

Beggar at the Feast

By Fengar Gael

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*This play is dedicated to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing of Germany (1729-1781),
and to all devoted practitioners of the art of dramaturgy.*

*“The poet is like the sovereign of the clouds,
Riding the storm above the marksman’s range;
In exile on earth, hooted and jeered at,
He cannot walk because of his great wings.”*

Charles Baudelaire

CHARACTERS

(a minimum ensemble cast of three men and three women play sixteen characters)

THE NEW YORKERS

SPIRIT OF REAMUS SKROLLS, the ageless immortal soul of an elderly dramaturg
FONTANA SKRATZ, Reamus Skrolls' beloved granddaughter; early twenties
GRIFFON WRIGHT, the Artistic Director of the Spencerian Theatre; mid-thirties
MAUDE SCRAWLINGS, the dramaturg of the Spencerian Theatre; early-thirties
SELWYNN (WYNN) SCRIVENER, the promising playwright; early-twenties
DETECTIVE JANE PAGETT, a New York City police officer; mid-thirties
DETECTIVE NATHAN BINDER, a New York City police officer; forties
SYBIL READMAN, Reamus's Skroll's neighbor, an entrepreneur; mid-twenties
SPIRIT OF VIOLET VELLUMARE, the ageless immortal soul of a deceased playwright

THE VULTURES, THE POET, and THE SCRIBE

VORCLAV VULTURIUS, a male vulture
VEERO VULTURIUS, a male vulture
VALORIE VULTURIUS, a female vulture
VOLGA VULTURIUS, a female vulture
VYVA VULTURIUS, a female vulture
JALALUDIN RUMI, a mystic and poet
HUSAM, the scribe of Jalaludin Rumi

Suggested Doubling:

Griffon Wright / Vorclav Vulturius / Rumi / Husam
Detective Jane Pagett / Vyva Vulturius / Spirit of Violet Vellumare
Detective Nathan Binder / Wynn Scrivener / Veero Vulturius
Maude Scrawlings / Volga Vulturius / Sybil Readman
Fontana Skratz / Valorie Vulturius

TIME

the present and thirteenth century

PLACE

A stylized set suggests the interior of a Manhattan brownstone, a police station office, and the mountains and skies of ancient Anatolia, a region of Turkey.

ACT I

PROLOGUE

(Strident police sirens fade as lights reveal the parlor of a Manhattan brownstone with walls and furnishings in varying shades of purple. Posed in a frozen tableau is the crime scene: on the floor lies the aged BODY OF REAMUS SKROLLS, a manuscript clasped in his hand. Near the body, stand DETECTIVES NATHAN BINDER and JANE PAGETT. Seated on a chair is GRIFFON WRIGHT, an impressive man in his mid-thirties. To the side, stands the SPIRIT OF REAMUS SKROLLS who resembles his corpse, and is clad in the same purple robe. He speaks with a British accent, smiling benignly at the audience.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

The theatre has a fourth wall, but there's also a fifth which isn't a wall at all, but a veil. When the veil is lifted, you gain access to a metaphysical dimension that allows the dead to speak to the living, though the means to my own end remains a mystery: Did I fall? Was I murdered? Did I take my own life? All I recall is a swift, prickly penetration that convulsed my heart with frightful flutterings, followed by an ominous sinking, then sudden suspension! Ascension! And up, up, up my soulful self sailed -- through ceilings, through clouds, all my senses shockingly alive to the sights and sounds of the celestial chorus, and ohhh, how the angels sang! (*he sighs*) How magnificent it was, until one of the sopranos stepped forth and suspended me mid-flight. "Stop," she bellowed! "You may return from whence you came!" Apparently, the dead are given the option to witness the consequences of their demise, which is why I'm back in New York, wafting through walls towards my own corpse, and it's marvelous what I can do. You see, before abandoning me, the angel bestowed a gift. (*lifting a sphere from his pocket*) Behold: my very own moon! Apparently for the dead, time is permeable and malleable: with a slight spin, my moon springs me forward, or with a tap on its crest, I can stop time altogether. Mind you, it never spins in reverse; otherwise, I could backtrack and still be among the living. (*strolling into the parlor*) And now I'll try not to interrupt the action, which shouldn't be difficult as I'm accustomed to being in the background: the uncredited, uncelebrated, and doomed to be forgotten -- till now.

SCENE 1

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS taps his moon, and the tableau springs to life: DETECTIVE NATHAN BINDER opens his notebook and addresses GRIFFON WRIGHT while DETECTIVE JANE PAGETT inspects the body.)

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Spell your name please, sir.

GRIFFON

I already told the officer. Here, take my card.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

(reading) Griffon Wright. You're acquainted with the deceased, Mister Raymus Scrolls?

GRIFFON

It's "Ree" not "Ray," Reamus Scrolls, and the answer is yes. We worked together at the Spencerian Theatre. He was our dramaturg.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

He was what...?

GRIFFON

Our "dramaturg." That's what we call a person who works on plays.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

You mean like an actor?

GRIFFON

No, more like a detective. A dramaturg investigates; he tracks plots, characters, as well as themes and motivations. If the playwrights are living, the dramaturg works with them on their scripts. *(pointing to the corpse)* In fact, I'm sure that's a script in his hand.

DET. JANE PAGETT

The cover's stained but I think it says Beggar at the Feast by Reamus Scrolls.

GRIFFON

So it does...

DET. JANE PAGETT

Most suicides leave notes. It looks like Mister Scrolls left a play, and a long one at that.

GRIFFON

(bending to retrieve the script) I'm surprised...

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Stop! Don't touch it! Sorry, sir, but it might be evidence. While this looks like suicide, we can't draw conclusions until the coroner sees him. What were you doing here?

GRIFFON

We were meeting to discuss revisions of a play I'm directing. I knocked, but the door was open, so I walked in and there he... God, I still can't believe it.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Did Mister Skrolls live alone?

GRIFFON

Yes.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Was he despondent?

GRIFFON

No more than usual.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Were you very close? I'm asking because it looks like he meant for you to discover his body.

GRIFFON

Well, yes, as I said, we worked together.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

(to Detective Paget) I'm going to inspect the rest of the house.

(DETECTIVE BINDER departs.)

DET. JANE PAGETT

Do you know any relatives we could contact?

GRIFFON

He once mentioned someone named Fontana -- his sister, I imagine. We never met, but Reamus was British, so she's probably in England. In the theatre world, he was well known and much admired. This will be a shock.

DET. JANE PAGETT

He appears to be in his seventies. Do you know how long he's been on meth?

GRIFFON

On what...?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Methamphetamine. He has all the symptoms of an addict.

GRIFFON

An addict?! That's ridiculous! The only drug Reamus took was aspirin for hangovers.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Maybe, but he's thin, with the same sunken eyes and skin sores we see on addicts. And he has meth mouth.

GRIFFON

What's that?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Tooth and gum decay caused by dead blood vessels. Look in his mouth.

GRIFFON

Sorry, I...I can't. Anyway, it's impossible. Reamus was too fastidious for smoking much less needles and injections. He's the least likely person to take drugs.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Meth comes in crystals, powders, or liquid, so it can be swallowed or inhaled. We see it all the time, and this is what it looks like. Trust me, sir, the autopsy will confirm it.

GRIFFON

Autopsy? Oh Christ, I...I'm feeling sick. Could I please leave?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Yes, but before you go, could you explain the room? I mean, the colors are so...

GRIFFON

Lurid? Nauseating? We called it "Ream's Plum Pot." It was meant to be a tribute to all the purple prose he was subjected to, though he preferred it -- the more ornate and impassioned the better. This room is where Reamus held his salons; all his playwrights read their works here on Mondays, and it was considered an honor to be invited.

(DETECTIVE BINDER returns.)

DET. NATHAN BINDER

The first floor seems in order, but upstairs -- you can see for yourself.

DET. JANE PAGETT

What...?

DET. NATHAN BINDER

I assume they're scripts -- covering the floors, stacked clear to the ceilings. There must be thousands in both rooms, nothing but piles and piles of scripts.

GRIFFON

Really? This I have to see!

DET. NATHAN BINDER

I'm sorry, sir, but...

GRIFFON

Please! You've kept me here and I've answered your questions, so at least let me look. Besides, I'm the one who knew him; maybe I can help.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

All right, but Detective Pagett will have to accompany you, and please don't touch anything. *(to Detective Pagett)* I'm going to check the cellar.

SCENE 2

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS spins his moon as lights flicker, revealing GRIFFIN and DETECTIVE PAGETT at the threshold of a room filled with manuscripts.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Griffon will appreciate my sanctum scriptorium. He'll know they're all...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...plays.

GRIFFON

Plays!

GRIFFON

My God, Reamus...

DET. JANE PAGETT

Talk about a fire trap!

GRIFFON

He said it pained him when we rejected plays, but I never suspected that he actually *kept* them.

DET. JANE PAGETT

They give me the creeps -- these pack rats.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Pack rats?!

DET. JANE PAGETT

The polite term is “excessive savers.” We see it a lot with the elderly, especially if they’re senile.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Senile?!

GRIFFON

No wonder he never let anyone up here.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Do you think he actually read them all?

GRIFFON

Yes.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...definitely! Every blessed word!

DET. JANE PAGETT

So you think there’s some undiscovered masterpiece in here?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, yes!

GRIFFON

God, no! Trust me, pick any pile, and you’ll find banal characters in stock plots by hacks raised on television. The trouble with Reamus was he believed everyone had genius.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Everyone...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes!

GRIFFON

Yes,...

GRIFFON

...he thought the sole purpose of our being born was to create art, and that playwrights should aspire to being poets and mythmakers.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Like the Greeks...?

GRIFFON

That's right. In his defense, I'll say he was a brilliant dramaturg, with a receptive and inquisitive mind.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Why Griffon...

GRIFFON

We've lost a genuine craftsman.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I'm touched.

GRIFFON

He was a true creative force who inspired writers with confidence. God, listen to me; I'm already composing his eulogy.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Imagine all these stories inside a single mind.

GRIFFON

Imagine all the forests felled to fill these rooms. But why? Why save them *all*?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Our forensic psychiatrist says it's a compulsion caused by abandonment.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

By love.

GRIFFON

The sentimental fool.

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS taps his moon, rendering GRIFFON and DETECTIVE PAGETT immobile.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes, but a fool who's crept inside the dark infernos and ascendant kingdoms of every character in every play. I've heard their voices, beheld their faces, felt their joys and sorrows, the whole gamut of human emotions, all encoded into my consciousness -- the very substance of my soul! So I ask you: how could I abandon them? These plays are my

SPIRIT OF REAMUS (cont'd)

orphans, and I'm the guardian of their worlds: the familiar and the exotic; the sacred and profane; the whole of human history, and everyone living and dead who loves the theatre.

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS reanimates the scene,
tapping his moon as DETECTIVE BINDER enters.)

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Jane, you've got to see this! I found the key to the cellar. He's got a whole factory down there, enough glass to tweak the city.

GRIFFON

Glass...?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Meth -- I told you.

GRIFFON

Did you say he has a "factory"...?

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Sorry, sir, we can't discuss it. *(to Detective Pagett)* I'll call Narcotics. *(to Griffon)*
I'm afraid you'll have to leave now, sir.

GRIFFON

Not till I see this factory!

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Sorry, that's not possible.

GRIFFON

Fine, then I want that script in his hand!

DET. JANE PAGETT

Later, sir.

GRIFFON

Look, you've got to promise you won't lose it, and don't let anyone else have it!

DET. JANE PAGETT

We'll do our best.

GRIFFON

Wait till they hear this. What was the title again?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Beggar at the Feast.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Beggar at the Feast!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ha, ha! Now let's follow the Beggar -- presumably to the police station. Spin, oh, moon of mine!

SCENE 3

(As the moon spins, lights flicker to reveal an office where DETECTIVE NATHAN BINDER sits addressing the lovely young FONTANA SKRATZ.)

DET. NATAN BINDER

I'm Detective Sergeant Binder. I'm very sorry to have to report that your grandfather has...passed away.

FONTANA

Oh, noooooo...

