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## **Cast of Characters**

MANNY  
BOB “WHIPLASH” McCORD  
CARTER  
GRUM  
CHERIE  
GUS  
JIMMY  
BULLDOG  
GERALDINE  
JOEY BANANAS  
LOLA  
MISS SMITHERS  
YOUNG MAN  
EMILY  
MINISTER’S DAUGHTER  
BAD MAN  
DIRECTOR  
ASSISTANT DIRECTORS  
CAMERAMAN  
CONTESTANT #1  
CONTESTANT #2  
STAGEHANDS  
STUDIO MUSICIAN  
CARPENTER #1  
CARPENTER#2  
GRIPS  
NURSE  
EXTRA  
SOLDIERS  
DOLPHINS  
MERMAIDS  
MERMEN  
LOBSTERS  
RADIO TECHNICIAN #1  
RADIO TECHNICIAN #2  
MARINE CORPS BAND

## **Acknowledgements**

*The Marriage of Miss Hollywood and King Neptune* was commissioned by the Pioneer Theatre Company (Charles Morey, Artistic Director) and the 2002 Cultural Olympiad for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games of Salt Lake City, Utah.

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# THE MARRIAGE OF MISS HOLLYWOOD AND KING NEPTUNE

by Robert Schenkkan

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(SETTING: A film stage on "Poverty Row" in Hollywood, 1929. The set is an interior Western Saloon with stairs US, a bar left, swinging doors right, two or three tables. "Behind the camera" there is a studio pay phone DR, an old piano DL, and a table with magazines, an ancient coffee pot and cups and several back issues of Photoplay.)*

*(AT RISE: The GRIPS are putting final touches on the stairs, hoisting a chandelier, getting the camera into position, setting props, fiddling with a silk screen which is diffusing the sun pouring in through the half-finished roof, etc.)*

*(Several people are playing poker at one of the tables, including the DIRECTOR, the actor playing the BAD MAN, the actress playing EMILY, the MINISTER'S DAUGHTER, and the CAMERAMAN who sits with his back to the audience. A STUDIO MUSICIAN sits at the piano, glancing through the paper and occasionally underscoring the dialogue with a sarcastic musical phrase on the keyboard. The newspaper headline reads: WESTERN AVENUE NEARS COMPLETION! Lots of activity combined with a certain irritable restlessness.)*

**DIRECTOR.** *(At the card table:)* Gimme two, and this time from the top of the deck.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** *(Dealing two cards:)* Like it would do you any good.

**STUDIO MUSICIAN.** *(Reading from paper:)* Hey, it says here that they're finally gonna finish Western Avenue. Isn't that somethin'? Gonna run all the way from Hollywood to the sea.

**CARPENTER #1.** Whereabouts?

**STUDIO MUSICIAN.** Somewheres near San Pedro. The County Road Commissioner hasn't decided yet.

**DIRECTOR.** Has this deck only got five cards or what?

**CAMERAMAN.** *(German accent:)* Bitch, bitch, bitch.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** The whole thing's a scam and I'll tell you who's getting a raw deal, people like me who live around there. The banks in San Pedro are foreclosing right and left. Sheriff woke me up this morning with an eviction notice.

**STUDIO MUSICIAN.** *(Lasciviously:)* You can stay with me, Jane.

**GRIP #1.** Or me!

*(All the men in the room raise their hand and call out an invitation.)*

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** I'm very touched, all.

**DIRECTOR.** WHERE THE HELL IS BOB?! *(To his ASSISTANT DIRECTOR:)* Tim, go up there and see if you can get Richard Burbage to grace us with his presence. Chop, Chop! We ain't got all day! For two cents I'd tear that Stetson-wearing Beef Wellington a new...

*(An athletic YOUNG MAN wearing a Western Union uniform walks on.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Excuse me, I'm looking for Manny Weisenberg?

**GRIP #1.** Try the track at Santa Anita!

**YOUNG MAN.** What set is that on?

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** They're so cute at that age.

**DIRECTOR.** He ain't here, kid, but if you run into him, tell'm Jack Straw wants to see him pronto.

**YOUNG MAN.** Thanks.

*(YOUNG MAN wanders off.)*

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** You want cards, Stutz?

**CAMERAMAN.** I vill pass, t'ank you.

*(The MINISTER'S DAUGHTER spits a stream of tobacco juice on the floor. The BAD MAN winces and complains in a surprisingly high voice for someone his size and bulk.)*

**BAD MAN.** Jeez Louise, you gotta do that on the floor?

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** I could spit in your face?

**BAD MAN.** *(Putting his cards down:)* I'm out.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** "I'm out." You sound like one of Bill Tilden's ball boys.

*(The BAD MAN makes cat sounds and a clawing gesture.)*

**BAD MAN.** You ain't bunkin' on my couch.

*(The MINISTER'S DAUGHTER laughs.)*

**CARPENTER #1.** *(On phone to bookie:)* No, that's two on Charger in the sixth. And in the seventh, gimme, I don't know...

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** *(Dealing herself:)* Two for momma. Quarter to stay in and see what I got.

**GRIP #1.** Everybody at Fox has seen what you got.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** Least the guys at Fox can do more than just look—unlike some people I know. "Honest, honey, I don't what's wrong. That never happened to me before."

*(Some of the guys laugh. GRIP #1 blushes.)*

**CARPENTER #1.** *(On the phone:)* I'm thinkin', I'm thinkin'.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** You in, you out?

**CARPENTER #2.** Said the actress to the archbishop.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** A quarter.

**DIRECTOR.** *(Tossing in a quarter:)* Fine.

**GRIP #1.** "A quarter." You raisin' your rates?

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** I'm raising my standards.

**GRIP #1.** Oh, no more than two legs now!

*(She flips him the bird; the GRIPS laugh.)*

**CARPENTER #1.** *(Calling to some of the guys:)* Hey, whaddya guys know about the seventh in Santa Anita? Moonshine or Go For Broke?

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** Drop your pants, gentlemen. Show and tell.

*(One of the other CARPENTERS tests the newly repaired step—it cracks under his foot.)*

**CARPENTER #2.** Where did you get this fucking lumber, Chuck?

**CARPENTER #1.** Griffith's Babylonian Gate. Come on, Moonshine or Go for Broke?

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** Read'em and weep.

**DIRECTOR.** I wanta new deck. Guys, we're losing the light here!

**CARPENTER #2.** Don't bitch at us. We'll be ready long before His Highness, the King of Assholia will be.

*(General round of snickers and disparaging remarks. MANNY WEISENBERG hurries on from UL, looking nervously over his shoulder. Manny's a good-looking agent in his upper-twenties, a ball of energy and inventiveness.)*

**MANNY.** Greetings all!

*(MANNY is universally liked. Everybody waves or calls out hello.)*

**DIRECTOR.** Manny! Just the guy I want to see.

**MANNY.** Hey, Chief, how's it going?

**DIRECTOR.** What does it fucking look like? I'm growing saddle sores.

*(MINISTER'S DAUGHTER crosses over to get some coffee.)*

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** Somebody was asking for you just now.

**MANNY.** *(Antennae up:)* Yeah? What'd they look like?

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** Young kid. Kinda cute.

**MANNY.** *(Relieved:)* Talented?

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** Be happy to audition him for you.

**DIRECTOR.** Manny.

**GRIP #1.** Gotta watch that jailbait stuff.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** Screw all of you's.

**MANNY.** *(To MINISTER'S DAUGHTER:)* Hey, little Mary Sunshine, what's eating you?

**BAD MAN.** She got evicted this morning.

**MANNY.** You do gotta pay the mortgage occasionally.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** I paid'em regular as clockwork only the sorry sons of bitches claim they never got my checks! "Sorry ma'am there's nothing we can do!"

**MANNY.** *(Handing her his card:)* Call my office. My girl'll help you find a place.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** You're a prince, Manny.

**MANNY.** De nada. Love your hair by the way. What'd you do with it?

**GRIP #1.** She combed the cockroaches out of it.

*(MINISTER'S DAUGHTER shoots him the finger.)*

**MANNY.** Hey, Charlie, how's the new baby?

**GRIP #1.** Fine, I guess.

**MANNY.** Did you say, "mine, I guess"?

**GRIP #1.** *(Smiling:)* Funny.

**DIRECTOR.** Manny, we need to talk!

*(MANNY waves at the DIRECTOR but doesn't make any effort to get any closer.)*

**MANNY.** Sure. No problem. *(Looking around:)* You guys seen two sharks in bad silk suits come through here? Kind of a hungry look about'em.

**MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.** *(Singsong:)* Manny's in trouble. Manny's in trouble.

**MANNY.** No big deal.

**CARPENTER #2.** Hey, Manny, how'd you do yesterday at the track?

**MANNY.** I did great! The horse I bet on, not so terrific.

**CARPENTER #2.** Slow?

**MANNY.** He's still out there running. *(Quietly:)* By the way, "officially" I wasn't at Santa Anita yesterday.

**CARPENTER #2.** Cherie still busting your balls about the ponies?

**CARPENTER #1.** Hey, Manny, who do you like in the seventh, Moonshine or Go For Broke?

**MANNY.** Moonshine! Definitely Moonshine.

**CARPENTER #1.** *(Into the phone:)* A sawbuck on Go for Broke.

**DIRECTOR.** We need to talk about your client. Now.

*(The DIRECTOR is closing in on MANNY and there's no escape. MANNY seizes the initiative and grabs his hand.)*

**MANNY.** Great stuff last week, Jack! THEY WORE LEATHER is gonna be a classic! Brilliant. D. W. Griffith couldn't have done it any better. I think I like it even more than DRY GULCH.

**DIRECTOR.** Quit with the vaseline; we need to talk.

*(Out of the corner of his eye, MANNY sees two THUGS walk across the back of the stage, clearly on the hunt. MANNY grabs a cowboy hat from a passing costumer and pulls it low over his face. Through the following speeches, MANNY will slowly counter around so that the DIRECTOR is always blocking him from view of the THUGS.)*

**MANNY.** Sure, no problem.

**DIRECTOR.** Yes, there is a problem, a big problem, and it's that British ham bone of yours.

**MANNY.** Edward a little under the weather today?

**DIRECTOR.** Edward a little under the influence today.

**MANNY.** Malicious gossip.

**DIRECTOR.** And yesterday.

**MANNY.** Ugly rumors.

**DIRECTOR.** And the day before that.

**MANNY.** *Photoplay* character assassination. You know the studio's considering a lawsuit against those muckrakers.

**DIRECTOR.** The studio may well sue somebody when this is all over but it ain't gonna be no cheap tabloid. It's 11:30 and I got one shot in the can and that was an insert and I gotta turn the set over at noon to that Pirate thing.

*(Sees the THUGS as they leave.)*

Friends of yours?

**MANNY.** A little misunderstanding. Maybe I should go straighten it out right now.

*(The DIRECTOR doesn't let go.)*

Maybe later.

**DIRECTOR.** Your client. Edward William Ralston, III. A.k.a Bob "Whiplash" McCord.

**MANNY.** Alright, alright, I hear you. To be honest... *(Voice low and suitably solemn:)* Edward's mother died last week in a tragic railway accident. Seems a baby carriage got away from a young mother, rolling down the steps into the path of an oncoming train. Edward's mother leapt out at the last minute and saved the child but...sadly, paid the ultimate price. Edward just got the telegram.

**DIRECTOR.** Thank you Battleship Potempkin. And as I recall, Edward's mother died last year bravely nursing influenza victims in the London slums.

**MANNY.** Did I say "mother"? I meant father.

**DIRECTOR.** He died last August. Salmon fishing. The rusty fishing lure got stuck in his...

**MANNY.** Right. Right. I'm telling this all wrong. Maybe it was a grandparent who died.

**DIRECTOR.** Yeah, "Old Granddad"; outta Kentucky.

**MANNY.** Look, I'm not making excuses for Edward but this is a hard time for him right now. He was very humiliated when you took the whip away from him...

*(The CAMERAMAN stands up and turns around and we can see he has a patch over one eye.)*

**CAMERAMAN.** Dat son bitch don't never get da vip again!

**MANNY.** Hey, how's that eye, Fritz?

**CAMERAMAN.** He get da vip und I QUIT!

**DIRECTOR.** We got a whip stunt double now.

**MANNY.** I know, I know, but he's Bob "Whiplash" McCord and kids all over the country look up to him and he takes it very personal when...

