

ANGEL'S MICE AND MEN

Scene One ... Friday evening, July 1, just before sunset.

Scene Two ... A week later. Late afternoon.

Scene Three ... Later that evening.

Scene Four ... A few hours later.

Scene Five ... Two weeks later. Early evening.

Scene Six ... The next afternoon.

Scene Seven... A week later. Evening.

Scene Eight ... The next morning, just before dawn.

Scene Nine ... The following day, just before dawn.

Cast of Characters (In order of appearance)

Gina Signorelli: A woman in her late 20s.

Angel Ventura: A widow in her late 30s.

Rose Bloom: A widow in her late 70s.

Steele La Chance: A man in his early 40s.

Mr. Pasquale: A man in his 70s; Often heard, but never seen.

ANGEL'S MICE AND MEN

SCENE 1

The action throughout takes place in ANGEL's fifty-something-year-old, Dutch Colonial home in Lynbrook, Long Island, New York. The year is 1992. The play begins just before sunset, around 8:10 p.m., on the first Friday in July and continues throughout the month. This is a multi-level set. Angel's living room, bedroom, and a hallway with doorways are on the main level. MRS. BLOOM's apartment is above that. The front stoop is on a lower level. All the Bible quotes are from the Public Domain UKJV, I Love Jesus Free to Copy Version.

At rise, Angel is wearing a black button-down blouse, and a calf-length black, pleated skirt and black, lace-up, oxford shoes. Her long black hair is turning gray at the temples and pulled back in a severe ponytail. GINA is wearing hot pants, a halter top, lots of big jewelry, a ton of makeup, and gold rhinestone, high heel sandals. Her hair is bleached-blonde and styled really: big. She has a Bible in one hand and a beer in the other. Mrs. Bloom's upstairs apartment is in Blackout. She is standing frozen behind her kitchen table, which is covered in a white tablecloth. She is wearing a long sleeve dress and has a white scarf covering her hair. On the table are two Shabbos candles and a Kiddush Cup. A loaf of challah bread is covered by a white, cloth napkin.

GINA. Angel, y'just gotta go to that dance club with me tonight.

ANGEL. Gina, how many times do I have to tell you – no!

GINA. But they're havin' a pre-Fourth of July luau complete with fireworks, a Don Ho impersonator, and a wet t-shirt contest. *(She places her hands on her breasts.)* And with my size C, scrumptious salines, I'm sure to be a shoo-in. *(Blackout.)*

(Lights on Mrs. Blooms's apartment. She is putting a few coins in the tzedakah pushka, charity box.)

MRS. BLOOM. Blessed are you, oh Lord, our God, King of the universe, who commands us to be charitable. *(Blackout.)*

(Lights on Angel's living room.)

GINA. The last time I saw Momma, she made me read out loud to her from the Good Book, and I found out God knows life's no paradise for Adam without Eve. Let me see, it was somewhere in

the beginning. (*Blackout. Angel and Gina cross into the bedroom.*) And God said, “Let there be light.”

MRS. BLOOM. (*Very dim lights on Mrs. Bloom’s apartment. Mrs. Bloom lights the right Shabbos candles and then the left one.*) Blessed are you, oh Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has commanded us to light the candles of Shabbat. (*She circles her hands around the flames three times. The third time bringing her hands to her face and gently covering her face with both hands, fingertips up, palms to her face. She says a silent prayer, and lowers her hands.*) Shabbat Shalom. (*Mrs. Bloom freezes.*)

GINA. “...and there was light.” (*Now there are lights on Angel’s bedroom too.*)

MRS. BLOOM. (*She begins singing “Shalom Aleichem.”*) “Shalom aleichem, mal’achei hasharet, mal’achei elyon... (*Singing slowly fades out. Mrs. Bloom freezes.*)

GINA. (*Gina takes a huge slug of beer.*) “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it...”

MRS. BLOOM. Blessed are you, oh Lord, our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine. (*She raises the glass.*) (*Blackout on Mrs. Bloom.*)

GINA. Oh, here’s the part I’ve been looking for... “And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make an associated helper for him.” Way to Go, God! Oh, I just love this part: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” (*Toasting her beer.*)
Salute!

ANGEL. Gina, when did you last visit Momma?

GINA. Yesterday.

ANGEL. And?

GINA. And “The Breathe-Easy Nursing Home,” stunk like urine-scented air freshener.

ANGEL. How did Momma seem?

GINA. More fried than ever.

ANGEL. But she’s on that experimental memory drug.

GINA. Yeah, and what’s in it, LSD? I’m telling ya, her delusions are getting’ on my nerves.

ANGEL. Don’t take them personally.

GINA. Oh, that’s easy for you to say. In her scrambled brain waves, y’ forever frozen as the vestal virgin. Me, I’m immortalized as the Sicilian slut. (*Gina puts her foot up on the nightstand, and begins polishing her toenails.*)

ANGEL. I’m so worried about her.

GINA. Y’ worried about her? That witch scared the living shit outta me yesterday.

ANGEL. Gina!

GINA. Don’t Gina, me. Momma was sound asleep when I got there, but every five minutes, she’d sit straight up, open her eyes, and shout, (*With a heavy Italian accent.*) “So, Sal, you want the macaroni up?” I swear, I was waitin’ for Poppa to yell from the grave, “Not yet!”

ANGEL. Poor Momma.

GINA. It’s hopeless.

ANGEL. (*Making the sign of the cross.*) Where’s there’s life, there’s hope.

GINA. If y’say so, but this morning she called ‘cause she remembered something really important. You know, one of her famous “It came to me in the middle-of-the-night like a vision,” speeches.

ANGEL. So?

GINA. So, she wished you and Tony many happy returns on your fifteenth wedding anniversary.

ANGEL. What else did she say?

GINA. How she knew Tony-boy was gonna buy you something real nice.

ANGEL. And what did you say?

GINA. What I’ve been saying for the last five years, “If I toldcha once, Momma, I toldcha a hundred times, Tony’s dead.

ANGEL. And?

GINA. And she said what she always says, “Why can’t I remember nothing no more?” I’m telling ya, if I knew the answer to that, I wouldn’t be doing bouffants in Bensonhurst. I’d be doing brain surgery in Bellevue.

ANGEL. She’s getting worse. I don’t know...maybe putting her in the home wasn’t such a good idea.

GINA. Don’t start.

ANGEL. I should have tried to keep her here longer.

GINA. The hell y’should’ve. She almost burnt your house down putting the laundry in the oven and the dinner in the dryer. And stop cleanin’ already, y’makin’ me nervous.

ANGEL. I’m just giving the place a lick and a promise, that’s all.

GINA. OK, who’s coming?

ANGEL. A house painter.

GINA. So, for him, y’house’s gotta be Christmas clean?

ANGEL. I’m just straightening up a bit.

GINA. Yeah, sure. If I had a heart attack right now, the doctor could perform surgery on your bedroom floor – it’s sterile.

ANGEL. *Basta*, Gina.

GINA. It ain’t like the Pope or the President’s coming. It’s just a friggen painter.

ANGEL. What color would look good?

GINA. Red.

ANGEL. Red? You want me to paint my bedroom – red?

GINA. Not y’bedroom, y’hair. I got this great “to die for” color. It’s called, “Drop Dead Red.” Believe me, the change’ll do y’good. Maybe you’ll stop with the whole Widow Ventura saga and join the land of the living again.

ANGEL. Gina, we’re talking painting the inside of the house now.

GINA. *(She walks into the living room. Angel follows her.)* I don’t give a damn what color you paint this place. You know how I feel about old houses. They give me the willies like they was haunted or something. But do me a favor? When you paint the living room – gut that picture.

ANGEL. No!

GINA. Come on, Angel. That guy in the Guinea gondola looks seasick.

ANGEL. That was from Tony.

GINA. Yeah, so? It still looks like something that should be hanging in a pizza parlor on Mulberry Street.

ANGEL. So, just because Tony's gone, I should take it down?

GINA. Tony's dying didn't turn that piece of crap into a masterpiece. It's still the same piece of shit it was when he was with us.

ANGEL. That's it Gina! Forget about staying here for a few days. Go home now.

GINA. All right, all right. God knows, I shouldn't talk bad about the dead. I just hope Tony don't put no evil whammy on me. *(To ward off the malocchio, Gina takes her two right hand middle fingers and curves them toward the palm, turning the index finger and the pinky into a pair of tongs. Talking to a picture of Tony.)*

GINA. Now Tony-boy, we all know when you was alive, Angel worshipped you. To her, you was the King of Kings. Remember how she cooked every night a meal for y'like it was The Last Supper? But y'dead now, and my big sister's turning y'into the patron saint of bad pizza parlor paintings. *(She picks up the coffee table book.)* I mean, look at this, Tony, *The Book of Saints*. Every time I come over; your daughter shows me how she circled all them Saint Anthonys. I swear, y'kid thinks they was named after you.

ANGEL. That reminds me. I should call Nikki.

GINA. Leave the kid alone, huh?

ANGEL. I just want her to know if she doesn't like camp, she doesn't have to stay the whole month.

GINA. Believe me, she's out there having the time of her life, and I think y'ought to do the same. Like for instance tonight. I'm not taking y'to a Guido place or nothin'. All them really rich, yuppie types hang out there...dentists...lawyers...stockbrokers.

ANGEL. Maybe next week.

GINA. Next week? By next week, God forbid, I could drop dead. You could drop dead. By then, the whole world could be blown to Kingdom Come.

ANGEL. I'll take my chances.

GINA. I'm sure that's what y'late husband said right before he wrapped his Cadi® around that weeping willow. *(Gina picks up a framed picture of Tony.)* One day I expect to come here, Tony-boy, and see y'bedroom all dark, and your widow's gonna have one of them portable bars set up in the corner like an altar, a shrine to you – her immortal lover.

ANGEL. You mean like *Nonna Santangelo* used to have for Poppy?

GINA. Exactly. Remember how she surrounded it with them little glasses of holy water?

ANGEL. And piles of holy cards in memory of so and so.

GINA. Her stack of them dearly departed cards got so high, I swear y'could play canasta with'em.

ANGEL. That room was always so dark.

GINA. Dark as death. So, you could see the candle –

ANGEL. – The eternal flame she kept burning for her beloved. Remember how she'd always make us kneel in front of it and say the "Hail Mary."

GINA. Jesus, by the time we got to the part, "...pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death," I was so scared – the hairs on my arms would stand straight up.

ANGEL. And every time I'd ask her if she'd ever marry again, she'd say –

GINA AND ANGEL. (*Simultaneously with a heavy Italian accent.*) "Never, then which husband would I go to when I die?"

GINA. Widow Ventura, y'gettin' more and more like her every day.

ANGEL. Gina! Please, listen to me. All I want, right now, is a little peace and quiet.

GINA. So, sign yourself into Momma's nursing home.

ANGEL. Tonight, I'm staying home in honor of my anniversary. *Capisce?*

GINA. Fine. Turn your house into a mausoleum for all I care. Now, I know you and St. Anthony had some kind of major battle the night he died, and you blame yourself for his drunken, asinine behavior, but he cracked up that Cadi® of his own free will. The end of the story. *Finito.*

ANGEL. *Finito*, no! Tony and I had one of those endings without end.

GINA. Face it, Angel. It's over. Dead and buried.

ANGEL. Dead and buried? Never! My love for him is everlasting. From the first minute I met Tony, I knew I would love him – always.

GINA. That's how I feel about every guy when I first meet him, but about two dates down the line I start getting the skeevies 'cause I start noticing things about him that I can't stand. Like he's got all that yellow wax hangin' out of his hairy ears.

ANGEL. I loved everything about Tony, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

GINA. I remember Momma saying, (*With a heavy Italian accent, imitating their mother.*)

"Angel, you act like this Tony, Tony, Tony is the second coming of Christ. *The Padre Eterno.*" For God's sake, Angel, he was just a man, and he ain't never gonna resurrect. Face it, y'Tony's history.

ANGEL. But I still feel his presence. It's like part of him never left and lives inside me.

GINA. Then call an exorcist. Y'know, I think Momma was right nicknaming him, *un diavolo*, the devil.

ANGEL. She was so sure he only wanted one thing from me – *Sesso*. Little did she know Tony would never lay a hand on me till the day we were married.

GINA. And till death did you part that horny dog couldn't keep his paws off of ya. Yeah, falling in love is wonderful. That's why I do it at least three times a month. The problem with me is – it never lasts. The problem with you is – it goes on forever. Now, Angel, stop cleaning for a minute and give the dust mites a chance to multiply. (*She wipes her finger on a table.*) Right now, there's another, invisible universe living on my fingertip, eating little pieces of dead flaky skin, fighting to survive. It makes me wonder how many other worlds exist out there, that we can't see? (*We hear a noise from above.*) What the hell was that?

ANGEL. Didn't I tell you? I rented out Momma's apartment.

GINA. To who?

ANGEL. Mrs. Rose Bloom. She's very nice, probably around Momma's age.

GINA. Oh, great. Just what y'needed around here, another senile senior citizen with one foot in the grave. So, where'd you find this antique?

ANGEL. Through the classifieds.

GINA. Through the classifieds? For all you know y'rented the apartment to an ax murderer.

MRS. BLOOM. (*MRS. BLOOM enters, coming down the stairs, carrying challah bread.*) Yoo hoo, *Donstairsikeh*. It's your *opstairsikeh*. Shabbat Shalom.

GINA. You must be Mrs. Bloom.

MRS. BLOOM. This demented antique could also be, maybe, Lizzie Borden.

GINA. I guess you heard me.

MRS. BLOOM. What makes you say that?

GINA. 'Cause I'm Angel's little sister, aka, *una boccalona*, the big mouth.

It's nice to meet you.

MRS. BLOOM. Likewise, I'm sure. I brought you some challah from my *Shabbos*. Friday evening is when I find myself missing my daughter, Sarah. Her hotshot husband, Max Fink, the doctor, is doing a new kind of operation that's, "Such a big growth opportunity, with so much room for expansion," that the Fink pack had to rush out to California, so as not to miss it.

GINA. What kind of operation is it?

MRS. BLOOM. Oy, I was afraid you'd ask. Dr. Fink...enlarges...ai-ai-ai. He turns schmeckles into shekels. In other words – he makes some little schmuck's cockamamie dreams of a bigger and better thing – come true.

GINA. What the hell can a doctor enlarge on a man's body to make his dreams come true?

MRS. BLOOM. I'll tell you what it ain't – his brain. (*Mrs. Bloom looks down between her legs.*)

GINA. What the –? Oh!

MRS. BLOOM. And from this, he makes a living. My son-in-law calls the procedure, "Max-a-Mizer," and while it may enlarge a man's private parts a little, it definitely shrinks his wallet – a lot!

ANGEL. Oh, my.

MRS. BLOOM. That's how the Finks got to move to a hoity-toity neighborhood in La Jolla that I, personally, wouldn't be caught dead in for free. Oy, don't ask if I miss my grandsons, that's a whole other *hartsveytik*. But they have a Spanish housekeeper and a Swedish au pair. So, what do they need from me, their *Yiddish* Grandmother?

ANGEL. Their loss is certainly our gain.

MRS. BLOOM. A better *donstairsikeh* God never made.

GINA. Now, Angel, how did you say you found this gem?

ANGEL. Through the classifieds.

GINA. I just had a brainstorm. (*Getting a newspaper.*) Here it is, "The Personals." The modern way to find a man.

