

"Three Strategems"

By

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Based on a short story  
by Gore Vidal

FADE IN:

EXT. KEY WEST - DAY

TITLE: KEY WEST 1950

WE BEGIN MONTAGE SEQUENCE

Vacationers unloading off of cruise ships.

Restaurants and shops bustling with tourists and the jaded bronzed denizens that reside on the island. They carry shopping bags and stroll the shop-lined streets.

Endless swaths of beaches covered with bathing beauties, old creeps, and everybody in between.

END MONTAGE SEQUENCE.

EXT. KEY WEST BEACH - DAY

The beach is bustling with activity, the sun is shining high in the sky. Onto the beach walks MICHAEL WILLIAMS. Michael is in his early twenties, well-built, with a nice face and a beachy white shirt with blue shorts. He walks toward down the beach, littered with bathing beauties and grotesque older women with fleeting young men of the moment.

Michael turns his head to the left toward the shoreline briefly, puts his hands in his pockets, and turns his head to the right to scan the action closer to the Casa Rosada.

Michael continues walking a moment before stopping at a metal rod leftover from a changing tent. He rests a moment before GEORGE ROYAL, a well-to-do gentleman in his late fifties, walks up beside him.

GEORGE

Haven't been here long have you.

A startled Michael turns to face George.

MICHAEL

Huh?

GEORGE

You're a bit on the pale side. Did you just arrive?

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

Oh well, uh, yes. Just this morning actually.

GEORGE

Well new visitor, I am George Royal. But you'll just call me George, never mind the Royal.

George laughs, which further disarms Michael, who is already charmed by his new acquaintance.

MICHAEL

Nice to meet you George. I'm Michael Williams.

GEORGE

It is lovely out this afternoon. Say how bout a drink, the hotel bar is right up the beach.

Michael shyly puts his hands back in his pockets, with mild blushing, and a sudden coyness.

MICHAEL

Sure. You lead the way.

Michael rises to walk with George up the beach toward the hotel bar. They pass some boisterous sailors on the prowl. Michael pauses for a moment before continuing onward behind George.

MICHAEL

(disgustedly)

Never met a good sailor.

GEORGE

Not a fan I take it.

MICHAEL

It's just that they're so rootless, they toss off any opportunities given to them. What I could do with their opportunities.

GEORGE

Understandable, I guess. What's your take on these gaudy old women caking it on and descending on the beach?

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

Well, they're- uh- they're ok, not really my style.

GEORGE

(slyly)

Good to know.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROSADA BEACH BAR - DAY

George and Michael step onto the deck-like bar situated about 30 yards from the hotel. The bar is sparse, with tables scattered about and JIMMY working behind the bar. George and Michael stop at the bar-top.

GEORGE

Hello Jimmy, lovely to have you back behind the bar.

JIMMY

Good to see ya to Georgie. What'll it be? Gin and tonic?

GEORGE

No. No, I think it'll be margaritas this day.

JIMMY

Right up.

George and Michael take a few steps toward a table, George motions to sit, which Michael does without the least hesitation. George then takes his seat, with a sigh of relief.

GEORGE

So... what is your style?

MICHAEL

I don't know really. A little more put together I guess. I just respect a bit more ambition in people. Like most of the people in Washington seem really -uh...

GEORGE

...put together, professional, that type of thing. Washington you said? Is that where your people are from?

(CONTINUED)

Jimmy stops over and places the drinks on the table and wanders back to the bar.

GEORGE

Ooh, thanks Jimmy.

MICHAEL

Well my people are scattered about now mostly. I was raised in Washington. What about your family?

GEORGE

Well, I'm all that's left these days. I have a brother who I avoid. My main business is in Newton, a smaller one in Belmont. I'm in the clothing business, I hadn't mentioned. Royal Clothes, that's me.

MICHAEL

(intrigued)

How is business these days?

GEORGE

Well you can see that I'm here and not at the store. It's quite well, and this quasi-retirement suits me oh too well. Came down here after Charlotte, that's my wife- was my wife, passed away three years ago. She loved it here. Now I have an agreeable suite in the hotel and some friends I get up with frequently, especially Hilda.

MICHAEL

It is quite pleasant here. I'm from Washington, went to Princeton some years ago-

GEORGE

Ah. Princeton. Did you by chance play sports? You have a really athletic look.

Michael smiles at this comment and laughs.

MICHAEL

Football. Thanks for noticing.

George begins to stand when JOE MYERS, a tall, very thin blonde with red swim trunks and little else approaches the table.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Hiya Georgie. How goes it?

GEORGE

It goes. Ah, Joe Myers, Michael Williams. Michael here is from Princeton. Joe's a painter.

JOE

Hi, how are ya?

GEORGE

Well, you two get acquainted. I must make a quick phone call. I won't be a moment.

George walks away toward the hotel. Joe sits down and waits a moment until George has disappeared inside.

JOE

Painter, my eye. I wanted to paint this morning, but it's been slow for Joe. I went to the canvas and realized I hadn't any paint. Can't find a decent man around here to save my life.

CUT TO:

INT. ROSADA LOBBY - DAY

George stands at the lobby desk on the telephone.

GEORGE

Hilda? George, just calling to make sure we're still on for this afternoon.

HILDA

(O.S.)

Of course, dearie. Twelve-fifteen. I'll bring a cab around dahlink.

GEORGE

Alright love, I'll see you then.

George places the receiver back on the phone and pushes it back toward the back of the desk, before turning to walk back to the beach bar.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSADA BEACH BAR - DAY

MICHAEL

Joe, when the hell did you get down here? Last time I saw you was that time in New York two years ago. You were shamelessly shackled up with that oily oil heir.

JOE

Nevermind about that, I been here a few weeks. More importantly, what's he told ya? How long ya known him?

MICHAEL

He's got a business in Belmont, one in Newton. Well off, dead wife, no--

JOE

(interrupting)  
Jackpot! How is he?

MICHAEL

I only just met him today, I got in this morning. Not everybody works as fast as you Joe.

JOE

Bitch! Don't knock my work methods. They're rather effective.

MICHAEL

That's why you have no paints.

George returns to the table, causing Joe to rise and excuse himself. George sits down.

JOE

Well, nice to meet ya Michael. Must be running along, let you two keep chatting. Hope to see ya's around happy hour, all the swell crowd will be out. Life's short, Au revoir.

GEORGE

Oh, so long.

MICHAEL

Goodbye.

Joe walks away from the table.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

He seems pleasant enough.

GEORGE

I never met a man I didn't like. Well I hate to cut it short, but I have a lunch date with my friend Hilda. Lovely old girl, known her for years. Say, have you any plans for dinner?

MICHAEL

None yet, I only just arrived remember?

GEORGE

Yes, yes, of course. Would you care to continue this conversation over some dinner. Ira in the hotel restaurant can do wonders with steak.

Michael pauses for a moment to mull over this invitation.

MICHAEL

I'd like that.

GEORGE

Well alright! Let's say meet at the restaurant bar about 6?

MICHAEL

Sounds good to me.

GEORGE

Most agreeable you are. Must be running off, see you this evening.

George rises and walks away from the table with a smile. Michael remains to finish his margarita, greedily pulling George's to his space also.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLOTHING STOREFRONT - DAY

George and a ferociously dressed HILDA JOHNSON, looking very over-the-top in a green pantsuit with an orange scarf and oversized sunglasses, walk down the sidewalk in front of the clothing store called Helene's. Upon reaching the door, they pause for a moment.

(CONTINUED)



HILDA

Say listen Georgie, don't let me leave this place without a new scarf, this tired thing is doing nothing for me these days.

GEORGE

It never did.

