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The Window
A Full-length Drama of Mystery and Intrigue

by
Donald Dewey

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The Window
A Full-length Drama of Mystery and Intrigue
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SETTING:

Principally, the studio of the recently deceased painter Louis Chalk

TIME:

The present

CHARACTERS:

Billy Waters; An attorney, age 60
Stella Chalk; The widow of Louis Chalk, a caterer by trade, about 35
Kate; An art dealer about 40
Allen; Her younger lover, a telemarketer by trade
Jason; An art dealer about 50
Lee; A sculptor, about 30, whose studio is in the same building

ETC:

A window remains up stage right throughout the play and is a continual presence over the thoughts and actions of all the characters. “The Window” is, in fact, the main character of the play.
The Window
by Donald Dewey

ACT I, SCENE ONE

(AT RISE: In the darkness, the SOUND OF A WINDOW OPENING OFF. A moment later, there is a MUFFLED CRY and a DULL, DISTANT THUD. LIGHTS UP on a window up stage right. BILLY WATERS enters stage left. A SPOTLIGHT follows him across the stage as HE addresses an unseen jury.)

WATERS
Ladies and Gentlemen. Let’s be direct with one another. I have a reputation in some quarters. You’ve heard it. Billy Waters, some experts say, is famous for defending his clients by attacking their victims. If the victims are dead, all the better because they can’t answer back. Well, here we are then. Louis Chalk is dead and can’t answer back. Anything I say about him, that my witnesses say about him, will be another example of Billy Waters spitting on a victim’s grave. Tomorrow’s New York Post: MUDDY WATERS RUN THROUGH COURTROOM... But you see the bind that puts us in? We’re investigating a death here, but we’re supposed to be silent about the dead man. A killer might have killed, but who did the killer kill? An abstraction. A non-entity. Or — could it be? — a saint who has already passed on to wherever saints go. Speak no ill of the dead. There were no angers or emotions involved in his death, none of that messy human being stuff. There was just the saint over here and perhaps a killer — the Phantom of the Opera, a Charles Manson lunatic, a Godfather goon — over here. Case closed before it ever gets heard!...I, for one, am not ready to accept that. I, for one, am not going to accept a V-chip being locked on my ability to think ahead of time because, Lord help me, the New York Post might not have good thoughts about me tomorrow. I believe I have an obligation here — as you do. And that obligation is weighing the facts very carefully before we decide what happened to Louis Chalk that grim day in his studio. That obligation is reality. We hope.

(SPOTLIGHT OUT on WATERS. HE exits stage right. LIGHTS UP on an artist’s studio in the late afternoon. THE WINDOW is now shown to be in its natural up stage right position. Canvas chairs and easels have been thrown in front of THE WINDOW. Upstage center is a model’s dais, now surrounded by cartons. A sleeping cover and pillow are folded up at the rear of the dais. A table downstage left is jammed with more cartons, paints and oils, and a folded open copy of The New York Times. An old couch sits center stage. An opened door stage left accesses a walk-in closet. The entrance door is downstage right. The walls are bare except for some tools. KATE sits on the floor before the couch examining old canvasses and separating them into two piles. There is a SNEEZE OFF from the closet.)
KATE

God bless!

(STELLA emerges from the closet carrying two canvasses and waving off a cloud of dust. SHE lays the paintings before KATE.)

STELLA

A cockroach would choke in there.

KATE

It’s like he was two different people. The pressure, color sense. Like he used one hand and eye for this old stuff and the other hand and eye for what he did after. (STELLA sneezes) Much more?

STELLA

Another whole shelf.

KATE

He got annoyed if I asked about the old days, but he sure as hell saved it all.

STELLA

Louis was a rat, Kate.

KATE

Packrat?

STELLA

What I said.

KATE

Almost.

STELLA

Why are you separating them?

KATE:

Some are more interesting than others.

STELLA

For what?

KATE

You could’ve asked anybody to come up here and help you, but you asked me. Want to know what I think or not?
STELLA  
(Looks at watch) Allen must’ve gone to China for that food.

KATE  
You won’t like my answer.

STELLA  
Pretend I asked anyway.

KATE  
This pile here, I like some of them. They’re not as mature as what I have down at the gallery, but it’s not finger-painting, either.

STELLA  
Don’t sound so enthusiastic.

KATE  
We haven’t gotten to the part you won’t like.

(ALLEN enters with a bag of Chinese takeout. HE is winded from climbing stairs. HE leaves the door ajar as HE walks in.)

ALLEN  
I dare either of you to tell me I forgot the duck sauce.

KATE  
You didn’t forget the duck sauce!

ALLEN  
Why can’t they deliver like their venerable ancestors?

STELLA  
Paper plates?

ALLEN  
I’m forgetful, not incompetent.

(ALLEN lays the bag on the table, removes a six-pack, and cracks open two cans. STELLA grabs the Times from the table.)

STELLA  
Finished with this?

KATE  
Yes.
(STELLA spreads the paper on the floor for an eating area. ALLEN crosses with a beer for KATE and glances at the canvasses.)

ALLEN
They could use those canvasses at a shelter or something.

KATE
Right. For all the homeless lined up with their brushes.

ALLEN
Some school. You know what I mean.

KATE
Stella hasn’t decided about that.

(KATE gets up and begins distributing the takeout over the newspaper area.)

STELLA
I haven’t heard what I don’t want to hear yet.

KATE
Death sells.

ALLEN
Kate!

KATE
Like it never occurred to you?

ALLEN
That’s not the point.

KATE
I’d like Jason to take a look. Figurative is more his area.

ALLEN
But Louis obviously didn’t want these shown.

KATE
Hush up, Allen.

STELLA
He’s right. We should just throw them out.
Okay, that’s settled. Which one is the shrimp?

Christ, you’re a bitch!

What gave you a clue?

Whenever you’re ready.

I want some dumplings.

Okay. Ready, ready, ready.

(ALL eat as THEY talk)

First, these things won’t lengthen Louis’ entry in the Encyclopedia of Art. But they might spark some retro interest. Why should a collector have only the Neo-Action Louis Chalk on his wall when he can flank it with one of these and get to pontificate about how Louis developed so radically?

Can’t you hear it? “Louis Chalk pursued pure truth and beauty in all their genres --- and now I own every step of his quest!”

Second, whatever the virtues of his art, Louis’ death has made him a media name for the immediate future. The next time they come to New York, some well-heeled cowboys are lots more likely to mosey on down to the Pandora Galleries to see what “that dead fella was up to before he got too expensive to hang on the bunkhouse wall.”

You’re never going to forgive people for living west of the Hudson, are you?

Third, if Louis hated this work so much, why did he keep it? There must be something about it he never disowned.

A reminder of how far he’d come.
You believe that?

No.

Because he said so?

Because he never talked about it at all.

Better grab those dumplings before I do.

Four; this isn’t about Louis anymore, it’s about you.

That was actually my number one.

But it’s true. Is your catering business doing so well you don’t need the extra money?

Tell her, Allen. In a pinch I can go back to modeling.

In a pinch she can go back to modeling.

You shouldn’t have to go back to anything. You’re entitled.

I loved Louis, Kate.

And he loved you. That’s a wash. The rest is where you have something coming.

She isn’t all that wrong, Stella.

I’m she when I’m out of the room.
STELLA
How about this? We’ll save the Face-Reality test for another day. Can I have a beer, Allen?

ALLEN
Sorry.

( ALLEN gets up to for a beer from the table. KATE keeps staring at STELLA. )

STELLA
What?

KATE
He fell out that window, Stella.

STELLA
That’s what they say.

KATE
He had no reason not to fall.

STELLA
That’s funny. (Accepts beer from ALLEN) Thank you.

( ALLEN sits down with a silent signal to KATE. )

KATE
What’s that supposed to mean? Shut up? I’m pushing too far?

ALLEN
You are.

KATE
Why? Because we all feel guilty we didn’t prevent it? We didn’t have the windows in here changed every month so they wouldn’t get stuck? We didn’t tell the super to stand guard whenever Louis was around in case he needed somebody to help with the heavy lifting?

ALLEN
For Christ sake, Kate.

KATE
Or better yet, forget that scenario altogether. No accident at all, but suicide. Because that’s even easier to feel guilty about. I thrive on self-delusion, Stella. I wouldn’t be in the gallery business if I didn’t. But I won’t tolerate it in friends. Louis didn’t jump. He got dizzy and fell out. And nobody’s to blame for that.
STELLA
Too bad. Suicide’s even better for selling these, isn’t it?

(WATERS knocks and peers around the door.)

WATERS
Louis Chalk’s studio?

KATE
Can we help you?

STELLA
If you’re from some magazine...

WATERS
My name is Billy Waters. I knew Louis.

KATE
The lawyer!

WATERS
Guilty.

STELLA
Billy Waters. Yes. Louis mentioned you.

WATERS
The doorman at your house said you’d be down here. I don’t mean to...

STELLA
Come in, come in. Please.

WATERS
I saw the obituary. I couldn’t get to the service, but I ...

STELLA
We’re just eating. Join us.

WATERS
No. No, thanks.

STELLA
There’s plenty.

WATERS
It’s a little early for my dinner.
At least a beer.

Well...

Quick, Allen, before he tells us he never drinks before 6:17.

(ALLEN gets a beer for WATERS who sits on the couch.)

That’s Kate. And Allen.

And you’re Mrs. Chalk.

Stella.

The lunatic who shoved the musician under the subway!

I’m not sure about the lunatic and the musician, but, yes, that was one of my cases.

You mean a music student losing his arm isn’t as serious as a member of the New York Philharmonic losing his?

Kate...

I was defending someone charged with assault. Whether the victim played for the Budapest String Quartet or worked in a Brooklyn bodega, the violence and tragedy were the same.

But they weren’t. That student...

Ever tried working a register, bagging kitty litter, and handling change with only one arm? Neither have I. But I bet it’s easier with two.
KATE
That’s no reason to run down the victim’s ambitions.

WATERS
I don’t think I did that.

KATE
I guess I read the wrong papers.

WATERS
Or the same one every day.

STELLA
I got the impression from Louis you hadn’t seen much of each other lately.

WATERS
Must be 25-30 years. (Sees canvasses) Yes, that’s what he was doing.

KATE
You prefer this to his later work?

WATERS
I haven’t seen the recent things. Abstract stuff, right?

KATE
We call it Neo-Action.

WATERS
Ah! Get the play station crowd.

KATE
Sells better. You know. Like lawyer, mouthpiece, ambulance chaser. Each creates expectations.

WATERS
Now that you mention it.

KATE
Neo-Action lets you anticipate platinum credit cards. “Abstract stuff?”

WATERS
Nickels and dimes.

KATE
Not at all platinum-worthy.
STELLA
You spent a lot of time together in Europe.

WATERS
Kept running into one another. Paris. Rome. Berlin when it had just one wall.

ALLEN
I like that.

WATERS
Sometimes we were in the same circles, sometimes not. But there was always some bar or cafe where the expatriates found each other.

KATE
Is that what you considered yourself?

WATERS
What I was mainly considering was if I wanted to go on being a lawyer.

KATE
As opposed to...?

WATERS
Oh, traveling around the world and quoting from the Best of Clarence Darrow. Off with your chains! Open your eyes, your minds, and your imaginations! And wherever I spoke, from Morocco to Malaysia, the people would rise up and smite their oppressors.

ALLEN
What you think when you’re young.

WATERS
Allen, is it?

ALLEN
Yes.

STELLA
Louis seemed to respect you a great deal.

WATERS
That’s nice to hear.

KATE
But all these years...
I guess we developed different tastes.

That “abstract stuff.”