(FONTANA weeps, then buries her head while the SPIRIT OF REAMUS thumbs his moon, and DETECTIVE BINDER and FONTANA freeze in time.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Did you hear him say "grandfather"? Truth be told, I was never a father and hardly a husband since the marriage lasted a mere five months. All I did was provide the seed, but Fontana's still my daughter's daughter, the only child of an only child, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood. Oh, dear, I can't bear to watch her weeping, so let's spin through time till she's dried her tears!

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS spins his moon, then skulks to the side.)

DET. NATHAN BINDER

He left a play, and though it's not likely, we're hoping it might hold clues to his motives as well as his clients and distributors. Tell me, were you aware of his illicit activities?

FONTANA

No, and I don't believe it! He must have rented the cellar to someone else.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

I hate to disillusion you, but his fingerprints are all over the flasks and beakers, they're everywhere.

FONTANA

Then I...I don't understand...

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Neither does our narcotics lab. It turns out it's not meth. *(reading from a report)* It seems he's formulated a combination of opiates and hallucinogens including tryptamines and cryptamines like lophophora diffusa, salvia divinorum, theolocactus, and a variety of uppers, downers, and drugs we don't even have names for.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

My ichor of Venus!

DET. NATAN BINDER

Apparently, it's unique to the street...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

With a pinch of persuasion!

DET NATHAN BINDER

...more potent than anything we've encountered,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

And a dash of delirium!

DET. NATHAN BINDER

...and possibly more addictive.

FONTANA

You make him sound like an alchemist.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

More likely a criminal intent on enslaving users into feelings of power, virility, and hallucinations of what we call "the shadow people".

FONTANA

Shadow people...?

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Some addicts see them in the last stages of addiction, but with your grandfather's formula, they make an appearance right away.

FONTANA

Really? How can you know that?

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Because one of our toxologists accidentally inhaled the stuff, and he's still recovering.

FONTANA

Oh, I...I'm sorry.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

He's not. Apparently, it's a euphoric.

FONTANA

Oh. But if Reamus was taking the drug himself, maybe he was only experimenting.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Then why make enough to supply the entire population of Manhattan? And did I mention it was a dangerous operation? He could have blown up his house and half a city block!

(DETECTIVE JANE PAGETT enters.)

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Detective Pagett, I'd like you to meet Fontana Skratz.

DET. JANE PAGETT

It seems your grandfather was an actor as well as a dramaturg. We had to track you through his phone records. All his bank accounts and credit cards are in the name of Skrolls, and he had no current license or passport. As far as we can tell, everyone thought he was English, and survived by a sister instead of a granddaughter. Now we've discovered he was born in Warsaw, and raised in Pittsburgh.

FONTANA

His parents were wealthy Polish Jews who came here to escape the Nazis. When they died, he inherited their fortune, moved to New York and changes his name from Skratz to Skrolls because he thought it sounded more poetic.

DET. JANE PAGETT

What about his wife, your grandmother?

FONTANA

She divorced Reamus before my mother was born, and now both she and my mother have passed on.

DET. JANE PAGETT

And your father is also deceased...?

FONTANA

When I was twelve.

DET. JANE PAGETT

I'm sorry. *(pause)* So why did Skratz from Pittsburgh move to New York to become Skrolls from London?

FONTANA

Reamus called himself "a wandering Jew." He said the theatre was his real home. Since he loved London, and could mimic accents, he decided to become English and follow his true vocation. But that was fifty years ago, before the internet, when people weren't objects of surveillance and could reinvent themselves.

DET. NATHAN BINDER

Believe me, people are still reinventing themselves. Now I'll leave you ladies to get acquainted.

(DETECTIVE BINDER departs.)

DET. JANE PAGETT

Were you close to your grandfather?

FONTANA

Only recently. A year before my mother died, I applied to Juilliard. When I was accepted, I moved here and tracked him down. My mother had kept his address in her book.

DET. JANE PAGETT

So did you get along?

FONTANA

Very well. We had dinner together on Sundays, and sometimes we went to the theatre.

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS pats his moon.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

So now you've met Fontana. Isn't she lovely? Soon she'll be wearing black because she won't just miss me, she'll mourn me. I know because the deceased can perceive the souls of the living, and Fontana's is a fountain of sunbeams whenever she speaks my (*tapping his moon*) name.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Since we're assuming his death was a suicide, we were wondering if you had any idea that he was planning to end his life?

FONTANA

No, though he seemed...distracted. Sometimes when we met at his home, I'd wait in the living room while Reamus was upstairs. I could hear him shuffling around, but he never invited me to see the rooms. Then a few weeks ago, he gave me a copy of his will, leaving me his house and everything he owned.

DET. JANE PAGETT

You'll have a lot of sorting out to do.

FONTANA

Yes, but he wasn't a hoarder like everyone keeps saying. He specialized which makes him a collector.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

That's right -- a collector! Oh, dear, all this exposition! I promised I wouldn't interrupt, but it's going rather well -- as if I wrote the scene myself!

DET. JANE PAGETT

Now that we've vacated the premises, will you be moving in?

FONTANA

Yes.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Do you have any idea why your grandfather was into drugs? He seemed financially stable, but did he have debts? Did he need more money?

FONTANA

Maybe. He spent his inheritance, and people don't make much money in the theatre, so maybe being a drug dealer was the only way he could afford to be dramaturg. (*pause*) He also talked about buying an abandoned church in the East Village. He was going to turn it into a theatre so he could produce plays that nobody else would touch.

DET. JANE PAGETT

What about The Spencerian? Didn't they produce the plays he liked?

FONTANA

Sometimes, but Reamus wanted to take the audience to *unfamiliar* worlds. He wanted the theatre to return to its roots and be a fusion of art forms.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

That's right, my dear,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...a fusion.

FONTANA

A fusion...

FONTANA

...of acting, singing, dancing, painting, and...

FONTANA

...poetry.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Poetry!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

The jewel in the crown of literature! The sublimest creation of the mind!

DET. JANE PAGETT

(pushing buttons, speaking into a phone) Please send Mister Wright in. *(to Fontana)* I hope you don't mind, but I've invited Griffon Wright, the Artistic Director of the Spencerian, to join us.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, damn!

DET. JANE PAGETT

I thought if the three of us talked, we might come up with more answers.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(tapping his moon) I suppose their meeting was inevitable, but I don't want Fontana getting chummy with Griffon. He can be deceptively charming, and he's famous for seducing actresses. Thank heaven Fontana's not an actress!

(GRIFFON enters.)

GRIFFON

So you're Fontana. I see a slight resemblance to Reamus. Are you an actress?

FONTANA
No.

REAMUS
No!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Now leave her alone!

FONTANA
I'm studying to become a composer.

GRIFFON
Really? Wonderful! I'm glad to know Reamus had family. He was a compassionate, nurturing man, especially to playwrights who tend to be bipolar manic depressives with delusions of grandeur -- the most miserable creatures on earth.

FONTANA
I doubt if he'd agree.

GRIFFON
You're right -- because he shared their delusions. Now, Detective, (*pointing to a script*) I assume that's the script, and you're ready to hand it over.

FONTANA
Excuse me, Mister Wright, but since I'm the heir to Reamus's estate, his possessions belong to me -- so doesn't the script belong to me as well?

GRIFFON
Have you read it? Did you even know it existed?

FONTANA
Well, no...

GRIFFON
I'm the one he called to the house, so we can assume that I'm the one he intended to read it.

FONTANA
We really can't know what he intended.

GRIFFON
Look, it's obvious even to the detectives that he wanted *me* to discover his body and therefore his play. In fact, I regret not taking it right away.

DET. JANE PAGETT

We had to dust it for fingerprints to be sure someone hadn't planted it

FONTANA

Why would anyone do that?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Apparently, secretly manufacturing drugs, then killing yourself is one way to attract interest. At last count, twelve producers have called the precinct requesting a copy.

GRIFFON

Tell them they can't have the rights!

FONTANA

Because they belong to me!

GRIFFON

Fine, but we'll be the first to produce it!

FONTANA

How can you think of producing a play you haven't even read?!

GRIFFON

In the theatre, celebrity's what matters. Now Reamus is famous as "The Toxic Turg." The publicity should guarantee a long run.

FONTANA

Publicity he'd have hated! Poor Reamus must be spinning in his grave.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(holding up his moon) Well, yes, in my way.

DET. JANE PAGETT

The issue of ownership's not our concern right now. *(to Griffon)* Mister Wright, since Mister Skrolls passed on, has there been any speculation by his colleagues about his motives?

GRIFFON

Yes, it occurred to several of us that Reamus might have suspected he was going to be... unemployed.

DET. JANE PAGETT

You mean fired?

GRIFFON

No, retired. He seemed...depressed. He was having problems dealing with one of our writers, Selwynn Scrivener, our boy wonder -- only twenty-three and his plays are sublime. Reamus was upset because Wynn preferred to work with Maude Scrawlings, our new literary manager, who's closer in age and temperament. *(to Fontana)* Did he ever mention Maude or Wynn?

FONTANA

Not that I remember, but whenever he seemed depressed, he blamed it on politics.

GRIFFON

Or religion. Reamus was afraid the world was headed for a New Dark Age, with fanatics destroying art, burning books and closing theatres -- speaking of which have you had a chance to read the play?

DET. JANE PAGETT

I started it last night; all the characters are vultures.

GRIFFON

Vultures...? If you mean as in birds, then it must be about critics.

DET. JANE PAGETT

I don't think so, and it's written in rhymes. But I've just begun, and I'm no judge.

GRIFFON

Trust me, in the theatre, everyone's a judge. You obviously haven't heard Linney's Law of the Three Human Compulsions: the compulsion to eat, to have sex, and to rewrite somebody else's play.

DET. JANE PAGETT

You'll be pleased to know I've made copies. *(handing out scripts)* If you notice on the first page, there's a request that the play be given its first reading in Mister Skrolls' parlor. There's some specific instructions you might want to consider.

GRIFFON

Great! We'll read it in the Plum Pot. *(to Fontana)* How about Thursday? I'll bring along some actors.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Marvelous!

GRIFFON

I'm in rehearsal all day, so evening would be best -- say six? If that's all right with you?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Yes!

FORTUNA
Yes.

(DETECTIVE BINDER enters.)

DET. NATHAN BINDER
Excuse me, Detective, I need to see you for a minute. *(to Fontana and Griffon)* Please wait here.

(The DETECTIVES depart.)

GRIFFON
(lifting the hefty script) It feels like overwrought epic theatre -- Ream's favorite. *(pause)* I still can't believe he actually wrote a play. He didn't approve of the literary staff being playwrights. He claimed it creates conflicts of interest -- since writers are competitive, they're not likely to promote plays that rival their own. By the way, we're clearing out Ream's office. Should I bring his personal items with me on Thursday?

FONTANA
Yes, please.

GRIFFON
The police confiscated his computer, but he left some reference books, and in his desk is a picture of a child with a frame engraved with the name "Mae."

FONTANA
Mae was my mother.

GRIFFON
(pause) I was wondering if you knew about Ream's secret forest of scripts?

FONTANA
No, but whenever he went upstairs, he said he was going to his "sanctum scriptorium." He told me that every play he'd ever read was up there.

GRIFFON
I could loan you a shredder, though what you really need is a trash compactor.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Nooooo!

FORTUNA
No,...

FONTANA
...I couldn't throw them away.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Bless you, my loyal Cordelia!

GRIFFON

I've been thinking -- Reamus did have an addict's personality, but his addiction was to reading. He told me he grew anxious if he went too long without seeing a printed page, though that doesn't explain how he descended from reading to drugs. That's quite a leap.

FONTANNA

Human beings are...capricious.

GRIFFON

And deceptive. I sometimes wonder if I knew him at all. *(pause)* You mentioned that you're a composer. If you've recorded any music, I'd like to hear it. Here's my card.

(DETECTIVE PAGETT enters.)

DET. JANE PAGETT

I'm afraid there's a new twist in the case: The coroner discovered a syringe that slipped from your grandfather's right hand into the sleeve of his robe. Our forensic team dusted for prints, and it turns out they don't match Mister Skrolls. Also, the angle of the puncture wound is such that it could have been administered by someone else. In other words, we now suspect Mister Skroll's suicide was a homicide.

