

PROBLEM PLAY; Or, REDUCTIO

A Comic Rondo

By Ben Josephson

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### Cast of Characters

<u>LOU</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"
<u>NICO</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"
<u>PAT</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"
<u>ROBIN</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"
<u>BLAKE</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"
<u>ALEX</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"
<u>DALE</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"
<u>SIDNEY</u> :	Any gender, any age, any "race"

### Scene

Here. Set construction coincides with the action of the play.

### Time

Now.

PROBLEM PLAY; OR, REDUCTIO

All eight characters on a bare stage.

Slathered with turquoise-to-aqua face and body paint, the skins of all the characters are of a single hue, making the real-life pigmentation of each actor indiscernible. Each character wears a blouse that is loose enough to accommodate breasts and to balloon out where no breasts are. From the waist down, something as simple as gray sweat pants and white tennis shoes for everyone would suffice. The effect is to render each actor's gender indiscernible.

Each blouse is of a distinct color scheme and pattern, and characters each wear a distinctive cap or hat, so as to individuate their respective appearances.

Sidney scratches him/her self, and continues scratching every now and then as the play proceeds.

LOU

So, summing up then, and in conclusion: there exists one fundamental and overarching problem.

PAT

Ain't that the truth!

LOU

And the problem is common to us all.

BLAKE

Agreed.

ROBIN

(To Lou.)

Do you mean to say this is *my* problem, too?!

BLAKE

It certainly is *mine*.

ALEX

Lou is right. This is a problem that plagues every one of us.

BLAKE

That being so, it does plague you, too, Robin.

ROBIN

Thank you.

BLAKE

No problem.

LOU

What?!

BLAKE

Problem! Yes! Yes, we have a problem!

NICO

You bet we have. Big time.

BLAKE

(To Robin.)

"Thank you," you said. I say: you're welcome.

ROBIN

I am?!

BLAKE

You are welcome.

ROBIN

(Giving Blake a kiss.)

Oh, Blake, I could eat you up!

DALE

Sidney! Quit scratching!

ROBIN

I am welcome! Me! Welcome!

NICO

The urgent question is: what do we do about our problem?

DALE

Nothing.

LOU

Are you suggesting it is of little consequence?

DALE

Hell, no. The problem is ruining my life.

SIDNEY

As for me, I am perfectly happy to concede that every one of us does partake of this...how shall I say? Difficulty.

LOU

It is no mere difficulty.

SIDNEY

Well, whatever you want to call it, we all do in some measure partake.

LOU

In **full** measure, my friend.

PAT

I partake in fuller measure than any of you.

LOU

Our problem is transcendent, and it is all-embracing.

SIDNEY

I would not go that far, Lou. But there can be no question whatsoever that each and every one of us is firmly stuck in the predicament upon which you have expounded.

ALEX

It is not a predicament. It is a conundrum.

LOU

No! It is a problem! One great humongous **problem!!!**

ROBIN

Ha!

LOU

Ha, what?

ROBIN

What it is, actually: it is a **dilemma**. Ha, ha, ha!

LOU

Fool!

ROBIN

A dilemma! Pure and simple! Yes! I have just banged the old nail smack on its big fat head.

LOU

Idiot!

ROBIN

Really? Well, I am way, way smarter than you.

Robin sticks out his/her tongue.

NICO  
Shame on you, Robin! How dare you disrupt our deliberations!

ROBIN  
I did nothing more than point out that Lou is an imbecile.

NICO  
You...you saboteur!

ROBIN  
Oh, don't...Nico, please don't be mad at me.

NICO  
Shame!

ROBIN  
Please, oh please don't be mad!

NICO  
Shame, shame, shame!

Robin breaks into tears. Alex  
embraces him/her.

BLAKE  
Good, Alex. Hug Robin. Hug him or her tight.

ROBIN  
(Crying.)  
I am bad.

ALEX  
No. No, you are beautiful.

BLAKE  
(To Lou.)  
You forgive Robin, don't you?

LOU  
I forgive.

BLAKE  
(To Nico.)  
And you?

NICO  
We have a project to undertake.

BLAKE  
Who does?

NICO

Myself, Lou, and...

BLAKE

The rest of us?

NICO

I envision a concerted effort.

SIDNEY

(Offering to shake Nico's hand.)

I, for one, am willing and eager to pitch right in.

NICO

Get away from me!

BLAKE

Pat, will you lend a hand to our project?

PAT

What project?

BLAKE

Nico will tell you all about it.

ROBIN

Will Nico tell me, too?

BLAKE

I will see that she does.

(To Nico.)

Or should I say: "I will see that **he** does?"

(Pause. Then, taking Nico's arm.)

Reconcile.

NICO

(To Robin, as they shake hands.)

And you: cooperate.

ROBIN

Oh, I will. I will. But...

(To Alex.)

...Alex, you should not call me beautiful. I am not beautiful at all.

ALEX

Then what is it about you, Robin, that I ache so much to capture?

SIDNEY

(To Robin.)

My own perception is that, notwithstanding a peculiarity or two in your appearance, anyone with an iota of sensibility could see you are not entirely unappealing.

ALEX

What is it, Robin, if not your supreme and ineffable beauty, that I would pluck if I could and then, the instant past, bear into and through and beyond...far, far beyond time?

DALE

Eeeee...Alex! Get off it! Look at...at this pig!

ALEX

In your own way, Dale, you too are beautiful.

DALE

I am beautiful in **every** way. And you are all butt-ugly. I am the only one here who can look in a mirror without breaking it.

LOU

Enough! Back to our problem.

BLAKE

Yes. Nico, what is the plan?

NICO

Our action must be determined, persistent and broad-based.

BLAKE

Hear that, Pat? You will have lots to do.

PAT

I will have nothing to do. Count me out.

BLAKE

We shall do no such thing. We are about to make a mighty effort, and you will---

PAT

Do all the grunt work?

SIDNEY

So as to fire us up, Nico, and quicken our exertions toward the outcome you envision, kindly present your analysis and explain how, in consequence of same, this activity or that, as you will, might be desirable.

NICO

Stop scratching, will you?!

LOU

Now, now. Be kind to Sidney.

BLAKE

Yes. We must show compassion when one of those among us has a condition.



ALEX

Not just compassion. We must show love. Because, though Sidney be afflicted, there is beauty in him and/or her, too.

SIDNEY

Alex, you are so very gracious.

Sidney approaches Alex for an embrace. Alex jumps away.

ALEX

(To Blake.)

I will not join in whatever it is Nico has in mind, unless it embody what is most gorgeous in our earthly realm, and from there leap up to embrace the sublime.

NICO

One thing at a time.

DALE

That won't work.

NICO

I beg your pardon?

DALE

In order to move along one thing at a time, you first have to come up with thing number one.

BLAKE

Nico **has** come up with thing number one.

(To Nico.)

Tell Dale what it is.

NICO

We are working from the bottom up.

Pause.

SIDNEY

Allow me if you would, Nico, to rephrase that, in order to accommodate Dale's apparent need for especial assurance that you have launched us firmly on a steady course. What you said---and here I employ, inelegantly to be sure, just a figure of speech---was: we are preparing the groundwork.

LOU

That is not just a figure of speech. It is exactly what Nico just stated. We are preparing this ground right here...

(Stomps his/her foot.)

...where our problem confronts us right now.

(Pause.)

BLAKE

Nico?

(Pause.)

We are preparing this ground...

(Pause.)

We are preparing this ground...?