Something like that.

Kate wants to have an exhibition of some of these. What do you think, Mr. Waters?

Billy.

But he kept them in a closet, didn’t look at them for ages.

I’ve got pants in my closet I haven’t looked at in ages. I don’t have the guts to try them on, but who knows, somebody might come up with some painless diet and I’ll need them again...May I?

Please.

(WATERS looks through one of the piles of canvasses.)

So many years! Wow!

You remember them from Europe?

In Rome he had a tiny place behind the Pantheon. Reeked of varnish. You never sat down too fast. If the chair didn’t collapse under you, a paint tube got you.
KATE
And the paintings?

WATERS
Now or then?

KATE
You’ve changed your mind about them?

WATERS
I thought they were interesting then, I think they’re interesting now. How’s that?

STELLA
Eat, Kate.

ALLEN
You’ll lose some of that mean and hungry look.

KATE
Am I irritating you, Billy?

WATERS
Most people do. Why be most people? (Picks up a painting) This is from Paris. A cafe on the Rue Moliere, as you enter the Left Bank. This guy was an out-of-work plumber. Came every day to drink tea, smoke his Gitanes, and bitch about the European Community costing him his job. “Not even plumbers are safe from all these cutbacks,” he’d rail to everybody. “Can’t we even piss French piss and shit French shit anymore?” Claude! Claude Marquand! That was his name.

“Claude Marquand.”

STELLA
People you run into.

WATERS
You must miss those days.

ALLEN
Not especially.

WATERS
But they’re still nice to have had.
WATERS
Sure.

ALLEN
That’s how Louis probably felt about these things. They’re just nice to have had.

KATE
They’re not old postcards, Allen.

ALLEN
Maybe that’s exactly what they are! Postcards he sent himself.

WATERS
(Looks at watch) I better get a move on.

STELLA
You haven’t even finished your beer.

ALLEN
An incomplete toast is an insincere one.

KATE
Allen’s in telemarketing. Any glib remark to keep you on the line.

WATERS
I have a client suing you people.

ALLEN
The old harassment angle?

WATERS
I didn’t know that was so old. But no, this is the new burglary angle.

ALLEN
What burglary?

WATERS
Telemarketing by fax. You enter a person’s home without permission and you steal his fax paper and toner to pitch your wares.

ALLEN
You’re kidding, right?

WATERS
The circular that invaded my client’s home was filled with photos and big bold lettering— all the better for wasting his ink.
ALLEN
Toner costs $35! Max!

WATERS
So you wouldn’t call the cops if you went home tonight to find a burglar had broken in and made off with, say, a radio costing $35—max?

ALLEN
That’s ridiculous.

STELLA
I like it.

KATE
I thought you specialized in Page Three cases.

WATERS
You take on arrogance where you can find it. (Stands and puts aside his beer) Anyway, I just wanted to say how sorry I was...

STELLA
Not even time for one call between you and Louis all these years?

ALLEN
He was too busy suing toner thieves.

WATERS
What can I say? People grow apart.

STELLA
If they let themselves.

KATE
Phones work in two directions, Stella.

STELLA
You know Louis never called anyone. When I gave him that cell phone, he acted like I was red tagging him in the wilderness.

KATE
So Mr. Waters is another grizzly bear.

(WATERS makes a mock growl at KATE.)
STELLA
I guess I’m making a mess of saying I’m sorry you weren’t in more contact.

WATERS
Things happen.

STELLA
But you’ll always have Paris?

WATERS
There you go. Now let me get out of the way of your dinner. You’re making me so hungry I might eat tonight before 8:06.

KATE
Oooooh. A man who doesn’t forget anything.

(STELLA is stung by the remark.)

STELLA
That’s right.

WATERS
Excuse me?

STELLA
Nothing.

(STELLA accompanies WATERS to the door.)

STELLA
Could we talk again?

WATERS
I don’t know what I can...

STELLA
If you don’t want to go into Claude Marquand, we won’t. If you do, that’s great, too. I’ll make it even easier: I’ll phone you. That way you can leave with an insincere promise and have time to warn your secretary to say you’ve taken a case in Brazil when I call.

WATERS
Some attorneys would kill for your agility.

STELLA
So give me your card. (HE does) To be sure you are who you say.
WATERS

Thank you, Stella... For the beer.

STELLA

Thank you, too.

(WATERS exits. STELLA closes the door and returns to the others.)

KATE

What the hell was all that about?

STELLA

I like him.

KATE

Get the full agenda first.

STELLA

What agenda?

KATE

For 25 years he doesn’t see Louis. For two weeks of Louis being dead he doesn’t show his face. But suddenly he’s dropping by your apartment and he’s so anxious to introduce himself to you, he gets your doorman to give him an address and he hops a cab down here.

ALLEN

Kate’s right. He wants something. But he wasn’t counting on us being with you.

STELLA

You’re both batty.

ALLEN

He’s a lawyer. Suggest something?

STELLA

I’ve done all the bills.

KATE

I was thinking more of you as a creditor.

STELLA

I have no interest in suing anybody, Kate.

KATE

I’m not talking about the goddamn money.
STELLA
Oh, I see. Sue the landlord for his negligence as therapy.

KATE
In your place, I’d grab any broom at all to sweep a few shadows out of my head.

STELLA
Billy Waters.

ALLEN
I’ll bet you anything that’s why he was so eager to see you. He’s got a nose for scruffy bucks.

STELLA
_Scruffy bucks!_

ALLEN
You know what I mean.

STELLA
I want that shrimp.

_(STELLA grabs the shrimp. The OTHERS stare at her in silence.)_

STELLA
We were talking about something else, weren’t we?

KATE
What about the pictures?

STELLA
Oh, right. After all this time, a few more days to make up my mind shouldn’t matter.

KATE
Of course not.

STELLA
Good.

ALLEN
Burglary! They’ll laugh him out of court!

_(ALL continue eating as LIGHTS DOWN)_
(AT RISE: The studio at night a few days later. The canvasses have been stacked neatly, but the studio otherwise looks the same. WATERS sits on the couch, STELLA stands at the table pouring scotch for both of them. SHE has already had a couple of drinks.

STELLA
Kate says you have an agenda.

WATERS
I bet Kate says that about the mailman.

STELLA
I don’t care because I have my own. I need a lawyer’s...what? Deliberateness.

WATERS
Judges deliberate. I blurt.

(STELLA carries the drinks to the couch and sits.)

STELLA
Cheers!

WATERS
Cheers!........There’re a million bars and coffee shops in the city, so I guess your agenda has to do with these paintings.

STELLA
The landlord wants me out before the end of the month or he’ll invoke Clause 935XK or something. And I promised Kate I’d make a decision about showing them.

WATERS
I’m no art expert, Stella.

STELLA
You’re a Louis expert.

WATERS
Even less.

STELLA
Know my least favorite part about being a widow? People telling me how important I was to Louis. The more they say it, the more I realize how unimportant I was to him.
WATERS
Because you didn’t know him way back when? Because you were born 25 years after him?

STELLA
Twenty-four. I hide it well.

WATERS
Magnificently.

STELLA
When we were out, we’d take bets on who’d be the first to assume I was his daughter. It was fun watching them squirm. I’m sorry there’s no ice.

WATERS
What’s the agenda?

STELLA
Louis didn’t just change styles when he came back from Europe. He positively ran from that one.

WATERS
It didn’t pay the bills.

STELLA
What he said.

WATERS
So?

STELLA
There’s a blankness, Billy. Whatever happened before we got married, it’s just not there.

WATERS
How’d he con you into that, anyway?

STELLA
I was modeling for him. Right up there. One day he looked up and suddenly he didn’t like his rule about not dating his models.

WATERS
Why’d he need a model for this Neo-Action business?

STELLA
Remind him of what he was missing?
(THEY laugh.)

STELLA
But it’s like one of those old horror movies, you know? The whole castle is yours except for that one locked door you have to stay away from. When I was taking those paintings out the other day, I felt like I’d finally penetrated the secret room.

WATERS
And discovered?

STELLA
That’s what I need you to tell me.

WATERS
You were married what, eight years? Well, triple that and then some. What would I know after so much time?

STELLA
It seemed like a hope.

(STELLA reaches for his empty glass, but WATERS gets up to pour himself a refill.)

WATERS
Kate’s right. I do have an agenda. Louis called me. The day before ...what happened.

STELLA
For what?

WATERS
I don’t know. I was in court with my subway pusher. My secretary took the call. Said a woman asked for me in Louis Chalk’s name, that he wanted to talk to me. Then the line went dead. I assumed it was you.

STELLA
No.

WATERS
So much for both our agendas.

STELLA
That doesn’t sound like Louis. Must’ve been somebody using his name.

WATERS
Right. It’s an alias that comes to mind right away.
STELLA

But he never called anybody!

WATERS

You said.

STELLA

So that’s it? You were hoping I’d tell you why he was calling?

WATERS

If he mentioned it. Mentioned me. Sure. I was curious.

STELLA

But you debated a couple of weeks before looking me up to ask.

WATERS

It didn’t seem proper to bother you before.

STELLA

Two weeks—yes, that sounds proper.

(WATERS ambles closer to THE WINDOW.)

STELLA

Yes.

WATERS

You put this clutter in front here?

STELLA

For what? Stop somebody else from falling out?

WATERS

A detective who was here, a Lieutenant Olmos...

STELLA

Manny Olmos?

WATERS

Yes. He said the hardest investigation was when somebody went out a window. It could be an accident, suicide, even homicide...(To WATER’s snicker) Is that funny?

STELLA

I hope you looked impressed.
STELLA

It isn’t true?

WATERS

If the cops are half-wits. If they can’t figure out it had to be murder because a second party was seen near the window with the victim, because this second party bolted right afterward, because this second party wasn’t seen looking out the window after the victim went out, because because because. Or if they can’t figure out it had to be an accident because the victim had a history of vertigo, because a stuck window was really stuck, because there had been complaints to the landlord about the windows, because because because. Or if they can’t figure out it had to be suicide because...

STELLA

Because Louis had been depressed for weeks.

WATERS

Because because because.

STELLA

So you think Olmos was just trying to get a rise out of me.

WATERS

It’s been ruled an accident, hasn’t it?

STELLA

Officially.

WATERS

And your insurance company?

STELLA

They were up here sniffing around.

WATERS

Give them two more weeks of sniffing. Then demand the check.

STELLA

Suppose I couldn’t do that in good conscience? Suppose I thought it was suicide?

WATERS

Why?

STELLA

I don’t believe in accidents.
WATERS
I don’t believe in good movies. But they happen.

STELLA
Kate says I should sue the landlord anyway. For therapy.

You wouldn’t be the first.

WATERS
Clients of yours?

STELLA
No.

WATERS
That’s definite.

STELLA
I hope so.

(WATERS polishes off her drink and extends her glass to WATERS.)

STELLA
Please.

(WATERS pours a drink for STELLA while SHE toes the top painting off the pile. When HE brings her the drink, HE sees the painting SHE has uncovered.)

STELLA
Paris?

WATERS
Early Seventies. After the invasion of Cambodia. We wanted to do more than parade down another boulevard to another American embassy and stand around chanting. We wanted to hurt the fuckers. At least I did.

STELLA
Louis?

WATERS
Louis had this magic weapon to make them hurt. He called it Art. Any street in the world, he could set up his canvasses and shoot them off and thousands of bad guys would go plunging through the sidewalk and drop straight down to Hell. I didn’t have that weapon.
STELLA

Or much belief in his?

