

# **SAFETY NET**

BOB HENNEBERGER

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS:

Bill Heartland - 60 years old, and the owner of the Safety Net employment agency and betting parlor.

Carmen Adams - The 50 year old receptionist for Safety net. She is in love with Bill.

John Smith - 30 year old Stepson of Bill and partner in Safety Net.

Phyllis Waters - A two-week replacement for Carmen while she is on vacation. She is 25, beautiful and wants to be an actress.

Lee Simon - An employment agency client of Safety Net. She is 23 years old.

Josh Simon - Brother of Lee, 27 years old, wants to be an actor, and falls in love with Phyllis.

Reverend Jenkins-A 38 year old vice cop who plays a pseudo-Southern faith healer to infiltrate the betting operation.

Paul Graceland - A 30 year old employment agency client who works for a mob family as a hit man.

Cathy Teasdale - Lee Simon's roommate and an employed actress.

Homer Delmar - A 22 year old Southerner, and an employment agency client.

Lucinda - Manager of a 'less than one star' restaurant and friend of Bill Heartland.

### MINOR CHARACTERS:

Hostess - 35 years old and works in a swanky restaurant.

Policeman 1

Policeman 2

Henrietta Smith - Semi-beautiful shrew; wife of John Smith.

ACT ONE  
SCENE ONE

THE TIME IS NINE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING. THE YEAR IS 1969, AND THE SEASON IS SPRING. THE PLACE IS A RUN-DOWN OFFICE INSIDE A BUILDING IN NEW YORK; A LESS THAN PERFECT OFFICE BUILDING IN AN AREA OF NEW YORK WHICH HAS SEEN BETTER DAYS. THE FLOOR IS PLANK HARDWOOD, WITH SEVERAL WORN RUGS OVER IT. THERE ARE THREE DOORS IN THE ROOM: ONE LEADING OUT TO THE ENTRANCE HALL, ONE LEADING TO AN OFFICE WITH "BILL HEARTLAND" ON IT, THE LAST IS A DOOR WITH "JOHN SMITH" ON IT. NEAR THE TWO OFFICE DOORS IS AN OLD WOODEN DESK WITH SEVERAL SMALL PILES OF PAPERS ON IT, A SIX LINE BLACK PHONE, AND AN OLD INTERCOM ON IT. SEATED AT THIS DESK IS CARMEN, A FIFTY YEAR OLD WOMAN WITH A PLEASANT FIGURE, DRESSED IN A BUSINESS OUTFIT. A LARGE MOOSE HEAD IS MOUNTED ABOVE BILL HEARTLAND'S DOOR, OVERLOOKING THE WHOLE OUTER OFFICE. AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE OUTER OFFICE FROM THE DESK IS A WINDOW. AN OLD, OVERSTUFFED NAUGAHYDE COUCH IS PUSHED UP TO THE EDGE OF THE WINDOW. TWO OVERSTUFFED AND SLIGHTLY TORN NAUGAHYDE CHAIRS ARE ARRANGED ON EITHER END OF THE SOFA, FACING THE DESK. IN FRONT OF THE SOFA IS A LONG, LOW WOODEN TABLE WITH ONE LEG MISSING. THERE IS A PILE OF OLD MAGAZINES ON THE OPPOSITE END FROM THE MISSING LEG, IN ORDER TO BALANCE THE TABLE. TO THE RIGHT OF THE SOFA AND CHAIRS IS A SMALLER TABLE WITH A COFFEE POT, SEVERAL MUGS, SPOONS, A CONTAINER OF SUGAR AND CREAMER. BILL HEARTLAND, SIXTY YEARS OLD, WITH WHITE HAIR, WALKS IN THROUGH THE ENTRY WAY DOOR WEARING A PIN STRIPED BUSINESS SUIT.

BILL

Hi, Carmen. How's it going?

CARMEN

It's going fine, but don't forget, I'm going tomorrow. (PAUSE) My two weeks off, remember?

BILL

(LOOKS SURPRISED AND TAPS HIS FOREHEAD WITH THE PALM OF HIS RIGHT HAND) God! I forgot. You're going for two weeks.

CARMEN

Two glorious weeks.

BILL

Did you get a replacement?

CARMEN

I was going to get my cousin, that way everything would be copasetic.

BILL

Yeah, I remember. Is she coming today or tomorrow?

CARMEN

No, not exactly.

BILL

What exactly, then?

CARMEN

She died yesterday. She was only sixty years old, and everyone thought she was in perfect health, but, poof! She was out like a light.

BILL

Gee, I'm sorry.

CARMEN

You're sorry? Just think how her date felt. That poor man's still in the hospital. (PAUSE) You know, the man's usually the one dispatched mid-passion; life just ain't fair sometimes.

BILL

(LOOKING CONCERNED) What about a replacement?

CARMEN

Bill! I don't think the poor man's going to be thinking of sex any time soon.

BILL

(DISGUSTED LOOK ON HIS FACE) I was talking about a replacement receptionist for you.

CARMEN

Not to worry, Bill. I've got a great replacement coming from the Temp Service this morning. I think you're in luck with this one, she's got more on the ball than most of the losers I see come through here. You look at her, then I'll train her, then I can leave.

BILL

Does she know?

CARMEN

No, but for two weeks she doesn't have to know. All she has to do is my job and go home at five o'clock.

BILL

(SCRATCHES HIS CHIN FOR A SECOND) We'll see. Buzz me when she comes.

BILL WALKS INTO HIS OFFICE. BILL'S OFFICE IS VERY SMALL. THERE ARE TWO WOODEN STRAIGHT BACK CHAIRS IN FRONT OF A SMALL WOODEN DESK. AN OLD LEATHER DESK CHAIR IS BEHIND THE DESK, LOADED WITH PAPERWORK AND UNOPENED LETTERS. DIRECTLY BEHIND THE SMALL DESK ARE CEILING TO FLOOR SHELVES, FILLED WITH BOOKS,

TROPHIES, AND BRICK-A-BRACK. MIDWAY UP THE SHELVES ARE TWELVE BOTTLES OF LIQUOR AND SEVERAL GLASSES. ONE SHELF DOWN IS A TYPEWRITER WHICH DATES BACK TO THE TURN OF THE CENTURY. ON THE TWO SIDE WALLS OF THE OFFICE ARE MANY PICTURES OF PEOPLE, GROUPS OF PEOPLE, BUILDINGS, AND FAMILY PICTURES. BILL PAUSES AT HIS DESK FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, AND LOOKS AT A SMALL PILE OF LETTERS ON THE EDGE OF HIS DESK. HE KEEPS ONE AND THROWS THE REST IN A PILE ON THE MIDDLE OF THE SMALL DESK. HE TURNS AROUND TO THE SHELF CONTAINING THE LIQUOR AND REACHES TO THE THIRD BOTTLE FROM THE LEFT AND GRABS IT BY THE NECK. PULLING THE BOTTLE FORWARD A SOFT CLICK IS HEARD, AND THE CENTER SECTION OF THE SHELVING OPENS A CRACK. BILL PULLS THE SHELVING OPEN LIKE A DOOR AND STEPS INTO ANOTHER ROOM. THIS INNER ROOM HAS VERY PLUSH CARPETING, AND SOUND PROOFING ON THE WALLS AND CEILING. THERE ARE FOUR BOOTHS WITH A PHONE AND A COMPUTER TERMINAL IN EACH. TWO ARE MANNED. THE PHONES DO NOT RING; A LIGHT FLASHES WHEN SOMEONE IS ON THE LINE. THERE IS A DOOR IN THE REAR OF THE ROOM WITH SEVERAL LOCKS ON IT. THE DOOR LEADS INTO THE MEN'S ROOM OF AN EMPTY SUITE NEXT DOOR.

JOHN SMITH IS LEANING AGAINST ONE OF THE BOOTHS, LOOKING AT A TELEVISION SCREEN. THE PICTURE ON THE TELEVISION SCREEN SHOWS THE OUTER OFFICE, WITH CARMEN SEATED IN HER CHAIR AT THE DESK. THE VIEW IS SHOT FROM A CAMERA HIDDEN IN THE MOUTH OF THE MOOSE HEAD.

JOHN

I heard. Who's this broad Carmen's gotten for us?

BILL

You'll find out when I find out.

JOHN

But this replacement doesn't know we run a bookie joint back here.

BILL

I agree with Carmen. The new girl doesn't have to know. We run an honest business out there.

JOHN

We don't DO any business out there, Remember. We send everybody somewhere else.

BILL

So, it's a referral business. What's important is that the cops haven't found out about our business in here yet, and it's been operating just fine, ever since my dad set it up in nineteen twenty one.

JOHN

(IRRITATED) I've heard this story a million times and I'm not worried about the cops, I'm worried about that new mob guy.

BILL

You mean Donald.

JOHN

Yeah, him! That name belongs to a duck, not a gangster.

BILL

(LOOKS AT JOHN) Don't tell HIM that. (LOOKS BACK AT THE MONITOR) This place's too small to bother them. We only gross a half a mill or so, it's peanuts to them.

JOHN

You can't count on anything; times're tough all over, and even the mob business is down. I think they'll come after us now.

BILL

You worry too much. I don't think we'll have trouble from the mob, the cops, or some woman sent by the Temp Service.

JOHN

You always were too much of an optimist.

FADE TO:



ACT ONE  
SCENE TWO

THE TIME IS THE SAME, THE SCENE IS ON THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE BUILDING. PHYLLIS WATERS IS STANDING IN FRONT OF THE MAIN ENTRANCE, LOOKING FOR A NUMBER; THERE IS NO NUMBER TO BE SEEN. JOSH SIMON, AND HIS SISTER, LEE SIMON, WALK BY. PHYLLIS TURNS TO LEE AND SPEAKS.

PHYLLIS

Is this three twenty four, or three twenty six? I can't see any numbers on the buildings.

LEE

I don't think any numbers are there.

JOSH

Or anywhere. It's three twenty four, because that's three twenty eight. (HE POINTS DOWN THE BLOCK.) It's two buildings down, and all the buildings on this side of the street are even numbers.

PHYLLIS

Thanks. (SHE SMILES AT JOSH.)

JOSH

Any time I can help. (HE SMILES BROADLY BACK AT HER.)

PHYLLIS QUICKLY WALKS INTO THE BUILDING. LEE LOOKS DISGUSTEDLY AT HER BROTHER.

LEE

You're a mess!

JOSH

I think I'm in love.

LEE

Pull your tongue back in and let's get going or we'll be late for our last day in school.

JOSH

No, I mean it. She's beautiful, and she's my type.

LEE

Anything in a dress and two boobs is your type; come on, let's go! (SHE TUGS AT JOSH'S SLEEVE.)

JOSH

This is different. I now believe in love at first sight, and I'm going to get to know that girl! I might even marry her!

LEE

Later! We're late!

JOSH

(BOWING FROM THE WAIST) Yes, mother. THEY BOTH WALK DOWN THE STREET.

FADE TO:

ACT ONE  
SCENE THREE

THE TIME IS THE SAME, FADE IN ON THE INNER ROOM. JOHN AND BILL ARE STILL IN THE SAME CONVERSATION.

JOHN

Yeah, yeah, but I don't like it anyway. (LOOKING AT THE TELEVISION SCREEN) Hey, check that fox out!

A WOMAN, PHYLLIS, ENTERS THE FRONT DOOR OF THE OUTER OFFICE WEARING A BLACK SKIRT, WITH A WHITE BLOUSE. SHE IS TWENTY FOUR YEARS OLD, HAS AN ALMOST PERFECT FIGURE, AND A BEAUTIFUL, DELICATE FACE. SHE SPEAKS IN A MID WESTERN ACCENT. PHYLLIS LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM FOR A SECOND, THEN WALKS TO CARMEN'S DESK.

FADE IN ON THE OUTER OFFICE.

CARMEN

Are you the replacement from the Temp Service?

PHYLLIS

Yes, I'm Phyllis Waters and I was sent here as a temporary replacement. Are you Ms. Adams?

CARMEN

That's me, honey, but I'll call the boss; he's got to hire you. (SHE PUSHES THE BUTTON ON THE INTERCOM) Mr. Heartland, the young woman is out here.

BILL WALKS THROUGH THE SECRET DOOR IN HIS OFFICE AND INTO THE MAIN OFFICE. HE LEANS AGAINST THE DESK, FACING PHYLLIS.

PHYLLIS

My name's Phyllis Waters and I was sent here to apply for a temporary job. At first I thought I might have the wrong address, I'm new in the city.

BILL

You got the right address. I'm looking for an office manager, someone to fill in while Carmen is off for two weeks.

PHYLLIS

I guess I was confused. This is an employment agency, isn't it? Why didn't you choose someone from your lists?

BILL

I hate to have to choose from our own clients. So many of them would be disappointed.

PHYLLIS

I guess I understand. (SHE SITS IN A WOODEN CHAIR NEXT TO THE DESK.)

BILL

Okay, honey, what kind of experience do you have. (HE LEANS FORWARD AND LOOKS INTO HER EYES.)

PHYLLIS

Well, I've worked at a television station...

BILL

(INTERRUPTING PHYLLIS.) Were you on time? How many days were you out sick?

PHYLLIS

(CONFUSED) I was never out sick, and I was always on time; I had to be, I was the weather girl at six and eleven. What kind of work is this?

BILL

Do you mean what kind of work I do, or what kind of work you'll do?

PHYLLIS

Well, both.

BILL

This is an employment agency, like it says on the sign out front. You'll be in charge out here. You'll take all the calls, and all the walk in traffic. After talking to the client, use the rolodex file on the desk to find a job interview for them. Each Monday and Wednesday, you call the numbers in that second rolodex and ask the companies what jobs they have listed, then update the other rolodex. Also call the Temp Service if they don't send their listing in the mail. Is that all right?

PHYLLIS

Sure, that's fine with me. Does that mean I have the job?

BILL

Can you start now? I'd like Carmen to start training you as soon as possible.

PHYLLIS

Yes.

BILL

Yes.

BILL WALKS BACK INTO HIS OFFICE.

CARMEN

(WALKING BACK FROM THE SOFA, WHICH SHE HAS BEEN LEANING AGAINST.) Here, come around to my chair and sit down. Bill told you what to do with these files. (SHE POINTS TO THE TWO ROLODEX FILES ON THE DESK.) If you forget, here's my notes on what to do. (SHE LIFTS UP TWO TYPE WRITTEN SHEETS.) You'll do just fine. Now, when the phone rings, you answer with this phrase. (SHE HANDS PHYLLIS A PIECE OF PAPER.) The boss wrote it himself, so we have to use it.

PHYLLIS LOOKS AT THE PIECE OF PAPER AND SMILES BROADLY. SHE LOOKS AT CARMEN AND GIVES HER A DISBELIEVING LOOK. THE PHONE RINGS. PHYLLIS LOOKS AT CARMEN, AND CARMEN MOTIONS FOR PHYLLIS TO ANSWER IT.

PHYLLIS

Good morning. Safety Net Employment Agency, you fell through, now we'll help you. Yes sir, this afternoon will be fine. (PICKS UP A PENCIL AND BEGINS TO WRITE ON AN APPOINTMENT BOOK.) Two thirty will be a good time. Someone will see you then, and thank you for calling Safety Net, good bye.

CARMEN

That was just fine, Phyllis. You've caught on much faster than I thought you would. (NOTICES THE SOUR LOOK ON PHYLLIS' FACE.) That didn't come across like it should. What I meant was, that I thought it would take a long time to replace me.

PHYLLIS

I think I know what you meant. I didn't think this would be too hard for a college graduate. But at the same time I thought there would be more out there for me than this job for three dollars an hour.

CARMEN

It's not so bad, sweetie. I worked here for fifteen years before I got that much.

PHYLLIS

(SHAKES HER HEAD AND LOOKS AT CARMEN.) Just where did you say you were going on your vacation?

CARMEN

I'm not going on vacation, I'm working somewhere else for two weeks, and I'm making a bundle!

PHYLLIS

What's this job you're going to take for two weeks?

CARMEN

Oh, it's a doozy! (SHE STANDS AND SMILES BROADLY.) I'm going to be the manager for a traveling road show. They're going to pay all my expenses, plus eighteen dollars an hour for the time I spend with the boys.

PHYLLIS

(COCKS HER HEAD.) What boys? What kind of show is this?

CARMEN

Oh, that's the great part! It's an all male review.

PHYLLIS

You mean men strippers!

CARMEN

No! We don't call them that! They're all artists, fine dancers in their own right.

PHYLLIS

(SHAKES HER HEAD.) I'm sure they all are. What IS your job going to be?

CARMEN

I'll be their mother while they're on the road. I'm going to make all the arrangements for hotels and meals, and my most important job will be to keep the bimbos off their back.

PHYLLIS

(LAUGHS.) I don't think I'll touch that line. (PAUSE) When do you start?

CARMEN

Tonight. That's why I'm glad you learn so quickly. Now I can leave before lunch. I can pack up my essentials and take care of my boys. Not that I don't like this job, I just need a change of pace, and

some major bucks for a few weeks won't hurt my feelings either.

PHYLLIS

Before you go, please tell me how you got this job, I mean the job with the dancers . It wasn't through this agency, was it?

CARMEN

Oh, no, honey. My mother owns the show. (CARMEN WALKS OUT THE DOOR.)

JOHN SMITH WALKS OUT OF HIS DOOR AND TO THE DESK. HE LEANS ON IT, AND STARES AT PHYLLIS.

JOHN

Was that some one here for an interview, good looking?

PHYLLIS

My name is Phyllis, not good looking. That was Carmen leaving for her new job. (SHE LOOKS AT HIM FOR A FEW SECONDS.) If you're John Smith, there's a client coming in at two thirty.

