

CRUELTIES

written by
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SCENE ONE

SETTING: A house in Los Angeles, early
1980s.

AT RISE: The WRITER, 50s, male, stands at
the door, greeted by the EDITOR,
50s, female.

WRITER

Don't greet me yet.

EDITOR

No?

WRITER

Let me sit down first.

EDITOR

Oh! Look at you! Are you not well?

WRITER

Decidedly sick.

EDITOR

Sick, my, yes! Let me help you.

WRITER

Thank you. I hope this is not too unpleasant a surprise.

EDITOR

Unexpected.

WRITER

It was impromptu. I found myself at the airport and could not
think of a reason not to visit. It must decades. Decades, yes?

EDITOR

At least a decade. Since we ended our professional relationship.

WRITER

I suppose I should start by asking, are you still angry about that?

EDITOR

I was never angry about it. There.

WRITER

Thank you. Now you may greet me.

EDITOR

Hello.

WRITER

I have a better greeting to suggest.

EDITOR

Do you?

WRITER

Indulge me. It's Buddhist.

EDITOR

All right. What?

WRITER

Repeat: Who is it?

EDITOR

Who is it?

WRITER

That is dragging?

EDITOR

That is dragging?

WRITER

That corpse around?

EDITOR

That corpse around?

WRITER

I have wondered that myself.

EDITOR

Corpse, yes. You don't look well.

WRITER

I would say I am not well.

EDITOR

Have you slept much?

WRITER

Slept? No. Sleep is for sissies, ha ha. I'm too rugged for that!
Why, is it late?

EDITOR

Two a.m.

WRITER

Oh, it is! I'm still on New York time.

EDITOR

Where it is five a.m.?

WRITER

And the party is just starting, darling. Did I wake you?

EDITOR

Well, no. Honestly, it is good to have company.

WRITER

I didn't wake you?

EDITOR

I have been sleeping badly.

WRITER

A pity. When I sleep, I sleep like the dead.

EDITOR

When is that?

WRITER

I don't remember.

EDITOR

Yes, your sleep habits have become a bit notorious. I heard you discuss them on the television interview.

WRITER

I beg your pardon? You heard it?

EDITOR

They rebroadcast part of it on the radio here in Los Angeles. You're still very much a celebrity, you know. You made quite a stir.

WRITER

Yes? What did you think?

EDITOR

Do you want to know?

WRITER

God yes.

EDITOR

I did not enjoy it. Honestly, it upset me.

WRITER

Oh, did it!

EDITOR

Yes.

WRITER

For the love of God, why?

EDITOR

You seemed – how to put it?

WRITER

Mad?

EDITOR

I was going to say fragile. But your suggestion works just as well. What were you thinking?

WRITER

Daytime television seems so dull to me. I just wanted to spice it up a little.

EDITOR

You did that. I kept waiting for men in white suits to run onstage and drag you off in butterfly nets.

WRITER

If only. I should have had you script my interview. You have such a sensational authorial voice!

EDITOR

A breakdown on live television isn't sensation enough?

WRITER

Everything I do is sensational. Although I must never let it creep into my writing.

EDITOR

Not at the rate you write it won't.

WRITER

Aha. Imagine that I have just yelped in pain. I will grant you that one. As a man, I am a wreck. As a writer, I am beyond aide.

EDITOR

Goodness. You do seem in an awful state.

WRITER

Yes. I am a disaster. But every disaster has an interesting story.

EDITOR

After your interview on television I would not have thought that you would have any stories left.

WRITER

Is that what you think? Ha ha! My love, the show might have been for children. My best stories have a considerably more adult rating!

EDITOR

Ugh. I don't want to hear them.

WRITER

But you will need to put them in my biography!

EDITOR

I beg your pardon?

WRITER

My biography! My biography!

EDITOR

Why do you keep shouting "my biography" at me? I can't imagine that you are suggesting that I should write your biography.

WRITER

Who else?

EDITOR

Why don't you write it?

WRITER

I won't live that long.

EDITOR

I believe that. But I can't do it.

WRITER

Oh, why not?

EDITOR

I can give you three reasons offhand. I am not a journalist. I have a sensational voice. And I am constantly shocked by you.

WRITER

But the last reason is why I want you to write it! I deserve no less! If I am not spoken of in an appalled tone, why have I bothered living?

EDITOR

Biography! Is that what you are doing here?

WRITER

Did you believe I was lonely for company?

EDITOR

I suppose it would be silly to think that.

WRITER

My close personal friends number in the tens of thousands.

EDITOR

It must be difficult to maintain your rolodex.

WRITER

Imagine it, if you will. I must meet hundreds of people per day, but when I wake in the morning and look in the mirror I do not even know myself.

EDITOR

When you wake up?

WRITER

When I wake up, yes.

EDITOR

And when is that?

WRITER

I don't remember. But you cannot imagine what a social gaffe it is to not remember the name of your coke dealer.

EDITOR

I cannot imagine, no.

WRITER

And I have seven coke dealers. I used to call them all Chico. But coke dealers can be nasty. They don't care if you are a famous writer. They don't mind slapping you in public, in the middle of a party! Sometimes they would be so cruel as to refuse me my cocaine.

EDITOR

Oh dear.

WRITER

Yes! hustlers don't care if you call them all Chico - they all seem to be named Chico anyway. But drug dealers?

EDITOR

Nasty?

WRITER

Just as I said. Nasty.

EDITOR

Marvelous.

WRITER

Jealous of my new friends?

EDITOR

I can't say I am. You were never very good to your old friends.

WRITER

Hah! So you are angry!

EDITOR

Maybe a little. But I have seen your new friends, and your tastes are worsening. I open magazines sometimes and there you are, surrounded by strangers, and they all look like malicious skeletons to me.

WRITER

What an image! I can't imagine which photos you are referring to.

EDITOR

From that club in New York.

WRITER

The club! Yes. Thank God for the club. It has given me a way to make an ongoing public spectacle of myself, which is all it takes to be a celebrity.

EDITOR

You should do more television interviews.

WRITER

I would if they would let me dance.

EDITOR

I've seen you dance.

WRITER

Yes you have. Thank goodness the club has no mirrors. And when people see me on the dance floor, they don't point and laugh.

EDITOR

No?

WRITER

No. They point and say "My God. Is that . . .?" And I wave, and a new dance comes on. Sometimes pretty little creatures come over and dance alongside me.

EDITOR

What an image. Pretty little creatures.

WRITER

Boys, of course. Not that I'm much good with boys nowadays.

EDITOR

This sounds like a discussion you should have with your doctor.

WRITER

I told him. He nearly had a stroke from the horror of it. He told me my impotency is the least of my problems. He told me if I continued what I was doing I would be dead in six months.

EDITOR

When did he tell you this?

WRITER

Three years ago. I win.

EDITOR

Bravo.

WRITER

You are more difficult to talk to than I recalled. Almost everybody laughs politely at my comments. I did not remember you as being so snippy.

EDITOR

Well, then I take back the bravo.

WRITER

I was always the sharp-tongued one.

EDITOR

So. Yes you were. I don't mean to disapprove. It is just that your life is so ...

WRITER

Dissolute? Depraved? Squalid? Sordid? Stop me when I find a word that seems appropriate.

EDITOR

They all seem appropriate. I mean, you were always a drunk — but there was a time when you were also a writer.

WRITER

Yes. Who would have thought that the writer would die before the drunk would? After all, the drunk was so goddamn unhealthy. But here I am, the drunk, after having buried the writer — when?

EDITOR

Decades?

WRITER

It seems likely.

EDITOR

You could write if you wanted to.

WRITER

No. I want to. It is like my impotence. But in this case the body is able but the spirit is not willing. I even saw a psychotherapist about it.

EDITOR

What did he say?

WRITER

He told me if I continued what I was doing I would be dead in six months.

EDITOR

Is this where your friends would laugh politely?

WRITER

Yes it is.

EDITOR

Ha ha.

WRITER

Thank you. Will you ask me something?

EDITOR

What.

WRITER

It is innocuous. Tell me you will - Humor me.

EDITOR

Then yes I will.

WRITER

Repeat: What is the thing?

EDITOR

What is the thing?

WRITER

You regret most?

EDITOR

You regret most?

WRITER

I will tell you my greatest regret, but I do not wish you to think me petty.

EDITOR

Oh my goodness. Too late. If anything, you have made an art of pettiness.

WRITER

Not in my crime book. There was not a petty or sensational note in that book.

EDITOR

It detailed a petty crime.

WRITER

Murder? That's hardly a petty crime.

EDITOR

I mean that the murderers were petty men.

WRITER

Did you think so? Then I failed as a writer. I found them magnificent. They had oversized ambitions.

EDITOR

To steal from a farmhouse and murder a family?

WRITER

No. Dear God, no. That wasn't their ambition. They wanted to get into heaven. It was their desire for redemption that made them magnificent. Can you not see that?

EDITOR

No. I see those men as sick and dangerous. I see them as awful creatures whose sole distinguishing feature was their cruelty. I suppose that is why I could not have written your book.

WRITER

Well, I did not need you to write the book. It was enough to have you assist me in researching it. But I have not answered your question.

EDITOR

Please do so.

WRITER

Ask it again.

EDITOR

What is your greatest regret?

WRITER

I have never wanted to get into heaven.

EDITOR

Then you will not be disappointed when you don't.

WRITER

I suspect I would be disappointed if I did. None of my friends will be there.

EDITOR

I expect present company would be included.

WRITER

You still view yourself as my friend?

EDITOR

Yes, if you can believe it. Certainly, yes.

WRITER

Do you think you won't go to heaven for that? I think you will. I think the angels will tally up your sins and then weigh them out, and they will say: It does not matter that she sinned. She was capable of forgiving a dying old dwarf. The doors to heaven will swing open.

