

Nicene Noir

An Allegory on the Creed

by Neil Olsen (verion2 LARGE PRINT)

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:26

Cast (Six Adults or Young Adults)

JOHN VENTURE, a private investigator, with a trench coat and Fedorda.

DAME, a Dame with wings, in a white dress.

MAYOR BRIDGE, formerly Judge Bridge

BLIND ELLIE, a street poet, with white cane and cup,

VIMMALA “VIM” CASTOR, a lounge singer and DA, a woman in basic black.

CARETAKER, a bearded man in his early 30’s.

Cue	Name	Suggested Source (Movie Theme)
01	Opening Theme	<i>This Gun for Hire</i>
02	Dame's Theme	<i>Laura</i>
03	Flashback Theme	<i>Double Indemnity</i>
04	Dame to Flashback	Laura shifting to Double Indemnity.
05	Street Theme	<i>White Heat</i>
06	Bar Theme	<i>The Bad and the Beautiful</i>
07	Conspiracy Theme	<i>The Asphalt Jungle</i>
08	Cemetery Theme	<i>Touch of Evil</i>
09	Closing Theme	<i>The Naked City</i>

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Prologue

(VENTURE enters, wearing a trench coat and fedora and goes to the Narration Place. LIGHTS: up on Narration Place. MUSIC: "Opening theme" fading on Ventures' speech.)

VENTURE. It began with a dame. It always begins with a dame. But this one had wings.

(Enter DAME, in wings and a white dress. MUSIC: "DAME's theme" fading after Dame is in place. LIGHTS: up on the DAME as she stands in the Street Place.)

She entered my office like a sleek jet plane gliding down the runway, looking for a place to unload, and it seems I was the terminal she was looking for.

(VENTURE takes off his Fedora and trench coat, and sits in his office. The DAME enters his office, and he stands politely. MUSIC: "Flashback theme", fading after DAME enters office. LIGHTS: up on Venture's office, down on Narration Place.)

Scene 1: Venture's office

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

DAME. Mr. Venture. I've come with a problem. It...It is just...I find it so difficult to explain.

VENTURE. Would a drink help? I'll even put it in a glass, if you're fussy.

DAME. Lack of spirits is not my problem.

VENTURE. Well, it's easy to speak. Just breathe deep, then say the first word. The rest just come tumbling out.

DAME. I...I have a ...friend. I think he is in trouble. He's gone missing.

VENTURE. For how long?

DAME. I haven't seen him in over ten days. He's my boss's son.

VENTURE. So?

DAME. The Boss's son. The Big Boss.

VENTURE. The guy who built and owns most of this lousy city?

DAME. Yes, from the Park Hill, to the Clay Harbor district, the Boss built it all, the mansion in the Hill, and the dives of the Clay. He has an interest in most everything: even when you don't see his name on the deed he probably owns that place too.

VENTURE. The Boss. I thought he was dead.

DAME. He is older than the hills. You don't see him much, these days. I work for him.

VENTURE. I didn't know the Boss had a kid. Don't tell me: they didn't get along, right?

DAME. It's an old story. Let's say in this family there could be only one boss.

VENTURE. What's the kid to you, sister?

DAME. We're close. Real close.

(She hands him a picture.)

Here is his picture.

VENTURE. *(Studying it rather too long a time.)* Oh. Yeah. How long did you say he was missing?

DAME. Find him, Venture. You'll get a reward. I'll be everlasting grateful.

(She starts to leave.)

VENTURE. What's your angle, Angel? What do you do for the boss?

DAME. I give him advice. I'm his agent in the City. Sort of like a lawyer.

VENTURE. Shall I call you counselor?

DAME. Call me anything you like, as long as you call me soon. My number is on the back of the picture. I'll be by the phone, waiting with bated breath.

(She exits. MUSIC: "Dame's theme quick fade leading into Flashback theme" which slowly fades during VENTURES speech. VENTURE goes to the Narration Place. LIGHTS: down on office, up on Narration Place.)

