

DENSITY RIGHTS

by

Jeremy Fox

NA Version

Jeremy Fox  
54 Crofton Road  
London, SE5 8NB, UK  
Tel: 0207 701 3107  
Fax: 0207 701 6918  
Email: [jeremy@fox.name](mailto:jeremy@fox.name)

## CHARACTERS

HOWARD STENCIL - Party political stalwart

REBECCA STIRWELL - Manager of the Social Workers Credit Union

BETSY LOMAN - Television News Presenter, Howard's wife

FERDINAND LECLERC - A Senior Bureaucrat

DANIEL RICHTER - Property Developer

DANIEL HEEP - Richter's assistant

YURI HOOPER - Lawyer

**PART ONE**

## SCENE 1

Meeting-room, Social Workers Credit Union. HOWARD STENCIL sits at a table centre stage before a microphone. Beside him, REBECCA STIRWELL with a pile of papers and ledgers. HOWARD surveys his audience and taps the microphone.

REBECCA

Everything's working Mr Stencil.

HOWARD

Howard.

REBECCA

Sorry?

HOWARD

Call me Howard.

REBECCA

Sorry. Our previous chairman,...

HOWARD

... belongs to the past. Voters have demanded a fresh start, Rebecca. May I call you Rebecca? We can begin by sweeping away the cobwebs, out-of-date practices like calling each other Mr and Ms as if we were bent on being strangers.

REBECCA

Oh yes. Sorry.

HOWARD

Just a detail, of course. But details reflect underlying philosophy. They matter.

REBECCA

Shall we start? Our new chairman.... Sorry, should it be chair person?

HOWARD

Chairman will do.

REBECCA

Over to our new our new chairman, then, Mr Howard Stencil.

HOWARD

I won't trouble you with preliminaries about being delighted and honoured. What we should be pleased about is that at last we have a government whose ideals match those of the Social Workers Credit Union. If the results of the last election had been otherwise, a different chairman would have been delighted etcetera instead of me. But would that chairman have subscribed to our values? Would he or she have brought the right principles? Sympathized with our aims? Fought for the dignity of each and every member of our society? Principles are the key. Not individuals. Principles won the election. Principles are what govern the Social Workers Credit Union. Principles are what I offer as your new chairman. Our job, as I see it, is to ensure that the social workers of this province, poorly-paid, treated with contempt by the media, unappreciated by the public at large, should reap some reward from their sacrifices. The least we can do for them is to ensure that each and every one has an opportunity to own a home. Property has always been the key to happiness. It doesn't have to be an acreage. We are not dreaming of mansions and castles. We are talking about a modest dwelling a social worker can call his or her own. More than ...Rebecca..?

REBECCA

Yes?

HOWARD

How many?

REBECCA

(puzzled)  
How many?

HOWARD

On our waiting list?

REBECCA

One thousand and seventeen as of the end of last month.

HOWARD

More than a thousand families waiting for affordable finance. That's our problem. Those families deserve a roof over their heads. Everyone does. Property is security, satisfaction, well-being. It's not a matter of bricks and mortar. It's a spiritual issue. In some ways, on this earth at any rate, it's one of the keys to paradise. That's not an exaggeration. Just ask anyone with a family to raise and who can't afford to rent an apartment at the kind of outrageous prices demanded in this city. But, and it is a very large but, there can be no homes without savings. And that too is our business. Which reminds me. Would you be good enough to tell us the cash balance, Rebecca?

REBECCA

In the building fund?

HOWARD

Right.

REBECCA

Including leverage?

HOWARD

Without going into unnecessary detail.

REBECCA

We have about eleven and a half million available for investment.

HOWARD

Eleven and a half million won't buy a hundred homes in today's climate. We need money for a thousand houses. There's the problem and the challenge. If we are to loan out savings we must take in savings. Our solemn duty, as board members, is to persuade our constituents to save not with the big banks - whose sole purpose is to extract profit from the labours of the weak - but with the Social Workers Credit Union. All our attention must focus to that end. Only then will Rebecca here be able to do her job. Am I right?

REBECCA

Oh absolutely.

HOWARD

We know what to do, so let's get on with it. That's it for this session, I'm afraid. Another engagement calls me. There'll be an opportunity at the next meeting for us to get to know each other a little better. Anyway I think the message is clear enough.

REBECCA

Date of next meeting, September 2nd. Put it in your diaries. If there's no further business, we can declare the meeting closed.

Applause. Sound of people departing

HOWARD

How did I do?

REBECCA

We all listened, that's for sure.

HOWARD

You think so?

REBECCA

First class.

HOWARD

Thought I should ask, since it's my first time. You probably weren't expecting a change of chairman.

REBECCA

There was some discomfort about the way the matter was handled.

HOWARD

Really?

REBECCA

Rather sudden. Nobody knew who you were so naturally we - the Board that is - were concerned.

HOWARD

You probably see me as a political appointee, even though the government has no jurisdiction over the Social Workers Credit Union.

REBECCA

Well aren't you?

HOWARD

What?

REBECCA

A political appointee?

HOWARD

Too strong. The minister might have made a suggestion. As you know, the financial sector is under scrutiny.

REBECCA

From the media anyway.

HOWARD

Believe me you needed protection.

REBECCA

Of a kind only you can give?

HOWARD

Let's say we can help.

REBECCA

I admit I was sceptical at first. But after your speech, I feel more positive, and I sense the board does too. You're quite persuasive. And you touched on an important point. We do need to increase savings.

HOWARD

I look forward to working with you, Rebecca.

REBECCA

Me too.

HOWARD

Better get going. Have an appointment with Daniel Richter.

REBECCA

*The* Daniel Richter? Of the Richter brothers?

HOWARD

Yup.

REBECCA

Bit out of our league.

HOWARD

Biggest property developers in the city.

REBECCA

Don't you have to be important or something to meet one of the Richters? Not that you aren't important. To us, I mean. But...I'm making a mess of this. Like how do you get to meet a Richter?

HOWARD

That would telling.

REBECCA

So tell.

HOWARD

He asked to see me.

REBECCA

Wow! That's really something.

HOWARD

What's important is what we're doing right here. Helping people in financial need. The rich don't matter. They can look after themselves. Mustn't be late. Keep me in touch with developments, won't you?

REBECCA

I will.

Exeunt

SCENE 2

Meeting-room in the offices of Sunrise Vista Corporation. Sofas. Blank screen on one wall. DANIEL HEEP, scion of Uriah, ushers HOWARD into the room.

HEEP

Mr Richter will be with you shortly, sir.

HOWARD

I didn't catch your name.

HEEP

Always wait 'til I'm asked, sir. Mr Richter says never to offer information unnecessarily. Golden rule of business.

HOWARD

I do ask.

HEEP

Daniel, sir. Daniel Heep.

HOWARD

Same as your boss.

HEEP

Mr Richter likes to have people around with the same name.

HOWARD

There are other Daniels here?

HEEP

Several.

HOWARD

Doesn't that cause confusion?

HEEP

If it does, that must be Mr Richter's intention.

HOWARD

What do you think?

HEEP

Mr Richter knows what he's doing.

HOWARD

You don't happen to know what this is all about, do you?

HEEP

All about?

HOWARD

My meeting with Mr Richter.

HEEP

Not for me to say, Mr Stencil. He'll be along shortly.

HEEP leaves.

HOWARD

Nice meeting you Daniel.

HOWARD paces, stares through the window, whistles with admiration, paces, stares.  
DANIEL RICHTER enters, correct, exiguously charming, Mephistopheles in muted pinstripe.

RICHTER

My apologies for keeping you waiting, Mr Stencil.

HOWARD

My pleasure.

RICHTER

You were enjoying the view.

HOWARD

I was wondering how much you owned of what I could see through the window. What fine buildings. Not all developers have your standards.

RICHTER

I own no buildings. None worthy of comment anyhow. Everything we do here is owned by Sunrise Vista. I am merely an employee like everyone else.

HEEP enters and serves coffee.

RICHTER (CONT'D)

Still, the better buildings you see in the immediate vicinity are Sunrise properties. We're proud of them, aren't we Daniel?

HEEP

Very proud Mr Richter. We've made a real difference to this city's skyline.

RICHTER

Thank you Daniel.

HEEP leaves.

RICHTER (CONT'D)

You have a well-known wife.

HOWARD

She has a few fans.

RICHTER

One of our best news presenters, so I'm told. I don't watch much television myself.

HOWARD

Right.

RICHTER

You're probably wondering why I invited you to visit me. The media have me down as reclusive. Apparently I won't talk to anyone except leaders of solvent countries and senior bank executives.

HOWARD

I'm neither of those!

RICHTER

Exactly. Reporters are the only people I avoid. Too fond of embroidery. They cook up the most fantastic tales about my family.

HOWARD

You are a familiar figure, Mr Richter.

RICHTER

Shall we use first names?

HOWARD

What? Oh yes. Howard.

RICHTER

Well Howard, you're known to be an authority in a field dear to my own heart.

HOWARD

I wouldn't claim. I mean, you know.

RICHTER

That's why I'm pleased you could find time to see me today. People who understand property are as common as one might imagine.

HOWARD

I suppose not.

RICHTER

I would say certainly not. I'm talking about serious property.

HOWARD

Right.

RICHTER

At Sunrise Vista Corporation, we've enjoyed some slight success over the years.

HOWARD

Fortune described you as the best.

RICHTER

Possibly the best, if my memory serves. We do have high standards. That's what I wanted to talk about. Despite our outstanding record, we've run into an obstacle. Two blocks from here, in Culloden Street. You know Culloden? We own a couple of lots there. One has a small, six-storey apartment building on it, number one ten, rather pleasing to the eye, renovated in simple style, in short, a charming place. Number one twelve adjacent, with a larger footprint, is occupied by an old warehouse that has to come down. Do you follow me?

