

**A DYING ART**

One Act in Seven Slugs

By

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CHARACTERS:

CHARLES CORKUM  
BARRY TRISTRAM  
COB  
HARLOW MARKET  
BETTY CORKUM

Corkum's friend, an amateur snuff filmmaker.  
Corkum's distributor, a snuff film producer.  
Corkum's murderer, a loan shark and strong arm.  
Corkum's wife.

TIME:

The Mid 1980s. In one prologue and one day.

SCENE:

A home and an electronics repair shop. The Western United States.

A NOTE ON THE SET:

The set mimics the blue screen used to superimpose film actors onto a setting; the back wall and floor are blue, their dimensions should mirror each other. Any set pieces should be simple, practical, and symbolic of the setting. The point is that the set is modular and is defined by the given circumstances of the play.

A NOTE ON USAGE:

Whenever a "/" appears in a line, the following dialogue should begin in order to create an overlapping effect.

*A Dying Art* should be played without an intermission.

"A fire – that's what a man is, Gautama. His firewood is speech; his smoke is breath; his flame is the tongue; his embers are sight; and his sparks are hearing. In that very fire gods offer food, and from that offering springs semen."

—*Chandogya Upanisad*

"Hell is for children."

—Pat Benatar

## SLUG ONE: INT. DEAD SYNC ELECTRONICS REPAIR - DAY

(BARRY TRISTRAM'S ELECTRONIC-REPAIR AND FILM-TO-VIDEO TRANSFER SHOP. A moviola, a Super-8 film viewer, casts blue light on the face of BARRY TRISTRAM, who is dressed in cotton-poly action slacks and a likewise cotton-poly button-up. He is fixated. COB sits apart from him. TRISTRAM's shop is projected onto the back wall. Lights up.)

TRISTRAM

Aw, goddamn. I hate to say it, but that's a cheap shot. Shoddy is what it is. Thinks he can just slip this one by me, huh? Like I'm not going to notice he cutaway from his reaction shot. I mean, that's what it's for. You cutaway *to* the reaction shot. I want to see a goddamn reaction.

(raising his voice for COB to hear)

He means to tell me this is the best he can do? It's passable, yes. I mean, it'll make you some money, but...

(beat)

It's nothing super-goddamn-natural, I'll put it that way. You know, just once, just once I'd like to have, I'd like to be responsible for something like this.

(indicating the film)

Only better. Better than this, this B-rate crap. You know, no one, nobody looks at the actual tape, you know, the real tape and says "Goddamn, that's some good work." At least they shouldn't. No one should appreciate *anything* on video anyway. But at least I'm providing a service. At any rate, they only see this film, and say, "Goddamn, that's some good work" because of my good work.

(indicating the VCR)

But the way things are going with this, that kind of hi-fi... And by the way, I'm half glad this thing ended up in my hands, means that's one more off the street. But the way things are going, I have to say it's not long, not long before I'm obsolete. Film-to-video transfer is going the way of the dodo bird, my friend. It is a dying art.

(indicating the film on the moviola)

You know, he actually had the nerve to tell me he was *going* to use his new camcorder on this one. His *camcorder*. Can you believe that? To him, it's got nothing to do with permanence. Nothing.

COB

Just transfer it.

TRISTRAM

Yeah, yeah, I'm getting there. You know, to you, you're just, nevermind...

COB

What?

TRISTRAM

Fine. You don't know your mirror shutters from you beam-splitters.

(pointing at the moviola)

Same for him. All he says, all he says is make it look good, like he thinks I'm some kind of transfer magician. Just the other day he says, "Just put it to tape and get it to Cob." Just put it to tape and get it to Cob. I'm just the middleman. That's what you guys think, huh? I'm just, you know, I'm like the guy who cleans the booths at a peep show.

COB

Just put it to tape and get it to me.

TRISTRAM

Right, just put it to tape and get it to Cob. Yeah, well, the guy who cleans the booths at the peep show, I'll bet that guy could tell you more about film than, than anyone. The filmmaker, if he's anything like this guy, just jams a tape in a camcorder and slaps a few people together. And that booth, if it weren't for the guy who cleans up the booth at the peep show, that booth would be too dirty for guys like you to make money on.

