**Chapter One**

*The Last Rehearsal*

*September 29, 1931*

*Hollywood, California*

*Interior/Night*

*Universal’s Movie Ranch*

*“The Barn”*

 “Who’s there?”

 Bernardo, the night watch, stepped out from the wings, blindfolded, his long arms out-stretched, groping, as if feeling his way in the dark.

 “Whoooo’s there?” he repeated in a sing-song voice.

 The Barn was illuminated by a blue flicker of lightning, followed by silence. A soft voice coming from the portable bleachers counted the seconds. “One one-thousand . . . two one- thousand two . . . three . . . . ”

 A whip-crack drew the cast and crew’s eyes toward the rafters.

 “Getting closer!”

 “Walter, do we keep going?” Bernardo asked.

 “Talk louder,” said the Director.

Another flash-bang. Suddenly Bernardo began to stagger around the stage, arms extended in a herky-jerky, Frankenstein pantomime, as if struck by lightning.

 Seated in the front row of old bleachers, the director, Walter, smiled his approval. He was an old soul of vaudeville and silent films who became child-like in the presence of an actor’s comedic gift.

 “Who’s there?” This time Bernardo’s question was posed as if by a frightened child, wanting to know the name of the person behind a fearful Halloween mask.

Walter interrupted his night watchman. “Whose idea was the blindfold?”

Bernardo aimed a long arm at a solitary red head seated halfway up the bleachers, her knees serving as a desk for her opened script. Ophelia shyly raised her hand.

“You,” said Walter, turning toward her, “are a dangerous woman!”

Her smile illumed the darkness just outside the alcove of light that isolated the “stage” from the rest of The Barn. “Well, since we’re doing *Hamlet* as a send-up . . . I thought why not take advantage of the movie’s popularity,” she said, referring to the premier of *Frankenstein* at Grauman’s Eygptian theatre.

“Ah, the night watch as electrified monster!” said the director.

“Well, the play is a kind of monster’s ball!” she replied.

“And tonight,” said Bernardo, “The Barn looks like a mad scientist’s hilltop laboratory!”

“I see,” said Walter. “With me as the mad scientist . . . and you as my live experiment! Hmmm . . . . ” he said, as he was prone to do when taking something under consideration. His thumb and forefinger massaged his chin. He turned and whispered into the ear of the young girl seated at his side on the front row of the bleachers.

“Make a note to have Mr. Laemmle invite Mr. Karloff to tomorrow’s performance . . . and the reception after. Wouldn’t hurt to have the star of *Frankenstein* circulating amongst the guests during the pre-show in the garden . . . or mingling with them afterward . . . over champagne. How often do you get to shake hands with a monster?”

Isabel, his sixteen year-old assistant director (and his daughter), dutifully recorded the note, flipping to the first page of “The Bible” cradled in her lap. This was a large, black, three-ring binder that contained Walter’s director’s version of the script: as hallowed an artifact to the company of stock players and long-time crew members as The Book of Kells to the Irish monks who painstaking inscribed and illustrated it. Walter turned his attention back to the night watch scene.

“Let’s continue. Fernando, your entrance.”

A head peeped out from the black-curtain of a wing. “It’s Francisco, sir.”

“Of course it is. Long day.”

“Or you could just call him FERNisco!” said Bernardo.

“Your line, Bernardo. And . . . action!”

 “I pray thee, speak Francisco!”

“Stand and unfold thyself!”

 Bernardo didn’t respond. Finally, he spoke in a low, matter-of-fact voice. “Line, please.” “Really?” Walter asked of nobody in particular. “Our last rehearsal . . . and we’re still dropping lines?

“Maybe he was struck by the lighting!” The First Player said from the bleachers.

“You can remove your blindfold anytime, Bernardo,” said Walter.

 Bernardo untied the bandana from his eyes, which served as a cowboy’s kerchief in the silent film they had just wrapped shooting—the latest in the *Tenderfoot Thriller* series of sage-brush romances, churned out by Universal’s stock company of actors and directors. He had been cast as the male lead in the sage brush ronmaces after being lured away from vaudeville, where he had developed a successful act, tap-dancing, playing the fiddle above his head, and doing the Russian kick dance, from a deep squat with arms folded, like a gypsy from the Russian steppes. Often, over a late night pint at the Pig and Whistle, he second-guessed his decision to walk away from the $200 per week he made on the Vaudeville stage to join this upstart company in an upstart medium—that was nevertheless drawing crowds into Saturday theatres across America.

