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Open House

William McGovern

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*rejection letter sent
1/10/97*

201 Victoria Lawn
Stratford, CT 06497
November 21, 1996

Holly J. Nichols, Chair
Women's Studies Program
URI
Kingston, RI

Dear Ms. Nichols:

I have enclosed the one-act play, "Open House," which I submit to you for consideration for your symposium. Let me give you a brief summary and history of the play. It was accepted and workshopped by Love Creek Productions of NYC this past July. Interestingly, 1996 is Love Creek's Year of the Woman, with scripts that deal with women from a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, economic backgrounds and sexual orientations.

I am a gay man and feel as strongly for the man in the play as I do for the woman. Yet Love Creek's production clearly favored the woman's point of view. The director said they liked the play so much because it was an insider's view of the tensions that exist between lesbians and gay men, almost a contest as to whose lifestyle is more valid.

Basically it's about a trashy English teacher who comes out to a group of parents on an open house night. One parent, Sue, is a lesbian with a child in this man's class. She is appalled by his presentation to the parents.

First and foremost, it's a comedy. A gay/lesbian audience would howl, no doubt, at the misconceptions each party holds for the other. Yet my belief is a staged reading of this play at your symposium would generate lots of interesting dialogue afterwards. Read it and let me know if you agree.

At this point the only involvement I would ask for is some control over the casting of the two roles and perhaps even attend rehearsals. Alas, I do not direct, nor do I know actors who would volunteer their talents. So that end of it would have to come from you or the university.

Give it a shot. I think you'll like it.

Sincerely,



William McGovern

Setting: A high school classroom. Desk in center faces audience. Blackboards on walls. Posters are famous floral reproductions. Door looks out on lighted hallway.

Characters: Daniel de Mato, English teacher in his forties.

Susan Jarvis, a parent in her fifties.

Enter Dan: (with books in arms) Good evening. Welcome to English 11 c. I am Daniel de Mato (straightens desk) and I like things just so in my class. There. I am passing out a piece of lined paper and pen, which I expect back, for you to sign your names and--

Voice: (loudspeaker) Parents should be in their first period class.

Dan: And indicate the student's name if it differs from your own

Voice: Parents should be in their first period class.

Dan: He gets 80,000 dollars for that. At this time I will also distribute a list of books that is available to English 11 C, obviously I cannot do all of them. Regulars include The Glass Menagerie, A Separate Peace, The Zoo Story, Death in Venice and Billy Budd. I only have you for 15 minutes so I will get right to the heart of it. One word. (writes on board) Irony. The gentleman in the second row, third seat. Can you tell me what irony is? (listens) No, that is alliteration. Irony is the opposite of what you expect but oftentimes with a nasty kick to it. Like the firehouse burned down. Or this ...

(He writes on board, 'I am a homosexual')

This is my twentieth open house. For 20 years I have stood before you good people of Glastonbury. I know all about your families, and yet I don't have a family, I don't want a family and quite frankly, I am repulsed by the sameness that families generate. Right now I am aghast to see so clearly the people who my students will grow up to become. The sameness is ... staggering.

You can't fire me for writing that on the board. Connecticut has a gay rights bill that protects me and my gay brothers and sisters. We are legal and we are coming out all over the state. They want pretty much what you have. They want to be married and to have kids somehow and to have homes with backyards and to attend open houses like this to make sure their children are being instructed properly.

But I'm not like them. I am the kind of homosexual you have nightmares about. I do public parks and rest stops. I will explain. Gentlemen in the room who travel the Merrit

Parkway and use the North Haven and Greenwich rest facilities have probably noticed a cutout in the john wall about so big (cups hands to make a circle) Yes? Well there's an eighty per cent chance that the eyeball on the other side of that hole belongs to me As well as the mouth The cutout is called a glory hole, and it's one of the last holdouts of good, dirty anonymous sex I sometimes spend an hour seated there before school to catch the morning commuters They're all pent up from the sex they didn't get the night before with their wives. I don't go there nights because the evening trade is mainly gay and everybody's fighting for the same thing, you know?