EDITOR

There was really nothing to forgive.

WRITER

There will be. And you shall document it.

EDITOR

I hope you are not planning anything dramatic.

WRITER

I am not planning anything at all, except that you write my biography.

EDITOR

I am flattered you chose me.

WRITER

You weren't my first choice.

EDITOR

Then I am less flattered.

WRITER

My first choice lives 16 miles from here. He contacted me by telephone six months ago. He wanted to write my life story. He sent me samples of his work. He would have done a remarkable job.

EDITOR

Then why are you at my house and not his?

WRITER

An accident of timing, really. I was on the way to his house. I did not get there.

EDITOR

Why not?

WRITER

My left arm went numb. I was not certain I would make it to his house, so I asked the taxicab to stop at yours.

EDITOR

What? How is your arm now?

WRITER

I can't move it.

EDITOR

Oh, dear God. You fool. We must get you to a doctor. Can you stand?

WRITER

While we have been talking I have stopped feeling my feet.

EDITOR

We need an ambulance!

WRITER

No! I do not want that!

EDITOR

I don't care what you want.

WRITER

If you exit this room I might not be alive when you return to it. I will be dead before the ambulance ever arrives.

EDITOR

Why? Tell me what you are feeling.

WRITER

I am feeling my body die. Bit by bit it is turning itself off. I don't mind it.

EDITOR

Are you in pain?

WRITER

No. I took quite a few painkillers in the taxicab. I can feel everything that is happening in my body, but there is no discomfort.

EDITOR

Oh, you fool! You have poisoned yourself!

WRITER

God, no. I don't have the heart for suicide. I am simply dying. It is quite strange – there is a coldness creeping up my body.

EDITOR

We must get you to the hospital.

WRITER

Are you going to insist on this?

EDITOR

Yes I am.

WRITER

I must tell you something first.

EDITOR

After I make the call.

WRITER

No. I do not wish to die before I say this. It is why you must write my biography. You alone will know it.

EDITOR

After I make the call.

WRITER

God damn you! Before! The telephone call can wait for one fucking minute!

EDITOR

Very well. Tell me. Quickly.

WRITER

I was murdered.

EDITOR

What?

WRITER

Ah, now you are interested! I knew that if I threw a little bit of sensationalism in, you would be hooked!

EDITOR

Somebody did this to you?

WRITER

Yes. Oh yes.

EDITOR

Who?

WRITER

The boy from my crime book. The cowboy.

EDITOR

What? The cowboy?

WRITER

Yes.

EDITOR

What is this nonsense? Let go of my hand!

WRITER

Let me finish. I shall let go when I finish. Otherwise you will need to drag me into the next room to make the telephone call. Won't that be fun?

EDITOR

Then tell me! Make some fucking sense!

WRITER

He murdered me!

EDITOR

You're hysterical. Do you see that you are becoming hysterical?

WRITER

God damn you, listen. I have never told anybody what I just told you. Somebody had to know. I saw them put the rope around his neck and drop him through the trap door. I did not do anything to stop it!

EDITOR

Let me make the call.

WRITER

Oh, God. Driving home, after I saw his body, I had to stop. I sat in the car for a full hour and wept. I watched him die, and I felt myself die with him.

EDITOR

You haven't died yet.

WRITER

Not yet? No. All right. Make the call.

SCENE TWO

SETTING: A television station, early 80s

AT RISE: The WRITER is interviewed by The INTERVIEWER, 50s, male.

INTERVIEWER

We can stop if you like.

WRITER

I do not.

INTERVIEWER

We do not need to continue.

WRITER

I wish to continue.

INTERVIEWER

You do not mind that I am asking you these questions?

WRITER

Quite the opposite. I'm delighted.

INTERVIEWER

But you must know that the audience might not understand what they are seeing.

WRITER

I disagree. They will know exactly what they are seeing.

INTERVIEWER

But the intimacy of your answers . . .

WRITER

May I make a suggestion?

INTERVIEWER

Of course.

WRITER

It is a professional recommendation. I hope you won't be insulted.

INTERVIEWER

By all means.

WRITER

You know that I have done many interviews.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, of course.

WRITER

Then here is my advice.

INTERVIEWER

Please.

WRITER

Never stop an interview. Even when your subject is falling to pieces before your eyes; even if they beg you to stop; even if you feel the deepest sympathy for them.

INTERVIEWER

I don't believe I can do that. I would not want to.

WRITER

As an interviewer, I would ask questions of a man who was dying in front of me. Even up until his final breath. It may be cruel, but you get the best quotes that way.

INTERVIEWER

We are almost back from the commercial break. I thank you for your advice, but I must ask you again if you wish to stop.

WRITER

This interview will end when I stop talking.

INTERVIEWER

Very well. And we are back. For those of you who have just tuned in, today's show has been unusual. I have a guest with me today who is one of the most influential writer of our generation, who has in the past few years become something of a celebrity.

WRITER

A public spectacle.

INTERVIEWER

As, I suppose, are all celebrities. What makes this interview so unusual for me is your candor. I have never had a guest reveal so many intimate details of his life in this manner.

WRITER

No? How fortunate for you. Won't Carson be jealous!

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps he will. I must commend you on your bravery, sir. It is a rare man that would go on television and discuss his homosexuality, for example.

WRITER

It is just the wine talking.

INTERVIEWER

Let me ask you about that. You have - I hope you will forgive me for bringing this up - you have had problems with alcohol in the past, have you not?

WRITER

I don't think alcohol is a problem. Everybody else, however, disagrees. I had a lover who used to throw out my bottles. But I found that if I hid them in the tank for the toilet, he would not find them.

INTERVIEWER

I see. Let me ask a frank question. You are, are you not, an alcoholic?

WRITER

An alcoholic? Oh, God, darling - alcoholism is just the joker in the deck.

INTERVIEWER

Are you in fact now drunk, sir?

WRITER

Ho ho! Drunk is the least of it. If I were to read to you an itemized list of the drugs I have taken in the past week this show would go on for several hours.

INTERVIEWER

Have you even been to bed in the past week?

WRITER

To bed? Yes. But I have not slept. Excuse my giggling.

INTERVIEWER

I see.

WRITER

It is not what you think. Oh, I giggle again, but imagine that I have a remorseful look on my face. Because it is worse than you think.

INTERVIEWER

How do you mean?

WRITER

I have an awful lot of money, you know. There are young men who will take money to provide services.

INTERVIEWER

Services of a sexual nature?

WRITER

Oh my, yes.

INTERVIEWER

How old are these boys?

WRITER

What an excellent question; I am surprised you asked it. How old are they? They all claim to be 18. But I have not checked their drivers' licenses. Some of them look like they are 14 or 15.

INTERVIEWER

Who are these boys?

WRITER

They come from all over. They love fine clothes; they love to mingle with the famous. They love drugs and they love money. They do not mind being toys to ancient trolls like me if it gets them any of these things.

INTERVIEWER

These boys are homosexual?

WRITER

Maybe. I believe everybody to be a homosexual until I find out otherwise. But I suspect many of them are not. Enough money and alcohol will turn anyone into a fairy.

INTERVIEWER

Where do you meet these boys?

WRITER

The club.

INTERVIEWER

So the club is a marketplace for sex and drugs?

WRITER

Yes. Yes, but – but the whole world is a marketplace for sex and drugs. If you were to drop me from an airplane into Wahoo, Nebraska, I would have a gram of cocaine and a male prostitute within 20 minutes.

INTERVIEWER

That's an odd boast.

WRITER

Have you ever been to Wahoo?

INTERVIEWER

I am going to be very blunt with my next question, sir: Most, admitting these things, would be consumed by shame. Do you feel any shame?

WRITER

Darling, I feel nothing but shame. I take shame to bed with me at night and wake up with it in the morning.

INTERVIEWER

Then why do you continue?

WRITER

Oh, it's no fun unless it is shameful. If you wish to know your soul, ask for the thing you are most mortified to ask for. Demand the thing you would be most ashamed to possess.

INTERVIEWER

Do you know your soul as a result?

WRITER

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like what you know about yourself?

WRITER

Oh, ha ha. Hardly – my greatest pleasure is in seeing myself as horrible. No, horrible is such a bland word. As journalists, we must ever search for the exact word. Odious is closer. Detestable.

INTERVIEWER

It is interesting to me that your answer made you laugh. Does all this – the drug use, the alcoholism, the sexual perversity – does it somehow seem like a comedy to you?

WRITER

My God, no. I wouldn't be much of a writer if I didn't see this for what it is.

INTERVIEWER

And what is it?

WRITER

It's a tragedy, isn't it?

INTERVIEWER

And you know what will happen if you continue the way you have?

WRITER

Of course. I will die. That's how tragedies end, isn't it? Were it a comedy, it would end with me getting married.

INTERVIEWER

Then why don't you stop?

WRITER

Can you see me married? Me? No, my dear, I do not wish to stop. I do not mind the thought of dying. I will gladly trade my life for drugs and alcohol and perversion.

INTERVIEWER

But what about us?

WRITER

I don't know what or who you mean.

INTERVIEWER

Us. The people who read your books.

WRITER

What of them?

INTERVIEWER

Why subtract your talent from the world? You have a way of writing that has moved millions of people. Your book on the murders of that farm family did as much to change the way people understand crime, and understand the death penalty, as anything written. Why take that away from us?

WRITER

I don't know if you have noticed, but I have long ceased to function as a writer.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

WRITER

I did not have the heart for it. I am not a great man. Did you know that as a child I always had hurt feelings?

INTERVIEWER

Did you?

WRITER

Yes. I was spoiled. If anything did not go my way I thought that there was an injustice in the whole of the world. I would throw terrible tantrums. I would harbor grudges for years. I never outgrew that.

INTERVIEWER

You still throw tantrums and keep grudges?

