

An Excerpt From:

KING COMA
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Fade out on Jim and Jer. Music. Sergio Mims stumbles front and center. He takes a Pop Tart from his pocket, eats. Disgusted, he spits it out. Above, Wendy enters.

Who's there? Mama?

SERGIO MIMS

Wendy stops.

Mama -- speak to me, mama.

SERGIO MIMS

Uh...hello.

WENDY

(gasps)
You hear your Sergio?

SERGIO MIMS

Sergio. Serge. Sonny.

WENDY

Oh, mama-I pray and pray to have this moment with you -- I ask all the saints. Tell me, which one pulled it off, I thank him.

SERGIO MIMS

Well they all did a good job.

WENDY

Which one -- please.

SERGIO MIMS

I can't pick a favorite -- it was a team effort.

WENDY

Which one, mama?

SERGIO MIMS

A beat.

Stanley. WENDY

Stanley. SERGIO MIMS

St. Stanley. WENDY

A beat.

You are not my mother! You are demon alcohol at work! SERGIO MIMS

I'm sorry. WENDY

Please! Demon! I blame myself! SERGIO MIMS

I'm not a demon. WENDY

You are a spirit! SERGIO MIMS

No. WENDY

A specter then! A ghoul! SERGIO MIMS

I'm none of those. I'm alive. WENDY

Please. Where are you, you're alive? SERGIO MIMS

Here. WENDY

A light rises on Wendy Coma. Sergio Mims is transfixed.

Living sleep. We are not so different. SERGIO MIMS

A beat.

After my mother died, I picked up every phone I could and thought to call her. On the other end, always silence. SERGIO MIMS

A plane roars overhead. Both duck.

SERGIO MIMS

Thank god for making planes. Their engines fill in the air like mortar between brick.

A pause.

SERGIO MIMS

Are you there?

WENDY

Yes.

SERGIO MIMS

I will wake up tomorrow and forget you.

WENDY

How did your mother die?

A pause.

SERGIO MIMS

Well.

(laughs)

From old age! The sweetest way to go!

A pause.

SERGIO MIMS

If what you say is true, I am glad the dead do not talk. They shame us enough with their silence.

He picks up his Pop Tart, eats. Lights rise on Louie and his Beef Hut nearby.

SERGIO MIMS

You have nothing to say to that? Are you hungry? Eat!

Music. He leaves the Pop Tart for her. Lights fade on Wendy and Wendy Coma. Sergio Mims stumbles into the Beef Hut and sits at the counter. Lombardo turns and puts a plate of food before him. Sergio Mims eats. Lombardo breaks from him and stares off into the distance.

SERGIO MIMS

I actually had a donut in my mouth. A big wide donut with sprinkles -- chocolate sprinkles! The big dumb Pollack don't even see who I am because I blend into the walls, another addict for donuts.

(MORE)

SERGIO MIMS (cont'd)

He is taking money from women's purses and dumping out the cash register and there are people looking at me, asking with their eyes why I don't flash a badge and get back all their donut money, but honestly buddy, I can say, eating donuts is much preferable to justice sometimes. And depending on what day, which way wind is blowing, that makes me good police or bad police -- who can tell!

He chuckles at himself, pleased.
Lombardo is not even listening. A beat.

SERGIO MIMS

Please, more Coke.

A pause. Lombardo is lost.

SERGIO MIMS

Coke, please.

Still nothing. Sergio Mims frowns, reaches over the counter and helps himself. Lombardo whips around.

LOMBARDO

You're paying for that!

SERGIO MIMS

I realize. You were sleeping, I just--

LOMBARDO

My eyes were open.

SERGIO MIMS

Oh. A daydream. Whatever. Still unconscious!

LOMBARDO

We're closing up now.

SERGIO MIMS

Your sign says 24 hours.

LOMBARDO

What?

(he looks)

Guess so.

Lombardo settles back again.

SERGIO MIMS

The only Italian Beef around the clock! You put Anthony's, Luigi's, Sammy's and Johnny's all out of business! Where's your help?

LOMBARDO

It's just me.

