

**THE COUNT OF ONE**

By Gary L. Blackwood

ACT I

(The St. Louis office of therapist DIAN DI SANTIS, comfortably appointed in the style of the mid-1960s. At Stage Right is a desk with a nameplate on it, a phone, and a Rolodex file. Behind the desk is a window. At Center is a reclining chair. The door to the reception area is at Left. A chime offstage indicates when anyone enters or leaves the reception area.)

(Dian is sprawled in the recliner. She is in her middle forties, a strong woman who likes being in control-- a trait that tends to drive away any potential romantic interest. She is growing tired of being alone, and of always having others depend on her. She looks worn and weary. Her hair is disheveled, her clothing askew, her face pale-- she wears no street makeup. She looks at her watch, tries to get up, sinks back down.)

(The door at Left flies open and in bursts and bundle of energy named NAOMI. In contrast to Dian, she is vivacious and optimistic, and a little ditzy. She's one of the few people Dian doesn't try to control. Though she is the receptionist and Dian the doctor, they talk on an equal footing. Naomi seldom hesitates to speak her mind--which is why Dian keeps her around)

NAOMI

You won't believe what Mrs. Hakim told me! (looks around, sees Dian in the chair) Oh, God. I'm sorry, Dian. Were you napping?

DIAN

Not exactly.

NAOMI

Then maybe you should be. You don't look so good.

DIAN

Thank you. Just what I wanted to hear. (She pries herself out of the chair) I feel as if I died and came back to life-- only not quite all the way back.

NAOMI

You poor thing. You want me to call Dr. Menghini and see if he can squeeze you in?

DIAN

No, I'll manage. I'm just so . . . tired. (She pours herself some coffee from a Mr. Coffee next to her desk)

NAOMI

You didn't eat any lunch again, did you? No wonder you're tired. You need to eat. You should be having caffeine, either, you know. It's bad for your system.

DIAN

I know. (Sits at her desk) Naomi, you missed your calling. You should have been a doctor. Or a mother.

NAOMI

Well, it's never too late, is it? Which reminds me. Guess what Mrs. Hakim saw in the cards for me.

DIAN

Something about a man.

NAOMI

Yes! According to the Tarot, I'm going to meet someone special. And it'll be soon.

DIAN

How soon is soon?

NAOMI

She didn't say. That's the hardest thing for a psychic to determine, you know-- the time frame when things are going to happen.

DIAN

She couldn't even give you a clue? I mean, you'll want to make sure you wear a nice dress.

NAOMI

It's not an exact science, Dian. It'll happen when it happens. I just hope it doesn't happen until after my hair appointment on Tuesday.

DIAN

How much did Mrs. Hokum charge to tell you all this?

NAOMI

It's Mrs. Hakim, as you very well know. And she charges a lot less than you do.

DIAN

Ouch. I guess I deserved that.

NAOMI

You certainly did. Just because you don't happen to believe in psychic phenomena or anything else that doesn't jump up and hit you in the nose, that's no reason to make fun of them. Really, I don't see how you could have spent twenty years hypnotizing people--which is pretty mysterious if you ask me-- and still completely dismiss the possibility of any other kind of unexplained powers.

DIAN

I'm not completely dismissing them. I'd just like to see more convincing evidence.

NAOMI

Well, you're a lot more likely to see something if you don't go around with your eyes closed. Just like you're more likely to find a man if you don't go around with your mind and your heart closed.

DIAN

Will you stop?

NAOMI

Well, it's not right to live the way you do, all alone.

DIAN

I prefer it that way.

NAOMI

Uh-huh. And the Beatles prefer to play polka music. It's not healthy. You should have somebody.

DIAN

If I "had somebody", I'd have to answer to them. I do what I want, when I want.

NAOMI

And you do it all alone.

DIAN

Look who's talking. (pause) I'm sorry.

NAOMI

Well, at least I'm trying. At least I'm open to the possibility. Dian, really; don't you ever get just the least bit tired of having all these people coming to you, wanting help, depending on you? Don't you ever wish you had somebody to depend on? (No reply) Why don't you call Brian? Why don't you tell him? It's not right to just shut him out of your life like this.

DIAN

I'm not the one who walked out. Let him call me.

NAOMI

He has, Dian. You would take the call.

DIAN

I don't have anything to say to him. It's all been said. Look, let's not talk about this, okay? Do I have a one o'clock?

NAOMI

Let me check. Do you want me to order a sandwich or something for you?

DIAN

No. I don't have much of an appetite.

NAOMI

All the same. Oops. I almost forgot. (She takes a bag of cookies from her purse and plunks it on the desk) There.

DIAN

Cookies?

NAOMI

Not just cookies. Oat meal cookies. And not just oatmeal cookies, Cornell oatmeal cookies.

DIAN

(examining them) Do they have little Ivy League diplomas, and everything?

NAOMI

Very funny. I'll have you know, these are extremely high in protein. They're made with soy flour, brewer's yeast, wheat germ, and raisins. Very scientific. They give you energy.

DIAN

God knows I could use some.

NAOMI

If you want my advice, you should take the rest of the day off. Go home, make a pot of chamomile tea, put your feet up, and read a good book.

DIAN

It sounds good-- except for maybe the chamomile. But I have patients to see.

NAOMI

(shrugs) They'll live for another week without dumping all their trouble on you. You have enough already.

DIAN

I'm fine.

NAOMI

Oh, sure. Here. (She takes out a compact) Lean over.

DIAN

Naomi . . .

NAOMI

Humor me, okay? (She brushes a little rouge on Dian's cheeks) That's better.

(She EXITS. Dian shakes her head. When Naomi is gone, she wipes at the rouge with a tissue. She takes a pill container from her desk, pops a couple of pills, and washed them down with coffee. Naomi REENTERS with a file)

NAOMI

Your one o'clock is a new fellow, a Mr. Novak--like on the TV show.

DIAN

A new patient? (Naomi puts a finger to her lips, closes the door) I told you not to schedule any new patients.

NAOMI

Sorry. Dr. Menghini sent him over. It's one of his regular patients. I didn't think you'd want me to tell him no.