They open the door and head in.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - DAY

The store is tended by two women in there late forties, who seem to not even notice when George and Hilda enter. Hilda, determined, makes a beeline for the ladies dress section. George follows steadily behind her.

HILDA

George, dont let me forget that, um, uh scarf. I know you're not buying anything.

GEORGE

I own my own clothing store, why would I buy elsewhere dear?

HILDA

Oh, Georgie would you look at this gown!

Hilda pulls a billowy yellow dress off the rack and looks at George.

HILDA

It looks just like the one I bought from you when I went with you and Charlotte on that trip. Remember, the one to New York for Charlotte's sister having that play or whatever it was.

GEORGE

The one where you complained that you were alone.

HILDA

The one where I was thankful for not having my late husband on. The old thing would've made the trip unbearable. Wherever he is, he should only stay there.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE

Hilda, don't you ever get lonely without him?

HILDA

No, besides who has time to be lonely, these young men just flock to me.

GEORGE

And then the flock to the other young men.

HILDA

That's to your benefit dearie. Aren't you feeling a bit lonely these days, with Charlotte gone and things, and I never see you with anybody hardly ever.

GEORGE

Actually, I have a date for dinner this evening.

A look of mild disgust comes across Hilda's face at this revelation. She still continues sifting through the rack of clothes with great hast.

HILDA

Oh do you. Tell me everything. How old?

GEORGE

His name is Michael and he's about 23 or so I'd say.

HILDA

Oh George he's probably a customer. Does he know about your business?

GEORGE

Well yes, I mentioned it.

HILDA

Oh Georgie, he is surely after your money.

George becomes suddenly sullen at this comment. He pauses for a moment before retorting.

GEORGE

Well, let's remember, I'm not looking my best anymore and isn't

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE (cont'd)  
it just as valid to be loved for  
your money as for your cooking or  
your face? Besides you're right,  
I'm lonely these days Dollface.

HILDA  
Sorry, you know I just don't trust  
these young things. Always on the  
prowl.

GEORGE  
You would know what with the whole  
coterie of men you keep.

HILDA  
First off, they are struggling  
artists usually. I want to be a  
patron of the arts. Also, not to be  
vain, even though I am, I like to  
have attractive young men to escort  
me around. They're like a bracelet,  
that can speak and accept dinner.

GEORGE  
So this bracelet that I'm having  
dinner with has a pretty face and  
wants my money, it's the same  
situation. He may want my money, I  
want his nice face. He's from  
Washington and went to Princeton,  
and seems very agreeable.

HILDA  
Well, at least you got yourself a  
fella. Want I should invite Joe, we  
can make it a double date?

GEORGE  
(sharply)  
I think not.

Hilda's eyes flare and she is oblivious to George's last  
comment as she has become enamored with a green skirt and  
matching scarf. She greedily pulls the dress off the rack  
and becomes exasperated.

HILDA  
Oh Georgie, I think we have a  
winner! I must buy this! Let's go!  
Look it even has the scarf, too  
easy.

(CONTINUED)

Hilda races to the sales counter with George following. A rather dull salesgirl rings up Hilda. She pays quickly.

HILDA  
Thank you, I love finding myself  
bits of gorgeousness! Come on  
Georgie!

George follows Hilda out of the store.

EXT. CLOTHING STOREFRONT - DAY

George and Hilda stop in the front of the store.

HILDA  
Joe should be along-- nevermind  
there he is.

Joe walks up to the pair nodding to George.

JOE  
Finished so soon?

HILDA  
Joe wait until you see the skirt I  
bought. Let's go to dinner tonight,  
I must wear this immediately.  
George would you like to come back  
with us?

GEORGE  
No, I should be fine. You two go on  
ahead, I have to get ready for  
dinner.

HILDA  
Oh that's right. Well you have a  
nice time Georgie.

GEORGE  
I'll try.

George gives Hilda a quick hug, he has become tired of her for the day.

