

DELMARVA RADIO THEATRE

A KISS FOR GERTRUDE

By Harold O. Wilson

Adapted for Radio by the Author

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR:

Thurmond Roydal

Johan Wolfgang Ballack

Joshua Summers

Dean Johnson

Student 1

Student 2

Student 3 and also Jordan Roberts

Colleague and also Alex Collingwood

MUSIC

NARRATOR:

The room is a single-bed dorm room in a redbrick building constructed before the Civil War. It is hot and musty and smells of age and decay. Thurmond Roydal crosses the room and lifts a black and white promotional photograph of Gertrude Lawrence from his dresser. He studies the woman's features for a moment then gently traces the outline of her face with his fingers. Her look is withdrawn and distant. A highlight on her lower lip expresses its contour and contributes to this appearance of melancholy. On her mouth, the dried smudge of a kiss soils the glass, then there is another, partial, overlaying the first. Clearly visible, each kiss is a translucent whitish stain hovering above the image.

With the thumb of his right hand Thurmond smears the marks on the glass and places the picture back on the dresser. He takes up his coat, pulls a thin Latin text from a stack of books on his desk, slides it into his pocket and leaves the room. It is Saturday morning December 7, 1958 and the campus of Price College is quiet. On the pattern of brick walkways that unite the college buildings, Thurmond meets only one other student. Hunched against the winter cold, her books clutched to her chest, she approaches and passes nodding a perfunctory greeting. Thurmond mumbles an acknowledgement, glances at her face and presses on toward the Malcolm Heath Language Arts Building and his meeting with Dr. John Ballack. A light snow is falling.

MUSIC

Founded by Dorgan Price in 1827, Price College believes itself to be an intellectual enclave called to cast out ignorance from the northwest Georgia farm country. Thurmond believes it to be a desert—dry and sterile in its physical and intellectual isolation. Set in a dusty rural town, its physical plant is enclosed by a low rock wall on its north and south sides and along its back. In the front, the wall follows a convex curve, the apogee of which is broken by a stone archway that provides entry to the campus from the east. “Price College, *Pro Deo et Ecclesia*, 1827” is carved on a polished granite slab across the top of the arch. Constrained by a religious fundamentalism which it struggles periodically to reach beyond, the intellectual life of Price College has never been able to transcend the motto cut in stone above its door.

Thurmond stops now before the Heath building and turns to face the front of the chapel. With its white spire and six columns, it dominates the college. A protective and guiding father standing over the seven academic buildings arrayed before it, the chapel regulates the physical, academic and moral life of the institution. It represents everything Thurmond hates about the school; the arrogance of its certitude, the deceit of its hypocrisy and the smugness of its intellectual security peck at his own self-assurance with an uneasy persistence. The Georgian architecture strikes him as too austere and the compulsory chapel services each Wednesday he finds intrusive as well as dull and uninspiring. On this December morning, obscure and confident, it faces him through the shroud of falling snow. Its brick walkways arrayed like tentacles reach to draw him in and its six white columns are set like bared teeth in a wide gaping mouth. Thurmond fingers the Latin text in his coat pocket, backs up the first two steps of the Heath building then turns and bounds up to the landing and through the great oak entrance door.

The interior of the building is stifling hot, oppressive. Thurmond crosses the foyer and removes his coat. He drags his fingers thumping along the wainscoting as he walks down the empty middle corridor. On his left he mounts the stairway leading to the second floor and takes the steps two at a time. Halfway down the second floor corridor he stops at a partially opened door marked Johann Wolfgang Ballack, Ph.D., Classical Languages. Thurmond knocks as he enters. Seated behind his desk, Dr. Ballack gestures for Thurmond to take a seat.

BALLACK:

Read, Mr. Roydal, read.

NARRATOR:

Thurmond drapes his coat across the arm of his chair and takes his text from its pocket.

ROYDAL:

Ipse loco medius rerum novitate paventem, Sol oculis iuvenem, quibus adspicit omnia, vidit— ”

BALLACK

No, no, Mr. Roydal, in English. In English. Translate,

NARRATOR:

He leans back in his chair and rests his arms across his chest. In his mid sixties, John Ballack does not look like a man who has spent his life pouring over obscure texts in dusty stacks or wandering in the maze of academia. He is a large man, heavy, with a gray complexion and generous silverwhite hair that he slicks down and combs straight back. Even though it is Saturday he has covered his ample frame in a dark three piece suit set off by a purple tie and matching handkerchief. His vest is buttoned tight across his chest. Unmoving, his arms resting now across his stomach, his gray fingers laced on the black fabric, John Ballack resembles a stolid glistening stone, smoothed and polished to a high sheen.