JOHN

Client? (FORCED LAUGH.) You can call them that, I call them losers. That's all we ever get in here are losers.

PHYLLIS

You shouldn't call them losers. Always put yourself in their shoes before you make a judgment.

JOHN

Oh. Aren't we the moralist. (PAUSE) They're still losers.

PHYLLIS

They pay the bills here, don't they?



JOHN

You wouldn't believe how much of the bills around here are paid by losers. (PAUSES.) Hey, how about old Carmen! She lucked out in that new job, didn't she? I don't know about it, though, I think she'll be like a dog in a butcher shop, I mean a hungry dog with all that meat around. Can she be trusted?

PHYLLIS

We're getting off on the wrong foot here. I'd rather not think I'm going to have to work with a overgrown adolescent jerk.

JOHN

Better get used to it, toots. This is my best behavior.

PHYLLIS

Your behavior had better improve. You have an appointment at two thirty this afternoon

JOHN

What? Look, sweet thing, I have better things to do around here, maybe with you even.

PHYLLIS

Keep it up, and you'll see my worst behavior, twerp! I had a boss like you on my last job, in the television station.

JOHN

Well, what happened?

PHYLLIS

It wasn't pleasant, that's all I'm going to say.

JOHN

(BACKS AWAY AND RAISES HIS HANDS.) Okay. Truce. You must be one of those women's libbers, who thinks given' a man a good time is kicking him in the pants.

PHYLLIS

(STANDS AND LOOKS ANGRILY AT JOHN.) Don't press your luck!

JOHN BACKS INTO HIS OFFICE AND SHUTS THE DOOR. PHYLLIS TURNS AROUND AND SITS BACK DOWN. JOHN OPENS HIS DOOR A CRACK AND STICKS HIS HEAD OUT. PHYLLIS LOOKS BACK AT HIM, AND HE SHUTS HIS DOOR AGAIN. BILL WALKS OUT OF HIS OFFICE AND STANDS NEXT TO PHYLLIS' DESK.

BILL

Did I hear a door? Do we have a client?

PHYLLIS

No, Mr. Heartland, that was just Mr. Smith slithering back into his office.

BILL

I thought he might behave himself for at least one day. I'm sorry he didn't. He's my second wife's oldest son, by one of her earlier marriages, I forget who. (HE LOOKS UP, PUZZLED.)

PHYLLIS

Some one named Smith?

BILL

Yes! That's the one! (HE PAUSES.) Anyway, he's about the only one I can afford to hire, so I'm getting what I pay for.

PHYLLIS

I'm sorry to hear that.

BILL

Just don't pay too much attention to him, he scares easily. He may be a bit of a fool, but he's very good at his job.

PHYLLIS

I noticed the fool part. (PAUSE.) Mr. Heartland, If I do all the interviewing, and placement; well, what do you and John do?

BILL

That's a good question. (PAUSE) We handle the more difficult cases. If you ever have a difficult case, just buzz me, or John on the intercom. Our names're on the buttons.

PHYLLIS

I guess that's why John got so peeved at me. I mean, I set up an appointment with him for this afternoon, and it's only a normal case.

BILL

Oh. That's all right. He could use a little practice.

JOHN

(NOW PEEKING THROUGH HIS CRACKED DOOR.) Does this one make coffee, or what?

PHYLLIS

(LOOKS AT JOHN'S DOOR.) NO!

JOHN

(SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT.)

BILL

(TO PHYLLIS) I think you'll get along just fine here.

PHYLLIS

Tell me, Mr. Heartland, how did you come up with the name for this business?

BILL

I change the name every ten years or so. People will think we're new and try us. I get the names from the news. I liked the phrase 'safety net'. The whole concept brought a very strange picture to my head. I could see a poor widow woman on top of a rickety old town house, holding a baby in her arms. Spiro Agnew pushing her off the top, and there was President Nixon, five stories below. Holding out a butterfly net, shouting, "Jump, we won't let you fall through!"

PHYLLIS

(LAUGHING.) That's great. It's nice to see you have a sense of humor. How much business do we do?

BILL

Why do WE ask? Do we want the afternoon off on our first day?

PHYLLIS

(SERIOUS EXPRESSION.) No, sir. I was just curious.

BILL

We do enough to stay in business at this location for forty eight years. My dad started this business in nineteen twenty one, with the business name, Jazz Placement Services, he changed the name in the early thirties to the Happy Days Employment Agency. I like to change the name more often.

PHYLLIS

Why?

BILL

To stay one step ahead of the (PAUSE) competition.

JOHN

(OPENING UP HIS DOOR AND STEPPING OUT SLOWLY, HE CROSSES TO THE DESK.)  
How about if I make YOU some coffee?

BILL

He usually takes off his lounge lizard exterior after a few hours and becomes almost human.

PHYLLIS

(TO JOHN.) I take mine black, please. (TO BILL.) This might be a good place to work after all.

JOHN

(HE WALKS TO THE COFFEE MAKER AND PREPARES TWO CUPS OF COFFEE, WHILE TALKING TO THE OTHERS.) What do you really want to do? I mean, no one wants to spend their lives in a job like this. (LOOKS AT BILL WHO IS GLARING BACK AT HIM.) You're the boss, that's different.

PHYLLIS

Well, how long has Carmen been here?

BILL

She's been here twenty five years.

JOHN

She's an exception. (TO PHYLLIS.) What do YOU want to do?

PHYLLIS

I came to New York to be an actress. Since that's about the hardest thing to become, I took this job in order to feed myself for two weeks, sort of.

BILL

An actress? Everybody wants to be an actor or a politician. You know, they are the same profession.

PHYLLIS

I don't want to be president, just an employed actor.

BILL

I'll keep my eyes open for you.

PHYLLIS

Thanks, I think you will, Mr. Heartland. I already have an agent, but sometimes I wonder if he realizes that he IS one.

BILL WALKS BACK INTO HIS OFFICE AND QUIETLY SHUTS THE DOOR. JOHN LEANS AGAINST THE DESK AND SLOWLY HANDS THE CUP OF COFFEE TO PHYLLIS.

PHYLLIS

Thank you, now SCRAM!

JOHN

What a B-I-T-C-H! (HE STORMS INTO HIS OFFICE AND SLAMS THE DOOR.)

PHYLLIS LOOKS AT HER WATCH, OPENS HER DESK DRAWER AND PULLS OUT A LUNCH BAG. SHE PRESSES A LEVER ON THE INTERCOM AND SPEAKS.

PHYLLIS

Mr. Heartland, it's twelve o'clock now, can I go to lunch?

BILL

(FROM THE INTERCOM.) Is anyone going to interrupt us, (PAUSE) I mean, are there any appointments before you get back?

PHYLLIS

No, sir. The only one is at two thirty.

BILL

Sure, but be back promptly.

PHYLLIS

Yes, sir.

PHYLLIS STANDS UP, PICKS UP HER BAG, AND WALKS TO THE DOOR. AS SHE OPENS THE DOOR, THERE IS A TALL MAN WITH A WIDE BRIMMED STRAW HAT STANDING IN THE DOORWAY. SHE IS STARTLED, AND JUMPS BACK A PACE. REVEREND JENKINS RAISES HIS RIGHT HAND AND SPEAKS IN A PSEUDO SOUTHERN FAITH HEALER DIALECT.

REVEREND

Be still, my troubled child. Carry Jeesus with you and ye shall be contented.

PHYLLIS

Who the hell are you!?

REVEREND

Blasphemer! Never take His name in vain.

PHYLLIS

Hell isn't a 'he', it's a 'where', and who are you?

REVEREND

I am Reverend Jenkins, one of this fine establishment's finest clients. Where is that kind woman who has helped me look for employment while I seek a congregation of my own?

PHYLLIS

Carmen has gone on vacation for two weeks, sir. (PHYLLIS LOOKS AT THE APPOINTMENT CALENDAR IN FRONT OF HER.) I'm sorry, sir, I don't see your name on the appointment book. May I help you?

REVEREND

You are sweet, but I would feel more at home in the care of the fine old Christian gentleman, Mr. Heartland, while Carmen is not here.

PHYLLIS WALKS TO THE DESK AND PRESSES THE INTERCOM.

PHYLLIS

Mr. Heartland, there's a Reverend Jenkins to see you, sir.

BILL

(VOICE FROM THE INTERCOM.) Can you take care of this?

LOOKING AT THE REVEREND AND HALF SMILING, PHYLLIS SHRUGS HER HOULDERS.

REVEREND

My sweet child, I must see Mr. Heartland. I harbor no ill feelings towards you, but I must deal with Mr. Heartland.

BILL



(VOICE FROM THE INTERCOM.) I heard. I'll be right out.

PHYLLIS

(SMILING AT THE REVEREND.) Have a seat, he'll be out in a minute.

REVEREND

Thank you.

BILL

(WALKING THROUGH HIS DOOR.) Reverend, I take it your last job wasn't too successful?

REVEREND

They just didn't give me a chance to explore my God given talents.

BILL

As I remember, we sent you on an interview as a grief councilor at a funeral parlor.

REVEREND

They fired me for comforting the grieved ones with the words of Jeeesus.

PHYLLIS STANDS OVER HER CHAIR, READY TO SIT, BUT DOESN'T.

BILL

I find that hard to believe, reverend.

REVEREND

I would preach my best sermon on death, resurrection, and damnation, yet my Philistine employer still fired me.

PHYLLIS FALLS INTO HER CHAIR AS SHE STARES AT THE REVEREND.

BILL

They fired you for just giving a sermon?

REVEREND

Well, I did, out of habit mind you, pass the plate a time or two as I preached.

BILL

What plate? In a funeral parlor?

REVEREND

The ash tray.

BILL

Like the time you sold the Bibles autographed by Jesus instead of the vacuum cleaners they sent you to sell?

REVEREND

They WERE signed by Jeesus, sir!

BILL

Jesus Morales, a Puerto Rican from the Bronx.

REVEREND

But, I didn't know it was THAT Jeesus.

BILL

Let's go into my office and look for a more permanent job this time.

BILL TURNS TO PHYLLIS.

BILL

You can go on to lunch, This is one of the cases I was telling you about.

PHYLLIS

(SHAKING HER HEAD.) Yes, sir, one of those for you or Mr. Smith. (SHE STANDS AND WALKS OUT OF THE DOOR.)

BILL AND THE REVEREND REMAIN STANDING, WATCHING PHYLLIS LEAVE.

REVEREND

Sweet child. How long has she worked here?

BILL

One day. What seems to be your difficulty? This is the seventh job I've sent you to this month. Is there some problem you would like to discuss with me? Perhaps something I could help you with?

REVEREND

No, kind sir, none at all. I have the calling of the lord behind me, all I lack is the evil green to feed my mortal body.

BILL

Exactly what religion are you ordained in?

REVEREND

(HE SPEAKS IN A HUSHED TONE.) If it matters to some I have been ordained to a small sect dedicated to the everlasting glory of comfortable living while positioned in this temporary situation

on the vast journey to everlasting fame, peace, and riches; spiritual, of course.

BILL

Let's change the subject, (HE SHAKES HIS HEAD.) Please. I think I have a great idea for a job for you. (BILL OPENS HIS OFFICE DOOR AND MOTIONS THE REVEREND IN.) Let's talk in private, and then I'll make a phone call or two for you.

THEY BOTH WALK INTO BILL'S OFFICE, AND THE DOOR CLOSES.

FADE TO:

ACT ONE  
SCENE FOUR

IT IS FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER. THE SCENE IS IN THE SECRET BACK ROOM, WHERE THE BOOKIE OPERATION IS GOING ON. BILL WALKS INTO THE ROOM AND SHAKES HIS HEAD.

BILL

Did you see any of that?

JOHN

Yeah, some of it, but three races just went off, and, well, business is business.

BILL

I guess, but what do you make of that weirdo?

JOHN

You said it, a weirdo.

BILL

What I mean is, do you think Donald sent him here? He always wants to talk to me, even the first time he came here. And, he ignores me every time I try to send him somewhere else. He just wants to use OUR agency. Hell, no one wants to use us to find a job.

JOHN

Maybe you've got a good reputation for finding employment among the deranged.

BILL

Get serious! Something about him bothers me.

JOHN

You might be right, but I can't see a professional mobster casing our joint with a dork like him.

BILL

Why not? We're not a walk in business like in the old days. We're all modernized. I'll bet they threw him at us, hoping to confuse us.

JOHN

I don't think so, but what the hell do I know.

BILL

Nothing. (PAUSE) Just what was that act you put on out there with the new girl.

JOHN

What act?

BILL

Well, it was partially an act. What is your problem today?

JOHN

No problem. I just want her to not like me enough so that she won't get interested in me, my office, or this little operation back here.

BILL

What makes you think she wants to be interested in you, your office, or this operation back here.

JOHN

You know what effect I have on women. The more beautiful they are, the more they throw themselves at me, and I just don't want her missing me and landing back here in the bull pen.

BILL

Right. (LOOKS DISGUSTED) Your mother WAS right about you.

JOHN

Which curse? Stupid, or obnoxious? I always did like the old broad.

BILL

Precisely. (PAUSE) Could you go out there and cover the phone while our new girl is at lunch?

JOHN

Sure, why not. I'll send out for a pizza. Yah want some?

BILL

Nah, I'm not that hungry.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT ONE  
SCENE FIVE

IT IS FORTY FIVE MINUTES LATER. JOHN IS AT THE DESK IN THE OUTER OFFICE, CLEANING UP THE LEFTOVERS FROM THE PIZZA. PHYLLIS WALKS IN THE FRONT DOOR.

JOHN

It's about time you got back! Now I can do my job, and YOU can do yours.

PHYLLIS

I wasn't late, as a matter of a fact, I'm five minutes early. (SHE SITS IN HER CHAIR AS JOHN FINISHES CLEANING.) Has the Reverend Jenkins left?

JOHN

That fruit cake! He left forty five minutes ago. The old man sent him on an interview for a job as an extra in an off-Broadway revival.

PHYLLIS

He'd do better in a revival of the "Beverly Hillbillies".

JOHN

You've got a point.

PHYLLIS

Don't forget, there's an appointment in an hour and a half.

JOHN

I'm ready, sugar! Do you think I can do it without a lengthy preparation?

PHYLLIS

(LOOKING AT HIM SLOWLY, FROM HIS HEAD TO HIS FEET.) No.



JOHN, LOOKING INSULTED, WALKS INTO HIS OFFICE AND SLAMS THE DOOR. BILL ENTERS FROM THE FRONT DOOR WITH A BIG SMILE ON HIS FACE, CARRYING A THICK FOLDER OF PAPERS AND SLAPS HIS HANDS TOGETHER.

BILL

Ha! I've done it!

PHYLLIS

Done what, sir?

BILL

This lunch was the most productive since my fourth marriage.

PHYLLIS

Please be more specific.

BILL

I've been to lunch with the head of the technical school down the street. It was a chance meeting, and I had no idea what he wanted. He's in charge of twenty two schools in the city. He wants to use us as the placement agency for his graduates of this one school now, maybe all of them later. Do you have any idea how much money we can make from that?

PHYLLIS

Not really, this is only my first day on the job, remember?

BILL

(TALKING TO HIMSELF) If he likes our work on these students, he'll give us the contract for all of the students, of all his schools. (LOOKING AT PHYLLIS) Add it up, I did.

PHYLLIS

(SMILING.) And what did you come up with?

BILL

More than we make now, even with taxes!

PHYLLIS

(SHAKES HER HEAD.) That must have been a very good three martini lunch.

BILL

(LOOKS AT PHYLLIS FOR A SECOND, THEN SPREADS HIS ARMS OUT.) I paid for the lunch. Look at this place, do you think I could afford martinis. When I spend, it's at the great golden arches, or nothing.

PHYLLIS

Oh, a three McTini lunch?

BILL

(SMILES.) I guess. (HE WALKS BACK INTO HIS OFFICE.)

BILL PULLS THE LIQUOR BOTTLE AND OPENS THE SECRET DOOR. HE WALKS INTO THE BACK ROOM, AND PULLS THE DOOR SHUT; IT FAILS TO SHUT FULLY, AND REOPENS SLIGHTLY AS HE WALKS AWAY FROM IT. BILL DOES NOT NOTICE THIS. BILL WALKS OVER TO JOHN, WHO HAS JUST HUNG UP THE TELEPHONE IN ONE OF THE BOOTHS.

JOHN

Damn! We just lost twenty thousand!

BILL

That doesn't matter, do you know what happened?

JOHN

Yeah, I couldn't help hearing you; I left the sound from the camera up, and you were real loud coming back from lunch. Just what in the hell're you doing!

BILL

Calm down! How much do we make in a year; I know what we gross, but how much do we average in real money?

JOHN

I dunno, I guess two or three hundred thousand.

BILL

Well, how does five million bucks sound. This guy down the block processes around a hundred thousand students a year through his places, at only fifty bucks per student, well, you add it up!

JOHN

Yeah, I can add, but we'd have to do quarterly taxes, and payroll, and all that stuff we swore we'd never do.

BILL

Yeah, but we'd still make more money. Ain't that what life's all about! Besides, if we got out of the bookie business, what would the mob want with us? After all these years as a bookie, I've got contacts all over this city. Hell, I think I could find a job for anybody, even you.

PHYLLIS IS AT HER DESK AS HER TWO THIRTY APPOINTMENT ARRIVES. PAUL, A TALL VERY DISTINGUISHED LOOKING MAN IN HIS EARLY THIRTIES, WALKS IN AND STANDS IN FRONT OF PHYLLIS' DESK.

PAUL

Is this the Safety Net Agency?

PHYLLIS

Yes.

PAUL

I'm here, can you help me?

