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## Cast of Characters

CHARLIE NICKELS, hard-bitten P.I. 30s-40s.

MONA LIVINGSTON, femme fatale. 20s-30s.

IDA, Charlie's gal Friday. 30s-50s.

LADY CLAIRMONT, wealthy dowager. 40s-60s.

VERONICA CLAIRMONT, leggy heiress. Early 20s.

CLIVE CLAIRMONT, bookish heir. 20s.

JAIME, Nicaraguan gardener. 20s-40s.

ADRIAN WILSON, English butler. 40s-60s.

LOUIE, lovable thug. 30s-50s.

HENRY, smallish, crazy thug. 30s-50s.

DEWEY, not-too-bright cop #1. 30s-50s.

JONESY, not-too-bright cop #2. 30s-50s.

BUGSY, renowned Hollywood mobster. 40s.

FISTS, shadowy former boxer. 30s.

LADY MARY, crazy Hobo. Any age.

STANLEY, sane Hobo. Any age.

SHIRLEY, imposing tough. Male, 30s-50s.

## Character Notes

Other characters include ARTIE SCHOTTS, LAURA-LYNN McCALLISTER, one FEMALE PATRON, two MALE PATRONS, four HOBOS of any sex, a LIBRARIAN, an MC, and BILLY. These roles can be of any age—except where indicated—and divided up among the actors playing the principal characters. Doubling and tripling up of the principals is also encouraged whenever possible—the original cast list will give some idea how this can be done. The cast can be as small as ten if you're creative.

## Set

The set and the effects can be as elaborate or as spare as the company desires. I'd place more emphasis on props and costumes than on sets that are unlikely to be perfectly depicted anyway—i.e. guns and suits are easier to duplicate than mansions and LaSalle's. The stark nature of film noir and the heavily descriptive style of the dialogue means much of the set and the environment can be left to the audience's imagination.

## Author's Note

The director is free to stage the show however he or she likes, but it might be helpful to know some of the staging details of the original Theatre of NOTE production. A car seat and a large rear window were permanently set stage-right. When Charlie drove the LaSalle during the longer monologues, he would pretend to hold a wheel, while footage of a receding city street was projected onto the window from behind. This car set doubled as the tan Merc Coupe driven by Louie, and which is later discovered straddling the butler's body. Stage left is the only other permanent set: Charlie's office. Ida resided here, and it was the only part of the stage heavily dressed throughout as it is always Charlie's office, and Ida has a great deal of business and crime-solving to do on her own. Upstage, center-left, was positioned a periaktoi with doors. It acted as Charlie's door to his office, the door to Lady Clairmont's house (as well as the wall to display the diamond), a wall at Tony's Liquor Lounge, a wall of Bugsy's office, and the door to Louie's apartment, among other things.

## Acknowledgments

*Kill Me, Deadly* was originally produced by Theatre of NOTE, Hollywood, California. It was produced for NOTE by John Money. The original cast and creative team were as follows:

CHARLIE NICKELS . . . . .	Dean Lemont
MONA LIVINGSTON . . . . .	Kirsten Vangsness
IDA . . . . .	Lynn Odell
LADY CLAIRMONT . . . . .	Kathleen Mary Carthy
VERONICA CLAIRMONT . . . . .	Megan Bartle
CLIVE CLAIRMONT . . . . .	Nicholas S. Williams
JAIME/FISTS/HENRY . . . . .	Phinneas Kiyomura
ADRIAN WILSON . . . . .	Ezra Buzzington, Trevor H. Olsen
LOUIE/SHIRLEY . . . . .	Darrett Sanders
JONESY/STANLEY . . . . .	Joe Roche
DEWEY/BUGSY . . . . .	Keith Allan
LADY MARY / LIBRARIAN / LAURA-LYNN . . . . .	Wendi West
Director . . . . .	Kiff Scholl
Set Design . . . . .	Davis Campbell
Lighting Design . . . . .	Matt Richter
Video and Projection . . . . .	Darrett Sanders
Prop Design . . . . .	Keith Allan
Costume Design . . . . .	Kimberly Freed
Scenic Painting . . . . .	Scott Siedman
Wig Design . . . . .	James Freitas
Sound Design . . . . .	Adam Phalen
Original Music . . . . .	Bill Newlin
Makeup . . . . .	Jennifer Aspinall
Fight Choreography . . . . .	Caleb Terray
Stage Manager . . . . .	Carolyn Connolly
Running Crew . . . . .	Stacy Benjamin, Kelly Egan

Other performers include Jennifer Weaver as MONA LIVINGSTON, Lucy Griffin as VERONICA CLAIRMONT, Phil Ward as ADRIAN WILSON, Joe Roche as CLIVE CLAIRMONT, David LM McIntyre as JONESY/STANLEY and Lorianne Hill as LADY MARY / LIBRARIAN / LAURA-LYNN.

## **Acknowledgments** (continued)

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Originally Produced by Theatre of NOTE, Hollywood, CA.

## **Special Thanks**

I owe a debt of gratitude to the hard-working and talented artists at Theatre of NOTE and, of course, to Lynn.

# KILL ME, DEADLY

by Bill Robens

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(In blackness haunting, hot jazz plays. Lights come up on several different scenes in quick succession played out in silence, except for the music. At the end of each scene, the actors can either exit or freeze in position on stage. A young girl, VERONICA, puts on makeup, then loads a gun and places it somewhere sexy. A thug, HENRY, grabs a terrified man [WILSON] by the lapels, threatening him. He pulls the man's wallet out of his pocket, grabs a wad of bills then disgustedly throws the wallet in the man's face and slaps him. A wealthy older woman, LADY CLAIRMONT, sits on her sofa in front of a large diamond, holding a snifter of cognac. She hears a noise and quickly draws a pistol. A large man, LOUIE, sits at a table drinking and crying while looking at a photo of two people on the beach. A door opens and an unidentifiable woman [MONA] enters. Clearly, she is dressed to go out, and this disappoints the man. She pauses while the two look at each other. He tries to say something, but can't. She's amused by his cowardice, laughs, and exits the apartment. The man looks at the photo, takes a swig, and drops his head in shame. As the man cries, CHARLIE NICKELS enters.)*

**CHARLIE.** L.A.'s a funny place. A person can walk from Boyle Heights to Santa Monica and never see a friendly face until they get muscled by some cigar-chomping, beet-faced, card-carrying member of the LAPD's Bum Brigade, grinning at you as you take some brass knuckles to the sternum and one for good measure in the chops.

*(CHARLIE approaches a counter where an older man – ARTIE SCHOTTS – with a big grin is working.)*

**CHARLIE.** Then in prison, they'll offer you some coffee. I once got eggs benedict in the stir. Pretty good too. *(To ARTIE:)* Fifth of bourbon and a pack of Chesterfields. *(To the audience:)* You meet some pretty funny people in a funny place like this. *(Gestures to ARTIE:)* There was Artie Schotts for one. Artie was a joker, a real card. He used to run the liquor store on Franklin and Argyle. Selection wasn't much, but he'd dress the place up nice holidays, and would goose the nuns who worked the seminary off Beachwood. He also liked to hack up newsboys, harvest their thumbs and store 'em in pickle jars.

*(Lights out on ARTIE.)*

**CHARLIE.** He got the chair last August, and newsboys can hitch-hike again, but you still can't buy a jar of pickles anywhere in the county of Los Angeles. From Long Beach to San Bernardino the market for pickles just dried up. Lot o' characters in this town.

*(A sweet-looking old lady, LAURA-LYNN MCCALLISTER, enters.)*

**CHARLIE.** Lot o' folks who have what you might call "quirks." One such quirky gal, was Laura-Lynn McCallister. She was a nanny with a talent for making necklaces out of... Well, that's a story for another day.

*(Lights out on LAURA-LYNN.)*

**CHARLIE.** I've been in this racket for some time and I never let the Laura-Lynn McCallisters or the Artie Schotts get to me. None of the hopheads or reefermen, palookas or patsies, gats or gunsels could ever shake what little faith I had left in humanity. It took a real special someone to make me want to forget who I was or wish I was someone else—anyone else, anytime other than the here and now. Anywhere other than Hollywood in 1947.

## Scene 2

*(CHARLIE walks into his office. IDA is sitting by a checkerboard.)*

**CHARLIE.** It started the way most of these things start: on a Monday. I was having a run of luck in my afternoon checkers game with my secretary, Ida, when we were rudely interrupted.

*(CHARLIE moves one of his pieces to the end of the board.)*

**CHARLIE.** *(To IDA:)* King me.

**IDA.** Again? A working girl can't catch a break!

*(The phone rings, IDA answers it.)*

**IDA.** Charlie Nickels' office. *(Pause.)* He can't right now. It's too late in the day to take any calls. Mm hmm. *(Sotto voce to CHARLIE:)* This broad wants to speak to you. She says she's rich.

**CHARLIE.** How rich?

**IDA.** *(To phone:)* How rich? *(Pause.)* That rich, huh? *(To CHARLIE:)* She says she's Lady Clairmont.

**CHARLIE.** Millionaire widow, Lady Clairmont? I'll take the call.

**Scene 3**

*(As CHARLIE leaves his office for the Clairmont Mansion, he addresses the audience.)*

**CHARLIE.** Lady Clairmont lived next to the campus at UCLA on a piece of property so big from a distance you couldn't tell which was the house and which was the campus. Her front door was wide enough to fit two Kate Smiths.

*(CHARLIE heads to the front door and rings the doorbell. SHIRLEY, house tough, opens it.)*

**SHIRLEY.** Yeah?

**CHARLIE.** I'm here for Lady Clairmont. She's expecting me.

*(SHIRLEY studies CHARLIE.)*

**SHIRLEY.** We're not innersted.

**CHARLIE.** Look, friend, you got the wrong idea. I've got an appointment.

**SHIRLEY.** What for?

**CHARLIE.** I'm the county dog catcher, and the police reported a stray poodle in the area.

**SHIRLEY.** Wise guy.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** *(Offstage:)* Who is it, Shirley?

**SHIRLEY.** It's one o' them door-to-door types, Lady Clairmont. You want I should give 'im the what-for?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** *(Offstage:)* Let me lay my eyes on him first.

*(LADY CLAIRMONT enters, walks to the door and gives CHARLIE the once-over.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Hmm... Whatever he's selling I'll take a year's supply.

**CHARLIE.** I'm Charlie Nickels, Miss Clairmont. You said you wanted to see me.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Yes, of course. Come in. Shirley, take Mr. Nickels' hat and coat.

**CHARLIE.** By all means, take my hat and coat, "Shirley!"

*(SHIRLEY growls and grudgingly takes Charlie's hat and coat. CHARLIE enters the Mansion's living room. It is luxuriously appointed, but the important thing is there is an enormous diamond, the Bengal Diamond, prominently displayed in a case on the wall.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** What's your drink, Mr. Nickels?

**CHARLIE.** I'll have what you're havin'.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** A flaming gay patee?

**CHARLIE.** That'll be fine, thanks.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** One umbrella, or two?

**CHARLIE.** One, please.

*(Short pause while she fixes a drink.)*

**CHARLIE.** Nice place you got here.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** It better be. It's the largest non-military structure west of the Mississippi.

**CHARLIE.** Not bad.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** The property's rich in history too. The guest house was built on one ancient Indian burial ground, and the tennis court was built over a second. Drat the luck! We're out of coconuts. Make yourself at home, Mr. Nickels, I'll be right back.

*(She exits to fetch more coconuts. A lithe 20-year old girl, VERONICA, enters wearing a riding outfit complete with crop and jodhpurs.)*

**VERONICA.** Mother, I swear this is the last time I ride that lippizaner. If it were up to me...

*(She sees CHARLIE.)*

**VERONICA.** You're not mother.

**CHARLIE.** Say, you're right. You ever think about being a P.I.?

**VERONICA.** I'm Veronica. You must be Charlie Nickels.

**CHARLIE.** Must I?

**VERONICA.** They say you're the best private dick in the city.

**CHARLIE.** I'll have to thank my publicist.

**VERONICA.** They also say you're a man of low morals and high ideals.

*(VERONICA winces and grabs her hip.)*

**CHARLIE.** Looks like you've got a hitch in your pelvis.

**VERONICA.** It's the lippizaner I got for Christmas. He gives, but he won't break.

**CHARLIE.** Maybe you ride him too hard.

**VERONICA.** Maybe he's a big boy who needs to learn a lesson.

**CHARLIE.** Maybe he's smart enough to teach you a thing or two.

**VERONICA.** Maybe he's a dumb buck who doesn't know what's good for him.

**CHARLIE.** Maybe he'll get fed up and knock you on your butt.

**VERONICA.** Maybe I'll like it.

*(LADY CLAIRMONT re-enters.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Coconuts! Coconuts for all! Oh, Veronica, I see you've met Charlie Nickels.

**VERONICA.** I was just leaving. I'd better feed that lippizaner. You can join me if you want, Mr. Nickels—that is if you know anything about pounding hay.

*(She exits sexily. CHARLIE gives one long, low, whistle.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Did you just whistle at my daughter?

**CHARLIE.** No. So what's this all about, Ms. Clairmont?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Mr. Nickels, as you know I'm an obscenely wealthy woman.

**CHARLIE.** Yes.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Obscenely.

**CHARLIE.** Uh-huh.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Really really really...

**CHARLIE.** Get to the point!

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Someone's trying to kill me.

**CHARLIE.** How do you know?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Let's call it "a mother's intuition." Oh, and this note.

*(She hands him a note. He opens it.)*

**CHARLIE.** "I'm going to kill you."

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** What do you think it means?

**CHARLIE.** Can you think of any reason why someone would want you dead?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** I can't imagine.

*(Her son, CLIVE, enters eating out of a jar of peanut butter, and tries to hustle past the two of them.)*

**CLIVE.** Excuse me.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Clive, aren't you going to say "hello"?

**CLIVE.** Hello.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Oh, Clive, really! This is my son, Mr. Nickels. I like to think of him as an idiot savant. Clive, this is Charlie Nickels. He'll be working for your mother.

**CLIVE.** Oh, I've heard of Mr. Nickels. His name frequently appears in the scandal sheets. Is it true what they say about the prevalence of marijuana in Hollywood? That it's no longer the domain of the itinerant jazzman?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Please don't bore our guest, Clive, and stand up straight. And try to walk with some confidence instead of mincing about on those little feet of yours. Did you fire Wilson like I asked?

**CLIVE.** Not yet, Mother.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** What are you waiting for? You are so craven, Clive, and lazy. And stupid. I want that man fired immediately. I will not tolerate a criminal in our midsts.

**CLIVE.** All he did was make a phone call, Mother.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** A personal call while on duty.

**CLIVE.** He was calling the hospital. He was going into a diabetic coma because you replaced his insulin with corn syrup.

*(CLIVE digs out an enormous scoop of peanut butter and puts it in his mouth.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** I don't care. It is the principal of the thing. And get that peanut butter out of your mouth. You know how I hate it when you eat directly out of the jar.

**CLIVE.** Beff, buvuv. Bow biff...

*(He swallows.)*

**CLIVE.** Now if you're quite through, I must return to the library.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Again with those confounded books.

**CLIVE.** They're vital to my studies, mother.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Tired old fops with not a whit of manly vigor between them. I don't see why you bother. I swear, you grate on me so, I don't know how I can stand it.

**CLIVE.** *(Screams:)* Why won't you leave me alone?

(CLIVE exits and slams the door. After a slight pause, LADY CLAIRMONT laughs hysterically.)

**CHARLIE.** Are you sure you can't think of anyone who would want you dead?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Me? Nonsense. I have a heart as big as this menacing, seventy-five thousand square-foot mansion.

(The front door opens and the Clairmont gardener, JAIME, enters.)

**JAIME.** Miss Clairmont?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Jaime.

**JAIME.** I have finished the garden by the reflecting pool as you asked.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Good. Now go home. You're fired.

**JAIME.** Señora?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** That's right, fired. So you can take your things and that little hot tamale you've been seen with and clear out.

**JAIME.** You mean my sister?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** And make it quick or I'll have you deported back to Mexico.

**JAIME.** But I'm from Nicaragua.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** You heard me. Either it's Mexico or nothing.

**JAIME.** But why, Señora, why?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Don't think I don't know about the petunias.

**JAIME.** Petunias, senora?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** The other day I saw a man looking just like you selling *my* petunias in front of the Angelus Temple in Echo Park.

**JAIME.** Never, señora!

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Your lying demeans us both.

**JAIME.** But señora, to be dismissed summarily like this and in such a perfunctory manner? And just one week before completing my masters thesis?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Jaime, please. I don't speak Mexican and I can't bear to hear you throttle the English language with such vile impunity. Shirley, roughly escort Mr. Gutierrez from the premises.

**SHIRLEY.** C'mere, you!

(As JAIME is dragged away:)

**JAIME.** I will have my revenge, Lady Clairmont. You will pay for this. And the spirits of my ancestors will mock your soul as it writhes on the devil's pitchfork. Do you hear me, Lady Clairmont? You will pay! You will pay!

*(Door slams.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Now where was I?

**CHARLIE.** You were describing the size of your heart.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** I won't deny a woman of my stature has enemies, Mr. Nickels, but I fear no one.

**CHARLIE.** What about...the Bengal Diamond?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** The Bengal Diamond? That old legend? Mr. Nickels, I think you've been reading too many...

*(CHARLIE slaps her.)*

**CHARLIE.** Quit the hanky-panky! Don't think I don't know about the Diamond.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** But how could you?

**CHARLIE.** For starters—I can see it. It's right there, behind you.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Where?

*(CHARLIE keeps pointing at the diamond, but LADY CLAIRMONT either refuses to look, or doesn't try very hard.)*

**CHARLIE.** There!

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Where?

**CHARLIE.** There!

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Where?

**CHARLIE.** There! In a display case on the wall.

*(She finally sees it.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** That? Why that could be anything.

**CHARLIE.** Sure, it could be anything. But the plaque next to the display case says it's The Bengal Diamond.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** All right, Mr. Nickels, I admit it. That's the Bengal Diamond: the most expensive diamond in the world.

**CHARLIE.** I had a feelin'.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Do you have any idea what a diamond of that magnitude is worth, Mr. Nickels?

**CHARLIE.** I haven't a clue.

*(A sense of danger and foreboding overwhelms the stage via the magic of music and lights.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Have you ever heard of the Jamaican Lunacy?

**CHARLIE.** I don't believe I have.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** The name Jamaican Lunacy derives from the strange case of the man at the helm of the *El Oro del Diablo*—the pride of the Spanish Main: one Captain Rodrigo Azabathamo. He was transporting the diamond from the King of Spain to a planter in the West Indies, but his lust for the cargo caused him to go so mad that his gums bled and he lost all his teeth.

**CHARLIE.** Hmm... Sounds kinda like scurvy.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** If you're superstitious, perhaps. Determined to steal the diamond, Azabathamo took up piracy and roamed the Caribbean for four years before he was captured by the Spanish Navy. But the captain of the ship who captured Azabathamo also went insane and stole the diamond, then the next captain who captured the second captain did the same thing and on and on for the next 150 years before falling into the hands of a Duke Thumbchuckle of Westtiptipshire, England in 1772. In 1817 it was given to a Hindi prince in exchange for the Indian subcontinent, where it languished for the next 125 years.

*(Pause while lights return to normal, and then quickly get scary again.)*

Oh, and it's cursed.

*(Lights go back to normal.)*

**CHARLIE.** Where'd you get it?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** From a man who loved me very deeply.

**CHARLIE.** *(Laughs.)* I'll bet.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** You're a cynic. You've never been in love, Mr. Nickels?

**CHARLIE.** *(Haunted:)* Yeah, I was in love once. But never again. Love is for suckers. *(Back to business:)* So who was this boyfriend of yours?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** *(Laughs.)* I'm not at liberty to say.

**CHARLIE.** That does it. Mmph!

*(CHARLIE hurls his coconut at the other coconuts.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** *(Gasp!)* The coconuts!

**CHARLIE.** Stop it! Stop it right now, you hear me? I don't know what little game you've got cooked up for me, but I ain't playin', get it? I'm never been much for games. Sure I've played my share of Monopoly, but if you take me for a sucker who'll sit by, smiling, while you fiddle with the dice, move the game pieces around when I'm not looking, and lie about the cost of hotels on Pennsylvania Avenue, then I don't care if you're willing to trade me the B&O, the Reading AND Marvin Gardens for Park Place, you know why? 'Cause dames like you always start the game with Boardwalk. And if you got Boardwalk and Park Place, then it doesn't matter what cards everyone else is holding—they're all Baltic Avenue to you.

*(He leaves her and heads towards the door.)*

**CHARLIE.** Shirley, my coat and hat!

*(SHIRLEY approaches threateningly.)*

**SHIRLEY.** You better watch your mouth, pal!

**CHARLIE.** Take that!

**SHIRLEY.** Pooh!

*(CHARLIE punches SHIRLEY in the gut, and takes his hat and coat.)*

**CHARLIE.** I'd give you my card, but I can only afford so many.

*(CHARLIE exits, slamming the door as he leaves.)*

#### Scene 4

*(CHARLIE addresses the audience on the way back to his car.)*

**CHARLIE.** Lady Clairmont had me pegged as a day-player—a patsy, a stooge. An extra waving palm fronds while she paraded through a courtyard of Ethiopians and lepers.

*(LOUIE, in the shadows or unseen to the audience and behind the wheel of a '41 Merc coupe—pronounced "koo-pay"—speeds away the instant he sees CHARLIE.)*

**CHARLIE.** To add insult to injury, someone in a tan '41 Merc coupe had been casing the joint. Feeling like a mark, I chose to eschew the boxing matches and night clubs that consume most of my evenings, and retire to my apartment in the Alto Nido building on North Ivar. After a little light reading and a scotch and soda I called it a night, hoping tomorrow would be better. It wasn't.

## Scene 5

(CHARLIE enters his office where IDA is sitting on his desk reading a newspaper.)

**CHARLIE.** Morning, Kid.

**IDA.** A new record!

**CHARLIE.** How's that?

**IDA.** One meeting and she winds up dead. Usually your clients don't get killed until you're two weeks into a case. Today's paper.

(She hands him the paper.)

**CHARLIE.** "World-Famous Bengal Diamond stolen! Unlikable blue-blood, Lady Clairmont, found dead beneath Echo Park Bridge in fatal diamond heist. Experts estimate the time of death as somewhere between 10pm and 2am." (To himself, but loud enough for IDA to hear:) Whoever was driving that '41 Merc Coupe must have known I wouldn't be there to protect her. Now she's playing a harp, while I'm played for a sap.

**IDA.** Looks like we'll be working pro bono for a while.

**CHARLIE.** (Thinks to himself;) Echo Park Bridge... There's been a Hobo village beneath that bridge for a few years. Maybe it's time someone asked them a few questions.

## Scene 6

(CHARLIE quickly drives and then arrives at Echo Park Bridge. HOBOS are kneeling before LADY MARY who's wearing a diamond tiara.)

**STANLEY.** Your majesty, now that you have been delivered your crown, you want I should make your announcement?

**LADY MARY.** Have at it.

**STANLEY.** Ladies and Gentlepersons of Hoboland, your Queen by both design right and noblesse oblige, Lady Mary of Echo Park and parts without.

(HOBOS applaud.)

**STANLEY.** Your highness, have you any instructions for us, your most loyal, humble and generally disreputable subjects?

**LADY MARY.** Yes. Tonight I sleep on dry ground. And if you have any tuna, I could really go for it.

(HOBOS *laugh and applaud.*)

**LADY MARY.** I am very hungry. I don't know why you're laughing.

(HOBOS *continue to laugh.* CHARLIE *enters and his voice pierces the laughter.*)

**CHARLIE.** Alright, hobos! Cut the racket!

(HOBOS *are startled.*)

**HOBO 1.** Who's he?

**HOBO 2.** He don't belong here.

**HOBO 1.** Outsider.

**HOBO 3.** Stranger.

**HOBO 4.** Protect the Queen.

**CHARLIE.** The name's Charlie Nickels. I'm a private dick, and I'm here to investigate a murder.

**HOBO 1.** I don't believe him.

**HOBO 2.** Outsider.

**HOBO 4.** Protect the Queen.

**CHARLIE.** I'm not after you, but after those responsible for the killing of Lady Clairmont. I lost a potential client and those don't come easy.

**STANLEY.** Oh, we don't know nothin' 'bout no murder, mister.

**HOBO 1.** Yeah, we j...j...just hobos.

**CHARLIE.** (*To STANLEY:*) Don't play dumb with me, hobo! If you don't know anything, then why does that woman have a tiara on her head?

**STANLEY.** A tiara?

**CHARLIE.** Yeah, a tiara. A crown. It's the only thing in sight that isn't covered in filth.

**STANLEY.** But...she's our Queen.

**CHARLIE.** Get outta here! Oomph!

(CHARLIE *tosses STANLEY into the lake, splash!*)

**CHARLIE.** You there, Queen. I want answers and I want 'em quick, comprende?

**LADY MARY.** Shall I make it a double?

**CHARLIE.** Huh?

**LADY MARY.** Cats make me sneeze.

**CHARLIE.** I don't follow yuh.

*(HOBOS laugh hysterically.)*

**HOB0 4.** *(Whispers:)* Protect the Queen.

**CHARLIE.** Listen Lady Hobo, I've had just about enough out of you!

*(A Hobo, FISTS, tries to hide his face from CHARLIE while addressing him from the shadows.)*

**FISTS.** It's no use, mister.

**CHARLIE.** What?

**FISTS.** She's crazy. She don't mean nothin'. She just don't know what's what.

**LADY MARY.** I'd like to redeem this coupon, please.

**CHARLIE.** Oh. And who are you?

**FISTS.** I ain't no one. I just live beneath this here bridge.

**CHARLIE.** You look mighty familiar.

**FISTS.** Oh, not me. I got no friends, no name, nothin'.

**CHARLIE.** I've seen you somewhere before I just can't place it.

**FISTS.** I'm like the wind mostly. I just drift from place to place, landin' nowhere in particulars.

**CHARLIE.** I DO know you! You're Fists Johansen! I saw you contend for the flufferweight title at the Olympic Auditorium in 1936.

**FISTS.** Oh, not me, mister. You must have me confused with someone else.

**CHARLIE.** You were up against Shins McGraw. Shins was the champ but you were heavily favored.

**FISTS.** Oh, I don't much follow the prize fights.

**CHARLIE.** You'd beaten Shins senseless for five rounds, then in the sixth you tripped over your own shoelaces, fell on your face and passed out. A riot broke out that night the LAPD couldn't contain for three days.

**FISTS.** OK, you got me. I guess you can see why I...

**CHARLIE.** It was later proved you took money from the Cleveland Outfit to take a dive.

**FISTS.** I guess we've all done some things we're not too proud of.

**CHARLIE.** Then you were arrested for running a phony insurance company that ripped off old people.

**FISTS.** Like I said, I've had some real...

**CHARLIE.** Lessee... You escaped to Canada to avoid the draft, then there were those charges that you were running a sweatshop...

**FISTS.** Yeah, I really really feel bad about...

**CHARLIE.** You may or may not have hit your sister in the head with a rock. That was never verified. You were arrested for running a puppy-drowning ring. That won't endear you to the kiddies.

**FISTS.** Again, I'm so sorry about all the...

**CHARLIE.** Now here you are. All surefired and cocky. Well that mob, senior citizen, and dead puppy money isn't gonna help you much here, will it, tough guy.

**FISTS.** Nah, I guess I'm kind of a loser.

**CHARLIE.** Alright, then. Tell me everything you know.

**FISTS.** Well, it was last night around midnight when I heard some ruckus goin' on overhead.

*(On the opposite end of the stage, LADY CLAIRMONT addresses SILHOUETTE #1. The silhouette is WILSON's, though the audience won't know that.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Well, I'm here. This had better be good, as I'm missing out on having drinks from some very expensive coconuts.

*(Slight pause as we hear some mumbling from SILHOUETTE #1.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** You'll be fine. You're a survivor. You'll land on your feet.

*(Mumble mumble.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** That's not my problem, now is it?

*(SILHOUETTE #1 pulls a gun.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Aah! The nerve! If you're going to pull out that thing, you'd better have the guts to use it.

*(The menacing silhouette nervously lowers the gun.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Hah! I thought not!

*(MONA, also unidentifiable to the audience, enters as SILHOUETTE #2. SILHOUETTE #1 hands the gun to her.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Wait a minute, who's this? I thought you said you were coming alone!

*(Gunfire!)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** You shot me! How dare you!

*(#2 wrestles with LADY CLAIRMONT for her diamond, then proceeds to push her off the bridge.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** *(Coughs:)* Aah... Urgh... My diamond! Give that back! What are you doing? Get away from me, you hear me? Get away? The bridge? Not the ledge to the bridge? Not the edge of the ledge to the bridge! You're not going to push me over! You are! You are going to push me over! You're pushing! I'm losing balance! I'm about to fall! I... I... AAAAAAAHHHHHHH!

*(LADY CLAIRMONT falls off the bridge, splash noise and re-enactment ends.)*

**CHARLIE.** Hmm... Sounds pretty detailed. Did she really give the play-by-play like that?

**FISTS.** I admit it was helpful. Oh, and there's this.

*(FISTS hands CHARLIE a watch.)*

**CHARLIE.** A watch, huh? *(Reads the brand:)* "Geneva Brothers"... Uh... Thanks, but I can't really accept this...

**FISTS.** I think it's... Uh, what do you call it... Evidence. I found it under the bridge by the dead lady and grabbed it before the police got here.

**CHARLIE.** Thanks, Fists. You think maybe you'll make it back to the ring someday?

**FISTS.** Nah. I'm too crooked.

**CHARLIE.** Take care o' yourself.

*(Starts to exit. STANLEY interrupts:)*

**STANLEY.** Hey, copper! You might act all tough, but this here tiara we got'll make us all rich as Rockefellers, how do you like that?

**CHARLIE.** Only if you can get rich off rhinestones.

**STANLEY.** Huh?

**CHARLIE.** You dumb rube. Don't you know rich broads like that only wear fake tiaras when they go out at night? Looks like you're still a buncha disgusting hobos, after all.

**Scene 7**

(CHARLIE is driving to Hollywood while hot jazz plays.)

