

WAR STORIES

a play
by
Donald Dewey

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Phil Lavan	35-40, ex-cop
Carmen Guzzo	60-65, pet shop owner
Joey Nicks	35-40, cop
Jane Smith	30, street peddler
Bartholomew	35, IA detective

ACT ONE/SCENE ONE

The lights come up on a refrigerator downstage right. PHIL LAVAN, wearing only underwear, approaches the refrigerator and opens it.

LAVAN: (*shouts*) You want one?

There is no reply as he takes out a beer and cracks it open.

LAVAN: So there I am, my first day out on patrol. The uniform is hanging on me like a sandwich board. I want everybody to see my badge, but not to look at me too close.

He spots some cheese and starts sampling it directly from the refrigerator.

LAVAN: But they see it in my eyes. They know I'm scared shitless out there. My mouth's so dry I can't get Hello out without sounding like a frog. Then here comes this slug out of the corner bodega. He's got a goddamn umbrella in his hand --- holding it up like this, you know? A bodega's got bags all over the place, but this moron, he's keeping this umbrella upsidedown to hold all the stuff he's ripped off inside! You wonder about people sometimes.

There is silence.

LAVAN: Maybe you don't. Anyway, here's this moron with his upsidedown umbrella stuffed with beers and cereals and Christ-knows-what and here I am, an hour-and-a-half on the job. I can see the headlines all over the *Daily News* --- ROOKIE COP PULLS GUN, KILLS INFANT BLIND BOY. What's the name of this cheese?

There is silence.

LAVAN: Hey, c'mon, Darlene! Don't go falling off on me!

There is silence.

LAVAN: Anyway, perp sees me the same second I see him. I'm already going for my weapon. And then I see.....me! The fear in his eyes, it was

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exactly what I must've looked like to the neighborhood people. The weirdest thing. An Hispanic, maybe five years younger than me, but in that second or two we had this kind of spiritual thing between us. I'm on the job, he's a thief, but we're sort of the same, know what I'm saying? (*drinks*) Then the fucker does something really stupid. He drops the umbrella and goes into his waistband. I didn't wait for the subway doors to open. Took him down with my first shot. Good thing, too. He had a .22 there. Defective firing pin, it turned out, but how was I supposed to know? Can you imagine? Just 90 minutes on the job!

He slams the refrigerator door.

LAVAN: Hey, you better not be asleep, Darlene! You promised!

He exits with the beer. The lights go down.

ACT ONE/SCENE TWO

There is a loud chattering of birds as the lights come up to reveal a pet shop. The key set elements are a counter laden with pet shop supplies; a couple of shelves of pet food and the like; a heater behind the counter for coffee and two cups; and a telephone. At stage left is the entrance, with surrounding display windows facing the street and holding (unseen to the audience) kittens and puppies for sale. Stage right consists of a door to the bathroom and a curtained exit suggesting a back room. The birds making all the noise, not seen by the audience, indicate the expanse of the shop.

CARMEN stands behind the counter tearing newspapers up into strips. JOEY NICKS enters the store.

NICKS: How's it hanging, Carmen?

CARMEN: Bird shit, cat piss, dog puke.

NICKS: Counting the days, I bet.

CARMEN: When we're down to hours, I'll start to believe it.

NICKS: You gotta leave me the address of your cabin. Maybe one of these days we can reel in a few bass together.

CARMEN: I'll go upstate, you stay here. How's that sound?

NICKS: So kill me for trying to be friendly. Where's your sucker?

CARMEN: Learnin' the trade. You shoulda bought in with him, Nicks. Then we get two bad cops off the streets.

NICKS: Jesus, do these birds ever shut up?

CARMEN: What birds?

NICKS takes out a pack of cigarettes.

CARMEN: Not in here.

NICKS: Sorry.

NICKS puts away the cigarettes and goes over to one of the windows. He looks down on the (unseen) cavorting kittens and puppies.

NICKS: Hey, cutie!.....What do you call this breed --- the black one?

CARMEN: A puppy.

NICKS: Ha, ha, ha. How much?

CARMEN: \$750.

NICKS: You gotta be kidding me!

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CARMEN: You want cheap, go to a shelter. They throw in shots.

NICKS: \$750???!

CARMEN: It cost me \$500. What price you put on it?

NICKS: I don't know. I never.....

CARMEN: So you don't know if it's dear or cheap.

NICKS: \$750's dear for anything.

CARMEN: For a carton of milk.

NICKS: You know what I mean.

CARMEN: What you mean, Nicks, is if it was \$7.50, you wouldn't buy it.

NICKS: The bachelor life. What can I say?

CARMEN: "Goodbye, Carmen. Have a nice day."

LAVAN enters through the front door carrying a stack of old newspapers and brings them over to CARMEN.

NICKS: Hey, the entrepreneur!

LAVAN: This is all the paper he had.

CARMEN: He's supposed to save them for me every week! You tell the son of a bitch I'm not out of here yet?

