



Ronald Tavel at 27 St. Mark's Place, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, during the writing of his first screenplay, eventually only presented on the stage, TAZAN OF THE FLICKS, circa 1962.

# **THE UNDERSTUDY**

**a play by Ronald Tavel**

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**Characters:**

**VINCENT**

**JESSE**

**GIULIANA**

**MYRA**

**The Set:**

A blank flat as large as the stage, running from wing to wing and floor to ceiling divides, about midway, upstage from downstage. A gigantic oval is cut out in the center of the flat, perhaps 25 feet in width, with the lowest point in its vertical diameter about 6 inches from the stage floor. Between the flat and the backdrop, and visible through the open oval, is the parlor of VINCENT's apartment. Upstage is a door giving onto the hallway; on the right, an open frame leading (presumably) to the kitchen, not visible. The parlor's furnishings vaguely suggest leftover 1930s hand-me-downs: a narrow table with two chairs, a stool near the door, and a shabby overstuffed cheater toward the audience. On the backdrop hangs a huge deco-framed oval mirror, large enough to reflect at least two entire persons standing before it.

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*[A knock on the door.]*

VINCENT: *[Offstage, calling from the kitchen.]* Jesse?

JESSE: *[Calling from beyond the door.]* Yes!

VINCENT: *[O.S.]* Let yourself in, the door is open!

*[JESSE pulls open the door and is seen standing in the hall, shaking out his umbrella. He is a slender young-looking man, open-faced, fair-haired, and personable. He enters the apartment tentatively and looks about, not knowing what to do with his wet umbrella.]*

VINCENT: *[O.S.]* Find a chair, I'll be with you in a second. Raining bad?

JESSE: It just started to really come down. I was half a block away. Before that it was misting, you know? Or I would've grabbed a cab or something.

VINCENT: *[O.S.]* You guys been in a huddle all morning?

JESSE: Since 9 o'clock. Listen, I didn't mean to disturb you if you're busy. I just came by to pick up the extra scripts they need.

VINCENT: *[O.S.]* I know, Marty called me from the office. He said you'd stop up to get them. I just got in myself about ten minutes ago. I was stuck in the xerox place for nearly two hours. And I went to that very expensive one, thinking there'd be fewer people there. But you know how Mondays are: everybody has to xerox their stuff on Monday.

JESSE: *[Pause]* Yeah.

*[Pause; he notices the deco fabrics and 30s furniture and examines them curiously.]*

VINCENT: *[O.S.]* Fridays they're empty.

JESSE: Is that right? I'll remember that. *[Looking at his watch.]* The conference is still going on. I said I'd be back in under an hour.



VINCENT: [O.S.] Yeah, but it's raining.

*[Appearing in the doorway right with 2 cups and saucers. He is about 30, olive-skinned, tall and very broad, with a stunning shock of wavy black hair. He has a swashbuckler's animal grace and is exceptionally handsome.]*

What do they want, blood?

*[JESSE is perceptibly taken aback by his prepossessing appearance.]*

It's bad enough having the playwright himself run this kind of errand. The least they can do is let you take your time about it.

JESSE: Well, Marty wouldn't normally ask me to do a thing like this. But there was no one else handy, 'cause rehearsal isn't called till mid-afternoon. Besides, I wanted to get out of there for a couple of minutes. So I volunteered. Are they ready to go?

VINCENT: Yes, I'll get them in a jiffy. I have to put them in a waterproof package.

JESSE: Nah, it's just a few blocks.

VINCENT: Don't you want some hot mocha?

JESSE: I didn't mean to make work for —

VINCENT: Warm you up. This is my own blend. Bet you've never tasted anything resembling it. It's spiced coffee and chocolate, with cream: separate layers of colors, you can see them.

*[Setting the cups and saucers on the table.]*

JESSE: The meeting was going pretty hot and heavy when I split —

VINCENT: And I put my own amalgam of petals and seeds in it. It's the anise that makes the difference.

JESSE: Anise?

VINCENT: Yeah, anise seeds. Licorice.

Marty and McIntyre are fighting over John Comer, aren't they?

JESSE: *[Deciding to reach for the cup.]* Well ...

VINCENT: Hell, Jesse, I know they are. For the lead, he stinks. He hasn't the goddamn vaguest idea of what your play's about.

JESSE: He's O.K.

VINCENT: How's it taste?

JESSE: Petals and seeds, huh?

VINCENT: That's my special touch. Mocha's a very individual thing. Or ought to be. Everyone should make it different, according to the way he thinks about it — and the taste can tell you just *how* much he *has* thought about it.

JESSE: I never make it.

VINCENT: And your leading man, that Comer, has never sat down for one minute and thought about his role. I know, I've watched every rehearsal — from beginning to end. Every day, every night. You're not there all the time.

JESSE: You the assistant stage manager?

JESSE: Yup.

JESSE: We were never introduced. I'm not good at names — I'm sorry, never was — I just had your apartment number. But I'm better with faces and I'm pretty sure we weren't introduced.

*[Watching VINCENT go to and lock the door.]*

VINCENT: I know, we weren't. I'm up in the booth most of the



time. Behind the instruments, back of the boards. You wouldn't of seen me from the pit.

JESSE: What's your name?

VINCENT: Vincent.

JESSE: [*Reaching to shake hands.*] Glad to meet you, Vincent. I mean, even if it *is* a little late. Speaking of being a little late —

VINCENT: But it's raining, man.

JESSE: Yeah, but McIntyre wants to come to a decision about Comer this afternoon. Specifically, whether to let him go or not. And they can't do that kind of thing without me there. I have *some* rights.

VINCENT: Oh, sure, that's a contractual matter. They can't hire or fire without the playwright's consent.

JESSE: I really like this mocha. But I'm sort of edgy, you know —

VINCENT: Nah, don't be. They're gonna go on arguing for a few days about him before they do anything. I know them. I've been working there a long time.

JESSE: Oh, yes?

VINCENT: Seven years. Went straight there the day I got out of acting school.

JESSE: Acting school: — so they made you an assistant stage manager.

VINCENT: Well, I'm more than just assistant stage manager, Jesse, I'm understudy for Junk Dealer.

JESSE: Oh, really? I didn't know that. Guess I don't know anybody who's understudying.

VINCENT: *That* they don't bother the playwright about.

JESSE: They should, though. What if there's an emergency? A bad stand-in could wreck a whole performance.

VINCENT: Sure. Except McIntyre never expects his actors to get sick. So they're not particular about the understudies. But, anyhow, *I'm* not a bad understudy. I'm a good one. A very good one.

JESSE: [*Pause.*] Must be sort of frustrating, Vinnie, being an understudy.

VINCENT: Vincent.

JESSE: [*Pause.*] Vincent.

What kind of waterproof thing do you have?

VINCENT: Listen, I want you to do me a favor — no, I want to do *you* a favor.

JESSE: What?

VINCENT: I'm going to act Junk Dealer for you. His scene, his first scene. So you can see how *he* should be played, man! *Every single* one of those guys is killing your play, Jesse, and you won't even acknowledge that much.

JESSE: Well, I realize things are sort of off, but what can I d —

VINCENT: If you saw how these fabulous parts you create *should* be done, you'd be *able* to do something about it! You'd be furious, like you should, and you'd stand up and talk for yourself and cause some waves, man, and make something happen. You're gonna have a flop with those bored goons, Jesse, those self-centered egomaniacs and it's such a beautiful play — you don't know what a beau-

tiful play you've written — I know, I've watched it every afternoon, every evening, I read it two hundred times, maybe four hundred, I thought about it, I know how to do it. *I love it!*

JESSE: Still, I don't —

VINCENT: You're helpless, man, 'cause you don't have any ammunition against them. Knowing how these roles are played will give you some. Let me get the scripts, O.K.? You read the other part.

JESSE: I probably know it by heart.

VINCENT: Yeah, but you never *read* it. Now, I want you to read it, I want you to see what you wrote.

*[Quickly grabbing the stool and running out into the hall.]*

JESSE: You keep the scripts out there, Vincent — in the hallway?

VINCENT: *[Standing on the stool.]* Yeah, well, like somebody might come in and burglarize the place, you know — *[Reaching overhead]* and I didn't want them to get the scripts. Things are safe out here, over the transom, like nobody would look for anything up here out in the hall.

JESSE: Oh.

VINCENT: *[Reentering the parlor with a stack of scripts.]*

Here, here's one for you. I don't need any. And there —

*[Placing the stack on the table.]*

that's the extra batch they want for the new round of auditions they may schedule. And now, wait, I'll just get into costume, I have some stuff I keep around —

*[Standing before the oval mirror and quickly, nervously, gluing on a wide putty-nose, hand-brushing back his hair, and pulling a twisted out-of-shape brim hat very low over his brow.]*

a few things give an impression of the guy, that's enough. See, this like weird semi-fedora, I mean, that's the character, that's Junk Dealer. And suspenders, he wears these suspenders... like so... O.K., ready?

JESSE: My umbrella: — what should I do with it?

VINCENT: Oh, gimme — I'm sorry — give it to me, that's why I didn't take it — I was looking at it, I knew I forgot something, that's the missing prop, it makes him, it's Junk Dealer, he carries one, like all the time, man, rain or shine. God! I should've *known* that. Should've remembered, shit.

✓ *[VINCENT adjusts the lights: a tiny high-intensity desk lamp which he angles sharply center and, jumping about, the ceiling light, a gradual dimmer, whose wall-switch he carefully sets. Moving as fast as possible so as not to lose his audience, he pulls the stool up center, squats on it, and leans forward on the umbrella, with only the bottom half of his face visible under the battered hat. The effect of his light adjustment is that of overheads spotting him on the stool and isolating him in space: the rest of the stage disappears. His transformation is complete, he is another person entirely. His voice now alters as well: it is sidelong and partially cracked, with a back-alley and unidentifiable, itinerant accent.]*

VINCENT: Hullo now, how ya doin'? I seen you go in the back before, when ya first come in. I was wonderin' if ya would come over here...