WRITER

And I still have hurt feelings. I am small-minded and do not like it when I do not have my way. I become a terrible beast. I put sugar in gas tanks.

INTERVIEWER

How does this prevent you from writing?

WRITER

I wrote about things that moved me. It is like taking a lover. Sooner or later you will be hurt. I could not stand it.

INTERVIEWER

What have you written that has hurt you?

WRITER

What hasn't? Did you read the excerpt from my novel in Playboy?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

WRITER

Do you know that when I see the people I wrote about, I flee across the street? I am not subtle about it either. I just turn and run through traffic, with my whole retinue trailing behind me. I am a coward.

INTERVIEWER

But why?

WRITER

Because I can't face them. I behaved monstrously toward these people. They had been my friends. But you can't be a writer and also be a coward. There is something essentially monstrous about writing, particularly if you choose to tell the truth.

INTERVIEWER

So you regret writing the story?

WRITER

No. I regret that I only ever wrote that one story, and didn't finish the novel. I regret my cowardice. But who has time for regrets when all of life has become a limitless opportunity for gaiety? It is gloriously distracting.

INTERVIEWER

A psychiatrist might suggest that you live this life you live, with the partying and the drug use, to escape your cowardice, your self-loathing, your shame.

WRITER

A psychiatrist might suggest such a thing?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

WRITER

A child suggested it to me in the park yesterday. Just came up and told me exactly what you just said, in exactly those words. It is as plain as the scarred, mashed nose on my fat, red face. I bury my pain in my degraded life. I surround myself with people who are likewise in pain. But the coke and the liquor and the gossip takes the edge off.

INTERVIEWER

I am getting the signal that it is time to take a break. We will return to this fascinating interview after these commercials and station identification.

WRITER

Oh, poo. I was just finding my rhythm.

INTERVIEWER

Are you enjoying this?

WRITER

Aren't you?

INTERVIEWER

No, sir, I am not. I had thought we would discuss literature.

WRITER

You won't win a Pulitzer discussing literature.

INTERVIEWER

I won't win a Pulitzer anyway;. This is television.

WRITER

What a marvelous medium! Perhaps you will not win a Pulitzer, but with this show you will win something grander.

INTERVIEWER

What?

WRITER

Notoriety. I myself shall tune in tomorrow to see what celebrity has a nervous breakdown on your show.

INTERVIEWER

I would not enjoy hosting such a show.

WRITER

But you are doing so well! You are very good at asking follow-up questions!

INTERVIEWER

I don't wish to become an excellent gossip columnist.

WRITER

I wouldn't worry about that. Gossip columnists work exclusively in print, don't they?

INTERVIEWER

Not after today they don't.

WRITER

You seem upset.

INTERVIEWER

I am. I did not realize you were destroying yourself. I did not know I would be witness to it. It is a horrendous waste.

WRITER

You would not say that if you had been to the parties I have been to.

INTERVIEWER

I see. Just a moment. We are back. During the break our guest informed me that I would not think his alcoholism and drug abuse was a waste if I had been to some of the parties he has seen. Tell me, sir, what is it about these parties that are so remarkable?

WRITER

The fact that you will never be invited.

INTERVIEWER

That sounds somewhat insulting.

WRITER

It is not meant to be. You are a lovely man. But what makes these parties special is that they are exclusive. You will never see what goes on behind closed doors. I will.

INTERVIEWER

Is it really that marvelous?

WRITER

No. But gossiping about it afterward is. I mean, if I were to go to just any party and see a good-looking young man screaming at his girlfriend, it is a bore. But if that young man is a porn star and his girlfriend is a model?

INTERVIEWER

It is better gossip?

WRITER

At the very least the costumes will be better. You would be surprised how much livelier a story becomes with the addition of a spangled décolletage.

INTERVIEWER

But there must be more to life than gossip.

WRITER

Must there? If there is I haven't found it.

INTERVIEWER

I disagree. I have read your novels.

WRITER

You have read my novels.

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

WRITER

And you disagree? My novels were nothing but gossip! They were fiction, yes - but very catty.

INTERVIEWER

Are you telling me that good literature is just another sort of gossip?

WRITER

You wanted to talk about literature. If you prefer, we can return to talking about male prostitutes. I have a diverting story about a Cuban hustler I met a few years ago. I could tell you that story, if that's what you want to discuss.

INTERVIEWER

Why don't you decide. Tell me, what is it that you wish to discuss?

WRITER

Oh — that is the hardest question I have ever been asked. Do you mind if I think about it for a moment?

INTERVIEWER

May I offer a suggestion?

WRITER

Please.

INTERVIEWER

Give me a question to ask you.

WRITER

Marvelous! What sort of question would you like?

INTERVIEWER

A hard one. The hardest possible.

WRITER

Oh. Oh. Bravo! With that challenge this interview has ceased to be what I want it to be.

INTERVIEWER

What is that?

WRITER

A game — an act of foolishness on my part; something to chuckle about later.

INTERVIEWER

Do you wish to end the interview?

WRITER

Not when it has just become so interesting.

INTERVIEWER

I fear it is almost over. We have just a few minutes left.

WRITER

Time for one last question.

INTERVIEWER

Yes. If you will provide it.

WRITER

I will. Here is my question: What is the worst thing you have ever done?

INTERVIEWER

I will ask you the question. Will you be honest with the answer?

WRITER

Yes. Fastidiously honest.

INTERVIEWER

Then tell me, what is the worst thing you have ever done?

WRITER

The worst thing I have ever done. I know what it is. I have always known. But I have such a fear of saying it.

INTERVIEWER

You can tell me directly.

WRITER

I can't force the words out.

INTERVIEWER

You may whisper it to me if it helps.

WRITER

I shall do so. The worst thing I have ever done.

INTERVIEWER

Yes?

WRITER

Is publish my crime novel.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mind if I repeat it out loud?

WRITER

I do mind, very much. But your show must have a suitable end.

INTERVIEWER

The answer was: The worst thing I have ever done was publish my crime novel. I must admit that was the last answer I expected.

WRITER

I should have cut off my hands rather than write the thing.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you feel this way?

WRITER

Because three people were murdered in that farmhouse.

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

WRITER

And two men were executed for the crime.

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

WRITER

And I made my fortune from it. And I love my money, and I love my fame. I would not trade them for anything.

INTERVIEWER

Would you trade those things if it meant the people in the farmhouse would not have been murdered?

WRITER

No. I would take my money and fame in trade for their lives.

INTERVIEWER

Would you trade it for the lives of the men who were hanged?

WRITER

No. That is why I am a monster.

INTERVIEWER

That is all the time we have for today.

SCENE THREE

SETTING: The WRITER's bedroom.

AT RISE: The WRITER speaks to a HUSTLER,
20s, male.

HUSTLER

You should write about this.

WRITER

What do you mean by this?

HUSTLER

This sort of thing.

WRITER

Male prostitution?

HUSTLER

No! I am not a prostitute!

WRITER

Darling, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you take money
for sex. You are a male prostitute.

HUSTLER

If you continue to insult me, I shall leave.

WRITER

But I have not paid you yet.

HUSTLER

I do not want your money. You are very offensive to me.

WRITER

Oh, God. I take it back. All right, you are not a male
prostitute. What would you rather I call you?

HUSTLER

Do I need to tell you? I am your friend.

WRITER

I do not give money to my friends.

HUSTLER

Yes you do.

WRITER

Well, you're right - but I only give money because I must. Do you give money to your friends?

HUSTLER

No.

WRITER

You see? But you're fun to be around.

HUSTLER

So I am no different from any of your friends.

WRITER

Do you mean that you couldn't stand to be around me if I didn't pay you?

HUSTLER

No. I mean you give me gifts, like you do everybody.

WRITER

But you take money for sex.

HUSTLER

No! We have never had sex!

WRITER

Well, don't start screaming. You have taken money to have sex while I watch. I don't see what the difference is.

HUSTLER

One is a prostitute. The other is an entertainer. Why are you laughing?

WRITER

I'm sorry. You're right. You're an entertainer. I find you very entertaining.

HUSTLER

Thank you. I also find you entertaining.

WRITER

Then perhaps you should be paying me.

HUSTLER

You don't need my money.

WRITER

True, but you don't have to pay me with money.

HUSTLER

What then?

WRITER

Tell me a story.

HUSTLER

What sort of story?

WRITER

About your friends. Who is that black boy you know?

HUSTLER

Which one?

WRITER

The tall one with the shaved head. He has the little scar on his lip.

HUSTLER

Caesar.

WRITER

Caesar! What an imposing name! Where is he from?

HUSTLER

Cuba. Like me.

WRITER

Tell me about him.

HUSTLER

Why?

WRITER

Perhaps I shall write about it.

HUSTLER

Like you did with those two killers?

WRITER

Like I did with ... You have been reading my book?

HUSTLER

Yes.

WRITER

This is not very much like the stories I wrote about those two men.

HUSTLER

Then perhaps you will not find my stories so interesting. Perhaps you will be bored by them.

WRITER

Let me be the judge of that.

HUSTLER

What do you want to know?

WRITER

What do you boys do together?

HUSTLER

Stuff.

WRITER

Stuff?

HUSTLER

I don't know.

WRITER

Stuff? You don't know? Well, then, I will tell you something about writing.

HUSTLER

Yes?

WRITER

There is only one job a journalist has.

HUSTLER

One job?

WRITER

Yes. Everybody has a story to tell.

HUSTLER

Everybody?

WRITER

Yes. And it is the job of the journalist to turn them into storytellers.

HUSTLER

I see. How do you do that?

WRITER

By asking the right sort of questions. And I have not been asking you the right sort of questions about Caesar.

HUSTLER

No?

WRITER

No. Because your answers have been boring the shit out of me. Let us start over.

HUSTLER

Okay.

WRITER

Is Caesar your lover?