LAVAN: Slipped my mind.

NICKS: Why newspaper? I thought litter was better.

CARMEN: Paper. Just paper.

NICKS: Because.....?

CARMEN: What do you care? *(to LAVAN)* Start in with what you got. Nice long strips.

CARMEN takes the strips he has made over to the windows and starts distributing them. LAVAN starts ripping up more papers.

NICKS: They got perfume in the litter, too.

CARMEN: So give some to your girlfriend.

NICKS: I'm just asking.

CARMEN: Look, you put a litter box in the window here and you won't have the kids pressin' their noses against the glass and whinin' for a puppy. All they'd see is turds and piss and keep on walkin' down the block.

NICKS: And you can't see that with newspapers?

LAVAN: Carmen says no.

NICKS: Carmen says.

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CARMEN: He can do anythin' he wants after I leave. But for now it's paper. I'm goin' to see who else has some. Remember: long strips.

CARMEN exits through the door. LAVAN keeps tearing up papers.

NICKS: Mister Personality.

LAVAN: He knows the business.

NICKS: Him, yeah.

LAVAN: You asking something, Joey?

NICKS: What everybody in the command is. Okay, Lavan's tired of all the political bullshit, he puts in his papers. He wants to be just another neighborhood shopkeeper.

LAVAN: There you go.

NICKS: But why a fucking pet shop? A bar. A restaurant. Even a check-cashing place. But what is it with the animals? Just the racket from these goddamn birds would drive me nuts.

LAVAN: What birds?

NICKS: Cute.

LAVAN: What do you want, Joey?

NICKS: Hey! Nine years together don't mean nothing? Can't I just drop by to see how my ex-partner's doing?

LAVAN: Good. Real good.

NICKS: Great.

LAVAN: And you?

NICKS: The best.

LAVAN: Glad to hear it.

NICKS: You could come around every once in awhile, you know. I mean, we're a lousy two blocks away.

LAVAN: What's over is over.

NICKS: Just like that?

LAVAN: What do you want, Joey?

NICKS: Thought I'd give you a heads-up. The grapevine says they're about to bag Fat Boy.

LAVAN: Oh, yeah?

NICKS: Somebody close to him took a deal. Been talking for weeks. You got to expect an arrest tomorrow, the weekend latest.

LAVAN: He's got lawyers.

NICKS: Win, lose, or plead out, lawyers make their money. And sometimes

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they like to plead out.

LAVAN: What do you want, Joey?

NICKS: Nobody been by bothering you?

LAVAN: What do you think?

NICKS: That you would've told me.

LAVAN: Good. So how about those Mets, huh? I think they need another starter. What do you think?

NICKS: Blubber like Fat Boy, he's not used to the hard drill. He'd give up his mother for time off.

LAVAN: Remember the German cruller?

NICKS: Cruller?

LAVAN: Couple of years ago. We're doing that stakeout down near the bridge and we smell that German bakery getting stuff ready for the next day. And you went over and got us a whole bag of crullers.

NICKS: Right!

LAVAN: So hot you didn't eat them, you just melted them on your tongue.

NICKS: I can still taste them. We must've eaten half a dozen each.

LAVAN: No, I had two. You had four.

NICKS: You sure?

LAVAN: And after I had my second one, I asked if there was any left and you said no, just the third one you were starting on.

NICKS: I offered you half!

LAVAN: But you didn't tell me about the other one you still had in the bag.

NICKS: You knew that?

LAVAN: What I don't know is what cruller are you hiding on me now.

NICKS: What? I told you I'm a little shaky about Fat Boy.....

LAVAN: And Fat Boy's a little shaky about me? And had a little talk with you about it and that's why you're really here?

NICKS: You're not on the job anymore. That makes him a little insecure.

LAVAN: Buy a kitten, Joey. They ease the daily stress.

NICKS: I'm an asshole, right?

LAVAN: That what you told Fat Boy?

NICKS: No, I told him you were Phil Lavan and Phil Lavan didn't need any halftime pep talks from me.

LAVAN: Good.

NICKS: Because he has nothing to gain by jogging down Memory Lane and telling war stories. Best that could happen, he'd forfeit all the money he's put into his animals for lawyers. And that's the best that could happen.

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JANE SMITH enters the shop. She totes an oversized bag filled to the brim with junk. She plops the bag down on the counter in front of LAVAN.

JANE: Today's your lucky day.

LAVAN: You don't say.

JANE: Pets need toys and I have toys.

NICKS: I bet you do.

JANE: That's good. Heavy-handed is good for sales. The more heavy-handed, the more you think you owe me.

LAVAN: We don't need anything.

JANE: Why not wait to see what I have? (to NICKS) Good. You resisted.

NICKS: I know what's in that bag from here. Pocket calculators. Calendars with velvet tigers.

LAVAN: Lighted yoyos.

NICKS: Marlboros. Hershey bars.

LAVAN: Triple A batteries.

NICKS: What are you --- a Kuang?