Me? I don't go back there, nah, there's too many people over back, drinkin' 'n talkin' — a crowd, fella — I can't handle it. Ya know, but like three or four guys, or jist you, O.K. like jist you, I can deal with



that. 'Cause I know I kin trust you. Like I trust myself: 'cause I'm alone 'n yer alone 'n I kin see yer colors. I recognize yer colors ... But I figured yid come over, no sweat, I didn't have to run after you. What do ya do? ...

*[He sniffles, takes a small roll of toilet paper from his pocket, tears a few sheets, and wipes his nose. Faint bar music is heard.]*

Oh, yeah, ya write? Like stories 'n stuff? ... Yeah. Yeah. That's good, that's nice. See, this place ain't so bad next to the window, but when they close the door 'cause like the juke box's too loud, then I don't try to stay, nah, what do I have to stay cooped up for: to try 'n cut a lotta people? The hell with that. ... Nah, I don't drink, thanks though, I'm cool. ... Me? I'm a junk dealer: that's what they call me, "Junk Dealer." In the winter when guys go in fer it, it's too cold to go out 'n they're workin', inta bread. But they hang out durin' summertime, ya know, it's too hot to work, they goof off, unemployment 'n stuff, they can't afford it. So I deal in house plants then. I pot 'em, clippin's 'n all 'n I root 'em, grow 'em up 'n sell 'em. Any kind ya kin think of. Guys get inta plants in good weather 'cause they're cheap then: golden pothos, begonia, ivy, sword plants, bella palms ... But I know yid come over here, I didn't have to go 'n run after ya back there. Ya could smell it if it's around, I mean if ya need it, right?

*[The lights widen slightly and JESSE, having discarded his raincoat, comes into the overhead effect, standing by the stool with a script in one hand and an empty drinking glass in the other. He reads from the script.]*

JESSE: No, I don't believe so. I have intoxicants at home in any case.

VINCENT: What? What d'ya have? I'll sell ya what ya don't got. Ya got blacks, coke?

JESSE: Sorry, I just don't fool with —

VINCENT: — How about junk? Ya into it? Never been cheaper. 'N buyers know me, Junk Dealer, top stuff, practically uncut, babe. 'Cause I do the preparation myself, advance orders only.

JESSE: I'm sorry. You might still cut me in, though.

VINCENT: Yeah?

JESSE: I am looking for ... *[Pause.]*

VINCENT: Somethin' in yer glass?

JESSE: I am, well ...  
looking around for ...

VINCENT: Talk louder.

JESSE: Some girls.

VINCENT: Oh, yeah?

JESSE: Some very particular girls.

VINCENT: *[Interested, crossing the umbrella between his legs.]*  
More than one, huh?

JESSE: Two. Exactly two.

VINCENT: That right? Two. What kind?

JESSE: Well, one has to have white hair, do you understand, long very flat white, not platinum, hair, and be slender, willowy like a model, with small features. A little nose, lips like a thin red bow on a gift package. Rather soft spoken, really feminine and not very strong, all angles and elbows and a high forehead. The sort that



dates older, upper-Avenue types or celebrities, agents, and music managers.

VINCENT: Not exactly what I could get a holda right off in the Battle Zone.

JESSE: [*Putting down the script and reciting from memory.*]

And the other must be a black-haired woman, over six feet, distinctly leggy, with full shoulders, straight very blue-black hair past her shoulder blades, who can wear a skirt that gullies between her knees and her thighs take the whole street with her when she walks down it, everyone stops to look, gaping, and turns drop-jawed around.

— Not one woman, but three.

VINCENT: That right? — That all?

JESSE: Yes.

VINCENT: Sure ya don't want some dope, ya could pop a few, imagine ya spent the whole week with them broads? Cost ya a damn-shot less.

JESSE: Look here, I can pay. I understand you've a rep for coming through with any kind of whore a client might dream up. And I've got seven hundred dollars to invest in that rep right now. For one afternoon.

VINCENT: That so?

JESSE: Are you game?

VINCENT: Well, pimpin's jist a sideline with me. And the sweeties ya askin' fer are mighty particular right down to the size shoe they wear practically.

JESSE: There's seven hundred in it, divide it any way you choose. And a generous tip for the girls if they work out. . . . If they're inventive, you understand? Want an advance? Or the full am —

VINCENT: Oh, uh two-fifths. That's my policy. 'Cause I trust you. Ya see, yer not part of a crowd. You a writer, huh?

JESSE: [*Producing several bills.*] Take three hundred, even. Are you hired?

VINCENT: [*Taking the money.*] I'll see what I can do, stud. Be the first time I fail if I fail. So what're ya broke now? 'Cause I kin see ya to this advance — or even lay, oh, a coupla hundred on ya if yer inta times. Like jist one stud to another.

JESSE: Why, no: I've more than sufficient funds to cover my proclivities.

VINCENT: [*Trying to return the money*] Nah, I make O.K. bread dealin', I'll spring fer the specialty acts, they seem to mean some-thin' important to ya. I take a personal interest in anythin' that sounds kinda urgent, kinda . . . "inventive."

JESSE: Please, I can't do it that way.

VINCENT: Listen: ya got some time?

JESSE: I have to be crosstown, but if you could set this up for Monday afternoon —

VINCENT: 'Cause I wanna talk to you. I been lookin' fer a writer, to like rap to him about my life, babe, it's a off-beat life, lotta strange things are always goin' down in it, and you could write them up.

JESSE: That's not exactly the field I'm familiar —

VINCENT: I tried, ya know, but I'm no writer, so if ya could sit down 'n write my experiences out fer me. . . .

JESSE: I'm writing out my own. *[Pause.]*

VINCENT: Then I could do somethin' with my life.  
*[Pause; putting down the umbrella]*

JESSE: You could rest.

VINCENT: Yeah. *[Pause.]* Rest.

*[The lights dim down the scene, catching and holding VINCENT's unearthly expression for a moment or so, and then they go dark. All at once, they come up: VINCENT is at the wall, throwing the switch, and JESSE is back in his chair by the table, evidently deeply disturbed.]*

JESSE: *[Tentative]* Wow.

VINCENT: Good?

JESSE: Flawless — as a high off Junk Dealer's uncut best!

VINCENT: You see what I mean?

JESSE: Indeed I do. Can't complain about that rendition.

VINCENT: And what do you get from Anconello, that half-wit playing the part?

JESSE: Drab dross.

VINCENT: Now you getting some idea what your play's about?

JESSE: A playwright simply couldn't pick a bone with your performance.

VINCENT: I love that play, man!

JESSE: *[Laughing, quite uncomfortable.]* Tell me, Vincent, how do you manage those lighting effects. And the music?

VINCENT: *[Showing JESSE.]* Easy. See, I've got switches and a dimmer wired onto an extension cord. I keep the controls in my pocket. I like to have complete control. Over everything.

JESSE: *[Pursuing; carefully.]* And that interpretation of Junk Dealer, how'd you come up with that?

VINCENT: Even easier. I know the guy.

JESSE: You do?

VINCENT: Sure, he's a permanent fixture on the Jack. Sometimes I think the Chamber of Commerce stocks the Battle Zone with characters like Dealer, like other places stock their wishing wells with goldfish — just to keep the tourists coming. That's how I know he sports an umbrella, Jesse, and uses it to make his singular points —

*[Suddenly wary.]*

I mean, when his points seem singular to him. He almost behaves in counterirritant to a pusher and a pimp.

JESSE: Well, he's a planter.

VINCENT: *[Smiling.]* Yeah, he's a planter.  
So you *do* know him.

JESSE: Yeah, I know him . . .

VINCENT: Good, well, that's good. You caught him like a fly with a swatter — in one shot. You did *your* job perfectly: it's those penny ante no-talent actors who're letting the show down. See, with me, I ante up like a lot, I believe in that, you know what I believe?



JESSE: What?

VINCENT: That to act a part well you have to real-ly act it and to "real-ly" act it you got to know the person it's about and experience him fully.

JESSE: Meaning ...

VINCENT: No, meaning you've got to have the same experiences or else how could you be him?

JESSE: Why be him?

VINCENT: What?

JESSE: Why be him? And what if the play isn't about real people, then how could —

VINCENT: Oh, Jesse, Jesse, baby, I *know* you: I've been riding on that magical merry-go-round you created for two months now, baby, watching it from the booth it seems since I was born I didn't have no other life. And I know your head, don't be afraid of it, it's a beautiful head, Jesse, the places it goes, wow! And those people are real in it, you know those very people, don't you think I know that, that's what's so great about it, what're you being humble for?

And I could do the part of Barry — I could do the fucking lead altogether!

JESSE: [*Cold.*] You dropped my umbrella.

[*Pause.*]

VINCENT: I xeroxed the scripts. Here. They want a dozen new copies, right. For the auditions? You can count them.

[*Pause.*]

JESSE: This mocha talks to you, doesn't it? I see what you mean by the separate layers of color. The white cream and the black chocolate. Balancing, instead of cancelling out, each other. — Got some more, Vincent?

VINCENT: On the stove. I'll fix you a second cup.

[*Retrieving JESSE's fallen umbrella, returning it, and exiting through the doorway right.*]

JESSE: How do you live with this weather? Air so swollen, so humid, we might as well be in Lou'siana for all the difference you can tell.

[*Staring ahead; then brushing the umbrella before his face as if dismissing something he has just seen.*]

Dammit! Makes ya feel like you're always stoned.

VINCENT: [*O.S.*] Oh, is it still raining? I can't tell in here, this kitchen faces an air shaft.

JESSE: [*Standing, moving up to draw a diaphonous drape aside and peer through a window, not visible.*]

No, just overcast now. Very sombre sky... with long logs of cloned grey clouds — like they were helplessly tumbled up and onto one another and being herded downriver to mill... Oppressive.

