

THE SCENT OF FRESH LEATHER

A One Act Play

By

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ACT ONE

NOEL WINSTON, spotlighted, is sitting on a stool steering an invisible steering wheel. As he drives, he talks to the road.

NOEL

How do you like my new car? Dazzling, isn't it? I just bought it two hours ago. Drove my old car into the lot, picked out this beauty, and told them to get it ready for immediate delivery. They told me that they'd prefer a day to polish it and vacuum the carpets, but I said forget it. I want this baby on the road tonight. While they pushed the car out of the showroom, I went into the salesman's office to haggle trade-in. It really wasn't much of a haggle. I took the first offer he made. I paid twenty-three thousand dollars for my old car eight months ago. He gave me fourteen for it. What do you think, should I have held out? Do you think I got screwed?

NOEL drives silently for a while, delighting in the experience of his new car. He sniffs the fresh leather. He maneuvers smoothly and effortlessly around tight corners. He downshifts as he roars past slow-moving vehicles. He loves this piece of machinery.

NOEL

I'll tell you why I bought it. It's not that I'm a frivolous person. On the contrary, I'm really somewhat prudent. It's just that today...well, today --

The spot goes off NOEL, and another goes up. There are a few pieces of teak furniture, suggesting a plush office. The BOSS is sitting behind the desk, poring over contracts. He looks utterly joyless until he notices NOEL entering reluctantly from the darkness.

NOEL

Hello, Mr. Conklin.

BOSS

Noel, my boy!

NOEL

I came as soon as I got your message.

BOSS

My boy, boy, boy!

NOEL

Is there a problem?

BOSS

Problem?

(holds up a document)

This is Jenkin's contract -- this is a problem!

(holds up another document)

This is my boy Noel's contract -- not a problem!

NOEL

Whew.

BOSS

My boy, how on earth did you ever get T.K. Carson to sign it?

NOEL

That's my job.

BOSS

Exactly what you said after you got Percy Lear to sign his contract. 'That's my job.' After you signed Josh Bingham. 'That's my job.' Monroe Connors. 'That's my job.' My god, you're always so goddamned modest.

NOEL

I'm not sure what I've done to be proud of.

BOSS

Noel, face the facts. You are the best officer in the company. No, in the world. In the universe!

NOEL

Believe me, Mr. Conklin, if I didn't have your name behind

NOEL (Continued)
me, I could never have done any of this.

BOSS
Will you take a compliment, goddamnit.

NOEL
But --

BOSS
For Christ's sake, I have forty other men working for me with your title, your experience, and my name behind them. They couldn't even get T.K. Carson on the phone.

NOEL
Maybe they didn't think it was important.

BOSS
I said take a goddamned compliment!

NOEL
Okay, okay, I'll take a compliment -- thanks for giving it.

BOSS
That's not all I'm giving you.
(he circles the desk and puts his arm around
NOEL's shoulder)
Do you have any idea who the highest paid officer in this company is?

NOEL
You.

BOSS
Besides me.

NOEL
I never ask what other people make -- what's the difference?

BOSS
Harry White.

NOEL
Good for Harry.

BOSS

Doesn't that piss the shit out of you?

NOEL

Should it?

BOSS

Of course it should, goddamnit! Harry White couldn't shine your shoes!

NOEL

But Harry White's been here longer -- he deserves more money.

BOSS

What the hell difference does that make? This isn't the post office you're working for. This is a private enterprise. I reward performance here, not seniority. And you're the number one performer I have. And now you're the highest paid performer I have. Congratulations. Your raise took effect retroactively as of nine o'clock this morning.

NOEL

Geeze, I don't know what to say.

BOSS

Say you're goddamned happy.

NOEL

Okay -- I'm happy.

BOSS

That's happy?

NOEL

Yes, sir.

BOSS

What would you look like if I told you your house burned down?

NOEL

Sad?

BOSS

Pathetic -- okay, wait.

(removes a fat envelope from his pocket and
hands it to NOEL)

NOEL

What's this?

BOSS

Your performance bonus.

NOEL

But you just gave me a raise.

BOSS

Open the goddamned envelope.

NOEL peeks into the envelope.

NOEL

That's a lot of money.

BOSS

Not bad, eh?

NOEL

Whoa.

BOSS

Hope I didn't bump you into a new tax bracket.

NOEL

Again, I don't know what to say.

BOSS

Let me help you with that. Say, whoopee! Say, hot damn!
Say, yippy-doo, I've just become the number one top gun in
the company! The big cheese! The king of the hill!

NOEL

But I don't need to be number one.

BOSS

Uhh --

NOEL

In fact, if you want my opinion, I think if you make me number one, you run the risk of losing Harry White. Harry loves being the top gun in the company. He brags about it all the time.

BOSS

Stop talking about Harry Goddamned White.

NOEL

I'm only trying to save you trouble up the road.

BOSS

Shut up.

NOEL

If Harry White quits, you'll have to replace him with --

BOSS

I said shut up about Harry White!

NOEL

I'm sorry, I --

BOSS

Noel, you have just been handed the keys to the magic kingdom. Are you aware that you don't act even the least bit excited?