WATERS

I was still going through the Best of Clarence Darrow and realizing old Clarence really didn’t have something relevant to cover every occasion. So I did what any reasonably disillusioned person would have done — I planted a bomb...Not exactly Hiroshima. Just three sticks of dynamite this Frenchman was hot to plant in the office of an airline that was a front for the CIA’s drug operations in Asia.

STELLA

You actually did this?

WATERS

The lookout part. One night I stood downstairs keeping an eye on the street while the Frenchman did his thing on the second floor. A brown Saab, red Citroen, green Renault, and three black Fiats. You don’t expect to see three black Fiats in a row even in Italy, and this was Paris!

STELLA

I don’t understand.

WATERS

The first six cars that went by while I was on lookout.

STELLA

Oh.

WATERS

Those Fiats bugged me. Was there some branch of the French police that used only black Fiats? I wanted to run upstairs, tell my friend to call it off, let’s just get the hell out of there. But then this white Jag came by. Hugh Hefner having a wet dream. Slick comb job. Silk maroon shirt open to his nipples. Big gold medallion. No way the French cops lived on the same planet with this geek! So I calmed down and a few minutes later the Frenchman came out and we walked away.

STELLA

The bomb?

WATERS

It went off before dawn. Took out the waiting room and some posters about Thailand. This is the Frenchman who planted it. Louis said he was a born loser, wouldn’t reach 40. Louis was wrong. He’s already been in two French governments.

STELLA

Louis was part of this?
WATERS
Christ, no! The only weapon he believed in was his talent.

STELLA
That doesn’t sound like a compliment.

WATERS
Envy, maybe.

STELLA
Not that, either.

(WATERS abruptly puts down his drink and goes to THE WINDOW. HE starts tossing aside the clutter in front of it.)

STELLA
What are you doing?

WATERS
Landlords gouge you by the inch. Don’t gouge yourself on top of it. *(Throws open THE WINDOW)* You paid to the end of the month, so use it!

STELLA
Suppose I don’t want to see it the way it was when the police were here?

WATERS
You already have that picture in your head.

STELLA
You’re not married or anything, are you?

WATERS
“Anything?” What’s that? The slinky concubine who shrinks not from putting her blow dryer in my bathroom?

(STELLA giggles.)

WATERS
What’s funny?

STELLA
You. You’ve answered my question. There’s been a wife. More than one. Probably a couple of children.

WATERS
You don’t say.
And they all eventually walked out.

Oh, yeah?

Because they got tired of...

What?

Asking you to change the toilet paper roll and having you flare up at them like Clarence Darrow raving at a witness.

Something like that.

And you don’t care all that much. Maybe about your children. They’re…

Not much younger than you.

You love them, see them for lunch and on holidays when you can. But down to it, you’re used to your success and you’d never trade it in for what might have been, could have been, or should have been.

Down to it.

Louis wouldn’t have made the trade, either.

(STELLA goes to the table to pour herself another drink.)

There’s something curious about that little art collection. We have our plumber Claude Marquand and our bomber. This mademoiselle and that fraulein. Kids. Bartenders. Tourists. We have Louis Chalk’s Rome, Paris, and Berlin. What we don’t have is Billy Waters.

I never posed for him.
STELLA
You didn’t have to. He was compulsive about drawing the human figure. Never for a show, of course. People were his private, secret thing. Didn’t he think of you as people?

WATERS
He tossed it, didn’t like what he did.

(STELLA brings her drink and the bottle back to the couch.)

STELLA
What he did? Or he didn’t like something you did?

WATERS
You’re looking for something that doesn’t exist, Stella.

STELLA
Look at Billy’s nose getting bigger.

WATERS
Try this novel idea: Whatever problems you had in your marriage started the day you got married.

STELLA
He jumped. Nobody wants to hear it, but I know that’s what happened.

WATERS
Accidents do happen.

STELLA
Not in here. The last couple of weeks, he lived in this soulless gray. Some place I didn’t know, just knew I didn’t want to know it. The only thing he did around the house was sit in a trance in front of those old cop shows in the afternoon — “Hawaii Five-O,” all those series with dead actors he didn’t see the first time around because he was in Europe. TV shouldn’t be new to you at four o’clock in the afternoon.

WATERS
What you’re going through...

STELLA
Yeah, I know. Kate’s given me the whole manual. But I know what I was living with. He wouldn’t have noticed if that window was stuck or not. And god knows he didn’t have the energy to open it just for air.

WATERS
Really sure, are you.
STELLA

Really sure.

WATERS

But isn’t that why they have shrinks, clinics, drug counters, a whole goddam industry? Every once in awhile, you even get a wife—before the fact—recommending her husband look into it.

STELLA

You don’t think I did? I was frantic. I tried everything.

WATERS

No question, the quiet gaga can be a pain.

STELLA

What?

WATERS

Not that you would’ve been better off with a serial killer in the same bed, but that quiet gaga gets on your nerves, too.

STELLA

How can you say that? He was ill!

WATERS

Sounds to me like he was just moody. That kind of artist moody to make yourself more interesting.

STELLA

How dare you!

WATERS

I didn’t invite me up here tonight.

(STELLA throws her glass at him and misses.)

WATERS

To hear you, his aim was better.

(STELLA lunges at WATERS.)

STELLA

How dare you! How dare you!

(STELLA pummels him until WATERS brings her hands under control. SHE breaks down in sobs as HE holds her against him.)
How many Kates and Allens have you been holding this in for?

Kate’s a friend.

Lucky Kate.

You’re so goddamn presumptuous.

Right. I know nothing.

You’re not platinum worthy.

Hell, no.

Who are you, Billy Waters? Why are you here?

Show you how another age lives.

Louis thought he was the one who seduced me.

Please! Leave us some illusions!

I felt good with him.

What were you before — a babbling idiot?

Close. I wanted to be a model, an actress, a caterer, a chef. I wanted my father to pass a plate to me at dinner instead of me always having to pass it to him. I wanted my good boyfriend to give me what was in his eyes so I could give it back to him. I wanted my bad boyfriend to hurt me harder. I wanted to be everything. But tomorrow, always tomorrow. Louis didn’t want me to wait that long. He made me feel self-important.
(WATERS looks at his watch and releases his hold on STELLA.)

WATERS
We should both work on being able to feel that way in the morning.

STELLA
Did I say something...?

(WATERS retrieves the scotch bottle and takes it back to the table. HE picks up the glass she threw, then looks around for the bottle cap.)

WATERS
I have a brief like an encyclopedia waiting for me at home.

STELLA
You’ve changed your mind.

WATERS
About what?

STELLA
Your curiosity. About Louis’ phone call.

WATERS
Where did you put the top?

STELLA
What, you thought he was calling up to say sorry? After years and years of reflection, you were right about that bomb?

WATERS
I guess we’ll never know.

STELLA
That’s why you told me about it! So at least I could be impressed!

WATERS
Even that urge has passed the statute of limitations.

STELLA
You’re bringing more lies into my life, Mr. Waters. Why are you doing that?...No, sshh! Say nothing.

(STELLA goes over to THE WINDOW.)
WATERS
Let’s go downstairs and get some coffee.

STELLA
That subway pusher. Louis saw you on the TV news one night and said to me, “Well, if anybody can get that fruitcake off, there’s the man. Billy Waters has absolutely no...”

WATERS
Conscience?

STELLA
No. I told you he admired you. No, it was...

I don’t care, Stella.

WATERS
You’re so high you’re even beyond praise?

STELLA
I said I don’t care.

(WATERS finds the cap on the floor and screws it back on the bottle.)

STELLA
You didn’t do something to him. He did something to you.

You’ve drunk too much.

WATERS
I don’t need any more shoulders.

(STELLA boosts herself up to THE WINDOW sill in a sudden motion. WATERS makes a belated move toward stopping her.)

STELLA
I want to know, Billy. I want to know why I opened that door and you came out with those paintings.

WATERS
I can’t help you.

STELLA
For old times sake.
They weren’t your times.

Think of it as *pro bono* work.

How could he have thought for a second he was the one doing the seducing?

He? That would be Louis Chalk, the painter? My late husband?

Him.

I’m listening.

It wouldn’t mean anything to you.

Because I’m so young and stupid?

He informed on me. To the FBI.

Louis?

Louis Chalk.

This bomb business?

Among other things.

Who were you? Fidel Castro?

It was a long time ago.
STELLA
You’re making it up...He admitted it?

WATERS
I asked for my FBI file. The Freedom of Information Act. In between all the crossed out lines, he was referred to as “our informant.”

STELLA
That could’ve been anybody.

WATERS
For some things, not all. I’m good at tracing patterns. With three cities involved, it wasn’t all that hard.

STELLA
Why would he do such a thing?

WATERS
He disapproved of me.

STELLA
So he just went dancing into some FBI office?

WATERS
In those days over there they danced up to you. Translators, movie dubbers, ministers working to end the war in the name of Jesus Christ. A glass of wine in a pleasant cafe and you were going on about how much you missed family Thanksgivings, the Mets, and the real Thomas’s English Muffins. Lots of mellow words until you got to the ones that ended up in some report.

STELLA
So he had a big mouth.

WATERS
The first couple of times, maybe.

STELLA:
When did you find this out?

WATERS
When I came back. I brought the file over to Louis. He shrugged it off, said it was ancient history, a dozen Iraqs ago, nobody cared anymore, let’s get on with life. I really didn’t want him to get on with his.
STELLA
Am I missing something here? The FBI hasn’t exactly surrounded your house and told you to come out with your hands up.

WATERS
No, it hasn’t.

STELLA
Everybody gets betrayed.

WATERS
I’m not talking about your college sweetheart.

STELLA
I didn’t have time for one. I had to get home to work in my father’s bakery.

WATERS
The powdered sugar guy.

STELLA
Got it. You’re good at helping people through the rough patches because you never take them seriously. *(STELLA hops off the sill, grabs one of the paintings, and hurls it through THE WINDOW. SHE then walks haughtily over to the table, grabs the scotch bottle, reopens it, swigs from it, and goes back to the couch.)* You’re dismissed.

WATERS
If you’re going to be all right…

STELLA
Stay and you help me finish this bottle.

WATERS
I’ve reached my limit.

STELLA
I won’t report you to the FBI.

WATERS
I’ve reached my limit.

STELLA
Go past it.

WATERS
No, thanks.
STELLA
I know all about you, Billy Waters. You came down here the other day because you
wanted to see the scene of atonement. You wanted to be looking over at the window
while I told you Louis had called you to apologize for being a rat. You have bigger
suicide fantasies than I do.

You have a bag or something?

WATERS

“Hang in there, Mrs. Chalk.”

STELLA

Get your things.

WATERS

(HE goes to the window to close it.)

STELLA

Leave that fucking window alone!

(WATERS leaves THE WINDOW without closing it and goes to the front door.)

WATERS

Come on. We’ll get a cab.

STELLA

I’m sleeping here tonight...Louis did whenever he felt inspired. Most nights, the other
woman was a white Neo-Action blotch. I bet your other women never brought home
twenty thou a shot to your wife.

You have a...?

WATERS

Diaphragm?

STELLA

Blanket.

WATERS

Whoops!

(STELLA waves toward the dais. WATERS goes to it for the bedclothes there.)
STELLA
You like Avgolemono soup? It’s Greek. I’m very good at it. I’ll cater your next court victory party. I do all kinds of Greek specialties. It’s my signature in the business. You have to have a signature.

(WATERS brings the bedclothes to her at the couch.)

STELLA
I’m entitled to a night like this, right?

WATERS
More than one.

STELLA
But you won’t be around for the others.

WATERS
You’ve got to stop raiding nursing homes. Lie down.

(STELLA lies down with the bottle. WATERS covers her.)

