

Dictator

by Murray Mednick

Dictator was first produced in 1997 at Theatre of NOTE in Los Angeles, under the direction of Diane Robinson, with the following cast:

Dictator: Armando Duran

Lawyer: James Lesure

Journalist/Ambassador: Katharine Gibson

Dr. Steward: Christopher Grove

Colonel: Christopher Kelley

Rhea: Christine Avila

President: David Bickford

Characters

The Dictator *Hispanic*; 40s.

The Lawyer (*Jenkins*) *Elegant black man*; 40s.

The Journalist (*Gina*) 31.

The Doctor (*Dr. Stewart*) 40s.

The Colonel 40s.

The Mistress (*Rhea*) *Cuban-born*; 30s.

The Ambassador (*Gina*) *Now* 34.

The President *The President of the United States*.

The Guard 20s.

1.

*SOUNDS of airplanes going by and occasional car alarms.
“Cucaracha” is the ambient music.*

Dictator *(To the walls, mostly in Spanish)* Where are we? Are we near an airport? Which airport? Those planes—what is that? Who is doing this to me? Is it the Colonel? Is it the President? Hey! Say something! You want money? I got more money than everybody! The Colonel, everybody! I got money stuffed in a bank, you and all your babies and babies’ babies will never see such money! Hey! Hey!

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2. Three months later.

New music. Find the DICTATOR greeting the LAWYER (JENKINS).

Dictator Hello, sir.

Jenkins Hello, how are ya?

Dictator I’m not the same. I’m not the man I was. You have news for me?

Jenkins No.

Dictator How come I don't see myself on television?

Jenkins Because you're in jail.

Dictator You seen my name in the paper? You seen my picture in the paper?

Jenkins No. There's nothing. Silence. You have disappeared.

Dictator They locked up my money.

Jenkins Sorry. I tried.

Dictator I can't pay you.

Jenkins That's why I tried very hard.

Dictator I got a lot to thank you for.

Jenkins No problema.

Dictator They were piping "Cucaracha" in here day and night.

Jenkins That's their idea of a joke.

Dictator It's not even my country, Mexico. And they finally gave me some videotapes that wasn't soft-core porno.

Jenkins What'd they give you?

Dictator They gave me *The Godfather* and *Birth of a Nation*. But I could use a few more books. And something to write on, like a computer.

Jenkins You can write?

Dictator I will write a book.

Jenkins On what?

Dictator Don't worry. The whole stinking truth.

Jenkins Forget about it.

Dictator How the CIA sold coca in L.A. for the Contras. *(Pause)*
And kept most of the *dinero* in their own pockets. *(Pause)*
Make me a deal. You'll be a rich man.

Jenkins I wish I could, General.

Dictator I need an activity, something to do with my time. It could

be like a hobby. I used to have bad hobbies. This could be a good hobby. What's your hobby?

Jenkins History of Rome. The Republic, Sulla to Augustus.

Dictator They were dictators, like me, 80 B.C. to 15 A.D.

Jenkins I know who they were. But these men were not like you, General. There were not small-time. They were dealing with an empire. Rome. Big.

Dictator I was big. I was dealing with the U.S. of A.

Jenkins On the wrong side.

Dictator Ah, tell 'em to go fuck their grandmothers. (*Looks at walls*)

Jenkins Stupid. Why play the thug?

Dictator You think I'm playing?

Jenkins No, you are a thug.

Dictator There's a couple more things.

Jenkins (*Irritated*) What are they?

Dictator I want to talk to a doctor. I always have a doctor, it's my right.

Jenkins You have regular checkups.

Dictator I want a personal doctor. I want to talk to him. I want to have a conversation.

Jenkins You have medical problems?

Dictator Me, I don't have no stinking medical problems. (*Smiles*)

Jenkins Oh, I see.

Dictator In my country, we got people, they'll dance for days—makes you feel better, and they feel good, too.

Jenkins A psychiatrist. I'll pass it on.

Dictator Can you dance?

Jenkins No.

Dictator Too bad. Me, I am a very good dancer.

Jenkins I'm pleased for you.

Dictator When's my trial gonna be?

Jenkins You had a trial.

Dictator I want a real trial. I want to be treated like a living person. I want to testify.

Jenkins You are not alone in this.

Dictator I am alone.

Jenkins A third of the young black men in this country are in prison.

Dictator You're mad at me for that?

Jenkins These kids, black kids, they start doing time when they're boys. They don't get an education. They're in the drug economy. They're on the streets or in the can.

Dictator That's my fault this happens?

Jenkins Yeah. Greaseballs like you bringing that shit in here from all over.

Dictator *(To the walls)* I'm sorry for what I did. *(To JENKINS)* I wish to be treated like a serious man. *(Pause)* I had a lot of money once.

Jenkins Kiss your money goodbye.

Dictator It's not legal.

Jenkins Your money was legal?

Dictator My money was my money.

Jenkins Your money was shit money.

Dictator Where is it now?

Jenkins It belongs to the United States of America. By law.

Dictator Whose law?

Jenkins By American law.

Dictator You know about the Romans?

Jenkins Sure. They were nothing like you. The Romans had an ideal.

Dictator What was the ideal?

Jenkins Rome.

Dictator I want to learn from them. The game's not over.

Jenkins It's over. You're not covered. You're not a citizen. You're a nonentity. *(Pause)*

Dictator International law?

Jenkins Scumbag like you? *(Pause)*

Dictator That's not nice. *(Pause)* Will they kill me?

Jenkins They may not bother.

Jenkins They got me buried me in here anyway.

Jenkins Correct.

Dictator *(To himself)* They go to law school and come out thieves and politicians. Me, I never went to a real school. But I seen the *Godfather* picture nineteen times now. *(To JENKINS)* I want to be like you. Handsome and educated. A cool guy, a gentleman, he knows the halls of American power like his own briefcase.

Jenkins That's me.

Dictator Are you a happy man? *(Pause)* Black guy like you, you should be more on my side.

Jenkins Black don't mean I'm stupid. Black don't mean I'm degenerate. I grew up with decent people, decent hard-working people. I'm not on your side. If it was up to me, I'd get all you punks and stop the wealth from pouring out of here like blood from a wound. *¿Comprende?*

Dictator What happens to me now?

Jenkins I don't know what happens to you.

Dictator You're uncomfortable. Not because you abandon a man in his dungeon, but because the man is intelligent.

Jenkins Intelligent? They give you a VCR and four walls and suddenly you're intelligent?

Dictator I'm very intelligent.

Jenkins You never had to sit still so long before without booze and dope and broads.

Dictator No, never.

Jenkins So maybe you're actually learning something now.