*(The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR runs on.)*

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.** He's ready! He's ready to go!

**MANNY.** See? No problem.

**DIRECTOR.** We're not done with this, you and me. *(To the COMPANY:)* All right, let's go! Places! PLACES!

*(A flurry of activity as the technicians clear the set and the ACTORS get ready. The CAMERAMAN moves behind the camera and the DIRECTOR stands next to him.)*

Camera ready?

**CAMERAMAN.** Yah.

**DIRECTOR.** Roll it! Scott, give us some music!

*(The piano player starts playing.)*

Slate picture. Iris down for slate.

*(The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR runs out with a board and holds it up.)*

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.** Bob “Whiplash” McCord and Caesar the Wonderhorse in ROUGH AND TUMBLE! Scene 25, take one.

**CAMERAMAN.** Iris in.

**DIRECTOR.** Slate out. Slowly, iris out. Pan across bar to Blaze Miller.

*(All the ACTORS are now in character and playing their parts as described by the DIRECTOR. The BAD MAN, Blaze Miller, hunters at the bar, fire in his eyes and a sneer on his lips.)*

OK, you’re Blaze Miller. You’re...What does the script say?

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.** *(Reading:)* “Blaze Miller. Mingling the brutal strength of a Grizzly bear with the treachery of a rattlesnake.”

**DIRECTOR.** Grizzly bear. Rattlesnake. Take in the room, Blaze. Cower, everybody. Cower! You can’t look in his eyes. Blaze, finish your drink. That’s right. Now, order another one.

**BAD MAN.** *(In his high squeaky voice:)* Gimme another.

*(Somebody titters.)*

**DIRECTOR.** Whoever did that, you owe a dollar to the coffee fund. Grab the bartender, Blaze. Good. Cower, bartender. More Cower. OK, now enter Minister’s Daughter!

*(The MINISTER’S DAUGHTER enters through the swinging doors. The piano plays something sweet and virginal. She looks around the room with large, moist eyes.)*

OK. You’ve never been in such a den of iniquity before. Sin, everywhere. You’re afraid. You want to run. BUT. You’ve made a vow to God. You move timidly into the room and hand one of the men a pamphlet. You getting this, Fritz?

**CAMERAMAN.** Yah. Beautiful.

**DIRECTOR.** Blaze. You see her. You want her. You march over to her and GRAB her in your arms! Yes! Struggle, Minister’s Daughter. Struggle! But he’s too strong. You want to kiss her, Blaze. You are going to kiss her but in comes Bob Whiplash McCord!

*(The camera pans to the doorway and everybody looks over there but BOB doesn't appear.)*

And in comes Bob Whiplash McCord!

*(Nothing.)*

AND IN COMES BOB WHIPLASH McCORD!

*(Still nothing.)*

Manny, I'm going to kill that son of a bitch with my bare hands.

*(Suddenly, the door US is kicked in and BOB appears, drunk as a skunk, in all his cowboy glory—sheepskin chaps, elaborately decorated cowboy shirt and vest, white ten-gallon hat, fringed gloves, six gun, and... whip in hand.)*

**BOB McCORD.** *(Deep resonant British voice:)* PUT HER DOWN, VARLET!

**CAMERAMAN.** *(Utter terror:)* He's got the whip!

*(This takes just a second to sink in and then everybody on the set either ducks for cover or runs off screaming. BOB cracks the whip and an unfortunate EXTRA grabs his crotch in pain. BOB cracks the whip again and pulls down an entire wall! In their haste to get out, the COMPANY virtually destroys the entire set, including the recently hung chandelier. A moment of silence. BOB stands—sways rather—in the center of the stage, looking about him in deep satisfaction. MANNY and the DIRECTOR peek up from behind an overturned table.)*

**BOB McCORD.** I told you...I could handle...the damn whip.

*(BOB sits down rather heavily and pulls a liquor bottle out of his holster. Furious, the DIRECTOR kicks the table aside and stands up.)*

**DIRECTOR.** You, you, you pathetic, soused ham!

**BOB McCORD.** What? Did I ruin your little skit?

*(MANNY sneaks around behind BOB and grabs the whip.)*

**DIRECTOR.** You've wasted an entire fucking day!

**BOB McCORD.** I'm wasting my life. (*Profound sorrow:*) I could be on stage in the West End.

**DIRECTOR.** I could be kicking your rear end!

**BOB McCORD.** Come and try it!

*(The two men lunge for each other but MANNY manages to get between them.)*

**MANNY.** Hold on now, Jack! Easy does it, Edward! OK now. Calm down!

**DIRECTOR.** That's it. I quit! I've had it! No more!

**BOB McCORD.** Oh, bugger off if you're going to.

**DIRECTOR.** (*To MANNY:*) I'm gonna take this to the top, Manny! You can't cover his ass anymore!

*(The DIRECTOR storms off. A moment. The GRIPS start to come back in but stop when they see BOB. MANNY shows them the whip and, relieved, they start to work replacing the Western set with a "Pirate" set. A NURSE comes in and begins tending the wounded.)*

**MANNY.** Edward. This is not good. Not good at all.

**BOB McCORD.** No, it's, it's tragic. You know what Duse said of me?

**MANNY.** "You had a beautiful ass."

**BOB McCORD.** That was Sarah Bernhardt; bless her heart. It was on the occasion of my Hamlet at the old Vic. Duse came up to me afterwards, I'll never forget it, she came up and looked at me with glistening tears in those matchless eyes of hers and said, "Young man, you are the greatest..."

**MANNY / BOB McCORD.** "...talent of your generation."

**MANNY.** You're preaching to the converted, here, Edward. You don't gotta sell me on your talent, I'm your biggest fan

**BOB McCORD.** (*With real feeling and talent:*) "Talent," yes, to what end? Squandered. Wasted. Gone. "Oh that this too, too sullied flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew. Or that the everlasting had not fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter."

**MANNY.** (*Genuine admiration:*) Goose bumps! Look that. Goose bumps. Like the first time I ever saw you on stage. This town is fulla phonies, Edward, but you, you're the real thing.

**BOB McCORD.** I am a clown in a ten gallon hat condemned to a sagebrush hell. Oh my God, what have I done?!

**MANNY.** Hey, hey. You've made millions of people happy.

**BOB McCORD.** So does carbonated sugar water.

**MANNY.** You're a hero to children everywhere.

**BOB McCORD.** My horse gets more mail than I do.

**MANNY.** You're a star!

**BOB McCORD.** I'm an entertainment!

**MANNY.** Shakespeare didn't entertain?

**BOB McCORD.** He held the mirror up to nature! We, we're like one of those amusement park galleries in Santa Monica where you pay a nickel and put your head through the hole in a painted board so you look like a weight lifter or a princess. Shakespeare was an artist. We're a sweatshop cranking out two reelers every three weeks like so many celluloid sausages. How did this happen?

**MANNY.** You signed a contract. A very good contract if I say so myself which brings me to the subject of my little visit. We got five more...

**BOB McCORD.** Money. Yes, damn money. BLOOD money. I sold my soul for it! And you, you, you are the serpent that brought me the apple of temptation.

**MANNY.** That would make you Eve, mother of mankind.

**BOB McCORD.** You know what I mean, you Philistine.

**MANNY.** Getting back to your contract...

**BOB McCORD.** God, I hate this place! This infernal sunshine...

**MANNY.** ...The balance of the contract, see, the sizeable balance, doesn't get paid unless we finish the forty pictures...

**BOB McCORD.** The smell of oranges makes me want to vomit!

**MANNY.** We got five more to go. That's all. Five. Count'em. One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

**BOB McCORD.** Might as well be five hundred.

**MANNY.** We're talking two months; three at the outside. Then you get to go home and take a nice little break. Fish and Chips. Bangers and mash. Warm beer.

**BOB McCORD.** I can't.

**MANNY.** I can't eat that shit either.

**BOB McCORD.** I can't finish the contract. You have to get me out!

**MANNY.** No can do.

**BOB McCORD.** There must be something.

**MANNY.** It's airtight.

**BOB McCORD.** Surely there must be something in there, some kind of contingency for Acts of God?

**MANNY.** In this town, the Studio is God.

**BOB McCORD.** Blasphemer. What if I was injured? An accident. A horrible disfiguring accident.

*(BOB picks up a broken shard of glass off the ground. MANNY grabs his hand. Just then, the YOUNG MAN comes on.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Mr. Weisenberg?

**MANNY.** Kind of a bad time right now, come back in five minutes!

*(The YOUNG MAN leaves.)*

Come on, Edward, they'd just slap a bandana on your face and turn you into the "masked outlaw"!

*(MANNY manages to tear the shard out of BOB's hands.)*

**BOB McCORD.** I'll walk away.

**MANNY.** We won't get paid.

**BOB McCORD.** I don't care.

**MANNY.** I care...!...about you, your, your financial health. They'd sue you for everything you got, the gold in your teeth.

**BOB McCORD.** Let'em!

**MANNY.** You don't know these people. They got lawyers here, federal lawyers, they keep'em chained up in a basement off Sunset and don't feed'em for days and then when they let'em loose...

**BOB McCORD.** Let'em strip us of every dime we have, the rags off our backs! Naked we come into this world and naked we shall go out of it. "Unaccommodated man is no more but such a bare, forked animal as thou art.!"

*(A moment of silence.)*

**MANNY.** OK.

**BOB McCORD.** OK?

*(MANNY straightens his coat.)*

**MANNY.** OK. You win. You know what I always say, Manny's golden rule of client management? "The Client is always right." You're unhappy. You're miserable. You're dying inside as an artist, the greatest talent of our generation is dying inside. What else can I say but, "OK."

**BOB McCORD.** *(Suspicious:)* OK.

**MANNY.** I'll go tell'em the news. *(Over his shoulder:)* I just feel sorry for those backers, that's all.

**BOB McCORD.** What backers?

*(MANNY stops.)*

**MANNY.** I was working on something for you, kind of a special deal, but...well, you know, that's the way the cookie crumbles. *(Starting off again:)* It's just that we were so damn close.

**BOB McCORD.** If this is another one of your...

**MANNY.** Pipe dreams? Yeah, probably. It is now, I guess. Forget it.

**BOB McCORD.** *(Hating himself:)* Close to what?

**MANNY.** You don't know how your fans love you, Edward. Let me tell you a little story. I was having a quiet drink three months ago at the Coconut Grove and I fell into conversation with a gentleman at the bar, a real theatre aficionado, and we started talking about great moments we had witnessed on the stage and of course, he'd seen your work.

**BOB McCORD.** He'd seen...?

**MANNY.** All of it. "Seen" is too inadequate an expression. I was astounded at his knowledge of your career. I think of myself as an expert but he lived and breathed it. Hamlet. Richard. Brutus. Antony. These were the stars of his firmament. We talked into the night of the profound and startling insights you had brought to these giants of the canon and we wept, wept there in the bar of the coconut grove as we imagined...well, what difference does it make now?

**BOB McCORD.** Imagined what?

**MANNY.** As we tried in our feeble way to imagine the glory of your...King Lear.

**BOB McCORD.** Ohhh. Lear.

**MANNY.** Lear. Like a giant peak dominating the alps. How many brave souls have started out, determined to scale that majestic summit; how many have perished along the journey; how few have actually achieved those rarified heights. It was then, in a flash of inspiration, that it hit us. What wouldn't we give not only to see you seize your birthright but to...immortalize the experience on film so that future generations may know what genius is.

**BOB McCORD.** A movie...?

**MANNY.** ...Of Lear. The definitive performance by the greatest talent of our generation. We had almost gathered all our backers. The studio was willing to support it but now...with you going back to England and breaking your contract...

**BOB McCORD.** You had the money?

**MANNY.** We were this close.

**BOB McCORD.** And the studio would be supportive?

**MANNY.** “Supportive”? When this gets out, it would not surprise me if there was a bidding war.

*(A long moment of silence.)*

**BOB McCORD.** Five more pictures?

**MANNY.** Might as well be five hundred.

**BOB McCORD.** I might...might be able to see my way to five more.

**MANNY.** Don't tease me, Edward!

**BOB McCORD.** Five more pictures.

**MANNY.** And no drinking. No brawling. You show up on time and let the stunt men handle the whip.

**BOB McCORD.** Lear!

**MANNY.** Lear!

**BOB McCORD.** By God, I'm a new man. When do we announce?

**MANNY.** Soon. Very soon. Just have to cross a few “T's” and dot some “i's.” Why don't you go home and clean yourself up. You've got a full day's work ahead of you. Maybe send some flowers and a bottle of scotch to Jack.

