

The Crack in the Door

*Bernadette Waterman Ward**

CAST:

LUCY Decker, secretary
THOMAS Uberti, professor
FRED Marovsky, professor
REGINA Reich, professor
JOHN PAUL Kowalski, student
SECURITY officer
CONNIE, student
GLORIA Stahowicz, student

DEAN Gerry Ontes
HOSPITAL SECURITY officer
DR. DECELLES, surgical
ophthalmologist
ANTIFA STUDENT
ANTIFA PROTESTER
MRS. UBERTI, mother of Thomas
POLICEMAN

SCENE 1: [*The secretary, Lucy, types behind an open sliding glass door. Thomas picks up papers from her desk. Fred's office door is stage left. It has a Tolkeian image, an icon of Mary and Fra Angelico's Annunciation. Behind a wall to the left, actors can disappear. Thomas faces the audience and walks toward Fred's door. Fred enters through the door and turns to lock it. Both have professorial props, briefcases or bookbags.*]

THOMAS: Maro. What do you think of my proposing a film studies major?

FRED: Possible. Outside Communications, your best allies would be drama and art. There is a film studies concentration, right?

THOMAS: In Communication; my intro to film is in it.

FRED: Section full? That helps.

THOMAS: It is. But with no major, I'll never get a course in, like, a major director. Two kids signed up for theory of film. I'm condemned to comp. Three hundred pages of bad prose every two weeks.

FRED: [*deep in his bag by now*] The word "theory" kills enrollment. When

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our department voted out the literature surveys to require theory, we lost half our majors in one term. After Regina Reich, the provost didn't tenure in English. Not enough demand. You're our first tenure line since then.

THOMAS: That's horrifying.

FRED: [*digging in his bag*] Theory is ugly. It doesn't help students enjoy literature. They need conventions and history; theory just baptizes them into jargon that justifies willful blindness – where's my Dante? Can't teach the *Commedia* without the Italian.

THOMAS: Baptizes?

FRED: You object to the religious metaphor?

THOMAS: Considering what's on your door.

FRED: The icon poster's from the Syriac church campaign for the refugees.

THOMAS: Oh, right; my Mom's into refugee stuff.

FRED: And that's the Annunciation. Tolkien makes the Dark Lord fall on March 25. Students ought to know he meant this. [*taps the Annunciation*] They don't. Utterly common knowledge to every civilized mind, in Tolkien's culture.

THOMAS: You mean white Christians. But isn't religion is like theory for them? – Baptized into jargon?

FRED: Some come in thinking it's silly. But religion has worn a good deal better than literary theory. It makes better poetry. *Ecco la*. [*pulls out an illustrated Divine Comedy*]

THOMAS: Pretty amazing visuals. What's the scene?

FRED: The heretics' burning tombs. Virgil's hands are on Dante's eyes so he won't look on Medusa and turn to stone.

THOMAS: Burning tombs of heretics?

FRED: It's symbolic. Farinata – here – was an Epicurean. He believed life ended in the tomb – no heaven or hell. His opinion shapes his hell-but it's still hell.

THOMAS: He gets a burning tomb forever – for an opinion?

FRED: He has what he chose to believe. The tomb is all he decided to take account of, so he has it. He also can't see actual reality, only a future – which isn't real yet – and remember a past – not real any more. Dante's God is real and present. It's not just opinion; people who just make mistakes get into heaven. It's willful resistance to reality that's hell.

THOMAS: Students like hearing this?

FRED: Dante tells a good story. Same as with my course in Tolkien and the
Medievales – they like the stories. Forty-five in that.

THOMAS: I guess Tolkien gets your numbers up but he's so simplistic
about good and evil. And there's no engagement with adult sexuality –

FRED: Thomas, I don't think that engagement with sexuality is one of our
students' desperate deprivations. Engagement with heroism is.

THOMAS: You may have a point there. I haven't seen much heroism, even
in the movies. [*enter Regina, stage right*]

REGINA: I swear they have a vendetta against me.

THOMAS: Who?

REGINA: You remember the kids who were doing the abortion display?

The guilt festival, with little crosses and charming slogans like “Never
allowed to take a breath” and “Never allowed to smell a flower.”

THOMAS: Yeah, that was – distressing.

REGINA: The boy at their table is in my class. Kiddie lit. Education major.

We're on fairy tales, patriarchy all over the place. The only way I can
stand it is to point out the rape fantasies. You know, Red Riding
Hood's wolf as rapist; or Snow White's spindle deflowering her with a
spot of blood –

THOMAS: [*shrugs*] Freudian approach, yeah.

REGINA: The students all want to read them as little moral lessons. Just
intolerable and simplistic. And here this anti-choice fanatic stands up as
soon as I mention Freud and tells the whole class, that Freud faked his
data and *lied* about little girls having sex fantasies. He says they were
being molested – that Freud's whole theory was to defend child
molesters.

THOMAS: I didn't read much Freud but wasn't there a book in the eighties?
That some mole in the Freud circle really did find discrepancies? Not to
say Freud wasn't a genius –

REGINA: Right, okay, it's Masson's book. Of course nobody takes Freud
for science any more. The psychology's moved to brain chemistry; but
the thing is, his insights are so powerful! Millions of people learned to
throw off the cloaks around forbidden sexuality. He was so liberating.
So I stopped the boy right there and told him to try to learn from people
who have found that Freud spoke to their situation. I mean, I was really
trying to make it a teaching moment and open his mind –

FRED: Did he say something rude?

REGINA: As if “child molester” weren’t a dog whistle! He said maybe those people were as nasty as Freud’s friends. Now, I’m teaching Freud and I’m a non-binary dyke. I knew he was calling out the Klan on me. I had to tell him to leave my classroom. It was pure homophobia.

THOMAS: “Child molester” is a dog whistle, all right. People just don’t want to think.

FRED: It looks to me like an academic dispute over the truth of Freud’s claims.

REGINA: What matters is not Freud’s truth claims, whatever that means. Freud is important; to any civilized person—

FRED: Should Freud be important if he’s basing arguments on fraud?

REGINA: Well, don’t you think people should worship a virgin for having a baby? Talk about fraud. Didn’t you read my chapter on virginity and patriarchy in *Medusa Rising*? Where slut-shaming demonized a student who chose to use her sexuality to earn her tuition at Princeton? [*Lucy answers her cell phone*]

FRED: I didn’t get far in *Medusa Rising*—

SECRETARY LUCY: Mom, Mom it’ll be okay. Cardiology at St Luke is good. No. Come on, Mom, it’ll be OK. Look, Fred Marovsky’s a deacon. Yeah, the professor. I’m sure he can come, his class ends at one – he’s right here – Maro – [*rises, beckons Fred*] [*enter Secretary through glass door*]

SECRETARY LUCY: Fred, can you do anointings at St Luke’s hospital?

FRED: Not technically – you need a priest – but I can pray with blessed oil. What’s wrong?

SECRETARY LUCY: Dad’s back in the hospital since about four hours ago; St. Luke’s; he’s going to need a valve replacement. Mom wants him to have anointing. Not today – before surgery—

FRED: When is the surgery?

SECRETARY LUCY: Here – talk to Mom. She’s pretty upset.

FRED: I’ll take it in the workroom— [*exit Fred behind wall, shutting glass door behind him as he takes the phone*]

THOMAS: I watched some of that Princeton girl’s movies – I mean, I respect her sexual choices, but the films are really violent. Did Lucy say her father’s sick again? She’s had such a hard year— [*enter John Paul, stage right*]

JOHN PAUL: Professor Reich, I wanted to apologize for, for class today. I

didn't mean to be disrespectful.

REGINA: Don't try to snow me. You were challenging me because I brought up sexuality.

JOHN PAUL: No, it was just because when you said Cinderella's slipper was, was

REGINA: A vagina.

JOHN PAUL: Yeah, you said you got it from Freud, from Freudian

REGINA: Freudian literary analysis, yes.

JOHN PAUL: Well, I wanted to know, since it's proven that Freud faked his data, why you thought it was, was, true or something, why we should go to him to learn? If he cheated in his reports.

REGINA: I'm using him for literary analysis, not science. Where did you get this denunciation of Freud?

JOHN PAUL: You mean where did I read about him? I have this book by Frederick Crews, and he quotes the real notes that Freud made. And he shows how Freud faked them to please his friends, to say they weren't molesting their kids ; and they were. He was helping child molesters. Read it. [*offers her the book*]

REGINA: I know what Crews is about – Jeffrey Masson's interpretation of the evidence. It's a construct playing on your prejudice that there is no childhood sexuality. You have no right to impose those standards on students who are trying to learn to interpret literature with an open mind.

JOHN PAUL: We're supposed to interpret fairy tales the way a child molester does?

REGINA: Sigmund Freud was not a child molester! This is just bigotry. Masson's shallow! His research plays into master narratives about children's sexuality. But your real agenda was homophobia. You were challenging me because I am a dyke and I talked about sexuality.

JOHN PAUL: No it's because Freud is wrong.

REGINA: You have no right to say that anything is, as you call it, wrong. Your categories are skewed. Your prejudices are patriarchal and gender-normative! You just see what you choose to see. And what I see is that you're a bigot, and you want to silence me! [*turns to stride aggressively away from John Paul and walks into sliding glass door. It cracks but does not shatter.*] [*They speak over one another.*]

JOHN PAUL: Oh, no, are you OK? Mrs. Decker!

REGINA: Kowalski, get away from me!

THOMAS: Reggie, are you hurt? [*to John Paul*] Go get security. [*exit John Paul*]

SECRETARY LUCY: What happened? I was putting a cartridge in the copier and I heard a big crack and my name.

THOMAS: Regina walked into the door.

SECRETARY LUCY: What? I should have put stickers on the door like they have in Chemistry. I was trying to find a Shakespeare sticker or something, you know – are you OK?

REGINA: I think there'll be a bruise.

SECRETARY LUCY: I'll run down the hall and get ice. That crack! Look at that! That isn't safety glass; it shouldn't crack like that. It's supposed to be a safety glass. I'm going to have to put in a work order. Better get some duct tape for now. Listen, I'll have the ice in a jiffy. I'm so sorry that happened. Lucky it didn't shatter. [*exit secretary Lucy*]

THOMAS: Are you OK?

REGINA: I have been so mad at the bigots around here, I can't even see straight.

THOMAS: Watch your vocabulary.

