

SCENE FROM A STAGE PLAY
The Sandpaper Dragon
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THE SANDPAPER DRAGON
By Johnny Blue Star

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PAUL- Described in text as “handsome, in his late twenties, medium height and build.” Paul probably speaks with a light New York accent. Very uptown in his demeanor initially, appearing casual and urbane, on top of the world, but eventually transformed into a somewhat driven, even brutal person, determined to put his artistry and chosen profession over personal and survival matters. Capable of great integrity, sensitivity but also cruelty and self-centeredness. Paul’s artistic obsession is supported by a certain spiritual paradigm, which also seems to unite within him a kind of lightness and hopefulness with an angry tenacity to follow a decisive path towards his personal truth. Despite all his flaws, Paul is heroic in some way, someone purely obsessed with a search for life’s meaning and his own vocation.

ANITA, described in text as “Paul's wife, a sleek-looking brunette in a dark skirt and peasant blouse.” Her specific hair color or costume is really rather irrelevant, but her character is not. She begins as a loyal, loving wife, but is transformed by poverty and desperation into a nagging, unhappy, shrill victim of her husband’s obsession. But her coping with these hardships and her own violent reaction, leads to a higher degree of self-knowledge and self-esteem.

SID, described in the text as “in his low fifties- a short, rather bald man- with an OPEN COLLAR, his TIE hanging loose. He's Polish- cultured, well-spoken, but with a strong, Jewish accent.” Sid has kind of adopted Paul and respects him. He is a shrewd business person with a sophisticated, but very bottom-line attitude towards success.

CHARLIE, around twenty-four, chunky (a little on the heavy-side but strong), very brusque to the point of rudeness, sarcastic when challenged; has a strong sense of ethics about his work and business. He is both an admirer and hater of Paul. I would consider casting him with a strong Brooklyn accent; very blue collar in appearance, but somewhat of an artist himself.

BERNIE, probably mid-thirties, wild-looking hair, dressed in work clothes, perhaps somewhat paint-splattered, very self-assured even cocky, aesthetic, perhaps a bit effeminate,

MRS. JENNINGS described in the text as “a middle-aged woman in CURLERS, is seated at her KITCHEN TABLE reading THE VILLAGE VOICE. “ Despite her somewhat slovenly appearance and her age, Mrs. Jennings is a sharp, surprising judge of character with a subtle, disarming wit.

BEN described in the text as, “is in his late twenties or early thirties. He wears a moustache. He exhibits a working-man's indifference to his clothing. His CLOTHES are old, all except A LONG LEATHER VEST and WELL-POLISHED BOOTS. He is also wearing a CAP which he takes off and throws onto a TABLE.” Ben is a committed craftsman, like Paul, but much more humane, wise, but perhaps lacking that special, obsessive drive that distinguishes Paul from the people around him. Ben has accepted life, while Paul is trying to unlock its mysteries.

Sample Scene

SETTING

This scene from the play, “The Sandpaper Dragon,” is set in the East Village in the 1970's. Paul, a successful headhunter (personnel recruiter) has decided to follow his dream and open up a woodworking studio, hopefully to become an elite cabinetry shop. To do this, he exposes his wife, Anita, to a life of entrepreneurial challenges and a downgraded lifestyle that fills her with disdain and despair. In this scene, they debate their situation with Paul coming up with a disturbing solution to their dilemma. This scene begins in an Apartment on East Sixth Street. New York in the Afternoon. Sometime in the early 1970s.

AT RISE: Paul and Anita both pacing back and forth
in their small apartment.

INT. LUSH NEW YORK CONDO. UPPER EAST SIDE --
LATE MORNING

Condo is furnished in white with WHITE CARPETS AND CABINETS, COFFEE TABLE AND BOOKSHELVES. PAUL, handsome, in his late twenties, medium height and build, is seated on a BLACK LEATHER ARMCHAIR. He has a COFFEE MUG in one hand and PHONE in the other. From time to time, he seems to forget the mug- at other times, it seems to be an enemy and he pushes it away, annoyed at its presence. From time to time, he actually sips from it.

PAUL

Look, Harry, Suaze is a cockroach. That's all there is to it. People who send him a resume once should be beaten for three days. People who send him one twice should be hung out to dry and shot. So if you think I feel sorry for you-

Paul's reaction indicates he has been hung up on. He shrugs, rapidly pushing more buttons on his PHONE.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Don, the fucker hung up on me so I don't know where he stands. The hell with him.

Picks up some sheets of paper.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Graham Lewis, a little bit the guru type- but, hey, last time I saw him he combed his hair. Fucker runs rings around Harry. Reads tech manuals for breakfast. Wierd sense of humor. I'll zap it to you tomorrow.

ANITA, Paul's wife, a sleek-looking brunette in a dark skirt and peasant blouse walks in.

ANITA

Paul-

PAUL

One minute-

Cups phone.

ANITA

Sid's on the other line.

PAUL

Tell him I'll call him in ten minutes.

ANITA

He wants to know-

PAUL

(sternly)

Ten minutes!

Anita looks at him. Shrugs.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Look, Don- on the Graham thing. You think? Yeah, well, I'll send it tomorrow.

ANITA

No more work-

PAUL

Sid-

ANITA

Sid can wait.

PAUL

Right.

Puts down his cup, takes hers and puts it down. Pulls her to him.

PAUL (CONT'D)

And how is Anita doing?

ANITA
(very warmly)
Anita's fine.

PAUL
I didn't make it. Harry hung
up on me.

ANITA
Why?

PAUL
He was screwing around with
Suaze. Suaze sent him to Bel
Aire for an interview on
Thursday. Wound up spending
three days in a hotel room
alone-

ANITA
What happened?

PAUL
Suaze forgot to confirm him
with the company. They
didn't know where he was and
the dumb jerk was afraid to
call them cause Suaze pre-set
the appointments.

ANITA
What are you going to do?

PAUL
Place Graham Lewis

ANITA
Big bucks?

PAUL
The biggest!

ANITA
Sid's gonna come over if you
don't call him.

PAUL

Let him come. No more work.

ANITA

Right. Sid's family.

PAUL

I just wish I didn't work for him.

ANITA

He's like a father to you.
Look at all he's given us.

PAUL

I admit it. He just expects everybody to be a workaholic like him.

ANITA

Why don't you call him?

PAUL

I get more rest when he comes over. Besides, Sid's fun-

ANITA

He is.

PAUL

Hey, I got something to show you. Stay right here!

Paul comes back with a partially, carved BLOCK OF WOOD. Anita takes it, but it is heavy. She sets it down.

ANITA

I see a little Picasso,
Gaughin in this- more
painters than sculptors- but,
God, Paul, this is ingenious.
What's it for?

PAUL

It's a mantle. I haven't finished it, of course, woodcarving is slow. I had to do this mostly by hand.

When I get more experienced,
I could do half of it with a
router- I think so-

ANITA
For the fireplace?

PAUL
Of course.

ANITA
This is kind of a
contemporary rendering of the
mantle on the fireplace in my
dorm, isn't it?

PAUL
Yup. It's that bird!

ANITA
(looking at it)
The phoenix! How absolutely
cool!

KNOCK ON DOOR. Anita goes to get it. SID comes
in. He is in his low fifties- a short, rather
bald man- with an OPEN COLLAR, his TIE hanging
loose. He's Polish- cultured, well-spoken, but
with a strong, Jewish accent.

SID
Well, did you pop it?

PAUL
Not- hello, how are you Paul?
How're you doing, Paul- but-
did you pop it? Sounds more
like a skin query than a
salutation?

SID
Well?

PAUL
Where's your sense of humor?

SID
Where's your goddamn
placement?

PAUL

I told Harry to fly a kite.
I'm sending him to Graham.

SID

Big mistake. Harry's got one
thousand times the calling
card. He's a nationally known
manager-

PAUL

Harry's a whore, Sid. He
went down for Suaze.

SID

Suaze placed?

PAUL

No- but Harry went down
twice.

SID

You should never have even
called Graham. Don will
never buy it. He doesn't
even comb his hair.

PHONE rings. Anita brings Sid some HORS
D'OEVRES. Sid eats, watching Paul intently.

PAUL

Yeah- well - no- yes-

SID

Who was it?

PAUL

I'm getting a haircut
tomorrow. Want to know the
details?

SID

Are they interesting?

PAUL

No.

SID

I didn't think so. By the
way-

PHONE rings again.

PAUL

Hello- yeah-

Looks at Sid.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(speaking on PHONE)

Really? I agree. Of course
you have 90 days. Tear it
up? OK, if that's what you
want. The hell with it? OK.
Whatever you want.

Hangs up.

SID

(quietly)

What was that? I've been in
this field for thirty goddamn
years and I couldn't make
head or tail out of that.

PAUL

He told me to tear up the
resume. He didn't even want
to see it.

SID

(quietly)

You should never have
mentioned the 90 days. It
works against you. Really.

PAUL

(quietly, too)

He hired him, sid. He said -
quote- fuck the resume.
Paul, I trust you.

SID

He waived the interview?

PAUL

Yeah.

SID
(incredulously)
You sure?

PAUL
Yeah.

SID
Anita, could you please bring
me some more of these things?

She goes to get some.

SID (CONT'D)
This is one for the record
books.

PAUL
You bet your sweet ass it is.

Anita comes in. Sid grabs at the HORS D'OEUVRES.
Begins to eat furiously.

ANITA
Congratulations.

PAUL
Thanks.

SID
(chewing like a cow)
Unbelievable. That's really
unbelievable.

ANITA
Is it big?

SID
Is it big? Like an elephant.

Sid glances down at the half-finished MANTLE
carving.

SID (CONT'D)
What's that?

PAUL
It's a mantelpiece.

SID
(picks it up)
It's terrible. Looks like a
third grader carved it.

PAUL
It's not finished.

ANITA
It's really quite promising.
It's a contemporary piece.

SID
What it's supposed to be?

PAUL
A phoenix.

SID
(his mouth full)
Stick to recruiting. Don't
waste your time on this.

ANITA
We used to have a mantle in
my dorm like that.

SID
Like that?

ANITA
Paul modernized the image.

SID
That's modernization? It
looks like third grade.

PAUL
If you want to understand
contemporary art, we have a
little museum here called the
Museum of Modern Art.

SID
Fantastic. I'll join
tomorrow so I can learn to
appreciate your work.

PAUL

Hey, Sid. You concentrate on what I do for you. I'll handle my little side ventures- OK?

SID

Just don't let your little side ventures interfere with your business.

PAUL

Unless I'm mistaken, I just popped the biggest placement in our little company's history.

SID

The check's not in-

PAUL

As far as I'm concerned, it is.

SID

We'll see.

Sid picks up Paul's carved mantelpiece.

SID (CONT'D)

Take my advice. Stick to recruiting. You'll get a lot further.

INT. OFFICE. LOWER MANHATTAN -- AFTERNOON.

Paul is flying various MULTICOLORED PAPER PLANES into a WASTEPAPER BASKET. CLOSE-IN as he takes exquisite aim, throws, but misses. He tries unsuccessfully again. Meanwhile, SID comes into the office. Sid watches Paul's little ritual, stunned, horrified. Paul motions to a CHAIR in the corner.

PAUL

Sit over there, please.

Sid motions to a CHAIR in the front of the DESK.

SID
Why can't I sit here?

PAUL
Because you'd be in my line
of fire.

SID
(standing up)
What the hell are you doing,
Paul? This is the middle of
the afternoon.

PAUL
I'm flying planes.

SID
PLANES- on a weekday? You're
supposed to be working.

PAUL
These are special planes.
Peter Max planes. Peter Max,
Sid.

SID
The hippy artist who did the
telephone book? So what?

PAUL
Well, now he does airplanes.
I fly them.

SID
Well, that's nice. I thought
the sixties were dead.

PAUL
They just died. I'm still in
mourning.

SID
This is 1972. Haven't we
grieved long enough? Here-
I give you this beautiful,
spacious office right in the
hub of Madison Avenue. I
give you the best Office
Match furniture, the

ORIGINAL Art Deco ornaments
you insisted on, a ridiculous
Mickey Mouse telephone that
makes me the laughingstock of
all the personnel agencies in
New York. Everytime you have
a client in your office, my
reputation spreads.

PAUL

You're just not used to
travelling in style.

SID

Recruiters are usually
drearier people than you and
their bosses are even worse.
My colleagues are shocked by
the extravagances I provide
you with. You even have your
own goddamn secretary.

PAUL

I could hire three
secretaries and you'd be all
right.

SID

True. Unfortunately true.
Even though you are eccentric
and probably crazy, you
happen to have some
ridiculous flair for this
business- and you fly
airplanes in the afternoon.
And, by the way, where is your
latest office assistant?

PAUL

I sent her home.

SID

Why, may I ask?

PAUL

Because I decided not to do
any business this afternoon.

SID

All afternoon? Paul, you are TRYING MY PATIENCE! Remember, I'm your boss- and you're a job consultant. A recruiter. YOU GET PAID FOR FINDING PEOPLE JOBS. REMEMBER?

PAUL

Thanks for reminding me. Did you check your little box this morning?

SID

No. Vivian hid it. So I know there was something in it- rather special.

PAUL

You bet your ass there was. There's 30K in it. In certified checks. Most of it from me. And a lot which belongs to me.

SID

You popped another one? At least one. Not just Graham.

PAUL

Two. Besides Graham. Do the math.

SID

So you decided to take the afternoon off without telling me.

PAUL

Yes. I knew you'd find out eventually.

SID

(losing control)

Instead of flying PSYCHEDELIC
airplanes, you should be ON
THE HORN finding some of our
clients some goddamn jobs.
Other people need to eat,
too.

PAUL

Hey, I'm not the only account
executive in this office, you
know.

SID

Yeah, well, you're the most
effective.

PAUL

Well, I'm sorry, Sid. I'm
resting now.

ANITA walks in, wearing a FOXY BUSINESS
SUIT.

ANITA

Paul, where were you? I
waited two hours.

PAUL

(sheepishly)

Oh, lunch...

SID

So now you stand up your wife
for lunch. Your boss isn't
enough for you? Your wife,
too.

PAUL

I'm sorry, Anita. Sid, will
you get off my back?

SID

Get off mine.

(to Anita)

I ask him why he's not
working. He says he's
resting.

ANITA

I'm sorry, Sid. Paul's been acting funny ever since we bought the condo.

SID

So, sell it- if it's too much of a strain. I told him not to buy it. With something needing that much work, it was too much of a gamble.

PAUL

I never solicited your opinion, Sid.

SID

You know what he was doing while you waited for him? He was flying paper airplanes. In my office. Paper airplanes.

ANITA

Oh, Paul...

(pause)

It's all right, Sid. Don't worry. We'll have a long talk when we go home.

SID

Yeah, talk to him. Someone should.

INT. PAUL AND ANITA'S CONDO-- EVENING.

Anita is seated on COUCH, casually sipping TEA.
MED. Paul pacing around the room.

ANITA

Paul, what are you doing to yourself?

PAUL

I don't like the condo.

ANITA

So sell it. You have my permission.

PAUL

I don't like my job.

ANITA

So quit. I won't hold it against you. But I'll tell you this. You won't find as tolerant a boss anywhere- as Sid Green.

PAUL

Sid's tolerant because I make him a lot of money.

ANITA

Sid loves you.

PAUL

ANITA

You want to open up an employment service?

PAUL

God, no. I want to open up a shop.

ANITA

What kind of a shop?

PAUL

A wood-working shop. A museum-quality cabinetry and furniture workshop.

ANITA

Paul, I believe you have talent. I saw the little table. And the mantle is looking great, especially after you've worked at it for four months. But is that enough experience to turn it into a business?

PAUL

Well, besides woodworking and carving, what else do you think I've been taking in night school?

ANITA

I don't know.

PAUL

Business education classes. I've taken two so far.

ANITA

My father and his father had their own businesses. It's tough. You need to be ready for it. Paul, a few woodworking classes and a business course or two is not enough.

PAUL

Well, it's got to help.

ANITA

Think about what you're saying. It involves me, too.

PAUL

I'm aware of that. I'll tell you what. I won't even talk about it for three weeks. Then I'll make my decision.

ANITA

I'd be more comfortable with three years.

PAUL

I can't wait three years.

ANITA

Promise me you won't be impulsive. You'll think this out.

PAUL

Come on, cheer up. If things go bad, I can always find myself a job. I'm an expert at it, aren't I?