

THE COMMEDIA WORLD OF LAFCADIO B

a play by

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THE COMMEDIA WORLD OF LAFCADIO BEAU
is the (revised) stylish Farce from Gagliano's VOODOO TRILOGY; which includes
the play,
IN THE VOODOO PARLOUR OF MARIE LAVEAU,
and the musical, CONGO SQUARE.

THE COMMEDIA WORLD OF LAFCADIO BEAU
takes place in 1917 New Orleans,
during an Influenza epidemic,
in a room that was once the voodoo parlour of Marie Laveau,
and in which Marie Laveau's ghost still hovers.

Enter the handsome, elegant, charismatic Con Man, "Lobo,"
Who is constantly fighting the dreaded "ennui,"
and who returns to New Orleans, this day,
to disentangle himself from a festering scandal,
and to be amused by -- and to confront:

the angry ghost of Marie Laveau,
the blackmailing whore Aurora,
the innocent, love-sick, shrimp fisherman,
Acini DiPepe,

and

to get laid.

FROM THE PLAY

AURORA: Are you a bastard then, Lobo? Like most of your friends?

LOBO: Friends? What friends?

AURORA: Or are you the Lobo some people say is generous, considerate?
A true gentleman?

LOBO (Grandly): I am any Lobo you like.

.AURORA: How can you have such a bill for -- "grapes?" He did say "grapes."

LOBO: One night I longed for an orgy of old. Especially the kind where nude girls stand over you, popping grapes and nipples into your mouth. So I called the Vigne Brothers.

AURORA: The grape kings?!

LOBO: Only the best. So -- just the cost of shipping . . .

AURORA: And the nipples?

LOBO: That creditor will call in another hour.

.LOBO: Aurora is the easy kind to have. She's like a jelly pastry; seemingly thick-skinned throughout, but at the center --soft gook! Having her wasn't the problem. Not for Lobo. Having her too easily was the problem.

LOBO: There's a rhythm to everything in the cosmos. Once you find the proper rhythm, everything falls into place.

LOBO: This Joan Of Arc has got me by the vitals.

DIPEPE: But that's pleasant.

LOBO: Not when she squeezes, DiPepe!

LOBO: Ah, Marie Laveau! I knew I'd unhinge your rhythm. You don't like what I'm up to, do you. It's unfair. Unjust. You voodoo queens, in your own spooky way, really tried to redress injustice back when you were riding high. Well, those days are over. It's my day! The day of the Confidence Man!

CHARACTERS

Lafcadio Beaugard (Lobo)

Aurora

Acini Di Pepe

Time: 1917

**Place: New Orleans, in a
hotel suite that was once
the voodoo parlour of
Marie Laveau.**

Dixieland music heard off.

New Orleans. 1917. A bare stage.
As music continues under, a card table
and chair with LOBO in the chair are
flown down from the flies.

LOBO is playing solitaire.
His makeup and costume suggest that
of an ARLECCHINO..

As soon as he lands, HE snaps
his fingers and a few other
bits of furniture are flown down. A
large round pouffe of red velvet, and
an ornate, black-lacquered table-desk
with phone.

When all is set, HE snaps his fingers
and music cuts out.

LOBO

(Turning over the last card)

I win!

(To audience)

Mais Certainment.

(Shuffles)

The point is, there is some kind of epidemic out there, raging in the streets of New Orleans, in this year of nineteen and seventeen. Influenza. But of a most virulent form. In-flu-en-za.

(HE likes the sound of the word)

Influenza. *Influenza*. Influenza!! Babies. Old folk

(The next, very red neck)

is 'specially meetin' eyeball to eyeball with their Maker!

(Himself again)

Prematurely.

(Shuffles again)

Listen —

(Snaps fingers. A Dixieland band is heard off)

. . .one of those funeral bands, playing "Didn't He Ramble 'Til The Butcher Cut Him Down."

(Sings a little with the music)

LOBO

(Continued)

They usually play the happy part on their way back from the cemetery. But they won't play funky again until the epidemic is over. But for now — here — and all up and down the Mississippi, on those floating casinos within which my entire existence usually floats

—

(Card-shark shuffle of deck)

even there it's, "Didn't He Ramble 'Til The Butcher Cut Him Down." Ha! Incredible city, this New Orleans. You can hire a band to accompany your love making, if you want.

(The next, as if answering a doubt from the audience)

It's true. I hired one once. It didn't help.

(Exaggerated sigh)

Nothing helps. Finally. Damnèd glands still keep promising excitement. But, in the end, it's the same old

(The next, very "bumps and ")

grind.

(Laughs. Snaps fingers. Music Out. Then he cuts cards and is about to flip over one card but suspends the gesture as he says:)

The trick is to find amusement at all times, N'est pas? Even during an unfortunate period: A period of catastrophe, say. In fact, I find that that's the period when amusement is sharpest. Contrast, I guess.

(Plays card)

Ah-ha! See? The Joker. That's me: Lafcadio Beau. Known as Lobo. Of course, Lobo is not about to dangle in front of the vorrracious jaws of Monsieur Maker's messenger, Monsieur "Influenza." No, not just yet.

(Flips over another card)

Ah! Queen of hearts!

(Lasciviously)

Mais certainment. Whoever she will be. And she will — *must* be.

(Shuffles again)

Yes, I can go out. And if I go out, I'll even walk around sans handkerchief to my mouth.

(Sticks his tongue out to the sky; gives God the raspberry)

So there.

(The lights from the sconces flicker)

Whoops! Sorry, Monsieur Maker. . . .No. Monsieur Maker might have thrown a lightning bolt; not just make lights flicker. Unless . . . Ahhhhhhhh. This place was once the house of a famous voodoo queen: Marie Laveau. . . .Was that you, Marie? Mad because I gave Monsieur Maker the raspberry?

...

LOBO

(Continued. Gives MARIE another raspberry.
Lights flicker. Sconces move)

Beautiful. I'd hoped you'd be around. That's why I took the room here. Hoped you'd be the kind of adversary worthy of Lobo. Are you?

(Shift)

And you really must believe, Marie, that I'm not afraid to go out there. I stay put because, out there, I'd get mad as hell. Because it makes me mad to look on such wholesale fear.

(Laughs)

Not to mention the ugly masks of those actually touched. Can't abide ugliness. That's why I'm glad you're not here in the flesh, Marie Laveau. I heard you were rather unattractive there toward the end.

(Lights biz)

(LOBO laughs and flips
over another card)

Jack of clubs.

(Very happy)

Mais -- mais -- mais certainment. Very promising possibilities.

(Picks up cards. Paces as HE shuffles)

But even more than ugliness, what really angers me to the soul is. . .are you ready, Marie?

(The next screamed from his very depths)

BOREDOM!!!

(Quick shift to soft charm)

What the charming Creole call "ennui." Imagine! Such a charming word for so ugly a meaning. Just like

(very lyrically)

"Influenza."

(Laugh, then scream again)

BOREDOM!!!

(Fast shift to charm again
but shuffles the cards faster)

Ennui. Well, the way to avoid ennui — and I hope you agree, Marie — is to constantly create strings. right? I mean entanglements to manipulate yourself into. Right? Until the strings are cut again and you've got to start from scratch: Creating strings. Cutting strings. Creating strings. cutting strings. *CREATING STRINGS* — yes!

(Places the three cards back in the deck again.

Fans out cards on the card table.

Picks out one card)

The joker again. That's me. String number one.

AURORA

— There! There you go! You know what my profession is; but you stop me from making my living at it.

