

FADE IN:

INT. CASTING OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

EARNEST ACTORS prepare to audition before the career-making casting director PERCIVAL WILBERFORCE.

BOOTH

I love you --

MONTY

My love is ages old, ever new --

FORREST

Before the world, my love awaited.

BOOTH

Awaited its maker, awaited its name.

INT. PERCIVAL'S CASTING SPACE - DAY

A DART FLIES into the headshot of each actor.

INT. CASTING OFFICE RESTROOM - DAY

An actor speaks his lines lovingly to the mirror.

MITCHUM

Now you have named it --

A sweating actor sits on the toilet with his script.

FIELDS

You have made my heart a holy place.

And in the next stall, another actor rehearses.

LAUREL

And my mind is its minister --

INT. CASTING OFFICE - ANOTHER CORNER

STEWART

If you cannot love me --

HENRY

Can never, never love me --

INT. PERCIVAL'S CASTING SPACE - DAY

ACTORS (V.O.)

Yet will I love you -- yet will I love
you -- yet will I love you --

A BLACK MARKER SCRAWLS AND DEFACTS the actors' headshots: "I Suck!" - "My Name is Shitface!" - "I'm An Idiot Actor!"

EXT. CASTING OFFICE PARKING LOT - DAY

Actors roam over the lot rehearsing their lines.

DEAN

-- Fiercely.

MARLON

Fairly.

HUMPHREY

Freely.

ROBINSON

Forevermore.

PAUL

I will love you forevermore.

INT. PERCIVAL'S CASTING SPACE - DAY

The actors' headshots are RIPPED TO SHREDS.

INT. CASTING OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

VICTORIA AVON, Percival's junior partner, listens to HORRIFIC SCREAMS OF RAGE AND DESPAIR behind Percival's door.

INT. CASTING OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

Victoria enters and addresses the WAITING ACTORS.

VICTORIA

Actors, can I have your attention, please? Percival has asked that you refrain from smiling at him, it is, and I quote, 'making his flesh crawl.' So please be sure you are not smiling at the casting director as you enter the audition space.

MONTY

Cool. I'm always intense and suffering anyway.

BURTON

(broad smile)

Can someone help me out here? Am I smiling?

DEAN

(doing deadpan)

I'll just do my deadpan.

VICTORIA

No kiss ass, no smart ass. And please do not try to shake Percival's hand.

She turns to another actor, TRACY.

VICTORIA

Do you have any idea where your pal
Keats McCaro -- excuse me, fucking
Keats McCaro, could be?

TRACY

Denmark, maybe? Abusing Ophelia?

VICTORIA

Ha ha. You know what? You're both way
too cool to have careers.

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY

LOW BATTERY BEEPS as KEATS McCARO argues on his cell phone.

KEATS

Mom, Mom, listen to me, I am not doing
drama, I am not exaggerating, I am truly
hysterical. I am being evicted in three
days. Mom, this is a small loan, I will
pay you back, I told you I am waiting on
a residual check. I don't know, it was
supposed to be here already. I just
need you to cover me for a few weeks.
You are not paying my rent every month.
You have paid it four times. Right, six
times, but I paid you back twice. Mom,
it is not my fault Regan bailed on me, she
stole everything while I was gone. Hey,
don't call me that. Don't call me that!
I don't call you 'Mother Superior,' you
don't call me 'the eternal undergraduate.'
We agreed on that last week!

Keats grabs his headshot and strides to the door.

KEATS

No, I am not getting a second job.
Because it violates my vision of myself!
Because that would make me a part-time
artist! No, Mom, I am too important to
the American drama, I have to save my
energy for art. You know I'm founding
my theatrical company, you know I'm
ushering in a new age of poetry and
performance and truth in art. No, it's
ridiculous! Mom, Prince Hamlet does not
wait tables! Mom, I am on my way to the
biggest audition of my life and this is
not good for my genius. Yes you are, you
are violating my vision of myself and
corrupting my confidence, and it is not
good for my genius!

EXT. KEATS' APARTMENTS - DAY

Keats hurries to his car.

KEATS

I can't believe you asked me that. No, I have not been gambling! Mom, I swear by all that is holy, from the most hallowed place in my heart, I have not been gambling! Mom listen to me, listen to me, actively listen to me. I am broke, I am eating bologna and ranch-style beans, I have no beer, I am going to be living in my car, and my car has no gas! Mom, I am your son. I am desperate. Are you going to send me the money? Are you going to send me the money? What? Hey, are you there? Are you there? Hey!

