Nationalities

A 10-Minute Play

by

David K. Farkas

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## Setting:

New York City, Sometime in the 1930s.

## Characters:

Major characters are indicated by boldface.

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| --- |
| **Joe Geller:**  Just out of accounting school, smart ambitious and a Jew. |
| **Sammy D:** The head of a Mafia family in New York City. |
| **Dominic:** Joe’s friend from baseball and Sammy D’s nephew. |

## Suggested Casting

**Joe**

**Sammy**

**Dominic**

# Scene 1

(Lights.)

(Offstage voices of JOE and DOMINIC.)

(JOE and DOMINIC enter wearing casual street clothes. DOMINIC has a lot of extra energy.)

JOE: Still throwing that slider?

DOMINIC: Yeah with the fast ball. And the change-up.

JOE: No one could ever hit that slider.

DOMINIC: Well, we won a few. (Laughingly, he gives up the false modesty.) Hell, we won more than a few!

(DOMINIC holds out his arm to represent his slider coming over home plate and dropping with a sharp diagonal. DOMINIC and JOE laugh and cavort a bit.)

DOMINIC: Hey Joe, Got a job yet?

JOE: No. Not yet.

DOMINIC: I guess it’s tough times.

JOE: Yeah. Not many ads in the help wanteds, and salaries are sure low. But I’ll get something.

DOMINIC: You did finish accountant school?

JOE: Yeah, Sure.

DOMINIC: What about going to work for my uncle?

JOE: Your uncle?

DOMINIC: Yeah. He has several little businesses. You know. Not always legal, but not that much worse than what big corporations do. It’s just harder for the little guy to get by because up in Albany, they don’t write laws to protect *us*. Anyways, Uncle Sammy’s been saying he could use a smart accountant. I told me I’d ask you. He’d pay real well, I can tell you that.

JOE: Your family? I always figured on working for a Jewish business.

DOMINIC: Italians are OK with Jews. We’re comfortable with Jews. We especially like Jewish doctors, Jewish accountants. Jewish mechanics, plumbers—not so much.

JOE: There’s a Jewish carpenter you liked pretty well.

DOMINIC: Yeah, something like that. But that was a thousand years ago. These days, your Jewish carpenters don’t cut so straight. (Mimics bad sawing.) and don’t hit the nails so even. (Mimics bad hammering.). We’ll take our own people for carpentry and plumbing. Hell, we’ll take Poles. (Laughing.) We’ll take anybody. (Long pause.) My Uncle Sammy —he’s an OK guy. And, if you’re loyal to him, he’s loyal to you.

(DOMINIC and JOE start walking offstage.)

JOE: Well maybe I should go talk to him.

DOMINIC: (Volume fading as they exit.) Yeah.

JOE: (Fading to silence.) Yea, Thanks, Dom. I think . . .

(Exit.)

(Blackout.)

# Scene 2

(Lights.)

(SAMMY sits at a big desk. JOE, dressed as an accountant, is standing in front of the desk.)

JOE: Mr. D, still no payment from Guardino.

SAMMY: Joe, don’t worry about it.

JOE: They’re way overdue. I sent them two letters already.

SAMMY: Joe, I said don’t worry about it. Just clear the books on that account. Mark it “All debts paid.”

(Blackout.)

# Scene 3

(Lights.)

(JOE and DOMINIC are standing. Stage is empty.)

DOMINIC: I hear it’s going well for you. I hear Uncle Sammy likes you. And trusts you.

JOE: I think so, Dom.

DOMINIC: I got stuff going too. Big stuff. Let me tell you. . . Just you.

(They start to walk offstage.)

DOMINIC: But soon everyone’s gonna hear about it.

(They Exit.)

(Blackout.)

# Scene 4

(Stage is empty.)

 (Action.)

SAMMY: Joe, I’m gonna ask you to do something special—out of your usual line of work. You can say no. . . There’s an element of risk.

JOE: Is it important to you?

SAMMY: Yes. Some of our guys, they broke a rule. Luchese Family—real stupid. Worst people to have trouble with. I want to negotiate with Marco Luchese. Negotiate our way out of this trouble. I apologized on the phone to Marco. He listened, but that’s not close to enough. He’s lost money . . . and, much more than that, he’s offended.

JOE: A bad situation. How can I help?

SAMMY: We’d like you to meet with Marco and his guys. Handle the negotiations on our side.

