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CAN WITH
YOU'RE BEAT
N. LOVE
SUSAN

TING POT

play

herman
and
Susan Rogers

Original Story
by
Susan Rogers

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THE MELTING POT

Screenplay
by
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FADE IN:

On BERNARD MULLER, over-weight, middle-aged and too kind-hearted for his own good.

He wears a grey suit, a grey tie and a bored expression. He sits at a grey desk in front of a greyer wall.

As we PULL BACK, we SEE his occupation:

He is methodically stamping blank forms.

As we PULL BACK FURTHER we SEE who he is doing this for:

A HUGE SEAL reads U.S. IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE.

Behind him, a water cooler gurgles like a disturbed stomach. He looks up from the forms and SEES ahead of him:

BERNARD'S POV:

A sea of BROWN FACES is watching his every movement. Sitting on neat rows of institutional chairs are a hundred men, women and children, captured illegal aliens, awaiting their fate.

One woman cries softly.

Bernard watches them uneasily, embarrassed by his power. He forces himself back to his task and accidentally STAMPS HIS OWN HAND.

Which brings him back sharply to the task at hand and he resumes stamping.

CUT TO:

Bernard's BOSS watching Bernard stamping his way through the mound of papers.

He's easily ten-years younger and he likes to think of himself as a mover and a shaker.

He walks up behind Bernard.

BOSS
Hi!

Bernie is shaken. He jumps.

Got a minute?

It's rhetorical. Bernard dutifully rises and follows his Boss to his office.

INT. OFFICE

The office is like every other lowly civil servant's office with the exception of a poster which declares "What is....Is."

Portraits of Presidents Nixon, Ford and Reagan adorn the walls.

BOSS
Sit, Muller.

Bernard sits, as obedient as a dog.

Now, I've been busting
my ass to help you, Muller.

Bernard frowns.

But you're not getting it.

An unseen WATER COOLER BUBBLES. The Boss looks up, warily, at Bernard.

You gotta get your quota.
All the agents bring in their
quota of wets....And you gotta
do it too. Otherwise you're going
to stay here stamping forms 'til
they can you. Before your time.
Get it?

BERNARD
I got it.

BOSS
Good. We've got a sweat shop
to sweep this afternoon. What
do you say?

Bernard smiles wan thanks.

CUT TO:

EXT. DILAPIDATED BUILDING DOWNTOWN L.A.

Where the BOSS, TWO OTHER AGENTS and Bernard are gathered.

We SEE from his gestures that the Boss is holding forth strategy, giving Bernard a WHISTLE and telling him to go around the back way.

As he departs down an alley the other agents look after him, shaking their heads sadly.

CUT TO:

Bernard sneaking like a sleuth through a labyrinth of alleys.

He grabs a door handle and flings the door open, whistle to his lips ----

A sign reads USE OTHER DOOR. He takes the whistle out.

O.S. the SHOUTS of PLAYING CHILDREN can be HEARD. Bernard hides, pressing himself flat in a second doorway, next to the first.

CUT TO:

CHILDREN running alongside the walls and chainlink fences, using sticks to rattle along them as they go.

CUT TO:

Bernard unable to fit his stomach in the doorway.

CUT TO:

The Children running past, each one's stick knocking on his stomach as they pass.

CUT TO:

Once the children have past, Bernard turns and tries the door behind him. O.S. we HEAR the NOISE of an approaching garbage truck. The door, of course, opens to a sign reading USE OTHER DOOR and an arrow points to the door he already opened.

Bernard steps back to make sure there isn't another door between the two converging arrows and

SMASH!

He collides with a drunk, who spills some of his brown-bagged sweet wine over Bernard's jacket. He tries to wring the wine out into his mouth. Bernard stares at him as if not inhabiting the suit at all.

Bernard finally disengages as the garbage truck lurches towards them and then takes off.

As the GARBAGE TRUCKS roar dims, the SOUND OF MANY SEWING MACHINES becomes audible.

Bernard cocks an ear and follows the sound to another door, further down the alley.