(trying to redial)

My battery is dead. My battery is dead!

INT. CASTING OFFICE - DAY

Victoria is on the 'phone, leaving Keats a message.

VICTORIA

Keats, if you are drunk, if you are playing poker in some God-forsaken place, if you are in Vegas, if you are once again sabotaging yourself and everyone around you --

(waving at actor, back to 'phone)

You are a loser, you are a liar, you are a lowlife scum-sucking shit-dick.

(smiling at actor)

Hi, Paul! You look great!

(back into 'phone)

You cannot do this to me. I will slit your sack and stomp your ugly balls. I will squash your ugly balls into little red spots, Keats. While you watch, you fucking phony!

(smiling at actor)

Hi, Anne! I love your new headshot!

(back into 'phone)

And don't worry, darling, I'll make sure your agent drops you like a turd. We'd hate to harass you with more auditions.

INT. CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Keats is speeding along. SOUNDS OF ENGINE LOCKING UP.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Keats opens his hood and is ENGULFED IN SMOKE.

KEATS

No! No! No! Shit on you, Satan!

(pacing)

This is not a sign. This is not a sign!

He sees ROSALIND at her car across the street.

KEATS

Hi! I'm Keats McCaro and you've seen me on television. My 'phone is dead, my car is on fire, and I am late for the audition of my life! Will you give me a ride to my audition? This is my headshot. It verifies my identity. The resume lists a number of my accomplishments. I can assure you rapists, robbers, and psycho killers do not roam our fair city with headshots in their hands.

(beat)

I'll give you fifty bucks and ride in the trunk.

Rosalind studies him.

ROSALIND

You don't have to ride in the trunk.

INT. THUG CAR - DAY

HAMMERHEAD and POUNDER, "disciplinarians" for the HAWKMAN, are on the telephone as they watch Keats.

HAMMERHEAD

(into 'phone)

He's hitching up with a random chick.

POUNDER

He's an erratic individual. It's hard to deal with him and that makes me dislike him even more.

HAMMERHEAD

(into 'phone)

You want to do this in front of a random chick? Yeah. We'll just follow for a while.

INT. ROSALIND'S CAR - DAY

ROSALIND

K-e-a-t-s? Like John Keats?

KEATS

My father adored John Keats, and I'm very much my father's son. 'Fair creature of an hour.' Did you think it was a stage name?

ROSALIND

I thought it was a little different. Like you.

(beat)

So what kind of stuff have you done on TV?

KEATS

Well, it would take a long time to list my credits. But you've probably seen my Boenhoffer Beer commercial -- the new one? Where the dog is on his hind legs carrying the tray of beers to the guys? I'm the friend who says, 'Whoa.'

ROSALIND

You're the friend, and you say 'whoa.'

KEATS

Yeah, it's like, supernatural, they always give me the most challenging part. I mean, I have to create this kind of masculine communion at the altar of the television, I have to evoke this history, this tradition of the guys gathering together in the name of spectator sports, I have to make this canine connection, and I have to summon this genuine awe, this stupefaction, that this dog is holding out a tray of beers with his paws, serving me, and expecting a tip. I have, what, nine seconds to achieve all this? So the director has me say 'whoa' twenty-eight times. I do it twenty-eight different ways, feeling it, believing it, every time. He is swooning. I said, 'Dude, you heard I was difficult. I am difficult. But this is why you work with Keats McCaro, baby. I bring truth to everything I do.'

(beat)

Rosalind, your beauty is so rare, so radiant, I can barely breathe. My heart is jumping like a little boy who just got out of school --

ROSALIND

Thank you. Are you acting?

KEATS

Do I seem like I'm acting?

INT. CASTING SPACE - DAY

Monty gets into character as the villain of "The Poor Player."

MONTY

What up, Orsino? Listen, the new dialogue is beautiful and heartfelt and everything, but I need you to write some good stuff for the chick to scream while I'm bangin' her. And write some jokes about how massive my cock is, and give it lots of girth.

INT. ROSALIND'S CAR - DAY - DRIVING

ROSALIND

This is kinda cool, I really want to see your commercial now.

KEATS

You haven't seen my commercial? It's a network national. It's prime time. It's running during all the sports --

ROSALIND

I never watch television, I haven't seen a film in like a year --

KEATS

Why not?

ROSALIND

I'm always reading. Passionately. Voraciously. For hours.

