

THE DEAL

By Ryan Kaminski

NAME: RYAN KAMINSKI

WHERE YOU ARE FROM: Flemington, NJ.

BIO: Ryan Kaminski is a playwright from Flemington, NJ. His full-length thriller play, *Forgotten Falls*, had a stage production at the Black Orchid Theatre Group this past February in New York City. His 10-minute plays, *The Sentence*, and, *The Meadow*, have appeared in playwriting festivals across the country. He is very excited to participate in the Bake-Off!

EMAIL: rydemi@comcast.net

What's keeping you positive? My family, my friends, my girlfriend, and my writing.

Yes, you can publish this!

CHARACTERS

VIVIAN HOWARD. age 30s-40s. High maintenance, proper etiquette, sickeningly sweet.

ARTHUR NELLIGAN. age 40s-50s. Articulate and refined. Dapper and sophisticated.

TIME

Sometime in the mid-1950s.

PLACE

The front porch of Vivian Howard's home. Louisiana.

(Three steps lead to a sweeping front porch. The porch consists of a small table beside a chair and a second chair near the front door. VIVIAN HOWARD sits in the chair beside the table. She wears a white dress and a crucifix around her neck. One of her fingers has been heavily bandaged. A pitcher of lemonade, a glass, and a radio rest on the table beside a check. Vivian picks up the check and examines it while fiddling with the radio. A Jazz song plays. She laughs.)

VIVIAN

(to herself)

My, my, my...

(pours herself a glass of lemonade and toasts the glass to the radio)

Here's to you, *Billy Boy*...

(She sets down the glass along with the check and rises. She starts dancing and twirling to the beat of a trumpet solo. She dances in the porch corner, lost in her own little world. ARTHUR NELLIGAN enters Stage Left. He wears a burgundy suit and a black tie. He carries a case. He climbs up the porch steps where Vivian continues to dance. The radio reception flickers at his arrival, causing Vivian to turn around and notice him. She becomes startled.)

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you!

(Vivian rushes over to the radio and flicks it off.)

VIVIAN

No, no, the fault is mine. I'm afraid, I forgot my manners. Here I am taking a dance break like a silly little girl when I have a visitor...

(notices his suit)

...a very distinguished visitor.

ARTHUR

(gestures to the radio)

Was that William Howard on the trumpet, by any chance?

VIVIAN

Yes. Yes, it was.

ARTHUR

Thought so. I never fail to recognize a signature Howard solo. Nobody could play the trumpet quite like *Billy Boy*. My name is Arthur Nelligan.

(shakes her hand)

And you must be Vivian, a.k.a "*Billy Boy's*" wife?

VIVIAN

I am. I mean, I was. I mean, I'm not sure if you heard but...

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to word it like that. Yes, I know all about the accident. Saw it on the news and I passed by the bridge on the way over. Forgive me, this was not the way I meant to introduce myself..

VIVIAN

How's about we start over then?

ARTHUR

Fine by me.

VIVIAN

What exactly can I do for you this evening, Mr. Nelligan?

ARTHUR

Believe it or not, but I'm here to bring you something. Something that belonged to your late husband.

VIVIAN

Bring me something? Are you saying you knew William?

ARTHUR

I did. Met him in New Orleans when he was a starving artist working at a voodoo shop in the French Quarter.

VIVIAN

Goodness! That must've been ages ago!

ARTHUR

It was. It was right before he caught his big break at the *Jackson Club*.

VIVIAN

Oh, the *Jackson*! It's been years since I was there. William and I would go all the time. They hung his picture on the wall and everything.

ARTHUR

I was in the audience the night he first played there. He was just a scared, scrawny kid back then, willing to do whatever it took to prove himself. The audience certainly wasn't on his side when they first laid eyes on him. That was until he started to play. The rest is history.

VIVIAN

That's really amazing you were there when it happened.

ARTHUR

It was quite the night to say the least. A much cooler night for certain...
(pulls out a handkerchief from his breast pocket and tabs at his forehead)

VIVIAN

Goodness, you must be hot. Especially in a suit like that. How's about some lemonade to cool you off?

