byline: Amanda Danger (1st ed. - 07.23.06) - bylineamandadanger7jr
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Cast of Characters

AMANDA DANGER, reporter at the Chicago News, and sometime sleuth

ITCHY, Amanda's sidekick, not so smart

FRECKLES, same (photographer); smarter

SCOOP, ditto; smartest

DENNISON PRESS**,** editor of the Chicago News

GRETTA, his mom

DEUCE**,** news stand operator, slightly paranormal

CARLOS DECAPISTRANO**,** a mystery man

LUCRECIA VILLANE, rival at the Gotham Gossip, falls a lot

R.L. ANDERSON, her editor

CIA, Charles Ignatius Alligator—an operative

HIS SIDEKICKS

BARBARINO ARCHIPELLIGO, an actress in Venice

The Usual Suspects:

TEX, a Texan
POUND, British
FISK, Asian
DRESDEN, German

Friends of Carlos:

BENEDITO VENDETTA
CARMELITA CLANDESTINA
RICKY RICARDOLINO

Players at the Theater in Venice:

DANTE
BEATRICE
MATILDA

[continued on opposite page]

An ensemble of any number playing a variety of secondary and tertiary roles including, but not limited to:

SAXOPHONIST
REPORTERS
NEWSIES
PERSON X
QUINCE, a newsperson
DENNISON PRESS' SECRETARY
LOCK, STOCK & BARREL**,** lawyers at the Chicago News
ALFRED HITCHCOCK
STEWARDESS
THEATER MANAGER IN VENICE
UNO, DUO, TRI, QUATRO, CINQO, in the airport
GOMBALLO**,** costumier in Venice
ROMEO, Carlos' apartment super
PRIEST
WAITER
CROONER, in nightmare
OLD PEOPLE, in nightmare
COUPLE IN LOVE
DELIVERY PERSON

Setting

The play takes place in many, many locations which seems to call for a fairly abstract, multi-use set. Among the locations are: a Chicago street, an elevator, newsrooms of the Chicago News and the Gotham Gossip, on an airplane, the airport outside Venice, Venice itself including an apartment house, the Café Enigma, a number of gondolas, city streets, at a masked ball, etc etc.

Production Notes

The dialog in this play should, as a rule, move like lightening. And there is no real Italian or French or any other language in the script—it's all gibberish, but should be delivered with great flair and velocity, as if by a native speaker.

It should feel so seriously *noir*, it hurts.

Acknowledgments

byline: Amanda Danger was commissioned and originally produced by Andy's Summer Playhouse in Wilton, NH with the following staff:

Director ..... Rob Spangler
Set Design ..... Brian Selznick
Costumes ..... Anna Thomford
Lights ..... Joan Sand

The play featured a large ensemble cast of actors, each portraying a variety of roles. The ensemble was headed by Maggie McBrien as Amanda Danger, and included: Nate Atkinson, Zak Baker-Salmon, Kip Bastedo, Emily Beligus, Sophie Chambers, Kim Ciola, Allison Closter, Alex DiGiacinto, David Donaway, Iona Giddings, Molly Harris, Astri Kartiwa, Margaret Kasper, Kim Langille, Jared Lydon, Gayle MacDonald, Ryan McGettigan, Sarabeth Murphy, Tyler Murphy, Daniel Needorf, Jennifer Peterson, Brad Proctor, Jonathan Roitman, Ethan Selby, Stephanie Speidel, Shannon Thompson, Luke Valeri, Lauren Wesnak and Vanessa Wesnak.

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

byline: Amanda Danger was commissioned and originally produced by Andy's Summer Playhouse in Wilton, NH.

BYLINE: AMANDA DANGER

A THEATRE NOIR

by Robert Lawson

ACT I

Prologue

(In the dark, a lone jazz saxophone. It is 5 a.m.—as this scene progresses, the sun will slowly rise. It is mid-summer. It is hot.)

(In a corner of the theatre, under a streetlamp, the lone saxophonist is illuminated, playing his soulful melody [actually, or faking it to SFX]. AMANDA DANGER *enters, walking slowly through the night, listening. After a moment, a door slams in the distance.* AMANDA *stops; the saxophone pauses for a moment; we hear the sound of running footsteps, echoing and receding into the distance.* AMANDA *sighs. The saxophone continues its refrain as* AMANDA *speaks:)*

AMANDA. There's a million stories in the naked city, and each one a tale, each one a window into a person, a life—a journey. And me? I search 'em out, in the hallways and alleys, the "hi-how-ya'-doin'?" highways and the "bye-see-you-later" byways of the city, the City—the city that almost never sleeps, no matter how bad it needs it. *(A sardonic laugh.)* And then? What else. I write 'em down.

(A child's ball rolls onto the stage. AMANDA *picks it up, looks off-stage for the child—who doesn't materialize.* AMANDA *laughs a sardonic kind of laugh.)*

AMANDA. *(Sings:)* MY KIND OF TOWN… CHICAGO IS… *(Chuckles:)* Yeah, Chi-town; 1940-something, after the war; a time of prosperity and, well—*optimism*. Everybody feels young again. And who can blame 'em?

(Somewhere, an elevated train rumbles by. The sun is rising. AMANDA *stretches.)*

AMANDA. Yeah, but I guess both of us could use a little break from all this exhilaration, me and this old Lady, this old bone tired

seen-it-all-before Lady o' the Lake. *(Breathes in the morning air.)* Chicago. *(Smiles.)* My kind of town.

(A squeal of brakes. A NEWSPAPER DELIVERY PERSON *appears and tosses a tied up bundle of newspapers onto the stage.)*

PAPER GUY. Mornin', ma'am.

(And exits. AMANDA *crosses to the bundle and pulls a paper out of it.)*

AMANDA. *(Reads, laughs.)* Now ain't that the truth?

Scene 1

(Sudden music. The saxophonist wails into a hot solo against the music and dances his exit, as DEUCE*—the news stand operator who knows everything about everybody—comes in, grabs the bundle of papers.* AMANDA *flips him a coin and he sets up shop at his news stand. He glances at the front page.)*

DEUCE. Sheesh. Who'd a thunk it? *(To* AMANDA:*)* You and Lady Luck, huh?

AMANDA. Siamese twins, Deuce. Siamese twins.

DEUCE. Read all about it! Stubby MaGoo nabbed in late night sting! Notorious gang stopped cold!

(And the stage floods with people going to work. Their action is a rhythmic counterpoint to AMANDA's *stillness as she peruses the newspaper.)*

AMANDA. So, Deuce. Gonna be a good day?

DEUCE. Always is! *(Hawking:)* Read all about it! Amanda Danger Spiderwebs Stubby MaGoo in Late Night Sting! Getcha News here!

*(A man appears [*CIA*] watching* AMANDA*, hiding behind a newspaper. We cannot see his face. He crosses the stage, brushes against* AMANDA*—she drops her newspaper.)*

AMANDA. Hey, buddy!

CIA. *(Mumbles:)* Skoozato.

(He moves on, takes out a pad and pencil and takes a note.)

AMANDA. *(Shakes her head:)* End of civilization as we know it.

(The News newspaper staff are starting to arrive at work.)

NEWSIE 1. Nice story, Amanda!

AMANDA. Thanks, Al.

NEWSIE 2. Way to go!

AMANDA. Thanks, Sal.

NEWSIE 3. What a scoop!

AMANDA. Here's lookin' at you, pal.

DEUCE. Getcha' Morning Standard! Getcha Gotham Gossiper! Getcha Metro News!

*(*AMANDA *crosses into the News building.)*

Scene 2

(An elevator; people crowd into it. AMANDA *continues to glance at her newspaper. The last person on is* GRETTA DENNISON, *an old woman.)*

GRETTA. 'Scuse me, 'scuse me. *(Stops:)* Oh, did I forget that— *(She looks in her handbag; the people on the elevator look at their watches, impatient.)* Old people forget things. But the things I remember—they'd make your head spin.

PERSON X. Would you mind—?

GRETTA. Oh—sorry. *(Finally,* GRETTA *is on and, Whoosh! the elevator doors close.)*

GRETTA. *(To* PERSON X:*)* Got a tight schedule, huh?

*(*PERSON X *nods;* GRETTA *nods, looks around.)*

GRETTA. I used to be busy, oh yeah, all those years of— *(Looks around, no one is listening)* —ahh, nothin'. *(Stretches:)* And let's not even talk about the arthritis and the lumbago. So your body says "bye bye" and you forget things *(Searches in her handbag again)* like

what you just said and where you were going. *(Coughs.)* As if it mattered—

(Then GRETTA *goes into a coughing fit; the elevator bell rings and stops, everyone falls out of the elevator to escape her.* AMANDA *listens at the back of the elevator.)*

GRETTA. Gettin' old is for the boids. *(She starts to get off.)*

AMANDA. Did you want to get off at the 8th floor?

GRETTA. Yes, thank you, dear. Yes, I'm looking for my son, he's a big city reporter, you know. His name's Dennison, Dennison Press. You heard of him?

AMANDA. *(Chuckles:)* I think I have. Let me give you a hand.

(And suddenly, we are on the newsroom floor.)

Scene 3

(The elevator people scramble out and on to their newsroom jobs. People on the newsroom floor are rushing hither and yon, saying hello, getting something to press, etc. AMANDA *moves fluidly through this choreographed chaos, guiding* GRETTA *to editor Press' secretary. Everyone greets* AMANDA *as she passes.)*

QUINCE. Amanda, whattaya know?

AMANDA. What's at the top, Quincey?

QUINCE. Nada new, Danger. What's with you?

AMANDA. Weather keeps changin', my coat remains the same.

QUINCE. Ditto that, Danger.

LOCK / STOCK / BARREL. Miss Danger!

AMANDA. Lock, Stock…Barrel.

LOCK. Miss Danger—

STOCK. —we got—

BARREL. —that document—

LOCK. —you wanted.

LOCK / STOCK / BARREL. Left it on your desk.

AMANDA. Thanks, boys.

(They sing in harmony, to the beginning refrain of the Alleluia chorus.)

LOCK / STOCK / BARREL. HEY, NO PROBLEM!

*(*AMANDA *guides* GRETTA *to Press' secretary, then goes to her desk.* DENNISON PRESS, *the editor, hugs* GRETTA. AMANDA *arrives at her desk; flops down in her chair, tired, irritated, exhausted and bored.)*

ITCHY. Amanda!

FRECKLES. 'manda!

AMANDA. Itchy, Freckles—

ITCHY/FRECKLES. Great story!

SCOOP. *(Preoccupied:)* Yeah…

AMANDA. Thanks, guys. *(Nods to* SCOOP:*)* Scoop.

*(*SCOOP *nods.)*

ITCHY. Amanda, look we got a hot one here—the Woolworth building just burst spontaneously into flames—

*(*ITCHY *and* FRECKLES *leaf through API squibs.)*

ITCHY. —there's 300 people trapped on the top floor—

AMANDA. Ahh, fires—that's a cub beat. What else you guys got? What else did the great Metropolis fling my way in the wee hours of the nighty night?

FRECKLES. I hoid about a double highjack armored truck thing, Amanda. Toity million in gold bullion!

ITCHY. Toity mil?! Wow!

(They look at AMANDA *in anticipation.)*

AMANDA. Piece o' change. Next.

ITCHY. 32 Old Master paintings snatched right off the walls of the Art Institute!

AMANDA. Find ’em some *new* masters. What else?

FRECKLES. There’s UFO’s over Missilipsi!

AMANDA. And a moon over Miami—

ITCHY. There’s alligators loose in the city sewers!

FRECKLES. Aliens land in Michigan Square!

ITCHY. A penny saved is a penny earned!

FRECKLES. And smoke gets in your eyes!

ITCHY & FRECKLES. A Pulitzer Prize in every one!

*(*AMANDA *opens her drawer and pulls out awards.)*

AMANDA. Like Cracker Jacks, kids, and it still don’t seem to matter.

(A phone rings. QUINCE *pokes his head in.)*

QUINCE. Albert Einstein on 2.

AMANDA. What in the world does *he* want?

QUINCE. Yer educated opinion on the possibility of black holes or something.

(A finger snapped beat under; a chant/rap:)

AMANDA. Tell him my life’s a black hole!
Tell him I’m relatively bored.
Tell him I need a quark or a spark or a singular something to take me out of this funk!
I’m sick of kings and
I’m sick of queens,
tired of the fires and the things in betweens. I want—

ALL. Yes?

AMANDA. I want—

ALL. Yes, yes?!

AMANDA. I wanna cover somethin' new! Somethin' diff!
Maybe what simply can't be.
Like a hole in the moon,
or a trip to the sun—
Something with meaning, adventure and fun.
Something that'll make these eyes see anew,
something not so awful tired and true.
I wanna cover something… I don't know…
a la mode.

ALL. *A la* who, *a la* what?

AMANDA. A la *Mode*, kids, *mode*: I want something, something, I want something new.

Scene 4

(Walking bass; finger snaps and in-place rhythms by the entire newsroom staff. DENNISON PRESS, *editor of the News, jazzes up to* AMANDA's *desk.)*

DENNISON. So Danger. Word says you're bored.

AMANDA. To tears, Snappo. I need something. I need a jumpstart.

DENNISON. This picture mean anything to you?

(He throws a glossy 8x10 on her desk.)

AMANDA. *(Uninterested:)* Looks like a bird.

DENNISON. Maybe kind of a bird. Maybe use'ta' be a jail bird. One Benedito Vendetta.

AMANDA. Vendetta?

DENNISON. And *how*—if you cross him. Known to his friends as Pinky, 'cause he ain't got one.

AMANDA. Accident?

DENNISON. Depends on how you define "accident." *(Jazzy shift; then* DENNISON *throws another glossy 8x10 on her desk.)* This picture mean anything to you?

AMANDA. Your dog, Sparky?

DENNISON. *(Looks at it:)* Oh. Sorry. *(He throws another glossy 8x10 on her desk.)* Try this.

AMANDA. *(Snorts:)* Your dog Sparky?

DENNISON. *(Snorts:)* No. Barbarino Archipelligo, aging star of stage and screen. Intimately involved in the whole shebang in some unidentified way.

AMANDA. Right. So. And?

DENNISON. What she might know—her life might not be worth a tisket.

AMANDA. *(Laughs:)* In trouble?

DENNISON. In cahoots.

AMANDA. With whom, might one ask?

*(*DENNISON *dumps a stack of photos on her desk.)*

DENNISON. The usual suspects? Well now that's the start, that's the trail, Danger. There's a story here, I can *(Sniff sniff)* smell it. *(Howls like a wolf:)* A-ooooooooooo…

REPORTERS. *(Chant:)* THE TRAIL IS HOT
THE NIGHTS ARE COLD
TIME'S A'WASTIN'
GETTIN' OLD…

AMANDA. So? And? I mean I ain't lookin' for a bibliography.

DENNISON. Yeah, I can see that. But this is just the cast of characters. Let me shoot you the plot. First, you gotta travel.

AMANDA. Plane, train or boat?

DENNISON. Little of each. Second—

AMANDA. That would be Number 2.

DENNISON. —you gotta travel to Venice.

AMANDA. Canals.

DENNISON. Yeah, and intrigue a'plenty.