JOE  
See ya later George.

GEORGE  
So long, Joe.

Joe and Hilda begin walking down the sidewalk. After a moment, George begins walking in the opposite direction.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGE'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

George's suite is nicely furnished and has a distinct lived-in look, with personal touches that make it most economically elegant. George stands before a mirror holding different shirts in front of himself. A steady stream of shirts go through this process, only for George to find them unsuitable. After putting a green shirt away, a picture near the mirror catches George's eye. The picture is of George with his wife Charlotte, taken at a fair some years before.

"WE BEGIN A FLASHBACK SEQUENCE"

INT. CHARLOTTE'S SICKROOM - NIGHT

A warmly decorated room with a bed, table with an ornate lamp, and chair. A weak, but immaculately coifed Charlotte, lies dying. George sits in the chair beside her bed, holding her hand.

CHARLOTTE

Old man, do you remember all those trips down to Key West? I wish we could have gone this past winter.

GEORGE

I'm sorry we didn't. We should've moved down there when you got sick.

CHARLOTTE

Well, no use thinking about that now. Besides, I might have gotten tired of the beach after awhile. But you know, you should take yourself down there after I go.

GEORGE

Maybe. I don't know though.

CHARLOTTE

That's you all over, so indecisive. Do it George, you love it down there.

GEORGE

Maybe.

The weakened Charlotte emits a light laugh and smiles at George. He smiles back.

"WE END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE"

INT. GEORGE'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

George suddenly snaps back to reality. He decisively grabs a red dress shirt and a black tie. He holds the shirt up to himself in the mirror, an approving smile creeps across his face.

CUT TO:

INT. ROSADA RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Into the warmly decorated, plushly cushioned Casa Rosada restaurant walks George in deep red dress shirt, black pants and tie. He walks confidently to the bar, noting his watch when he comes to stop. Jimmy appears.

JIMMY

Evening, George. Nice shirt.  
Margarita?

GEORGE

Not this time. Gin and tonic if you  
will, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Alright.

GEORGE

Say Jimmy, will you pass the phone?

JIMMY

Sure thing.

Jimmy pulls a phone from under the bar and pushes it across the bar to George. Jimmy begins mixing while George dials and soon places the receiver to his face.

GEORGE

Hello, Hilda?

HILDA

(O.S.)

Georgie!! Did it end already? You  
wanna have a drink on it love?

GEORGE

No Hilda, it hath yet to begin. Do  
you really think he's just after my  
money. No matter either way.

(CONTINUED)

HILDA

(O.S.)

Oh George! Well you did mention his college, means he mentioned it so soon after meeting. College boys after big game.

GEORGE

Glad to hear I'm in season... Hold on a second.

Jimmy has finished and delivered the gin. George, asiding the phone, addresses Jimmy.

GEORGE

Thanks. Say is Ira back in the kitchen-- can you ask him to set up two steak dinners with a cabernet in my suite please?

Jimmy nods and disappears to complete this task.

HILDA

(O.S.)

George??

GEORGE

Yes Dear?

HILDA

(O.S.)

Have a good time tonight.

GEORGE

Goodnight Dear.

George hangs up the receiver and pushes the phone back across the bar, sitting down to start his drink. A half-hour passes and the restaurant gradually fills up. Half-way through his drink, George notices Michael, wearing an acceptable but far from sharp suit of gray and blue, on the other side of the restaurant. Michael is scanning the restaurant to find George.

GEORGE

Jimmy, can I get two more of these.

Jimmy, without response, begins mixing. Michael, having spotted George is fast approaching, as George sucks down the watery remains of his old drink. Just as he finishes, Michael slides into the barstool beside him.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

I hope I'm not too terrible late.

GEORGE

No, you're right on time. I ordered some drinks, I hope you like gin.

MICHAEL

I do. Glad to see you're proactive.

GEORGE

As for dinner, I wonder if you'd like to have it a little more privately?