**CHARLIE.** Feeling satisfied I'd made my point with the Hobos, I left Echo Park for Hollywood to see if the Clairmont butler, Wilson, was accepting visitors. I drove my 1940 Buick LaSalle south on Vine and turned a left onto Fountain and up to Wilson's house where the old chap was already entertaining some company.

**Scene 8**

(CHARLIE hides in front of the house. WILSON is visible from inside. MONA reclines and plays Clue, and never has her face to the audience or to CHARLIE.)

**WILSON.** (*Panicking with a British accent:*) The way they taunted me... Manipulated me... Twisting every word I was saying until I swore I was going mad. For three hours those policemen grilled me. It made no sense! One of them would be very nice to me and offer me a cigarette, then the other would slam his fists down on the table and scream at me like I was a common criminal. It was as if they were playing some elaborate game of good constable/bad constable.

**MONA.** I'm going to say Professor Plum, in the Library with the Candlestick.

**WILSON.** Have you heard a word I've said?

**MONA.** I swear sometimes you are so boring!

**WILSON.** How can you play a game at a time like this?

**MONA.** That does it, I'm looking in the envelope myself.

**WILSON.** She's dead, her diamond is missing, and we're the chief suspects!

**MONA.** WE are? (*Laughs.*) There's no we. We? There's only you and you know it. I'm the Woman in Red. I'm more of a phantom than a suspect.

(MONA laughs cruelly.)

**WILSON.** What are you laughing at?

**MONA.** Do you know if I walked out that door and fed the police the incriminating evidence they're looking for, you'd be finished? And I would be with another man, a REAL man, in no time while you're dangling from a post in San Quentin with your little feet searching for some support to relieve that crushing sensation in your neck.

*(Laughs some more.)*

**WILSON.** My God, you're evil! You haven't the faintest trace of human kindness anywhere in that soulless husk you call your corporeal presence!

**MONA.** I never called it my "corporeal presence." You called it that because you're British. You're British and you're weak.

**WILSON.** Why? Why can't I be done with you, you despicable, cruel woman?

**MONA.** Despicable? You...think...I'm...despicable?

*(MONA begins to cry.)*

**WILSON.** *(Laughs sardonically:)* What do you take me for? You can cry all you like, but I shan't do your bidding any further. I will never again trust your black black spirit.

**MONA.** *(Sobbing:)* You hate me. *(More sobbing:)* I don't blame you. I AM evil. But I try to be good. I really do. But who has time these days? If only I could ever...feel...loved.

*(Lets loose with the sobbing.)*

**WILSON.** *(Relenting:)* There there. I'm sorry. You're not evil. I know I've been such a bear lately.

**MONA.** Aren't I pretty? I wore this dress just for you and you didn't even say anything.

**WILSON.** Well, let me look at it. Why, it's lovely! It is!

**MONA.** Thank you.

**WILSON.** I can't think of any girl I'd rather go "on the lamb" with than you.

**MONA.** Aw, you're sweet.

*(Slight pause, maybe they sigh like young lovers—then...MACHINE GUN FIRE! Bullets rip through the house. Plates and glass breaking. MONA and WILSON scream a lot, but neither are hit as the attack was purely a warning. CHARLIE ducks, of course. LOUIE yells from his car—either offstage or from the audience—and holding a Thompson gun.)*

**LOUIE.** That's a warning, butler! Pay up or next time you'll be paying up but with interest! And by "interest" I mean bullets. And by "paying up" I mean in your skull!

*(Car drives off.)*

**MONA.** Oh, Adrian, why won't everyone just leave us alone?

*(Police sirens approach.)*

**MONA.** The police! What'll we do?

**WILSON.** Hide yourself, my dear. I'll tell them I was polishing my old revolver when it went off several times.

*(Sirens get louder.)*

**WILSON.** Quickly now!

### Scene 9

*(CHARLIE leaves Wilson's house, and makes his way over to his office. IDA is already there, surrounded by papers and a magnifying glass, waiting for him.)*

**CHARLIE.** I was too busy dodging bullets to make out the hired meat with the gat, so I cheesed it before the cops arrived. I checked in with Ida for a cup of coffee. *(To IDA:)* You got a new hobby there, Ida?

**IDA.** Nah. Writing samples. Last night I broke into the Clairmont Mansion and grabbed some papers from every room in the house to compare them to the Old Lady's death threats. After several hours of analysis, I've concluded the handwriting on those death threats belongs to none other than Clive Clairmont.

**CHARLIE.** Good work, doll.

**IDA.** Oh, and while I was there, I took a look at the tire treads in front of the house—the ones left by that car that was watching you?

**CHARLIE.** Uh-huh.

**IDA.** They were a lateral hash design from Goodyear.

**CHARLIE.** OK.

**IDA.** You know, lateral hash?

*(CHARLIE doesn't.)*

**IDA.** It's a type of tire that required a high-grade rubber and was discontinued in 1942 on account of the war. That means that car ain't been driven much in five years. On a hunch I checked some retirement homes in the area and the folks at the Happy Tidings home in Brentwood had a car stolen from one of their residents two weeks ago: a 1941 tan Merc coupe.

*(CHARLIE fiddles with the Geneva Brothers watch.)*

**CHARLIE.** Well, that takes care of the car.

**IDA.** What's that you got there?

*(CHARLIE hands IDA the watch he got from FISTS.)*

**IDA.** *(Reading watch:)* "Geneva Brothers." Hmm... Sounds fancy.

*(IDA walks to the bookshelf and grabs an enormous tome.)*

**CHARLIE.** I found it at the scene in Echo Park.

*(IDA sets the book down on Charlie's desk and begins flipping through it.)*

**IDA.** Let me just check the ol' jewelry database. Let's see here...

*(IDA examines the watch while referencing the book.)*

Classic 1920s southern French design... Stainless clasp with...non-elastic binding. D... E... Here it is!

*(She shows what she found to CHARLIE.)*

This watch was purchased at Nelson's Pawn Shop on La Brea and Olympic.

*(Something on the watch catches IDA's eye.)*

**IDA.** D'you see these bloodstains?

**CHARLIE.** I hadn't noticed.

**IDA.** I better run some tests and see if I can come up with anything.

**CHARLIE.** Good thinking, Ida. You're a treasure. The best in the biz.

**IDA.** Good enough to join me for the new William Bendix picture at the Chinese this Thursday?

**CHARLIE.** I'm on a case, baby. You know I got no time for the pictures.

**IDA.** Always a bridesmaid.

**CHARLIE.** I'll make it up to you, sweetheart. In the meantime, call Clive Clairmont for me.

## Scene 10

*(CHARLIE driving and/or talking over jazz or something while on his way to Tony's. When he arrives, he'll be seated next to Clive. There is a steady buzz of music, people and activity about the place.)*

**CHARLIE.** I had Clive meet me at Tony's Liquor Lounge at 1517 Ca-huenga Blvd., just north of Sunset, for a little heart-to-heart.

**CLIVE.** It's true I didn't get along too well with mother; I suspect you've heard the gossip.

**CHARLIE.** A little. I know you left her little notes saying you were going to kill her.

**CLIVE.** Oh, those. (*Laughs.*) We so enjoyed ribbing one another.

**CHARLIE.** And I know that despite all of her wealth and the premature death of your father in a Pennsylvania coal fire, she was notoriously cheap.

**CLIVE.** It wasn't as bad as all that.

**CHARLIE.** She'd give you acorns for your birthday. That must have upset you.

**CLIVE.** Not particularly.

**CHARLIE.** They were collected from the acorn tree outside your house.

**CLIVE.** It's the thought that counts, Mr. Nickels.

**CHARLIE.** She wouldn't gather them herself. She'd make you do it.

**CLIVE.** Well I...

**CHARLIE.** And as an extra touch, just so's you didn't get spoiled, she'd make you give the acorns to charity, didn't she?

**CLIVE.** Now see here, what's the point of all this?

**CHARLIE.** Did you kill your mother, Mr. Clairmont?

**CLIVE.** Of course not! How dare you, sir!

(*CHARLIE grabs CLIVE by the collar.*)

**CHARLIE.** Look here, Fontleroy! No one raises their voice to Charlie Nickels, see? I know your mother's murder must have been hard on you, but it just so happens that with the 50 million semolians you look to inherit due to your old lady's untimely run-in with the business-end of a Smith and Wesson, you've hit the top of the LAPD's "most likely prep-school flunky to ice their mothers" list. So either you play straight with me, or you keep crackin' wise and get yourself fitted for a new pair of striped pajamas, capiche?

**CLIVE.** Yes. I'm sorry, Mr. Nickels, you're right.

(*CHARLIE lets go in disgust.*)

**CLIVE.** I apologize if I've acted untoward.

**CHARLIE.** Don't worry about it.

(*LOUIE and HENRY approach the table.*)

**HENRY.** I shoulda known it was you makin' a rumpus.

**CHARLIE.** Louie, Henry, I didn't know you two mugs were still working here.

**LOUIE.** Look, Charlie, we don't want no trouble.

**CHARLIE.** No trouble, huh? That's good because me and my friend could use a drink.

**HENRY.** Your money's no good here.

**LOUIE.** The boss won't take it, Charlie, you know that.

**CHARLIE.** Tony's getting mighty particular in his old age.

**HENRY.** The Boss is always lookin' out fer the bum steer.

**LOUIE.** Your money always comes up counterfeit.

**CHARLIE.** Tony forgets he owes me one. If it weren't for me, he'd be tending gardens in Fulsom instead of running a "classy" joint like this.

**HENRY.** The Boss don't see it that way.

**CHARLIE.** Just get me a drink. I'm parched. I'll take a Manhattan, and junior here will take a chocolate milk.

**CLIVE.** No, make that two manhattans. I assure you I can handle my liquor, Mr. Nickels. I've been to University.

**CHARLIE.** Two manhattans, and you better not slip me a Mickey. This should take care of it.

*(CHARLIE hands LOUIE \$10 worth of Monopoly money.)*

**HENRY.** What's the big idea?

**LOUIE.** Aw, jeez, Charlie, this stuff don't look real to the casual observer. It's got the little choo-choos on the front.

**HENRY.** It ain't even green.

**CHARLIE.** Just beat it an' make with the liquor.

**LOUIE.** OK, but the Boss ain't gonna like this.

**HENRY.** Wise guy.

*(LOUIE and HENRY exit.)*

**CHARLIE.** Now tell me what you know about the Bengal Diamond.

**CLIVE.** It's the only 300 karat red diamond in the world. Mother got it as a gift from an Indian Rajah when she saved his life.

**CHARLIE.** I remember that. Didn't he have a heart attack?

**CLIVE.** Mother was there on business, when he suffered an attack, mid-conversation. She rushed to his side and gave him some aspirin. He recovered nearly immediately since it turned out to be heartburn, but he was so convinced that she had saved his life, he insisted that she take the diamond as his gift. Ironically, he died three days later from an allergic reaction to aspirin.

**CHARLIE.** Isn't the diamond supposed to be cursed?

*(Lights go down and everything gets real scary.)*

**CLIVE.** Yes, they call it the 95-year curse. Every owner of the diamond going back seven centuries dies in their sleep at the age of 95 or older.

**CHARLIE.** Spooky.

*(Lights back up.)*

**CLIVE.** Despite this horrifying curse, mother insisted on keeping it.

*(MONA walks by with a couple drinks on her tray.)*

**MONA.** Your drinks, Gentlemen.

*(She hands the drink to CHARLIE.)*

**CHARLIE.** Thanks, doll.

**MONA.** *(To CLIVE:)* Will a glass do, young man, or shall I get you a sippy-cup?

*(Hands drink to CLIVE.)*

**CLIVE.** Now see here...

**CHARLIE.** Cool it, junior.

**CLIVE.** Haven't I met you somewhere before?

**MONA.** I don't know. Was it some place a cheap line like that works?

**CLIVE.** *(To CHARLIE:)* I swear I know her from some place.

**MONA.** I work a lot of clubs in town. The Cabana Club, The Derby Grove, The PooCAMBOO, The Death Rattle, and on Wednesdays I play the vibraphone at Nebakanezer's Babylon Hut.

**CHARLIE.** I saw that show. *(To CLIVE:)* She did the whole number with six pounds of bananas on her head. She handled the mallets like she was carving a turkey.

**MONA.** I like whacking small metal bars with soft little hammers.

**CHARLIE.** Hmm... That wasn't as dirty as I anticipated.

**MONA.** Well, stick around. It's lookin' to get a whole lot dirtier.

*(We hear a general bustle and an MC makes an announcement.)*

**MC.** *(Voice-over:)* Ladies and Gentlemen: the dulcet tones of Miss Mona Livingston!

**MONA.** If you'll excuse me, I'd better run. Any requests?

**CHARLIE.** Yeah. You know "Rainbow Dream"?

**MONA.** Does Joe Louis beat guys senseless?

*(She heads to the stage and says something under her breath to the piano player. CLIVE drinks his Manhattan and coughs.)*

**CLIVE.** Goodness, what's in this?

**CHARLIE.** Nothing you'll find at one of your universities.

*(Spotlight on MONA in full torch-song mode.)*

**MONA.** This is dedicated to the children of the world who dream about rainbows.

*(She proceeds to sing.)*

**MONA.** *(Prelude:)*

DREAM ABOUT A RAINBOW  
A BRIGHT ENCHANTING RAINBOW  
DREAM ABOUT THE CHILDREN WHO DARE  
TO DREAM ABOUT A RAINBOW  
HIGH UPON A MOUNTAIN  
BATHED IN DREAMY SUNLIGHT  
THE CHILDREN OF THE MISTY HILLS  
ARE SINGING IN THE MOONLIGHT

*(Verse:)*

SEEK SHELTER IN A RAINBOW DREAM  
SING THE CHILDREN OF THE HILLSIDE  
THINGS ARE NE'ER AS BAD AS THEY SEEM  
THERE ARE FEW WILD COUGARS FROM WHICH TO HIDE  
ALWAYS REACH FOR THE BRIGHTEST STAR  
SING THE CHILDREN ON THE HILLSIDE  
ALWAYS BELIEVE IN WHO YOU ARE  
AND ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

*(Bridge:)*

OF LIFE  
THERE IS TROUBLE HIDING IN THE WAVES  
AND CHOICES YOU MUST MAKE  
BUT LIKE THE MIGHTY UNICORN  
WHO WEARS A COAT THAT'S NEWLY SHORN

RIDE THE HIGHEST WAVE INTO THE SUN

*(Chorus:)*

LIVE THAT RAINBOW DREAM  
INTO THE PLACE WHERE CHILDREN PLAY  
CROSS THAT RAGING STREAM  
OE'R THE BRIDGE OF HAPPY DAYS  
COME ALONG AND JOIN THE WINNING TEAM  
YOUR HEART HAS SO MUCH TO SAY  
AND SAVE A DREAM FOR ME.

*(Everyone applauds. MONA returns to the table.)*

**MONA.** What'd ya think?

**CLIVE.** I thought you handled that transition at the end of the prelude quite...

**MONA.** Not you! Him.

**CHARLIE.** What do you need my opinion for? You don't know me from Adam.

**MONA.** I know you're Charlie Nickels.

**CHARLIE.** Is that so?

**MONA.** I know you're a private dick, and you've been looking all over Los Angeles for a lead on the Bengal Diamond case.