CUT TO:

Bernard opening a DOOR - very loud whirring sounds get louder as the opening door REVEALS:

LINES OF HISPANIC WORKERS, bent over sewing machines.

CUT TO:

One of the workers, a YOUNG WOMAN who has her LITTLE BOY waiting for her to finish a long day's work and next to her, her YOUNG HUSBAND, working at another machine.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT OF BUILDING

The Boss and the other agents are waiting to hear Bernard's whistle.

BOSS
Where is that bonehead, Muller?

JERRY, one of the other agents remarks:

JERRY
Never send Bernard to
do a man's job.

And he jogs off enthusiastically into the alley after Bernard.

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOT Bernard BLOWING the whistle in the open doorway.

CUT TO:

The Boss and the Other Agent hear it and heave their way into the building.

BOSS
Nobody Move! Immigration!

CUT TO:

THE YOUNG MAN gathers up the child and looks anxiously at his wife.

CUT TO:

Bernard charges into the back of the room as, across it, the Boss and other agent enters the front.

TOTAL CHAOS as everyone tries to get out, but are trapped.

VARIOUS VOICES
La Migra! Vamos Amigos!

The YOUNG WOMAN AND MAN make a run for it, but they are slowed by the child.

THE BOSS SEES them escaping past Bernard. He shouts and POINTS.

BERNARD hones in on them.

As the Boss and other agents start to round up the others who are running in every direction; HIDING behind racks of clothing; TURNING over ironing boards: SLIPPING on pins and other sewing things.

BERNARD pursues the family into a corner of the warehouse.

They hide behind a rack of clothes. He puts his arm through to feel for them.

The LITTLE BOY takes up a hot iron and touches it to Bernard's grasping hand.

BERNARD pulls back his hand quickly and sucks his thumb where it got burnt.

The family make a run for the back door.

They run out, over Jerry who is just entering and AWAY.

Bernard comes out, full tilt after them, also over Jerry, who had just managed to get up.

He has an odd run, as though his legs are constantly trying to catch up with his head.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET

Bernard comes panting out of the alley. He stops for a second, looking up and down the street.

He sees the couple disappear into a CHINESE RESTAURANT.

A WASP buzzes around him, after the sweet wine. He bats it off, then another, then another.....He runs full tilt after the escaped couple, pursued by angry wasps.

CUT TO:

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT

Bernard runs in and looks around. It's a busy place. He runs through and into the kitchen, leaving the customers to swat at the wasps who have followed him in.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - KITCHEN

It's very small and crazily busy as the cooks and waiters prepare for the evening onslaught.

One COOK picks up a huge pail of uncooked FISH, CRAYFISH, CLAMS and LIVE LOBSTERS and starts to carry it very carefully across a passageway into the stove area as:

The Young Man, Young Woman and Child, dash through from the dining room and each of them almost knock him over as they race through.

AS they EXIT through the back door;

YOUNG MAN
Migra! La MIGRA!

The Cook pauses one second before dropping the seafood and following them out of the door.

The fish slide, the clams roll, the lobsters scurry away.

Bernard enters through the dining room doors and slips agonizingly on the various creatures. He never falls, each time he slips, he manages to recover his balance. Finally he heaves a sigh of relief and starts to head out after the fugitives WHEN:

A CHINESE BUSBOY carrying a large bin of used dishes and glasses to be washed up, walks into the hallway WHEN:

He steps on a fish and SKIDS:

His THICK GLASSES fly off his nose and sightless, he's about to tumble, when Bernard saves the day and the dishes.

A PROPRIETRESS

arrives to see Bernard and the Busboy triumphant. Both are on the floor, but not a dish is cracked!

They both stand. Bernard bows before taking off after his prey.

BERNARD
Sorry....
(by way of inadequate
explanation)
Immigration.

As he steps through the doors, we HEAR a loud SCRUNCH as he steps on and demolishes the busboy's glasses.

The busboy hears his glasses go and DROPS THE TRAY.

