

VERA, CHUCK AND DAVE

SYNOPSIS: Three veteran actors are waiting to be seen by a casting agent for a three-line part. As they grow more and more impatient, they trade stories about their lives in the theater to both pass the time and remind each other of better days. Old grudges, past romances, onstage disasters and backstage gossip fill the time until their patience wears thin and they decide to take matters into their own hands.

Characters:

DAVE, MALE, 60s, is energetic, upbeat and definitely in denial about his age. He's in their auditioning, even willing to "go nude," "play gay" (he's very straight) and whatever else might land him his job.

CHUCK, MALE, 60s, has seen it all and has some dry zingers for any occasion. Contrary to DAVE, he has had to "play straight" for most of his career (he's very gay). He finds it difficult to adjust to the new world of show business.

VERA, FEMALE, 60s. She has also seen it all, but with an added twist of having to put up with a variety of males. She entered the business when putting up with males was considered required, and now that she's older and alone, she's finally realizing how angry she is.

While gender identity and age for the three characters are essential to the story, race and ethnicity are not.

*The music and lyrics to "Meet Me around the Corner" are included at the end of this script.

ACT ONE

Laughter in the dark.

Lights up. CHUCK and DAVE sit on two of three folding chairs. They each have shoulder bags that contain the “sides” of the script they are auditioning for. They are in the middle of remembering a story about a show DAVE was in.

DAVE

Yeah. And then I said, “One more time, but see if you can hit the guy in the third row!”

Laughter.

CHUCK

Did he?

DAVE

Him? No – he didn’t have a sense of humor.

CHUCK

Gotta have a sense of humor.

DAVE

In this racket? Hell, yeah.

CHUCK

Hell yeah. *(Pause.)* Which reminds me – did you ever work with Helen Fortnum?

DAVE

Hell on Wheels Fortnum? Did I!

CHUCK

Did she ever—*(He mimes an overly aggressive kiss and embrace.)*

DAVE

Every night.

CHUCK

Oh, I can't believe that.

DAVE

We had one scene. Ended with a tender kiss. Two lovers pledging themselves to each other forever. Director staged it—

CHUCK

A bench.

DAVE

A bench! Of course! We were to lean over, tentatively. (*He gestures for CHUCK to sit beside him, reenacting the scene.*) I lean in like this and—here, you be me. I'll be Hell on Wheels—

He pulls CHUCK violently toward him and pushes him down on the chair, straddling him.

CHUCK

(*Wincing:*) Hey! Watch it! (*Gesturing offstage:*) They may want me to actually show them I can move!

DAVE

(*Ignoring him:*) Bam! She's on top of me. I swear if it weren't the end of the scene, the audience would have seen her pull my pants down.

CHUCK

God, it's like the scene in *Streetcar*. Anthony Quinn throws Uta Hagen down and tears his shirt off. Except the lights didn't go down as he jumps on top of her. He didn't know what to do, so Uta whispered,

DAVE AND CHUCK TOGETHER

“Fuck me, you idiot!”

DAVE

Except it was Brando and Jessica Tandy.

DAVE

Anyway, thank God the lights went down on me before Hell on Wheels did.

CHUCK

I wonder if they're going to try a *Streetcar* with roles reversed. Then Helen could actually play Stanley.

DAVE

You never know these days.

CHUCK

You ever do *Streetcar*?

DAVE

Once. I was the doctor who comes in at the end.

CHUCK

Jeez! What did you do for the first two hours?

DAVE

Hoped the guy playing Mitch would get sick. I was his understudy.

CHUCK

Ever go on?

DAVE

Nah. Crummy production anyway.

CHUCK

Mmm.

DAVE

At least Hell on Wheels was a woman. Oh, no offense. I mean, a guy kissed me onstage once.

CHUCK

Lucky you.

DAVE

I'm Romeo, right? I see Mercutio stabbed. (*He lies on the ground, motions to CHUCK:*) Here, you be me. Stand over me. (*In character as dying Mercutio:*) "No 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve." (*He has slowly risen so that his lips and CHUCK's are close.*)

CHUCK isn't too thrilled that DAVE might move for the final kiss, so he subtly moves away.

DAVE

Boom! Plants a big one on me.

CHUCK

Tongues?

DAVE

Only on Saturday matinees.

They laugh.

CHUCK

So, was this the director's choice or his?

DAVE

Who knows?

CHUCK

I had to kiss a guy in *Deathtrap*.

DAVE

Had to?

CHUCK

Point taken.

DAVE

I mean, what's the big deal?

CHUCK

One way or the other.

DAVE

Right.

CHUCK

I mean, I've had to kiss many a female. It's all make-believe, right?

DAVE

Exactly. I mean, Mary Tyrone isn't offstage shooting up real morphine. Tybalt doesn't actually stab Mercutio.

CHUCK

Ooh! Except once! The Tybalt in Santa Fe once got carried away.

DAVE

Hey, that's nice!

CHUCK

What?

DAVE

The rhyme! "The Tybalt in Santa *Fe* once got carried away."

DAVE AND CHUCK TOGETHER

"The Tybalt in Santa *Fe* once got carried away."

They improvise a little dance, repeating the phrase as they dance. At one point, DAVE "stabs" CHUCK, who falls down.

CHUCK

Ow.

DAVE

Oh. Sorry. How's the new hip?

CHUCK

Who told you?

DAVE

I don't know.

CHUCK

Well, keep it quiet. If they think I can't do any physical business... (*struggles to get up:*) Help me up.

DAVE helps CHUCK to his feet.

DAVE

Oh, God. Speaking of not being able to do any physical—reminds me of Felix.

CHUCK

Morecomb?

DAVE

The very one. Slathered on the pancake to play the young lead in that old English chestnut--

CHUCK

Charley's Aunt?

DAVE

No.

CHUCK

Journey's End?

DAVE

No! Dammit. Now I can't remember it. You know, Teddy Roosevelt, two old ladies...

DAVE AND CHUCK TOGETHER

Arsenic and Old Lace.

CHUCK

That's not English.

DAVE

(*Ignoring him:*) So, old Felix has the bit where he finds the body in the window seat and does this great double take. Or he would have. But owing to him being like a century too old for the part, he snaps his head around to do the double take and his knee gives out. Falls flat. Audience loves it. But he can't move. I mean, he's on the floor unless somebody picks him up. He looks around. Nobody. Stage manager either doesn't see or is loving the fact that old Felix is struggling like a flounder. Finally, crawls to the window seat, opens the lid and whispers to the

guy in the window seat, "Help me up!" I swear to God, this scared kid they have playing the dead body comes up out of the window seat like Dracula rising from the grave and walks over (*he walks like Bela Lugosi, arms straight out:*) hoists up old Felix, gets him on his feet and then climbs back into the window seat.

CHUCK

And the audience ate it up.

DAVE

Of course they did.

CHUCK

God. May we never get that old. No. We can get that old. Just don't let me think I can play 20 again. Or 40.

DAVE AND CHUCK TOGETHER

(*After due consideration:*) Well...

Pause.

DAVE

So, like, when you kiss women, what's it like?

CHUCK

Huh?

DAVE

No, I mean, I know what it's like for me. But, like, do you have to find the woman attractive?

CHUCK

(*Mulls this over.*) I suppose. In some way. I mean, obviously I don't want to carry it into the bedroom...

DAVE

Never?

CHUCK

No.

DAVE

I'm hearing now that...there's a whole range of sexuality.

CHUCK

(Sarcastic:) Yes, Oprah. I'm hearing that, too.

DAVE

No, I mean. I don't want to assume that you're...100% gay.

CHUCK

Well, I am. Pure gay. No additives, dyes or perfumes.

DAVE

Right, but you need to find something attractive about the woman you're kissing onstage.

CHUCK

Well, I mean, she should have nice breath. I once had to kiss a woman who smoked unfiltered Camels and refused to brush her teeth before our scene. That was pretty grim.

DAVE

What did you find attractive about her?

CHUCK

My paycheck.

Pause.

DAVE

Do you find me attractive?

CHUCK

Um...what?

DAVE

Well, is it the same for guys? Do you have to find something attractive about them?

CHUCK

At my age, I find anyone not me attractive.

Pause.

DAVE

So, you would find me attractive. If I was gay.

CHUCK

Is this..are you trying to tell me something?

DAVE

No! No. I just. See, I'm 100% the other way.

CHUCK

The other way?

DAVE

Straight.

CHUCK

Good for you.

DAVE

But seeing as how the parts are getting tougher and tougher to land, I thought I'd figure out, if, you know, men found me attractive.

CHUCK

I see.

DAVE

Because, I could find you attractive, I guess.

CHUCK

For the paycheck.

DAVE

For the work. Like, a real job. Been a while.

CHUCK

I hear you. And, could we move on to another topic?

DAVE

I'm not coming on to you!

CHUCK

Good.

DAVE

Except. Um, like, could you come at me as if you were going to kiss me?

CHUCK

No!

DAVE

Can I come at you?

CHUCK

No!

DAVE

Just, okay. How about a hug?

*DAVE tentatively walks toward CHUCK.
CHUCK backs up.*

CHUCK

How about we just wait for our turn?

DAVE

Okay. *(Pause.)* So you find me repulsive.

CHUCK

No—what—just—I'm sure if you had to kiss me—and the paycheck was a fat one—I would let you.

DAVE

Really?

CHUCK

Yeah.

DAVE

(Advancing to CHUCK again:) How about that hug.

CHUCK backs off again, and trips on the chair leg. He starts to fall but catches himself. Nevertheless, he might have pulled something.

CHUCK

Hey! Back off! Ow!

DAVE

The hip?

CHUCK

Yeah! Just—let's just settle down. Let me go over my lines.

DAVE relents. They both mouth the lines for the audition. They look offstage impatiently.

CHUCK

Come *on*. God, this kid they have running this thing looks like about 10.

DAVE

I know.

CHUCK

Intern?

DAVE

The way these things are going, I bet that's the director

CHUCK

No. Intern, I bet. Maybe junior casting director. But whoever, I'm getting pretty tired of waiting around like this.

DAVE

They don't care.

CHUCK

They don't have our bladders.

DAVE

(After a brief pause.) Okay, that was not cool.

CHUCK

What?

DAVE

Now I have to go.

CHUCK

That's not my fault.

DAVE

I didn't have to until you said something about bladders.

CHUCK

Sorry.

DAVE

If they call me, promise you'll tell them I'm just doing some breathing exercises to re-center my concentration.

CHUCK

With your pee-pee in your hand?

DAVE

Just... Oh...

DAVE rushes offstage. A pause.

CHUCK

Shit. Now I have to. *(He practices his line to take his mind off:)* "Welcome to the LoveLight Resort. Your every wish fulfilled. I'm Mister Eterno, your host." *(He tries a vaguely Dracula-like accent:)* "Velcome to dee LoveLight Resort. Your every vish fulfilled. I'm Mister Eterno, your host." *(Now as a suave Frenchman:)* "Welcome to zee LoveLight Resort. Your every wish fulfeelled. I'm Monsieur Eterno, your 'ost." *(Dropping the accent:)* Shit. Now I really have to. *(Shakes it off. Begins his favorite monologue:)*

Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt

Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!

VERA enters, picking up the monologue:

VERA

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

CHUCK turns around, recognizes VERA. A long moment before an awkward hug.

CHUCK

Are you here too?