HUSTLER

No. I do not sleep with men for pleasure.

WRITER

No. But have you ever slept with him?

HUSTLER

Slept with him? No. We both fucked the same woman.

WRITER

How?

HUSTLER

You want the details?

WRITER

Christ yes! The more lurid, the better!

HUSTLER

Lurid?

WRITER

Graphic. As graphic as possible. Be very detailed in your descriptions.

HUSTLER

I fucked her from behind while she sucked on his cock. Then we turned her around and she sucked on my cock while he fucked her.

WRITER

Ha! I knew there was a grand story in you somewhere! Who was this woman?

HUSTLER

A woman that I met at the club.

WRITER

Don't be coy with me; I know everybody at the club. Tell me who it was!

HUSTLER

Guess!

WRITER

Cruel. You're making me work for the story. Give me a hint.

HUSTLER

Red hair.

WRITER

Long red hair?

HUSTLER

Yes.

WRITER

Oh my God, you don't mean . . .!

HUSTLER

Yes!

WRITER

Oh God, that's too funny! Did she pay you?

HUSTLER

Now you insult me again.

WRITER

Oh, come on – she must have paid you! She's almost 50 years old!

HUSTLER

She's how old?

WRITER

She's at least 30 years your senior, honey.

HUSTLER

Really?

WRITER

Oh no. Tell me she didn't get you and Caesar for free.

HUSTLER

She did not pay me. I am not a whore.

WRITER

An entertainer, I know. Christ. She must have put something in your drink.

HUSTLER

She did not need to put it in my drink. She just gave it to me to swallow.

WRITER

What? A pill?

HUSTLER

Yes. Amongst a lots of other things.

WRITER

What other things? Cocaine?

HUSTLER

Maybe.

WRITER

Amphetamines?

HUSTLER

I don't know what we took.

WRITER

Sweet Jesus, you must have fucked all night.

HUSTLER

All night? Yes.

WRITER

Oh, God, am I jealous of her. Her! Do you know we used to be great friends?

HUSTLER

She does not seem to like you.

WRITER

Well, we are not friends anymore.

HUSTLER

Why not?

WRITER

Because I wrote about her. She was a character in a story I published.

HUSTLER

Yes?

WRITER

Now you're just being kind, letting an old man go on like this about his sad memories.

HUSTLER

No. I want to know!

WRITER

Why, you little sycophant? Don't pretend to listen to my awful stories unless you're really interested.

HUSTLER

I am interested.

WRITER

Why?

HUSTLER

Maybe I want to write about you.

WRITER

All right, for the present I shall pretend that you are telling the truth. Why don't you pretend that I am flattered that you are interested in my life?

HUSTLER

I can do that. I like to pretend.

WRITER

Oh, I know you do, you little Roscius! Well, continue your pretending and ask me a question.

HUSTLER

Did she have a story to tell you?

WRITER

Who?

HUSTLER

The redhead?

WRITER

Oh. No. At least, I never asked her. But everybody I know has a story to tell about her. I listened to those stories and then wrote about them.

HUSTLER

What sorts of stories?

WRITER

There are only so many stories you can tell about people who are rich and decadent. They lie, they fuck people when they shouldn't. They don't fuck people when they should. They spend their money on stupid things. They are hateful and foolish. They are petty. They use drugs. They carry little dogs with them.

HUSTLER

Yes.

WRITER

So you already know all this.

HUSTLER

Yes.

WRITER

Those are all of the stories about rich people.

HUSTLER

And you are rich!

WRITER

You know I am, you adorable gold digger.

HUSTLER

Then I will write about you!

WRITER

Oh? Which would you tell?

HUSTLER

Which story is yours?

WRITER

They all are, except the dogs.

HUSTLER

You don't have as little dog?

WRITER

My little dog died. When I wrote about the redhead, I might as well have been writing autobiography. Do you know, she cornered me in a bathroom a few years ago and I tried to tell her that.

HUSTLER

Because you are also rich - but also wicked.

WRITER

Yes. Rich and wicked.

HUSTLER

If I were rich, I would be exactly like you.

WRITER

What? God, if you weren't so eager to please, that statement would stop my heart! What on earth do mean by that?

HUSTLER

I would drive a Jaguar like you do. I would have dinner with royal people, like you do. I would travel, I would go on talk shows, and everybody would think that I am fascinating.

WRITER

It sounds so appealing when you say it. But you don't need to be rich for any of those things. You can drive my Jaguar anytime you want.

HUSTLER

Yes?

WRITER

Of course. And you travel, don't you?

HUSTLER

Yes.

WRITER

I'll introduce you to royalty if you like. In fact, I know a Bulgarian who would be very interested in meeting you. There is a pun there somewhere, but I am too drunk to find it.

HUSTLER

And talk shows?

WRITER

I should take you with me onto a talk show. Oh, my goodness, the stories you could tell!

HUSTLER

So we are not so different at all.

WRITER

Well, I would flatter myself to believe it. But there is one large difference between us.

HUSTLER

Yes?

WRITER

Do you know what the difference is?

HUSTLER

No.

WRITER

I am a whore.

HUSTLER

Some whore! You can't even get your cock to work!

WRITER

Oh! Cruel! I meant that I will do almost anything for money. I have. I have done awful things for money.

HUSTLER

But not like me.

WRITER

No. My God, no! Who would pay me to entertain?

HUSTLER

I have known some people who might.

WRITER

Really? They go for lisping dwarves? There is a fetish for that?

HUSTLER

Only for fat ones.

WRITER

Ah! You make me howl in pain, you cruel child!

HUSTLER

But you like it.

WRITER

God, I think I do.

HUSTLER

Bitch, I know you like it!

WRITER

Maybe.

HUSTLER

Maybe? Fuck maybe. You want to hear maybe? I'll tell you a few maybes.

WRITER

My breath is in my throat!

HUSTLER

Because maybe you are perverted?

WRITER

I must be.

HUSTLER

Maybe it makes me want to be cruel to you. Maybe sometimes when I hear your voice I want to slap you in the face.

WRITER

When is that?

HUSTLER

When I'm fucking.

WRITER

Really?

HUSTLER

Yeah. It is hard to fuck when you are watching.

WRITER

It is?

HUSTLER

Maybe you want to hear about my hard cock.

WRITER

Oh my God yes.

HUSTLER

Maybe you want to hear about me sliding it into some sweet, tight asshole.

WRITER

Jesus. Of course!

HUSTLER

Yeah, you love to hear about it. You love to hear that I ram my prick in and out, and you love to hear me groaning and talking.

WRITER

I do love it. I love to hear what you say!

HUSTLER

I say, "Take that cock. Take it! Take it all, motherfucker!" And I reach around and stroke his cock, and my balls feel like they are going to explode, they are so hard, slapping against his legs.

WRITER

Yes.

HUSTLER

And then I hear your voice.

WRITER

Oh no.

HUSTLER

Your voice. Talking.

WRITER

Yes? What am I saying.

HUSTLER

You're lisping at me in that little girl voice. "Fuck him," you say. "Move your leg so I can see your cock! Pull out and shoot it on his face." And I hate your voice.

WRITER

Oh. Hate?

HUSTLER

Hate. It drives me fucking crazy. I want to run across the room and grab you. I want to grab your ears and bang your head against the wall. I want to see blood pour out of your nose and hear you crying in pain.

WRITER

What keeps you from hurting me?

HUSTLER

If I hurt you, I won't get paid.

WRITER

I see. Yes, that makes sense.

HUSTLER

Ha! How was that?

WRITER

How was that?

HUSTLER

Did I scare you?

WRITER

Do you know, you did. I feel very frightened right now.

HUSTLER

I was sufficiently cruel?

WRITER

You were very cruel.

HUSTLER

Did you like that?

WRITER

No.

HUSTLER

You didn't? I thought you wanted me to ...

WRITER

You thought I wanted you to? I suppose I did. You did what I wanted you to.

HUSTLER

I don't think so. I think you are unhappy now. If I didn't think you would like it, I would never have ... !

WRITER

It's not your fault.

HUSTLER

No, I do not want you to be unhappy. I did not mean what I said.

WRITER

It does not matter.

HUSTLER

Some people like that, when I talk to them like that! I was trying to make you happy.

WRITER

I know. Eager to please. But why?

HUSTLER

Because I am your friend.

WRITER

Because you are my friend?

HUSTLER

I am your friend.

WRITER

Then I suppose I owe you some money.

SCENE FOUR

SETTING: A bathroom in a club, late 70s.

AT RISE: The WRITER speaks to a SOCIALITE,
50s, female.

SOCIALITE

Did you come in here to hide from me?

WRITER

Yes.

SOCIALITE

You could have picked a better place than the bathroom. Did you think I would never come in here?

WRITER

It is the men's bathroom.

SOCIALITE

No it isn't.

WRITER

It isn't?

SOCIALITE

It's the women's.

WRITER

It is not well marked. I have been using it as the men's bathroom for seven months.

SOCIALITE

Do you think I mean to harm you?

WRITER

Do I think what?

SOCIALITE

That I mean to harm you? Maybe you think I'm going to walk up to you and slap your face. Is that why you ran away from me?

WRITER

I don't know what I thought. Slap my face? Maybe throw vitriol in it. Something violent.

SOCIALITE

I saw you run away from me before. You saw me walking toward you. On Broadway.

WRITER

Yes.

SOCIALITE

You ran right through traffic. I thought you were going to kill yourself.

WRITER

I nearly did. A motorcycle bumped my side. I almost fell in front of a bus.

SOCIALITE

You don't need to run. I haven't read it.

WRITER

You haven't?

SOCIALITE

No.

WRITER

You had better hurry out and buy it. Playboy has almost sold out, from what I hear. If you miss this issue, you won't be able to read the story.