REGINA: That boy is best friends with the girl who got my course cancelled last term. Now they're after me about Children's Lit.

THOMAS: Doesn't Judy usually teach that?

REGINA: It was kiddie lit for the education majors or composition. Judy's lucky to get any adjunct work at all. Anyway, I'm shaking up her little sweet heteronormative syllabus. It had – get this – units called “boys' books” and “girls' books.” Totally reinforcing binary stereotypes. Just – intolerable. The books were already ordered. All because that homophobe's little girlfriend sent my packet of readings to the chancellor and got my course cancelled.

THOMAS: Can that happen? Couldn't you invoke academic freedom?

REGINA: I made the case. I told Dean Ontes that without Lesbian erotica you are missing something really elemental in women's literature.

THOMAS: Yeah, that makes sense. One of my students told me you gave them a pretty edgy assignment though. I mean, she enjoyed writing her own erotica; but it is a little edgy.

REGINA: Even our friend with the holy door has students write imitations. If somebody was triggered they didn't have to do it. Gloria Stahowitz

got an alternate assignment. But the chancellor's lawyer said it could constitute sexual harassment.

THOMAS: Stahowicz. Why do I know that name?

REGINA: Gloria Stahowicz is the kid who turned me in. She carries a Bible; she wears a long skirt. She wasn't really triggered, just narrowminded. I had to come up with different readings. Then Rob nominated her for the English achievement award. Just because she got the highest grade on the comps. As if testing was what we do.

THOMAS: Oh, her. In the meeting, you didn't talk about Women's Lit.

REGINA: I couldn't make it sound like a personal complaint. But really, we can't give the award to somebody who's afraid to read major works. Rob admitted that she asked for an alternate reading for *Lolita*.

THOMAS: Rob did say she did brilliant work on *Pale Fire*.

REGINA: I made him show me that paper. You know *Pale Fire*?

THOMAS: Of course.

REGINA: Well, Gloria Stahowicz turned it into an antigay tract – said Nabokov's ideal reader would think that the idea of a homosexual hero was funny. An element of the comedy.

THOMAS: She might have a point. Ever seen a Thirties screwball comedy? That kind of attitude was part of American culture.

REGINA: OK, maybe Nabokov was pandering to that – maybe. But she didn't condemn it. It would have been a travesty to give the award to a complete bigot.

THOMAS: Fred Marovsky didn't think she was bigoted.

REGINA: Yeah, Apparachatnik Fred Marovsky, Vatican City cossack. We almost lost the awards election by, shall I say, Russian interference.

THOMAS: I don't think he's Russian Orthodox. Isn't he Catholic? He does things that make me think he's Catholic.

REGINA: He is Catholic. Like burn 'em at the stake, take 'em on crusade, get thee to a nunnery Catholic. That's why he couldn't see that if you accept bigotry about the gay community you're a bigot.

THOMAS: Fred showed me some medieval imitations Gloria wrote for him. They were very good for an undergrad. She'd taken three courses from him.

REGINA: Taking any course from Fred Marovsky is enrolling in the alt-right.

THOMAS: So how did the dean defend canceling the course?

REGINA: In case you don't know: Dean Ontes comes and talks to you about something. Pretty soon, whatever you actually said, a memo circulates declaring that you said whatever Ontes wanted you to say. The registrar got a note, "We have discussed this course in the light of the chancellor's concerns and concluded that it would be better if were not offered this term." Ontes does everything by phone calls and visits until sending those deadly memos. No paper trail. All the committee appointments depend on the dean, so what can I do? He makes the appointments to the grievance committee.

THOMAS: Rob told me that early on. Is the dean antigay?

REGINA: No. Ontes just sucks up to the provost, who sucks up to the chancellor, who sees a lawsuit around every corner.

THOMAS: But Ontes is progressive at least.

REGINA: Oh, yeah. It's only Apparachatnik Marovsky here who hates faggots.

THOMAS: He's been very polite to me. We disagree, but he's never disgusting.

REGINA: Wait till he tries to pray over you.

THOMAS: Come on, he doesn't do that.

REGINA: I've heard some strange things from students. You've only been here a year.

THOMAS: Doesn't he do some sort of church hospital volunteering? Some students probably saw him dressed up in a Roman collar and one of those green scarf things. I saw him at the hospital once when I had to take Frankie in. That's probably all it is.

REGINA: He has two pictures of the Virgin Mary on his door.

THOMAS: Point taken. You know, those things have probably been there for months, and I just didn't see them— [*sees watch on his arm*] Yikes! I've got intro to film. Gotta run. [*exit Thomas. Enter Secretary Lucy*]

SECRETARY LUCY: Come sit down with some ice on your head. It took me forever to find the duct tape. Gotta get in a work order; they're always so slow at maintenance. [*exeunt*] [*enter John Paul with Security Officer*]

JOHN PAUL: See, there's the crack in the door.

SECURITY OFFICER: Shouldn't be cracking like that. Not security glass. [*enter Fred*] Afternoon, Dr. Marovsky. You seen Professor Reich?

FRED: She's sitting by the copier with ice on her face.

SECURITY OFFICER: I got to go talk to her about this door.

FRED: She is – how shall I say? – eager to place blame.

SECURITY OFFICER: Don't you worry. I seen her when she run into a Toyota in the parking lot and you'd think the president and the Republicans was responsible for parking the car there. I go see her now. *[exit security officer]*

FRED: So how'd that book about Freud work out?

JOHN PAUL: I think I'll have to drop the class – which means no education major.

FRED: It was that bad?

JOHN PAUL: She wouldn't even look at the evidence. She wouldn't meet with me. Finally, I'm sorry about this, but I got little snotty in class.

FRED: Not wise. But she ought to meet with you. Grade disputes get a formal meeting--not a few words in a hallway. Get a friend with a phone to video her admitting that you didn't get inside her office and she didn't reconsider the paper. If she agrees to meet – no whining; ask specific questions. Take notes – and email them back to her. Ask her to reply with specific corrections of any verbal inaccuracies; put a time limit, a week. Be absolutely accurate about her words. Paper trail, video trail.

JOHN PAUL: Wow. OK.

FRED: Deans respect paper trails – and they rarely leave any. If you go to the dean, write the same sort of memo, time limit included. And – parents are a big help.

JOHN PAUL: I'll copy to them. Thank you. *[takes notes]* Anyway, even if I have to drop the class at least I know that what she was saying about fairy tales was – well, besides disgusting–

FRED: Oh, Tolkien's got a wonderful essay about fairy tales. Come in, I'll find it. *[exeunt into Fred's office]*

SCENE 2: *[coffee shop, John Paul and Gloria]*

JOHN PAUL: Faith said the *real* spiritual battle will be not to be glad that she ran into the door. Hi, Connie. *[enter Connie]*

GLORIA: Gotta bind the spirit of resentment.

CONNIE: You guys keep using this *bind* and *spirit* in strange ways.

JOHN PAUL: Dante writes about angels and devils all the time.

CONNIE: Aren't they symbolic?

JOHN PAUL: Right at the start Maro told us how the sun is a symbol. That doesn't mean the sun isn't real.

CONNIE: This spirit stuff is how Dante thought? Like, how do people get into this?

GLORIA: Well, for me and my family it was my dad losing his job about ten years ago. He got way depressed. Spent all his time fixing things around the house and didn't go look for a job. It was two years. Mom started working at Burger King.

JOHN PAUL: What was his work?

GLORIA: Building contractor – houses. His loan officer dug him into debt because people were going to buy these houses someday. He was just selling a bunch of promises; nobody had any money.

JOHN PAUL: Selling promises?

CONNIE: Like selling loans. Remember, Maro was explaining that, about the people sitting with money bags in the rain of fire? They got rich by selling other people's promises to pay money.

JOHN PAUL: Dante in real life. Wow.

GLORIA: Anyway, we got poor. My dad couldn't look us in the face.

JOHN PAUL: Spirit of despair.

GLORIA: My Mom was talking to our neighbor whose husband is a real prayer warrior. He sat down with my Dad and explained that he had to battle that spirit. And we started going to church. It was the spirit of pride, really; they did a deliverance. Dad was freed, and went for the airport job. It's all good now. Last year my parents even bought a house. The spirit of pride caused an illusion that working for someone else meant he was some kind of, I don't know, slave or something. He just felt awful and out of place in the family, especially when my mother was working and he wasn't.

CONNIE: And this deliverance worked? He didn't feel out of place?

GLORIA: Jesus changes everything. You should come to the Holy Spirit fellowship; there are lots of stories like this.

CONNIE: Text me. I have Romanticism now. *Childe Harold*. [exit]

JOHN PAUL: Whoever he is. Speaking of whoever he is – what sex is Connie?

GLORIA: Oh, stop it. You mean you don't like the way he dresses.

JOHN PAUL: Well, yeah. Guys aren't supposed to dress like girls.

GLORIA: Look, I know nobody does that without a lot of bad stuff in the background. He's under a spirit of strong delusion. Like we were reading in last week's passage. He may need deliverance. But I think mostly he's really lonely. And if there's something really wrong, who can make it better?

JOHN PAUL: Do you think he'd even come to the fellowship?

GLORIA: We've got to be Jesus to him and show him some love. How well do you know him?

JOHN PAUL: He's really smart. He's in Maro's class with me. I can try, but he's so weird.

SCENE 3: [*the coffer shop with Fred, John Paul, and Connie*]

FRED: So, you two plan to present about the figure of the Medusa.

JOHN PAUL: Connie likes monsters.

CONNIE: Medusa's really fascinating. Powerful, female—

JOHN PAUL: I looked her up on the net. Ancient Greeks put Medusa on shields they carried into battle. I think the turning to stone stuff is about getting guys frozen with fear.

CONNIE: Oh, wow, it was! The terror of the monster face! You know, I'm reading *Frankenstein* in the Romantic class and she assigned this great article, "My Monster, My Self." It's like, your personal monster is what you don't want to look at.

FRED: That's a good connection; not to Frankenstein, exactly, but the idea of the freezing terror. Now, let's step down to the literal level. Where are they?

JOHN PAUL: Dante and Virgil are by the city of Dis. They can't get in.

FRED: Right. What's around them?

CONNIE: [*looks in his book*] The burning tombs.

FRED: Who's in the tombs?

JOHN PAUL: People who didn't believe in Heaven or Hell.

FRED: How does Dante know these two tomb-mates?

