

Denial

by

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ACT I

SCENE 1. A SPLASH IN THE DARK

(Sidewalk along railing. The light of one street light off to one side. Sound: WATER lapping, WIND, a FOG HORN in the distance. FOOTSTEPS.)

(An indistinct form, almost a silhouette, enters, passing a figure standing at the railing just outside the light. The person stops and tries to light a cigarette, but the wind blows out the flame. The person walks farther along and stops and tries again, unsuccessfully. The figure walks over, taking something from his pocket. There is a brief FLARE OF LIGHT from a lighter.)

WOMAN

Oh! You startled me. (pause) Thank you. Why couldn't I do that?

MAN

A moment of good fortune. The wind died. It's lovely night for a walk, isn't it?

WOMAN

Yes it is. Thank you.

(She exits. The other figure follows her.)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Wha--!! (cut off, muffled)

(Sounds of violence, then the SPLASH of a large object falling into water. The indistinct figure reemerges from the shadow and walks slowly back to where he was standing and stops. He looks out for a moment and then walks away.)

(Sound: WIND picks up. FOG HORN.)

SCENE 2. OPEN FOR BUSINESS

(Morning at the Cafe de Nile, at various times a restaurant, bar, and café, now coffee/wine bar. The decor, including a mural on one wall, once thought to capture the mystique of Casablanca meets Cleopatra, but is now worn and faded and probably for the better. A sign hanging on the closed door reads OPEN from the inside. At the other end of the room double French doors lead to a small dock overlooking the canal. The room is lit but not fully.)

(VIDAL DOROTA is behind the counter getting ready to open. CHRISTOPHER EHRIMAN, dressed in expensive suit, comes to the door and finds that it is still locked. He sees Dorota and KNOCKS on the glass.)

DOROTA

Not open yet. Come back in five minutes.

EHRIMAN

(pleasantly)

Come back from where? I don't have any place to go.

DOROTA

Walk down to river and come back. (points) Ten minutes.

EHRIMAN

I came from there. It's foggy and cold.

DOROTA

Walk to city center. (points other way) Come back. Fifteen minutes.

EHRIMAN

What if I stand here outside the door and talk to you for fifteen minutes. (pause) Or I can sit quietly inside and wait for you to be ready. Please. I'm a customer.

DOROTA

Not yet.

(The man hugs himself as if cold, and DOROTA relents. He turns on the rest of the lights and goes to the door. He unlocks it and turns over the OPEN/CLOSED sign so OPEN faces out. He returns to the counter without opening the door.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

Today I open early.

EHRIMAN

Thank you.

DOROTA

Welcome. Have a seat. I'm not ready for customers. Was hoping no one would come when I opened.

(DOROTA goes back behind counter and continues getting ready, taking different colored cups from the dishwasher, putting on a pot of coffee, taking pastries from a box and putting them in the pastry case. EHRIMAN puts his coat on a chair goes to the pastry case.)

EHRIMAN

Then you got your wish.

DOROTA

I had a feeling it wasn't going to work out.

EHRIMAN

You get what you resist.

DOROTA

Who says that?

EHRIMAN

Everyone. May I? I'd like a bearclaw. (takes one). Could I have a cup of coffee when it's ready. Black. Thank you.

(EHRIMAN sits again. DOROTA brings him a small plate and a napkin.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Thank you again.

(Ehriman watches Dorota with interest as he works. After a moment CECIL BECK enters, carrying a laptop and cord and some papers and a book. He ignores Ehriman and waves absently to Dorota and sits at a table by the wall, back to counter, and proceeds to plug in his laptop and open it. He opens the book and reads a bit, glancing at the screen. Then he types a few words, looks at a paper, types a few more words, and sits staring at the screen.)

(DOROTA takes a black coffee cup and pours it full and takes it to Ehriman. He goes back and puts a glazed donut on a plate and pours coffee into a gray cup. With the sound of the cup being placed on the counter, BECK gets up and gets it. He takes the cup to where the cream and sugar is and doctors his coffee.)

BECK

(not looking at Dorota)

Thanks, Vidal.

DOROTA

And how is your paper today, Cecil?

BECK

(slightly annoyed)

You ask me that every morning.

DOROTA

So you know how it is going. I am that small, still voice within you, prodding you to succeed.

(BECK returns to seat with donut and coffee and stares at laptop screen, then turns to Vidal.)

BECK

Well, Vidal, it feels like a cattle prod, OK. A cattle prod, so stop asking. It's going. Slowly. Slow. Slow enough that I don't need to be reminded!

(VIDAL hurries to BECK and takes his donut and coffee from him, placing them on the table and ushering Beck into his seat.)

DOROTA

I am all apologies. I didn't mean to upset you so early in the day. Later perhaps. I leave you to your ruminations. When you need another donut, simply wave.

(BECK waves him off, then realizes he's waved.)

BECK

No, stop! I don't want another donut! Why do I come here?

DOROTA

So not writing feels like doing something. (pause) Perhaps you should go ... to where these things you don't write about happened. Sometimes the brain isn't the answer; the butt is. Put it in its right place. South America.

BECK

You keep saying that, Vidal. Wouldn't make a difference. I've been there.

DOROTA

That was then, this is now. You want to be the student your whole life?

BECK

And what do you want to be, Vidal?

DOROTA

I want to run an oasis and study the animals that come to drink. I too am a scientist. I study you, Beck. All of you.

(BECK waves off smiling Dorota, then retracts the wave, and goes back to "work.")

EHRIMAN

This is good coffee, Vidal. You roast your own beans, don't you.

DOROTA

Some.

EHRIMAN

I was going to say this was Columbian, but I don't think so. But South American, I think.

(BECK looks at his coffee differently and takes a sip.)

DOROTA

Venezuela, but near Columbia.

EHRIMAN

I knew I should come here.

(EHRIMAN takes a sip and looks at BECK, who is caught not staring at his work.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

I bet Vidal changes the house coffee on a regular basis, and you don't even notice, lost as you are in your research. A mind is a terrible thing to lose in work. A shame.

DOROTA

Sad, yes. To Cecil, coffee is just a carrier of caffeine.

EHRIMAN

I'd say you're a writer, and judging from the book and papers, a student. Based on your age, probably in a Masters program, or...that slight wildness in your eyes...you might be in the last throes of a PhD program. Cecil, are you a PhD candidate?

DOROTA

A PhD candidate. Yes. Cecil is running for the office of PhD.

BECK

It's not an election, Vidal.

EHRIMAN

Of course not. What is it, Cecil? What are you studying?

BECK

Ah, cultural anthropology. Indigenous peoples.

EHRIMAN

Specifically?

BECK

The...ah...North America, a possible migration, from Siberia...to South America, and later, their unexplained demise, possibly. And the consequences.

EHRIMAN

Excellent. You're working on your dissertation...

BECK

Yes. I am. (pause) The abstract.

EHRIMAN

Nearly done then.

(Before BECK has to respond again the door opens and KYRENE GIZANE and ARISSA MARLIS enter. GIZANE is dressed professionally for work and carries a laptop bag; MARLIS is dressed casually and carries a newspaper.)

MARLIS

It wasn't so much that it didn't work out as I could see that it wasn't going to work out. I can see that sort of thing faster than most people. It wasn't right for me.

GIZANE

But how is leaving so soon going to look on your resume?

(MARLIS heads straight for a table near Ehriman. GIZANE stops by BECK.)

MARLIS

Won't be on it. Vidal, I need coffee, but hold the danish.

GIZANE

Morning, Ceese. How are you? Things beginning to come together?

(BECK shrugs; GIZANE taps on his head on way to counter.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Or is everything still piling up in here?

BECK

Still a pile.

GIZANE

Hi, Vidal. What are you serving this morning?

DOROTA

Venezuela. Grown by a friend of a friend. Roasted under the smallest sliver of a moon last night. Ground only minutes ago.

GIZANE

Yum, I'll have some.

(DOROTA has poured a green cup for MARLIS and now pours a peach cup for GIZANE, who pays and takes them both to the table. BECK works; EHRIMAN watches, MARLIS reads the paper.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Thank you, Vidal. So, Arissa, what are you looking for this time.

MARLIS

Was that judgment I heard in "this time"?

GIZANE

Concern.

MARLIS

At my free-spirited approach to life?

GIZANE

At your hair-trigger approach to work. I wish you could find something you really like to do, then you'd probably stick with it.

MARLIS

It's matter of fit, Kyrene. I'm an in-between size, and most jobs just don't fit well. They're all too... tight.

GIZANE

So, what are you looking for? Queen?

MARLIS

Certainly not Lady in Waiting.

GIZANE

I'm biding my time, working my way up. Establishing a track record; it's the way it's done.

MARLIS

The way you do it, not me. You're waiting to be seen, but no one is looking. They take you for granted. I don't know how you put up with it.

GIZANE

Well, another way to look at it, I suppose, is who's employed and who isn't.

MARLIS

You know me. It won't take long.

GIZANE

Practice makes perfect.

MARLIS

People see my strengths easily; they're often just not the right people.

GIZANE

Enough of this. What are you looking for?

MARLIS

I'm just seeing what's out there. I have an appointment with a headhunter this afternoon, and I want to know what to steer her away from. You're looking extra dressy today. Something happening at City Hall?

GIZANE

Big meeting. A consulting firm is coming in to do a presentation on their proposal to revitalize downtown.

EHRIMAN

What a remarkable coincidence. Excuse me, I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but, well, I'm the head of that consulting firm, Ehriman & Associates. I'm Christopher Ehriman.

GIZANE

Pleased to meet you, Mr. Ehriman. My name is Kyrene Gizane, and this is my friend Arissa Marlis.

(MARLIS reaches over to shake hands with Ehriman, who then extends his hand to Gizane.)

MARLIS

Hello.

EHRIMAN

Hello, Arissa. (to Gizane) You corresponded with my office, I believe. Am I correct in assuming you work with Mayor Brown?

GIZANE

Yes, I'm on his staff. We've been looking forward to meeting you. Did you have a pleasant trip?

EHRIMAN

I did. Arrived on the first flight this morning. Had time to check into my hotel and take a little walk, during which I discovered your delightful little backwater cafe. Vidal was kind enough to open early for me.

GIZANE

He's a dear.

MARLIS

Excuse me, I need to step out back.

(MARLIS takes her coffee and walks across the room with a touch of sex in her steps, She goes out onto the dock. The light REFLECTS on her in ripples off the water. She leans against the railing and takes a sip, looking back inside, following the conversation between Ehriman and Gizane.)

EHRIMAN

Go out back?

GIZANE

She smokes.

EHRIMAN

Oh, how brave of her. Kyrene...do you mind if I call you by your first name?

GIZANE

No, not at all.

EHRIMAN

Kyrene, what do you do in the mayor's office?

GIZANE

I work with his Chief of Staff. I'm sort of the chief of staff to the Chief of Staff.

EHRIMAN

Really? I thought you must be the Chief of Staff.

GIZANE

Not yet. In a few years perhaps. Although I'm also considering running for Supervisor from my district in the next election.

EHRIMAN

I'm sure you'll succeed whichever way you choose. Perhaps my little project can be a stepping stone.