 “Now slowly turn around,” Walter said to Bernardo.

 “Turn my back on the audience?” Bernardo asked.

 “Well, we could move the audience on stage . . . up-center . . . then they’d still be in front of you!”

“Just asking!”

As Bernardo began to turn upstage, Walter turned and nodded to Leo up in the “lighting booth,” positioned at the edge of the hay loft. A bright light came on at Bernardo’s feet, projecting his ten foot shadow on the white “parapet” behind him. The Barn filled with Walter’s girlish scream. He jumped behind Francisco as if frightened by a mouse.

 “Meet the Ghost!” said Walter.

 “My own shadow?”

“Exactly! Is it real . . . or a projection of your own fears . . . of all their fears?”

The whispers that raced through the bleachers around her reminded Ophelia of an audience’s reaction to a magician’s wizardry: as if a dove had just fluttered from a cavernous sleeve.

 “Sorry ‘bout the surprise, Bernardo, but we needed an honest take when you first see the ghost! . . . Now give it to us like that tomorrow night.”

His back still to Walter, Bernardo raised a wagging finger, as if to say “you naughty boy . . . frightened by my own ghost!”

“It’s importance the audience feel your fright . . . the moment you see it. We’ll stage it the same with Hamlet . . . speaking to his own silhouette on the wall . . . as if it were a ghost!”

In this manner, Walter found a way to give a fresh twist to a scene that had been staged a thousand times over the centuries.

“Proceed, Bernardo. Your line.”

Bernardo assumed his place, down-center, his back to the bleachers. Without warning, he spun to face them, a flashlight positioned under his chin.

“Tis now strook twelf!”

 At the word “twelf,” he pressed the button. It was as if he had donned a ghoulish mask, his Neanderthal brows under-lit by the flashlight, his eyes shining mayhem from their cavernous hollows, accentuated by a Jack-o-Lantern grin.

Walter spit the coffee from his thermos cup, which Bernardo feigned to avoid with a deft back step. The director shook his head in laughter, as if resigned to these comic ambushes from his players, as if realizing his directorial control of their acting had its limits. *But then,* he mused, *this is as it should be! It is a collaborative beast isn’t it . . . who is happiest if not completely tamed!* A blue flicker outside a window above the hayloft added an eerie accompaniment.

“One one-thousand . . . . ”

Kaboom! The sky over The Barn detonated with a rippling crack. Ophelia looked up

from her “sides,” a haunted look in her eyes.

Walter turned and whispered to Isabel, setting her pencil in motion across a blank page of The Bible, opposite a page of scripted lines. Because it rarely left her lap during a shoot or rehearsal, the black binder seemed continuous with her body. She knew the script backwards and forwards, which is why the cast looked on her as something of a savant in The Barn, blessed with a photographic memory when it came to her role as Script Mistress, or Mistress Word as Bernardo teasingly called her. Something of her father’s stage craft informed her own precocious gift, as if this had been passed down to her along with his thick black hair and deep blue eyes.

“There are more things in heaven and earth, dear Director,” said Bernardo, aiming a long arm at the rafters, “than are mentioned in your Bible!”

“Walter, may I ask a question?” said Francisco, as he moved to Bernardo’s side. “Why not include this byplay between actors and director in our script?”

“Yes! That way we will have a play-within-a-play,” said Bernardo,” about a play within a play.”

“I see, four play! Hmmm,” was all Walter said.

His great forehead shone in the halo of light created by The Bible’s small reading lamp. This “hmmm” was taken as a promising sign, given the looks that were exchanged in the bleachers.

“You could speak your lines as a disembodied voice in the theatre . . . from out in The House,” said Francisco.

“Or over the sound system!” the First Player added form the bleachers.

“Yes . . . like our God!” said Bernardo

“Handing down our Commandments!” his stage mate added.

“Thou shalt not assume the fig leaf position!” said Bernardo, as if volleying a ping-pong ball with Francisco, while covering his loins with crossed hands!

“Might give ya a chance,” said The First Player, speaking what was on everyone’s mind, “to get back in the lime-light.”

Walter affected not to hear this last comment while whispering to Isabel. The cast harbored a regret, as old as it was collective. None of them had ever seen Walter on stage. They entertained an equally persistent dream of someday sharing the stage with him.