VERA

(Looks behind her, a "take.") It appears that I am.

CHUCK

For what part?

VERA

Mr. Eterno. Or, I guess, Ms. Eterno if I get it.

CHUCK

Gender-neutral. Swell. I thought I was just up against Dave.

VERA

Is he here?

CHUCK

In the can.

VERA

I just went before I came. Doesn't mean I won't have to in another ten minutes. To check my makeup, you understand.

CHUCK

Yeah, ever since I turned sixty I have to check my makeup three times during the night.

VERA

Have you gone in yet?

CHUCK

No. I gather this is the senior lounge. A group of younger artists are corralled elsewhere. They're reading for more significant roles.

VERA

Well, I guess it's pretty good if it's just down to the three of us for this one.

CHUCK

Or the gig is so lousy nobody else's agent sent them up for it.

VERA

Chuck the optimist. You haven't changed. I remember when you and I were doing that thing in Cleveland that everybody loved. You moped around backstage like you were in the worst flop. Here's you. *(She gets up to demonstrate, imitating CHUCK:)* "I don't get it. Am I the only one who wonders what the hell they see in this? It's a fiasco." I used to love the way you said it. Like three separate words: "FEE ASS CO!"

*DAVE enters. He's surprised to see VERA.
And not that thrilled. Neither is she.*

DAVE

(As he enters, before he sees VERA:) You'll never guess what the color scheme in the bathroom is: yellow and brown. Like I don't know why I'm in there. *(Acknowledges VERA:)* I thought I heard your signature screech. How are you, Vera?

VERA

Oh! Dave! How nice! Will you be reading with me?

DAVE

No, Vera. I am here to audition. Much as it may surprise you, I was actually sent up for this job. And my script says *Mister* Eterno.

VERA

If you bought your reading glasses somewhere other than Dollar General, you might have seen that it was spelled M-S-T-E-R. Get it? *MS*-ter.

DAVE

Oh.

VERA

I can't believe it. Now I'm auditioning against twice as many people for half as many parts!

CHUCK

I think we need to make tee shirts with that on. (*Winces.*) This goddamn chair. Don't they know we need chairs with support? (*Pause.*) Reminds me of Maurice Winterholder. Didn't you do *Man Who Came to Dinner* with him?

VERA

Ecch. Yes. He put together a summer production.

CHUCK

Of course he did. He loved doing that part. That way he could be in a wheelchair all night and no one would know that he was falling-down drunk.

VERA

He ran over my feet with that damn wheelchair so many times by August *I* needed a wheelchair. The best night was when he thought he was improvising a bit and was wheeling around and around during his scene with the actress.

CHUCK

Who played her?

VERA

Oh, you know. The one with no comic timing.

CHUCK

Narrow it down for me.

VERA

She had that whatever it's called on her neck.

CHUCK

Oh, right! Celia Braverman.

VERA

That's her. Anyway. Here. You be her and I'll be Maurice. Stand there.

CHUCK

Um, no. Dave'll do it.

DAVE warily stands in the position. VERA crouches down as if she's in a wheelchair.

VERA

Say that line.

DAVE

What line?

VERA

You know, the one about her career.

DAVE

I've never done the play.

VERA

You're joking.

DAVE

Nope.

VERA

How did you escape that?

DAVE

By doing so many *Harveys* I began to see actual rabbits.

VERA

Oh! So that's what they meant when they said, "Dave's doing *Harvey* again." I assumed you'd gone to the other side and Harvey was some chorus boy.

CHUCK

Careful. Touchy subject.

DAVE

Are we going to do the scene or not?

VERA

Okay. Just stand there looking empty headed and sultry.

He tries.

VERA (CONTINUED)

(“‘Wheeling’ around and around DAVE, in ever nearer concentric circles as DAVE cringes. *In character:*) My Blossom Girl, why you’re positively radiant! I could eat you up with a spoon! You’ll never guess – Maggie thinks she’s in love!” *(She is now right beside DAVE, with her head approximately under his arm. Out of character, directing DAVE:)* Now, put your hands on my shoulders and say “Oh, Sherry!”

He does.

DAVE

Oh, Sherry!

VERA mimes losing control of the wheelchair and heads downstage.

VERA

Aaahhhh! *(She stops, smiles:)* Right on top of the biggest donor to the Cedar Rapids Summer Tent Theater. Broke her jaw.

CHUCK

You’re making that up.

VERA

Swear.

They all three pause, glance at their scripts, look up and mouth the lines, almost in sync (although they’re unaware of this.)

ALL THREE

(Silently mouthing:)

Welcome to the LoveLight Resort. Your every wish fulfilled. I’m Mister/Ms. Eterno, your host.

VERA

I don't know how I feel about this gender-neutral stuff. Of course, it does give us a crack at more roles. After all, Mr. Shakespeare gave us just a handful of juicy females.

DAVE

Yeah, yeah. I get it. You never got to play Hamlet.

VERA

Oh, didn't I?

DAVE

Where?

VERA

Stratford.

DAVE

Stratford what? South Dakota?

VERA

No! Arkansas.

CHUCK AND DAVE

There's a Stratford, *Arkansas*?

VERA

Yes. In 19—well, a while ago. They were very forward thinking.

CHUCK

There's a statement you thought you'd never hear: "Arkansas is very forward-thinking."

VERA

The company was.

DAVE

Let me guess. Female artistic director.

VERA

Yes, so?

DAVE

Nothing.

VERA

What?

DAVE

Did you kiss Ophelia?

VERA

I think so. So?

DAVE

The artistic director. She wanted to see two women make out.

VERA

Uh, no. That's something you boys would like.

CHUCK

Not me.

VERA

Okay. Dave and the boys.

DAVE

I don't dispute it. (*Looks at CHUCK:*) It's just...something...men...like.

VERA

Yeah. Did you get that out of your system in *Forum*?

DAVE

What?

VERA

(*Imitating him:*) "What?" (*Regular voice:*) Those twins.

DAVE doesn't remember.

VERA (CONTINUED)

The hit revival of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*? Your Broadway debut.

DAVE

Oh. Ew. I never. No. Well...one at a time, yes. But together, that's just sick!

CHUCK

When was this?

DAVE

What do you mean, when was this? My Broadway debut!

CHUCK

What year?

DAVE

(*Hedging:*) You know, the year they fired that poor sucker who couldn't act. In the Mamet play. Bart Breezewood!

CHUCK

Oh, I went to college with him. Bart Berkowitz.

DAVE

Berkowitz?

CHUCK

Yeah. He was always in some showcase project at school, but everybody knew he was terrible.

DAVE

Except Bart.

CHUCK

Except Bart.

VERA

Well, he made it to Broadway.

DAVE

Well, technically. They canned him during previews.

CHUCK

(*Wistfully:*) Broadway. Remember Broadway?

VERA

What do you mean?

CHUCK

I mean when we were there.

VERA

Doing what? Avoiding the muggers?

CHUCK

No! Hey! Come on! We were part of it! (*To DAVE:*) You did *Forum*. (*To VERA:*) You were terrific in that Wendy Wasserstein play.

DAVE

Seriously. You were robbed out of a Tony nomination.

VERA

Well...and (*to CHUCK:*) You had us all beat. A whole year in *Les Miz*.

CHUCK

Everybody did *Les Miz*. No big feat.

VERA

Hey – we didn't. Don't sell yourself short.

A reflective pause as each remembers their Broadway time.

DAVE

(*Breaking the reverie:*) Did either of you see Bart before he got canned?

VERA AND CHUCK

No.

DAVE

He was so—Okay, I'll show you. (*To CHUCK:*) You did that play somewhere.

CHUCK

Twice!

DAVE

Okay, remember the argument in front of the freezer?

CHUCK

Of course!

DAVE

Okay, you be you and I'll do Bart's part.

CHUCK

Okay. Just—don't touch me.

VERA looks confused.

DAVE

(*To VERA:*) He's got a new hip.

CHUCK

Will you keep that quiet?!

VERA

Oh, I knew.

CHUCK

How?

VERA

I don't know. Word gets around.

CHUCK

Great.

DAVE

Anyway, back to Bart. Here's how it it's *supposed to go*. You start. You, know
“Get...get...away”—

CHUCK

Yeah, yeah. Got it.

In the following, the two do a good job of acting the dialogue “Mamet’s way,” with naturalistic, fragmented dialogue.

CHUCK

...get...away from // the friggin’—

DAVE

//I don’t...You can’t tell// me...

CHUCK

//I can friggin’ *tell* you—look: my freezer, my rules.

DAVE

Not—I can’t... Why do you always—

CHUCK

Jimmy! Get the frig—the freezer is mine! Three seconds, Jimmy!

DAVE

You can count all you want, Nate. I ain’t...I mean. I—

Now DAVE says each line as if it were a full sentence, often waiting to say a line for a full second after CHUCK stops saying his line.

CHUCK

...get...away from the friggin’—

DAVE

(Slow and dull:) I. Don’t. You can’t tell me...

CHUCK

I can friggin’ *tell* you—look: my freezer, my rules.

DAVE

(Really bad:) Not. I can’t. Why do you always?

CHUCK

Jimmy! Get the frig—the freezer is mine! Three seconds, Jimmy!

DAVE

(Still really bad:) You can count all you want, Nate. I ain't...I mean. I—

VERA

(Now breaking the scene:) Oh, my God, he didn't.

DAVE

Finally he just had to be fired. I mean, Lou What's His Name was playing Nate. I thought he was going to strangle Bart.

VERA

Oh, right. I remember now. I was dating Lou—Althorp was his last name—at the time.

DAVE

You were dating Lou Althorp at the time or his last name was Althorp at the time?

VERA

Both.

DAVE

What happened?

VERA

It ran its course.

CHUCK

After a month? Even I used to be able to stick it out till the end of the season.

VERA

Literally, I hear.

DAVE

I was always a perfect gentleman. When it came to, um, show-mances.

DAVE

(To CHUCK:) But that doesn't mean we were pigs. I really resent the idea that just because I may have...made my desires clear to a certain lady in the company that I was a pig.

VERA

And you took no for an answer.

DAVE

I—what?

VERA

No, you were very nice about it.

DAVE

You mean I—?

VERA

Well, thanks a lot for remembering!

DAVE

When was this?

VERA

Well, the first time was—

CHUCK AND DAVE

The first time?

VERA

Was when you walked around bare-chested all during the first act.

DAVE

Picnic.

VERA

Picnic.

CHUCK

(To VERA:) You were in *Picnic*?

VERA

Understudy. To the lead girl. I never got to go on. Even when that woman had a rash that went from her belly button to her chin, but she wouldn't let me go on. Made me help her cover the hives with quarts of makeup, though.

DAVE

Markie something or other.

VERA

Marta. Marta Flavin.

DAVE

(Remembering with pleasure:) Ah. Marta Flavin.

VERA

It was during her rash that you decided to “audition” me.

CHUCK

You mean, he was with Marta for a while?

VERA

Yes.

CHUCK

(To DAVE:) Did you give her the rash?

DAVE

No!

CHUCK

Did she give it to you?

DAVE

No—wait. Oh, my God.

VERA

Yep. It was while I was smearing Max Factor on your manly chest that you pulled the immortal line, *(deep manly voice:)* “you do that really well.” And then you flashed your smile.

CHUCK

But—?