Dictator I think, maybe, there's a chance.

Jenkins Small chance. They say it's over by the time you're seven years old.

Dictator I am a war prisoner!

Jenkins No, you're not. Nobody declared war.

Dictator An army walks into your territory and shoots your people and blows up buildings and arrests the head of government and this is not war?

Jenkins No. No war, therefore no war prisoners. When there's a threat to the state, the state can break the rules. It's an old story. The Roman Senate, they had a decree—the *consul-tum ultimum*. What it did was, it said to the Consul, "Do what you have to—save the state." They went after Gaius Gracchus with it and tried to club him to death. He wanted to break up the big estates, open up the land. You, you played with drug dealers and mercenaries and whores.

Dictator Gringos included.

Jenkins Who, for instance?

Dictator *(Not answering)* What happened to...?

Jenkins Gracchus? You don't know? They trapped him, and he killed himself.

Dictator Is that a hint? You're not a bad guy, Jenkins. *(Pause)* You quit the case for good?

Jenkins Yes. Today.

Dictator I'm sorry. I was starting to like you. It's okay you don't like me.

Jenkins It's business.

Dictator Yeah, yeah. America, business. I want to talk also to the press. It's my right! *(Pause)* I feel bad about what I did. You think I am a dog? I was a king in my country! I was a man to be feared!

Jenkins I've been giving you a chance to talk. *(Pause)* Last chance.

Dictator One hand washes the other. Am I right?

Jenkins Right.

Dictator Yeah, but I'm not telling you anything.

Jenkins Fine. Your choice. *(Exits)*

Dictator *(Continuing)* You're the same as me, a thug. No, I changed my mind. You and me are not the same. You don't like people. Me, I am a social fellow, I like people. You don't like people, you don't like yourself, you're disappointed, your best days are behind you. You, you got your walking papers, you got your own money somewhere in a bank, but you don't believe in it, and you will take a fall. *(Pause)* "Probably. But when I do, it'll be in bed, in my own house. You went right down the toilet."

BLACKOUT.

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3. Six months later.

Find the JOURNALIST (GINA) standing at entrance. DICTATOR is stunned, as though viewing an apparition. There is a computer, and more books are scattered around the room. Different music.

Dictator You're a journalist?

Gina Yes, I am.

Dictator You got permission to see me?

Gina I'm here.

Dictator Why?

Gina You asked for the press. They sent me.

Dictator Why they send you, a beautiful girl like you?

Gina I applied for the assignment through my agent. I had no idea it was you.

Dictator Anonymous dictator requests interview.

Gina Yes. Didn't they tell you?

Dictator They don't tell me nothin'.

Gina You got the questions in advance.

Dictator Oh. I forgot. That was months ago. Sit down, please.

She does so.

Yeah, so you interview the dictator, it's a big feather in your hair.

Gina Not really.

Dictator You like me?

Gina I don't know you.

Dictator You'll take my picture?

Gina Later.

Dictator When later?

Gina Later later.

Dictator Okay. First question.

Gina You had a chance to go into exile, and avoid prison. Why didn't you take it?

Dictator I refuse to dishonor myself. I am a war prisoner. I want to

talk to the International Red Cross. I want to be treated according to the Geneva Conventions.

Gina *(Blurting)* Why'd you do it?

Dictator Why'd I do what?

Gina Become a military dictator, a pimp, and a dope-pusher, all at the same time.

Dictator It seemed like the thing to do. I regret it now.

Gina Do you?

Dictator I wanted to have a good time. Who wants to suffer? You'd have to be a stupid idiot. I got a kick out of being the boss. Top dog. Nobody telling me what to do, pushing my face around. Until I got squashed by the Americans. I took a fall and they broke me into pieces. Now I try to put myself back together again.

Gina How?

Dictator I do sit-ups. I walk on walls. And...I write.

Gina You write?

Dictator Of course. It's the best thing. I'm isolated. I am walled in. My day is settled. I'm not hunted. They feed me. I watch television. I have time. But I feel caged. Yes, I'm edgy. And I'm horny as a monk. You feel safe with me?

Gina Sure.

Dictator Sure, the walls have eyes and ears. The walls *are* eyes and ears.

Gina They say it was the CIA.

Dictator They say.

Gina And if it wasn't the CIA, who was it?

Dictator Who did what?

Gina Will you tell?

Dictator No.

Gina I can help you.

Dictator How?

Gina I'll help you on the outside.

Dictator Nothing outside can help me. Only inside can help me. Big inside. Bigger than this room. Big interior.

Gina Were the Nicaraguans acting as middlemen for the coke?

Dictator I don't know no stinking Nicaraguans. *(Smiles)*

Gina Excuse me. This question was on the list of questions that we agreed upon.

Dictator I wanted to see somebody for a change. But I don't have any information for you.

Gina Should I leave?

Dictator Wait. I do have ideas, and I have time. I want to share. Are you getting this?

Gina *(Checking her tape recorder)* Yes. Go on.

Dictator I'm an army man, a military man. But I never read a book on it. Now I'm learning, for example, what it means, a soldier-politician. I went to school, it was kill the lefties and *campesinos* school, sponsored by the U.S. of A. I didn't think about it. Kick the other guy before he kicks you, that was my ideology. You want an army job in my country, you work for the gringos. *(Half to himself)* I myself am a coward by nature. I fear conflict. *(To GINA)* You want to hear how I got into this situation?

Gina Yes.

Dictator A difficult childhood. Bad company, misfortune. Lousy circumstances. You know? This is a setup.

He looks at walls—she looks at walls.

Gina I see.

Dictator They pay you?

Gina Absolutely.

Dictator That's good.

Gina Should we continue?

Dictator Continue. *(Pause)* I don't know why. People think, What is success? Must be pleasure.

Gina I'm not following you.

Dictator Coke and hundred-dollar bills and dirty movies. *(Pause)* Maybe I don't know anything else.

Gina Maybe I should go, then.

Dictator You want to talk about porno?

Gina Not really.

Dictator It's not a pretty picture of human life. I will become an author. I will write myself out of this situation. Writing will redeem me. *(Pause)* I wanted to make a lot of money. But poets and monks, they stay poor for life. *Indios*, they don't even have no money. I have ancestors, they were not like me and you. Noblemen.

Gina Really?

Dictator I lied. I'm a mongrel dog, I was born in an alley.

Gina And your parents?

Dictator Dogs, like me. I'm in a bad mood now. *(Pause)* My ancestry, it's in the language. Latin. *(Pause)* I should learn Latin. I'm a Roman. Never mind. It's all lies. I will write a story, describe my life, maybe lie a lot, get my ass outta here.

Gina Fine.