**CHARLIE.** Looks like you're quite the gumshoe yourself. Anything you can fill me in on?

**MONA.** You're a fool, Charlie. Every two-bit hood and snoopy Mc-Snoopkins in Los Angeles has been trying to crack this case. What makes you think you can do any better?

**CHARLIE.** Suppose I told you I knew who the killer was?

**MONA.** Suppose I didn't believe you?

**CHARLIE.** Suppose that broke me up inside?

**MONA.** Suppose you went roller skating to forget your troubles?

**CHARLIE.** Suppose I went roller skating, fell and skinned my knee?

**MONA.** Suppose I kissed your boo-boo and made it all better?

**CHARLIE.** Suppose it wasn't my boo-boo you were kissing?

**MONA.** Hmm...

*(LOUIE comes running up to the table.)*

**LOUIE.** Charlie, it's Tony! He's... *(Sees MONA:)* Oh, excuse me, Ms. Livingston.

**MONA.** That's all right, Louie. What is it?

**LOUIE.** *(To CHARLIE:)* It's Tony! He's awful mad about the funny money eminatn' from your table, Charlie. And Ms. Livingston, he said he was...

*(Reciting a memorized line:)*

...fed up with your shenanigans, said you were a no-good tramp, and if he ever saw your face again he'd kill ya, dame or no dame. I never seen him like this. Ya's better amscray. I gotta go. I can't be seen here.

*(LOUIE runs off.)*

**CHARLIE.** We'd better get outta here or next time you sing it'll be through a fat lip.

**MONA.** Let that big monkey try it!

**CHARLIE.** I wouldn't push my luck if I were you. Can you get home alright?

**MONA.** I don't have a car! I can't drive!

**CHARLIE.** You can come with us. C'mon!

*(CHARLIE grabs MONA and CLIVE and they start to exit. They work their way through the crowd but stop as they reach the door. CLIVE turns around to say something to CHARLIE. While CLIVE speaks, MONA surreptitiously, or not-so-surreptitiously, stabs CLIVE from behind.)*

**CLIVE.** Mr. Nickels, I've got it! I know where I've seen Ms. Livingston before! It was on the night of the murder. I was across the street from the library when I bumped into her, causing me to drop my books. I noticed she seemed rather nervous and... AAAGGH!!

**CHARLIE.** Kid, take it easy, it's not all that... *(Sees the knife:)* Kid!

*(CHARLIE removes the knife from CLIVE's back. A woman screams. There is a bustle of activity.)*

**MALE PATRON 1.** That boy's been stabbed!

**FEMALE PATRON.** That man's got a knife! Someone stop him!

**MALE PATRON 2.** Yeah! Someone grab him!

*(MONA runs in as if she'd been somewhere.)*

**MONA.** Charlie, what happened?

**CHARLIE.** Clive's been murdered! Where were you?

**MONA.** I was talking to someone when a strange man hurled a knife at me! I was just able to get out of the way.

**FEMALE PATRON.** Why won't someone stop him?

**MALE PATRON 1.** He's right there! Someone should stop him!

**MALE PATRON 2.** Someone should definitely grab him! He's just a couple feet away!

**MONA.** Charlie, let's get out of here! Someone's trying to kill me! Run, Charlie, run!

**CHARLIE.** I'll run for now. But no one frames Charlie Nickels, you hear me? No one.

*(He kisses MONA passionately. They exit.)*

### Scene 11

*(CHARLIE's driving home with MONA. During the monologue he'll drive while she rests her head on his shoulder, seeking comfort. Near the end, he'll rouse her and lead her into his apartment.)*

**CHARLIE.** Clive Clairmont—murdered. In just 48 hours he went from ne'er-do-well to captain of industry to the losing player in a game of knife-in-the-back paddycake. As for the girl, Mona Livingston, the moment I saw her I knew that I had to have her. I don't know why. Maybe it was her gams, or her hair, or her spectacular set of pipes. Whatever it was, she had a hold on me like a wolverine on a moose.

*(They enter Charlie's apartment. There are sirens outside.)*

**CHARLIE.** You can sleep in the bedroom. I'll take the couch.

**MONA.** I can't stay here. I have work in the morning.

**CHARLIE.** I know it's not the Roosevelt, but it should be O.K. for a high-class dame like yourself. And as for Tony's Liquor Lounge, consider yourself laid off.

**MONA.** Well this is entirely uncalled for, and I won't stand for it.

*(Gets up to leave.)*

**CHARLIE.** Get away from that door!

**MONA.** *(Refusing:)* Harumph!

*(CHARLIE grabs her and throws her down on the couch.)*

**CHARLIE.** You'll stay put and you'll like it! You just witnessed a murder, and I was seen holding the murder weapon. That makes you an accomplice. And as for Tony's, I'd make myself scarce. Whatever you did to Tony got him mighty steamed, and if you go back there they'll greet you like you were a giraffe at a vampire convention.

**MONA.** Oh, Charlie! How could this have happened? And that poor boy! Why, Charlie, why?

*(Sobs.)*

**CHARLIE.** Look, I'm sorry you had to get caught up in all this, but there are about a hundred flatfoots out there dying to get their hands on yours truly, so we'll just have to stay put.

*(Gets closer.)*

**MONA.** How long do we have to be holed up like this?

**CHARLIE.** I don't know.

*(Slight pause as they come very close to kissing before he releases her.)*

**MONA.** *(Chuckles.)* Well, Mona, you've really done it this time. Wait'll the gang back in Tulsa hears about this.

**CHARLIE.** What difference does it make what they hear back home?

**MONA.** You don't know Mona Livingston. She's always got a story. There's this one she tells about a small-town girl who comes out to California so she can become a big movie star, only maybe she doesn't get so big so fast, see, and she's gotta tell the gang back home something. So she makes up this story that she changed her name to Lana Turner. Then maybe the gang's not so sure Mona's telling the truth on account o' she's a redhead and a little shorter, and this Mona had to keep writing home asking for money, and Lana Turner's pretty rich. And the return address on the envelope said "Mona Livingston" and... And... Oh, Charlie!

*(She cries uncontrollably.)*

**CHARLIE.** It's OK, baby.

*(She keeps crying.)*

**CHARLIE.** It'll be all right.

*(She keeps crying.)*

**CHARLIE.** Now now...OK.

*(She keeps crying, he slaps her.)*

**CHARLIE.** Stop it, you hear me? Stop it! You gotta be strong! I don't care who you are. I don't care if you're Lana Turner in disguise,

or Mona Livingston and broke and unemployed. And I don't care about your friends, and if you're a joke or not, or if you're the most unpopular loser from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and you know why?

**MONA.** (*Feebly:*) Why?

**CHARLIE.** Because right now you're with me. And I happen to think you're a pretty swell kid. (*Pause.*) You're trembling.

**MONA.** Oh... I guess I'm just nervous. I've never been so close to a world-famous detective is all.

**CHARLIE.** I'm not so world-famous...once you get to know me.

(*Fireworks, music, smooching, blackout.*)

## Scene 12

(*The next morning, they are having breakfast. A table should be set serving two.*)

**MONA.** Wow! A complete breakfast, how splendid! They say breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but I never have it. Who has time these days?

**CHARLIE.** How's your eggs, Mona?

**MONA.** Just perfect. Hard on the outside, soft on the in. And the orange juice! We owe a lot to oranges when you think about it. They give us so much and ask for so little in return.

**CHARLIE.** Hmm...

(*A knock on the door, and some dramatic music. CHARLIE pulls his gun.*)

**MONA.** Charlie, who is it?

**CHARLIE.** I don't know. You'd better hide in the other room.

**MONA.** What are they gonna...

**CHARLIE.** Hurry!

(*MONA exits. More knocks.*)

**CHARLIE.** Who is it?

**DEWEY.** (*Offstage:*) It's me, Charlie, Dewey. Open up!

(*CHARLIE opens the door. DEWEY and JONESY enter.*)

**CHARLIE.** Hey, fellas. Dewey, Jonesy.

**JONESY.** Top o' the mornin'.

**DEWEY.** Hiya, Charlie. Smells good. Whatcha got cookin'?

**CHARLIE.** Some breakfast. Cup o' joe?

**DEWEY.** No time, Charlie.

**JONESY.** Kinda busy.

**DEWEY.** Yeah, kinda busy, you see, on account o' this murder that took place last night.

**CHARLIE.** Murder, huh?

**DEWEY.** Yeah, seems some blueblood got a little get-well card in the form of a knife.

**JONESY.** Yeah, only it was in his back. And it didn't make him well so much as... Uh, you know...

**DEWEY.** Dead.

**JONESY.** Yeah, dead.

**DEWEY.** So, you wouldn't know anything about that, would you?

**CHARLIE.** Geez... That's awful. What is this world coming to?

**JONESY.** In a handbasket, I says.

**DEWEY.** The victim was one Clive Clairmont, and the whole sordid affair took place last night at Tony's Liquor Lounge.

**JONESY.** A place which you've been known to frequent from time to time.

**CHARLIE.** Not any more, fellas. In case you haven't heard, Tony and me are on the outs. The only drink I'd get served there is a clop in the chops.

**DEWEY.** Sure, only we got witnesses sayin' they saw someone looking just like you holding the kid in one hand, and a bloody knife in the other.

**JONESY.** So you can see why we might want to ask you what happened.

**CHARLIE.** You boys have been reading too many dime novels. I wasn't there last night, I was at the office reorganizing my to-do files.

**DEWEY.** To-do what? Murder a kid?

*(Flurry of activity while CHARLIE gets up to punch him.)*

**CHARLIE.** I don't have to take that from you!

**JONESY.** Easy! Easy!

**DEWEY.** Let him go, Jonesy! Maybe when we throw him in the cooler for assaulting a police officer, he'll tell us about the murder AND about that girl he was with.

**CHARLIE.** What girl? What are you talking about?

**DEWEY.** You know what I'm talking about. That girl you were seen with last night: Mona Livingston.

**JONESY.** A real looker.

**DEWEY.** Yeah. Pretty. Nice pins, nice pipes... And she would have known the victim pretty well since she'd been seen chatting up his sister.

**JONESY.** Veronica Clairmont.

**DEWEY.** The singer's been dipping her beak with Miss Clairmont, nightly, at Tony's for the past several weeks. Except for that one night.

**JONESY.** Yeah, the night of Lady Clairmont's murder little Miss Clairmont was having a tete a tete with some geezer.

**DEWEY.** Livingston wasn't there for that.

**JONESY.** The old man is as yet unidentified, but it's curious that Livingston wasn't at her regular table with Veronica Clairmont the night the old Lady gets shot and thrown off a bridge.

**DEWEY.** Funny coincidence, that.

**JONESY.** But she was seen with you last night.

**DEWEY.** Was a cocktail waitress at Tony's, then some kid puts a down payment on a wooden kimono, then she's gone.

**CHARLIE.** What would I know about some working girl? I don't do H.R. for Tony's, so you can crack foxy somewhere else.

**DEWEY.** Yeah? Then why do you got two plates of eggs?

**CHARLIE.** What are you driving at?

**DEWEY.** Two plates. You see that, Jonesy?

**JONESY.** Sure. Eggs, bacon, toast, waffles, French toast, hot tea, coffee, granola... Two of each. Breakfast for a king and his queen!

**DEWEY.** A regular smorgasbord!

**CHARLIE.** That does it!

*(CHARLIE grabs a plate of eggs and throws it towards DEWEY and JONESY.)*

**JONESY.** Dewey, look out! Eggs!

**CHARLIE.** I just want to enjoy my breakfast, see? Maybe, after working all night at the office, I'd like to indulge in a double helping of breakfast without getting interrupted at 8:30 in the morning by a couple of slow-witted flatfoots with chips on their shoulders because they're stuck on another case that, if they screw up, will be their twelfth unsolved murder in a row, insuring them a bust back down to sergeant and a career of rousting railroad bums for extra cash so they can get a little something for their wives to help them forget they're married to the dullest, most pathetic dicks on the force!

**JONESY.** Hey!

**DEWEY.** Gee whiz, Charlie, you don't have to get personal.

**JONESY.** Yeah, we're just bantering with you, Charlie.

**CHARLIE.** Take your banter somewhere else. It bores me.

**DEWEY.** We're goin'. We're goin'.

**JONESY.** Just let us know if you hear anything.

**CHARLIE.** You'll be lucky if you get a Christmas card.

*(Door slams. MONA enters.)*

**MONA.** Are those awful men gone?

**CHARLIE.** Yeah.

**MONA.** Oh, thank goodness! Charlie, what would I do without you? I can always count on you in a crisis. That's what I like about you. You're quick on your feet, and that'll help us if we have to leave town to get away from the police. Oh, just think how romantic, Charles! We can move to my cousin's place in San Berdoo. You can support us by working odd jobs. And I can stay home and bake cookies all day. And maybe some pecan pie! Then, if there's a county fair, we can...

**CHARLIE.** Clam up, will ya!

*(CHARLIE throws a plate of eggs at MONA.)*

**MONA.** Charlie, why are you throwing eggs at me?

**CHARLIE.** "Help me," she says. "Oh, that poor boy," she says.

**MONA.** Are you mocking me?

**CHARLIE.** Tell me about Veronica Clairmont.

**MONA.** Veronica who?

**CHARLIE.** You said you were afraid someone was trying to kill you. You didn't say you were bosom chums with the victim's sister. The same sister who just inherited \$100 million.

**MONA.** Wait. You don't understand!

**CHARLIE.** You're involved in this thing deeper than you let on. How? And don't feed me any more stories about Tulsa and how lonely you are.

**MONA.** But... I'm so lonely.

**CHARLIE.** What do you know about the Clairmonts?

**MONA.** You're right. I deserve your scorn. I am a terrible liar some times. I know I am. But only because I've never been so close to death, and that boy... And that knife... And I... I...

*(Sobs.)*

**CHARLIE.** Look, Mona, I'm not the police. But I can't help you unless you level with me.

**MONA.** Veronica Clairmont started coming in to Tony's on a regular basis starting about six weeks ago. She intimidated the regulars, but she seemed very sweet to me and vulnerable.

**CHARLIE.** Did she talk about her mother much?

**MONA.** Not really. Funny, though... *(Thinks.)* When she did talk about her mother she'd kinda clench her teeth, and then she'd grab a napkin and tear at it. Then she might absentmindedly claw at the napkin with a cocktail spear like she was kinda torturing it out of some pent-up desire for revenge. Funny.

**CHARLIE.** Who was the older man she was with?

**MONA.** I don't know. They seemed to be talking about something very important, and I didn't want to bother them.

**CHARLIE.** And you never saw Clive before last night?

**MONA.** No. She always came alone.

**CHARLIE.** What about the Butler? Did she ever talk about him?

**MONA.** *(Laughs lightly.)* A butler? I don't know anything about a butler.

**CHARLIE.** Did she ever talk about the diamond?

**MONA.** I swear I never heard of the diamond until it was in all the papers!

*(CHARLIE starts to leave.)*

**MONA.** Where are you going?

**CHARLIE.** I've got to get to work.

**MONA.** Charlie, don't leave me!

**CHARLIE.** (*Gently:*) It'll be OK, sweetheart. You just lay low here for a while. Help yourself to whatever's in the icebox, and I'll be back this afternoon.