NICO

You make a statement. Then you repeat it as a question.

DALE

Because we want an answer.

NICO

Dale, go away.

LOU

(To Dale.)

Back off.

(To Nico.)

Nico, we do want an answer.

NICO

Logic, Lou. Logic! This ground...this ground is our ground. In order to prepare it...to prepare our ground, we must in some way alter it. Should we raise it? Should we lower it?

ROBIN

What we should do is sprinkle it.

LOU

You...keep your mouth shut! Nico is explaining.

NICO

In order to raise it, or to lower it, or to raise it and then lower it, or to lower it and then raise it, or to raise some parts and lower others, we must dig. This, Lou, is logic. Do you understand?

LOU

We must dig.

Pause.

BLAKE

Dig what?

NICO

That which logic dictates.

BLAKE

Logic, huh? Hmmm...

(Pause.)

(MORE)

BLAKE (cont'd)  
 Would you mind being explicit?

NICO  
 I am always explicit.

DALE  
 Sure you are!

NICO  
 (To Lou.)  
 Dale keeps taunting me. Yet you say nothing.

LOU  
 I say we dig. We dig that which logic dictates.

NICO  
 Then what are we waiting for?

DALE  
 How can you ask a rhetorical question at a time like this?

NICO  
 I forbid you to challenge me, Dale.

DALE  
 But how can you?

NICO  
 There was nothing rhetorical about that question.

DALE  
 Okay. Then what's the answer?

NICO  
 We are waiting for, uh...

SIDNEY  
 We are waiting for you, Nico. To inform us as to what it is that logic dictates we must dig.

NICO  
 What logic dictates, uh...it dictates that that which we dig must be...logically, it must be that which, going forward, we **have** when, at the end of the day, logic dictates we stop digging.

(Long pause.)  
 A hole.

BLAKE  
 A hole! Yes! Yes, of course! Pat, dig us a hole!

SIDNEY  
I'll get a shovel.

Sidney exits stage right.

PAT  
(To Alex.)  
You don't look so bad yourself.

ALEX  
I have voluptuous lips.

PAT  
You certainly do. And beyond them, below them, underneath  
your costume...?

Sidney, with a shovel, enters stage  
right.

NICO  
(To Sidney.)  
Give the shovel to Pat.

Pat sneers, then takes Alex's hand;  
they exit stage left.

SIDNEY  
Shall I proceed to dig, myself?

NICO  
Ask Blake.

SIDNEY  
Please. May I? To break ground is an honor.

LOU  
It is! Yes! An **honor**. Blake, this is a ceremonial function.

BLAKE  
Of course. It is not a job for the likes of Pat. What ever  
was I thinking? This is something a leader has to do.

NICO  
Sidney, Blake will break ground. Give h-h---  
(Pointing to Blake.)  
...this individual the shovel.

Sidney proffers the shovel to Nico.

BLAKE  
No! No, get away!

LOU

(To Sidney.)

Go! Git! Do as Blake said! And take that thing back where you got it!

Sidney, with the shovel, exits stage right.

BLAKE

What ever were **you** thinking?!

NICO

I goofed.

LOU

How could you?!

BLAKE

I came **that close** to touching something Sidney touched!

LOU

Nico will not goof again.

NICO

Robin, get Blake a shovel.

ROBIN

Oh, yes! I will! Thank you, Nico. I am so, so happy you asked!

Robin exits stage left.

BLAKE

Dale, I like you.

(Pause.)

Do **you** like **me**?

(To Nico.)

He, too, has a role to play in this endeavor of ours.

(To Dale.)

Or is it **she** or...?

(Pause.)

A prominent one.

DALE

You are an ass.

LOU

The problem, Dale---you told us this yourself---**the problem** is ruining your life. Be respectful. We are prepared, but if and only if you comport yourself with unwavering respect, to accept you as a distinguished member of our team.

Pat enters stage left.

PAT

Hmmm. No hole.

NICO

Do not be deceived. We have been proceeding briskly.

BLAKE

Have you seen Robin?

PAT

She hooked up with us for a three-way. Or **he** did.

LOU

Nico told him or her to get a shovel.

PAT

Oh, Robin got one all right.

BLAKE

Then go back and get it and bring it to me.

(Pause.)

Dale, go bring me that shovel.

Pause.

NICO

Dale refuses.

LOU

Dale **respectfully** refuses.

PAT

So, we're going at it, and Robin comes along, and starts in with this...kink. With the shovel. It drives Alex wild.

BLAKE

Aha. Hmmm. Alex...Alex is not like the rest of us.

LOU

Blake! We are all alike!

PAT

Some are shorter. Some are taller. Some are---

LOU

That is mere quantification. In essence, we are all alike.

Sidney enters stage right.

PAT

Well, as for me, I am just an old-fashioned kind of maybe guy, maybe gal. I don't like orgies. I am into plain vanilla one-on-one. And, alas, implements of excavation do not turn me on.

SIDNEY

I, too, am old-fashioned, Pat, in the very same way. And I find you most attractive.

PAT

How sweet, Sidney.

SIDNEY

I can be more than sweet. I can be fiery hot. And get you hot.

PAT

But I won't let you. You have cooties.

SIDNEY

So I had thought. I therefore consulted a physician.

BLAKE

Yes, Lou, we **are** all alike. We all appreciate comeliness and grace, we all thrill in the presence of splendor and magnificence. But with respect to things like these, Alex differs in the most notable---though, as you say, strictly quantitative---way. Before these same manifestations of beauty to which we all respond, she responds or he responds **more**, and more ardently. **I** will fetch the shovel.

Blake exits stage left.

SIDNEY

On examination, my physician found no cooties, but he---

DALE

Or she.

SIDNEY

**He**, Dale. Although he found none, he did treat me for cooties, just in case, with a suitable topical pediculocide. My itching persisted.

PAT

All right, then. You don't have cooties. You have scabies.

SIDNEY

(Approaching Pat, arms wide.)

He treated me for that, too.

PAT

Stop! Keep your distance!

Robin enters stage left.

ROBIN  
Blake took my shovel!

LOU  
That shovel, Robin, is **his**.

ROBIN  
Really?!

LOU  
Okay, then: **hers**.

ROBIN  
It is not!

NICO  
The shovel is Blake's, and Blake's alone, because without it, there is no way this person of indeterminate gender can initiate our enterprise.

ROBIN  
Alex is not our enterprise.

DALE  
What **is** our enterprise, Nico?

PAT  
(Pause.)  
In any case, Blake can't initiate Alex.

ROBIN  
Because **I** did that already.

PAT  
No you didn't.

ROBIN  
Shovel-wise.

PAT  
Shovel-wise? Yes, **that** you did.

ROBIN  
And that shovel is mine.

LOU  
You procured it, at Nico's direction, for Blake's use.

ROBIN  
She or he or he or she took it from me. That is theft.



LOU  
It is the exercise of her or his or his or her prerogative.

ROBIN  
Moron!

NICO  
Robin!

ROBIN  
(To Lou.)  
Nitwit!

NICO  
Enough!

ROBIN  
(To Lou.)  
**Prerogative?**! Ha! It is larceny, you pea-brained bozo! It is pillage! It is plunder!

NICO  
You are not one of us.

ROBIN  
But I am.

NICO  
You may not further participate in our undertaking.

ROBIN  
Nico, no!

NICO  
I had conceived a sensational role, just for you. Would you like to know what it was?

ROBIN  
Yes! Tell me. What?

NICO  
No matter. It is the problem that is our concern.