Thurmond closes his text and looks at the man across the desk.

ROYDAL:

“And From their center. The all-seeing Sun saw this young man, who trembled / At all the strangeness. ‘Phaethon,’ he said, / Why have you come here to this highest of dwellings? / What do you seek, O Phaethon, my son? / Without doubt my son?” And the boy answered: / ‘O common light of the great universe, / Phoebus, my father, if I have the right / To use that name, and my mother is not lying / To hide some guilt with false pretense, / Give me proof my father, so people will believe me, / Know me for what I am and free my mind / from doubting!’

BALLACK:

Beautiful, Mr. Roydal. Very impressive,... particularly for a freshman. Is the translation yours or have you simply memorized someone else’s?

NARRATOR:

John Ballack’s eyebrows lift slightly and he nods his head a little to the right which Thurmond sees as incredulity.

ROYDAL:

With some help from Humphries the translation is mine, then I memorized it.

BALLACK:

Come, Mr. Roydal, all of *Metamorphoses*?

NARRATOR:

John Ballack is still leaning back in his chair. The gray stone face smiles now.

ROYDAL:

No, Dr. Ballack, just Chapter II.”

BALLACK:

You do amaze me, Mr. Roydal. You read Latin like a scholar and yet you are failing in all your other classes except theatre. You help students with their calculus, yet you are failing in math. You help students with their themes, yet you are failing English. And it is the same in history.... Is there an explanation, Mr. Roydal?

NARRATOR:

John Ballack is leaning forward now. He fingers a small gold scale on his desk and the great stone face is concerned. The best Latin student he has had in his thirty-five years of teaching and he is on the verge of losing him. Thirty-five years of teaching a dead language to dead students in a department now teetering on the edge of extinction and the one student who makes the language live, who has the power to reawaken its vitality within Ballack himself will be expelled at the end of the semester or at least, if there is no change at the end of the school year.

All this Thurmond reads in the troubled stone face. But he has no answer. He cannot help Johann Wolfgang Ballack.

MUSIC

NARRATOR:

John Ballack sees the end of his career. He knows he is being gently eased out and it is not the way he expected to finish. He admits to himself that his interest in the language, his desire to teach has been drying up for years now. The stony demeanor he projects is only a veneer to protect the fragility of his self confidence. He is convinced there is nothing he can do now to stop his disintegration. His Latin classes are crumbling beneath him; there were only five students in his advanced class and no one signed up for beginning Latin this semester. Old Dr. Morris in Greek was forced out last year and Ballack was given the three students who remained. Then the inevitable, a young hotshot Ph.D. from Yale is hired for next year to enliven, no, to resurrect the Department—like Lazarus, raise it from the dead was the phrase the dean used. And now, in the midst of the decay, Thurmond has rekindled in him the excitement and beauty of the language, stirred in him again the desire to discover and to teach. But John Ballack does not completely embrace this new found energy. His mind tells him there is something of a threat in this strange boy, something unsettling in the nervous enthusiasm Thurmond brings into Ballack’s graveyard of the classics.

John Ballack is egotistical enough to believe he has made a contribution to the academic world of Latin and Greek. His countless articles and presentations at prestigious classical language symposia, his three university textbooks written with a colleague from Wisconsin, two in Latin and one in Greek, did lead for a time to the guarded deference expected from colleagues in the field. Now invitations are few, publications almost nonexistent and he knows he is coasting to a close. It has been smooth and easy, his time at Price. In fact, John Ballack has never done anything untold or exceptional in his life, not in his classroom and not in his private life. He attends chapel and church regularly, married well and raised three children who are successful. He mourned appropriately and received with grace the condolences of his friends and colleagues when his wife died of cancer, accepted their casseroles and dinner invitations with magnanimity and would have melted away at Price College if it had not been for Thurmond Roydal.

John Ballack is fidgeting with the gold balance now and he notices Thurmond watching his fingers turn the little replica one way and then another.

ROYDAL:

A memento, Dr. Ballack?

BALLACK:

A gift from a student a few years back...said she found my name in a new story by Heinrich Böll,... 'The Balek Scale.' My name is spelled differently but still, there it is. I'm the villain in that story, you know.