LOBO

T'aint so.

AURORA

T'is so! You never paid me for my last—
(Says the next, very French)
liaison — with you.

LOBO

That's so.

AURORA

And you haven't paid me for the goddamned photographs.

LOBO

And that's so.

AURORA

Then how am I supposed to live?

LOBO

What does one have to do with the other?

AURORA

Plenty!

LOBO

Oh? Then tell me about it. Sit here. . . .Now, let me have that handkerchief. That's too beautiful a mouth to hide. Besides, this hotel used to be the voodoo house of the voodoo queen Marie Laveau, and Marie's ol' ghost won't let Monsieur Influenza get at us. Now, I will place my head on your lap. . . .Like so. And you will tell me what is bothering you.

(A long pause)

AURORA

Isn't it right to pay someone for services rendered?

LOBO

Someone is morally bound.

AURORA

Did I not render you a service?

LOBO

The most important. Some people think.

AURORA

Do I cheat?

LOBO

Only yourself. It's creativity like yours that keeps fooling my glands.

AURORA

And didn't I once render my services to you in — if I may say so myself — a more creative-than-usual session?

LOBO

Yes.

AURORA

And didn't I — to get even — steal three filthy photographs from you that, if given to the right people, could get a lot of big shots — and *you* — hanged?

LOBO

You're cruel, cruel: You don't even talk in metaphor.

AURORA

And didn't you promise to pay me for the return of said *wicked* photographs?

LOBO

I must have. Would hate to be hanged.

AURORA

And *did* you pay me for the foul, filthy . . . diseased. . .

(SHE can't find the next word to indicate her disgust)

LOBO

(HE supplies the word)

"Unspeakable!"

AURORA

— unspeakable photographs?

No. LOBO

There then. AURORA

“There then” — what? LOBO

Oh! AURORA
(SHE rolls him off, onto the floor.
Jumps to her feet!)

The PHOTOS!
(SHE reaches down the back of her skirt
and pulls up a small packet)

These photos. With you in them. And the Governor. And the BISHOP!
(SHE crosses herself)

And that smug bitch, Kate Townsend. And
(Crosses herself hard)

the DONKEY!
(One final cross)

Loathsome.

Ah, yes. That set. LOBO

What do you mean, “that set?” AURORA

LOBO
(From the floor)
Well, there’s also the “Pig” set. And the “Dwarf” set. I just wanted to be sure. The
“Donkey” set. Right.

AURORA
Despicable! Why did you have such photos made?

LOBO
(From the floor)
To blackmail all the Powerful involved. With those photos I’m *not* in, of course. I’m afraid
— for the “Donkey” set — my glands and exhibitionistic nature got the better of me. So I
took part.

(Still from the floor. Sitting up!)
Gee, Aurora, I sure wish you’d give in to your better nature and give that Donkey-batch
back to me.

AURORA

Pay me for them.

LOBO

That would do it. . . .On the other hand, they're probably as safe in the vicinity of your divine bun-buns as anywhere else.

AURORA

(Paces)

Oh, God! It is so aggravating to blackmail someone who won't *be* blackmailed!

(Sudden shift. Sweet. Smiling)

Three thousand dollars. That's all I ask. Three thousand. A fortune for me. Pennies for you.

LOBO

(Still from the floor)

Pennies? What pennies?

AURORA

(Still smiling)

Are you a bastard then, Lobo? Like most of your friends?

LOBO

(From the floor)

Friends? What friends?

AURORA

(Still smiling)

Or are you the Lobo some people say is generous, considerate? A True gentleman?

LOBO

(From the floor. Grandly)

I'm any Lobo you like.

AURORA

(Still smiling)

I like the generous one. Pay me for the photographs.

LOBO

(From the floor)

But I don't have any money.

(Begins to rise)

Not a single solitary cent and --

(AURORA stops smiling.
SHE quickly puts photo-pack back on
HER person, pounces on LOBO,
so that HE's back down on the floor,
and kisses him at intervals)

AURORA

And I have no heart!

(Kiss)

Everything's business with me!

(Kiss)

I worship money! Got to have it!

(Kiss)

Lobo, must I go against my better nature and tell the world — your world
— how you cheated a poor, simple whore?

(Kiss)

Do I have to run through the streets of New Orleans, waving the photographs and
screaming to everyone that Lobo is a bastard?

(Kiss, kiss)

Must I get the powerful degenerates involved to help *HANG YOU?*

(Kiss, Kiss, Kiss)

Lobo, MUST I DO THAT?

LOBO

(Strangling)

But if they hang me. . .YOU. . .don't get a. . .CENT!

AURORA

BUT I GET EVEN!!!

(AURORA gives LOBO one last bruising kiss)

LOBO

(Through kiss)

You already. . .*HAVE!* You're breaking. . .*MY LIPS!*

AURORA

(Releasing him)

Oh!

LOBO

(Rising)

God, you're powerful!

AURORA

And don't you forget it! If you're thinking of trying to take these!

(Pats HER rump, where she's
placed the packet of photos)

God! Do you realize the Navy's about to close Storyville?

(Takes out compact. Fixes face)

Every goddamned Sportin' House in the district is going to be shut down. That means that all those simple-headed quifs, who used to depend on their fat madams, will go independent — become direct competition.

LOBO

Why don't you organize them? Start a franchise for disenfranchised whores?

AURORA

Because I work with no one! Independent — that's me! Besides, none of those fornicating machines are in Aurora's league. I may be a "simple" whore, but I am not a "common" whore. Class. Miss Aurora is *class*. And you know it. I mean, did I pick *you* up? Did I make a play for you? Uh-uh. You made the fast pass. You even tried to get me to dance! Christ! How I *hate* to dance!

LOBO

I know that. And I am grateful for your — your —

AURORA

"Creativity." I know. Someday I'm going to meet a man who cares nothing about art.

LOBO

Now, look, my little 'ol Hush Puppy —

AURORA

And don't think you'll — how did you used to put it? . . . Oh, yes — "dizzy me up." Well, don't think you'll "dizzy me up" and slip out of my sight. Not this time.

LOBO

How can I do that? My boat is quarantined. Beached.

AURORA

Oh, I know you. You're like an eel — quarantine of no quarantine. Forget it. I was brought up in eel country — snake country, too. I'm very good at holding on to anything slimy.

LOBO

You do seem determined.

AURORA

Determined? I'm scared to death of catching the sickness
(crosses herself)

But as soon as I heard you were back in town, not even *that* could stop me. And I have accepted the invitation of one of my admirers: To use his apartment whenever he's out of town. He is and I am — using it, I mean. Apartment 7. Right below you. Apartment 7. Whose door will always be open a crack. With an eye glued behind it. Mine. How's that for determined?

LOBO

I'm impressed, flabbergasted and flattered! But you could fan the fires of the Nibelungen and ring it round this former voodoo house to keep me in, but you still wouldn't get the money. I honestly don't have it!

AURORA

Ha!

LOBO

I'm hounded by creditors. God knows how they found out I'm back in town. But they get to me. Every hour. Even in this time of In-flu-en-za they harrass me.

AURORA

Ha! Again!

LOBO

You think I'm lying. Okay. In five seconds — watch!

(After exactly five seconds,
the phone rings)

Answer it, Aurora! But for God's sake don't say I'm here!

(AURORA, a bit shaken,
goes to the phone. Picks it up)

AURORA

Hello.