CONNIE: They were Florentine politicians.

FRED: So we have Florentine politicians a who didn't believe in anything beyond this world. Politics would be pretty important then, wouldn't it?

CONNIE: Politics is pretty important.

FRED: Dante was a politician. What would he get if he went back to Florence?

CONNIE: They were going to burn him to death. Oh, like the tombs are burning. I get it.

FRED: That may be useful. [*Connie takes a note*] Now back to the literal level. How's Dante feeling when Medusa appears?

JOHN PAUL: He's really scared. And Virgil covers his eyes. And Virgil is scared too. They need the angel to rescue them. Why can't Virgil just take care of it? He did it with the three-headed dog, and with Charon.

FRED: This is what you have to think about. What does Virgil represent?

JOHN PAUL: [*consults notes*] The best in human reason.

CONNIE: The best in pagan culture.

FRED: Roman culture. The highest thing for him was Rome, and the *Pax Romana*.

JOHN PAUL: Pox?

FRED: The Roman peace; peace across the Roman world. Why can't he rescue Dante?

CONNIE: He's all about politics and they're all about politics?

JOHN PAUL: They can't go anywhere. Virgil can't either, without the angel.

CONNIE: But they're different. The politicians are boxed in.

FRED: It's a *contrapasso*.

JOHN PAUL: That means the boxes are their sin. The tombs are their sin.

CONNIE: The sin was not believing in life after death. What connects that and politics?

FRED: Sometimes people who hate religion worship politics.

JOHN PAUL: That's funny. It's true. But what about the Medusa? The fear?

CONNIE: Yeah, we got distracted with the tombs.

JOHN PAUL: It wasn't a distraction. These people are afraid of something, and so they got distracted with politics; let me think. They're heretics. They didn't want to think about God; that's what got them trapped. And the angel, the angel can do it—

FRED: Angels are confident because they know the truth; they don't have to insult anyone; see how the angel just points out the facts?

CONNIE: But – “afraid to think about God” – oh, come on.

FRED: I think John Paul's onto something. Remember in the beginning, the

Vita Nuova; Dante said he was afraid to show his love for Beatrice, and he went astray—

JOHN PAUL: And became a politician! And Florence was horrible!

CONNIE: So the monster is his own obsession with politics and treachery.

Two women, Beatrice and Medusa. The women, Dante's fear, his monster – we can *do* this.

FRED: I think you can. Go write it up.

SCENE 4: [*coffee shop. Enter Fred, Gloria, and John Paul*]

FRED: I can transport your signs, but I can't drive you. It's a regulation; faculty can't transport student groups in their personal cars.

GLORIA: Well, even that will help. We have a booth to set up, and some pretty big banners.

FRED: If you drive right behind me, you won't lose my truck. I know where to park. So – seven on Saturday morning. At which dorm?

JOHN PAUL: Mine. North.

FRED: I've always been tempted to find a portrait of Lord North to hang in the lobby there. Never found one. Well, then. [*prepares to leave*]

GLORIA: I, I wanted to talk to you about our Bible study. Holy Spirit Fellowship has an open fellowship hour and then in the dorms we have a men's Bible study and a women's Bible study. So there's a guy who dresses like a girl, and he's taking hormones and says next year he'll have the surgery. And he's been coming to the girls' study, and it's making people uncomfortable. It may be the Lord is leading him, you know, to hear the Word, but – it's a girls' Bible study.

FRED: Do I know him? Is he in Medieval Epic?

JOHN PAUL: Connie.

FRED: Good mind. I'm sorry. I was afraid the vultures were after him.

GLORIA: I think he needs deliverance from a spirit of delusion.

FRED: He needs friends. Men. Christian men.

JOHN PAUL: That won't be easy.

FRED: You have to just close your eyes to the way he's dressed.

JOHN PAUL: But he's real whiney and touchy when he thinks people aren't super nice. If anybody disagrees with him, it's like *evil, nazi*; you can't give your reasons.

FRED: This needs to be handled very delicately. It may be the man has real spiritual needs – no, of course he does; who doesn't? But at the Bible study, he may be coming with a political aim, to destroy the group because it's not "inclusive" enough. Do you follow a set program?

GLORIA: No, just whoever feels moved to lead it each time sends an email around about the passage.

FRED: I would encourage a more formal structure. Very soon. And Gloria-- choose your leaders carefully.

GLORIA: We like to be open to the Holy Spirit.

FRED: One of His gifts is Counsel. Be harmless as doves – but wise as serpents. Our Lord said that.

SCENE 5 [*Enter Regina and Connie, who follows Regina to stage right.*]

REGINA: Do you really want friends in the alt-right? Think about it.

CONNIE It's just a Bible study. And they were nice people.

REGINA: Cults do this thing called love-bombing to suck you into their religion. It happened to my mother in the eighties. What's the name of the group?

CONNIE: The Holy Spirit Fellowship.

REGINA: You know who they are? The anti-choice display with all the little crosses? I bet they speak in tongues.

CONNIE: They talk about that.

REGINA: Listen, it wasn't the same name but my mother had us in one of these woo-woo groups from when I was nine to about eleven or twelve. You paid a hundred dollars to take the course to get the Holy Spirit, and then they'd have these meetings. A man would preach and all of a sudden he'd point to somebody: "Speak in tongues," he'd say, and the person would blurt out some gibberish. And he was such a bully. All the men bullied all the women. They were all in it because God was supposed to bless you and make you rich.

CONNIE: It doesn't sound the same. Their speaking in tongues is a kind of song thing, like singing in harmony

REGINA: But the men are all about women doing what they say. Look, my mom spent so much money on these courses, and the men got weirder and weirder – she flipped and went into crystals and chakras once we

were out of money. Just get away from these people. I was so lucky to find women's studies at college, those Nazis had messed me up so much. Look, they will tell you that your sexuality is evil.

CONNIE: They just show me stuff in the Bible.

REGINA: That's supposed to settle everything, isn't it? Theocracy in action.

We need to get these kind of people out of universities where they prey on people who are just trying to live their lives. They're the American Taliban. Yeah, at first they seem like really nice people, but if you're at all progressive – you've *got* to expose their hate. [*turns on him*] You know what? Join. Try to get a leadership position. I'll get you the name of the Title Nine coordinator and you can turn them in when they show how homophobic they are. You've got to resist the haters wherever you find them. Promise me you will. So that we'll all live where people can be free to be themselves.

CONNIE Well, I'm already on a project with one of them for Maro's class. Medieval Epic.

REGINA: Marovsky! You're not safe! Come into my office. [*exeunt*]

SCENE 6: [A room empty except for shelves with knick knacks. Thomas and Lucy fill boxes.]

LUCY: This is so nice of you, helping with Dad's collections.

THOMAS: Are the movers already at the assisted living?

LUCY: Yeah. Don's looking out for the furniture. Dad wasn't sure about going into this place and then they said he have to have the valve replaced, and Mom's like, we have got to get into that assisted living, like *now*. Mom found him on the ground when he was doing yard work. So I drove her down. A place had just opened and Mom signed the papers. Dad is OK with it, but he didn't want any movers to touch his basement.

THOMAS: Well, I'm getting good at boxing things up lately. This wasn't the Saturday to spend in my apartment. They'll sell the house?

LUCY: A friend of Fred's in his prayer group is a realtor, a real honest guy. He'll come over Monday. We were lucky my folks had enough in savings to get into this place, but we've got to get this house sold, like, in three months.

THOMAS: Wasn't Fred coming to your parents' place today?

LUCY: Oh, yeah, he'll bring his truck. He's got some sort of a march thing this morning; it'll be over by two.

THOMAS: Fred has a truck?

LUCY: A big Ford pickup. Used to have a camper cap; when his wife was alive they'd all go camping. The kids would use a tent. Good times. We went with them a couple times when our girls were about ten and twelve.

THOMAS: Wow. Fred camping in a pickup. I've never gone camping. Apparently my father liked to do it, but he left when I was four. He liked guns. My brother likes guns, too.

LUCY: You have a brother?

THOMAS: In jail. Like his father before him.

LUCY: Oh, I'm so sorry. That must be so hard on your mom.

THOMAS: Awful. Once my father was in jail, we became almost secretive. We practically stopped going to even the park across the street. My brother's five years older and he just busted out. I mean, he was fighting with kids, stealing, making trouble with teachers; got kicked out of the Catholic school. I can just remember the big ten o'clock Mass with donuts and everything at the end. I missed the donuts when we started sneaking in on Sundays at 6:30 in the morning to Mass in some nunnery.

LUCY: I didn't know you were Catholic.

THOMAS: Ex-Catholic since high school. But I was the good boy. I've always been – compliant; my brother was the bad boy. I never came home with anything below an A-. And my mother spent, what, thirteen years being ashamed until I got into Stanford. Meanwhile, I watched a lot of movies.

LUCY: Is that what got you into film studies?

THOMAS: That and the media teacher at my high school – first term freshman year he got me into the gay-straight alliance.

LUCY: The gay-straight alliance was, like, an official club?

THOMAS: Yeah; we had our own bulletin board, and a cool website. The political activism looked great on my record – basically whatever Mr. Hampson said, I did it. He told me to discuss my questioning with a counselor, so I met Mr. Tony, who was really accepting. From then on school was home; home was where my mother was anxious.

LUCY: How did she handle it when you left the Church?

THOMAS: Oh, I went with her every week at 6:30; I didn't want her to feel bad. I was in grad school when I came out to her. She didn't get what I was saying. She thought I was "going steady with a girl" as she quaintly put it. I didn't pick a great way to introduce her to Bill, but by then I had kind of lost track of how she would feel about it – it just didn't seem like a big deal.

LUCY: What did she do?

THOMAS: She was nice to him. I really didn't expect she'd get upset, or of course I wouldn't have told her

LUCY: So, was it a big deal for her?

THOMAS: I guess; the phone calls got shorter. I don't identify with strong reactions. Maybe I'm less passionate than most people. Like when Bill left, I was sad, but I just went on with the diss and hung out with whoever was interested. Other people got very stressed on the job market or applying to good schools; I just kind of fell into things.

LUCY: No grandkids.

THOMAS: Not unless my brother gets one of his girlfriends pregnant.

LUCY: What's your brother's name?

THOMAS: Guido. That probably didn't help. When I was little he'd hit me for calling him Gigi. One of the many things that would get him to beat on me.

LUCY: Did other people call him that?

