

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

(JOHNNY D's hotel suite, late spring
1983)

(It is a hotel suite like none other. JOHNNY D has lived here more than thirty years and nearly all the furnishings and other things in it belong to him, not the hotel. For all of that, there is an odd hotel-like quality about the room, albeit circa 1955. The furnishings are old, not antiques. They were cheap when they were bought and are cheap now.)

(The room is in two levels -- a living area below, a bedroom/library above. The back wall is covered with shelves of books, most of which appear to have been read. The bed is crisply made and there are night stands flanking it. A railing divides the upper level from the lower and short flights of steps drop down to the lower level from either end of it. On the lower, immediately below the railing is a sofa -- possibly, aside from the bed, the only remaining piece of authentic hotel furniture in the room. An end table with a lamp and telephone are next to the sofa. At up right, beyond the upper level, is the door to the hall. At up left is a window which is open, this being the first really warm day of spring. Traffic sound floats in softly from the streets below.)

(At rise, GEORGE McCARTHY sits at a small secretary desk at down left center. On it is a stack of mail through which he is laboriously working. JOHNNY D stands on the upper level next to the bed, holding an open newspaper in his hand. He is dressed impeccably, dark suit, white shirt, striped tie.)

JOHNNY D

Next!

GEORGE

From Mr. Thomas Holt, Muscatine, Iowa.

JOHNNY D

My God, another shit-kicker from the farm belt! I grew up on a farm, George, knee-deep in shit and I know whereof I speak.

GEORGE

Yes, sir.

JOHNNY D

The hog shit alone was enough to curl the hair in your nose. Not to mention the cow dung. Farm life is not for a man with a sensitive nose.

GEORGE

No, sir.

JOHNNY D

You don't have to "yes, sir" and "no, sir" me, George. Not if we're to have an actual conversation.

GEORGE

No, sir. I mean....I'm sorry.

JOHNNY D

Never mind. I'll admit, we have a ticklish situation here. If you offend me, I might fire you and that book you're writing about me would never get written? And I offend easily, don't I?

GEORGE

I wouldn't know, Mr. DeMarco.

JOHNNY D

You wouldn't? What kind of researcher are you, "Mr. McCarthy"? Anyone knows that -- anyone, at all. Just ask the first five people you meet on the street. Offend the Great Johnny D and you're banished. For life. You did know that, didn't you?

GEORGE

I guess I heard it someplace.

JOHNNY D

It's quite true, you know. You get the one chance. That's all. And I won't tell you when you've had it. I probably won't even tell you what you did. And if you don't believe me, you could ask Sonny Fortunato. That is, you could if he were still alive, which he isn't.

GEORGE

Sonny...who?

JOHNNY D

Fortunato -- oh, come now, George. Sonny Fortunato. Sonny Fortune. Sonny's Place. The restaurant. I have to tell you, I despair of that book of yours if that's... (Pause) Of course, you're just getting me to talk, pretending you don't know who Sonny is so I'll speak more freely. But, really, could I speak more freely than I am? Soon enough you'll be wishing that I would simply shut up.

GEORGE

What did he do?

JOHNNY D

Pardon?

GEORGE

Sonny Fortune. What did he do to get banished?

JOHNNY D

(darkly) He tried to use me. He tried to use me to promote a new restaurant. After thirty years. As if I was the one who owed him! (Pause) I won't abide users. I won't have their stink in the same room with me. (Pause, more calmly) There, you see? You knew all about Sonny.

GEORGE

I didn't know his real name was Fortunato.

JOHNNY D

Good Lord, nobody's real name is Fortune! (Pause) Sonny was an immigrant's kid, just like me. Giovanni Fortunato. Me, I was lucky. My old man got off the boat, took one look at New York and kept right on going. So I got to miss out on Hell's Kitchen and the Bowery and the Lower East Side like Sonny. (Pause) Why aren't you writing this down? This is good stuff, especially the hog shit and the cow dung. Do you know what you'd have to pay for barnyard aromas like that on Fifth Avenue?

GEORGE

I have a good memory. (Pause) Why did you give me this job?

JOHNNY D

Why shouldn't I give you a job? You're a nice kid. You have neat handwriting. You don't mind all the mail -- in fact, I think the mail is your favorite part. So why shouldn't I give you a job?

GEORGE

Well, the book and all. I know how you feel about publicity and I didn't think...

JOHNNY D

...that I'd take the viper to my bosom, so to speak? (Pause) My, wasn't that pretty? Shakespeare, I think. Or the Bible. See, I'm not some illiterate Dago like some of the writers would like to believe.

GEORGE

You're not a lot of things the writers say you are.

