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VERONICA CORY
By Josepha Gutelius

CHARACTERS:

VERONICA CORY: mid-late 20s, Small and thin, with short- cropped hair, dresses carelessly, almost raggedly, and could be mistaken for an angel.

MALCOLM MARSHALL: mid-late 20s, Veronica's FBI surveillant. Polite, extremely well-groomed.

MADAME SULTRA: bag lady and savant fortune-teller. Close enough in age and temperament for Veronica to befriend.

SHADOW MAN: late 30s, charismatic.

HEIDI: mid-20s, a secretary at the Welfare Department where Veronica works.

MS. BARKER: middle-aged, Veronica's new supervisor.

FBI OFFICER: middle-aged.

(The actors playing Ms. Barker and FBI OFFICER will double for the Professor and Wife in one scene in Act 1. The actors playing Heidi and Ms. Barker will double as Younger and Older FBI agents for one scene in Act 2.)

SETTING:

The setting should be suggestive and minimal (late 1970's). A shift between a New York City Street and a Social Services Department, with one scene in the FBI office.

The Street: a bench, a dumpster, graffiti.

Social Services Office and FBI Office: a desk and a chair.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: The Street, late at night, winter. An eerie, low droning sound (much like the sound you hear when you stand under a highway bridge).

MADAME SULTRA is dragging a garbage bag of empty cans. She's dressed crazily in layers of beat-up clothes in clashing colors. She heads for a dumpster. VERONICA follows behind her. Veronica's face is bundled up in a tattered scarf. She's dressed with a unique flair, but her clothes are torn. She carries a book bag/knapsack.

VERONICA

I spent months trying to get a room for you.

SULTRA

I never gave you any encouragement.

VERONICA

Everything's paid for. You get breakfast and a hot supper -- and a real bed. You'll be warm. -- You can't last the winter on the streets.

SULTRA

(rummaging through the trash, collecting cans)

I last so long as I last and no longer than I'm meant to.

VERONICA

It's freezing out here tonight, aren't you cold?

SULTRA

Nope.

(Finds a half-sandwich and sniffs it like a connoisseur before she takes a delicate taste test and tosses it back in the dumpster).

VERONICA

We haven't hit the coldest hour yet. It's only one o'clock in the morning - wait till it's four and you're the only one left out here.

SULTRA

(suddenly, loud: looking out)

"O Lord thou didst give thy angels charge over thee..."

(Sultra is quoting the Bible)

VERONICA

I didn't see any angels last time I took you to the emergency ward.

SULTRA

"And thou willst hear their cries in the shadow of death"

VERONICA

Tell me why no one'll hear your cries.

SULTRA

'Cause you talk too much. Shhh!

VERONICA

What.

SULTRA

There... You watch.

(eating a sandwich she found in the trash)

VERONICA

(looking out)

Watch what?

SULTRA

(wagging her finger at the "shadow")

I see you.

VERONICA

Who. I don't see anybody.

SULTRA

Don't look for a man...Look for a shadow... a long shadow...

VERONICA

Everything looks like a shadow. It's pitch-black out there.

SULTRA

If it wanted to be seen, it wouldn't be a shadow.
(Sultra chuckles)

VERONICA

Last night I saw a shriveled-up face full of bullet-holes.

SULTRA

(startled)

Huh?

VERONICA

Sorta like what happens to people stupid enough to sleep out in the streets - and the face said, "This is what the End looks like -"

SULTRA

Oh yeah...?

VERONICA

Yeah, and I said, "The End of what?"

SULTRA

And the face said, "The end of this dream." And you woke up.

VERONICA

(has to laugh)

Okay...Is that your final answer? 'Cause I've got to go to work. There's loads of people needing rooms tonight.

SULTRA

(looking out)

Just stand right there...

VERONICA

You remember to take your medication. I'll come by tomorrow.

SULTRA

Watch for the shadow.

(chuckles, resumes her activity)

(Veronica starts to leave, then stops, peers out into the darkness, struggling to control her fear, the low droning sound gets louder...Lights fade to black)

Scene 2: The Welfare Department, the next day

A metal desk, piled high with papers and files. Desk phone. Radio. A typewriter. Two chairs. HEIDI is seated at one, typing reports.

RADIO ANNOUNCER'S voice

Last night more terrorist attacks were reported on military installations outside London. No group has claimed responsibility for the --

(phone rings; Heidi snaps off the radio)

HEIDI

(into phone)

Morning, Social Services. No, Veronica Cory isn't in yet. Who's calling?
...FBI???

VERONICA's voice

Oh hell.

HEIDI

Wait a minute! She's-- hello?

(VERONICA enters, dressed the same as Scene 1.)

VERONICA

Pfew it's getting rough out there...

(Veronica takes off her scarf - her cheek has a
large bruise)

HEIDI

(into the phone - the caller has hung up)

Hello?... Weird...

VERONICA

Congratulate me.

(opening her bag, taking out files on her cases)

HEIDI

Veronica! You look terrible!

(She hangs up the phone)

VERONICA

I spent all night installing forty bag ladies into the George Washington Motel.
Could you type up these reports for me?

HEIDI

(peering closer at Veronica's bruise)

Oh no! - Did they do that to you?

VERONICA

(busy writing up her reports)

No, I bumped into a stop sign.

HEIDI

Ha! Always a straight answer.

VERONICA

(while writing and checking files)

What do you think my ladies are dreaming about right now? They're at George Washington's Motel: they can't believe their luck. Puke-colored wallpaper; puke-colored rugs, stinking of roach spray.

HEIDI

(peering at Veronica's bruise)

That is really a nasty bruise... Does it burn?

VERONICA

I wish. It'd be the one part of my body that's warm.

HEIDI

You should really talk to the new supervisor about giving you easier cases. This is ridiculous.

VERONICA

Once I got them in the motel: no incidents. Just minor bed-wetting. They were shitting terrified. They really thought I was rounding them up to be exterminated.

(Phone rings)

HEIDI

You answer it.

VERONICA

Why?

HEIDI

Some guy from the FBI has been calling you all morning. And then he hangs up. You deal with it.

VERONICA

(stops)

Tell him I'm not here.

HEIDI

Veronica, why is the FBI calling?

VERONICA

(glancing at her watch)

Oh shit, I'm late for the Alvarez-

HEIDI

Veronica...

VERONICA

(leaving)

Tell the new supervisor I'll be back this afternoon. I've really got to go -
(Veronica exits)

HEIDI

(reluctantly answering the phone)

Social Services... FBI??? Hey, what do you want?

(Lights dim and rise as MS. BARKER ENTERS from her office)

MS. BARKER (entering)

Heidi, may I see Miss Cory's files again?

(sits down to review the huge stacks of
Veronica's cases on Heidi's desk)

I've heard good things about her. These are very impressive.

HEIDI

Veronica is what you call too enthusiastic. She's only been here a few months. How long do you think she'll last before she burns out? She's really not cut out for it. She's almost a debutante, probably.

MS. BARKER

Is Miss Cory that rich?

HEIDI

Stinking. She gets money from somewhere mysterious. What's she doing here? I don't know why she puts up with this place. She gets ninety percent of the creeps.

MS. BARKER

Well! She does excellent work.

(MARSHALL appears, dressed classic FBI)

MARSHALL

(clears his throat for attention)

Sorry to intrude –

HEIDI

(waving him away - mistaking him for a client)

We're not seeing anyone today.

MARSHALL

Is Veronica Cory here?

HEIDI

(showing him to the door)

No. She's not here. No appointments today. We're briefing the new supervisor.

(Ms. Barker continues looking over Veronica's reports)

MARSHALL

I'd like to speak with the new supervisor.

HEIDI

Call tomorrow. Goodbye Goodbye.

MARSHALL

(flashing an ID)

FBI.

MS. BARKER

Oh. I'm the new supervisor. Can I help you?

MARSHALL

(eyeing Heidi suspiciously)

Can we speak freely?

MS. BARKER

Heidi is my assistant.

MARSHALL

Fine. This shouldn't take long. Does the name Boris Weber mean anything to you?

MS. BARKER

Who?

MARSHALL

Does Ms. Cory ever speak of her husband?

HEIDI

(surprised)

Husband!?

MS. BARKER

I haven't met Ms. Cory yet.

HEIDI

Veronica's *married*???!

MARSHALL

I assume you ran a background check on her when she applied here.

MS. BARKER

(to Heidi)

Did we?

HEIDI

Beats me.

MARSHALL

(handing Ms. Barker a red folder)

Here's her dossier. You might want to look it over. We've been surveilling her for two years.

MS. BARKER

You've been surveilling Ms. Cory for two years?

MARSHALL

Off and on. Do you recall two years ago there was a bomb explosion in the city university chess club?

MS. BARKER

Yes, and...?

MARSHALL

I was part of the investigation after the tragedy. Bombs were secretly manufactured in the cellar of the chess club. The bombs accidentally went off. A large chess tournament was going on. Dozens of people were killed.

MS. BARKER

What does that have to do with Ms. Cory?

MARSHALL

Her husband, Boris Weber, was the ringleader of the students who were making those bombs. He used the chess club as a front. Veronica fell under his influence. So did many other students. Weber was a very charismatic, brilliant, deceptive fanatic.

HEIDI

What...?

MARSHALL

The official story is, Boris Weber was killed when the bombs went off. But we have solid evidence that Weber escaped and left the country and he is now the ringleader of an international terrorist network.

HEIDI

Wow... I always wondered why she gives so much money to bums.

MS. BARKER

Quiet! I have a caseworker who is connected to a terrorist network?

MARSHALL

Let's just say we have reason to believe Weber is coming back to the States to see her. And we want him.

(writes down his phone number on a slip of paper)

My name is Marshall. Here's my phone number. I'd appreciate it, if you could keep an eye on Ms. Cory - if you see or hear or suspect anything - anything at all

MS. BARKER

Yes.

MARSHALL

And let's not tell Ms. Cory about this conversation. You understand.

MS. BARKER

I understand.

MARSHALL

Thank you. Have a pleasant day, ladies.

(Marshall exits)

HEIDI

Wow...

MS. BARKER

Not a word of this to anyone, Heidi - Not a word.

(MS. BARKER exits, agitated, with Veronica's dossier)

Scene 3: The Street, the same day, that afternoon

MADAME SULTRA is sitting, dozing.

VERONICA's voice calls out... "Madame Sultra!... Madame Sultra!"

(VERONICA enters, calling. She's carrying a grocery bag)

Madame Sul -

(she stops at the sight of Sultra and sneaks up to her)

VERONICA

Madame Sultra fell asleep one night and when she woke she got a terrible fright:
chilled to the bone, and her face was white:

(in a high-pitched voice)

"Oh no!" she cried, "I froze to death last night!"

MADAME SULTRA

(opening one eye)

That's no way to talk!

VERONICA

(joins her, taking oranges from bag)

Why? What's wrong with it? It'll happen if you don't take that room I got for you.
Unless of course you just wanna freeze to death. It's your choice.

SULTRA

Yup. It's my choice.

VERONICA

It's a nice room. At least it's got walls and a door.

SULTRA

(holding an orange up to the light)

Nope. Don't look right... The pulp's brown and the seed's shriveled up.

VERONICA

(grabs the orange from Sultra, peels it)

My we're choosy... If you can see through an orange skin, you can see into your
own future...

SULTRA

(licking her finger, then holding it high in the air)

West...

VERONICA

West wind?... Does that mean good or bad?

SULTRA

Sometimes.

VERONICA

"Sometimes!"

SULTRA

Sometimes good.

VERONICA

Right. Everybody else has taken the rooms I got for 'em, what's your problem? The George Washington. They love it. Snug as bugs in a rug.

SULTRA

(coughing)

Sounds like heaven.

VERONICA

(searching around Sultra)

What'd you do with your medication?

SULTRA

(glancing around)

Swiped....!

VERONICA

(drawing out a bottle of pills)

Somebody swiped it, huh? Well isn't this your day. I happen to have some spares.

SULTRA

Ohhhh... good.

(Veronica takes out a pill, opens her mouth wide, for Sultra to imitate)

VERONICA

Ahhhh...

SULTRA

(half-heartedly, sticking out her tongue)

Ahhh...

VERONICA

(plops a pill on Sultra's tongue)

Swallow it! It's just what you need to fight that flu --

(Sultra gulps loudly, pretending to swallow the pill. Veronica turns to unpack a bottle of water. Sultra spits out the pill).

VERONICA

I saw that! That's it! That's it! From now on, you can just squat here and wait for the Second Coming to save you! I've had it!

(Veronica stomps off; leaves the groceries with Sultra)

SULTRA

(not turning around)

She's going far.

VERONICA

(stops)

Who? Me?

SULTRA

Yup. I got a vision last night. I seen you up there - flying.... O Mother Mary shining with the sun behind her, with her torch held up high, a flame glowing in the clouds.

(holding her arms up, like the Statue of Liberty)

VERONICA

(short laugh, joining Sultra again)

You look just like the Statue of Liberty.

SULTRA

I seen you under a palm tree.

(Sultra chuckles)

VERONICA

(gives her a wrapped sandwich)

Alright. Show your stuff. Guess what's in there... without looking.

SULTRA

(feeling the bag for a "vision")

Uh... fried baloney on rye ... with melted peanut butter... My favorite.

VERONICA

Lucky hunch. But I never trust a fortune-teller with the shakes.

SULTRA

(holding out her trembling hand)

"His hand is stretched out and who will turn it back..."

(Veronica holds out her hand)

SULTRA

(reading Veronica's palm, chuckles)

Tck tck tck. Very cold. Voices in a grave...

VERONICA

That's cheerful news.

SULTRA

(tracing a line across Veronica's palm)

The shortcut to heaven is through hell... New life. Change...Cross. Uh-huh.
Watch for the double-cross...

(Sultra chuckles, immediately loses interest)

VERONICA

(looking at her palm)

What "double-cross"?

SULTRA

(who's been looking out)

Shhh...There it is again.

VERONICA

What.

SULTRA

Last night it was the same...

VERONICA

(now she sees him)

The shadow? Did he come up close last night?

SULTRA

Nope. It left when you left... Look: it's moving.

VERONICA

(calling)

Hey Shadow Man!

(sings the Paul Anka song)

"Put your head on my shoulder... Whisper in my ear, baaaby... words I..."

SULTRA

(peering out)

Shh! Sidewalk talks, Shadow hides. Copman comes. Shadow runs. It's in a hurry.
Someone's made it run away. There: it's in the cab.

VERONICA

Cab??

(MARSHALL enters from behind them)

MARSHALL

Well well well if it isn't our little one-woman Salvation Army.

VERONICA
(under her breath)
Shit...

MARSHALL
Good afternoon, ladies.

SULTRA
(starting to say a greeting to Marshall)
Hey -

VERONICA
(low voice, to Sultra)
Don't talk to him.

MARSHALL
Whisper, whisper. I hope Veronica isn't keeping secrets from me.

VERONICA
If you don't like whispering, try the next street, it's louder.

MARSHALL
But not half as interesting.
(to Sultra)
Now what were you saying about "running away"? I couldn't help but overhear.
Have you seen someone who's run away?

SULTRA
(chuckling)
A shadow on your shadow.

MARSHALL
Yes the past casts long shadows... How have you been, Mrs. Weber?

VERONICA
(correcting him)
Cory.

MARSHALL
You look like you've slept in a closet full of rats.
(Marshall laughs uproariously at his own joke)

VERONICA
Thanks, I feel lousy.

MARSHALL

So do I. But I've brought something to cheer us up.

(reaches in his inside breast pocket, pulls out a photo)

Will you look at this photograph for me?

VERONICA

(doesn't take it)

No.

MARSHALL

Please.

VERONICA

Why should I?

MARSHALL

Because you always do when I say please... And if you don't, I will pull you in for questioning.

VERONICA

Little Boy Peep plays cop.

MARSHALL

I am a cop. FBI. The best.

SULTRA

(chuckling, crossing herself)

West wind blows the menace in.

VERONICA

So why don't you go track down criminals for a change?

MARSHALL

(referring to the photo)

I've been tracking down this criminal for two years, Mrs. Weber.

VERONICA

Cory. And I thought we agreed you weren't coming around anymore.

MARSHALL

You might like to know your husband is on file with Amnesty International as a torture victim. But maybe you're not interested.

(he pockets the photo)

VERONICA

(hesitates, but can't resist)

Let me see it.

MARSHALL

I'm sorry it's not a pretty picture. But he survived.

(hands Veronica the photo)

His comrades helped him escape to Syria.

VERONICA

(throws down the photo; seething with rage)

You've really gone too far now Marshall...

MARSHALL

I only try to keep you informed.

VERONICA

The last Boris you found was in Beirut! And the Boris before that was in Rome, "killing the Pope."...

MARSHALL

(pulls out a clipping from a Syrian newspaper)

But this time it's really him. Look. It was taken three months ago. He's training those people in martial arts.

VERONICA

(peering at a clipping)

What "people"? Looks like a bunch of camels in the middle of a sandstorm.

MARSHALL

(prissily)

The photo is slightly blurred.

VERONICA

Hard to know if they're camels or dogs with humps on their backs.

MARSHALL

If you look closely you can see there are people there.

VERONICA

You and your stupid obsession. When are you going to face the fact that he's dead?

MARSHALL

Boris Weber is not dead.

VERONICA

Boris has been dead for two years. You were at his funeral for Chrissake!

MARSHALL

The man you buried was disfigured beyond recognition.

VERONICA

(referring to the photo of the torture victim)

So is this man. If Boris is alive, show me a photo that looks like him.

MARSHALL

(retrieves the torture photo)

I can't. He never looks the same.

(pulls out a pile of newspaper and magazine clippings)

Here. Rook.

(hands her the clippings, one by one)

VERONICA

Rook??

MARSHALL

Rook. His alias. Cute, eh? Chess term. Your husband played chess, you recall? He's called the Rook. Here. Carlos. Carlos is his other alias. Carlos, Rook, D.D. That's D.D....More Carlos... Rook... Here's D.D. again... Sahib. Here's Sahib. They're all the same man.

VERONICA

They all look different.

MARSHALL

Yes.

VERONICA

They're all supposed to be the same person?

MARSHALL

Yes.

VERONICA

Not one of them looks anything like Boris.

MARSHALL

Exactly. Your husband's a master of disguises. That's why nobody can get him.

VERONICA

(giving Sultra a clipping)

Okay. What do you think?

SULTRA

(holds the photo against her forehead)

...Thou wilt turn black to white, mourning to dancing, tears to laughter, widow to wife -

MARSHALL

(amazed at Sultra's divination)

This man is definitely Boris Weber. He matches the profile.

VERONICA

(takes the clipping from Sultra)

Profile: the most violent thing Boris ever did was turn the page of a book.

MARSHALL

Cunning and dangerous -

VERONICA

... deadly... slinking across the world to plant the seeds of terror, then moving on, on and on, always in a new disguise, under a new alias, Malcolm Marshall's stalking Angel of Death...

(Sultra chuckles loudly)

MARSHALL

It's no laughing matter.

VERONICA

No it's terribly tragic. The FBI's a bunch of necrophiliacs.

MARSHALL

We're concerned for your safety.

VERONICA

When have I heard that before?

MARSHALL

You're going to need my protection.

VERONICA

I've never needed your protection.

MARSHALL

You've never appreciated my protection. But you will...

VERONICA
(lets out a gasp of horror)

MARSHALL
(following her gaze)

What.

VERONICA
You see him? - Crawling toward us? One eyeball hanging down his chin and a mouthful of blood - my god it's The Rook. He's coming after us!
(Sultra chuckles)

MARSHALL
(pocketing the photo and clippings)
Well, I'll keep you posted.

VERONICA
Six months ago you promised me that you were going to stay out of my life.

MARSHALL
I have stayed out of your life.

VERONICA
Permanently!

MARSHALL
Unless I have information.

VERONICA
You never have information. It's been two years you've been hounding me about Boris! When are you going to get off my back for good!
(Sultra chuckles loudly)

MARSHALL
It hasn't been easy for any of us.
(takes out a pressed handkerchief, blows his nose loudly)

MARSHALL
This damn winter... Days like this I dream of La Sarena.

VERONICA
(change of tone)
La Sarena?

MARSHALL

(as if he'd forgotten)

Oh! You honeymooned there didn't you...

(Pause. He watches the effect on Veronica. Smiles, pockets the handkerchief)

Keep yourself warm, Mrs. Weber.

VERONICA

Cory.

MARSHALL

Warm. You have to build up your resistance.

(Marshall exits, strumming a "guitar", singing, Latino-ballad-style)

La-Sa-Reena... La Sarena Sarena Sarena....

(Lights fade to black)

Scene 4: The Welfare Department, morning, the following day

HEIDI is typing. The radio is on.

RADIO NEWSCASTER's voice

No injuries have been reported in the bombing of the American consulate this afternoon in West Berlin. Authorities believe the bombing is directly linked to recent terrorist attacks in --

(VERONICA enters, halfway through the news. She overlaps the Announcer's voice)

VERONICA

(shivering from the cold)

Whoa! Is it ever murder out there!

HEIDI

(shutting off the radio)

Veronica! Well it's about time!

VERONICA

(overlapping, reaching for the coffee on Heidi's desk)

Hey Heidi, how's it going? This coffee?

(drinks)

HEIDI

Veronica, you're not going to believe what's happened --

VERONICA

Hmmm. Tastes like shit. Listen to this, I've got to tell you something -

HEIDI

Me too --

VERONICA

Ricky Alvarez, remember I told you about that family, right? He's fourteen years old, and he wrote this essay for school on the American revolution, so he was showing it to me this morning - get a load of this opening, he made it up himself:

Listen my people and ye shall hear
the story of a revolt by some poor pioneers.
They was gentle folk, burdened with toil and woe,
but for all their work, they hadn't nothing to show
but log cabins, corn, and maple syrup
'cause if gold was found, it was sent back to Europe.
Yes, there was gold in the rivers, there was silver in the ground
but Americans did labor under a foreign crown.

HEIDI

Will you please shut up!

VERONICA

(noticing Heidi's state for the first time)

What's wrong?

HEIDI

Where have you been!

VERONICA

Working.

(MS. BARKER appears, in coat, etc. She has just arrived at work)

MS. BARKER

(to Heidi)

Ms. Cory?

HEIDI

(to Veronica)

Our new supervisor.

MS. BARKER
(shaking hands with Veronica)

Ms. Barker.

VERONICA

How do you do.

MS. BARKER
I've been looking forward to meeting you.
(eyeing Veronica's ragged clothes)
I like your outfit. Where have you been?

VERONICA
At the Alvarezes. There was a pipe burst at their apartment- boiling hot water gushing through the living room, and naturally the landlord could not be reached so –

MS. BARKER
Truth... Dignity... Charity.
(pregnant pause)

MS. BARKER
These are our guiding principles, don't you agree?

VERONICA
Um... sure, that sounds right.

HEIDI
(interrupts)
She's worked wonders with the Alvarezes.

MS. BARKER
(not taking her eyes off Veronica)
Heidi, could you please get Ms. Cory's file.

HEIDI
Her -

MS. BARKER
Yes. In my office.
(HEIDI exits and Ms. Barker slowly peels off her gloves, coat, scarf, not keeping her eyes off Veronica)

MS. BARKER
Have a seat, Ms. Cory - it is "Miss," isn't it? You're not married?

No. VERONICA

Never? MS. BARKER

No. VERONICA

MS. BARKER
You have several pet projects. Hobbies. Outside interests?

VERONICA
Why do I have this feeling I'm being interviewed by a dating service?

Ms. BARKER
Just getting acquainted.

VERONICA
Right. Sorry.

MS. BARKER
Never married?

VERONICA
(about to confess)
Well - actually -

MS. BARKER
Yes?

VERONICA
(decides against it)
Hobbies. I did a little film for the Review Board.

MS. BARKER
Interesting.

VERONICA
You want to hear about it?

Ms. BARKER
No I heard about it already. You filmed homeless people living in an abandoned subway tunnel. Everyone says it was very moving.

VERONICA

Thanks...In fact... in fact they're right here.

MS. BARKER

"Here"?

VERONICA

Right under our feet. Imagine: all that life going on. Do you ever have the feeling, when you're sitting up here, there's a whole other life going on, underneath the life you're living, if you only knew where to look for it?

Ms. BARKER

No. I never had that feeling.

VERONICA

Neither did I. Until I saw it. But it's down there. Right below us. I took a camera down there for a couple weeks- I call it the Red X.

MS. BARKER

The what?

(HEIDI enters, with Veronica's dossier, listens)

VERONICA

The Red X...um... 'Cause when Madame Sultra first took me down there I gave it one look and I said, "No-go, this is red light for me" - and she said, "That's what you'll call it" - 'cause I'd said, "This is red light" - and she said, "We'll call it the Red X" - Red X, 'cause there was no light down there, you follow? - I mean, you can't get darker if you found the crawlspace to hell. This weird subterranean world and mean motherfuck - excuse me, but they are really mean motherfuckers

HEIDI

(quickly, with exaggerated cheer)

Fascinating.

MS. BARKER

Why?

VERONICA

Why ... what.

MS. BARKER

Why did you do it? Why put yourself in so much danger?

HEIDI

It took an awful lot of courage -

MS. BARKER

Do you thrive on danger?

VERONICA

No, but you know how it is – you pass bums on the street, and you don't look at them – you probably don't, right? Well, you might, but most people don't – but you know -- you know there must be something there worth looking at if you're afraid to see it... right?

(No response from Ms. Barker)

VERONICA

It's hard to describe but there's just some - there's something pure about them - maybe it's because I'm ...blabbing, blabbing, blabbing. Sorry. I had a long night.

MS. BARKER

So that's your pet project.

VERONICA

Yes, to see it.

MS. BARKER

But I think you missed a great deal. Heidi, show Miss Cory her dossier.

HEIDI

(hesitantly)

Veronica, we did a security check.

VERONICA

(innocently)

A what?

MS. BARKER

Show it to her.

(Heidi hands her the red folder)

MS. BARKER

Is anything missing?

VERONICA

(scanning the papers)

What is this?... What are these photos of Boris doing here?

MS. BARKER

It's an unfortunate overachievement of technology. When we ask for information about employees there's no telling what kind of trivia the computers turn up.

VERONICA

Boris's death wasn't trivial.

MS. BARKER

Boris? Your husband? He must be very trivial, since you say you were never married.

VERONICA

Ms. Barker, he was killed in a bomb explosion. This is private.

MS. BARKER

Not if you have a criminal record.

HEIDI

But it's not like she was arrested or anything. The police don't even have her fingerprints.

VERONICA

That what?

HEIDI

(catching Ms. Barker's eye)

The pol - the computer.

VERONICA

You just said police.

HEIDI

No I didn't. You just heard what you wanted to hear.

MS. BARKER

What were you doing with a man like Boris Weber?

VERONICA

Why don't you ask the computer? It knows more about me than I do.

HEIDI

He was a philosophy teacher. It says so right here.

MS. BARKER

From philosophy to bombs: there must be a lesson in that somewhere.

(taking the sheet of paper out of Heidi's typewriter)

Heidi has typed up a letter of resignation for you. All you have to do is sign it.

VERONICA

Resignation?

MS. BARKER

You don't have to give reasons why you're resigning. You're free to maintain your privacy.

VERONICA

Why?

MS. BARKER

It's your choice. You can file a grievance with the Review Board and have a trial and be asked unpleasant, personal questions or you can resign. Either way, you won't be a social worker.

VERONICA

Ms. Barker, do you have anything against the way I do my job? Because this work means everything to me, and no one's ever told me I don't do it well.

MS. BARKER

(leaving)

I'm sorry. With your background, you should never have been hired. If you have any respect for this department, you'll resign. And you'll do it quietly, without embarrassing us.

VERONICA

What brought this on?

HEIDI

(blurting it out)

She can't tell you.

MS. BARKER

Heidi, will you join me in my office please. Nice meeting you, Veronica.

VERONICA

Same here. I like your face.

MS. BARKER

Thank you.

(MS. BARKER EXITS, with dossier)

HEIDI

(to Veronica, admiringly)

You were great.

MS. BARKER'S VOICE (off)

Heidi!

HEIDI

Ciao, Veronica...It's really tough...

(HEIDI EXITS, leaving Veronica alone with the letter of resignation. Long pause. She signs it.)

Scene 5: The Street: That night, late

SULTRA, in her usual spot.

VERONICA's voice

Fuck 'em. Muck 'em Duck 'em –

(entering, very drunk, carrying two bottles of wine. One is open; she drinks from it)

Who needs 'em. They got attitude. They give attitude. They got a problem. I don't need their problem.

(Sultra watches Veronica, chuckling)

SULTRA

You're a nice girl.

VERONICA

(joining Sultra, opening the second bottle)

I'm a really nice girl when I bring out the booze.

SULTRA

You got a clean face.

VERONICA

Yeah I washed off the footprints.

(handing Sultra the second bottle)

Cheers...

(they smack their bottles together as a toast, drink)
(Pause)

VERONICA

We're ahead of our time, you and I.

SULTRA

(drinking)

Hmm-mm. That we are.

VERONICA

We're so advanced -

SULTRA

Yup.

VERONICA

...we're already in the new Ice Age. Snow stuck in our teeth, icicles in our hair, eyes bulging from snow blindness.

(speaking into her bottle, like a microphone)

This is the year Three Thousand Twenty in the City of the Dead... all the smart ones have gone below the equator...

(turns the bottle toward Sultra)

SULTRA

(speaking into Veronica's bottle, like a microphone)

Under a palm tree...

VERONICA

(speaking into the bottle)

And those of us left are -

(slight pause)

What are we waiting for? We're idiots! How come we don't escape?

(Veronica and Sultra burst out in laughter. ENTER Professor Lachmann and his wife, in evening dress)

WIFE

We'll never get out of here alive -

(Veronica and Sultra burst out in fresh giggles)

PROFESSOR

We'll find a cab.

VERONICA

(to Sultra)

Shhh...

(both women stifle their laughter)

WIFE

Cabs do not come to this area - not at this time of night -

SULTRA

(shaking her cup of change in their direction)

God bless you.

PROFESSOR
We'll find a cab.

VERONICA
(rises, with dawning recognition)
Hey...

WIFE
(spotting Veronica; whispers)
Oh no! -

VERONICA
Hey...

WIFE
(takes her husband's arm)
Keep moving -

VERONICA
Hey...

WIFE
Don't turn around -

VERONICA
Hey - Professor Lachmann?

WIFE
(stops, to husband)
Do you know her???

(Professor gives an embarrassed shrug)

VERONICA
Professor? Do you remember me? Boris Weber's wife?

PROFESSOR
(he doesn't recognize her)
Why ...--

VERONICA
(grabbing his hand, shaking it vigorously)
Veronica.

PROFESSOR
Why... Yes.

VERONICA

Hi.

PROFESSOR

What a surprise. Dear, you remember Boris Weber's wife.

WIFE

Yes.

VERONICA

(grabbing the wife's hand, vigorously)

Hi. We met at Boris's funeral.

WIFE

Yes.

VERONICA

(grabbing the Professor's hand again, shaking it)

Oh it's so nice to see you...

PROFESSOR

How is everything, um -

VERONICA

Veronica. I'm in social work. Was. I keep busy. Busy as I can.

PROFESSOR

Good. You look well. Social work... Boris would be proud of you.

VERONICA

(blurting)

Oh...I miss him. I miss him awfully.

PROFESSOR

Yes. So do I.

WIFE

We all do.

(nudges her husband to leave)

VERONICA

(keeps her grip on the Professor)

I don't know how to stop missing him - There's not a day when I don't think of him and want him and miss him and wish I could talk to him and hold him and fuck him and –

(Sultra chuckles)

WIFE

Darling, I'm cold -

VERONICA

I'm sorry.

PROFESSOR

(gently, to Veronica)

Don't be.

VERONICA

I've had a lot to drink. It's my birthday.

SULTRA

It's MY birthday.

VERONICA

Yes. It's her birthday. I got it mixed up.

PROFESSOR

(to Sultra)

Happy Birthday.

SULTRA

(shaking her cup of change)

Same to you.

VERONICA

Professor Lachmann, Boris always talked about you, he loved you. Did you love him?

PROFESSOR

Yes. He was my best student.

VERONICA

(desperately)

He hasn't contacted you, has he?

(Stunned glances between the professor and wife)

VERONICA

Has he? Please tell me

PROFESSOR

Why - um - I'm not sure I know what you -

WIFE

Darling, we really must go.

VERONICA

Please - I've got to know.

WIFE

NOW. I want to go now.

VERONICA

(grabbing the Professor)

You're not keeping anything from me are you?

PROFESSOR

(to Veronica)

Give me a call sometime. Let's have lunch.

(They start to leave)

VERONICA

(holding the Professor back)

If Boris was alive, he'd be with me, wouldn't be?

PROFESSOR

Yes. Of course he'd be with you.

WIFE

(out of earshot)

That girl is a drug addict.

PROFESSOR

Pitiful.

(PROFESSOR Lachmann and his WIFE exit)

(Lights lower, Veronica wraps a blanket around herself, lies down. Lights rise: morning on the street)

(SULTRA, sprawled, asleep. Near her, a mound of blankets)

(MARSHALL ENTERS. He's carrying a picnic basket)

MARSHALL

Cockledoodle-doo...!

(no response)

(Marshall pumps himself up, imitates the real sound of a rooster)

(The mound of blankets moves, groans, Veronica's head appears. She groans louder at the sight of Marshall)

VERONICA

Ohhh... What are you doing here...

MARSHALL

(beaming)

Protecting you.

VERONICA

(sits up, yells toward the street)

Help...!

(Marshall reaches into his basket, takes out a washcloth)

MARSHALL

(peering at Sultra)

She sure sleeps soundly. The deep sleep of the inebriate.

VERONICA

(drowsily, rubbing her face)

Good people sleep good.

MARSHALL

I sleep splendidly. How about you?

(hands the washcloth to Veronica. She presses it against her face, savoring the warmth)

VERONICA

Oh this feels so warm.

MARSHALL

Your daddy and mommy must be tossing in heaven seeing you curled up on the pavement like this... I bet you had a grand bedroom, didn't you? As a child?... Like a fairy-tale. Feeling weak? You're not taking very good care of yourself - on the streets!

VERONICA

(lowering the washcloth from her face)

Why don't you shoot me for it? Then you can spend the next two years tracking down my ghost.

MARSHALL

I brought you some muffins. My mother baked them for you. Bran. For fiber.
(He takes out a muffin wrapped in a neatly ironed checkered cloth)

VERONICA

Your mother? I thought she was dead.

MARSHALL

(distractedly unwrapping the muffin: he's spotted something across the street)

Is she? ... I'm not sure...

(Marshall's eyes never waver from the object)

VERONICA

Yeah, that's the problem: it's hard to tell the difference if they're seriously dead or they're just pretending.

MARSHALL

Hmm.

VERONICA

And if you believe the dead aren't dead, it's 'cause you're dead yourself, right?

MARSHALL

(not listening to Veronica)

Could be.

VERONICA

Good. That's settled then. Hey Marshall, you know what? You're dead.

MARSHALL

I am?

(hands Veronica the muffin)

VERONICA

Yeah you're dead. You're dead and I'm alive. You live in a dead world, world of the dead, expecting a visit from a dead man.

MARSHALL

(trying to act unaware of being observed)

Don't be alarmed, but that yellow taxi has been circling the block for the past twenty minutes.

VERONICA

Excuse me while I take my pulse.

MARSHALL

He's after you.

VERONICA

There must be a million yellow taxis in this city.

MARSHALL

There are so many perverts...

(trying to act unaware of being observed)

Coffee?

(hands her a cup of coffee, speaks out of the corner of his mouth)

See it? with the man in back -

VERONICA

What man in back?

MARSHALL

(affecting casualness, so the man doesn't know he's been spotted)

He's looking at you very queerly.

VERONICA

I can't even see his face, how can you tell where he's looking?

MARSHALL

(surreptitiously consulting the pad where he'd written down the license number)

It's always the same taxi. I took the license number.

(Pause. Veronica stares out. A flash of terror goes through her. Sultra wakes up momentarily, snorting. The sound startles Marshall and Veronica)

MARSHALL

(referring to Sultra)

My god it's alive!

(Sultra instantly settles back into a deep sleep)

MARSHALL

She looks awfully ill.

VERONICA

(trying to shake off the terror)

She is awfully ill.

MARSHALL

You don't look much better. Why is your face so yellow?

VERONICA

Camouflage. So I blend in with the taxis.

MARSHALL

Sick, sick, sick.

VERONICA

(relieved)

Look. He's gone. He stopped 'cause of a red light. And I'm getting my own breakfast.

(She hands him back the muffin and gets up to go)

MARSHALL

I brought your mail.

VERONICA

Thank you.

MARSHALL

There's nothing interesting. Just overdue bills. I took the liberty of paying your electric bill. They threatened to turn off your electricity.

VERONICA

(glanced over the mail, which includes an airmail letter)

Beautiful...

MARSHALL

Who's the letter from? Could it be from that disgusting crank?
(Veronica looks at him)

VERONICA

I should've known.