SOCIALITE

I don't want to read it. I never liked your writing anyway.

WRITER

Aren't you curious? You're the main character.

SOCIALITE

I don't care what people write about me. When you have no reputation at all, you have no reputation to defend. My motto. Cute, isn't it?

WRITER

Cute. Yes. What are those? Are those amphetamines?

SOCIALITE

Yes.

WRITER

May I have one?

SOCIALITE

Yes. There are some people who are furious.

WRITER

I know.

SOCIALITE

Fewer than you would think. Most people think the story is pretty funny.

WRITER

They should be furious.

SOCIALITE

Why?

WRITER

Because I will not be throwing any more parties.

SOCIALITE

That's a shame. They will be disappointed.

WRITER

I got what I needed.

SOCIALITE

What? The skeletons in our closets? You're welcome to them. We all knew you were writing that damned silly book.

WRITER

I spoke of it often.

SOCIALITE

You spoke of it endlessly. You pestered us with questions and demanded our gossip. We were surprised that you weren't constantly jotting down notes.

WRITER

I have trained my memory so that I don't need to.

SOCIALITE

Really?

WRITER

Yes. When I was writing the crime novel. I discovered people didn't want to talk to me if I was taking notes. So I trained my memory to retain an hour of conversation at a time.

SOCIALITE

God, but your parties went on for 10 hours – sometimes more!

WRITER

But out of those 10 hours I would only get a few minutes worth of stuff that was really usable.

SOCIALITE

Like what?

WRITER

Like your abortion.

SOCIALITE

That old thing? I can't see why it would interest you.

WRITER

It is the story I published in Playboy.

SOCIALITE

The story is about my abortion?

WRITER

Among other things. Didn't anybody tell you?

SOCIALITE

No. But everybody I talked to seems to think the story is about them.

WRITER

Perhaps you should read it before we talk anymore.

SOCIALITE

Aw, fuck it. If I read it I will just have to chase you down. And I don't care to run through traffic. What is that?

WRITER

Cocaine.

SOCIALITE

It looks odd. What are those brown specks?

WRITER

It is cut with several different pharmaceuticals.

SOCIALITE

Which ones?

WRITER

I don't remember. The dealer named them all so quickly.

SOCIALITE

What does it do?

WRITER

It's different. It makes the coke less harsh. It's like doing regular coke, but without that jaggedness.

SOCIALITE

Can I try it?

WRITER

Yes.

SOCIALITE

Oh.

WRITER

Interesting, huh?

SOCIALITE

Yes. Are you going to keep avoiding me?

WRITER

Yes.

SOCIALITE

Even though I don't care about the story.

WRITER

Yes.

SOCIALITE

Why?

WRITER

Stories need to proceed logically. It is not logical for me to cross all my friends and then attempt to remain friends.

SOCIALITE

So what then? You're just going to drop all your old relationships?

WRITER

Yes.

SOCIALITE

They will miss you.

WRITER

I doubt it.

SOCIALITE

They will miss your parties.

WRITER

Yes. But I always thought my parties were unbearably tedious. There was only one moment at the parties that I liked.

SOCIALITE

What?

WRITER

Arriving at them.

SOCIALITE

Oh, yes. In the limos.

WRITER

In costume.

SOCIALITE

With the press waiting. All the photos!

WRITER

Yes. There was nothing like leafing through the newspaper the next day looking for photographs of your friends.

SOCIALITE

And then making fun of how they dressed.

WRITER

Or whispering gossip about them.

SOCIALITE

I never understood your obsession with gossip. Nobody has interesting stories. They all sin the same way. And none of their sins are interesting.

WRITER

It doesn't matter if the story is interesting. Gossip is a tool for social survival.

SOCIALITE

Is it really? How do you figure?

WRITER

Do you know when you have really arrived?

SOCIALITE

No.

WRITER

When you know everybody's secrets. Otherwise you are just another stranger.

SOCIALITE

I don't want to know anybody's secrets. I'm even bored with my own.

WRITER

After the Playboy story, you don't have any more secrets.

SOCIALITE

Then I suppose I should thank you.

WRITER

You're welcome.

SOCIALITE

But I don't think you are correct.

WRITER

Correct about what?

SOCIALITE

About when you have arrived. It is not when you know everybody's secrets.

WRITER

No?

SOCIALITE

It's when everybody knows yours.

WRITER

Ah.

SOCIALITE

The most powerful person in the room is the one who everybody gossips about. No?

WRITER

Then I suppose I have failed. Nobody gossips about me.

SOCIALITE

You idiot. Do you think a freak like you can go through life unnoticed? You were a subject of gossip before you even published your first book.

WRITER

I was? What did people say?

SOCIALITE

They said you were a fag.

WRITER

Is that all? Sooner or later, everybody is called a fag. The only rumor that is more common is that somebody has a venereal disease.

SOCIALITE

Oh.

WRITER

What?

SOCIALITE

People also said you had a venereal disease.

WRITER

Really? Which one?

SOCIALITE

The clap.

WRITER

Oh God — the most common venereal disease story! Am I that boring?

SOCIALITE

Well, there are two rumors every girl must deal with.

WRITER

Yes?

SOCIALITE

That we're sluts and that we had an abortion.

WRITER

I have heard such stories about you.

SOCIALITE

Yes. And then published them, it seems.

WRITER

They were good stories.

SOCIALITE

They seem awfully plain to me.

WRITER

But you don't see the pathos! A 19-year-old girl sleeps with her father's business partner, becomes pregnant. The father pays for the abortion. The girl suffers severe depression as a result and slips into a spiral of drug abuse. It's heartbreaking!

SOCIALITE

How strange. From what I hear, you wrote it as a comedy.

WRITER

Satire, really; It is not a very funny story.

SOCIALITE

It didn't seem funny to me when it happened. But I don't know why I became so depressed.

WRITER

It was tragic.

SOCIALITE

Hardly. Those farm murders you wrote about were tragic. My affair, my abortion, was woefully common. Do you know I had three friends who had abortions that same month?

WRITER

Teenage girls do seem to like to do everything together.

SOCIALITE

I never stopped sleeping with daddy's business partner, either.

WRITER

No?

SOCIALITE

You didn't hear that story?

WRITER

No! What a long affair you had! Didn't he die two years ago?

SOCIALITE

Yes. I slept with him in the hospital the day before he died. His wife was with his doctor, discussing insurance. It was quite embarrassing, really. I was having my period – droplets of blood everywhere. The nurse thought it was his. Might as well have been. He had a stroke that night and died at two in the morning.

WRITER

Well, maybe he died happy.

SOCIALITE

I didn't hate him, you know. I was fond of him.

WRITER

I feel like I should call Playboy and add a few paragraphs to my story.

SOCIALITE

That's the trouble with gossip.

WRITER

What?

SOCIALITE

It's incomplete. The story is so much better when you hear it from the person who experienced it.

WRITER

I disagree. When you hear it from somebody else it is daring, or naughty, or horrifying. The moment you put a human face on it, gossip just becomes sad and seedy.

SOCIALITE

I have heard a rumor about you. Tell me, will it turn sad and seedy if I ask you about it?

WRITER

I am a fag. I've never had the clap.

SOCIALITE

I heard the Mick broke your nose.

WRITER

Oh, that is a good rumor! That's one I never expected to hear.

SOCIALITE

Is it true?

WRITER

Do you think the Mick was capable of such a thing?

SOCIALITE

I can't tell. He was so outdoorsy. With weather-beaten skin and that gray-flecked red hair. He looked like a man who wouldn't mind a fight.

WRITER

Well, you know how it is. You say boo to a straight man, he turns and runs, but you get a tough-looking fairy angry there will be teeth flying.

SOCIALITE

So is it true.

WRITER

He loved to lecture me. But sometimes he would throw things. Look here.

SOCIALITE

A little welt.

WRITER

A scar. He caught me on the bridge of my nose.

SOCIALITE

Broken?

WRITER

I never went to a doctor. Bloodied. Black eyes for weeks.

SOCIALITE

Well, that's love for you.

WRITER

He deserved better than me. After the crime book came out, there wasn't a betrayal I didn't attempt. I sometimes thought that if he took me to a deserted island, I would walk out into the sea and fuck a squid just to cross him.

SOCIALITE

I heard it started even before the book.

WRITER

What?

SOCIALITE

The infidelities.

WRITER

Oh my God. I had no idea there were so many little stories about me. Perhaps you should have written for Playboy. What did you hear?

SOCIALITE

I heard you slept with one of those murderers.

WRITER

WHAT?

SOCIALITE

From your crime novel. The Cowboy who killed that little girl. I heard you fucked him the day he was going to be executed.

WRITER

Oh my God. Who did you hear that from?

SOCIALITE

A good journalist always protects their sources. Is that story true?

WRITER

What a horrifying question! I won't answer it.

SOCIALITE

It's true, isn't it!

WRITER

I never ... I never fucked him.

SOCIALITE

Were you fucked by him?

WRITER

So crass! No - Christ, I don't do that! You know that!

SOCIALITE

But something happened in that jail cell. Didn't it?

WRITER

God. Yes. Something happened.

SOCIALITE

But you're not going to tell me what happened, are you?

WRITER

No. Oh my God no.

SOCIALITE

I can't believe it. That cowboy murdered a 14-year-old girl!

WRITER

I know.

SOCIALITE

You like them rough, do you?

WRITER

He was less rough than you might think. Did you know he wrote songs?

SOCIALITE

No.

WRITER

I went through his cell after they hanged him. I found a book of songs he had written. There were almost 100 melodies in it, all written on death row.

SOCIALITE

I imagine there isn't much else to do.

WRITER

Can you guess what he wrote about?

SOCIALITE

No. Tell me.

WRITER

Rodeo queens. High school girls. Mexican prostitutes. They were all love songs.

SOCIALITE

That must have been very interesting for you.