JOHNNY D

You've noticed that, have you? Good for you. (Pause) Let me ask you something. If I hadn't taken you on, would you have gone off and found some other paragon to write about? Lou Gehrig, say? Or Christy Mathewson? Abner Doubleday, possibly?

GEORGE

(laughing) No, probably not.

JOHNNY D

No, of course not. You would have written about me, anyway. And without the advantage of any real knowledge of the subject. Just the lies of my enemies and the even bigger lies of my friends. (Pause) So, you see, this arrangement is really all to my advantage. The book would be written, anyway, regardless of what I did or said. This way, at least I'll have some small say in what goes into it.

GEORGE

But you won't....

(JOHNNY D puts up his hand, as if to shush GEORGE)

JOHNNY D

Don't worry, lad. I wouldn't try to influence what you write. I won't even ask to see the first draft. If you write a pack of damned lies, I'll simply say so. And quite loudly, as I always do. Now then, what can we do for Mr. Thomas Holt of Muscatine, Iowa?

GEORGE

How do you do that?

JOHNNY D

How do I do what?

GEORGE

I said the man's name and the town's name once and that must have been ten minutes ago and we've had this whole conversation since -- and yet you rattle it off like you had the letter in your hand.

JOHNNY D

I keep my eye on the ball, my boy. I have always kept my eye on the ball. How do you think I got all those hits in all those games? Now what does the shit-kicker want?

(GEORGE laughs, then unfolds the letter he's been holding in his hand and begins to read)

GEORGE

"Dear Johnny D, I was born here in Muscatine..."

JOHNNY D

Dear God, the man's going to tell us the whole damned story of his whole damned life!

GEORGE

"...which, as you know, ain't all that far from where you grewed up in Nebraska..."

JOHNNY D

You know, I can almost hear the man. (mimicking) "Ain't all that *fur* from *whar* you *growed* up..."

GEORGE

If you keep it up, it's going to take all day just to read this one letter.

JOHNNY D

My apologies. It brings back a lot of memories, is all.

GEORGE

"Even though I lived my whole life here in Muscatine, I seen you play once in an exhibition game up to Omaha where my Pa was selling some of our cows...."

JOHNNY D

He "seen" me, did he? Is it true that baseball fans -- all baseball fans, that is -- are only semi-literate?

GEORGE

Better than football fans. They can't read...or write.

JOHNNY D

You must remind me to send a note of congratulations to Frank Gifford. Imagine what mail he must get! (Pause) Read on.

GEORGE

If I could keep my place... (reads) "...which was in 1939. You was playing the Cardinals and Dizzy Dean was pitching and you struck a long fly ball which went foul and which I caught..."

JOHNNY D

Saints preserve us! What does the man want?!

GEORGE

(reads) "I have always treasured that ball of yours, though you did not sign it. My boy has always admired the ball and how I keep it in its own case, on its own shelf, and all. You have always been his greatest hero and I know that, if you were to sign to him a bat or a ball or even just a piece of paper, he would treasure it forever."

JOHNNY D

Of course he would. For about an hour. Until his father sold it.

GEORGE

You think he'd do that?

JOHNNY D

Tell me, what's the name of the son of Mr. Thomas Holt of Muscatine, Iowa? It must be there somewhere.

(GEORGE reads silently for a moment, then looks up, chagrined.)

GEORGE

Oh. I see.

JOHNNY D

And the winner would be....?

GEORGE

(reading) "My boy's name is Tommy Holt, also."

JOHNNY D

Indeed. How convenient for Mr. Holt, senior.

GEORGE

Why would he... I mean, if it's not for his son...

JOHNNY D

My dear boy, he probably doesn't even have a son. He wants my autograph, which is worth about a hundred dollars, preferably on a ball, which would be worth three hundred, or even a bat, which he could sell for, oh, an even thousand.

(He comes to the desk and takes the letter from GEORGE)

Users, George. The world is full of users. There will always be those who want something from you, some part of you. They think because they know your name, because they've seen your

JOHNNY D (cont'd)

picture in the paper or, perhaps, have paid money to watch you work or buy your work, that they have this claim on you. They never want much. Just sign your name to this. A ball, a bat. Or -- a contract, perhaps, a contract allowing them to use your name and your face to sell their product. Or promote their restaurant. And because you're famous they think they have the right to do this. Particularly if, at one time or another in your life you were foolish enough to call them your friend.

(He puts the letter back down on the desk)

No one makes money from Johnny DeMarco's name except Johnny DeMarco. Those who wish to pay for the privilege may do so. Those who don't -- well, no one gets it for free. Not Sonny Fortune, not the New York Yankees...and certainly not Mr. Thomas Holt of Muscatine, Iowa. (Pause) Send him an autographed picture. One of the preprinted ones. Let Mr. Holt, junior, treasure that, if he will. Or let Mr. Holt, senior try to sell it. And please dispose of his letter in the appropriate manner.

GEORGE

Sure, Johnny.

(He sets the letter aside)

JOHNNY D

I'm feeling a little tired just now. We can finish all this up tomorrow. You can go now.

GEORGE

Whatever you say, Johnny.

(He begins to straighten up the desk, and takes a photograph and an envelope from the desk drawer to put with the letter)

Did you want to go through the RSVP's for the party?

JOHNNY D

Why? Do you suppose anyone had the nerve to say "No"?

GEORGE

You never know.

JOHNNY D

The ones who want something from me will be there. The ones who don't -- well, they'll be there because they love me.

GEORGE

If you say so. (Pause) How do you know the difference?

JOHNNY D

What?

GEORGE

How do you know the difference between the ones who want to something and the ones who love you?

(LONG PAUSE)

JOHNNY D

If I knew the answer to that, I would have made far fewer mistakes in my life. (Pause) I used to think the ones who'd been with me from the start, who were there when I was nothing and nobody, those were the ones I could trust, they were my friends because they were there when being my friend gained them nothing. (Pause) But then I found that they were the worst betrayers, that they expected the most because -- well, because they thought they'd given me the most. They can't see that... (Pause) Seventy. When did I get so old? When I was playing, I couldn't imagine such a thing!

(GEORGE, embarrassed, begins to gather his things.)

GEORGE

If there's nothing else....

JOHNNY D

I remember that game, you know. The one Mr. Holt was at.

GEORGE

But that was... Lord, that was over forty years ago!

JOHNNY D

So? My knees may be shot, but my memory's just fine. Name any date between April and October from 1935 to 1952. Go ahead, any date.

GEORGE

May 10, 1944.

JOHNNY D

Not fair. I was on an aircraft carrier somewhere in the South Pacific.

(Pause, he laughs)

The war, George. Try again.

GEORGE

June 10, 1947.

JOHNNY D

Boston. We beat the Red Sox 7-1. I went two for four with a double and a walk.

(GEORGE looks at him incredulously and
JOHNNY D laughs)

Go ahead. Try me again.

GEORGE

April 21, 1949.

JOHNNY D

I didn't play. I was in the hospital because of...

GEORGE

The toe.

JOHNNY D

Yes, indeed. The toe. The famous toe. Probably the most famous toe in the history of baseball.

GEORGE

How could you remember that?

JOHNNY D

It was my life. For seventeen glorious summers. There are times those days are more real to me than.... (Pause) I remember that game. It wasn't the Cardinals, it was the Cubs -- Dizzy Dean had been traded two years before and, anyway, he was nearly finished. Third inning, it was. He threw me a high inside fastball. I swung, mainly to keep it from hitting me -- Dean was kind of wild those last couple of years. And I fouled it off. Which is how our Mr. Holt got his souvenir. Next pitch, ground ball back to the pitcher. Inning over.

GEORGE

Who won?

JOHNNY D

They did. 4-2. And Mr. Dean put a collar on me. Last time I ever played against him. Two years later, he was out of baseball. Oh, he tried to come back in '47, but he wasn't... (Pause) You see, that's the thing, George. You have to be your best. You always have to be your best. If you're not, you're cheating. You're cheating your team, you're cheating the fans. You're cheating yourself. That's what people don't understand. When I couldn't play, anymore, when I couldn't play my best, I quit. I wouldn't cheat. I wouldn't demean what I had been with what I had become.

(He stops. After a moment, he walks over to the desk, takes a piece of paper,

JOHNNY D (cont'd)

signs his name to it and hands it to
GEORGE.)

Put that in the envelope for our friend, Mr. Thomas Holt of
Muscatine, Iowa.

GEORGE

Why give it to him now?

JOHNNY D

Because he remembered. And he who remembers, truly remembers,
must be served. (Pause) Now, then, off with you. You'll cause
me to miss my nap.

GEORGE

(stammers) Yeah...sure...I'm going.

(GEORGE takes his things and starts for
the door.)

JOHNNY D

The envelope, George. Don't forget the envelope. Not after
all the trouble we've gone to.

GEORGE

No, of course not.

(He crosses back to the desk and picks
up the envelope)

JOHNNY D

Did you understand, George? Did you understand anything I
said? (Pause) No, probably not. Well, you will.

GEORGE

I...

JOHNNY D

Good night, George.

GEORGE

God night, Mr. Good night, Johnny.