

it. Pulling the trigger. I was starting to walk away— All of a sudden he was on the ground—

CHARLIE. That's the best way to remember it — you don't remember it. You've got other people to worry about. Alea, the old man, me— Come on. I'll buy you another beer. We'll talk about all the good things we're going to do. *(Picks up the beer mugs and exits.)*

VAL. I had him cuffed, Charlie— I had him cuffed. *(Slow blackout. Music.)*

## ACT I

### Scene 4

*Music out. Lights. VAL and ALEA's apartment. A short time later.*

*VAL enters the apartment. ALEA is asleep on the couch (DSL bench) with test papers and red pen in hand. She wears glasses. VAL takes off his jacket and drapes it on chair USC. He moves to her and attempts to remove test papers. She wakes up.*

ALEA. What time is it?

VAL. Four. A little after.

ALEA. Four? Did something happen?

VAL. It was busy, that's all. I did overtime. *(Kisses her. Gestures — the door.)* You forgot to lock the "police bar."

ALEA. *(slowly sitting up)* I thought you'd be back earlier. I dropped your father off— What? Ten-thirty? I bought him a beer. He liked the fireworks.

VAL. I'm going to put a sign up — "Bolt me."

ALEA. I'll remember. Is it really four o'clock? I didn't mean to fall asleep here—

VAL. Anybody could "jimmy" the lock. He doesn't even have to be good.

ALEA. I'll remember. I promise.

VAL. (*Crosses USC to chair, takes off gun & holster.*) Second time this week.

ALEA. I'm half-awake. Quit scolding. It's four o'clock, and I've got a class in five hours.

VAL. (*Crosses DSL to ALEA, sits and massages her feet.*) How'd you like to skip it?

ALEA. I'd like to, but I can't.

VAL. Why not?

ALEA. I've already been out twice.

VAL. We could drive upstate. Look at some land for

Rusty.

ALEA. They did homework. I'm supposed to collect it.

VAL. We could find a place, have dinner, take our time—

ALEA. You've got to work tomorrow night.

VAL. I'll get Charlie to cover. Or Carlos. They're both off tomorrow. They owe me.

ALEA. We can do it Sunday.

VAL. No, tomorrow's better.

ALEA. We've got the weekend.

VAL. I need to get out of the city.

ALEA. But why tomorrow?

VAL. (*Pulls at his shirt.*) How come you didn't turn on the air-conditioner?

ALEA. I fell asleep, that's all.

VAL. It's got to be eighty-five — ninety degrees in here.

ALEA. Val?

VAL. I had a close-call tonight.

ALEA. What happened?

VAL. Some punk pulled a knife on me.

ALEA. A knife?

VAL. He dropped it.

ALEA. Where'd it happen?

VAL. (*Crosses SL.*) Twenty-eighth and Eleventh.

ALEA. Was it a kid?

VAL. A kid, right. Eighteen, nineteen. I'm not sure.

ALEA. How big was the knife?

VAL. Big enough.

ALEA. What kind of knife was it?

VAL. Kitchen.

ALEA. Did he try to use it?

VAL. He made a move. But he wasn't that fast. He was high. We found a bunch of "shit" on him.

ALEA. Eighteen years old?

VAL. Something like that.

ALEA. Those bastards!

VAL. Right.

ALEA. Was he black?

VAL. Black, right—

ALEA. He had a knife. I guess it doesn't matter, does it?

VAL. No—

ALEA. (*She moves to him, embraces him.*) Why don't we stay overnight?

VAL. We can't. I mean, I can't. I've got to be back Friday—

ALEA. I'll take Friday off, too. We'll come back late.

VAL. I've got a meeting. Friday morning.

ALEA. What kind of meeting?

VAL. Routine. Departmental.

ALEA. What time?

VAL. I've got to be back, that's all. It's early. Ten o'clock.

ALEA. I don't remember any Friday morning meetings.

VAL. I've been skipping them. Captain sent me a memo. "I'm missed" — that's what it said. I don't want to push it.

ALEA. Then we'll come back tomorrow night. Do you want anything to eat? Some tea? (*He stares straight ahead. He shakes his head. "no."*) Val?

VAL. I'm telling you, the next punk who comes at me with a knife— The next punk who comes at me with anything, I'm going to pull the trigger!

ALEA. What?

VAL. I'm getting to hate it. I don't know, you knock down one jerk, four more stand up behind him.

ALEA. He really scared you, didn't he?

VAL. (*Crosses SL, sits on bench.*) He didn't scare me. I wanted to tear him apart. I almost did— No, forget it. It's over.

ALEA. Why didn't you call?

VAL. I went out for a beer. I ran into Charlie—

ALEA. (*Crosses to SC, folds jacket.*) Charlie?

VAL. Right.

ALEA. Charlie's been working "days."

VAL. He was looking for some action. He came around.

ALEA. Was it more than just a kid with a knife?

VAL. No. It was a kid with a knife, that's all. One night's worse than another. The Fourth of July— it's always nuts. It was just another incident. I should have called—

ALEA. How serious was it?

VAL. (*Stands, crosses USL of ALEA.*) Look, I don't want to talk about it right now. Really. I just don't want to go through it again. I want to get some sleep. I want to get out of this city. It'll blow over. Like it always does. Like it has to. It was automatic. It was reflexes.

ALEA. What was?

VAL. This guy— What happened—

ALEA. I thought it was a kid. A black kid.

VAL. All right, it was a kid!

ALEA. Who do I have to ask? Charlie? He's got the details, doesn't he?

VAL. Some of them.

ALEA. Who else are you going to tell? Rusty?

VAL. Look, I survive. That's all you need to know. Sometimes I get home late. Sometimes I forget to call. That's it.

ALEA. (*Puts jacket on chair.*) That's it?