ANGEL. Didn't you just yell at me for finding a tenant through the newspaper? But now it's OK for you to find a mate through one?

GINA. That's different. I plan on going out with him a few weeks before I ask him to move in. Take, for, instance, this one: "Catch of the day. SWM, Italian Catholic, 33, tall, dark, handsome."

MRS. BLOOM. And modest, too.

GINA. "Into cruises to nowhere, Disney World, moonlit beaches, sunsets, hot days, and even hotter nights. Send Photo."

ANGEL. That's like answering a cattle call.

GINA. Y'know...y'right.

ANGEL. So, throw that stupid column out.

GINA. Not on your life. What's stoppin' me from staging my own bull call? Just imagine, a hundred studs sending their photos t'me. Now, Angel, let's go over to your

computer, and you do y'word processing thingy, and we'll write an ad that'll knock'em dead.

ANGEL. Forget about it. I already asked Mrs. Bloom if I could store my computer in her apartment, while it's being painted down here, and I was just about to dismantle it and bring it up there.

GINA. I'll help y'do that later. Right after we write my ad.

MRS. BLOOM. I'm a good editor. I could help.

GINA. (*Pulls Angel over to the computer.*) Now, how would you describe me?

ANGEL. Nutty.

GINA. Oh, I like that. Type that in. "Nutty." What else?

MRS. BLOOM. You're certainly one-of-a-kind.

GINA. Oh, I like that too! "Nutty, one-of-a-kind, SW..." I'm not one of them women that's got a magic mirror, so I can't say I'm beautiful or even pretty. So, honestly, y'two, how would you describe my looks?

MRS. BLOOM. Striking.

GINA. I can live with that. "Nutty, one-of-a-kind, striking SW looking for ..." What am I looking for?

ANGEL. See, that's your problem.

MRS. BLOOM. You could, maybe, start by saying, "Looking for a nice man."

GINA. I can't say that.

ANGEL. Why not?

GINA. 'Cause half the male population ain't nice, and I don't want to limit my responses.

ANGEL. You are looking for a single man? Well, aren't you?

GINA. I want you two to know – y'takin' all the fun out of this. "Looking for S... and... M."

MRS. BLOOM. Oy.

ANGEL. What do you mean? "Looking for S and M." That's it?

GINA. Yeah.

MRS. BLOOM. Oy vay.

GINA. "S" for Single and "M" for Male.

ANGEL. Don't you think you're setting your standards a little low?

GINA. Look, with a generic ad like this, a million guys'll answer. I'll set my standards higher then. And anyone I don't want; I'll pass your way.

ANGEL. Don't do me any favors. If you don't want them, nobody does.

GINA. My dates haven't been all that bad.

ANGEL. Oh, no? How about the mortician who claimed he was abducted by aliens?

GINA. Could've happened. That might be one of the worlds that exist that nobody sees.

ANGEL. Or how about the plumber from Staten Island who claims a headless John the Baptist appears in his hot tub the second Sunday of every month, and charges people ten dollars a holy dunk? Mastercard® and Visa® accepted. No personal checks, please. Gina, help me bring the computer up to Mrs. Bloom's apartment.

GINA. What about printing up my ad, so I can mail it to *Newsday*?

ANGEL. I want you to sleep on it tonight, and if it's all right with you, Mrs. Bloom, can I hook up the computer in your apartment in the morning and print up this idiotic ad, if Gina hasn't come to her senses by then?

MRS. BLOOM. You're more than welcome to do that, but in the meantime, I'm going to pray that between now and then, your sister forgets all about that cockamamie idea.

GINA. No way in hell that's gonna happen! (*Angel hands Gina the keyboard and mouse.*) Angel, I still haven't given up on the idea of you going out with me tonight. (*Mrs. Bloom heads up the stairs. Gina follows her. Angel carries the monitor and follows them. A moment later, they enter Mrs. Bloom's kitchen.*) Nice picture, Mrs. Bloom.

MRS. BLOOM. Ah, Jerusalem, the "City of Peace." I hung it in honor of my first husband, Ben Wise, "May his memory be a blessing." He died of a broken heart, never getting over the loss of so many family members, who perished in the Holocaust. (*Angel gives Mrs. Bloom a long hug.*)

GINA. Jesus, there're too many ghosts of husbands-past floating around this place. I say it's high time we brought in a couple of warm bodies around here.

MRS. BLOOM. Listen, Angel, maybe, tonight, you should go out with your sister.

GINA. It wouldn't kill you –

MRS. BLOOM. – to live a little. Now, if you'll both excuse me, I'm going to sit down, put my feet up, and bury myself in a book.

ANGEL. You're a woman after my own heart. A good book is a godsend. As soon as the downstairs is painted, I'll get my computer out of here. (*Exiting down the stairs with Gina behind her.*)

MRS. BLOOM. No rush. Who knows? Maybe I'll become a regular computernik while it's here.

GINA. Outta my way, Angel. I'm going into your closet to find you something to wear tonight.

ANGEL. Oh, no, you're not.

GINA. Oh, yes, I am.

ANGEL. You think so?

GINA. I know so.

ANGEL. Over my dead body.

GINA. Y'scarin' me, Angel. I'm shaking in my high heel sandals.

(Gina enters the walk-in-closet.) What the hell is this?

ANGEL. What's what?

GINA. *(Coming out of the closet with one of Tony's jackets on and wearing a baseball cap.)* I can't believe y'still got a closet full of Tony's clothes. How long y'plan on keeping this stuff – like forever?

ANGEL. Every time I try sorting through it, I get sick to my stomach.

GINA. That's it. Get me a box. *(Angel exits.)* If y'waitin' for a sign from Tony that it's OK for you to return to the land of the living, I wouldn't hold my breath. Now, I'm gonna chuck all his worldly possessions into that box, load it in my car, and tomorrow morning I'll take it to the church's thrift shop. With the money from this crap, the priests could buy another solid gold door for the seminary.

(Angel enters with a box. Gina starts taking stuff and chucks it in the box. Angel lovingly examines each item. Gina goes back into the closet and comes out with an Elvis costume.)

ANGEL. Remember how you did my hair in the beehive and lined my eyes with all that black eyeliner, so I could be Priscilla to Tony's, Elvis. I want to keep this.

GINA. *(Gina goes back into the walk-in-closet. Coming out of the closet, Gina is carrying a Cleopatra costume. She is wearing an Egyptian-style headpiece.)* Here's that dress you wore that Halloween when you was Cleopatra to Tony's Anthony. Yeah, Pricilla and Elvis, Anthony and Cleopatra, Angel and Tony, some of the great romances of all times. But that was then. This is now. You see, I could do in five minutes, what you couldn't do in five years. Now, I'm gonna find y'something to wear tonight.

ANGEL. It's too late to go anywhere.

GINA. On a Friday night? The clubs don't start heating up till after 11:00. *(Gina goes into the walk-in-closet and comes out with a dowdy dress.)* Who designed this? Mother Teresa? I'm not trying to be mean or nothin', Angel, but just 'cause you teach in a

Catholic school with a pack of nuns, don't mean y' gotta look like one. (*Going back into the closet.*) Come hell or high water, y'going with me tonight. Hey, what's this? (*Gina comes out of the closet with a hot-to-trot dress.*) Where did a nice girl like you, get a bad girl dress like this?

ANGEL. (*Grabs it from Gina and throws it in the box.*) From Tony. I told him I wouldn't be caught dead in that.

GINA. Y'know whatcha problem is? You're afraid to be beautiful. If anybody's got the body for this – it's you. And your face, it's a gift from on high to share with the world. As for me, two nose jobs later, I still look like Tony Bennett. Angel, if I looked like you, I'd be married already to somebody big like Bon Jovi, or John Gotti, or maybe even Donald Trump.

ANGEL. Gina, please leave me alone.