FONTANA

Homicide...?

GRIFFON

Homicide!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Homicide?!

GRIFFON

Who would murder Reamus?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Who indeed?!

DET. JANE PAGETT

A desperate client or dealer.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Or dramatist..?

GRIFFON

So did someone else put the script in his hand ?

DET. JANE PAGETT

No, those prints are his own, but my Lieutenant requested that I be present at the reading. I could even read a part since I acted in school. *(to Fontana)* By the way, your house is under surveillance, and before you leave, you'll both have to see Sergeant Letterman to have your prints taken.

GRIFFON

You're kidding?

DET. JANE PAGETT

We need to exclude you as suspects.

FONTANA

Suspects...?

GRIFFON

Wait till they hear this!

DET. JANE PAGETT

I'd appreciate your discretion, and please, don't leave the city.

GRIFFON

Now that's a cheap line if I ever heard it!

DET. JANE PAGETT

Maybe, but I mean it.

(GRIFFON and FONTANA depart.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Damn! How the plot sickens! If only my last hours were lucid! So let's spin through four days to the night of the reading. I'm hoping Griffon will bring the Spencerian's finest thespians. Every playwright -- living or dead -- is thrilled when those gesticulating elocutionists called "actors" infuse their personalities into our characters, breathing their fevered fires into our words! It's one of the great good blessings of life! *(spinning his moon)* Now, launch me, Luna! Into the future!

SCENE 4

(Lights flicker as GRIFFON hands FONTANA a box while the SPIRIT OF REAMUS strolls into his parlor.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Fontana hasn't moved a thing; everything's just as I left it, bless her.

GRIFFON

I assume you'll redecorate.

FONTANA

Maybe, but I'm starting to appreciate it. Imagine all the conversations that occurred in this room, all the plays read by playwrights with their bright hopes and dreams.

GRIFFON

And all the misery and despair when their words leapt off the page to assault the ear! Sorry, but this room's seen its share of dreck and doggerel. You might consider selling the place.

FONTANA

Sometimes I think I feel his presence; I even smell his cologne.

(GRIFFON sniffs as the SPIRIT OF REAMUS thumbs his moon.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ah, yes, Fontana! You sense what I behold: the secret soul of every object in this room: The carpet will caress your feet; this chair where I sat will embrace you; and the drapes are especially warm when you fondle their folds. Yes, everything vibrates with affection for you, my dear,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...everything!

FONTANA

Everything...

FONTANA

...I touch brings him back. Here's the pillow he always tucked behind his back, and here's the throw that covered his feet. In his bedroom, the comforter was stretched taut, the closet so orderly with his shirts and shoes aligned. That's why I think Reamus planned to...to leave, because he left everything so perfectly in place, and (*tears surfacing*) I...I just can't believe anyone could hurt him.

GRIFFON

(*putting his arm around her*) Oh, my dear, sit down.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Hands off, Griffon!

FONTANA

I...I'm sorry...

GRIFFON

Don't be, it's only natural to feel sad.

FONTANA

I was thinking of scheduling a memorial service at the synagogue -- after the publicity dies down. I want people to remember that Reamus dedicated his life to the talents of others. I hope you'll say a few words.

GRIFFON

Of course. We all knew him as a lover of literature as well as a devout...grammarian.

FONTANA

Even his handwriting was exquisite.

GRIFFON

Like a calligrapher's. His favorite punctuation mark was the exclamation point -- since he preferred a theatre of heightened passions. He also appreciated fine stationery, French champagne,...

FONTANA

Yes.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes!

GRIFFON

...Italian and Indian cuisine...

FONTANA

Scarlet roses, psychology, philosophy, science...

GRIFFON

The music, paintings, and poetry of every age. His essays for our programs revealed a virtual polymath...

FONTANA

An erudite historian...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I really should stop this scene before I blush!

(The doorbell rings.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Damn!

(FONTANA answers the door. DETECTIVE PAGETT enters, followed by MAUDE SCRAWLINGS, and the dashing young playwright, WYNN SCRIVENER.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, no! What are they doing here?! Where are the actors?! I wanted actors, *real* actors!

GRIFFON

Hello! Fontana, may I introduce Maude Scrawlings, our literary manager, and Wynn Scrivener, our resident playwright. *(to Maude)* I assume you've met Detective Pagett.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I can't believe it -- my play in the hands of the enemy!

WYNN

(gawking at Fontana) Wow! No wonder Reamus hoarded you to himself.

MAUDE

Down boy.

FONTANA

(to Griffon) I thought you were going to bring actors?

GRIFFON

They'll be fine.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

They will *not* be fine! They'll be mediocre at best, but I can't control the casting from here now, can I?

MAUDE

We're very sorry to hear about your grandfather.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Bollocks!

MAUDE

I was stunned; we all were.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Hah! You were thrilled! Ecstatic!

WYNN

We really admired Reamus. He was very...insightful.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Wasn't he though?!

WYNN

I'm really looking forward to reading his play. Both Maude and I have done some acting, so we'll try to read with feeling.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ha! Feelings of condescension and superiority! I don't want them touching my play much less reading it! Oh, agony, this is hell, hell, hell!

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS strikes his moon.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

If you're like me, then you know the downside of being dead is that those dark feelings that festered in life have been salvaged, stuck like barnacles to the soul-ship's keel. I thought they'd be pried loose in transit, but I'm still plagued with anger, envy, bitterness and even *(whispering)* ambition.

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS taps his moon as GRIFFON opens a cabinet and retrieves some glasses while FONTANA arranges the chairs in a semi-circle.)

GRIFFON

I brought some wine to help loosen our tongues. You're off duty, aren't you, Detective? *(to Fontana)* Shall we use the good crystal?

FONTANA

Yes, please.

(Pause as THEY seat themselves with scripts in hand.)

GRIFFON

As you know, we're here honoring Reamus's request to have his play read in this room. On the first page, he wrote instructions to open the chest by the window.

WYNN

I'll do it! *(opening the chest)* Oh, look, costumes! Black capes, ha, ha!

MAUDE

You're kidding?

WYNN

This way we'll look like vultures. And underneath the capes are masks, ha, ha! *(placing a beaked mask on his face)* How do I look?

MAUDE

Peckish.

WYNN

There's more -- under the masks are branches! He's even provided the scenery, ha, ha!

GRIFFON

(reading the script) We're supposed to hang the branches on hooks around the room.

WYNN

(hanging a branch) Here's a hook.

FONTANA

There's another by the door.

MAUDE

Do we have to wear the masks? I have asthma.

FONTANA

That's what Reamus wanted.

MAUDE

But he's not here now, is he?

FONTANA

I'm sure he is.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ah, my wise Minerva!

MAUDE

You're not serious?

FONTANA

If you don't want to wear the mask, then you can leave and I'll take your part.

MAUDE

No, that's okay, I'll wear it.

FONTANA

To be honest, I'm not sure Reamus would want you reading his play. I've been going through his mail, and there were several letters from playwrights complaining about the cruel rejections they'd received from...

FONTANA
...Maude the Merciless.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Maude the Merciless!

WYNN
Ha! That's Maude all right! She's famous for her "Titanic Theory of Playwriting."
Tell her about it, Maudie.

MAUDE
No thanks.

WYNN
You see, there's this ship full of playwrights that's sinking. Meanwhile, the theatre literati
stand on shore with life lines, deciding who gets rescued and who...

WYNN
...drowns.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Drowns...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
...in the Ocean of Obscurity!

MAUDE
Someone has to.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Not you, you horrid harridan! You wouldn't know a true original if it bit you on the bum!

MAUDE
Writers have such thin skins.

WYNN
Because we're passionate.

FONTANA
Reamus said sensitivity was essential to the creative spirit.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Yes!

WYNN
Yes,...

WYNN
...absolutely! Reams wanted writers to be treated with reverence, but Maude would say
he wasn't being realistic. Then Reams would say being realistic was choking the life out
of the theatre.

MAUDE

He didn't believe that audiences want to see themselves in familiar settings. Reamus preferred black comedies with actors playing animals or ghosts floating around.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Which allows me to stop this travesty in its tracks! (*slapping his moon*) The trouble with Maude is that she's a miserly pinch-souled reader, and harmful to writers who take risks, writers whose plays require a stretching of one's willing suspension of disbelief -- like you're doing now -- while Maude wouldn't last two minutes in the audience of this play! Besides, Maude wanted playwrights to be academic pedigrees, preferably Yale, male, and young -- like our winsome Wynn. Sorry to keep adding superfluous exposition, but it's *my* play! *Mine!*

GRIFFON

I've taken the liberty of assigning roles: Fontana, if you would read the role of Valoree.

FONTANA

All right, but I...I'm not really an actress, though I did play Ophelia in college.

WYNN

Really? I played Hamlet.

DET. JANE PAGETT

I was Cleopatra.

GRIFFON

Then you can read Vyva. Maude, if you'd please read Volga; Wynn can read Veero, and I'll read Vorclav and the stage directions. Whenever the Vulturine Chorus speaks, we'll all join in.

WYNN

Nice vulturian names -- Reams loved names. (*to Fontana*) He claimed you could tell by the names how imaginative a play would be.

GRIFFON

Before we begin, I'd like to propose a toast. (*lifting his glass*) To the author, Reamus Skrolls, may his Beggar prove to be majestic! A royal feast for the ears and eyes!

(ALL but MAUDE sip the wine. FONTANA notices.)

MAUDE

Sorry, I don't drink.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Of course you don't! You don't drink; you don't dance; you don't screw or indulge in the bliss of a kiss.

GRIFFON

Now are we all masked and ready?

DET. JANE PAGETT
Yes.

FONTANA
Yes!

WYNN
Ready!

SCENE 5

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS reclines to listen as GRIFFON begins reading the play.)

GRIFFON

Act One, Prologue: In ancient Anatolia, on the limb of a tree, Vorclav Vulturius, a large male vulture, stands alone, his wings outstretched. (*deepening his voice*)

This play of coupled rhymes

Begins in olden times:

In the Kingdom of the Vultures,

Ruling nations of great cultures,

Serving poets among men,

Great wielders of the pen,

Whose poems are wrought with plumes from wings,

And that is how a feather sings!

THE VULTURINE CHORUS (Everyone)

Poems are wrought with plumes from wings,

And that is how a feather sings!

GRIFFON

That's the "Prologue." So are we ready to begin "Scene One?"

WYNN
Ready.

FONTANA
Yes.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Yes!

FONTANA

I'm already enjoying it. (*to Griffon*) Do you think it needs music...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Yes!

GRIFFON
Yes!

GRIFFON

Maybe you could compose the score.

WYNN

You're a composer? Awesome.

GRIFFON

(reading directions) Scene One: Vorclav hops aside as Veero enters, hunched over, pecking meekly at the ground.

VORCLAV (Griffon)

There once was a vulture named Veero,
An orphan and unlikely hero.
He was slow, he was shabby, the last at the table,
Doomed to eat scraps in this avian fable.
By his parents abandoned, Veero nested alone;
In the carrion fields, he subsisted on bone.
Though the meat near the bone is the sweetest of all,
T'was not sweet enough to make Veero grow tall.
(reading directions) The female vultures: Valoree, Volga, and Vyva enter, whispering.

VALORIE (Fontana)

Poor little Veero, he still hasn't grown;...

VOLGA (Maude)

With such flimsy feathers, it's a wonder he's flown!
He's less like a vulture and more like a crow,
What's wrong little Veero, why can't you grow?

VYVA (Det. Jane Pagett)

They say he's so shy, he won't even speak,
Or maybe he hasn't a tongue in his beak.

VEERO (Wynn)

(with a high nasal lisp) Though my voice is small and fades at times,
Like every raptor raised on rhymes,
I long to hear my songs resound,
But vertigo keeps me close to the ground.
I may never soar like true vultures at all;
Whenever I try, I feel dizzy and fall.
I flop to the ground, crack my beak in the dirt,...

VALORIE (Fontana)

...Oh, dear, little Veero, doesn't that hurt?

