

*The stage of a small theatre. Three actors, Clifford, Tom and Mandi, carry scripts as they mill about, drinking coffee and telling lies. Director, stopwatch in hand, enters from the audience.*

DIRECTOR: Okay everybody... quiet, please. Quiet, can we have some quiet in here?

*(Actors stop milling and lying)*

DIRECTOR: We've got exactly fifty-one minutes 'til we have to start this reading, so listen up.

CLIFFORD: I believe the proper procedure for calling actors to attention is to address each cast member on an individual basis...

DIRECTOR: Thanks, Clifford, I'll try to remember that. Now, pay attention, people. We're going to go ahead and rehearse as much of this as we can before the reading starts at eight. *(checks watch)* Does anybody know where Cora is?

CLIFFORD: I know she's not here - and, correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe the first rule of theatre is to be on time.

TOM: The first rule of theatre is to mind your own damn business.

MANDI: She'll be here. She always likes to "make an entrance."

TOM: They don't call her "Hurricane Cora" for nothing.

DIRECTOR: We've got fifty minutes. Clifford, you read her lines 'til she gets here.

CLIFFORD: What if she doesn't show up?

DIRECTOR: We'll deal with that - when we have to deal with that. In the meantime, read her lines.

CLIFFORD: Well, as Stanislavsky said, "An actor must be prepared." So I'm ready, willing and able to assist in any way I can.

DIRECTOR: Good, I'm happy to hear that - read her lines. Let's get started.

*(Tom stays center, as the other actors fade up)*

TOM: *(motions to cube)* This is the fire escape?

DIRECTOR: It is. *(pointing upstage of the cube)* And this area is your alley. Go ahead and have a seat.

TOM: *(sits on cube; laughs)* Feels just like a fire escape.

DIRECTOR: That's the idea.

MANDI: *(to Director)* I don't think we should start without Cora.

DIRECTOR: Mandi, we don't have the time to wait. We need to get going.

CLIFFORD: I'm reading her part, Mandi. It is not exactly my "cup of tea" but I know I can do more than an adequate job. After all, "The basic components of all the characters we play are within ourselves."

MANDI: Who are you quoting now?

CLIFFORD: Uta Hagen.

TOM: (*rising*) Jesus H. Christ!

DIRECTOR: Tom...

TOM: This is a bunch of shit.

TOM: (*moves to Director*) No, man, it's like every damn time we do a reading. People aren't here, there's no organization. We stand around with our thumb up our ass, waiting for someone to show up...

MANDI: I'll have you know, sir - you don't start a rehearsal without all the actors being present. It isn't done.

TOM: Come on, it's just a reading...

CLIFFORD: Just a reading? What a cavalier way of dismissing this work. "Theatre" requires that actors put forth all of their artistic efforts and abilities. It's the actors' job to sublimate their own personae to that of the characters being portrayed.

TOM: Will you shut up?

CLIFFORD: "The seed to the craft of acting is the reality of doing."

MANDI: Meisner.

TOM: Crap.

DIRECTOR: People, please! We need to get going here.

CLIFFORD: If you are not willing... or capable, of giving this "reading" your very best effort, I suggest that you re-assess your priorities. "Theatre" requires dedication.

TOM: Fuck off...

MANDI: Has everyone paid their dues?

TOM: What...!?

MANDI: You won't be allowed to take part in this reading if your dues are not up to date.

DIRECTOR: Look, Mandi's right, Clifford's right... and as far as that goes, you're right, too, Tom. But we really need to...

MANDI: "The Final Act," as a dues-based organization, is dependent upon its members to provide financial support to operate this theatre. It's the fuel we need to run our organization. And, as vice-president of the board of directors, I would like to be reassured that everyone in the cast is a paid-up member of The Final Act Theatre Company.

DIRECTOR: We'll talk about this later.