

## DOWNSTAIRS, UPSTAIRS

By Wendy MacLeod

A basement office with no windows. A light bulb dangles from the ceiling. STUART, in shirtsleeves, sits at a desk in an isolated pool of light. He wears a JC Penney tie askew, and taps at a computer terminal. There is the sound of dripping water. Stuart's belongings--a shaving kit, a toothbrush, a pillow--are strewn around. MAC enters, in an expensive suit, finding his way by flashlight.

MAC

There he is! There's my guy! What's the good word? How's life downstairs?

STUART

In the coal mines?

MAC

On the front lines!

STUART

In the trenches?

MAC

Below sea level!

STUART

Not as good as upstairs, I'll bet...

MAC

What do you know about upstairs?

STUART

Not enough!

MAC

I bring news of upstairs!

STUART

To the peasants?

MAC

To the plebes!

To the lowly! STUART

Are you not men? MAC

I like to think so.  
How are things? Upstairs? STUART

You don't want to know. MAC

I do. STUART

You'll turn green. You'll vomit with envy. MAC

Look at me! I'm already green! I'm a 70's appliance! I'm avocado! STUART

More of a pistachio... MAC

Maybe in full daylight. STUART

When do *you* see daylight? MAC

Approximately never. STUART

The two men laugh.

So what brings you down to the netherworld? STUART (CONT'D)

To the slave galley! MAC

To the bowels of the corporation! STUART

MAC

Funny thing is I don't *think* of it as a corporation.

STUART

No?

MAC

I think of it as a *family*.

Beat. The two men burst into laughter.

STUART

Tell me the truth. Do they even know we're down here?

MAC

Do they know...Your contributions have been noticed, my friend.

STUART

Bullshit.

MAC

I am a truth-teller.

STUART

Since when?

They briefly pummel each other.

MAC

More than noticed. Noted. Your work has been noted.

STUART

As well it should! I've been working my ass off!

MAC

I know you have.

STUART

I sleep here. I *live* here.

MAC

Don't we all?

STUART

No, I mean I actually live here.

Mac picks up a toothbrush.

MAC

When was the last time? You went out?

STUART

It must have been that birthday lunch.

MAC

For who? For Martin? When was that?

STUART

Must have been the 90's.

MAC

Was it *that* long ago?

STUART

Well he died in 2000. Remember? It was just after he moved upstairs.

MAC

Your dedication impresses me. But more importantly, it will impress them. They have sent me here. On a fact-finding mission.

STUART

They *sent* you? Is there...is there talk of bringing me up?

MAC

There is more than talk. But listen to me carefully, my friend. If they send for you, if your number comes up, say no.

STUART

*Is* my number coming up?

MAC

In exchange for copious amounts of money and unbelievable percs they will demand complete and total fealty. They will demand that you sign a contract. Your 401K will be seized if you so much as return a journalist's phone call!

STUART

How much money are we talking?

MAC

It's not about the money!

STUART

Yeah it is!

MAC

You can be bought, is that what you're saying? You admit you're a prostitute. Now we're just agreeing on the price?

STUART

I would love to be a prostitute! I just haven't had any customers yet! Tell me more about the percs!

MAC

Don't be that guy. Don't fall for the Beemers, the beachfront condos, the box seats at the opera!? They're just the cheese in the mousetrap!

STUART

I've never been to the opera.

MAC

You wouldn't like it. The women are fat!

STUART

It sounds like you don't want me upstairs....

MAC

Didn't we start out together? Didn't we take turns running to Starbuck's? Don't I know *exactly* how you like your cappucino?

STUART

Like you remember!

MAC

Venti, skim, dry.

They embrace.

MAC

Of course I want you upstairs! Selfishly. I'm just trying to advise you, to apprise you, to *warn* you.

STUART

But they sent you here! To find out about me! Doesn't that demonstrate their good will?

MAC

(lowering his voice)

If they *hadn't* sent me, I couldn't be here. We can only leave to go to the rest room.

STUART

Like kindergarten!

MAC

With guns.

Pause.

STUART

Couldn't I just *try* upstairs? I mean, if they make me an offer.

MAC

Upstairs is not a shoe store. "Do these come in black? Do they come in half sizes?" Upstairs is a *commitment*. Once you go upstairs, downstairs is no longer an option. Once you go upstairs, there are no other jobs. The headhunters can no longer *find* you. Once you go upstairs, you can kiss your nostalgic notions of retirement goodbye. There will be no lake house, no grandchildren, no *hobbies*. You will die at your desk and be taken away by janitors. Martin's body was still warm, for Christ sake. His cordovan loafer dangled pathetically from his recently deceased toe. Knowing all that, what will you say when they come to you?

STUART

This company is my home, Mac. I can't imagine working someplace else. I know all the departments, and the heads of all the departments, and when the bagels come, and what the initials stand for, and where my mailbox is and what times of day there's likely to be something in that mailbox. I couldn't leave all that. And if I'm going to work here, if I'm going to stay here, I'd just as soon be upstairs. At least I'd get a window. Wouldn't I?

MAC

You would. You would get a window.

STUART

That's enough for me.

MAC

You *will* get a window. After you sign this.

Mac produces a contract.

STUART

("you shouldn't have")

Mac.

MAC

We had to be sure.

Stuart signs.

**END OF PLAY**