Dictator You don't think I can do it.

Gina No. Not alone.

Dictator I had a friend, he was from Texas. A colleague, an apprentice—ha!—I meant to say acquaintance! “Apprentice,” what? What do you think?

Gina Criminal?

Dictator Yes! Exactly! He had a criminal mind, in that...in that...

Gina In that?

Dictator He didn’t like himself. Big, Texas ego, but he didn’t like himself. You see? I can write, I can express.

Gina Texas.

Dictator Well, he gets caught at the border, he’s carrying heroin into the U.S.A., big white handsome ol’ boy, he’s smuggling heroin into the U.S. of A., they lock him in a federal slammer and they throw away the key. In prison, he writes a novel about his childhood, he impresses a few people in New York, and he gets out.

Gina Who was he?

Dictator No names. He never wrote another book. I read his book—recently—he used plain words. A book of disappointment and nostalgia, it got him out of jail, the sonofabitch.

Gina And yours, General?

Dictator A book of questioning and...rehabilitation. (*Smiles, looks at the walls*) But of course, nothing that shouldn’t be known will be revealed. Nothing about the gringos. No gringo connections. (*To the walls*) America, America, they have elections, they get what they deserve. Americans, I know. Tobacco, pills, whiskey, boredom, bad food, they don’t admit about life, themselves, nothing. Okay, I shouldn’t act big. I’m not sounding good. I never got any learning. But I’m intelligent. I got native intelligence. Someone like

me, he's got one choice, which is the army. I'm still a kid, these two gringo alcoholic whoremongers take me out to a joint—they want me to make a lot of money—I'm an idiot if I don't take the money—only I should spy on the officers and the wiseguys who might have political ideas or personal hatreds—gringo hate. These gringos, they were very hard men. They took me up to the top of a building. Two tall guys, they were much bigger than me. One was from Kansas, and the other from Missouri, but they had the same name cities—same name, two different cities. I came to know them well. They thought I was a piece of shit from beginning to end. And of themselves, they were criminal types, hard men, they're working for the government, things were simple for them. They were serene. They picked me up by the elbows and took me to the edge of the roof. One talked like a cowboy, the other like a banker, without feeling. I was trying to imagine, "Can I survive a fall from here?"

Gina And?

Dictator We came downstairs from the building, I was working for the U.S. of A. *(Smiles)*

BLACKOUT.

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4. Three months later.

Find DR. STEWART sitting with the DICTATOR.

Dictator I thought you were a psychiatrist.

Doctor I am.

Dictator Then let's talk about my problems.

Doctor We are talking about your problems.

Dictator I'm not well.

Doctor More exercise. I know it's hard, but use the machines.

Dictator I need an anguish pill.

Doctor I don't have any.

Dictator Don't forget my stomach and my bowels.

Doctor Exercise will help there, too.

Dictator They took away my money.

Doctor I can't do anything about that.

Dictator They pay you to come here?

Doctor Yes.

Dictator Why do they want me healthy if they're going kill me?

Doctor I don't know.

Dictator You could poison me.

Doctor I could.

Dictator You think you will?

Doctor No.

Dictator You think they'll kill me?

Doctor I don't know.

Dictator What then?

Doctor I don't know.

Dictator They say, "Go examine the Dictator," and you go?

Doctor Voluntarily.

Dictator Why?

Doctor No special reason.

Dictator You don't have reasons?

Doctor It's my life's training.

Dictator You're in charge of a hospital?

Doctor I run a V.A. hospital.

Dictator Where?

Doctor I can't tell you.

Dictator So the government knows you and trusts you.

Doctor Evidently.

Dictator And you trust them? (*No answer*) Maybe they hope I transmigrate away.

Doctor Transmigrate?

Dictator Yeah, like a worm into a butterfly. Why you laugh?

Doctor That's something else. You mean metamorphosis.

Dictator *Eso es*. So, you work with addicts?

Doctor Addicts and alcoholics.

Dictator All veterans.

Doctor All veterans. (*Long pause*)

Dictator So they picked you for the great scumbag dictator.

Doctor Are you bragging or complaining?

Dictator I am an addict, an alcoholic, and a veteran.

Doctor I won't give you drugs.

Dictator Why not?

Doctor You could replace me. The next guy might do it.

Dictator I need a pill for my brain, for rehabilitation.

Doctor They might like the idea.

Dictator Yes?

Doctor Sure. Tranquilize you, stupefy you.

Dictator I'm glad to see you. My guards, they're not allowed to talk to me. You have kids and a wife?

Doctor Yes. We've been married ten years and we have two daughters. And you?

Dictator Oh, no! Me and women—two weeks, two days, I get bored,

they want presents, this and that—you watch 'em eat, put on perfume, the romance is over. I tell 'em, “Get outta here, go home.” But I feel good for you. Five minutes ago, I thought everybody should be killed.

Doctor Why?

Dictator Give the rest of life a chance. Once, I might have had a shot at it.

Doctor We get men coming in all the time, tired of the pain. Most want to find a way to stay loaded, legally or illegally. Many talk about wanting to die. I tell them, addiction is a relative term. We have a methadone program, group meetings. I tell 'em, at bottom they have a choice. They can go up or they can go down, but they can't stay even. The chemistry won't work that way.

Dictator I learn. I study. I learn about brain chemistry, what a synapse is. I learned what I knew already from my life, that man is vile, and the history of man, if it is anywhere written for the truth, is a book of terror.

Doctor I won't debate you, but that means, “I am vile.” You see?

Dictator Yes. I'm writing my own book on it. I just put down what happened. It happened, I put it down. Straight English. But we can never understand each other in any language, because when I say “vile,” I have memories, I have experience, they don't belong to you, they don't belong to your class.

Doctor You read that in a book?

Dictator No, I never read that.

Doctor Because it does no good to identify. And vileness has nothing to do with class.

Dictator Maybe I didn't say it right.

Doctor Try again.

Dictator Is this therapy?

Doctor This is therapy.

Dictator There are boys down in Mexico, on the border, they choose a nice girl, a middle-class girl, they take her out to the desert and gang-rape her and kill her.

Doctor Yes?

Dictator They think nothing about it. They speak another language. It's not even Spanish. It's Spanish thug-talk. It's a language without morals. *(Pause)* All of a sudden I have anguish. *(Pause)* I am turning yellow from the lights in here. I'm staring at the mirror, I see an old man fading, I see his bones. *(Pause)* I can't tell any secrets—

Doctor —That's all right with me—

Dictator —Otherwise someone will kill me. One side or the other. I have to be good, right down the middle.

Doctor I think you're doing very well.

Dictator But I have thoughts, I have memories, I have knowledge.

