

POLICING THE YEARS

NOTES ON CASTING

Not counting offstage voices, there are twenty six speaking roles in **POLICING THE YEARS**, (on the plus side, no mute roles added to this total), a manageable number on the Elizabethan/Jacobean stage or even in Brechtian epic theatre, but generally considered impracticable on contemporary ones. As it happens however, the cast is susceptible to conceptual duplication, on up to quadruplication, so that a cast of eight could serve. (No fewer than eight, since in Act I, Scene iii. *After the Funeral*, there are eight speaking parts, five female, three male.

Adam Tarrant Arcane/1st Mourner/Adrian Tarrant Arcane/1st Subordinate.

It's unlikely there'd be any confusion among audiences between Adam, appearing first entirely wrapped in bandages like the Soldier in White in **Catch-22**, and the 1st Mourner, but a studious reader of the cast list where this doubling is indicated will appreciate the irony that one of Arcane's insincere mourners, secretly and then openly gleeful at his passing, is Arcane himself; and a family resemblance between father and son is hardly remarkable; as for the 1st Subordinate, he is as anonymous behind his mask as Arcane in his concealment of bandages.

Josef Maurice Voxo/3rd Mourner/Jose Morgan Valentine/Art Eg

Jose explicitly claims to have been Josef in the preceding century, and one of the long-lived sharks should double as one of those most threatened by shortened life spans to feed the hunger for mounting years of the wealthy (and it has to be someone embedded in the middle of the Promenade Scene, *Equal Shares*, so there's time to change costume.

Arthur Verdant Trellis/5th Mourner/Sven Olaf Vergerus/2nd Subordinate

Petrolia Tertia Arcane/Carmela Venue/Susan Candle

Petrolia, Carmela and Susan are the youngest people in each act, and the roles have many interesting points for comparison and contrast. It might be a challenge to change from Carmela to Susan, but not if Carmela's presentation gown in *Futures* and *Equal Shares* were worn over Susan's rags in *Fire Lizard and Cracker* and *The Year Police*.

Sapphira Secunda Arcane-Voxo/Periphera Cone/Jane Finch

Though it's broadly hinted that Periphera is Adrian's mother, no longer recognized as such—identity is fluid among the rich who deal in lifespans spun out at such length—the rich do age whatever's done to slow the process, and in the six decades or thereabouts between Act I and II, Petrolia has aged enough to resemble the ex-wife she once displaced in Adam Tarrant Arcane's affections. Jane Finch in her own way has Sapphira/Periphera's steely toughness of mind.

Aurelia Prima Arcane-Trellis/Leader

Wearing a tunic with padded shoulders and arms, the woman taking on the role of the leader in **Act II, Scene iv** *The Year Police* can convincingly appear masculine if this is deemed necessary; she needn't, probably shouldn't, deepen her voice. In contrast to their alarming mask and

dehumanizing uniforms, the speech of the Year Police is commonplace, and their inflections shouldn't call special attention to themselves.

Prologue Suits

*Two men dressed for business enter from opposite sides, **Arcane** wings leftt, **Voxo** wings right, sauntering at their ease until each spots the other and they begin circling suspiciously. The circle they describe has a diameter of about six feet.*

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

I don't like you.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

That goes double for me.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

We had a good quarter when all is said.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

A better one's predicted.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

My father didn't like your father either.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

That goes quadruple for him.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

I contemplate you from the loft peak of my holdings.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

From the airy summit of my hoardings I look across at you

A.T. ARCANE/J.M. VOXO

I DON'T LIKE WHAT I SEE!

Each flexes his fingers aggressively, a gesture they will repeat from time to time.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

Our grandfathers got along all right though.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

They had smaller peaks. Those were simpler times. It's a jungle out there and that's on a good day.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

It is. Our grandmothers were responsible.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

You better not say anything about my grandmother!

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

That goes sextuple for her.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

If I knew what that meant I might take offence.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

If I knew what it meant I might have intended some. Possibly not. My quarrel is not with grandmothers.

A.T. ARCANE/J.M VOXO

IT'S WITH THE STUBBORNNESS OF A NO-GROWTH MARKET!

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

We have joint interests for now. Mutually beneficial concerns.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

Foothills in the lower ranges where our mountains of acquisition overlap and commingle.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

Conglobe. That doesn't mean I won't spit you like red meat on a rotisserie if the opportunity presents itself.

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

Fatal merger leaving you out in the cold with nothing but hundreds of millions in buyouts and severance to console your idle hours.

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

Fifties of millions is the best you'll squeak out of me. I don't like you!

JOSEF MAURICE VOXO

I don't like you!

Suddenly they spring at each other, fingers entwining in a fierce hand wrestling match, which continues and intensifies as light fades slowly to black.

ACT I

DEATH BY MISADVENTURE

Scene i Collision

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE

So there's a bright yellow sign popping up as I drive

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE(cont)

YOU ARE LOVED

DRIVE SAFELY

How would anyone drive except safely, assuming they had a choice? When you look at the stats on accidents I grant you it seems some people are looking to crash and take as many others as possible along, which is why I'm abnormally careful when it comes to negotiating and signing contracts. Don't want any unexpected pile up I figure in personally, and if I don't want to lose my money why would I want to lose my life? Just because of some lower class driver behind the wheel whose personal fortune may be yuge but who can't afford psychoanalysis if their life depended on it as if that was likely to do them any good. Losers! Sure somebody loves them for a prominent spot in their will and every last penny they can suck up on insurance, and isn't that about the size of love as a proposition in this world? Somebody loves me. Sure I'll drive safely and keep them in suspense a long time to come.

If you were in a high speed chase like in a Hollywood movie it's another matter, let's say you're Vin Diesel or Paul Walker for example. There's a reason then, though you'd probably have a stunt driver for the dangerous stuff. People all the time trying to foist chauffeurs on me "for my own good," just like signing officers for backup in case of my absence at a crucial time. Why would I be absent at a crucial time, what kind of man who wants to stay in business wants to do that? I do some of my best thinking on the road, dealmaking too, get it down on record—do I need some nosy servant overhearing and selling me out to a rival for a junior partnership? We've all got to start somewhere.

So what's this now? I look up from my cellphone at a big billboard sign across the overpass in

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE(cont)

Amber lights:

KEEP YOUR MIND ON THE ROAD

right, so where else would it be I'm behind the wheel of a car for crying out loud?