DIAN

(sighs) All right. Is he here now? (Naomi nods, hands her the file) Just give me a minute. (Naomi EXITS. Dian takes a deep breath straightens herself, brushes her hair a bit. A knock on the door) Come in. (STUART NOVAK ENTERS. He is a meek-looking guy in his late twenties, used to "being good", doing what is expected of him without complaint--which is the root of his problem. He carries his head stiffly, as if there's something wrong with his neck) Mr. Novak?

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

I'm Dr. DiSantis. I understand Dr. Menghini referred you to me. (She shakes his hand; he winces) I'm sorry. Do you have an injury?

STUART

No. That is, not exactly. It's just a sort of a . . . sharp pain.

DIAN

I see. That's why you're here, then.

STUART

(starts to nod, but it's painful) One of the reasons. (embarrassed) I didn't really see what good it would do to . . . you now . . . get hypnotized. But Dr. Menghini said it was worth a try.

DIAN

He's right. We've had quite a lot of success delaying with psychosomatic problems.

STUART

I'm sure. I didn't mean to imply -- I just didn't want to take up your time for no reason.

DIAN

If you're in pain, that's reason enough. Why don't you have a seat here, Stuart. Do you go by Stuart, or Stu?

STUART

Either one. Anything's okay . . . as long as you don't call me late for dinner. (a weak, nervous laugh)

DIAN

(forces a smile) Don't worry. I'll be sure to wake you in plenty of time for dinner. Or I could just give you a post-hypnotic suggestion that will make you think you've already had dinner. That's a little trick we use on patients who want to lose weight. You don't look as if you need that.

STUART

No.

DIAN

(opens his file) So. What problems do you have aside from the neck pain?

STUART

(touches his forehead) Well, I have these headaches on and off. And . . . ah . . .

DIAN

And?

STUART

And . . . ah . . . I have these dreams. Well, just one dream, actually; the same one over and over, night after night. It makes it hard to get a good night's sleep.

DIAN

I understand. Do you think you could describe it for me? The dream?

STUART

(Clears his throat. His voice gives him trouble occasionally, and he puts his hand to his throat. He is obviously reluctant, but also used to doing as he's told) Well . . . I, ah . . . I'm walking down this narrow corridor, or hallway and . . . ah . . . I come to a door, a wooden door. There's a small hole, in the door, right at eye level, like a peephole. I put my eye up to the hole, and I see a man n a rocking chair--just kind of a shadow; a silhouette, I guess you'd say, because there are bright lights behind him. I . . . I seem to recognize the man, and yet I can't quite make out who it is. All I'm sure of is that . . .

DIAN

Go on.

STUART

Is that . . . I've been sent there to . . . to kill him.

DIAN

I beg your pardon?

STUART

(disturbed) I've been sent to kill him. (His voice breaks)

DIAN

I see. Can you give me a description of this man?

STUART

No. As I said, all I see is his outline, against the lights.

DIAN

Is it possible that the man is your father?

STUART

(confused) I don't think so. Why would I be sent to kill my father?

DIAN

When you're having this dream-- when you're in the middle of it-- do you feel the pain in your neck or your head?

STUART

No. I don't feel anything in particular, except for a sort of . . .

DIAN

Yes? A sort of what?

STUART

A sort of . . . well, excitement, I guess you'd say. Why would I feel excited about killing someone?

DIAN

It's all right. You don't have to feel guilty because of something that happens in a dream. It's not as if you're actually doing it, or even wishing you could do it. You're just imagining. Where the imagination is concerned, anything goes.

STUART

I guess you're right. It's just that it feels so real. As if I'm remembering something that really took place. That's why it's so upsetting. I've never done anything to harm anyone. I've always tried to do what's right.

DIAN

Of course; I'm sure you have. Is there more to the dream?

STUART

That's all. Just as I'm about to open the door, I wake up.

DIAN

And the pain? Is that when you feel it?

STUART

Yes. But it's not the only time. It can come on any time, any place. It's been worse in the past couple of months. Sometimes it gets so bad I have to leave work. I don't like to do that. I've always been very conscientious about my work.

DIAN

What do you do? Your job, I mean.

STUART

I get jokes about me being a schoolteacher, like Mr. Novak on the TV show. I'm not. I'm a bank teller.

DIAN

Is there a lot of stress involved in being a teller?

STUART

Not unless my drawer comes up short. That doesn't happen often. I've always been very good with figures.

DIAN

Is there any stress in your personal life? Anything that's making you unhappy? Relationships?

STUART

No. I live alone. No one bothers me.

DIAN

If I read Dr. Menghini's scribbles correctly, he's found no physiological explanation for the problem.

STUART

No. He gave me a muscle relaxant, but it hasn't helped much.

DIAN

Um-hmm. (closes file briskly) Well. Let's see if we can get to the root of it using hypnosis. Have you ever been hypnotized?

STUART

No. I've never even tried. I wasn't sure I wanted to.

DIANDIAN

It won't hurt a bit, I promise.

STUART

It's not that. It's just that I've always been sort of . . . well . . . afraid in a way.

DIAN

I understand. You're afraid of losing control.

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

Afraid of saying or doing something foolish or embarrassing, something you'd never do or say if you were awake and aware.

STUART

Yes. That's it exactly. How did you know?

DIAN

It's a perfectly normal reaction. We all want to stay in control of ourselves and of the situation. But being hypnotized doesn't mean you're giving up that control. In fact, quite the opposite. What you're doing is taking control of a new part of your mind, a part that, most of the time, does pretty much what it wants to. Don't worry. I'm not going to make you bark like a dog or sing dirty songs or give me the combination to the bank vault. All we're going to do is something called age regression. Basically, that

means taking you back through your life until we uncover the cause of the pain you're experiencing. We may get to the heart of it in this first session, or it may take two or three visits. It rarely take more than that. Okay?

STUART

Okay. What do you want me to do?

