

# **Death's no Laughing Matter**

by

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A play in two acts and five scenes

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## Characters

**SUSAN DENTON:** A young movie actor who has starred in several cheap, beach and motorcycle, movies. Thus far in her career, her directors and producers have only exploited her seductive face and her alluring body. Her acting talent has remained unchallenged. She is waiting for a part and the opportunity to demonstrate her acting ability.

**BOB PEARSON:** A film director. He is in his early thirties. He specializes in sexploitation movies that have established Susan Denton as a starlet. He considers himself a God's gift to womankind and considers his duty and right to bed every actor in his movies.

**SAM LEVI:** Susan Denton's agent. He is in his late forties. At one time, he had hoped for fame and fortune as an actor. Years of struggle and failure have made him reconsider his options. Realizing that he possesses neither the talent for acting nor directing, he has set his sights on the next logical option - he wants to become a producer. Currently, he represents Susan and Bob. The most extraordinary thing about Sam is that he is genuinely concerned about the careers of his clients.

**JOSEPH COHEN:** A very successful and influential producer. He is close to fifty. Whenever necessary, he assumes the fatherly role. Most of the time, he goes around pretending that he is still a young man in his twenties. He dresses as a young man; he wears his hair a little too long, and in most situations, looks out of place. He assumes that he owns everyone working for him. He has the charm of a slave driver. In the previous century, Abraham Lincoln would not have liked him. In this century, not many people like him either.

**KIM CLOVER:** A young actress with tremendous acting potential and a devil-may-care attitude. She is Joe Cohen's most recent discovery. Kim is an intelligent woman who is trying to act otherwise to succeed in a business run by men like Bob Pearson, Sam Levi, and Joe Cohen.

**JAMES:** Sue Denton's butler. A fragile old man in his seventies. He is graceful and speaks with a British accent. The heaviest object that he cares to lift or carry is a tray of drinks. Pouring, mixing, and carrying drinks is his key function. He also announces the arrival of visitors and guests. He does everything with a great deal of theatrics. He is from Oklahoma.

**THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR:** A man in his late twenties - a reminder of the Vietnam War and the Flower Power movement era.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

TIME: YESTERDAY EVENING, 8 P.M.

*(The curtain rises in SUSAN DENTON's living room. The furniture, the decor, rugs, and lamps are contemporary. Walls and curtains are in pastel colors. With the exception of a dozen bright red roses in a light gray vase, everything in the room is in dull, non-reflective colors. Large, framed, black-and-white, pictures of Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, and James Dean hang on the walls.*

*There is a well-stocked bar on stage left. A door on stage right leads to the front door. The back wall has a large window that offers the view of the city from the fourth or fifth floor. There are two doors, one on each side of the window. The door on the left leads to Susan's bedroom. The door on the right goes to the front door. There is a small window by the side of the bar. A door to the left of the bar opens to a guest bathroom.*

*Susan is sitting on a sofa. She is a stunningly beautiful woman. She is wearing a light, peach-colored, Chinese silk gown. Her makeup is flawless, with every hair in its place. She is turning the pages in a film script. She yawns. Not wanting to disturb her makeup, she gently rubs her index finger against her forehead. She leans back on the sofa and looks to her left towards the bar where BOB PEARSON is firmly planted on a tall stool behind the bar. He is drinking and, unquestionably, reading the same film script. BOB picks up his drink and downs a good portion of it noisily. SUSAN finds BOB's personality in general and his drinking in particular somewhat disgusting.)*

BOB: Sue, this is a great scene. It's going to kill the audience.

SUE: Bob, I've got a headache, and that's going to kill me.

BOB: Here, have another drink.

SUE: I don't want any more to drink.

BOB (*picking up a bottle of Chivas Regal and waving it at her*): This is good stuff, sure you don't want...

SUE: I know it's good stuff, *I* bought it, remember?

BOB: I feel sorry for you when you have a headache.

SUE: You mean you feel sorry for yourself when I have a headache.

BOB: That too. How do you like the rewrites on the scenes for tomorrow? Fantastic material, huh?

SUE: Sure, almost as fantastic as a free ride on the Titanic. Bob, get those writers to come up with something new, something fresh. All this is old stuff, and no amount of rewriting is going to improve this pile of horse manure.

BOB: Baby, this is a great script! Just read this scene. Here, let me read it to you.

SUE: Bob, don't bother.. I've got news for you. We've already done this scene.

BOB: No, we haven't, sweetheart.

SUE: I remember it. We have done it.

BOB: No, honey, we...

SUE: Don't honey me. And go easy on that drink. (*waving the script at him*) I even remember the dialog. Now, you know me. I can't memorize anything. But these lines here, I already know these lines. (*singing*) *We-have-shot-this-scene.*

BOB: Doll, I'm directing this picture, and I'm telling you that we have not shot this scene.

SUE: Are you telling me that this is the first time I am seeing these lines?

BOB: Yep.

SUE: Then, how come I know these lines? How come I even know my blocking, huh? You tell me!

BOB (*belching loudly*): That's remarkable.

SUE: Wish you'd cut down a bit on booze, and concentrate a bit more on work.

BOB: The writer gave me these pages this afternoon. Even I don't know these lines. How can you?

SUE: You're directing this picture, you tell me... I guess this is what they call *déjà vu*.

