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SF PERUSALS

The Ritz

A New Comedy

by Terrence McNally

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
New York Hollywood London Toronto
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For Adela Holzer

THE RITZ was originally performed at the Yale Repertory Theatre. It opened January 20, 1975, at the Longacre Theatre in New York City. It was produced by Adela Holzer. It was directed by Robert Drivas. Scenery and costumes designed by Michael H. Yeargan and Lawrence King. Lighting designed by Martin Aronstein. The production stage manager was Larry Forde. The assistants to the director were Tony DeSantis and Gary Keeper.

THE CAST
(*In Order of Appearance*)

ABE ..... *George Dzundza*
CLAUDE PERKINS ..... *Paul B. Price*
GAETANO PROCLO ..... *Jack Weston*
CHRIS ..... *F. Murray Abraham*
GOOGIE GOMEZ ..... *Rita Moreno*
MAURINE ..... *Hortensia Colorado*
MICHAEL BRICK..... *Stephen Collins*
TIGER ..... *John Everson*
DUFF ..... *Christopher J. Brown*
CARMINE VESPUCCI ..... *Jerry Stiller*
VIVIAN PROCLO ..... *Ruth Jaroslow*

THE PATRONS

PIANIST ..... *Ron Abel*
POLICEMAN ..... *Bruce Bauer*
CRISCO ..... *Richard Boccelli*
SHELDON FARENTHOLD ..... *Tony deSantis*
PATRON IN CHAPS ..... *John Remme*
PATRON FROM SHERIDAN SQUARE ..... *Steve Scott*

The time of the play is now.

The place of the play is a men's bathhouse in New York City.

The people of the play are:

GAETANO PROCLO: He is in his early 40's, balding and stout.

CHRIS: He is in his early 30's with a big, open face and features.

MICHAEL BRICK: He is in his mid-20's, very rugged and very handsome.

CARMINE VESPUCCI: He is in his 40's, balding and stout.

CLAUDE PERKINS: He is in his 40's and quite lean.

TIGER: He is in his early 20's, wiry and has lots of curly hair.

DUFF: He is in his early 20's, wiry and has lots of curly hair. In fact, he looks a lot like Tiger.

ABE: He is in his 50's and stocky.

THE PATRONS: They come in all sizes, shapes and ages.

GOOGIE GOMEZ: She is in her 30's and has a sensational figure.

VIVIAN PROCLO: She is in her early 40's and stout.

MAURINE: She's in her mid-40's and very thin.

The Ritz

ACT ONE

The house curtain is in, the house lights are on and the overture from Rossini's "TANCREDI" is playing as the audience comes in. The house goes black. In the darkness we hear the sounds of the Rosary being recited. Occasionally a stifled sob over-rides the steady incantation of the prayers.

PRIESTS AND RELATIVES. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(*Underneath all this, the funeral march from Verdi's "NABUCCO" is heard. The lights have revealed* OLD MAN VESPUCCI'S *death bed.* RELATIVES *and* FAMILY *are grouped around him, all in silhouette. Kneeling to his right is* CARMINE. *Kneeling to his left is* VIVIAN. *They are weeping profusely.*)

CARMINE. Poppa . . . !
VIVIAN. Poppa . . . !

(*The death rattles are beginning.* OLD MAN VESPUCCI *feebly summons the others to draw close for his final words.*)

AUNT VERA. *Aspetta! Aspetta!*
COUSIN HORTENSIA. Sshh! Speak to us, Poppa!
AUNT VERA. Give us your blessing, Poppa!
COUSIN HORTENSIA. One final word, Poppa!
AUNT VERA. *Un poccita parole,* Poppa!
VIVIAN. Give us your blessing, Poppa!

OLD MAN VESPUCCI. Vivian.

VIVIAN. Yes, Poppa?

OLD MAN VESPUCCI. *Vieni qua.*

VIVIAN. Yes, Poppa.

OLD MAN VESPUCCI. Get Proclo.

VIVIAN. Get Proclo, Poppa? Yes, Poppa. He's coming. The plane was late from Cleveland. He'll be here for your blessing. (OLD MAN VESPUCCI *dismisses his daughter with a hand gesture.*)

OLD MAN VESPUCCI. Carmine, my son.

CARMINE. Yes, Poppa. I'm here, Poppa.

OLD MAN VESPUCCI. Get Proclo.

CARMINE. Get Proclo, Poppa?

OLD MAN VESPUCCI. Get Proclo. *Qui brute. Qui boce, Tha botania!* Kill him! Kill him! Kill him! Kill the son of a bitch!

VIVIAN. Proclo is my husband, Poppa!

OLD MAN VESPUCCI. (*Finally mustering all the strength he can, he raises himself up.*) GET PROCLO!!! (*He falls back dead.*)

RELATIVES. (*Simultaneously.*) Aaaaaiiiieeeee!