SERGIO MIMS

Just you? You don't sleep -- as on a pillow?

LOMBARDO

No.

SERGIO MIMS

You must need money, man, desperately, to work so hard.

Lombardo doesn't answer. Sergio Mims fishes out a business card and hand it over.

SERGIO MIMS

You call me you need a break. Sergio Mims -- security on call. It's what I do now. Seriously. You call me.

LOMBARDO

There's nothing here worth it to steal.

SERGIO MIMS

You don't know that. I see very desperate people on this job. Dude man broke into Methodist church and stole a statue of the Virgin mother.

LOMBARDO

What did the Methodists do?

SERGIO MIMS

Shouted "Another Annunciation, praise be to God!" When I found lovely Mary in a dumpster smeared in chicken grease and lawn clippings, they actually looked disappointed. They were good on their way thinking God chose them-- here -- to display his superior hocus pocus. Not pleased.

A beat.

SERGIO MIMS

Anything can happen. I tell everyone that.

A beat.

SERGIO MIMS

Please more Coke.

Lombardo gives him one.

SERGIO MIMS

So you got a secret, man?

LOMBARDO

No secret.

SERGIO MIMS

Something in the air? Smoke all your competitors to smithereens?

Lombardo does not respond.

SERGIO MIMS

That's how Core is, man, you'll know, stay here long enough. Good hope gets smoked. Couple years ago, the mayor and police chief made a mint raiding the town vault. Feds come running, they took off to Canada, somewhere. Town board should'a took charge, but they just licked the meat left on the bones, you know? That well went dry, they disappear too. Left zero for salaries for basic services -- police, fire, emergency -- they all shut down the alarms, moved out, let the county take over -- as if the county cared. County don't know Core exists. We're in shadows! Tall brick factories and refineries that shut out the lights long ago forced us to become castaways on an island. Tax base smoked since the mayor and her skeleton crew skipped. Businesses see a slide happening and they ain't gonna stick around see how it ends. That's what happens in Core. That's what happens in a lotta places I bet. One person gets greedy and makes a move and behind them, avalanche. Nothing gets back to where it once was.

LOMBARDO

Yes.

SERGIO MIMS

Yes? You say yes to that?

LOMBARDO

I do.

SERGIO MIMS

Well.

(smiles)

How honored I am.

Lombardo pours him another Coke. He drinks. A beat.

SERGIO MIMS

You will become a notch on my rounds.

Lombardo goes to the radio and tries to tune something in.

LOMBARDO

You have rounds?

SERGIO MIMS

Oh, round and round. I try walking straight and I spin! All police go, vanish, in middle of the night like I told you! Doesn't mean they took the criminals. After that, people, scared people, look at me -- they don't ask me but I know what their eyes say: could I patrol? Just be out there. You'd be impressed how safe people feel if they think one pair of feet is out there, at night, looking after things.

LOMBARDO

(fiddling with radio)

Uh-huh.

SERGIO MIMS

Doesn't mean I catch criminals. I saw one once. He waved at me outside the currency exchange he just held up. And I'm not rude -- my mama taught me: wave back. Later that night I turn a corner and he's running outside a liquor store and this time I wave.

LOMBARDO

(hitting radio)

He wave back?

SERGIO MIMS

Now this I'm not sure. He was ducking a lot because of the gunfire. I think that's the last I'll see of that criminal but at the end of the night, when I am winding down at Johnny's after a whole night of spinning, there, beside me at the pop dispenser, is him. He dispensing root beer, me dispensing Minute Maid lemonade -- I don't drink on job. It is end of the night. We're both tired. The sun is bringing us a new day which is all people in Core can ask for. So we nod. I give him a plastic lid, the criminal gets us two straws. And we sit outside on the plastic park bench watching a day begin.

Lombardo hits the radio.

SERGIO MIMS

See, I learn, even criminals like knowing someone's out there. That they're not the last person in town who'll have to turn out the lights.

Lombardo hits the radio.

LOMBARDO

Damn, damn thing! Doesn't anything work out here? It's a radio for Chrissakes -- we got two hundred-fifty stations where I come from -- out here, band-to-band static!

Sergio Mims stands and walks "outside."

SERGIO MIMS

Louie.

LOMBARDO

What?

(looks up)

Where're you going?

SERGIO MIMS

(inhaling deeply)

Take a whiff, man. Relaxes you.

Lombardo steps "outside." He inhales.

LOMBARDO

Yeah. Always about this time, too.

SERGIO MIMS

The vats.

LOMBARDO

Vats where.

SERGIO MIMS

The old factories! Rising like a castle. Didn't you see it coming in? You don't know what Core was famous for back in the day?

LOMBARDO

What?

SERGIO MIMS

(inhales)

The old Marshfield Family of Chocolates and Jawbreaking Delights.

(laughs)

Gooey chewballs and spice hotbombs, delicate mint niblets and exotic caramel finger rods. Because of this company and the loyalty there was, there is a generation of babies out there in the world with names like Buttercup Surprise and Blueberry Sprinkles. Since most of the town breathed in such seductive aromas and manhandled the thickest of fudge up to their shoulders all day, there was sensuality inside these borders that rose to a level beyond dangerous. Where sugar rivers ran and palisades of dyes numbered 7, 8 and 10 once flowed, insects gnaw and vermin squat and teenagers drink beer and make babies. But if wind from Lake Michigan decides to be graceful and travels through the night just an extra eight miles, you can smell the town that Core once was.

They both inhale. A beat.

LOMBARDO

I remember Marshfield. Old man Marshfield. Made his name at the World's Fair, didn't he? Stole some idea from the Asians and repackaged it over here. Got his whole enterprise going.

SERGIO MIMS

If Core was a constellation in the sky, the stars would take the shape of Marshfield's finest creation: the double swirl, triple fruit, jumbo double fisted Lollipop.

They look up into the sky. The radio erupts. State, loud voices, crazy music, etc. Lombardo rushes back inside, grabs it, bring it outside where he's cradling it, tuning it in carefully until: a woman's voice blares through. She is singing "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston with no accompaniment and very, very badly. They listen, their cringing going through different distinct stages. Shouting over the radio:

LOMBARDO

(handing radio to Sergio Mims)
Find another station!!

SERGIO MIMS

Many try.

LOMBARDO

Sports talk, farm reports, anything!

SERGIO MIMS

Tragically, she is it.

LOMBARDO

She's awful -- who lets that on the air?

SERGIO MIMS

Herself. All up to her, man. College station holds a fund drive four times a year and she's the only bidder. Bid so much she has open mic midnight to five. Bids all my money we have to squat half the year when rent goes out.

NADIA (V.O.)

I heard that Sergio.

LOMBARDO

Who's that -- you know her?

SERGIO MIMS

My wife.

NADIA (V.O.)

I hear you Sergio. Can't you let me sing my song in peace?

SERGIO MIMS

I am, special one.

NADIA (V.O.)

You're telling someone again how put out you are by your poor, talented wife. Your shoe's untied.

Sergio Mims looks down.

NADIA (V.O.)

Made you look.

She continues to sing.

SERGIO MIMS

She is training to be Idol.

LOMBARDO

What's that?

NADIA (V.O.)

An Idol. You go through this again and again with someone new, every night, don't you Sergio? The baker, a prostitute, the bus drivers taking a break.

SERGIO MIMS

These are my people, Nadia! I am talking up your name!

NADIA (V.O.)

Nadia Mims, ladies and gentlemen. I am so happy you're here.

She continues to sing.

SERGIO MIMS

We were watching television one night and she turned to me and said, "I'm special, too, you know." And I said, "baby, baby, I know you're special." And she said, "no, I'm more special than special. I'm just as special as everyone who gets their own special on TV. I have a special light inside me that needs to be lit." "But what are you special at?" We were watching a soup commercial and I was hoping she'd say "making soup." "Singing." "Singing? You're no singer! You bend notes like boomerang!" "Doesn't matter," she says. "I have it deep inside me." "You sew my pants good," I tell her and try stroking her hair. She stands up. "There's no reason why I can't be an Idol." And from that point on, she's been singing that song.

