

STiFF.

written by
Jeff Swearingen

Based on a concept by Dave Tenney

Characters:

The Writer. Robert Gray

The Director. Stanley Miller

The Producer. Theodore Saul Solomon

The Actor. Guy Van

The Actress. Vanessa Verkamp

The Understudy. Maggie Simon

The Critic. Mickey Blake

The Executive. Walter Goldstein

The Alcoholic. Hilary Doyle-Blake

The Janitor. Margret Pilsner

The Show: The Blighted Heart! by Robert Gray -A play in nine acts

Starring Guy Van and Vanessa Verkamp as John and Jane Doe.

-lines in between dashes are spoken on top of each other-

Reading Narration (Prologue)

1950's New York, The Golden Age of Broadway. The theatre scene is booming. Artists flock from every corner of the globe to follow their dreams. Stars are made, and dreams are crushed. Dedication, talent and luck are but some of the ingredients of success, for nothing is more important than the approval given by the masters of the printed word. Critics held all the power to raise a production to glorious heights or shut the doors after only a few performances. The survival of a production depended on them. And this is the predicament we find ourselves in today. Here we are, the lower east side of Manhattan, at the Tin Box Theatre. It's an often over looked performance space off, off.... way off Broadway. It's the week of April 11th, 1954. The day journalistic researchers conclude was the most boring and uneventful in all of history, but then again this happened...

ACT ONE

Scene 1.

Reading Narration

(Lights up on actor and actress on stage. The man is seated in a cheaply made Gazebo upstage center. The rest of the set is an inept shoestring budget attempt at creating the look and feel of an early 1900's southern plantation. The actress delivers the following monologue downstage, just left of center. The producer, writer, and director are sitting in the front row audience right. New York's most powerful critic, Mickey Blake, sits expressionless in the front row far to the left. The monologue is performed poorly)

Vanessa

(as Jane) ...and it all comes crashing down on me. Over and over, like the waves of the tide against the rocks along the shore in the night. The war, the depression, the ill health. It's relentless like the ocean. And through all of it I loved you. I loved you when we danced, and I loved you when we

fought. When you cried, I cried for you. And when I cried, you let me cry alone. But still I loved you. For there was that once, that solitary moment, when we cried together. Tears streaming from each of our faces on to the others, anguished bursts of anger and our hands lifted in rage to the skies. It was my happiest time. We were one. And that's when I felt it. I loved you so much, that the cancer went into my brain as we pressed our faces against one another. So that we could share everything from that moment on. And life would be perfect. It took the cancer to make it right. I have something to tell you now, *(She moves to go to him, but he still stares at her first mark)* The doctors say your cancer is more severe, you'll be leaving me soon. It's better this way. For me at least. I couldn't bare the thought of you being alone, here on this green earth. You wouldn't have anyone to make you sandwiches. It was always my curse to be the one left loving, and missing, and longing for death.

Guy

(As John.) I...Love...You...Jane. Be...strong...for...the both of us.

Vanessa

I love you, John. And I will. A woman in love is doomed to be the stronger. The blighted heart, the woman holds within.

Reading Narration

(Lights slow fade on the play. The following voices start in the dark with a slow fade up of the house and work lights. Robert's voice is slightly muffled due to locking himself in a bathroom that is conveniently and inconveniently accessible through a door just to the right of the audience seating. The play concluded about 25 minutes ago and the brave but few patrons who made it through the entire play left immediately afterward.)

Scene 2.

Robert

Not going to happen!

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley
Please.

Robert
No.

Stanley
Will you just stop this already?

Robert
No!

Stanley
Robert!

Robert
I've been very clear since the beginning!

Stanley
How many times are you going to do this? How many times are you going to run away and throw a fit?

Robert
A million times if I have to!

Stanley
You're being ridiculous. This is childish behavior.

Robert
Refusing to contribute to the destruction of your words, your ideas, is not childish!

Stanley
Locking yourself in the bathroom is childish.

Robert
(*Pause*) Not in the defense of art!

Stanley

That's even sillier.

Robert

It's not silly. It's a statement.

Stanley

How is that a statement? You're not stating anything. You're not even communicating...

Robert

I'm communicating through my actions.

Stanley

No, you are not...

Robert

Yes I am!

Stanley

Locking yourself in the bathroom, only communicates you are childish or you have indigestion. So which is it? *(Pause.)* If you have indigestion, I'll leave you alone.

Robert

(Robert bursts out the door.) I don't have indigestion, and I'm not being childish. I am clearly taking a stand against months of work, good work, being performed by two people who can barely communicate a concept in the english language, and being directed to perform it like they're on high doses of Milltown, so that the end result is the murder of my soul.

Stanley

The murder of your soul?

Robert

I'm not going to settle for it.

Stanley

Is that your statement?

Robert

Yes, it is.

Stanley

Because you're not in the bathroom anymore.

Robert

I'm going back in. *(Returns to the restroom.)*

Stanley

Thank you for the face to face.

Robert

I'm not coming out until it's performed correctly.

Stanley

And how can you perform it correctly, Robert? You have a plantation couple with contagious cancer...

Robert

The cancer is not contagious! No, cancer is...

Stanley

Then how in the world does she possibly catch it?

Robert

(Robert bursts out of the bathroom.) She very.. *(Robert bursts back into the Bathroom.)* She very clearly states in the monologue.

Stanley

...Robert...

Reading Narration

(Enter Saul, with Vanessa. Saul is impeccably dressed in a three piece pin stripe suit. Vanessa is in a long evening dress and a fur coat. She is 1950's glamour personified. They are very affectionate.)

Saul

You, my dear...you. You are something incredible, let me tell you. I have seen many an actress in my day and I have never, never... been moved...like that. That was...life... up there. I'm serious, I'm blown away.

Vanessa

You just love me because I'm beautiful.

Saul

You're beautiful?! I've never noticed before.

Vanessa

Oh you!

Saul

I'll put it in the next press release "this just in!"

Vanessa

You are such a meanie.

Saul

You are...

Vanessa

(She moves closer.) What?

Saul

...incredible.

Vanessa

You already said that.

Saul

It's all my mind can think of.

Vanessa

Oh I'm sure you can think of a little more than that.

Saul

(Robert has come out during the previous exchange. He and Stan both look at Vanessa longingly.) Yes...but uh...Robert and Stanley are over there and I think they are just looking at us. So you know...they're my friends...it's awkward.

Vanessa

What's awkward about it?

Saul

It just is.

Vanessa

What are they doing?

Saul

Just staring at us.

Vanessa

They're just standing there staring at us?

Saul

Yes

Vanessa

Why are they doing that?

Saul

Well, I'm sure I could guess.

Vanessa

What do they expect us to do?

Saul

I don't know, I just think it's a little much for them...so soon.

Vanessa

(After a moment.) Okay.

Saul

Here...take a cab home tonight. You deserve it.

Vanessa

Thank you.

Saul

Thank you, for walking into my life and up on this stage.

Vanessa

You're welcome, Theodore. Bye, Stanley. Bye, Robert.

Stanley

Bye. Grea- good work tonight.

Vanessa

Thank you. I really felt like I took some strides tonight, and the script is simple enough. I'm just going to grab my things. *(She exits.)*

Stanley

Theodore?

Robert

What did she mean the script is simple enough?

Stanley

Theodore?

Robert

Simple enough- what did she mean by that?

Saul

Who knows.

Stanley

Your name is Theodore?

Saul

Shhh, only my mother calls me that.

Stanley

How does she know it?

Robert

Maybe it wouldn't seem so simple if she understood the symbolism...

Saul

She doesn't know what symbolism is. She asked me why you keep talking about those things band people use. I asked her what she meant, and she said "those things they crash together" And she made a little move like this. So, it's safe to say she doesn't know.

Robert

(Angry laughter)

Stanley

How does she know...

Saul

She heard my mother call me that.

Stanley

When did she hear your mother say it?

Saul

One time.

Stanley
One time when?

Saul
One time at dinner.

Stanley
When were they at dinner together?

Saul
One time. It was like Thanksgiving or something, at my parents house. I don't know.

Stanley
You took her to meet your parents?

Saul
Yeah, they live down the street so what? *(Pause)* I'm sure you took her to meet your parents right?

Stanley
Nope.

Saul
I'm sure she would have understood, your parents being in Indiana and all.

Stanley
What does that mean?

Saul
Nothing, I'm just saying...it's hard to drag people to Indiana. But, I'm sure she would have understood.

Stanley
Hmm.

Saul

Don't give me the jealousy thing. You guys had your chance.

Robert

I'm over it!

Saul

People move on, to bigger and better things...sometimes...and if this were one of those situations, maybe...

Stanley

I get it...

Saul

Look, it's nothing to be jealous of, we're not in love, it's not even that serious...

Vanessa

(From off.) Bye, my little Theodore bear! Love you!

Saul

Love you too!

Vanessa

Always and forever!

Saul

Muah Muah Muah! What was I saying?

Robert

You weren't in love.

Saul

Right. We're almost like friends, really.

Stanley

I find that hard to believe.

Robert

I don't. He probably said he loved her and then she said "Love? You mean the things that keep your hands warm?"

Saul

What?

Robert

What, what?

Saul

Why would she think about mittens?

Stanley

-He means gloves!-

Robert

-She's not thinking about mittens- Gloves!

Saul

-Right, it rhymes I got it- Got it. You said warm, so I thought... You should make it more clear.

Robert

...(Robert stares at Saul as if he's plotting his murder.)

Saul

Hey speaking of changes, can I make a suggestion?

Robert

No. Why?

Stanley

What do you want to change?

Robert

We're not making any changes. I'm not changing the script.

Stanley

We don't even know what he wants to change.

Robert

I swear I'm not changing anything.

Stanley

Yes. We understand. What do you want to change?

Robert

Nothing!

Stanley

I'm asking him.

Saul

Not a lot. I just want to change the end a little.

Robert

I'm not changing the end.

Saul

Just a little.

Robert

No.

Stanley

This probably isn't the best time for rewrites..

Saul

Just a little change.

Stanley

-He spent the last thirty minutes in the bathroom, he's going to spazz out-

Robert

-There isn't going to be a rewrite- No, No, I'm curious. Tell me. Tell me how the end should go.

Saul

Sometimes I feel like you two don't value my artistic creativity.

Stanley

Please...

Saul

You know I'm the one who pays for this, all of this.

Stanley

Please, let's just hear your idea.

Robert

Yes, please tell us an idea that money can't buy.

Saul

Well, now I don't feel like my ideas are going to be welcomed.

Robert

You think?

Saul

I can shut this down.

Stanley

Please! Let's just hear the idea. He's not going to force the idea on you. Lord knows that could never happen. Just calm down.

Robert

He's the one talking about closing.

Stanley

He's not going to close anything with tickets on the books. Lord knows none of us want another flop. What is your idea?

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Saul

Okay, what do you guys think... about a happy ending?

Robert

What?

Saul

A happy ending!

Robert

How?

Stanley

I'm not sure that would work.

Saul

Think about it. You know when she says "hey I have something to tell you the doctors said yada yada" What if she says: "There is no cancer."

Robert

What?

Saul

You know like, "hey I was just fooling around, you don't have cancer"

Stanley

...No.

Robert

Are you kidding me?

Saul

Don't be so quick to dismiss it.

Stanley

How could you possibly think that that would work?

Saul
It could happen.

Robert
In what world?

Saul
In what world can love, share cancer together?

Robert
That's completely different.

Saul
-No, it's not-

Robert
-Yes- it is!

Stanley
I'm actually in complete agreement with Robert here. How would we explain the symptoms?

Saul
She was pretending the whole time.

Robert
Why would anyone do that?

Stanley
Okay, so how would we explain his symptoms?

Saul
Look, that's not my job. Depressing plays make for a depressing box office. I'm saying that happy plays are recommendable plays. How about this, what if she just pretends she has cancer until he dies? To make him feel better.

Stanly

It's been a long night, -I think it's best we- yeah.

Saul

-Don't make any decisions- Just think about it.

Robert

I'm not going to think about it.

Stanley

We were just about to be done with the conversation.

Saul

Just sleep on it.

Robert

No, that is the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

Saul

Look there wouldn't be a play without me...

Robert

There wouldn't be a play without me!

Stanley

Can we do a play without this!?

Robert

-Fine-

Saul

-I was done-

Stanley

Thank you.