GINA. I have left y'alone, and you know what's happening? Your world's getting smaller and smaller, and I'm scared 'cause in a couple of years, Nikki will be outta here, and y'gonna be awful lonely.

ANGEL. And what about you? You've been out there staging a war against loneliness for years, and I don't see that you're any better off than I am.

GINA. But at least, I haven't given up. Every time I set foot in a disco, hope springs eternal. It's like I bought a ticket to love's lottery, and I know, one day, I'm gonna hit the jackpot.

ANGEL. And if you don't?

GINA. I get enough little winnings along the way to keep me satisfied.

ANGEL. Sorry, but I'm not like you.

GINA. Y'know what I think?

ANGEL. I haven't got a clue.

GINA. I think you're more afraid of men than you are of mice.

ANGEL. What?

GINA. Mice. You've always been terrified of 'em. Remember when you was first married, y'saw a mouse in y'bedroom and came home. I mean come on, Angel, it wasn't a lion, a tiger, or a bear. It was just a mouse.

ANGEL. What's your point?

GINA. That you're making a mouse out of meetin' men. If y'agst me –

ANGEL. – nobody's "agsting" you.

GINA. I'm tellin' y' anyway. The thought of spending the rest of y'life alone ought to scare the bejesus outta ya. I know it scares me. Y'see, my biological clock's ticking

away like a time bomb. And let's face it, I got the same puss that *Nonna Santangelo* had, and I know, when I hit thirty, I'm gonna start aging in dog years. So, for me, it's now or never. And I plan, by this time next year, to be standing on the altar of The Cathedral Basilica of St. James saying my, "Till death do us parts." I've already reserved a date, August 15th. I bought my dress, headpiece, and veil, and I'm gonna have my reception in the Oriental Manor. I just gave them a deposit.

ANGEL. You're only missing one thing – the groom.

GINA. Not for long. You know me. Once I set my mind on something, I do it. Remember when I wanted to have my boobs made bigger? Everybody said I'd never be able to save enough money the way I spend. Well, how long did it take me, six months?

ANGEL. Getting breast implants is one thing. Finding a husband is a whole, other ball game.

GINA. That's right. It's a game. In the old days they had arranged marriages and neighborhood matchmakers. Now they've got personal columns, 900 numbers, video services. I mean, really, dating is big business nowadays. And when you make a business outta something, things start happening. So, from now on, I want you to look at every situation as a potential place to meet a mate. For instance, how did you find this painter? (*Gina is carrying the box to the front stoop.*)

ANGEL. In the phone book.

GINA. Call him and cancel.

ANGEL. Why should I do that?

GINA. 'Cause y'hired him sight unseen. Tomorrow we'll drive around a couple of places till we spot a hot looking, single painter, then we'll hire him.

ANGEL. I can't do that.

GINA. Why not?

ANGEL. Because he'll be here any minute.

GINA. Who the hell gives an estimate after hours on a Friday night? Jack the Ripper? Look, I'm just runnin' out to fill up the tank before the gas station closes. Dead bolt the door while I'm gone. If he gets here before I get back, don't let him in. (*Gina exits, yelling.*) I mean it, Angel! Y'don't know him from Adam.

(*We hear offstage voice of MR. PASQUALE, Angel's next-door neighbor. He has a heavy Italian accent. We also hear his dog barking, and a chain reaction of other dogs in the neighborhood following suit.*)

MR. PASQUALE. (*Off.*) Hey, Gina, y’just wake me and my dog and my wife, and she’s so sick, sometimes she don’t eat, sometimes she don’t sleep, sometimes she don’t even breathe. And me, I don’t have sex in three months, and I was just in the middle of a beautiful dream. Me and Sophia Loren, *una poppona*, alone on a heart-shaped bed in the Poconos.

ANGEL. (*Shouting out the front door.*) Gina! Tell Mr. Pasquale you’re sorry. (*We don’t hear any apologies, just the sound of Gina’s car racing away. Angel dead bolts the door, and then walks back into the living room. The doorbell rings. She heads toward the door, opens it, and immediately turns away.*) I am not going out with you tonight and that’s final.

(*STEELE LA CHANCE enters, dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, and an Outback hat.*)

STEELE. Mrs. Ventura?

ANGEL. (*Turning toward Steele.*) Oh, I’m sorry. I thought you were someone else.

STEELE. Steele La Chance—Renaissance Painters. “We treat your walls and ceilings like fine works of art.” I believe I’m the man you’ve been waiting for.

(*Blackout.*)

SCENE 2

(*A week later. Late afternoon. Angel’s front stoop. Mrs. Bloom is wearing a housedress and garden gloves. She is kneeling in front of the flowerbed. All the weeds are gone, but she has left a one-foot high, greenish-purple stalk with linear, green leaves that are broader at the base and narrower at the top. Gina is sunning on the stoop. She is wearing a bikini and high heel sandals.*)

MRS. BLOOM. (*Putting one last weed into a garbage bag.*) Thank God, that’s done.

GINA. I think y’missed one.

MRS. BLOOM. This?

GINA. Yeah, that.

MRS. BLOOM. That is not a weed.

GINA. Sure, looks it to me.

MRS. BLOOM. Looks can be deceiving. Pfui! From the humidity you could drop dead. Listen, when the rain finally comes—

GINA. —if it comes.

MRS. BLOOM. If it comes? Oy, I feel it in my knees already, and I'm telling you, we better ready the ark.

(Steele enters out the front door. Angel, wearing a colorful summer dress, enters behind him.

Her hair is down, and the gray is gone.)

STEELE. Gina, didn't you say you had a hot date tonight?

GINA. Yeah, with a used car salesman in Howard Beach.

STEELE. Then you're going to have to take the back route through the Rockaways.

GINA. The hell, I am. I'm just gonna jump on the Southern State to the Belt.

STEELE. That bloody parkways going to be closed for hours.

GINA. What the...?

STEELE. The "Southern State Sniper's" back. He just shot at three cars in Valley Stream by the Long Island Tourism booth.

GINA. I love New York!

ANGEL. That's it, Gina! Please, cancel your date. I don't want you driving through the Rockaways all alone. It's too dangerous. And with that sniper loose...

GINA. Look, if my times up, and they're gunning for me, I'm going. So, I'm gonna live it up tonight like there's no tomorrow.

(Steele laughs and heads back into the house.)

ANGEL. *(Following Steele.)* Steele, would you like something cold to drink?

GINA. That's it. Now, I know my radar's right on target!

MRS. BLOOM. What are you getting at?

GINA. Don't you think it's high time Angel let go of Tony, the Holy Ghost, and freed herself to be with a real flesh and blood man?

MRS. BLOOM. Like Steele?

GINA. Bingo! Y'see, I got this plan, but I'm gonna need y'help. For the last week I've been watching Steele and Angel when they're together.

MRS. BLOOM. I've had my eye on them too. Come on, give!

GINA. Then you've noticed there's definitely something going on there. I mean, why else would the Widow Ventura let me wash that gray right outta her hair?

MRS. BLOOM. And not for nothing, but your sister bought a couple of fancy-schmancy dresses yesterday.

GINA. The problem is, you know it and I know it, but do they know it?

MRS. BLOOM. They do seem like...maybe...they could be a match made in heaven.

GINA. And I got a sixth sense for this kind of thing. When I was just a kid, I knew that Father Bona had the hots for Sister Margaret, long before he knocked her up.

MRS. BLOOM. No?

GINA. Would I lie about something like that? And my sixth sense tells me Angel and Steele was meant for each other. Personally, I don't know how the hell she talks to that guy without a dictionary.

MRS. BLOOM. Go figure. Angel hires a house painter, and she gets a regular "littérateur."

GINA. Yeah, you said it.

MRS. BLOOM. Now, Gina, this Steele seems like a nice enough fellow, but you think, maybe, he's a little too unconventional for our Angel?