A beat. They listen.

SERGIO MIMS

And you know what? She's actually got some calls. One wanted to hire her to strip at a bachelor party. She made some good money and a guy gave her a card and said he could get her a meeting with the brother of Tom Jones who owns a bridal shop in Pittsburgh and who sees Tom at least once a year and apparently he really has his ear. Then there were other, just common ordinary night owls who called to say "go get 'em" and--

NADIA (V.O.)

"We're all behind you."

SERGIO MIMS

And--

NADIA (V.O.)

"You sound like such a sweet young lady with such promise."

SERGIO MIMS

Makes me think maybe she was right. Singing's got nothing to do with it.

NADIA (V.O.)

I just want to take a second to thank the kind people from my hometown, Core, Illinois. The support me and continue to support me in my quest to become a bonafide, successful, televised and genuinely commercially endorsed Idol. You all have lit up my heart, there are sunbeams shooting out my fingernails.

SERGIO MIMS

(to Lombardo)

I wrote that.

NADIA (V.O.)

So remember. If you are a very important member of the entertainment industry who is drinking alone in a pricey hotel lounge somewhere or just listening to this in a cab while on the way to a prostitute, I am available. The public is impatient. I have dozens of supporters who hear me--

SERGIO MIMS

(to Lombardo)

A thousand watt station, roughly from here to White Castle...

NADIA (V.O.)

--Which means if you multiply that by any number block by block, there are others out there in the night who feel exactly the same way. Please don't disappoint them. These are alienating, confusing times where Idols -- more Idols -- can do so much good. Just page my confidante, bookkeeper and manager Sergio Mims at 861-2793.

SERGIO MIMS

She makes me replace batteries in it every morning!

NADIA (V.O.)

He will negotiate on my behalf. But don't worry: he has my blessing to be fair and ask for no more than what my talent for entertaining is worth.

She continues to sing.

SERGIO MIMS

For two years she does this, I see real change in Nadia. She still cleans houses, of course.

NADIA (V.O.)

Shut up, degenerate!

SERGIO MIMS

--But she will never again get on her knees to scrub a floor.

NADIA (V.O.)

I use a mop!

Sergio kisses the radio.

SERGIO MIMS

Feel that Pumpkin Bread?

NADIA (V.O.)

I am singing Sergio! I am singing! Sergio Mims turns the volume down.

SERGIO MIMS

Oh blessed volume knob! If you only you made life just as easy during daytime.

A beat. Silence. Sergio Mims and Lombardo don't know what to say. They go back "inside" and resume their normal positions. A beat. Moments until:

LOMBARDO

"Not Licked Yet."

SERGIO MIMS

What you say? -- more Coke.

LOMBARDO

(opening a can)

A town needs to find out why it is special, then embrace it. Tourists like history.

SERGIO MIMS

Tourists like casinos and cute coffee shops with very expensive coffee.

LOMBARDO

Why can't that be Core? Every corner a banner: "Core, Illinois: Not Licked Yet -- Plan a Visit For Old Lollipop Days, a Fistful of Suckers--"

SERGIO MIMS

--A key word!--

LOMBARDO

"--For Every Boy and Every Girl."

SERGIO MIMS

Mr. Louis. If you were a woman I'd kiss you and say you're very cute. Ha!

He drinks. A beat.

LOMBARDO

I wouldn't expect you to understand.

He resumes his work.

SERGIO MIMS

You don't see with your own very eyes. Do you see? Do you see where you live?

Both look up, around at the town. Wendy enters dancing. She meets eyes with Lombardo and slowly backs into the darkness.

LOMBARDO

Yes.

SERGIO MIMS

Well.

Chuckling, he drinks. A beat.

LOMBARDO

My first job was pulling appliances up from a basement and putting them on a conveyor belt so the customers upstairs would get them. I hated that job, but I used to think, "oh, I'm just launching boats in a very rocky current." Every box I'd put down on the belt, I'd watch sail away up into the horizon.

(smiles. A beat.)

I was very good at my job then.