MARSHALL

I took it to the lab to have it verified. It's from Zurich. It's the fourth letter that's come out of Zurich.

VERONICA

The fourth letter?

MARSHALL

I wouldn't read it if I were you. It'll only upset you.

VERONICA

Why haven't I seen the other letters?

MARSHALL

And you're upset. Which is why I haven't shown them to you. It's from the same crank who's been writing you for two years. Do you really want to read it? Nothing has changed. Only, now he writes he's coming for you.

VERONICA

He's "coming for me"?

MARSHALL

Go ahead and read it if you want.

VERONICA

Who is he?

MARSHALL

A crank, evidently. And he still signs with red, dripping, bloody crosses. I've put a tracer on him.

VERONICA

What are bloody crosses supposed to mean?

MARSHALL

(shrugs)

He writes quite a few stories about himself.

VERONICA

Everybody's got a story... Everybody's story sucks...You can keep it.
(hands him back the letter)

MARSHALL

Thanks. I already made a copy of it.

(she pockets the letter)

MARSHALL

Do you still keep your phone unlisted?

VERONICA

Why?

MARSHALL

Because he'll try to call you. I wouldn't want to see you alone with him.

VERONICA

I've tucked in bums at night. I've been places you don't dare go, Marshall.

MARSHALL

"My Madeline! Sweet dreamer! Lovely bride! Say, is he for aye thy vassal blest?"

VERONICA

Oh I love it.

MARSHALL

Do you remember it? I would read that poem to you... Four hundred lines long... "The Eve of St. Agnes" - it helped us get through so many hours... What a lovely plot... a boy and a girl... and dragons... and a magician: "O Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine. Cruel! What traitor could thee hither bring?"

(Marshall looks at her expectantly)

VERONICA

Marshall, you're like a talking migraine.

MARSHALL

Trust me. I've always been there. Who else can you turn to? After the bombs went off, and you were suffering so terribly – curled up in the corner, like Cinderella among the ashes. You wouldn't talk to anyone, not even the finest psychiatrists.

(he brings out flowers)

But when you saw my flowers you would smile. They said you wanted to die, but I knew you would live. I fed you with my own hands, talking softly, urging you to eat –

(handing her the muffin again)

"Eat, Veronica, eat. Live. There's so much to live for."

VERONICA

Oh what am I going to do with you? I know you mean well, Marshall. You really do. And I'm grateful. It's not that I don't appreciate what you've done for me. But I'm not in the hospital anymore.

MARSHALL

(smiling)

Come on, let's have a picnic. You have time. I woke you up early.

(pats the seat next to him)

You shouldn't go to work on an empty stomach.

(Slight pause, stops smiling)

What is it? ...Is it because of that crank? I knew I shouldn't have showed you the letter...

VERONICA

(sadly)

You really don't know? You know about everything else.

MARSHALL

What.

VERONICA

I lost my job.

MARSHALL

(genuinely surprised)

I beg your pardon?

VERONICA

They fired me.

MARSHALL

(stunned)

That's impossible.

VERONICA

I'm out of work.

MARSHALL

They can't do that. They can't fire a civil servant.

VERONICA

They said I embarrassed them.

MARSHALL

Embarrassed them!

(assuming she'd done something unorthodox)

Well what did you do?

VERONICA

They wouldn't tell me.

MARSHALL

Well didn't they give you any reasons?

VERONICA

No.

MARSHALL

Well what are you going to do? You have no money. You let your money dribble away. Dribble, dribble, for worthless bums, I warned you. Bums are wasting assets. This is terrible. What terrible timing! Idiots! Idiots! I hate bureaucrats! ...I'm so deeply sorry, Veronica. I never thought this could happen. How could this happen? They had no right to do that.

VERONICA

They had photos of Boris. Graduation pictures. Our marriage. They even had a baby photo with his mother. How did they get these pictures?

MARSHALL

He has an FBI file.

VERONICA

What is he doing there? He's DEAD!

MARSHALL

That isn't important right now. You shouldn't dwell on the past. It's over.

VERONICA

You're the one who's always dwelling on the past!

MARSHALL

(truly upset)

I've been wrong. I was wrong. I don't know how it happened they could get rid of you like that. They're fools. Bureaucrats. But you've made wonderful progress. The important thing is, you keep yourself occupied. You musn't slip back.

VERONICA

You admit you're wrong about Boris?

MARSHALL

No.

VERONICA

Yes. He told me he'd found the girl he wanted to have grandchildren with.

MARSHALL

Grandchildren? What does that have to do with anything?

VERONICA

That's the way he was. He thought ahead. He had his dreams scored out in a blueprint. By now he'd be a tenured professor. Do you have any of that in your files?

MARSHALL

You've idealized him beyond recognition.

VERONICA

You never knew him, Marshall.

MARSHALL

But I understood him. And here we are talking about him, and you say you're not obsessed.

VERONICA

(in despair)

What am I going to do?

MARSHALL

We'll find something to keep you busy. First, I'll take you home. I cleaned it for you.

VERONICA

You mean you searched my apartment.

MARSHALL

Yes. Okay. But I also vacuumed and dusted your apartment. You've been neglecting it.

(hailing a cab)

Taxi!

(to himself)

They're never around when you need them.

MARSHALL

(to Veronica)

Come on.

(He runs off)

Taxi! Taxi!

(He gets one finally)

MARSHALL's voice

Veronica! Get in! The meter's running! I can't wait all day!

(Veronica runs off in the opposite direction. Marshall runs on, stops, sees that she's fled)

MARSHALL

Rats!

(He studies Sultra a second. Goes up to her)

MARSHALL

Psst... Psst!

(nudges her awake)

SULTRA

(groaning)

Ohhh...

MARSHALL

We can't all be secretive, can we? It doesn't pay.

(reaches for his wallet, takes out a \$1 bill)

Ah... what have we here... Washington: never told a lie -

(Sultra ignores him)

but: he was a sap.

(puts the dollar away, takes out a \$10 bill, studies it)

Hamilton: bright fellow, bright - a visionary like yourself

(Sultra waves it away. Marshall puts the \$10 away, reluctantly takes out a \$20 bill)

Ah... Jackson: I always thought I bore a resemblance to him - do you?

(Sultra grabs the \$20 without comment, stuffs it inside her shirt)

You mentioned something about a man...

SULTRA

Huh?

MARSHALL

The Shadow? The taxi?

SULTRA

(recalling)

Shadow on your shadow...

MARSHALL

Someone's following her.

SULTRA

Someone's maybe going the same way she is.

MARSHALL

How long have you been seeing him?

SULTRA

Yesterday.

MARSHALL

(greatly worried)

Have they talked?

SULTRA

Huh?

MARSHALL

Veronica and the man.

SULTRA

Never seen a shadow that talks...

(Loud, eerie chuckling from Sultra, lights fade to black)

Scene 6: Midnight by the harbor

VERONICA

(pacing, distraught, holding the crank letter in her fist)

Bloody crosses, Shadow Man, Crank... "I'm coming for you." For you - for you - for you.... All along the waterfront -not one ship, not one person, not one car, nobody, nothing -not a sign of life -

(picks up a stone, throws it in the water, "skips" it, hears something, turns around)

What do you want? Is anybody there?

(She throws a stone in the direction of the sound)

Everybody's hibernating.

(gathers stones)

"I'm coming for you - for you - for you - for you"

(throwing stones in succession, looks up at the stars)

I Veronica Weber presently existing under the constellation Orion the hunter the killer the lover Orion

(throws more stones)

shoots a shadow in the river!

(squints, takes a step forward, peeing into the darkness)

Boris?

(screams)

BORIS!!!!

(shrinks back, weeps, runs off. VERONICA EXITS, MARSHALL ENTERS, stands there. Lights change. Desk comes in view, dim light)

Scene 7: FBI Office, 9:00 the next morning

(The shadowy figure of an FBI OFFICER, smoking a cigar. VERONICA bursts in, stops in front of the desk)

VERONICA

So: this is the almighty FBI. I love the low lights. I always wondered what it looks like at the source. This big shadowy thing that followed me for two years and treated me like a criminal and now I'm here and it's nine o'clock in the morning and the sun is shining outside and I still can't see anything.

FBI OFFICER

(turns on the desk lamp)

Is that better? Now, what can we do for you, Miss-um -

VERONICA

(shines the lamp on her face)

Cory. I go by my family name: Cory. But I'm known by my husband's name: Weber. It's not his real name. He wasn't born "Weber," did you know that? He took it on because he thought it sounded more "philosophical." It's German. It means "weaver." Boris told me that. To weave. To weave a web. He liked German philosophy. That's my husband: Boris Weber... The bombing in the university chess club? Ring a bell? You were head of the investigation, then you turned the case over to Marshall.

FBI OFFICER

Oh yes yes yes, now I remember. You look changed. How have you been?

VERONICA

I lost my job, it's winter, I'm freezing, people are freezing on the streets and I can't do anything about it, I've run out of ideas, I'm doing great. Veronica Cory would like to know when this is going to be over. So does Veronica Weber. I think you can answer that for us.

(pause)

Would you like to answer that for me?

FBI OFFICER

What is the question?

VERONICA

I want to know when this is going to be over. It's been two years. Maybe you can't picture what it's like to spend two years not knowing what's true or not true. But you were there. You saw what was left of my husband's body. To you it was a body, to me he was the first and only man I ever loved and the only family I had. Veronica Weber is just somebody in your files, but I want you to know it's my life you've been playing with. He was my life. I never wanted to come in here for you to see you're breaking me, but now I want you to see it: You're breaking me. And if that's what you've been after, you've done it, and I don't know why you're doing it –

FBI OFFICER

Mrs. Weber -

VERONICA

I want you to tell me what you know. Not just rumors and speculation and fantasy I want something real, I want proof. I want proof Boris is alive.