HOWARD

Uh huh.

RICHTER

Here are things as they stand now.

RICHTER projects onto the screen.

RICHTER (CONT'D)

The renovated building, very respectable. The warehouse, a derelict scar on the face of the city which we aim to replace with something worthy of the location. Here's what we have in mind.

On screen, computer renderings of a high-rise, luxury office tower shown alongside the six-storey building.

RICHTER (CONT'D)

Number one hundred and twelve, Sunrise Bellevue Place. Thirty-two floors of high-technology. The most ecologically responsible, energy-efficient office tower in the hemisphere. A symbol of the future, an example of why this great city of ours has emerged as a world leader in innovative design.

HOWARD

Impressive.

RICHTER

Glad you think so. We're rather proud of the concept ourselves. You're wondering what this has to do with you.

HOWARD

I guess so.

RICHTER

The answer is a great deal. That is if you'd like.

HOWARD

I don't follow.

RICHTER

How about the atrium?

HOWARD

Beautiful.

RICHTER

A sample office.

HOWARD

Good enough for the Chairman of the Board.

RICHTER

Bird's eye exterior. Not the tallest building in town, but arguably the most elegant. Thirty-two floors. Needs at least that height to achieve the aesthetic effect.

HOWARD

And to justify the investment I imagine.

RICHTER

We could hardly build it at a loss.

HOWARD

No.

RICHTER

And there we have a problem as you have already perceived.

HOWARD

Oh?.

RICHTER

Thirty-two floors is, how shall I put it, not kosher. Density rights on Culloden allow for only twenty-three on a site of that size. That's forty percent fewer than in the next street, by the way.

HOWARD

Doesn't make sense.

RICHTER

Exactly. A totally unreasonable restriction given the demand for world-class office space in the city centre.

HOWARD

The government supports enterprise.

RICHTER

So we understand. Which is why Sunrise Bellevue Place should proceed. And note that this building exactly fits the government's manifesto promise to promote energy-efficient, environmentally responsible construction. We need rights for at least thirty-two storeys. More we can handle. Less and the numbers won't work. Hitherto, we've always managed to get the regulations relaxed for our major projects by acquiring density rights from nearby buildings.

HOWARD

In this case you have an adjacent building of your own.

RICHTER

Yes. But I regret to say the government is being uncooperative. Our application for a permit to transfer rights from number one ten has a been rejected out of hand.

HOWARD

Rejected?

RICHTER

I'm afraid so.

HOWARD

Any idea why?

RICHTER

I attribute the problem to our lack of contact with the new administration. We've made overtures repeatedly since the election but have been repeatedly rebuffed. They don't seem to like us. Perhaps we're seen as having been too close to the previous government. Even though company policy forbids involvement with political parties.

HOWARD

Perhaps I could help.

RICHTER

I was wondering.

HOWARD

I know a couple of key people.

RICHTER

Well enough to have the matter reviewed?

HOWARD

Ferdinand Leclerc might be useful. He's a senior adviser on the planning side. And an old school friend.

RICHTER

Really?

HOWARD

High school and college. I could approach him no problem. That is if you would like me to.

RICHTER

More coffee?

HOWARD

Oh, Yes. Thank you.

RICHTER

I'd like us to work together.

HOWARD

You and me?

RICHTER

You and Sunrise Vista. Through me of course.

HOWARD

You want to work with me?

RICHTER

Here's a proposal for you consider. Help us secure the permits we need for our new office block on Culloden. In return, we thought we might sell you the smaller property at a knock-down price.

HOWARD

Sell me the property?

RICHTER

That's right. As a gesture of appreciation.

HOWARD

Number one ten?

RICHTER

We don't usually sell anything in the downtown area, but on this occasion.

HOWARD

It must be worth millions.

RICHTER

About ten in today's market. We could let you have it for five.

HOWARD

That's very generous.

RICHTER

Not at all. It's simply a measure of how highly we would value your collaboration.

HOWARD

There is one problem.

RICHTER

Oh?

HOWARD

I know this sounds ridiculous, but five million is rather a lot money for me.

RICHTER

Take a mortgage. Five per cent down should be enough, given the property's value.

HOWARD

Five... that's two hundred and fifty thousand? I don't. Where would I? I just don't have that kind of cash.

RICHTER

I was rather hoping you would jump at the chance. A downtown building at half the market price.

HOWARD

It's definitely worth ten million?

RICHTER

No doubt about it.

HOWARD

I'm not really in that league, Mr Richter.

RICHTER

Surely you're not going to turn me down?

HOWARD

Could I have a day or so to think about it?

RICHTER

By all means. Take a week if you need it. We're in a hurry - but a few days here and there won't make much difference.

HOWARD

Thank you.

RICHTER

If you decide to go ahead, you do understand that the issue of density rights for number one twelve will have to be settled. It will be a tacit condition of the sale.

HOWARD

Yes, of course.

RICHTER

An unofficial condition, of course. We would have to keep our understanding confidential.

HOWARD

Absolutely.

RICHTER

It's been a pleasure meeting you, Howard.

HEEP enters on cue.

HOWARD

The pleasure's mine.

RICHTER

Daniel, will you show Mr Stencil out? And give him my card.

(To Stencil)

I look forward to hearing from you.

(To Heep)

Whenever Mr Stencil calls, have him put through to me, Daniel.

HEEP

I'll place Mr Stencil on your list, Mr Richter.

HOWARD

Thank you Mr Richter. It's been a pleasure.

SCENE 3

Home of Stencil and wife/partner BETSY LOMAN. A television anchor, she is crisp and self confident.

HOWARD

That's what he said. He'll let us have it for half price.

BETSY

Meaning?

HOWARD

Five million instead of ten.

BETSY

What?

HOWARD

He says it's worth at least ten million. Maybe more.

BETSY

When have the Richters ever taken a loss on a property deal?

HOWARD

That's the whole point. It's not a property deal. They'll be repaying me for a favour.

BETSY

You haven't done them any favours.

HOWARD

They want me to get them density rights on a piece of land in the same street.

BETSY

Density what?

HOWARD

The right to pack more building into a space than the regulations allow.

BETSY

Is that legal?

HOWARD

Sure. With a special permit. That's where I come in.

BETSY

You can get the Richter's a permit?

HOWARD

Maybe.

BETSY

Sounds highly improbable to me. And even if you did, where would we get five million?

HOWARD

We'd only need enough for a deposit. Say two hundred and fifty. We'd cover the rest with a mortgage.

BETSY

Darling, we don't have that kind of cash.

HOWARD

What if we did?

BETSY

We don't.

HOWARD

Just think about it for a moment.

BETSY

I don't want to think about it even for a second.

HOWARD

Suppose...

BETSY

Howard!

HOWARD

Just hold it. Say I bought the building for five million.

BETSY

You mean “we”. We bought the building.

HOWARD

Right.

BETSY

But we’re not going to, are we?.

HOWARD

Hear me out. Just for fun.

BETSY

Are imaginary property deals fun?

HOWARD

For love then.

BETSY

Cheap at the price.

HOWARD

Here’s the idea.

BETSY

A love token first or I’ll refuse to listen.

HOWARD

It’s a deal.

They kiss.

BETSY

Go on then. Tell me all about it.

HOWARD

Here we go. We buy the building for five. Then, instead of keeping it, we put it straight on the market for ten. There’d be a five million dollar profit. Let’s say four million after commissions and taxes. We’d be millionaires overnight. That’s how things are done in the property field. You either make big or you don’t make at all.

BETSY

What if it isn't worth ten?

HOWARD

The Richters know what they're doing. They're number one in their field.

BETSY

So?

HOWARD

They wouldn't mislead me if that's what you're suggesting. Remember, I'll be arranging something of even greater value for them.

BETSY

Density something-or-other. Now that I've listened I don't like the sound of it any more than I did before. If it goes wrong...

Doorbell.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

How can it go wrong? That will be Ferdie.

BETSY

You don't have planning authority.

Doorbell.

HOWARD

Ferdie does. I asked him round for coffee.

BETSY

You're serious about this, aren't you?

HOWARD

Yes. I don't know yet. Depends on Ferdie to some extent. You'll be nice to him?

BETSY

He's what you men like to call a slime ball.

HOWARD

I'll get the door.

FERDINAND LECLERC enters. An ebullient fox.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(re-entering)

Sorry to keep you...

FERDINAND

Betsy! Good to see you. Stunning as always.

BETSY

Hi.

FERDINAND

How's television these days?

BETSY

Coffee?

FERDINAND

You bet. Black one sugar. Howard I'm jealous of you, if you don't mind me saying so. TV's most beautiful and accomplished news reader.

BETSY

News anchor.

FERDINAND

News anchor. I stand corrected. Seriously though.

BETSY

Cut it out Ferdy.

FERDINAND

Only telling the truth. You're widely admired. They were discussing the media in lobby of the House the other day and one minister - can't tell you who of course - said 'Betsy Loman' he said, 'the thinking man's pin-up'. Well he said something more vivid than 'pin-up' but that's what he meant.

BETSY

You want me to hand you this coffee or pour it over you?

FERDINAND

I'll say no more. That's a promise. Well Howard, I'm all ears. Can't stay too long. You know how it is.

HOWARD

You'll like this Ferdy. I had a meeting with Daniel Richter the other day.

FERDINAND

Do you know him?

HOWARD

I didn't. But he asked to see me. We met in his office.

FERDINAND

*The Daniel Richter?*

HOWARD

The same. He must have noticed my appointment to the chair of the Social Workers Credit Union and figured I knew about property.