(MORE)

LOMBARDO (cont'd)

I thought maybe a talent like mine -- whimsy, I thought -- could be greatly appreciated by other men, men who'd pay me a sizable salary...

SERGIO MIMS

Is that right? Exactly who?

LOMBARDO

The men of Real Estate Development.

SERGIO MIMS

Oh, yes?

(a pause. low voice:)

I don't know what that is, please.

LOMBARDO

The company I worked for -- Alan J. Hinkey, Esquire and Associates -- started out west. They were the company known for convincing the Blackhawk Indians they should sell all their land because it was poisoned with the black darkness even the Great Spirit couldn't combat.

SERGIO MIMS

Ah-ha! Those dumbass tomahawk-choppers! What about the Mexicans?

LOMBARDO

Hinkey Men fanned across the entire Southwest convincing every Mexican they came across that the Great Spirit wanted them to sell too.

SERGIO MIMS

But Mexicans don't believe in the Great Spirit.

LOMBARDO

That's when they were shot.

SERGIO MIMS

Oh!

(laughs)

Don't mess with Hinkey!

LOMBARDO

Hinkey built this country over generations. If not the actual towns and actual cities and actual cobwebs of roads that strung them together, then they at least invented the idea. That what could be is always better than what is.

SERGIO MIMS

Hinkey's still the biggest?

LOMBARDO

Well, I think the Germans own them today. The Hinkey men dried up when all the land they turned into towns turned into cities. When all that could be bought was sold, they disappeared.

SERGIO MIMS

Coals were quiet with no one to rake!

LOMBARDO

The company just faded for almost a century. Then Alan J. Hinkey the 29th was born. He grew up on a farm. Legend is his first words were "off street parking."

SERGIO MIMS

No! That's made up!

LOMBARDO

Doesn't matter. He recharged Hinkey and turned his eye to all those cities his ancestors built long ago -- now rotten and abandoned because that's what history does -- and Twenty-Nine set out to make them taller, bigger and shinier versions of themselves.

SERGIO MIMS

Did the Germans go along with it?

LOMBARDO

At that point, the company was owned by a tailer in Dayton, Ohio. Twenty-Nine bought him breakfast and bought him out. Legend has it--

SERGIO MIMS

Oh yes, another legend!

LOMBARDO

--That Twenty-Nine was 29 when he made his vows with destiny. On his birthday, he promised numbers one through twenty-eight that American still had a frontier, only it was hidden and just needed a howdy-do to the people who may not have been able to say it, but felt crammed in and shut out by all the mistakes and plundering of those who came before. That progress was never in their name, that even the cement in their streets was poured before they were born and stretched down, unshakable, into the core of the earth keeping them stuck, making renewal a word that, until Twenty-Nine came along, could not even be pronounced.

SERGIO MIMS

"Renewal." "My subscription to Motorcross Digest is up for renewal."

He reaches for more Coke and looks for permission.

LOMBARDO

Go ahead.

Sergio Mims pours.

SERGIO MIMS

Hinkey delivered the boom, didn't he?

LOMBARDO

People needed convincing, but once they could see at the prosperity, it spread.

SERGIO MIMS

That's what you were, then -- a Hinkey man.

LOMBARDO

I didn't travel. I was hired because Twenty-Nine discovered my gift.

SERGIO MIMS

Which was?

LOMBARDO

I was brought in and shown photos of a wild, uninhabitable marsh next to a highway on the south side of Atlanta. Twenty-Nine told me to study them and say what I saw. I looked closely at the shots and could see a thin fog resting on the flora, how the kudzu hung down the trees in an elegant drape. Twenty-Nine asked what I saw and I said, "Mystery Gardens." In a month they had 30 signed contracts for townhomes that would be delivered in a year.

SERGIO MIMS

Ah-ha!

(laughs)

Bingo!

LOMBARDO

From that point on, I cast spells over the most backwater, abandoned and neglected pockets of our country and from a few, but precise words uttered, sprang sleek shopping centers, bullet chromed high rises, condominiums of every shape and size and patches upon patches of neighborhoods in places where deer used to roam. I'd whisper these words in Twenty-Nine's ear and in a matter of two years or three, grand boulevards presented themselves, each one just like the next, the same colors on signs that would make the loneliest outcast feel the familiarity of home. I went from renting a basement apartment to owning a home on the water, my wife enjoying the nicest things, my daughter the finest schools.