NARRATOR:

John Ballack sets the scale aside and leans back in his chair. The great stone face looks tired now, resigned to something inevitable.

BALLACK:

Every subject except Latin and theatre, Mr. Roydal, you're failing every subject and there is no need. Why have you come here,... to this place? Certainly there were other opportunities.

NARRATOR:

Thurmond stands and turns toward the door.

ROYDAL:

My father sent me. The great *Sol Oculis*, all-seeing, all-knowing sun god who directs the affairs of the earth from a tower in New York. He sent me. The great light of the universe decided I should descend from Teaneck, New Jersey to this barren...this place withered and sere that is, to paraphrase Böll in the story you mention, more than fifty-five grams short of justice.

NARRATOR:

Thurmond takes the doorknob in his hand, lifts his coat from the chair, studies the great stone face for a moment then looks around the office.

ROYDAL:

And the reason? Well, that's becoming clear now.

NARRATOR:

And he passes into the corridor.

John Ballack *was* tired; now he is exhausted. This young man with so much potential he finds wearying and exhilarating at the same time.

MUSIC

NARRATOR:

The snow is still falling. The cold has deepened and the pods of the magnolia trees have managed to capture and stockpile a few of the flakes. Thurmond hurries along the brick walk to the library; his eyes never leave the chapel entrance passing to his right. In the library he meets a fellow student and spends an hour helping him with his math. From there he descends to LongJohn's café in town and over lunch in the steamy little coffee shop feeds lines to the girl who has the lead in the student production of *Antigone*.

Back in his room Thurmond shakes the droplets of water from his coat, tosses it on the bed and takes the photograph from the dresser. Seated at his desk, he looks across the radiator and out his window at the chapel. It has not moved and keeps its side to him. He studies the eyes in the photograph; they don't look at him but past him into some void. In these eyes, the high cheekbones and angular chin of the woman, Thurmond feels a profound sadness. It is as though she is locked in this cheap frame—a black and white world controlled and dictated by others—a world fifty-five grams short of justice. He raises the frame to his face and kisses the portrait on the lips once and then once again. Now he turns the picture over and traces his finger over the word he has written on the back, "Mother."

Thurmond places the photograph on the dresser, checks the chapel out his window one more time, then takes out a Latin text. He translates three pages on Stoicism from Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* then works and reworks his translation until it sparkles. This he places in his notebook. Next he writes a theme for English exploring the impact of guilt and homosexuality in Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," completes a history paper on Deism and the Founding Fathers, then works for an hour on calculus problems. Except for required reading, this completes his assignments for the week. He now reviews the work he has done, makes corrections, refinements, places it in a neat pile then deposits it in the wastebasket.

MUSIC

Wednesday morning December 11 is clear and cold. There is no snow and the chapel stands unshrouded. The time is seven forty-five and the bell is calling the college to morning services. Students arriving up the brick walkways knot up at the stairs leading to the porch then pass through the opening in the center between the six white pillars. They disburse on the portico and make their way into the chapel through small entry doors on either side and a large double door in the center. Inside, there is a foyer with stairs at either end to access the balcony. Three doors open the foyer to the sanctuary which also serves as an auditorium. In the sanctuary everything is white. The vaulted ceiling is white, the walls are white with large clear-glass small-pane windows, and the three banks of pews are white. Lighting is provided by three massive brass chandeliers that hang from the vault over the center bank of pews. Brass sconces between the windows supplement the light from the chandeliers. The chancel is a raised stage. It is bare except for a blond mahogany ambo or lectern placed at center front and a pedestal stage right standing against the black curtain of the back wall. On the pedestal is an urn containing a tall monkshood plant with purplish-blue blossoms. This is the prop for *Antigone* which will be played in black tie and evening dress on an otherwise empty stage.

The faculty takes the first three rows in the center bank of pews. Behind them sit the freshmen, followed by the sophomores and finally the juniors. Seniors take the remainder of the seats as they wish. This includes the balcony. The bell ceases tolling at exactly eight o'clock and the college chaplain takes his place at the lectern. This is the ritual every Wednesday morning and is no exception on this cold morning. The chaplain is Joshua Summers. He is also the minister of the local Baptist Church which holds Sunday services in the chapel. Summers begins with an invocation and then invites the congregation to rise and join in the hymn of praise, "All glory laude and honor to Thee Redeemer King." The organ leads out from the balcony. Following the hymn the faculty and students all sit except for one student in the freshman section who remains standing. Looking down at his text, Summers does not notice the student and begins the scripture.