FERDINAND

You don't know more than him.

HOWARD

Of course not. He wanted to know if I could help him resolve a problem with a new Sunrise tower. It's political really.

FERDINAND

What kind of problem?

HOWARD

He wants to transfer density rights from one property to another in the same street.

Sunrise applied for the permit, but somebody in planning blocked it.

FERDINAND

Probably Monty Cruickshank, the Housing Minister. He thinks the Richters are devils incarnate.

HOWARD

Can we help?

FERDINAND

Why should we?

HOWARD

They've a lot of investment in this city.

FERDINAND

So do others.

HOWARD

Not like the Richters.

BETSY

I'll make myself scarce.

FERDINAND

No Betsy. If this is boring you we'll talk about something else.

BETSY

Maybe the something else wouldn't interest me either. Anyway I have to leave for the studio.

FERDINAND

But you're the main attraction. I mean it.

LOMAN leaves.

FERDINAND

Is she upset?

HOWARD

Working too hard.

FERDINAND

If you ever get divorced I'm next in line. Just kidding. But you're a lucky bastard, Howard.

HOWARD

About the Richter issue.

FERDINAND

What about it?

HOWARD

Can we do anything?

FERDINAND

They're none too popular with our people. You know that.

HOWARD

Now we're in power, surely we have to be practical. Sunrise is too important to alienate. They employ nearly three thousand people in the city alone.

FERDINAND

Did Richter offer you anything?

HOWARD

What do mean?

FERDINAND

A reward.

HOWARD

You mean a bribe?

FERDINAND

If you like. That's how they usually work when they want something.

HOWARD

No way. I told him I didn't have the authority to solve his problem, but that I'd bring it to you.

FERDINAND

You mentioned my name?

HOWARD

I said you were a friend. That's all. I made no promise.

FERDINAND

If I do take this up.

HOWARD

Yes.

FERDINAND

Could you introduce us?

HOWARD

You and Richter? Why not?

FERDINAND

Discreetly. I wouldn't want Cruickshank to know.

HOWARD

Can I tell him the problem will be fixed?

FERDINAND

Ask him to have the application sent to my office. Marked 'Confidential'.

HOWARD

That's great Ferdy. It's the right thing to do.

FERDINAND

No guarantee.

HOWARD

No.

FERDINAND

And I want that meeting.

HOWARD

Agreed. By the way, what's the latest gossip?

FERDINAND

From where?

HOWARD

You know. The inner workings of state.

FERDINAND

Nothing much. Plenty of infighting, jostling for position. That's been going on ever since we came to power. Some big hitters from the CIA and the US Defence Department are coming in next week to talk about security.

HOWARD

What do they want?

FERDINAND

Travel restrictions I expect. They're going to ask us to vet everyone travelling to the US.

HOWARD

And?

FERDINAND

We'll cooperate within reason.

HOWARD

Godammit Ferdy that's against everything the party stands for.

FERDINAND

We'll do it anyway. If we don't they'll start cancelling flights to the US by our airlines. They have a standard procedure. They wait until an aircraft is in the air, then they order it to turn round. Every time they do that, our guys lose passengers and money. Politics, my dear Howard, is about the size of your prick. Big pricks screw little pricks.

HOWARD

And we're a little prick.

FERDINAND

Medium sized. We do our own screwing from time to time.

SCENE 4

Meeting-room, Social Workers Credit Union. A tray of sandwiches and drinks. REBECCA adjusts her appearance. HOWARD enters.

HOWARD

Hope I'm not late.

REBECCA

Exactly on time. Sandwiches, the coffee's freshly made, or there's tea. And here's a copy of the latest accounts hot off the press.

HOWARD

Very efficient.

REBECCA

Just trying to impress the new chairman.

HOWARD

Now I have to make a good impression on you by supporting your efforts.

REBECCA

Your speech to the committee the other day was absolutely brilliant.

HOWARD

Then we have a meeting of minds.

REBECCA

Oh yes.

HOWARD

And...

REBECCA

Yes?

HOWARD

I was going to say hearts.

REBECCA

Hearts. Exactly. I like how you go about things.  
You had the committee eating out of your hand. All  
of us.

HOWARD

Did I?

REBECCA

No doubt about it.

HOWARD

That's encouraging.

REBECCA

Where shall we start? Would you like to go through  
the accounts? Do take a sandwich.

HOWARD

Maybe.

REBECCA

Organic from Naturebaked. Do you know them?  
Just off King's Street.

HOWARD

Oh, right.

REBECCA

The accounts?

HOWARD

I trust they're in good order?

REBECCA

I think so.

HOWARD

That's most of what I need to know. Truth is I wanted to discuss something else.

REBECCA

Credit applications?

HOWARD

No.

REBECCA

Savings?

HOWARD

Something's cropped up and I was wondering if the Credit Union could help.

REBECCA

We always do our best.

HOWARD

This is, let's say, a personal request. More of a proposal really.

REBECCA

I'm listening.

HOWARD

It's a tad unorthodox but I thought you might be interested. Remember the other day I had to rush off to an appointment with Daniel Richter? Well, they're offering to sell me a building at a very low price. In return for a small favour. A gesture of thanks.

REBECCA

Where's the building?

HOWARD

Culloden Street.

REBECCA

That's downtown. Can't be cheap.

HOWARD

It's worth about ten million on the open market. They've offered it to me for half price. The idea is that I'll acquire the property and immediately sell it on for a profit. However, I need to finance the initial purchase. So I thought of you.

REBECCA

Me?

HOWARD

The Social Workers' Credit union actually. If you could arrange a bridging loan. I know it's not strictly appropriate.

REBECCA

How much would you need?

HOWARD

Five million.

REBECCA

Five million!

HOWARD

It would only be for a month at the most. As soon as the deal goes through, the property will be back on the market. To make sure it sells immediately, I can lower the price to nine million. Even after commissions and taxes that would still leave a big surplus. Once the building's sold, I'll return the money to the Credit Union and there we are.

REBECCA

It's impossible Howard. I can't arrange for any kind of loan to the chairman, let alone for five million. If anyone found out, I wouldn't just lose my job, I could land in jail. So could you for that matter.

HOWARD

It'll only be for a month. How would anyone know?

REBECCA

I'd know. That would be enough.

HOWARD

Naturally, you could expect a commission. I was thinking of a percentage of the net.

REBECCA

Howard!

HOWARD

At least a hundred thousand.

REBECCA

What are you talking about?

HOWARD

A hundred is the minimum. Could be much more depending on the final proceeds.

REBECCA

What could be more?

HOWARD

Your commission, Rebecca.

REBECCA

It's a lot of money.

HOWARD

Isn't it just?

REBECCA

No, I can't. You have to understand, it isn't easy for a woman to reach a position like mine. I'm trusted. And I'm successful. I can't jeopardize my career.

HOWARD

You wouldn't be jeopardizing anything. There's no risk attached. I only need the loan for - let's say a month at the most. And think of the commission.

You could end up with half a million; maybe even more than that.

REBECCA

You said a hundred thousand.

HOWARD

I didn't want to promise too much in case you wouldn't believe me. My real intention was to offer you a third of the profit.

REBECCA

Why not half?

HOWARD

Half?

REBECCA

Fifty, fifty. My risk is the same as yours, isn't it?

HOWARD

You drive a hard bargain.

REBECCA

Wouldn't you?

HOWARD

If I agree, will you do it?

REBECCA

What do I tell the bookkeeper? He comes in every month.

HOWARD

Tell him the statements haven't arrived from the bank. By the time he comes in the following month, the money will be back in the account.

REBECCA

What about the interest?

HOWARD

We'll replace that too.

REBECCA

What if something goes wrong?

HOWARD

How can it? I have the Richters' backing.

REBECCA

So?

HOWARD

I'll call Daniel Richter right now if you like. On the speaker 'phone - so you can hear for yourself. May I?

HOWARD dials.

HEEP (O.S.)

(Through the telephone speaker)  
Sunrise Vista Head Office.

HOWARD

Is that Daniel?

HEEP

With whom do you wish to speak?

HOWARD

Daniel this is Howard Stencil. Remember?

HEEP

Yes Mr Stencil.

HOWARD

Could you put me through to Mr Richter?

HEEP

One moment.

REBECCA

I'm not hearing this.

HOWARD

Shsh. You're not here.

REBECCA

(Whispering)

I AM here.

HEEP

Mr Stencil?

HOWARD

Right here Daniel.

HEEP

Mr Richter will speak to you now.

HOWARD

(Whispering)

Better believe it.

RICHTER (O.S.)

Howard, how are you?

HOWARD

Fine Mr Richter. Thanks for taking my call.

RICHTER (O.S.)

Any time.

HOWARD

I just wanted some reassurance. You know, about the building's value.

RICHTER (O.S.)

Which building is that? Oh yes. One ten Culloden. Ten million I believe I told you.

HOWARD

That's right.

RICHTER (O.S.)

Worth at least that in its present condition.

HOWARD

Thank you Mr Richter. I'll be in touch shortly.

RICHTER (O.S.)

With a positive answer I trust.

HOWARD

I think so.

RICHTER (O.S.)

I look forward to hearing from you.

HOWARD

Thank you Mr Richter. I'll get back to you as soon as possible.

Hangs up.

HOWARD

Convinced?

REBECCA

We agree on the fifty fifty? It's the only way I'll do it.

HOWARD

Agreed.

REBECCA

How many people would know?

HOWARD

You and I.

REBECCA

Mr Richter?

HOWARD

No reason to tell him where the funds come from. I guess.

REBECCA

The lawyers?

HOWARD

No.

REBECCA

What about your wife?

HOWARD

Definitely not.

REBECCA

Then just us two?