STELLA
You know, I almost got married before Louis.

WATERS
Oh, yeah? Did he know it?

STELLA
Him, my father, the whole neighborhood.

WATERS
What was the last-minute epiphany?

STELLA
Lots of them. But the one that maybe rankled the most was the conversation about the school where we’d send our kids. Jesus, I didn’t even have morning sickness yet! (WATERS laughs) I should thank you. You told me why he broke his rule about not dating his models.

WATERS
When did I do that?

STELLA
I had nothing to do with those paintings, with you, with Europe, with anything at all in his past. I was that Latin thing. What do you call it— A blank slate?
WATERS

Tabula rasa?

STELLA

Sounds better in Latin. Makes me sound classical instead of just empty.

Give me the bottle.

STELLA

Get your own.

(WATERS wrests the bottle away from STELLA without much problem.)

STELLA

I think you’re still holding something back.

What would that be?

STELLA

For you to know and me to find out.

I didn’t see a bathroom.

STELLA

In case sloppy Stella becomes gross Stella? It’s out in the hall. (SHE pulls his face closer and studies it.) No way he didn’t do your face.

It was recycled as something else a long time ago.

STELLA

There’s still a locked door in the castle, Billy.

We’ll talk about it next time.

STELLA

Promise me there’ll be one.

Good Night, Stella.
STELLA
That’s not a promise.

WATERS
If you need me, I’ll be here.

STELLA
As a lawyer? We’ll sue the landlord so I can feel better?

WATERS
Good Night.

(WATERS kisses her and goes to the door. HE then remembers THE WINDOW and closes it. STELLA nods off as he turns off the light and exits. After a moment, there is the sound of a street door being closed. STELLA stirs awake.)

STELLA
I didn’t mean it, Louis! I didn’t mean it!

(LIGHTS FADE OUT)

ACT I, SCENE THREE

(AT RISE: The studio the following morning. STELLA is under the blankets on the dais. The clothes she was wearing in the previous scene are now scattered around the floor because during the night she moved from the couch to the dais to get closer to her days as Chalk’s nude model. SHE is covered only by the blanket. The rest of the studio is as last seen. KATE, carrying a container of coffee and a New York Times, opens the front door with a key. Only after SHE has closed the door behind her does SHE take in the stirring STELLA.

STELLA
Kate?

KATE
I didn’t know you’d be here.

(STELLA takes in what SHE has done during her tipsiness and hurriedly recovers herself with the blanket.)

STELLA
Oh, God!

KATE
You weren’t sure which was the couch. Happens to me all the time.
STELLA
Why do I doubt that?...What time is it?

KATE
Sevenish.

STELLA
In the morning??!!

KATE
I called you all day yesterday and kept getting your machine. Maybe I should come back when...

STELLA
No, hold on.

(STELLA tries to make peace with her royal hangover.)

STELLA
Oh, Jesus!

KATE
Sounds like fun.

STELLA
Just give me a second.

(KATE takes in the glasses and bottle on the table.)

STELLA
And with a mystery guest!

KATE
Anybody in the hall?

STELLA
I thought I heard that sculptor across the way.

KATE
His name is Lee. And you know it.

(STOUND OF HAMMERING OFF)

KATE
When he changes his name to Michelangelo, I’ll remember it.
STELLA
What’s wrong with you people? Don’t you ever look at a clock?

(STELLA tightens the blanket around her, goes to the door, peers outside, then scurries out. KATE takes in the studio. The SOUND OF HAMMERING CONTINUES OFF. KATE puts the coffee and paper on the table. SHE picks up Stella’s clothes and puts them on the couch. SHE then goes over to the paintings and goes through a few of them and notices one is missing. KATE looks more thoroughly for the missing painting. SHE looks around the room to see if it is somewhere else then returns to the pile. STELLA comes running back in, clutching the blanket around her.)

STELLA
What in god’s name has to be created so loudly?

Huh?

Lee!

Oh.

What’re you looking for?

There’s one missing. A brunette with high cheek bones.

I threw her out the window.

Excuse me?

She irritated me. I threw her out the window.

(KATE opens the window and looks out. STELLA begins dressing).

I don’t see it.

Talk to the alley cats. What’re you doing here, Kate?
(SOUND OF HAMMERING OUT)

KATE
Oh. There’s somebody coming by the gallery this morning who might be interested in these old things of Louis’. (Takes a digital camera from her bag) I thought I’d whet his appetite with a few shots.

STELLA
I still haven’t decided about a show.

KATE
No show. Just a piece or two for private viewing.

STELLA
Private or public, I’m still thinking about it.

KATE
And that’s what I’ll tell him. The worst that happens, we get a taste of the market.

STELLA
Okay. I’m speaking Hindi this morning.

KATE
There’s coffee there. Take some.

(STELLA goes over to the coffee. SHE notices the newspaper.)

STELLA
Ever miss your bible here in the morning?

KATE
Why should I?

STELLA
Louis never read newspapers around the house. What he didn’t get from TV, he didn’t want to know about. But I found four copies of the Times here. Why should he want to keep me in the dark about that?

KATE
This character who’s coming by the gallery, he’s loaded. Microsoft, for starters. Some kind of high-tech engineer. Do they have those?

(STELLA looks at her without reply. KATE takes the top canvas off the pile and sets it up near THE WINDOW for better exposure. KATE goes about shooting the canvasses as STELLA watches and sips coffee.)
KATE
The one you threw out might’ve been the best of the lot.

STELLA
When did Louis give you a key?...I’m hung-over, not deaf.

KATE
Last year.

STELLA
To pick up things for the show?

KATE
No.

STELLA
Please don’t look so brave. You didn’t rescue a child from a burning building, you fucked my husband.

KATE
It just happened.

STELLA
Both of you just happened to screw while you just happened to be reading the *Times* together?

KATE
It was only once.

STELLA
Oh, that’s okay, then.

KATE
We didn’t plan it. It was...just there.

STELLA
Because because because.

KATE
It’s the truth.

STELLA
Fuck you, Kate.

KATE
I’d like to leave it at that.
STELLA
Afraid I’ll take those to some other gallery?

KATE
Louis and I were useful to each other. He painted, I sold what he painted. I can do that for you, too.

STELLA
Sorry. No quickies here.

KATE
He gave me the key after that day.

STELLA
After? Sounds like you wasted it.

KATE
We talked. That’s all.

STELLA
Really. And what were these great discussions about?

KATE
Things he couldn’t talk about at home, I suppose.

STELLA
There’s some territory!

KATE
That’s what we did – talk.

STELLA
I thought whores did that for tip money.

KATE
You know I wasn’t the only one.

STELLA
Those kinds of confidences? You’re right. He probably would’ve felt awkward gabbing about that in front of “Law and Order.”

KATE
What do you want me to do?
STELLA
Die. Or just take your pictures. Maybe I’ll feel better telling you you’ve thrown away a lot of good film.

KATE
I want to make it up to you...I’m serious.

STELLA
I don’t know the word unfuck.

(STELLA stands abruptly and snatches the camera away from KATE. STELLA yanks another painting off the pile and sets it up for shooting.)

STELLA
Start with this one. You can have a photo of an ancient painting of someone across the ocean the painter didn’t have a clue about. How’s that for up-close and personal?

(STELLA shoots the painting, slaps the camera back in KATE’s hand, and returns to her coffee. KATE looks at the image.)

KATE
Am I supposed to know the subject?

STELLA
A Frenchman. Been in two governments. Should be worth extra.

KATE
A friend of Billy Waters?

STELLA
Yes, that’s who drank out of the second glass. Got it all now?

KATE
Did Waters tell you Louis called him the day before he died?

STELLA
As a matter of fact. What is it you’re negotiating here, Kate? I’m not a customer looking for a good deal.

KATE
I just thought you should know.

STELLA
Which must be why you didn’t tell me when he dropped by the other day. But come to think of it, he didn’t say Louis called him. He said you did in Louis’ name. And then the line went dead.
KATE
Louis was furious at the way Waters was treating that music student.

STELLA
Please.

KATE
He ranted about it so much I got Waters’ number and dared him to tell somebody besides me. As soon as I handed him the phone, he hung up.

(SOUND OF HAMMERING RESUMES OFF)

STELLA
So Louis wasn’t very good at reality tests. What else is new?

KATE
Isn’t that why Waters came by? Maybe just a little guilty he never called back?

STELLA
I thought it was because he wanted to represent me in a suit against the landlord here.

KATE
I’m sure he wouldn’t turn that down, either.

STELLA
You’re magnificent, you know that?

KATE
And you’re wallowing. (Glances at the dais) The old modeling days? When it was enough to have him drooling over you?

(KATE puts away her camera.)

KATE
You’re right. I shouldn’t advertise what I’m not sure I can deliver.

STELLA
What does Allen say about everything?

KATE
Assuming I’ve told him.

STELLA
Assuming I’ve been the last to find out.
KATE
Allen would be just as happy if you burned all these things.

STELLA
I still might.

KATE
Good. At least that would be a decision.

STELLA
Why does he stay with you?

KATE
I excite him.

STELLA
Minus those seconds.

KATE
He’s lazy. And after work, I like lazy.

STELLA
Ah!

(SOUND OF HAMMERING OUT)

KATE
Most people are. They wait for things to happen. That’s why I have a business. Tell them anything at all is happening and, if they can afford it, they can’t wait to buy into it. It beats having to move their own pinkies.

STELLA
That’s lovely.

KATE
Louis was that way, too. He let you happen to him. All that bubbly insecurity and wet hair he only had to put a towel around to feel alive again. He let me and Jason and Pandora Galleries happen to him, too. We sold him Neo-Action before we ever sold it to a single customer.

STELLA
Must be hard finding equals.

KATE
I really don’t spend much time looking anymore.
(KATE starts toward the door.)

STELLA
What exactly was it that was just there, Kate?...That time with Louis. What was just there? The need to hold on to an important artist?

KATE
Think that. I don’t mind.

(KATE sees her newspaper and goes over to get it.)

STELLA
I want you to tell me. What was it? What was just there?

KATE
A feeling something was passing through. For the one and only time.

STELLA
Louis Chalk?

KATE
You find that so unbelievable? You’re the one who married him.

STELLA
My Louis?

KATE
I didn’t have the husband. I had the artist.

STELLA
Got you. Another of those mountains people are always climbing because they’re there. You wanted to be able to say you’d done it.

KATE
So he could say we had.

(KATE starts toward the door again.)

STELLA
Did he jump out that window, Kate?

KATE
He might have.

STELLA
Because nothing at all was important to him?
KATE
He was repeating himself in his work for a long time.

STELLA
Besides his goddamn work!

KATE
The only thing I saw was what Waters was doing to that music student. And he couldn’t even carry through on that.

STELLA
We loved each other!

I know.

KATE
And that didn’t mean anything to you. To either one of you.

STELLA
I’m sorry, Stella, but nothing is everything.

(KATE exits rapidly. STELLA watches after her a moment, then goes to THE WINDOW. SOUND OF HAMMERING RESUMES OFF as SHE looks out indecisively. SHE might be on the verge of jumping. THE SOUND OF HAMMERING OUT. SHE waves to somebody SHE sees through a nearby window. SHE settles down again and gazes back around the studio. SHE goes back to the paintings, sits down on the floor, and begins going through them more diligently. SOUND OF KNOCK at door.)

STELLA
It’s open!

(LEE opens the door and sticks his head in.)

LEE
Sorry for the noise so early. I didn’t know you were here.

STELLA
No problem, Lee.

(�STElla continues going through the paintings as LEE edges inside.)

LEE
How you been?
Steady as she goes.