AUNT VERA. *Poppa è morto!*

PRIEST. *In nomine patris et filii et spiritu sancti requiescat in . . .*

(*The lights fade on the death bed. At the same time, the sound of a pounding drum is heard. It leads directly into a lively rock orchestral. The lights come up, revealing activity inside The Ritz behind scrims. The main thing we see are doors. Doors and doors and doors. Each door has a number. Outside all these doors are corridors. Lots and lots of corridors. Filling these corridors are Men. Lots and lots of men. They are prowling the corridors. One of the most important aspects of the production is this sense of men endlessly prowling the corridors outside the numbered doors. The same People will pass up and down the same*

corridors and stairways over and over again. After a while, you'll start to think some of them are on a treadmill. Most of them are dressed exactly alike; i.e., they are wearing bathrobes. A few men wear towels around their waists. Every so often we see someone in bikini underwear or an additional accoutrement, such as boots or a vest. The number of men, referred to from now on as the PATRONS, *can vary, but EACH ACTOR must be encouraged to develop a specific characterization. Even though they seldom speak, these various* PATRONS *must become* specific, intetgral *members of the cast. We also see* TIGER *and* DUFF, *two attendants. They are sweeping up and making beds. Over the music, we hear announcements.*)

ABE. (*Over the loudspeaker.*) 217 coming up, Duff! . . .Tiger, they're out of soap in the showers! On the double! And check the linens and robes on the third floor. . . . Just a reminder that every Monday and Thursday is Buddy Night at the Ritz. So bring a friend. Two entrances for the price of one. (*The lights dim, and the entrance area is flown in. The inner door and* ABE's *booth are moved on from left and right. The center scrim flies as the lights come up bright, and we are in the admissions area of The Ritz. The various* PATRONS *will pay, check their valuables, receive a room key and then be buzzed through the inner door adjacent to the booth.* ONE PATRON *has just finished checking in. As he is buzzed through the door, we see* ABE *announce his room number over a loudspeaker.*) 274! That's 274 coming up, Duff! (*The* PATRON *disappears. The phone on* ABE's *desk rings, and he answers.*) Hello, the Ritz. No, we don't take reservations! (*He hangs up, as* ANOTHER PATRON enters.)

PATRON. Good evening.

ABE. Yeah?

PATRON. Nasty night.

ABE. Is it?

PATRON. I'm one big puddle.

ABE. Well watch where you're dripping. I just had that floor mopped.

PATRON. I'd like a room, please.

ABE. That's ten bucks. Sign the registration book and check in your valuables.

(*The* PATRON *begins the check-in procedure.* CLAUDE PERKINS *has entered from the outside. He is wearing a raincoat over rather ordinary clothes. He carries a bag from Zabar's Delicatessen and has a Valet Pack slung over one shoulder. He gets in line behind the* PATRON.)

PATRON. You're dripping.

CLAUDE. What?

PATRON. I said, you're dripping.

CLAUDE. Of course I'm dripping. It's pouring out there.

PATRON. Well try not to. They don't like you dripping here. (*He starts for the door.*) See you. (*He is buzzed through.*)

CLAUDE. I hope not.

ABE. (*Over the loudspeaker.*) 376! That's room 376! Coming up, Duff!

CLAUDE. That's a good floor for that one. Nobody goes up there.

ABE. Well look who's back. Hello, stranger.

CLAUDE. Hello, Abe.

ABE. I thought you'd sworn off this place.

CLAUDE. I thought I had, too.

ABE. You got homesick for us, right?

CLAUDE. I didn't have much choice. I don't speak Spanish, so the Continental is out. The Club Baths are just too far downtown, I'm boycotting the Beacon, Man's Country's had it and I've been barred from the Everard.

ABE. You've been barred from the Everard?

CLAUDE. They'll regret it.

ABE. Nobody gets barred from the Everard. How'd you manage that?

CLAUDE. There was this man there.

ABE. A fat man, right?

CLAUDE. Fat? He was the magic mountain. He drove me into one of my frenzies. I went berserk and I kicked his door in. So they threw me out and told me never to come back. I was willing to pay for it. I just wanted to talk to him.

ABE. Pick on somebody your own size, why don't you, Claude?

CLAUDE. I wouldn't like that. How much do you weigh?

ABE. Forget it.

CLAUDE. Are you up to 200 yet?

ABE. Forget it!

CLAUDE. When you get up to 200 come and knock on my door.

ABE. Forget it!

CLAUDE. Couldn't we just install a weigh-in station here?

ABE. I said forget it!! You want to check that?

CLAUDE. It's my costume for the talent show. (*He is heading for the door, still carrying the Valet Pack and Zabar's shopping bag.*) It's good to be back, Abe. I'm feeling strangely optimistic this evening.

ABE. Just don't kick any doors in.

CLAUDE. I hope I don't have to. (CLAUDE *is buzzed through the door.*)

ABE. 205! Coming up! That's 205!

(GAETANO PROCLO *comes dashing in. He is carrying a suitcase and a big box of Panettone, the Italian bakery specialty. He is wearing a wet raincoat, a cheap wig, a big bushy moustache and dark glasses. He goes directly to* ABE.)

PROCLO. Can you cash a check for me? It's on Ohio State National.