VERA

Um, the rash was kind of a dealbreaker. *(To Chuck:)* Yep, whatever Marta had been rolling in, she rolled it on to this one here. *(To Dave:)* By the time you healed, you found Marta had healed, too.

DAVE

I'm sorry that I didn't remember.

CHUCK

What was the second time?

VERA

The next season we were the only two from the season before. But Mr. Leading Man here was busted down to...what's the name of the nerd in *Death of a Salesman*?

DAVE

Bernard.

VERA

Bernard. Believe me, Bernard isn't quite the chick magnet that the guy in *Picnic* was.

DAVE

See? That just proves my versatile talent.

CHUCK

That nobody wanted to sleep with you?

DAVE

Well, you know how the role and the person can get...conflated when the actor really nails it.

VERA

And that's the only thing you nailed that season.

DAVE

Were you one of the two girls in the bar scene?

VERA

Yep.

DAVE

The one where Biff and Happy leave their father in the bathroom and take the two of you home?

VERA

Yep.

DAVE

And I asked you out?

VERA

Yep.

DAVE

And—?

VERA

(Imitating Dave:) “You know how the role and the person can get...conflated when the actor really nails it?” Let us just say that *Biff* and *Happy* continued their seduction offstage.

CHUCK

Which one did you have, Biff or Happy?

VERA

Biff for July and Happy for August, as I recall.

CHUCK reacts to what is obviously a young assistant who has entered the room. The assistant is unseen by the audience.

CHUCK

Oh, hi! *(Reacting to the assistant's youth)* Are you our--? Um, are they ready for me? (“Yes.”) Great!

CHUCK leaps up too fast, and obviously hurts his back. He can't straighten up.

CHUCK

(TO unseen assistant:) No, no! Just a physical choice I'm trying out. Uh, but I'll just need to pop into the restroom for a minute.

DAVE sees CHUCK hobbling and obviously in need of a pee.

DAVE

What are you doing?

CHUCK

Trying to straighten up after *you* sabotaged me!

DAVE

Hey, no! I wouldn't—

CHUCK

Yeah, well, I'm making it a choice, okay? Mr. Eterno walks like this! And keep your mouth shut or I'll tell them about your overactive bladder! *(At the mention of "bladder":)* Oh, shit, shit, shit. Where's that bathroom?

CHUCK limps off.

DAVE

Poor guy. He's falling apart. *(Pause.)*

VERA

(Referring to the unseen assistant:) Who's that kid?

DAVE

Casting director?

VERA

No. Assistant, maybe. Intern?

DAVE

Probably somebody's grandchild.

VERA

Great. No wonder we're stuck in this hallway. How old can this kid be? Probably doesn't know anybody before...name some hot teenage sensation.

DAVE

(Thinking:) Um...oh, who the hell knows?

VERA

Yeah, they're all influencers now. Dancing in a cat costume and getting millions of viewers.

DAVE

Really?

VERA

So I understand.

Pause.

DAVE

Do you think Chuck reads "gay?"

VERA

What do you mean?

DAVE

Like, if he was up for a part that was gay. Would you cast him?

VERA

He *is* gay.

DAVE

I know, but does he *read* gay?

VERA

What are you talking about? Didn't he do that TV thing where he was gay?

DAVE

What TV thing?

VERA

It was called, what was it? Something like, *Ordering In*, or *Setting the Table*...

DAVE

One Less Place at Dinner?

VERA

That's it.

DAVE

He was in that?

VERA

Episode one. He was the father.

DAVE

There was no father. That was the point. The father left the family.

VERA

Right. For a man.

DAVE

Right.

VERA

He played the father.

DAVE

There *was* no father. That was—

VERA

The opening scene. You saw his back as he walked out the door and into the car with that hunky guy.

DAVE

Did he have lines?

VERA

Maybe one. Like “Goodbye, kids.”

DAVE

Hmm. Did he read gay?

VERA

The back of his head read very gay.

DAVE

I'm just saying.

VERA

Are you asking me if you read gay?

DAVE

Maybe.

VERA

Why?

DAVE

There's this show across town. It's been running for a year. The gay guy's leaving.

VERA

Wait. The *actor* is gay or the *character* is?

DAVE

Both, I think.

VERA

And you're age appropriate for this role?

DAVE

Yeah. He's..fort—fif—tyish...

VERA

And you're six—sixtyish.

DAVE

Let me try out being gay. Give me a line.

VERA

A line?

DAVE

Like, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

VERA

Too easy. Everybody sounds gay saying that one.

DAVE

Okay. Give me a hard one.

VERA

That also sounds pretty gay.

DAVE

Come on. Something from, um, how 'bout something from...*The Importance of Being Earnest*.

VERA

Again, way too easy.

DAVE

A Few Good Men! Yes! Here, try this: (*trying to "sound gay"*) You can't handle the truth!

VERA

(*Drily:*) Super gay.

DAVE

Come on!

VERA

Dave, just audition for the part.

DAVE

But what if they say you have to be gay in real life?

VERA

They can't do that.

DAVE

Oh, yes they can. They call it “authentic lived experience.” That’s how Chuck beat me out for that part in that original thing by that guy.

VERA

The one about Fire Island?

DAVE

It was Provincetown. In fact, it was called *Provincetown*.

VERA

And you were up for the same part?

DAVE

Yeah. And the director came right out and said, “I need an *authentic* performance. I’m sorry.”

VERA

Huh! That kinda sucks.

DAVE

Yep. But it only ran that one weekend and then it got shut down.

VERA

Oh, yeah. The young guy complained about the director’s...attentions.

DAVE

Yep. And I’m sure his attentions were—

DAVE AND VERA (TOGETHER)

...*authentic*.

Laughter. Pause. They both remember to look at the script. VERA takes out a bag of potato chips from her tote bag, opens it and starts eating them. As an afterthought, she gestures to DAVE inviting him to have a potato chip.

DAVE

Nah. It’ll just make my mouth dry.

VERA

No, see, it does the opposite. Opera singers swear by potato chips.

DAVE

Huh?

VERA

The salt moistens your mouth by making you salivate. The grease lubricates your throat.

DAVE

Really?

VERA

Swear.

*DAVE shrugs and takes a few chips. They
chew and mentally review their lines.*

VERA

See?

DAVE

Not really. Hey, remember that guy who choked on a Cheese Doodle?

VERA

Oh, yeah! Cary? Charlie?

DAVE

Cory. Cory Singletary.

VERA

The show was...?

DAVE

That one where the guy dies.

VERA

Again, every play ever?

DAVE

Cory was off stage left pounding down the Doodles when one went right into his windpipe.

VERA

Oh, yeah. I remember hearing about this. Plugged it up tight.

DAVE

And the stage manager couldn't figure out why he was doing this (*The choking signal: hand over throat*).

VERA

Yeah, and the play was...?

DAVE

(*Tries to think. Still can't come up with it.*) Who knows? And old Cory is (DAVE *imitates this:*) staggering around, waving at the Stage Manager, who then hears Cory's cue and shoves his onstage. Here, you be the woman he has to choke to death.

VERA

What?

DAVE

Come on, I'll show you. It was hilarious!

VERA

You were there?

DAVE

Yeah! I was the *assistant* stage manager. (*New idea:*) Ooh, ooh! Back up. I'll be *me* backstage. You be Cory choking on the Doodle.

VERA

Why? What did you do?

DAVE

Here. Act like you're choking on a Cheese Doodle.

Reluctantly, "what the hell," VERA stands up and starts making choking and gagging noises.

DAVE

No, no! Remember, he couldn't make a sound! The Doodle was right up against his larynx. He just mimed that he was choking. Like this. (*He puts his hand up to his throat and looks wide-eyed. VERA follows suit.*) OK. Now. I go like this. (*He gets behind VERA and pulls a Heimlich maneuver.*)

VERA

Ow! What the hell are you doing?

DAVE

Sorry. Did I—?

VERA

(*Mocking him:*) Easy! I had a bypass two months ago! It's still kinda sore around here (*points to her midsection.*)

DAVE

Sorry. Anyway, it didn't work with Cory. And he's supposed to go out on stage and scream at the woman and then choke her. Like this— (*He goes to demonstrate. VERA backs away.*)

VERA

Not on your life.

DAVE

Okay. So the stage manager shoves Cory onstage anyway. He can't get anything out and he's looking desperate at the woman. She doesn't understand, and she starts running around the stage and he's chasing her going like this (*Makes the choking sign*). Just in the nick of time, the Doodle disintegrated. He can finally breathe! Except, he coughs and spews orange, er, Doodle slime all over the poor girl.

VERA

Don't demonstrate. In fact, sit down and change the subject. (*She rubs her sore midsection.*)

Pause.

DAVE AND VERA (TOGETHER)

Of Mice and Men!

DAVE

Poor Cory.

Silence as they eat more potato chips. Then:

VERA

(Finally deciding to confront Dave with this:) My husband had just *died*, Dave.

DAVE

Huh?

VERA

Your phone call.

DAVE

My—you mean after Joe died?

VERA

Yeah. *Just* after.

DAVE

I'm...not...?

VERA

Dave, I mean, trolling for widows is a little low.

DAVE

You—you think I was hitting on you?

VERA shrugs.

DAVE

I—it's called being nice. I thought that you might like to talk.

VERA

Over dinner.

DAVE

Well, yeah!

VERA

Did you think I was so out of the game that I wouldn't know a date when one is thrown at me?

DAVE

I can't believe this! I tried to be a nice guy. I thought—

VERA

You mean you never thought, “oh, Vera’s really vulnerable right now. She might need a slap and tickle with good old Dave”? That wasn’t even thought about?

DAVE

Boy, you’re a tough room to play. I really thought I was extending an offer of friendship.

VERA

I—really?

DAVE

Yes ! What? Surprised that old Dave isn’t always thinking with “Old Reliable” down there?

VERA

Well, I guess it’s *possible*. Look, I’m sorry. But I was pretty raw for a while.

DAVE

Yeah. Look, I get it.

VERA

I’m not sure dinner with you was what I needed about then.

DAVE

Um, I said, *I get it*.

VERA

Okay. But, you know, *now*—

CHUCK comes back in, interrupting Vera’s attempt to suggest a date with Dave.

DAVE

So?

CHUCK

Who knows? He asked me to do it about five different ways. I think I was brilliant in about three.

DAVE

Five different ways?!!

CHUCK

To show that you're "open to direction."

DAVE

But *five*? For a shit one-day part?

CHUCK

Look: give them credit for caring.

DAVE

Okay. You're right.

VERA

No. You are right. Sometimes we forget. Caring about the details is what it's all about.

Pause.

VERA, CHUCK AND DAVE (TOGETHER)

Fosse.

*They have a moment of blissful reverie.
Perhaps Vera and Chuck even get up and do
a few "Fosse" moves (jazz hands, gyrations)
and then wince from their respective pains).*

VERA

Oh, God. My one Fosse audition. For—what was the last thing he did?

CHUCK

Big Deal.

VERA

Big Deal. I took the bus to New York, stood in line for God knows how long, and he friggin' saw me! And when I left—

CHUCK

You thought, "that's what I dreamed of."

VERA

Yep.

CHUCK

I went up for that show, too. God, scared? But thrilled.

DAVE

Thrilled! I did too.

CHUCK

You couldn't dance.

DAVE

Yep. Of course I got cut. And you know what he said to us losers? "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for sharing your talents. I'm sorry to say that I can't use you in this particular show."

CHUCK

Class!

VERA

Respect!

DAVE

Best day of my professional life, maybe.

They bask in the reflection of the memory.

VERA

Of course, I lied on my resume to get in the door.

DAVE

Me, too.

CHUCK

Yep.

DAVE

(*To VERA:*) What did you say?

VERA

That I spent two years as a dancer on *Shindig*.

CHUCK

Jesus! How old *are* you? *Shindig* was certainly before my time.

VERA

I know. And I was so stupid I didn't know Fosse worked in Hollywood and knew, like *everybody*. (To Chuck:) What did you lie about?

CHUCK

That I was in the road show of *Pippin*

VERA

Did you even know Fosse *directed Pippin*?

CHUCK

No. But I thought, "Fosse will cast me, you know, because I just did *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* in high school!"

VERA

Yeah, that's a real heavy dance show....(To DAVE:) And what did *you* tell Mr. Fosse?

DAVE

That I always wanted to work with a genius.

VERA AND CHUCK (TOGETHER)

Really?

DAVE

Yep.

VERA

And—?

DAVE

Let's just say I didn't get cut as quick as either of you. And *I* can't dance.

CHUCK

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why the theater is a bitch.

VERA

Show business is a bitch. Not just theater.

DAVE

(To VERA:) That's right. You did do that one movie, and then—

VERA

Excuse me. I did a few.

CHUCK

You were great in *Roman Fever*. Best Actress award if I remember?

DAVE

Really?

VERA

Nomination. Daytime Emmys. My little local PBS movie put me up against Afternoon Specials. Didn't have a chance. That woman from *Little House on the Prairie* won.

DAVE

For what?

VERA

Who knows? Her kid dropped out of school, or did angel dust or murdered somebody...I forget.

CHUCK

Still it should have led to bigger things.

VERA

Yeah, well...

DAVE

Well, you got that lead in the one with the werewolf loose on a train. What was it called?

VERA

Werewolf on a Train.

CHUCK

Excellent. Tell the public what it's getting, I say.

DAVE

You were his final victim, right? You were this wolf expert who happened to be taking a train with a werewolf loose on it.

CHUCK

What are the odds?

VERA

Pretty bad for my character, as it turned out. And for everyone else who went before me. Let's see, there was the shy priest who caught me taking my top off in my sleeper car, the hunky conductor who took my top off before we did it in my sleeper car, and of course, the doctor.

DAVE

He didn't get to take your top off?

VERA

Oh, indeed he did. You see, I had a near-death tussle with the werewolf but survived the first attack. The doctor had to take my top off to make sure that I wasn't wounded, you know, in the boobs.

DAVE

Very considerate.

VERA

Yeah, the werewolf got him before me, though.

CHUCK

You fought off the werewolf bravely as I remember.

VERA

Right. But not before he—

VERA, CHUCK AND DAVE (TOGETHER)

Got your/my top off.

CHUCK

God! Men are pigs!

DAVE

No, now, not all men are pigs. And not all women are saints.

VERA

Agreed.

DAVE

Just last year a woman, well, she made me feel violated during an audition.

VERA

(Drily:) Do tell.

DAVE

It was a Zoom audition.

All three groan in disgust.

CHUCK

God, I hate those.

DAVE

Anyway, I was auditioning for this really great part. He was a kind of suave older lover. Kinda like Sam Elliott.

CHUCK and VERA exchange a look.

DAVE

And the casting director, a *woman*, kept asking me to stop and then try it a different way. Oh, and by the way, she was not on camera. Well, I'm thinking, *I must be on the fast track if she's spending this much time with me.* Then I heard, well, little noises.

CHUCK

What kind of noises?

DAVE

(To CHUCK:) Like, she was enjoying my audition a little too much. Here, you be me and I'll be her.

CHUCK

Hell, no. I have a callback. The last thing I need is another improv with you, Mr. Rough Stuff.

DAVE

I promise I'll be gentle.

CHUCK

Heard that before.

DAVE

OK. Vera, you be me.

VERA

Oh, again with the non-traditional casting. (*Sighs.*) OK.

DAVE

(*VERA:*) My line was "I still believe I can love again." Say it like you're me.

VERA

"I still believe I can love again."

DAVE

(*As the female casting director:*) Oh, Ohhhh. Yes Try it again. Deeper voice. And slower,.
Much slower!

VERA

I

DAVE

Oh!

VERA

Still.

DAVE

OHHH!

VERA

Believe

DAVE

Mmmmmm!

VERA

I can—(*normal voice:*) OK. I get the picture.

DAVE

The noises became—more rapid and then, I swear, a final *crescendo*, if you follow. And then, here's the worst part. She whispers, "Thanks. That was great," and then just hangs up!

VERA

Disgusting. But now I guess you know what it's like.

DAVE

Did that ever happen to you?

VERA

I don't think any guy ever, you know, pleased himself. Well, probably. But not in my presence. But, I mean, why do you think that creepy werewolf producer kept hanging around the set on naked booby days? (*Shivers.*) And, yes, he flashed his gold medallion and hairy chest and suggested that I might not get more work if I weren't, you know, *cooperative*. And then gestured toward my dressing room.

DAVE

What happened?

VERA

(*Sarcastic:*) I did what you did back then. (*Seeing the men's surprise:*) No, not that. The fallback was always to point to a big stagehand and say, "I'll have to ask my boyfriend. He's pretty jealous."

CHUCK

Do you think they had anything to do with—you know...

VERA

What the “slowdown” in my career? Because I didn’t let them see the rest of me? No! Maybe. I don’t know. Who cares....(*But she does.*) I’d like to think my lackluster career was not due to Norman Sunshine.

CHUCK

He was the producer?

DAVE

The guy who had like five wives and, what was it, twelve kids?

CHUCK

Yeah. Remember the jokes? (*Sings:*) “Let the Sunshine In!”

DAVE

(*Sings from “Put on a Happy Face”*) “Spread Sunshine all over the place...”

CHUCK

(*To VERA:*) Do you think if you had become Mrs. Sunshine things would have turned out differently?

VERA

Can you name any of the ex-Mrs. Sunshines?

CHUCK

Good point.

DAVE

(*After a reflective pause:*) I guess you’re right. I guess I should be like women do and reported that woman. But I didn’t.

CHUCK

Because you liked it.

VERA AND DAVE TOGETHER

What?

CHUCK

(To DAVE:) You liked it! You were Sam Elliott! You made an impact on an audience. Okay, a gross one, but nevertheless...

DAVE

Now, look—

CHUCK

I'm not criticizing you. I get it! For a few—admittedly weird—minutes you were doing what we all want to do. Entertain an audience!

VERA

That's like saying that my taking my top off to turn on some straight-to-video creeps was somehow artistically rewarding for me?

CHUCK

No, of course not. But that's because you weren't acting. You were just stripping under the guise of acting.

VERA

Hey, wait a minute!

CHUCK

I'm saying it wrong. I just mean that Dave was playing a role and it turned someone on. She didn't ask him to drop his drawers.

DAVE suddenly looks sheepish. This registers with VERA and CHUCK.

CHUCK

You didn't.

DAVE

I didn't whip anything out. I just took my shirt off. And, kinda unbuttoned my top pants button.

VERA

God, who are you?

DAVE

It was relevant to the scene.

VERA

I give up.

CHUCK

Well, he's kind of right. Look, it's part of the business. I mean, once your werewolf movie went to video, don't you think that thousands of guys—and quite a few women—freeze framed your sexy scene and—(to DAVE:) Am I right?

DAVE

I...wouldn't say thousands. I mean it gets like half a star on Rotten Tomatoes.

CHUCK

You know what I mean!

DAVE

I do.

CHUCK

And, yes, it was gratuitous and cheesy and exploitative. And, you're right, you were acting. And, in some way you entertained an audience. And part of that entertainment meant taking your top off.

VERA

I'm still not sure what you're saying.

CHUCK

Oh, I'm just so tired of...everybody is getting so...What's wrong with sex? Sex is fun. Sex is healthy. Sex is life. I would have done nude, if anyone asked me. And, yes, if it turned the director on, so long as I thought it would also turn *an audience* on, I'd do it. But no one should do it just get the director or producer or whoever off privately.

DAVE

You did nude?

CHUCK

Did I say I did nude?

DAVE

(To VERA:) Isn't that what he said?

VERA

No.

DAVE

(*To CHUCK:*) But you would have?

CHUCK

Yeah.

DAVE

Really? With that body?

VERA

Oh, nice!

DAVE

No, I just mean—

CHUCK

No, Dave. Nobody asked me to then and I'm reasonably sure nobody would ask me now. Unless I'm in a morgue drawer on that crime series.

DAVE

Are they looking?

CHUCK

I—I'm not saying this right. I just am so damned confused about it all now. What's okay and what's not? Like, this young couple who went at it in that BBC drama then complained when somebody posted a clip of it on social media. But, if someone posted a clip of them doing a dramatic scene from a Scorsese movie they'd see it as free publicity. They were really good-looking, and the scene was *designed* to turn us on. I think you shouldn't be ashamed of your body.

VERA

You have a point.

VERA starts unbuttoning her blouse.

CHUCK

What are you doing?

VERA

Well, it's my choice. So I'm going to air them out.

DAVE AND CHUCK (TOGETHER)

Are you--? No!

They rush to cover her in case she takes her top off.

VERA

(*Mocking CHUCK:*) "Sex is fun!" "Sex is healthy!" "I think you should love your body!"

CHUCK

You're twisting me all around.

VERA

So, Dave can take his shirt off to pleasure a horny casting director, and that's okay.

CHUCK

No, that's not okay. I'm still trying to process that anyone would want him to take his shirt off, much less drop trou.

DAVE

Yeah? And when's the last time you turned someone on with that bag of sag you call a body?

VERA

Hey! Hey! Stop! This is not helpful! God! What are we doing? We're three professionals sitting here ready to strip naked! And all for one of us to get a three-line part!

They look up. The unseen assistant has appeared. VERA talks in the assistant's direction.

VERA

Ready for me? (*Assistant says yes.*) OK.

She stands up and immediately winces from where DAVE gave her the Heimlich. She glares at him, turns, smiles broadly at the unseen assistant, and exits.)

DAVE

Seriously, do you think I can play gay?

CHUCK

Seriously, I have no idea.

DAVE

Well! I thought you would have more insight! I realize being gay isn't just the physical act. It's an entire...um....panoply of characteristics.

CHUCK

Please. Fill me in. What is my panoply of characteristics?

DAVE

Well, I mean, how do you present your *authentic self*?

CHUCK

Gimme a break.

DAVE

No, I mean it. Don't be a homophobe.

CHUCK

I'm sorry?

DAVE

You can be a self-hating gay person, you know.

CHUCK

I've heard tell.

DAVE

Well, do you feel that being gay is just about sleeping with men?

CHUCK

God, I hope not. That would mean I haven't been gay for three years.

DAVE

I'm trying to have a serious discussion.

CHUCK

No, you're not. You're trying to mine me for something because you're going after that replacement thing, aren't you?

DAVE

The--?

CHUCK

Yep. Dave, seriously. I'm trying to be your friend here. You're not going to get the part.

DAVE

Wow! That's pretty harsh!

CHUCK

Not as harsh as nearly screwing up the work of the best hip specialist in the Valley!

DAVE

I wasn't trying to hurt you! But now you're trying to psych me out about going for that gay role.

CHUCK

I am not.

DAVE

You're going out for it, aren't you? That's it.

CHUCK

That is not it. I am not going out for it. I'm not right for the part.

DAVE

Why?

CHUCK

Because...I...*we're* too old.

DAVE

(After a pause:) Wow. You're homophobic and ageist.

CHUCK

I'm not. The part says, "forties to fifties."

DAVE

I can still—

CHUCK,,

Okay. Okay. Whatever.

DAVE

Don't "whatever" me. Tell me!

CHUCK

I just did.

DAVE

What?

CHUCK

They want someone younger.

DAVE

No, they want someone who can "read" forties to fifties.

CHUCK

Okay, Dave. I don't want to have this discussion. I would leave, but believe it or not, the young one out there said they want me to stay.

DAVE

They—? So, do you think that means you have the part?

CHUCK

No. Well, not yet.

DAVE

Did you do it...gay?

CHUCK

What?

DAVE

You know. Should I see Mr. Eterno as gay?

CHUCK

Sure.

DAVE

No, really.

CHUCK

Jesus H. Christ! It's a dinky part in a sci-fi thing! Do whatever you want!

VERA returns.

VERA

(Looking back at the "assistant":) Happy to. I have the whole afternoon. Of course, unless Netflix calls. But they said they might go a different way. *(Laughs. Sees that the joke doesn't land with the "assistant.")*. Yeah, well...I really like your tattoo...(To CHUCK AND DAVE:) Hello, boys. Still strolling down Memory Lane?

DAVE

How'd it go?

VERA

Yep. Asked me to do it five ways. I was a good little girl and gave them "sexy" Eterno, "robotic" Eterno, batshit crazy Eterno... *(Suddenly very tired:)* Why am I doing this?

CHUCK

Come on. We're all in the same boat.

DAVE

Hey, they asked you to stay...

VERA

True. And, I guess I'm just glad it's not the hundredth audition for Alzheimer's medication. I mean, I'm not that friggin' old!

DAVE

Tell that to Chuck.

VERA

What?

CHUCK

No. I didn't say you were old.

DAVE

He said I was.

CHUCK

I did not. I said you were not right for a particular part!

VERA

Oh, you mean the gay thing?

CHUCK

No!

DAVE

He said I was too old.

CHUCK

I said *we* were too old for *that part*. Jesus, could you drop it?

VERA

Well, after being interviewed by the teen dream team, I for one am feeling old.

CHUCK

I know. God, if one more young person asks if I was at the Stonewall Riots...I feel like saying "Yes, and I stormed the Bastille, too."

A shared laugh. The "assistant" has entered and wants DAVE.

DAVE

(To the "assistant"): Me? Okay.

CHUCK

(Genuinely:) Knock 'em dead.

DAVE exits. An awkward silence.

VERA

So, who's going to say it first?

CHUCK

What?

VERA rolls her eyes.

CHUCK (CONTINUED)

Oh. Why don't we say it together?

VERA

(Considers this, then nods.) Okay. Count of three?

CHUCK

Okay.

VERA AND CHUCK (TOGETHER)

One. Two. Three.

VERA

CHUCK

I've missed you.

I hate Dave, too.

They are, naturally, surprised.

VERA AND CHUCK (TOGETHER)

Huh?

VERA

I thought—never mind.

CHUCK

No, it's okay. I just didn't think we were going to—

VERA

No. Let's not. We need to concentrate.

CHUCK

On saying "Welcome"? Please. Just...go ahead. Say what you were going to say.

VERA

I just... You look great, by the way.

CHUCK

Oh, you do too!

VERA

Yeah...well, anyway...

CHUCK

What?

VERA

I just don't know what happened.

CHUCK

I don't think anything, really. I mean, it's so hard these days. Everybody in their own little pods. I just guess it's been a long time, but it's nobody's—

VERA

(Flaring:) It's your fault, dammit!

CHUCK

Huh?

VERA

Yours! I didn't do anything!

CHUCK

What did I do?

VERA

You—okay. When Joe died, I really thought you'd do more than just attend the funeral.

CHUCK

Oh.

VERA

I mean, look: you and Steve was really there when Joe was sick, but then you seemed to just...I don't know...

CHUCK

We were going through our own stuff.

VERA

I'm sure.

CHUCK

No, we were.

VERA

Like what?

CHUCK

Like breaking up.

VERA

You—? You and Steve aren't—?

CHUCK shakes his head.

VERA (CONTINUED)

Oh, God. I'm sorry. (*Pause.*) Wait. I'm not that sorry. I got a dead husband. That's beats a divorce ten ways!

CHUCK

You're right.

VERA

I mean, it just seemed so cold of you.

CHUCK

I've become a very cold person.

VERA

Really?

CHUCK

Not cold. Numb?

VERA

Yeah. Numb. That feels about right. And I keep thinking if I could just get back into something terrific. I don't care if it's some dumpy theater in a strip mall. Or this ridiculous Eterno thing. Just to be in front of an audience or a camera. Being somebody else for a couple of hours.

CHUCK

Being somebody else...Like not the shitty friend who didn't help you through.

VERA

It's okay. Now that I chewed you out it's all better.

CHUCK

No, it's not. Look, I don't know about you, but I'm beginning to get real tired of reading the obits and realizing I worked with these people. So, before one of us croaks, let's be friends again.

VERA

Sure.

CHUCK

No, I mean it. Once a week. Drinks and dinner. But gluten free and mocktails.

VERA

Fuck that shit. Dirty martinis and rib-eyes.

CHUCK

I just said *before* we croak, not "let's hasten our demise."

VERA

Okay. (*Pause*). Why do you hate Dave?

CHUCK

Oh. I don't hate him. I thought you did.

VERA

Why?

CHUCK

Well, you know, him not remembering about propositioning you? Bumping you for Marta Flavin and those twins?

VERA

(Laughs:) You really think some horny dude not remembering him hitting on me thirty years ago would make me hate him?

CHUCK

It would if it were me.

VERA

Do you hate all the guys who don't remember they tried to get you in the sack?

CHUCK

(Long pause.) Yes.

VERA

(Laughs.) Well, that still doesn't explain why you hate Dave. Oh—wait... Did you--?

CHUCK

What? Ew! No!

VERA

He was pretty cute in *Picnic*.

CHUCK

I wasn't in *Picnic*. And I did not proposition Dave.

VERA

I don't know. If he propositioned me now, I'd consider it.

CHUCK

Oh, God.

VERA

Well, it's been a while, if you know what I mean.

CHUCK

Unfortunately, I do.

VERA

So?

CHUCK

So what?

VERA

Why do you hate Dave?

CHUCK

Oh, I don't know. He's so...out there in the world still. He—still sees himself as, well, not young, but still in the game. Maybe he's just getting laid more than you and me.

VERA

No, he just has that Dave thing.

CHUCK

Ego?

VERA

No. Confidence. Persistence. What we need to sell ourselves every friggin' time we go out for a role. I thought after I got this much experience under my belt, and a few decent credits, it would get easier.

CHUCK

It's the anger for me.

VERA

What anger?

CHUCK

That things are passing me by.

VERA

I know. Gotta fight it, though.

CHUCK

I know.

VERA

Be more like Dave.

CHUCK

Um...I wouldn't go that far. (*Sigh:*) Dave isn't a bad guy. I don't hate him. Hey, I really am sorry.

VERA

Oh, well, if nothing else came from this ridiculous day, maybe it was worth it. Not to hate you.

CHUCK

So you did, huh?

VERA

Kinda.

DAVE enters, high energy.

DAVE

(*To "assistant":*) Great! Thanks! Glad you like it! (*To VERA and CHUCK:*) Hi, kids!

CHUCK

(*Mock teenager:*) Hi, Skippy! Did you make junior varsity?

DAVE

Well, they want to see me again.

VERA

God! I almost wish they'd send me home! We're still in this hallway and none of us have moved forward.

DAVE

Au contraire. We're still in the game!

CHUCK and VERA smile at each other.

CHUCK

I gather you're called back as well?

DAVE

Indeed.

VERA

Any word on when we'll be let back into the chamber of secrets?

CHUCK

Yeah, these damn chairs are killing my back.

DAVE

I don't know. But they seemed to like my choices.

CHUCK

Like?

DAVE

Yeah, I suggested that Mr. Eterno was kinda like that old Latino guy with the pecs.

VERA

Fernando Lamas?

CHUCK

No, the one on *Fantasy Island*.

VERA

Oh, yeah.

*They all try to remember the name. Finally
they give up.*

DAVE

Hey, did either of you see that thing that Matt did?

CHUCK

Matt—?

VERA

Matt Malone.

DAVE

Formerly MacIlhenny.

CHUCK

He was in a thing?

VERA

Yes! Eight episodes!

CHUCK

What is a “thing”?

DAVE

Oh. You know. Streaming thing. Tutu, YouHoo, something..

VERA

Hulu

DAVE

Right. Hulu.

VERA

Eight episodes!

DAVE

I hear it got absolutely trashed by the critics.

VERA

Yeah, but with the leads being, um, you know, that guy with the mole and the girl whose eyebrows don't match...I mean, those are some big stars.

DAVE

All of us have had our critical disappointments..

CHUCK

(Rolls his eyes at DAVE. Then, to VERA:) What did Matt play?

VERA

He was some old guy who sits on his boat. Every time the guy with the mole walks down the dock, Matt would get this creepy closeup and say, *(Creepy voice:)* “the sea takes its own sweet time.”

CHUCK

Did you watch all eight episodes?

VERA

God, no. I just saw Matt’s clip on his website.

CHUCK AND DAVE (TOGETHER)

Ugh! Websites!

VERA

I know.

DAVE

(To Vera:) I saw yours. Nice.

VERA

Thanks.

DAVE

I like the shot of us from *The Precious Damsels*.

VERA

The Learned Ladies.

DAVE

Whatever. Hey, can I get a copy of that shot for my website?

VERA

Um, you right click on my website, and there you go.

DAVE

There I go, what?

VERA

You can copy the picture. It's not encrypted.

DAVE

I don't know what you're talking about. I have this kid who does mine.

VERA

So do I, but I know how to copy an image from a website.

DAVE

Good for you.

VERA

Just give the photo credit, or the photographer will burn your ass.

DAVE

Hey, what year was *The Precious Damsels*?

VERA

Learned Ladies. (Thinking:) Um...it was the year I had my eyes done.

CHUCK

Is the picture before or after?

VERA

After. Dr. Kantler surgically removed the bags under my eyes a month before rehearsals.

CHUCK

(Looks closely at her eyes:) Then what are those?

VERA

(Witheringly:) They come back. If I get this lousy three-line part I might actually be able to afford to be "Kantlerized" again.

DAVE

I think you look good.

CHUCK

Yeah.

VERA

Guys, it's okay. I am a character woman. In show biz that means I don't have to look anything other than about twenty years younger than my actual age.

The three look up, wearily, as it seems that the unseen casting assistant has said they're breaking for lunch.

ALL THREE

Lunch?

DAVE

Holy crap.

CHUCK

I didn't bring anything except my mid-day pills.

The casting assistant says that they'll be back at one.

VERA

Alright. Yeah, we'll be back by one. *(To CHUCK and DAVE:)* Wanna grab something around the corner?

CHUCK

It's got to be something without dairy.

DAVE suddenly stands up with barely contained rage.

DAVE

(To the casting assistant:) No. Hey, don't walk away! No! I'm going to do my lousy, stinking three lines again right here, right now. Get back here!

He mimes dragging the ASSISTANT to the center of the stage.

You're going to listen *once again* for my brilliant rendition of this stupid, fucking, demeaning one-day part. Then you can cross me off the list and I can go home!

VERA and CHUCK react with surprise, then catch DAVE's fervor.

VERA

(To casting assistant:) Me, too!

CHUCK

Um...okay. Me too! *(To himself:)* My agent will kill me...

(Suddenly, with resolve, to the assistant:) Sit down and listen, Goddammit!

DAVE collects himself, "prepares," and is about to begin when it's clear he's struggling for the first line.)

DAVE

Oh, shit. What's the first line?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The scene is a half hour later. DAVE is seated, holding his head in his hands, humiliated. VERA is eating a salad out of a to-go plastic dish. CHUCK is taking his pills and washing them down with bottled water. VERA offers CHUCK a roll, which he starts to refuse and then accepts it. They chew pensively.

VERA

It happens to everyone sooner or later. (*To herself:*) Boy, it's been a long time since I've said *that* to a man...

CHUCK

I think it's great. I think we made a real impression.

DAVE

Yeah. I proved that I can't remember three lines.

VERA

Look, you just—you followed your instincts. You demanded a little dignity for us all.

CHUCK

Yeah. At least we didn't get canned. We're still here.

VERA

And we did let the little shit go get falafel.

CHUCK

How do you know it's a falafel?

VERA

Just made it up. Looks like a vegan.

CHUCK

True!

DAVE

What does a vegan look like?

VERA

CHUCK

Pasty-faced.

Skinny.

DAVE

Again, why are we still here?

VERA

If we leave now, while they're on lunch break, they've won.

A pensive silence.

CHUCK

(To DAVE, encouragingly:) Tell us a story.

DAVE

What?

CHUCK

Come on. You've got a million of them. Pick one. Vera and I will play the other parts.*(To DAVE after looking conspiratorially at VERA, to encourage her to boost DAVE's spirits:)* What about the time you saved that production of *La Mancha*?

DAVE

You've heard that a hundred times.

CHUCK

I think only ninety-nine. Let's go for the even hundred.

DAVE

Nah.

VERA

Come on. As I recall, the guy playing Don Quixote—

DAVE

Norman Binford.

VERA

—Right. Binford went out on the town one night.

CHUCK

(*Warming to the story:*) And got royally tanked. Wound up in some fleabag, totally naked, wallet gone. This is before cell phones, right? So, he has to pull the sheet over him. (*To DAVE:*) Go on. You be Binford.

DAVE

Nah. I'm just gonna leave, I think.

VERA

No! We can't give in! Goddammit, one of us is going to get this crappy little part or that kid isn't making it out of here alive.

Another pensive silence.

CHUCK

Hey, did anyone see Valerie in that indie thing?

VERA

Valerie Suarez or Valerie Longbottom?

DAVE

Who is Valerie *Longbottom*?

VERA

Real name. I swear. She thought keeping her real name made her a "serious actress." Like (*makes a face:*) Meryl Streep and Swoosie Kurtz.

CHUCK

I meant Valerie Suarez.

DAVE

I saw it. She was pretty good. (*Catching himself, to VERA:*) You would have been better, of course.

VERA

Good save. Valerie got the call. I did not.

DAVE

Sorry. Anyway, she plays this psycho killer who is getting back at the Salvation Army Santa who attacked her years earlier. She has spent years infiltrating the Salvation Army. She rises in the ranks, all the while perfecting her plan. See, she has implanted explosives in all the Christmas kettles and has a timing device that will make them go off at exactly midnight on Christmas Eve. Her plan is going perfectly until—

CHUCK

I asked if you *saw* it. That's all I asked.

DAVE

I thought you wanted me to tell you a story.

CHUCK

Not a movie synopsis. A *story*. You know, about someone we worked with.

VERA

OK, look. (*Looks at her watch or phone:*) It's five minutes till they come back from lunch. Let's get it all out.

DAVE

What all out?

VERA

Every single thing we hate about this racket.

CHUCK

Five minutes? Can't be done.

VERA

No. Rapid fire I'll start, but let's get a real head of steam up. Ready?

CHUCK and DAVE look quizzical, but nod.

VERA

I'll go. What's with this "Thank you, 10," "Thank you, Places" thing?

This ignites DAVE and CHUCK.

DAVE AND CHUCK

Oh God/Yeah!

DAVE

So instead of just yelling “thank you” to the stage manager when they say “five minutes,” why do we have to say “Thank you *five*?”

CHUCK

For the same reason they have to take the damn phones out of their hands before they go on set.

VERA

Yeah— they yell at us to keep on schedule, time is money. Meanwhile, how many takes are ruined because a phone goes off? And not just the background people, the stars!

CHUCK

Phones. I swear, has there been a time in the last five years that a phone *hasn't* gone off in the audience during a show?

DAVE

I had one jerk watching a Dodgers game. I'm acting my ass off and this jerk suddenly yells, “safe!”

VERA

Yeah, and I'll bet if someone glared at him, he looked back like, “what?”

CHUCK

And the repeaters!

VERA

The what?

CHUCK

The ones who repeat every joke. (*To DAVE:*) Do your favorite punch line. From *The Odd Couple*.

DAVE

“You stupid idiot—you don't even know it's linguini!”

CHUCK

(As a boorish audience member, laughing:) He don't even know it's linguini!! *(Laughs raucously.)*

VERA

I prefer the repeaters over the "what'd he say"-ers.

DAVE

Every important moment of every drama. You take a pause and—

VERA

"What'd he say?" "He said his mother is dead." "Deaf?" "Dead!" "Who's dead?" "His mother!"

CHUCK

And will somebody tell our fellow actors that when they see one of us in a show, they don't have to hoot and holler at curtain call like you're at a Monster Truck rally. Just clap!

DAVE

And stop with the standing ovations! Believe it or not, we *know* whether we're in a show that sucks or not.

VERA

(Checking her watch or phone:) Three minutes. Intimacy coordinators.

DAVE AND CHUCK

Aughh!

DAVE

(Starting to get hot under the collar:) Taking money for telling people whether they can kiss.

CHUCK

It's like, "do I have permission to put my hand on your shoulder?" "No."

DAVE

(A new gripe:) Why do we have to submit video auditions? I had to buy a green screen and a key light and all this shit and fit it into my little apartment...

CHUCK

When did you sell your house?

DAVE

After I couldn't keep the mortgage payments up, that's when. (*Back to bitching:*) And why is CGI and AI and all the other I's taking the place of *actors and props* and—

CHUCK

(*Still surprised that DAVE sold his house, to DAVE:*) So where are you now?

DAVE

In Santa Monica.

CHUCK

California?

DAVE

Yeah.

CHUCK

You're here full time now?

DAVE

Yeah.

CHUCK

And you like it?

DAVE

No! I just got tired of spending all that money to fly across the country only to be kicked to the curb. And New York ain't New York anymore.

CHUCK starts to talk.

DAVE

Wait. I've got more. Trigger warnings.

VERA AND CHUCK

Aughh!

CHUCK

I actually saw a sign in the lobby of a show that warned the audience there might be "small amounts of vomit." They meant onstage, but believe me, the show itself was pretty nauseating.

VERA

How 'bout the decline of real critics in real newspapers? Now you get "I'm not a critic but I'm going to review your show for this stupid website" dot com!

VERA

Hey – whatever happened to actors' bios in the program that just tell us what they've done? What are the most overused words in the actors' program bios?

DAVE

"I'm thrilled to be in this awesome show!" "I'm ecstatic to be working with this amazing cast!"

CHUCK

"I want to thank God!"

VERA

Just say what you were in, what awards you won and stop thanking everybody from your first voice teacher to the son of God!

CHUCK

And nobody stays in a show for the whole run. As soon as they add the credit, they're off to another show.

DAVE

If they're lucky.

VERA

And nobody wants to just stay and get the work done. You just hit a moment and you know it's not working and the stage manager calls "time." Back in the day we just sent the stage manager or whoever home, put on our coats and went to the director's house or some loft so we could get a moment right before we lost it. But now, God forbid anyone wants to do that! I *love* rehearsing! I mean, you only have a few weeks to put a whole play on—that's never enough time! And forget about TV and movies. They want you to be perfect on the first take. *No* rehearsal.

CHUCK

Unless they ask you to do it five different ways.

They take a collective pause.

VERA

(Checks time:) One minute.

CHUCK

I'm spent.

DAVE

Me, too.

VERA

OK, then: five minutes of why we love this.

Long, reflective silence as each tries to find an answer.

CHUCK

(Finally:) Are we blacksmiths?

DAVE and VERA look at him, not getting it.

DAVE

Huh?

CHUCK

Blacksmiths. Once the Model T came in nobody needed blacksmiths. Obsolete overnight. Highly trained to do something that nobody wants.

DAVE

That's pretty grim.

CHUCK

Well, think about it. We've been spending the past few hours looking back at our glory days. Bitching about things that we don't understand. We're blacksmiths. This gig is like what the blacksmiths were forced to do. If they were young enough, they could train to be mechanics and go work in a garage. Otherwise, they were forced to work at racetracks, farms...with long stretches of no work.

Silence.

VERA

Well, that's not how I wanted this five minutes to go.

DAVE

Me neither. (*With sudden resolution:*) Let's go.

VERA and CHUCK react.

DAVE (CONTINUED)

I mean it. If we can't even come up with one reason why we should stay, let's just bag it.

CHUCK

Is this Dave talking? Mister "I'm still in the game"?

DAVE

(*Dramatic pause.*) The game, my friends, is over.

VERA

(*A sudden revelation.*) Oh, my God.

CHUCK AND DAVE

What?

VERA

Shame on us! Shame, shame!

CHUCK AND DAVE

What, what?

VERA

Here we are bitching about loving to rehearse, needing time and what have we been doing all this time?

CHUCK

Aging rapidly.

VERA

No, I mean, what have we been doing since we got here?

DAVE

Waiting.

VERA

Exactly.

CHUCK

Um, why is that shameful?

VERA

Because we weren't doing anything to prepare!

CHUCK

For a shitty three-line part?

VERA

Exactly! Shame on you!

CHUCK

Hey!

VERA

(*To DAVE:*) What exactly have you been doing to prepare for this role?

DAVE

I tried out different line readings—

VERA

Line readings! Amateur!

DAVE

Hey! Nobody calls me an amateur!

VERA

I'm one too!

CHUCK

Vera, you want to cut the dramatic acting coach bit? What are you talking about?

VERA

(*To DAVE:*) Get up.

DAVE

Huh?

VERA

On your feet.

DAVE stands, mystified.

VERA

(*To CHUCK:*) You too. Stand next to Dave.

CHUCK does.

VERA

Okay. Now. Chuck, you're Mr. Eterno. Show me what you've worked on.

*CHUCK reluctantly strikes a "mysterious"
– and hokey – pose opposite DAVE.*

VERA

What are you doing?

CHUCK

I'm Mr. Eterno.

VERA

No. You're that lousy actor who played my werewolf. Stop posing.

CHUCK drops the pose.

VERA

Okay. Now. Who is Mr. Eterno?

CHUCK

A chance to get off unemployment.