DIAN

I'll do all the work. All you have to do is lie back and close your eyes and relax. (Spreads a blanket over him) I'll spread this over you so you stay warm and cozy. Comfortable? Good. Take a deep breath, as deep as you can. Now exhale slowly. Again. Each time you do this, I want you to visualize yourself releasing all your stored up tension and anxiety. Breathe deeply; exhale. Now, picture every muscle in your body relaxing, starting with the muscles in your face and neck. Relax. You no longer feel the pain in your neck because you're so relaxed. Now relax all the muscles in your arms. Now your back and stomach. Now your legs. Each time you breathe out you relax even more. Let your body sink down into the chair, deeper and deeper, growing more and more relaxed. I'll begin counting backward from ten to one. With each number I say, you'll reach a deeper level of relaxation. Ten . . . relaxing. Nine. . . deeper. Eight . . . even deeper. Seven, six . . . relaxing . . . five, four, three, two one. You are now completely and totally relaxed, more relaxed than you've ever been in your life. So relaxed and free from distraction that you can recall at will anything from your memory, no matter how far back. But I want you to do more than just remember. I want you to go back in time, as it were, to relive certain moments from your past. Can you do that? (Stuart nods) Good. I want you to take us back to a point in time before the neck pain and the headaches you've been having began. On the count of one, you'll be there. Three . . . two . . . one. Have you reached that point?

STUART

Yes. (Through the following scene, Stuart's voice changes, gets more strong and confident and mellifluous-- the voice of a trained actor)

DIAN  
(taking notes) How old are you?

STUART  
Twenty-four.

DIAN  
And what year is it?

STUART  
1862.

DIAN  
(taken aback ) Let me ask you again. What year is this?

STUART  
Let me repeat-- the year is 1862.

DIAN  
Surely you mean 1962.

STUART  
Are you trying to make a fool of me?

DIAN  
No, of course not. I'm only trying to make sure that-- that we know where we stand. (tries) another tack) Can you . . . can you tell me the name of the current president of the United States?

STUART  
You continue to mock me, madam.

DIAN  
I don't mean to. Please answer the question.

STUART  
I cannot.

DIAN  
Because you don't know the answer?

STUART

Because there is no answer, for there are no United States. There are only Union states and Confederate states.

DIAN

Union and-- (losing control) Who-- (She gets hold of herself) Would you tell me your name, please?

STUART

(smoothing an imaginary mustache, something he does repeatedly during the Booth sequences) I am greatly disappointed, madam. I had vainly thought my face so familiar that no further introduction would be necessary. I see that my fame is not quite so secure or so widespread as I have been led to believe. (He touches the brim of an imaginary hat) Mr. Booth at your service.

DIAN

And . . . your first name, sir?

STUART

I am best known by the name I employ for my stage appearances-- John Wilkes Booth.

DIAN

(shaken) Where is Stuart?

STUART

I know no one by that name, unless perhaps you mean Dr. Stewart.

DIAN

No.

STUART

Well. If you are quite done quizzing me, I have a performance to prepare for. Will you excuse me?

DIAN

No. I won't. On the count of one, you will return to the present day, to 1965, but you will stay in a state of deep relaxation. (rushing it) Three, two, one. (She looks

distraught, bewildered. She takes a deep breath, goes to the door) Naomi. When is my next appointment?

NAOMI

(comes to door) Three o'clock. If she shows up. You know Mrs. Dougherty.

DIAN

(looks at watch) Yes. All right.

NAOMI

Is anything wrong? (looks in at Stuart)

DIAN

I'm not sure.

NAOMI

You look as if you saw a ghost.

DIAN

No. I just ran into some . . . unexpected complications. Nothing major.

NAOMI

Uh-huh. Dian, what's going on?

DIAN

When I find out, you'll be the first to know. (She closes the door, takes another deep breath) Stuart?

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

(relieved) When I reach the count of one, I want you to go back in time again, to a point shortly after the pain in your neck began. Is that clear?

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

Okay. Three, two, one. Stuart? Stuart?

STUART

I'm sorry. I'm afraid you mistake me for someone else.

DIAN

(hesitantly) Mr. Booth, I presume.

STUART

Now you have it. And you have the advantage of me, Miss .  
. . Miss . . .

DIAN

(flustered, recovers) Don't tell me you've forgotten my name, Mr. Booth.

STUART

A thousand apologies. My mind is so filled up with lines from Shakespeare that something else has to go. Do you know that in a new town I often forget the name of the theatre where I'm playing? If I lose my way, I simply stop someone and ask directions to the theatre where Mr. Booth is appearing. Usually that does the trick--unless my brother Edwin is in town. Now, if you would be so forgiving as to refresh my memory. The face is unforgettable, I assure you, but I cannot recall the name.

DIAN

It's . . . ah . . . off the top of her head) It's Mary.

STUART

Of course, of course. Mary. How delightful to re-make your acquaintance. I hope to see you in the audience this evening. I'm doing Richard the Third at Grover's. Or is it Grover the Third at Richard's? Only joking, of course. Do you know that the great Mr. Lincoln actually attended last night's performance? In fact, he was practically in the performance. During the fight scene, I laid into my Richmond so forcefully that he tumbled backward into the Presidential box and narrowly missed impaling Mr. Lincoln. Unfortunately. (Dian turns away, distressed) Mary? Is something wrong? You're so quiet suddenly. I'm sorry if my joke offended you.

DIAN

I don't consider death a subject to joke about.

STUART

Nor do I. But you must admit, the country would be far better off if Mr. Lincoln were not in it. Last spring I had an engagement in New Orleans, and passed through much of the South-- now what once was the South. The wrenching poverty, the wanton looting and destruction I witnessed made me sick at heart. And the real tragedy of it is that none of it was necessary. All Lincoln had to do was to agree to a different sort of emancipation. The emancipation not of the Negro, but of the entire South. Our way of life, our whole outlook, has always been distinct from that of the North. Why, then, should the two be thrown together willy-nilly, like two brothers of vastly different philosophies and enthusiasms forced to live under the same roof.

DIAN

I'd like to move on to some other subject, now, something less controversial.

STUART

(coolly) Yes, of course. I should have realized that a woman would not care to discuss matters of such consequence.

DIAN

There's no need to insult my intelligence, Mr. B-- Mr. N-- (under her breath) Whoever the hell you are. And there's no need to let this degenerate into an argument.

STUART

You are quite right. I make it a point never to argue with an attractive woman. A frown upon a fair face is most unbecoming. And yet-- (declaiming) "Her very frowns are fairer far than smiles of other maidens are." (his voice falters, he winces)

DIAN

Are you experiencing much pain in your neck?