GINA. She needs that. A man who's a little left of the beaten path. A bit of a rebel. This way Angel can tame him, and he can set her free.

MRS. BLOOM. And he is single. I know. I asked. But let's face it...even if it is a match made in heaven, a little earthly intervention couldn't hurt.

GINA. And that's where we come in. Listen carefully. I bought a bottle of champagne and hid it in the hall closet. Now, I've noticed Steele seems to paint till around eight, so tonight you could sort of say, somebody gave you this champagne...It's not kosher...

MRS. BLOOM. ...It shouldn't go to waste...

GINA. Exactly, and I bought a Frank Sinatra tape. It's got all them really seductive songs on it like "Strangers in the Night," and "Fools Rush In." You could play it real loud in your apartment.

MRS. BLOOM. And I could pack a picnic basket. Wait, wait, wait. Have I got a great idea! You got a couple of minutes to run over to, "Bagels and Woks?"

GINA. Bagels and what?

MRS. BLOOM. (*Mrs. Bloom cracks up laughing.*) Not what? Woks...in Woodmere. It's a brand new, A-Number-One, glatt kosher, combination, Chinese takeout and bagel shop.

GINA. And?

MRS. BLOOM. And get a load of this. They have a personalized, fortune cookie making machine. I'm telling you, like some cupid we could make with that!

GINA. Mrs. Bloom, you're a genius.

MRS. BLOOM. I know. I'm a regular Einstein. (*Blackout.*)

Scene 3

(Later that Evening. Angel's living room. We hear the sound of heavy rain and wind. Steele and Angel are sitting on a drop cloth on the floor having a picnic. Everything else in the living room is covered in drop cloths.)

STEELE. Gina was acting kind of strange earlier.

ANGEL. How can you tell? But now that you've mentioned it, so was Mrs. Bloom.

STEELE. She has been playing Frank Sinatra, *ad nauseam*.

ANGEL. The two of them are definitely up to something with the champagne and the picnic basket. *(Angel looks inside the picnic basket.)* Look, there are two fortune cookies in here. *(Angel hands one to Steele.)*

STEELE. You read yours first.

ANGEL. *(Hesitating for a minute.)* "Love will take you by storm, if only you'd let go of the past."

STEELE. "Listen, *Bubala*, love is in the air. It will come to you on a wing and a prayer." Some love-struck, kosher Chinaman must be writing these fortunes.

ANGEL. Sounds more like the work of a matchmaking Brooklyn beautician and a Lynbrook *bubbie*, if you ask me.

STEELE. I think you're bloody right on that one.

ANGEL. Bloody? Why do you always say bloody this or bloody that?

STEELE. It's my bloody Australian roots popping out.

ANGEL. A man from Down Under, are you?

STEELE. Born Back o' Beyond in Never Never Land. I only lived there till I was five, but I haven't been able to shake that bloody, Aussie expression.

ANGEL. I can relate to that...being born in Brooklyn. If I'm not careful, I'll say, "agst," instead of asked, or "egscape," instead of escape.

STEELE. If you "agst" me, it just goes to show, we can never truly "egscape" our bloody past.

ANGEL. Have you ever gone back there?

STEELE. Only once. Putting it mildly, it was a painful jog down memory lane. Reminding me of when my mum died, and my granny came and hauled my dad and me back to the states. But I've been just about everywhere else in the world, time and time again, having hit the road at the ripe young age of fifteen.

ANGEL. I can't imagine Nikki leaving home in two years. On her own, I don't think she could find her way to the travel section in the Lynbrook Library.

STEELE. Back then, I thought I was Jack Kerouac. (*He walks over to the picture window.*)

(*We hear the sound of heavy rain.*) Hey, Angel, come here. It looks like monsoon season in South East Asia out there.

ANGEL. May I ask you something else?

STEELE. Angel, you can ask me anything, and more often than not, I'll tell you the truth.

ANGEL. The other day, when you were painting Nikki's room, I saw you writing something. What was it? (*They sit back down.*)

STEELE. I don't remember exactly. It was probably just a word, or a phrase that popped into my head. I'm finishing up a novel.

ANGEL. You're a writer?

STEELE. Like every other doctor, lawyer, and Indian Chief in New York. I'm finishing up an Australian saga scanning several generations called, *Beneath the Banyan Tree*. It's set in Darwin, a city that truly belongs to survival of the fittest.

ANGEL. Do you have a publisher yet?

STEELE. By the grace of God, yes. Unfortunately, I do have a tight deadline to meet, so I have to be heading home soon.

ANGEL. And home is?

STEELE. Bayville. I came back to Long Island five years ago...to bury...my Granny. Then I found myself with a \$175,000 inheritance. To a vagabond like me, that was a fortune, and I decided not to squander it. God knows that money was covered with my Grandmother's blood, sweat, and tears. I used to call her "The Workhorse of the World." She never spent a dime on herself, stockpiling it all for me.

ANGEL. She must have loved you very much.

STEELE. Too much if you ask me. My running away had broken her heart. I didn't know it then. God knows – I know it now. So, to honor her memory, I decided to find a place to stay put, plant roots, and write. Granny once told me, "Steele, find a little shanty by the sea, settle down, and say what you need to say. You've got a book in you, son, but you're going to have sit still long enough to pen it."

ANGEL. Bayville always struck me as being the kind of scenic, seaside village that once you've set foot on it, you'd never want to leave. (*The lights flicker.*)

STEELE. That's exactly how I felt, and I knew Granny would approve of a cottage on the sound since she'd grown up in Norway and used to say, "Steele, the sea is in my soul." And, besides, this house had quite a colorful history, and that appealed to the

writer in me. So, I'm proud to say that I am the owner of a ramshackle bungalow in Bayville, complete with an apparition.

ANGEL. *(The lights flicker again.)* An apparition?

STEELE. I thought it might come in handy in case I ever needed a ghostwriter.

ANGEL. Do you have any idea who this supposed phantom is? *(The rain and wind have grown steadily louder.)*

STEELE. Local legend holds that during the Roaring Twenties my cottage had belonged to a young couple who were caretakers of an estate in Mill Neck. One morning, the husband went out fishing on the sound and was lost at sea during a surprise, summer storm. On the fifth anniversary of his disappearance, the young widow hung herself in the master bedroom.

ANGEL. How sad.

STEELE. Every family that moved in after that has claimed that she returns within five years to wreak havoc on their lives – be it financial failure, some mysterious plague, dementia, death by natural, or unnatural causes. The house was thus deemed cursed and remained abandoned for almost two decades.

ANGEL. Whatever you do, don't tell Gina. about this. She'll make you hang garlic cloves from the outside railing. But really, weren't you just a little afraid to move in there?

STEELE. It's always been my contention that some sort of disaster afflicts our lives every five years no matter what we do. So, I decided to buy it. It was a real steal, and I knew I could gut it, and bring it back to life. It's right on Oyster Bay Harbor. The sunset views are magnificent.

MRS. BLOOM. *(Shouting down the stairs.)* Donstairsikeh. It's your opstairsikeh. May I come down? It's an emergency.

ANGEL. What is it?

MRS. BLOOM. *(Entering with a transistor radio.)* Just what I thought. The two of you haven't been watching television or listening to the radio, have you?

STEELE. No, we've been talking.

MRS. BLOOM. *(Turning on the transistor radio.)* Listen...

RADIO ANNOUNCER. *(Off.)* ...the emergency Broadcast system. *(We hear a long beep.)*

This is not a test. We repeat – this is not a test.

ANGEL. It sounds like the world is coming to an end.

RADIO ANNOUNCER. (*Off.*) The National Weather Service has issued a flood warning for the following areas: Bronx County, Kings County, Queens County, New York County, Suffolk County, Nassau County...

MRS. BLOOM. (*Lowering volume.*) I thought you should know. Steele, where do you live?