BOB: How did they get into this?

SUE: Who?

BOB: Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young.

SUE: Who are they, a law firm?

BOB: Forget it, Sue, now, back to the script (*he gets up from the bar and walks to the sofa. He sits down and tries to touch SUE's foot. She curls away from him. She puts the script aside and sits up. She opens a small pillbox and takes a couple of pills. She washes them down with the remainder of her drink. BOB walks back to the bar and starts to make himself a fresh drink. He prepares a concoction mixing from three different bottles. He drops two cherries in the glass and takes a sip.*)

SUE: I don't understand why you don't believe me. Listen to me, Bob. The scene is in a living room, right? I've been smoking grass and I am supposed to be higher than a kite. And my boyfriend, a king-size bore and a pain in the-you-know-where, wants to read about some Hopi Indian village. That's his idea of an exciting time. I say to him: Let's go for a drive. He says that he has to study for an exam. So, I tell him exactly what he can do with his anthropology book, and listen to this, I say: I'm going out to get myself a memorable ride. And I slam the door behind me. Cut. Is this the scene or what?

BOB: Mmmm. Yes, that's the scene.

SUE: Well then, we've already done it.

BOB: Ohhh yessss, I remember now. We shot a similar scene for our last picture, *The Wild Rooster*. This movie is, *The Wild Rider*.

SUE: What's the difference?

BOB: *Rooster* was a beach movie. This one is a motorcycle picture. Here, you are like Pete Fonda, a girl easy-rider. The women's lib will love it.

SUE: But it's the same scene.

BOB: Almost the same. See, this scene was such a rave in the *Rooster* that we thought that we'd use it again. Once you've got a good thing going, why let it go? And it's not exactly the same scene. Similar, yes, but not the same.

SUE: What's the difference? I get to wear an even shorter skirt?

BOB: Yes, you do.

SUE: If they get any shorter, my pubic hair will be exposed.

BOB: Ever heard of a bikini wax?

SUE: Bob, I have an awful headache, let's talk about this at another time, in another life.

BOB: That's exactly how the skirt is designed for this scene, out of this world. It's almost like a maxi belt.

SUE: Go hang yourself with it.

BOB: Take an aspirin. Have another drink. Let me tell you about this scene.

SUE: I've already taken six aspirins, I've had four drinks, and I've made the same movie about a dozen times. Nothing seems to help.

BOB: Listen to this scene with you and a Harley Davidson.

SUE (*not paying any attention*): Who is he?

BOB: What?

SUE: Who is this David Harley character?

BOB: It's a Harley Davidson.

SUE: Okay. Who the hell is he?

BOB: Sue, it's a motorcycle.

SUE: Are you out of your mind? You expect me to get on a motorbike?

BOB: Listen to this.

SUE: No, you listen. The insurance company will never permit me to get on a motorcycle. You ought to know that much. What's the matter with you?

BOB: Of course we are going to use a stunt man, a double.

SUE: Then read the bloody scene to him. Hey, why should it be a stunt *man*? Why not a stunt woman? What happened to the women's lib, eh?

BOB: Whatever you say, dear.

SUE: Good. Then read the scene to him.

BOB: To whom?

SUE: To the stunt man. What was his name? David Harley? Or whoever it was.

BOB: Whomever.

SUE: Whatever.

BOB: Just picture this. We have a top shot of the motorbike. It has a long, one-piece, white, kid-leather seat. You come at it in sloooow motion. We cut to a low angle shot as you mount it. A close up of your tanned thighs against the white leather, another close up of your wrist as you grip the handle. A quick cut to your leg as you go for the kick. And then, a shot of your behind as the bike comes to life and vibrates the hell out of your sweet ass. Another close up of your hand around the handle as you get a firmer grip, and zoom! You take off. Okay, now just go ahead and tell me Sue, that this scene is not the ultimate in ecstasy. This sequence is going to make motion picture history. Just like *Easy Rider*, years from now, kids all over the world, taking film history classes, will study this scene and analyze its symbolism.

SUE: What symbolism?

BOB: Hell, I don't know. It's not for us to worry about; it's for the critics to figure out.

SUE: I've seen this sort of flesh peddling in every motorcycle movie.

BOB: Not in *Easy Rider*.

SUE (*she has had enough of Easy Rider*): What's the big deal about that movie anyway? It looked like a home movie by a couple of acidheads.

BOB (*obviously appalled by her comment about his all-time favorite movie*): Sue, you have a bad headache. That's why you're coming down on everything. But, I have something else for you that will perk you right up.

SUE: There's nothing you can do that will perk me up. Don't even bother to make a pass at me, okay?

BOB: Oh, I wouldn't dream of it.

SUE: Why, what's that supposed to mean? Don't I turn you on? Am I not good enough for you? You pea-brain, dick head.

BOB: We are only going to shoot six scenes with you tomorrow.

SUE: Only six scenes?

BOB: Yep. Only six setups. Piece of cake, huh?

SUE: Only six setups in an entire day? Bob, aren't we running behind schedule on this picture?

BOB: Only a couple of days. We'll catch up. You see, we've got this new girl in some of the scenes with you, and she's still uneasy. She needs time.

SUE: Better not give her too much time, otherwise she might figure out what a phony you are.

BOB: You didn't talk like this when I put you in your first picture. In fact, as I recall, you didn't talk much at all. I gave you your first speaking part.

SUE: I couldn't talk because, half the time, I had your...oh, I don't even want to think about that anymore. Here, pour me another four fingers of scotch. You talked me into it.

(BOB takes her glass and walks back to the bar. He pours her drink and brings it back to her.)

BOB (*handing her the glass*): You're welcome.

SUE: Thanks Bob... you're not so bad. It must be the headache... Only six close-ups tomorrow.

BOB: Six scenes, not close ups.

SUE: Bob, what have you told this new girl anyway? That I am over the hill and she will soon replace me? Well, you'd better tell her that she's got a long way to go. She almost ran into a chair the other day. I think she's got a drinking problem. And you know what, half the time, I can't even understand what she's mumbling

BOB: Honey, that's from the training at the Actor's Studio. Elia Kazan and Stravinsky.

SUE: That was Stanislavsky who introduced the method acting, you idiot.

BOB: That's what I said, the method acting.

SUE: Method, my ass, I miss my cues.

BOB: Come on, Sue, the kid's got talent.

SUE: Talent! Has she now? I must say that I have failed to notice any, but maybe, one has to penetrate deeper to feel her real talent. Knowing you, I assume, you have. Come on Bob, you can tell me, is she that good in the sack?

BOB: Don't blame this one on me. Our beloved producer, Joe Cohen, discovered her. However, I do hear that he has big plans for her.

SUE: I can't imagine what he sees in her.

BOB: There is a lot to see. I mean, she's no two-bags date.

SUE (*takes another couple of pills*): I don't know how many bags you have to put on her head and how many on yours, but I can tell you this much - she can't act her way out of a bag that's got holes on both sides.

BOB: Baby, give the girl some credit. She's killing herself just trying to imitate you, your style of acting, especially, your walk.

SUE: I thought you said that she was a method actor. Anyway, why are you wasting your time on imitation when you already have the real thing? And I'm supposed to be the star of the picture, not that two-bit ass-peddler. Why do you keep shooting her close ups?

BOB: Joe Cohen thinks that she is developed at the right places. They are good for the box-office.

SUE (*with her back to the audience, she opens her gown to refresh his memory*): What's wrong with my merchandise? These are the assets that sold the last six pictures.

BOB: These are the best, babe. But, more never hurts.

SUE (*covering herself angrily*): Don't be ridiculous. You can't possibly want more than what I've got. No one can.

(JAMES *appears at the door. He is dressed in a black tuxedo, a dress shirt, a bow tie, and a hat. His black shoes display a blinding shine.*)

JAMES (*clears his throat politely, takes two steps forward*): Madam, Mr. Joseph Cohen, Mr. Samuel Levi, and Miss Kim Clover are here.

SUE: Oh, please show them in, and, James, make sure we have enough glasses and things.

JAMES: Yes, *any*-thing you say, madam. Very good madam. (*He bows, and walks to the bar. He arranges some glasses and produces a bottle of 18-year old scotch from under the counter and places it next to an ice bucket. Walking backwards, he goes out the door.*)

BOB: Where did you find him? In a London pub?

SUE: No, I spotted him in an amateur theater company in Dumas, Texas.

BOB: He's from Texas?

SUE: Oklahoma, I think.

BOB: What a performer. Can we put him in a movie?

SUE: No. His services are strictly reserved for me. And he is totally devoted to me, in case you haven't noticed.

BOB: You're not...

SUE: Get your mind out of the gutter. He's like a father.

BOB: I thought you never knew your father.

SUE: True, but he is old enough to be my father.

BOB: That never stopped you before.

*(JOE COHEN, SAM LEVI, and KIM CLOVER enter. SAM and JOE are middle-aged men. SAM is the handsomer looking of the two. KIM is an attractive woman who is dressed in a very low-cut evening dress. Hellos are adlibbed. SUE throws a sly smile in the general direction of KIM and totally ignores SAM who is accustomed to being over-looked by his clients. He proceeds to the bar and helps himself to a handful of nuts. KIM follows him. SAM offers her a bowl of green olives. SUE coasts over to JOE, kisses him passionately, and wraps herself around him. JOE gloats in her display of affection.)*

JOE: Hi, Baby-Sue, how have you been? Sam, just look at her! Isn't she the most beautiful woman in the world?

SAM and BOB (*simultaneously*): Oh yes, absolutely.

*(Behind the bar, KIM kicks SAM in the ribs. SAM makes a gesture with his hand indicating that she should ignore their agreeing to Joe's comment. KIM sits behind the bar and proceeds to help herself to nuts, olives, cherries, and little cheese cubes. She finds a bottle of champagne and begins to work on it mercilessly. She shows a total lack of interest in the conversation of the others.)*

SUE: Joe, you're a darling, but, he (*pointing at BOB*) doesn't think that I am good enough.

JOE: Not enough! Baby, you're too much. What's all this about, Bob?

BOB: I... I didn't say anything, I ...me ...I, oh...

JOE: If you've got something to say, say it. Don't babble.

BOB: Yes, sir.

JOE: You got something to say?

BOB: No sir.

JOE: Then, shut up and

BOB: Yes sir.

JOE: And...