LAVAN: Another niece. How many nieces old Kuang have?

NICKS: The population of Hong Kong.

LAVAN: And they're always so lucky to be standing on the highway when the crates fall off the trucks.

JANE: You two should do an act together.

NICKS: We did, sweetie. (to LAVAN) Talk to you later.

LAVAN: I think we covered it.

NICKS: Sure.....Maybe her yoyos will turn on your birds.

NICKS exits. JANE starts unloading cheap plastic toys from her bag.

JANE: Subtle guy.

LAVAN: I'm not interested in this crap, lady.

JANE: Why's it crap? Because it wasn't made in Dayton, Ohio?

LAVAN: Because it's crap, that's why.

JANE: You'd pay twice as much if you ordered it from your usual suppliers.

LAVAN: This stuff I don't order from anybody.

JANE: Ask your kittens first. It's for them, not you.

He picks up a plastic sphere with metal balls inside.

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LAVAN: I don't have to ask them. Look. (*rolls sphere across the counter*)
The kitten's supposed to chase it, right? Well, it won't because the things are too big and too noisy. Hear that racket? Either the cat ignores it or it goes diving under a chair.

JANE: Okay, it's loud. I know it and you know it. But the customer won't, and you'll have made your sale by the time the cat complains.

LAVAN: You got a real future in business.

JANE: All right. How about this for your fish tanks?.....

LAVAN: Look around you. The only thing we don't have for the fish tanks is an old boot.

JANE: You're a tough sale.

LAVAN: I'm no sale.

JANE: Really?

LAVAN: Really, really.

She starts reloading the bag.

JANE: Well, I was warned.....The deli guy across the street. He said you used to be a cop. Made it sound like you have one foot on a buzzer back there to the station house.

LAVAN: But you came in anyway.

JANE: Sell a hard-ass, it's a double scoop of ice cream. With all the junk you got in here, I don't see why you can't add a little more.

LAVAN: I told you.

JANE: Right. Not for cats. But you really think a cocker spaniel wants to live in that cheesy wooden thing?

LAVAN: Nobody's ever complained. At least until after the sale.

JANE: You do have a sense of humor!

LAVAN: Laugh-a-Minute Lavan.

JANE: Jane Smith.

LAVAN: Bullshit.

JANE: Okay. For you I'll be Jane Mao Tse-Tung. Feel better?

LAVAN: I don't care what you call yourself.

JANE: Good. How about a coffee? I've been running around since seven.

LAVAN: Sorry. No cups.

JANE: I see two.

LAVAN: Carmen doesn't like anybody drinking out of his.

JANE: Lucky you don't have that problem.

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He pours her a coffee in his cup.

LAVAN: No milk or sugar. I don't use them.

JANE: You're okay with water, though, right?

He gives her the coffee.

LAVAN: You got nothing better to do than go around with this trash?

JANE: Family tradition.

LAVAN: The Smiths?

He goes back to shredding the newspapers.

JANE: You're right about paper. Litter boxes always look like litter boxes.

LAVAN: That's right.

JANE: How come cats and dogs do it for you now?

LAVAN: Sound like you've been talking to Nicks.

JANE: Who?

LAVAN: Never mind. Anyway, they're not cats and dogs.

JANE: No?

LAVAN: They're kittens and puppies.

JANE: Oh.

LAVAN: "Oh."

JANE: If you think there's a difference, play it out.

LAVAN: What I'm doing.

JANE: Well, now you have my permission, too.

She glances off stage right to the source of the bird sounds.

JANE: Parakeets, right? I think they come from India originally.

LAVAN: Australia.

JANE: Sure about that?

LAVAN: Yup.

JANE: I had one from India once.

LAVAN: Tell me something that's true, Jane Smith.

JANE: I did.

LAVAN: So don't tell me.

JANE: Something true? Okay. I picked up this bag in a warehouse at six-

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thirty this morning. There were hundreds of other bags like it and dozens of other people like me.

LAVAN: Thanks.

JANE: That's it? I bare my soul to you and it's just "thanks?" I got a better idea. You give me a hundred bucks and I'll leave the whole bag with you.

LAVAN: If not in this life.....

JANE: This one. Because there's something in you that says it would be a good investment. It would let you feel generous and whimsical and crazy all in one fell swoop. And it would broaden your social circle.

LAVAN: I'm cutting mine down.

He takes the paper he has shredded over to the windows.

JANE: Plus --- the biggest incentive for Laugh-a-Minute Lavan --- that hundred bucks will be the only claim I ever make on you. Once you pay me that, it's free sledding down the hill.

LAVAN: Whoopee!

JANE: And you'll also be sure where this crap is. Because I'm warning you, Lavan, if it takes me the rest of the day, I'll find the sickos out there who're waiting for these batteries and yoyos. No way I won't track them down. You want that on your conscience?

LAVAN: No.

JANE: I didn't think so.

LAVAN: Would you get out of here, then?