(CHARLES CORKUM enters. TRISTRAM fumbles to turn off the projector. CORKUM sits cloaked in shadow and brow-rubbing self-pity.)

TRISTRAM (cont.)

Mr. Corkum. Goddamn, buzz first. That's why there's a buzzer.

CORKUM

It was open.

TRISTRAM

Goddamn, Cob. Did you leave the door open? Listen, this is a bad time. Busy season. You think you could stop by later?

(silence)

You don't look so good.

(picking up a VCR)

This isn't about the hi-fi, is it? I mean, once you sell it to me, it's, well, it's not yours. I've already got the heads in a machine halfway across the county by now.

CORKUM

No. I know.

TRISTRAM

Okay, then. You think you could stop by another time? I'm smack in the middle of something?

CORKUM

It can't wait...

TRISTRAM

Look, Mr. Corkum, unless you've got something to sell, or else you want to buy something / I've gotta ask--

CORKUM

*Please.* I don't, I don't know, know where else to go...

TRISTRAM

Can you make it quick?

CORKUM

I'll, I'll try...

TRISTRAM

(indicating to COB to leave)

Cob, would you...?

CORKUM

He can stay.

TRISTRAM

What can I do you for, Mr. Corkum?

CORKUM

My wife... I'm here because of my wife.

TRISTRAM

Mrs. Corkum?

CORKUM

It's about the money.

TRISTRAM

Money?

CORKUM

That I owe the...

TRISTRAM

The goon? Is this about the loan shark?

CORKUM

Yeah, yes. But I'm more worried about Mrs. Corkum. What she'd do if something, when something happens to me.

TRISTRAM

What are you talking about, Mr. Corkum?

CORKUM

I just need some...

TRISTRAM

Some what? Why are you here, Mr. Corkum?

CORKUM

My wife.

TRISTRAM

No, no, I, I know. But why are you *here*?

CORKUM

You're a good friend. I don't have anywhere else, / I can go...

TRISTRAM

So you need more money?

Yes. CORKUM

TRISTRAM  
New credit to cover your bad credit?

CORKUM  
/ Well, yeah, no, I ...

TRISTRAM  
What makes you think I have that kind of money?

CORKUM  
I've seen it around here.

TRISTRAM  
I'd like to make something like that happen for you, Mr. Corkum, but it's just not something I'm, I just don't have the, the resources...

COB  
(to TRISTRAM)  
Hold now.  
(to CORKUM)  
Spill it.

CORKUM  
*Spill?* Spill what? / Sorry, I don't...

TRISTRAM  
That's his way for asking what happened. Did something happen between you and the goon?

CORKUM  
You mean, what he said, what we talked about, what happened?  
(faltering and hesitant, hand to brow)  
I couldn't... say. What he told me. A few... slurs. Called me ugly. The usual. I tried... to get more time. But he hit me. Down. Down to the ground. He... stooped over me. Said, "You had enough." "Yeah," I said. He hit me again. "Enough," I said. He hit me again. "Please don't hit me." He stopped. Apologized. Said he thought I agreed with him. That I had enough time. I just wanted him to stop hitting me.

TRISTRAM  
How many times did he hit you?

COB

Three.

CORKUM

Four. He hit me in the arm. Once.

TRISTRAM

For flinching?

CORKUM

Yeah, / I guess.

TRISTRAM

So it was friendly?

CORKUM

It still hurt.

TRISTRAM

So, four. Four times.

CORKUM

Yes. Four times. Then he helped me up. Brushed me off.

TRISTRAM

That it, Mr. Corkum? Is that all?

CORKUM

No. Told me I had a big mouth. Talk too much.

TRISTRAM

Right.

CORKUM

He said he was going to kill me.

TRISTRAM

Wait. Kill you?

COB

/ How?

TRISTRAM

For what?

CORKUM

I still owe him the money.

TRISTRAM

Who, what kind of, what kind of loan shark makes good on something like that?  
Just break something, / like a knee cap.

CORKUM

Wait, what?

TRISTRAM

If he kills you, he'll get nothing. What kind of / loan shark--?

COB

How?

CORKUM

How...?

TRISTRAM

How did he threaten to kill you, Mr. Corkum?

CORKUM

He...

TRISTRAM

What?

CORKUM

He said he'd strangle me.

COB

Too clean.

CORKUM

Strangle me, cut my throat, and pull my tongue through.

TRISTRAM

(silence, then)  
Goddamn...

COB

Colombian Necktie. Perfect.

CORKUM

What? / What?

TRISTRAM

That's what he was threatening? A Colombian Necktie? Why?

CORKUM

I don't know.

(beat)

Look, it's not easy. To talk / about this.

TRISTRAM

Sure, I can only imagine.

CORKUM

I... I came to ask, / to ask if you could--

TRISTRAM

You're not here to get your stuff back, are you, Mr. Corkum?

CORKUM

No. I'd only need the money for a few days... I promise.

COB

When?

CORKUM

Now.

TRISTRAM

When what, Cob?

(beat)

Do you mean "When?" as in "Did he say when he would do it?"

CORKUM

Two days.

TRISTRAM

(to CORKUM)

Hold on.

(to COB)

Cob, what are you saying?

COB

Colombian Necktie.

TRISTRAM

What about it?

(beat)

What about it?

COB

You wanted to be responsible for something like this.

TRISTRAM

(beat, turns to CORKUM)

Wait. Him? A, a, a film?

CORKUM

Me? / What?

TRISTRAM

I'm, goddamn, I don't / know...

CORKUM

What?

TRISTRAM

I don't think, I don't think I could do that to him...

COB

Then stay the booth cleaner at the peep show.

(SILENCE.)

TRISTRAM

Then there's some scheduled meet-and-greet? An exchange of sorts. Between you and the goon. What's his name again?

CORKUM

Market.

TRISTRAM

Market. You're supposed to meet. Drop a suit case, something like that.

CORKUM

Yes. Two days. By the factory. Early morning. / Why?

COB

Magic hour.

TRISTRAM

(to COB)

Just hold on.

CORKUM

What?

TRISTRAM

Magic Hour. Just before Dawn. Good for shooting buildings, landscapes.

(beat)

What happens if you go and don't have the money?

CORKUM

Like I said...

TRISTRAM

"Like you said," *what?*

CORKUM

He'll kill me. Why?

TRISTRAM

And if you don't go at all?

CORKUM

He said he'd get me some time.

COB

He's got no other choice.

TRISTRAM

Why don't you just, just disappear for a while?

CORKUM

Where can I go? What about my wife?

COB

(to TRISTRAM)

Here's your chance.

(to CORKUM)

Keep the date.

(to TRISTRAM)

Colombian Necktie.

CORKUM

What are you / talking about?

TRISTRAM

(coughing, then gulping)

Mr. Corkum, a Colombian Necktie is...

(gravely considering)

It's a lot of things, Mr. Corkum.

CORKUM

Like?

TRISTRAM

Well, you know, like rare, for instance.

COB

Valuable.

TRISTRAM

The nature of my business is what drew Cob to it in the first place.

CORKUM

Electronic repair...?

TRISTRAM

And film-to-video transfer.

(beat)

Where as you came to me to sell off your hi-fi equipment, others, men kind of like you, come to me for, to transfer films to video tape.

(long pause)

Let me try to explain what Cob's implying.

(To CORKUM, holding up a dissected VCR)

Mr. Corkum, this is a lot like the VCR you sold me. Seeing it like this, it's probably hard to imagine you ever gave up your hi-fi. New equipment is like a new-born baby. Do you have kids, Mr. Corkum?

CORKUM

No.

TRISTRAM

Then hi-fi is as close as you're going to get, right? But this is an analog world we're handling here, and this baby, your VCR, merely makes magnetic copies. In layman's terms, Mr. Corkum, every time you run something through that VCR, that something is going to look worse and worse until it's unrecognizable. It'd be like a painter faxing his stuff to a gallery. You see what I'm saying?

CORKUM

No, I, I... / don't.

TRISTRAM

No, I, I know you don't. I know it's hard to get a handle on a frequency like this. Bet it's all Japanese to you, you know, just like hi-fi instructions. But just forget

your VCR's made in Japan. Too murky. Forget the baby thing. Too murky. I mean, it's like it's one in the same, Japan and babies.

