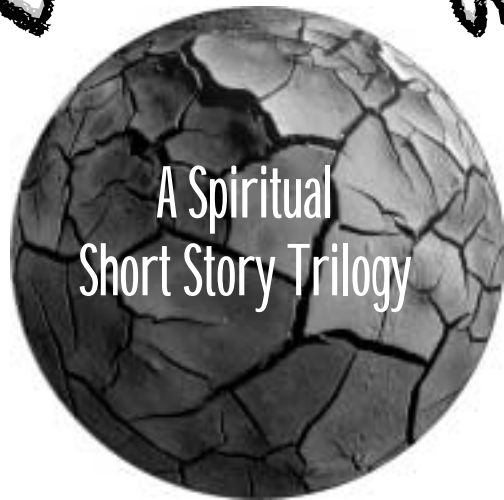


A Stage Adaptation

DARK SPACES



Randy Doyle Hazlett, PhD

"Mesmerizing, Enchanting, Enlightening"

Dark Spaces

A play in three parts

By Randy Doyle Hazlett

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Dark Spaces

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PART A

CHARACTERS

Inizio A stoic black male with above normal stature, short, well-groomed hair, and chiseled features dressed in white leggings and white muscle shirt. No shoes. Deep powerful voice.

Inizia A well endowed white female with ballerina physique wearing black leggings and black spandex top to accentuate her curves. She has long, straight blonde hair. No shoes. Distinctly feminine, sultry voice.

The Intruder A shadowy character wearing a dingy black overcoat with popped up collar, a wide-brimmed hat, and black pants and shoes. He has whiter than normal complexion and spiked blonde hair seen when he lifts his hat to run his hand through his own hair. Youthful voice.

Narrator Unseen female with soothing, but expressive, voice.

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SCENE ONE

(The stage is not illuminated. The sound of cello music signals the beginning. As more orchestral pieces are added, the music is that of creation with upward-directed color splashes in the canopy coincident with cymbal crashes. The music decrescendos with dropouts, leaving the lone cello. With but one spotlight narrowly focused centerstage on nothing, we hear the opening narration.)

NARRATOR

(with wonderment)

In a space which was void, but suddenly filled, in a time given reference only by the deceleration of pure energy to the speed of light, mass in three dimensions was cast into being. The inhabitants of this space were likewise initiated, complete in form and function. It was a delightful space, a glorious space, a space lacking only the essence of the designer, yet the trace of his splendor was everywhere. This space had ample light, but it seemed dreadfully lacking, especially following visitation by *The Keeper*. All other light paled by comparison.

(matter-of-factly)

The pair of occupants in this space was afforded a lamp, which emitted enough light for one in its possession to see perhaps five or ten paces ahead of his or her present position - but no more. To see beyond, one must advance a step. Still, there was little reason to wander, for all they needed was present. What was considered necessary to replenish, *The Keeper* supplied. Of all *The Keeper* furnished, nothing was more precious than oil to tend the lamp, for the lamp supplied more than illumination; the light kept darkness at bay.

(A red background light uniformly illuminates the set, barren but for a few props - some large rocks in the background, a circle of smaller rocks signifying the encampment of Inizio and

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Inizia, and a few burlap sacks of provisions. A violin solo serves as a prelude to opening dialogue. Inizio and Inizia are crouched before a lamp. The lamp gives off a white light distinguishing color beyond the red surroundings. Inizia sets aside a bowl and rises to gaze silently as a faint white light approaches. The glow begins as simply a dot and slowly increases in size and intensity. Inizio follows her lead, but he picks up the lamp. They are fixated upon this intrusion on their space. The two stand in close proximity.)

(Inizia points momentarily and gently turns head and eyes to her partner.)

INIZIA
(perplexed)

What a peculiar light from an unfamiliar direction. Should we attempt to conceal ourselves?

(Inizio places his free hand on Inizia's hip from behind)

INIZIO
(comforting)

We've already been found out. Our lamp betrays us. Look! The light - it grows.

INIZIA
(resumes glare at horizon;
cautiously curious)

Could it be *The Keeper* at this hour? I cannot see. The glow is too faint.

(with a hint of fear)
Please, shield me, Inizio.

(Inizia is welcomed into Inizio's one armed embrace, then he releases to free up his hand to adjust the lamp.)

INIZIO
(authoritatively)

I will adjust our lamp for greater illumination.

(Inizio instinctively increases the intake to the lamp, and the cone of light around Inizio and Inizia enlarges.)

INIZIA
(tenderly placing her hand on his;
lovingly correcting)

No, My Husband, you must lower the intake to improve our range of vision, ... but be careful not to snuff out the flame, for we have no means to re-establish a quenched lamp.

(Inizio trims the lamp to a much reduced level.)

INIZIO
(straining sight outward to
determine the effect)

I dare not reduce it further.

(as Inizia leans in)

We already risk too much, Inizia.

(lovingly redirecting Inizia's face
away from the lamp)

An ill-directed breath might secure our undoing. Let's award time enough for our eyes to adjust to less light.

(The lessening of their own emitted light had the intended effect, for the dot elongates slightly. Inizio sets down the lamp in the center of the encampment, and both take two steps backwards.)

INIZIA
(stroking her breast and arm in one
slow motion; confirming with
enjoyment)

This feels so much less self-revealing.

(Inizia finds her way back into
Inizio's arms and contorts to
commonly gaze towards the horizon)

I find comfort in limiting exposure, and at the same time, increasing discernment in others. I do believe we are better able to judge the forthcoming uncertainty.

(turning to make eye contact;
momentarily confident)

We shall face the encounter together.

(with crescendoing fear)

Just don't leave my side.

(turning towards Inizio and
clinging to him)

Say you will not leave my side, Inizio!

INIZIO

(steadfast in body orientation
toward the approaching threat
despite Inizia's contortions;
reassuringly)

I have not and will not.

(Their eyes meet, then refocus on
the horizon)

Our view is better, but not sufficient.

(deductively)

It is definitely not *The Keeper* - much too dim, far too dark.

INIZIA

(separating from Inizio two steps
toward the light; fearful)

Who or what else treads this patch of earth and stone?
What are the possibilities?

INIZIO

(stoic, decidedly)

The Keeper would know.

INIZIA

(posture melts slightly;
unsatisfied)

That is your answer far too often, My Husband.

(Long pause)

INIZIA

(points; enlightened)

See ... the light sways to and fro, much like our own lamp would toddle along with a human gait.

INIZIO

(nods; verifying)

True, and the arc of the pendulum grows with the intensity of the approaching light.

INIZIA

(fidgeting; passionately)

How far away do you suppose he is, assuming he has a lamp like ours? How much time must we wait to know?

INIZIO

(showing his palm; a little edgy)

Don't be in such a hurry to paint his portrait! We do not know *it* is a 'he' or if 'he' carries a lamp ... but rest assured, if *it* is a 'he' and 'he' carries a lamp, and if 'his' lamp is like ours, 'he' could only have received the lamp from *The Keeper* - just like us.

INIZIA

(head slumps; unsatisfied)

Inizio, you are so predictable.

INIZIO

(shakes head, takes deep breath;
hurt)

And you, Inizia, so ... predictably unpredictable.

INIZIA

(with hushed voice, stepping
forward; challenging)

Now that 'he' is only twenty paces away, can you not detect the pattern fragments in the alternating sequence of shadows as human?

INIZIO

(grimaces; confidently)

What seemed like a bright light cutting through the darkness is only a dim lamp, poorly trimmed.

(making eye contact with Inizia;
caringly)

Speak no further until we have ascertained both intent
and motive.

(At seven paces, the figure stops. A pulse
of air is evident in Inizia's hair. Inizia
closes her eyes to enjoy the wave of
pleasure that accompanies the intruder's
arrival.)

INIZIA

(whispering, stepping closer to
Inizio; with pleasure)

A wave of coolness. Such strange delight.

INIZIO

(stretching neck muscles;
displeased)

This surge of foreign air makes the hair on my neck stand
on end.

THE INTRUDER

(bowing slightly; openly)

Friends, I didn't know there was anyone else here.

(It is a distinctly a male voice - a
curiously soothing blend of bass tones.)

INIZIO

(shifting stance; cautiously)

Neither did we.

THE INTRUDER

(nodding; agreeing)

I suppose you wouldn't
on this side.

(with a sweeping upward palm)

INIZIO

(tilting head forward; confused)

This side?

THE INTRUDER

(pulling back slightly; baffled in
pretense)

Just an expression, Friends, ... perhaps a feeble one
worth retracting?

(Inizia strains to see the man's face,
especially the eyes. She glances toward
Inizio to harvest his facial expression.
She reaches across and touches Inizio's
forearm, the one clutching their lamp.
Speech is unnecessary. Inizio nods and
lifts their lamp carriage higher to
illumine the intruder's face,
instinctively assessing Inizia's anxiety.)

INIZIO

(protectively)

You count us as friends, but we do not know you any
better than we can see you?

THE INTRUDER

(abruptly backing up two steps and
shielding his eyes with an
outstretched hand; imploringly)

Please! After so much darkness, I've developed a
hypersensitivity to light.

(During that brief moment of illumination,
we see The intruder's clothing is
functional, yet unimpressive - a dark,
loose-fitting outer garment. A thin layer
of sojourner's dust falls to the ground
accompanying his quick retreat.)

INIZIA

(whispering, leaning toward Inizio;
with amazement)

Did you see ...?

INIZIO

(blankly)

Did I see what?

INIZIA

(whispering; with awe)

Absolutely nothing.

(engaging Inizio's eyes)

As our intruder's coat fluttered in the recoil, his silhouette could almost be better interpreted by the space no longer occupied - a sort of negative shadow. I saw ... nothing.

(Inizia slowly and defiantly turns her head to stare directly into the intruder's eyes.)

INIZIA

(whispering to Inizio, squinting; with a rush of comfort)

His form spawns ample doubt, but he has a pair of trustworthy eyes, as alluring as polished black onyx.

INIZIO

(countering)

I saw nothing inspiring trust - a ruddy fellow with unrefined features - a traveler in our midst with little desire to be seen.

THE INTRUDER

(arms wide, palm up; justifyingly)

The longer we're here, the less need we have of light. There is a compensating effect in the dark. We develop a greater self-awareness, and sooner or later,

(sweeping arm gesture)

we don't even need the light at all. In fact, the transformation is swift if one simply

(pulls in fingers to make fist)

disregards the light entirely, though this takes an enormous leap of faith.

INIZIO

(eyes glaring; aggressively)

But you carry a lamp!

THE INTRUDER

(defensively)

Yes, a lamp ... but I only secured it on this journey for your benefit. I could just as easily douse the flame entirely.

INIZIO

(castigating)

How can you speak of such things? We were instructed to never allow our flame to extinguish. Does not *The Keeper* bring you oil as he does us?

THE INTRUDER

(running fingers through beard stubble; reminiscently)

Ah ... *The Keeper*. I've not heard that name for a long while.