ABE. What do I look like? A teller in a bank?

PROCLO. You don't understand. I've got a cab waiting. I'll be right back. That's why I got into the cab in the first place, to go somewhere, and it's to here I've come. (*Sounds of a horn blowing.*) You hear that? That's him!

ABE. You got a traveler's check?

PROCLO. No.

ABE. Travelers are supposed to have traveler's checks.

PROCLO. Well this traveler doesn't. We left Cleveland in a hurry. Traveler's checks are for people who plan! (*More honking.*) There he goes again!

ABE. I'm sorry.

PROCLO. Look, I've got all the identification in the world. Driver's license, Social Security, Blue Cross, voter registration, Rotary Club . . .What about my business card? "Proclo Sanitation Services, Gaetano Proclo, President." That's me.

ABE. You got a credit card?

PROCLO. I don't want credit, I want cash!

ABE. N—o, buddy.

PROCLO. Oh come on! Do I look like someone who would try to pass a bad check? (*A realization.*) Why of course I do! (*He takes off his dark glasses.*) There! Now can you see me? (*More honking.*) Oh all right! (*He removes his moustache.*) Now are you satisfied?

ABE. I don't make the rules here.

PROCLO. Wait! Wait! (*He takes off his wig.*) Everything else is real.

ABE. I'd like to help you out, mac, but—

PROCLO. Then do it! Do it!

ABE. Hey, calm down.

PROCLO. The only thing that's gonna calm me down is *you* cashing my check. My brother-in-law is a maniac and he's going to kill me tonight. If you don't

let me in there I'm going to be a dead person. Please, mister, you are making a grown man cry. I'm begging you. It's a matter of life and death! (*More honking.*)

ABE. I shouldn't really be doing this but . . .

PROCLO. You are a good man . . .

ABE. Abe.

PROCLO. Abe. I'm gonna have a novena said for you when I get back to Cleveland. What's your last name? Abe what?

ABE. Lefkowitz.

PROCLO. I'm *still* gonna have that novena said for you!

(*More honking.* CHRIS *has entered from the outside. He wears jeans, a blue nylon windbreaker, and a bright purple shirt. He carries an overnight bag. Also, he is wearing a policeman's whistle and a "popper" holder around his neck.*)

CHRIS. Does anybody have a cab waiting?

PROCLO. What?

CHRIS. Is that your cab out there?

PROCLO. Oh yes, yes it is!

CHRIS. Well you've also got one very pissed off driver.

PROCLO. (*To* ABE.) Can you cash this for me now? (*To* CHRIS.) How pissed off is he?

CHRIS. On a ten scale? Ten. (*More honking.*)

PROCLO. Christ! (PROCLO *is fumbling with the money and heading for the door.*) Keep an eye on those for me, will you?

CHRIS. Sure thing. (PROCLO *hurries out.* CHRIS *looks at the suitcase and the Panettone.*) Planning a big night of it, honey? (*To* ABE.) I had a friend who tried moving into the baths.

ABE. What happened?

CHRIS. He died from a lack of sunshine. He died happy and blind, but he still died.

ABE. We missed you last week.

CHRIS. How do you think your customers felt? I'm a legend in my own lifetime. (*Yelling into* ABE's *microphone.*) Try to hold out, men! Help is on the way!

ABE. Hold your horses, Chris.

CHRIS. That's all I've been holding all week.

ABE. You wanna sign in?

CHRIS. (*While he writes.*) How's that gorgeous son of yours?

ABE. You're too late. He's getting married.

CHRIS. That's terrific. Give him my love, will you?

ABE. Sure thing, Chris.

CHRIS. Does he need anyone to practice with?

ABE. He's been practicing too much. That's why he has to get married.

CHRIS. Compared to me, Abe, she'd have to be an amateur. (*He returns the registration book.*)

ABE. Ronald Reagan! Aw, c'mon, Chris!

CHRIS. You know, he used to be lovers with John Wayne.

ABE. Sure he was.

CHRIS. Right after he broke up with Xavier Cugat.

ABE. People like you think the whole world's queer.

CHRIS. It's lucky for people like you it is.

PROCLO. (*He comes rushing back in.*) He can't change a ten! Do you believe it? New York City, one of the great cities of the world, and this driver I have can't change a ten!

CHRIS. They still don't take anything over a five.

PROCLO. In Cleveland even a paper boy can change a ten!

CHRIS. Did I ever have you?

PROCLO. What?

CHRIS. I've got a rotten memory that way. You never used to live in Rego Park?

PROCLO. No!

CHRIS. 'Cause you look like someone I knew once who was from Rego Park.

PROCLO. I'm afraid not.

CHRIS. He was a large man like you and he was in ladies' shoes, I remember.

PROCLO. Well I'm from Cleveland and I'm in refuse.

CHRIS. I guess not then. Sorry.

PROCLO. That's perfectly all right. (*He hurries back out.*)

CHRIS. A gay garbageman!

ABE. You never can tell.

