commitment to the program.

Tamara
(to Cleta)
And this is all fine by my advisor?

Cleta
Cassie's offer is very generous. A Master's degree from a prestigious university, that's nothing to look down on.

Tamara
I know, that's why I was getting one.

Cleta
And this would be no different.

Tamara
Then why do it?

Cleta
Because... it is your best option.

Tamara
You mean I have no choice.

Cleta
There's also...

Oz
Some people just aren't cut out for the graduate school experience.

Tamara
Okay.

(She stands.)

Tamara (*ct'd.*)

You have no leverage over me. I know your secrets. So, no. I will not be expelled. I will graduate on time, and if you ask me very, very nicely, I won't sue you —

(*Oz*)

And you —

(*Doc*)

And you —

(*Alma*)

And the Institute and the whole University, and take my settlement in cash. All I ask is that that man —

(*Oz*)

Never teaches here again. So what do you say, team? Do you accept my terms?

(*Oz applauds.*)

Oz

There's the actor I knew was in there! Great performance, you really seemed convinced of yourself. Unfortunately, you still need to read your audience. You see, you have no leverage over us. We are under no obligation to enroll you for next semester, right Cleta? Or to fund your education, right Doc? And there is no record of any of this, right Alma?... I spoke to Pandora, and she has no problem with what happened in class last week, in fact, I've offered her the lead in *Antigone*. She's a real trooper. I have my colleagues to vouch for me. The only thing you have is your word.

Tamara

And Cassie's word.

(*She turns to Cassie.*)

Tamara (ct'd)

She knows what happened.

(*Pause.*)

Cassie...?

Cassie

...Maybe you were confused.

Tamara

No...

Cassie

I wasn't there.

Oz

In fact, Cassie, I think Tamara has changed her story a few times. First I kiss this student, then I kissed her. Seems inconsistent.

Cassie
It is inconsistent.

Tamara
I never said he kissed me.

Doc
That's not what I heard. Cassie?

Cassie
I'm offering you a chance to finish a degree. It's what I have to offer. You should take it.

(Long pause.)

Tamara
I just want what's right.

Cassie
That is the one thing I can't give you.

Doc
We need an answer before you leave this room.

(Pause.)

Tamara
You know, teaching is a sacred act. You carry each student in your hands in their most vulnerable moments. They want your approval, your guidance. You decide their self esteem, their methods, their philosophies. And you have the opportunity to do something beautiful. You can be a force of creation, or destruction. And I swear to God, I will burn this place to the ground before I let you treat another student the way you have treated me. I will never give in to you. I will march in the streets. Everyone will hear about what you've done here.

(To Cassie:)

Tamara (*ct'd*)
Sleep well, Professor, I hope it was worth it.

(Tamara leaves.)

Oz
Did she just threaten to burn down the school?

Alma
Yes, I think she did.

Oz
That's... dangerous. Criminal.

Alma
Certainly calls her mental health into question.

Oz
We should get her the help she needs.

Cleta
Before she hurts herself. Or others.

Doc
Then I believe our path is clear.

Oz
Yes.

Doc
Alma?

Alma
Yes.

Doc
Cleta?

Cleta
...Yes.

Doc
Cassie.

Cassie
...Yes.

Oz
Welcome to the family.

(Beat.)

Doc
Lunch?

Scene 20:

(The Gala.)

Doc

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your generous contributions tonight. After tonight, we have reached our goal —

(interrupted by applause)

— Our goal to raise twenty-one-and-a-half million dollars to build a new, state-of-the-art theatre center that will make this University a home to the most ambitious productions in the country.

This project has been, in many ways, my life's work, to leave this institution something of myself, some legacy I can be proud of. Which is why it is with some sadness, but mostly with deep gratitude, that I must announce that I will be retiring at the end of this year. I know. I was shocked too.

I have been offered the opportunity to become the Artistic Director at the National Theatre Showcase in LA, and I know I would never be able to take on a role of that significance and complexity without the integrity, friendship, and — yes — education I got in my tenure as chair of this department. I will truly miss you all, but I know that I leave you in the very capable hands of Oz McGrail, a veteran teacher, and a good, good man.

I have learned so much while I was here. I have done so much good theatre, and met so many inspiring students. I know that you will give Oz the same love, patience, and hard work you gave me over the years.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to an old friend, and your new chair.
Ozymandias McGrail!

(Applause.)

Scene 21:

(A month after the faculty meeting. Oz's office is populated with props, masks, and trophies, and is half-packed for a move. Oz is sorting his many books into boxes. Cassie knocks on the door.)

Cassie

What's up, Doc?

Oz

Cassie! How are you?

Cassie
Congrats on the new gig.

Oz
Big shoes to fill, but it'll do.

Cassie
May I?

Oz
Of course, of course. What can I do for you?

Cassie
I wanted to make sure you and I were... okay.

Oz
Why wouldn't we be?

Cassie
Because of the situation, with Tamara.

Oz
Cassie, you mustn't worry. That was hard on all of us. And you did your best.

Cassie
I know we didn't see eye to eye...

Oz
Nonsense. I think you comported yourself very well. I am pleased to have someone of your —character— on the faculty.

Cassie
That's good to hear. I didn't want any bad blood between us.

Oz
I can see why you would check in, and thank you for doing that, but you have nothing to worry about. We all want what's best for the students.

Cassie
Exactly.

Oz
You see? Same page.

Cassie
That's good to hear.

Oz
And please, do come to me with anything like this in the future. I have a lot of learning to do, and I can always use feedback.

Cassie
I will.

Oz
Was there anything else?

Cassie
Oh no. Not really. Just one other thing.

