

'GATE' OPENED NEW FRONTIER FOR KAVA

By JANICE ARKATOV

You may recall that "Heaven's Gate" was a long—and costly—time in the making. Well, for part of the film's North-western location shoot, Caroline Kava took up residence in a local house of prostitution. Research for her role, of course. Eventually, the movie wrapped and the actress went home to New York. But Kava kept thinking about those women. The result is her first play, "The

attractive, seductive to be a child—be taken care of. But after a while, it stops working and [one] becomes angry, resentful."

Where does their anger go? "They weren't drug addicted," Kava said, "but they were compulsives, certainly—eaters and smokers. Going to and from a trick, they'd come into the room and light a cigarette or eat something, engage in anything that was distracting, anything to keep them from thinking about what they'd just

finished writing the screenplay of "Early Girl" for Universal. As an actress, she's in the coming feature, "Little Nikita"; she's also been in "Year of the Dragon" and the TV movie "Nobody's Child."

Best of all, Kava is no longer waiting/waitressing. "That's where the title of the play came from," she said cheerfully. "It's all so revelatory. I was an 'early girl' when I waited tables in New York. You get there, you're all ready in case somebody comes, and nobody may come. So you're just on hold. You're ready. You wait."

And now? "I'd thought the writing was going to support my acting, but it's turned out the other way. You've got one play, seven opportunities for acting and only one for a playwright. You know? I should have figured that out."



CLAY OWEN

Actress-turned-playwright Caroline Kava will have her first play, "The Early Girl," staged at the Back Alley theater.

"Early Girl," opening Saturday at the Back Alley.

"I never met, never saw a client," she stressed. "The setting of the play is very much what my experience was: seeing the women before and after they met with their tricks. It takes place in an exclusive area of the house where the women wait, where they make a record of the transactions, where the money's kept, where they eat. It's very safe. Men can't come in, they can't even see in."

If they ever did, chances are they'd be pretty bored.

"It was like a dressing room backstage or a room of secretaries," Kava marveled. "I had this image about prostitutes that I grew up with from the movies. And the only contact I have with them in New York is seeing a streetwalker on 11th Avenue and 42nd Street. They're usually runaways or

been doing. Because making yourself intimate with a stranger is an extremely vulnerable thing. There's a certain amount of denial that has to take place."

Consequently, the subject of sex takes a back seat in the play, too.

"This isn't about what makes a woman a prostitute," said Kava, "but the side effects of that choice—putting one's time and talents to an unworthy use. I identify so much with that [aspect] of it: waiting, abdicating control and responsibility to someone else—the most vivid metaphor for that is the prostitute. But all of us, in society, have to make that choice: to please ourselves or accomplish somebody else's goals. And if you put your goals second, it's a compromise."

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"So what surprised me was how similar they were to me and my colleagues. They were young, intelligent, funny. They had dreams. And they didn't sit and talk about their work or think about prostitution. It was just something they were doing for a reason—and then they'd move on. But it's a very difficult thing to break from. Being responsible for oneself is hard, it's

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For Kava, at 37, the profile of an actress' life wasn't all that different. "It's true. You sit there—and you're ready, ready to work. You're not really doing anything else. So I changed. Instead of being on somebody else's schedule, I got on my own schedule. It's amazing how much you can accomplish in that waiting period. One does not have to just sit and wait for the phone to ring. I used to let that pass for living. 'What did you do?' 'Well, I waited for this. I was available for that. I'm between engagements.'"

Nowadays, Kava (Chicago-born and trained at New York's Neighborhood Playhouse) is seldom "unengaged." Between navigating the Los Angeles freeways, she's just

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