CHRIS. That's true. I mean, look at me. If you just saw me walking down the street, you'd think I was a queen. (CHRIS *blows his whistle as he is buzzed through the door.*) All right, men! This is a raid! Up against the wall for a short-arm inspection!

ABE. 240! Two-four-oh! She's here, boys!

(*A young man has entered from outside. His name is* MICHAEL BRICK. *He is neatly dressed in a trench coat and hat. He looks like a classic detective. He steps up to the admissions booth.*)

MICHAEL. I'd like a room please. (*The first time we hear* MICHAEL'S *voice we are in for a shock. It is a high, boy soprano-ish treble. A timbre totally incongruous with his rugged physique.*) One of your private rooms. How much is that?

ABE. You want what?

MICHAEL. A room, please. I was told you have private rooms.

ABE. Yeah, we got rooms.

MICHAEL. Then I'd like one, sir. How much is that?

ABE. How long?

MICHAEL. Is what, sir?

ABE. How long do you want it for?

MICHAEL. Three or four hours should be sufficient for my purposes.

ABE. I don't care what your purposes are: twelve's our minimum.

MICHAEL. All right, twelve then, sir.

ABE. That's ten bucks. Sign in and I'll take your valuables.

MICHAEL. Tell me something. Has a balding, middle-aged fat man come in here recently?

ABE. I don't believe what just came in here recently.

MICHAEL. Think hard. I'll repeat his description. A balding, middle-aged fat man.

ABE. We got all kinds inside. Fat, thin, short, tall, young, old. I can't keep track.

MICHAEL. Well I guess I'll just have to go in and see for myself, sir.

ABE. I guess you will. You're not a cop, are you?

MICHAEL. I'm a detective, sir. Michael Brick. The Greybar Agency. Our client wants the goods on him and I'm just the man to get them. I've never failed a client yet. What do I do now?

ABE. Through there and up the stairs. Someone'll show you your room.

MICHAEL. Thank you, sir.

ABE. Let me give you a little tip, Brick. Stay out of the steam room.

MICHAEL. Why, sir?

ABE. It gets pretty wild in there.

MICHAEL. Oh, I can take it, sir. In my line of work I get to do a lot of wild things. This is my first seduction job. Wish me luck.

ABE. With that voice, you'll need it. (MICHAEL *is buzzed through the door and is gone.*) 101 coming up! That's one-oh-one! Oh boy!

(GOOGIE GOMEZ *comes into the admissions area, protecting herself from the rain with a wet copy of* Variety. *She is carrying a wig box and wardrobe bag.*)

GOOGIE. No rain, he tells me! No rain, he says! No rain! That fucking Tex Antoine! That little *maricon!*

I'd like to pull his little beard off! One spot on this dress and I'm finished! The biggest night of my life and it's pissing dogs and cats.

PROCLO. (*Who has entered behind* GOOGIE.) That's cats and dogs. (GOOGIE *has been so busy worrying about rain spots on her dress she really hasn't noticed* PROCLO *yet. When she does, there is a marked change in her behavior and vocabulary.*)

GOOGIE. Joe Papp! Hello, Mr. Papp. It's a real pleasure to meet you. I seen all your shows. Uptown, downtown, in the park. They're all fabulous. *Fabulosa!* And I just know, in my heart of hearts, that after you see my show tonight you're going to want to give me a chance at one of your wonderful theatres. Uptown, downtown, in the park. I'll even work the mobile theatre. Thank you for coming, Mr. Papp. Excuse me, I got a little laryngitis. But the show must go on, si?

PROCLO. My name isn't Papp.

GOOGIE. You're not Joe Papp?

PROCLO. I'm sorry.

GOOGIE. But you are a producer?

PROCLO. No.

GOOGIE. Are you sure?

PROCLO. Yes.

GOOGIE. That's okay. I heard there was gonna be a big producer around tonight and I wasn't taking any chances. You never know. It's hard for me to speak English good like that. (*A new outburst.*) Aaaaiiieee! My God, not the hairs! *Cono!* (*Her hands are hovering in the vicinity of her head.*) Okay. Go ahead and say it. It's okay. I can take it. Tell me I look like shit.

PROCLO. Why would I want to say a thing like that to such an attractive young lady?

GOOGIE. You boys really know how to cheer a girl up when she's dumps in the down. (*She gives* PROCLO *a kiss on the cheek.*) My boyfriend Hector see me do that: *ay! cuidado!* He hates you *maricones,* that Hector! He's a ball breaker with me, too, mister. You

know why you're not a producer. You're too nice to be a producer. But I'm gonna show them all, mister, and tonight's the night I'm gonna do it. (GOOGIE *is moving towards the door.*) One day you gonna see the name Googie Gomez in lights and you gonna say to yourself "Was that *her?*" And you gonna answer yourself "That was her!" But you know something, mister? I was *always* her. Just nobody knows it. *Yo soy Googie Gomez, estrellita del futuro!* (GOOGIE *is buzzed through the door and is gone.*)

PROCLO. Who the hell was that?

ABE. Googie.

PROCLO. I thought this was a bathhouse.

ABE. It is.

PROCLO. A *male* bathhouse!