STEELE. In a haunted house in Bayville.

MRS. BLOOM. So long as the poltergeist pays rent, I wouldn't complain. (*She puts the volume up again.*)

RADIO ANNOUNCER. (*Off.*) Rain can be expected upwards of two inches an hour. The weather service advises – Do not take your vehicle out. Many roads and highways are already flooded including the FDR Drive, the West Side Highway, the Belt Parkway, the Wantagh Parkway, the Meadowbrook Parkway, Ocean Parkway...

MRS. BLOOM. (*She lowers the volume again.*) Steele, you'd better stay the night.

ANGEL. Yes, you're more than welcome to. But I'm getting really worried. Gina's out there right now driving to Howard Beach. I hope she's all right.

STEELE. Believe me, Gina can take care of herself.

ANGEL. Oh, God, Nikki's camp is right on the water in Southampton.

MRS. BLOOM. You'll call the camp.

(*The lights go out completely.*)

STEELE. Angel, I hope you have plenty of candles, flashlights, and batteries. This bloody blackout could last a while.

RADIO ANNOUNCER. (*Off.*) We are waiting for more devastation until 11 PM, now that high tide is here. Wind gusts up to ninety miles per hour can be expected from the surprise summer storm we're calling *The Mouse that Roared*. Expect widespread outages and many downed power lines. Safety experts recommend that you gather up flashlights, enough food and water for three days, secure all windows and doors, bring in lawn furniture, garbage cans, grills, and the like. Place all valuable possessions in waterproof containers. If you live near the coastal areas, anticipate evacuation. Several houses in Fire Island and in the Seagate section of Brooklyn have already washed out to sea...

SCENE 4

(*A few hours later. The set is still in Blackout. We hear a scratching noise. The noise grows louder and louder. Angel is sleeping in her bedroom. She is wearing, a pretty*

summer nightgown. Steele is in the living room sleeping on the sofa bed. Angel wakes up and grabs the flashlight that is on her night table. She aims it toward the wall in her bedroom where the scratching sound is coming from. We see a huge shadow of a mouse. Then it scurries away. Angel lets out a death-defying scream.)

STEELE. What the hell's going on?

ANGEL. I heard a scratching noise. At first, I thought you were up already scraping or spackling, but then I saw it.

STEELE. Saw what?

ANGEL. *(Angel hesitates.)* A mouse.

STEELE. A mouse? That's it? You saw a mouse? Jesus Christ, Angel! You scared the hell out of me.

ANGEL. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you.

STEELE. Wake me? I think you've woken the dead. Let's just hope you didn't wake Mr. Pasquale from one of his dreams, or you're going to hear it tomorrow. *(Steele spots himself in a mirror and is embarrassed by his semi-nakedness.)* I'll be right back. There's something I have to tell you, but I'm sure we'd both feel more comfortable if I weren't standing here half naked.

(Steele exits into the living room and puts on his jeans.) Angel, I'm sorry but your apple tree didn't make it through the storm.

ANGEL. *(Angel lights a candle.)* It was half dead anyway.

STEELE. *(Entering Angel's bedroom.)* The Talmud, according to Mrs. Bloom, says, "To live a full life you must write a book, plant a tree, and make a child." So, in my quest for a full life, I'm going to plant you another one. Angel, you're all white like you just saw a ghost.

ANGEL. I think I'm still a little shaken up over the mouse. You see I have this phobia about them.

STEELE. Don't lose any sleep over it. I have just what you need in my van and in the morning... I'll set it up for you. My friend, Joe, invented this kinder, gentler mousetrap that he calls, "Hickory Dickory Dock." It looks like Big Ben and draws the mouse in with infrared light. Once caught, you can just let the pest go free somewhere out there.

ANGEL. Jupiter would be nice. My fear of mice would drive my husband crazy.

STEELE. You still miss him a lot, don't you?

ANGEL. My Tony...I miss him every second of every day. And it's been so much worse for me...now...with my mother in the nursing home. And when August rolls around, it just won't be the same without Momma out back surrounded by bushels and bushels of fresh, orange-red plum tomatoes. From dawn to dusk, she'd be out there by the barbeque pit making her own fresh gravy from scratch. It's sad, isn't it, how quickly the old ways die out...slip away like the sweet wood smell of smoke and sauce...

STEELE. ...on a sultry summer afternoon.

ANGEL. Oh, listen to me, going on about tomatoes. But it seems like everything's changing, and now with Nikki away at camp, I haven't felt this alone, I don't know, I guess ever.

STEELE. For me, loneliness comes as regularly as the full moon, or as irregularly as the rain. How long has he been gone?

ANGEL. Five years.

STEELE. There must have been someone else since then?

ANGEL. Not since Tony, not before Tony, not during Tony. In my life, there's only been Tony. And when I need to, which seems to be a lot lately, I talk to him.

STEELE. He doesn't talk back, does he?

ANGEL. Not so anybody could hear him, no, of course not. Steele, isn't there someone you've been in love with, and when you're not together, you just sort of find yourself talking to that person?

STEELE. I've never been in love.

ANGEL. Now that's sad.

STEELE. Not as sad as losing someone.

ANGEL. Sadder...much sadder to have always been alone.

STEELE. What kind of things do you and your late husband talk about?

ANGEL. Mostly just everyday, ordinary things. For instance, when Nikki said she wanted to go away to camp, I asked Tony how he felt about it.

STEELE. And?

ANGEL. He was dead set against it, of course.

STEELE. But you let her go anyway.

ANGEL. Over his dead body!

STEELE. (*Spotting the Elvis costume.*) A little early for Halloween, no?

ANGEL. That's more like a ghost from Halloween past. Gina gutted my closet. Elvis was one of the only survivors. (*She picks up a music box.*) This used to play the song,

“Can’t Help Falling in Love.” On the night Tony died, I threw it across the room, and it’s been silent ever since.

STEELE. I may be able to fix it.

ANGEL. It seems like you can fix most anything.

STEELE. Yeah, I am a certifiable jackass of all trades. (*Steele, spotting the Bible on Angel’s night table, picks it up.*) Have you ever read the “Song of Songs?”

ANGEL. A long time ago. It was by Solomon, right?

STEELE. So, they say, but the language and style in Canticles points to a later era. It was probably written by some long forgotten, love-sick fool, whose passion proved immortal. To me, it’s unforgettable... hauntingly beautiful in its depiction of love in its purest form. The “Song of Songs,” Chapter 2. “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.” I’ll read the Bridegroom; you read the Bride. “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.”

ANGEL. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love...”

STEELE. I’ve been meaning to ask you – is your real name Angel?

ANGEL. It’s short for Angelica. Although in my whole life, nobody’s ever called me that, except when I was in trouble.

STEELE. Which I imagine wasn’t very often. Would you mind if I called you Angelica? It’s such a beautiful name. It fits you. (*He strokes her hair.*) You’re shaking. I’m sorry I didn’t mean to frighten you. (*They look at each other and embrace for a long moment, then Steele kisses Angel.*

She kisses him back.) Oh, God, Angelica, you really are an Angel.

ANGEL. (*Blowing out the candle.*) Heaven help us, Steele, but I really don’t want to be an Angel tonight. (*Blackout.*)

Scene 5

(Two weeks later. Early Evening. Mrs. Bloom is in Angel’s living room sitting on the couch. Everything is still covered in drop cloths.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER. (*Off.*) “The Long Island Lighting Company is taking heat for failing to bring back power to many waterfront communities two week after being hit by the surprise-storm-of-the-century, aptly dubbed *The Mouse that Roared.*”

(Enter Gina carrying an armful of envelopes.)

MRS. BLOOM. *(She shuts off the radio.)* Long time no see.

