

PHILADELPHIA

TEXT 1: FIRED

Andrew Beckett, a young and brilliant lawyer who has AIDS, has been summoned² by the senior partners of his firm.

⌘ Andrew, " Mr. Wheeler said, "before we begin I'd like to say that everyone in this room is your friend."
"I know that, Charles," Andrew said.

5 "Well, Andy, we've been talking it over," Mr. Wheeler said. "We think your future is, ah, we feel that, because we respect you so much we have to be honest with you."

"I'm all for honesty," Andrew said.

"Are you really?" Mr. Kenton said.

10 "Yes, Walter, I am." Andrew stopped. Suddenly he understood. He had heard stories about Mr. Wheeler's little good-luck-and-get-out speech, always given in front of the other managing partners and always recorded by a secretary. Around the firm, it was called "The Executioner's Song," and Andrew realized that this was it. "Excuse me," he said, "am I being fired?" Only a second or two passed, but it felt like an eternity.

⌘ "Let's put it this way, Andy," Mr. Wheeler said. "Your place in the future of this firm is no longer secure. We don't think it's fair to keep you here where you're limited. But we do wish you luck, Andy, all the luck in the world."

15 Andrew suddenly felt sick; the kind of life he had enjoyed so much, and had always assumed would continue, was over in an instant.

Mr. Wheeler stood, gave Andrew his best paternalistic smile, and said, "And I hate to rush you out of here, but we've got a meeting in my office."

20 Everyone stood, smiling pleasantly, as though they had all enjoyed some trivial conversation, not destroyed a career.

"Excuse me, Charles," Andrew said. "With all due respect, this is preposterous. It doesn't make any sense – it sounds like we're talking about somebody else. Pardon the lack of humility, but I've had the distinct impression that I was one of the rising stars around here, and I'm sure that wasn't just my imagination, I think I deserve to know what is really going on!"

25 ⌘ "Oh, you're right, Beckett," Mr. Kenton said sarcastically, "you don't have an attitude problem."

"Take it easy, Walter," Mr. Wheeler said.

"If you'd lost confidence in me, why did you give me the Highline case?"

"Andy!" Mr. Seidman said. "You nearly blew the case, for God's sake³! That alone is inexcusable. It could have been catastrophic for us. Put yourself in our shoes, Andy."

30 "Bob!" Mr. Wheeler warned.

"There's no coming back from a mistake like that," Mr. Seidman continued, "regardless of who you are." He sounded sad about it, but he definitely supported the others. "I'm sorry, Andy," he said softly.

"I see," Andrew said.

35 "Good luck, Andrew," Mr. Wheeler said, and one by one the partners and Mr. Wheeler's secretary left the room. Then a man walked in.

"Mr. Beckett?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm here to escort you to your office so you can organize your belongings."

Christopher DAVIS, *Philadelphia* (1993)

⌘ © Bantam Doubleday Dell, Inc.

² summon: *convoquer*.

³ for God's sake: *pour l'amour de Dieu*.

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ANTICIPATION

1. Read the introduction and deduce the meaning of the title, *Fired*:

- promoted* (promu)?
- dismissed* (renvoyé)?
- cured* (guéri)?

Then read the text until you find the sentence that confirms your hypothesis.

WORDS

2. Guess the meaning of the words in bold letters. What words in each sentence gave you a clue?

- a) "... as though they had all enjoyed a **trivial** conversation, not destroyed a career." (l. 20-21)
- b) "With all due respect this is **preposterous**." (l. 22)
- c) "Pardon the **lack** of humility, but I've had the distinct impression that I was one of the rising stars around here..." (l. 23)
- d) "... I was one of the rising stars here [...]. I think I **deserve** to know..." (l. 24)
- e) "If you'd lost **confidence** in me, why did you give me the Highline case?" (l. 28)

3. Translate into English. You will find most words in the text.

- a) *Disons les choses ainsi: vous êtes viré.*
- b) *J'aimerais savoir ce qui se passe ici.*
- c) *Il lui dit de prendre tes choses calmement.*
- d) *Il a failli faire rater l'affaire.*
- e) *Mettez-vous à notre place: nous ne pouvons plus vous garder avec nous.*

4. Observe the following words and find how they are built (root, prefix, suffix). Then give the nature and meaning of each word:

- executioner (l. 11)
- paternalistic (l. 18)
- sarcastically (l. 26)
- inexcusable (l. 29)
- regardless (l. 32)
- belongings (l. 39)

MEANING

5. The senior (or managing) partners: give their complete names.

6. Understatement

- a) Pick out a second sentence that expresses the fact that Andrew is fired.
- b) The word AIDS is not uttered once. How does one of the senior partners manage to tell Andrew why he is dismissed?
- c) What other reason enables the managers to justify their decision?
- d) What is understated when Seidman says "*That alone is inexcusable*." (l. 29)?

7. Andrew Beckett

- a) Find out the expressions alluding to the fact that he is a brilliant lawyer.

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- b) What makes him realize that he is being fired?
c) Discard the statements that do not correspond to Andrew's reactions. Justify your answers by quoting from the text.
- He more or less expected this to happen so he doesn't overreact.
 - He is flabbergasted (*stupéfait*).
 - He sounds indifferent.
 - He feels so hopeless that he doesn't try to defend himself.
 - He attempts to make them understand that his dismissal is against the firm's interests.
 - He accuses them of employment discrimination.
- d) Imagine what is going to happen afterwards.

8. Your opinion

Do you know other examples of discrimination against people who are infected with AIDS? How do you account for this? Have you seen the film Philadelphia? Do you think this type of film helps mentalities to evolve?

HELP YOURSELF

NOUNS:

- AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)
- HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)
- AIDS carrier / patient (*malade du SIDA*)
- heterosexual ≠ homosexual = gay behavior (*comportement*)
- prejudice (*préjugé*)
- fear = scare
- black sheep (*brebis galeuse*) = pariah, rejection, exclusion, (social / moral / professional, etc.)
- ghetto = isolation
- blinkers (*œillères*)

ADJECTIVES:

- HIV positive (*séropositif*)
- catching (*contagieux*), dangerous ≠ safe
- hypocritical, narrow-minded (*borné*)
- unfriendly ≠ friendly, pitiless (*sans pitié*) / intolerant ≠ tolerant,
- selfish ≠ helpful, willing to (*disposé à*) ≠ unwilling to = reluctant to
- frightened = scared
- become / make somebody aware of = conscious of

VERBS:

- catch a disease (*maladie*)
- be discriminated against
- be prejudiced against
- turn one's back on somebody, shrink back from somebody / something / V-ing (*reculer*) = recoil from, avoid (*éviter*) somebody / V-ing
- keep somebody away = reject = cast somebody out = ostracize = exclude, bar somebody from something / V-ing
- treat / regard somebody as a leper (*lépreux*) ≠ dare (*oser*)
- dread (*redouter*) something / V-ing, feel threatened (*menacé*)
- sympathize with (*compatir*), comfort (*réconforter*), support (*soutenir*)
- denounce, criticize, condemn
- sue / prosecute (*engager des poursuites judiciaires*) / go to court