JANE: Cross my heart.

LAVAN: You really believe you have a shot at dumping that shit on me!

JANE: Don't I?

LAVAN: Not this visit.

She puts down her coffee cup and grabs the bag.

JANE: Fair enough. Keep those laughs coming, Lavan.

She leaves. Only with her departure does he notice the plastic sphere she has left on the counter. He goes over to it and rolls it back and forth idly. CARMEN enters with more old newspapers under his arm.

CARMEN: Nicks so horny he's feelin' up Oriental peddlers now?

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LAVAN: He left ten minutes ago.

CARMEN: Then his twin brother's out there makin' the moves on some lotus flower. All right, finish these and I'll show you the bird meal.

LAVAN goes to the window and looks out.

LAVAN: I don't see anybody.

CARMEN: So I'm makin' it up.

LAVAN: Sure it was Joey?

CARMEN: What's the matter with you? A pang for the skirt-chasin' days?

LAVAN: Yeah, sure.

CARMEN: Don't get weird on me, Lavan. I got lakes of fish waitin' for me upstate.

LAVAN: Meaning what?

CARMEN: That sometimes I still don't believe my luck findin' you. No one else would've taken this place off my hands for what you paid.

LAVAN: You banked the check.

CARMEN: That's not what I'm talkin' about.....I don't know. I'm sure his mother loved him, but your friend makes me nervous.

LAVAN: Joey or me, Carmen?

CARMEN: Joey. You. That Chinese peddler. The bus driver going past. The queen of England. I'm comin' to a big life change --- isn't that what they call it? Okay, so everything's got me edgy. What do you want from me?

LAVAN: Show me the bird meal. And what you can put in it to shut them up.

CARMEN: That's easy.

CARMEN goes into an exaggeratedly pensive pose. The bird chirping dies out at once.

LAVAN: What did you do?

CARMEN: Asked them to be quiet.

LAVAN: No way.

CARMEN: What do you hear?

LAVAN: You gotta teach me that.

CARMEN: You'll learn it. C'mon. Let's feed them.

CARMEN and LAVAN head for the rear as the store lights go down.

ACT ONE/SCENE THREE

LAVAN comes down to a refrigerator downstage right. He wears only underwear. He takes a soda from the refrigerator.

LAVAN: All you got is soda!

There is silence. He cracks open the can, then rummages around for something to eat.

LAVAN: So anyway, we're only halfway through the tour and we already got three DOAs. Then the call comes. An EDP with a gun boarded up with his wife and kids. Joey and I get over there. Place looks like a movie set, so many lights and cameras. Every TV station in the city smells a goodie. Action helicopters, whatever they call them, swooping around. No way Joey's missing out on all this! Me, I'd like to go back to the house for our lunch break, but not Nicks. Before I know it, we're crouching down outside the apartment trying to talk the EDP out of his weapon, his wife, his kids, whatever he's willing to give up. Guy agrees to open the door so we can go in and talk face to face. There he is sitting on the couch calm as can be, his daughter on his knee, the gun in her back. The wife and son are on the rug in front of him. They could've been there watching TV, except the set wasn't on. Only thing on is the EDP.

He finds some cold cuts and tries them.

LAVAN: So what's the nut's beef? Turns out he fell under the spell of some storefront preacher. If he doesn't surrender his paycheck every week, this preacher's convinced him, the guy and his family will burn in Hell. The wife has gotten tired of waiting for pay that never comes home, so she makes a deal with the EDP's employer to turn his check directly over to her. The husband goes ballistic. She's made him betray Jesus Christ and now they're all going to Hell. That's why we have the loony tune scene. Want a soda?

The lights come up upstage right to show JANE in bed. Clothes are scattered around the bed on the floor.

JANE: Please.

The lights go down on the refrigerator as LAVAN takes another soda from it

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and then walks back to the bed. He gets in the bed with both cans.

LAVAN: I'm trying to talk some sense into the guy while Joey's working out his reach to the gun. If I'm Joey, I'm figuring the daughter goes down, but the wife and son should be all right.

JANE: You're kidding.

LAVAN: We're talking real life here, not *The Wizard of Oz*.

JANE: Don't tell me that's what happened.

LAVAN: No, we got lucky. The EDP saw he was in a bad place, so he just ate his gun right there on the couch. Boom! Big clump of grass from the back of his head on the wall.

JANE: With the daughter on his lap??!!

LAVAN: I got her out of there in three seconds flat. The father was still dropping his gun when I had her. Yeah, she'll be traumatized for the rest of her life, probably. I mean, you would be, right? Not something the mother and son are going to forget too fast, either.

JANE: That's horrible.

LAVAN: What pissed me off was we couldn't touch that fucking preacher. The EDP bought his spiel? Too bad for the EDP. Maybe by blowing his brains out, though, he saved himself from Hell. What do you think?

JANE: I don't see what's funny about it, Lavan.

