

TOPSY-TURVY

THOMAS RICCIO & MARVIN COHEN

Characters:

WILBERT WILLS: (Later a.k.a. THE GRAND DUKE OF WILBERTANIA.) Novelist, age mid-fifties.

THADDEUS: (Later a.k.a. PRINCE GLITZ.) Age 21. Very graceful and handsome, in the romantic hero mold.

SY: Age early fifties. Suntanned L.A. Assistant T.V. Producer under MORTON RAY.

BRUCE WAIN: Age mid-thirties. Hard-boiled, no-nonsense Private Eye.

ROXY: Age 21. Beautiful, innocent aspiring actress.

MORTON RAY: Age late fifties. T.V. Producer, suntanned, L.A., rather small of height.

MARCONI: Age mid-thirties. Homosexual. Casting Director.

MAGGIE: Age early thirties. T.V. Associate Producer under SY. Beautiful but cold and calculating.

VITTORIO: Age early forties. Italian émigré. T.V. Director.

CELIA SEE: Age thirties or forties. Feature writer for T.V. & show biz gossip magazine, "Peep-hole Magazine."

Note: So that no extra actors or actresses are needed, various of the above characters can be doubled with the following minor, miscellaneous characters:

Waiter, Scriptwriters, Announcer, Set men, Reporters, Photographers, Studio technician, Lighting people, Camera crew, Cameraman, Assistants to Director, Wardrobe people, Policemen.

SYNOPSIS

WILBERT, a "pure" novelist whose aesthetic muse has dried up, is commissioned to write an episode for a prime-time, mass-market vulgar T.V. series by his former old friend SY, now the series' Assistant Producer. WILBERT is to inject new blood into the commercially flagging series by creating a new character, a young romantic male lead. But that character, THADDEUS, suddenly disappears from WILBERT's working script. WILBERT accuses SY of having THADDEUS kidnapped, but SY denies it. WILBERT hires a tough Private Eye, BRUCE WAIN, to find THADDEUS. Meanwhile, THADDEUS, who has amnesia, meets a lovely young would-be actress, ROXY, in Sardi's; they fall in love. BRUCE WAIN arrives too late at Sardi's: THADDEUS has gone to be auditioned for, coincidentally, the same role for which WILBERT had created him. The producers fly THADDEUS, whom they rename PRINCE GLITZ, to L.A. to be filmed in the T.V. series, amid press media hullabaloo. BRUCE WAIN follows him there, then ROXY, as well as WILBERT. The latter three find themselves also cast as characters in the same T.V. series, along with the series' actual producers, director, etc. Thus the drama merges on two levels: the actual action and the T.V. series acting. These two levels coincide and become one.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

(N.Y.C.—WILBERT's East Village apartment.)

(WILBERT, feverish excitement in his eyes, leaves his paper-cluttered desk and rushes out of the room, and out of his flat, and out of the building. Silence. Then from below paper-cluttered desk, a weird slow-motion crashing-through occurs: the figure of THADDEUS

emerges, breaking through not only the desk but also the room walls)

THADDEUS: Some force beyond myself lifts me away from here, toward—unpredictably what? I'm being impelled, compelled, propelled—but not expelled. A double mystery perplexes me utterly: where am I going to, and where am I coming from? Between those two mysteries, in passage, I lack a stable definition, I lack a secure identity, with a blurred future, a blurred past, and an undetermined me. As I live, I wish to give my life some consistent shape. To that end, I rush—whither? From whence?

Outward bound, I whizz away from this unsatisfactory “here,” to forge some self-realization in fulfillment of an as yet undefined urge. I'm curious what I'm to become. Both the curiosity and the becoming are now in process, starting with this escape.

SCENE II

(5:30 P.M. on same day as in Scene One. Sy's New York hotel room. WILBERT, carrying briefcase, greeted at door by Sy.)

SY: So Wilbert baby, come on in, sorry I'm in a rush, big dinner party tonight, the T.V. division of Paramount up at Helmsley Palace. But come in, I'm expecting something you got in that little briefcase. It's good seein' you again. What's it been, four, five years? You lost a little weight, but you're lookin' great. When you get to be our age, a few pounds loss is always a good plus. Sit down, my home is your home.

WILBERT: Sy, it sure has been a while.

SY: *(Slapping WILBERT on back, half-embracing)* Good to see ya, old pal.

WILBERT: *(Eyeing SY up and down)* You look in sound health.

SY: Never felt better. How do I look, huh? Southern Cal has done this

to me. Bought a little place along the ocean, a little get-away, two tennis courts, pool, hot tub. I tell ya, this series has been good to me, real good. You know I'm real happy that I could cut *you* in on some of the action.

WILBERT: Thank you.

SY: By the end of the season we'll be number one. If things work out (*Looks at WILBERT's briefcase*) and Morton is happy with your work, maybe I can get you on the staff: it'll be an income like I know you never even saw yet, with all your lifetime struggling as a writer, you poor sap.

WILBERT: Here I am—there you are. How changed we are from those old days when we started out together in the glow of youthful ideals.

SY: Yeah, we sure go back, don't we. But when I think about it, it was another incarnation, Wilbert. Another time and another space. It sure don't stack up against what I got *now*.

WILBERT: I've stuck to my guns nobly till recent years when my Muse dried up, thus sucking the life out of potential new novels.

SY: Had a bad day, huh? This city is no good for the psyche. Maybe you've been havin' women trouble. I'll get you a drink. Scotch, right? (*WILBERT doesn't answer; SY prepares a drink.*) As for me, you know what? I can't even remember some of the titles of those novels I wrote! Poetic rubbish.

WILBERT: You willfully, ignominiously sold out years ago.

SY: (*Vigorously, in self-defense, self-justification*) Sold out? Bought in! Look at me now: I'm paid too much, do little work, get to travel a lot, have friends and fawners in abundance—(*Forcefully, emphatically, rubbing it in:*) I have fun and still I reach twenty million plus a week! (*Complacently, as though that settles it:*) Now tell me, what more can we ask for in this life, right?

WILBERT: You've become a weary cynic, a conformist in the commercial exploitation of the lowest popular taste. It's a sad sight!

SY: (*Laughs, to maintain superiority*) Same old Wilbert! The starry-eyed idealist: (*Claps him on back, with mock-affection.*) It's really good to see you, guy!

WILBERT: You depress me. I despise—

SY: (*Interrupting*) You're serious, aren't you (*Condescendingly:*) You got to learn to lighten up—you'll live a lot longer, and get more women. Consider the evolution of the species, Wilbert baby, and learn what it takes to survive!

WILBERT: (*Angrily*) Don't sicken me! You talk cheap!

SY: (*Overriding WILBERT's anger*) Take a look at yourself. Now I only say this—I take the liberty, the license of an old friend—but who are you? Some quasi-poetic “pure” novelist? What does the public care for your precious fiction—your careful prose? Am I right? Or who's wrong?

WILBERT: (*Angry*) You little fink!

SY: (*Overriding WILBERT*) Look here . . . (*Fingering WILBERT's clothes above waist*) Take stock. Just look at yourself. (*WILBERT makes a gesture of pushing SY away, but SY persists.*) Shoes there untied. Your tie has your lunch on it, I see you still go for that veal Parmesan. Shirt missing a button. (*Musses WILBERT's hair despite WILBERT's warning look of annoyance.*) You sure do need a haircut. (*Fingering WILBERT's jacket:*) This sport coat *was* very stylish—in the fifties! (*Finally WILBERT wriggles out of SY's grasp and shoves SY away. WILBERT looks grim.*)

WILBERT: Who are you insulting?—You trendy little creep!

SY: (*Sneering*) Sure, you've made some sort of name for yourself—a little high-fallutin' critical fame in literary circles. But Wilbert, dear boy, face it—the times have changed!

WILBERT: All right, so why'd you hire me?

SY: You still don't get it, do you?

WILBERT: What's there to “get”?

SY: The real world, Wilbert baby. Rise and shine. We put your name on

the credits; your name elevates our show-biz mass-market commercial classiness with the imported extra clout of your contribution to our product: your pseudo-intellectual literary pretentiousness. We'll get the cover story from *T.V. Guide* at least, and the highbrow press will fork over promotional coverage.

WILBERT: I was hired for that? Is my name worth that much? Then I *do* have credentials! My devotion to pure writing *has* been vindicated!

SY: You poor slob. Don't let it go to your head. All your hard work, your dedication to your so-called craft, makes you—you know what?—a nobody! Nobody recognizes *you* on the streets, but they're beginning to recognize *me*. I have a limousine, too.

WILBERT: You've sunk as low as a snake in the grass. Your sneer has lowbrow slime written all over it.

SY: Is that an example of your gratitude? I love you, we're old friends, so why come at me like I'm doin' something wrong?

WILBERT: (*In ominous tone, to accompaniment of musical chord*) Because you are—you've done *great* wrong! Where's my character?

SY: (*Perplexed, puzzled*) Where's my what? Are you crazy? I throw a nice fat series commission at you, for old times' sake, and you make out like I stole your soul.

WILBERT: (*Staring at SY; still taken aback, finding new SY unrecognizable from old one*) Are you human?

SY: So Wilbert baby—(*Eyes WILBERT's briefcase*) . . . Where's the script?

WILBERT: I knew you would mention it—hypocrite!

SY: Don't be spiteful.

WILBERT: (*Sarcastic*) Old friend!

SY: (*Earnest, busy, trying to get back to point*) I love you, Wilbert, but another time. I have this dinner party, then I fly back to L.A. tomorrow afternoon. Come out there and spend some time pool-side. Do you play tennis yet? (*Eyeing briefcase:*) So let's have it.

WILBERT: (*Mocking*) Sure, "let's have it."

SY: That's how it is. Morton gets on my back and puts me on to your back.

WILBERT: How quaint. We're all a bunch of slimy frogs on each other's backs in a mating ritual of a pecking order of a T.V. production's creative department's hierarchy, splashing in the pond, counter-croaking a daisy-chain ritual . . .

SY: (*Eyeing briefcase; forceful*) I love it, Wilbert, but I *don't* love it.

WILBERT: (*Deliberately stalling, to spite SY's impatience for script*) For protecting me from backsliding into effete intellectualism, what do I owe you?

SY: Don't lay that on me. Appreciate where I'm coming from. (*Pressing WILBERT physically:*) This one episode (*Eyeing briefcase*) you're about to hand over will put you into the living rooms of twenty million Americans sitting on forty million buttocks. What's the sales figures on all your novels put together? If this episode (*Again eyeing briefcase*) hits, you can write your own ticket. You'd make out like crazy in L.A. The dames save their special stuff for writers. (*Eyeing briefcase:*) Now hand it over. I can't be late tonight.

WILBERT: (*Being perverse by deliberately stalling*) With ill-earned T.V. script-writing money, I could afford to stop this degradation into the gross taste of mass popular demand and return to true art's loftier simplicity.

SY: Money's not only the bottom line—it's everything!

WILBERT: (*Interrupting*) I'll make a comeback, resume the Muse, turn her juices hack on, and be my old true self. Then I won't have to put up with the likes of you and Morton Ray.

SY: (*Goes over to WILBERT's briefcase and picks it up*) I'll take the script now.

WILBERT: (*Yelling*) That's mine!

SY: The *case* is yours. The *contents* are mine.

WILBERT: Now look—there's something I want to ask you. That char-

acter—

SY: (*Interrupting, impatiently*) Yes, yes, fascinating, I only wish we could relax and have a chat, for old times' sake if for nothing else, but I gotta get ready.

WILBERT: (*Sarcastically*) Oh how disappointing for poor abandoned me.

SY: (*Interrupting*) I'll read the script on the way to L.A. and give you a call.

WILBERT: (*Snatching back the briefcase*) It's all your fault—you damn kidnapper!

SY: Is something wrong with the script?

WILBERT: Stop pretending you don't know what I'm talking about.

SY: Wilbert, I love you. But this is no time for jokes!

WILBERT: Who's joking?

SY: Be professional, baby.

WILBERT: Professional? I, at least, still have a profession! What's yours?—Prostitution?

SY: You disappoint me.

WILBERT: Sy, you and I—we go back a long way together.

SY: I don't have any more time to give you. Right now, I need this *product*. (*Pointing to briefcase in WILBERT'S possession.*)

WILBERT: (*Still stalling, to be spiteful, in power play*) "Product!" I'm not some prefab-cranking piece of mass machinery. Respect me, I'm an artist, even if it takes me years, even though the script is commissioned by your time-bomb deadline—respect me—

SY: Look, baby, what are you trying to pull on me? You're getting me all tensed and stressed out. In this situation I'm in control, I'm the associate producer.

WILBERT: You're not in control of *this* (*Pointing to self*) exploited peon scribbler! (*SY aggresses, WILBERT pushes him away.*)

SY: So you had a problem with the script? Is *that* why you're so defensive? You couldn't finish? You had a block? All right, let's not get childish and cry over it. I own a staff of writers, they'll finish it, they'll patch it up. We won't blow this thing out of proportion and quibble like babies. Pretend you're a man.

WILBERT: You're low and cheap, Sy. And sly. I thought a kidnapper had more guts.

SY: (*Sighing, shrugging*) Oh Wilbert, what are you doing to me?

WILBERT: What have *you* done to *me*? Or more to the point, what have you done to my *character*? (*Angrily:*) Answer!

SY: Hey, I just copped a half ounce of the highest grade coke; want a blow? You're grounded now, but it could put you right back in the saddle again.

WILBERT: Betraying me into betraying my own ideals to T.V. Babylon's tawdry corrupt rot!

SY: (*Preparing the cocaine*) You signed that contract by your own free will!

WILBERT: By free will? By economic necessity! Yet I upheld artistic honor, integrity, by creating such a character that you had to steal him!

SY: Raving again? (*With cocaine.*) Take a blow, Wilbert baby. Nothing like this high-grade Bolivian. Come on, it'll resume our friendship. (*Snorts the cocaine, while WILBERT declines some for himself.*)

WILBERT: (*Bitterly contemptuous*) You sniffing, sniveling, snide—

SY: I can't believe it! Other writers would lavish booze and flowers on me for the contract I made the mistake of throwing away on you! A good turn—that you turned on!

WILBERT: Sy, I'll level with you.

SY: Be reasonable, within reason, (*Sniffing the coke.*) What's with the story? Talk to me. I can deal with it. What's the problem? Having trouble with that new young romantic lead?

WILBERT: (*Paranoiacally confirmed in his suspicion*) You little sneak!

SY: (*Ignoring WILBERT's tone*) Did you develop him okay?

WILBERT: (*Blowing up*) You took him! You helped yourself!

SY: Take it easy: Would another drink tone you up?

WILBERT: Under intense pressure to meet today's deadline, I was working away—

SY: (*Interrupting, conciliatory*) If all you could manage was a rough draft, that would be acceptable.

WILBERT: I worked myself to a frenzy of exhaustion, till sorely needing a rest break to curb my whirling head.

SY: I didn't ask you to write an epic.

WILBERT: Anyway, to clear my fiery head I left off writing to go for a walk, to breathe the free and open air so far as this ever-crowded city would permit, with its big buildings bulging together to close me in with my head bursting out.

SY: The script, Wilbert!

WILBERT: Returning—somewhat refreshed and calmed down, ready for renewed exertions, in the ardors of verbal battle, I turned to the manuscript with a glorious glow, only to discover—

(*Pause and organ chord.*)

SY: Yes?—Discover what?

WILBERT: The brazen crime of an old and former friend, now ruthless and amoral!

SY: What the hell are you talkin' about?!

WILBERT: (*Staring fixedly at Sy*) You play dumb so convincingly . . . Braced by my head-clearing walk, fortified to the restored levels of working energy, I took up my pen, angled my typewriter to the ready . . . first surveying my pages already written by dint and stint of brow-sweating labor . . .

SY: So what happened?

WILBERT: (*Accusingly*) You know it, all too well!

SY: (*Angrily*) Know *what?*, damn you!

WILBERT: That's right—where's Thaddeus?

SY: Who the hell's Thaddeus? (*Flash of discovery on face:*) Oh, I get it—he's our new character?

WILBERT: (*Picking up on "our"*) "Our" new character?! My creation!

SY: (*As to a lunatic*) You've been working *much* too hard.

WILBERT: There he was, all sketched out, his personality portrayed, given a place in the universe all his own, uniquely original, and blessed with striking dialogue!

SY: So what's the problem?

WILBERT: He's lost. Gone.

SY: Look, we have a strict shooting schedule.

WILBERT: It's no use, Sy.

SY: (*Impatient*) Where are those pages, Wilbert?

WILBERT: Don't raise your voice at me like you're innocent! All the script pages are accounted for, numbered in pagination, carbon and all.

SY: Well, he's *there*, then.

WILBERT: (*Lifting his briefcase*) Yeah? I'll show you something magic—before your very eyes. Blank empty spaces where Thaddeus had appeared! Want to see?

SY: Sure, show me.

(Finally opening his briefcase, WILBERT snatches the script pages, flings them at SY and then, in despair, into the air.)

WILBERT: (*Becoming upset like a bereft parent in seeing the pages*) See where he's vanished—see here—see here—see here—not a trace!

SY: (*Picking up some of the pages and inspecting them anxiously*) It's

terrible! How could this happen? Blank spaces, more blank spaces! Some magic vandalism. Some leprechaun, some negative occult deity. The context reveals all the places he has to appear—and they're gaping holes!—white, wiped of type!

WILBERT: (*Himself re-examining a few pages*) And here! And look here! Gone and stolen, bodily, from all these multiple places. I—(*He looks ready to cry, in despair.*)

SY: This is like "Twilight Zone."

WILBERT: Why me? Why Thaddeus?

SY: Look, keep cool. (*Tremblingly pours himself a drink, gulps it. Tremblingly, reaches for phone.*) I'll phone L.A. They'll know how to . . .

WILBERT: (*Coming out of his grief-stultification*) You know what they've done with him.

SY: (*Confused*) What?

WILBERT: I'm convinced by the conviction of logical intuition that the culprit stands before me—he's you!

SY: Don't joke about it.

WILBERT: (*Taking over*) No joking. Only a few questions. (*Pushes SY into a chair.*)

SY: Hey, what—?

WILBERT: Not you—me, *I'm* the one to ask the questions.

SY: (*Protestingly*) Look—

WILBERT: (*Interrupting decisively*) Where were you at three-thirty this afternoon?

SY: You think I have the key to your apartment?!

WILBERT: My character—he's lost.

SY: (*Accompanied by organ chord*) Are you sure you even *had* a character?

WILBERT: Extracted, lifted—bodily, entire, with all his soul's potential still immature but ripe in the brilliance of promise—from those script

pages. (*Pointing to pages scattered about.*)

SY: My ass is on the line, too! I gotta call L.A. My career's at stake, my pool, my tennis courts, my expense account, my dames . . . Where's that phone? (*SY tries to get out of his chair to get to phone, but is pushed back into chair by WILBERT.*)

WILBERT: (*Tough*) Look me in the eyes, buddy boy!

(SY extracts sunglasses from inside jacket pocket, and puts them carefully on. [This should get a laugh.])

SY: Wilbert, I don't have time for this.

WILBERT: For years you've been anxious of my characters. And now—my boldest, truest conception—

SY: (*Pleading*) I got to call LA.

WILBERT: Your T.V. series needed new blood—a well-fashioned young male to capture some of the younger market—

SY: But why would I *take* your character? We hired you to write him.

WILBERT: Fearing that I would render Thaddeus too exquisitely literary for your coarse audience, you had your network hoods abduct him to be stereotype-transformed into T.V. banality before I could wean him to the sublime maturity he's destined for, inherent to his created nature, high above the vulgarization mold you plot for him. I've seen it happen to other great literary creations—lobotomized, robotized, mangled flat out of recognition. And that's your intention for my precious Thaddeus!

SY: Wilbert, you're out to lunch.