KEATS

You read?

ROSALIND

Novels, short stories, lots of poems. It's more like making your own movies, in your mind. I like my private images more than what I see on screens. They're a lot more interesting, and original.

KEATS

I would really like to see those images.

ROSALIND

You probably would. But they're all mine.
(smiling, beat)
So you're a successful actor, huh?

KEATS

You mean financially as well as artistically? I'm doing very well. A network national usually brings in six figures or so. But what is the meaning of money to Keats McCaro? The meaning of money to Keats McCaro is empowerment of his artistic projects --

ROSALIND

Is there another Keats McCaro? You keep talking about yourself like you're somebody else.

KEATS

You're supposed to do that when you become known. Can I not rehearse for future fame?

INT. THUG CAR - DAY

POUNDER

You notice how this charlatan never shuts up?

HAMMERHEAD

Talk is cheap. Gambling isn't.

POUNDER

I definitely do not like him. I know I'm right when I don't like a guy.

INT. ROSALIND'S CAR - DAY

ROSALIND

So what is the 'difficult' Keats McCaro auditioning for?

KEATS

"The Poor Player." It's a backstage drama, the director is Nathaniel Scott, I've adored his work since he was off-Broadway. He made a no-budget film that changed my life and he's been fighting to tell this story for seven years. He's pitching it as 'Cyrano Learns All About Eve in Day For Night.' I'm Orsino Johnson, this poor, shy, lonesome playwright who's being produced for the first time, and I fall in love with my leading lady --

ROSALIND

That surprises me.

KEATS

The foundation is a cliché, but then it grows organically into something new. Anyway, I realize my play is transforming this actress into the very lover I've imagined and longed for my whole life. Through the power of my words, through belief in my words, my ideal, my soul's mate, is becoming real right before my eyes. And I have to talk to her but I can't talk to her because I'm shy and I stutter. I can only write new dialogue to express how I feel and I have to let the show's star speak for me, and he hates learning new lines and he hates poetry and he hates her because she's refused his advances, and this malicious moronic motherfucker keeps mangling my words! I hate bad actors, man.

ROSALIND

I believe it --

KEATS

So now it's the big opening night and the star and the understudy go on a binge and after various shenanigans, contrived, but cute, forgivable, they end up in hospital beds in matching body casts, the curtain is going up, the show must go on, and what do you think happens? Yeah, hell yeah -- I step into the role. And I have to become my own character, prove my own words, and confess my love at last. And I realize as my leading lady looks at me and speaks my words back to me that this beautiful woman, this word made flesh, has created me, made me an artist for the ages, and a hymn soars out of me, unbidden, and right there on the stage, in this imaginary scene, we live a poem of true love, a love poem for all time, and maybe beyond time -- this is totally a writer's fantasy, every writer wants to be an actor.

ROSALIND

That's a film I might want to see.

KEATS

Yeah, it should be pretty good if I'm in it.

(beat)

Rosalind, your eyes are enthralling me. I mean they are emanating -- mischievous sympathy, passion, it's playful, but it's passion, a high spirit that hails adventure -- I'm looking at you, and I'm like, wow --

ROSALIND

Don't you mean 'whoa?'

INT. PERCIVAL'S ROOM - DAY

MAD CACKLING as PISS TRICKLES over Keats' headshot.

INT. ROSALIND'S CAR - DAY

KEATS

Can I ask you a personal question?
Did you envision me as the lovesick
playwright?

ROSALIND

I was kind of seeing you as the
obnoxious actor guy.

KEATS

No. I'm Orsino. I mean, when I look inside
myself I realize I'm very romantic and
bookish and vulnerable and shy. I have
stammered many times in my life. Just
give me some spectacles, a stutter, some
kind of homely sweater corduroy thing --
and then, when I take off my glasses and
step out on stage and become the leading
man of my own story -- you will swoon.

ROSALIND

You do kind of have a way with words.

KEATS

See, I am Orsino and Orsino is me.

(beat)

Let me ask you something else. Do I
look like Hamlet?

INT. PERCIVAL'S ROOM - DAY

GUTTERAL CURSES as Tracy's headshot is KNIFED and SLASHED.

EXT. CASTING BUILDING - DAY

Rosalind and Keats stand at the car.

KEATS

Wow.

ROSALIND

Whoa.

KEATS

I have a confession to make. I have no money. When I told you I'd pay you fifty bucks, I meant eventually, when I get my residual check.