(SHE pushes the phone from her ear;
then pulls it back)

No, Lobo's not here. . . .Hey! Hey! Hey! Stop shouting! I don't know where Lobo is. And I know nothing about his bills. . . .What? Me pay?! How dare you?! I'm his cousin from the country. *AND I'M ON WELFARE!*

(SHE slams down the phone)

PIMP!

LOBO

Not everyone's a pimp, Aurora. Like you, he's a creditor.

AURORA

How can you have such a bill for — "grapes?" He did say "grapes."

LOBO

I've always had this fascination with the Roman Empire. And it came to me one day that, while we're as rotten as the Romans, we don't really have the knack of enjoying ourselves the way they did. One night I longed for an orgy of old. Especially the kind where nude girls stand over you popping grapes and nipples into your mouth. So I called the Vigne Brothers.

AURORA

The grape kings?

LOBO

Only the best. So — just the cost of shipping . . .

AURORA

And the nipples?

LOBO

That creditor will call in another hour.

AURORA

Lafcadio Beaugard! You're a degenerate!

LOBO

Never! I just make realities of what, in other people, stay fantasies.

AURORA

I don't even know what you're talking about.

LOBO

Aurora, I want to pay. I'd love to pay —

AURORA

Then pay!

LOBO

But I don't have the—

AURORA

Bastard, bastard0, BASTARD!

LOBO

I NEED A MIRACLE!

(The Phone rings)

Hello. Yes, this is Lafcadio Beau; known as Lobo. . . .Of course I can guess who this is: You're Mr. DiPepe. Where the hell have you been? I've been expecting you. . . .Look, I've no time for small talk now. Just come right up. The address is 10 Basin Street. Apartment 9.

(Hangs up)

He'll be here in 5 minutes!

AURORA

Who?

LOBO

DiPepe, of course. That Wop shrimp-boat fleet! As usual, Aurora. I've slipped in dog shit again.

AURORA

Lobo!!!

LOBO

Ha! You genteel whores! If it isn't feelthy photos that shock you, it's the mention of dog poop. Look: All I mean is, I've slipped in good luck. *You* have slipped in good luck. Now, get out of here and be back in 20 minutes.

AURORA

Why?

LOBO

Come back in 20 minutes with the photographs and threaten me with a scandal!

AURORA

But I've already —

LOBO

I won't be here. Rich, rich, RICH Mr. DiPepe will! You will threaten me to him.

AURORA

But why?

LOBO

You want money. He has money. Understand?

AURORA

No.

LOBO

Think about it downstairs. He'll be here soon.

AURORA

But—

(LOBO kisses her — a kiss that turns long and passionate. Suddenly, she pushes him away)

AURORA

Oh, no you don't! You're not going to dizzy me up!

LOBO

I wasn't dizzying you up. I was feeling you up.

(HE tries again. She backs away)

AURORA

(Sweetly. Smiling)

Remember. Apartment 7. Try to slip by my evil eye and a well-aimed chamber pot, filled to the brim, will crack your skull.

(Still smiling, AURORA, sweetly smiling, blows him a kiss and disappears. After a beat, LOBO roars)

LOBO

Spunky, spunky, spunky! I really love these independent, self-educated whores. Confident. Secure. Like to think they've got you over a barrel. Ha! We'll see.

(MUSIC: Off. Dirge part of. "Didn't He Ramble 'Til The Butcher Cut Him Down")

This is no time for a funeral. Things are looking up!

(Snaps fingers.
MUSIC out)

Besides, there's another rhythm that keeps beating in these two veins in my head. How did she put it! . . . "Are you a bastard then, Lobo?" Good rhythm. "A bastard Lobo."

(Continues saying it and dances to the rhythm of it. Stops. To audience)

You see: There's a rhythm to everything in the cosmos. Once you find the proper rhythm, everything falls into place.

LOBO

(Continued. As if answering a question
from the audience)

You don't believe me? Come on! Do you really think that I would have been trapped into that blackmailing business unless I wanted to be? Aurora is the easy kind to have. She's like a jelly pastry; seemingly thick-skinned throughout, but at the center — soft gook. Having her wasn't the problem. Not for Lobo. Having her too easily was the problem. For Lobo. So I agreed to pay for "it." Had "it" — a very creative "it," by the way. That's true. Then I told Aurora I was broke. Which had the desired effect of her momentarily losing her gook and going all thick skin. And in the midst of her gorgeous fury, I allowed her to take the planted photos, eel-èd out of town, and left the problem unsolved until another day. Today. Problem: To deal with those photographs and make some cash besides; to have fun while doing it and, perhaps, to satisfy my glands with Aurora tonight. They — my glands — seem to be up for a creative session. And I will accomplish all, until my floating casino is de-quanantined, and it and I become unbeached. In short — and as usual— I will attempt to rhythm my pastry and eat it, too.

(Lights flicker, table shakes, etc.)

LOBO

(Continued)

Ah, Marie Laveau! I knew I'd unhinge your rhythm. You don't like what I'm up to, do you. It's unfair. Unjust. You voodoo queens, in your own spooky way, really tried to redress injustice back when you were riding high. Those were your strings. Well, those days are over. It's my day! The day of the Confidence Man! All you can do is rattle and shake your props. But can you do more? Can you rhythm onto the stage a new character in this Commedia? Huh?! Go ahead! Try it! Pull your voodoo strings!

(Shaking gets fiercer)

Ha! Nothing! Now watch my rhythm!

(Flips card over from deck)

The Jack of Clubs!

(shaking gets fiercer)

LOBO

(Continued)

Ha! Nothing. Now watch my rhythm!

(Flips card from flickering
and noise out)

KNOCKING off)

Come in, Mr. DePepe, the door is open!

(Enter DIPEPE who resembles
a Pantalone)

DiPEPE
(Arms outstretched, advances)
Lafcadi—-!

LOBO
(Side stepping)
Uh uh! None of that!

DiPEPE
(Following)
But a hug at least!

LOBO
You're in the city now. Here we just shake hands.

DiPEPE
(Disappointed)
Okay then. . .
(Extends hand)

LOBO
That's better.
(Shakes — pulls hand away)
God! Is that sandpaper in your palm?!

DiPEPE
(Laughing)
No, no, that's my natural hand; the hand of a fisherman who works along with his men.
I'm sorry. I sometimes forget how rough the hand is—
(then proudly)
But I don't smell of shrimp! Never smelled of shrimp! I'm proud of not smelling of shrimp!

LOBO
Well, there's nothing like a proud fisherman who doesn't smell of shrimp.

DiPEPE
And I'm strong. Like a whale. Tell the truth: I look like forty. Right?

LOBO
No, you look like fifty seven.

DiPEPE
Well, I'm not! I'm fifty. . .seven.

LOBO

And strong enough to brave Monsieur Influenza.

DiPEPE

Bah! I've never even had a cold! I'd do business in a leper colony. And, if I started to rot, well — one must accept God's ways,

LOBO

Nonsense. Why? And why didn't you call sooner?

DiPEPE

But how did you know I would call? And how did you even remember me?

LOBO

What's to forget? You're a proud 57-year-old fisherman who doesn't smell of shrimp. Too bad in a way. Certain odors are attractive to women.

DiPEPE

Please, Lafcadio, I don't think of women.

LOBO

Do you think of men?

DiPEPE

Lobo!

LOBO

You must think of something—

DiPEPE

I think of my old mother and my shrimp fleet. It's no easy matter supervising hundreds of men — running around the entire Gulf coast on business.

DiPEPE

(Continued. Then, cunningly)

And maybe soon—not only the Gulf Coast. Not bad for a Sicilian who has not been in this country long, eh?

LOBO

Well, it's your life.

DiPEPE

And it's a hard one. But a good one. And honest — more or less. After all, not all of us can be frivolous.

LOBO

Frivolous? You mean, like me.

DiPEPE

Well. . .yes.

LOBO

I can't be all that frivolous. I did you a good turn. With that bastard Malocchio.

DiPEPE

Yes. In fact ot was that bastard—I mean, it was the Senator who told me you were in town.

LOBO

Oh! God! I was half hoping that Monsieur Influenza would have gotten that bastard.

DiPEPE

You keep calling the Senator a bastard. I thought he was a friend of yours.

LOBO

He is. But, like me, he's illegitimate. If you'd care to use that information for further favors—

DiPEPE

Of course not!

LOBO

As I see it: Three thousand dollars should do it.

DiPEPE

Three Thousand!!!!

LOBO

You've made a fortune because of me. Right?

DiPEPE

Well, I did make—

LOBO

And you hesitate for a lousy three thousand bucks?

DiPEPE

It's not that. It's just that it's all so quick and —

LOBO

Without ceremony. You thought we'd kiss each other on the cheeks. And mingle tears of brotherly love.

DIPEPE

Well—

LOBO

Mr. DiPepe! —We live in a modern age! There is no more time for transition! To the action!

(LOBO extends his right hand—palm up.
DIPEPE takes out his wallet, counts out bills and hands them to LOBO, who stuffs the bills into his pockets)

DIPEPE

I thought I was tough in my business dealings. But next to you, Lafcadio—

LOBO

Signore DiPepe: Isn't there a Sicilian proverb that says, "Pi ogni favori, ni fano sempre dui?" "For one favor, always two?"

DIPEPE

I don't know. Maybe. There are so many damned proverbs in sicilian and —
(Delighted)

Then you are originally from Siciliy, too?

LOBO

Ich bin eine Mann von der velt.

DIPEPE

I don't understand that dialect.

LOBO

On the other hand, I may have been Sicilian. I really don't know.

DIPEPE

I'll bet you are. I know you are. You're handsome, clever, a great lover from your reputation, and you wave your hands a lot.

LOBO

Because they're beautiful.

DIPEPE

Still—

LOBO

If I *am* Sicilian, let's get one thing straight, DiPepe: I was never the "Cavalleria Rusticana" peasant type. I mean I never had the habit of pulling my crotch or blowing my nose with my fingers.

DiPEPE

(Who had been pulling his crotch,
suddenly stops)

I never met a Sicilian who did not own a crotch—I mean, a handkerchief.

LOBO

Handkerchiefs and crotches aside, DiPepe, will you live up to that proverb: *Pi Ogni favuri, ni fano sempre dui?*

DiPEPE

Now, just a minute—!

LOBO

FOR ONE FAVOR, ALWAYS TWO!

DiPEPE

But I've got to make a train.

LOBO

The only train running now is the Influenza Special. Anyway, before you were willing to waste time hugging me and—

DiPEPE

Yes, but—

LOBO

Besides, you might be casting bread on the waters!

(Pause)

DiPEPE

What is it you want?

LOBO

(Suddenly the victim)

Mr. DiPepe, do you really think it's easy being "frivolous?" You go along enjoying the game — the wicked reputation, the duels of wit and all the rest, when suddenly you're confronted with—

(HE suddenly sees an image)

LOBO

(Continued)

Imagine a young woman. simple, innocent. Who gets her education on the streets of the wicked city. On the surface she's successful and chic; underneath she stays earthy, strong, healthy, fresh. Can you imagine that?

(DiPEPE has no difficulty imaging that)

DiPEPE

(Salivating)

Yes? Go on! Go on!

LOBO

This Joan Of Arc has got me by the vitals.

DiPEPE

But that's pleasant.

LOBO

Not when she squeezes, DiPepe!

DiPEPE

Lobo, please!

LOBO

Aurora has some. . .well. . .unfortunate photographs in her possession.

DiPEPE

So? . . .oh. You mean—?

LOBO

Yes. With me in them.

DiPEPE

But you're so clever. How—?

LOBO

Ah yes, clever Lobo can get away with anything. The great Lobo just has to wave his wand and he gets what he wants. Not so, Caro Mio, no always so.

(suddenly sees that image again)

I first saw her at the riverside casino. I was with the usual coterie of parasites who flock to me whenever I drop anchor. We saw her undulating through the Game room like a healthy panthe—her arm entwined with the arm of some shriveled old squid and — oops! Pardon me, DiPepe, but I've got to admit it — she loves older men.

DiPEPE
She does?

LOBO
Anyway, I knew I had to. . .had to. . .—

DiPEPE
Make out. “Make out” is the phrase.

LOBO
Right. “Make out.” Trouble was, she had the reputation of being difficult to. . .to. . .to--

DiPEPE
Make out *with*.

LOBO
Yes, “make out *with*. Unless you were loaded with money. Of course, I’m always broke. But from my bag of tricks, I knew I’d succeed.

DiPEPE
And?

LOBO
I didn’t. Nothing worked. Her natural, country intelligence won out. She resisted.

DiPEPE
Good for her!

LOBO
But I had to have her.

DiPEPE
Of course.

LOBO
So I rustled up a down payment.

DiPEPE
And when you didn’t pay the rest—

LOBO
She stole the photos.

DiPEPE
Bravo!

LOBO

DiPepe, she's a blackmailer!

DiPEPE

That's true. And that's terrible. But one can understand her wanting to get even.

LOBO

I understand it. I just don't like it!

DiPEPE

But tell me. . .was it good?

LOBO

Was what good?

DiPEPE

Your. . .your—

DiPEPE
Making out!

LOBO
Making out!

LOBO

Ah, Mr. DiPepe, you drink Chianti all your life and you think that's wine. Then you sip a delicate Rosè and you know you've really tasted wine for the first time.

DiPEPE

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

(Pause)

LOBO

Therefore — *you* will get those letters back for me.

DIPEPE

What? Me? But—but—

LOBO

It's the only way.

DiPEPE

But you have money now and—

LOBO

Not enough. She wants
(to AUDIENCE)

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS!

But I like her. Anyway—

DiPEPE

You like her? You haven't met her.

LOBO

Through your eyes—

DiPEPE

I've painted a picture of a cunning woman who — were you devoid of natural fishmonger intelligence — would have you smelling of shrimp without you knowing it.

LOBO

Even so — I'm not the type.

DiPEPE

Mr. DiPepe, for one favor, always two! Are you or are you NOT a man of principle?

LOBO

BY GOD, I AM!

DiPEPE

Then you'll do this little favor for me.

LOBO

(Softer, placing an arm
around DiPepe's shoulders)

Now, you mustn't worry. Seriously. She's a crook. Wait 'till you meet her. You'll want to hit her.

I couldn't!

DIPEPE

Of course you couldn't! You mustn't get angry!

LOBO

I mustn't?

DIPEPE

Remember, you are doing me a favor. Your mission is to get those damaging photos.

LOBO

But I've little cash left.

DIPEPE

LOBO

Oh? . . .--Well, then, get them without money!

DiPEPE

But how?

LOBO

Charm them out of her. Dizzy her up!

DiPEPE

But I don't know how to "dizzy her up!"

LOBO

That's good! That false modesty is very convincing.

DiPEPE

But I'm serious! Put me with a woman other than my mother and I'm an ass!

LOBO

Very, very good!

DiPEPE

I break into a sweat, And once my pores are open I begin to break out in terrible blotches.

LOBO

Great! Heart rending!

DiPEPE

The bumps on my head redden! And—and—and these two veins on my brow POP, like purple lights!

LOBO

YOU'LL TEAR HER APART WITH YOUR CHARM!

DiPEPE

And my. . . You think so?

LOBO

There are some things even I don't know; but I do know women. Especially Aurora. She'll eat you up.

DiPEPE

She will?

LOBO

Not at first. First she'll try to devour you.

DiPEPE

What's the difference?

LOBO

To be devoured hurts. To be eaten is pleasant. You must use all your cunning to be eaten.

DiPEPE

But I'm not cunning enough to be eaten.

LOBO

You're rich. You must be cunning. You've got to look on this as the business deal of your life. Your goal: The Photos. Your adversary: The shrewdest woman in the world. A woman! Think of that! Is a mere woman the equal of the great DiPepe?

DiPEPE

By heaven, *no!*

LOBO

Your tactics then?

DiPEPE

The usual: TO LIE!

LOBO

Of course! What lie?

DiPEPE

The . . .the . . . Ah! The scandal will kill you!

LOBO

No, no! That would make Aurora happy. The scandal would kill my poor, penniless, fisherman-of-a-father — your best friend from the old country.

DiPEPE

And your mother!

LOBO

Nonono! *She* died from the last scandal!

DiPEPE

What scandal?

LOBO

Make it up! Aurora will be here soon. Now, remember: Cunning, charm—

DiPEPE

Oh, Lafcadio, how—?

LOBO

Oh! And kiss her hand. Smooth. Be smooth. And no clumsy gestures. All, all gently. And dance. That's right, Aurora loves to dance. Can you dance?

DiPEPE

I polka, but —

LOBO

Marvellous. Aurora loves to polka. I never could.

DiPEPE

But to suddenly polka—

LOBO

Now, sit here facing the door and have faith.

DiPEPE

And where will you be?

LOBO

She's due any minute now. I'll go down the fire escape. But you have nothing to worry about. My presence will be felt at all times.

DiPEPE

And if I get the photographs?

LOBO

When you get them, you'll leave and call me right after.

DiPEPE

(Wiping head and face with handkerchief)

O, Lobo, I don't know—

LOBO

You *do* know.

(He turns DiPEPE's head so that DiPEPE is facing the door. Then HE begins to back off to the apron)

Now remember: Charm and cunning. Charm. Cunning.

LOBO

(Continued. HE is on the stage apron.

Shaking biz)

Marie Laveau? Good! Still there. And you want me to stop. Right? . . . Think not. I must watch them dangle together.

(Shaking biz)

Perhaps. . . . Tell me, Marie? What do you think will happen next?

(Shaking biz)

Really? "Surprises?" ". . ." "Reversals?" . . . Stuff like that will do smug me in? Let's see.

DIPEPE

What a mess! . . . I wonder what he meant by "casting bread on the waters?"

(HE rises)

Maybe he'll help me again. Introduce me to the Governor. Oooops! I should be sitting!

(Sits)

Must relax. Mustn't sweat. Mustn't blotch.

(Tries to achieve all three)

Miss Aurora. That's a nice name. Name of a princess. No! Nothing nice about her. She's sinful and shrewed and she'll try to devour me. No! By heaven! SHE WON'T DEVOUR MANGIATO ACINI DIPEPE!

(Shakes fist at door)

Nor will you take my good friend Lafcadio for five thousand dollars! Not if I have to dance you to death!

(Remembers)

But I haven't polka'd since the old country. Let's see. . . 1 and 2 and 2 and 1. No no! . . . 1-2-3 and . . .

(DIPEPE continues dancing clumsily.

HE bangs into the table.

HE moves away and the table kicks him)

LOBO

Oh oh! That clod is getting Marie Laveau angry. She may cut short the smusement yet. Aurora better arrive.

(THE DOOR OPENS. Aurora there.

SHE stands and stares, looking in amazement at the clumsy DiPepe)

As DiPepe stops to rub his knee:)

AURORA

Don't stop. Why waste the music?

DIPEPE

What— ? Ah! Miss Aorora, I believe —

(HE trips and lands flat on his face)

AURORA

An acrobat, I believe.

DiPEPE

No, I'm—

AURORA

Here, let me help you.

DiPEPE

(Rising To Kiss HER hand)

Yes, Miss Aurora, I —

AURORA

(Pulling back her hands)

Don't you dare

(DiPEPE falls flat on his face)

kiss my hand!

DiPEPE

My dear Miss Aurora—I—oh, I'm bushed.

AURORA

(Beginning to sympathize)

Just don't kiss my hand. Here, let me help you.

(Extends hand again)

DiPEPE

(Getting to his knees)

No no! I'm all right!

AURORA

Come on. . .you need help.

DiPEPE

(Crawling away)

I. . .don't. . .need. . .help!

AURORA

(Following him)

Don't be a stubborn ass!

(SHE runs in front of him. Extends HER hands. HE turns and crawles away. SHE runs in front of him. Extends HER hands. Same business)

LOBO

Oiè!

(Slaps hands

DiPEPE

(Stops. Places left hand on heart— stretches out his other hand for balance)

A moment please.

AURORA

(Thinking HE's offered his hand for help, grabs it)

Finally. Let me—

DiPEPE

No! I don't need help!

(HE tugs. SHE tugs)

AURORA

Don't carry on like this!

DiPEPE

You are trying to devour me!

(AURORA falls on top of him)

LOBO

Somehow you always wind up on the floor with Aurora.

(Pause)

DiPEPE

Would you please get your chin out of my shoulder. You've got a sharp chin.

AURORA

And you've got a dull brain!

(AURORA rises and fixes HER face)

DiPEPE

(From floor)
My mother was right.

AURORA

No mothers are right.

DiPEPE

Mine was. When they should be helping their fellow man, she said, the city woman paints her face.

AURORA

Look, what do you want from me? You refused my help. And God help me if you had fallen on me!

DiPEPE

It's the principle: She was right.

AURORA

That's nice. I'm glad you've got such a right mother. Where's Lafcadio?
(SHE opens the door to the bedroom)

Has that eel—?

DIPEPE

My God! Lobo!

LOBO

About time he remembered me.

DIPEPE

You are Aurora.

AURORA

And you're an acrobat.

(SHE disappears into the bedroom)

DIPEPE

(Laughs)
I'm not an acrobat. I'm . . . I'm Lobo's uncle.

AURORA

(Head out of the bedroom door)
What are you talking about? Lafcadio has no relatives. He's too sensible.

(Head back into the bedroom)

LOBO

She learns well.

DiPEPE

You sound just like Lobo when you talk like that.

AURORA

(Entering from the bedroom)

I sound nothing like that— that—

DiPEPE

Cunning swine?

AURORA

That pimp!

LOBO

I'm getting a little tired of being called names.

DiPEPE

Well, I'm not really his uncle. But you know how kids are: They call all grown up people they like "Uncle." Didn't you?

AURORA

I was never a kid. I shot up from the Gulf Of Mexico on an oyster shell — full blown — all white and naked with long fingernails to scratch out the eyes of pimps like Lobo and his uncle!

DiPEPE

Don't you dare try to devour me again!

(HE runs behind the round lounge)

AURORA

I don't want to devour anyone. I just want Lobo.

DiPEPE

I'm here instead.