**MONA.** Wait! Do you... Do you believe me? It's very important that you do.

**CHARLIE.** I believe you, baby.

**MONA.** Do you...love me, Charles?

*(He kisses her.)*

**CHARLIE.** Call my office if you need anything.

*(He exits.)*

### Scene 13

*(CHARLIE drives a bit, then quickly heads to a pay phone. IDA will appear in the office.)*

**CHARLIE.** Mona Livingston was as tough to figure out as a jigsaw puzzle made of soap.

*(Picks up a phone.)*

Ida! Nickels!

**IDA.** Charlie Nickels, as I live and breathe. You know you're late. And if you weren't my boss I'd fire you.

**CHARLIE.** You're a taskmaster, Ida. Listen, I was hoping to stop by the office...

**IDA.** I wouldn't do that if I were you.

**CHARLIE.** Why's that?

**IDA.** 'Cause a couple o' good humor men from Tony's were here this morning to pay you a visit. I told 'em you weren't gonna be in today, but they hung around the office for twenty minutes polishing brass knuckles and playing cat's cradle with piano wire.

**CHARLIE.** Is that so?

**IDA.** So's you might want to stick to house calls for a while 'til the heat cools off. Oh, and I have a message for you.

**CHARLIE.** Who is it?

**IDA.** He didn't say, but he's afraid his life is in danger, and he needs to see you right away. He lives in La Loma in Chavez Ravine.

### Scene 14

*(CHARLIE arrives at a small house in a poor neighborhood. The front door is slightly ajar and from outside we can hear the sounds of families speaking in Spanish, chickens clucking, cows mooing and music in the air. JAIME is seated alone in the dark. CHARLIE knocks on the door and there is a slight pause. He slowly pushes the door open and sticks his head in, reaching for, but not removing, the gun in his shoulder holster.)*

**CHARLIE.** Hello? It's Nickels!

**JAIME.** *(Darkly:)* Come in, Señor Nickels. Sit down! Sit down, por favor!

*(CHARLIE closes the door, and all outside noise immediately stops.)*

**CHARLIE.** Jaime, right?

**JAIME.** Si. Jaime Guttierrez. Lo siento... Um... I'm sorry for the... Cómo se dice... Premonitory circumstances.

**CHARLIE.** Don't mention it.

**JAIME.** Can I get you some tea? *(Darkly:)* I have chamomile.

**CHARLIE.** No thanks, I'm in a bit of a hurry.

**JAIME.** Of course. My life, it seems, may be in danger, so it behooves us both if this mystery is... How you say... Resolved expeditiously.

**CHARLIE.** Yeah, me too. I understand you have some information?

**JAIME.** Sí, señor. I was in Echo Park the night of the murder. I was in front of the Angelus Temple as I am every night selling petunias to the passersby when I saw Clive Clairmont leaving the library.

*(Flashback: Nighttime in front of the library CLIVE is holding some books and speaking with the LIBRARIAN.)*

**LIBRARIAN.** Good night, Clive.

**CLIVE.** Thank you, Ms. Hutchinson, for keeping the library open so late in the evening.

**LIBRARIAN.** Oh, Clive, you're such a charming boy.

*(The door shuts – CLIVE walks alone in the dark.)*

**CLIVE.** That went well. I found the Balzac I wanted, and one can never read too much Chaucer.

*(We hear distant gun shots.)*

**CLIVE.** What was that? Was that backfire?

*(A voice in the distant screams, then you hear a distant splash.)*

**CLIVE.** What a harrowing scream! And then that splashing sound! A woman must have been alarmed by her car backfiring, and then panicked and threw a bucket of water on her tailpipe. But why would someone carry a bucket of water in her car? I wonder if they left the library open.

*(MONA enters—though again, it's unclear who it is, at least in theory.)*

**MONA.** Watch it, stupid!

*(MONA and CLIVE collide, and his books go flying.)*

**CLIVE.** Pardon me, Madam! But I believe you owe me an apology!

**MONA.** Out of my way!

**CLIVE.** My, but you're sweating!

**MONA.** I said "move it!"!

*(She shoves him, and runs off.)*

**CLIVE.** I wonder where she's going in such a hurry.

*(Flashback fades away somehow.)*

**CHARLIE.** And you couldn't make out who the girl was?

**JAIME.** No, señor. There was just enough to light to see everything except that.

**CHARLIE.** Hmm... Thanks for the tip, Jaime.

*(Gets up to leave.)*

**CHARLIE.** Now, if you'll excuse me.

**JAIME.** Yes, I had better get to work myself. I need to pack my things. The city is tearing down Chavez Ravine and the paving process is to begin in four days.

**CHARLIE.** I heard about that. That's a tough break.

**JAIME.** It's not so bad. The city says my little home will provide parking for up to three cars!

**CHARLIE.** Is it true they're planning on building a ballpark here?

**JAIME.** No. Just parking.

*(Slight awkward pause.)*

**CHARLIE.** Well, adiós!

*(CHARLIE exits.)*

**Scene 15**

(CHARLIE drives, then arrives at the Clairmont Mansion's backyard, where VERONICA is lounging sexily by the pool.)

**CHARLIE.** I returned to the Clairmont Mansion, climbed the fence in the back and got a look at the Mansion's yard. It was big. Biggest back yard I'd ever seen. There was a menagerie, a botanical garden, a golf course, a miniature golf course, a livery, a miniature livery, and a river winding through a manmade forest of pine trees and stuffed elk until it reached the back of the house where twenty Greek gods were spitting chlorinated water into a pool the size of the Rose Bowl. Sunbathing by the pool was a living goddess. One Veronica Clairmont.

**VERONICA.** Are you going to say something or are you just going to stand there watching me put on cocoa butter?

**CHARLIE.** I was waiting for you to stop, but it's taken fifteen minutes. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?

**VERONICA.** Is this where I get grilled?

**CHARLIE.** Excuse me?

**VERONICA.** Isn't that what they call it in your profession, Mr. Nickels? "Grilling a suspect?"

(VERONICA stands.)

**CHARLIE.** I suppose...

**VERONICA.** Or are you going to give me "the business"? I don't know if I could handle it.

**CHARLIE.** I think you could.

**VERONICA.** I might crack under pressure.

**CHARLIE.** I'd like to see that.

**VERONICA.** Could you tell if I was lying?

**CHARLIE.** Sure.

**VERONICA.** I'll bet you have an innate sense of when someone is... "Taking you for a ride."

(VERONICA comes in close.)

Is that something they teach you in detective school or do you have to be born with it?

**CHARLIE.** I guess I'm pretty good at reading lips.

**VERONICA.** Is that so? Read these.

(VERONICA leans in and gives him a long, slow, kiss.)

Well? What were they saying?

**CHARLIE.** Inconclusive. I'll need a follow-up.

(He kisses her.)

**VERONICA.** Now?

**CHARLIE.** I think they're trying to tell me your whereabouts on the night of your mother's murder.

(VERONICA, shunned, coldly backs away.)

**VERONICA.** I was training my Lipizzaner, Brutus.

**CHARLIE.** I saw you that afternoon, and you had just finished riding him. How often do you ride that horse?

**VERONICA.** For your information, Mr. Nickels, I own six Lipizzaner stallions, three thoroughbreds, two greyhounds and one gamecock. Each one requires several hours of work at all times, day and night.

**CHARLIE.** Tell me: how do you tend to all that livestock and still prowl seedy bars at night?

**VERONICA.** Seedy bars? What do you...

**CHARLIE.** (*Interrupting:*) Look, baby, I know you've spent every evening for the past six weeks throwing back cocktails with the dead-enders at Tony's Liquor Lounge, so you can peddle your wares somewhere else, 'cause I'm not buyin'.

**VERONICA.** (*Laughs:*) Mr. Nickels, where do you get these tawdry rumors?

**CHARLIE.** You were there that night, weren't you?

**VERONICA.** I was. After I rode Brutus, at about nine o'clock, getting home at three the next morning.

**CHARLIE.** You weren't alone. You were with a man. An older man.

**VERONICA.** I'm always with older men.

**CHARLIE.** You knew this man intimately. Who was he?

**VERONICA.** I was with Wilson, our butler. He was in the market for some tea and sympathy, so I thought I'd oblige.

**CHARLIE.** You make social visits with him often?

**VERONICA.** Just once before—at Tony's, two days previous. He's been in our family since I was a child. Taught me how to ride horses. And how to train gamecocks.

**CHARLIE.** What did you talk about?

**VERONICA.** Mostly we talked about Mother. You may not know this, Charlie, but he and my Mother were lovers once. To Mother it was a fling, but he was desperately in love with her. When he arrived at Tony's that night, he was very upset and very drunk.

**CHARLIE.** Did he leave with you?

**VERONICA.** We talked for a couple hours, he made a crude pass at me, as all men do eventually, then excused himself and went home. He's a good man. He knew my father in the First World War.

**CHARLIE.** They serve together?

**VERONICA.** Father was a colonel in the army, and Wilson was a corporal in an English Butler Squadron. After the war he came to work for us.

**CHARLIE.** Did you ever notice anything suspicious?

**VERONICA.** Not particularly. *(Suddenly remembers something:)* Oh, he kept a snubnose .45 in the pantry.

**CHARLIE.** Is that standard issue for Bel Air help?

**VERONICA.** He only needed it because he had \$75,000 in gambling debts and people were always threatening to kill him.

**CHARLIE.** Who threatened to kill him?

**VERONICA.** I don't know. I remember these two thugs used to come by every few months and break and then re-break his legs.

**CHARLIE.** Do you know who they were working for?

**VERONICA.** I heard them threatening him sometimes, but had trouble making out who sent them. It was...something Siegel... Bugsy something.

**CHARLIE.** Hmm... That could be anyone.

*(VERONICA comes in close.)*

**VERONICA.** Listen, Charlie, I know my unorthodox way of dealing with the loss of two close family members by sunning myself by the pool isn't the best way to evoke sympathy... But—

*(CHARLIE puts a finger to her lips, muzzling her.)*

**CHARLIE.** Shh... You just keep tanning, sweetheart. I'll find whoever killed Clive and your mother.

*(He takes his hand away from her mouth. They share a sexy look.)*

**SHIRLEY.** *(Offstage:)* Is that Charlie Nickels?

**VERONICA.** Oh, my! Shirley!

**SHIRLEY.** (*Offstage:*) I told ya what would happen if you showed your face around here again!

**VERONICA.** You should get out of here. All these murders have made him awfully jumpy.

**CHARLIE.** I'll be back later.

**VERONICA.** I'll be waiting.

(*CHARLIE exits.*)

### Scene 16

(*CHARLIE enters his office. IDA is studying piles of old bar tabs, and adding machine rolls.*)

**CHARLIE.** Hey, doll!

**IDA.** Oh, hiya, Charlie.

**CHARLIE.** Looks like our butler has a little gambling problem.

**IDA.** Yeah. Seventy-five large.

**CHARLIE.** He's in debt to the tune of... Yeah.

(*CHARLIE notices the papers strewn all over his desk.*)

What's my little bookworm working on now?

**IDA.** Clues, Charlie?

**CHARLIE.** Again?

**IDA.** You know me, Charlie! I love a good snoop!

**CHARLIE.** What do ya got?

**IDA.** You know that girl, Mona, you been seein'?

**CHARLIE.** I can tell you right now, that's a dead end sweetheart. She had nothing to do with this.

**IDA.** I know the police were looking for her, so I thought I'd do a little following up. You know how Veronica Clairmont and the butler had drinks the night of the murder?

**CHARLIE.** Yeah, I just found out...

**IDA.** Well I thought it was pretty likely Mona maybe struck up a friendship with the guy.

**CHARLIE.** Impossible. She told me herself she never met him.

**IDA.** I wanted to get a precise time the butler was at Tony's, so I went rummaging through his trash can and found 5 bottles of gin, 4 bottles of sweet vermouth and 4 bottles of Campari as well as several orange twists. You know what that means?

**CHARLIE.** No, what?

**IDA.** He's a negroni man! This afternoon, dressed as Shelly, an androgynous grifter persona I invented whenever I need information, I was able to sneak into Tony's office, hit Tony in the head with a blackjack, and rifle through their receipts going back three days.

**CHARLIE.** Uh-huh.

**IDA.** And wouldn't you know it? On the night of the murder, between 9:30 and midnight, one tab had seven negronis and three champagne cocktails.

**CHARLIE.** Wilson and Veronica.

**IDA.** That tab was closed out at 12 sharp, but, at the same time, at a table in the back, a new tab was started that had three negronis and two wine spritzers. And guess who's shift ended at midnight?

**CHARLIE.** I dunno.

**IDA.** Mona Livingston. And two days before? The same thing. And same 6pm to 12am shift for Mona both nights.

**CHARLIE.** I don't know Ida, that's pretty circumstantial.

**IDA.** I thought so too, so I went to the library on a hunch and found these.

*(She hands three books to CHARLIE. He reads them.)*

**CHARLIE.** "The Bengal Diamond"... "Memoirs of Lord Thumbchustle, Diamond Collector" and... "Diamond Theft Made Easy." So?

**IDA.** Those are the only three books in the L.A. Central Library about the Bengal Diamond and diamond theft, and look who last checked them out.

**CHARLIE.** *(Opens front cover of one of them:)* "M. Livingston." Why that little... *(To IDA:)* Hold my calls. I might be out for a while.

*(CHARLIE exits angrily.)*

Scene 17

*(Charlie's apartment. MONA's on the phone.)*

**MONA.** That's just too bad isn't it. We're all frightened... We all get shot at sometimes. Suck it up and be there at seven o'clock sharp or I'll hunt you down and ring your neck myself!

*(CHARLIE enters. MONA slams phone.)*

**CHARLIE.** Anyone I know?

**MONA.** *(Thinking fast:)* Phone solicitor.

**CHARLIE.** You sounded pretty upset.

**MONA.** I... They shouldn't... It's just rude, ya know?

**CHARLIE.** You know what else is rude?

**MONA.** *(Suddenly amused:)* Ooh, a riddle, Charlie? I just love word games! Tell me, Charlie, what else is rude?

**CHARLIE.** Dames who lie through their teeth to get what they want!

**MONA.** *(Slight pause.)* I don't get it. Is this one of those daily jumbles?

**CHARLIE.** Tell me everything you know about the Clairmonts!

**MONA.** Who?

**CHARLIE.** I know for a fact you met the Butler at least twice, so why did you lie to me?

**MONA.** Because... I... I don't think we were properly... Um...

*(Knock on the door.)*

**CHARLIE.** Who is it?

**LOUIE.** Hey, Charlie... Uh... It's Louie, can I come in?

**CHARLIE.** Get outta here, Louie, we're busy.

**LOUIE.** I got orders to bust the door down, Charlie, and I'd like to avoid that, if possible.

**CHARLIE.** *(Opens door:)* OK.

**LOUIE.** Hey, Charlie! I gotta... Oh, excuse me, Miss Livingston.

**MONA.** It's all right, Louie.

**LOUIE.** I beg your pardon, but Charlie, you gotta come with me. The Boss says I'm to pound on ya, if you don't cooperate.