THOMAS: They called him Junior. He kept adopting the names of criminals or rap artists. It's not a pretty story. The grandkids thing will probably be all right. [*picks up some oddment*] Where does this go?

LUCY: Fits right in here. That'll do it. Just the strapping tape.

THOMAS: There's Maro with the truck. [*enter Fred with hand truck*]

FRED: Hey, Lucy. Good to see you, Thomas. This is more than I thought.

LUCY: Will you need two trips?

FRED: It'll fit. Just take out the stuff in the back and leave it here; I'll pick it up on my way home.

THOMAS: [*lifting a box*] Don't let her take the heavy ones. [*exit Thomas*]

LUCY: This is so nice of you guys. How was the march?

FRED: Well-attended. The music was horrible at the rally, but there was quite a moving speaker. A young woman– [*re-enter Thomas with a "De-Fund Planned Parenthood" banner and a box evidently*]

containing "It's a child, not a Choice" signs]

THOMAS: Maro – what are these for?

FRED: For communicating a political opinion. [*picks up a sign from the box*] “It’s not a choice, it’s a child.” That’s actually important information. You can leave them here.

THOMAS: I see. [*puts down banner and box of signs*] Well, let’s get boxes, shall we? [*exeunt, carrying boxes*]

SCENE 7

CONNIE: So you think I have a demon.

GLORIA: It’s not like you’re possessed or something, but, like my father, they really mess up people's lives–

CONNIE: I don’t believe in demons. This is me, this is what I am. You’re not going to cast out me.

JOHN PAUL: Why don't you believe in demons?

CONNIE: Why don't I believe in fairies or Santa Claus? I don't see them. There are natural causes for things. I have a woman's brain in a man's body.

JOHN PAUL: Your brain has the same DNA as all the rest of you.

CONNIE: Gender isn't biology. Gender is constructed.

JOHN PAUL That's not the way the real world works.

CONNIE: You talk about real world when you believe in angels and devils with no evidence?

JOHN: I've seen evidence of God. And evil. Practically everybody has. You *don't* have any evidence you're not a man, except a feeling somebody told you that you had.

GLORIA: Stop it, John Paul. His feelings are his feelings. It's an oppression.

JOHN PAUL: I'm out of here. [*exit*]

GLORIA: John Paul's acting exactly like you don't need, isn't he? It's like my dad when he didn't even know he wasn't looking at us.

CONNIE: Nobody hassles girls for doing guy stuff.

GLORIA: Yeah, I used to pretend to be a boy. And when I made up stories, I was always a boy, because they got to have all the adventures.

CONNIE: But it's girls who get to do all the cool stuff. I used to imagine

being the princess, the great gown, the prince coming through all the briars just for me, waking up and the whole castle wakes with me--I used to pretend to be an Italian noblewoman, Constanza – when I was eleven I had a friend for a while, Cindy. We'd play dressup – and I had lace shirts and she was a queen, and we'd play all these spy stories. Then she moved away, and there was nobody. My mother signed me up for sports teams. Or sent me to my grandfather to torture worms on hooks.

GLORIA: Didn't you have friends in high school?

CONNIE: Sort of. I was the weird kid; but sometimes Jesse would let me hang out. Jessie was a junior who transitioned to Gisela at the end of my freshman year, and, man, Gisela was amazing. She was so funny, and so out there, and she could sing, and she was in all the school musicals. Nobody could ignore Gisela. Like, sequins and jewelry and glitter makeup – oh, my God, it was all about pageantry. But I couldn't sing and they made me a boy in the musical.

GLORIA: But being a girl isn't like being Gisela. I mean, an ordinary girl. Like, getting periods and cramps and worrying about if boys like you and trying not to be your Mom...actually my Mom's pretty good.

CONNIE: Gisela made me up very carefully one time, and we went out, and people treated me like I really was a girl, and it felt so right.

GLORIA: Would you want to marry a man who wants to be a father? Do you want to be a mom, have a family?

CONNIE: It's more about living where I am now, now. I can't live like a guy. Future stuff – I don't know, I've got to deal with transition first. That's what everyone said. Counselors were like, oh, you're trans, here's how you transition. That's where I am.

GLORIA: But that's about the future too.

CONNIE: I guess. Look, I have to go to class– [*exeunt*]

SCENE 8: [*door has duct tape on it and a note: "Maintenance: Safety Glass Only"*]

THOMAS: So, the dean?

REGINA: Purely to save trouble, our dean Gerry Ontes is supporting an alt-right bully. Gloria Stahowitz took a phone video of me in the hall

telling Kowalski he'd get the grade I decided to give. As if that weren't in the faculty handbook. And now Kowalski's helicopter parents are upset.

THOMAS: So he appealed to the dean.

REGINA: For a stupid little reaction paper! They want to shout me down.

Who gave him that book on Freud?

THOMAS: I think Fred Marovsky did. Fred finished at Berkeley in the 90s.

Worked with Frederick Crews. And I saw your alt-right warrior leave his office with Tolkien's essay on fairy tales.

REGINA: Who says there's no right-wing conspiracy? [*enter Fred*]

FRED: I do.

REGINA: So why couldn't we get a Department of Queer and Gender studies?

FRED: Cost-benefit ratio. No demand. Film studies has a chance, by the way; the graphic design professors in the art department want to talk to you.

THOMAS: Oh, good. Thanks.

REGINA: That doesn't answer my question. Why did your committee refuse us the right to study how the construction of gender produces oppression?

FRED: Maybe first you could study whether gender is constructed or just an inference from sex? And, if there are purely social aspects to sexual categories, *whether* they produce oppression, or *in what cases* they might produce oppression, or, in short, why human beings have evolved them at all?

REGINA: None of the committee read the articles I sent that demonstrate that gender stereotypes are social oppression?

FRED: Some people got through them. They were all exercises in circular reasoning. After four, I got tired of hearing that I can't find their evidence persuasive because I'm too brainwashed. If I can't see invisible cats, it may be because they aren't there. There's a much simpler explanation. Biological. Rational.

REGINA: Which is all you're going to look at because you won't examine your assumptions.

FRED: You didn't make the case against biology. Some people refuse to believe in biology and do real harm.

REGINA: Who do you mean?

FRED: Some people will behead a baby when its legs are kicking in the air and say it's not a baby yet.

THOMAS: That doesn't happen.

REGINA: You got that off some faked videos.

FRED: I can show you the training manual for the procedure. And the raw footage for the Planned Parenthood videos is on the net. Have you seen it?

REGINA: We were talking about Queer and Gender Studies.

FRED: We were. You have a perfect right to study these things. We have no obligation to fund your doing it.

REGINA: That's just what the people in power always say. Protecting their territory. [*exit Fred into office*]

SCENE 9: [*Fred at a table in the snack bar*]

CONNIE: [*lays a smartphone on the table*] Thanks for meeting here, Professor.

FRED: Well, my office doesn't seem especially dangerous to me, but I have no objection to coffee. Can I buy you something?

CONNIE: No, no thanks. It's about Berneto Latini.

FRED: Brunetto. Yes.

CONNIE: You said all the people running in the rain of fire are homosexuals.

FRED: That's the traditional reading, yes.

CONNIE: But here it says, "denial of the Christian doctrine that Nature, created by God, is good."

FRED: I don't see what Mandelbaum bases that on. He doesn't cite any of Latini's works for it. Not much is extant by Jacopo Rusticucci; anyway, see the note – there – canto sixteen.

CONNIE: "Line 45 may indicate that the sin here was of sexual practices regarded as against nature."

FRED: And here. They are all *d'un peccato medesimo al mondo lerci*. For one same sin. Of course, that would include artificial birth control – basically, any activity that was sexual and deliberately infertile.

CONNIE: Birth control. This could be about birth control?

FRED: That was classed among unnatural sins. But Hollander, whose notes

are very well-researched, reports a general consensus that these men had a reputation for sexual interest in males. Hollander's book is too expensive for students, but it's on reserve.

CONNIE: But it's unfair to call it unnatural. For some people it is natural.

Why can't people love who they want to love?

FRED: One advantage of Dante's arranged marriage was that he was unlikely to confuse love with sexual intercourse. That was for children.

CONNIE: Sex for children?

FRED: For pregnancy. Reproduction. Biology.

CONNIE: That's so racist. Biology has nothing to do with who you are.

FRED: It has to do with sex. And that's something of who you are.

CONNIE: What do you mean?

FRED: Dante believed in a biological difference between men and women that had all kinds of consequences for who one was.

CONNIE: Do you believe that?

FRED: We're meeting about Dante. And perhaps you should stop recording the meeting on your cellphone. [*Connie stands up, grabbing the cellphone, and exits aggressively*]

SCENE 10 [*Same set: the coffee shop. Gloria and John Paul at a table. Enter Connie. Gloria rises and hugs him.*]

GLORIA: Hey, Connie. Peace in Jesus. [*John Paul hugs him more reluctantly*]

JOHN PAUL: Peace in Jesus.

GLORIA: Connie, you put your name in to lead the study next month. We want you at the fellowship hour; but you keep saying things that aren't, that aren't in the Lord. You really ripped into the girls planning for the prolife March. Being anti-abortion is not unChristian.

JOHN PAUL: Look in the Bible; God has relationships with people before they're born – Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Samson. You can't say that Jesus would give a woman money to get an abortion.

CONNIE: Jesus does the loving thing. Without abortion, you make one bad decision, and then it's permanent. Jesus is about forgiveness. Abortion is a fresh start for a woman who's made a bad choice.

GLORIA: No. it just adds another bad choice. Abortion doesn't make you

not a mother – just a mother who’s killed a baby – A mother who *can* do that. You know child abuse rates go up when abortion goes up?

CONNIE: I do not believe that. You can’t abuse a child that’s not there.

GLORIA: It’s not like it never happened; a woman who has ever been pregnant has permanent physical differences. Your body remembers you were a mother. But it’s even more, spiritually. To have an abortion, you have to see a child as something you get to choose about, as something you can get rid of. And you have to *keep* seeing the children that way, or say to yourself that it wasn’t a baby when you know it was. Forever – or else you can’t stand it. It’s like deciding to be blind.

JOHN PAUL: Don’t leave out the men’s part. If a man has sex without being married, he’s enjoying it, thinking he’s pretty fine because he got some. Maybe he’s just a pig, but he’s putting the girl in a place where she’s tempted to be worse than a pig. He’s making her desperate, and making it easy to be a killer.