(squatting to sift a handful of dirt; autonomously)

No, your keeper supplies me with nothing. My oil ... is, well, *my* oil. I suppose he grants you rations as well? But of course, he would.

(rising to fully gauge response)

After all, you are his bondservants.

INIZIO

(rebutting with visible disbelief)

Bondservants? I think not. *The Keeper* does give us food and supplies - all we need, but we have no chains - no lock and key. We are not prisoners.

THE INTRUDER

(calmly, compromisingly)

Chains? No, ... at least not literally speaking, but you are tethered nevertheless.

(After allowing the phrase to soak in a little more deeply)

Tell me, have you been allowed into your keeper's chamber?

INIZIO

(openly)

No, our home is here. We know little of *The Keeper* except he brings us what we need.

THE INTRUDER

(coming as close as he dares into
the light; with contempt)

If you'd seen his quarters and tasted his opulence, you'd know what squalor you have been allotted here in this dungeon.

INIZIO

(surprised)

You've seen this place?

THE INTRUDER

(begins pacing; defiantly)

Of course! I would not speak of such things on the basis of rumor. His chamber is beyond description: walls of jasper, gates of pearl, walkways in gold. Silver is of little value there.

(stops pacing to query; mockingly)

Tell me, where are your precious gems? I fail to see your gold, but I do see plenty of red earth and hoards of cold stone. No, this is but a footstool, and you are kept as animals in a pen. Your keeper wished to enslave me also, but I would have none of it. I came here to warn you.

(walks to a burlap bag and flings
some corn seed)

He tosses you a few crumbs and some oil, and you are here in the dark none the wiser.

(Inizia hurriedly gathers the scattered
seed on her knees.)

INIZIO

(ignoring the tirade; with interest
in detail)

It's not dark there?

THE INTRUDER

(eyes on Inizia while talking to
Inizio; taken back with pretense)

No. No lamp is required at all. The light touches everything. Everything is exposed - treasures, thoughts, motives. That is precisely the reason I came here ... to

avoid confiscation of all I have and all I am and, of course, to warn you.

(Still on her knees, Inizia stops
gathering and turns to face the Intruder
at the last remark.)

INIZIO

(pacing; digging deeper)

What do you mean by confiscation of all you are and have? Were you not given everything according to your need, as are we?

THE INTRUDER

(with broad arm gestures; firing
back sharply)

You know nothing of my needs! I only wanted to relieve *The Keeper* of some of his burden.

(more softly and slowly)

That is why I started a collection of my own to keep and supply. That brought me here. Here I come and go as I please, unlike yourselves.

INIZIO

(irritated)

Again, we have no chains!

THE INTRUDER

(confidently)

Do you not wait here for your keeper to parcel your rations: your daily bread, your precious sacrament of oil?

(calmly)

What if he didn't show? What if when he came, you hid yourselves? Could you survive on your own?

INIZIO

(feet firmly planted; challenging)

If *The Keeper* did not come, we would have neither means to keep warm nor mode to see the path we tread, yet the desire to hide has never been part of us. It seems unnatural. To give up comfort in the wake of a stranger's yarn also appears to be a foolish exploit. We have no desire to fret *The Keeper* with disobedience.

(A glance at Inizia reveals a surety not so well founded, but Inizia's confidence in Inizio is transmitted through the warmth of a grip now skirting Inizio's arm and the closeness now enjoyed by the proximity of their torsos. Inizio's muscular build affords Inizia a cloak of protection she cherishes, but her decisions are by proxy. She now has doubts of her own, evidenced upon her face.)

INIZIA
(unsure)

I am ... conflicted, but my lot is forever cast with Inizio.

THE INTRUDER
(pacing but stopping as a hunter to deliver well directed arrows; with intrigue)

Your words are spoken in a strength not shared by your curiosity. Tell me, what do you suppose would be your keeper's reaction if you escaped? If he loved you, would he not express concern for your wellbeing, searching endlessly until that anxiety be relieved. However, if you were indeed his bondservants, do you not think he would rather be filled with rage at his loss?

(with certainty)

No, the slavemaster that he is would lash out in word and deed, because his property has taken undue liberty. Woe to the man standing in the path of his wrathful quest to restore sovereignty. Test me in this, and you will discern your true disposition.

INIZIA
(pouring gathered seed slowly into the sack; cautiously)

Would we not also escape *The Keeper's* provision?

(With heightened potential in the second of possible audiences, the intruder refocuses his dialog.)

THE INTRUDER

(eyes fixed on Inizia; luring)

Escape is possible, and so is survival on your own merit. Look at me. My lamp is full, and so is my stomach. Is more proof necessary? Why settle for just enough when more is possible?

(Sensing apprehension, he backpedals)

Nonetheless, if it is only a test you desire, you could simply hide and show yourselves at a convenient time - a time when the status with your keeper is mirrored in action. If you are right, the test will result only in a stroke of your confidence.

INIZIO

(flexes back muscles; distressed)

How can we even entertain such ruse? *The Keeper* has always known our whereabouts. He has always found us here. His lamp penetrates the darkness.

THE INTRUDER

(eyes widening; lashing back)

And you have always desired to be found, and therein lies the difference. He is drawn by your light, however so dim. Why do you think he supplies you the oil? Why do you suppose he demands that your lamp be forever trimmed? He has found his prisoners obedient to that which binds them to his watchful eye. If you extinguished your lamp, be it just for a moment, you could see in your keeper's face who he is and whose you are.

(The intruder finds pleasure in this exchange of logic. He knows the longer he can prolong the conversation and the process of rational thought, the better his opportunity to strike a chord. He especially delights in the notion of supplying missing information concerning *The Keeper*. They are an open book on the subject, ready for lines to be scribbled in to weave a story to his own liking. His last statement appears to strike its mark profoundly.)

INIZIA
(stepping toward the stranger;
alarmed)

You have seen *The Keeper's* face?

(now warmly petrified)

His lamp is so strong, we are not even able to gaze upon him!

THE INTRUDER

(holding his ground; defiantly)

I have seen him face-to-face in his chamber. When I looked him in the eye, I thought no less of myself. Before that, I too feared him. Afterwards, I knew my future was here, away from all he owns or enslaves.

INIZIO

(looks to ground; logically)

To snuff out our lamp merely to avoid detection is an irreversible course. Your moment to gauge response would be too dire for us, for we have no means to re-engage our light once it is lost.

THE INTRUDER

(opening stance; downplaying)

If that is all you require, I have a flint. Here, take it.

(extending his hand)

It is yours.

INIZIO

(shaking his head; assuredly)

We will not walk this reckless path. It is a woeful risk just to test one man's fanciful thoughts.

(arm extended; forcefully)

Please depart from us, Intruder, for your rebellious words grieve our hearts.

THE INTRUDER

(slight bow while stepping back;
curiously resigned)

Very well, then. Enjoy your servanthood in blissful ignorance. Perhaps we shall meet again should you find yourselves on my path.

(With that, he lowers his light intensity and wanders off in the direction from which he came. It is a long walk, a calculated walk, a surveyed retreat until an opportune time.)

In the little light that remains, Inizia catches a reflection in the corner of her eye. The flint that the intruder presumably intended for his pocket had missed the mark.)

INIZIA

(crouching toward the object with arm extended, then turning the head to address Inizio; with astonishment)

Inizio, did you see ... ?

(turning back toward the object; quietly)

No, you wouldn't.

(Calculatingly)

No, you shouldn't.

(As Inizio turned body and lantern to guide the way, Inizia quietly thrusts her hand into the darkness in the direction of the reflection in her mind's eye.)

INIZIA

(with hopeful expression)

Memory, do not fail me!

(Her effort is rewarded with a perfect strike and treasured prize, but she shields her trophy.)

INIZIA

(cradling the flint in both hands; cherishingly)

You must be my secret, for Inizio would never approve. With you, *The Keeper* is less ... necessary. With you,

boldness swells within me. Truth is less important, yet the desire for truth shortens each breath within me.

(Inizio is concerned for Inizia in darkness. He returns to retrieve her.)

INIZIO

(with tremendous apprehension)

Hurry, *The Keeper* is coming! I sense his steps. We are not where we should be! Ideas have been erected. We must erase all doubt. Come.

(Inizio hurries off without Inizia. From the direction opposite the Intruder's departure, a light grows toward a now distant Inizio. Inizia watches comfortably from her vantage point as a brilliant light envelops Inizio.)

INIZIA

(standing, hands on hips; to herself convincingly with desperation)

If I can only peer in the direction of the light to somehow see around it to catch a glimpse of his countenance.

(on tiptoes)

Perhaps, I could even crystallize a facial impression, if not directly, maybe in shadow form.

(Inizia squints to the point of pain; pushing back the tears, she persists. As much as she desires it, the brightness is greater than her natural ability. The light is impenetrable by human eyes.)

INIZIA

(back of hand to forehead; with sorrow from failure)

The light is far too intense for discernment. Tears cloud my purpose. I can make out two forms, but only the lesser casts a shadow.

(The retreating light reveals a fresh supply of all that sustains them. Inizia watches carefully as the beacon of light fades.)

INIZIA

(melts to the ground; resigned)

To see *The Keeper's* face is not a simple task, no matter the degree of calculation nor the wit of the calculator.

(She consoles herself with residual tears.)

INIZIA

(straightens back; suddenly encouraged)

Wait, I am rewarded for the attempt! As the light retreats, I glean a faint pendulum motion.

(mimics with rocking motion of the hand)

Yes, an ebb and flow ever so slight.

(That wisp of information solidifies her doubt.)

INIZIA

(to her feet; defiantly)

If *The Keeper* is indeed a man not unlike us, why should he be the one to come and go? Why cannot I be a guardian of plenty with the right to keep? Somehow I must broach the subject again with Inizio, for I dare not act alone. We share but one lamp.

(*Stage lights extinguish.*)

SCENE TWO

(The narrator's vacant cone of light reappears.)

NARRATOR

Considerable time passed with little change in routine or habit. With each set of provisions, Inizio's mind is cleansed of the malicious thought pattern planted by the intruder. Inizia, however, clung to those words and could not release them. What dulled from Inizio's dreams, whetted in Inizia's. She found sleep unappealing and meals uneventful. She found joy in turning down the lantern to the faintest of levels. She did this, of course, while Inizio slept, so as not to arouse distrust. Gradually, the darkness became more alluring, and Inizia's eyes grew more accustomed to the coolness tendered away from the flame. On a particularly dark period, Inizia knew she simply had to approach Inizio once again on the subject.

(The scene is set as before. Inizio tends the lamp as Inizia watches. As he rises to leave the lamp unattended, Inizia achieves a necessary level of boldness.)

INIZIA

(stepping forward; poignantly)

Have you given further thought to our visitor and his suggestion?

INIZIO

(with surprise)

The Intruder?

(extending his hand, then pulling Inizia inward; amorously)

I recall the visitation, but a suggestion is beyond me.