AURORA

Will you pay me for the photos?

DIPEPE

No—I mean. . .not exactly.

AURORA

Somebody better pay me.

(Picks up photo of Lobo)

Spineless eel!

(Holds picture over her head
to smash it)

Filth!

LOBO

Don't forget "Pimp!"

AURORA

PIMP!

DiPEPE

(Grabbing her upraised arm)

No! Don't. That picture is for. . .for. . .poor Turiddu. . .Lobo's father.

AURORA

Father? Lafcadio's an orphan.

DiPEPE

Right! I'm testing you.

AURORA

Then give me an "A" and let my arm go.

DiPEPE

His *step*-father. . .my good friend. . .from the old country. . .He'll. . .he'll drop dead.

AURORA

(Still holding position)

If he doesn't get this picture?

DiPEPE

Yes. No. I mean—

AURORA

(Still holding position)

Just what *do* you mean? And kindly let me go! The blood is running to my ARMPIT!

DiPEPE

(Releasing HER arm)

Oh—I'm sorry—very sorry—I only meant—

AURORA

(Placing photo of Lobo back on table)

Look, I don't know anything about Lafcadio's father. I only know that that crook is going to pay me what he owes me or I'll cause such a goddamned scandal that he'll never set foot back—

DiPEPE

But five thousand dollars is a little steep, Miss Aurora.

AURORA

Five thousand?

DiPEPE

For the photos. I mean, now that I see you, I can see that you are worth every cent of it, but—

AURORA

Five thousand?

LOBO

Come on. Love. Play along.

AURORA

Of course. Five thousand.

LOBO

Good girl.

DiPEPE

And blackmail *is* a dirty business.

AURORA

What business isn't? Oh, I'm tired of this. Do you have the money?

DiPEPE

No, but—

AURORA

Then get the hell out!

DiPEPE

I'll give you one thousand.

AURORA
One thousand? Are you crazy?

DIPEPE
That's all I have on me.

AURORA
(Looks at LOBO's picture)
Then you're *not* rich.

DIPEPE
Please take it. It's better than nothing.

AURORA
No it's not.

DIPEPE
And surely you weren't depending exclusively on that five thousand.

AURORA
Mr—Mr—

DIPEPE
(Slight bow)
DiPepe. Mangiato Acini DiPepe.

AURORA
I *was* depending on that money. With it I could have rested awhile from—from pigs like Lobo. Maybe even invest it. Put it toward a shop. You like this necklace?

DIPEPE
It's charming.

LOBO
It really is. One must admit it.

AURORA
I made it. From sea shells and strange stones. *I* —and only *I* — can get the stones from any voodoo queen in this town. They trust me. Only me, A shop. Of necklaces and bracelets and pins and earrings. I could set one up if—Oh, but that man who promised me the money—!

(SHE grabs LOBO's photo again.
Holds it over HER head)

DiPEPE

(Grabs HER arm again)

Miss Aurora, please — remember the step father—

AURORA

THAT STEP FATHER AGAIN! Let me go!

DiPEPE

(Releasing HER arm and dropping to HIS knees)

Please, please don't make a scandal. Take the thousand — because for one favor there must always be two — and anyway you can't always devour people! You must stop for your own soul!

AURORA

My own — *what?*

(Breaks from the freeze)

I don't know what you're talking about! But I wish you'd stop exciting yourself! Bumps are coming out on your head and—!

(Photo to chest)

Oh my God—the Influenza!

DiPEPE

No no! It is not the Influenza. It's. . .it's—Oh, I'm a wreck!

LOBO

Get on with it, DePepe!

DiPEPE

You see. . .his step father! His step father is old and hunch-back. . .

AURORA

Yes?

DiPEPE

And in his heart —

AURORA

Whose heart?

DiPEPE

The hunch-backed step father. In *his* heart is a heaviness as big as the lump on his back. Because he wants to see his son — *step* son! that caused him such heartache — his *step* son that. . .

AURORA

Yes? . . .Yes!

DiPEPE

(In one breath)

Hisstepsonthatcausedthedeathofhismother!

AURORA

The death of his mother? Lafcadio had a step mother?

DiPEPE

Oh, No. His *real* mother.

AURORA

What does his real mother have to do with his step father?

LOBO

Exactly what I was wondering.

DiPEPE

Oh. Because. . .because she was the step father's — aunt?

AURORA

Aunt?

DIPEPE

—Or sister!

AURORA

There's a difference.

DiPEPE

I'm not good at details. *Oh God.* I'm sure, though, she worked as a maid.

AURORA

A maid? Where?

DiPEPE

At the step fathers.

AURORA

Lafcadio's real mother was his step father's maid?

DiPEPE

Exactly.

AURORA

Who was also Lafcadio's step father's aunt or sister?

DiPEPE

Yes. You see—she wanted to be near her son—brother—and/or nephew who is Lobo's step father.

LOBO

Brilliant.

AURORA

I'm going out of my mind!

DiPEPE

Oh — please don't!

AURORA

And this aunt/mother/maid died?

DiPEPE

That's right. Because of another of Lobo's scandals. Ahhh. . .—One of those affairs of the haystack.

AURORA

(Putting photo back)

Oh, who cares about that kind of thing today?

DiPEPE

WITH A NUN!

AURORA

With a Nun?

LOBO

He's all right, El Shrimpo!

DiPEPE

That's why you mustn't create a scandal.

AURORA

What do I care about any hunch-backed Nun?

DiPEPE

(Correcting)

Father. The *step*father sent me here to try to persuade his son to visit him. He hasn't seen him in years.

AURORA

Lafcadio won't go.

DiPEPE

I know. That's why I'll bring the picture. I'll say Lobo gave it to me — that being such a big shot, he couldn't make it. But he misses his stepfather so much, and so he sent the picture.

AURORA

The old man would believe that?

DiPEPE

I think so. But if there's a scandal and—

AURORA

How would the old man hear of any scandal? Unless you—

DiPEPE

Ah, Miss Aurora, news travels fast and far, even to tiny Pascagoula.

AURORA

(Quickly)

Pascagoula?

DIPEPE

Yes. That's where we all settled. Me and my mother — and old poor Turiddu — and his maid—aunt. . .sister. . .

(Pause.
AURORA moves to the lounge.
Sits)

AURORA

(Distantly)

Is the water at Biloxi still very blue? and Clear?

DiPEPE

Very blue/green and. . .Ah! You know Biloxi?

LOBO

Oh oh! I fear a scene of reminiscence.

AURORA

(Distantly)

Biloxi. Pascagoula.

DiPEPE

Actually, I haven't been to Biloxy in years. I used to go more often, before I became successful. And I used to love to sit on the dunes and look over the blue-green Gulf. A fine place to just sit and think.

LOBO

This scene requires music.

(LOBO plays an imaginary violin
and hums in falsetto)

DiPEPE

And sometimes I'd see the naked little children screaming and running in and out of the water. That always tickled me. Yes, I guess the place is still the same. I hope it is. But who knows? Maybe it's become a tourist paradise, like every place else.

AURORA

(In a semi trance)

And is the public school in Biloxi still in the same building with the City Hall?

DiPEPE

Yes. . . .But how did you know?

AURORA

Because I was one of those naked children.

LOBO

(Stops humming)

Pause, for genuine surprise.

DiPEPE

I knew it! I knew I liked you! And now I know why. Underneath it all, you're like me; a simple person who doesn't belong here!