VINCENT: [*O.S.*] Not to me. Overcast skies excite me. Probably a childhood association. Didn't have to go out and play when it rained, didn't have to compete. I stayed alone, in bed, with all my favorite toys: hunters, duelling pirates, and troops of soldiers with bayonets arranged on top of my blanket. That's when I was happiest when I was a kid. Same as being sick.

[*Stepping into the doorway with a cup.*]

So overcast weather is still my favorite.

[*JESSE turns and stares: at the incongruity of his appearance*]



*and circumstance; puzzled pause.]*  
Next to fog. I like fog the best.  
*[Pause; loud knocking on the door.]*  
Wow, I forgot!  
JESSE: Oh — you're expecting company?  
VINCENT: No, stay where you are, it's O.K.  
*[More knocking; calling out.]*  
Just a minute! — Please!

*[VINCENT puts down the cup, sponges off the table, pushes his chair to it, and goes to the door. He undoes the lock and opens it. GIULIANA and MYRA, carrying raingear, are seen standing in the hallway. GIULIANA in heels is easily six feet tall, leggy and magnificent, with very long, soft black hair. Her beauty is as statuesque as it is imperious; her deportment as brassy as it is overbearing. MYRA is tall and quite thin, a perfectly elegant model-type, very carefully made-up. She has startling, shoulder-length, straight white hair. As with actresses, both are high-keyed, energetic, at times almost frenetic.]*

GIULIANA: *[Extremely loud and brassy.]* What the hell takes you so long to open the door? What're you doing in here?

MYRA: *[Cheerily.]* Hi, Vincent!

VINCENT: Nothing, I'm not doing nothing. Hello, Giuliana. Hello, Myra. How are ya?

GIULIANA: *[Loud.]* Great! We *love* standing in dingy hallways while the neighbors ogle us through their peer-spies, and who knows what kinda creeps are lurking down the end of the corridor!

MYRA: Oooo, it's nice and warm in here!

VINCENT: Let me take your equipment.  
*[Taking their raingear and hanging it up.]*

GIULIANA: Is that your john at the end of the corridor — where shvüggies might be laying in wait?

VINCENT: Why, you gotta go?

GIULIANA: I'm just askin'. I don't gotta go.

VINCENT: No, this apartment's got its own john, on the inside.

MYRA: Oh, can I use it? — I wanna fix my hair.

VINCENT: *[Pointing to wing right, a bit downstage of the kitchen doorframe.]* It's that door there; the light's on the left.

MYRA: *[Crossing the parlor; then, first seeing JESSE.]* Thank you. Hey! wow, it's Jesse! Jesse! Jesse! how ya been? *[Hugging JESSE.]*

JESSE: Fine, Myra, how are you?

GIULIANA: Why, it's Jesse-boy! What a nice surprise.

JESSE: What're you girls doing?

VINCENT: Runnin' lines.

MYRA: Yeah, Vincent's gonna run our lines with us before we go to the theatre. Excuse me. *[Exiting right, downstage of the kitchen doorframe.]*

VINCENT: First time we're doin' 'em here, in my apartment. Normally we run 'em mornings at the girls' place. — It's just one of my minor chores as stage manager. ... This is sort of a twenty-four hour job.

JESSE: I'm hip.

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*Adiletto 2*

GIULIANA: [*With mock-sexuality and sarcasm.*] Wanna watch us while we run lines? Sounds like great fun, huh?

JESSE: Well I've got a dozen people to —

VINCENT: Please, Jesse, stay. I think you'll learn a lot from this — it's a revelation, I mean the way *we* do it.

GIULIANA: Oh, Vincent! what a bore — let the man go: you think he has nothing better to do than listen to the same shit outside of rehearsal, too?

VINCENT: We don't do it the way you do in rehearsal!

GIULIANA: Big deal. You think that's gonna change the way Marty makes us do it in rehearsal?

VINCENT: *He* could change it! Jesse could when he sees the right way, he could demand it — he has that prerogative, he's the author.

GIULIANA: [*Negative.*] Sigh! Ya got some coffee?

VINCENT: Mocha.

GIULIANA: Mocha? What're you crazy? What the hell is mocha? — Oh, yeah, wait, that's that chocolate shit, right?

VINCENT: No, it's part coffee, mixed with spiced chocolate. To show the lay —

GIULIANA: All chocolate is shit, man. Not for me, I'm fine. Myra, where the —

MYRA: [*O.S.*] — hell am I? In the john, I'll be there in a sec.

GIULIANA: She'll be here in a sec. So how ya feelin', Jess? Ya get yer pay check?

JESSE: I'm afraid not, Giuliana. Not yet. You two didn't get yours, did you?

GIULIANA: Not in the past three weeks. Man, are *we* hard up! Listen, lemme tell ya what happened to me 'n Myra yesterday: just as we were about to —

MYRA: [*Reentering.*] Need to use my blush, Giuliana?

GIULIANA: [*Laughing.*] Blush!! Is this girl demented or *is* she demented? *You* oughta try spendin' two months with her! So, like I'm sayin', we're makin' it into rehearsal 'n this creep comes up to us in the alley 'n —

MYRA: Look what I found in the john: "Miracle-Grow" — is this just for plants, or can it grow your hair, too?

VINCENT: Girls, let's get started here, Jesse doesn't have all day. — You're staying, right?

JESSE: Do you have plants — ?

MYRA: I've been ready for seven whole seconds.

VINCENT: You, Giuliana?

GIULIANA: I'm ready, man, I'm always ready. Siddown, Jesse, take the starch outta yer crease. It's raining, anyway.

MYRA: [*Wide-eyed.*] I thought it stopped?

GIULIANA: Shut up, huh?

JESSE: I'm sorry, you guys, but if I don't get back in —

GIULIANA: Aw, Jesse-boy, gimme a break! You wrote our two hoksey roles *for* Myra 'n me, didn't you? Tailored them to our exact talents? So, then, you gotta sweat 'em out as well, or it's no fair.



MYRA: That's right, Jesse, creativity calls for a *little* sacrifice, you know.

JESSE: Call sitting through seventy-eight run-throughs a *little* sacrifice?

VINCENT: Seventy-eight, minus how many with you out scarin' up material for yer next play?

JESSE: [*Suddenly paranoid.*] What do you mean?

VINCENT: [*Taken aback.*] Nothing. I don't mean nothing.

MYRA: Oh, come on, Jesse, stay!

JESSE: [*Staring at VINCENT*] O.K. — I'll stay...

VINCENT: Good! Let's go into the den: I dragged an old door up from the street, it was laying out front with the garbage; and I fit it with an iron throw-bar that my neighbor had. This way, please, everybody...

*[They ALL step up through the oval and cross to downright, the den, lighted now for the first time. It is empty except for an imposing, almost dungeonesque door, across which is soldered a thick steel bar and a cupping latch.]*

VINCENT: See, it'll do great for the stage door, right?

MYRA: [*Pleased.*] It's better than the one they got in the theatre.

JESSE: No wisecracks now, Myra. So we *don't* have the most expensive production of the season.

GIULIANA: I'll say: — they do monodramas for more money.

VINCENT: [*Seeming momentarily thrown.*] Monodramas?

GIULIANA: Yeah, monodramas — why, ya never heard of them?

VINCENT: Oh, yeah, sure: monodrama, monodrama.

GIULIANA: He'll be all right.

MYRA: Now remember, Vincent, don't play our beats. And don't retreat, don't fade, 'n don't concede the scene.

JESSE: So could we start?

VINCENT: I'll fix the lighting.

*[VINCENT adjusts a floor-dimmer: the entire stage goes dark and a small oval of blue light comes up on the eerie, dungeonesque door downright. GIULIANA, performing as Empress, and MYRA, performing as Maddy, are discovered together pulling on the steel bar. Both are out of breath. JESSE is glimpsed for a moment, and then he disappears in the dark. VINCENT is at extreme right, in total shadow.]*

VINCENT: Take it, Giuliana!

GIULIANA: Dammit, it's stuck, Maddy!

MYRA: Pull harder!

GIULIANA: I am, can't you understand, the freakin' thing is stuck.

VINCENT: [*Appearing quite suddenly as Junk Dealer, but without make-up or costume.*] Need an umbrella, girls?

GIULIANA: Go piss in a milk pitcher! It ain't rainin'.

VINCENT: But maybe yis need an umbrella jist the same.

MYRA: Why? Ya sell *goloshes*, instead? I'm up to my ankles in mud-water.

VINCENT: I would if ya really needed them. Where there's a



urgency, there's Junk Dealer. I deal in junk fer a dreary afternoon: — umbrellas 'n rubbers. . . .

Gigolos, hookers, uppers, downers,  
Spend-Monday-afternoon-in-townners.

GIULIANA: Cute boy.

MYRA: Can you see if you could open this door for us? The dampness must've swollen it. And the grating's corroded to begin with. Look at this: my palms are red with rust!

GIULIANA: Agh! Rub it off on your dress.

[MYRA *does so.*]

VINCENT: Jist don't keep pullin', pressure won't do it. Ya gotta relax when yer confronted with a predicament like this, 'n be prepared to spend a little time in this here alley.

GIULIANA: What *are* you talking about, nerd?

VINCENT: Life is like jumpin' into a cold lake. Ya know that shock ya get at first? — and then yer body starts to adjust 'n pretty soon it feels jist great. So the longer ya stay with it, the more sense it makes.

MYRA: But we wanna get in out of the cold. This ain't no lake, it's a mud puddle. We won't get to feel great by standing in it any longer.

VINCENT: I'll lay ya odds, ya will. Besides, yer rehearsal don't begin fer another twenty minutes.

GIULIANA: How do you know?

VINCENT: Well, yis two are in the play gonna go inta previews in this here theatre in a few days, ain'tcha? What's it called: — "Two Beheaded Prostitutes?"

MYRA: How do you know?

VINCENT: I see youse come in 'n outta this door every day. Ain't much goes down around the Jack Junk Dealer don't know about.

MYRA: Wanna do us a favor and shout up to that window for someone to come and push the door open from the inside?