CONNIE: So this is all about getting married to have babies.

JOHN PAUL: That’s it.

CONNIE: Can I tell you what that does to people? Force a woman to have a baby, and then she feels like she has to get a husband from some collection of available brutes. She pushes some unwilling guy into it. He then spends the rest of their lives putting her down for trapping him, or she divorces him and then does it again. Tell me that’s good for children.

JOHN PAUL: That sounds like a man who was worse than a pig.

CONNIE: I’ve seen a lot of it. Ask my mother’s sisters. Ask my mother.

JOHN PAUL: If your mother met bad men, better reason to be a good one yourself.

CONNIE: Good men get married.

JOHN PAUL: First.

CONNIE: Some people aren’t made that way. Does everything have to be male-female, marriage and babies? Aren’t there other kinds of people in the world?

GLORIA: Everybody has feelings that pull them in ways they’re not supposed to go. But we have to encourage one another in the narrow way. You know, some people don’t marry; some people are single for the Lord.

CONNIE: And if people have different feelings, they just shouldn’t exist?

Or live alone? I thought the Holy Spirit fellowship was open to everyone.

GLORIA: If feelings are out of line with reality, work on the feelings.

CONNIE: Pray the gay away?

GLORIA: Do what the Lord says, even if you're tempted. It's like the women who try to convince themselves that the baby isn't a baby. Abortion makes them are afraid to believe what's real.

JOHN PAUL: Look at a lab rat. Would you take one of those rats and put it in a container and jab a knife around in it until you could take it out in pieces? Don't look away; that's how they do it. Abortion is that *mean*, except it's a baby. And a man who wants it to happen is way meaner.

CONNIE: Stop guilting me with stories about chopping babies up. You're the one who thinks women are mean. You want to force everybody to get hetero married.

GLORIA: Well, on that topic – we need t talk about your coming to the women's Bible study. We love you, and we want you at the fellowship hour; but the women's Bible study isn't comfortable with having you come to the meetings.

CONNIE: I feel like a black person in the South.

JOHN PAUL: We're fine with having you at the men's Bible study. Hey, we're always hearing about male privilege. You're not going to say women are privileged, are you?

CONNIE: Why do I have to pretend I'm a man?

JOHN PAUL: It's not pretending. It's the way God made you. It's not biblical for you to wear women's clothes.

CONNIE: It is if I'm a woman! Can't you get it in your heads what I really am?

GLORIA: I can't get it in my instincts. I can't feel like that. Neither can the other girls; we felt awkward. Why aren't our feelings as important as yours?

CONNIE: Because I'm the marginalized person. You're just going along without thinking in your heteronormative privilege. Why can't you be inclusive? Wasn't Jesus inclusive?

JOHN PAUL: He was fine with the people who did bad stuff but he told them to cut out doing it. Look, you were great putting our presentation together for Marovsky's class. You don't have to think every minute about whether you look like a guy or a girl. Why don't you just think

about something else?

CONNIE: You don't have to think about it; you're normative. I'm not; every single moment I don't fit with anyone. Christians are supposed to be the most accepting kind of people. You won't let me lead a women's Bible study.

GLORIA: Girls are different around guys. We can't force ourselves to feel like you're a woman. Like, when we see you, we don't see a woman, no matter what you're wearing; it just doesn't feel like sitting next to a woman to sit next to you.

JOHN PAUL: Because of the physical reality.

CONNIE: You don't know what reality is. I feel like a woman.

JOHN PAUL: What does that mean? You don't have the right parts.

GLORIA: Don't be gross.

CONNIE: I've never felt like a guy. I don't like the way men act, I don't like the way they sound, I don't like what they do—

GLORIA: But I'm a girl and I like men.

CONNIE: You don't want to be a man.

GLORIA: No, but I don't get bothered about men being men.

CONNIE: Well, I do.

GLORIA: But that doesn't make you a girl.

CONNIE: But I like the way girls are so nice to each other, they take care of each other—

GLORIA: You weren't a girl in seventh grade.

CONNIE: Guys treat people badly if they act like girls.

JOHN PAUL: Not everybody. You don't need surgery to do that.

CONNIE: I need the kind of body that matches my soul. I want people to treat me as a woman.

JOHN PAUL: I don't think that's possible. I don't know how to say it but you don't smell right.

GLORIA: But I think I'm beginning to see what Connie means. Look, Jop; aren't there differences between the way men act with each other and the way women do? Women are friends kind of differently than guys are friends with each other.

JOHN PAUL: I hadn't really noticed.

GLORIA: That's one of the ways guys are different. You don't notice

JOHN PAUL: Yeah, I guess there's less talking. No, I mean when we talk it's about things. Maybe it is just less talking. No, I guess it's a feeling;

what they were talking about in Bible study last week; iron sharpens iron. There's just a little bit of challenge, maybe.

GLORIA: I think I'm kind of getting this. You don't like the way people expect men to act like.

CONNIE: Maybe it is the expectations people have when they meet you. I want a woman's set of expectations.

JOHN PAUL: But your body's your body.

CONNIE: Remember what we were reading about the wood of the suicides, who turned into trees because they rejected their bodies? I wouldn't mind being there. I hate my body.

JOHN PAUL: So you want someone else to attack it with a knife?

CONNIE: Is that a threat?

JOHN PAUL: No, I was talking about the surgery

CONNIE: Sure you were.

JOHN PAUL: I don't want you to do bad things to your own body.

CONNIE: You'll do them instead.

JOHN PAUL: No, no, no

CONNIE: But you'll keep me out of your pure little Bible group.

JOHN PAUL: Look, in the Bible study, what if somebody said the wrong thing and you react like—

CONNIE: Like what?

JOHN PAUL: Like you just did. Saying people want to – threaten you.

CONNIE: Look, I live under threat all the time! You don't understand! *[exit Connie]*

JOHN PAUL: It was crazy to ask him.

GLORIA: No, Jesus loves Connie too.

JOHN PAUL: I don't see how Jesus is going to reach him.

SCENE 11: *[in front of duct-taped door, Regina enters with Connie. Lucy at her desk]*

REGINA: You have rights to be whoever you really are, no matter what they say. And they have no right to meet on university property if they are violating the rights of other students. Biology is not destiny.

CONNIE: I know; they brought up DNA and everything, and I said, like didn't you ever see the movie *Zootopia*?

REGINA: *Zootopia*?

CONNIE: It's my favorite movie. There's like this rabbit and she wants to be a policeman and they think that the predators are going to attack the other animals because, you know, it's in their DNA. Then it turns out that the problem making them attack the other animals isn't biology. It was a poison that was manufactured – really a symbol of social oppression. It's a movie against biological prejudice. You need to see it.

REGINA: A rabbit?

CONNIE: And her best friend is a fox. And she gets to become a policeman.

REGINA: Police officer.

CONNIE: Yeah.

REGINA: So what did they say about this movie?

CONNIE: John Paul said only stupid cartoons would make a rabbit friends with a predator. Faith Lwanga said it was falsehood that will put people in hell.

REGINA: Who is Faith Lwanga?

CONNIE: An African girl. The first one who asked me why I was there. She's really huffy, you know – she has two scars under her eyes, some kind of tribal markings–

REGINA: She's taken on the religion of Western colonialism?

CONNIE: She says we are foolish to think Jesus just came to Europe; he never went to Europe. Then she gave me a passage.

REGINA: What does that mean?

CONNIE: She told me Bible verses from Romans that make it sound like being gay is some kind of a punishment.

REGINA: This woman is absolutely venomous with binary prejudice.

CONNIE: Africans are all like that. If you're trans, they just act like you're a joke.

REGINA: Maybe she is afraid of not seeming normative, thinking the American Taliban is normal.

CONNIE: The Africans are more heteronormative than the white kids. They're way unprogressive, all of them.

REGINA: She hasn't awakened to her own people's oppression.

CONNIE: She acts so *superior*.

REGINA: You have to assert your rights, loud and proud. You need to set her free from her fear of difference. It won't take you ten minutes to get

that club thrown off campus. Go to the Title Nine coordinator and tell zir what you told me. [*enter Thomas from workroom, sits by Lucy's desk*]

THOMAS: I'm not changing apartments, after all. Only Frankie is.

SECRETARY LUCY: You mean all that was...?

THOMAS: Frank wasn't sure he was going to go, so he took me along to look at the places, but I've gotten boring because I'm always grading papers.

SECRETARY LUCY: He left for that?

THOMAS: Well, he met someone, some guy named Paul. I don't think it's going to last. But Frank's so emotional; he always is. Frank was like that about me, once. He's been talking about Paul all the time, like a storm building up; and then it broke. The apartment's all torn apart, he's separating my stuff from his – it's a tornado – damn, I've got to get a grip on myself before class–

SECRETARY LUCY: Hey, Don and I are having a roast tonight, and it's too much for the two of us. Why don't you just come over? [*enter Regina, stage right, carrying a campus newspaper*]

REGINA: Look at this. Misogyny in action.

THOMAS: Is that Fred?

REGINA: Holding the banner that says "De-Fund Planned Parenthood."

THOMAS: It's not like we didn't know he was–

REGINA: Lending the authority of our university to an anti-woman cause. Every woman who's had an abortion will be triggered by this! That's one in three!

THOMAS: Really? Doesn't anybody use condoms?

REGINA: It's one in three! Triggered! By this bigot! I'm not calling Dean Ontes, I'm calling News Five. [*exit Regina, leaving newspaper*]

SECRETARY LUCY: So, you coming over?

THOMAS: That's very nice, but Fred's not thinking. I have to save my books. It's going to be awful. God, look at that newspaper. Fred should have known better.

SECRETARY LUCY: He has a right to an opinion.

THOMAS: But there are students in this picture.

SECRETARY LUCY: Oh, that's Gloria. And the two girls who did the poetry project. Is that the boy who was here when they cracked the door?

THOMAS: This goes beyond one professor expressing his opinion. Don't you remember the stack of signs in his truck? You just can't do that with students. [*exit, stage right, with newspaper*] [*enter Fred, stage left*]

FRED: Good morning, Lucy. I hope nobody's come to my first office hour; I got a phone call I couldn't get away from at home.

SECRETARY LUCY: Oh, yeah?

FRED: How's your father now?

SECRETARY LUCY: He's even joking with the nurses. Mom slept at the assisted living last night instead of the hospital. Mom really appreciated your coming.

