

"When I was young I had the blues. I couldn't pay my light bill. I couldn't pay my rent. Now, I can pay my light bill. I can pay my rent. But I still have the blues... I guess I was born with them."

— Muddy Waters

Nothing Here I Want

Characters:

- AUGUSTINO (*occasional worker of menial jobs, early 30's*)
- BIXEL (*constantly out-of-work political organizer, late 30's*)
- COLVIN (*former city worker living off disability, late 30's*)
- MARY (*white hooker, 30's*)
- RITA (*black bartender, 30's, intimidating to patrons, wisehearted*)
- BIG JIM (*large white man in late 40's who played pro football for one year*)

Regular bar patrons (their brief speaking parts, signified by upper case below, can be doubled by cast members):

- ALFRED (*bar owner who dresses and acts like a genteel mortician, in late 50's*)
- middle-aged male Hispanic crack ADDICT
- black DEALER
- black TRANSVESTITE
- white TRANSVESTITE
- POLICEMAN
- policeman
- black hooker
- girlfriend of Colvin
- BIG MAC
- REVEREND MORE
- COLLEGE GIRL
- WOMAN
- MAN
- various regular drunks of all races

(the distinctions of race above, far from permanently fixed, exist only to ensure the cast reflects a mixed-neighborhood urban bar.)

Set:

• *an L-shaped bar with its corner at an angle very near to the front of the stage, so that characters seated at the bar face or are in profile to the audience and the dialogue can be clearly heard. A few tables and chairs are spread out to the side of and behind the bar. Everything is sordid in appearance, with stuffing coming out of chairs, cheap neon beer lights, bikini posters on the walls and an ancient jukebox. The clothes of the three main characters are those of vagrants, tattered, full of paint and other blemishes, and ill-fitting.*

ACT I**scene 1:**

Lights out. Spotlights come up slowly on BIXEL and COLVIN seated at the bar, then RITA, who talks inaudibly and sparingly into the phone tucked against her ear while she cleans a glass with a cloth. AUGUSTINO enters and sits down with BIXEL and COLVIN.

BIXEL: Hey-hey. You're late for dinner.

AUGUSTINO: BIXEL. COLVIN. Needed to get a few more hours in down at that warehouse.

BIXEL: Wow, you worked the whole week, AUGUSTINO. I'm damn proud of you. Maybe you finally found your calling — dockworker.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah, *(affecting tough guy voice)* "He coulda' been a contenda', now he's a dead-end dockworker. But — he's still hungry." *(they laugh.)* I was going to quit this morning, then I remembered: it's Payday Friday — I get a check anyway.

COLVIN: Did you say check?

BIXEL: I heard check. *(COLVIN and BIXEL high five, but with just their index fingers.)*

COLVIN: So how 'bout one?

AUGUSTINO: Bring these fellows a round, RITA. *(she doesn't acknowledge them.)*

BIXEL: Ah, the fruits of labor.

COLVIN: Kinda' like we're the hungry mouths of babes he never had at home to feed.

BIXEL: Only we're the thirsty mouths.

AUGUSTINO: It's a couple rounds, then you're back on your own. RITA, bring us-

RITA: Shut up a minute! What, you can't you see I'm talking here? *(she looks*

away from them and goes back to her conversation.)

BIXEL: Hey, he's been loading trucks all day- *(to AUGUSTINO)* you been loading trucks? *(AUGUSTINO wavers his hand in the air in loose approximation)*- he's been loading trucks all day! *(to AUGUSTINO)* See, you can't let her neglect you like that, she used to try the same stuff with me.

AUGUSTINO: What, you never have any money, what's there to neglect?!

COLVIN: He's right. You earned these drink- I mean you earned that paycheck.

AUGUSTINO: I guess she's earning hers, too.

COLVIN: But you've got the money, and isn't it RITA'S job to take your money?

AUGUSTINO: You're damn straight. *(he gets up, walks over and taps RITA on the shoulder. while still on the phone, she calmly takes the glass in her hands, fills it with icewater from a pitcher on the bar, throws it on him, glares at him, then turns back to her conversation and begins wiping the glass again. he walks back. BIXEL tries handing him a cocktail napkin, but he brushes it away.)* Tough to celebrate around here. *(music starts and lights come up immediately to reveal rest of the cast partying animatedly as Koko Taylor's "Wang Dang Doodle" plays from the jukebox [prop can be used] while the ADDICT taps and snaps and leans an elbow against it to look at the other selections, a hooker enters, uses the bar phone and leaves, two drunks stumble to a booth, the ADDICT'S DEALER enters and they go through an elaborate handshake together at the jukebox, then sit at a table and exchange the stuff for money under the table. the DEALER exits. TRANSVESTITES begin a shoving match over a \$5 bill on the bar. the ADDICT begins unraveling his baggie. ALFRED appears to try and calm down the TRANSVESTITES. the volume of the music lowers to a level where the audience can just barely hear the dialogue.)*

ALFRED: Please girls. Now, now girls, we can't have rough-housing here. *(they don't even acknowledge his presence and continue arguing. one of them bumps into COLVIN.)*

COLVIN: Hey man, watch it.

TRANSVESTITE: What'd you call me, sugar?

COLVIN: Well whatever, just watch it.

ALFRED: Please, now I've told you two before about this, we can't have that kind of behavior- *(the bill tears in half and one TRANSVESTITE then rips her half up into small pieces and throws them on the floor.)*

TRANSVESTITE: There, you got your half, I got mine. *(they both walk off to a booth, the second*

TRANSVESTITE *still holding the half of the bill moves a little more slowly and dejectedly.*)

DRUNK AT
TABLE:

Greenbacks! *(he points at the floor and is trying to summons the coordination to get up by rocking back and forth in the booth.)*

ALFRED:

(signaling drunk to stay seated with his hands) No, just relax. It's alright. *(hurriedly grabs an ashtray from the bar and, with the small wisk broom always attached to his belt, sweeps the pieces in as best he can, then turns down the jukebox volume from the bar and more blues music fades to a background level until noted otherwise.)*

COLVIN:

So how much more you gonna keep working this gig?

AUGUSTINO:

I'll see about it on Monday. Work's running out anyway.

COLVIN:

Yeah? Sure it is.

BIXEL:

What do you know about work?

COLVIN:

Enough to know I did my share. *(RITA slides beers to them. AUGUSTINO glares at her and flings her the bills.)* At least I don't pretend to be employed.

BIXEL:

I've been volunteering down at the mission, which I guess doesn't count for you. Besides, politics is seasonal. I do my odd jobs when I need to.

AUGUSTINO:

Ah, you're the only one of us who's got anything close to a career. You'll make it just fine. Besides, you stay in shape for those campaigns by coming here, eh BIX?

BIXEL:

I like how you put that. See COLVIN, AUGUSTINO here knows. He's a working man. *(they all laugh.)*

AUGUSTINO:

That's right, boss. *(slips his work gloves on his hands and mockingly lifts the mug of beer to his mouth with both hands.)*

COLVIN:

Let's hope we can all laugh about it next week, 'cause that's when you're gonna' have to find some place to sleep besides my floor. I can't take the snoring any longer.

AUGUSTINO:

Don't worry, I'll be outta' there. I finally found a good sleeping bag at the pawnshop.

BIXEL:

Did you buy your camera back? *(AUGUSTINO bows his head in defeat.)*

COLVIN:

Necessities first, BIXEL.

AUGUSTINO: The camera is a necessity.

COLVIN: Oh come on, you stole that.

AUGUSTINO: Right, and when I stole it as a dumb-ass kid from that pawnshop, I thought I'd just sell it. But then I started to use it.

BIXEL: You'll get it back, AUG.

AUGUSTINO: When I do, I'm gonna keep it for good. I'm even going to pay back the pawnshop I took it from so that it really will be mine.

BIXEL: In the meantime, I'm paid till the end of the month at the motel. You can shower there, maybe even stay a night or two.

AUGUSTINO: Thanks BIX, I'll be alright.

BIXEL: We gotta' stick together, that's what I always say on the campaign trails, don't forget those who are struggling.

COLVIN: Maybe some people should try a little less struggling and a little more working. *(sneaking up on the ADDICT who is unraveling his baggie to get a closer look)* Don't drop it! *(ADDICT startles, drops it and snatches it.)*

ADDICT: Hey fuck you! *(COLVIN makes his way off stage to the men's room to the opposite stage side of the exit sign.)*

AUGUSTINO: So I'm taking a nap this morning behind a rack of palates, still getting over all the wine we had last night, and this foreman passes by, laughs and says, "Well don't hurt yourself, fella', they might keep you on another week." I say, "Naw, they already got YOU here to take orders." He kinda hitches between steps and I turn around hoping he's gonna fire me so I can get my check a few hours early and go get a little hair of the happy hour dog. But nothing. He just keeps walking!

BIXEL: Maybe he agreed with you.

AUGUSTINO: Unbelievable, I used to be able to get canned from a job like that at will. I decided to stick it out the rest of the day for the extra cash, then just play it by ear on Monday.

COLVIN: *(returning)* You worry too much about things like that.

AUGUSTINO: What, do I look worried? *(extending arms, beer in hand)*

COLVIN: You worry about small things and miss the big things. You and him both.

BIXEL: Maybe that's 'cause we don't have disability paying our way, so our small things seem a little bigger than yours.

COLVIN: You get what you deserve, I get what I deserve.

AUGUSTINO: *(to BIXEL)* If we could sit on our asses like him and get drunk all the time we would.

BIXEL: I do. I just don't get paid for it.

COLVIN: Hey, I didn't ask to get hit with a shovel.

AUGUSTINO: Even if I did ask someone on the job to hit me with a shovel, I probably wouldn't wrench my neck enough to get disability. I'd just have a big ass welt on my head to show for it.

BIXEL: I'd probably have a hemorrhage and die.

COLVIN: Look, it's just like with anything. Everyone's got the same chance of getting smacked in the head with a shovel. It's what you make out of it.

AUGUSTINO: RITA. *(she comes half way over, sees they're empty and later returns with beers.)*

BIXEL: You're alright, AUGIE.

AUGUSTINO: It'll be your turn soon enough.

BIXEL: Oh, I'll be getting some campaign work soon for the biggie, presidential campaign work.

COLVIN: Right.

BIXEL: No, seriously, party headquarters will let me know where they might need help, then I get to choose. Imagine if I work for the winner? I could get a permanent job — sure, not in Washington, but at the state capitol level.

COLVIN: How many years have you been doing this stuff?

BIXEL: A while.

COLVIN: How many?

BIXEL: About 14, why.

COLVIN: Have you ever worked on a winning campaign?

BIXEL: There's different ways of defining it.

COLVIN: Has one of your candidates or initiative measures or amendment campaigns or whatever the hell you call the things you do, ever won by popular vote?

BIXEL: No.

AUGUSTINO: Ease up, at least he tries, he tries to help the little guys like us.