MICHAEL

I do enjoy dining quietly.

GEORGE

Wunderbar. Ira should have it ready presently.

MICHAEL

I think proactive is an understatement.

George lets out a hearty laugh at this comment. Jimmy sets two drinks on the bartop.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

Michael lifts his drink and takes a sip, George follows suit.

MICHAEL

These are strong.

GEORGE

Would you have them weak?

MICHAEL

Well, no, I guess.

JIMMY

Oh George, Ira has your meals ready.

GEORGE

Thanks Jimmy. Care if we take this drinks. I promise not to steal the glasses.

(CONTINUED)



JIMMY

You're fine to take anything you wish, the hotel knows where you live.

GEORGE

Good man.

George sets a ten-dollar bill on the bar and turns to address Michael, sipping his drink.

GEORGE

Well, shall we?

MICHAEL

Lead the way.

Michael and George rise and, drinks in hand, leave the restaurant.

CUT TO:

INT. ROSADA HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

George and Michael, drink glasses already empty, approach George's suite door. George unlocks the door and the pair enter.

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGE'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

George's suite has two elegant steak dinners covered by gleaming silver lids. George enters behind Michael. George collects Michael's glass and places it along with his own on the counter. George motions for Michael to sit down, which he does, removing his jacket beforehand. George grabs the wine bottle off the table and pours two glasses, upon completion of this, he sits opposite Michael.

MICHAEL

I haven't even opened that lid and that smells like its going to be the most amazing steak of all times!

GEORGE

Well, lets not waste anymore time in suspense.

(CONTINUED)

The pair laugh and lift the lids to their respective dinners. Without a word, they pick up their knives and forks and dig in. They each take several bites, incautiously sipping their wines.

GEORGE

Well is it everything you dreamed of?

MICHAEL

If it's not, it's pretty damn close.

GEORGE

Ira, thats the cook, always does fantastic work.

MICHAEL

My regards.

The pair continue eating.

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGE'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

A short while has passed and both George and Michael have moved onto their side meals and their next glasses of wine.

MICHAEL

You know, that view from your living room is really nice.

GEORGE

It's even better when the moon is out. Not tonight, unfortunately. You got a bit of sun today.

MICHAEL

Oh am I burnt up?

GEORGE

No, no. The beach seems to agree with you too. You really should go sailing while you're here.

MICHAEL

I went sailing once up to Maine. Was there on a trip when I was younger, Dad had a summer house there. Last time I went there was after I graduated from Princeton. It was sold while I was in Europe.

(CONTINUED)

George, suddenly responsive to this prompt, pounces on the subject of Europe.

GEORGE

Europe? What were you up to in Europe? Sweden, a favorite locale of mine.

MICHAEL

Well after I graduated, I wanted to travel and then I took a job with American Express for about a year. Not my cup of tea, as they say.

GEORGE

So then you left that job and came back here?

MICHAEL

Yea, hard to stay living in Paris without a job. Came back to Washington about a year and a half ago. Met Katrina almost right after I got settled back in. Oh sorry, Katrina, that's my fiancée.

George appears responseless to this revelation.

GEORGE

What's a young guy like yourself getting married for? Nowadays, there's no rush into things. You could wait till at least 30. I should know, although Charlotte was a remarkable woman--

MICHAEL

Well it's just that I don't wanna be left aimless-- like those sailors on the beach. Marrying Katrina would add something stable and give status. Nobody really trusts an unmarried man, do they?

GEORGE

Eh, if they're a widower, like me. But do you care for her at all?

MICHAEL

Katrina's sweet, nice wife material, very pretty. I care for her a great deal, she's wonderful.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL (cont'd)  
I can't, obviously, parade *this*  
life around Washington.

Solemnity has coated George's face, for a moment he appears shattered, suddenly his face twists back into nonchalance and a cheery smile and a strong laugh.