Saul

He was the one bringing it back up.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley

He's done now

Robert

Look, I don't want to argue, I just don't want to take anybody's suggestions.

Saul

Oh! Imagine if I did that!

Reading Narration

(Guy and Maggie enter. Maggie is modestly dressed and carries herself the same way, but we see nothing but the warmth and honesty in her eyes and smile. Guy is in slacks and a sports coat, but we see nothing but the ridiculous ascot he wears to be "an actor".)

Guy

Hey, did you talk to the critic?

Stanley

No.

Guy

Was it Mickey Blake?

Saul

You bet it was Mickey Blake! Mickey Blake and I are like this. When Saul Solomon and Stanley Miller put on any play you can bet Mickey Blake will be in the front row.

Guy

Did you watch him?

Stanley

Yes.

Saul

Hey, great job tonight.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

(Robert has a little fit.)

Stanley

There's still work to be done.

Guy

Did Mickey Blake laugh?

Stanley

Did he laugh?

Guy

Yeah, did he laugh?

Stanley

No.

Guy

That's not good.

Stanley

The play isn't meant to be funny.

Robert

Wait, you think the play is supposed to be funny?

Guy

I thought it was. But if you say it isn't then that's good. Because there wasn't a lot of laughing.

Stanley

No there wasn't.

Robert

(To Stanley) You think that's part of the problem?

Stanley

Tip of the iceberg.

Saul

Hey, big step away from the the television and the puppets and everything.

Guy

It is a world's distance away from the, the distant world of that. So different.

Saul

Is that so?

Guy

Yeah, I mean, it's still sort of the same, for instance I'm still a person. So that's the same. But the main difference is I don't have one hand going like that. *(Uses hand to make a puppet talking motion.)*

Robert

I wish my hand could go like that. *(Uses same hand motion to mean "bye")*

Stanley

I want to go over some of the moments, first thing in the morning.

Guy

You bet. Wait a minute like moments in the play?

Stanley

Yes.

Guy

Oh! Okay, sure. *(Starts to leave.)* Wait, is that all you wanted to say?

Stanley

I believe so.

Guy

Okay, bye guys. Bye, Robert.

Saul

I know, I know. He comes with benefits.

Stanley

What can we do for you, Maggie?

Maggie

I'm sorry, I didn't want to interrupt. I just wanted to make sure my performance was okay tonight.

Saul

As the... nursemaid?

Maggie

I know it was an important night.

Stanley

You were great, Maggie.

Robert

Really good work.

Maggie

Thank you. I'm trying very hard. And I want you to know that I have studied all the lines for Jane Doe...

Stanley

(To Robert) That's also something I want to talk about...

Maggie

And I will be ready anytime you need me.

Saul

You are wonderful, just wonderful. Isn't she wonderful. That's great. I don't see us having any emergencies, and Verkamp is the draw...

Maggie

I know. I just wanted to let you know I will be there if you need me.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Saul

Thank you.

Maggie

You are so welcome, Mr. Solomon. Well, have a good night. He looks so cute sleeping.

Robert

Who does?

Maggie

Mickey Blake. He looks so peaceful. *(She exits.)*

Robert

What did she mean by that?

Stanley

I think she means that would be Mickey Blake.

Reading Narration

(They look over and see Mickey Blake peacefully "sleeping" upright in his chair in the front row. Not one of the three has noticed him until now)

Saul

Would you get a load of that?

Robert

Should we wake him up?

Saul

No, you kidding me? No.

Stanley

What do we do? Lock him in?

Saul

No, we wait till he wakes up.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Robert

What if he sleeps all night?

Saul

There's no way, look how uncomfortable he looks.

Stanley

Did we really put him to sleep?

Saul

That is not good.

Robert

Who cares.

Stanley

What?

Robert

If he didn't like it then fine. I don't care. I didn't write it to impress him.

Saul

Well I assure you when I produced this piece he was one of the people I wanted to impress!

Stanley

Keep your voices down!

Saul

What do we do?

Stanley

I have no idea.

Saul

Well, you're a director.

Stanley
What does that mean?

Saul
Direct something.

Stanley
Direct what?

Saul
A course of action!

Stanley
And what do you suggest?!

Saul
I don't know!

Robert
Well, we can't just be standing here when he wakes up. It's going to be weird if we're just standing here when he wakes up.

Stanley
I understand that.

Saul
But we can't just leave him there either, so everybody just act natural. (after a moment) Am I acting natural?

Stanley
Not really.

Robert
No.

Saul
Well, then help me.

Stanley

Okay, I guess just everyone spread out. Just look preoccupied with something else. *(They all spread out and try to look natural, Robert goes and assumes a depressed sulking posture, Stan acts as if he is inspecting the Gazebo and Saul Just strikes a pose with a welcoming smile towards Mickey.)* Maybe you should look preoccupied with something other than Mr. Blake.

Saul

Oh right! Good thinking. *(Saul now acts like he is fascinated with the wall.)*

Stanley

Robert, don't look suicidal.

Robert

Sorry.

Stanley

Maybe take out your pad or something.

Robert

Got it.

(Pause.)

Saul

How long do we have to do this?

Stanley

I guess we should make some noise.

Saul

I don't want it to seem like we woke him up. Natural noises. Good old natural nature noises.

Stanley

Robert, make some noises.

Robert
What, like foley?

Stanley
Yeah.

Robert
Okay, um *(Makes a quiet bird sound.)*

Stanley
Something louder.

Robert
Got it. *(He makes some city noises, but it eventually turns into the story of a horrific car wreck. Stan and Saul look on in shock)* I'm sorry, it just...off the top of my head...

Stanley
Maybe grab one of the dishes and drop it.

Saul
Good idea! *(runs offstage and comes back with a coffee cup, he drops it and it breaks)*

Stanley
Saul.

Saul
Yeah?

Stanley
Maybe something unbreakable. A metal pot or pan for instance.

Saul
Oh! Right! *(starts to go then)* That wasn't expensive, was it?

Stanley
No.

Saul

Great. *(he runs off, a pot comes flying in, it lands and makes a horribly noise. He enters immediately casting blame)* Why are you guys making so much noise when Mr. Blake is clearly trying to sleep?

Robert

What?

Stanley

It didn't work. No need to start blaming us for your action.

Saul

I'm sorry, I just don't want to be the one to make him angry. It makes me nervous. I'm sorry.

Robert

It's like he's dead.

Stanley

What is it with you and death and darkness?

Saul

Plan?

Robert

We're going to need more dishes.

Reading Narration

(Lights down. Lights up on the three guys center center stage. They have pots raised and are ready to run, Robert gives the nod and they all drop and flee. Lights down. Lights up they each have two pots this time and they try again. Nothing. Lights down. Lights up again Saul has a bunch of pots, and Stan and Robert each have a pot and a squeaky toy. They all drop and run as Stan and Robert squeak the toys. As soon as they all get off stage Saul immediately pops back in)

Saul

Why are you guys making so much noise when...clearly Mickey Blake
(*Sees Mickey still sleeping.*) is STILL ASLEEP!

(*Robert and Stan walk back in.*)

Stanley

He is really out.

Robert

Mr. Blake!

Saul

Shhh! No! (*Robert moves toward him.*) Don't do that!

Robert

I'm just going to shake him a little!

Saul

No! Absolutely not. We will just wait.

Robert

For how long?

Saul

All night if we have to.

Stanley

Get comfortable.

(*Lights fade*)

Reading Narration

(*Lights up. Stan, Saul and Robert are all sitting or lying downstage right, all appear bored and tired. Mickey Blake has not moved an inch. Stanley and Saul are in the middle of a game of twenty questions*)

Yes. Stanley

Do you have legs? Saul

....No. Stanley

Are you a snake? Saul

No. Stanley

He already said it was a -mineral- Robert

-I forgot, right right.- I give up. Saul

You have 15 more questions. Stanley

I'm impatient, I don't want to wait. What is it? Saul

I'm a train. Stanley

Ah! I was just about to guess train! Saul

This is ridiculous. I can't be up all night. Robert

I'm sure he'll wake up any second now. Saul

Robert

That's what we thought three hours ago.

Saul

Fine. Wake him up, but I am not responsible.

Stanley

I'll be responsible. This is ridiculous: three grown men terrified to wake someone up who is clearly sleeping in an unacceptable place.

Robert

So do it.

Stanley

I'm going to.

Saul

So go on.

Stanley

I will if you stop bothering me. I'm concentrating.

Saul

Don't scare him.

Stanley

I'm not going to scare him.

Saul

If you scare him you're fired.

Stanley

(Very meek in his attempt, as if waking a baby.) Mickey....Mickey...

(Robert's patience run out and he goes to Mickey and tugs on his jacket sleeve.)

Robert

Mickey Blake!

Stanley

Let go of his jacket! *(Stanley tries to separate Robert from Mickey, by pushing Robert away but the end result is knocking Mickey over in the chair. His body has become stiff so when he gets knocked over his legs stick up.)*

Saul

Holy sweet Jehovah!

Robert

I'm sorry!

Saul

Pick him up! Pick him up! *(They do but his legs catch on the seat next to him bending him into a contorted position.)* Fix his legs! Fix his legs!

Stanley

Get his legs!

Saul

Pick him up! *(Stanley tries to lift him.)* Put him down, set him up!
Holy dear god!

(Stanley freaks out.)

Robert

What what? He's fine, he didn't wake up!

(Stanley is trying to say something but there is no power behind his voice, so he is just mouthing "cold, ice cold")

Saul

Don't worry I'm not firing you, that was Robert's fault.

Fine. No script!

Robert

That's not fair!

Saul

He's dead.

Stanley

What?

Robert

Mickey Blake is dead.

Stanley

What?

Robert

Mr. Blake has passed away.

Stanley

Oh my god.

Robert

Really?

Saul

Really.

Stanley

Saul

Oh no. Oh dear god no... *(Saul takes a few steps away, starts to cry, Stanley goes to comfort him.)* How are we going to sell the show now?! We killed the critic. We are the production, the production team... that killed Mickey Blake.

Robert

This is a new career low for me.

Stanley

This is tragic.

Saul

Tragic for us. How do we spin this? How does one spin DEATH!

Stanley

I don't know.

Saul

The Blighted Heart: a play in nine acts that kills audiences and critics alike, no seriously murder charges are being brought before the state of New York.

Stanley

Please calm down.

Robert

Would you excuse me?

Saul

Hey, where are you going?

Robert

Just a minute.

Stanley

Are you leaving?

Robert

No, I just remembered I touched a dead person. Just a minute.
(We hear him go into the bathroom and wash hands psychotically.)

Saul

Is he alright?

Stanley

Is he ever?

(Robert returns with his hair, face and arms drenched in water.)

Robert

Wait, guys did I ever touch my clothes after I touched him?

Saul

Maybe...

Stanley

...no you didn't.

Robert

Are you sure?

Stanley

I watched your hands the whole time.

Robert

Okay *(Goes to turn off water.)*

Saul

He had his arms crossed...

Stanley

Seriously don't tell him that.

Robert

Sorry.

(Silent moment, they are all stunned and in shock.)

Saul

Why did I go into the arts?

(More silent moments.)

Stanley
I wonder what he thought.

Robert
Take a look at his pad.

Saul
You see it?

Robert
Yeah, it's right there.

Saul
Think you can get a look at it?

Robert
I think we've established nothing will wake him up.

Saul
Grab it then.

Stanley
Yeah, grab it.

(Robert walks up to Mickey Blake like he isn't fazed, but does a quick snatch and toss of the notes to Stan.)

Robert
Here.

Stanley
You don't want to know?

Saul
I do.

Robert
It's not going to affect me either way.

Stanley
Let's see...

Saul
What does it say about the production value?

Stanley
Hold on, it's scribbles I'm looking at here. Let's see V.V., I'm assuming Vanessa, "easy on the eyes but not enough to sell tickets to her performance that looks and sounds like something resembling a cat being run over by a lawn mower"

Saul
Ouch.

Robert
That's horrible.

Saul
I thought she was pretty good.

Stanley
Well she wasn't if that's not apparent.

Robert
What else does it say?

Stanley
"Guy Van should stick to puppets on national T.V. instead of puking his lines out on the stages of New York. I've never seen worse. Many a child will be disappointed to learn their hero is a putz."

Robert
Was he just sitting here writing the review? How does he have the time to write all that?

Saul

He was going to say Putz in the review?

Robert

I agree with him there.

Saul

You're kidding me.

Robert

We have to be open to criticism...

Stanley

Robert Gray's script is in nine acts and feels like ten acts too long.

Robert

What?!

Stanley

"Although I do have to thank him for the predictable plot, it gives me time to get ahead on the review, and to bed early, where hopefully his words will not plague my dreams and thus giving me screaming nightmares. His play would be excellent if it were used for torturing Soviet spies. Someone should clue the defense department to this new method of torture."

Robert

Oh I'm!...I am so...

Saul

You see sometimes you have to be open as an artist to suggestion...

Robert

Be quiet!

Stanley

His turns next. "Someone needs to explain to Saul Solomon the difference between charm and cheap. I can often see the intentions in an artist's heart

and mind when it comes to their choices, but it has never been so apparent the way this producer chooses to behave with his wallet. Renting out the Tin Box Theatre in the lower east side, and furnishing the set with a pitiful excuse for a gazebo, which by the way, he chooses to use for every one of the plays twenty-seven locations, which is perhaps a failure on everyone's part, gives the play the same kind of factory fake feel that the acting and writing do."

Saul

The nerve of this guy...I'm almost glad he's dead.

Robert

Anything else?

Stanley

Oh, there's lots more. "The entire production under Stanley Miller's direction is disappointing. Mr. Miller has taken completely incoherent, incompatible elements and still find a magical process for making them monotone and one note. I was hopeful for Mr. Miller in his early career, and even championed him to an extent, but after all of these years Mr. Miller has never found his footing, and *The Blighted Heart* under his direction only comes off...stiff... like all of Stanley Miller's productions."

Saul

I'm sorry, Stan. This is garbage, give it to me.

Stanley

Stiff...

Robert

Some people just don't understand, what it takes to write a play. They just don't.

Saul

What are these? Title ideas? "An evening with *The Blighted Heart*, learning that nuclear annihilation isn't the worse that can happen." "*The Blighted Heart*, an argument for the return of small pox." Oh, here's a good one: "Got polio? Good! Then you are blessed that you won't be walking into the

Tin Box for a performance of The Blighted Heart anytime soon." This is over kill! Listen to this guy.

Robert

I wish you were alive so I could kill you.

Stanley

Well, my morale is crushed.

Robert

He completely missed the point.

Stanley

Did he?

Robert

Apparently.

Stanley

We have to tell his family. And the police.

Robert

I'm not going to the funeral. I'm just going to write a review of his life. See how he likes it.

Saul

Well, he probably won't care, because he's dead. He's beyond revenge.

Stanley

I think someone should call the police.

Saul

Put a nail in all of our coffins.

Robert

I'll go.

Stanley
I'll call an ambulance.

Saul
Why? He's dead.

Stanley
Formality?

(Robert and Stan start to go.)

Saul
Wait!

Stanley
What for?

Saul
Just...I don't know...don't you just want to feel your career for a bit longer? Once this hits the news stands we're done. Let's just feel it one last time. See doesn't that feel nice. Robert, you're a writer, you make...words. And Stanley! Stanley. You bring them to life. You guys are artists. You make and create magical...magic times for all to see. I mean Robert, you were just getting warmed up. It's a shame you never wrote that novel. It would have been great. And it would have been American. It could have very well been the great American novel. It had all the ingredients, what I like to refer to as the right stuff. And Stan...golden boy...it's hard for people to understand genius...

Stanley
I'm not a genius.

Saul
Well then, aren't you going to wish you dated more actresses? I always thought you should have been dating more of your actresses.

Stanley
What are you buttering us up for?

Saul

Nothing. Okay a conspiracy. I'm just saying, Mickey Blake kicked the bucket, that doesn't mean our careers should be kicked in the rear end as well.

Robert

There's nothing we can do.

Saul

Is there? What if Mickey Blake wrote a review that wasn't horrible, and then died.... What if? What if, Mickey Blake wrote a good review and then died somewhere else? Like on the way home?

Stanley

You are a sick human being.

Saul

Perhaps. But I'm not stupid. I know how hard we worked. I know what this will do to our careers and all the decades of hard work and starving, mostly on Robert's end, will be for nothing. I might be disturbed, but I'm not greedy. I wouldn't ruin you guys' chance at being happy to feel better about myself morally. Because it won't change a thing. And it's not fair. I might be sick, but I'm not okay with harm coming to my friends. My two best...

Stanley

Okay, that, that's enough. You made your point. (*Stanley paces to himself for a moment.*) If, and I do mean if, how would one pull this off?

Saul

I don't know.

Robert

He drops the review in the mail box at the times, He drops it with a little note that says "sorry, I wasn't feeling well, wanted to get this in on time etc etc." Then due to feeling bad he checks in to a hotel instead of making the long walk home.

Saul

Yeah, cause he just wants to lay down...

Robert

The hotel staff finds him the next day. Words already out that he felt bad. Three witnesses saw him leave the theatre.

Saul

Yeah, and he was complaining about a stuffy nose!

Stanley

You don't die from a stuffy nose.

Saul

He was complaining about a ruptured spleen! I don't know! Keep going.

Robert

Well, that's it. The simpler the better.

Saul

How do we do it, Stan?

Stanley

Someone would have to pose as him, to book the hotel.

Saul

Would that person be recognizable?

Stanley

Well, the story is he's sick, so he could be covering his face slightly with a rag that he occasionally coughs in to.

Saul

Sharp. Sharp.

Stanley

Once access is gained to the hotel, the back door gets opened, Mickey gets dragged up. Two people go down the fire escape.

(They are silent for a second as all of their minds race.)

Robert

Could we actually do this?

Stanley

I...I think so. With any luck.

Saul

We have to try. It's about survival. It's like when one beast hides another beast in the forest, he's not concerned with anything but his own survival.

(Tiny moment of weird silence as Stan and Robert wonder what Saul is even talking about.)

Robert

I say we do it.

Saul

Yes! I knew you would be easy to convince. Stan?

Stanley

I'm thinking.

Saul

Stan, sometimes you have to make a decision, and then just go with it.

Stanley

I think you're right. I think you're right.

Saul

Okay, let's get to work. I'll write the review...

Stanley

No, Robert's the writer. He will write the review. You are going to help me get him in to the hotel. You will pose as him. We'll get you in his clothes.

Saul

Sounds good let's get him to the dressing room.

Reading Narration

(They have extreme difficulty working together to pick him up, they drop him on the floor, at that very moment Maggie walks on to the stage, she begins to rehearse not noticing the others who are down in the audience)

Stanley

Maggie, what are you doing?

Maggie

Oh, I'm terribly sorry. I was out walking to go over some notes in my head, and I saw the door was still open and the lights were on. I thought I might take the opportunity to rehearse a bit.

Stanley

No, that's okay. Too much rehearsal yields diminishing returns. Go get some sleep, Maggie.

Maggie

I'm sorry, I won't over rehearse again.

Stanley

It's okay.

Maggie

Please forgive me.

Stanley

It's really okay, Maggie.

Maggie

I hope so.

Stanley/Saul/Robert

...It is....etc...

Maggie

If you say so, then it is. (*Maggie starts to leave, then turns to say..*) You should always trust the director. (*Turns and takes a few steps then turns back.*) And the writer always has the answers. (*Turns to go but turns back immediately.*) Sorry, I don't know any quotes about producers.

Saul

It's okay. (*She exits.*) She's sweet. This city is going to chew that kid up.

Robert

Let's get him up.

Stanley

Wait, should we say a few words?

Saul

That might be classy.

Robert

What, like now?

Stanley

Let's put him in the gazebo. Formal.

Reading Narration

(*They carry him into the gazebo, and gather around in what they feel is a funeral fashion.*)

Saul

Someone say some words. Robert, say some words.

Robert

About?

Saul

I don't know give him a Yule log.

Robert
A eulogy?

Saul
Whatever.

Robert
A Yule log is an actual log you burn at Christmas.

Saul
Christmas is strange to me! Just, let's go we don't have much time.

Robert
Right. Uh. Here lies Mickey Blake, not sure if that's his real name but... He was a good person, who dedicated his life to making people... aware of art... through the use of his criticisms. He sometimes, well often times, would miss the mark. He was dense, and judgmental. I mean, this guy couldn't understand a metaphor to save his life. He couldn't recognize brilliance if Albert Einstein was his conjoined twin!

Stanley
Okay, Amen. God rest his soul. I think a memorial service is beyond our maturity. Let's get going.

Reading Narration
(They start to take him to the dressing room. He is heavy and it is difficult for them.)

Stan
Wait, grab his things. Just hang him here for a second

Reading Narration
(They hang Mickey's dead body to a limb of one of the fake trees by his watch. They all scramble to get his belongings)

Guy
(Off stage) Hello?

Who is that? Saul

It's Guy. Stanley

What is he doing here? Saul

I don't know. Stanley

Get Mickey! Saul

Reading Narration

(Robert tries to get Mickey free from the tree but it is difficult. He tries to push Mickey's body out of the way in order to get him loose and it swings him around and makes him "hug" Guy the very second he enters from backstage.)

Hey guys! Who is this? Guy

It's...Mickey Blake! Stanley

Why is he hugging me? Guy

He loved your performance! Saul

Really? Guy

Loved it. Saul

Guy

(Whispers) This is excellent for my career. Did you guys hear that?

Robert

Yes.

Guy

Did you really like it Mr. Blake?

Saul

He sure did.

Guy

He's not letting go. Don't ever let go Mr. Blake. *(He starts to cry.)*

Stanley

Well, Mr. Blake needs to be going.

Guy

This is the greatest day of my life.

Saul

That's beautiful.

Guy

What did he say about me?

Saul

He said that Guy, his performance was great.

Guy

You sure he didn't mean "those guys" My name is Guy and it sounds a awful lot like guys. It's almost the same word. Almost. But there's an S. Sometimes people get confused I think.

Saul

I think he knew exactly who he was talking about.

Guy

That's great guys. You guys. Not me.

Stanley

We gotcha.

Guy

Bye Mr. Blake. *(Robert spins his body around, still suspended by his watch he appears to wave "bye". Guy exits proud of himself.)*

Stanley

He is destined to give me a heart attack. It's in the stars.

Saul

Come on let's get it together. Robert, I want a good review the second we get back.

Stanley

Use his stationary, copy his handwriting.

Robert

Got it.

Reading Narration

(Stan and Saul carry Mickey off. Robert sits to write the review, after a few moments just as we adjust to the silence, Mickey's wife comes in and starts to make a scene. Her overcoat is buttoned incorrectly and her hair looks like she crashed into several objects on the way there, maybe even attacked by pigeons. She is obviously drunk and enraged.)

Hilary

(Yelling.) Where are you?! I know you're in here!

Robert

Can I help you?

No. Hilary

I'm sorry? Robert

What are you an idiot? Hilary

I certainly hope not. Robert

Don't get your hopes up. Where is he? Hilary

Who? Robert

(Mocking.) "Who?" What are you writing? Hilary

Nothing. *(She goes to grab Robert's review.)* Wait! *(He beats her to it and keeps it safe.)* Nothing it's private. Robert

What is it like a diary or something? Hilary

It's a play actually. Robert

Yeah! Yeah! ...Don't quit your day job! You must know my husband. Hilary

Who exactly? Robert

Hilary

Are you stupid or something?

Robert

No...

Hilary

Yes! Mickey Blake. I'm Mrs. Blake!

Robert

Mrs. Blake!

Hilary

That's right time to start kissing up! Kiss kiss kiss Muah Muah! Pathetic.

Robert

Excuse me.

Hilary

You're pathetic!

Robert

Ma'am. I really think you should be getting home.

Hilary

Covering for him eh?

Robert

What?

Hilary

Where is he?

Robert

He said he was feeling bad...

Hilary

Oh ugh Uggghhh! That the best you can do! Aren't you a writer?

Robert

Yes, I am.

Hilary

Well, jeez. Enchant me with a story, don't just give me the typical. My father is in...is in... publishing and I know! I know!

Robert

You know what?

Hilary

I know a writer when I see one...and Ha!

Robert

Mr. Blake is no longer here, he was feeling...

Hilary

Where's Mickey!

Robert

I'm trying to tell you...

Hilary

Where is Mickey?

Robert

If you would just... He wasn't feeling well he said...

Hilary

So he says! Why are you covering for him? You are a bad person.

Robert

Ma'am, I am really trying to tell you (*She starts crying.*) I don't...know how to help you.

Hilary

I'm going to find him. (*She notices all the dishes they dropped earlier.*) I need a new set of plates.

Ma'am? Robert

Stop calling me that. Do I look old to you? Hilary

No. Robert

Do I!?!? *(She grinds her palm into his face.)* Hilary

No! Robert

What is your problem? Hilary

You're seriously scaring me! Robert

Oh! Is that it? Am I scary? That's what I am? Huh? Hilary

No. Robert

You are so sweet. *(She collapses on to him crying, and then suddenly stops. She raises her head and with a cold blooded calm says..)* You tell him I'm on to him. If he comes home tonight I am going to kill him. *(She starts to leave.)* Don't quit your day job! Hilary

What? Robert

Hilary

Don't quit your day job. To be a writer, cause you can't.

Robert

It is my job.

Hilary

In that case...just shoot yourself.

(She leaves, then comes back in.)

Hilary

I forgot my purse. You shouldn't be so mean to people.

(She exits sobbing. Lights down..)

Scene 3

(Lights Up. Stanley and Saul return to find Robert finishing the review)

Stanley

Did you finish the review?

Robert

Barely. His wife came.

Saul

Who? Mickey's? What did you say?

Robert

I tried to tell her the story we came up with, but she was, incoherent.

Stanley

How so?

Robert

Drunk, out of her mind. Slightly homicidal.

Saul

Oh, man! If I had a quarter for every woman who went homicidal on me. You get use to it.

Robert

She was challenging.

Stanley

Well, we got him set. Seemed to go over just fine.

Saul

Like butter, like butter. I was amazing. Wasn't I?

Stanley

Yes.

Saul

I didn't want to carry him up the stairs though, my back and all.

Robert

You have a bad back?

Saul

It just started bothering me.

Stanley

On the way over.

Saul

Tragic. You got the review?

Robert

Yes. Here it is.

Saul
And it's good right?

Robert
It's good. Fair but good.

Saul
It's got to be better than fair!

Stanley
I'm sure he means "fair" as in realistic, right?

Robert
Yes. I know how to write.

Saul
We know. We know. I'm going to drop this off. *(Starts to exit.)* You guys are beautiful! *(Comes back.)* We are co-conspirators! *(Starts to go, then comes back.)* Me too, Brute! *(Exits.)*

Robert
(After a pause.) Too tired to correct him. He's proud of himself.

Stanley
Yes he is. What was Mickey's wife doing here?

Robert
It was... the weirdest thing I've ever seen. I think she thought I was trying to hide an affair for him.

Stanley
As in he's having an affair, and you were covering?

Robert
That's what she thought. She was all over the map. She was crazy.

Stanley
I'm so sorry, Robert.

Robert

I'm sorry you had to carry him up the stairs all by yourself.

Stanley

To the penthouse, no less.

Robert

Why the penthouse?

Stanley

It's...Saul...long story. He gets to the...you know...I'll just tell you later. I am so tired. I have to sleep. I have to.

Robert

Same here. I think we're safe. How hard can it be to drop the review in the mail box?

Stanley

Who knows, but...you never know. Go get some sleep, I'll do the same.

Robert

Right.

Maggie

(Entering) Hi, Mr. Miller. Hi, Mr. Gray.

Stanley

Maggie, what are you doing here?

Maggie

Rehearsal. *(She exits to the dressing room.)*

Stanley

Oh that's right! We have rehearsal. Oh my god, they always come at the worst time.

Robert

I can't think of anything worse than a rehearsal right now.

Stanley

Get some sleep. Come back in a few hours.

Robert

I'm fine. I'll stay.

Stanley

Dealing with Guy and Vanessa is the last thing I want to do right now.

Robert

I understand.

Stanley

Can we just get through this one?

Robert

What do you mean?

Stanley

Well, and I mean this with all due respect, can you refrain from being your normal charming self today?

Robert

(pause) You're lucky I'm tired.

Stanley

Good. I was hoping it wouldn't make you more cranky...cause everything does.

Robert

I'll be fine.

(Guy and Vanessa enter.)

Stanley

Hey...

Vanessa

(Harshly.) I have not had enough coffee yet.

Stanley

I was talking to Guy. *(She goes to the dressing room.)* What were you doing here last night?

Guy

I was in the show...

Robert

No, after the show. Did you stay the whole time?

Guy

...

Robert

Were you here the whole time from the end of the show, to when we said goodbye?

Guy

The second time?

Stanley

Yes.

Guy

No, I just came back to get my gum.

Robert

Okay.

Guy

I didn't get the wrong gum, did I?

Robert
What?

Guy
I didn't take your gum?

Robert
No.

Guy
Okay good. Cause that would be awkward. *(Awkward moment, then he exits.)*

Stanley
This is going to be a long day.

(Lights fade down...)

Reading Narration

(Lights up on the following scene from the rehearsal of The Blighted Heart. Vanessa and Maggie are on stage. Stan is on his feet in the audience, and Robert is seated nearby. Margret, the frumpy janitor, cleans up the broken coffee cup and scattered pots and pans. She moves slowly, weighted down by several decades of shattered dreams. Her gaze only conveys that there is no happiness in life.)

Guy
(As John offstage) Where's my harlot?

Vanessa
(As Jane) Oh no! He's drunk again. Don't be afraid.

Maggie
(As house keeper) We have to call the police!

Guy

(Completely sober without accent.) There you are. Make me a sandwich.

Maggie

Now don't go getting him all angry!

Vanessa

Make your own Sandwich!

Guy

Jane.

Vanessa

You're drunk!

Guy

I don't care. I can drink if I want to. Come here and love me.

Vanessa

You can barely stand up!

Maggie

You're drunk Mr. Doe!

Stanley

(Interrupting.) No he's not. Guy? *(He doesn't answer.)* Guy!?

Guy

Sorry. I was submerged into the scene. It's very real when I'm up here.

Stanley

That's surprising. You don't appear drunk at all, and the scene looks ridiculous because of it.

Guy

Rasputin said to do it this way.

Excuse me? Stanley

Rasputin... Guy

Rasputin? Stanley

Guy
Vikolav Rasputin, my acting coach. He said that drunk people don't act drunk. So I'm acting not drunk to appear like I'm drunk.

Stanley
I think it serves the story if he appears drunk.

Guy
But drunk people don't act drunk...

Stanley
I don't know if you've been around drunk people, but people don't drink a lot and drive straight. There should be some clue to the audience that you are drunk. Please apply yourself. Again.

Guy
Where from?

Stanley
Just keep going.

Maggie
You're drunk Mr. Doe!

Guy
(*Cheating out towards the audience.*) I'm going to beat you!

Stanley
Okay, let's stop there. Why do you take that line out?

Guy

I just figured since it's such a strong emotion, I would take it out.

Stanley

Yes, but it looks as if you're talking to the next door neighbors.

Guy

Where should I take it?

Stanley

To them! It's a line you deliver to them!

Guy

Oh!

Stanley

Again.

Maggie

You're drunk Mr. Doe!

Guy

I'm sick of hearing that! I'm tired! Images of the war keep...

Stanley

Intensity! More! Please!

Guy

...keep haunting my dreams. I'm losing my sanity! I watched my friend die from the sharpen-nail.

Robert

Shrapnel! The word is shrapnel!

Guy

Shrap-a-null. I wish my mom was still alive to hold me, but she died of the pu-ne-monia. (*Pronounces it: puh-Knee-moe-Knee-a*)

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Pneumonia. Stanley

(Starts to cry, poorly.) Guy

Now, don't you go to him! Maggie

I have to. Don't you see he needs me? Vanessa

If you go to him, I'm leaving. Maggie

Go! You have your own life to lead and dreams to shatter. Go. And don't fall in love with a bad one. (She goes.) John. (He drops to his knees and tries to hug her on but is too far away, so he just puts his face on her shoe.) Vanessa

Jane. Jane. Jane. Guy

What are you doing? Stanley

I got down to my knees too far away, so it ruined it kind of. Guy

Think. THINK! Stanley

In all my life I have never seen a worse... Robert

Stanley

Thank you! Thank you, Robert. That's lunch! (*The actors break.*) Kill me. Just put me in the hotel with Blake.

Robert

I'll join you.

Stanley

Why are their names John and Jane Doe?

Robert

They're supposed to represent all of us. Any of us can associate with their problems.

Stanley

I don't think you have to name them John and Jane Doe to represent that, when over the course of nine acts they encounter every hardship that could ever possibly befall a man and woman.

Robert

I want everyone to be able to associate with them.

Stanley

Can we change their names?

Robert

No.

Stanley

Robert!

Robert

I like their names.

Stanley

Please.

Robert

It doesn't matter what their names are.

Stanley

Usually, I would agree, but not in this case.

(Saul enters.)

Saul

Hey, everyone! Scene looks great!

Robert

They're on break.

Saul

I know.

Stanley

Did you do it?

Saul

Course I did. Straight away! Now we just have to sit back and wait. Wait for the money that is. And the fame. And whatever it is you're after, Robert.

Stanley

You just dropped it in the mail?

Saul

Yes. Today's edition is already out. But good things begin tomorrow.

Robert

You're awfully positive.

Saul

You should try it sometime. Anything happening here?

Stanley

I was just about to run them through, the goodbye scene.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Saul

Alright everybody, let's do the goodbye scene for Stan! This one's for the Captain! (*Stanley and Robert are eyeing his behavior.*) What?

Stanley

You just have a lot of pep. Did you sleep?

Saul

No. I'm just excited for the future. What?

Stanley

Alright let's do it.

Guy

(*Guy enters spinning in circles just from his torso up.*) Jane. I must leave know.

Robert

The word is now.

Saul

Why is he acting like that?

Stanley

I don't know.

Robert

He decides to act drunk in this scene?

Stanley

Guy, why are you swerving around?

Guy

Rasputin told me...

Saul

Rasputin?

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley

His acting teacher, Russian I'm assuming.

Saul

He should look into a name change.

Stanley

What... exactly?

Guy

Oh. He told me to use emotions I've experienced to make this scene more real. So I have something behind the lines.

Stanley

Okay...what exact emotion are you using?

Guy

Dizzy.

Stanley

Dizzy?

Guy

Yeah, it's one I've experienced before. *(Robert laughs hysterically.)* What?

Saul

You tickled him with, your comedy.

Guy

(Encouraged by the laughter.) You guys want me to keep doing it?

Stanley

No. Just stand and speak.

Guy

Jane. I must leave know...now. I must leave now. It is time. Now I will miss you.

Stanley

The word is know.

Guy

The first one?

Stanley

Second.

Guy

Oh that makes sense. (*back in scene*) Jane. I must leave you now. It is time. Know I will miss you.

Stanley

Lose the accent.

Vanessa

(*bragging*) I worked really hard on mine.

Stanley

And it shows. Keep going.

Guy

I am going to the war. World War One. It's going to be a bloody war, and I might come back to you in pieces. Lots of broken pieces. But I will think of you everyday. Good...

Vanessa

No!... I won't. I will not say goodbye. No matter what. Stay together. Stay alive, in one piece and you come back to me. This isn't the end!

Guy

But it might be. The Japanese have guns and mortars. And the Germans have tanks and bombs. And the Japanese have... plains and trains. And the Germans have mean...soldiers...

(Stanley makes a puzzled look at Robert.)

Robert

He doesn't know the lines.

Stanley

Start over. Get out the lines.

Saul

Looking good, Verkamp. *(She smiles)* Is it Verkamp or VerCHAMP?

Guy

Jane, I must leave now. *(The scene continues through the whole speech as the following action happens.)*

Saul

Who is that?

(Hilary has entered. She is no longer drunk)

Robert

That's his wife!

Saul

Who?

Stanley

Oh my God.

Saul

Who's wife?

Mickey Blake's!

Robert

What is she doing here?

Saul

Excuse me. I was wondering where I could find the writer of this play? Are you listening to me? I'm trying to find the little man who wrote this. He works here? (*Maggie points to the three.*) Oh, sorry to interrupt.

Hilary

Can we help you?

Stanley

Sorry for last night. I don't usually drink. It was a long day and i hadn't eaten much.

Hilary

It's fine.

Robert

Have you seen my husband?

Hilary

This is Mrs. Blake.

Robert

As in Mrs. Mickey Blake? Pleasure to meet you.

Saul

Yes, thank you.

Hilary

Mickey, uh he was having some symptoms he said...

Saul

Symptoms?

Hilary

Stanley
He said he wasn't feeling well.

Robert
After the play.

Saul
Last we saw of him.

Stanley
Did he not come home?

Hilary
No he didn't.

Saul
Strange. He said he was going to go straight home and write a review.
Which I might add he loved the play.

Hilary
I don't care.

Saul
Delightful.

Hilary
If he's smart, he'll stay gone. (*Louder to the whole room.*) And if he's been
consorting with any of these tramps...heaven help us.

Stanley
Thank you.

Hilary
(*She stumbles a bit getting off stage*) I don't need help!

(*She Exits*)

Stanley
Still positive?

Saul
Everything is fine.

Maggie
Should we continue?

Stanley
No. Stop. Just stop. Please. Everyone. See you tonight.

(The actors all leave.)

Saul
I promise all will be fine. I promise.

Robert
You've said that lots of times.

Stanley
Let's just get through the night.

(Lights Down)

Scene 4

Reading Narration

(Lights up on that night's performance. The play is in progress. The house lights are down, and Stan, Saul and Robert are all in the audience watching. Vanessa is holding a prop baby bundle, chastising Guy who is sitting wasted in the Gazebo)

Vanessa

You coward. You good for nothing...coward! Look at you. Too drunk to be a father. This baby needs you. We need you! I... Get up. Get up or I'll pull you up. *(Sets the baby down into a basket.)* Fine. If that's the way you want it John Doe. Fine. Get up. Get up and hold your baby. Be a father, be a man for once in your life. Hold your baby daughter!

Guy

I can't. I'm too ashamed of my drinking. I'm too ashamed!

Vanessa

You need to take care of this baby!

Reading Narration

(At this moment, the shoddy craftsmanship and cheap quality of the Gazebo deliver their consequences. A support beam snaps loose and falls directly on to the baby basket, obviously killing any small delicate object inside. Vanessa and Guy are stunned and don't know how to proceed. Robert immediately storms off and slams the bathroom door shut behind him. Saul just puts his face in his hands and Stan eagerly gestures for them to keep going. They do nothing. The roof of the Gazebo almost caves in and Vanessa screams. Finally, Maggie enters to try and save the scene the best she can.)

Maggie

Hi, I know I was fired years ago, I was just walking by, and thought maybe I'd take this baby to the hospital...so there will actually be a baby in your lives to fight about.

(Vanessa and Guy are confused for a second. Then Vanessa glares at Guy to do something.)

Guy

Fine I'll hold her. *(Confused, he ends up miming the baby.)* I love her. You're right I love her. I love her so much. I love this baby!

(Lights fade....)

(Lights up. The show is now over. Stan is sitting defeated on the edge of the stage. Saul hovers by him trying to cheer him up.)

Saul

It will be okay. I promise everything will be okay. I mean it was better than last night.

Stanley

That isn't a great achievement.

Saul

Is Robert still in the bathroom?

Stanley

Yes. I don't have the strength to get him out.

Saul

Just leave him in there for a while. He'll be fine. He can drink from the faucet, and if he needs to use the restroom...he's already in there.

(Stanley gets up and walks to the middle of the stage and slowly starts to lie down.)

Stanley

I'm so tired. My soul is tired. It's the worst feeling.

Saul

You going to be okay?

Stanley

Yeah. I'm just going to go to sleep right here.

Saul

You sure?

Stanley

I am positive. And when I wake up, I'm going to start drinking.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Saul

Drinking?

Stanley

Oh yeah. And I don't mean socially. I'm talking about a complete plunge in to alcoholism. I'm going to dedicate my life to it. Drinking will be my religion.

Saul

Suit yourself. Tell you what, tomorrow the cocktails are on me. All of them. *(Starts to leave.)* I'm just going to leave Robert in there too. Partly because I don't want to deal with him, but mostly because I think it's funny.

Stanley

Understood. Understood. Time to sleep. *(Saul exits.)* Tomorrow, my life as a wino begins.

(Lights fade...)

END OF ACT

ACT 2

Scene 1

Reading Narration

(Lights up on Stanley still asleep on the stage. Margret is sweeping near by. Guy enters the building and wakes him up oddly, smiling and hugging him, then goes to the dressing room. Stanley is confused, starts to go back to sleep)

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Maggie

(Entering.) Congratulations, Mr. Miller. You must be so happy.

Stanley

What are you talking about?

Maggie

The review. He loved it.

Stanley

Oh.

Maggie

I can't believe it.

Stanley

Stranger things have happened. *(Starts to go back to sleep, but sits back up.)* How good was it, exactly?

Maggie

Glowing. I've never seen a better one. I didn't expect it. I mean, I think you have done all you can do with the play, I just didn't expect the review to be that good. The way he said I was up and coming, it made me very proud of myself.

Stanley

How "glowing" was it?

Maggie

Like I said, I've never seen better.

Stanley

Really? That's great Maggie. See you soon.

Maggie

Okay. I owe it all to you.

Stanley

You don't have a copy by any chance?

Maggie

No, I'm sorry. They had a copy floating around the deli, that's where I read it.

(She leaves. The janitor walks by)

Stanley

Excuse me.

Margret

Yes?

Stanley

Would you mind terribly doing me a huge favor?

Margret

Depends.

Stanley

Would you mind running around the corner and picking me up a copy of the times?

Margret

That's not my job, is it?

Stanley

Well, no. That's why I said favor.

Margret

I'm not your slave. *(She walks away)*

(Vanessa enters.)

Vanessa

Oh my god it's amazing! Can you believe it?

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley

No I can't!

Vanessa

Amazing work, Stan. All that pushing really helped the rest of the cast keep up. I owe you a big thanks.

Stanley

Do you have a copy?

Vanessa

Yes I do. Here you can have this one. I have thirty at home.

Maggie

(Entering from the dressing room.) Did you read it?

Vanessa

(Coldly.) Yes. *(She exits.)*

Maggie

(After a small moment.) Well, I guess I'll go get ready.

(Stan is reading the review. Slowly walking to the bathroom.)

Stanley

Hey, Robert...?

Robert

(From in the bathroom.) What?

Stanley

Want to come out here for a minute?

Robert

Why?

Stanley

It will just take a second.

Robert

I believe I've made myself clear.

Stanley

The review is out. Want to read it?

Robert

I know what it says. I wrote it.

Stanley

Really?

Robert

Yeah, really.

Stanley.

Really? You wrote "The Blighted Heart is the greatest play of all time" and "Saul Solomon will define this era of Broadway productions"?

Robert

What!?! (*Coming out of the bathroom.*) Give me that. (*Reading aloud.*) Saul Solomon's latest production, *The Blighted Heart*, running at The Tin Box Theatre, my favorite hang out I might add, located in the lower east side is the greatest play of all time. *The Blighted Heart* is a play in nine acts and by the end you are going to be wanting nineteen more. Robert Gray's script is chilling and powerful. It is clear that Mr. Gray is the reincarnation of Shakespeare, Homer, Dickens, that other guy that wrote the stuff about the whale and Steinbeck.

Stanley

Steinbeck is still alive.

Robert

Only he is better than all of them put together. The only play I've ever reviewed in my career where the words are better than music. It should be

a play and a movie. Maybe even a book. Guy Van is powerful and dynamic as the guy in the play. Vanessa Verkamp is the most beautiful woman on earth and the most talented actress to ever grace a stage anywhere in the history of the universe. She plays the girl in it. Rush to buy your tickets today to get a glimpse of this rare beauty. Maggie Simon proves to be up and coming and New York's next major star. Buy a ticket today so you can say you saw her when! The entire cast under Stanley Miller's direction is excellent. That Stan Miller could direct the sun not to shine and the tide to laugh at the moon. He is a genius among men. All of these elements are brought together and guided by the leadership, and gentle guiding touch of New York's finest producer: Saul Solomon. Saul Solomon, a titan of Broadway, once again makes the hit production of the year. It is about time he had a sandwich named after him. Saul Solomon will define this era of Broadway productions. I will see *The Blighted Heart* time and time again. As a matter of fact, I just bought my ticket for next Thursday and Friday night. I'm sure it will be the next two of many times I see the greatest play ever performed on soil. Ever. Only communists will not enjoy this play. If the saints or any holy figures were ever to return it would be to see this play. And the Tin Box Theatre does not discriminate, they take everyone's money, so reserve your ticket today! -Mickey Blake.

Stanley

I would be willing to bet, and I'm just shooting in the dark here, that that was not the review you wrote.

Robert

Not at all.

Stanley

Let's go get Saul on the phone. *(They get up and head to the door. It starts to open, they see it is Saul and they hide to ambush him.)*

Saul

(Saul cautiously creeps in.) Hello? *(He creeps in further and further, Stanley and Robert are creeping up behind him. He turns and sees them.)* Oh! Hey. Did you guys see the review?

(They both pounce on him.)

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Why did you do that? Stanley

Do what? Saul

Rewrite the review! Robert

I just gave it a little shine! Saul

A little shine?!?! Robert

Yes, a little shine! You guys always sell yourselves short!
(Vanessa comes in, they release their choke holds etc.)

Theo Bear! Vanessa

Pork chop! How are you? Saul

Did you read the review? Vanessa

I certainly did. Thought he could have spoke more about you, though. Saul

Oh you! Vanessa

No, you! Saul

Vanessa

Baby bear.

Stanley

Do you mind if we speak to Saul for a minute?

Vanessa

No. Is everything alright?

Robert

Everything's fine.

Vanessa

Okay. See you in a bit.

(She leaves, they grab him again.)

Robert

That was so dumb!

Saul

What was dumb? Selling the show. Saying good things about us for once!?

Stanley

And what happens if people start to ask questions? Huh? If people start poking their nose around? He disappears after our play, and then this pops up in the mailbox? This poorly written over sold piece of... lies!

Saul

I'm trying to be a team player!

Robert

Well, you just threw a grenade on the team bus.

Saul

Your review was a bust! I'm just trying to get people to see the darn play!

Stanley

There's more to it than that.

Robert

What happened to doing art for arts sake?

Saul

I don't believe in that! I'm not going to sit around like an artist and say, you know, "now is the summer of my discontent!"

Stanley

That's not even what I'm talking about!

Saul

I'm talking about we have a hit on our hands for a change!

Stanley

We have a fake on our hands, and a scandal! We are so finished.

Reading Narration

(Enter Walter Goldstein. His suit looks like it cost more than the theatre they are standing in and his watch shines like a star, but his charisma and approachability make him feel like an old friend to all who meet him.)

Walter

Hello? Anybody home? Look at this! Lovely place. I feel a lot of magic in these walls. Whoa, did you feel that? Feels like heaven and earth just shifted cause something happened on this stage. This place is something special I can feel it!

Saul

Goldstein? Walter Goldstein?

Walter

Hey, did someone call ahead? Or did my reputation just save me a place in line. Right you are, I would be Mr. Goldstein.

Saul

Saul...

Walter

Solomon. We got to talk you and me. *(To Stan)* How are you? Walter Goldstein.

Stanley

Stanley Miller.

Walter

The hot shot! And who's this guy?

Stanley

This is Robert Gray.

Robert

Nice to meet you...

(Walter goes to shake hands but jerks his back as if he's been shocked as soon as they make contact.)

Walter

Whoa! Did you feel that? This guy's electric!

Saul

I just want to say I love your films! They are fantastic productions for adults and children alike. We often go to the cinema to see them.

Robert

I never go to the cinema...

Saul

...In town. He never goes to the cinema in town. It's too crowded. When Robert here watches one of your films he likes to be immersed in the art of the production.

Walter

Oh? Well that's wonderful. I hear you are quite the producer. Ever going to make it out west?

Saul

Oh sure eventually. I'm just trying to dedicate some time to the stage. Art for art's sake if you know what I mean. Big believer in it. It shapes our nation's children.

Walter

If you ever do it looks like I would have quite the competition, better we stay a team. For me at least.

Saul

Oh, sure, sure yeah.

Walter

Where can I get a ticket?

Saul

Huh?

Walter

Where can I get a ticket for Thursday night, or is Mick Hanging around somewhere?

Stanley

Mick?

Walter

Blake. Went to Yale with the old cat. He has impeccable taste. Read the review, had to come check it out. Got a flight in the morning back to the Gold Coast but I wanted to catch Mickey if I could. I want a seat right next to him if he's going to come.

Robert

I'm not sure if he's...

Saul

...Sitting house right or left. He likes to switch it up. But you can rest assure he will be here.

Stanley

Or sometimes not.

Robert

He told me he wasn't coming.

Stanley

That's right I heard him.

Saul

Uh, yeah he told me the same thing, he wasn't coming tonight because he was coming tomorrow. He just can't stay away.

Stanley

But you know the life of a critic, have to be at a different play every night.

Robert

Chances are he won't be here tonight. Wouldn't want you up late the night before an early flight.

Walter

He's coming tomorrow, you said?

Saul

Already on the books.

Walter

I can get another flight. Put me down for Friday.

Stanley

There are no seats left.

Saul

I'm sure we can lose someone for Mr. Goldstein.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley
Kind of rude...

Saul
It can be done!

Robert
Flights are expensive.

Walter
Not when you work in film. Half the time your money is no good. Everyone wants to do you a favor.

Saul
The man wants to see the show! We'll seat you right next to Mickey.

(Vanessa enters reading her lines.)

Walter
Excellent. *(He notices Vanessa.)* Whoa! Who is that?

Saul
I would like you to meet Vanessa Verkamp. Vanessa?

Vanessa
Oh, Hi. I'm Vanessa...

Walter
Verkamp, so I've heard. You are stunning.

Vanessa
(Unimpressed.) Thank you. Are we going to rehearse sometime today?

Stanley
I will be with you in a moment.

(she stands off to the side)

Walter

Going to sell tickets with that one. She is stunning. She belongs in Hollywood. Friday it is. I'll see you gentlemen at the theatre. "Once more to the beach, my dear friends"It's a theatre reference.

Saul

I got it.

Walter

I can't wait to see Mickey. I trust Mickey more than anyone, and if this play is half as good as he says it is, come Saturday we start talking money, cause I'm going to want in.. *(He exits)*

Stanley

Vanessa, can you wait in the dressing room with the rest of the cast? We're going to have a production meeting. *(She leaves making her disgust at the inconvenience apparent.)*

Saul

Can I get a head start?

Stanley

(Grabbing him.) Why did you do that!? Now we not only have to explain Mickey's whereabouts, we have to make this into a decent play- which is impossible!

Saul

I can't help it.

Robert

Calm down! *(Breaks them apart.)*

Saul

Your grip is like death!

Robert

You deserved it.

Saul

We just have to make the play better.

Stanley

How? How are we going to do that?

Saul

I don't know. My job is to back you guys up!

Robert

Right, back us up! Not push us off of the mountain.

Saul

You guys act like I'm the only one who ever messes up.

Robert

Because ninety-nine percent of the time it's you who messes up.

Saul

I consider this script a mess up.

Robert

The script would be fine if it wasn't for...you know what?! I should have just made the story into a novel.

Saul

Well, why don't you next time? I can spend my money elsewhere.

Robert

That's great, then I won't have to waste a good idea on an undercut budget.

Saul

Thank you! Here you are like an angel of savings!

Stanley

(Years of playing referee and middleman come to an end as Stanley explodes.) Have neither of you learned anything? Anything at all? Mickey

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Blake wrote a stinky review because we stunk. All I heard out of the both of you is "not my fault, not my fault" As far as bad reviews go it's our worst, but it isn't our first. We get them all the time. We are lucky we work in this town again. When he criticized the production and your writing all I heard was: "he's crazy, he just didn't get it. It's not fair" But when he said my direction was stiff...I learned something! He was right. Yes, I have the two worst actors in New York, yes I have a nine act script, yes I have a gazebo that falls apart killing the imaginary baby, but I did nothing to help. I just sat there and let it happen. Every decision I made was to keep people out of the bathroom and not hurt anyone's feelings. And here we are. Paying the price!

(Stanley's explosion leaves the room humbled and deflated. After a few moments, Saul begins speaking in a more sensitive and apologetic tone.)

Saul

Okay, Fine. I'll admit we're not the best, but don't you guys ever want to try for more? I believed what I wrote in that review. Robert is a good writer, and he's going to get better. You are going to be great someday, it's why I keep taking chances. It's why I keep employing you guys. I'm not just opportunistic for me, I'm opportunistic for us. For all of us the same. I am an equal opportunistic employer. Don't you guys see!? We have a chance now. I knew opportunities like that would come. And we can get more. We could start winning from this moment right here. I'll do what I need to do. And I won't mess up anymore. I promise.

Stanley

I don't think there is anything we could do now.

Robert

We could make the play good.

Saul

Yeah, We could. You think we could do that, Stan? If Robert and I just got out of your way?

Stanley

If you guys help I can make it better.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Saul

We will. I'm speaking for Robert too.

Stanley

You have to get a Carpenter in here today. And secure everything.

Saul

You got it.

Stanley

(Speaking in a tone as if he's going to inform someone of a loved ones death.) And Robert...

Robert

What?

Stanley

Robert...

Robert

What?

Stanley

We...You...have to cut the play. You have to. Nine acts?

Robert

What are we talking...eight?

Stanley

No...

Robert

Seven? Five?

Saul

Keep going.

Stanley
Shut up, Saul. Keep going.

Robert
Three?

Stanley
Let's start with two.

Robert
Just...Just give me a second. *(He puts his face on the wall and covers it with his hands making his own portable happy place, stays there for a few seconds.)* Okay. Two acts. Fine.

Stanley
It's not the end of the world. One day you will make this entire story into a novel and it can be as long as you like. This is just the play.

Saul
Yeah, it's like a commercial...for your book!

Robert
A commercial?

Saul
Yeah you don't give everything away in the commercial!

Robert
You're right. So should I take all the good stuff out?

Stanley
No, no...

Robert
Right, right.

Stanley

For our purposes leave only the best in. That way people want to buy the book.

Saul

He's right!

Robert

Okay. I can do it.

Saul

Great! See I knew we were a team. We're like the Yankees, but better! Joe DiMaggio, Lou Gehrig and I can't think of another one. But you get the picture!

Stanley

You make the cuts. We rehearse them tonight, get them locked in and then...hmmm

Saul

What, what?

Stanley

Mickey.

Robert

It's safe to say he won't show up.

Stanley

Hmmm.

Saul

You got me there.

Robert

What if he did show up?

Stanley

What if he did show up??

Saul

I'm all for you becoming a little more positive, but now is not the time.

Robert

Remember when Guy thought Mickey was hugging him?

Saul

Ha! What a Schmuck!

Robert

What if we could pull that off on a larger scale?

Stanley

Who would fall for that?

Robert

Guy did.

Stanley

I think Saul put it best when he said Guy is a schmuck.

Robert

Yeah, but what if we did it...more convincing. And someone wasn't looking that close. I mean Goldstein will be watching the play, what if there was just a little more of a distraction?

Saul

What do you mean?

Robert

I mean, what if we could get him distracted a bit? Where he wasn't looking that close?

Stanley

How?

Saul

Yeah, he said they were old friends...

Stanley

...Who haven't seen each other in a long time.

Saul

He's going to want to catch up.

Stanley

Unless. Something could come between them.

Saul

What could come between best friends no matter what? And distract them.

(they think, Vanessa enters)

Vanessa

Production meeting still going on? I heard the yelling stop, usually means they're over.

(they all look at each other)

Saul

Actually take a lunch.

Vanessa

It's the morning.

Saul

Then take a breakfast, tell everyone else.

Vanessa

Very well. You're being strange today.

Saul

(Pause) Thank you.

(She leaves)

Robert

She's perfect!

Stanley

I know! Do you mind?

Saul

You kidding me? No. I'll trade her in in a heartbeat. For this? Preemptive strike if you ask me. Go ahead.

Stanley

Then we shift Maggie over to Jane. And we change the names of the characters!

Robert

Ugh..fine. I'll change the last names only.

Stanley

Works for me. Maggie plays the part. Limit Guy as much as we can. We get Vanessa to distract him. Now we need Mickey.

Robert

Can we even get him in time? Before someone finds him?

Saul

We have plenty of time. I put the do not disturb sign on the door and I reserved the suite for a week

Stanley

Listen to this, tell him why.

Saul

Because I get to the counter and I say I want the room and the concierge says "just a regular room?" And I wasn't going to have him thinking I was some nobody, some low life.

Robert

But you were pretending to be somebody else..

Saul

Yeah but I couldn't take his little condescending gaze. So I said "No the penthouse" He didn't seem impressed so I booked it for the week.

Stanley

And so I had to carry him the whole way up. I'm still sore by the way.

Saul

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Robert

Well. That's it, right? That's all the pieces.

Saul

Minus a little finesse.

Stanley

Could we do this?

Robert

We kind of have to.

Saul

Thanks to me.

Stanley/Robert

-I was just about to say that.-

Saul

-I get it.- I get it.

(Vanessa enters.)

Vanessa

Are you coming to lunch? or breakfast? Or whatever it is.

Saul

Do we tell her everything? Or just the...

Stanley

No.

Saul

Okay. Baby doll, can you sit here for a minute?

Vanessa

Okay. *(She sits on the edge of the stage with them.)*

Saul

How do I say this? We were hoping Maggie could go on for you Friday...

Stanley

And tonight.

Saul

And tonight.

Vanessa

I will stab you in the eye.

Saul

Help me out here.

Stanley

Vanessa, we were hoping you would escort a guest of ours to the show.

Vanessa

Who?

Robert

Mr. Goldstein.

Vanessa

I'm not going on a date... I have a show! Have you read the review!? I'm a star! The public needs me in that part!

Saul

We know, We know. You see... you are all I'm thinking about. -Mr. Goldstein...-

Vanessa

-I will send your head rolling to Jersey-

Saul

... is a Hollywood producer.

Vanessa

Hollywood?....Really?

Stanley

Sure is.

Vanessa

(She processes for a few seconds then straightens herself out.) I've been meaning to talk to you about our relationship.

Saul

No need. A guy like me can't cage a beautiful bird like you.

Vanessa

I was just thinking the same thing! Okay, I'll do it. No hard feelings?

Saul

No hard feelings.

Stanley

We just want whats best for you.

Vanessa

Me too. I'm so excited. Hollywood! You think I will impress him?

(They all agree that she will.)

Vanessa

I'm going to look amazing!

Saul

Perfect.

Vanessa

I know, but I'm going to look even better. I got to go.

Stanley

Have a good lunch or breakfast or whatever.

Vanessa

Oh no...I'm not eating for the next two days. I call it the ring fast. I hear wedding bells! *(She exits.)*

Stanley

Okay...Okay!

Robert

That was easy.

Stanley

A little too easy.

Saul

Whatever I'll take it.

Stanley

Well. Let's get moving.

Saul

Can we put our hands in or something?

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley

Huh?

Saul

You know like do one of these? *(He puts his hand out for the others to put their hands on top of his.)*

Stanley

Sure. *(He does, Robert starts to, then hesitates.)*

Robert

Wait, have you guys washed your hands recently?

Stanley

Yes we have.

(Robert puts his hand in.)

Stanley

Yesterday. *(Robert is annoyed for a moment but deals with it. They just stand there, they don't know what to do next.)* Is this all we do?

Saul

I think so.

Stanley

For how long?

Saul

Until we get bored I guess.

Robert

Let's just stop now.

(They agree and let go.)

Stanley

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Let's go get Mickey.

Robert

Let's go.

(Lights down...)

Scene 2

(Lights up on Maggie talking with Stanley and Robert. It's the big day. About an hour before curtain.)

Stanley

You're going to do great tonight.

Maggie

Thank you. I know I wasn't perfect with all the new cuts, But I studied all night and all morning.

Stanley

You are a professional Maggie.

Maggie

Thank you.

Stanley

Thank You. I can't tell you how relieved I am to have you in the part.

Maggie

That's really nice to hear. Vanessa isn't always encouraging.

Stanley

That surprises me. *(Pause)* I'm kidding.

Maggie

Oh, very funny.

Stanley

Go get ready. *(She leaves)* I think she'll do great.

Robert

She wasn't bad last night.

Stanley

No she wasn't. The script is great. You did good, Robert.

Robert

Thanks. The coast clear?

Stanley

I think so.

Robert

Let's get to work. Where did you hide him?

Stanley

Prop closet.

(They go get him and drag him on stage.)

Robert

Hold on, I'm going to grab a chair. *(He leaves to go get a chair, leaving Stan holding Mickey)*

Stanley

Okay, hurry.

(Maggie comes back in, startled by seeing Stanley hugging Mickey. There is a slight bit of heart break on her face, she leaves, Robert returns.)

Robert

Okay, here we go.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley
Gently, gently. *(They set him in the chair.)*

(Saul enters.)

Saul
Okay I got just the thing.

Robert
What did you get?

Saul
It's called duck tape.

Robert
Duck tape?

Saul
Sure is. They used it in the war, it will do the trick. Wait is everyone gone?

Stanley
Yeah, we got a bit, before everyone returns.

Robert
We have to spray him down with cologne or something.

Saul
Yeah. Cologne and booze.

Stanley
Good thinking. See what you can find everyone.

(They all scatter. Margret walks through when they are gone and sees nothing as she walks through the space. They all come back in with booze, cologne etc.)

Stanley

Okay spray him down.

Saul

Okay let's get him taped up

Reading Narration

*(Saul and Stan each tape one of Mickey's legs to one of their own and practice walking and moving with him. As they get more successful at it they get more and more excited, and begin to dance with him to **Glen Miller's In the Mood**. They begin to work as a team for the first time. At one point Guy comes in and tries to get in on the action but Robert chases him off, they resume dancing until Vanessa enters.)*

Vanessa

Oh my god is he dead?!!

Saul/Robert/Stanley

Whoa! Wait! It's not what it looks like!?.etc.

Vanessa

Why are you playing with a dead body?

Saul

Okay. Okay. Look...it's Mickey Blake.

Vanessa

Oh my God!

Stanley

Do you see? He died the other night at our play. We can't say he died at our play.

Robert

And we can't reveal it on the night Mr. Goldstein is coming.

Saul

It will ruin our careers.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Robert

We're just trying to pretend he didn't die. For everyone's career.

Saul

Just for tonight. In front of Mr. Goldstein. Please don't call the police.
Please.

Stanley

He is only coming because Mickey said he liked it.

Vanessa

It isn't fair.

Stanley

I promise we will give him a proper burial and a 21 gun salute after tonight.
Just please don't tell anyone.

Vanessa

It isn't fair to do this to me, to bring death to my big night. Men have a lot of
nerve.

Saul

He was only thinking about himself!

Vanessa

Apparently so.

Stanley

So you see?

Vanessa

See what?

Stanley

What we have to do.

Vanessa

Pretend he's alive?

Saul

And it would be great if you could distract Mr. Goldstein...

Robert

The entire time...

Saul

If you could do that, who knows what the future holds. Hollywood? The next tax bracket? Who knows...

Vanessa

I knew this day would come.

Saul

The day when you got us by the goods?

Vanessa

The day I would have to hide a body for my career. I knew it would happen sooner or later.

Robert

So you're okay?

Vanessa

This isn't my first rodeo. I'll keep him distracted.

(They go to hug her, shake her hand etc.)

Vanessa

(Yelling) Do not touch me! *(Then calmly and coldly.)* I spent hours on this. Just do your part. I'll get him distracted, trust me. You worry about your part. Do not get me caught. Or I will sing like a bird and say I was forced in to this.

Saul

We won't get you caught, Vanessa.

Vanessa

Okay. And if tonight goes well, you all have to bring me a really good present to the wedding.

Stanley

Done.

Robert

I don't believe in the institution of marriage.

Saul

But he believes in yours! Welcome to the team.

Vanessa

Okay. Try to keep your heads together tonight, I suggest a little cooperation would be in order.

Stanley

We have been working on it.

Vanessa

Oh, and if anyone... says that Maggie is better in the part than me to Mr. Goldstein. I will kill all of you. And burn this place to the ground.

Stanley

Only fair.

(She leaves.)

Robert

Think she'll keep quiet.

Saul

She has no soul when it comes to her career.

Stanley

A lot like us apparently. We will be fine.

Robert

Let's get him to base.

Stanley

Let's go. Grab the stuff.

Robert

Got it. The cleaning lady!

Reading Narration

(They hide from Margret by sandwiching in to a corner like sardines, they lose grip on Mickey while they are frozen, and he falls to the ground with a thud. Margret whirls around to see what the sound was but sees nothing. She exits.)

Robert

Okay, okay. *(They hide him in a storage closet and then return.)*

Saul

No turning back now.

Stanley

Looks that way.

Saul

How much time do we have?

Robert

About 15 minutes before house.

Saul

Go time.

Stanley

Yep.

Robert
Can we put our hands in or something?

Stanley
Really?

Robert
Is that okay?

Stanley
Yeah, I'm just surprised you want to. *(They do.)*

Robert
Okay, That's enough.

(Maggie enters.)

Maggie
Hey, everyone. Sorry I'm late. I just wanted to be perfect tonight.

Stanley
No worries, Maggie. And you look great. I would marry you in a heartbeat if I were a worthy man.

Maggie
(Remembering him embracing Mickey.) Uh huh. I'm so excited for tonight.

Saul
We are too. We are too.

Robert
You're going to be great, Maggie.

Maggie
I can't wait to see who I'm with tonight.

Stanley
Pardon?

Maggie
Who I'm sharing the stage with. Vanessa did my parts last night but I know she isn't doing the show tonight, so I'm curious.

(They have panic in their eyes.)

Maggie
You guys have someone, right?

Stanley
Yeah...

Maggie
I'm sure you guys brought in someone great!

Saul
For you? To share the stage with you? We brought in a star!

Maggie
Who?

Saul
...You'll see.

Stanley
Go get ready, Maggie.

(She leaves. Immediate panic.)

Robert
I didn't even think about it.

Stanley
Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god.

Saul

I can only have so many heart attacks in one night.

Stanley

We up to three now?

Robert

Guys?

Saul

Everyone think. What do we do?

Stanley

I have no idea.

Saul

Who do we get? Robert, you always have an idea.

Robert

Um. What if...

Saul

What?

Stanley

What... what?

Robert

(Pause...pause.) Never mind it's stupid.

Stanley

Any idea is worth considering.

Robert

It's dumb.

Saul

Tell us anyway.

Robert

I was about to go "what if Mickey Blake did it" But then I realized that would be stupid.

Stanley

Well, hold on..(*Pause.*)..No it's stupid.

Robert

Yeah.

Saul

Eh.(*Tiny pause*) Stupid.

Stanley

How did we over look this?

Saul

We just got to get somebody. Anybody. A pulse is the level of talent required.

(*Margret walks in, they rush her.*)

Saul

You! Honey! Baby!

Margret

My name is Margret, not honey baby.

Saul

I know, I know.

Stanley

It's your lucky day, Margret.

Saul

The sun shines down, my friend.

Margret

I'm not going to buy you a paper. It's not my job.

Stanley

Of course it isn't. I apologize for that. Look we have a proposition to ask..

Margret

I'm not doing any favors.

Saul

We know, we know. What we have for you is a chance, an opportunity. A gold mine opportunity.

Margret

What?

Stanley

We want you to do the show tonight.

Saul

Do you want to be up on the stage?

Margret

Yeah, but no one ever let's me do it. Why didn't you cast me when I auditioned?

Stanley

You auditioned?

Margret

Yeah, don't you remember?

Stanley

Um...

Margret

What monologue did I do?

Saul

...A good one.

Margret

Helen Keller...

Saul

Right!

Margret

You guys don't remember?

Saul

Of course we do! And we've been kicking ourselves ever since. Right?
(They agree.) We want you to do..

Margret

Cause it seemed like you guys weren't paying attention.

Stanley

We will pay attention to you now.

Margret

You guys want to see it again?

Saul

We do, but we have to make it quick.

Margret

Okay this is the part where Helen is alone in her room by herself.

(She does a Helen Keller monologue, it's pointless and offensive even by 1950's standards. She feels around in the air and makes offensive deaf noises. She is trying really hard. Stan and Saul look petrified and Robert goes to his safe place again until Saul notices and slaps him on the arm so Margret doesn't see it.)

Stanley

(Trying as hard as he can to be sincere.) That was great Margret. Really powerful stuff. Let's go get you ready.

Robert,

I'll get you a script.

Margret

Okay.

Saul

Need my help?

Stanley

No, stay here in the event Mr. Goldstein shows up before we are ready.

(Hilary enters.)

Saul

Hey, his wife! His wife!

Robert

Get her out!

Stanley

You have to get her out!

Saul

What if she won't get out?!

Robert

Then take her out!

(Robert and Stan go.)

Saul

(To himself.) Take her out, take her out. Okay. Um, miss?

Hilary

Don't even start with me! Where's Mickey?!

Saul

Calm down. He's right over there. *(She walks past him and he billy clubs her in the back of the head.)* Oh jeez. *(He drags her towards the closet, sees the guys.)* Hey guys! I did it! Ta da! I knocked her out.

Stanley

What?!

Robert

What did you do?!

Saul

You said take her out!

Robert

I meant get her to leave!

Stanley

What did you do?

Saul

I billy clubbed her in the head.

Stanley

How...why did you even have a billy club?

Saul

It's standard when you're a producer to have a billy club. I always carry one.

Robert

Way to go!

Stanley

This is a monumental foul up, Saul. Why can you not let anything go right.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Saul

We just drag her along too, See? She's sort of in and out of it. It will be more convincing.

Stanley

You do it. You drag her along. You make it work.

Saul

I will. Piece of cake.

Stanley

And the plan is still the same.

Saul

Yeah, yeah. I got it.

Stanley

Let's go. I can't believe you.

Saul

I'm sorry.

(Lights go down...)

(Lights up.)

Reading Narration

(House is open and has been for some time. Walter is looking around for everyone but is having trouble because the crowd is dense. The energy in the room is intense as the audience eagerly awaits the greatest reviewed play of all time.)

Walter

Hey there he is!

(Stan, Saul and Robert are carrying Mickey and Hilary between them.)

Stanley
Oh man! Have we been drinking!

Saul
All of us!

Walter
Just like old times, eh Mickey?

(Robert makes Mickey high five Walter.)

Robert
We had a lot of fun!

Stanley
We can't wait to get seated.

Saul
Look how much fun Mrs. Blake had!

(They all laugh.)

Walter
Oh yeah, she always has lots of fun. Good to see you again, Mick.
Are you okay?

(Enter Vanessa.)

Vanessa
You boys have room for one more? Excuse me. *(She tries to go between them.)*

Stanley
Can you go around?

Vanessa

Oh. *(She awkwardly squirms between the huddle and the seats.)* Thought I'd take the night off and offer you some company. That okay? Would you like some company?

Walter

Don't you worry, Mick. I still got the moves. Remember the old days when you used to call me the Panther? Well, the panther hunts again.

Vanessa

I'm waiting.

Stanley

We'll see you at the intermission, let's get seated.

Walter

Don't mind if I do.

Robert

(Giving a curtain speech.) Uh. Welcome to the Tin Box Theatre, and Saul Solomon's production of *The Blighted Heart*, written by me, Robert Gray and directed by Stanley Miller. There are...*(Hard for him to say.)* two acts and one intermission. Please enjoy the show.

Lights fade in the house...

*Lights up on **The Blighted Heart***

>>>Meet at the creek

Jane:

Hey what's your name?

John:
My name is John and I don't talk to girls.

Jane:
But I want to be friends.

John:
I don't like no icky girls. This crick is my place! Get! Go on get!

(Stage lights fade...then up again.)

>>>Second Meeting

John:
I thought I told you never come around this here crick!

Jane:
It's a free country!

John:
What do you got there?

Jane:
Its licorice.

John:
I love licorice.

Jane:
Too bad.

John:
Give me some.

Jane:
Are you going to be nice?

John:
Fine.

Jane:
Here.

John:
Oh boy, do I love licorice.

Jane:
We live next door. We could become best friends, you know?

John:
I would like that.

Jane:
Me too.

John:
But I'm not going to tell anybody I'm friends with a girl. *(They sit and eat and end up doing the Lady and the tramp spaghetti lazzi with a licorice, they both get embarrassed.)*

(Stage lights fade...then up again.)

>>>Young Love

John:
Hey I was hoping you would come to the dance with me?

Jane:
Me?

John:

You have changed, you became beautiful. You're not so funny looking to me anymore.

Jane:

You really know how to romance a girl off her feet, John Smith.