*(LEE takes in the paintings.)*

Old stuff, huh?

You want them?

Me? No.

They’re probably worth something.

I’m sure.

Sorry. That’s not what I meant.

You don’t owe me anything, Stella.

Sure about that?

I’m sure.

And if I killed him? You still wouldn’t have seen anything from your studio window?

Don’t say that.

That cop with all the skeptical questions, he might decide you were one of those accessories after the fact. Or was it during the fact?

*(LEE stares at the paintings.)*

Do you hear me?
LEE
No...Who are these people?

STELLA
Strangers. Lives Louis protected from me.

(LIGHTS DOWN as STELLA and LEE stare at the paintings.)

ACT II, SCENE ONE

(AT RISE: The stage is dark except for THE WINDOW up stage right. As at the very beginning of the play, WATERS enters stage left in a SPOTLIGHT. Once again he addresses the unseen jury.)

WATERS
If motive was the be-all and end-all some people claim, I think we could pretty much clear this planet of human life in two or three weeks. We are a reasonable species, so we have trillions and trillions of reasons for exterminating friends, enemies, neighbors, lovers, and passersby. And that’s without counting the TV weathermen. Motives are all over the place. You stepped on my foot, you didn’t pay me what you owe me, you’re standing in the way of my vice-presidency, I love you too much for you to go on living in this sordid world. I think we should all get up every morning thankful we’ve gotten through the night, that somebody didn’t take our snoring or mumbling as a reason for putting a pillow over our heads!...And what’s the other ingredient besides motive they tell us is so essential? Right! Opportunity! We need to be with the person we want to kill. Gee, really? I thought the target could be planting asparagus over in China while I’m buying the morning paper in the Bronx! Wow, that opportunity thing, that’s really fundamental, isn’t it? You lick that one, you should get your shield to detective first class right away. Who would’ve thought opportunity was so important?...But what we really want to talk about here is something else, isn’t it? We want to talk about the third of the Three Stooges. We want to talk about the weapon!

(LIGHTS INTENSIFY on THE WINDOW)

WATERS
Something classical like a knife or a gun? Something a little more bizarre like a Japanese sword brought home from World War II as a trophy? Or maybe human hands --- they’re always good for smothering and choking and garroting. No, no, nothing like that. Just a window. You know windows. You see them everywhere. Buildings, houses, cars. In fact, it’s when you don’t see them, you should start worrying. They’re supposed to be there. You want to call them a weapon? I call them other things. Even when they’re looking out on some back alley, they can show you much more than garbage cans…
(SPOTLIGHT OUT on WATERS, leaving LIGHT ON THE WINDOW as the only visible object on the stage. Then LIGHTS UP FULL on the studio at night. It has been cleaned up for a dinner party. Chalk’s old canvasses are now off the floor and hanging from the walls. The table has been cleared for a buffet supper. Wine and liquor bottles are on the model’s stand. A CD player plays Yves Montand. ALLEN sits sipping wine. JASON and LEE circle the room studying the paintings. There is awkwardness in the atmosphere.

ALLEN

So you’re a sculptor.

LEE

Yeah.

ALLEN

Must’ve had a lot to talk about with Chalk.

LEE

We’d meet in the hallway. He was here to work, I was here to work. Didn’t really spend much time together. Downer what happened.

“Downer.” That’s good.

LEE

I didn’t mean...

ALLEN

It’s what happened, right?

LEE

I warned them about the windows in this place. They were put in during the Civil War. You need to be Schwarzenegger to open them. I don’t know why Stella isn’t suing them.

Yeah. Wonder why.

(ALLEN refills his glass.)

ALLEN

So what about it, Jason? See anything special?

JASON

What to you would be special, Allen?

ALLEN

Something that sets me off. A thought I’ve never had before. A feeling I’ve never had.
You ask a lot.

ALLEN
Why paint otherwise? Just to cover up the plaster? You don’t make your statues just for
the pigeons to shit on, do you?

LEE
Mobiles. Not statues.

ALLEN
Whatever.

JASON
Lee was invited to a party, Allen. Be festive.

LEE
I probably work for the same reason you do what you do.

ALLEN
You want people to buy a Discovery card?

LEE
It always comes down to doing what you think you’re good at.

JASON
Take note, Allen.

ALLEN
That’s it? What about this gift you’re supposed to have? The kind that turns on the ladies
even when you don’t have a penny and are coughing blood out of your TB lungs?

LEE
You go the movies a lot, man.

JASON
And if you hurry, you can catch the 8:00 show around the corner.

ALLEN
So I’m a simpleton. I’m my own best customer. I believe what all the ads tell me.

(STEMMA comes rushing through the front door toting bags with the evening meal SHE
has prepared. SHE brings them to the table. LEE rises to assist.)

JASON
Ah! The famous dinner for the gods!
STELLA
Spanakopita, spanakopita! Say it after me ten times.

JASON
Spanakopita.

STELLA
Kate’s not here yet?

ALLEN
She knows the address.

(STELLA and LEE take casserole pots out of the bags.)

LEE
I’ll do it.

STELLA
You don’t know...

LEE
It’s in the bag, it’s got to come out of the bag. Get yourself a drink.

STELLA
You’re dedicated to making me a sane woman, aren’t you?

(ALLEN peeks into a serving dish.)

ALLEN
Looks like cheese and spinach.

STELLA
Just like the Original Ray’s. Get me a slice when you go down. Give me a cigarette, Jason?

LEE
Everybody’s getting rid of you, man.

ALLEN
Notice that?

(LEE arranges things at the table as STELLA goes over to JASON. JASON gives STELLA a cigarette and lights it for her.)

JASON
Always so anxious about the meals you cater?
STELLA
When I’m not, don’t eat it...So what do you think?

JASON
I haven’t tasted it yet.

STELLA
The paintings, Jason!

ALLEN
He’s trying to dodge that question.

JASON
Left to me, I’d say no. There’s rawness of vision and rawness of talent. This strikes me as the latter. But it isn’t up to me.

STELLA
That’s not what Kate says.

JASON
A game partners play. I let her decide for me what I intend doing and she lets me decide for her what she intends doing. That way, disasters are nobody’s fault.

STELLA
There must be something about them you like.

JASON
They’re clear.

STELLA
“Clear.”

JASON
Look at them. Louis knew what he thought of his subjects. Some he liked, some he detested.

STELLA
What’s wrong with that?

JASON
Honestly?

STELLA
I’m not asking for another eulogy, Jason.
JASON
Nothing’s wrong with it. This was Louis when he was still relating to the outside world. He had likes and dislikes, like all the rest of us. But the more powerful Louis Chalk, the one who’s helped Pandora Galleries pay its rent for some time now, didn’t have time for that human traffic. He didn’t have likes or dislikes. He had only himself, his own vision, his own language. In his world, he was the only legitimate citizen.

LEE
That’s a little heavy, man.

STELLA
It’s all right.

JASON
Do I really have to flatter you at this stage?

LEE
That’s not the guy I knew.

STELLA
It wasn’t?

LEE
I mean, he didn’t go out of his way to say let’s have a beer, what’re you working on. But...

ALLEN
Isn’t that what you wanted him to ask?

LEE
Well...

ALLEN
At least pretend he was interested in your mobiles? Even we do that when we bust your chops at suppertime. “Hello, there. How are you this evening? Are you having a nice day today? No? What can I do to cheer you up? Oh, hey, I’ve got an idea…”

JASON
Some wine?

STELLA
A drop.

(JASON goes to the model stand to pour two glasses of wine.)
Who’s this singing—Jacques Brel?

Yves Montand.

The Frenchies all sound the same when they sing like that.

Brel was Belgian, Montand Italian.

Yikes! Another cultural blooper in front of Kate’s friends!

(KATE comes through the door hefting bottles.)

I don’t have friends. I can do without liquor store clerks, too.

They didn’t have the Naoussa?

Once I persuaded the idiot to look for it.

Merlot would have been just as good.

You didn’t tell me that, Stella.

Sorry.

(KATE leaves the bottles with LEE and ALLEN and wanders over to JASON and STELLA. KATE glances around at the canvasses.)

The light doesn’t do them justice.

I’ve told Stella what I think.

I was thinking the end of July.
Good. I’ll be in Scotland.

Don’t be a prick, Jason.

He told me what he thought. No problem. Now let’s have a toast.

Right. To Louis Chalk!

No. To Louis Chalk’s studio! Without it...

We’d all be strangers.

Here, here.

Yes. Without it we’d all be strangers.

(KATE takes in LEE as the others drink. The Montand CD ends, and JASON crosses to change it.

The sculptor across the hall?

He was a big help straightening up this place.

Mobiles, right?

This is a special night, Kate. Let’s not ask questions we know the answers to, okay?

(WATERS enters with a bottle of champagne.)

Well!

I’ll take that as a welcome.
STELLA
How are you, Billy?

WATERS
Quick to forget you didn’t have a refrigerator up here.

STELLA
Leave it to me.

(STELLA takes the champagne and exits through the front door.)

KATE
I didn’t know you were coming.

WATERS
Too late for you to back out now.

KATE
Billy — Jason and... I’m sorry.

LEE
Lee.

KATE
Allen you know.

WATERS
Never forget the face of a burglar.

ALLEN
No subpoena yet.

WATERS
Give it time.

(STELLA enters without the champagne and strides to the closet.)

STELLA
There’s no stopper in the sink. There must be something in one of those tool boxes. Hey, where’s the music? I thought you were the disc jockey, Lee.

LEE
I am? Okay.

(STELLA enters the closet and starts rattling through tools OFF while LEE selects a CD.)
Get the man a drink, Allen.

Scotch neat would be nice.

(ALLEN crosses to make the drink.)

He won’t poison it.

But the thought has definitely crossed his mind.

(A lively tarantella erupts from the CD player. STELLA emerges from the closet with masking tape and strides right back out the front door. WATERS takes in the paintings with KATE and JASON.)

Bring back memories?

Of the people. Of Louis standing at his easel doing them. Does that make the pictures themselves what they call evocative?

I rest my case. (Referring to the music) This thing is too damn noisy.

(JASON turns off the tarantella and looks for something else.)

You’re not helping.

Sorry.

You must’ve felt lousy for not calling right back.

It was you?

You intimidated him. Why?
WATERS
I’m famous, charming, good-looking. I win the state lottery twice a week. What’s not to be intimidated by?

KATE
When he hung up on your secretary, he looked like somebody who had failed at something. I don’t think it was just that music student.

WATERS
And you’re curious because...?

KATE
The more I know my painters, the more I know their work.

WATERS
Why does that sound upside-down?

(An Italian ballad plays. ALLEN brings WATERS his drink.)

WATERS
Thanks. So what’s this surprise Stella mentioned on the phone? Why’re we doing this?

ALLEN
The studio’s been declared an historic landmark.

(STELLA enters.)

STELLA
The tape will hold the water in the sink for about 15 minutes. Then somebody has to go refill the basin. I’ll be busy at a fabulous party.

(A CELLPHONE RINGS in JASON’s pocket. HE answers it. STELLA goes to LEE.)

STELLA
Let’s try the naoussa. Billy, come meet Lee.

(WATERS disengages himself from KATE and ALLEN).

ALLEN
You don’t want anything?

KATE
You’re being sloppy.

ALLEN
Oh! I must’ve lost my bib!
(LEE opens the bottle of naoussa wine as WATERS joins him and STELLA.)

STELLA
Lee has a studio across the hall. For another few days, anyway. Then he’s moving in here.

LEE
Same rent, twice the size of my closet.

WATERS
Sounds like you’ve got something on somebody.

LEE
We’ve met before, right?