Doctor By the way, are you aware that you squint?

Dictator I need glasses for reading.

Doctor Nothing to be ashamed of. I'll examine your eyesight. *(Setting up)* We've observed you squinting. I came prepared. You tell me what you see, I order a lens.

Dictator I had a vision. I saw my fate. When they caught me, the vicious dictator.

Doctor Don't be nervous. This won't hurt.

Dictator While I was being hunted down like an animal.

Doctor You had time for visions?

Dictator No, not then. It was being built, it was accumulating. I was going top speed. I had no time for even thoughts. Buildings

blown up, boom! Crash! People exploding, like plastic dummies, bnf! Bnf! The world was turned inside out, and it was flat! Running was like diving, walking was like falling. You have a name, doctor?

Doctor Stewart.

Dictator Sitting was like spinning, Dr. Stewart, on a ball.

Doctor Sit down.

Dictator I was sitting in the embassy with the Cardinal, when it came to me.

Doctor *(Turns on machine light)* I see.

Dictator The Cardinal kept talking about God, and I wondered what he meant. They marched me to the airport. I said goodbye to Flatland, so long Third World.

Doctor See the lines of letters?

Dictator Yeah.

Doctor Which line can't you read? Which one starts to get fuzzy?

Dictator Uh, the third one down.

Doctor Try reading the one above it.

Dictator Sure. X. Z. E. P. ...

Doctor Okay, now the fuzzy one.

Dictator Wait a minute.

Doctor Yes?

Dictator Wait a minute.

The upstage wall—a panel—is penetrated by the BEAM OF LIGHT. Visible facing us is a YOUNG MAN (THE GUARD) in a white shirt sitting at a console with headphones, a notepad, a computer. A long wait while the DICTATOR stares at him, dumbfounded.

Dictator You see that, Doctor?

Doctor What?

The YOUNG MAN looks up, presses a button—the panel goes dark.

Dictator The light, it went out. You didn't see that? Young man, white shirt, earphones, a computer?

Doctor No. Now I want you to look through these. We're going to take it one eye at a time... You tell me which image is the sharpest and clearest.

Dictator There was a dictator in the east, he tried to solve the problem. He killed a lot of people.

Doctor Pol Pot?

Dictator Him. He had an ideal. It was not a Christian ideal. He tried to slim it down, make a perfect society.

Doctor Some people believe in force, they think they can make a new world with it. Personally, I think it's sunspots. Causes mass psychosis on earth.

Dictator Nobody thinks they're wrong. I never met a person yet, thinks they're wrong about anything.

Doctor True.

Dictator They had a thing in Rome, they could do things, called Save the State. That was me, I did things, save the state.

Doctor Not really. You just did things.

Dictator Okay. Now I worry about it. This room is wired. They send me visitors so they can hear me say what things. *(Pause, looks at walls)* I'm watched. I take it as a challenge. I go from one wall to the other, maybe to the toilet. Come back, sit down, maybe do it again. I try not to forget what

happened. Wall to wall, to chair, to toilet. Time is killing me. I don't have a friend in the world. I'm feeling sorry for myself. I grew up, my brothers and sisters were begging in the streets and selling their bodies. This I want to write about, it comes out thick, nobody will understand me or agree with me. Now I want to walk through walls. Now I want to turn into another person. I'm insecure. I fuck with whores, I don't think nobody can love me. You grow up like me, you think the world is pissing on you. And they are! One day, we are swimming in the canal near my home, my shack. I knew a gringo soldier, his name was Chuck. Him, I thought he was a benefactor, he gives money, candy, big bully of a fellow, he gives protection, he is watching us swimming, boys and girls, I come out of the water, I sit on edge of canal, all happy, I feel warm water on my back, I'm thinking, "What is this? Warm water? Canal is cold!" Behind me, Chuck is laughing—I jump to my feet! Chuck is pissing on me! In front of my friends, my sisters, this gringo prick is pissing on me! I start to cry, to fight, to kill the bastard! He laughs, he throws me into the canal! I swore, one day I find revenge on this fat American. Still, today, I could rip him apart with an Uzi. *(Long pause, looks at walls)* Who knows where this man is now? In which hell? *(Pause)* When I was running, I ran to the Vatican Embassy. I ran for sanctuary. While I was there, waiting, resting, I saw my—

A KNOCKING, off.

Doctor It's time.

Dictator —Fate. Since then, I have mainly forgotten. Once in a while, I remember the idea. (*Knocking*)

BLACKOUT.

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5. Six months later.

Find the COLONEL facing the DICTATOR. More books, no TV. The DICTATOR is writing the whole time.

Dictator What do you want, Colonel?

Colonel I wanted you to know, I'm doing great now.

Dictator What do I care?

Colonel I went through hell. I suffered.

Dictator You expect sympathy from me?

Colonel Not at all.

Dictator I don't give a fuck about you. We're not pals.

Colonel I came out the other end, I came out okay. You keep your head on straight, all things are possible.

Dictator What things?

Colonel Success, a career.

Dictator Who sent you to me? Who sent you, that I should hear this bullshit enlightenment?

Colonel Destiny.

Dictator Come on, some government hack sent you. Nobody gets in here without permission. It's the President. The President sent you.

Colonel You can learn from my experience.
Dictator No, I can't. You got your picture in the paper, you sang on TV—a shitty song, but you sang it—you became a celebrity. Me, I'm a *desaparecido*.
Colonel Why a shitty song?
Dictator You got no morals. You got no virtue.
Colonel I had to tell them shit, but I kept my faith. And where do you get off, talking morals and virtue?
Dictator Fuck you, I didn't ask for you.
Colonel You're not behaving intelligently.
Dictator I know, the walls have eyes and ears. You don't like it, you can go home.
Colonel Bye, now.
Dictator Goodbye.

No one moves, DICTATOR keeps writing.

Colonel I know all about being on the spot, I was in everybody's living room.
Dictator I know. You're a celebrity banana-head.
Colonel I have my beliefs, I still have them.
Dictator You got a gun on you?
Colonel Of course not.
Dictator You killed a few people.
Colonel *(Cold)* I did America's business.
Dictator Let's say you caused a few thousand people to be killed, Colonel. How's that?
Colonel That's war. *(Pause)* Are your hands clean, you greasy shit?
Dictator That's not nice. *(Looking at the walls)* No, they're not clean. I been trying to wash 'em.

Colonel I've come to encourage you.

Dictator Horseshit. You're a party hack. Talk slow, please. You got a gun, or not?

Colonel No. Why bother to write that down?

Dictator Last will and testament. Last words of the dictator and the army hack. I saw you in the hearings, I broke the fucking television. Enough is enough.

Colonel You want a new one?

Dictator No, thank you. (*Reads from notes*) They send the consigliere—who is that? The actor? I can't think of his name—never mind, they send him to this old-timer, his days are numbered, because he's been singing, like you. The counselor says, "Remember the days of Rome, the days of our ancestors? In those days a man knew how to save his honor, his dignity." The old-timer gets the message, next time we see him, he's in his bath, he's cut his wrists. You should see the movie. On the other hand, you have nothing to worry about.

Colonel How's that?

Dictator You have neither honor nor dignity. (*Long pause*)

Colonel You piece of greaseball shit.

Dictator You wanna talk about your testimony? Yeah. It occurs to me—You're surprised? About my English?

Colonel When I knew you, all you could say was "money" and "more."

Dictator Right. But of course, I never knew you. Especially according to your own testimony. Speaking of which, the word "testimony," it means "by the balls." The old Romans, they would swear an oath, they swore by their balls, they held their balls and spoke, heh, heh. Of course, that

couldn't be the case with you, you got no balls. I'm watching the hearings, I'm thinking, "This is asshole talk, not balls talk." Fuck it. (*Sadly*) I got an education, I'd be a star now, I'd be in the firmament. So what do you have to say? Talk slow.

Colonel (*Sigh*) I'm doing all right. Legit. I'm in business, a citizen.

Dictator What business?

Colonel We sell bulletproof vests. It's a good product. My name, my image, it's honorable enough, it's respected enough, I'm an asset to the business. We sell to police departments only, strictly on the up-and-up. I had an ordeal, I did my time, but I got through. You're lucky, you don't know what it's like, trials and investigations. Goddamn congressmen grilling you, you think their hands are clean? Anyway, it doesn't matter, I kept to my belief, I kept the country first and foremost.

Dictator This is not my country.

Colonel You getting this? I stayed true, I betrayed no one who wasn't already set up for a fall by their own deeds. We got something to defend here, and it's called freedom. To do business. To live your life, be productive, write books, if that's what you want to do. I have an agent now for speaking engagements. People want to know what I have to say and they'll pay to hear it. There's a lot of patriotism out there, a real feeling for the country. I wouldn't put that down. I'm happy and grateful for the opportunities.

Dictator It's a terrible thing: the memory goes. You have to write everything down. Now I'm reminded, this guy, the canary, he couldn't get off the hook, they'll kill his relatives. I'm sad about that. The walls hear me. The walls watch and listen

and judge. They are watching you too, Colonel, as you know. They know what's happening. It's over. Me, I'm behind walls that see me, so I'm paranoid. Maybe you saw the same doctor as me, no? Yes, at Roman trials, for some they said, *Condemno*, others they said *Damno*. I don't know what the difference was supposed to be. That's where it all comes from, Colonel, the condemned and the damned. They call it the Roman Catholic Church, after all. I had a lawyer, he was a Romanist. It's my own religion, I don't put it down, believe me. I'm trying to restore myself also, morally speaking. I had a visit from a doctor, he was a very nice man. (*Looks at walls*)

Colonel As I was saying—

Dictator I had a country, they disappeared it.

Colonel They'll leave you alone here, to make a buck, take of your family.

Dictator I was born in a garbage can. I have no family.

Colonel We're not on the same page here.

Dictator I'm sorry. (*Looks at walls*) I read an article, Joe Stalin's wife, a beautiful woman, she killed herself. I couldn't get it out of my mind. I had to write about it. What was he thinking? He was thinking of the state? What kind of thoughts in his head? What kind of feelings, a beautiful wife who kills herself? How could he live with that? What was he saying to himself?

Silence. COLONEL looks at walls.

Colonel Well, I'm glad to hear you speak this way.

Dictator writes.

I've been all over, General, and there's no place like America, whatever the problems, the injustices, whatever.

Dictator I don't think the same anymore. I don't worry about justice. I saw *Birth of a Nation* eleven times. You?

Colonel Is that a movie?

Dictator Nevermind.

Colonel I'd just like to finish up here now, General.

Dictator Why? You're leaving? Good.

Colonel Charity and love, General. My final notes for you.
(COLONEL exits)

BLACKOUT.

*

6. Six months later.

Dictator is reading. Sound of woman's voice, RHEA's, off. Dictator jumps to his feet.

Dictator Who is that? Is that...?

Sound of door opening and closing. Enter RHEA.

My God, is it you?

Rhea Don't I get at least a hug?

DICTATOR hugs her stiffly.

You haven't changed.

Dictator Wrong. I have changed.

Rhea Still stiff as a board. You can't hug. You're like a cripple, one arm hangs limp and the other clutches. Your hips are welded to your back, your shoulders are like stones. And your insides are as stuck together as your outsides. What is it? It must be like glue—your heart is glued to your spine, your dick is glued to your liver. That's it.

Dictator What brings you, Rhea?

Rhea Relax, darling.

Dictator Don't call me "darling."

Rhea You wear glasses now?

Dictator Only to read.

Rhea You read now?

Dictator Why'd they send you, Rhea?

Rhea I'm on a mission of mercy.

Dictator You bring a knife? Poison?

Rhea You like to search me? You can look everywhere.

Dictator Who sent you?

Rhea Afraid to touch, darling?

Dictator Don't call me that.

Rhea You must be so horny, you have a hard-on now.

Dictator You came here to check me, see if it works any better?

Rhea Does it?

Dictator I don't know.

Rhea You must really be starving. How about a kiss?

Dictator I don't feel like it.

Rhea You've missed me. Say it.

Dictator Sure. Sure, I did. I've missed you.
Rhea You don't want to finger me now, see what I've got inside me? I might have a present for you.
Dictator No. You have to talk like a slut?

RHEA breaks into tears.

I'm sorry. (*Goes to her*) What happened to you?

She sobs convulsively.

What did they do to you?
Rhea You don't love me.
Dictator Stop that.
Rhea You don't. You never did.
Dictator Please. The walls have eyes and ears.
Rhea Tell me the truth.
Dictator I don't know what it is, love. I never learned.
Rhea You never learned and you never will. It's too late. You can't learn it.
Dictator Maybe I can.
Rhea I don't think so. It's not even a joke! (*Laughs hysterically*)
Dictator Calm down, Rhea.
Rhea It's true, I don't know you. You're not the same prick.
Dictator How could I be, Rhea?
Rhea You're a different prick.
Dictator Come on, you can talk to me.
Rhea Let's just fuck, so I can go home.
Dictator (*Tempted*) Let's talk first.
Rhea I can't believe this. You've turned into a monk.

Dictator Where is home, Rhea?
Rhea How do I look?
Dictator You look good. You look fine.
Rhea I'm in shape. I'm refreshed. I eat well, I exercise, I take the sun.
Dictator You're provided for? Who provides?
Rhea I'm not a burnt-out whore anymore. I'm in recovery. I'm interested in love now, before it's too late. This is something you could never understand.
Dictator You're in love?

She breaks into tears.

Please, Rhea.
Rhea Why so uptight?
Dictator I'm embarrassed.
Rhea Why? It's only us here.
Dictator Wrong. The walls watch everything.
Rhea This is awful. What could I have been dreaming?
Dictator I'm glad to see you.
Rhea Okay. How are you?
Dictator I'm having a bad day. It must be grey outside, and cold and wet.
Rhea It's a nice day. The sun is shining. They don't let you out?
Dictator Only within the walls.
Rhea You can't see the sky?
Dictator From here? I can't see the sky from here!
Rhea Don't get annoyed. When they walk you, can you see the sky?
Dictator Yeah! Above the walls is the sky! Twice a week, I go around with guards, I can see the sky!

Rhea You look pasty.

Dictator Tell me more, please. How are you kept?

Rhea I'm kept well. I'm not just a piece of ass.

Dictator By whom?

Rhea By short-haired white men. And some homeboys, *tambien*, from California.

Dictator The F.B.I.!

Rhea Polite, proper, stupid-looking guys. Well, they're not all so bad. People have to make a living. But they never talk to me.

Dictator Same here!

Rhea What is this freedom and democracy? What's it about?

Dictator You don't know?

Rhea Why should I know?

Dictator You're a citizen!

Rhea I was born in Cuba! I grew up in Miami!

Dictator That's no answer. You never paid attention, you never learned.

Rhea And you? You know? You, the Dictator?

Dictator Yeah, people started voting against me, I beat their brains out. (*Chuckles*)

Rhea It's true, here you can vote and make money, nobody kicks your head in.

Dictator (*Looking at the walls*) You still like Fidel?

Rhea (*Shrugging*) He's a nice man. But in his mind he hasn't been wrong in thirty years. How can you have a relationship with someone like that? And you? How do they keep you?

Dictator What you see here. (*Pause*) But I have everything I need.

Rhea Your English, it's wonderful.

Dictator Thank you. They want to erase me, Rhea, like a bad mark. But I'm intelligent. I'm erasing me myself.

Rhea Who are you now?

Dictator I'm a writer.

Rhea You're not.

Dictator I am.

Rhea Read me something.

Dictator Really?

Rhea Come on.

Dictator I don't know.

Rhea Don't be shy. (*Indicates walls*)

Dictator Well, maybe a little...

Rhea Please, darling.

Dictator is irritated.

Sorry.

Dictator Okay. (*Finds papers*) Uh, okay. I'll read. Tell you what, I'll just read the opening paragraph, okay, of a story?

Rhea Yes, please.

Dictator Okay. (*Trembles, clears his throat, reads*) "As winter approached, people left their homes and began to appear in the streets, out of their minds: ranting bitterly, wandering, shivering, they shook their fists at the cold blasts of wind, and howled. One dark-skinned woman, not yet old, but quite mad, wore a thin red sari and would surely freeze to death before long. There were white circles of cold and terror around her eyes that looked like they were painted on. 'Stay low, Buddy,' she told me, 'stay low.' Then she slunk away like something transforming downward, into an insect,

staying low. I was still a boy then, but I knew that it was useless to try to communicate with crazy persons who have been crushed by absolute certainty, and so I thanked her and watched her go. She was one of the many women who had come out into their neighborhoods insane that year.” *(Pause)*

Rhea Oh.

Dictator What’s the matter?

Rhea Nothing.

Dictator You didn’t like it.

Rhea I did like it.

Dictator Well, I can see plenty of things wrong with it now.

Rhea It was very good.

Dictator It’s just a first draft.

Rhea I’m amazed.

Dictator It’s good to hear it aloud, I could hear things. I’ll work on it.

Rhea I liked it. *(Pause, looks at walls, sighs, etc.)* You have more?

Dictator Oh, yes.

Rhea Read it.

Dictator No. No, it uh, needs too much work. Really, what did you think so far?

Rhea I told you.

Dictator No, honestly.

Rhea Well, there’s a thing about women, I guess.

Dictator Yeah.

Rhea And the kid?

Dictator Yeah, the kid has no legs. He looks down at some point, and he sees that he has no legs. And the next sentence is, the next paragraph, the narrator says, “One of the women, the most grotesque of all, was my mother.” And then it

goes on. *(Pause)* It needs work, I know. *(Reads)* “Emerged from” is better than “came out into,” don’t you think?

Rhea I can’t remember, actually.

Dictator Yeah, I think that’s better. *(Changes it)* Thank you.

Rhea I don’t know if I can handle this.

Dictator What?

Rhea I don’t know you. This man is sitting in front of me, we used to be intimate, now he’s a stranger.

Dictator We had some good times, eh?

Rhea Now he’s a writer, in English no less.

Dictator I always had a little English.

Rhea Yeah, but not like a professor.

Dictator What could be a good name for him?

Rhea You mean, for you?

Dictator Yeah, a new name. What they call a pseudonym. How about Caesar something? The Great Dictator!

Rhea What’s the last name?

Dictator That WAS his last name.

Rhea No, I mean you.

Dictator Let’s see, his mother’s name was Aurelia.

Rhea Nice name.

Dictator No, we need something gringo. Jones, or Carter. ...What are you thinking?

Rhea I’m feeling for my sex—I think I like you better now. Caesar. You used to be fun, but we were smashed all the time in those days.

Dictator You were a party girl, Rhea.

She bursts into tears.

I'm sorry. Please. I like you, too, Rhea.

Rhea I'm so ashamed of myself. *(Pause)* You were bad, Caesar, very bad.

Dictator *(Looks at the walls)* I was a victim of American imperialism! *(Whispers)* Yes, I was bad. I was no better than a dog. Nevermind. They had a job to do. We didn't know any better, truly. That was the life. Now I'm feeling my own sex. *(Looks at the walls)* No.

Rhea No.

Dictator No, of course not.

Rhea Maybe in another life.

Dictator There will be another life.

Rhea Are you a Christian now?

Dictator I mean in this life. *(Looks at walls)*

Rhea Do you know what you're saying?

Dictator When?

Rhea I mean in your writing. I mean about women. That's why you're so stiff and tense, Caesar. The women are crazy and the kid has no legs.

Dictator *(Distant)* We should stop apologizing, Rhea. We are always apologizing.

Rhea I don't think I could live with you now, Caesar. You're far away from me now. Before, we had pleasure in common. We had an attitude in common. *(Cries)*

Dictator Why do you weep so much?

Rhea I live in Paramus, New Jersey. *(Laughs)* I am watched, and I have nothing for the pain.

Dictator *(Shouting)* LET THIS WOMAN GO! DO YOU HEAR ME! LET HER GO!

Rhea Stop. It's alright.

He restrains himself. Long pause. NOISES off.

Rhea They're coming. *(She rises)*

SOUND of door opening.

Goodbye, Caesar.

Dictator I'll be seeing you...? *(She shrugs. They embrace)*

Rhea Good, Caesar. Good *abrazo*.

Dictator Think of a name, a last name...

Rhea I'll try.

Dictator Send me a message...!

RHEA exits. Fast DIM OUT.

*

7. Six months later.

Find the AMBASSADOR (GINA) standing with the DICTATOR.

Dictator You? An ambassador?

Gina Well, yes. I'm glad to see you again, as I'd hoped.

Dictator Why is that?

Gina You're not glad to see me?

Dictator I'm shocked. Last time, you were a journalist.

Gina I'm glad because of the progress that you've made here, despite the solitude.

Dictator Thank you.

Gina As is the State Department.

Dictator Save the state, save the state.

Gina I said I'd try to help, and I have.

Dictator I believe you. The Colonel was here awhile ago. Charity and love were his last words.

Gina We approve. We like the direction he's taken, too, of late. Can't have been easy for him.

Dictator He's still a gringo prick.

Gina Yes.

Dictator You agree with me?

Gina Why not?

Dictator The man thinks he's a patriot, doing the right thing.
(Pause) I'm trying to remember last time. What we talked about. I think it was something erotic.

Gina Not what I recall.

Dictator Oh, yes. Months, years, I thought about it.

Gina Really? What?

Dictator *(Looking at walls)* You. Legs up in the air. Heh, heh. What happens in solitary. Imagine, imagine.

Gina *(Blushing)* I see.

Dictator And you?

Gina What?

Dictator You think about it?

Gina No. By the way, I have a message for you. *(Hands him a piece of paper)*

Dictator *(Reads)* "Truscott." Oh!

Gina Truscott?

Dictator You don't know? That's my name! My new last name! From my girlfriend, Rhea, with love. Caesar Truscott! How do you like it?

Gina Just fine.

Dictator How is she?

Gina Just fine.

Dictator And you?

Gina Fine.

Dictator Tell me where she is.

Gina She's in Paramus.

Dictator Will I see her again?

Gina It's possible.

Dictator Where are we? Are we near an airport? I hear planes going by all the time, it drives me crazy.

Gina New name, new career. I have helped you, General. I want you to know that.

Dictator Why did you help me?

Gina Because I like your writing.

Dictator Thank you.

Gina Now we want to help you make a new past also, and talk a bit about the future.

Dictator What is that sound I hear, waaah, waaah, what is that?

Gina Those are car alarms, General. So, first of all, regarding the past.

Dictator You think I'm making up shit just to collaborate with the state, which is a Roman idea, incidentally. Save the state. What is it now? Three years? Four years?

Gina Three and a half years.

Dictator Astounding. Three and a half years of airplanes and automobile jungle shrieks.

Gina You know that Lignam Vitae Press has accepted your book and is interested in your welfare.

Dictator I got a wire. I was ecstatic.

Gina That was my doing.

Dictator Okay, gracias. *Lignam vitae*. Means “live rock.” Live Rock Press. This is one of my biggest regrets now, that I never learned Latin. Street kids don’t learn Latin. I’d like to read Cicero in Latin. Cicero. He is the father of us all.

Gina They’re very much in your corner, the publishers.

Dictator What does that mean? I haven’t got a dime.

Gina Morally speaking. Also, my entire staff read your book, and, aside from its literary values, appreciated its attitudes.

Dictator Attitudes?

Gina Yes, as towards drug-dealing, prostitution, and the like.

Dictator No drug-dealing illiterate morons playing footsie with the industrialized democracies.

Gina Correct.

Dictator I wouldn’t think of it.

Gina I’m glad.

Dictator However, the irony is not lost on me.

Gina Explain.

Dictator I refer to Laos, Thailand, Pakistan, Mexico, Panama, Colombia, etc., where drug-dealing warlords are playing with taxpayers’ money right and left. (*Looks at walls*) But forget I said it.

Gina I will try.

Dictator I’m not interested anyway.

Gina You aren’t?

Dictator Truly, no. I have more serious problems. Loneliness. Regrets.

Gina I understand.

Dictator You don’t understand.

Gina Fine. Let’s talk about the future.

Dictator I walk off the path and I'm shot down like a dog. That's the future. Some future. Where's my money at?

Gina (*Looking at walls*) Your money?

Dictator I made a lot of money. I did business with certain people at certain times through certain banks; they were *bona fide* U.S. banks, they were supposed to take care of my money.

Gina You don't have any money, and you're stupid to bring it up.

Dictator Do you drink?

Gina None of your business.

Dictator I'd love to have a drink. Married?

Stiff silence.

I'm an artist, I think about real things now. I don't drink, I don't get laid, I can't help myself, nothing.

Gina (*Patiently*) Okay. Caesar Truscott. Good name for an author. An *homo novum*, a new man.

Dictator I never went to college.

Gina A new man, worked hard to overcome adversity and achieved a decent life for himself through authorship. Good. But we're not going to sweeten the path, Mr. Truscott. It is an honor and a privilege to be an American citizen. An immigrant must learn to stand on his own two feet.

Dictator Does this mean I get to be a U.S. citizen?

Gina No. We're not all the way there yet, Mr. Truscott.

Dictator But...he is thinking of letting me out of here?

Gina We're not there yet, Mr. Truscott. We're not quite there. (*Rises*) You have three choices as we see it, Mr. Truscott. We could throw you into a federal pen—no doubt in solitude for the rest of your life—or we could shoot you.

Dictator That's two of YOUR choices.
Gina The third—which I support—is letting you out, as Caesar Truscott, author, another person, into the cruel world. But we're not there yet, Mr. Truscott, we're not there yet. (*Exits*)

DIM OUT.

*

8. Six months later.

DICTATOR in his cell. Enter the GUARD.

Dictator What is it now, Gerald?
Guard The President of the United States.
Dictator The who?
Guard The President of the United States.

Enter THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

President Good morning, Mr. Truscott.
Dictator Well, I'll be damned.

Pause. DICTATOR holds a chair for him and the PRESIDENT sits.