(lady apparently exits) Ma'm, you could at least give me the courtesy of finishing. Hmm, I bet I know whose mother she is the same impatience with anything complex. Where was I? Oh yes, bathroom sex My politically correct brothers and sisters say that I am into fast and nameless sex because I grew up oppressed They say that you people--upright family people--make me hate myself for who I am. I'm not going to lay that on you I have fought hard to remain true to who I am. How many of you can say that? When you discovered that you liked to steal or cheat, or that you lust after little girls or your wife's brother and you stuck to it, right to the bitter, ugly end cause it is who you are. Well, nothing is sweeter to me than blowing the good fathers of Glastonbury. Weary, family men who just want a little relief before they go back to the business of protecting the hearth

Ladies, you needn't fret because all my sex has no strings or commitments to it. I was in a relationship once. It lasted... four days. After that I knew I was not coupling material. Scarey admission by the way We don't set out to be alone Particularly when everything around us is in twos or more ...boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives, partners families. yikes I think sometimes that's why I'm such a good teacher. I need your kids for 8 hours a day. They're my family so to speak You see, a trick in a toilet can blow a load in my face and even call me a dirty cocksucker A self-protective kind of thing I understand. But it would get to me if I didn't come to room 110 and have one of your children ask, as Megan did today, if Hamlet had any brothers or sisters. I mean the innocence of the question next to the savagery of I need them both

You need never worry about me abusing the teacher/student relationship. I'll tell you why The more I learn about someone the less he becomes an object of desire for me. I can see by your faces that you find that rather sad. I'll admit it creates a kind of frenzied existence You must seek new people constantly and, should you find someone quite fulfilling, you must keep the gentleman at bay his identity, that is, his personality How can you not know your students? A year in a room together everyday Their papers alone are so revealing. I'm not going to say I don't recognize beauty don't get me wrong I can spot the John Kennedy Jrs. and Brad Pitts of the world early on, believe me. But when they become troubled, funny, insecure ... they lose it for me The girls of course are no problem

Why am I telling you all this? Well, for once in 20 years I'd like a group of parents to really know me. But more I want you to like me. It's so important that you realize people like me can be intelligent, normal and gentle people. It really bothers me

when I see on the news a principal, say, arrested in a sex scandal and colleagues say, 'oh, I always thought he was devoted to kids' or 'he just couldn't do this.' Well, he can and probably did, and it's not a contradiction, you know? We're not monsters. He can love and be brilliant with kids and still want to put on women's underpants or whatever. I mean, grow up. This is a complicated world

Unfortunately, it always doesn't take people like me seriously. You say I'm incapable of intimacy and therefore I'm sick. Well, maybe. But I've seen what you call closeness and from where I sit it's another word for boredom. Marriage and monogamy did not originate with civilization. Historically, they've been around for two hundred years or so. Not long. To me they're a convenient way to deny your essential aloneness. Lenny Bruce said it. 'You don't know anything about anybody but you. Just you live in that thing. You always live alone. You're always in there, even with your wife.' Sound familiar?

On the other hand I can boast some absolutely thrilling 15 minute encounters with men I will never see again in my life. But they're in here. (indicates head) And I carry them with me and replay them again and again. The Reverend Canon Jones claims there can be something cleansing, even spiritual about a onenight stand. He's right.

I must bring closure to this because I want to include one last point about some of your children. I could lie and say I waited to come out until the law protected me. The truth is we had a student teacher here last year, Peter Bedelament. Handsome, athletic, hopelessly straight. I observed his class one day and watched him chastise the class for allowing someone to write the word 'faggot' on a desk. He said, that's as offensive to me as nigger or kike. It is not permitted in this room. Well, I was stunned. He was saying the words that I am supposed to say. And didn't. Well, I'm saying them now.

I'm doing more than talking. The Board has approved an after school drop-in center in this very room for any teenager who wants to learn more about alternate sexual lifestyles. It is not... I repeat, not a recruitment center for the gay and lesbian life. There will be some literature on it, yes, and lots of wholesome talk about it. I will chair it and make certain that no one pushes anyone into anything. Just a place for students to kick around any doubts or confusions they may have about their sexual needs.

I suspect tonight would be easier for you if I had said that I found someone special, that we live in a loving and committed relationship and want to live a life exactly like you have. Emerson said imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. But I don't want what you have. I would shrivel up and die in your life. But I promise to respect it and only ask you do the same for mine. Good night. Thank you for coming. It's time to move on to our second period classes. And remember, there's room for everyone at the table.

Scene Two. Dan's classroom, empty

Voice (via loudspeaker): All parents should now prepare to exit the building. Thank you for your attendance. All parents should exit the building.

Enter Dan. He sorts books and tidies desk. Enter Sue, a middle aged woman in a business outfit. She closes the door quickly behind her.

