

BEN. You got your free legal work from my firm; now I'm not going to be on your board of directors, too.

NED. I got our free legal work from your firm by going to Norman and he said, "Of course, no problem." I asked him, "Don't you have to put it before your committee?" And he said, "Nah, I'll just tell them we're going to do it."

BEN. Well . . . you got it.

NED. All I'm asking for is the use of your name. You don't have to do a thing. This is an honorary board. For the stationary.

BEN. Ned, come on—it's your cause, not mine.

NED. That is just an evasion!

BEN. It is not. I don't ask you to help me with the Larchmont school board, do I?

NED. But I would if you asked me.

BEN. But I don't.

NED. Would you be more interested if you thought this was a straight disease?

BEN. It has nothing to do with your being gay.

NED. Of course it has. What else has it got to do with?

BEN. I've got other things to do.

NED. But I'm telling you you don't have to do a thing!

BEN. The answer is No.

NED. It's impossible to get this epidemic taken seriously. I wrote a letter to the gay newspaper and some guy wrote in, "Oh there goes Ned Weeks again; he wants us all to die so he can say 'I told you so.'"

BEN. He sounds like a crazy.

NED. It kept me up all night.

BEN. Then you're crazy, too.

NED. I ran into an old friend I hadn't seen in years in the subway, and I said, "Hello, how are you?" He started screaming, "You're giving away all our secrets, you're

painting us as sick, you're destroying homosexuality"—and then he tried to slug me. Right there in the subway. Under Bloomingdale's.

BEN. Another crazy.

NED. We did raise \$50,000 at our dance last week. That's more money than any gay organization has ever raised at one time in this city before.

BEN. That's wonderful, Ned. So you must be beginning to do something right.

NED. And I made a speech appealing for volunteers and we got over a hundred people to sign up, including a few women. And I've got us on Donahue. I'm going to be on Donahue with a doctor and a patient.

BEN. Don't tell your mother.

NED. Why not?

BEN. She's afraid someone is going to shoot you. *(BEN rolls the model house stage center and pulls off the cover.)*

NED. What about you? Aren't you afraid your corporate clients will say, "Was that your faggot brother I saw on TV?" Excuse me—is this a bad time? You seem pre-occupied.

BEN. Do I? I'm sorry. A morning with the architect is enough to shake me up a little bit. It's going to cost more than I thought.

NED. More?

BEN. Twice as much.

NED. Two million?

BEN. I can handle it.

NED. You can? That's very nice. You know, Ben, one of these days I'll make you agree that over twenty million men and women are not all here on this earth because of something requiring the services of a psychiatrist.

BEN. Oh, it's up to twenty million now, is it? Every

time we have this discussion, you up the ante.

NED. We haven't had this discussion in years, Ben. And we grow, just like everybody else.

BEN. Look, I try to understand. I read stuff. (*picking up a copy of Newsweek, with "Gay America" on the cover*) I open magazines and I see pictures of you guys in leather and chains and whips and black masks, with captions saying this is a social worker, this is a computer analyst, this is a schoolteacher—and I say to myself, "This isn't Ned."

NED. No, it isn't. It isn't most of us. You know the media always dramatizes the most extreme. Do you think we all wear dresses, too?

BEN. Don't you?

NED. Me, personally? No, I do not.

BEN. But then you tell me how you go to the bathhouses and fuck blindly, and to me that's not so different from this. You guys don't seem to understand why there are rules, and regulations, guidelines, responsibilities. You guys have a dreadful image problem.

NED. I know that! That's what has to be changed. That's why it's so important to have people like you supporting us. You're a respected person. You already have your dignity.

BEN. We better decide where we're going to eat lunch and get out of here. I have an important meeting.

NED. Do you? How important? I've asked for your support.

BEN. In every area I consider important you have my support.

NED. In some place deep inside of you you still think I'm sick. Isn't that right? Okay. Define it for me. What do you mean by "sick"? Sick unhealthy? Sick perverted? Sick I'll get over it? Sick to be locked up?