SIDNEY  
If, Nico, the plan you have formulated is a response to this concern---

LOU  
Do not call it a concern.

SIDNEY  
Nico just did.

NICO

That is so, Sidney. But tell me: what did I say it was, that this concern consisted of?

SIDNEY

The problem.

LOU

Bravo. Or brava, as the case may be.

SIDNEY

(To Nico.)

If your plan is a necessary and satisfactory response, and if what it is responding to is a matter of momentous import---

LOU

Which it most emphatically is.

SIDNEY

---then in the great scheme of things, Robin's intemperate castigation of Lou amounts to something so inconsequential as to be less than trivial, and ought not disqualify our good companion from full collaboration with the rest of us.

ROBIN

Sidney is brilliant.

LOU

You think so?

ROBIN

Sidney, you are wonderful.

LOU

Really? Then go give this hero of yours---

DALE

Or heroine.

LOU

To be sure.

(Back to Robin.)

---a big, wet kiss.

ROBIN

You are too stupid, Lou, to know how stupid you are, even when I tell you how stupid you are.

SIDNEY

No more, Robin. You have had your say. Your letting loose this new outburst now is redundant. And its intent, actually, is not to further attack Lou, but to change the subject. Isn't it?

(Pause.)

I know full well you would never, ever kiss me.

ROBIN

I would like to.

SIDNEY

Tell Lou you didn't mean what you just said to...to Lou.

ROBIN

But I did.

SIDNEY

Tell Lou that you take it back. Because it was unnecessarily repetitious.

ROBIN

I take it back.

Blake enters stage left, shovel in hand; Alex follows.

BLAKE

Nico, Alex will be advising you.

NICO

(To Alex.)

What are your qualifications?

(Pause.)

Name your mentors. Who are your connections? Show me some diplomas.

(Pause. To Blake.)

Blake, any consultant with whom I work must be qualified.

BLAKE

With respect to aesthetics, you will follow Alex's direction. Now, let's get going.

Blake plunges the shovel into the ground, and comes up with some dirt. Lou, Nico, Alex, Sidney and Pat applaud.

ROBIN

That's my shovel.

LOU

You wish.

NICO

This is history in the making!

ROBIN

In the making with *my* shovel!

NICO

This is...it is earth-shattering!

DALE

Literally.

(Slapping Nico on the back.)

Well done, Nico.

(Pause.)

I said: "well done."

(Slapping Nico on the back.)

Take credit, boy!

(Again slapping Nico on the back.)

Take credit, girl!

NICO

I am not boastful.

DALE

You serve. That's all.

NICO

I serve.

DALE

Bless you.

NICO

I serve tirelessly.

DALE

For the benefit of the seven of us.

NICO

Don't you ever forget it.

DALE

Plus yourself.

NICO

It can not be otherwise. To bring about the optimum outcome in behalf of all of you is *ipso facto* the optimum outcome for me.

DALE

Okay, so then...what next?

BLAKE

(Pause. To Pat, proffering the shovel.)

Next, Pat finishes the hole.

Pat stares Blake down.

BLAKE  
(Proffering the shovel to Dale.)

Dale?

DALE  
Respectfully, sir/madam...  
(To Lou.)  
How am I doing?

Lou nods.

DALE (cont'd)  
...and with all due reverence...  
(To Lou.)  
Still good?

LOU  
Better!

DALE  
...with deference unbounded, too, and with wrenching regret,  
I choose not to oblige.

LOU  
Very well done.

Blake lays the shovel down, and  
walks away from it.

BLAKE  
Pick that up, Sidney. Dig. And when you have finished,  
discard it.

ALEX  
No!

Robin edges toward the shovel, and  
Lou blocks him/her.

BLAKE  
But someone has to complete the hole.

ALEX  
Blake, my dear. My darling Blake.

BLAKE  
Yes, Alex, my most beloved?

ALEX  
That shovel has sanctified our precious bond. We must  
treasure it. Would you subject it to contamination?

BLAKE

Sidney, don't you dare ever even **dream** of touching our shovel.

Lou blocks Sidney from the shovel.

SIDNEY

But I am quite free of any communicable pathogens.

PAT

You have a skin disease.

Robin again edges toward the shovel, and Lou again blocks him/her.

SIDNEY

Not so. My aforementioned primary care provider referred me to a dermatologist, who proceeded to elicit a comprehensive medical history. This good clinician then scraped away at my epidermis, and performed a microscopic examination of the detritus. Finding nothing therein to explain my trouble, she---**she** advised me to assess my living environment for allergens, irritants, fomites, and bugs. I did, and made such adjustments as were indicated, but to no avail. She proceeded, at this point, to prescribe pills, some as palliatives, and others as a so-called "trial of therapy." They relieved me no more than had the topical preparations I cited earlier. Exceptionally sagacious, and of some renown in matters pertaining to the human integument, this superlative practitioner now snipped off a...well, snippet of tissue, clear down into the subcutis. Taking uncommon pains to assess her prize...to scrutinize, explore and, as it were, interrogate this morsel of my flesh, she ended up concluding I have first-rate skin. "Your skin, Sidney," she said with exuberant delight, "is as healthy as can be."

NICO

But did she say you are not contagious?

SIDNEY

No. The internist did.

PAT

Why didn't the dermatologist?

SIDNEY

Because, dear Pat, it was implicit. Even so, after she had sent me on to internal medicine, in order to determine if there might be some non-dermatologic etiology for my complaint, I thought it best to put the question in so many words.

NICO

And this internist...

SIDNEY

...said he discovered no physiological pathology, whatsoever, which could possibly support any contention that what I suffer from is transmissible.

BLAKE

Alex, what do you think?

ALEX

Sidney would not lie.

BLAKE

All right, Sidney. Be my guest.

ROBIN

Wait!

LOU

Robin, this is none of your business. That shovel is **not yours**.

ROBIN

What was the diagnosis?

SIDNEY

I told you.

DALE

No you didn't.

ROBIN

You told us what the diagnosis **wasn't**.

DALE

And you can not have gone to three doctors, Sidney, without them giving you a diagnosis that **was**.

LOU

Why not?

DALE

Because without a diagnosis, in black and white on the doctor's bill, the doctor can not collect a fee.

ROBIN

Tell us what it was.

SIDNEY

Idiopathic pruritus.

LOU  
 (Positioning himself/herself between  
 Sidney and the shovel.)

Idiopathic?!!!

ALEX

Pyew-ritis?!!!

SIDNEY

***Pru-ri-tus***. It is Latin for "itching." "Idiopathic" is Greek. It means no more than that they were unable find a cause.

(To Lou.)

Stand aside.

BLAKE

No! Lou will stand her or his ground.

SIDNEY

But---

BLAKE

Idiopathic pruritus?!

SIDNEY

Blake, it means nothing, other than that I itch, and they don't know why.

BLAKE

***You have idiopathic pruritus!!!***

SIDNEY

It was you, Lou, who impressed upon us the importance of the problem. It was you who made the stunning observation that the problem is common to us all. We have embarked upon an effort to do something about it. I have as much right as anyone else to strive toward that end.

LOU

I will not let you touch the shovel.

SIDNEY

Very well, then. I will touch ***you***.

Sidney reaches towards Lou, who jumps aside.

LOU

No!

As Sidney pursues Lou for a few steps, Robin bolts in and grabs the shovel.



ROBIN

This shovel is mine! This shovel is mine!