COLVIN: Speak for yourself.

AUGUSTINO: Oh that's right COLVIN, you're just little where it counts.

COLVIN: Now I bet you'd like to know, wouldn't you AUGUSTINO, ya' squirrely little sand nigger.

AUGUSTINO: *(getting up.)* My grandparents were from Mexico, you dumb fuck.

COLVIN: All the same to me.

AUGUSTINO: Should I take the drinks I just bought you out of your ass.

BIXEL: *(stepping between them and sitting them down.)* Hey, let's not have any fighting. I just wanna get drunk. Calm down, come on. *(AUGUSTINO sits back down.)* Now look, here's BIG JIM, you don't see him acting like that. *(BIG JIM enters and sits at bar)*

AUGUSTINO: BIG JIM!

BIXEL: Class all the way.

COLVIN: BIG JIM!

BIG JIM: Boys, how we doin' this fine fresh evening?

BIXEL: Good as can be, good as can be. Where you been?

BIG JIM: Started at Dorothy's and shot a couple games of pool with Wild Bill. Then I stopped in at The Ready Room and had a drink with Pops. And I just came from Roslyn's. Benny and Lakota Sue were there but I couldn't understand much of what they were saying.

AUGUSTINO: They dig in pretty early. You better get to them around breakfast time. And I don't mean brunch.

BIG JIM: I remember one fella' I played football with, he'd start off each morning, game day or not, with at least three big belts of whiskey. Just to get the juices flowing again.

BIXEL: In the pros?

BIG JIM: Yeah, my roommate the only full season I was on the team.

AUGUSTINO: What was his name?

BIG JIM: You're too young, but (*pointing to BIXEL and COLVIN*) even these guys wouldn't recognize it, Ed only played one year more than me, which is when this happened. Anyway, not ever getting in any games, he told me he started nipping a bit more in the daytime during the week. He stayed in good shape but his reflexes were getting dull, and even a fraction of a second makes a big difference. One game, both guards get hurt, a freak occurrence, and Ed has to fill in, it's his big chance. But Ed's kinda become more a drinker now than a blocker. It's a close game and Ed's man is making tackles. He's trying every trick he knows, but the guy's too fast for him. It gets to be late in the game and they come down to a make or break play. Ed decides to cheat and take his man down, and just hope the line judge referee doesn't see it. The problem is, he gets spun around right from the start of the play and loses his bearing. He makes a quick dive to tackle the guy and actually knocks him down like a ton a bricks. Problem is, it's his own quarterback. Well, they go on to lose that game and it was the last time Ed appeared in a pro game. They put him on the practice squad and cut him the next summer.

BIXEL: You see, you gotta be ready when your chance comes.

BIG JIM: And never drink on the job.

BIXEL: Yeah, AUGGIE, ready to go sober?

AUGUSTINO: Sure, but BIG JIM'S talking about juicing on the job. I can keep from doing that if I'm looking at a career.

BIXEL: Career? You know, I've been kinda tossing around a career idea in my head, too.

COLVIN: Listen to this bullshit.

BIXEL: No, I've been working for all these candidates for so long, I'm thinking, why don't I just run myself?

COLVIN: Go for senator. No, hell, president.

BIXEL: No, you start small, idiot, and network. You don't just get arrogant right off the bat like that. How 'bout you, AUG, what are you gonna' go for?

AUGUSTINO: Well I don't see much of a future, but I still have my dream: I'd like to get my camera out of hock — for good — and just take photos. Maybe see some of them published. That's it.

BIXEL: You see, and I thought it was just a hobby for you.

AUGUSTINO: Well aren't hobbies what we'd all like to do for a living if we could?

BIXEL: Politics is more than a hobby, it's my life's passion. If only the pay were more steady. The volunteer stuff keeps me going in between, there's no money but at least I'm helping out somewhere.

AUGUSTINO: BIX, you're living week to week in a motel, what are you doing working as a volunteer?

COLVIN: It's just goddamned pathetic, is what it is.

BIXEL: It's my mother, God rest, she raised all of us that way. She used to say, "The weak will take and not give. The strong will give and not take. But there's always going to be a little give 'n take."

AUGUSTINO: Wish I could tell the difference.

BIG JIM: Me too, you think that one over there's a woman?

AUGUSTINO: That's not what I was- I don't know, JIM, I don't risk it.

BIG JIM: I'll be careful. *(gets up, walks over to the booth and squeezes next to the BLACK TRANSVESTITE).*

COLVIN: *(A woman appears in the doorway and waves to COLVIN.)* God, not a minute too soon. *(he gets up and walks over to her, they embrace, then walk out.)*

BIXEL: You and me, AUGIE, we can still turn things around.

AUGUSTINO: Not sure what you mean, BIX. *(beat. gently.)* Maybe you're hearing all those speeches, those voices in your head again.

BIXEL: *(subdued)* OK. You're right. *(violently changing tone)* Ahh! Don't be a damn pessimist AUGUSTINO! Where's your fight? It's common sense that what's up goes down and what's down goes up. Can't ya' see, it's cyclical. RITA! *(beat.)* Put your money away, I got you covered this time, pal, put your money away.

AUGUSTINO: I don't have my money out because it's your roun-

BIXEL: Put it away, put it away, I got this. *(RITA brings two more beers. BIG JIM, pushed out of the booth by the angry TRANSVESTITES, gets up and staggers out. COLVIN comes in after he exits.)*

AUGUSTINO: Looks like JIM guessed wrong. Or right, who knows.

BIXEL: Were you guys in the dumpster again?

COLVIN: *(sitting back down)* What if we were?

AUGUSTINO: That's just wrong, man.

COLVIN: Don't knock it till you tried it, son.

AUGUSTINO: It's tough enough imagining a woman wanting to engage in sexual acts with you, but then to go into a dumpster-

COLVIN: I don't see you getting any, AUGUSTINO! She only gets a half hour break from her job. Lighten up.

DEALER: Call an ambulance!

RITA: If it's a customer, bring 'em in here and walk him around first. We don't want the cops.

DEALER: No, call a damn ambulance! *(background music off.)*

RITA: What happened?

DEALER: That big white boy is all cut up, damn! All cut up to pieces.

COLVIN & AUGUSTINO: BIG JIM. *(they both run out with BIXEL.)*

scene 2: *(AUGUSTINO and RITA at bar.)*

RITA: Where's your pals?

AUGUSTINO: Still at the hospital I guess. I just couldn't bear to see JIM like that any longer: half conscious, half unconscious, half alive, half dead.

RITA: I don't see why anyone would wanna hurt a sweet man like that.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah. Whenever you think you've got it bad, it makes you realize some people really had it brought down on them.

RITA: That why you come in here?

AUGUSTINO: *(beat.)* Maybe. What about you?

RITA: I get paid, remember?

AUGUSTINO: Oh, yeah. But-

RITA: This isn't my only job. You think I'm just here to amuse you guys?

AUGUSTINO: I never said you were amusing.

RITA: *(wiping the bar)* I may not be amusing, but I'm not sitting here with a bunch of dumb asses.

AUGUSTINO: Oh here we go, is it lesson time again about dumb asses? Ease up, RITA, it's been a rough night for all of us. *(beat.)* How about a free drink in honor of ol' BIG JIM?

RITA: You're pathetic.

AUGUSTINO: Ouch. Hey, you know Weird Eddie, real skinny, usually tries to sneak something in and then order some mixer?

RITA: Yeah.

AUGUSTINO: Somebody was telling me he was tying one on tonight at The Music Box when a fight broke out. A cop car pulled up to check on a domestic call next door. They must've been green because they left the keys in the car to go roust some drunks they saw leaving the bar. Eddie stumbles out while this is going on, climbs in the cruiser like he was expecting it, starts it right up and guns it off the curb. They found it parked on the front lawn of his building and him passed out in his apartment with the good ol' black and white fuzz, so to speak, blaring away on the TV.

RITA: I've heard he's done that before, but never with a cop car.

AUGUSTINO: *(she brings him a beer.)* Thanks, you're alright RITA.

RITA: Yeah, right. *(beat.)* You ever get tired of hanging out here?

AUGUSTINO: I'm waiting for COLVIN.

RITA: That's not what I meant.

AUGUSTINO: Sure I do. When I was young I wanted to be a photojournalist. I didn't have the money to go to school for it, so what, other people wanted to be firemen or movie stars or bankers or some shit. You take the part that's there for you.

RITA: And hanging out here is a part?

AUGUSTINO: Yeah- I don't know- look, I'm no different than anyone else in here. Ask them and maybe they'll have better answers than I do.

RITA: You and COLVIN roommates now?

AUGUSTINO: Naw, I'm just staying on his floor a while. Of course, if your place is a little too chilly for you tonight?

RITA: You must be fucking dreaming.

AUGUSTINO: Well our dreams are still free.

RITA: Find yourself a new one, AUGUSTINO. *(she walks off as COLVIN and BIXEL enter drunk. background music on again.)*

AUGUSTINO: Where you guys been?

BIXEL: Just the Ready Room.

COLVIN: Then The Elbow Room.

BIXEL: And The Music Box.

AUGUSTINO: Music Bo- did you hear about Weird Eddie?

COLVIN: We talked with the cops.

BIXEL: Boy, were they mad.

AUGUSTINO: When the hell did you leave the hospital?

BIXEL: Right after you did.

COLVIN: Now I'm broke.

AUGUSTINO: Great. This is just great. Well I hope you two had enough to drink.

BIXEL: You sure would think so, wouldn't you, but I'll be damned if I couldn't sip anoth-

COLVIN: Shut up, BIXEL. *(to AUGUSTINO)* Come on, I'm letting you stay at my place.

AUGUSTINO: *(with resignation)* RITA *(motions two more to her)*.

BIXEL: Still can't figure out why anyone would wanna cut BIG JIM like that.

COLVIN: Maybe he got in with the wrong color, hanging out in that booth with that Hershey's Kiss. They don't like that.

AUGUSTINO: What?

COLVIN: Hey, I was in the service, I know about this stuff.

BIXEL: You always gotta make some sort of racial shit outta things, don't you?.

COLVIN: I ain't no more racist than you, some of my best buddies in the service were black. Every man, every woman, every child is racist in some manner or another. *(beat.)*

BIXEL: Here's to BIG JIM. *(they touch bottles and then, falsely confident)* He'll pull through. Hey, John the Brain says they're still having those little parties in the park down by the river.

COLVIN: Too easy to get rolled or busted there.

BIXEL: Just an idea.

AUGUSTINO: Well, wasn't John the Brain's last idea trying to sell people used ball point pens?

COLVIN: I think he called 'em "refurbished" pens.

AUGUSTINO: Where you at tonight?

BIXEL: You don't remember, I paid up at the motel when I got my welfare check last week.

AUGUSTINO: Nice of you to count on us to buy your drinks tonight.