PHYLLIS

I can try. My name's Phyllis Waters. Please have a seat.

PAUL WALKS TO THE LARGE CHAIR TO THE RIGHT OF THE SOFA AND SITS DOWN. HE SINKS UP TO HIS KNEES ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, AND THEN KEEPS SINKING SLOWLY. HE STRUGGLES TO GET OUT AND DOES. HE STANDS AND WALKS BACK TO PHYLLIS' DESK.

PHYLLIS

I meant sit in the chair right here, next to my desk.

PAUL

Oh, I'm sorry. I've been to fifteen agencies seeking a position, and the last one told me I should try you people. Please help me, I don't know what to do.

PHYLLIS

Let's start with what you normally do for a living.

PAUL

That's easy; nothing.

PHYLLIS

(PAUSE.) Could you expand on that just a little?

PAUL

Well, my father has millions, our family always has. My job was the same as my father's: wait for him to die, then take over all the money. The trouble all started when I got engaged. It was all

Father's fault; he told me to get a backbone and make my own decisions, well I did! I found a woman who would make a fine, proper wife, and I did it all on my own.

PHYLLIS

(CLOSING HER EYES FOR A LONG BLINK.) I know I shouldn't ask, but; what happened?

PAUL

One sad event after another. My love, my future wife turned out to be a transvestite. Even Father had told me how lovely she looked and it was he who discovered Julie's little secret when he made a crude physical pass at her. (PAUL SHAKES HIS HEAD.) Boy, was Daddy surprised at what he found up there. Well, he got so furious that he had the butler throw me out on the street with out a single credit card, not even cash! I've been living like a gypsy ever since. Can you help me?

PHYLLIS

(SHE LOOKS AT THE CEILING.) This is not a tough one; I can do it myself. Who needs John the stupid (LOOKING AT PAUL.) I'll find a job for you. (SHE LOOKS AT THE JOB ROLODEX AND THINKS.) You would be good in a service job. You have spent all your life with servants, correct?

PAUL

Every moment, until now.

PHYLLIS

Fine. I've found a position as a butler. (SHE WRITES A PHONE NUMBER ON A SLIP OF PAPER AND HANDS IT TO PAUL.) You're used to living in the grand style, so it won't be new to you, all you'll have to do is get used to serving, not being served.

PAUL

I can do that! I'll try it! (HE TAKES THE PAPER AND LEAVES.)

PHYLLIS BEGINS TO WRITE ON A FORM. HER PEN RUNS OUT OF INK AND SHE SHAKES IT IN THE AIR. IT STILL WON'T

WRITE, SO SHE BEGINS TO LOOK IN THE DRAWERS OF THE DESK FOR ANOTHER PEN. AFTER TEN SECONDS OF RIFLING THROUGH THE DRAWERS, SHE GETS UP AND WALKS TO BILL'S OFFICE DOOR, AND OPENS IT. SHE WALKS INTO HIS OFFICE AND STARTS TO CALL BILL, BUT NOTICES THAT THE OFFICE IS EMPTY. SHE LOOKS CONFUSED, AND LOOKS ALL AROUND THE SMALL OFFICE. SHE NOTICES THE PARTIALLY OPEN BOOKCASE DOOR. SHE WALKS SLOWLY TO IT, AND PEERS THROUGH THE CRACK. JOHN AND BILL ARE STILL IN THEIR CONVERSATION.

JOHN

A bet in the hand is worth more than millions in the sky. We've got a good little operation here, and I for one don't want to start something honest now. (PAUSE) Look, we just dropped twenty thousand on the dogs in Florida, and I'd like to make it up before the day's through, so if you'll excuse me.

JOHN WALKS AWAY FROM BILL, AND GLANCES AT THE TELEVISION MONITOR.

JOHN

(TURNING BACK TO BILL.) Hey, where'd that broad go to now?

BILL

(TURNING TOWARD JOHN.) What? (HE NOTICES THE DOOR AJAR AND WALKS QUICKLY TO IT. HE PULLS IT WIDE OPEN, AND PHYLLIS IS STANDING THERE MOTIONLESS, WITH A SCARED SMILE ON HER FACE.)

PHYLLIS

(VERY MEEKLY) Hi. My pen ran out of ink, and I couldn't find one in Carmen's desk.

BILL

Miss Waters?

JOHN

The pens are in the bottom right hand drawer of your desk, honey, but you might not need them

anyway.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE ONE

SAME TIME AND PLACE AS PREVIOUS SCENE.

PHYLLIS

Gee! (SHE WALKS IN THE DOOR AND LOOKS ALL AROUND WHILE SHE TALKS.) This is a bookie joint? God, it doesn't look anything like I thought one should. And, where are all the bums, hanging around losing all their money? The only bum I see is him. (POINTS TO JOHN.)

JOHN

Will you shut up! I don't think you realize how much trouble you're in, toots.

PHYLLIS

(SHE TURNS AND STARES AT JOHN.) I don't think you realize how much trouble you'll be in, if you call me toots again.

BILL

I like your spunk, but I'm afraid my friend here has a point. You didn't know about our little operation back here, now you do.

PHYLLIS

Did Carmen?

BILL

Well, yes, but knowing was part of her job.

PHYLLIS

Why can't it be part of mine, at least for the next two weeks.



JOHN

That's the whole problem in a nutshell, sweet thing. Just what will you do when the two weeks are up?

PHYLLIS

I've already told you, I want to be an actress, so, in two weeks I'll still be looking for acting jobs, or I'll be in a show. If I'm in a show, this sort of thing will be great for my acting. (PAUSE.) Sweet thing is no better than toots, dipstick!

BILL

How's that? (PAUSE.) Not the sweet thing junk, the rest of it.

PHYLLIS

Look at all this exposure to local color. (SHE WAVES HER HAND ABOUT THE ROOM.) This is great!

BILL

(LOOKING AT JOHN AND SHRUGGING HIS SHOULDERS.) Well?

JOHN

It's up to you, boss, but I think she's trouble. I'd rather shoot her. (LOOKS SIDEWAYS AT PHYLLIS.)

BILL

We could keep her back here for a week or so.

PHYLLIS

You'd have to hire someone else to handle all those new clients you've just gotten for the business out there. (SHE POINTS IN THE DIRECTION OF THE OUTER OFFICE.)

BILL

Damn! I forgot all about that.

JOHN

So what!

BILL

So, that's more money than we make in here.

JOHN

I'll believe that when I see it.

BILL

You will, and you'll work for it also.

JOHN

Why should I?

BILL

Because I said so!

JOHN

(TURNS TO PHYLLIS.) Big friggin' deal!

PHYLLIS

Look, is this a local operation, or does the mob run things?

BILL

You aren't as dumb as John hoped for.

PHYLLIS

Thank you, I think, but I'll bet you're a local operation. If the real mob is anywhere as mean as in the mob movies, then sooner or later you'll be in big trouble with them. Then there's the cops. You can't buy them off forever.

JOHN

You sure talk a lot for a broad.

PHYLLIS

And, you sure don't think much for a prick.

JOHN

(STEPPING CLOSER TO PHYLLIS.) You must have a deep desire to die very soon.

PHYLLIS

(STEPPING BACK A PACE.) No, I have a desire to keep this job for two weeks. You don't know how hard it is to get a decent job in this town.

BILL

You still consider this to be a decent job?

PHYLLIS

Sure, why not? You seem like a nice man; I'd like to trust you. (LOOKS AT JOHN.) He's an idiot, but I judge him to be all mouth and no action.

BILL

Well, then, what do you propose to happen?

PHYLLIS

You'll pay me to run the outer office, and I'll get lots of experience. When I get asked to play someone who works outside the law, I can tell the producer I really did work for a bookie once. I won't say where, but it might help.

BILL

(HE LOOKS AT HER FOR TEN SECONDS IN SILENCE.) I think you're on the level.

JOHN

I don't trust her.

PHYLLIS

(GLARING AT JOHN) We're even. I don't trust you.

BILL

(TURNING TO JOHN.) I like her, and she'll stay for the two weeks.

JOHN

(SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AND TURNS AWAY FROM BILL.) It's your funeral. (HE WALKS TO ANOTHER SECRET DOOR WHICH LEADS INTO HIS SMALL OFFICE, AND GOES THROUGH IT.)

BILL

Just between you and me, why are you doing this? I mean, this is a potentially dangerous situation.

PHYLLIS

I've been employed by men who have chased me around their office on the first day. That bum who I worked for at the TV station caught me, then his wife, which he swore he didn't have, caught us. Through experience, I've learned to judge men pretty well, and you're okay. I need the money. All I'm chancing is that nothing fatal will happen in just two weeks, besides, you said you've been at this for almost fifty years without a hitch so far.

BILL

(WALKING TO PHYLLIS.) Look, I've decided to trust you. Please don't screw me like your TV boss screwed you.

PHYLLIS

I won't, so long as I don't get busted.

BILL

I was serious, my dad started this place forty eight years ago, as an employment agency, and a bookie joint. The cops have never raided this place, (PAUSE.) ever!

PHYLLIS

Do you buy them off?

BILL

No, they just don't know about us, or we're too small for them to bother with. You were right about the mob, though

PHYLLIS

Yeah?

BILL

They've been closing down small, independent operations a lot lately, and I've been worrying about that.

PHYLLIS

You don't think they'll be here in the next two weeks, do you?

BILL

I hope they never come here, but I hear that the new honcho's trying to close all the independent loan sharks, pimps, and bookies down in his area.

PHYLLIS

Does he know where you are?

BILL

He's got to.

PHYLLIS

(SHE THINKS TO HER SELF FOR A WHILE.) I still want to stay, I could use something a little different in my life for a while, and this is about as different as I can stand.

BILL

Great! (HE LOOKS AT HIS WATCH.) It's about quitting time, so you go on ahead and I'll lock up. Don't tell anyone about what you've seen. The mob boss will send a snoop around, and no one knows who he'll be, but he'll be around for sure.

PHYLLIS NODS HER HEAD, AND WALKS OUT OF THE BACK ROOM. SHE WALKS BACK INTO THE FRONT OFFICE, AND PULLS HER PURSE OUT OF THE DESK. SHE WALKS OUT OF THE OFFICE.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE TWO

THE EXTERIOR DOOR TO THE BUILDING IS SEEN FROM THE STREET IN FRONT. PHYLLIS WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR AS JOSH IS WALKING TOWARDS HER FROM THE END OF THE BLOCK. HE SEES HER AND HURRIES HIS PACE, IN ORDER TO CATCH UP TO HER. HE SLOWS HIS PACE, JUST AS HE WALKS UP BESIDE PHYLLIS.

JOSH

Hi. Did you find the right place this morning?

PHYLLIS

(STOPS AND TURNS TOWARD HIM. SHE LOOKS VERY HARD AT HIS FACE, THEN RECOGNIZES HIM.) Oh! You're the guy I asked directions from this morning. (PAUSE.) Yeah, this was the right place; and I got the job I was after.

JOSH

That's great! What is it, if I can ask.

PHYLLIS

You just did. Anyway, it's a very interesting job, working for an employment agency. Do you work around here?

JOSH

Not yet. I go to school at the technical institute on the end of this block. Do you want to go for a bite to eat?

PHYLLIS

(SMILES.) Not right now, I'm really beat. It was one hell of a first day on the job.

JOSH

Maybe some other time? Tomorrow?

PHYLLIS

(KEEPS SMILING.) That might work out sometime. I think we might run into each other again, soon. (SHE STARTS WALKING AWAY.)

JOSH

I hope so. (HE TURNS AND WALKS IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.)

FADE TO BLACK.



ACT TWO  
SCENE THREE

THE SCENE OPENS IN THE INSIDE OF A LARGE NEW YORK PENTHOUSE APARTMENT. IT IS DECORATED WITH EXPENSIVE LOOKING ANTIQUES. ON THE WALLS ARE HUNG A MIXTURE OF PAINTINGS: SIXTEENTH CENTURY OLD WORLD, AND PHOTO REALISM. GROUPED AROUND A LARGE OAK AND MARBLE FIREPLACE MANTLE ARE MANY PHOTOGRAPHS OF MOVIE STARS FROM THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES, EACH WITH AN INSCRIPTION "TO PENNY ADAMS, WITH LOVE". PENNY ADAMS, A WOMAN IN HER LATE SEVENTIES, IS SEATED IN THE LIVING ROOM, IN A LARGE SEMI-RECLINING CHAIR WHICH HAS A STEREO AND A COLOR TELEVISION BUILT INTO IT. HER DAUGHTER, CARMEN, WALKS INTO THE LIVING ROOM FROM THE KITCHEN.

CARMEN

Mom, will you turn that trash off! I want to talk to you

CARMEN SITS IN A SOFA BESIDE HER MOTHER.

PENNY

(SHE PUSHES A BUTTON ON THE ARM OF THE CHAIR, AND IT TURNS SLOWLY TOWARDS CARMEN. PENNY TURNS THE VOLUME DOWN A BIT.) I hear you just fine. You know ( PAUSE ) my parents thought our music was trash too. You should be more tolerant.

CARMEN

You know, it was trash back then too.

PENNY

So, what do you want to talk about?

CARMEN

What about my job? Do you think it's really that good?

PENNY

I didn't say it was that good, all I said was that it was better than working for that bum. All I've seen you do for so long is to pine over that Heartland jerk! maybe now you can grow up and become a woman of the sixties.

CARMEN

Mom, will you leave me alone! (CARMEN LEANS BACK IN THE SOFA AND LOOKS AT THE CEILING.) I'm a big girl now, and I can take care of myself just fine, thank you very much!

PENNY

Like I said before, if you can take care of yourself so well, why have you been pining over that boss of yours for fifty years.

CARMEN

It hasn't been fifty years, and I'm not pining! (SHE LOOKS DIRECTLY AT HER MOTHER.) Look, mom, most women your age are in a home for the feeble minded, or staring up at six feet of dirt. Don't push your luck.

PENNY

It ain't luck, it's common sense. Someday you too might get some. In the meantime, don't screw up this road show.

CARMEN

What's to screw up? A bunch of absolutely gorgeous men jump around on a stage and take all their clothes off. I think I can handle that, mom.

PENNY

I wonder. (SHE LEANS FORWARD IN HER CHAIR AND LOOKS AT CARMEN.) Did I ever give you that sex talk?

CARMEN

Yes, but if you need a cheap thrill, you can go over it again.

PENNY

Thrill, schmill! All I want you to do is keep the club owners happy, keep the boys out of jail, and keep the money rolling in.

CARMEN

I said I thought I could handle that, at least for two weeks!

PENNY

Just as long as you handle THAT and not THEM.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE FOUR

THE TIME IS THAT SAME NIGHT, IN AN OLD WAREHOUSE WHICH HAS BEEN CONVERTED INTO FIVE APARTMENTS; THREE ON THE GROUND FLOOR AND TWO ON THE SECOND FLOOR. THE ENTRANCE IS CLUTTERED WITH TRASH AND LIT BY ONLY A BARE TWENTY FIVE WATT LIGHT BULB. THERE IS A LONG, DIMLY LIT HALLWAY WITH THREE DOORS TO THE SIDES. A METAL AND WOODEN STAIRWAY IS AT THE END OF THE HALLWAY. LAUGHTER AND SEVERAL VOICES ARE HEARD COMING FROM AN APARTMENT UPSTAIRS. SOMEONE HAS LEFT THEIR DOOR OPEN . THE SCENE SHIFTS TO THE OPEN DOOR, IN THE UPSTAIRS APARTMENT. REVEREND JENKINS IS STANDING IN THE CENTER OF A LARGE, ALMOST EMPTY ROOM, HOLDING A BIBLE. JOSH SIMON AND A PRETTY BLONDE ARE STANDING IN FRONT OF HIM, HOLDING HANDS.

REVEREND

Shall we try it once more, and this time we shall be correct. We must be correct when all eyes are watching us in two days.

JOSH

You're right. (TO CATHY.) This is about the most important thing that's happened to us since we met. (HE HUGS CATHY.)

REVEREND

All right, Let us continue. (PAUSES AS HE RAISES THE BIBLE.) Do you, fill in your name, take this woman for better or for worse.

CATHY

Why don't you use our real names for now?

REVEREND

That's a splendid idea!

JOSH

Please go on.

REVEREND

Do you Take this woman, Cathy Teasedale, to be your lawful wedded wife, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, from this day forward, until Jeesus swoops down and carries your souls to blessed heaven.

JOSH

Cut the embellishments, reverend. Just read it like they wrote it. Don't screw up, please.

REVEREND

You're right, son. Do you, Joshua Simon, take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, in sickness, and in health, for richer or for poorer, from this day forward.

JOSH

I do.

REVEREND

If there be no man present who objects to this union, then I now pronounce...

CATHY

I think it's time to quit. Lee's here with the pizza

LEE SIMON ENTERS THROUGH THE DOOR WITH SEVERAL BOXES OF PIZZA. SHE WALKS TO THE ONLY COUCH AND SITS DOWN, DROPPING THE BOXES ON A SMALL TABLE IN FRONT OF THE SOFA.

LEE

(LOOKING AROUND THE ROOM.) Don't quit. I thought you all wanted to eat and rehearse.

JOSH

I don't want to, I don't have the heart. I'm in love.

CATHY

You're always in love! The world will be better off when your hormones reach a safe level.

REVEREND

Is that a Canadian Bacon pizza?

LEE

Sure is, Reverend. (PAUSE.) Hey, are you really a reverend?

REVEREND

I have my pastoral discount card for airline tickets to prove it. A man of God does not lie!

LEE

I'm sorry. Have you ever acted before?

REVEREND

You are full of questions. (PAUSE.) No, I haven't, but I think I like it a lot. I really must thank Mr. Heartland for leading my life in this direction.