CORKUM

Please, Barry, I'm, I'm, I just don't understand. You're not / helping.

TRISTRAM

Bear with me. For a minute here.

(beat)

You have the choice to leave something behind. Something that'll last for a long, long time. It's your choice to make though. But Mr. Corkum, I, we can help you make that choice.

CORKUM

What?

COB

Die.

TRISTRAM

No, no, no, / no, no.

CORKUM

*Please.* I don't understand.

TRISTRAM

Let's slow down here. What Cob is trying to say is, he distributes specialty films.

CORKUM

What do you mean, "specialty"? Industrial?

TRISTRAM

Of sorts. But without the indifference.

COB

Snuff.

CORKUM

Snuff film? You mean, you want I should let him kill me? Tape it?

TRISTRAM

God, no. Film it. *Film.*

CORKUM

Snuff film? Are you, are you...? / Snuff film, me?

TRISTRAM

Mr. Corkum, this could be the best thing I, you, we've ever done...

CORKUM

(getting up to leave)

No... No. / No.

TRISTRAM

Mr. Corkum, I'm sorry... I didn't, we didn't... Mr. Corkum, we just wanted to, it was for you, Mr. Corkum.

CORKUM

I'm sorry, I'm not, I'm not right for this kind of thing.  
(He lingers on the verge of leaving.)

TRISTRAM

There's money in it. For you.  
(beat)  
For Mrs Corkum.

CORKUM

Is there ... Is there money in it?

TRISTRAM

But it's not *just* about the money.

CORKUM

I just want, she needs, I just want to provide for Mrs Corkum.

TRISTRAM

Let's forget the *money*. For now. Let me, let me try to reiterate Cob's proposal. In, well, in *camera-man's* terms. We're talking about your legacy. The Corkum name...

(beat)

You can be a headstone *or* you can be a film. The former just waits to be kicked over by shiftless townies. The latter: wide release. A big exhale and your film will breath down necks. For a long run. Longer than your own. Mr. Corkum, if you let me make your film, it'll, we'll both, it'll be a legacy.

CORKUM

Fine. Whatever, whatever it takes to, to take care of Mrs Corkum.

TRISTRAM

You do understand what this means don't you?

CORKUM

Yes.

(silence)

Yes.

(beat)

I'm leaving my life in your hands. I need something in writing.

(beat)

How will, how will you get the money to my wife. You can't tell her where it came from.

COB

Do you have insurance?

CORKUM

No. No. Work benefits were suspended.

COB

Insurance.

TRISTRAM

There you go. You got insurance. Tell Mrs Corkum we're an insurance company, I'm your agent.

(silence)

Trust me. We'll, Cob and I will take care of everything. We will film your death. I will... accommodate the transfer process. Cob will distribute the, / the, you--

COB

Necktie.

TRISTRAM

Cob will distribute you, your film, the Colombian Necktie.

CORKUM

(stammering)

You promise she'll be taken care of?

TRISTRAM

(extending his hand to shake CORKUM's hand)

Yes.

CORKUM

Something in writing. / Please.

TRISTRAM

Sure. Sure.

(rifling through the briefcase and retrieving a business card)

Mr. Corkum, I know, know how much you care about your wife. And nothing says "I care" more than, well, than a life insurance policy. Don't I know.

(handing CORKUM the card)

This'll have to do. My card.

CORKUM

(reading)

*Dead Sync?*

TRISTRAM

Film term. Has to do with sound and image syncing. Name of my store. Dead Sync Electronic Repair and Film-to-Video Transfer. Couldn't fit it all on the window. Can't yet afford the sign. Maybe after the, after this deal.

CORKUM

Dead Sync. Never knew the name.

TRISTRAM

(smiling)

Okay.

(shaking CORKUM's hand)

Two days, Mr. Corkum.

CORKUM

Is, is "thank you" appropriate?

TRISTRAM

No. Thank *you*, Mr. Corkum. Now, why don't you go home and show your wife how much you care.

(END OF SAMPLE. CONTACT AUTHOR FOR FULL SCRIPT.)