Bernard closes the street door, oblivious to the wreckage.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET

Bernard looks up and down the street and SEES the Family dash into a movie theater.

He takes off with his odd run, FULL TILT after them.

CUT TO:

INT. MOVIE THEATER

A sea of faces, mainly Japanese. They all stare, their heads at the same angle, their expressions similarly sad, at the screen. Feature the Young man, the Young Woman and the Little Boy in the audience, struggling to quieten their heavier breathing.

CUT TO:

Bernard staring at the audience, the screen behind him. We hear JAPANESE DIALOGUE from the film. The audience leans forward in one movement.

Bernard turns to see what is fascinating them.

CUT TO:

The movie: It's IKURU. Watanabe is listening to his son through the thin walls of his house.

CUT TO:

Bernard has sat down to watch the film.

CUT TO:

A little more film.

CUT TO:

Bernard is unconsciously helping himself to his neighbor's popcorn...he chews thoughtfully, staring up at the screen.

CUT TO:

Watanabe alone on the swings in a snowstorm.

CUT TO:

Bernard leaving the theater. He's holding the unfinished popcorn in one hand and a coca cola in the other. He brushes a tear from his eye with his elbow.

Distractedly, he joins a line for the men's room, not recognizing that the Young man, with the child over his shoulder, is in the line ahead of him.

Both affected by the film, Bernard and the Little Boy exchange sad glances. The Boy reaches over and takes a handful of pop-corn from Bernard's box.

The Young Man sniffs, grimaces and turns. He SEES

Bernard staring at him, not really recognizing him. But,

The Young man panics and BURSTS AWAY, spilling coke all over the front of Bernard's already liquor-soaked jacket. The popcorn EXPLODES out of Bernard's hands and sticks to him.

Guilelessly, the Little Boy waves to Bernard over his father's shoulder as they speed away out of the theater lobby.

CUT TO:

EXT. BERNARD'S HOUSE NIGHT- LATER

Bernard opens the gate and enters his front garden. He searches through his pockets for a key in the dim light of the porch, finally giving up and ringing the bell.

A minute passes and he HEARS:

WIFE'S VOICE (O.S.)
Who is it?

BERNARD
Me.

WIFE'S VOICE (O.S.)
Who?

BERNARD
Me. ...Bernard.

WIFE'S VOICE (O.S.)
Oh.

The door opens and Bernard's wife JOY appears. She looks at him as though he's a blind date. Up and down. Up then down again.

After a moment Bernard looks down too. Not only is he filthy, but there's a lobster from the Chinese restaurant attached to his trousers' leg. It's small lobster, but a lobster nonetheless.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD BERNARD'S HOUSE NIGHT

Bernard washes down his shoes with a hose, trying to get the mud from the alley off them.

Through the BRIGHTLY LIT kitchen window, we can see JOY ironing a gigantic pink, net petticoat - the sort that old fashioned ballroom dancers wear.

Bernard sends a little bit of water in the direction of the lobster. It's sluggish and feeble, but it manages to wave one feeler in salute.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH DAWN

Bernard walks down to the water and returns the lobster to it's natural habitat. He looks down in satisfaction to see the creature scramble happily back into the salt water.

CUT TO:

BERNARD asleep in bed. His eyelids move, flicker and open.

He sniffs a couple of times, frowns and gets up.

Pulling on his tartan robe over his pajamas, he exits the bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN MORNING

Bernard enters still sleepy eyed and sniffing. Joy is practicing dance steps by the stove.

He leans over to kiss her.

BERNARD
Morning dear....

He stops in mid-air, his lips pursed.

On the stove, in a pot of boiling water, beside her is the lobster.

BERNARD looks at the lobster's dead face.

CUT TO:

EXT. KOREATOWN STREET - DAYTIME

CLOSE on PICKET SIGNS which read things like "DEMOCRACY FOR KOREA", as KOREANS young and old demonstrate outside a convention hotel in Downtown Los Angeles.

They shout at American and South Korean Politicians as they leave a limousine for the hotel.