JOSH

Please! Can't you see that I'm in pain.

LEE

That can be surgically corrected.

JOSH

GOD! I've found the true love of my life, and no one cares.

JOSH STANDS AND WALKS OUT OF THE DOOR.

CATHY

(IN A SOFT VOICE.) I care. Well, sort of.

LEE

(TO CATHY.) Can't you do something for him?

CATHY

Lee! You're my roommate and my best friend, but there are some things I must draw the line at.

LEE

Not sleep with him! I meant get him this job on your show.

CATHY

Oh. I'm still trying. The producers are looking for a new heart throb doctor, and for all his faults, Josh is gorgeous.

LEE

He's okay. I wouldn't go as far as even presentable, but he's okay.

REVEREND

(TO CATHY.) How tough are these producers? I mean, do you think I stand a chance?

CATHY

Reverend, just be yourself and they'll love you. You're exactly what they want.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE FIVE

IT IS EIGHT THIRTY THE NEXT MORNING. THE SCENE IS THE OUTER OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY. PHYLLIS WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR AND TO THE DESK. THE OFFICE APPEARS VACANT. SHE DROPS HER PURSE, LUNCH BAG, AND WORK SHOES ON THE DESK, THEN SHE YAWNS AND STRETCHES. SHE SITS BACK DOWN AND CHANGES FROM HER WALKING SHOES TO HER WORK SHOES. SHE THEN WALKS TO THE COFFEE MAKER AND PICKS UP THE GLASS POT. JOHN IS UNDER A COVER ON THE SOFA, BUT PHYLLIS NEVER SEES HIM. AS SHE TURNS TO WALK INTO THE HALL TO FILL THE GLASS POT, BILL WALKS INTO THE MAIN OFFICE FROM HIS OFFICE.

BILL

Can you type? I forgot to ask you in the interview if you could type.

PHYLLIS

You happen to be in luck, I can type. I prefer to be type cast, but I can type type with the best of them. I didn't see a typewriter in here, though.

BILL

We keep it in my office, but I'll bring it out to your desk, along with all the typing. Those folks at the school want a file completed on each student, and do you realize how many students there are in that two bit place? We're not used to this type of work here. Can you even guess how much stuff there is to do?

PHYLLIS

A lot?

BILL

A shit pile!

PHYLLIS

Quaint expression.

BILL

Tough times call for tough talk.



PHYLLIS

Just bring out the typewriter.

BILL GOES INTO HIS OFFICE. THE PHONE RINGS, AND PHYLLIS ANSWERS IT.

PHYLLIS

Safety Net Employment Agency. You fell through, now we'll help you. (PAUSE.) I promise we'll help. Hello. Hello? Hello! If anyone is there, hello. (PHYLLIS SHRUGS HER SHOULDERS, THEN HANGS UP THE PHONE.)

BILL REAPPEARS WITH A MUSEUM VINTAGE TYPEWRITER, AND SETS IT ON PHYLLIS' DESK.

PHYLLIS

(LOOKING AT THE TYPEWRITER, THEN AT BILL.) Most owners save their first dollar, not their first typewriter.

BILL

That's my friend, she still works as good as the first day I bought her. (BILL PATS THE TYPEWRITER.)

PHYLLIS

I'll use her, but it'll be like beating on my grandmother.

BILL

(HE GOES INTO HIS OFFICE, THEN COMES BACK OUT WITH A LARGE PILE OF PAPERS WHICH HE THEN DUMPS ON HER DESK.) Good, now type these up as soon as you can. I'm not quite finished with the rough work ups.

PHYLLIS

You mean there's more?

BILL

Not too much. You know, this is exciting! Real work, and I can get rich doing it.

PHYLLIS

Do I have to interview and place these people as well as type up all their folders?

BILL

No, we'll do all the interviewing while you type, then you can help us with the interviewing and placing. It'll be fun, and God! we'll make a bundle in just a few weeks!

BILL SMILES BROADLY, WALKS BACK INTO HIS OFFICE AND CLOSSES THE DOOR.

PHYLLIS

(PHYLLIS SIGHS LOUDLY THEN SITS DOWN IN FRONT OF THE TYPEWRITER.) Just bring the rest of it out when it's finished, and I'll do it as fast as I can. (SHE SHUFFLES SOME OF THE PAPERS AND THEN PUTS A CLEAN SHEET OF TYPING PAPER IN THE TYPEWRITER. SHE BEGINS TO TYPE.)

JOHN THROWS OFF HIS COVER AND RISES FROM THE COUCH. PHYLLIS DROPS DOWN BEHIND HER DESK AND LOOKS AT JOHN. AS SOON AS SHE SEES WHO IT IS, SHE STANDS UP AND SHOUTS AT JOHN.

PHYLLIS

What the hell do you think your doing! You scared the wits out of me sneaking around like that!

JOHN

I WAS sleeping, not sneaking. Now I'm waking up, very quickly. How about some coffee. (PAUSE.) I need it.

PHYLLIS

So do I, and you made it so well yesterday, that I think you should do a repeat performance.

JOHN

Why go home, I now have one of you to nag me at the office. You don't happen to know any other wifely duties, do you?

PHYLLIS

Sure (HOLDING OUT HER HAND.) I can spend your money.

JOHN

I'm too tired for this. I had to spend the night and do all of the job back there (HE POINTS TO THE ROOM IN BACK) while the boss played with the student folders. I'll give up and make the coffee myself. (HE TAKES THE POT INTO THE HALL, AND COMES BACK WITH IT FULL OF WATER. HE MAKES THE COFFEE.)

A YOUNG, DARK HAired MAN STICKS HIS HEAD INTO THE OFFICE. HE IS TALL AND VERY MUSCULAR. HE HAS A STRONG SOUTHERN ACCENT.

DEL

Am I too early?

JOHN

That depends on why you're here.

DEL

I need a job.

JOHN

Then you could be too late.

DEL

I hope not, I'm graduatin' from Ed's technical school down the street.

PHYLLIS

You're in the right office, and to spite what sleeping beauty over there said, you are on time. What's your name, maybe I can pull your folder from this pile. (SHE POINTS TO THE STACK OF FOLDERS ON HER DESK.)

DEL

My name's Homer Delmar, my friends call me Del. (LOOKING AT PHYLLIS.) Gee, you're real pretty at this hour of the morning.

PHYLLIS

Thank you, that's the first complement I've gotten since I moved to New York.

DEL

Well, maybe you can tell I ain't from here neither.

PHYLLIS

I think I noticed that.

DEL

Yeah, I don't talk funny like these big applers. Well, when I see a pretty woman, I up and tell'em. I don't pinch her or holler at 'em like these Yankees up here.

PHYLLIS

(THUMBING THROUGH THE FOLDERS.) I found your folder. Mr. Smith will see you. (LOOKING AT JOHN.)

JOHN

(LOOKING ANNOYED AT PHYLLIS.) All right, deny a man his first cup of coffee! Right this way, sir. By the way, what did you study at Ed U.?

DEL

I studied up to be a secretary.

JOHN

Simply wonderful. We should have almost no trouble in placing you.

JOHN AND DEL GO INTO JOHN'S OFFICE. LEE AND JOSH SIMON WALK THROUGH THE DOOR. AS THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION TAKES PLACE, PHYLLIS LOOKS AT EACH OF THEM ALTERNATIVELY, AS IF WATCHING A TENNIS GAME.

LEE

Young woman, is this the agency handling the graduating class from the technical institute?

JOSH

You mean Ed's house of training.

LEE

Oh, shut up, Josh! You're the one who chose the oddball career, not me!

JOSH

You think being Proctologists assistant is non weird?

LEE

Don't start up with the ass witticisms, Josh.

JOSH

You're the butt of one too many jokes, right?

PHYLLIS LOOKS AT LEE, WAITING FOR HER RESPONSE.

LEE

What are you looking at! Are we at the right place?

PHYLLIS

Yes, you are. Are you two married?

LEE

(LOOKING VERY ANNOYED.) Heavens, no! He's my stupid brother.

JOSH

And that must make you my stupid sister.

PHYLLIS

If I had a little more of your names, maybe I could find your folders. (PAUSE.) Don't I know you? (SHE LOOKS AT JOSH.) You're the guy in front of the building. I thought you'd be coming here.

LEE

(INTERRUPTING HER.) We are Lee and Josh Simon.

JOSH

No, You are Lee Simon. (POINTING TO HIS CHEST.) I am Josh Simon.

PHYLLIS

Whoever you think you are, I found what must be your folders. Lee, you can go in and see Mr. Heartland. Josh, you can wait here. (SHE POINTS TO THE CHAIRS, THE PUNCHES THE

INTERCOM BUTTON.) Mr. Heartland, Lee Simon is here for an interview.

BILL

(HIS VOICE ON THE INTERCOM.) Send her in with her folder, Ms. Waters.

JOSH WALKS TO THE CHAIR AND BEGINS TO SIT.

PHYLLIS

Don't sit in that one! It almost ate a client yesterday. Try the sofa, I believe it's more civilized.

JOSH

(MOVING TO THE SOFA.) Thank's The life you may have saved is mine.

PHYLLIS

What trade did you learn at this school?

JOSH

I learned to be a short order cook. What I really want to do is be an actor, but since I can't live on the money I stand to make at acting for the next few years, I have to do something to pay the bills, and I figured that as a cook, I could at least feed myself at work.

PHYLLIS

There must be a bunch of us in New York.

JOSH

Cooks? Or do you want to act too?

PHYLLIS

More than be a receptionist.

JOSH

What have you done so far?

PHYLLIS

Not much here, but I was on a local TV station back home as the weather girl on weekends, and I starred in some college plays.

JOSH

I've done one commercial. Actually my feet were in it, but I got the money. I did some work in college, and spent last summer on the road in the world's smallest summer company.

PHYLLIS

Are you from here?

JOSH

If you mean New York, yes.

PHYLLIS

Is it easier to find work here if you're from New York?

JOSH

Not really. Some casting agents are from out of town, so they want what looks like a fresh New York face.

PHYLLIS

Well, like I said, you guys must have the edge.

JOSH



Not quite, none of the Hollywood types think we look local. They always pick the out of town people like you.

PHYLLIS

That sounds encouraging. How many calls a day does your agent get for you?

JOSH

A day? You are from out of town. I get more obscene phone calls than I hear from him. Matter of a fact, some of his calls could be classified as obscene.

PHYLLIS

The reason I asked is that my agent hardly ever calls with a reading, or anything. I just wondered if that was normal.

JOSH

As normal as smog in August.

PHYLLIS

It's fun talking to you. You seem to be a nice guy. It's funny, but...

JOSH

But, what?

PHYLLIS

I usually don't like guys who come on to me, but, well, you're kind of nice.

JOSH

Thanks. I've been practicing at it for years.

PHYLLIS

It's not perfect yet.

JOSH

Gee, I live for encouragement like that.

PHYLLIS

I meant that as sort of a compliment.

JOSH

Then I guess I'll take it as sort of one.

DEL AND JOHN COME OUT OF JOHN'S OFFICE.

DEL

Thanks a lot, Mr. Smith. I think I'm gonna like working with nothin' but ladies.

JOHN

No problem, Del. If that doesn't work out, just come right on back.

DEL WALKS OUT WHISTLING.

PHYLLIS

Where did you send him?

JOHN

Among other places, to N.O.W. headquarters. Let's see if they put their money where their mouths are.

PHYLLIS

Very funny! (SARCASTICALLY.) Why don't you send him to the U.N. as a diplomat?

JOHN

Good idea! I should've thought of that myself. Is he next? (POINTING TO JOSH.)

PHYLLIS

Yes, he's just a short order cook (PAUSE.) you can't do much damage with that.

JOHN

We'll see, introduce us.

PHYLLIS

Josh Simon, this is John Smith. He's going to do his best, as a favor to me, to get you the highest paying cook's job in the city.

JOHN

I can't promise that, the city's on a hiring freeze right now.

JOHN AND JOSH WALK TOWARDS JOHN'S OFFICE. JOSH STOPS BY PHYLLIS' DESK AND SPEAKS.

JOSH

What time do you go to lunch. I'd like to share experiences in job hunting with you, acting jobs, that is.

PHYLLIS

I'd like that. I go at twelve. I'll meet you in front of the building then, I'm afraid I don't know my way around yet.

JOSH AND JOHN GO INTO THE OFFICE.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE SIX

THE TIME IS THE SAME, THE SCENE IS A SMALL, VERY GRUBBY RESTAURANT DOWN THE BLOCK FROM THE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY BUILDING. THERE ARE ABOUT A DOZEN PATRONS, AND TWO SERVERS, A WOMAN, AND A MAN, PAUL. THE ROOM IS SMALL. THERE IS A COUNTER WITH SIX STOOLS IN FRONT OF IT. ALL SIX HAVE PEOPLE SITTING AT THEM. ALONG THE OPPOSITE WALL AND THE BACK WALL ARE BOOTHS. THE ONES ALONG THE SIDE WALL ARE LARGE ENOUGH FOR FOUR PEOPLE, AND THE ONES ALONG THE BACK WALL ARE ONLY FOR TWO PEOPLE. THE NAUGAHYDE ON ALMOST ALL OF THE BOOTH SEATS IS TORN, SOME RIPS HAVE BEEN PATCHED WITH TAPE. NEXT TO THE ENTRANCE TO THE KITCHEN IS A PAY PHONE. STANDING AT THE PHONE, TALKING IN A VERY LOW VOICE IS REVEREND JENKINS. PAUL, IN BETWEEN SERVING FOOD, IS PACING NEAR THE PHONE, WAITING FOR A TURN TO MAKE A PHONE CALL.

REVEREND

(IN A VERY LOW VOICE HE DOESN'T HAVE THE FAKE SOUTHERN FAITH HEALER ACCENT ANYMORE.) Look, lieutenant I know you want me to finish this thing up, but it's just going to take longer than I thought. (PAUSE) No I'm not in any danger, I don't think either one of them even carries a gun. (PAUSE) I've checked the main phone block in the basement of the building, and they really only have five phones going to their office. I counted only three phones, but they could have dropped two lines sometime in the past. (PAUSE) No, I don't know how they could take bets without more phones, or runners, and I haven't seen anything like that either. (PAUSE) If they're the ones who we think they are, then they're real good at hiding it. (PAUSE) I'll report back in the morning. I've got something important to do at ten, but I'll call before then. (PAUSE) Calm down, just give me forty eight more hours, and I'll come in with whatever I've found by then. (PAUSE) Bye.

THE REVEREND STRAIGHTENS HIS COAT AS HE STEPS BACK FROM THE PHONE. HE WALKS DIRECTLY OUT OF THE SMALL RESTAURANT. PAUL, SEEING THE PHONE HAS BECOME FREE, MOVES QUICKLY TO IT. HE DROPS A COIN IN IT AND DIALS A NUMBER. WHILE HE WAITS FOR AN ANSWER HE LOOKS ABOUT THE ROOM, BACKING UP TO THE WALL AND LEANING ON IT.

PAUL

Hello, is this Donald? (PAUSE) This is Paul. I've checked on those items you've spoken to me about. (PAUSE) Yes, it's them. They're smarter than I had guessed. (PAUSE) The police would be hard pressed to discover anything, they may never. (PAUSE) I've been to their place. (PAUSE) They have no idea who I am, nor could they guess. (PAUSE) Yes, by this time two days from now it will be done.

PAUL HANGS UP THE PHONE AND WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE SEVEN

THE TIME IS TWELVE THIRTY THAT SAME DAY. THE PLACE IS THE SAME SMALL FAST ORDER RESTAURANT. JOSH AND PHYLLIS ARE IN A BOOTH TO THE LEFT OF A DIRTY COUNTER WITH SEVERAL CUSTOMERS SITTING AT IT.

PHYLLIS

I don't think I've ever seen this place, and it's near my office too.

JOSH

It's not a great place, but it's the cheapest around. A lot of the starving actors eat their few meals here. Since I want to buy you lunch, and I only have ten dollars until the end of the week, this place has a certain charm, to me at least.

PHYLLIS

You don't have to buy me lunch! We can go Dutch. You sound like you need the money to last out the week.

JOSH

Take a free meal when offered. That's the first and best bit of advice anyone will give you as an unemployed actress. Besides, the end of the week for me is tomorrow, so don't worry, but don't spend my whole ten bucks!

PHYLLIS

I'm not unemployed, as an actress I am, but in general, I am employed.

JOSH

Let me get the waitress, I'm getting hungry arguing about who can afford to pay. (JOSH WAVES AT A WAITRESS. SHE ACKNOWLEDGES HIM AND CALLS INTO THE KITCHEN FOR A WAITER.)

PAUL

(WALKING OUT IN A SUIT WITH A VERY DIRTY WHITE APRON OVER IT, PAUL SPEAKS) May I help you?

PHYLLIS

Is that you? Paul?

PAUL

Oh no! Someone recognized me! Who are you? (LOOKS HARD AT PHYLLIS.) Oh, it's just you, the lady from the employment agency. That's a relief. May I take your order?

PHYLLIS

You can, but first you have to tell me what you're doing here? I thought you were going to be a butler?

PAUL

I called and went to the address you gave me. You sent me to see a Mr. Perdue. How was I to know that that was my father's butler? All I ever knew him as was James, the butler. Well, James was looking for a common serving boy for the in town house. As soon as he saw me, he hid me in kitchen so my father wouldn't see me and have James throw me on the street again. When I told James that I was looking for work, he became terribly sorry for me and offered me a job in this filthy little restaurant he owns. I swear I could hear him crying uncontrollably as I walked away from the kitchen. So that's why I'm here, and what do you want?

JOSH

What do you recommend?