WRITER

Why?

SOCIALITE

Because, basically, all you write are love letters.

WRITER

Is that your literary criticism? You are the only one who has ever thought that.

SOCIALITE

I don't care. I'm right. You are like a little boy. You are so embarrassed to be in love that you get nasty. You tease, you tell mean stories. But I know what it means when my pigtails are getting dipped into ink.

WRITER

Do you believe that's what my Playboy story is?

SOCIALITE

I haven't read it. But I read your crime novel.

WRITER

And?

SOCIALITE

And it's a love letter to the cowboy. But instead of admitting it, you must tell every little horrifying story you can dig up about the man. You have to linger on the moment when he cuts that little girl's throat. It is so infantile.

WRITER

Is that why you never liked my writing?

SOCIALITE

Yes.

WRITER

So I was right to run from you.

SOCIALITE

What? Why?

WRITER

Because you did mean to harm me.

SOCIALITE

Oh, poor boy. You always turn into a little beast when you get criticized. But you're an utter failure as a writer, and it's time somebody told you.

WRITER

I hope you enjoy this little moment of nastiness. The next time I see that shock of red hair coming up the street at me or bouncing through the crowd at the club, I will make sure it is a men's bathroom I duck into. This is the last time you will ever see me.

SOCIALITE

Oh, I doubt that. We share a coke dealer.

WRITER

We do? Who?

SOCIALITE

The man with the birthmark on his face.

WRITER

Chico?

SOCIALITE

His name isn't Chico. So much for your famous memory.

WRITER

You mean to say whatever is on your mind, don't you?

SOCIALITE

Yes.

WRITER

Then be done with it.

SOCIALITE

You failed as a writer because there was only one interesting story to come out of that farmhouse murder, and you didn't write it.

WRITER

What was that?

SOCIALITE

Whatever happened between you and the cowboy on the day he was hanged.

WRITER

Fuck you.

SOCIALITE

I bet it is the only thing in your life that wasn't sad or seedy.

WRITER

Fuck you.

SOCIALITE

I didn't mean to make you cry.

WRITER

Oh, you're enjoying this.

SOCIALITE

Yes, I am.

WRITER

Then I am leaving.

SOCIALITE

It's been fun. I look forward to seeing you running through traffic again.

WRITER

Fuck you.

SCENE FIVE

SETTING: An hotel room in England, late
60s.

AT RISE: The WRITER clutches his nose,
looking at THE MICK, 40s, male.

WRITER

What is it that you just threw at me?

THE MICK

A book.

WRITER

One of mine?

THE MICK

I don't know.

WRITER

Let me see. No. Flannery O'Conner. I suppose there is some irony
to that. But it would have been better irony had you lugged one
of my own books at me.

THE MICK

I was not thinking about the irony when I threw it.

WRITER

Well, when I retell this story, I shall make it one of my books.
Oh, what a tale! I don't think I have ever bled so much in my
life! It's just awful.

THE MICK

I hope you are not expecting an apology.

WRITER

Expecting? This whole encounter has been unexpected. I thought I
would be getting another lecture.

THE MICK

It may still be forthcoming.

WRITER

Oh, I don't think so. I wouldn't stand for that. You may lecture me, or you may fling books at me, but you may not do both. I imagine that I am in an awful lot of pain right now.

THE MICK

I imagine you are.

WRITER

How convenient that I numbed myself well in advance of our encounter. You'll just have to pretend that I am screaming and flailing about.

THE MICK

Had I known you were so drunk, I might have chosen to lecture you instead.

WRITER

This is so much more exciting! Perhaps I should run off to a cabin like Tennessee Williams. Tell myself I have only a few months to live and write something astounding. Oh, goodness! My nose is actually moving about on my face of its own accord!

THE MICK

I should be surprised that you are enjoying this so much.

WRITER

But you are not.

THE MICK

No. I have started to think that you want it. Every time I see you, you've got another fellow slapping your face or throwing a drink in your lap.

WRITER

Aha! So that's what this is about. You saw me tonight.

THE MICK

Yes.

WRITER

Aw, Christ. You know I always come back to you. I'm just fooling around, baby. Why else be famous? I didn't expect that you would be jealous.

THE MICK

Do you think I care who or what you fuck? Is that why you think I am angry?

WRITER

I could never figure out the tempers of Boston Irish poets. You're all so thoughtful and subdued, and then I say the wrong thing and everybody's ears turn red and their eyes dart away from me. You would think that I would know enough to duck by now.

THE MICK

I will call down to the concierge and have them send up some ice.

WRITER

And vodka, please.

THE MICK

Ice for your nose.

WRITER

Oh, then don't bother. It will stop bleeding when it is done. You know that we meet the Queen Mother tomorrow.

THE MICK

Yes.

WRITER

Won't I be in quite a state? Should I tell her you threw my New York book at me or my crime book?

THE MICK

Whatever you please.

WRITER

Then I will tell her I was beaten in the streets by a roving gang of Irish nationalists. I will say that I would not stop singing Rule Britannia while they struck at me with their shillelaghs. How does that sound?

THE MICK

Very exciting. Why did they attack you?

WRITER

I presume it was because I had spent a good part of the evening throwing money at a gorgeous London barkeep and finally convinced him to blow me in the back seat of a taxi. Somehow they witnessed this. Somehow, the goddamn micks always know what I am up to.

THE MICK

You're going to tell the Queen Mother that you were blown in the backseat of a taxi?

WRITER

I hear she likes a good story.

THE MICK

You don't lack for good stories. It's a wonder you don't choke on them.

WRITER

Hey? You used to love my stories, baby. Remember when we met? You used to buy me drinks just to hear me talk.

THE MICK

Aha. You remember that.

WRITER

Yes, baby!

THE MICK

You remember when I was just a freckle-faced Boston lad, swooning over your every word, looking upon you as though I could see little cupids in your eyes.

WRITER

Well, I wouldn't put it like that - too sentimental. I think you are having sport with me.

THE MICK

You remember that boy, though.

WRITER

Yes, baby. Of course I remember.

THE MICK

You remember a boy in uniform, fresh out of the military, filling up notebook after notebook with sonnets and sneaking his hand onto your knee at the Saturday matinees. Am I still being too sentimental?

WRITER

Yes, baby, but I don't mind it. Memories!

THE MICK

Memories! I remember our first kiss, in my apartment in Chelsea, after you had spent the afternoon bullying a photographer from a magazine into taking your picture draped across a divan like some Turkish sultan. How many drinks did I put into you to get that kiss?

WRITER

You didn't need to put any drinks into me to get a kiss, baby. I think we were just both bashful.

THE MICK

Bashful, eh? It was a bashful kiss. Our lips pressed together and then apart again, and it did not happen again for two months. I thought you must hate me.

WRITER

Hardly, baby! I was crazy about you!

THE MICK

So when did you start to hate me?

WRITER

You can't think that. I'm just a drunk, and it makes me stupid. I don't mean anything when I fool around. I'm awful fond of you.

THE MICK

And how do you think I feel about you?

WRITER

Less fond, I would guess. And you would be right. I am spoiled and rotten and treats his friends badly. Do you know, I sometimes wonders if I am even tolerable.

THE MICK

And what do you conclude?

WRITER

There must be something about me that you love, and so there must be something about me that is worth loving.

THE MICK

At the moment, I am hard pressed to tell you just what that is.

WRITER

Can I make a widdle gussy-poo, baby?

THE MICK

And what is your guessy-poo?

WRITER

My stories? Of course?

THE MICK

You'll meet the Queen Mother tomorrow, and she will hear your stories, and like everybody else, she will fall in love with them. And where does that leave me?

WRITER

You tell stories too, baby. What would I do without them?

THE MICK

My stories mean that much to you?

WRITER

Yes!

THE MICK

Then I shall tell you one now. Would you like that?

WRITER

I think I would. A bedtime story, I think, because I am going to pass out from loss of blood any moment now.

THE MICK

A bedtime story. Should I tell you one you already know?

WRITER

Those are the best kind, baby! Is it a story about a midget?

THE MICK

Yes!

WRITER

With a lisp?

THE MICK

Yes!

WRITER

My favorite character! I expect that I will like this story very much!

THE MICK

Very well. How shall I begin?

WRITER

Maybe with a bedtime prayer?

THE MICK

Well, isn't that fitting? Do you know that this midget used to pray to Saint Theresa every night.

WRITER

Saint Theresa?

THE MICK

Can you tell me why?

WRITER

I can't imagine, baby! What an interesting story!

THE MICK

You know that Saint Theresa had something to say about prayers, don't you?

WRITER

Yes, in fact I do.

THE MICK

And what was that?

WRITER

Saint Theresa said that more pain is caused by answered prayers that by unanswered prayers.

THE MICK

Do you think that's true?

WRITER

I know it is, baby. So what did this midget pray for?

THE MICK

We'll save that until the end of the story. It will be the big surprise.

WRITER

Oh, dear me, baby! I shall have to do my best to stay up for the entire story.

THE MICK

You like the story?

WRITER

Very much.

THE MICK

I should warn you: It may not go so well.

WRITER

Well, let me be the judge of that. But leave out any unpleasant details.

THE MICK

Oh. Perhaps I should skip the midget's childhood.

WRITER

Please do. I suspect it was not happy.

THE MICK

Miserable. And you know what happens to children who are raised in a state of constant unhappiness.

WRITER

Ugh. Only too well.

THE MICK

This midget grew badly. Now here's the part of the story that you will have to help me with. Can you do that?

WRITER

Oh, yes! What do you need?

THE MICK

I need you to give me words when I ask for them. And here is where I ask you for my first word. When the midget grew up, what profession did he choose?

WRITER

Let's pick something fabulous. A jongleur!

THE MICK

A jongleur, yes, splendid. And what did he do?

