

the beginning of

**CLASS DISMISSED** (from **COUPLES**)

a short play by Rich Orloff

*Place:* The office of a college professor.

*Time:* Shortly before midnight.

*Characters:* GENE, a professor  
LAWRENCE, a student

As the play begins, GENE is packing his office. On the shelves are many books, papers, and religious artifacts. There are several open boxes scattered about. Gene isn't working very efficiently. His mind seems to be elsewhere. There's a knock on the door. Gene checks his watch.

GENE

Come in.

LAWRENCE enters.

GENE (cont'd)

What are you –

LAWRENCE

I saw your light was on.

GENE

I asked you not –

LAWRENCE

I know. I didn't listen.

GENE

Shut the door.

LAWRENCE

Thanks.

Lawrence shuts the door.

GENE

You should go.

LAWRENCE

I can't.

GENE

Why not?

LAWRENCE

I just shut the door.

GENE

I didn't want to risk saying "You should go"  
with the door open.

LAWRENCE

May I take off my coat?

GENE

I wish you wouldn't.

Lawrence tosses off his coat. After he finishes:

GENE (cont'd)

(with exaggerated courtesy)

Why don't you take off your coat?

LAWRENCE

Thanks... You look like shit.

GENE

Yes, and you... You look as good as ever,  
you little bastard.

LAWRENCE

Well, I feel like shit.

GENE

That's what I miss most about youth:  
the ability to feel like shit and still look good.

LAWRENCE

Rumor has it they gave you till midnight.

GENE

Yes, and given everything else they said,  
I expect Security to visit at 12:01.

LAWRENCE

How liberal of them.

GENE

Yes. Liberals. God bless 'em.

LAWRENCE

Can I help?

GENE

No, thanks.

LAWRENCE

These books go in here?

Lawrence begins packing a box.

GENE

(with exaggerated courtesy)

Would you be so kind as to help me?

LAWRENCE

I'd be honored.

GENE

You really shouldn't be here.

LAWRENCE

I stopped worrying about "should"  
halfway through my sophomore year.

GENE

I bet someone was very grateful.

LAWRENCE

Several people were.

Gene holds a stapler. He seems distracted.

LAWRENCE (cont'd)

I didn't mean to –

GENE

No, no, it's not you, it's – Do you think I  
should take my college-issued stapler?

LAWRENCE

Do you need one?

GENE

I don't know... Oh, hell. It's not like  
I teach Ethics.

Gene tosses the stapler in his box.

LAWRENCE

I think you're the most ethical man I know.

Gene thinks a moment and takes the stapler out of the box.

LAWRENCE (cont'd)

I didn't mean you should –

GENE

I know.

LAWRENCE

Take the damn –

GENE

I just don't know what to take and what to let go of.

LAWRENCE

Gene –

GENE

Did anybody see you come here?

LAWRENCE

No.

GENE

Good... Oh, what the hell.

Gene, feeling light for a moment, tosses the stapler back into his box. His lightness fades quickly, and he leans against his desk, too filled with emotion to do anything else. Lawrence walks over to him and kneels to Gene's level.

GENE (cont'd)

Please don't –

Lawrence takes Gene's hand and kisses it tenderly.

GENE (cont'd)

(with exaggerated courtesy)

Would you like to kiss my hand?

LAWRENCE

Why won't you tell me where you're going?

GENE

Do you want me to get into even more trouble?

LAWRENCE

Tell me – or I'll snitch about the stapler.

GENE

Oh, that'll put the nail on the coffin.

(imagining a phone conversation:)

"Hello, is this the Dean of the College?

Professor Hailey has applied for a position  
in our department and we were wondering –"

"Professor Hailey? Top notch. Published in  
all the major journals. His classes invariably  
have huge waiting lists."

"And could you vouch for his character?"

"His character is impeccable, as long as he's  
not around attractive young men or staplers."

LAWRENCE

Please tell me where you're going.

GENE

I don't know.

LAWRENCE

You must have –

GENE

It's not like they gave me a long time  
to make plans... Shit.

Gene takes the stapler out of his box.

LAWRENCE

Gene –

GENE

(picking up some bluebooks:)

How'd you like to grade some midterms?

I'm supposed to grade these before I go.

LAWRENCE

Gene –

GENE

Hell, let my replacement do it.

LAWRENCE

How are they going to replace you  
halfway through the semester?

GENE

Oh, you know, they'll just call up some temp agency for religion professors. Kelly Profs or something.

(imagining the call:)

"No, no, typing speed isn't important. Do you have anyone with a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies? Is he either happily married or a eunuch?... Good."

LAWRENCE

You don't have to let them win.

GENE

I hate to spoil your idealistic mind, but the war is already over. They moved swiftly and with all their power. And I have no weapons.

LAWRENCE

Will you listen to reason?

GENE

Listen to reason? I teach *religion*.

LAWRENCE

We could organize.

GENE

Oh, yes. Maybe we could charter a new student organization, Students In Favor of Student Unions With Professors.

LAWRENCE

If we argue our case –

GENE

"In silence man can most readily preserve his integrity." Meister Eckhart.

LAWRENCE

People need to know the facts.

GENE

What facts?

LAWRENCE

That there was no coercion.

GENE

That depends on your theoretical framework.

LAWRENCE

Other professors have affairs with students.

GENE

Other students' fathers don't threaten lawsuits and publicity.

LAWRENCE

You didn't lay a hand on me until after I finished your class.

GENE

Oh, I'll get bonus points for that, won't I?

LAWRENCE

I wanted you.

GENE

Well, we can't always get what we want, can we?

LAWRENCE

Well, damn it, why not?

GENE

Because if we could, there'd be no need for religion.