Robin, maniacally, goes about digging. The lights fade, then come back up. Shovel in hand, Robin reels about; then, dropping the shovel, s/he collapses.

ROBIN

Water!

Pat gives Robin water, and s/he drinks.

BLAKE

Nico, what is the status of the hole?

NICO

(Examining the hole.)

It has been dug.

BLAKE

Completely?

NICO

Right down to its bottom.

LOU

What about the other holes?

BLAKE

Other holes?

LOU

Yes. There are others.

BLAKE

(To Nico.)

Inspect.

Nico inspects.

BLAKE

Report.

NICO

There are indeed other holes.

BLAKE

Fully and thoroughly dug?

NICO  
Dug utterly.

BLAKE  
How many?

NICO  
A number.

BLAKE  
Now what?

Long, long pause.

DALE  
Stick in posts.

All eyes turn to Dale. Pause.

DALE (cont'd)  
Even the dimmest retard knows that when you have holes, the thing you do is...stick in posts.

NICO  
Blake, it is not appropriate for anyone else to direct activities during those rare, brief intervals in which I, devising strategy, prudently remain silent.

BLAKE  
You should not have jumped the gun, Dale. But since what you suggested was identical to what Nico was about to decree---

DALE  
No it wasn't.

BLAKE  
Oh, no? Nico: what was it, then, you **were** about to say?  
(Pause. To Dale.)  
See? You and Nico are on exactly the same page. So, even though you were peremptory just now, and very rude, no harm was done...none at all. And I must admit: it did please me...it pleased me no end, that you spoke up to advance our cause. Truly, you are one of us.

DALE  
The hell I am.

BLAKE  
Pat, I tried, before, to order you around. You ignored me. I accept that. I was abrupt, I was inconsiderate. And I apologize.

DALE

I have nothing in common with any of you.

LOU

You have the same problem we do.

DALE

Nothing **else** in common.

BLAKE

(To Pat.)

In order to tackle our problem, we require, at this juncture, a number of posts.

DALE

You people are not my people. I come from people who are noble. People with integrity. They are elegant, honorable, enlightened, imaginative, and courageous.

BLAKE

Pat, I have a request.

PAT

I am not going to go get you your posts.

BLAKE

A request. Not a command. I am **asking**. We are collaborators here. We are united in pursuit of a single, imperative goal.

PAT

Fellow collaborator, **I** have a request. Would you, yourself, Blake, kindly go get us some posts?

(Pause.)

How about you, Nico?

(Pause.)

Lou?

(Pause.)

Alex?

ALEX

(Walking about, examining the holes.)

I am cogitating.

PAT

Well...Robin is recuperating, and Sidney is taboo. So...that leaves...

(To Dale.)

...you.

DALE

My people do not stoop.

PAT  
Not even for one lousy post?

NICO  
More than one.

PAT  
Yes. Nico, how many holes did you say there are?

NICO  
Were you not listening?

PAT  
I was.

NICO  
Then why should I repeat myself?

PAT  
I would just like to know exactly how many posts---

NICO  
You would, would you? Out of an abundance of courtesy, Pat, not a single ounce of which you by any means merit, I will repeat myself just this once, and I will never ever do so again. What I said was: "a number."

PAT  
(To Dale.)  
As for you...

DALE  
Do not provoke me. We are an indulgent people, and compassionate. That is why, even though lesser beings like yourselves have treated us unspeakably time and time again, we have been willing to humor you and to endure your barbaric insolence. Go just one inch too far, however, and you will find that we are wrathful and we are just.

PAT  
Blake, I would be happy to get you that...one lousy post.

BLAKE  
Great!

PAT  
**One.** But first, promise that, from me, you will settle for just the one, and go about filling your quota by way of other members of our community.

BLAKE  
But---

ROBIN  
 Promise.

BLAKE  
 Are you ready to get back into action?

ROBIN  
 Yes! I am raring to go!  
 (Standing up.)  
 How many posts do we need?

Robin collapses, and goes back to his/her water bottle.

BLAKE  
 As you see, Pat, we are short of able-bodied labor, so you ought to offer at least two---

PAT  
 One. Promise.

BLAKE  
 (To Nico.)  
 Might your strategy not accommodate a...tactical concession, and permit us, pending further organizational consolidation, to advance with just...one single post?

NICO  
 My approach, of course, is excruciatingly well thought out.

BLAKE  
 It is deliberate, it is circumspect, and it is orderly.

NICO  
 Systematic.

BLAKE  
 It will therefore result---

NICO  
 Inevitably result.

BLAKE  
 It will result *inexorably* in unparalleled and smashing success.

NICO  
 You, Blake, are wise. You understand.

BLAKE  
 So...then, shall I promise?

NICO

That is of no concern to me. A consideration so extraneous could not possibly affect the progression of what has already taken on the contours of an astonishing accomplishment.

BLAKE

(To Pat.)

I promise.

Pat exits stage left.

ALEX

What we have here, Nico, is more than just a bunch of holes. We have holes of various dimensions, arrayed in a particular way, and all in this unique place.

Pat enters stage left, with a post. It is over seven feet high, but spindly enough to be lightweight and readily manageable. Pat sticks it into a hole.

ALEX (cont'd)

Pat, that was very poorly done.

(To Nico.)

Wasn't it?

(Pause.)

What you have conceptualized, Nico, will be without value, unless it be exalting.

Alex grabs the post and twists it.

ALEX (cont'd)

There!

(To Nico.)

Do you see the difference?

BLAKE

Of course Nico does.

ALEX

I could go off now, cheerfully, just by myself, and come back with all the posts we need. This is a thrilling opportunity. I have never made site-specific art before. But in light of the problem, and considering the objective towards which we are striving on account of that problem, I think you should all seize this chance to make your own creative contributions.

SIDNEY

All but *me*.

ALEX

Sidney, there is a hole...

(Walking all the way stage left.)

...way over here. It is so far from the other holes, that no member of our group could reasonably claim that your placement of a post into it would pose a threat. Now, Pat has already placed a post, and I know Blake will want to insert no less than two. Lou, Nico and Dale, however, will, like me, have to be content to provide one each.

DALE

I am not going to---

ALEX

No, Dale.

DALE

I am not---

ALEX

No. I can not allot you more than one.

DALE

I have no intention---

ALEX

And **I** have no interest in this intention you don't have. Robin is clearly perking up. Unless the rest of us refrain from sticking in too many posts, there will not be enough holes left for---

ROBIN

For me!

Alex exits stage right, then promptly returns with a post.

ALEX

Everybody watch. We are not just willy-nilly plopping posts into the ground. We are bringing into being a site-specific installation.

(Sticking the post into a hole.)

A work of art!

Alex walks away from the post to take a look, then walks back to reposition it.

ALEX (cont'd)

Now...go!

Sidney exits stage left.

You, too! Go, go, go!

ALEX (cont'd)

Blake, Nico and Lou exit stage right. Robin stands unsteadily, and gulps more water, as Alex walks around his/her post, repositioning it several times. Sidney enters stage left with a post, and places it into the hole s/he was assigned. Nico and Lou enter stage right with one post each along with Blake, who carries two posts.

BLAKE

Which hole...?

ALEX

That one.

Blake starts to stick a post into the designated hole.

ALEX (cont'd)

Not that one!

BLAKE

But you said---!

ALEX

I said that **hole!** Not that **post!**

Blake sticks the other post into the designated hole.

LOU

What about mine?

ALEX

Place it, please, in there.

Lou sticks his/her post into the designated hole.