**BOB McCORD.** He's a good man, isn't he?

**MANNY.** Salt of the earth.

**BOB McCORD.** Who's directing?

**MANNY.** Directing?

**BOB McCORD.** My...

**MANNY.** Lear? Ah, well, I...I can't say right at this moment. Still negotiating but, I think you'll be very pleased. Very, very, very pleased.

**BOB McCORD.** Vidor?

**MANNY.** My lips are sealed.

**BOB McCORD.** Not...Griffith?

**MANNY.** You didn't hear it from me.

*(BOB starts offstage.)*

**BOB McCORD.** You're a good chap, Manny.

**MANNY.** Just doing my job.

**BOB McCORD.** I'd like to meet him.

**MANNY.** Meet?

**BOB McCORD.** Your backer. The angel in the bar.

**MANNY.** Oh. Yes. God, he'd be so thrilled! I'll get right on that. But you go home and get yourself ready for tomorrow.

**BOB McCORD.** "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow."

*(MANNY is practically pushing BOB offstage.)*

**MANNY.** "Good night, sweet prince! May flights of angels sing you to your sleep!"

*(BOB leaves. MANNY turns and starts in the opposite direction just as the two thugs, CARTER and GRUM, return. MANNY does an about-face and grabs a basket of props which he hoists in front of his face. The THUGS walk past and MANNY looks like he's almost home free when the YOUNG MAN comes on SL.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Mr. Weisenberg?

*(CARTER turns and smiles like a shark smelling blood in the water.)*

**CARTER.** Mister Weisenberg.

**MANNY.** *(To the YOUNG MAN, reluctantly:)* Five minutes.

*(The YOUNG MAN exits SL. MANNY turns to face the music. The two THUGS split up so there is one on either side of him. CARTER speaks in a slightly formal and stilted manner. GRUM is deaf and signs his words.)*

**CARTER.** Mr. Weisenberg. I am Mr. Carter and this is my professional associated, Mr. Grum.

**MANNY.** Pleased to meet you.

(MANNY *extends his hand*; GRUM *just looks at it*. GRUM *signs*.  
CARTER *translates*.)

**CARTER.** Likewise, I'm sure.

**MANNY.** Is he, uh...?

**CARTER.** Yes.

(GRUM *signs*.)

But not the other thing.

**MANNY.** No.

**CARTER.** He hates it when people call him the other thing.

(GRUM *signs viciously*.)

**MANNY.** No problem.

**CARTER.** We are here at the bequest of our employer, Mr. Joey Bananas, on the matter of some urgency; a delinquent debt.

**MANNY.** I'm sure it's just a little bookkeeping mistake.

(GRUM *signs*; CARTER *translates*.)

**CARTER.** Actually, we had one of those last week.

**MANNY.** You did? Well, see, there you have it.

**CARTER.** The little bookkeeper who made the mistake is now studying the marine... (*Hesitates a moment*) ...en-viron-ment of Santa Monica bay.

(CARTER *pulls a little red book out of his jacket pocket, thumbs through it and marks a page with a stub of a pencil*.)

**MANNY.** Good book?

**CARTER.** "The Power of Words." I'm supposed to use a word three times a day to make it mine. I am of the opinion that vocabulary makes the man.

(GRUM *signs*. CARTER *to GRUM*.)

Who's asking you?

**MANNY.** You've got...aspirations?

**CARTER.** (*Embarrassed:*) I shower twice a day.

**MANNY.** No, I mean, you want to “improve” yourself. Change your life. Do something different than...than what you do.

**CARTER.** (*Confiding:*) It’s not very satisfying.

**MANNY.** I can imagine. Have you ever given thought to a career in film? You, both of you, have very strong features. And a look. A definite look. A good look. Let me tell you a little story. Five years ago there was a young man, with no more advantages than yourself, a man who had tumbled about in the world and felt its indifference and its blows. And then one day an agent saw this young man on the street and was struck by his rugged looks, so much like your own, and arranged an audition for him. That prescient agent was myself and that young man was William S. Hart.

(GRUM *signs to* CARTER.)

**CARTER.** (*To* GRUM:) I know, I know. (*To* MANNY:) We would be most pleased to continue this discussion with you at a later date. If there is such a thing for you. You owe Mr. Bananas three thousand four hundred and thirty-five dollars and fifty cents.

**MANNY.** Fifty cents?

**CARTER.** We took a trolley over.

**MANNY.** I’m a man of my word, gentlemen, and I certainly don’t want to disappoint Mr. Bananas...

**CARTER.** No sir, you don’t want to do that.

**MANNY.** I just, uh, wasn’t expecting this conversation right now and I don’t carry that kind of cash on me. But I could certainly arrange to meet you here later.

**CARTER.** We would require a deposit of some kind. Anatomically speaking.

**MANNY.** Look, the truth is, I haven’t got it but, but I’ve got something going here, something big, a sure thing, and I’m quite confident that if Mr. Bananas could see his way to giving me just a couple of months...

**CARTER.** Most first-time clients prefer a digit.

*(GRUM pulls out a small pair of pruning shears.)*

**MANNY.** A couple of weeks?!

**CARTER.** You can choose the hand.

**MANNY.** A week! One week and I will have it all, every dime, I swear! And, we can discuss that other matter. Your audition.

*(CARTER and GRUM confer quietly.)*

**CARTER.** *(To MANNY:)* You're including the vig, of course?

**MANNY.** Of course!

*(GRUM signs.)*

**CARTER.** *(To MANNY:)* You represent Bob Whiplash McCord?

**MANNY.** Yes. I do.

*(GRUM signs.)*

**CARTER.** No! Absolutely not.

*(GRUM signs again; very emphatically.)*

It's fucking unprofessional.

*(GRUM signs. CARTER sighs and turns back to MANNY.)*

My associate has a kid who is a big fan of Mr. McCord and he wonders if it would be an inconveyance if he got an autographed pictures for him?

**MANNY.** Not at all. Who should he make it out to?

*(CARTER looks at GRUM. GRUM blushes as he signs.)*

**CARTER.** You're kidding? *(To MANNY:)* Could you make it out to... "Tom Grum."

**MANNY.** Tom Grum.

**CARTER.** *(A dig at GRUM:)* His daughter will be ever so pleased. We will see you in one week, Mr. Weisenberg.

**MANNY.** A week.

**CARTER.** One. Week.

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(CARTER and GRUM leave SR. MANNY wipes the sweat off his face. The YOUNG MAN comes back on SL.)

**YOUNG MAN.** Mr. Weisenberg?

*(No response.)*

Mr. Weisenberg, are you ok?

**MANNY.** Just peachy

**YOUNG MAN.** Is this a bad time?

**MANNY.** “Is this a bad time?” No, it’s an awful time. A disastrous time. A catastrophic time but that doesn’t mean we can’t talk.

**YOUNG MAN.** I could come back; it’s more personal than professional.

**MANNY.** Nah, you been very patient. Me and King Neptune here... *(Re: the balsa wood figure of Poseidon on the ship’s bow:)* ...we’re all ears.

**YOUNG MAN.** King who?

**MANNY.** Neptune. God of the ocean. Patron saint of drowning agents. So, what you got for me; personally, not professionally?

**YOUNG MAN.** Miss Bow, Miss Clara Bow, suggested I talk to you. She thinks...well, she says, I have talent.

**MANNY.** “Talent”? Where did you meet Miss Bow?

**YOUNG MAN.** USC.

**MANNY.** You a letterman?

**YOUNG MAN.** Yessir! Played fullback on the varsity squad.

**MANNY.** *(Wryly:)* I’d heard Clara went in for team sports; the more the merrier!

**YOUNG MAN.** She’s been very supportive. Of all of us.

**MANNY.** I can imagine. So, you wanta be in movies?

**YOUNG MAN.** Yessir. Very much.

**MANNY.** Why?

**YOUNG MAN.** *(An alien thought:)* “Why?” Well, gee, I don’t know, exactly. I guess...It looks like fun.

**MANNY.** Fun? *(He laughs.)* Oh, yeah, let the good times roll. OK, so what kind of movies do you want to make?

**YOUNG MAN.** Westerns!

**MANNY.** Westerns? Oh, for the love of...look, Kid, I like a good oater same as the next guy but between you, me, and the wall, Westerns are on their way out. Gonna be dead as a dodo in five years.

**YOUNG MAN.** *(Stubborn:)* I like westerns.

**MANNY.** He likes westerns. What’s your name?

**YOUNG MAN.** Marion Michael Morrison.

*(MANNY grimaces.)*

**MANNY.** You gotta dog? What’s your dog’s name?

**YOUNG MAN.** Duke.

**MANNY.** Duke is good. Duke Morrison. Michael Duke. Something like that. Come by the office on Monday and we’ll talk.

**YOUNG MAN.** Yessir!

**MANNY.** And Duke?

**YOUNG MAN.** Sir?

**MANNY.** Forget the westerns.

*(The YOUNG MAN waves and walks off SL. CHERIE enters from SR wearing a lobster costume.)*

**CHERIE.** Manny!

**MANNY.** Cherie!

*(His whole face lights up at the sight of her.)*

“Camera rolling! Iris in on slate. TRUE LOVE, starring Manny Weisenberg and Cherie Miller. You’re alone, Manny. You’ve just had the worst day of your life. You feel like you’ve got a grizzly bear AND a rattlesnake in your gut. Suddenly, Cherie enters. A

breath of fresh air. The room is filled with flowers and light. You see her. You WANT her. (*Advancing of CHERIE:*) You march over to her and GRAB her in your arms!”

**CHERIE.** CUT!

*(CHERIE holds him off with a gesture and a tone that is maybe a little more curt than she intended.)*

**MANNY.** Cut?

**CHERIE.** The costume’s...kinda fragile.

**MANNY.** (*Uncertain:*) Oh, OK. Sure.

*(They share a tenuous hug.)*

I didn’t know you were working today, toots.

**CHERIE.** “Treasures of the Sea.” We’re over at the barn. I just gotta five.

**MANNY.** You look fabulous.

**CHERIE.** I look like the blue plate special down at the pier. You mind lighting me up?

*(MANNY puts a cigarette in her mouth and lights it. Through the following he will give her a puff and then hold the cigarette.)*

**MANNY.** I thought you quit?

**CHERIE.** What’s wrong, you don’t like your seafood smoked?

**MANNY.** It’s bad for you.

**CHERIE.** I know. Makes your shell green and your claws droop and plays hell when you molt. You say you had a bad day?

**MANNY.** Oh, you know, “Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you like the play?”

**CHERIE.** That bad?

**MANNY.** Edward’s feeling unloved; he was ready to book passage on the Queen Mary but I think I got him back on the reservation. And...there was other stuff. No big deal. It’ll work out.

**CHERIE.** You always say that.

**MANNY.** It always does.

**CHERIE.** This bad day, wouldn't have anything to do with you being down at the track, would it?

**MANNY.** Hey, I made a promise, kiddo.

**CHERIE.** 'Cause I saw you talking to those two guys...

**MANNY.** *(Interrupting:)* Just now you mean? Prospective clients. They're working on that Gangster thing over on seven. How's about you? Why don't you sit down, take a load off.

*(CHERIE tries to sit down but can't.)*

**CHERIE.** I hate this stupid costume. *(Starting to cry:)* I can't do this anymore, Manny. I can't.

**MANNY.** Hey, hey, hey, what's with the waterworks? Please, baby, you know you slay me when you cry.

**CHERIE.** I think I should call it quits.

**MANNY.** What're you talking about?

**CHERIE.** I want to go home.

**MANNY.** No.

**CHERIE.** My career's just not working out, Manny. It's not happening. I'm not getting anywhere.

**MANNY.** What is that? What? You're doing great! You got a job...

**CHERIE.** Look at me, Manny, I'm a LOBSTER!

**MANNY.** OK. OK. I know this isn't great but it's a start.

**CHERIE.** Don't tell me I'm paying my dues.

**MANNY.** You're working your way up the ladder.

**CHERIE.** I'm working my way down the food chain! Three weeks ago when they opened that new restaurant on La Brea I was a chicken; today I'm a crustacean. This is not progress.

**MANNY.** Look, baby, let me tell you a little story.

**CHERIE.** I don't want any little stories.

**MANNY.** Just one. Once upon a time, true story now, there was this young actress came to town, sweet and beautiful and talented, very much like somebody else I know but whose name I won't mention, but anyways, this young actress didn't know a soul, didn't have two dimes to rub together but she was determined to make a go of it because she had dream. So, she demonstrated hand creams at Schwabs and played a petunia in the Rose Parade and a senorita in the La Fiesta and then one day she got a part in a movie, just a little part mind you, nothing big, coupla lines, but when people saw her on the screen they went nuts. You know who that actress was?

**CHERIE.** King Kong?

**MANNY.** Mary Pickford.

**CHERIE.** I'm not Mary Pickford.

**MANNY.** No, you're not, you're better.

**CHERIE.** Stop.

**MANNY.** I know, I'm prejudiced, but hey, I can be objective about these things. I spend all day looking at talent and I know it when I see it. And I'm looking at it right now.

**CHERIE.** I don't think I got it, Manny.

**MANNY.** You do, you just don't see it. You don't see it because you don't know how to look. People everywhere, they don't know how to look. That's what movies do. They show you how to look. Lemme show you.

*(MANNY grinds out the cigarette on the ground and then gently takes off her lobster helmet. He fluffs her hair gently and guides her over to where the prop guys have parked a pirate's treasure chest full of coins and jewelry. Sticking out of the top is a heavily jeweled hand mirror. MANNY holds it up in front of CHERIE.)*

**MANNY.** OK. Close up, Cherie Miller. Tell me what you see.

**CHERIE.** I see...the world's worst case of shingles.

**MANNY.** You're not looking.

**CHERIE.** I see a girl in a lobster suit.

**MANNY.** Look closer at the girl.

**CHERIE.** I see a dime a dozen.

**MANNY.** Look closer. What do you see? Tell me about her face.

**CHERIE.** She's got...this is stupid.

**MANNY.** Indulge me.

**CHERIE.** She's got all the right number of parts, two ears, one nose, one mouth, one chin.

**MANNY.** Look closer. Really look. You see the dimple in the her chin? You see that?

**CHERIE.** Yeah.

**MANNY.** And that adorable mouth?

**CHERIE.** Not so...

**MANNY.** (*Interrupting:*) And her eyes? Tell me about her eyes.

**CHERIE.** She's got...OK eyes.

**MANNY.** OK? OK?! And the Hope diamond is an "OK" rock? What are the eyes like?

**CHERIE.** They're blue. Where they're not red.

**MANNY.** Blue like the Pacific ocean.

**CHERIE.** (*Blushing:*) Stop.

**MANNY.** You see the fire in those eyes?

**CHERIE.** Those are tears.

**MANNY.** That's so you can see rainbows. Behind the tears, there's fire in those eyes. You see that.

**CHERIE.** (*Very quietly:*) Maybe.

**MANNY.** There's fire in those eyes 'cause there's a dream in your heart. A big dream. A dream too big for the little town it grew up in so it came out West where dreams have got room. You're not a dime a dozen here, Cherie. You and your dream, you're the heart and soul of this town.

*(Gently puts a paste crown on her head.)*

You...you are Miss Hollywood.

**CHERIE.** Ahhh.

*(They kiss. An ASSISTANT DIRECTOR sticks his head on stage.)*

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.** Hey! Lobster girl! We're back! Get your ass in gear!

*(The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR leaves. The mood broken, CHERIE takes off her crown and picks up her lobster helmet.)*

**CHERIE.** I know that's the way you see it, Manny. I don't. I'm going home.

**MANNY.** Please, baby, don't do that.

**CHERIE.** You can come with me?

**MANNY.** And do what?

**CHERIE.** I know.

**MANNY.** Look, Cherie, just...just give it one more week, alright. One week. I got a feeling that something good is just about to happen for you. A hunch.

**CHERIE.** *(Wryly:)* Like you get at the track?

**MANNY.** Oooh, low blow. One week. The buses are still gonna be running. What's a week? You're so close, baby, I know it, I can feel it in my bones. *(Grabbing the newspaper:)* Someday it's gonna be you in that headline.

**CHERIE.** CHERIE MILLER NEARS COMPLETION?

*(MANNY laughs and stuffs the paper in his pocket.)*

**MANNY.** No! CHERIE MILLER, AMERICA'S SWEETHEART! What do you say?

**CHERIE.** I say...Manny Weisenberg, you could sell ice cream to eskimos but not today...no sale.

*(CHERIE starts to walk off.)*

**MANNY.** One week and if something great doesn't happen, a part, a real part in a real movie, then...then...I'll leave with you!

**CHERIE.** You'll...come with me to Poughkeepsie?

**MANNY.** Poughkeepsie?

*(Deep breath.)*

OK. One week!

**CHERIE.** How's that gonna happen?

**MANNY.** I don't know, fate! A little something here, a little something there, it comes together and BOOM!

*(A moment.)*

**CHERIE.** OK, Manny one week. But when it doesn't work out, I ain't gonna hold you to the Poughkeepsie part.

**MANNY.** You aren't gonna need to 'cause in one week the most fabulous thing is gonna happen! You wait and see.

*(CHERIE leaves. MANNY stands there a minute in a state of shock at what he's done. He walks over to the pirate ship and looks up at King Neptune.)*

You ever have one of those days, your Highness—just feel like you're treadin' water and goin' down for the third time? Me, too.

*(MANNY absently pulls the newspaper out of his pocket and slowly whacks himself on the head with it, over and over.)*

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

*(Suddenly, MANNY stops hitting himself. He unfolds the newspaper and reads with growing excitement:)*

“WESTERN AVENUE NEARS COMPLETION! Excitement is building as the last few miles of historic Western Avenue approach San Pedro, linking Hollywood with the Pacific Ocean. Real Estate developers and local boosters like San Pedro's “Committee of 100” eagerly await a decision by the Los Angeles County Road Commissioner as to the exact route of Western Avenue and then, happy citizens will pop the champagne!

*(A moment as the wheels turn and his idea takes shape.)*

Linking Hollywood...

*(MANNY glances over at the paste crown and a golden beam of light falls down on it like the living embodiment of divine inspiration.)*

...and the Pacific Ocean.

*(MANNY looks over at the papier mache figure of King Neptune and another golden beam of light falls on that. MANNY plops Bob's cowboy hat on top of Neptune's head. MANNY stands back, grinning, enjoying the image and slowly raises the newspaper over his head in triumph as the Hallelujah chorus rings throughout the firmament!)*

*(Blackout.)*

## Scene 2

*(TIME: That night.)*

*(SETTING: An office in San Pedro. A couple of beat-up desks, several phones, a watercooler, stacks of promotional materials and yard signs advertising Casa Del Oro Estates. Featured prominently on the wall is a large map labeled WESTERN AVENUE. The stretch of road shows parcels of land alongside it which are colored out in different ink except for one patch. Hanging above is a banner which reads: "The Western Avenue Scenic Drive Association Committee of One Hundred!")*

*(AT RISE: Two men are in the room, GUS GRIDLEY, a local developer and San Pedro City Manager, and JAMES "JIMMY" BOYLE, a local banker and Mayor of San Pedro. GUS is in shirt sleeves and suspenders. JIMMY wears a tie, a coat, and a look of perpetual guilt.)*

**JIMMY.** What's taking Bulldog so long?

**GUS.** I don't know. The County Road Commissioner's a snake. With him, you never can tell.

*(Both men nervously knock on wood. The downstage phone rings. The two men look at the phone. JIMMY starts to reach for the phone and then stops in panic.)*

**JIMMY.** Is that “Gold Coast Savings and Loan,” or “Triple A Mortgage brokerage”?

**GUS.** For Pete’s sake, Jimmy, “Triple A Mortgage Brokerage!”

**JIMMY.** *(Popping an antacid tablet:)* I’m tired all right, so shoot me! Feels like we haven’t slept in weeks.

**GUS.** It’ll all be over soon. One way or another. I’ll set and you close.

*(JIMMY picks up and hands GUS the phone. GUS slips into his “receptionist” character.)*

Hello? “Triple A Mortgage Brokerage,” Michael Murphy’s office. How may I help you? And who may I say is calling? Mrs. McGillicuddy.

*(GUS signals excitedly to JIMMY who hurries to the wall and checks the map.)*

**JIMMY.** *(Whispering:)* Bingo!

**GUS.** *(On the phone:)* Just a minute, Mrs. McGillicuddy, I’m putting you through to Mr. Murphy.

*(GUS hands the phone to JIMMY who slips into character.)*

**JIMMY.** Michael Murphy here, Mrs...McGillicuddy. Yes. What can I do for you? Well, what kind of letter was it, ma’am? Well, of course you’re upset. A foreclosure is very upsetting.

*(JIMMY holds the phone away from his ear while the party on the other end vents loudly. Then, back into the phone.)*

There’s really no need for that kind of language, Mrs. McGillicuddy. Well, you could call the lender on your mortgage. Do you have your papers in front of you? Gold Coast Savings and Loan? Well, I suggest you give Gold Coast a call and see what they say. What? Must be a clerical error. Let me see, I’m pretty sure I’ve got their phone number here somewhere...

*(JIMMY cups phone and counts silently to ten. Back to phone:)*

Here we are, Gold Coast Savings and Loan is Lakewood 8-7965. No problem. Glad to be of help.

*(JIMMY hangs up. Wracked with guilt:)*

There's going to be a special place in hell for us.

**GUS.** You'll forget all about it when that dough starts rolling in. What the hell is holding up Bulldog? He should've been back hours ago.

**JIMMY.** You think the County Road Commissioner wouldn't take our... "contribution"?

**GUS.** Hard to imagine. That sleazeball is always on the take.

*(Both men knock wood.)*

Maybe Bulldog stopped in at Gerties to celebrate!

**JIMMY.** I thought he shut Gerties down?

**GUS.** Temporary. A couple of the girls were just behind a little.

*(The US phone rings. GUS nods to JIMMY.)*

OK. This is it. Let's make a clean kill.

*(JIMMY picks up.)*

**JIMMY.** *(In a falsetto:)* Gold Coast Savings and Loan. How may I direct your call? Uh-huh. Sounds like you need to speak to one of our account managers in the Loan department. Let me put you through. *(Covers the phone and whispers:)* McGillicuddy.

*(GUS takes the phone and assumes a new personae and voice.)*

**GUS.** Chuck Baker here, to whom do I have the pleasure of speaking? "Mrs. McGillicuddy." How do you spell that? Uh-huh. And how may I be of service to you today, Mrs. McGillicuddy? I see. Do you have the loan number in front of you? Uh-huh. let me just jot that down.

*(Counts to ten silently, then back into phone.)*

Well, I'll certainly look into it but if we haven't received your mortgage payments for...how long does the letter say it's been? That long? Gosh, I'm sorry, but if that's really the case I doubt there's very much we can do now, the process of eviction becomes automatic at that point. Do you have any proof you sent those checks?

*(Both men wait nervously. GUS suddenly smiles at JIMMY in relief.)*

Uh-huh. That is too bad. Yes. Well, it could be the fault of the post office but how would we know that? Ma'am. Ma'am, crying isn't going to solve anything. No, no that's right. You just pick up your little chin and start packing. God bless you!

*(GUS hangs up.)*

It's done!

*(JIMMY hurries to the wall map and triumphantly inks in the last remaining blank space.)*

**JIMMY.** It's ours! Every property along the whole route is ours, kit and caboodle!

**GUS.** Now if the Road Commissioner will just run the extension through our parcel...

**JIMMY.** Amen!

**GUS.** We'll sub-divide...

**JIMMY.** ...Roll out those estate plans...

**GUS.** ...and start selling houses at twenty thousand smackaroos a pop. Casa del Oro.

**JIMMY.** Vista del Oro.

**GUS.** Casa del Vista del Oro! Whatever!

*(A moment as their achievement sinks in.)*

**JIMMY.** What are you going to do with your share, Gus?

**GUS.** Baja. Great fishing down there. Gonna buy me a thirty-foot boat with a hand-picked "deck crew," if you know what I mean, in halter tops and little linen short shorts, the kind that get see-

through when they get wet, and just cruise along, keg of beer down below in the ice along with that trophy sailfish I just caught. How's about you?

**JIMMY.** Me? Oh, I don't know. I think...I think I'd like to go to Europe. Travel the world, maybe. Yeah. One of those swank rooms on the Queen Mary, a suite. I'd sit on my private balcony and watch the sun go down while the steward brings me another drink before I even ask for it. Maybe there's a movie star staying next door, hiding out from her public, but we bump into each other at the captain's table and...

*(The door opens and SHERIFF BARNEY "BULLDOG" SVENSON enters.)*

**GUS.** Hey, Dog! What took you so long? We were just going to send out the cavalry!

**JIMMY.** Great news, Bulldog, we just bagged the last one!

**GUS.** McGillicuddy is ours.

**JIMMY.** Folded just a few minutes ago so we got every property on the whole route sewed up!

**GUS.** So what did the Road Commissioner say? Is he gonna run the Western Avenue extension through our parcel, or one of those other guys?

*(BULLDOG considers them for a moment.)*

**BULLDOG.** Drink.

*(A worried glance between JIMMY and GUS. JIMMY pulls out a chair while GUS pours a shot of scotch. BULLDOG downs it.)*

**GUS.** So, how'd we do?

**JIMMY.** What's the good word?

*(BULLDOG clears his throat.)*

**BULLDOG.** Boys...we're fucked.

**JIMMY.** I knew it!

**GUS.** What happened? Wouldn't the County Road Commissioner see you?

**BULLDOG.** Oh, yeah. He saw me. First, he kept me waiting half an hour outside his office just to let me know who's boss. Then, when he brings me in, he chews out his secretary for making me wait but I know it's all an act. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. These fuckin' Micks. Bog-trotting, whiskey soaked, graft taking sons of bitches. They're all as crooked as a dog's hind leg! No offense, Boyle.

**JIMMY.** None taken.

**GUS.** So what happened? Did he take our...campaign contribution?

**BULLDOG.** Of course he took it! Pissin' and moanin' the whole time about his re-election expenses. Like I don't know what it costs to be a public servant in LA County!

**JIMMY.** Was it enough?

**BULLDOG.** Apparently it just keeps us in the running with the other guys.

**GUS.** What did he say about Western Avenue?

**BULLDOG.** He wouldn't. "We're still doing more topographical surveys, looking at grades, soil samples..." (*Makes masturbatory gesture*) ...yeah, yeah, yeah, and all the time he's sitting there, this smug expression on his face.

**GUS.** So when is he going to make a decision about the route?

**BULLDOG.** At least I got that out of him. One week from today. One week from today and he announces his decision. One week from today and it's all over.

**JIMMY.** You think he's going to give it to one of the other syndicates?

**BULLDOG.** I think he's going to play us off against each other as long as possible and squeeze everybody as much as he can.

**JIMMY.** A bidding war?

**GUS.** Doesn't matter, we're tapped out.

**JIMMY.** (*Unwrapping another antacid:*) We could always go back to Joey Bananas.

**GUS.** Right. We go back to Joey for more money and he's going to want more of the deal and by the end we'll be lucky if Joey let's us have five percent and all of our fingers.

**JIMMY.** Five percent of something is better than fifty percent of nothing. And at least this way, we pay Joey off. The other way, we can't pay Joey back and...and...we all know what that means.

*(A nervous moment. JIMMY eats two lozenges, GUS lights a cigarette and BULLDOG takes another drink. There is a knock at the door. The men look at one another.)*

**JIMMY.** McGillicuddy?

**GUS.** Don't be stupid. It's probably a Casa Del Oro estates.

**BULLDOG.** Come in!

*(MANNY steps inside the door.)*

**MANNY.** Evening all, I'm Manny Weisenberg.

**GUS.** And you're interested in a Casa del Oro estate property?

*(MANNY glances about, shrewdly taking in the scene.)*

**MANNY.** Those soon to be magnificent properties bordering the new Western Avenue extension?

**JIMMY.** We hope.

*(GUS and BULLDOG both look daggers at JIMMY. He quails. Quickly...)*

We hope you like'em.

**GUS.** Would you like to see some plans?

**MANNY.** Actually, I was looking for... (*Consulting his newspaper:*) ...the headquarters of "The Western Avenue Scenic Drive Association Committee of One Hundred."

**BULLDOG.** You're looking at'em.

**MANNY.** I see.

**JIMMY.** You got boxes, just leave 'em in the hallway.

**MANNY.** The only delivery I'm making tonight is good news.

**GUS.** *(Suddenly hopeful:)* You from the LA County Commissioner of Roads?

**MANNY.** No, sir, I am heaven sent.

**BULLDOG.** Oh, Christ, it's one of those Watchtower nuts. Get outta here ya bum!

**MANNY.** I think there's a misunderstanding. I am a talent agent in Hollywood.

**JIMMY.** *(Very interested:)* You're with the movies?

**MANNY.** I am! I handle some of Hollywood's greatest stars. My card. All I want, gentlemen, is a minute of your time to discuss an undertaking of mutual interest. A minute and...maybe a drink?

**BULLDOG.** Something must be wrong with your eyes. I'm an officer of the law and alcohol is against the law.

**MANNY.** Then, maybe I could have a cup of tea. Out of that bottle behind you.

*(JIMMY and GUS look to BULLDOG. He shrugs. GUS pours MANNY a shot. MANNY drinks. Smiles.)*

**MANNY.** Douglas Fairbanks doesn't pour smoother hootch than that.

**BULLDOG.** We break up a lot of stills around here. Among other things.

**MANNY.** *(Getting the hint:)* You look like busy people so let me get right to the point. I couldn't help but notice the exciting news this morning regarding the extension of Western Avenue. It reminded me of a little story I once heard. Once upon a time there was a similar road being built and there was this enterprising group of civic minded gentlemen who understood that wherever those last two miles of road were gonna be laid, property values were gonna go sky high.

*(MANNY looks at their map.)*

And so these visionaries began to acquire as much land as possible along that stretch. The only possible fly in their ointment was that the Powers That Be had yet to determine where exactly this road would go: through the newly acquired property of our heroes, or these other groups who had stolen their idea and were trying to beat them at their own game. Pretty damn exciting stuff. For the winner, there was going to be champagne and oysters. For the loser...there was going to be a lot of expensive dirt that nobody wanted and couldn't be given away.

**BULLDOG.** So, what happened to these guys?

**MANNY.** Well, it's interesting. The actual decision was to be made by the County Road Commissioner. Our heroes knew well what all elected officials want more than anything else in the world.

**JIMMY.** Money?

**BULLDOG.** Don't be vulgar. "RE."—"E."—"LECTION."

**MANNY.** Exactly.

**BULLDOG.** So they did what?

**MANNY.** They knew that the only meaningful leverage they could apply to the Roads Commissioner was public pressure. Public expectation. Public DEMAND. They realized that if they could convince the Voting Public that their route was the ONLY way to go, the Commissioner would have to rule in their favor.

**BULLDOG.** How do we do that? I mean, how did they do that?

**MANNY.** They found a man. A man with unique gifts and connections who showed them how to create a public event of such extraordinary size and popularity that the tide of public opinion would turn and flow with unstoppable force in their favor.

*(BULLDOG, JIMMY, and GUS exchange looks.)*

**BULLDOG.** OK. What can you do?

**MANNY.** Imagine if you will, a spectacle, here, in San Pedro that recognizes the historic achievement of bringing Western Avenue from the hills of Hollywood to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. A stunning pageant...

**BULLDOG.** (*Interrupting:*) A pageant? Get the fuck outta here!

**GUS.** No, wait a minute, Bulldog, he may be onto something. I mean, I sell real estate with gimmicks all the time. You take some farmed out orange grove and you can't give it away and then you build a white stucco gate in front and call it "Vista View" and suddenly you can't keep up with the demand.

**MANNY.** This is no gimmick! This is an EVENT that people will talk about for years to come. The first Thanksgiving. The signing of the Declaration of Independence. The golden spike joining the transcontinental railroad. Gimmick? This will a sumptuous feast for the senses, covered by every news organization in the country, and replete with Hollywood royalty. I can guarantee you the presence of... (*Pausing dramatically.*) ...Bob "Whiplash" McCord!

**BULLDOG.** Whiplash McCord?!

**JIMMY.** Holy God!

**GUS.** My kids would piss themselves!

**BULLDOG.** Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute! Sure, you can get a big turnout for Whiplash but somebody like that is gonna cost a fortune. Which we ain't got.

**MANNY.** Actually, Mr. McCord might be willing to forgo his usual up-front appearance fee. (*Whispering with excitement:*) You see I can't release all the details but Mr. McCord is about to announce the start of a major new film. For a very modest investment, the Western Avenue Scenic Association could become backers in this exciting and sure to be lucrative event.

**BULLDOG.** How modest?

**MANNY.** The details we can go over later BUT—with the exception of my personal fee, which is a mere...three thousand four hundred and thirty-five dollars and fifty cents—your actual investment would not need to be paid until after the Road Commissioner announces you have won the right of way at which point, you will be swimming in so much money this will just be pocket change for you.

**GUS.** Let me get this straight. We don't got to pay nothing up front except your fee of three thousand...

**MANNY.** ...four hundred and thirty-five dollars and fifty cents...

**JIMMY.** ...Fifty cents...?

**MANNY.** ...My accountants are very strict. And various and sundry miscellaneous production expenses.

**GUS.** ...And the rest of it we don't got to pay until after we nail down the right of way?

**MANNY.** Correctomundo. And frankly, gentlemen, with the attention I anticipate, I don't see how the Road Commissioner can afford NOT to give you the right of way.

*(GUS, BULLDOG, and JIMMY look at one another silently.)*

It's a bold undertaking, I understand.

*(Pause.)*

And you know, I think it's only fair to present this proposal to your rival group as well. Why don't you mull it over while I go talk to them...

*(MANNY starts to leave.)*

**BULLDOG.** Hold your horses!

**JIMMY.** Wait a minute!

**GUS.** Hang on!

**BULLDOG.** *(Chewing his lip:)* Tell me...tell me what you got in mind exactly. This "pageant" thing.

**MANNY.** Imagine if you will, a beauty pageant with the most gorgeous young women you have ever seen. From among these staggering bevy of beauties, one exquisite blossom is plucked...

*(The walls of the set are pulled away. CHERIE appears in a swimsuit, looking fabulous. A dozen red roses are handed to her. She blows kisses to the crowd as costumed attendants put a robe on her and then a gold crown.)*

...and crowned...Miss Hollywood! Attended by her court of damsels, Miss Hollywood makes her way in solemn procession along Western Avenue down from the hills of Hollywood, bridally attended by...by...the U.S. Army!

*(American flags unfurl. SOLDIERS enter singing "The Star Spangled Banner.")*

Simultaneously, in the once quiet bay of San Pedro, the U.S. Navy fires a twenty-one gun salute as the mighty monarch of the waves, KING NEPTUNE himself, rises out of the briny deep!

*(BOB is rolled onstage atop a high platform, dressed as King Neptune with a flowing cape twenty feet long. Around his feet, DOLPHINS, MERMAIDS, and LOBSTERS sport themselves.)*

Escorted by the U.S. Marine Corps band...

*(The MARINE CORPS BAND enters playing.)*

The grizzled sea God will make his way in state to the golden Shores of San Pedro there to await his bride! Yes, his BRIDE! The two processions of royalty from these twin adjoining kingdoms will meet on the sand, where, in front of thousands of bedazzled onlookers and on Nationwide radio hookup, Miss Hollywood and King Neptune will be wed!!!