GIULIANA: Wanna do us a bigger favor and get the hell out of this alley?

VINCENT: No, like I don't wanna start in with more people, O.K.? I like to keep it down to three or four. The same sorta four folks.

GIULIANA: By tryin' to unload a beat up, second-hand umbrella on us? Look, scum —

MYRA: What *four* folks?

VINCENT: Like that's the deal I'm workin' on here, if ya'll only get yer feet wet — I mean, like a little longer. Seven bills'll buy ya a awful lotta severe oxfords.

GIULIANA: Seven *bills*?

VINCENT: Yup. Seven hundred *somollians*.

MYRA: We're not interes —

GIULIANA: Hold it —

VINCENT: Now ya ain't so rushed, right? I got this stud, nice-lookin', O.K.? — young, who's inta extremely specific inclinations. Dresses distinctive, very bred, and talks like a Ph.D., man. Wants me to set him up with two class acts fer jist one hour tomorrow afternoon: one white-haired 'n one a brunette, of such 'n such heights, weight, look, outlook, carriage, attitudes and what have you.

GIULIANA: Well, *have* we?

VINCENT: Yup. He described yis in numerous and very literary detail.

MYRA: We're not remotely interest —

VINCENT: Why not? I been all over town trackin' down the types or I wouldn't be botherin' yis two actresses but I can't find their kind no where except yis two are almost their clones so I'm offerin' the bucks to youse.

MYRA: Keep trackin'. We're not hookers.

VINCENT: But yer actresses. You could act two whores easy.

MYRA: Now, wait —

VINCENT: They say that's the easiest kinda role to play.

MYRA: What nerve!

GIULIANA: Hey, take five, I wanna talk to her private:

*[Drawing MYRA aside into an amber light right of center; VINCENT stands waiting in the dark.]*

He's right, Maddy, we could get into a scene like this no sweat and make ourselves a quick killing.

MYRA: Oh, come on, Empress — you nuts? The guy's a weirdo. We'll get into more trouble than we could handle.

GIULIANA: But we could handle this. We play actresses in the play who play prostitutes, we could play prostitutes without blinking for just one hour in the afternoon.

MYRA: No, it's different, this is like, I mean, *prostitution*, Empress!

GIULIANA: And when's the last time you saw seven big ones? We got the rent coming up in three days, remember?

MYRA: — Who could it be?

GIULIANA: Who, *that* guy? Some pimp tha —

MYRA: No, whoever wants *us* to be whores for him.

GIULIANA: What makes you think he wants *us*? He jist says we fit the description of what this john is lookin' for. Probably making it up. The pea-brain.

MYRA: No, but don't you see, this is exactly like what happens in the play! Our characters get approached to act whores in real life.

GIULIANA: Yeah ...

MYRA: So who could it be that wants us to do this? 'Cause I mean, the play hasn't opened, so who could know?

GIULIANA: Probably, then, it's someone in the production —

MYRA: That's what *I'm* thinking.

GIULIANA: *[Infuriated.]* I see your point!

*[Virtually shouting.]*

The scabfaced prick! I'll stomp him out! Now, I can't wait — to find out who it is and get my freakin' hands on him! We won't have to report this to the union — I'll handle the lousy maniac, whoever he is, myself! Lemme handle *this* asshole now:

*[Returning to VINCENT by the door; lights shift.]*

We talked it over. You got an advance?

VINCENT: A hundred bucks fer each of yis now. The rest when ya show up at —

MYRA: Wow! A hundred —

GIULIANA: A hundred fifty for each. Now.

VINCENT: *[Taken aback; then, reaching into his pockets.]*  
So my plants *don't* get a new greenhouse again this year. And I was gonna make the first down payment on the one I picked out tomorrow.

GIULIANA: Ain't that a kicker.

MYRA: Gee! A hundred fifty on consignment!

VINCENT: On pure spec, so to speak.

GIULIANA: *[Taking the money.]* What's to speculate about? Unless you need glasses. But if this John don't have the complement, so to speak —

VINCENT: He'll have it. He has it now, I seen it. You gals seen this latch?

MYRA: *[Astonished.]* The latch was thrown! All the time!

VINCENT: Not very observant, are yis?

GIULIANA: I *knew* it's always left open! — *You* threw that latch, didn't you?

VINCENT: That's right: Junk Dealer had yis two staked out. And now, with a little instrumental dexterity. . . .  
*[Hooking his umbrella handle on the steel bar and deftly prying open the door with a single handgrasp on the umbrella pin; then, turning to exit right.]*

GIULIANA: *[Under her breath.]* Fucker. . . .  
*[Starting to go through the stage door.]*

MYRA: Didn't you forget something?

VINCENT: Like what?

MYRA: The address. And the time.

VINCENT: *[Turning around.]* Oh, no. They will be in a envelope on yer dressin' room table at exactly 4:00 tomorrow afternoon.

GIULIANA: *[Flatly.]* Thanks.

VINCENT: *[Going off right.]* And pay yer rent, girls, don't go dancin' at unnecessarily expensive new discos with that fat advance, huh? . . .

*[VINCENT turns off the playing light, ending the scene, and then switches some other lights on. There is a stir of excitement as the WOMEN surround VINCENT; and JESSE comes back into view, making an effort at concealing the full extent of his puzzled and ambiguous reaction.]*

GIULIANA: Shit! You are fantastic, man! Did Ancongello ever see you do his part, Vincent? He'd be scared shitless!

VINCENT: No; no, he's never seen me do it.

MYRA: Yeah, you *are* great as Junk Dealer.

JESSE: I just think he was born to play that role. Vincent *is* Junk Dealer.

VINCENT: Well, thank you. Thank you.

GIULIANA: You oughta fire Ancongello, Jesse, and hire *him*!

JESSE: Think so?

GIULIANA: I'm telling you, man! Then maybe we'd have a show.



Or half of one. John Comer ain't no Tony Award-winner neither.

MYRA: And how do you like the way we do Maddy and Empress?

JESSE: I *love* this way of doing Maddy and Empress! And whose idea is that — yours, too, Vincent?

GIULIANA: Sure, it is. Whadda you think we wanna run our scenes with him for? Boy, if we could only get a chance to do it this way at the theatre, so they see —

MYRA: You know, we *should* do it this way on opening night! You know what I mean? — play ball with the two idiots during rehearsals and then, when we open, without any warning, sock it to the audience, the board of trustees, and the critics! To hell with McIntyre and that — eech! — director.

GIULIANA: But you should hire Vincent right off, Jesse-boy.

JESSE: I will.

VINCENT & MYRA: [*Simultaneously.*] What?

JESSE: I said, I will. I've seen enough. I'm convinced. And I can do it. I'll simply force the issue. I've got that power, and Marty and McIntyre are so divided right now as it is, they're sure to concede that much to me. Or I'll walk. I swear I'll walk on the whole production.

GIULIANA: Smart boy.

MYRA: Well, Vincent, you happy?

VINCENT: [*Genuinely confused.*] I'm ... — I'm ... wow — I can hardly believe —

JESSE: You better believe it. I won't have anybody else in the part.

VINCENT: Thank you. Can I thank you?

JESSE: Can I thank you?

GIULIANA: Can I have some coffee?

[*Going up through the oval into the parlor. Lights come on in the parlor.*]

Or do I gotta drink this moggia? What is it — some kinda Guinny swill? — Do they get high on this?

MYRA: Congratulations, Vincent.

VINCENT: I can barely talk.

MYRA: [*Taking VINCENT arm in arm and leading him up into the parlor.*] I'll drink your mocha.

VINCENT: Good. It's already made. I'll fix you both a cup.  
[*Exiting through the kitchen doorframe.*]

GIULIANA: [*Discovering the scripts and calling out in full voice as if outraged.*] Jesse — did you see this? More copies of your damn script, man! Don't you know there's a lumber shortage? A forest fire's goin' on, half the Coast is burning down. How about writing shorter plays?

MYRA: Jesse is a wonderful writer. He should write them as long as he wants.

GIULIANA: He doesn't have to memorize them, man.

[*Inadvertently catching her own image in the large oval mirror.*]

VINCENT: [*Reentering with two steaming cups and giving them to the WOMEN just as JESSE, with head thoughtfully bowed, enters the parlor.*] Yes, may you write them as long as you want. And may you want as long as y—

GIULIANA: [*Smiling broadly, half-reviling, but—despite herself—half happily embarrassed by the group's communal sentimentality.*] Sigh!

[*Having successfully deflated VINCENT with her expression, flopping carelessly into the overstuffed; then, suddenly shooting her index finger forward:*]

So, listen, you guys, like I was sayin' when we came in, did anyone tell you two what happened yesterday?

VINCENT: What?

JESSE: No, what?

MYRA: Oh, you mean? — oh, you won't believe it!

GIULIANA: I don't believe it, man! Yesterday, when Myra and me were makin' it into rehearsal, some beat lookin' mother stops us, and I swear to God, he goes through this whole freakin' scene, the one we just ran.

VINCENT: What?

GIULIANA: I'm tellin' you, Vincent, it's goddamn incredible — right, Myra, am I tellin' the truth?

MYRA: Yeah, she is. He did. Someone did.

JESSE: What do you mean? This scene in the play?

MYRA: Yes, this very scene. He came up and offered us seven hundred dollars to fool around with some guy for an hour later this afternoon.

GIULIANA: And he had every line down pat. Or nearly every line. I couldn't believe my ears!

JESSE: How strange. You sure?

MYRA: Unless we're suffering from a *folie à deux*.

GIULIANA: A who?

JESSE: A shared hallucination. But can this be true?

GIULIANA: No, it can't, man: but it *is*.

VINCENT: What did you do?

MYRA: We played right along with it. We couldn't resist. We *are* actresses.

VINCENT: But that could be dangerous, very dangerous!

GIULIANA: No shit.

MYRA: Not really: because we are not going through with it — right, Giuliana? — ... Giuliana — I'm talking to you! ... — We're not that crazy.