VEERO (Wynn)

How I've begged my wings to sprout shiny and strong;
I've begged every day, my whole wretched life long.
I talk to my wings, I say, "Wings time to fly!"
They're deaf to my pleas, they don't care that I cry.

VALORIE (Fontana)

Forget it, wings, you should say aloud!
A grounded vulture can still be proud!
The pain that you feel must make you aware
Of other things small, (*pointing*) like that olive tree there.

VOLGA (Maude)

That tree is so stunted, it's barely a tree!

VEERO (Wynn)

But it shares my affliction, and beckons to me.
So I perch on its lowest limbs and observe:
Oh, the creatures I've seen; the stories I've heard!

VYVA (Det. Jane Pagett)

Then speak of the poets who wander this way.
Are they wise? Are they clever? What do they say?

VEERO (Wynn)

When poets come picking the olives, I hide,
Since I'm told I provoke thoughts of suicide.
They relish the ripest, then toss out the pits,
And more than one poet means a contest of wits.
They worship Erato, the muse of their verse,
But revile vicious critics whose scribblings they curse.

VOLGA (Maude)

Enough of this gossip, it's time we flew west
To join our fine friends at the Great Vulture's Fest!
There's a contest for birds with feathers divine
To be clipped into quills that write verses sublime.
While feathers like yours are condemned to make brooms,
Feathers like ours rank the rarest of plumes.

VYVA (Det. Jane Pagett)

The ink for the quill will be blood from an eye;
The paper pure vellum from skin stretched to dry;
The blood's from a tiger, the skin's from a sheep;
With such sacrifice made, we were bound to compete!
Now let's tell little Veero what we already know:
At the Great Vulture Fest...

VYVA, VOLGA, VALORIE (Det. Pagett, Maude, Fontana)

...we will win, place, and show!

VEERO (Wynn)

I'll follow your trail -- if you vultures don't mind,
And devour the scraps you might leave behind.

VOLGA (Maude)

We'll fly past Olympus to feed on the dead,
With the world at war, we'll be very well fed!

VYVA, VOLGA, VALORIE (Maude, Det. Pagett, Fontana)

We'll fly past Olympus to feed on the dead,
With the world at war, we'll be very well fed!

MAUDE

Well, we all know where this is going -- a bird's eye view of war and Veero's going to snatch the prize. It's not the kind of play we usually produce. It might have sentimental appeal, but we tend to be more political and...relevant. *(to Griffon)* What do you think?

GRIFFON

To be honest, if it didn't come with Ream's notoriety, then we'd probably pass.

FONTANA

Pass...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Pass...?

WYNN

Well, I love it! The vultures are cool, and I like the plot -- Reamus loved plot. He was always quoting Aristotle who claimed...

WYNN

...the essence of drama is story.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

The essence of drama is story!

WYNN

Of course Veero will triumph, because Reams hated it when writers abdicated hope. He thought it was un-American, a crime against the future. He said there were too many dark, depressing plays ripped from the headlines...

WYNN

...instead of the heart..

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Instead of the heart.

GRIFFON

What about you, Detective? What do you think?

DET. JANE PAGETT

I really like it, especially Veero. I've been an outsider myself, so I can relate.

GRIFFON

That's because the play's about an outcast, a universal theme. Veero's the Everyman or should I say "Every-vulture?" He's excluded and reviled.

WYNN

The underrated, underdog vulture who heroically soldiers on.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes!

FONTANA

Yes!

FONTANA

So it is relevant! That last line referring to war means the soldiers' corpses feed the birds whose feathers become the poets' pens, so destruction fuels creation.

WYNN

And aren't we're all vultures? I mean, just being alive means dealing with the carnage of eating and being eaten. We're all predators and prey: the rich prey on the poor; the young on the old, the old on the young, warring tribes on warring tribes.

GRIFFON

Christians on heretics; Muslims on infidels.

MAUDE

Men on women.

WYNN

Women on men, dogs on cats, cats on rats.

FONTANA

The living on the dead.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

The dead on the living.

FONTANA

Reamus wants us to see life from the vulture's point of view, and he's doing it in a poetic way.

MAUDE

Maybe, but it's more Seuss than Shakespeare.

FONTANA

It's neither! There's no formula; it's not a science. Poetry's magical, something that happens in the words to strike chords in our...souls.

WYNN

But Maude doesn't believe in souls, do you, Maudie?

MAUDE

I believe in the mind.

FONTANA

Then maybe you should pry yours open.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ha, ha! That's my girl!

MAUDE

Look, Reamus was your grandfather, but I have to be objective. Griffin invited me here because if we produce the play, I'll be the dramaturg, which means I'll be the person who suggests revisions.

FONTANA

Revisions...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Revisions?!

MAUDE

Of course, and it needs to be cut.

FONTANA

Cut...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Cut?!

MAUDE

I'm wondering if we should consider it for our children's theatre since it's so benign.

FONTANA

Benign...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Benign?!

MAUDE

Are adults really going to relate to vultures?

FONTANA

Yes!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...you bigoted barracuda!

FONTANA

Detective Pagett related. I'm sorry, Maude, but I think Reamus would want a more receptive reader, so please don't be offended, but I think you should leave.

MAUDE

Fine, but before I leave, I'd like to see the upstairs rooms where Reamus kept the scripts.

WYNN

So would I.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

No!

FONTANA

No,...

FONTANA

...I'm sorry, but Reamus never allowed anyone up there. To him, it was a...sacred place.

MAUDE

Fine. You know, you're as bat shit crazy as Reamus.

GRIFFON

Maude!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ha, ha!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

The beast bears her claws!

GRIFFON

Apologize to Fontana!

MAUDE

Why? She's the one with the attitude. Before I go, Detective, maybe you want to hear my theory about Reamus's death?

WYNN

No!

GRIFFON

Not now, for chrissake!

DET. JANE PAGETT

Why don't you make an appointment to see me tomorrow?

FONTANA

There's no need to spare my feelings. Please tell us.

WYNN

Please don't!

FONTANA

I insist!

MAUDE

Reamus was the dramaturg assigned to Wynn's new play. But Wynn preferred to work with me, which was painful for Reamus because he was...attracted to Wynn.

FONTANA

What...? But he's...

MAUDE

Decades younger...? Yeah, but everyone knew he was infatuated -- obsessed.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

That's ridiculous.

FONTANA

That's ridiculous;...

FONTANA

...I don't believe it.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I was not obsessed; I...

MAUDE

He...

MAUDE

...was in love.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...was in love.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(circling the immobilized Wynn) It's true, I was hopelessly smitten, but who wouldn't be? *(gesturing)* Behold my Winsome Wynn, a bright shining prince, so precocious, so prolific, as noble an artist as he was a man -- or so I believed during those early days of blissful congeniality, *(tapping his moon)* before my "loves labors lost."

MAUDE

Reamus couldn't keep his eyes off Wynn; he practically stalked him. Wynn didn't mind at first...

WYNN

That's enough, Maude!

MAUDE

You didn't! You even flirted back which made us think you swung both ways.

GRIFFON

Ha! That's true!

MAUDE

I don't mean to shatter your idol.

GRIFFON

Maude's right. It was strange watching someone so rational become so...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Besotted...?

GRIFFON

...careless. We noticed he was losing weight;...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I couldn't eat!

MAUDE

He looked tired;...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Couldn't sleep!

MAUDE

...in a constant state of...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Frenzy! Desire!

MAUDE

...agitation.

GRIFFON

One day he'd be depressed, then the next...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Scaling skyscrapers!

GRIFFON

...working till dawn. We watched in awe.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I was God and the Devil!

MAUDE

I mean, who'd think at his age...

WYNN

What did he want...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

To lay my heart at your feet!

MAUDE

Then suddenly he started making spiteful...

MAUDE

...accusations.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(striking his moon) Accusations!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ha! You see, Wynn's first play sounded faintly familiar, but only faintly, like the tinkling of wind chimes. It was his second play that rang the bells of remembrance, and the third clanged the clappers so incessantly, I was compelled to ask: "Wynn, are these plays really yours? Forgive me for asking, but they sound...familiar." Wynn blushed, and responded with such ferocity that I knew my instincts were right. After that, I searched my archives to no avail and pleaded: "Memory, speak! Reveal the true author of Wynn wondrous plays." *(to Wynn)* Now why don't you...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
...tell the truth!

MAUDE
(to Wynn) Tell the truth.

WYNN
(pause) I'm sorry, Fontana, I know he's your grandfather, but he made my life...awkward.

MAUDE
Tell her what you told me -- how he repulsed you, how he was always groping...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
No!

WYNN
No,...

WYNN
...I didn't mean he "repulsed" me; he just made inappropriate...advances.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Never! Never once did I touch him!

WYNN
When I wasn't interested, he couldn't deal with it. I think he needed an excuse to hate me, so he accused me of plagiarism.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Rubbish! Pure rubbish!

WYNN
He said I was too young and inexperienced to have conceived my characters.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Lies, lies! Nothing but lies!

MAUDE
He convinced himself that the plays weren't Wynn's.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
They weren't! They aren't!

WYNN
He said he'd prove it by finding the original scripts.

FONTANA
That explains it; that's why Reamus was always upstairs! He was sorting through scripts.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Exactly!

FONTANA

One of the last things Reamus said was, “When you compose, remember Ezra’s dictum to ‘make it new.’

WYNN

That’s right: real artists create work that’s uniquely their own, which is why it’s so upsetting when someone calls you a...

WYNN

...thief.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Thief!!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Scoundrel! Villain! (*smacking his moon*) But a villain who suffers from mortal dread of the beastly screen, the cruel gaping maw of his computer screaming to be fed with words, words, words! But Wynn can’t feed it because of a chronic case of cyberglut, or to quote Eliot, “He’s distracted from distractions by distractions,” compulsively checking his electronic umbilical cord because he can’t endure solitude much less silence, and the Muse requires both. She wants Wynn to make himself available, but he’s not, so he steals -- but from whom? Oh, how I wish it didn’t matter. Why, why, why do I care? Is Maude right? Has disappointment soured into (*tapping his moon*) vengeance?

MAUDE

So there’s your motive: a rejected homosexual pining after a younger, more talented man. Reamus was jealous and despondent, and since he regretted his vindictive accusations, he killed himself.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, Fontana, don’t believe it! Say it, say,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...I don’t believe it!

FONTANA

I don’t believe it,...

FONTANA

...I don’t! Reamus was *not* vindictive! He encouraged talent; he was never jealous of anyone! (*to Det. Pagett*) If my grandfather’s case is a homicide, and you’re looking for motives, (*pointing to Wynn*) then he’s the person who’d most benefit from his death!

WYNN

Me...?

FONTANA

If Reamus had lived, he'd be exposed as a plagiarist! Where were you the night he died?

MAUDE

She's got to be kidding?!

DET. JANE PAGETT

Where were you, Mister Scrivener?

WYNN

I was having dinner with my sister in Brooklyn. Call her if you don't believe me. (*writing on a card*) Here's her number.

DET. JANE PAGETT

I'd like to see you at the station tomorrow, and could you please bring the scripts Mister Skrolls believed were plagerized.

WYNN

No problem.

MAUDE

I don't believe this.

FONTANA

(*to Wynn*) I'd like to read the plays too. Then I'll know what to look for. Since Reamus kept every play he ever read, they'll be upstairs in his scriptorium.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Not if someone broke in and stole them.

FONTANA

But nobody knew the rooms existed, did they?

GRIFFON

No, I didn't.

WYNN

He never said a word.

GRIFFON

Fontana, you're not serious? You're not going to rummage through all those piles?

FONANA

Yes, it's my duty to Reamus.

GRIFFON

But to find similarities, you'd have to read hundreds of scripts which would take months -- years! You can't squander your youth reading bad plays. It could affect your health, not to mention your sanity.

FONTANA

Why assume the plays are bad? I'm sure there's something worthwhile in all of them.

MAUDE

If that were true, they'd have been produced.

FONTANA

Not if they were lost on the people reading them, people with narrow aesthetic boundaries, people with low emotional thresholds, who lacked...

FONTANA

...majesty of imagination...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Majesty of imagination!