WRITER

He roamed the hillsides, singing little songs and telling jokes to entertain peasants.

THE MICK

And our jongleur had a strange genius. People fell in love with him. Every cruel thing he said, every petty action he took has a strange beauty to it. Those who loved him followed him everywhere. They even followed him to the gallows.

WRITER

Oh. Baby, don't.

THE MICK

Would you like me to stop the story?

WRITER

No. Just ... don't. Don't be unkind. Be fair when you tell this story.

THE MICK

Very well. I will tell you how I will be fair. I will ask you to help me again at this point in the story. How does that sound?

WRITER

Swell, baby. Just swell.

THE MICK

So here we are at the gibbet, with the midget. And what do you think he's doing?

WRITER

Again, let me find a suitable world. Let's say he's writing a coronach.

THE MICK

My goodness, what a word! A coronach, yes, that will do very nicely. He composes dirges for the dead men. Does that seem like a fair way to tell our story?

WRITER

Yes.

THE MICK

Now, there are some who say that the jongleur might have tried to do more for the hanged men. There are some who say that the midget could have talked to the judges, or the governors, or the hangmen, and convinced them to spare the men. But the people who say this aren't being fair, are they?

WRITER

No.

THE MICK

No. They're being unkind. And furthermore, they are being even more unkind when they claim that the jongleur wanted the men to die, because then he would be able to write his coronaches, and his éloges, and epicedes about them. If there was art to be made of a hanging, our jongleur would make it. Now who would say such things?

WRITER

Nobody who ever loved the jongleur.

THE MICK

But the men were hanged, and the jongleur sang his songs, and he became very famous. And why else have fame? You will have to help me out here. Why else have fame?

WRITER

If not to dance?

THE MICK

If not to dance. Splendid. And he danced. He danced polkas, he danced polonaises, he danced mazurkas. If there was a dance to be danced, what do you think or jongleur did?

WRITER

Danced them.

THE MICK

Why else have fame? But the jongleur was also filled with the bitterest of emotions. His mouth tasted like ash, and his ears buzzed with accusations, and his humors turned black and heavy. And why do you think this was?

WRITER

Baby, I wish I knew.

THE MICK

Might it have been it because he had allowed hangings? Was it because he had grown rich and fat off their deaths? Who knows? Who would even say such a thing?

WRITER

Nobody who ever loved the jongleur.

THE MICK

No. No indeed. Nobody who loved the jongleur would even dare think such a thing. But something happened to the midget. He continued to dance, and he started to drink, and his drinking became greater, and his dancing became greater. He drank seven kegs of beer a day, and danced 15 hours. His face and limbs were soaked with alcohol, and his legs grew hot from the friction of his feet striking the floor, and they moved so fast that they let off sparks.

WRITER

Sparks.

THE MICK

Terrible, hot sparks, yes. They would smoke and burn the floor around him. And one day, when his shirt and pants were soaked with alcohol, a spark set him alight. And up he went like a chubby little candle, spinning and burning. And those who loved him rushed to him to put out the flames, and they too were caught in the conflagration. Some were burned terribly. Some died in the fire. Some suffocated from the smoke. And the last thing any of them heard was the jongleur. And what do you think he was doing?

WRITER

Singing?

THE MICK

No. He had stopped singing many years earlier. What else?

WRITER

Well ... are we at the end of our story?

THE MICK

Yes.

WRITER

Then he must have been praying.

THE MICK

Yes. They heard him praying.

WRITER

To Saint Theresa.

THE MICK

Yes.

WRITER

And do we find out now what the jongleur prayed for?

THE MICK

Yes.

WRITER

My breath is in my throat. Tell me!

THE MICK

He prayed that no prayer should ever again be answered.

WRITER

Yes.

THE MICK

Do you see? The story does not end well.

WRITER

Very badly.

THE MICK

Yes. And where do you think I was during the fire.

WRITER

I don't know.

THE MICK

Long gone. It's a fool who rushes to put out a fire and gets burned as well.

WRITER

I see.

THE MICK

Next week we will have been together 11 years.

WRITER

Eleven years is a long time to be together.

THE MICK

Eleven is as long as we will ever be together.

WRITER

It's the best lecture you have ever given me.

THE MICK

Thank you. Have you stopped bleeding?

WRITER

No.

SCENE SIX

SETTING: A prison cell, early 60s.

AT RISE: The WRITER speaks to a prisoner,
THE COWBOY, 20s.

THE COWBOY

I didn't think you would come.

WRITER

I wasn't sure that I would come either. But how could I not see you?

THE COWBOY

Did you speak to the governor?

WRITER

No.

THE COWBOY

No?

WRITER

He would not see me. I have told you. There is nothing I can do.

THE COWBOY

Well. Well. So it is. So I die. I am glad you came, though. You had asked me about my songs.

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

I want to sing one to you. Every time you come to my cell, you look at my guitar and ask about it.

WRITER

I have always been curious about your songs.

THE COWBOY

Do you think this will be good for your book? To hear one of my songs?

WRITER

I'm sure it will be good for my book. And whatever the case, I want to hear you sing anyway. I am curious.

THE COWBOY

I know. But I'm shy singing for people. I only ever sang for myself. But I don't expect it will matter much after today. I might as well go ahead and make a fool of myself in front of you.

WRITER

Well, I'm very glad. I am glad to hear the song, and I don't expect that you will seem foolish at all.

THE COWBOY

Wasn't I your man?
 Wasn't you my gal?
 I was lucky then--
 I had it all.
 What did I say
 To make you cry like that?
 You showed me the door,
 You handed me my hat.

What can I say
 I ain't already said?
 I miss your voice.
 I miss our bed.
 Wasn't we in love?
 Wasn't we a pair?
 I reach in the dark
 And find you ain't there.

THE COWBOY (cont.)

What am I now?
Not much of a man.
I sleep where I lie down,
I work where I can.
I wait for the day
When you call me home.
I ain't half what I used to be,
But I'm twice as alone.

WRITER

Did you write that?

THE COWBOY

Yes. What do you think?

WRITER

I like it very much.

THE COWBOY

Do you?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

I used to think that if this hadn't happened, I might have gone into songwriting. Or painting, or something. Writing, like you do. I always thought, if it wasn't for that one bad thing that I done, I might have wound up just like you.

WRITER

I don't see why not.

THE COWBOY

Well, that ain't gonna happen now. Did you see the other hanging?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

What was it like?

WRITER

Are you sure you want to hear this?

THE COWBOY

Yes. It's gonna be my turn soon. I want to know what to expect.

WRITER

It was surprising.

THE COWBOY

How?

WRITER

It seemed more like a rehearsal than an execution. He seemed like a tailor's dummy.

THE COWBOY

Why?

WRITER

He was wrapped up. He was put into a straight jacket, and a hood was put over his head. And when they opened the trap door, he fell a short distance. It happened so gently, it was impossible to believe that anybody had died.

THE COWBOY

Will I wear a straight jacket and a hood?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

So I won't be able to see nothing?

WRITER

No.

THE COWBOY

And nobody will see me?

WRITER

Nobody will see you.

THE COWBOY

I think that's for the best. Did you talk to him before they hanged him?

WRITER

Yes. He asked me to pray with him. He said he believed he was going to a better place.

THE COWBOY

Do you believe that?

WRITER

I don't know. But I prayed with him. Do you think you will go to a better place?

THE COWBOY

I believe there is a better place. I hope I'm going to it.

WRITER

You seem pale. How are you doing?

THE COWBOY

Not well. I have thrown up three times today. I can't keep my food down. The guards won't look at me or talk to me. If I don't distract myself, I start shaking. It takes over my whole body. I can't control it.

WRITER

Have you seen a minister?

THE COWBOY

No. I'm gonna speak to one just before they come to take me.
Just like in the movies.

WRITER

What will you tell him?

THE COWBOY

I'll tell him I don't mind dying if it makes things even for
that little girl I killed. I just want everything to be even.

WRITER

Do you think it will be even?

THE COWBOY

No. Nothing will ever make things even for a dead 14-year-old
girl.

WRITER

You think about her often, don't you?

THE COWBOY

Yes. I think about that moment when I was in her room with her,
and she was tied to the bed. She was begging me not to hurt her
even as I was cutting her throat.

WRITER

Was there ever a time when you thought that you would stop? That
you wouldn't hurt the girl?

THE COWBOY

No. I went into that room to kill her. I never questioned it. I
didn't enjoy doing it, but it had to be done. She seemed like a
nice girl, though.

WRITER

Why do you say that?

THE COWBOY

When I was walking to her room, I heard her begging. She was begging for the lives of her family. If we had swapped places, I would have begged for myself. I would not even have thought about my family. I remember thinking that it was mighty decent of her to beg for everybody like that.

WRITER

How long did it take for you to kill her?

THE COWBOY

I don't know. How long does it take to cut a throat? I put her on her side, so the blood wouldn't spray onto me.

WRITER

Was there a lot of blood?

THE COWBOY

Yes. When you cut a throat, the blood spurts out of it. But I've slaughtered chicken and pigs all my life, so it didn't surprise me none.

WRITER

If you could speak to her now, what would you say?

THE COWBOY

I don't know. I would ask her not to hate me. So many people seem to hate me.

WRITER

Should they?

THE COWBOY

Sometimes I think yes. But sometimes I think: if it wasn't for that one night, I would just be another farmhand. Except for doing one terrible thing, I never did nothing worth hating.

WRITER

Who do you think hates you?

THE COWBOY

Oh, hell, who don't? Since I got arrested, you're the only person from outside this jail who has had a kind word for me. Even my lawyers treat me like I'm some kind of dangerous animal.

WRITER

I think you could have had better lawyers.

THE COWBOY

I could have used help in here, that's for sure. Any help. I didn't get much.