LAVAN: What funny? I'm talking from the point of view of the EDP. He must've figured something like shooting himself would get him off the hook, right? Strictly from his point of view.

JANE: I wouldn't know.

LAVAN: Don't be so sure.

JANE: I look like one of your EDPs to you?

LAVAN: I'm not talking about that. Maybe you haven't had a hostage situation, but I bet you've had your worries about what happens after the end of the show.

JANE: Show?

LAVAN: This.

JANE: Oh.

LAVAN: It's human nature.

JANE: Actually.....

LAVAN: I knew it!

JANE: It was only last week.

LAVAN: What?

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JANE: I had a breast cancer scare.

LAVAN: No shit!

JANE: God, did I sweat those three days waiting for the test results!

LAVAN: Nothing wrong, right?

JANE: Just a week ago I was entertaining myself thinking about last meals and last trips.

LAVAN: Lots of women go through that. Pretty common these days.

JANE: It wasn't common for me, Lavan!

LAVAN: I don't mean it that way. Everybody lives in his own pit, right?

JANE: What?

LAVAN: An expression.

JANE: "Everybody lives in his own pit??!!!"

LAVAN: You know what I mean.

JANE: Do we blame this on some ex-wife or is this the vision that's made sure there's never been an ex-wife?

LAVAN: I bought your toys. Let's leave it at that for now.

He kisses her. She doesn't respond. There is a sound of a chirping bird.

LAVAN: You hear that?

JANE: What?

The lights go down as the bird chirping gets louder.

ACT ONE/SCENE FOUR

The pet shop. The birds are in full voice. CARMEN sits behind the counter speaking on the telephone. He has a couple of ledgers opened before him and is drinking coffee.

CARMEN: *(in phone)* Yeah, well, this time I'm not just talkin' about it. I did it.....Nobody you know.....What, you were countin' on me croakin' behind the counter so you could claim the store as your inheritance? You had that shot 10 years ago. How many highs ago was that, Terry?

BARTHOLOMEW enters the store. He begins browsing on the shelves.

CARMEN: *(in phone)* What do you have to know his name for? Somebody I can trust with the stock, okay?.....Yeah, maybe you're right. Maybe they are more important to me. I go to sleep every night thinkin' of the goldfish instead of you.....Terry?

CARMEN hangs up reluctantly. He goes back to a ledger. BARTHOLOMEW continues browsing. CARMEN slams the ledger closed.

BARTHOLOMEW: Numbers. They drive you crazy, don't they?

CARMEN: Somethin' I can help you with?

BARTHOLOMEW: I was looking for Phil.

CARMEN: Friend of Lavan's?

BARTHOLOMEW: Lavan. Joey Nicks.

CARMEN: Oh. From the precinct.

BARTHOLOMEW: Downtown. But we've worked some cases together. Joey said Phil was here.....

CARMEN: He's out on a delivery. But I can help you.

BARTHOLOMEW: Joey said.....

CARMEN: Got it. Nicks is going around promisin' discounts.

BARTHOLOMEW: That obvious?

CARMEN: Tell me what you're lookin' for and we'll see what we can do.

BARTHOLOMEW: You must be Carmen.

CARMEN: Guilty. And you're in the market for.....what, a muzzle?

BARTHOLOMEW: I'm having trouble with my bloodhound on the street.

CARMEN: Goes after other dogs?

BARTHOLOMEW: Doesn't seem to like people much, either.

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CARMEN comes around from the counter to go to the shelves.

CARMEN: With a bloodhound you have to worry about the flews.

BARTHOLOMEW: The what?

CARMEN: The hangin' lips. You want somethin' that won't rub into them. How old's the dog?

BARTHOLOMEW: Two, I think.

CARMEN: You don't know?

BARTHOLOMEW: Surprise birthday present. Between you and me I would've preferred a bottle of scotch. But now that I've got it, I feel kind of responsible for it.

CARMEN: Happens.

BARTHOLOMEW: Uh, oh. I don't make your list of great pet owners.

CARMEN: Dogs need affection, too. If you're just feelin' responsible for them.....Well, that's none of my business. Here, this one should do the job. Nylon. Run you \$16.99.

BARTHOLOMEW: You're the expert.

CARMEN takes the muzzle over to the counter to bag it. BARTHOLOMEW takes out a bill and follows after him.

CARMEN: Cash?

BARTHOLOMEW: Yeah. So how's it been breaking in Phil?

CARMEN: You learn what you want to learn. He wants to learn.

BARTHOLOMEW: You're partners or he buy you out altogether?

CARMEN: *(takes the bill)* Out of twenty?

BARTHOLOMEW: I ask because this is a big place. Rent must be a beaut.

CARMEN: *(makes change)* Nothin's for free.

BARTHOLOMEW: Just as long as the cash is clean, right?

CARMEN: What?

BARTHOLOMEW: I mean, if that twenty was counterfeit, wouldn't make much difference how high your markup was.

CARMEN: You got somethin' there.

BARTHOLOMEW: Or if it was a hot bill, you could have somebody with a badge busting in here this afternoon impounding it as evidence. You'd be out of pocket that way, too.

CARMEN: You're a gloomy Gus, aren't you?

BARTHOLOMEW: Too much time in the city. That's why I envy you.

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CARMEN: You don't even know me.

BARTHOLOMEW: Joey mentioned you wanted to go off to some cabin you have upstate. Away from all the traffic lights.

CARMEN: You and Nicks do a lot of pillow talk.

BARTHOLOMEW: *(laughs)* Got to tell him that one.

CARMEN: Here's your change. And your muzzle.

BARTHOLOMEW: Tell Lavan to do the right thing, Carmen.

CARMEN: I don't know what the hell you're talkin' about.

BARTHOLOMEW: If Joey beats him to it, you may never get to wade into one your streams upstate.

CARMEN: Soon as you get back to English, give me the high sign.

BARTHOLOMEW hands him a business card.

BARTHOLOMEW: Lavan can get me here whenever he wants. You, too.

BARTHOLOMEW heads for the door and stops.

BARTHOLOMEW: We forgot the professional courtesy discount.

CARMEN: Get it from Joey Nicks.

BARTHOLOMEW exits. CARMEN sits down with the card. The telephone rings. He answers it.

CARMEN: *(in phone)* Ridgewood Pets.....We don't have any.....Because we're out, that's why!

He slams down the receiver. LAVAN enters with a newspaper under his arm.

LAVAN: One more happy three-year-old and one more mother having second thoughts.....Really humming around here. What kind of dead-end operation you con me into buying, Guzzo?

CARMEN: Friend of yours dropped by. *(reads card)* Andrew Bartholomew.

LAVAN: Never heard of him.

CARMEN: Says he's from downtown. What's that, Internal Affairs?

LAVAN: *(glances at card)* Just a name and a number? Probably.

CARMEN: And?

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LAVAN: And what?

CARMEN: An Internal Affairs cop is in here makin' all these sounds about you and Nicks.....

LAVAN: What sounds?

CARMEN: Somethin' about you doing the right thing before Nicks does.

LAVAN: Yeah, that sounds like IA.

CARMEN: You listenin' to me, Lavan?

LAVAN: I think so.

CARMEN: So what "right thing?"

LAVAN: How the hell do I know? Ask him.

CARMEN: He seemed to think I knew.

LAVAN: It's a very sophisticated technique they use, Carmen. It's called playing with yourself.

CARMEN: So there's no problem?

LAVAN: Why should there.....? Oh, I get it! Bartholomew is IA, you think I've been on the arm, and you're worried they'll go after my money.

CARMEN: The thought is there.

LAVAN: The money in the bank from me isn't mine anymore, it's yours.

CARMEN: Why don't it feel that simple?

LAVAN: What do I do for a living these days, Carmen? I got nothing more to do with IA and they have no more jurisdiction over me. So what does that tell you about your friend Bartholomew?

CARMEN: Nicks.

LAVAN: Bingo!

CARMEN: They're investigatin' him, not you.

LAVAN: Joey's hauled off a couple of comps to Citifield, gung-ho IA is on the case, and they're looking up old partners to see if he's ever shown similar criminal tendencies involving Madison Square Garden.

CARMEN: It's got to be more than that.

LAVAN: (*tears up business card*) How about we use some of this downtime in the thriving life of Ridgewood Pets to go over the apartment? Any crazy gas jets upstairs I should know about?

CARMEN: You were partners. You know Nicks cuts corners.

LAVAN: "Cuts corners." Let's see where that is in the penal code. Must be in the index under C.

CARMEN: I've got one foot and four toes of the other one out that door, Lavan. I want to go through it.

LAVAN: Nothing stopping you I can see. But hear this. I bring the Siamese

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around, right? The mother answers the door and reminds herself she's got to look happy. Fifteen years of clawed up furniture and cat smells ahead of her, but she puts this actressy look in her eyes as she leads me into the living room. The kid's playing on the floor with some kind of Lego thing.....

CARMEN: Know the best part of gettin' out of here, Lavan?

LAVAN: The whole thing. Getting out.

CARMEN: What? Turnin' into a mountain yokel? Standin' in a stream all day, puttin' logs in the fireplace at night?

LAVAN: Why not?

CARMEN: The best part is thinkin' about it. You comin' in here and makin' your offer. Me showin' you the ins and outs. That's the best part. Just thinkin' about gettin' out after 33 years.

LAVAN: There's more than that.

CARMEN: You want to listen to me or to yourself again?

LAVAN: Okay, okay.

CARMEN: I've looked forward to these last coupla weeks a long time. Ten years, almost. I never figured I'd be turnin' the place over to you, but why not you? Least you'll feed the damn things instead of worryin' about a fix.

LAVAN: That's your stuff, Carmen. Your family's your family. I don't have to hear about any of that.