GEORGE  
Yes, you're very right. Nobody  
wants queers like us running around  
the Capitol. Best have some good  
times before settling into that  
prison.

Michael is somewhat taken aback by this sudden mood changeover. He quickly accepts it and continues chatting.

MICHAEL  
Well yes, exactly my reason for  
being down here while she's away at  
school... But her father is a  
really big attorney, like my old  
man was, in D.C. I'm sure he can  
fix me up with something after the  
wedding.

GEORGE  
Anyplace in particular? When's the  
wedding?

MICHAEL  
I'd like the Foreign Services. As  
for the wedding, it's sometime next  
year after she finishes college.

GEORGE  
Smart girl. I'm sure you'd be good  
at the Foreign Services.

MICHAEL  
I like to think so.

George raises his glass to toast, Michael does the same. Just as George begins to speak, Michael drops his glass and starts into convulsions. A look of calmed horror overtakes George as he watched Michael collapse violently to the floor.

GEORGE  
Oh, shit!

George rises and leaps for the phone on the counter a few feet away. He grabs it and dials the hotel doctor, looking at the helpless Michael jerking violently around on the floor.

GEORGE

Hotel doctor? George Royal Suite  
237. I have a friend and he's  
having a seizure!

DOCTOR GRANT

(O.S.)

I'll be there in just a few  
minutes.

GEORGE

Okay. Hurry please.

George hangs up the receiver, unable to assist, looking down at Michael. After a moment, there is a knock at the door. George steps over Michael and whips the door open. Doctor Grant, a dignified man in his late 40's wearing a brown jacket and carrying a bag enters.

GEORGE

(panicked)

We were about to toast and he  
suddenly dropped his glass and that  
happened. Whats wrong with him  
doctor?

DOCTOR GRANT

Grab a spoon for me.

Grant has crouched down to Michael, George grabs a spoon from the counter and hands it to Grant, who places it between Michaels teeth. Grant begins pulling examination equipment from his medical bag. After several moments investigation he pulls a syringe and small vile from the bag.

DOCTOR GRANT

Calm down George. It's common  
epilepsy. This is just a great  
seizure. Glad to see you already  
thought to stick the spoon in his  
mouth. He'll be fine in a second,  
this sedative is fast-acting.

Grant administers a shot and after several moments Michael's body calms and lies on the floor amongst the broken glass from the glass and plate he had took down with him.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE  
Thank you Doctor.

DOCTOR GRANT  
He'll be fine now. Can you put him  
up for the night on your sofa?

GEORGE  
Of course. Help me lift him.

Doctor Grant and George lift Michael, awake but severely weak, and carry him across the room to the couch. They lie him down on the couch, and George puts a nearby pillow under his head, before covering him with a blanket located on top of the couch.

DOCTOR GRANT  
He should be right as rain in the  
morning. Goodnight George.

GEORGE  
Goodnight Doctor.

George walks with Grant to the door. After the doctor exits, George closes the door behind him and begins to clean up the mess.

CUT TO:

EXT. KEY WEST BEACH - DAY

TITLE: SOME DAYS LATER

George and Hilda sit on the beach, populated as always with it's typical inhabitants. They sip margaritas, George sitting up, Hilda lying down on a sky blue towel.

HILDA  
Georgie, what ever happened with  
that dinner the other night?

George looks to the left and notices Michael, up and about, walking with a thirtysomething dignified man in the distance. He stares for a moment.

HILDA  
George?

GEORGE  
Oh, sorry. It turned out to be  
nothing.

(CONTINUED)

HILDA

He probably wasn't worth a second  
of your time love. You'll find a  
nice little something for yourself  
though.

GEORGE

I know.

George turns to look down at Hilda, holding out his  
margarita.

GEORGE

Cheers.

Hilda taps her margarita against George's with a loud clink.  
They both take a long sip. George lowers his glass and  
continues gazing into the ocean.

FADE OUT

THE END