Anecdotes from his most memorable performances, handed down from older to younger actors, verified by his mother and sister (who for years served as his make-up artist and costume designer), had become part of the company’s lore—like relic costumes and props from shows whose final curtain had fallen long ago, in another time—before the era of the silver screen. Sometimes at the start of a show, when costumes, props, and set pieces were being retrieved from the dusty recesses of the studio ranch’s warehouse, Bernardo, Francisco, Ophelia, and the veterans of the troupe, liked to wander amongst these benign ghosts, who even though coated in dust, yet retained a stain of enchantment from illusory worlds they had helped call forth. As if something of the “magic bubble” of make believe they had once occupied yet lingered in their musty presence. Bernardo and Ophelia even liked to run their lines as Tenderfoot and Nell in the old warehouse, under the watchful, territorial eyes of its old, eccentric curator, Sebastian, as if hoping to catch a little inspirational lighting in a bottle from the costumes, props, and set pieces

of “old” silent films—from the musty presence of Ben Hur’s chariot (circa 1925).

Images flickered in their collective memory—of old still photos of Walter’s performance of Lear, descending a medieval stone stairwell, long axe in hand, to mete out dungeon justice to his traitorous daughters. Though aware of his love of directing, to which he had sacrificed his love of acting, they couldn’t help but wonder, if in some happy recess of his soul there still dwelt an urge to leap on stage and “have it out” with his best players, scene for scene, word for word, their incendiary performance enflaming his own. All sensed he still had “it,” and that this “it,” far from weakening over time, had only intensified, as if enervated by its long neglect.

Once or twice they had baited him from retirement at a wrap party or Christmas gathering into a staged vignette from one of his roles—or some other set performance piece. He had not a boastful bone in his body, which yet had something of the longshoreman’s thick-boned athleticism about it. He had the hands of a workman, carpenter, or master ship-builder. However, the only sign his owlish jowls gave in response to Bernardo’s question was a sly, secretive smile.

“Well, thank you for this comic RELIEF,” Walter said to two actors down center, laying a particular emphasis on the last word. He waited. “‘Uh . . . ‘relief’’ was your cue, Francisco.”

The night-watch snapped to. “Oh, right you are! My cue.” He cleared his throat. “For this . . . *relief .* . . much thanks.” He began to unzip his trousers.

“What are you doing?” said Bernardo, unscripted.

“Relieving myself. It’s midnight. I’ve been on the parapet for hours!”

“And I am sick at heart!” said Bernardo, gazing meaningfully at Ophelia in the bleachers.”

“Stand Ho!” said Francisco, motioning the young actress to rise.

“What did you call me?” she said, lifting her eyes from her “sides.” “Watch your mouth, Mr. Watchman. Or I shall sick my Great Dane on you!”

Bernardo advanced toward Francisco, eyeing the crotch of his trousers. “What? Has this thing appeared again tonight . . . . Are you touching the dreaded site?” He turned toward Walter. “I’m afraid our colleague has taken matters into his own hands!”

With star-gazing eyes, Francisco answered, while zipping his trousers. “I speak of yond same star,” he said, pointing to the young actress in the bleachers. “She who sits westward of our pole!”

Ophelia’s belly laugh filled the barn. She clapped a hand to her mouth. “Dream on, night watch!” she said, turning her attention back to the script in her lap. “This star and your pole will never be aligned! What will you tell me next? That you “smote the dreaded Pollack on the ice?”

“”I’m afraid,” said Bernardo, “the only Pollocks on ice that he smote were at the bottom of his scotch rocks at the Pig and Whistle!”

“Ay me, the scotch have rocks?” said Ophelia. “For brains, I presume?”

“I think the answer,” said Bernardo, “lies somewhat lower.”

“And If we hurry up and get through this,” said Francisco, “we might make last call.”

“So you two can wet your whistle at The Whistle??” said Ophelia.

“Like a couple o’ pigs at the trough!” said Francisco.

“I was thinking,” said Bernardo, “that I might let Y’ALL wet my whistle.”

She laughed at his Tenderfoot drawl, enjoying this latest round in their courtship of wits. “How can I keep a straight face, Tenderfoot, if y’all come courtin’ with that dang twang!”