ABE. It is.

PROCLO. Then what's she doing in there?

ABE. Googie sings in The Pits.

PROCLO. The pits? What pits?

ABE. The nightclub.

PROCLO. You've got a nightclub in there?

ABE. We've got a nightclub, movies, TV, swimming pool, steam room, sauna, massage table, discotheque, bridge, amateur night and free blood tests every Wednesday. (PROCLO *turns at the sound of* MAURINE *entering behind him from outside. She is wearing a duffel coat with the hood up, pants and tall rubber rain boots. No chic dresser,* MAURINE. *She seems deep in concentration and takes no notice of* PROCLO *as she moves towards the door.*) How'd it go today, Mo? (MAURINE *just shrugs. She is buzzed through the door and is gone.*)

PROCLO. I don't even want to *think* what she does.

ABE. Mo's just our accountant.

PROCLO. I asked that cab driver to bring me to the last place in the world anybody would think of looking for me.

ABE. You found it.

PROCLO. Except everybody in the world is already in there. I need calm, privacy, safety tonight.

ABE. So stay in your room and keep your door locked.

PROCLO. Don't worry. I will. How much is that?

ABE. Ten dollars.

PROCLO. (*He looks at the registration book.*) Ronald Reagan!

ABE. You can write John Doe for all I care. Just so long as we get some kind of a name down there.

PROCLO. Any name at all? Oh, Abe, I'm gonna speak to the Pope about getting you canonized! (*Reads what he's written.*) "Carmine Vespucci, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn."

ABE. Who's that?

PROCLO. My maniac brother-in-law who was going to kill me tonight!

ABE. What did you do to him?

PROCLO. I got born and I married his sister.

ABE. That's all?

PROCLO. Just my whole life. (PROCLO *gathers his suitcase and Panettone, ready to enter now.*)

ABE. Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?

PROCLO. The man who just saved my life can ask me anything.

ABE. You ever been in a place like this?

PROCLO. Oh sure. We got a Jack LaLanne's in Cleveland. (*The door is buzzed and* PROCLO *goes through.*)

ABE. 196! That's one-nine-six coming up, Duff. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!

(*While* ABE *is speaking, the lights will fade on the admissions area and another rock orchestral comes up. The admissions area and the scrims are flown. Other lights are coming up and we are in the interior of The Ritz. On the lower level we see* TIGER *sweeping up.* CHRIS *enters behind him.*)

TIGER. Hey, Chris.

CHRIS. Hi, Tiger.

TIGER. What took you so long? They called your number ten minutes ago.

CHRIS. I was in the boutique.

TIGER. What'd you buy?

CHRIS. A red light bulb for my room and this month's VIVA.

TIGER. You don't need a red light bulb.

CHRIS. And I hope I don't need this month's VIVA. Much action tonight?

TIGER. With you here I'm sure there will be.

CHRIS. Slow, hunh?

TIGER. Real dead, so far.

CHRIS. Don't worry, honey, I'll shake this place up good.

TIGER. If anybody can it's you.

CHRIS. The thing that no one understands about me is that sex is just my way of saying hello.

TIGER. Yeah, but you want to say hello to everybody you meet.

CHRIS. Don't you?

TIGER. I work here!

CHRIS. I wish I did. (*They go.* CLAUDE PERKINS *has come up to the wandering and lost* PROCLO. *The moment* CLAUDE *lays eyes on him, we hear an immediately recognizable love theme.*)

CLAUDE. Hello, there.

PROCLO. Hello.

CLAUDE. What seems to be the problem?

PROCLO. I can't seem to find my room.

CLAUDE. Well you just come with me.

PROCLO. Why thank you. That's very kind of you.

(*They leave together as the music surges. On the upper level we see* DUFF. CHRIS *comes up the stairs and pokes his head into the steam room.*)

CHRIS. Guess who!

DUFF. Hey, Chris.

CHRIS. Hi, Duffie.

DUFF. 240 again?

CHRIS. And it better be clean! Last time they were having a crab race on the sheets.

DUFF. I did it myself, first thing when I came on. (*He opens the door with* CHRIS' *key.*)

CHRIS. Home sweet home! If these walls could talk . . . !

DUFF. They don't have to.

CHRIS. I've spent some of the happiest hours of my life in this room.

DUFF. I know. We've all heard you.

CHRIS. When are we gonna get together, you cute little hump?

DUFF. I don't know. Ask Tiger.

CHRIS. That means "forget it". Out! Out! I've got a busy night ahead of me, I hope. (*Calling out loudly.*) There will be an orgy beginning in room 240 in exactly four minutes! That's an orgy in room 240 in exactly four minutes! (*He goes into his room and closes the door. We have been watching* CLAUDE *lead* PROCLO *to his—that is,* CLAUDE'*s—room.* CLAUDE *has followed* PROCLO *in and has closed the door.*)

PROCLO. Are you sure this is 196? I think this is someone else's room. Look, see the clothes?

CLAUDE. You'll never guess what I made for dinner tonight, so I'm just going to have to tell you.