JOE: OK. But why me?

SAMMY: Well, you’re smart. And, maybe even more important for this situation. . . you’re sort of a neutral party. Not in the family. Just an employee. That adds a little distance. Like Switzerland. Makes the negotiation less emotional than if he’s looking straight at one of us.

JOE: OK.

SAMMY: Marco’s not the calm type. Most guys get to head families because they’re smart—and that usually means calm, careful. Marco, he’s smart but he’s not calm. He’s a very emotional guy. So you’re a good choice to meet with Marco. No history. No close involvement. Also, they know *you* won’t try any funny stuff. That reduces the tension. . . And I don’t think they’ll hurt you.

JOE: (Smiling.) That’s good to know.

SAMMY: Killing our Jewish accountant? Wouldn’t prove a thing. When the families found out, he’d just get laughed at. “So, Marco, he gets mad at Sammy D. And you know what he does? He offs Sammy’s little Jewish accountant!” “What! He did *that*?” (SAMMY fakes the derisive laughter he’s imagining.)

JOE: Thanks a lot.

SAMMY: You know what I mean.

JOE: What if they grab me and make me give up stuff I know? The accounts. The payoffs.

SAMMY: Joe, you’re always thinking. We like that. But that’s how a Jewish accountant thinks. There’s nothing to worry about on that score. That’s just not what we do. I’m 90% certain they won’t kill you. I’m 80% certain they won’t rough you up. But I’m 100% sure they won’t try to squeeze information out of you.

JOE: When do you want me to go?

SAMMY: Tomorrow.

JOE: Mr. D—tomorrow’s Yom Kippur.

SAMMY: I know that. The meeting is at 4:00. It will be over with enough time for you to get to shul before sundown. You’re allowed to work right until sundown. Right?

(JOE nods.)

SAMMY: We don’t need to hear from you until after Yom Kippur. Whatever happens at your meeting, just go straight from the meeting to shul. Come back to work on Thursday.

JOE: OK. If that’s how you want it.

SAMMY: Here’s the deal. As a peace offering, tell Marco he can have our numbers game south of Mott street. That’s a big area. That’s giving up a lot. And . . . I’ll sign over the deed to our plot in the new addition to Green Wood Cemetery. It’s beautiful and big enough for 20 graves. It’s up on a little hill with a view of the City. Almost as nice as the Pierpont Family plots nearby. That’s offering Marco a lot. That’s respectability. Maybe he’ll ask for something else. I don’t know. Just use your head. Be real flexible here. We don’t want a war. They are bigger than us. (Long pause and then a serious tone of voice.) One thing: What we really don’t want to give up is the warehouse on 12th Street.

JOE: (A little suspiciously.) OK, the warehouse on 12th Street.

SAMMY: Try not to give that up. But give it up if it means preventing a war. And, Joe. You Jews. On Yom Kippur you do a prayer for the dead. Big part of the service. Yes?

JOE: Yeah that’s right.

SAMMY: Well do some praying for . . . people you know, our people. Pray to God to keep our people safe.

JOE: That’s not exactly what Yom Kippur prayer is about.

SAMMY: Joe, just do it. I’m asking.

JOE: I’ll do it. I’ll do everything you’re asking me.

(Blackout.)

# Scene 5

(Lights.)

(SAMMY is at his desk. JOE is standing.)

JOE: Mr. D.

SAMMY: Yeah, Joe.

JOE: I had to give up the warehouse. You were right. That’s what Marco wanted. I couldn’t get him off that. I tried.

 (No reaction from SAMMY D.)

JOE: But there’s not gonna be a war. Isn’t that what counts?

SAMMY: Yeah, Joe.

JOE: You don’t seem happy, Mr. D. It’s just a *warehouse*. And none of what I’m saying seems like news to you.

SAMMY: It’s not news, Joe. We know about your meeting. I talked to Marco yesterday while you were at shul. We met face to face at the place he likes to go for lunch. I took a little chance there.

JOE: Mr. D, what could be so important about that warehouse? I know that street end to end. Not one special building on that street.

SAMMY: The warehouse is a person, Joe. One the guys who offended Marco. You gave Marco an authorized hit on someone.

JOE: Who? Which person?

SAMMY: You don’t need to know.

JOE: Yes I do.