INT. UNMARKED VAN

The Boss, Muller and other agents alight.

BOSS
Fan out. You two stay on
on the outskirts...Muller...

He gestures for Muller to stay with him.

One of the DISSIDENTS, an older man, notices:

BERNARD AND THE BOSS

Sauntering near the crowd, looking around like agents.

DISSIDENT
(loudly in Korean)
Immigration! Leave if you don't
have a Green Card!

There's a restlessness in the crowd - like the moments before a
cattle stampede - then as they too SEE:

Bernard and his Boss

They move away, at first at walking pace, then running. Bernard
and his Boss take after them.

Bernard separates from his Boss to follow THREE KOREANS down a
street of small, elderly shops.

The Korean Men turn a corner and disappear.

CUT TO:

The Three Koreans

conversing urgently in front of a store. One of them is trying to
persuade the others to enter quickly, finally they do.

Bernard rounds the corner

to SEE the last Korean enter the store.

Bernard runs to the store and without looking, ENTERS:

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: BERNARD charging in the door shouting:

BERNARD
You are in the country
illegally....!!!!

The words die on his lips as he SEES:

TWENTY NATIVE AMERICANS looking at him. The Koreans are sitting
behind them.

Bernard backs out of the room apologetically.

EXT. BUILDING DAY

AS Bernard backs out of the Store, we SEE the sign on top of the building:

NATIVE AMERICAN CENTER

CUT TO:

INT. EARLY EVENING

A very deft and elegant BLACK HAND puts the finishing touches on a dry martini.

PULL BACK to SEE:

A HAITIAN BARTENDER, ALEX, in an immaculate tuxedo carrying the finished drinks into a crowd of WELL-HEELED PARTYGOERS. He is every inch an obsequious servant:

And as the guests give him a load of new orders, we may HEAR their ENGLISH accents.

Alex rushes back to the bar to mix another batch of drinks, nodding as he passes THREE OTHER WEST INDIAN WAITERS.

ALEX
Grin and bear it...
The pay's not bad.

The HOUSE OWNER, who'se party this is, hears this. It reminds him of something. He walks out of the room to a hallway and picks up the phone surreptitiously.

HOUSE OWNER
(English Accent)
I'd like to report a
group of illegal aliens....
In two hours, they will be.....

CUT TO:

INT. IMMIGRATION HOLDING CENTER

Bernard has a huge pile of papers to stamp in front of him.

Like a robot, he stamps over and over, a faraway look in his eyes.

He ceases after a BEAT. Then STAMPS: Then DREAMS AGAIN:

More ALIENS WAIT in rows ahead of him, tense with suspense as his stamp hovers in the air.

Bernard is completely lost in DREAM, holding his stamp in the

air, he gazes over their heads.

CUT TO:

The Boss on the phone as the other agents watching replays of Monday Night Football on tv in his office.

Through the window, we SEE Bernard still lost in his dream, the stamp still in the air.

The Boss hangs up the phone, stands and turns off the television.

CUT TO:

BOSS (VOICE OVER)
Sleeping Beauty...Muller!

Bernard comes back to earth slowly and painfully.

He turns and SEES, the Boss beckoning him from his office door with one finger.

He gets up and follows him into his office as the Aliens watch with interest.

CUT TO:

INT. BOSS' OFFICE

The Boss leans back in his chair as Bernard sits, on a much shorter chair, across the desk from him:

BOSS
It's your last chance Muller.

Bernard nods in agreement.

So, PLEASE, I'd hate to
see you in processing forever....

Bernard smiles wanly at this obvious lie.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARTY HOUSE - LATER

All the Lights are on and we CAN HEAR the SOUND of the PARTY in the background.

Bernard, the Boss and OTHER AGENTS split up, Bernard to the back door, with the whistle, the others to the front and sides.

Bernard opens a gate only to be cornered by a VICIOUS LOOKING DOG.

It SNARLS, GROWLS and BARES it's teeth.

bernard tries to calm it as he walks sideways along the wall of the house.