AMANDA. Yeah, well I'm a big gondola fan, but—

DENNISON. Number 3.

AMANDA. What'cha' got?

DENNISON. What else? A mystery man.

AMANDA. *(Laughs:)* And what would we do without a mystery man?

DENNISON. We'd have a mystery woman.

AMANDA. Yeah well that's been cast, Dennison—yours truly.

DENNISON. Copy that. But let's throw in a Mr. X, hiding somewhere in Venice. And let's say that he's the contact, the core of the conundrum, the essence of the enigma.

*(*REPORTERS *chant under as the dialog continues:)*

REPORTERS. *Enigma,*
conundrum,
a mystery, too—
a puzzle
to puzzle
a cryptogram, ooo!
A quandary,
dilemma,
a riddle for you…
Enigma,
conundrum—
Oh toodle eee oo…

DENNISON. Now let's say there's a question, like why has he absconded with the last remaining cap of the virtually extinct Blue Royale mushroom—

(Music sting.)

AMANDA. *(Sits up:)* Blue Royale?!

DENNISON. —a mushroom whose cap, when crushed, made into butta' and spread on toast points, yields the most powerful elixir in the world, the key to eternal youth. And who d'you think wants it? Well, let's just say Everybody, thinkin' of the possibilities…

AMANDA. I—

DENNISON. And the dangers—

AMANDA. *(Softly:)* Blue Royale…

DENNISON. —of immortality.

AMANDA. Ringin' a bell…

DENNISON. Two things, Amanda, two things I want: One—you cover the story for the News, a global exclusive. Two—you chalk up another Pulitzer. Three—

AMANDA. You said two points.

DENNISON. I lied. Three—you save the free world.

AMANDA. *(Nods, taking it all in:)* I'm kinda liking this.

DENNISON. I thought you might.

(He tosses plane tickets, etc. on her desk.)

Scene 5 (split scene)

(The following rhythmic lingo keys in with the Daily News chant—Enigma…)

DENNISON. So you take the 2:22 to Kalamazoo,
then the 4:44 to the Euro shore,
the 6:26 is where it all clicks,
catch the time zone shift,
clock set,
jet lag,
hot food,
sleep tight,
nighty night,
up right,
with the light,
then by 5 or 6, you pick up the sticks,
7 or 8—

AMANDA. You lay them straight?

DENNISON. Uh huh, 9, 10—you're there in the den—that's 10 their time—then—

(All the rhythm stuff stops dead.)

AMANDA. Wait!

DENNISON. What?!

AMANDA. The mystery man. Who's the mystery man? The contact? The man with the—

DENNISON/AMANDA. Blue Royale?

AMANDA. Right…the—*Blue Royale.*

DENNISON. I don't know. Is this a key? Perhaps.

(He pulls out a note, tosses it to AMANDA.*)*

DENNISON. This cryptic marzipan arrived for you this morning in a plain brown envelope. The return address says simply: "CdC."

AMANDA. "CdC"?

DENNISON. "CdC." And that's all it says.

*(*CARLOS *appears in a strange corner of the theatre; foreign accent; we can't see his face.* AMANDA *is spotlit as she reads the note.)*

CARLOS. "Amanda: Kolocha doe notto benay. Piatta ah Venee-ceeah, pronto. Hoogatoh ay smoochato—el Royalio Bloo."

*(*CARLOS *disappears.* AMANDA *looks up from the note.)*

AMANDA. What… the heck does that mean?

*(*DENNISON *puts on his reading glasses, looks at the note.)*

DENNISON. Offhand I'd say "Hope things are good wit you. Come to Venice immediately. Hugs and smooches, the Blue Royale." I don't know about you, but *(yanks off his glasses)* —this looks like a clue to yours truly.

AMANDA. *(Astonished:)* Not —— CARLOS…

DENNISON. That would explain the "C." But I hope that "dc" ain't no disease control…

AMANDA. —deCapistrano…

DENNISON. Ahhh—DC. You know ’im?

AMANDA. Know him?

(Extremely romantic music. CARLOS *appears in another strange corner of the theatre,* AMANDA *is spotlit.* DENNISON *looks at her strangely.)*

CARLOS. …and perhaps, one day, we shall meet again under more, shall we say, agreeable circumstances.

DENNISON. Amanda?

AMANDA. Carlos…

CARLOS. You are one in a million. Until then, may the spell of the Blue Royale cast its shadow of protection on you. ’Til then…

(He disappears. The lights return to normal.)

DENNISON. Amanda? You all right?

AMANDA. Carlos…

DENNISON. *(Quietly:)* My friends call me Denny, but you can call me *Mister* Dennison— *(Loud:)* AMANDA!

AMANDA. What? Who…? *(Disappointed when she sees* DENNISON *and not Carlos:)* Oh…

DENNISON. Sorry.

AMANDA. But you don’t understand…Carlos deCapistrano…is dead.

(Music sting.)

DENNISON. Then this is more of a mystery than I heretofore thought.

(Meanwhile: in another part of the stage, we see LUCRECIA VILLANE, *star reporter for the Gotham Gossiper, and her editor,* R. L. ANDERSON, *at his desk at the Gossiper listening to the conversation that* AMANDA *and* DENNISON *are having: they’ve bugged his office.)*

BUG. *(Voice 1:)* But you don't understand…Carlos de Capistrano… is dead. *(Voice 2:)* Then this is more of a mystery than I heretofore thought…

LUCRECIA. Of course: Venetia. City of canals and intrigue. R. L.—I need this scoop.

R.L. Lucrecia, take a break, won'cha? You're just jealous 'cause she got the O'Shay story… *(Sotto voice)* while you were sittin' on your claws.

LUCRECIA. What?!

R.L. Saws. Did I hear saws?

> *(He starts to go,* LUCRECIA *grabs him and sits him back down in his swivel chair, spins him around to face her.)*

LUCRECIA. The O'Shay story was small po-ta-toes. I wanna work on something so big it'll really clean her clock. Put her right out of the newspaper game.

R.L. Lucrecia, you're obsessed.

LUCRECIA. Of course, I'm obsessed! Who's scooped me on practically every story I've tackled?

R.L. Well, I'd be forced to say—Amanda Danger.

LUCRECIA. I hate that name!!

R.L. *(Thin:)* We could maybe ask her to change it—?

> *(*LUCRECIA *opens a cigar box on* R.L.'s *desk and pulls out a twizzler, starts chomping on it viciously.)*

R.L. Hey, that's Cuban—!

> *(She grabs him by the lapels.)*

LUCRECIA. I'm tellin' ya', R.L.: I'm gonna scoop that Betty Boop nicompoop if it's the last thing I doop!

> *(Meanwhile…in another part of the stage,* CIA *listens in. Meanwhile* LUCRECIA *and* R.L. *in their corner, and* AMANDA *and* DENNISON *in their corner continue "talkin"' silently.)*

BUG 2. *(Voice:)* I'm tellin' ya', R.L.: I'm gonna scoop that Betty Boop nicompoop if it's the last thing I doop!

*(*CIA *smiles.)*

AMANDA. It's all so…impossible. *(To* DENNISON:*)* I'm sold. Venice it is. *(They shake.)* By the bye, Dennison—

(Everything stops, lights change, focus in on AMANDA *and* DENNISON.*)*

AMANDA. —how's your mom?

DENNISON. Gettin' old, Amanda…gettin' old.

AMANDA. Hmm…no cure for that.

DENNISON. Well… *(He picks up a photo of the Blue Royale, hands it to her.)* We'll see about that, won't we?

AMANDA. Hidden agenda, huh? *(Smiles:)* I like your style, Denny.

DENNISON. Dennison.

AMANDA. Dennison. I like your style.

(Stage is restored to normal.)

AMANDA. Scoop, Itchy, Freckles! You're with me!

DENNISON. Bring back the scoop, Danger. Bring back the Blue Royale. Do it, Amanda. Do it for the Gipper.

AMANDA. Will do, Snappo. Will absolutely do.

*(*ITCHY, FRECKLES *and* SCOOP *come dashing up to* AMANDA.*)*

ITCHY, FRECKLES and SCOOP. What's the word, hummingbird?

(Drum roll.)

AMANDA. The word is Venice. And the time is now.

LUCRECIA. Now.

CIA. Now.

(Drum roll climaxes.)

ITCHY. Well golly heck—let's go!

*(*CIA *and* LUCRECIA *pack up their radio kits, pick up baggage and get ready for departure.)*

Scene 6

(Driving music! AMANDA *looks at her watch. A miniature airplane roars to life and is flown around the theatre as the ensemble stakes out a vast map, holding signs that name cities and red dotted lines that resemble those maps they used to project on films showing the graphic/cartoon travel of a plane.*

*(*AMANDA *and the News crew,* LUCRECIA *[badly disguised] and* CIA *are all seated in airplane seats flying.)*

(Scenario/Events: ITCHY *is feeling ill,* STEWARDESS *keeps offering him food,* FRECKLES *is reading travel brochures, very excited,* AMANDA *studies Italian,* CIA *skulks, takes notes, and* STEWARDESS *offers* LUCRECIA *a pillow.* LUCRECIA *attempts to smother* AMANDA, *but at the last moment, there is turbulence and* LUCRECIA *is sucked out of the airplane.)*

STEWARDESS. We are now starting our final approach to Venice. Please put your seats in the upright and locked position. We hope you had a pleasant flight…

ITCHY. Yeah. Right.

LUCRECIA. *(Offstage, "falling:")* Ahhhhhhhhhh…….!

Scene 7

(The airport at Venice. People are speaking Italian gibberish all over the place, rushing hither and yon. In the midst of it stands AMANDA, *calm, looking very put together. Around her, her exhausted traveling companions.)*

ITCHY. Geez, I really got some *vertigo* there.

FRECKLES. You still feelin' dizzy?

(Someone crosses the stage with skis. ITCHY *trances out. A person wearing a sandwich board passes by: "Tired? Relax at the Bates Motel," and in smaller letters "Hot showers, nearby swimming.")*

(NOTE: this is the beginning of a series of Hitchcock references that pepper the dialog whenever we're in the airport…for some reason.)

SCOOP. Relax, Itchy, we'll find a nice motel somewhere and get a hot shower. You'll feel better.

ITCHY. I hope. *(Sound of birds flapping.)* 'S'at birds?

SCOOP. C'mere. *(She tightens his tie.)*

ITCHY. Agh! Geez, you wanna strangle me?

SCOOP. Relax, Itchy. Don't get into such a *frenzy.*

FRECKLES. *(Looking out window:)* Hey, the plane is chasing that guy!

SCOOP. *(Not really interested:)* Hmm…what's that? *North by northwest* they're goin'?

ITCHY. *(Checking his compass:)* Looks like it.

FRECKLES. *(To* ITCHY:*)* Boy, I hope we get a room with a *rear window.*

ITCHY. And no *torn curtains* like that last joint.

FRECKLES. Second that.

SCOOP. Geez, being in a foreign city sure gets the imagination going.

*(*ALFRED HITCHCOCK *walks by, exits.)*

SCOOP. That guy looks familiar…

*(*CIA *brushes past* AMANDA.*)*

CIA. Scoozato.

(He starts off, pulls out a newspaper and stops, pretends to read. His newspaper has two large eye holes cut out so that he can see clearly through the newspaper, and we can see him looking. Two similarly

dressed short people move to him and also act suspicious next to him.)

AMANDA. *(Shakes her head:)* Sheesh. End of civilization as we know it.

FRECKLES. *(Sighs:)* I love Europe. *(She opens her guidebook:)* Let's see…

*(*CIA *motions for one of his cohorts to go to* AMANDA.*)*

SIDEKICK. Skoozee.

AMANDA. Yes, what is it you sweet little Italian kid you?

(The SIDEKICK *hands her a brooch.)*

SIDEKICK. You are very beautiful. This is gift for you. From all of Italy. Because you are…who you are.

AMANDA. Why, thank you. How sweet.

(She puts the brooch on. CIA *and his cohorts beat a hasty retreat and hide in the shadows.)*

AMANDA. That's about the nicest thing anyone's ever… *(She looks around, sees that the* SIDEKICK *is gone.)* Hm. That's funny… *(*AMANDA *stops a* PERSON *who is rushing past her.)* Skoozee. El telephono izza qua qua qua?

PERSON. El telephono la caligula, señora.

AMANDA. Gratzee.

SCOOP. Amanda—when did you learn to speak Italian?

AMANDA. Somewhere between Greenland and Barcelona.

SCOOP. Ah.

*(*AMANDA *goes to a phone booth, looks in it—sees something that startles her. She puts the phone book down, emerges.)*

AMANDA. Taxi, Itchy.

ITCHY. Where we headed?

AMANDA. Into the Twilight Zone. Hail a cab.

(Everyone is looking at AMANDA *oddly.)*

ITCHY. Taxi!

(A taxi appears out of nowhere, screeches to a halt and AMANDA *et al get it. The cab's radio is playing "O Solo Mio.")*

AMANDA. El Hotel a Canal-ee-Ahl-ee-in-come-free, and step on it.

(The taxi speeds off. CIA *and cohorts exit, and as they do, they tune in their radio, and we hear a static-filled rendition of "O Solo Mio," and* AMANDA's *voice saying:)*

AMANDA. *(Voice:)* Hurry! Please hurry!

*(*CIA *smiles, exits.)*

Scene 8

(Music! The taxi careens about the theatre, finally screeching to a halt at the El Hotel della Canal-ee-Ahl-ee-in-come-free.)

AMANDA. Here we are.

SCOOP. Where's…*here,* Amanda?

AMANDA. Well, it's supposed to be the home of…a dead man.

FRECKLES. A dead man?

AMANDA. *(Half smiles:)* Or maybe a man who never really died.

(Somewhere in the theatre, LUCRECIA *finishes her fall.)*

LUCRECIA. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh……

(Smashing of plaster, glass, etc.)

SCOOP. What was that?

ITCHY. I don't know.

FRECKLES. This is gettin' a little weird.

(She clutches ITCHY's *arm. A door appears on stage, and* AMANDA *is about to knock on it—then* ROMEO *appears at the balcony above.)*

ROMEO. Ooochay nolla condollo.

SCOOP. What?

ROMEO. *(Louder:)* Ooochay nolla condollo! Diatra. Conchay mondoleeno repatchay noko—

AMANDA. *(Enunciating too clearly:)* Do you speak English?

ROMEO. *(Enunciating too clearly:)* Do I speak English?

AMANDA. Yes— *(Enunciating too clearly:)* Do you speak English?

ROMEO. *(Shrugs, smiles:)* Un poco moteeoh. A leetle.

AMANDA. We're looking for…Carlos deCapistrano. Does he—?

ROMEO. Oh that's a his apartamento, alright. But they took him away.

AMANDA. Took him away? Who took him where?

ROMEO. The— *(Thinking)* combinitza… uh… *(Makes siren sounds.)*

ITCHY. Air raid? Uh…

(Really trying, ROMEO *spins his finger in the air, trying to simulate the turning red ambulance light.)*

ITCHY. New Year's Eve?

AMANDA. They took him away in an ambulance?

*(*ROMEO *taps his finger on his nose excitedly.)*

ROMEO. Bueno! Molto benay! You're good, lady.

AMANDA. Do you know where he's—

ROMEO. Finito. *(Runs his finger across his neck:)* Bye bye.

