

Forsaken

By Vin Morreale, Jr.

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CHARACTERS

<i>The Boss</i>	<i>45, handsome, persuasive, forceful</i>
<i>The Guest</i>	<i>33, lost and confused</i>
<i>Lucille</i>	<i>28, attractive, but naive</i>
<i>Angus</i>	<i>35, a large, angry man</i>
<i>Priscilla</i>	<i>42, Sophisticated, condescending</i>
<i>Gregory</i>	<i>60, Whiny and spiteful</i>
<i>Sloan</i>	<i>20, an overweight slacker</i>

SET

A darkly elegant office

Forsaken

AT RISE: Lights come up on a richly appointed office. Dark wood and antique furniture reek of old money and power. Stage Left is dominated by an elegant, high-backed chair, elevated to give the owner a sense of power. Before it sprawls a large mahogany desk, its surface polished to mirror brightness and nothing on it, except an ancient human skull. UpStage Center rests an antique divan, flanked by modern bar stools. Above these are mounted a pair of framed motivational posters. One reads: "SUCCESS BY ANY MEANS POSSIBLE!" The other shouts: "BOUNDLESS AMBITION IS NO SIN!" Beside the posters are two small windows that glow with a red flickering light. Stage Right holds the only door in or out of the room. Downstage Right stands an old-fashioned globe of the world. Center stage bears only a primitive wooden chair, far less comfortable and ornate than the rest of the furnishings. In fact, the front legs of the chair appear to have been cut slightly, so that it tilts uncomfortably toward the desk it faces.

The song "Backstabbers" by the O-Jays plays in the background. The Stage Right door swings open and PRISCILLA strides into the room, followed by GREGORY and LUCILLE. Priscilla is fit, middle-aged, and very sophisticated in her well-tailored business suit. She carries herself with whirlwind confidence and disdain for her companions. Gregory is equally well-groomed but afflicted with chronic complaints and a perpetual sneer of distaste. Lucille, by contrast, dresses for effect, not elegance or efficiency. She is 28, extremely curvaceous and very attractive, with a feline sensuality to her movements. Everything about her suggests a woman accustomed to winning whatever she wants from a man. Throughout the following, Gregory and Priscilla will toss poorly disguised looks of hatred her way, but Lucille seems naive to the point of oblivious.

PRISCILLA. Remember now. The Boss wants everything perfect. No mistakes. Nothing out of place.

(Priscilla paces back and forth, as she checks items on her clipboard. Gregory plops lazily on the divan and Lucille bends over the antique globe, straining the confines of her revealing dress.)

LUCILLE. *(Primping. Worried.)* Why? Is something out of place?

PRISCILLA. I'm sure he wasn't taking about you, Lucille.

GREGORY. Although that thing you laughingly refer to as a dress would be considered out of place for anything but a Halloween party at a brothel...if you ask me.

PRISCILLA. No one is asking you, Gregory.

LUCILLE. What's wrong with my dress?

GREGORY. Let's just say...there is simply too much *you* in it, if you know what I mean. *(Under his breath.)* And I'm fairly confident you don't.

LUCILLE. Are you saying I'm dumb or something?

GREGORY. Or something.

PRISCILLA. Let's focus, people! The Boss has been waiting for this day a long time. And I will not allow you cretins to mess it up with your petty bickering.

GREGORY. I don't see what the big deal is. Ever since this new guy showed up, you act like none of us can do anything right.

PRISCILLA. You can't. I'm the only one who can make this place run. I've got the knowledge and the skills. You two are just here to amp up the annoyance factor.

GREGORY. I resent that.

PRISCILLA. Of course you do. But I notice you don't deny it. You just complicate everything with your greed and jealousy.

LUCILLE. You tell him, Priscilla.

PRISCILLA. And you're just here for decoration. The token eye candy that makes the rest of us look bad.

LUCILLE. Poor, Priscilla. You only look bad because I look so good. You know that, don't you, honey?

PRISCILLA. Remind me to hate you later. In the meantime, how is our special guest doing?

GREGORY. We cleaned him up a bit. He was pretty disgusting when he arrived here.

LUCILLE. I'll say.

PRISCILLA. It's been over thirty hours now. What has he said about...being here?

GREGORY. Not a thing. He seems to be in shock.

PRISCILLA. They all are at first.

LUCILLE. It's worse than that. He hasn't said a word to anyone. Not even me.

GREGORY. Then at least he exhibits some taste. I say that's a mark in his favor.

LUCILLE. What do you know about taste? You thought the Dark Ages was a fashion statement.

PRISCILLA. Stop it, you two! Our orders are clear. We are to make this guy comfortable at all costs. He is our number one priority.

GREGORY. I don't understand why this one deserves such special treatment.

LUCILLE. Yeah. What's the big deal?

GREGORY. We've had our share of high and mighty pass through here. They all show up with attitude, then end up groveling to the Boss in no time flat.

LUCILLE. Gosh, Gregory... I thought groveling was your specialty?

GREGORY. Tramp.

LUCILLE. You wish.

GREGORY. I wish for a lot of things. Sorry to break your heart, but you are not even in my top ten thousand. That's ten thou-sand. A ten and three little zeros behind it.

LUCILLE. There's only one little zero in this room.

PRISCILLA. Cut it out, will you?! You are both less than pond scum as far as I'm concerned!

GREGORY. Thank you for that evaluation. I must commend you on your people skills. *(Priscilla glares at him, before returning to her clipboard.)* As I said, I don't see what makes this guy worth all the extra effort.

PRISCILLA. Haven't you heard the rumors? Don't you know who he is?

GREGORY. The rumors?

PRISCILLA. You better get plugged in around here, if you ever want to make it to middle management. Everybody is talking about it.

GREGORY. You don't mean he's..?

PRISCILLA. That's right.

LUCILLE. *(In awe.)* The one that..?

PRISCILLA. *(Nods.)* Perhaps now you understand why the Boss wants us to keep him happy. This is a major coup for us. With him in our camp, the whole balance of power shifts.

LUCILLE. Wow.

GREGORY. To put it mildly.

(The door flies open and careens off the wall. In storms ANGUS, a massive, burly man with unkempt red hair and an intimidating scowl.)

ANGUS. Are you three just going to stand there?!

GREGORY. Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir!

(Gregory leaps to his feet, clearly terrified by the big man. Priscilla, by contrast, is unimpressed, while Lucille just smiles at Angus flirtatiously.)

LUCILLE. Hi, Angus.

ANGUS. Don't 'Hi' me... If the Boss catches you all staring off into space, there's going to be some serious fire and brimstone!

PRISCILLA. Cut the attitude, Angus. I have everything under control.

ANGUS. You better. Because he's on his way up right now! And he looks...

(The door bursts open wide as The Boss storms into the room like a force to be reckoned with. The others quickly clear a path for him. The STAGE LIGHTS DARKEN SLIGHTLY and take on a subtle reddish tint. His fiery eyes seem to siphon power from everyone else in the room. The Boss is dark, handsome and dynamic, dressed in an impeccably tailored suit.)

BOSS. Could someone please tell me why I am surrounded by idiots?!

ANGUS. Who you talkin' about, Boss?

BOSS. A case in point. *(To Priscilla.)* Did you get everything I asked for?

PRISCILLA. Yes, sir. *(Hands him a folder.)* Here are all the reports. New arrivals. Status. Everything in triplicate.

BOSS. And our guest? He's being well-tended?

PRISCILLA. All cleaned and comfortable. Do you want me to get him for you?

BOSS. Give him a little more time. He has a lot of adjusting to do.

LUCILLE. Is it really true, Boss?

BOSS. That's a strange question to ask of me.

LUCILLE. I mean, is he...our guest...was he..?

GREGORY. Was he the number two guy for the competition? The one we kept hearing about?

BOSS. The rumor mill is still working adequately, I see.

PRISCILLA. Knowledge is power. That's what you always say.

BOSS. Nice to know my words sink in now and then. Yes... he was the object of all the buzz and hype... The one that could have put us out of business. And suddenly, he just falls into our laps. Gets pushed actually.

ANGUS. What do you mean, Boss?

BOSS. It seems the good guys are not so good after all. They needed a scapegoat, and they chose him. Hung him out to dry. Literally.

GREGORY. So he ends up here. How delicious.

BOSS. Think of it. This one has talent. Power. Charisma. Everything we need to regain the edge. And best of all, he's vulnerable right now. Disoriented... Not like when he was on top. If we can get to him while he's still rattled by his sudden fall from grace... the whole power spectrum could shift in our favor!

PRISCILLA. But if he's all you say he is...why did they let him go? Why dump your best player?

BOSS. I haven't quite figured that out yet. Maybe he wanted to take over the family business before the big guy was ready to hand him the keys. Maybe he wasn't a team player.

GREGORY. Maybe he got greedy?

BOSS. Who knows? But I've never been one to spit on a free meal. We got him now and they don't. I'll have plenty of time to figure out their game plan after we close the deal.

LUCILLE. Do you really think he'll do it, Boss? Switch sides, just like that?

BOSS. Why not? This guy was completely innocent, and they cut him off at the knees. His own father used him for some silly game, and then turned his back when the kid needed him most. He was a boy scout, and they fed him to the wolves. (*Darkly.*) If someone treated you like that, what would you do?

(They each consider this silently and end up pleased with their conclusions.)

BOSS. The important thing is to be subtle. He's smart, but he's been knocked off-guard by what happened. So we play it easy. Seductive. Be the friends he suddenly remembers he doesn't have anymore. Fill the void, while he's still groggy. Once we gain his trust, we reel him in so gently, he'll never even know he's hooked.

(The Boss begins to chuckle.)

LUCILLE. What's so funny, Boss?

BOSS. Listen to me. "Reel him and he'll never know he's hooked." Ha! I'm a fisher of men!

(He crosses to his high-backed chair, Stage Left, and continues to laugh quietly to himself. The others share a look of bewilderment.)

LUCILLE. I don't get it..?

BOSS. An inside joke. Gotta love it...

(The door slowly swings open as SLOAN enters. Ragged and slovenly in appearance and demeanor, the teen slacker juggles a huge bucket of chicken and a box of Krispy Kreme donuts.)

SLOAN. What's going on?

BOSS. *(Almost growling.)* You're late, Sloan!

SLOAN. *(Sbrugs.)* Got hungry. *(He pulls out a chicken leg and munches on it hungrily.)* I miss anything important?

BOSS. You disgust me.

SLOAN. That's rather harsh. I mean, in the overall scope of things, punctuality is no big...

BOSS. Shut up, Sloan. *(Turning to Priscilla.)* Priscilla, you know how long I've been waiting for a break like this. *(Nods toward Sloan.)* See that this pig doesn't screw it up.

PRISCILLA. Permission to castrate, sir?

BOSS. If necessary. Angus, you and Gregory rouse our Guest and bring him down here. *(Catching himself.)* Straight here... I don't want him catching a glimpse of the rest of the operation. Not yet.

ANGUS. No problem.

GREGORY. Slyness is my specialty.

BOSS. It better be. Our guest is still confused and upset, and I prefer to keep him that way.

PRISCILLA. Consider it done, Boss.

BOSS. Priscilla, you better go with them. If our guest asks anything too specific, I want someone there who understands the concept of discretion.

ANGUS. I understand discretion, Boss!

BOSS. Yeah? Then spell it.

ANGUS. Sure. Discretion... D...I...S... uh...dis... *(Opens the door. Waves Priscilla forward.)* After you.

PRISCILLA. In so many ways.

BOSS. Priscilla...

(She turns in the doorway to face him.)

BOSS. You, of all people, know how much I want this. I'm counting on you.

PRISCILLA. *(Smiles sweetly.)* Of course you are.

(She turns and exits, followed by Angus and Gregory. The door slams shut behind them. The Boss crosses to his desk and begins to review the reports Priscilla gave him. Lucille perches on the corner of the desk, her hemline creeping higher on her crossed legs. The Boss can't help but notice, and they share a sly smile. The moment is broken by Sloan's overly loud yawn, as he plops down on the divan. The Boss looks up at Sloan, who crams a whole donut in his mouth.)

SLOAN. Wan' som'?

BOSS. You disgust me.

SLOAN. *(Swallowing.)* So you keep saying.

(A moment passes before the door opens and Priscilla enters. Behind her are Angus and Gregory holding up the GUEST, whom they half-drag into the room. The Guest is in his early thirties, though he looks pale and worn beyond his years. His legs barely hold him up and his eyes are glazed over as if drugged or weakened by some unspeakable trauma.)

BOSS. Ahhh, there you are! Welcome, my boy. Please, have a seat.

Angus and Gregory push him into the wooden chair facing the desk. The Guest is clad in an old, ill-fitting white suit, as if someone tried half-heartedly to clean him up before this meeting. His eyes scan the room, frightened and confused. Because the front legs of the rickety wooden chair have been cut shorter, he nearly tumbles out of it.)

GREGORY. Watch yourself. You still look a bit wobbly.

(The Guest tries to steady himself in this uncomfortable chair facing the Boss, who looks down on his visitor from his ornate raised high back chair; a king on his throne.)

BOSS. That's better. Comfortable?

GUEST. *(Voice raspy and weak.)* The chair... it...

BOSS. Nice, isn't it? I knew you liked real wood furniture, so I had that brought in especially for you.

GUEST. It leans...forward...

BOSS. Don't be silly. You are merely experiencing some spatial disorientation. I suggest a drink.

(The Boss opens his lower desk drawer and pulls out a fully poured glass of water. He snaps his fingers and Lucille saunters it over to the confused Guest.)

LUCILLE. Drink up. It'll clear your head.

(The Guest hesitates, then drinks.)

GUEST. Water?

BOSS. With a subtle flavor enhancement. I am, after all, known for my distinctive tastes. Drink up.

(They all watch The Guest sips his drink with a little too much eagerness. Made uncomfortable by their stares and smiles, he places the empty glass by his feet.)

BOSS. Good. Excellent! That should make you feel quite refreshed.

GUEST. Thank you.

BOSS. No trouble at all. Now then... Let me start by saying what a genuine pleasure it is to see you again.

(The Guest begins to waiver, as if he is suddenly woozier than before. He rubs his forehead, trying to escape the dizziness.)

GUEST. Again..?

BOSS. We met before. A long, long time ago, and under far different circumstances. I offered you a hand of friendship back then. You refused.

GUEST. I..I can't seem to remember...

BOSS. That's quite all right. Don't give it a second thought. I am just glad that I am now in a position to help you.

GUEST. Help me..?

(But the words seem to catch in his throat. He gasps for breath.)

BOSS. Is something wrong? You don't seem like your old self.

GUEST. ...my old self?

GREGORY. The poor boy looks confused.

LUCILLE. Dizzy

ANGUS. Dazed.

SLOAN. Disoriented.

PRISCILLA. Perhaps he isn't feeling well?

GUEST. How could I be feeling well? I was...

BOSS. Traumatized. We know all about it.

GUEST. You do?

BOSS. Yes. And I say it's a crime. You deserved better. *(To others.)* Didn't he deserve better than the way he was treated?

GREGORY. Much better...

PRISCILLA. A terrible shame...

SLOAN. No one deserves to be treated like that.

LUCILLE. But you're among friends now.

BOSS. I know you must be feeling a bit out-of-place. A little out of whack.
Not quite sure what is real and what isn't. Don't worry. That's normal.

GREGORY. Very normal.

LUCILLE. Everyone goes through it.

SLOAN. Everyone.

GUEST. What is this...this thing I am wearing?

PRISCILLA. We didn't want you to feel uncomfortable, so I took the liberty
of picking out an ensemble for you. Your old clothes were rather... Let's
just say, they were not practical anymore.

GREGORY. A bit of peasant chic, if you don't mind my saying.

*(The Guest looks curiously at his suit, as if he had never seen a jacket
before.)*

BOSS. I realize it is probably not a style you are familiar with. Late
Twentieth Century Armani, actually....but we tend to be a bit
anachronistic down here. You'll find time isn't as important or confining
around here.

GUEST. Where exactly...?

BOSS. ...is here?

GUEST. Yes...

BOSS. You are in my office. Surrounded by friends. Good friends.

GUEST. But how did I get here? The last thing I remember was...

BOSS. Don't dwell on that right now. You had a difficult experience.

GREGORY. To say the least.

PRISCILLA. And you ended up here.

LUCILLE. With us.

BOSS. A stroke of luck, actually.

GUEST. Luck?

BOSS. It gives us an opportunity to talk. Especially now that you are in a position to gain a fresher perspective on your...um...career.

GUEST. I remember, there was...

BOSS. As I said, don't dwell on any of those troubling memories. That life is over. You have new opportunities now. And we...your new-found friends...have no intentions of letting you down. Believe me.

(The Guest rubs his temples. His head clears a bit, and he recoils at the Boss' chilling smile.)

GUEST. I...I know you. Who you are. What you've done...

BOSS. *(His smile fading.)* Don't assume everything you heard back there was true. A lot of it was propaganda. Corporate libel. Calling me the enemy, just to keep you on their team. *(His eyes narrow.)* But when push came to shove, who were the real deceivers? Where was the back-up you were promised? Where were your armies of supporters?

PRISCILLA. They never showed up.

BOSS. They never showed up. No one else had the heart or the guts to take responsibility for all that corruption. You were left alone to bear the guilt of it all.

GUEST. *(Trying to remember.)* Yes... The guilt... I bore the guilt...

BOSS. Put it right out of your mind. Let's concentrate on the future. Okay?

GUEST. The future? There was a plan... I can't seem to...remember...

BOSS. Perfectly understandable. You had a long journey to get here. It can skew your reasoning. Make your thoughts turn cloudy and unreliable. Happens to everyone. Consider it jet lag.

GUEST. Jet lag?

BOSS. Crossing time zones messes with your sense of equilibrium. Distorts your thought processes.

GUEST. Your words. So strange...

(They all start to circle him, trying to unfocus his attention.)

BOSS. That's another symptom. Like the flashbacks. Terrible flashbacks. And faulty images. Can't really trust the memories.

ANGUS. Nothing seems right.

PRISCILLA. You can't always trust what you believe.

GREGORY. Or what you thought before.

LUCILLE. Or even what you feel right now.

SLOAN. Perhaps you should have another drink.

GUEST. No. No more...

BOSS. That's all right. No one is forcing you into anything. Just trust in the soothing power of my voice. You are among friends now. We want to help you through this transition period. Just trust in my voice. Trust in my voice.

GREGORY. *(Softly.)* Trust in his voice...

LUCILLE. *(Softly.)* Trust in his voice...

BOSS. *(Suddenly cold.)* Trust in my voice...

(Their hypnotic whispering nearly sedates the Guest, but at the last moment, he rouses himself. Gains back some degree of clarity.)

GUEST. Why am I here?

BOSS. *(Changing tactics.)* Why don't you ask your father that question? He's the one who abandoned you. He sent you here.

GUEST. I was not abandoned.

BOSS. Call it what you will. But as I see it, you were the one with all the potential. Hard worker. Good attitude. All the right connections.

PRISCILLA. Connections are so important.

GREGORY. I wish I had connections like yours.

LUCILLE. But what good did they do you?

BOSS. Exactly. What good? You were dedicated. Had a spotless record. Someone who genuinely loved his work. And loyal to a fault. How am I doing so far?

SLOAN. Sounds pretty accurate to me, Boss.

BOSS. All the right qualities and an eagerness to use them. So what happens? You do your job. Keep your nose clean. Win over lots of new customers, and one day... bam! They need a fall guy and you're the one left hanging. Does that sound like justice to you?

GUEST. There are... many forms of justice.

BOSS. I use that same line, whenever I pull a fast one on somebody. But you may be right. You may be right. It just seems to me that going from golden boy to scapegoat in less than a week can really start to make you question your loyalties. *(Smiles magnanimously.)* Then again, I could be wrong.

ANGUS. Don't sound like it to me, Boss.

GUEST. What is it you want of me?

BOSS. Want of you? Not a blessed thing. You're a guest here. I don't require anything of my guests.

(The others shift uncomfortably. He notices this and eyes them with tightly held rage. They shrink under his stare.)

BOSS. Sure, there are some who come to my door and fail to give me the proper respect. And for them, I can make their time here a living hell, believe me.

ANGUS. You want wailing and gnashing of teeth, he can make it happen just like that! *(Snaps his fingers, winces with the memory. Tries to avoid the Boss' evil glare.)*

BOSS. *(Smiling. To Guest.)* But I don't see that for you. You have gifts. Skills. I believe we can help each other.

GUEST. How?

BOSS. Let's try to make your stay here pleasant. Productive. You are a people person. I know how much you love being right there in the center of things. Helping out those in need. And you love sinners, which happens to be our target demo. I can put you back in the middle of it all. How does that sound?

PRISCILLA. It's a generous offer.

LUCILLE. Very generous.

GREGORY. He doesn't offer a deal like that to everybody.

BOSS. Think of it. You interact with the same crowd you did before...only now as a spokesman for our team. We simply tailor your message to reflect our new partnership. Reshape and refocus it a little. That's not asking a lot, is it?

GREGORY. It's the least you can do.

SLOAN. The very least.

PRISCILLA. And it's not like he has much choice, does he?

BOSS. Now that is an excellent point, Priscilla. You really don't have a lot of options left. You've hit rock bottom. There's nowhere to go from here. All those grandiose plans you had. Your previous connections...they're as insubstantial as yesterday morning's mist.

GUEST. I cannot work for you. You are...evil. Pure evil.

(Angus jumps up and raises a huge fist to strike the Guest.)

BOSS. Angus! He is our guest. *(Coldly.)* Despite the fact that he has shown me such disrespect. Sit down.

ANGUS. Just let me..!

BOSS. Sit down, Angus! Now!

(Angus hesitates, then sits. He continues to glare at the Guest, who begins to flinch, as if reliving the memory of some past beating.)

LUCILLE. You feeling all right, sweetie?

(He seems unable to speak, lost in a previous nightmare. The Boss tries to hide a smile at his adversary's discomfort. He looks to Lucille and nods. She rises, strolls seductively over to the Guest.)

LUCILLE. It seems to me the Boss is being really tolerant of you. He usually doesn't allow anyone to disrespect him in his place of business.

(She moves behind him. Plays with his hair. He flinches but says nothing. The physical contact seems to disorient him even more.)

PRISCILLA. Perhaps we do things a little different around here. Our tactics may not be exactly what you're used to. But evil is such a judgmental word, isn't it?

(Priscilla hovers, as Lucille begins to massage his shoulders.)

GUEST. Don't...

(He shakes off his confusion and removes Lucille's hands from his shoulders.)

GUEST. Do not touch me. It is difficult to think...to remember. But, I know... I feel... something is not right here...

PRISCILLA. *(Soothingly.)* You want to know what's not right? Doing everything that's asked of you and more. Being the best that ever was. And then being betrayed. Stabbed in the back by those you taught and trusted. That's not right.

GREGORY. Having everything you deserve snatched out from under your feet. Having it all...then having it taken away from you.

(They all begin to hover around him. Whispering, as if casting a spell.)

SLOAN. All that hard work for nothing...

PRISCILLA. No appreciation. No glory...

ANGUS. No respect...

GREGORY. No riches. No fame...

LUCILLE. No comfort. No affection...

GUEST. Get away from me! (*Stands on uncertain legs.*) What makes you think that I ever wanted riches or fame? That I expected comfort or glory?

(*The Boss subtly waves his people back to their seats.*)

GUEST. Yes, I was betrayed...but I knew that was likely to happen when I started.

BOSS. Is that what you wanted? To be a martyr? How noble.

GUEST. It wasn't nobility. It was obedience.

BOSS. Whatever the cost?

GUEST. (*Grimly.*) Whatever the cost.

BOSS. Blind obedience. I appreciate that. But why'd it have to be you?

GUEST. If...if there was a way that cup could have been taken from me... (*With shaky resolve.*) But there wasn't.

(*A long pause. The Boss stands magnanimously.*)

BOSS. Well, then. It's water under the bridge. No regrets. Forget the pain. The humiliation. The betrayal. Did I mention the pain? But, hey. What's done is done. Let someone else pick up the pieces.

GUEST. It was my duty to pay the price.

BOSS. To sacrifice everything, just so a few others could have their luxuries and their comforts and their vices. (*Glances noticeably to Lucille.*) Their sweet, sweet vices...

GUEST. It was my...

BOSS. Yeah. Pay the price. I got it. No regrets at all. And all that agony and suffering, not much of a price to pay for...um...for...

LUCILLE. For what, Boss?

BOSS. (*Pretends to be confused.*) Sorry. I seem to have forgotten. What was it exactly you accomplished?

GUEST. I...I am not sure.

BOSS. I'm not sure either. You did what you were told. Expected certain results. Something that would be worth all that struggling and sacrifice. But then the top man pulls the plug before you're finished. And all the good you've done...

GREGORY. Gone.

LUCILLE. Forgotten.

PRISCILLE. A distant memory.

BOSS. (*A condescending smile.*) Well, it was a good try, anyway.

GUEST. It may yet bear fruit.

BOSS. Who knows? I haven't seen the long-term projections. Then again, maybe you're just yesterday's news. And all that you did and all that you said won't be remembered when the sun comes up tomorrow.

GUEST. If that is God's will...

BOSS. That's the spirit! Focus on the positive! Maybe everything you worked so hard for, and everything you were forced to give up will impress a few random slobs. Get them to straighten up their act for a week or two. That's gotta be worth all the sacrifice and humiliation. (*Leans into him.*) But what exactly do *you* get out of the deal?

SLOAN. (*Snorts.*) A one-way ticket here.

BOSS. That's right. You get dumped on my doorstep like a sack of junk mail. A man with your talents... All those good intentions....But hey. It was all part of the job. No regrets. No regrets at all.

(He stands above the Guest's chair. Leans in close to his face.)

BOSS. (*With quiet malice.*) But the question is...what do you do now? Huh? Down here, you gotta pull your weight, or I can make things very unpleasant.

ANGUS. (*Sadistically.*) Very unpleasant.

BOSS. You took your shot at the big leagues and got trashed. How tragic for you. But now it's time to take the next step. A career change. Something with a few more...benefits.

(The Guest raises his eyes. Looks straight into the Boss' face with fierce resolve.)

GUEST. There is nothing...Nothing you can do to force me...

BOSS. *(Feigning surprise.)* You misunderstand me, my boy. I would never force you to do anything. I probably couldn't if I tried.

GUEST. You couldn't.

BOSS. Maybe. All I'm asking is that you think about what I said. Consider what I offered. You're still a little woozy from your trip. It's not the best time to make such an important decision. So just... think it over.

(He nods to the others and exits through the Stage Right door, followed by Sloan and Angus. As soon as he leaves, the lights become slightly BRIGHTER, a little less red. Without his imposing presence, the Guest becomes less shaky, less confused. He sighs in exhaustion.)

LUCILLE. Poor baby...

(She walks over to him. Touches a gentle hand to his face. Smiles seductively.)

LUCILLE. You should listen to him, you know. The benefits here can be real attractive...if you know what I mean.

GUEST. I know exactly what you mean.

LUCILLE. *(Feigning innocence.)* Do you?

(The Guest rises from his chair. Takes her hands in his.)

GUEST. Tell me. Why do you do this?

LUCILLE. *(Unnerved by his sincerity.)* Do...what?

GUEST. Reduce yourself to these desperate attempts at intimacy? Define yourself merely by the seductive power of your body. Judge your worth solely by the reactions of other.

LUCILLE. I...I don't...

GUEST. Poor child. You allow yourself to be minimized and debased. Yet you are worth so much more than this.

LUCILLE. What do you mean?

GUEST. You have taken the easy road. (*Turns to the others.*) All of you have. Such is the seductive danger of free will. You have chosen a path of quick pleasure and self-glorification, believing it was your own choice to make. Yet, where has that path led you? Are you any closer to fulfillment? Do you feel any satisfaction in this? Do you?

LUCILLE. (*Flirtatiously.*) I'm always satisfied.

GUEST. Are you? Do you feel satisfaction in your heart? (*He touches her heart. She recoils, then softens at his touch.*) Not physical pleasure, which is doomed to fade, but fulfillment. Lasting joy. Do you truly feel this deep inside? (*Turns to the others.*) Do any of you?

GREGORY. I say joy is overrated. Give me a nice fat bank account any day.

GUEST. The love of money is the root of all evil.

GREGORY. Oh, please. Spare me your tired, old proverbs! Money can't buy happiness. Money can't buy me love. Well, in case you haven't noticed, poverty is hardly the currency for joy either. Ask any beggar on the streets whether he would happily risk a little evil just to put food in his belly. I guarantee he'll show you a love of money that'll make you blush.

GUEST. And do you crave wealth because your stomach is empty?

GREGORY. I crave wealth because I love the feel of it. I don't just want to be rich. I want to be filthy rich. Obscenely rich. Absolutely decadent in my financial excesses. You can keep your lower-class righteousness. My theology is 'he who dies with the most toys wins.'

GUEST. That is what the cynic says while he's alive. I doubt he believes the same as he hovers at death's door.

GREGORY. Wanna bet? Besides, look at you. How easy it is for you to talk. I mean, look where you come from. You were the golden boy. The next in line. You had everything. Fame. Power. Everything!

GUEST. Would you really have wanted to trade places with me? After all I've gone through?

GREGORY. Not that crash and burn, 'sacrificial lamb' drama. That made no sense to me.

GUEST. Because you think only of yourself and what you stand to lose. Money and possessions have become your addiction. But they are cold companions. Bitter. Demanding. They whisper in your ear at night...Whisper that you'll never be safe. That you'll never have enough. That there will always be someone better off. Someone with more than you.

GREGORY. There's nobody better off! If you knew what I..!

GUEST. I know what you have. A fortune in regret. Regret that you surrounded yourself with lifeless things you believed were valuable, until you really needed them. Regret that you were so focused on the bottom line that you missed the higher calling. Regret, because you learned too late that net worth can only be calculated from the inside out. *(Sympathetically.)* The poor are not holier. Only less distracted by the glittering traps we set for ourselves. He who dies with the most toys...is still dead. Just like you, Gregory. Just like you.

(An uncomfortable silence as this registers on them. Gregory tries to show a brave face, but he is clearly shaken.)

GREGORY. Well...we all are, aren't we? Filled with regret, I mean. I know Lucille is. And Priscilla...

PRISCILLA. Leave me out of this.

GUEST. He is right. Regret is the human condition. Either it motivates you to change your ways or ensnares you in a downward spiral of guilt and self-loathing. Until nothing can make you feel you are worth anything. And no one is left to ease the pain.

PRISCILLA. I don't need anyone. I rely on myself. I take pride in my work and all that I've accomplished. That's how one earns respect.

GUEST. Can you feel truly proud of what you've accomplished...knowing that all you've done has been bought at the expense of others? You haven't created or improved a single thing.

(He moves closer to her. Looks deep into her eyes.)