Though rehearsing a send-up of *Hamlet* for a special, one-night “backer’s audition” of Hollywood VIPs, they were still in their silent film, *Tenderfoot Thriller* costumes, a time-saving adjustment that added its own comic touch to the rehearsal of *I,Ophelia*. Those who had leads in previous versions of the silent film serial played minor parts in the *Hamlet* pastiche, and vice versa.

 “How’ bout it, Ophelia?” pleaded Francisco. “A horse race to the Pig n Whistle to see who gets served first?”

“I think your friends Rudy and Charlie beat ya’ to the punch bowl there . . . besides, y’all have enough *dust*,” she said, dropping her voice into a deep, guttural register, “on your faces as it is. Why would y’all want to eat some more?”

“Your tongue has lost its bit! Most unbridled!” said Bernardo.

“Because un-brided!”

“”Un-brided perhaps because un-broken.”

“You would mount me? Are you good with a rope, sir? For without one, you will need a tongue like a lariat!”

“Perhaps we could practice that trick!” said Bernardo.

“I see. You need a mount . . . on which to practice your rope tricks! And would you tie me up . . . or . . . tie me down on a rail-road track . . . like a damsel in dis dress,” she said, gesturing to the white summer dress she was still wearing from the Tenderfoot shoot.

“Only so that I might un-bind you!”

“Would your tongue was tied in knots!”

He smiled. “I would happily have it so . . . if you would untie it with yours!”

“How gallant of you!”

“Hmmm,” said Walter. “*Hamlet* meets *Much Ado*! Perhaps we should o’ done Benedict and Beatrice!”

“Well volleyed,” Fernando said in an aside to Bernardo.

“Just spare me your backhand!” said Ophelia, overhearing the comment..

“Advantage Ophelia!” said Francisco.

“I’m best at love-forty,” said Bernardo.

“If I were you,” said Ophelia, “I might think of getting a new racket!” she said, with a sly smile.” Thank you for the invitation to the Pee and Dubaya. It’s tempting. Imagining myself squeezed between Tenderfoot and The Bashful Whirlwind . . . like a rose between two thorns!”

“Or between a rock and a hard place,” said Francisco, draping an arm around Bernardo’s shoulders, which were a half foot below his own.

“A real rock!” said Bernardo.

“And a real hard place!” said Francisco.

Bernardo removed his cowboy hat. “What can I say to change your mind, ma’am. We are no Celler Smellers . . . looking for a free lap!”

“A free lap, indeed! Nooooo . . . you’re looking for a lap to quench another thirst!”

“Please, mum, we are no Dewdroppers . . . no work and all play . . . who sin by night and sleep by day!”

“And I am no Dumbdora! It seems to me all you do is play . . . and well at that, I might add!”

The two friends tipped their bared heads.

 “Whay-ul,” said Bernardo, “we’ll sive y’all a seat at the corner tible just the sime!”

Walter turned toward Isabel. “You getting this?”

She nodded, chasing after their words with her pencil.

Bernardo turned toward the director. “Walter, since we’re encouraged to play with our parts . . . wait . . . did that sound right? Anyway, since you’re trying to create a sandbox on stage for us to play in, I was thinking, maybe next time we could hold rehearsals at Malibu.”

“Or Carpenteria!” said Francisco.

“Lots o’ sand there!”

“Isn’t what we’re doing kind o’ like building a sand castle anyway?”

“Might make it easier to get into character!”

“We could line-up in front of the waves and run our lines . . . so that you could hear them over the surf!”

“Then maybe the guy in the back row wouldn’t fall asleep!”

 “And Ophelia could drown herself in the sea!”

 “Her clothes spread wide,” said Bernardo, lapsing into poetic altar tones, “where mermaid-like awhile they bore her up!”

 “”I’m already bored-up,” she said, with a mock yawn, “listening to the two of you!”

 “She speaks poignards!” said Francisco, a hand over his heart.

 “I tell you what,” said Walter. “Let’s do what actors do, and PRETEND we’re at the sea . . . and this stage IS a sandbox!”

Walter turned, and in a louder voice spoke into a far corner of The Barn, where a stout, middle-aged woman was silhouetted by a row of bulbs that framed a wooden vanity table with three stools positioned before it.

“Bess, can we add a touch of ghoulish make-up to our night watch?”

His mother, who was also the company’s vocal director, and its long-time make-up artist, reached for a button on the electric cord that emerged from the row of lights, and pressed it. The lights blinked once, by way of an answer to his query. As Walter turned back to the night-watch scene, Bess resumed dressing the grey hair of Gertrude, the two speaking softly into their mirrored reflections.

Walter turned and spoke into the opposite corner of The Barn, where a woman a few years his junior sat in a pool of light at a sewing machine, whose hum suddenly ceased. She brushed her graying, brunette hair from her eyes as she turned toward the familiar figure seated in the first row of bleachers at the center of The Barn.

“Mable, add the night watch’s blindfold to your list.” She grabbed a flashlight from the top of the sewing machine, pressed the “on” button, answering with a single flash. Then her skilled fingers and feet began working the machine, like a virtuoso rehearsing a piano recital. Something of Walter’s quiet, unpretentious, yet willful personality was “twinned” in that of his mother and sister, who had similarly grown up in the world of vaudeville and silent film. Set further back into her corner were two rolling costume racks, divided with labels that bore the characters’ names in order of their appearance. A nearby wooden table was heaped with other costumes, which Mabel was still mending, accessorizing, or designing, piled in order of priority.

The tribal nature of the Lost Angels Players took its cue from the blood ties of its founding family—so that the two formed an extended family. A kind of high-spirited silliness prevailed during these shoots and rehearsals at Universal’s studio ranch, which was itself an effect of their unpretentious professionalism. Cast and crew had weathered so many shoots and shows together, that the “banana peels” of fresh adversities were as welcome as new members of the company.

Walter next turned and looked up into a wooden “booth” high above the top bleachers, and spoke to an Ichabod Crane-like figure, silhouetted there: his longtime lighting designer, Leo. He and Walter worked together like the right and left hand of an accomplished technician—with an almost effortless accord, as reserved as it was respectful. With respect to the rest of the cast and crew, Leo had a well-earned reputation as a cantankerous, introverted, condescending, and fearful first associate of Walter’s, who artistry all begrudgingly acknowledged—and whose black Scottish temper all dreaded.

During a pre-shoot or rehearsal, Leo moved around The Barn, from its floor to its rafters, with the nimble agility of a hollow-eyed raccoon, shadowed by his youthful assistant, a youth, who like Isabel, had enrolled herself in this hands-on internship in lighting design: Isadora. She was also a classmate of Isabel, who had recruited her, and these two were as thick as thieves, inside and outside The Barn. To the Company, they were simply known as “The Izzy’s” or “The Tweedles”: barn shorthand for “tweedle-dee” and “tweedle-dum”. To the First Player, they were the “Izzy Dorabels,” which Francisco modified to “The Dorabels.” This was given a final twist by Bernardo: “The Doorbells it is!”

Each had a “crush” on their “cowboy” of choice, Tenderfoot and Bashful (Bernardo and Francisco), at times shadowing their movements around the barn when they were not on “stage.”

During breaks, they sat side by side in the bleachers, giggling into their hands, casting side-long looks at their own matinee idols. While Isabel esteemed Ophelia for her acting, she was jealous of her long-standing, ribald flirtation with Tenderfoot. For his part, Tenderfoot endured Isabel’s crush with a pretense of ignorance, adopting toward her a guarded good-fellowship so as not to fan the flames of her adolescent infatuation. Isabel’s idolatry did not escape Ophelia’s attention, who playfully chided her fellow player, referring to Isabel as “your little Nell.” “Have you seen,” she teased, “the look in her eyes when you take off your cowboy hat and start talking in that dang twang? Now there’s you bucket o’ hog livers!”

Her guffaw startled a few bats from the barn rafters.

To press her lost cause, Isabel had learned the art of theatrical make-up from her mother, Bess, so as to have the pleasure of doing Tenderfoot’s make-up. And he had to confess, there was something calming in her touch, in her presence, which settled his nerve before a shoot or dress rehearsal—in the same way he had seen the spirited appaloosa grow calm under the gentling hand of the young wrangler, Cole. This he had witnessed during breaks in outdoor shoots when he stood at the corral between Ophelia and Isabel, their arms draped over the top rail, watching the wrangler prep the horses for a scene in which Tenderfoot was to try and “break” this unbroken mount before the adoring eyes of his sweetheart Nell.