FONTANA

...and...

FONTANA

....generosity of heart.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Generosity of heart!

GRIFFON

Listen, Fontana, you can quote Reamus all you want, but don't let his obsessions become your own. He's obviously had a profound effect on you, but it took a lifetime to amass all those scripts, and it will take another to read them.

FONTANA

Then why don't you help me? We could read them together.

GRIFFON

I have a theatre to run! Besides, Wynn's plays are so incredibly imaginative, that if Reamus had actually read them before, why didn't he recommend them to me?

FONTANA

Maybe he read them before you came to the Spencerian. Or maybe he was afraid you wouldn't appreciate them. He said too many artistic directors were turning into business obsessed lemmings who couldn't tell a play from a press release.

GRIFFON

Really...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ha, ha!

MAUDE

(to Fontana) Let's get this straight: you think Wynn copied some obscure plays which Reamus remembered reading, so he confronted Wynn who retaliated by killing him with a drug overdose?

WYNN

It's absurd!

MAUDE

Totally!

GRIFFON

(*to Fontana*) Even you thought it was suicide!

FONTANA

I've changed my mind!

GRIFFON

Well, I haven't! There's plenty of reason to kill yourself in the theatre. Please try to be reasonable, and you realize that if Maude and Wynn leave, then the three of us will have to play all the parts.

FONTANA

You should have brought actors!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

That's telling him!

MAUDE

Come on, Wynn, let's go!

WYNN

Not yet; I'll see you later.

(MAUDE marches off.)

WYNN

I'm sorry, Fontana, but I can't just leave like this. You may not believe me, but I always respected Reamus. Of course my plays sounded familiar; as my dramaturg, he'd studied them in detail. Now that we know he was into drugs, maybe that's what affected his memory. When I think about it, he was always misplacing scripts, his glasses, forgetting to answer messages.

GRIFFON

Forgetting to show up at meetings.

WYNN

Someday I'll prove Reamus was wrong about me, but right now I really love reading Veero, and I'm honored to be among the first readers. So please, Fontana, let me stay.

GRIFFON

You have to admit, he's captured the character, and *(to Det. Pagett)* isn't it wise to keep the accused in close proximity?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Yes, it is.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, the weasels.

FONTANA

Well, I...I guess...

GRIFFON

Good! Then let's put on our masks and get back to the play. *(reading directions)* Vyva speaks to the female vultures.

VYVA (Det. Jane Pagett)

Behold the sun falleth, we must maketh haste;
The flame of fame beckons, there's no time to waste!

VALORIE (Fontana)

Wait! If Veero can't join us, at least we can pluck
A plume from his wing, then wish him good luck.
They don't judge the bird or even its wing;
To enter the contest, a feather's the thing!

VEERO (Wynn)

(drawing forth a plume) Take this single plume from the wing on the left;
Though it appears flimsy, it fits the hand best.
This feather bore witness to ice storms and heat,
That dried up the rivers and scorched my bare...
(speaking as Wynn, clutching his stomach) Excuse me, I...I'm feeling queasy; I need
a glass of water.

(As WYNN walks off, a melodic whistling is heard.)

DET. JANE PAGETT

(to Fontana) Are you expecting someone?

FONTANA

No, why?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Isn't that the door bell?

FONTANA

I don't hear anything.

GRIFFON

Are you all right, Detective?

DET. JANE PAGETT

(covering her ears) I...I'm just a little dizzy.

FONTANA

I'm not feeling well either. Could it be the wine? *(to Griffon)* You brought it, didn't you?

GRIFFON

Yes, but tucked behind the glasses was a bottle of superior cabernet -- you don't think it's drugged?

DET. JANE PAGETT

The police were supposed to confiscate everything.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, dear...

GRIFFON

It tastes fine, and I'm feeling all right.

FONTANA

I'm not!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I'm not...

WYNN

(reentering the parlor) There's something's weird going on with my eyes. The walls are wavy, and there's sounds, like whistling...

DET. JANE PAGETT

You hear it too?

WYNN

Oh, yeah.

FONTANA

Yes, and there's cooing.

WYNN

Like doves!

GRIFFON

Should we be calling an ambulance?

WYNN
No, not yet...

DET. JANE PAGETT
I think I'm okay.

GRIFFON
Then let's start the next scene. I'll play the poet, Rumi, who's greeting the vultures.
(with a Turkish accent) Welcome, all ye predators, great sweepers of the earth!
Fowl feasters on creatures, mere humans doomed from birth!
From infancy to dying, from the foolish to the sage,
The victors and the vanquished made immortal on the stage!
(reading directions) Now Rumi gestures, bringing forth hundreds of species of birds.
Behold the great raptors, the eagles and hawks; the peacocks, the pigeons...

(Suddenly a wind blows through the parlor, followed by the sweeping shadows of birds.)

WYNN
Whoa, what's happening?

FONTANA
(gasping) Ahhh!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Oh, dear...

GRIFFON
Is there a window open? Do you feel a chill?

FONTANA
Yes!

DET. PAGETT
Yeah.

WYNN
It's freezing!

FONTANA
Are you seeing shadows?

DET. JANE PAGETT
Black birds! *(drawing her pistol)* There's two coming through the wall!

GRIFFON
Don't shoot, for chrissake!

(Loud squawks are heard, followed by honking ducks.)

DET. JANE PAGETT
(to Griffon) Can't you see them?!

GRIFFON
No, but I hear them!

FONTANA
There's geese overhead!

GRIFFON
Ohhh, now I see them!

WYNN
Awesome...

DET. JANE PAGETT
(*pointing, turning in circles*) Look, there's seagulls and pelicans...

FONTANA
Humming birds are everywhere!

GRIFFON
Hawks! I see hawks!!

FONTANA
My arms! My arms are extending!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Oh, no, here it comes, the...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS	DET. JANE PAGETT	WYNN	GRIFFON
...wings!	Wings!	Wings!	Wings!

FONTANA
We're growing wings!

WYNN, FONTANA, GRIFFON, DET. JANE PAGETT
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!! Sqwaaaaaaaaawwwwww, whhhheeeeww, hhooooooooo...

(Wild laughter turns into squawking, chirping, hooting, and honking as the wind billows their capes into wings, and the SPIRIT OF REAMUS whips forth his moon.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
This can't be happening?! They're breaking the rules! Spin, Moonie, spin, me free of this travesty!

(Darkness descends as the BIRDS and their SHADOWS fly off, leaving only the caw of a single CROW.)

CROW'S VOICE
Caaaaaaaaaaaaawwwwwwwwwwww.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 7

(A ROOSTER crows as lights reveal the parlor where FONTANA, GRIFFON, WYNN, and DET. JANE PAGETT are sprawled unconscious on the floor, their capes and masks askew. Slumped in a chair, is the SPIRIT OF REAMUS staring at the audience.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

When you die, take my advice and don't get too attached to the living. They're totally unpredictable, and they weren't suppose to drink my secret stash -- though I confess the avian extras did wonders for my play -- it flew off the page, ha, ha!

(The doorbell rings.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Now what!?

(MAUDE enters cautiously. Upon seeing the bodies, SHE gasps and rushes to GRIFFON.)

MAUDE

Oh, my god, Griffon! Oh, my dear, my sweet darling, please, please be alive!

(MAUDE kisses GRIFFON, then places her ear to his chest. WYNN stirs and observes her as the SPIRIT OF REAMUS taps his moon.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Maude smitten with Griffon?! Who knew...? And did I mention that her soul's as bright as yours and mine? I suppose this means we're all given the same wattage even if we're as sour, sullen, and nasty as stupidity allows.

MAUDE

Oh, Griffon, you're breathing -- thank Christ!

WYNN

Sssshush, lower your voice!

MAUDE

What happened? Did you get drunk?

WYNN

Drugged. What time is it?

MAUDE

Almost noon -- you've been here since yesterday! I've been calling everywhere! You and Griffon were supposed to be at rehearsal! I'll wake the others.

WYNN

No, don't, not yet! Did I see you kissing Griffon?

MAUDE

No, that was...resuscitation.

WYNN

It sure looked like a kiss -- though you didn't wake your froggy prince.

MAUDE

He's not my prince.

WYNN

Good, because he wouldn't scrape you off his boots.

MAUDE

Thanks.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ouch!

WYNN

Where's my vixen Valorie? (*crawling towards Fontana*) I'd like to carry her home and keep her in a cage.

MAUDE

Get a grip!

WYNN

(*stroking Fontana's hair*) Even as a vulture, she's sexy.

(WYNN kisses FONTANA.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Leave her alone!

MAUDE

Leave her alone!

MAUDE

What's gotten into you?!

WYNN

We birds need the bees. It's not fair: you want Griffon and Griffon wants Fontana...

MAUDE

And Fontana wants Griffon!

WYNN

No, she doesn't, and Griffon only wants her so he can get the rights to Reams' play.
(*stroking Fontana's breasts*) Isn't she beautiful?

MAUDE

Stop that!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Stop that,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...you swine!

MAUDE

Stop pawing her!

WYNN

I could take her right now; after all, vultures are predators.

(WYNN lifts FONTANA in his arms and walks off.)

MAUDE

Wait! Where are you going?!

WYNN

(*whispering*) To my nest.

MAUDE

You can't; she's not conscious!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Put her down!

MAUDE

Put her down;...

MAUDE

...or I'm calling the cops!

WYNN

Don't be such a pussy.

MAUDE

How dare you!? What you're doing is wrong, it's evil, it's...

MAUDE

...rape!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Rape!!!!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(to Maude) Don't just stand there! Stop him! Stop him! (*leaping about*) Wake up, Fontana! Wake up, Detective!

(The distraught SPIRIT OF REAMUS fumbles, then drops his moon which rolls!)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, no, my moon! I've dropped my moon!

(Lights flicker wildly as the SPIRIT OF REAMUS chases after his moon.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Nooooooooooooooooooooo!!

(Blackout.)

SCENE 8

(Rearranged in a frozen tableau are FONTANA, WYNN GRIFFON, and DET. JANE PAGETT, visibly hungover. MAUDE holds a tray of coffee mugs, and the SPIRIT OF REAMUS stands aside.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

According to Aristotle's laws of dramaturgy, a tragedy features a single character whose fortune flows from happiness to misery. That character in this play appears to be Fontana. Alas, since I dropped my moon and lost a few hours, we don't know if that devil debauched her. (*approaching Wynn*) Did you? You lecher, you louse! (*tapping his moon*) Oh, Lord, will someone please tell me...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...what happened?!

DET. JANE PAGETT

What happened...?

MAUDE

(*handing her a mug*) You were drugged and passed out.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Where are the...birds?

MAUDE

They've flown the coop.

GRIFFON

(to Fontana) Did the ceiling dissolve into...clouds?

FONTANA

Did the curtains fold into mountains?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Did the wolf assault my lamb?! Tell me! Somebody tell me!

DET. JANE PAGETT

I've misplaced my phone. *(departing unsteadily)* Don't anybody leave. I'll be in the study calling the station.

WYNN

Right, explain to your captain that you've just flown to Anatolia as a vulture named Vyva.

MAUDE

So, Griffon, has your trip given you new insights?

GRIFFON

I have a better understanding of why drugs are illegal.

WYNN

My legs keep twitching. What's in it I wonder?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(circling Wynn) Tincture of treachery!

WYNN

I felt euphoric,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(to Wynn) Liters of lust!

WYNN

I was even aroused. *(to Fontana)* I almost ravished you.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

“Almost?” Did he say, “almost?”

MAUDE

Bullshit! He tried to rape you! Lucky for you I was here!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Thank heaven, thank heaven!

GRIFFON

(to Wynn) What is she saying? What did you do?

WYNN

Just stole a kiss.

FONTANA

You what...?

WYNN

I...I didn't mean to...

MAUDE

Bullshit! You were pawing her! *(to Fontana)* He was dragging you to the bedroom!

GRIFFON

Jesus, Wynn...

WYNN

Sorry...

FONTANA

How dare you?!

WYNN

I was drugged!

MAUDE

You're shameless! Pervert!

WYNN

You should talk! *(to Griffin)* She was humped all over you.