AVOID CELLPHONE USE

You kidding, on a drive this long, with the cutthroat competition snapping at my heels? As if it's the highway department's business anyway and so

Looks out at audience from bed where every limb is suspended in traction, eyes and mouth only visible within white bandage wrapping his head.

What? What, you think I look bad, past recovery or something? I wake up in traction and all of a sudden it's the end of the world. I'll have you know I'm getting the best treatment money can buy—better be, a bit of defunding and a place like this would go out of business in no time. Sooner! Rest they say, let competent staff and board of directors take over while time does its work and you recover. Listen carefully, gentlemen, ladies, wives and ex-wives too, time works for me and so do every last one of you, don't ever forget it. I don't pay hefty tax bills for nothing, in fact I don't pay any tax at all that I can avoid. It's amazing how many ways that's possible if you're rich enough and responsible only to yourself.

All right, Universe or whatever I get the message! Especially since my phone time here's strictly limited (can't use one in the first place without a nurse's aid) and conference calls are right out, hospital switchboards won't accommodate them apparently. So my chief communication with

ADAM TARRANT ARCANE(cont)

staff is by old-fashioned word of mouth and even worse---generally one on one which is not the most comfortable situation. Juniors by the herd lot are more easily harried along into acquiescence. On top of which---every single visit it seems we have to run through a ritual of commiseration that eats up valuable time. I really don't have room in my schedule for all this recovery.

I worry about the company of course. Hard to micromanage if your team can only reach you during visiting hours. Hard to read the markets with nothing but news and business reports to go by. Impossible to tell how serious my subordinates are when they tell me everything's clicking along just fine without me. Do I interpret that to mean I'm dispensable? Of course not boss, look at the valuable orders and advice you're dispensing now. Say it isn't true---there'll be a hell of a patch-up ahead once I can stand on my own two feet enough to kick a few deserving butts again. Say it is true---I'll have schemes and conspiracies from every direction to quell and dispel, at the same time as a lawsuit for criminal negligence and, so I hope, a brisk yet truly ugly divorce. Fun times ahead. In future I'll switch over completely to speakerphones.

Scene ii

MAYBE WE'LL HEAR SOMETHING SOON

Three women sit in a row of straight backed chairs in a hospital waiting area. Aurelia Prima Arcane-Trellis is a woman in her early sixties with platinum blonde hair done up in a severe yet elegant bun, emerald green scarf at her throat, flowery print dress, ruby red lipstick and

matching high heels, pearl white gloves. Sapphira Secunda Arcane-Voxo is a woman in her mid forties in a grey suit jacket and skirt, white shirt whose flounces seem to ride out in waves from her cleavage, black stockings with a flowery pattern inwoven, black stillettos, thick black hair in an upsweep. Petrolia Tertia Arcane is a woman in her late twenties in red pencil skirt and jacket, royal blue blouse that matches her heels, flame red hair falling free about her shoulders.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

I have something coming to me for the grief of our life together and the grief if it chances there should be any at his death—I haven't decided yet, it's a point I'm still hashing out with my lawyer, accountant and spiritual advisor. I know I'm in his will and if I'm not, there'll be some serious contesting. Oral and written promises and protestations going back over decades. Don't know what will be more engaging, refreshing, getting what I'm entitled to or fighting for it tooth and nail, horn and hoof and gooey grime-ridden claw. I was an innocent once. I blame him very much for that.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

I'm entitled, don't tell me I'm not just because I married his bitterest business rival out of spite! Promised me the earth, the moon, a few selected asteroids made entirely of gemstone or precious metal. He was intolerably rich and florid in his courting or I'd never have believed a word of it. I shouldn't have. Unless they're concealing it somewhere, his devious attorneys, there's not a single asteroid in his possession made entirely of sapphire or eerily green-glowing gold. As for the earth, it's surprising, considering his methods of preemptive commercial conquest, how very much of it he didn't own in comparison to what smally he did. I'm ready for a scrap, as a discarded flower of his ripe middle age, over my fair share of the wealth to be divvied up over

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO(cont)

his soon-carcass. I was naïve I suppose, but I make up for it now with a cunning so all-embracing I'm a close secret even to myself.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

I've been advised by some who prefer to remain nameless that my simplest course of action would be to have these two killed. I hesitate, is my nature too gentle to express itself with peremptory violence even in a cause so just against two such implacable enemies? It could be done so that the most dogged prosecutor could never trace it back to me, and anyway what's the most dogged prosecutor imaginable? Only someone who hasn't met a bribe yet that was big enough to overthrow any and all scruples. Could clip off a good chunk of either the gold or the sapphire asteroid we've managed to conceal from eventual probate—you could buy off whole precincts just for a start, and on top of that a whole team of crusading prosecutors. I hope neither of these two is listening in on my thoughts. Sure do wish I could listen in on theirs.

Had a good run but knew it was coming to an end. He was looking at girls younger than me, pushing the limits I can tell you—rumours that he already has, there is that civil and criminal case still pending about the eleven year old, she's in her late thirties now. It never worried me much even if it happened, because that was way back when he was married to Sapphira. I showed that bottled blackhead! loosen your grip for one minute on a fiscally sound marital partnership and watch out! hostile takeover.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDO ARCANE-VOXO

Petrolia wasn't the first of Adam's indiscretions in beds non-marital, and I hardly expected her to be the last, he had the class to marry me after all. I wasn't wrong about that, he simply shifted the carnal ground zero of his infidelities, almost certainly before the signatures were inked on their wedding certificate, most definitely within a week of the ink drying, I can attest to that personally. I shed tears when he left that last time for good, but when they hit the floor they shattered and before I swept them up, one of them cut my feet. I had a thorough checkup with two different eye doctors just to be sure, and there's nothing out of the ordinary about my eyes except their seductive beauty and power. How do you weep glass tears out of standard human eyes?