ROSALIND

Don't be crass. I enjoyed meeting you and if you get the part, it'll make a great story.

KEATS

That's what I was thinking! It's so compelling! You think you're going to the store and you drive yourself into the heart of the American Drama! Rosalind, I love you. My soul, your servant, pursues you to the verge of space, my thoughts of you outnumber the stars. Yes, those are my lines, but I am living them, and I so need this right now.

Keats and Rosalind KISS, rolling along the car, then gape at one another in surprise.

KEATS

The drama never dies. I am a playwright, I am lovesick, thank you. I'll call you tonight.

ROSALIND

Yeah, I want to hear all about it.

KEATS

I'm a leading man, right? Potentially your leading man?

ROSALIND

If you stop performing.

KEATS

That's my sign! That's my sign!

Keats trots over the lot, greeting friends, reciting lines.

KEATS

I love you. My love is ages old, ever new -- hey man! I love you -- what up, dude? Hey, they called you in? They lookin' at older and fatter? Rock on! Whoo! I'm feelin' pretty good!

EXT. BUILDING WALL - DAY

Hammerhead and Pounder step out.

POUNDER

Hi, Keats.

HAMMERHEAD

Does nineteen thousand six hundred and fifty dollars seem like serious money to you? It does to the Hawkman.

KEATS

Hey, I already talked to the Hawkman, he knows I'm waiting on a residual check!

HAMMERHEAD

Reality check. You're waiting on a reality check.

POUNDER

Why you gambling money you don't have, Keats?

HAMMERHEAD

Now you can't afford a stunt double.

KEATS

Guys, let's do something fresh and audacious. Let's don't punch Keats --

Hammerhead and Pounder grab Keats and PUMMEL him.

KEATS

Don't hit my face, man! I can't make money if you fuck up my face!

Keats falls, and Hawkman and Pounder KICK VICIOUSLY.

KEATS

Hey! I've got a love scene to do!

HAMMERHEAD

Don't keep the Hawkman waiting.

POUNDER

It's rude.

HAMMERHEAD

It's unethical.

POUNDER

Keats, you reading for the sissybitch? I'd cast you as the sissybitch.

The disciplinarians stroll off.

KEATS

This is not a sign.

Tracy comes out the door, dazed. Keats rises painfully.

KEATS

Tracy! How'd it go, man?

TRACY

Primal. I think it was primal.

KEATS

Did you read with Percival? Who else is in there?

TRACY

I don't know.

(beat)

We have to make choices. How do we make the right choice? I chose to be an actor. Why?

KEATS

Tracy, what are you talking about?

TRACY

See? You can't answer me.

Tracy shuffles off. Keats stares after him.

KEATS

You're a good actor, dude!

INT. CASTING OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

Keats hurries inside and a furious Victoria waits for him.

VICTORIA

Where have you been?

KEATS

My 'phone died and my car flamed. And I just got pummeled outside.

VICTORIA

I don't believe a word you say. Do you know what I went through to get you this read -- you do not appreciate me!

KEATS

Baby, I do, I do --

VICTORIA

This is Percival Wilberforce, Keats! He is best friends with the director!

KEATS

I'll be brilliant. I've got Cyrano, Dante, Troilus, Abelard, they're with me, they're in me, I'm even gonna radiate some Romeo, baby. I will be as great as nature! I will be poetry personified! He will swoon!

VICTORIA

Justify yourself, Keats. I'm serious.

Keats tries to hug and kiss her.

KEATS

I am too, I am too, I'm really serious --

VICTORIA

You use me because I allow you to use me. I can stop allowing you to use me, Keats, I can --

KEATS

Baby, come here, come here, help me out --

VICTORIA

No, Keats, I am working --

KEATS

Help me believe, help me believe. Tell me I'm beautiful, tell me I'm true --

VICTORIA

When you have to be --

She allows Keats to kiss her, then pushes him away.

VICTORIA

We're running way behind.

KEATS

Good, I'll be ready. Victoria, there is no going back from this righteous rack.
(hands on her breasts)
Oh, that feels good. You soothe me, baby. You brace me. Yeah.

INT. CASTING OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

Keats goes to sign-in and Monty banters with him.

MONTY

Oh no, it's Olivier Brando! We might as well go home!

KEATS

Don't go home, man. Eavesdrop at the door as McCaro makes it happen, steal what you can -- then go home.

(to a passing actor)

Hey, dude.

JULIET waits for him at the sign-in table.

JULIET

Will you fill this out after you sign in?

KEATS

Sure. I haven't met you, I'm Keats.

JULIET

I'm Juliet.

KEATS

Hi, Juliet -- wait a minute. Have I seen you on WB? Wow, I love your cheekbones.

JULIET

Thank you.

KEATS

And your hair. 'My fingers are on fire to trail through those golden streams.'

JULIET

Are you for real?

KEATS

Yes. And your eyes are emanating --

JULIET

They're emanating? What are they emanating?

KEATS

Purity, passion, it's shy, but it's passion, this kind of holy heedfulness, a demand that life be as majestic as your secret yearnings. Juliet -- I love you. Did you believe that?

JULIET

Yeah, kinda.

KEATS

You know why? 'Cause I'm feeling it. And I'll tell you something else. My love is ages old, ever new --

JULIET

Right.

KEATS

Hey, I really mean that --

JULIET

I don't trust guys. I don't believe a word they say, especially if the word is love.

KEATS

Aw, Juliet, come on now --

JULIET

Plus you seem like kind of a player.

KEATS

I'm a playwright, and I believe this so much I am lovesick --

JULIET

There's no such thing as love.

KEATS

Juliet, how can you say that? Love is the divine impulse, the mover of the universe, it sustains the very atoms of our being. Love is the one eternal law, love --

Dean, pale and dazed, comes to sign out and COLLAPSES. CONFUSION as Juliet, Keats, and others check on him.

JULIET

Are you all right?

DEAN

It's just a virus --

Keats stares in shock.

INT. CASTING HALLWAY - DAY

Keats finds Victoria.

KEATS

Hey, one of the actors is --

They hear EERIE SHRIEKS from the reading room.

KEATS

What the hell is that?

VICTORIA

Percival is working through some spiritual difficulties.

KEATS

Is something going on I need to know about? Did you see how weird Tracy was acting --

VICTORIA

Let it go. You need to get ready. It's Junius, Edwin, Monty, then you.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

KATE sits with SYLVIA and MIRANDA and watches Keats chatting up Juliet.

KATE

Ladies and gentlemen, the asshole hovers.

KEATS

(seeing Kate)
Hi, Kate.

KATE

I've done nothing that would encourage you to accost me.

Keats approaches anyway.

KEATS

How is she?

KATE

She's at home with Mom and Dad and crying on my shoulder all day.

KEATS

Don't believe everything she tells you --

KATE

Yeah, why would I believe my own suicidal sister?

Miranda and Sylvia exchange looks as Keats sits among them.

SYLVIA

Oh my God, this is Keats? The eternal undergraduate?

KATE

This is Keats, the great artist and misunderstood genius and William Shakespeare's only begotten Hamlet, which he has yet to present to the public. Keats, this is Miranda, this is Sylvia.

KEATS

Hi, girls --

MIRANDA

So you ditched Regan on her wedding day?

KEATS

I didn't ditch Regan on our wedding day.
I called her to reschedule --

KATE

You called it off at three o'clock in
the morning, Keats. That's the day of
the wedding. Then he had himself a real
bachelor party, which is still in
progress.

SYLVIA

You don't look like I imagined you.

KEATS

How did you imagine me?

SYLVIA

I thought you would look more like a
penis head. Dripping pus.

KEATS

(turning to Miranda)

So -- you're reading for the runaway?

MIRANDA

Yeah. Are you reading for the conceited
actor guy?

KEATS

No. I'm Orsino, the playwright.

KATE

That's ridiculous.

KEATS

Why is it ridiculous?

KATE

Orsino is a man who truly loves. You
could never express true love. You're
not that good an actor.

SYLVIA

Maybe if you do an affective memory.
Regan is loving you and believing in
you when no one else does --

KATE

Handing you more money --

KEATS

(to Miranda)

Now who wouldn't want this charming girl for a sister-in-law?

Keats rises and goes back to Juliet.

MIRANDA

(to Kate)

You are so mean sometimes.

KATE

He ditched my sister on her wedding day. Fuck him, up the ass, with a big, broad, blunt object.

Victoria is organizing the actors.

VICTORIA

Good to see you, Edwin. Monty, are you ready?

(to Keats)

Quit flirting, focus, and don't fuck up.

Miranda approaches Keats.

MIRANDA

Hi. I forgot to tell you. I saw your beer commercial. It's really cute. You did a lot with it.

KEATS

Thank you -- what's the matter?

MIRANDA

I just want to do good. I want this so bad and I want to do so good, and there are so many people --

KEATS

Hey, don't worry about other people. Not one person here has what you have.

MIRANDA

What do I have?

KEATS

Yourself. There is no one like you in all creation, there never has been and there never will be. You are a marvel, a masterwork of the Divine Maker. And you're not a vindictive bitch like Kate, which is a real advantage --

MIRANDA

I just keep hearing how hard Percival
is on actors --

KEATS

Percival Wilberforce is here to help you.
How can he look good if you look bad?
He wants to show Nathaniel Scott a
beautiful, gifted young artist, a
witness to human wonder, and that is
you, Miranda.

MIRANDA

Wow, you have me believing this --

KEATS

Believe it. I do.

MIRANDA

Also I was wondering -- I'm doing this
showcase and I need a really strong
partner who has a lot of experience --

KEATS

Hey, man, I'm not playing your dirty
step-dad or your English instructor --

MIRANDA

No, you'd be my pimp. It's real intense.

KEATS

I'm totally pimp, totally intense.

VICTORIA (O.C.)

Keats?

KEATS

Miranda -- I love you. My thoughts of you
outnumber the stars, my words, seeking
you, create new constellations --

VICTORIA (O.C.)

Keats!

INT. CASTING HALLWAY - DAY

Victoria frowns as Keats pauses in the hallway.

KEATS

I'll be back.

He turns to the wall and "enters" the Stage of Keats' Soul.

INT. THE STAGE OF KEATS' SOUL - DAY

Keats parts the curtains and comes out on an EMPTY STAGE.

KEATS

All Hail to Thee, Heavenly Muse! Kiss thy blessing upon this brow, palm this pulsing breast, dwell in this quick commodious heart and grace these ready limbs. Make these eyes luminous portals, let wonders and secrets pass. Sing through these lips the sacred language of the Poet Primal, make music of meaning, fathom this stranger my soul and form a living emblem to bear your treasures to yearning spirits in every land and age to be. Tell your tale of beauty, sorrow, shame, splendor, show a multitude in one man. May I win glad tidings for hopes forlorn, truth's high communion, a waning world, the moment immortal -- a glimpse of God.

Keats is "dissected" by the camera as he presents himself.

KEATS (CONT'D)

Height: six feet, one inch. Weight: 175 pounds. Waist: 32 inches, inseam 34 inches, shirt: large, coat size 41, shoe size 11-D. Hair: dark brown, traces of silver. Eyes: hazel. Essence: holy fire. You shall see. You shall see.

Keats gazes out on a vast empty theatre.

INT. CASTING HALLWAY - DAY

Keats turns back to Victoria.

KEATS

I know who I am.

Keats and Victoria walk toward Percival's room.

KEATS

Hey, who got that pilot we were all --

VICTORIA

"Lethal Lovers?" Cary Cagney.

KEATS

They gave it to Cary Cagney? Fuck that guy, he's terrible! He's a face-maker, he's got no holy fire, and he's not nearly as hot as I am. Fuck that guy!
(CONT'D)

KEATS (CONT'D)

No, that's good, that's good, let 'im
have it, he needs it more than I do.
He's totally TV, his career is over
anyway, I'm Orsino, he's not, fuck 'im.

Monty is staggering out of Percival's room. He falls on his
knees, sobbing. Victoria kneels to help him.

MONTY

I love you -- I love you --

Victoria motions Keats on as Monty babbles in her bosom.

VICTORIA

(remembering)

Don't smile --

INT. PERCIVAL'S SPACE - DAY

Keats enters smiling. He sees headshots riddled with darts,
torn to shreds.

Percival stares from his table, surrounded by bottles of
liquor, pills, an ashtray, a roach clip.

KEATS

Hi. Keats McCaro.

Percival makes notes.

PERCIVAL

Do you think I could wipe my ass with
your headshot?

KEATS

I'm not sure --

PERCIVAL

Then what is it good for?

(beat)

So you're an actor.

KEATS

Yes.

PERCIVAL

Bravo. You are an actor! That means
you are beautiful and interesting to
watch. That means you feel deeply, far
more deeply than we common folk can
fathom. I want to thank you on behalf
of humanity for being an actor.

(beat)

You've had plenty of time to look over
the sides, right?

KEATS

Read the whole script, love it, I'm pumped.

PERCIVAL

Any questions?

KEATS

Uh, no, I think I got it.

PERCIVAL

You certainly do. All right, whenever you're ready.

KEATS

I love you. My love is ages old, ever new. Before the world, my love awaited. Awaited its maker, awaited its name. Now you have named it. You have made my heart a holy place. And my mind is its minister --

PERCIVAL

Whoa. You really looked this over?

KEATS

Yeah, I really worked on this --

PERCIVAL

This script?

KEATS

Yes.

PERCIVAL

All right, let's try it again.

KEATS

Okay, uh -- you wanna change anything or --

PERCIVAL

Just make a strong choice.

KEATS

Okay. I thought I was making a strong choice, but I'll try to make a stronger choice --

PERCIVAL

And try to be real. Good acting is about being real. Do you know what that word means -- real? All right, whenever you're ready.

KEATS

I love you --

PERCIVAL

Part of the problem is your eyes remind me of someone and I hate his fucking guts. All right, invite me in.

KEATS

I love you. My love is ages old, ever new --

PERCIVAL

Ouch. I'm sorry, but you're excruciating. You consider that real?

KEATS

Yeah -- I mean that felt pretty real to me --

PERCIVAL

That's how you would say it in life?

KEATS

Well, I don't know if I would say this kind of stuff in --

PERCIVAL

Why not? Because you're not romantic? Because your soul has no majesty?

KEATS

No, I just mean this is poetic and most of life is prose, and we don't have a lot of opportunities for poetry. But I am really feeling this.

PERCIVAL

Are you sure? I don't feel it at all. If I'm not feeling it, you are faking it. Okay, I've got hundreds of actors waiting out there, but I'm a really cool person, I'm a really kind person, and I'm going to give you another shot.

(beat)

Maybe it's your nose that's bugging me. Okay, go.

KEATS

I love you --

PERCIVAL

Like you know what love is. Invite me in, let's go.

KEATS

I love you. My love is ages old, ever
new --

PERCIVAL

Bullshit.

KEATS

Excuse me?

PERCIVAL

Is it me?

KEATS

Is what -- I'm --

PERCIVAL

Are you having a hard time saying
these words to me? Do you find me
unattractive or something?

KEATS

Not at all.

PERCIVAL

Are you sure?

KEATS

I find you very attractive.

PERCIVAL

Don't lie to me.

KEATS

I find you very attractive, I swear.

PERCIVAL

What do you find attractive about me?

KEATS

Everything --

PERCIVAL

That's a vague choice. I told you to
make a strong choice. A specific choice.

KEATS

Your eyes -- they emanate this kind of
fury for the truth, this keen azure
awareness, I like the sensuous sculpting
of your cheekbones and how your hair
frames your face. Your lips are wary,
but sensitive, and I think they'd be warm
and consoling. I'm very attracted to you.

PERCIVAL

Is that how you talk to a girl? Is that how you woo? I'll bet you fuck a lot of girls in a very manly fashion and all you have to speak is prose. Who needs poetry when you have a penis, right? I don't see your phallic measurements on your resume. How big is your penis?

KEATS

Are you serious?

PERCIVAL

Yes.

KEATS

Seven inches. Stiff.

PERCIVAL

I'm very proud of you. Now give me some poetry with that big penis of yours.

KEATS

I love you.

PERCIVAL

Say it to me! Make me your girl!

KEATS

I love you --

PERCIVAL

Again!

KEATS

I love you.

PERCIVAL

I realize I'm missing the orifice you need most. Make me feel it, Mr. Seven Inch Stiffy! Make me complete.

KEATS

I love you.

PERCIVAL

Do I need to augment my breasts? Would that help you here? Would that make me your ideal?

KEATS

You're already my ideal.

PERCIVAL

If I'm your ideal, why don't you want me?

KEATS

I do want you!

PERCIVAL

I want love!

KEATS

I'm giving you love!

PERCIVAL

Really? Is that what you're expressing here? Tell me all about love.

KEATS

Love is, love is a feeling we --

PERCIVAL

A feeling? Fuck your feeling. A feeling fades. This scene is not about a feeling.

(beat)

Have you ever loved anyone?

KEATS

Yes.

PERCIVAL

I mean besides yourself.

KEATS

Yes, I have.

PERCIVAL

You've never even married.

KEATS

How do you know that?

PERCIVAL

I know a lot. I know you want to rape me physically, emotionally and psychically.

KEATS

No, I want to give you true love. My love transcends desire, it transcends death --

PERCIVAL

Your heart is a holy place.