**CHARLIE.** You tell Tony if I so much as sneeze, he'd better hire a high-priced attorney.

**LOUIE.** It's not Tony, Charlie. I got other bosses. I'm what you call uh... A independent contractor.

**CHARLIE.** Tell whoever it is I'm not home.

**LOUIE.** I'm afraid he insists.

**CHARLIE.** Buzz off, will ya? I'm busy.

**LOUIE.** I hate to do this Charlie.

*(LOUIE pounds him a couple times while MONA screams.)*

**MONA.** Charlie!

**LOUIE.** You didn't see nothin', Miss Livingston. Let's go, Charlie.

*(LOUIE drags CHARLIE off.)*

### Scene 18

*(LOUIE drags a semiconscious CHARLIE through the street to a car. LOUIE removes a small glass jar from his coat pocket, then empties a little of the clear fluid inside into a handkerchief.)*

**LOUIE.** Take a whiff o' this.

*(LOUIE puts the handkerchief up to CHARLIE's nose. He weakly resists.)*

**CHARLIE.** Hmmph!

*(CHARLIE passes out and LOUIE throws him into the back seat of the car. LOUIE closes the door, and leaves the stage. In quick succession we hear the driver's door open, close, and then the engine start. The car drives while CHARLIE has an oddly detailed dream. Several characters appear within the dreamscape, neither entering or exiting. The characters' lines may be voice-overs, or not, except for Wilson's non-flashback lines.)*

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Someone's trying to kill me.

**VERONICA.** They say you're the best private dick in the city.

**JAIME.** I will have my revenge, Lady Clairmont. You will pay!

**LOUIE.** It's got the little choo-choos on the front!

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** The Bengal Diamond? That old legend?

**VERONICA.** The Bengal Diamond!

**JAIME.** The Bengal Diamond!

**CLIVE.** The only 300 karat red diamond in the world.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** Drat the luck! We're out of coconuts!

*(Out of the darkness is WILSON, in real time. He's holding a suitcase, and appears ready to travel somewhere. Though he's in the darkness, there appears to be ambient light nearby which he is addressing.)*

**WILSON-REAL TIME.** Darling? Is that you?

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** You shot me! How dare you!

**WILSON-REAL TIME.** *(Nervously:)* I'm so relieved you're here! I must admit I was a bit uneasy standing out here alone like this.

**CLIVE.** They call it the 95-year curse.

**LADY CLAIRMONT.** I'm losing balance! I'm about to fall! I... I...  
AAAAAAHHHHHHH!

**WILSON-REAL TIME.** Meeting like this in Laurel Canyon... At night.

**CLIVE.** Haven't I met you somewhere before?

**WILSON-REAL TIME.** I've closed all my accounts, and tied up all the loose ends just like you asked.

**MONA.** I like whacking small metal bars with soft little hammers.

**CLIVE.** I noticed she seemed rather nervous and... AAAGGH!!

**MONA.** Someone's trying to kill me! Run, Charlie, run!

**WILSON-REAL TIME.** *(Laughs:)* Why, I could disappear from the face of the earth forever and no one would even notice!

**JONESY.** Veronica Clairmont.

**DEWEY.** She's been dipping her beak with Miss Clairmont, nightly, at Tony's for the past several weeks.

**VERONICA.** My back's the only part of my whole body that doesn't smell like a pina colada.

**DEWEY.** Funny coincidence, that.

**JONESY.** In a handbasket, I says.

**WILSON-REAL TIME.** Darling, I can't see you!

**MONA.** I swear I never heard of the diamond until it was in all the papers!

**HOB0 5.** Protect the Queen!

**VERONICA.** He kept a snubnose .45 in the pantry.

**WILSON-REAL TIME.** Are you alone? Darling?

*(Headlights shine on him as we hear a car accelerate towards him.  
He shields his eyes.)*

**WILSON-REAL TIME. AAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!**

*(Blackout.)*

*End of Act I*

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*(CHARLIE is tied to a chair in the otherwise well-kept office of Bugsy Siegel, while BUGSY and LOUIE play cards. BUGSY is a handsome, charismatic gangster who considers himself something of a movie star despite his prolific career of beating up and killing people. He takes every opportunity to study himself in the mirror and is preening constantly.)*

**LOUIE.** Do you have any sevens?

**BUGSY.** Natch.

*(CHARLIE wakes up and starts coughing like the recently beat-up often do.)*

**CHARLIE.** If you're selling Fuller Brushes, I'm not interested. Ooh... My head.

**BUGSY.** My associate said you took some convincing last night.

**CHARLIE.** He made a persuasive argument.

**BUGSY.** You were mumbling all morning. You must've had some crazy dreams bouncin' around in that overactive noodle o' yours.

**CHARLIE.** Sure. Dreams.

**BUGSY.** *(To CHARLIE:)* Would you like a beer? Or perhaps a raspberry phosphate?

**CHARLIE.** What do you want from me?

**BUGSY.** Do you know who I am?

**CHARLIE.** Why would I? I don't subscribe to Cheap Thug Weekly.

**BUGSY.** *(Laughs:)* Louie, work on him.

**LOUIE.** Tense up your ribs, Charlie.

*(Punches follow with the appropriate "pooh" sounds and groans of pain from CHARLIE.)*

**LOUIE.** Now clench your jaw.

*(Punches in face.)*

**BUGSY.** Too bad yer head's not as smart as your mouth. Louie, untie him and leave us alone a minute.

**LOUIE.** Sure thing, Boss.

*(LOUIE unties CHARLIE and exits.)*

**BUGSY.** *(To CHARLIE:)* You know who I am.

**CHARLIE.** You're Ben Siegel, what of it?

**BUGSY.** Word is you got a nose for diamonds.

**CHARLIE.** I don't know what you're talking about.

**BUGSY.** Look, Nickels, I don't like to sap hard-working stiffs like you. It's not my nature. The problem is, as a successful businessman, I gotta get results. Ergo—the beatin's. *(Pause.)* What have you heard about the Bengal Diamond?

**CHARLIE.** It's a big shiny stone.

**BUGSY.** *(Laughs:)* To the uneducated, perhaps. You ever hear of the Kerala Madness?

**CHARLIE.** It sounds like I have.

*(Lights darken and get spooky.)*

**BUGSY.** The story goes that about a hundred years ago, an Indian Prince named Dwahili Rafsanmhadi, stole the diamond from his old man to give to this maiden he'd been pinin' for. He was on his way to give the diamond to his true love, when the elephant he was riding went meshugana, threw him to the ground, stomped on him and then fed him to some tigers who were watching from the side of the road—as if the whole thing were a set-up. When the maiden came out to look for him, all that was left of him was his hand, clutching the diamond.

*(Lights back up, slight pause, then lights back down.)*

**BUGSY.** Oh yeah, and it's cursed.

*(Lights back up again.)*

**CHARLIE.** You sure you want this diamond?

**BUGSY.** I need this diamond, Nickels. I need the money real bad, and I've already extorted all I can from my friends and relations.

**CHARLIE.** What do you need this money so bad for you're willing to mess with some cursed rock?

**BUGSY.** 'Cause I got a vision, Nickels. I see things. Great things.

**CHARLIE.** I got an eye doctor I can recommend.

**BUGSY.** It's been a rough few years for my people, you know that?

**CHARLIE.** Sure. I read the papers.

**BUGSY.** Do you know what it's like not having a home? Do you know what that means to a people? Knowing you're not wanted?

Think of it. Everywhere you go, everyone you turn to treats you like a stranger. We've been kicked out of every nation on earth and forced to wander deserts the world over for centuries but not no more. In 1948 we're establishing a homeland: a safe haven for my people once and for all. We'll run it. We'll defend it and from now on there ain't gonna be anyone tellin' us what to do.

**CHARLIE.** Yeah, that's great. So... You're gonna give the diamond to Israel?

**BUGSY.** Israel? What are you talkin' about? You must be gettin' me confused with someone else.

**CHARLIE.** Wait. Weren't you talking about the Jewish people?

**BUGSY.** The Jews? No, no, I'm talkin' about gangsters! And how they need a homeland! What does that have to do with... Oh, I got it now. OK, in retrospect, I could see how that might have sounded confusing. Allow me to clarify.

*(He pulls down a map of the United States.)*

**BUGSY.** You ever been to Las Vegas, Nevada?

**CHARLIE.** I think I got a hangnail removed there once.

**BUGSY.** Not no more! Soon, it will be the entertainment capital of the world. Charlie Nickels, take a look at the Las Vegas of the future!

*(Flips over map of the U.S. to reveal an artist's rendering of the new Las Vegas.)*

**BUGSY.** What do you think?

**CHARLIE.** Hey, that's a pretty good rendering. *(Pauses and looks it over.)* That's not a volcano, is it?

**BUGSY.** It sure is. And swimming pools and artificial lakes and reefs, and a ski resort made out of cotton candy—all ringed by a moat of crocodiles for those who don't pony up the fifty bucks to enter the town.

**CHARLIE.** Sounds classy.

**BUGSY.** All these things you see here: the solid gold ferris wheel, the Trevi fountain that runs on champagne, the holding tank filled with performing killer dolphins... They all run up quite a bill. And my investors are just about tapped out.

**CHARLIE.** That's why you want that diamond so bad.

**BUGSY.** I was hoping to purchase it for a song from Lady Clairmont herself.

**CHARLIE.** How?

**BUGSY.** With some rather embarrassing information we got about the Clairmont home-life.

**CHARLIE.** Blackmail. But with what?

**BUGSY.** As you may know, we'd been taking that Butler they got there, Wilson, to the woodshed on account o' the 75 Gs he owes us. And if you break a guy's legs enough he'll tell you all sorts of things. His love-life, for instance.

**CHARLIE.** I know all about him and the old lady.

**BUGSY.** Heh. If it were only that simple.

**CHARLIE.** Ain't it?

**BUGSY.** Not when there's a kid involved. That butler spent twenty years slavin' away over puff pastries for his own daughter and she didn't even know.

**CHARLIE.** (*Realizing:*) Veronica Clairmont!

**BUGSY.** After the old man got buried by three-hundred tons of burning coal back in the '20s, Lady Clairmont looked for a little comfort in her time of grief and ends up with a kid.

**CHARLIE.** And she's too much of a blue-blood to ever admit her butler's the father, so he drowns his sorrows in booze and gambling while scheming for a way to get back at the woman keeping him from his own daughter. But if you're so sure Wilson did it and he's got the diamond, what do you want from me?

**BUGSY.** Don't you read the papers? The Butler's gone missin'! The last we seen of him was the night we shot up his place with a Thompson.

**CHARLIE.** I don't know why he'd disappear like that.

**BUGSY.** If you get me the diamond, I'll give you a percentage of the Flamingo and make sure the police are off your tracks. This is an excellent opportunity for you, Mr. Nickels.

(*CHARLIE starts to leave.*)

**CHARLIE.** Yeah. I guess opportunity knocks with a punch in the gut.

**Scene 2**

*(CHARLIE drives back to the Mansion. When he gets there, SHIRLEY is massaging VERONICA out by the pool.)*

**CHARLIE.** It was all starting to make sense. The dough eyes, the cocoa butter, makin' like the damsel in distress when the whole time she was playin' me like a harmonica. Veronica was the one hiding out with Wilson the night Bugsy's men shot up his place. "Don't I look pretty?" She says. "What'll we do?" She says. All nice and helpless like a fly in a bowl of tomato soup. Only this fly's a black widow and the soup she's in ain't made of tomato pulp and salt, but a concoction of chicken stock, garlic and dreams of melted gold and diamond-flavored revenge.

*(CHARLIE approaches SHIRLEY and VERONICA.)*

**CHARLIE.** Take a powder! The lady and I need to talk.

**SHIRLEY.** I don't like your attitude, mister.

**CHARLIE.** Which part of my attitude you got a problem with? This part?

*(Punches him in the stomach.)*

**SHIRLEY.** Pooh!

**CHARLIE.** Or this part?

*(Punches him in the jaw—SHIRLEY goes down.)*

**VERONICA.** What is the meaning of this?

**CHARLIE.** You're gonna spill it, and you're gonna spill it good, ya understand?

**VERONICA.** Whatever are you talking about?

**CHARLIE.** Look here, schoolgirl. Your smart-talking, big-city mol in the body of a lithe and innocent world-class polo jockey act might work with your debutante friends and high-collared snuff addicts, but if you don't spill it to me straight in the next five minutes I'll have the LAPD on you faster than a midshipman on a zoot suit.

**VERONICA.** I swear I've told you everything I know!

**CHARLIE.** Tell me about the Butler!

**VERONICA.** What? Tell you what?

**CHARLIE.** Tell me!

*(Slaps her.)*

**VERONICA.** Charlie, please!

**CHARLIE.** Tell me!

*(Slaps her again.)*

**VERONICA.** Charlie!

**CHARLIE.** Tell me everything about Wilson!

*(Slaps again, she whimpers.)*

**CHARLIE.** I want the truth!

*(More slapping and whimpering.)*

**CHARLIE.** The truth!

*(More slapping.)*

**VERONICA.** I don't know what you're talking about!

**CHARLIE.** Stop lying about the butler!

*(Slap/whimper.)*

**VERONICA.** I don't know anything else!

**CHARLIE.** Stop it!

*(Slap, slap, slap... Progressively slowing.)*

**CHARLIE.** You don't...

*(He slaps her one more time for good measure.)*

You don't know what I'm talking about do you?

*(She's crying.)*

**VERONICA.** I don't! I don't know why you're doing this, Charlie!

**CHARLIE.** There's really nothing else about the Butler you can tell me?

*(VERONICA cries softly.)*

**CHARLIE.** Oh... Well, I... Uh... Funny story. Just got back from Bugsy Siegel's place. He's the guy who the butler owed all that money to... And... Uh, over the course of the last few months the butler told Bugsy's goons that he—the butler, I mean—was your father.

**VERONICA.** Wilson?

**CHARLIE.** Yeah.

**VERONICA.** Wilson's my father?

**CHARLIE.** I'm awful sorry you had to find out this way. I really thought you knew already, otherwise I wouldn't have kept slapping you like that.

**VERONICA.** Wilson... My father.

**CHARLIE.** That's something, isn't it?

**VERONICA.** So that night, at the club, when he was so sad and distraught...it was over me?

**CHARLIE.** That's the looks of it.

**VERONICA.** All this time... I've never known a father. I'm so fortunate we've been given this chance to start anew. You've given me quite a gift, Mr. Nickels.

**CHARLIE.** Don't mention it.

**VERONICA.** Oh, the things we'll do! Think of it! A whole lifetime to catch up on! (*Laughs, then sighs sadly.*) Poor father! What he must have gone through. Suffering every day, just to watch over me and make sure I was brought up right. Well, no more suffering, father. We will make it right, you and I. We will both finally have what we've always wanted: you, your place in the world, and I will have a father.

(DEWEY and JONESY enter.)

