

"VALEDICTORY"

Synopsis: The chance encounter at the tenth school reunion escalates to a confrontation in the corridor between a former screw-up student who now has his own multi-million dollar company and the former valedictorian who mops floors.

Cast: Both characters are post-college ages

"VALEDICTORY"

(DARKNESS. SOUND OF LATE 80'S ROCK INTERSPERSED WITH A MIXED CROWD TALKING EXCITEDLY THROUGHOUT. LIGHTS UP ON THREE LOCKERS AND CURT DAMP-MOPPING THE FLOOR. A WHEELED BUCKET WITH A WRINGER SITS NEARBY. AFTER A MOMENT, WE HEAR SHOE HEELS APPROACHING. ENTER TOM IMPECCABLY DRESSED IN A THREE PIECE SUIT AND ROLEX WATCH). TOM WALKS AROUND THE WET SPOT, PASSING CURT. HE STOPS, LOOKS AROUND, LOST).

TOM

Where's the men's room, boss?

CURT

You passed it. And it's called the BOY'S ROOM, boss.

TOM

I would've bet my life it was down here.

CURT

They changed it when they built the new wing.

TOM

Thought I was losing my mind. So I backtrack...

CURT

First right, second left, on the left.

TOM

Got it.

CURT

Sure?

TOM
Right, left, left.

CURT
Right, second left, on the left.

TOM
Thanks.

CURT
Yeah.

(TOM STARTS TO GO. STOPS. LOOKS BACK ON CURT WHO NOW DIPS THE MOP IN THE BUCKET AND WRINGS IT DRY).

TOM
Do we know one another?

CURT
A case could be made for it.

(CURT CONTINUES WORK).

TOM
Sorry? Curt?

CURT
Hi, Tom.

TOM
Curt! I'm sorry! How ya doin'?

(TOM OFFERS A HANDSHAKE. CURT KEEPS BOTH HANDS ON THE MOP MAKING A VERY AWKWARD MOMENT).

CURT
How am I *doing*? You see *what* I'm doing. Simple deduction and your fabled street smarts should answer the question.

TOM
Good to see you again, Curt.

CURT
Really?

TOM
You look so different with a beard. So how've you been?

CURT

I think therefore I am.

TOM

It's just really good to see you.

CURT

And why's that?

TOM

Well, it just is.

CURT

Oh, tautology?

TOM

C'mon, Curt. I saw you everyday for 4 years.

CURT

What's tautology?

TOM

I know we learned it but it never came up in my life so I guess that's why I don't remember. Like so many other things they teach in school.

CURT

You said it's good to see me because it's good to see me.

TOM

So--this is what you do?

CURT

No, Tom, I do this just to get out of the house.

TOM

But what else do you have going on?

CURT

Just this. Eight to five, Monday through Friday. Go home. Do a six and roll a few in front of the idiot box.

TOM

C'mon, Curt, you're talking to me. There's got to be more than that.

CURT

Out of the mud the lotus blossoms.

TOM

I don't understand. You're the only one who made Ivy League. Didn't you get into--?

CURT

Princeton. Yeah.

TOM

So how was Princeton?

CURT

It interfered with my education.

TOM

I don't understand.

CURT

You're right.

TOM

Remember Busby?

CURT

How could I not?

TOM

I just heard he oh-deed his first semester at Berkley. And Turbo went into anthropology and fell off a cliff on a dig in Colorado.

CURT

But how impressive that would look on his resume.

TOM

He died.

CURT

A sudden stop will do that.

TOM

So Princeton didn't work out?

CURT

Satori!

TOM

So this is just like temporary?

CURT

No. This is just like IT.

TOM

Curt, c'mon, you were valedictorian.

CURT

And what's that qualify one for?

TOM

You had a 99 g.p.a.

CURT

Ninty-nine point three.

TOM

Not everybody gets into Princeton.

CURT

Yet some who don't wear three piece suits and give the impression.

TOM

I didn't even apply because I knew I didn't have a chance.

CURT

But you did okay in some little Podunk.

TOM

I squeaked in and squeaked by.

CURT

And look at you now.

TOM

I did okay.

CURT

Okay means showing up at the big reunion in your shocking yellow Porsche.

TOM

It's transportation for spendthrifts. How'd you--? If you saw me drive up, then why--?

CURT

I didn't want to embarrass you.

TOM

Embarrass me?

CURT

Hey, you don't have to feign embarrassment. You're the one who made it. Who-da-thunk-it?

TOM

I did the best I could with what I had.

CURT

At what?

TOM

Business.

CURT

Busy-ness.

TOM

Busy is right.

CURT

What is the nature of your busy-ness?

TOM

Online biz-to-biz financial services.

CURT

You, computers?

TOM

Believe it or not.

CURT

I got you through computer science.

TOM

Yeah, you did. It's different when it's connected to reality.

CURT

Lucre.

TOM

Yeah.

CURT

Rakin' it in.

TOM

Sometimes I think w, w, w means wow wow wow.

CURT

What's your position in the company?

TOM

I'm up there.

CURT

What's your title?

TOM

The Man.

CURT

Is that what your employees call you?

TOM

C.E.O.

CURT

You didn't want to say it because you didn't want to embarrass me. What's HTML?

TOM

You mean the--

CURT

You know what I mean.

TOM

HTML.

CURT

Yeah.

TOM

It's a computer thing.

CURT

Oh, a computer thing. You make a living at this?

TOM

I hire tech people. I do the business.

CURT

How about Hypertext Markup Language.

TOM

HyperText Markup Language. My education feels so complete now that I know that.

CURT

Some things never change.

TOM

Agreed. Eggheads will be eggheads.

CURT

And under-achievers will be under-achievers.

TOM

Tautology.

CURT

Very good.