KEATS

Yes.

PERCIVAL

Confess it.

KEATS

You have made my heart a holy place and
my mind is its minister. My soul, your
servant --

A LOUD OBNOXIOUS FART stops Keats.

PERCIVAL

That's what your words mean. You don't
love me.

KEATS

Yes I do.

PERCIVAL

No, you don't.

KEATS

I truly love you!

PERCIVAL

And who is that, pray tell? Whom do
you love?

KEATS

A man -- a woman -- an ideal --

PERCIVAL

You don't even know me.

KEATS

We never truly know one another, but
in love we seek with all our being --

PERCIVAL

You love an illusion. And the illusion
is you.

KEATS

No, we recognize -- this is what I'm
saying as a playwright. Before the
world, we await, we originate in perfect
love, we're forged, figured in holy fire,
we come forth with a divine spark that
sustains us --

PERCIVAL

What the fuck are you talking about?

KEATS

Our love is a divine spark and when we
join, our sparks create a flame that
warms us in the cosmic cold and in that
light we seek one another and we
recognize kin, and we have a glimpse
of God --

PERCIVAL

You believe that?

KEATS

Yes.

PERCIVAL

You truly believe that?

KEATS

Yes.

PERCIVAL

Then why don't you live it?

KEATS

I'm still sitting here. I am still sitting here.

PERCIVAL

Listen to me. You are not only utterly wrong for this role, you are lacking the basic human qualities art requires. I've seen a lot of bad actors in my time, but you are the worst. I want you to get out of acting. Right now.

KEATS

What?

PERCIVAL

Actors are supposed to be good listeners. I told you to get out of acting, right now.

KEATS

Get out of acting? This has been my dream since I was eight years old.

PERCIVAL

Stop dreaming. You have no love, no shame, and no talent. Your soul is a shithole. Give up.

KEATS

Do you know how hard I've worked for this? Do you have any idea what I've suffered, what kind of sacrifices I've made?

PERCIVAL

What can I say? It was all a waste of time.

KEATS

I've been broke and hungry and rejected.
I've had a hundred humiliating jobs, I've
slept on friends' sofas, I've lived in my
car. But I kept the faith, I trained and
trained, I used everything that happened to
me and I turned it into art! I live acting,
I breathe it, I feel it, I think it, I
sleep it, I dream it -- I am acting, man!
And I'll tell you something else -- I
like my nose!

PERCIVAL

Then use it. You reek. I don't care how
much you've suffered or what sacrifices
you've made, or how many classes you've
taken. You suck and you're always gonna
suck.

KEATS

That's a lie! I have what it takes. I
have the truth, man --

PERCIVAL

I don't believe a word you say.

KEATS

I have the truth, not you. I embody it,
man. I make it personal and it becomes
universal. I give witness to the infinite
secrets of humanity's soul -- I am the
symbol of the striving spirit!

PERCIVAL

You are a symbol of a pretentious piece
of shit.

KEATS

My work means something, man! I move
people! I help them see -- and they see
more than me. I am their mirror. They
like watching me. They believe in me.
My coaches believe in me! My agent
believes in me.

PERCIVAL

I'm going to call your agent and tell
her to fire your phony ass. I am going
to make sure you never work again.

KEATS

You can't do that!

PERCIVAL

Why not?

KEATS

Because -- because I love you! My love
is ages old, ever new. Before the world,
my love awaited. Awaited its maker,
awaited its name. Now you have named it.
You have made my heart a holy place, and
my mind is its minister. My soul, your
servant, pursues you to the verge of
space, my thoughts of you outnumber the
stars, my words, seeking you, create new
constellations as fixed in time as the
shining symbols of the sky. And true
lovers, wayfarers in a world of woe, will
seek our poem and find themselves, and
know their course, and hold steadfast
until their days are done. If you cannot
love me, can never, never love me -- yet
will I love you, fiercely, fairly,
freely, forevermore.

PERCIVAL

Forevermore?

KEATS

Forevermore.

Keats is on the table, embracing Percival.

PERCIVAL

That was not bad. Bravo. You will meet
Nathaniel this week as my personal
choice for Orsino. And I want you
to believe this more and feel it more
and make it much more real.

EXT. CASTING OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

Keats emerges and walks in a daze down the hall, hugging each
person he sees.

EXT. CASTING OFFICE FRONT STEPS - DAY

Keats sits down. He weeps, in relief, sorrowing
self-knowledge, amazement, exaltation.