SCOOP. Amanda…

ITCHY. Geez…

AMANDA. Not again.

(She starts to faint, SCOOP *catches her.)*

ROMEO. It was…an accident-ay. Right in front of the partamento. With my own eyes, this I have seen. You betchoo baby.

AMANDA. When… when did they—

ROMEO. The undertakoray—they come and get a—atteeray… atteeray…a suit! Suit. They get a suit this morning and take it with them, I unlock the door, they take the suit… *(Puzzled:)* I wonder if they take the box.

SCOOP. The box?

ROMEO. Oh, yes—the box. The box that Mr. Carlos carry always around with him. *(No accent:)* A small, strange rather Oriental black box, with obscure symbols and lettering on all sides of it. *(Looks at them:)* Perhaps they take it, perhaps they do not. I know nothing of this. *(Accent:)* So. End of story. *(Shrugs:)* I don know.

AMANDA. A box… ?

ROMEO. Box a sometin. They bury it with him? I don know.

AMANDA. *(Shaken:)* Thank you. Thank you.

ROMEO. S'nothing. Poor lady. She's capsized, uh? Overturned.

SCOOP. Upset.

ROMEO. *(Smiles:)* Right! Dat's it! Upsetta. Poor lady.

*(*AMANDA *is crying.)*

SCOOP. Hankie, Amanda?

AMANDA. No, no hankie, Scoop. Thanks.

SCOOP. Danada…

(They start to move away from the apartment building. In another part of the space, a funeral is in progress. ROMEO *goes about his business, looking back at* AMANDA *with sad eyes.)*

ROMEO. She capsized alright. Poor bambeeno…

(The 2 CIA SIDEKICKS *move past* ROMEO, *both listening to ear pieces. They exchange looks with* ROMEO, *and exit.)*

Scene 9

(Gregorian chant. A PRIEST *tosses dirt into an open grave. Next to him, an altar boy swings a censor back and forth as if a pendulum, periodically coughing.)*

PRIEST. Absoloom absoloom, ashes-etay ama ashes-etay, aylah dustum ooo dustum…

ALL. Amen.

*(*AMANDA *et al move solemnly towards the funeral, where there are a number of suspicious characters including the* USUAL SUSPECTS *and* CIA.*)*

PRIEST. Eeternoom absolootum you betchoo in restoom, eternalootum cause-ah dey no daypositoom no returnum.

ALL. Amen.

PRIEST. In pahchay daylorum exsquee-seetum absolootum, okay chum you byebye.

(He makes signs and tosses dirt into the open grave. People move past the grave, taking little spoonfuls of dirt and throwing them into the ground. AMANDA *stands there numb, sniffing.)*

ITCHY. Geez, Amanda. I'm awful sorry. Guess you really, uh, liked the guy, huh?

SCOOP. *(Elbowing* ITCHY:*)* Nitwit.

AMANDA. No, it's okay, but thanks, Scoop.

SCOOP. Hankie, Amanda?

AMANDA. No, no hankie, Scoop. Thanks.

SCOOP. Danada…

FRECKLES. This is so… romantic.

ITCHY. Romantic? Geez, Freckles, the guy's dead and all.

*(*AMANDA *wails.* SCOOP *elbows* ITCHY.*)*

ITCHY. Sorry. Geez…

*(*AMANDA *scoops some dirt, tosses it into the grave.* SCOOP *takes her picture. The* PRIEST *sneezes.)*

PRIEST. Scoozato mio.

AMANDA. Gellato, seenyor.

PRIEST. Pocks no nekko wayferino.

(The PRIEST *slowly exits. The coffin is lowered into the grave.)*

AMANDA. Goodbye, again…Patch.

ITCHY. Patch?

SCOOP. *(Sniffling, elbows* ITCHY:*)* Ahh, put a lid on it, Itchy. Ain't'cha got no romance in ya'?

ITCHY. *(To himself:)* Patch?

*(*AMANDA *starts to go. The* CIA *guy keeps pace with* AMANDA. *Not looking where she's going,* AMANDA *nearly trips.* CIA *catches her.)*

AMANDA. Oh. Sorry. Clumsy me.

CIA. No, the ground is so uneven here.

ITCHY. *(Unconscious as usual:)* Yeah, well as a general rule, graveyards are like that.

*(*AMANDA *breaks into renewed sobbing.* SCOOP *and* FRECKLES *elbow* ITCHY.*)*

ITCHY. Geez Louise…

CIA. *(To* AMANDA:*)* Are you going back to town?

AMANDA. Why, yes… ?

CIA. May I offer you a ride in my automobile?

AMANDA. That would be…very nice of you.

*(*CIA *pulls out a matchbox car from his pocket.)*

AMANDA. But will we fit?

CIA. Oh, this. But this is merely a replica I am using in a metaphoric manner, since representing an actual vehicle in this cramped venue would be, shall we say…impractical.

(Pause.)

AMANDA. Oh.

(The sound of a car driving off. AMANDA *and* CIA *stand still.* ITCHY, FRECKLES *and* SCOOP *run off in another direction, presumably chasing the departing car.)*

ALL. Hey!

(They exit. The altar boy with the censor also exits, coughing softly as he does so.)

Scene 10

(The Café Enigma is set up as AMANDA *and* CIA *walk into it. Soft jazzy music. There are other tables and chairs—the* USUAL SUSPECTS *enter and seat themselves, all hiding behind newspapers, eavesdropping.* CIA *puts the little car back in his pocket. The SFX of a car stopping, turning off the engine, doors slamming shut.)*

AMANDA. What a lovely car.

CIA. Thank you. It's small but elegant.

AMANDA. Yes.

CIA. Waiter!

(A WAITER *comes up.)*

CIA. Dooay caffay, pronto.

WAITER. Dooay caffay, si. Pronto, si.

(He exits. AMANDA *and* CIA *start to sit.* CIA *bumps* AMANDA *and she drops her bag.)*

CIA. Scoozato.

(Another waiter walks past without bothering to pick up her bag. CIA *shakes his head, bends to pick up her bag.)*

CIA. End of civilization as we know it.

(He hands her bag to her, AMANDA *looks at him oddly, trying to remember where she's heard this line before.)*

CIA. — Something?

AMANDA. — Déjà vu?

(She smiles. CIA *pulls out a silver cigarette holder, places it on the table.* AMANDA *looks at an engraving.)*

AMANDA. CIA?

CIA. Charles Ignatius Alligator. I know—it's a confusing monogram. *(He opens the cigarette case, pulls out a licorice stick.)* Licorice?

AMANDA. No…thank you.

(He pulls one out, starts chewing on it.)

CIA. Calms the nerves.

AMANDA. *(Noncommittal:)* Mmm…

(The WAITER *brings the coffee, then sits down near them, pulls out a book, starts reading, waiting for people to order things.)*

CIA. So. I assume you knew Carlos.

AMANDA. I guess nobody knew Carlos like I did.

CIA. Mmm…How long?

AMANDA. Oh, since the South American junket.

CIA. And when did you see him last?

AMANDA. *(Smiles:)* Last time? At his last funeral.

CIA. I'm sorry—his *last* funeral?

AMANDA. It's a long story—hey, what is this, the third degree?

CIA. No, just the second, masquerading as the idle chit chat one uses while trying to diffuse the difficulty of a situation between two people who don't really know each other from Adam and have just come from the funeral of a, shall we say, mutual acquaintance.

AMANDA. *(Suspicious:)* Oh…I see.

CIA. And before that?

AMANDA. *(Really suspicious now:)* Seldom. Waiter! May I have some biscotti?

(The WAITER *puts his/her book down, takes the order.)*

WAITER. Si, seenyora. Biscotti.

AMANDA. What's that you're reading?

WAITER. *Death in Venice.*

*(*AMANDA *breaks down.)*

AMANDA. Just when I thought—ahh, it's such a waste. Him dying like that.

CIA. I'm not surprised a man like that, staging his own death. Then maybe staging it again.

AMANDA. What are you—?

CIA. His life wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. Eternal youth is a top bidder these days.

*(*AMANDA *picks up his licorice container, tosses it at him; stands.)*

AMANDA. Monogram, my foot. You are CIA, aren't you?

CIA. Nothing you need concern yourself about.

AMANDA. Nothing I—! And you think you deserve to find the Blue Royale.

CIA. This is a different matter entirely. Carlos deCapistrano took something that didn't belong to him—

AMANDA. And here all along I thought he cultivated those fungi as a safeguard against the family curse—

CIA. Madness—yes. Then, by accident, it was discovered that those fungi had a curious by-product.

AMANDA. Eternal youth. So? And now—what?

CIA. Do you realize what would happen if that fungi fell into the wrong hands?

AMANDA. Depends on how you define "wrong," doesn't it?

CIA. I suppose it does. How would you define it, Miss Amanda Danger, United States citizen?

AMANDA. I am a citizen of the truth, Mr. Alligator.

CIA. Isn't that lovely—

AMANDA. Isn't it.

CIA. Well, Carlos deCapistrano is a citizen of the US of A, Miss Danger, and something so important as this Blue Royale business cannot be left in the hands of an ordinary citizen—

AMANDA. Carlos deCapistrano was never ordinary.

CIA. True. *(He tosses a bill on the table to pay the tab.)* Anyway—now that he's wanted on a felony charge, we have no option but—

AMANDA. Felony?

CIA. *(Looks her in the eyes:)* He burned the plantation, Miss Danger. Burned every last one of the fungi, then salted the ground to kill the roots.

*(*AMANDA *is shaken.)*

CIA. Destroyed every fungi…but one.

AMANDA. But without those fungi, he…he would go—

CIA. Loco? Yes. We figure within 24 hours, he won't know a hawk from a handsaw. *(Rises:)* 24 hours, Miss Danger.

AMANDA. *(Distressed:)* Carlos…

CIA. I want that fungi.

AMANDA. Stop saying that word—!!

CIA. *(Cruel, taunting:)* Fungi.

AMANDA. Stop it!!

CIA. I will get it, Miss Danger—with or without your help. Or my name isn't Charles Ignatius Alligator.

(He is about to leave.)

AMANDA. Wait! *(He stops.)* We have neglected one very important point in this complex and emotionally wrenching exposition.

CIA. Oh? And what, praytell, might that be?

AMANDA. That Carlos deCapistrano…is dead.

(Dramatic music sting. Pause.)

CIA. Is he.

(Dramatic music sting. Pause.)

AMANDA. What do you mean? I just saw them lower the coffin—

CIA. Good day, Miss Danger.

(A 3rd music sting. AMANDA *tries to grab him.* CIA *does some fancy moves and* AMANDA *starts to fall—THEN: shift into slow motion as* SCOOP *et al fall into the café, see the fracas and catch* AMANDA.*)*

CIA. *(To* SCOOP:*)* She your's?

SCOOP. You could say that.

CIA. Well take care of her, alright? I hate a scribbler with too much time on her hands and not enough smarts to stay out of harm's way.

AMANDA. Oh yeah? Well, we'll see about that Mr. Ignatz Alligator.

CIA. Ignatius.

AMANDA. Whatever.

CIA. Charles Ignatius—

AMANDA. I said whatever! And anyway, we'll just see about that.

CIA. About what?

AMANDA. That!

CIA. *(Threatening:)* Don't…confuse me. *(Starts to go.)*

AMANDA. *(Under her breath:)* Yeah, see ya' later, alligator.

CIA. *(Really peeved:)* And if I were you, I'd catch the next flight out of town! There's more than merely the danger of drowning in… *(Music sting; pose:)* Venice.

> *(In a flourish,* CIA *exits.* SCOOP *and company flop down at her table.* AMANDA *glares after* CIA.*)*

SCOOP. We had a heck of a time finding you.

ITCHY. You know how many canals there are in Venice? You swim here, you swim there…

AMANDA. You're supposed to take the gondolas.

ITCHY. *(A revelation:)* Oh. I was wondering what all those boats were about.

AMANDA. Itchy, Freckles, Scoop!

ALL. What what what?

AMANDA. Carlos deCapistrano is alive!

ALL. No!

AMANDA. Yes! I feel it! Mr. Alligator said—

ITCHY. Alligator?

AMANDA. Charles Ignatius Alligator, so he says.

SCOOP. That's a tough monogram to live with.

AMANDA. Yeah, Charles Alligator, my Aunt Fanny.

FRECKLES. Mine too.

SCOOP. Yeah.

ITCHY. Yeah.

> *(They all sit there for a few moments, simmering. Then* ITCHY *clears his throat.)*

ITCHY. *(Very polite, to* AMANDA:*)* Did you say something about Mr. deCapistrano?

AMANDA. *(Remembering:)* Right! I think he's alive.

ALL. Alive?!

AMANDA. Yes!

(Then one of the USUAL SUSPECTS *clears his throat and lowers his newspaper; the others follow suit.)*

TEX. *(Texan:)* I believe the gentleman was speaking metaphorically.

POUND. *(British:)* Quite so.

TEX. I do not believe that the gentleman is actually *alive*, per se, but rather that his legacy remains alive.

DRESDEN. *(German:)* Ze fungi.

TEX. Yeah—the fungi.

(All the USUAL SUSPECTS *laugh rather menacingly.)*

POUND. You see, Mr. deCapistrano was a very popular man when he arrived in Venice.

DRESDEN. Popular…ja…

FISK. *(Asian:)* There were many people who were, shall we say, interested in what he had in the box.

AMANDA. *(Remembering:)* The box…

(All but AMANDA *freeze.* ROMEO *appears in some odd place. Only* AMANDA *hears him…)*

ROMEO. A small, strange rather Oriental black box, with obscure symbols and lettering on all sides of it.

(He smiles, disappears.)

FISK. Rather a small enameled box.

TEX. A box which has mysteriously disappeared.

DRESDEN. Since his—you vill forgive ze expression—untimely demise.

TEX. Or timely, depending on your point of view.

AMANDA. Yes, I was supposed to meet him, but he… *(Choke.)*

FISK. Yes, that is awkward, isn't it.

AMANDA. Awkward? That's what you say when someone dies? "Awkward?"

FISK. Well, it is… isn't it? *(To* TEX:*)* Is that not the right word?

TEX. Yeah…*awkward.*

AMANDA. Did you know him?

TEX. Oh, forget about us, ma'am. We're just a couple stray longhorns in town for the AARRRP convention.

AMANDA. The American Association of—?

TEX. Relatively Recently Retired People.

POUND. *(Laughs:)* And of course, retired people have a kind of abiding interest, you might say, in the possibilities of eternal you(th)—

*(*TEXAS *elbows him, and to cover his faux pas, sings:)*

TEX. *(Sings, a country song:)* ETERNAL YOU, ETERNAL ME, ETERNAL US, I WANNA BE…da da da da…

(He waltzes USUAL 2 *back to their table, where they engage in a heated argument.)*

SCOOP. Amanda! Psst.

AMANDA. He said it was "Awkward."

SCOOP. Amanda: the box.

AMANDA. The box…?

SCOOP. The box that that guy at the building was talking about.

AMANDA. My thoughts exactly, Scoop.

SCOOP. He said Carlos always carried it with him. Don't you find that a bit…quirky?

AMANDA. Well, he always was a bit of an eccentric—

SCOOP. But if it was so important to him, whatta'ya think was in it?