STUART

It is not severe, thank you. How did you know about that?

DIAN

(improvising) Well, when someone is as famous as you, Mr. Booth, such news is bound to travel quickly.

STUART

No doubt. And just what are they saying about how I came to suffer this injury? (puts his hand to his neck)

DIAN

(another shot in the dark) I think I heard someone say that you . . . that you fell from a horse.

STUART

(laughs derisively) Did they indeed? Anyone who knows me well at all knows how unlikely that is. If I do say so, I am an excellent horseman. (leans forward) Would you like to know how it really came about?

DIAN

Yes, I would; very much.

STUART

It was a jealous husband. He suspected me of compromising his wife, and he drilled me.

DIAN

Shot you, you mean? In the neck?

STUART

It was a small caliber pistol, and the bullet did not go deep, Even so, when the doctor dug it out, it left a hole the size of my fist. It took twenty stitches to close it up. Not as glorious as being wounded in a battle, but more dignified than falling off a horse. Doctor May expressly told me not to try and perform before it was properly healed, but what could I do? I was set to play opposite the charming and talented Miss Cushman. I could hardly expect her to make do with some plodding understudy, now, could I? I was as careful as I might be through most of the play, but then we came to the scene which calls for Miss Cushman to embrace me, and she did so with such ardor that it tore the stitches loose. It's just now getting right again.

DIAN

I see. Dr. May, you said? Do you happen to remember the date that this surgery was performed?

STUART

What odd questions you ask. Anyone would think that you doubt my veracity.

DIAN

Will you please answer the question?

STUART

Forgive me, but I don't like being interrogated. I think it's time I took my leave. I have more pressing matters to attend to. Good day, miss.

DIAN

Took your leave? I'm sorry, but I haven't finished yet. I'd just like to ask a couple more questions, and then I'll bring you back. All right? Mr. Booth? Mr. Booth? (no response) Damn! How is that possible? I'm in charge here, not you! (She stops, realizing she's losing it. She paces about the room in frustration. Naomi peeks in)

NAOMI

Dian? Is everything all right?

DIAN

Yes, yes, everything's fine. Well, no. It's not fine. It's screwed up. I've lost my subject.

NAOMI

Oh, my God! He's dead?

DIAN

No, no. At least I don't think he is! (She hastens to feel his pulse, shows relief) I'd better bring him back. You'll have to leave, Naomi. I'd need his permission to have someone else present.

NAOMI

Sure. You want me to cancel your three o'clock?

DIAN

No. I'll wrap thing up here in a minute. I'm just a little . . . confused right now. Naomi EXITS) I'm going to count down from ten again. When I reach the count of one, you will be back in the present day; you will be refreshed and relaxed and free of pain. If we visit again, you will be able to reach that same deep relaxed state again very quickly and easily. (She counts from ten to once, forces a smile. Stuart opens his eyes) Hello. How do you feel?

STUART

(a bit dreamily) Very . . . relaxed. Sorry it didn't work. I'm not such a good subject, I guess.

DIAN

Oh, it worked, all right. You were out like a light within a few minutes.

STUART

No kidding.

DIAN

No kidding. You've been under for most of an hour.

STUART

That long? What-- what did I do

DIAN

You don't remember any of it?

STUART

No. Should I?

DIAN

Not necessarily. You just . . . talked, basically. How's your neck?

STUART

(sits up, moves his head around) The pain seems to be gone. Is that possible?

DIAN

Quite possible. The brain is a pretty amazing tool. It can create problems, but it can also clear them up if you push the right buttons.

STUART

I guess you must have pushed them, then. This is incredible. I don't know how to thank you. Should I-- should I go?

DIAN

In a minute. Tell, me Stuart. Are you by any chance a history buff?

STUART

Me? No. It was probably my worst subject in school

DIAN

Did you ever study the Civil War era?

STUART

I guess I must have. But I don't remember much about it. I don't even remember the dates for sure. Why?

DIAN

Oh, it's just that I've been . . . learning about John Wilkes Booth. In a book. I thought you might be interested in reading it.

STUART

I don't read much; sorry. Mostly just TV.

DIAN

(nods) Well. Now you can watch it a lot more comfortably, right? (She opens the door for him)

STUART

Right. Thanks again. It feels great!

NAOMI

(to Stuart, as she enters) Goodbye. (to Dian) Mrs. Dougherty called to say she won't be in. The aliens zapped her ignition system again.

DIAN

Thank God. Or whoever it is that send aliens down. I'm exhausted. (sits in recliner)

NAOMI

You look it. Did you have a cookie?

DIAN

You're relentless, Naomi.

NAOMI

I'm concerned, that's all.

DIAN

I know.

NAOMI

(gets her a cookie) I suppose you'll have to have coffee with this.

DIAN

Unless you have something stronger.

NAOMI

(she gets the coffee, adds a second cookie to the plate as an afterthought) Tough session, huh? It seemed to work, though. He was smiling instead of grimacing.

DIAN

Good. I don't want to see him again.

NAOMI

Not even if he's still having problems.

DIAN

He won't. If he does, let him get a cortisone shot. If he calls tell him I went out of business. Tell him I died.

NAOMI

Not funny. What was so bad about him? He seemed like a nice enough guy-- a little wishy-washy, but that could be a plus. Not bad looking, either. Is he married?

DIAN

Naomi.

NAOMI

Well, who knows? He could be the one Mrs. Hakim saw in the cards.

DIAN

Don't even think about it. This one has too many problems.

NAOMI

What kind? Oh, I guess it wouldn't be ethical to talk about it, huh?

DIAN

No, it wouldn't. What do you know about John Wilkes Booth?

NAOMI

Now there's a quick change of subject. John Wilkes Booth. I know he was an actor, and he killed Lincoln. I think he was insane. That's about it. Why?

DIAN

I was hoping you knew more than I did.

NAOMI

Why this sudden interest in a presidential assassin?

DIAN

Well. . . it seems that for the past half hour or so I've been talking to him.

NAOMI

To John Wilkes Booth?

DIAN

Somebody who says he is, anyway.

NAOMI

You mean . . . Mr. Novak's got a split personality?

DIAN

Not exactly. The only thing I can think of is that he's read a lot about Booth, and identifies with him somehow-- so much so that when he's regressed, he becomes Booth.

NAOMI

Does he know he's doing this?

DIAN

Apparently not. And I couldn't decide whether or not to tell him. It might help clear things up, but it might just disturb him more. I did ask him if he'd ever studied about Booth or about the Civil War. He claimed he hadn't, but what other possible explanation could there be?

NAOMI

I can think of one.

DIAN

Don't tell me-- Stuart Novak is a medium, right, and he's channeling the spirit of John Wilkes Booth?

NAOMI

Well, that's an interesting theory, too. I hadn't thought of that.

DIAN

You mean your theory is even more off the wall than that?

NAOMI

No. And if you're going to take that kid of attitude, I won't even bother to bring it up.

DIAN

Good.

NAOMI

Let me just say two words: Bridey. Murphy.

DIAN

Oh, spare me.

NAOMI

No, now, think about it. What if you do have another Bridey Murphy on your hand? You can write about it, and you'll be famous. And rich. You can give all this up and take it easy the rest of-- Besides, think of all the men you'll attract.

DIAN

Uh-huh. A bunch of nut cases.

NAOMI

Well, you could at least look into it, explore it further, instead of just cutting the guy off like this, like you did--

DIAN

Like I did with Brian? No. It's too risky.

NAOMI

Risk? You're always telling your patients that hypnosis is perfectly safe.

DIAN

This is . . . different. You remember when I said I'd lost my subject?

NAOMI

Yeah. But I didn't know what you meant.

DIAN

What I meant was he . . . well, he left.

NAOMI

As in left the room?

DIAN

No, not Novak. Booth. He said he had more pressing matters to attend to, good day, and then . . . he was gone.

NAOMI

What's so bad about that? If I were you, I'd have been more worried that he was going to go bananas and shoot you or something.

DIAN

That never crossed my mind. He didn't seem dangerous at all, just . . . strong willed. A subject should not be able to just terminate the conversation like that. No one's ever done it to me before, and I don't like it.

NAOMI

I'm not surprised.

DIAN

What does that mean?

NAOMI

Nothing. It's just that you do have this teeny thing about being in control?

DIAN

Thank you, Dr. Naomi.

NAOMI

Well, you asked.

DIAN

I don't think that's necessarily a negative thing, wanting to be in control.

NAOMI

That depends on who you're controlling. I imagine patients like it. Boyfriends and husbands don't.

DIAN

This man is a patient.

NAOMI

Maybe not. Maybe only the Stuart Novak part is.

DIAN

Well, in any case<sup>3</sup> he's not going to be a patient any longer. I'm not going to work with somebody I can't-- work with.

NAOMI

Control. You were going to say control. You know, I have a sneaking suspicion that's why you don't care for the whole idea of psychic phenomena. They can't be controlled. Think about it. (Starts to leave)

DIAN

Naomi.

NAOMI

Yes?

DIAN

You're fired.

NAOMI

(cheerfully) Nope, sorry. Mrs. Hakim would have seen it in the cards.

(Lights down)

(Lights up. A few days later. Dian is at is at her desk, drinking coffee and reading a book. The door flies open, Naomi sweeps in, shedding her coat.)

NAOMI

Guess what?

DIAN

(claps the book shut, half conceals it with her arm) Did it ever occur to you to knock?

NAOMI

No. Did you want me to?

DIAN

I'd appreciate it.

NAOMI

Okay. (She exits, closes door, knocks)

DIAN

Not now!

NAOMI

(peeks in) You mean I can't come in now?

DIAN

I mean you don't need to knock now. Next time.

NAOMI

Oh. Guess what? I met him.

DIAN

Who?

NAOMI

Him. The one in the Tarot cards. His name is Jerry. Jerry Pursley. Isn't that cure? Sort of like purslane. Or Parsley. I met him at the Community Grocery. I was buying ginger and he was buying mung beans, and I said, You know, I've always wondered what it is you're supposed to do with mung beans, and he said, Well, I usually sprout them, so we got to talking about sprouts, and then about other things, and . . . and we're going out to dinner after work. It's just like Mrs. Hakim said.

DIAN

Did she predict the part about the mung beans?

NAOMI

No. I told you, psychic messages are not that specific. The point is, she knew I was going to meet someone.

DIAN

That doesn't mean it was fated to happen, Naomi. You made it happen, by asking about the mung beans.

NAOMI

Yes, but if I hadn't known it was coming, maybe I wouldn't have made it a point to ask about the mung beans. You didn't think I really had no idea what to do with mung beans, did you? That was just what you call a subtle ploy. Men like to be asked things.

DIAN

Thank you for that insight. Have you told Jerry Parsley that he turned up in a Tarot deck?

NAOMI

No.

DIAN

Take my advice. Don't.

NAOMI

Maybe he's not as close-minded as some people. What are you reading? Anything good? (She pushes Dian's arm aside. Dian is embarrassed. Myself Alone: A Life of . . . John Wilkes Booth? He really got to you, didn't he?)

DIAN

He said some . . . intriguing things-- Novak, I mean. I just wanted to check and see whether he dreamed it all up, or whether it had some basis in fact.

NAOMI

And what did you find out?

DIAN

Not much. I was interrupted. I was just reading about the assassination.

NAOMI

(opens the book to a picture of Booth) Ooh, he was a handsome devil, wasn't he? Look at those eyes. (PHONE RINGS O.S.)

DIAN

(takes book) Your phone's ringing.

NAOMI

Oops. (She EXITS. Dian opens the book, looks at the photo appraisingly. She unconsciously touches her hair, as if worried about how she looks to him. Naomi pokes her head in.) Um . . . it's Stuart Novak on the phone. He wants to know if you can work him in.

DIAN

(angrily) I told you-- (approaches Naomi; more softly) I told you I didn't want to see him again.

NAOMI

I know, I know. But he says the nightmare have gotten worse, and the headaches are unbearable. He sounds like he's desperate, Dian.

DIAN

Aren't we all? (sighs, looks down at Booth's photo) When does he want to come in?

NAOMI

He says any time-- the sooner the better. You don't have anything else until ten. He's calling from the bank, it's just a few blocks away.

DIAN

(wearily) All right, all right. Tell him to come in.

NAOMI

Yes! (more subdued) I'll tell him.

DIAN

Tell him not to bring his friend! (She slams the book shut, sits wearily, takes a couple of pills from her desk and downs them with coffee)

NAOMI

(ENTERS) He'll be up in about five minutes. You should have heard him. He sounded really pitiful.

DIAN

Uh-huh. Well, that's something of a male specialty, isn't it? They're always looking for someone to mother them.

NAOMI

Oh, I don't think it's just a male thing. Isn't that what we're all secretly looking for-- somebody to take care of us?

DIAN

No.

NAOMI

Well, it's like a-- what do you call it? A dichotomy. Part of us wants to be grown up, to be in charge, to call the shots, and another part of us wants to stay a kid, and let somebody else take care of things for us. Don't you think?

DIAN

I think you should write a book about it. (downs her coffee) He'll be here any minute, I imagine.

NAOMI

You think he'll turn into Mr. Hyde-- I mean Mr. Booth this time?

DIAN

Not if I can help it. The trouble is, I'm not sure I can help it.

NAOMI

You want me to stick around in case he wigs out and gets violent? I know-- you like to handle things yourself, but after all, he was an insane murderer. And even if you're not dealing with the real Booth here, you said he identifies with him.

DIAN

Well . . . actually maybe that's not such a bad idea, if Novak will agree to it.

NAOMI

Him? He'll agree to anything. (outside door CHIMES)  
Oops. There he is. (opens door) Mr. Novak. Come in.

DIAN

How are you?

STUART

Not so good. (He looks warily at Naomi, as if expecting her to leave)

DIAN

If you don't mind, I'm going to have Naomi sit in on this session. That way she can take notes, and I won't have that to distract me.

STUART

Okay, if you say so.

(Behind his back, Naomi mouths "I told you")

DIAN

(sternly) Why don't you get your notebook, Naomi?

NAOMI

Oops. (She EXITS, REENTERS shortly and pulls up a chair for herself)

DIAN

Have a seat, Stuart. I understand you're still having the headaches.

STUART

Yes. Nothing Dr. Mengini gives me does much good.

DIAN

Where do they seem to center?

STUART

Right here. (Touches his right forehead)

DIAN

You've never had any sort of head injury?

STUART

No.

DIAN

What about the neck pain? Are you still experiencing that?

STUART

Some. Not as much, or as often.

DIAN

And you're still having the same recurring dream?

STUART

Only there's more of it. Now I lift the latch and open the door and go through it. Then I . . . I move up behind the figure in the rocking chair.

DIAN

And?

STUART

And I raise my hand and I place it behind his ear.

DIAN

Just your hand?

STUART

No. (pause) There's a gun in it. A small gun. It almost fits in my palm. The odd thing is-- I mean, having a gun in my hand is odd enough. I've never even held one, and never wanted to. But what's even odder is that I'm holding it in my left hand. (He gestures to show how awkward that is)

DIAN

And you're not left handed?

STUART

No.

DIAN

What happens then?

STUART

Then I wake up, shaking and sweating. And I stay awake. I make myself stay awake, because I don't want to experience that again. I'm afraid that the next time I might . . .

DIAN

I understand.

STUART

Are you going to hypnotize me again?

DIAN

That's what we're here for.

STUART

It's not the same as falling asleep, is it? I won't have any dreams.

DIAN

No. It's a little like dreaming, because you're tapping into your unconscious mind, but you won't be imagining things. You'll only be remembering things that actually happened.

STUART

Well, I've never actually shot anyone. I'd remember.

DIAN

I hope so. Okay. Lie back and relax. Let all that tension drain out of your body. Since you're an old hand at this now, you'll have no trouble at all entering a deep trance state. I'll count backward, and when I reach one, you'll be totally relaxed and able to recall readily anything I ask you about. (She counts from ten to one, covers him as she counts) You're now in a state of deep relaxation and, just as you did in our last visit, I want you to go back in time, this time to a point immediately before the headaches began. Now listen closely. I do not want you to imagine or to invent anything. I want you to relive only things that actually happened. Is that clear? Stuart?

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

Good. On the count of one, you will go back to that point in time just before the headaches began. Three . . . two . . . one. What do you see?

STUART

A row of bright lights. Candles. Beyond them, an auditorium full of empty seats. A man with a sword, coming at me. (He mimes fencing movements in a subdued, reflexive

way. His voice changes and becomes Booth's) Lay on, then, Richmond. Come, don't hold back. Make it real.

DIAN

Stuart? What's happening?

STUART

(ignores her) Come on! Harder! You want to kill me-- the tyrant who despoiled your beloved country. That's it! (He jerks back, gasps, puts an arm to his forehead as if struck there) No, no, I'm all right. Go on. Go on with the scene, Richmond. (He mimes more moves, occasionally wiping "blood" from his eyes) Watch your defense now.

DIAN

Stuart! I want to know what's happening!

STUART

Ha! A hit! A very palpable hit!

DIAN

On the count of one, you will return to the present day, but remain in the deep trance state. Three, two, one. (walks away from him) Damn. You see what I mean?

NAOMI

What was he doing?

DIAN

Swordfighting, I'd say.

NAOMI

With who?

DIAN

Someone named Richmond, apparently. He mentioned that name before. (goes to the book) Something about Richmond tumbling backward into the President's box.

NAOMI

He was holding his head, like he was wounded.

DIAN

I know. (check index of book) Here we are. Richmond. Richmond Theatre; no. Richmond, Virginia; no. Richmond, Earl of. (leafs back) It looks as if the Earl of Richmond was a character in Shakespeare's Richard III. And guess who played Richard.

NAOMI

Mr. Hyde.

DIAN

Exactly.

NAOMI

(takes book) Let's see. Uh-oh. Listen to this. "Booth insisted on approaching the play's action scenes as if they were real. When he was rehearsing the dueling scene from Richard III in Cleveland, he pushed J. C. McCollom, the actor playing Richmond, into such a state of ferocity that McCollom put a gash in Booth's forehead with his blunted rapier that left a permanent scar."

DIAN

That proves it!

NAOMI

Proves what?

DIAN

It proves that Stuart studied Booth's life extensively. How else could he have known a detail like that?

NAOMI

Well, you know, it's possible that--

DIAN

Let me think. I've got to find some way of keeping this under control. All right. I think I know what I did wrong. I asked him to relive the events. So that's what he did. He was experiencing tem, or at least he was convinced that he was. What I need is to get him to be more objective, to just recall the events after the fact. (She collects herself) Stuart.

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

I want you to go back now to a point in time shortly after the headaches began. You won't be reliving anything, you'll just be recalling, just remembering. Can you do that?

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

Good. Three, two, one. Now. Did you recently receive an injury to your forehead?

STUART

(touches head) It is rather obvious, isn't it?

DIAN

And . . . in what year did this happen?

STUART

It was but a few days ago.

DIAN

What year, please?

STUART

Why, 1863.

DIAN

Damn!

STUART

I beg your pardon?

DIAN

Mr. Booth.

STUART

Yes. I'm sorry; do I know you?

DIAN

It's . . . it's Mary.

NAOMI

Mary?

DIAN

(shushes her) We spoke before.

STUART

Of course. Forgive me. My vision is a trifle blurry. As you can see, my eye is still swollen, despite liberal applications of raw oysters. At least the oysters made a delicious stew.

DIAN

I see. (She mimes for Naomi to get the tape recorder. Naomi doesn't get the message) The tape recorder.

STUART

Tape . . . recorder? I'm afraid I don't . . .

DIAN

I'm sorry. I was speaking to someone else.

STUART

But there is no one else here.

DIAN

Yes. There is. There's the . . . reporter. From the newspaper. (beckons to Naomi, whispers) Say something. (Naomi is flustered) Anything. (She sets up the tape recorder through the following.

NAOMI

I'm . . . so happy to meet you, Mr. Booth.

STUART

And I you. I do not recall ever being interviewed by a reporter of the fair sex. And I am quite certain I never encountered a more charming one.

NAOMI

Well. Thank you. I've just been admiring your photo--  
(realizes this is a contemporary term) --graph.  
Photograph.

STUART

It is kind of you to say so. Would you are to have your own  
copy of my carte de visite?

NAOMI

Oh. Yes. Of course. Thanks.

STUART

(mimes handing it to her) Considering the rate at which my  
supply of these cards dwindles, anyone would think I was  
handing out dollar bills, and not a poor photograph. I  
refer, of course, to Union dollar bills. The Confederate  
ones are widely conspired to be not worth stuffing the sole  
of a shoe with.

DIAN

Let's get back to the subject of your head injury, shall we?

STUART

Must we? It's a minor wound, really, hardly worth writing  
up in a newspaper. Would your readers not prefer to hear  
about the upcoming performance? Or perhaps something about  
my illustrious brother? Or my even more illustrious father?

DIAN

You sound . . . resentful of their success.

STUART

Not at all. I have my own success, on my own terms. I only  
resent being compared so often to them. I am not Edwin, nor  
do I wish to be. And I am assuredly not my father. I am  
myself alone.

NAOMI

The book! It's the title of the book. Myself Alone.

STUART

I beg your pardon.

DIAN

It's nothing. Now, at the risk of being tiresome, can we discuss the injury?

STUART

Very well. You've heard, I suppose how I came by it?

DIAN

There are . . . conflicting stories. I'd like to hear it from you.

STUART

Well, the truth of it is (pause) a rather emotional young woman-- courtesy compels me not to identify her by name-- accused me of toying with her affections. Though I tried to assure her that I had no such intention, she flew into a rage and set upon me with a dagger. I deflected the blow with one arm, but, as you see, the point of the dagger struck me here. I believe she thought she had done for me-- I was bleeding like a stuck pig-- and in her remorse she turned the knife on herself-- not fatally, thank heaven. Is that sensational enough for your readers?

NAOMI

I should think so.

DIAN

But is it the truth?

STUART

Has anyone told you that you are an infuriating woman?

DIAN

Many times. Please answer the question.

STUART

It is the truth as I recall it.

DIAN

Or as you wish to recall it? Weren't you, in fact, wounded by another actor's sword during a rehearsal of Richard III?

STUART

Undoubtedly. I have sustained more bruises and scratches on stage than I could ever hope to recall. You see, when I perform, I hold nothing back. I live the role.

DIAN

And is that what you're doing now? Living the role?

STUART

I don't understand . . .

NAOMI

Excuse us, please. (She drags Dian aside) Did you ever hear the saying, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar"?

DIAN

No.

NAOMI

I don't want to tell you how to do your job, but don't you think maybe you'd learn more if you did less demanding and more wheedling?

DIAN

Wheedling?

NAOMI

Yes, wheedling. Making nice. Being tactful.

DIAN

I shouldn't have to. I'm a doctor, not a . . . a concubine.

NAOMI

A concubine?

DIAN

Whatever. I don't know how to "wheedle".

NAOMI

Well then maybe you'd better learn. Because I'd say you're losing him again.

DIAN

Mr. Booth. I--I apologize for being so . . . unpleasant. I was only trying to get the truth.

STUART

The truth? You say that as if there were but one, when in fact there are many. Truth depends upon one's point of view, does it not? That dagger-wielding woman, for example, was convinced that I was playing with her affections. But from my point of view I was merely behaving as one should behave toward a beautiful woman; I was being attentive and complimentary. You say that you are only trying to get at the truth. But from my point of view, you seem bent on making me out a liar. you see? Which is the truth? Neither. Both are true.

DIAN

All right, let's not talk about truth then. Let's talk about facts. Either a thing happened, or it didn't happen.

STUART

Ah, but even facts are subject to interpretation. Hamlet is a fact. The words are there, just as Shakespeare wrote them. Yet each actor interprets them according his own nature. My brother Edwin's Hamlet is like a drizzling day, gloomy and soggy. Mine is more like a thunderstorm, full of rumbles and flashes. Which is the real Hamlet?

DIAN

Hamlet is only a play. I'm concerned with real life.

STUART

All the world's a stage, remember? Life imitates art in this. A man's actions are right or wrong, good or bad, according to who is judging them. To some, John Brown was a heroic figure, striking a blow for the right; to others of us he was a scoundrel and a madman. To some of us, Mr. Davis is a leader of courage and vision, to others he is merely a traitor.

DIAN

I'm sorry, I don't accept that. Of course it's true that everyone sees things differently. But not every way of seeing things is equally valid. Some are correct, and some are false.

STUART

Perhaps. But who is to say which is which?

DIAN

All right; this is getting us nowhere fast. I'm not good at wheedling, and I don't have time to go on playing games. On the count of one, you will be fully awake, refreshed and rested and free of pain. (Unhooks the tape recorder as she counts down from ten to one. There is no response from Stuart) You can sit up, now, and open your eye.

STUART

(still in Booth's voice) What in heaven's name-- What place is this? Who are you?

DIAN

Oh, Jesus! (She hurries to him, gently pushes him back into a reclining position, covers his eyes. She is stressed, but trying to sound calm) It's all right. Close your eyes. Relax. Breathe deeply. ON the count of one you will return to a deep trance state. Three, two, one.

NAOMI

What happened?

DIAN

(shaken) God, how could I be so stupid? I forgot to return him to the present day.

NAOMI

You mean . . . he expected to find himself in 1863?

DIAN

(nods) Imagine how this must have looked to him. If I hadn't been able to put him under again, it could have been a disaster. I have got to be more careful. You see why I didn't want to do this? If I can't even keep control of myself, how can I hope to control him? (She pours a cup of coffee, washes down some pills)

NAOMI

I'm sorry. I should have told him you couldn't see him.

DIAN

No. The man is in pain. I have to help if I can. But not this way. It's not working. He's too caught up in this Booth . . . fantasy, identifying with Booth's experiences. They're obviously the source of the pain and the nightmares. I've got to make him aware of that fact consciously, get him to let go of Booth's influence, or he'll never get better.

NAOMI

How are you going to do that?

DIAN

Play the tape for him.

NAOMI

Are you sure this is a good idea? When the Bridey Murphy lady heard herself talking in Bridey's voice, she got pretty upset.

DIAN

I think he has to be made aware of what he's doing, even if it upsets him. (pause) Maybe I can get him to recall it by using post-hypnotic suggestion. When I count to one, you will return to the present day-- to 1965. You'll be refreshed and relaxed, and able to recall everything you said to me while you were in a trance state, but you won't be alarmed by any of it. It will all seem like a story you've read, and now you'll be able to put the story aside and return to real life. (Counts from ten to one) Stuart.

STUART

Yes.

DIAN

You can open your eyes. How do you feel?

STUART

Good. Like I had a long sleep. Without any dreams.

DIAN

Do you remember the conversation we had while you were in the trance?

STUART

No. I remember you saying to go back in time, before the headaches started. And then you telling me to wake up. That's all.

DIAN

Nothing about . . . swordfighting, or a woman with a dagger?

STUART

(laughs nervously) No. Did I talk about those things?

DIAN

(rewinds tape) would you like to hear what you said?

STUART

I don't know. I guess so, if you think I should.

DIAN

I think you should.

STUART

Okay. (Dian plays the segment beginning "Ah, but even facts are subject to interpretation." Stuart frowns, holds his head as if he can't take this in. He gestures as if he'd like to turn the tape off. She shuts it off at "No, I don't accept that") Is this a joke? That's not my voice. Why are you doing this?

DIAN

To make you aware of what you're doing. It is your voice, Stuart, but you're playing a role. You're imagining you're John Wilkes Booth.

STUART

Why would I do that? How could I? I don't know the first thing about those people and those events he was talking about. John Brown-- Hamlet-- I know the names, but that's all.

DIAN

Maybe you read about them , and forgot.

STUART

No.

DIAN

Please think about it. You must have studied about Booth at some point, and identified with him in some way.

STUART

With a murderer?

DIAN

Don't you see the connection between this and the nightmares you've been having? I just read an account of Lincoln's assassination in this book, and it matches the details of your dream perfectly-- the peephole, the rocking chair, the derringer-- Have you ever read this book?

STUART

No.

DIAN

Do you recall reading any other book about Booth, or seeing a movie, maybe when you were a boy--

STUART

No! I would remember. I have an excellent memory.

DIAN

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pressure you. All right. How about this; how about if I put you under again, and just jog your memory a little? Stuart?

STUART

(this is difficult for him) I . . . I don't think we should.

DIAN

I do. It'll help us get to the source of the pain and the bad dreams, and bring it to the surface.

STUART

But what else will it bring to the surface?

DIAN

Whatever it is, it's better to know it and accept it than to repress it.

STUART

Better for who? Besides, the pain is gone.

DIAN

But for how long?

STUART

For now, at least. I should get back to work.

DIAN

(resigned) All right. Stuart. Do you want the tape? Maybe if you listened to it--

STUART

No! No. (EXITS)

NAOMI

Well. Getting assertive, isn't he?

DIAN

He must have learned it from Booth.

NAOMI

He could learn a lot of things from Booth. The guy is pretty charming-- for an insane assassin. Don't you think so?

DIAN

I guess, if you like male chauvinists.

NAOMI

Hey, he lived a hundred years ago. He didn't know any better.

DIAN

Uh-huh. I guess he hadn't heard that you're not supposed to shoot Presidents, either.

NAOMI

Maybe he thought he was doing the right thing. Maybe he thought he was being a hero. You mind if I take this book home with me? I promise not to slobber on the pictures.

DIAN

Be my guest. I've had enough of John Wilkes Booth for a while. (looks at her watch) Who's my ten o'clock?

NAOMI

Cleopatra. Kidding. (PHONE RINGS) Have a cookie. (She EXITS. Dian looks exhausted. She pours more coffee. Naomi opens the door, sticks her head in) It's Brian. Do you want to pick up?

DIAN

No. What does he want?

NAOMI

He didn't say. I would imagine he wants to know how you're doing

DIAN

How am I doing without him, in other words. Tell him I'm just fine.

NAOMI

But that's not true.

DIAN

Well, as Mr. Booth would say, truth depends upon one's point of view, does it not?

(Lights down.)

End of Act One

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