AURORA

I felt I didn't belong there. I was brought up by a Bayou lady. A Witch, everyone called her.

DiPEPE

The Witch who lives in the shack on the beach!

AURORA

LIVES?

DIPEPE

Yes! She's still there! I sometimes see her. When she comes to Pascagoula.

AURORA

Still alive. I've thought about her often. How good she was to me. How she taught me how to sew. And I repaid her by running away.

DiPEPE

Why?

AURORA

Because I saw things — things I wanted, I guess; things she couldn't give me. And because I was ashamed of her. When I began to understand the whisperings and the looks in people's eyes when they saw her, I became ashamed of her. *Of HER!* —Did you ever hear her talk about me?

DIPEPE

I never heard her speak. She'd just come into town all wrinkled and stooped. Wearing that black dress and yellow apron—

AURORA

My apron!

DiPEPE

—and with her hair, flying about her face like snakes. And she always wore that necklace, made of blue sea shells.

AURORA

My shells! She still remembers. How nice. . .

DiPEPE

(Cautiously)

. . .have you ever thought about going back?

AURORA

Back? Yes. But I've tasted the world. I've lived high. There's a generator in me that pumps at high speed.

LOBO

(Understanding)

The rhythm.

AURORA

And it would be impossible to slow it down.

DiPEPE

Not impossible. You said yourself this world was unpleasant. And you *did* think of going back.

AURORA

Yes, yes. I think of going back. Because underneath, I'm soft, soft. And I cry a lot. And I have dolls on my bed. And, at church, I put money in the poor boxes. But the generator. . .the generator. . .

DiPEPE

Miss Aurora, you're afraid because you're alone. But, you'd always have a friend in Pascagoula. An important friend.

(Pause.

Then DiPEPE takes AURORA's hand and kisses it. AURORA breaks down and cries. DiPEPE sits next to HER, and holds HER hand)

DiPEPE

(Continued)

Oh, Miss Aurora, come back with me. I'll be your friend — or more! If you like. . . .You're the first woman I've ever talked to like this. I know I'm older than you. . .and hideous—

(AURORA tries to say "no," but she can't control HER tears)

DiPEPE

(Continued)

But I don't smell of shrimp! *NEVER SMELL OF SHRIMP!* So. . .so come back. You don't belong here.

AURORA

(Through tears)

But would they accept me now in Pascagoula? After all, —-

DIPEPE

Accept? Accept? They accept who DiPepe tells them to accept or DiPepe pulls out his fleet and says

(gives F-arm)

BA-FAN-GULLA, PASCAGOULA!

LOBO

Beautiful! “Ba-fan-gulla!” Beautiful.

AURORA

What about Lobo and his dying father and—

DIPEPE

That’s all a fake. A scheme. Just give me back the photographs. Lobo can’t complain.

AURORA

I don’t know. I’m confused and scared. It’s such a big step.

DIPEPE

You’re scared because you have no money. I have no cash, but I do have a check book.

AURORA

I thought so!

DIPEPE

I’ll make out a check to you for, say, ten thousand.

(Makes it out)

AURORA

No, I couldn’t—

DIPEPE

Once you feel financially secure, you make up your mind without fear. There.

AURORA

(Slowly taking the check)

I don’t know what to say.

DIPEPE

Don’t say anything now. Think about it. And if you decide to come with me, contact me this evening. Epidemic or no epidemic, I’m leaving tomorrow morning. Early. Here’s my phone number.

(DiPEPE hands AURORA a card)

AURORA

Oh! Mr. DiPepe -- wait! There’s something I’ve got to tell you. You weren’t the only one plotting--

DIPEPE

Miss Aurora, I don't care about your past. We must think only of the future. Come now, I'll take you to your—

AURORA

Wait a minute! . . . I want to face Lobo — laugh in that smug face of his. Because no matter what I decide, I want the pleasure of telling him off.

DIPEPE

Yes, my dear, I understand. Oh! The photographs. You'd better give them to me. I promised I'd get them.

AURORA

Let me do it. Let me have the pleasure of tearing them up and throwing the pieces in his smug face.

DIPEPE

Now, we mustn't be too harsh on him. It's enough to tell him off and to leave this world he's king of.

AURORA

Well. . . all right.

(AURORA reaches back and down.
DIPEPE looks away discreetly.
AURORA hands DIPEPE the photographs)

DIPEPE

Thank you, Aurora.

(Backs out to the door)

I'll wait for your call. I'll wait in twitching anticipation. I'll wait—

(HE trips on the rug and
falls flat on his back)

AURORA

(Running to him)

Mr. DiPepe! Let me —

DIPEPE

(Moving backwards towards the door
on his hands and heels)

No no Miss Aurora! I'll—I'll be all right!

(HE reaches the door, rises, opens it)

Farewell.

(HE blows HER a kiss and backs out of sight.
Soon there's a noise of a body falling.
AURORA rushes to the door)

AURORA

Mr. DiPepe!

DIPEPE

(Off)
I'm all right! I'm all right!

(AURORA waves and slowly closes the door)

AURORA

So, Lobo! Now I'm free.

(She sits, closes HER eyes and relaxes.

The lights blink on and off for a bit)

LOBO

Is that you laughing, Marie Laveau? Do you really think, in an age of Con Men, that the con-est of Con Men can be bested? We'll see.

(Lights steady again as LOBO
enters the scene. HE tip toes up
to the front door)

AURORA

(Jumps up)

Lobo!

LOBO

Now, Aurora, before you jump down my throat, let me explain.

AURORA

No! You listen to me!

(Pause. SHE stares hard at HIM)

LOBO

Well, what is it?

(Pause.
The attack isn't worth it.
Slowly, SHE starts to gather up HER belongings)

AURORA

Did you ever take the time to look at—- really look at — the blue-green Gulf? It is so blue, and so clear, that you can see the bottom. And the bottom is like a painting, a design put there by God.

LOBO

Yes. I have seen the blue-green Gulf many times. As a guest of the mighty Con Men. On their Yachts. I've swum there. Often. With Beautiful ladies. But I assure you, God did not paint the bottom.

AURORA

I'm not talking about Yachts and beautiful ladies. I'm talking about home. My home. I'm leaving, Lafcadio. I am going home.

LOBO

But you *are* home.

AURORA

No, Lobo. This — and places like this — is *your* home. This close, stuffy, crawling, diseased — yes, even without the Influenza — this *diseased* place is your home, not mine. Well, I'm free now. It was like drowning. I've been down twice. But not for the third time, Lobo. Not for the third time.

LOBO

Say, wasn't that speech in free verse?

AURORA

Sneer! Make fun! I don't care. I'm through.

LOBO

Well, it's your life. But that still doesn't alter the business of the photographs.

AURORA

Relax. Forget them. Your friend DiPepe has them.

(Pause)

LOBO

What did you say?

AURORA

Your friend DiPepe has them.

LOBO

That's impossible.

AURORA

That is not impossible.

LOBO

DiPepe called again after you left. He had to leave suddenly, he said. I went to try to get some money from him before he left — even braved the Influenza. But for my bravery and great favor — this! A cigarette lighter.

AURORA

You're crazy. I tell you I spoke with DiPepe. He took the photographs.

(Pause)

LOBO

(Deadly quiet)

Aurora, what have you done?

AURORA

Only what you planned.

LOBO

This man. . .this man who now has the photos. . .what did he look like?

AURORA

Older man. . .bushy eyebrows.

LOBO

Always scratching himself?

AURORA

Yes. Constantly.

LOBO

Godgod. . .Oh, God!