**DEWEY.** Charlie, that you?

**CHARLIE.** Hope you haven't come to arrest me again.

**JONESY.** Nah, you're off the hook, Charlie, in light of recent developments.

**DEWEY.** We found that Butler you been lookin' for.

**VERONICA.** Wilson? You found him?

**DEWEY.** Yeah, you could say that.

**CHARLIE.** Where is he?

**JONESY.** Mostly off Laurel Canyon Blvd, just North of Mulholland.

**DEWEY.** But his brains are sorta scattered all over.

**VERONICA.** You mean, he's... He's...

**JONESY.** Deader'n a doornail.

**DEWEY.** Brains all scattered.

**JONESY.** All over.

**VERONICA.** (*Screams:*) AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!

(*Cries horribly.*)

**DEWEY.** What got into her?

**CHARLIE.** Look, fellas, you picked a bad time for this.

**DEWEY.** Come with us, Charlie. You gotta take a look at this.

**JONESY.** What a mess!

*(They exit.)*

### Scene 3

*(DEWEY, JONESY, and CHARLIE arrive at the scene in the hills near Mulholland. The BUTLER is dead, squished, and a beat up wreck of a car is on him. The car is the tan '41 Merc Coupe. Perhaps all we see is a pair of shoes and a wheel on them.)*

**DEWEY.** There he is.

**JONESY.** Still dead.

**DEWEY.** And there's some of his brains.

**CHARLIE.** *(To himself:)* This all seems strangely familiar.

*(To the others:)*

Killed by a '41 Merc Coupe. The same car I saw on the night of the murder. You find him like this?

**DEWEY.** Yeah.

**CHARLIE.** I thought you said it was a suicide.

**DEWEY.** He drove off the cliff, Charlie.

**JONESY.** There he is, and there's the car. What else do you need?

**CHARLIE.** He's under the car, Jonesy. A guy doesn't have an accident, fall out of the car and have it roll over him.

**DEWEY.** This one did. We got proof!

**JONESY.** Yeah. The Butler left a suicide note with all the details.

**DEWEY.** That's how come you're no longer a suspect.

**JONESY.** It's all Jake.

**DEWEY.** He spells the whole thing out.

**JONESY.** From A to Zed.

*(Hands over note.)*

**CHARLIE.** "Dear world, I'm killing myself because I can't live with the guilt any longer. It was I who killed Lady Clairmont and her son, Clive, for the diamond. Don't bother looking for the Diamond, however, as I've hidden it someplace where you'll never ever find

it, so you should give up completely any attempt to recover said diamond. And if, by chance, you discover any other murders in the course of looking for the diamond, I committed those too. Goodbye, cruel world, sincerely, Adrian Wilson."

**JONESY.** And that's that.

**DEWEY.** Jake-a-loo.

**JONESY.** Clears up a lot.

**CHARLIE.** You really think he wrote this note?

**JONESY.** Why not?

**DEWEY.** It's got his John Hancock right there.

**CHARLIE.** I don't think a sixty-year old man would dot the "I"'s on his suicide note with little hearts.

**JONESY.** He's English.

**DEWEY.** A guy crazy enough to kill himself is likely to do all sorts of crazy stuff.

**JONESY.** And it makes our job easier since we no longer have to look for that diamond.

**DEWEY.** That thing could be anywhere.

**JONESY.** Case closed.

*(CHARLIE starts to exit.)*

**DEWEY.** Hey, where you goin'?

**CHARLIE.** To look for the killer!

*(CHARLIE exits.)*

#### Scene 4

*(CHARLIE enters his office which has taken on the appearance of a crime lab. On the back wall, there are diagrams of Tony's Liquor Lounge, and the Clairmont Mansion. Nearby are profiles of the bodies of CLIVE and LADY CLAIRMONT, showing entrance and exit wounds, time and cause of death and other forensic details. On Charlie's desk are several test tubes filled with blood. IDA is seated at his desk, dusting for prints on the wheel of the Merc coupe.)*

**IDA.** So glad you could drop by!

**CHARLIE.** Hey, sweetheart. Looks like the case just got a little murkier.

**IDA.** You mean Wilson?

**CHARLIE.** The butler was jus... Yeah.

**IDA.** I just got back myself. My source in the LAPD called a couple hours ago, so I went to the scene dressed as a cub reporter. That's how I got the Merc coupe's steering wheel. (*Suddenly remembers:*) Ooh! You can have the watch back.

*(IDA opens a drawer, removes the watch and hands it to CHARLIE.)*

I got the blood type off of it, and it's the same as some residual blood I found on Lady Clairmont's dress. You know the LAPD didn't even notice the blood on her dress wasn't her own? Tsk tsk. Sloppy sloppy.

*(Phone rings, CHARLIE picks it up.)*

**CHARLIE.** Nickels.

*(Lights up on MONA on the opposite side of the stage on a public telephone.)*

**MONA.** Charlie, it's me, Mona! I went to see Tony!

**CHARLIE.** Mona! What are you trying to do, get yourself killed?

**MONA.** Oh, Charlie, you're right! I don't know what I was thinking! I went to see Tony to apologize and his men grabbed me and tied me up. They took me upstairs, but I was able to break loose.

**CHARLIE.** Where are you?

**MONA.** I'm outside. I'm at the phone booth in the alley behind Tony's, opposite Dina's Junk Shop.

**CHARLIE.** Hold tight, I'm on my way!

**MONA.** Charlie, someone's coming! I can hear him! He sounds awful! He sounds like he might be holding a loaded gun!

**CHARLIE.** Mona, get away from there!

**MONA.** (*To stranger:*) Who are you? What do you want? What are you doing?

**CHARLIE.** Mona!

**MONA.** What is that in your hand? It looks deadly! Don't! Please, don't!

**CHARLIE.** Mona!

**MONA.** AAAAAAHHHHHHH!

## Scene 5

(CHARLIE behind the wheel of his car, rushing to Mona's rescue.)

**CHARLIE.** On the drive to the alley behind Tony's, I may have been listening to the rebroadcast of NBC Presents Lolita and the Earl's Boogie-Woogie Dance Emporium and Coffee Clatch, but I was thinking of Mona. I was thinking of what some big ape was doing to her and it made me so angry that I almost ran the LaSalle into a traffic light just to get those pictures out of my head. I knew the alley she was talking about, and I hated going back there. It was dark. Much darker than most Hollywood Alleys. There were streetlights, but they never seemed to light anything. All they did was make silhouettes of the fedoras, trenchcoats and cigarettes of the two-bit toughs seeking anonymity in the dark. From the stale air of the alley, you could sometimes catch the faint breeze of the city beyond its borders: the smell of conga lines and movie premieres; starlets and golf caddies; palm trees and big shot movie executives with phones by the pools. But in a flash that was all gone, and you were in the lot behind Tony's on Cahuenga and Sunset, where the only sound you heard was the cruel, steady drip from the gutter over the liquor store, and the air you breathed was Hollywood's heavier, more common air—laying low to the ground, but rising slowly, steadily, like a fog above the fetid sink of ruined hopes that drain like millions of raindrops from a million roof tiles in the Hollywood Hills into a million alleys just like this—dotting the city, like stars. This was easily the world's most depressing alley.

## Scene 6

(In the alley LOUIE and HENRY are waiting. HENRY is chewing gum.)

**LOUIE.** Hey, Henry.

**HENRY.** Yeah?

**LOUIE.** So you figure them Dodgers can take the pennant?

**HENRY.** How should I know?

**LOUIE.** I don't know. I just figured since you ran numbers you had the inside scoop.

**HENRY.** You was mistaken.

(Pause.)

**LOUIE.** Hey, Henry.

**HENRY.** What?

**LOUIE.** You know that donut shop down on Melrose and... Fairfax?

**HENRY.** Stan's?

**LOUIE.** Yeah, Stan's. Well I was down there on Tuesday and, get this. They added a new donut with the sprinkles on it. It's new and it's got sprinkles.

**HENRY.** So it's got sprinkles.

**LOUIE.** That gives 'em six. Six different kinds o' donuts. One more. Just one more is all they need.

*(Pause.)*

**HENRY.** For what?

**LOUIE.** Huh?

**HENRY.** For what? The donuts. All they need for what?

**LOUIE.** Oh! For seven. That'll give 'em seven donuts, Henry. That means you can go there every day, all week long, and you'll have a different donut every day. Only they ain't open Sundays, so I guess it would carry into next week! Not bad, huh?

**HENRY.** What are you getting' excited for?

**LOUIE.** I ain't excited.

**HENRY.** Why we out here anyway?

**LOUIE.** 'Cause the Boss says so, Henry.

**HENRY.** Applesauce.

**LOUIE.** It's true.

**HENRY.** When'd you talk to the Boss? He's been in Catalina all day.

**LOUIE.** He sent a wire.

**HENRY.** A wire? I don't remember hearin' about no...

*(A noise as CHARLIE approaches.)*

**LOUIE.** Henry! Comin' this way!

**HENRY.** Well, well! Things are lookin' up, ain't they, Louie? It's Charlie Nickels arrivin' just in time like he was Santy Claus himself!

**LOUIE.** Gee, Charlie, you know you shouldn't o' come back here.

**CHARLIE.** I don't want any trouble, Louie. Give me the girl and I'll be on my way.

**HENRY.** We ain't got no girl, Charlie.

**LOUIE.** Nah. No girl.

**HENRY.** We got you, though, so the evening hasn't been a total loss.

**CHARLIE.** Where is she? Where's Mona Livingston?

**HENRY.** Mona Livingston?

**LOUIE.** Mona ain't here, Charlie.

**HENRY.** We ain't seen that broad in days. Not since you got on Tony's bad side by icing that kid without his permission.

*(LOUIE approaches CHARLIE.)*

**LOUIE.** Let's go, Charlie.

**CHARLIE.** Back off! I've had enough of getting pushed around by the likes of you.

**HENRY.** Yeah, well we're gonna keep pushin' so you might want to come to terms with your situation.

*(Pulls a gun.)*

Get 'im, Louie!

**LOUIE.** I hate to do this, Charlie.

*(LOUIE starts punching CHARLIE, but he's ready for it, so he blocks every other punch or so. LOUIE gets in a good one.)*

**LOUIE.** I'm awful sorry about this, Charlie.

*(A few more punches and one good one by LOUIE.)*

**LOUIE.** I just feel rotten for you, Charlie, I do, but you know how the Boss is.

**CHARLIE.** Hold it! Hold it! Would you hold it, please?

*(LOUIE pauses.)*

**HENRY.** What are you doin', Louie? He's still standin' for cryin' out loud! Mix it up, ya pansy!

*(LOUIE turns around briefly to explain.)*

**LOUIE.** He asked nice, Henry!

*(CHARLIE grabs LOUIE by the coat.)*

**HENRY.** Louie, watch it!

*(Super fast, CHARLIE pulls the coat down over LOUIE's arms, rendering him helpless, then shoves him real hard against HENRY, causing him to shoot LOUIE in the arm and drop his gun.)*

**LOUIE.** AAARRRGGGHHH!!

(LOUIE falls, helpless. CHARLIE grabs the stunned HENRY and slams his head several times against the brick wall until he passes out. CHARLIE picks up the gun.)

LOUIE. Argh! My arm, Charlie! I got shot! Jeepers, that smarts!

CHARLIE. C'mere. Let me see it.

(He examines it briefly. Pulls out a handkerchief from Louie's coat pocket, and makes a tourniquet above the gunshot wound on his arm, slowing the bleeding.)

CHARLIE. How's that? Snug?

LOUIE. Better, I guess. Kinda tingly.

CHARLIE. Did you get hit anywhere else?

LOUIE. I don't think so.

CHARLIE. Good. Then this shouldn't do any permanent damage.

(CHARLIE punches LOUIE several times in the mouth and a couple times in the stomach.)

LOUIE. I deserved that.

CHARLIE. What say you, me and your pulpy arm have a little chat?

LOUIE. Sure, Charlie. I feel real bad about what happened. I'll tell you anything you wanna know.

CHARLIE. First, where's Mona?

LOUIE. She got away, Charlie.

CHARLIE. From a couple a big guys like yourselves?

LOUIE. She's very resourceful. You know that.

CHARLIE. Who hired you to grab her?

LOUIE. You know we work for To...

CHARLIE. (Punches him.) Don't give me that! The Clairmont case is closed, so why the "hit" job?

LOUIE. I don't know what you're talkin' about.

CHARLIE. Talk!

(Whacks LOUIE a couple times, LOUIE starts getting dizzy.)

LOUIE. Okay! Okay! I got another boss.

CHARLIE. Bugsy?

LOUIE. Nah. Not for this. Not Bugsy. I... It's... I just can't Charlie!

CHARLIE. We're staying here all night until you 'fess up.

*(Punch punch punch, LOUIE gets dizzier.)*

**LOUIE.** I got the jitters, Charlie. I never wanted to hurt nobody too bad, ya know? But I was told to do one bad thing, and then another and then.... I can't. I just can't.

**CHARLIE.** Can't what? What can't you do?

**LOUIE.** I can't tell ya. I want to, but I can't. I'll get killed, and I'd like to avoid that if possible.

*(A siren approaches in the background.)*

**CHARLIE.** Well, you're getting' killed either way, Louie, so you might as well come clean.

*(Punches LOUIE who coughs and breathes heavy.)*

**LOUIE.** The butler... *(Coughs.)* Charlie... I know...the papers said he done himself in...but I can tell ya...it wasn't no suicide. That was my car, Charlie... I did it... I didn't do those other murders... I swear I didn't... And I didn't want to do this one...but I had no choice.

**CHARLIE.** Who made you do it, Louie? Who are you working for?

*(LOUIE begins to pass out, but as he does, his eyes get real big and he kinda points towards where someone is approaching—then he passes out. Coincidentally, MONA enters as the sirens get louder.)*

**MONA.** Charlie!

*(CHARLIE gets up and embraces MONA.)*

**CHARLIE.** Mona, are you all right?

**MONA.** I'm good. I heard the shot. Were you hurt?

**CHARLIE.** Naw, I got out O.K.

**MONA.** Louie! Is he dead?

**CHARLIE.** Just sleepin'.

**MONA.** Did he do it, Charlie? Was he the killer this whole time?

**CHARLIE.** No. He's just the button man.

**MONA.** "Button Man"? What do you mean?

**CHARLIE.** I mean it's his job to take dirty laundry to the cleaners.

**MONA.** I don't understand.

**CHARLIE.** He's a hired gun, get it? A triggerman, a bruno, a drop-per, a torpedo, a hatchet man.

**MONA.** You mean he...hurts people for money?

**CHARLIE.** Clear as crystal, baby. Only I gotta find whoever's paying his rent.

**MONA.** All this killing! It's so awful! Protect me, Charlie! Protect me, please!

*(Sobs.)*

**CHARLIE.** I'll take care of you, sweetheart. But first, I better make sure nothing happens to that kisser o' yours.

**MONA.** Lay one on me, tough guy.

*(Kissing, smooching and then the sirens much louder.)*

**CHARLIE.** What say we keep this conversation going at my place?

**MONA.** Let's amscray.

### Scene 7

*(CHARLIE drives MONA, then they arrive at his place.)*

**CHARLIE.** Louie's passing out at the moment he was ready to reveal the killer bothered me, but you find in this line of work that people typically pass out or die just prior to giving you the one piece of information you need the most. I was relieved Mona was OK. I think I was starting to love Mona even though I wasn't sure I could trust her. But why fall in love with a broad you can trust? That's like reading a book you already know the ending to.