VENTURE. Some bait. Oh, she had her hooks out all right, sparkling and sharp, and I couldn't wait to swallow. But it wouldn't work out, of course, her and me. It never works out. But I knew where to start looking for the kid. Down in the sleepless district of Clay Harbor, the potholed neighborhood of dark alleys, broken lights, and streets that have lost their names, where the neon lights reflect in the gutter like the stained glass widows of a ruined church, where justice is measured in dollar signs, and love is just another business transaction without a money-back guarantee. Every city has a one, call it Sunset Boulevard, the Levee, Plank Road, the Combat Zone, the Block, South Park: here it is Clay Harbor, mostly known as The Clay.

Scene 2: A Clay Harbor Street

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,

of one Being with the Father.

(LIGHTS: down on Narration Place, up on Street Place. Enter Blind Ellie, holding a cane and a cup out. Venture walks up behind her. MUSIC: "Street theme", fading as Blind Ellie greets Venture.)

BLIND ELLIE. It must be that damned PI, that spy, Venture in his trencher, the Shamus of sin, the old has-been Hello, Jonnie, my bonnie love.

VENTURE. Hey, Blind Ellie. How do you always know it's me?

BLIND ELLIE. The smell.

VENTURE. I was downwind.

BLIND ELLIE. I smelled the sound of your footsteps: they were reeking of gumshoe, flatfeet, and the fragrant cologne of failed expectations.

VENTURE. I've come about a boy in Clay Harbor.

BLIND ELLIE. Boys don't last long here in the Clay, no way. Real quick they turn either into hard eyed men or corpses.

VENTURE. You know everything, Blind Ellie, you hear everything. Did you ever hear the Boss had a son?

BLIND ELLIE. Oh Blind Ellie hears everything- but talks only for cash. Blind Ellie is what they call a profit center. Twenty will start me smart, Detective.

(Venture takes out a twenty. She feels and pockets it.)

VENTURE. Take it. As for Detective. Well, that was a long time past; I don't talk about those days. That's why they call it past. So, does the Boss have a son?

BLIND ELLIE. Oh believe it, Hon, there always was one; there is a son,

VENTURE. Did he have a brother- about ten years older?

BLIND ELLIE. No, Junior is his only son. Boss's boy is the Boss's joy, the light of his life, that's right. Junior Boss, just like old Boss, the real McCoy, no toy. So alike, the Boss and the tyke, and close as stone and moss.

VENTURE. Well, Junior is missing.

BLIND ELLIE. I know he's been down to the demon town, to old bold cold Clay Harbor, where there is no day and the devils play. But if you want to know more, ask the Mayor, he'll tell you the score. But Junior ain't no boy no more.

VENTURE. So which is he? Man or corpse?

BLIND ELLIE. Ask the Mayor; he's the player, the payer and slayer.

(She exits. VENTURE goes to the Narration Place. LIGHTS: Street lights down, Narration Place lights up. MUSIC: "Flashback theme".)

VENTURE. Clay Harbor is a district of alienation, nihilism, loneliness, corruption, decay and sin: it has all the modern amenities. I've seen it all: greed, lust, and ambition, wrapped

in indifference, string-tied with fear, and delivered daily to each slum walk-up and flea pad in the city, shipped free of charge but costing your life. And in the very middle of this trash heap of wasted lives and discarded reputations, is a bar called “Wrath”, where all lost souls in the City drift to, like blown newspapers to the gutter, the final stage on the journey to the trash bin.

Scene 3: The *Wrath*, a Bar

Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

(VIM CASTOR in a black dress enters and stands in front of a microphone. LIGHTS. Down on Narration Place, up on a lounge Bar, with a spot on CASTOR. MUSIC: “Bar theme” which fades before CASTOR’s speech. VENTURE enters the bar.)

CASTOR. (Singing a fragment of torch song “The Table Set for One”.)

Have I told you about the lost love of my life?
Here I sit with the plates, and the forks, and the knife,
Thinking of you my love, with my coffee or tea.
As the strangers walk past, they all try not to see
The table set for one.

I once lived a story, but you were not in it,
My own once on a time lasted less than a minute,
It was all about you, and you weren’t even there,
Just a missing wine glass, and a vacant chair,
For the table was for one.