ALEX (cont'd)

That was pathetic.

LOU

I thought I did a pretty good job.

BLAKE

Where do you want this one, Alex?



ALEX

Oh...stick it in any hole you like.

BLAKE

But---

ALEX

I will make all necessary adjustments. I will fix everything.

Blake sticks his/her second post into a hole, as Alex takes Nico's post from him/her and sticks it into yet another.

ROBIN

How many left?

ALEX

Count.

Robin walks around and counts, silently. Alex walks around, scrutinizing and tweaking all the posts except Sidney's. Robin exits stage right.

BLAKE

What do you say, Nico? Amazing progress, no?

Robin enters stage right with a post or two, and sticks it/them into the ground as Alex keeps tweaking. Sidney walks around too, at stage left, scrutinizing and tweaking his/her post. Robin exits stage right.

BLAKE (cont'd)

Have you ever seen anything as dazzling as this?

ALEX

Dazzling?! This is **radiant**!

Alex tweaks, as Robin enters stage right with a post or two, and sticks it/them into the ground.

DALE

The word, Alex, is not "radiant." It is---

LOU

Oh, please, Dale! We don't need another of your gratuitous interjections to understand that, as fabulous as all this is, it is first and foremost a formidable cluster of sturdy posts.

Robin exits stage right, as Alex tweaks.

SIDNEY

Hey, Alex: what do you think of mine?

Alex walks around Sidney's post, scrutinizing it cautiously, keeping his/her distance.

LOU

In other words: what we have here is a solid foundation for what Nico is contriving.

ALEX

(To Sidney.)

Tweak it that way.

Sidney tweaks the post, and continues tweaking in accordance with Alex's hand signals.

DALE

(To Nico.)

So, then, with this solid foundation now in place, do tell us precisely what it is you **are** contriving.

NICO

Dale, shut up! I am a personage of the greatest learning, ingenuity and proficiency.

Robin enters stage right with a post or two, and sticks it/them into the ground. Alex signals Sidney to stop, and gives a thumbs-up. Sidney quits tweaking, and Alex goes back to tweaking the other posts.

NICO

I have devoted my whole being to the application of reason, for the sake of achievement. You above all, as the scion of a proud and estimable people, ought to admire me, and praise everything I stand for.

ROBIN

Are these posts everything you stand for, Nico?

(Pause.)

I mean, we have so much more to do.

LOU

So very much, yes. The problem being what it is.

BLAKE

And representing what it does.

LOU

But the problem is a singularity, Blake. A unity. How can it represent anything that is not itself?

BLAKE

Oh, I do suppose you're right, Lou. So, then, shall we rather say that the problem compels us to devise efficacious conglomerations within which we can get on with what we need to get on with?

ALEX

(Standing back, looking at the posts.)

Done!

BLAKE

Shall we not say that the problem *impels* us to conceive and construct, if you will, a, uh...a---?

ROBIN

Framework?

ALEX

(Taking in the completed installation.)

This is perfect!

BLAKE

A framework! Hmmm. Nico: is that what we want?

(Pause.)

Nico?

NICO

You ask me if we want a framework?

BLAKE

Yes.

NICO

What a stupid question.

BLAKE

So then...we don't?

NICO

Of course we want a framework! How can anyone possibly get anything done without a framework?!

BLAKE

Why did you not tell us this before?

NICO

Because it goes without saying.

BLAKE

Okay. Robin, would you kindly---?

ROBIN

You better believe I would! Hey, everybody: I am off to get some two-by-fours!

ALEX

(Yanking Robin back.)

Oh, no you're not! This is art! There is nothing to add. It is complete. It is immutable.

LOU

Alex, what you have brought about here is very, **very** pretty indeed. And you have transformed me, personally. Having performed in, as you said, a pathetic manner a few minutes ago, and having then watched your inspired activity, I now know the right way to place a post into a hole, and I even have a sense as to how to properly position it. But as a response to our problem, what we have put together under your exemplary oversight is simply insufficient.

ALEX

Nico, tell Lou we have finished.

LOU

But, Nico, is that possible?

(Pause.)

We have a problem!

NICO

And a process. I have examined our posture, *vis-à-vis* the problem that torments us, from every angle known to Euclid, and in four dimensions, too. Be aware, every one of you, that authoritative studies, embracing an entire universe, and then some, of applicable data points, have conclusively, again and again and again, demonstrated this: what we face is an ever-proliferating panoply of plausible, and calamitous, outcomes. In consequence, while always and forever heartily cognizant of not just the salutary concrete effects of our ongoing activities but of their deep moral ramifications as well, I shall not cease incorporating relevant considerations into those models, and only those

(MORE)

NICO (cont'd)

models, I have assembled by means of the most robust methodologies, and whose scrupulous application, consistent with the logic of our framework and in conjunction with the timely mobilization of suitable expedients from my undepletable toolkit, categorically can not fail to put the problem squarely in its place.

ALEX

The application of your models **has** put the problem squarely in its place.

LOU

Nonsense! We don't even have a framework yet!

ALEX

I will destroy anybody who disturbs this installation.

SIDNEY

Because?

ALEX

That should be obvious.

SIDNEY

But, to me, Alex, it is not. So in one and, if you please, only one word: you would destroy anybody who disturbs this installation because...it...is...?

ALEX

Beautiful.

SIDNEY

Fine. Let us now consider the matter in a more expansive way.

ALEX

No, let us not.

SIDNEY

I would like to change your mind. What must I do?

ALEX

You can't change my mind.

SIDNEY

It would be best, I think, if we spoke about this confidentially.

(Starting towards Alex.)

Close up. Heads together, my arm around your shoulder.

ALEX

Back! You speak to me from back there.

Sidney goes half way back.

SIDNEY

From here?

ALEX

All the way back.

Sidney returns to his/her post.

SIDNEY

Here, then?

(Pause.)

Good. Please answer this. Is the *Venus de Milo* beautiful?

ALEX

Yes.

SIDNEY

Would you therefore destroy anyone who disturbed her?

ALEX

I would.

SIDNEY

Would you therefore destroy anyone who, having found her arms, attached them to their stumps?

(Pause.)

Aha! You catch my drift.

(To Blake.)

Alex has rallied us to create a masterpiece. In platonic terms, our masterpiece is a lesser form which participates in ideal form. The armless statue of the goddess is also a lesser form which participates in ideal form. But it participates in the original, unbroken statue, too. That is: in another form which, though not ideal, is nonetheless higher than itself. It is not unreasonable to posit that, between the form we have wrought here and *its* ideal form, there are higher realizable forms. And, given the...what Lou insists is the *gravity* of our problem, we could do well---we *would* do well---to transmute this form we have now into one that is higher.

Blake looks at Alex, expectantly.

ALEX

(Pause. To Sidney.)

I do wish you would stop scratching yourself.

Blake nods to Robin, who exits stage right. The lights fade, then come back up. There is a latticework of horizontal beams bridging the posts. Robin enters stage right with a beam.

ROBIN

Last one!

Robin, at one end of the beam, slides it toward Sidney.

ROBIN (cont'd)

Grab the end, Sidney. Just the tip. The tip-tip-tippiest tip.

Sidney takes the other end. They reach up and position the beam so as to bridge Sidney's post to the rest of the framework.

ALEX

Are you all satisfied now?

BLAKE

Alex, this is only a framework.

ALEX

It is hideous.

BLAKE

No. Although, I will grant that, in one or two respects, it may...want enhancement.

PAT

What this structure wants is energy.