SUMMERS:

I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

Isaiah is speaking here of our Lord Jesus Christ,...

NARRATOR:

Raising his eyes from the lectern he is aware now of the standing student, he nods,

SUMMERS:

Please be seated.

NARRATOR:

And Summers turns back to his text. The student does not move. A soft murmur and shuffling like the low hum of bees rises from among the seated students and floats across the sanctuary. Faculty members shift in their pews to look at the cause of the disturbance. A student crosses the stage and slides a note onto the lectern.

SUMMERS:

Mr. Roydal, please take your seat so we can proceed.

NARRATOR:

Instead of sitting down, Thurmond turns his back on the chaplain and facing the student body, loosely crosses his arms on his chest.

SUMMERS:

Mr. Roydal, please. We can't proceed until you've taken your seat,

NARRATOR:

Thurmond hears the chaplain but does not listen. He hears the murmuring, feels the shuffling growing in insistence but still does not move. In truth, he is scared to death, but he could not sit down now if he wanted to. He is held up by something more than himself. He looks at the students and what he sees is a wall of white faces, arrogant, certain in their privilege, confident in the superiority of their race, their class. Individually the faces are not uniform; they are pink, red, gray, in varying shades. Still for all that, they are all white. In the kitchen and dining hall Thurmond knows black faces, a black face cleans his room and talks to him about her family, black faces rake leaves, remove snow, pick up the campus. But in the squirming, restless mass before him and in the pews at his back, there are only white faces, smug in the knowledge of their dominance and power. The morning sun is cracking through the chapel windows now, ricocheting off the walls in head splitting shafts of brilliance. Thurmond is sweating; the bigotry, the mind numbing ideology, and the assured authority of the place wash over him like a nauseating sickness. No, he will not sit down. He has sharpened into an obstinate presence, the other, offered as an offence to this mass of self-absorbed supremacy that is fifty-five grams short of justice.

Dean Samuel Johnson has replaced the chaplain at the lectern.

JOHNSON:

Mr. Roydal, you are creating an intolerable disturbance. If you don't take a seat, we will have you removed from the chapel."

STUDENT 1:

Sit down, jerk.

STUDENT 2

Yeah, Jerk.

Student 3:

You know he kisses photographs. He smooches a picture, the pervert,

NARRATOR:

"Pervert," is called out again and is taken up as a chant,

STUDENTS:

"per vert, per vert, per vert!

(laughter and the stamping of feet in rhythm with the chant, "per vert, per vert.")

NARRATOR:

Dean Johnson's arms are raised in an attempt to quiet the students. He is useless. The noise of laughter, shouting, and the chant of per vert have all joined in a rhythmic crescendo of sound. In accompaniment, a student has taken over the organ and is pounding out a cord in support of the chant: thrum dum, thrum dum, thrum dum.

Thurmond does not move. He is amazed, confused, and frightened.

The first missile is an eraser. It strikes Thurmond on the shoulder and a cheer goes up from the students. Next is a wad of paper that misses and almost strikes a faculty member. An involuntary ooh and then laughter break the chant. Now there is a shower of debris launched at Thurmond: erasers, pencils, Jujubes, gumdrops, and wads of paper. He doesn't move and doesn't try to shield his face.

The noise drops instantly when two local policemen enter the sanctuary. The dean is back in control now. He nods and the officers separate and walk down the two center aisles. They clear the pew of students where Thurmond is standing, and one on either side, take him by the arms.

JOHNSON:

Escort Mr. Roydal to my office please, gentlemen. I believe that will be quite enough now. Go to class please.

MUSIC

NARRATOR:

The officers escort Thurmond out of the auditorium. They are followed by the students then the faculty. John Ballack remains seated.

FACULTY MEMBER

Isn't he a student of yours, John,

BALLACK:

Yes, It's unfortunate, isn't it... he appears to be quite an unstable young man.

FACULTY MEMBER:

We do get a few, don't we...? Are you coming, John?

BALLACK:

In a moment... I'll be along in a moment.