PROCLO. I beg your pardon?

CLAUDE. A nice rich ground pork meat loaf with a mozzarella cheese center, gobs of mashed potatoes swimming in gravy, carrots floating in butter and for a salad, avocado chunks smothered in Roquefort dressing. Could you just die?

PROCLO. I could just . . . ! I don't know what I could just!

CLAUDE. And then: Dutch Chocolate layer cake with two big scoops of Baskin-Robbins mocha walnut ice cream and a fudge malted.

PROCLO. It sounds delicious.

CLAUDE. You could've been there.

PROCLO. I was in Brooklyn watching Bowling For Dollars. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll—

CLAUDE. Wait! (*He is rummaging in his shopping bag.*) You want a bagel with lox and cream cheese?

PROCLO. No, thank you. I've eaten.

CLAUDE. An eclair? Some homemade brownies? I know! A corned beef on rye with a dill pickle!

PROCLO. Really, I'm not hungry.

CLAUDE. (*He is blocking his way.*) How much do you weigh?

PROCLO. What?

CLAUDE. Your weight! 210? 220?

PROCLO. 226. (CLAUDE *has started to undulate, dance almost, and move towards* PROCLO.)

CLAUDE. (*Singing in a low, sexy growl.*)

JELLY ROLL BABY
YOU'RE MY JELLY ROLL MAN . . .

PROCLO. I think there is some confusion here.

CLAUDE.

JELLY ROLL CUPCAKE
I'M YOUR JELLY ROLL FAN . . .

PROCLO. In fact, I *know* there is some confusion going on in here.

CLAUDE.

YOU GOT THE ROLL
AND I GOT THE SOUL
THAT STRICTLY ADORES
PAYING JELLY ROLL TOLL . . .

(CLAUDE *is still singing as he pulls* PROCLO *towards him and they collapse heavily on the bed.*)

PROCLO. Stop it! Please! You're hurting me!

CLAUDE. I'm hurting *you?*

PROCLO. Help! Help! (TIGER *has been seen running along the corridor and uses his pass key now to come into the room. A small crowd of* PATRONS *starts forming in the corridor outside the room.*)

TIGER. (*Pulling* PROCLO *off* CLAUDE.) Okay, fat man! Leave the little guy alone! What are you trying to do? Pull his head off? (*He takes* PROCLO'S *key.*) Let me see your key. 196! Now get down there and don't cause any more trouble. What do you think this is? The YMCA? (*He puts* PROCLO'S *suitcase in the corridor and turns back to* CLAUDE.) I'm sorry, sir. It won't happen again.

CLAUDE. (*He is moaning happily.*) I certainly hope not.

TIGER. Get down there, man! (*He goes.*)

PROCLO. He ought to be locked up! (*The crowd of* PATRONS *are all looking at* PROCLO.) Hello. Whew! I just had quite a little experience in there. I think that guy's got a problem. People like that really shouldn't be allowed in a place like this. (*Stony silence from the* PATRONS.) What unusual pants. They look like cowboy chaps.

PATRON IN CHAPS. They are cowboy chaps.

PROCLO. I was just thinking I thought they looked like cowboy chaps. Well, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, and let me get out of these clothes. Bye. Nice talking to you. (PROCLO *beats an embarrassed retreat down the stairs. The group of* PATRONS *will slowly disband.* CHRIS *opens the door to his room, sticks his head out and yells.*)

CHRIS. Okay, boys, room 240! Soup's on, come and get it! (*He goes back into his room.* MICHAEL BRICK *has appeared in the area of a pay telephone. He dials a number and waits.*)

MICHAEL. Hello, Bimbi's? Is this the bar across the street from The Ritz? There's a Mr. Carmine Vespucci there. I've got to speak to him. It's urgent.

ABE. (*Over the loudspeaker.*) Tiger! Duff! The linen people are here. On the double!

MICHAEL. Mr. Vespucci? My name is Michael Brick. I'm with the Greybar Detective Agency. You hired my partner to get something on a Mr. Gaetano Proclo, only my partner's sick so I'm taking over the case for him. I'm calling you from The Ritz. I just got here. Now let me see if I've got his description right. A balding middle-aged fat man? That's not much to go on, but I'll do my best. (GOOGIE *enters. She likes what she sees.* MICHAEL *covers the receiver.*) It's terrible here, sir. You have no idea. One of those transvestites is standing right next to me. Now you just stay by the phone in that bar across the street and I'll get back to you.

GOOGIE. (*Vamping him.*) *Ay, que cosa linda!*

MICHAEL. I can't talk now. I think he's surrounding me for unnatural things. (MICHAEL *hangs up, gives* GOOGIE *a horrified look and hurries off.*)

GOOGIE. Hey *chico,* I was just gonna talk to you! (TIGER *enters.*) Tiger, is he here yet?

TIGER. Who?

GOOGIE. Who? What do you mean who? There is only one *who* I am interested in you telling me about! Listen, you told me there was gonna be a big producer here tonight. I dress special. I do the hairs special. If you're lying to me, Tiger . . .