SAMMY: It’s Dominic. The “warehouse” stood for Dominic. I set it up that way with Marco before you met with him. Dom’s one of the guys who offended, and the one who should have known better. Dom thought he was gonna show Marco what a tough guy he is, how smart he is. Didn’t tell me anything. Well, he wasn’t so smart, and of the three, Dom’s the guy Marco chose. Dom offended Marco, offended his reputation, his honor. Now Marco needs to assert himself, show he’s the big guy who gets what he wants. That’s how it works here.

JOE: No, not Dominic!

(SAMMY stands and holds approaches JOE closely, maybe puts an arm over him.)

SAMMY: I tried to save him. I begged. I *begged*. I offered everything.

JOE: Not Dominic!

SAMMY: Dom brought it on himself. It was either Dominic’s dead or else a couple of Dominics dead. And some of their Dominics besides. No one knows where it would have stopped.

JOE: You should have told me before I met with Marco.

SAMMY: No it was better to have an outsider do the negotiations. And it was better you didn’t know what you were offering up. You wouldn’t have been calm if you knew you were talking about Dom.

JOE: Where’s Dominic now?

SAMMY: No one knows just where he is. We don’t want to know. He’s cut off now. And if you try to help Dom, Marco will likely find out. Don’t do it, Joe. Don’t join Dominic’s brotherhood of young fools.

JOE: Mr. D, I may be able to fix this.

SAMMY: You?

JOE: Yes.

JOE: Maybe I’m an outsider in the nationalities—a Jew, not an Italian. But the world’s divided up in lots of other ways, different kinds of “nationalities”—rich, poor; smart, dumb; kind, cruel. . . old, young. Mr. D, I’m part of the nationality of the young people. So is Dom. You’re not. We know things you and Marco don’t.

SAMMY: What are you saying?

JOE: Dominic is seeing Theresa Luchese, seeing her a lot, more than “seeing” her—they have plans.

JOE: If Marco Luchese has Dominic killed, he’ll wish he had the plots in Green Wood Cemetery so he could dig himself a hole, jump in, and escape from his daughter.

SAMMY: You know this?

JOE: Yes, and the brotherhood of young men and women, we have our allies—powerful allies. That’s the mothers and the aunts and the grandmothers who care more about weddings and children than about business and family honor. . . If Luchese kills Dominic, he’ll be dealing with all the womenfolk around him. They’ll be really “offended!”

SAMMY: OK. OK. Let’s go visit Luchese. I think the terms of the deal are different now. . . But if you’re lying to me to save your friend, you’re a very foolish young man. Then you’re in the nationality of Jews, of accountants, of young men, and . . . of reckless fools who won’t live long.

JOE: I’m no liar! You know that. I don’t *know* whether I’d lie to you to try to save Dominic. But fortunately for me I won’t need to find out. He and Theresa Luchese are as deep in love as you can get. Marco is going to have to accept that. Dom’s told me about Theresa. He didn’t tell me about his stupid stunt to impress the man who’ll be his father-in-law. I would have stopped that.

 (SAMMY is smiling.)

SAMMY: OK. Let’s see Marco right this minute. Other than this recent thing, Marco never had anything against Dom. I’m gonna hate to give up the numbers business south of Mott street, and I’ll really hate to give up the plots at Green Wood. . . My God, Dominic could get buried there some day with Theresa. . .

JOE: There’s a thought.

SAMMY: Joe, our two families are kind of joining, which isn’t so bad when you consider that we’re small. We were getting squeezed out. And Dominic, he’s getting *his* punishment for being part of the nationality of young fools. He owes me *big* for what I’m gonna have to give Marco. And, if he ever gets to serious fighting with Theresa, she’ll remind that she’s the reason he’s even alive. But, putting it all together, this is a pretty good day. . . for everyone. Thank you, Joe. You got a good head on your shoulders. And maybe you did some good praying in your shul.

 (Blackout.)

## THE END

# Production Notes

SAMMY: Joe, our two families are kind of joining, which isn’t so bad when you consider we that we’re small. We were getting squeezed out. And
Dominic, he’s getting his punishment ~~as well~~ for being part of the nationality of young fools. He owes me *big* for what I’m gonna have to give Marco. And if he ever gets to serious fighting with Thereas, she’ll remind that she’s the reason he’s even alive. But, putting it all together, this is a pretty good day. . . for everyone. Thank you, Joe. You got a good head on your shoulders. And maybe you did some good praying in your shul.