LOU

Vibrancy.

PAT

Potent pizazz.

ROBIN

Let's festoon it with ribbons!

PAT

No. They would just droop.

BLAKE

Nico, if you don't mind...

(Pause. To the others)

(MORE)

BLAKE (cont'd)

He, or she, or whoever, is ruminating.

(To Nico.)

If you would allow me, for just the smallest fraction of a moment, to impose upon you...

(Pause. To the others.)

We should all thank our lucky stars that Nico deliberates, for our sake, so intensely and devotedly and well.

(To Nico.)

We find ourselves, at long last, unable to move forward.

(Tapping Nico on the shoulder.)

We appeal to you.

NICO

Blake!

BLAKE

This is an emergency.

NICO

You have derailed my train of thought.

PAT

The framework needs power.

BLAKE

(To Nico.)

Without instruction from you, how can we ever hope to find our way?

PAT

Power, Nico: That is what this framework needs.

BLAKE

Nico is listening.

PAT

(To Nico.)

We have a problem. You roused us to do something about it. We look to you now.

(Pause. To Blake.)

To do something, Blake, is essential. Absolutely vital.

BLAKE

It is critical.

PAT

(To Nico.)

"Power," I said!

(Pause.)

Propose something, damn it!

(Pause. To Blake.)

(MORE)



PAT (cont'd)

Nico has credentials. I do not. I do, however, have a skill or two. When I take on a job, I get it done. I am reliable. And capable.

NICO

Capable of impudent disruption.

PAT

I am **able**.

NICO

Ability! Ha! That is no substitute for expertise.

PAT

(To Robin.)

Do you have strong legs?

ROBIN

My legs are awesome.

PAT

(To Blake.)

I volunteer to energize this framework.

NICO

Blake, beware!

PAT

(To Blake.)

I will build a generator.

NICO

Oh, no you won't.

PAT

(To Blake.)

**If**. An electric generator. But **only** if the rest of you, save Robin and, of course, Sidney, go get me the stuff I need to build it.

ROBIN

Why not me?!

PAT

For you, I have something better in store.

NICO

(To Blake.)

I am a policymaker.

BLAKE

Yes. But **I** am **the** policymaker.

NICO

Tell me, Blake: who is **the** policymaker's policymaker?

(To Pat.)

**I** am. And **you** are an impertinent crackpot. Go get lost!

BLAKE

(Pause. To Pat.)

What stuff do you need?

Pat scribbles a list, and hands it to Blake.

PAT

Here.

BLAKE

(Looking at the list.)

Alex, fetch us a motor.

Alex sits down.

BLAKE (cont'd)

(To Alex.)

All right, then. An inverter.

Alex stays put.

BLAKE (cont'd)

Nico?

Nico sits down.

BLAKE (cont'd)

Get up!

Nico broods.

LOU

You hurt her feelings slash you hurt his feelings.

BLAKE

Well...Dale---

DALE

Yes? How may I be of service?

BLAKE

Forget it.

(To Lou, handing him/her the list.)

Here. It's all up to you.

Pat takes the list from Lou, and tears it in half.

PAT

(Handing a half back to Lou.)

It is *half* up to you.

Lou exits stage right.

PAT (cont'd)

(Handing the other half to Blake.)

And, half of it is up to...

Blake exits stage right. The lights fade, then come back up with Lou and Blake back on stage. Robin furiously pedals a stationary bike, connected to the framework with some wires, stage right. Pat watches a gauge.

PAT (cont'd)

One seventy...one eighty...one eighty...one eighty...faster, Robin!...Harder!...One-ninety...two hundred! Yes!...Two ten...two...two twenty...two---

Nico goes up to the bike and grabs Robin.

NICO

Get down! Off that bike!

Nico brings Robin down. Pat tackles Nico. The three tussle. Sidney walks over, arms outstretched.

PAT

Watch out!

NICO

Don't touch!

ROBIN

Get away!

NICO

Don't touch!

The three combatants scatter. Sidney walks back to his/her post, stage left.

LOU

What good is it, Pat?

PAT

Robin was on the way to three hundred watts!

LOU

Who cares?

BLAKE

Hey, come on, Lou. Pat has turned this into a spectacularly powerful construction.

LOU

But in what way, pray tell, does this powerful construction bear upon the problem?

BLAKE

It doesn't. Now. But in due time, it will, and the way it then bears upon the problem will amaze you.

LOU

I see. Hmmm. When, please, do you anticipate "due time" will arrive?

BLAKE

As soon as we finish up.

LOU

With this...

BLAKE

Framework.

LOU

Which, when finished up, will bear upon the problem by virtue of...?

BLAKE

Its stout and steady conformation.

LOU

Uh-huh...?

BLAKE

And its formidable, illustrious compass.

LOU

All of which...?

BLAKE

In synergistic concert.

LOU

And by way of...?

BLAKE  
Its electrifying circuitry.

LOU  
Will...?

BLAKE  
Propel us...

LOU  
That sounds promising...

BLAKE  
to...

LOU  
to...?

BLAKE  
...establish, effectuate, apply and, ultimately, exploit that one definitive and transformational instrumentality we have been so feverishly seeking, and which is a hundred percent guaranteed to bring the problem crashing to its knees.

LOU  
Who was it elucidated the problem to you in the first place?  
(Pause.)

And in my presentation, did I once say anything which so much as began to insinuate, in even the teensiest-weensiest way, that the problem...our forbidding, tenacious, and thus far implacable problem, has **knees**?

(Pause.)  
Blake, you have let us down.

BLAKE  
No, Lou. Don't say that. Believe in me.

LOU  
The problem is what I believe in. It is **all** that I believe in. I believe it is excruciating.

BLAKE  
So do I.

LOU  
And that it demands an onslaught of ferocious remediation.

BLAKE  
Amen.

LOU

I believe the problem necessitates our implementation of every conceivable intrepid approach.

BLAKE

It truly does.

LOU

Of every imaginable heroic stratagem. Bar none.

BLAKE

Bar none.

LOU

With all the bells and whistles.

BLAKE

Right.

(Pause.)

**Right!**

Blake exits stage right, then enters back with some bells and whistles. The lights fade, then come back up. Robin pedals the bells and whistles, now affixed to the framework, to ringing and whistling away.

LOU

This is still no---.

BLAKE

I can't hear you.

LOU

I said, this is still---.

BLAKE

Speak up!

Lou rips some wires off the framework, silencing the clamor. Robin stops pedaling.

LOU

This is still no good, Blake.

ROBIN

You snuffed out my sound-effects!

Robin dismounts.

LOU

I have taken the greatest of pains to impress upon you all that we are caught in the grip of a problem whose proportions are immense, and whose implications are dire.

Robin beats up on Lou.

LOU

(Fending Robin off.)

I have alerted the lot of you. And what, as a result, have you all done about it? Look! Behold this...scene.

ALEX

This scene would be super, if it weren't for all that crap stuck onto my posts.

LOU

(Sparring with Robin.)

Behold! We have accomplished...what?

ROBIN

(Sparring.)

A disaster, that's what!

LOU

(Sparring.)

Correct. Now, tell me whose fault it is.

ROBIN

(Sparring.)

Yours.

LOU

(Sparring.)

Yours, too. And it's Blake's fault, and it's Alex's, and it's Pat's.

SIDNEY

And, lamentably, it is mine as well.

LOU

(Sparring.)

You...you just stay where you are. As for Dale---

DALE

Dale is the one and only character who is blameless.