FBI OFFICER

Mrs. Weber, I'm sorry it's been difficult for you to adjust --

VERONICA

No! No! Don't-! Don't give me that! Don't give me your double-talk! I've been up all night walking the streets in sub-zero waiting for your damn office to open. I want to know if he's alive!

FBI OFFICER

Mrs. Weber, no one survived the bombing in the chess club.

VERONICA

Is he alive?

FBI OFFICER

But we made it clear to you -

VERONICA

Is he? Yes or no.

FBI OFFICER

No.

VERONICA

He's dead.

FBI OFFICER

Yes. How can there be any question in your mind?
(pause)

VERONICA

Boris is a terrorist ringleader. He and his friends were terrorists making bombs in the cellar of the chess club and Boris staged it so when the bombs went off it would look like he was killed.

FBI OFFICER

Your husband was a very intelligent man, highly regarded by the university --

VERONICA

Why do you say he's a terrorist?

FBI OFFICER

We never said he was a terrorist. He had nothing to do with the bombing.

VERONICA

Why are you still on the case?

FBI OFFICER

Mrs. Weber, I don't know what you want. Your husband was killed in an unfortunate bombing accident. There is no case.

VERONICA

Marshall's on the case.

FBI OFFICER

(with a slight wince)

Malcolm Marshall?

VERONICA

You're his boss.

(pause)

FBI OFFICER

Malcolm mishandled the case. He was running surveillance on the student who we suspected was making the bombs. Instead, he tailed your husband. He was obsessed with Boris Weber. He's still obsessed with Boris Weber. We don't know why, but we hear from our secretaries they still get calls from Malcolm about Boris Weber. We ignore the calls.

VERONICA

You ignore...? So what is he doing in the FBI?

FBI OFFICER

He's not FBI. He was relieved of his job, on my orders. His last case was the bombing in the chess club.

(thinking aloud to himself)

I don't know what went wrong with Malcolm – He sends us bizarre letters which he's obviously forged and signs them with huge red crosses....

VERONICA

He's not FBI...?

FBI OFFICER

He could have become a very good agent.

(to himself)

Now he's a nut, a nuisance, a pest...

(seeing Veronica wander off)

Mrs. Weber...?

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Scene 1: The Street. The following evening.

(MADAME SULTRA, sitting in her usual spot. She's wearing clear plastic garbage-can liners over her clothes. MARSHALL enters in an exultant mood.)

MARSHALL

(casing the area for Weber)

How 'bout a little fortune-telling, Miss Sultra? What do you see in the stars, hmmm?

(He gives her a ten-dollar bill. Sultra pockets it in her shirt, perfunctorily. Marshall gazing up at the sky)

All those interconnecting networks up there.... And down here... the ultimate network has sent its emissary....Have you seen him?

SULTRA

Nope.

MARSHALL

You will... Like clockwork, like the stars -- everything has its place and order.

(fists in the air, triumphant)

I have caught Boris Weber!!!!

(catches Sultra's eye, clears his throat, embarrassed, calms down)

I'm not assigned to him, you know. Never was. I was assigned to watch one of his friends -- what was his name...

(snaps his fingers, straining to remember, finally:)

Smith--

SULTRA

Hard name to remember.

MARSHALL

Total crackpot -- but Weber -- Weber interested me.

SULTRA

Lucky him.

MARSHALL

I watch him, with her – sashaying down the street arm-in-arm with her on hot, miserably hot summer evenings. And Wednesday evening he'd go to the chess club. She wouldn't come with him – I suppose the cigarette smoke bothered her. He'd enter the club, stop by a table, sit down, smack some pieces around, get up, chat a little with his ... admirers and ever so casually he would go through a door that led to a cellar where he and his students made the bombs. Oh he was sooooo good. I can't help saying that: he was very, very, very smooth.

(VERONICA enters, carrying a large department-store box)

VERONICA

What are you doing here?

MARSHALL

Nothing, nothing. Shooting the breeze, enjoying the scent of magnolias...

VERONICA

What magnolias.

MARSHALL

Don't you smell them? Spring's in the air. You can smell it in the wind.

VERONICA

Oh?

MARSHALL

(hint, hint)

I have an acute sense of smell.

VERONICA

I'd like to talk to her.

MARSHALL

(magnanimously)

Oh, be my guest.

VERONICA

Alone... *please*.

MARSHALL

Certainly.

(turns to leave)

VERONICA

Wait. I want the key to my apartment.

MARSHALL

Don't tell me you lost your key again.

VERONICA

No, I didn't lose my key. I want the key YOU have.

MARSHALL

My key –

VERONICA

No. My key.

MARSHALL

Any particular reason?

VERONICA

Yes. It's mine.

MARSHALL

You have someone else in mind to give it to?

VERONICA

Just hand it over.

MARSHALL

(looks through his pockets)

Certainly. Let me see if I have it... I suggest you get a new lock by the way. Someone broke in.

VERONICA

(startled)

What?

MARSHALL

Last night. Don't be alarmed. Nothing was taken. I did a thorough check. It was probably just someone looking for you.

VERONICA

Who's looking for me?

MARSHALL

No one important, I suppose. Or he would have found you. He did a clean job, picking the lock, obviously an experienced burglar. Luckily you weren't there. Where were you last night?

VERONICA

(slight pause to think about it; and finally concluding that he's lying)

Marshall, don't you ever get tired of this?

MARSHALL

Who could it have been? He slept in your bed -- very carefully.

(for *Sultra's* benefit also)

Like a shadow, he left no trace of himself.

(looking at the stars)

Oh look at that gorgeous constellation. What's it called -- Orion, that's it. You know the fable of Orion...the goddess shot an arrow and killed him because she mistook him for a shadow...? Now why was I thinking of that? I found a strand of hair on your pillow -- I'll show you -- we can go to your apartment right now --

VERONICA

Just give me my key!

MARSHALL

Fine. Don't say I didn't warn you.

(gives her a tiny envelope from his pocket. Change of tone: very cheerful)

Uh -- may I borrow some change please?

VERONICA

What for?

MARSHALL

The phone.

(Veronica holds out her hand, Marshall takes a quarter)

Thank you. Don't worry, I'll vouch for you. Even though you're his wife. I'll explain you gave me the money to call them.

VERONICA

Call who?

MARSHALL

The authorities.

VERONICA

What authorities?

MARSHALL

Coming. You can't see them. They drive without their headlights. Uh - If you need me --

VERONICA

I'll shoot myself first.

MARSHALL

Should I say when you need me. Just give me a whistle. You know I'm never far.
(MARSHALL EXITS. Veronica watches until he's out of sight)

SULTRA

(pulling out the \$10)

Now don't ask me what this was for --

VERONICA

He gave you that?

SULTRA

He's on top of the world tonight.

MARSHALL (*off -- from far away singing*)

"La Sarena"...

VERONICA

Who's going to stop me from killing that man....

SULTRA

Don't look at me.

(Whistling from Marshall is heard)

VERONICA

I went to the FBI this morning and guess what they told me? He's a nut.

SULTRA

(holds her heart, gasps in "shock")

No...!

VERONICA

You're not surprised? "A nut, a nuisance, a pest..."

(paces restlessly)

I don't know why I didn't think of that myself... I've got to get away...

SULTRA

Away?

VERONICA

Yeah ... I'm going away, Madame Sultra... I went to the graveyard today and I said goodbye to Boris and I really meant it. Who am I kidding? It's not like he'll pop up out of his grave and say, "Oh...Sorry, I didn't get back sooner, honey-bunch, but the car had a flat tire."

SULTRA

One flat?

VERONICA

Four flats. One after another.

SULTRA

(does the sign of the cross on herself)

Jinxed.

VERONICA

Yeah, I'm the jinx. Everyone I love ends up dead.

SULTRA

You gotta have air.

VERONICA

(nodding, taking a deep breath)

Right. Breathe in, breathe out: simple...

(sniffing)

Ew I stink. I haven't bathed in three days.

SULTRA

You smell like an angel.

VERONICA

Yeah I stink of the city of the dead.

SULTRA

(chuckling, wagging her finger)

You're tricky...

VERONICA

I was going to the office, I thought, "I'll go there, I'll present the facts, I'll win" -- and then I stopped...

SULTRA

No sense going back there.

VERONICA

Yeah. Why go back? I'm free. That's it. I am. I don't have to answer to anybody.

SULTRA

I been free since I learned to crawl.

VERONICA

Yeah, it's wonderful, isn't it?

SULTRA

(shrugs)

So-so.

VERONICA

It's scary ...shit...it's scary... -- I don't know anything different than this city.

SULTRA

Honey, nothing's different nowhere.

VERONICA

There's got to be something different.

(spots a roach)

I want to see honey-bees not just roaches-- elch!

(stomps on it)

SULTRA

(peering down at the roach)

You just killed the city commissioner.

VERONICA

I want to see things grow. How 'bout the Heartland?

SULTRA

Don't know it.

VERONICA

Isn't that what it's called? Heartland? -- I mean, where the hell does our food come from?

SULTRA

(pointing to a garbage can)

There.

VERONICA

(persuing her own thoughts)

I never in my life touched a stalk of wheat. I've never seen a cornfield, except in movies, have you?

SULTRA

Na. The last movie I seen is "The Ten Commandments."

VERONICA

Cows... what's it like to talk to a cow?

(she starts mooing. Sultra has a coughing fit)

VERONICA

I brought you something ... to keep you warm...

(takes the coat out of the box)

SULTRA

(not sincerely)

Oooh...it's ... beautiful...

VERONICA

Not very colorful... I know you like more colors.

SULTRA

No it's so pretty.

VERONICA

I hate to leave you like this.

SULTRA

Huh?

VERONICA

You know there's a room for you. You just need to go there and –

(she breaks off, realizing she can't persuade Sultra, starts to go)

VERONICA

Well... so long partner.

SULTRA

I didn't take my medicine.

VERONICA

(stops)

No?

(searches her pockets for Sultra's pills, astounded by Sultra's acquiescence)

SULTRA

Two.

VERONICA

You sure? They're gonna knock you out, you know.

SULTRA

Will they give me sweet dreams?

VERONICA

The sweetest there is.

(hands Sultra 2 pills, puts the bottle near her)

SULTRA

Come on, stay by me - just a bit?...

VERONICA

Sure...

SULTRA

(motions to Veronica to come closer; hoarse whisper)

He don't know who Shadow Man is.

VERONICA

Who.

SULTRA

The Menace.

VERONICA

Marshall? Did he ask you about the Shadow Man?

SULTRA

Let the Menace box with his own shadow.

(Sultra chuckles)

VERONICA

I should've stood up for myself a long time ago.

SULTRA

You stand up, you get pushed around. You sit tight - nobody can budge you.

VERONICA

You don't really believe that? If you don't budge, nobody can budge you?

SULTRA

I got a soul, and it needs nobody and nothing. You need something, that's hell. You need, you want, you fight, you cry -- that's hell. In heaven, you don't fight, you don't care, you lay aside your treasures. I got a heaven now and no hell.

VERONICA

That's the loneliest heaven I ever heard of.

SULTRA

(chuckles)

You're goin' to be there real soon. I seen it. You got a clean face.

VERONICA

Yeah? You see the map to heaven on it, or hell?

SULTRA

Heaven's right here. Hell's right there.

(pointing out)

I sit and watch all these poor people rushin' around in hell. All their cryin' and wants....Hell.

VERONICA

Yeah...You got a point... If I hadn't gone to the FBI this morning I'd still be trying to figure out "Is he alive, is he dead, is the whole world against me? How come nothing's sure?" It was like a conspiracy. These almighty ones shaking up my brains for fun -

SULTRA

I got plenty 'a *them*.

VERONICA

...Marshall. When I think of him sneaking around my apartment -- touching my things -- I even let him do my laundry -- how could I let him do that? His hands were on my underwear -- I let - I let him

(breaks off)

He was my nanny...

(considers it)

Well, he wasn't so bad. He wasn't a BAD nanny, as nannies go, but --

SULTRA

(closing her eyes)

These pills are making me sleepy... You are me...

I'm you?
VERONICA

You are me....
SULTRA

(stares at her)
Why do you say that...?
VERONICA

I seen you... You're wearing my face...
SULTRA

Oh god ... I hope someday something makes you really good and angry.
VERONICA

Tell me a tale...
SULTRA

Are you warm enough?
(Sultra nods drowsily; the coat slips off. Veronica tries unsuccessfully to put it back on Sultra's shoulders)
VERONICA

It's the plastic. Nothing sticks.
SULTRA

Okay.... bedtime tale coming up.
(Sultra sighs, dozes off while Veronica recites a poem that she has often recited to Sultra)
VERONICA

It's called...

... "Madame Sultra Escapes from the Tundra..."
(while Veronica recites the poem, Sultra mouths the words before gradually falling asleep)
SULTRA

(with melancholy)
VERONICA
Right.
A blizzard was howling, the fields were deserts of snow.
Plodding across the ice was Madame Sultra, where the full moon glowed.
She shook her fist against the white sky, she cursed the tundra glare,

And the voice that heard her voice declared:
Madame Sultra, I will save you from this place where
nothing grows.

When the --"

(Veronica spots something appear in the shadeows;
with creeping fear)

Oh shit damn... Madame Sultra... hey, wake up. Shit. *Don't sleep on me now,
please...*

(change of voice)

Like it so far, Shadow Man?

(Veronica looks toward offstage-right, where the shadow is,
draws a small bag of unshelled peanuts out of her pocket,
takes out the peanuts, cracks them; continues the story)

Well... "at that instant, the sun rose, the ice melted" --

(calming herself; cracking the peanuts)

Pain in the ass you have to shell them -- I got 'em for the zoo. There's a sign
says, "Do Not Feed Animals Unshelled Peanuts." Incredible. Very specific: "No
Unshelled Peanuts." So I'm supposed to stand there and shell
nuts for these pathetic monkeys....

(holds out her palm)

Want some?

(*VERONICA* stands; covers up the sleeping Sultra while the
MAN ENTERS, approaches her slowly, from far away. He's
lean, blond, definitely charismatic, wearing loose slacks,
leather jacket, scarf. He walks with a cane, his movements
are pained. He could be a ghost, or shell-shocked)

Talk about monkeys... You know King Kong? You know how big he really was?
Three feet... Three feet tall... Every time I see a little ape like you I think about
that... I remind myself of your real size: Puny. You think you're big, but you're
puny... You don't scare me. Nobody scares me. I go down to the Red X at
midnight and wade with my bare feet through puke and shit. I bring a camera
down there with nothing but a guardian angel who tells me the shortcut to heaven
is through hell. So you wanna "come for me," you gutless creep, you--

MAN

(hoarse whisper)

Veronica, it's me.

(Veronica takes a step backward at the sound of his voice)

Don't go... Wait, please.... I can't go after you... I can't move fast... Don't be
frightened... Listen... Do you recognize my voice...

(he comes closer, slowly, rolls up his sleeve)

Give me some time.... Look... You've got the same tattoo... Do you remember
when we got the same tattoo... a rainy day, in winter, in La Sarena? Who else
would know that, but me?

(Now face to face, Veronica stares at the tattoo, stares at his
face)

VERONICA

(hoarse whisper)

What are you?

MAN

(whispering)

It's me. Boris. I look different, I know --

VERONICA

(barely able to get the words out)

I - buried - him - with - his - face blown off.

BORIS

I wasn't there. I wasn't in the chess club.

VERONICA

No...

BORIS

I didn't think I'd be gone this long. I didn't want to be. You got the money I sent?
Yes?

(VERONICA shakes her head)

You didn't?

VERONICA

It's really you?

(whispers)

You're breathing, are you breathing?

(they hug)

Oh man oh man oh man... I haven't had a man in two years... Thank God I didn't
cremate you... Oh what did I say? Were your eyes always brown?

BORIS

No.

VERONICA

Oh my god...what have you done to your eyes? Why aren't your eyes blue
anymore...?

BORIS

I'm wearing contacts.

VERONICA

Damn...

(punches him)

VERONICA (cont...)

You look like a frigging ghost. What's wrong with you? Where have you been, where the hell have you been? I'm so excited I'm gonna vomit. Oh... I missed you so badly.

BORIS

I missed you too.

VERONICA

You smell like milk... I remember that: you never sweat ...Oh shit I'm sorry I stink like a toilet.

BORIS

You're beautiful.

(weepy, gets out a handkerchief, blows his nose)

It's going to feel so good to get away from here.

VERONICA

(after a pause, for this to register)

You're leaving?

BORIS

Come with me? Will you? These two years -- for the first time in my life I've found something I can do. Not just theory, not just talking ideas. I need to do something that has meaning.

VERONICA

(after a pause)

Me too. Let's go to my place.

BORIS

Now. Tonight. I have a place for us. You'll be safe there. Will you?

VERONICA

What is it? A graveyard? Shit, did I say "graveyard"? I'm a little, you know...
(gesturing she's feeling dizzy-crazy-happy)

BORIS

Me too. I'm a lot, you know... Let's go. I've got your passport.

VERONICA

I don't have a passport.

BORIS

I got one for you. I took a photo from your apartment.

VERONICA

You've been in my apartment?

BORIS

I broke in. I slept there last night.

VERONICA

There's no sheets on the bed.

BORIS

I noticed. There are no chairs either.

VERONICA

I had no one to sit with.

BORIS

(smiling)

You kept my books though... "Veritas est adaequatio" -

VERONICA

Shadow Man...

VERONICA (cont...)

(looking at Sultra, recalling her palm-reading)

Change... new life... I don't believe this!... I've got to wake her up - she has to see this -

(Veronica moves toward Sultra)

BORIS

I love you.

VERONICA

Oh I love you too.

(MARSHALL ENTERS, with gun out)

MARSHALL

If you're carrying a weapon Mister Weber, please remove it.

VERONICA
Marshall, what are you doing?

MARSHALL
(inches toward Boris)
Out with it.

BORIS
(pats his pants)
I don't have one.

MARSHALL
Hands up!

VERONICA
Marshall, put that down.

MARSHALL
(kicks away Boris's cane, which is lying on the ground. Pulls out handcuffs from his pocket, tosses Veronica the handcuffs)
Put them on him. Carefully.

VERONICA
Why?

MARSHALL
He knows karate. The ruffians you befriend on the streets are peanuts compared to him.

BORIS
You've got the wrong guy.

MARSHALL
(aiming the gun at Veronica)
Tell her to handcuff you.