FRED: Hospital ministry is always so good.

SECRETARY LUCY: So what was the phone call about?

FRED: It was Joe, the realtor from the prayer group – Sheila, our coordinator's wife had five inoperable lesions on the spine. Father James held a healing service and somebody got a word about the Lord mighty to save; this morning the CAT scan showed no lesions. They're going to check her blood for tumor markers, but – the pain's gone, too.

SECRETARY LUCY: You think she's healed? Like a miracle?

FRED: The doctors can't account for it. Joe wants me there when they get the results. [*enter Connie with newspaper*]

CONNIE: You took students to that anti-choice march!

FRED: No. I was *at* the March for Life. I did not take students.

CONNIE: I got pictures. An you're a transphobic piece of toilet paper and I'm putting it on every social media platform I can think of. And I have my phone interview. "Biology. And your sex did have something to do with it." [*exit Connie*]

SECRETARY LUCY: What do you think of that?

FRED: It's nothing. Faculty can't give students rides, and that's that.

SECRETARY LUCY: But what about the picture?

FRED: We marched in the same rank. It's natural to march with people you know.

SECRETARY LUCY: Doesn't look good.

FRED: Why do you say that?

SECRETARY LUCY: Have you seen Regina today?

FRED: Regina's Regina. After Sheila's healing, nothing can spoil this day. Did you print out the quiz on Anglo-Saxon battle poems?

SECRETARY LUCY: Forty-five. Here you go. Weird letters and all.

FRED: Thanks. Perfect. Then the Pearl-poet, some Canterbury Tales, and after that it's pretty much all Tolkien. [*Stuffs the quizzes in his bag.*] I've got some prep to do at the library; if anybody comes for my office hour, tell them I'll have an extra hour during lunch time. [*Exit Fred stage left. Enter Regina stage right.*]

REGINA: Where's Maro?

SECRETARY LUCY: Library. He has class in twenty minutes.

REGINA: Well, it will be his last class. I have forty-seven signatures of faculty calling on the provost to dismiss him for religious indoctrination. [*deposits pile of papers on Lucy's desk*]

SECRETARY LUCY: Is there something in your contract that says you can't talk about religion?

REGINA It's bias. It creates bias.

SECRETARY LUCY: Wouldn't you need, like, grades to prove it?

REGINA: Did you see the newspaper? He'll trigger women who've had abortions! And he taught that the word *man* is neutral in gender. He's teaching false information because of his prejudices. I'm going to the administration building. My office hour is canceled. Put it on the door. [*exit Regina, stage left, without pile of papers*]

SECRETARY LUCY: It'll be on your office door. [*picks up her phone and texts, makes sign and exits stage right, as Regina enter hastily with Thomas*]

THOMAS: So, why didn't you do this online where people could just read it?

REGINA: Online stuff spreads. The alt-right can get to parents. And people are a lot less likely to look me in the face and say they won't.

THOMAS: I guess so. I'd have preferred it online.

REGINA: Thank God, here it is.

THOMAS: Watch your language. *Goddess*.

REGINA: Cute; now sign.

THOMAS: You don't mind if I actually read it, do you? [*reads*] You know, this sentence – that's a pretty embarrassing misplaced modifier –

REGINA: Where? Damn it, Thomas, you're *editing*?

THOMAS: I just graded thirty personal essays. I'm an English professor – hi, Fred. [*enter Fred*]

REGINA: Why did you recruit students for your march to oppose women's

health?

FRED: If you mean the March for Life, I did not recruit students, at least no more than I try to persuade any other citizens that unborn children should not be killed. Being protected from medical murder promotes the health of very young women – the ones in the womb. And failing to kill their own children does no harm to mothers.

REGINA: Thomas saw “De-fund Planned Parenthood: signs in your truck. I have photos of you with the students at the march.

FRED: The students went; I went. I carried signs for them in my truck. At their request.

REGINA: And it’s also at their request that you teach students that “natural” gender refers to a person’s biological sex? That anything else is unnatural?

FRED: What are you talking about?

THOMAS: In your Tolkien class you said “man” was a neuter word, and that English uses only natural gender.

FRED: Well, in Anglo-Saxon there was a neuter, but middle and modern English use only natural gender.

THOMAS: Natural?

FRED: That’s the technical linguistic term. I was teaching them about Anglo-Saxon grammar. It’s a medieval course.

REGINA: No, you did it to shame a student who was protesting against the heteronormative masculinist bias of using “he” and “him” when gender is uncertain.

FRED: Connie’s question – was the occasion for mentioning it – but, look, I have *Bright’s Anglo-Saxon Grammar* right here – look – noun neuter – here’s the declension–

THOMAS: But, Fred, that’s an *old* textbook.

FRED: It’s an old language. The grammar hasn’t changed. It’s been dead a thousand years.

REGINA: You are shaming students! You are triggering students for religious reasons! You have trans students cringing with fear at your bias! People are crying; why can’t you just let people be what they are and not be judging them? They aren’t some sort of a threat to you being what they are.

THOMAS: [*quickly signs*] Regina, you needed this signed?

REGINA: [*stuffs the papers in her bag*] You have trans students cringing

with fear at your bias!. Why can't you just let people be, without judging them? They aren't any threat to what you are—

FRED: And what is that?

REGINA: A cisgender male.

FRED: No; a man. With a soul. Destined toward God. Who made male and female. [*Exit Fred, stage right, past Thomas, who backs away with palms out. Regina snatches the paper and exits, stage left. Thomas exits more slowly, following Fred.*]

SCENE 12: [*Holy Spirit Fellowship students knock on Fred's door*]

FRED: [*opens door*] I thought no one knew I was here.

GLORIA: We found out what the administration is doing to you.

JOHN PAUL: It's about Title Nine.

FRED: You mean why they have a women's basketball team?

JOHN PAUL: Sex bias. Now gender bias. Gender means whatever Dr.

Reich says it means – this week. You're in trouble, and we want to pray with you.

FRED: Well, come in. It's not like I don't need prayers.

GLORIA: I have a passage for you. Oh, no, I forgot the song sheets.

JOHN PAUL: Everybody knows "Amazing Grace."

[*Exit students and Fred into office, which is visible to the audience. They then speak antiphonally:*]

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity and have trusted in the Lord without wavering.

Prove me, o Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind

For Thy steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to Thee.

I do not sit with false men, nor do I consort with dissemblers.

[*Then they sing:*]

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound

that saved a wretch like me

I once was lost but now I'm found

was blind [*During the song, enter Regina, leading Dean Ontes. Regina*

knocks on Fred's door.] but now I see. [*enter Fred*]

FRED: Gerry. I don't see you very often here. Hello, Regina.

DEAN ONTES: I'm here in my capacity as dean. Over thirty of your colleagues have signed a petition asking for your removal.

FRED: Tenure exists to protect the unpopular.

DEAN ONTES: Of course. But the offenses alleged are so serious that the college will have to suspend you: Title Nine discrimination against a transgender student.

FRED: This is begging for public mockery of the university. Do you really want a national free-speech case? Over the genders of West Saxon nouns?

DEAN ONTES: There are also charges of religious discrimination.

FRED: Charges like that can go both ways.

DEAN ONTES: You won't win. What I suggest is early retirement. We could arrange it for next week.

FRED: Fortunately the secretary is listening. You can't claim that I accepted that absurd suggestion. I'm in the middle of courses.

DEAN ONTES: You led students in a political march that has triggering effects on some of our students.

FRED: I was not leading these students. They came and I came because of political opinions we share. They are adults and citizens. I have the right to engage in political speech.

DEAN ONTES: You must not associate the university with behavior that is hostile to racial or sexual minority groups. We have to serve multiple clienteles, and we have to be inclusive – not just with tolerance, but acceptance–

FRED: Unless the minority happens to be Christian. [*points to his door*] It's happening in Syria, too, you know.

DEAN ONTES: Come now, we don't have to make absurd comparisons.

FRED: The university should teach people to think for themselves. It's the supreme place for free speech.

DEAN ONTES: I was hoping we could reach a reasonable compromise. I'm surprised to find you so – hostile. The Title Nine coordinator will be speaking to the faculty committee. Our lawyer is looking into the legalities of suspension without pay. I was hoping to avoid that.

FRED: I can't leave. No one can teach the Dante course.

DEAN ONTES: We have to put the safety of our students first; students find your class an unsafe place.

FRED: Students or one student?

DEAN ONTES: I am not allowed to reveal the identities of students who complain.

FRED: But the number? How many?

DEAN ONTES: Considering the nature of the charges which are very serious, I'm assigning the course to someone who participates in the safe spaces movement for LGBTQ students.

FRED: Are you allowed to say who that is?

DEAN ONTES: Thomas Uberti

FRED: He's never read Dante.

DEAN ONTES: He has five days.

FRED: Five days. To read the *Commedia*. And he knows no Italian. Our students deserve a professor who knows the material. Why won't you tell me how many complained?

DEAN ONTES: You are damaging to the students, or else there would have been no complaints. Knowing your views on abortion, which you have made very public, will trigger women in your class.

FRED: Have any women been, as you say, "triggered" about my support of the march?

DEAN ONTES: One woman certainly has.

FRED: Any women in my class?

GLORIA: [*from behind Fred's door*] No.

REGINA: [*opening Fred's door*] Oh. My. God. Look at this. An on-campus meeting of a banned university club. In his office.

DEAN ONTES: What are they banned for?

REGINA: Title Nine violations; transgender discrimination.

DEAN ONTES [*stands up to leave*]: That's all I need to say. You'll turn over class materials to Rob for distribution to your substitutes. [*Exit dean.*]

SECRETARY LUCY: Did he say without pay?

FRED: Don't worry. I don't have much in the way of bills. It's, it's being a professor – it's the students–

SECRETARY LUCY: Look, Don and I are having a roast tonight. It's too much for just the two of us–

FRED: You're wonderful, Lucy. Can I call you from the hospital? I don't

know what will go on with Sheila.

SECRETARY LUCY: Of course. We'll just put on another plate if you're coming.

FRED: Good. I'll leave right after my noon office hour for St. Luke's. You know, two hours ago, I didn't think this could be a bad day. [*Exit Fred into office.*]

SCENE 13 [*Hospital hallway. Fred in clericals and deacon's stole. He holds a little black case and peruses a list. Enter Dr. DeCelles.*]

DR. DECELLES: Are you the chaplain? Fr. Marovsky?

