

Safe Streets Arts Foundation
Dennis Sobin
2512 Virginia Ave NW, #58043
Washington, DC 20037

February 12, 2014

Dear Mr. Sobin:

Please find enclosed my eighteen page play, "Lessons," for consideration for your 2014 Kennedy Center contest and performance. Also enclosed, is a SASE so I might be sent a receipt of delivery of this play into your contest.

Thank you very much for the opportunity you have given not only myself, but others who are incarcerated, to have our voices heard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jason Cooper".

Jason Cooper
#AA2968 D16-106
480 Alta Road
San Diego, CA 92179

LESSONS
BY
JASON COOPER

PLAYERS

Richard Turner: English Professor, 50's-60's

Steven Fox: Struggling writer, 20's

Laura Turner: Housewife, 50's-60's

Amy Fox: Young professional: 20's

STAGE SET-UP

A casual living room, with a couch mid-center stage, a chair on either side, angled to face towards the audience. Conversely, five folding chairs with three together to form the couch and the other two set seperately angled towards the audience. Only full stage lights for lighting.

[Curtain raises, stage lights come up showing Richard sitting on the couch. Laura is sitting in left chair. Steven is on the edge, stage right]

Steven: [Mimes knocking. Richard walks over and answers the door] Mr. Turner, thanks for inviting me.

Richard: You're always welcome, but not if you call me Mr. Turner. It's been years since you were one of my students. It's Richard, or else I'll send you right back out the front door. Agreed?

Steven: [Laughs] Agreed.

Laura: Is that Steven, dear? Don't keep jawing at him in the doorway, bring him in. What will he think of our manners?

Richard: [Shakes his head. Mutters to Steven] Yes, always mind our manners. The key to Western Civilization and all that. [Starts walking slowly toward the couch] So, what have you been working on lately?

Steven: Not much, to be honest. One thing or another always seems to interfere. Especially with the wedding just around the corner. [Richard sits back on the couch and motions for Steven to take the other chair, which he does as he continues] I don't know if Amy is excited or angry about the whole thing half the time.

Laura: Steven, Steven, it's so good to see you. You were a regular visitor in your college days. How's that pretty little fiancée of yours?

Steven: She's doing just wonderful, Mrs. Turner.

Laura: Oh Richard, remember when we were about to be wed? It was such a splendid time, wasn't it? What we should do, is renew our vows. Yes, that's just the thing. Don't you think? Why just the other day I saw the perfect dress for such an occasion. Yes, just the dress.

Laura: Really, it [A timer bell rings off stage], that's the oven, I'll be back in just a jiff.

Richard: [Once Laura leaves] Saved by the bell. I know how you must have felt when I was droning on during some lecture. Only, you were able to leave when class was over. Not so in marriage. [Shakes head] Well, I suppose it is a bit different these days, all the papers are full of divorce statistics and so on. But, some of us become students so long that we get comfortable in our classes, whether we continue learning or not.

Steven: I can't believe that I'm hearing this.

Richard: No, no, I'm not trying to dissuade you from marriage by any means. Ignore me, please. I suppose I tend to ramble on a bit these days.

Steven: I wasn't objecting to your honesty. God knows, it's hard enough to find that, anywhere. I just can't believe you said that you got used to a thing whether you learned something or not. At the beginning of every term you always wrote, "The day you stop learning is the day you start dying."

Richard: I did. I did at that. I don't know, Steven. Perhaps that's why we get old, or older, anyway. We get so comfortable that we stop learning, then we age, badly, and then we never learn again, avoiding even the chance to at that point.

Steven: [Laughs nervously] So, the fountain of youth is really the search for knowledge, maybe. That's a thought. It

Steven: would explain why old Ponce never found it. He was determined though. That should count for something.

Richard: Determination...

Laura: [Rushes back on-stage and interrupts] I'm so sorry. What are we all talking about.

Richard: Determination.

Steven: The fountain of youth. [Said at the same time as Richard]

Laura: [Face lights up] Wouldn't that have been wonderful if that had actually been found? I tell you, I have this one face cream and I swear that Revlon found it, because it has taken years off, I swear. Don't you think?

Richard: You're as beautiful as the first day I met you.

Steven: Not a day older than when I was last here in college.

Laura: [Beaming] Aren't you two sweet. I think...

Steven: [Cell phone rings. Steven pulls it out and looks at it] Sorry, it's Amy. I need to take this. [Walks a little away, mouthing into phone]

Laura: [Softly] Walking around with telephones, interrupting people in mid-word. Especially when spending time with company...

Richard: Didn't you rush off when the oven timer went off?

Laura: [Firmly] You know that's different. Richard, please don't argue with me in front of company.

Richard: I wasn't... [Sighs] Yes, dear. I'm sorry.

Steven: [Returning] I have to go, sorry. Amy's having some sort of meltdown at the florist.

Laura: Well of course you have to go and help her. She's your fiancée and soon, your wife. Though what a man can know about flowers, I just don't know. But when you get there, just let her have a good cry.

Steven: Ummm, I'll do that Mrs. Turner, thank you.

Richard: Come by when things settle down, or anytime, actually. I'm always glad to see you. [Walks Steven to door, hand on his shoulder]

Steven: Of course, I'll call you later. Bye. [Exits stage right]

[Lights fade out. A moment passes then stage lights at full. Laura is now sitting on the couch. Richard is sitting in the chair stage left. Steven and Amy are standing at the edge of stage right, outside of the "home." Doorbell rings, Richard goes to answer the door]

Richard: [Mimes opening the door] Steven, Amy, how are you?

Amy: Great Richard, thanks.

Steven: I took you up on your offer.

Richard: I see, great! Come in, come in! [They both come in]

Laura: How are our newlyweds? [Amy sits on the couch next to Laura. Steven takes the chair, stage right] I bet you two still have stars in your eyes. Don't ever lose them. That's called love, you know?

Amy: We won't, we won't. We've been together two whole years already. I'm sure we would've lost them by now

Amy: already if they were going anywhere.

Richard: How was the honeymoon? I hear Maui's nice this time of year, not too hot and all of that.

Amy: It was great. We saw dolphins, who would've thought we would actually see them in person?

Steven: It was an experience, that's for sure. [Undertones]

Amy: Yeah, one we'll never forget. I brought pictures.

Laura: [Excited] I was hoping you would. Let's look at them in the other room. Men don't care about that type of thing. And, I'll show you some pictures from when Richard and I were married.

Amy: Alright. [Both women get up and exit stage left]

Richard: An experience, hmmm?

Steven: Not like that. I mean, well, we've lived together for the past year. So, some things were just the same, you know? I know that when you and Laura...

Richard: [Interrupts with a laugh] Please, you think we weren't having sex after our second date?

Steven: [Flustered] I, uh, uh...

Richard: You said you appreciated honest, Steven, and well, I appreciate being able to be honest with you. But I knew that you didn't mean the sex; the virginal bride has been a myth since the first man laid eyes on a woman. No, you said "experience" like it had all sorts of negative connotations. So?

Steven: [Pauses a moment] Well, for example, when we went to a museum on Hawaiian culture and I was reading all of the

Steven: plaques because they were interesting, she kept trying to rush me, sighing the whole time. It turned into something ugly. She was upset that I wasn't doing everything she wanted to do on her [Emphasizes] honeymoon, how dare I, and she just didn't care about what I was interested in. By the end of the day we were talking about getting an annulment. Sure we made up, but I guess I just hoped we wouldn't fight like that on our honeymoon. I mean, we just got married and, well, I don't know. [Sighs]

Richard: Not a good sign, but maybe things will get better. All marriages have rocky times.

Steven: Getting married was supposed to fix the problems. I think we both hoped that once we were spouses the downward spiral would not only stop, but reverse itself.

Richard: A bandaid. You got married as a bandaid.

Steven: [Defensive] That's not...

Richard: [Holds up hands in a stopping motion] Whoa, I'm not judging you. Trust me, I'm not. [Pauses a moment] Truth be told, I never really wanted to marry Laura, my mother wanted me to, and my father expected me to. And since we're being honest, I was too much of a coward not to do what was expected of me. I would like to think differently, but no. I did exactly what I was supposed to do. I ended up with a beautiful woman—without a brain. I would have been happier with a parrot. At least when you cover up the cage it goes

Richard: goes to sleep. [Bitter laugh]

Steven: Then why?

Richard: [Sighs] It was a different time. And like I said, I was too much of a coward to defy my parents, society, custom, you name it. Don't be like me, Steven. Be bold, like your writing.

Steven: What? Bold? But, I'm just struggling, no one even knows my work.

Richard: When one writes, no matter how famous one becomes, he should always struggle, at least if his writing is any good. It's the struggle that makes for such good reading. The struggle to better himself, to re-invent himself, struggle to be who he truly is, to be bold, and honest. You see?

Steven: I suppose.

Richard: I know it's rather heavy, and I want to say forgive me, but it's the teacher in me, and I won't apologize for that, not with my favorite student. Just don't become a teacher. [Laughs sadly] Continue to write, because there is truth in the saying, "Those who can't do, teach." And you, you can do. Just let yourself.

Laura: [Came back into the room with Amy and they take their previous seats] Oh, Steven, you looked so handsome in your tuxedo, even if I don't understand why you didn't wear a bowtie, but one of those strange, regular ties.

Steven: A cravat.

Amy: [Shakes her head] Yes, he insisted.

Richard: I'm sure he was dashing in his cravat. Gentlemen have worn them for centuries, after all.

Steven: [Gives Richard a thankful look] Exactly, I thought some old world charm...

Amy: [Interrupts] Even his best man wore one. But those two always stick by each other. Though, we see less of Tim now.

Steven: [Slowly nods] True.

Laura: Well, of course. You're married now. Bachelorhood [Said as if its a dirty word] is thankfully gone by the wayside. And Amy, you were just beautiful in your dress. I would've never imagined having a wedding dress without a long train, but you pulled it off wonderfully.

Amy: Thank you, actually it was my mother's idea.

Laura: Well, mother's are so sensible. Why I don't know what...

Amy: [Looks at her watch suddenly] Crap! [Laura looks shocked] We gotta go Laura, Richard. I lost track of time looking at those old pictures. We have to go to our friend's condo-warming.

Steven: That's tonight?

Amy: [Exasperated] I told you last week. Sorry, Laura, we have to get going. [Amy heads towards the "door" at stage right] Thanks for having us. [Exits stage right]

Steven: [Gets up] Sorry, I thought we'd be able to stay a while. I wouldn't have come over for just a couple...

Amy: [From off-stage] Steven, hurry up. We're late.

Steven: [Glances off-stage in frustrion] Goodbye. [Heads towards door. Turns back right before he exits] I'll call, Richard. [Exits stage right]

Laura: Well then. She should have let us know just how long their visit would be. They're always rushing off.

Richard: Such a full life.

[Lights fade out. A moment passes then stage lights at full.

Richard is sitting in the stage left chair. Amy and steven stand at the edge of stage right. Amy knocks, Richard goes to answer the door]

Amy: Hey Richard.

Richard: Good to see you again, Amy. Steven, always a pleasure.

Steven: Richard.

Amy: [Talks as Richard shows them in] Is Laura here? I brought some more pictures to show her.

Richard: [Sits in stage left chair. Amy sits on the couch. Steven sits in stage right chair] I'm afraid not. There was some sort of sale that she just couldn't miss; [Laughs ruefully] she loves to go shopping.

Amy: That sucks. I wish she'd called. I would've gone with her. [Looks like she is starting to get up] Or I would've stayed at...

Steven: So Richard, how have you been? [Amy sits still and looks resigned]

Richard: God, good. Though my department head and I got into a

Richard: bit of a debate the other day that left him the worse for wear, I'd say.

Steven: [Leans forward] Really? About what?

Richard: Religion actually. I know they say never discuss religion or politics with your co-workers, but sometimes they want your opinion. Then what? Tell them, "No, I'm sorry, I don't have one?"

Amy: We don't ever talk about religion in the office, it might piss someone off or hurt their feelings, you know?

Steven: We don't at my office either, but then again we never talk about it at home, so...

Amy: What's to talk about?

Richard: There's always something to talk about with that, so many belief systems, and many different views even within the same belief system.

Steven: I know. I saw something on t.v. the other day that was talking about Muslim atrocities and how Christians are more peaceful and you don't hear about any Christian atrocities. What kind of statement is that?

Richard: What kind of statement?

Steven: Well to talk about the religions as if they should be held to the same standards when the commentator is obviously not doing that himself. Why don't they ever talk about the ages of the religions?

Richard: What about the ages?

Steven: Well Islam is what, 600 years or so younger than Christianity? Just look at what Christianity was doing

Steven: 600 years ago. People never talk about that. Why won't they?

Richard: Why won't they?

Steven: Probably because they want to hide from it. After all, there were the Crusades where we slaughtered innocent people because they were a different religion, then there was the Inquisition, and even more recently the burning of witches. And what about what that gunman did at the abortion clinic the other week?

Richard: What was done?

Steven: Why he just... [Breaks into a smile] Wait a minute. You know all of this. You even talked about some of it when we discussed the influence of religion on literature. You were doing the whole Socrates thing.

Amy: [Perks up a bit from looking bored] The what?

Steven: You know, the Socratic Method, answer a question with a question.

Amy: [Frustrated] No, I don't know. That's why I asked.

Richard: It's quite all right. Most people don't even realize when it's being used, and that's when they know what it is. I had an instructor use it when I was in school and I marveled at how it made us think, rather than just being given the answer. I've used it for years, and when you do something for years, it just becomes a part of your everyday approach to things.

Amy: Answer a question with a question? Doesn't seem like much of an answer to me. I'd rather be told the

Amy: answer, since it's the answer on the test and that's what matters for your grade.

Steven: Yeah, but it gets you to think, to comprehend, even to disagree.

Amy: My thinking has been just fine without all of that, thanks! What you're talking about just makes you focus on things that don't really matter when all you're trying to do is get a good grade and graduate.

Richard: I hate to be disagreeable, but a diploma is just a piece of paper, and the grade on it is nothing more than a mark. Sure, it's a benchmark to wave in front of an employers face or point to when you feel a bit of self-doubt. But, the other is growth in life, which can't really be measured, but affects every aspect of it rather than just one small area.

Amy: If you say so. [Said doubtfully]

Steven: [Trying to re-start the conversation] You said that people don't talk about religion or politics, well we've talked about religion, at least a little. What about politics?

Richard: What about politics?

Steven: Don't start that again. [Steven and Richard both laugh]

Richard: You caught me. Well, [thinks for a moment] I started off as a Republican, probably as devout as you could imagine, but over the years I've drifted towards the left and am now an Independent. What about you?

Steven: I'm a Moderate Liberal, if there is such a thing.

Steven: [Laughs], while Amy always votes along Democratic party lines, when she does vote. But, it's another thing we don't really talk about.

Richard: I'm sorry I brought it up.

Amy: You didn't, Steve did. He usually brings these things up. Things better left to oneself.

Richard: [Trying to re-direct the conversation] So, how's your new apartment?

Amy: Cramped!

Steven: Great! [Said at same time as Amy's "cramped"]

Amy: Steve! You can hardly turn around in it.

Steven: True, but it's got a small balcony, which it nice.

Amy: Yeah, small. Only one person fits on it at a time.

Steven: But with a great view.

Amy: [Scoffs] Yeah, if you like staring at buildings.

[Awkward silence]

Richard: I'd love to see it some time...

Laura: [Enters from stage right] Honey, you won't believe what I found. [Notices Amy and Steven] Oh, hello my dears. I didn't know you were coming over.

Amy: Actually, [gets up] we were just leaving, weren't we Steve?

Steven: [Gives Richard a long look, then sighs] I suppose so.

Amy: It was nice seeing you Richard, you too, Laura.

Laura: Feel free to stay a while. I'd love to show you the spectacular blouses I found.

Amy: [Shakes head firmly] Sorry, next time. Come on, Steve.

Amy: [Heads toward door, then exits stage right]

Steven: Bye Laura, sorry we couldn't stay to visit with you.

[Heads toward door, then stops awkwardly] Richard,
maybe you could stop by our place some time.

Richard: I'd like that, Steven. I'll call you and we'll set it
all up. [Steven nods and exits stage right]

Laura: [Looking bewildered] Was it something I said?

Richard: No dear, I believe it was something either Steven or
myself said.

Laura: [Sniffs] I wouldn't be surprised. Men don't really
know how to have conversations with company. That's why
why I plan all of our get-togethers.

Richard: Yes, of course.

[Stage lights fade out. A moment pass then stage lights at full.
Richard is sitting on the couch. Steven stands at the edge of
stage right. Steven knocks, Richard answers the door]

Richard: I'm glad you came over young man, you sounded like you
could use the company when we were on the phone.

[Walks over to the sofa with Steven, they both sit down
on the sofa]

Steven: It was that apparent, huh?

Richard: It was to a person who knows how to listen.

Steven: I suppose that's why I'm here. Amy [long pause] doesn't
listen. It wasn't so bad when I had Tim, but after
Amy and I got married, Time was [awkward, unsure pause]

Steven: well, upset. And then he got married and moved away.

So, really, it's just me.

Richard: Why did Tim get upset? Did he not approve of Amy?

Steven: No, not really. See, [another unsure pause] we can be honest with each other, right? [Said pleadingly]

Richard: Of course.

Steven: [Still hesitant] Completely honest?

Richard: There will never be any judgment here.

Steven: [Relieved] In college Tim and I were more than just friends. You know what I mean?

Richard: I do. You two were lovers. [Said simply]

Steven: Yeah, I suppose that's the word. And well, when I decided to get married he couldn't believe it. I think he kept hoping that I would change my mind. After all, it wasn't like it was another guy or anything. It's just that now, I wonder if I made the wrong choice. Not about Time, but about [pauses] all of it, I guess. Do you know what I mean? 'Cause I'm not sure I know.

Richard: [Nods slowly] I do. Believe me; I do. I had a friend like that back in my fraternity days: Thomas. Of course you couldn't be "that way" back then. It just wasn't allowed. Remember when I told you I was a coward and chose to marry Laura?

Steven: Yeah.

Richard: I did so because my father suspected and he wanted that "activity," as he called it, stopped right away. I didn't stand up to him, I never could, with any of his

Richard: expectations. So, I married Laura, and things have been all right, but I've never been happy, not really.

Steven, be how you write, be honest. If Amy isn't the one for you then be strong enough, bold enough to make the right choice. The choice I never did. It is the only fair thing for both of you.

Steven: I've thought about it, a lot. It seems all I do is think. [Sighs] She doesn't understand me, not even a little, and I don't think she ever has. What I need is a friend, a companion, maybe something more. I don't know. Tim never understood that it was never about sex with me, it was the companionship.

Richard: I understand. [Said kindly]

Steven: Do you? I want someone so badly.

Richard: Remember when we read "Death in Venice" by Thomas Mann in class?

Steven: Of course.

Richard: Well, don't be Aschenbach. Don't die on the inside like I let myself. Not over something you could have had if you just reached out for it.

Steven: Who want's to die? Not on the outside, but especially not on the inside. Not over something so simple.

Richard: [Leans forward] Is it simple?

Steven: No, no it's not. But that's why I always seem to find myself right back here, with you. I always looked up to you, you always seemed to know the answer. Even when you were just throwing the questions back at us. You

Steven: knew, I could just tell you understood. And I know we're friends, but I want [pauses] I want us to be more. [Steven's hand reaches out]

Richard: [Considers] If you will be my Phaedrus, I will be your Socrates. [Richard's hand closes over Steven's own]

[Lights fade. Richard and Steven give each other an embrace.

Curtain closes]