(MORE)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

I expect it will generate lots of opportunities. I mean, if it goes ahead, of course. I know we're not the only ones being considered.

GIZANE

Well, I can tell you that no one has an inside track. You have the same chance as everyone else. You're not at a disadvantage because you're from out of town.

EHRIMAN

I couldn't ask for more.

(MARLIS puts her coffee on the railing and takes cigarettes from her purse. She removes one and a lighter and turns around. She lights the lighter and raises the cigarette ... looks at the water, and screams.)

MARLIS

Eeeeeeeeeee!

(Everyone looks. DOROTA hurries outside.)

MARLIS (CONT'D)

There's a body in the canal!

SCENE 3. END OF LONG DAYS

(Cafe de Nile, evening.)

(A tired DOROTA cleans up one of several messy tables. BECK, leaning back with legs stretched out, appears to be thinking, but he's sleeping.)

(GIZANE enters, and seeing Beck starts toward him, but DOROTA motions her away and then makes a "he's sleeping" gesture. GIZANE goes to the counter.)

GIZANE

Hi Vidal. What a day. Did he get anything done?

DOROTA

He needs to stop working if he wants to get anything done. I spray furniture polish on his butt and give him a new chair every day. That's the work he does.

(GIZANE glances at a few of the other chairs.)

GIZANE

Writer's block. He'll get over it.

DOROTA

Maybe he just writes what he knows.

GIZANE

It's only been two weeks since he quit trying to work in that rat's nest of an apartment. I bet he never slept this well at home. And you're not allowed to sleep in the library. Once he's rested, I bet the words will flow like...like what?

DOROTA

Wheels with corners.

GIZANE

Another of your folk sayings that doesn't quite translate?

DOROTA

Ancient. From Toltec graffiti carvings. Can I get you something, Kyrene?

(GIZANE walks to door leading outside to dock.)

GIZANE

Just a glass of water. I'm meeting Arissa. Maybe I'll have something when she comes.

(DOROTA brings her a glass of water.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Thanks. You look tired, Vidal. Have a tough day? Were the police here again?

DOROTA

No, not today. Lot's of people come in to go out back and look. I am now the "Cafe de Nile Where the Body Was Found." I served a cheap Brazilian blend in stained cups.

GIZANE

Why? Didn't you think they'd notice?

DOROTA

Didn't want them to come back.

GIZANE

What kind of capitalist are you?

DOROTA

One who doesn't think the customer is always right.

GIZANE

I dunno, Vidal. What would the owner think?

DOROTA

Business is OK. Owner lives up north.

(MARLIS enters, sees BECK sleeping, and sits opposite him at the table. She slips off a shoe and begins to rub one his legs gently with her foot.)

GIZANE

What are you doing?

MARLIS

I'm giving him dreams.

(BECK begins to stir, then awakens with a jerk. MARLIS stops rubbing his leg before he realizes what she was doing.)

BECK

(groggily)

Hello.

MARLIS

Morning, Beck. Sleep well?

BECK

Yeah...I was dreaming. What are you doing here?

MARLIS

Depends. Where are you?

BECK

Oh. (rubs face) Vidal, got any coffee?

DOROTA

I don't know let me check yes.

(GIZANE joins them at the table.)

GIZANE

Better make it decaf.

BECK

Huh?

GIZANE

It's night. You may want to go to bed later.

BECK

How long have I been sleeping?

GIZANE

Ask Vidal.

BECK

Vidal, how long--

DOROTA

Doesn't matter. No one took anything.

MARLIS

What were you dreaming?

BECK

I was dreaming that I...was working. I was writing furiously.

GIZANE

About what? Do you remember?

BECK

It was about...I dunno. It was clear in the dream, inspired even.

MARLIS

Then what happened.

BECK

A large snake starting climbing up my leg.

MARLIS

Like this.

(MARLIS rubs his leg again and laughs, BECK pulls back.)

BECK

Shouldn't interrupt a man's dreams.

MARLIS

Shouldn't dream in public places.

(DOROTA brings a gray cup of coffee to Beck.)

DOROTA

Decaf.

BECK

Thanks.

MARLIS

I'd like a glass of white. Kyrene, want one?

GIZANE

I do.

BECK

(holds up cup)

I'm good.

MARLIS

So tell me about your date. No, wait, did you hear anything about the woman. On the news they're still saying "unidentified murder victim." You're in the mayor's office. You must have heard something.

GIZANE

Well, she's still unidentified. No ID. And no one's been reported missing. It's a mystery.

BECK

Why don't they broadcast a picture?

GIZANE

Can't. Her face was...disfigured. She was beaten. Badly. And she'd been in the water a few days.

(DOROTA brings two glasses of wine.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Thank you, Vidal.

(DOROTA leaves.)

MARLIS

Makes you think. Coulda been me.

BECK

Yes, if you'd been floating face down in the canal, dead, it would have been you.

GIZANE

Cecil!

BECK

I just meant, Arissa, that occasionally it's not about you.

MARLIS

Not true.

GIZANE

Because of her the poor woman will at least have a decent Christian burial. Well, not necessarily Christian. I mean, we don't know.

BECK

Nondenominational. A noncommittal nondenominational nondescript ending to an unknown life. Wow, coulda been me.

MARLIS

Yes, if you were face down in your keyboard, dead, it would have been you. If anyone noticed. Is it too late to change your major?

BECK

It was a snake.

MARLIS

So, Kyrene, tell me about your date. Where did you eat? What did you order? How much were the drinks?

GIZANE

Yes, he was nice. We had a good time.

MARLIS

Of course. And you'll see him...what, maybe once or twice more. But restaurant information, that's something I can use. You always go to good restaurants.

GIZANE

What makes you think--

MARLIS

--your voice. I've known you since you had a crush on Dennis Delanno but went to the prom with Matt Ryder. I know the "he's nice" voice. Kiss of death. The restaurant please.

GIZANE

Fairchilds.

BECK

Whoa...

GIZANE

... all the hors d'oeuvres, lobster, spring salad, double chocolate cake, all to die for.

MARLIS

And a light kiss.

GIZANE

A light kiss.

MARLIS

Outside the door.

(MARLIS mimes a chaste kiss and good night.)

GIZANE

Stop it, Arissa! What do you expect? An "I'm eating your face" kiss like in the movies?

(GIZANE mimes a gnawing sloppy movie kiss.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

It was a first date, not a test drive.

MARLIS

The first kiss is a test drive.

GIZANE

My god, Arissa. Can't I just go out and have a little fun?

MARLIS

How much fun did you have?

GIZANE

Enough, all right. I had enough fun. At least I don't have a relationship based on reduced expectations!

MARLIS

Not reduced. Realistic. You want perfection. I'll settle for OK and keep my eyes open.

BECK

You've been seeing Eric for six months. Does he know this?

MARLIS

Of course he does. He's trying to better himself. Always.

BECK

Boy, can't wait until I have time for a relationship.

GIZANE

Enough about my relationship... situation, Arissa. How's the search for work going?

MARLIS

Gainful employment. I don't like the word *work*.

BECK

And Marlis launches a return volley.

(Sound of a SPLASH from outside, followed by BUMPING sound and GRUNT. Then sound of man STRAINING and another smaller SPLASH.)

SETON (O.S.)

Damn!

(MICHAEL SETON enters and stops, looking around. One leg is wet halfway to knee. No one says anything for a moment.)

DOROTA

Only one person has come in that way before. And she was dead. ... Can I get you something? A towel perhaps?

SETON

Got any coffee?

(DOROTA pours dark blue cup of coffee and puts on counter. SETON picks it up, and scowls.)

SETON (CONT'D)

Is this the same crap you were serving earlier this week?

DOROTA

Cheap blend, weak and overcooked?

SETON

Robusta?

DOROTA

Brazil.

SETON

Trying to drive customers away?

DOROTA

Yes.

(DOROTA reaches for cup as SETON hands it to him.)

SETON

The worse the crime, the bigger the turnout.

DOROTA

I make you Costa Rican, mountain grown, full body, excellent acidity. Like yourself.

SETON

Black.

MARLIS

Who are you?

SETON

You would be Arissa Marlis, unemployed something or other.

MARLIS

Consultant. Management consultant.

SETON

Yes, Arrisa Marlis, who discovered the body.

MARLIS

It was floating by. Is that what you were doing, floating by?

SETON

My name is Michael Seton. I'm the lead detective on this case. What I was doing is police business.

MARLIS

Getting kind of a late start, aren't you, Detective Seton?

(BECK gets up and walks to back window, looks out at water.)

BECK

The tide is going out. You floated down with the tide, didn't you? To see how long it took, to get some data. To figure out where the body entered the water.

SETON

Very good Mister--

BECK

Beck. Cecil Beck. What'd you come up with?

SETON

Nothing yet, Mr. Beck. I just got off the boat.

BECK

You know, the body couldn't have floated for two days down this canal. It isn't long enough, and the tide goes in and out. And in and out. It must have got caught on something.

SETON

That's what I thought too, Mr. Beck. Beck. Beck. You were here too when the body was found, weren't you?

BECK

Yes. We all were.

SETON

All?

GIZANE

I was here too. My name is Kyrene Gizane.

DOROTA

And I am Dorota. Vidal Dorota.

SETON

I see.

MARLIS

You know, Detective Seton. I think you'll find that when this woman was killed, everyone was somewhere.

SETON

That a fact. Mr. Beck, what do you do?

MARLIS

What is this! You think we're suspects because we were here! Like one of us did it and then came here to wait until the body floated by? That's sick!

SETON

This event was the product of a sick mind, Miss Arissa Marlis. The kind of person who, in my experience, is often described as quiet, normal, friendly, just not the type of person you'd ever expect to beat a woman until her head broke and she was unrecognizable. Mr. Beck?

BECK

I'm investigating whether Siberian hunters migrated to Equador.

SETON

Why don't you ask them?

BECK

Ask them?

SETON

Yes. Ask them.

BECK

Can't. They're dead. (pause) I had nothing to do with it.

SETON

Ask someone who knew them.

BECK

Can't. They're all gone.

SETON

Convenient.

BECK

This was twenty-five thousand years ago. I'm writing about it for my doctoral dissertation.

SETON

Got any evidence of that?

BECK

Evidence? Do you mean, have I written anything? ... I've been having a little--

SETON

--Don't mean anything. Just having a little fun. Read about you in the report. "Cecil Beck, student. Tried to explain theory of ancient migration. Question at own risk."

BECK

So I'm not a suspect.

SETON

Everyone's a suspect.

MARLIS

Well isn't your world a happy place.

SETON

Not world. Job. And, yes. It's a happy place. I like what I do.

(DOROTA puts dark blue cup of coffee on counter.)

DOROTA

I would offer it to you free, but that would be bribe, wouldn't it?

SETON

Depends on the value. How much would this be?

DOROTA

Five dollars.

SETON

Extortion.

DOROTA

Two dollars.

SETON

A deal.

DOROTA

Please, with my compliments. Want you to think clearly.

SETON

Thank you, Mr. Dorota.

GIZANE

Mr. Seton?