(Inizio drapes his arms around Inizia and disturbs her balance, giving her no choice but to lean against his frame. A less than receptive Inizia is now at a loss on a proper course of action to jog a memory,

if that were still possible. She does not desire to be perceived as the originator of the thought, so she desperately hopes that recall will prevail if tweaked ever so appropriately.)

INIZIA

(pulls away to maintain eye contact; with disbelief)

Is not the memory of your exchange fresh each and every day? You dealt with our visitor so ... masterfully. I think I can recall each and every word.

INIZIO

(fixated on physical touch)

Words are but tools on the way to an action.

(Inizia retreats and recalibrates. She picks up the lamp and walks until Inizio is no longer seen.)

INIZIA

(walking and talking to herself; shrewdly)

To perpetuate what has been established cannot prevail. A habit is simply routine. Truth must be exposed, even if through a winding passageway of deception.

(self-indulgently)

My plan unfolds in my mind's eye. It's an excellent course - a discerning path. The suggestions of the visitor were simply prompts. There need be no more talk of the visitor or his words. Words not fortified by action are void.

(convinced)

Inizio would agree if our minds were able to turn the corner together. If he leads, I am obliged to follow.

(with desperation)

Inizio must lead!

(running hand up body stopping at the breast)

Surely, physical endowment could blind a man just long enough to plant an idea without leaving a trail to its origin!

(Inizia returns, sets down the lamp, and now submits completely to Inizio's embrace. She brings physical comfort, blind to motive. After ample incubation, Inizia disengages, takes a couple of calculated steps, turns, and reinitiates conversation.)

INIZIA

(without eye contact; deceptively)

For quite some time, I have buried an uneasiness within me. It's as if this dark space in which we live is closing in on me. If only we could enjoy a little more light, even if only for a few countable breaths. Alas, we have but one lamp.

INIZIO

(lovingly, extending his hand)

A single lamp has served us well.

INIZIA

(gently accepting that hand and cradling it in her bosom with motive)

Do you think we could ... petition *The Keeper* for another?

INIZIO

(deep breath; cautiously)

To petition *The Keeper* is not a trivial thing. He supplies our every need, but he has always provided without the necessity of petition. If we needed it, he would bring it forthright. We depend upon him, but he serves us. If his service is not repaid in complete thankfulness, we will make a grave mistake in challenging his intellect. Let us wait to see if he grants a second lantern. If so, then we truly had need of it.

(Seeing this as leading nowhere, Inizia starts to break free of contact, then settles back, for the idea of a petition had absorbed.)

INIZIA

(smiling without and within)

Thank you, My Husband, for listening to my foolish whims.

INIZIO

(reassuringly)

If a new lamp is not delivered, the norm will suffice.

The Keeper supplies all we require, and ...

(slowing and honestly)

I take pleasure in sharing a single lamp.

INIZIA

(turning to place her head on his chest; with regret)

As do I. If only it were sufficient.

INIZIO

(avowing)

It has always been my goal to keep the source equidistant between us. In the future, I purpose to hold the lamp closer to you, allowing less for me. I will yield more than my portion for the benefit of the one I love and with whom I share but a single lamp.

INIZIA

(lifting head to speak; with pretense)

Just in these brief moments I have come to realize a second lamp is folly. I harbor no desire for a lantern of my own.

(Inizia contorts to a more compact embrace.)

INIZIA

(seductively)

My heart yearns for more light, but now I know that a lantern is not needed. I long only to share your lamp, but the coolness that accompanies the dark cuts to my bones. Perhaps if we could get more oil, we could together share in the added warmth.

(Cradling Inizia, Inizio feels the coolness of which she spoke.)

INIZIO

(inductively)

The lamp was constructed primarily for light, not heat. Perhaps the light is sufficient, but the heat is not, not with the lamp trimmed with sight in mind.

(with vigorous determination)

I will do all within my power to secure warm breath for you. Just as we tend the lantern to keep the light forever burning, the lamp within

(gesturing to breast)

must also never be allowed to extinguish.

(now with kindled fear)

What would I not do for you? We have always been two sharing one lamp. I have not the will to lift a lamp only for myself.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE THREE

(The narration cone reappears.)

NARRATOR

When no additional oil was supplied on the next few visits by *The Keeper*, Inizio ventured he must ask. While he fumbled for the opportunity and the words, the next round of rations came with an extra allotment of oil. Inizio's faith in *The Keeper* was never so strong. He graciously trimmed the lamp higher and placed it closer to Inizia than it had ever been before.

The heat, however, brought Inizia no comfort, though the lamp burned nearer and brighter, for she had no need of added warmth. She had no desire for the lamp at all. When Inizio slept, she not only lowered the lantern's intensity to the bare minimum, but she drained off the excess oil which would have been consumed and stored it in a safe place, a secret place. Soon she would have sufficient oil. She already held fast to the flint.

(Inizia sleeps by the lamp. Inizio is visibly further away from the source. He rises, but Inizio appears worn and weary.)

INIZIO

(to himself; distraught)

Why am I finding restoration so difficult? I lay to renew myself, but I awake with mounting fear. I sense ongoing change in Inizia. The heat from a brighter lamp must be insufficient, as Inizia's vigor fades. My time in rest is consumed with evaluation of scenarios which might be. Petition simply is no longer a forbidden subject.

(searching frantically)

If only I knew how or for what to ask. My indecision derides my soul. The encounters with *The Keeper* alone bring me relief. The warmth of visitation lingers beyond the actual event. Why is the same not true for Inizia, my beloved Inizia?

(exhausted; reflectively)

I must rest.

(Inizio reclines to rest. When Inizia senses her husband is asleep, she rises from her ruse. Her eyes are more deeply set. Her hair unkept. She is visably the weaker vessel.)

INIZIA

(to herself; selfishly)

Sleep, My Dear Husband. You must get your rest. My supply of oil beyond our needs is growing. I find such pleasure in accumulation I sometimes ignore the goal.

(Inizia turns down the flame and siphons off some oil from the belly of the lamp. Inizio turns to his side.)

INIZIA

(thankfully)

Poor Inizio seems to require more and more rest, allowing me to hoard a few drops more of oil. Now that he has repositioned, I may rob the lamp of its prime.

(arrogantly)

I can read his habits. I'll stop at the first sign of transition movements with plenty of time to restore the lamp. I know him.

(Inizia siphons off some oil from the belly of the lamp. She gazes into the reduced flame. She is fixated upon it so much so that she fails to see transition signs in her mate. Inizio, troubled by his thoughts, opens his eyes abruptly to find Inizia crouching over a poorly managed lamp. Inizia is startled. As Inizio approaches the lamp, his darkened countenance is evident.)

INIZIO

(very sharply)

Why have you allowed the lamp to burn so low? Why jeopardize your fate with such insolence? Do you not know how I fret over your coolness? Return the lamp to its normal state to rewarm yourself! Can I now not even

rest without concern that your lamp within will be snuffed out when I rise?

INIZIA

(repentant with tears)

My guilt overwhelms me. I have acted foolishly. I will properly tend the lamp at the state of your choosing. But you, My Husband, please get your rest. You are beginning to look like ... like me.

(Inizia gently nudges her cache of oil further into the shadows. Inizia restores the lamp. Inizio returns to a reclining position and quickly to a slumber.)

INIZIA

(whispering to herself but towards Inizio, still teary)

Your words flowed not from anger, but from love. If you had seen my cache, I fear alternate words might have taken the place of these.

(to herself; resolved)

I am unwilling to risk this activity further. Confiding in Inizio will never be an option. Inizio would only be satisfied with a bright lamp. I will no longer siphon oil, nor approach the lamp during times of rest.

(recovering)

Besides, I already have all I need.

(contemplatively)

Why prolong the inevitable and risk more? It is clear now; I will have to act alone and soon. If *The Keeper* is indeed holding us prisoner, I must save us both.

(toward Inizio; passionately)

Sleep, My Dear Husband. You are precious to me (lifting her cache) like oil.

(Inizio remains at rest. Inizia watches him intently. When convinced of his slumber, she fondles her cache, holding it to her breast. It was an opportune time.)

INIZIA

(to herself; anxiously)

Separating thought from action is difficult. *The Keeper* will soon be here, and Inizio slumbers.

(with a distant gaze)

Yes, on the horizon, *The Keeper's* light is now visible! It is time to act.

(With the flint in one hand and the other on the lamp controls, Inizia trims the lantern to a low level. She lifts the lantern to her face.)

INIZIA

(with pure enjoyment and building confidence)

Ahh, such delight! These moments of growing darkness give me strength for what I am compelled to do. Surely Inizio will also come to find pleasure in a lesser light after I set us free.

(Inizia sets down the lamp and stoops to scoop up a handful of soft, moist earth and let it fall between her fingers at a steady, consistently rate.)

INIZIA

(to the soil; sarcastically)

Will I miss you? The earth mocks me! I will trade you for gold and jasper.

(As if this task were taking too long or the rate she chose was inappropriate, she flings the remainder to the ground in haste. The light on the horizon grows.)

INIZIA

(with compact posture as if cold; paranoid)

I can feel the darkness that surrounds me, broken only by puffs of increasingly heavy warm breath. At these light levels, my senses appear to be ... heightened.

(alarmed)

Perhaps it is true also for Inizio and *The Keeper*. I fear my breath sounds may betray me. What if Inizio is aroused or *The Keeper* drawn by my sound in the absence of light?

(She tries holding her breath, then exhales.)

INIZIA

(thwarted)

The release point is even more divulging.

(holding up hand palm out, eyes closed while experimenting; gathering nerve)

I find courage only in a series of slow but defining exhales. I will simply douse the flame in its entirety for a countable number of breaths while looking to the horizon for signs of change in the approaching light of *The Keeper*. It will only take a moment to draw a proper conclusion. If the orientation of *The Keeper's* path is confused by the absence of signal, all the remaining words of the visitor warrant credence. If the anger of an owner is visible, as suspected, I'll wait until *The Keeper* departs to reveal our way from this space of imprisonment. My stockpile of oil will vest a long journey.

(halfheartedly)

By chance my surety is folly, I will rekindle the wick as I have reluctantly practiced in my mind and claim that the lantern must have been momentarily shielded from plain view - a plausible misrepresentation.

(With one last glance towards Inizio and one final prolonged breath, Inizia executes her plan. She extinguishes the lamp.)

INIZIA

(quickly losing physical strength; frantic)

What is this?

(slowing)

I find myself too weak, too burdened, to execute the plan.

(melting to the ground but looking up to Inizio; remorseful)

Forgive me, My Husband. You will not join me in choice, but consequence.

(With no lamp between the two of them, Inizia abruptly joins Inizio in deep rest. Red stage lights dim to black. This time, the narration light is blue.)

