

Registration

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forgot to pick up a freshman composition course card!

MR. MULLER: (In a derogatory manner) You forgot to pick up a freshman composition card. Eureka! The key to the university is in my hand. Open sesame!

(He draws back the beige curtain, which reveals a plotted chart of English sections drawn with different colored chalk to denote whether or not a particular section is open or closed.)

I have a very artistic temperament with a latent talent for portrait painting, wouldn't you say? I call it my blue period. Of course any great work should be judged from a distance. (A beat) It is time for you to make your decision. (He pantomimes a drum roll.)

KEITH: What would you recommend?

MR. MULLER: Whatever section is open. I'm afraid you don't have much choice.

KEITH: I wanted section eight if it's not already closed.

MR. MULLER: You came too late. I'm sorry but there are too many students enrolled in that section already. You'll have to take something else.

KEITH: All right, then how about section nineteen.

MR. MULLER: Nineteen...no I'm afraid that's closed too. Any other alternatives?

KEITH: No, I'm afraid not.

MR. MULLER: It's closed now, but of course it may open again later this afternoon when we get the word from the Administration Building.

KEITH: What's open?

MR. MULLER: Sections twenty through thirty-four.

KEITH: They won't fit into my schedule.

MR. MULLER: I strongly doubt that.

KEITH: Why? What time do they meet?

MR. MULLER: Seven a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I don't suppose you have any pressing engagements at that hour?

KEITH: Oh I don't know, I could think of a few offhand.

MR. MULLER: Remember, this isn't supposed to be a rest cure. Maybe I didn't make that clear from the very beginning.

KEITH: (Resigned) All right, give me section twenty-six.

MR. MULLER: Congratulations! You're our first student to land on her. (Salaciously) Take a ride on Miss Redding and pay owner twice the rental shown. She's quite a little utility, if you know what I mean. How would you like to tail her caboose on Free Parking? (He laughs crudely) Listen I'll get you a course card. They should be on top of my desk somewhere. Let me go check. (He walks over with Keith to the side of his desk.) That's funny, they were here this morning. Someone must have moved them. I'd better call upstairs to check and see if there are any left. (He picks up the phone and dials '0') Hattie, would you connect me with Miss Redding please. (To Keith:) These new dial tones can drive you deaf! That's the convenience of modern day science for you! (Into receiver) Hello, Celia. I'm fine - and how is your cocoon this afternoon: Listen, I have a young man in my office who wants to take your freshman English course. No, I can't find

the blue cards anywhere. The yellow ones...I thought those were for English X. (He checks his desk again.) Are you sure they aren't beige with red asterisks tattooed onto the corners? No, we're out of those. All right then, I'll check with you later. (Hangs up) Those sections are closed. Unfortunately, they're already reserved for preregistered students. Sections three, eight and twelve are open again. That's all that's left.

KEITH: Wait, I'll have to check my schedule. Section eight seems good offhand. Yes, it was my first choice to begin with. I'll take it!

MR. MULLER: (Relieved) Here's your card. Keep it in your identi-pack until you pay your registration fees.

(The phone rings. Mr. Muller goes over to answer it, while Keith gets all of his things together.)

MR. MULLER: (Into phone) What's the problem now? (Keith is hurriedly on his way out.) I think I can catch him.

(Mr. Muller bangs down the phone and runs over to Keith, who is almost out of the door by this time. Mr. Muller grabs his registration packet away from him.)

No dice. All of these years I've tried to pass go-and prize boy, you're not going to get ahead of me so quickly. Sit down and wait your turn, it's going to be a long wait.

KEITH: I've been here all day.

MR. MULLER: Yes, and I've been here close to a lifetime. I've never been kind to parvenus who use me as a continual stepping stone. Oh yes, I've known your line of action all along. I'm tired of machines getting all the credit for the idiot work that I'm supposed to do around here! Yes, even machines break down once in awhile-especially when they've been fed too much information. Just remember at all times that I'm your personal advisor. Come to me to solve your everyday problems. Those personal anxieties which mount up in your diminutive brain. (In a highly conciliatory but artificial manner) Shall we start again? (Mr. Muller shakes Keith's hand.) Ira B. Muller, glad to meet you. Please forgive my cynicism. When you get to know me better, you'll understand the dark side of my nature. (He pauses) Won't you sit down? I didn't catch your name the first time around.

KEITH: (Quietly) Keith Sorenson. I just came in for a course card.

MR. MULLER: Fine. Fine. So glad to see you. Would you like something to drink?

KEITH: That would be very nice. Thank you.

MR. MULLER: Sorry there's no water in the cooler. (He points in the direction of the water cooler.) I'll have my secretary bring something in in a few minutes. (He pauses reflectively) You know I used to be like you.

KEITH: In what way?

MR. MULLER: If I made it hard for you, I'm sorry. I just wanted to show you what you're up against out here.

KEITH: Yes, I understand.

MR. MULLER: No, I don't think you do, and that's the tragedy of the whole situation. It's right in front of you and you don't even see what you're looking at. You came so far to see so little. I moved out here with the intention of spreading the written word. My father was a Unitarian minister in the great tradition of William Ellery Channing and other true transcendentalists. He preached for the Salvation Army

when his church closed down in the East Bronx. He sacrificed his Godly mission and instead sang idyllic Christmas carols on Fifth avenue. Where was the inner core of meaning behind "Silent Night"? That is how I have become, estranged in a mass of whirling faces with an ideal that no longer applies, and never did. I belong with him, we all do-to share a world of universal harmony. He died in my arms as if the branch of an olive tree in a rising storm cracked off and fell to the ground, assuaging the roots of his life-long existence in a moment of belabored sorrow. For I stand as firm as the olive tree-only to be withered by words as yet unspoken. (Breaking off quickly) All ready to play the second round?

KEITH: I'm sorry-

MR. MULLER: You needn't be sorry.

KEITH: (Abruptly) You see, the other two English sections couldn't possibly fit into my schedule.

MR. MULLER: Then you'll have to change it.

KEITH: I'll try to - but I really must go now.

MR. MULLER: Wait, I'm sure we can work something out. What's wrong with section eight?

KEITH: You just took the course card away from me.

MR. MULLER: So I did. (Over-compensatingly) But what's an advisor for!

KEITH: (Dryly) That's what I'd like to know!

MR. MULLER: (Starting it up again) You don't want an education, do you? You want free advice, which you don't seem to be getting. Talk is cheap! But not that cheap! Sometimes you have to pay for what you don't want to hear. (The telephone rings) Saved by the bells of Friar Tuck! (He goes over to his desk to pick up the phone.) Yes Hattie, put her on. (Holding receiver) It's Miss Redding again. Perhaps she has some good news from the outer world but I wouldn't count on it. (Into receiver again) Yes, well look - if she has encumbrances how does she expect to register? Honestly, you think we were the ones who made up the God given rules. Celia, I'm still trying to get that young man a course card for freshman composition. Sure, I'll hold on. (To Keith) It may take a year but she's checking right now with the head of the English Department. I only hope - (Into receiver again) Hello, Yes. No, that's fine. No, that's quite all right. I appreciate that - really I do. Look I'll check with you later. No, I have them in my hand. All right - fine, I'll put them in your box when I leave tonight. Have a good weekend now. Lock the main office when you leave, O.K? Fine - good-bye, Celia. (He hangs up.) You've won your first battle; now on to the war grounds. You'll be happy to know that section eight is officially open again.

KEITH: (Politely) Can I have my course card back, please?

MR. MULLER: (Correcting him with winning knowledge) May I-

KEITH: (A bit annoyed) May I have my course card back, please?

MR. MULLER: Yes you may.

(Mr. Muller hands the course card back to him, and then in a tone of winning confidence-)

Welcome to my composition course!

KEITH: You don't mean you're my teacher.

MR. MULLER: If I couldn't preach to men, at least I could preach to youth. The sopranos in

the chorus have to be converted. I am their temporal guide to the empyreal realm of deliverance. (He smiles enigmatically) Learning by doing...That's John Dewey, isn't it? That's what both of us have been taught. We follow the same God but in a different direction. You're going forward, and I've already been. I wish I could make it easier for you, but I'm only your advisor...Your sanctified mentor, advising you on what's already unadvisable. The glories of mass education, the gospel according to Ira B. Muller, a multiple choice catechism from the new college catalogue!

(He stands on top of his desk, totally immersed in the fervor of an evangelist's sermon as papers from all sides of the desk fly to the floor.)

This is a test of your ability to read directions from the text and to repeat what's already been spoken at previous lectures. "As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" into a world of right and wrong, true or false, fair or four-er any equivocation we will meet on the Judgement Day called graduation! A human being has no internal dimensions of his own making. He is forced to be denuded of strength and his sublime capabilities to reason. He is as epicene as the eunuch-standing on the threshold of Armageddon, caught in a vice of self-deception. Repent!, sinners. Repent! We are forced to teach in class a different story, although, our hearts call to a different God of communication; for we are forced to acquiesce in a bucolic reverence for untaught knowledge!

KEITH: I don't understand. I'm sorry I spoke out of turn. I didn't mean to upset you. Anyway, I'd better be going home now - I mean back to my dormitory.

(Keith goes across the room and tries to open the door.)

MR. MULLER: Are you ready for our first lesson?

KEITH: The door's locked. I can't seem to open it.

MR. MULLER: At four-thirty just like clockwork, I am hermetically sealed between these vacuous walls of scholasticism. It was my order.

KEITH: I don't understand.

MR. MULLER: Oh, I have the master key, so there's nothing for you to worry about.

KEITH: But I have to get home right away.

MR. MULLER: I'll only detain you for a few more minutes - besides, I haven't served the refreshments yet. There's much to be said for the Socratic Method you know, although, I never really cared for hemlock. I suppose it's an acquired taste of sorts.

KEITH: (On the verge of hysteria) Please let me out of here! You're sick - you're really sick - I don't understand what you want of me. Please let me out!

MR. MULLER: (Unctuously) Not until you have gone through the initiation of fraternal brotherhood, the mystogogue of life - (In mock religious tones) Come to me, my son - and enter into my sequestered world of communal education.

KEITH: What do you mean?

MR. MULLER: (Over-poweringly) Virgin bough of youthfulness support my falling member of disseminating seed!

KEITH: Stand away from me. I don't want to stay here.

MR. MULLER: Man of sorrows! Pitiful misogynist, avanti!

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KEITH: Here's your course card; I don't want to be in your class.

MR. MULLER: But you are.

KEITH: You are no teacher! You don't know the first thing about teaching. I can only be polite for so long, and then it's my turn to teach you. You can't destroy what I already know. You don't have that power.

MR. MULLER: (As he takes a stopwatch out from his pocket:) Silence! I am the teacher! Time for the first question. Skin is to snake as A. Wood is to fire. B. Goat is to milk. C. Pluck is to chicken. D. Feather is to ostrich. Time is running out, would you hazard a guess...Time's up! Plethoric is to superfluous as subliminal is to -

KEITH: I really don't know.

MR. MULLER: Then shall we try our word problems instead? Let's try one more analogy problem just for the record, shall we? Scientific facts are to data as A. Theories are to laws. B. Eggs are to -

KEITH: I'm not a testing machine.

MR. MULLER: No, that's right, keep on convincing me you're a real person. But first can you verbalize your hostility in a more effective sentence structure?

KEITH: Can you? It's my turn for questions now.

MR. MULLER: But you haven't raised your hand. This is my classroom you forgot. You signed up for my course out of your own volition.

KEITH: I haven't registered yet.

MR. MULLER: You needn't bother. You'll be registered before you leave here today. Are you ready for one more round?

KEITH: When will you hand me the key?

MR. MULLER: After you're sworn in under oath.

KEITH: I don't understand.

MR. MULLER: Are you ready to answer the toss-up?

KEITH: Can't you see I have a bloody nose?

MR. MULLER: (Derisively) If I was Saint Veronica I'd throw you a handkerchief!

KEITH: It's so nice to know who's the martyr! (His nose keeps bleeding throughout the remainder of the scene.)

MR. MULLER: Oh! you'll get acclimated, don't worry! (Speeding ahead) For the scientist, "Publish or perish" might be rewritten as A. Publish or cease to exist. B. Perish the thought. C. Publish to exist. D. Publish in spite of the parish.

KEITH: (As he rubs his head:) Huhh?

MR. MULLER: To whom? Notice the grammatical construction of the indirect object.

KEITH: I haven't registered yet. I can still go home - even back to New York. Nothing's keeping me here once I open that door.

MR. MULLER: Once you open the door, - but by that time it will be too late. (Keith crosses over to Mr. Muller's desk.)

KEITH: I don't want to stay here. You can't control my destiny. (Keith reaches for the telephone.)

MR. MULLER: No one else is in the building, and we're on the other side of the campus. Your call won't go through. I heard Hattie leave a few minutes ago.

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