SETON

Yes, Ms Gizane.

MARLIS

Why is she Ms Gizane but I'm Miss Marlis?

SETON

Thought she might be married; thought you might be single.

MARLIS

We're both single.

SETON

Noted. Yes, Ms Gizane.

GIZANE

When you talked about the murderer, you said "the kind of person who, in your experience..." Have there been other... I mean...

SETON

No, no, not that I know of. Not around here. We have no reason right now to think that this crime is connected to any others. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you. What I meant was. I was referring to the brutality of the crime. It was probably personal. It likely wasn't a random act.

MARLIS

Likely? Likely? Aren't you reassuring.

SETON

Not trying to be. There's nothing reassuring about living in a society that breeds people who do such things. You have to be careful. Especially at night in the city. And during the day.

GIZANE

Do you know who she was? Have they identified her?

MARLIS

Did you figure out where it happened? I mean how can I be careful if I don't know where I have to pay attention?

SETON

Try everywhere for now.

BECK

What evidence have you found? Was there a cell phone? Did you check the calls she made? Credit card receipts? What were the contents of her stomach?

SETON

I watch TV too, Mr. Beck. Down at the station. We know the routine.

MARLIS

I think we have a right to real answers, Mr. Seton.

SETON

Actually you don't.

MARLIS

Who the hell are you! Where do you get off--

SETON

--Shut up! (pause) I'll tell you who I am. I'm the person who spends his time tracking down brutal killers while you while away your time in a coffee shop. I'm the person who floats down a smelly canal at night on his own time looking for clues. I'm the person who is going to find this twisted mind because people like this need to be found out and put away. (pause, continuing calmly) And on a slightly different note, and to quote those holding the highest offices in this great country, I am not permitted to comment on an ongoing investigation.

MARLIS

Bureaucratic excuse for a cover-up.

SETON

You might be surprised to find out, Ms. Marlis, that serial killers and rapists and drug dealers and pimps and embezzlers often read the paper and watch the news. They are, after all, the news. People like reading about themselves. Knowing what we know can help them stay a step ahead. And we wouldn't want that, would we? No we wouldn't. I thought not.

(SETON looks out at the canal, then back to the room.)

SETON (CONT'D)

I will tell you a little bit about how I work and what I'm going to do. I like to spend a lot of time in the field when I work a case. So you're likely to see me around quite a bit. Here. Try to ignore me. Go about your business as if I'm just another regular customer.

(SETON surveys the room and picks a table against the wall at the end of the counter. One foot SQUISHES as he walks to it. He sits down and removes the shoe and then sock.)

His coffee cup is empty, so he wrings his sock out into it, then puts it back on the counter. DOROTA walks over and takes it, grimacing.)

DOROTA

How about a refill?

SETON

Fresh cup if you don't mind.

(DOROTA pours him more coffee in another dark blue cup. BECK returns to his work, and MARLIS and GIZANE to each other, with peeks at SETON.)

GIZANE

So, where were we? Oh, your gainful employment. Anything out there meeting your high standards?

MARLIS

Actually, it looks like a few things may be opening up connected with the downtown redevelopment. Lots of things. We could end up working together.

GIZANE

Really? That would be great. Want me to put a good word in somewhere? Talk to the mayor, or one of the supervisors?

MARLIS

No. But it's good of you to offer. Always looking out for me.

SETON

Ms Gizane, could I speak with you for a moment. If you don't mind.

(SETON motions to a chair at his table. GIZANE goes over and sits down.)

SETON (CONT'D)

Thank you. I won't interrupt your evening for long. You work in the mayor's office, don't you.

GIZANE

Yes.

SETON

Do you work closely with the mayor?

GIZANE

Well, I'm not sure what you mean. But yes. I work with his chief of staff. I go to meetings with him. I provide input for policy decisions.

SETON

I see. Then you often hear things about what's going on, in the mayor's office, the city, the police department.

GIZANE

Oh, I see. Yes, I generally know what's going on. Things that aren't public. I won't say anything, if that's what you're getting at.

SETON

Yes, exactly. If you hear anything about the investigation ... well, your discretion will be very much appreciated.

GIZANE

I understand. ... Is that it then?

SETON

There's one more thing. You, and your friends, come here often?

GIZANE

Yes, we practically live here.

SETON

And you work in the area too. How's it been around here lately? Places have a rhythm, a feel. Notice anything different?

GIZANE

No, I can't say that I have.

SETON

Well thank for your time, Ms Gizane.

GIZANE

You're welcome...what do I call you? Officer? Detective?

SETON

Detective Seton, Mr. Seton, Michael...whatever works for you is fine.

GIZANE

All right, then. ...I'll see you around...here, I guess.

(GIZANE returns to her table.)

MARLIS

What was that all about? I thought we weren't suspects.

GIZANE

We're not. He wanted to know if I'd seen anything unusual, because I work in the area and hang out here a lot.

MARLIS

What about the rest of us?

GIZANE

I'm to keep an eye on you.

SETON

Mr. Beck. Could I talk to you for a moment?

BECK

Sure.

(BECK goes to Seton's table and stands there.)

SETON

Have a seat, please.

(BECK sits.)

SETON (CONT'D)

You pass a lot of time here, don't you?

BECK

Yes. Vidal let's me work here.

SETON

On your dissertation.

BECK

Yes, on my dissertation.

SETON

Tell me something, Mr. Beck.

BECK

If I can.

SETON

Why in the hell would anyone happy to live a northern climate like Siberia want to go live at the equator? Too damn hot, don't you think?

BECK

Well, it didn't happen all at once.

SETON

Maybe they sent their parents down first, because they were cold all the time. Hands like ice. Toes like ice popsicles. And then the rest followed.

BECK

I think maybe it had something to do with another group moving into the area, forcing them out, or with large predators.

SETON

Why not. You're a fixture here, aren't you. Like the cappuccino machine. Seen anything lately. New people hanging around? Strangers? Anything suspicious?

BECK

Ah, no.

SETON

Let me know if you do. And investigate the cold parent angle. Might be something in it.

(BECK gets up, puts chair back in place, and goes back to his seat.)

SETON (CONT'D)

Miss Marlis. Could I have a moment of your time, please?

(MARLIS walks over, pulls the chair away a little and sits down.)

MARLIS

How can I help you?

SETON

You strike me as the sort of person who knows what's going on. Finger on the pulse, that sort of thing.

MARLIS

I'd say informed. But I guess you wouldn't.

SETON

Informed, yes. I didn't mean to offend you.

MARLIS

Once is enough. Are you going to apologize? How should I know police procedure?

SETON

You shouldn't. That doesn't make me angry. That's just ignorance. No reason you should know police procedure.

MARLIS

What about five minutes ago! You told me to shut up. I should file a complaint against you.

SETON

You went from ignorance to disrespect. That does make me angry. (pause) But I understand, a crime like this makes people jumpy, afraid. ... Even the police get a little touchy sometimes.

MARLIS

What can I do for you, Detective Seton?

SETON

I'm just asking you and your friends if you've seen anything out of the ordinary lately. Anything...different. Sometimes the most inconsequential thing can be a clue, help connect things.

MARLIS

Like a victim and her murderer.

SETON

Exactly.

MARLIS

I read something, or saw it on cable, about how there aren't any "accidents." No random events. Everything is connected. People meet for a reason, even ...

SETON

People like this woman and the man who took her life.

MARLIS

Why would.. I mean...I don't know what I mean.

SETON

What could this woman have done to have drawn this thing into her life? What did she do that I might be doing?

MARLIS

You're not as dumb as you look.

SETON

And you're not as hard as you seem. (pause) She didn't do anything. People like this, they don't need reasons.

MARLIS

Well,I haven't noticed anything. Things have been downright boring around here.

SETON

Just the way we like it in my line of work. Thank you for your time. And good luck with the job search.

(MARLIS gets up.)

MARLIS

Thank you.

(MARLIS goes back to her table.)

GIZANE

So, you two talked for a while.

MARLIS

He wanted to apologize for yelling at me.

GIZANE

Really?

MARLIS

He's less of a slug than I thought. And he knows more than we think he does.

GIZANE

I hope so.

(SETON gets up and stands at the counter. DOROTA comes over.)

DOROTA

Any suspects?

SETON

I think Marlis did it in the library with an attitude.

DOROTA

Lots of fire in that one.

SETON

Mr. Dorota, in your line of work, you probably notice new faces, different faces. Someone who's maybe come in more than once? Hung around? Acted strange.

DOROTA

You mean someone who acts like a psychopathic killer?

SETON

Unfortunately not. They often act normal, except, you know, when they're disemboweling someone. But killers sometimes return to the scene of the crime. Might be the same with this place. Because of the body.

DOROTA

Uh-huh.

SETON

Keep your radar tuned.

(People turn to the sound of the door opening. EHRIMAN walks to the counter and removes his coat, leaving it on a stool.)

EHRIMAN

Good evening, Vidal. Streetlights are on. Fog's coming in. Fills the city with atmosphere. Quite lovely. Bit of a chill, though. How about a straight shot, ristretto.

DOROTA

Ah, Mr. Ehriman has a late night planned.

EHRIMAN

Lot's of work to do. Things are coming together.

(EHRIMAN sees BECK working and goes over.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Beck, still hard at it. How's the writing coming along? You know, it was pleasant to come in and see you sitting here by the warm glow of a laptop. Makes the place feel friendly, inviting.

BECK

Thanks, Mr. Ehriman. It's going...better...I think. I can feel some ideas...beginning...to come together.

EHRIMAN

Excellent. Keep at it. Before you know it, they'll gather right on the page.

(EHRIMAN notices MARLIS and GIZANE looking at him and he goes to their table.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Good evening. Nice to see you again.

(GIZANE smiles and is about to answer but MARLIS strikes first.)

MARLIS

Hello Mr. Ehriman. You're in a good mood tonight. Things must be going well with the city.

EHRIMAN

Indeed they are, Ms Marlis. Our presentation was well received. I've been asked for some follow-up information.

GIZANE

It was well done, Mr. Ehriman.

MARLIS

So you think you'll get the contract?

GIZANE

There are other presentations yet.

EHRIMAN

You know, I do. I have a feeling about this. I think there will be lots of opportunities around here in the not too distant future.

GIZANE

Would you like to join us, Mr. Ehriman?

EHRIMAN

Thank you, but no. I have lots of notes to make for tomorrow. If you'll excuse me.

(DOROTA has put ristretto on counter in small black cup. EHRIMAN returns to counter and throws his ristretto down.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Oh, very nice. Let me have a black coffee now to warm my insides.

(DOROTA pours coffee in black cup and puts on counter. EHRIMAN sips coffee and makes notes. SETON watches him. BECK rubs his eyes and collects his things.)

MARLIS

Hmmm. Perhaps Mr. Ehriman needs help. Is he going to be at city hall tomorrow? Perhaps I could drop by.

BECK

Hey, good night you guys. Thanks Vidal.

(DOROTA waves.)

MARLIS

Nite Ceese.

(MARLIS waves offhandedly.)

GIZANE

Big day tomorrow for me too. Hang on, Ceese. I'll walk out with you. Nite, Arissa. Bye, Vidal.

