

ACT I

*In the darkness we hear a man struggling.*

LIGHTS UP on *ESTER*, a large man, standing *CENTER*. He wears long-underwear, top and bottom, and old, leather, shoes. He is wearing a vest that is too small. He struggles to button it, almost gets it, fails. He tries again, almost gets it, and fails. At some point, he hangs the vest up, walks away and tries a few actor warm up exercises in a pretentious, over pronouncing, voice, “Red Leather, Yellow Leather...”, “The Big Black Bear...”, sings a few voice warm up scales, etc.

*He looks at the vest. He puts the vest back on, tries again, fails. He takes the vest off to check that it is the right one. He begins again and fails. He takes the vest off, perplexed, gives it a good shake, tries again and fails. This continues.*

~~*VAL enters, dressed similar to ESTER, but wearing an old pair of pants, a bowler hat with no vest. He carries two “to-go” coffee cups and a paper bag full of sugar packets and creams. VAL is more slender to ESTER’s largeness and has a gentle naiveté about his face. He sits in the small chair, setting down the coffee cups and pouring out the bag of sugars and creams onto the table. ESTER, moving away, hiding his struggle with his vest- coincides his actions with VAL’s. VAL picks up a sugar packet. He tries to tear open the packet. He almost gets it, fails. He tries again, almost gets it, and fails. This continues. Finally, disgusted, VAL tosses the sugar packet away.*~~

VAL

Nothing to /be-

ESTER

(holding up a hand)

Shush. Not now.

*While VAL seems to be looking away, ESTER grabs both coffee cups, tests which one is more full and sets the other one back down.*

ESTER

So, where does the coffee come from today?

VAL

A coffee shop.

ESTER

Which one?

VAL

The AM/PM.

ESTER

Ugh. A gas station.

VAL

If you say so.

ESTER

Did you give them a picture?

VAL

A picture?

ESTER

Yes, a picture.

VAL

Why would I give them a picture?

*ESTER stops buttoning the vest, crosses to VAL.*

ESTER

Trick of the trade my lad. You offer them a picture to hang on the wall and in return they offer you free coffee.

VAL

Why would they do that?

ESTER

Because if people know that this is where true artists go to get coffee, it adds some prestige to said establishment.

Gas station. VAL

If you say so. ESTER

You've done this? VAL

But of course! I haven't paid for coffee or dry cleaning in over ten years! ESTER

But don't you have to pay for the pictures? VAL

Mind your own business! ESTER

Well, I did not give them a picture. VAL

Then, how did you get the coffee? ESTER

I didn't get the coffee. VAL

Then, how did *we* get the coffee? ESTER

Aunt Mary got us the coffee! VAL

Aunt Mary. ESTER

Aunt Mary! VAL

Good God, it's like she comes every night! ESTER

She does come every night. Just in case we perform. She says I'm going to be a famous actor one day! VAL

ESTER

And you believe her?

VAL

Do you think she's lying?

ESTER

You don't have to be a liar to be crazy.

VAL

Aunt Mary is not crazy. She's just sick is all. And seeing me go on will make her feel better.

ESTER

But we *never* go on. We're the understudies. We're waiting.

VAL

Right. Well, so is Aunt Mary. Waiting for us to go on. Speaking of which, any word?

ESTER

About what?

VAL

Us.

ESTER

Us?

VAL

From him?

ESTER

Him, who?

VAL

Him, the Director.

ESTER

Oh, him! No. Nothing.

VAL

So it is not our night.

*VAL returns to tasting and mixing his coffee.*