BORIS
(calmly)
Handcuff me.

MARSHALL
Thank you.
(to Veronica)
Do it! You heard him!

(Veronica reluctantly gets the handcuffs)

MARSHALL

Put them in prayer.

VERONICA

Prayer?

MARSHALL

(shows her with his own hands)

Like this...Behind!

(seeing Veronica's hesitation, he aims the gun at her wildly)

Do it. Tell her --

BORIS

Put them in prayer.

VERONICA

What? Whose side are you on anyway?

BORIS

Yours. Do what he says.

MARSHALL

Thank you. I admire that. I have to say that.

(hissing to Veronica)

Hurry up! Wiggle it.

VERONICA

What.

MARSHALL

Wiggle -- jiggle the lock!

(Marshall leans out to check the cars)

Reinforcements arriving --

(several little beeps of a car horn. Marshall checks his watch)

Yes! Right on the nose.

(yelling to the cop cars on the street)

NOW!

SULTRA

(groaning awake)

Ohhh my head...!

MARSHALL
 (waving the gun toward Boris and Sultra)
 Get her out of the way!
 (Boris moves)

MARSHALL
 (to Boris)
 Not you!

VERONICA
 (referring to Marshall's gun)
 Stop waving that around!
 (Veronica helps a grouchy Sultra get up)

MARSHALL
 Sorry...

SULTRA
 Person can't get any sleep...

MARSHALL
 (to Sultra)
 CLEAR OUT OR I'LL--
 (Veronica lunges for the gun. Sultra hurries off, muttering to herself about "crazy people," etc.)

No!!
 (Veronica knocks the gun out of Marshall's hand; throws her whole body over the gun. Instantly, everything is silent. A pause before Veronica speaks)

VERONICA
 (hissing; to Marshall and Boris)
 Don't touch me! Nobody come near me!
 (rising to her feet; holding the gun out at arm's length, slowly "pans" the street as if the gun were a camera -- both Marshall and Boris are very nervous)
 So... Who's here?

MARSHALL
 Give it back to me please?
 (holding his hand out for the gun)

VERONICA

Why is it so goddamn quiet? ... Where is everybody?

MARSHALL

(whispering)

Keep the gun on him.

VERONICA

(pointing the gun at Marshall)

You remember that white, windowless room and how quiet it was? We were holding the torch for the same guy –

MARSHALL

Yes! I told my boss, you remember? I told him, "That girl is a deceived bride," I--

VERONICA

Was I deceived?

BORIS

Veronica, please, you're wasting time. Let's go.

MARSHALL

Don't let him --

VERONICA

(to Boris)

You were all I had, didn't you know that?

MARSHALL

She knows what you are, you killer!

BORIS

(to Veronica)

I've never killed.

MARSHALL

Liar! Berlin, yesterday. A car bomb, attributed to Achew.

VERONICA

"Ha-Choo???"

BORIS

(to Veronica)

I wasn't in Berlin yesterday.

MARSHALL

He always gets away. Checkmate, Ahem! ROOK!!! -- You flinched, I saw it.
(to Veronica)

There's not a legitimate government in the world that doesn't want to put him behind bars before he leads the world into a bloodbath.

BORIS

(referring to Marshall's gun)

No one wants a bloodbath –

MARSHALL

Ohhhh.... he's soooooo.... good!

(spots Boris making a move)

Watch it!

VERONICA

(whirling on Boris)

Stay away from me!

BORIS

You're holding it wrong.

VERONICA

What?!

MARSHALL

(assuming Veronica is going to shoot Boris)

Don't shoot! Let the authorities decide.

VERONICA

What authorities?

(Veronica glances out. Boris knocks the gun out of her hand and puts his foot on the gun)

MARSHALL

No!...

(scrambles away, hissing to Veronica)

You didn't lock it. You stupid twit! You let him trick you!

(to Boris)

Don't hurt me! Please... please... I won't do anything. I can't... I never hurt anyone.

(to Veronica)

He throws you away and comes back and you make it so EASY for him. Well HAVE HIM.

(to Boris)

You can have her. I won't stop you. No, not me. No. Not anymore. She's nothing to me. DIRT.

(to Veronica)

You... dirt! I hope you die in his bombs, I'll fish you out of the ashes and laugh. Damn you. Damn both of you! Kill me, I'm not afraid! Do it! I have nothing left, nothing -- Neither do you -- you've got nothing -- Damn you -- That gun doesn't have bullets.

(MARSHALL EXITS, weeping in frustration... a long pause)

BORIS

I didn't know what it's been like for you.

VERONICA

(wonderingly)

Neither did I... I hate those things...

(referring to the gun)

BORIS

So do I.

(he checks to see if there are bullets, then thoroughly wipes off every inch of the gun)

VERONICA

I almost killed you...almost killed Marshall, too....What am I?...I never thought I'd see myself do anything like that...I got the makings of a genuine outlaw...Well you always did show me new things I'm capable of. What were you doing trying to save his life?

BORIS

That's what I do. I save lives.

(he drops the gun in the garbage can)

I train defenseless people to defend themselves. I save lives.

(gives her a long look)

Do you understand me?

VERONICA

I don't understand anything... This whole day has been incredible...!... This morning I went to the FBI and they said you were dead. - Next thing I know, Elvis is gonna show up.

(SULTRA ENTERS, dragging a large garbage bag of clanking cans. Eventually she will plop herself down on her bench)

SULTRA

(sings Elvis Presley's song)

"Love me tender... love me true..."

(continues humming)

BORIS

I watched you for days, you know, waiting for the right moment to go up to you...
When I looked around your apartment, I thought about how much I left behind. ...
But if I knew what I know now, I'd probably still do it all wrong.

VERONICA

Oh... I'll just droop into your arms and you can shape me like a blob of hot wax.
(they hug)

BORIS

I don't want to lose you. Don't let me go.
(sound of police siren)

SULTRA

(crosses herself, peering out)

One car on the north corner.

(touches her forehead)

One lady south

(touches her abdomen)

Another lady east

(touches her heart, peers out)

West?... West? Nope. Nobody west yet. Lord have mercy.

(Boris reluctantly breaks away from Veronica, looks out, then gets down to business: removes his clothes, removes his blond wig, and throws them into Sultra's dumpster -- Sultra for her part will be happy to add his clothes to her layers, and she will don his wig, and eventually discover his gun in the dumpster. Veronica watches Boris perform this remarkable transformation. When he is done, he will be wearing a suit and tie).

VERONICA

Boris... Maybe I never really knew you, but I've never been happy with anyone except you. That much I know. Even when you were dead, you were more alive to me than I was to myself... I can remember the exact moment when I fell in love with you. You were on stage, lecturing something to do with um... economics or electronics or microbes, what the hell. I wasn't really listening. I was just... totaled. You were beautiful, so compelling. There was a mystery about you. An aura of distress, wow. My brain's stuck. It's awful ... I can't remember what your old face was like anymore, it's getting so confusing.

BORIS

Don't let them confuse you. I'm on your side.

(off in the distance: a sharp whistle, answered by another)

I have to go. I'll send you money. I won't forget you.

VERONICA

What? Where are you going? I'm going with you.

(another whistle is heard)

BORIS

Stay where you are. Don't follow me. And don't look back.

(BORIS EXITS quickly, with no sign of a limp)

VERONICA

What? Hey...! Wait! No! What are you doing? I was stuck to you, I was glued --

(More whistles)

MARSHALL'S voice (off)

It's him! Over here! This way!

(Veronica runs toward the voice, stops as MARSHALL and OLDER FBI WOMAN burst on stage)

OLDER FBI WOMAN

(yelling at Sultra, gun out)

Freeze! FBI!

SULTRA

(turns around to face FBI, carelessly wagging Marshall's old gun)

Trick or treat?

VERONICA

Sultra, drop the gun!

SULTRA

(playfully)

Bang-bang.

OLDER FBI WOMAN

Drop it!

(YOUNGER FBI WOMAN bursts on, gun out, sees Sultra pointing gun at FBI WOMAN, shoots Sultra. At sound of gunshot, FBI OFFICER bursts on. A beat, before Veronica registers what's happened)

Sultra...?
 VERONICA
 (runs to Sultra. OLDER FBI WOMAN joins her)

Who fired?
 FBI OFFICER

Me, sir.
 YOUNGER FBI WOMAN
 (to FBI Officer)

Sultra... No...! No...!
 VERONICA

Why?
 FBI OFFICER

She didn't drop the gun, sir.
 YOUNGER FBI WOMAN

(in shock)
 MARSHALL
 Boris Weber is The Rook. Weber was here. That's his clothes she's wearing.
 That's his hair.
 (referring to Weber's wig, which has fallen off Sultra)

I thought it was Rook. She had a gun, sir.
 YOUNGER FBI WOMAN
 (to FBI Officer)

You're the ones with the guns. You killers...! She never hurt anybody!
 VERONICA

Ohh...
 SULTRA
 (groaning, clawing off her clothes)

Sultra?
 VERONICA

Oh... you shot my Bible.
 SULTRA
 (pulls out a huge tattered Bible)

VERONICA

You're alive...! Oh... you're alive!

SULTRA

Saved by the Word of the Lord, halleluyah She-Almighty!

FBI OFFICER

Mrs. Weber -- I --

VERONICA

Don't frigging "Mrs. Weber" me. It's Cory! Cory! My name is Cory! Veronica Cory is who I am!

(Black-out)

END OF PLAY

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