Sue: You are a fuckin' embarrassment!

Dan: It's a real pleasure to meet you, too.

Sue: The thought of you counseling students is appalling. I'd rather hand my kids over to Jeffrey Dahmer. How dare you? How dare you parade your garbage life in front of these good people? Perverts like you should never come out. You reduce the rest of us to sexual predators!

Dan: Us?

Sue: (hands him card) I'd like to wring your neck!

Dan (reads) Sue Jarvis, chairperson of the CT Coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered. Are you what is known as a lipstick lesbian?

Sue: I am what is known as a human being. The question is what are you?

Dan: Why were you in my classroom?

Sue: I am a parent. I live in this town. With my partner. We have spent ten long years building a positive image of homosexuality, which you destroyed in ten minutes.

Dan: What part didn't you like? What's wrong? Is my hair messed?

Sue: Look, it's obvious we're on different plains. I'm not going to allow myself to get any angrier.

Dan: No, you shouldn't. Can I get you some water?

Sue: Here's what I came to say. One, you're to get help. There's a sexual compulsive group at the Community Center, meets Tuesday and Thursday nights. You can begin there. Two, the counseling center is very, very important to us. We've been trying for years to get something like it established in a public school. How you pulled that off is mind boggling. How you even got a teaching certificate escapes me entirely. The point is you are not to be in charge of the center; in fact, you are to stay out of it. By tomorrow I will have some names to submit. There's Mavis Stack at LBYN, who would

be perfect if I can get her consent. Do you agree with the terms before I proceed?

Dan: I think you should go home, take a hot bath and call your parole officer in the morning. Good night.

Sue: My next door neighbor is Chris Dawson, chairman of the Board of Ed. He and his wife attended our ceremony of domestic partnership. If you don't agree, I will petition him and the Board to have you suspended.

Dan: You're on Johnny Cake Lane. The red house. I play bridge Tuesdays with Eleanor.

Sue: You and Eleanor Dawson? Then she knows?

Dan: Heavens yes. She fetched me one night when my car was impounded at the rest stop.

Sue: Son of a bitch.

(Sue lights a cigar, loosens her frilly neck scarf and paces)

Dan: There's no smoking. You sent over a strawberry rhubarb pie once, homemade. Which surprised me. I thought lesbians always ate in diners.

Sue: When it's food. (paces)

Dan: (hands her dish) You can put that out here.

Sue: (ignores him) She's not one of us. Is she bi?

Dan: I never asked.

Sue: Fag hag, what else? Obviously, you hold no interest to a real woman.

Dan: Funny, I was thinking of becoming one.

Sue: You'd hate it. ~~Orgasm~~^{Sex} takes longer than one minute.

Dan: Either put that thing out or get out. I refuse to enter a room that smells of smoke tomorrow.

Sue: (complies) I forgot, you prefer the fragrance of a toilet. Have you any idea of the years of work that went into the passage of the CT gay rights bill? The bill that enabled you to get up and spill your guts tonight. Women like Helen Foland, Ann Starbuck, Irene Garcia of Las Bonitas Amigas, Lina Mulrone, Womensong, Yalesbians and

myself worked tirelessly on that bill

Dan: Aren't there any men in the coalition?

Sue: Ha! They come to cruise one another. Most are alcoholics and can't wait to adjourn to the bars.

Dan: Anybody cute?

Sue: You're a cliché. A pathetic cliché.

Dan: Perhaps. But the Board approved me to run the center.

Sue: More patriarchal bullshit.

Dan: No, I am very effective with children.

Sue: Historically, women are the nurturers

Dan: Like I said, I'm good with kids

Sue: With the right ones in charge, the center can become a model for the rest of the United States. Give it over to us. After all, what do you know about commitment or family values?

Dan: Oh my..

Sue: That distresses you? Face it, these children have homes and parents.

Dan: My dear I have lived and worked here for 20 years. Never have I mimicked the parents in order to get their approval.

Sue: Mimic? ?

Dan: Since when does a self respecting lesbian carry a handbag?

Sue: You'd prefer me in a flannel shirt perhaps?

Dan: I do not prefer women in any way. But yes, your outfit strikes me as something of a camouflage. You should be home now, watching the series with the rest of the guys

Sue: With a Bud kinger in my hand?

Dan: Judging from your girth, yes

Sue: ~~My body is not shaped by the male dictate of beauty.~~

I determine the shape of my body. Not Playboy or Hustler magazine

Dan: How about Field & Stream?