ARTHUR

Sounds lovely.

VIVIAN

Great. Have a seat and I'll be back with another glass.

(She pulls over the second chair and places it at the table. She then exits through the front door. Arthur sits and notices the check. He picks it up and examines it. Vivian reenters with a second glass. She notices him holding the check.)

ARTHUR

Goodness...

(drops the check)

Now I'm the one who's forgotten their manners. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry. I was looking at it because I wasn't sure what it was.

VIVIAN

It's quite all right.

(pours him a glass)

Life insurance people brought it earlier this afternoon. Never even realized he had life insurance. I've always been a bit of a scatterbrain with money, especially when it's unexpected money. I guess I haven't gotten a chance to bring it inside yet.

(Her crucifix dangles in front of Arthur as she pours. He quickly looks away from it, but not before noticing her arm. He then scoops up his glass and drinks.)

ARTHUR

Whoa...

VIVIAN

Something wrong?

ARTHUR

No. I just didn't expect it to be so sweet.

VIVIAN

Want to know a secret?

(pause)

All my friends think it's homemade, but I just use frozen lemonade and pour in some extra sugar.

ARTHUR

Interesting. Well, like I always say: "we all have our secrets."

(gestures to her arm)

What happened there? Those aren't burn marks, are they?

VIVIAN

(takes an extra-long sip of lemonade)

I'm afraid I was rather careless with the stove a while back. I can be quite the klutz at times as you can see...

(gestures to her bandaged finger)

You said you had something for me?

ARTHUR

Yes. Keep in mind, I've tried to keep this in decent condition over the years.

(He sets the case on the table and opens it. He pulls out a trumpet and hands it to her.)

VIVIAN

Oh my...

ARTHUR

One of William's first trumpets. In fact, it was the first trumpet he played as "*Billy Boy*" Howard.

VIVIAN

Wait...

(examines it)

Are you telling me this is the trumpet he played that night at the *Jackson*?

ARTHUR

That it is. Look here if you don't believe me.

(He pulls out a pamphlet from the case. Vivien reads it over.)

VIVIAN

My goodness. This is a pamphlet from the club that night. It's dated and everything! I do declare...

(gestures to the trumpet)

How on earth did you get this?

ARTHUR

It was my mine originally. You see, the night before William was set to play at the *Jackson*, he dropped his only trumpet off the fire escape at his apartment. He desperately needed a new trumpet, so I let him borrow mine.

VIVIAN

That was very kind of you. If you don't mind me asking, why did you hang onto the pamphlet for all these years?

ARTHUR

Because I knew William would be heading straight for the top after that performance. I knew the items from that night would be worth something someday.

VIVIAN

You were right there. I know many of William's fans who would pay top dollar for these things. Especially now...

(pause)

I just can't believe you came all the way out here to give them to me.

ARTHUR

Now that you mention it, there is another reason for my presence this evening..

VIVIAN

Oh?

ARTHUR

You see, I'm afraid your husband owed me something. Something he failed to deliver.

VIVIAN

I see. Well, Mr. Nelligan, it embarrasses me to say this, but you're not the first person whom William was indebted to. Tell you what: how about in the morning, we go to my lawyer and see if we can work something out?

ARTHUR

I'm afraid your lawyer would be useless in this case.

VIVIAN

I don't understand.

ARTHUR

Flip the pamphlet over and read..

(Vivian turns the pamphlet over and reads a hand-written inscription at the top.)

VIVIAN

"I, William Howard, do solemnly swear, that in exchange for my success, my fame, and my fortune, I will grant Mr. Arthur Nelligan.."

ARTHUR

(sips his lemonade)

Finish it..

VIVIAN

"...complete and total ownership over my soul.."

ARTHUR

You'll see the initials are written in blood as is the date.

VIVIAN

What on earth is this?

ARTHUR

It's a contract, Mrs. Howard, signed and dated by your husband. It states that in exchange for me giving him the fame and fortune he so desired in life, I was to receive ownership over his soul at the time of his death.

VIVIAN

I'm not sure what kind of game you're playing, but it's not funny...

ARTHUR

I agree, there's nothing funny about it. Just like there's nothing funny about those cigarette burns on your arms.

(pause)

Come on Mrs. Howard, we both know you didn't burn yourself on the stove. *Billy Boy* used to put his cigarettes out on you when he got drunk. He told me himself.

VIVIAN

And when did he tell you this?

ARTHUR

About an hour or two after he died.

VIVIAN

Okay, I'm calling the police...

(attempts to rise)

ARTHUR

Go ahead. The police have no power over me. No man does...

VIVIAN

STOP IT! Stop it right now and tell me who you really are!

ARTHUR

Who I really am? Over the years, I've gone by many names, for I was present when the earth began. I've soared above your skies as an angel, slithered through your gardens as a snake, and walked among your people as a charming stranger. Throughout it all, man has looked to me for guidance, and often turned to me as a last resort. I am whatever man needs me to, and in the case of your husband, I was the one who could make all his dreams come true. And as part of

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

the deal we made, I was promised a soul; a soul which I have yet to collect.

(He stares at her intently. Vivian stares into his eyes and shudders.)

VIVIAN

Oh my God...

ARTHUR

You can see it in my eyes now, can't you? You can see that I'm telling you the truth.

VIVIAN

If my husband promised you his soul, then what are you doing here? My husband is dead, so why don't you have his soul yet?

ARTHUR

Because the man who promised me his soul wasn't the same man who drove off that bridge. The man who promised me his soul, still had a soul worth collecting. But over the years, he let his fame and fortune destroy everything that made his soul pure. He cheated, he lied, he stole, and most of all, he delighted in abusing you. Such crimes made his soul rot, and I cannot take a rotten soul.

VIVIAN

Then what do you want from me?

ARTHUR

Isn't it obvious? When your husband died, you inherited all his fortune, which means, you also inherited all his *debts*...

VIVIAN

No. No, you can't be serious...!

ARTHUR

You know I am, or else I wouldn't be here. As part of my deal, I need a soul that's fresh and pure, and with *Billy Boy's* soul as black as night, I'm afraid, I'm left with yours.

VIVIAN

No. Please! No, my soul is far from pure...

ARTHUR

It's pure compared to your husband's. The man committed every crime short of murder. And because of that I need...

VIVIAN

What did you just say?

ARTHUR

What?

VIVIAN

About my husband's crimes?

ARTHUR

I said he committed every crime short of murder.

VIVIAN

And does murder blacken the soul?

ARTHUR

Of course, it does. Does a God-fearing woman like yourself really need to ask me that?

(Vivian starts to laugh. She laughs and laughs until Arthur becomes annoyed.)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Why're you laughing? Is this somehow funny to you?

VIVIAN

No. What's funny is you never asked me about my finger.

ARTHUR

Your finger? What're you talking about?

VIVIAN

While William *did* abuse me, what happened to my finger was my *own* doing.

(pulls off the bandage and lets him see)

I cut it myself. I cut it while I was puncturing the break line to his car.

ARTHUR

You...you did what...?

VIVIAN

I punctured his break line. Which means, William drove off that bridge because of me. I murdered him and I would gladly do so again. So, if murder blackens the soul, then I'm afraid my soul is as black as your tie, Mr. Nelligan.

ARTHUR

No. No! YOU'RE LYING! YOU'RE LYING...

(Vivian stares at him intently. Arthur stares into her eyes and shudders.)

VIVIAN

You can see it in my eyes now, can't you? You can see that I'm telling you the truth.

(Arthur rips up the pamphlet in a rage.)

ARTHUR

HOW DARE YOU! HOW DARE YOU CHEAT ME...!

VIVIAN

As you said before: we all have our secrets, don't we?

(He descends the steps, and storms off Stage Left. Vivian pours herself another glass of lemonade and turns on the radio. The radio plays another Jazz song.)

VIVIAN

(to herself)

My, my, my...

(toasts the glass to the radio)

Here's to you, *Billy Boy*...

(BLACKOUT followed by CURTAIN.)

(End of Play.)