WATERS
Kate introduced us a few minutes ago.

STELLA
You’ve seen Billy on the TV news. He handles all those splashy cases. “Details at 11!”

WATERS
And there never are!

(STELLA and WATERS laugh. LEE pours drinks.)

LEE
Maybe I’m just trying to compensate for your friend.

STELLA
Who? Kate?

LEE
Tonight must’ve been the third time she pretended she didn’t know my name. I don’t think that’s a good sign for showing my work at the Pandora Galleries, do you?

STELLA
Just the opposite, it’s a great sign. Kate likes you to know your place so she can rescue you from it.

LEE
Then maybe she should just go fuck herself.

STELLA
She doesn’t have to. Okay. Let’s see what we have here.
(STELLA, LEE and WATERS sip the naoussa.

STELLA
Not bad.

WATERS
Agreed.

(JASON shuts off his phone.)

JASON
Scratch Cynthia and her crowd.

STELLA
No!

JASON
Her brother was hurt in an accident. He’s okay, but Carlos had to drive her up to Westchester.

(ALLEN pours himself another drink.)

ALLEN
Louis’ way of saying this place should only be for work. The way it was when he was in it.

JASON
As long as we’re not waiting for anybody else, why don’t we get to this food of the gods?

(STELLA turns off the music and goes up on the model’s stand.)

STELLA
Actually, I had something more in mind than a goodbye to the studio. The thing is, Kate wants to have a show of these old pieces. But Jason isn’t so enthusiastic.

JASON
I explained...

STELLA
I know. You’ll be in Scotland. But I wouldn’t be. I’d be here, expected to go to an opening and do a lot of smiling for my supper. I’m really tired of that, Kate. So I thought we’d put on the show here tonight.

JASON
You misunderstood me...
STELLA
Too late, Jason. While you’re over there eating your haggis, the gallery’s going to be dark and you’re not going to be making a penny.

KATE
You haven’t thought this through.

STELLA
What’s to think? Louis’ oldest and newest friends are here. Why shouldn’t they have exclusive bidding rights?

ALLEN
Because they’re broke.

STELLA
Even for a $50 ceiling?

KATE
Don’t be absurd.

STELLA
Why? These obviously meant something to Louis or he would’ve gotten rid of them a long time ago. But he wanted them to mean something only to him, so they stayed in that closet. He succeeded. They mean nothing to me, and I’d be a parasite to cash in on them.

WATERS
Then give them away.

STELLA
You’re the one who reminded me he painted them to sell them. By the way, everybody, Billy can give us a little background on each piece.

KATE
I’ll pass.

STELLA
Please don’t.

ALLEN
That one there — I kind of like it.

(KATE goes to the table for some naoussa.)

KATE
So play her game.
Fifty bucks max?

Bidding starts at five dollars and goes up by fives. The last one at $50 gets it.

You’re mocking his work, Stella. Burn them if you want. It would be better than this.

Only a dealer would say selling them cheap is worse than destroying them.

He doesn’t deserve this.

Right now I don’t think he gives a damn one way or the other.

Which one, Allen?

That one.

(Stella removes the painting from the wall.)

Let’s give it a try. Who’s this, Billy? He looks like a mailman.

Somebody in the past.

So bring him into the present.

Maybe he’s better off where he is.

I don’t think so. I want to know all about him.

His name was Jacques.

WATERS
He dropped by that cafe for a brandy halfway through his route every day. Jacques had a son named Pierre.

ALLEN
Of course he did! See, I told you!

WATERS
Pierre was a junkie with ambitions to be a professional wrestler.

ALLEN
Bullshit.

STELLA
Five dollars, Allen?

ALLEN
I don’t know.

LEE
Five dollars.

STELLA
Five dollars from Lee.

JASON
Ten.

STELLA
Allen?

ALLEN
It looked better on the wall.

STELLA

JASON
Do that one next.

ALLEN
I thought you didn’t like his stuff.

KATE
He just wants the canvasses. To paint over.
STELLA
I don’t care why he wants it. Who’s this woman, Billy?

WATERS
Somebody else from another time and place.

STELLA
No, she’s here. Louis saw to that.

WATERS
A fruit woman from the Campo de’ Fiori in Rome. Louis bought oranges from her every day.

JASON
Five dollars.

ALLEN
Who needs her staring down at you all day?

WATERS
Isabella — that’s her name — found Louis irritating the way he always dug down into the bottom rows of her cart before he picked what he wanted. He didn’t particularly like her, either, but it was important to him to think she had the best oranges in the piazza.

STELLA
You didn’t think so?

WATERS
I think what we make important becomes important. Then it’s just a question of when reality catches up to us.

STELLA
Five dollars from Jason. Isabella once. Isabella twi...

Conforti.

WATERS

STELLA

What?

WATERS
Isabella Conforti. I saw her license on the cart one time. That’s who you’re auctioning off. Isabella Conforti.

STELLA

Sold to Jason!
(STELLA hands the canvas to JASON, who points out another one.)

JASON
That one. In fact, let’s do those three together. They look like a set.

STELLA
One at a time.

JASON
I want to get to your divine food!

WATERS
They can’t be auctioned off together. One’s from Rome, one from Paris, and one from Berlin.

JASON
What difference does that make?

WATERS
To you, none.

LEE
Five dollars for the one from Paris.

STELLA
They’ll think you’re my shill, Lee.

LEE
Ten dollars.

JASON
You’re bidding against yourself.

WATERS
Fifteen. (Takes painting off wall) This is Francine.

KATE
An old flame?

WATERS
Francine was an archeologist. She was always going to Ethiopia and Egypt looking for the Magic Ruin. She married an academic who woke up one morning, shot her in the chest, went into the next bedroom and shot their twin daughters, then turned the gun on himself. Francine got over the chest wound, but not much else.
What an atrocious story!

You just want the canvas anyway.

No, thanks.

Anybody want to top $15?

Twenty.

Twenty-five.

Thirty.

Thirty-five.

Don’t, Lee.

Why not?

Forty.

You’re right. You can get a hundred times that for it.

Even without your sordid story.

Make it forty-five.

It’s yours for the taking, Kate.
KATE

You pushed me here deliberately.

WATERS

I always wondered why Francine didn’t just step off a curb in front of a bus one day. The only thing she’d been left with was the certainty about what had happened to her family. No guesswork there. Boom, boom, boom, boom. How could she live with so much certainty? But she did. She woke up every morning insisting on not being dead, needing to be a greater survivor than all the trinkets she found in Ethiopia. It was a point of pride with her. To outlive a whole civilization!

STELLA

Do you want it or not, Kate?

KATE

Of course I do.

WATERS

Sold to the lady.

(WATERS hands the canvas to KATE, then goes over for another drink.)

ALLEN

Do the Berlin one. Maybe we’ll hear another saga.

WATERS

His name was Dieter. He thought he was a singer. He was in the minority. Most he ever did was sidewalk stuff in fringe festivals. People walking by him practically covered their ears. He started imagining his audience. For some reason, it was heavy on Bulgarians. “I’m very popular in Sofia,” he’d tell us. “They all want to hear me there.” Dieter ended up in an asylum. And the funny thing was, the nurse who took care of him most of the time was Bulgarian.

ALLEN

Why are you all listening to him? He’s making it all up!

STELLA

Are you?

No.

WATERS

Right.

(LEE takes the Berlin painting off the wall.)
LEE
Five dollars, anyone?

STELLA
Lee...

KATE
Fifty.

ALLEN
You can’t jump ahead like that.

KATE
I want this charade over with. Goddamn right I’ll jump ahead. Fifty dollars, Mrs. Chalk!

ALLEN
For a lousy painting of a lousy singer who went nuts??!!

(KATE slaps ALLEN in the face. In the ensuing stunned silence SHE hurries out of the studio to the bathroom.)

JASON
I think we should take a break and have at that food.

LEE
Good idea.

(JASON and LEE go to the table and begin serving themselves. ALLEN pours himself another drink. STELLA is left with WATERS.)

WATERS
I’m going to push off.

STELLA
You’re always in a hurry to leave.

WATERS
I think I’ve been here too long as it is.

STELLA
I’ve come to count on your disapproval. Tell me what to do next.

WATERS
Remember the good times.
This is fabulous, Stella!

Absolutely!

Make me a plate. I want to be sure I’m not poisoning anybody.

Good Night.

(WATERS starts toward the door.)

Wait a minute.

(STELLA hurries off to the closet. LEE makes another plate of food for her.)

Not eating?

No, thanks.

Your mistake.

It was here, wasn’t it?

Excuse me?

Where I saw you before. It wasn’t on TV, it was here.

Yeah, I’ve been here before.

Right. That’s what I thought.

(STELLA comes out of the closet with the canvas of the bomber and hands it to WATERS.)
STELLA

I put your French bomber aside for you.

WATERS

Other times.

STELLA

You don’t want it?

WATERS

That’s Louis’ picture of him. Not mine.

STELLA

So you don’t care who gets it?

WATERS

No.

(STELLA climbs up on the model’s platform.)

STELLA

Small interruption, everybody. We have a very special piece here. You may even recognize the subject.

JASON

Who is it?

STELLA

The President of France.

JASON

Is that true, Waters?

WATERS

A portrait ahead of its time.

STELLA

Who’ll open the bidding?

JASON

If it’s really him, it could be worth something.

LEE

Louis actually knew the President of France?
ALLEN
Kings and presidents. Moguls and potentates. Jesus, leave your phone number! Have I got a bridge for you!

STELLA
Why don’t you buy it yourself, Allen? Only five dollars.

ALLEN
Why not?

STELLA
Ten, Jason?

JASON
To hold for you until you want it back.

STELLA
It’s never been mine. That right, Billy?

WATERS
No matter how you try to make it yours.

STELLA
Lee?

LEE
(Eating) I prefer your cooking.

ALLEN
Fifteen.

JASON
Twenty.

ALLEN
Twenty-five.

JASON
Thirty.

STELLA
Not in my name, Jason.

JASON
The thirty stands.
In my name — fifty.

By fives.

You skipped for Kate.

He’s right.

We established the ground rules...

Then you should’ve stuck to them. Tell her about creating a precedent, Waters.

What would you do with it?...Come to think of it, I don’t want to know.

(\textit{JASON returns to eating.})

Your plate’s getting cold, Stella.

Billy?

I think Allen’s earned it.

(\textit{ALLEN thrusts money at STELLA.})

Sold to Allen.

(\textit{STELLA takes the money and hands the canvas to ALLEN who appraises it.})

Sidewalk painters do better.

Then take your money back.
ALLEN
But that’s why I like it. Not only fucked behind my back, but by a hack! I mean, if it was Picasso or somebody, I’d say, “Great, Kate. Go for it. Get some of those vital juices in you!” But this shit?

(ALLEN takes out a pocketknife.)

WATERS
That wine’s gone to your head, kid.

ALLEN
So I’ll wake up tomorrow and be sober. But all of you will still be in thrall to the Great Artist.

STELLA
Allen!

ALLEN
Tell her, Waters. Tell her how some burglars aren’t satisfied robbing you. They trash everything before they leave.

(ALLEN slashes at the painting. KATE enters.)

KATE
What are you doing?

ALLEN
My share of the Chalk estate.

KATE
Are you insane?

(ALLEN slashes at the canvas again. WATERS stops KATE from intervening.)

ALLEN
I wouldn’t mind a little thank you, Stella. You haven’t got the nerve, so I’m doing it for both of us.

STELLA
Get out.

(LEE starts toward ALLEN, but ALLEN whirs on him with the knife.)

ALLEN
Oooh, he’s mobile, too!
(Lee stops in his tracks.)