NARRATOR:

John Ballack was horrified to watch his prize student systematically destroy himself. Now Ballack is also frightened. He knows he is identified with the boy. He has spoken affectionately about him, argued for a little forbearance concerning his eccentricity, and touted, to the annoyance of his colleagues Thurmond's facility with Latin. The faculty members to whom he has confided tell John Ballack that they are witness to no academic merit in Thurmond Roydal. They suspect also a lack of religious grounding and a certain contempt for Southern ways. These traits they tended to excuse, however, because after all he *is* from New Jersey, so wouldn't you know. What they can not excuse, is that the boy does not seem to understand that it is a privilege to be on this campus, an honor to have been chosen to study at Price College. John Ballack knows that this stunt in the chapel marks the end for Thurmond Roydal; his mental instability now confirmed for all his detractors.

Instead of following the faculty out of the chapel, John Ballack remains in his pew. The great gray stone, the grand menhir polished to a high sheen, impressive in his passive immensity is shaken to his foundation. Only the silver hair slicked back, the three piece dark suit with its pocket handkerchief and the hard immobile features of the great stone face hide the pile of rubble that was once Ballack's unassailable wall of confidence.

When he leaves the chapel John Ballack does not go to his class. He decides the students will quickly get the idea he's not coming. What is it, ten minutes they have to wait? It is the first class he has ever intentionally missed. "*Das ist mir scheißegal,*" he mutters and avoiding the brick walkway he crosses on the bare earth to the dorm facing the side of the chapel and lets himself into Thurmond Roydal's room. Seated on the small bed which is now weighted to an impressive sag, Ballack reaches for the framed photograph on the dresser. He frowns at the smudge marks on the glass, looks at the eyes that stare past him into the void. Now John Ballack understands. It is certainly a publicity photograph but it has captured the essence of loneliness, a deep emptiness in the midst of fawning care. This woman is a captive not of her art, but of her handlers. She is not an object of erotic fantasy or even of maternal love. She is an affirmation of something deeper. It is the will to endure that he sees...yes, that's it, the will to endure against all odds. And John Ballack feels the shame of his own lack of courage.

The door opens as Ballack studies the photograph now resting in his lap. From his expression it is clear Thurmond Roydal is surprised to see the great stone face in his room, his immensity crushing his bed. He is more surprised to see Ballack analyzing the portrait of Gertrude Lawrence. Ballack raises the picture, flashes it toward Roydal then places it back on the dresser.

BALLACK:

Well? What did he say, Mr. Roydal?

ROYDAL: Nothing, There'll be a disciplinary hearing at three o'clock in the dean's office.

BALLACK:

Do you know who'll be there?

ROYDAL:

Dean Johnson, President Thorndike, and Dr. Pritchard.

BALLACK:

(Muttering) Thorny dick and Bitch hard the religious prig, Jesus, what is happening to him. They're going to dismiss you, you know. Send you home.

ROYDAL:

Yes...I believe so,

BALLACK:

Doesn't that bother you? What possessed you, Mr. Roydal?

NARRATOR:

John Ballack is standing now and Thurmond has taken off his coat and thrown it on the bed. They face each other across the small room that has witnessed the troubles of young men for over a hundred and thirty-one years. The room is indifferent to their drama and offers nothing but the perspective of time.

ROYDAL:

What possessed me. Certainly I thought you would know...you could see... All these years you've held the balance in your hands knowing the hypocrisy, the injustice. Christ, of all people you should understand.

BALLACK:

Of course I understand...You raised the curtain, didn't you; did the righteous deed. A small gesture to trouble the social order. How noble you are, Mr. Roydal.

ROYDAL:

I am no Amos, Dr. Ballack, to call down justice from the heavens. I'm just the worm in the beam that exposes the rotten wood, that's all. And the social order—look around you, the social order is already boiling far more than you can imagine.

BALLACK:

Yes, yes...we shall see. I'm going to the dean now, Mr. Roydal, but you know I can't save you.

NARRATOR:

Thurmond sits at his desk and takes the photograph from his dresser. He sets it on a book resting to one side of the desk, turns in his chair to face the great stone menhir glistening by the door,

ROYDAL:

Nor I you, Dr. Ballack.

MUSIC:

John Ballack knows what to expect from Dr. Johnson, but the rebuke is none the less demeaning and humiliating.

JOHNSON:

Dr. Ballack, how dare you represent that boy as anything but mentally incompetent. The mere insinuation that he should be placed on probation and given another chance is an affront to common decency and everything Price College stands for. In the best light, that simpleton mocked the authority of the college and trampled on the honor of studying at this institution. No, he will be told at three o'clock that he is dismissed and must vacate the premises before six o'clock tomorrow morning. The Greyhound bus stops at LongJohn's café at eleven this evening and he should be on it. Any of his possessions he cannot carry with him shall be placed in a trunk which we will ship to him post haste. And you, John, if I were you I would be careful of the students I befriend in the future. A little more discretion would be advised.