FRED: Technically, just Reverend Mister. I am the chaplain.

DR. DECELLES: I'm Dr. Terry DeCelles, new in Ophthalmology. [*They shake hands.*]

FRED: Surgeon? Johns Hopkins?

DR. DECELLES: That's right, Reverend.

FRED: You can call me Fred. My students call me Maro. I'm an English professor in my other life. [*Phone rings. He answers.*] I'd better take this.

DR. DECELLES: I'll let you go. [*Exit Dr. DeCelles.*]

FRED: [*into phone*] Hello, Rob. So when did you hear? [*listens to phone*] Ontes usually tells the least affected people first. [*listens to phone*] I'll fight it. The grievance system is broken. I'll have to use legal channels. [*listens to phone*] All relevant parties are of age to be legally responsible. Anyway, meanwhile somebody's got to teach. I'm not worried about the Tolkien course – set Judy on it, I've covered all the Anglo-Saxon material. They won't get as much as they should from the Pearl Poet, but at least it's Tolkien's translation. Once they get to Tolkien, the class teaches itself. [*listens to phone*] Basic Structures in Composition is on five-paragraph essays. That can be handled by any warm body who can write an English sentence. [*listens to phone*] She wouldn't do it; besides, do you want to read papers that sound like *Medusa Rising*? Look, a girl at the desk in Admissions has a master's in English – I'll get her name for you. [*listens to phone*] Admissions does flexible hours. [*listens to phone*] The dean has specified Uberti for the Dante course. [*listens to phone. Enter Gloria, John Paul, and*

others upstage.] Dean Ontes is perfectly conscious that Thomas Uberti doesn't know Italian. In fact, Thomas has never even read Dante in translation; and I *told* Gerry Ontes that. This has nothing to do with students learning anything; it's a matter of politics. [*listens to phone*] Fabrizio retired two years ago. He won't come back from Florence for half a term of adjunct's pay. [*listens to phone*] He's in his second year. Thomas won't dare refuse. I'll meet with him to prepare him. I'll be in at three. [*listens to phone*] I have not yet – retained counsel. [*listens to phone*] See you soon. [*hangs up, observes students*]

GLORIA: Professor Maro?

FRED: Hello. Is someone sick?

JOHN PAUL: We want to hold a protest.

FRED: How did you find me here?

GLORIA: Mrs. Decker said you were at this hospital.

FRED: Lucy knows where everything is. What do you mean?

JOHN PAUL: A march. Signs. The Women's Center is organizing one against you, so we want one for you.

FRED: I don't want to know who and I don't want to know where.

GLORIA: Why?

FRED: I saw the Seventies. Protest and counter-protest are not actually a good idea.

GLORIA: But this is persecution. They're taking away your job!

FRED: There are legal channels

JOHN PAUL: What will you do for money? Lawyers cost money.

FRED: I have plenty of savings. I'm a widower; my children are fine; I don't have big bills.

JOHN PAUL: They started it with protests.

FRED: Remember that I discouraged you. As for the suspension, I'll just spend more time at the hospital.

GLORIA: But you have to come to campus sometimes.

FRED: I may well be forbidden the campus.

JOHN PAUL: That is not right. That is not right. [*He texts. Enter the Hospital Security Guard.*]

HOSPITAL SECURITY GUARD: Chaplain?

FRED: Yes.

HOSPITAL SECURITY GUARD: The family wants you. [*Fred waves the students off and exits with the Security Guard. Students exeunt opposite.*]

SCENE 14 [*Night. English Department Office.*]

FRED: I know you're not happy to have to do this. It's too much, with three sections of comp.

THOMAS: I should have read the *Divine Comedy* a long time ago.

FRED: How far are you?

THOMAS: I'm in the hell of the falsifiers; someone is swollen to the shape of a lute. And people are scaly with itches, and steaming with fever-- Dante certainly is creative about inventing diseases--

FRED: They're all real diseases; but still symbolic. Adam put false coins in circulation; he has poisons in his circulation. The sin is the disease; a disease is a symbolic manifestation of sin.

THOMAS: It's all too simple. Sin makes you sick. Like the AIDS nazis. If you have a disease you're a sinner.

FRED: There wouldn't be any point in asserting a one-to-one correspondence. Saints get sick and die like everybody else. The mediaevals connected disease logically enough with our lack of self-control – but religiously, disease shows that humans are in occupied territory, that our flesh is generally ruled by the devil; and that's why you have the overwhelming predominance of healings in the Gospels

THOMAS: And after that God stopped doing miracles.

FRED: The expectation of miracles was not built upon a situation where none happened.

THOMAS: You mean people did get cured of hysterical syndromes.

FRED: No, of things like my neighbor's spinal tumors, which were healed a week ago. Five of them, and the only explanation prayer.

THOMAS: You're overstating some case for effect.

FRED: I could introduce you to the doctor, who remains rather astounded.

THOMAS: I'm sorry, I don't buy this. You think that if you ask pretty please God will send some candy?

FRED: No. A miracle is always a sign. it's a message; why the message is sent we don't know. It's communication.

THOMAS: You really believe these happen.

FRED: I hear about them not infrequently.

THOMAS: What kinds of forums do these come up in?

FRED: Prayer meetings; I belong to a charismatic group – have you heard of

the Charismatic Renewal?

THOMAS: A friend took me to one of their meetings. Speaking in tongues, slain in the spirit. I wasn't impressed. You don't think that in these reports there might be a hint of confirmation bias?

FRED: Certainly sometimes. But why decide beforehand that what so many people have reported has never been experienced? For instance, I believe that Connie has all the feelings that he describes.

THOMAS: She.

FRED: Feelings don't change physiology; and Connie doesn't claim that, or he wouldn't want surgery. Do you believe that his feelings have changed his physiology?

THOMAS: Well, no; but I believe people should be able to express their understanding of reality by language.

FRED: So I should be able to express mine. I use the word "he" in its ordinary sense to refer to measurable physiology.

THOMAS: Language is for human purposes.

FRED: Or inhuman. If I can't invoke truth, then if you call someone vermin, there's no recourse – as long as I can get others to agree. Abortionists say children aren't human. If language shapes reality, they could just fictionalize it without all the violence.

THOMAS: What are you talking about?

FRED: If things change because you imagine them so, couldn't a woman imagine the baby didn't exist long enough for it to get born? That's possible if one doesn't need to attend to physical fact, isn't it?

THOMAS: How did we get onto abortion? That's a grotesque argument.

FRED: And Connie's arguments aren't? How did it come to this – people unable to see their own bodies because they are trapped in some fictive future of perfect inclusion; it's like Farinata in the burning tomb. Don't you see that you'll always have to find some other inclusion to condemn people about? Even in your lifetime, you must have noticed something like mission creep from tolerance to acceptance to inclusion to domination.

THOMAS: I'd hardly call it domination.

FRED: It's why you're trying to spend five days to read the *Divine Comedy* – and with no idea that Dante is passionate about truth.

THOMAS: It's a fiction. Can we get back to the text?

FRED: Fine. This tercet – do you know who Myrrha is and what she did?

THOMAS: No.

FRED: Intergenerational relationships. Also called incest. And she's gone rabid. She pretended to be someone else in order to satisfy her lust. People often have bad reasons for acting on a conscious fiction.

THOMAS: Like Christianity?

FRED: Acting upon trust – as Dante does with Virgil – is not the same as acting upon fiction – as Myrrha did with her father.

THOMAS: Life is fiction.

FRED: Is pain fiction? [Thomas's phone rings. He looks, turns off the phone, puts it down, and pushes it away.]

THOMAS: I'd try to say yes to your question if that weren't Frankie. [*beat*] How long before we get out of hell?

FRED: Not long. But we have to go through ice in the hell of betrayal first.

THOMAS: Betrayal. Yeah. [*They read. Lights off.*]

SCENE 15: [*Secretary Lucy at her desk. Enter Fred.*]

SECRETARY LUCY: I thought you weren't supposed to come in today.

FRED: Well, there are things in my office.

SECRETARY LUCY: Fred, go home. I've heard some not-good things.

FRED: What worse can they do?

REGINA'S VOICE: He came back. He thinks he's so privileged nobody can touch him! [*Fred unlocks his door. Enter Regina and Thomas with Antifa crowd.*]

FRED: [*confronting them*] Can't a man teach about the declensions of adjectives without arousing the thought police?

ANTIFA STUDENT: Man is a noun!

FRED: And you use neuter forms with it. Gender is about grammar; it's not about the way people feel about themselves. Sex is about what every biology textbook says–

REGINA: You heard it yourselves–

ANTIFA PROTESTER: This is what we are! You can't say I'm not what I am!

ANTIFA STUDENT: Not all women have uterii.

FRED: No, generally one apiece. [*enter Holy Spirit Fellowship with protest signs*]

ANTIFA PROTESTER: Alt-right faggot hater! And here come his transphobic troops!

FRED: Man is the neutral term in Anglo-Saxon. There do exist gendered terms; it's like *vir* and *homo* in Latin—

ANTIFA STUDENT: He's talking about homos now! Muscle!

JOHN PAUL: Dr. Maro, they've got baseball bats! [*John Paul pushes Fred into his office and slams the door as a baseball bat hits it.*]

THOMAS: Wait! Nonviolence!

GLORIA: This is religious persecution.

ANTIFA PROTESTER: She's the antifaggot for the homophobic religion! Muscle! [*Lucy grabs Gloria, pulls her behind the glass door and pulls it shut. Shoved by the protesters, Thomas shatters the door and screams.*]

THOMAS: My eyes!

PROTESTERS: Trouble; get out of here! [Exeunt protesters.]

SECRETARY LUCY: Gloria – call 911 – there's blood – Thomas [*Thomas, huddled on the ground, continues making moans of pain*]

SCENE 16: [*Hospital room. Thomas, face bandaged. Mrs. Uberti is at his beside.*]

THOMAS: Mom, are you there?

MRS UBERTI: I'm here, Tommy.

THOMAS: You've lost everything you put into me.

MRS UBERTI: No, I haven't, Tommy.

THOMAS: It is not possible to be a professor of film studies without eyes. I've been trying to bargain with God, and I don't even believe in God – the doctor said he'd have to take out my right eye but maybe the left – oh, God, if I just had any, enough to fake it, I'd forgive all those damn protesters, I'd even go to the six-thirty Masses, just one eye, just some light – God, God, God

MRS. UBERTI: Tommy – I could get you anointed – call the chaplain – should I do that, Tommy?

