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Product Code A0100-F

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

by Donald Dewey

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.

STELLA

It's one of them.

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.

KATE

Okay, that's settled. Which one is the shrimp?

STELLA

Christ, you're a bitch!

ALLEN

What gave you a clue?

KATE

Whenever you're ready.

ALLEN

I want some dumplings.

STELLA

Okay. Ready, ready, ready.

(ALL eat as THEY talk)

KATE

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?

ALLEN

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!"

KATE

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."

ALLEN

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

KATE:

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

STELLA

A reminder of how far he'd come.

KATE
You believe that?

STELLA
No.

KATE
Because he said so?

STELLA
Because he never talked about it at all.

ALLEN
Better grab those dumplings before I do.

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

STELLA
That was actually my number one.

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

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

ALLEN
In a pinch she can go back to modeling.

KATE
You shouldn't have to go back to anything. You're entitled.

STELLA
I loved Louis, Kate.

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

ALLEN
She isn't all that wrong, Stella.

KATE
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.

STELLA

At least a beer.

WATERS

Well...

KATE

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

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

STELLA

That's Kate. And Allen.

WATERS

And you're Mrs. Chalk.

STELLA

Stella.

ALLEN

The lunatic who shoved the musician under the subway!

WATERS

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

KATE

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

STELLA

Kate...

WATERS

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.

KATE

But they weren't. That student...

WATERS

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...

WATERS

I guess we developed different tastes.

KATE

That “abstract stuff.”

WATERS

Something like that.

STELLA

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

WATERS

Billy.

STELLA

Billy.

WATERS

I’m sure when he did them, he wanted to sell them.

KATE

What I say.

STELLA

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

WATERS

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?

STELLA

Please.

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

WATERS

So many years! Wow!

STELLA

You remember them from Europe?

WATERS

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.

STELLA

"Claude Marquand."

WATERS

People you run into.

ALLEN

You must miss those days.

WATERS

Not especially.

ALLEN

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

Ooooooh. 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)

ACT I, SCENE TWO

(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.)

WATERS

You put this clutter in front here?

STELLA

Yes.

WATERS

For what? Stop somebody else from falling out?

STELLA

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

WATERS

Manny Olmos?

STELLA

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?

WATERS

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.

WATERS

You wouldn't be the first.

STELLA

Clients of yours?

WATERS

No.

STELLA

That's definite.

WATERS

I hope so.

(STELLA 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.

STELLA

Oh, yeah?

WATERS

Because they got tired of...

STELLA

What?

WATERS

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

STELLA

Something like that.

WATERS

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

STELLA

Not much younger than you.

WATERS

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.

STELLA

Down to it.

WATERS

Louis wouldn't have made the trade, either.

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

STELLA

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.

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.)

WATERS

How many Kates and Allens have you been holding this in for?

STELLA

Kate's a friend.

WATERS

Lucky Kate.

STELLA

You're so goddamn presumptuous.

WATERS

Right. I know nothing.

STELLA

You're not platinum worthy.

WATERS

Hell, no.

STELLA

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

WATERS

Show you how another age lives.

STELLA

Louis thought he was the one who seduced me.

WATERS

Please! Leave us some illusions!

STELLA

I felt good with him.

WATERS

What were you before — a babbling idiot?

STELLA

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...

WATERS

I don't care, Stella.

STELLA

You're so high you're even beyond praise?

WATERS

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.

WATERS

You've drunk too much.

STELLA

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.

WATERS

Think of it as *pro bono* work.

STELLA

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

WATERS

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

STELLA

Him.

WATERS

I'm listening.

STELLA

It wouldn't mean anything to you.

WATERS

Because I'm so young and stupid?

STELLA

He informed on me. To the FBI.

WATERS

Louis?

STELLA

Louis Chalk.

WATERS

This bomb business?

STELLA

Among other things.

WATERS

Who were you? Fidel Castro?

STELLA

It was a long time ago.

WATERS

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.

WATERS

You have a bag or something?

STELLA

“Hang in there, Mrs. Chalk.”

WATERS

Get your things.

(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.

WATERS

You have a...?

STELLA

Diaphragm?

WATERS

Blanket.

STELLA

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.

WATERS

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.

WATERS

What would that be?

STELLA

For you to know and me to find out.

WATERS

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.

WATERS

It was recycled as something else a long time ago.

STELLA

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

WATERS

We'll talk about it next time.

STELLA

Promise me there'll be one.

WATERS

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.)

KATE

And with a mystery guest!

STELLA

Anybody in the hall?

KATE

I thought I heard that sculptor across the way.

STELLA

His name is Lee. And you know it.

(SOUND 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?

KATE

Huh?

STELLA

Lee!

KATE

Oh.

STELLA

What're you looking for?

KATE

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

STELLA

I threw her out the window.

KATE

Excuse me?

STELLA

She irritated me. I threw her out the window.

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

KATE

I don't see it.

STELLA

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 news paper 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!

KATE

I know.

STELLA

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

KATE

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?

Stella
Steady as she goes.
(LEE takes in the paintings.)

Lee
Old stuff, huh?

Stella
You want them?

Lee
Me? No.

Stella
They're probably worth something.

Lee
I'm sure.

Stella
Sorry. That's not what I meant.

Lee
You don't owe me anything, Stella.

Stella
Sure about that?

Lee
I'm sure.

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

Lee
Don't say that.

Stella
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.)

Stella
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.

ALLEN

"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.

ALLEN

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.

LEE

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.

(STELLA 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 supertime. "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.)

ALLEN
Who's this singing— Jacques Brel?

JASON
Yves Montand.

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

JASON
Brel was Belgian, Montand Italian.

ALLEN
Yikes! Another cultural blooper in front of Kate's friends!

(KATE comes through the door hefting bottles.)

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

STELLA
They didn't have the Naoussa?

KATE
Once I persuaded the idiot to look for it.

STELLA
Merlot would have been just as good.

KATE
You didn't tell me that, Stella.

STELLA
Sorry.

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

KATE
The light doesn't do them justice.

JASON
I've told Stella what I think.

KATE
I was thinking the end of July.

JASON

Good. I'll be in Scotland.

KATE

Don't be a prick, Jason.

STELLA

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

JASON

Right. To Louis Chalk!

STELLA

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

LEE

We'd all be strangers.

ALLEN

Here, here.

STELLA

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.)

KATE

The sculptor across the hall?

STELLA

He was a big help straightening up this place.

KATE

Mobiles, right?

STELLA

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

(WATERS enters with a bottle of champagne.)

KATE

Well!

WATERS

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.)

KATE

Get the man a drink, Allen.

WATERS

Scotch neat would be nice.

(ALLEN crosses to make the drink.)

KATE

He won't poison it.

WATERS

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.)

KATE

Bring back memories?

WATERS

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

JASON

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

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

KATE

You're not helping.

WATERS

Sorry.

KATE

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

WATERS

It was you?

KATE

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.)

Not bad. STELLA

Agreed. WATERS

(JASON shuts off his phone.)

Scratch Cynthia and her crowd. JASON

No! STELLA

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

(ALLEN pours himself another drink.)

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

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

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

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. STELLA

I explained... JASON

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. STELLA

You misunderstood me... JASON

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.

ALLEN

Fifty bucks max?

STELLA

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

KATE:

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

STELLA

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

KATE

He doesn't deserve this.

ALLEN

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

STELLA

Which one, Allen?

ALLEN

That one.

(STELLA removes the painting from the wall.)

STELLA

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

WATERS

Somebody in the past.

STELLA

So bring him into the present.

WATERS

Maybe he's better off where he is.

STELLA

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

WATERS

His name was Jacques.

ALLEN

Right. Not Pierre. 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

Anyone else? Going once. Going twice. Sold to Jason for ten dollars. (*Hands canvas to JASON*) Everybody keep count of what you owe.

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...

WATERS

Conforti.

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!

JASON

You just want the canvas anyway.

WATERS

No, thanks.

JASON

Anybody want to top \$15?

STELLA

Twenty.

LEE

Twenty-five.

WATERS

Thirty.

LEE

Thirty-five.

WATERS

Don't, Lee.

STELLA

Why not?

LEE

Forty.

KATE

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

WATERS

Even without your sordid story.

KATE

Make it forty-five.

WATERS

It's yours for the taking, Kate.

ALLEN

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?

WATERS

No.

ALLEN

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.

LEE

This is fabulous, Stella!

JASON

Absolutely!

STELLA

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

WATERS

Good Night.

(WATERS starts toward the door.)

STELLA

Wait a minute.

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

LEE

Not eating?

WATERS

No, thanks.

JASON

Your mistake.

LEE

It was here, wasn't it?

WATERS

Excuse me?

LEE

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

WATERS

Yeah, I've been here before.

LEE

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.

ALLEN

By fives.

STELLA

You skipped for Kate.

ALLEN

He's right.

LEE

We established the ground rules...

STELLA

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

ALLEN

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

JASON

(JASON returns to eating.)

Your plate's getting cold, Stella.

LEE

Billy?

STELLA

I think Allen's earned it.

WATERS

(ALLEN thrusts money at STELLA.)

Sold to Allen.

STELLA

(STELLA takes the money and hands the canvas to ALLEN who appraises it.)

Sidewalk painters do better.

ALLEN

Then take your money back.

STELLA

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 whirls 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.)

STELLA

Forgetting.

WATERS

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.

WATERS

Sorry.

LEE

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.

WATERS

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...

WATERS

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...

WATERS

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?

STELLA

Of course not.

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.

WATERS

You were here, though.

STELLA

If you say so.

WATERS

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.

STELLA

I never asked Lee...

WATERS

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

STELLA

I don't want him lying for me.

WATERS

Cut it, Stella.

STELLA

What happened here that day was...

WATERS

Neo-Action.

STELLA

What are you getting out of this?

WATERS

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.

STELLA

What argument?

WATERS

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.

WATERS

So end of story.

STELLA

What happened was my fault.

WATERS

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.

STELLA

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

WATERS

Open my eyes.

STELLA

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.

WATERS

Jesus Christ...!

STELLA

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.

WATERS

Stella...

STELLA

Unless you made up that FBI story.

WATERS

Listen to me, Stella.

STELLA

Yes?

WATERS

Did you or did you not push Louis out that window?

STELLA

I'm telling you...

WATERS

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

STELLA

There are ways and ways.

WATERS

There's only one way.

STELLA

There were times I wished...

WATERS

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

STELLA

Not in so many...

WATERS

Stella!

STELLA

No! Of course I didn't!

WATERS

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?

STELLA

I don't think that's funny.

WATERS

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?

STELLA

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

WATERS, *Continued*

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