**MONA.** Can I fix you a drink, lover?

**CHARLIE.** Listen, baby. I've talked to a lot of people over the last twenty-four hours and I got a couple questions that need answering.

**MONA.** *(Laughing sexily:)* My my! We're all business. I'll bite. Who'd you talk to that got you all hot and bothered?

**CHARLIE.** Veronica Clairmont, for one.

**MONA.** *(Suddenly a little nervous:)* That young Clairmont girl? Why, Charlie, I'm liable to get jealous. What does she have that I don't?

**CHARLIE.** An alibi.

**MONA.** *(Laughs:)* Oh, Charlie, you and your monkey-shines! I knew it the minute I laid eyes on you! Beware of this Charlie Nickels, I said to myself, he's a joker, this one is. A regular Danny Kaye. Daffy Duck's got nothing on Mr. Charlie Nick...

**CHARLIE.** *(Laughs:)* Oh, you're good! You got more change-ups than Satchel Paige.

**MONA.** What have I done except come to you for help? Is it my fault Veronica Clairmont and the Butler had just broken off a torrid love affair the night of Lady Clairmont's murder? Oops!

**CHARLIE.** There was no love affair, Mona, and you know it.

*(MONA goes to a table against the wall upon which rests dozens of origami cranes, and one vase. She proceeds to fold a new crane.)*

The Butler was Veronica Clairmont's father, but he was never able to tell her. Even after several drinks there are some things that are so tough to say to a person, a fella'll break his own heart to pieces rather than say it. Poor slob.

**MONA.** I hope I'm never alone like that Butler.

**CHARLIE.** Don't we all.

**MONA.** I hope I can rely on you, Charles. I know you think I'm being silly, and I'm sure you don't believe me. I would imagine you don't believe a word I say, ever, but there have been people in my life—friends and family—who have believed what I was saying at one time or another and I hope you'd be included in that group. I do. I really do.

**CHARLIE.** What is that you're working on there, Mona?

**MONA.** Some cranes. Some origami cranes. Three-thousand origami cranes. Placed, one by one, in the shape of a rhombus. Right next to this crystal vase. *(Picks up vase.)* This beautiful vase, right here. Oops!

*(MONA drops the vase, it shatters and she screams.)*

I'm so frightened! I've been like this for days. You have to help me!

**CHARLIE.** Take it easy, baby!

**MONA.** So many people have been hurt and/or killed. I have Tony's people after me, and the police, and now I'm afraid even you've got me pegged as a killer.

**CHARLIE.** I'm on your side, sweetheart. You just have to trust me.

**MONA.** I love you, Charlie. I could trust you better if you'd tell me you loved me.

**CHARLIE.** I can't do it, baby. I've been hurt too much. I can't take that chance.

**MONA.** I don't blame you. I too have known hurt. *(Pause.)* Why do you do it, Charlie?

**CHARLIE.** Do what?

**MONA.** Risk your neck for people who usually wind up getting killed anyway.

**CHARLIE.** You ever work in the oil business?

**MONA.** The oil business?

**CHARLIE.** You ever see what an oil well does to a man who mistakenly sticks his head over the gushcap of a clogged drill?

**MONA.** Oh, Charlie!

**CHARLIE.** I spent eleven years working as an oil executive. A real big-shot. It's the only business in the world where you have a million dollars laying at your feet and if you have the sense to lean over and pick it up? Then you're some kind of genius. That is until one day after a typical three-martini lunch, a nineteen-year old intern asks if he can see what's wrong with a clogged drill and you tell him "sure kid, knock yourself out. Just don't stick your head over the gush cap." Seems the kid didn't hear that last part. They shut down production for two hours while they searched L.A. county for his head. When it turned up at a church picnic in San Pedro, the pumps started up again as if nothing had happened.

**MONA.** Oh, Charlie!

*(MONA goes to fix CHARLIE a drink.)*

**CHARLIE.** So I put a shingle on the door that reads Private Detective. So maybe the pay's not as good as it once was and maybe I am a little late some of the time and my clients are always getting killed, but I'll tell you one thing: at least I can sleep at night.

*(MONA hands a drink to CHARLIE and makes sure he drinks it.)*

**MONA.** *(Quietly, as if starting to smooch:)* You know if you aren't careful, a girl could get the idea that you're a pretty swell Joe.

*(CHARLIE takes a gulp and sets the drink aside.)*

**CHARLIE.** I guess I'll have to take that chance.

*(They kiss. After a moment, CHARLIE pulls away and begins to stagger about.)*

**MONA.** What's wrong, Charlie?

**CHARLIE.** Nothin'... I..just got a headache is all.

**MONA.** It must be all the excitement.

*(CHARLIE drops his glass as his stagger increases.)*

**CHARLIE.** Sure. Maybe if I just take a load off.

(CHARLIE staggers some more, then falls face down on the couch. MONA approaches CHARLIE gingerly.)

**MONA.** Charlie?

(MONA pokes CHARLIE to make sure he's asleep. Convinced, she removes a small piece of paper from her purse, writes a message on it and places the note in Charlie's breast pocket, then quietly exits.)

### Scene 8

(Lights change and MONA's gone. CHARLIE tries to rouse himself from his stupor.)

**CHARLIE.** Whatever she put in my drink must have been pretty strong. When I woke up my head hurt as bad as if someone had shrunk Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, stuck them in my brain and told them to have it out. Winner gets to leave my brain. Loser gets to go bowling, but in my brain. She was nice enough to write a good-bye note on the back of a receipt telling me she loved me and she didn't know when she'd see me again. (Looks at the note carefully:) Hmm... That's funny. Who else do I know dots their "I"s with little hearts?

(CHARLIE is about to exit when the phone rings. He answers it. We can't hear the voice on the other end.)

**CHARLIE.** Nickels. (Pause.) What? Who is this? (Pause.) 111 South Grand? That's on Bunker Hill. Hello? Hello?

(CHARLIE taps the hook switch several times. To himself, ominously:)

Bunker Hill.

### Scene 9

(CHARLIE drives to Bunker Hill and narrates.)

**CHARLIE.** Bunker Hill used to be a nice neighborhood right around the time the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth rock. Since then it's been known as Bumtown, Crumbtown, Dudtown, Crudtown and Schnooktown. Row after row of painted lady flophouses, holding every type of criminal element known to the LAPD rap sheet. I've had eight partners since I became a P.I., and seven of them were shot to death. All of them on Bunker Hill.

**Scene 10**

*(CHARLIE gets out of the car and heads up to the front door. The door is slightly ajar, so he pulls his gun and gently pushes the door open to reveal a room in shadows. A turntable is quietly playing Benny Goodman. CHARLIE takes in the surroundings. The front parlor is a mess. Around the room are several pictures of ducks, some models of ducks, and a couple stuffed ducks. There's also a portrait of Louie and Mona at Laguna Beach, but CHARLIE won't notice this. On the floor on the far edge of the room is a pool of blood. CHARLIE crosses the room, sees the blood and briefly follows its trail to LOUIE, lying dead on the floor.)*

**HENRY.** Hiya, Charlie.

*(HENRY emerges from the shadows. CHARLIE turns with his gun.)*

**HENRY.** Why so jumpy, Nickels? He ain't gonna hurt ya. Not now.

*(CHARLIE puts his gun away.)*

**CHARLIE.** Henry Lumpkus! Were you in on this?

**HENRY.** I didn't do nothin'! He was late to work today, and if there's one thing you can say about Louie Shorts it's that he's punctual. Ever since that Okie came out here, there ain't a lunch date, a meetin' or an orientation he's been five minutes late for. "Henry," he'd say, "You should always treat someone else's time as valuable as you treat your own." So I knew when he was late to work for the first time in ten years he was probably dead.

**CHARLIE.** Why'd you call me out here?

**HENRY.** It ain't right to let your partner get rubbed out without who done it gettin' what's theirs.

**CHARLIE.** How do you know I didn't do it?

**HENRY.** If you wanted Louie nixed, you woulda put him on ice last night.

**CHARLIE.** Louie worked for Bugsy. Maybe Louie gets a taste for diamonds, and Bugsy gets wise to Louie and has him silenced.

**HENRY.** I don't think Bugsy's in the position to be makin' executive decisions about nobody.

**CHARLIE.** What do you mean?

**HENRY.** Didn't ya hear? Bugsy Siegel was found dead this mornin'. I guess someone decided he wasn't cut out for hotel management.

**CHARLIE.** Sometimes bad things happen to bad people.

**HENRY.** Besides, Louie wasn't lookin' for rocks. He couldn't find a clown at a circus.

**CHARLIE.** He must have been up to something. A bear doesn't get stung unless he's found some honey.

**HENRY.** Louie followed orders. He don't dance unless the bandleader gives him an 8-count?

**CHARLIE.** Tony's the bandleader. He played Henry like a French horn.

**HENRY.** Tony's in Catalina. I would've known if he sent over any sheet music.

**CHARLIE.** Maybe Louie was killed in a robbery gone bad.

**HENRY.** Anyone who hit this place is the only crook who don't like to steal money or possessions, 'cause nothin's been touched. Not his wallet, not his collection o' ducks. Nothin'. Not even that nice watch he just got.

**CHARLIE.** Watch, what watch?

**HENRY.** This one right here.

*(Points to a watch on Louie's wrist.)*

**CHARLIE.** *(Reads the band:)* "Geneva Brothers." Wait a minute...

*(Reaches into his pocket.)*

**CHARLIE.** I had a note written to me on the back of a receipt just the other day that read...

*(CHARLIE looks at the note, flips it over, reads it and exits.)*

**HENRY.** Hey! Where you goin'?

### Scene 11

*(CHARLIE narrates while he drives and then visits Nelson's. When he reaches Nelson's he'll deliver his monologue while he and BILLY enact the events.)*

**CHARLIE.** Louie'd been silenced all right. Silenced but good. He wasn't killed for money, or comeuppance, but for whatever he had spinning around in that noodle of his: damning evidence of whoever killed Lady Clairmont, Clive Clairmont and Adrian Wilson. I had a good hunch who it was but I was hoping to be proved wrong. Was I a chump? Maybe. A sucker? Sure. I? Perhaps. Did I have a stubborn

faith in things I could neither see nor prove? In all likelihood. Was I the first mate on the Ship of Fools pulling into Face the Facts Harbor? Aye, matey. But before I could give up my pipe dreams, I paid a visit to Nelson's Jewelry and Pawnshop. I asked Billy, the boy at the front, if he remembered selling a couple of Geneva Brothers watches to a certain someone. He did. Then he showed me a little thank-you note from the purchaser of said watches.

*(CHARLIE makes a call from a phone booth. There is a lot of big city ambient sound that CHARLIE and IDA have to yell over. There is the distant sound of a train getting closer. IDA picks up on the other end.)*

**CHARLIE.** Ida? Nickels!

**IDA.** Charlie, I'm glad you called!

**CHARLIE.** Did you get any results...

**IDA.** I crossed-checked the fingerprints and blood type on the watch with the security records from Tony's. You know how Tony's has the strictest background checks in town on account of all the murders they keep havin'?

**CHARLIE.** Yeah.

**IDA.** Anyway, I got the results.

**CHARLIE.** And?

**IDA.** You ain't gonna like it, Charlie. The murderer of Lady Clairmont is...

*(IDA mouths something but her words are drowned out by the train which is now passing CHARLIE, complete with the ding-ding-ding of the crossing gate. CHARLIE, however, can hear what she says and displays the appropriate shocked and horrified expression.)*

## Scene 12

*(MONA is standing by the bar in her apartment, nervously drinking a scotch and soda. She is wearing a wrap over her shoulders and covering her neckline. Next to the door are two suitcases. There's a knock on the door. MONA grabs the suitcases, and answers it. She is shocked to see CHARLIE standing in front of her.)*

**MONA.** Charlie!

*(CHARLIE looks at her and suitcases and walks past her.)*

**CHARLIE.** Going somewhere, Mona?

**MONA.** Um... No.

**CHARLIE.** Why the suitcases?

*(Pause.)*

**MONA.** I always keep them there.

**CHARLIE.** Strange. Why's that?

**MONA.** Earthquakes.

*(CHARLIE closes the door.)*

**CHARLIE.** If you were waiting for a cab to take you to the train station, you can forget it. One pulled up in front of the building and I told him to take a powder.

*(MONA laughs a little too much.)*

**MONA.** Oh, Charlie! Your sense of humor has such a way of putting a girl at ease! I've been on edge all day. The police were here. I didn't know what to think. It's that boy across the way. He hates me, you know. I'm sure you've noticed so many people hate me. Listen to me being pitiful. Forgive me, Charles. I know I've been so very troublesome. I don't know how you can stand it.

*(CHARLIE tosses the Geneva Brothers watch on the table, or whatever's convenient.)*

**MONA.** *(Feigning ignorance:)* What's this?

**CHARLIE.** Oh, just a little something I picked up at Nelson's.

**MONA.** A gift, Charles? I'm surprised at you, I never figured you for the type who...

*(CHARLIE grabs her and turns her around.)*

**CHARLIE.** Now, cut the rhubarb! That's your watch and you know it.

**MONA.** Whatever do you...

**CHARLIE.** I found that in Echo Park. The night after Lady Clairmont was killed. It's got more of your fingerprints on it than a... Well it had a lot of fingerprints.

**MONA.** That's imposs...

**CHARLIE.** *And* wrist prints. Blood stains too that match your type. I also noticed this.

*(He throws the note/receipt onto the same table.)*

**CHARLIE.** This little memo you passed me the other day happened to be a receipt from Nelson's. Fella at the place says he sold the watch to a dame. He couldn't remember what color her hair was, but he knew trouble when he saw it.

**MONA.** Why, Charlie, are you going to take the word of some boy?

**CHARLIE.** How'd you know it was a boy, Mona?

**MONA.** But... You...

**CHARLIE.** And if that wasn't enough, you left this note.

*(Pulls out a small piece of paper from his coat pocket.)*

**CHARLIE.** "Thanks for the watch, Billy, it's perfect to wear while committing murder, love, Mona."

**MONA.** But, Charlie, I swear I've never heard of this "Billy" person in my life!

**CHARLIE.** Don't play "dumb" with me, Mona, it makes your neck look fat.

**MONA.** All right, I admit it! I bought the watch, but I never killed that girl! You've got to listen to me. I know I'm not perfect. I know I'm a liar, I'll always be a liar. I lie about everything, all the time, constantly. I lie so much, even I don't know when I'm telling the truth. But regardless of my extensive past history of lying, and of the many lies I will tell in the future, you have to believe me this one time when I tell you I had nothing to do with the tragic shooting of Lady Clairmont.

**CHARLIE.** How'd you know she was shot?

**MONA.** I didn't. I guessed it.

**CHARLIE.** Hmm...

**MONA.** Oh, Charles, I'm frightened! Protect me, will you? It's funny I should ask you for help—the one man who wants to condemn me, but I'm not afraid of you, for some reason. I'm afraid of those other men—those policemen. I'm afraid what those men will do to me if they were to think I was the one responsible for that ghastly murder.

*(She draws him near.)*

**MONA.** You will protect me, won't you Charlie? You're so very strong and... And...palpable.

*(CHARLIE pushes her away and slaps her.)*

**CHARLIE.** Stop it!

**THIS PLAY IS  
NOT OVER!**

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