

FLUE SEASON: A COMEDY OF HORRORS

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Christopher Burruto, Bill Caposerre, and Tim Slisz

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SYNOPSIS: The school is cold. Freezing cold. After several chilling days, Carl, the head custodian, manages to revive a mysterious boiler, the STU 9000, but little does Carl know that STU needs and feeds on kids! When a student accidentally gets “fed” to the furnace, STU becomes greedy and demands more “food” to feed his massive appetite. At first Carl is reluctant, but when the building becomes warm and everybody stops complaining, Carl is happy to feed STU a few unruly teens here or there until someone starts to miss them. A complete comedy of horrors about teenagers, teachers and a hungry heater.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(TOTAL CAST OF 21: APPROXIMATELY 7ADULTS
AND 14 TEENAGERS, PLUS EXTRAS.*

NOTE: THE ADULTS COULD BE PLAYED BY TEENAGERS)

ADULTS: 2 WOMEN, 5 EITHER

TEENS: 4 MEN, 4 WOMEN, 6 EITHER

CARL (m/f).....Adult custodian of the school. He is badgered by the principal, students, and teachers alike to make the building a little warmer. *(96 lines)*

MR/S. HART (m/f)Adult. The school principal. Demands a great deal from Carl. *(26 lines)*

MRS. HAUSER (f)Adult. Principal’s secretary. *(10 lines)*

THE JOCKS

Middle school/high school age. The stereotypical jock. Not very bright, sports oriented.

- ROCKY (m).....(38 lines)
- STEVO (m).....(23 lines)
- TONY (m).....(23 lines)

THE CHEERLEADERS

Middle school/high school. Stereotypical cheerleaders. They are essentially interchangeable such that they even have trouble remembering their own names...

- ANNIE-ANNE (f).....(8 lines)
- HEATHER-ANNE (f).....(8 lines)
- SUSIE-ANNE (f).....(4 lines)

MIKE (m).....Middle school/high school. A jock, but a sensitive and intelligent one. Mike is played against type. (45 lines)

KRISTY (f).....Middle school/high school. A cheerleader by association only. Kristy is friends with everyone. She is played against type as well. (66 lines)

WHEELS (m/f).....Middle school/high school. A typical skater. Is facile with the skater lingo. (9 lines)

SPOKES (m/f).....Middle school/high school. Another skater, but friends with everyone. Played against type. (44 lines)

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AXL (m/f).....Middle school/high school. Axl is a goth/emo student, but, is a brilliant musician who plays cello and electric guitar. He or she is also a brilliant student. Loves Metallica (or its contemporary equivalent) no more or less than he/she loves Bach. *(40 lines)*

LEONARD (m/f)Middle school/high school “nerd”. Scared of his own shadow. *(7 lines)*

WALLACE(m/f).....Middle school/high school nerd, though, played against type. Wallace is friends with all the other main characters and is the glue that holds them together. *(55 lines)*

MR/S. FINCH (m/f).....Adult science teacher. *(10 lines)*

MR/S. RORSCHACH (m/f).....Adult school guidance counselor. Well intentioned but overly enthusiastic. Attempts to get Carl to open up about his feelings and frustrations. *(8 lines)*

MRS. BRAINERD (f).....Adult. Leonard’s mother. *(4 lines)*

S.T.U. (m/f).....The boiler. STU stands for Student Thermal Units. STU is brought to life after Carl “inadvertently” feeds a student into the boiler. At the end of the play, the actor playing STU actually appears. It is fun to have STU played by a student with a distinctive voice. Or, it’s fun to have STU played by a favorite teacher. *(48 lines)*

MR/S. LONARDO (m/f)Adult shop teacher. *(1 line)*

ASSORTED TEACHERS(m/f)

STUDENTS (m/f).....Middle school/high school. Try to cast the production with a variety of different groups: jocks, cheerleaders, nerds, emos, goths, etc.

AUTHOR NOTES

Flue Season: A Comedy of Horrors was first written and performed in 1991, and has been revived and updated several times in the intervening years. It remains a student and faculty favorite, as well as one of our favorites!

One of the reasons for its popularity is that not only does the play exaggerate types, but it also has several characters which play against it. Each of the main student characters is, like every real student, a part of many groups, not just one.

In one early production, the cheerleaders were all played by football players, and the football players were played by a combination of cheerleaders and “nerds.” That production was one of the most well-attended and well-received productions we’ve ever had. Real teachers also love to get in the act, either strolling through the hallway set as themselves, or dressed up as a student type. Imagine the school football coach dressed as a nerd and bumbling through the hallways, or dressed as a cheerleader—hairy legs and all!

PRODUCTION NOTES

CARL’S OFFICE can simply be a table/desk and chair on stage left. The boiler, S.T.U., can be a cardboard box, any size will do. If you have the room, so much the better. The size of the boiler doesn’t matter as much as how it is decorated. Adding dials, grills, and snaking tubes makes it more fun. Have a sign or plaque “S.T.U. 9000” prominent somewhere on a side visible to the audience.

HART’S OFFICE can be a simple desk and chair located stage right.

The SCHOOL HALLWAY can be a single flat or several flats with lockers painted on it. One locker needs to open to create a space in which Wallace is confined. Benches on either side of the stage creates space for students to sit.

STU's voice could be pre-recorded, but a microphone is typically best.

COSTUMES

Each student "type" should have clothes to identify them appropriately.

- Cheerleaders could wear full cheerleader outfits, or simply dress exactly the same with some indication, maybe pom poms to indicate they are cheerleaders. Kristy however is less "cheerleader" than the others, as is Mike less "jockey" looking.
- Jocks could have a football, pads, helmets, etc that they carry around with them all the time.
- Nerds should carry large stacks of books, briefcases, etc.
- Teachers should wear shirts and ties or skirts to look professional. Anything to make them look older and more professional is acceptable.
- Carl should wear matching pants and shirt—either dark green, dark blue, or brown. It would be nice to have a patch sewn onto his shirt with his name, "Carl."
- Zombie students and teachers should represent those that Carl fed into the furnace, but they don't necessarily have to be the same actor, as those actors will be present in the last scene. Zombies can wear ripped clothing of their "type," black make-up around their eyes, and hair sprayed and held at strange and exotic angles.

PROPERTY LIST

- Carl needs a large trash bin, preferably on wheels, large enough for Leonard to hide in.
- Skateboards for Wheels and Spokes
- Yellow sneakers (or the like) for Leonard
- Pom-poms for cheerleaders
- Footballs, basketballs, helmets, and similar items for football players
- Newspaper with Leonard's picture prominently displayed
- Cart to wheel Finch across stage
- iPod for Axl
- Cup of coffee for Carl
- Donuts for Carl
- Broom for Carl
- Toolbox for Carl
- Scroll for Carl's "to do" list
- Stepladder
- "God Bless America" music
- Cans of "Ditz Spritz" hairspray
- Saddle shoes for cheerleaders

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE, SCENE 1 School Hallway
ACT ONE, SCENE 2 Carl's Office
ACT ONE, SCENE 3 School Hallway
ACT ONE, SCENE 4 Carl's Office
ACT ONE, SCENE 5 School Hallway
ACT ONE, SCENE 6 Carl's Office
ACT ONE, SCENE 7 School Hallway

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO, SCENE 8 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 9 Carl's Office
ACT TWO, SCENE 10 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 11 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 12 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 13 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 14 Carl's Office
ACT TWO, SCENE 15 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 16 Carl's Office
ACT TWO, SCENE 17 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 18 School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 19 Office/Carl's Office/School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 20 Carl's Office
ACT TWO, SCENE 21 School Hallway

ACT ONE, SCENE 1
SCHOOL HALLWAY

A lone figure, Carl, enters pushing a broom. He looks around, shivers and wraps his arms around himself, pulling his coat closer to his body. He checks the thermostat.

CARL: Sure is cold in here this morning. Maybe something's wrong with the boiler.

Other teachers enter, ad-lib "good mornings" and one or two ad-lib something about the cold.

FINCH: *(Prissy.)* Good morning Carl.

CARL: Good morning, Mrs. Finch.

FINCH: Little chilly here today...look, I can see my breath! And we're inside. Should give my science lesson on Global Warming a touch of irony, wouldn't you say Carl?

CARL: *(Stares at her.)* Yeah. Irony. I'm working on it.

FINCH: *(As exiting, suck up.)* Good morning Principal Hart. *(Gives Carl a dirty look.)*

HART: Carl, it's actually colder INSIDE the building than OUTSIDE it.

CARL: BOILER must have shut down during the night.

HART: Didn't we just replace the BOILER? With a brand new one?

CARL: New to us, yes, but not brand new. We salvaged it from the OLD middle school...before they tore it down. *(Ominous music or sounds.)*

HART: Well, get on that heat, won't you Carl? *(Teachers surround Carl, shivering. He looks at them.)*

CARL: OK! OK! I get it! You're all cold. I'm working on it. *(Exits.)*

HAUSER: *(Secretary Hauser at desk left apron. We see her speaking into the microphone. The lights go all red begin to flash.)* ATTENTION ALL STAFF. *(Teachers are still.)* Students are about to enter the compound. This is not a drill. I repeat: THIS is not a drill. Man all positions. *(Sound of kids in background.)* Science teachers cover the right flank; social studies, the bulkhead by the main entrance. English teachers, please be ready to be called up for active duty. Doors opening in T minus 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1.

Lights up, extras enter, go to lockers, put stuff in. One group of five kids sit on lower steps stage right, a "couple" lower steps stage left. Jocks enter tossing a basketball or football back and forth and calling out each others' names. Use full stage. Allow students to fill stage before dialogue. Mike and Kristy. Kristy is a cheerleader; Mike is a football player, but they are not stereotypes.

ROCKY: *(Jocks enter and do a jock fraternity greeting thing.)* Stevo! The Stevenator! Hey, catch this one *(Throws football, cheerleaders watch nearby, Annie-Anne catches the ball.)* Great catch, Stevo. *(Tosses it back to Rocky)*

ROCKY: OK Tony, this one is for you. It's fourth down, five seconds left in the game, and we're down by five...go long...*(He does. Rocky throws, but Heather-Anne "intercepts it.")*

TONY: *(Shyly, intimidated and lovelorn.)* Nice catch *(Or "nice try" depending if she catches it or not.)* Heather-Anne. *(He leaves looking behind him.)*

ANNIE-ANNE: *(She gives over-exaggerated laugh, hands ball off and joins cheerleader friends. Turns to group as they move toward locker.)* Oh my GOSH, did you guys hear that? He said, *(Pause.)* "Nice catch, Heather-Anne!"

HEATHER-ANNE: But you're not HEATHER-Anne, you're Annie-Anne. I'm HEATHER-Anne. Remember-er?

ANNIE-ANNE: *(Surprised.)* Oh yeah! Forgot! Memo to self: The name is ANNIE-Anne. That's me! But—he still said nice catch. Did you hear him Susie-Anne? *(She's actually turned to another Anne.)*

HEATHER-ANNE: HEATHER-Anne, remember-er?

ANNIE-ANNE: RIGHT! Yeah! Go HEATHER-Anne! *(Does quasi-cheer.)*

SUZIE-ANNE: And, yeah, I did hear him...

HEATHER-ANNE: Yeah, and that Rocky. He's so, so, what's the word again? *(Thinks.)*

CHEERLEADERS: *(Do a little cheer.)* Cute?

SUZIE-ANNE: Yeah. He's so THAT WORD! Cute!

CHEERLEADERS: Yeah! CUTE... *(Cheerleaders do a little cute cheer then mime conversation.)*

ROCKY: Hey guys! Check out those cheerleaders. They're uh, uh. Uh... *(Points to his eyes.)*

STEVO: *(Looks first.)* Eyeball?

TONY: *(Looks, too.)* Poking their eyes out?

ROCKY: No, Tony. *(Hits Tony, Tony falls into Stevo, Stevo hits Tony back.)* You know, what you do with your eyes.

STEVO: Rub? Your eyes?

ROCKY: No, not RUB...the other thing...

TONY: *(Slowly.)* You mean... *(Pause.)* READ? *(The entire stage is quiet and in shock.)*

JOCKS: *(Rocky and Stevo look at each other in shock.)* Read? *(They laugh, then look at Tony.)* NO WAY!

TONY: Read, yeah right. I wasn't thinkin' straight-

STEVO: I know. Look?

ROCKY: Yeah, yeah. They're LOOKING at us.

JOCKS: They are? *(They begin to look at cheerleaders, Tony waves.)* Hi cheerleader girls.

ROCKY: *(Slaps hand down.)* Don't wave at 'em. Never, ever let - GIRLS - know you're looking at them. Especially when THEY'RE looking at YOU to see if YOU are looking at THEM. See what I mean?

JOCKS: *(Look at each other.)* Ohhhh. So what do we do?

ROCKY: Act, like me. Like jocks. Boys...do what I do. *(Start preening. Sees Mike.)* Hey Mikey!

JOCKS: *(In mindless imitation.)* Mikey!

MIKE: Hi... *(Embarrassed.)* Guys...

Mike stage right, Kristy stage left. Mike looks at posing jocks, Kristy looks at priming Annes, both shake their heads in amused disgust, turn to each other. Move toward one another.

KRISTY: Hi Mike!

MIKE: Hey, Kristy!

KRISTY: Not pretty is it? *(Referencing antics of cheerleaders and jocks. Mike shakes head no. Kristy and Mike look at their respective groups, look back at each other, shrug.)*

MIKE: They make it seem like we're all, well...

KRISTY: As mindless as protozoa?

MIKE: ...That may be an insult to protozoa. *(They laugh, go back to lockers. Mike gets books.)*

Car squeals, off-stage—Spokes and Wheels enter stage right on boards.

WHEELS: *(Hopping off and high-fiving Spokes.)* Rad move, dude, grabbing that Porsche's bumper. Totally awesome. I thought you were gonna hit warp twelve.

SPOKES: Dude, my wheels were smokin'. And man, nice ultimate swervage to avoid Mr. Hart's Smart Car! *(Another high-five.)*

Hart enters center, scowling.

HART: Kids! They should outlaw skateboards. Almost tapped my Smart Car... *(Axl enters, the music on his iPod is really loud. "Back in Black" is playing over sound system. He does an air guitar screaming solo. Hart stops in front of Axl, loud music up.)* Hey. Turn that down *(HART Continues past, stops after step or two, returns.)* I said turn that down. *(Still no reaction.)* I said, turn *(Lifts one earphone.)* it *(Lifts other earphone. Axl lowers volume, silence.)* DOWN! *(Everyone looks at Hart.)*

AXL: *(Smiling. Happy. Cool with who s/he is.)* Dude. Chill out. I Heard ya. *(Mimics Hart's speech pattern.)* Loud. And. Clear.

Hart exits to office, Axl exits right. Spokes and Wheels exit left. Wallace and Leonard enter stage right in mid-conversation, pause upstage right.

LEONARD: Yeah, it was on the Discovery Channel, right after the special on Stephen Hawking's theory of the inflationary universe which of course, as you are no doubt acutely aware, supplants the theory of the Big Bang.

WALLACE: Yeah, I saw that show. "The Big Bang Goes Boom."

LEONARD: Yeah, and *(Sees jocks coming toward him, dismayed.)* Uh, oh... *(Grabs Wallace's arm and spins around, attempting to hide behind Wallace.)*

WALLACE: What? What's wrong?

LEONARD: JOCKS!

WALLACE: Where?

LEONARD: Three o'clock. *(Or wherever they are "o'clock." Overdramatic whisper. Scared.)* They're. At. Their. Lockers!

WALLACE: Leonard, they're at their lockers every day. That's where the pack bonds.

LEONARD: I know. I know. And every day we end up inside our lockers. I'm tired of it, Wallace. *(Begins to back away stage right.)*

WALLACE: *(Puts arm around Leonard and pulls him further upstage.)* Leonard, listen to me. Every day we face our adversities, is another day we show ourselves to be the stronger men.

LEONARD: *(Nods in agreement and recognition.)* Wow. Emerson? Jefferson? Thoreau?

WALLACE: No, *(Preen's a bit.)* Armstrong. Wallace Albert, to be exact.

LEONARD: Great. Here's one from Leonard Newton Brainerd. *(Porky pig.)* Deyapdeyapdeyap, that's all folks. I'm outta here. *(Exits. Wallace sighs and goes over to his locker.)*

Jocks move to center stage.

TONY: Hey Rocky, you do your science homework?

ROCKY: This is a joke right? I haven't done my own homework in the *(pause, counts on his fingers confusedly, then raises a foot)* eleven years I've been in middle school...

TONY: What am I gonna do? Old Lady Finch will call my parents.

ROCKY: Why don't you steal it from one of those human calculators over there.

ROCKY: *(They move together toward Wallace.)* Lookie who's here - the original homework machine, Wallace Albert Armstrong. Hey, my little friend... *(Pulls Wallace forward, pushes him toward Stevo. Stevo grabs and puts Wallace into a clench.)*

WALLACE: Oh, just in time for another meeting of the Neanderthal Club! Done much evolving lately, Neanderthals?

ROCKY: Evolving? *(scratches head in a simian way)*

STEVO: Duh, what's a...a— *(He begins to pick off cornflakes from Rocky's shirt or jacket and eats them.)*

ROCKY: What are you doing?

STEVO: Cornflakes. On your shirt... *(They both begin to pick and eat.)*

Finch, the science teacher, enters.

ROCKY: Yo, Mr/s. Finch, what's a nee, nee, nee...

FINCH: Neanderthal? *(Moves upstage a few steps.)*

JOCKS: *(Grunt.)* Yeah!

FINCH: A Neanderthal is a Middle-Paleolithic pre-hominid with a protruding brow ridge and large occipital lobe. The successors to the Neanderthals were the Cro-Magnon.

ROCKY: *(Dismissive.)* Yeah, yeah, yeah...

FINCH: In lay person's words...“cavemen.” *(Sarcastically as she exits.)* You're welcome...

JOCKS: *(Turning around, dismissing Finch.)* Yeah, yeah. *(Pause, look at each other.)*

ROCKY: *(To Tony.)* Cavemen?

TONY: *(To Stevo.)* Cavemen?

STEVO: He callin' us cavemen?

ALL: *(Turns to Wallace.)* Cavemen?!

WALLACE: Well...you do have certain characteristics which resemble...

ROCKY: Hey. I got an idea! Why don't WE put WALLACE in a CAVE?

JOCKS: Yeah! *(beat)* What's your idea?

ROCKY: What do you mean what's my idea?

TONY: You know, that idea you had...

ROCKY: I don't remember-er.

Wallace, during above dialogue, drops head in disgust. He moves to his locker, opens the door, and steps in.

WALLACE: Boys? Was this your idea?

JOCKS: Yeah! Thanks. *(They close the door on him. They begin to exit)*

STEVE: Hey, that Wallace, he sure has some good ideas!

PA: Remember students you have twenty seconds to get to homeroom. *(Pause.)* You now have fifteen seconds to get to your homeroom. *(Pause.)* You now have ten seconds in which to report to homeroom. *(Pause. Screams.)* MOVE!

Students scatter. Extras exit. Annes rush stage left, jocks rush stage right. Collision and confusion. Tony and Annie-Anne run into each other, Tony catches her, spins.

TONY: Sorry Susie-Anne.

Annie-Anne sighs, faints into the arms of the Annes. Jocks grab Tony. Both are dragged offstage on their heels.

ANNIE-ANNE: *(While being dragged.)* Did you hear that? He said "Sorry Susie-Anne."

SUSIE-ANNE: That's so like nice! But, hey, I'm Susie-Anne. I think. You're Annie-Anne.

ANNIE-ANNE: Whatever... *(They all laugh, cheer, exit.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

CARL'S OFFICE

Lights slowly up Carl's office, right side. Carl at desk, TV on, bite of doughnut, pours cup of coffee, leans back, spot up on office on other side.

CARL: Got my coffee. *(Sits at desk, picks up paper.)* Got my newspaper. What more could a head custodian wish for? Wait! I know! *(Opens box of doughnuts.)* Dare I dream? *(With emotion, holds it up like it's religious relic.)* A double-fudge, custard-filled bit of custodial paradise. *(Sings.)* Hallelujah! *(Dunks doughnut, just about to bite.)*

HART: Carl! *(Carl jolts at noise, spills coffee or drops donut.)*

CARL: Yes Ms. Hart. *(Wiping off shirt.)*

HART: Did you notice something today?

CARL: Ma'am? *(Or sir.)*

HART: Did you notice? The faculty and students? In school, wearing sweaters? Sweatshirts? Parkas?

CARL: Um, hmmm. Not really...I...

HART: Did you notice that you could see your BREATH? **In** the building, not outside it? Did you notice the Outdoors Club is trying to light a bonfire in the middle of the math hallway?

CARL: Well, *(Laughs a little.)* it is winter and all. I can't really control the weather you know...I ain't no Kevin Williams *(Or prominent local weatherman.)*

HART: CARL! *(He jolts.)* I am NOT asking you to **control** the weather. I AM asking you to provide some HEAT in this building before we all FREEZE!

CARL: Yeah, okay. As soon as I take care of some other business. *(Does the dunking thing again with donut, begins to settle back again and drink.)*

HART: I sense you are having a little trouble understanding me. Why don't we TALK about it in my OFFICE.

CARL: Okay. *(He takes another sip.)*

HART: NOW! *(CARL Jolted, spills coffee on shirt, grumbles, gets container and exits door. Lights dim.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 3
SCHOOL HALLWAY

HAUSER: (*Chimes. Voice is sweetly cheerful.*) Good morning, students and welcome to homeroom... There is still no winner for the “Name that Lunch” contest. This makes 42 days in a row without a winner—a new school record. Try your luck again during today’s lunch. Attention meteorology club members: there will be a meeting today after school in the courtyard. Weather permitting. Finally, tickets for the dance can still be purchased in the cafeteria.

HART: (*Angry and annoyed.*) Dances! Dances! People moving. People touching one another. I hate them. Hate them.

HAUSER: Reminder: today is a SEWAR day—Stop Everything, Write and Read. Thank you and have a nice day! (*Chimes.*)

KRISTY: (*Enters. To herself.*) I know I saw him earlier this morning. I know it... (*Out loud to anyone on stage.*) Has anybody seen Wallace Armstrong?

FINCH: (*Enters just at edge.*) Where do you think **you’re** going young lady? You can’t just get up and leave homeroom you know. We’ve got important things to do! Leave here, and you won’t be allowed back in. Nobody leaves Mrs. Finch’s homeroom and gets away with it. (*Mike enters from off stage.*) Nobody. Do you hear me? (*Finch exits again.*)

MIKE: Hey Kristy. What’s wrong?

KRISTY: It’s Wallace. He’s not in homeroom, and I know I saw him this morning.

MIKE: Did you check his locker?

KRISTY: (*Gestures obviously to locker.*) He’s not there...

MIKE: Not AT his locker. Hold on. (*Goes to Wallace’s locker. Axl walks on with cello case.*) Wallace, you in there? (*Muffled response.*)

MIKE: He’s in there. What do we do? (*They despair a little.*)

AXL: Why uh, why don’t you ask him to give you his combination?

MIKE: Who are you?

AXL: Call me AXL.

MIKE: (*To Wallace.*) Can you hear me? (*Muffled sounds.*) Can you tell us your combination?

Bell rings. Kids come out, etc.

MIKE: I need quiet...

KRISTY: Is he going to suffocate? Oh no...

AXL: He'll be fine.

MIKE: Hold on a second Wallace.

AXL: Here, let me do a little... *(Axl does complicated locker opening ritual, locker opens. They help Wallace out.)*

WALLACE: Thanks, getting a little claustrophobic in there.

KRISTY: Sorry Wallace....I couldn't keep an eye on you today...

MIKE: I'm the one who should say sorry. Wallace. I've told those guys a thousand times not to pull this stunt anymore.

WALLACE: Thanks Mike. I hope you guys didn't get into trouble for skipping homeroom.

MIKE: *(They move to steps stage right.)* Getting you out is a little more important.

WALLACE: Well, thanks Mike.

KRISTY: Axl's the one who actually got you out.

WALLACE: So you've mastered safe cracking as well as differential equations.

KRISTY: You already know each other?

WALLACE: Axl here is in my Hyper-Extreme-Advanced Math class. He's a legend... *(Wallace bows to Axl.)*

AXL: *(Axl modest.)* Hey, keep it down will ya? *(Looks around conspiratorily.)* I've got a rep to maintain...

MIKE: Maybe you can give me a hand. I'm stuck on this problem, and it's due next period...

AXL: *(Looks around then takes paper from Wallace, looks it over, shows it to Wallace.)* Here it is, Dude. You mixed up your variables in step three, and in step five, you added your exponents in the polynomial when you should have applied the reverse multiplicative modality.

MIKE: *(Taking paper.)* Wow. I can't believe I missed that.

AXL: Easy mistake: it happens. Gotta go. Cello lesson.

MIKE: Cello? I would have guessed screaming guitar.

AXL: Well, that too, but I also like the mathematical beauty of Bach's Canons. *(Pause.)* And it limbers up my fingers for that screaming guitar.

WALLACE: OK, thanks again, Axl.

AXL: Yeah, I'll catch ya all later. *(Exits left.)*

HAUSER: *(Chimes.)* I hope you all enjoyed your reading and writing today. Remember, tomorrow is a SURE day—Shut Up and Read Everyone! *(Chimes.)*

Carl enters center with trash container and doughnut.

FINCH: *(Pulling overhead from room upstage a few steps.)* Carl. *(Interrupts Carl as he tries to bite doughnut.)* Carl, about this overhead projector. This thing hasn't worked for weeks. *(Carl tries bite. Finch grabs arm for emphasis.)* How am I supposed to teach without my overhead? I can't. I can't teach without an overhead. And my colored markers. They're frozen. *(Carl tries bite.)* And these erasers, they haven't been cleaned since last year. Just look at this. *(Bangs, cloud of dust. Carl coughs, staggers toward cheerleader area, Spokes goes by, grabs doughnut.)*

SPOKES: Thanks dude!

CARL: *(Turning.)* Hey! *(Cough, gasp.)* My doughnut *(Coughs, gasps, turns back and moves toward cheerleaders, who blast with him with hairspray over their shoulders. Carl staggers toward office.)*

RORSCHACH: *(Enters from right.)* Carl?

CARL: What? What is it Ms...

RORSCHACH: Rorschach. School psychologist. Here's my card *(Hands it to him.)*

CARL: *(Looking at card every which way.)* Is that your name? Some kind of insect?

RORSCHACH: What do you think it is, Carl? You seem a bit edgy. Are you feeling a little stressed?

CARL: It's these kids. This school is filled with them. And dirt. And dust. And all these kids. And all their garbage.

RORSCHACH: Why don't we talk about it, Carl. *(Pats him on the back, draws him to side. They mime conversation, Carl despairing, Rorschach consoling.)*

Leonard enters stage center, looks scared, looks behind him, then around. Spots garbage bin, climbs inside.

RORSCHACH: Carl, if you ever need another little chat, my door is open. Always.

Rorschach shakes head, pats shoulder, directs him toward office, exits right. Carl enters office, mime conversation with secretary.

Jocks enter running center, "Where's that nerd," etc., look around, stop upstage center, look into the audience and point out, "There he goes." Jocks exit down both steps into the audience...eventually, they exit out back of audience.

HAUSER: *(Hands Carl scroll.)* We've had a number of work requests, but we've narrowed it down to these few high priority items.

CARL: *(Beginning to turn away.)* Ahhh, that's not so bad. *(Lets go, paper unfolds.)*

HAUSER: *(As Carl struggles with paper. The following names of teachers can all be replaced with local teachers.)* On page 37, you'll see Mr. Smith needs you to round up the frogs that escaped from their cages. Seems as if one of our little animal rights terrorists has set them free...

CARL: *(Whining.)* Not again....

HAUSER: On page 6, Mrs. Sementa seems to have misplaced her pinata. Rumor has it, it's being held hostage in Mr. Gebhardt's room. No doubt it has been emptied of its candy contents. If you know what I mean...

CARL: Surprise, surprise!

HAUSER: Page 132. One of our little angels has gotten hold of some superglue and has been . . . *(Phone buzzes.)* Mrs. Kohl? You're stuck to your chair too? Ok, I'll put you on the list. Stay where you are. *(Pushes another button.)* Mr. Lonardo? Do you have something that will break a superglue bond?

OVER PA: Yes, yes, I do... *(Sound of chainsaw.)*

HAUSER: Thank you. *(Hangs up, Carl by now should have scroll back neatly.)* Cross that one off. Ok, back to number two . . . *(Chimes.)*

Jocks come running back on stage, spot Wallace at his locker, move up to him. Wallace turns, sees them.

WALLACE: *(Holds up hand.)* Gentlemen, allow me. *(Enters locker by himself.)*

Wheels enters. Before Wallace can shut locker, Rocky grabs locker with one hand as Tony grabs doughnut from Wheels. Tony hands doughnut to Rocky, Rocky shoves it into Wallace's mouth and shuts locker. Jocks look at each other, nod, exit. Hall clears. Hart enters office right.

HART: Carl! Where have you been? *(Carl holds up scroll as if to explain. Hart grabs.)* Never mind that. *(Throws into hall.)* Number one, get ready for the assembly at the end of the day. Then there's that PTSA meeting tonight. I'm getting tired of these parents trying to meddle in their kids' education *(Carl begins to back up, Hart follows closely. At doorway.)* Carl! Look at this hallway! Look at this garbage! What do you do all day? *(Kicks scroll.)* Pick this up! *(Turns to go, Carl begins to bend to pick up scroll, Hart turns back.)* And Carl...please...do something about the heat! *(Carl puts scroll back together, Rorschach enters right, taps Carl on shoulder, Carl jumps and loses scroll all over.)*

RORSCHACH: Carl! You still seem a little tense. *(Takes scroll and folds it for him.)* Didn't our little talk help? Remember, my door's always open. And I'm seemingly always here.

CARL: *(Backing to left, out of her earshot.)* Yeah. So, I've noticed.

RORSCHACH: *(Moving toward office.)* And Carl, it's awfully cold in here. Are you doing anything about the heat? *(Rorschach exits. Carl backs to science room. Another teacher enters.)*

TEACHER: Carl, my classroom, it's like another ice age in there. We've been reduced to lighting small fires in the center of the room. Kidding. But, it's really cold.

CARL: OK, OK. I'll see what I can do... *(Exits to his office.)*

Lights down.

**ACT ONE, SCENE 4
CARL'S OFFICE**

CARL: *(Carl shows empty trash bin like he's already emptied it.)*
Finally! Maybe a little heat for the school, and a little hard-earned rest for one expert custodial engineer, Carl. *(Sits, leans back in chair.)* Time for my well-deserved 9:15 mid-morning coffee nap. *(Raises paper, paper slowly settles over face. Sound of snoring. Lights down.)*

Dream music; lights up. Carl at desk with paper over his face. Sudden "whoosh" and red glow from the furnace. Carl slowly wakes up, pulls paper down, looks around, goes to boiler, plays with gauges, kicks it. There's a loud belching noise and a scorched sneaker pops out. Carl picks it up and scratches head.

S.T.U.: Thanks, I needed that. *(Carl startled, looks around, checks cup.)* No, not in the cup, Carl. Over here. *(Carl checks under desk.)* Over heeeeere, Carl. *(Carl moves to boiler, looks it over.)*

CARL: Huh? Who's there?

S.T.U.: What's wrong Carl? You seem a bit tense today. Is it a touch of...the FLU?

CARL: *(Looking up, as if to PA speaker.)* Ms. Hart? Ma'am? Is that you ma'am? Just uh, sitting here with my eyes closed to better visualize the possible configuration of the seats at today's assembly, ma'am.

S.T.U.: *(Whoosh.)* Not up there, Carl, you poor excuse for a janitor.

CARL: Janitor? I'm a custodian! And head custodian at that. Right here *(Pulls shirt forward.)* And it took me a long time to climb that far. Years of hard work and lots of sweat - all those messy pep assemblies, those food fights, kids getting sick before they make it to the bathroom, I hate that sawdust stuff, and that smell. And now it's the heat. Everyone complaining about the heat. You try and...wait a second. Hold on...Carl, Carl, you're losing it. Get a grip. Get a grip buddy. It IS time to see Rorschach, the shrink. *(Sits at desk, head in hands.)* Now I'm talking to the walls.

S.T.U.: Not the walls, Carl. Me.

CARL: *(Looks up and over shoulder.)* What, the boiler? *(Laughs dismissively.)*

S.T.U.: Boiler? Boiler? You insult me! I am not just a boiler. I am the *(One letter at a time.)* S. T. U. 9000, thank you. But you can call me...Stu.

CARL: Stu? *(Rises and moves toward boiler.)*

S.T.U.: Stu. S. T. U. As in Student Thermal Units.

CARL: STUDENT Thermal Units?

S.T.U.: That's right. System 9000 up and running and at your service.

CARL: Well, that's great, but you're talking to a guy who's from a long line of head custodians. *(Points to pictures on wall.)* And in all the custodial tales ever handed down from Carl Sr. to Carl Jr. to me, I've never heard of Student Thermal Units. And that's beside the point. People have been bugging me about the heat all day! Where were you? Huh? Some boiler you are! What brought YOU suddenly back on-line?

S.T.U.: It was you, Carl. You brought me to life. You knew exactly what it took to *(Pause.)* light my fire.

CARL: To life? You're a machine. You're not alive. Are you? No. Of course not. You're just a boiler!

S.T.U.: Not just any boiler Carl. Read my lips: the STU 9000. **Student. Thermal.** Units System 9000. The fuel's in the name, Carl. And you fed me the right fuel.

CARL: Student Thermal Unit System 9000. Student Thermal Unit 9000. Student thermal...student? *(Looks at sneaker on desk, moves over and picks it up.)*

S.T.U.: Yeah, that little nerd you fed me sure was tasty. He was well worth the wait.

CARL: *(looks at sneaker, horrified.)* Nooooo

S.T.U.: But them sneakers. Ooooh, they give me gas!

CARL: Nooooo *(shakes head, Backs away.)* What am I doing? I'm talking to a BOILER. *(Gets toolbox.)* I gotta get outta here. *(Puts sneaker in toolbox.)* I got work to do. This place is driving me crazy. *(Exits back right.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 5
SCHOOL HALLWAY

Carl enters center. He has a ladder and mimes fixing something. He is stealthily listening to the jocks.

Rocky saunters on from stage left, jocks enter right, running into Rocky. He jerks thumb toward locker.

Jocks open locker, take doughnut from Wallace's mouth and drag him forward.

ROCKY: Yo, nerd. Where's your, uh, the other of your—

WALLACE: Are you referring to one of my compatriots? *(Jocks look at each other, "huh?" Stevo continues throughout the next dialogue trying to finish Rocky's sentence.)* Companion? Ally? Ami? Amigo? *(Jocks look at each other confusedly at each word.)* Let's see if I can phrase it simply, in your lexicon. *(Looks at each one in the face.)* Buddy? Chum? Pal?

ROCKY: Yeah!

STEVO: Friend! *(Tony and Rocky look at him and shake head.)*

WALLACE: Which one?

ROCKY: That nerdo guy.

STEVO: With all the names.

TONY: And the Brady Bunch pants.

ROCKY: The one you guys call uh, uh, uh . . . *(Lost in thinking.)*

STEVO: *(With authority. But wrong.)* Leon the nardo.

TONY: Leon the nerdo?

STEVO: D'ats what I said...

WALLACE: Leon? (*Shakes head.*) Leonardo? LEONARD?

TONY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

STEVO: That's the one.

ROCKY: We had a - what you call - a mutually satisfying arraignment.

WALLACE: Arraignment? You had an arraignment? You had an ARRANGEMENT? A deal? You had a deal?

ROCKY: Yeah that's it. A deal. We had a deal. (*Uses hands to demonstrate.*) He does my homework; he gets to live another day. So here I am. Do I have any homework? (*Tony/Stevo shake heads.*) No. (*Rocky pulls Wallace by lapel.*) Do you see any Leonard? (*Wallace/Stevo shake heads with incidental comments like "nope," "not no homework here."*) No. So what I'm wondering now is... (*Pause. Turns to Tony/Stevo.*) What am I wondering?

STEVO: Lunch! You're wondering what's for lunch!

TONY: (*Hits Stevo, falls into Rocky, Rocky hits Stevo a la three stooges.*) No, he's wondering where Leonardo the nerdo is.

ROCKY: Yeah. So what I'm wondering is, where is Leonard? And (*Pause.*) if Leon the nardo ain't here (*Pause, turns to Tony/Stevo.*) What if he ain't here?

STEVO: **Who** does your homework?

ROCKY: (*To Wallace.*) Yeah, who does **your** homework?

TONY: (*Taps Rocky on his shoulder.*) No, who does **your** homework (*Points to Rocky.*)

ROCKY: That's what I said, who does **your** homework?

TONY: **Who** does my homework?

STEVO: I do your homework.

ROCKY: **You** do **his** homework?

TONY: I thought I did my own homework. Hey, how'm I doin'?

STEVO: Oh, geesh Tony! You love science. Yer doin' GREAT in science!

TONY: That's great! (*Speaks terrible English.*) How'm I doin' in English?

STEVO: Ok, but your penmanship is awful. And your reading comprehension, not so good...sorry...

TONY: Geesh...I hope my parents don't find out.

STEVO: They've already grounded ME for a week.

TONY: Really?

ROCKY: (*Annoyed at them.*) WHO CARES?

WALLACE: Boys, have you considered the benefits and pleasures - not to mention the intellectual challenge - of doing your own homework?

JOCKS: (*Look at each other as if considering it. Three count.*)
Naahh!

ROCKY: (*Slowly, imitating Wallace.*) Have you ever considered the benefits and pleasures of doing what we tell you to do, and say, maybe avoidin' a prolonged and painful hospital stay? If you know what I mean...?

WALLACE: And I do...especially since you put it so eloquently, how can I help you?

ROCKY: Where's the nerd?

WALLACE: Last I remember, I saw him being chased by you fine gentlemen. I believe he sought safety in the custodian's refuse receptacle. Of course, it's hard to say, as I've been in this locker for the better part of the day, and my vision has been somewhat impaired. I'd like to take this opportunity to extend my warmest thanks and appreciation to you all for letting me escape from my confinement. I hope that in the future, we can forge a mutually satisfying detente in which to maximize. . . (*Jocks shove doughnut back in his mouth and Wallace back in the locker.*)

ROCKY: So the nerd went out with the garbage! He's probably long gone by now. Great. Now we gotta stay after school and do that stupid science lab. By ourselves. I hate elasticity!

STEVO: That's electricity.

TONY: What's electricity?

ROCKY: That feeling you get when you put your tongue to the power outlet?

JOCKS: Huh?

ROCKY: It was a dare. I won. At least, that's what the EMT said.

STEVO: So what's the science lab?

TONY: It's electrical.

STEVO: Electoral? I think my brother is the starting lineman for the Electoral College.

TONY: Defensive? Offensive?

STEVO: Offensive? He's not so bad.

ROCKY: The lab is on electricity, you dim watt bulbs!

TONY: You mean like the electrical chair?

ROCKY: You know what I'd like? *(Begins to hit and shove them off stage right.)* I'd like to electi-cute chair that Leonard.

TONY: Yeah, let's electi-cute chair that Leonard. *(They make "bzzz" sounds like electricity arcing.)*

Carl reaches into tool box, accidentally pulls out sneaker Rorschach enters behind Carl.

RORSCHACH: Carl!

CARL: *(Looking up, thinking it's the boiler.)* What?! What?! I don't care what you say! I don't believe you! I don't believe **in** you! Get outta my head, and just leave me alone, you crazy machine!

RORSCHACH: *(Insulted. Teary-eyed.)* Carl, I'm not always a machine...I'm a person. With feelings. And I'm only trying to help, *(Carl hides sneaker. Rorschach snuffles.)* I know some people don't **believe** in psychology, or they think it's for the birds. But, it's exactly **those** people who need the help the most. *(With strength.)* Your emotional outburst leads me to believe that you have an *(Pause.)* **inferno** of anger just **boiling** away inside you. Good day! *(Turns with indignant toss of head, exits crying.)*

Hart and Mrs. Brainerd enter hallway and hold conversation while moving to locker area.

HART: Well, Mrs. Brainerd, are you sure Leonard knew he had the appointment? His teachers have listed him as absent.

BRAINERD: Absent? Leonard hasn't missed a day of class since *(Beat.)* Lamaze. And he never forgets an appointment. They're all logged into his atomic-powered Blackberry.

HART: I don't want you to panic Mrs. Brainerd, but...have you checked his locker?

BRAINERD: *(Relieved.)* His locker! Of course! He told me he'd be stuck in his locker during this period. I'd forgotten that some of those fun-loving, sporty types often place him there in a sweet exhibition of Tom Foolery. *(They stop in front of locker.)* I have the combination. *(Opens locker.)* Oh, he's not here. *(Wallace is banging.)* Wallace honey, is that you? It's Mrs. Brainerd, Leonard's Mom. *(Muffled answer.)* I hope you have a sweater on in there - it's a little chilly. *(Aside.)* His mother tells me he's a little sickly. *(Muffled noise.)* Is that a cough I hear? I hope you aren't coming down with the flu. Anyway sweetie, have you seen my Leonard? *(One word muffled answer.)* Yes? Where honey? He doesn't know. Thanks honey *(Turns to Hart.)* I guess he already left. *(They begin to move away, loud muffled yells, she turns back.)* Thank you Wallace dear! You have a nice weekend, too. *(One last "arrgggghhhh" from Wallace.)*

HART: So is everything all set here Mrs. Brainerd? *(In front of Carl.)*

BRAINERD: Wallace seems to think that Leonard WALKED to his appointment. I warned him against walking in those bright yellow sneakers on a day like today. *(Carl takes sneaker from toolbox, looks.)* They'll get muddy. He just loves those sneakers.

S.T.U.: *(From above.)* Remember Carl, they give me gas. *(Carl tries to cover with hands, grabs sneaker and tries to cover.)*

BRAINERD: Thanks Mr. Hart. *(Exits.)*

HART: Sure thing, Mrs. Brainerd. *(Spots Carl.)* Carl! *(Carl shoves sneaker in toolbox and slams lid on hand.)* Good job on that heat! Already feels warmer in here! *(Carl nods in pain, gasping yes sound.)* So I don't need to call in the district supervisor after all, eh? *(Carl shakes head no.)* You feeling all right, Carl? *(Nods head yes.)*

Hart exits. Carl screams and exits center. Teachers pop into hall, look at each other, shrug, exit back.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6
CARL'S OFFICE

S.T.U.: School's nice and warm now, isn't it Carl! Who's going to get the credit for that Carl? You. That's who. What was it she said to you in the hallway?

CARL: Who?

S.T.U.: Hart. What'd Hart say to you about the heat Carl?

CARL: *(Quietly.)* Good job...

S.T.U.: No Carl. She said *(Imitation of Hart, booming, proud-like voice.)* "Good job on that heat, already feels warmer in here." She's PROUD of you Carl. They're ALL proud of you! They're starting to LIKE you. Treating you with RESPECT. The way I see it, you gotta dream big Carl. What are you now, Head Custodian? Think bigger. Today Head Custodian. Tomorrow, District Facilities Coordinator. *(Carl lifts head, low undertone of "God Bless America" music will slowly build through the remainder of the scene.)* Maybe even President of the Custodial Engineers of America. *(Stands.)* Awarded and proud bearer of the Congressional Custodial Medal of Honor! *(Places hand over heart with sneaker.)* And, if you dare to dream, Carl, if you dare to dream big enough, you could be the Chief Custodial Engineer of the United States of America. *(Salutes.)* And all it takes *(Pause.)* is a few. Tasty. Students. *(Music scratches to a halt.)*

CARL: *(Pause, smile of consideration, then look of rejection. Throws sneaker to the ground.)* Never! Never! I took an oath. An oath!

S.T.U.: Who could expect you to keep such an oath with the unfair workload you have?

CARL: No! Leave me alone – *(Runs out. Lights down.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 7 SCHOOL HALLWAY

In this scene, Carl can hear the boiler, but no one else can. But the students and everyone on stage can hear Carl's reactions to the boiler, and react accordingly.

CARL: What a nightmare! *(Sees teacher with open paper with Leonard's picture on it. Grabs paper and throws paper down.)*

TEACHER: If you want the paper Carl, just ask, okay. *(Leaves in a huff.)*

S.T.U.: *(Weakly.)* Pretty good likeness of the little guy, huh Carl? *(Carl hides paper behind back.)* You can't hide from it, Carl. You can't hide from me Carl.

PA: Will Leonard Newton Brainerd please come down to the attendance office. That's Leonard Newton Brainerd to the attendance office please...

S.T.U.: Gee, I wonder if he hears the announcement! *(Laughs.)* Or hear another one ever again?

CARL: You're just a nightmare—caused by a slice of hot chili pepper and double anchovy pizza gone bad. None of this is happening.

S.T.U.: I'm not a piece of pizza Carl. I'm real. I'm just as real as you are.

CARL: No. It's this job. I'm overworked. Underpaid. Unappreciated.

S.T.U.: I appreciate you Carl. I want to keep our relationship alive. Growing... But, I'm losing patience... *(Students on the stage all of a sudden shiver, like struck by an arctic blast. Wind sound effects.)*

S.T.U.: You feel that? I can turn it off and on at will, Carl. Whenever I feel like it...

HART: *(Enters.)* Carl? *(Carl looks up.)* Down here Carl. *(Points to self.)* You might recognize me. I'm Mr. Hart. Custodian of all the people in this building, responsible for the general welfare of all who go to school here. WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR HEAT? It feels like the Arctic in here.

S.T.U.: I call it "THE COLD SHOULDER"!

CARL: Shut up!

HART: Did you just - tell me to shut up? **You?** A custodian? Telling **ME** to shut up?

S.T.U.: Only **YOU** can hear me Carl! Only you! But, I can change that, and let Hart know what really happened to Leonard.

CARL: OK. I apologize.

HART/S.T.U.: Apology accepted.

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