I wished to date the perfect man,
I had a dream, I had a plan,
The problem was it never began,
It was a race I never ran.

All the days that we missed, never getting together,
When we never discussed the new film or the weather,
When we never told jokes about you, about me,
Were all lost to the lack of a fixed guarantee,

At the table just for one.

Now I play an old game called regard and regret,
Where the dice never rolls, no one places a bet,
The lipstick on the glass is the telltale impression,
And the second cocktail is my only confession,
That the table's for one. Just for one. Just for one.

(She finishes the song to desultory applause, and walks over to VENTURE.)

CASTOR. Well, it's the City's hindmost Private Eye, John Venture.

VENTURE. And it's Vim Caster- when did you start moonlighting as a lounge singer?

CASTOR. It's a hobby. I've got a great voice for a bar- it drives everyone to order a drink.

VENTURE. But still the same old Vim in the same old same day job?

CASTOR. Same old. Just like you. Sinners like us don't change.

VENTURE. Yeah. Why meddle with success?

CASTOR. It's been a long time, Venture. What brings you to the Wrath?

VENTURE. A thirst for Justice.

CASTOR. What's that, a new name for a whisky?

VENTURE. Yeah, and it's real hard to find. Do you remember this kid?

(He shows her the picture.)

CASTOR. Oh, him. That kid was beyond naive, Venture. Thought he could change the world with his good intentions. He came down to the Clay to help the poor folks into clean sheets and dirty tax forms. The people he hung around with were the sort of low life no one would touch with a ten foot subpoena: beggars, druggies, ex-cons, street singers, bums: all the riffraff and discards of the city.

VENTURE. Whereas, in this bar you meet?

CASTOR. Politicians on the take, adulterers on the hunt, and crooked accountants with loose numbers up their sleeves, all looking for a martini and a sad song.

VENTURE. Yeah, all the criminals who haven't got caught yet- your natural habitat.

CASTOR. That kid had to fall. He was begging for trouble.

VENTURE. If I recall you handed him trouble on a platter, then we put his head on the platter. It seems later we found he was innocent.

CASTOR. So we all screwed up. Big deal.

VENTURE. It was to the kid's neck.

CASTOR. Mistakes were made. We made a reasonable judgment call. It was what you call a gray area.

VENTURE. Gray is ok, if you're a mouse. Or a rat.

CASTOR. Why do you bring up that old mess, Detective? It's been ten years.

VENTURE. To remind you that you owe me a favor, Vim. I'm on a case and need information. You know the Boss?

CASTOR. Who doesn't? He's slum lord to most of Clay Harbor. He probably owns this dump as well.

VENTURE. Ever hear he had a son?

CASTOR. Yeah, the old dodger had a boy off some girl years ago.

VENTURE. Have you seen Junior around here?

CASTOR. Never.

VENTURE. Rumor has it, he's gone missing.

CASTOR. Then ask Rumor where he is.

VENTURE. I've been told the Mayor knows. I want to see the Mayor, Vim.

CASTOR. He's a busy man.

VENTURE. But you and he are close. Real close. I want to see him.

CASTOR. I'll see what I can do. You know, we ought to get together sometime, again. There was a time.

VENTURE. There was a time in the past, but that's over. That's why they call it... past.

CASTOR. Vim and Venture- it alliterates. We could write poems.

VENTURE. I ain't much for alliteration, or any literation. I like my words with lips behind them.

CASTOR. You say the words, and I'll find the lips.

(Exit CASTOR. Lights down on the Bar, up on the narration place. VENTURE goes to the Narration Place. MUSIC: "Flashback theme" fading during VENTURE'S speech.)

VENTURE. She recognized the picture, of course, but the trial was ten years ago. Ten years. The boss's son went missing just recently: they can't be the same person. Unless the Dame lied. Unless Blind Ellie lied. Unless Vim Castor lied. Arithmetic wasn't my best subject, but even I knew it didn't add up. Within an hour Vim called. The Mayor would see me at ten that evening.

Scene 4: Mayor's office

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

(Lights down on the Narration place, up on the office. Enter the MAYOR followed by CASTOR. MUSIC: "Conspiracy theme" slowly fading Enter Venture.)

VENTURE. Mr. Mayor, Vim.

MAYOR. John- how good to see you- it's been years, hasn't it?

VENTURE. Ten years. I was *Detective* Venture then.

MAYOR. And I was just Judge Bridge, and not in a position to spike the investigation. Oh, yes, I know we owe you. What do you want?

VENTURE. Information. The Boss. Did you know he once had a son?

MAYOR. The boss and I don't talk much. We have separate spheres of influence.

CASTOR. Word on the street is, the Boss has a kid.

MAYOR. Has? Oh, good for him. Children are our future, you know.

VENTURE. Unless they are in Clay Harbor, where children have no future.

MAYOR. Now you sound like that kid who stirred up all the trouble. Remember him?

(The MAYOR goes to the Narration Place. LIGHTS: down on office, up on Narration Place.

MUSIC: "Flashback theme" which fades during the speech.)

I was just Judge Bridge then, building a reputation for control, confidence, and reform. Then this kid, this agitator, this nobody, came out of nowhere, and began to shoot off his mouth, gathering street people around him in Clay Harbor- he was a gang leader really- yes, I don't care what they say now, he was a gang leader. He said our fair City was evil, that we could make it a better place, no doubt without me in the picture and him as king of the heap. We busted his gang, and nailed him for murder. My protégé, Vimala Castor was the very young and very pretty Prosecutor.

(The MAYOR puts on a robe and becomes JUDGE BRIDGE; he sits and takes up the gavel.

LIGHTS down on Narration Place, up on Courtroom. Music: "Conspiracy theme" going through the scene. He bangs the gavel once.)

The court is in session.

(VIM CASTOR comes forward.)

CASTOR. Your honor, I present the case of The People vs. Anonymous.

MAYOR. Anonymous?

CASTOR. He won't give his name, your honor. He won't even speak to us.

MAYOR. That will not stop justice. If justice can be blind, it can be deaf as well. Proceed.

CASTOR. The defendant is charged with murder. We have a witness who saw this kid- this man- this...

MAYOR. Gang leader, Prosecutor, he's a gang leader.

CASTOR. The witness saw this gang leader brutally murder a shopkeeper.

MAYOR. Proceed.

(He bangs the Gavel three times.)

Guilty...guilty...guilty...

(MUSIC: fades. He takes off the judge's robe. We are back in the Mayor's office.)

He got the city all riled up. He got the press in a furor. He got the people frantic.

VENTURE. He got executed.

CASTOR. He got you fired.

VENTURE. Did he? Did he turn me in? Did he suddenly “discover” cash in an account in my name I’d never seen? I always wondered who set me up.

MAYOR. As a Judge, I couldn’t interfere in the procedural termination of a detective accused of taking bribes.

CASTOR. Have a drink, Venture, it’s your brand.

VENTURE. These days that’s any bottle with a label.

(CASTOR hands out two glasses. VENTURE drinks.)

So, I got the boot, and you got to be Mayor.

MAYOR. The people applauded my devotion to law and order.

VENTURE. And you, *District Attorney* Vim Castor? You got...the drink...you drugged it...the drink...

MAYOR. So sorry, Venture. We didn’t know that the Kid was the Boss’s son until you showed up with the picture. We can’t let that get out.

CASTOR. I guess Vim and Venture will never get together.

VENTURE. Vim... alliterates...

CASTOR. ...with Venture...

VENTURE. No...with...Viper.

(He falls. LIGHTS: Blackout During the Blackout VENTURE gets up and goes to the Narration Place. MUSIC: “Flashback Theme”. LIGHTS: up on Narration Place after VENTURE is in place.)

Scene 5: Clay Harbor Cemetery

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

VENTURE. I woke with a head pounding like a trashcan gaveled by an angry Judge. I looked around. I was in Clay Harbor’s old cemetery, lying on a stone slab near a marble Angel that looked just like my Dame but with a warmer heart. I reeked of alcohol spilled on my clothing. A heavy blanket covered me. Then up walked a dead man.

(Lights: Blackout. MUSIC: “Cemetery theme” which fades after CARETAKER enters. VENTURE gets up and goes to the table, lies on it, and pulls a blanket over himself. The

CARETAKER enters pushing a wheelbarrow, and VENTURE sits up. LIGHTS up on cemetery as CARETAKER enters.)

CARETAKER. Awake so soon? I was planning to move you somewhere warmer.

VENTURE. Well, it wouldn't be the first time I was treated like dirt.

CARETAKER. You have remarkable recuperative powers, Mr. Venture.

VENTURE. Look who's talking. You're dead. Surely they told you?

CARETAKER. I was never much at following authority.

VENTURE. Well, Mr. Anonymous at last. Or should I say Junior?

CARETAKER. Call me Caretaker. It's my job now.

VENTURE. So how long have you been missing: ten years or ten days?

CARETAKER. I'm not missing. I'm just not recognized. You know, they dumped you here unconscious. The temperature has dropped below freezing. You were supposed to die of exposure, but fortunately a friend called and sent me to find you.

VENTURE. Exposure.

CARETAKER. Isn't that strange, Detective Venture? The body dies of exposure, but the spirit is often rescued by it.

VENTURE. They doused me with alcohol. Everyone would just assume another washed up bitter drunk had passed out and died. You remember me?

CARETAKER. It is hard to forget a man who causes your execution.

VENTURE. They told me you were a gang leader and murderer, but we couldn't get the goods on you legitimately. Back then, I foolishly believed Judges and Junior Prosecutors told the truth.

CARETAKER. And these days?

VENTURE. I don't believe in much of anything. But I didn't expect them to drop the death sentence on you. How did you beat the rap?

CARETAKER. I had friends in high places. They got me out after... the event... and bought me back to Park Hills.

VENTURE. And yet The Boss lets you live down here?

CARETAKER. I'm Father's right hand man. He lets me run all his business in Clay Harbor. I like the job.

VENTURE. Running this human cesspit is not much of a job for a favored son. How did the Boss come to build such a miserable slum?

CARETAKER. He didn't make it this way. He just let it be. He left it alone, and it became itself.

VENTURE. Things left alone rot.

CARETAKER. Like fruit. And some things rot, go to seed, and grow out of the rot into trees. Like fruit. You can't tell fruit that rots and dies from the fruit that rots and seeds until you let them alone for a time.

VENTURE. As he left his son alone.

CARETAKER. Never alone. I'm actually quite close to my father. And my sister.

VENTURE. Sister! Say, is she a dame with wings?

CARETAKER. She likes accessories. What now? You can turn me in to the Prosecutor. They'd have to hang me again.

VENTURE. You could have let me die, and kept yourself safe, but you didn't. No, it wouldn't be right to turn you in.

CARETAKER. Integrity at last, Mr. Venture?

VENTURE. I just think it a waste of the public's money to hang a man twice. You know, if I recant my testimony; you'd be free and clear. What would you do?

CARETAKER. Perhaps run for Judge. Extend my Jurisdiction to the whole City, not just the Clay. I could cause no end of real good trouble. I could dig up the past, examine the present, and make sure everyone was honest and got justice.

VENTURE. I hope not. What would a private eye do, if everyone were honest?

CARETAKER. Remember, Mr. Venture. The body dies of exposure, but the spirit is often rescued by it. Goodbye.

(He exits with wheelbarrow. LIGHTS down on Cemetery; up on Narration Place. VENTURE goes to the Narration Place. MUSIC: "Flashback theme" fading during speech.)

VENTURE. I had been set up again. I was real tired of being set up. I'm not sure I believed the Dame at all. And Blind Ellie? How did she know to send me to the Mayor? For a detective, mysteries come with the territory, but they must be solved; they ache like a bad tooth until pulled. I had to find Blind Ellie and make her talk.

(Enter BLIND ELLIE who stands in the street. VENTURE walks over to her. LIGHTS down on Narration Place, up on Street. MUSIC: "Street theme" fading when BLIND ELLIE is in place.)

Scene 6: A Clay Harbor Street

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

BLIND ELLIE. Hey, Venture, long time no see.

VENTURE. Enough jokes. I met the Mayor, and Vim Castor. Frankly, the company stunk.

BLIND ELLIE. But the drinks were free. I heard you were dying for a drink.

VENTURE. So you knew. You set me up with them. They knew all about the kid; they brought up the trial; they were ready for me.

BLIND ELLIE. Some trial, full of bile. I was there for the whole affair, listening outside, the windows were opened wide. I remember you too were there...

(MUSIC: "Conspiracy theme". LIGHTS down on Street, up on Courtroom. Enter MAYOR dressed as in robes JUDGE BRIDGE and VIM CASTOR. We are in the Courtroom again. VENTURE goes up to them, and the Mayor puts his arm around him.)

MAYOR. Remember, Detective Venture- the kid's a gang leader, a killer. We can't nail him legit, so you finger him for the package store hit.

VENTURE. It stinks.

MAYOR. We just want to put him away for a few years.

(He drops his arm, and VIM slides seductively onto VENTURE's ARMS.)

It's the only way to get justice done in Clay Harbor.

CASTOR: Do it, Venture, for me.

(They kiss.)

VENTURE. Ok, I'll do it.

(The MAYOR goes over to the table and sits. He bangs for order with a gavel three times.)

MAYOR. The court is in session.

CASTOR. The defendant is charged with murder. We have a witness who saw this gang leader brutally murder a shopkeeper. I call to the stand Detective John Venture. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, Detective Venture?

VENTURE. Stop! Stop!

(MUSIC: fades out. VENTURE leaves the courtroom and rejoins BLIND ELLIE. LIGHTS down on Courtroom, up on Street.)

BLIND ELLIE. Guilty...guilty...guilty...

VENTURE. Stop! I said stop it.

BLIND ELLIE. But I heard more, standing below the courthouse window. I heard them vipers griping away that day, right after the verdict, I heard it,

(MUSIC: "Conspiracy theme".)

MAYOR. *(taking off his robe.)* Well, thanks to you, Venture fingered the Kid. We told Venture we wouldn't execute the kid, but we have to. I'll never make Mayor with the kid around, acting a martyr in jail, telling people there's a better City than the one I run. This is the only real city! My city!

CASTOR. What can Venture do?

MAYOR. Never trust a man with a desire for integrity. He might have an unfortunate attack of regret and recant his testimony to save the kid: that would end us. We have to destroy his credibility.

CASTOR. I'll put ten grand in a bank account in his name, and then turn in an anonymous report of bribed testimony. He'll at least get kicked off the force, if not convicted.

(She fixes two drinks.)

MAYOR. I'll be shocked and run for Mayor on a reform plank. Perfect. It is amazing how good things happen to smart people. To *ex*-detective Venture, and District Attorney Vim Castor.

(They toast each other. LIGHTS fade on Courtroom, and rise on Street Place. Exit MAYOR and CASTOR. MUSIC: fades on VENTURE's- speech.)

VENTURE. When they went after me for bribery, she dropped me like a dirty shirt. But I never thought...what happened then.

BLIND ELLIE. I called the kid's sister.

VENTURE. The dame.

BLIND ELLIE. I loved that family, always worshiped that family. Before they buried her Brother, she carried him off.

VENTURE. How did they revive him? Who else was in on it?

BLIND ELLIE. Yesterday, Sister comes to me from the Boss, sweet as sauce. She says, you speak for me to Venture. Tell him to see the Mayor; that's your chore, to even the score. That's all I know. You believe me, Jonnie?

VENTURE. I guess- but I don't believe the Dame. I've had nothing but half-truths and trouble from her. I should have known better than to trust a Dame with wings.

BLIND ELLIE. See you around, Jonnie.

(Exit BLIND ELLIE. MUSIC: "Flashback theme". VENTURE goes to the Narrative place. LIGHTS down on Street, and up on Narration Place.)

VENTURE. There were more twists in this case than in a hangman's noose. But a twist is often the next turn on the road to the truth. I now knew the case wasn't about the Boss, or Junior, or the kid, or the Caretaker, or Mayor Bridge or Chief Prosecutor Vim Castor. It was all about the Dame. So I called the Dame and set up a meeting at my office. She came right away. She was the Boss's daughter to others, but to me, she was just another Dame with wings.

(LIGHTS: as in opening scene, down on Narration Place, spot on DAME in Street Place, and up on Venture's office. VENTURE enters his office. The DAME enters and stands, she is now wearing a very bright and colorful dress. After a pause, she enters the office. MUSIC: Same as opening, "Opening Theme", fading, leading to "Dame's Theme", fading after DAME enters the office.)

Scene 7: Venture's office

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

DAME. Have you found him, Mr. Venture?

VENTURE. Did you really think I was such a dim chump as to fall for your act?

DAME. I don't care for your tone.

VENTURE. I never claimed to be much of a singer. Your whole story stinks like week old bait. You set me up. Didn't you. Didn't you! Answer me.

(He slaps her. They are both shocked.)

DAME. The Boss. My boss. My father. The Caretaker. His son. My brother. Yes, you're right. We set you up.

VENTURE. Sorry, I tend to lose control when someone tries to murder me.

DAME. Family business. Father had built Clay Harbor as well as the rest of the City, and he hated what that district had become. But we only had influence in the upper city, until my brother left us to try to save Clay Harbor. I visited him often. Then he was arrested on trumped up charges, and you lied on the stand under oath. You practically knotted the rope, tied the toe tag on his body, and tucked him in the grave. Yes, I set you up.

VENTURE. I was unfinished business for you, it seems.

DAME. Not the sort of business you are thinking of, not revenge. You see, it all worked out for the best in the end. The Boss didn't have to intervene directly in Clay Harbor business. My brother became the Caretaker, the job he was born for. Our family's organization now operates freely in Park Hills *and* Clay Harbor, in the entire City, everywhere, for everyone.

VENTURE. Then why did you set me up?

DAME. It's not about me. It's about you. I saw you one day staring out this window. It was raining. Rain ran like tears down the window over your face. A face with such sadness and cynicism: the face of a dead man.

VENTURE. But not dead enough. You wanted to take me out, and got the Mayor and Prosecutor to do it.

DAME. No, we wanted to save you, the only one who lost out. It's time to come clean, and confess, Mr. Venture. Recant your testimony. Spill the beans on the Mayor and his Chief Prosecutor. You can live again outside this room free of the past. And my brother will be free to leave the Cemetery.

VENTURE. So this is the final twist. It's really all about me. My choice. I can get right with the world if I only do the right thing, and spring your brother from the murder rap. I'd like to believe your charming story, but truth is a death warrant in this city: the Mayor and Castor will try again.

DAME. Perhaps. But I'll be watching over you. And Blind Ellie, and the Caretaker, and the Boss. You are never alone.

VENTURE. Why should I believe you?

(MUSIC: Dame's theme, quietly in the background.)

DAME. In order to act at all, when you come to the final twist, when you reach the last scene, where there is no where else to go, you have to believe in something, you have to find your faith. Or else you merely have found your burial place.

VENTURE. I have to think.

DAME. When you are ready, just say the word. I will come to you. It's easy. Just breathe deep, and say the first word. The rest will just come tumbling out.

Epilogue

Amen.

(The Dame goes to her entrance spot in the Street Place and stands there lit by the spot light.

VENTURE goes to the Narration Place. LIGHTS down on office, up on Narration Place.

MUSIC: *Dames theme fades when she is in place. MUSIC: "Closing theme" when Venture in place, played to the end of the play.)*

VENTURE. Just say the word. Everything after the first word is easy. And her promise of the future: it is like you had only seen pictures drawn in black and white and gray, and she suddenly offers you colors. Could I do it? Leave the past, correct my mistake, begin my life again, and live in the world to come? Or was I just a sucker waiting for another fall? It began with a Dame. It always begins with a Dame. But it doesn't always have to end the same way.

(LIGHTS: slow fade.)

The End.