VINCENT: Thank God, you're not. Or we'd be auditioning for new girls. And I couldn't sit through one more day of those damn auditions on my life.

MYRA: What sentimentality.



JESSE: So what happened?

GIULIANA: What happened? — I just told you: exactly what happens in that scene you wrote, man. He gave us three hundred dollars.

VINCENT: A whole three hun —

GIULIANA: In American mint.

MYRA: Except for one thing.

GIULIANA: Yeah, that's right.

JESSE: What?

GIULIANA: He never turned around to tell us where we'd find the john's address that we're supposed to go to. *Or* the exact time. He just gave us the money, man! Forked it right over. Like in the play. So we couldn't follow up, anyhow.

JESSE: Weird!

GIULIANA: I'll say. But I love money. More than mocha, anyway.

VINCENT: I could alter the components in yours, if you like, Giuliana. If you want more coffee and less chocolate —

JESSE: *Who* could it be?

GIULIANA: Like who cares? We got the bread.

MYRA: We think it's Ancongello.

JESSE: Ancongello DeCantata? But why?

GIULIANA: 'Cause, man, he wants that stinkin' small role so bad he goes all over the freakin' city doin' it for real. So he can get the feel of it, dig? He's afraid they're gonna can him — like you just did.

VINCENT: But wants it to the tune of three hundred dollars just like that, like it was nothin'?

GIULIANA: Some people got bread, man.

JESSE: I doubt that Ancongello does. What would he be doing in a production like ours if he was rich?

GIULIANA: Likes to act.

VINCENT: But couldn't you tell if he was Ancongello or not?

MYRA: No, he had this bulky raincoat on, and a floppy fedora twisted out of shape down half his nose; and it's dark as a ... a —

GIULIANA: Bear's behind.

MYRA: Thank you, a hibernating bear's behind in a burnt down forest in that alley.

GIULIANA: You forgot to put a new bulb in by the stage door, Vincent; isn't that your job, babe?

VINCENT: But, come on, *you* could tell if it was Ancongello!

GIULIANA: How could I tell? I never looked straight at that ugly mugger. I'm tellin' you — I never looked him in the face. It was *his* voice.

VINCENT: You neither, Myra?

MYRA: I wouldn't get that close, Vincent. Seemed the type that smells. Coulda been anyone.

GIULIANA: Yeah. How about you, grease-ball, seein' as how you do Dealer to a "T"?!

*[They ALL laugh loudly.]*

JESSE: *[When the laughter subsides.]* You know what I'm

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*Filetto*  
**2**

thinking, Vincent? That it was . . .

VINCENT: Who?

JESSE: You can't guess?

VINCENT: No. Like who?

JESSE: Junk Dealer. The real-life Junk Dealer.

MYRA: There's a real-life Junk Dealer?

VINCENT: Yeah, there is. Me and Jesse know him.

GIULIANA: [*Snapping her fingers.*] Rock 'n roll!

JESSE: 'Cause Junk Dealer, he's been known to give away money to the indigent.

GIULIANA: Who's indigent, man? So we didn't have next month's rent. [*Laughing.*] Who gets up rent acting in *your* plays?

JESSE: I mean, I depicted it in his first scene, see: when he offers to return Barry's advance.

GIULIANA: No, Jess, I'm tellin' you, it has to be Ancongello. Who else knows the stupid part? The show didn't open and if it heads the way it's *been* headin', it never will. He comes right up to us in the alley and he goes: "Need an umbrella, girls" — man, that's Ancongello, the guy's sick, I never appreciated him before. Man, he's *far out*, goin' down dark streets doin' his pathetic role in a play and handin' out money.

VINCENT: Or maybe it's some psychotic who studied one of the scripts we circulate for call-backs. Like these here. And now he's living out the play. Could be any of a dozen or more guys we had up for Dealer.

MYRA: I think it's scary. . . . Somebody playing at pimping for . . . well, then, possibly somebody playing at killing.

VINCENT: [*Angrily.*] And still, you *took* the money!

GIULIANA: You bet your ass, I did!

JESSE: Oh, I doubt that, Myra. If he had no address, he has no john. So I wonder why Junk Dealer persists in giv — been busted so much lately, he doesn't have a pot to piss in. Probably doesn't have a pot to pot his plants in.

VINCENT: But how could Junk Dealer know the scene exactly?

JESSE: Well, like, I told you, Vincent: he's where I got it from in the first place. He laid it on me. In his life's story. The whole bit . . . Lines 'n all. I just stole the lines from him.

GIULIANA: Whadda you guys talkin' about? You know what time it is? — we gotta do our big scene and split, or we'll be late for rehearsal — again.

MYRA: And you know what that means.

GIULIANA: You ready, Vincent?

JESSE: I should leave, they're probably wondering —

VINCENT: No, Jesse, don't —

JESSE: — if I drowned in a mud puddle.

VINCENT: But not now, Jesse, stay ten minutes, watch us do the bedroom sce —

JESSE: Now, Vincent —

MYRA: Yeah, Jesse, stay! That'll be fun: We need an audience for



this bit. No one sensible's seen us do it since we've figured out how to make it work. Come on, stay and see if we're right.

GIULIANA: *[Straight.]* You really oughtta, Jesse. It's *your* play, man. If you don't care, why should McIntyre? Or Marty?

VINCENT: You will? — Please!

JESSE: *[Looking at his watch.]* Um, O.K.: if you guys start this second and no breaks.

MYRA: Got a napkin? I dripped some mocha on my chin.

GIULIANA: Oh, Myra! Use yer blush.

VINCENT: *[Ecstatic, almost like a child.]* Great! Jesse's staying! Jesse's staying! I've got my bedroom set up just like in the play. The phone and everything. Let's go. It's to the left. Can you see all right? Giuliana, there's a light switch by the door jamb, could you get it? I'll bring the props.

*[GIULIANA finds the switch and clicks it on. Then she and JESSE go through the oval to down left. This scene is played from down center to down left wing. There is a telephone on a night table, two chairs and a large handbag.]*

GIULIANA: Say, it does look exactly like our set. I feel right at home. Clever boy.

*[JESSE runs his eyes carefully over the arrangement, and sits on the floor. GIULIANA goes to one of the chairs and breathes evenly, relaxing herself. VINCENT comes through the oval, partly costumed, carrying an umbrella, a fedora, and a script; followed by MYRA.]*

VINCENT: O.K., so we'll start from where Empress and Maddy are already in the bedroom making themselves comfortable. And I'll do Barry, of course. So, from the line: "You furnish this place yourself? 'Cause it sucks."

GIULIANA: *[A second's pause; crossing her long, shapely legs.]* You furnish this place yourself? 'Cause it sucks, man.

VINCENT: *[With script in hand.]* You don't think I live here, do you now? You can't believe I'd be so foolish as to trick in my own apartment? Even lizards, cold-blooded reptiles, won't eat and shit in the same place.

GIULIANA: A cold-blooded lizard: I knew you reminded me of something.

MYRA: *[Standing, somewhat upstage.]* Probably a lounge-lizard. Except there's no scotch around.

VINCENT: I'm sorry, ladies, I do not drink. Consequently, no liquor is stocked.

GIULIANA: Mind if I do?

*[Opening the handbag on the floor beside her chair, and taking out a pint of Wild Turkey, which she drinks straight from the bottle: as she does so, her loose sleeve slides down her arm revealing a wide silver-pyramid studded leather brace strapped to her wrist.]*

VINCENT: Please feel free. I should say that I do indulge on occasion, but dislike alcoholic fumes befuddling my brain while I work. I cannot have that.

GIULIANA: While you work? I thought this was play-time.

VINCENT: No. It is my work.

MYRA: What are you working on?

VINCENT: Your ecstasy.

GIULIANA: *[Pause.]* — My name is Empress. What's yours?

VINCENT: Barry. And yours, my dear?

MYRA: Madeleine. Maddy, for short. Call me Maddy.

VINCENT: I shall call you Madeleine.

MYRA: Suit yerself.

GIULIANA: *[As if disgusted with both of them.]* Balls! ...  
*[Pretending boredom, singing to herself:]*  
 "Those April showers,  
 They bring the flowers  
 That bloom in May ..."

MYRA: You got a stereo, some fast music? Like to —

VINCENT: I'm afraid not. No music.

GIULIANA: You got some cheese or olives, then; you know, the little nasties?

VINCENT: I said I do not eat where I shit.

GIULIANA: Oh, boy.

MYRA: You call our ecstasy, shitting?

VINCENT: The choice of words is tedious all around. Now, shall we start again from the beginning, this time on a more productive note?

GIULIANA: Productive?

VINCENT: Yes: let us get directly to it. I do not have all afternoon.

MYRA: You have exactly one hour.

VINCENT: Correct. And then I must be somewhere else. I'm sorry, my dears, to be so dispatch-minded, however —

MYRA: But an hour should be enough. To dispatch with the business.

VINCENT: *[Smiling.]* Indeed.

MYRA: You see, we're not really in this business. We're not —

GIULIANA: Shut yer mouth!

VINCENT: I'm sure you are both of the most respectable calling. As am I. But the three of us have felt an urgency to convene here now that has little bearing on our modes of winning a living. Because we are somewhat larger than that blended muddle on whose unimaginative mills we tread for our daily keep. We respect the cultivation of our strength — and seek to muscle it to a capacity that they not choosing to be in this room can, *tant pis*, never know.  
*[Suddenly lifting GIULIANA's unrolled sleeve to reveal a second leather armstrap.]*  
 What do these bracelets signify, my dear?

GIULIANA: Whadda you mean, signify? I wear them.

VINCENT: My error. Thank you, Empress. Costume is precise and ought not be equated with anything else. It is pure poignancy; and that should be enough. Have you seen *these* bracelets? —  
*[Producing handcuffs.]*  
 — they, too, signify nothing. You wear them. And they constrict you. Allow me, my dear?