The other AGENTS cover their EYES and BACK AWAY:

The dog JUMPS AT Bernard:

Knocking him backwards THROUGH the kitchen door onto the floor of the kitchen .

BERNARD'S POV

The Dog LICKS his face with love in his eyes.

BERNARD picks himself up and LOOKS AROUND:

INT. KITCHEN

It's a madhouse. The waiters, seen earlier, fly in and out dropping empty trays and lifting freshly loaded ones.

As Bernard walks through, he doesn't notice the DISHWASHER, who may look a little familiar. He's the Young Man that Bernard chased in the first sequence.

He doesn't notice Bernard either. In fact, as Bernard passes, he hands the Young man a dish that's slipping from his hands and the Young Man nods his thanks and they still remain happily oblivious.

Each time Bernard tries to EXIT the Kitchen, he is met by a busy waiter and has to dodge out of the way.

As he finally leaves the room, the Young Man, turns with a bucket of clean dishes. He SEES BERNARD:

And DROPS the dishes.

None of which Bernard notices having just navigated his way through the doors and into the party.

INT. PARTY

The Party has been in full swing for some time. Bernard looks around, counting the waiters.

SUDDENLY, a CLAW-LIKE hand reaches up and attaches itself to his arm.

Bernard looks down:

and SEES:

A wizened OLD LADY, covered in expensive jewelry, smiling up at him.

OLD LADY
(English accent)
Hello Son....

BERNARD
ER...I'm not...

Behind them, the Young Man is quietly and bravely pointing Bernard out to the West Indian Waiters.

The OLD LADY has a hearing problem.

OLD LADY
Pleased to see me?

Bernard pauses. He doesn't like to say no, but he isn't much of a liar.

OLD LADY
I know you are....
Where's Mary?

BERNARD
Mary...?

People are starting to look for waiters.

OLD LADY
Your wife...What's the
matter with you tonight?

BERNARD
I'm not your son and my
wife's name is Joy...not...

OLD LADY
You've been drinking.

Bernard is desperate. He looks up and SEES his Boss staring through the window at him.

BERNARD
Lady...I'm not your son...

She gestures, indicating she can't hear him.

Bernard raises his voice.

I AM NOT YOUR SON!

OLD LADY
Who are you then?

BERNARD
I'm with immigration...;

OLD LADY
I beg your pardon?

BERNARD
IMMIGRATION!

The entire party STOPS and turns.

CUT TO:

INT. INS. HOLDING CENTER - NIGHT

Bernard leads in almost everyone that was at the party.

They are protesting LOUDLY in English and occasionally French accents. Bernard, however, is happy - he has finally made his quota.

He sits down at the processing table and takes up a form.

He looks up indicating that the first ENGLISHMAN should step forward.

BERNARD
(pleasantly bland)
Name....?

CUT TO:

EXT. SPORTS STADIUM - DAY

Bernard, a slight smile on his face, a slight spring in his step, shepards a group of thick set M N in checkered shirts out of the gates.

They pass a SIGN for a CANADA vs. US hockey game.

CUT TO:

Bernard holds open the door to the Holding Center and half a dozen ENGLISH NANNIES, in starchy uniforms and caps walk in, each carrying a basket containing a TABBY CAT.

CUT TO:

The Boss standing at his office window looking out to the holding area. The PHONE RINGS behind him.

He jumps, shaken.

CUT TO:

bernard stamping papers. There's a slight lilt to it - he may even be a fraction brisker than he was before. Otherwise, nothing has changed.

He looks up and into the holding center.

CUT TO:

The Holding center has changed. There is hardly a brown face in it. There are the English nannies playing bridge, the Canadian hockey fans, perhaps a few French ballet dancers, a German photographer. They stare back at him as they await their fate.

CUT TO:

The Boss looking out of the window as he talks on the phone in his office. He has the look of man with a lot to explain.

CUT TO:

Bernard stamping papers - He starts whistling.

START CREDITS AS Bernard stamps and whistles.

T H E E N D