BEN. I think you've adjusted to life quite well.

NED. All things considered? (*BEN nods.*) In the only area I consider important I don't have your support at all. The single-minded determination of all you people to forever see us as sick helps keep us sick.

BEN. I saw how unhappy you were!

NED. So were you! You wound up going to shrinks, too. We grew up side by side. We both felt pretty much the same about Mom and Pop. I refuse to accept for one more second that I was damaged by our childhood while you were not.

BEN. But we all don't react the same way to the same thing.

NED. That's right. So I became a writer and you became a lawyer. I'll agree to the fact that I have any number of awful character traits. But not to the fact that whatever they did to us as kids automatically made me sick and gay while you stayed straight and healthy.

BEN. Well, that's the difference of opinion we have over theory.

NED. But your theory turns me into a man from Mars. My theory doesn't do that to you.

BEN. Are you suggesting it was wrong of me to send you into therapy so young? I didn't think you'd stay in it forever.

NED. I didn't think I'd done anything wrong until you sent me into it. Ben, you know you mean more to me than anyone else in the world; you always have. Although I think I've finally found someone I like . . . Don't you understand?

BEN. No, I don't understand.

NED. You've got to say it. I'm the same as you. Just say it. Say it!

BEN. No, you're not. I can't say it.

NED. (*He is heartbroken.*) Every time I lose this fight it hurts more. I don't want to have lunch. I'll see you. (*He starts out.*)

BEN. Come on, lemon, I still love you. Sarah loves you. Our children. Our cat. Our dog.

NED. You think this is a joke!

BEN. (*angry*) You have my love and you have my legal advice and my financial supervision. I can't give you the courage to stand up and say to me that you don't give a good healthy fuck what I think. Please stop trying to wring some admission of guilt out of me. I am truly happy that you've met someone. It's about time. And I'm sorry your friends are dying . . .

NED. If you're so sorry, join our honorary board and say you're sorry out loud!

BEN. My agreeing you were born just like I was born is not going to help save your dying friends.

NED. Funny — that's exactly what I think will help save my dying friends.

BEN. Ned — you can be gay and you can be proud no matter what I think. Everybody is oppressed by somebody else in some form or another. Some of us learn how to fight back, with or without the help of others, despite their opinions, even those closest to us. And judging from this mess your friends are in, it's imperative that you stand up and fight to be prouder than ever.

NED. Can't you see that I'm trying to do that? Can't your perverse ego proclaiming its superiority see that I'm trying to be proud? You can only find room to call yourself normal.

BEN. You make me sound like I'm the enemy.

NED. I'm beginning to think that you and your straight world are our enemy. I am furious with you, and with myself and with every goddamned doctor who ever told

me I'm sick and interfered with my loving a man. I'm trying to understand why nobody wants to hear we're dying, why nobody wants to help, why my own brother doesn't want to help. Two million dollars — for a house! We can't even get twenty-nine cents from the city. You still think I'm sick, and I simply cannot allow that any longer. I will not speak to you again until you accept me as your equal. Your healthy equal. Your brother! (*He runs out.*)

SCENE 7

NED's apartment. FELIX, working on an article, is spread out on the floor with books, note pad, comforter, and pillows. NED enters, eating from a pint of ice cream.

NED. At the rate I'm going, no one in this city will be talking to me in about three more weeks. I had another fight with Bruce today. I slammed the phone down on him. I don't know why I do that — I'm never finished saying what I want to, so I just have to call him back, during which I inevitably work myself up into another frenzy and hang up on him again. That poor man doesn't know what to do with me. I don't think people like me work at Citibank.

FELIX. Why can't you see what an ordinary guy Bruce is? I know you think he has hidden qualities, if you just give him plant food he'll grow into the fighter you are. He can't. All he's got is a lot of good looking Pendleton shirts.

NED. I know there are better ways to handle him. I just can't seem to. This epidemic is killing friendships,