John:

I might not know a lot. But I love you.

Jane:

I'll go.

John:

You will?

Jane:

I will.

John:

Can I get a kiss?

Jane:

You're bold John Smith!

John:

Can't I just get one kiss?

Jane:

Okay, but don't tell anyone.

(They do. It's a little peck but they breathe afterwards like it was passionate love making they both just experienced.)

(Stage lights fade...Then up again.)

>>>Breaking trust scene

Jane:
You have a lot of nerve John Smith!

John:
What?

Jane:
Telling everyone at school I kissed you down by the crick!

John:
I'm sorry! I was with the boys, I was trying to be cool!

Jane:
Now everyone thinks, I'm unclean and impure.

John:
I don't think that.

Jane:
You still want to go to the dance with me?

John:
Of course I do.

Jane:
I forgive you John.

(Stage lights fade... Then up again)

>>>After The Dance

Jane:

How could you do that? How could you stand me up?

John:

I'm sorry, you were right, everyone thinks you're unclean. I succumbed to the peer pressure.

Jane:

I hate you! I'm so glad it's the last day of school so I never have to see you again!

John:

Nooooooooo! *(Falls trying to catch her.)*

(Stage lights fade... Then up again...)

>>>Old friend scene

John:

Hey, I heard what happened. I know we haven't spoken in many years, But I wanted to say I'm sorry about your Dad. Run over by a train is a terrible way to go. I never understood, why this train had to come right through our properties like that. I brought a puppet to make you feel better. *(Talks with a sock puppet.)* Hello, I'm a puppet. Well, you don't seem like you are in the mood. *(He walks away, but she stops him before he completely exits.)*

Jane:

John... Thank you.

(Stage lights fade... The up again)

>>>>War scene

John:

Jane. I must leave you now. It is time. Know I will miss you. I am going to the war. World War One. It's going to be a bloody war, and I might come back to you in pieces. Lots of broken pieces. But I will think of you everyday. Good...

Jane:

No! I won't. I will not say goodbye. No matter what. Stay together. Stay alive, in one piece and you come back to me. This isn't the end.

John:

But it might be. The Japanese have guns and mortars. And the Germans have tanks and bombs. But before I go...I don't want to die without being married to you. Jane Will you marry me?

Jane:

Yes! Yes! Etc...

(Stage Lights fade and House lights come up on intermission of The Blighted Heart.)

Stanley

Time to stretch the legs!

Saul

I got to go to the bathroom, you too, Mickey? Let's go.

Stanley

Let's all go!

Saul

(Referring to Hilary) Look she's passed out, how adorable!

Walter

Mickey, when are we going to talk?

(Vanessa distracts him by turning his face, and getting close)

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Stanley

Well, intermission is over!

Saul

Let's get back to the blockbuster production. Act two is even better!

Walter

Seriously? it's been like sixty seconds!?

Stanley

We are trying to keep the intermissions down to two minutes.

Walter

That's fast.

Vanessa

I like fast. *(She pushes him into the seat.)*

Saul

And here we go.

(House lights fade and stage lights come up.)

The Blighted Heart Act 2 >>>>>

>>>Return Home Scene

Jane:

You're back!

John:

But I'm changed. I'm changed. The horror. The images in my mind.

Jane:
We will work through it!

John:
Why me? Why was I the one to make it!? *(cries a lot)*

(Stage lights fade...then...up again.)

>>>>>Drunk Scene

John:
Where's my harlot?

Jane:
Oh no! He's drunk again. Don't be afraid.

Margret:
We have to call the police.

John:
There you are! Make me a sandwich.

Margret:
Now don't go getting him all angry.

Jane:
Make your own Sandwich!

John:
Jane.

Jane:
You're drunk.

John:

I don't care. I can drink if I want to. Come here and love me.

Jane:

You can barely stand up!

Margret:

You're drunk Mr. Doe!

John:

I'm going to beat you!

Jane:

You're Drunk!

John:

I'm sick of hearing that! I'm tired! Images of the war keep..keep haunting my dreams. I'm losing my sanity! I watched my friend die from the shrapnel. I wish my mom was still alive to hold me, but she died of the pneumonia. *(Starts to cry.)*

Margret:

Now, don't you go to him!

Jane:

I have to. Don't you see he needs me?

Margret:

If you go to him, I'm leaving.

Jane:

Go. *(Margret really does and Maggie quickly grabs her to finish the line.)*

You have your own life to lead and dreams to shatter. Go! And don't fall in love with a bad one. *(Margret goes after Maggie slightly gestures it's time.)*

John...

(They embrace.)

John:
Jane. Jane. Jane.

(Stage lights fade...then up again.)

>>>Baby Scene

Jane:
You coward. You good for nothing...coward! Look at you. Too drunk to be a father. This baby needs you. We need you! I... Get up. Get up or I'll pull you up. Fine. If that's the way you want it John Doe. Fine. Get up. Get up and hold your baby. Be a father, be a man for once in your life. Hold your baby daughter!

John:
I can't. I'm too ashamed of my drinking. I'm too ashamed.

Jane:
You need to take care of this baby!

John:
Fine I'll hold her. I love her. You're right I love her. I love her so much. God I love this baby!

(Stage lights fade...Then up)

>>>We lost her scene

John:
She's gone. The polio took her.

Jane:

John... I don't know if I can put the pieces back together.

John:

I loved our daughter. Why didn't I show her more?! (*indicates on more*)

Jane:

She knew you loved her.

John:

I'm not sure I want to go on. Sometimes I just want to step in front of the train!

Jane:

No. That's not what she would have wanted.

John:

I miss her so much. The cancer and now this.

Jane:

I love you I'm here for you.

Reading Narration

(They cry together, then lift their hands in rage at the skies then collapse crying together again while they embrace each other. Then Jane feels the cancer go in to her brain. She can feel it. She feels closer to John than ever. She looks to the sky and nods knowingly to the heavens.)

(Stage lights fade...then up on the final monologue of The Blighted Heart.)

>>>Full circle scene.

Jane:

...and it all comes crashing down on me. Over and over, like the waves of the tide against the rocks. The war, the depression, the ill health. It's

relentless like the ocean. And through all of it I loved you. I loved you when we danced, I loved you when we fought. When you cried, I cried for you. And when I cried, you let me cry alone. But still I loved you. For there was that once, that solitary moment, when we cried together. Tears streaming from each of our faces on to the others, anguished bursts of anger and our hands lifted in rage to the skies. We were one. And that's when I felt it. I loved you so much, that the cancer went into my brain as we pressed our faces against one another. So that we could share everything from that moment on. It took the cancer to make it right. I have something to tell you now, The doctors say your cancer is more severe, you'll be leaving me soon. It's better this way. I couldn't bare the thought of you being alone, here on this green earth. It was always my curse to be the one left loving, and missing, and longing for death.

John:

I...Love...You...Jane. Be...strong...for...the both of us.

Jane:

I love you, John. And I will. A woman in love is doomed to be the stronger. The blighted heart, the woman holds within.

John:

I'm dead. I mean... I'm dying.

Jane:

No! *(She breaks down crying, then she hears the train coming, walks down stage to the tracks, there is a lighting effect of an oncoming train. She is going to let herself be struck by it. She lifts her arms to welcome the train in a final embrace... but jumps out of the way at the last second.)* No. I have to be strong. For you. For us. For me. *(Lights fade.)*

The End of the Blighted heart.

(Lights up in the house...)

Saul

Well that was superb! Well, we have to get these guys home! They are passed out!

Walter

I'll help, I know their housekeeper.

Saul

Vanessa?

Vanessa

I'm going to help, I'm his favorite actress, it's only appropriate.

Stanley

What are you doing?

Walter

Come on we got to go. I have other things to do.

Saul

I don't have time to explain. I got to take the opportunity, I know em when I see them. I got a plan. Hold her. Trust me. You got to trust me. I'll be back.

Reading Narration

(Saul, Vanessa and Walter are carrying Mickey and Hilary toward the exit.)

Robert

You have to come back!

Saul

Don't worry! I got a plan! I won't screw up I promise. I promise!

Stanley

What are you going to do?

Walter

Let's go, I want to get this done and get this girl out on the town.

Saul

I'll be back I promise!

(They all exit leaving Stan and Robert looking hopelessly at whatever the outcome of Saul's plan will be...)

(Lights down...)

Reading Narration

Lights up. It is the next morning, Stan and Robert have fallen asleep next to each other. They are almost cuddling. Maggie enters and is startled to see them. Then thinks it best to just sneak by and not be part of an awkward scene. She exits)

Robert

(waking up) Hey. Hey, did anything happen?

Stanley

Well, were not arrested. That might be a good sign.

Robert

He ever come back?

Stanley

I don't know. I don't remember falling asleep.

Saul

(Entering, singing.) Hey!

(Robert and Stan rush to him.)

Stanley

What happened?

Saul

Magic happened that's what! I got them in bed cuddled up together.

Stanley

You cuddled her with a dead person!?

Saul

She thought he's still alive at that point. And I wrote a note...

Robert

Oh my god. What note?

Saul

A note from Mickey to her. I copied some lines from your other plays Robert so you might want to change them if you ever get published.

Stanley

What did it say?

(Hilary walks in.)

Hilary

I'm not sure if you guys heard. Mickey died last night.

(They have lame, fake reactions of disbelief.)

Stanley

Are you okay?

Hilary

I'm heavily medicated. He wrote me this beautiful note. We have been having some problems and your play woke up the passion he had in his heart for me. I only remember glimpses of last night, but I remember him holding me. We had a happy ending. *(To Robert)* I just wanted to say thank you. My father is in publishing. If you ever want to make the story a book. Call him up and tell him I loved it. And I'll do the same.

(She leaves.)

Saul

Just in case that ever develops into something I just want to say it isn't shameful to marry for power and or money.

Stanley

Well done, Saul!

Robert

You actually did it!

Saul

What can I say? I always do it. And get this! I'm going out to California! Goldstein invited me. We got a lunch he wants to talk about a film draft.

Robert

Great!

Saul

What did I tell you guys? A happy ending.

Stanley

You did great Saul.

Saul

You did great Stan. You really pulled this together. We did.

(Stanley puts his hand in, they do as well.)

Saul

We good? *(They take their hands back.)* I think we should keep them short and powerful.

Robert

I agree.

Saul

And Robert knows a good idea, when he sees one!

Stanley

So, are we losing you to the west coast?

Saul

Are you kidding me? No. You kidding me? We're best friends. We are a team. I'm always going to be around. Just for a few weeks. I'm always going to be an off off Broadway producer. Until our next play that is.

Robert

Which I will write for the stage.

Stanley

And we won't cast Guy.

Robert

And we won't cast Guy.

Saul

He's got his show anyway.

Stanley

Or Vanessa.

Saul

Won't have the chance. She is on her way west any day now. God bless her though.

Robert

Yeah.

Stanley

Yeah.

(Robert pulls out a flask.)

Stanley

You always carry that?

Robert

Certainly do. It's standard when you're a writer.

Stanley

I got to start carrying something.

Robert

To Mickey.

Robert, Stan and Saul

To Mickey. *(They all take a shot.)*

Saul

Well we got to make a lunch. See you tonight Stan.

Stanley

See you tonight.

(Stan and Robert leave. Stan is alone thinking to himself when Maggie enters.)

Maggie

Hi, Mr. Miller.

Stanley

Hi Maggie.

Maggie

Was I okay last night?

Stanley

Maggie, you are, and were..wonderful.

Maggie

Oh, thank you.

Stanley

Come here.

Stiff by Jeff Swearingen

Maggie
Why?
Stanley
I want to dance with you. Is that okay?

Maggie
It's fine. I just...didn't think you were the type.

Stanley
I am full of surprises. I surprise even myself these days. I think I just might have some of the old spark left after all.

Maggie
That's nice. Have any idea what your next play will be?

Stanley
Maybe. Maybe.

Maggie
Let me know if you want me in it.

Stanley
I will. Want you in it. *(A moment of connection occurs.)*

Saul
(Robert and Saul enter once more.) Hey you two!

Stanley
I can always count on my friends to ruin the magic.

Saul
Want to come to lunch?

Robert
Come to lunch.

Saul

See? Now I know he's not a fly trap. Anyways I'm tired of guessing. What are you?

Stanley

Nope.

Saul

Oh come on!

Lights fade...

THE END