DOROTA

Good night, Kyrene.

(GIZANE gathers her things and she and BECK leave. SETON watches, looks down and makes notes, looks up, staring away, makes another note and looks up again, staring into space in the direction of EHRIMAN.)

EHRIMAN

Can I help you?

(SETON doesn't respond.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

SETON

What?

EHRIMAN

Is there something I can do for you? You've been staring at me.

SETON

I didn't mean to be. I was thinking, lost in thought. Didn't know I was looking at you.

EHRIMAN

I expect not. A difficult case, I take it.

SETON

A difficult case?

EHRIMAN

The murder of that young woman. I read your name in the paper. You're the detective in charge, aren't you. Michael Seton. I'm Christopher Ehriman. Downtown redevelopment. Your photo is on the wall at City Hall, getting an award from the mayor. For...bravery?

SETON

Yes, community service. Pleased to meet you. You're an observant man, Mr. Ehriman. There's lots of faces on that wall. ... Yes, it's a serious case. But solvable. I have no doubt I'll find the person responsible.

EHRIMAN

You have clues then?

SETON

Well, I really can't talk about that.

EHRIMAN

Of course not. I understand. I shouldn't have asked. It's just that...well... I know what cities can be like, especially the more dilapidated parts. They breed ... fear. You can feel it in the air, can't you, like a cold mist drifting across your face.

SETON

A poet and a developer. You've noticed that? In our fair city.

EHRIMAN

I have. This week. I've wandered around a bit, spent time in the areas proposed for redevelopment. I talk to people. Before they answer, there's a pause, while they look at you, wondering. Could you be the one? It's ... well, unpleasant is the word I guess. It's eerie.

SETON

Again, you have a good eye, Mr. Ehriman. I've noticed the same thing. People are afraid.

EHRIMAN

And wary.

SETON

Yes. Being extra alert is good. ... If you'll excuse me.

(SETON smiles and returns to his note taking.)

EHRIMAN

You're not afraid, though, are you Detective Seton?

(SETON looks up again, mildly annoyed now. He looks at Ehriman for a moment before he answers.)

SETON

I'm a cautious man, and I have a healthy respect for what people like this can do. ... But no, I'm not afraid of whoever did this.

EHRIMAN

You're experienced. I can tell. Well...good hunting. I have notes to make too. Big day tomorrow.

(EHRIMAN looks down at his work, and SETON does the same. After a moment SETON looks up again, lost in thought, or is he looking at Ehriman?)

SCENE 4. EHRIMAN INQUIRY

(Cafe de Nile, late afternoon.)

(BECK is in his usual place, with gray cup of coffee. DOROTA takes dishes from a table and puts them in tub. He wipes off the table and then pulls up a chair near BECK, sitting with his legs outstretched. BECK doesn't look up.)

Note: During this scene lighting changes to show passage from afternoon to evening.)

BECK

No, I don't want to know what you think, Vidal.

(Pause. DOROTA looks around as if deciding, starts to wag his finger as if to make a point, but stops, then starts again.)

DOROTA

Cecil, do you know what I think? You go ahead and keep working. I don't want to interrupt what you're not doing. I'll tell you what I think. How well do you think I could run the Cafe de Nile if I came in and just sat like I am now?

(Pause.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

Come on answer me. I'm talking to you.

BECK

I thought you said... Not very--

(DOROTA gets up and goes back to counter.)

BECK (CONT'D)

--well. Is this your point? I should get off my butt and go somewhere? It's not that simple, Vidal. You run a coffee shop. I'm trying to write a dissertation. You pour a black liquid into cups. I'm trying to explain a mystery.

DOROTA

I provide personal service to scholars such as yourself. And I clean the cups too. Don't forget that. And I know coffee. And I run the business. (gesture widely with arms)

BECK

What business? How do you even stay open? No offense, Vidal, but you could use a degree in Business Administration. Why do you even care about what I do? You don't harass the other customers with their face stuck on LCD screens. Why me? Is that why you said I could park myself here, just so you could poke me now and then.

(Pause.)

DOROTA

And to polish my chairs. ... Finally. You begin to understand.

BECK

Huh?

DOROTA

I have a degree.

BECK

You do not.

(DOROTA goes to Beck's computer, commandeers it, and goes to a website. He points at the screen with his finger.)

DOROTA

There. That's me. Read.

BECK

Doctor of Philosophy. Community Political Psychology. ... P-H-D. ... This long name...that's all you?

(DOROTA nods.)

BECK (CONT'D)

What's Community Political Psychology?

DOROTA

It deals with how people relate to their communities and their governments in different political systems.

(BECK gets up and paces.)

BECK

And you're doing some kind of study? Is that it? I'm here because I'm part of your research? I'm part of an experiment?

DOROTA

It's observational, not experimental. You might call it prototypical bartender behavior.

BECK

I can't believe it.

(BECK slumps back into his chair. DOROTA laughs. BECK looks over angrily.)

DOROTA

What? You want to be a scientist, but you don't want to be studied yourself?

BECK

Absolutely not. ... I have friends for that.

(BECK stares at his computer screen, then gets up and rearranges his table so his back is no longer to Dorota. DOROTA busys himself behind counter.)

BECK (CONT'D)

Doesn't telling me about what you're doing ruin my value as a subject?

DOROTA

Yes. To a degree. But only if you could change your behavior.

BECK

What behavior? Never mind. Why tell me? Just to mock me?

DOROTA

No. You have friends for that. What I say to you...it has no meaning. You don't listen to me. I am only the simple manager of a coffee shop. Perhaps now you will think a little about what I say.

BECK

And you're probably going to say it now, aren't you.

DOROTA

Get out of here. Go back to the field. That is where your answers are. Only there will you learn what you need to know.

BECK

What makes you so sure? Did you see something in how I relate to my community and my government that gives you insight into my future?

(DOROTA walks over to the table.)

DOROTA

No. You don't relate to either. You're my control. Cecil, what I know is that you are not happy.

BECK

Of course I'm not happy! I have writer's block! I'm stuck. I'm behind! And you think I'll be different if I have writer's block in the jungle instead of a coffee shop!

DOROTA

No, I think you will be the same.

BECK

Then why go?

DOROTA

You think the issue is that you cannot form your thoughts around migrating Eskimos, or whatever. I don't. I think you don't want to be what you're trying to become. That's why you can't write. You don't want to be a social anthropologist. I don't know what you want to be, but that is not it. You sit like a condemned man.

(BECK improves his posture a little.)

BECK

But I should go back into the field?

DOROTA

Yes. I think if you go back into the field, you will find you like it even less than being here. And that should tell you something.

(DOROTA goes back behind the counter. He looks at BECK and smiles.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

You're not in your right place.

(BECK stares at him and then gets up and rearranges his table as it was, his back to the counter, and sits down again and pretends to write energetically.)

BECK

I see, two wrongs make a right.

DOROTA

Hey, Cecil. Keep my secret?

BECK

Why should I?

DOROTA

I'm not through watching.

(BECK turns to face DOROTA again.)

BECK

What are you studying?

DOROTA

Here. Compared to where I come from. My family, going back for generations, we grew up in the same area, the same towns.
(MORE)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

Over time the government slowly changed, from a dictatorship, to a ...less repressive dictatorship, to a third world republic, now to what you rich countries call second world. A banana republic grande. That's what I wrote my dissertation about.

BECK

A banana republic grande?

DOROTA

Those changes. Those relationships. Since then, I've been studying these things in different countries. (*gestures to include cafe*) Not so formally.

BECK

The Cafe de Nile. A second world place--

DOROTA

--in a first world political system.

BECK

If I keep your secret, will you leave me alone?

DOROTA

Your simple coffee shop manager. At your service, senior.

BECK

Gracias.

(BECK returns to work.)

BECK (CONT'D)

You're not going to tell me I should think about what you said?

DOROTA

How can you not?

BECK

I'm not. I'm not a quitter. You might think I am, but I'm not.

DOROTA

It's not about quitting.

BECK

You have an advanced degree from a prestigious university in your own country and you're serving people coffee in a dump like this in America. Why should I listen to you?

DOROTA

You're stuck. I'm not.

BECK

You're in your right place?

DOROTA

Right now.

BECK

Good for you.

DOROTA

You are right. You should write your paper about Eskimos in the Amazon. You can call it "A Snowball's Chance in Hell."

(DOROTA walks over to BECK.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

Stand up. ... Come on, stand up.

(BECK stands. DOROTA studies the chair he was sitting in. Picking it up and holding it to the light to study the seat.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

It's done.

BECK

What's done?

(DOROTA puts the chair down near another table and takes one of its chairs and puts it behind BECK.)

He then produces a yellow aerosol can from his apron and sprays on Beck's backside. BECK yelps and jumps away.)

BECK (CONT'D)

Hey! What are you doing? What was that?

DOROTA

Furniture polish. If you're going to stay I want you to work. Sit down.

BECK

What's wrong with you? ... How do I get this stuff off my pants? These are my good jeans. Give me a rag.

DOROTA

Just sit down. (sits Beck down) Wipe it on the chair. Go on. Squirm around like a kid who has to pee.

(DOROTA goes back behind counter and picks up a box and exits through door behind counter.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

Watch the place, will you. I'll be right back. Gotta grind a few beans.

BECK

Did you really spray stuff on my butt?

(BECK looks confused, looks around to see if anyone is watching, and squirms back and forth. Then he stares at his computer screen.)

ACT II

SCENE 1. COMING TOGETHER

(Cafe de Nile, late afternoon.)

(BECK sitting, squirming in seat. EHRIMAN enters, a bounce to his step, looking pleased.)

EHRIMAN

Mr. Beck, hard at it. Good for you. How goes the writing?

BECK

Ah, OK, Mr. Ehriman. ... You're in a good mood.

EHRIMAN

Indeed I am. It's not official, so don't quote me on this, except, you know, as hearsay if you want to leak it to the papers. But I fully expect Ehriman & Associates to land the redevelopment contract. We're going to recreate your decaying waterfront and make it a centerpiece of business and affordable urban living.

BECK

Even for us poor students? Most of the cheap apartments are here.

EHRIMAN

Don't worry. We're moving you to reservations. A joke. Don't worry. Besides, I expect you'll be a professor by then.

BECK

I doubt that, but I may not be here either. *(pause)* I had the thought...the consideration...that I might go back into the field. Do a little more research, get close to my subject again.

EHRIMAN

I see. Close to your subject...or farther from your writing?

BECK

I'd take it with me.

EHRIMAN

Yes, of course. Physically. But what would you really be doing? Running away? You've done your research, haven't you? Collected data?

BECK

Yes.

EHRIMAN

Formed a theory? Researched the literature?

BECK

Yes. But things haven't been coming--

EHRIMAN

--together as easily as you expected? Of course not. Nothing worth it does. ... Now you know best what you need to do. And if you're sure you need to go, then by all means go. But sometimes a person just needs another set of eyes. Someone who's not in your head, so to speak.