GINA. I had my hands full with all this manna from heaven. *Newsday* forwarded more than a hundred responses from men answering my Personal Ad, and that's not even counting the two from Nassau County jail, the three in detox at South Oaks, and a magician who claims to be a New Age Jesus with escape powers of Houdini, "So let'em just try to crucify me."

MRS. BLOOM. Oy.

GINA. No, trust me. The rest of them are pretty good – a union electrician, a dentist, a proctologist, and one guy from upstate New York who made his fortune when a meteor landed on his car. He even enclosed a picture of himself. He's no "Man of Steel" or nothin', but he's cute in a Clark Kent-ish kind of way. *(Opening another envelope.)* Get a load of this nut job, he says, "I'm a born-again Christian by day, bouncer in a Gay bar at night. If you want to connect with me, you'd better do it soon. According to Biblical numerology, September 6th will be the end of the world as we know it."

MRS. BLOOM. Oy vey, the sky is falling, the sky is falling, but I'll take my chances and step out for some fresh air all the same. *(Mrs. Bloom exits to the front stoop, just as Angel enters.)*

That was some Personal Ad we wrote. Your sister got like a million responses.

GINA. *(Gina opens another envelope.)* Hey, Angel, here's one for you. This guy's a house painter. *(Gina tosses that envelope to Angel.)* From the looks of this place you could use another one.

ANGEL. *(Angel throws the envelope back at her.)* Steele will be back.

GINA. I hope you didn't pay that guy in advance.

ANGEL. I haven't given him a dime yet.

GINA. Then where the hell is he?

ANGEL. I don't know. I haven't seen him since...

GINA. Since when?

ANGEL. Since the morning after...the storm.

GINA. Do me a favor, Angel? Don't mention that goddamn storm ever again.

ANGEL. Why?

GINA. 'Cause that night was the worst night of my life, that's why.

ANGEL. You still haven't told me what happened.

GINA. First, I got stranded on Rockaway Beach Boulevard, and the johns thought I was a hooker.

ANGEL. Oh, boy!

GINA. Then the cops came and told me I had to abandon my beloved Corvette®, in the Rockaways. And the friggen' looters had a picnic ripping-off my hubcaps, the radio, and of course, my air bag.

ANGEL. So, where did you spend the night?

GINA. If I tell you, y'gotta swear on your eyes, you'll never tell another living soul about it.

ANGEL. Your secret is safe with me.

GINA. I stayed in a shelter set up in a –

ANGEL. – in a what?

GINA. A convent.

ANGEL. And that was so terrible?

GINA. Believe me, I wouldn't want to make a habit out of it. (*Gina walks to the living room window.*) Hey, y'lawn looks like its coming back to life.

ANGEL. Thanks to Mrs. Bloom. Every night she gets out there with the hose.

GINA. Just like Tony and Momma used to do. Y'know, with the drop cloths everywhere, this place really looks haunted. I think y'better face it, Angel, Steele ain't never coming back. (*Gina takes nail polish out of her pocketbook and starts doing her nails.*)

ANGEL. All I keep hearing is how hard Bayville was hit by the storm. People have lost their homes, businesses, everything. They've even had to set up a shelter in St. Gertrude's Church. No, something terrible's happened to Steele I can feel it here. (*Pointing to her heart.*)

GINA. Y'kiddin' me?

ANGEL. I keep calling him, but his phone is dead.

GINA. So, fuck him!

ANGEL. What?

GINA. Let's face it. This guy screwed you, and he ain't coming back. What'd I say?

ANGEL. It's not you.

GINA. Then what the hell is it?

ANGEL. I already told you that Steele spent the night here on account of the storm.

GINA. Yeah, so? He slept on the Castro®. What's that make him – the dictator of your life?

ANGEL. We made love.

GINA. Wait ...Wait ...Wait! (*She starts jumping on one foot and hitting the opposite side of her head with her hand.*) I must've got water in my ears at Jones Beach yesterday. You won't believe what I thought you said. I thought you said, "We made love."

ANGEL. That's what I said.

GINA. Who the hell do you think you are – me?

ANGEL. And...I'm late.

GINA. Late?

ANGEL. Late.

GINA. No?

ANGEL. Yes.

GINA. How late?

ANGEL. One day.

GINA. Oh, that's nothing to worry about.

ANGEL. For me it is. I was only late one other time in my life.

GINA. When was that?

ANGEL. When I was pregnant with Nikki.

GINA. And you didn't practice safe sex?

ANGEL. Obviously not.

GINA. Momma Mia, Angelica! You know what I always say, "If you can't be good, for God's sake, be safe!"

ANGEL. And the only reason Steele came into my room that night was because I freaked out when I saw a mouse. You don't suppose Tony sent that rodent down to me as a kind of a sign? Like he was giving us his blessing.

GINA. (*Looking out the picture window.*) Angel, y'better get over here.

(*Mrs. Bloom enters rushing.*)

MRS. BLOOM. *Donstairsikeh*, hurry. Steele's out front. Sober, he isn't. He's fallen, Angel, on the statue of... Oy, I forgot who she is.

ANGEL. The Virgin Mary.

GINA. That damn thing's made of solid cement. Steele must really be stoned.

ANGEL. Mrs. Bloom! Put up coffee. Make it strong. Gina, help me bring Steele inside.

(*Mrs. Bloom exits.*)

GINA. Come on, Angel, I just did my nails.

(*Steele enters stumbling.*)

STEELE: Going someplace, ladies?

GINA. He's tanked.

STEELE. Tanked? No. I'm embalmed.

ANGEL. I've been so worried about you.

STEELE. Angelica –

GINA. Angelica? The man calls you – Angelica. Now I know you're in big trouble.

STEELE. I bought you an apple tree to replace the one that got knocked down in the storm. I'm going to plant it right now. As soon as I can remember where I parked my van.

ANGEL. Tomorrow's another day.

STEELE. Tomorrow? Tomorrow? I could be dead tomorrow.

ANGEL. Now you sound like Gina. What happened to your glasses?

STEELE. In Huntington, I got a fist in my face.

GINA. What do you mean, in Huntington, y'got a fist in your face?

STEELE. In a real dive bar. It was no White Horse Tavern, mind you, but I thought I could probably drink myself to death there. Now, Gina, what'd you ask me?

GINA. About the fist in your face.

STEELE. Oh, yeah. These guys were comparing notes on all the weapons they owned, and I said something about there being too many guns on the street. Then one jackass starts screaming, "You a commie or something? You don't like the constitution?" And I said, "I'm really big on the First Amendment. It's just the Second Amendment, the part about the right to bear arms, I could live without."

GINA. God knows – booze and politics don't mix.

STEELE. The next thing I knew, I got a fist in my face.

GINA. Y'damn lucky you didn't get a bullet in y'brain.

STEELE. If it weren't for this Hell's Angel dude, I'd be nothing but dead meat right now.

ANGEL. Gina, do me a favor? Get me the peroxide and cotton balls from the medicine cabinet. I've got to try and clean up this mess.

(Gina exits.)

STEELE. After that, I got back in my van, but I was sort of driving around in circles. I seemed to have lost my way.

ANGEL. You could have lost a lot more than that tonight. You could have gotten yourself killed.

STEELE. No such luck. For me, this life sentence, this hell on earth, is going on and on without mercy, without end. So, now, where was I?

ANGEL. Driving around in circles.

(Gina enters with the peroxide and cotton balls.)

STEELE. That's right. I finally stopped and asked this old lady if she knew what street I was on. And she said, "Why it's Walt Whitman Road. Right across the street is Walt's old farmhouse." *(Angel begins cleaning his wounds.)* So, I got out of my van and walked over there, and I swear old Walt was with me, white beard, his poetry, and all. What the hell are you putting on my face, battery acid? *(He pushes her hand away.)* Just leave me alone. It's no big deal.

MRS. BLOOM. *(Off.)* No big deal? From that, you could wind up with flesh-eating bacteria and drop dead.