Oz
Well, by all means, my dear.

Cassie
I think you should do my play.

Oz
Which one?

Cassie
The one about the girl's swimming team.

Oz
I love that one. But I'm afraid the season is set.

Cassie
I just thought... since I was the playwright in residence, the students would benefit from seeing a new play development process. Up close.

Oz
A wonderful idea. As I said, the season is set. But next season... we'll make it our opener.

Cassie
But I want to do my play now. After everything I've done for this department, I thought it would be... appropriate.

Oz
I see.

Cassie

You see.

Oz
That's quite an ask.

Cassie
Well, I'm quite an asset.

Oz
I see. Yes. I think we understand each other.

Cassie
...Good! I'll send you the new draft.

Oz
Good.

Cassie
And I'll see you at the Gala?

Oz
At the gala.

Cassie
You're right. This was good to talk.

Oz
And no hard feelings about the Tamara thing.

Cassie
Of course not.

Oz
We all did our best.

Cassie
We did.

Oz
And we won't let one crazy student derail our relationship.

(Beat.)

Cassie
I'm sorry, say that again.

Oz
Say what again?

Cassie
She isn't crazy.

Oz
I think the doctors said she was.

Cassie
Yeah, because we told them she was.

Oz
Perhaps I misspoke — .

Cassie
What we did... she wasn't crazy.

Oz
What did we do Cassie? We gave her what she wanted, which was to be far away from us.

Cassie
From you.

Oz
Cassie. I — don't want to fight with you.

Cassie
She wasn't crazy. She was right about everything.

Oz
Right about... me?

(Beat.)

Cassie
Yes.

Oz
I see. Then perhaps we don't understand each other.

Cassie
Perhaps not.

Oz
Do you... regret your decision?

Cassie
I live with my decision.

Oz
I suppose you wish that she was back, and I was gone?...

Cassie
...It doesn't matter. We did what we did.

Oz
Cassie. Is there bad blood between us?

Cassie
Just admit that she wasn't crazy. We can do that in private, can't we?

Oz
It's better if we stick to the same story.

Cassie
So, you want me to pretend what we did was right?

Oz
You read her psych notes, just like I did. She was a very troubled young woman.

Cassie
That's — another issue. We ruined that woman's life, and she was telling the truth.

Oz
Agree to disagree.

Cassie
I don't accept that.

Oz
It's a free country.

Cassie
Actually, it's not. It's private property. Its own little kingdom, with its own little dukes and duchesses.

Oz
I'm afraid you've got us all wrong. We're just bureaucrats, trying to get to the end of the day.

Cassie

And in this kingdom, the nobles take no responsibility for their actions. They haze their apprentices, grooming their favorites to rule just like them.

Oz

And what is so wrong with the way we teach? A generation of students have graduated from this program, and thrived in the world. We prepare you for life. And life is hard, and tiring, and cruel.

Cassie

Cruelty is a part of the training?

Oz

Of course not. Like Macbeth, they love and hate the people who push them. Their own “Lady Macbeth.” She pushes them to be bigger, to be more, and they take it as an affront. It hurts the ego.

You want what we offer, you want to play our game, but you’re afraid. Afraid you’re good at it. Afraid you like it. We unlock the truth of who you are, and if you don’t like that... it isn’t this department that is your trouble.

Cassie

It’s true. I am afraid of my power. I’m afraid of what I’m capable of.

(Cassie kisses him.)

Oz

Get the fuck off me!

Cassie

Oh, you didn’t like that?

Oz

That’s different.

Cassie

How?

Oz

Because I was teaching! I was doing my job, and, yes, I kissed her, and maybe I shouldn’t have. But I made the decisions I made, and they were in good faith. I was only trying to teach.

Cassie

That’s not teaching.

Oz

I’ll let you in on the Big Secret. Acting can’t be taught. You either have it or you don’t.

Cassie
Then why teach?

Oz
It's a gig!

(Beat.)

Cassie
Oh.
I think we finally understand each other.
(*pause*)
Don't you dare do my show. You're not worthy of it.

(Cassie exits.)

Scene 22:

(The Gala.)

Oz
Thank you. Thank you everyone.

It is with some trepidation that I take on this new role. After all, Doc has some big shoes!

(Laughter.)

But if I know one thing, it is teaching. I hope that over the next year, as we transition to a new phase of our life as an institution, we can continue to put teaching first. After all, without the students, we're just old men talking to ourselves.

And leading that charge, we have our new Thomas J. Agnew Professor of playwriting, Cassie Dunbar. Who, I believe, has prepared some scenes from her new play tonight. Is that right? You know this really is a remarkable moment for our department: with the addition of Professor Dunbar, we are now a 50% female department, composed of the finest educators in the country, of many backgrounds and different walks of life. And representing that change, and a new generation of academic leadership, we are very pleased indeed to introduce, Ladies and Gentlemen, Cassie Dunbar.

Cassie
Thank you, everyone. It is my responsibility, as a woman in the theatre, to take up space in your minds.

I teach the students to go outside of their comfort zones, and write what scares them. It would be hypocritical of me to ask of my students, something I would not risk myself. And thanks to the strong, ambitious, young women in this program, I finally know what I am most afraid of: myself. Inside all of us is a Beast. Who knows only hunger. I recently met mine. And I would like you to meet her too. And so, Ladies, and Gentlemen, Members of the Board. Colleagues. Doc. Cleta. Oz. I am proud and terrified to present: some scenes from my new play... An Institution.

(Cassie takes her place in the scene. Tamara enters, and crosses to her starting position. They take the same places where Tamara and Cassie first stood.)

Tamara
Open or closed?

THE BEGINNING

#