AMANDA. My thoughts exactly, Scoop. *(*AMANDA *sneezes.)*

SCOOP. Hankie, Amanda?

AMANDA. No thanks, Scoop. No hankie. But thanks anyway.

SCOOP. Danada.

AMANDA. The apartment.

SCOOP. The apartment—check.

*(*AMANDA *yawns.)*

AMANDA. I sure could use a nap.

ITCHY. A nap?

SCOOP. *(Yawns:)* Yeah, a nap would sure feel good.

FRECKLES. But shouldn't we oughta—

AMANDA. Sleep! Yeah, you're right. We oughta catch 40 winks.

(They start yawning, and because yawning is contagious, all the USUAL SUSPECTS *start yawning too. Soon everyone is yawning so much they don't notice* AMANDA *and friends slipping out of the cafe. Then:)*

TEX. Hey! Where'd they go?

Other 3. After them!

(They all exit bumblingly in the opposite direction. The stage is empty for half a second, when AMANDA *reenters the cafe—she's forgotten her purse. As she crosses to the table at which she was sitting,* DEUCE *the newsstand guy enters and sits at the table, reaches under and produces her purse. He holds it out,* AMANDA *reaches the table and gropes around until her hand lights on the purse. She realizes that someone is holding it. She sees* DEUCE *and startles.)*

AMANDA. Deuce?

DEUCE. Hi ya', Amanda. How are ya'?

AMANDA. Deuce? Deuce, what's a Chicago newsstand operator like you doing here in Venice of all places?

DEUCE. I like the funny boats? *(Laughs:)* Listen. Amanda—I got a hot tip.

AMANDA. *(Suspicious:)* Oh yeah?

DEUCE. Yeah. Maybe the Via Veneetcea tonight at 8:30. Maybe some interesting developments. Maybe.

AMANDA. What kind of developments, Deuce?

DEUCE. Does the name Barbarino Archipelligo ring a bell?

*(*DENNISON *appears in a strange location.)*

DENNISON. …Barbarino Archipelligo, aging star of stage and screen. Intimately involved in the whole shebang in some unidentified way…

(And he disappears. AMANDA *thinks for a moment.)*

AMANDA. Maybe a little ding-a-ling…

DEUCE. Oh. Well. Hey, look at the time. *(Smiles:)* I gotta run. Got the late edition to get out. *(He stands to go, calls out:)* Getcha Extra, Extra!

AMANDA. Deuce! Wait!

(But DEUCE *disappears into the foggy night, his voice fading as he goes.)*

DEUCE. Read all about it! Fog envelops the truth! Will Amanda Danger find her way out of the miasma? Read all about it in the Midnight Times!

AMANDA. That was so…*unusual.*

DEUCE. *(His voice far away:)* Read all about it….

AMANDA. Barbarino Archipelligo…

*(*SCOOP *et al poke their heads into the cafe.)*

ALL. Psst. Amanda!

*(*AMANDA *picks up her purse and absently follows them, as if in a trance.)*

AMANDA. Hmmm…

Scene 11

(An empty stage for a moment, then a shifting of debris, falling of things, glass breaking. Then silence, as the debris settles. Then a door opens into the theatre, and LUCRECIA *stands there, looking a bit the worse for wear. She is dragging the remnants of a parachute behind her.)*

LUCRECIA. Lucky that pillow turned out to be a parachute. Silly stewardess.

(From way far off, we hear DEUCE's *voice.)*

DEUCE. Read all about it! Amanda Danger seeks out mystery man in Venetian acrostic!

LUCRECIA. *(Seething:)* Danger…

DEUCE. *(As he fades:)* Read allllll about it…

LUCRECIA. I'm gonna getcha, Danger. And I'm gonna get that scoop if it kills me!

(She starts to walk, but her parachute trips her up. She falls with more sounds of breaking glass.)

DEUCE. And it just might…

(She grabs the parachute and pulls, as if it were her hem that was caught. A tremendous tearing sound. From all over the theatre:)

ALL. Read all about it!

(And LUCRECIA *storms to the middle of the theatre and screams out.)*

LUCRECIA. Danger!!!

(Sudden music. Scene change. LUCRECIA *storms out.)*

Scene 12 (split scene)

(First, we are in the apartment of 3 individuals who were skulking around at the funeral: BENEDITO VENDETTA, CARMELITA CLANDESTINA *and* RICKY RICARDOLINO, *all friends of* CARLOS'. *They're playing poker.)*

(The second split is in CARLOS' *apartment—*AMANDA *and cohorts with Flashlights going through his possessions.)*

(NOTE: Both apartments should feel as if they are in the same building, above one another.)

CARMELITA. What do I know? She's a reporter, 'at's all I know. I'll see that and I'll raise you 200.

(Tosses chips into the pot.)

BENEDITO. I'm in. But what's she know, is what's important. What does she know about the fungi?

CARMELITA. And it's whereabouts.

BENEDITO. And it's whereabouts, that's what I'd like to know. What's she know?

RICKY. What's the difference?

BENEDITO. What's the difference?

RICKY. What's the difference? We did the job—we got paid—end of story.

BENEDITO. End of story?

RICKY. End of story.

BENEDITO. I guess you ain't heard the news as to the net worth of the cargo our illustrious "accident victim" was trying to protect.

RICKY. I heard, I heard. And? So?

CARMELITA. Raise you 600.

RICKY. Too rich for my blood.

CARMELITA. It's just lira.

BENEDITO. And? So? So I think we undervalued our services is all.

CARMELITA. And then this Amanda Danger character falls into the picture.

BENEDITO. I'd just like to know what she knows.

CARMELITA. So call her.

BENEDITO. What?

CARMELITA. Call her and ask her.

BENEDITO. Right, and she's gonna open up like a friendly oyster.

CARMELITA. It was just a thought. Are you in?

BENEDITO. I'm in.

RICKY. Maybe we should just forget the whole thing. Be satisfied with the fee and forget the whole thing.

BENEDITO. This fungi thing, Ricky. This fungi thing is worth millions, and I ain't talkin' lira.

CARMELITA. We got shortchanged.

RICKY. We got paid to do a thing, we did that thing, and now we go on to the next thing. I say we forget the whole thing.

CARMELITA. What thing are you talking about? I lost track.

RICKY. The fungi thing.

BENEDITO. And I say this Danger character knows something.

RICKY. It's dangerous.

CARMELITA. What isn't. Royal flush.

BENEDITO. Playing poker with you—that's dangerous. This fungi business—that's business.

CARMELITA. He held out on us. You help a guy out, and he holds out on you.

BENEDITO. And now we gotta find the guy.

CARMELITA. The fungi.

BENEDITO. The fungi, the guy, the fungi, the guy—it's the same thing. You find the guy, you find the fungi.

CARMELITA. So how we gonna find the guy?

BENEDITO. I'm telling you—this Danger character, this Danger character: she knows something. Else why'd she come to Venice? The canals? The gondolas, for criminey's sake??

CARMELITA. She's the key, you think?

BENEDITO. She's the key in our quest for the holy grail.

RICKY. The what?

CARMELITA. It's a metaphor.

RICKY. Oh.

CARMELITA. But she's a snoop.

BENEDITO. Snoops are good. Snoops are okay if they snoop the right stuff and then you get the stuff out of them, then you don't have to snoop so much, you know what I mean?

RICKY. I'm lost.

CARMELITA. You deal. We'll make the roadmaps.

BENEDITO. All I'm saying is we should be pro-active.

CARMELITA. What the heck does that mean?

BENEDITO. *(Shakes his head:)* I don't know. Just know it's what we oughta be. *(Tosses in chips:)* Ante up.

> *(They ante up, stare at their cards. Silence as they all elaborately shift their cards into order. Nothing for a while but the sounds of cards, then they launch back into it.)*

CARMELITA. And what about Barbarino Archipelligo, huh? What does she know, huh? All these loose ends here we ought to be pursuing whilst we sit here and play five card stud.

RICKY. I thought we were playing…never mind.

CARMELITA. What'd you think we were playing—gin rummy?

RICKY. I said never mind.

BENEDITO. We gotta touch her. Gotta make contact.

CARMELITA. With the grieving widow?

BENEDITO. She ain't his widow.

RICKY. And *he* ain't—

CARMELITA. Hit me.

*(*RICKY *gives her a card.)*

BENEDITO. I'm just saying that they, as a couple, weren't what she thought they ought to be and maybe she convinced herself that they were what she wanted, but he knew they weren't and never would be but she couldn't buy that.

CARMELITA. We gotta bite the bullet.

RICKY. What's that supposed to mean?

CARMELITA. Just we gotta talk with Miss Archipelligo and see if she knows anything, see what she knows.

RICKY. She don't know nothin'.

CARMELITA. She might know plenty.

BENEDITO. She might. And I am telling you, if this Danger character ever gets in contact with Miss Archipelligo before we do, we are in a deep annoyance for certain.

CARMELITA. Do you think she knows something?

RICKY. What does Archipelligo know? Nothing. That's what she knows—nothing.

CARMELITA. *(Insisting:)* Do you think she knows anything?

BENEDITO. *(Shrugs:)* She was his friend, his confidant. And she did maybe some other shenanigans on the side.

RICKY. On which side?

BENEDITO. The left side. Will you hit me?

*(*RICKY *gives him a card. They play silently while…)*

(In another part of the stage, AMANDA *is searching through* CARLOS' *apartment.* ITCHY, FRECKLES *and* SCOOP *are bored and playing cards by flashlight.* SCOOP *is searching as well,*

unwrapping things that are wrapped in newspaper. At times, she pauses to read the newspapers.)

ITCHY. My deal.

FRECKLES. Didn't you just deal?

ITCHY. No.

SCOOP. Ahh, let him deal, Freckles. *(To* AMANDA:*)* I'm bored.

*(*ITCHY *deals, they play cards.)*

FRECKLES. Yeah, Amanda. There's nothing here. We've gone through everything.

AMANDA. Not everything.

ITCHY. Well *almost* everything. Everything except pulled the floorboards up, and frankly, I'm hungry.

AMANDA. *(To herself:)* Floorboards…

*(*AMANDA *starts to tug at the floorboards.* FRECKLES *lays out her cards.)*

FRECKLES. Straight, Jacks high.

SCOOP. Will ya look at that…

ITCHY. Geez.

*(*SCOOP *scoops up the cards, starts to shuffle.)*

*(*LUCRECIA *appears at their window, about to break into the apartment, then she sees the flashlights and "hides" on the window-sill.* SCOOP *reads the newspaper he/she has just unwrapped.)*

SCOOP. Amanda, what's "Oon commeedeeah della farsicola"?

AMANDA. A comedy farce, why?

SCOOP. Nothing. Just catching the news as I look for something interesting.

AMANDA. Find anything?

SCOOP. Naw. Just this bird.

(She tosses it to AMANDA. AMANDA *catches it, reads the "made in" writing.* SCOOP *sees her looking.)*

SCOOP. Maltese. I already looked.

AMANDA. Maltese—what? *(Looks at the sculpture:)* Falcon?

SCOOP. 'At's what I'd say.

AMANDA. Huh.

(She tosses it back to SCOOP, *who wraps it back up.* SCOOP *is caught by the newspaper again.)*

SCOOP. Hey, look at that?

AMANDA. What?

(She crosses over to SCOOP *and looks at the newspaper.)*

(Back to the other locale.)

RICKY. I'm telling you—she's got nothing to say.

CARMELITA. He may be right. I mean, she bought the story of his accident lock, stock and barrel.

*(*LOCK, STOCK *and* BARREL *appear.)*

LOCK, STOCK & BARREL. You called?

*(*CARMELITA, RICKY *and* BENEDITO *scream, drop their cards;* LOCK, STOCK *and* BARREL *scream as well. All stare in frozen tableau. Back to* AMANDA.*)*

ITCHY. Gin. *(He lays out his cards, smiles.)*

SCOOP. —We're not playing Gin, Itchy.

ITCHY. Oh.

AMANDA. Wait a second.

(She takes the newspaper from SCOOP.*)*

AMANDA. "…performing at the theatre in Luigi Pirandello Square right off the Via Veneetcea…

*(*DEUCE *also appears at the window;* LUCRECIA *startles, stares at him aghast, starts to lose her balance.)*

DEUCE. *(Whispers:)* The Via Veneetcea tonight at 8:30. Maybe some interesting developments…

*(*AMANDA *has wandered over to the window absently reading the newspaper.* DEUCE *disappears from view, leaving* LUCRECIA *losing her balance.* AMANDA *makes a decision, slams the newspaper down on the windowsill.)*

AMANDA. Right.

*(*LUCRECIA *falls.)*

LUCRECIA. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh……!

AMANDA. Get us tickets, Scoop. I've got a hunch about this. *(Sniffs:)* And my news nose knows a story when she sees it.

ITCHY. Your nose sees things?

AMANDA. It's a metaphor, Itchy.

(The frozen group in the other location starts to falter. Outside their window, LUCRECIA *falls past.)*

LUCRECIA. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh……!

CARMELITA. What the heck was that?

FRECKLES. Amanda, I—

AMANDA. *(Shushes her:)* Wait for it.

(Pause; then the distant breaking of glass, a cat screeches.)

AMANDA. Did you hear something?

(The rest of them look at each other, shrug.)

FRECKLES. Not me.

SCOOP. Nope.

ITCHY. Not me. Gin.

(He lays out his cards, smiles.)

SCOOP. We're not playing Gin, Itchy.

ITCHY. Oh.

(The other frozen tableau loses its balance and they fall all over themselves.)

AMANDA. Did you hear something?

(The rest of them look at each other, shrug.)

FRECKLES. Not me.

SCOOP. Nope.

ITCHY. Not me. Gin.

(He lays out his cards, smiles.)

SCOOP. Did I mention we're not playing Gin, Itchy?

ITCHY. Oh.

(The 3 thugs get up, brush themselves off and scoot LOCK, STOCK *and* BARREL *off stage.)*

BENEDITO. Scoot! Go on! Get outta here.

CARMELITA. Who were they?

BENEDITO. I don't know, I don't know. All I know is that if we don't scope out this Danger character, then our goose is potentially cooked.

*(*AMANDA *sits down near the phone. Then —phones ring all over the theatre. In one location,* CIA *goes to pick up a phone; in another,* TEX *of the* USUAL SUSPECTS *pick up a phone.)*

CIA / BENEDITO / AMANDA / TEX. Hello?

DEUCE. *(Voice only:)* Hello, I have a conference call for the protagonists.

*(*CIA *and* TEX *decide not to talk, and they hold their hands against the mouthpiece.)*

BENEDITO / AMANDA. Thank you. Hello?

AMANDA. Who is this?

BENEDITO. *(Disguised voice:)* Miss Danger?

AMANDA. Yes? Who is it?

BENEDITO. A friend…of Carlos deCapistrano's.

AMANDA. *(Interested:)* Oh. What do you want?

BENEDITO. Only to help. I am…a doctor. Doctor…uh—

*(*CARMELITA *plays charades, winking at him.* RICKY *shuffles the cards, shakes his head.)*

BENEDITO. Doctor…Winkey. Yes, that's it. Dr. Winkey. A friend I was of Carlos'. I was there when he…met his untimely demise.