*(Blackout)*

*End of Act I*

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*(TIME: One week later. Midday.)*

*(SETTING: On the beach at San Pedro. The backstage area of a temporary structure erected underneath and behind the Pier. Several large storage trailers are parked haphazardly and overflow with racks of costumes and baskets of props. Bits and pieces of floats from the parade are parked here and there. A number of temporary “dressing room” areas have been created by hanging an assortment of old drapes. A set of stairs US leads onto the “wing” of the stage. A scrim allows us to see the wing and a piece of the stage as desired.)*

*(From US, there is sound of a huge audience, which has followed the parade through San Pedro and now taken their seats in a temporary bandstand arranged for the occasion to watch the culminating event of the day: the pageant at which “Miss Hollywood” will be crowned. Above the din of the waiting crowd can occasionally be heard the cries of hotdog, lemonade, and cotton candy vendors, along with seagulls, and horns from passing boats.)*

*(AT RISE: Several CARPENTERS are putting the finishing touches on King Neptune’s throne. MANNY, carrying a papier mache dolphin under one arm, leads on two RADIO TECHNICIANS carrying their equipment.)*

**MANNY.** Right up those stairs there is the stage. You can set up your equipment in the wings.

**RADIO TECHNICIAN #1.** Thanks, Manny.

**MANNY.** De nada. You need anything, give me a call. Keep your hands off the mermaids, they’re all in high school, and Craft services is around the corner. A word to the wise—avoid the potato salad.

*(The RADIO TECHNICIANS go off. MANNY looks around nervously.)*

Hey, Chuck, you seen those two sharks of Joey Bananas’ around here today?

**CARPENTER #1.** The coast is clear.

**MANNY.** Gimme the high sign if you do, OK? How about Gus Gridley or Jimmy Boyles?

**CARPENTER #1.** They're around here somewhere.

**MANNY.** Thanks. *(Re: the throne:)* Nice work. I really appreciate you guys helpin' out today.

*(MANNY goes off SL as GUS, acting as Stage Manager, hurries on SR, carrying a clipboard and looking very harried.)*

**GUS.** Hey, what's with the throne?!

**CARPENTER #1.** We're workin' on it, Einstein.

**GUS.** Well, we're startin' in five minutes! Get a move on!

*(CARPENTER #1 rises threateningly, hammer in hand. GUS backs away.)*

Or just as soon as you can.

*(GUS hurries to Dressing Room #1)*

Five minutes till curtain, Mr. McCord!

*(The YOUNG MAN in the Western Union uniform wanders on looking very lost.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Excuse me. I'm looking for a Manny Weisenberg?

**GUS.** Try the concession tent.

*(The YOUNG MAN goes off SR as MANNY re-enters SL.)*

**MANNY.** Gus Gridley! Just the man I want to see!

**GUS.** Oh. Hey, Manny. Great parade!

*(GUS counters so that the throne and the carpenters are between him and MANNY—a move that is not lost on MANNY.)*

**MANNY.** You. You have been ducking me all day! Where's my check?

**GUS.** Your check?

**MANNY.** My check for three thousand four hundred and thirty-five dollars and fifty cents.

**GUS.** Gee, I'm pretty sure Jimmy has that.

**MANNY.** Jimmy has it?

*(The CARPENTERS lift up the throne and start off, GUS goes with them, keeping his distance from MANNY.)*

**GUS.** I'm pretty sure!

*(Before MANNY can give pursuit, CHERIE enters from Dressing Room #2.)*

**CHERIE.** Manny!

**MANNY.** Sweetheart.

**CHERIE.** Isn't it exciting?!

**MANNY.** *(Looking after GUS:)* Never a dull moment.

**CHERIE.** Do I look OK?

*(MANNY looks at CHERIE in her swim suit.)*

**MANNY.** No, you don't.

**CHERIE.** No?

**MANNY.** Definitely not "OK." Fabulous, maybe. Beautiful, definitely! Extraordinary! Mindboggling. Gorgeosity itself.

**CHERIE.** It's kinda revealin'.

**MANNY.** That's 'cause you're used to scales and claws and feathers and stuff. No, I think we'll just have to cancel the competition now.

**CHERIE.** Cancel!

**MANNY.** What's the point? You win hands down.

**CHERIE.** Oh, stop. Can I do my monologue for you?

**MANNY.** Your monologue?

**CHERIE.** My talent! I'm doing something from Shakespeare.

**MANNY.** Shakespeare? What happened to a little song, a little dance?

**CHERIE.** On account of Mr. McCord's judging. Can I do it for you?

**MANNY.** Nothing I'd like better, baby, but I got a million things to tend to right this minute. Give me five minutes. OK?

**CHERIE.** You promise?

**MANNY.** My word is my bond. Now, get ready, we're goin' up any second. And stay away from the potato salad at the Craft services table. Half of King Neptune's escort is puking their guts out and I gotta scrounge up some mermen fast.

*(BOB enters, dramatically casting aside the drape to his dressing room.)*

**BOB McCORD.** Manny!

*(CHERIE curtsseys, blushing to be in the presence of Hollywood royalty.)*

**CHERIE.** Your majesty. *(To MANNY:)* Catch you on the flip side!

*(CHERIE runs back into her dressing room.)*

**BOB McCORD.** Who was that?

**MANNY.** One of the contestants. How are your accommodations?

**BOB McCORD.** Dreadful beyond belief. Reminds me of a public toilet in Brighton. You told me this was going to be a simple PR event.

**MANNY.** Hey. When Bob McCord appears in public, nothing is simple. You see the size of those crowds lining the street?! They love you.

**BOB McCORD.** Why do I have to do this?

**MANNY.** It's good for your fans. And it's good to remind the studio how popular you are.

**BOB McCORD.** *(Shuddering:)* Judging a beauty pageant.

**MANNY.** Just smile and I'll give you the high sign on who to pick as your Miss Hollywood

**BOB McCORD.** But why "King Neptune"?

**MANNY.** *(Pulling BOB aside:)* Look, we're doing a major Image Makeover here. Remember the goal: King Lear.

**BOB McCORD.** *(Wistfully:)* Lear! You said my backer was going to be here.

**MANNY.** He is. He is.

**BOB McCORD.** He is?

**MANNY.** He's so shy, though.

**BOB McCORD.** I just want to thank him properly.

**MANNY.** Of course. Edward, there's one other thing we gotta talk about.

*(MANNY pulls off the head of the dolphin to reveal a bottle of scotch hidden inside.)*

How did this get there?

**BOB McCORD.** Hmmm. Just one of those mysteries of the sea, I suppose.

**MANNY.** Edward. It's very important right now that you stay on the wagon.

**BOB McCORD.** I know.

**MANNY.** You made me a promise.

**BOB McCORD.** Well, then, I'll keep it.

**MANNY.** Will you?

**BOB McCORD.** I need to get ready.

*(BOB ducks back into his dressing room. JIMMY enters, in an ill-fitting tux. He's MCing the event. He sees MANNY and does a U-turn. MANNY cuts him off.)*

**MANNY.** Hey. Hey! HEY! Jimmy, long time no see.

**JIMMY.** I gotta get on stage, Manny; the show's about to start.

**MANNY.** Here, your tie's crooked; let me fix it for you.

*(MANNY tightens JIMMY's tie.)*

Where's my check?

**JIMMY.** Your check?

**MANNY.** My fee.

**JIMMY.** I'm pretty sure that Gus has it.

**MANNY.** Funny. He said the same thing about you.

**JIMMY.** *(Choking:)* I think that's tight enough.

**MANNY.** I need my check.

*(BULLDOG and his annoying and extremely unattractive young daughter, GERALDINE, enter behind MANNY. GERALDINE is eating a candy bar. When BULLDOG talks to her, he tends to speak in "baby-talk.")*

**JIMMY.** Talk to Bulldog!

**MANNY.** I'm talking to you.

**BULLDOG.** Who needs to talk to the Dog?

*(MANNY spins around and JIMMY slips out of his grasp)*

Don't you need to get up on-stage, Jimmy, and get things started?

**JIMMY.** *(Relieved:)* Yes, sir!

*(JIMMY exits. Offstage, a small BAND begins playing.)*

**BULLDOG.** Geraldine, sweetie pie, what are you doin' stuffin' your little face? How many times I gotta tell you.

*(BULLDOG tears the candy out of her hands.)*

**GERALDINE.** I'm huuuungry!

**BULLDOG.** Manny, I'd like you to meet my Geraldine, the apple of my eye. Go ahead, sweetheart. Show him your stuff.

**GERALDINE.** *(Sulking:)* I don't wantta.

**BULLDOG.** Mr. Weisenberg is a Hollywood agent.

**GERALDINE.** Movies?!

(GERALDINE *immediately launches into a horrible version of “Big Rock Candy Mountain.”* BULLDOG *watches approvingly; MANNY is slack-jawed with dismay.* GERALDINE *finishes with a big tap dance flurry and strikes a pose.* BULLDOG *applauds thunderously.*)

**BULLDOG.** Isn't she something?

**MANNY.** Isn't she?

**BULLDOG.** Talent like that you don't see everyday.

**MANNY.** It's...rare.

**GERALDINE.** I wanta be in the movies! Daddy, tell him!

**JIMMY.** (*Over the backstage intercom:*) Ladies and Gentlemen! San Pedro's own "Western Avenue Scenic Drive Association Committee of One Hundred" invites you to sit back and watch as our beautiful contestants vie for the title of... "Miss Hollywood, 1929"...to be immediately followed by the nuptial event with King Neptune, presided over by our very own County Commissioner of Roads who promises an Announcement of special interest to all you citizens of San Pedro!

(*Applause. The BAND plays a fanfare. MANNY switches the intercom off.*)

**MANNY.** Bulldog, we had an agreement. I have arranged this fabulous event, as promised. Bob "Whiplash" McCord is here, as promised. The crowds are here, as promised. The National press is here, as promised. Where's my check?

(*BULLDOG pulls out a check.*)

**BULLDOG.** Right here.

**MANNY.** Oh, thank God. For a minute there, I thought...well, never mind.

(*MANNY reaches for the check but BULLDOG pulls it away.*)

**BULLDOG.** You also promised that the County Road commissioner would be here.

**MANNY.** He will be.

**BULLDOG.** And you promised that he will announce we got the right of way.

**MANNY.** ...It's in the bag. The press coverage has been relentless. All week he's been deluged with postcards and letters. He may be greedy but he's not stupid.

**BULLDOG.** Well, when he gets here and announces that Western Avenue is going through my little piece of San Pedro, then you get paid.

**MANNY.** That wasn't our deal!

**BULLDOG.** Call a cop why don'tcha?

*(A moment.)*

**MANNY.** Look, I have debts, here, and deadlines of my own, and I don't think you appreciate the delicacy of my position.

**BULLDOG.** I don't give a rat's ass! Now listen to me you little pissant! You are...

**GERALDINE.** Daddy! You're being a potty mouth.

**BULLDOG.** Sorry, sweetheart; Daddy's working. *(To MANNY:)* Listen, asshole, the Commissioner says the magic words and... *(Holding up a check:)* ...everybody gets paid but not a dime before then. Am I clear. Now, where does Geraldine get changed?

**MANNY.** What?

**BULLDOG.** Geraldine. She's in the pageant.

**MANNY.** *(In horror:)* No.

**BULLDOG.** *(Smiling:)* Yes.

**GERALDINE.** I'm gonna be a star!

**BULLDOG.** Yes, you are, snookums. You're gonna make a movie with Bob "Whiplash" McCord!

**GERALDINE.** Oh, Daddy, you're the bestest!

**MANNY.** This was not part of our deal!

**BULLDOG.** Musta slipped my mind. *(To GERALDINE:)* Daddy's gonna go out front and watch the show, babycakes. Have fun!

*(BULLDOG leaves. MANNY barely has time to wipe his brow before BOB enters in fury wearing his King Neptune costume.)*

**BOB McCORD.** Manny!

**GERALDINE.** *(Imperious:)* Where's my dressing room!

**MANNY.** *(To GERALDINE:)* Inna second, you. *(To BOB:)* What's up, chief?

**BOB McCORD.** Who designed this costume? It's Medea meets 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.

**MANNY.** God, I'd love to see your Medea.

**GERALDINE.** *(Jumping up and down:)* Where's my dressing room!

**BOB McCORD.** Children should be seen and not heard. *(A shuddering second look at GERALDINE:)* Sometimes they shouldn't even be seen.

**GERALDINE.** You look like a girl!

**MANNY.** *(Quickly:)* Hey, Geraldine, you hungry?

**GERALDINE.** Yeah.

**MANNY.** Well, over there is a special tent called, "Craft services" and it has anything you could ever want to eat, you just help yourself.