(EHRIMAN takes out one of his business cards and writes a name and phone number on it. DOROTA returns from back room.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Here, call this man if you like. *(gives Beck the card)* He's a friend of mine. Tell him what your doing, what your ideas are. He'll give you some feedback. Maybe help you along. Listen to him.

BECK

Dr. Norman Rosen! You know Norman Rosen? How? He's one of the top guys in the field.

EHRIMAN

So he says. We met through some work at his campus.

BECK

Thanks, Mr. Ehriman.

EHRIMAN

Quite welcome. I'll let him know you'll be calling. Vidal, I'll have a glass of white. Your best. And where's the gentlemen's room?

(DOROTA points to hall at end of counter. EHRIMAN exits. DOROTA exits behind counter and returns with a bottle. He opens it and pours a glass, which he leaves on the counter. BECK smiles in thought. SETON enters and sits away from the others. He takes out a newspaper and reads. MARLIS enters, distraught. She looks around, frowns at SETON, sees BECK, and goes up to him.)

MARLIS

Hi. What are you smiling about?

BECK

I made some progress on my writing. What's with you?

MARLIS

I had a shitty interview this afternoon. I went home to dump on Eric. But he's still out of town. So I came here to dump on you.

BECK

If you wait awhile, maybe Kyrene will come in.

MARLIS

No, you'll do.

(MARLIS sits at BECK's table and closes his laptop.)

MARLIS (CONT'D)

Have you ever had an interview where everything just clicks? Where you establish this instant rapport with everyone you talk to and know how much they'd enjoy working with you?

BECK

No.

MARLIS

No, I suppose not. Well, can you imagine what that would be like?

(Pause.)

BECK

Uh-uh.

MARLIS

Work with me, Cecil. Can you remember a scene in a movie where someone else did something like this?

BECK

Ah... *Basic Instinct?*

MARLIS

That's not called rapport.

(EHRIMAN returns and sees the glass. He sips and nods approvingly to DOROTA. DOROTA shows him the bottle. Ehriman stays at counter looking, drinking, watching.)

BECK

How about *The Music Man*.

MARLIS

Stop thinking. Just listen. I talked to some underling in Human Resources and said all the right things. I passed and met with the Director of Operations, the hiring manager. We hit it off. We practically got engaged. And then I talked to three people in the department. And it's like we'd all known each other forever.

BECK

Maybe they felt that way too.

(MARLIS pauses, unsure. DOROTA exits into back again.)

BECK (CONT'D)

It sounds great. When do we get to the shitty part?

MARLIS

So they all leave and I'm left alone in this cavernous conference room without even a sparkling water, and then the director comes back in, you know, to say how much they all liked me but there's a few other candidates or whatever and I'll hear shortly. But we both know I'll get the job.

BECK

Arrisa, how can you possibly think you'd know something like that?

MARLIS

Because I know people. I've been on lots of interviews. I've gotten lots of jobs. All of them, in fact.

(MARLIS pauses, getting steamed again as she relives the event.)

BECK

What happened?

MARLIS

You wanna know what happened?

BECK

I do. More than I usually want to know about anything that happens to you.

MARLIS

This Mr. Hamilton Director of Operations says "We all enjoyed meeting you Miss Marlis but to tell you the truth we don't feel there's a good fit here. We need someone with more experience solving our sorts of challenges and I don't like to keep a candidate waiting and slow down their job search elsewhere I'm sure you'll do very well thank you for coming in" and that was it. It was over.

BECK

And you thanked him for his time and graciously said good-by.

MARLIS

I said "It's not about experience; it's about who can do the job."

BECK

Oh. Then he graciously said good-by.

MARLIS

Vidal! Whatdaya got to drink?

(MARLIS looks at counter, but DOROTA is not there. She sees EHRIMAN, who holds up the bottle.)

EHRIMAN

Mr. Dorota is busy in back. Could I interest you in an exquisite Pouilly-Fuissé (pooh-YEE fwee-SAY)? I couldn't help but overhear. This would most certainly cheer you up. In fact, I might be able to cheer you up also. You're looking for work?

(EHRIMAN takes two glasses from behind counter and goes to the table. DOROTA returns and pours dark-red cup of coffee and delivers to SETON, who nods appreciatively. After a few minutes of behind the counter activity, DOROTA takes a clipboard and goes into the back again.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

May I?

MARLIS

Please.

EHRIMAN

And Mr. Beck?

BECK

Thank you.

(EHRIMAN pours two glasses of wine, sits, and raises his glass.)

EHRIMAN

To interesting days.

BECK

To interesting days.

MARLIS

To interesting days.

(They drink. EHRIMAN savors; the others just drink.)

MARLIS (CONT'D)

Mmmm, good. Yes, Mr. Ehriman, I'm looking for an engagement. And I'm always looking to be cheered up.

EHRIMAN

Operations, if I overheard you correctly.

MARLIS

Yes, operations, project management, management. I have, if I may be so bold as to say so myself, leadership ability.

BECK

Only her lack of self confidence holds her back.

MARLIS

From the mouths of babes. Cecil, you're an idiot savant.

EHRIMAN

I like people who are self possessed. I need them. In fact, I fully expect to need many of them in the near future.

BECK

You got the contract?

EHRIMAN

I am confident. Very confident in fact. Confident enough to consider staffing requirements. On projects like this, I like to work with a liaison, a sort of operations manager. Someone to interface between my project manager, myself sometimes, and the mayor's office. Much the way Ms Gizane has acted on my visit.

MARLIS

Well, I could certainly do that for you. Kyrene is such a great organizer. I like to think we're the same as far as that goes.

EHRIMAN

I expect you are, and much more I'm sure. You could well be the right person, Ms Marlis.

MARLIS

I hope you'll consider it. Would I, or whoever, report to you directly, or to the project manager?

EHRIMAN

Hard to say at this point. Varies from project to project, city to city. Sometimes the person reports to me, sometimes my manager, and sometimes the person works out of the mayor's office.

MARLIS

I see. When should we talk about this? It's not too soon, is it? I don't mean to rush you.

BECK

Yes she does.

MARLIS

Yes I do.

(EHRIMAN laughs. MARLIS takes a business card out of her purse and gives it to him.)

EHRIMAN

I'll contact you tomorrow. We'll set up something.

MARLIS

I look forward to your call.

(MARLIS finishes her wine and stands.)

MARLIS (CONT'D)

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to take care of some business while the stores are still open.

(MARLIS exits. BECK is uncomfortable alone with EHRIMAN. He gulps his wine and quickly gathers his things.)

BECK

And I should get some notes together before I call Professor Rosen. Thank you for the wine, Mr. Ehriman.

EHRIMAN

My pleasure. Till next time.

(BECK leaves. EHRIMAN pours himself another glass and holds up the bottle, noting that there is wine left. He looks at SETON, takes a sip, then picks up an empty glass and the bottle and goes to SETON's table. EHRIMAN stands there; SETON lowers the paper until they see each other.)

SETON

Mr. Ehriman, how nice to see you.

EHRIMAN

I know I'm intruding, but I feel the situation demands it.

(DOROTA returns looks at them, and sits at the counter reading a book.)

SETON

What situation would that be, Mr. Ehriman?

EHRIMAN

This Pouilly-Fuissé. I'm at my two-glass limit, and there's a glass left. I realize you may be on duty, but if you had even a sip of this wine, you'd feel it was a crime to waste it. If you were French, you'd feel duty bound to imbibe.

(Pause.)

SETON

That good.

(EHRIMAN pours a small amount in glass and gives it to Seton, who tastes it.)

SETON (CONT'D)

I believe I just went off duty.

(SETON holds up his glass and EHRIMAN empties the bottle into it.)

SETON (CONT'D)

Thank you, Mr. Ehriman. Very kind.

EHRIMAN

Thank you.

(EHRIMAN turns to leave.)

SETON

Mr. Ehriman? ... If you'd care to join me, I 'd like to ask you a few questions about your work.

(EHRIMAN sits.)

EHRIMAN

Ask away. I'm nothing if not self-centered. That was a joke. Actually I'm humble and withdrawn.

SETON

So I've observed. *(takes a sip, nods approvingly)* Very nice. ... I drove up to St. Ambrose yesterday to consult on an unfortunate incident that occurred there a while ago. Not dissimilar to what happened here.

EHRIMAN

Oh my. Do you think the events are related?

SETON

Wouldn't think so, no. Other than the level of violence. The brutality. But near the scene was a large construction project, and the sign said--

EHRIMAN

--Ehriman & Associates. I know. We're redoing the campus of the St. Ambrose Academy. I believe someone guilty and rich died, left them some money. We're helping him atone for his sins, I think, whatever they might have been. Must have been considerable, although he was a pillar of the community. There was a crime nearby? How unfortunate. You think there's a connection apparently.

SETON

I think that large public or institutional construction projects often involve people of influence and large sums of money and various segments of the construction industry. The raw ingredients for criminal activity. Occasionally.

EHRIMAN

I should think so yes. Criminal activity occurs in all aspects of society. All societies. All countries. I doubt that St. Ambrose is immune.

SETON

I thought maybe with your background you might shed some light on...such connections. I'm looking for leads, Mr. Ehriman, and I'm not getting very far.

EHRIMAN

Oh, I see. I'm afraid not. What I know I learned on TV. You know. Follow the money. Who stands to gain. Who knows who. Get a DNA sample. All the things I'm sure you're pursuing.

(Pause.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

In fact, could it be Detective Seton, that you're pursuing me? ... What an intriguing thought. Me, a suspect. A person of interest. Just because we met in a coffee shop. Such a thin thread to bind us together. Or is there more?

SETON

No, nothing more, Mr. Ehriman. A thin thread, and a glass of wine.

EHRIMAN

Don't worry. I have no doubt you'll meet your man.

SETON

Nor do I. I expect it to be a day he'll remember.

EHRIMAN

Perhaps you should investigate my projects in other cities. See if there are unsolved crimes, unknown connections.

(MORE)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Perhaps one of my suppliers has money problems, or was committed when he was young and his record expunged, or changed his name. Ripped from the headlines. Has to begin somewhere, doesn't it?

SETON

Do you think I would find anything?

EHRIMAN

Oh who knows. But do tell me. And better get busy, I've worked in lots of places. In fact I was recently in Baghdad. A gold mine for someone in your line of work, and mine. But I suspect you've already started. You're good at what you do. The mayor even said so.

SETON

I can't help but wonder if you're playing with me, Mr. Ehriman. You're glib beyond words, if that is possible.

EHRIMAN

It's the wine. Makes me run on and on. I apologize. More likely I'm just innocent and bored and having fun at your expense. Business trips can get tedious. I have a restless mind.

SETON

And excellent taste in wine. (empties glass) Thank you.

(SETON stands and collects his things.)

EHRIMAN

You're quite welcome. And I'll tell you what, for my impertinence, I'll help you in any way I can. If you think there might be a connection between my work and these crimes, if you want some records or information about who I work with or anything at all, just let me know. I'll see that my office helps you in any way possible. No subpoenas required. My treat.

SETON

A kind offer. Thank you, Mr. Ehriman. I wish everyone were as civic minded. Now if you'll excuse me.

(SETON leaves. EHRIMAN sits until SETON is gone, then gets up and goes slowly to window and looks out.)

