

Two men sit in an office. Phil sits at a desk, reading Tom's résumé.

Phil's Résumé

PHIL: Yeah, this is —

TOM: I also dance. Plus, I condensed. That's not everything.

PHIL: Oh —

TOM: I mean, it's representative. There's a ton more stuff, I just thought —

PHIL: No question. The thing is, your type —

TOM: I don't really see myself as a type. There's much more range, you know different —

PHIL: Character —

TOM: Yeah, character-type work, and, um, improvisation —

PHIL: This is what I'm saying. A character actor, what are you, mid-thirties —

TOM: Early. Early thirties, although I often read, last year, I played a twenty-three-year-old junkie, in an independent, and it was —

PHIL: *(Slightly impressed.)* A junkie? 'Cause there's maybe, they're hot this year —

TOM: You want tape on that? 'Cause I could get you that tape. The junkie tape —

PHIL: Yeah, I —

TOM: I mean, it was excellent, I didn't have a lot to do, but there's a great cameo of me nodding off, it's killer stuff —

PHIL: No, you know what you should do? All this, you do a lot of theater, right? This is mostly like stage stuff?

TOM: Yeah, a lot, my training is —

PHIL: Fantastic. I love the theater. Why don't you give us a call, next time you're in something, we'll stop by and take a look, OK?

(He pushes the résumé toward Tom. Tom does not take it.)

TOM: Well but isn't that why you called me in? 'Cause you saw the showcase and —

PHIL: It would just be great to see you in something bigger. Get more of a sense of what you can do.

TOM: Yeah but you called and asked me to come in and now —

PHIL: Hey can I be candid? *(Looks at résumé.)* Tom? I mean, this is a tough business, it's best to be candid, right?

TOM: Oh absolutely, that's —

PHIL: 'Cause I'm sort of not really getting your tone here. I mean I called you in 'cause I think you have talent, I might want to, you know, *represent* you someday and now I'm getting like a ton of attitude here.

TOM: No, you're not getting attitude. I just —

PHIL: I'm just saying. Don't talk to me like a jerk.

TOM: I'm not talking to you like a jerk. You're talking to me like — You call me in, I take time out of my schedule —

PHIL: Your very busy schedule — *(He waves the résumé, unimpressed.)*

TOM: I told you, that's not — besides, who cares what's on my — Harrison Ford was a *carpenter* for God's sake —

PHIL: If you were Harrison Ford, believe me, this conversation would be very different.

TOM: You called me. *You called me* —

PHIL: Yes, I called you and you jumped. You jumped at this. I mean, you want representation or not? You want it or not?

TOM: Of course I want it, I —

PHIL: All right. I am the representation. I am what you want. I am the object of desire in this town. Got that? It's not some fucking starlet tits out to here. It isn't a gold BMW. It's me. You want to work, you want to see your face on the big screen, the fucking tube, whatever —

TOM: Look, I —

PHIL: *(Very reasonable.)* I am what gets you that. I am what makes this town run. So when I say jump, you don't say why. I mean, what, you have a problem with authority? You didn't like your dad or something? Tell it to your shrink. Keep it out of my damn office and just do what I say.

TOM: Why are you yelling at me?

PHIL: Oh, now I'm —

TOM: Yes, you're not even representing me and you're, you're —

PHIL: I said I *might*.

TOM: Oh well that's —

PHIL: Look. I didn't invent the world. I didn't make up the rules. I'm giving you advice here. This is free! Do you know what you are? You're an actor! No one gives a shit about you! You're a total nobody! The fact that I'm even speaking to you is going to be the most significant thing that happens to you all year. You should be fucking genuflecting, and I mean literally hitting your knees when I say boo, and what do I get instead? What do I *get*? "You called me up and now you aren't being nice to me." This is show business, you moron! Nobody's nice to anybody! Especially actors. You guys are the lowest form of life. Oh yeah, I know everybody says that about agents, but they're wrong. I mean, we're slime, OK, I don't argue that, but we're slime that *you* need, and *you* want, so you are lower even than me, and that means I don't *have* to be nice to you. *You* have to be nice to me!

TOM: I just — I don't — that's nuts. You're nuts.

PHIL: I'm *what*?

TOM: I mean, I'm an actor. How can you — I'm an *artist*. Laurence Olivier, for God's sake — this is an art form and you're — yeah, OK, I understand that it's not show friends, it's show business, but — we're talking about telling *stories*, reaching in and communicating our *humanity*, and if you can't even — if decency means *nothing* anymore, then why — I just don't accept that. I'm sorry, but I don't. I've given up everything to do this work, my family thinks I'm completely — I've maxed out all — I mean, I am fucking broke every second of my life, and I know that I'm just another actor but that's not — this is a *noble thing*. Do you understand that? We are as puppets dancing for the gods. We spin meaning out of nothing, out of oblivion we make *art*, and you — well. You're not — I can't — you don't — No.

PHIL: Did you finish a sentence in there? I mean, did you actually say something?

TOM: I don't want you to represent me.

PHIL: You *what*?

TOM: You're a bad person. (*Tom takes his résumé and puts it in his knapsack.*)

PHIL: Oh. Well. You cut me to the quick, Tom. I, I just don't know what to say.

(*Tom is heading for the door.*)

PHIL: Hey! What are you doing?

TOM: I'm leaving.

PHIL: Did I say you could go? 'Cause I don't remember saying that.

TOM: I, I didn't ask.

PHIL: Tom. This is really — sit down. Would you sit down? Come on. I mean, I like you Tom, would I be even talking to you if I didn't — sit down. Come on.

(*Tom does.*)

TOM: I'm really confused.

PHIL: I don't see why.

TOM: I'm getting very mixed signals from you.

PHIL: How so, Tom? 'Cause I'm being as candid as I possibly know how to be. I mean, most people in this town — some of that stuff you said, you could've really pissed some people off with that. And you know, someone like me, if I were vindictive, I could call every casting agent I know and tell them, you know, you're a difficult guy, and that would be it. Your career would be over.

TOM: Is that a threat?

PHIL: It's just a fact. Nobody wants to deal with anybody who's difficult. Life's too short, babe. You want to have a conversation about, what do you call it —

TOM: The work?

PHIL: "The work," people aren't gonna put up with that. Humanity, noble, decency, art — Tom. People are not gonna put up with it.

TOM: Why are you saying these things? I was going to leave. I am leaving —
(He stands.)

PHIL: You leave when I tell you to leave!

(Tom looks at him, confused.)

PHIL: I mean, there's something you're not getting here, Tom. I am your friend. I see an actor with talent, I ask him to come in, he's clearly confused about how the world works but I like him so I decide to teach him a few useful lessons. I am your friend. And if you ever want to work as an actor, get paid, actually have a real acting job instead of some stupid theater thing, then you will LEAVE when I SAY LEAVE.

(They stare at each other.)

TOM: You know, Nietzsche was not right.

PHIL: Oh, Jesus —

TOM: Yes, Nietzsche, the philosopher said —

PHIL: I'm trying to tell you something, Tom —

TOM: And I'm trying to tell you, the guy was like obsessed —

PHIL: Yeah, that's fascinating, I'm so —

TOM: So we did this acting exercise in grad school, which was based on a Nietzschean model of humanity and basically the exercise was all about who's going to win the scene, because Nietzsche has this theory about the will to power but —

PHIL: DON'T YOU FUCKING TALK TO ME ABOUT NIETZSCHE!

TOM: *(Cowed but continuing.)* It's just that it's a very limited model of humanity. As an actor you have to draw on many aspects of . . . you know what? I can see that this is really important to you, so you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to let you win the scene. *(He sits back down.)*

PHIL: You're what?

TOM: Whatever you want, Phil. I'll do whatever you want. You want me to stay, leave, whatever. That's what I'll do.

PHIL: I want you to listen.

TOM: I'm listening.

PHIL: I want you to get with the picture.

TOM: That's what I'm doing.

PHIL: I mean, which one of us knows this town, you or me?

TOM: You.

PHIL: That's right.

TOM: That's right. And I really appreciate everything you've said to me. You really put me on the right path and I appreciate it.

PHIL: You should.

TOM: I do.

(Tom looks at him. Phil studies him, uncomfortable.)

PHIL: What are you doing?

TOM: I'm letting you win the scene.

PHIL: You're *letting* me? What do you mean, you're —

TOM: I don't mean anything.

PHIL: You said "let."

TOM: That's not what I meant at all. What I meant was it just took me a while to understand what you were trying to tell me, and I'm just, I'm saying you're right. You are right. You're amazing. It's a thrill meeting you and thank you for your time.

PHIL: *(Suspicious.)* You're acting, aren't you?

TOM: Do you want me to be acting?

PHIL: Yeah, that's funny. I mean, you're a real comedian.

TOM: If that's what you want me to be.

(He strikes a little shticky pose for him. Phil laughs a little. Tom joins him. They have a good chuckle together. Phil looks at him, liking him again.)

PHIL: So . . . was this whole thing an act? One big mind-fuck? Nietzsche and art and humanity — you been putting the whole thing on, right? You're fucking with my head so I'll sign you. Am I right? I mean, 'cause that's kind of brilliant.

TOM: Well . . .

PHIL: I mean, I could work with that. 'Cause then we understand each other. You know, then we're on a wavelength.

TOM: *(Some growing concern.)* Oh . . . oh. Oh, oh, oh.

PHIL: *(Snapping again.)* Oh what? Are we understanding each other or not? I mean, am I winning this scene or not?

TOM: Yeah. Yeah, of course.

(Phil studies Tom, then points his finger at him and starts laughing. Tom laughs too, a bit uncomfortably.)

PHIL: I like you. I like you. *(He thinks for a minute, then suddenly yells.)* Hey SUZIE! Get me a set of standard contracts, will you?

TOM: Oh. You want to —

PHIL: I'm gonna sign you, Tom! Welcome to Hollywood.

(He shakes his hand, laughing. Tom laughs too. The laughter goes on for quite a while. Tom ends up looking a little sick.)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY