

## LAWFUL

### *The Actor*

One male actor, mid-30s, performs all of the roles in the play. Characters are differentiated by changes in the tone and pitch of the actor's voice, various dialects when indicated, and through variations of physicality.

### *The Setting*

An attic bedroom. Exposed overhead beams and wall studs. More than a dozen book shelves have been constructed within the studs and hold a vast library that includes books on Spanish, French, German, Latin, Chinese, Russian, Greek mythology, ancient history, Napoleon, Hitler, Marxism, psychology, chemistry, botany, nuclear weapons, electronics, mathematics and concordances of the Bible. Authors include Twain, Steinbeck, Orwell, Hugo, Dickens, Wells, Camus, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Shakespeare and Joseph Conrad.

A small bed, a wood-burning potbelly stove, an old door fashioned into a desk with two drawers and a chair are the only comforts. Clean clothes hang from hooks on the walls. A well-used trombone sits on a stand in one corner. A small typewriter, papers and open textbooks cover the desk, but otherwise the room is pin neat.

There is a single door and window.

### *The Time*

1978

## LAWFUL

*The houselights dim. Stage lights reveal only the front lip of the stage.*

*The ACTOR enters, dressed in a light blue, oxford dress shirt; khaki slacks; and brown cordovan shoes.*

*He holds in one hand a large, rolled, parchment document bound by a crimson ribbon.*

*He walks to the front center of the stage and addresses the audience.*

### ACTOR

Good evening/afternoon. Welcome to this performance of the play “Lawful,” written by Michael David and directed by \_\_\_\_\_ . Normally at this time we would be asking the audience to turn off your cell phones, to unwrap your candies and to take a moment to locate the nearest exit in the unlikely event of an emergency. But since this is a particularly intelligent play and we assume the audience is also, we are not making such an announcement. (*a moment*) My name is [actor’s full name]. Thank you for being here. This play is based on actual events. Most of the characters in the play are — or were — very real people. Few of the names have been changed. (*he breathes*) Our story begins with the reading of this document.

*He removes the ribbon and unrolls the document.*

*As he does, the lights dim to a single spotlight, tight on the ACTOR, with the large document now hiding his face.*

*A moment, then the ACTOR reads the words only he can see.*

ACTOR

Harvard University, at Cambridge in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts ... The President and Fellows of Harvard College ... with the consent of the Honorable and Reverend the Board of Overseers ... and Acting on the recommendation of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences ... on this twelfth day of June in the year of Our Lord nineteen-hundred and sixty-two ... have conferred the degree of Bachelor of Arts ... on Theodore James Kaczynski.

*The ACTOR lowers the diploma, revealing TED, 36.*

*He rolls up the parchment and begins to tie the ribbon.*

*As he does, he looks at the audience.*

TED

*(with an amused smile)*

“Theodore.” Everyone has always called me Ted. Or Teddy.

*The lights rise to reveal the attic bedroom. The spotlight gradually dims out.*

*TED walks over to the bed, kneels down, and pulls out from underneath a 12-inch square wooden box.*

*He sets it on the bed and removes the lid.*

*During the following, TED places his diploma inside the box.*

TED

Twenty years ago, in September 1958, I entered Harvard University, as a freshman. I was 16 years old. I was 16 on my first day at Harvard because when I was in fifth grade my school guidance counselor, Miss Vivian Frack, gave me an IQ test. I scored 167. Einstein was 160.

*TED replaces the lid on the wooden box, kneels, and returns the box to the same position under the bed.*

*He stands.*

TED

Miss Frack, upon learning of my score, couldn't wait to share the news with my parents. Turk and Wanda Kaczynski, 127 Carpenter Street, Chicago. Polish Catholics. Miss Frack pretended not to smell the unrelenting stench of the stockyards, just a few blocks away.

*TED is suddenly supplanted by VIVIAN FRACK, a thirtyish schoolteacher.*

*VIVIAN has picked up a folder of papers from the desk.*

VIVIAN

Mr. and Mrs. Kaczynski, I've always believed Ted to be exceptional, and now this test proves it. A score of 167 is considered to be at the level of genius.

TED

My father will speak first. He's a big man, working class, but highly self-educated. He works in the family business. Kaczynski's Sausages, since 1927.

*Another shift by the ACTOR.*

*He is now TURK, early 40s, with a lingering Polish accent.*

TURK

We've always known that Teddy is smart. From early on. But he's never done well on tests.

VIVIAN

Mr. Kaczynski, based on these results, I feel strongly, and the school administration agrees, that Ted should skip the sixth and go directly into the seventh grade.

TED

My mother is mortified that Father has divulged my not-so-spectacular test history and quickly jumps in to offer up faults less ... academic.

*Another abrupt shift by the ACTOR, this time to WANDA, late 30s, similar accent.*

WANDA

To be honest, Miss Frack, this is *not* why we thought you wanted to talk to us. I thought you were going to tell us about some trouble he'd gotten into, boy stuff, y'know, nothing serious. Teddy, he's a good kid. Or maybe something to do with this girl ... Darlene something.

TED

*(a non-present observer)*

Are you not listening, Mother?! She's saying I'm a *genius*!

TURK

Are you not listening, Wanda?! She's saying our Teddy is a *genius*! And you think, Miss Frack, that having Teddy skip a grade will help him be even smarter?

VIVIAN

Ted needs to be challenged. Advancing him next year to the seventh grade will likely give him the boost he needs. Frankly, I think that if Ted puts his mind to it, he can be whatever he wants to be. His future is unlimited.

*VIVIAN morphs into TED.*

*He replaces the papers to the desk and, after a slight pause, addresses the audience.*

TED

My parents remind me of this meeting with Miss Frack many times during the subsequent years, usually after I have somehow disappointed them. And they always end with her prophetic last words, as if she had read them from stone tablets. "His future is unlimited." *(a shift)* So I enter seventh grade with the label of child prodigy. It doesn't take long for word to get around. Teachers love the gifted child. Schoolmates do not.

*TED becomes WANDA.*

WANDA

You should go outside. It's a beautiful day. I can hear the boys playing Red Rover.

TED

*(at 11 years old)*

They've already picked teams, Mother. Besides, I have to read this book for Monday.

WANDA

You should play more. People will talk if you never go outside.

*TED turns to us, an adult once more.*

TED

That same night, after dinner, my father would come to my room.

*TED becomes TURK.*

TURK

Your mother tells me you received a 'B' in English.

TED

*(the 11 year old)*

I received all 'A's in my other subjects.

TURK

But that 'B'. There is no excuse for it. And in English! You speak English constantly! A 'B' in English looks psychotic. People will think we're insane.

TED

*(the adult)*

The next year my family moves from Chicago to Evergreen Park. When I ask my mother why we're moving, she says it's to provide me with a better class of friends. I am twelve years old, going to a new school where everyone is at least a year older, and a stranger. I don't want to disappoint her, but making friends is going to be difficult.

*WANDA appears.*

WANDA

What was wrong with my suggestion to join the Boy Scouts?

TED

*(now 12 years old)*

I enjoy reading, Mother. Why can't I just choose to be alone? Papa is telling me all the time to read more.

WANDA

Don't listen to your father. He's an idiot. And no mother wants her son to grow up to be a social misfit.

TED

*(the adult again)*

Psychologists use the term “socialization” to define the process by which children are trained to think and act as society demands. A person is said to be “well socialized” if he believes in and obeys the moral code of his society and fits in well as a functioning part of that society. That is what my mother wanted above all else. Because if *I* was well socialized it meant that my family — and, more importantly, that *she* — was well socialized. *(a moment)* Evergreen Park Community High School is brand new my freshman year — with white lines yet to be painted on the parking lot and football field — so that means a majority of the students don't already know each other. My mother is convinced this will result in me quickly becoming instantly popular among my classmates. But I'm a serious student, a “grind,” a “briefcase boy,” a “nerd.” So my few friends are other grinds, briefcase boys and nerds. Like Randolph Wixson.

*TED transforms into RANDOLPH, the same age as the adult TED.*

RANDOLPH

I probably knew Ted better than anyone else. We were part of a group that hung out together. We were both members of the National Honor Society. Sputnik had just gone up, kids were being pushed hard into science. It required so much of our time we had little of it left for girls. And Ted's relations with the opposite sex were more of the “pigtails in the inkwell” variety. *(with slightly more determination)* And despite what the Chicago Tribune reported, Ted was not a loner, not hostile, not obsessed with explosives. All high school kids want to make bombs. We were no exceptions. And Ted, being bright, knew how to do it. Others badgered him, demanding that he show them how. Ted, anxious to please, told one boy how to do it. So the boy made a bomb.

RANDOLPH

*(continued, with a shake of the head)*

The Tribune article said that the bomb broke windows in the chemistry lab, but that was ridiculous. I was standing six feet away and wasn't hurt. The principal called the boy in, who explained that Ted had told him how to make this small bomb, but the boy clearly didn't follow Ted's instructions or the result wouldn't have been so pitiful. Ted was suspended for a day. But it was no big deal ... the principal knew Ted couldn't be responsible for what the other kid did, and Ted said his parents' reaction was not what he expected.

TURK

My son, the *rocket* scientist!

WANDA

This boy who built the bomb, should we have him to dinner?

TED

At the end of my sophomore year it is again recommended that I skip a grade and start the following school year as a fifteen-year-old senior. This excites everyone except for my band teacher, Mr. Oberon.

*JAMES OBERON is just a few years from retirement and is a passionate advocate for TED.*

OBERON

Mr. Kaczynski, please do not allow Ted to skip another grade level. High school is more than just an educational experience. It is an opportunity to develop social maturity as well.

TURK

But don't college admissions look favorably on applicants that graduate at such a young age?

OBERON

Some will, yes.

TURK

And you've said yourself that Ted needs to be challenged more than he is now.

OBERON

Academically, yes.

TURK

The kid's a genius.

OBERON

On that, we agree. But—

TURK

—And no one is going to hold him back. You got it?

*TURK and OBERON disappear, replaced by TED.*

TED

And so begins my senior year. I join the chess, biology, German and mathematics clubs. I collect coins. I read ravenously and wildly. I explore the music of Bach, Vivaldi and Wagner. Gabrieli. Berlioz.

*TED walks over to the trombone in the corner.*

TED

And I am awarded a scholarship to Harvard University. Which prompts another pleading by Mr. Oberon.

*TED is JAMES OBERON once more.*

OBERON

Please, Mr. Kaczynski, if I may speak frankly. Ted's too young, too immature, and Harvard too impersonal. He could easily fall between the cracks.

TURK

You expect my son to refuse a full scholarship to Harvard? If that is so, Mr. Oberon, I question your motives and the sincerity of your concern for Ted's future. He *will* be attending Harvard in the fall, majoring in mathematics.

*TED picks up the trombone from its stand.*

TED

To first generation Polish immigrants, a son attending Harvard is the pinnacle of the American Dream. How can I deny them this?

*TED, the trombone in one hand, sets the desk chair downstage center.*

TED

After all, it *is* Harvard. I welcome the challenge. I'm sure to meet many "university intellectuals" who constitute the most highly socialized segment of our society and also the most leftist segment. And leftists are such fun and so easy to confound.

*TED sits.*

TED

Harvard has a long and storied history. Quite a contrast from Evergreen Park Community High with its paint still wet to the touch.

*He warms the embouchure with his hands and breath.*

TED

Nathan Marsh Pusey, the 24th president of Harvard University and in office during my attendance, will now provide some of the most momentous dates in the Harvard annals.

*TED begins to play the opening Allegro of Hector Berlioz's 'Roman Carnival Overture Opus 9.'*

*After the first few bars, TED stands and props the trombone against his chair.*

*The music, however, continues.*

*TED becomes Harvard President PUSEY, mid 50s, with still a hint of his midwestern roots.*

PUSEY

In 1638, John Harvard wills his library of 400 books and half his estate to the establishment of a College. In recognition, the Great and General Court orders "that the college agreed upon formerly to be built at Cambridge shall be called Harvard College."

- In 1642, the first Harvard commencement, with nine graduates.
- In 1776, eight Harvard alumni sign the Declaration of Independence.
- In 1817, Harvard Law School is established.

PUSEY  
(continued)

- In 1836, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is appointed professor.
- In 1879, The Harvard Annex, later known as Radcliffe College, opens with 27 female students.
- In 1903, Franklin D. Roosevelt is elected president of the Harvard Crimson.
- In 1914, Professor Theodore William Richards wins the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, the first of 28 Harvard Nobel laureates.
- In 1955, Helen Keller is the first woman to receive a Harvard honorary degree.
- In 1975, an equal admissions policy for male and female undergraduates is adopted.

This seems an appropriate point at which to conclude.

*A moment, then TED takes over from PUSEY and returns to his chair.*

*He resumes playing, seamlessly merging with the music that has continued throughout. The sound comes only from TED'S trombone as the musical piece quickly reaches its conclusion.*

*TED stands and returns the chair and the trombone to their previous locations.*

*He goes again to centerstage.*

TED

- In 1850, a Harvard professor, John White Webster, kills his medical school colleague, Dr. George Parkman, because he owed Parkman money and couldn't pay it back. A janitor finds parts of Parkman's body cemented behind a brick vault below Webster's laboratory. Investigators later find other body parts strewn around the lab.
- In 1906, Harvard dropout Harry Kendall Thaw shoots and kills America's most famous architect, Stanford White, at the old Madison Square Garden. Thaw was incensed that his wife had slept with White.

*TED circles the room, remembering.*