

## Seven Stages

*Center stage sits a coffin on a bier. On one side of the stage are two rows of four folding chairs each. Somber organ music plays silently through the piece. Janet, dressed in black, enters, sobbing quietly to herself.*

JANET

Danny, Danny. How could you leave me so soon, Danny? We had so many plans, so many plans. What will I do? What will I do? I love you so much.

*Janet walks somberly to the chairs and sits down as Bobby, dressed in a leisure suit, swaggers to the coffin. He stand over the body, and appears to begin to make the sign of the cross, but instead reaches into a pocket and takes out a container of breath spray, which he uses. He waves it towards the body, then laughs.*

BOBBY

Want some? Nahh, I don't suppose you gotta worry about bad breath in there? Jeez. They said outside you look so bad dey won't even open the coffin. I told ya to lay off dem donuts, you fat bastard, now look at ya. Dead. *(Anxiety rising)* Just like every deal you and me was ever gonna make. Rich we was gonna be. That's what you said you son-of-a bitch. What the hell am I supposed to do now?

*Bobby stops when he realizes he's been speaking too loudly. He glares at the body in the coffin, crosses himself, and sits down next to Janet, who has been watching him.*

BOBBY

So, you da wife?

JANET

Yes.

BOBBY

Yea, well, I was sorry about hear about... you know.

JANET

Thank you. I –

*There is a ringing sound from Bobby's pocket. He takes out a cell phone.*

BOBBY

Hold on a second. *(Into the phone)* Yo. Joey, wazzup? A funeral, man. Where are you?

JANET

What are you doing?

BOBBY

I gotta take a call... I'll just be a sec...

JANET

...of all the....

BOBBY (over phone)

...OK, what's the conditions? Rain? OK, OK... to show, no, wait!

*Bobby fumbles in his pocket, takes out a crumpled racing news page, glances at it)*

BOBBY (cont'd)

... I changed my mind... to place!... yeah... five hundred to place! OK, OK, Hey! I gotta go! Show a little respect, fer crying out loud! (*Bobby hangs up*)

JANET

*(pulling herself together)* Excuse me, but I've never seen you before. Are you a friend of my husband's?

BOBBY

...I guess you could say that... yeah...

JANET

...don't you think that we should meet, Mister...? (*she reaches out her hand to shake his*)

BOBBY

Oh, yeah! (*shakes her hand with enthusiasm*) I'm so sorry, I just get nervous... ya know, dead people scare me... (*Janet starts to react emotionally, Bobby realizes his mistake*) OH! I'm so sorry, I meant that... jeez... now I got ya all upset. Bobby. That's my name. Bobby Storch. "Ladies hold the torch for old Bobby Storch"... that's what my Mama used to say. (*uncomfortable pause*) They don't actually.... It's just what my Mama would say... (*no reaction again; Bobby stands up, whistles softly and sits back down*) I'll tell you, they did a great job on Old Tweezer... he looks great! (*sits back down*)

JANET

"Old Tweezer" You called my husband "old Tweezer"?

BOBBY

That was one of his better names! What a guy! Not for nothing, but your husband was one HELL of a guy! If we was outta scotch money, he'd be right there for ya... one of the true real friends that has ever walked God's green earth!

JANET

But that still doesn't explain why you called him "Old Tweezer."

BOBBY

Come on. You were his wife. You musta known about it.

JANET

Known about what?

BOBBY

The club.

JANET

My husband belonged to a club? I never knew about any club.

BOBBY

Maybe he was a little embarrassed.

JANET

But we didn't have secrets. I even knew about the affair.

BOBBY

What! Tweez' was sleepin' around and he told you, and didn't tell me?

JANET

Apparently.

BOBBY

That sneaky son of a bitch. When was it?

JANET

Wait a minute. If you want to hear about Danny's affair, I want to hear about this secret club and why you called him "Old Tweezer".

BOBBY

I guess that's fair. You ever seen the movie "Fight Club"?

JANET

Yes.

BOBBY.

It's nothing like that. You ever notice that Danny came home late on Wednesdays? (Wait for a response, but Janet just stares) Well, Danny was livin' a double life. By day he worked at sellin' insurance, but every Wednesday he'd change his clothes and turn into "Old Tweezer." You see, Danny was the cities best...

BOBBY (cont'd)

... bug collector.

JANET

I beg your pardon?!?

BOBBY

Well, since he's gone to place the ultimate bet with the Bookie up above, or down below as the case may be, I suppose tellin' you can't really do him no harm. You see, there was a group of us that would convene every Wednesday in the basement of Dominic's Garage. We would set up a ring, and bet on the bugs, as it were. And nobody farmed them like "Old Tweezer." He'd come in with his fancy tackle box filled with the biggest six- and eight-legged fighters you'd ever seen. He always selected who he would use with this gorgeous 14-carat gold tweezer. I remember years ago when he got it as a birthday present from his mentor, "Legs" McInnenny. "Legs" was callin' it quits, and so he passed it down to Tweez'. I'll never forget "Legs" sittin' there and sayin', "When they're ready to win ya the bank, this will point ya the way." Truly touched me... *(he wipes a tear from his eye, quite melodramatically)*

JANET

Oh god! So Danny was messed up in...

BOBBY

Yes, ma'am... cockroach fighting.

JANET

The bastard! That explains so much. All the things he never wanted in the house. Ant traps, fly traps, insecticide.

BOBBY

I could understand his feelings. It could've quite affected his edge, ya understand? He was the best, ma'am.

JANET

It could also explain his death.

BOBBY

You know, I read the obit, but the cause of death wasn't mentioned. How did he go?

JANET

Well, it was so strange...

BOBBY

Strange?

JANET

Very strange. The doctors at the emergency room said they had never seen anything like it – ever.

BOBBY

Ever? Oh my God, what was it?

POLICE OFFICER

Excuse me, sir. Is that your van parked outside. The white van.

BOBBY

White van?

POLICE OFFICER

That's right. The white van.....with commercial plates.

BOBBY

Could be.

POLICE OFFICER

Could be? Seems to me it is or it isn't, would you say sir?

BOBBY

Yes, alright. Yes, it's mine.

POLICE OFFICER

Good. Well, I see by the sign strategically placed in the rear window of said van that it's for sale. How much do you want for it?

BOBBY

How much? Well. I was just....

POLICE OFFICER

It looks in good shape. Can I take a look inside?

BOBBY

Well I don't see why not. Except that I was just about to....

POLICE OFFICER (*as he and BOBBY exit*)

Won't be long. Just need to hear what it sounds like. What's the mileage?

STEVEN

Excuse me, about Danny.....it's probably not a good idea to explain his demise...

JANET

*Hijo de puta*, what are you doing there hiding behind the drapes—you nearly gave me a *síncope*.

STEVEN

I'm sorry. About everything.

JANET

Steven. My God.

STEVEN

Anita

JANET

Don't call me that. I'm through with that life.

STEVEN

Witness protection hasn't been all that you'd hoped?

JANET

NSA son of a bitch. (*she slaps him.*)

STEVEN

Is that any way to say hello?

JANET

Are you here on official business, or...

STEVEN

You could always see right through me, Anita

JANET

I told you. It's Janet. You saw to that, didn't you, when you stuck me with that *gringa* alias. Danny was the one good thing in my life and now...

STEVEN

Listen, cupcake, it's not just for old times sake that I'm here. I've come to warn you, you're in terrible danger. Danny's death wasn't an accident. And your husbands gambling buddy isn't just here to pay his respects. The fact is, Danny "Old Tweezer" Santarpio was working both side of the fence. The roaches, the gambling, the Jersey girlfriend—don't you see?

JANET

My God, you don't mean...

BOBBY

*(re-entering with gun drawn)*

Look what I found lying on the church steps! It's a Colt .45, just like the one Clint Eastwood had in "Dirty Harry."

STEVEN

*(Draws his own gun, points it at BOBBY)* Drop it, Bozo.

JANET

Steven!

STEVEN

Quiet, Anita. This is between me and Bozo here.

BOBBY

I have no idea what you're talking about.

STEVEN

Oh, really? You just HAPPENED to find a COLT .45 that just HAPPENED to be lying on the steps when Anita here just HAPPENED to be attending her husband's funeral? IS THAT IT?

BOBBY

*(To JANET)* You said he wouldn't be armed.

JANET

Run.

*(BOBBY turns and tries to run. STEVEN shoots him and he falls to the floor. He turns to JANET, triumphant, but she smashes him over the head with a club she had hidden beneath the pew. STEVEN falls to the floor unconscious. Pause, then JANET walks over to BOBBY.)*

BOBBY

My leg!... He shot my beautiful leg!...

JANET

Quiet. You're barely bleeding.

*(DANNY sits up in the coffin.)*

DANNY

Did you get him?

JANET

Of course I got him. Being in witness protection doesn't mean I haven't kept up my chops.

*[DANNY gets out of the coffin, and he and JANET stuff STEVE into the coffin.]*

DANNY

(to BOBBY) You make great bait -- Steve bit -- but otherwise, Bobby, you're useless like you've always been, so shut up.

*[JANET pulls screwdrivers from her pocketbook. They screw lid tight.]*

BOBBY

You're gonna --

JANET

Dawn comes late to Marblehead -- (to DANNY) *un tonto*.

DANNY

Been hunted by him long enough, ain't we, sweetheart. Not anymore. Now he's going under --

JANET

Just like he did to us. Free at least.

DANNY

(yelling at the coffin) Worm food!

*[A look of triumph -- but then footsteps -- and it's the POLICE OFFICER.]*

POLICE OFFICER

Thought you could get away with it, eh? With all of it. Tweezing us, selling off to the scientists. *(He peels away his mask and his clothes to reveal a 6' tall cockroach, very powerfully built)* But genetic selection is a marvelous thing, isn't it? When the golden tweezer didn't kill us, it made us stronger and stronger and stronger. *(He pulls out a pair of diabolical-looking gold tweezers and clicks them)* Just call me Kafka. Payback is going to be sweet.

*[Lights out as the air fills with screams.]*