KATE We’re leaving now, Allen.

Allen (slashing at painting again) Shut up.

KATE We’ve both made fools of ourselves.

Allen At least I’m keeping my pants on while I do.

KATE What do you want me to say?

Allen I want you to be sorry for what you did. I want you to know you owe me that.

KATE I do.

Allen I’m serious.

KATE I know that.

(There is a long pause.)

Stella What now?

Allen She knows I’m serious.

Stella She’s already said that.

KATE I’ll take care of it, Stella.

Stella Like everything else.
KATE
We’ll go home, Allen. We’ll talk.

STELLA
You look silly holding that little thing.

WATERS
Stella...

STELLA
But he does! That little thing’s for peeling apples.

WATERS
Slow down, Stella.

(STELLA crosses closer to ALLEN.)

STELLA
You’re a pathetic little salesman, you know that? You don’t even get to see the faces of
the people who don’t want you in their lives. Your idea of death is a dial tone.

ALLEN
Tell her, Kate.

STELLA
Tell me, Kate. What’s he capable of? So far tonight, we’ve seen him drink a lot, make a
lot of empty cracks, get his face slapped, and slash an old painting. Your idea of a mover
and a shaker, Kate?

JASON
Let them go home, Stella.

KATE
Why are you doing this?

STELLA
All these miserable people in these paintings — most of them are probably dead by now.
But they’re worth more than we are, Kate. They were worth more to Louis.

WATERS
Maybe he shouldn’t be your standard.

STELLA
Who, then? Who’ve you got to replace him, Billy Waters? I’m in the market, in case you
haven’t noticed.
KATE

Let’s go home, Allen.

STELLA

Toddle along, Allen. Mommy has a treat for you at home.

WATERS

(To STELLA) That’s enough.

STELLA

Read my lips, Allen. Kate and Louis. Kate and Louis.

WATERS

Stella!

(ALLEN swings out with the knife, stabbing STELLA in the arm. LEE and WATERS jump ALLEN, get him to the ground, and disarm him. JASON and KATE help the wounded STELLA.

KATE

(To JASON) Your phone! Call EMS or something!

(JASON takes out his cell phone and punches out a number. LEE has restrained ALLEN sufficiently for WATERS to go over to STELLA.)

STELLA

Call anybody and that Lieutenant Olmos is going to start asking questions again.

WATERS

That’s what you wanted, isn’t it?

STELLA

Maybe.

KATE

What are you talking about?

STELLA

Death sells, Kate. And some kinds sell more than others. You should be happy.

ALLEN

Kate!

(ALLEN begins to sob. WATERS replaces KATE’s grip on STELLA and nods for her to go over to ALLEN. KATE goes over to the destroyed ALLEN.)
WATERS

There were easier ways.

STELLA

You bring so many lies, Billy Waters. I asked you not to do that.

JASON

(Hangs up) Ambulance is coming.

(JASON joins LEE for a drink. KATE sits cradling ALLEN.)

Forgetting.

STELLA

What?

STELLA

That’s what Louis said the night he saw you on TV. He said you’d get that subway pusher off because “Billy Waters has no forgetting in him.” Like some frontier character in a western. “Billy Waters has no forgetting in him.” You remember everything to use anything. That’s why I know you didn’t make up those stories. “Billy Waters has no forgetting in him.” Why does that still seem to come out as a lie?

(LIGHTS DOWN)

ACT II, SCENE TWO

(AT RISE: The studio during the day. Rain falls heavily outside THE WINDOW. The place looks more or less as it did during the party, with some wine glasses still standing around unwashed. The key additions are a bag with restaurant coffee on the table, an umbrella tented on the floor near the front door, and an attaché case on the stand. The front door is ajar. WATERS stands at THE WINDOW looking out at the rain and drinking coffee from a Styrofoam cup. After a moment, LEE comes through the door hefting a couple of cartons as part of his moving in. He is surprised to see WATERS.

LEE

Oh! Hi!

WATERS

Door was open. I’m meeting Stella.

LEE

No problem.
WATERS
Just a few minutes. Then it’ll be all yours.

LEE
No problem.

*(LEE puts the cartons down on the floor.)*

LEE
Sounds like she’s getting better every day. I was really worried there at first. All that blood...

WATERS
Things can look gorier than they are.

LEE
I guess.

*(WATERS points out THE WINDOW.)*

WATERS
That’s your studio window right there, isn’t it?

LEE
Yeah. You could probably see the river from it before they put up that building next door.

WATERS
You can see in here anyway.

LEE
Stay there. I’ll run inside and peek out at you.

WATERS
I just mean it beats looking out at some drainpipe.

LEE
Don’t underestimate drainpipes. They have their attractions.

WATERS
Visually.

LEE
Visually.

*(LEE starts out.)*
WATERS
What’s your take on it all, Lee?

LEE
The other night? The guy drank too much. He was...

WATERS
I mean Louis.

LEE
Oh. What’s to say?

WATERS
I get these little vibes with you. Like maybe you don’t buy what everybody’s selling.

LEE
Not really.

WATERS
*Really* being…?

LEE
It’s like I told the cops. My window sticks, too. Guy like Louis, he’s not going to be philosophical about something like that. Probably get a little short-tempered about it. Push so hard he’s still pushing when there’s nothing left to push.

WATERS
That’s a lot of temper.

LEE
Louis wasn’t a very happy guy.

WATERS
And?

LEE
And nothing. He wasn’t a very happy guy.

WATERS
But if there was an *and*?

LEE
He didn’t make the people around him too happy, either.
WATERS
So the idea of an accident, that’s not the first thing that came into your head when you heard about it.

LEE
Is that what I said?

WATERS
No, you told me what you told the cops.

LEE
I’m starting to feel like I’m on a witness stand.

Sorry.

WATERS
I suppose it doesn’t make any difference now that they’ve ruled it an accident. But between you and me? Yeah, I thought about suicide. The guy always seemed to be boiling inside himself. You, me, anybody he passed on the staircase — we didn’t really exist. Whenever I saw him, he was one-on-one and he was the one. That’s a lot of Louis Chalk in concentrated doses. Maybe especially for Louis Chalk.

You didn’t like him.

LEE
He didn’t give you much to like.

WATERS
Guy like that could piss off people, too.

LEE
If you had to take him seriously. But I didn’t. The only thing we really had in common was the toilet down the hall.

(WATERS opens and closes THE WINDOW as a demonstration.)

WATERS
Not much wrong with this window.

LEE
Now. You can bet as soon as the cops got out of here that day, the landlord came in and...

Lee.
LEE
Don’t think so?

WATERS
I know the cops working this case. That sloppy they’re not.

LEE
Okay. Hey, I’m just as glad. I’m in for the duration down here. Why think bad thoughts about your landlord if you don’t have to?

WATERS
Why think them about anybody if you don’t have to?

LEE
Exactly.

WATERS
Why say things to the cops if you don’t have to, either?

LEE
You lost me.

WATERS
Maybe just my ego. Sometimes I assume other people are doing exactly what I am. So the other night here, I thought I was trying to protect somebody. And I had a real strong feeling you thought you were, too.

LEE
I don’t know why.

WATERS
Like I say — ego.

LEE
What can I tell you?

(LEE exits. WATERS goes back to watching the rain. A moment later, WATERS hears the SOUND OF AN OUTSIDE DOOR SLAMMING. HE crosses to the bag on the table and takes out another Styrofoam cup of coffee, opens it, and rests it on the table. HE returns to THE WINDOW as STELLA enters wearing a sling and shaking out an umbrella.)

STELLA
All this mystery on the phone!

(WATERS points over to the coffee on the table.)
WATERS
There’s some coffee.

STELLA
I could’ve made my own at the apartment.

(STELLA tents her umbrella next to his, then takes in the cartons that Lee has left.)

STELLA
Lee’s not wasting any time.

WATERS
You gave him permission, didn’t you?

(STELLA goes over to the coffee on the table.)

WATERS
How’s the arm?

STELLA
Reminding me how it’s supposed to be useful. I should sue that little shit.

WATERS
One thing at a time. I saw Olmos this morning.

STELLA
Welcome to the club. That’s why we had to meet down here?

WATERS
He dotted a lot of i’s, crossed a lot of t’s.

STELLA
I’m sorry you had to be dragged into it. Remind me: The next time Allen stabs me, we’ll call my doctor instead of the EMS.

WATERS
There were also a lot of questions about you.

STELLA
I was the victim.

WATERS
Olmos didn’t doubt that. He just seemed a little unsure about what you were the victim of.
STELLA

That supposed to be funny?

WATERS

I think he’s going to want another round with you.

STELLA

For what??!!

WATERS

He’s a cop. He assumes everybody’s playing games with him. You playing games with him, Stella?

STELLA

Excuse me, but when is it I hired you exactly?

WATERS

You want to close out this studio or not?

STELLA

Lee’s under the impression I already have.

WATERS

The way Olmos is thinking, Lee might discover he’s rented a crime scene.

STELLA

Do you hear yourself?

WATERS

A lot lately.

STELLA

I’m not playing any games! What are you talking about?

WATERS

Lee said something interesting before you came in. He said Louis didn’t exist for anyone but Louis. He was always in a world of his own.

STELLA

Insight!

WATERS

So I think to myself, if that’s true, what kind of person could live with him for so long? And the only plausible answer was somebody who also lived in her own world all the time. Somebody who adopted his tactics, or maybe already had them before they met. Maybe that was even their attraction to one another.
STELLA
Maybe if you’d paid attention to one of your wives, you’d know it doesn’t work that easily.

WATERS
I wouldn’t have thought so.

STELLA
Good. Any other counsel in case Olmos calls again?

WATERS
Tell me about the self-importance.

STELLA
The what?

WATERS
The night we were here. What you told me Louis gave you. A sense of self-importance, you said.

STELLA
I was drinking too much that night.

WATERS
Yeah, but that’s who Louis was, wasn’t it? The emperor of that landlocked little kingdom called Self-Importance? You were right about that. And you and all his other subjects wanted to believe the glimpses of it he gave you was his special gift to you. It was safe being grateful to him.

STELLA
Being so removed from it as you are.

WATERS
Hell, no. I’ve had the longest look of all.

STELLA
I thought he betrayed you.

WATERS
And when I found out, I was sad and furious. And, hallelujah, I was also reborn in the River Jordan! Forget that dusty little office of mine in the Bronx. Forget having to schlep into court every morning to argue some epic traffic violation case. Hallelujah, I was a dangerous radical again! I was that outlaw in Paris getting paranoid about seeing so many black Fiats going by. “Don’t believe me? Ask the FBI. Look at my file.” I owed that glimpse of self-importance to Louis Chalk.
STELLA

Pretty faded laurels.

WATERS

Two years ago — not thirty, but two — friends invited me to lunch for a full-court press about going after a judgeship. And as they went on flattering me, I’m thinking to myself: “Forget it, Billy Boy. No way it’s going to happen because somewhere along the line that FBI file is going to surface and you’ll have as much chance of getting on the bench as Janis Joplin has of giving another concert.” It was an oddly satisfying feeling. I was king of two worlds. The liberal Establishment thought enough of me to be its candidate, and I had to say no because I was still...

STELLA

Fidel Castro?

WATERS

“Don’t believe me? Ask the FBI. Look at my file.” Thanks again, Louis Chalk.

(SOUND OF HAMMERING OFF)

STELLA

Congratulations.

WATERS

Go to the window...Please. Just for a second.

(STELLA goes to THE WINDOW.)

WATERS

Pull it down.

STELLA

In case you haven’t noticed, I have just one...

Pull it down, Stella!

