

## PHILADELPHIA

### TEXT 2: CULTURE SHOCK

*A brilliant young lawyer, Andrew Beckett is a star in the making at his prestigious Philadelphia law firm, Wyant and Wheeler. But his future is not as certain as it seems: Andrew Beckett has AIDS.*

*As the symptoms of his illness become more visible, Andrew is fired. He is told his dismissal is due to incompetence. But Andrew knows the charges are unfounded.*

*Joe Miller is a black lawyer in a small firm. One day, Andrew Beckett walks into his office.*

### PART I

☞ "Good to see you, Counselor," Andrew said. He shook Joe's hand.

"What can I do for you?" Joe said.

5 "I was fired from Wyant, Wheeler. I plan to bring a wrongful discrimination suit against Charles Wheeler and his partners."

"You want to sue Wyant, Wheeler, Hellerman, Telow, and Brown?"

"Correct," Andrew said, "I'm seeking representation."

Jesus, Joe thought, how can I get this guy out of my office? "Continue," he said.

"I misplaced an important complaint. That's their story. Want to hear mine?"

10 "How many lawyers did you call before you called me?" Joe asked.

"Nine."

"That's not exactly a vote of confidence, is it?" Joe said. "But continue."

15 "I was diagnosed with AIDS about eight months ago, during a bout of pneumonia. I recovered quickly and went back to work in ten days. I was doing so well on my medication that we decided against telling anyone about it, except friends, of course."

"We?" Joe asked.

"My lover and I."

"Your *lover* and you?"

20 "Miguel Alvarez. He's from Spain. He teaches at the Institute of the Arts. But anyway, after the pneumonia I dove back into work. Everything was fine until the KS showed up.

"KS?"

"Kaposi's sarcoma. It's the AIDS-related skin cancer that causes these lesions." Andrew pointed to his forehead.

"I see," Joe said, and he could see the lesions very plainly. "Continue."

25 "First I had them on my legs, then on my forearm, then my back, then my face. When they hit my face, I worked at home for a while waiting for the chemo to kick in.

"So how'd you get fired?"

30 "They say I lost a very important complaint, but I *know* I left it there. And not only did the complaint itself vanish, but even my computer files were gone. And then it was mysteriously found at the last minute. And the next thing I know, the following morning I'm being escorted by a security guard to pick up my belongings."

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## PART II

☞ "So you were concealing your illness?" Joe asked.

"Correct," Andrew said. This is not going well, he thought, not at all.

"Okay, explain this to me like I'm a two year old," Joe said, "because there's an element I can't get through my thick head. Didn't you have an obligation to inform your employers you had this dreaded, deadly, infections disease?"

"No! I did not! And besides, that's not the point! From the day they hired me to the day they fired me, I served my clients consistently, thoroughly, and with absolute excellence. And if they hadn't fired me, I'd still be doing that today!"

"Okay, okay, calm down." Joe thought for a minute or two. "So you're saying they didn't want to fire you for having AIDS so, despite your brilliance, they tried to make you look bad. Hence, the mysterious lost file. Is that about it?"

"It was a complaint. I was sabotaged. And yes, that's about it."

"I don't buy it, Counselor."

"That's very disappointing," Andrew interjected.

"— and I don't see a case." Joe took out a pack of Roloids; this was not going to be a good day.

"I do have a case!" Andrew said. "If you don't want to take it for personal reasons —"

"Thank you, Counselor, I don't," Joe said firmly. There went Andrew's last hope.

"Thank you for your time, Counselor," he said, and he stood and went to the door.

"Beckett?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry about what happened to you. It's a bitch."

"Don't send flowers, my friend. I'm not dead yet," Andrew said, and he left with dignity, not showing his disappointment, not showing his exhaustion.

"Have a nice day, Mr. Beckett," Iris said as he walked out, and he nodded, remembering what George Burns said about that phrase: *Everyday I'm above ground is a nice day.*

Joe's associate Filko watched Andrew leave.

"What the hell's wrong with that guy?" he said.

Iris shrugged as Joe came to her desk. "Iris, find out if Dr. Armbruster can see me," Joe told her.

"Armbruster? When?"

"Today sometime. Soon! Right away!" Joe said, and he went back to his office.

Adapted and abridged from *Philadelphia*, Christopher DAVIS (1993)

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## SCANNING

1. How many characters are mentioned in the passage?
2. How many are actually present? Quote their names.
3. Describe their relation to the main protagonists, choosing from the list below (some propositions are wrong): *associate, employee, employer, father, partner, sarcoma, secretary, well-known American comic entertainer*. Ex.: *Kaposi is father to...*

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## ANALYSIS

1. What do Joe's question (Part 1, l. 6) and his reflection "*Jesus, how can I get this guy out of my office?*" (Part 1, l. 8) show?
2. Throughout the interview, Joe is rather hostile to Andrew. List the various signs showing this.
3. What details in the interview show that Joe is indeed experiencing culture shock?
4. When Joe asks the question "*So you were concealing your illness?*" (Part 2, l. 1) he has actually been given the answer long before. In which lines?
5. How does Andrew react to the question? Why?
6. Andrew is a sincere, honest and straightforward man. How are we made to feel this throughout the interview?
7. How do you explain, then, his concealing his illness?

### PARADOX

1. **Although he was** HIV-positive, Andrew didn't want his boss to know about his illness.
2. **(Even) though he was** HIV-positive, Andrew didn't want his boss to know about his illness.
3. **Despite** the fact that he was HIV-positive, Andrew didn't want his boss to know about his illness.
4. **In spite of** the fact that he was HIV-positive, Andrew didn't want his boss to know about his illness.
5. Andrew was HIV-positive. **And yet / However** he didn't want his boss to know about his illness.  
**All the same / Nevertheless,**
6. **Granted,** he was HIV-positive. **Still** he didn't want his boss to know about his illness.
7. **For all** his honesty, Andrew didn't want his boss to know about his illness.
8. **No matter** how honest Andrew was, he didn't want his boss to know about his illness.

8. What does Joe want to see a doctor for?

## PASSIVE VOICE

There are a certain number of passive forms referring to Andrew's situation. List them. What does this show regarding his situation?

## WORDS

"*Roloids*" (Part 2, l. 15) are digestive, antacid tablets. "*I don't see a case*" (Part 2, l. 15) means that legally, there's nothing to be done. But there are words and expressions whose meaning may be deduced from the context like:

- "*waiting for the chemo to kick in*" (Part 1, l. 26);
- "*I was sabotaged*" (Part 2, l. 12);
- "*I don't buy it, Counselor*" (Part 2, l. 13);
- "*It's a bitch*" (Part 2, l. 21).

Explain them.