NARRATOR

Inizia hadn't considered a personal response to an inactive lamp. She hadn't anticipated a personal consequence to a lack of flame. Inizia was unable to witness the tears of *The Keeper* when he happened upon their motionless bodies. She saw not his light approach without change in form or countenance. *The Keeper* came directly to the spot where they lay. He needed not their light to detect their whereabouts. Strangely enough, he had no provisions with him on this journey. *The Keeper* simply scooped up his beloved, one in his right arm, the other in his left, and returned in the direction from which he came. He had no lantern also to carry, for *The Keeper* and light were synonymous.

The Keeper lovingly deposited the bodies of Inizio and Inizia in another space where there can be no more visitation. The bounds of that space will not allow it. Its borders are sealed with his tears. The integrity of the seal, however, in no way lessens the need or desire for the revived Inizio and Inizia to know their keeper throughout their remaining, countable breaths. In this space, all will be different. When the fullness of time has come, *The Keeper* will return to reverse the course of man and break the seal at his own expense out of the love ... he holds ... for his keep.

(Fade to black.)

PART B

CHARACTERS:

Ricomincio	A stoic Hispanic male with above normal stature, short, well-groomed hair, and chiseled features dressed in gray leggings and gray muscle shirt. No shoes. Deep authoritative voice.
Ricomincia	A well endowed Hispanic female with ballerina physique wearing gray leggings and gray spandex top to accentuate her curves. She has long, wavy auburn hair. No shoes. Distinctly feminine, kind voice.
The Collector	A shadowy character wearing a dingy black overcoat with popped up collar, a wide-brimmed hat, and black pants and shoes. He has whiter than normal complexion and spiked blonde hair seen when he lifts his hat to run his hand through his own hair. Youthful voice.
Old Man	An older man with a shock of white hair, plenty of wrinkles, and mature build with unassuming gray clothing.
The Accused	A thin, middle-aged man with flowing hair and compassionate eyes, dressed in gray robe without belt or shoes.
Narrator	Unseen female with soothing, but expressive, voice.
Tall Man, Short Lad, Woman, Witness	Citizens appropriately dressed.

SCENE ONE

(A blue empty cone of light appears onstage.)

NARRATOR

A seed was firmly planted. Roots crept into fertile soil, tentacles clinging to a source of unendingly supply. The garden was tended with intent to flourish. However, when shoots sprang forth to experience the fullness of life, they took objection to the light. Rather, they turned their leaves oblique to their source. They unwittingly exchanged the ability to flower for a withered existence amongst thorns and thistles. So it was with Inizio and Inizia. Life in *this* space is consumed in amassing enough provision for the moment.

Slowly, Inizio and Inizia adapted to a life of perpetual shadows. They would have lamented the loss of *The Keeper's* visitation had they the time. Following a calculated period of struggle, their vulnerability was determined to be sufficient. At an opportune time, they received a welcome visitor - a figure from the past. His light, ever so dim, delighted the pair. It was then no surprise when the linkage transitioned from fortuitous to necessary. *The Collector* finally had his keep.

The following generations knew of *The Keeper* only through narrative, allowing the leash of *The Collector* to contract. A question unasked, a response cut short, and *The Keeper* was relegated to folklore status, though ample evidence of his existence ran through their very veins. Removing only a link at a time suited *The Collector*, as to reel in an undetectable distance drew little resistance. Over the course of the ages, *The Collector* was afforded virtual control in this space, though he had no authority but that granted to him.

In this transformed space, a dark space, a space beyond the ageless border where *The Keeper* no longer treads, *The Collector* watches over *his* keep. It is the redefined

space of Inizio and Inizia; however, generations have come and gone, barely leaving their mark in life except to birth the next cycle. *The Collector* is comfortable with his collection. They ask neither for light nor lamp, which is favorable, for he has none to lend.

Through the generations thick blackness, *The Collector* transports his goods across the plain toward the big city with unscalable walls. The trail is uneventful but for the occasional interruption to take soundings. *The Collector* carries no lantern, for light is neither pleasurable nor necessary. Ricomincio and Ricomincia follow closely behind, but neither do they have choice. The bolt and fetter guarantee it. They were born into this dark space and grew to understand the ways of *The Collector*. They gave no interpretation to their bindings, for they knew nothing else. Cooperation was to avoid punishment. Punishment at the hand of *The Collector* was to be avoided at all cost, for flesh suffered greatly under correction without the benefit of light. In this space, light, no matter how small, brought a sensation to be avoided. Not that light was harmful or even painful, but it was a conditioned response, one *The Collector* desired above all.

(The set is uniformly illuminated with a blue-gray light. Initially, there is little to see - a flat barren stage. The caravan appears from stage left and slowly traverses.)

RICOMINCIA

(whispering with anxiety)

Where do you suppose we are going?

RICOMINCIO

(stoically)

What good does it do us to know? He leads; we follow. Where I go, you go. These chains define us. We trudge through this nothingness together.

RICOMINCIA

(courageously)

You are wise and strong, yet I match you step for step.

RICOMINCIO

(plainly)

You match, or I pull. It makes little difference. Flesh will not prevail over iron.

RICOMINCIA

(after pausing for several steps of reflection; honestly)

Ricomincio, tell me, are you really defined by links of cold steel? Who is the real man to whom I am coupled?

RICOMINCIO

(resigned)

What is real? I am what I am, and you are no better positioned. A look downward rather than courting fantasy and you will see I am right.

RICOMINCIA

(challenging)

Look! See? There is not ample light to see one's own self, much less another, no matter how short the leash.

RICOMINCIO

(admonishing)

A fool sees only with her eyes, but relationship between slaves is measured by the links of forged metal that binds us.

RICOMINCIA

(shifting)

Ricomincio, do you not enjoy this coupling of convenience? In this darkness, we have shared much.

RICOMINCIO

(with newfound sentiment)

I did not choose our commonality, ... but should these chains be removed, I would not seek another.

THE COLLECTOR

(angrily, but with a harnessed voice)

Silence!

(The Collector stops to take soundings by placing his ear to the ground, cupped in one hand, and tapping with the index finger of the other hand. Once completed, he addresses his keep.)

THE COLLECTOR

(abrupt)

If you knew this path, you would cloak that chatter. There are those who would pay a high price for such as you ... or die trying. I am taking you to the one place my investment can be preserved - a place with just enough light that order prevails over anarchy. I can manipulate shadows, but neither man nor woman can be trusted in complete darkness. Our destination awaits only a countable number of steps.

(Stage lights trim to reveal the outline of a citadel. In front of the wall, The Collector waves his draped arm to reveal a previously hidden gate. At the gate, a guard, whom The Collector delivered here long ago, hastens to yield access. He silently bows, waiting for The Collector to pass completely before standing upright and closing the gate. The gate then disappears from view once again.)

The scene shifts to inside the city walls. A dull, uniform light serves the city well. The light inside is blue and considerably brighter. There is a village with shops forming a square. Fully exposed for the first time, Ricomincio and Ricomincia are brought to their knees with sensory overload. The Collector abruptly unlocks the chains and disappears amid the city streets. Ricomincio and Ricomincia are abandoned in the central courtyard.)

RICOMINCIA

(fearfully)

What is this place? It is evil, for the light penetrates my mind, if that were possible. Ricomincio, you are here with me, are you not?

RICOMINCIO

(with apprehension)

Yes, I am here. Shut your eyes to the light, as a steel cage. Perhaps it will pass.

(Gradually, as strength faded, Ricomincia relents.)

RICOMINCIA

(weary)

I fear I am for the first time unable to follow your lead.

(First, she simply allows the light to bathe her eyelids.)

RICOMINCIA

(unsure)

There is a penetrating warmth.

(That feeling intrigues her about the possibility of further stimulation.)

RICOMINCIA

(exhausted)

I must surrender.

(She lifts her eyelids to expose a spectacle of colors unimaginable. Ricomincia makes a loud gasp.)

RICOMINCIO

(terrified)

Ricomincia!

RICOMINCIA

I ... am adjusting.

(pausing for evaluation; stunned then awe)

There appear to be no ill effects - only a world I've never before experienced. Our chains no longer insure it, but I ask you to join me.

RICOMINCIO

(submissive)

With you I am forever yoked.

(Ricomincio slowly relinquishes his grip on darkness. As each beheld the other as never before, neither was disappointed. In this light, they could see the calloused-over flesh beneath the rings of iron now removed.)

RICOMINCIO

(blissful)

You are ... beautiful. The light is beautiful. No chains and such ... splendor. A burden much heavier than the weight of metal alloy has been lifted from our being.

(Self-awareness drifts to self-consciousness, as they recognize they are also on display.)

RICOMINCIO

(whispering with tension)

We are not alone. I was unseeing, but now I feel the lustful eyes of old men upon us from the shadows. Ricomincia, you are a prize in any amount of light. We should leave this place.

RICOMINCIA

(unwillingly)

Leave this place? We do not know if the light will follow. Where could we go? We have no collector to guide us.

(frustrated)

We are ill-equipped for freedom and its decision-making.

(Their utter naivety shows on their faces. An old fellow steps forward to take pity

on their obvious plight. He is a pleasant-looking elder with a shock of white hair and no small amount of wrinkles. He is surprisingly nimble for a fellow of his class.)

OLD MAN
(calmly)

Please, take some water and bread. You have had a long journey.

(Rubbing his own iron-stained wrists, Ricomincio notices that the scars from a similar set of shackles has not faded from their host's outstretched arms, as he offers water and a little sustenance. Quite depleted, they readily accept his gifts.)

OLD MAN
Come, we must leave this place. Danger lurks.

RICOMINCIA
(to Ricomincio)
Should we trust him? Is he a collector?

RICOMINCIO
(deductively)
The scars on his wrists like ours tell otherwise. Though faded with time, he once was part of someone's collection. I share his concern. We must not remain here.

RICOMINCIA
(acquiescing)
Very well then. Lead on.

(The old man leads them away from the public square.)

OLD MAN
(with concern)
You must not take rest here in the open. Men love nothing more than to cause mischief in public spaces,

(after glancing at Ricomincia, the old man's eyes returned to Ricomincio)
and you stand to lose much from a wrong course of action. How long was your journey?

RICOMINCIO
(bewildered)
We know not how to measure length. The dark space from which we came has no reference. We followed the lead of *The Collector*. He brought us to this place and abandoned us. It appears we are, for the first time, without a monitor.

OLD MAN
(directly)
Do you seek a monitor, a mentor for this space?

RICOMINCIO
(unsure)
We know no other life, and we are strangers to this space.

OLD MAN
(cautious)
There are many monitors who seek an audience, but that depends upon your allegiance. What is yours?

RICOMINCIO
(openly)
We've known only *The Collector*. Now that our bindings have been loosened, we have no further allegiance.

OLD MAN
(vigilant)
In these times, one must be careful. There is talk amongst those who petition of an intruder among us, even now. Do you petition?

RICOMINCIO
(confused)
We know not even the nature of what you speak.

OLD MAN
(guardedly)

To petition is to request more light ... more than what this space affords. We can speak more on this after a time of rest. You must be in need of renewal after your experience.

(They arrive at their destination, the man's home. The scene shifts inside as the old man leads them to an inner room.)