Ophelia, who didn’t miss much at these shoots and rehearsals, caught the blue shine that appeared in Cole’s eyes whenever he looked Isabel’s way. The teenage theatrical savant, while pleased by the wrangler’s attention, affected annoyance, perhaps because, while boyishly good-looking, he lacked the matinee idol looks of Tenderfoot—perhaps because something was lost in her heart in the translation from this real cowboy to her make-believe one. Though each “wrangler” did justice to a cowboy hat and a neck kerchief, one was missing the halo of the silver screen and the stage lights.

Isadora’s eyes had the same “polished apple” look whenever they turn toward Bashful Whirlwind (Francisco). In The Barn, these adolescent flirtations had their adult counterparts in The Company, which existed not just in the three dimensions of a current shoot or rehearsal, but in the fourth dimension of previous sage brush romances. Thus, these liaisons existed not just in space but in time. They also developed not just between players, but between members of the crew, sometimes crossing the bounds between them—giving the group dynamics within the company a complex, entangled, shifting, and seemingly “incestuous” nature, which often took years to fully comprehend. This was because the histories of these company romances were unfolded in a fitful manner: by a chance remark over a pint at the Pig and Whistle, while watching a scene in the bleachers, or by the serendipitous interception of a look between players which betrayed something of the history between them.

Realizing some things were simply beyond his power to control, Walter regarded these romances and the tensions that came with them no differently than he regarded the spirited behavior of corralled thoroughbreds. In the end, he knew the actor would tame the lover when the red light came on, and the starting bell sounded the chase. Though all too human in their hearts, they were blooded professionals when it came time to play. The pressure of live performance and the blood of romantic hearts already heated with the energy of their collaboration, resulted in a charged harmony—not unlike the combustible fusion that occurs between atoms at extreme temperatures.

Ophelia blinked free of these thoughts as she watched Leo and his assistant, Isadora, duct tape lighting cables to the barn floor, under the bleachers, and up to the tech booth. The pair were as inseparable as a he-coon and his daughter, as they went about their business on the edges of the light, venturing to and from the booth, as if from an electric cave. To Bernardo, the lighting director was known as Quasimodo, or simply Q.

“When he and Walter are talking,” his whispered to his fellow night watch, Francisco, “it’s like a Gargoyle’s head is speaking from the heights of Notre Dame!”

“He gives me the willies . . . It’s like Lon Chaney has snuck into The Barn . . . been sleeping up in the hay loft . . . talking to the mice!”

“He looks at us players like we stole his girl!”

“Or would dump a bucket of tar on our heads . . . if we dared talk to him directly!”

“It’s like having our own Frankenstein in the company!”

“Probably gets all his juice from the cables and control panel . . . a mad scientist as lighting designer.”

“Do you think he sleeps with his roll of electrical tape!”

“Only when he’s not sleeping with a titty-pink gel!”

“Do you think he was conceived by a lightning bolt?”

As if on cue, The Barn strobe-lighted in a white light.

The two night watchmen exchanged a spooked look—as if a live current connected Leo’s lighting booth to the electrically charged heavens.

“It’s not safe to talk about him like this . . . at least not tonight!”

 Leo had been scurrying back and forth between the set and the booth—climbing a step ladder to insert or replace a gel, sliding it into the square metal frame ten feet above the barn floor. As he headed back to the bleachers, and the ladder leading up to the hay loft, his scuffed black boot tripped on a cable insufficiently duct-taped to the floor. He merely looked at the girl who was crouching on the floor taping down another cable some yards away. He cleared his throat to get Isadora’s attention and pointed to the offending cable. She immediately stopped what she was doing and a moment later was kneeling over the spot, as he clod-hopped up the bleachers.

Many of the players not on stage were seated in the bleachers, studying their “sides, snacking on sandwiches from brown paper bags in between sips of coffee from a thermos. Many kept one eye on the rehearsal below, for fear of missing one of Walter’s comic interventions. In a deserted part of the barn, Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern were running their lines while waiting for their scene to be “called.” Walter realized that by encouraging their spirit of playfulness, then giving it free reign in rehearsal, he risked losing control of the process—as if opening Pandora’s Box.

*But after-all,* he reminded himself*, it is a send-up! We need a script for that . . . which we have to pull out of thin air. So why not let them co-author it for me . . . with Isabel setting the type-script? Letting the dialogue bleed from the stage into the bleachers . . . as part of the show?*

Done conferring with his Script Mistress, Walter turned his attention back to the night watch, wondering what tricks his old vaudevillian, Bernardo, might spring on him next.