(STELLA pulls down THE WINDOW.)

WATERS

Open it again.

(STELLA pulls up THE WINDOW.)

WATERS

You oil it since Louis died?
Of course not.

STELLA

WATERS

Doesn’t do much for the accident theory.

STELLA

Who ever believed that?

WATERS

We’re thinking like Olmos, okay? Crossing out the possibilities in his little notebook. Now he comes to suicide. Why would Louis do it, Stella? What made this last depression so much worse than the others?

STELLA

I have no idea.

WATERS

Or were there any others? Maybe just one big one lasting not a few weeks here and there, but for most of the eight years of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Chalk?

STELLA

You think I have so little to offer?

WATERS

The question is, did Louis?

STELLA

He loved me. And I took my marriage seriously.

WATERS

Fine. But if I have a curious mind like Olmos, I now have to move on to the third item on my list. You knew about Louis and Kate, about Louis and What’s Her Name, about Louis and the Rockettes. You pretended for a long time it didn’t matter, that you were still Mrs. Chalk who didn’t have to pass the peas to her father anymore, that whatever happened here during the day was irrelevant as long as he came home at night. But then you couldn’t pretend anymore. Just like when you couldn’t walk down the aisle with Mister Breeder and you had to disappoint the church and the wedding gown store and your family. Something happened that made all the faking intolerable. His shirt stank of perfume. You found stockings sticking out of his back pocket. Condoms were disappearing from your night table. So you came over here and faced him down.

STELLA

I didn’t say that.
You were here, though.

If you say so.

Not me. Your sculptor friend. You’ve got him holding on to that little detail like he’s protecting the X-Files. He thinks whatever happened to Louis that day, Louis deserved it. He didn’t even tell the cops.

I never asked Lee…

If you had, he might not have wanted to protect you. That’s not what gallantry’s about.

I don’t want him lying for me.

Cut it, Stella.

What happened here that day was…

Neo-Action.

What are you getting out of this?

By now Allen’s convinced every police shrink in the Department that old oils are about the only thing he’d go after. But we can also be sure Allen’s told them a lot of stories about Louis. And they’re sitting around with Olmos saying, “Hey, now, wait a minute. Maybe we closed this case too fast. Maybe a lot of people had something against this Chalk guy.” Tell me about the argument.

What argument?

Fight. Argument. Threat. Whatever it was between you and Louis that’s had you walking on eggshells ever since we met.
STELLA
I’m sorry my widow behavior doesn’t meet your standards.

WATERS
You’ve been screaming, Stella. Only I can’t make out the words.

(SOUND OF HAMMERING OFF stops for a moment, then there is the SOUND OF TWO QUICK HAMMER BLOWS then total silence.)

WATERS
You don’t need Standup Guys. You need a clear head.

(STELLA goes to her bag for a cigarette, lights it, and goes over to THE WINDOW.)

STELLA
Ever daydream about how things would’ve been different if you’d opened your mouth when you had the chance?...No, I don’t suppose you know that feeling. But I could’ve won the fifth-grade spelling bee if I’d told the teacher Susan Farkas had written dozens of words on her palms. I could’ve skipped some so-called lovers if I’d asked them for more than wanting me. So many things have been my fault because I didn’t open my mouth when I had the chance. Just demanded something. I was tired of making that mistake with Louis. That’s what our argument here that day was about.

WATERS
What did you demand of him?

STELLA
What he couldn’t give me anymore — the feeling I was all he needed.

WATERS
You expected that to go on forever?

STELLA
Why not? That’s what he promised me. I was the only person he trusted. The phony world was out there, I was in here. They got all those oh-it’s-so-good-to-see-yous. I was the only one who got the who-the-hell-was-that-asshole? It was a very privileged position, and I was totally worthy of his trust.

WATERS
Eight years?
STELLA
It worked, didn’t it? For them he was just the flavor of the month. For me he was a needy, self-hating man who was going to be that way even after all the gallery phonies had moved on to somebody else. And yes, you’re absolutely right: It was very safe in his landlocked kingdom. I didn’t have to exert myself much at all. Just make sure he had his prescriptions renewed. I even had time to invent a catering business for myself.

WATERS
Until that day.

STELLA
Oh, there were special days before then, too. One morning, the TV news was on and they said something about Italian politicians getting arrested for kickbacks. He laughed, said it was like the Seventies. Some Lockheed scandal?

WATERS
What about it?

STELLA
I said I didn’t remember a Lockheed scandal from the Seventies. He stared across the table at me. Didn’t say a word. It was like I’d fallen into a well and his arms weren’t long enough to reach down to me. Just like that. Some idiot reads the news on “Good Morning, America” and those 24 years suddenly felt like they’d been between us from the beginning.

WATERS
How did you make your demands on him?

STELLA
How else? By being pissy. Muttering if he wore the same shirt two days in a row. Talking too loud on the phone if he was watching his dead actors. Going to bed if he wanted to talk. Talking when he wanted quiet. Just breathing covered a lot of it.

WATERS
Why did you come here that day?

STELLA
Another look I got. In a Chinese restaurant. Louis and Kate were going on forever about movies made in the Fifties and Sixties. They’d memorized every one of them. She couldn’t have seen them in a theater, but she sounded like they’d been sitting together in his old neighborhood movie house. If I heard another word about Natalie Wood, I would’ve screamed. It got so relentless Allen asked her if they’d gone half and half on the popcorn. She didn’t shush him like she usually did. Instead, she just looked at me. Get used to it, her eyes said. She loved Louis in a way I couldn’t, and there wasn’t a damn thing I could do about it.
WATERS

Was there?

STELLA

I have to wear this damn sling at least two weeks. I really want to sue that little creep.

WATERS

What did you do about it, Stella?

STELLA

I didn’t mean to bring things to a head. You ought to be entitled to a serious warning or two before reaching a crisis point. But Louis had his own timetable. I was right, he said. We’d been going downhill a long time. He’d been unfair to me, didn’t know if he was coming or going, didn’t have a clue what he wanted anymore. His work felt as phony as he did. And by the way, how come I never talked about his work anymore? I didn’t understand it? I didn’t like it? If I didn’t like it, why didn’t I just say so? Maybe he wouldn’t have felt so empty about what he was doing if I’d warned him about it. Did I really think I was being a good wife for a painter? Why did he suddenly feel like he was competing with my catering business for my attention? Was he supposed to just ignore my indifference, pretend it wasn’t there? Maybe he should stay at the studio for a few days, get his head straightened out...I didn’t want to hear that. That’s not why I came down here. I was just supposed to warn him and he was just supposed to get the hint. “Hey, Louis, the battle-ax has the rolling pin out! Better be careful!”...I couldn’t believe I’d forced things so far. So I apologized.

WATERS

You what?

STELLA

I apologized to him.

WATERS

For what?

STELLA

For being me, of course!

(STELLA looks around for a place to discard her butt. WATERS takes it from her and tosses it out THE WINDOW.)

WATERS

Then you left again. You apologized to him and you left again.

STELLA

Yes.
So end of story.

What happened was my fault.

Absolutely. You left and an hour later he goes out the window. You’re so powerful you’re sending people to their deaths from your couch miles uptown.

It was my apologizing. Can’t you see that?

Open my eyes.

His reliable friend. His anchor. The one person he didn’t have to invent himself for every day. Here she is, this grasping, pathetic creature willing to submit to anything to avoid a showdown. Think that went over big in his kingdom, Billy? He’d deluded himself the whole time. He’d never been able to count on anybody except me. And now I was taking off, too. I wasn’t worthy of his trust, either.

Jesus Christ...!

Who did that leave him with? You know who. With a man who got close to people only to inform on them, cheat on them, or hustle them for checks.

Unless you made up that FBI story.

Listen to me, Stella.

Yes?

Did you or did you not push Louis out that window?
I’m telling you...

Did you or didn’t you — in fact, actually, in a physical, homicidal way — push Louis Chalk out that window?

There are ways and ways.

There’s only one way.

There were times I wished…

I don’t give a flying fuck what you wish or daydream! Did you or didn’t you push Louis out that window?

Not in so many...

Stella!

No! Of course I didn’t!

Did you rust that window or tell the landlord not to come up here to fix it? Did you spread banana peels all over the floor in front of the window? Did you introduce some exotic vertigo virus in the coffee you served Louis that morning for breakfast?

I don’t think that’s funny.

And guilty consciences irritate me as much as any other kind of arrogance. Now here’s the biggie. Did you really so deprive Louis Chalk of so much — love, understanding, knowing what every Lockheed scandal was about — did you so desolate him that he pitched himself out that window?

Nobody was closer to him!
WATERS

Did you so desolate him...?

STELLA

We had a pact!

WATERS

Did you or did you not drive him into jumping?

STELLA

You weren’t here…

WATERS

Yes or no, Stella?

STELLA

No! No! No! I didn’t do anything! Don’t you understand? I didn’t do anything! I never do anything!

(THEY need a moment to regain their composure. The SOUND OF HAMMERING OFF resumes.)

WATERS

Okay.

STELLA

“Okay?” You mean Louis can come back now?

WATERS

You can.

STELLA

To what?

(WATERS goes to his attaché case and takes out a small, tightly wrapped canvas. He removes the wrapping to reveal a typical Neo-Action work of Chalk’s. It consists of little more than a series of smears.)

STELLA

That’s one of his.

WATERS

I borrowed it from Jason this morning. Six thousand bucks, he says, and I’ll owe him every penny if I scratch it. You asked why he never painted me like all those bartenders and mailmen. He did, Stella. Here I am. He’s been painting me and people like me ever since he came back. The fools who belong to a foolish world. Even wretched Francine
and crazy Dieter had faces. We didn’t even merit that much. If there’s just rot outside his kingdom, why get particular about a receding hairline?

STELLA
You don’t have much of an understanding of art, do you?

WATERS
I’m a Louis expert, not an art expert, remember?

STELLA
You didn’t know him for decades!

WATERS
What did I miss?

STELLA
You…!

WATERS
What I do know are those people you were auctioning off the other night. And I know why they were in his closet. To be kept for a rainy day. Fifty bucks or fifty thousand, they were there for you to dispose of for him. He didn’t dare do it himself. They were too real.

STELLA
You made him angry enough about that music student.

WATERS
Oh, yeah. And when he heard about that kid, it was all suddenly in front of him. That student had one thing once-upon-a-time Louis didn’t have anymore — hope. Those mornings of waking up excited about what he could accomplish on the day. All that cut off at the forearm by the #1 train? Hmm. What’re we talking here? Sorrow? Anger? Maybe even envy of somebody who’s going to be spared all that futile effort? Oh, wait a second! Look who’s defending the lunatic responsible for it all! I know him! That’s Billy Waters! Let’s go back to anger because I owe that son of a bitch for some of the fucked up neurons in my head! That guy Waters did jackshit for my self-esteem, making me inform on him! And now he’s browbeating this poor cripple of a kid, too! Open the gates to the world! I’m about to emerge for the first time in ages! I want Billy Waters to know what he did, how he helped stop me from being so much more!...Except he couldn’t even do that. He didn’t have the guts. Kate had to try to do it for him. And he slammed down the phone when she handed it to him.

(WATERS hands STELLA the canvas. )
WATERS
You can keep selling the kingdom of Self-Importance. I’m sure Kate and Jason will. But you can’t just walk out of it after penning yourself up inside it so long. Louis couldn’t. Not for a music student, not for me, not for you.

(STELLA studies the Neo-Action canvas.) WATERS
Did you hear me, Stella?

STELLA
Yes.

WATERS
And?

STELLA
Louis jumped.

*This is Not the End of the Play*
*Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes*