

7. Sexual Perversity Inferno

Lights up. We are in the Tenth Circle, and BOBBY and DANTE are seated at the table, each with a drink. Bobby is a movie producer, Dante is a writer. Rita, the waitress, enters during this opening section.

DANTE
So how'd you do last night?

BOBBY
Are you kidding me?

DANTE
Yeah?

BOBBY
Are you fucking kidding me?

DANTE
Yeah?

BOBBY
So box office to here, focus groups to there.

DANTE
Christ.

BOBBY
So the picture sucks, right?

DANTE
I didn't say that.

BOBBY
You didn't see it? You want to?

DANTE
Um, no.

BOBBY
You read the reviews?

DANTE
No--

BOBBY
You read the reviews.

DANTE
No, I'm telling you--

BOBBY

You read the goddamned reviews. Why would you do something like that?

DANTE

It's just not my kind of movie. You say the picture sucks?

BOBBY

(making eyes at Rita)

And it doesn't even do that very well, you get my drift...

Rita brushes it off.

DANTE

So why make it?

BOBBY

Danny. When Michael Bay comes to you and says, "Pirates. Supermodels. Time travel--"

DANTE

And a talking cat--

BOBBY

--he did not mention the talking cat at that point--

DANTE

He should have...

BOBBY

Yes, well, I'll check my hindsight on the way to Fort Knox, Danny.

DANTE

Dante.

BOBBY

Nice to meet you...

We hear a muffled meowing. Dante hears it, as does Rita.

DANTE

Did you hear something?

BOBBY

Yeah, the death knell of my artistic soul.

The meowing turns to coughing.

DANTE

(looking at the boxes)

No, no, like a cat. A cat in a box...

BOBBY

All right, I'm cutting you off--

Bobby gestures to Rita for two more drinks. She leaves. The cat grows quiet.

DANTE

It sounds like a cat with a hairball...

BOBBY

Lovely. Probably make a better movie. Except Bay would want to blow it up...

DANTE

Does it ever bother you?

BOBBY

What? This? I make movies.

DANTE

You produce movies.

BOBBY

Semantics. I allow movies to get made.

DANTE

Bad ones.

BOBBY

What, there's something out there worth filming doesn't involve pirates and models?

DANTE

Great stories. Novels. Theatre.

Rita enters with two fresh drinks, puts them down. Bobby moves Dante's to his side. They can play chess with the drinks as the scene continues.

BOBBY

What, are you kidding me? People don't want to see theatre anymore.

RITA

Excuse me? People want to see theatre.

BOBBY

Some people.

DANTE

Enough people.

BOBBY

First rule of moviemaking, there's no such thing as "enough people."

RITA

Please.

BOBBY

Even within your "enough people," there's only a small and select subset of people who want to see the kind of theatre you're talking about. And that group just wants to see early Mamet, middle Shakespeare and Late Night with Conan O'Brien, quite frankly.

DANTE

You mean, the Tonight Show with Conan O'Brien.

BOBBY

Um, no.

Rita exits.

DANTE

What about Tennessee Williams? Arthur Miller?

BOBBY

What about 'em? Fuck 'em. All Thomas Lanier Williams did--and that was his name, you know--all he did was give us Marlon Brando, who, I might add, never did another night in the theatre after "Stella!"

DANTE

"Streetcar Named Desire--"

BOBBY

(overlapping)

Desire. I know, I know. Listen to me. Arthur Miller? All the plays he wrote in all those years, you only really ever see two of them anywhere, and let's face it, you only actually want to see one of them, and you don't even want to see that one.

DANTE

What?

BOBBY

Death of a Salesman? I mean, come on, he's depressed, he's depressed, he's depressed, BANG, he kills himself, end of story. The title's a spoiler.

DANTE

It's--no--see--you're supposed to know it's a tragedy going in, that's the point. And it wasn't BANG, it was a car crash--

BOBBY

Offstage sound effect, BANG.

DANTE

Fine.

BOBBY

What do I care? He's dead, end of story. If Miller'd been pitching that in my office, I'd've had his ass out of there by the second "he's depressed."

You know, someone actually tried to sell me on that once. Salesman, I mean. "Willy Loman, yeah yeah yeah, but here's the thing, we change the ending."

DANTE

What?

BOBBY

Is what I said. Change the ending? He goes, "yeah, Willy makes up with his family, gets a promotion, attention is paid--or at least paid off--everyone's joke, we fade on a family picnic, whoomp, there it is."

DANTE

You can't do that.

BOBBY

I didn't.

DANTE

But--

BOBBY

And he says, "Of course, we'd have to change the title, something sunny, happy, sweet." So I say, okay, you get a happy title, but then you're going to say, what, "Inspired by 'Death of a Salesman'"?

DANTE

You've got to be kidding--

BOBBY

So the guy, let's call him Charlie, Charlie says, "all right, we change the names. Make Willy an executive. Henry. Henry is an executive. No. A pro ballplayer."

DANTE

Jesus.

BOBBY

"And he's happy...he's happy because he 'plays ball.' You get that, Bobby," he says to me. Me! "But now he's down, he's out, he walks away from the game--" Charlie's pacing the office now. "Stays away from the game, but the game doesn't stay away from him. It's (MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

like a lover, a lover he can't leave his wife for, what a bitch."

DANTE

I say again, Jesus.

BOBBY

"So he's down, and then--" You do see where this is going, right? "--he comes back, back to the game, he's older, wiser, slower, he hits a giant home run, blows out the lights around the field, fireworks and standing o's and orchestra swells..."

DANTE

That's "The Natural."

BOBBY

Naturally. Which also got a happy ending on its way from book to film, for those of you scoring at home.

DANTE

But what's the point?

BOBBY

The point?

DANTE

The death.

BOBBY

The death is the point?

DANTE

His death gives his life meaning.

BOBBY

No, his death is a big fuck-you to his family.

DANTE

Well, that, too.

BOBBY

Danny, between you and me, right now, death is out.

DANTE

So. Charlie. D'you have his ass out of there?

BOBBY

Um, no. He got promoted. Because he had the *Touch*.

DANTE

The touch?

BOBBY

No, the *Touch*. He knew what people would pay to see.

DANTE

And you didn't?

BOBBY

No, I knew. But I had a little restraint. Taste. Pride. But just a little.

First day in the corner office, little fucker says to me, "You want to play ball, Bobby?"

You want to play ball.

DANTE

(raises glass to toast)
Attention must be paid!

BOBBY

Here and here--

They drink as the lights fade.