AURORA

Lobo, what is it?

LOBO

Did he say he was . . . a fisherman? but didn't smell of . . .shrimp?

AURORA

. . .something like that.

LOBO

And he appeared clumsy? A kind of simpleton?

AURORA

Well, he was dancing alone when I arrived and —

LOBO

(Detonates)

OH GOD!!!!

(Falls onto couch, buries his
head under a pillow and rants)

AURORA

Lobo. . .please. . .tell me what it is. I, I only followed your orders.

LOBO

(Removes pillow)

Destroy me, God! Take me directly to hell where a man has a chance!
(Head under pillow again)

AURORA

Lobo, please —

LOBO

(Bolting up)

Aurora, a man like me not only has enemies, he has *the* most powerful enemies.
. . .Aurora, you have given those photos. . . to Simoni Ladroni. Confidence Man
supreme. A real, honest-to-God blackmailer. New Orleans Czar. Whose albatross
around the neck has always been Lobo. For years, he's been trying to get something on
me. For years I've eluded him — laughed in his face, while confounding him. Do you
know what he will blackmail me for?

AURORA

Just a minute! How did he know all about DiPepe?

LOBO

Ladroni knows. Ladroni knows everything. Once I had some dealings with a priest — in
a sacred confessional. Still, Ladroni found out. Ladroni knows when you go to the
bathroom.

AURORA

He was going to protect me. Take me away. He wanted me to call him. Come to him.
Here. . .here's the number.

LOBO

(Crumpling paper and flinging it to the floor)

Just like him. Oh, he would have protected you, all right. For tonight . *At* and *for* his own pleasure. Then, when he was through with you, you would have been back out on the street.

AURORA

But he gave me a check! For ten thousand dollars!

LOBO

Ten thousand! Ha!

AURORA

Lobo, here! You take it!

(LOBO doesn't move)

Look, I'll sign it over to you.

(SHE rushes to the table
and endorses the check)

There. That should take care of whatever that Ladroni asks.

(LOBO takes the check, crumples it
into a ball and throws it to the floor)

LOBO

Oh, Aurora! How can you be so dumb? You really believe that check is worth anything?

AURORA

Even that?

(LOBO sits. AURORA approaches sadly.
SHE sits next to him)

AURORA

(Continued)

Oh, Lobo. I'm sorry.

(SHE sobs. LOBO slowly turns to HER. Then.
Takes HER in his arms)

LOBO

There, there Aurora. You couldn't know.

AURORA

I — I should have.

LOBO

And I should have been here.

AURORA

(Great sobs. Genuine hurtful tears)

He was so. . .so nice. And. . .and he said. . .such. . .such—

LOBO

I know. I know.

(AURORA suddenly stops crying.
Stands and stomps around the room)

AURORA

Oh! That rotten, lousy pig! That slimy, clumsy. . .
(Searches for Le Mot Just)

LOBO

Cockroach!

AURORA

Kid seducer!

LOBO

Rotten prawn!

AURORA

PIMP! —Oh, Lobo, isn't there anything we can do?

LOBO

Well, Lobo isn't about to give up.

AURORA

(Rushes to HIM. Falls on HER knees)

You can't! Promise me that, Lobo! And you've got to let me help you! I'll work hard! I'll make lots of money — give it all to you! *TO FIGHT THAT — THAT SHRIMP PIMP!*

LOBO

(Very embarrassed)

Oh, Aurora! I —

AURORA

(Hugging HIS legs)

But I want to! We've got to get him!

LOBO

Well. . .maybe with you near me, I can—

AURORA

I'll be more than near you. I'll. . .I'll be part of you.

(AURORA slowly rises)

. . .Lobo . . . may I be creative to you. . .now?

(Pause)

LOBO

Oh yes, Aurora. Yes.

(Passionate kiss)

You go into the bedroom. I've got to make a call. Start things going against that — that
—

AURORA

Pimp!

LOBO

Yes!

AURORA

(Exiting to the bedroom)

But hurry. . .hurry. . .

(from inside the bedroom)

. . . hurry. . .

(Pause)

LOBO

(Spots audience)

Well, damnit! The glands *are* calling. And she *is* creative. And what does that old shrimpboat know about art?

(LOBO picks up the slip of paper
with DIPEPE's number on it.

Goes to the phone. Dials. Gets dial tone.

Into phone:)

DiPepe? Lobo. . . You sound happy. How did it go? . . . Great! . . . Yes, I know: Those photos really *are* shocking. And I *am* ashamed of them. So you'd better rip them up. . . . Yes. Now. And in an ashtray, please. . . . That's exactly what I'd like you to do. I'll breathe easier if they're burned — if that shameful episode in my life is burned away, you might say. . . . You understand? Good. . . . Yes, DiPepe, I *can* almost hear the flames. . . . All ash now, you say? Thank you. God, but it's a relief getting all *four* out of

LOBO

(Continued)

the way and— . . .What's that? Only *three*? —Oh, No, DiPepe! That means that cunning bitch still has one photograph. DiPepe, you've ruined me! . . .What's that? A check for ten thousand? You gave her a — And you really expected her to come? . . .Fool! When I arrived she was laughing. Mumbling something about an old fool. She wouldn't even stop to talk to me. Just kept laughing as she left! Let's face it, DiPepe, we've both been taken. She still has one letter and— . . .What's that? , , , Yes, two thousand more will cover it. That's very generous. . . .Yes, send the check to this address. I believe I'll be in town for a few days more. . . .You mustn't sound so sad. It could not have worked. . . .Me? You know me. I'll survive. Thank you, Mr. DiPepe. Do call again.

(HE hangs up)

AURORA

(Offstage)

Lobo!

LOBO

Coming, my love.

(HE picks up the crumpled check.
Smooths it out. Places it in his wallet.

To audience)

Now now, you musn't have that attitude. It's the rhythm. I will continue getting away with things at the expense of other people. And Aurora and DiPepe will always be the other people. Besides, it couldn't possibly have worked out. Can you imagine Aurora in Pascagoula? They never would have accepted her there. You don't know those little towns. They're even more bigoted and corrupt than the big ones. Anyway, Pascagoula *has* become a tourist paradise. Like every place else, it has deteriorated.

(MUSIC: Off)

Listen. . .Ah. . ."Didn't He Ramble 'Til The Butcher Cut Him Down. . ." Up tempo, very up tempo, to close out this commedia. *And* — that means that the influenza has lost its punch. Damn!. I was all set to get entangled in *that* danger, after ennui-ing my glands with Aurora. Oh, well — next time. You can always count on an epidemic somewhere. Now, if you'll excuse me —

(Music continues to build under
as the table kicks LOBO. Also,
lights biz, etc.)

LOBO

(Continued)

Ah ha! Delayed reaction from an impotent queen! *You* don't like how things have turned out. Do you, Marie Laveau? For awhile there, you thought that, finally, Lobo would get his — what's the word? — AH! *Comeuppence*. Now you know I won't. And all you can do is rattle and shake again. Well, shake the bed inside, will you? That might just be the thing to make it memorable for my glands. . . . Look at that! She's furious! Well, Marie Laveau, all I can say to you—in the immortal words of Mangiato Acini DiPepe — is

(Makes the F-arm to the room)

“BA-FAN-GULLA!”

(Then, to the audience)

And a “ba-fan-gulla” to you all!

AURORA

(Off)

Lobo!

(LOBO bows, then enters the bedroom as the room dances and the music builds to

CURTAIN)