

He worked nights and he'd come home and he'd take us to Forty-Second Street. And we'd come out of one movie and go to another and another movie — I don't know why — but I loved musicals.

ZACH. How old were you?

PAUL. Seven or eight.

ZACH. On Forty-Second Street?

PAUL. Yeah — it was a trip.

ZACH. Go on ...

PAUL. I'd have to move down front — 'cause I couldn't see — I wear contact lenses now ... I'd move down front and these strange men would come and sit beside me and "play" with me. I never told anyone because — well, I guess it didn't matter ...

ZACH. Why didn't it matter?

PAUL. Why? Ah ... Well ...

ZACH. Look, Paul, if this is too rough for you, I have your picture and résumé ...

PAUL is now downstage center on THE LINE.

PAUL. No. Ah ... Okay. From seeing all those movie musicals, I used to dance around on the street, and I'd get caught all the time. God, it was embarrassing. I was always being Cyd Charisse ... Always. Which I don't really understand, because I always wanted to be an actor. I mean, I really wanted to perform. Once my cousin said to me, "You'll never be an actor," and I knew she was telling me this because I was such a sissy. I mean, I was terribly effeminate. I always knew I was gay, but that didn't bother me. What bothered me was that I didn't know how to be a boy.

One day I looked at myself in the mirror and said, "You're fourteen years old and you're a faggot. What are you going to do with your life?" By that time I was in Cardinal Hayes High School. There were three thousand boys there. I had no protection anymore. No homeroom where I could be charming and funny with the tough guys so they'd fight my battles for me. Like when I went to small schools. I liked school. But my grades got so bad. Even if I knew the answers to questions, I wouldn't raise my hand because I would be afraid they would laugh at me. They'd even whistle at me in the halls. It was awful ... just awful. Finally, I went down to the Principal's office and said, "I'm a homosexual." Well, it was a Catholic high school and at the age of fifteen you just didn't say that. He said, "Would you like to see a psychologist?" And I did. And he said, "I think you're very well adjusted for your age and I think you should quit school." So, I did. But I really didn't want to. I couldn't take it anymore.

See, when I quit school, what I was doing was trying to find out who I was and how to be a man. You know, there are a lot of people in this world who don't know how to be men. And since then, I found out that I am one. I was looking for the wrong thing. I was trying to learn how to be butch. Anyway, I started hanging around Seventy-Second Street, meeting all these really strange people. Just trying to make friends that were like me. So that I'd understand what it was that I was.

Somebody told me they were looking for male dancers for the Jewel Box Revue, you know, the drag show. So, I go down to audition. Now, from all those years of pretending I was Cyd Charisse, I had this fabulous extension. I mean, I could turn, anything my first audition. And they said to me, "You're too short to be a boy, would you like to be a pony?" And I said, "What's that?" And they said, "A girl." "What do I have to do?" "Show us your legs." "But I have hair on my legs." "That's okay, come on upstairs." So I went and they hiked up my dungarees and they put on a pair of nylon stockings and high heels. It was freaky. It was incredible. And then they brought me back downstairs and they said, "Oh, you have wonderful legs." I said, "Really? ... Terrific ..."

It's so strange thinking about all this. It was a whole lifetime ago. I was just past sixteen. Anyway, then there was this thing of me trying to hide it from my parents. That was something. 'Cause I had to buy all this stuff. Like, ah, shoes to rehearse in, earrings, makeup. And I would hide it all and my mother would find it. I told her there was this girl in the show and she didn't want her mother to know what she was doing and I was holding this stuff for her. She believed me.

Well, I was finally in show business. It was the asshole of show business — but it was a job ... Nothing to brag about. I had friends. But after a while, it was so demeaning. Nobody at the Jewel Box had any dignity and most of them were ashamed of themselves and considered themselves freaks. I don't know, I think it was the lack of dignity that got to me, so I left. Oh, I muddled around for a while. I worked as an office boy, a waiter — But without an education, you can't get a good job. So, when the Jewel Box called and asked if I'd come back, I went.

We were at the Apollo Theatre on a Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. Doing four shows a day with a movie. It was really tacky. The show was going to go to Chicago. My parents wanted to say goodbye and they were going to bring my luggage to the theatre after the show. Well, we were doing this oriental number and I looked like Anna May Wong. I had these two great big chrysanthemums on either side of my head and a huge headdress with gold balls hanging all over it. I was going on for the finale and going down the stairs and who should I see standing by the stage door ... my parents. They got there too early. I freaked. I didn't know what to do. I thought to myself, "I know, I'll just walk

quickly past them like all the others and they'll never recognize me." So I took a deep breath and started down the stairs and just as I passed my mother I heard her say, "Oh, my God." Well ... I died. But what could I do? I had to go on for the finale so I just kept going. After the show I went back to my dressing room and after I'd finished dressing and taking my makeup off, I went back downstairs. And there they were standing in the middle of all these ... And all they said to me was, "Please write, make sure you eat and take care of yourself." And just before my parents left, my father turned to the producer and he said, "Take care of my son ..." That was the first time he ever called me that ... I ... ah ... I ... ah.

PAUL *breaks down. Music in after 3 slow beats.*

No. 20

End Of Paul's Scene

(Orchestra)

During the music, ZACH comes down the aisle, up on stage, crosses to PAUL, puts an arm around his shoulder and walks a few steps up left talking to him so quietly we don't hear.

LARRY. *(entering from stage right. [Bar 8]) Zach, you ready for them yet?*

ZACH *signals "no" with his hands and continues talking to PAUL. Then ZACH drops his hand. Music segues.*

No. 21

"One"

(Company)

ZACH. *(over music)* All right, bring 'em in.

*Zach crosses to his stool, downstage right.
Paul crosses to first wing right and drops his dance bag.*

LARRY. Okay, kids, here we go. Everybody in.

The rest of the AUDITIONERS enter from upstage right as the upstage black panels revolve to mirrors.

ZACH. *(over music)* Larry, get the hats.

*LARRY and PAUL pull a box of hats on stage,
and ZACH gets his own hat from under his stool.*

LARRY. We're using hats. Everybody grab a hat. Try to find one that fits.

ZACH. *(to LARRY)* All right, let's review this.

All the AUDITIONERS grab hats and begin warming up, going over lyrics, commenting on hats, etc., while LARRY and ZACH are reviewing the combination facing the mirrors. When PAUL and RICHIE move the hat box off, ZACH crosses down center and the AUDITIONERS gather in a group around him.