TOM

Curt...I know everybody would love to see you in the gym.

CURT

They sure would love to see me like this.

TOM

C'mon, Curt, people have been asking about you.

CURT

Really? Not one person contacted me in ten years.

TOM

You haven't responded to the, uh, you know, the notice of the reunion. Ask any guy in there. Whenever we run into one another or talk on the phone, your name always comes up.

CURT

You mean, in the list of tragedies. Turbo fell off a cliff. Busby oh-deed. And Curt the Wunderkind is mopping floors, in the groves of academe, no less.

TOM

Curt, excuse me: No. Every guy I talk to says the same thing when your name comes up. We all think about your valedictory speech just about every day of our lives, especially when things are not going my way. That list. My God. Every person in there can quote your speech. Every person in that gymnasium, holding a plastic cup of chardonnay right now, could quote that list you burned into our brains the day we graduated. "Alexander conquered the world at 32. Michaelangelo carved "David at 19 and "Pieta" at 23. Napoleon was emperor at 33. Einstein conceived the theory of relativity at the age of 26. Bill Gates

was a college drop-out." You put this yardstick in our heads. Sometimes I find myself goofing off, and then I think the list. Alexander, Michaelangelo, Napoleon, Einstein, Bill Gates. Thirty's coming up. Better get busy or I'll never make the list. Sometimes I wish I never heard your valedictory. But it spurs me onward. I can't get your list out of my head. Every single guy in there feels the same way. And your last line. "There's not a minute to lose." You're part of our psyches, man. Part of you is part of us. Look, Curt, I have to make a speech in a minute.

CURT

Ah, so anticipating the speech, you had nervous urination?

TOM

I know a lot of guys would love to see you.

CURT

Love to see the top of the class at the bottom of the food chain so they could congratulate themselves on following the mediocre path.

TOM

Let's jump in my car, we'll get you home, you get cleaned up--

CURT

Oh, no, I'd have to be seen like this. And when they ask, What do you do, I could say that I'm in education. Yes, I play a multifaceted role in the halls of academe.

TOM

Look, Curt, nobody in there is as down on you as you are on yourself. Things didn't work out for lots of people, but you're still young, you can turn things around. Nobody cares.

CURT

What'd you get on your S.A.T.'s?

TOM

I don't remember.

CURT

I do. Your scores were dreadful.

TOM

So what. I never tested well.

CURT

Because you studied desultorily. What's that mean, Tom?

TOM

It means I didn't have the discipline you had.

CURT

No, Tom, your retention was poor because you crammed because you don't have the gift of curiosity and want to know for knowing's sake. You studied to get a grade. You studied lacking consistency. Fitfully. No wonder your verbal scores were appalling. I got 1600.

TOM

I know.

CURT

Perfect. They made me take it again because they thought I cheated.

TOM

Curt, look, I need to get in there and make the speech. You always stood out. You come in as you are, you'll probably start a trend.

CURT

Yeah, Evening Janitorial.

TOM

I'd be proud to walk in there with you.

CURT

No wonder you did so well. You can small-talk with the best of them.

TOM

C'mon, you and me, let's walk in there together.

(CURT FIGHTS POWERFUL EMOTIONS WHICH HE INVESTS INTO HIS MOP. HE WETS THE MOP, WRINGS IT DRY, AND THROWS HIMSELF INTO MOPPING THE FLOOR. TOM TAKES OUT A BUSINESS CARD, HANDS IT TO CURT WITH TENDER DELICACY).

TOM (CONT'D)

Curt, I gotta run. I'd hire you in a heartbeat. I'm going global next year. You can carve out a niche for yourself.

(CURT CRUMBLES THE CARD, THROWS IT AT TOM).

TOM (CONT'D)

Curt, if the situation was reversed--

CURT

"If the situation WERE reversed." It's a hypothetical assertion, therefore requires the present subjunctive tense.

TOM

If the situation were reversed, I'd have no problem accepting that offer.

(CURT ATTACKS TOM, TAKES HOLD OF HIS CLOTHES. THEY STRUGGLE).

CURT

I tutored you! You idiot! I tutored you! You were a stupid jock!

TOM

Let go.

CURT

I tutored half the people in there!

(THEY GO DOWN TO THE FLOOR).

TOM

Curt!

CURT

You're mediocrity through and through!

(THEY STRUGGLE. TOM PINS HIM. CURT TRIES TO BREAK OUT OF THE HOLD BUT CAN'T. HE STOPS STRUGGLING)

TOM

Yeah, Curt, but I didn't sit around feeling superior to everybody else. I went out there and fell on my face and got back up and feel on my face and when I got tired of falling on my face I started to learn. I guess that's where we differ. You never got out there because you're afraid that maybe life ain't nice and neat the way knowledge is arranged in a textbook. Sometimes life is less like taking an S.A.T. test more like being a line-backer and making a big tackle that wins the game. I can honestly say that you were the inspiration of my success. So thanks, Curt.

(TOM GETS OFF CURT, GETS TO HIS FEET. CLEANS HIMSELF UP WITH A HANDKERCHIEF.)

CURT REMAINS ON THE FLOOR. TOM OFFERS A HAND. CURT REFUSES HELP).

TOM (CONT'D)

You okay?

(CURT GETS UP BY HIMSELF).

TOM (CONT'D)

This never happened. It was good to see you again. And that's not small talk. Now maybe you'd give me a chance to return the favor and let me tutor you.

(Beat)

Right, second left, on the left.

(EXIT TOM. CURT MOPS THE FLOOR. AFTER A MOMENT, HE LOOKS AT THE CRUMBLED BUSINESS CARD ON THE FLOOR. HE PICKS IT UP, UNFOLDS IT, SMOOTHS IT OUT, READS IT AS LIGHTS FADE).