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Sapphira wasn't the first of Adam's indiscretions in beds non-marital, in fact he broke off a long-standing engagement to marry me, though he certainly took his time telling the girl about it. He was furiously jealous on top of all that. (*The other two nod.*) Whether he had reason to be is a secret I'll carry to my grave, but bear in mind—I'm not exactly a withered hag presently, but bear in mind—I'm not exactly a withered hag presently, but in my prime I could have given Marilyn Monroe a half hour head start and still beat her out of the running with any man you'd care to name. Well, Marilyn died before I was born, but if she'd been resurrected in her prime so there was a level playing field, I'm confident who would come out on top. I beat out women more beautiful than Marilyn even a little past my prime. Still haven't figured out how Sapphira managed to oust me, or how she was even legitimately in the running.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

It seems maybe we're the Fates in Adam Tarrant Arcane's life as it spins to its close like a car on treacherous ice rounding the curve of a mountain road.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

The Fates were sisters, surely we were born too far apart for that.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

A mother's womb dilated three times over a forty year period would be a bit of a stretch.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Thirty five. Less. Don't pretend you're not twenty eight, your age was given in *People* and *Us* both.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

On *Entertainment Tonight*.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

My age was given as 22!

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Six years ago. Therefore, twenty eight now.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Ipsa facto.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

Neither *ipso* nor *facto* whatever that means. Stupid to give my age even in the first place, especially when there are so many people eager to add it up to your disadvantage.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

But I think we can all agree—if we're sisters, that would be a long career of motherhood for someone.

PETROLIA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Men speak of being brothers from different mothers if the association between them is close.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Which it isn't in our case.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

Not at all. Not hardly. Not in the least.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Hogging the ritual lines now is it?

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Each of us in turn was entitled to one of those nots. Imagine the theatrical effect!

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Never mind, her greed will undo her in the end.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

I wonder how long that will be?

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

Why are you both looking at me like that?

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

You're third in line.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

You'd be the one with the scissors.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE(*clutching purse tightly*)

I didn't bring anything like that with me at all.

Shakes her head vigorously.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

We may be closer than we think.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Friends close, enemies closer.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

We may be sisters from different litters.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

That is *not* a comforting thought.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

No.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

No. (*Three beat pause.*) Maybe we'll hear something soon.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Even before visiting hours. Maybe. Certainly not

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

Certainly not much after. A few short hours.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Days at the most.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Days at the most.

James Maurice Voxo places his hand on Sapphira's shoulder. She reaches up and covers it with her hand.

JAMES MAURICE VOXO

There's some satisfaction being in at the death, but I'd always yearned to dispatch him personally, or at least have the majority vote.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

You'd have ended up dead or paralyzed in that case, dear. Wouldn't want to have two husbands gone in one accident boom!

JAMES MAURICE VOXO

Don't know why duelling went out of fashion. Oh there've been hostile takeovers, plenty of them, but even financially I wonder if they so much as mussed his hair. Ruined thousands, drove some of them to suicide, that was satisfying in its way but it would have been truly exhilarating only if they were people he cared about instead of throwing them up as random sacrifices to save himself. Ah well, the monster's nearly dead.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE -VOXO

Barring unexpected triumphs of modern medicine, knock wood. *(Raps on chair with free hand.)*

Long live the rest of us who continue on.

Arthur Verdant Trellis places his hand on Aurelia's shoulder. She reaches up and covers it with her hand.

ARTHUR VERDANT TRELLIS

Hectares of rainforest that can never grow again, clearcut to build a casino in the Amazon jungle. The location was hardly practical, it couldn't be reached without leaving trails of jet fuel or at best the diesel exhaust of trains that made daily excursions to that destination alone.

ARTHUR VERDANT TRELLIS(*cont*)

Inaccessibility was a chief selling point in its boom years, it's deserted now of course. My whole career since has been dedicated to economy of means in building, sustainability calculated as an immediate expense rather than discounted as luxury, and in many small ways it's proved itself a paying proposition. Intelligent reuse and elimination of waste even in the smallest detail of design must become the way of the future if we're to have one. And it's not only because your husband of the time cheated my workers and I so grossly of our merited wages. I've seen the error of my ways.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

As long as you never stop being extravagant in your care and coddling of me, darling.

ARTHUR VERDANT TRELLIS

The suicide chambers with their discreet black curtains were an innovative efficiency. Gamblers who'd brought everything they had and lost it all didn't need to burn up yet more fossil fuel in leaving. A gel capsule==fifty seven flavours available—a glass of water to wash it down if you didn't want to wait the few seconds it took to dissolve under the tongue. It's an efficient method he might have learned from himself—taking so long about his own suicide, and implicating the whole world in the process!

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Well he has pulled it off at last, dear, at least I don't see how it can be made longer, knock wood.
(Raps on chair, the ring of which is metallic.)

ARTHUR VERDANT TRELLIS

It's for that reason alone I'm here—riveted to this spot until his passing's confirmed, once and for all. Then if you like we can drive a little out of town—nowhere near so far as the Amazon—try our luck a little at Blackjack, Poker, Roulette, whatever you like.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS(*nods*)

But let's get him slotted first.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE(*with a sigh*)

Snip snip snip. What? What are you two looking at? I didn't say that, I didn't even think it.

Scene iv After The Funeral

Five mourners, 1, 3 and 5 male, 2 and 4 female, stand at the beginning of a receiving line of three women (Petrolia Tertia Arcane, . Sapphira Secunda Arcane-Voxo, Aurelia Prima Arcane-Trellis, the 3rd, 2nd and 1st wife respectively of the deceased, Adam Tarrant Arcane).

1st Mourner taps glass, which sets off an echoing ring.

1ST MOURNER

His taste in stemware couldn't be faulted.

Moves along the line. Ad-libbed, inaudible greetings exchanged over handshakes with each in turn.

2ND MOURNER

I'm pretty sure it was his wife who was responsible.

Moves among etc.

3RD MOURNER

Seems more the thing you'd expect of a wife's expertise.

Moves among etc.

4TH MOURNER

Which one? There's a forty year spread, first to last.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Not as much spread as that; barely thirty five.

4TH MOURNER

Even so. Not sure glassware that old would be safe to handle.

Moves among etc.

5TH MOURNER

'Fraid it might explode? Anyway quite the spread.

Echo of ring from glass dies out.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE(*glaring*)

How can you say a thing like that at a time like this? My husband's not even cold in the ground.

5TH MOURNER

Well, I . . . suppose . . . I can see where . . . but surely just about anything we say would be trivial in the face of . . .

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

I know my husband wasn't universally loved, even among the insincere mourners and exes collected here. I'll even acknowledge he had character faults, redeemed by his considerable virtues.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Faults, yes. She was one of them

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

You were too, and somewhat previous.

AURELIA/SAPPHIRA

Virtues you'd have to search for pretty minutely.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

You two aren't helping. My husband

SAPPHIRA SECONDA ARCANE-VOXO(*hand up*)

Mine too

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS(*hand up*)

Once upon a time.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

He was loved as well as despised and feared anyway how do you succeed in the cutthroat world of serious money and power if you don't strike cringing terror into the hearts of those who might oppose you? I loved him, whatever the gutter press and that interview I didn't even know was being taped might seem to imply. *I'm* certainly not glad he's dead.

5TH MOURNER

Oh. That's what you thought I said.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOX0

He said "Quite the spread," dear.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

He was referring to the buffet.

Glares, recollecting.

Better have been. I was responsible for the catering by the way.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

O! Well! Pardon me to pieces then. I misheard. I've had so little sleep since the dreadful night I sat by his bed 'til his last dying breath.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

All of us. Our husbands were there.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Her husband certainly was, and isn't any longer. I wonder who she's got her eyes on next?

2ND MOURNER

But your husbands aren't here at the reception?

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

They were at the funeral to pay their last respects.

1ST MOURNER(*whispers to fourth*)

Make sure he didn't rise out of his coffin more likely.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

My husband never broke bread with him except in councils of war—brief truces while they conspired against rivals mostly.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

My husband mostly just ignored the obstacles my ex threw in the way of his architectural career.

4TH MOURNER(*whispers to 1st*)

Be worth having him back just to see their faces if he suddenly rears up in his coffin.

AURELIA/SAPPHIRA

Neither thought it proper to eat up his food on such an august and final occasion.

3RD MOURNER(*whispers to both*)

Not if he didn't sink right back in half a minute at most.

Everyone gathered in an informal circle now, the conversation no more in whispers.

5TH MOURNER

A wizard at turning a personal profit out of bankruptcies—wouldn't surprise me if he entertained us with a little corpse dancing.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE(*laughing gaily*)

You're terrible.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

It isn't as if we didn't all see it coming.

3RD MOURNER

From a far distance and with great eagerness I hear.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

He didn't die of a wasting disease or a chronic condition he died in a car crash! How can you say we all saw that coming?

SAPPHIRA/PETROLIA

He was a notoriously bad driver.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

Thought the road belonged to him.

1ST MOURNER

Didn't maintain it very well if it did.

2ND MOURNER

Did anyone else die in the pile up?

3RD MOURNER

Two, and one paralyzed for life.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

I'll be fighting those lawsuits with every resource at my command. It's what he'd have wanted.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

You'd get better publicity with a generous settlement.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Reasonably generous. You can't make catastrophes too profitable or everyone will want one.

(Whispers to 4th mourner.) Ask her about the scissors.

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

Scissors what are you talking about scissors? My cuticle scissors you mean? Of course I carry a pair of those, nothing sinister about that, who knows when a flap of skin will turn up next to a fingernail? What are you suggesting, scissors heavy and sharp enough to cut the cord of human fate? How could you even carry that in a purse, it would rip right through the sturdiest leather unless you wrapped it in a special astatic silk.

2ND MOURNER(*whispers to 4th*)

I had an affair with him once.

4TH MOURNER(*whispers*)

Me? Twice, at widely disparate times. I'm not sure he even remembered me the second time.

2ND MOURNER(*whispers*)

Don't tell my husband. (*Indicating Mourner 5.*)

4TH MOURNER(*whispers*)

Or mine. (*Indicates Mourner 1.*)

2ND/4TH MOURNER

We girls have to stick together.

VOICES OFF RIGHT

Happy birthday to you

VOICES OFF RIGHT(*cont*)

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday dear Petrolia

Happy birthday to you.

MOURNERS

Well! Ironical.

SAPPHIRA/AURELIA

Celebrating birth and death in adjoining rooms.

VOICES OFF RIGHT

Where's the birthday girl now?

Where's the birthday girl now?

Where's the birthday girl Petrolia?

PETROLIA TERTIA ARCANE

Oh my God! Sorry everybody. (*Rushes off right.*)

VOICES OFF RIGHT

There's the birthday girl now.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Quite a coincidence.

3RD MOURNER

They do weddings too. My fiancée and I will be here in early summer.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

If she'd been a little speedier courting, that would have been quite the trifecta.

MOURNERS

And none of us were invited.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

You're still more than welcome here.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

Hours to come. Our third hostess will even be back eventually.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Probably the worse for birthday cake and champagne.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

So it's recommended you keep up.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Excellent wines, liquors and beers. Not to mention the buffet.

5TH MOURNER

Quite the spread.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Yes. We all are.

AURELIA PRIMA ARCANE-TRELLIS

All glad. Some show it more than others.

SAPPHIRA SECUNDA ARCANE-VOXO

Bad taste really.

1st mourner once again pings glass with finger. BLACKOUT to resounding fine tuned echo.

ACT II
ARE YOU NOW

Scene i Futures

VOICES OFF LEFT

How old are you now?

How old are you now?

How old are you, people?

How old are you now?

A woman addresses four judges arranged, Shark Tank style, I armchairs around a coffee table.

CARMELA VENUE

I'm accused of being 80 years old in secret. I'm barely twenty-seven, I have two small children.

It's because the rich want to buy up as many years as they can past when they'd normally have to surrender to the Euthanasia Bureau like the rest of us. A year here and there, even a decade from somebody who may be ailing or suicidal anyway? That's understandable, but fifty three years off a girl's possible life is a bit much.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

You could walk out of the studio and be hit by a bus. All bets would be immediately off. This is a highly speculative commodity you're asking us to buy into.

CARMELA VENUE

I'm not in the habit of walking in front of buses. Silly habit to get into if you ask me. They go their way and I go mine unless I'm riding one. Why would I do that now of all times, just to spite someone who's possibly the only hope my babes have for as secure a future as possible in this wicked world? The order to report has a 48 hour deadline. I can keep myself safe that long and then those years belong to whoever has successfully bid on them tonight, to use as they wish. I imagine they'd be distributed among family and such. None of you could keep 53 years added to the legally mandated 80 all for yourselves.

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

You'd be surprised how long technology can extend a life if you have the price. I'm 176 and don't look a day over 175.

PERIPHERA CONE

That would mean you were born in 1899. How did you survive long enough for these new medical advances to help you out so much?

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

I have my ways. Naturally long lived family if you must know.

CARMELA VENUE

Personally I would have pegged your age much lower. (*Aside.*) Not. But if I can insinuate myself—not that I’m proposing it up front or anything, one of the Behemoths has to advance the offer himself or herself I suppose. Then instead of selling my years I can trade my young healthy body and its many tricks and impulses for a sheltering arm full of influential wealth, enjoy a natural lifespan at least and properly raise those two my husband stuck me with before running off to stick some other woman.

PERIPHERA CONE(*snapping fingers*)

Are you with us young lady? Still in the land of the conscious as well as the living? Time’s a-wasting and we have other offers to entertain. Sell us on those years of yours and make it snappy. And don’t fret over how we’ll distribute them, that’s in the prerogative of the winning bidder entirely.

CARMELA VENUE(*aside*)

She doesn’t look like much of a prospect for purchase of the flesh, it’s years she’s after I hope I’m not reduced to a bargain on those terms. (*To Judges.*) I’m unemployed, true, but only the last two weeks—a short term layoff while my employer makes a few adjustments in his accounts receivable whatever that means. I think it’s another means of exercising control like the below-

CARMELA VENUE

minimum wage he pays under the table in cash—is *that* why I read as unemployed for so much longer than I have been? They screw you every way they can don’t they? Have I been a

CARMELA VENUE(cont)

neglectful mother? No! What are credit cards and lines of credit for if you can't max them out in the interest of your precious children's future such as it is? *Why* can't I get a job? I'm obviously able-bodied (*strikes a pose*) but there's no work to be had.

Surreptitiously strikes alluring poses and attitudes from time to time as she continues.

I suspect *that* told against me too, no work for longer than I was actually not working because my employer wants to dodge payroll tax, as if people like us weren't the bedrock of the system with our contributions to the underground and the aboveground economy both. Money you need to live sure doesn't sit in some privileged account in a country with discreet tax records, it's spent and helps keep up the flow of the revenue stream. My theory is our local overlord's gathering in as many surplus years as possible to trade for influence with lobbyists. This close to a turnover by the selection committee can that possibly be a coincidence?

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

Defendant (*blinks*) contestant will refrain from characterizing motive of officers hand-selected to represent the public good.

PERIPHERA CONE

And from the provocative poses and gestures accompanying her presentation. Not that they'll do any harm to our ratings.

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

I don't mind that. Gentlemen?

Venezuela and Vergerus shake their heads.

You're outvoted, Periphera, sorry!

Carmela is showing a lot of leg, adjusting garter belt on her left stocking. Lets go of skirt when done so it falls to (once again) demurely cover to the knee.

CARMELA VENUE

Pardon me gentlemen, lady, I felt my stocking beginning to slip and bunch unattractively on my leg. A girl is taught from a very early age to attend to such matters promptly.

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

No need to apologize on my account.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

Nor mine. Does the other need adjusting? They're a matched pair

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

Dangling on one lacy belt with its adorable clip-on snaps, very early twentieth century. What?

I've studied these matters first-hand after all. How many here can say that?

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

How many would want to?

PERIPHERA CONE

Boys boys boys! Well it'll send numbers through the roof on YouTube and iTunes, so on behalf of my shareholder I can't really object.

She is side-eyeing Carmela, seems a hint disappointed as the skirt falls, once more, back into place.

If you'd care to favour us with your most eloquent pitch. We're all ears.

CARMELA VENUE*(aside)*

I've hooked her too. Bids for my body instead of my years! Bids for my body instead of my years!

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

Our next contestant's 68—less than half my present age ironically—

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

Quite a bit under mine too.

Sven Olaf Vergerus nods. They all look at Periphera Cone.

PERIPHERA CONE

You know a lady never reveals her age.

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

That one'll pretty much be open and shut.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

Small fund in trust for his grandchildren's coming of age.

PERIPHERA CONE

Your energy and moxie's a shot in the arm to the whole spirit of our enterprise. I'm i—well, I suppose we'd better hear what's on the table as an offer first.

CARMELA VENUE(*aside*)

That one's a dark horse! She's going to be in the bidding clear to the end. Body instead of years, body instead of years! I can get all those fifty-three potential years back if I avoid stepping in front of a bus or terminal illness or any such nonsense. Raise my children myself until they're old enough to be out of my hair instead of passing them into the impersonal hands of an institution administering a trust. Who can trust these trusts anyway, things I've been hearing? And in the course of an ordinary lifespan who knows? The power you can acquire as a favoured mistress, the years extending into the mists of time. . . youth as well as life enhancers, when I'm 176 I won't look any 175! Sorry about old Granddad, he'll get the shaft but then again in three cases out of four so will I, but with years and options available to ride it out.

To Judges.

Lady, gentlemen! Fifty-three years as my birth certificate will attest, genuine and not fake like the one I used when I was sixteen to get into bars and clubs. . . Fifty-three years that will be

stripped from me and entered in the time coffers to be dealt out in dribs and drabs, a week here, a month there, profiting no one very much, unless one of you act now! All I want in return is enough provision for my heirs that they'll live on with as much security as can reasonably be guaranteed given their social stratum, enough provision to raise their stratum and status both it goes without saying. Unless! Any of you would care to propose another sort of arrangement, one I'm not permitted to initiate but may entertain?

The four judges look on, squirming with anticipation, each beginning to speak and then hesitating, not eager to speak first and tip their hand, only Carmela calm at last, over slow fade to

BLACKOUT

Scene ii Fire Lizard and Cracker

A man and two women, Art Egg, Susan Candle and Jane Finch, dressed as you'd expect, huddle for warmth around a trash can with a fire burning in it. The diffused light allows a dim view of cardboard boxes on its periphery, a curved row of them, improvised dwellings. From time to time snoring is heard along this periphery.

ART EGG

I wonder if a hundred years ago, three hundred years ago, dreams generally seeped into people's lives, daily lives I mean?

SUSAN CANDLE

Not their sleeping lives you mean? It's natural they'd seep in there. (*The others nod.*)

JANE FINCH

Better not be wet dreams if they're seeping in here. Don't want to risk putting out the fire, night as cold as this.

Sudden explosion in the barrel.

ART EGG

What was that? Somebody throw a firecracker in the barrel again?

SUSAN CANDLE

I didn't hear anything.

JANE FINCH

Not me.

ART EGG

If you can hear conversation for sure you could hear a sudden explosion like that! I suppose you'll tell me next you didn't see a lizard made of fire scramble over the top of the barrel and race out of here.

SUSAN CANDLE

No, I saw that.

JANE FINCH(*nods*)

I wonder where it ran off to though.

ART EGG

That way. It must be somewhere among all those people watching.

SUSAN CANDLE

There are people watching us?

All three turn to stare out at audience.

JANE FINCH

It's true, there are. What do you suppose is so interesting to them about us? It's not as if any of them would hire us to work for them on a bet.

ART EGG

Could be keeping track of us for the secret police. I always suspected I was important enough for that.

SUSAN CANDLE

I haven't, not in this dream at least.

JANE FINCH

But after all, what could they do to us anyway? Worse than they've already done. I say we simply ignore them the way they will us when they're done staring, however long that is.

They return their gaze and attention to each other.

JANE FINCH(cont)

Living rough ages you, but how old do I look to you anyway? How would I know what people's dreams did a hundred years ago, let alone three hundred? I don't even know what their personal home computers looked like. I've heard they were gawky and oversized.

SUSAN CANDLE

Five years ago I had an Ipod *and* an Ipad.

JANE FINCH

I had a tablet.

ART EGG

I had a laptop and a lap for it to top. (*Expectant pause.*) That was a joke, though not entirely. I still do have a lap.

SUSAN CANDLE

Imagine the wave of excitement that piece of intel sends pulsing between us.

JANE FINCH

Between us is right. Somewhere in the air there, well back of the fire. Retires crushed, don't take it so hard hmm?

SUSAN CANDLE

Pretty much everyone had something to connect them to the World Wide Web—I wonder if they still call it that?—in the developed world at least. In the developing world neighbourhoods and whole villages had to share. That'd give you a crowded and partial view of an iPod.

JANE FINCH

Crowding in amongst a whole village of your peers, straining for a peep, I just bet it would!

ART EGG

Sharpen your eye for the tiniest detail though.

JANE FINCH

Now only people in gated communities have any of these communication and understanding-the-world devices. They're hardly seen anymore in the world at large. Sometimes, if somebody out of the gate is looking at one waiting at a crosswalk, you can cop a peep at a datum or two.

SUSAN CANDLE

Hard to put it together so it adds up to anything though. Serious consequences if you're caught with a device inappropriate to your station.

JANE FINCH

No penalties for stealing a peep though.

They glare out at the audience a moment, then return attention to each other.

Anyway who says dreams seep into our life now? I wonder where that fire lizard got to by this time? I wonder if people are going up in flames out there, even as we speak?

SUSAN CANDLE

BTW are we still the developed world?

JANE FINCH

There've been some developments for sure.

ART EGG

Maybe we've slipped in the ranking a little. China's making strides I bet, and maybe Brazil.

JANE FINCH

There was an Ice Age and I was trapped in it—not even sure how recently it was I thawed.

ART EGG

Global warming I expect.

SUSAN CANDLE

And what use is that if we still need to burn trash at night to keep warm?

JANE FINCH

I felt guilty waking up, because no time had passed subjectively and I knew I hadn't finished a vital cave painting I was working on. They take more than a day you know, the ambitious ones,

it's finicky detail work and when you consider the light in there especially—like the light here actually, even though we're out in the open.

SUSAN CANDLE

It's night. Is this story going anywhere?

JANE FINCH

I'm aware it's night, but daylight wasn't much brighter in the cave. Anyway I have nine days to go before this great beast, a rare animal to hunt, is finished. And suddenly out of nowhere—I mean we had been noticing it getting colder—I'm trapped in an instantly forming block of ice. I think it's barely seven years since I was thawed. What a world to find yourself in for the first time in fifty thousand years!

ART EGG

So you didn't finish a painting of one of the beasts you hunted. What's there to feel guilty about? Go back and finish it now if you want.

SUSAN CANDLE

I bet she's planning to do just that as soon as she has the price of a ticket. In our circumstances there's no possible reason that would be IMPOSSIBLE is there?

JANE FINCH

You don't understand, this wasn't a beast we *had* hunted. It was one we *would* hunt, once my drawing of it was finished and it began to exist in the world.

ART EGG

I've read that was an idea of primitive prehistoric peoples about what their art was doing, but I'm not at all sure how it could work out like that in actuality. There are laws of physics and conservation of energy and such.

SUSAN CANDLE

Primitive! Prehistoric! Does this look like prehistory to you? Does Jane look like a primitive? And what about quantum physics, smarty?

ART EGG

They don't operate on the macro scale of the world we live in.

SUSAN CANDLE

Maybe they did then. Maybe they still do now in ways we don't quite observe.

JANE FINCH

Sure it worked out in actuality. There were some rare beasts in the heyday of my tribe, featuring no single animal I hadn't painted first before it existed. Others killed, skinned, prepared and cooked on smoky fires, but I got the first parts as acknowledged mistress of the feast. Why do you think the detail work on these earliest human masterworks was so precise? It's not as if there were loads of critics and curators and random gawking appreciators we had to impress. That animal I was working on might have fed my people through the worst of the ice age, it was hardy and adaptable but half of it was still in outline form. The finished part had only two legs, which a beast like that can't stand on even if its front end is a white chalky ghost. And what kind of beast

can get around anywhere without a head or a functional nose? Or a heart! My poor little beast didn't have a heart yet. And my tribe didn't have a snowball's. . . didn't have an exposed fire's chance in a perpetual blizzard.

SUSAN CANDLE

No use crying over spilt tribes.

JANE FINCH

They're missed in the modern world you know. They had qualities we could use today: morals, scruples, a wide-reaching sense of community.

ART EGG

Bet it didn't go as far as the tribe over the hill.

JANE FINCH

We were the tribe over the hill, a lot of hills. We were a far-ranging bunch. You had to be if you were a hunter-gatherer society.

SUSAN CANDLE

Morals and scruples I'm not so sure about, but there's still a sense of community behind the gates, which is where I still live BTW. In a feather bed where I'm sleeping and dreaming all of you

With a sweep of the arm indicates audience.

SUSAN CANDLE(cont)

All of *you*. Sorry if that means none of you exist, outside my head at least, but you must have suspected it surely?

ART EGG

Speaking for myself, I'd be inclined to doubt anyone's existence before I'd doubt my own.

JANE FINCH

If I'm going to be anybody's dream, I'd like it to be someone handsomer than you and built very different below the waist.

SUSAN CANDLE

You'd rather you were the dream of some man who had real women, maybe by the dozen, behind gates where he lived his actual life? Women like you—maybe a little more presentable—he brought in from outside? I have rough trade delivered all the time. It never gets out of control because they always know who's bossess. Maybe that's what my psychoanalyst means when he says my dreams are wish fulfillment. Momentarily I'm out in the world I bring these transient protoges out of, which they return to and I can't even visit otherwise. Daddy would never hear of it. I'm here and it's a dream and I'm in total control.

Jane Finch slaps her.

I made you do that. I told you I like rough trade.

ART EGG

Maybe you're dreaming and here in real life. It would fit my theory of dream seepage, and that would mean I'm not just a figure in your dream but really alive. I'd like that better, why I don't know—what's real life done for me lately?

JANE FINCH

I could kill you. That would prove I'm real even if I am in your dream.

ART EGG

I could help. Nothing personal, Susan, just an experiment to test the nature of our reality.

SUSAN CANDLE

If you tried to kill me I'd wake up first before I was dead I'm certain. Why would I wish to die in my dream if I could wake up in a feather bed and send out for a dozen just like you, make 'em jump through hoops at my bidding? I'll tell you what, if you once try to kill me I'll never dream about you again how's that? I can find other burning trash cans. I can find crack houses, booze cans, rolling dice and crap games, little communities living under bridges, ghetto enclaves of many kinds on every continent, religious retreats if I feel like a sanctimonious sleep for a change. I don't need you, you need me!

Lights begin to fade

JANE FINCH

What's she on? Whatever it is I could use some of it myself. Maybe I'm dreaming all of you, still encased in that great block of ice. What about you, Art? Where are you if you're dreaming this?

ART EGG

Right here, dreaming wide awake. I'm positive that's what's happening, so what could I awaken to? You see what I'm saying, see page?

to BLACKOUT on everything but the trash barrel with its fire.

Scene iii Equal Shares

Spotlight up, Down Stage Right, on Carmela Venue and Adrian Tarrant Arcane. They stroll across the apron of the stage, arm in arm.

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

My father died just before all the advances in anti'aging that might have preserved him even to the present day—unluckily for him, luckily for me as I'd still be waiting on my inheritance otherwise

CARMELA VENUE

Isn't your mother still alive?

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

Somewhere. Our paths don't cross much. We made an amicable separation and split of father's resources at my coming of age, you wouldn't easily believe how many years ago. I don't know if I'd even recognize her at this late juncture if I ran into her.

CARMELA VENUE

Separation?

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

Poor choice of words. She was my mother—she had a husband very shortly after my real father's death, she was criticized somewhat for that. That husband wasn't me.

CARMELA VENUE

Self evidently.

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

She could have done worse. It's the general consensus she did. More than once. So I hear, we live in different worlds.

CARMELA VENUE

Your paths never cross?

ADRIAN TARRANT ARCANE

If we do we may be unaware of it ourselves. Identity becomes fluid in age suspension. But you wouldn't know about that.

He slides out of spotlight.

CARMELA VENUE(*aside*)

But I certainly intend to find out.

She links arms with Jose Venezuela, who really doesn't look 175, but is much the oldest in appearance of the four sharks. They walk arm in arm along the apron of the stage.

CARMELA VENUE

How do you keep the Year Police off your trail if you're really as old as you say?

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

How do any of us? Do you think a single one of the four of us who own quarter shares of you is under eighty. Well, Adrian, he's barely sixtie, but all the rest. . .

CARMELA VENUE

He doesn't look much older than me.

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

Age is relative. A little over a week ago you had two days to live, how much older than that can you get?

CARMELA VENUE

Not much, unless you figure a workable dodge.

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

Which you certainly have. Got all your years back and who knows? If you play your cards right . . .

CARMELA VENUE(*holding it up*)

How's my hand?

Jose lifts it to his lips and kisses it. They walk on.

CARMELA VENUE

1899?

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE(*nods*)

And still have all my teeth and the majority of my bodily functions. Certainly the ladies have nothing to complain of in one area.

CARMELA VENUE(*aside*)

Their purses.

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

Another trick—you might think about it if you slip past the eighty year cull—is a switch of names and identity. It doesn't fool the insiders, maybe it doesn't even deceive the legislators, but it usually succeeds as a legal fiction. Most of last century and the first part of this I was Josef Maurice Voxo.

CARMELA VENUE

There's a kind of fluid identity anyway among all you long livers, isn't there?

JOSE MORGAN VALENTINE

We appear and vanish, reappear in new, improved guises. I don't know how Adrian would handle it if he knew who Periphera originally was, he hasn't heard from or spoken to her in so long.

Jose exits and Periphera enters spotlight. Arm in arm Carmela and Periphera walk along the apron of the stage.

CARMELA VENUE

The men are easy enough to size up on the whole, but I'm still puzzling out what your interest

PERIPHERA CONE

25%. One hundred percent on those days assigned to me exclusively. You're lucky the percentages are so evenly spread. If one of us had 26% it would only take a combination of two for a hostile takeover of your contract, which might drastically alter the terms. As it is you'd have to displease all of us—or one of us enough to persuade the others you'd gone too far, or even to go too far himself

CARMELA VENUE

Or herself

PERIPHERA CONE

In a moment of passionate anger leading to hefty payments to the other partners but no more serious repercussions. Not that that couldn't happen even as things now stand—I for one mmean

to keep you on your toes (alternately, knees) if you want to keep the years and generous maintenance currently afforded you.

CARMELA VENUE

My lawyer assures me that would be a prohibitively expensive indulgence for a one-quarter holder.

PERIPHERA CONE

He's right. But all of us are scheming, offers and counter-offers, to own more of you than we do as yet. Not with any dangerous intent, but controlling interest is always best with subordinates. Take my hand. Like that, yes, now stroke it with your fingers. Ahh! Your beauty stirs me deep within. I'll have those digits diving and trawling elsewhere 'ere long.

CARMELA VENUE

Your known list of male conquests is notorious.

PERIPHERA CONE

Many of them indentured, but a certain number equals for all practical purposes. Women I simply use and where sex is played out, discard. But in your case I'd have to sell off my shares to the remainder of the consortium. No danger of that for some time yet. There's a compulsive fascination I'm going to have to ride 'til its natural course is exhausted.

CARMELA VENUE

We were both pretty exhausted the last time.

PERIPHERA CONE

But you're so pretty when you're exhausted—there's the danger of trying to keep you permanently in that state, and who has the energy for that, even if the obsession simply won't let go? Satisfy every whim it still won't let go.

CARMELA VENUE

You have enough of those.

Periphera Cone slides out, Sven Olaf Vergerus slides into spotlight at this, so the line could be spoken to either or both.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

You don't know the half of it. Have you any idea the real extent of my holdings?

Arm in arm they walk across the apron of the stage.

CARMELA VENUE

In people? Most of them you have at a cheaper rate than me I know.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

And own more than 25% to boot. People and other things. My possessions are immense.

CARMELA VENUE

I know. You list them off to delay climax.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

It pleases me to please you. The sheen of sweat on our naked bodies. The riptide of orgasm fountaining from your loins, meeting in the land of sex oblivion the geyser of mine.

Carmela giggles. Sven glowers but can't control a responding giggle of his own that swells into a belly laugh. They momentarily collapse into each others' arms laughing, then collect themselves and continue their linked arm promenade.

CARMELA VENUE

You please me too, and I'm not saying that only because of the years you bought back for me and the generous provisions in place for my children's futures along with my own. How are they doing by the way? They're not much at emailing their devoted mother and I know you're their favourite uncle.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

They're doing well. I don't have to prompt them much about their grade, they've been drilled enough by their teachers about the potentially fatal consequences, somewhere down the line, of the least C or lower, even in conduct or rote memorization.

CARMELA VENUE

They inherited my intelligence. Of course they're getting straight As. The school sends me all their reports whether they bother to drop a line or not.

SVEN OLAF VERGERUS

Your daughter approaches the day her womanhood will flower with the characteristic red blossom. She already breaks out everywhere in girlish sexual vitality. She'll be a beauty like her mother.

Carmela greets this with a searching sideways frown as the two exit Wings Right. Lights slowly come up around trash barrel again.

Scene iv The Year Police

Murmurs left and right grow as the light spreads, revealing Art Egg, Susan Candle and Jane Finch asleep, then suddenly startled awake as the murmurs grow in nearness and volume.

ART EGG

They're coming. For us!

Rushes to the first of the row of boxes and throws down a curtain. Continues along the row.

JANE FINCH

What are you doing? We can't hide in one of those from the Year Police!

ART EGG

We can use them as a distraction while we flee.

SUSAN CANDLE

You two may have to hide or flee. I can wake up any time I like.

Jane Finch is helping close the flaps on the boxes.

JANE FINCH

Any of us can wake up any time we like, but not any place. We'll wake up in the Evacuation Centre and they'll put us to sleep forever.

ART EGG

Not in a feather bed either.

Susan has rushed to join the others, closes the last of the covers.

SUSAN CANDLE

I know what I'll do. I'll wake up, you'll disappear 'til I dream you again and we'll all be saved.

Blinks. Continues blinking. The results are disappointing. Sullenly,

All right. What's your plan then?

VOICES OFF LEFT AND RIGHT

Come out, come out, wherever you are.

Wherever you are, come out.

VOICES OFF RIGHT

Anybody your way?

VOICE OFF LEFT

Nobody. Your way?

ART EGG/JANE FINCH

We run out that way.

VOICES OFF RIGHT

Nobody.

SUSAN CANDLE

They're right there! They'll see us.

VOICE OFF LEFT

Bet they're snoring up a storm in empty box city.

ART EGG/JANE FINCH

Not if we run at exactly the right moment. Ready?

VOICES OFF RIGHT

Moving in on target at the count of three, boss.

VOICE OFF LEFT

One . . . two . . .

ART EGG/JANE FINCH

Go!

VOICE OFF LEFT

Three.

Jane, Art and Susan run out Wings Right as two Year Police officer enter in black leather butcher's apron and pants, metallic visors with black holes for their eyes. One of them is wheeling an old fashioned cart with solid wooden wheels. They look straight ahead and so don't see the three runners. Their boss, same outfit but a tunic with red trim instead of a butcher's apron, enters Wings Left. Nods, and the cart is set down. His two subordinates are already peremptorily lifting and throwing back the curtains, to frustrating result.

1ST SUBORDINATE

Where could they be then?

2ND SUBORDINATE

Must be bunking somewhere else. Oh wait!

Hauls puppet, roughly life size, out of one box and slings it over his shoulder.

1ST SUBORDINATE

One here too!

Slings a second puppet over his shoulder.

LEADER

Anything for me, lads?

They throw up third-last curtain—nothing. Second last curtain—nothing. Last curtain—success.

1ST SUBORDINATE

One here, boss.

2ND SUBORDINATE

Here, boss.

LEADER

Well?

1st and 2nd Subordinate exchanged puzzled glances.

1ST/2ND SUBORDINATE

Sir?

LEADER

Bring it to me! What are your two arms for, the strong muscles on your shoulders? I know what the ones above your neck are for!

1st and 2nd Subordinate awkwardly lift puppet and bring it over to leader, holding it up for his inspection.

LEADER

Well?

They look at each other puzzled.

LEADER

I'm not going to ask you twice.

Inspiration dawns. Between them they lift the puppet and, one before, one behind, drape it over the leader's shoulder.

LEADER(*aside*)

Good lads, but not the brightest fires in the ashcan.

To Subordinates.

Not such a bad haul I'd say, but I'm not sure we're done for the night.

1ST SUBORDINATE

Probably not a birth certificate among 'em.

2ND SUBORDINATE

Not as if you could read their ages by rings of growth like trees.

1ST SUBORDINATE

Oh yeah? When did you ever see a tree?

2ND SUBORDINATE

I've seen a tree. I've seen several if I really cast my mind back.

LEADER

Never mind, it's up to the Centre to estimate all that. Best they can. Let's just leave these here for now shall we?

They heap the puppets into the wooden-wheeled cart.

LEADER

What's your best guess, lads? Where did the others scamper off?

Pulls taser and long flashlight out of belt as the two look in every direction, at last pointing to audience.

1ST/2ND SUBORDINATE

That way sir.

LEADER

Let's go have a look then. Tasers and flashlights ready. You take the nearest lane, I'll go up the middle one and you! Cover the lane at the far end.

They walk up the outer aisles and the centre one, slowly, playing their flashlights across the crowd, all the time changing "Come out, come out wherever you are. Wherever you are, come out! How old are you now? How old are you now? How old are you out there? How old are you now? There are people need years. There aare rick folks need years. Can we give them your

years folks? 'Course we can, this isn't a debate? Come out, come out, wherever you are. . . " etc.

Then they exit out the back. House lights up.