BIXEL: Hey, whose wine were you drinking yesterday?

AUGUSTINO: COLVIN'S.

BIXEL: Well, and who do you think probably put in some money on that wine at some point.

COLVIN: Maybe he would make a good politician.

AUGUSTINO: I can't spend any more of my check. Here's to JIM. *(they toast again.)* I'll tell you one thing. Just let some fool try that shit on me and I'll take him to the circus and make him a sword-swallower.

BIXEL: They knew BIG JIM had money, he didn't always hang out in places like this. Why would someone bother with you when you don't have anything?

AUGUSTINO: Maybe they don't know that.

COLVIN: Have you taken a look in a mirror lately?

AUGUSTINO: I figure why bother, I feel so damn good.

BIXEL: You're a daily like us, now, brother.

COLVIN: It has its advantages. You kind of get to be invisible. People don't notice you unless you give them reason to.

BIXEL: No need to give them reason to most of the time.

AUGUSTINO: Invisible? I don't like the sound of that.

COLVIN: Oh, don't get me wrong, I make my presence known damn quick if necessary

AUGUSTINO: *(more uncertain)* I'll mess people up if necessary.

BIXEL: I can take care of myself.

COLVIN: Listen to this, neither of you seen shit. *(to AUGUSTINO)* You been in combat? *(to BIXEL)* You been in combat?

BIXEL: Neither have you!

COLVIN: Don't be a dumb fuck.

BIXEL: COLVIN, there was no war going on when you were in the service. What war were you in? What war?

COLVIN: I never said war. I'm talking combat situations.

BIXEL: Come on, not the Sergeant Rock stuff again.

COLVIN: You don't understand that sometimes you have to fight for your way of life.

AUGUSTINO: All I hear BIXEL saying is that you never fought for it either.

COLVIN: Are you getting to be as bad as him, ignorant and ungrateful for what you have?

AUGUSTINO: You just drank up about half of what I have tonight. COLVIN, there was no war.

COLVIN: There's always a war damnit! We live, eat and breathe it — everyday of our lives. There's nothing that hasn't been fought for, it's the law of nature, open your eyes, junior, open your eyes.

AUGUSTINO: I got 'em open, and you're not much to look at.

COLVIN: Pfff, you wouldn't last a day in the service.

AUGUSTINO: Good!

COLVIN: Too damn lazy.

AUGUSTINO: Speak for yourself!

BIXEL: Alright, alright, the both of you. What about BIG JIM, you think he's trying to talk tough right now like you idiots, you think he's talking football, huh? *(beat.)*

AUGUSTINO: *(aside to BIXEL)* You're right, I just get tired of hearing his shit over and over.

COLVIN: *(overhearing this.)* Me too!

BIXEL: Listen, maybe I ought to call it a night *(begins feeling his pockets)*.

COLVIN: It's still not last call. I'll ask RITA to put this round on my tab, in honor of BIG JIM.

BIXEL: Hey, what the hell, look what I found, an extra five. No, I got this, save your money COLVIN *(who was waving RITA over and digging through his wallet)*.

AUGUSTINO: Why don't you find money when I'm buying?

BIXEL: I got you for one. RITA! *(she eventually comes with the drinks.)*

AUGUSTINO: I think RITA's kinda sweet on me.

COLVIN: That why she poured a glass on you tonight?

AUGUSTINO: Sure, she'll do that, she'll do that. But that was before poor JIM got it. Maybe that made her realize her true feelings about what she needs.

BIXEL: Your drink'll be here soon, AUG.

AUGUSTINO: No, that kind of thing will make a person think of what they give a damn about. About who they like.

COLVIN: Hey, you're drunker than we are.

AUGUSTINO: She's always kind of looked out for me, in an unspoken way. You gotta listen between the words for that, a woman isn't gonna tell you straight out that she likes you.

COLVIN: (*RITA brings the drinks.*) Hey RITA, I hear you're a little sweet on AUGIE.

RITA: Fuck off.

AUGUSTINO: See what I mean. What she says and what she means are two-

RITA: Listen, why don't you all drink up and move on. We should have closed, anyway, if ALFRED had any balls.

AUGUSTINO: RITA, come on, you didn't talk that way before they showed up. I understand if you need to get me alone.

RITA: (*puts the drinks downs and collects the money.*) You're always gonna' be alone you keep talking that way, asshole.

AUGUSTINO: There's the spirit. See, she means that if I did stop talking that way, we might be together. (*she walks away.*)

BIXEL: Guess who was in here the other day? Jerry.

AUGUSTINO: Jerry?

BIXEL: Yeah, still outside, so I let him crash at my place.

COLVIN: That was smart. He take anything?

BIXEL: No! Christ. It's Jerry.

AUGUSTINO: BIX, I liked Jerry, too, but COLVIN'S right about being careful.

BIXEL: It's Jerry, I've known him 10 years.

COLVIN: Yeah, but for about the last half of those he's been out of the picture. That's okay for a while, just till you get back on your feet, but he's hard core now.

BIXEL: He just needs a job, like the rest of us. Except COLVIN.

COLVIN: Then why don't he go out and get one from time to time?

BIXEL: What the hell besides the right break makes you a damn bit different than him?

COLVIN: Because I wanted to work, I wanted to make a better life for myself.

AUGUSTINO: I can't imagine what it's like being outdoors for years, and neither can you, so just be careful is all.

BIXEL: Listen to both of you. What's happened, are you afraid to help people out now? Come on. Take a look around once in a while. We're in the same boat here.

COLVIN: How is Jerry?

BIXEL: He's living in an alley behind Scully's Sports Store!

COLVIN: I mean otherwise.

BIXEL: Oh other than that he's fantastic.

AUGUSTINO: I haven't had a place of my own for a while, but I'm not outdoors. Funny I've never seen him in line to get a number at Day Labor.

BIXEL: Yeah, you're quite the success story.

AUGUSTINO: I been getting that a lot lately.

COLVIN: It can be a bitch sometimes, but all I'm saying is if you really want to make it, you'll make it.

AUGUSTINO: Wait a minute, how do you mean "make it?"

COLVIN: Make something of yourself, idiot.

AUGUSTINO: I'm just talking about staying indoors, I think that's an achievable goal

— what’s this “make something of yourself” crap?

COLVIN: I didn’t expect you to know much about it, but I’m talking about securing one’s place, one’s station, working your way up. When I worked for the city, for example, I started out as a ditch digger and-

BIXEL: And you’re still shoveling it-

COLVIN: Shut up – and I worked my way up, I made something of myself.

AUGUSTINO: How are you different from the rest of us? I don’t know, the way I see it, we’re all failures, including you.

COLVIN: *(genuinely hurt by this)* Hey, you don't call a person that. You don't call a person that. I never called you or BIXEL that.

AUGUSTINO: Maybe you should.

COLVIN: You got no right to say that, no right! I had a bad break, otherwise who knows I wouldn't have been a crew supervisor by now.

AUGUSTINO: What’s the big deal, at least be man enough to admit it.

COLVIN: Fuck you! That's not it at all. You go ahead and feel sorry for yourself. You too, BIXEL, if that's what you want to do. But if I get a doctor's clearance, there still may be an executive position with the city to go after. *(lights fade on scene.)* I'm not ruling anything out. *(his voice trails off gradually as well.)* You two do what you want, I won’t complain about things, set limits on myself. I might even open up my own business. You just need to be able to see a need and answer it. That's how you make it in this world. *(lights out.)*

scene 3: *(another night in the bar, full of the same kind of activity and characters on stage as in the opening scene. AUGUSTINO is dancing with COLVIN'S girlfriend to Hank Williams' "Lost Highway." COLVIN and BIXEL are at the bar.)*

COLVIN: Why the hell does he need to dance? And with her?

BIXEL: Ah, let him have his fun.

COLVIN: I know, but we don't get much time together, with her working nights and him still at my place.

BIXEL: Thought he was moving out.

COLVIN: He's got a place lined up for next week. But then he said that last week. Okay, enough's enough. *(gets up and taps AUGUSTINO on the shoulder to cut in on the dance. He dances his girlfriend right out the door to their favorite dumpster in the alley again. AUGUSTINO returns to bar.)*

AUGUSTINO: She's pretty light on her feet.

BIXEL: You have to be in order to hop into a dumpster.

AUGUSTINO: That's just wrong.

BIXEL: You aren't too bad yourself.

AUGUSTINO: I used to dance a little in high school, you know, mixers, plays, musicals and stuff.

BIXEL: *(loudly)* You danced in musicals?

AUGUSTINO: Would you shut the hell up? Every time I tell you something you gotta repeat what I say as loud as you can.

BIXEL: *(facetiously)* Sorry, just asking a question. *(beat.)* So, you were in like "Hello Dolly" and "Guys and Dolls?"

AUGUSTINO: No, no I wasn't BIXEL.

BIXEL: Well at least you were popular.

AUGUSTINO: No I really wasn't, alright?

BIXEL: Well, doesn't matter much now.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah? *(beat.)* Shouldn't you be popular if you're in politics?

BIXEL: Well sure, if you've got money, popularity's a nice bonus.

AUGUSTINO: Well, here's hoping this campaign job turns out for you all the same. Cheers. *(they touch glasses.)*

BIXEL: Thanks. The big players in the party know me, so I'm not worried, they know what I can do.

AUGUSTINO: Keep this to yourself, BIX, but I saw this help wanted ad: I'm applying for a photography internship at the newspaper.

BIXEL: A photographer!

AUGUSTINO: Great, go ahead and scream it. You know, what the hell did I just say?

BIXEL: Sorry, but that's great, AUGIE, I always knew your photos were good enough.

RITA: Who's a photographer?

BIXEL: Right here, you're looking at him, Mr. AUGUSTINO.

AUGUSTINO: Would you shut the hell up?

RITA: I didn't know you were into art.

BIXEL: Oh yeah, he's an artist, alright.

AUGUSTINO: No, I'm not, and I'm not a photographer. Can I get another beer, RITA? *(she leaves the area.)* Goddamn you BIXEL.

BIXEL: You don't give yourself enough credit.

AUGUSTINO: Photographers get paid, BIXEL. This is just an internship, just a trial run. That's why I'd appreciate it if you don't tell people, especially COLVIN. I don't need his shit.

BIXEL: I don't care about him, damnit. *(loudly)* You're a damn good photographer! *(AUGUSTINO leaps up and violently pushes him off the stool.)*

AUGUSTINO: I told you to quit fucking screaming in my ear! And I don't even own a camera to pawn anymore, asshole, which you damn well know.

BIXEL: Christ, AUGIE.

AUGUSTINO: So just shut the fuck up!

RITA: Hey, help him up or you're out of here.

AUGUSTINO: Fuck you!

RITA: Out!

AUGUSTINO: On my way.

RITA: And don't come back. *(beat. to BIXEL)* You alright?

BIXEL: Sure. Just banged my head a little. Of course, there's no wrenched neck, there's never a wrenched neck or anything. *(enter COLVIN, who kisses his girl at the door. she leaves.)*

COLVIN: What's going on?

BIXEL: AUGUSTINO got mad.

COLVIN: Asshole. Here. (*helps him up.*) Who the hell does he think he is?

BIXEL: I guess not a photographer.

COLVIN: What, you sure you're okay?

BIXEL: He's trying to get on with the newspaper as a photographer, you know, through some internship. And he didn't want me telling anyone and I guess he thought I blabbed about it too much.

COLVIN: That's no reason to get violent. He's probably embarrassed about it.

BIXEL: Why?

COLVIN: I would be, working for free like that. An internship means you don't get paid.

BIXEL: Well Christ, I'm not making any money right now either, but I'm still working.

COLVIN: I figured you'd say that. Here (*brushing him off*). You can't allow yourself to be treated like this, no matter who it is. I don't want to see you end up like BIG JIM.

BIXEL: What do you mean by that?

COLVIN: I'm not talkin' about AUGUSTINO-

BIXEL: Good, 'cause you'll be the one I smack if you are. What does BIG JIM have to do with me and AUGUSTINO?

COLVIN: I'm saying don't let yourself be taken advantage of, is all.

BIXEL: So it's JIM'S fault he almost got killed?

COLVIN: Not all of it, no. It was a bad break, too.

BIXEL: You know, AUGIE might make me mad, but sometimes you make me nauseous.

COLVIN: He hung out with the wrong color 'a people for him.

BIXEL: He got rolled, it had nothing to do with who he was hangin' out with or what color they were.

COLVIN: Be honest, of course it did.

BIXEL: You think everything's so damn simple.

COLVIN: I just don't ignore the obvious. And speaking about ignoring the obvious, you and AUGIE need to think more about the future.

BIXEL: When I get elected I'll come toss you a bone.

COLVIN: *(opens his wallet and takes out a wad of cash.)* I got bones.

BIXEL: *(trying to stuff money back in the wallet immediately and get it below the bar. then, in strained whispers)* What are you, crazy! Get that out of sight.

COLVIN: Finally got the punitive damages from my disability suit this week. Order yourself whatever you want. I didn't want to let AUGUSTINO know yet because he's already gettin' a free ride from me. Go ahead, order up.

BIXEL: *(more strained whispering)* Listen, are you out of your fucking mind bringing that kinda cash in here? There must be two or three grand there.

COLVIN: And plenty more where that came from.

BIXEL: You ARE out of your mind. Goddamnit. RITA. *(motioning a tall glass)* Sapphire and tonic, with extra limes.

COLVIN: It ain't like I didn't have it comin'.

BIXEL: What are you gonna' do with it?

COLVIN: Me and SUSIE have been talking about traveling somewhere, if she can get some shifts off.

BIXEL: Yeah, where to?

COLVIN: We're thinking about Mexico.

BIXEL: Mexico? But you don't like Mexicans.

COLVIN: Guess they're no worse than anyone else. Besides, we'll probably just be checking out the sights most of the time, drinking margaritas and maybe hanging out at their beaches.

BIXEL: Listen, let's finish up and get out of here, we still might have time to

make it to the store, get a nice bottle or two of something.

COLVIN: Relax. Have another one first and enjoy my windfall, you're not gonna have one yourself anytime soon.

BIXEL: That's not the issue.

COLVIN: How many years we known each other? 10? 15?

BIXEL: I don't know.

COLVIN: Then relax. My treat. AUGUSTINO blew his chance. (*RITA brings drinks.*)

BIXEL: You thinking about leaving town?

COLVIN: Who knows? The monthly disability goes where I go.

BIXEL: Would you work?

COLVIN: That'd be one of the things me and SUSIE would have to discuss, besides where we'd go.

BIXEL: So how much money are we talking here?

COLVIN: Enough to last a little while, at least.

BIXEL: Damn, this is incredible, first AUGIE with his fancy internship and now you with the settlement. Well good for you, good for the both of you. And maybe you got something there, maybe that's what I ought to do, start over somewhere else, get a clean start. I could even take a campaign on the road.

COLVIN: Well-

BIXEL: Just blow in to a state and get my name out there. I could even work for someone else for a while, do some campaign fieldwork. They wouldn't need to know all these things about tax filings and police records and all that stuff.

COLVIN: Or maybe you could just get an honest job, driving a truck, stocking shelves, moving furniture, cooking, who knows.

BIXEL: (*waving and winking at MARY, the hooker who's taken a seat at the bar. she waves back.*) Hey, since you won't really miss it for a while, can you loan me \$100 till Friday?

COLVIN: \$100? Shit. *(begins opening wallet on bar again.)*

BIXEL: *(pushing his hands down.)* Under the table, under the table. Thanks.

COLVIN: *(while BIXEL is writing a note on a napkin and pushes it down to MARY, who reads it, smiles and nods her head yes, then puts it away.)* You're never gonna change. At least AUGUSTINO has a temper. You, you're just happy with anything.

BIXEL: That's another one of my bad habits, but I'm trying to be more unsatisfied.

COLVIN: That ain't what I'm sayin'.

BIXEL: It can get worse?

COLVIN: I didn't say that either.

BIXEL: Then things are lookin' up for us already. Come on, cheers! *(they touch glasses, COLVIN a little confusedly.)* You got your lawsuit and, after this campaign hires me, I'll be on my own way.

COLVIN: You said you already were hired.

BIXEL: We haven't gone through the formalities, but I'm in, it's a lock.

COLVIN: I don't know why I believe anything you say. If you don't want to take ownership of your own life, that's up to you.

BIXEL: My mama always taught me humility. Don't pretend to own what you're just renting, she'd say. *(nodding toward MARY.)* MARY'S lookin' pretty cute tonight, isn't she?

COLVIN: She's a whore.

BIXEL: Still, she's cute.

COLVIN: Whatever you say, but can we just drink, instead of pretending we're at a high school mixer.

BIXEL: Sure *(he waves and smiles at her again so that COLVIN can't see him.)* But you know that Florida primary I worked 10 years ago?

COLVIN: No.

BIXEL: If it weren't for the prostitutes, we don't even come close in that election—simple as that.

COLVIN: What? How do you know they didn't keep you from winning?

BIXEL: Let's just say, sometimes you have to see an election to believe it.

COLVIN: Whatever happened with that last gal you were seein', Jackie?

BIXEL: She hit me with her car.

COLVIN: On purpose?

BIXEL: Well, she hit me out on her front lawn, while I was trying to run away from her, so I think she meant to do it.

COLVIN: You get hurt?

BIXEL: Got back up too quick for that.

COLVIN: Shit.

BIXEL: Thing is, we got along really well except for a few times like that.

COLVIN: I don't know what you do to them, but you sure know how to piss women off.

BIXEL: I thought we could've made it work.

COLVIN: You always think that.

BIXEL: Yeah? Son of a bitch.

COLVIN: Here, what the hell, go buy her a drink, too. *(he pulls out his wallet and gives BIXEL money. BIXEL walks over to MARY. before COLVIN can put his wallet away, one of the TRANSVETITES rises up quickly behind him, pulls a phillips screwdriver from a purse, stabs COLVIN in the back, grabs the wallet and runs.)* Son of a bitch! *(COLVIN moans and falls off the bar stool.)*

BIXEL: *(turning back)* Nooo! Nooo! Goddamnit. *(runs over and holds COLVIN.)* Hold on, buddy. RITA!

POLICEMAN: *(two policemen are waved in off the street by MARY, who is standing in the doorway. they rush in and see what's happened.)* ALFRED! Damit ALFRED! That's it, the court's warned you about losing your licenses, you're done!

BIXEL: Mexico, keep thinking about Mexico, COLVIN, no more of this fucking place, come on buddy, just palm trees waving in the breeze, white sands, baby blue water, rivers of tequila. Mexico. And no more troubles, no

more troubles. (*Lights out.*)

INTERMISSION BREAK

ACT II

scene 1:

(*BIXEL and MARY enter a simple hotel room after a long bus ride to Iowa for a presidential caucus.*)

BIXEL: Whaddya' think, eh?

MARY You're asking me about hotel rooms?

BIXEL: At least it's clean, and there's room for me to work (pointing to a desk, while setting their bags down).

MARY: When are you gonna' be able to pick up the car?

BIXEL: You watch, they'll give me one soon.

MARY: When?

BIXEL: Probably in the morning.

MARY: I won't be hanging out long if there's no car.

BIXEL: Jesus, we'll get a car, I told you. You're missin' the point, baby: We're on the campaign trail!

MARY: You are.

BIXEL: Just wait till you get a feel for this race, you'll get caught up in it.

MARY: Is it kinda like a horse race, only with jackasses?

BIXEL: (*pointing at her.*) That right there, that's not a winning attitude. You're the one who said you could use a change in atmosphere. But like we agreed, you can leave anytime you want. (*beat.*) I got work to do. This is serious business. (*she lays on the bed and pulls some covers over her. BIXEL unpacks his ratty briefcase on the desk and begins looking through a notebook, then makes a call.*) Hi, is this Jim Price? Hello, it's BIXEL, I just made it into town. Good, good thanks. So, should I plan on coming in tomorrow? Oh. Well when do you want me to report? What? Alright, I'm at a hotel, I'll call you back in a few. Okay, bye.

MARY: Who was that?

BIXEL: Price, the field manager.

MARY: He the guy that's gonna give you the car?

BIXEL: Yes- I mean I dunno. I've gotta' call back.

MARY: And then let's get a drink.

BIXEL: Good idea.

MARY: I never know what to make of you BIXEL, except that you're kinda' fucked up like everyone else I know.

BIXEL: Well, you just watch me (*diving on the bed and grabbing at her*). Just watch me!

MARY: (*she laughs.*) Hey! Ouch!

BIXEL: All those hours on a bus and not a peep (*trying to tickle her*). Well if you're gonna peep, then peep.

MARY: (*giggling slightly*) No, stop it (*pushes his hands away*). I ain't ticklish anyway.

BIXEL: What a surprise. Remember, I want you to have fun. It can even be like a vacation for you if you want.

MARY: Then let's go get that drink.

BIXEL: We will. Who knows, maybe you'll like this little vacation enough not to go back.

MARY: Back to what? (*beat.*) You mean hookin'?

BIXEL: Yeah.

MARY: If I had a dime for every time I've heard that I wouldn't need to.

BIXEL: I could come out of this alright if it's only money-

MARY: You really are crazy, aren't you? Does this guy even have a chance to win?

BIXEL: Sure, we just need to get folks out to vote.

MARY: Isn't that what the other side's thinking too?

BIXEL: The enemy's got their voter block, but we can reach people who don't vote.

MARY: Think so?

BIXEL: Yeah.

MARY: Then I'm your enemy, not them. *(beat.)*

BIXEL: I wouldn't put it like that. But in a way, yeah.

MARY: Yet you're associatin' with me and you know I don't vote.

BIXEL: *(with concern and worry)* Baby don't let me down out here.

MARY: You've been let down before, you can make it.

BIXEL: Maybe there's a point when you don't make it anymore.

MARY: I don't plan on finding out.

BIXEL: I don't think you get to choose.

MARY: Oh I do, I get my vote on it!

BIXEL: *(mutteringly)* Damn whores. Let's go.

MARY: And get a drink?

BIXEL: Yeah yeah, and get a drink.

scene 2: *(RITA and AUGUSTINO in his apartment. same set pieces can be used as previous scene if necessary: bed, table, lamp, etc.)*

AUGUSTINO: I never figured being the one asking someone else this, but have you had any luck with finding another job?

RITA: Most places are full up, and the nicer ones don't want to talk to me when they find out where I bartended.

AUGUSTINO: I'm still not sure how I got hired.

RITA: You likin' it?

AUGUSTINO: The pay's great. It's just weird being around successful professionals. Like I feel like I have to keep quiet about some things. Well, I don't have to, but I do.

RITA: Why, you ashamed or something?

AUGUSTINO: Maybe I was, but not anymore. I dunno, I guess I just feel better talking to someone like you about certain things.

RITA: You mean somebody who's not successful.

AUGUSTINO: That's not what I meant. I just thought I would start feeling like I fit in a little more by now.

RITA: You'll fit in if it's what you want.

AUGUSTINO: I want to fit in with you.

RITA: I know, but it's better this way. *(beat.)*

AUGUSTINO: COLVIN and BIXEL would never believe us sittin' here like this, friends.

RITA: Why not?

AUGUSTINO: Well, at least COLVIN wouldn't.

RITA: I saw him the other day when I was filling out an application.

AUGUSTINO: What?! Why didn't you say! Nobody heard anything! I checked those hospitals, his room, no trace, no one knew if he'd died or anything.

RITA: Looked healed up alright to me. Just sitting there drinking alone, over at The White Horse.

AUGUSTINO: Then he must've moved to the other side of town. No shit. He say anything?

RITA: No, just that sheepish grin.

AUGUSTINO: Well good, good, he's alive and well.

RITA: He'd probably love to see you.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah, I'll go see him, maybe when BIXEL'S back in town.

RITA: When's that?

AUGUSTINO: (*agitatedly*) I don't know, am I my brother's keeper here?

RITA: Hey don't go gettin' mad at me.

AUGUSTINO: Sorry. It's just that I've got to be responsible to this job.

RITA: What does that have to do with your friends?

AUGUSTINO: I don't want to blow it. I never used to care but-

RITA: But first you won't have the time, and then, before you know it, you won't even recognize your old friends.

AUGUSTINO: Oh bullshit.

RITA: But don't go apologizing, AUGUSTINO, it's just part of the game.

AUGUSTINO: Look I just wanna be left alone, just like before, just like always. I'll get in touch with those guys. But now I'm doing something that's close to what I care about. I get to take pictures. Not of what I want, but I get to take pictures.

RITA: I guess bartending used to be that way for me. Till I got tired of all the people's stories.

AUGUSTINO: They all start to sound the same?

RITA: No, different. All different. There's a thousand different ways to fail, but only a few ways to succeed. It's too much to listen to after a while. You just don't give a damn, you don't want to hear it.

AUGUSTINO: What about the work itself?

RITA: It was a routine.

AUGUSTINO: I hoped that wouldn't happen with photography, but maybe it has a little bit already. I try to have some connection with whoever or whatever I'm shooting, you know, find the right moment, that kinda' thing. But they're not after the connections, just the images. You're just supposed to get it done and get back, no matter what you have to bring back.

RITA: It's a newspaper, what do you expect?

AUGUSTINO: Sure, but it's still a matter of care.

RITA: I care about the money. That's what I need to find. I'm no dreamer like you and your BIXEL.

AUGUSTINO: So everything that isn't about money is a dream? Well, even money is, for most people.

RITA: I got a son to worry about. There's no dreaming involved.

AUGUSTINO: What if you had money?

RITA: Then I'd feel set.

AUGUSTINO: I got some now, but I don't feel set.

RITA: Maybe because you don't have a responsibility, you don't have anything grounding you, you probably never will.

AUGUSTINO: I could have a responsibility to you, you're my friend now.

RITA: Just don't do me any favors yet, 'cause I can't pay 'em back right now. What about COLVIN? You feel a responsibility to him, to see him, talk to him?

AUGUSTINO: That's different.

RITA: How? *(beat.)*

AUGUSTINO: *(changing the subject.)* You know, me and COLVIN, we used to have the damndest conversations about women. I know, you're probably thinking he's not much to look at, but he's had his share — believe it or not.

RITA: I'd rather not.

AUGUSTINO: Oh you're not a fan?

RITA: Fan? What the hell kind of word is that to use? I'm not even a fan of you.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah, I know.

RITA: You know what I mean.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah. I said I know.

RITA: Goddamnit! Oh now you get to feel sorry for yourself, is that it?

AUGUSTINO: Naw, I think I'll give it a wait and see first.

RITA: Well don't forget to take a breath.

scene 3:

BIXEL:

(back to hotel room.)

(MARY is with a customer in bed while BIXEL is on the phone. the MAN'S face can be seen but MARY is under the sheets performing oral sex.) I think fundraising is huge, but we have to get out and meet with people, too. Not everything can bring in revenue right away, but if you talk with people, it'll pay off down the road. Not to mention bring in some votes, right, which is why we're doing this. *(beat.)* I know, but- *(beat.)* I'm not trying to say how to do things but- *(beat.)* No, I don't *(MAN'S moans have become louder than the hushed previous levels. BIXEL covers phone.)* I've got to hear this, can you guys tone it down? *(back to phone)* Yeah JIM, but I came out here to be a field manager. And for a week my field's been this hotel room. *(beat.)* What do you mean corporate experience? *(beat.)* You! You're the one that hired me! *(beat. the moaning gets louder again, he covers the phone.)* Cover your mouth! *(back to phone)* I'm not some damn college volunteer, I've been doing this for years. I'm a professional. *(beat.)* Good, but then why is it I'm not working yet? *(beat.)* You've been telling me that for a week. *(moans quicken and grow louder. covers phone.)* Shut up! *(back to phone)* If you don't want me in the field, then why'd you have me come out here, I told you that's what my experience is in. *(beat.)* I can't wait any longer. *(beat.)* That's not- but- *(beat. covers phone. simultaneously, MAN groans loudly as he comes and BIXEL screams to the ceiling. as MARY wipes up, MAN immediately slides out of bed, self-consciously zips his pants up, puts on T-shirt and shoes, throws money on the bed and exits. back to the phone)* Wha- yeah, no I can hear you. *(beat.)* Look, I can't wait around anymore, I'm broke! *(beat.)* What do you mean a change in plans- you owe me money. I spent my own goddamn savings to come out here! *(beat.)* I need my pay now! I want my pay right now, you hear! Hello? Hello? Damn it!!!

MARY:

(beat.) What happened, get fired from a job you never got hired for? *(BIXEL has put his head in his hands. MARY comes over to comfort him.)* What's wrong, BIXEL? *(puts her arm on his back.)* Don't worry, baby, I'll take care of you. I'll get us back home.

BIXEL:

COLVIN was right. You too. I'm a fool.

MARY:

I said you were crazy, not a fool. There's plenty worse things to be, anyway.

BIXEL:

You at least offer people a service. They don't get cheated.

MARY:

Maybe you offer people a service too.

BIXEL: No. *(lifting head from hands.)* I don't offer a fucking thing. What I offer's unemployable. And I don't have anything to my name. What, what do I offer? *(beat.)*

MARY: I don't know. Your time, you offer your time.

BIXEL: COLVIN always said that the most you can do, even in politics, is help people help themselves. But then, wouldn't it also figure that the most anyone can do is help people hurt themselves, that people would still have to be their own undoing? Well, it don't feel it's going that way for me. They told me I had a job. That's why I came out here.

MARY: Nothing's for certain. But there's got to be fair trade, even in my work. Otherwise, everything just falls apart.

BIXEL: Jesus, do we have enough for a drink?

MARY: We do now.

scene 4: *(AUGUSTINO'S apartment. lights down. RITA and AUGUSTINO are asleep in an embrace on his bed.)*

AUGUSTINO: *(RITA awakes and, so as not to awaken AUGUSTINO, very slowly extricates herself to the edge of the bed and begins to put on her clothes. AUGUSTINO wakes up.)* What time is it?

RITA: Must be gettin' close to dawn.

AUGUSTINO: *(reaches for clock.)* It's 4 a.m.

RITA: Still, I better go.

AUGUSTINO: What? *(turns on light, lights come up.)*

RITA: It was nice seeing you again. And it's been a lot of fun. But, that's enough.

AUGUSTINO: What do you mean, we don't ever see each other again, call each other?

RITA: Now's not the time for me to start anything with anyone, not just you.

AUGUSTINO: If you're going to get all reasonable, then there's never a good time.

RITA: Sure there is. Tonight was really good, but people have to have things in common, have a common purpose.

AUGUSTINO: Is this a race thing, is that it?

RITA: No, I don't care about that. But I have to think about my son. *(beat.)* I got to go now, AUGIE.

AUGUSTINO: *(putting his arm around her)* RITA stay, stay a while.

RITA: I can't, baby.

AUGUSTINO: Why not?

RITA: I told you. I gotta go to my mom's and pick up my son.

AUGUSTINO: At 4 a.m.?

RITA: I wish you hadn't woken up.

AUGUSTINO: Look, RITA, this job pays me pretty well.

RITA: *(looks around the apartment, laughs.)* Yeah, so what the hell you spending your money on?

AUGUSTINO: I haven't quite figured that out yet. And now — I probably shouldn't even be telling anybody this — but they're talking about giving me a raise, something about passing a probation period. I thought at most places you had to be there a year. *(beat.)* But I guess the good part is that I've been able to make a savings. Just in case.

RITA: Just in case what?

AUGUSTINO: Well, I'm not a bum anymore. I guess I'm saving money as insurance, so I don't have to go back to living like that. *(beat.)* Oh hell, I don't know. *(beat.)* Maybe I could spend some money on you, we could spend some of it together.

RITA: I don't want your money, why don't you buy some furniture and some clothes?

AUGUSTINO: But then what do I do when I need the money?

RITA: What? Forget it.

AUGUSTINO: OK, OK I'll buy some furniture if that's what you want. Look, I decided I didn't want to keep on being stupid, wind up outdoors again, or even worse, end up some back alley casualty. That was the easy part. Big deal.

RITA: You did good. Just don't seem so damn surprised everything's not

beautiful.

AUGUSTINO: Funny, the more things seem to be looking up, the less they seem under my control. I'm not the same. Nothing's the same.

RITA: After a while, nobody's the same. We just pretend we are. Sometimes, it's not such a bad thing. *(she exits.)*

scene 5: *(BIXEL and MARY in bed. phone rings.)*

MARY: What? Is that the morning guy already?

BIXEL: *(getting up and answering the phone.)* Hello? Yeah, she's here, you can come up and see her.

MARY: Oh shit. *(getting out of bed and putting her clothes on, motioning BIXEL to delay for more time.)*

BIXEL: Can you give us a minute? *(beat.)* Okay, room 229.

MARY: I thought you set the alarm?

BIXEL: I thought I did, too. *(picks it up.)* Damn thing.

MARY: Where'd you meet this one again?

BIXEL: Just down at the bar. He's here for the primary, too, except he's got a job.

MARY: Same candidate?

BIXEL: Yep! I might not be a campaign staffer, but I'm still a contributor.

MARY: *(still straightening herself up).* Jesus, I never knew campaigns could be this good. I would've tried this sooner if it weren't for my man back home.

BIXEL: The best part is, when he found out I knew so much about politics he started buying me my drinks — I barely spent a dime. *(doorknock heard)* That's my boy. Listen honey, I don't want to wait in the hall anymore, besides, it looks fishy, might get us in trouble. He's a good ol' boy from Missouri, I told him I get off on listening, not watching. He believed it. This way I can do a little more calculating our expenses versus the money we need to get back.

- MARY: Okay, but if he asks you to leave you gotta' leave.
- BIXEL: Sure sure. *(at the door. puts his hand over his eyes and opens it.)* That you, BIG MAC?
- BIG MAC: That you, FRENCH FRY?
- BIXEL: Sure is, and you caught me with my blindfold off. I'm gonna let you in and then go hide my face at my desk. But you, you just let your eyes have a feast *(opens the door and gestures to MARY.)*
- BIG MAC: OK FRENCH FRY, you do that. My my, you weren't lying.
- MARY: What'll it be, BIG MAC?
- BIG MAC: How about you take your clothes off?
- MARY: Then the meter would be running. Come closer and we'll talk this out. *(BIG MAC goes to her and sits on the bed. she whispers in his ear as she begins to take her clothes off. shortly after they're both under the covers, the moaning begins, but not as loud this time, more of a background level. as this is happening, the lights dim and a spotlight encircles BIXEL at the desk working his adding machine, paper and pencil. he soon gets up with his thoughts and walks to the front of the stage, allowing him the freedom to speak more quietly, raising his voice only to talk to BIG MAC.)*
- BIXEL: I've been in worse ways than this before. Get back on the ol' two feet, everything'll be fine. You just gotta wait your turn.
- BIG MAC: *(emits a loud moan.)* How's that, FRENCH FRY?
- BIXEL: Good BIG MAC DADDIO, real good, music to my ears — just as long as I don't see anything now, OK? *(back to his monologue.)* I don't even need to go back, really, there's nowhere to go to. Maybe we'll find another candidate, another campaign somewhere. She likes campaigns now, I knew she would. And I can work in politics anywhere. And as for my friends, COLVIN'S tough, he'll be alright. AUGIE, fine.
- BIG MAC: *(groans again.)* Did you get that, FRENCH FRY: Oh baby!
- BIXEL: Yeah, good, but it's better if you don't talk to me directly. In fact, don't even worry about me, BIG MAC, I'm getting it, I'm getting it all real good. *(back to monologue.)* We're gonna' need to make more money than this per week. No matter what your cause, it takes money. Takes money to fight money, they say. *(beat.)* Hey, now wait a minute. I could start MY campaign. Why not? Now's as good a time as any. I'll go back and run for a council spot — or even state rep! "Kicked out of his campaign

job, he decides to get the job done on his own"- What could be more grassroots than that? And for the fundraising, I'll, I'll just talk to everyone I know. *(beat.)* Okay, maybe I talk to everyone I don't know instead. And I'll do a lot of the scheduling and planning myself to cut costs. It'll be unorthodox, I'm gonna' break new ground here. *(BIG MAC groans loudly in climax.)* Yes! Oh yeah!

BIG MAC: Hope it was as good for you as it was for me, FRENCH FRY.

BIXEL: Boy, was it ever. *(BIG MAC dresses while talking to MARY, occasionally stopping to gesture, while she nods in agreement, then kneeling and talking more in close with her.)* I've got a creative streak that can give me an edge in a close race.

BIG MAC: *(coming over to BIXEL, lights go all the way up.)* Just want to say thanks again before I leave. You've shown a new guy in town a damn good time, and you we're real straight with me, both last night and today.

BIXEL: Don't mention it, I get a charge out of it, too.

BIG MAC: Yeah, guess you do. *(beat.)* Look, I don't know yet what I'm going to be doing on this campaign, but who knows, maybe we can use a guy like you. You know insider politics well enough to fake it. If the opportunity presents itself, I could put in a word for you.

BIXEL: *(beat. uncomfortably)* That's a nice thing to say, but I think I'll be alright.

BIG MAC: With your gifts for speaking and a little training, you could manage some phone banks or even fundraising projects. No, wait, what am I saying, you're sharp enough — you can help with our narrow casting, market the campaign demographically.

BIXEL: *(heatedly)* I work in the field — with voters! With real people who vote!

BIG MAC: Ah I knew it! I knew it the minute I saw you last night that you were a worker. In the field, huh?

BIXEL: *(reluctant, subdued)* Yeah.

BIG MAC: Well, I don't know how long you've been away from the game, but I can catch you up to speed anytime you get the itch again. We'll recycle your skills.

BIXEL: Oh yeah?

BIG MAC: Sure FRENCH FRY. You've got my card, just give me a call. Oh, and I was talking with MARY. I was hoping you don't mind, but it's awful

cramped in here for two. I offered to put her up in a nicer place, which would be better for both of you. Right baby?

MARY: Yeah.

BIXEL: What?!

MARY: Don't get mad, baby.

BIG MAC: It'll help you out, too, FRENCH FRY. You can't think in here it's so tight. This'll help clear your head — who knows — maybe you wise up and get back in the game? *(hits him in the shoulder.)* Now you stay in touch.

MARY: *(has finished packing her bag, grabs BIXEL'S hand and puts some money in it. kisses him on the cheek.)* You'll get over it, baby.

scene 6: *(Street. BIXEL, back from Iowa, catches up to REVEREND MORE, doubled by actor playing ALFRED. REVEREND MORE enters first.)*

BIXEL: REVEREND MORE! Hey! REVEREND MORE!

REVEREND MORE: *(excitedly)* BIX! *(they hug.)* It's been a long time pal, where you been?

BIXEL: Looking for you, actually. I was out on the ol' campaign trail. But I'm back now.

REVEREND MORE: He travels best that knows when to return. So did you win this time?

BIXEL: You know what they say, it's not really whether you win or lose-

REVEREND MORE: So they say. Gave 'em a good fight, though, eh BIX?

BIXEL: Oh yeah REV, you know me. So how are things at the mission?

REVEREND MORE: The addition is finished and now we've got 70 more beds. And since you left, the funding came through for the kitchen renovation. It looks great, you should come by and see it.

BIXEL: That's what I wanted to talk to you about.

REVEREND MORE: Well we'd love to have you back volunteering, BIX, if that's what you mean. We can always use help like yours.

BIXEL: Uh, sure, I-I can help, but this time, well, I'm just back in town, REV, this campaign wiped me out and I'm in between jobs. So if I could just hang out a little while until I get a job-

REVEREND
MORE: You mean you want a bed?

BIXEL: Not for long, REV, this is just a temporary-

REVEREND
MORE: BIX I've been turning away 40 to 60 people every night for months, even with the addition. You'd have a little wait in front of you most likely.

BIXEL: No joke?

REVEREND
MORE: You know I wouldn't joke about something like that with you, brother. BIX, I'm real sorry, that's just the way it is right now.

BIXEL: Oh no sweat, REV, I'll find something. I just thought that since I ran into you-

REVEREND
MORE: No, sure sure, BIX. I'll keep my ears open and you keep checking back with me.

BIXEL: I'll find something quick, but I'll check back on you anyway to make sure you're behaving.

REVEREND
MORE: That's the spirit, BIX, keep 'em honest out there. *(they shake, lights down.)*

scene 7: *(RITA, moving to a different part of town, stops by to collect a few things she's loaned AUGUSTINO. the easiness they felt together is gone as they face the awkwardness of having just been intimate with one another and now retreating from that intimacy to go their own ways.)*

AUGUSTINO: Here's your records *(hands her some record albums.)* I never even got to the Archie Schepp.

RITA: You can borrow it again some time.

AUGUSTINO: It's no big deal.

RITA: I just need to get my things all together for this move.

AUGUSTINO: Sure, later, later. *(beat.)* So you say it's over on the west side?

RITA: Yeah. It's cheaper rent, and I'll have a better chance of finding another job there. I should be able to get a used car soon and I'll come visit.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah, or I'll just drive the beater over there.

RITA: It should make it. But I still don't know why you bought a used car instead of a new one.

AUGUSTINO: This one works fine.

RITA: We'll seeing each other one way or another.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah *(beat.)* Alright, so are we gonna' just pretend like the time we've spent together didn't happen?

RITA: That's an asinine statement.

AUGUSTINO: I'm just saying, it was real to me.

RITA: That's another asinine statement.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah, well I've got a lot more.

RITA: I bet you do, but I don't have to listen to them *(moves to leave.)*

AUGUSTINO: *(getting between her and the door, but slowly, not threateningly.)* Come on, you already knew that about me, right, so don't leave like this. *(beat.)* I've been used to being alone and we seemed to get along and so I jumped to a few conclusions I shouldn't have. No harm done, right? So you can at least tell me before you leave why you never wanted to give it a try.

RITA: I told you, my son comes first.

AUGUSTINO: Your son's two, he doesn't know me from his father and John Doe.

RITA: And he might never know his father. But he'll know he's black like he is.

AUGUSTINO: I thought you said that didn't matter to you.

RITA: It doesn't. But how do you know it won't matter to him? *(beat.)*

AUGUSTINO: Yeah. *(beat.)* But that's a chance people out there take every day.

RITA: And maybe it's a bigger chance for some than others.

AUGUSTINO: If things were different, if you didn't have a child, would you-

RITA: Why do you keep talking about this? Why do you always make things more difficult than they have to be? Why do you, why the hell- *(beat.)* I-I'm gonna' miss you.

AUGUSTINO: I'll miss you, too. *(they embrace in a hug momentarily.)*

RITA: Things'll be alright. I'll work two jobs again. You, big department manager, you're already on your way.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah. I think I shot more photos when I was an extreme temp worker.

RITA: You can shoot photos when you're on your own. You've got more freedom now.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah, it feels different, though.

RITA: Get out of this place once in a while and spend some money. Talk to people!

AUGUSTINO: I don't have anything of value to them.

