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# **WITHIN THE SHADOWS**

**by**

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(WITHIN THE SHADOWS)**

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# **WITHIN THE SHADOWS**

**A Play in One Act  
For One Man and One Woman**

## **CHARACTERS**

**STEVEN . . . . .** a professional dancer; energetic, sensitive, 24  
**SANDRA . . . . .** beginning a modest career in gallery art.  
Perceptive, also 24

**TIME:** The present.

**SETTING:** Sandra's apartment.  
Greenwich Village, New York.

## WITHIN THE SHADOWS

**SCENE:** *Sandra's loft apartment in Greenwich Village. Moonlight enters through the large window, illuminating the room in shadows. It is 1:00 a.m.*

**AS THE PLAY BEGINS:** *The door is thrown open by STEVEN. Remaining in the doorway, his silhouette is created by the light in the hall. He is a little bit drunk.*

**STEVEN.** Ladies and gentlemen! It is my extreme pleasure...  
*(Normal voice.)*...shit. Where's the light, Sandi? I can't find the damn switch.

**SANDRA** *(unseen)*. Right-hand side—by the plant stand—hurry up, I'm freezing.

**STEVEN** *(turns on the light and resumes his position at the door)*. Ladies and gentlemen! A drumroll, please! *(Begins banging his hands on the door. SANDRA's doing the same on the frame, still unseen.)* It is my extreme pleasure to introduce New York's newest, youngest, and most pompous entrepreneur...

**SANDRA** *(overlapping)*. Watch it!

**STEVEN.** Owner of the all-new, all-exciting, Vankirk Art Gallery! *(He applauds, whistles, etc.)*

*(SANDRA enters with dramatic flourish to the center of the room—pushing STEVEN to the side. She speaks à la Bette Davis.)*

SANDRA. Thank you. (*She curtsies.*) Thank you so very much. Darlings, I would...

STEVEN (*coming behind her with a mock whisper*). Extend the A, extend the A. (*Demonstrating.*) DAAAhrlings! (*He runs back to the door.*)

SANDRA. DAAAhrlings...

STEVEN. Roll the R!

SANDRA (*over-exaggerating*). DAAAHRRRRLings!

STEVEN. Louder!

SANDRA. DAAAAHRRRRRRLings!! (*They begin to laugh uncontrollably.*)

STEVEN. You should have seen yourself. Darling, this painting over here and this...

SANDRA (*overlapping*). I did not sound like that...

STEVEN. Yes, yes, yes... (*Suddenly they stop, look at one another, and...*)

STEVEN/SANDRA. DAAAAHRRRRLings! (*They laugh.*)

SANDRA. I've got to get out of these clothes.

STEVEN. Me too. Where'd you put my suitcase?

SANDRA. On the chair. (*She crosses to the bureau. He goes to the chair DR. They change into comfortable clothes immodestly while speaking.*)

STEVEN. You drew quite a crowd tonight. I knew you would.

SANDRA. They were the most bizarre group of people I've ever seen.

STEVEN. I think the only reason they go to artistic functions is so that they can get their annual injection of culture—kind of like church on Christmas.

SANDRA. Did you see that woman—the one with the really bad hat? She kept walking around scoffing at all the post-modern pieces. (*STEVEN puts one of his shirts over his*

*head in imitation of the bad hat and runs to the easel in only his underwear.)*

STEVEN. Very offensive, love, don't you think? Just look at the images hidden within the piece. The implication presented here is one of sado-masochistic love romping. To be sure, this artist should be spanked for his audacity, whipped for his decadence, chained, hand-cuffed, tied, slapped, tortured, and, and...oh, ohh, mercy! *(He mockingly gasps for air.)* I just adore these new artists, Matilda, they're so in tune with the needs of humanity!

SANDRA *(laughing)*. You're sick!

STEVEN *(grabbing his stomach and bending over)*. Oh!

SANDRA. Steven, are you...

STEVEN *(looks up victoriously)*. I'm sick...*(He moves toward her, retching.)*

SANDRA. Get away from me! *(She begins to back up.)*

STEVEN. I'm sick, I'm twisted, I'm...sexually frustrated! *(He starts to chase her—she screams—they run about the apartment, jumping over furniture, throwing things, etc. They end up exhausted on the couch. Pause.)* It's good to be here.

SANDRA. Yeah...it's nice. *(Pause.)*

STEVEN. You know what I miss most? Our late-night talk marathons—the three of us trying to be so intellectual.

SANDRA. Yeah.

STEVEN. Right here...right now...it'd be perfect if Sean were...

SANDRA. Don't. *(She rises and crosses to the bureau to finish dressing. Pause.)*

STEVEN *(crossing to the stereo)*. What do you want to hear?

SANDRA. Surprise me. *(He plays something quiet and contemporary then crosses to his suitcase to finish dressing. The music plays softly.)*

STEVEN. I thought the opening tonight was beautiful. It was wonderful how you captured the nuance of each artist. It was like each room was breathing its own conceptual personality.

SANDRA. Are you going to get all poetic on me?

STEVEN. Me? Poetic? (*With mock machismo.*) Please, baby, don't insult my manhood...I have to keep up my reputation as the straightest male dancer in the state.

SANDRA. Are you?

STEVEN. What?

SANDRA. Straight.

STEVEN. Why?

SANDRA. Because.

STEVEN. Yes.

SANDRA. OK. Just checking. It seems to be the norm here in artist's land to become confused by one's sexuality every now and then.

STEVEN (*imitating Humphrey Bogart*). Well, sweetheart, you don't have to worry about me. I just love those swerves and curves...I certainly do. (*She laughs. As himself now.*) Hey! I brought us a surprise! (*He runs to his suitcase, searches, finds, and hides the prize in his hands.*) What could it be, sports fans? A pearl necklace for the lady? A studded watch for the gent? No! It's...Vanilla Nut Coffee!

SANDRA. My hero! (*A beat.*) Let's boil the beans!

STEVEN (*overlapping*). ..."boil the beans!" (*She takes the bag and moves to the kitchen area. They listen to music as she makes the coffee.*) Mmm...the smell...it reminds me of the coffee house at school.

SANDRA. Yeah...we spent more time there than in classes.

STEVEN. When we're rich and famous and someone asks me where it all began...(To SANDRA)...ask me where it all began.

SANDRA (*a very close Scarlett O'Hara*). Tell me, where did it all possibly begin?

STEVEN. On a cold winter's day. The wind was howling, the snow was blowing, and three naive freshmen went searching for warmth and a morsel to eat...

SANDRA. Easy, Dickens. (*STEVEN laughs.*)

STEVEN. Who would have thought...sitting there listening to Mozart, reading Chekhov...that we'd be making it so soon.

SANDRA. It depends on how you define "making it."

STEVEN. I have a theory why we're so lucky.

SANDRA. Naturally.

STEVEN. I love an attentive audience.

SANDRA. Is it intermission yet?

STEVEN. I believe the three of us, together, created a certain...magic.

SANDRA. You're getting poetic. Don't forget your manhood.

STEVEN. I'm serious. Look at us. The innovative choreographer, the painter prodigy, and the successful exhibitor who wowed them tonight with...

SANDRA. I'm not successful yet.

STEVEN. You will be. (*Beat.*) It was like the three of us were put together for a reason. (*Beat.*) When does the review come out?

SANDRA. Tomorrow.

STEVEN. Remember how he used to make us camp out in front of that newsstand every time he submitted a new painting? He wanted to be the first reader in all New York to see how people responded to his work. (*SANDRA accidentally knocks a coffee cup off the counter—it breaks.*)

SANDRA. Oh, damn! (*She bends down to clean up the mess. STEVEN helps her.*)

STEVEN. Are you OK?

SANDRA. Yes.

STEVEN. This reminds me of a valuable lesson I once learned.

SANDRA. Great. I sense a tangent coming on.

STEVEN. You witnessed it.

SANDRA. I'm scared of this.

STEVEN. Fall...broken. Fall...ouch! Fall...rip. Got it?

SANDRA. You're insane?

STEVEN. Junior year. I was choreographing my first concert and dancing the lead role.

SANDRA. Of course, you also cast it.

STEVEN. Ouch! The crowd winces. She takes him out with a blow to the ego.

SANDRA. It would take more than just one.

STEVEN. *Anyway...*the audience is loving it...applauding my every entrance. (*He begins demonstrating.*) I leap, they clap. I leap higher, they stomp their feet.

SANDRA (*overlapping*). I don't think I can stomach this...

STEVEN. And so, with deafening appreciation filling my ears, I jumped, I turned, I extended. The crowd was going nuts! Then...it happened! Exit concentration. Enter ego. My only thoughts were to please the crowd. And so, on my final leap, I prepared, I jumped, I sliced through the air and...fell to the ground, ripped a ligament and lay there writhing, *à la* coffee cup. Broken.

SANDRA. It's funny now...but then...

STEVEN. Yeah. I was lying there...couldn't look up because I was so humiliated. The next thing I knew there was a hand on my shoulder...remember? I thought it was one of the other dancers trying to help me—but when I looked up, Sean was standing there. I couldn't believe it. He actually leapt on stage—not caring that two hundred people were watching.

SANDRA. Yes, I remember. *(Pause.)* Well, Barishnikov, it's time for me to hit the sack. I haven't slept in...

STEVEN. What's wrong?

SANDRA. Nothing.

STEVEN. You could at least patronize me and say you don't want to talk about it.

SANDRA. Nothing's wrong.

STEVEN. Come on. I know you better than that.

SANDRA. It's been a long night. I'm tired, that's all.

STEVEN. Whatever.

SANDRA. Don't start.

STEVEN. No, I'm gonna start. Here I am trying to have this conversation with you and bang! every time I mention him you close up and walk away.

SANDRA. Don't push it. Everything was fine. We were getting along, we were laughing. Don't spoil it now by bringing up...

STEVEN. By bringing up what? A dog I had when I was four? We're talking about Sean.

SANDRA. *You're* talking about Sean.

STEVEN. Come on! The three of us practically lived together for four years and you want...

SANDRA. Stop it, Steven!

STEVEN *(overlapping)*. ...to simply forget everything...

SANDRA *(overlapping)*. Stop.

STEVEN. ...about him. Why?

SANDRA. Because I miss him!

STEVEN. I know that.

SANDRA. I really miss him.

STEVEN. I know. *(Pause. Softly.)* I know.

SANDRA. How about some of that coffee?

STEVEN. Is there a cup to put it in?

**SANDRA** (*smiling*). Jerk. Change the tape. (*She goes to get the coffee. STEVEN changes the music and moves to the couch. He picks up a photo from the table and looks at it. SANDRA joins him. They sit for a moment in silence.*)

**STEVEN** (*looking at the photo*). This was so much fun.

**SANDRA**. Camping under the stars. It was great until it started to rain.

**STEVEN**. Who was it that forgot the tent? (*She looks at him.*)  
Guilty as charged. (*They look at the picture together.*) He proposed to you under Orion. Very classy.

**SANDRA**. I wish I could have gotten in touch with you.

**STEVEN**. I know. I should have never gone on that damn tour. If I would've been here...

**SANDRA**. You didn't know. There's no way you could have passed up that opportunity. Dancing in Europe. Who would have given that up?

**STEVEN**. I know. But now, compared to everything else, it seems so insignificant.

**SANDRA**. You were doing what you needed to do. We all were.

**STEVEN**. Did he ever try to get in touch with me?

**SANDRA**. Constantly. (*Pause.*) But you were in a different city every other day. It was hard to track you down. We gave up after a while.

**STEVEN**. I didn't exactly keep in touch, did I?

**SANDRA**. No, you didn't.

**STEVEN**. I can be so selfish.

**SANDRA**. Guilty as charged.

**STEVEN**. Thanks.

**SANDRA**. He missed you. (*Pause.*) You know, when we were in school I...ready for this? A confession from the past. I used to get so jealous of you two.

STEVEN. What do you mean? You were with us every second.

SANDRA. I know. But there was something you two shared. You were so tight. It was something I couldn't touch.

STEVEN. But...

SANDRA. I didn't condemn you for it. As a matter of fact, I would catch myself smiling when I'd see the two of you together. You were so...I don't know...like two little hamsters running around on one of those plastic wheel things.

STEVEN (*overlapping*). ...little hamsters?

SANDRA. Yeah. You could play off one another like the best of them. (*Pause.*) I just knew it was something I couldn't be a part of.

STEVEN. But you were a part of it.

SANDRA. Oh, Steven. You wouldn't be able to understand even if you could see it objectively.

STEVEN (*after slight pause*). Hamsters?

SANDRA. Chip and Dale.

STEVEN. Weren't they gophers or chipmunks or something?

SANDRA. What's this sudden obsession with small rodents?

STEVEN. You brought it up.

SANDRA. Let it go, Steven...just let it go...(They laugh.  
*Pause.*)

STEVEN. You had every minute together last year...just the two of you.

SANDRA. He changed.

STEVEN. Changed?

SANDRA. Yeah. He got really obsessed with the painting... not passionate obsessed like he always was, but...self-destructive.

STEVEN. He was always that way—intense about everything. Who else would call at four in the morning to discuss the horrors of Existentialism.

SANDRA. This was different. He became distant. He stopped talking after a while. Just...stopped. He got tired...didn't sleep, eat...

STEVEN. It doesn't make sense. All he ever talked about was the day his paintings would be accepted as legitimate works of art. Did you hear that one guy tonight who kept saying Sean's work was among the best he's seen in years? He was becoming successful. How could he be miserable? The wedding was coming up...

SANDRA. Hey, your cup's empty. *That's a cardinal sin.*  
More coffee?

STEVEN. What?

SANDRA. More coffee?

STEVEN. Sure. (*SANDRA moves to the kitchen area. STEVEN picks up the picture.*)

SANDRA. What time does your plane leave tomorrow?

STEVEN. Ten. I don't know if I'm going to go, though.

SANDRA. Why not?

STEVEN. It's nice to be back. For the first time in a long time I feel relaxed. It's probably being in this apartment again.

SANDRA. Funny. This is the only place I don't feel relaxed.

STEVEN. Are you going to move?

SANDRA. I don't know yet.

STEVEN. I'd hate to think of anyone else living here.  
(*Pause.*)

SANDRA. Well, if the critics didn't like my little *soirée* tonight, I hope they at least acknowledge *The Lonely Place*. I think it's Sean's best.

STEVEN. What'd you say?

SANDRA. I think it's the best piece Sean ever did. I really do.

STEVEN. No, before that.

SANDRA. Oh. Sean titled it *The Lonely Place*. I was going to keep it for myself—hang it in here—but I decided to present it tonight because...I don't know...it was kind of my personal dedication to him. (*Pause.*) Hey, sporto, you with me?

STEVEN. Huh? Yeah...yeah...

SANDRA. What'd you think of it?

STEVEN. What?

SANDRA. Sean's painting. What'd you think of it?

STEVEN. I don't know. I didn't see it.

SANDRA. What do you mean you didn't see it? I displayed it on the center wall. You couldn't have missed it.

STEVEN. I know. I didn't think I could look at it without... you know...

SANDRA. Yeah. (*Pause.*) It's brilliant. It really is. He captured so much...power. That's the only word I can think of. The whole painting is a hundred shades of a hundred different colors...particles. He put them on the canvas in a way that creates this motion. It moves in a circular pattern...constantly spinning. And this rush of energy makes the canvas appear as if it's moving. The longer you look at it, the more you forget it's a painting because it starts to absorb you.

STEVEN. What do you mean?

SANDRA. You can actually feel yourself being drawn into it...hypnotized by all those moving colors. And soon, without realizing it, you're thrown into the rotating spectrum. You start moving with it, slowly at first, and then faster... and faster...until you become totally lost and completely immersed within it. It's incredible. And as you turn, you see, in the center of all this motion, the tiny, painted figure of a man. And you know that the energy propelling this force comes from him. He controls it. You connect with