AMANDA. Oh. I see.

BENEDITO. I want to help.

AMANDA. Are you sure his death was accidental? Could he have been pushed, Dr. Binkey?

BENEDITO. It's Winkey. And yes, I am sure. But we must not—

AMANDA. But in the autopsy, were there any signs that would indicate foul play, Dr. Binkey?

BENEDITO. *(Irritated:)* Winkey. It's Winkey, and no—there were not, but such matters are not for the telephono, no? Let us meet, say, tonight at…

(He looks to the others; CARMELITA *is holding up a newspaper and she points to an ad.)*

BENEDITO. …at the theatre, say? I was going to go and see the new play at the Theatre Nationale on the Via Veneetcea. Would you join me there? We could speak after the show.

AMANDA. What a strange coincidence. I was going there myself this evening.

BENEDITO. Then we shall call it a date, yes? After the show, in the lobby. I will be wearing a red carnation.

AMANDA. After the show, then.

(She and BENEDITO *hang up their phones. Then* CIA *and* TEX *do the same. Silently,* TEX *confers with the other* USUAL SUSPECTS, *and* CIA *confers with his* SIDEKICKS.*)*

*(*AMANDA *stalks the room making a decision, then goes to the window and dramatically shuts the curtains.)*

AMANDA. It's curtains!

ALL. What?!

AMANDA. 8 o'clock. We've got a curtain to make!

(In the other locale, BENEDITO *stands by the phone, contemplatively.)*

CARMELITA. Well? Did she bite?

BENEDITO. Yes.

RICKY. I don't know about this…

BENEDITO. We got a curtain to make!

*(*BENEDITO *et al exit.* ITCHY *gets up to go and trips.)*

ITCHY. What the—? Oh, that floorboard is coming loose. *(He leans down to fix the floor and pulls up a small box.)* Hmm…that's funny…?

*(*AMANDA *grabs the box.)*

AMANDA. The box! That's the box!

SCOOP. Open it!

ITCHY. Open it, Amanda!

FRECKLES. Wait! *(She puts a flashbulb in her camera, aims.)* Ok. Open the box!

*(*AMANDA *opens the box.* FRECKLES *shoots.)*

AMANDA. A key…and a note! And—

OTHER 3. A fungi?!

AMANDA. No.

ITCHY. That's disappointing!

FRECKLES. Read the note!

SCOOP. Yeah, read the note!

AMANDA. " 'A': if you find this note, then you will know that the fungi has found its true home. Koncheela fra diavolo con messa mia corino. Carlos."

(They all fall into contemplation. Finally.)

SCOOP. Well what the hell does that mean?

AMANDA. "The devil's conch shell is on top of my heart."

ALL. Ah…. *(They all fall into contemplation. Finally.)* Well what the hell does that mean?!

AMANDA. I have no idea. And which "A" does he mean? Is "A" me?

(The sound of a taxi screeching to a halt.)

AMANDA. I don't know, but whatever it means, we're sure to find out—at the theatre! *(To taxi driver:)* Plass della Luigi Pirandello Zefferelli and step on it! *(They zoom off.)*

End Act I

ACT II

Scene 13

(A highly costumed French farce in full swing—powdered wigs and all; lots of doors. Other actors form an on-stage audience for this play-within-the-play.)

DANTE. Chellee chellini mombassa?

BEATRICE. Di cretto bom balla too.

(Audience laughs.)

DANTE. Coretto? Dolchay dorinna coolotta borumbay, ay? *(Chastising:)* Chello chello notto beh-bay.

(Audience laughs.)

(While the play continues, everybody else crowds into the theatre: CIA *and his* SIDEKICKS, BENEDITO *et al, and the* USUAL SUSPECTS *[who are masquerading as ushers].* AMANDA *and friends squeeze in as well. Any character who shouldn't know Italian starts laughing with the crowd, but of course they do not understand any of it—they react when and how the general "on stage" audience reacts.)*

BEATRICE. Chello *chellino* notto beh-bay.

(The audience howls with laughter, and AMANDA *joins in. One of the* USUAL SUSPECTS *approaches* AMANDA.*)*

POUND. Programa, seenyora?

AMANDA. Thank you.

*(*POUND *retreats to the background, eyeing* AMANDA. AMANDA *looks at the program, has a thought—and looks for* POUND, *who has disappeared.)*

AMANDA. Dr. Binkey?

(Someone seated next to AMANDA *turns to her.)*

PERSON. *(Whisper:)* It's Winkey.

AMANDA. Sorry.

(They go back to watching the play.)

MATILDA. *(Calling:)* Corinna! Corinna! *(She bustles in.)* Corinna, mia caro, delta lotto molto benay? *(She starts to cry.)* Cree-ah-cha, cree-ah-cha, neo bambino. Tool-ay-roota? No…no…

(Everyone in the play-within-a-play is crying, and the audience starts to weep as well.)

MATILDA. No, may lah ka leeto, nay? Chollay oh kelloh norroh. Banchina! Medeechee rinnoh caro mia! Chellinee…chellinee mamba ria. *(Slowly and sadly as she leaves:)* Leebeara vendeeta paray notah del ministairay-oh deglee chellinee…deglee chellinee, oh….

(Everyone is weeping their eyes out. AMANDA *starts to pretend to cry, so as not to be left out. In fact, she weeps louder than the whole audience. In fact, long after they stop, she is still weeping, until she looks around and everyone is staring at her; she smiles, wipes her tears, and motions for the show to continue. Which it does.)*

DANTE. Porkino! Eechay porkino…

BEATRICE. Porkino…

DANTE. Chay chay chay porkino…

BEATRICE. *(Makes kissey noises:)* Porkino eeno meeoh meeoh…

(They continue looking for porkino; the audience is amused.)

(When things have settled down again, AMANDA *sneaks out of her seat and up to the play-within-a-play stage—'off stage'. She is followed at a discreet distance by* CIA, BENEDITO *and all four of the* USUAL SUSPECTS. CIA *and* BENEDITO *stand discreetly at some distance. The* USUAL SUSPECTS *crowd in on* AMANDA.*)*

*(*AMANDA *whispers from the 'wings' to one of the actors in the play—it is not* BARBARINO *Archipelligo, but* AMANDA *thinks it is.)*

AMANDA. Psst!

(The actress looks uncertainly at the wing, a little confused; sees AMANDA, *who motions for her to come hither.* BARBARINO *also looks, uncertain.* AMANDA *scribbles something on a large sheet of paper and holds it up. It reads: "I knew Carlos deCapistrano."* BARBARINO's *eyes pop, but she has a line in the play, so she stays on*

stage. However, the other actress manages to edge her way to the edge of the stage.)

(While this is happening, AMANDA *turns and runs smack into the* USUAL SUSPECTS.*)*

ALL SUSPECTS. Programa, seenyora?

AMANDA. *(Suspicious:)* No, thank you.

(With no other choice, the USUAL SUSPECTS *retreat back into the "theatre," saying as they go:)*

ALL SUSPECTS. Programsa, programsa…get'cha programsa here…

(Meanwhile, the other actress has made her way to the edge of the stage. The real BARBARINO *half-acts, half-watches this encounter.* BENEDITO *stays in the shadows, sees all…)*

ACTRESS. Porkino meeoh…

(The following dialog is all in harsh whispers.)

AMANDA. So you knew who Carlos was.

ACTRESS. No.

AMANDA. Then why did you get off stage to speak with me?

ACTRESS. I love your outfit. Wherever did you get it?

AMANDA. What?

ACTRESS. *(Loud, towards the stage:)* Porkino! *(Back to* AMANDA:*)* Is it Italian?

AMANDA. I have to go—

(From onstage, the real BARBARINO *rushes offstage towards* AMANDA. *She thrusts the other actress aside, who staggers back onto the stage calling for Porkino.)*

ACTRESS. Porkino!

BARBARINO. Alright! You've torn it out of me! I knew him. Yes! Yes, there! I knew him! What of it?! We were only friends! Did he tell me of the discovery, the hell and heaven of the fungi's

mysterious power to restore the joy and energy of youth? Yes! Yes, you hear?! There, I said it. But now he's dead, Dead, you hear?! And nothing, not even the coveted Blue Royale can bring him back! *(She weeps.)*

AMANDA. Look, I—

BARBARINO. You're brutal, you hear? Brutal! Will you never give up? You're relentless, wearing me down—alright—Alright! Did I want the fungi? *(Laughs.)* Of course I did—who wouldn't desire eternal youth, eternal springtime, everlasting joy!?!

AMANDA. Do the words "Koncheela fra diavolo con messa mia corino" mean anything to—?

*(*BARBARINO *bursts into tears.)*

BARBARINO. Of course, you fiend—torture me with his last words, you she-demon! *(Crying out:)* Yes, Carlos, yes! The devil's conch shell is on top of *my* heart, too!

AMANDA. Uh—

BARBARINO. *(Terrified, she retreats from* AMANDA:*)* I know nothing of the rumors! Nothing, you hear? And nothing you can say can tear them out of me!!! *(Pause.)* So you wanna have coffee?

AMANDA. Your dressing room after the show?

BARBARINO. Sounds good. *(Loud towards the stage:)* Porkino!

*(*BARBARINO *goes back towards the stage.* AMANDA *turns to go, running smack into* CIA; *a pause; then* CIA *runs onto the stage with* BARBARINO *to escape* AMANDA's *recognition, all yelling:)*

BARBARINO / CIA. Porkino!!!

(But they realize that the scene on stage has completely changed; the actors and audience look at her as if they were crazy.)

BARBARINO / CIA. Thank God they found Porkino!

(Melodramatically they sweep offstage.)

BENEDITO. I have a plan.

(He leaves. The actors on stage compose them selves, and pose for the end of the play.)

DANTE. La tornado say bye bye!

(The audience rises to their feet cheering and applauding madly. The "curtain" falls, then up, and the acting troupe takes their bow, including BARBARINO.*)*

(Curtain.)

(Gunshot… Pause applause.)

(Someone falls… Pause…)

(Applause renewed—"Bravo Bravo!")

(Then, after a moment's pause, the audience disperses.)

Scene 14

(A crowded lobby; everyone is wearing a red carnation.)

AMANDA. Dr. Binkey?

EVERYONE. It's Winkey.

AMANDA. Sorry.

(The crowd goes back to their discussions. AMANDA *looks around hopelessly.)*

Scene 15

(A dressing table is brought on in another part of the stage, and RICKY*—dressed as* BARBARINO*—sits, staring angrily in the mirror.* CARMELITA *and* BENEDITO *are in the room as well.)*

RICKY. Why me?

CARMELITA. Because.

RICKY. *(Thinks for a moment, then bursts out:)* That's not a good enough reason!

(There is a knock.)

BENEDITO. Well, it'll have to do!

*(*BENEDITO *and* CARMELITA *hide, as* AMANDA *knocks again.)*

RICKY. *(Clears throat, gets into character:)* Ahhtray.

*(*AMANDA *sweeps into the room. In fact, in this scene, everybody sweeps around.)*

AMANDA. I just adored the— *(She looks at* RICKY:*)* You look so… different on the stage.

RICKY. It is the magic of the theatre.

AMANDA. Ah.

RICKY. You were saying?

AMANDA. *(Sweeping again:)* I loved the play very much.

RICKY. Oh? Do you understand Italian?

AMANDA. Une poco moto.

(During the next monologue, and unseen by AMANDA, BENEDITO *and* CARMELITA *put some fizzy stuff in a glass of water and hand it to* RICKY.*)*

RICKY. And, so? Then? Do you agree with the thesis of the play? That the existential nature of our diminishing relationship with the environment and the need for bilateral accords will lessen our seeming inability to cease further obfuscating the clarity of our dimming vision for the future and the survival of all bifurcated individuals as stated in the thesis of the second act?

(Pause.)

AMANDA. Absolutely.

RICKY. We have so much in common, you and I.

*(*RICKY *starts to drink the water, but* CARMELITA's *hand stops him and forces it in the direction of* AMANDA. RICKY *hands* AMANDA *the glass of tainted water.)*

RICKY. You look thirsty.

AMANDA. I do?

(A knock on the door.)

AMANDA. I'll get it.

(She doesn't drink. RICKY *looks at* CARMELITA *and* BENEDITO *as if to say "I tried!"* BENEDITO *and* CARMELITA *look exasperated.* AMANDA *opens the door. The* USUAL SUSPECTS *stand there, all disguised as cleaning ladies.)*

ALL SUSPECTS. Here to clean!

RICKY. Can't it wait?

(They move into the dressing room; clean.)

RICKY. This is awkward.

AMANDA. It's okay. We can still talk. About…Carlos.

RICKY. Are you thirsty? *(*AMANDA *shakes her head.)* Sure? *(She shakes her head.)* Right—Carlos. As I was saying…ah yes—we have so much in common, you and I.

AMANDA. Do we?

RICKY. Did we not both love Carlos deCapistrano? *(Gasps.)* Oh. I have said too much.

AMANDA. Yes, you have. But now that you've started, continue.

(Outside the dressing room window, LUCRECIA *appears, listening through the window. Her feet are sticking through the partially open window.)*

RICKY. Continue? *(He's at a loss.)* Okay…well, I'll tell you what: tell me what you know about the fungi and its whereabouts and I'll tell you…things. Sort of like, um, whisper down the lane…or something.

(The USUAL SUSPECTS *are all listening closely, stop cleaning.* RICKY *looks at them, clears his throat. They all go back to pretend cleaning.* CIA *appears at the door, is about to knock, hears the voices and listens at the door instead.)*

AMANDA. Well…I can tell you that it's not in the box.

ALL. It's not?!

(The USUAL SUSPECTS *whistle and go back to their work.* CIA *exits.)*

RICKY. I mean… *(Feigning disinterest:)* Oh, really? Well, of course it's not.

AMANDA. Of course?

RICKY. Sure you're not thirsty?

AMANDA. *(Suspicious:)* Haven't we been here before?

RICKY. Right.

(He puts the glass down; exasperated, BENEDITO *skips out of the dressing room.)*

(Meanwhile, at the window, CIA *appears between* LUCRECIA's *feet, also eavesdropping. A panicked look passes* LUCRECIA's *face: she's losing her balance.* RICKY *is losing his patience. The* USUAL SUSPECTS *are pretending to clean.)*

RICKY. Well—

(He closes the window on LUCRECIA's *feet.* LUCRECIA *stifles her screams, then tries to free her feet.)*

RICKY. As I was saying—

*(*LUCRECIA *frees her feet, smiles…then falls, taking* CIA *with her.)*

LUCRECIA / CIA. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh……

(For a moment RICKY *and* AMANDA *stop and listen. Then, while* AMANDA *is still listening,* RICKY *starts again.)*

RICKY. As I was saying—

AMANDA. Shh. Wait for it.

(Pause; then the distant breaking of glass, a cat screeches.)

AMANDA. Did you hear something?

RICKY. *(Shrugs.)* Not me.

AMANDA. It's the darnest thing…

(The THEATRE MANAGER *knocks at the door then walks in.)*

MANAGER. *(Gruff:)* Sorry, Miss Archipelago. Hey you crew!

(The USUAL SUSPECTS *look at him uncertain.)*

MANAGER. Yeah, you. You're supposed to do the downstairs bathrooms first. Let's hop to it!

ALL SUSPECTS. But—

MANAGER. Let's hop to it! Hup hup hup! And scrub that sink this time—I want that thing to *shine*!

(He hustles them out of the dressing room; they leave, looking back and helpless. AMANDA *starts to say something, then there is a knock at the door.)*

RICKY. It's nice to be popular.

*(He opens the door—*BENEDITO *appears in disguise.)*

BENEDITO. It is I—Dr. Zink van Winkey!

AMANDA. Dr. Winkey!

RICKY. Binkey.

BENEDITO. Winkey! *(Suddenly, to* AMANDA:*)* You look thirsty.

AMANDA. Really, I'm touched that everyone is so concerned—

BENEDITO. But I am a doctor! *(He picks up the glass.)* Drink!

AMANDA. *(Drinking:)* Oh alright. *(Puts glass down:)* Now let's—*(She faints a little, falls against the dressing table.)* Oh! I feel kinda… woozy.

*(*AMANDA *falls onto the divan.* RICKY *tears off his wig, lets his voice down to its original timbre.* BENEDITO *also tears off his disguise.)*

BENEDITO. Alright, you little fibbermagee, you, now tell me where it is?

*(*CARMELITA *also appears.)*

AMANDA. It? It?? What it?

(She sees RICKY *without his wig.)*

AMANDA. Hey! You're not Barbarino Archipelligo!

(She sees BENEDITO.*)*

AMANDA. And you're not Binkey!

*(*BENEDITO *grits his teeth but says nothing.* AMANDA *sees* CARMELITA.*)*

AMANDA. And neither are you!!!

ALL 3. How clever you are!

AMANDA. Oh. I'm feeling sorta…woozy…

CARMELITA. *(Laughs sardonically:)* Yes, that's the truth serum we put in your drink!

AMANDA. No!

ALL 3. Yes!

AMANDA. Who…who are you?

BENEDITO. Let us just say that we are your destiny!

AMANDA. You…you fiend… iends!

RICKY. Well, you don't have to say the truth *all* the time.

AMANDA. But I…I can't help it. Your eye shadow…it's hideous.

RICKY. Oh, stop it…

AMANDA. And that dress —did *you* pick that out?

RICKY. Stop it!

*(*RICKY *picks up a vase of flowers and hits* AMANDA *over the head with it. He smiles at the others who are aghast. Then he realizes what he's done.)*

RICKY. Trattoria!

(In the distance, something breaks. AMANDA *momentarily comes to consciousness.)*

AMANDA. Did you hear something?

(The others shrug.)

ALL 3. Nope.

AMANDA. It's the darnest thing.

(Then she collapses again into unconsciousness. BENEDITO *and* CARMELITA *rush to catch her but it's too late.)*

(At a loss, they slump down onto the divan. RICKY, *meanwhile, searches* AMANDA'S *pockets. He finds the key from the box and the note.)*

RICKY. Look!

*(*CARMELITA *grabs the note.* BENEDITO *grabs the key.)*

RICKY. Hey!

CARMELITA. *(Reading:)* "Conch shell"?

BENEDITO. *(Holding up the key:)* Look!

CARMELITA. Well, at least it's not a total loss.

(They smile and exit. Spin dissolve to…)

Scene 16

*(*AMANDA's *Dream.)*

(Everything in this section is in slow motion, very dreamy, strange, surreal, impossible things juxtapose. The first thing that happens is DEUCE *comes in and sits at the dressing table, starts applying bizarre make-up.)*

DEUCE. Read all about it! Amanda Danger is somnambulant state!

*(*AMANDA *sits bolt upright, looks at* DEUCE.*)*

AMANDA. Deuce. You're back.

*(*DEUCE *looks at* AMANDA*—he has painted a hideous smile on his face.)*

DEUCE. Hey, you're pretty quick, kid.

AMANDA. How's Chicago?

DEUCE. What's a "Chicago"?

(A voice in the distance:)

CARLOS. Amanda? Amanda? I can't find you in this fog…

AMANDA. Carlos? Carlos is that you? I thought you were dead!

CARLOS. So did I…

AMANDA. I mean the first time…

DEUCE. Hey, Amanda. Keep an eye on those false clues…there's lots of bad back alleys on the way to the truth…

CHORUS. Rosebud…

AMANDA. Who? Oh, I'm so confused…

(A vast Blue Royale drifts through the space. The USUAL SUSPECTS *chant:)*

SUSPECTS. Fungi, fungi, fungi
Follow the blue blue fungee-ooo…

(A CROONER *appears in a spotlight.)*

CROONER. *(Sung to the tune of "All the Things You Are":)* YOU ARE THE THRESHLESS BRUSH OF BLINGBLIME THAT FUMBLES ON THE SINK OF A GLOVELY GLONG…

(Bound and gagged, BARBARINA ARCHIPELLIGO *drifts through the theater, grunting.)*

CARLOS. I was afraid that the powers of evil would—

CROONER. DU BIST THE SAGE I KNOW THAT FIGHTS THE SCARS, THE DEAREST GLING-A-GLOW IS WHAT YOU ARE… YOU ARE…

VOICE. Was he what he seemed to be?

VOICE. Everyone needs hope—

VOICE. He wanted it all for himself

AMANDA / CARLOS. That's not true!

VOICE. He wanted to live forever…alone…

(The USUAL SUSPECTS *return looking through magnifying glasses; images of huge eyes float through the space. Sung to the tune of Row, Row, Row…)*

SUSPECTS. LOOK LOOK LOOK AROUND
FOLLOW EV'RY LEAD
FEARFUL OF WHAT YOU MAY FIND IN PANDORA, THE BOX OF WHICH YOU DREAM…

CARLOS. There is nothing in the box…

VOICE. He's wearing the dream

VOICE. Wearing the nightmare

VOICE. Breathing the fragrance

VOICE. Sipping the nectar

SUSPECTS. Watch out!

ALL. SOMEDAY SOME WAY MY SNAPPY ARMS WILL MOLD YOU, AND SOME WAY I'LL GROW THAT FUNGI DIVINE, AND ALL THE CLINGS YOU SNAR ARE—

(Cruel music cuts the singing off. LUCRECIA *comes in as an evil Queen, like Cruella DeVille, laughing. She is on stilts or very tall shoes.)*

LUCRECIA. Ha ha ha ha ha! You thought you would get the scoop on me, did you Danger?! I may be a clumsy sod, but I'll get you… and your little *dog* too! Ha ha ha ha!

(A group of OLD PEOPLE *come in, huddling.)*

OLD PEOPLE. Please! The fungi! We need the fungi! We don't want to get older! We want to be young again!

AMANDA. Why?

OLD PEOPLE. Why?! Ask our bones why if you will. Ask our eyes why if you will. Ask our minds why if you will. Ask our hearts why if you will. Our bones, our eyes, our minds, our hearts… *(Repeat.)*

RICH PERSON. I'm too rich to be old!

AMANDA. Carlos!

*(*DENNISON *waltzes in with his mother.)*

DENNISON. For the Gipper, Amanda. Bring it back home.

GRETTA. My boy's a famous big city reporter, you know. Like to see my grandchildren grow up, don't you know.

DENNISON / GRETTA. Bring it back home.

AMANDA. Carlos!

CARLOS. You see? They all want the fungi, and why not? Why shouldn't they want it? But do they really know what it means? None of them. None of them knows the terrible pain of immortality—

OLD PEOPLE. Let us taste it!

CARLOS. But I do!

AMANDA. Carlos!

CARLOS. I have been alive for a thousand years! The things I have seen, the horrors…and the beauty…

OLD PEOPLE. Our bones, our eyes, our minds, our hearts… *(Repeat.)*

SUSPECTS. *(To the* OLD PEOPLE:*)* We're on your side! We're spies for AARRRP!

OLD PEOPLE. Well, do your job!

CARLOS. There is no democracy in immortality!

AMANDA. What does that mean?

CARLOS. I don't know, all I know is that it is true. Immortality is a cruel task master!

*(*DENNISON *drifts back through.)*

DENNISON. Well, she's old, Amanda.

CHORUS. No cure for that…

SUSPECTS. THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE— *(Sustained tone:)* LIVING FOREVER…

*(*SCOOP *et al appear, bending over thin air.)*

SCOOP. Amanda?

AMANDA. I don't have the fungi! I don't know if I believe in the fungi!

OLD PEOPLE. For us!

DENNISON. For her!

GRETTA. For me!

ALL. For ever, For Ever, FOR EVER!

AMANDA. No!

(And the dream people spin out of the space, leaving AMANDA *lying on the floor under where* SCOOP *et al are looking.)*

SCOOP. Amanda?

ITCHY. Hey, Amanda, wake up, would'ya?

FRECKLES. Amanda!

SCOOP. Amanda!

ALL. AMANDA!

(And AMANDA *wakes up with a start.* FRECKLES *pops a flash picture of her.* AMANDA, *very confused, gets up and starts to run out.)*

SCOOP. Hey, Amanda—!

*(*AMANDA *staggers to a doorway.)*

AMANDA. Leave me alone!

Scene 17

*(*AMANDA *runs out of the theatre,* SCOOP *et al in hot pursuit. Then a man [*CARLOS *but unidentifiable] enters the theatre as if pursued, just as* AMANDA *reenters from another entrance.* CARLOS *quickly hides in a shadowed doorway. We are on the street.)*

AMANDA. Hello?!

(The "hello" echoes all over the theatre. No one is about. Emptiness, hollow sounds. A car engine approaches, car lights strafe AMANDA, *a horn honks,* AMANDA *throws herself against the wall to avoid being hit. The car screeches past and out of earshot.)*

(A series of strange street events, shadows moving along the walls, sounds and voices in confusing cacophony. The figure in the doorway starts to emerge, then another car enters and exits, and the figure dashes back into the doorway.)

AMANDA. *(Frustrated and shouting:)* Who's there? What do you want? What're you, following me too? Everybody in this wretched city spying on me?! Why doncha show your face, huh, coward!

(In a high window, a woman appears, irritated.)

WOMAN. *(Quietly at first:)* Zotzo feelay la nochay…

AMANDA. *(Shouting:)* Everybody sees the victim, huh? Well let's see who the stalker is! Who's the coward in the shadows?!!

WOMAN. *(Shouting now:)* Señora! Mama lotitsa macheeray!

(The WOMAN *switches on the light in her window, and the light streaks across the stage, illuminating the face of the man in the shadows:* CARLOS DECAPISTRANO. AMANDA *gasps.)*

AMANDA. *(A whisper:)* Carlos?

WOMAN. *(Yelling:)* Batchkee tata bonoroh, eh?! Say cha nochay matirah, eh señora? *(Shakes her head:)* Kreecha kreecha, dayoos ex macheena, eh…dayoos dayoos…

(She starts to leave her window.)

AMANDA. *(Gasp:)* Carlos!

(He smiles.)

CARLOS. Amanda…my Amanda Danger.

(Then the WOMAN *turns out her light and* CARLOS' *face disappears back into the darkness. He runs out, his footsteps echoing in the dark.)*

AMANDA. Carlos——NO!!!

(Foomp! The lights bang to black. Dramatic music up! In the darkness, a flashlight pierces the dark. Then two, then many flashlights, strafing the theatre. A whistle.)

AMANDA. Carlos!

(A chase ensues, AMANDA *chasing glimpses of* CARLOS' *shadow as he runs to escape the flashlights and the whistles. Then he disappears from sight, and* AMANDA *is left alone, not knowing where to turn next.)*

AMANDA. Carlos! I won't lose you again!

(The people with the flashlights and whistles descend on the stage, flashing the lights, peering into the darkness. The distant sound of running steps, and the flashlighters half exit; a struggle off stage, then the flashlighters reenter holding a struggling figure. AMANDA *grabs a flashlight and along with her, a dozen flashlights beam into the person's face: it is* ITCHY.*)*

AMANDA. Itchy!

ITCHY. Amanda, am I glad to see you!

PERSON 1. Tratoray! Becheeno gomballay tarrita Tee-roh!

(Various intense accusations in Italian gibberish agreeing with the man.)

AMANDA. Itchy, what happened?

ITCHY. I don't know! I was practicing my Italian phrases, you know, the ones from the book, and all I said was—

(He leafs through his book, pronouncing carefully and cheerfully.)

ITCHY. —"Voocha cheentoray pombarroh lokatto?" *(Smiles.)*

(The angry crowd cries for his blood again, in gibberish Italian. ITCHY *screams.)*

AMANDA. Momento! Momento moray!

(The crowd subsides.)

AMANDA. Vee-enda polloto la pollo meekay.

(The crowd murmurs, they're uncertain.)

AMANDA. Trustata mee-oh. Vee-enda polloto la pollo meekay.

(The crowd slowly breaks up, still uncertain they should leave ITCHY *with this woman, but they do. The last person to leave is a little girl who stomps on* ITCHY's *foot.)*

ITCHY. Ah!

(He sits, rubs his foot. AMANDA, *meanwhile, is looking around again, searching for* CARLOS *who has effectively disappeared.)*

ITCHY. So, Amanda. What did I say? I meant to say, "I love your delightful country."

AMANDA. *(Preoccupied:)* You said, "You foolish slugs, living in this water-logged sponge of a city."

ITCHY. Geez, what a complicated language.

AMANDA. And I said "Don't worry: I will see that the little chicken is roasted to a crisp on the fires of justice."

ITCHY. Thanks, Amanda.

AMANDA. Itchy, I've seen Carlos deCapistrano.

ITCHY. You've seen Carlos deCapistrano?!

(From the shadows, a voice.)

GRETTA. Miss Danger…

AMANDA. Carlos?

(From the shadows, a cackle. Then the wizened figure of GRETTA DENNISON *emerges.)*

GRETTA. *(Chuckling:)* No… No, I'm afraid not. It is only I, Gretta Dennison, here to thank you again for being so nice on the elevator.

AMANDA. Ms. Dennison!

GRETTA. Please—call me Gretta.

AMANDA. Gretta…

*(*GRETTA *chuckles.)*

ITCHY. Stop that chuckling!

AMANDA. Itchy!

GRETTA. No, no it's alright, Miss Danger. Old people can't help chuckling and the youthful can't help being irritated by their unruly chuckling. *(Chuckles.)*

ITCHY. Stop it!!!

(He grabs his head, he's in pain. He looks up at AMANDA.*)*

ITCHY. Sorry. It's like chalk on a blackboard.

GRETTA. Youth. When such things mattered. Now? Now, I can't even hear myself chuckle. Such is the wasteland of the aged.

AMANDA. What brings you to Venice, Gretta?

GRETTA. Package tour. Elder Hostel. Sponsored through the AARRRP.

(The USUAL SUSPECTS *pop up—they have been spying on* AMANDA.*)*

GRETTA. So you're looking, I take it, for Carlos deCapistrano?

AMANDA. You knew Carlos?

(Now, from behind everything, everybody appears: CIA, BENEDITO *et al,* LUCRECIA VILLANE, *et al. They listen.)*

GRETTA. Oh, yes…Carlos is not someone one soon forgets…

(Extremely romantic music. CARLOS *appears in a strange corner of the theatre.* GRETTA *is spotlit.* ITCHY *and* AMANDA *look at her strangely.)*

CARLOS. …and perhaps, one day, we shall meet again under more, shall we say, agreeable circumstances.