Sue: Such a conforming sychophant. How can you be in the same room with these giants? Melville ... Cather ... Thoreau.

Dan: Pleassee, not her.

Sue: Don't you read any of these people? Emily Dickenson, poor thing ... where's Audre Lourde?! Surely in an anthology?

Dan: Funny you should mention her. I took a workshop with Miss Lourde ~~once~~. She told us in the early days of the feminist movement she belonged to a radical group who voted to strangle at birth any of their children who were male.

Sue: Now there's a dyke!

Dan: Then she had a son.

Sue: And ... ?

Dan: And suddenly a man had some value.

Sue: We don't hate men.

Dan: (stages cough) Excuse me ... something caught in my throat.

Sue: You think we do?

Dan: Let me tell you something. I considered engaging a lesbian to ~~co~~-chair the center with me. After all, there will be teen aged girls who attend. Do you know what changed my mind?

Sue: This ought to be good.

Dan: A year ago this month there was a women's conference in Northhampton.

Sue: I was there.

Dan: Men were disinvited. Even gay men. Yet straight women were welcome. If that isn't manhating I don't know what is.

Sue: You miss the point of the gesture. You need to grow up oppressed to understand it. You are white male and can hide your homosexuality if you choose to...well, maybe not you. The point is women are still intimidated by the presence of men because -

Dan: Me?! I'm a nellie!

Sue: Doesn't matter, you got a dick.

Dan: Penis envy. That's what this is all about.

Sue: No. This is about intellegent, organized women who must still cow tow to male dominance. However inept. Look at the center. It is under the auspices of a man who is a slave to his passions. It is doomed to fail.

Dan: There is no correlation between my ability to teach and my fondness for sucking cock. Which reminds me, I want to do a drive-by the rest stop so if we could wrap this up.

Sue: I am not going away until I get a promise from you.

Dan: You are in no position to exact anything.

(Rock enters window)

Dan: Ah, what the hell!?

Sue: Your fan club. Better organized than I thought. (reads note)

Dan: What is it?

Sue: For you.

Dan: (reads) Cocksucker.

Sue: I suggest you kill the lights.

Dan: I've done nothing wrong.

(Sue flicks off lights. The room darkens, lit now by the hallway light through the door.)

Dan: (peers out window) I can't see anyone.

Sue: Get away from there

Voice : (off stage) Faggot!

Dan: That's no kid.

Sue: They're called concerned parents.

Dan: What do they want?

Sue: Your testicles

Dan: They can't do anything. I'm legal

Sue: Keep telling them that as they yank them from you.

(Sound of crash off stage) Dan : Take hers.

Dan: What's that?!

Sue: Probably your windshield. Where's the nearest telephone?

Dan: The main office.

Dan: Where are you going?

Sue: I could have ten good dykes here in a flash.

Dan: I'll go, too

Sue: (they stop in doorway) What now?

Dan: It's dark. Which means it's locked. Everybody's gone.

Sue: I'm sure they have the exits covered. We need a plan

Dan: Maybe they're here to talk.

Sue: And maybe I'm Cinderella. (gets flag pole) You got anything stronger than this?

Dan: For what?

Sue: You might have to kick some ass.

Dan: I can't fight!

Sue: You'll learn, fast. What's this? (wooden sword)

Dan: Act 3, Romeo and Juliet.

Sue: It'll have to do. Here I figure no more than half a dozen. As long as all of them don't rush at once, you got a chance

Dan: I have never hit anyone in my life. Where are you going?

Sue: They don't want me. (puts on jacket)

Dan: You'd leave me?!

Sue: I have no allegiance to you and really, no beef with them. I don't like their methods, but I don't like your life either

Dan: We are sisters!

Sue: Don't demean lesbianism, please. I'll call the cops at home. If you hold out till then, you're all set. Course the cops might stall. They not so fond of queers

Dan: What about solidarity?

Sue: What about the center? You ready to concede?

Dan: This is blackmail.

Sue: Not really. The way I see it you're dead meat if I leave. That puts the center up for grabs anyway. Give it over now, you got a shot.

Dan: What shot? You got an idea?

Sue: I'll get you out of this

Dan: How?

Sue: Trust me

Dan: No. I refuse to be pushed around. I will get out of this myself.

(Sound of door closing)

Sue: They're in the building. Mind if I watch?

//

Dan: People like you underestimate the importance of goodwill. I have gotten these people's children into excellent colleges; I attend their graduations and weddings. They need a reminder, that's all. One reasonable person.. that's all it takes and the rest fall into place.

(Dan opens hallway door and peers out. Sounds of name calling, bottles smashing, even gun shots are heard. He quickly jumps back in.)

Dan: They're still upset

Sue: So much for good will.

Dan: What are your thoughts?

Sue: Wondering how that plump ass of yours'll look with a baseball bat up it.

Dan: Maybe...

Sue: Yes?

Dan: Maybe you could speak with them. Do the Barbara Stanwycyk 'get off of my land' speech

Sue: Maybe...

Dan: I'd do it myself but I don't have my chaps.

Sue: And what will you do for me?

Dan: I see. Still the center. What if I placed a lesbian as a consultant?

Sue: They're mighty angry out there.

Dan: All right, a co-chair.

Sue: In fact they might even rape you before they maim you.

Dan: REeally! That's my Sal Mineo prison fantasy.

Sue: Well then I'll leave you to it.

Dan: No, stay. You could be Beaula Bondi. With all them keys. No, wait. You can't leave me like this.

Sue: Talk to me

Dan: What you don't know about me is that I do, in fact, have a strong moral character. I believe in the center, as you do. But not as a place to turn gay kids into clones of straight ones.

Sue: I don't want that.

Dan: I'm not so sure--BUT this is not the time to argue it. Fifty-fifty, co - chair, lesbian of your choice.

Sue: Control, total. With you as..... consultant.

Dan: That is a shabby offer. Do you always squeeze people when they're desperate?

Sue: It helps.

Dan: Yeah? Well maybe with most people. But you underestimate my integrity. That's right, I've got some. I refuse to turn those cute little queers over to a power hungry pussy!

(off stage sounds) Kill the faggot, kill the faggot!

Where do I sign?

Sue: Put it there. (shakes)

Dan: Ouch! You drive a hard bargain. Now, what do we do about.....

(off stage sounds) Kill the faggot, kill the faggot!

. that.

Sue: I said I'd take care of it. (takes some clothing off)

Dan: I don't think that's going to work. Nothing personal.

Sue: Stay here (steps into hall. Silence) All right you mealy-mouthed mother fuckers, you want to play hard ball, let's play!

(re-enters room)

The coast is clear.

(from Page 12, bottom)

Dan: How'd you do that?

Sue: It's called testosterone. You ought to get some.

Dan: I hear it enlarges the breasts.

Sue: You are a piece of work. The kids are crazy about you. You're all we hear about at the supper table. I'm starting to see why. You're a needy, quivering little shit that you have to take under your wing.

Dan: Thank you....I think. Is Rose your daughter?

Sue: My partner's. I never conceived.

Dan: Surprise!

Sue: You don't see me as a mother, hun?

Dan: Yes...in a kind of Lady MacBeth way.

Sue: I love the hell out of that kid. Come to supper. See for yourself. Better still, bunk in for a few days. Till they cool down.

Dan: You think there will be more trouble?

Sue: Oh yeah. Look, you pissed me off and I'm family. These guys aren't through.

Dan: Can I have my own room?

Sue: No, You got to sleep with me. Ha ha! Think you can handle it?

Dan: I don't know if I'm woman enough.

Sue: Just leave the driving to me.

Dan: You're fresh!

Sue: Come on. Let's get your prissy ass out of here.

Dan: We'll need to go by my place to pick up one or two...steamer trunks. Can I bring something? A side of beef?

Sue: Naw. Mert's a great cook.

16
Dan: Why do I see a stack of Wonder bread on the table?

Sue: Rosie's going to be tickled.

Dan: Hey. Thank you. For tonight. You probably saved my life.

Sue: Next time think before you speak.

Dan: I spoke the truth.

Sue: Obviously they're not ready for it.

Dan: Our first goal is to develop a Center position paper on diversity.

Sue: Whoa! What's this 'our' business?

Dan: 'Our' as in consultant. Or did I misunderstand the terms?

Sue: The terms are etched on my brain. And if you ever think about changing them, tonight's a garden party compared to what the lesbian avengers'll do to your ass.

(The two exit to hallway. The remaining exchange is heard, suggesting the debate is ongoing.)

Dan: When are you going to realize we are on the same side?!

Sue: When you stop blowing the enemy.

Dan: I'll blow whoever I damn well please.

The End