THOMAS: Yeah. Fine, Go ahead. My life is over. Frankie and then my eyes, my eyes—

MRS. UBERTI: I'll get him, Tommy, I'll get him. It'll be all right, Tommy.

SCENE 17 [*Hospital hallway. Enter Holy Spirit Fellowship.*]

CONNIE: Nobody in the Women's Center will let me say it's my fault. But they won't even say the baseball bat was bad. They blame Maro.

JOHN PAUL: Maro didn't have a bat.

CONNIE: Now I'm here I can't face it. How can I say, I'm sorry I made you blind? It's forever. Nobody can fix it.

GLORIA: But at least Professor Uberti will know you didn't mean it. He tried to stop them.

CONNIE: Why did I tell Antifa?

GLORIA: A spirit of delusion will lead you to the most destructive way of handling a situation. You're under spiritual attack. [*enter Fred*]
Apologizing to Professor Uberti can – Dr. Maro!

FRED: Gloria, John Paul. Connie?

JOHN PAUL: We got cellphone video on The College Fix. Nobody will be able to claim you pushed anybody.

FRED: The dent in my door wasn't enough? Well, thank you.

GLORIA: Can Connie go to see professor Uberti? He wants

CONNIE: No, I don't! I can't face him!

FRED: Do you want me to tell him you're sorry he's hurt?

CONNIE: I don't want him to think about – me –

FRED: But you didn't want something like this to happen.

CONNIE: No. No, I didn't.

FRED: These things get out of control. I'll speak to him. He suffered the violence meant for me. Just now, I've been asked to go pray with Professor Uberti.

JOHN PAUL: No! really?

GLORIA: Oh, praise God! We'll hold him up to the Lord.

SCENE 18 [*A car. Regina is driving Connie.*]

REGINA: Of course you feel bad. You saw it. But you didn't do anything wrong. You were fighting for justice.

CONNIE: Professor Marovsky's not a mean person.

REGINA: But he shouldn't be teaching students to hate trans people.

CONNIE: So why get Antifa after him with baseball bats? Do we have to beat people who don't think our way? Everyone's blaming Marovsky.

REGINA: There can't be progress if you don't challenge them – what, do you want to apologize to Marovsky? Is this internalized oppression?

CONNIE: Everyone's saying he pushed Uberti and I know he didn't. He was in his office. I saw the video.

REGINA: Don't you tell me it wasn't his fault just because he technically didn't lay hands on Uberti. He's an oppressor. He provoked it.

CONNIE: It was the Antifa–

REGINA: Antifascists need to stand up to power. With force if necessary. He knew what he'd done wrong. They had to stick it in his face

CONNIE: What about Uberti's face? [*beat*] I know that Marovsky is at the hospital today and I'm going to apologize to him.

REGINA: Get out of my car.

CONNIE: But we have another block to go.

REGINA: Get out of my car and take your stupid flowers. I am not going to support your alternative version of the facts. This was provoked by stubborn, vicious, right-wing extremism trying to prevent inclusion of people just like you. Get out of my car! [*Exit Connie. Lights down. Exeunt.*]

SCENE 19: [*Hospital room and corridor. Thomas in bed. His mother beside the bed. Fred besides Mrs. Uberti. Both have rosaries.*]

FRED: Meditating on the mysteries of the Holy Rosary, we may imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise.

MRS. UBERTI: Amen. [*puts away her rosary*] They've really got him drugged up.

FRED: Eye injuries are very painful. I'm sorry I couldn't get here until so late; there was a car accident; two deaths; it was a rough night.

MRS. UBERTI: And you're here again so early. Could you lay hands on him and pray again?

FRED: Sure. [*lays hands on him*] Christ, who made the blind to see and the deaf to hear– [*enter Regina*]

REGINA: Why in hell do you have your hands on Thomas Uberti? Making sure you've done the job?

FRED: put forth your power of salvation

REGINA: It wasn't enough to push him through a glass door? You have to come gloat?

MRS. UBERTI: He's here to pray with Tommy. [*enter Connie*]

CONNIE: Professor—

REGINA: Thomas doesn't want you to call up your sky fairy. Give me that thing! [*Grabs Rosary. Fred resists.*] He's gone blind; what in hell can you and your bead toys do for him? [*She grabs his hand and struggles. Rosary breaks.*]

FRED: I can't do anything. God can—

CONNIE: You can't take his stuff! Give it back! this is like Antifa! Here! [*Thrusts broken rosary at Fred.*]

MRS UBERTI: Security! [*Exit Connie, running.*]

REGINA: Who the hell are you to come imposing your religion – and he's blind, and he's too doped up to even tell you to go to hell! [*Enter security guard with Connie.*]

MRS UBERTI: This woman – she came in while the deacon was praying and broke his rosary.

SECURITY: What about him?

MRS. UBERTI: He stopped her.

SECURITY: [*to Fred*] Is this true? Did she touch you?

FRED: Yes, she did. She broke this. [*Lifts broken rosary.*]

HOSPITAL SECURITY GUARD: May I have it for evidence?

FRED: Yes.

NURSE: Please [*gestures for them to leave*]

HOSPITAL SECURITY GUARD: Step outside, please, all of you. [*They step into hallway. Nurse pulls curtain and closes door.*] This woman entered and grabbed the rosary with no provocation from you?

FRED: Yes, she did.

REGINA: He *only* started the riot that left my colleague blind. You're going to prosecute my touching your stupid beads? Where's your Christian forgiveness?

FRED: My religion does not require me to lie, or to interfere with the law. No one is allowed to physically assault people while they work at the hospital.

HOSPITAL SECURITY GUARD: You saw it happen?

MRS UBERTI: I asked the deacon to come anoint my son. And then this

woman, I don't know from where, comes charging in, and she shoves him away and starts screaming at him.

REGINA: Maybe she asked him to engage in battery on her son with religious items. He is not religious, and she should not be imposing that on him. But I'll leave. I don't have to spend my time with crazy people.

SECURITY GUARD: Lady, you're not going anywhere. Assault is serious.

REGINA: Don't call me lady!

SECURITY GUARD: [radio] Security, Room B16. Disturbance; battery with witnesses. Yes – police department, someone to book the suspect.

[*Enter Dr. DeCelles upstage, checks clipboard, enters Thomas's room.*]

REGINA: This is ridiculous. I know who that man is; he's a professor banned from Farinata University for instigating alt-right attacks on students. That's my colleague in that bed, and Fred Marovsky was committing battery. He had his hands on Thomas Uberti. [*Nurse emerges with equipment.*]

MRS. UBERTI: I'm Thomas Uberti's mother, and that is the chaplain I called in–

DR. DECELLES: Doctor. [within] This is astounding. I removed the shards of glass myself. Is this Thomas Uberti? [*emerges, holding chart*] Are you Thomas Uberti's mother?

MRS. UBERTI: Yes.

DR. DECELLES: Something has happened that I can't account for. Yesterday I took shards of glass from the right eye. The retina was damaged beyond repair. I was expecting we would have to remove the entire eye. I came here to see if there was any hope at all of restoring function to the left eye. Look at the diagram. That laceration through the iris was almost certainly incompatible with vision.

MRS. UBERTI: I heard all that. There was nothing you could do for the injuries.

DR. DECELLES: And I did nothing. And the chart says nothing but pain meds and the antibiotic. Mrs. Uberti, just now I unwrapped the dressings. There is no evidence of injury – no deformation, no scars, no injury. He's too groggy from the tramadol to answer questions--but his pupils respond to the light. I don't know what happened. I've sent the nurse to ask about any unusual events – I'm simply – I've never seen such a thing.

MRS. UBERTI: The anointing.

DR. DECELLES: Anointing? [*Enter Thomas, unbandaged*]

THOMAS: Momma, I can see. Fred, you're wearing – a purple boa? Am I hallucinating? [*Fred puts his hand on the shoulder of Thomas, praying*]
Oh, it's one of those priest things, a – cope, chasuble?

FRED: Stole.

MRS. UBERTI: I called in the deacon here to anoint you. He prayed. And I prayed. And, God! God listened. You cured my Tommy!

CONNIE: Spirit of resentment – miracle – it's real – [*Sits on floor*]

THOMAS: I, I can't feel where the glass was. There was glass – it really hurt – there was glass–

DOCTOR: You were blind. The damage was irreparable. Yesterday. I don't know what this is. Do you mind? [*Shines a light in each eye.*] This is completely out of my experience.

MRS. UBERTI: This is miracle. You prayed and got a miracle. That man – Tommy. It's a miracle.

THOMAS: Fred, did you know I was trying to get you fired?

FRED: That doesn't matter. You meant it for evil, God meant it for good. He wanted to *give* you something.

REGINA: He didn't. He didn't. He couldn't. You couldn't cure a blind man.

FRED: But God could. Sometimes He does. He wanted you to see things you hadn't seen before.

REGINA: You weren't that badly hurt.

DOCTOR: He was.

REGINA: He couldn't have been! Give me that chart–

DOCTOR: No, ma'am.

REGINA: I'm non-binary!! Give me that! You're hiding something!
[*Security Guard seizes her; enter police officer.*]

POLICE OFFICER: Is this the lady?

REGINA: [*struggling*] I'm not a lady! I'm non-binary! There's a fraud going on here! He's the one who ought to be arrested! [*Exit Regina, security guard, and police officer.*]

MRS. UBERTI: Do you believe in God now?

THOMAS: I've been given – it's a whole different universe.

FRED: It's a good place. You can live here. Men, women, babies. It doesn't mean there won't be evil. God isn't magic. But it's like the *Commedia*; there's a way out of hell, if you want to take it.

THOMAS: It's actually rather frightening.

FRED: If you stare at Medusa, you'll stay among the burning tombs. If you take reason for a guide, there's a way out of hell. And the first step is opening your eyes to the reality of the world you see.

MRS. UBERTI: What's he talking about?

THOMAS: Something we both were teaching. A poem I ought to listen to. You know the way out of the tombs?

FRED: I know someone who does.

THOMAS: Let's go into my room and I'll hear you. [*Exeunt, except doctor, who pauses, reading the chart, takes off his stethoscope, then follows. Connie remains sitting on the floor.*]

CURTAIN

FINIS