PAUL

Another restaurant, any other restaurant, but since I'll need your generous tip, I suggest you get a hamburger, at least the more unpleasant things in it have been incinerated.

PHYLLIS

That sounds fine, I'll drink plain water.



JOSH

Me too.

PAUL

I suggest you get something out of a bottle, not the tap. I'll treat.

PHYLLIS

Thanks, that'll be fine.

PAUL WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN, PHYLLIS' EYES FOLLOW HIM.

JOSH

Was the butler crying hysterically, or laughing hysterically, when he sent him here.

PHYLLIS

(STILL LOOKING AT THE KITCHEN DOOR.) What do you think?

JOSH

Now, he could be a fine comic actor.

PHYLLIS

No one would believe him, besides people who seem to put on a great act in real life generally stink on the stage.

JOSH

That's not always true, besides what are you? A critic, or an actor. Remember, those two groups are mortal enemies. But, as all bigots say, some of my best friends are critics.

PHYLLIS

Are they?

JOSH

I wish! Well, my worst critic is myself, and I am friends with myself.

PHYLLIS

What's the best thing for me to do now, that a clean cut girl like me can tell my mother about, to get going on my career.

JOSH

You do have an agent.

PHYLLIS

Remember, we talked about him in the office.

JOSH

Oh, yeah! How soon I forget.

PHYLLIS

I hope I'm not that forgettable.

JOSH

Never in a million years!

PHYLLIS

Enough! Back to my question about what I can do.

JOSH

Do you have a picture portfolio, and a resume?

PHYLLIS

Yes, and yes.

JOSH

Do you have patience?

PHYLLIS

Yes, for now.

JOSH

You have all the necessary basics for survival. Now, all you need is talent, luck, and an opportunity to display both to a producer. You're so beautiful; have you considered modeling?

PHYLLIS

I tried to get some modeling jobs when I first came to town, but nothing worked out, and I needed to eat. I tried every agency in town, but none of them wanted me. The job I have now is interesting, and it'll leave me some time to go on calls. Mr. Heartland seems like a great old man, and he promised to look out for acting jobs for me.

JOSH

Does he have any contacts in the business?

PHYLLIS

I'm not sure, but he did send a rather eccentric man on a call for an off Broadway show.

JOSH

Which one?

PHYLLIS

What, which? The play or the eccentric man?

JOSH

The play, and the man.

PHYLLIS

The man was real strange. He was kind of a preacher, or at least he said he was. His name was Jenkins.

JOSH

(Interrupting) Oh, that weirdo! We see him around this neighborhood a lot. We can't figure out if he's putting on an act or not. In fact, two of my friends from acting school asked him if he'd like to take up the art of acting on a professional basis, and I think he's taken them up on the idea.

PHYLLIS

You mean he's been in something before?

JOSH

Only in life so far. Every day's an act for him.

PHYLLIS

What does he do for a living?

JOSH

I don't know for sure. The last time I saw him, he did say something about going to a call for a play. Do you know what play Heartland set him up in?

PHYLLIS

A revival of Arsenic and Old Lace? He's make a great Teddy Roosevelt.

JOSH

No (LAUGHS), but I know about that show. If he can send people over that easily, he has some great contacts. That producer isn't seeing anyone without a big name, or at least a big name agent.

PHYLLIS

That's nice to know. (LOOKING AT PAUL APPROACHING THE TABLE) I think our food is here.

PAUL

(SERVING THE FOOD.) Here it is, such as it is. The Cola's on me. (HE SLAMS THE BOTTLE HARD ON THE TABLE AND A SMALL AMOUNT SPLASHES ONTO JOSH.)

JOSH

(ASIDE TO PHYLLIS) Actually the Coke's on me. Thank you my good man. (BEGINS TO EAT.) This stuff tastes like crap!

PHYLLIS

(PUTTING HER FOOD BACK DOWN ON THE PLATE.) You don't encourage a soul to eat, do you?

JOSH

I'm sorry, it's just that I learned how to make the lowest grade of mystery meat taste good at Ed's U.

PHYLLIS

Why don't you send it back?

JOSH

At a place like this, sending it back is like kissing it good bye, you'll never see it again, and then there's no telling what stray animal you'll be eating.

PHYLLIS

You're starting to make me sick. Why don't you complain to the manager?

JOSH

No, but you gave me another idea. Remember when you implied that acting and real life are not the

same. Please observe the following. (HE WAVES AT PAUL TO COME TO THE TABLE.)

PHYLLIS

What ARE you going to do?

JOSH

(TO PHYLLIS.) Just watch.

PAUL

Something stuck in your craw, sir? Please don't take that into account when you decide on the tip.

JOSH

The service is excellent.

PAUL

Oh, thank you, sir!

JOSH

But I need to talk to the manager.

PAUL

If it's not about me, she's the fat bitch over there. (POINTING TO A FAT, FORTYISH WOMAN IN A VERY DIRTY APRON.)

JOSH

Could you ask her to come over here?

PAUL

I shall, but let me warn you, she's got a knife in her right pocket. (PAUL WALKS TO THE MANAGER AND SPEAKS TO HER. THE MANAGER, LUCINDA, WALKS TO JOSH AND PHYLLIS' TABLE.)

LUCINDA

Just what do YOU want, bub?

JOSH

What I want is to tell you that this hamburger tastes like it died from unnatural causes (PAUSE) several weeks ago.

LUCINDA

(STICKING HER HAND INTO HER RIGHT POCKET.) And?

JOSH

And, I have just finished a course of study at the technical school around the corner in which I learned to cook crud like this so it'll taste like real food. Hire me as a cook, and I'll keep the local ambulance chasers from your door.

LUCINDA

(STUDIES HIM FOR SEVERAL SECONDS.) Our new cook isn't that good, but he's the owner's cousin. Just how good are you?

JOSH

Let me make you a hamburger.

LUCINDA

Get your fancy ass in the kitchen and fix it! Be fast!

JOSH

(RACING TO THE KITCHEN.) In a second or two!

PHYLLIS

(LOOKING AT HER WATCH.) I hope I won't be late to work, it's my second day on the job.

LUCINDA

If he takes that long, he won't even have a first day on this job.

PHYLLIS NERVOUSLY GETS UP AND WALKS TOWARDS THE KITCHEN, ALL THE WHILE LOOKING AT LUCINDA. PHYLLIS PACES IN FRONT OF THE KITCHEN DOOR. JOSH BURSTS THROUGH THE DOOR, ALMOST KNOCKING PHYLLIS OVER.

JOSH

(HANDING THE PLATE TO LUCINDA.) Here, taste the food of the gods, made from the garbage in the kitchen.

LUCINDA

(TASTING THE BURGER AND SMILING.) This crap is good! How did you make what we buy taste this good?

JOSH

It's my secret. Hire me and you won't have to know the secret, all you'll have to do is sit back and enjoy your new fame and fortune.

LUCINDA

You've got a job! I'll move that cousin putz out here to serve YOUR food. The owner only sends me the relatives he hates, so it won't matter anyway.

PHYLLIS AND JOSH LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND SMILE.

JOSH

(ASIDE TO PHYLLIS.) Take note of how to use your acting talent in ways other than on the stage. Remember, all the world's a stage.

PHYLLIS



Doesn't that one end with something about a fool strutting around.

JOSH

Don't be so picky, if it works, go with it!

PHYLLIS

(WRITING HER PHONE NUMBER ON A PIECE OF PAPER AND HANDING IT TO JOSH.)  
Here's my number. Call me about six tonight, I'd like to get together again, maybe we could talk some more. I like you, don't ask me why, but I do. You asked me out on a date the second time you saw me, and I'll accept now.

JOSH

I'd like that.

LUCINDA

Get your fancy ass in the kitchen, and get to work!

JOSH

(TO PHYLLIS) Good bye.

PHYLLIS

I think I'm going to like our relationship. Good bye.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE EIGHT

THE TIME IS TEN MINUTES LATER THAT SAME DAY. THE SCENE IS THE MAIN OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY. PHYLLIS WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR AND SEES BILL AT THE DESK, WITH BOTH HIS HANDS PROPPING UP HIS HEAD. HE IS STARING AT THE TABLE. PHYLLIS WALKS UP TO BILL AND TAPS HIM ON THE SHOULDER.

PHYLLIS

I'm back, Mr. Heartland.

BILL

(SHAKING HIS HEAD.) I can see you are, dear. It's been a very busy day for me. Not that I'm complaining, but you wouldn't believe how much good has happened to me today. (PAUSE) Have you finished all the typing?

PHYLLIS

You seem like a nice man, I'm glad you're having so much good luck. (PAUSE.) I haven't finished all of the typing yet. I think I'll be finished by the end of the day. It's not easy on this typewriter. The "e" looks like an "o", and the "o" punches holes in the paper.

BILL

So, they look different, don't they?

PHYLLIS

Well, yes.

BILL

So, what's the problem? Both of us will know our "e"s from  
our "o"s

PHYLLIS

(SHE SHRUGS) I guess so. (PHYLLIS PUTS MORE PAPER IN THE OLD TYPEWRITER AND BEGINS TO TYPE.)

BILL STRETCHES, THEN SLOWLY WALKS INTO HIS OFFICE. JOHN WALKS OUT OF HIS OFFICE AND LEANS ON PHYLLIS' DESK.

JOHN

Your lunch was no fun for me.

PHYLLIS

It was for me. Whatever your problems are, save them. The only way I can finish this typing is to be left alone.

JOHN

(STANDING UPRIGHT.) It was hell here after you left. Almost the rest of Ed's graduating class came up here, and wanted jobs on the spot. All the little potential millionaires bugged the hell out of us for one solid hour.

PHYLLIS

(STILL TYPING.) Why didn't you make appointments with them for later, and just see a few of them now?

JOHN

Oh, Bill did that, but he made me see a hoard of weirdoes in the last hour.

PHYLLIS

(SHE STOPS TYPING AND LOOKS UP AT HIM.) How many weirdoes are there in a hoard?  
(SHE STARTS TO TYPE AGAIN.)

JOHN

Three, (PAUSE) but they were all tough to place. The worst was that assistant fannie fondler Bill gave to me to place.

PHYLLIS

(PHYLLIS LOOKS CONFUSED FOR A SECOND, THEN REALIZES WHO HE IS TALKING ABOUT.) Oh! You mean Lee, Josh's sister.

JOHN

My, my! It's Josh is it! Are we getting cozy with the customers?

PHYLLIS

(SHE STOPS TYPING AND LOOKS DIRECTLY AT JOHN.) If you're jealous, I'd be happy to stand aside and give you a shot at him, but I don't think he's your type. (SHE LOOKS DOWN AT THE TYPEWRITER AND BEGINS TYPING AGAIN.)

JOHN

Very funny! I have an appointment in a few minutes. Make sure they don't get lost in the office. (JOHN WALKS BACK INTO HIS OFFICE.)

BILL WALKS OUT OF HIS OFFICE WITH A FOLDER IN HIS HAND.

BILL

This Josh Simon, I see you made a notation about his wanting to be an actor? I thought Ed had trained him to be a cook? Whatever he wants to do, I need to call him, and you forgot to put a phone number down for him.

PHYLLIS

(SHE STOPS TYPING.) I'm sorry, sir. I just had lunch with him, and he convinced the manager to give him a job in that dinner.

BILL

(HE SCRATCHES HIS CHIN AND LOOKS AT THE CEILING.) Had lunch with him? (PAUSE, THEN HE LOOKS AT PHYLLIS.) Then, you must know where he works, and could find the phone number.

PHYLLIS

Yes, sir. It was that extremely filthy little place down the block.

BILL

Walk left out the front door?

PHYLLIS

Yes, that's the one!

BILL

I found that job for Lucinda, the manager. It was tough, but I found it for her within a week after she was let loose from prison.

PHYLLIS

Prison?!

BILL

Oh, she'll be all right. (PAUSE.) As long as she never marries again.

BILL WALKS BACK INTO HIS OFFICE, AND PHYLLIS STARES AT THE CLOSED DOOR FOR A FEW SECONDS.

PHYLLIS

Prison! Married again? (SHE STARTS TYPING AGAIN.)

HOMER DELMAR WALKS INTO THE OFFICE AND SITS DOWN HARD ON ONE OF THE CHAIRS, SINKING DEEPLY INTO IT.

PHYLLIS

What's the matter, Dell? Didn't the interview work out?

DEL

I either wanna kill myself, or punch that Smith guy out!

PHYLLIS

I think the punching out option would be more satisfying. Tell me, what happened? Didn't they like your qualifications?

DEL

All they did was lecture me about how we men had stomped all over them forever, and I could stick my steno pad up my butt and wiggle on out of there before they would let a chauvinist like me take a job from one of their sisters. (PAUSE) I thought nepotism was illegal?

PHYLLIS

What did the personnel officer say about your treatment?

DEL

That was the personnel officer!

PHYLLIS

Well, what did you say back to her?

DEL

I said, "Get your hands off my rear end!"

PHYLLIS

I can't see anyone at N.O.W treating you like that.

DEL

Oh, it wasn't them, I went to the first place on list Mr. Smith gave me.

PHYLLIS

(SLOWLY.) Where was that?

DEL

Some magazine, named Play something.

PHYLLIS

(QUICKLY.) I get the picture. Why don't you look carefully at the list Mr. Smith gave you. Pick one that doesn't appear to be so bad.

DEL

(CLIMBING OUT OF THE CHAIR.) I guess that would be better than pounding Mr. Smith. G'bye. (HE WALKS TO THE DOOR.)

PHYLLIS

Good bye and good luck. (SHE CONTINUES TYPING.)

THE PHONE RINGS AND PHYLLIS ANSWERS.

PHYLLIS

Safety Net Employment Agency. You fell through, now we'll help you. (PAUSE.) Yes he's here. (PAUSE.) Yes he was here all night. (PAUSE.) I'm the new receptionist, Carmen left yesterday. (PAUSE.) I don't see what my age could have to do with anything, who is this? (PAUSE.) Well I don't have to know, but you didn't have to be that ugly about it. (PAUSE.) Yes, I'll let you talk to him, I'll put you on hold for a moment. (SHE PRESSES THE INTERCOM.) John, there's a woman on the phone asking to speak to the fart faced weasel. (PAUSE) it must be for you, so she's on line one. (SHE HANGS UP THE PHONE, SHAKES HER HEAD, AND CONTINUES TYPING.)

JOHN

(RUNNING TO PHYLLIS' DESK.) Help! That was my wife! She thinks you and I slept together here last night! Together!

PHYLLIS

What a disgusting thought!

JOHN

She said she's thrown all my things out the window and into the street! We live on the fifth floor!

PHYLLIS

Go home and gather up your stuff, and assure your wife that I wouldn't even shake your hand if you were the last man on earth.

JOHN

Thanks! I'll tell her that. Cover for me, I'll be back in an hour or two. I have a lot of stuff to pick up. (HE RUSHES OUT THE DOOR.)

BILL

(WALKING INTO THE MAIN OFFICE.) What was that all about?

PHYLLIS



John's wife thinks he and I are having an affair.

BILL

This is only your second day! My, you work fast.

PHYLLIS

Don't even say that in jest!

BILL

Sorry, I understand. John's wife is the jealous type, but they usually make up. She liked Carmen as the secretary, though.

PHYLLIS

Why?

BILL

She was old, and she had the hots for me.

PHYLLIS

She did? Do you like her too? Carmen seemed real cute.

BILL

I know, no offence, but I kind of miss her around here.

PHYLLIS

(SMILING.) No offence taken. (PAUSE.) Are you married now?

BILL

No, why? Are you interested, lots have been.

PHYLLIS

Not interested, just curious. How many times have you been married?

BILL

More than I should have, and not enough.

PHYLLIS

You do kind of like Carmen, don't you?

BILL

Have you finished typing all those reports yet?

PHYLLIS

Not yet. I keep getting interrupted.

BILL

Get back to it. I have some calls to get done. (HE GOES BACK INTO HIS OFFICE AND CLOSSES THE DOOR.)

PHYLLIS CONTINUES TYPING.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT TWO  
SCENE NINE

THE TIME IS ALMOST FIVE O'CLOCK THAT SAME DAY. THE SCENE IS THE MAIN OFFICE OF SAFETY NET. PHYLLIS IS ALONE AT HER DESK, PILING UP ALL THE FOLDERS SHE HAS JUST FINISHED TYPING. BILL COMES OUT OF HIS OFFICE.

BILL

You've finished?

PHYLLIS

Yes, sir. I'm surprised I did, considering the number of those technical school people you saw today, the number of folders, and the age of this machine. (SHE POINTS TO THE TYPEWRITER.)

BILL

You pitched in just fine, like a pro. I'm proud of the way you helped, and got all the typing done too.

PHYLLIS

Thanks, it's fun working for a good boss. (PAUSE) I'd like to talk to you about something.

BILL

Is there a problem? Already?

PHYLLIS

No, I have an idea on how to avoid some though.

THERE IS A LOUD THUMP AT THE DOOR. PHYLLIS AND BILL TURN AND STARE AT IT. JOHN PUSHES OPEN THE DOOR WITH HIS FOOT.

JOHN

(DRAGGING IN THE FRONT DOOR.) I hate to interrupt your private conversations, but I'm ruined.

BILL

You may also be fired!

JOHN

Go ahead, complete the day for me! Cap it off with one more in a long succession of mishaps.

PHYLLIS

I take it that you and your wife haven't made up?

JOHN

Not after she snuck up here and peeked in to see you. You were just too young, and too pretty.

PHYLLIS

Sorry.

JOHN

It's not your fault, it's mine. I guess she keeps believing all the rumors I start about myself.

BILL

I told you to be careful about it, that sort of thing was the reason your mother and I split up.

JOHN

But at least your rumors were true.

BILL

(SMILING.) There was that.

PHYLLIS

Mr. Heartland, you should be ashamed.

BILL

I should be, but I was too young to be then, and now it's a matter for memories. (SMILES AGAIN.)

JOHN

Is there any work left? It seems I HAVE to sleep here anyway now.

BILL

No, we needed you this afternoon. But there'll be plenty of work tomorrow, so get a good night's sleep. Good night to all. (BILL LEAVES.)

JOHN

(TO PHYLLIS.) I'm going into my office and sulk. (HE GOES INTO HIS OFFICE AND CLOSES THE DOOR.)

THE PHONE RINGS. PHYLLIS ANSWERS IT.

PHYLLIS

Safety Net Employment Agency. You fell through, now we'll help you. (PAUSE.) Hi, Josh! (PAUSE.) You what? A surprise that will be great for our relationship? I didn't know we had one yet? (PAUSE.) Well, I think I might like one too. (PAUSE.) Where do you want me to go. (SHE GRABS A PEN AND PAPER AND BEGINS WRITING AN ADDRESS.) Slow down, I just got some paper. (PAUSE.) I think I can get a cab to take me there. (PAUSE) At six thirty, not before, Why so exact? (PAUSE.) I think I understand. (PAUSE.) I think I'm going to like that too. (SHE SMILES AND HANGS UP THE PHONE.)

JOHN

(STICKING HIS HEAD OUT OF HIS OFFICE.) Was that for me?

PHYLLIS

No, it was for me. Someone is expecting me at six thirty, but I'm going to go there early and take him out to dinner. I'm happy for the first time in New York!

JOHN

I hope it wasn't me! Don't tell my wife!

PHYLLIS

Good bye, John. Even you can't upset me now. (PHYLLIS LEAVES, AND JOHN CLOSES HIS DOOR.)

FADE TO:

ACT TWO  
SCENE TEN

THE TIME IS FIVE THIRTY THAT SAME DAY. THE SCENE IS LUCINDA HAWKINS' RESTAURANT, WHICH IS PACKED WITH PEOPLE. BILL WALKS IN AND LOOKS AROUND AT ALL THE CUSTOMERS. LUCINDA RECOGNIZES HIM, PLACES A BIG SMILE ON HER FACE, AND HURRIES TO THE FRONT TO GREET HIM.

LUCINDA

Mr. Heartland! I haven't seen you in months. I was beginning to wonder if you'd croaked or somethin'. (SHE PUTS HER ARM BEHIND HIM AND PUSHES HIM TO THE ONLY EMPTY SEAT IN THE ROOM.) Have something to eat, on the house this time.

BILL

No, I think I'd like to go on living. (PAUSE) I'm just looking for some information.

LUCINDA

Isn't everybody. What is it?

BILL

Well, you know that Donald's in this neighborhood, and I don't know what his muscle looks like.

LUCINDA

I've seen some goons around, but I can't place who they're with. Why?

BILL

No reason. I just worry, you know that.

LUCINDA

Hey, I owe you a lot. When I got out of the slammer from killing my old man, no one would give me the time of day, 'cept you.

BILL

Lucinda, even though your dead husband was one of my biggest losers for years, I never did blame you for shooting him. I thought he deserved it, and that you deserved better.

LUCINDA

(TURNS HER HEAD ASIDE AND SMILES.) You still single?

BILL

(PAUSE.) Well, yes, but I've decided to stay that way for a while.

LUCINDA

If you decide to change your mind.

BILL

You'll be one of the first to know. (HE SMILES.)

LUCINDA

I didn't know the heat was on you, though. I'll keep my eye out.

BILL

Thanks.

LUCINDA

No problem. (PAUSE) Oh, by the way, thanks for sendin' that fancy waiter here for me.

BILL

Who? (HE LOOKS CONFUSED) My new girl, the one taking Carmen's place, said you got a cook, but I don't remember any waiters.



LUCINDA

It's that Paul Donaldson guy. He said he went to your place and you sent him to the Greyson mansion, 'n they sent him here. I got a note from their butler, 'ya know, the guy who owns this palace.

BILL

Yeah, I know who these people are, but I wouldn't send anyone there.

LUCINDA

Why?

BILL

Greyson's a lawyer for the mob. He's Donald's personal lawyer. That's one of the reasons I think he might be after me now. Greyson has bet with me for years, and lost most of the time. Now, (PAUSE) Well, I'm worried a bit.

LUCINDA

I'm always the last to know, 'n the first to get hit.

BILL

Just be careful with him. He may be harmless, and he may not. Greyson never did know anything about how my operation works, I think that's saved my life so far.

LUCINDA

Yeah, maybe you oughtta get out of the business 'n retire in Miami, or somethin'.

BILL

(LOOKS SURPRISED AT LUCINDA.) I'm not that old, yet!

LUCINDA

Don't hand me that bull shit. You ain't that much older than I am, 'n I'd retire in a minute. (PAUSE)  
I didn't know Carmen left.

BILL

She didn't. She just went away to work for her mother for two weeks. She said it would be a  
vacation for her.

LUCINDA

God! That mom of her's; she's a trip! (SHE SHAKES HER FINGER AT BILL.) You'd better  
marry that girl before she up 'n leaves you for good.

BILL

Give me a break! I told you, I wasn't ready to get married again. You do remember the old saying,  
seven times bitten, once shy.

LUCINDA

Just remember the other one; a bird in the hand is worth more than jack shit!

BILL

(SMILING AT LUCINDA.) Okay. I'll remember that one. (PAUSE) I really have to go on now.  
Keep an eye out for me, will you?

LUCINDA

Sure. I told ya, you're one of my favorite people, 'n I'll do what it takes.

BILL

Thanks. (HE WALKS TO THE DOOR.) Bye. (HE WALKS OUT INTO THE  
STREET.)

FADE TO:

ACT TWO  
SCENE ELEVEN

THE TIME IS THE SAME. THE SCENE IS CATHY TEASDALE AND LEE SIMON'S APARTMENT IN THE OLD WAREHOUSE. THE REVEREND, CATHY, AND JOSH ARE IN THE LIVING ROOM REHEARSING A SCENE. THE DOOR TO THE APARTMENT IS LEFT OPEN A CRACK.

CATHY

Josh, I'm so happy you got into the front door.

JOSH

Me too, now only if I could get the girl too, my life would be complete.

CATHY

(LOOKS AT JOSH WITH A QUESTIONING LOOK.) You're serious aren't you?

JOSH

Damn right I am. She coming here to meet me for a date tonight, and I just might pop the goddamn question to her on the spot!

REVEREND

Brother Joshua, please keep thy tongue out of the hands of the devil!

JOSH

(SMILING.) All right. (TO CATHY.) But I am serious this time.

CATHY

If you are, I'm glad. But, we need to get this scene down now, tomorrow'll be too late for the two of you.

REVEREND

The fine woman is correct! Shall we begin again?

CATHY

(SHAKES HER HEAD.) Right, reverend. Let's start at the top of page fifteen; where we're saying our I do to each other.

FADE TO:

II/12

ACT TWO  
SCENE TWELVE

IN FRONT OF AN APARTMENT BUILDING, PHYLLIS GETS OUT OF A CAB. THE SCENE IS IN FRONT OF THE WAREHOUSE-APARTMENT BUILDING AND THE TIME IS THE SAME. SHE LOOKS AT A PIECE OF PAPER IN HER HAND. SHE LOOKS UP AT THE NUMBER ON THE BUILDING AND WALKS THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR. PHYLLIS SEES THE SLIGHTLY OPEN DOOR OF THE INTERIOR APARTMENT, AND HEARS THE REVEREND'S VOICE. SHE WALKS TO THE DOOR AND PEEPS INSIDE.

REVEREND

If there be no man present who objects to this union, then I now pronounce...

PHYLLIS STICKS HER HEAD ALL THE WAY INTO THE ROOM AND STARES AT JOSH. HER EXPRESSION BECOMES FLUSHED AND VERY ANGRY. SHE PUSHES THE DOOR ALL THE WAY OPEN. EVERYONE ELSE STOPS TALKING AND STARES AT HER AS SHE STOMPS TO JOSH.

PHYLLIS

Is this your idea of a surprise! What did you want me for, a flower girl?

JOSH

Phyllis!

CATHY

Is that her?

REVEREND

My dear.

PHYLLIS

Just what the hell is going on here!

REVEREND

Blasphemer. Be silent you sinful woman!

PHYLLIS

(TO REVEREND JENKINS) Stick your head up your (PAUSES, LOOKING FOR A SAFE WORD) Uh, old Bible and keep out of this! (TO JOSH.) You're the worst human being I've ever met! At least in the last year (TO CATHY.) That cook want's to marry you and set me up as a side dish, all on the same night!

REVEREND

(GRASPING HIS HEART WITH HIS BIBLE.) May Jeesus forgive my ears for hearing such language, May I not be struck with deafness. (HOLDING HIS EARS NOW.)

PHYLLIS STARTS TO CRY, AND RUSHES BACK TO THE DOOR. SHE STOPS BY THE DOOR AND TURNS TO FACE THE OTHERS.

JOSH

Wait, I need to explain! (JOSH WALKS TOWARDS PHYLLIS.)

PHYLLIS

(PHYLLIS GRABS THE DOOR KNOB, BUT WAITS BY THE DOOR.) Explain what! My life has been complicated enough so far, and more complicated than you'd believe this past few days, but I thought at least you weren't complicated. I liked you. I didn't want to come to your wedding with her!

JOSH

If I wanted to marry anyone, it would be you.

PHYLLIS

ME! Like hell! That bleached blonde doesn't look at all like me.

JOSH

YOU! That bleached blonde isn't my type, you are!

CATHY

Hey, you two! This is good stuff, but I'm a real blonde.

JOSH and PHYLLIS

(AT THE SAME TIME.) Like hell you are!

REVEREND

This den of sinners sounds like a daytime serial, or whatever. Please solve this problem without violence.

JOSH

We aren't married. (POINTING TO CATHY.)

CATHY

God, I hope not, his sister would never forgive me!

PHYLLIS

Well, he's a real reverend, and he performs real ceremonies.

CATHY

He's about as unreal as they come.

REVEREND

(SMILING.) I am a real reverend. I am as real as I come.

JOSH

Don't listen to him, listen to me! I want to get to know you. I want to get to love you.

PHYLLIS

When! On your honeymoon with HER! (POINTING TO CATHY.) I've been through this before, and I swore I'd never do it again, and I won't! You can go on your honeymoon alone!



CATHY

Now that's a good concept, the writers could take that and go far with it.

JOSH

(TO CATHY.) Shut up! You're not helping any!

PHYLLIS

And neither are you! (PHYLLIS LEAVES AND SLAMS THE DOOR.)

CATHY

Josh's right, that girl has talent.

REVEREND

But she must be healed of her afflictions.

CATHY

Cut the crap, rev, it's getting on my nerves.

REVEREND

(IN A LOUD VOICE.) I shall give up! If any of you sinners need pastoral counseling, I shall be at the ready. (HE WALKS TO THE SOFA AND SITS DOWN.)

CATHY

Did I miss something? Was she acting, or was that real.

JOSH

That was about as real as it gets. I have to catch up with her and try to get her to understand.

CATHY

As soon as you get her to understand, come back here and get me to understand.

JOSH RUSHES OUT THE DOOR, LEAVING IT OPEN. A FEW SECONDS PASS, THEN LEE SIMON WALKS IN CARRYING A BUCKET OF FRIED CHICKEN.

LEE

(LOOKING AROUND THE ROOM.) Where did everybody go? I was almost run down on the stairs by my crazed brother. what's happening? I thought the three of you had to rehearse for your cast call?

CATHY

That's what I thought too, but some girlfriend of Josh's barged in and accused me of stealing him from her, the reverend got pissed off, Josh got brushed off, and I'm confused, but I'm still hungry. (SHE REACHES INTO THE BUCKET OF CHICKEN AND PULLS OUT A DRUMSTICK.)

LEE

(LOOKING A BIT CONFUSED.) At least I'm glad you guys paid for all this in advance. (SHE MOVES THE BUCKET TO THE DINING ROOM TABLE. CATHY FOLLOWS HER, WHILE EATING HER CHICKEN.) What did happen? Try to make it comprehensible.

THE REVEREND FOLLOWS THEM TO THE TABLE AND GRABS A PIECE OF CHICKEN RETURNS TO THE SOFA WHERE HE EATS, AND READS THE SCRIPT.

CATHY

That girl he told us about, the one from the employment agency; well, she stormed in here just as we were starting the wedding scene and started to shout and carry on like a fish wife. She accused me of wanting to marry Josh, and accused Josh of wanting to two time her. You know, I just can't figure out how someone can be two timed before they've been one timed; I mean he hasn't even kissed her, (PAUSE) not even anywhere yet, or so he says, and here she is putting one hell of a guilt trip on him. God! I wouldn't put up with that in a man, why should he put up with that in her; she isn't even that good looking...

LEE

(INTERRUPTING CATHY.) Please! I have to digest this stuff. I get the picture. Did Josh have a chance to explain?

CATHY

Not at all. She ran out of here like the police were after her or something. I don't think a track star could've caught up with her....

LEE

(INTERRUPTING.) Remember, answer in fifty words or less.

CATHY

That was less, so I have at least twenty five more. What is it with your brother? Why does he always go for the strange women?

LEE

Don't forget, he had a crush on you when he first met you.

CATHY

Oh, yeah. He just wanted to get into my pants; I affect all men that way. That was when I moved in here with you, to help pay the rent.

LEE

Neither one of us could pay rent then.

CATHY

But now, maybe, we all can be rich.

LEE

You were the first one to make it, though.

CATHY

Yeah. (SMALL LAUGH.) It still surprises me a little.

LEE

It still surprises me a lot. I'm so happy you were able to get Josh a reading for the new doctor.

CATHY

Oh, that's no problem. They were looking for someone his age, height, and hair color, so naturally, I thought of him. The producers like to do casting through friends; they say it helps the cast get along better, but I don't believe it. You know that old fart who plays the caretaker in the cemetery; well, he brought his granddaughter in for an audition for the part of my daughter, and thank god she didn't get the part. I don't know where she learned her tricks, like stepping on my feet when it was time for my line, but for a nine year old she was the biggest bitch I've ever met...

LEE

(INTERRUPTING.) Please!

CATHY

I know. But, you know what I mean.

LEE

I've even forgotten where this conversation started.

CATHY

You were thanking me for getting Josh that audition, but don't worry, I'll be so happy if he gets the job. It'll be great having him play my new husband, the only true love in my life, who had been given up for dead for the past four years in the jungles of Guiana.

LEE

You know, Cathy, you really do belong in the soaps.

JOSH COMES BACK INTO THE ROOM, BREATHING HEAVILY. HE WALKS TO THE SOFA AND FALLS INTO THE OPPOSITE END OF IT FROM THE REVEREND.

REVEREND

My son, you seem a trifle exhausted. Was your chase to no avail?

JOSH

(CATCHING HIS BREATH.) You might say that.

REVEREND

I just did.

LEE AND CATHY WALK FROM THE DINING AREA TO THE LIVING ROOM.

CATHY

(HESITATING.) Uh, she seemed nice.

JOSH

She's more than nice!

LEE

Yeah, she's fast. You didn't catch up to her, did you?

JOSH

(SLOWLY TURNING TO HIS SISTER.) Good guess.

CATHY

(SITTING NEXT TO JOSH ON THE SOFA.) Look at it this way, she likes you enough to get pissed off at you.

REVEREND

Crudely phrased, but accurate. I can see a Christian future in this relationship.

CATHY

(LOOKING CROSSLY AT THE REVEREND.) Weirdly phrased, but I agree.

REVEREND

Shall we continue with the scene. I must be prepared. (HE RISES AND LOOKS AT JOSH.) Put your love life aside for tonight, for you too must be prepared.

JOSH

You're right.

THEY ALL STAND, PICK UP THEIR COPIES OF THE SCRIPT AND BEGIN TO REHEARSE THE SCENE.

FADE TO:

ACT TWO  
SCENE THIRTEEN

THE TIME IS HALF PAST MIDNIGHT THE SAME NIGHT. BILL IS WALKING DOWN A STILL CROWDED STREET IN A SWANK SECTION OF MANHATTAN. HE PAUSES AT THE WINDOW OF AN EXPENSIVE RESTAURANT. HE LOOKS IN THE WINDOW AND SPOTS THE REVEREND FINISHING HIS MEAL AT A TABLE TOWARDS THE REAR OF THE MAIN ROOM. BILL WALKS INTO THE RESTAURANT AND IS GREETED BY A WELL DRESSED HOSTESS.

HOSTESS

May I take your name sir? How many will there be in your party?

BILL

I'm with the gentleman in the seat back there. (BILL POINTS TO THE REVEREND.) I believe he's already been served. I knew I would be late, so I told him to start without me.

HOSTESS

Thank you, sir. Please follow me. (SHE LEADS HIM TO THE TABLE AND SEATS HIM ACROSS FROM THE REVEREND, WHO LOOKS AT HIM, BUT DOES NOT CHANGE HIS EXPRESSION.)

REVEREND

(STILL IN HIS FAKE SOUTHERN ACCENT.) Mr. Heartland, what a pleasant surprise.

BILL

Cut the crap! We thought you might be from the mob; that Donald had sent you to case my joint. At first I didn't believe it, and now I know it's not true.

REVEREND

And what am I?

BILL

A vice cop. It took me the better part of the evening to place who is and who isn't my enemy.

REVEREND

(HE LOSES HIS SOUTHERN ACCENT.) Who is and who isn't might amaze you.