OLD MAN
(authoritatively)

You will remain here with me ... at least until you have made your choice. You can rest here. You will need alternate clothing so as not to mark yourselves so plainly.

RICOMINCIO
(ungraciously)

These clothes have served us well.

OLD MAN
(compromisingly)

Yes ... that will be your first choice, but the soil-stained garments, that served you well in darkness, are but filthy rags in this much light.

(The old man leaves the room after depositing some alternate clothing.)

RICOMINCIA
(opinionated)

He is right. I feel ... dirty. I think we should accept the gift and shed our past.

(Ricominicia picks up a brown garment with gold trim, then begins to disrobe.)

RICOMINCIO
(forcefully)

Wait!

(Ricominicio approaches Ricominicia and embraces her.)

RICOMINCIA
(thankful)

Our bonds are not broken?

RICOMINCIO
(romantically)

I just want to take it slow, now that the visible has been added to the invisible, the visual to the tactile. Our bond persists - much stronger than steel.

(He caresses her. The scene cuts to black.)

SCENE TWO

(As the stage lights resume, we find Ricominchia waking.)

RICOMINCIA
(to a sleeping Ricomincio;
tenderly)

Are you sufficiently rested?

(There is no response.)

RICOMINCIA
(to herself; heartfelt)

The foreign words of our host were more than I could digest, but I do so long for greater understanding.

(looking at Ricomincio)

I am blessed to be on this path with you, though I regret more information is not available to chart a worthwhile course.

(Impatiently, Ricominchia nudges her mate to hasten their journey together, wherever it leads.)

RICOMINCIO
(sleepily)

Is everything okay?

RICOMINCIA
(forthcoming)

It is too quiet, and my mind is racing.

RICOMINCIO
(now alert)

Where is our host?

RICOMINCIA
(observantly)

I have seen no trace, but there are some exposed provisions. Perhaps they are for us. It seems in character.

Dark Spaces

Randy Doyle Hazlett

(After looking around, they discover they are indeed alone.)

RICOMINCIA
(lightly)

Where do you suppose he has gone? Surely, he will not betray us after befriending us so.

RICOMINCIO
(uncertain)

He found us in the public square, so perhaps he frequents that space.

RICOMINCIA
(with disdain)

That space is dreadful!

RICOMINCIO
(with resolve)

Let us venture forth.

RICOMINCIA
(alarmed)

Do we dare?

RICOMINCIO
(determined)

We have need of a monitor.

(With a heightened sense of bearing, developed from extensive darkness, Ricomincio and Ricominchia retraced their steps back to the public square. The same surly group of fellows was augmented by a few more not so different individuals. Ricomincio approaches the most knowledgeable-looking of the bunch, based upon nothing more than height and quality of clothing.)

RICOMINCIO
(openly)

We are in search of an old man with knowledge of light. Could you direct us to him or another?

Dark Spaces

Randy Doyle Hazlett

(The man snickers and glances at his comrades.)

RICOMINCIO

(perturbed at the response)

We have need of a monitor. Can you help us or not?

TALL MAN

(shooting back saucily)

Do I look like a fool that you should ask me such a question?

(He and the lot with which he threw in his coin entered a phase of prolonged laughter - a chorus of rousing cheer. He then leans in so as not to be overheard.)

TALL MAN

(covertly)

These drinking buddies only monitor the bottom of their mugs as quickly and as often as possible. Their allegiance is only to the next fellow who'll offer a pint without recompense. At the last gulp, their contract is cancelled awaiting renewal. The longer their cup remains dry, the deeper their hatred grows for the prior host. No, it's a dangerous proposition to foster comradeship. (to all) A round on me for all takers!

(At the offer, the street clears of idlers, and the drunken roar of friends fades. A much shorter lad, a lesser dressed lad, approaches a bewildered Ricomincio.)

SHORT LAD

(quietly)

'Tis a dangerous cast, but they'll not be back for a good while. They draw much comfort in their brew.

(pausing)

Did I hear correctly that you were in search of a monitor?

RICOMINCIO

(hesitant)

I thought that is what we wanted, but I must question everything in this space.

SHORT LAD

(confirming but admonishing)

A very wise strategy, indeed, but you cannot simply request a monitor without restriction. It would be a dangerous course to link with any old monitor to cross your path. No, a monitor must be carefully chosen, for some search for greater light, while others search simply for more searchers. There is a big difference. For a meager sum, I could direct you to an appropriate choice.

RICOMINCIO

(disconcerted)

We have nothing to offer.

(The lad looks intensely at Ricomincio's loose-fitting clothing and applies a little imagination.)

SHORT LAD

(greedily)

I wouldn't rush to such a hasty conclusion.

(As the lad stretches out his hand to add sensory credence to his imagination, Ricomincio intercepts the advance with an iron grip with his left, and delivers a crushing blow to the left side of the lad's face with his right. The encounter sends the young fellow sprawling backwards with little recourse and considerable commotion. As a crowd grows from nowhere to spectacle the next round of events, Ricomincio gasps when a hand falls upon her shoulder from behind.)

OLD MAN

(hastily)

Come! We should not stay for another round of engagement.

(Ricominchia latches hands with Ricomincio, and they back away from the scene. Once a few paces removed, they turn to quicken the withdrawal back to their quarters.)

OLD MAN
(after a prolonged silence with deep concern)

There are proper channels. I have done some inquiring on your behalf. People here are reluctant to share their light, for no relationship is sacred when so many report to *The Collector*.

RICOMINCIA
(confidently)

The Collector is not among us. He comes and goes.

OLD MAN
(instructively)

That is what he wishes all to think, but many monitors are his eyes and ears. Their followers are convinced that their light is brighter, but in fact, they simply slip further into darkness, so that the existing light seems brighter. I can sense the desire for light in you growing. That is what drives you to seek a monitor, though you know not why. The same drive took you back to the square, but those who frequent the square are driven only by a ravenous appetite for overindulgence. They have become so calloused that their sensual experiences must be extreme to be felt at all. Only when they feel are they reminded of their humanity. Ecstasy, lust, pain, panic - they all will do. They do not discriminate. There is no benefit for them in the milder emotions: compassion, joy, empathy, love. That is why you must avoid another encounter like today. This time you were ... I started to say lucky, but I don't much believe in that. **You were destined for better.**

RICOMINCIA
(perplexed)

You barely know us, yet you can speak of our personal destiny.

OLD MAN
(calmly)

It is desired that all should learn the truth and be set free by it.

RICOMINCIO
(puzzled)

We know what it is to be shackled. When we arrived here, were we not set free?

OLD MAN
(bluntly)

Did you not see the walls and gates of iron upon your entrance to the city? Nothing escapes this space with breath still intact. Though the yoke has been lifted, you are no less prisoners.

RICOMINCIO
(engrossed)

Prisoners or not, you still speak of being set free. Who bestows this truth? Of whom do you speak? *The Collector* or another?

OLD MAN
(frankly)

The Collector held you in darkness until you were deposited here. Can darkness and light coexist? No, I speak of the keeper of light, but his name is beyond understanding. Its utterance is forbidden. He is merely called *The Keeper*.

RICOMINCIA
(anxiously)

We are grateful for the light we now have. It is so much more than we have ever known. If a little light is this pleasing, we must have more. Yet, you rescued us twice from the public square. Is it not dangerous for you as well?

OLD MAN
(reflectively)

One does not gather grapes without entering the vineyard. I pull those from darkness who are ready for truth and bring them into greater understanding - into more light.

That is what I do, but I, too, must tread cautiously on the square, for the job of harvesting is a perilous one.

(Pausing in a moment of contemplation)

I fear my time of labor approaches an end. I have been searching for a suitable replacement amongst *The Collector's* deposits.

RICOMINCIA
(shooting back)

You were looking for us?

OLD MAN
(matter-of-factly)

I was merely obedient - a quality leading to your election as well. Meanwhile, you have much to learn. I will be your monitor.

(Upon this announcement, Ricomincio and Ricomincia knelt at the old fellow's feet. He quickly lifted them to eye level with a strength not in accordance with his age.)

OLD MAN
(reproving in love)

I am not a keeper. The light we see today is only a fragment of what is possible. In *The Keeper's* light, we all must bow. No man, no monitor, no collector can do otherwise. Be thankful for revealed light, but withhold your praise for any but the source of that light.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE THREE

(The narration cone reappears.)

NARRATOR

In accordance with his role as monitor, the old man recounted ancient events. He spoke of *The Keeper* and his chamber - how once *The Keeper* walked among his people, providing for their every need. He related how the choice to extinguish man's lamp placed all in the path of *The Collector*, only to be enslaved by his ways of darkness. He told how man was evicted from that space to this one, where *The Keeper* does not tread. He told of the chasm erected to separate light from darkness until that time when *The Keeper* himself would come to break the seal. On rare occasion, an enlightened one would speak of that day and the need to realign lives toward the coming light. The public square claimed many such lives, for the people drew delight in separating life from self-proclaimed light. In the shadows, no eye can see what the hand conspires, or so they believe. Neither thought nor deed, however, escapes *The Keeper*.

(The scene reopens outside the old man's space.)

OLD MAN
(hastily)

Come. Follow me. This is the appointed time for you to witness a quintessential portion of your teaching.

(He leads the procession down a number of slender passages to an outpost overlooking the city.)

OLD MAN
(quietly)

We will wait here.

RICOMINCIO
(impatiently)

Time in this space seems too precious to spend it without word or action.

RICOMINCIA
(assuringly)

We must wait.

(While the others looked outward over their perch, Ricomincio focuses his attention elsewhere - on the one who made the journey worthwhile. She was a treasure.)

RICOMINCIO
(dotingly)

I can fill any length of time with only my eyes.

OLD MAN
(breaking the silence with a soft voice)

Look! They come. Before us is the gate by which any who enter our space can exit, but passage is reserved only following the separation of breath from life. Shhh ... the time approaches and so do the damned.

RICOMINCIA
(whispering)

I see no gate, only a wall.

(Longitudinal ripples suddenly appear in the wall. The visual distortion grows until a massive gate of forged iron and blood-stained bone displaces the false image. Ricomincia turns and sees cold sweat forming on Ricomincio's brow. She pretends not to notice so as not to invoke embarrassment, but her own anxiety is far from buried. Ricomincia wants to break the silence but holds fast to her quandary.)

RICOMINCIA
(distressed)

How could such a hideous sight remain hidden from plain view? Who would dare venture to such a portal, for any fate behind a gate as this is not for the asking? Is

this gate for escape from this space, or does it serve to keep something vile out?

OLD MAN
(vigilantly)

Do and say nothing to betray our position.

(As Ricomincia contemplates the horror, a detachment of conscripted workers carries forward the shells of lives beyond their limit. Ricomincio and Ricomincia watch as the bodies of those with no remaining internal lamp are unloaded under the breach in the wall, stacked up nicely, though hurriedly. Ricomincio and Ricomincia watch as the detail dismisses with none lingering behind. They watch as the gate opens without sound or ceremony. As the gate swings wide, a wave of icy coolness steals a breath from Ricomincia. Nothing can be seen beyond the pitch blackness. Then The Collector appears from the shadow of shadows to begin the process of collecting. One by one, the lifeforms are lifted from the gateway and dragged into darkness. When the task is complete, The Collector closes the gate with great delight. While no sound accompanies the opening, the closing is accompanied by groans.)

OLD MAN
(reassured)

You have witnessed the fate due us all, if not for *The Keeper's* promise of restoration. He has promised to open another door, one that leads to his chamber, filled with light and joy. Rather than a passage from life unto darkness, it will be a path from life to abundant light. *The Keeper* is the guardian of light. It is within *The Keeper's* power to give life and restore it. This is the hope that is mine, and now I give to you. Faith in *The Keeper* to keep is our only hope.

RICOMINCIA

(troubled)

What hope is there for those collected? The sound of the door's closing was like a million souls clamoring for one last look.

OLD MAN

(looking into Ricomincia's eyes;
honestly)

For those, there is no hope. Their time has passed, but your caring leads me to believe you are ready. I had questioned if I had adequately done my part in moving you from darkness into light. Now, I am sure of it all. The eyes do not lie. These are not windows on the soul which still serve *The Collector*. You must know one more element before my job is complete.

(pausing; animatedly)

The Keeper himself now walks among us to separate the worthy from the dross. He has come to restore a channel of light to this space.

RICOMINCIA

(thankful)

In such a short period we have been brought from total darkness into knowledge of a keeper and the benefits of light.

RICOMINCIO

(alarmed)

We are grateful, but this revelation is numbing. You have moved us into a realm, one of responsibility - guardians of a dangerous detail.

RICOMINCIA

(enlightened)

But this newfound truth places all in perspective.

RICOMINCIO

(questioning)

Would not one so powerfully visible as he be the object of untold recognition and reverence in this space of so little directed light?

OLD MAN

(plainly)

One would think so, but that is not his mission. He comes not to test with that which can be seen, just as he desires to test that which cannot. *The Keeper* has chosen to cast off his luminescence to assume our form. If he passed by you, say even in the square, you would not be mindful of him or the encounter. To call attention to himself would be counterproductive.

RICOMINCIA

(intrigued)

How do you know all this?

OLD MAN

(candidly)

I am one who petitions, just as you will become. You haven't been brought to this space at this time by chance. You have been chosen to witness the unrolling of events unspeakable, only to be charged with a speaking role. As for me, I have sat in *The Keeper's* counsel here on this side. He walks and breathes among us. He has spoken of his outgoing, the reason for his coming. He must carry the penalty of darkness passed down to all generations on his own shoulders to break the seal for countless others to follow.

RICOMINCIA

(baffled)

We ... I do not understand. You spoke so plainly before. Now I can scarcely follow the utterance, much less the meaning.

OLD MAN

(straightforwardly)

That comes only with petition. Allow me to petition in your stead right now for brightness.

RICOMINCIA

(pleadingly)

Yes, please ... before we slide to the position from whence we came. We long for greater light!

OLD MAN

(objectively)

I will petition further for you, but you have already secured your lot with your recognition and your petition. A greater petition can come from the lips of no man or woman.

(reverently)

To the one unseen who sees us, to the keeper of all light, may the light never dim but only increase in these lives. Illumine their path, just as you have illumined their minds, and grant courage to follow the course marked for them no matter the cost.

RICOMINCIA

(relieved)

Strangely, your words strike up no fear. Only comfort fills my thoughts.

RICOMINCIO

(assertively)

We are of one accord. We eagerly await your words.

RICOMINCIA

(joyously)

A thousand questions flood my soul, but none rise to the surface.

(The stage lights go black.)

SCENE FOUR

(Ricominicio and Ricominicia are resting at the old man's quarters. The old man rushes in out of breath.)

OLD MAN

(distraught)

Come quickly! We must go to the public square. I'm afraid it's all going rather badly.

(The old man exits. Ricominicio and Ricominicia dress in haste.)

RICOMINCIA

(compassionately)

I've never seen such concern etched upon his face. His anxiety has become my own.

RICOMINCIO

(regretfully)

The public square is the last place I wish to visit.

RICOMINCIA

(determined)

We know the way well.

(Once girded with readiness, they can find the old man nowhere.)

RICOMINCIO

(reconciled)

I guess a prolonged departure was not an option for our monitor.

RICOMINCIA

(resolutely)

We must quickly venture on our own to that wretched public spot.

(They arrive to find a mob had converged.
Ricomincia and Ricomincio select a
nondescript spot with full view.)

RICOMINCIO

(quietly to Ricomincia)

It seems an unlikely fellow, badly bruised, proves to be
the center of attention. Had he not funds for two rounds
of brew?

RICOMINCIA

(refuting)

Let us listen without judgment. Our monitor would not
fret over drink or lack of it.

WOMAN

(screaming)

Are you, or are you not a keeper?

(The object of their scorn was silent.)

RICOMINCIO

(whispering)

From the condition of his clothes and the mottling of the
skin, I surmise that this is not the first line of
questioning.

(Just then, a half disposed bottle flies
from an anonymous donor and careens across
the poor fellow's brow. It opens a
sizable gash, but the man is unable or
unwilling to thwart such assailment.
Without thought, Ricomincia steps forward.
Ricomincio reaches out to restrain
Ricomincia, but he fails to latch hold.
She rips the hem securing the border of
her outer garment, and applies a makeshift
bandage to the open wound. The man,
appreciative of the gesture, could only
give repayment with the look in his eyes.
Ricomincia shrinks back to an approaching
Ricomincio.)

RICOMINCIO

(angrily)

We must be careful. All eyes are now upon us, too.

RICOMINCIA

(mesmerized)

Did you see - his eyes? It was a paralyzing look held in
reserve - a comforting look so out of place with these
circumstances, a private look deep into my soul. I had
no expectation of such a rich reward. I did only what
the old man would have done, what he has done for us.

RICOMINCIO

(crossly)

Yes, but action has thrown you into the same lot as this
fellow with light in his eyes. Can you not see the
transference of hatred? It is written in dark
countenance over all the nameless faces in this crowd.

RICOMINCIA

(calmly)

At that moment, only the man mattered.

(A hand on the shoulder whisks Ricomincia
from the central focus. It was the old
man, just as before. As they turn,
however, Ricomincio's eyes find a familiar
garb amongst the frenzied crowd.)

RICOMINCIO

(fearfully)

Look there ... in the crowd. It is unquestionably the
attire belonging to the one whom for so long held the
other end of our chain. *The Collector* is among us. We
must recede from his attention.

(The Collector is far too engrossed in
other recourse than to follow the
departure of an old man and two former
clients. Ricomincia, Ricomincio, and the
old man could not bring themselves to
leave the scene completely, so they halt
at a safe distance to see how it all will
unfold.)

WOMAN
(accusingly)

Are you *The Keeper*?"

THE ACCUSED
(addressing the mob)

I am.

THE COLLECTOR
(stepping forward from the crowd;
with hatred)

Need we hear more? Rid this space of him!

WITNESS
(cautiously)

But we have laws in this space! What is the charge levied to merit the hatred you wish to enact? I am an overseer of accounts in this space.

THE COLLECTOR
(with righteous indignation)

The charge ... is insurrection, the desire to overturn the natural order of things in this space. If you choose to side with him, perhaps you also wish to share in his fate.

WITNESS
(retreating)

My only desire is to see that laws are not neglected. Now that the charge is formalized, let your hand follow what your spirit has determined.

THE COLLECTOR
(shouting offensively with
authority)

Quench his lamp!

(The pleasure of all on the square is evident. No sooner had the words filled the square than did the restraint of the crowd give way. They rush him from all directions, flailing fists and objects conveniently finding their way into an

open hand. They feel, and they love it! The mayhem does not cease until life and light are separated. None are ashamed as they retreat from their duty, leaving the exposed body, scarcely recognizable, at the center of the public square for passersby to take notice and weep, if that were possible. The old man, Ricomincio, and Ricominia take notice and exit.

Some amongst those who petition are bold enough to venture into the square to collect the broken body in which no lamp remains. Some carrying bowls and white rags give the body a customary washing. One brings a large linen cloth to cover the body in preparation for the journey outward - outward from this space with unscalable walls in which no one can leave with breath still intact. Another carries a stretcher. A group encircles the body, carefully lifts it onto the stretcher, and solemnly steps offstage in slow, uniform steps.)

SCENE FIVE

(They arrive at the old man's space but separately. Ricominchia is visably distraught and sheds uncontrollable tears. Ricominchio tries to conceal his tremors and is unable to provide comfort to Ricominchia. After a period of unbridled solitude, the old man joins Ricominchio and Ricominchia. They rushed at him with a flurry of questions reserved for a monitor.)

RICOMINCIO

(hysterically)

Was that necessary? Was he really *The Keeper*? What purpose could that possibly serve, and why were we witness to a senseless, indefensible act?

OLD MAN

(with an inexplicable calmness)

One at a time. We have waited so long. I rejoice that my breath count did not expire before this time in this space.

RICOMINCIO

(contemptuously)

What cruel joy is this? I fear we have chosen a monitor badly? Is your coin tossed in with them? Surely we were not deceived by fanciful stories and cloaked dishonesty!

OLD MAN

(Aware of the danger in his attitude from reading their facial expression)

Was that necessary?

(Pausing briefly)

The Keeper himself set the partition long ago, and only he could pierce through. Breaking into our space was a trivial matter, but his purpose was our benefit - to make passage for us to enter his. By his coming and going, he will break the seal. Recall, there is no escape from this space with breath still intact. Even now, his body

is prepared for exit. Only, *The Collector* cannot claim it, for he cannot claim what is not his. *The Keeper* himself will rise and open a new door for those who love light more than darkness. That door will lead to his chamber where light persists forever. That door will be for you and me and all those who choose to believe *The Keeper* has forged this path for his beloved. The door will be opened for his keep. None other can find it useful.

(The old man sees elements of acceptance in Ricominchio and Ricominchia.)

OLD MAN

As for the second question, let's see ... was he really *The Keeper*? On this question there is no middle ground. Your heart either swells with contempt or overflows with compassion. That is the very reason he allowed such a brutal expression of death - to distinguish between the contemptible and kindred spirit. Which is it for you? Need I even ask? Did your lamp within not burn brighter in his presence rather than falter? While our thoughts make him no less *The Keeper*, disbelief excludes some from his eternal keep. The seal will be broken, but the path to his chamber is one of choice. You chose to side with *The Keeper*. Otherwise, your act of kindness would not have transpired. Those who petition are already speaking of it. It will escape neither memory in this space nor reward in the next. As to purpose, I believe that element of uncertainty has already been withdrawn from the table.

This leaves only the question of your role. Was it not your purpose in coming from darkness into light? Was it not the reason you were deposited here at this time, through no collaboration with *The Collector*? Does your heart not burn within you even now with the information in your bosom? In the final analysis, I can only suggest an array of possibilities. The true answer must come from within. No man can plant another's significance. We can only petition. I have petitioned on your behalf and will continue to do so. My own petition has been granted. My time as monitor has now run its course. I fear I shall be making the outbound journey very soon.

Should you get word of my passing, do not mourn for me as one of the multitude behind *The Collector's* wall, for I shall not be there. My lot is cast in light, and that is where my soul shall dwell. As I relinquish my monitor role, I have but one question for you. What will you do with your great learning?

(The old man exits leaving Ricomincio and Ricominchia alone.)

RICOMINCIO
(bewildered)

Where shall we go?

RICOMINCIA
(securely)

We must petition. I know only that the journey will be delightfully perilous.

(Ricomincio and Ricominchia gather their scanty possessions and exit the old man's space. They look upward.)

RICOMINCIO
(challenged)

That's odd. I anticipated added light. I perceive no change.

RICOMINCIA
(resolutely)

It is of no consequence, my husband, for I can feel the light within burning brighter than imaginable. It is a directed light, though hidden from view. The lamp is so intense that I can scarcely contain it.

RICOMINCIO
(accepting)

Then as we go, we shall spill over into the lives of others in whatever space they occupy.

RICOMINCIA
(curiously)

The old man spoke of his replacement. Are we to be monitors?

RICOMINCIO
(plainly)

It is but a name. I am Ricomincio.

RICOMINCIA
(joyfully)

And I, your bondservant, Ricominchia. For however many countable breaths remain, we must trust the lamp within to be our guide.

(Ricomincio and Ricominchia exit this space. Lights fade to black.)

PART C

CHARACTERS:

Finisco A stoic white male with above normal stature, short, well-groomed hair, and chiseled features dressed in black leggings and black muscle shirt. No shoes. Deep powerful voice.

Finisce A well endowed black female with ballerina physique wearing white leggings and white spandex top to accentuate her curves. She has long, straight black hair. No shoes. Distinctly feminine, innocent voice.

The Interrogator A siren dressed in black leather with a short crop of strawberry blonde hair, blue eyes, high cheekbones, and sculptured brows. The complexion is clear and wrinkle-free. .

The Warden An older man with white crew cut hair and stocky physique in white pants and white dress shirt.

The Technician A younger man with blonde hair, black cargo pants, black polo, and white labcoat.

The Keeper A thin, middle-aged man with flowing hair and compationate eyes, dressed in white linen robe with gold belt and no shoes.

Narrator Female with soothing, but expressive, voice and nice physique, now seen in red, strapless cocktail dress and red stiletto heels.

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SCENE ONE

(Stage with adobe cityscape. Tall vertical compartments dominate the view. A uniform green light persists.)

NARRATOR

(now physically present onstage)

In the same space, a modernized space, men have expanded their limits without expanding their minds. They have built the city of unscalable walls upwards to create a hierarchical existence. They express their insistence on upward living as a desire to have more light, but in this space of uniform exposure, light and the desire for it are oft confused. The higher one lives, the less one feels a need for light, resulting in the abstraction of more light. They have more than what they desire.

The aspiration for upward living has ancient roots. No matter how the architectural style and construction methods have evolved, the city walls are an ever-present reminder of mortality. In the recesses of human thought, upward living is propelled by the notion that if one climbs high enough on this side, one can peer over the wall to the other. Once the goal of escape is visible, though unspeakable, the goal of immortality is seen as attainable. For, what has stopped man thus far from monumental achievement?

It is an age of knowledge, yet wisdom is nowhere to be found. Insight from predecessors is archived in volumes too great to be digested. Knowledge of *The Keeper* would have befallen the same fate if not for *his* desire to be known. In this culture of quantum dot storage arrays, written records of *The Keeper's* act of reconciliation still circulate. A few persist in echoing the promises of witnesses to the light, such as Ricomincio and Ricominchia, yet few are interested in selecting a path beyond the present.

In this hierarchical space, those that live atop detest those beneath them. While those in intermediate spaces feel the unmerited hatred from those above, they,

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nevertheless, do not pass up the opportunity to relegate those beneath them to the status of lesser beings. It helps them to feel better about themselves - being the object of so much downward-directed ill will. Those living at the bottom, though detested many times over, are the most content. Buried under the shadows of opaque towers, those at the bottom often have the most light to share. Sharing is what keeps the foundation steady, for without the bottom-dwellers, the towers could not be supported in this space. Should collapse be imminent, those atop have the most to lose and the greatest fall. Those at the bottom have no desire to see that happen to their fellowman, so the hierarchical space enjoys the stability afforded to it by the underclass.

In this space, in the middle layers, we find Finisco and Finisce. They were good people, obeying most laws. The ones they overlook hold no consequence, for all did likewise. Their decision-making follows fiscal gain religiously. Spending money is their obsession; making money is their god.

It was completely uncharacteristic for Finisce to interrupt the flow, especially when things were going so well. After all, calendars were filled, appointments were met, and cash flow was at an all-time high. Nevertheless, in a particularly candid moment, when Finisce had Finisco's undivided attention, she had some poignant questions she had harbored at length.

(Lights lift to reveal the quarters of Finisco and Finisce. The decorum is distinctly modern with ample use of color, function, and style.)

FINISCE
(impatiently)

Finisco, are you happy?

FINISCO
(calmly)

I have a beautiful wife, plenty to eat - all I need.

FINISCE
(aggressively)

You aren't keeping any secrets from me, are you?

FINISCO
(quite frankly)

No, Baby, I am an open book.

FINISCE
(with a serious tone)

It's funny you should mention books, because I found one while sorting through your old things, trying to reclaim some of our lost space.

(She pulls an old volume wrapped in linen from a box behind the counter.)

FINISCE
(confrontingly)

Where did this come from?

(She removes the covering to expose the book's binding. Upon first glance, the tension freezes every muscle in Finisco's body. His eyes dilate; his ocular capillaries pulse. Finisco forces down a gulp.)

FINISCO
(apologetically)

Baby, I'm sorry. I was thinking we could use a little extra money. I remembered I had a few items from my inheritance that might really bring a windfall if offered to the right people. I already disposed of some jewelry, but I thought the book should bring a little more. I promise you that I will get rid of it soon. I never intended on putting us in danger. You have to believe me.

FINISCE
(sharply)

Do you know what's in here?

FINISCO

(trying to diffuse the tension)

No, Baby, just some stories my grandmother used to read to me at bedtime.

(Finisco firmly takes the book from Finisce's hand, hurriedly wraps it with the cloth, and puts it back in the box.)

FINISCO

(reassuredly)

If all goes well, I should have it out of here very soon in exchange for a pretty penny or two for good luck.

(proudly)

I think I have located a buyer.

(Finisce has a look of disappointment on her face as she relinquishes the book and accepts Finisco's response. Things are different in her eyes.)

FINISCO

(reconciliatory)

Let me make it up to you. Let's have a little pre-celebration of our windfall. We can throw a party - have all your friends over - live it up.

(Finisco pulls Finisce close. She reluctantly submits.)

FINISCO

(comforting)

It will be okay. I'll make things right. You deserve better, and I will see to it that you have it.

(A knock on the door changes everything. As Finisco naively approaches, he is hurled backwards by the force of the door flying off its hinges. The splintered laminate delivers a sturdy indiscriminant blow. There is an issue of blood, but Finisco had not even time to ascertain his injury. Finisce screams indiscriminately. Finisco watches helplessly as the

paramilitary detail storms the living quarters. Everything is fuzzy and spinning in slow motion.)

FINISCO

(with pain and immense concern)

Finisce!

(He sees Finisce only in a succession of still frames [using a strobe light], immobilized and being fondled heavily by two in uniform. Finisco is surrounded and pummeled with stun guns until his world goes black [strobe frequency slows to zero]. Fade to black.)

SCENE TWO

(Finisco regains consciousness in a padded cell. He is dressed in orange scrubs. A makeshift bandage is applied above his left eye, but the eye is full of blood and of little use. The only items in the room are a closed circuit monitor and a camera.)

FINISCO
(writhing)

Oh, my head!

(Finisco struggles to his feet and rattles the door. He notices the camera which seems to track his every move.)

FINISCO
(dryly)

Where is Finisce?

(The stretching of his jawbone brings excruciating pain.)

FINISCO
(near his tolerance threshold)
Oh, the throbbing! My head is about to explode. Every nerve fiber has been exposed. I just want to peel off this scorched skin.

(He whimpers as he digs his nails into his face but is forced to withdraw. Finisco curls up in a fetal position and waits. There is no sense of time. Finisco loses consciousness. An unknown time later, Finisco regains his faculties.)

FINISCO
(groggy)
Where am I? Has time pushed forward or ground to a halt? Such pain!

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(The focus on himself is finally interrupted by a video transmission.)

THE INTERROGATOR:
(mechanically)
Are you ready to confess?

(Finisco grasps his head at the stimulus to his inner ear, still badly swollen by electric burns.)

THE INTERROGATOR
Are you ready to confess?

FINISCO
(pleading and broken)
Tell me of what I am accused, and perhaps I will acquiesce.

THE INTERROGATOR
(without emotion)
We found the contraband among your possessions. You cannot claim ignorance.

(Finisco can now barely make out a visual off the plasma monitor of his accuser, though the face is unfamiliar. The voice is female, but the image is unisex at best. The imaged figure has a short crop of strawberry blonde hair, blue eyes, high cheekbones, and sculptured brows. The complexion is clear and wrinkle-free.)

FINISCO
(shifting from self to this mental puzzle before him)
Who are you? Do I know you? Have we met before? Surely, I would have total recall of such an encounter.

THE INTERROGATOR
(unphased)
Are you ready to confess? If so, we can move on.

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FINISCO

(whispering to himself)

She is simply was too perfect - probably a software rendering. This femme fatale would draw the attention of countless men in any public venue, if she were real, and the services of many others, if she were not.

(it then dawns)

She never blinks! Any appeal for compassion would be misappropriated. I must take a logical tack, as with a machine.

(now addressing the monitor)

As a matter of law, I request to see the charge against me.

(At this, there is a prolonged silence.)

FINISCO

(whispering to himself)

That must have created a stir of confusion or, at least, a software glitch. The separation is semantical. Cause and effect. Good that I am well versed in my rights. This space still recognizes individual rights, or so I thought, by manifesto.

(After some delay, a response finally comes.)

THE INTERROGATOR

(accommodating)

Visuals of the incriminating evidence are being uploaded now. First, a recent receipt for charitable giving.

FINISCO

(refutingly)

Purely a financial decision, a loophole provided by the state, which I forthrightly secured.

THE INTERROGATOR

(continuing)

Second, a surveillance photo of you and your wife in the presence of a conspirator.

FINISCO

(indignant)

A neighbor! I don't even recall the man's name.

THE INTERROGATOR

(dispassionately)

Finally, a bound record of light, a book. Are you ready to confess?

(Finisco breaks into a sweat when he sees the last image, for possession of such items had transgressed from being discouraged, to regulated, to criminal in a brief period.)

FINISCO

(rebutting profoundly)

A keepsake passed down from prior generations!

(deceptively)

Is it now against the law to keep a book of your grandmother's folklore?

THE INTERROGATOR

(without empathy)

It is. Your biorhythms refute your testimony. Are you ready to confess?

FINISCO

(justifyingly)

I kept the bound volume only on surety it would reap a hefty price on the black market. It means nothing to me! Worthless!

(seeking another legal loophole or software bug)

I can respond to this so-called evidence only if I know the linkage to a charge. I exercise my right to knowledge of the charge levied.

(Once again, there is a period of silence, but this line of questioning must have been anticipated, for the answer comes back without the extensive delay.)

THE INTERROGATOR
(dispassionately)

The charges against you are as follows:

1. You are charged with illegal possession of contraband, destructive to our society.
2. You are charged with support of a known fugitive.
3. You are charged with conspiracy against the state.
4. You are charged with treason.

FINISCO
(to himself)

This is serious.

(sweating profusely)

Violent abduction, isolation, and if these charges are not lifted, punishment will involve nothing less than lifespan termination.

(out loud)

As for the first count, I plead guilty and agree to pay the fine and suffer confiscation as clearly outlined in law, but I must be presented with detail on the other charges, for I am at a loss on how to respond to such absurdity.

(Now with a seamless, human-like, response time, the surveillance photo is remounted on the screen -- a picture of Finisco, Finisce, and another individual.)

THE INTERROGATOR
(accommodatingly)

This man is a known teacher of directed light. He has managed escape, but some under his monitor have been rounded up and duly punished. We extracted information from a few prior to their termination of a forthcoming subversive movement to be organized by the enlightened community. Some among them also gave up names in order to quicken their life separation. Your household was implicated. Extensive study of this criminal's operations suggests that those within your neighborhood would have had primary contact. Failure to report the known whereabouts of a fugitive not only constitutes aid, but together with other evidence, suggests you are also a student of the light and a co-conspirator.

FINISCO
(loudly and desperately)

It's true I owned the bound volume, but I have scarcely opened the pages from my youth! I know not its content, its message, nor its meaning! Would not a conspirator be aware of the plot? I am victim of some follower's lies to shorten his pain. I have only acted out of the drive for upward living!

THE INTERROGATOR
(emotionless)

Your position is defenseless. Regarding your simplest claim, hydrocarbon and moisture content analysis of the bound volume cover and pages indicate extensive recent use. If you lie, you must do so more convincingly and with corroborating evidence. We find inability to refute the mildest charge incriminating on all others. The state must act swiftly against all threats of conspiracy and error on the side of preservation. For the good of our society, the charges against you are validated. The corresponding punishment is invoked and will be immediately enforced.

(A wall lifts automatically, revealing a part of the city never before seen by Finisco. It is a ground-level labyrinth made up of the spaces between the residential towers. The floors are of uneven stone and covered with what must be generations of filth. Stripped of his shoes, the mirth squeezes up between his toes with each step. The walls are of rugged granite, worn smooth near the base from touch. The passageway thickness varies, but it is never more than an arm span from side to side.)

FINISCO
(Peering upward)

I am free to go?

(laughing)

Was that a scare tactic? I must have passed the padded cell test.

(The joy on Finisco's face is short-lived. The moment Finisco progresses into the maze, he senses a change.)

FINISCO

(to himself; paranoid)

There is a draw against my every breath. In this space of uniform light, a darkness pursues me.

(breaking into a jog)

Perhaps I can outrun my destiny.

(Finisco propels forward through the maze, simulated onstage either through digital projection or with handheld wall panels in perpetual movement using stage crew or possibly even characters from prior parts.)

FINISCO

Each intersection looks so familiar. Am I retracing my path? I do not even know if there exists a means of escape, but the advancing darkness so black as to be felt propels me forward.

(Finisco now heavily labors to force air into his lungs.)

FINISCO

(to himself; exhausted)

Something is overtaking my soul! How much longer can I maintain this personal struggle for breath? Five steps? Two? Shall I use my strength for another step or another breath?

(With one final right turn, Finisco finds himself before a door in the city with unscalable walls. A forceful thrust accomplishes nothing. Neither does a second or third.)

FINISCO

(with contempt)

It is locked! Consciousness has begun to lift from my possession.

(yelling)

I ... am ... innocent!

(He shrinks there with his back against the door awaiting the end.)

At this moment, lights lift to reveal a broken Finisco in the confines of another room. There strapped into an asylum chair in full view of a camera tracking system, Finisco has witnessed everything. Cranial implants are embedded deeply in order to capture her every brain nerve firing. She also sports the same orange scrubs.)

FINISCO

(pleading)

Spare his life. It was me! I studied the book! At first, I was simply curious, but I soon was confronted with my shame. The light dawned within me as the truth of my existence unraveled. I am a disciple of the light. He is innocent. Let him not assume my punishment!

(At that, Finisco's voice went limp in concert with her emotional depletion.)

WARDEN

(to technician)

Did we get it?

TECHNICIAN

(mechanically)

We have a full matrix of correlation coefficients to catalog the thought patterns of this enemy of the state. I believe this data quality is sufficient to screen the populous and profile the guilty at large.

WARDEN
(delighted)

Apprehending fugitives by preying upon their documented weaknesses ... I love it! Initiate the process of cranial implant removal.

(With all monitors still operational, Finisce was overjoyed to see a guard aid Finisco, once again breathing freely, securely into the compound. The equipment records this response also, although the technician had already begun the painful process of electrode withdrawal.)

TECHNICIAN
(alarmed)

Though extraction has begun, there is one last data set.

WARDEN
(indifferent)

The mix of emotional joy with personal physical pain has compromised the quality of this last data set. Delete it as unreliable.

(Once the extraction procedure is complete, Finisce is led directly to another room. Almost as soon as the door closes, the wall opens as she had witnessed for Finisco.)

FINISCE
(fraught)

Memory, do not fail me! Let me recall Finisco's series of choices, filtering out the poor selections. Left, then right, followed by two consecutive lefts. From my vantage point I was able to maintain a sense of direction which Finisco could not.

(panicking)

I feel the darkness approaching quickly.

(Finisce also ventures through the maze simulated in the same manner as before.)

FINISCE
(determined)

Though breath is a struggle, I cannot halt and return to darkness, now that I have tasted light! My strength is not enough.

(rhetorically)

Why is this all happening to me? I have only been obedient in thought and deed. Is intense suffering to be my sole reward?

(to herself; resolved)

I must offset this spiritual confusion with mental clarity required for the maze. Darkness will never again be my choice.

(At that point of resolution, Finisce turns right only to find a dead end. Panic reflexes engage.)

FINISCE
(stubbornly)

Darkness needs no advocate!

(She lunges at the wall.)

FINISCE
(disheartened)

Sets of finger-width grooves etched into the granite witness the failure of others before me.

(Several swift plunges with her bare fist brought only a mixture of pain and blood. Cold sweat mingled with Finisce's already drenched clothing. She fights to suppress emotion and recover lucidity.)

FINISCE
(reassessing)

Had I not remembered correctly? Perhaps that prior left should have also been a right? If the error occurred any earlier, my die has been cast!

(Finisce retraces her weary steps to remedy her last two choices - selections upon which her future hinged.)

FINISCE

(trying to retain focus)

I feel dizzy, as if fading between worlds. Are my strides in the physical, or am I dreaming?

(With a final right turn, Finisce, indeed, buckles in relief before the door.)

FINISCE

(spent)

If only I had strength to try the handle. Yet, why should I bother to expend my soul on a locked door? It had been firmly so for Finisco. Unlike my Finisco, the end has come with no compensating confession possible.

(Lights lift back in the compound, where the roles are indeed reversed. The technician busily instruments Finisco. The monitors display a test pattern.)

FINISCO

(eagerly)

I do so hope to have another session with the blonde.

TECHNICIAN

(mechanically)

We are a go.

WARDEN

(grinning)

Very well then. Initiate recording. Video on!

(The monitor now shows Finisce expended before the door in the maze. Finisco sits drained from his own experience and demonstrates surprisingly little emotion, as if not personally impacted by the quandary of his mate.)

TECHNICIAN

(delighted)

We are receiving a completely different suite of recordings as hoped.

WARDEN

(deviously)

Excellent!

FINISCO

(talking calmly to the monitor)

Do not be afraid, Baby. The quest is harrowing, but nonfatal. I escaped. I passed the test. I only had been chosen to go first.

(coldly)

Actually, I found my brush with extreme darkness exhilarating. Perhaps you will find it equally so. The door is locked! It is all a farce!

(As Finisco sees Finisce reaching for the handle, a curious smile crosses Finisco's face until that smile melts to fright.)

With a strength not her own, Finisce lifts herself by the door handle and pulls with all that is within her. The door falls open to usher in an immeasurably bright light. Standing in the doorway is a figure dressed in blood-soaked, white linen wearing Ricominia's belt of gold. The brilliance of white apparel can possibly be enhanced using black light. Behind the central figure stands a multitude of projected spiritual beings dressed in white linen, girded for battle. The Keeper lifts Finisce unto himself.)

THE KEEPER

(convincingly)

The door is to remain open for the light to flood the city and purify it.

(The armed multitude passes as figures of light to fulfill the prophesy.)

FINISCE

(looking into the eyes of *The Keeper*)

Is this a dream? Is my lamp extinguished? Have you come to collect my soul?

THE KEEPER

(compassionately)

To collect? No, I have come to keep safe with me that which I have always loved.

FINISCE

(confident but still weak)

I knew You would not abandon me.

(benevolently)

What about the others?

THE KEEPER

(authoritatively)

Woe to the city, for it is written, "This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

FINISCE

(remorsefully)

And of Finisco?

THE KEEPER

(decisively)

He never knew me. For Finisco and legions of others clinging to *The Collector's* mark, there will be no escape.

(White lights dramatically increase in intensity then cut to black amid the resounding accompaniment of tympani and trumpets.)

✠ Amen ✠



A Cast of Characters

– In Italian –

<i>Inizio</i>	I begin
<i>Inizia</i>	She begins
<i>Ricomincio</i>	I begin again
<i>Ricomincia</i>	She begins again
<i>Finisco</i>	I finish
<i>Finisce</i>	She finishes



Can you find your way out?

About the Author

Randy Doyle Hazlett is both author and scientist. When challenged to a life of significance by mentor Zig Ziglar, Dr. Hazlett embarked upon a series of projects to make a difference in the lives of others. While still very much involved in leading edge research, Dr. Hazlett has turned his time and talent to musical composition and legacy literary projects, such as *The Pilgrimage* and *Dark Spaces*. The author pours much energy into the next generation, especially when it comes to equipping them for the spiritual battles of life. The author truly believes a foundation of faith is the only anchor in this life and hope for the next.