NOEL

But I am excited.

BOSS

You are.

NOEL

Sure.

BOSS

About what?

NOEL

About being the number one highest paid officer in the company?

BOSS

Are you asking me or telling me?

NOEL
Telling you.

BOSS
And how about the bonus money?

NOEL
I'm excited about that, too.

BOSS
But you're not showing it.

NOEL
I'm not?

BOSS
I'll show you showing it. Watch closely. I just got a phone call. I've won the Irish Sweepstakes.

Delirious, the BOSS jumps up and down, hooting and hollering. NOEL looks on studiously.

NOEL
I see.

BOSS
Now that's showing it.

NOEL
You looked very excited.

BOSS
And I felt excited -- now you try.

NOEL
Me?

BOSS
It'll be good for you.

NOEL
Gee, I don't know if I can --

BOSS
Try it, goddamnit! You won the Irish Goddamned Sweepstakes!

NOEL

Okay, okay.

(with no conviction whatsoever, NOEL hoots and hollers)

How was that?

BOSS

Painful. Look. Maybe I chose the wrong example. Let's try something else. Hmm. Do you like baseball?

NOEL

I love baseball.

BOSS

Excellent. What's your favorite team?

NOEL

The Yankees.

BOSS

I just saw a glint in your eye.

NOEL

I went to the Stadium once when I was a kid.

BOSS

Perfect.

(removes his coat and tosses it on a chair)

Okay. It's the seventh game of the World Series, and it's all tied up in the bottom of the ninth with two outs.

(pushes away some furniture)

There are fifty thousand screaming fans in the stands. A hundred million watching on TV. The bases are loaded. Mickey Mantle is on first. Joe DiMaggio on second. Babe Ruth is on third. Casey Stengel looks down the bench for his best clutch hitter. Then, from the Stadium loudspeakers --

(like an announcer)

And now, ladies and gentlemen, batting for Lou Gehrig, the one and only ... Noel Winston!

(makes cheering noises)

You step out of the dugout. The Stadium is going wild. Police have to fight to keep everyone in the stands. You take a few warm-up swings.

(takes some swings)

Then you step into the batter's box.

BOSS (Continued)

(he steps into the batter's box)

Sandy Koufax is pitching for the Dodgers. He glares at you, but you know he's quaking in his boots. You dig your heels into the dirt.

(digs his heels into the carpet)

The BOSS steps out of the batter's box and hands the bat to NOEL.

BOSS

Here. You do it.

NOEL

Me?

BOSS

Hurry -- the fans are waiting for you -- you can't let down your fans.

NOEL

Ooo.

NOEL takes the bat.

BOSS

Now step into the batter's box.

NOEL

Where is it?

BOSS

Right there -- come on, hustle up.

NOEL hustles into the batters box.

BOSS

Now dig your heels into the dirt.

(NOEL does it)

Good. Now take a few warm-up swings.

(NOEL does it)

Excellent. Now get into a batter's crouch.

(NOEL does it)

Perfect. Okay. I'm Sandy Koufax.

(moves to the pitcher's mound)

I'm giving you the evil eye.

(he glares)

BOSS (Continued)

Now you give the evil eye back to Koufax.

(NOEL tries)

That's not evil enough!

(NOEL glares)

Yes!

(like an announcer)

Koufax winds up. He kicks his leg. He releases the ball. Noel Winston swings.

(NOEL stands there)

Come on, damnit, swing!

(NOEL swings)

Blammo! You connect on the meat of the bat! The ball sails up and up and up and up! It's out of here! The longest home run ever hit in Yankee Stadium! It lands on the subway platform! You round the bases! Sandy Koufax stares in awe! Your pals are waiting at the plate! The Mick! The Babe! Joltin' Joe! They lift you up and carry you on their shoulders! Fifty thousand fans pour onto the field! The Yankees win the Series! The Yankees win the Series! Noel Winston is the hero! Babe Ruth gives you a hug! Mickey Mantle hands you the game ball! You're the star of the ticker tape parade!

(The BOSS, who's in a frenzy, sees that NOEL has barely budged)

Noel! Will you get excited, goddamnit! For christ's sake, boy, you just hit a grand-slam home run in the seventh game of the World Goddamned Series!

NOEL tries desperately to look excited. He grabs a water pitcher off the desk, and with no warning, pours the ice water on the BOSS' head, drenching him.

BOSS

Noel! What the hell are you doing!

NOEL

Champagne. I'm pouring champagne on our heads. I just hit a home run. I won the World Series.

(he jumps up and down, hooting and with wild abandon)

Whoopee! Thanks for the raise! Thanks for the bonus! Thanks for making me the top gun in the office! Hot damn! Yippy-doo!

NOEL hoots and hollers and prances out of the office. As the soaking wet BOSS stands there, the lights fade off, then up again on NOEL, who's steering his new car.

NOEL

Umm. The scent of fresh leather. Let's see. I paid twenty-three thousand dollars for my old car. They gave me fourteen on the trade-in. This new beauty cost me fifty-two thousand dollars. What do you think, did I get screwed?

END OF THE PLAY