President How are ya, Truscott?
Dictator Fair to middling, sir.
President I wanted to have a conversation with you, man to man.
Dictator (*Looking at the walls*) Are we being taped?

President No. This is totally off the record. As a matter of fact, this never happened. I don't know you, Mr. Truscott. We've only just met. I used to know—ever so slightly, mind you—a double-dealing punk drug-pusher who made himself into a military dictator for a few months and thumbed his nose at the United States of America.

Dictator It was a lot of fun. I was on a roll.

President Not you, Mr. Truscott.

Dictator Call me Cesar, Mr. President.

President No.

Dictator Uh, this dictator you speak of, he used to be acquainted with a certain operative, now the guy is the most powerful man in the world.

President How things change. You've become a great example of what this country stands for, Truscott.

Dictator Well, I ought to have more company then. I ought to receive more often.

President Many are reading your book, Truscott.

Dictator How many, sir?

President I don't know, exactly.

Dictator They ought to send me a royalty report, for chrissakes.

President What is the book called?

Dictator *Wild Dog Sorrows*, sir.

President Oh, yes. *Wild Dog Sorrows*. I'd like to read it sometime.

Dictator You won't like it, sir, take my word for it.

President One false move and we'll eliminate you, Truscott, and that'll be that. You and your girlfriend and any trace of you. But I hope for your sake that such a course will be unnecessary.

Dictator It is my devout wish to become an American citizen, sir.

President Well, I don't see any reason why not. You won't have a record. Your name is clear. Put in your time, pay your taxes.

Dictator Is this the final test, then?

President It is. Of course, you'll then have to make it out there, on your own.

Dictator Cesar Truscott hits the street.

President You'll be a shining light, Truscott. And of course, I'll do what I have to do to defend our freedoms and our interests.

Dictator You know about Roman triumphs, sir?

President Very little, Truscott.

Dictator Career and ego, ego and career. Rode through town like gods, sir. I guess they had an ideal behind it all.

President Which was?

Dictator Rome, sir. They just called it ROME. It was a patrician idea, very old.

President Same with us, Truscott.

Dictator I see that now. I want to open a Latin deli someplace, Paramus maybe, and find a way to live on.

President Good plan, Truscott. But try not to waste your talent.

Dictator Thank you, sir.

President Do you know anything at all about drug cartels in bed with United States government operatives?

Dictator Nothing, sir.

President CIA selling crack cocaine in the City of Angels?

Dictator Not really, sir.

President Good, Truscott.

Dictator However, I do know that there are chemicals on this planet which affect the mind, in itself a neurochemical process, and that certain of these chemicals are illegal in the United States; that the demand for these chemicals in the United

States is so fierce that a huge transfer of wealth has occurred and is occurring to the supply-side section of the planet; that a large percentage of the American population, African-American and Hispanic for the most part, survives on black-market distribution of these chemicals; and that a goodly number of these young persons spend a large portion of their formative years in prison.

President It's an imperfect world, Truscott.

Dictator That it is, sir.

President On the other hand, who's to say?

Dictator Not me, sir.

President *(Stands)* I'm very glad to have had this opportunity to meet you.

Dictator Same here, Mr. President.

President And I do hope you'll have success with your fiction writing, Truscott.

Dictator Thank you, sir.

PRESIDENT exits. BLACKOUT.

*

9. One year later.

The upstage panel is removed, revealing a table, counter, etc.—a deli. A little LIGHT streams in from a small window above. Same ambient NOISE of planes and car alarms. The DICTATOR is wearing an apron, sweeping the floor and

whistling "Cucaracha." DR. STEWART enters and picks up a menu. DICTATOR stares at him a long time, carefully puts aside the broom.

Dictator Can I help you?
Doctor *(Reading menu)* Well, I don't know...
Dictator You don't recognize me?
Doctor No...I don't think so...
Dictator Cesar Truscotta.
Doctor No...
Dictator *Wild Dog Sorrows.*
Doctor Excuse me?
Dictator A novel. I'm afraid it's out of print.
Doctor No, I don't think I...
Dictator *(Takes off glasses)* Formerly obnoxious third world dictator?
Doctor Oh...
Dictator You examined his eyes.
Doctor Yes! *(Standing)* Yes, of course!

They shake hands.

How are you?
Dictator Please, sit.

DOCTOR sits, DICTATOR takes off apron.

Doctor My goodness! I'm astonished! What happened?
Dictator They let me out, as a new man. Cesar Truscott, author.
Doctor A novel!

Dictator Nevermind, it didn't sell. Now I'm Cesar Truscotta.
(*Calling*) Rhea! Rhea!

Enter RHEA.

Rhea, you remember the doctor I told you about, the psychiatrist who fixed my eyes, Doctor...?

Doctor Stewart.

Dictator Dr. Stewart, this is my wife, Rhea.

Doctor Well, how do you do?

Rhea I'm very pleased to meet you, Dr. Stewart. Excuse my appearance.

Doctor Not at all.

Rhea Please. I'll be right back. (*Hurries off*)

Dictator As you see, with my esteemed wife, I run a deli. And you? Still with the V.A.?

Doctor No, I moved on. Private practice.

Dictator You prescribe drugs?

Doctor For depression, sometimes, yes. Are you...? Do you...? My office is not far from here.

Dictator I could always use someone to talk to.

Doctor Please. Call me. And how's your writing coming along?

Re-enter RHEA, freshened, and dressed up.

Rhea He gave it up. He doesn't work, he doesn't try.

Dictator Once I had a vision. Not lately.

Rhea He hangs around here in the deli. He gossips with the customers.

Dictator I'm an attraction. Brings 'em in.

Rhea Would you like a coffee, Doctor? *Café con leche*, Cuban style, eh?

Doctor Yes, I would. Thank you.

Dictator You can't force it. If there's nothing there, there's nothing there, forget about it.

Rhea What a waste! You should write! (*Brings coffee*)

Dictator Write what, darling?

Rhea I don't know. Something. Something...uplifting.

Doctor (*To RHEA*) Thank you.

Rhea *De nada, Señor.*

Dictator (*To DR. STEWART*) When I, uh, got out, I tried. I talked to editors, publishers. "I wrote a novel under difficult—yet ideal—conditions, about...well...terror and despair and madness." (*Laughs*) "Well, the market right now, Mr. Truscotta... write something uplifting...and perhaps..." Finally, I said, "Listen, you have something to sell, I'll sell it, you have something to buy, I'll buy it." "We don't understand," they said. "Well," I said, "writing is not a fit profession for a man like me. I think I'll open a delicatessen." (*Laughs, looks at the walls*)

DIM OUT as RHEA joins them at the table.

Rhea It's a shame, if you ask me.

BLACKOUT.

The End