(MORE)

LOMBARDO (cont'd)

Twenty-Nine game me an office, a secretary and a car. I had no responsibilities except go to a site and imagine, "what does this place want to be?" A fire ravaged paper factory in the city's worse slum--"Stationary Village." Meadowlands mowed down to make way for a mega mall and eight surrounding office towers--"Prairie Crossing." The abandoned rail yard buffering the blacks from downtown--"The Station Lofts"--and I got a bonus for this addendum--"Of the South." Far out west where centuries-old farmland got divided into morsels of mansions with three-car garages are today, because of me, "The Estates of Canterbury." I made certain creeks bled dry and forests chopped down were not in vain. They became eulogized forever on the placards at entryways: "Creekside Manor" and "The Woods of Arcadia." Unusual topography became "Heights" and "Hills" by other developers. Which was hackwork. I looked and imagined "Grand Marquee Bluffs" and "The Slopes of Monte Carlo." I got so good, Hinkey showed me a condo development he wanted to build along the city's busiest intersection next to a Citgo and across from a trailer park. I stared at the photos for three days. I slept in my car at the site. I paced at three in the morning, waiting for something to happen. And then, on the third day, I had it: "The Motor Homes -- A Living Excursion." It sold in a week. Now there's million dollar homes from curb to curb one mile in all directions.

Lombardo smiles. He is lost in his glory. He is very happy. A moment.

LOMBARDO

Whatever I said -- it was like a magical spell. And everyone became rich.

SERGIO MIMS

Not everyone.

A plane roars overhead. They duck.

LOMBARDO

They would if they knew how easy it is for one thing to become another thing.

SERGIO MIMS

How easy?

LOMBARDO

First, you have to say the right words.

SERGIO MIMS

Oh...unlock the locket.

Lombardo smiles and goes back to work. A moment.

SERGIO MIMS

So Skip To My Lou -- You're no longer a Hinkey man?

LOMBARDO

Not anymore.

Wendy enters overhead. Lombardo sees her. They meet eyes.

WENDY

I'm learning to knit. I thought I'd have to wait until I'm but I have a lotta time.

SERGIO MIMS

Must have been better than beef. You love it?

WENDY

Can you hear me?

LOMBARDO

Yes.

WENDY

I'll make you socks, maybe.

SERGIO MIMS

You gotta love what you do.

WENDY

Not that they'll fit okay.

SERGIO MIMS

Does anyone have that anymore? The Pope.

WENDY

But if they don't fit, I'll do some more. And more and more until they're right and snugly.

LOMBARDO

They'll never fit.

Wendy stops what she is doing and looks at him.

LOMBARDO

None of this fits.

Lombardo whips off his apron and hands it to Sergio Mims. Still looking up at Wendy, he runs, exiting.

WENDY

MOM!!!

Blackout on the Beef Hut. Lights rise on the living room. Wendy Coma is surrounded by religious candles, etc., all illuminated. The wheelchair now looks lit it is in a grotto, a shrine. Lucina tends to it.

LUCINA

What -- Wendy, what?

WENDY

Dad's coming!

Lombardo enters, stops.

WENDY

Mom. Don't let him near me.

LUCINA

Louie, you're home early.

LOMBARDO

Go to the kitchen.

LUCINA

The whole town's outside. Isn't it beautiful. They made our little girl a shrine. They say she's inspirational.

Lombardo moves towards the wall plug. Lucina blocks him, even though she's pretending she's not.

LUCINA

A woman across the alley said Wendy, in some little way I don't know, helped her stop watching so much prime time television.

Lombardo tries to dodge her. She blocks him.

LOMBARDO

Let me do my job woman!

LUCINA

There's mothers out there who've had songs killed by the most horrible street violence and they say they feel soothed just by looking at our baby's face.