HOWARD

No one else.

REBECCA

Makes a big difference. If we're the only ones in on it, then I suppose we could do go ahead. As long its only for a month.

HOWARD

Rebecca I could kiss you.

REBECCA

Why don't you?

HOWARD

What?

REBECCA

Kiss me.

HOWARD

What?

REBECCA

Don't make me say it again.

HOWARD

I suppose, if we, this is a partnership, of a kind, it wouldn't be amiss, if, a small gesture of... We should break out the champagne really. Perhaps that wouldn't be appropriate in your office. Someone might come in.

REBECCA

They won't.

HOWARD

Sure?

REBECCA

Danger can be exciting.

HOWARD

I don't want to get you into trouble. Quickly then.  
There.

REBECCA

Hasty but tasty, as they say.

HOWARD

Have to make arrangements. Richter's in a hurry.  
This is a red letter day. Can't thank you enough  
Rebecca.

REBECCA

I hope not.

HOWARD

Let me know as soon as the loan's ready.

Exit

REBECCA

You didn't have lunch.

SCENE 5

Stencil-Loman home.

HOWARD

I've done it.

(Pause)

I said I've done it.

BETSY

What?

HOWARD

Sit down for a moment. Wait 'til you hear this. It'll blow your pants off.

BETSY

Another of your schemes for getting rich?

HOWARD

The one I told you about already.

BETSY

You've told me about several hundred.

HOWARD

A few maybe over the years. But this one's real.

BETSY

Which one?

HOWARD

The property in Culloden Street.

BETSY

I don't want to know.

HOWARD

Yes you do darling. Remember I love you.

BETSY

That's what you wanted to say?

HOWARD

Not exactly.

BETSY

Great.

HOWARD

No. I do. Love you. And I know this'll make you happy.

BETSY

Well?

HOWARD

I'm going to buy it.

BETSY

What?

HOWARD

The building. Number one ten. Six floors. Ten apartments plus a penthouse. Five million. All arranged.

BETSY

Don't talk nonsense Howard.

HOWARD

I mean it.

BETSY

Let's get this straight. You've agreed to buy a five-million dollar building?

HOWARD

Yup.

BETSY

What with?

HOWARD

Where did I get money?

BETSY

The last time I looked at our bank account, we had a five-hundred dollar overdraft.

HOWARD

Took out a loan.

BETSY

For five million? Who from?

HOWARD

The Credit Union.

BETSY

No. This is not right, Howard. You're the chairman.

HOWARD

The building's worth twice as much, remember?

BETSY

That's not the point.

HOWARD

Yes it is. I'll sell the building right away, pay back the loan and the rest, minus a few expenses, will be ours. We're going to be rich Betsy. What do you say?

BETSY

Nobody gets rich that quickly unless they win the lottery.

HOWARD

Any halfwit can win the lottery. To secure a deal like this you have to be smart.

BETSY

Has Ferdinand something to do with this?

HOWARD

Indirectly. He doesn't know the details.

BETSY

That's why he came round the other day, isn't it? You know I don't much like him.

HOWARD

I won't bring him round again. That's a promise.

BETSY

You haven't bribed him?

HOWARD

Betsy!

BETSY

I don't want you cited for corruption.

HOWARD

It won't happen.

BETSY

There must be some risk.

HOWARD

None.

BETSY

You haven't put our house up as collateral?

HOWARD

Of course not.

BETSY

That's a comfort anyway.

HOWARD

I thought you'd be pleased.

BETSY

I just feel somebody must be losing somewhere.

HOWARD

Why should they?

BETSY

You didn't work for this money you're supposedly going to make. Neither did this Daniel Richter. So where's it coming from?

HOWARD

From the market. It's win win all round. That's what happens in property deals. It's how the rich get to be rich. Not step by step, but giant stride by giant stride. You don't work hard, you work smart.

BETSY

Did Richter teach you that?

HOWARD

I probably heard it in a movie.

BETSY

You were an idealist when I met you, Howard. That's why you joined the party. It's certainly why I fell for you. You used to rail against politicians and bureaucrats who abused power to enrich their friends. You hated the Richters and everything they stood for because you said they always got their way with officials, always managed to have the rules changed to suit themselves, always had the government in their pocket. You said things would change once our side was in government. So where's the difference?

HOWARD

Changing the world takes time, Betsy.

BETSY

Why not start right here? Tell the Richters to go to hell.

HOWARD

We can't alienate companies like Sunrise Vista. They're too powerful. Employ too many people. They could take their business and go elsewhere any time. How would we look then to the voters?

BETSY

So the wealthy of this world always get their way, do they? No matter who's in power.

HOWARD

For now, yes.

BETSY

Only this time we're going to profit instead of the other side.

HOWARD

If I'd turned them down, somebody else would have stepped in.

BETSY

I thought the party stood for integrity.

HOWARD

We've been in the wilderness a long time, Betsy. Now it's our turn for some milk and honey.

BETSY

I feel I hardly recognize you.

HOWARD

You stood by me for the last four or five years when I practically gave my life to the party for peanuts. Stand by me now Betsy, because the reward is on its way.

BETSY

I'm not sure if I can.

HOWARD

What are you saying?

BETSY

Maybe I don't know what I'm saying. Before the election I thought I knew who you were

HOWARD

I haven't lost my convictions. I want a better, more just society. But just because half the world starves doesn't mean we have to starve as well.

BETSY

We're not starving.

HOWARD

We're far from well-off. And I have a duty to you, to us both, to our children when we get round to having them, a duty to ensure that we have good and secure life. Isn't that what you want?

BETSY

Remember that little verse you quoted me over our first dinner together? That's was when I started to fall in love with you. How did it go? The rain it raineth every day.

HOWARD

Upon the just and unjust fella. But more upon the just because

BETSY

The unjust has the just's umbrella.

HOWARD

The unjust has the just's umbrella.

BETSY

That's what you were about. "Bringing hope to those who had none. "From the impoverished millions of Africa to the homeless tramp camping on the corner of our street." Remember those words? You wrote them for the party manifesto. Funny how our ideals form and then deform.

HOWARD

I'm the same man, Betsy.

BETSY

Then you need to come to your senses. I hope this loan falls through.

HOWARD

That won't happen. And when a couple of million clear profit is nestling in our bank account, you won't have a problem getting used to it.

BETSY

Don't hold your breath.

HOWARD

Betsy, come on!

BETSY

Just make sure we don't lose.

## SCENE 6

The law offices of Hooper, Melville, and Finkelberg. DANIEL RICHTER and YURI HOOPER in conference.

RICHTER

I thought it best for us to meet Howard Stencil here, Yuri where we can maintain the formalities.

HOOPER

Your office would have done as well.

RICHTER

I don't want him to become too familiar.

HOOPER

A man in your position has to be cautious, it's true.

RICHTER

He's already telephoned me unnecessarily several times. And this is a very small deal.

HOOPER

Small for you. Large for your Mr Stencil I imagine. I'm surprised you haven't delegated the project to an assistant.

RICHTER

It has its delicacies. He's not my Mr Stencil by the way.

A knock at the door

HOOPER

No. My apologies.

HOWARD enters.

HOWARD

Your secretary told me to come straight in.

RICHTER

Howard, delighted. This is Mr Yuri Hooper.

HOWARD

Hi.

RICHTER

Yuri is our legal adviser.

HOOPER

Welcome Mr Stencil.

RICHTER

This shouldn't take long. You've brought the authorizations?

HOWARD

Right here.

RICHTER

Yuri?

HOWARD

They're counter-signed by the minister.

HOOPER

Very good.

HOWARD

Density rights specified on page three.

RICHTER

Thirty-two floors?

HOWARD

Up to a maximum of thirty-five.

RICHTER

Yuri?

HOOPER

Seems to be in order. The sale documents for one ten Culloden are ready. You have the draft?

HOWARD

Right here.

HOOPER

A cheque. We would have preferred a bank draft.

HOWARD

It's a good chèque. I wouldn't present a dud to someone like Mr Richter, would I?

RICHTER

Of course not. Yuri is as ever zealous to protect the interests of Sunrise Vista. But he's not implying - correct me if I'm wrong - that the chèque might bounce.

HOOPER

Of course not.

RICHTER

However, when we first discussed the deal you said you didn't have the money. So it would be a measure of comfort to us to know something of, let us say, its source.

HOWARD

You want to know where I got the money?

HOOPER

It would certainly help.

HOWARD

I'd rather keep it confidential.

HOOPER

Naturally it's confidential. Between the three of us.

HOWARD

I meant private. A matter of trust. Between me and the financial.... institution. The person that is.

HOOPER

It's certainly a matter of trust. I really don't think I can advise my client to proceed without some financial clarity.

HOWARD

Not go ahead?

HOOPER

My client heads the most respectable property company in the nation. He is a public figure. He does business only at the highest level of integrity. He is a guest in the most exclusive houses in the land. We can't afford to harbour the slightest doubt about any of his transactions. We are grateful to you for securing ministerial assistance in the matter of density rights. They will be a great help. One day, Mr Richter may be able to repay you. Indeed, he thought he had already found a means of doing so. But under the conditions of secrecy that you require, there can be no question.

HOWARD

The deal's off?

HOOPER

Unless you can provide some evidence that the funds were properly obtained.

HOWARD

They were properly obtained.

HOOPER

But since you are unwilling to tell us how. I must regrettably return your chèque.

HOWARD

I could have the minister's decision reversed.

HOOPER

Do ministers in this government use reverse gear?  
Already?

RICHTER

There's really no need for this.

HOOPER

A simple account of where you secured the funds would satisfy my client, wouldn't it Mr Richter?

RICHTER

Indeed.

HOOPER

A superb property is ready to fall into your hands Mr Stencil.

HOWARD

I did promise not to reveal where the money came from. It's not stolen or anything. Don't think that.

HOOPER

Promises sometimes have to be broken. And in this case the secret could hardly be more secure.

HOWARD

Okay. I borrowed the money short-term from the Social Workers Credit Union.

HOOPER

Of which you are chairman.

HOWARD

I know it's not entirely appropriate. But it's short term. A bridging loan. My plan was to sell the building straight away and repay the Union from the proceeds. You don't obviously don't approve.

RICHTER

Yuri?

HOOPER

Somewhat marginal, perhaps. The funds certainly originate from a legitimate source;

but whether you are right, Mr Stencil, to employ them for your own purposes, even for a short time... Well, I suppose the decision must be yours.

HOWARD

I know it's a conflict of interest.

HOOPER

Very possibly. I think it best we remain unaware of it. If that suits you Mr Stencil.

HOWARD

But I thought....

HOOPER

Naturally, Mr Richter is happy for you to resell the building at a profit. Indeed, it's what he expects.

RICHTER

Perfectly happy.

HOWARD

So it's a deal?

HOOPER

I think I can recommend it. Mr Richter?

RICHTER

Yes.

HOOPER

If you'd like to sign the papers, Mr Stencil. Here and here. Initials on all the other pages. Copies for each party.

RICHTER

Extraordinary how the afternoon sunlight glints on Sunrise Headquarters.

HOOPER

Mr Richter to sign.

RICHTER

It's what we intended architecturally. Shows very well from your office Yuri.

HOOPER

Very striking. I'll witness the transaction. Your chèque Mr Stencil. Thank you. Your copy of the sale contract. You'll receive the deeds in due course, once the chèque has cleared. And the keys. Congratulations are due all round.

HOWARD

I have to thank you Mr Richter - Daniel - for this opportunity.

RICHTER

It's I who should thank you.

HOOPER

There will be no legal costs, Mr Richter having kindly.

HOWARD

Yes, yes. Thank you.

HOOPER

If you need anything further, please fell free.

HOWARD

You've been very kind.

HOOPER

Good-bye then Mr Stencil.

RICHTER

Howard.

Howard leaves.

RICHTER

What do you really think about Stencil's financing?

HOOPER

Criminality might be difficult to prove so long as he returns the funds. I suppose the Credit Union might have grounds for a civil suit. Hardly worth their trouble though if they have their money back. Of course it's hardly ethical. If the secret leaks out, there would certainly be a scandal.

RICHTER

Questions in parliament?

HOOPER

Probably. Mr Stencil wouldn't emerge with a very savory reputation. Nor the government for that matter.

RICHTER

What about Sunrise Vista? We wouldn't want to be tainted by any suggestion of impropriety.

HOOPER

We're playing no part in raising the capital. And officially we know nothing of its source. There is the matter of the density rights.

RICHTER

Yes?

HOOPER

If someone were to suggest that Sunrise had, let's say, bribed Stencil to use his influence in government by selling him a cheap building.

RICHTER

Cheap building?

HOOPER

One ten Culloden.

RICHTER

It's not a cheap building.

HOOPER

Rather a valuable one if I've understood correctly. But Stencil has acquired it from Sunrise at a substantial discount.

RICHTER

Not at all Yuri. Stencil is paying the market price. You know it's not our policy to sell cheaply to anyone.

HOOPER

Didn't you suggest that it might be worth 10 million?

RICHTER

Very likely it might. With the original density rights. However, those rights are now with Sunrise. In today's economic climate, I wonder whether one ten Culloden would fetch as much as five. Four, perhaps. Three and a half certainly. Five? Well, let's see what Stencil does with it.

HOOPER

Remarkable. There's why you're known as the best in the business. How could you be so sure that Stencil would go for it?

RICHTER

As chairman of the Social Workers credit Union he's supposed to be an expert on property. In truth he knows almost nothing. But I suspected, rightly, that his ego would not allow him to admit as much even to himself.

HOOPER

So he doesn't understand that the building has been reduced in value?

RICHTER

He probably gave it no thought. He may also have blinded by the prospect of sudden wealth. Greed can lead ambitious people astray.

HOOPER

You don't feel sorry for him?

RICHTER

I don't follow you.

HOOPER

He will likely be ruined.

RICHTER

No one's forced his hand. How many people's lives are destroyed by earthquakes or drought or war? How many are born in poverty and can find no way out? Compared with the world's unfortunates Howard Stencil's condition looks blissful. Why should anyone feel sorry for him? Fate has dealt him a good hand. He can afford to lose a few tricks.

HOOPER

And if it's more than a few tricks?

RICHTER

I'm a Darwinian, Yuri. So long as the species survives, the fate of individuals scarcely matters. I could be killed in a car crash tomorrow. So what? Sunrise would continue. Others would take my place and I'd soon be forgotten. I like to think my family would miss me. A few close friends perhaps.

HOOPER

I would miss you.

RICHTER

Thank you Yuri. You'd miss your retainer too no doubt. I rest my case. Stencil may dip beneath the waves for a time, or forever. Either way the universe will shrug its shoulders.

HOOPER

Still, if he can't repay the Credit Union loan, he could end up in jail.

RICHTER

I think we might find him a way out before the police knock on his door. I might be willing to repurchase the building. Not necessarily for the price he expects, or even for the price he paid. But more than he'll get elsewhere.

HOOPER

It'll have to be enough to get him off the hook. I suppose you could loan him the difference.

RICHTER

What an idea. Sometimes, Yuri, I suspect you're even tougher than me.

**PART TWO**

## SCENE 1

HOWARD'S office. He is on the telephone.

## HOWARD

Three weeks now without an offer. Doesn't make sense. Yes I know you think it's overpriced; but you accepted it at that price when I listed it with you. What do you mean reluctantly? Come on, the property's been valued by the best real estate brain in the country. It's a he not a she. Yes. Ten million. No I'm not going to tell you his name. But you can take my word for it. I'm prepared to lower the price for a quick sale. Say nine. If need be I'll go as low as eight. How does that grab you? What are other buildings fetching in the downtown area? I know it depends. I'm talking about buildings around the same size. They can't be that different. Well what does it depend on? Density rights? In that area you're talking about thirty or forty million. Maybe more. Am I right? Right! So? The rights went to the adjacent building. Sunrise Vista. I told you already. They're going to build a thirty-two floor luxury office block there.

REBECCA enters.

## HOWARD (CONT'D)

Have to go. I'll call you later. Okay? Meanwhile check out market values for me will you? I know you have. No harm in doing it again.

(To REBECCA)

Be with you in a minute.

(To telephone)

What about local sales records over the last twelve months? Maybe you missed something. Look, I'll call you back before the end of the day.

(To REBECCA)

Rebecca. What a surprise. Just dealing with. You know. Hassles.

REBECCA

Hope you don't mind my bursting in. There was no one at the front desk.

HOWARD

Good thing you're not a terrorist.

REBECCA

Don't be so sure. Thought you might be free for a spot of lunch.

HOWARD

Love to. Unfortunately, hardly time to breathe.

REBECCA

You've been putting me off Howard and putting me off.

HOWARD

Stresses of being in the party of government. They keep piling jobs on me. Whenever they can't send something to a department, they send it to me. Oh Stencil can handle things. That's the attitude.

REBECCA

They must value you highly. Quite right too.

HOWARD

Thanks.

REBECCA

You're probably working too hard.

HOWARD

Maybe.

REBECCA

Well?

HOWARD

Well what?

REBECCA

How's it going?

HOWARD

Fine.

REBECCA

The deal. Have you had an offer for the property?

HOWARD

I'm holding out for the best price.

REBECCA

Time's nearly up, Howard. How long will this take?

HOWARD

Another week. At most

REBECCA

That's right up to the deadline. I have to get the money back into Credit Union account by the end of the month.

HOWARD

The agent's getting floods of inquiries.

REBECCA

I ordered a new car by the way.

HOWARD

Congratulations.

REBECCA

Top-of-the-line SUV.

HOWARD

Right.

REBECCA

It's okay for me to go ahead then?

HOWARD

What with?

REBECCA

The new car?

HOWARD

Why not?

REBECCA

I've been thinking you might like.... as this is the modern world... and we're modern people. In the old days women weren't supposed to state their case. They had to be asked. And half the time if nothing was said, nothing was done. Or ended up being done with the wrong people. Frustrating all round I should think. Anyway, those days are well and truly. We make our own decisions. Pop our own questions. So I thought we could inaugurate the new car together. A weekend in the country. A friend of mine has a cottage.

HOWARD

I don't follow.

REBECCA

I've decided to sleep with you. Thought we could start off in romantic surroundings.

HOWARD

A weekend?

REBECCA

How do you like it?

HOWARD

I'm married Rebecca.

REBECCA

I assume it's a modern marriage.

HOWARD

Oh Yes. Except that Betsy. I'd have to make an excuse. For a weekend.

REBECCA

Up to you. Anyway the offer's open. Limited time only. That is if you're interested.

HOWARD

Interested?

REBECCA

I thought women had a monopoly on reticence.

HOWARD

Betsy's a bit sensitive about things like that.

REBECCA

We'll keep it a secret. Like the loan. Just the two of us.

HOWARD

Yes.

REBECCA

Well if you can't make it for lunch, I'd better grab a sandwich and get back to work.

HOWARD

Right.

REBECCA

Quick kiss before I go.

(Forcing the issue)

Great. Must be off. Let me know which weekend you'd like.

HOWARD

I will.

REBECCA

Bye Howard.

HOWARD

Bye.

REBECCA  
About the property.

HOWARD  
Yes.

REBECCA  
You'd better not let me down.

The telephone rings. HOWARD snatches the receiver.

HOWARD  
Stencil. Yes. Just a minute.

REBECCA  
Because if you do...

HOWARD  
(Sotto Voce to REBECCA)  
I'll be in touch.

HOWARD  
(on the telephone)  
Sorry. What was that?

REBECCA leaves reluctantly.

HOWARD  
Three and half. That's ridiculous. Have you looked at downtown property prices over the last year? I already asked you? Please. I don't want to hear about density rights. What's the maximum asking price, according to you? Four's not enough. What about six? I can't afford to wait for a year. Five and a half then? Just to see. I know you don't think it'll sell. But there's no harm in trying, is there? For a few days.

He hangs up.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

God Almighty. What the hell's going on? Why would Daniel Richter tell me it was worth ten million? He had no reason to lie.

During the remainder of this scene the speeches in italics take place in Stencil's thoughts.

*RICHTER (O.S.)*

*None at all.*

HOWARD

Could he have made a mistake?

*RICHTER (O.S.)*

*Sunrise Vista Corporation doesn't make mistakes.  
Not when it comes to property.*

*HOOPER (O.S.)*

*Not in anything if I can help it.*

HOWARD

At least if it sells for five and a half. That'll give a modest profit. Enough to pay off the loan.

*REBECCA (O.S.)*

*And my commission. Don't forget.*

HOWARD

It won't sell at five and a half, though, will it?  
Might not even make four. A million out of pocket.  
I can't cope with that kind of debt.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*You can't cope?!*

*REBECCA*

*If you mess this up, you could ruin the Credit Union.  
And ruin me too.*

HOWARD

They'll throw the book at me.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*You promised you wouldn't risk the house.*

HOWARD

I swear there's no risk, Betsy. No risk! They'll go for everything I own.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*Everything we own.*

HOWARD

I'll be indicted for fraud.

REBECCA

*We'll be indicted.*

*HOOPER (O.S.)*

*Quite possibly.*

HOWARD

Kicked out of the party.

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*Can't let the government be tainted by scandal.*

HOWARD

Bankrupt and out of a job.

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*I'm afraid we'll have to let you go. You've been a fool, mon ami.*

HOWARD

Maybe I should go to the police right now and confess. They can put me in jail. At least then I could have some peace. Betsy will leave me.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*If I have any sense.*

HOWARD

Probably already suspects something's amiss.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*Right.*

HOWARD

Wives have no illusions about their husbands.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*Like most women who put their faith in men.*

HOWARD

I'm sorry Betsy. I tried to make us a better life.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*That's not repentance. It's an excuse.*

HOWARD

I'll call her. Maybe if I explain over the 'phone first.

He dials. BETSY answers.

BETSY (O.S.)

Betsy Loman. Hello? Anyone there. Hello?

HOWARD tries but fails to speak.

BETSY (O.S.)

Oh God a heavy breather. Get yourself a life asshole.

She hangs up.

HOWARD

If I'm an asshole now I must have been an asshole a few weeks back when I showed you that five million dollar contract. I'm the same man, Betsy. The one you fell in love with. I speak with the same voice. The same blood runs through my veins. It's the world that's changed. It doesn't like people who fuck up. There must be a way out of this.

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*If so, you'd better find it.*

*REBECCA (O.S.)*

*There'll be no way out. Not for you Howard Stencil.*

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*I feel for Betsy! She'll take it badly.*

*REBECCA (O.S.)*

*I'll call a board meeting and explain to them how you misused your position as chairman.*

*HOOPER (O.S.)*

*It' could well be a police matter.*

*REBECCA (O.S.)*

*I'll tell them you made a clumsy attempt to seduce me. Then threatened me when I turned you down.*

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*The press will have field day.*

*REBECCA (O.S.)*

*You took the money. And who bought the building.*

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*Imagine the headlines.*

*REBECCA (O.S.)*

*I had nothing to do with it.*

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*Bankruptcy.*

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*Government fixer caught with both hands in the till.*

*HOOPER (O.S.)*

*The court won't be very sympathetic.*

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*We'll have no option but to cast you adrift.*

*HOOPER (O.S.)*

*A jail term isn't out of the question.*

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*How could you?*

*REBECCA (O.S.)*

*Bastard!*

*FERDINAND (O.S.)*

*Fool!*

*BETSY (O.S.)*

*Liar!*

HOWARD

Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop.

*RICHTER (O.S.)*

*Howard Stencil's not our concern. But let's hope for his sake that he succeeds in selling the property.*

HOWARD

What was that? Mr Richter?

(Pause)

Maybe, if I talk to him. If I explain the problem. If I tell him the building won't sell even for five. Maybe he'll. I don't know. He might. We could work out something.

He dials.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(On the telephone)

Howard Stencil here.... Oh.... I was expecting Mr Richter's assistant.... Daniel Heep, yes.... When will he be back?... You're *Daniel Heep's* assistant? Maybe you can help. I need to speak to Mr Richter.... When will he be available?... I prefer not to leave a message.... Can't you put me through to him?... It's urgent. In fact it's an emergency.... No, I can't tell you what kind of emergency. It's confidential.... He'll receive my call for sure. Please ask him..... Why not?.... Wait a minute. Is your name Danielle?

Mr Richter told me that if I didn't get through to his assistant, you know, Daniel, then I should talk to you, Danielle.... Yes.... That's why he gave me your name.... That's quite all right.... So he's in? In that case...No, on second thoughts don't put me through. Just let him know I called. It *is* an emergency. I'll be there in ten minutes.

He is about to leave when the telephone rings again. HOWARD responds.

HOWARD

Stencil.... Oh Rebecca. I'm on my way out.... What? You called the real estate agent? Why didn't you leave it to me?... No need to be anxious.... Your reputation *and* mine.... He said three and a half? That's nonsense.... No don't do that....Okay, I admit there haven't been any offers. *That's* the truth.... Wait, don't do that. I'm on my way to see Mr Richter.... I'm hoping he'll bale me out.... Yes, bale *us* out.... I don't know for certain.... No.... Leave it now for god's sake. I'll get us out of this somehow. Don't scream. I'm not an asshole.

(He hangs up)

What have I done? What the fuck have I done?

Exit.

SCENE 2

Daniel Richter's office. HEEP sits reading. Time hangs. The telephone rings. HEEP answers

HEEP

Sunrise Vista.... Mr Richter's not available.... If he hasn't replied already then he probably won't....  
No.

He returns to his reading. Again the telephone rings.

HEEP (CONT'D)

Mr Richter's office... Stencil? Why did you let him in?... I don't care how anxious. He doesn't have an appointment.

He hangs up.

HEEP (CONT'D)

Shit.

HOWARD enters.

HOWARD

Daniel, thank goodness. I was talking to your assistant on the telephone. Danielle. Very helpful. I need to see Mr Richter urgently.

HEEP

He's not expecting you.

HOWARD

No. But I must see him.

HEEP

This is a busy office.

HOWARD

It's urgent.

HEEP

Everything Mr Richter does is urgent. You have no appointment.

HOWARD

Please. Tell Mr Richter I'm sorry to disturb him but.. May I call you Daniel? I'm Howard by the way.

HEEP

I know.

HOWARD

Daniel, I'm in deep trouble and I need to speak to Mr Richter. That's the truth. I'm asking you to help me.

HEEP

I can't make Mr Richter see you if he doesn't want to.

HOWARD

Did he say he doesn't want to see me?

HEEP

Not exactly. He doesn't know you're here.

HOWARD

Then please.

HEEP

Okay I'll ask him. But I should warn you he usually says no.

HOWARD

Usually?

HEEP

People are always coming to him with emergencies.

HOWARD

Oh God.

HEEP exits. HOWARD paces, sits, fidgets, paces. HEEP returns.

HEEP

Mr Richter can spare you five minutes.

HOWARD

Is that all?

HEEP

It's more than most people get. I'd be grateful.

HOWARD  
I am. I owe you one Daniel.

RICHTER enters.

RICHTER  
Thank you Daniel.

HEEP leaves

RICHTER (CONT'D)  
I'm afraid I have little time.

HOWARD  
I'm grateful to you for seeing me.

RICHTER  
Please be brief.

HOWARD  
I don't know how to put this. It's about the  
property.

RICHTER  
Property?

HOWARD  
The one you I bought from you.

RICHTER  
From Sunrise Vista?

HOWARD  
Sorry?

RICHTER  
You bought it from Sunrise Vista, not from me..  
Which property was it, could you remind me?

HOWARD  
One ten Culloden.

RICHTER

Ah yes. Fine little building.

HOWARD

Things haven't worked out quite as I'd planned.

RICHTER

Oh?

HOWARD

I'd intended to sell it. But I've had no offers.

RICHTER

It's eminently saleable.

HOWARD

Not at the price.

RICHTER

What price?

HOWARD

The price you said it would fetch.

RICHTER

What price was that?

HOWARD

Ten million.

RICHTER

Ten million?

HOWARD

That's right.

RICHTER

I said it would sell for ten million?

HOWARD

Yes.

RICHTER

Please continue.

HOWARD

My best offer so far has been three and a half.

RICHTER

The market is difficult at present. What with the change of government, the recession in the United States.

HOWARD

But you said...

RICHTER

I must have been referring to normal times. We're not in normal times. Things will settle down eventually. All you need to do is hang onto the property until the market improves. A year, a couple of years and you'll be able to cash in with a handsome profit.

HOWARD

I have to sell it now.

RICHTER

Why is that?

HOWARD

Remember, I told you? I borrowed the money from the Social Workers' Credit Union on the understanding it would be returned in a month.

RICHTER

You have an alternative source of funding?

HOWARD

No.

RICHTER

Rather risky.

HOWARD

I was hoping to sell on immediately.

RICHTER

Why not request an extension of the loan?

HOWARD

Only the manager knows about it. If the news gets out there'll be hell to pay. As chairman of the credit union, I'm in a conflict of interest.

RICHTER

What has this got to do with Sunrise Vista corporation?

HOWARD

I wanted to ask you. I wanted to know if you can. You know. Help?

RICHTER

In what way?

HOWARD

Buy back the building.

RICHTER

Are you making a proposal?

HOWARD

It's my only hope.

RICHTER

I have to tell you that our corporate business plan doesn't call for repurchase of one ten Culloden. Given the current business cycle my colleagues would likely oppose such a transaction. Even if I myself thought it a good idea.

HOWARD

Mr Richter, I'm facing ruin.

RICHTER

What price do you have in mind?

HOWARD

Only what I paid for the building. Nothing more.  
Please, I plead with you.

RICHTER

No need to plead. I'd like to help you, especially in view of the assistance you've given to us. My problem is how to justify the expenditure of...how much? Five million? I doubt it *could* be justified in today's market.

HOWARD

You did tell me it was worth twice as much.

RICHTER

Without doubt. As a long-term investment. But we're not interested in one ten Culloden as a long-term investment. That's why we sold it.

HOWARD

So your answer is no?

RICHTER

Not necessarily. I believe you own a house?

HOWARD

Yes.

RICHTER

Market value?

HOWARD

About three hundred I would guess.

RICHTER

Mortgage?

HOWARD

A couple of hundred.

RICHTER

So you have about one hundred in equity. Just about the transactional cost to our firm of reacquiring one ten Culloden. Very well. Here are the conditions I'm willing to propose to my colleagues. We will pay you the five million you need, in return for the Culloden Street building plus your current house.

HOWARD

My house?

RICHTER

Five for the two properties.

HOWARD

You want my home?

RICHTER

Not really. But we are a business, Mr Stencil, not a charity. I can't justify incurring all the legal and other expenses simply as a favour, can I? If we bail you out, you'll be able to return all the money to Credit Union, and you'll avoid a dreadful scandal and, perhaps even worse. You surely don't want us to pay the costs of doing you such extraordinary favours?

HOWARD

What will I tell my wife?

RICHTER

The truth I imagine.

HOWARD

Where will we live?

RICHTER

I suppose I should tell you that's not the concern of Sunrise Vista. If you're stuck for somewhere to live, we could probably rent you an apartment in one of our properties. Let my assistant know. And now I must ask you to release me.

HOWARD

About the sale.

RICHTER

You'll receive a call from Mr Hooper. Now please excuse me. I met your friend Mr Leclerc, by the way. Very pleasant, highly intelligent. You know your way out I believe.

Exit.

HOWARD

Yes. Mr Richter. Thank you.

SCENE 3

Stencil-Loman home. The doorbell rings.

BETSY

Just a minute. Yes. Who are you?

REBECCA

Ms Loman?

BETSY

Yes.

REBECCA

I'm Rebecca Stirwell.

BETSY

I'm afraid I'm rather busy.

REBECCA

I think you'll have time for what I want to say.

BETSY

Really?

REBECCA

It's about your husband.

BETSY

Who are you?

REBECCA

I'm general manager of the Social Workers Credit Union. Your husband is the chairman.

BETSY

Go on.

REBECCA

Perhaps you know he's been involved in an property underhand deal.

BETSY

Culloden Street. I didn't know it was 'underhand' as you put.

REBECCA

Yes.

BETSY

You'd better come in.

REBECCA

Do you know where he got the money?

BETSY

I assume it was a bridging loan.

REBECCA

He got it from the Credit Union.

BETSY

Once the building is sold, he'll pay the money back.

REBECCA

Will he? According to my information, he paid too much in the first place. He could be a million short, maybe more.

BETSY

Are you serious?

REBECCA

He assured me the property would be sold immediately at a profit.

BETSY

So you were in on this?

REBECCA

He tried to seduce me. And when that failed he threatened to use his political influence to have me fired - unless I arranged the loan for him.

BETSY

Nobody will buy that story.

REBECCA

No money went into my account, Ms Loman.

BETSY

Why are you telling me this?

REBECCA

When the news breaks of what your husband's been up to, there'll be a scandal. You'll have the press lining up to interview you. I thought you should at least know the truth.

BETSY

Very noble of you.

REBECCA

I didn't come to you out of nobility. I just think women should stick together when something like this happens. Howard's betrayed us both in different ways.

BETSY

You want revenge.

REBECCA

Don't you?

BETSY

It's none of your business.

REBECCA

Well, I've said what I wanted to say.

BETSY

Did you have an affair with him?

REBECCA

You'd better ask him.

BETSY

I'm asking you.

REBECCA

I was tempted. More than tempted.

BETSY

I thought you said he threatened you.

REBECCA

He did; but that was later after I realized that he only wanted me for the loan. Before that I had more or less decided to have an affair with him. He's an attractive man. We can agree on that, can't we? I even dreamed of making out with him while you were on television. They say men can't concentrate on the news when you're reading it. They're too busy staring at your boobs. Such a glamor girl on screen. Intelligent, sexy, probably overpaid. Most of it's image, right? But have you ever thought what you make other women feel? We're all inadequate beside you.

BETSY

It isn't like that.

REBECCA

When I met Howard I thought, yeah, it figures.  
Women like you get to choose their men. The rest  
of us have to humiliate ourselves by laying traps.  
And waiting. I suppose I imagined I could have him  
instead of you. Sadly, what he wanted from me was  
not me. He wanted a crooked deal. So he turned out  
not to be a great catch after all.

BETSY

Thank you for telling me.

REBECCA

If he were my husband.

BETSY

But he isn't.

REBECCA

I'd show him the door.

A car door slams. Footsteps.

BETSY

Will you please go.

REBECCA

Happily. Get ready for the media.

HOWARD enters.

BETSY

Just go.

HOWARD

Darling. Rebecca? What's going on?

REBECCA

Ah, the great Howard Stencil who turns out to be a  
lying piece of shit. You can keep him.

REBECCA leaves.

HOWARD

What was she doing here?

BETSY

She came here to fill me in on your activities.  
According to her, you borrowed five million dollars  
from the Social Workers Credit Union.

HOWARD

Short term. A bridging loan. I told you about it.

BETSY

You're the chairman.

HOWARD

I know.

BETSY

She's the manager.

HOWARD

Yes.

BETSY

In order to get her to agree, you slept with her.

HOWARD

That's not true.

BETSY

You tried to anyway. And when she refused, you  
threatened her instead.

HOWARD

That's absurd Betsy. You know me better than  
that.

BETSY

So how did you persuade her to give you the loan?

HOWARD

I offered her a commission. On the profit from the  
sale of the property.

BETSY

So why is she so angry?

HOWARD

There won't be any profit. I messed up Betsy. That's what I have to tell you. I can't sell it for ten million. Without Daniel Richter I couldn't even sell it for five. He's going to buy it back. As a favour.

BETSY

He lied to you about the value?

HOWARD

Yes. I don't know. He says it'll be worth ten when the recession's over.

BETSY

I didn't know there was a recession.

HOWARD

Me neither. I don't know any more. I'm out of my depth.

BETSY

You say Richter's buying back the building from you?

HOWARD

For five million yes. I'll be able to repay the loan.

BETSY

So why is this Miss Stirwell going to alert the media?

HOWARD

She said that? She's upset about not getting the commission.

BETSY

Don't you mean about not getting you? What did you promise her?

HOWARD

Only the commission.

BETSY

She expected something else. And you knew it.  
Didn't you?

HOWARD

Maybe.

BETSY

Yes or no?

HOWARD

Yes. But I had no intention.

BETSY

I don't know what to think, Howard.

HOWARD

You don't deserve this.

BETSY

What about your position?

HOWARD

The party will turn its back on me for sure.

BETSY

You're a damn fool.

HOWARD

There's something else. The deal I had to do with  
Richter wasn't straightforward.

BETSY

Go on.

HOWARD

He's going to pay the full five million. But.

BETSY

But what?

HOWARD

I had to agree to throw in the house as well.

BETSY

What house? You mean our home? Oh no you don't. He's not getting our home. It's my home as much as yours.

HOWARD

He insisted.

BETSY

Well he can un-insist.

HOWARD

We've no option, Betsy. If I refuse to include the house, he won't do the deal. And if that happens the Credit Union will come after us and take everything. We could end up owing a million. Maybe more.

BETSY

What have you done Howard?

HOWARD

Betsy.

BETSY

Leave me alone.

HOWARD

If you want a divorce.

BETSY

Don't talk to me.

HOWARD

Betsy.

BETSY

Shut up for god's sake. Who do you think I am? A doll you can play with? Didn't the risks of borrowing from the Credit Union occur to you?

Didn't you give a thought to the morality of using money that wasn't yours? Money set aside for people who have little or none of their own? Did you worry at all about leading this Rebecca astray? Why didn't you listen to me?

HOWARD

I didn't...

BETSY

She thought you were in love with her. She fantasized about what she'd have with you.

HOWARD

I didn't force her.

BETSY

No. You promised her an affair that she hoped would lead to love. That's why she's so angry. Angry enough to expose the whole sordid business to the media, and smart enough to protect her own neck in the process. Where was I in all this Howard? You surely didn't take me for a submissive housewife.

HOWARD

You're hardly that.

BETSY

People see me on television and think I'm successful; that I lead a charmed life. Truth is I'm just a newsreader on a modest salary with a partner who's just gambled away my home.

HOWARD

You want to split up?

BETSY

I don't know right now.

Sound of cars arriving. The doorbells rings. BETSY answers.

BETSY (CONT'D)

Yes? What do you want? Get out of here.

She slams the door, but the doorbell immediately rings again.

BETSY (CONT'D)

(To HOWARD)

You deal with it. Your Ms Stirwell doesn't waste time.

HOWARD

(At door)

Yes. No comment. No. Go away. I refuse to answer questions.

He slams the door shut, but the ringing recommences.

BETSY

This is your mess Howard.

HOWARD

Okay I'll go.

He reopens the door. Sound of voices. BETSY closes the door behind HOWARD.

BETSY

(To herself)

You deal with it.

#### SCENE 4

Stencil-Loman home. Cardboard boxes. Suitcases. FERDINAND enters.

FERDINAND

Anyone in? Hello. Anyone in?

BETSY (O.S.)

(Calling)

Just a minute.

FERDINAND

Ah! Betsy. No hurry.

BETSY enters.

FERDINAND

Betsy.

BETSY

We're moving on.

FERDINAND

Is this a separation?

BETSY

Not quite. Or not yet. Who knows?

FERDINAND

I heard all about the problem of course.

BETSY

You and how many million.

FERDINAND

I'm truly sorry Betsy.

BETSY

Most people seem to be enjoying it. 'Glamorous couple get theirs'. They've taken me off air, until the fuss dies down. You might have noticed.

FERDINAND

Your fans miss you, Betsy.

BETSY

Do they? If you've come to see Howard, he isn't around.

FERDINAND

Know where I can find him?

BETSY

Even if I did... The answer's no. He comes to see me from time to time.

FERDINAND

He's left home?

BETSY

Is that what you're here to find out?

FERDINAND

You're hard on me Betsy. Howard's my friend.

BETSY

I've never liked you much, Ferdinand. You always make a show of wanting to get into my pants. But you couldn't be less interested. It's tiresome. And hardly friendly to your friend Howard.

FERDINAND

It is a show, Betsy. Did Howard never tell you?

BETSY

What?

FERDINAND

I'm gay.

BETSY

You're kidding me.

FERDINAND

I pretended to fancy you - you are rather lovely - because there was no danger. Not to you, not to Howard and certainly not to me. It was a joke. I thought you knew.

BETSY

It never crossed my mind. I'm so stupidly naive. Why did you bother with all that nonsense?

FERDINAND

Insecurity I guess. In theory we live in an emancipated world; but I still find it hard to trust people. So I pretend. I do it all the time, Without thinking really. Can we be make up now, you and I?

BETSY

I suppose so. You've made me smile anyway.  
Something I haven't done for a while.

FERDINAND

Things are really bad?

BETSY

We've lost the house Ferdy. I've taken a one bedroom on Kings Street. Howard lost his job, of course. I almost lost mine. I can cope with the financial problem but Howard's something else. I hardly see him. Once every couple of weeks when he's tired and hungry, he comes home. I feed him, make sure he changes his clothes, and then off he goes again. I think he spends his time wandering the streets. I've no idea where he sleeps. He says he's not worthy of me. I asked him to help me pack up the house, but he just told me to sell his possessions. He wouldn't be needing them.

FERDINAND

I didn't think it was so bad. You've no idea where I can find him?

BETSY

A friend of mine spotted him the other day bumming for coins in Lime Street park. But when I went to see, he wasn't there. I'm struggling Ferdy. I don't know what to do.

FERDINAND

You want him back?

BETSY

Everybody tells me to dump him. Apparently I'd have no problem finding a replacement. I'm so furious with him, and disappointed. But.

FERDINAND

You love him.

BETSY

I'm not sure what that means any more. Yes, I suppose so.

FERDINAND

I may be able to help. Something's cropped up.

BETSY

In the government? Surely they wouldn't take him on. Not after his fall from grace - and the uproar in the media.

FERDINAND

The press have a short attention span and now they're occupied with more important matters than a minor misdeed in a credit union: war in the Middle East, the hedge fund scandal. Howard's a good man, Betsy. Anybody can make a mistake.

BETSY

I read out the news every day - most of it about tragedy and corruption. But it's as if I never took it in until now, never understood that people make the news, ordinary people like us. It's we who screw each other around.

FERDINAND

He didn't mean to betray you, Betsy. Given the chance, I might had done the same as him. He'd have been a hero if his scheme had worked, remember.

BETSY

Not in my eyes. The whole thing smelled bad to me right from the start.

FERDINAND

Still, you'd have been pretty well off. Lime Street Park, right?

## SCENE 5

HOWARD on a park bench. FERDINAND enters.

FERDINAND

Howard? Howard Stencil. Howard? Don't run off.  
Please. Come back.

HOWARD

What do you want?

FERDINAND

I've been looking for you.

HOWARD

What for?

FERDINAND

Come back and I'll tell you.

HOWARD

If I owe you money...

FERDINAND

You don't. If anything I owe you.

HOWARD

What are you talking about?

FERDINAND

Let me tell you.

HOWARD

There's no point.

FERDINAND

Just hear me out, okay? For Betsy's sake if not for  
your own.

HOWARD

Leave my wife out of it!

FERDINAND

She's in it whether you like it or not. And she's still there for you. Know why? Because you're a lucky son of a bitch.

HOWARD

Okay, get it over with.

FERDINAND

You're a bit of a dishevelled, Howard.

HOWARD

If that's what you wanted to tell me.

FERDINAND

It isn't. But you look as if you could do with a good meal. Why don't I take you for lunch?

HOWARD

I've no money.

FERDINAND

It's on me.

HOWARD

What's this about?

FERDINAND

A job.

HOWARD

A job?

FERDINAND

Yes.

HOWARD

For me?

FERDINAND

If you want it.

HOWARD

I don't.

FERDINAND

You do.

HOWARD

I'm unemployable.

FERDINAND

I'm offering it.

HOWARD

Your minister won't allow it.

FERDINAND

He already has. The party stands by its people, Howard. We had to let you go while the fuss blew over. Now we can re-open the gates.

HOWARD

I've changed, Ferdy. I'm not fit for work any more. Or for anything else.

FERDINAND

Don't be ridiculous.

HOWARD

I mean it. I worked years to get where I was. And the truth is, that wasn't very far. In the time you made it to deputy minister, I became a middle-ranking party hack and chairman of the Social Workers Credit Union. Is that success? I don't think so. And when I tried to break out and achieve something more, I failed big time.

FERDINAND

You were unlucky.

HOWARD

I took a short cut and walked into a swamp. That wasn't bad luck. It was stupidity. Why did I do it? Greed, ambition, yeah, yeah yeah. All that crap. Guilty as charged. Should I be in jail? Probably. But it's not the issue. The real deal is that I was travelling on the wrong road. I wanted the whole song and dance: instant riches, self-gratification, a lifetime of buying things I'd never need. I pretended to have a social conscience; but it went AWOL at the first sniff of wealth. No Ferdy. I have to find something else to do. Or maybe I'm good for nothing. Either way you don't want me around.

FERDINAND

Hear me out. That's all I ask.

HOWARD

You're keen to save me, or what?

FERDINAND

I want to make you an offer. If you don't like it, so be it. The decision's yours.

HOWARD

Have you been talking to Betsy?

FERDINAND

Not a word.

HOWARD

I don't believe you.

FERDINAND

I did ask her where you were. She said she didn't know; but that a friend had seen you here, in the park

HOWARD

What else?

FERDINAND

Nothing. Oh yeah. I told her I'm gay.

HOWARD

You what? No kidding'? That's funny. What did she say?

FERDINAND

She smiled.

HOWARD

That's funny.

FERDINAND

Now will you listen to me?

HOWARD

I won't go back to a crummy desk in the back office. No way. Ferdy. Don't even try it. I'd rather starve.

FERDINAND

You're forgetting we're in government now. The hard times are over. And we need you. The party can't afford to lose people of your calibre.

HOWARD

My calibre? That's a poor joke.

FERDINAND

Here's the challenge. We need an overhaul of the property tax system. We promised voters we'd get started on it as soon as we came to power. Our problem is there's nobody in the treasury we can trust. Most of them are closet liberals; and the ones that aren't are deranged out-of-sight radicals. So we thought of you.

HOWARD

Me?

FERDINAND

Why not?

HOWARD

I don't know a damn thing about tax.

FERDINAND

None of us do. And that's precisely what we need. Not another smart ass expert who'll come up with something even more complicated, but somebody who knows how it feels to be out there, confused, and maybe nursing a grievance about the system. Who doesn't just see the problems but lives them too.

HOWARD

Me and an army of others.

FERDINAND

We want somebody who knows what the government stands for, someone who cares about social justice.

HOWARD

Really?

FERDINAND

Everyone thinks the present system is unfair. Particularly unfair to the workers of this country, our core voters. We've made promises to them that we can't ignore. That will be your job. The Minister needs a full report and proposal within the next eighteen months. Can you do it? Will you do it?

HOWARD

Can I do it?

FERDINAND

You'll be able to hire whatever expertise you need.

HOWARD

Can I do it? Sure I can do it. As well as anybody. What's the budget?

FERDINAND

Twelve million for the rest of this year. Enough to staff up. At least double for the following twelve months.

HOWARD

It's tight, but I could probably manage with that.

FERDINAND

You'll need offices. We've reserved four floors downtown, in Sunrise Vista Towers.

HOWARD

That's a Richter property.

FERDINAND

They gave us a good deal. I should thank you for introducing me to Daniel Richter by the way. Good man to be friends with.

HOWARD

Yes.

FERDINAND

Now can I buy you lunch?

HOWARD

Do I need to change?

FERDINAND

You're fine as you are. Let's go.

End