Lou pivots away from Robin and slugs Dale, who goes down.

ROBIN

(To Lou.)

Nice!

Robin and Lou high-five. Robin then goes about reattaching the wires to the framework.

LOU

But the principal responsibility for our cataclysmic failure in the face of this unrelenting problem is...

(To Nico.)

...**yours**. You are worthless, Nico.

NICO

No. Nobody is worthless. Had you not all recklessly dismissed what I sought so hard to contribute, we would now be celebrating a peerless triumph.

Lou laughs.

NICO (cont'd)

I am not worthless.

Dale, Pat and Alex laugh.

NICO (cont'd)

Neither are you, or you, or you...or you...or you, or you, or you. Had you all simply contemplated, humbly, what I humbly brought to your attention, you would have grasped not just the fact that every one of us has worth. You would have screamed in ecstasy, smitten by a revelation as ineluctable as it is glorious: that there is so mightily much more worth, in each of us, as we go about our lives, than we ever show. And, eminently worthy as we are, we are all---note these words, remember them, **inscribe** them...inscribe them in your hearts---**we are all in this together!**

LOU

You are wasting our time. We have a problem.

NICO

And that problem we have cries out! Let us cry back! Shout the problem down! Holler the problem to hell! Yell, and bellow, and roar! "We are all in this together!"

Robin, back on the bike, pedals a few bell rings and whistle whistles.

LOU

Noise! What good is this noise?! The problem does not hear.

NICO

That is so, Lou: it does not hear. It does not, in fact, do anything which it does not do. But what it does **not** not do is...is...



Is what it **does** do! ROBIN

And what **does** it do? It wages war! War on the worthy! NICO

War on **us**! ROBIN

What, then, must **we** do to **it**? NICO

Wage war right back. ROBIN

How? NICO

Together! ROBIN

Proclaim it! NICO

We are all in this together! ROBIN

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings and whistle whistles.

Proclaim it from way up there, high in the fly space! NICO

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings and whistle whistles.

Proclaim it from out in the wings! NICO (cont'd)

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings and whistle whistles.

Proclaim it in lights! NICO

In lights! ROBIN

Robin pedals more bell rings and whistle whistles.

What a fantastic idea!

BLAKE

Proclaim it in lights!

ROBIN

Robin pedals still more bell rings  
and whistle whistles.

BLAKE  
(Writing down the words.)  
Let's see...let's see...

Robin pedals a protracted flurry of  
bell rings and whistle whistles.

BLAKE (cont'd)  
(Writing.)  
"We are all in this together."

What fun!

ROBIN

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings  
and whistle whistles.

BLAKE  
"We...all...together." That comes to...nineteen letters.

Twenty-two.

SIDNEY

BLAKE  
In any case, more than enough to go around.

ALEX  
The design of each letter, Blake, will be up to me.

BLAKE  
It all begins with **W**.

ROBIN  
**W**...we...wheee!

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings  
and whistle whistles.

ALEX  
Now, that is a letter with clout.

ROBIN  
Wheee...are all in this together!

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings  
and whistle whistles.

ALEX

We **are** all in this together! And so shall we declare.

ROBIN

In lights!

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings  
and whistle whistles.

PAT

That sentence is our manifesto!

ALEX

And our mission is this: to enshrine every letter of that  
sentence---

ROBIN

In lights!

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings  
and whistle whistles.

ALEX

...to enshrine every letter. We shall fashion each with  
exquisite finesse, then raise them all up and place them,  
like precious stones, into august settings. At last, awash  
in wonder and replete with joy, we shall---

ROBIN

Light them up!

ALEX

Robin!

Robin pedals the beginnings of a  
burst of bell ring and whistle  
whistle.

ALEX (cont'd)

Don't!

ROBIN

But---

ALEX

No! Now is not the time.

(To the others.)

We shall illuminate them, one by one, with **W** as their  
spearhead, and their anchor. If there be anybody obnoxious  
enough to object, or with the rank temerity to demand we  
start with any other letter...speak up.

Pause.

DALE

Why are you all looking at me?

SIDNEY

**W**'s glyph is the widest glyph of them all.

(Pause.)

What I mean: it is definitely a formidable letter.

BLAKE

And so, dear friends, the **W** is *mine*.

ALEX

The font you are to employ is "Impact."

BLAKE

That sounds right.

ALEX

In stately purple.

BLAKE

Nico, out of profound gratitude for your having dreamed up our impending spectacle, I assign the fabrication of the alphabet's first letter, the magisterial **A**, to you.

SIDNEY

Which **A**?

(Pause.)

There are two **As**.

BLAKE

(To Nico.)

Both.

SIDNEY

There are also two **Hs**, **Is**, **Ls**, and **Rs**.

BLAKE

Okay. Who wants the **Rs**?

SIDNEY

You will have to split them up.

BLAKE

Don't you tell me what I will have to do. Lou, the **Rs** are yours.

SIDNEY

If we are all in this together, Blake, then I get to make a letter, too.

BLAKE

Sure you do. Take...I don't know. Isn't there an **N**?

SIDNEY

All right.

Sidney walks toward center stage.

BLAKE

Where do you think you're going?

SIDNEY

To that point on the framework where, approximately, I expect to hang my letter. I would like to give it a thorough look-see.

BLAKE

Get back! Get back!

Sidney goes back to his/her spot, stage left.

BLAKE (cont'd)

Now, stay there. You will hang your letter at your post, and nowhere else.

DALE

You can't put the **N** at the end of the sentence.

BLAKE

I know that.

DALE

Then why are you doing it?

BLAKE

I am doing no such thing. Quit being difficult.

DALE

I am not being difficult. Look, I agree with Lou about the problem...

BLAKE

So you keep saying. But you **dis**agree with all of us about everything else.

DALE

Wrong. I accept Nico's proclamation.

BLAKE

You're kidding.

DALE

I **embrace** it, Blake. Why wouldn't I? Though our problem does grind on relentlessly, now we wield the antidote to its horrific depredations: Nico's blast of defiance.

LOU

A string of words.

ROBIN

Words!

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings and whistle whistles.

DALE

Now we unite.

LOU

Nothing is more useless than a string of words.

ROBIN

Words in lights!

Robin pedals a burst of bell rings and whistle whistles.

DALE

Yes! In lights! We absolutely **are** all in this together!

BLAKE

My, what a refreshing turnabout.

DALE

However---and please don't reprimand me for this---I must insist Sidney's designated position, at extreme stage left, dictates that---whatever pronoun applies---

SIDNEY

My designated position dictates that **Sidney**...

DALE

"Sidney" is not a pronoun.

SIDNEY

No. It is a proper noun.

DALE

Then why did you interject it?

SIDNEY

Just continue, Dale, with your explanation.

DALE

(To Blake.)

I must insist Sidney's position dictates that Sidney hang **only the last letter** in the sequence.

SIDNEY

R.

DALE

(To Blake.)

And that **only Sidney** hang the last letter in the sequence. When I say Sidney, I mean...

(Points to Sidney.)

ROBIN

You mean...

(A finger thrust toward Sidney.)

...him!

(A finger thrust toward Sidney.)

Her!

(A finger thrust toward Sidney.)

Them!

DALE

I mean...

(A finger thrust toward Sidney.)

Sidney!

SIDNEY

(To Blake.)

R.

BLAKE

Aah...aha. Lou, confine yourself, please, to the first **R**. The terminal **R** belongs to...

(A finger thrust toward Sidney.)

SIDNEY

Alex, may I choose a font?

ALEX

You may not choose any of your letter's specifications. "Comic" will be your font.

SIDNEY

Really? But won't that undercut the *gravitas*?

ALEX

It will undergird the universality of the opus, and throw its profundity into high relief.

With serif? SIDNEY

Sans. ALEX

Italic? SIDNEY

Don't be ridiculous. ALEX

Case? SIDNEY

ALEX  
Upper. Listen, everybody: all letters are to be caps, except for the first **a**, the second **h**, and the first **l**. That first **l** shall be italicized. It will be the **only** italic letter. So then, if you can, picture our sprightly first **l**: lower case, italic, and...here's the zinger: it will, unlike every other letter, have a loop!

SIDNEY  
As for my upper case, roman, sans serif and comic **R**, Alex: yellow? Pink?

Ice blue. ALEX

How bright? SIDNEY

Fifteen hundred lumens. ALEX

Size? SIDNEY

ALEX  
(Gesturing.)  
About...so.

What about my **W**? BLAKE

Five thousand lumens. ALEX

Why not six? BLAKE



ALEX

And about...  
 (Gesturing a size at least twice  
 Sidney's **R**.)  
 ...yea big.

BLAKE

Why not bigger?

ALEX

Sidney, are you keeping track?

SIDNEY

Of the twenty-two letters?

ALEX

Yes. How many have we assigned?

SIDNEY

Five, so far.

BLAKE

Excellent!

DALE

So, then...seventeen remain?

SIDNEY

Seventeen remain.

DALE

May I pick more than one?

BLAKE

Go for it.

DALE

**F, Y, Z, B, P, K, V, U, Q...and D...**

BLAKE

That's the spirit!

DALE

...and **C**...

BLAKE

Yes!

DALE

...and **M** and **X** and...

More, Dale!

BLAKE

...and...

DALE

More!

BLAKE

...and **J**.

DALE

Done. (Brief pause.)

BLAKE

Fantastic!

(Slapping Dale on the back.)

Ah ha ha! That was stupendous!

(To Sidney.)

How many left?

SIDNEY

Seventeen.

BLAKE

Pat? (Blake takes a long moment to register this.)

PAT

**N**.

BLAKE

And...?

PAT

And...that leaves sixteen.

ALEX

I will take the sinuous **S**, with all its seductive sibilance.

BLAKE

Well, Robin, I guess the rest of the letters are yours.

ROBIN

Yippee! Write 'em all down.

BLAKE

There is **E**... (Writing down the letters.)

Yeah...?  
ROBIN

Three of them.  
BLAKE

Ooh.  
ROBIN

There are not three of them. There are four.  
SIDNEY

Four?! Oh, that is so cool!  
ROBIN

You will configure them separately, each with its own distinct set of parameters.  
ALEX

Tell me.  
ROBIN

Later.  
ALEX

More letters!  
ROBIN

Of **H** and **I** and **L**, there are---.  
BLAKE

As I was just saying...  
SIDNEY

Sidney, don't interrupt me.  
BLAKE

...two each.  
SIDNEY

And the first **I** is going to have a loop! Oh...oh, how cool is **that**?!  
ROBIN

There are three---.  
BLAKE

**Ts**.  
SIDNEY

Wow!  
ROBIN

BLAKE  
Not another peep out of you, Sidney!

ROBIN  
I want more letters!

BLAKE  
There are no more.

SIDNEY  
Peep.

BLAKE  
Sidney...!

ROBIN  
No more at all?

BLAKE  
At all. That's it.

ROBIN  
Aww...bummer.

(Taking the list from Blake.)

Well, hey: come on, everybody! Let's go make some letters that shine!

Robin dashes off stage right; and the rest, except for Sidney and Dale, straggle off after. Sidney exits stage left. The lights fade, then come back up. Everyone is back on stage but Sidney. Robin sits still on the bike. All of the letters but Sidney's hang in place. Housed in boxy units, and as yet unlit, the letters are not yet legible. Wires run every which-way around and through the framework. Sidney enters stage left with a ladder, and sets in place.

BLAKE  
It is about time, Sidney.

Sidney exits stage left, then returns with Sidney's letter.

BLAKE (cont'd)  
Ready, Robin?

ROBIN  
Say the word.

SIDNEY  
(Climbing the ladder, with the letter.)  
Give me a minute, will you?

BLAKE  
(Pause.)  
Hurry up.

SIDNEY  
(Hanging the letter.)  
Patience, Blake.

BLAKE  
(Pause.)  
Enough patience! The lights are too bright. For this  
extravaganza that is about to commence, we want the backdrop  
dark. Bring 'em down.

The lights dim.

SIDNEY  
I can not see what I am doing!

The lights go back up.

BLAKE  
Dim the lights!

The lights dim.

SIDNEY  
At least give me a spot.

Spot light on Sidney.

BLAKE  
Go!

Robin starts pedaling, and all the  
other characters, save Sidney,  
gather down stage center to watch  
the display. The **W** (which conforms  
to Alex's specifications) lights  
up.

BLAKE (cont'd)  
That's my **W**!

As Robin cranks it up, the first **E**  
comes on...then the first **a**. The  
display shows:

[WE a ]

BLAKE (cont'd)

(Slapping Lou and Nico on their backs.)

Look at it!

The first **R** lights up...then the second **E**:

[WE aRE ]

ALEX

Breathtaking!

The second **A** lights up...then the first **l** (in a looped italic font):

[WE aRE Al ]

BLAKE

Look at that!

The second **L**...and the first **I** light up:

[WE aRE ALL I ]

ALEX

This is...oh, it is ravishing!

Blake, Alex, Nico, Pat, Lou and Dale watch the display, and all but the last two go about ooh-ing and ah-ing as the **N**...then the first **T**...and the first **H** light up:

[WE aRE ALL IN TH ]

Sidney, in the tracking spot light, climbs down the ladder, as the ooh-ing and ah-ing continue. The second **I**...the **S**...and the second **T** light up:

[WE aRE ALL IN THIS T ]

BLAKE

How do you like that **W**?!

Sidney, in the spot light, stows the ladder while Blake, Alex, Nico and Pat continue to ooh and ah. The **W** emits a cloud of smoke. There is a pop, and all the letters but the **l**, **L**, and the second **I** go black:

[           **lL**           **I**                               **R** ]

Gasps, then silence. The terminal **R** (which conforms to Alex's specifications) lights up; and Sidney, in the tracking spot light, begins walking slowly towards down stage center.

[           **lL**           **I**                               **R** ]

The **O** and **g** (the latter italicized, and with a loop) begin, at only half brightness, to flicker on and off in alternation:

[           **lL**           **I**   **O**                               **R** ]

[           **lL**           **I**   **g**                               **R** ]

Robin pedals along. Sidney approaches the others. They quickly, but calmly and in silence, make way and scatter, as the already dim ambient stage lights fade to black. Down stage center now and in the spot light, Sidney, with Sidney's back squarely facing the audience, stands stock still with eyes on the display. The **O** and **g** both light up, full bright and steady:

[           **lL**           **I**   **Og**                               **R** ]

Sidney watches the display, stock still. After a moment, Sidney reaches a hand around to Sidney's ass, digs in and, as bells begin to ring and whistles to whistle, scratches away lustily. Then the spot light goes black.

[           **lL**           **I**   **Og**                               **R** ]

Pause. The bells and whistles stop.

[ lL I Og R]

###THE END###