RITA: That's not their fault.

AUGUSTINO: I know it sounds ridiculous, believe me, I wish to hell it were different. *(beat.)* But I'm getting old now. And it still feels like there's nothing here I want.

RITA: Well, the it looks like there's no hope for you then.

AUGUSTINO: There's only so long a person gets to mess around before they decide what to do with their life. After that, whatever doors were open close. It was time I made a decision.

RITA: Then a whole lot of people have had a whole lot of doors shut.

AUGUSTINO: Hell if I know. That's their business! They're the same as me, right?

RITA: Maybe it'd do you some good to find your friends and talk to them. If they're still your friends.

AUGUSTINO: Look, we go back too many years. I'm not worried about me and them.

RITA: Through the thick and thin, right?

AUGUSTINO: Right.

- RITA: And being drunk and out of work and broke all those years had nothing to do with you being friends.
- AUGUSTINO: (animatedly) Sure it did! We kept each other alive! (RITA shakes her head back and forth in frustration. (long beat.) I don't know where they are. And I'm still not sure what I'd do if I did. I don't wanna' go back to, to just hanging out.
- RITA: Tell them that.
- AUGUSTINO: It's not that easy and you know it- I know where you're going with this but you're wrong. We might not hang out together, but after all the shit we've been through, we'll always be like brothers. (*beat.*) I hope BIXEL's alright. COLVIN always said he was a fool, a lovable foo, but a fool.
- RITA: Is that what you think about him, too?
- AUGUSTINO: I think he's a better man than COLVIN and I, but that better men are usually fools to everyone else.
- RITA: I always thought all three of you were fools.
- AUGUSTINO: I'm guessing you mean that in the complimentary sense, like I did? (*she doesn't respond.*) But see, that's why I talk to you, I can count on you to have more sense than they do. (*beat.*) You really think you'll be happy once you get ahead?
- RITA: I said I'd be "set," I didn't say anything about happy.
- AUGUSTINO: Things weren't easy when I was broke, but my decisions only had to be about necessities. I wasn't part of the world, and the world wasn't part of me.
- RITA: Whaddya' mean?
- AUGUSTINO: Well if you don't pay taxes, you don't vote, you don't hardly work, you don't pay rent, you don't even wear underwear, then you aren't really connected with the rest of the people in the city going about their business.
- RITA: Yeah you are, just differently.
- AUGUSTINO: Alright look, what I mean is: you don't make as much of an impact on things as they do.
- RITA: I've seen enough people like that, and so have you, and they give and

take from each other like everyone else, good or bad. So whose fault is it?

AUGUSTINO: Can you just forget about whose fault it is for a minute, I'm not talking about that. I've got more choices now, choices I never had before. I'm gonna' be filing taxes for the first time in my life, I'm gonna' vote, I'm gonna' – I don't know what I'm gonna' do. *(beat.)*

RITA: Who does? Nobody knows how things are gonna' turn out. I lay awake some nights just hoping I'll make things right for my boy, because I'm the one who brought him into this world. But no one knows. That's why, sometimes I think, when one person makes a decision, when one person stands up and chooses, in some ways, it's in the name of all of us.

AUGUSTINO: My decisions have always been to avoid making decisions as long as possible. But you I felt sure about.

RITA: That means a lot.

AUGUSTINO: But not quite enough.

RITA: My son can't make his own decisions yet.

AUGUSTINO: He's lucky. It feels like what I'm doing now will decide who I am and who I'm going to be for a long time. I'm not floating along as a possibility anymore.

RITA: I remember seeing possibilities. Seems like it was a dream now. Like it was a different life.

AUGUSTINO: I wish I would have known you then.

RITA: Who knows what would've happened.

AUGUSTINO: Well, we would have been like princes and princesses. *(they both speak lightly, not literally.)*

RITA: We would have seen the world. *(they embrace again.)*

AUGUSTINO: And enjoyed the finest champagne.

RITA: Poured by a different bartender, not me.

AUGUSTINO: And drank by your prince, not your drunk. *(they hug. lights dim. RITA exits, waving or looking back at him. lights out.)*

ACT III

(AUGUSTINO, in sportcoat, untucked button-down shirt and dress pants, and BIXEL, even more shabbily dressed than before, meet at their old bar, which is newly remodeled and reopened; sports posters, pennants and other paraphernalia adorn the walls, and the bar looks cleaner, in general.)

scene 1:

(BIXEL is seated at the bar and a bartender, this time wearing a vest and a uniform, is cleaning a glass and talking on the phone.)

AUGUSTINO: *(enters and looks around in disbelief.)* How's dinner buddy?

BIXEL: Hey AUGUSTINO! *(they embrace.)*

AUGUSTINO: Good to see you, pal.

BIXEL: What's it been, a year?

AUGUSTINO: At least. How'd you get my work number?

BIXEL: After I got back from the campaign I looked around for you at all the usual places, but nobody'd seen you for a long time. I remembered about the internship and called the newspaper to see if they knew about you. Well, they definitely knew about you. Department manager, congratulations buddy!

AUGUSTINO: Thanks, things kinda happened fast. I was sorry to hear your guy lost, but if it's any consolation, I voted for him.

BIXEL: You voted?! Wow. Well, I'm damn proud of you, AUG, but it was just a matter of running out of money.

AUGUSTINO: Him or you?

BIXEL: Both. Nothing against Iowa, but it won't bother me if I never hear that five letter, three-syllable, two-bit whore word again. But that's all behind, gotta' move forward, right?

AUGUSTINO: That's what I figured out finally. I put the past a long way behind me, BIX.

BIXEL: Yeah? I wish I could do that.

AUGUSTINO: You'll do it.

BIXEL: Well I'm a little stuck in the present now, AUG, which is one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. I haven't been doing so well since I got back. I just need to get back indoors, get moving again and I'll be

fine.

AUGUSTINO: What? What the hell you been doing with yourself?

BIXEL: Most of the time I've been staying down by the river.

AUGUSTINO: With John the Brain?

BIXEL: Yeah.

AUGUSTINO: Well that says it all right there, what are you doing with those guys?

BIXEL: When I got back, I couldn't find anything, nothing. I tried temping, but this time none of them panned out into longer terms. I know, it's my fault, I should've given it a little more time. I just need a few nights on your couch and I'll get my bearings back.

AUGUSTINO: I've got a real job now, BIX, I go to bed early, I get up early, I can't blow it. *(beat.)* Have you seen COLVIN lately?

BIXEL: *(uneasily)* Uh, I was afraid of that. *(beat.)* You didn't hear then, did you?

AUGUSTINO: Hear what?

BIXEL: The last time we were all together, the night he got poked, his settlement had finally come in. It was quite a bit- and if the asshole wouldn't have been waving it around like a movie star, he'd have never gotten stabbed! Anyway, they wouldn't let me ride in the ambulance and couldn't tell me where they'd be taking him. And the reason we couldn't find him was because first, he doesn't have any family here, and second, he was listed at the hospital under the name, "John Colvin Gonzalez."

AUGUSTINO: You're shitting me.

BIXEL: No. I never knew either. *(beat.)* So I took off for Iow- for the campaign- not knowing anything. But he healed up OK and got out of the hospital. He and his girl had made plans to go to Mexico, and they kept making those plans while spending all the money. COLVIN began to really start drinking it up, without any budget constraint anymore. One night he just had too much and passed out on a bench on his way home. He didn't wake up.

AUGUSTINO: Jesus. *(beat.)* The son of a bitch. Why didn't he just go and get out of-

BIXEL: Well I got out of here and it didn't help me. It's no panacea.

AUGUSTINO: When you told me he got knifed and we called the hospitals, well — I-I

never really tried to find him again after you left. RITA'd told me she'd seen him. But I was getting up, working and going home, getting up, working and going home. I didn't make the time.

BIXEL: It's not your fault he fucked up. *(beat.)* AUG *(pointing to his almost empty beer)*, I'm broke.

AUGUSTINO: Can I get a couple of beers? *(bartender puts down what he's doing and brings the drinks immediately, surprising AUGUSTINO, who pays him.)* Guess this place has changed, too.

BIXEL: *(looking around)* I'll say. I don't think I like it, it feels, I don't know, "clean."

AUGUSTINO: Well, I don't care, I won't be hanging out here again, anyway.

BIXEL: Too good to drink with us now?

AUGUSTINO: Us? There's only you now, BIXEL.

BIXEL: *(drunkenness showing through.)* Poor COLVIN. I've been missing him every day. I think about him a lot.

AUGUSTINO: We drank a lot and we fought a lot. Poor bastard.

BIXEL: Is that what's gonna' happen to me, too? Huh AUG? *(beat.)* Hang around a couple more years until I'm not employable anymore, develop my own special disability? Have my blood mopped up in some alley? Shit! I gotta get straight, start workin' again – somewhere, anywhere.

AUGUSTINO: You'll do it, you're not gonna' give up like he did.

BIXEL: You don't need to give up to fail. AUG, I need a few nights at your place, it'll give me a jump start, just put me up for a few nights

AUGUSTINO: Don't you still know people back at the mission?

BIXEL: AUG, I'm in politics. I can't go back there as a tenant. Word'll get out. Besides, you know how people get rolled there, it's safer on the street. Come on, it's a few nights.

AUGUSTINO: Christ, BIXEL, I'm in the same fucking boat as you. I don't really know yet whether I can keep this job or not. But I want to try. And I didn't create the circumstances, so don't fucking blame me. I can't get any more professional at drinking, and fucking around, and losing days and telling the world to fuck off and I can't do it ANY MORE.

- BIXEL: Don't get upset at me, I'm the one who said you'd get your shit together, remember? *(beat.)* I remember when COLVIN and I first saw you come in and sit down at the bar. You had that army laundry bag, not even a backpack like all the other kids, and this look on your face like I'd never seen before — or since, really. Almost everyone was scared and lost, but they were too scared to let it show. But you knew it showed on you and you didn't care, almost like you were resigned to the fact. You were the first one I'd seen who wasn't afraid to let you know he was afraid. I never forgot that.
- AUGUSTINO: Well, I guess I have, BIX. *(beat.)* Look, it's maybe the first time in my life I'm playing by the rules. But I didn't make them.
- BIXEL: And you can't make an exception for me?
- AUGUSTINO: I'll give you money, but you can't stay with me.
- BIXEL: I don't want to STAY with you, I asked for a few nights.
- AUGUSTINO: You sound like me. *(grabbing BIXEL'S hand and putting money inside it.)* Don't drink all of this and it'll keep you fed for at least a week.
- BIXEL: Alright brother, thanks. *(beat.)* You're really serious. *(AUGUSTINO shakes his head in affirmation. beat while they sit in silence and BIXEL looks at him intently.)* It hasn't worked out for me yet. Maybe it never will. I'll keep trying, but you, you always dreamed of getting paid to shoot photos as long as I've known-
- AUGUSTINO: It's got nothing to do with my bullshit dreams, BIXEL, I work for the dreams of others, not my own. Sure, I might have thought differently at first, but that didn't turn out to be the choice I made. Look, if you want to keep living month to month, day to day, it's alright, it's up to you. But I'm not part of that anymore.
- BIXEL: COLVIN always warned me. He said I needed to get my head out of the clouds with this political bullshit, get a regular job – anything – and put time in, work my way up.
- AUGUSTINO: Well, maybe ol' COLVIN had more sense than I gave him credit. I don't know.
- BIXEL: But no, I never listened, I never did what was smart. I always thought, "I'll do what seems right to me and everything else will take care of itself."
- AUGUSTINO: At least you cared about that stuff. I wouldn't blame you for feeling it should be you and not me who landed a career job.

- BIXEL: No, hell, these things can't be, can't be helped. There's no predicting them. Sure, I always did work more than you, which makes it a little ironic. I even did the volunteer work. And you, well, you- goddamn you! What's wrong with you!? I need help, godamnit!
- AUGUSTINO: I gave you the money, I can't do more than that.
- BIXEL: It's me, BIXEL!
- AUGUSTINO: *(starting to break.)* Damnit. Damnit BIX, I'm- I-I- I shouldn't have come here *(gets up to leave and just as he's about to exit, BIXEL, who's been monitoring him carefully and with growing amusement, rushes to stop him at the last minute.)*
- BIXEL: *(laughing and clapping.)* Alright, bravo, bravo, hold up, now hold up, brother. You passed! I'll be damned if you didn't, you passed the test.
- AUGUSTINO: What the hell are you talking about?
- BIXEL: The road test. I'm back staying at the motel, got a part-time job working on mailers at party headquarters. I made this stuff up to see if you'd really changed like I heard, to see if you really could make it. Congratulations, AUG. *(extends a hand and they shake, with AUGUSTINO reacting slowly, still confused. BIXEL gestures the barstools and they sit down again.)*
- AUGUSTINO: You don't have to do this, BIXEL, 'cause I don't feel guilty.
- BIXEL: Do what?
- AUGUSTINO: Pretend that you're doing OK.
- BIXEL: What the hell are you talking about? Here, take your money back, I told you, I don't need it *(AUGUSTINO refuses to take it from his hand.)* I'm serious, take it back. *(BIXEL tries to force it on him but he avoids taking it.)* You saying I'm not capable of taking care of myself, is that what you're saying?
- AUGUSTINO: No. Let's just drop it.
- BIXEL: Because you're not any better than I am, AUGUSTINO.
- AUGUSTINO: I know, which is why I'm not gonna' let you sleep on my sofa.
- BIXEL: I just told you, dumb ass, I don't need your goddamn sofa. And you're gonna' take this money back before the night's over. *(he puts it back in his pocket for now. lights go down for quick scene change to signify later*

same evening.)

scene 2: *(the bar is now peopled with more moneyed patrons played by the same cast members doubling; eg., COLLEGE GIRL, MAN and WOMAN roles are filled by the actors who previously played MARY, BIG MAC and RITA. bad pop music plays in the background from the jukebox.)*

WOMAN: *(to bartender)* Hey Johnny!

BARTENDER: Wow, you guys are in early today.

WOMAN: We were bored. Plus, it's way past noon. *(to BIXEL)* What better reason to start drinking, am I right, sir?

BIXEL: You got a point.

WOMAN: Well then can I get you a drink, too?

BIXEL: I don't see anything stopping you.

WOMAN: Four beers, Johnny.

BARTENDER: You got it.

BIXEL: Thanks sweetheart.

WOMAN: You're welcome. Don't think I've seen you here before.

BIXEL: You're right. Me and my friend here *(pointing toward AUGUSTINO)* frequented this place before it was shut down.

WOMAN: No shit! I knew it! That's so cool. Were you guys regulars?

AUGUSTINO: *(proudly)* Every day. *(catching himself, more subdued.)* I mean, we were here often.

WOMAN: *(to her friends.)* You guys, c'mere! These two are some of the old regulars.

COLLEGE GIRL: Very cool. This place has such a history, that's why we come here. It's so cool meeting you *(she offers handshake)*.

BIXEL: You're kidding us, right?

COLLEGE GIRL: What? No. Some other regulars came in once or twice after the re-opening. Cool people. But you guys, you're actually kinda cute, too -

don't let my boyfriend hear that.

BIXEL: *(elbows AUGUSTINO.)* You must be joking, but it's a pleasure. *(she and BIXEL shake and then she shakes AUGUSTINO'S hand.)*

AUGUSTINO: Pleasure.

MAN: *(jokingly)* By the way, I heard that *(gestures with a friendly wave.)* How are you guys?

BIXEL: Fine thanks.

COLLEGE GIRL: So what was the old place like?

AUGUSTINO: Well, it-

COLLEGE GIRL: Some of our friends like to go to clubs, but that scene's so tired. We'd rather hang out at a dive bar like this and just relax.

AUGUSTINO: I know what you're saying; plus, it's cheaper, I-I mean, it's a better value for your money.

COLLEGE GIRL: Yeah, hey, how about some shots everyone *(her friends yell approvals.)* You guys want a shot? Come on.

BIXEL: Sure, why not?

AUGUSTINO: Thanks but I don't need you to buy- *(BIXEL elbows him sharply again.)*

COLLEGE GIRL: A round of shots Johnny, Lemon Drops! *(BARTENDER brings shots and everybody drinks up, AUGUSTINO reluctantly. to AUGUSTINO)* I wouldn't have guessed you were a regular here.

AUGUSTINO: It's all in the past now, but yeah, I could tell you some stories about this place.

COLLEGE GIRL: *(teasingly)* I bet you could. *(BIXEL elbows AUGUSTINO, who this time angrily grabs BIXEL'S arm.)*

AUGUSTINO: *(under his breath to BIXEL)* Cut it out.

BIXEL: Sweetheart, among all the people that used to hang out here, he's done probably the best.

AUGUSTINO: My friend likes to exaggerate.

COLLEGE GIRL: Well, at least you haven't forgotten where you used to hang out, and I

think that's cool.

BIXEL: Oh he doesn't go to bars like this anymore *(this time AUGUSTINO elbows BIXEL.)* I-I mean neither do I, because we didn't know it had reopened.

COLLEGE GIRL: Well maybe you'll come in again sometime.

AUGUSTINO: You never know.

BIXEL: This place was for the down and out, he's an up and comer now. And it's great to see. We were just talking-

AUGUSTINO: *(interrupting loudly)* I'm here now, aren't I?

COLLEGE GIRL: *(coming on to him again.)* You sure are. *(beat.)* We heard this place used to be called the "Star Wars" bar.

AUGUSTINO: There were some different kind of people that came in.

COLLEGE GIRL: And there were a lot of bar brawls, some people got hurt.

AUGUSTINO: Once in a while.

COLLEGE GIRL: Wow, that's messed up. It's still a street bar, that's why we like it, but it's not full of assholes. *(coyly)* You know, my boyfriend isn't much younger than you.

AUGUSTINO: Well, then he's lucky in love if not youth.

COLLEGE GIRL: You're sweet. Let's have some more of those shots, Johnny.

AUGUSTINO: No, that's OK.

COLLEGE GIRL: Come on, lighten up.

BIXEL: Yeah, lighten up. *(As a cheesey hip hop song plays, the WOMAN dances her way over to the COLLEGE GIRL from the jukebox where she has been choosing music and they start whispering to each other about AUGUSTINO and BIXEL. the COLLEGE GIRL takes out a camera and gives it to the WOMAN.)*

COLLEGE GIRL: I want to get a photo with you two.

AUGUSTINO: What? *(before he realizes it, WOMAN has snapped a photo of the three of them and given the camera back to COLLEGE GIRL, who then begins taking more photos of AUGUSTINO and BIXEL.)* Hey, come on, stop it.

COLLEGE GIRL: Don't be so uptight, I want some photos of you, I want to party with you. They let us put some of these on the wall here.

AUGUSTINO: Yeah, but we don't want our photos- *(she grabs him by the arm.)*

COLLEGE GIRL: Come on, let's party. *(WOMAN grabs BIXEL and pulls him out of his chair, so that both AUGUSTINO and BIXEL quickly find themselves in the middle of the crowd being urged on to dance by everyone. they try to go back to their seats but the girls pull them back, the crowd urges them on. they look at each other briefly, shruggingly, as if both have resigned to it at the same time, and begin dancing slowly. the hip hop song has ended and a rock song with a building crescendo begins [like "Dirty Deeds" by AC/DC, for example, or even a flash-in-the-pan '90s band]. as the song progresses, the crowd gradually clears space for the four of them. AUGUSTINO and BIXEL begin more actively dancing, and all four are trading partners arm in arm until the girls drop out and it's just BIXEL and AUGUSTINO, now furiously twirling each other about, yet under control, as if they've been practicing. a spotlight has gradually narrowed to highlight only them as the other stage lights go down. as the song ends they fall abruptly in unison to the floor, their arms still locked together. the spotlight fades.)*

scene 3: *(slower, softer music. lights are down and a spotlight comes up on AUGUSTINO as he enters a deserted park; a few snow-covered leaves are on the ground, a streetlamp represents the light source.)*

AUGUSTINO: Ahh, it's chilly. I'm glad I wore this coat. I'm glad for small things, for very small things. Like this coat. *(beat.)* I'm glad for my new clothes. And my coaster set. And wine glasses. And my new blender, with all its fruit drinks. And shakes. *(beat. then abruptly)* Why did I agree to go back there? To be someone else's joke, an amusing twist in their story? *(walks a bit more.)* What about my story, am I the one telling my story? Am I the one calling the shots? Or have I just traded in a few risks. *(beat.)* BIXE-? Damn it, I knew it. *(light comes up to reveal BIXEL sleeping on a bench.)* A risk like this, for example. *(feels BIXEL's nostrils to see he's breathing.)* Sound asleep. With all your dreams. Is it better to sleep through your dreams? Or wake and try to make them real, even if it turns them into lies? It's better not to even talk about these things. A man doesn't question. He works, he earns, he provides, he accepts and so is accepted, and in doing so, becomes a good man because he learns how to be good to himself. This is the way — to swim, not drown. *(beat.)* I'll float away like everyone else. *(looks back to BIXEL.)* One day we'll both step in that same river, no matter when, or where or how. *(almost breaking down.)* But they say it's easier heading downstream with everyone else, brother. They say it's always been every man for himself, no matter how its disguised. Get up and take what's yours. Before the flood comes for you, too. Goodbye brother. I told you I wasn't going to feel guilty, not with everyone's

blessing. *(beat.)* God help us all. *(exits. BIXEL sits up after he's gone and gazes in the direction AUGUSTINO has walked off. spotlight fades slowly on BIXEL. lights out.)*

— **END** —