BILL

Amaze me.

REVEREND

You did a good turn for me, even though you might not have meant it. You led me to acting.

BILL

You seemed a natural. A proper amount of insanity, and a good delivery.

REVEREND.

For whatever reason, I thank you. Now, let me give you some advice in return. I'm not telling you this, okay?

BILL

All right, don't tell me soon because it's well past my bedtime.

REVEREND

As of this afternoon I know how you operate. We have to bust you in the morning to make it stick. Get out of the business now, and stay out of it.

BILL

I have one more thing for you. The acting connections are on the house. (PAUSES AS HE LEANS OVER THE TABLE.) I also uncovered the hit man Donald sent to take John and me out.



REVEREND

Who? Anybody of interest?

BILL

I think so; at least I can unofficially give you the names of his last four hits. Beyond that, it's up to you.

REVEREND

Tell me.

BILL

The new waiter at Lucinda's cafe. He said he was Grayson's son. I know his son, and this guy, Paul, isn't. Grayson is now Donald's lawyer, and he's in on the hit.

REVEREND

(RETURNING TO HIS FAKE ACCENT AND STANDING UP.) Thank you, kind sir, for the meal, and the small chat. I have counseled you on the true path to take in your life. The journey is now up to you, my son! (HE LEAVES HE RESTAURANT.)

THE WAITRESS COMES TO THE TABLE TO TAKE BILL'S ORDER. BILL JUST LIFTS UP THE CHECK AND SPEAKS.

BILL

I can't afford to eat and pay for his meal in the same decade, honey. Do you take Diner's Club?

FADE TO:

ACT THREE  
SCENE ONE

THE TIME IS THE NEXT MORNING, AT TEN O'CLOCK. THE PLACE IS THE MAIN OFFICE. JOHN IS MAKING COFFEE IN HIS PAJAMAS, AND PHYLLIS IS MOPING AT HER DESK.

PHYLLIS

Get dressed, what if your wife walks in now, your chances of explaining this situation would be slim to none, besides if you don't get dressed I may stand a chance of losing my breakfast.

JOHN

I'm not that bad looking in my PJs. (PAUSE) I'm here because she kicked me out. It's all her fault! She wouldn't come here on a bet.

HENRIETTA

(BURSTING INTO THE OFFICE.) You lose! I came here to give you another chance! See what it gets me! You're here with this hussy, God knows what you two have been doing on that sofa!

JOHN

You can't even sit comfortably on that sofa, let alone DO anything.

HENRIETTA

All right! You two did it on the desk! Or on the floor! We haven't done anything in weeks, and here you do everything with this over made up bimbo! (POINTING AT PHYLLIS.)

JOHN

Well, why don't you broadcast it to the nation?

HENRIETTA

All right, JOHN CAN'T RISE TO ANY OCCASION!

PHYLLIS

Listen, Ms. Smith! There's no way in hell I'd do ANYTHING with John, let alone what you think! And don't ever call me a bimbo again.

HENRIETTA

That's not what it looks like from here, you BIMBO! (SHE SWINGS HER PURSE AT JOHN, WHO DUCKS. SHE STOMPS OUT OF THE OFFICE.)

JOHN

If I didn't have bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck at all.

PHYLLIS

Did anyone ever tell you that you speak in trivialities.

JOHN

Never!

PHYLLIS

Consider it said.

BILL

(YAWNING AS HE COMES OUT OF HIS OFFICE.) What's all the noise? It sounded like Henrietta. Have you two made up?

JOHN

Not hardly.

BILL

You two sounded like you had. What's the problem?

JOHN

She came in and caught me in my pajamas, with her. (POINTING TO PHYLLIS.)

BILL

That's right, you're in your PJs. Get dressed!

JOHN

You sound just like Henrietta.

BILL

Am I big and ugly? Have I hit you? (PAUSE.) Yet?

JOHN

I'll get dressed. (JOHN GRABS HIS CLOTHS AND GOES OUT INTO THE HALL. A WOMAN'S SCREAM IS HEARD FROM THE HALLWAY.) Excuse me, madam. Haven't you ever seen a man in his pajamas before?

PHYLLIS

How did I ever get mixed up in this one? You were here before I was this morning, can't you call his wife and tell her John was here alone all night.

BILL

I suppose I'd better, or all our customers will get their turn at seeing John in his PJs. (HE GOES BACK INTO HIS OFFICE.)

PHYLLIS WALKS OVER TO THE COUCH, BALLS UP JOHN'S BLANKET, THEN THROWS IT INTO HIS OFFICE. SHE WALKS TO THE COFFEE MAKER AND POURS HERSELF A CUP OF COFFEE. WALKING BACK TO HER DESK, SHE SIPS THE COFFEE THEN MAKE A VERY SOUR EXPRESSION ON HER FACE. CARMEN WALKS INTO THE OFFICE AS PHYLLIS SITS AT HER DESK.

CARMEN

Hello, replacement. How are things going?

PHYLLIS

(PUTTING DOWN HER CUP AND STANDING.) Hi, Carmen. I guess things are pretty quiet. John and his wife have split up because she thinks I'm having an affair with John. Bill got a contract with Ed's Technical School and we have more work than this office has ever seen, that includes the betting parlor in back that I found out about yesterday. Last night I walked in on my boyfriend's wedding to another girl, and this coffee tastes like cedar chips.

CARMEN

Oh, John made it in his sleep. I won't tell you what he uses, you might get sick. Henrietta throws him out regularly, and he always sleeps here. The bookie joint isn't so bad, they're real nice men. Anyway, the coffee probably won't make you die.

PHYLLIS

I might anyway. (PAUSE) What's new with you? Are your boys in town for a show?

CARMEN

(BEGINNING TO CRY.) No, Mom fired me!

PHYLLIS

(PUTS HER ARM AROUND CARMEN'S SHOULDER.) What happened?

CARMEN

(SOBBING.) I was like a diabetic in a candy store. I went crazy and it was all bad for me! I found out they were all gay. I knew I could help them; I thought I could straighten them out after a few tries. I tied some of them up back stage last night. It all seemed so logical at the time, but Mama didn't see it that way.

PHYLLIS

I can't believe your mother would be so hard on you.

CARMEN

Believe it! She fired Daddy last year because she caught him stealing from the gate.

PHYLLIS

Oh.

CARMEN

I don't suppose you'd like to quit your job?

PHYLLIS

Not really, I find this hard to believe, but I'm getting used to it, even though I won't have it much longer anyway.

CARMEN

Yeah, it's great, isn't it?

BILL

(STICKING HIS HEAD OUT OF HIS DOOR.) I thought I heard your voice out here. (COMING INTO THE MAIN OFFICE.) Do you want to come back early? Couldn't make it out there?

CARMEN

(SHE STRAIGHTENS UP, WIPES HER FACE AND LOOKS STRAIGHT AT BILL.) No way! I've got it made with all my boys. Money and hunks, what more could I want. What a vacation!

PHYLLIS LOOKS AT CARMEN, THEN AT BILL. CARMEN AND BILL STARE AT EACH OTHER FOR A FEW SECONDS, THEN BILL GOES BACK INTO HIS OFFICE. CARMEN BEGINS TO CRY AGAIN. PHYLLIS HUGS HER AGAIN.

PHYLLIS

Why did you lie to him?

CARMEN

I couldn't let him pity me.

PHYLLIS

That's not what I saw. I saw a man who likes you very much, hoping that you'd come back to be with him.

CARMEN

BULL! I've loved that man through four wives, and he never gave me a second look. I've given up on him. I need to look somewhere else now.

PHYLLIS

No you don't. Give him a chance. I think he likes you very much.

CARMEN

You think so?

PHYLLIS

I think so.

JOHN

(WALKING BACK IN WITH HIS SUIT ON.) Hi Carmen. Did ya get canned by your Mom?

CARMEN BREAKS OUT IN TEARS AND RUSHES OUT OF THE OFFICE.

PHYLLIS

Where did you learn your social skills? Old Nazi training films?

JOHN

Gees! All I did is ask a simple question! (PAUSE.) WOMEN!

JOHN STOMPS INTO HIS OFFICE AND SLAMS THE DOOR.

BILL

(WALKING OUT OF HIS OFFICE.) Was that Carmen coming back?

PHYLLIS

No, sir. She left, and she was very upset.

BILL

Was it John? It's always that dunder head! He has a way of insulting almost any woman.

PHYLLIS

I've noticed that. Carmen loves you.

BILL

What?

PHYLLIS

This office does not promote formality, so I'll repeat it. Carmen loves you, she has for a long time. Do you love her?

BILL

I think I do.

PHYLLIS



What do you mean, you think you do?

BILL

When you've been married as many times as I have, you'll understand the total confusion in the meaning of love.

PHYLLIS

That doesn't make any sense.

BILL

Neither does being in love.

PHYLLIS

How about a simple yes or no. Do you love Carmen?

BILL

(PAUSE.) Yes.

PHYLLIS

Then, why don't you go out there and find her and tell HER.

BILL

I knew there was a good reason I hired you. (BILL STARTS OUT THE FRONT DOOR .) If your friend Josh comes in, tell him I have the contracts all ready for him to sign. John can find them. Bye!

PHYLLIS

That turd is no friend of mine!

JOHN

(COMING OUT OF HIS OFFICE.) Where's the old man going? We have a bunch of people coming this morning!

PHYLLIS

He's gone after Carmen. He's the boss, and he's got more of a right to disappear than you did yesterday afternoon

JOHN

All right! You don't have to be so bitchy!

PHYLLIS

(IN A LOUD VOICE.) If you don't stop being so obnoxious, you'll see just how bitchy "bitchy" can get!

JOHN JUMPS BACK INTO HIS OFFICE. PHYLLIS PUTS HER HANDS FLAT ON THE DESK AND MAKES A LOUD GRUMBLING NOISE. SHE THEN STANDS UP AND BEGINS TO PACE IN FRONT OF HER DESK. LEE SIMON SLOWLY WALKS INTO THE OFFICE AND LOOKS AT PHYLLIS. PHYLLIS RETURNS HER GLANCE, THEN BEGINS TO SPEAK, AS IF LEE WEREN'T THERE.

PHYLLIS

Why do I let men get to me? First, there was that snake of a boss on my old TV job! All he wanted was to get me in bed! I spent a whole year thinking he wanted to help my career; Hah! Now it's Josh! I thought he wanted to have a relationship. I thought he felt respect for me. I thought he could be a promising prospect. I thought he could learn to love me. I thought we would have three children and live six months on the coast to do movies, and six months here to do plays. The trouble is, that I think too much, and don't think at all! The trouble is that he is marrying another woman and wants to set me up as a part-time diversion for when his bleached blonde bride becomes boring, and from what I saw that should be often.

LEE

(WALKING TO THE CENTER OF THE ROOM.) Do you often talk to yourself?

PHYLLIS

Not often, (PAUSE.) but it seems natural all of a sudden.

LEE

I couldn't help but hear some of what you were saying, and I was wondering if I know this worm of a man? His name sounds very familiar.

PHYLLIS

He's your brother.

LEE

No way! I thought you might be talking about my brother. Josh is a turkey, but not that kind of a turkey. Besides, if he were getting married, I'd know about it. Who is this street walker you think he's hooked up with?

PHYLLIS

I didn't stay around to find out, but I did see the rehearsal for their wedding, and there was a real minister there!

LEE

This sounds odd. Josh doesn't do anything important without telling the whole family about it. The last time he got a speeding ticket he almost sent out printed announcements when he decided to contest it. I can't believe he'd get married and not tell anyone. I really think you ought to talk to him your self. You might be surprised.

PHYLLIS

Well, I believe my own eyes! Anyway, did you come here for any other reason?

LEE

Yes, to tell you that I start at one o'clock today at the job you guys sent me to yesterday.

PHYLLIS

That's great! I hope everything went well, I mean pay and hours and all.

LEE

Couldn't be greater. I picked that field because Ed's is the only proctology assistant program in the State. His graduates have the market cornered. Mr. Heartland gave me a list of twenty openings. I had you call the one I wanted first, and it all worked out great!

PHYLLIS

I guess you picked that field so you'd be up to your ass in offers?

LEE

God! You and Josh SHOULD get married! Your minds both work in the same demented way.

PHYLLIS

No we don't! I believe in respect and I care about other people's feelings!

JOSH

(PUSHING THE FRONT DOOR OPEN.) And so do I, if you'll let me explain.

PHYLLIS

(STANDING AND SHOUTING.) I don't want to hear or see you again! (PHYLLIS GRABS HER PURSE, RUNS TO JOHN'S OFFICE DOOR AND KICKS IT.) Get out here weasel breath, I'm going to lunch early! (PHYLLIS STORMS OUT THE DOOR.)

JOHN

(HE SLOWLY WALKS OUT OF HIS DOOR, THEN NOTICES LEE AND JOSH. HE STOPS AND PUTS A BIG, FORCED GRIN ON HIS FACE.) It must have been the coffee I made for her

this morning. (PAUSE.) It takes a while to get used to it.

JOSH

(LOOKING AT LEE.) Didn't you tell her anything?

LEE

(PUTTING ONE HAND ON HER HIP AND LOOKING ANGRILY AT JOSH.) It's your love life, you live it yourself! (SHE WALKS OUT.)

JOSH

(LOOKING AT JOHN, THEN FORCING A SMILE.) I guess I'd better handle it myself. (HE WALKS OUT THE DOOR.)

JOHN

(SHAKING HIS HEAD.) If I'd wanted the soaps, I'd have stayed home. (PAUSE.) Oh, I don't have a home anymore. (HE WALKS INTO HIS OFFICE.)

FADE TO BLACK

ACT THREE  
SCENE TWO

THE TIME IS ONE HOUR LATER. THE PLACE IS THE MAIN OFFICE. PHYLLIS IS AT HER DESK, READING A MAGAZINE. BILL RUSHES INTO THE OFFICE, SLAMS THE DOOR AFTER HIM AND LOCKS IT.

PHYLLIS

What's going on?

BILL

(CATCHING HIS BREATH.) Don't ask questions! Go through my office, into the back room and get the hell out of here through the back door!

PHYLLIS

What!

BILL

(LEANING AGAINST THE DESK, STILL BREATHING HARD, BILL CALLS TOWARDS JOHN'S OFFICE.) John! John! Get the hell out here with the gun!

JOHN

(QUICKLY PULLING OPEN HIS DOOR.) What!

BILL

Get the gun! I found out who Donald's heat is, and he's about five minutes behind me.

JOHN GOES BACK INTO HIS OFFICE.

PHYLLIS

(STANDING, AND LOOKING VERY SURPRISED.) You promised there would be no danger!

BILL

Look, honey, I said get the hell out of here!

PHYLLIS RUNS FOR THE FRONT DOOR. JOHN CAN BE HEARD IN HIS OFFICE, LOUDLY LOOKING FOR THE GUN, BUT NOT FINDING IT.

BILL

I said go through the back door! He's out there. (POINTING TO THE FRONT DOOR.)

JOHN COMES BACK INTO THE OFFICE, WITH A SCARED EXPRESSION. PHYLLIS RUSHES INTO BILL'S OFFICE.

JOHN

I can't find the damn thing! Where the hell did you put it!

BILL

I gave it to you years ago. I don't like guns, remember?

PHYLLIS

Will you two stop arguing and tell me how to get through the wall in your office!

THE SHADOW OF A MAN CAN BE SEEN THROUGH THE OPAQUE GLASS IN THE FRONT DOOR. THE THREE OF THEM SEE IT, AND FALL SILENT. THE MAN AT THE DOOR KNOCKS SEVERAL TIMES. THE FIGURE IS THEN SEEN WRAPPING HIS HAND IN A HANDKERCHIEF AND THEN BREAKING THE GLASS IN THE DOOR WITH IT.

PHYLLIS

(QUIETLY.) Oh God! I did want to live a little longer.

BILL

(PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HER.) Don't worry, he's after John and me, he'll let you go.

JOHN

Bull shit! She'll see who he is, and he'll kill us all!

PHYLLIS STARTS TO CRY, AND SHE PUTS HER ARMS AROUND BILL.

BILL

(TO JOHN.) You know, you really are a putz!

A HAND REACHES THROUGH THE BROKEN WINDOW AND BEGINS TO UNLOCK THE DOOR. JOHN LOOKS AT THE DESK, THEN QUICKLY GRABS A LETTER OPENER FROM IT AND RUSHES TO THE LEFT SIDE OF THE DOOR. PAUL DONALDSON PUSHES OPEN THE DOOR, BLOCKING HIS VIEW OF JOHN. PAUL HAS AN AUTOMATIC PISTOL IN HIS HAND, AND AS HE SEES BILL AND PHYLLIS, HE SMILES. VERY QUICKLY, JOHN JUMPS FROM BEHIND THE DOOR AND STICKS THE LETTER OPENER INTO PAUL'S BACK.

JOHN

It may only be a knife, but I'll open you up like a welfare check if you don't drop the gun.

PAUL

(IN A CALM VOICE.) Don't be stupid! I can kill all three of you even if you do stick me with that knife.

BILL

(MOVING AWAY FROM PHYLLIS.) But why go through the pain, when I have a better alternative.

PAUL

Go on.

JOHN

But, make it snappy.

PHYLLIS MOVES TO ONE OF THE OVERSTUFFED CHAIRS AND SINKS INTO IT.

BILL

(GIVING JOHN A DISGUSTED LOOK, HE SPEAKS TO PAUL.) Donald wants my business, well, he can have it. That's right, I'll give it to him.



PAUL

I don't think you understand, he has it, and soon he'll have you too.

BILL

If you take the two of us out, Donald won't have a damn thing! It's taken me five years to perfect this operation.

PAUL

What's to perfect?