**GERALDINE.** Anything?

**MANNY.** Candy, soda pop, chips. Anything...except...the potato salad. You can't eat that. It's for grown-ups only.

**GERALDINE.** I want potato salad!

**MANNY.** Sorry; no can do.

**GERALDINE.** I want potato salad!

**MANNY.** No. Absolutely not. It's for your own good.

**GERALDINE.** DAAADDDYYYYY!!!

**MANNY.** Alright, alright, alright! You can have the potato salad.

**GERALDINE.** I'm gonna be a star!

*(GERALDINE runs off eagerly.)*

**BOB McCORD.** I never before understood the appeal of child sacrifice.

**MANNY.** You look great.

**BOB McCORD.** Don't mock me. I look like the Sargasso Sea wearing a dress. Where's my backer? I want to meet this "phantom"—that is, if he even exists.

**MANNY.** Oh ye of little faith.

*(GUS enters)*

**GUS.** Mr. McCord, you're on!

**MANNY.** You, I wanta talk to! Wait a minute! come here!

*(GUS runs off, pursued by MANNY. BOB stands there a moment, looking at himself in a mirror.)*

**BOB McCORD.** I...am a clown.

*(The YOUNG MAN enters.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Excuse me, sir, I'm lookin' for Manny Weisenberg? Say, you're Bob "Whiplash" McCord, ain't ya?!

**BOB McCORD.** Sadly, I am.

**YOUNG MAN.** Wow, wait'll I tell the guys.

**BOB McCORD.** Would you do me a favor, young man?

**YOUNG MAN.** Sure, anything!

*(BOB reaches into his costume and extracts a wad of bills. He peels off several and puts them into the YOUNG MAN's hand.)*

**BOB McCORD.** I need a bottle of whiskey; Scotch would do very nicely but I would settle for shoe polish.

**YOUNG MAN.** Sure, no problem.

**BOB McCORD.** (*Peeling more bills:*) And here, you get yourself a...a cream soda or something. A case of cream sodas. Open a cream soda store.

**YOUNG MAN.** Gee, thanks!

**BOB McCORD.** (*Glancing offstage:*) Mum's the word, though.

**YOUNG MAN.** I got you. On the QT.

**BOB McCORD.** Off you go. Hurry now. "Go, go, swifter than the arrow from the Tartar's bow!"

(*YOUNG MAN exits and MANNY returns.*)

**MANNY.** Edward, shouldn't you be on stage?

**BOB McCORD.** Of course.

(*BOB glances in the mirror, adjusts his green wig, sighs, and heads up the stairs.*)

"We, who are about to die"...die.

(*MANNY turns on the intercom.*)

**JIMMY.** (*Over intercom:*) Ladies and Gentlemen, here he is, the Lord of the Deep, the Sultan of Salt, the Ruler of the Waves...**KING NEPTUNE!**

(*Loud applause. MANNY turns off speaker and goes to Cherie's dressing room.*)

**MANNY.** Knock. Knock. It's me. I'm sorry, baby. You wanta show me your monologue now?

(*CHERIE sticks her head out.*)

**CHERIE.** You mean it?

**MANNY.** Sure!

(*CARTER enters from SL.*)

(*Whispering:*) Ah, sorry. Something just came up. Gimme a few more minutes, sweetheart.

(*MANNY gently pushes CHERIE back into her dressing room.*)

**CHERIE.** *(Protesting:)* Manny!

*(MANNY hurries off SR only to run into GRUM.)*

**CARTER.** Mr. Weisenberg.

*(CARTER and GRUM close in on MANNY.)*

**MANNY.** Gentlemen. How nice to see you.

**CARTER.** Many sal-u-tations.

**MANNY.** Very impressive.

**CARTER.** Respite a word three times a day and it's yours forever.

**MANNY.** Isn't that the truth?

*(GUS enters SL.)*

**GUS.** First contestant. You're up!

*(GUS sees GRUM/CARTER and does a U-turn, putting the clipboard up in front of his face and hurrying off SL. CONTESTANT #1 comes out of her room carrying two batons. She's frazzled.)*

**CONTESTANT #1.** Hey, any you guys gotta match?

*(GRUM and CARTER each search their pockets but GRUM whips out a lighter first and CONTESTANT #1 hurriedly lights her batons. MANNY starts to edge towards an exit.)*

You're a doll.

*(CONTESTANT #1 hurries up the stairs. GRUM looks triumphantly at CARTER.)*

**CARTER.** Big deal.

*(GRUM signs.)*

I am not a sore loser!

*(GRUM rolls his eyes.)*

Hey! You! Where you think you're goin'?

**MANNY.** Nowhere. No...Look, I know today's the day I'm supposed to pay my loan but I've run into a little problem here, a mo-

mentary thing, very, very momentary, and I should be able to satisfy Mr. Bananas within an hour.

*(Silence.)*

**CARTER.** Normally, such an event would perspire a most unfortunate response. Digitally speaking.

*(GRUM flashes his pruning shears. MANNY blanches.)*

However, today we are the bearings of glad tithings.

**MANNY.** *(Clinging to hope:)* Yeah?

**CARTER.** Mr. Bananas is here, himself, in the person, to speak to you.

**MANNY.** Joey Bananas is here?

**CARTER.** To speak to you.

*(GRUM signs.)*

A rare honor, indeed; however short-lived the occasion.

**MANNY.** Just my lucky day, I guess.

*(CARTER calls OS.)*

**CARTER.** Mr. Bananas, sir?

*(A moment and then JOEY BANANAS enters. He's sleek, stylish, and the size of a fire plug. Whatever MANNY expected, Joey is not it.)*

**JOEY BANANAS.** Mr. Weisenberg! At last, we meet.

**MANNY.** Mr...Bananas?

**JOEY BANANAS.** The pleasure is all mine. What a won'eful event you've put together! Nothin' like a parade to make you feel like a fuckin' kid again.

*(GUS enters from the other side of the stage, dragging GERALDINE by the hand.)*

**GERALDINE.** I wasn't done!

**GUS.** You gotta get ready or your Dad is gonna... *(Sees JOEY:)*  
Gonnagonnagonnagonna. Oh, boy.

**JOEY BANANAS.** Hey, Gus, long time no see! How's the city council? How's the real estate business? Where is Western Avenue?

**GUS.** We're just...just waiting to hear the announcement, Mr. Bananas. Should be...be...be any minute now.

**JOEY BANANAS.** Good news, I hope. I'd hate to think my investment was misplaced.

**MANNY.** Your investment?

**JOEY BANANAS.** I run a diversified business.

*(JIMMY appears at the top of the stairs holding a fire extinguisher.)*

**JIMMY.** Gus! Get the next contestant ready. We're dying up here.

**GUS.** We're dying down here, too.

**JIMMY.** Hey, Mr. Bananas. Mr. Bananas!

**JOEY BANANAS.** Hey, Jimmy. How's tricks?

**GERALDINE.** I'M STILL HUNGRY!

*(JOEY goes over to GERALDINE.)*

**JOEY BANANAS.** And who is this little angel?

*(GERALDINE kicks JOEY in the shins.)*

AAAAAHHHHHH!

**GERALDINE.** Get away from me, you little creep!

*(MANNY grabs GERALDINE and shoves her into a dressing room.)*

**MANNY.** Geraldine, get ready, NOW! Gus, why don't you get Mr. Bananas some ice. And I think Jimmy's right, the next contestant ought to be heading up. Yes?

**GUS.** Right!

*(Unutterably relieved to get out alive, GUS sprints OS and JIMMY disappears US.)*

**JOEY BANANAS.** Son of a bitch!

**CARTER.** (*Gestures towards Geraldine's dressing room.*) Would you like us to do anything, Mr. Bananas?

**JOEY BANANAS.** Yeah, come here.

(*CARTER hustles over obediently and JOEY kicks him in the shin.*)

“Do I want you to do anything?” What, whack a nine year old?! (*To MANNY.*) It's so hard to get good help these days.

**MANNY.** I know.

**JOEY BANANAS.** I'm sure you do. You and me, we're in the same kind of business, really.

**MANNY.** We are?

**JOEY BANANAS.** The “entertainment” industry. We make people laugh. We make people cry. Sometimes they cry a lot. A whole lot, sometimes. Sometimes they won't stop crying. But a real people kind of business. Full of ups and downs. Know what I mean?

**MANNY.** You're so right. And, right now, you know, it's funny you say that because, right now, I'm kinda having a little “down.” Very temporary. Very, very temporary but which makes it sort of difficult for me to pay my debt to you which I take very seriously and which I have every intention of...

**JOEY BANANAS.** Relax. I'm giving you another week. Without the vig.

**MANNY.** That's...that's very generous.

**JOEY BANANAS.** Call it a favor between friends. And in return, I'm gonna need a little favor, too...

(*MANNY starts to have a bad feeling. But before he can pursue it there is a shrill cry offstage.*)

**LOLA.** Jooooooooooooeyyyyyyy!

(*And LOLA GOTTALOTTA storms on. LOLA is a towering Vegas Valkyrie with legs up to her throat and flaming red hair out of a bottle. JOEY immediately changes in her presence, becoming extremely solicitous.*)

You think you're just gonna leave me standin' out there while you're back here, what, oogling these half-dressed beach tarts?!

**JOEY BANANAS.** Baby, I wasn't doin'...

**LOLA.** Don't "baby" me, you two timing Lothario.

**JOEY BANANAS.** Honest, sweetie, I was all business. Ain't that right, fellas?

**CARTER.** Yes, sir!

*(GRUM signs furiously.)*

**LOLA.** Oh, yeah, like I'd believe you two, tweedledee and tweedledum! I know you got one of your floozies stashed away back here. Where is she?!

**JOEY BANANAS.** Baby cakes, I don't know what you're talking about.

*(GUS hurries on with a bag of ice.)*

**GUS.** Here's your ice, Mr. Bananas! *(Outside Dressing Room #2:)* Contestant #2, you're on! *(Back to JOEY:)* Anything else I can get ya, Mr. Bananas? She packs a mean kick, I know.

**LOLA.** She?! SHE?! She who?!

*(GUS discreetly exits.)*

**JOEY BANANAS.** A kid!

**LOLA.** A child? You are disgusting.

**JOEY BANANAS.** It's not like that, I swear!

**MANNY.** I think there's a little misunderstanding here.

**LOLA.** Back off, bub!

**JOEY BANANAS.** Lola, this is Manny Weisenberg, the Hollywood talent agent you was wantin' to meet.

**LOLA.** Oh. Ooooh. *(Suddenly solicitous:)* Mr. Weisenberg. Lola Got-talotta. So pleased to make your acquaintance.

*(CONTESTANT #1 comes downstairs, as CONTESTANT #2—holding a poodle and a hoop—runs out of her dressing room.)*

**CONTESTANT #2.** How'd it go?

**CONTESTANT #1.** Swell, I guess. Except for the curtains. Good luck!

**CONTESTANT #2.** You too!

**LOLA.** *(To JOEY:)* HEY! What are you lookin' at?

**JOEY BANANAS.** Nothin'. I swear it.

**LOLA.** You better be. You look, and I'll tear your eyes out. You touch, and I'll rip your fingers off. You do anything else, and I'll peel your bananas, Mister, the whole bunch of em!

*(All the men involuntarily cross their legs.)*

**JOEY BANANAS.** Baby, you're the only one I love.

**LOLA.** Yeah. Tell it to the judge.

**JOEY BANANAS.** I swear it! There ain't a dame in LA got what you got. Come on. You know it's true. I'm crazy about you.

**LOLA.** *(Softening:)* Yeah?

**JOEY BANANAS.** You know it. You're the only girl for me.

**LOLA.** I swear, you get me so worked up sometimes I don't know what I'm saying. You forgive me? C'mere.

*(LOLA pulls JOEY into her abundant bosom and then kisses him so hard she practically extracts his tongue.)*

**MANNY.** *(Whispering to CARTER:)* Maybe they'd like a little alone time together? I think I'll just...

*(LOLA abruptly breaks their clinch.)*

**LOLA.** So. Which room's mine?

**JOEY BANANAS.** Any one you want!

**MANNY.** Sorry?

**JOEY BANANAS.** That favor I need.

**MANNY.** Miss Gottalotta's in the pageant?

**JOEY BANANAS.** Miss Gotalotta's gonna win the pageant or these mugs here are gonna give you a full manicure. Right?

*(Slight hesitation.)*

**MANNY.** Right.

**LOLA.** I'm gonna be in pictures! Wish me luck!

**JOEY BANANAS.** *(Looking at MANNY:)* You ain't gonna need any luck, sweetheart. I'll be out front, watching. Carter! Grum! You stay here with Mr. Weisenberg and see that he don't get lost.