BALLACK:

(Sotto voce) Discretion indeed. How amusing. What does that self-righteous bastard Johnson know of discretion. His whole life is defined by caution. Mr. Roydal, Mr. Roydal, that worm in the wood is right—the time for accommodation is past. Damn you Mr. Roydal! And John Ballack feels that he is standing on the edge of a great abyss.

MUSIC

NARRATOR:

Thurmond is gone the next morning when John Ballack enters his eight o'clock class. The desk in the back of the room that had held his lanky presence is empty of substance and intellect. The void that Ballack feels in the room now is like death. Death now sitting in Thurmond's empty seat mocking him. Behind his desk, watching death cross his legs and flash an indifferent smirk, John Ballack is listening to a student struggle through Tacitus' Annals.

BALLACK:

"Please, Mr. Roberts, *abutebaris modo subjunctivo denuo*.

ROBERTS: *(One of the chanting students.)*

Sir?

Ballack:

I said you're screwing up the subjunctive again, Mr. Roberts... Please, it's a cold day, dig those spurs in and get that pony moving a little better before we all stiffen up from catatonic boredom. *Jesus Christ*, we should be reading Catullus' poems today. That would liven this dreary morning, keep us awake now, wouldn't it...

NARRATOR:

Ballack stands, raises his hands in frustration, and looking at the specter at Thurmond's desk,

BALLACK:

Bugger you. Yes bugger you. Class dismissed.

NARRATOR:

John Ballack cancels his second period class as well and retreats to his office. As he enters, he immediately notices a framed photograph on his desk. It is a black and white publicity photograph of Gertrude Lawrence. In fact it is *the* photograph of Gertrude Lawrence Thurmond Roydal had in his room. Ballack sits at his desk and lifts the picture. He turns it over and on the back the word Mother has been expanded to read, "The Mother of us all." A little below, also in Thurmond Roydal's hand is written: "*Illigitimum non carborundom*, they are all fifty-five grams short of justice." The great stone face smiles at the cliché in Latin,

BALLACK:

Okay, okay, so don't let the bastards grind you down.

MUSIC

NARRATOR:

Wednesday, December 18 offers a beautiful cold morning and as the students and faculty file into the chapel for services all are giddy with the prospect of Christmas vacation. The stage-set in the sanctuary has not changed. The lectern is in its place and the deadly purple-blue monkhood observes the inflow of white faces from its pedestal against the black curtain. Summers takes his place behind the lectern and offers the invocation. With everyone standing, the congregation sings "Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel." Following the hymn, as is his custom, Summers turns to the scripture.

SUMMERS:

Keeping with the season of Advent, let us read Isaiah and the great foretelling of the coming of Jesus Christ. *Behold my servant*, he reads, *whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth:...*

NARRATOR:

A small wave of laughter breaks across the sanctuary and Summers looks up. In front of him, in the first row of faculty pews Johann Wolfgang Ballack is still standing. He glances up at Summers then turns to face his colleagues and students. Carefully and deliberately he crosses his arms on his great paunch. The majestic polished menhir is looking his best. A dark-blue three-

piece suit with a bloodred tie accents the majesty of his great size. A matching handkerchief is showing purpose in his breast pocket. His silver hair is slicked back and his face is gray and regal. He is an imposing figure. No one moves, neither faculty nor students. Summers is rooted at his podium. The air is crackling and the sanctuary is tense with anticipation.

Seated next to John Ballack is Alex Collingwood from the English Department. He tugs at the hem of Ballack's coat and whispers,

COLLINGWOOD:

John, what are you doing? What *is* this?

BALLACK:

What is this?"

NARRATOR:

Ballack is staring out at the expanse of anonymous white faces.

BALLACK:

This is a kiss... Yes... this is a kiss for Gertrude.

NARRATOR:

The first missile to strike John Ballack is a harmless wad of paper. It bounces off his shoulder and drops to the floor. The second is an eraser. It strikes Ballack in the face and leaves an ugly red welt.

There is a moment of stunned silence, then, a delirious scream of delight explodes from the congregation and they are on him.

MUSIC