

She was sitting crosslegged on a hassock, wearing a black silk shirt and a pair of woolly socks of mine that had never looked better.

"My dream?" A sweet, spontaneous, let's be honest, kid.

"Your dream. Everyone has one." Wanting to know more about this vibrant and free young woman who had dropped into my life before she flew away. I never imagined my attraction and affection to be so little, so late.

"I've wanted to act my whole life."

"All twenty odd years?" Don't we have enough actors, yet?

"Most of them." The firelight played on her cheekbones as she speared a tofu chunk with the end of a chopstick.

"After Japan, I'm really doing it. I'm using the money to go to New York to study. I've seen some of your theater books. Were you an actor?" Okay, okay, me too.

"Years ago," I reminisced. "Still do some film work when a movie comes through town." Never had my work in crowd scenes sounded so glamorous.

"I need to put together a monologue to use in auditions. Can you help me?"

"That I can." I took a gulp of champagne and she smiled wide at me. Her under the silk. Of course, The Digby Phelps School of Acting. I had finally found my calling. Special scholarships available.

"I mean, I'm not ready for Shakespeare." I would point her in the right direction.

"Stay put," I said, "I know just the script."

We rehearsed. Truly. I'm not going to say that the combination of her scant clothing, sexier than nudity, firelight, wine and enthusiasm didn't inspire lust on the part of the Director.

The Maestro made every attempt to channel his desire to the service of Art, however. Steeling myself, I drilled my prodigy through three scene readings before sending her upstairs, alone, to rehearse her lines as I set up my tape machine and hid a microphone.

"Digby," she called from my bedroom, "I think I'm ready." Digby Junior stirred at her voice, eager for a feature role.

"Let's get to work," I instructed Digby Junior, and then Shayna made her entrance and stood near the door. I

punched a button that fed the tape into the machine.

"Forget we're recording this," I said. "Quiet on the set. Ready, action." I scissored my fingers at her and she smiled.

"I've never met a guy like you," she sighed. "Up 'til now, I've always been the one to walk away without looking back."