EHRIMAN

A man on a mission. (pause) Vidal, this section of town's pretty crappy, but some of the buildings aren't so bad. Something to consider when we start planning. What do you think?

(EHRIMAN walks to counter and sits across from DOROTA, who puts his book away.)

DOROTA

Me, Mr. Ehriman? What do I think? I don't know so much about redevelopment. Where I come from, there are lots of old buildings, and new buildings abandoned with rebar sticking up like bad hair. They stay that way until they fall down. ... Can I get you something else?

EHRIMAN

But there must be people like me too. Fixing things up for the next generation.

DOROTA

It's good to fix things up.

EHRIMAN

Oh, come on, Vidal. You don't have to diminish yourself for me. You're reading Jorge Luis Borges. Hardly food for a simple mind. ... I understand why you might want to adopt a more humble persona while working here. Makes it easier to sit back and watch doesn't it? Keeps people away?

DOROTA

A teacher recommended this book. Said it would teach me about America.

EHRIMAN

Of course, "The Lottery in Babylon," a pleasant fiction. ... I guess you're watching me too. Why not. But tell me, do you think we should keep any of the buildings around here? Or just level the whole area and start over?

DOROTA

Without the cafe, I don't work.

EHRIMAN

Don't worry about that. I'll make sure you have a job if that's what's on your mind. I'm interested in what you think about the area, though. I would think you're more in tune with it.

(Pause.)

DOROTA

I think an old building like this, where people have come. They have a life. New buildings do not. ... They have Wi-Fi.

(EHRIMAN gets up and walks about the room, pausing to look out at the canal and then out at the street.)

EHRIMAN

I know what you mean. The Cafe de Nile must have seen a lot. Look at the brickwork. This building must be 100 years old. I love the feeling. That's something we want to preserve. The feeling. We may keep the front and some of the interior walls, for that sense of authenticity. Preserve the flavor, if not the food. ... But maybe we should keep the whole building, eh? When I can, I like to save at least one building that would normally be torn down. I often absorb the extra cost just to make it happen. Maybe the Cafe de Nile will be that building. What do you think, Vidal?

DOROTA

That would be nice. I can give you the owner's number if you wish.

EHRIMAN

Thank you. I have it already. ... Now what's that look, Vidal? That's not the look of a simple coffee shop manager.

(Pause.)

DOROTA

I was thinking, in my country, we also have men like you. ...
Men with good ideas for the people.

EHRIMAN

There's more to you than meets the eye, Vidal. Unlike some of
the people you serve.

*(EHRIMAN takes out bill out his wallet and gives
it to Dorota.)*

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Will this cover the wine?

(DOROTA takes single bill starts to make change.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Keep the change. Please. You deserve more than I'm sure you
make here. Perhaps we can talk about that another time. Good
evening, Vidal.

DOROTA

Good night, Mr. Ehriman.

*(EHRIMAN leaves. DOROTA watches him leave and
stares at the door.)*

SCENE 2. SPLINTERING

Cafe de Nile, night. Fog swirls outside the windows. DOROTA washes and dries glasses. A lone black coffee cup sits on the counter. BECK sits at a table, sipping a glass of wine, laptop open, gray coffee cup on table, no appearance of working. SETON sits in a far corner with a newspaper and red coffee cup.

BECK

Vidal, whata ya think's going to happen around here when the redevelopment starts?

DOROTA stops what's doing and looks at BECK. He takes the black cup and washes it.)

DOROTA

Don't know.

BECK

The Cafe de Nile has become like a home to me.

(When there is no response, BECK sips his wine, adjusts the position of his laptop, looks around. After a moment, GIZANE enters and goes straight to DOROTA.)

BECK (CONT'D)

Hi Kyrene? Join me?

GIZANE

Hi Ceese. Later. I need to talk to Vidal.

(GIZANE takes a seat at the counter.)

DOROTA

You need to talk to me? You need help with your love life. Finally you ask. Let me get you a cup of French Roast. I want you alert.

(DOROTA pours a cup of coffee in a dark orange cup.)

GIZANE

No Vidal! It's about you.

DOROTA

About me? How is that possible. My love life is fine. Just ask around.

GIZANE

Ask who?

DOROTA

Everyone. Vidal Dorota, mender of broken hearts.

GIZANE

I'm sure. (takes a sip) Hmm, this is good. Thank you. It's not about you, exactly, Vidal, it's about the cafe.

DOROTA

Ah. The wrecking ball draws near.

GIZANE

It's possible. Ehriman is getting the contract, and this whole area is in the redevelopment district. You might want to look for another job while there's time.

DOROTA

Thank you for telling me. But Mr. Ehriman already offered me a job.

GIZANE

He did? He offered Arissa some kind of job too, apparently. He really is a people person. I thought that was just a mission statement. Doing what?

DOROTA

Not sure. The same, I think. Running the cafe.

GIZANE

Here? That doesn't seem likely. Everything around here is going to be torn down.

DOROTA

He said he might save the building.

GIZANE

Really. He's full of surprises. Not sure how he can do that, but he and the mayor have become pretty close. Maybe this will be the historic district, a re-imagining of warehouses and drug dens as giftshops and restaurants. I'm sure Mr. Ehriman could sell that, or anything else.

DOROTA

Yes, he's a snake.

GIZANE

Snake-oil salesman, not snake. And I don't think so. He seems harmless enough. But he's definitely a salesman. Are you going to take him up on his offer?

DOROTA

Don't think he's harmless, Kyrene.

GIZANE

What do you mean?

A feeling. ... Men like him make promises. I'll wait and see.

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Vidal, you can't always wait and see. This could be an opportunity for you. I'll be seeing Mr. Ehriman at work. I could tell him about you, put in a good word. I'd like to help you.

DOROTA

Don't bother.

GIZANE

It's no trouble. I'll talk to him next time I see him.

DOROTA

I wish you wouldn't.

GIZANE

I insist. I'm going to do it.

DOROTA

Don't.

GIZANE

Vidal, you're standing in your own way. Do you want to work in a place like this your whole life? I have some influence with the mayor, and through him to Ehriman. This is your chance to take a step up. I can help you. In fact, I'll help you whether you like it or not. You can decide what to do when the offer comes.

DOROTA

Don't!

GIZANE

But--

DOROTA

--Kyrene, DO NOT intercede with either the mayor or Mr. Ehriman on my behalf. Do nothing. Do not mention my name. Do not involve yourself in my affairs.

(Pause.)

GIZANE

Are you in the country illegally?

DOROTA

I have papers.

BECK

He probably has a book deal.

DOROTA

Shut up.

GIZANE

A book deal? ... Intercede? Are you a writer, Vidal?

DOROTA

I am who you think I am, please. I am someone who does not want his life touched by Christopher Ehriman.

SETON

Why would that be, Vidal? ... I couldn't help but overhear.
You have a melodious voice that carries well.

*(DOROTA looks over at SETON, then back at BECK,
then at GIZANE. He pours himself a glass of water
and drinks.)*

DOROTA

My father taught us who to watch out for. Not the men you
know are bad...they are easy to see. The others. The men who
make you afraid and you don't know why. They speak words of
honey and have hearts like coal.

GIZANE

And you think Mr. Ehriman is such a man?

*(DOROTA'S demeanor says yes, but he doesn't
answer.)*

GIZANE (CONT'D)

What makes you think so?

BECK

He's helping me with my dissertation.

GIZANE

He got Arissa a job. That makes him a miracle worker.

(Pause.)

DOROTA

Nothing makes me think so. It is something I feel. In here.
When I am around him. When he talks.

SETON

What is that, Vidal? What exactly?

(Pause.)

DOROTA

My ears like to listen, but my body wants to run.

SETON

Vidal, in your country, did something happen because of these men? To someone you knew?

DOROTA

An uncle. He spoke well, and he had a good heart. But he didn't listen. He didn't know when to be afraid.

GIZANE

What happened?

DOROTA

He disappeared one day. He went to the plaza, and he didn't come home.

SETON

I'm sorry.

GIZANE

You're not in your country now, Vidal. You don't have to be afraid.

DOROTA

Fear can make you alert, but it can also make you numb. Too much for too long, without reasons. Or the wrong reasons. You forget how to feel it, how to listen to it in your body. You all think too much.

BECK

Is that your book? ... What a bummer.

GIZANE

Who are you, Vidal?

(SETON gets up and goes to the counter.)

SETON

Yes, who are you Mr. Dorota? It seems you've been hiding something from us.

(Pause.)

DOROTA

It was coming to an end anyhow. ... Cecil, show them. You bookmarked the page, I'm sure.

(BECK goes to the counter with his laptop, and shows them the web page.)

BECK

See. He's got a Ph.D in Community Political Psychology. And all that...that's his name. There's Vidal...and there...there's Dorota, and the rest--

DOROTA

--Is family.

GIZANE

Community Political Psychology? What's that?

SETON

Has to do with the evolution and manifestation of relationships of individuals to their communities and the state, with a focus on the role of human thought, emotion, and behavior. It draws from a wide range of the disciplines, including anthropology, cognitive and personality psychology, sociology, psychiatry, and other more distant fields such as economics, philosophy, metaphysics, and the arts. ... I've studied it a little myself.

BECK

Wow. You're not as--

SETON

--No, I'm not. Although, you might be, Mr. Beck. So, Mr. Dorota, what are you doing with all this at the Cafe de Nile?

DOROTA

Learning. About other people. Other systems.

SETON

And then you're going to write a book?

DOROTA

Yes. When I'm not roasting coffee. And providing exemplary service.

BECK

What's it called? "The evolution and manifestation of relationships of individuals to their communities and the state"?

DOROTA

No, I want it to sell. The working title is "All Governments Are Alike, Only the People Are Different."

SETON

I'd like a copy.

GIZANE

Your background in psychology--that's what tells you Mr. Ehriman is...not what he seems? What is it that he does?

DOROTA

I'm what tells me.

BECK

Does he smile with his mouth, but not his eyes? I read about that.

SETON

You're thinking of politicians, not salesmen.

BECK

Well, he said he would help me with my work, and he did. He put a word in with a top professor in my field, and he's going to talk to me. That makes Ehriman OK by me.

GIZANE

Cecil, that's great.

DOROTA

No it's not.

SETON

That's all well and good, Mr. Beck, but that doesn't mean Ehriman is just what he seems.

GIZANE

What do mean? Are you investigating Ehriman? I should know if there are any issues with him. We're about to sign a multimillion dollar contract.

SETON

Not with him per se. His company. Possibly. And the mayor is aware. There was a murder in St. Ambrose about a month ago, not far from one of his construction sites. And I've found several similar deaths in cities where he was doing work. No real evidence. Just a circumstantial connection, if any. These are large cities with bad neighborhoods, and his company works all over. But there might be a connection between an employee or a subcontractor and the victims, or the timing. We're looking into it.

BECK

This is an "ongoing investigation." Why are you telling us?

SETON

Because I've ruled you out as suspects. Because this area is going to be a job site, and his employees and subs will be around. Some will undoubtedly come here while it's open, drawn by the good coffee and fine service. Unless, Vidal, you plan to serve that crap you use to drive customers away.

DOROTA

Not during on ongoing investigation.

SETON

Good. And you have eyes and ears. And if I suspect anyone's been indiscreet...

BECK

You'll arrest us.

SETON

On a number of counts.

GIZANE

But you're not investigating Ehriman himself.

SETON

I'm not not investigating Ehriman himself. I'm looking into everything.

DOROTA

You need to watch him. And you need to watch yourself.

SETON

I didn't grow up in a climate of fear. I'm not afraid of your honey-talking death squads. What we do here is find people like that, not run from them.

GIZANE

Vidal, you might be overreacting.

SETON

Thank you for your concern, Vidal. I'll be fine.

(SETON returns to his table.)

BECK

How's the book coming?

DOROTA

I write every day. How's the meeting coming?

(BECK goes back to his table.)

GIZANE

So all this time--

DOROTA

--I was deceiving you. It was the only way I could do my work.

GIZANE

I was going to say I knew who you were.

DOROTA

How?

GIZANE

I was researching some things for the redevelopment, and I came across one of your publications. There was a picture.

DOROTA

You didn't say anything.

GIZANE

I wanted to watch for awhile. The scientist in the wild.

DOROTA

Thanks for not letting on. It doesn't work if everyone knows. I guess it's time to move on.

GIZANE

You don't want to stay through the redevelopment? Wouldn't that be an interesting event to witness? We could keep your secret.

DOROTA

Beck? Arissa? Seton? City Hall...

GIZANE

Well, no. I suppose not.

DOROTA

I think this chapter is long enough. Things are changing.

GIZANE

I hope they do. I'm expecting a promotion. I'm going to help oversee the redevelopment.

DOROTA

Well, I wish you all the best. You were nice to me even before I had a Ph.D. ... But then, you knew.

GIZANE

Not until recently. ... Perhaps I was nice even though I thought you'd fallen from academic grace and were reduced to ... providing good coffee and exemplary service.

(MARLIS enters, dressed professionally to the nines. Everyone stares. She does a turn.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Arissa, this is more than an interview I think. Could this be the new job I heard about?

MARLIS

It most certainly is. Vidal, a bottle of your finest Pouilly-Fuissé if you please. I am to be the liaison between Ehriman & Associates and the city for the redevelopment project.

(Pause.)

GIZANE

You are. ... That's great. ... We'll probably be working together. I'm going to be representing the mayor's office with the Planning Commission. ... As soon as the details ... are worked out.

(DOROTA opens a bottle and pours a glass.)

MARLIS

As I understand it, I think that's my position you described. I believe I'm to be working out of the mayor's office, at least for the duration of this project. That's what Christopher said when we talked. Oh, thank you. Kyrene, join me? Another glass, Vidal.

(BECK looks expectant. DOROTA gets glasses and gives one to BECK and GIZANE. SETON waves no. MARLIS pours GIZANE's and waits for toast.)

MARLIS (CONT'D)

Well?

GIZANE

Congratulations, Arrisa. I'm glad you found a position you wanted.

(GIZANE sips; MARLIS drinks.)

MARLIS

Thank you. ... But you know, that wasn't very enthusiastic, Kyrene. Don't you think I deserve this? I do.

(Pause.)

GIZANE

I ... I am happy for you. I just ... well, I guess I'm shocked at how you described the position. It sounds like ... mine. I was expecting a promotion.

MARLIS

I'm sure you'll get it. Perhaps we'll work together.

GIZANE

No. There's only one position like that.

(GIZANE takes her wine and sits at a table, forlorn.)

BECK

Can I have some?

(Pause. MARLIS looks over at BECK, gives him the bottle.)

MARLIS

Don't be greedy.

(BECK pours a little. MARLIS walks over and stands by GIZANE. MARLIS looks at him.)

SETON

Congratulations on your good fortune, Ms Marlis.

MARLIS

Thank you, Detective Seton. Please, join me.

(BECK pours SETON a glass. MARLIS turns back to Gizane.)

MARLIS (CONT'D)

I don't get it, Kyrene. You're all bummed because I got a job you thought was yours? Is that it?

GIZANE

I'm upset because I didn't get it. Not ... because you did. I'm qualified. I have experience. I know the systems. I thought ...

MARLIS

You thought you were the only qualified candidate? You thought the job was yours because you had an inside track? You thought there was no way in hell I could get it?

GIZANE

Arissa, how can you say that?

MARLIS

Because I'm tired of living in the box you put me in.

GIZANE

What box?

MARLIS

How you see me.

GIZANE

I think, Arissa, I see you as you are. I try to.

MARLIS

As long as it's a step down from you.

GIZANE

(becoming angry)

I see. So, Arissa, tell me about your qualifications to be the operations manager, the liaison between the city Planning Commission, Ehriman & Associates, and the mayor's office.

MARLIS

What are you suggesting?

DOROTA

Let me help. She's trying to suggest, without rightfully exploding, that she's trained, experienced, and qualified for the position, and you're none of those things.

(MORE)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

I imagine she feels somewhat insulted by the situation, and by your insensitivity. You're insensitivity is nothing new, as you know, but she's always accepted it, and you. Me, not as much.

MARLIS

Who the hell are you?

DOROTA

Beck.

BECK

Check this out.

(BECK motions MARLIS over. She goes and looks at the computer screen, then at DOROTA.)

BECK (CONT'D)

He's writing a book.

MARLIS

About what?

(Pause.)

DOROTA

Bitches.

MARLIS

You know, Kyrene, and Vidal whoever-the-hell-you-are ... and Detective Seton and you Beck just because you're here ... when one person grows in a relationship, and the other doesn't, then, it's like over. Over.

(MARLIS storms out. After a brief pause she rushes back in, takes the bottle from the counter, and hurries out again.)

SETON

So much for exemplary service.

GIZANE

Vidal, you didn't have to say all that.

DOROTA

Something needed to be said. It's what came out.

(Pause.)

SETON

She's roaming the streets with an open container. I'll see she doesn't get into trouble.

(SETON leaves.)

SCENE 3. SPLASH IN THE DARK 2

Cafe de Nile, next night, late. BECK in place, eyes to screen. DOROTA behind counter, drinking last from a white cup and putting it behind counter.

DOROTA

Pack it up, Cecil. It's almost closing.

BECK

OK. Give me a minute.

DOROTA

For what?

BECK

If I tell you, will you put it in your book?

DOROTA

You're not in my book.

(BECK scowls. GIZANE comes in, a look of concern on her face.)

GIZANE

Hi Cecil. Hello, Vidal. Have either of you seen Arissa? Has she been in? I've been trying to reach her all day. I feel bad about what happened yesterday.

BECK

Haven't seen her.

DOROTA

She hasn't been in. I don't think she'll be coming back to the Cafe de Nile. You called her?

GIZANE

Her phone isn't on. I left a message at her house.

DOROTA

How was work today?

GIZANE

Work. ... I asked about my promotion. I was told something was "in the works." That's how work was. In the works.

BECK

So, you'll still get a promotion.

GIZANE

More likely just more work. It's beginning to feel sideways, not up. ... Well, it's late. I just stopped in to see if anyone had heard from Arrisa.

(There's thud as SETON bumps into the door as he enters, limping, his head bandaged and an arm in a cast.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Oh my god! Detective Seton, what happened?

(SETON makes his way to the counter, where he takes a stool.)

SETON

What happened is I was attacked. Mugged. Last night while I was following Marlis.

BECK

You don't look too good.

SETON

I look as good as can be expected for eight stitches, a broken arm, and assorted bruises. ... I let my guard down. I was being a nanny instead of a cop. Big mistake.

BECK

Did you get a look at the guy who did it? How many were there? Must of been more than one.

SETON

Only one. Some people saw it from a distance. Hit me from behind, picked me up, through me like a rag doll. I was out before I knew what happened. They screamed and he ran off. By all rights I should be dead. Owwwe--shit. Jesus! Vidal, what'da ya you got for pain?

DOROTA

Cecil, read some of your abstract to Detective Seton. It'll knock you right out.

GIZANE

Shouldn't you be at home? In bed?

SETON

I was. All day. Read reports all night. Had to get some air. I was hoping I might run into Mr. Ehriman here.

DOROTA

He'll be in.

SETON

How do you know?

DOROTA

He told me.

BECK

Why do you want to see Mr. Ehriman?

(A chipper EHRIMAN walks in.)

EHRIMAN

Hello everyone. Detective Seton, my god, what happened to you?

BECK

He was mugged last night.

EHRIMAN

More than that it appears. Are you all right? I mean of course you're not, but how are you?

SETON

Broken arm, eight stitches, bruises. But lucky. I'm here.

EHRIMAN

That's the spirit.

SETON

I was hoping to see you, Mr. Ehriman.

EHRIMAN

Why is that? Can I help you? What can I do?

SETON

I have a few more questions I'd like to ask you.

EHRIMAN

Of course. Happy to oblige.

SETON

First--

EHRIMAN

--But not right now. You're in no shape to be doing police work. I suspect you're not even officially on duty. You probably checked out of the hospital against doctor's orders. ... I thought so. Go home. Go to bed. Call me tomorrow. I'll be happy to talk with you.

GIZANE

He's right. You really should be in bed.

DOROTA

We're closed. If we were open, you'd be driving away customers. I'd have to ask you to leave.

SETON

All right. Tomorrow, Mr. Ehriman.

(SETON gets up and makes his way unsteadily toward the door.)

EHRIMAN

Cecil, help the detective to his car.

(BECK takes his things and guides SETON out.)

BECK

Nite guys.

GIZANE

Nite Ceese.

DOROTA

Bye.

EHRIMAN

Poor man.

GIZANE

All because he was trying to help Arissa, and she didn't even know.

DOROTA

Or care.

EHRIMAN

Ms Marlis?

GIZANE

He wanted to make sure she got home all right. He was following her. It's a bit of a story. You haven't talked to her, have you?

EHRIMAN

I have. This morning.

GIZANE

Really! I've been trying to reach her.

EHRIMAN

She's out of town.

GIZANE

Out of town?

EHRIMAN

She left today for the home office. Orientation. A week, week and a half, two weeks. I forget what it is. Starts Monday. Check with Human Resources on Monday. They'll know.

GIZANE

Do you know where she's staying? I'd rather not wait.

EHRIMAN

I'm afraid I don't. She went early to sight-see over the weekend.

GIZANE

Oh. Well, thanks for the information.

EHRIMAN

Be sure to call H-R if you don't get in touch before Monday. They'll be able to help you.

GIZANE

I will.

EHRIMAN

I'm sure it's been a long day, Vidal. Why don't you go home. I'll close up tonight. ... I insist.

DOROTA

OK, Mr. Ehriman.

GIZANE

You'll close up?

DOROTA

Mr. Ehriman is the new owner of the Cafe de Nile.

EHRIMAN

An arrangement I worked out as part of saving the building. I'm quite pleased. You've all made me feel quite at home here.

GIZANE

I'm...surprised. Congratulations. I never thought of you as the ... owner-of-a-coffee bar type. Vidal, wait up, I'll walk out with you.

EHRIMAN

Ms Gizane, would you be so kind as to wait a few minutes. I have a proposition for you. I'm excited to hear what you think. It's about the redevelopment.

(EHRIMAN glances at Dorota, who leaves. EHRIMAN pours himself a black cup of coffee.)

GIZANE

Sure. I've got a few minutes.

EHRIMAN

I have some new plans for the area at the end of sixth street. Along the canal.

GIZANE

Yes, the area marked TBD in your presentation.

EHRIMAN

We didn't have any information to work with then. Now we do, and I think we've got a good approach. I've got some conceptual art, high level blueprints. Not much, but enough to capture the essence. I'd like to share them with you.

GIZANE

With me?

EHRIMAN

Yes, you. The mayor...he's an elected official. He has a political agenda, as well he should.

(MORE)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

He is the mayor after all. But you, I think, you represent more the spirit of the city. I'd like your feedback. First.

GIZANE

First?

EHRIMAN

Before I share our approach with the mayor. If I don't bring an honest flavor of the community to things, well, they don't come off as quite true. I can't do that alone.

GIZANE

I'm flattered. I'd be happy to look at your plans.

EHRIMAN

Excellent. Could you meet me tomorrow around sunset. At the foot of sixth street?

(GIZANE looks reluctant.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Oh I quite understand. It's an odd request. But I want you to see them in the context of the actual place. So you can see the "before" and "imagine" the after. Surely you can understand that. I need your imagination. I can't get there any earlier, and I'm dining with the mayor after. I'd like to take your opinion with me. ... Please, even in a shabby industrial neighborhood, a lovely sunset is still lovely.

(Pause.)

GIZANE

So it is. I'll see you tomorrow.

EHRIMAN

You've made my day. Thank you so much.

GIZANE

Good night, Mr. Ehriman.

EHRIMAN

And a good evening to you. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

SCENE 4. WATER'S EDGE

(Railing at water's edge. Night falling. The light of one street light off to one side, flickering on. Sound: WATER lapping, WIND, a FOG HORN in the distance.)

(Gizane stands by railing, looking at watch. FOOTSTEPS. GIZANE looks up and down the walk, not seeing anyone, she looks out at the last vestiges of the sunset. A figure appears to one side, watches her for a moment, then approaches.)

DOROTA

Hello.

GIZANE

(startled)

Oh! Vidal! You startled me.

DOROTA

More like scared the crap out of you.

GIZANE

I was thinking. I wasn't paying attention. I guess I should.

DOROTA

Not the best part of town.

GIZANE

No. What are you doing here? Why aren't you at the cafe?

DOROTA

Don't work there anymore. I quit. Last night I guess. When I left, I knew I was never going back.... I wanted to say good-bye. I overheard you last night. You're meeting Ehriman.

GIZANE

Good-bye? This is sudden. Where are you going? ...I'll miss you.

DOROTA

France. France has a government too I'm told. Friend's father owns a real cafe. Always looking for cheap outsourced labor.

GIZANE

Who combines great coffee with exemplary service.

DOROTA

"Service extraordinaire." Come with me. I'll teach you how to be a French barmaid.

GIZANE

What would you know about that?

DOROTA

I'll learn.

GIZANE

I'll stop by on vacation. How's that. But leave me out of your book.

DOROTA

A deal. Don't forget.

(They hug briefly.)

GIZANE

Bye Vidal.

DOROTA

Good bye. Save the city from itself.

(DOROTA exits, stops before leaving stage.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

Are you sure you're OK?

(Pause.)

GIZANE

I'm OK. Mr. Ehriman will be here in a minute.

(DOROTA leaves. GIZANE looks up and down the walk again. Then out toward the sunset, but it's gone. She turns around and leans on the railing. She's uneasy.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

Vidal! Wait! Vidal!

(DOROTA returns. GIZANE goes to him.)

GIZANE (CONT'D)

It's not OK, is it. It...doesn't feel right. Does it?

DOROTA

Not if you say so. Not to me. ... If you were my sister, I'd have dragged you off by now.

(Pause.)

DOROTA (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's get out of here.

(DOROTA and GIZANE exit. An indistinct form, almost a silhouette, enters and stops at the railing. The figure looks left and right. After a moment, the figure reaches into one pocket and takes out a pack of cigarettes and removes one, then takes a lighter from the other pocket and lights it. The figure waits.)

SCENE 5 CONFRONTATIONS

(Cafe de Nile, morning.)

(BECK's things are on his table, but he is behind the counter, doing things but looking a bit lost. EHRIMAN sits at another table, reading a newspaper.)

BECK

I don't know what to do, Mr. Ehriman.

EHRIMAN

Just look busy. Pour the coffee I made if someone comes in. I'm sure Vidal will be here shortly.

(EHRIMAN turns the page, scans, then turns to next, and scans. BECK takes a donut from the case, butts it on a plate, and then begins to eat it. he pours himself a gray cup of coffee. EHRIMAN turns the page. After a moment, DOROTA walks in. He stops, looking at BECK, and then EHRIMAN.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

I opened this morning. You weren't here, as you know. Cecil was helping out.

(BECK takes his donut and coffee and starts toward his table.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Stay where you are, Cecil. (pause) Mr. Dorota doesn't work here anymore. (pause) Do you?

DOROTA

You would know. I need to get some things from the back room.

(DOROTA crosses room.)

EHRIMAN

I guess I neglected to make an arrangement with the previous owner. An oversight. But then, you weren't going to stay anyhow, were you, Vidal?

(DOROTA stops at entrance to back room.)

DOROTA

You are not the sort of man who wants to own a coffee shop.

(DOROTA goes into back room.)

EHRIMAN

I must be.

(EHRIMAN reads paper again. GIZANE enters.)

GIZANE

Cecil. What are--

BECK

--I'm helping out. ... Mr. Ehriman. Until he finds....Vidal quit, I guess.

EHRIMAN

Ms. Gizane. I am so sorry about last night!

(EHRIMAN ushers GIZANE to a seat at his table and then goes to counter.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

Let me explain. Cecil, a cup of coffee for Kyrene, on the house. Use one of those new holiday cups I found.

BECK pours a cup of coffee behind the counter, then gives EHRIMAN a bright red cup. EHRIMAN puts it on the table by GIZANE and takes a seat.)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

I was unavoidably delayed. I tried to call, but the only number I had was your office number. How stupid of me! You'll find the message when you get to work.

(MORE)

EHRIMAN (CONT'D)

I was out with the mayor, on the site of the old steel mill, and he...well, he wouldn't stop talking. (Gizane smiles) You know him, don't you. I did come. Honest, late as I was, but you were gone. Not that I expected you to wait, of course. But I had to know. A thousand apologies. How can I make it up to you? We'll have to reschedule. Pick a date.

(DOROTA renters with a box and stands by end of counter. White cup visible on top. A moment later SETON enters.)

GIZANE

Apology accepted. I do know the mayor, better than I used to. I won't be needing to see your concepts, Mr. Ehriman, so there's no need to reschedule anything. That whole part of things will move along quite well without me. I see that now, and that's OK. That's not what I want--

EHRIMAN

--Now Kyrene, don't play yourself down. I was sincere when I--

GIZANE

--What happened to Arissa?

EHRIMAN

What? Why would I know?

(SETON enters, paper under arm. He looks at BECK behind counter while he takes off his coat. GIZANE ignores his entrance, focused on EHRIMAN.)

SETON

Promotion?

BECK

I'm just helping--

GIZANE

--No one has seen her. And the last thing we know is she got a job with you.

EHRIMAN

Why do you think I know what happened to her? I barely knew her. I'll tell you what I know. I met her briefly. You were there. She and I talked about work, here. You were all present. Later I offered her a job which she accepted, and I made all the arrangements through my office. Paperwork, orientation, room reservation. We even paid for the flight. You can check yourself. I'll give you the number.

SETON

No need. I've already checked. (to Gizane) Her boyfriend called. What Mr. Ehriman says is true.

EHRIMAN

So I am a person of interest.

SETON

You're part of an ongoing investigation.

GIZANE

Did you talk to Arissa?

SETON

No. She didn't make the flight and didn't check into her hotel. She's officially a missing person now.

GIZANE

Oh my god!

EHRIMAN

And you think I had something to do with it.

SETON

I think where you are concerned there are an unfortunate number of coincidences.

GIZANE

You don't seem to care at all.

SETON

You really are too glib for words, Mr. Ehriman. Could you dispense with all the verbal diarrhea and answer a few simple questions.

EHRIMAN

Shouldn't you tell me my rights first?

SETON

Be happy too. You have the right to remain silent--

EHRIMAN

--Not necessary. I'll be happy to cooperate. You want to know exactly when was the last time I saw Arissa Marlis and what did I say. The last time I saw her was her when we had that delightful wine that you so enjoyed. I didn't speak with her after that. I called her about a job offer but she wasn't home, so I left all the details on her answering machine, as you must know. I would have preferred to speak in person, but I didn't want her to miss the next orientation and all that. (pause) Cecil told me there was a bit of a spat the next time she was in. (pause) Perhaps she disappeared because she didn't want to see any of you again. Have you looked into that angle, Detective Seton?

BECK

What I said, it wasn't what Mr. Ehriman said. Not exactly. What I said was--

EHRIMAN

--Oh, shut up, Cecil! Seton will take your statement later, when I'm not around to make you nervous. Is there something else I can help you with? Would you like to brainstorm about possible leads?

GIZANE

You don't care that she's missing, do you! You don't care at all. It's just this game you're playing.

BECK

Well, Detective Seton is kinda interrogating him. He has a right to defend himself.

EHRIMAN

Thank you, Cecil. ... That will be all.

GIZANE

Why did you hire Arissa? You know she's not qualified for that job. She doesn't seem like ... your type. You're more perceptive than that.

EHRIMAN

You would hardly know my type, Ms Gizane. ... The way things are is not actually the way you think they are.

SETON

Oh, I'm not so sure you're all that complicated, Mr. Ehriman, in spite of the gloss. You're no more or less than the rest of us. ... That's a bit hard to swallow, isn't it.

(EHRIMAN stands and walks slowly toward doors to dock, then turns around.)

EHRIMAN

You're going to pick at me until you find something, anything. It's the nature of limitation to do that. The moth that thinks it's a bull dog.

SETON

Do you expect to go on for long? Should we order out?

EHRIMAN

I'll tell you why I hired Arissa Marlis. To get rid of her.

BECK

That's it? To get rid of her? You couldn't have, like gone somewhere else?

EHRIMAN

I didn't want to go somewhere else. I wanted her to go.
(pause) I am not a simple, uncomplicated person. Quite the opposite. I am exceedingly sensitive in an odd otherworldly way. I am aware of the lies people tell themselves, the ones that drive them that they are no longer conscious of. People radiate like cell towers, and I pick up the signals.

GIZANE

BECK

Ehriman erupts, explain his "sensitivity" to the lies people exude. Has everyone figured out but Dorota. Characters leave one by one until only D and E left. "Do you think I could kill someone?" "I think you could kill everyone." D leaves, E goes to follow, stops, seeing S looking in. Stands, at counter, back to audience.

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