LOMBARDO

Enough, go--

LUCINA

Wendy's presence was so strong, it brought all the invalids in this town to their feet because for the first time they wanted to see--

LOMBARDO

Get--

LUCINA

--A beautiful thing, Louis!--

LOMBARDO

--Out!

Lombardo shoves her away. He grabs the plug. Both are out of breath. A moment.

WENDY

(quietly)

Mom?

LUCINA

She's still alive, Louis. The candles flickering. Like her eyes.

LOMBARDO

Glass--

LUCINA

No--

LOMBARDO

--Glass eyes!!

A pause.

WENDY

Mom...

LOMBARDO

Larry and Maeve were right. We should have done this when it happened.

LUCINA

No...

LOMBARDO

At the very start! Don't you know I hear her!

LUCINA

I do also. She dances above us, like a fish somersaulting from the ocean...

That's not real! LOMBARDO

It is. You hear her-- LUCINA

Daddy. WENDY

--She's beside us. Wendy hears what we say. Already, look how strangers -- simple working people -- have been so moved. Look what they made her. What she is. A lighthouse. LUCINA

No... LOMBARDO

A salve for their suffering... LUCINA

Why? So they can sink further into debt and despair and just give in for good? LOMBARDO

Daddy-- WENDY

Don't talk to me! Ghost!
(to Lucina)
I have to forget. LOMBARDO

Forget what. LUCINA

What? LOMBARDO

What should you forget. LUCINA

I can knit you socks. And some for mom too. I'll have them in time for Christmas. WENDY

Lombardo drops the plug and staggers away.

There's harsh things out there. Things that serve no purpose. LOMBARDO

LUCINA
Our daughter does. I don't want to forget her.

LOMBARDO
She died!

Lombardo whips open "doors" and shouts
to the town.

LOMBARDO
SHE DIED!!

Townspeople begin to filter onstage in
various configurations.

LOMBARDO
(to no one in general)
You'll all die too! Just stay how you are, in misery and
boredom and ignorance! You don't have to do a thing!

LUCINA
Louis.

LOMBARDO
(to Lucina)
This may be where people like us end up but it doesn't mean
it was meant to be that way.

LUCINA
Come inside.

LOMBARDO
Take off your clothes.

LUCINA
What?

LOMBARDO
(to town)
REMOVE YOUR CLOTHES!!
(to Lucina)
That's all it takes, my love, just one simple action. Please.

LUCINA
Louis.

Lombardo grabs the plug.

LOMBARDO
Please, Lucy.
(to the town)
THAT'S ALL IT TAKES--NO MATTER WHAT ANYONE TELLS YOU! YOU
JUST HAVE TO BELIEVE!

A moment. Lucina hesitates. She removes her clothes. In one swift motion, they drop to reveal what she is wearing underneath: a bright, regal gown of a queen. She can't believe it.

LOMBARDO

Your pocket.

She fishes in her pocket and pulls out a crown. Lombardo takes it from her and places it on her head. She is the most colorful thing on the stage. She glows. The townspeople gasp.

LOMBARDO

NOW YOU BELIEVE DON'T YOU? SEE FOR YOURSELF!

The townspeople slowly do the same. Louis walks among them, encouraging them. They all undress to discover they are clothed in brightly-colored regalia, medieval-style clothing made of the finest materials. When they are finished, Lombardo stands center stage and in one swift motion, rips off his Beef Hut uniform to unveil the wardrobe of a king. He crowns himself. A moment for all to take this in.

Then, the townspeople gasp "look," etc., turning their heads. Their town - the factory buildings, smokestacks, steeples, grey skies, etc., together transform and become a medieval town. Expressways become pastoral country roads, fire escapes reveal green vines, a castle turret grows, the sun begins to glow. The stage looks like nothing it once was. The townspeople are amazed, joyous. Lombardo takes Lucina to his side and they beam.

LOMBARDO

EVERY MAN A KING!!

The townspeople erupt, cheering. A moment until a flash: We see the snout of a dragon snort fire. This is powerfully loud but only Lombardo sees it. He clutches his stomach in pain.

In their celebration, everyone else is
oblivious.

A BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE