

HAL'S LAST CALL

A play in two acts with five songs and a poem

By

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Cast of Characters

Hal: **Cornet, proprietor of the bar, black, middle sixties**

Tom: **Bass, bartender at the bar, middle fifties**

Ken: **Keyboards, early forties**

Steve: **Electric guitar, early thirties**

Aliyah: **Singer, black, mid twenties**

Vida: **Acoustic guitarist, early twenties**

Dave: **Drummer, fifteen years old**

Alan: **British, late sixties, customer**

Place: **A club with no name**

Set Design

The set has the usual “music club / hole in the wall” look. The walls are painted flat black with the requisite posters of past shows from other towns and other times. From right to left, after the entry door which is marked by two stone steps down into the club, we have a small door against the back wall. This represents the bathroom and back office. The lounge area is up stage from the back room and consists of a couple of old lounges drawn straight from the 1970's replete with a polyester feel and outlandish design in bright orange and red.

Past the lounges against the back wall is the stage. It is a box-spring like structure of wood painted black raised off the ground approximately a foot. There are stage lights, plain white spots, focused on the main lead positions: lead singer, the organ, the drummer and lead guitarist. The stage is crowded with mikes, an organ, several guitar holders holding acoustic and electric guitars. Leaning against the wall are several random instruments: a bongo, a tambourine, and several other miscellaneous percussion instruments.

Further left is the bar area, focused around a makeshift wooden structure that acts as a bar. It's a slim fit in the three feet behind it until the wall. One person has to move out from behind the bar in order that another person can get in. In front of the bar, there is a small table surrounded by an assortment of stools, chairs, and sitting things; none of which match any other. Otherwise, the hall is empty. It seems small, cramped and ill-equipped for its purpose.

ACT I

(Before the lights come up, we hear the music. The song is "Green Onions," though it is barely discernible as the band plays it. As the lights come up, all the players are situated precariously on the stage as there is barely enough room to fit everyone. Across the front row from right to left, KEN: is at the keyboards, ALIYAH: is at the front mike, and STEVE: is playing electric guitar. Row two has TOM: playing bass behind STEVE:, VIDA: with an acoustic guitar in between STEVE: and ALIYAH:, and HAL: with a cornet between her and the keyboards. DAVE: is at the drums, pressed against the back wall so close that he has to climb over the drum set to take his seat. All seven are in various stages of playing which is the reason for the poor sound being produced. Each seems to be playing for themselves, independent of what the song calls for. The playing continues for two minutes and becomes steadily worse)

KEN: Hold it. Hold it! *(only HAL: keeps playing)*

TOM: Hal....*Hal!*—

HAL: *What!*....Oh, sorry.

KEN: Dave, it's too slow. I tell you the same thing every goddamn time.

DAVE: If I go any faster then Steven doesn't keep up.

KEN: Steven, you've got to hit the goddamn changes.

STEVE: I'll hit the goddamn changes Ken. But don't rush into them. It's in 4/4 time!—

KEN: No—

STEVE: *(he bangs on his guitar as he says this)* Boom ba ba boom ba boom ba ba boom—

KEN: No. No!—

STEVE: Hear it. That's the beat.

KEN: No! It's here. *(he bangs the keyboard. His version only slightly faster)*

STEVE: That's too fast!

KEN: That's what it is!

STEVE: Since when?!

KEN: That's the way it's always been played.

STEVE: Bullshit.

HAL: Now boys, please—

ALIYAH: Here we go again.

VIDA: Shut up Aliyah, at least we play instruments.

HAL: Vida honey—

ALIYAH: You call that playing Vida.

VIDA: You call yourself a fucking singer.

ALIYAH: *I...am* a song stylist.

HAL: Of course you are Aliyah, my dear—

DAVE: Oh *that's* what they call off key and lame.

HAL: David!

ALIYAH: Beating animal skin. That's challenging.

DAVE: At least, *I...do* it well.

KEN: What do you call someone who hangs out with musicians?...A drummer.

HAL: Kenneth, that's not—

ALIYAH: Enough said.

DAVE: Blow me grandpa.

(The general bickering picks up until HAL: speaks above it)

HAL: All right everybody! All right! Why don't we take five?

TOM: Let's take twenty-five.

HAL: Better yet.

(Everyone puts down their instruments and departs the stage en masse. TOM:, KEN:, & HAL: head for the bar. DAVE:, VIDA:, & ALIYAH: head to the lounges. VIDA: carries her acoustic guitar and DAVE: has his drumsticks. STEVE: stays on the stage alone strumming his guitar. The spotlight illuminates the bar area)

KEN: *Jesus!* We never get that right.

TOM: *(picking up a broken toaster oven with its bottom off that he fiddles with throughout the scene)* What difference does it make? We never get any of them right.

HAL: Heh-heh.

(A word on HAL:'s laugh: Not so much a laugh, but more punctuation cloaked as a cackle. An exhale stolen from the Bill Cosby repertoire. It is an all-purpose expression. An agreement, an exclamation, a nervous pause, an inside joke between friends. It can, and most times is, accompanied by an elbow nudge, a nod, a pat or some other physical show of expression)

KEN: Just once I want to get the damn thing right!

HAL: We will Kenneth. We will. Be patient, my boy. Heh-heh. Thomas, refill our friend here.

TOM: Can't you see I'm busy. He can get it himself.

HAL: Oh, for heaven's sake.

(HAL: goes behind the bar, grabs a Styrofoam cup and a jug of wine. He studies the wine label expertly, gives KEN: a reassuring, impressed look, laughs, pulls the cork, and gives a healthy pour)

KEN: You employ the only bartender I know who never pours a drink.

HAL: Yes, but he's a hell of a bass player.

KEN: Any idiot can play the bass.

TOM: Hey.

HAL: That's true.

TOM: *Hey!*

HAL: Well....

TOM: *(beat)* Yeah all right.

HAL: Yes, heh-heh. But can any idiot have a job as a bartender who never pours a drink. *That* takes ingenuity.

KEN: Who's the idiot then?

HAL: Oh no, you see, where else can I get a good bass player for bartender wages?

KEN: You've got me there.

HAL: Yes, heh-heh. Yes.

TOM: *(pause)* How's the market Ken?

KEN: Shitty.

TOM: I thought I read the economy's supposed to be strong.

KEN: It is! It's flying! But it's been that way too long. Nobody trusts it. After a while, everybody figures something's got to give.

TOM: People don't like prosperity. Makes them nervous.

KEN: *(more to himself)* Because deep down they know life is gooey caramel crap, wrapped inside sweet milk chocolate goodness....

TOM: Conjures a vision for me.

HAL: You're the poet.

KEN: After the initial taste of sweetness, all you're left gnawing on is this endless taste of dung.
(He downs his drink)

TOM: Another happy customer.

HAL: I aims to please.

KEN: Huh? Yeah well, try explaining the markets to Helen.

TOM: Should've guessed it.

HAL: Trouble with the Misses.

KEN: Christ, Helen's relentless. She's like a street boss in the Mafia. Bring in more. Bring in more. We need white linens for the guest bedrooms and matching place mats and napkin holders. So honey, sweetie, please....bring in the bacon. Christ! Bring in the whole goddamn pig.

TOM: Have to get me one of those one of these days

HAL: A pig?

TOM: A wife. Or a real job.

HAL: Get the job. It's a lot less work. I should know. I've had three wives. Only one when I was sober, of course.

TOM: Of course.

HAL: Well, mostly anyway.

TOM: A heartfelt testament to matrimony.

HAL: Don't you think? Ah, that's why I love drinking. As hard and as drunk as I get, she never leaves me.

TOM: I'll drink to that.

HAL: Amen brother. *(They toast their glasses)*

KEN: Christ, you two. *(Drinking from an empty glass)* Aaaugghh. Fill me up.

TOM: *(As HAL: fills the cup)* Did you talk to him today?

HAL: Nope. Didn't get the chance. Busy with chores, heh-heh. So many chores, I didn't find the time.

TOM: *(he stops tinkering)* You're gonna have to....Maybe if you talk to him, he'll understand.

HAL: I know, I will. I'm just waiting. Heh-heh. Waiting for the right moment. As soon as it comes along, mmm hmm.

TOM: *(pause)* You know what he said. He was very clear.

HAL: I know, I know. I will.

TOM: *(pause)* This is the last month....It's not our fault. It's nobody's fault. It just hasn't worked out. And we're going to have to face the fact—

HAL: No!....No, not yet.

TOM: *(pause)* Hal....

HAL: I've worked long and too hard. We both have. So don't go telling me the facts. I know the facts....But I'm chasing the dream....Something will. I believe something will. You'll see.

(They stare at each other a long moment as the spotlight fades down on the bar and comes up on STEVE: at the stage who is strumming and singing to himself)

STEVE: Prodigal Son, where have you gone wrong? *(he stops)* No. *No!* *(takes a breath and starts again)* Prodigal Son, what have you become? Yeah. Better.

(He slides the guitar down his hip and writes on a piece of paper on the floor. Then the spotlight fades down on the stage and comes up on VIDA:, DAVE:, & ALIYAH: at the lounges)

(A word on DAVE: and his drumsticks: He is always drumming. Against anything and anyone in his close vicinity. It is something he annoys and pesters with. When he describes music, either an era or a person, he immediately imitates the drummer or drumming style that is the subject of his talk)

VIDA: I don't. I *don't* fucking believe you!

DAVE: What?

VIDA: You're fucking crazy, that's all.

DAVE: *I'm* fucking crazy? *(always to ALIYAH:)* *I'm* fucking crazy!

VIDA: *Dylan* is everything! He's where it all starts. Everything comes from him.

DAVE: You're out of your mind! She's out of her mind! I mean like have you ever heard of that group? Oh, what was their name? Four guys, Liverpool, bigger than Jesus. Oh yes that's it....*The fucking Beatles!*

VIDA: Yes, sure. Fine. Fine! The Beatles *became* something.

DAVE: Became! *Became!*

ALIYAH: Now that's big of you.

VIDA: Yes! Be-came! But it's all because of Dylan. He's their touchstone.

DAVE: Have you lost your mind? Has she lost her mind? (*doing an imitation of Ringo drumming*) "*I saw her yesterday and I knew she would be mine*"—

VIDA: Yeah, yeah! That's it. That's just—

DAVE: "*Here come old flat top, he come groovin' up slowly*"

VIDA: That's it! That's just fucking it! Because when Dylan was writing "*Blowin' in the Wind*" and "*The Times They're are Changin'*," what were the Beatles writing? What? (*in a dull, monotone voice, beat by beat*) "*She Loves You, Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.*" And—and "*Love. Love. Me. Do. You. Know. I. Love. You.*" I mean c'mon. What the fuck is that?

ALIYAH: That's baby talk, honey.

DAVE: Excuse me. Excuse me! *Excuse me!* Have you heard of that swinging little thing they call Sgt. Pepper's. Huh? Huh?! Abbey Road. I mean Abbey fucking Road, maybe you've heard of that.

VIDA: Yeah, yeah. I know. You guys are always bringing that—

DAVE: *Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom let it be.* Boom—boom—boom. Let It Fucking Be!

ALIYAH: Oh yeah yeah, baby. (*they high five*)

VIDA: I'm not—

DAVE: Yes!—

VIDA: I'm not!—

ALIYAH: Unh huh, baby—

VIDA: I'm not saying they weren't great. They were. But it doesn't come from them. It comes from Dylan.

ALIYAH: I can't stand that man's voice.

VIDA: That voice—

ALIYAH: It always sounds like he's got head cold.

VIDA: That voice!—

DAVE: *Heeeeeeeey Mister Taaaaaambourine Man, play a song for meeeeeeee.*

ALIYAH: How can you listen to that?

VIDA: *That voice* is—is—is the voice of the common man. The voice of the people! His pain, his anguish is—is—our disappointment and disillusionment. *That voice* is the lost conscience of America crying out to be heard!

DAVE: Ring ring Vida, its Timothy Leary. He wants you to *get a fucking life!*

ALIYAH: *(high fiving DAVE: again)* Yeah baby.

VIDA: This is not worth my fucking time. It's not.

ALIYAH: Personally, I think Motown was where it was at.

VIDA: Motown?! *Motown?!*

DAVE: Sing it for me Sista.

ALIYAH: *Yes Motown! Otis and all. (she sings with customary flair) "Sittin on the Dock of the Bay. Watching the cl-houds roll away." And Marvin. You know Marvin. "Ummmm, What's Going On. Ohhhh, What's Going On."*

DAVE: Sing it for me one time.

ALIYAH: Oh yeah, there baby. *There's* your conscience. A conscience....with *style*.

DAVE: Yes ma'am! Power to the people.

ALIYAH: That's right! *(they slap hands again)*

VIDA: Style. Style! Style and conscience are mortally opposed.

DAVE: You must be kidding? She must be kidding?

VIDA: Once you've shot for style, you're fucking lost. A whore. A sell-out. Elvis, bloated and sinking—

DAVE: Do not!—

VIDA: Elvis!—

DAVE: Do NOT! mess....*with the King!*

VIDA: Elvis, bloated and sinking, wearing gold lamé doing three weeks at the Sands with Bobby Vinton and Seymour the Talking fucking Dog opening up.

DAVE: *(beat)* You're a communist. She's a fucking communist.

VIDA: What!? They didn't even write their own fucking songs!

DAVE: Whatever comrade. Whatever.

(Slowly, we hear STEVE: plugged in and miked up. As he begins to strum louder, the lights fade on the lounges and come up slowly on him standing in front of the mike. He begins to play, but as he begins the first line HAL: interrupts)

HAL: No. No Steven. No! *(STEVE: stops, discouraged)* Introduce it, son. Introduce your songs. You got to talk to the audience. Build a rapport. You're an entertainer.

STEVE: I just uh—

HAL: You must reach out to them. Grab hold of them.

STEVE: *(reluctant after a big sigh)* This is—this is a new song. I just wrote it. I guess that's kind of redundant. I—uh—It's called Prodigal Son. *(he begins to play again)*

HAL: Yes, heh-heh. Better. Better!

PRODIGAL SON

*Boring nights follow mundane days
He can't believe that his life turned out this way
Cause he had plans and such big ideas
I swear you never saw a future as bright as his*

*But he's still waiting for the pendulum to swing
Now he spends his time talking down everything
The bigger they are, the smaller by comparison he seems*

*Prodigal Son
You're not the only one
My prodigal son*

*Idle thoughts led to wasted dreams
The only life he gets now comes from his t.v. screen
A pathetic sight, this repeated scene
He just sits around and thinks about all the things that might have been*

Recounting old glories with his friends

*Who are polite enough to stay to the end
And as they're leaving, he tells himself, "I'm better than them."*

*Prodigal Son
You're not the only one
My Prodigal Son
You're not the only one*

*These are the days of whines and poses
These are the times to file a claim
And we're so tired of your excuses
Just get off your ass and get in the game*

*And enough with all your introspection
Where do think it'll get you to?
Have you found yourself another new direction?
Have you found yourself some kind of clue?
About what you're going to do*

*Well, Prodigal Son, what have you become?
Have you finally realized you're not going to be their number one?
Was it the pressure, all in your head?
We just so full of yourself that there was no room for anyone else instead?*

*I'm sure you think you've got something to say
But now all these problems have you held in their sway
But I remember when nothing was ever going to stand in your way*

*Prodigal Son
You're not the only one
My Prodigal Son
You're not the only one*

(When he's finished, everyone claps as he nods embarrassed. Over the cheering, we hear the following over one another)

HAL: Fabulous, Steven, heh-heh. Yes sir!

DAVE: Freebird.

HAL: Absolutely fabulous!

ALIYAH: Woooooweee, baby. *(pumping her arms)* Woo woo woo.

DAVE: Freebird. *(in a Cockney accent)* My Way.

(The spotlight fades down on the stage and comes up on the bar. KEN: is behind the bar, pouring himself another drink. HAL: comes to it after standing closer to the stage clapping. TOM: is still fiddling with the toaster)

HAL: Yes sir, heh-heh. Yes, indeed.

TOM: You know he's really....he's really very good.

HAL: He's the best we've ever had.

KEN: He's not that good.

HAL: *Yes....he is.*

KEN: *(pause)* Yeah well, it doesn't matter anyway. No one'll ever find him here.

HAL: Somebody will.

KEN: Not here at this dead end.

HAL: Here, there, anywhere. Talent survives. Talent endures. That's the way the world works. I don't know why, but that's the way it does.

KEN: Yeah, sure it does.

TOM: George Seaver was discovered in a place like this. Some small hole in the wall in back water East St. Louis.

HAL: You see, heh-heh, there you go. Do tell brother.

TOM: *(he stops fiddling)* At the time, he had nothing. No regular band, no regular gig. Only thing he's regular in is the bathroom.

HAL: Heh-heh, yes sir. (*he elbows KEN:*)

TOM: And one rainy night, Clive Thomas, that big promoter from Top Flight Records, well his train breaks down out there in Missouri. Busted piston shaft. You know how those old trains were always having that problem.

HAL: Oh, sure sure.

TOM: It being particular to those Roderrick's American class built around 1920. Miserable money grubbing robber baron. Built such *ruten* locomotives, made a fortune off the war—

HAL: As you were saying.

TOM: What? Oh yeah. Well ol' Clive, he has to lay over a night there, so he goes on down to some local greasy spoon for dinner. And Georgie's there playing. Just banging on an old, out-of-tune upright they got there, singing just for kicks. But man, he's laying it down. Just knocking 'em dead, you know.

HAL: Yes I do.

TOM: Well Clive comes up to him when he finishes and says, "*Son!* Son I'm gonna make you a star. I'm taking you with me to New York City."

HAL: Amen!

KEN: Yeah right, of course he does.

TOM: Uh ah, but there's a catch, you see. George, mmmn George ain't so sure. He ain't never been away from home, you know. And with East St. Louis being one rail stop before abject metaphysical nowhere, he's a little suspect. So he asks him, "Mister, do they have sausage gravy out there in New York City?" Cause he ain't going nowhere that they don't have no sausage gravy.

KEN: Why would he?

HAL: Why indeed!

TOM: Right. Well now ol' Clive, he's getting nervous see. He don't know sausage gravy from a shot of whiskey. Which, by the way, he knew plenty about. Cause when he died, they dispatched his liver to NASA for carbon-dating. And for all he knows, sausage gravy is some special kind of carburetor oil or something. But see, this is no time to get weak in the knees. Oh no, he's got the real deal here and he knows it. Right here in his sweaty little hands.

KEN: You're *not* buying a word of this?

HAL: Every last one!

TOM: So Clive, he pauses a moment, breathes out real heavy like, and says “*Son!....Son*, are you kidding me? *Are you kidding me?!....We invented* sausage gravy in New York City!”

HAL: Amen brother! Hallelujah!

KEN: C'mon!

TOM: Unh huh. And that's all George needs to hear. Goes on the train with Clive that very next morning. And the rest is, as they say (*in unison with Hal*) "is history!"

HAL: Yes sir! Heh-heh. I'll drink to that!

TOM: Me too! (*they both lift their glasses*)

KEN: Oh, *please!*

TOM: It's the truth.

HAL: I know it is brother. *I knows* it is!

KEN: You don't believe that load of crap?

HAL: Oh yes I do. I most certainly do.

KEN: Well I don't.

TOM: Look it up.

KEN: I will.

HAL: Don't bother Kenneth. Don't bother. Let me tell you something about this man. In the ten years, *ten years* I've known him, in all that *ten years* time, he's only been wrong twice.

KEN: What? About music?

HAL: About anything! The man's an encyclopedia. *That's* why I pay him to bartend! Can't pour a decent drink to save his life!

TOM: *Hey! (they look at him)* Yeah all right.

HAL: Heh-heh, yes. But in ten years, he's only been wrong twice. Twice mind you. And one of those was a technicality.

KEN: Be serious.

HAL: *I am!* Something about the largest cash crop in Holland. Whether you measured it in dollars or volume. But whatever. I should know. I spent the first five years of our association trying to catch him. Every gosh-darned day! *That's* why I *pay* him to bartend. Anyone can be wrong for free.

TOM: Thank you sir.

HAL: You're quite welcome.

KEN: *(holding up his hands submissively)* Now you two are ganging up on me. All right. I graciously concede.

HAL: Heh-heh.

KEN: *(downing his drink)* Hit me again.

TOM: (*HAL: pours another drink*) Hitting it pretty hard tonight Ken?

KEN: So? What's it to you? I know *you* haven't got a problem with drinking. (*to HAL:*) What? No speech from the failed reformed?

HAL: Nope.

KEN: No "Don't do as I've done, Son. Don't walk down my path."

HAL: Unh uh.

KEN: Good! Then tell it to your friend here.

HAL: (*he stands slowly*) Every man's entitled to walk off his own cliffs....But that don't mean his people have to sit by and watch it. (*HAL: leaves*)

KEN: Fare thee well. (*looking at TOM:*) What?!

TOM: What the hell's matter with you?!

KEN: What? (*waving it off*) Aaaagghhhh.

TOM: You listen to me and you listen good. That man has been through enough. Do you hear me? Don't you *dare* infest him with what's got into you. You got that?!

KEN: Yeah.

TOM: You better damn well be sure you do. (*TOM: wipes down the bar*)

KEN: (*pause*) Don't you find it awful ironic though? A drunk like he was, now running a bar....Maybe that's the way it works in this life. You choose your addiction, your one thing. And life provides you the access to it. The constant contact. Building it slowly, subtly into a need, a must. And it's there, punishing you, mocking you, teasing you with its presence....just enough to keep breaking your heart.

TOM: Yeah.

KEN: *(pause)* But you know it's over, don't you? You know that. His dream. This whole silly damn thing. This place ain't making a penny off of just us seven losers. And that means he ain't making good on his promise. Sooner or later, the owner's gonna wake up and pull the plug on this—

TOM: Excuse me. *(he walks away from the bar)*

KEN: What? What?! Aw c'mon. Aaaaauugghhh.

(KEN: alone, waits a moment. Then pours himself more wine, downs what's in his glass, then heads to the stage. KEN: sits down at the keyboards and gets ready to play. STEVE: who has stayed there after his song begins to get up)

KEN: Stay there!....Play. Verse's in D. Chorus in G.

(Immediately begins to play "King of the World" DAVE: lumbers over slowly, stands to the right of the stage digging the beat, bopping his head to the imaginary drums he's already playing. The song is already two minutes in, by the time he finally joins in after the first chorus.

The jam between the middle and third verse is clean and smooth. First, KEN: takes his shot. His is firm and strong. A seasoned player staking his claim against the onslaught of youth. He means this to be a lesson. When finished, everyone claps. He nods in notification of it.

Then STEVE: takes his turn with a nod from KEN:.. He is hot. With fingers flying and sweat pouring, all the Rock Gods are pleased. Youth has its answer to age. Before he is done, they both go off at the same time. It is competitive and combative and wholly astonishing.

When they are done soaring, their work once again is met with cheers. Everyone is enraptured as the trio works it. Nobody has noticed that midway through the song, ALAN: has entered the bar)

KING OF THE WORLD

*Sitting right here on a mountain of potential
Trying to get myself back to the bear essentials
People don't think too much these days,
All I know is that I'm so damn tired of being afraid
So I decide to go it alone
Going try and step out on my own
And everybody says, "Boy, better get your ass back, back where you belong"*

*But I could have been, I could have been
The King of the World
I could have been, I could have been
King of the World*

*I know I'm different, but that ain't a crime
It's knowing I'm different, that's part of the difference in my mind
We spend so much time trying to all be alike
Never knowing its the differences that gives us mystery to our lives
And they say "Quit wasting your time"
"Won't make anything of yourself playing all the time
"Why don't you get it straight, Son, and focus on what's really important in your life"*

*But I could have been, I could have been
The King of the World
I could have been, I could have been
King of the World*

*There's a million excuses, a million little lies
I've been telling myself, they're so useful in helping me to deny
I can blame it on the market, I can blame it on my wife
I can blame it on my family, they've all been holding me down my whole entire life
But when it comes down to it, its just me
Who else could it possibly be?
Its time I face the facts that others have made it and stop copping this bullshit little plea*

*But I could have been, I should have been
The King of the World
I could have been, yeah, I should have been
King of the World*

*But I could have been, I could have been
The King of the World
I could have been, yeah, I could have been
King of the World*

(As the song ends, there is applause and then the lights fade on the stage and rise up on the bar on HAL: who has already returned to the vacated bar. ALAN:, who has been waiting patiently by the door so as not to pass through the musician's spotlight, moves to the bar and gets there at about the time STEVE: hits it. STEVE: walks around the bar, picks up a beer from the refrigerator)

HAL: Great show, my boy. Great show!

STEVE: Thanks.

HAL: Was that a new one?

STEVE: That?....that was Ken's.

HAL: *No*, not that one. Yours before it.

STEVE: Oh....yeah.

HAL: *Super*, heh-heh. Absolutely super!

ALAN: That's a fine guitar you play.

STEVE: Thanks.

HAL: Yes he do, heh-heh. Yes he do! What'll you have Friend?

ALAN: Well let's see. How about a McCallum's on the rocks with water back.

HAL: I'm afraid we only have one of those.

ALAN: I don't follow.

STEVE: All the water you want.

ALAN: I sorry.

STEVE: He can't sell alcohol here. No liquor license.

HAL: No well, heh-heh, I never *did* quite get around to that.

ALAN: (*he looks at the bar and sees the beer bottles*) What are these?

HAL: Gifts.

ALAN: Gifts?

HAL: Heh-heh. You see, I *have* all the Cold Bud and lousy red wine you could ever want. But I don't actually sell it.

ALAN: No?

HAL: No, I just let *you*, as one of my oldest and dearest friends, have a welcoming little libation as a uh—

STEVE: Courtesy of your friendship.

HAL: Precisely. And at the end of the night, when you're done, you just happen to remember an uh—

STEVE: Old poker debt.

HAL: Exactly so. That you owe me.

ALAN: Quite a brilliant system.

HAL: Yes, heh-heh. Yes it is. Well now, hello old friend. What can I get you?

ALAN: Since you put it so charmingly before, I think I'll have the lousy red wine.

HAL: Heh-heh, okay!

ALAN: It is French?

HAL: Uh, *no*, I...uh....don't uh....

ALAN: Californian?

HAL: *(beat)* Heh-heh. Steven, would you do the honor?

TOM: *(returning with a plunger in hand)* I'll do that.

HAL: My, this *is* an occasion. A new precedent is being set.

TOM: *(handing the plunger to STEVE: who hands it to HAL: who places it on the bar)* It's from New Jersey actually. Not far from here.

(STEVE: slides out from behind the bar, relieved of his duties and goes over to the lounges with his beer in hand. TOM: goes in behind the bar and searches for a bottle of wine underneath. Finally, he seizes the one on top, grabs a cup and pours heartily)

HAL: There you have it then. New Jersey. The Garden State. Wine capital of the East!

TOM: Newark to be specific. It used to be one of the largest beer and wine producing cities in the country back last century. Shaffer, Pabst, Rhinegold, all the old line breweries had plants there. Before the blasted industrialization set in and started dumping into the local rivers, contaminating the water supply till it glowed turquoise like then neon signs they advertised with. They're all gone now except one. But this wine is fine. These grapes grow along the banks of the same river they make the Budweiser from around here so.... *(placing the cup in front of him)* how bad can it be?

HAL: *(looking around the bar, lifting a couple of things)* Yes, and it does have a cork. Or at least it did when we opened it a few years back. It must be here somewhere. *(finally under the plunger where he finds it)* Heh-heh, only kidding. I'm drinking it myself.

ALAN: I thought you were drinking beer.

HAL: I am.

ALAN: Yes well....to your health. *(he raises his cup, takes a swig, and makes a face of approval)*

HAL: Heh-heh. Yes sir.

ALAN: So I gather you're the proprietor here.

HAL: That would be I. Hayward Lucas Junior at your service. But everyone calls me Hal. So you go right ahead too. Excuse me for one moment. *(to TOM:, motioning towards the plunger)*
Is it working?

TOM: *(fiddling with the toaster)* Not yet. But I'm optimistic.

HAL: So pleased to hear it. But we are beginning to reek from your sanguinity.

TOM: Tut tut. Such doubtfulness. And in front of landed gentry, too.

HAL: Where?

TOM: Him.

ALAN: Who?

TOM: You.

ALAN: Me?

TOM: You can't fool me. This gentleman here is Alan Brunstein. Former head?....

ALAN: I'm not....

TOM: Former head and I believe still Emeritus Director of Artists and Repertoire at Marquee Records.

HAL: *(grabbing his hand to shake)* You don't say! Heh-heh. You *don't* say! Well yes sir! Yes sir! Traveling incognito, hmmm?

ALAN: Well no, I'm—

HAL: Smart move. A very *smart* move. Heh-heh. Well pleased to meet you. Pleased to meet you.

ALAN: I just was—

HAL: It's an honor to have you here in my little establishment. I was just saying to Tom, wasn't I just saying?!

TOM: He was just saying.

HAL: I was *just* saying to Tom here, how it's going to happen. I keep telling these kids. Telling them every time. Believe, believe. You've got to believe! Don't I tell them?

TOM: He tells them.

HAL: I keep telling them that people in your position, still have to get out. Out to the places, to the small places where talent lies. Real talent. Yes sir, the stars of tomorrow. The stars that will shine on.

ALAN: Yes, but you see, I'm—

HAL: I started this place in the hope of being that little push, that little something that starts one of them on their path. And I keep telling them. I keep telling them. Someday, *someday* it'll happen. Yes sir! And boy, you should see these kids play. Superior. *Magnificent!* These kids here are working. Working and practicing—

TOM: Why don't you shut up and let the man speak?

HAL: Oh sure sure. Heh-heh. Right right. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm just so excited! Heh-heh.

ALAN: No, that's quite all right. Actually, it's me that's sorry. I was just happening by when I heard the music. It's funny, I heard music here years before, but it's been so long since I've thought about this place.

HAL: No, of course. Of course. It's only recently been resurrected. A phoenix from the ashes!

ALAN: I love to hear live music. It always lifts my spirits. And it's been such a bloody awful day, I just needed a place where I could rest. So when I heard the music, I had to stop in—

HAL: Well, heh-heh, your misfortune is our serendipity. Yes indeed, our serendipity!

ALAN: No, you see, the problem is—

HAL: There's no problem. No problem at all, heh-heh. Is there a problem?

TOM: No problem.

ALAN: But I—

HAL: No, none at all! You just sit here, heh-heh. (*pushing him onto a stool*) You just sit here, drink free, and listen. And the kids'll play you some songs and that's all you've got to do. Just drink free and listen. You can't beat that. He can't beat that, now can he?

TOM: No he can't.

ALAN: But I can't—

HAL: No you can't. Of course you can't. These kids, these kids you see.... (*pulling ALAN: aside and speaking in a serious voice*) You see, these kids need a shot in the arm. They're, they're beginning not to believe in it, you know. The dream and all. And you're just what they need. Just the lift they need. The proximity to it. They....they really need this. They're down to it, you know. Face up against it. And I don't know how much longer they can hang on.

ALAN: Well I...when you put it that way....how can I refuse?

HAL: Heh-heh, yes sir! Excellent! Ex-cell-ant! (*his voice full again*) And you'll see. You'll see. Some of them are quite good. Quite good. Like that Steven you just met here. Yes sir, the star of the future. Your star of the future. I see him already touring the country under your banner. (*loudly in the direction of the lounge area*) Hey you—

ALAN: (*quickly pulling HAL:'s arm*) Uh—uh, let's....let's just keep this between ourselves....and not tell anyone.

HAL: No?

DAVE: (*from the lounges*) You say something, Hal?

HAL: (*to the lounges*) I—uh....

ALAN: *No!* You don't want them getting too nervous. Playing in front of industry people and all.

HAL: No? (*looking to TOM:*)

TOM: Some of them do get pretty nervous.

ALAN: Sure they do. It's a lot of pressure. And if they knew who they were playing in front of, they might not be at their best and we don't want that.

HAL: (*to the lounges*) Uh—

ALAN: I just want them to play naturally. Just like always.

TOM: That does sound best.

HAL: (*pause*) Heh-heh, yes. That's a capital idea. A capital idea! They'll play like they always do.

ALAN: Yes.

HAL: Heh-heh. A capital idea. (*As HAL: is about to call to the lounges*)

ALAN: Uh uh, remember....no one.

HAL: Heh-heh. (*to the lounges*) Yes, uh Steven, will you play one for us?

STEVE: I just played a couple. Let someone else take a turn.

HAL: That's okay. You can play again—

ALIYAH: *(softly)* Hal?—

HAL: I'd really like to hear another one. Maybe that one about the women or perhaps the—

ALIYAH: *(louder)* Hal!?

HAL: *(pause)* Yes, Aliyah honey.

ALIYAH: Is it time for me to sing one of my songs?

HAL: What uh....uh....sure. Sure honey. Sing us one of your songs.

ALIYAH: Okay! *(she responds with a happy bounce. The lights fade down on the bar and come up on the stage as ALIYAH: arrives there)*

ALIYAH: Kenneth, David, would you accompany me, please? Well, let's see. Good evening everyone. Welcome to the club this fine Wednesday evening. It's a pleasure to see a lot of familiar faces and some new ones in the audience. How 'bout we start off by you giving me some words?

ALAN: *(to TOM:)* Some words?

TOM: Wait. You'll see. *(to ALIYAH:)* Flaxen.

ALIYAH: Flaxen. Oooh, great one.

KEN: *(on his way to the stage)* Range Rover.

ALIYAH: Range Rover? Oh-kay.

DAVE: *(getting into his drums)* Fornicate.

ALIYAH: Thank you!

VIDA: *(as she moves to the bar)* Sacrilegious.

ALIYAH: *Fine....*Hal?

HAL: *(with a nervous look to ALAN:)* What? Uh....Promoter. Heh-heh.

ALIYAH: Okay....one more?

TOM: *(to ALAN:)* Go ahead.

ALAN: I don't eh....

TOM: *Go ahead.*

ALAN: Eh....prevarication.

ALIYAH: Oooh, yes. I like that one. Thomas, a little bass?

TOM: Thought you'd never ask.

(TOM: comes out from behind the bar and takes up the bass on the stage. He starts with a slow, deep rhythm with KEN: on the organ and DAVE: on the bongos. ALIYAH: with a tambourine in her hand begins to hum and moan. It's more of a chant than anything coherent. The music is mournful and elegiac. After two minutes of this, ALIYAH: begins to sing. The best thing that can be said of her singing is that she looks great. With great theatricality, the lyrics are forced or rather jammed into the weave.)

ALIYAH: This will be called....“Winter Colors.”

*When I was a very, very very little girl
I was told I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that
A sheltered bird in this silly, willy little world
All because I wasn't white, I was black*

*It was lies, lies, lies prevarications
That made me feel so inferior
It left my mind, so winded, so binded with consternation
Cause I didn't have flaxen hair*

Take it boys.

(She dances slowly, seductively like a serpent charmer's snake. As she moans, the band takes the lead. As they do, HAL: crosses over to STEVE: sitting on the lounges listening and strumming his guitar. This next conversation takes place above the music)

HAL: Play well tonight, my boy. That English gentleman is President of A&R at Marquee Records.

STEVE: Really? In here?

HAL: Yes, in here! That's what I've been telling you!

STEVE: Wow.

HAL: *(with a nudge)* Yeah....heh-heh.

(ALIYAH: begins to sing again)

*So now my days are filled, willed, killed by wickedness
Cause I haven't got all that I could ever want
Drive the kids to schools in my Range Rover
And fornicate with my husband when he wants a little*

*You find your life a worthless, worthless pilgrimage
When you sell yourself like a whore
But it's a crime, a crime a sacrilege
And you can't recognize yourself anymore*

Come on now.

(With this the band takes another solo as ALIYAH: dances her mating rituals for all)

STEVE: That's not really my kind of label.

HAL: Son, any one that pays is your kind of label. Let's not let this opportunity pass you by. They don't come around that often in life. Have I ever told you about—

STEVE: About a thousand times.

HAL: Well remind me to teach you more manners!....Yes well, you know, I was there though. I mean man, I was there.

STEVE: I know.

(ALIYAH: begins singing again. She gets louder to almost a shrill scream)

*Mr. Promoter, don't sell me out
Mr. School Teacher, don't sell me out
Mr. Politician, don't sell me out
Mr. Executioner, don't sell me out*

*Don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself out
Don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself out
Don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself out
Don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself, don't sell yourself out*

(It ends mercifully with a nod to the band and a big long note held out for meaning. At this, a smattering of clapping occurs. ALIYAH: bows outlandishly, blows kisses and bounds off the stage as her star is born. KEN:, TOM:, DAVE:, follow dutifully behind the star as they all go to the bar where ALAN: has been sitting at the bar with VIDA: at the table.)

HAL: *(to ALIYAH: as she goes to the bar)* Heh-heh. Bravo, my dear. Bravo, brav-o! Heh-heh. *(back to STEVE:)* Yes yes, I was there. I was there! Me and Monk. Monk and *me!* Juke joints and jazz clubs. East Harlem and all. I was there!

STEVE: I know you were.

HAL: It was before I was a drunk of course. Way before that. But I could play, man. I could flat out fly! People'd come to hear me. Me! Hayward Lucas.

STEVE: And Monk.

HAL: Yeah yeah yeah, and Monk too. But it was me, man. I swear it was me! Then, then they would notice this other cat there playing with me. Man! (*imitating his trombone*) Ba baba, ba bana, baba. Yes sir, I was hot!

STEVE: I'm sure Pops.

HAL: Yes, but I didn't do it. I didn't play the game.

STEVE: Market.

HAL: That's right son, *market!* You've got to market. That's how it's done.

STEVE: It's not me. I don't want it like that.

HAL: It's not any of us. Nobody likes it. 'Cepting maybe Aliyah and she ain't so right in the head. But you've gots to do it. You've got the tools. You know you got the tools. So play son! I'm not saying don't play. Play your little heart out. Just like you always do. Cause that's where it's really at. But come down when you're done. Come down and play *ball!* It's the same selling. You're selling your soul up there. I know. I knows it all. But you do it all up there. Alls I'm saying is, come down after that. Come down and do it down here.

STEVE: But that's not why I do it.

HAL: It's why we all do it. To reach people. To reach *ourselves*. To reach a part of ourselves, you can't reach any other way. And this is the only way to get at it. The places you can't reach alone. Son, son you're gonna pay anyways. You've got no choice about that. It's already been decided. But I figure, I figure if you're gonna pay some, you might as well get some payback for it, you know. You get me. You've got it. Now just be it. (*he moves closer*) Because Son sometimes, sometimes we've got to lead the family. Pave the path for others to follow unto the Promised Land. Now, now I know, I knows you might not want it this way, but *needs* son. There are needs, and we who can, have to provide for those who can't. You dig what I'm saying?

STEVE: I understand.

HAL: Okay then?

STEVE: *(pause)* Yeah, sure. Okay Pops.

HAL: Good, heh-heh. Yes sir. Now c'mon.

STEVE: Yes I will. In a minute. *(HAL: points at him as if to say "you better" and starts towards the bar)* Hal....thanks for the confidence.

HAL: It's not confidence, my dear boy. It's not confidence. Empirical data. We must replenish the well, lest the well run dry. And where would that leave us, drunks like me? Where? I'll tell you. Watching Aliyah sing these terrible songs, thinking like a dirty old man, and wishing I was young again.

STEVE: All righty Pops. I'll be over in a minute.

HAL: Heh-heh. *(HAL: moves towards the bar)*

(The lights fade down on the lounges and come up over the bar area as HAL: walks over there. KEN: is behind the bar drinking to himself. VIDA:, ALIYAH:, TOM:, ALAN:, and DAVE:, are spread out around the stools and chairs)

HAL: *(with a face betraying the meaning here, he plants a kiss on ALIYAH:)* Yes yes, heh-heh. I don't know *how* you do it sweetheart. I don't know how you do it. But each week it gets tougher and tougher.

ALIYAH: It's like this Karmic thing, I guess. I just feel the words so deeply. Their energy and all. Their connections are just running through me. And I'm their muse. It's all very Einstein and stuff. You know how he believed eventually all humans would advance so far as to no longer need our bodies. Maybe I'm just advanced.

VIDA: Maybe you're just crazy.

ALAN: Actually Einstein didn't believe in an anthropomorphic god. He was more of a deist. *(everybody turns to him upon noticing him for the first time)*

HAL: *(pause)* An "Andy Griffith's on Morphine" god. Now *there's* something I can believe in.

ALAN: *(beat)* No. Anthropomorphic. Having human elements. A god that punishes us, or for that matter forgives us for our sins.

ALIYAH: Yeah right. *Right.*

KEN: Well thank you Mr. Professor.

ALAN: Don't eh....don't mention it.

HAL: Alan, may I present Aliyah, David, Vida and Kenneth. And I think you've met Steven.
(STEVE: is heading over to the bar area)

STEVE: Hey. *(he sits down at the table)*

ALAN: I'm eh....

TOM: This is Alan. He's an old friend of Hal's.

HAL: Yes, heh-heh, yes. From my *London* days!

VIDA: We've never heard you talk about your London days.

ALIYAH: Yeah.

HAL: Well I've taught you everything you know. I haven't taught you everything I know.

DAVE: Lord knows, it seems like you've tried.

HAL: Hey, you stop that! Heh-heh. Well Alan, how about a round on the house?

KEN: Here here!

DAVE: Great!

TOM: *Not* you!

HAL: What'll you have?

ALAN: I guess I'll have a little more of this dreadful claret you've been offending me with so far.

HAL: Heh-heh. Grows on you, don't it? Well coming right up. Thomas, will you do the honors?

TOM: Certainly. *(as he begins to go behind the bar, all heads turn up to him)* What?...I am the bartender here.

ALAN: I don't think anyone knows it.

TOM: That goes to show you how good I am at "*tending*" to the bar.

KEN: Or attending to every damn thing else.... *(he bangs the top of the bar)* but the bar!

TOM: We all have our callings.

HAL: Enough chatter. Get out of my way. Anything for our *distinguished* guest, heh-heh. Speaking of callings Steven, are you going to do a little slide work for our friend here? You should hear this boy play slide.

ALAN: Is that right?

DAVE: Like Jimi on an eight ball.

ALIYAH: Uh huh, baby. *(they high five)*

ALAN: I'd be glad to hear some.

KEN: Yes, play for the man *Jimi!* Wow us with your virtuosity.

STEVE: Maybe later.

VIDA: Hal, tell us about your London days.

ALIYAH: Yeah?

HAL: Well, you know, I...uh, heh-heh, I don't remember too much from that period. But Alan, Alan you probably remember it better.

ALAN: I don't know. I wasn't eh—

DAVE: Come on. *(he drums on him until TOM: grabs his sticks away)*

HAL: Yes Alan, please.

ALAN: It's probably not for everyone's ears.

ALIYAH: That's okay. We like it juicy. The juicier, the better.

TOM: There must be some stories you can tell.

ALAN: *(pause)* Well, yes. There *are* a couple of nights I think might do the trick.

HAL: *(filling up Alan's glass)* Yes sir, heh-heh. Let me top that off for you. Heh-heh. Yes indeed, yes in-deed.

Fade to Black

ACT II

(Same location about one half hour after we left off. Everyone has been drinking. KEN: has been drinking hard. We hear part of the chatter before the lights come up. With the lights, we see at the bar, everyone is sitting on chairs and stools as they listen to ALAN: orate. He's holding court. Everyone is enraptured with his talk, his history and his presence. It opens with all laughing in keeping with their characters. ALIYAH: is high pitched and exaggerated, STEVE: smiles slyly, HAL: is strong, Ed McMahon-like, VIDA: is caught between a smile and a look of confusion, DAVE: with drums beating harder the funnier it gets, TOM: smiles and nods, already familiar with the story, as he works on the toaster, and KEN: standing behind the bar, isn't laughing at all. He seems lost in his own world and his drink. We open at the story's end)

ALAN: *(after a loud burst of laughter)* And it goes on this way for over an hour. And we can hear him in there and it's awful. So bloody awful, the sounds coming out of there. *(the lights come up as ALAN: is also laughing)* And—and no matter bloody what Drop Down does, he can't stop it. It just keeps coming. So he's playing a song and—and then he's running off.

HAL: No, no.

DAVE: That's *cool!*

ALIYAH: That's disgusting!

ALAN: Yes it is. He's barely getting a song in now between trips. But this last time, the lad's busted the button on his bloody knickers and now....now he's not even bothering with the buckle.

STEVE: Jesus.

HAL: Oh, you're killing me. You're killing me.

ALAN: *(he stands for effect)* So when he's starts playing....the pants, the pants begin to droop down around his legs. And—and you've got to see this. He's just standing there in his bloomers, shuffling along to keep from falling down and flashing his bum to everyone.

VIDA: That's ridiculous.

ALAN: Yes, I agree. It is. But he's really going. Really playing it with that slip drop slide he had. So he doesn't stop. (*he imitates a jazz guitar while shuffling*) Butoodeedop bedopdop bededeedop. And it's hilarious. It's hilarious and religious all at the same time. I'm telling you, it was holy!

HAL: Fabulous! Absolutely fabulous!

ALAN: Indeed. And then he finishes the song all the while wiggling to keep his pants up. And then he lays down his guitar, pulls up his pants in a bunch, and runs off again. This time for the last time.

HAL: That's incredible. Absolutely incredible.

ALAN: (*exhausted, falling down into his chair*) Oooooffff. My God, it was something. You remember the Old Rialto? Yes? Yes? No? Oh well. It was a great hall. A great hall. Great acoustics, great....It had a high built-up stage so you stood beneath the artists as they played peering down at you like Gods peering down from Olympus. And the walls, the walls were lined with these red satin sheets that gave the impression of waves of fire as the music moved in and out of the hall. Just waves and waves pouring over you with the sounds....And it had these green stage lights. These—these blue-green stage lights, like autumn twilight in Wessex just as darkness sets in—

STEVE: "*Deep greens and blues are the colors I choose*"—

ALAN: So simple and pure—

VIDA: Sweet Baby James.

DAVE: (*a step behind*) Sweet Baby James. (*STEVE: points to VIDA: signifying her victory*)
Damn!

ALAN: How's that?

TOM: Never mind. It's just a game they play.

KEN: A stupid goddamn game!

HAL: Yes. He's right. Please go on. *(first with a calming look to KEN: and then with a look to the offending pair)*

ALAN: Yes well....it was a magical night. Incandescent. That lad could play. The talent....it just came shinning through. Like a beacon in wartime. The war against it all. And everyone was there. Dickey Selz. Tree Top Murphy too. And Jimmy Jazz. Everyone went to the Rialto on Mondays. Monday was the Sabbath for Jazz and at the Rialto, you were entering Bethlehem. And Sammy or rather Drop Down, as we took to calling him after that. That's how that name got started. People think it was that move he did, slinging the guitar down low. No. It was his knickers that night. He just put it in the show after that. But Drop Down, he's just the embodiment. What we wanted, everything we needed.

HAL: Amen.

ALAN: *(growing serious)* Back then we believed we were going to win the war, that we still could. Nobody believes that anymore. Nobody believes....You worked hard. You succeeded. And you were valued, and treated as if you were. That's how it was then. That was the covenant....It was a golden era.

HAL: Yes it was.

ALAN: I guess that's the thing I miss most these days. The people who made it, you rooted for them. You respected them, admired them for what it took to get there.

DAVE: Famous for the want of Kaopectate?

ALAN: Yes....I guess so.

TOM: And some talent.

ALAN: Indeed....They tore down the old Rialto. Brick by brick. Out came the sheets and the panels, the lights and then....and then the stage.

KEN: Tear it down. Tear down everything. It's served its purpose.

ALAN: (*pause*) Respect for the talent shouldn't disappear when the talent does. That's just the natural order of things. That's what happens. It happens to all of us. It's only natural!...We should have respect for what once was, even though it may not be any longer. We should still have respect.

ALIYAH: (*pause*) That story sounds like Vida.

DAVE: (*drumming against VIDA:*) Yeah.

VIDA: No it doesn't.

ALAN: Do tell?

VIDA: No thank you.

HAL: C'mon dear. It's a funny story.

VIDA: *I was sick!*

ALIYAH: Sick with fear.

HAL: She had a little case of stage fright her first time.

DAVE: She threw up, right there in the lou.

ALIYAH: *Four* times!

VIDA: It was three!

DAVE: *Four!* That last time counts.

VIDA: Nothing came out!

HAL: All right Ladies and Gentleman, I don't think we have to enumerate.

TOM: The poor girl was nervous about going on.

HAL: I thought a little elixir of courage would calm her down.

DAVE: I don't think *down* is the right direction.

ALAN: No. *(they laugh)*

KEN: That's real smart! Give her a drink. That cures everything. When in doubt, lubricate. Drown the mother down.

HAL: She played!

TOM: It's tough to be embarrassed after you've uh....

DAVE: Puked your guts up for half an hour.

HAL: Yes, heh-heh. But when she finally got up there, she sang like a songbird. A beautiful soaring songbird. *(planting a kiss on her forehead)*

VIDA: It wasn't performing, I just wasn't used to the liquor.

ALIYAH: Yeah right. You were white as a shroud when you walked in here.

VIDA: God I hate that fucking story. *(she gets up and moves over to lounges, picks up her guitar and goes to the stage)*

HAL: Now Vida honey, c'mon. We're just putting you on a little.

ALIYAH: She's emotional.

TOM: It's her gift.

DAVE: And our punishment.

HAL: Let her be now!

*(The lights fade down on the bar and come up on the stage as VIDA: begins to play "Thirty."
She plays the opening chords in between her speaking. As she speaks, HAL: beams with pride)*

VIDA: I wrote this song last week. It's about how I'm feeling now....Today. In this world....When time and life are weighing on you. Dragging you down....Maybe for the first time....maybe for the last....It's called "Thirty."

(Her voice is beautiful. Strong, tough and full of life. A voice not expected in a place such as this. Her playing on the other hand is pained. She is obviously a new player. Her chord changes are slow, labored, and filled with many missed strokes and awkward sounds. At times, she seems plodding, but her desire forces her on)

Thirty

*There was a time when I was not of this mind
I saw so blind and played so carefree
And its hard to believe that that innocence was me
But it was me, before the tragedy*

*Sometimes I remember and I think back again
To that place, though I know its not safe
And with a wistful smile, cautious all the while
I will laugh at how I used to be*

*Cause it was my face and its been so hard to erase
But so much has gone and taken its place
Cause this world has its way and the price you must pay
To carry on, is to say "so long"*

*So look at me now and stop wondering how
Cause that answer isn't worth that much to me now
And if I'm in here I'm not sure, a little bit left that's still pure
Then there's some hope for me to survive this tragedy*

*Thirty, I'm turning
Thirty, I'm turning
Thirty, I'm turning
Thirty, I'm turning*

(When she finishes, everyone applauds. She moves to the lounges with guitar in hand)

HAL: Fine work, Vida honey. Fine work. Heh-heh. A song bird you see. A beautiful songbird.

ALIYAH: But Vida baby, you're only twenty-two.

VIDA: But I've been feeling thirty for so long.

DAVE: You look barely eighteen.

VIDA: I've got an old soul! Okay. Fucking Christ!

ALIYAH: And an older hair style. *(DAVE: & ALIYAH: laugh)*

HAL: Stop that, you two. Enough! *(To VIDA:)* And a huge heart, my dear. A gigantic blue heart, heh-heh. That was marvelous. Just marvelous. Now you just sit down and relax now, honey. Okay? Deep breaths. *Deep* breaths. Yes, heh-heh.

TOM: *(to ALAN:)* Those first few times are always tough.

ALAN: Of course they are.

HAL: Yes sir, heh-heh, I remember my first. My first one. Pure splendor.

DAVE: Ah, women.

TOM: He's not talking about that!

ALAN: I didn't think so.

HAL: No, well, not exactly. But I followed her though. Like you'd follow a beautiful woman....right off a cliff. I was thirteen when Mother bought her for me.

DAVE: Oh baby, you knows I like it kinky. *(TOM: gently slaps him in the back of the head)*

ALIYAH: *(to ALAN:)* He means his trumpet.

TOM: A cornet.

ALAN: Ah, Satch's piece.

HAL: Right. *Right!*....Yes sir, I wanted her bad. She'd been sitting in that pawner's window over a year then. But we were poor. Poor and ignorant. Pawner said it was once played by Satch hisself....It wasn't. Couldn't've been. Something Satch a'played ending up in a place like that. No way....Poor and ignorant. But boy, I wanted her. Never wanted anything so much my whole life. Mother saved all year for her. Cleaned offices at night, you know, after the peoples went home. Bought her for me, Christmas '47....God, what sound came out of her. Deep....deep and resonant.

ALAN: Holy.

HAL: Yeah. *Yeah!*....And I learned to play on her. And I played, all right. Mmm hmm. That thing was attached to me. Part of my arm. Got to be pretty good, too. Played my way through after the little schooling I had. You could make a living from it in those days.

ALAN: Sounds real nice.

HAL: Yes, it was.

ALAN: Passed tense?

TOM: Listen.

HAL: (*pause*) Yeah well, I pawned her back years gone by now. Needed the cash. Needed the drink. Funny....was that same damn pawner, still there in '64. What is that?

TOM: Seventeen years.

HAL: Seven-teen years....Got clean for a couple of months or so, a year or two later. Maybe '65 or '66. And I went back there, *ran* back there....but it was gone.

ALAN: He sold it—

TOM: No.

HAL: *(pause)* No....The shop. The whole damn thing. It'd become one of those money operated Laundromats. A "Clean-N-Save," I think....A dime a load.

TOM: A little heavy-handed, don't you think?

ALAN: Rather quite.

HAL: *(pause)* Yeah....I always felt that shop was waiting on me. Waiting on me real heavy like. It wanted its metal back. Once it got it....it was gone.

ALAN: What'd you do with the cash?

KEN: Phuuuuff! What'd you do with the cash? That's funny. That's real....that's funny.
(everyone turns to him and then back to HAL:)

HAL: *(pause)* Yes, I guess so....Couldn't tell you. Probably drank it away by night fall....Don't remember getting much for it. When your Mister comes a'calling, you pay in the only currency at hand. And you don't have much negotiating leverage....Yes sir, I miss her still.

TOM: *(pause)* I remember my first one. She *too*, was something. Long thin neck. Sleek and tall. Smooth.

ALAN: Ah, one of those old stand-ups models?

TOM: No, more like lie downs actually.

ALAN: I don't follow.

TOM: She was a prostitute.

HAL: *Thomas!*

TOM: *(to ALAN:)* Lynetta Davis. Worked the north corner of St. Germain and Royal Streets at the back end of the quarter.

HAL: Will you please?

TOM: What?! You reminded me of her. *(to ALAN:)* She took all the underage boys there. The whole of St. Aloysius's School for Wayward Youth.

ALAN: I imagine you weren't wayward after that.

TOM: Nope. After that, we had focus.

HAL: Would you please! *(Looking at DAVE:)*

(STEVE: leaves the bar and goes over to the lounges where VIDA: sits alone strumming)

DAVE: Ah, excuse me....is there any chance she's still working there? *(HAL: gives him a gentle smack behind the head and he flinches)*

HAL: You see.

TOM: Oh c'mon.

ALIYAH: She'd be about ninety now.

DAVE: So she's probably not working as many hours? *(TOM: gives him a smack)* That would be a "no."

(The lights fade down on the bar and come up on the lounges as STEVE: and VIDA: talk)

STEVE: *(he sits and takes the guitar from her hands)* Play well tonight, darling. That Alan guy's President of Marquee Records.

VIDA: Are you shitting me?!

STEVE: That's what Tommy says.

VIDA: Fuck!

STEVE: What?

VIDA: I played that stupid song. *God!* What was I thinking?

STEVE: Don't worry about it. It was fine. You sang it well.

VIDA: Yeah, but it's dumb. It's a dumb fucking song. It's not even finished yet.

STEVE: *(he begins to strum)* Relax darling. You'll play another. Besides, this ain't no fairy tale.

VIDA: Stranger things have happened.

STEVE: *Please.* Record contracts, videos, your own tour bus!

VIDA: I don't know, maybe. Why not?

STEVE: Vida, Live at Boudakhan. Unplugged in New York City. At the Hollywood Bowl!

VIDA: Don't forget the groupie sex and all the blow I can do.

STEVE: Yeah, right.

VIDA: Yeah well, it could happen.

STEVE: Where we gonna go? Where would somebody take us?

VIDA: You're good. You got juice. You are!

STEVE: I'm here because this is where I belong. I got a mediocre voice and a slow hand. And I don't mean that complimentarily.

VIDA: Fucking bull shit! Gutless, that's what you are, man. Heart and soul gets over. A willingness to lay it out there on the line each and every day.

STEVE: You've been listening to Hal too much, sweetheart. Getting caught in his dream web. *Rock 'n roll* and all that shit. Be careful darling, you're clichés are showing.

VIDA: Fuck that!

STEVE: Nope. A cute ass, nice hair and the ability to make them both shake in opposite directions at the same time. That's what gets over. It's like Ken says. We're weekend players. Bar Mitzvahs and VFW Halls.

VIDA: *You've* been listening to Ken too much. That's *your* problem. Don't listen to him! He's jealous of you. He's a sell-out. A fucking suit. And he hates himself for it.

STEVE: *(pause)* I don't know. Maybe I'm just realistic, you know. Softening the blow. Trying to keep what matters most, from getting rolled up in all this shit. Afraid if I let it get away from me, from why I started in the first place, to get girls....I just might lose it all. "*Music is my life, it is not my livelihood.*"

VIDA: "*Mr. Tanner.*" That's great.

STEVE: Yes it is....If just once I could write one like that. No one has to know. *I'll* know....That's all I'll need.

VIDA: Not me.

(KEN: comes over from the bar to the lounges with drink firmly in hand. He's noticeably drunk and slurs)

STEVE: Yes I know, darling. Well, there's a man over there who can get you what you need.

KEN: Christ, I can take only so much of a fucking know-it-all. Tommy's a pain in the ass as it is. But this guy puts Tommy to shame.

STEVE: Be nice. Tommy says he's owns Marquee Records.

KEN: Marquee, really?....Shit.

VIDA: Yeah, and I played that song in front of him.

KEN: What the hell does it matter to you?

VIDA: Fuck you!

KEN: Aauugghhh. (*waving her off, her turns away from them but listens in as he continues sipping his drink*)

STEVE: (*to VIDA:*) You know, if you don't mind me saying, you need to *expand* your vocabulary.

VIDA: (*in KEN:'s general direction*) Yeah I know. People think I say *fuck* too much.

STEVE: No, I didn't mean that. However....But your chords, you're using just a few.

VIDA: What do you mean?

STEVE: Whole chords. Major chords.

VIDA: One-four-five, man. Three chords and the truth.

STEVE: Yeah I know, but—

KEN: (*to himself*) Marquee Records. It figures. Now, for Christ's sake.

STEVE: There's only one mood there. One message from the music. Secure. Strong. Unwavering. But that one mood isn't life. It's the others. The minor chords, the sevenths. They're the soul and the sadness.

VIDA: Show me.

STEVE: *(he stops playing)* Well, they say what the words can't. The feeling inside. *(playing each one, just one stroke as he says them)* A minor, E minor, B minor. *(playing)* They're the reminder that every happy moment, every promise made in the melody, has underneath its reality, it's undeniable truth. It's there, bittersweet like a conscience. You know it....you knew it all along.

VIDA: And sevenths?

KEN: Fucking industry pricks. You wait your whole goddamn life for them to show....

STEVE: *(to KEN:)* Yeah, I know. *(to VIDA:)* Sevenths....sevenths are confusion, disorder. They tell you, you're human. You don't have all the answers. *(he plays as before one at a time)* C Seventh, D seventh, A seventh. *(he plays several strumming)* Discordant. Cacophonous. Adam heard sevenths when he bit down. When he fell. They were there, playing in the background.

VIDA: Yeah....yeah! I see it!

STEVE: Don't. *(he stops)* Feel it.

KEN: *(with difficulty trying to stand)* Christ, listen to the Second Coming pontificate.

STEVE: *(playing)* That's right Old Man. That's me. Now you pay attention, too.

KEN: Yeah well, remember who taught you how to believe?

STEVE: *(he plays softer a moment)* I remember him. I remember....Do you?

KEN: Do I? Do I?! Aaaaugh. *(he waves him off, downs his drink, then stares of into the distance)*

STEVE: *(he's really moving now)* Every chord, every note has its significance, its story to tell. It tells the story without the conflict of words. Without bias, without distortion, without interpretation. The beauty, the pain. It's there in the notes, in the chords. Each distinct and separate, yet, together....a whole.

VIDA: That's real pretty, man. Real pretty.

STEVE: *(he stops)* Yeah.

KEN: Yes, just fucking beautiful.

VIDA: What about ninths and suspendeds?

KEN: We play rock and roll, honey. Those are for musicians.

STEVE: *(handing her the guitar)* Why don't we start where we are?

KEN: Oh god, *please*. Someone rescue me. *(Starting to stagger in the direction of the bar)*
Thomas! Tommy, save me. Have you got one for us?

TOM: I was wondering when you people would remember your manners.

(the lights fade down on the lounges and rise up on the stage as TOM: makes his way there. He passes KEN: heading behind the bar for another drink. KEN: tries to pat him on the back as he passes, but misses drunkenly)

TOM: I've been working on this one all week. It's not quite finished though.

HAL: No disclaimers! *(TOM: looks sternly towards the bar)*

DAVE: You need accompaniment?

TOM: No. Thank you. Here goes nothing. *(he clears his throat)* An original composition by Thomas Daniel Black. *(delivered melancholically)*

The Drunkard's Lament

*When you're woke up alone again this morning
Just like the year before and the year before that
And the last woman to show any interest in you
Was your last ex-wife and it's been five years since that
And you're just now getting a glimpse, a premonition of just how cruel*

Nothing, no nothing, says hope to you like an open stool

*When your family sweeps under the rug all that you've dug
And your children choose orphaned as the easier call
And as the phones have stopped ringing, yet you still keep believing
That the blame lies not within but with all
Where is the forgiveness and the kindness of the Golden rule?
Nothing, no nothing, says hope to you like an open stool*

*When you've sold your pad and your pen for that last fifth of gin
And earned your time and wait at the "Last Souls" place
Haunted by rules one through three, you've worked hard to make believe
That all life's worthless and we vanish without a trace
There's always another meeting, another time, at another church or school
Nothing, no nothing says hope to you like an open stool*

*At last, the alarm clocks burns and the calendar turns
Time into a sentence in the sun's cold, heartless glare
And you don't note the trees and the cool summer breeze
Because you've long forgotten what it felt to be aware
Thus, it never dawns on you who's starring in the role of the grand fool
Nothing, no nothing, says hope to you like an open stool*

*It's not money
Nor fame
Or the good fortune
Of even health*

*It's not respect
Nor position
Or the influence
Of real power*

*It's not beauty
Nor possessions
Or the understanding
Of that one clear truth*

*It's love
Yes, love
And it's all there is
And nothing, no nothing, says hope, of it, to you
Like an open stool*

(Thunderous clapping occurs when he's finished. All the characters stand and clap as TOM: waves off the applause on his way to the bar. The lights fade down on the stage and rise up the bar area. Several of the following performance comments are overlapping)

HAL: You old softy, heh-heh. Ladies and Gentleman. Happiness incarnate!

KEN: *(Drunkenly loud from behind the bar)* Bravo! Bravo!

TOM: *Muchas gracias. Señores y señoritas.*

HAL: Heh-heh, yes sir! Let's here it for my multi-talented *bard-tender!*

KEN: Bravisimo! Yeeeeeesss sir!

HAL: *(trying to calm KEN:)* Easy, heh-heh.

ALAN: Well said.

KEN: Yes, well said. Very well said.

TOM: Thank you.

KEN: *(with the wine bottle in his hand)* Let me fill you up!

TOM: Okay. *(he fills himself first, then TOM's glass)*

HAL: Yes, heh-heh. Yes. *(everyone settles down)* God I love this!

ALAN: Yes. It *is* brilliant.

HAL: That's why I started this place. Right now, it's only Wednesdays. I convinced the owner to let me have the place one night a week to see if I could make something of it. *(to TOM:)* When was that?

TOM: Twenty-three months ago.

HAL: Twenty-three months ago. But you wait. This place is going to be big time! Big time! This place is my redemption. My salvation. *“How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”* Mmm hmm, heh-heh. It was just me and Thomas here then. But slowly, the others came. They drifted in with the music. Just like you. Quite a collection, my family. I guess we all need a place like this. The feeling it gives.

ALAN: It has a great feel. What—what’s its name? I didn’t see a sign coming in.

HAL: Doesn’t have one.

ALIYAH: How come you never named the place, Hal?

KEN: What’s the point now?!

HAL: Oh, I don’t know. How can you name a feeling? That’s a bad business naming feelings. Never known one to do justice to the feeling they’s supposed to be relating. I thought about a couple. Hal’s Place, Hal’s Joint, Hal’s....but nothing ever seemed right. Nothing captured truly what I wanted it to be. What it was for me....But you wait. Yes sir, you wait. It’s one of the only places in this town you can still get this.

ALAN: What’s that, live music?

HAL: No, this. This! *(he looks around at every one slightly confused)* Don’t you know what this is?! This isn’t just live music. This is dream chasing. Real live dream chasing in person. In big beautiful Technicolor broadcast.

ALAN: There is something quite exquisite about it.

HAL: Of course there is. Of course there is! It lifts you up. Takes you away. Where else can you share this? Not only share it. You *are* it! You’re a part of it. The applause, the reaction. You *are* the dream chase.

TOM: There’s too little dream chasing in this world.

HAL: Of course there is!

TOM: We get so caught up in our lives. The getting and then the keeping. We forget we're supposed to be living.

HAL: And how!

ALAN: Life is a Cabaret, eh old chum? Come to your Cabaret.

HAL: Yes sir! Heh-heh. Yes, sir.

KEN: But life isn't a cabaret, is it Mr. Marquee? (*everyone turns to KEN:*) What? Oh yeah, yeah, didn't you know? Well, you're bloody well right. You see little ones, Mr. British here, is industry. Oh yeah, *yeah!* A big man at Marquee Records, just putting another one over on us.

ALAN: I wasn't trying to put anything—

KEN: Oh *no! No!* Not you.

HAL: It wasn't like that Ken. I asked him to—

KEN: Of course you did, Hallie Boy. Of course you did.

TOM: It wasn't that way.

KEN: (*imitating HAL:*) Heh-heh Tommy, of course not. (*to ALAN:*) C'mon. Tell us. What it's like? Huh? What's it like from your position looking down? Does it feel like—like you're God?

ALAN: I am not—

KEN: Sure you're not! Of course you're not! No....Don't worry. I know the routine....I've heard all the shit before.

HAL: Kenneth now, heh-heh, that's not necessary. Alan's just here as our friend, come to see the talent.

KEN: Of course he is. (*back to his wine, by himself in the corner of the bar*)

HAL: He doesn't mean any harm. *(to the others) No!* Nothing of the sort. He just came here to listen to us play, that's all. There's no harm in that. Is there?

DAVE: *(he moves suspiciously towards ALAN:)* Marquee, huh? That's Miles' label. And BB's too?

ALAN: Yes, it is.

DAVE: *(beat)* That's huge man. *Huge!* Fucking awesome!

TOM: Watch your mouth.

DAVE: Sorry. But tell me man, have you partied with any big lights? Huh? You know like anyone colossal.

ALAN: I don't follow what you mean.

DAVE: Colossal, man. *Mammoth!* *Huge*, you know! The Keiths. Moon or Richards. Pete. Bonham—

ALAN: I see—

DAVE: The real heavyweights. Elvis right! A little fried chicken, a little fried morphine. Elvis, you know! You're old enough, right?

HAL: David! Don't ask the man that.

DAVE: What? I don't know!

HAL: You know better than that. Come here. *(HAL: pulls him aside to discuss the matter quietly)*

ALIYAH: *(coming up to ALAN:)* Did you know I take dance lessons?

ALAN: No, I didn't—

ALIYAH: I think it'll be great for the videos. When I get to that. We study all the classics. Paula Abdul, Miss Janet. Did you know that Paula choreographed all her great videos? At least the early ones. When she was a Laker girl. She's my idol. I think she's a *genius*. Did you know I had an audition to be a New York Knick City Dancer?

ALAN: What's that?

ALIYAH: In between time-outs at the basketball games, you know what basketball is? Well, us girls come out and do a little number to entertain the crowd. (*she begins to move about*) There's really a lot of dance to it. Mostly high kicks. (*she kicks*) And a little booty shaking. (*she shakes*) We try to get the crowd riled up and all.

ALAN: Very effective, I'm sure. (*ALIYAH: nearly kicks his head*) Woah. Ha ha. Very impressive.

ALIYAH: (*She stops, slightly out of breath*) I didn't get it though. I did get a date with one of the ballplayers. A point guard. He doesn't play much. Only when they're losing real bad.

DAVE: Excuse me, but the man, the man does *not* care about your procreative conquests. (*To ALAN:*) But *your* procreative conquests! Edify me, man, *edify!* Which babes are better? Tour bus or backstage? I gots to know. I gots to know!

ALAN: Well David, I'll tell you. It's not—

HAL: It's *not* something you're going to discuss with him. Now stop it, you two. Let the man alone.

DAVE: But Hal man, the grail! *He* has seen the grail!

HAL: Be gone now. Both of you.

ALIYAH: & DAVE: (*They move with minor protests together*) But Hal...C'mon Hal.

HAL: (*he waves them away*) Be gone!

ALAN: Uhhh, David....“*Sweet sweet Connie....I caught her act.*”

DAVE: “*She had the whole show and that's a natural fact.*” Grand Funk, man. Grand Funk!
That's killer. *Killer!*

HAL: Away! Away! (*after they move on*) Heh-heh. They are something.

ALAN: Yes they are.

TOM: That boy will be the death of us.

HAL: Speak for yourself. Aliyah nearly gave me a stroke right there.

TOM: I hear that.

HAL: Mmm hmm.

ALAN: (*pause*) You know I could never play an instrument. Not that I didn't try. I tried considerably. Guitar, saxophone, drums, you name it. And singing was out of the question....No, nothing ever caught on for me. It's just that way with some people. I had flashes of passion, but not the perseverance. Perseverance is in short supply for the common man. Talent's a gift, sure. But belief...*faith*....that's the real miracle.

KEN: (*quietly from the corner*) What the fuck do you know about it?

ALAN: I, well I was just—

KEN: I mean seriously, what the fuck do you know about it?!

HAL: Woah, boy, easy there. Heh-heh. A little too much of the fruit of the vine.

KEN: No, no really. What do you know about greatness? Huh? I don't mean just—just competent or even very, very good. But I mean greatness. Excellence beyond compare. Have you ever sat and wondered about it?

ALAN: That's what I was saying—

KEN: It's Almighty! It's a little piece of God right down here on Earth. Not some religious anthro whatever crap of yours. I don't believe a word of that bullshit. But Divine! Flawless. A moment of human perfection.

ALAN: Yes, but that, getting to that takes faith. When there's nothing to believe in. It's—

KEN: What the fuck do you know?!

HAL: Now, Ken, c'mon let's not talk—

ALAN: I was just—

KEN: (*he moves closer to ALAN:*) Think about it! It's an impossibility. A mathematical impossibility. A million to one shot. And some guy, some *guy* who can't play a lick, who doesn't know a thing from *nothing*, he controls it. He controls your destiny.

ALAN: Separation of powers, isn't that what you Americans—

HAL: Well c'mon now, you have to admit that it's a bit ridicu—

KEN: YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT!

TOM: Ken!

KEN: (*pause, calmer*) But we know. We know what greatness is. We can see it. We know it better than most. And you know why? Huh? You wanna know why?...Because we've tried. We tried to get there, and we fell short....What do you think about that? Isn't that....isn't that tragic?

HAL: (*pause*) On the outside, on the outside you lie to yourself. You tell yourself you can be it. Hell, why not you....But that's there on the surface. Where you can believe it. You cover it up with excuses. Bad timing, bad breaks....alcohol, whatever works....But it's not deep. Deep down you know. Deep down inside, you know it, because it's there. You see it every day. (*motioning to KEN:*) He's right. That's the curse. Some have it, you know they do. And it's there for you to see and feel everyday, but never be....How *do* you go on and live with that?....How do you do?

ALAN: *(pause)* How do you live with that? That's what you're asking? How do I *live* with knowing that I'll never be great?...Well, glory be, welcome to the bloody world! How arrogant. How *fucking arrogant* of you! What made you think you could be? What—what made you....who gave you that right! Who blessed you with that privilege!?! *(to KEN:)* You're right. You *can* see it! Yes, probably better than most. But you're close. Closer to it than most of us will ever know. You've known greatness. Moments of it. Glimpses. I've seen you. You *have* something! Not all, no. But you're in the vicinity. You've had those flashes. *(to HAL:)* You *have* something to place your dreams on!...But what of the others? What about the rest of us!? Have *you* ever for one moment in your nomadic searches thought of us? Those of us waiting on—on lotteries and sweepstakes, hoping for fucking insurance settlements and an overheard stock tip. You chase your dreams, you get to. You were born with that courage. Why'd you get that? Why'd you get so lucky?! WHAT MAKES YOU SO GODDAMN SPECIAL!?!—

KEN: NO GODDAMN IT! DON'T YOU ASK FOR THAT! Don't you ask for my sympathy!

HAL: Ken please he's not saying—

ALAN: I'm not asking for—

KEN: YES YOU ARE! YES YOU GODDAMN ARE! With—with your fucking randomness and—and—and with your arbitrary.... *(staggering towards VIDA: at the lounges)* You want to know about my first time. My first time was in some piece of shit hotel bar. I played my heart out for three hours every Tuesday night. Three fucking hours! But you couldn't hear me. You couldn't hear a note I was playing. Nobody listened. Nobody cared. They drowned me out with their whining and their complaining about their bullshit little lives. I wasn't even there.

HAL: Ken please now—

KEN: *(turning back to ALAN:)* So go ahead, tell me. How do you choose? Huh? Whom do we favor today? Whom do we lift up?

ALAN: It doesn't—

KEN: And say, here it is everybody! Here is the ordained gospel. Look, listen, *believe!* For it is chosen! We have marked the messiah! No....no better yet. Don't tell me. Leave it a mystery....Leave your mysterious ways one big fucking mystery to me.

ALAN: I AM NOT—

KEN: DON'T TELL ME! DON'T YOU TELL ME!....You know why? Because it doesn't matter. It doesn't....I do this for me. FOR ME! I DO THIS FOR ME!....How do you explain that? How do you explain that to someone, someone who's never known, who's *never* had a clue? Who's never had *a dream* beyond survival. How do you explain to someone who's never had an aspiration, a desire beyond white linens and bathroom towels and *goddamn* matching place mats!....How do you explain to her the torture, the emptiness inside....that I do this for me?....

HAL: Ken....

KEN: (*pause*) She's right. You *are* hollow....It's *not* like it was. *I'm* not like I was. What once charmed, now annoys....And you don't care. You don't....because you want to be doing something else. You want to *be* something else! Something beautiful....something divine.

HAL: Amen brother.

KEN: But you can't. You can't. (*now pointing at the others one at a time. At HAL:)* And you can't! (*At ALIYAH:)* And you can't! (*At DAVE:)* And you can't! (*At VIDA:)* And you can't!

HAL: Ken please—

KEN: Tell them. It's true. TELL THEM!—

HAL: Don't do this. Please. Not tonight. Not—

KEN: (*staggering near the lounges*) If you love them Hal, tell them.

HAL: Ken not now. Not to—

KEN: TELL THEM! It's true. You know it is. Tell them Mr. Marquee. Tell them it won't happen. Go ahead. Crush their dreams! Do it now! Get it over with! It's for their own good. So they can get over it. GET OVER IT! GET ON WITH YOUR LIVES. STOP THIS GODDAMNED DREAMING!—

HAL: NOOOOO! *(he grabs KEN: menacingly his fists to his neck and throws him up against a wall. There is a long pause as they stay there pinned to a wall)* No....Don't do this to them. Don't do this....

(HAL: slowly let's go and moves away. There is another long pause)

KEN: Yes....yes. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. You're fabulous. You're all so fabulous and....and I'm drunk. I'm just a washed-up....Please, play something. Someone please play something....something real. *(no one is listening, they've all turned away)* I gotta to the bathroom. Steven, where is he? Steven, Steven please buddy please, play something....play me out of this.

(As KEN: staggers to the bathroom, STEVE: gets up on the stage, picks an acoustic guitar and begins to play "Painful Reminders." DAVE: and ALIYAH: join in on the second verse as drums, and background vocals)

PAINFUL REMINDERS

*Beauty doesn't fade so gracefully
When you not allotted your full share
And with time, it goes by so mercilessly
Its hard to tell it was ever there*

*Now cut to the beauty parading away
Hungry boys follow close behind
And see our woman avoiding, obviously
Can't you just tell what she has on her mind*

*Cause just outside of your reach
But never too far from your view
Is everything you wanted to be
A painful reminder to you?
A painful reminder to you?*

*When all your dreams are left fallow
It leaves a hole you just can't fill
And the remains of "should of and could of done"
All the diversions in the world just can't kill*

*Now cut to our woman crossing the park
She notices a child by her side
"Whose are you, my dear little one?
And where'd you get those deep blue eyes."*

*Cause just outside of your reach
But never too far from your view
Is everything you wanted to be
A painful reminder to you?
A painful reminder to you?
A painful reminder to you?*

*Its been said better, times before
Indeed, the heart's a lonely hunter
But when does it all begin to end
I know these things you must often wonder*

*And life is cheap when times are hard
And there ain't no joy here to justify
But, please carry on, my solitaire heart
Though I can't begin to tell you why*

(KEN: comes out of the bathroom and takes a seat on a little chair near it. Away from everyone, he sits alone by the bathroom door in contemplation)

*Cause just outside of your reach
But never too far from your view
Everything you wanted to be
Are painful reminders to you
Are painful reminders to you
Are painful reminders to you*

(As he ends, there is no applause. The lights fade down on the stage with silence and come up on the bar on HAL:, TOM:, and ALAN:)

HAL: Some of these kids can play....I know it!

ALAN: Yes, they can. (*HAL: turns to him*) Yes well, you know....

HAL: Yeah I know, *I know!*....But that boy is good!

ALAN: Yes he is.

HAL: Well then?

TOM: Jesus Hal, you're as bad as they are.

HAL: I know, I know....I'm just thinking....

ALAN: I know. I was thinking the same thing....Let's just see, okay.

HAL: Sure....sure, let's just see.

ALAN: We can't all be discovered like I discovered Phil Ronnings at The Waterloo.

TOM: At the Waterloo?

ALAN: Yes. You know it?

TOM: (*beat*) I know of it.

ALAN: There were nine other people on the bill that night. The first five were so bloody awful, I was tempted to leave. But Bill Johnson, the proprietor, he persuaded me to stay. Bill and I were mates from the old days. We'd gone to primary together down in Dorchester.

HAL: (*looking around the bar*) Wait. Stop. Stop! I almost forgot. Heh-heh. Got to get my scrapebook. Where is it?

ALAN: Scrapebook?

HAL: Brother, with what that book and I have been through, heh-heh. I'll tell you. Mmm hmm. Where is it?

TOM: In the back room near the sound board.

HAL: We have a sound board? Heh-heh. (*nudging ALAN:*) Right-o, Old Chap. Hold on. Hold on! I'll be back in a jiffy. (*HAL: goes away*)

ALAN: I remember that night. That spark....it just shines right through.

TOM: At the Waterloo?

ALAN: Yes. Do you know the place?

TOM: I just told you I didn't. (*TOM: stares hard at him. They share a long moment of great unease*)

ALAN: It was something. A great feel. Great....I missed that one, eh laddy? Yes, of course. It was Willow Street Hall....To the well, one too many times Old Boy. (*TOM: looks away painfully. ALAN: smiles sadly*) Waterloo....Much too heavy handed....Much too much.

TOM: Why?

ALAN: (*paraphrasing from The Tempest by William Shakespeare*)

Be cheerful sir, our revels now are ended.

These actors were mere spirits

And are melted into air, into thin air.

(*pause*) Why? I didn't mean to. I had no intention of harming anyone. I just needed....And you all so much wanted me to be, and I wanted to be it for you—

TOM: No.

(*After another moment, HAL: returns*)

HAL: It was behind the magazine stack in there. You know, Playboys and Penthouses, heh-heh. Just kidding. Did a little business. We've still got a problem back there. (*TOM: responds with a*

shake of his head, turning away) What's the matter with you? *(to ALAN:)* The Waterloo was something, huh? Boy, I'm sorry I never did get to London. Maybe next time.

ALAN: Yes it was. Something special. Reminds me a little like this place. You could just go there and get lost in it. Forget who you were....Be whoever you wanted to be.

HAL: Heh-heh, not so easy when you're the head of Marquee Records with people like Thomas around.

ALAN: *(beat)* Yes. Especially then.

HAL: Listen Al....don't be sore with Ken. He's okay. A good lad. He's just having some troubles at home, that's all.

ALAN: I understand.

HAL: Yeah, that's all. He's all right.

ALAN: Of course, he is.

HAL: And that boy Steven, he does have talent.

ALAN: Yes....I believe he does.

HAL: Of course he does. Of course he does.

TOM: Shame no one'll know it. *(TOM: walks away from the bar)*

HAL: Not unless our friend here, does what he can. What do you say?

ALAN: Well you know, it's not something one can just do like that anymore. Not even me. It doesn't work that way.

HAL: No, nothing ever does. Nothing works the way it used to. But you can bring someone by to see him. Get a consensus.

ALAN: Well, I eh....sure. It's the least I can do for you. I'll send someone around in a few weeks. Get a consensus.

HAL: Yes sir. Magnificent! Absolutely magnificent! It's just what these kids need.

ALAN: But this time, *please*....let's keep this between us. All right?

HAL: Oh sure sure. Absolutely. Ab-sol-lutely, heh-heh. But let's not make it next week. No. I'm getting two new amps in on Saturday. (*TOM: returns with some empty beer bottles*)

TOM: How the hell am I going to fit them into the board? I've already got the damn thing rigged to handle more than's safe. It's a goddamn fire hazard in here!

HAL: I don't know. You'll figure it out. That's why I pay you to bartend. Besides, we're hitting the big time. The big time! Our friend here is bringing us into the big time.

ALAN: (*he stands*) I really must be going.

HAL: Oh, okay. Okay. But do come after that. Do come. You'll see. This place'll be special then. *Special!* When you hear the sound distribution in here. Ooo weee, heh-heh. Wall to wall. Just like a big time place.

ALAN: Yes, I will....Thank you Hayward.

HAL: Call me Hal.

ALAN: Thank you Hal. You've got a very special place already.

HAL: Yes, heh-heh.

ALAN: Do you want some money for the drinks?

HAL: No, no! We had a deal. Besides, you're coming in two weeks, right? To see Steve and hear the new system.

ALAN: Sure. (*he walks to the door. HAL: follows a few feet behind*)

HAL: Oh! I almost forgot. You didn't sign my scrapebook. That's okay. You'll sign it when you come back. Don't you worry, I'll get you then.

ALAN: *(he reaches the door)* Yes, of course....In two weeks then. *(to the whole bar)* Thank you everyone. Thank you. I can't tell you what a great thrill it has been for me. *(With this, he waves, turns and leaves. As the door shuts, the lights come up everywhere)*

HAL: Yes, heh-heh. Yes! See you in two weeks Old Chap. In two weeks! *(as the door closes, he turns full of excitement)* Hey hey! Wasn't that something? Wasn't that something?!

TOM: Hal—

HAL: He's coming back in two weeks to see Steven. And he's going to bring some of his industry friends.

ALIYAH: Why just Steven?

DAVE: Yeah.

TOM: *(louder)* Hal!—

HAL: Well, no, not just Steven, my dear, but everyone. Everyone! Steven's just the main attraction. The headliner, heh-heh. Once here, they'll see everyone. Right here! Right here in this nothing little no name place. Steven, he said—

TOM: HAL!—

HAL: For god sakes man, what is it?!

TOM: *(pause)* It wasn't him.

HAL: What wasn't?

TOM: That wasn't him....That wasn't Alan Brunstein.

HAL: What? Of course it was. You said it was. I heard you say it.

TOM: I was wrong.

HAL: No, you weren't wrong. You're never wrong. And you said it was—

TOM: I was wrong!

HAL: *(pause)* But—but the stories, the places. The names!

VIDA: How do you know?

ALIYAH: Yeah? How do you know?

TOM: *(pause)* He said he discovered Phil Ronnings at Willow Street Hall.

DAVE: Maybe he made a mistake. That happens.

VIDA: Yeah, all these places look alike.

ALIYAH: It could happen.

TOM: No.

ALIYAH: It could be.

DAVE: Maybe this time—

TOM: NO!....Alan Brunstein didn't discover Phil Ronnings. Clyde Hargrove did.

VIDA: *(pause)* Then who was this guy?

TOM: I don't know....Just some guy.

DAVE: Why didn't you call him on it?

ALIYAH: Yeah.

(Tom just shrugs and dejected, goes back towards the bar. There is a long sustained pause)

HAL: You said it was him. I heard you. You said it....I'm sorry. I'm sorry everyone. I....I just thought....I thought....

(HAL: pauses a long moment. The life has faded from his face. He drifts slowly to the middle of the bar. Everyone silently moves away to the lounges. He stands there struggling to find an explanation)

TOM: Come old friend....let me buy you a drink.

(HAL: pauses a moment. When he begins to move slowly towards TOM: at the bar, we hear the beginnings of "Green Onions" the song the band was playing as the play opens. After he gets to the bar, and slowly grabs his drink, the lights go down)

Fade to Black