VERA

Stop! No jokes! Who is Mr. Eterno?

CHUCK

I—I guess I don't know.

VERA

Okay. Sit down and think about it. *(To DAVE:)* You're now Mr. Eterno. Be him. Welcome me.

DAVE takes a minute to "prepare." He then tries a sexy approach.

DAVE

(Sexily:) Welcome to the LoveLight Resort. Your every wish fulfilled. I'm Mister Eterno, your host. *(Breaking "character":)* Hey! I remembered the damn lines!

For a moment, there is a palpable attraction between VERA and DAVE.

VERA

Okay. That was something. So, why did Mr. Eterno come on to me?

CHUCK

I can answer that.

VERA

(Ignoring CHUCK:) No, I mean it. What was behind that?

DAVE

I—I think he—I—uses what he has to get people into the trap.

VERA

Yeah. What does he have?

DAVE

He—I—has this thing.

VERA

What thing?

DAVE

This sex thing he uses.

VERA

Okay. Now let's break it down. Let's see that. Again.

They face each other. There is a powerful connection that surprises both of them.

DAVE

(In his sexy attitude:) Welcome to the LoveLight Resort.

VERA suddenly turns away from him, as if the attraction is too strong. DAVE grabs her arm to stop her.

DAVE

(With intensity:) Your every wish fulfilled. *(He suddenly and tenderly draws VERA close to him:)* I'm Mister Eterno, your host.

They almost kiss. VERA then looks frightened and runs into CHUCK's arms. After a moment, she breaks character and is herself again.

VERA

That's what I'm talking about. *(To CHUCK:)* Your turn. You're Mr. Eterno. Who are you?

CHUCK

Well, I'm not turned on by Dave, just in case you're wondering.

VERA

Why not?

CHUCK

What?

VERA

Why don't you want to *act*, Chuck? Maybe Mr. Eterno *is* turned on by his latest victim.

CHUCK

What?

VERA

Be Mr. Eterno. Be whoever he's supposed to be, but *do* something. Don't just do line readings.

DAVE

If it helps, I'll try doing the gay thing.

CHUCK

Oh, for *God's sake!* (*Exasperated:*) Okay! Lay it on me, baby! Make me want you!

DAVE

Uh—ok. Um, what?

CHUCK

The “gay thing!” Do it! For God’s sake! So I never have to hear about it again!

DAVE

Uh, wait. (*He “prepares.”*) OK. (*Sexy? Mmm. Maybe. But he approaches CHUCK “seductively.”*) “Excuse me, but are you Mr. Eterno?”

CHUCK

(*Equallyl seductively:*) Yes. Welcome to the LoveLight Resort. (*A pause. CHUCK looks like maybe he is as turned on as VERA was. Finally, breaking character and using his hand to mime talking into a phone:*) Hi. Could you call maintenance? I think I’m about to barf.

DAVE

Hey!

CHUCK

OK, now that that’s over...

VERA

(*To CHUCK:*) That actually wasn’t fair. You weren’t in the scene.

CHUCK

I—?

VERA

Seriously. Dave was trying. You weren’t.

CHUCK

Jesus, I feel like I’m back at the Actors Studio.

VERA

Exactly! Now go!

CHUCK thinks a bit. He then throws his arms around a rather stunned DAVE. He is conspiratorial, like he's sharing a criminal secret. It's good.

CHUCK

Welcome to the LoveLight Resort! *(Then whispering in DAVE's ear:)* Your every wish fulfilled.

Both CHUCK and DAVE laugh conspiratorially.

CHUCK

(As if his name is obviously an alias:) I'm "Mister Eterno," your host.

CHUCK and DAVE break into laughter again. It continues for a while, and when they "break," they both beam with the satisfaction of doing a good job with the scene. They look to VERA for approval.

VERA

Good.

They look offstage in reaction to a noise. It is obvious that the assistant is back from lunch.

CHUCK

(Goes into the hall. To the unseen assistant offstage:) No, no. You caught us rehearsing for our next audition.? Come on, come back. We're ready to get back to Mr. or Ms. Eterno now. Come on. That's right.

Their eyes follow the "entrance" of the assistant.

DAVE

I...must apologize. You see, it was right before lunch, and I think my blood sugar went a little haywire.

VERA

No, it didn't. We just got a little testy. You see, each of us has a pretty good resume. We've performed in some very nice theatres and on some movies people actually came to see. Some people even recognize us from time to time. So, it gets a little under our skin when we're kept waiting.

DAVE

But that's all water under the bridge. We're all willing to jump back into the fray and audition.

The assistant appears to leave.

CHUCK

Hey! Don't leave.

DAVE

We want you to tell us why we're still here. Come on, you must have heard them talking. Is one of us the front runner?

Assistant appears to leave again.

CHUCK

No! You're staying here! Why are we still here?? *(A sudden idea, he changes his tone to something friendly:)* Wait! See, if you don't go, maybe they'll be forced to come out here to find you. That way we can save everybody some time.

DAVE

(Catching on:) Yeah. You'll be...our hostage.

Assistant must be scared by that.

VERA

(After looking askance at DAVE, to assistant:) Oh come here, darling. Don't—don't...don't be afraid. Don't—no, I'm not gonna...come here, darling. Come on. Just...stay here with us for a minute.

The assistant leaves.

CHUCK

Oh, for God's sake.

DAVE

Let's go.

CHUCK

No. I'm staying. Whoever gets this stupid part gets to do something that day other than play Wordle, decide whether to go to Aldi or Trader Joe's and wind up ordering in and watching fifteen hours of reality TV. I speak only for myself.

DAVE AND VERA

(Ruefully:) No/No you don't.

VERA

(To CHUCK:) Hey, cheer us up. Do your number.

CHUCK

What?

VERA

Your number. The one from your act.

DAVE

Oh, yeah!

CHUCK

Why?

VERA

Why not? Dave and I will be your backup.

CHUCK

Huh?

VERA

The doo-wop number.

DAVE

Yeah, give us the key.

CHUCK

(To DAVE and VERA:) Okay, start the shoo-doop-ee doobie doop.

CHUCK takes “center stage”, and DAVE and VERA move behind him. DAVE and VERA sing doo-wop and do some improvised backup moves. CHUCK sings:

CHUCK

Why don't you trust me?

And why when it's just me

And you

Do you shy away?

DAVE AND VERA

(Singing:) Why don't you trust me and why when it's just me and you do you shy away?

CHUCK

And

Why won't you date me?

And why do you rate me

A “two”?

We could fly away

If only for a day. Why don't you...

Fast tempo. DAVE and VERA change their backup moves to fit the beat.

Meet me around the corner at seven.

I'll take you for a pizza somewhere.

I promise I'll have you back by eleven

And if I don't I promise you you won't care!

I love your eyes, I love your nose,

I love your knees I love your toes

I love your highs I love your lows
I love your these I love your those—

*They notice that the ASSISTANT has entered
and fade out.*

CHUCK

Sorry. We were just killing time.

ASSISTANT complements him.

CHUCK

Thanks.

ASSISTANT says CHUCK is next.

CHUCK

Me? Well, if you liked what you just saw, why don't we go in as a group. We could improvise whatever they're looking for... Yes, that's right. All together.

DAVE

All together?

CHUCK

(Gets a sudden idea;) Yeah. I wonder if this character might be a sort of *Greek chorus*.

VERA

(Catching the fever:) Yeah. Kind of like the three witches in the Scottish play.

DAVE

(Finally getting it:) Oh, I think that could work. Three of us, all working; I mean all bringing something unique.

*The three form a circle and intone the lines
together.*

ALL THREE

Welcome to the LoveLight Resort. Your every wish fulfilled.

(In a fugue, one after the other:)

CHUCK

I'm Mister Eterno, your host.

VERA

I'm *Ms.* Eterno, your host.

DAVE

I'm Mister Eterno, your host.

CHUCK

And, here's another wacky thought. I wonder if this entire Greek chorus, say three actors, might be, um, expanded a bit.

DAVE

Yeah! Hey, what if they appear *throughout* the movie? You know, commenting on what's happening—

CHUCK

Maybe changing shape and morphing into other characters—

VERA

Yeah! (*To CHUCK and DAVE:*) Why don't we show this wonderful young person?

CHUCK and DAVE don't get it. The assistant moves to leave.

VERA CONTINUED

No, no. Stay. Just for a minute. Since that's all we seem to rate here, Mr. and Ms. Eterno will now present their entire careers, all in five minutes or less. (*To CHUCK and DAVE:*) I will begin. (*She takes a moment, then screams:*) There's a werewolf on the train! (*Looks at CHUCK and DAVE as if to say, "come on, improvise with me!"*)

CHUCK AND DAVE get it.

CHUCK

I'm a doctor. Take off your top.

DAVE

I'm the conductor. Take off your top.

VERA

(Screams:) But I'm afraid one of you is the werewolf!

The guys "morph" into werewolves. They "menace" VERA for a while, often aiming at her chest. Suddenly DAVE starts to choke.

VERA

The werewolf! He's choking!

CHUCK

What could it be?

VERA

I'm afraid to look!

CHUCK

(Peering cautiously at DAVE:) It appears to be—can it be? A Cheese Doodle? Try to get it out.

VERA

No! He might rip my throat out. Or at least rip my top off.

DAVE alternately goes for VERA's top and mimes choking. CHUCK gets behind him and does the Heimlich. DAVE mimes spewing all over VERA.

VERA

Oh, my God! Atomic Doodle slime! (To DAVE:) Quick! Take your top off!

DAVE

Huh?

VERA

Off!

DAVE begins to unbutton his shirt.

VERA

Wait! Let me smear this anti-werewolf cream on you!

VERA mimes smearing cream on DAVE's chest.

DAVE

(*Sexy:*) You do that really well.

CHUCK

(*To DAVE:*) Who do you think you are? The stud from *Picnic*? You're just that nerd next door from *Death of a Salesman*!

DAVE

(*Picking up the cue and becoming "Bernard":*) "C'mon, Biff, if you don't study, you'll never pass history!"

CHUCK

(*British accent:*) Biff? My good man, I am Sheridan Whiteside! Mind my wheelchair! (*Mimes losing control, just as VERA did in Act I, heads for VERA:*) Uh, oh, whoaaa!

VERA screams and mimes being hurt. She limps toward CHUCK, who drags her to her feet.

CHUCK

(*Marching in place A la Les Miz:*) "Do you hear the people sing? Singing the song of angry men..."

DAVE then hands VERA an imaginary Emmy award.

VERA

Hi, I'm Vera! Sue Beth couldn't accept this award since she's deep into shooting this season of *Little House*. I'm sure if she were here, she would like to thank the entire cast, crew and, of course, her Lord and Savior.

DAVE mimes "quieting" the audience as VERA and CHUCK mime taking selfies and scrolling through text during the following:

DAVE

(*To unseen audience:*) Welcome to the Arkansas Shakespeare Company. We hope you enjoy the show. And, please. While I'm doing my very touching monologue about my dead mother, feel free to receive or send texts, emails or phone calls. As long as I get a standing ovation!

CHUCK

(*Whooping:*) Woot, woot! “Greater than *King Lear*! Funnier than *Hello Dolly*!” says “I don’t know shit about theater but they gave me free tickets dot com!”

VERA

Oh, if only I’d let Norman Sunshine in. I might be a star today! Oh, why oh why?