GIULIANA: Now, wait a minute —

VINCENT: But waiting can only be entertained if you place



restrictions on restriction. You don't now, do you? You and I are free agents and restriction is invited in the interests of emancipating ourselves, as in willfully taking on a role, as with a role in a play, to enlarge our jurisdiction through the constricting of our actual selves. You know what I mean.

GIULIANA: Do I?

VINCENT: Then I repeat: there is a very special way that *we* wish to see ourselves. And we wish to reflect that image to our self-comprehension.

GIULIANA: But if you hate yer real life to start with —

VINCENT: Let me finish: amidst the uncostumed mundane I do not have the supporting cast to support the potent trenchancy which I know to be my need and nature. So I purchase your support.

GIULIANA: O.K. I guess you do.

VINCENT: Thank you, Empress.

*[Clamping the handcuffs on her.]*

So they will be tight. But in a moment, comfortable.

MYRA: Empress, do you think you should —

VINCENT: Now, now, Madeleine, you must stand to the side for a time. I will want to hold you when I am ready to work, and my own clamped fist will be *your* bracelet then, clamped on your calve when I burrow into your friend here, when I root myself, skewer and root myself into her vise.

GIULIANA: *[Startled at just now realizing that she has been talked into the handcuffs.]* SSShit! You actually got these damn things on me. O.K., so what?: big mother ... What's next?

VINCENT: Ah! you don't like them? — Why didn't you say so, then? I don't want you to be unhappy.

*[Unlocking the handcuffs.]* *abrogated.*

There. Your discomfort no sooner signaled, but ~~the~~ The lake is just slightly colder for you than I should have anticipated.

*[Dropping the handcuffs into his pocket.]*

Making me ever so slightly disappointed in you.

*[Suddenly kissing her fiercely on the lips.]*

A bit later, perhaps? — Or something else?

GIULIANA: *[Chafing her wrists.]* Rubbing alcohol.

VINCENT: *[Blanked; pause; appearing to be "going up" on his lines; looking in the script for, and not finding, them; and, then, recouping and seeming to cover himself by turning from GIULIANA to MYRA.]* And so now, Madeleine, let me look at you. You are my master. White as mother's milk and the moon. What do you fancy you'd like to do?

MYRA: Dance.

GIULIANA: What for? We'll be stompin' at "The ~~Dirty~~ Thirties" all night long.

VINCENT: *[Seeming to "go up" again.]* "~~Dirty~~ Thirties?"

GIULIANA: Yeah, you can punk till you puke there and be deco'd to death at the same time. Who could ask for anything more?

VINCENT: Who, indeed? And are reservations necessary at this accommodating establishment, my cream-haired beauty?

MYRA: Reservations are not *de rigueur*, though at that place they may be *de rigueur-mortis*.

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*stiletto 2*

VINCENT: *[Laughing along with her.]* Ah! *that* is the spirit, Madeleine.

*[Placing the script aside; grabbing her wrist.]*

—How would you like to consummate on the floor?

MYRA: Did you vacuum today?

VINCENT: It is *you* who must vacuum me up into your —

GIULIANA: — Disposable bag!

*[Guffawing out loud, derisively.]*

God, where was the last time I heard such scintillating repartée?

VINCENT: *[Suddenly, ferociously turning on GIULIANA, still in her chair drinking.]* Whore, bitch, tart, teaser — you clawed scissor queen — giant-cunted, razor-quimmed syphilis spreader! How's that for scintillating repartée?!

*[Hooking GIULIANA's neck with the carved handle of his umbrella.]*

You like my saying dirty words to you, huh? — you like that, yes, prostitute?

*[Slowly sliding his fingers along the folded umbrella until he reaches the pin, then twisting the pin which dislodges, inch by careful inch, to reveal a lubriciously emerging sword.]*

Words as cutting sharp as your own, as your legs, and as this sword!!

MYRA: Say, listen —

VINCENT: No, you stay where you are now, Madeleine.

*[Turning the gleaming, naked sword toward her.]*

I *thought* our Empress here, our ruling Queen, could not endure more than two minutes of my divided patronization. You'll wear these, then, now?

*[Quickly, handcuffing GIULIANA's frozen wrists.]*

And here, *you* take these: your very own pair.

*[Tossing a second pair of handcuffs to MYRA.]*

Put them on, petunia, yourself, go ahead, right off, or your friend here won't have a very pretty face with which to sit around and wait until you do.

*[MYRA complies.]*

Good girl. You are both good girls.

GIULIANA: You slimy sonovabitch. . .

VINCENT: Can you drink from your pint of anesthesia with your hands that way?

GIULIANA: You —

VINCENT: What's the matter? Not thirsty any more?

GIULIANA: Fuckoff.

VINCENT: Is that scintillating repartée? You haven't suddenly lost your regal right to corrosive wit, have you? — or your memory? Remember: this is just a role. We *are* playing, aren't we? — getting into someone else's skin in order to escape the helplessness of our own? It's the only way to claim, school and flex effectuality . . . to nurture its potential for . . . ecstasy. . . Only the free, actors totally divested of their dependence can experience this most precious, forbidden being.

MYRA: I'm watching the clock. — Do you have a clock, around . . . somewhere?

VINCENT: *[Opening small rips in the sleeve and shoulder of GIULIANA's dress with the sword-tip.]* See, first I hurt you, Empress, my empress, my slave-empress, then I caress you,



*[Wiping her wounds with the sash removed from his expensive fedora and then caressing her arms with the same article.]*

then I hurt you again, and again caress you. . . . the flesh tingles as after a strong, long swim in a — yes — cold lake. See, now you see, how the longer you stay with it, the more sense it makes?

You like this way of making love, don't you?

GIULIANA: No, I hate it! I hate all this talk with our clothes on. Come on, take these handcuffs off me and let's take off our clothes. I like to see a man naked, his shoulders, belly, his set and thighs and all.

VINCENT: Clever, aren't you? Very clever. But who can play a role out of costume?

GIULIANA: Not you, you shithead, all you are is a costume!

VINCENT: *[Tying GIULIANA to her chair with his belt.]* No, I am myself *and* my role. There are always two of me. That's why I need two of you. Two very distinct beauties. You believe I get so absorbed in my work that I become the part, utterly lost in it. But that's not so. I hold and balance both at all times, a shackled big brunette and an abstract, chalk-haired spirit, vaguely floating free: myself and my activation. For any mode of activation, any sway at all, can no longer be the undeflowered self. And I like myself. The undeflowered self is *all* roles, as yet unplayed. Therefore, I shall never deflower either of you.

GIULIANA: Then what *will* you do?

VINCENT: I will cut off both of your heads.

GIULIANA: *[Screaming.]* Oh, God! God! God!!

MYRA: Help! help us! Somebody—!

*[VINCENT quickly gags GIULIANA with a torn strip of her own blood-stained sleeve. Then he rushes to MYRA who is bewildered and crying, and pulls her to the other chair.]*

VINCENT: Didn't you see this before, my little spirit: your chair, with your very own strap on it? Not very observant, are you?

MYRA: Barry, Barry, listen to me, what are you doing this for? Stop, wait —

VINCENT: So that I can write it all down, dear Madeleine.

MYRA: *[Pushed into the chair which VINCENT kicks forward so that it is flush with GIULIANA's chair; hysterical:]* What in the world are you talking about?!

VINCENT: Writing it down? But how else can I ever make something of my life?

MYRA: But I don't understand!

VINCENT: *[Strapping MYRA to the chair with practised velocity.]* What can't you understand? — that I wish to do something with my life? Now, enough of your chatter, you will be silent —

*[Using the sash stripped from his fedora to gag MYRA]*

because I want to explain something to you two. I have a certain exchange I executed, I keep it in the kitchen, on the window, I'll bring it. . . .

*[VINCENT dashes through the oval to the kitchen while the WOMEN struggle with the straps, looking wild-eyed at each other. He returns with a 2½' tall Snake plant which he places on the night table after pulling the latter a way downstage so that the plant is in full view of the WOMEN. The Snake is in flower, having sent up a single, glorious spike of white blooms.]*

VINCENT *is now, as not previously, unrestrainedly excited, and in a pell-mell of words:*

VINCENT: Look at it: the Snake plant — the Sansevieria — and it's called, as well, the mother-in-law's tongue, the Lucky plant, and the Leopard Lily. So many names because it once was common as rain. What child cannot remember it in his grandmother's home?

I bought it from Junk Dealer — yes, you know him, your pimp: but he is also a planter of plants — and ideas — the connection who bought *you* to my exact specification. So lucky me, the Lucky plant — lucky because it survives little warmth, less watering, and consignment to the bins and basement of our awareness. Like me.

*But* we had a maid when I was young, a Creole from the delta, and she once was washing a kitchen window bathed with brilliant sunlight, and there was a Snake plant on it. She screamed: "Look, look here everybody! — the Snake has flowers!" And she ran from our house embracing the pink-edged white petals and shriekingly summoned every soul on the street, every new mother and abandoned old woman, and wept and cried out to God because he had selected them: because Creoles believe only once in a century the Sansevieria blooms, and that everyone who recognizes that, and applauds it, is infused with its power, the power to prevail. . . .

And they also call it a Sword plant. . . . Since these leaves are sword-shaped blades.

So look, that is what I want to show you. That early this very morning when I went into the kitchen to brew my mocha, I saw it — it having shot up suddenly, completely unseen, during the dark, that's how it does it, and there it was — full like this, like that, just like it is! It flourishes, they say, briefly, so briefly, and its fanfare will be gone, curtained to a memory by tonight. As will you two.

*[The WOMEN struggle in their chairs.]*

Now, now, your pointless squirmings distract my train of thought: for this flower is the signal my whole life hangs upon: the sudden, applauding mirror of my metamorphosis from obscurity — to finally take control, battle for my rest, and write it down. And here is the instrument of that achievement: a sword — concealed in a fake umbrella identical, I believe, to the one Junk Dealer, that Creole renegade, sports. Oh, how I wondered what that umbrella of his is, since he never opens it in the rain. Till last night when I discovered this one in a costume shop — yes, a theatrical costume shop, an old, seemingly broken umbrella with its curious, carved-flower, antique handle — and I was puzzled by it: is this, then, what that connection, planter and pimp carries about with him? And why? What for? And naturally, I remembered the one in your play. And so I knew. It surely is. Which is how Dealer's umbrella and plant schooled me for your appearance. Pushing me to recognize what I could do now. To write my own play. . . .

Goodbye, brief flowerhood, my pink-edged complements in floral display, as good as your word, showing up to shoot into centennial blossom, and on the exact afternoon to die!

*[Bringing the sword to the level of the WOMEN's necks and stepping up closer, as about to run it across, slashing both their throats with the same stroke and beheading them.]*

JESSE: *[Springing to his feet with great animation.]* Wait a minute, can I — oh, I'm sorry to interrupt you, Vincent — can I see something?

VINCENT: Vincent?

JESSE: Yes, but it's just what I thought! This plant is real. This is a



real flowering Sword plant!

VINCENT: Real?

JESSE: Where did you get it, Vincent? The one we have in the play is plastic. My God! — the real thing.

VINCENT: Of course: real, real.

JESSE: This *is* a miracle. I was sitting on the floor and staring at it and thinking, but then I thought, it couldn't be. I haven't seen this happen since I was a kid. Since — yeah, that incident with the Creole servant. — She was my nurse ... actually. I became hysterical. ...

A live-in nurse ... Very small, and ...

*[Pause. The MEN stare at each other. VINCENT seems quite spaced — temporarily lost. Then, he becomes indignant.]*

VINCENT: Of course, it's real! — and a sign: — What do you think my pl — your play is about? This annunciation. Made to *me*: that I am Barry!

JESSE: *[Pause.]* What are you talking about?

VINCENT: Go back and sit down, Jesse, let me finish, for Chrissake you broke my concentration. — I'm O.K.!

JESSE: I meant to examine the pl — Wow, shit! spit! I thought here for a moment. ... Pissss, I'm mixed up. Sorry.

VINCENT: Mixed up about what?

JESSE: No, I mean, Vincent, wow, I just thought you were going to — I mean, hell, the power of a performance, yeah — ... — And I imagined that Giuliana's blood was real.

VINCENT: It is. That's how we do it. Tiny slits — superficial cuts, she doesn't feel a thing.

JESSE: She. ... — Isn't the plant in the wrong place?

VINCENT: No, I reset it: it works better when it's nearer to them.

JESSE: I don't want it that way. I specified exact —

VINCENT: If they see it in front of their faces —

JESSE: I wrote the play!

VINCENT: O.K., O.K.; I'll move it back where you —

JESSE: Grab both ends of the table or it'll spill. Lemme have the sword. Use both your hands, I said. C'here, I'll hold it.

VINCENT: *[Letting JESSE take the sword; adjusting the table a foot upstage.]* Can I have it back?

JESSE: *[Not returning the sword; walking downleft.]*

Jesse, uh, Vincent, I don't want you doing Barry. You understudied Junk Dealer —

VINCENT: But —

JESSE: And I'm giving you Dealer — believe me — I *am*!

VINCENT: But I want you to cast me in the lead! I'm right for — well, dammit, you just saw the real live guy! The real Barry.

JESSE: *[Pause.]* You think there's a real Barry?

VINCENT: What ever: that's how he's played!

JESSE: Bullshit, baby. Who wrote the fucking thing?

VINCENT: What's wrong?

JESSE: Must I justify myself? His character tags, textual errors. Vincent, I know you dig the play and I like you. It's incredible for an

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*Adatto 2*

author to watch some stranger just take his work and — well, a helluva ego trip. But twisting reality out of shape just to get a role —

VINCENT: O.K., so he's not real. So what don't you like?

JESSE: The lines you invent, for a start.

VINCENT: Which? I know that script backwards.

JESSE: It's not mocha that Barry brews in the morning, it's coffee.

VINCENT: It's not c — did I say —?

JESSE: Yeah, you said mocha.

VINCENT: Well it — that's funny — I confused my own —

JESSE: Your own thing with my thing. Not Barry, not Barry's thing, you understand? *My* thing. Barry is what *I* want, he does what *I* write down. — Can I take the gags off these two damsels? There's no point in their staying in character while you and I hash this out —

*[Removing, off-handedly, the WOMEN's gags; but when he attempts, even more nonchalantly, to undo their straps, VINCENT restrains him.]*

GIULIANA: Thanks, Jesse! — Whadda ya mean I don't feel a thing? I sure as hell do now! You're supposed to just scratch me lightly —

VINCENT: Shut up! — What else?

JESSE: Barry doesn't buy the plant. It's a fortuitous and unfortunate gift from Dealer — who likes to give things away: set-ups, money, pills —

VINCENT: But *I did* buy it from Junk Dealer! So I could get to speak to him, I planned it out, to study him closely, at my leisure, while he operated.

JESSE: I say I don't give a damn what *you* did with Junk Dealer. What could that have to do with *my* play? — And I'll tell you something else about your performance: you keep coloring your objective with theirs, the women's, which not only robs the scene of its written-in conflict by humanizing a character I intended to be virtually cardboard, but accounts for your constant loss of concentration resulting in you very nearly going up on four distinct occasions.

MYRA: It's true, Vincent. I had to really work to make you look good. Which kept making me make Maddy look all wrong. Because I could hardly handle your cues they were coming along so strange.

GIULIANA: Agh, I fielded a few.

MYRA: Yours were easier.

GIULIANA: Like which?

JESSE: *[Quieting the WOMEN.]* Sssh.

*[Pause.]*

— And, Vincent, you lied to me this afternoon. About your kitchen window. You said it faces an air shaft, that you can't see even if it's raining or not. A window like that doesn't have sunlight, much less the direct, blinding sunshine it needs to make a Sword plant burst into bloom.

Vincent, why did you lie to me?

VINCENT: *[Long pause.]* I couldn't risk your finding out what



happened. To the plant. I didn't know you'd come here today. Because you would know what that bloom meant: —That I was selected this morning, exactly as Barry was, for his exact same achievement.

JESSE: And so you were planning to see Giuliana and Myra all by yourself.

I interrupted.

You were going to kill them.

VINCENT: [*Innocent.*] Certainly.

GIULIANA: [*Abruptly tilting her chair.*] You motherfucker!

VINCENT: Catch!

[*Tossing GIULIANA's pint bottle to JESSE who, reflexively, drops the sword and catches the bottle; VINCENT picks up the sword.*]

GIULIANA: Jesse! get us out of these chairs, quick —

VINCENT: No, I wouldn't if I were Jesse. He won't just now, ladies. Let's all just stay put.

MYRA: Oh, Vincent, please, you're confused, you —

GIULIANA: Confused nothing, you freaked-out moron! What's this supposed to be, acting? What you're doing now?! You lost your goddamn mind — and you know why? — 'cause you can't act at all — *not* in front of an audience! I've seen you, man, a dozen times, and saw the difference — only in front of a mirror — by yourself, all night long, doing the whole freakin' play, every single role in it, one part after another for yourself, fuckin' all alone, you masturbating insect!!

VINCENT: [*Turning on GIULIANA, exploding with a lifetime of built-up rage.*] You paralyzing, suffocating piece of shit —!!

JESSE: And that umbrella! listen, Vincent! *I* designed a trick umbrella, a stage prop for Barry's use — So Barry never had an actual sword —

VINCENT: Ha! see, that's where you're mistaken, Jesse, because Barry *believes* Dealer's umbrella is an actual sword, in the *play* he does and that's what you wrote, that's how come he buys an umbrella that *is* — and *I* believe it, too — and so *my* umbrella is! *Barry's* is!

[*Regagging the WOMEN.*]

See, see, Jesse, that's where *you're* going off the track! You're mixing yourself up, smart man. You ought to let me have my way because, like I told you when you first came in here *I* know my play a whole lot better than you and *I* wouldn't let it down like you've been doing, down till it makes a perfect landing as the biggest bomb ever to hit that theatre — No! I won't let you grind me into the ground like that! 'Cause who are *you*? *I* am Barry, the writer, the killer!

JESSE: Man, I took that play from the headlines, the two be-headed prostitutes, that unsolved murder case right in this neighborhood, what the fuck does it have to do with *you*? And *I* made up this whole damn story of Barry, Empress, and Maddy — to fit with the facts the papers gave out. It isn't real.

[*As VINCENT approaches the WOMEN, completely frenzied, with the sword at their throats.*]

Vincent!! it's fiction!

VINCENT: Is the miracle of the flowering Sword plant fiction?! Look at it here — if it's not here, then *I'm* not here and this won't happen —

JESSE: Barry! Barry!!

*[VINCENT pauses, the blade in mid-air.]*

Barry, you didn't kill those girls — because there is no Barry. He's made up. I invented him because. . .

I killed them.

*[Very long pause. VINCENT lowers the sword. He trembles violently and bursts into tears, seeming to gag and sob deep within himself like a deserted child. Then, choking:]*

VINCENT: I don't want you to die for those murders, Jesse.

Once the show opens, don't you know they'll all know? I don't want anyone to know.

I love you, man — what a mind, what a talent you are. I just want to have what being you is having, to have — your power — but so that way, I can stand-in for you. And go to prison, to the row even, you're worth it.

What is there anyhow besides what you've experienced, and I will for one hour, through you?

JESSE: No one will guess. There's no necessary connection. Can I untie Myra and Giuliana now?

VINCENT: *[Leaning his weight on the sword, head bowed.]* No. No, you can't. Sure they'll guess. Why don't you come to your senses? I'm so tired.

JESSE: Then could we go into the other room for a bit? They'll stay put.

*[Placing a hand on VINCENT's shoulder, JESSE encourages him to go up into the parlor. The lights, in their wake, in very slow degrees, dim out the downstage bedroom.]*

VINCENT: *[Sheepishly.]* If I can act only when I'm completely alone, how come I was so convincing as Junk Dealer when I stopped them in the alley? I fooled them there, Jess, both of them, isn't that so? . . . that's acting.

JESSE: Take it easy.

VINCENT: I *am* a first-rate actor, aren't I?

JESSE: *[Moving away from VINCENT and standing before the mirror, staring at himself.]* You knew?

VINCENT: Yeah, somewhere in my mind, I knew. Some of the time I knew. Sometimes in the morning, over mocha, or in the evening, for a moment by the mirror, I knew you murdered the, well, two prostitutes. Two actresses playing prostitutes.

There is a previous play about that, isn't there? I mean, one you didn't write?

JESSE: Yeah, there is. I saw it in a warehouse over by the docks seven years ago. In rehearsal, of course, it never opened, some friends of mine were connected with the production. It's a lost piece, written back in the '30s. Based on a double murder of that period. And then I went out and found Junk Dealer — or he found me. Yeah, he found me. Off-handed Creole from N'Orleans. And then, well, I asked him to find two hook — . . . well, and then the rest followed.

Anyhow, nobody remembers it.

VINCENT: Big town, a coupla murders, headlines for two or three days, then everybody forgets. Me, too, I did. But it would come back to me, every so often, when I was in the booth watching it. Then, watching you, it all became apparent.



JESSE: And you never thought of reporting it?

VINCENT: [*Gripping the sword, meaningfully.*] How little you like yourself. — Now, let me finish wh —

JESSE: You'll never go on in the play if you harm our actresses.

VINCENT: I never intended to. The *play* isn't going on. I just want you to give me the role of saving you, here. So I'll have that. — Recognition. You know I don't act in front of an audience.

JESSE: Recognition? For what?! Perpetuating this atrocity?

VINCENT: It's not *me*: it's you who perpetuate this ... this ...

JESSE: No, say it, go ahead, Vincent — say it: this "helplessness." ... Because your sacrifice will be futile. You see standing-in for me as the power to save me. It won't. It will only be a cover for me, like make-up. And you're imagining that the make-up of power gives you the actual colors of a man who can save. It doesn't: after your ordeal, I'll still be as helpless as I am now — still be just a writer, someone who is — who is the uncast Understudy for power.

VINCENT: [*Wild, beyond understanding.*] That's why my roles are *not* make-up that I put on, but exact reproductions of my actuality. And my act-uality is waiting for me now in that bedroom!

JESSE: [*Laughing grotesquely.*] And I thought I was in trouble *earlier*! when you had me believing Junk Dealer was out there black-mailing me!

VINCENT: So you laugh at me?! — you find me funny. You stop me in mid-performance? To, of all people, question the sacrifice for creativity? — *you* who murdered a pair of performing prostitutes in order to set that down in a typewriter — are now trying to deter *me* from doing something real?!

JESSE: [*Pause. Then, softly.*] Real? When I sat there watching it, that tale of blood, that chimera of achievement, made me restive. And I yearned to know what that unreal rest, Barry's truce with this life, feels like. So I tried to by expending a fictional force, the force of that character in his murders. But no one real can be Barry: since he's not. And my truce, too, came out chimerical.

VINCENT: [*Advancing.*] Don't block my going into the bedroom, Jesse! Your yearning was directed by a fiction — but I have that plant shooting blooms up in that room there with the victims — *real* blooms: have you forgotten it, offstage off-your-mind, to prevent the only good I could ever offer anyone in this world?

JESSE: You *have* the role of Barry!! — No one could play it more tellingly than you.

*You* could tell the world what Jesse did.

VINCENT: Never! I will kill those women.

JESSE: No! No, rehearsal's in half an hour: let me phone ahead, please, McIntyre's waiting, I'll let him know you're playing Barry — I've faith in you to do it, on the *stage*! — and you could save the women instead, they're innocent. And I'll reach the costume girl, she'll measure you, you'll be on your way —

VINCENT: No! I'm afraid!! I can't do the part because — well, I didn't — but I'd *have* to "real-ly" do it first!

JESSE: I *know* you would — I know you *WILL* — but not this — not this afternoon, Vincent. The whole show could be cancelled by this delay, they were up for that when I left them, they're probably doing that now, or have done it — but let's head them off, or

change their minds, patch things up, please, Vincent, so we don't even have the thirty minutes to spare!

Quick, give me the sword, you don't need it right now, and let me call the office —

*[JESSE snatches the sword from VINCENT and hops through the oval into the unlit bedroom. VINCENT is stranded in the parlor, disarmed and disoriented. He looks for a cup on the table, turns, looks toward the kitchen, frowns, looks at the mirror. He walks to it, finding JESSE's hat and coat on the way, and slips them on when he gets there.]*

VINCENT: Don't you see, Jesse, I *am* you, I *am* you! Who have you been, anyhow, for seven years? — not even the killer you saw in a performance in a warehouse back then. And I? — Oh, well, I?

Hello, Vincent. It's me, Jesse.

Listen, Vincent, you can't play any of these roles I wrote. But not because you can't act before a full house. I know you *can*. So that's not my reason: it's simply that no one else can be these characters. Because they are me: don't you understand that, Vincent, don't you even understand that much about life? I am already everyone in the play, that's what a writer is: the population of his works. And I have full power over them, ordering them into and out of rooms, into the murders they commit and the lives they must give up, let go of, as it strikes me as I strike any key of my typewriter. You hate me for that, don't you, Vincent? But that's power, Vincent, the only power worth having, and you'll never experience that, never feel this decision in my fingers over life and death. You oughta give up while you're still ahead back there in your booth in the back, in the very back of the lighting booth, insect.

*[Pulling Junk Dealer's hat off a hook by the mirror and putting it on in place of JESSE's.]*

Hullo, there. I knew ya was comin' over. Well, I jist gotta sit by the window 'n wait ya out, yid come to me. Who am I? Ya know them islands off of N'Orleans? Swelterin' there, man, 'n damp, that plant they turn into bowstring hemp, hell, it shoots up there, hard as steel 'n extremely determined to flourish. Very few guys got its spirit in them, but ya kin tell by their colors when they do — 'cause do men get clear-eyed, sunburnt, 'n a white halo around them from frustration? Hell, no, that kind cottons to its challenge, yanks off the sudden blossom 'n duels with its steel blades like a pirate! I kin pick 'em out if there ain't too many together, that's why I like jist a coupla studs, so I kin tell right away which has the colors. Yeah, it was like that in the islands: they'd glow all over soon's they'd spot its spike of flowers. I kin bring the plant fer ya next time, charge ya jist three hundred bucks. Considerin' it's the rarest specimen on the continent 'n about to bloom, ya oughta jump the deal: 'cause I got them sweeties set up fer ya, and what ya need to set ya off with them is somethin' really inventive. Say, I think the sun's comin' out — Look out.

*[Dashing the hats and coat to the floor.]*

Hey, Jesse, please! watch me do Barry. You don't need him anymore, you finished describing him, living him, let him go. As your stand-in, I'd get inside that lead, since you think he's you. But you really know why, Jesse, do you? It's because I discovered that you were writing about *me*, not you, all along anyhow. See my apartment, how it's decked out, all '30s? And without ever having met me, and why not? Did I ever meet Dealer before? — and *he* knew me — knew what item I was coming to him about! Your play would blow your mind if you put me in charge — 'cause I'd charge



right through it to the end you wrote it for — which is: the only play ever put on with our lives!

*[Pulling on Barry's white gloves.]*

Come, come, my dears, we must act with dispatch — and may, since our every move is thoroughly charted. And this re-enactment will fan our cinder of life into the forest fire of existing; simply to cinder it utterly. . . . Either that, or it will prove to be a Sunburst: a spike of white blossoms pinked with the whispering insinuation of scab at their otherwise moribund edges, as are your skin wounds. . . . But that only so that if some indelibly scarring sacrifice on some one or other's part occurs, can you be momentarily saved. — But I don't think that's about to happen here, my dears, do you?

*[Discarding the gloves, both pleased and angry.]*

— So not be you, Jesse?! Did you see that? I *am* you! To perfection! You've wasted a whole afternoon if you still can't even identify your own self. You so cunning, so ingenious a quick-switch artist, wasted a Monday afternoon and your last at that.

That's right, Jesse, your last afternoon. Because I see now that there is simply no reasoning with you. So if I'm to take your place, if I'm to take my place, be you who I've undertaken and earned and am better at being than you, well, then, I think there can simply be no more of you. Because you denounce who you are and what you achieved, identifying that as unreal and a failure.

But I don't.

*[JESSE re-enters the parlor, carrying the sword. He is enervated and unnerved, his steps slow and trying.]*

JESSE: Are you ready to go, Vincent? I called, they're waiting for us. The sun is almost down. I mean if there were a sun today, it would be almost down.

But there wasn't any, was there?

VINCENT: There is always a sun. It was hidden from you.

JESSE: Hidden from *me*?

VINCENT: Of course. Now, may I have the sword so I can complete my —

JESSE: We'll take it with us — to the theatre — thing like this doesn't need to be left —

VINCENT: — unused!! Oh, Jesse —

*[Grabbing the sword from JESSE]*

who would have thought *three* murders stood between me and your mind?!

*[JESSE lunges at VINCENT to retake the weapon, but VINCENT kicks him about and slashes the sword across his back: blood spurts up over the sword onto VINCENT's face and shirt. JESSE staggers forward with a cry, reaching the dark doorframe of the bedroom. He whispers with agony:]*

JESSE: My play stands between you and my mind, Vincent . . . because . . . you never really understood it . . . or you would have realized . . . that the sun wasn't hidden from me. And that . . . I would save you. . . .

*[Leaning against the left jamb of the door, JESSE clicks on the light and then slips, dying, down the length of the doorjamb to the floor. The lights in the bedroom come up brilliantly, revealing MYRA and GIULIANA still tied to the chairs with their bloodied heads thrown back and their throats slashed from ear to ear.]*

JESSE: And I *had* saved you.