CARMEN: And I don't want you hearin' it. Just like I don't give a goddamn if you're goin' to move in three wives, a dozen kids, or some homo lover after I leave. That's *your* stuff. But where it's *our* stuff is right now. While I still got it up here. The best part.

LAVAN: And nothing's going to screw it up for you. Not me, not Joey Nicks, not this Bartholomew.

CARMEN: That's a guarantee, is it?

LAVAN: What do you want --- a fucking blood oath?

CARMEN: Would it do any good?

LAVAN: It's an expression.

CARMEN: Tell me about the kid.

LAVAN: Kid?

CARMEN: The one playin' Lego!

LAVAN: Right. The mother says, "Mikey, here's something your father and I got you for your birthday." Kid looks up from the floor. Sees me, has this second of doubt I'm his present. Can't figure that out for shit. Who the hell wants a gom like me for a birthday present?

CARMEN: Not what I would've asked for.

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LAVAN: Then he sees the carrier I'm holding. I swear, Carmen, it took that kid longer to stand up than when he was learning how to walk. He couldn't believe what I might-probably-had-to-have under my arm! Pulls himself up slower than a caterpillar, this little beam getting bigger in his eyes. Waddled over to where I put the carrier on the floor. I wanted him to open the thing by himself, but the damn catch was stuck and I had to give it a yank. The mother's going to drop by this afternoon for a replacement. I told her no problem, we wouldn't charge.....

CARMEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LAVAN: Anyway, I opened the carrier. There's the kitten gaping out at us, like it's waiting for me to make the introductions. You should've seen the kid's face. Picked up the damn thing, could hardly hold it. Kitten's running all over his chest and arms, almost knocked him on his ass.

CARMEN: You can't fake that with kids.

LAVAN: No. It was kind of nice seeing his face.

CARMEN: Yeah, you're Santa Claus. Let's keep it that way.

CARMEN exits through the bathroom door. LAVAN watches after him a moment, then looks down at the front page of the newspaper he has brought in. He wrinkles up the paper in anger and flings it away. The lights go down.

ACT TWO/SCENE ONE

The lights come up on the refrigerator downstage right. JANE, wearing only a robe, opens the refrigerator and takes out a beer.

JANE: Yin, Yin, Yin. Okay? Jane Yin. You like that more than Jane Smith? You know what it means?

The lights go down on the refrigerator and up on the bed upstage right as she pads back to LAVAN lying there.

LAVAN: Like that yin-yang thing? Man and woman?

JANE: Right. Yin the passive, earthly receptacle for whatever you want to drop in me. Want to drop something in me, Lavan?

LAVAN: Give me another five minutes.

JANE: Five hours, you say?

LAVAN: Give me a sip.

JANE: (*gives him a bottle*) Jane Smith is better. Gives me a sense of self.....That funny?

LAVAN: What can I tell you?

JANE: I'm not talking about the Chinkdom.

LAVAN: Oh.

JANE: But of course for you that's the same thing --- self, Chinkdom.

LAVAN: I didn't say that.

JANE: Jane Smith doesn't give a rat's ass if you did or not.

LAVAN: So the kids weren't nice to Jane Yin in school.

JANE: No, they weren't. And their parents weren't much better.

LAVAN: No one tried to lynch you or mutilate you or anything.

JANE: There's that.

LAVAN: So what's the big deal?

JANE: I don't know, Lavan. What is it?

LAVAN: All I'm saying is, lots of people get treated worse than you, but they don't go changing their names because that's supposed to give them a shield against Kryptonite.

JANE: What?

LAVAN: Kryptonite. You know, Superman?

JANE: Superman.

LAVAN: Before it was a movie it was a comic book.

JANE: Golly! The things you know!

LAVAN: You want to be Jane Smith, no problem.....How old is she?

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JANE: Who?

LAVAN: Jane Smith.

JANE: About three or four. That's when I made her up.

LAVAN: That's right.

JANE: What is?

LAVAN: People are better when they're kids. The crap comes later, when they grow up.

JANE: The famous puppies and kittens theory.

LAVAN: I liked my brother better when he was a kid. I liked myself better.

JANE: You check out elephants?

LAVAN: I'm trying to tell you why I like you as Jane Smith.

JANE: Sorry.

LAVAN: I understand.

JANE: Really.

LAVAN: Jane Yin you're not responsible for. She got into a lot of shit she didn't know was shit until she got into it. Jane Smith you can control.

JANE: That's right!

LAVAN: Told you.

She kisses him lightly.

LAVAN: What'd you think, I got a boulder for brains?

JANE: It's part of your charm.

He evades another kiss.

LAVAN: One time Joey and I crashed into this weapon dealer's place. Found more Uzis than the Israeli army had. Joey's idea was we should stick a couple of them on top of the dumbwaiter before we called it in. Somebody finds them, we can just say we didn't check there, the perp must've hidden them. They don't find them, we go back the next day, get the guns, and find our own market for them.

JANE: Always thinking our friend Joey.

LAVAN: Nobody found them. We ended up splitting six grand.

JANE: That happens to be illegal, doesn't it?

LAVAN: And you're Jane Smith. I want my own beer.

He gets up from the bed. The lights go down on the bed and up on the

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refrigerator as he goes downstage.

LAVAN: Those Uzis opened some big doors for us.

JANE: Whose doors?

LAVAN: Never mind.

JANE: Then don't brag about it.

LAVAN: People with clout, okay?

JANE: You say so.

He takes a beer from the refrigerator and swigs.

LAVAN: That's good. Who taught you that technique --- Internal Affairs?

JANE: *(in darkness)* Me?

LAVAN: Why not? They use pussy, too.

JANE: *(in darkness)* Tell me something that's not crass, Lavan.

LAVAN: What's that mean?

JANE: *(in darkness)* When you weren't being a wise guy.

LAVAN: I get a reward?

JANE: *(in darkness)* Maybe.

He takes another swig.

LAVAN: One time, when I was nine, I woke up and found my cat dead in my bed. I went running into my mother, woke her up all in tears, and she came back to my bedroom with me. Looked at the cat, said he'd died of a heart attack. A kitten six months old with a heart attack? Like I believed that! We both knew I'd rolled over on the scrawny son of a bitch and smothered it.

JANE: *(in darkness)* What did your mother do?

LAVAN: Got an old towel, put the kitten in it, then put it in the dumbwaiter and sent it down to the cellar before my father and brother knew about it. Then we both went back to bed. We were the only ones who knew about it.

JANE: *(in darkness)* Bullshit.

LAVAN: What do you know?

JANE: *(in darkness)* For god sake, Lavan. Your father and brother didn't notice the cat wasn't around anymore? She told them first thing the next day, probably asked them not to pester you about it.

LAVAN: You don't know that.

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JANE: *(in darkness)* Okay. It happened the way you said. Only you and your mother ever knew.

LAVAN: Why do you have to be such a bitch all the time?

JANE: *(in darkness)* I'm accepting your version! What else you want?

LAVAN: But you don't believe what I'm saying. You're always looking for the angle, shoving it in my face. Can't you let it go for a lousy second?

JANE: *(in darkness)* Okay, okay. I'm letting it go.

LAVAN: I don't think it's much to ask for.

JANE: *(in darkness)* Nothing.

LAVAN: You're still a bitch.

JANE: *(in darkness)* Who doesn't want you drinking up all my beer. Come back to me.

He goes back to her. The lights go down. The bird sounds come up.

ACT TWO/SCENE TWO

The pet shop. CARMEN is sweeping the floor. There are no bird sounds. He pauses at one of the window displays to play with an (unseen) puppy.

CARMEN: I'm goin' to beat you out of here. How you like them apples?.....For what, right? Bunch of crickets. Who the hell wants to hear crickets all night?

LAVAN comes to the front door. He is about to let himself in with a key when he sees CARMEN. He just opens the door to enter. The birds begin chirping.

LAVAN: What the hell you doing down so early?

CARMEN: Special day.

LAVAN: It is?

CARMEN: I forgot to tell you that when you sweep up in the morning, keep the bird cages hooded until you're finished. They don't like dust any more than we do and they don't have our lungs.

LAVAN goes behind the counter to make coffee.

LAVAN: I'll remember.

CARMEN: You better.

LAVAN: Whoa! What happy fairies you dream about last night?

CARMEN: Monday.

LAVAN: What about it?

CARMEN: It'll all be yours. This is my last day.

LAVAN: Hey, c'mon, Carmen. What's the rush?

CARMEN: Rush? It's been three weeks!

LAVAN: There's a million things you got to show me yet.

CARMEN: And a million after that. But nothin's forever.

LAVAN: This has nothing to do with that IA guy.....?

CARMEN: It's time, Lavan.

LAVAN: Just like that. Weekend notice.

CARMEN: No, I was plannin' on a little more ceremony. I'll come down Sunday and screw around, see if there's anythin' I forgot to tell you. Then Monday mornin' we'll meet at the diner for breakfast, we'll go over any last things, you'll pay the check, I'll give you the keys for the apartment and the mailbox, and we'll shake hands. I'll promise to drop down to the city every

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once in awhile, you'll promise to come upstate one of these days, and we'll both get off with a Christmas card or two.

LAVAN: You don't give much away, do you, old man?

CARMEN: Saves on the bullshit.

LAVAN: Maybe bullshit's not so bad sometimes.

CARMEN: Figure out the bird trick I showed you yet?

LAVAN: I think so.

CARMEN: What is it?

LAVAN: Around here you hear only what you want to hear.

CARMEN: Right. And if you're lucky, you can count on that for 33 years. More than that nobody's got comin'.

LAVAN: Won't you be surprised when I really do drive up to that cabin!

CARMEN: Don't get weepy on me. When you answered that robbery call last year, you were on your way to buyin' a safe place. I've profited, you've profited. Let's leave it at that.