TIGER. Can't you take a little joke?

GOOGIE. My career is no joke. Nobody's career is never no joke.

TIGER. I was just trying to build you up.

GOOGIE. I tell you something and I mean this: You ever hear of instant laryngitis? No producer be out there tonight and that's what I got—instant laryngitis—and you and Duff are gonna do the show alone. Those are my words, they are from the heart and I am now officially sick!

TIGER. Googie! (GOOGIE *rasps an answer and leaves,*

TIGER *following her.* PROCLO *comes wandering into view, still carrying his suitcase and still shaken from his experience with* CLAUDE.)

PROCLO. This place is like a Chinese maze. (DUFF *comes out of one of the rooms.*)

DUFF. Are you 196?

PROCLO. Something like that.

DUFF. I meant your room.

PROCLO. So did I.

DUFF. Follow me. (*He leads* PROCLO *to the room.*) 196. Here it is. (DUFF *has opened the door for him.* PROCLO *goes into the room. It is a shambles from the previous occupant. He calls out into the corridors.*) Hey, Tiger! Room 196! On the double!

PROCLO. You're kidding. Tell me you're kidding.

DUFF. What did you expect?

PROCLO. I don't know. A room maybe. A normal size room.

DUFF. You should see some of the rooms they could've put you in.

PROCLO. You're telling me they come even smaller?

DUFF. Half this size.

PROCLO. Does Mickey Rooney know about this place?

DUFF. You got far out taste, mister.

PROCLO. Vespucci. Carmine Vespucci. What's your name?

DUFF. Duff.

PROCLO. It's good to see you, Duff.

DUFF. How do you mean?

PROCLO. I was beginning to think this place was a little too esoteric for my tastes, if you know what I mean. Like that guy up there with all the food.

DUFF. I think it's something to do with the weather. Rainy nights always bring out the weirdos.

PROCLO. They shouldn't let people like that in here. It'll give this place a bad name.

DUFF. This place already has a bad name. (TIGER

has arrived with a mop and a change of linen. The room will be very crowded with the three of them and PROCLO's *luggage.*)

TIGER. We're both up shit creek again.

DUFF. Who with this time?

TIGER. I told Googie there'd be a producer out front tonight.

DUFF. Maybe there will be.

TIGER. I promised her. No producer, she's not going on. She's locked in her dressing room with instant laryngitis.

PROCLO. She told me she was feeling better.

TIGER. You know Googie?

PROCLO. I met her downstairs. She thought I was a producer. She's very colorful.

TIGER. Right now she's also very pissed off.

DUFF. Let me talk to her.

PROCLO. Not so fast, Duff. What about slippers?

DUFF. Slippers?

PROCLO. Slippers. For your feet.

DUFF. Where do you think you are? Jack La-Lannes? Slippers! (DUFF *leaves as* TIGER *continues to clean* PROCLO's *room and make up his bed.*)

PROCLO. I always thought they gave you slippers in a bathhouse. I mean, you could catch athlete's foot in a place like this.

TIGER. You're lucky if that's all you catch. (*Trying to make up the bed.*) Excuse me.

PROCLO. I'm sorry. (*He stands.*) Looking at you two, I think I'm seeing double.

TIGER. He's Duff. I'm Tiger.

PROCLO. How are people supposed to tell you apart?

TIGER. They don't usually. Just try to stay out of 205 this time.

PROCLO. What's in 205?

TIGER. That room I had to pull you out of. You could hurt someone doing that.

PROCLO. Now just a minute! I thought that guy was

taking me to my room! You don't think I went in there because I wanted to?

TIGER (*Dawning on him.*) You trying to tell me he's a chubby chaser?

PROCLO. A chubby what?

TIGER. Someone who likes . . . (*He gestures, indicating great bulk.*)

PROCLO. You mean like me?

TIGER. You're right up his alley.

PROCLO. I knew someone like that once. I just never knew what to call him. "Get away from me, Claude!" was all I could come up with. A chubby chaser! That's kind of funny. Unless, of course, you happen to be the chubby they're chasing. Room 205. Thanks for the tip. I'll avoid it like the plague.

DUFF. (*He has returned and is knocking loudly on the door.*) Fifteen minutes!

PROCLO. Oh my God!

TIGER. Relax! (*He opens the door.*)

DUFF. Come on, Tiger. Show time!

TIGER. What happened?

DUFF. Googie's Mr. Big is here. He's going to be sitting ringside for the first show tonight.

TIGER. How'd you manage that?

DUFF. I didn't. But with a little help from our friend here . . . !

PROCLO. Hey, now just a minute!

DUFF. Aw, now come on, Mr. Vespucci! Give two down and out go-go boys with aspirations for higher things a break.

PROCLO. I don't want to get involved with anything.

DUFF. All you have to do is listen to her act.

PROCLO. I don't want to listen to her act.

DUFF. I don't blame you, but that's not the point.

PROCLO. I'm not a producer.

DUFF. Googie's not really a singer.

TIGER. Come on, what do you say?

PROCLO. What if she finds out?

DUFF. That's our problem.

TIGER. Leave everything to us.

PROCLO. I came here to lay low.

TIGER. Man, you can't lay any lower than Googie's nightclub act.

DUFF. Come on, we gotta change.

TIGER. You're a prince, Mr. . . .

DUFF. Vespucci.

TIGER. An honest-to-God prince.

PROCLO. Thank you, Duff.

TIGER. He's Duff. I'm Tiger. (*They run off.* PROCLO *closes the door and shakes his head.*)

PROCLO. Seclusion! Is that asking so very much, God? Simple seclusion? I must be crazy! Allowing them to tell her I'm a producer! (MICHAEL BRICK *is seen outside* CLAUDE'S *door, which is ajar. He sticks his head into the room.*)

MICHAEL. Excuse me.

CLAUDE. I'm resting.

MICHAEL. May I come in?

CLAUDE. I said I'm resting.

MICHAEL. I'm looking for someone.

CLAUDE. I told you I'm resting.

MICHAEL. That's okay. I just want to ask you—

CLAUDE. What do you need? A brick wall to fall on your head? "Resting!" It's a euphemism for "not interested"! Skinny! (CLAUDE *slams the door in* MICHAEL'S *face.* MICHAEL *knocks on another door.*)

MICHAEL. Excuse me. May I come in? (MICHAEL *starts into the room, then comes rushing out.*) Oh, I beg your pardon! Excuse me, may I come in? Thank you very much. (*He goes into another room. The door closes. There is a beat and again he comes rushing out.*) Oh, my goodness! (MICHAEL'S *mother never told him there would be nights like this. He steels himself and enters the steam room. On the swing of the door, he is back out and gone.* PROCLO *has nearly finished changing when there is a knock on his door. He quickly puts his wig back on.*)

PROCLO. Yes?

CLAUDE. Are you there?

PROCLO. Who is it?

CLAUDE. Room service.

PROCLO. Who? (*He opens the door a crack, sees* CLAUDE *and slams it.*) Go away!

CLAUDE. I've got a box of Hershey bars. (*He begins throwing bars of candy through the transom.*)

PROCLO. I said go away!

CLAUDE. Peter Paul Mounds, Milky Ways . . .

PROCLO. I know what you are now!

CLAUDE. I can make you very happy!

PROCLO. You're a chubby chaser!

CLAUDE. I know.

PROCLO. Well stop it!

CLAUDE. How?

PROCLO. I don't know! (PROCLO *waits, listens.*) Are you still there?

CLAUDE. I'm never leaving.

PROCLO. You can't stand out there all night. This is my room and that's my door to it. Now go away or I'll call Tiger and Duff.

CLAUDE. I'm not doing anything.

PROCLO. You're making me nervous.

CLAUDE. (*He thinks, then sings.*) LOVE YOUR MAGIC SPELL IS EVERYWHERE . . . (*He thinks.*) CAN'T HELP LOVING DAT MAN OF MINE . . . (*He thinks.*) THEN ALONG CAME . . . (*He stops singing.*) Who? Then along came who?

PROCLO. Vespucci.

CLAUDE. (*An inspiration.*)

VESPUCCI!
I JUST MET A BOY NAMED VESPUCCI!
AND SUDDENLY THAT NAME . . .

(PROCLO *stops moaning and comes up with a plan.*)

PROCLO. Okay, you win. What room are you in?

CLAUDE. 205.

PROCLO. All right, you go back to 205. I'll be right up.

CLAUDE. Promise?

PROCLO. On my mother's grave! (*He is crossing his fingers.*) Just get away from that door! 'Cause if you're still standing out there when I come out of this room, the deal is off.

CLAUDE. And if you're not up in my room in five minutes . . .

PROCLO. What?

CLAUDE. I'll find you.

PROCLO. And?

CLAUDE. You don't want to make me do anything rash, do you, Mr. Vespucci?

PROCLO. Oh no, oh no!

CLAUDE. Five minutes then. Room 205. If you're not up there, I'm gonna come down here and break your knees. Don't push your luck with Claude Perkins. (*He goes. His name seems to have struck a distant bell for* PROCLO.)

PROCLO. Claude Perkins. It can't be the same one. Claude Perkins. That's all I need. He's dead. He has to be dead. Claude Perkins. (PROCLO *opens the door and looks out. No sign of* CLAUDE. *Without realizing it, he shuts the door behind him and locks himself out.*) Oh no! Come on, will you? Open up. Damn! (*Calling off.*) Boys! Boys! You with the keys! Yoo hoo! Yoo hoo! (PROCLO *is suddenly aware of a* PATRON *who is just looking at him and smiling.*) Hello. Just clearing my throat. Ahoo! Ahoo! Too many cigarettes. Ahoo! Hello there. I hear the Knicks tied it up in the last quarter.

PATRON. Crisco.

PROCLO. What?

PATRON. Crisco oil party.

PROCLO. Crisco oil party?

PATRON. Room 419. Pass it on.

PROCLO. Pass what on?

PATRON. And bring Joey.

PROCLO. Who's Joey?

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