BOB: Yes, sir.

JOE: Don't say yes till I'm done talking.

BOB: No, sir, I mean, yes sir.

JOE: Now, my sweet child, what seems to be the problem?

SUE: Bob keeps shooting close ups of his new girlfriend. Her (*SUE points at KIM with a killer smile.*)

SAM: Kim has an important part in the picture.

JOE: I'm not talking to you, Sam, my good friend. As her agent, you got her a good part. You've done your job.

SAM: Joe, Sue and Bob are also my clients.

JOE: Well, all your clients are working. Terrific. Count your blessings, and your commission. But now, let me produce the picture. Cause if this picture does not make money, some of your clients will have no work. And that, my friend, will have serious consequences for your agency. *Comprende?*

SAM: Of course, Joe. I would not dream of telling you how to do your job.

KIM (*whispering directly to the audience*): No one in this town would.

JOE: Bob, I think you need to have your eyes examined, better still, have your head examined. Why, you dim-witted, nincompoop, you take one good look at her. Sue, come over here, and stand by this light. (SUE *moves closer to a floor lamp to receive the fullest benefit of backlighting. We can see the outline of her full figure through her robe.*) Now, see this. Look at this wild, honey-blond hair. Look into these blue eyes - see what delightful temptations they promise? Look at these lips - fire! And look some more...do you know why cinemascope was invented? I'll tell you why. It was invented to photograph these magnificent boobs, I mean, the body of Sue Denton.

SUE: J.C., you sweet talker, you.

JOE: And listen to her voice. This is the voice that makes men lose control in the movie theaters all over the world.

SAM: Joe is one hundred and ten percent right, Bob.

(KIM *kicks SAM again.*)

JOE: Why, you should feel privileged to be directing a Sue Denton picture.

Have you been drinking? What's that you're drinking?

BOB (*stretching his arm with the drink towards JOE*): It's a combination of ... it's called ... "horse's neck".

JOE: Figures. It completes the picture.

BOB: Yes, sir.

JOE: I have a question for you.

BOB: Yes, sir?

JOE: Whose idea was it to shoot this picture in wide screen?

BOB: It was my idea.

JOE: I thought so. You blockhead, you've cost me an extra million and a half.

BOB: How did I do that? I brought the last picture under budget and completed it on time.

JOE: Do you have any idea what's happening out there in the real world? In the market place?

SAM: What, the stock market crashed?

JOE: Nobody's going to the movies anymore. Last year, movies made more money through the DVD and video rentals than at the box-office.

BOB: I don't understand. Our movies are sold and rented in these formats.

JOE: Exactly. What good is a wide screen movie if it's going to end up on that, (*pointing towards a TV set*) that *thing* over there? Sue, I'm surprised that you have one in your house! Throw it out.

SUE: Joe, darling, you gave me that set last year for my birthday.

JOE: Get rid of it. Put it someplace else. Put it in the basement. Television is the worst thing that's happened to movies. In fact, this is the worst thing that has happened to humanity.

KIM (*to the audience*): I thought, *he* was the worst thing that happened to humanity.

(JAMES *enters. He walks to the bar and adds more peanuts and olives to the nearly empty plates. He pours more champagne in several glasses, and hands the half empty bottle to KIM.*)

KIM: May I have some black olives, please?

JAMES: *Any-thing* you like, Miss Clover.

(JAMES produces a bottle of olives from his pocket and places it in front of KIM).

JOE (*turning to BOB*): Here's what I want you to do. You listening? Scrap everything that we've shot so far, and start all over again.

BOB: You mean, start all over again?

JOE: Sam, isn't that what I just said?

SAM: That's what you just said.

JOE: I'll say it again. Scrap everything and start over. And there's more. Are you paying attention?

BOB: Yes, sir.

JOE: I don't want Sue to be wasting any more time on that picture.

SUE: What, you don't want me in the picture! Am I fired? Is that it?

JOE: No, baby. I'm taking you out of that movie so that you can do more meaningful pictures. I have some great plans for you.

BOB: But for now, she's out of this picture. Right? ... Who's going to replace her?

JOE: Kim will replace her.

*(This bit of news shocks every one. KIM falls off her chair. JAMES picks up a glass of champagne and downs it in one gulp. SAM helps KIM back to her chair.)*

KIM: Did I hear what I heard, or is it the champagne? I haven't eaten all day. This stuff goes directly to my head.

JOE: Be quiet, Kim. I am making an expensive decision here. A million and a half dollars' worth. Bob, make sure you understand this. We reshoot the picture just as it is scripted. Only two changes. Shot it in regular format, and put Kim in Sue's part. Everything else remains the same.

BOB (*as if afraid to ask*): Who is going to play Kim's part?

JOE (*irritated*): Find some other dumb blond.

KIM: Thanks guys. You're all sweethearts.

JOE: Don't get me wrong, Kim.

SAM: I have just the girl for you.

JOE (*ignoring SAM*): I'm sure you do. Kim, look at the break I'm giving you.

Look at the chance I'm taking on you. You should show some gratitude.

KIM: Show gratitude, huh? That's all I've been doing ever since I came to this town. Hey, now that I'm playing the lead, will I get more money?

SAM: Let me handle that, remember, I still represent you.

KIM: How can I ever forget?

SAM: Leave it all to me. I'll get you more money, I will. Would I lie?

JOE: Of course he would. He's an agent. He won't get a dime more than I want to give you. Kim, I'll take care of you. Don't I always take care of all my children?

SAM: What is this? Cut down, Sam, day.

JOE: You're lucky that it isn't, but don't tempt me.

SAM (*directing his anger and frustration at BOB*): Bob, with all this rescheduling and planning, don't you have a whole lot of work to do?

BOB (*finishing his drink hurriedly*): Yes, I do. I best be going. I'll see you around, Sue. Bye, Kim.

(JAMES *walks with BOB to the door. Both exit.*)

SUE: Joe, you've come to little Sue's house! What have I done to deserve this honor? You didn't have to come here to tell me that I was fired from the picture. Are you trying to let me down easy?

JOE: It's nothing like that.

SUE: You did come here to tell me that I was fired. And in her presence.

KIM: Honey, I had no idea. I swear.

JOE: I know that you're upset, but, I've got a big, fat, surprise for you.

SAM: Yes, Sue, he really has a big-fat-surprise for you.

SUE: I can hardly wait.

*(JAMES appears at the door. He is holding a bouquet of flowers.)*

JAMES: These just arrived for you, Miss Denton.

SAM: They are here! Perfect timing. Here, let me take these. Sue, these are from Joe. Where would you like me to put these?

*(SUE gives him a long, dirty look. She did not have to spell out where he could put them.)*

SUE (*angrily*): This is the fucking big-fat-surprise?

JOE: James, please take those flowers away from Sam and put them in a vase or something. Sue, I have brought you something very special.

SAM: We've brought you a contract. A five-picture deal. It's everything that you've ever dreamed of.

SUE: Since when do you know about my dreams?

SAM: I've worked very hard to put this contract together.

JOE: That's an agent talking for you. His lawyers worked with my lawyers. He's done nothing. Pay him no attention, his only concern is his ten percent.

SAM: Why, Joe, the money never crossed my mind.

KIM: Not much else has either.

SAM: What do you take me for?

JOE: You're an actor.

SAM: An actor! He just insulted me.

KIM: No, I think he insulted the actors.

JOE: Okay, okay. I'll take out a full-page ad in the *Variety* and apologize to the Actors' Guild.

KIM: We were just kidding. You don't have to do a thing for me, for us.

Right, Sue?

SUE: Yeah, whatever. So what's this new contract all about?

JOE: Sue, I think that you've reached a stage in your career where you need special handling.

SAM: You never said anything about special handling.

JOE: All in good time. As I was saying, you need a special kind of attention and a new contract. So, I've put one together for you.

SAM: I had something to do with it too. (*SAM is discouraged by JOE's look*)  
Okay, you go ahead and tell her the rest.

JOE: A million a picture, plus five percent of the net.

KIM: If there ever is any.

JOE: This is for five pictures, for the next five years. All with my company.  
And I'll take care of the loan-outs.

(*SAM walks to KIM and sits beside her. He pours himself a drink.*)

KIM: I will still respect you in the morning.

JOE: What do you say, Sue?

SUE: Have I ever said 'no' to you?

JOE: Don't you ever think of it. From now on, we're talking about real pictures. The stuff the Europeans call, films. No more of that trash that you've been doing.

KIM: I'll be doing that trash from now on.

JOE (*to KIM*): Yes, dear, (*turning to SUE*) As I was saying, you'll be doing pictures with real actors, written by real writers, and directed by big-time directors - not dumb onions like that, what's his name....I'm talking about directors like Vittorio de Sica and Federico Fellini.

KIM: They're both dead.

JOE: No kidding!

SAM: Fellini is dead? And de Sica too?

KIM: Yes. Where have you been?

SAM: Here, in Hollywood.

JOE: That's a damn shame.

SAM: Hey, wait a minute. I have this young director, a client of mine. A film-school kid. He won a prize at some film festival in a village in Utah. His name is Victor Sanchez. I could change his name to Vittorio De Sica. Who would know! Is that brilliant, or is that brilliant?

JOE: Right, who'd know? We could have a movie directed by Vittorio De Sica.

SUE: How can I thank you? I know that it sounds like a cliché, but I don't know what to say.

JOE: Don't say anything. You're an actor; you only say something when you're given a script and dialog. So, for now, just listen. I'm going to give you top billing, and we are going to say that you get to pick your scripts, your directors, and your leading men.

SUE: Mmmm. I'd like that.

JOE: That's what we will say to the press. But, you'll do what I tell you to do and say what I tell you to say. Sue, I'll make you the biggest sex goddess that ever was.

SUE: Is it really happening? (*SUE walks to JOE and hugs him*) I'm not dreaming am I? Am I going to wake up in the morning and find that you were never here? And none of this happened.

JOE: I might still be here when you wake up.

KIM: And still nothing would have happened.

SAM: It is a great contract. Julia Roberts never had a contract like this. And the money...

JOE: Don't you ever think of anything else but money?

SAM: Oh, I used to think about other things like success, fame, stardom, and respect...

KIM: But he has learned that he can buy all those with money.

SAM: I was trained in the theater, that's what I wanted to do. I just got sidetracked.

KIM: Well, Sam, you've turned a lot of people into famous stars, and some of them must attribute their success to you. And if you could keep your hands to yourself, they might even respect you.

JOE: Sam, where did you find her?

SAM: The usual stuff. She knew someone, who knew someone, who knew me.

SUE: Yeah, it's not what you know; it's whom you know.

KIM: No, honey, that's not how it goes. It goes like this: it's not what you can do, it's who you do it to.

JOE: Come on, you know that it's not true. You've got to have talent to succeed in this business.

SAM: That, my friend, is debatable. This town is a living proof of the fact that success and talent are not connected. It's all about power. It's all about money.

KIM: And all this time, I thought it was about sex.

SAM: It is, but if you've got money and power, you can have more sex than Woody Allen ever dreamed of.

SUE: Money is not important, Sam. That's not why we're in this business. That's not why J.C. makes movies. He does it because he's an artist.

KIM: This is getting better every minute.

JOE: Money has its value.

SUE: I know, one needs it for the parking meters, and to pay taxes.... But there are things more important than money, things like art and inner satisfaction.

SAM and JOE (*simultaneously*): Right.

KIM: What would they know about it?

SUE: I think we should all drink to that. James!

(JAMES *appears at the door instantly.*)

JAMES: Yes, Miss Denton.

SUE: James, get Mr. Joe Cohen a drink, get me a drink, get everybody a drink. And you have one too.

JAMES: *Any-thing you wish, Miss Denton. (He begins pouring champagne.)*

JOE: Now, you leave everything to me. With your looks, and my planning, we'll have this town by its short hair. I'll show'em that Joe Cohen can still make quality pictures. I'll show'em that I too can give this town new stars, new directors, and new writers. I'll show them. Sue, I'm talking European film festivals, I'm talking critics' awards, and I'm talking about the Big One! I've done it before, I can do it again. I'll get my studio back, yet. You'll see. (JOE *becomes overexcited during this speech. With one hand on his heart, he sits on the sofa. He is experiencing difficulty breathing. JAMES rushes to him and gives him a drink.*)

SUE: You take it easy, baby. And take care of yourself. We'll all be lost without you.

JOE: Nothing's gonna happen to me. Here's, to your success.

SAM: To the new contract.

SUE (*turning to KIM*): To a new leading lady. A toast to the movies - a business for the artists... And to inner satisfaction.

JOE: Yes, to art and satisfaction.

SAM: Sue, I've heard from a very reliable source at Disney that they want you for a picture.

SUE: Disney wants me! I take that as an insult.

JOE: I know about that project. I said: I'll take care of the loan outs.

SUE: You won't lend me to Disney, would you? I don't want to do a children's movie, or a picture with a bunch of animals. Even as a child, I hated going to the zoo.

JOE: Glen Close is doing a Disney picture.

SUE: Isn't she, sort of, over the hill?

KIM: It all depends on which side of the hill you're standing on.

SAM: I was thinking...

SUE: Really! He is full of surprises today.

SAM: I was serious.

SUE: Don't be, Sam, dear, you'll hurt yourself.

JOE: She's hot tonight. Sue, baby, I like this gown. Tell you what I'll do. I'll get a designer to create a line for you.

SUE: You mean like a line of clothes, dresses, and things like that?

KIM: No, he means a line of potential lovers.

JOE: Yeah, clothes, shoes, sunglasses, even a perfume.

SUE: Jeez, I don't know anything about those things.

JOE: Do you think that Sophia Loren is an eye doctor on the side? Or Liz Taylor has a Ph.D. in biochemistry. Other people do the work. They just put your name on it.

KIM: He would know all about that.

*(SUE looks at SAM. He nods encouragingly.)*

SUE: J.C.. I know that you're a great admirer of art and beauty; you have to take a look at this year's German.

JOE *(in near panic)*: What Germans? Where?

SUE: The 600 SL. It is a work of art, an absolute gem .... It's so automatic that all you have to do is give it the address and it takes you there.

JOE: Well, then, you must have one. It will make a perfect gift, won't it?

SAM: Oh, absolutely, I think it's a great idea.

JOE: I'm glad you agree. It's settled then.

SUE: I couldn't accept such an expensive gift.

JOE: Nonsense. It's a part of your new image, and besides, it's tax deductible.

SUE: But it costs...

JOE: Don't even mention the cost. Remember, do what I say, and say what I say. No talking back, no arguments. You have no idea about the value of the free press that a gift like that will generate. More expensive the gift, bigger the press.

SUE: You're so smart.

JOE: What's your favorite color?

SUE (*without any hesitation*): Auburn. The color of my hair.

JOE: But your hair is...

SUE: J.C.! The real color. Have you forgotten?

JOE: It's been a long time, baby. I think I need a refresher. (*Turning to SAM*)  
Sam, remind me.

SAM: First thing in the morning, I'll remind you.

JOE: I want you in my office tomorrow to sign the contract. You know, we're almost like partners now.

SUE: Where is it?

JOE: Where is what?

SUE: The contract.

SAM: Oh, I have it, right here. (*Takes out a thick envelope from his pocket and extends his hand towards JOE. SUE grabs the envelope quickly.*)

SUE: Why not sign it now.

SAM: Yes, why not now?

JOE: If we do it in front of the media, we'll get a lot of free press.

SUE: I say, go ahead and sign it now. Tomorrow, we can fake it for the press. Those idiots will never know.

JOE: Fake it?

KIM: She's an expert!

SAM: Yes, get it over with.

SUE: *(taking out a pen from her pocket)* Here, Joey, dear.

*(JOE signs the contract, and gives the contract and the pen back to SUE.)*

JOE: I still want you in the office for the conference.

SUE: What time tomorrow?

JOE: We'll let you know. Keep tomorrow open.

SUE: Always open for you, J.C. ...

JOE: Smart girl. *(JOE takes her glass and pours out the drink in a flowerpot.)*  
Now, get some rest. I want you to look your best for the press conference.

SUE: Leaving already?

JOE: Yes. Sam and I have work at the office. *(Starting for the door)* We have to flirt and sway and stir the media for the conference.

SUE: Thank you again. J.C. You are a wonderful man. I have a headache and it's been bothering me all day. Maybe sleep will help some.

KIM: I'm really very happy for you. I know that we're going to be great friends.

SUE: Thanks.

KIM: Anytime you want anything. Can count on me.

JOE *(looking around the living room and pointing at the photographs of the movie stars)*: Do something about this place. Take down these photographs of dead people. Put up some of your own pictures. Get a decorator. Sam?

SAM: I'll remind you, first thing in the morning.

JOE: You shouldn't be living among the dead. It's depressing. No wonder you have headaches.

SUE: But these people aren't really dead. They'll never die. Not as long as their movies are around.

JOE: Sure, sure. But add some life around here. Remind me to send a dozen auburn roses. Do they make auburn roses?

SAM: Sure, they'll make 'em any color you like.

SUE (*lowering her voice to a whisper*): My headache isn't that bad. Won't you stay a little longer? What do you say?

JOE: In the interest of our business and our art, I'd say: Partner, you're a working girl. First, give us your best close-ups tomorrow. Afterwards, we play.

SUE: Okay, chief. (*SUE kisses JOE, hugs KIM, and waves good-night to SAM.*)

(*JOE, KIM, and SAM exit. SUE returns to the sofa as she hums a few bars of some unrecognizable tune. She picks up the script and starts to read. As she reads she becomes increasingly disgusted with the script.*)

SUE: What? They got to be out of their minds! I'd never do that on camera. No way. What trash! (*She tosses the script out of the window, gets up, and goes into her bedroom.*)

*Lights Fade Out.*

END SCENE I

End of ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE I

TWENTY MINUTES LATER

*(A YOUNG MAN in his late twenties is trying to enter the apartment through the window. The man is clumsy in his movements. His feet are stuck in the window frame and the rest of his body is on the floor. In one hand, he is holding the script that SUE had thrown away; with his other hand he is trying to untangle his feet. The index finger of his hand with the script is stuck in the window. SUE appears at the bedroom door. She has changed into a tiny, see-through, negligee. She is standing against a light. We see the outline of her figure. A black velvet mask covers her eyes. Consequently, she cannot see a thing.)*

SUE: What's going on here? *(SUE uncovers her eyes.)* Who are you? And what are you doing with your finger stuck in my window?

*(THE MAN finally manages to get free. He looks at SUE and is dazed by her beauty. Her state of undress leaves him speechless.)*

MAN: This is a vision!

SUE: Huh, a television, did you say?

MAN: You are Miss Susan Denton, the movie star?

SUE: No. I'm Rosie the riveter.

MAN: NO!

SUE: Of course, I am Susan Denton.

MAN: Oh, praise the Lord. I nearly broke my neck trying to get to you.

*(THE MAN gets up slowly. He tries to take a step. He limps as he tries walking. He is obviously in pain. He bends down and touches his ankle. He stumbles and collapses by the window.)*

MAN *(holding his leg)*: I think it is broken.

SUE: You must be a real dumb turkey. If you broke your neck, you're rubbing the wrong end.

(THE MAN *stretches his hand towards her.*)

MAN: I am very pleased to meet you. Miss Susan Denton. My name is Azrael.

(SUE *takes his hand.*)

SUE: What kind of a name is that? Foreign?

MAN: You might say that. It's sort of a biblical name.

SUE: And where did you come from?

MAN: I've come from a place far, far away, and yet so close.

SUE: I know. Wait, don't tell me. Ronald Coleman in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

MAN: No, no. That was: It's a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.

SUE: Give it a rest; you've gone far enough. Now get out, or I'll have you arrested.

MAN: Miss Denton, I have some very important business with you.

SUE: Talk to my agent.

MAN: Not that kind of business.

SUE: Exactly what I thought. OUT. BE GONE!

MAN: Please, hear me out first.

SUE: The answer is, no. Read my lips - N.O., no. Now, be missing or I'll have you thrown out - right through that window, the way you came in.

MAN: Miss Denton, for crying out loud, listen to me.

SUE: I don't have to. The answer is, no. I haven't any intentions of getting married. Mind you, there's nothing personal here. I'm sure that underneath all this, you're a very sweet person. And someday, you'll

make some lucky girl very happy. But I have no interest in getting married, at least not in the near future, especially not tonight. I have a headache. Will you please get up and leave?

MAN: I'm not here to propose marriage to you.

SUE: Oh, just a one-night stand?

MAN: Miss Denton. I'm not that kind of a man.

SUE: Excuse me. So, would you take an autographed picture?

*(She finds a small picture. Signs her name across the left bottom, hands it to him. He takes it, looks at it, and carefully, pockets it, but makes no move towards leaving.)*

SUE: Well, what now?

MAN: Miss Denton, you need to listen to me.

*(SUE runs her hand through her hair and comes up with a couple of strands. She offers those to him.)*

SUE: Here, take these. Happy now?

MAN: Not those either.

SUE: What? Not these hair? What sort of a degenerate are you?

MAN: No. no, don't get me wrong. These are precious. I shall never part with these. Ever since I saw Gary Cooper and Walter Brennan in *The Westerner*, I had wanted a lock of Miss Lillie Langtree's hair, ... well, any movie star. This *(indicating to her hair strands)* is a great stroke of luck because you are much prettier than Ava Gardner.

SUE: Right movie, but wrong actress

MAN: Not Ava Gardner? Wrong actress, huh. *(Carefully places the hair in his wallet.)* Thank you very much. This is most generous of you. Wait till the

boys upstairs see all these goodies . Yum, yum. But, Miss Denton, you must listen to me. PLEASE. *(He gets up and manages to stay up.)*

SUE: What do you want now?

MAN: You. Miss Denton, I want you.

SUE: You take one step towards me and you're dead meat.

MAN *(putting his hands up in the air)*: I don't have to lay a finger on you.

*(SUE considers the implications of his suggestion.)*

SUE: You don't look like a pervert. But you are, I can tell. I've dealt with guys like you all my life. *(A new idea hits her.)* I get it now. You broke into my house through the window.

MAN: But your window was open.

SUE: You are a thief! Tough luck, kid, I happen to be home. Now, beat it.

MAN: Do I look like a burglar?

SUE: Yes. Do you have a weapon? *(The man reacts in protest.)* I mean, are you armed?

MAN: I must insist that I am a decent and a respectable citizen of ...

SUE: Decent and respectable people don't break into other people's houses through windows.

MAN: How do they get in? Through the ceiling?

SUE: They use front doors.

MAN: Your door was locked.

SUE: So it was. *(Turning to the door)* James!

*(JAMES appears at the door.)*

SUE: James, open the front door and let this character out.

*(JAMES looks around the room. He is unable to see THE MAN. JAMES is obviously bewildered.)*

MAN: He can't see me.

SUE: Why not?

MAN: Only you can see me.

SUE: What?

JAMES: What did you say, Miss Denton?

SUE: Hah! James, I said, open the door, and throw this character out.

JAMES: Open the door? Throw "this character" out?

SUE: Yes. Throw him out. At once.

JAMES *(not even looking in the direction of THE MAN)*: At once, Miss Denton.

*(JAMES exits. A moment later, a heavy door is unlocked and opened in the distance.)*

JAMES *(off stage)*: The door's open. madam.

SUE: Now, move it. Action!

MAN: Wait a second, we're not shooting a picture here. Go easy on that heavy, prime time, TV dialogue.

SUE: Look, I want to get back to bed. I have a three-dimensional headache.

MAN: All right, let's go.

SUE: Us? Did I hear you say, us? Where do you suppose we're going?

MAN: You're coming with me.

SUE: Boy, you're something else. You've got to be crazy to think that I'd go anywhere with you.

MAN: You are coming with me.

SUE: I'm coming with you? What kind of a freak are you?

MAN: There's absolutely no need to make such unkind remarks.

SUE: I don't believe this. Are you going to leave or does poor James have to drag you out?

MAN: I can't leave here alone. You've got to come with me. You just have to. Read my lips: You're coming with me.

SUE: What are you talking about? Who are you anyway?

MAN: I-am-your-death-Miss-Denton-and-I-have-come-to-take-you.

SUE: I say, you are a good actor.

MAN: I'm dead serious. No pun intended, but you're time is up, and you're coming with me tonight. How's your headache?

SUE: It's killing me.

MAN: I know.

SUE: What? Hey, be a sport, it's almost midnight, and I have a very early call. I have to be at the studio at seven in the morning. Give me a break, will you?

MAN (*knows that she is lying*): You don't have a call tomorrow.

SUE (*bewildered*): What?

MAN: It's tonight.

SUE: How's that?

MAN: Tonight. Your call is for tonight. I'm going to take you to the Studio of the Ultimate Truth.

SUE (*gaining back some self-confidence*): That's ridiculous. I have six close ups in the morning. I have a press conference in the afternoon, and I have to sign my new contract tomorrow evening. It's a five- year, five- picture contract. I can't go anywhere tonight or tomorrow. Oh, what am I talking about? Why am I even telling you all this?

MAN: You don't have a tomorrow.

SUE: Are you trying to be funny? I'm not laughing.

MAN: Death is not a laughing matter. Get ready. Are you ready?

SUE: Shut up.

MAN: Now that is funny! You telling me to shut up. Actually, it's time for you to shut up. You didn't answer my question.

SUE: Oh? What was the question?

MAN: Are you prepared?

SUE: (*giving him a very hard look*): You are my death. Or should I say, my angel of death? Just look at your face.

MAN: What's wrong with my face? Had I not been up there, me too could have become a star.