GRETTA. *(Sighs:)* Carlos…

ITCHY/AMANDA. Carlos?

CARLOS. You're one in a million. Until then, may the spell of the Blue Royale cast its shadow of protection on you. 'Til then…

(He disappears.)

GRETTA. 'Til then…

AMANDA. Wait a second! That's my daydream!

GRETTA. Well, dearie, it's mine too. But for completely different reasons. You see, I was his teacher, his guide in the ways of the world. And what he saw in me, how he treated me—made me feel as if I were a young woman again. And then, I woke up and looked in the mirror and realized that I was growing old. Yes, the whole nine yards: wrinkled skin, the loss of memory, of energy, the loss of…oh the *loss.*

ITCHY. It happens to the best of us.

GRETTA. Ah, you can say that so glibly, my callow watersprite.

ITCHY. I am not your callow watersprite!

GRETTA. Are too.

ITCHY. Am not.

GRETTA. Are too.

ITCHY. Am not!

GRETTA. Let us stop this juvenile repartee, shall we?

AMANDA. When was the last time you saw Carlos?

GRETTA. It was an hour, no more than that, before he died.

AMANDA. He's not dead.

> *(Suddenly from out of all the cracks and crevices in the theatre, all the watchers poke their heads out.)*

GRETTA & EVERYONE. He's not?!

> *(*AMANDA *stops, then, before she can look around, all the heads disappear.)*

AMANDA. What'd you say?

GRETTA. I said "He's not?"

AMANDA. Must be the echo of the Italian piazzas.

GRETTA. What?

AMANDA. *(Loud:)* I said "Must be the echo of the Italian piazzas!"

(Again all the heads poke out and echo her.)

ALL. PIAZZAS…piazzas…piazzas…

(Then the heads disappear. AMANDA *shakes her head.)*

GRETTA. He's not, eh? *(Smiles.)* Isn't that the coup de grace?

AMANDA. I saw him, just a few moments ago. Here, in this piazza—

(Waits for the echo, none comes. She shrugs.)

AMANDA. —in the shadows, he—

(Belatedly the heads poke out and echo her.)

ALL. PIAZZA…piazza—

AMANDA. Enough.

(The heads disappear.)

GRETTA. Here in the piazz—?

AMANDA. Don't say that word!

GRETTA. Right.

ITCHY. *(Looking around:)* Geez. Carlos…here Carlos Carlos Carlos…

(While he continues to look, the ACTRESS *from the theatre scene crosses the stage.)*

ACTRESS. Porkino? Here Porkino…

(—And exits.)

AMANDA. Perhaps he has escaped into the sewers or the waterways. No, we won't find him this way. We must tell…

(Ominous music.)

AMANDA. —the Alligator.

GRETTA. There are alligators in the sewers?

AMANDA. Only in New York.

GRETTA. That's what I thought.

AMANDA. No, by alligator I mean—

(Ominous music.)

AMANDA. —Charles Ignatius Alligator, CIA operative.

GRETTA. Culinary Institute of America?

AMANDA. What?

GRETTA. You said CIA.

AMANDA. No, I meant—

(Ominous music.)

AMANDA. —Central Intelligence Agency, *(Loud)* and if that ominous music doesn't take a hike I'm gonna be awful testy in the morning!

SOUND GUY. Sorry.

*(*CIA *comes in.)*

CIA. Sorry, I simply couldn't come in with all that ominous music playing. It makes me feel, well, self conscious.

AMANDA. Well, it oughta.

(Ominous music.)

CIA. *(Strikes a pose:)* But it is so irresistible!

AMANDA. Much as I hate to say it—we need your help.

CIA. You do, do you?

*(*SCOOP *and* FRECKLES *appear.)*

SCOOP. Amanda, where the blue blasted blazes have you been?

FRECKLES. Yeah, we've been searching everywhere for you. Smile.

(She takes a photo of AMANDA, *et al.)*

FRECKLES. Thanks.

AMANDA. *(To* SCOOP *et al:)* It's a long long story. *(To* CIA:*)* Will you help? Can you help find him?

CIA. Perhaps.

AMANDA. How cryptic.

CIA. You were expecting maybe a roadmap? X marks the spot?

AMANDA. No, but—

*(*DEUCE *appears.)*

DEUCE. Your gondola is waiting, Miss Danger.

AMANDA. My gondola? But I didn't— *(Breathless:)* Deuce!

DEUCE. *(Smiles:)* I turn up in the funniest places, don't I?

AMANDA. You can say that again.

*(*DEUCE *starts to say it again, but—)*

AMANDA. Don't. But I didn't ask for a —

DEUCE. To take you to Carlos deCapistrano.

CIA. Don't take it.

AMANDA. *(Ignoring* CIA:*)* Where is it?

(Everyone freezes.)

DEUCE. *(To audience:)* I will now seem to be speaking in a foreign tongue so that no one but Amanda will be able to understand me. Why will I do this? Because I can.

(Everyone unfreezes.)

DEUCE. Down by the Corenzeeah Canal.

CIA. *(To* SCOOP:*)* What'd he say?

SCOOP. I can't understand him.

DEUCE. But beware!

AMANDA. Beware?

DEUCE. Things are not as they seem.

AMANDA. They aren't?

DEUCE. No.

AMANDA. Why?

DEUCE. Because this is Venice.

AMANDA. Ah.

FRECKLES. What's he saying?

(Everybody shrugs.)

DEUCE. City of Intrigue.

AMANDA. Ah.

DEUCE. Carlos is waiting at a phone booth at the corner of the canal Loochenzo and Vine Street. He will be there in 10 minutes.

AMANDA. Taxi!

DEUCE. Amanda.

AMANDA. What?

DEUCE. Remember—this is Venice. And the taxis float.

AMANDA. Ah… *(Softer, in a more fluid tone:)* Taxi…

DEUCE. That's better…

*(*DEUCE *starts to fade into the fog. Everyone else on stage acts as if they are being sucked slowly away from the stage, as if they are drowning in slow motion.)*

AMANDA. *(Very soft:)* Taxi…

DEUCE. Nice…very nice…

ALL. What's he saying?

Scene 18

(The stage is very quiet; distant music, lots of watery reflections. DEUCE *enters, mysterioso. He holds up his hand, like one would hail a taxi. A gondola glides into view.)*

*(*DEUCE *looks in the other direction, hails again.* AMANDA *glides into view. The gondolier smiles [this is* DRESDEN *of the* USUAL SUSPECTS *in disguise].)*

(The gondola stops, AMANDA *gets in.)*

AMANDA. There is a phone booth at the corner of the canal Loochenzo and Vine Street—pause there: we will be picking up another passenger.

DRESDEN. Si, seenyora. Loochenzo and Vine.

(He pushes off, they are gliding down the canal. DEUCE *disappears humming "O Solo Mio.")*

DRESDEN. The stars, seenyora. The moon, the warm night air…a perfect night for love.

AMANDA. Perhaps it is.

(The gondola slows, and a second gondolier climbs in [this is TEX *of the* USUAL SUSPECTS*].)*

DRESDEN. You do not mind if I pick my brother up on the way? He also is a gondolier.

AMANDA. *(Absently:)* No, no…I don't mind.

(She is looking ahead, thinking.)

DRESDEN. He will serve food stuffs as we ply the subtle waters of the Venetian canals.

TEX. Ma'am.

(He serves AMANDA *snacks while they go along.)*

DRESDEN. I was mentioning to the senyora what a lovely night it is. The stars, the moon, etcetera.

TEX. A true night for love.

DRESDEN. My words exactly.

AMANDA. Are we near to the destination?

DRESDEN. We are near, but we are not there.

(The gondola slows, and a third gondolier steps in [this is FISK *from the* USUAL SUSPECTS*].)*

FISK. Brother!

DRESDEN. Brother!

TEX. Brother!

(They all smile at AMANDA.*)*

AMANDA. He's your brother?

DRESDEN. He's a musician. He will serenade you and your friend as we ply the subtle waters of the Venetian canals.

FISK. Ma'am.

(He starts to play an obscure stringed instrument, while TEX *serves her something to drink. The gondola slows once more, and a fourth gondolier gets in [this is* POUND *of the* USUAL SUSPECTS.*].)*

POUND. Brother!

FISK. Brother!

DRESDEN. Brother!

TEX. Brother!

(They all smile at AMANDA. *She barely looks up.)*

AMANDA. Don't tell me: he sings.

POUND. That's me.

(And so POUND *sings while* FISK *plays while* TEX *serves while* DRESDEN *steers. They all exchange looks of satisfaction.)*

DRESDEN. Did I mention that he would sing while we ply the—

AMANDA / DRESDEN. —subtle waters of the Venetian canals?

AMANDA. I assumed.

DRESDEN. This is the best gondola in Venice, you bet Lady.

AMANDA. I don't have a problem with that.

(And CARLOS *comes into view, dressed in a trench coat and slouch hat.)*

DRESDEN. Loochenzo and Vine, and is this your mysterious friend waiting by that phone booth?

*(*AMANDA *sits up.)*

AMANDA. Perhaps.

(The gondola slows and CARLOS DECAPISTRANO *steps in.)*

CARLOS. Amanda…

AMANDA. *(Uncertain:)* Carlos? Is it really you?

CARLOS. It is, my Amanda. It seems I have some explaining to do.

AMANDA. It would seem.

(But they embrace. After a moment.)

TEX. *(To* CARLOS:*)* Something to eat?

CARLOS. No…no thank you, not right now.

TEX. Perhaps later.

CARLOS. Perhaps.

(He turns his attention to AMANDA.*)*

CARLOS. I'm glad you could make it. I'm afraid my life isn't worth a farthing in the day time.

AMANDA. I would think it would be easier, being dead and all.

CARLOS. Oh. That.

AMANDA. Again.

CARLOS. It was after the skiing accident—

AMANDA. Your body was never recovered.

CARLOS. No. I thought I had surely died. But it was then that I realized that the fungi that was keeping me sane had more power than I had realized.

AMANDA. Immortality.

CARLOS. Just so. And as you can imagine, the demand for this "miracle" is more than one could envision in one's wildest dreams.

AMANDA. I had one of those dreams the other night.

CARLOS. Did you.

AMANDA. And then I woke up and had another dream in which I thought I saw you in the back alleys of Venice.

CARLOS. I must also apologize for that…hasty departure.

AMANDA. I accept that. But now that's over—

CARLOS. Ah, if it were only that simple. If the dark and maddening saga of the fungi were only over so soon.

(At this point the GONDOLIERS*—who have been listening closely—listen even closer, crowding* CARLOS *and* AMANDA.*)*

AMANDA. So, the story is not complete.

CARLOS. I'm afraid not.

AMANDA. Where is the fungi?

(The GONDOLIERS *come in very very close.)*

CARLOS. The fungi is…safe.

(The GONDOLIERS *fall over in a lump.* AMANDA *and* CARLOS *surprised.)*

TEX. Something to eat?

CARLOS. No thank you.

FISK / POUND. A request perhaps?

AMANDA. Nothing at the moment.

DRESDEN. Shall we continue down this canal?

CARLOS / AMANDA. Carry on.

(All freeze.)

Scene 19 (split scene)

(Busy airport. A bank of lockers. BENEDITO *and cohorts nervously enter the scene, looking around to make sure no one is looking at them. A person bumps into* CARMELITA, *falls.)*

UNO. Skoosee. I guess I really got some *vertigo* there. I'm…I'm feeling dizzy, seeing…patterns all over the place. It's like it's got me *spellbound.*

(A person wearing a sandwich board passes by: "Tired? Relax at the Bates Motel," and in smaller letters "Hot showers, nearby swimming." The person exits.)

CARMELITA. Perhaps you should find a nice motel somewhere and get a hot shower. You'll feel better.

UNO. I can only hope.

(The sound of birds flapping. A person walks by, reading a newspaper with big headlines that read: BIRDS UNUSUALLY ACTIVE IN VENICE. LUNAR EQUINOX. Person exits, then another person enters the stage, runs to a window.)

DUO. *(Looking out window:)* That plane—it's chasing that man!

(A small crowd gathers at the window.)

TRIO. Which way are they going?!

DUO. *(Check compass:) North by northwest.*

(A couple walks by.)

QUATRO. I hope we get a room with a *rear window.*

CINQO. And no *torn curtains* like that last joint.

QUATRO. I'm for that.

(They exit as ALFRED HITCHCOCK *walks by.)*

RICKY. Boy, that guy looks familiar…

(Finally they arrive at the locker. RICKY *stands there holding the key, staring at the locker.* BENEDITO *and* CARMELITA *stare at* RICKY, *starting to fume, when finally…)*

CARMELITA. Well? Open it!

RICKY. I'm nervous.

BENEDITO. You're always nervous—open it!

RICKY. But what if it's not in there?

BENEDITO. If it's not in there, then maybe there's something else that'll lead us to it.

RICKY. I don't know. I'm afraid it won't be in there.

CARMELITA. Give me that key! *(She grabs the key, opens the locker. Pause.)* It's not in there.

RICKY. See?! See?! I knew it! I knew it!!

(They freeze; then back to…)

Scene 20 (split continues)

(The Gondola. Everything returns to "normal," but CARLOS *is suspicious of the gondoliers.)*

AMANDA. Once more around the canal, driver. I think I'm in love. *(To* CARLOS:*)* So: the fungi.

*(*CARLOS *motions to her that there is something suspicious about the gondoliers; speaks in a clearly cover-up kind of way.)*

CARLOS. Yes, well, as I was saying, it's in a safe place, and will remain there until I decide what to do about it. I can only hope that nothing happens to me, but even if someone tortured me, I would tell them nothing, for the secrets of the fungi are too precious and dangerous for any one person to hold.

(The GONDOLIERS *look at each other, decide that this is the time to act.)*

TEX. *(Throwing off his disguise:)* Well, now, ain't that somethin'. I'll tell ya', partner, somebody gonna end up with that precious cargo, and I think it should go to the highest bidder.

POUND. And in lieu of that, to the most aggressive pursuer.

(A struggle ensues, and in the midst of it, CARLOS *is about to plunge over the side of the gondola into the canal—a frozen moment.)*

CARLOS. Amanda—meet me tomorrow night at the Doge's palace. There is a masked ball every year at this time, the Festivale des

Arlequino. Wear the costume of Harlequin, and I shall recognize you. I will bring the fungi—and then I shall reveal everything.

*(*CARLOS *plunges into the canal and is gone.)*

AMANDA. Carlos!

(But he is gone.)

AMANDA. That's twice in one city.

(The GONDOLIERS *are very frustrated. But then they turn their gaze on* AMANDA, *and an idea comes into their collective heads. They smile.)*

ALL 3. Next best thing.

AMANDA. No!

(She starts to dive over the side of the gondola herself, but the GONDOLIERS *grab her and tie her up.)*

TEX. Well, now, ain't this a pretty situation. I don't know about you, boys, but I think little miss Amanda Danger knows more than she's lettin' on to.

FISK. As do I.

POUND. Likewise.

DRESDEN. Perhaps we might attempt to persuade her to share her insights with us.

AMANDA. You heard him. He's hidden the fungi.

TEX. Has he? Well we'll just see about that. *(To* DRESDEN:*)* The hideout, and step on it.

*(*DRESDEN *pulls a rip cord on the back of the gondola. A motor roars to life.)*

DRESDEN. Hold on.

(They zoom off.)

AMANDA. Carlos!

(Music! The gondola disappears.)

Scene 21 (end of split)

CARMELITA. *(Opens the locker; pause:)* It's not in there.

RICKY. I knew it! I knew it!

CARMELITA. But there is…this!

(With a flourish she whips a Harlequin costume out of the locker. Pause.)

BENEDITO. What the heck is that?

RICKY. What is this—candid camera?

(He looks around for the hidden camera.)

CARMELITA. It's a costume of some sort. And unless I miss my guess, it's a clown costume…of sorts.

BENEDITO. Well. Try it on.

CARMELITA. Try it on?

BENEDITO. Try it on.

RICKY. *(Into the unfound camera:)* Hello?

CARMELITA. I'll try it on. *(She tries in on. It fits.)* It fits.

BENEDITO. Hm.

(Everyone is at a loss as to what to do. RICKY *is still looking in the plants for the hidden camera.)*

RICKY. Hello?

*(*BENEDITO *snaps his fingers.)*

BENEDITO. The Masked Ball!

CARMELITA. Of course!

*(*RICKY *turns and sees* CARMELITA *in the costume for the first time; screams.)*

RICKY. What happened? What did I miss?!

BENEDITO. Every year the city of Venice throws a masked ball for the Festivale des Arlequino and the whole city is invited. It is the perfect place for Carlos deCapistrano to make a connection with the fungi and be inconspicuous.

CARMELITA. Of course—the Festivale des Arlequino—at the Palace of the Doge.

BENEDITO. Precisely. And he must have left this costume for someone to wear so that he would recognize them and pass on the information—

CARMELITA. Or the fungi itself.

BENEDITO. Or the fungi itself.

RICKY. *(Dawning on him:)* Or the fungi itself, eh?

(All three look at each other, smile.)

CARMELITA. I will dress up in the Harlequin outfit and mingle and—

BENEDITO. No.

CARMELITA / RICKY. No?

BENEDITO. We shall *all* dress up in Harlequin outfits and we shall have three times as much potential to hook up with Mr. deCapistrano. Remember, the whole city will be there.

CARMELITA. Brilliant!

RICKY. But where will we get the costumes?

BENEDITO. Gomballo the Costumier.

CARMELITA / RICKY. Ah!

BENEDITO. On the Via Masquerade.

CARMELITA / RICKY. Ah!

BENEDITO. Now let us hurry—time is of the essence!

Scene 22

*(*ITCHY, FRECKLES *and* SCOOP *enter the stage.)*

FRECKLES. So one minute she's there and the next minute—poof!

ITCHY. Like into thin air.

SCOOP. It's not safe.

ITCHY. What?

SCOOP. Her being alone in…this city.

ITCHY. But she knows Italian.

SCOOP. It's not enough.

*(*DEUCE *walks by with a sandwich board that reads "COME ONE, COME ALL TO THE FESTIVALE DES ARLEQUINO AT THE PALACE OF THE DOGE! SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE WITCHING HOUR. ALL VENICE WELCOME! YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS IT!"* DEUCE *smiles.)*

DEUCE. Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Doge Does Doo! Palace Pounds with Pleasure! Delirious Acrobatics Abound! Extra! Extra!

(He leaves.)

FRECKLES. Boy, that guy looks familiar.

*(*ALFRED HITCHCOCK *walk through.)*

FRECKLES. So does he.

SCOOP. If the whole city is gonna be at that masked ball, then that'll be the best place to find Amanda. She always liked a party.

FRECKLES. Good idea, Scoop.

SCOOP. Thanks, Freckles.

*(*ITCHY *sneezes.)*

SCOOP. Hankie, Itchy?

ITCHY. No, thanks, Scoop. No hankie. But thanks.

SCOOP. Danada. Let's go.

(He starts to go.)

OTHERS. Where to?

SCOOP. Ya' can't go to a masked ball without a mask. And I know just the place.

(They start to leave.)

FRECKLES. I'm tellin' you, that guy looked familiar.

ITCHY. That's what I thought.

(They exit.)

Scene 23

(In the dark…)

TEX. Right. Like he died and gone to heaven

AMANDA. I'm telling you the truth!

(Lights up.)

FISK. Yeah, and I'm Rip van Binkey.

AMANDA. Winkey.

FISK. What?

AMANDA. It's Winkey. Rip van Winkey.

TEX. That ain't the point here!

AMANDA. What is the point? That I confess to you that I know the whereabouts of something that I don't know the whereabouts to? What? You want me to tell you that the key I used to have in my pocket opens a locker somewhere where the fungi is? Is that what you want?

POUND. What key?

AMANDA. The key I used to have in my pocket that I found in Carlos's apartment.

TEX. Where is it?!

AMANDA. On the Via Cheekree, number—

POUND. The locker, Miss Danger—the locker! We know where his apartment is.

AMANDA. What locker?

TEX. The locker that the key you used to have opened!

AMANDA. I don't know of any locker.

DRESDEN. But you just said—

AMANDA. Besides I don't have the key anymore.

ALL 4. Where is it?

AMANDA. They stole it.

ALL 4. Who stole it?

AMANDA. Dr. Winkey and the man who isn't Barbarino Archipelligo, after they gave me the truth drug they had dropped into the water in the dressing room.

POUND. I thought we took care of Miss Archipelligo?

FISK. We did.

DRESDEN. Then who's masquerading as her?

TEX. Vendetta!

POUND / FISK / DRESDEN. Vendetta?

TEX. He said he knew nothing. He said deCapistrano was dead. And we bought his story, lock, stock and barrel.

*(*Lock, Stock *and* Barrel *appear.)*

TEX. Not now.

(They exit.)

POUND. Of course! And they have the key!

DRESDEN. And the key is the key to it all!

(Suddenly CIA *bursts in.)*

CIA. Cheese it! The cops!

POUND. Isn't that our line?

CIA. Whatever. You're all under arrest.

TEX. She is of no use to us! We must find Vendetta!

(They do some fancy footwork and escape.)

AMANDA. Charles. So finally you do something useful.

CIA. I always do useful things. They just sometimes masquerade as rotten things.

AMANDA. Ah.

CIA. Come on.

AMANDA. Where're we goin?

CIA. We got a party to make. And you're the bait's gonna lead me right to Mr. Carlos deCapistrano and one long overdue blue fungi.

AMANDA. Not if I can help it.

CIA. Well we'll just see about that, shan't we?

(He unties her, they exit.)

(Silence for a moment. Then LUCRECIA *bursts in through the window.)*

LUCRECIA. Aha! *(She looks around. Nothing.)*

LUCRECIA. Drat. And just when I got the hang of those window things. Well, I'm takin' the right way down this time.

(She walks to the elevator, punches the button. The elevator door opens. She falls into space.)

LUCRECIA. Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo……!

*(*DEUCE *appears.)*

DEUCE. *(To audience:)* Wait for it.

(A distant crash and tinkle of glass. DEUCE *smiles. Noise and music take us to—)*

Scene 24

(Outside Gomballo the Costumier's on the Via Masquerade. A long line of people is lined up, waiting. BENEDITO, CARMELITA *and* RICKY *enter, see the line and are astonished; shrug, get in line.)*

RICKY. The Festivale des Arlequino is very popular, I guess.

CARMELITA. I guess.

GOMBALLO. Next!

BENEDITO. Gomballo! Gomballo, it is I—Benedito Vendetta!

GOMBALLO. Benedito, my old friend! You are getting costume for the Festival ball, no?

BENEDITO. Yes, and with my friend as well.

(He puts his arm around RICKY.*)*

GOMBALLO. Ah! And what can I get for you this year? I am having some specials—would you like to see them?

BENEDITO. Well, we had in mind a very special idea…

GOMBALLO. Yes?

(He leads them into the shop, the other people in line are ticked off that they got preferential treatment, and so they start to crowd into the shop.)

Scene 25

(Down in one. ITCHY *enters dressed as Harlequin in a too large costume.* FRECKLES *and* SCOOP *are right behind.)*

ITCHY. I feel silly.

SCOOP. You look great. Like it was made for you.

ITCHY. Well, I feel silly.

FRECKLES. *(To* SCOOP:*)* Do you think this'll work?

SCOOP. Watertight.

FRECKLES. If you say so. Hey. Let me get a snap here.

ITCHY. No way!

FRECKLES. Come on!

*(*SCOOP *and* FRECKLES *hog tie* ITCHY, *smile into the camera.)*

FRECKLES. Say cheese!

ITCHY. Provolone.

*(*FRECKLES *takes a photo, and the whole theatre comes alive with music, lights and…)*

Scene 26—The Masked Ball

(—shadowy people waltz into the space, all dressed in costumes. They strike a marvelous tableau, then the lights spring to life and we see…a ballroom full of people all dressed like Harlequin. They all look at each other, stunned, then start the party anyway.)

ITCHY. Psst! Amanda! Is that you?

MAN. What?

ITCHY. Nevermind.

(He surveys the crowd of Harlequins.)

ITCHY. I feel ill.

(He moves through the crowd, listening to people's voices, trying to locate AMANDA. *Meanwhile, three Harlequins enter, holding tightly onto each other.)*

CARMELITA. What a brilliant idea.

BENEDITO. It seemed the only way to be the contact he was expecting! How was I to know —

(Another Harlequin walks close to them and says, sotto voce:)

SCOOP. Meet me in 10 minutes by the shrubbery. I just heard something that may be of great importance.

BENEDITO. Right.

(And SCOOP *moves off. Pause.)*

BENEDITO. *(To* CARMELITA:*)* Who was that?

CARMELITA. Oh, that? That was the Queen of Albania— *(Exploding:)* How should I know who that was?!

BENEDITO. Come on—let's mingle. We must find that fungi before anyone else does, or our chickens are broiled.

RICKY. You mean "Our geese are cooked."

BENEDITO. You cook your geese, I'll broil my chickens.

(As they go…)

BENEDITO. Perhaps we should wend our way to the shrubbery…

(They disappear into the crowd. Another Harlequin moves through the crowd; on his hat, a peculiar decoration that greatly resembles a mushroom. He surveys the crowd, then goes straight up to one of the anonymous Harlequins.)

CARLOS. Amanda.

AMANDA. Who—?

CARLOS. Not now. Meet me by the shrubbery in 10 minutes. Do not fail me.

(And he moves off into the anonymous crowd.)

AMANDA. But who—?

(Waltz music strikes up. Then…)

Scene 27

(The shrubbery. Many Harlequins are edging their way into the periphery of this scene. When noticed, they pretend nonchalance. In the center to the stage, there is a small foot bridge, spanning a gurgling stream. Finally, CARLOS*—with his mushroom decorated hat—walks up onto the footbridge. All the other Harlequins pay attention.* CARLOS *looks into the water, contemplating. After a few moments, another Harlequin [*AMANDA*] approaches tentatively.)*

AMANDA. Hello?

*(*CARLOS *turns.)*

CARLOS. Amanda. You came.

AMANDA. Carlos! Is it really you?!

*(*CARLOS *removes his mask.)*

CARLOS. It is.

(They embrace.)

AMANDA. Oh, Carlos. What a long strange trip it's been, to finally end up with you here, in this strange place dressed like something out of the pages of history surrounded by dozens of other people dressed like something out of the pages of history. C'est tres bizzare, n'est-ce pas mon petit chouchou?

CARLOS. Oui, mon cher. Tres tres bizarre. Mais je suis le compellitare avec les nonpareils, et vous?

AMANDA. Oui, j'ai prentemps. Et le—

DEUCE. *(Coming out of the shadows:)* Excuse me.

AMANDA/CARLOS. Yes?

DEUCE. Would you mind speaking in English—it's very hard for anyone to effectively eavesdrop when you can't understand the language.

AMANDA / CARLOS. Certainly.

AMANDA. I was saying, "Is it not bizarre, my little artichoke?", and then he said—wait a second! Who are you?

*(*DEUCE *tears off his mask.)*

DEUCE. Surely you recognize me?!

AMANDA. Deuce the News stand guy!

DEUCE. And I've brought with me, a whole cast of characters!

(Everybody rips off their masks.)

ITCHY / FRECKLES. Amanda! We're backing you up!

SCOOP. You betcha, Amanda.

AMANDA. Thanks, Scoop.

SCOOP. *(Bold and brave:)* Hankie, Amanda?

AMANDA. *(Also bold and brave:)* No thanks, Scoop.

SCOOP. *(Still bold and brave:)* Danada.

CIA. *(Also unveiling himself:)* Carlos deCapistrano, I arrest you in the name of the United States Government! And hereby take possession of the last of the fungi that you must surely have in your possession or at least nearby!

AMANDA. Carlos!

CARLOS. Do not worry, my little cummerbund. The fungi is safe…

(He takes off his hat, removes the mushroom, brandishes it.)

CARLOS. … with me!

(All gasp.)

TEX. So listen, buddy. We can work out very lucrative deal with you, your fungi and the AARRRP.

POUND. We might say 10 million pounds Sterling and a new identity in the country of your choice.

CARLOS. I'm not interested in money.

DRESDEN. Vell den, ve just…take it!

(He lunges at the mushroom, but CARLOS *sidesteps and the* USUAL SUSPECTS *fall on their faces. Three more faces are unmasked. It's* BENEDITO, CARMELITA *and* RICKY.*)*

BENEDITO. Carlos—I think it is time we got our cut.

CARLOS. Benedito. Our deal ended with the staging of the accident. We are even.

CARMELITA. We are, perhaps, even, but had we known the value of that little item in your hand, we might have renegotiated.

RICKY. We'll just hold the item for safe keeping until appropriate terms can be set.

(The three of them lunge for the fungi, but CARLOS *stops them.)*

CARLOS. I will eat the fungi.

(All gasp.)

CARLOS. If anyone makes one more move, I will eat the fungi. And there will end anyone's dreams of world domination or endless wealth, or whatever other petty dreams you are harboring. And have you forgotten about me? About my need for the fungi? Without its elixir, I will go insane and die a slow and miserable death. Don't my needs supercede anyone's here? Can anyone make a stronger claim on the powers of the Blue Royale?

(Pause.)

AMANDA. Yes, Carlos. I can.

ALL. You can?

AMANDA. There is a woman…an old woman. I met her one day before I left to come to Venice. She's the mother of my editor, and she is a lovely woman. But she is old, very old. And a good woman. Certainly, she deserves to live—

CARLOS. Forever?

AMANDA. If not forever, then…more.

(Another figure unmasks themselves—it is DENNISON PRESS, *and he is teary eyed.)*

DENNISON. That's about the most beautiful thing I've ever had the privilege of hearing.

ITCHY / FRECKLES / SCOOP / AMANDA. Editor Dennison?!

DENNISON. Thanks Amanda. That was…eloquent.

(He weeps. Everyone starts to weep. GRETTA DENNISON *appears from the shadows.)*

GRETTA. You think *you* think that was eloquent? I'm truly touched, dear.

ITCHY / FRECKLES / SCOOP / AMANDA. Editor Dennison's mother?!

GRETTA. The one and only.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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