BILL

In the old days, and in the not-so-old days, all we did was to take bets over the phone, and by runners, just like you do now. That was too easy to find, and too easy to lose money.

PAUL

Keep talking.

BILL

What we do now is to take bets over bank computer networks, and do money transfers the same way.

PAUL

I know damned well what you're doing, what's so hard about that?

BILL

Well, just go ahead and try it, especially the bank transfers, without every cop in the world knowing about it! We could have a billion dollar business, but we've just started and I don't have the cash reserve to overextend myself yet.

PAUL

But we do.

BILL

Right. What I have to trade is information for our lives.

PAUL THINKS FOR A FEW SECONDS.

PAUL

Okay. I'll try it out on the boss, but if he says you go, then I don't give a damn about that jerk with the knife! Hand me the phone.

BILL PICKS UP THE PHONE AND MOVES IT TO THE CLOSEST CORNER OF THE DESK TO PAUL. PAUL WALKS TO THE EDGE OF THE DESK, JOHN WALKS IN LOCK STEP WITH HIM, KEEPING THE LETTER OPENER IN HIS BACK. KEEPING THE GUN POINTED AT BILL, PAUL PUTS THE RECEIVER ON THE DESK, DIALS A NUMBER, AND LIFTS UP THE RECEIVER.

PAUL

Hello, boss? (PAUSE) Well, get him to the phone now! (PAUSE) Donald? (PAUSE) I know what you said about calling you, but I have to! (PAUSE) Look, their operation's a lot more involved than I thought. It could make a fortune for you, I mean billions! (PAUSE.) They want to lay it all out for you, and give it to you. (PAUSE) Yeah, they want to trade their lives for it. (Pause) Three of 'em. (PAUSE) Yeah, the young broad's here too. (PAUSE.) Okay. (HE HANGS UP AND LOOKS AT BILL.) The boss said Okay. All of you come with me, and we'll go see him, then work out what needs to happen.

JOHN

Put away the gun, and I'll put up the knife.

PAUL SLIPS HIS GUN INTO A SHOULDER HOLSTER. JOHN PUTS THE LETTER OPENER INTO HIS COAT POCKET.

PHYLLIS

(STANDING UP.) So, what now?

BILL

I really don't know. I wish I did, but nothing works exactly as you think it will.

PAUL

Yes it does. We go to Donald's mansion, and you spill your guts, or you really shall spill your guts.

REVEREND JENKINS WALKS IN THE OPEN DOOR.

REVEREND

Sir! I have need of your services!

PAUL

Get that loony tune out of here!

REVEREND

(LOOKING AT PAUL.) You vile disciple of the devil! Your insults shall not go unpunished. (HE WAVES HIS HAND.)

THREE UNIFORMED POLICEMEN RUSH INTO THE ROOM FROM THE HALL, WITH THEIR REVOLVERS DRAWN. PAUL RAISES HIS HANDS. JOHN LOOKS SURPRISED AND RAISES HIS HANDS ALSO. BILL SMILES AND PUSHES JOHN'S HANDS DOWN. BILL MOTIONS FOR JOHN AND PHYLLIS TO COME TO HIM. JOHN AND PHYLLIS BOTH STAND ON EITHER SIDE OF BILL. SEVERAL MORE PLAIN CLOTHED POLICEMEN ENTER THE OFFICE. ONE OF THEM APPROACHES BILL AND HANDS HIM A PIECE OF PAPER.

POLICEMAN

Sir, this is a legal search warrant, we will begin looking around now, and I think you know why.

BILL

I haven't the slightest idea what you want. We run an honest business here, and I resent your comment, and this search!

POLICEMAN

Yes, sir. Excuse me, but don't leave here until I say you can.

BILL

Are we under arrest? For what?

POLICEMAN

Not yet. The great reverend over there'll read you your rights. (HE MOTIONS FOR THE REVEREND TO COME TO THEM. THE POLICEMAN BEGINS TO LOOK INTO BILL'S OFFICE.)

REVEREND

(WALKING UP TO THEM. HE SPEAKS WITHOUT HIS FAKE SOUTHERN ACCENT.) You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say...

BILL

(INTERRUPTING HIM.) We all know that. He won't find anything.

REVEREND

(EXPRESSIONLESS.) Very good, sir, you all understand your rights. If you care to call your attorneys, I suggest you do so now.

BILL

Did you get the part?

REVEREND

(SMILES AND WINKS AT BILL.) I turned in my resignation today. (HE WALKS TO THE DOOR.)

BILL

(TO THE REVEREND.) That's great.

THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION TAKES PLACE IN WHISPERS.

PHYLLIS

What's great? I'd like to know anything that's great right now.

BILL

Be quiet and listen, there'll be enough time later for everything, but for now, just listen.

JOHN

Go on, boss.

BILL

We aren't, nor have we ever been a bookie joint.

PHYLLIS

But.

JOHN

Shut the hell up!

BILL

I dismantled the whole thing, and spent all last night moving it out, and covering all our trails.

JOHN

How did you know?

BILL

Long story, I'll tell you later, but for now, both of you keep to the story that we've always been an employment agency, and always will be.

PHYLLIS and JOHN

Yes.

THE POLICEMAN WALKS INTO THE OFFICE.

POLICEMAN

Just what is this room back here?

BILL

My father bought this whole building in 1917. He had his office here until he died. (PAUSE.) He sold liquor out of his office during the twenties, and that's where he hid it. I keep all our office junk in it. There's nothing illegal now, and there hasn't been since we could all drink booze legally.

POLICEMAN

I guess not, but we'll keep looking. You understand.

BILL

Not very well, but it's your game.

FADE TO BLACK

ACT THREE  
SCENE THREE

THE TIME IS TWO O'CLOCK THAT SAME AFTERNOON. THE SCENE IS THE MAIN OFFICE. BILL, JOHN AND PHYLLIS ARE ALONE. BILL IS SEATED AT THE DESK AND JOHN IS SITTING ON THE EDGE OF THE DESK, FACING BILL. PHYLLIS IS SITTING ON THE EDGE OF ONE OF THE CHAIRS. THE ROOM HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT STRAIGHTENED UP AFTER THE SEARCH. BROWN PAPER HAS BEEN TAPED OVER THE BROKEN WINDOW IN THE DOOR.

BILL

Don't be so sad about it. I should be the one in tears, after all I grew up in this business, but I had no choice. Both the cops and the mob were on our doorstep.

JOHN

But, I liked it, and I don't want to change.

BILL

Phyllis has the right idea. She said we should change, and I think it'll turn out all right.

JOHN

That broad's ruined everything! First my marriage, then the best job I ever had.

PHYLLIS

(STANDING AND LOOKING AT JOHN.) Only you can ruin your marriage. As for the best job, well, I hope you might aspire to more.

JOHN

Bull shit!

PHYLLIS

I expected that.

BILL

I think she's right. It's time we went into the placement business full time. If we do the job for Ed right, then we stand to make more money anyway. You'll be richer, and so will I.

JOHN

(LOOKING AT PHYLLIS.) See, he knows how to make me feel better.

PHYLLIS

The cops looked everywhere. They tore this place apart. Why didn't they find anything?

BILL

I worked all last night, and nothing's here. All that expensive equipment we used to have is in a million pieces in the dump right now.

JOHN

I hope you got rid of our accounts?

BILL

All of it. We'd better make money at placing people in jobs, or we'll be awful broke.

PHYLLIS

Now that it's all over, (PAUSE) do I still have a job?

BILL

Of course you do, honey.

JOHN

Oh great! Everything falls to hell and you let the bitch keep her job to boot! What'll I tell Henrietta?



PHYLLIS

If you don't stop whining, I'll tell Henrietta something worthy of your death.

BILL

(LOOKING ANXIOUS.) I'll let you two duke it out, I've got to be somewhere in a few minutes.  
(HE RUSHES OUT THE DOOR.)

PHYLLIS TURNS TO JOHN.

PHYLLIS

I need to go out for a while.

JOHN

Why? That's a hell of a note, you screw up everything, then you want two lunch hours in the same day.

PHYLLIS

This is no lunch! I don't care what Bill says, I know I won't be here the whole two weeks, so I'm going to the unemployment office to get back in line. You of all people should want me to leave.

JOHN

Since you put it that way, I'll be glad to hold down what's left of the fort for a few hours.

FADE TO BLACK

ACT THREE  
SCENE FOUR

THE TIME IS ONE HOUR LATER. THE PLACE IS THE MAIN OFFICE. PHYLLIS WALKS IN AND SEES DEL SITTING IN HER CHAIR.

DELL

Hi there, Ma'am.

PHYLLIS

Isn't Mr. Smith here?

DEL

Sure, he's in there. (POINTING TO JOHN'S DOOR.)

PHYLLIS

Well, why isn't he helping you?

DEL

Could be 'cause I told him I was gonna tear his nose off.

PHYLLIS

Is he in alive?

DEL

Sure, he's just locked himself in there. I won't do nothing, I just like scarin' em.

PHYLLIS

I take it that the last interview didn't go to well?

DEL

Worse'n the last. All these people wanted was a common street woman to wine 'n dine senators and big business men in order for them to give money 'n favors to their organization. Even though they advertised for a secretary, what they wanted was a whore, and since I couldn't do that, I lost out again!

PHYLLIS

Don't you have any other prospects?

DEL

Yeah, That dummy in there wants to send me to some place where everybody is named Brucey.

PHYLLIS

He didn't!

DEL

He did!

JOHN

(FROM INSIDE HIS OFFICE.) But they pay great!

DEL

I don't think much of their benefits package.

JOHN

I want to live to fight again with Henrietta.

DEL

No way! You find me a good job, or you'll stay there forever, or die! (PAUSE.) Who the hell's Henrietta?

PHYLLIS

Much as I would like to have you stay, so I could watch you demolish John, I have a better plan. You go home and wait there. I'll get some decent interviews myself for you and call you at home.

DEL

I trust you. I'll go. (HE LEAVES.)

JOHN

(PEEKING OUT FROM HIS DOOR.) Is the Southern gentleman gone? Could he find the front door?

PHYLLIS

What is the problem? Why do you dislike him so much?

JOHN

I guess it's because the only other Southerner I've had contact with is my wife's step-father. He's a judge in Mississippi. The last time we went there for a visit, he had me put in jail for vagrancy.

PHYLLIS

I can see the root of your dislike, but it's unfair to Dell. Look for some decent jobs, and I'll do the same. He deserves better treatment than this, even from you! Besides, if you screw up any of Ed's graduates, you might not get the contract, and what will you use for money then?

JOHN

All right. (PAUSE.) Remember when Josh Simon was here this morning?

PHYLLIS

Yes. (LOOKING ANNOYED.)

JOHN

Why did you storm out so quickly? Josh and I had a very interesting conversation after you left, one that you should have been in on.

PHYLLIS

I don't think he has anything interesting to say to me. Besides, I would like you to stay out of my personal life.

JOHN

It was mostly business we were talking about.

PHYLLIS

I don't care.

JOHN

You should.

BILL

(WALKS IN THE FRONT DOOR, WHISTLING.) Good afternoon kids!

JOHN

(GIVING BILL A HARD LOOK.) Are you drunk, or have you gotten married again?

BILL

Yes.

JOHN

Yes to what?

PHYLLIS

You and Carmen?

BILL

Yes. Not yet, but yes.

PHYLLIS

That's great! I'm so glad I sent you out to find her.

BILL

What find? She was waiting for me in diner down the street.

JOHN

You mean the puke palace?

PHYLLIS

Don't be disgusting! (SHE TURNS TO BILL.) Where is she now?

BILL

She's out getting tickets for Las Vegas. We're leaving for three weeks.

JOHN

Three weeks! How in the hell do you expect me to handle the office all alone? God! First you dump the money maker, then we almost get dumped permanently, then we almost get dumped in jail, then you dump it all on me, alone!

PHYLLIS

What am I, Casper the ghost?

JOHN

Well, no, but you're just the dumb receptionist.

BILL

She already knows more about the business than you do.

JOHN

There is that.

PHYLLIS

Most of the hard work is done with Ed's graduates. Bill is coming back in three weeks, so it won't be too bad. (PAUSE. SPEAKS TO BILL.) I guess that means I really do have a job for at least the next two weeks?

BILL

Yeah, well sort of. But when I do come back, we'll have a new junior partner.

PHYLLIS

Carmen?

JOHN

Carmen!

BILL

Carmen. We'll need the help, because Ed called this morning. He gave us the placement contract for fifteen of his schools.

JOHN

We'll have customers out the wazoo! We might actually make more at this than on the multitude of bad betters .

PHYLLIS

Think of all those people we'll help.

JOHN

Think of all the dollars we'll make.

BILL

Think of all the work you'll have to do.

JOHN

There is that.

BILL

I have to go now. (HE WALKS TO THE FRONT DOOR AND SPEAKS TO PHYLLIS) I hope you like what I did for your friend Josh, and for you. (HE LEAVES.)

PHYLLIS

What the hell is he talking about!

JOHN

What I've been trying to tell you about. Sit down and shut up!

PHYLLIS

Yes sire. (SHE SITS.)

JOHN

Bill helped Josh with contracts for an audition he had today.

PHYLLIS

Where?



JOHN

I said shut up!

PHYLLIS

You must enjoy this.

JOHN

I do. (PAUSE.) Josh went for it today. It was as a continuing part on a soap opera. He told me when he was here that he thinks he got it, they called him back for a second time. Bill acted as his agent, and cut the deal for him this morning, right before the hit man and the cops got here.

PHYLLIS

That sounds interesting.

JOHN

What's more, do you remember our favorite reverend?

PHYLLIS

Reverend Jenkins? The cop?

JOHN

One in the same. The producers of the musical he tried out for, recommended him for a part in the same soap opera. He and Josh read at the same time, in the same scene.

PHYLLIS

I'm getting a very sick feeling.

JOHN

(IN A TEASING TONE.) I think I know what it is.

PHYLLIS

Is the character Josh will play marrying someone? Is the reverend-cop playing the preacher who marries them?

JOHN

That's right, he's marrying one of the old time regulars. That's how they're introducing him. His sister's roommate, Cathy, has had a part on that soap for almost a year.

PHYLLIS

And the reverend?

JOHN

That's right, He's the one who will marry them. The two of them, along with Lee's roommate, were rehearsing the scene when you snuck into the hall they were using. All of them are taping it today sometime. The reverend's quitting the vice squad.

PHYLLIS

And I jumped to the wrong conclusion; about everything.

JOHN

(POINTING TO PHYLLIS.) Bingo! The same conclusion Henrietta jumps to all the time, wrong.

PHYLLIS

I have to go find Josh!

JOHN

Now, just wait a minute! I refuse to be left here all alone again!

PHYLLIS

Don't worry, I'll be right back (SHE RUSHES OUT THE FRONT DOOR.)

JOHN

Abandoned again, the story of my life.

PHYLLIS

(WALKING BACK IN THE FRONT DOOR HOLDING JOSH'S HAND.) See, I told you I'd be right back.

JOSH

I was waiting in the hall for her. I ran into Bill downtown, and he told me to wait in the hall. He said something about it being lucky for me.

JOHN

Maybe it's lucky for me too. (JOHN REACHES FOR THE DOORKNOB. HENRIETTA OPENS THE DOOR, KNOCKING JOHN TO THE FLOOR.) I guess it's not so lucky for me after all, is it?

PHYLLIS

Don't discount your chickens before they hatch.

JOSH

Mark them down, but don't discount them.

HENRIETTA

What are all these strange people talking about, John?

JOHN

(GETTING OFF THE FLOOR.) Trying to be clever, (PAUSE.) but not too hard, nor too well.

HENRIETTA

That reminds me of you, dear.

JOHN

Very funny! Just why did you come here, (PAUSE.) to make my day?

HENRIETTA

No, I came to talk to the other woman.

PHYLLIS

What other woman?

HENRIETTA

YOU!

PHYLLIS

Look, Henrietta, John holds no fascination for me. This, (PATTING JOSH'S ARM.) is my boyfriend.

HENRIETTA

Is this true?

JOSH

It certainly is. (HE KISSES PHYLLIS.) We are going to have three children and live six months here and six months on the coast.

HENRIETTA

That sounds nice.

PHYLLIS

How did you know that? Were you listening?

JOSH

A little bird named Lee told me.

PHYLLIS

I guess I can't be too mad at her.

HENRIETTA

I liked Carmen. She was safe, I mean she was a good secretary.

JOHN

We all know what you mean.

HENRIETTA

Well then, you will understand when I tell you that you can come back only if you fire her (POINTING TO PHYLLIS) and hire someone more suitable.

JOHN

You mean more old, and/or more ugly.

HENRIETTA

I just mean more suitable. (PATTING PHYLLIS' ARM.) No offence to you dear.

PHYLLIS

That sounds pretty offensive to me. Just what am I supposed to do for a job?

JOSH

Maybe you could go to the audition Bill set up for you.

PHYLLIS

What!

JOSH

You know what an audition is, don't you?

PHYLLIS

Yes. To what?

JOSH

For a supporting role in a new play by a very famous writer who never has had a loser on Broadway.

JOHN

Even though the lush writer had many more than one loser in here.

PHYLLIS

What!

JOSH

(TO JOHN.) What?

JOHN

If she gets the part, who in the hell will be here to help me while Bill's gone?

JOHN and PHYLLIS

(AT THE SAME TIME.) DELL!

DELL

Yo!

JOHN

(JUMPS INTO THE AIR..) Whoa!

PHYLLIS

What are you doing here? I didn't call you.

DELL

Bill did. He said I should wait in the hall out there until I heard someone call me.

PHYLLIS

Well, we finally found a great job for you.

FADE TO BLACK

END