The three start singing “Let the Sunshine In,” “You are the Sunshine of my Life” and “Sunshine on my Shoulder” cacophonously. They advance in a circle toward the assistant.

ALL THREE

Welcome to our lives in show business!

They take a bow and look expectantly at the assistant. The assistant insists that they only want CHUCK.

CHUCK

(*To assistant:*) What? No. I don’t think so. I mean it. It’s all three or nothing.

VERA

No. Go.

DAVE

What? I thought it was all three—

VERA

It’s fine. (*To assistant:*) Thanks for letting us try it out. (*To CHUCK:*) Knock ‘em dead.

CHUCK

(*To DAVE:*) Are you okay with this?

DAVE

No. But go.

CHUCK exits.

VERA

So. Are you seeing anyone since you've moved out here?

DAVE

Oh, you know, off and on.

VERA

Oh.

DAVE

Mostly off.

VERA

Yeah.

Pause.

VERA

Feel like grabbing a drink?

DAVE

(Getting her point:) Uh, yeah! You mean like, now?

VERA

Yes. I have a pitcher of margaritas in my purse. No. Just...some time.

DAVE

Yeah. *(He steels himself for a confession:)* Um. Yeah. I—it's not like I wanted to take advantage of you when Joe passed—

VERA

Died.

DAVE

What?

VERA

I hate "passed." You pass a class. You pass a kidney stone. You pass an old lady in the slow lane. When someone's heart gives out they *die*.

DAVE

Um, okay. What I mean is that I really didn't mean for you to think that I was hitting on you. But, if I'm being honest, I probably hoped that you, you know, did need a masculine shoulder.

VERA

(Laughs.) A masculine shoulder? This from someone who's wondering if he can play gay? Oh, my God!

DAVE

I—you're not going to let me off the hook, are you?

VERA

I just—I just marvel at your obsession with gender roles. I have a cousin named Jessica who has “masculine shoulders” but she's as girly as they come. That's not what I needed. I just needed no more complications or hidden motives. I just wanted to be sad, and angry and confused and mostly angry.

DAVE

I get it.

VERA

No. I'm saying that I'm still raw after all this time, so my “go to” emotion around men is usually kind of hostile. I'm sorry.

DAVE

It's alright.

VERA

Holy shit! You did it! You got *me* to apologize to *you*! You really are something, you know that?

DAVE

What did I do?

VERA

I am *not* sorry. And I am *not* sorry that I didn't know that Chuck and Steve split up.

DAVE

They did?

VERA

Yes.

DAVE

Oh. Gee. Maybe that's why I caught a vibe from him.

VERA

Oh. My. God.

DAVE

No, not a sex vibe. A kind of—sad vibe. Under the wisecracks. I mean, he's—we're all kind of at sixes and sevens.

VERA

You mean sixties and seventies, don't you?

DAVE

Okay, okay. I'm sorry.

VERA

Me, too.

*Silence as they wait for CHUCK to return.
Suddenly Vera begins to giggle, which turns
into full-blown laughter.*

DAVE

(Starts to laugh himself:) What?

VERA

Oh, just..."Caught a vibe."

DAVE

I told you, it wasn't a sexual thing.

VERA

I know. I just...(warmly:) I missed this.

DAVE

What?

VERA

Just three old hams telling war stories.

DAVE

All this while we wait for Godot in there.

VERA

Three characters in search of a paycheck.

CHUCK returns.

VERA

So?

CHUCK

So, I turned it down.

VERA

You what?

CHUCK

I said I thought the three of us was a great idea. They said the only idea they liked was making Mr. Eterno...a singing role. They were thinking of giving me a song.

DAVE

Wow! You might have a hit! It might be nominated for an Oscar.

CHUCK

I have to admit it, Dave. You have so much confidence you can actually share it with others.

VERA

Go back and say you'll take it.

CHUCK

Nah.

VERA

Go.

CHUCK

Yeah, it's just a crappy three-line part.

VERA

It's a chance to do what you were trained to do. A chance to be somebody else, remember?

DAVE

What you were *born* to do!

CHUCK

(*Genuinely touched.*) Gee, Dave. Are you sure you two are okay with this?

DAVE AND VERA

Yes.

CHUCK

Sure, sure?

DAVE AND VERA

Go!

CHUCK exits.

VERA

That was nice what you said.

DAVE

I meant it! He's good. *You're* good. Listen: thanks.

VERA

For what?

DAVE

For holding us up to a higher standard.

VERA

You make me sound like a Hebrew National hot dog.

DAVE

No. I mean it. We're artists. All this new stuff being thrown at us, it's just new stuff. It's the way it works. Remember when body mics started?

VERA

Oh, God. The moans and groans.

DAVE

And that was just while they strapped on those battery packs.

VERA

Yep. And, by the way, that was a new way for some of the boys to cop a quick feel trying to "adjust the wire."

DAVE

Really?

VERA

Oh, yeah. But you have a point. The old guard thought it was sacrilege. Along with video projections—

DAVE

Computers on the light board—

VERA

The more things change....So, you're up for a drink?

DAVE

Yeah.

VERA

And when Chuck wins his Oscar, he damn well better include us in his thank you.

DAVE

Right between his first acting coach and the Son of God.

CHUCK returns.

VERA

That was quick.

CHUCK

I have to go back in. They're getting my agent on the phone.

DAVE AND VERA

That is great/fantastic

CHUCK

(Sensing their disappointment, to VERA:) Maybe a dirty marty and some steak next week?

VERA

You're on.

DAVE

Can I come?

VERA and CHUCK look at each other.

CHUCK

Only if you promise to finish the story about Norman Binford.

DAVE

Oh! Yeah, well, see, he was all set to go on, when—

CHUCK

Save it for next week.

CHUCK starts to leave.

VERA

(Another sudden revelation:) Shame on us!

CHUCK

Again with the shame on us?

VERA

We really have forgotten what this business is all about.

CHUCK

Rejection?

DAVE

Heartache?

VERA

No! Well, yes. But what did we do before anybody knew who we were?

CHUCK

Wait tables.

DAVE

Write home for money.

VERA

No! Well, yes. But we had to get seen. We went to classes, we hung out at all the theatre hangouts hoping for inside info. We stood in line for hours to get a slot at a cattle call. *And...*

CHUCK

Rejection.

DAVE

Heartache.

VERA

Stop. No, we did *showcases*. (*To Chuck:*) What was that thing you did in the basement of that church?

CHUCK

(*Wistfully nostalgic:*) *Let Us Entertain You*. Two performances. *Backstage* said they thought I had something special.

VERA

(*To Dave:*) And how many NYU student films did you do?

DAVE

Let's see. There was *I'm In Love with Professor Morgan*, *I Slept with a Sophomore*, *A Kiss on the Brooklyn Bridge...*

VERA

And did you get anything from it?

DAVE

(*Wistfully nostalgic:*) The sophomore. Oh, you mean *work*? Yeah. I got my first agent.

VERA

See?

DAVE

Not really.

VERA

Look what we just did to land this part. And one of us did. We can't depend on casting directors who don't know us, or three-minute clips on our website, or whatever. We have to go back to square one.

CHUCK

So, our centuries of experience and rejection and work mean nothing?

VERA

Correct. But it never did. You're only as good as your last job. We all know that.

CHUCK

Oh, God. I'm just tired.

DAVE

I thought all this new stuff, the websites and the video auditions were what we were supposed to do.

VERA

That. Plus.... We have to showcase ourselves.

DAVE

Doing what?

VERA

What we just did, only expanded. Take each of the things we recreated for this little twerp and turn it into a showcase. We have all the material. All we need to do is expand it, refine it—

CHUCK

(*Unconvinced:*) —Get a director, find a venue...oh, and if you think I'll have extra money lying around to bankroll this...

DAVE

We'll scout around for somebody to finance the show. Maybe start a GoFundMe! Whatever that is.

VERA

No need. We've got the money.

DAVE

From where?

VERA

Let's say it's time that we had a little Sunshine in our lives.

DAVE AND CHUCK

What?/That old perv?

VERA

Look. I could spend the next ten year joining the Me Too brigade. I could make Mr. Sunshine's golden years a living hell in court until one of us dies like some modern-day *Bleak House*, or...I could just drag him out of retirement...or at least his money. I'll remind him of a few times when he invited himself into my dressing room, and...

CHUCK

Do you think he has any money left after all those wives?

VERA

Three of them are dead already.

CHUCK

Yikes, really?

VERA

Yep. Two from natural causes and one under investigation. I think we better hit the Sunshine Fund soon, though. What do you boys think?

CHUCK

I like it.

DAVE

I don't know. He's such a jerk. Would we really want "Norman Sunshine presents" on the program?

VERA

We can come up with a bogus production company.

CHUCK

How about Werewolf Productions?

They laugh.

DAVE

And I've got the title: "Reminds Me of a Story."

The assistant is calling CHUCK back in.

CHUCK

I gotta go. But you're both really okay about this?

VERA

Yes. And we'll start working on the showcase. Are you in?

CHUCK

Depends on how long I'm committed to this project.

VERA

Right so, after those three days, are you in?

CHUCK

Hey, I might have a song. I mean, do they call your agent for a three-line part?

DAVE

If the agent has anything to say about it. You in?

CHUCK

Yes.

CHUCK goes to leave. He turns back.

CHUCK

(Old Western character:) I reckon we might just have to work on them new-fangled autoMObiles now, eh partners?

All three laugh as...

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

Meet Me around the Corner

Voice: *D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ D Bm⁷*
 Why don't you trust me and why

Piano: *D³ Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷*

V. *Em⁷ A⁷+ D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷+ D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ Dmaj⁷ Bm⁷*
 when it's just me and you do you shy a - way? And why won't you date me and why

Pno.

V. *Em⁷ A⁷+ D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ D Bm⁷ Em⁷ Edim tacet accel.*
 do you rate me a two? We could fly a - way if on - ly for a day. Why don't you

Pno.

V. *D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ D Bm⁷*
 meet me a-round the cor-ner at se-ven? I'll take you for a pi-z-a some-where I pro-mise I'll have you back be-fore e -

Pno.

V. *Em⁷ A⁷ D A⁷ D⁶ D D⁷*
 le - ven and if I don't I pro-mise you you won't care! I love your eyes I love your nose I love your

Pno.

29 2

V. G Gm D D⁷ G Gm A⁷ D 3 Bm⁷

high I love your lows I love your knees I love your toes, I love your these I love your those why don't you meet me a-round the cor-ner at

Pno.

33 Em⁷ A⁷ D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷+ D 3 Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷

se-ven? Drop your cares and leave your cau-tion be-hind I pro-mise-I'll have you back a-round e le-ven. And if I

Pno.

38 D G⁷ D⁶ D D⁷ G 3 3 Gm

don't I pro-mise you you won't mind ! I think you're great, I think you're grand, I think it's hea-ven just hold-ing your hand, I pay the

Pno.

42 D D⁷ G Gm A⁷ D 3 Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷

checks, I'll hold the doors, I'll show you mine you show me yours! Why don't you meet me a-round the cor-ner at se-ven We're

Pno.

46 D Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ D 3 Bm⁷ Em⁷ A⁷+ D

on - ly gon - na go for a walk. I pro-mise I'll have you back a-round e - le - ven and if I

Pno.

50 D G⁷ D⁶ Gdim D

don't, I pro - mise you you won't balk! You won't balk!

Pno.