WILBERT: Pretending you needed the script as per deadline for production schedule, was a dodge to keep me from rightfully suspecting your engineering of the evil abduction of my Thaddeus.

(SY has meanwhile sneaked away out of chair and gone for phone, but WILBERT recovers and seizes the phone

before Sy can.)

SY: (*Yelling*) It's *my* phone!

WILBERT: T.V. pillager! Stealing Thaddeus out of envy, spite, malice, and crass commercialization, you pilfered my soul's alter-ego, my noble created other self, the purity of my heart!

SY: Search my whole hotel room, search *me* even.

WILBERT: Your network hoods did the dirty work and have him in their clutches. I want him released—(*Threateningly:*)—or—

SY: (*Calmly, regaining control*) Sit down and relax before you burst a blood vessel! Let *me* take over.

WILBERT: (*Irate, aggressing on Sy*) Arch enemy of art! You commercialized meddler, you character-flattener! This cynical tampering by envious, world-besotted villain—

SY: (*Warding WILBERT off*) Behave yourself. Wherever he is, we'll find him.

WILBERT: How?

SY: By assigning some reliable writers, and helping you patch up the script.

WILBERT: "Patch up!" my beloved character! (*Wails like a wounded animal.*)

SY: Wilbert, why not just fill in the blanks with a new character?

WILBERT: You've lost all concept of the true writer's art. "Just fill in the blanks!"

SY: But why not?

WILBERT: There can never be another Thaddeus, the whole world over. He was once-in-a-lifetime—a unique entity, irreplaceable, unduplicable.

SY: Oh, come on, now!

WILBERT: (*Earnestly*) In him I'd found my own consummate charac-

ter, the delicate alchemy of self idealized into the miracle of fiction.

SY: Relax!

WILBERT: No rest till he's found. Till then, no moment will be peaceful.

(WILBERT has turned as if obedient to an inner voice that calls him out of the room. SY had already gathered up the loose script pages.)

WILBERT: *(In a mesmerized voice, while leaving)* No peace.

SY: *(Calling after WILBERT, waving aloft the few pages he's already picked up)* Hey wait! The script! Is this all there is? I paid you for it! It's mine by rights, by contract! They'll have my neck!

WILBERT: *(Offstage, as if into far distance)* Can you hear me, Thad-deus? Can you hear me?

(SY takes phone and dials hurriedly.)

SY: *(On phone)* Hello, A.J. . . . Sy here. I just had the strangest scene with Wilbert. Is Morton in? *(Indignantly)* No, no, do I sound like I'm kidding?

SCENE III

(Messy office of BRUCE WAIN, private eye.)

WILBERT: Mr. Bruce Wain, private eye?

WAIN: Yeah? Who's looking for him?

WILBERT: I, as a matter of fact.

WAIN: Yeah? Who are you?

WILBERT: Wilbert Wills, fiction writer, in the flesh.

WAIN: Yeah, I believe you. Come in. Sorry the place is a mess.

WILBERT: I need your help, please, and I'll pay promptly.

WAIN: Make yourself at home.

WILBERT: I have what must be the most unusual case you, in your professional capacity, have ever been asked to handle.

WAIN: All my cases are unusual.

WILBERT: Mine is truly extraordinary . . .

WAIN: I'll tell you how extraordinary it is after I've solved it.

WILBERT: Good. I was told you're precisely the man for the job.

WAIN: What's the problem, Mr. Wills?

WILBERT: You must realize how difficult it must be for me to discuss it.

WAIN: I've heard them all.

WILBERT: This has been a most upsetting experience.

WAIN: Relax, sit down.

WILBERT: *(Sits down)* Thank you, Mr. Wain.

WAIN: Cigarette?

WILBERT: Thanks, but I don't smoke.

WAIN: Chewing gum?

WILBERT: No, I can't—dentures.

WAIN: So start from the beginning.

WILBERT: You see, I'm a novelist, poet, short story writer, and occasional essayist by profession. In addition, my lecture tours . . .

(Both WAIN and WILBERT go into fast action as WILBERT indicates his life history. Sound of WILBERT's sped-up dialogue comes over the P.A.)

WAIN: You really make a living doing that?

WILBERT: I do eke out a living, yes, not the best one . . .

WAIN: Okay, that T.V. stuff—what gives?

WILBERT: Well, I was commissioned to write this series episode. Struck with a wonderful burst of blind inspiration, I poured out a volume of notes, outlines, a character profile. Then the other day, disaster struck.

WAIN: Oh yeah? What?

WILBERT: Helpless, I realized . . .

WAIN: Go on.

WILBERT: A different medium had now enveloped me.

WAIN: Uh huh.

WILBERT: Uh huh.

WAIN: And that's when you noticed this guy was missin'?

WILBERT: After my inspired gush of writing, I needed to clear my seething head, and went for a walk. While walking, a weird apprehension came over me: that here was altogether a different medium, and I was in it! In eerie panic, I rushed home to resume working on the script. Back at my desk, I discovered the mystery: my newly created character had vanished!

WAIN: He wasn't there?

WILBERT: No, sir.

WAIN: Nothin' else was touched?

WILBERT: No, nothing! Everything else was intact, every comma, exactly as I had left it.

WAIN: You contact the police?

WILBERT: No! No! Please, no police. That's why I came to you, Mr. Wain. All I want is to locate my character again, take him back, and quietly continue with my work. Please, you must consent.

WAIN: I understand, Mr. Wills.

WILBERT: This has all been so upsetting to me. I can't sleep nights.

WAIN: This ever happen to you before?

WILBERT: Of course not! What kind of writer do you take me for?

Some novice hack?! I've written dozens of characters of every shape, color, size, period, style, and philosophical inclination. My works are well-respected and—if I do say so—elegantly formed. Because they haven't received a popular audience has no bearing on their aesthetic merit. Undoubtedly my fame awaits me, in the tardy irony of the post-humous.

WAIN: What's this guy's name again?

WILBERT: Thaddeus . . . dear, poor Thaddeus.

WAIN: (*Spelling it*) T-H-A-D-

WILBERT: (*Finishing spelling*) D-E-U-S: "Thaddeus."

WAIN: Last name?

WILBERT: I didn't get that far yet. I was on the verge—

WAIN: Keep calm. I'm here to help you.

WILBERT: Sorry, sir. I had just begun to render him. The blood was beginning to flow. From my volume of notes I had introduced him to the script. He embodied the ideal hero. He was to become lifelike, real. This lost love of my soul was spontaneously developing into the distillation of all my toil and literary development. The culmination of my lifetime nurturing of genius, he was arriving, he was coming—

WAIN: Uh, Mr. Wills . . . ?

WILBERT: Certainly—yes?

WAIN: You and this Thaddeus guy . . . (*Mimes homosexual gestures: limp wrist, etc.*)

WILBERT: (Indignant) Mr. Wain!

WAIN: Then what *was* your relationship?

WILBERT: Simply that of creator to creation. It's the consummate relationship.

WAIN: I *see*.

WILBERT: I doubt if you actually do.

WAIN: *Look*, Mr. Wills, you gotta help me find him—*see*?

WILBERT: I'm sorry. I do sincerely apologize.

WAIN: Okay, now down to some hard facts.

WILBERT: Yes?

WAIN: What's this guy look like?

WILBERT: I—I—I have just a general idea.

WAIN: That don't help me.

WILBERT: You see, I first sketch in the essence, the soul, of a character, and build from there outward to the physical characteristics last, that come to externalize the core.

WAIN: Any photos?

WILBERT: No, but I was about to depict him . . .

WAIN: That don't help me now. How old is the guy?

WILBERT: —Ahh—Certainly he's young, handsome, and brilliant. The idealized, aesthetic paragon of our blighted age.

WAIN: How old is that in years?

WILBERT: (*Deciding on the spot*) Twenty-one. Yes, twenty-one would be the right age for him. But far from the peak of his powers.

WAIN: You ain't makin' my job easy.

WILBERT: I'm sorry, but I'm a high-class fiction writer, not some reporter on the New York Post who writes for idiots.

WAIN: Unless you get more precise with the information, Mr. Wills, I don't know . . .

WILBERT: Excuse me. I've been inappropriately highbrow.

WAIN: How tall?

WILBERT: Five-eleven. No, that wouldn't do. Six feet, at least . . . I have it: Six feet-one. (*Proudly possessive:*) That's my Thaddeus, to the inch!

WAIN: Weight?

WILBERT: Ahh . . . one-seventy-five pounds . . . Yes, that's perfect. No superfluous fat.

WAIN: Build?

WILBERT: Build?

WAIN: Yeah. Build.

WILBERT: An interesting problem. Medium. Well-toned, but not too muscular. Like a Michaelangelo figure in the heroic mold . . . Or rather, Bernini: slender, supple.

WAIN: Hair?

WILBERT: Soft, slightly curly.

WAIN: I mean the color.

WILBERT: Black! . . .

WAIN: Black?

WILBERT: Of course not! What was I saying?! Blond. And, of course, natural.

WAIN: Eyes?

WILBERT: Blue!

WAIN: Beard or moustache?

WILBERT: (*Severely*) Nothing of the sort. He's a classical inspiration, not a cartoon strip!

WAIN: Birth marks, identifying scars, tattoos?

WILBERT: How fortunate you mentioned that!

WAIN: (*To himself*) Oh brother!

WILBERT: What was that?

WAIN: No brothers?

WILBERT: No, not the least.

WAIN: How about family?

WILBERT: He's the last remaining heir of a long and noble line . . .

WAIN: Huh?

WILBERT: The long-lost last prince of an ancient royal duchy. Due to

an unfortunate case of amnesia, little does Thaddeus realize the distinction of his ancestry. He must assume his rightful place to carry on the great tradition. That's why his long-lost uncle, the Duke of Wilbertania, seeks him. (*WAIN looks at him with cynical lifted arched eyebrow:*) Don't ask *me*—I didn't write the plot outline!

WAIN: No scars, then?

WILBERT: Please, Mr. Wain: No banality, please.

WAIN: (*He's been jotting things down in his notebook*) Any other distinguishing marks?

WILBERT: I'll consult my notes upon my return home.

WAIN: Where does he live?

WILBERT: I never got that far. The Village? Why not? . . . No, that's not quite right. Soho is the place. On Prince Street.

WAIN: Address?

WILBERT: 122 Prince Street. Apartment 3F.

WAIN: This guy an artist?

WILBERT: Artist? . . . A much better idea. However, the script outline requires that he be an actor.

WAIN: Friends, relatives?

WILBERT: Not yet. Give him time.

WAIN: This guy screwin' any broad?

WILBERT: To overlook your reductivist coarseness, let me reply that romance is certainly in the air, given Thaddeus' magnificent good looks and passionate though intellectual nature; not to mention that this is a nation-wide television serial or, to be blunt, a prime-time melodrama, with expensive advertising rates; so most assuredly romance is in the air—as soon as it will be *on* the air.

WAIN: Who's the dame?

WILBERT: Being under contract, I had to semi-vulgarize my unique originality of scenario plot and story line.

WAIN: Who's the dame?

WILBERT: As pre-established, she's an ongoing character, an aspiring actress, a starlet in the making.

WAIN: Name?

WILBERT: Nothing *I* would choose. I suppose it's perfect for T.V. Catchy, sexy, actressy. How they meet . . .

WAIN: What type of a guy is this Thaddeus?

WILBERT: (*Indignant*) Type! How dare you! What do you take me for? I create unique original individuals, not—

WAIN: Describe him.

WILBERT: Brilliant. Articulate, well-mannered. Highly artistic, innately cultivated, distinguished superior. But tough, worldly, practical, too. Confident, self-assured, quick to act. Magnetic. Electrifying. In short, dynamite.

WAIN: Where was he last seen?

WILBERT: In the scene I put him into. Late afternoon, sitting in Sardi's. That's where I had left him . . .

WAIN: Any chance he left on his own?

WILBERT: What?!

WAIN: Maybe he *wanted* to leave.

WILBERT: (*Indignant*) He'd never be so ungrateful as to leave me—his creator—when only half-developed!

WAIN: Mr. Wills, you're in a different medium now, where anythin' can happen.

WILBERT: (*On his knees, frantic*) Promise me you'll find him! Promise me!

WAIN: Cut the hysteria. (*Pause.*) One last thing.

WILBERT: (*Getting up*) Yes?

WAIN: What was he wearin' the last time you saw him?

WILBERT: You *would* be that practical! I never thought about his garments—the turn of the story hadn't suggested as yet what he'd have on . . . (*Thinks.*) I supposed he must be attired in some of my own clothes. Where else could he have acquired anything to wear? I'm his parent—I'm both his parents. (*Preens.*) Naturally, he's dressed as stylishly as I am. (*This is an obvious self-delusion, for WILBERT is dressed sloppy and unkempt while being ignorant of that fact.*)

WAIN: (*Mostly to self or audience*) This is gonna be a tough one to crack.

SCENE IV

(Tuesday, lunch hour in Sardi's. Sounds of bar music and subsequent bar crowd. Having a draft beer, and wearing glasses, THADDEUS sits at table by himself contemplating quizzically his surroundings. The customers are stage-set papier-mâché dummies.)

THADDEUS: (*Looking around*) What is this place, where I find myself? From the egocentric point of view, surely it's this moment's center of the universe. However, the world is broader than only here. Nor is this place typical of all other places.

(*To audience:*) How did I get here? Did some outer force plop me down here at random, or plant me here for a purpose?

I feel so incomplete, undeveloped, half-baked: perhaps vulnerably passive to whatever—or whoever—might chance to impinge upon me now.

What was my boyhood, who were my ancestors—from whence have I arrived? Where, if anywhere, do I “belong”?

(*ROXY enters in the distance.*) Here, drowning in my own loneliness, uncertainty, incompleteness, I'm being furtively approached by this pretty girl. She'll offer me a destiny good as any: I'll let her take me over, she'll lead me into an aspect of the world, thus momentarily filling this vacuum of availability I'm currently embarrassed to be in. (*ROXY has finally arrived at his table, standing near him.*) This ends my solilo-

quy, for it now becomes appropriate—sane—to change my monologue into a dialogue: losing, in the process, that solitary isolation called loneliness.

(ROXY, having entered Sardi's looking for someone else, but seen and been impressed by THADDEUS, has glided or sidled over to his table.)

ROXY: Hi. Mind if I join you? I'm waiting for somebody—you know how it is to wait for somebody.

THADDEUS: I've been waiting too.

ROXY: Really? Who for?

THADDEUS: You, perhaps.

ROXY: Oh no, don't get me wrong, mister. I just thought—

THADDEUS: How opportune you are! I was just feeling so self-pityingly lost.

ROXY: *(Sitting down at THADDEUS's table)* You don't talk like you look.

THADDEUS: How so, my beauty?

ROXY: *(Blushing at what THADDEUS called her)* Are you some professor or something like that? I went to acting school, because I'm destined to be an actress. I just can't wait!

THADDEUS: You're the messenger, the go-between. I'm so grateful! I adore you!

ROXY: *(Surprised, not unpleasantly)* what made you say that?

THADDEUS: I don't know . . . I'm not me. Are these words my own? Or am I a mouthpiece—

ROXY: But we've only just met—

THADDEUS: Something destined us to meet.

ROXY: Now look, you're putting me on, aren't you?

(WAITER enters.)

WAITER: (Wearing a white jacket, comes over, with an insolent attitude) I can take your order now.

ROXY: (Compassionately) You're so busy today.

WAITER: (Rudely snappy) Why shouldn't I be? Why don't you just give me your order?

ROXY: (Too caught up with meeting THADDEUS, to be too stung by WAITER's curtness) I'll take a beer too.

WAITER: (Writing in pad; to THADDEUS) Another draft beer? (THADDEUS stares blankly into space.) Two draft beers. (WAITER turns and exits severely.)

ROXY: (Mildly hurt by WAITER; then, noticing one of the customers) Oh, you see that man over there?

THADDEUS: (Turning in direction ROXY indicated) Yes—?

ROXY: Don't stare. That's Hugh Raymond, in the flesh!

THADDEUS: Sorry, I—

ROXY: Sure you know him—you're just pretending not to!

THADDEUS: (Smiling) I am?

ROXY: (Annoyed) You mean to say you can sit there and actually not know who Hugh Raymond is? Where have you been?

THADDEUS: (Meditatively) Where *indeed* have I been?

ROXY: Don't tell me you're not an actor!

THADDEUS: I suppose I *must* be an actor. . . Is he (indicating direction of "Hugh Raymond") an actor?

ROXY: (Scandalized at THADDEUS's naiveté) Where have you been?

THADDEUS: If this is life, then life is exceedingly strange.

ROXY: You sound like you just came from another planet.

THADDEUS: But do tell me who he is.

ROXY: (*Exclaiming, as to a child*) He's the biggest star of all soap opera. He's in—don't tell me you haven't seen it!— "As All the Guilding World's Hospital Turns with Hope."

THADDEUS: Bombastic, pretentious title.

ROXY: I think you're fabulous.

THADDEUS: Why, thank you.

ROXY: The minute I saw you, when I first walked in, I knew you were the maximum! I *knew* it!

THADDEUS: You insist so convincingly, out of such conviction . . .

ROXY: What's your astrology sign?

THADDEUS: I feel as if I'm being taken over. But it's a pleasant feeling—with *you*.

ROXY: (*Passionately*) Oh darling! (*She impulsively kisses THADDEUS; then backs off, looking abashed and self-conscious at what she's just done. Recovers herself, sighs romantically.*)

THADDEUS: My life is a vacuum. Why don't you fill it?

ROXY: (*Begins to respond warmly, but then spots someone*) Oh look! There's Tony Evans!

THADDEUS: Sorry, I—

ROXY: He produces movies and T.V. (*Looking at THADDEUS's no-recognition expression:*) Where have you been?

THADDEUS: (*Affectionately mocking*) "Where have you been?!"—Your refrain, from which you couldn't refrain.

ROXY: You're a real smoothie!

THADDEUS: Pardon. I didn't realize—

ROXY: (*Taking out a pack of cigarettes*) You want a cigarette? (*Puts one in his mouth and lights it.*) You know—you're really odd. Are you from L.A.?

THADDEUS: L.A.? L.A.? That has a familiar ring to it.

ROXY: (*Teasingly, not accusingly*) Are you schizophrenic? Maybe you just got out of Bellevue.

(*Before THADDEUS can think of an answer, WAITER re-enters severely and condescendingly with a tray on which are two draft beers.*)

WAITER: (*Condescendingly, contemptuously*) Two draft beers. (*He puts them on table with ostentatious contemptuousness, then condescendingly exits.*)

ROXY: (*Too smitten with THADDEUS to bother to mind WAITER's offensiveness, she holds up her beer glass to salute*) Well, here's to us. (*They drink.*) But you're so weird.

THADDEUS: How?

ROXY: You're funny. We'll consult my astrology chart later, if you're free to come with me.

THADDEUS: Of course I'm free. All *too* free . . . Freedom—that's all I have, right now.

ROXY: (*Ignoring his words; staring amorously at THADDEUS*) What's your name?

THADDEUS: Thaddeus.

ROXY: Oh.

THADDEUS: Do I fit the name? Or does the name fit me? I don't know *where* I belong—or who, even, if am. Perhaps you'll help me latch on to something. I'm cut off from my past, severed from roots; isolated in time. Undeveloped, I'm devoid of structure or purpose. I'm floating, moorless, in the passive quandary of a vacuum. I'm all dressed up with nowhere to go. I need to hook on to the world. I'm helpless. Help me.

ROXY: (*Passionately*) Oh, Thaddeus! I'm Roxy. (*She leans over table to embrace him, not only amorously but protectively and possessively.*) I'll take care of you!

THADDEUS: Thanks.

ROXY: (*Fervently*) We'll *always* be together! We'll be inseparable! We'll be known as the *team*—like Lunt and Fontaine, like Hepburn and Tracy, like Taylor and Burton, like—

THADDEUS: I was drowning, but you've pulled me ashore.