MAUDE

I was just trying to see if you were breathing.

GRIFFIN

(pause, he sighs) Look, let's try to calm down and think: we must've succumbed to some kind of collective delusion. The last thing I remember was flying over fig trees, and the poet, Rumi, was spinning in circles beneath our own.

MAUDE

Rumi blurted out couplets while his scribe, Husam, took dictation. Husam was the one who used the quills -- which is why he judged the feathers. Last night I slogged through the entire script. With work, it might be adapted into a musical -- for puppets.

FONTANA

Puppets...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Puppets?!

MAUDE

Sorry, but I don't think vultures eating dead Mongol warriors for lunch has universal appeal. *(to Griffon)* When you sober up, you'll have to ask yourself: is it really a play? Does it have a clear initial incident, a crisis, a climax, and denouement?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes, yes, yes, it does, you solipsistic shrew!

MAUDE

I see a quirky fable with actors pretending to fly which will look ridiculous, have limited appeal, and the critics will be merciless -- assuming they stay past the prologue.

GRIFFON

Maybe, but we're already getting calls from agents, and every actor in the city wants to audition.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Really? Ha, ha!

(DETECTIVE JANE PAGETT returns.)

DET. JANE PAGETT

Sorry to interrupt. My Captain recommends we check in with our doctors. He also wants me to inquire about a resident of the building next door. Her name is...

DET. JANE PAGETT

...Sybil Reade.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Sybil Reade.

DET. JANE PAGETT

She's served time for dealing and has a record for possession. (*displaying a photo on her cell phone*) She's twenty-six with dark hair, and we believe was acquainted with Mister Skrolls. Did any of you hear him mention Sybil or see her at his meetings?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
No!

GRIFFON
No.

MAUDE
I was never invited.

WYNN
I don't remember anyone named Sybil.

DET. JANE PAGETT
Now I have to leave, but remember: this investigation is ongoing, so stay available.

GRIFFON
So we're still suspects?

DET. JANE PAGETT
You all had something to gain from Mister Skrolls death: Mister Scrivener, you're free from accusations of plagiarism; Miss Skratz you now own his house; Miss Scrawlings, you're relieved of an antagonistic co-worker...

MAUDE
That's ludicrous!

FONTANA
I'd much rather have Reamus!

DET. JANE PAGETT
And Mister Wright, you've gained publicity for your theatre, and access to a play that everyone wants to produce. Now we need to pick a date to read the rest of the play. I suggest next Friday.

FONTANA
Fine.

GRIFFON
I think so...

WYNN
Okay.

DET. JANE PAGETT
(*while departing*) I'll call to confirm.

MAUDE
Let's catch a cab, Griffon. I'll drop you off.

GRIFFON
I'd like to stay with Fontana awhile -- if she doesn't mind.

WYNN

I should stay too; I'm still shaky...

GRIFFON

I'd rather you didn't.

WYNN

Why?

GRIFFON

Because *I'm* staying -- to discuss the production.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Bollocks, you brazen Lotharios!

GRIFFON

Go home and rest.

WYNN

I can't. The walls are still wavy, my heart's racing; my knees wobbling...

GRIFFON

Then Maude can take you.

MAUDE

You've got to be kidding!

GRIFFON

Please, Maudie, for me. Take a cab, and make sure he gets into his apartment.

MAUDE

Oh, all right, come on. (*mumbling*) What balls!

(MAUDE leaves, followed by WYNN who stops in his tracks when the SPIRIT OF REAMUS taps his moon.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Farewell my fallen angel. I admit I no longer find Wynn quite so...seductive. True, he still has those amber eyes, and that lock of hair falling over his forehead, not to mention his irrepressible vitality, but Fontana's no fool. She's not susceptible, so make your exit! Go, go, go!

(WYNN departs.)

SCENE 9

(FONTANA closes the door and turns to GRIFFON.)

FONTANA

They're gone -- good! (*opening a drawer*) Reamus kept copies of the scripts he was working on in this drawer. (*holding up several scripts*) Are these Wynn's plays?

GRIFFON

Yes, all three involve royalty, so they're collectively titled A Trilogy of Kings: The first is Lord Velvet, the second's The Viscount Villanelle, and the last is Queen Sateen.

FONTANA

I'll read them all so I'll know what to look for.

GRIFFON

Trust me, Wynn is neither a plagiarist nor a murderer, and even if he were, that's *his* problem, not yours.

FONTANA

I can't help it. I feel it's my mission to find the truth.

GRIFFON

(*presenting his card*) When you get tired of your mission, here's my private number. We're friends now, fellow vultures and collaborators since I assume you'll be composing the score. In fact, consider yourself commissioned.

FONTANA

But you've never heard my music! Though even if I'm not involved, I intend to give you the rights. I know that Reamus would have wanted the Spencerian to produce his play.

GRIFFON

And he'd have wanted you to compose the music! I'm only sorry he didn't introduce us sooner.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Because this is what I wished to avoid!

GRIFFON

I'm sure he thought I was...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

A philistine!

GRIFFON

...unworthy of the privilege. Please don't look so sad.

FONTANA

I can't help it, I...I miss him.

GRIFFON

I hope you don't mind, but I have an overwhelming urge to...hug you.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Back off you grasping gigilo! Stop that! Stop right now!!!

(THEY embrace and kiss as the SPIRIT OF REAMUS attempts to separate them.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Damn, I can't project a shadow, much less pry them apart! *(to Griffon)* Leave her alone, you licentious leech, you priapic prick! Oh,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

....noooooo!

FONTANA

(pushing Griffon away) Nooooooo!

FONTANA

What am I doing?! How can I kiss the man who was going to fire my grandfather?!

GRIFFON

Retire, not fire, and I'm sorry, but you don't understand...

FONTANA

Please leave -- now!

GRIFFON

All, right, all right. *(he sighs)* I'll see you Friday.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Good, the rascal's gone! My Juliette should be courting worthier Romeos -- fine, cultured, creative boys. I can't believe she'll last long holed up in my scriptorium, though she has the makings of a great reader. If literature mirrors our possibilities, then Fontana reflects an infinite universe, so twirl topsy, and behold the universe three days hence!

SCENE 10

(The moon spins as lights flicker to reveal FONTANA wearing a robe, seated among towering scripts, reading while the SPIRIT OF REAMUS blows in her ear.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

It's Monday and there she is: so submerged in the transcendent rapture of reading, she can't even feel my death-breath. So shall we check Fontana's progress two days hence?

(Lights flicker as FONTANA is revealed reading, slouched in another position.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

It's Wednesday, and she's still here, though there's circles under her eyes, but notice how she just turned the page, and from her smile we can infer she's reading a comedy. Oh, don't you love the theatre for allowing us to focus wherever we choose? There's no bullying camera telling you where to look, no sound surround telling you how to feel. Here you gaze at the perpetual wide stage to admire my cluttered scriptorium or Fontana's slender neck or flirt with the fellow across the aisle while I spin towards Friday! Friday! Friday!

(Lights flicker as the SPIRIT OF REAMUS spins again, revealing FONTANA hours later, still reading and weary, her hair disheveled.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Good heavens, she's still here! She's supposed to be hosting the reading of my play!

(A knock is heard.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Who's there?!

FONTANA

Who's there...?

(GRIFFON enters.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Him again.

GRIFFON

Your front door's unlocked, for godssake! I didn't mean to scare you, but I was worried. Why don't you answer my texts or your phone?

FONTANA

It's turned off.

GRIFFON

Detective Pagett said you postponed the reading! What the hell's going on?

FONTANA

Nothing, I'm fine.

GRIFFON

No you're not!

FONTANA

I can't help myself. It's the plays: Reamus was right: they live and breathe on the page...

FONTANA

...as well as the stage.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

As well as the stage.

FONTANA

The characters keep drawing me into their worlds, and when I leave, I pick up another script, then another...

GRIFFON

Well, you're making yourself sick for nothing! Wynn's alibi checks out, and the fingerprints on the syringe aren't his, so he didn't kill Reamus.

FONTANA

Then he hired someone.

GRIFFON

Detective Pagett had his plays scanned on plagiarism software, and found nothing.

FONTANA

Of course not. The originals were never published.

GRIFFON

Fontana, look at me! *(pause as she complies)* Another reason I'm here is that I'm about to announce the season, and our managing director wants the contract signed.

FONTANA

Just put it here, I'll read it later.

GRIFFON

She wants it now! And have you started composing the score?

FONTANA

The piano needs tuning.

GRIFFON

You know, Reamus wouldn't want you here.

FONTANA

Yes, he would!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

No, he wouldn't!

FONTANA

I think he's here; I sense a strange scurrying -- (*pointing away from Reamus*) Over there.

GRIFFON

It's probably mice.

FONTANA

(*pointing nearer to Reamus*) No, he's moved.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Closer...

FONTANA

(*pointing correctly*) He's there!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Bingo! Ha, ha!

FONTANA

(*staring at him*) I hope Reamus knows how grateful I am.

GRIFFON

Then write the music to his play! If you want to be grateful, then be grateful for the miracle that gave you the talent to compose. Most people can't; for most of us music is an esoteric language, a secret code of keys that every poet...

GRIFFON

....dreams of possessing.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Dreams of possessing.

FONTANA

Reamus said that.

GRIFFON

That's right, and he wouldn't approve of his mania becoming yours. Just look at this room: to any reasonable person, it's evidence of a disturbed mind. Detective Pagett said collectors have abandonment issues, so he probably suffered some childhood trauma.

FONTANA

During the war, when Reamus was an infant, he and his mother left Poland. His father was supposed to follow, but didn't. He was a musician, a pianist like me. They never found out if he escaped or was killed, but they must have felt abandoned. *(pause)* Maybe that's why he saved all these plays. He cherished and preserved them like...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(whispering in Fontana's ear) Orphans...

FONTANA

...orphans. There's even a few in Polish that Reamus could read.

GRIFFON

The trouble with his orphans is they're too overwrought to be adopted.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(whispering in Fontana's ear) They're waiting.

FONTANA

They're waiting -- for the brave theatres of the future. That's why Reamus kept them here in his sanctum scriptorium, his temple.

GRIFFON

The theatre was his temple.

FONTANA

And actors were his saints.

GRIFFON

Saints...?! Hah!

FONTANA

They let us live outside ourselves. Reamus said theatre will last forever because souls yearn for the company of other souls, and the older the souls, the more they realize the futility of the material, virtual, and digital worlds. People will stop going to churches or

FONTANA (cont'd)

malls, and be drawn instead to theatres where their presence matters, because going to the theatre...

FONTANA

...is a creative act.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Is a creative act.

FONTANA

The barer the stage, the more creative the audience, because they have to imagine the sun and ...

FONTANA

...the moon.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

The moon!

GRIFFON

Yes, and, if I were an actor, I'd carry you upstage, throw you in a tub, and call a piano tuner. (*grasping her arm*) Now stop this nonsense and get up!

FONTANA

Don't touch me!

GRIFFON

Have you looked in a mirror lately? Have you had any sleep?

FONTANA

Go away!

GRIFFON

When did you last eat?!

FONTANA

None of your business!

GRIFFON

For chrissake, have some respect for yourself!

FONTANA

How dare you!? I asked you to go and I meant it!

GRIFFON

I ought to haul you over my shoulder and carry you out right now!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Do it! Be a man, for godssake!

FONTANA

If you don't leave, I'll call the police!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Don't listen! Don't go!

GRIFFON

Oh, all right, all right! (*walking off, muttering*) You're impossible, impossible...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Don't give up! Don't surrender; don't abandon her! Oh, please, please, turn back!
Oh, God, did I really say that? How the worm turns! Well, she can't still be here a week from now!

(The SPIRIT OF REAMUS spins his moon as lights flicker to reveal FONTANA still reading, slumped on the floor.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, lord, she's grown pale, gaunt, undernourished. Quick, oh, moon of mine, fling me forth -- two weeks hence!

(Lights flash, and FONTANA lies supine, a bedraggled wreck.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(*touching her forehead*) Oh, my god, she's feverish, dehydrated. I've got to do something. Maybe if I blow hard enough my death breath will rattle the page in her hand and give her...