VAL. That's it! That's enough.

ALEA. People talk about their jobs!

VAL. I talk about my job.

ALEA. I get the anecdotes. I get the laughs. That's your style.

VAL. The rest is ugly. The rest stays on the streets.

ALEA. You live here. I have a right to know.

VAL. I didn't marry you so I could tell you goddamn cop stories all night!

ALEA. No? Then what am I supposed to think about

while you're gone?

VAL. You've got your kids. You've got your classes. Why mix it up with a lot of shit?

ALEA. Then what am I supposed to think about while you're here? You don't want me to know anything about your work, except that one night's dangerous, one night's not.

VAL. You got it!

ALEA. How am I supposed to know which night is which?

VAL. You're not supposed to know!

ALEA. Then what do you need me around for?! You come home three hours late. You don't call. But I'm not supposed to say anything. I'm not supposed to ask questions, because, no, we don't talk about your work.

VAL. (*Crosses DSL*) Alea, leave it alone.

ALEA. We talk about my work instead, don't we? My school. The kids. Do they like me? How come they don't like me? What's so goddamn important about teaching English when they'd rather speak Spanish? But let's forget about you. Let's leave the Police Department out of it. That's the way you want it, isn't it?

VAL. That's the way I want it, yes!

ALEA. Because you've always got to be in control, right?

VAL. You lose it, you let it go for a second, you even snap your fingers, somebody else picks it up, and fast!

ALEA. Is that what Rusty taught you? Is that your father's code?

VAL. No, it's mine. I learned it early — starting at six — starting in Pittsburgh. I got dragged off the "Hill." Three

white punks. I got tied to a tree. I got my clothes sliced off with a knife. I got poison ivy rubbed all over me. I hung there five hours. It got dark out. I was still there. That's when I learned it. (*Crosses DSR*)

ALEA. You were six years old, Val.

VAL. It could have been yesterday.

ALEA. And so nothing else counts?

VAL. Not a fucking thing!

ALEA. Nothing else defines you, right?

VAL. It got me through a war, and it gets me through my job!

ALEA. And what's it do to me, Val? What's it do to you?

VAL. Let it go.

ALEA. Why?

VAL. Because you wouldn't like to hear about this one. Not this one.

ALEA. No? I'm supposed to be a partner, remember? I don't give a goddamn if Rusty never told your mother anything. All I know is that I'm tired of watching fifty percent of you disappear every night when you come through that door, barred or not barred, and I'm tired of knowing that fifty percent of me can't function when you're around me. (*Crosses DS to C*)

VAL. You wouldn't want to hear about this one.

ALEA. Why not?

VAL. Nobody wants to hear about this one.

ALEA. (*Crosses R to VAL*) Try me.

VAL. You don't want to hear about it!

ALEA. Try me!

VAL. All right. Why not? Let's get involved in my job.

ALEA. Don't make fun of me.

VAL. The Fourth of July. A big night in my life. I offered a white dude. Twenty-eighth and Eleventh. I put him out of commission for good. One shot. Right through the heart.

ALEA. Oh, my God, Val.

VAL. You wanted to know, didn't you?

ALEA. I wanted to help. I want to help. (*Crosses SL to bench, sits.*)

VAL. (*Crosses US to C.*) Help? No way you can do that, baby. Morgue van picked him up four hours ago. William H. Willis. Very white. Numbers and burglary. Out of Detroit. A ten-page sheet on him. Two stretches in New York. Sing Sing and Rikers. This time it was a car. A '77 Oldsmobile. He tried to snatch it. I wasn't on a break. Unlucky for me. Unlucky for him. I happened to spot him first, and now he's laid out, courtesy of the city. 30th and First, waiting for his brother.

ALEA. Why— Why'd you shoot him? Val?

VAL. The shit pulled a knife on me, that's why! So I blew his fucking chest away! How's that sound?! Three feet away from me! No time for conversation! No time for manners! He was dead with his stomach in his mouth before he even hit the street! Hey, maybe you should have been there! (*Crosses DSR.*)

ALEA. Val!

VAL. Quite a sight, baby! Real involvement. A cop's wife, right beside him. Action. Front-line action. You could have chalked him, told your kids about it, spent a whole lesson drawing it on the blackboard—

ALEA. (*Crosses R to VAL.*) It was self-defense!

VAL. Sure it was. Of course it was. But you still should have seen it. I mean, not much up front — just a neat round hole — but check out his back, no shoulder blade. But you're right. A clear-cut case of self-defense. A cop's life on the line. A black cop's life on the line, but still a cop. I've got the badge, he had the knife, and, white or not, was that son of a bitch ever surprised when the last thing he ever saw was the look on my face!

ALEA. Val? That's not the way it happened, is it?

VAL. I had an hour left. If he'd tried to steal it an hour later, I could have looked the other way. I could have done that. I didn't need to chase him. It was a goddamn car, falling apart. He wasn't even driving it. But I had to make it important. I had to do my job. I couldn't let him get away.

ALEA. (*Sits SR platform.*) How'd it happen?

VAL. (*Crosses SL to bench.*) I had the cuffs on him. I was waiting for a radio car. I was standing seven, maybe eight feet away from him. I had my gun on him. "Procedure" to the letter. I heard the siren. I guess I must have jumped. It was dark. There weren't any street lamps around. Firecrackers were going off all over the place. I accidentally squeezed the trigger.

ALEA. What about the handcuffs?

VAL. I had time. I took them off.

ALEA. And the knife?

VAL. He had a knife. I opened it. I wiped off the prints. I stuck it in his hand.

ALEA. (*She moves to him, embraces him.*) Then there's nothing to worry about— Is there?

VAL. No— (*The lights begin to fade to darkness. Music. Black-out. Music out.*)

END OF ACT I