ANGEL. Steele just keep talking, it won't hurt so much.

STEELE. Now, where the hell was I?

GINA. Lost in Huntington with some dead poet.

STEELE. That's right and I felt as if he were haunting me. Whole stanzas and even complete poems from *Leaves of Grass* would just come to me. I know that this is going to sound crazy, but earlier today I heard the following lines spoken aloud, "The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred..." Then I looked up and standing before me was the young Whitman reciting his exquisite, erotic poem, "I Sing the Body Electric." I thought I'd lost my mind. So, I started driving around some more, and pulled over into a schoolyard to puke and pass out. When I woke up, I was lying in front of a statue...

GINA. You've been doing a lot of that lately.

STEELE. You're never going to believe who the stoned-faced guy was. It was none other than St. Anthony himself.

GINA. No shit!

STEELE. And God knows why, but, somehow, I ended up here. *(Mrs. Bloom enters with coffee.)* "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time." Yeats, that's Yeats...a mystic, a poet, and a playwright. Just another fucking asshole writer. *(Steele walks over to the mousetrap.)* "Hickory, Dickory, Dock," the kinder, gentler mousetrap.

MRS. BLOOM. That gadget's from hunger.

STEELE. It hasn't caught anything yet?

GINA. That can only catch mice that crawl. Angel's had wings.

ANGEL. Mrs. Bloom, Gina, why don't you two leave us alone for a minute?

STEELE. “Three blind mice. See how they run! Did you ever see such a sight in your life, as three blind mice?”

(Gina and Mrs. Bloom start to exit.)

GINA. Mrs. Bloom! Mark my words! The *merda*’s about to hit the fan. That’s *amore!*

MRS. BLOOM. If you need us, you know where to find us.

ANGEL. Steele, what’s wrong?

STEELE. Let me answer in biblical terms. You believe in that stuff, don’t you, Angelica...in goddamn guardian angels and the like? “...What profit has a man of all his labour which he takes under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 1:3.) I’ve lost everything. I guess I should have hung the goddamn garlic cloves. The five-year phantom strikes again.

ANGEL. You’re not making any sense.

STEELE. My house is gone. The whole place is underwater.

ANGEL. You must have insurance?

STEELE. Flood insurance? No way. Who the hell was I to think that I could plant roots and stay put?

ANGEL. I’m sorry.

STEELE. That’s only the first half of the nightmare. My manuscript. The five-hundred-page saga that took me five long years to write...it’s in my basement office...entombed by sand and sea.

ANGEL. You must have a copy?

STEELE. In my living room, under water.

ANGEL. You can do it again.

STEELE. No, Angelica, to a writer, *Spiritus Mundi*, comes but once.

ANGEL. I’m not saying rewrite it from scratch, but between the two manuscripts there should be enough parts still legible to salvage it.

STEELE. For me typing alone was a monster. As primitive and crude as it may seem, I used the old hunt and peck method on my Olivetti Underwood Lettera 32, circa 1964. To try and do it all again, even if I could, would take till hell freezes over. The bottom line is that there’s no way that I’m going to meet the publisher’s deadline, so, at this point, my book is essentially dead in the water.

ANGEL. “... All things are possible to him that believes.”

STEELE. You just don’t get it, do you? What do you think’s going to happen? Some kind of divine resurrection from the ruins, perchance? A miraculous emergence from the ashes, or perhaps God will send down from seventh heaven a seraphim

stenographer? No, Angelica, I've lost everything. All my hopes and dreams...washed away...buried beneath that haunted bungalow by the sea.

ANGEL. You'll find a way. We fall down. We pick ourselves up. We fail. We start over. We learn to go on. We have to!

STEELE. I don't have it in me anymore. I'm spent.

ANGEL. Give yourself time to heal, and meanwhile, let me comfort you.

STEELE. *(He takes out a small bottle of Southern Comfort® from his pants pocket.)*

The only comfort I need is right here in this little bottle, and like my idol, Dylan Thomas, I'm going to drink myself to an untimely demise. *(Toasting.)* To...The End.

ANGEL. You don't know what you're saying.

STEELE. What do you think? I'm *non-compos mentis*? Believe me, I'm perfectly capable of managing my own affairs.

ANGEL. *(Grabbing the bottle from him.)* Right now, it's the booze that's talking, and if you "agst" me, you've really had enough.

STEELE. Nobody's bloody "agsting" you. *(He struggles to grab the bottle and almost falls over doing so.)* Fine, keep it. *(Taking keys out of his pocket.)* Have it your way. I'll just go find my van and buy me another bigger bottle. *(She grabs the keys. Note: Never in any of the struggles does Steele ever lay a hand on Angel.)*

ANGEL. *(Steele tries to get them back.)* You're not taking your van in some drunken, macho act of rage so you can go wrap yourself around a tree. End of story for you. Beginning of nightmare Part II for me.

STEELE. Are you trying to tell me your sainted, late hubby was drunk the night he died?

ANGEL. Dead drunk.

STEELE. Something must have driven the man to drink.

ANGEL. Not something. Someone – me.

STEELE. You?

ANGEL. I wanted another baby.

STEELE. And?

ANGEL. And it just wasn't happening, so I wanted to adopt a child.

STEELE. Yeah, so?

ANGEL. So, Tony went crazy...screaming, "We're not raising somebody else's bastard."

(He starts for the door.) You'll get in that van – over my dead body. I'll never forgive myself for letting my husband, Nikki's father, kill himself because I wasn't strong enough to stop him. But I'll stop you, if it's the last thing I do. So, help me God.

STEELE. God...God...so help me God? God, who let his only begotten son be crucified? What kind of father would do that to his only son? Now, Angelica, I'm not your husband, or the father of your child. I'm just the fucking house painter. So, give me my goddamn keys. *(They struggle. The bottle smashes, cutting Angel's hand.)* Oh, Jesus, I'm wrestling with a bloody angel. *(Angel wipes the tears from her eyes, and blood drips from her cut onto her face. Exhausted, she plops onto a nearby chair. Steele obviously moved by her tears, by the sight of blood, and by her devotion, gently wipes the blood from her face with his hands. It drips down his wrists.)*

ANGEL. “*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Dona nobis pacem.*”

STEELE. Ah, Latin, a goddamn dead language. That's right, Angelica. Comfort me with dead words whispered to a dying writer.

ANGEL. *(Begins reciting Psalm 91.)* I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust.”

STEELE. My God...perhaps I should become a poet now. Poems are, oh, so short, so succinct.

ANGEL. “Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the dangerous pestilence.”

STEELE. I could master the word processor as a fast fire weapon, a semiautomatic, then wage guerilla warfare with my woebegone words.

ANGEL. “He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings shall you trust: his truth shall be your shield and buckler.”

STEELE. I could march to the free form beat of the suicide poets. Those satanic seraphim's...Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Steele La Chance....

ANGEL. You shall not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day...”

STEELE. So melancholy, so masochistic, so melodramatic with their anti-sonnets, anti-self, anti-survival stanzas...I could become as famous as John Berryman. He was a Catholic like you, but more like me, not always a very good one. It's hard to be a religious man when your childhood's been blown to smithereens by a solitary shotgun blast.

ANGEL. “Nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness; nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.” *(She covers her ears.)*

STEELE. And like Berryman, I could write about my own father's bloody suicide ... about his Angel/devil, dead face...a sort of séance of our souls. His infamous death could live on forever, ensuring my own immortality. Angelica, do you think Latin is the language dead poets speak in their final resting place – Hades? *(In a drunken stupor, Steele collapses in Angel's arms. The image is of Michelangelo's, Pieta. There is only a single spotlight creating a halo around the two of them.)*

ANGEL. “For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” *(For a moment Angel gazes at Steele. Then she whispers a Litany.)* “Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.”
(Slow fade to Blackout, as the hymn “Agnus Dei” plays.)