FONTANA

Ouch!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

....a paper cut!

FONTANA

A paper cut!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Hah! Oh, my dear sweet Fontana, how can I make you cease this madness?! Why are the dead so impotent? It's worse than being alive!

(A creaking sound is heard, and FONTANA sits up.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
What's that?

FONTANA
What's that!?

FONTANA
Who's there? *(pause)* Is someone there?! Hello?

SCENE 11

(SYBIL READMAN, a unkempt young woman, enters.)

FONTANA
(gasps) Who...? Who are you?

SYBIL
Sybil.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Sybil...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
...to the rescue!

SYBIL
Who are you?

FONTANA
Fontana Skratz, I live here. How did you get in?

SYBIL
Reamus gave me a key. I've been in Mexico; the neighbors told me what happened.

FONTANA
You and Reamus were friends?

SYBIL
Partners. I checked out the cellar -- looks like they dismantled the shop. *(pause)* Guess I'd better split.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
No, wait!

FONTANA
No, wait,...

FONTANA
...please stay, I have so many questions: How...how did you know Reamus?

SYBIL

I live next door, across the alley. We'd run into each other on the street, so one day he invited me for drinks, and since I sensed he was cool, I brought mushrooms. Turns out we're both into chemistry, and a week later we were in business. He told me about you; I figured it was you up here.

FONTANA

You've been in these rooms before?

SYBIL

Yeah. Look, I'm here 'cause Reamus stashed his formulas under that pile by that window. *(uncovering a small box)* He was always experimenting, trying to find the right mix. That's why I was in Mexico -- stocking up on the organics.

FONTANA

What's in it, anyway?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

A whiff of whimsy.

FONTANA

The police say it defies analysis.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

A does of divinity!

FONTANA

There's nothing like it.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

And a touch of the trembles.

SYBIL

It's an empathogen we call tick for tikkum olam. That's Hebrew for...

SYBIL

...healing the world.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Healing the world.

SYBIL

Reamus said we Jews are on earth to finish god's work of creation and since words aren't enough, since they don't keep people from killing, we're mixing our own benign brew. Crazy, huh?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Crazy is it?! (*smacking his moon*) All wars are failures of language. Because our species is cursed with monstrous egos, we're easily offended and leave the table too early, but if we're chemically inspired by my empathogens -- well, you get my drift.

FONTANA

Maybe Reamus really was an alchemist -- just a taste and you feel...

FONTANA

...boundless bliss.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Boundless bliss!

FONTANA

I know because I drank it and grew wings -- then landed.

SYBIL

That's the bitch -- the landing, and it's hell on the gums. But still, you can extend your horizons, you can see there's...

SYBIL

... a World to Come.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

A World to Come!

FONTANA

(*gesturing to the scripts*) And here worlds were turned into words. (*pause, she sighs*) I'm looking for specific plays. I'm trying to expose a plagiarist named Selwynn Scrivener, but he's not just a thief. I think he killed Reamus.

SYBIL

Forget it. Reamus killed Reamus.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Really?

FONTANA

Really...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I took my own life...? But why?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Why?

FONTANA

Why?

SYBIL

He was losing it, going down fast, plus he had a bad case for some guy. I never met him, but I figured he was the creep I saw poking around up here.

FONTANA

But nobody was allowed up here.

SYBIL

Yeah? Well, my apartment's across that alley, and I'm not blind.

FONTANA

Was he tall with dark hair?

SYBIL

Yeah, and he picked up a box and left.

FONTANA

(pause) But if...if Wynn was up here, stealing the original scripts, then that means I've been looking for something that can never be found...

SYBIL

(lighting a cigarette) Life's a bitch.

FONTANA

You can't smoke here! Are you crazy!?

SYBIL

Hey, chill...

FONTANA

The whole place could be an inferno in seconds!

SYBIL

Would that be so bad?

FONTANA

Yes!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(gasps!)

SYBIL

No offense, but if you don't get some fresh air, you'll wind up like Reamus. What's the deal anyway?

FONTANA

I'm trying to expose an injustice.

SYBIL

Yeah?

FONTANA

I found out from his bank that he'd been paying for my education. Thanks to Reamus, I attended the very best schools, but my mother never told me.

(The doorbell rings.)

SYBIL

Fuck! Who's that?

(DET. JANE PAGETT enters.)

DET. JANE PAGETT

Excuse the interruption, but are you Sybil Readman?

SYBIL

No!

DET. JANE PAGETT

You fit her description, and I'm sorry, Fontana, but you're both under arrest.

SYBIL
Shhhhhittttt!

FONTANA
What for...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Oh, dear...

DET. JANE PAGETT

(to Fontana) For harboring a felon. *(to Sybil)* And you for manufacturing and distributing illegal drugs, and for the murder of Reamus Skrolls.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
What?!

SYBIL
What the fuck?!

DET. JANE PAGETT

(fastening handcuffs) You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court...

(FONTANA collapses to the floor with a thud!)

FONTANA
Ohhhhh....

SYBIL
Oh, shit!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
(gasping) Nooooo!

DET. JANE PAGETT

(speaking into her cell phone) I need an ambulance!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Save her! Save my poor Fontana! (*tapping his moon*) Here we have a crisis involving a minor character when what we really need is a deus ex machina that revives Fontana, liberates Sybil, proves plagiarism, promotes my play, and hastens me to heaven! Hurl me, Moonie, six days hence!

SCENE 12

(Shimmering lights reveal the purple parlor where FONTANA is dressed and seated near GRIFFON.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ah, Fontana's home again! Griffon has entered, and she appears to be explaining that...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...charges have been dropped.

FONTANA

Charges have been dropped,...

FONTANA

...thanks to your attorney, but Sybil's fingerprints were on the syringe. She claims they got high together before she went to Mexico. When she left, Reamus was still alive; she's taking a polygraph test to prove it.

GRIFFON

Good. Now sign the contract, I'll announce Beggar at the Feast for next season. We're promoting the play as a metaphor for our collective insanity, for accepting violence as a solution to our problems. Plus it dares to posit the question: should humans rule the Earth? Have you started composing the music?

FONTANA

Yes, I think the play should be an opera.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(*delightedly*) An opera!

GRIFFON

(*skeptically*) An opera...?

GRIFFON

Really...? By the way, Detective Paget wants to see us tomorrow at seven. We'll read the rest of the play, but she wants the original readers in attendance.

FONTANA

If that includes Wynn and Maude, then tell her that's *not* possible!

GRIFFON

Listen, Fontana: the theatre's all about collaboration, so it's never perfect. There's too many elements, too many competing egos, so you learn to compromise.

FONTANA

With devious liars? No thanks, and I hope you're not still producing Wynn's Trilogy.

GRIFFON

As a matter of fact, Lord Velvet is already in rehearsal. I thought you knew.

FONTANA

If that's true, then you can't have the rights to Beggar at the Feast!

GRIFFON

What...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, dear...

FONTANA

You heard me! I haven't signed the contract, and I won't compromise!

GRIFFON

That's blackmail; Wynn would be devastated.

FONTANA

Good!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Good.

GRIFFON

Are you going to dog his every step?

FONTANA

Yes!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes.

GRIFFON

Beat him till he's six feet under?!

FONTANA

Yes!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes.

GRIFFON

For chrissake, Fontana, what's he supposed to do; what do you want from him?!

FONTANA

Responsibility! For lying, for stealing, and for...

GRIFFON

What...? For not loving Reamus...?

FONTANA

Reamus died of unrequited love -- either way, Wynn killed him.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, dear...

GRIFFON

You talk about responsibility -- how I wish Reamus could see what chaos he's wrought! For one thing, I wouldn't have met you, and for the first time experienced the same turmoil he must have felt, though I didn't expect you to be so...stubborn! Sometimes I wish you were more like...like Reamus.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

What...?

GRIFFON

We didn't always agree, but he was open hearted, an optimist who expected the best of people. To be with Reamus was to feel accepted, even admired, free to say anything and not be ridiculed. He possessed a kind of grace...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Oh, lord...

GRIFFON

...an innate, even saintly benevolence.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

The irony!

GRIFFON

In fact, the only person I've ever known him to dislike was Maude, and he was right about her. She's mean spirited, but Reamus was beloved. You should read the cards and e-mails pouring in; some brought tears to my eyes. You might consider reading a few at his memorial service. *(pause)* Most of us at the theatre believe Reamus caused his own death because we think he felt...superfluous. He was crushed when Wynn rejected him as his dramaturg, and for some people suicide is a logical solution to an...unnecessary life.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Unnecessary...?

FONTANA

Unnecessary!?

FONTANA

But there's piles of plays on his desk from playwrights all over the world! To them, he was more than necessary; he was essential!

GRIFFON

Maybe he didn't know that; maybe that's why he started his pharmaceutical career. But what if we're wrong? What if you yourself were the reason? Maybe after you contacted him, Reamus saw what he'd missed. He might have regretted abandoning his wife and daughter; he might have been plagued with remorse, then...

FONTANA

(covering her ears) Stop!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Stop,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...stop, stop theorizing! Forget about me and get on with your lives!

FONTANA

I think you ought to leave.

GRIFFON

There you go again -- snarling like a cat.

FONTANA

And there you go -- insulting me!

GRIFFON

You're so stubborn, I keep suppressing the urge to thrash you!

FONTANA

You're the one who should be thrashed!

GRIFFON

Right on cue, you obstinate fool!

FONTANA

And you're an arrogant bastard!

GRIFFON

Even on fire, you're... beautiful.

FONTANA

And you're the devil!

GRIFFON

Please let's stop arguing -- let me hold you.

FONTANA

Never!

GRIFFON

Please don't turn away.

FONTANA

(facing him) What do you want?!

GRIFFON

You,...just you.

FONTANA

Why? I'm a cat like you say, an avenging tiger.

GRIFFON

Reamus wouldn't want vengeance, though he'd be touched by your loyalty, and...

GRIFFON

...your spirit.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Your spirit...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...glows, my dear, a flaming aurora.

FONTANA

But nothing good lasts; we have so little...

FONTANA

...time.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Time...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

...enough, my dears.

GRIFFON

Then let's spend it together.

(GRIFFON draws FONTANA to him as the SPIRIT OF REAMUS taps his moon, freezing their embrace.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Well, well, for Griffon loves labors won. I don't approve, but I'm not as vehemently opposed. Still, a play should aspire to be a marvel of craft and compression, and now the plot's a muddle, there's too much exposition, the characters can't stop groping each other, and I'm nothing but a voyeuristic timekeeper, incapable of interacting and invisible to everyone but (*pointing to the audience*) you! At least the play within the play is amusing, so let's spin to the reading of my Beggar's final scene. Go, Topsy, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow!

SCENE 13

(Flickering lights reveal the parlor of vulture-beaked readers: WYNN, MAUDE, DETECTIVE JANE PAGETT, GRIFFON, and FONTANA at the piano.)

GRIFFON

Since Fontana's composed some music, feel free to sing your parts. Remember we're in Anatolia where the contest is progressing. (*reading directions*) Now the female vultures enter to present their feathers to Husam who explains his role:

(*singing with a Turkish accent*)

At the Great Vulture Fest, I've come to appraise

The feather best suited for poems by the sage.

I'll weigh stem and strands, judge the slant of the taper,

Which cleaves to my fingers while ink stains the paper.

VOLGA and VYVA (Maude and Det. Jane Pagett)

(*singing*) *Feathers like ours inspire great verse;*

To quicken the heart and fatten the purse!

VALORIE (Fontana)

(*singing*) *Herewith my feather, quite modest and light,*

It may not have weathered enough yet to write.

HUSAM (Griffon)

(*singing*) *'Tis a fine plume, the fronds fairly dense;*

The shaft is quite hollow so ink can commence

from the nib of the quill which is cut like a cone,

Though blots on the page tend to ruin the poem.