ROXY: (*Ecstatic*) This was fated to be. Co-stars! Hollywood's top romantic pair! (*In rhapsody:*) I can see it! I can see it!

THADDEUS: A lovely vision. And you're a vision in loveliness.

ROXY: (*Turning more coy*) What a line! You don't waste much time, do you?

THADDEUS: (*Philosophically*) What, then, is time?

ROXY: (*Literal-mindedly*) Oh, don't worry. (*Looking at her wristwatch.*) It's still early.

THADDEUS: You'll take care of me?

ROXY: (*Worldly*) If this is an act, I can tell you—it's working.

THADDEUS: Maybe it *is* an act. Am I playing a pre-ordained role? Am I being directed by some invisible hand? Am I, unwittingly, performing a part, in character, in some drama larger—or smaller—than life?

ROXY: (*Sympathetically*) Don't let it bother you.

THADDEUS: I'm being enveloped—taken over—I'm weak—I'm hungry. . . Marconi.

ROXY: Marconi! Do you know Marconi?! He's the biggest casting director in New York! I've been hoping to get in to see him for a year!

THADDEUS: I have an appointment with him.

ROXY: What?! When?! Where?!

THADDEUS: (*Pulls out a business card, shows it to ROXY*) Here.

ROXY: Two-thirty! Fabulous! He's only seven blocks away. We'll go together, he'll cast us as a team! Wait for me, be back in a jiff, just going to the little girls' room to powder my nose and fix my hair.

(She exits enthusiastically in a hurry. But instead of waiting for ROXY, THADDEUS, as though pulled and impelled by a fate beyond his knowing, leaves the restaurant alone to keep his appointment, as though ROXY had never asked him to wait for her.)

SCENE V

(Tuesday, 4:00 P.M. WILBERT's East Village apartment. BRUCE WAIN, having just missed THADDEUS and ROXY at Sardi's, confers with WILBERT.)

WAIN: So then a dame named Roxy came by.

WILBERT: Roxy did you say?

WAIN: Whats-a-matter?

WILBERT: The script's plot specified a certain "Roxy" whom Thaddeus was to meet at that same "Sardi's."

WAIN: That so? The waiter said this dame was a sexy would-be actress type, good-lookin', talented, but not smart enough to play the game of show biz.

WILBERT: That's precisely her description as she's to be depicted as per the script. It's the splittin' image of the Roxy of the series—the same one. How odd! What else were you told?

WAIN: *(Reading from notes)* She joined him about two o'clock. The fag waiter said he was talkin' to himself before she came over. Then they started talkin', they even kissed, then he left the place like in a hurry, while she was in the ladies' room.

WILBERT: Poor Thaddeus! This is my living nightmare! We must find him!

WAIN: There's more, Mr. Wills.

WILBERT: *(Brought up short)* Yes, of course. Please go on.

WAIN: Then I proceeded to—

WILBERT: (*Interrupting*) It's truly possible: Roxy is their instrument: a sexually alluring device planted by them to tempt my unsuspecting Thaddeus away from me—permanently.

WAIN: Then I proceeded to—

WILBERT: (*Interrupting*) Mr. Wain—excellent detective work!

WAIN: —To one-twenty-two Prince Street, that address you had for him.

WILBERT: Yes?—yes?

WAIN: No cigar. I had to rough up the super a little, so he spilled what he had and it wasn't much. Apartment 3F is vacant, been for some time. He swore he don't remember any guy of Thaddeus's description bein' there.

WILBERT: All this—it's too upsetting.

WAIN: It's only the tip of the iceberg, Mr. Wills.

WILBERT: The dreadful possibility occurs to me that, this very moment, my Thaddeus is being corrupted, contaminated, by the company of actual T.V. characters in person!

WAIN: Yeah, it sure could be. Got anythin' on the dame?

WILBERT: Not me. I gave you all I had on her. They saddled me at the onset with her basic character outline to work from; but as for her particulars apropos of our desperate quest of Thaddeus; I'm at a loss.

WAIN: Yeah? What happens next in the "plot"?

WILBERT: (*Admiringly*) Of course! How logical you are! I knew I hired the right man! (*Goes to desk and piles through his papers.*)

WAIN: Cut the flattery, Mr. Wills.

WILBERT: I was assigned by plot requirement to follow Thaddeus on appointment to a leading major T.V. casting agent, for Scene Three.

WAIN: What name you got for that guy?

WILBERT: He too, is an ongoing character in the series. (*Finds name at*

desk:) Marconi.

WAIN: Spell it.

WILBERT: M-A-R-C-O-N-I.

WAIN: Maybe Mafia?

WILBERT: Do you suspect a conspiracy of magnitude—an international plot?

WAIN: Looks like Thaddeus's only the tip of the iceberg.

WILBERT: Your cliché, through repetition, becomes a cliché.

WAIN: What about the rest o' the plot?

WILBERT: Of course . . . (*Obediently fumbling through his papers.*) The outline is here somewhere . . . it *ought* to be . . . ah, *here* it is!

WAIN: (*Roughly*) Gimme that. (*Grabs script from WILBERT.*)

WILBERT: Sorry. It's embarrassing how awkward I can be at times.

WAIN: (*Reading*) It says here, "Scene Three, Thaddeus at casting agent Marconi's office, Thaddeus cast as new romantic lead in T.V. series . . ."

WILBERT: (*Incredulous, horrified*) It says that?

WAIN: You didn't read the outline?

WILBERT: Having invented my marvelous Thaddeus, his development distracted me, it consumed me, it obsessed me—

WAIN: (*Reading*) "Scene Four, Thaddeus now Prince Glitz. His uncle, the Grand Duke of Wilbertania from Europe, arrives in New York, hires a private eye to locate his (*Has trouble pronouncing it:*) amnesia-ridden nephew."

WILBERT: That part I remember! Yes, the Grand Duke realizes how vulnerable, innocent, unprotected his nephew, the long-lost heir . . . Oh, I should have read that plot more carefully. Mr. Wain, it's urgent—we must find Thaddeus *now!* What's the next Scene? It should afford us a clue, and that's our cue—quick, what follows?

WAIN: That's it.

WILBERT: No! There *must* be! (*Takes the outline; reads; disappointed:*) You're right: it says, "To be continued in L.A."

WAIN: Who gave you this Plot?

WILBERT: Sy did—he's the associate producer, and story editor, of this series.

WAIN: Then he's the man we want.

WILBERT: When I first discovered my hero's disappearance, my suspicion pointed to Sy as the one behind it.

WAIN: If it's that guy's plot, he's the one we're after.

WILBERT: The villain—I can see him controlling, manipulating Thaddeus at the evil promptings of his whim, for slick commercial gain.

WAIN: (*Making aggressive gestures*) Where do I find 'em?

WILBERT: He lives in Los Angeles, but is at a New York hotel at the moment. But hurry—he's due to fly back to Los Angeles very soon.

WAIN: Why would he want to take Thaddeus?

WILBERT: The survival of his series—in fact of his career—depends on his getting his greasy paws on a well-drawn character to degrade into the vulgar appeal of stereotype.

WAIN: (*Philosophically—for him*) It's dog eat dog, all right.

WILBERT: T.V. is notorious for its plundering, pillaging of truly original characters and stories: they're stolen, raped for all they're commercially worth, then discarded broken, uselessly vulgarized, drained of soul and substance.

WAIN: How come you didn't mention Sy before?

WILBERT: You see, Sy, in years gone by, had been my friend; and for an old friend to stab me in the back—

WAIN: Those are the ones that'll do it to ya.

WILBERT: Before desperation turns to despair, we must pull out all the stops, leave no stone unturned, nor guilty nose unbroken, pursuing a single goal—get Thaddeus back to me, intact!

WAIN: Like I told ya, it's only the tip of the iceberg! (*Making ready to go.*)

SCENE VI

(Same day, 3:00 P.M. MARCONI's glitzy office, show-biz decor, on Lexington Avenue in the Sixties. THADDEUS dashes in, MARCONI greets him.)

MARCONI: It's about time, young man! Thaddeus, I presume?

THADDEUS: It's I, if you think so.

MARCONI: (*Circling around to ogle THADDEUS*) Funny, but cute to the point of devastating! You know, honey, that we've all been waiting for you?

THADDEUS: For me?

MARCONI: We've heard so much about you, and here you are finally! (*Ogling:*) Not bad, not at all bad! And what sweet buns you have! Anyone ever tell you that, baby?

THADDEUS: If so, I don't remember.

MARCONI: (*Noticing his clothes*) What's with the rags?

THADDEUS: (*Uncomprehending*) Rags?

MARCONI: (*Turning bitchily severe*) You're not here for an artsy theater audition, this is no Public Theatre on Lafayette Street, or [*name of actual theater where this play is being currently performed*]. Let me set you straight. You're here for a T.V. audition—big money, good looks, glamor, Hollywood Boulevard. Get it? So what gives?

THADDEUS: Sorry, I didn't know what my appointment was for. I'm not sure—

MARCONI: That's not *my* problem, go scream at your agent. They're looking for a leading man—not some character actor who occasionally pops out of the background!

THADDEUS: They are? Where? . . . Is that who I am? I've been at a loss, pondering my identity.

MARCONI: (*Melting*) You're sweet, dumb, and innocent—just the way I like them. But really—you *must* do something before I let you go in there. (*Scolding like a parent:*) Just look at you!

(*MARCONI takes it upon himself to adjust THADDEUS'S clothes to make him look up-to-date fashionable: takes off his glasses, puts his collar up, etc.*)

THADDEUS: I'm feeling awkward.

MARCONI: Don't worry, my infant, big daddy will be there to help you. (*Backing up to inspect the "new" THADDEUS:*) Now you look more like the hunk you are, my gorgeous piece of handiwork!

(*MARCONI stares at THADDEUS, till THADDEUS finally, self-consciously, has to break the silent staring spell.*)

THADDEUS: Something else wrong?

MARCONI: (*Shaking his head—incredulous with wonder*) I just can't get over it!

THADDEUS: Over what?

MARCONI: You look exactly like the character breakdown! It's incredible!

THADDEUS: How happy I am, at last, to be rounding out into *some* identity! I feel I'm in good hands. What should I do next?

MARCONI: That's the boy! Now, take this side and read it over. (*Leaving.*) I'll be right back out and they'll be ready to audition you, dear.

THADDEUS: Read this? But you took my glasses.

(*MARCONI exits. THADDEUS tries to read by holding the paper close to his face. MARCONI enters again.*)

MARCONI: My sweet thing, they're all ready for you!

THADDEUS: (*Concerned*) But I haven't been able to read this yet.

MARCONI: (*Breezily*) Just fake it.

THADDEUS: (*Pleading, earnest*) But why am I here? What am I doing?

MARCONI: You're adorable when you look so serious, so earnest! You're reading the part of the new romantic lead in that fabulous T.V. series, "Fantasy Life." That turn you on, you sexpot? Now let's go, we don't want to keep the money people waiting, do we, darling?

(*MARCONI coquetishly shoves THADDEUS into next room, where seated are SY, VITTORIO, and MAGGIE.*)

MARCONI: (*Whispering to THADDEUS*) Now's your big chance! I don't have the slightest doubt in you. (*Pinching THADDEUS on behind.*)

THADDEUS: Big chance? For what? (*Looking about. To himself:*) Yet this room fills me with instinctual foreboding: a dreaded doom it's too late to avert, as the die is cast, as though here destiny and I meet at the crossroads of our rendezvous. Marconi's my Virgil, at an underworld's portal, escorting me—closing all doors behind me forever—to—ah yes, where is he leading me? Across this threshold, my first station, my first stage—in this, a journey I'm blindly led to undertake.

MARCONI: You just have to *read*, my child: they don't need you to do a *monologue*.

(*The CASTING TRIO has risen and are now standing behind their table.*)

MARCONI: Well folks, here he is. Thaddeus, I'd like you to meet Sy, the Assistant Producer in charge of casting and script development.

SY: (*Shaking his hand*) My pleasure, Thaddeus. Just relax, now.

THADDEUS: Thank you, sir.

MARCONI: This is Vittorio, the series Director.

VITTORIO: Buongiorno!

THADDEUS: Placere, Signor.

MARCONI: (*Surprised*) Oh—you speak Italian?

THADDEUS: Huh?

MARCONI: And this is Maggie, the series' Associate Producer.

THADDEUS: The series?

MARCONI: Isn't he fun? So Sy, would you like to fill Thaddeus in a little on the scene?

SY: We'll just lay a few things on you; then you can take it from there. It's about a guy just like you: a good-looking guy, name of Prince Glitz, he's found wandering around New York—and he doesn't know who he is, or where he's from.

MAGGIE: (*Husky sexy throaty voice in all her speeches*) And in this scene he wanders right into Sardi's, sits down, and has a beer.

VITTORIO: (*Italian accent in all his speeches*) A lovely, universal scene! So touching! He is right in the middle of a pure, pure identity crisis!

SY: And right then, this dame Roxy comes in—looking for somebody.

THADDEUS: (*Recognizing*) Roxy! That's right, Roxy.

MAGGIE: (*Sexually responding to THADDEUS, to parallel her description*) As soon as she enters, without expecting to be, she finds herself attracted—immediately—to Prince as to a magnet, she's drawn to him. Why? Because of his irresistible sexual powers. He's a knockout! . . . And that's you, all over . . .

THADDEUS: (*As if by belated discovery*) Prince did you say . . . my name is Prince Glitz?

SY: You got it! That's you!

THADDEUS: But where does he come from? What's wrong with him? Why doesn't he know where he is—and why he's there? Is he in possession of his faculties; fully, to find his bearings, his orientation, and to locate himself, at the core of identity?

SY: Take it easy. Not so fast.

THADDEUS: Fast? Why not?

SY: My script staff hasn't finished this scene yet. A certain writer—you see, we had some difficulty with him. Not to worry, though. In a few days he'll be all fleshed out . . . and so will you . . . we're working on your character.

THADDEUS: Can you fill me in more specifically for the time being?

MAGGIE: He has amnesia. He's from European royalty. From a long, illustrious line of nobility, he has just one living relative left: his uncle, whose title is—I know it sounds funny, in this day and age—"the Grand Duke of Wilbertania."

VITTORIO: You see, you—Prince—is the sole remaining heir to a noble heritage.

SY: You got it? And the uncle—

MAGGIE: —the Grand Duke, that is—

VITTORIO: —he come looking for him, he help him find himself, and realize his destiny.

MAGGIE: That uncle, he's miserable, for he misses his relative: the uncle is lost until he can find Prince!

VITTORIO: And Prince,

SY: who's amnesiac,

VITTORIO: must to shake off his amnesia, to relate to the real world,

SY: to become well-adjusted;

VITTORIO: he is bewildered by the world he is found himself in—and he is looking—

MAGGIE: —Just like his uncle is looking for *him*, he's looking for *himself*.

SY: That's right—get it?

THADDEUS: I'm beginning to—to find myself.

SY: Great! We love it!

THADDEUS: (*Indicating script*) Let's read this. I've got to know more.

SY: Yeah, you'll find your way, you'll make your own way.

THADDEUS: I'm dying to! Please!

SY: That's the spirit! You're getting there!

MARCONI: Thaddeus's right—let's get back to the script. He can feel his own way.

THADDEUS: I can!

MARCONI: I'll be reading the part of Roxy, the pretty girl who's just come into the restaurant.

THADDEUS: Yes, Roxy—it's coming back to me.

SY: That's terrific, Thaddeus baby.

MAGGIE: (*Winking at THADDEUS*) We're ready if you are.

THADDEUS: (*Reading with some difficulty*) Where am I? Oh, how did I get here? Why . . . I must be lost! But how, how? Ah, why am I feeling this way? It's tragic! I'm overwhelmed! Who am I?

(MARCONI, in playing ROXY, unwittingly imitates and mimes her precise voice, gestures, mannerisms, etc., as she was in previous scene, Scene IV:)

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) Hi. Mind if I join you? I'm waiting for somebody—you know how it is to wait for somebody.

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) Why of course, baby. Sit down and make yourself at home. You've chased all my loneliness away! You make me feel like a man!

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) Oh no, don't get me wrong, mister. I just thought—

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) You sure are good-looking. Let's have a little chat. Who knows—it could lead to romance!

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) You don't talk like you look.

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) How easily you've dropped into my life! Like a princess from the clouds! Well, now that you're here, let's make the most of it!

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) But we've only just met.

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) Come on, baby.

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) You want a cigarette? (*Puts one in THADDEUS's mouth and lights it.*) You know—you're really odd. Are you from L.A.?

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) Why do you say that, my lovely?

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) You're a real smoothie!

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) I'm fascinated! Tell me more! How do I look? In fact—

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) I think you're fabulous.

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) Oh, am I?

MARCONI: (*Playing ROXY; reading*) If this is an act, I can tell you—it's working.

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) Ah, if—

SY: (*Cutting in*) Thank you, that's all we need to hear.

(The CASTING TRIO gather closely in a huddle, buzzing in hushed conversation.)

MARCONI: They just loved you. (*Winking sexually*) I know I sure did.

THADDEUS: I could barely see the lines.

MARCONI: (*As though that proves THADDEUS's rare talent*) You're a natural!

(The CASTING TRIO conclude their conference.)

SY: Thaddeus baby, are you under contract now?

THADDEUS: What?

MAGGIE: How much camera work have you done?

THADDEUS: What?

VITTORIO: Is that you natural hair color?

SY: Thaddeus, you see this paper?

THADDEUS: Of course. What is it?

SY: I'll tell you what it is. Now listen.

THADDEUS: Please.

SY: It's a two-year contract to play the leading man in our T.V. series, "Fantasy Life." Happy to have you aboard. Will you sign it, please?

MAGGIE: We think the role was made for you.

VITTORIO: You and the role fit, like the snug together.

SY: Yeah, there's no difference. Sign, baby.

THADDEUS: I'm not sure. I'm somewhat scared by all this—taken aback, somewhat. Apprehensive. *My life* is at stake. My whole life.

MARCONI: (*In confidential, intimate tone*) Darling, take it. They're making you a wonderful offer.

MAGGIE: Yes, just think: for the next two years you won't have a thing to worry about!

SY: Your slightest needs will be taken care of. You'll have tons of money, and future financial security.

VITTORIO: Every week, twenty million Americans soak you up, they drink you in—you get fan mail!

SY: You're star material. We'll smooth you out—polish you up. A little shading, here and there—presto!—you *are* the role! You're a star!

MAGGIE: You'll fit it perfectly. (*Erotically suggestively:*) You're a perfect fit!

THADDEUS: I'm overwhelmed, it's too wonderful to be true. But—

VITTORIO: Si?

THADDEUS: But where's the rest of the script? I'd like to know where I stand, in it. It's essential. What am I to be? How will my life go?

SY: Don't worry about a *thing!* It's all taken care of. Right now, I've got my writing boys working on it. And as soon as you get to L.A., you'll know where you are, who you are, where you're going.

MAGGIE: Other actors can only *dream* of what *you're* actually being offered.

VITTORIO: Next week we start shooting.

THADDEUS: I'm not sure—I'm uncertain—what should I do next?

SY: All you have to do is sign right here. That's the beauty of corporate media, see? It's as simple as that.

THADDEUS: Really? I see—so *that's* what comes next.

SY: You just fall in with it. It's all for your benefit. It's like music.

THADDEUS: That's what follows?

SY: Hollywood is next, big boy, then the starry heavens. It's the big time!

(THADDEUS goes to the contract, hesitates while the others hold their breath—which they release with relief when he finally signs.)

CASTING TRIO PLUS MARCONI: Bravo! Congratulations! A star is born!

SY: *(Taking the contract and checking it)* No champagne now, don't have time—things to do and places to go. Maggie, you're in charge of Thaddeus. *(MAGGIE responds with look of sexual joy.)* Get him some new clothes, get his hair done. I'll arrange the press for when he hits L.A.. We can get a lot of coverage out of this. We have a hot superstar in the making, it's good timing, there happens to be a vacuum in the public hero worship right now, a slot made for a Prince Glitz. He's the unique product everyone's looking for. Marconi, you'll call and make

sure the limo is downstairs for me. *(To everyone:)* Let's get hustling.

MARCONI: Sure thing, Sy.

SY: Vittorio, you and I have that five o'clock at LaGuardia, or we'll miss our meeting with Morton . . . Thaddeus, here's your copy of the contract. *(Hands it to THADDEUS.)*

THADDEUS: Oh, thank you.

(THADDEUS puts the contract in a pocket, but it falls out and onto the floor, unnoticed by himself and the others.)

SY: Maggie, make sure Thaddeus sees video tapes of the series, get him caught up to date; get him loosened up for the shooting, he seems a little stiff. Make him natural, at home—you know what I mean, baby. *(Pets MAGGIE on her behind.)*

MAGGIE: *(Winking)* Will do, Sy.

(As SY, MARCONI, and VITTORIO leave in a rush:)

SY: See ya in L.A., Thaddeus baby!

(MAGGIE and THADDEUS then follow, together.)

MAGGIE: You don't know how lucky you are, Thaddeus. Your day has come.

THADDEUS: So I'm Prince Glitz now?

MAGGIE: *(Keeping close, clinging to him physically.)* You got it, sweetheart. You've met your destiny now. Isn't it sweet?

(MAGGIE and THADDEUS exit, and now everyone's gone. After a moment, the sound of breaking glass is heard. From the shadows BRUCE WAIN, Private Eye, enters the office quietly, looking carefully around. Beginning to

snoop, he notices THADDEUS's accidentally fallen contract on the floor, and picks it up. Reading it over, he looks up in direction of exit)

WAIN: L.A., huh? Well, me too.

SCENE VII

(Wednesday morning, L.A. airport. Even at airport, L.A. is shown—as fantasy-land, etc.—in startling contrast to previous N.Y. scenes, and will continue to be shown thus for remainder of play (this Scene and all of Act Two). Grouped on one side, waiting, are reporters, photographers, and a T.V. video crew.)

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE ON P.A. SYSTEM: Now arriving, Flight 807 from New York's LaGuardia Airport, at Gate Seven. Flight 807 from New York's LaGuardia Airport at Gate Seven.

(THADDEUS, now known publicly as Prince Glitz, and MAGGIE enter from direction opposite to the waiting media group on the other side. They're carrying hand luggage. THADDEUS has been transformed into Prince visibly: dressed stylishly up-to-date, sporting a new haircut, etc.)

FIRST REPORTER: There he is!

SECOND REPORTER: Over there, guys!

(The media group all rush over to THADDEUS and MAGGIE.)

MAGGIE: *(Taking charge)* Hello, guys. Well, here he is: meet Prince Glitz. Isn't he gorgeous?

(There's a flurry of flash photos.)

MAGGIE: We only have time for a few questions. Prince has a very busy schedule.

FIRST REPORTER: How does it feel, Mr. Glitz, to be cast in "Fantasy Life"?

THADDEUS: A new world, a new life, is opening up for me.

SECOND REPORTER: Is this your first major network role?

THADDEUS: Very possibly so. The past is somewhat murky.

THIRD REPORTER: Who's your designer, Prince?

THADDEUS: For now; whoever's writing the script.

FOURTH REPORTER: What do you think of the "Fantasy Life" series so far, up to where *you're* climbing aboard?

THADDEUS: I'm here to be directed. I'll do the best I can. I won't rock the boat.

FIFTH REPORTER: Will it fit comfortably on your own style?

THADDEUS: I'll learn my lines. I'm a good adapter. One can get used to just about anything, I guess.

MAGGIE: *(Beaming proprietorial, possessively)* Isn't he charming, guys? He's the goods, isn't he?

FOURTH REPORTER: How was Prince cast?

FIFTH REPORTER: Was it a difficult choice?

MAGGIE: Our Prince was selected only after the most exhaustive, nation-wide search for the positively absolutely right and perfect character.

FIRST REPORTER: How many were auditioned?

MAGGIE: Literally thousands! It was like an all-points manhunt! But once we saw Prince, we knew that we had no choice—he made it seem inevitable.

SECOND REPORTER: Do you predict he'll push "Fantasy Life" back into

the number one ratings slot?

MAGGIE: I'd stake my life on it.

THIRD REPORTER: Prince—what's your astrological sign?

THADDEUS: Huh?

FOURTH REPORTER: Were you trained for the stage?

THADDEUS: For the stage?—*what* stage?

FIRST REPORTER: Maggie, could we have you two stand a little closer together?

MAGGIE: Glad to oblige. He's a heartbreaker, isn't he?

(MAGGIE pulls THADDEUS closer to her. Flash photos flash in a flurry.)

FOURTH REPORTER: You two aren't an item, are you?

MAGGIE: *(Deliberately ambiguous, for P.R. intrigue)* Maybe, maybe not. Now don't you print anything, I'm still married. I don't want any scandal-mongering.

THIRD REPORTER: Prince, do you plan to settle in Hollywood?

THADDEUS: Hollywood?

FIRST REPORTER: Do you think life on the West Coast is different?

FOURTH REPORTER: How does it feel to be the romantic lead opposite some of T.V.'s most yummy glamor girls?

SECOND REPORTER: When does the shooting start?

THIRD REPORTER: What kind of contract are you under, Prince?

FOURTH REPORTER: I don't mean to pry into your personal affairs, but you wouldn't want to mention any figures, would you?

THADDEUS: I—I—the contract?

THIRD REPORTER: Who's your agent?

FIRST REPORTER: Who's your hairdresser?

FOURTH REPORTER: What's your definite opinion about the current political situation? What are you for? What are you against?

THADDEUS: The political situation? Which one?

SECOND REPORTER: What's your hobby, Prince? What sports do you go in for?—heh heh, I mean *outdoor* sports.

THIRD REPORTER: Prince, who's number one in your love life?

FIRST REPORTER: When did you first fall in love?

SECOND REPORTER: What's your personal opinion about bisexuality? Does it agree with your own lifestyle? Or are you shy about it? Is it a closed secret?

THIRD REPORTER: Have you ever been in love? I mean *truly* in love, with all the trimmings? What advice can you give on the subject?

FOURTH REPORTER: Ever been married, Prince? For how long?

FIFTH REPORTER: How many times?

FIRST REPORTER: Who's your favorite pop star?

SECOND REPORTER: Prince, what do you *really* like to do in your spare time? Be frank!

THIRD REPORTER: Have you ever had a mystical experience?

FOURTH REPORTER: Next to acting, what's your favorite activity?

FIFTH REPORTER: Would you like to direct some day, Prince?

FIRST REPORTER: Any tips for aspiring actors who are just setting out, Prince?

SECOND REPORTER: Or words of caution?

THIRD REPORTER: What's the worst thing that ever happened to you? Be honest!

FOURTH REPORTER: What about your past, Prince?

THADDEUS: My past—my past? It's sort of a blank right now.

FIFTH REPORTER: (*To MAGGIE*) Can you tell our "Entertainment Tonight" viewers anything about this prime-time heart-throb new

mystery-man?

(The T.V. cameras get in close. A reporter comes up to hold microphone close to THADDEUS.)

MAGGIE: Prince will tell you a little about himself, then we really have to go, we have a tight schedule. Go ahead, Prince.

THADDEUS: What handicaps me in trying to come to terms with my past, is the dimness of my recollection of it.

SECOND REPORTER: Was it too painful, Prince? Try hard to remember. We're all on your side.

THADDEUS: It's so vague! Only one thing is clear about my past. Cultivation, high culture. The best in literature, art, theatre, music, opera. It was a proud upbringing. Classy, you might say.

THIRD REPORTER: Boo! So you turn out to be a real culture snob, eh? Would you call yourself too good for Hollywood, T.V.—the *popular arts*?

THADDEUS: My lineage is aristocratic, from high nobility.

(This last statement produces a hush, hum, buzz, uproar, perking up the group of media people. As the T.V. cameras, in the sensational revelation of this media event, move up closer, BRUCE WAIN, private eye, is seen in the background.)

FIRST REPORTER: Could you tell us more about that, Prince? It's what we'd all like to know.

THADDEUS: *(Innocently, not boastfully)* I'm the last of a long and noble line. As the sole remaining heir to the Dukedom of Wilbertania, I'm nevertheless delighted to have arrived in Hollywood, where "Fantasy Life" is filling in the blanks in my life, and covering over my identity-void with the acquisition of new true substance. Before "Fantasy Life,"

I confess to having been confused, undirected—in a fog. The lines of my script—my role—have given fresh meaning to my life, as I replace my former vacuum with what comes next in the episodes to come. This serial *is* my life. I draw my vitality from it, and owe my identity to it. My veins of blue blood are nourished red by the characterization in the script. I'm wedded to my job—at one with it. Acting is my whole life.

(This speech is treated as a great sensation-revelation by the media group. Uproar.)

MAGGIE: Sorry, guys, but that's it for today. We've got to be on our way now.

FOURTH REPORTER: Ah come on, Maggie—after what he said, you got to let us at this guy!

THIRD REPORTER: It could be the story of the season!

FIRST REPORTER: You can't let us down!

FIFTH REPORTER: Yeah, give us a break, Maggie!

MAGGIE: You'll just have to make do with what you've got this morning—and that's plenty!

(Groans and cries of protests come from media group.)

MAGGIE: You poor deprived babies! You're greedy! Well, I promise you a press conference next week, so you can save your ammunition for Prince for then, till then.

(As groans, moans, outcries greet this, MAGGIE and THADDEUS start to exit. Reporters hound, surround, follow them as they exit. Photos flash madly. A reporter desperately tries to get in a question.)

(BRUCE WAIN, straight from airplane, still wearing his N.Y. duds, goes to telephone booth, dials a long-distance

number.)

WAIN: *(On phone)* Hello, Wills? Wain here.

WILBERT'S VOICE ON PHONE: I've been waiting desperately for your call. Where have you been? Any development?

WAIN: Sure thing. I'm in L.A. now.

WILBERT'S VOICE ON PHONE: *(Alarmed)* No!—don't tell me! No!

WAIN: Sit tight, now. They got your boy here. *(Scream heard from WILBERT'S voice. WAIN holds hands over his ears.)* Screams won't get you nowhere, Wills, but an airplane ticket will. Yeah, they got him. We might have to do something illegal. *(WILBERT'S voice sputters.)* Sounds desperate? So is the case, Mr. Wills.

ACT TWO

SCENE I

(L.A. studio script development department for the T.V. series, "Fantasy Life." Four SCRIPTWRITERS sitting around a large table writing, as SY enters in a rush.)

SY: Okay, gang, here we go! I was just in with Morton. He knows our backs are against the wall—but he and I have faith in this staff!

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: Gee, thanks boss!

SY: Good enough, sweethearts. So this is how it stands. The artsy-fartsy writer we commissioned for the episode couldn't deliver. So it's a patch-up job—we'll tie scraps together, fill in blank spots. Our priority is getting the last scenes finished up by our shoot deadline.

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: Lay it on us, boss!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: No problem.

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: A piece of cake!

SY: Okay! Alright! Some background first. (*Waves a paper aloft.*) See this here? Know what this is?

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: What, boss?

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: Don't keep us in suspense!

SY: It's market research survey our sponsors have just hit us with.

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Oh, tell us, what does it say, boss?

SY: (*Reading*) The ratings are down two points from the beginning of the season.

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: (*Taking blame hanging their heads in shame*)
Sorry, boss!

SY: (*Part-reading*) It also says that eighty-five percent of our audience share is middle-aged or older. That's no good, since our sponsors are desperate to project a youthful image in their lines of products and appeal to the upscale, upwardly mobile market.

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: We'll go young, Sy, we'll aim for the kids and the yuppies.

SY: That's right—give the money people what they want.

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: What *do* they want?

SY: More action, more romance, a more exotic setting, glamor, intrigue, adventure, excitement, passion. That's what'll sell their products. Guys, have I been heard?

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: Loud and clear, boss!

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: Let's get going!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: We introduced Roxy two episodes ago.

SY: A good move—that's a step we can capitalize on now.

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: She's young, sexy, but innocent.

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: We still need a male romantic lead in her age bracket to play opposite her but who'll turn out too good, too big, for her. That's what we need!

SY: Not any more—now we've got him!

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: We have?

SY: He's in our possession—Prince Glitz!

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: Hurray! Prince Glitz! In person!

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Our problems are solved!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: I feel lighter!

SY: He's in our hands, to make of him what we want. He can get us a number-one rating if we do *our* job—to realize his potential as the prime-time heart-throb new-wave rave, the magnet to a million new fans who'll *stay* tuned in, if only we provide him with live-wire material so he can strut his stuff and bounce all over the tube. Dig?

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: We dig!

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: You got it—we got it!

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: We're with you every inch of the way, boss!

SY: I love it! Render me the music. Run down the outline. Go on, blast!

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Here's what our plot gives:

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: Prince wanders vague into Sardi's, all lost, no memory. Roxy walks in, then they meet then they fall in love—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Then Prince abandons her to keep his appointment with Marconi—alone—

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: He's cast in a T.V. show—

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Next stop is stupendous L.A. in the captivity of sexy Maggie, one of the biggies behind the show.

SY: (*Urging them on, in semi-sexual cadence*) Yeah, don't stop now, lay it on, you've worked me up, don't leave me dry—

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: (*Downward note*) Our invention pauses there, boss. We're at a loss . . .

SY: You perched long enough—now fly again—

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: We're stuck—let's get unclogged—let's flow!

SY: What does the doctor order?

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: A romantic scene. Dreamy but devastating.

SY: You got it!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: A triangle—to introduce conflict?

SY: Specify!

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Build up suspense?

SY: I hired you, so think!

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Lay on intrigue?

SY: Don't stop the music *now!*

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: How about this scene: we build on the Grand Duke of Wilbertania, who arrives in L.A. looking for his long-lost nephew, heir to the noble legacy but currently amnesia-ridden—

SY: (*Acting like an orchestra conductor*) Fantastic! But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: I got it!—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Yeah—

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: How about—

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: Roxy—she's in love with—

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: Obsessed, driven by her love for Prince,

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: She follows him—doglike—to L.A.

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Groovy! Women become his slaves—he's an irresistible dreamboat of stunning clean-cut angelic sweet-tempered virility—

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: Sy, what's our golden boy look like?

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: Yeah, boss, can you precision him?

SY: (*Handing out identical copies to each of the SCRIPTWRITERS*) Here's the data sheet. (*Reading from his copy:*) Obvious hero type. Built in the wholesome pure romantic mold. Age twenty-one, height six feet one, weight one-seventy-five well-proportioned pounds—build not

too muscular but well-toned. Hair soft, slightly curly, blond—not light blond but masculine blond, and completely natural to fit the rest of him. Eyes a piercing, but relaxing, blue. No beard, no moustache—there's nothing sinister about him.

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: What a lowdown, boss!

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: He's all-American!

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: What about his personality?

SY: Glad you asked. Here, boys. (*Hands out more identical copies all around. Reading:*) Bright, articulate, tends to be introspective. Well bred—polite and courteous. High artistic sensibility—appreciates the finer things of life. Yet, being impulsive, can be easily spurred into action. Knows his way around town, confident in any situation, self-assured—yet not arrogant. He has no relatives except his long-lost uncle; but he's welcome among the best people, he has charisma, magnetic vitality. Whatever he does it's damn interesting and frequently leads to drama. (*Stops reading, resumes talking*) And boys, he's macho-tough. The audience will get larger and younger—a perfect cult figure that'll hurry up the puberty of teenage girls and bring back the puberty of the young marrieds.

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: He's our saviour, incarnate!

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: He'll save our bacon and zoom the ratings!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: Boss, his clothes?

SY: Proper, stylish, smart—naturally.

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: As befits his character, boss!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: So in the next scene, we put—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Roxy and Prince—

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Together in a sexual steambath—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: She's been desperate for him—

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: With a heart of gold, her love for Prince is unselfish—heartfelt—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: In the sweet but starchy innocence of a long-lost virginity.

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: This will titillate all fledgling imaginations—

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: Of an increasingly switched-on young audience—

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: To whom our ecstatic sponsors will sell their soaring products—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: In an expanding market of delirious consumers.

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: Lovelorn, Roxy visits Prince in his bachelor flat,

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: And love rides the saddle in L.A.!

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Their modest whispers grow risqué!

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Just then—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Who should walk in—

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: No less, but Maggie!

SY: Music to my ears, I love it! Okay, now that *that* scene's sketched out, leading to the raging triangle in a tangle of wild passion with dreams that go boom or bust—we're hot!—so let's move on to the *next* scene.

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: The one introducing the eccentric uncle, the Grand Duke?

SY: (*Urging them on*) You got it! I didn't hire no dummies! Talk to me, make me happy.

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: The Grand Duke of Wilbertania, all the way from moldy old Europe, that jaded, decadent nest of history—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Arrives in clean and shining L.A., desperately seeking—

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: his amnesia-ridden nephew, who's none other —

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: than our own local stud-in-residence, Prince Glitz—

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: Who's built along the hero mold!

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: To locate the lost Prince, the Duke has hired—

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: the toughest Private Eye he can find, built along the brutal lines—

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: of the semi-sadistic Micky Spillane!

SY: Gentlemen, I'm overwhelmed. This is truly greatness. I feel like praying.

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: Hallelujah, boss! Let's piously keep the faith in the almighty holy media dollar!

(All SCRIPTWRITERS, along with SY, pause for a unison moment of prayer and meditation.)

SY: *(Snapping them out of it, ready to crack the whip)* Okay, guys. I love it, but religion ain't everything. Let's roll up our sleeves and hammer out the greatest T.V. script in the annals of mankind.

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: *(Variously)* Sure thing, boss! / It's in the bag! / A cinch!

SY: Put your nose to the grindstone. Let's hustle. I can smell paydirt.

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: *(Scrambling to begin)* So can we!

SY: You have all the information. Let's be creative! We're artists, poets, of the mass electronic age!

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: We're the collective Shakespeares of L.A., boss! By committee!

SY: Okay. Hop to it. Here. *(Hands out more script-note copies all around.)* Here's the bits-and-pieces remnants that the artsy-fartsy writer left for us. Now, make hay of this. Refine this raw material, patch it up, embroider, amalgamate, incorporate, stitch together—get going! I don't want no lazy beach-bums around here, so bloated on sun and cocaine that they're too lazy to breathe!

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: *(Rolling up their sleeves, etc.)* We're here to work,

boss!

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: We got rhythm!

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Momentum!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: We're on top of the game!

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: We're *ahead* of the game!

SY: You won't let me down?

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: (*Singing operatically in chorus*) No! A million times no!

SY: Convert this stuff to exotic magic.

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: You got it, boss!

SY: Fulfill all romantic dreams ever dreamed.

SCRIPTWRITER ONE: In no time, boss!

SY: Will our ratings go juicy?

SCRIPTWRITER FOUR: Our ratings will ejaculate, boss!

SCRIPTWRITER THREE: Our ratings will cream in their panties with multiple orgasms!

SCRIPTWRITER TWO: Our ratings will scream themselves breathless!

SY: Well, what do I hear?

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: "Fantasy Life"!

SY: This one's for the Gipper!

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: Hurrah!

SY: Shall you earn your salaries by putting in an honest day's work to dignify labor in our capitalistic society?

ALL SCRIPTWRITERS: We'll do it or die trying!

SY: Then unleash your minds. Let it rip! Bang out the shooting script!

*(Pandemonium is thrown loose, no holds barred:
Speed-up soundtrack, speed-up visual motion. Script
pages, pens, pencils, typewriters, glasses, bottles, are*

thrown around in wild scene of working chaos. SCRIPTWRITERS animatedly, heatedly continue discussing script, plot, characterization, etc., in comical farcical zany speed-up exaggeration effects, as this part of Scene finally ends. Tempo changes. A wall clock spins, denoting passage of time. Lights dramatically shift, slow down.)

(Tired, worn; pooped, spent, the SCRIPTWRITERS all leave office. SY remains, as the responsible executive, summoning reserves of stamina and endurance, to go over his notes at his desk, and to coordinate his new notes with the SCRIPTWRITERS' copies.)

(BRUCE WAIN, Private Eye, enters disguised as cleaning lady with mop, bucket, etc., wearing a babushka, etc., and goes over to SY.)

SY: *(Only slightly distracted; goes on working at desk)* Can you do the windows today?

WAIN: *(In falsetto)* I don't do windows. That's Josephine's department.

(After looking around, WAIN goes to door and locks it. Then he goes to busy, preoccupied, unheeding, unsuspecting SY, grabs him unceremoniously by the collar, and lifts him out of his chair.)

WAIN: Hey you. You got a minute?

SY: *(Startled)* Why—you talk like a man!

WAIN: You like the color of my babushka?

SY: You *are* a man! What a fabulous disguise!

WAIN: Tryin' a little flattery? *(Menacingly:)* Where do you think that'll get you? *(Steps up the threatening rough-housing.)*

SY: What are you doing here? Our security here is as tight as the Kremlin's.

WAIN: I ain't here for politics.

SY: What do you want?—I didn't do anything!

WAIN: Who's askin' the questions—you or me?

SY: *Please* don't hurt me—I'm too important, too responsible!

WAIN: I checked it out. The door's locked, the room's sound-proof. So I don't want no unnecessary screamin'.

SY: (*Meek, cowardly, cringing, whining, simpering*) You look like you mean business.

WAIN: I ain't here to take no vacation.

SY: (*Cringing*) I'll answer your questions! (*WAIN grabs SY.*) My nerves are delicate—my skin is too sensitive,

WAIN: Yeah? (*A mock-cordial offer:*) I can toughen it up. (*Laughs brutally. Points to notes on desk:*) Those notes on Prince Glitz where'd you get all that info?

SY: (*Helpless*) I made it up: Give me credit! I'm creative!

WAIN: Sensitive, delicate, creative, eh? You a fairy? (*Slaps SY hard.*)

SY: Were you hired by another network?

WAIN: Who's askin' *who* questions? (*Slaps SY again.*)

SY: (*Hurt with pain*) Oh! That hit home!

WAIN: So where's Thaddeus?

SY: Thaddeus? Who's *he*?

WAIN: (*Slugging SY a few times*) You're saying "who?"—I'm sayin' "where?"

SY: Enough spare me! I don't know who "Thaddeus" is. Obviously, you've come to the wrong department. (*Desperately trying to help, to be of service:*) You must want the "Movie of the Week" department. They're in the next studio.

WAIN: (*Slugging SY again, then pointing to notes on desk*) Thaddeus is right there. You're messin' with somebody's character. See?—Prince Glitz!

SY: No he isn't! How can you presume—(*Silenced with another blow.*)

WAIN: You played a trick, but I'm no sucker to it.

SY: (*With hurt pride, righteously*) I!? Never!

WAIN: You changed his name. I don't fall for that stuff.

SY: I'm innocent!

WAIN: Innocent? No you ain't. Talk. (*Slaps SY more blows.*)

SY: (*Wilting in pain*) Okay! Okay! Our script department developed Prince Glitz. We own him—outright. There's only one way for you to get him to buy the rights. But no gold can glitter our Glitz from us.

WAIN: Who do I see about the rights?

SY: I've already told you all I know.

WAIN: Who do I see? Fast!

SY: I told you all I know, already—there's nothing left—

WAIN: (*Slugging SY, and pretending to be hard of hearing*) I didn't hear you.

SY: (*Persuaded*) Morton Ray's your man! He's our producer. He owns us all. He has all the rights—and none of the wrongs.

WAIN: What's this Morton Ray guy gonna do with Prince Glitz?

SY: Make him a famous character.

WAIN: Where?

SY: In "Fantasy Life."

WAIN: Where's that?

SY: It's our show.

WAIN: When?

SY: He'll be introduced in the next episode.

WAIN: (*Raising his hand threateningly again*) What else? You ain't through yet.

SY: (*Cowering in fear*) That's the limit of my knowledge! I swear!

WAIN: Where're they keepin' Prince?

SY: They found him a split-level—modest by Hollywood standards—a nice pool and hot tub but no tennis court.

WAIN: Yeah? What's *your* end of all this?

SY: I'm only a functionary. I have no executive responsibility. I'm an unimportant cog.

WAIN: That wasn't your tune before.

SY: I'm merely paid to do what the producer and the sponsors tell me to. My nose is clean.

WAIN: It is? (*Gripping SY by the nose, and twisting it hard.*) Seems pretty dirty to me.

SY: (*In physical agony: having difficulty talking with his nose closed by WAIN's grip, he talks in a funny way with distorted sounds and nasal grunts*) I'm personally innocent. I'm not involved. Morton Ray is the one. (*Reduced almost to his knees in WAIN's tightening grip:*) You should be doing this to *him*—all this pain is being *wasted* on me! (*Sobbing:*) How unfair, that innocence should he a martyr, a scapegoat!

WAIN: Yeah? Go on, talk.

SY: (*In agony*) I already talked. I even shouted. Maybe your babushka is too tight over your ears.

WAIN: You don't like my babushka? (*Slugs SY a final time; SY slumps over.*) Thanks for your help. I appreciate it.

(*WAIN goes over to retrieve his cleaning gear and bucket. While exiting with them, he glances at SY out cold on the floor:*)

WAIN: Hollywood's a weirdo town.

SCENE II

(L.A. THADDEUS's split-level: very fashionably appointed; lots of chrome and glass. He sits alone—isolated at removal from his surroundings. He's blankly staring at the T.V. set, which flickeringly reflects a blue glow across his face, seeming to absorb him into its entrails. Finally, as if in tremor; he monologues:)

THADDEUS: Someone—is it I?—but what is *that?*—sits here in my chair, watching the blue glow flickering across his face . . . I thought certain issues had settled themselves. For a moment I was fortified by my new identity as Prince Glitz. Standing assured and confident, for a brief moment I “knew” who I was. Now doubts come questioning forth from some unknown place. Prince Glitz? It seems arbitrary, it doesn't ring true, it falls flat. For the real me, I'm called back into a past I can't recall. But where's my current identity—the me I just can't place? The answer is not in these cool flames that lash and lick up at me. This box and I both flicker agitatedly, from an inner emptiness. Our solitudes rage, both cool and perturbed.

(Pause. Then knock on door is heard.)

THADDEUS: I'm hearing my heart's echo, my chest's rhythm!

(More knocks. Then knob is tried.)

THADDEUS: This is *external* to my identity: it's the *door*.

(THADDEUS goes over to door, opens it. ROXY enters, and immediately puts her arms around his neck.)

ROXY: Honey—it's me!

THADDEUS: Who?

ROXY: (*Passionately*) Oh, how I've missed you!

THADDEUS: Pardon, but—

ROXY: Why did you run out on me like that?

THADDEUS: Did I?

ROXY: Don't you know me?!

THADDEUS: Sorry, I—

ROXY: This takes the cake!

THADDEUS: *What* cake?

ROXY: I came all the way from New York to find you—and this is how you greet me?

THADDEUS: (*Reflecting*) Yes—you *are* somewhat familiar.

ROXY: Thanks a lot! How can you forget your own words to me: "My life is a vacuum; why don't you fill it?"

THADDEUS: Of course—it's coming back.

ROXY: We were in Sardi's—I was looking for someone, you were waiting for someone or something.

THADDEUS: Yes—and my waiting hasn't stopped.

ROXY: Then you asked—I'll never, ever forget it—"You'll take care of me?" Oh, you were the cutest!

THADDEUS: Of course! You're—

ROXY: Roxy—my darling! (*Embraces him.*)

THADDEUS: (*Belatedly, anti-climactically finishing his own sentence*)
Roxy.

ROXY: (*Looking around split-level*) Boy, look at this place! You really made out alright for yourself, didn't you? Wow! Classy! What's the rent here?

THADDEUS: Where did we meet?

ROXY: (*Laughing*) Still spaced out, huh? In New York, you were wait-

ing at a table and your beer was getting warm. I saw you—

THADDEUS: What was—what is—my name?

ROXY: This is some sort of game?

THADDEUS: Game? Am I named Game?

ROXY: It's Thaddeus!

THADDEUS: Now I *am* confused.

ROXY: You're in L.A. a few days, already you're acting like you're born here. (*Touching his hair:*) I like your haircut; wonderful color.

THADDEUS: (*Act of remembering*) It comes back to me! Of course! I'm Thaddeus!

ROXY: How do you do? I'm Roxy, remember? I'm here to take care of you.

THADDEUS: You're Roxy? No, no, it can't be . . . But then—(*Making a recently learned connection*)—I must be Prince.

ROXY: (*Laughing*) Boy, you're weird!

THADDEUS: (*Gets script and points at parts to show her*) It says so—right here—and *here*, too.

ROXY: What's that? (*Takes script from him:*) Here, let me see it. (*Reads it, her eyes skimming and leaping over it.*) Prince . . . Roxy . . . wow! (*Looks at script's cover:*) I don't believe this! It's the shooting script for "Fantasy Life"! (*Excitedly:*) Are you Prince?

THADDEUS: That's what I wonder about.

ROXY: Oh God, to be Roxy!

THADDEUS: But Roxy—that's who you *are*!

ROXY: You're tempting me! It's an actress's dream, to get that part.

THADDEUS: "Part"? Of what whole is it a part? A part of our whole?

ROXY: (*Enthusiastically*) Oh, Thaddeus! Us playing opposite each other in a prime-time T.V. drama! If only it *could* be!

THADDEUS: By playing your role—your part—maybe you can help me

find out who I actually I am—the real me?

ROXY: You're really stuck on that, aren't you?—you're obsessed.

THADDEUS: Of course. Isn't that everyone's quest?

ROXY: Thaddeus—I understand—I want to help you more than anything! (*They embrace.*)

THADDEUS: Yes? Then all that's required is that you play *your* part.

ROXY: *My* part?

THADDEUS: Roxy.

ROXY: But I can't just *play* Roxy!

THADDEUS: You're the only Roxy *I* could play opposite to, with the full conviction of love.

ROXY: (*Melting*) Oh, if only *I could!*

THADDEUS: I'll insist that you alone play it. Otherwise I'll refuse to be the Prince Glitz they're so eager for me to be.

ROXY: (*Melting*) Are we dreaming? (*They kiss.*)

THADDEUS: And anyway—even as we're talking—you're already being a convincing Roxy: the only true authentic Roxy there can be. So go on with it, to help me discover *myself*. See: (*Pointing to script:*) It says so right here.

ROXY: (*Looking at script*) You're right—I'm the only one to help you! You're my tender crusade! (*Suddenly looking in alarm at THADDEUS:*) Oh honey—you've gone pale! Is something wrong?

THADDEUS: (*Looking pale, with eyes fixed*) A vague voice keeps uttering that I'm not what they've forced me to be: despite this script, "Prince" doesn't fit me; I'm in the wrong place; I'm in a false position. There's a different path I should have followed: somehow, I miss my calling; I've fallen into hands that misguide me. I'm led away from where by rights—if I can only locate them—I should be. You're here, so I appeal to you—can you straighten me out? My gratitude is love itself. For your love is all I can go by—my sole certainty.

ROXY: (*Having been looking at script while listening.*) Gosh! That was beautiful! I'm really awed! You memorized these lines (*Indicating script*) perfectly! (*Awed:*) You're a natural!

THADDEUS: You promise to help me find out who I am?

ROXY: (*As they embrace*) I promise, my poor lost darling! Oh, you're so lost! Oh Thaddeus, of course I'll help you. (*Glancing at script, then reading from it:*) "my pitiful love! My lost soul!" How was that? How'd I do?

THADDEUS: *Then* what happens? (*Indicating script:*) Does it say there?

ROXY: (*Reads*) "There's a knock on the door."

(*There's a knock on door. Then knob turns: MAGGIE enters, dressed only as those in Hollywood can be dressed.*)

BOTH ROXY AND MAGGIE: (*Simultaneously to each other*) Who do you think you are? What the hell are you doing here?

ROXY: None of your business!

MAGGIE: It's obvious that the bitch that's addressing me so insolently is—Roxy.

THADDEUS: (*Pursuing his own logic*) That's right . . . if she's Roxy, I'm Prince . . .

MAGGIE: To what great fortune do we owe her presence?

THADDEUS: She's here to take care of me—in my plight, which centers around an identity problem.

MAGGIE: (*Sarcastically*) How thoroughly kind, how decent, of her!

THADDEUS: Yes, isn't it?

MAGGIE: But that's *my* job, remember?

THADDEUS: Your job?

ROXY: (*Sarcastically, to MAGGIE*) You must have made a great impression on him!

MAGGIE: Since you don't belong here, I don't acknowledge you.

THADDEUS: My memory is appallingly erratic.

ROXY: Thaddeus—don't let this woman snap our spell.

MAGGIE: She's a dime a dozen, Prince. I gave you credit for better taste than *this*.

ROXY: Say something, Thaddeus—tell her about us!

THADDEUS: I'm at a loss—I don't know what to say . . .

ROXY: Take your cue from here. (*Reading from script:*) "Prince, oh Prince. We love each other, don't we? And that's all that matters! Right, my dear?"

MAGGIE: Sorry, that's not right. Let's take it back.

ROXY: See, look. (*Showing THADDEUS the script:*) This is what you say next, Thaddeus.

MAGGIE: Let's take it back. Ready, Prince?

THADDEUS: Okay.

(All three actors return to original positions as they redo following lines with same inflections and gestures as before:)

THADDEUS: Your job?

ROXY: (*Sarcastically, to MAGGIE*) You must have made a great impression on him!

MAGGIE: Since you don't belong here, I don't acknowledge you.

THADDEUS: My memory is appallingly erratic.

ROXY: Thaddeus—don't let this woman snap our spell.

MAGGIE: She's a dime a dozen, Prince. I gave you credit for better taste than *this*.

ROXY: Say something, Thaddeus—tell her about us!

THADDEUS: I'm at a loss—I don't know what to say . . . What am I

supposed to say?

ROXY: (*Indicating script*) Let me look at it—I'll help you find your lines.

MAGGIE: Prince, we'll straighten this out later. We all make mistakes. I forgive you.

ROXY: (*Taking back script from THADDEUS*) Hey, wait a minute! You don't *own* him!

MAGGIE: Oh, is it preferable that he be influenced by some ordinary nobody—like you?

ROXY: What are you calling me? I know what *you're* after!

THADDEUS: (*Looking through script*) I'm sorry . . . you lost me. What page are we on?

MAGGIE: (*Sternly*) Prince, I don't need all this. (*Consulting watch:*) we're due at the Studio in twenty minutes. Say goodbye, and let's go!

ROXY: (*Mockingly mimicking MAGGIE*) La dee dah! "We're due at the Studio in twenty minutes." Where'd you get that accent, at Vassar or Bryn Mawr?

MAGGIE: Now look—

ROXY: (*Forcibly interrupting*) At what? You think you can order Thaddeus around because you're some Hollywood type? You're nothin' and never *will* be. You know why? Because I have what you'd give your ass to have. You know what it is?—it's Thaddeus's love! So go find somebody else to manipulate!

MAGGIE: (*Defiant*) Thanks to me, Prince is going to be a star! I'm not about to let a little nobody like you take my Prince and ruin him! Over my dead body, sister!

ROXY: Dead body? You've been dead for years! You were out of fashion before you were born!

THADDEUS: (*Finding the right page, finds his lines, reads:*) Girls! Please don't fight! It's beneath you! Remember your dignity. Let's not make an ugly scene.

ROXY: Thaddeus—we're in love, remember?

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) We are, my dearest. But I have to be at the Studio. I'll make oodles of money, to set off the jewel of our love in a glittering setting! Have to run now. You just keep the home fires burning, honey!

MAGGIE: Look, Prince: Your career comes first. You'll have to learn to sacrifice a few cheap temptations (*Indicating ROXY*) for the sake of your future stardom. You'll have to give up some things *now*. You need discipline, Prince—I'll enforce it.

ROXY: I wouldn't put it past you, bitch!

MAGGIE: Prince—I'm leaving now. Either you come with me, or remain behind and ruin your whole career before it even starts!

ROXY: (*Scorning*) A showdown, huh?

MAGGIE: What's your choice, Prince? Be a man!

THADDEUS: I'll be a man—but I wish I knew *what* man.

MAGGIE: We're late already.

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) Roxy! (*Takes her in his arms and kisses her tenderly.*) I'm leaving now, don't grieve, it's not forever. You must trust our love. It's sacred to me. I'll be back.

ROXY: (*Weeping*) Men are all alike. Stringing us along with promises!

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) But Roxy!—

ROXY: (*Sobbing*) You'll forget me—I *know* you will! *She* can offer you fame, fortune, glamor, excitement. But Thaddeus—I can help you find yourself—just give me the chance! With me, you'll find the true you: the you that only *I* can see, it's so deep within. Oh Thaddeus!

THADDEUS: (*Reading*) Roxy—I hate to, but I *must* go! But make yourself at home. Help yourself to the fridge—anything you want, especially the perishables. I'll phone later. Be patient, love!

MAGGIE: (*Proprietorially victorious*) Come on, my dear. We mustn't waste any more time.

THADDEUS: Right behind you, Maggie.

(As MAGGIE exits followed by THADDEUS, ROXY bravely, pathetically, heartbrokenly waves to THADDEUS.)

MAGGIE: *(As she exits)* Tough luck, honey. Don't worry. I'll keep him nice and fresh for you.

(Alone in THADDEUS's split-level, ROXY sits, forlorn, crying. She turns a page of the script left behind.)

SCENE III

(T.V. Studio for "Fantasy Life." WILBERT waiting nervously. He's dressed out of sync—inappropriate for L.A.: heavy tweed jacket, hat, scarf, overcoat. By contrast, BRUCE WAIN now enters dressed in sync with L.A. for first time: sunglasses, a loud tropical print shirt, white trousers, etc. The disguise is so effective that WILBERT doesn't recognize him.)

WILBERT: Excuse me, sir, but I was looking for—

WAIN: Cut the stuff, Wills, it's me—*(Raising sunglasses, then lowering them back in place)*—Wain. Keep cool, act nonchalant. I was followed. We're probably bein' watched now.

WILBERT: Maybe it was unwise to meet here?

WAIN: We're movin' in for the kill. It's the *only* place to meet.

WILBERT: *(Looking around)* Your metamorphosis is so convincingly thorough, I'm not sure I'm even talking to the one I presume you to be—if you are, indeed, you.

WAIN: These are just some duds I picked up in the costume shop . . . You're shakin', Wills.

WILBERT: I fear the worst—that something terrible might have happened to Thaddeus.

WAIN: (*Looks around*) There's still time.

WILBERT: What have you found out? I've been a nervous wreck since leaving New York.

WAIN: We're closin' in.

WILBERT: How close?

WAIN: (*Putting his finger to his lips*) Act natural.

(*A STUDIO TECHNICIAN walks by with a head-set on.*

WAIN assumes a "casual, natural" pose.)

WAIN: (*Voice disguised, for benefit of passing TECHNICIAN*) So the guy says to the dame, "Well, whataya got, baby?" And the dame says to the guy, "That's not the point. The point is what *you* got." So he rises to . . .

(*The STUDIO TECHNICIAN has left; Wain looks around.*)

WILBERT: Is this elaborately melodramatic caution quite necessary?

WAIN: Like you said, Wills—this is another medium, where anythin' could happen.

WILBERT: Threats abound in vague shapes of dread.

WAIN: L.A. is a nutty place. You think you got a fact; then the fact, in fact, ain't there no more—in fact, you got an illusion.

(*They keep looking around in cautious alert suspicion, but it's always a false "alarm."*)

WILBERT: Thaddeus may be in a web of peril and all is lost if we waste a minute. What's your rescue plan, Wain?

WAIN: We got to wait now; And he ain't Thaddeus.

WILBERT: (*Alarmed*) What—!

WAIN: They gave him a new name.

WILBERT: Those tampering meddlers, manhandling butchers, identity-molesters, character-levelers, stereotype addicts!

WAIN: Keep it down, Wills.

WILBERT: What nameplate did they brand their stolen merchandise with?

WAIN: Prince Glitz.

WILBERT: How crassly banal of those nomenclature-nincompoops! How degrading, demeaning, debasing in their slimy Hollywoodizing. Beyond the nominal, what have the criminals—

WAIN: They made a T.V. star of him—they already shot the first episode.

WILBERT: (*In a comic hamming of the agonized outraged*) I've just entered the special hell reserved only for authors!

WAIN: Sy's not the guy we're after.

WILBERT: Diabolically *who*, then?

WAIN: Sy's the front man. He organized the hit but he ain't the brains.

WILBERT: You've uncovered the big fry to Sy's small fry: an ultimate mastermind villain schemer?

WAIN: Morton Ray.

WILBERT: Of course—the Producer.

WAIN: You're quick, Wills.

WILBERT: He's sullied, distorted, contorted into a hideous Prince Glitz my gallant Thaddeus. Let's restore and redeem my fine original!

WAIN: If there's still anythin' left of him.

WILBERT: A horrible vision: I can see him entwined forever in T.V. airwave network—or floating aimlessly through the dreary mediocrity of prime-time, seeking the lost substance of his pure old self, in endless

purgatorial claptrap.

WAIN: Calm down, Wills. Seems like Morton Ray done this kind of dirty work before.

WILBERT: His evil must be sharpened to routine formula! How many worthy characters from actual or potential literature—not to mention the stories themselves—has he bleached of original substance, and drained dry of artistic merit, till the meaning runs out? Till one day there'll be nothing left from our literary heritage except what's crumpled to palpable pulp for popular consumption. The wreckage and remains of cultural genocide, beaten down to the idiotically plain.

WAIN: Relax, Wills. (*Looking cautiously around.*) While you're out here, maybe you oughta get a little sun.

WILBERT: Forget about me—get Thaddeus! They—

WAIN: Shhh!

(Like two identical mechanical dolls or toy soldiers, they simultaneously look around, then wait stock-still in frozen dummy silence for a moment—all in unwittingly comical pantomime.)

WILBERT: (*Whispering*) What is it?

WAIN: Dunno, thought I heard somethin'.

WILBERT: Mr. Wain—I'm deathly afraid!

WAIN: Nothin's gonna happen to yuh if me and Bessy have anythin' to do with it.

WILBERT: Bessy?

(WAIN identifies "Bessy" by pulling out a 45 automatic pistol, then quickly reconcealing it.)

WAIN: They got this place rigged up so eerie, yuh don't know if you're comin' or goin'. I think they hypnotize yuh with that electronic wave

frequency that T.V. puts out.

WILBERT: An electronically manipulating system that's invisible, like nerve gas, chemical warfare? It's illegal!

WAIN: This is their territory.

WILBERT: A nice little predicament! What do we do now?

WAIN: We'll act like the guys that belong here. Be cool, play dumb.

WILBERT: But how?

WAIN: Don't tip 'em off with any of those big jawbreakin' words—only use small words.

WILBERT: What else?

WAIN: Don't say nothin' that makes any sense. Change the subject a lot, like you're ignorant. Never look anybody in the eye. That's the way they do it out here.

WILBERT: Such cautionary prudence! I feel gripped by a paranoiac vapor.

WAIN: Don't worry, we'll get out o' this okay.

WILBERT: (*Panicking, so that he forgets himself and speaks in normal voice*) Yes, but Thaddeus—Thaddeus—

WAIN: (*Hand roughly over WILBERT's mouth*) Keep it down—you wanna blow our cover?

WILBERT: (*Chastened; in obediently soft voice*) Where—where is he?

WAIN: They got him holed up in some split-level in Hollywood somewhere.

WILBERT: But why are we *here*?

WAIN: They gotta bring him here, sooner or later. Anyway, I gotta find Ray, he's the kingpin and answer man.

WILBERT: Do you propose to beat the information out of him?

WAIN: Come off it, Wills, you been watchin' too many T.V. cop stories. This is still real life, where it ain't that easy.

(WAIN and WILBERT immediately, simultaneously strike exaggerated "nonchalant" poses as a CAMERAMAN wheels a camera by them and across stage. Once coast is clear, they resume their normal hushed, huddled, intent, suspicious, cautious postures.)

WILBERT: Why isn't it that easy?

WAIN: There's complications. How come you never told me Ray owns Thaddeus?

WILBERT: *(Taken aback)* I own Thaddeus! Don't *you* try to mix me up, when all the elements here conspire to my befuddlement.

WAIN: You signed a contract: any characters you made for the show are Ray's property; he commissioned you to write the stuff.

WILBERT: He commissioned me to write for a T.V. show. But the character I created belongs beyond T.V.—in a literary work of art.

WAIN: It's all the same as far as these guys go.

WILBERT: This is a nightmare. My lifetime's supreme creation is lawfully maimed and tainted to the banal promptings of a gold-chained, suntanned T.V. tycoon-vulgarian without a soul to his name!

WAIN: How do yuh know he's suntanned?—Shhh!

(WAIN and WILBERT look apprehensively in opposite directions; then, like clockwork, back to each other.)

WAIN: I'm still with yuh. Nobody got a right to mess with another guy's character—I don't care how much money is behind it. I don't care if this is in the nineteen-eighties, I don't even care that this is L.A.—there's *still* rights and wrongs, right?

WILBERT: Why, Mr. Wain, what a noble manifesto, a humane proclamation, and a testament of personal loyalty that exalts me above the role of a mere paying client. It honors me—

WAIN: It ain't no big deal, Wills. Cut out the crap.

WILBERT: It affords me the timely reassurance of comfort and support at this juncture of my life's crisis when my psyche's precarious balance tilts in a fragile tremor of disequilibrium.

WAIN: (*Taking out a little bottle and offering it*) You want an aspirin?

WILBERT: No, this is a pain I must live with.

WAIN: I'm on to this Ray guy. I gotta go now.

WILBERT: (*Frightened*) Are you leaving me here?! (*Grabbing hold of WAIN's arm.*) The electronically transformationally hypnotic waves of this sinister, ominous atmosphere scare my will and threaten its self-control.

WAIN: (*Showing 45 automatic pistol*) Me and Bessy will take care of you. We'll be back soon. If anybody asks you any questions, just play along with them, make up a story, play dumb; these clowns, ain't too bright, they'll buy anythin'. (*WAIN leaves.*)

WILBERT: (*Feebly, futilely calling after*) But—but—how . . . ?

(WILBERT stands fidgety for a moment, then darts off in one direction only to abruptly stop short, turn, and dart off in another direction, in restless nervousness: confused as to what to do, where to go, etc.)

(Two SET MEN move a piece of wall into place behind WILBERT.)

SET MAN ONE: Hey, watch out there, buddy.

WILBERT: Oh, pardon. Am I in your way?

SET MAN TWO: Yeah—move *that* way.

WILBERT: (*Moving*) Here?

SET MAN ONE: No, over *there*, stupid!

(Confused, scared, WILBERT obediently moves again.)

(VITTORIO enters in a flurry and flourish, with two ASSISTANTS in tow. He goes immediately to WILBERT.)

VITTORIO: At last! Where were you? I am too busy to go chasing around!

WILBERT: I've been here.

VITTORIO: *(Surprised)* Here?! *(To ASSISTANT ONE:)* Where was he supposed to be?

ASSISTANT ONE: *(Looking at clipboard)* In Wardrobe.

VITTORIO: See? In Wardrobe. Half-hour ago. *(To ASSISTANT ONE:)* Half-hour, right?

ASSISTANT ONE: That's right, sir.

VITTORIO: So, what do you do *here*?

WILBERT: Sorry, but what are you talking about?

VITTORIO: Please, this is no time for the jokes. I am very, very busy. *(To ASSISTANT TWO:)* Right?

ASSISTANT TWO: A schedule so tight you can barely breathe.

VITTORIO: *(To WILBERT)* You see?

(SET MAN ONE enters with chair.)

VITTORIO: *(Shouting at SET MAN ONE)* You are blind! No! No! Not that color! It must be blue to show regal power! Take it off, I don't want to see it!

(SET MAN ONE obeys. SET MAN TWO enters with a desk.)

SET MAN TWO: Where should this go?

VITTORIO: Here . . . No, no, to the left. *(To ASSISTANT ONE:)* Where

was I? (*ASSISTANT ONE points to WILBERT.*)

VITTORIO: (*To WILBERT*) You! You still here!

(*Two WARDROBE PEOPLE enter bearing a costume.*)

VITTORIO: (*To WARDROBE PEOPLE:*) Ah, very, very good! (*To WILBERT*) See, if you no go to Wardrobe, Wardrobe go to you! (*To WARDROBE PEOPLE:*) Please, take care of this man.

(*As VITTORIO then turns his attention to the set, the WARDROBE PEOPLE begin to tug and take off WILBERT'S overcoat, attending to him busily and professionally, etc.*)

WARDROBE PERSON ONE: We were looking all over for you!—Hold still!—Where were you?!

WARDROBE PERSON TWO: You're wanted in Make-Up right after this.

WARDROBE PERSON ONE: They need to white your hair and wrinkle your hands.

WILBERT: But what for?

WARDROBE PERSON TWO: To make you old and crotchety.

WILBERT: (*Wrestling away from them*) Hold on, you're making a mistake! I'm not the man you assume you're referring to! (*WILBERT frees himself from their clutches.*)

VITTORIO: What do you want? Not ready still?

WILBERT: There's some absurd misunderstanding; I'm a victim of mistaken identity as though playing a comic part in a Restoration Comedy! They're trying to prepare me for television. This would be funny—

VITTORIO: What is funny about it? I am very busy!

WILBERT: I'm not who they think I am.

VITTORIO: You are crazy?!

WILBERT: (*Blurting out*) I'm here to find my character—that's my sole purpose for being here! Otherwise, I'm back in New York!

VITTORIO: I am no interested in character motivation—I want the results. (*VITTORIO'S attention is drawn away to the set. To SET MEN:*) No, no, I tell you before, you don't listen! Producer's desk to be cluttered with work—he is busy making deals! Hurry! And bring the lighting! Do what you are told!

(The two WARDROBE PEOPLE have resumed their hurried, professional pawing at WILBERT.)

WILBERT: (*Resisting again*) Stop! Leave me alone! I'm not who you think I am!

VITTORIO: (*To ASSISTANT ONE*) My distractions are being interrupted! What is this?

ASSISTANT ONE: (*Pointing to WILBERT*) He's acting up.

VITTORIO: (*To WILBERT*) Professional standards I insist here! Unions or no Unions! I am too efficient for anarchy, I am too streamlined for chaos!

WILBERT: I'm not an actor, and never was! I want my Thaddeus back!

VITTORIO: Who is Thaddeus?

WILBERT: They kidnapped him; he has no recollection of his past, poor boy; they were going to manipulate—to corrupt—him into the broad flat pulp of mass-market vulgarization as the top T.V. romantic commodity—

VITTORIO: (*Relieved*) Good, but you must read scripts more carefully; the names you must get right. Thaddeus is the original name, but the T.V. people make him into Prince Glitz. Prince Glitz is his name. (*To both ASSISTANTS:*) These actors!

WILBERT: That's right—I heard he was renamed into that ugly, trivial name! I demand an audience with the Producer!

VITTORIO: You actors! You are an emotional caveman! *Who* are you looking for?

WILBERT: "Prince Glitz," as he's misnamed! I *must* have him back!

VITTORIO: (*Applauding*) Molto bene! You are the best character actor: The intention is right, commitment, execution, timing. But you must save it for the cameras. The time is not now. (*To WARDROBE PEOPLE:*) Hurry with the costuming!

(*While they've been talking, the setting behind them has been gradually transformed—not yet complete—into MORTON RAY's office.*)

WILBERT: (*Wailing outcry*) Try to understand me! What do I have to do to get a little sympathy around here?!

VITTORIO: I give you very much your share of sympathy and understanding. I am no nursemaid! *Other* actors need me too. (*Attention drawn to set work: To SET MEN:*) Very good; more blue in the lights, I want more blue. (*To WILBERT:*) Prime donnas I refuse to direct unless they are stars—you are not!

WILBERT: I—

VITTORIO: (*Cutting him off. To him and WARDROBE PEOPLE:*) In costume, please. The Duke of Wilbertania must to be elegant, regal, and noble. If you see the character different, I am sorry, this is television—no-one will believe you are royalty dressed like this. You are out of character. You must let them fit you.

WILBERT: *What* Duke? Far from a Duke, I'm merely what I am: Wilbert Wills, novelist, fiction-writer, occasional essayist!

VITTORIO: What?! Script, please! (*Takes script from ASSISTANT ONE:*) See, it says "Duke" here!

WILBERT: But I write! I've seen that script before—or *some* of it, anyway.

VITTORIO: You must to have seen an early version. Please, pardon, you

are right and I am wrong. Please, I am sorry. (*Screaming to ASSISTANT TWO:*) Go to get the new version of the second episode—hurry! Sub-
mitto! (*ASSISTANT TWO obediently dashes off.*)

WILBERT: (*Exasperated*) But you don't understand: I'm no actor!

VITTORIO: Absolutely no! *Prince* is the actor—you are the *uncle*, the Grand Duke! (*Looking over WILBERT carefully:*) You are perfect for this character!

WILBERT: You're not listening to me!—must I scream?

(*Camera crews roll in with the lights and microphones.*)

VITTORIO: No, no. We are getting you the new script. You must to look at Episode Two, Scene Thirteen. This Scene, you are convinced that the Producer has kidnapped your nephew. You will confront the evil television people at a Beverley Hills party. Then you find the precious, long-lost object of your longing soul's mortal quest.

WILBERT: (*Suddenly overjoyed at this "news"*) I will? Oh Lord! Deliverance, after long travail! (*Sighs with his first contentedness in a long time.*)

VITTORIO: Ah, at last you are happy! Finally, we have found a way to satisfy you! (*Indicating WARDROBE PEOPLE:*) Go with them now. They will get you ready to confront that evil Producer and find your dear lost one!

(*WILBERT is pulled off—but without resisting—by the WARDROBE PEOPLE, who, even in motion, start disrobing him of his inappropriate-for-L.A. clothes he's worn from New York; they garb him bit by bit with his new T.V.-script-scenario costume.*)

VITTORIO: Pah! These Method actors! Psycho cases! What ever happened to just pretending?

SCENE IV

(Same setting as in last Scene. An ASSISTANT DIRECTOR enters and goes to VITTORIO. There's much activity—changing of lighting equipment and camera, etc.)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: We're almost ready with the set-up. Do you want to start with the scheduled Scene?

VITTORIO: Yes, we cannot wait any longer. We shall go immediately.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: *(Making a general announcement)* Everybody! We're going to start with Scene Eight. Lighting and camera adjustments for Scene Eight, please.

(LIGHTING AND CAMERA PEOPLE go into action.)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Bring in the talent!

(MORTON RAY, T.V. Producer, is escorted in by a Production Assistant. RAY wears wig and jacket to make himself look bigger.)

VITTORIO: *(Goes to MORTON RAY)* All right, you have all your lines down this time? This is a simple scene. You must keep it light, uncomplicated.

RAY: Got it.

VITTORIO: Keep your chin up—don't rush the lines.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Quiet on the set. Scene Eight, Clap Boards.

VITTORIO: All right, everyone, ready?—Roll 'em—and action!

(Cameras roll in and move around continually during this entire scene between RAY and WAIN. MORTON RAY is busy at his desk, as VITTORIO and others look on.)

Then BRUCE WAIN enters, dressed the way we last saw him. He takes a quick look around, then goes to RAY, who, just now, startled, notices WAIN.)

WAIN: You Morton Ray?

RAY: How did you get in here? Who are you?

WAIN: *I'm askin' the questions. (Pulls out his 45 automatic pistol—Bessy—and points it at RAY.)*

RAY: What do you want—I didn't do anything. Please, put that away—please—then we can talk.

WAIN: I want Prince Glitz.

RAY: Who?

WAIN: Clean your ears. Prince Glitz! *(Waves his gun at RAY.)*

RAY: Why, but, but,—if—but—and—if—

WAIN: I don't want no "ands," "ifs," or "buts!"

RAY: I mean Prince Glitz is just a *character!*

WAIN: I know that.

RAY: But *why* do you want him?—what's he to you?

WAIN: I ain't here to discuss things.

RAY: Who sent you? You're not from another network?

WAIN: What'd I tell you about questions? *(Cocks his pistol, alarming RAY.)*

RAY: Okay, okay! Whatever you want!

WAIN: That's better.

RAY: But you're not going to get away with this.

WAIN: You gonna stop me?

RAY: I mean, I own Prince Glitz *legally*. You can't just come in here and take one of my characters and expect to get away with it. Just a matter of time, and we'd find him and take him back—So you see, I'm trying

to save you trouble and embarrassment in the first place!

WAIN: You're goin' to sign him over real legal-like, up front, fair and square—savvy? (*Waves his gun to RAY to signal him to write.*) Get writin'.

RAY: How can you go this!? You'd *never* get away with it! A great character like Prince Glitz—a once in a lifetime—we don't let him go that easy.

WAIN: And *I* think you will. (*Points his gun directly at RAY, ready to shoot.*)

RAY: (*Frightened*) No, please, control yourself—please! I'll do what you want.

WAIN: Write.

RAY: I will, but first I have to know who I'm signing him over to!

WAIN: The Grand Duke of Wilbertania.

RAY: The Grand Duke of Wilbertania!

WAIN: Yeah!

RAY: But I thought he was dead!

WAIN: Write!

RAY: I'll do it!

WAIN: Put down: He "has sole and rightful authority over Prince Glitz."

RAY: (*Writing*) But what does he want with Prince? Prince is of age: he can handle affairs for himself, he's about to become a great T.V. star—through *me*, I'm *making* him one! That's why I own him! So what could the Grand Duke possibly want with him?!

WAIN: Prince is his nephew, so he just wants what's rightfully his.

RAY: We could work out a deal. I could cut the Grand Duke in on a percentage.

WAIN: He ain't interested.

RAY: You sure? (*WAIN glares at him, in savage silence.*) Okay, then

you—how about *you*? How much do you want? You want a part in the series?—you'd be great! Just name your price, you're a reasonable guy, I can trust you; you'd get a lot farther with me than some old coot like the Grand—

WAIN: (*Cutting him short*) You finished with that writin' yet?

RAY: Sorry, here it is. (*RAY gives WAIN the document, WAIN looks it over.*) Think about it, it's a great opportunity for you! You'd never have to work again. It's an offer—

WAIN: (*Interrupting*) There's some things you just can't buy, chump—or sell. Loyalty to an aesthetic ethos is one a' them.

RAY: There's got to be more to this than you're letting on.

WAIN: Okay, enough chit-chat. Where do I find him?

RAY: (*Stalling*) Who?

WAIN: Prince Glitz, dummy.

RAY: Sorry, I'd like to help you, but I just don't know—(*WAIN pistol-whips RAY a few times.*)

WAIN: Maybe that'll help to jog your memory.

RAY: Okay, please, no more. He'll be at a party in his honor. Everybody who's connected with the show will be there.

WAIN: Write down the address.

RAY: No, wait, here, here's an invitation.

(RAY hands WAIN an invitation, then suddenly reaches for WAIN's gun. They struggle, till gun goes off, blasting RAY backwards, covered with blood. WAIN looks around to make sure he hasn't been heard.)

WAIN: You shouldn't a' done that—that's how people get hurt.

(WAIN exits, with document RAY signed. RAY's body is left slumped.)

VITTORIO: Keep rolling! Zoom in for a close-up of the body! (*Camera crew do so with camera.*) That is it, get the blood. Pan up to his face . . . Good! Okay! Cut! That is a keeper!

(*RAY stands up, brushing the "blood" off himself.*)

RAY: How'd it look?

VITTORIO: Terrific, spectacular! Very good acting. You were very real.

(*Set crew eruptingly goes to work, rushing about with cameras, lights, etc., taking down walls, to prepare for and establish the next scene.*)

RAY: Thanks, Vittorio. (*RAY takes off wig and jacket that made him look bigger.*) Whew! Sure feels good to get out of *this* stuff! (*To VITTORIO:*) Are you going to the party?

VITTORIO: Yes, but I will be late. There is one more scene to shoot.

RAY: (*Leaving*) See you later, then.

VITTORIO: Save me some caviar and cocaine, okay?

(*RAY exits.*)

VITTORIO: (*To ASSISTANT DIRECTOR*) Assistant! This scene will take place before the live audience. (*Looking at audience:*) Correct?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: That's right, Vittorio. Last scene of the episode.

VITTORIO: (*Looking at audience*) Good: All the audience extras are in place?

(*ASSISTANT DIRECTOR is now on walkie-talkie, talking to someone unheard by audience except for walkie-talkie's metallic chords; all the while, he's looking at audience.*)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: (To VITTORIO) All go.

VITTORIO: Good. We wrap this episode, so then we can go to the party.

(Blackout simultaneous with curtain fall.)

SCENE V

(T.V. monitors are in position downstage. "Applause" and "Quiet" signs appear, also an "On Air / Off Air" sign. The set is either in blackout or behind a curtain. Then ANNOUNCER enters, with microphone in hand, accompanied by a musical fanfare.)

ANNOUNCER: (To audience) Hello everybody and welcome to Studio Eighteen. I'm Bert Convoy and this is "Fantasy Life." ("Applause" sign flashes; an applause track echoes over the sound system.) Thank you, thank you! As you all know, "Fantasy Life" is one of television's most popular dramatic series, and it's our pleasure to present the finest for your entertainment. ("Applause" sign flashes; a short applause over sound system.) Thank you! For those of you who never before attended the live taping of a television program, I must explain a few ground rules. (Looks at his notes.) You've probably noted the signs on display here. When the "Applause" sign goes on, that of course indicates that you should applaud. And when the "Quiet" sign flashes, then everyone please be quiet. Over here (Pointing) we have this "On Air" sign when we're taping, and this (Pointing) "Off Air" sign when we're not taping. See?—it's simple. Now these (Pointing) two monitors will show you what the camera is seeing, and that's what will be broadcast not only throughout the country but in many other parts of the world as well. And you'll also see the commercials that will be broadcast. That's when we'd like you to cough, sneeze, shuffle your feet, and whatever else you want to do—save it for then. (Spontaneous but moderate audience laughter.) Okay, so does everybody got it? (Looks approvingly at audience.) Good! ("Applause" sign flashes; applause comes over sound

system.) Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming to see "Fantasy Life." Now, sit back and enjoy the show!

(ANNOUNCER exits. Then a commercial flashes onto the monitors. When commercial is over, the set is revealed: a patio area of SY's Beverly Hills home, foliage, lounge chairs, etc. Heard in distance are splashing of pool water and frolicking of friends and other guests. It's early evening just prior to sunset. Music plays in distance. Then host SY enters escorting CELIA SEE, star reporter for a personality magazine, "Peep-hole Magazine." Both are dressed casually, drinks in hand.)

CELIA SEE: Fabulous pool, Sy.

SY: *(Oozing charm, playing the genial but commercially "operating" host)* Thanks, Celia. I just knew you'd love it. How do you like the view?

CELIA: Great! I can see all the way to Santa Monica.

SY: I tell people that from here I can see all the way across America.

CELIA: *(Professionally jotting in writing pad)* A terrific image! The whole depth and breadth of our great land, from your patio. Mind if I quote you?

SY: *(Suavely)* Mind?! I'd love you to!

CELIA: So tell me more about this Prince Glitz. He's the talk of the town; all Hollywood's buzzin' about him. *(Scolding:)* Sy—why are you keeping him such a big secret? Why the tease?

SY: Because he's the ultimate. It's a quantum leap; he's the beginning of something new. He'll start the rave of a wave. He'll be the biggest thing ever to hit prime time T.V.—he'll make "Dallas" look like one of the flops of ancient history.

CELIA: Oh Sy, cut the hype!

SY: Look, you're a pro; I know you've heard things like this before. But this time it's for real! I kid you not, just because it's my show; On the

level: Prince represents a new way for the American image. After him, it's all been said and done, there'll be nothing else, nowhere else to go. He's *it!* Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

CELIA: You're building up my blood pressure. If I don't meet him soon, I'll *die!*

SY: (*Flattered, triumphant*) That's the spirit! (*Looking at watch:*) He's due any minute now.

CELIA: (*Suspicious*) Sy, you didn't invite any other reporters, did you?

SY: You *have* an exclusive: but only if *you* promise *me* a cover story.

CELIA: (*Admiringly*) You devil! You strike a hard bargain, as per usual!

SY: (*Nonchalant, suave*) Care for another drink, darling?

CELIA: (*Winks at SY suggestively, seductively*) I'm a working girl today, remember? (*They come closer together, betraying intimacy, familiarity.*)

(BRUCE WAIN, though recognizable to audience as himself, enters dressed as waiter, with fashionably servile demeanor; wearing white jacket, glasses, and moustache; and carrying a serving tray.)

CELIA: (*Calling WAIN*) Boy—over here, please!

WAIN: (*Going over to CELIA and SY and serving them. Throughout this Scene his voice is disguised until he reveals himself*) I recommend the shrimp—it's extra tasty today.

SY: (*Eyeing WAIN with curiosity*) Don't I know you?

WAIN: No way. I'm new to town. (*Laugh track.*)

SY: In New York, possibly?

WAIN: Not me; I came here straight from Cleveland. (*Laugh track.*)

SY: You were never an extra in "Fantasy Life"?

WAIN: No, I only do principals. (*Pause.*) On principle. (*Laugh track at pun. WAIN turns politely and exits.*)

SY: (*Briefly looking after WAIN*) I know I know him. (*Perplexed, confounded.*) But where?

(VITTORIO enters. Applause sign and track.)

VITTORIO: Ah, so here is the party!

CELIA: Vittorio—darling! (*They embrace.*) It's been ages! And you haven't changed a bit!

VITTORIO: (*With Continental gallantry*) Nor have you—still as fabulously beautiful as ever! (*Kisses her hand—the Continental touch.*)

CELIA: Vittorio! Your charm is irresistible!

SY: Vittorio's been so busy at the Studio, we haven't been able to see each other since New York.

VITTORIO: (*To SY*) And you too.

SY: (*Puzzled*) Me too?

VITTORIO: *You* have not changed a bit, either! (*Kissing SY's hand, in mock-duplication-parody of his having just kissed CELIA's hand. Laugh track.*)

SY: So how's the shooting been with Prince Glitz?

VITTORIO: (*Semi-swooning*) Need you ask? It is Heaven! *Every* director should be so lucky!

CELIA: (*Professionally skeptical, suspicious of promotion ploys*) That sounds extravagant. Tell me more.

VITTORIO: (*With extravagant gesticulating*) He is a charm to work with—a dream—such a beautiful performer as never before there has been anyone like him in front of a camera. He is a blessing that God has sent us.

CELIA: Oh, my panties are getting wet! (*Laugh track.*) I haven't ever been so excited about something all my life since Santa Claus. (*Laugh track.*) In fact, maybe he *is* Santa Claus. (*Laugh track.*) Adult version, of course. (*Laugh track.*)

(MORTON RAY and MARCONI enter. Applause sign and track. RAY is wearing same oversized jacket and wig he had on during last Scene's "shooting" scene and which, when shooting was over, he took off with relief—bloody then, but not now.)

MARCONI: (Making a mincingly showing-off, conspicuous self-conscious "entrance") Well, hello, darlings! I was wondering where all the fun people were! (Laugh track.)

RAY: Hi everybody!

MARCONI: High? No, not yet! Give them time. It's too early! (Laugh track, due to pun.)

SY: The party can't officially even *begin* to begin till you show up.

MARCONI: We've been here for an hour, haven't we, Morty?

RAY: Yes, we were sitting pool-side.

(Both RAY and MARCONI, in unison, sniff as in comical pantomiming of cocaine-sniffing. Laugh track.)

MARCONI: (Phony melodramatic scene-stealing, hogging limelight, as though discovering CELIA there for first time) Celia! Darling! It's been ages! (Swooning gesticulating.)

CELIA: We miss you here. All L.A. does.

MARCONI: The feeling's mutual! All this wonderful sunshine, it's so much more natural than going to those tanning spas! (Laugh track.)

VITTORIO: (Greeting MARCONI) Wonderful again to see you, sweetheart.

MARCONI: (Sexually clowning, pulling VITTORIO toward himself) "Sweetheart!" Ah, another one who's just come out of the closet! (Laugh track.)

VITTORIO: (Offended; on his starchy masculine dignity) Sorry, I not

want to disappoint you. (*Laugh track.*)

MARCONI: (*Teasingly affecting disappointment*) Just kidding, macho man. We can't push our luck, can we? (*Laugh track.*)

SY: So Morton, heard it was really rough at the studio. How was the shooting? (*Laugh track, due to ambiguous pun on roughness and "shooting" by WAIN in last Scene.*)

RAY: All in a day's work. It's bloody business! I'm dead! (*Laugh track, due to puns on "bloody" and "dead".*)

VITTORIO: We knocked out several scenes.

CELIA: That's when the plot thickens—right, Morton?

RAY: Let's just say that the excitement builds to a surprise ending—but of course a happy one.

MARCONI: (*To RAY*) You don't want to tell her everything, Morty. She's Celia, the official voyeur for "Peep-hole Magazine." (*Laugh track, due to pun on "People Magazine," utilizing "voyeur."*)

CELIA: You're right—and I've got my eye on you, Marconi. (*Laugh track.*)

MARCONI: You do? Well, then, don't forget to put your "eye" at the end of my name when you try to spell it right this time. (*Laugh track.*)

CELIA: *Your* name! That's not the name that's being bandied about all around town, on everyone's tongue: you hear "Prince Glitz," "Prince Glitz." (*To RAY:*) They say he's a virtual goldmine.

RAY: Let's put it this way—and ordinarily I'm not given to exaggerate—

CELIA: (*Cynically interrupting*) No? You'd fool me. (*Laugh track.*)

RAY: Seriously, Celia. He's going to change the way we see television.

CELIA: (*Feigning disappointment*) That's all? (*Laugh track.*)

MARCONI: (*Feeling left out; wants to call back attention to himself: gesticulating with sexual obscenity innuendo*) He's already changed my life. (*Laugh track. Then, feigning frustration:*) Or rather, I wish he would!

(*Laugh track.*) I wish I could have such a hunk in my bunk! (*Laugh track.*)

CELIA: Where the hell is this media messiah?

RAY: My personal guarantee—you won't be disappointed.

VITTORIO: He is one of a kind.

MARCONI: Yes; and one is too few. I wish he could clone his body. (*Laugh track.*)

(*WAIN re-enters as WAITER, as before, carrying tray.*)

(*MAGGIE enters. Applause track.*)

MAGGIE: Hi, everybody!

RAY: Hi, yourself, Maggie. But where's Prince?

SY: (*To MAGGIE*) Wasn't he coming with you?

MARCONI: (*Enviously, lasciviously, erotically*) Why wasn't he coming with *me*? (*Laugh track, for punning on "coming."*)

CELIA: (*To MAGGIE*) So where is he? I'm so impatient for him, I could—

MARCONI: (*To CELIA*) Keep your panties on, dear. We're in public. (*Laugh track.*)

MAGGIE: He's in the bathroom combing his hair.

MARCONI: His *hair* needed *coming*? (*Laugh track due to risqué "combing"—"coming" pun.*)

MAGGIE: He's in the bathroom.

MARCONI: I volunteer to do everyone a favor, by going to the bathroom to get him. (*Laugh track. MARCONI making as if to go there.*) I won't be long now. (*Laugh track.*)

CELIA: No? How long will you be?

MARCONI: (*Winking, wickedly, suggestively looking down to his own crotch*) Very long—it's all up to him. (*Laugh track.*)

CELIA: (*Earnestly*) I know suspense is good publicity, but a star mustn't keep his fans waiting *too long*.

MARCONI: (*Leeringly pointing to his genitals*) I'm "too long" just waiting! (*Laugh track.*)

MAGGIE: (*Seeing THADDEUS approaching in distance, but unseen by audience*) Oh, I can see him coming!

MARCONI: Oh good!

MAGGIE: (*With proprietorship pride*) At long last! (*Laugh track, though the pun was inadvertent, unintended.*) The moment everyone's been waiting for!

(MAGGIE outstretches her arms to introduce THADDEUS—though he's still unseen by audience. Musical fanfare. Then stage goes dark and all the actors on stage abruptly stop their acting poses and take a "relax" break. The monitors go on, to reveal a commercial. Then the "Off Air" sign flashes—there's now a commercial break.)

SCENE VI

(The "On Air" sign flashes: This immediately signals the actors to assume the exact positions and actions they each had just before commercial break. All are dramatically facing in direction of THADDEUS's long-expected entrance.)

MAGGIE: Finally! Here he is! The moment you've all been waiting for!

(THADDEUS enters. He stands a moment to allow everyone to look at him. He's been transformed into a slick, "Hollywood" look, sporting ultra fashionable wardrobe. He looks tough, confident, almost defiant. All the others react strongly—they're impressed, dumbfounded,

turned on, in awe. They freeze in long, awestruck pause.
Finally:)

THADDEUS: Well, here I am. (*The others, paralyzed, remain dumb-founded and speechless.*) This is some dull party. (*Smiles with self-assurance.*)

(*Following, in overlapping gushes:*)

MAGGIE: Prince, you're wonderful!

THADDEUS: (*In his stride*) Why, thank you!

MARCONI: We've been waiting for you, sweetheart.

CELIA: He's been well worth the wait!

SY: He's everything he should be—and more!

VITTORIO: Finest actor I have ever been privileged to work with!

SY: You're a destined superstar.

THADDEUS: Of course.

WAIN: (*Uncertain that this star, Prince Glitz is the THADDEUS he's looking for*) You Prince Glitz?

MARCONI: His name is on everyone's tongue!

CELIA: (*To SY*) This is overwhelming. Need I even mention that you *have* that cover story?

THADDEUS: It's so nice to be here with everybody. Are you all having fun?

VARIOUSLY: (*In overlapping gushes*) Darling! / Smashing! / Fantastic / Loads of fun / Delirious! / Having a ball! / Best time in years! / Of course! / Wonderful! / etc.

THADDEUS: Good!

MAGGIE: Care for a drink, Prince?

THADDEUS: Ought I?

MAGGIE: In *this* scene—yes.

THADDEUS: Good, then I'll have one. Dry gin martini.

MAGGIE: (*To a puzzled WAIN*) You heard his order, boy. Quit your gaping and please hurry.

WAIN: (*Snapping out of it*) Huh? Oh yeah—yeah. (*Exits: shaking his head in disbelief.*)

MARCONI: (*Gushing*) Oh! I just love your jacket!

THADDEUS: Just something I picked up.

(The others disperse into their conversational groupings; however, the focus of their attention remains on THADDEUS, never straying from him.)

(SY, bringing CELIA, comes over to THADDEUS.)

MAGGIE: (*Intercepting*) Oh, hi, Celia!

CELIA: Nice to see you again, darling.

SY: Prince, I have someone special, who's been just dying to meet you. This is the well-known "Peep-hole Magazine" feature writer, Celia See.

CELIA: I'm am delighted to meet you!

THADDEUS: It's a mutual delight, Celia. (*Taking her hand with suave sophistication, and kissing it.*) Ah, I can swoon over your bouquet!

CELIA: You're too kind, too charming, Mr. Glitz. You're too much!

THADDEUS: Please . . . just call me Prince.

CELIA: Prince, your old-world charm is irresistible.

SY: You can imagine how proud of Prince we people of "Fantasy Life" are!

MAGGIE: He's Mr. Perfection itself!

SY: He's the greatest salesman of traditional American values that any advertiser could pray for!

MAGGIE: Or pay for.

THADDEUS: The charm you see in me, dear Celia See, is but the reflection of your own, as moon to sun.

CELIA: What a gorgeous compliment! What a flowery phrase! It's a line that would melt any woman in the world: make her pant for you, make her your slave.

THADDEUS: Why, Celia—

CELIA: (*With notebook and pen*) May I quote you, Prince?

THADDEUS: (*Gallantly, with old-world charm*) But Celia—of course! I'm all yours—words and all!

(*WAIN enters with drink on tray. He wants to test to see if "Prince" identifies himself as THADDEUS, with appropriate response. WAIN has doubts, since THADDEUS defies all of WAIN's prepared description-expectations of him.*)

WAIN: Hey—Prince Glitz!

THADDEUS: (*Turns around to WAIN*) Yes? (*Takes the drink.*)

WAIN: (*Eyes THADDEUS closely, still doubting*) There—that's your drink.

MAGGIE: (*Severely, to WAIN*) Boy, don't you have better things to do than to stand with your impertinent gawking at Mr. Glitz?

WAIN: Sorry, lady.

MAGGIE: Your tray is empty. Go get the marinated caviar shrimp hors d'oeuvres and start serving them!

WAIN: The what?

MAGGIE: (*Impatient*) Go see the chef, he'll tell you what to do.

(*WAIN exits, shaking his head doubtfully about THADDEUS really being THADDEUS, still not convinced.*)

MAGGIE: (*Muttering indignantly*) The help these days! Revolting!

CELIA: So tell me, Prince—how is Hollywood treating you?

THADDEUS: It's been wonderful, Celia. Hollywood's been heaven. Perhaps I was born to be here—perhaps it was my destiny.

CELIA: Your press packet says you derive from an ancient lineage of European royalty.

THADDEUS: Tradition has always run deep in my family, extending from the origin of language itself.

SY: Yes, Celia, Prince is the last of a long and noble line; everyone else has died off.

CELIA: *(With notebook and pen)* How quaint, Prince; but first tell me about "Fantasy Life."

THADDEUS: "Fantasy Life" is *my* life—that's how natural it comes to me. It's like I've been doing it all my life. It fits into my identity so smoothly—or rather vice versa. Were it not for "Fantasy Life," I just don't know what I'd do with my life—I'd have no focus point, no definition.

(ROXY's voice is suddenly heard off-stage, mingled with various noises. People are trying to prevent her entrance.)

ROXY: *(Offstage)* Let me in! Let me in or I'll slug you! Leave me alone—I need to see Prince—Please—tell him I'm here—let me in!

CELIA: *(Tartly, jealousy, to THADDEUS)* One of your fans.

RAY: The nerve some people have!—

(ROXY bursts into the area, frenzied, hysterical.)

SY: Hold it! Who are you, what do you want?

MAGGIE: Not *you* again!

MARCONI: *(Bitchy)* This is a private party, honey.

RAY: Crashers aren't welcome.

MARCONI: (*Bitchy*) We like to feel exclusive.

VITTORIO: (*Melodramatically, arms skyward*) Oh, Hollywood, the city of endless drama!

ROXY: (*Spotting THADDEUS*) Thaddeus! (*Passionately:*) Oh, Thaddeus!

THADDEUS: Roxy! My Roxy!

ROXY: My darling! Thaddeus!

THADDEUS: It's really you! Roxy!

MAGGIE: Stop them!

SY: (*To ROXY*) What's going on here? Who are you?!

CELIA: (*Writing in pad*) Is that Roxy with a "y" or an "i-e"?

ROXY: (*Unthinkingly, mechanically semi-posing, automatically to media*) With a "y", thank you.

THADDEUS: But Roxy! Why are you here?!

ROXY: Thaddeus—I'm here to rescue you from this den of vipers. (*Indicating all the T.V. people.*)

MAGGIE: I've had enough of this!

RAY: Somebody call the police!

SY: Why are you here?

MARCONI: You crazy intruder!

CELIA: Are you Prince's secret lover?

ROXY: I'm his *real* lover, his true-love! And anyway, he's not Prince—he's Thaddeus!

THADDEUS: Rescue me? What from?

CELIA: "Thaddeus"? Is that a pseudonym?

MAGGIE: Do something, Sy—she'll ruin us!

SY: What can I do?

RAY: Rip her away from Prince!

ROXY: (*Trying to take THADDEUS away*) Let's leave this dreadful place!

Hurry!

THADDEUS: But wait, Roxy—why?

ROXY: Don't you understand?—have they brainwashed you?

CELIA: (*Excitedly scribbling in pad*) Oh this is wonderful! A scoop sensation!

RAY: Call the police!

SY: Good idea! (*Starts rushing away to phone police.*)

MAGGIE: She wasn't invited!

MARCONI: She's trespassing!

(*Sy exits in hurry to phone police.*)

ROXY: Let's get away, Thaddeus. You're being tampered with, manipulated, into their own degrading image. They're undermining your integrity; they're pinning the mask of a false identity on you. They're making you into Prince—

THADDEUS: (*Uncertain*) But that's who I am—? (*Weakly:*) Isn't it?

ROXY: (*Urgently*) You're *Thaddeus!*

THADDEUS: (*Bewildered, unsteady*) Thaddeus . . . *that's* who I am . . .

ROXY: (*Urgently, breathlessly*) Let's get out of here!

MAGGIE: You little hussy, I've just about had enough of you. (*Aggressing, laying hands on ROXY.*)

MARCONI: (*Rooting MAGGIE on*) That-a-girl!

RAY: You tell her, Maggie baby!

MARCONI: Tear her tits away!

VITTORIO: (*Ever the Director*) We have magnificent drama here!

(*MAGGIE wrestles with ROXY.*)

ROXY: I'll teach you to corrupt my man!

VITTORIO: Wonderful! So true to life!

RAY: Come on, Maggie!

MARCONI: Oh—sexy!

(*CELIA takes out her camera, takes flash photos.*)

ROXY: (*Struggling, puffing, out of breath*) Thaddeus—help me . . .

MAGGIE: (*Also struggling, puffing, out of breath*) Prince—don't listen to her! . . .

THADDEUS: (*Helplessly*) Roxy—how can I help you?—I can't even help myself—(*Wailing:*) Who am I?

MARCONI: (*Obscenely rooting MAGGIE on*) Grab her by the crotch, Maggie!

VITTORIO: (*Ever the Director; admiring ROXY*) This Roxy is a sensational new actress!

CELIA: (*To THADDEUS*) Prince—er Thaddeus—which are you? Make up your name—I mean your mind. And who do you *really* love? Are they fighting for your love? For you? For your name? What's behind all this?

ROXY AND MAGGIE TOGETHER: (*Still struggling*) None of your business!

MARCONI: (*Amorously*) Poor Prince—I'll take care of you!

THADDEUS: I'm at a loss! I haven't the foggiest notion. Who I am—it's anyone's guess. I don't know anything except for what I'm doing now—but what *am* I doing?

VITTORIO: (*Ever the Director; admiring the wrestling*) Such a fight scene! It links the real world to art itself!

ROXY: (*Still wrestling*) Run, Thaddeus! Run for your life! They'll make a zombie out of you!

THADDEUS: Where do I go? My will is paralyzed. Like Hamlet, I'm acting the part of a man who can't take action!

CELIA: This is wonderful copy!

MARCONI: (*Ecstatic, panting sexually*) Pin her, Maggie!

RAY: Pulverize her!

VITTORIO: If this were being taped, I would get an Emmy!

(*Sy enters, rushing back.*)

SY: (*Out of breath*) The police are on their way! What's happening?

ROXY: (*Still wrestling; to Sy*) You bastard!

(*Sy tries to grab hold of ROXY, but she slugs him and sends him staggering back. She and MAGGIE renew their wrestling savagery.*)

MARCONI: Good slug!

CELIA: That was a first-class sock! She's mixed media—wrestling *and* boxing! And with a romantic bottom-line: all for the love of a man!

VITTORIO: Sy, you all right?

SY: (*Still on the ground*) Stop her! She'll ruin us—we'll lose our jobs! She threatens to make this episode of "Fantasy Life" the unexpected conclusion to the whole series!

RAY: Stop that little monster—she'll destroy us, Sy! This is an emergency!

MARCONI: (*Shrieking at ROXY*) Stop already! The party's over!

VITTORIO: (*Ever the Director; looking at audience*) Will the audience find this believable? This is so astounding, I am worried about credibility!

(*THADDEUS acts indecisive, mumbling to himself, trying to decide what to do. He makes false starts, then stops, like someone falling apart. Another false move toward*

ROXY; then he stops, indecisively. RAY and MARCONI grab ROXY just as she's getting upper hand over MAGGIE.)

VITTORIO: *(As if directing)* Enough! Basta! You must be civilized, refined, ladylike!

(ROXY is still kicking and struggling. RAY feels ROXY up.)

ROXY: *(Struggling)* Help me, Thaddeus! We've got to escape their clutches! Help!

THADDEUS: *(Indecisive, broken down)* I . . . you . . . I . . .

ROXY: *(Being held by RAY and MARCONI)* Who'll help us? Who'll save us?

(As if timely, dramatically answering ROXY's urgent pleas—summons, WAIN enters, with full tray of hors d'oeuvres that MAGGIE had ordered.)

MAGGIE: You little bitch! You'll pay for this!

RAY: *(Still fondling, feeling up, ROXY)* We've got you now!

SY: *(To CELIA)* Celia darling, I beg you—please forget that any of this happened!

CELIA: Forget!?! This is Hollywood's biggest story in years!

(WAIN throws down his full tray of hors d'oeuvres and whips out his 45 automatic "Bessy.")

WAIN: All right, everyone, I'm in charge. *(To RAY and MARCONI:)* Let that dame go, or I'll drill ya.

(MAGGIE screams; RAY and MARCONI obediently release ROXY.)

WAIN: *(To MAGGIE who's still screaming)* Shut up, lady. "Bessy" here *(Indicating gun)* is no sexist: She'd plug you soon as any guy. *(MAGGIE obediently stops screaming.)*

SY: Who are you—and what do you want?

(Meanwhile THADDEUS still indecisive, not too aware of what's going on around him, resumes mumbling to himself.)

WAIN: *(To T.V. GROUP)* Everybody get over there—*(To ROXY:)* But not you, babe, you and the dizzy guy *(Indicating THADDEUS)* stay over here.

MARCONI: This is thrilling! *(Flirtatiously indicating WAIN's gun.)*

CELIA: Sy—surely this isn't for real?

SY: Celia—please!

CELIA: It *must* be! This is "Fantasy Life" to the core! Its most brilliant episode!

VITTORIO: *(Ever the Director)* This goes *beyond* television—it is a new consciousness!

MARCONI: *(Reacting erotically to WAIN)* Oh, I'd *pay* him to beat me up!

WAIN: Shut up ever there. *I'm* talkin' now.

MAGGIE: Brute!

WAIN: What'd I say, lady? *(To ROXY:)* Take care of our dizzy friend. *(Indicating THADDEUS.)*

(ROXY goes to THADDEUS, tenderly ministering to him; he's still mumbling, bewildered.)

ROXY: *(Weeping)* Look what they've done to him—to my lovely Thad-deus! I hardly recognize him!

WAIN: *(To T.V. GROUP)* You scum-bags did a job on him! You nearly had *me* fooled too—and that ain't easy to do. Thought you'd get away

with it, eh? Well, I'll teach yuh not to go around stealin' someone else's character and messin' around with 'em. Some people still think their character's sacred. What's the world comin' to, anyhow?

SY: (*Having been conspicuously studying WAIN's face*) You're the cleaning lady!

WAIN: Brilliant deduction, sleaze-bag. But watch out! (*Waving gun.*)

SY: (*Scared*) Sorry—I didn't mean it.

CELIA: You just *can't* be for real. I have a real nose for these things.

WAIN: Yeah? Go powder it, lady.

MAGGIE: (*Still defiant*) What do you want?

RAY: We'll make a deal.

SY: What's your price?

WAIN: (*To ROXY*) How's the kid doin'? Still dizzy?

ROXY: He's still in left field, but he's coming back to his senses.

WAIN: Think he can travel?

ROXY: Give him a minute.

WAIN: We barely got that.

RAY: Look: He's clearing his throat!

CELIA: He's trying to say something!

THADDEUS: (*Mumbling, barely coherent*) What happened? Who am I? Where am I? Who are all of you?

WAIN: (*To T.V. GROUP*) You guys really did a number on him.

ROXY: (*To T.V. GROUP*) You didn't give him a chance to find out who he really is. Knowing how vulnerable, defenseless, impressionable he was, you exploited him to your own mean ends. Indecent, cruel, inhumane!

SY: Not me—I didn't do anything!

RAY: I'm innocent!

VITTORIO: I am only under contract.

WAIN: Shut up.

MAGGIE: No-one forced him to do anything.

ROXY: He's about to speak—quiet!

WAIN: (*To THADDEUS*) Yeah, kid, you're feelin' better now?—you wanna say somethin'?

THADDEUS: (*Clearing his head and throat*) What am I? I don't know. But what do I *feel* like? A character in a television drama. Does that constitute my reality? . . . What I'm saying—is it speech? Or is it dialogue as from a script? . . . (*Falters.*)

WAIN: (*Encouraging THADDEUS*) Go on—you're doin' fine.

THADDEUS: (*Continuing*) Am I in the reality element, or the fictional element? Or have they fused together, in a weird blending?

ROXY: (*Lovingly encouraging THADDEUS*) Now you sound more like yourself, my darling!

THADDEUS: (*Continuing*) Have I been living life under false pretenses? But if so, what are the true premises, under which I may now conduct my life?

WAIN: (*Encouraging THADDEUS*) Attaboy, kid! You're pullin' through!

THADDEUS: (*Continuing*) Indeed, what *is* real? And what portion of reality can my so-called “self” claim? . . . What *defines* my “self”? By these clothes I wear, which were so much admired just now? By these words I speak? By that lumped-together compound called “feeling”?

(*To audience, but also to all the other characters on stage.*) By you, these people I see in front of me by looking? . . . Are we all actors in the same prime-time melodrama, strutting and reciting our lines so that they sound maximally “natural,” unacted, unrehearsed? Are we all playing roles in this, our common scene? Or is this scene secretly, in actuality, the “world”? . . . What you've been saying—what connection is that to what I've been feeling? And am I feeling this privately?—or as a hired actor, in a public performance? . . . And you out there—how do I know what *you're* feeling? By the way you look? But are your looks all

posed? Are we professionals?

MARCONI: (*Marveling, and drawn amorously to THADDEUS as well as admiring his acted speech*) Oh, how beautiful!

VITTORIO: A brilliant actor!

RAY: (*Despairing*) There goes our whole series!

SY: (*Despairing*) We just blew it—we'll be cancelled—we'll be out on our ass, with this intellectual literary stuff.

MAGGIE: Prince—we're your friends!

RAY: We're your colleagues!

SY: We're your allies! It's a *team*, Prince!

MAGGIE: We're in a show together. Don't let us down!

ROXY: (*To counter MAGGIE*) Thaddeus, don't listen to them!

SY: (*To THADDEUS*) You just can't do this!

RAY: You're under legal contract.

MAGGIE: We can sue—

ROXY: (*Interrupting*) He'll do what he wants.

THADDEUS: My sense of self—if I ever had it, however tentatively—I've lost it. I'm directionless, lost in a maze, devoid of future, empty of past, bankrupt in will, floating free-fall in a vacuum, blind to all boundaries.

WAIN: (*Angrily accusing the T.V. GROUP*) Hear that? That's what you bums did to him!

THADDEUS: (*To T.V. GROUP*) "Him"? "I"? what "I"? . . . Will someone, among you, please explain certain fundamental puzzles: What am I supposed to feel? What do I think? What am I? Who? What's my definition?

CELIA: That's *my* job.

THADDEUS: (*Exasperated; to audience*) Is there *anyone* out there, somewhere, who can possibly tell me just what or who I'm supposed to be? Someone with the authority to speak?

(In perfect, dramatic timing to that question:)

WILBERT'S VOICE OFFSTAGE: *(But from now on to end of play, in European aristocratic accent)* Yes! That is I!

(WILBERT enters, wearing goatee, dressed in cape; as the Grand Duke of Wilbertania. His entrance causes a sensation.)

WILBERT: Now—having found you—I shall inform you what, or who, you are.

THADDEUS: But first—who are *you*?

WILBERT: *(Grandly)* The Grand Duke of Wilbertania, and your uncle.

CELIA: I thought you were dead!

WAIN: Look again, lady.

WILBERT: Some would like to think I am dead and forgotten. They are wrong, as you may behold. *(To THADDEUS:)* You are my long-lost nephew, sole heir to our noble heritage. Thus have I sought you out; that you may claim your old birthright and not to allow the lapse into oblivion of our precious lineage.

MARCONI: *(Coyly)* What a cute old man!

WILBERT: Thaddeus, you will come with me. You shall assume your rightful position, which awaits you. You shall regenerate our long, illustrious dynasty; to carry our noble lineage through these wicked times, intact, for future prosperity.

THADDEUS: No.

WILBERT: *(Startled, pulled up short)* I do not comprehend your “no”. You are the heir to royalty. Do you dare to doubt me?

THADDEUS: There's so much fiction going on here. How can I sort out what's true, from all this fancy electronic play-acting involving enormous advertising budgets from vast capitalistic sponsors?

WILBERT: My Thaddeus! Over many miles have I traveled, to seek you out and reclaim you, many dusty miles for a worn-out old man; and I come to you, at last, in love and duty I hold sacred. I started my journey when your absence was discovered. Now, this is my journey's end. You are here! Return with me, my nephew. You must assume the mantle of your great destiny.

THADDEUS: Sorry. Something inside me says no.

WILBERT: Your heritage is an obligation. You derive from exquisite breeding. No expense was spared in your upbringing, your education. You have a duty!

THADDEUS: Just like I reject these T.V. freaks (*Indicating the T.V. GROUP*), so what *you* have to offer is suspect too. The family glory on which your appeal is based does seem true. But I deny any commitment to it. To me, this "noble old family" business is as much a fiction, as alien to me, as what they (*Indicating the T.V. GROUP*) represent—their T.V. fantasy. I don't want other people's reality to be imposed on me. I just want my *own* way to make.

WILBERT: Spare me, for I am venerable.

WAIN: He only means you good, kid. He came a long way for yuh.

ROXY: (*Protectively*) Please—Thaddeus must decide for himself.

THADDEUS: I will remain detached—lost—*independent*—remote. For all my traveling, my transformations, I belong to nothing, I'm not a part of anything. I'm not as yet a whole person—and might never be.

WILBERT: I beg you not to break my heart.

THADDEUS: (*To WILBERT*) Sir: I respect you, I venerate you—yet I must reject you. While duly appreciative how far you've come, how hard you've toiled just to find me, and how noble your intentions on my behalf, still—no. (*WILBERT weeps.*) And as for these people (*Indicating T.V. GROUP:*), they would have lobotomized me into a T.V. robot star. They would have bleached me dry, had I remained their stultified victim. Miraculously, I was rescued by Roxy, and by this very kind man (*Indicating WAIN*).

WAIN: Thanks, kid. But I was hired by your uncle here.

THADDEUS: Alone, I'll seek out what I'll be. A force greater than myself will direct me: I'm driven by something internal, whose force compels where yours (*Indicating WILBERT*) and yours (*Indicating T.V. GROUP*) merely provoke my resistance, my defiance.

MAGGIE: Where will you go?

THADDEUS: I shall leave: thus, to arrive.

CELIA: Arrive? But where?

WILBERT: Now, I have nothing. That is my burden to encumber my melancholy return home.

WAIN: (*Restraining WILBERT from getting to THADDEUS*) He's got to sort things out for himself. He's gotta follow his own star—where it leads him. (*To THADDEUS:*) Lots of luck, kid. Have some good adventures. Send me a post card.

CELIA: But to throw it all away—glamor and fame—it's a shame.

VITTORIO: The greatest actor I have ever had the privilege—

MARCONI: (*Interrupting, in romantic misery*) Take me with you!

THADDEUS: (*Going over to WAIN and shaking his hand*) Thanks for your help. (*Then THADDEUS goes over to the weeping WILBERT and silently embraces and kisses, European style, his old kinsman. Then, to T.V. GROUP:*) Maybe you all helped me too—more than you can realize. You inoculated me with the serum of corruption—granting me, from now on, immunity. So long, then. (*Turns and dramatically meets ROXY's stare.*)

CELIA: Oh, this is the most beautiful feature story that my byline will ever have graced!

MARCONI: He doesn't love me! (*Breaks dawn sobbing.*)

VITTORIO: (*Anguished*) The greatest actor ever—voluntary premature retirement: A cultural tragedy! Incalculable waste: of talent; of everything.

RAY: It's a disaster!

ROXY: (*She and THADDEUS still staring longingly at each other*) Thaddeus—belovèd!

THADDEUS: My Roxy of Roxys!

MAGGIE: Oh brother!

ROXY: (*Tenderly*) My Thaddeus . . .

THADDEUS: (*In deep, breaking, cracking voice*) I'll carry you in my heart forever.

ROXY: No—not in your *heart*—by your *side*. Along *with* you.

THADDEUS: I can't ask you . . .

ROXY: But you can! And I accept!

THADDEUS: You'll come—?

ROXY: Of course! Together, we'll find your true self—and mine. In each other! (*They embrace ferociously.*)

THADDEUS: (*With deep voice*) We'll begin our journey, into the stars, the unknown, the drama of the self, of the void, of the world. The age-old journey, but with two new travelers. (*Pause. Turns to WILBERT:*) My ancestors! Farewell. (*THADDEUS and WILBERT embrace and kiss, European style.*)

(*As THADDEUS and ROXY are leaving:*)

MARCONI: (*Covering his eyes*) No—I can't bear it—he's leaving us!

MAGGIE: (*To MARCONI*) You think *you've* lost something?!

VITTORIO: (*Anguished*) What a career! What a career—that shall never be!

WAIN: (*Tender-tough*) So long, pal.

(*THADDEUS and ROXY exit.*)

WILBERT: (*Sadly*) Goodbye, Thaddeus. (*To WAIN:*) Well, Mr. Wain, we found him. I found my character!

WAIN: Yeah—we *found* him all right.

WILBERT: And a great character he is! How right I was, to hire you, to look for him so hard. We did him good! He's saved—for something greater than we can ever know.

(WAIN puts his arm comradely around WILBERT. Police sirens sound in distance. Then the Applause track and sign are turned on. Sappy, sentimental violin music. Curtain almost completes falling, signifying end of play, when—belatedly—two POLICEMEN rush in, frantic, panting.)

POLICEMAN ONE: Okay, what's the problem?

POLICEMAN TWO: (*Looking around*) Everybody relax—we'll take care of everything!

VITTORIO: (*Holding his head in professional anguish*) Oh No! The anti-climax I have always dreaded! (*A relieved thought*) Luckily, we are on tape! We will edit it out!

(Blackout.)