WRITER

Must we go through this again? I talked to whoever I could talk to. Believe me, if I could have done more, I would have.

THE COWBOY

Really? I would not have lifted a finger. If I was you and you was me, I would have let you hang.

WRITER

Why?

THE COWBOY

Because it would make a better ending to my book.

WRITER

No. People like happy endings.

THE COWBOY

In a few hours you'll have one. When I'm dead, everybody can go home and not worry about nothing anymore. What could be happier than that?

WRITER

Don't talk like that.

THE COWBOY

Why?

WRITER

It's not true. It is terrible that they are going to execute you.

THE COWBOY

I don't think so. My life ain't worth that much. Maybe I should have gone into the army. If I'd died in a war, my life might mean something. But I got nothing to live for. There is nothing I will miss.

WRITER

You don't have any happy memories at all?

THE COWBOY

Some. I like learning new words. That's why I think I could have been a WRITER. Do you know what word I learned today?

WRITER

What?

THE COWBOY

Aperçu. It's an outline or a syllabus. I learned it from the dictionary you gave me. But now I don't think I'm going to get to use the word in a sentence.

WRITER

Sure you can. Ask me about my book.

THE COWBOY

How's your book coming?

WRITER

I've finished the outline.

THE COWBOY

So your aperçu is coming along nicely.

WRITER

Aha!

THE COWBOY

I don't think I have anything else to say to you, unless you want to talk about the murder some more.

WRITER

No.

THE COWBOY

Then we might as well end our conversations today. You need to finish your book anyway.

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

How will you end it? Will you write about the conversations we have had?

WRITER

No.

THE COWBOY

No?

WRITER

I am not a character in my book. I will use our conversations to reconstruct the events.

THE COWBOY

The events of the crime?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

And then the hangings?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

I wish there was some way to let you know what I am thinking when they hang me, so you could put it in your book.

WRITER

What do you imagine you will be thinking?

THE COWBOY

That I'm going to shit myself. That when they cut my body down, it will be a mess. My tongue will be sticking out of my mouth. My eyes will be all bugged out. And I will reek of shit.

WRITER

Will you think about anything else?

THE COWBOY

That I hope it will be over quickly.

WRITER

It will. The other hanging only took 10 minutes, all told. It seemed to happen too quickly. I felt like there should have been speeches, or something.

THE COWBOY

Why?

WRITER

It didn't seem like a thing that needed to be rushed. The execution took less time than we have been talking.

THE COWBOY

I want to ask you something.

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

Will you look at my body after I die?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

So you can describe it in your book?

WRITER

Yes. Does that make you unhappy?

THE COWBOY

Yes.

WRITER

Why?

THE COWBOY

I'm awful vain. Haven't you figured that out?

WRITER

Why do you say you're vain?

THE COWBOY

I ran out of something yesterday, so I asked the guards to get me some more of it. They had to go out of their way to do so. Do you know what that thing was?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

You spoke to the guards?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

What was it?

WRITER

Pomade.

THE COWBOY

When I ran out of pomade, and I thought I would have to go to the gallows without doing up my hair, I vomited. It was the most frightened I have been.

WRITER

You want to make sure your hair looks right before they take you to the gallows.

THE COWBOY

Heck, yes. Tell me that's not vain! But I only ever had one thing going for me.

WRITER

What is that?

THE COWBOY

My face. Do you agree?

WRITER

With what?

THE COWBOY

That I am a good-looking man.

WRITER

Yes. You are a good-looking man.

THE COWBOY

How good looking?

WRITER

Very. Very good looking.

THE COWBOY

I'm ain't smart and I'm ain't charming, but I could always rely on my smile to get me what I needed.

WRITER

Like what?

THE COWBOY

I don't know. Jobs, sometimes. Dates. It didn't ever matter how much trouble I was in; people always seemed to give me another chance.

WRITER

Until now.

THE COWBOY

Naw. Even now. The guards treat me pretty well. They would even hang around and bullshit with me, give me cigarettes. Nobody ever gave me trouble while I was locked up.

WRITER

You think the guards were nice to you because you are good looking?

THE COWBOY

Sure. It's why you're nice to me, isn't it?

WRITER

No! What?

THE COWBOY

You've come to visit me for two years. Is that all because of your book?

WRITER

No.

THE COWBOY

It's because you like looking at me.

WRITER

No! I've enjoyed our talks. I think of you as a friend.

THE COWBOY

You know, I don't believe that. Outside this prison, you and I would never be friends. I'm just a stupid goddamn farmhand.

WRITER

I think we would be friends. I don't know how many times I have to tell you that. We would be friends.

THE COWBOY

If you wanted to screw me, we would.

WRITER

Don't say that.

THE COWBOY

I don't mind it. What else would we have to do together? I'm ain't smart, I don't know any funny stories and I get mean when I'm drunk.

WRITER

I also get mean when I'm drunk.

THE COWBOY

Well, then have that in common. That and the fact that we both like my pretty face.

WRITER

Please stop.

THE COWBOY

Don't get upset; it's all right with me. The only thing I have had to look forward to these past two years have been your visits.

WRITER

But you question my motives.

THE COWBOY

You ain't given me no reason not to.

WRITER

What do you want me to tell you?

THE COWBOY

Why me? Why spend all this time with me? I heard you bribed a man to get into this prison. They give you free run of this place! They open the door and in you walk, right into my cell. Why would you want to do that?

WRITER

At first, because I thought you had a good story to tell.

THE COWBOY

Weren't you scared? Weren't you at all afraid of being alone in a cell with a man who had cut the throat of a little girl?

WRITER

Yes. I almost didn't come. I'm not a very brave man.

THE COWBOY

Did you think I would hurt you?

WRITER

I was afraid to even think about it. The first time we met, I could hardly speak; I was so frightened.

THE COWBOY

Then why?

WRITER

I can't explain it. I'm suppose I'm fascinated by misbehavior.

THE COWBOY

Well, I suppose I've misbehaved some.

WRITER

I was just going to write about the murders. I didn't even care who killed the family when I started the book – I just wanted to write about how a crime like this would affect a town. But when you were arrested, and I saw your photo, I knew I was going to have to write about you as well. I had to know why.

THE COWBOY

Why what?

WRITER

Why you killed her. You didn't seem like a killer.

THE COWBOY

I am a killer. I could kill you right now. They're gonna hang me soon, so it wouldn't make to much difference.

WRITER

I suppose you could. Why don't you?

THE COWBOY

I don't reckon I have any real reason to. It wouldn't do me any good, and it wouldn't do you much good either.

WRITER

I'm glad.

THE COWBOY

Don't look so nervous; I'd never hurt you. I like you!

WRITER

I like you too. That's why I've come back to talk to you for all this time.

THE COWBOY

But if I dropped to my knees right now and started sucking your cock you wouldn't complain either, would you?

WRITER

God. I don't want you to think of me like that. Whatever has happened between us ... I want you to think of me as your friend.

THE COWBOY

Well, I apologize. I was never good at holding my tongue, and now that I'm gonna die there don't seem to be no reason not to say what's on my mind.

WRITER

I don't want you to think I've used you — in any way. You know?

THE COWBOY

Hell, we used each other. It gets lonely on death row; I would have done anything to keep you coming back to talk with me — whatever you wanted in return, I was happy to do. I used you for your company. It didn't matter to me if we talked or whatever. Better than being locked up all alone. So I used you too.

WRITER

I don't mind.

THE COWBOY

So tell the truth. What was it about my photo that got you so curious? Why did you think I wasn't a killer?

WRITER

I don't want to tell you.

THE COWBOY

Aw. Goddamn you. Why not?

WRITER

If I tell you, you might feel that it confirms your suspicions about me.

THE COWBOY

So confirm them. It won't bother me. What was it you saw in my photograph?

WRITER

You were so....

THE COWBOY

What? I was so what?

WRITER

You were so. Fucking. Beautiful. Clear eyes, good hair, bright smile. I saw that photo and thought, "This is a killer?"

THE COWBOY

There. That's why I want to do my hair up before I go to the gallows. Because right up until the moment when I die, it's important.

WRITER

Important?

THE COWBOY

It's important that I'm beautiful. That's why I don't want you to see me after they have hanged me.

WRITER

I don't understand.

THE COWBOY

Because I don't want you to remember me that way.

WRITER

Why is that important to you?

THE COWBOY

I don't want you looking at my dead body and seeing it all messed up. I want you to remember me with perfect hair. Do you promise me you won't look at my body?

WRITER

It's really that important to you?

THE COWBOY

Yes.

WRITER

I promise.

THE COWBOY

Thank you. So when you write your book, and you talk about me being taken to the gallows, what will you say?

WRITER

I will write about how nice your hair was.

THE COWBOY

And how will you end it?

WRITER

With them putting the hood over your head, and the noose around your neck, and then dropping you through the trapdoor.

THE COWBOY

And then?

WRITER

And then nothing. That will be the end of my novel.

THE COWBOY

A happy ending.

WRITER

Not so happy.

THE COWBOY

Oh, I think it is. And you've worked awful hard on it, and now you're going to be able to finish it. How long you been at this?

WRITER

Six years.

THE COWBOY

You must be glad that it's almost over. I would be.

WRITER

Glad? No. But relieved, yes, a little.

THE COWBOY

And what do you think? Will people read the book?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

Will it be a bestseller?

WRITER

Yes.

THE COWBOY

So you're going to be famous! Rich and famous! I'm glad for you. Something good has got to come out of all this. That seems like a happy ending to me. Don't it seem like a happy ending to you?

WRITER

Does it?

THE COWBOY

Heck yes! This has all got to mean something, in the end, don't it? Tell me that when I get hanged, it's going to mean something. Tell me we got us a happy ending here.

WRITER

Yes. We do. We have. We've got it.

THE COWBOY

We've got what.

WRITER

A happy ending.

END