VALORIE (Fontana)

(*singing*) *Here's poor little Veero's plume to apprise,*

Though it came from a wing of diminutive size,

HUSAM (Griffon)

*(singing) This plume is not like the rest that I see;
It seems to be housing a lost honey bee.
With a bedbug, a beetle, and three legged tick,
This feather's a nest for the weary and sick.
This feather has weathered a fire and a freeze,
Which means it's unlikely to snap with a sneeze.
The stem's bent with grief, the filaments slight;
From feeling forsaken, night after night.
This feather's been places the other's have not;
It's seen more of life, the rage and the rot.
Yea, this is the feather to scribe for all time
The poems of Rumi, his couplets sublime!*

GRIFFON

*(reading directions) Trumpets blare as Husam brings forth a nest of golden eggs. Now
Veero is seen limping into the arena.*

VYVA (Det. Jane Pagett)

*(singing) Look yonder, there's Veero, our plucky old chum!
He'll be crowing from knowing his feather has won!*

VALORIE (Fontana)

*(singing) Oh, Veero, my hero, Husam has proclaimed,
Your feather's your fortune despite being maimed.*

VEERO (Wynn)

*(singing) What are you saying, can this really be true?
Did my flimsy feather with fronds all askew
Reap its reward at the Great Vulture Fest?
Was it really deemed better than all of the rest?*

HUSAM (Griffon)

*(singing) Your feather, dear Veero, now feathers your nest;
But beware vulture vice, and stay true to your quest:
Cease feasting on soldiers unless they are dead,
Though it's tempting to eat the fresh ones instead.
If you must eat the living, begin with the eyes;
Once they are blinded, some men become wise.
No longer drawn to the trumpets of war,
They know endless battles won't even the score.
Yea, armies, like lemmings march to their dooms,
While generals in charge obey stark raving loons.*

HUSAM (cont'd)

*The loons tell the lemmings that killing's no vice,
 Preserving their freedoms, their blood is the price.
 Digesting their flesh, it turns into your own:
 Part vulture feathers and part vulture bone.
 Fly forth, eat your fill in the carrion field,
 Through wars never ending, what banquets they yield!*

THE VULTURINE CHORUS

*(singing in harmony) Fly forth, eat your fill in the carrion field,
 Through wars never ending, what banquets they yield!*

GRIFFON

The end!

MAUDE

(mumbling) Thank Christ!

WYNN

(applauding) Awesome.

FONTANA

(applauding) Wonderful!

FONTANA

There'll be standing ovations!

WYNN

They'll call for the author.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Who won't be forthcoming.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Before you go, I've been authorized to inform you that you're no longer suspects.

GRIFFON

Now there's good news.

WYNN

It's about time.

FONTANA

What about Sybil?

DET. JANE PAGETT

Trafficking in narcotics is a felony, so she's being held until her trial.

GRIFFON

So we're all officially innocent?

FONTANA

No, we're not! *(to Wynn)* Sybil said she spotted a man in the scriptorium stealing scripts. Was it you, Wynn?! Was it?!

GRIFFON

For chrissake, Fontana, let it go!

MAUDE

He's right; you'll never prove he plagiarized because you'll never find the original.

FONTANA

(pointing at Wynn) Because he has them!

MAUDE

No, because I have them! *(pulling scripts from her satchel)* Here!

WYNN

Maude...?

GRIFFON

What are you saying?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ah ha!

MAUDE

When I dropped Wynn at his apartment, he crashed on the sofa, but before leaving, I noticed a stack of scripts on his desk. They were typed on an old portable, the pages so brown and brittle, they almost crumbled in my hands. Since I'm Wynn's dramaturg, I only had to read a single page to realize the dialog was...

MAUDE

...familiar.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Familiar!

WYNN

You stole them!

MAUDE

No, *you* stole them! *(to Wynn)* Now why don't we tell them the name of the real author?

MAUDE

Violet Vellumare!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(peering over Maude's shoulder) Violet Vellumare...?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Of course, now I remember!

GRIFFON

Never heard of her.

WYNN

Nobody has. *(pause)* When Reamus showed me his scriptorium, he pointed to some old boxes covered with dust full of scripts he said he hadn't yet read. One night he fell asleep after dinner, so I took the box home, and that's how I found Violet's plays -- sixteen in all. I researched the titles, and none were ever published or produced, so I scanned them into my computer.

MAUDE

Pretty stupid of you not to have destroyed them!

FONTANA

Oh, Maude, how can I ever thank you?

MAUDE

I'm not exposing Wynn for your sake, *(to Griffon)* or yours, *(to Wynn)* or even because you're a creepy lying bastard. I did it for Reamus.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

For me...?

MAUDE

We didn't get along, but it's wrong for everyone to think he was deluded when his instincts were right on. It's not fair to his memory.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Why, Maude...

WYNN

At least give me credit for delivering the goods. How many Violet Vellumares are out there who never find the right reader never mind a production?

GRIFFON

But why?! What possessed you to lie?

WYNN

I wanted to be a playwright, but after several attempts, realized I'd rather read a play than write one. *(pause)* I came to the Plum Pot as a friend's guest, weaseled my way into Reams' confidence, and lucky Violet! I saved her from obscurity. I knew Reamus would appreciate her originality because he was...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes...?

WYNN

...a literary epicure, a cultivated connoisseur,...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Why, Wynn...

WYNN

...even if he was a parasite.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

What?!

MAUDE

What...?!

FONTANA

What?!

WYNN

No wonder he wrote about vultures. Don't dramaturgs feed on the bodies of other people's work?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

No!

MAUDE

No!

MAUDE

We enrich, reshape, and elucidate! Most plays wouldn't make it to the stage without us!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

You tell him, Maude!

WYNN

So far neither you nor Reamus have said anything remotely interesting much less useful about Violet's plays. I don't see why anyone in his right mind would trust you.

MAUDE

You're despicable! Reamus wasn't usually intrusive, but didn't he rewrite Lord Velvet's opening monologue?!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes!

GRIFFON

Yes!

GRIFFON

And didn't he cut the Chorus of Crown Jewels?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes!

MAUDE

Yes!

MAUDE

And didn't he restructure the last two scenes?

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Yes!

GRIFFON

Yes!

MAUDE

You ungrateful prick! What did Reamus ever see in you anyway?!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(tapping his moon) Love is blind. It's a wretched cliché, but haven't we all loved someone who didn't love us back? Yet to me Wynn still shimmers with that free, unconscious ease he has, his utter delight in himself and his powers.

DET. JANE PAGETT

Mr. Scrivener should be an actor.

WYNN

She's right! *(to Griffon)* If you're smart, you'll let me continue in my role. I mean, isn't a living playwright better than a dead one? Besides, isn't the theatre all about disguises? Aren't we all actors and pretenders? Reamus might even appreciate my deception -- being full of deceptions himself.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Touché!

WYNN

Since I'm confessing: he never laid a hand on me -- not that he didn't want to.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

I'd have torn down the canopy of heaven for a kiss.

FONTANA

(to Detective Pagett) Well, aren't you going to arrest him?!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(patting his moon) Arrest him? Now behold my winsome Wynn, wearing the expression of someone thinking: "What misery have I wrought? To what depths have I fallen?" Well, why not? Ever since its ancient beginnings, the theatre's recounted the fate of failures: the liars and layabouts, not to mention murderers, molesters, and corrupt politicians. Yet the theatre has always bestowed the nobility of poetry, of passion, and even...sympathy. Yes, I'm actually feeling sympathy. Has pity replaced vengeance? Is this my moral reckoning? *(to Det. Pagett, smacking his moon)* Please, please don't...

SPIRIT OF REAMUS	GRIFFON	MAUDE] FONTANA
...arrest him.	Arrest him!	Arrest him!	Arrest him!

DET. JANE PAGETT

I'm sorry, but I'm a homicide detective. Cases of fraud are settled in court.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Thank heaven! I'm feeling so...relieved, so much lighter. Have I forgiven Wynn...?

MAUDE

I'm leaving!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Have I forgiven Maude and Griffon?

WYNN

No, stay! Please, everyone stay. Since this is a night of revelations, there's something you should know.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Ah, the denouement!

WYNN

Before I went to Brooklyn, I stopped by Reamus's house to drop off a letter threatening to sue him for slander. The front door was open, so I walked in and saw him lying there. I also saw the script in his hand, but on top of the script was a note. I don't know what came over me. I guess I was afraid he'd killed himself and was leaving a note blaming me so I...I snatched it. *(passing the note to Fontana)* Here, it was meant for you.

FONTANA

"For Fontana: My doctors declare my heart's failing fast;
 'Tis time for my exit; these words are my last:
 This script that I'm leaving was wrought years ago
 Inspired by my child climbing drifts in the snow.
 As darkness descended, she waved a good night
 Gazing up at a circle of raptors in flight.
 This folly was meant for that little girl, Mae,
 Who was only a child when I started the play.
 Now Mae has passed on, left a child of her own,
 Who has entered my life, so I leave her this tome."
(pause) Mae was my mother. It's dated the night of Reamus's...

FONTANA
...suicide.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
Suicide...

MAUDE
I knew it! It's a children's play after all! He never expected it to be produced!

GRIFFON
Well, it's too late now!

MAUDE
(to Wynn) You prick! How could you keep this to yourself?! The anxiety you could have spared us!

DET. JANE PAGETT
(to Fontana) I'll take that note if you don't mind. *(to Wynn)* You realize you've interfered with an investigation, and may very well be arrested, so please don't leave the city. Now I'm afraid I have to leave. Good night.

FONTANA
Good bye, Detective.

GRIFFON
I'll send you tickets to the opening.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
No, no, please don't go; I feel so tethered to you all...

WYNN
I'm leaving too. *(turning to Maude)* You're a rat as well as a troll!

MAUDE
See you in court, dick brain!

WYNN
I'm still auditioning, bitch!

(WYNN leaves, followed by MAUDE as FONTANA and GRIFFON embrace, then depart.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS
There they go, the cast of my comedy. *(he sighs)* Yet how tragic that I couldn't see in life what I see in death -- the radiance behind the masks. *(he sighs)* Oh, launch me, Luna, take me to the theatre -- to rehearsals! *(the moon tumbles from his grasp)* Oh, no, not again!! My moon, my moon! Too much time's passing, too much! Ahhhhhhhhhh!

(Lights flicker wildly.)

SCENE 14: THE EPILOGUE

(Mystical music is heard as dazzling lights reveal the dancing SPIRIT OF VIOLET VELLUMARE dressed in shades of violet.)

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

(gaping in awe) Who...? Who are you?

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

The Spirit of Violet Vellumare. I'm here to thank you for safeguarding my scripts, and to escort you to The World To Come.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

What?! Now?! But what about my play, my Beggar at the Feast?

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

It opened last week.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

What?! I...I missed my opening?!

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

You can see it *(pointing heavenward)* from the balcony -- if it's still running.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

But how...how did it go? Did the crowds cheer? Did the critics rave?

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

It doesn't matter, believe me; it's all an illusion.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Of course it's an illusion -- it's theatre!

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

So is life, my dear. Now come, hold my hand.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

But I...I'm not ready! I can't abandon my *(gesturing)* audience. They deserve a proper epilogue.

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

They're living their epilogues; they're deceased.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Deceased?! But I thought they were alive!

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

No, they're dead like you. In fact if you gaze into your moon you can see how they died.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Really? (*peering into his orb, then looking out*) Ha, ha! (*pointing to various audience members*) You tripped on the garden hose; you toppled off a horse; your kidneys failed; and you -- you were shot by your lover! You perished in a plane crash; you were hit by a falling rock, electric shock, dipsomania, diabetes, gangrene, gluttony, tick bites, botulism, but you -- lucky you! -- you died from arrhythmia during orgasm, ha, ha!

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

Enough, Reamus! (*snatching the moon*) Give me your moon. It's time to go!

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Wait, wait! What about my orphans? The plays in my scriptorium?

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

They're being stored in a warehouse in Queens.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Can't I take them with me?

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

Everything you need is already there.

SPIRIT OF REAMUS

Really? Everything...?

SPIRIT OF VIOLET

Yes, now take my hand -- The Paradise Theatre awaits!

(Lights glimmer as cascading feathers flutter from the heavens. The CHORUS OF ANGELS is heard singing as the SPIRITS OF REAMUS and VIOLET ascend.)

End of Play