*(JOEY kisses LOLA and exits. LOLA goes into a dressing room. A second later, GERALDINE gets tossed out of the same dressing room.)*

**GERALDINE.** She stole my dressing room!

**MANNY.** She didn't.

**GERALDINE.** I'm gonna tell my daddy on her!

**MANNY.** That's a very good idea. In the meantime, why don't you wait over here? You're gonna be on very soon.

*(MANNY shoves her into another room and turns to face CARTER and GRUM.)*

Guys, since we're gonna be working together today, I wonder if you could help me out with a little something. We lost some Mer-men at the end of the parade and we could sure use a couple of good-looking fellas like yourselves in King Neptune's court.

**CARTER.** You want us to appear in da show?

**MANNY.** It's asking a lot, I know. On stage. Surrounded by Beauty Queens.

*(GRUM signs.)*

**CARTER.** What? Where's the harm?

*(GRUM signs.)*

Where's he gonna go?

**MANNY.** No where. I'm goin' nowhere. Believe me.

*(GRUM signs.)*

**CARTER.** We'll need your car keys.

**MANNY.** My car keys? This is silly. I gotta show to run, fellas! You think, what, I'm gonna get in my car and drive to Mexico? Brazil? Mainland China?

**CARTER.** Your keys.

*(MANNY reluctantly hands over his keys.)*

**MANNY.** All right! All right. Now. Can you help me out on stage?

*(CARTER and GRUM look at one another.)*

**CARTER.** There gonna be studio types around?

**MANNY.** Wherever Bob "Whiplash" McCord goes, there are studio executives.

*(GRUM signs with interest.)*

**CARTER.** We'll be near Mr. McCord?

**MANNY.** Of course.

*(GRUM signs enthusiastically.)*

**CARTER.** My associated and me would be most pleased to help.

**MANNY.** Great! Here are a couple of costumes, just find one that fits... *(Grabbing clothes off rack:)* ...and change in here.

*(MANNY opens door. WOMAN screams from inside. MANNY closes door.)*

Maybe over here.

*(MANNY pushes GRUM and CARTER into a dressing room. MANNY starts to leave but CHERIE sticks her head out of her dressing room.)*

**CHERIE.** Is now a good time, Manny?

**MANNY.** Not really.

**CHERIE.** You look kinda down in the dumps, mister.

**MANNY.** Opening night jitters.

**CHERIE.** Come here.

**MANNY.** I gotta million things to do.

**CHERIE.** Just for a second. You're always lookin' after everybody else, sweetie, but who's lookin' after you? Me, that's who. Lemme rub your head. I'm not takin' "No" for an answer. Come here. Come here!

*(She starts to rub his head.)*

**MANNY.** I shouldn't really...really...oh, boy. That's good. That's really good.

**CHERIE.** Where does it hurt?

**MANNY.** I think it's probably gonna hurt everywhere.

**CHERIE.** What?

**MANNY.** You got nice hands, you know that.

*(Her hands move down to his chest.)*

**CHERIE.** And you gotta nice heart, you know that? I love you, Manny.

**MANNY.** I love you too, baby.

**CHERIE.** I feel bad sometimes 'cause I feel like all I do is complain and you, you work so hard for me, for everybody and you never ask for anything for yourself. Well, I want you to know I'm here for you, Manny, and if there's anything you ever need, you come to me.

**MANNY.** *(Feeling very guilty:)* Yeah?

**CHERIE.** You bet.

**MANNY.** Could I...could I borrow your car for a minute?

**CHERIE.** Well, sure. Hold on.

*(CHERIE goes into her dressing room.)*

**MANNY.** *(To himself:)* You are the scum of the earth.

*(CONTESTANT #2 comes down the stairs in near tears, holding her dog.)*

How'd it go?

**CONTESTANT #2.** Pierre had an accident on stage!

*(JIMMY appears at the top of the stairs.)*

**JIMMY.** Got a shovel down there?

**MANNY.** Sorry.

*(JIMMY disappears. CHERIE comes back out of her dressing room and hands MANNY her keys.)*

You're a lifesaver.

**CHERIE.** Where you gotta go?

**MANNY.** I think your makeup's a little smudged right there.

**CHERIE.** Oh my goodness! Thanks.

*(CHERIE returns to her room. GUS runs on and goes to Geraldine's old room.)*

**GUS.** Geraldine, you're on!

*(LOLA sticks her head out.)*

**LOLA.** Hey! I'm gettin' into character here. You mind?

**GUS.** Sorry.

*(MANNY quietly edges towards the exit.)*

Manny?! Where's Geraldine?

**MANNY.** Number four.

*(GUS goes to Dressing Room #4.)*

**GUS.** Geraldine? You're on!

*(GERALDINE comes out, looking very green around the gills.)*

**GERALDINE.** My tummy doesn't feel so good.

**GUS.** That makes two of us. Come on, kiddo.

*(GUS helps GERALDINE stagger up the stairs. Relieved, MANNY starts to leave but runs into CARTER who steps out of his dressing room in his Merman costume.)*

**CARTER.** How do I look?

**MANNY.** Oh my God. You look...fabulous!

**CARTER.** The pants are kinda tight.

**MANNY.** That's the style. Gives you a He man, Merman kind of walk. You need a...you need...you know what you need? You need a trident.

**CARTER.** A what?

**MANNY.** A spear thingy. Three prongs. There are a stack of props behind the concession tent. Go grab one and come back.

*(CARTER waddles off. Desperate, MANNY turns to leave. BOB is sneaking down the stairs, hoping to meet his booze. Both men see each other and react guiltily.)*

**BOB McCORD.** Manny!

**MANNY.** Edward! What are you doing?

**BOB McCORD.** Had to drain the lizard.

**MANNY.** You wouldn't be looking for a drink, would you?

**BOB McCORD.** I'm shocked at the mere suggestion.

**MANNY.** My apologies. Won't they miss you upstairs?

**BOB McCORD.** That appalling child threw up. Everywhere. It was like Mount Vesuvius. They've declared a short intermission. Maybe you should find them another mop.

**MANNY.** Good idea.

*(MANNY turns to leave just as GRUM exits his dressing room, also in Merman costume. GRUM stops and does a double-take when he sees BOB.)*

**BOB McCORD.** Wait a minute. Who's that fellow?

**MANNY.** That?...That's...that's... *(Dropping his voice:)* ...you know.

**BOB McCORD.** My backer?!

*(And before MANNY can stop him, BOB strides toward the awe-struck GRUM.)*

Sir, what an extraordinary pleasure it is to meet you! (*Shaking his hand:*) Are you joining us today in our little pageant? The things we artists must endure in order to do what we were meant to do. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the extraordinary opportunity you are giving me! I want you to know that I am going to give our movie everything I have within me!

(GRUM *just stares at BOB.*)

He doesn't say much, does he?

**MANNY.** I told you, he's shy. And uh, he doesn't speak English.

**BOB McCORD.** From the Continent? Where?

**MANNY.** Ummm. (*Thinking frantically:*) Tridentia.

**BOB McCORD.** Eastern European.

**MANNY.** Very.

**BOB McCORD.** He has a noble face. He wouldn't be... (*Whispering:*) Royalty?

**MANNY.** You didn't hear it from me. Gimme a minute.

(MANNY *pulls GRUM aside, so that their backs are to BOB and begins jotting him a message on a note pad.*)

Mr. McCord has received many death threats and needs protection. Can you help?

(GRUM *nods vigorously.*)

Don't let him out of your sight! And be very careful with suspicious packages.

(MANNY *goes over and pulls BOB aside.*)

Look, I've gotta...go get that mop and take care of a couple of other things. (*Feeling guilty:*) I want you to know, representing you has been the highlight of my professional life. So, I'm gonna leave you two to get acquainted. Alright?

(*And before he can change his mind about skipping town, MANNY runs off SR. An awkward moment between BOB and GRUM.*)

**BOB McCORD.** You know, I don't believe in all the excitement that I got your name? Su namen. Parle vouz Francois? I understand you've seen a great deal of my work? What were your favorites?

*(GRUM begins to sign a declaration of his appreciation for BOB and a vow to keep him safe. BOB is completely in the dark but gamely tries to follow GRUM's elaborate hand motions.)*

My Hamlet? "To be or not..." Uh, no, perhaps the Scottish play!?" "Is this a dagger I see..." I'm not following you. Falstaff!

*(The YOUNG MAN returns SL with a brown paper package under his arm.)*

**YOUNG MAN.** Here's that special order you wanted, Mr. McCord.

**BOB McCORD.** Bless you, my son!

*(BOB reaches for it but GRUM is quicker. He yanks the package away, throws it across the stage, pulls out his gun and empties it into the box!)*

NOOOOOO!

*(Terrified, the YOUNG MAN runs off SL. BOB mournfully picks up the ruptured box which is leaking what's left of his booze. GRUM is confused. BOB looks at him a moment.)*

You're right. By God, you're right! I've been killing my talent with this poison all these years. Killing my soul. I swear to you, I'll never drink again! *(Hugging GRUM:)* Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

*(GRUM returns BOB's embrace with fervor. A moment. BOB relaxes into the evident pleasure of it.)*

Oh. My dear boy. My dear, dear, boy.

*(BOB and GRUM start to kiss. MANNY runs back in from SR and at the same time, CARTER, trident in hand, waddles in from SL.)*

**MANNY.** Everybody OK?!

**CARTER.** *(To GRUM:)* What the hell you doin'? Target practicin'!

*(GRUM and BOB break apart guiltily. GRUM signs vigorously.)*

**BOB McCORD.** Wonderful! Never felt better!

**CARTER.** *(To GRUM:)* What were you doin' just now?

*(GRUM signs.)*

Fuck your feelin's! I got feelin's, too.

*(GRUM signs.)*

I don't care, it's fuckin' unprofessional. We're tryin' to put on a show up here. Very sorry, Mr. McCord.

**BOB McCORD.** Nonsense! Nothing to apologize for. But you're right. Perhaps we should get back on stage, gentlemen?

*(With new energy, BOB leads GRUM and CARTER back upstairs, passing JIMMY leading GERALDINE down the stairs.)*

**JIMMY.** OK, easy does it. *(To BOB:)* It's still a little damp on stage, fellas. Be careful.

*(GUS hurries on and JIMMY hands GERALDINE off to him.)*

I think she should just lie down for awhile.

**GERALDINE.** I don't wanta lie down!

**JIMMY.** Who's next?

**GUS.** New contestant. *(Checking clipboard:)* Lola Gottalotta.

**JIMMY.** Get her up.

*(JIMMY runs upstairs and OS.)*

**GUS.** MISS LOLA GOTTALOTTA, YOU'RE ON!

**GERALDINE.** But I didn't get to do my act!

**GUS.** Maybe later.

*(LOLA runs out of her dressing room. She's wearing a g-string and pasties with tassels and carries a trombone. She glances at herself in the mirror.)*

**LOLA.** How do I look?

**MANNY.** Words can't begin to describe.

*(LOLA runs up the stairs and onstage. GERALDINE kicks GUS in the shins.)*

**GUS.** Owwww!

**GERALDINE.** I didn't get to show my stuff!

**GUS.** I think you showed'em a lot more than they ever wanted to see.

**MANNY.** *(To GUS:)* Go run the show; I'll deal with this.

**GUS.** Bless you!

*(GUS hobbles off SR. Almost immediately we can hear JIMMY announce LOLA and then snatches of her act: a bump and grind version "Roll Out the Barrel" on the trombone.)*

**MANNY.** Now you. You go in your dressing room and lie down.

**GERALDINE.** You're a bad man.

**MANNY.** I wouldn't disagree.

*(MANNY turns to escape SL but BULLDOG comes rushing in.)*

**BULLDOG.** Where's my little star?!

*(GERALDINE falls into BULLDOG's arms.)*

**GERALDINE.** Daddddyyyyyy!

**BULLDOG.** Now, now, what's with the tears, baby girl? You were great! Wasn't she great?

**MANNY.** Unforgettable.

**BULLDOG.** See?

**GERALDINE.** King fishy-thing missed my number!

**BULLDOG.** He did? Well, it doesn't matter. *(To MANNY:)* Does it?

**MANNY.** It's in the bag.

**BULLDOG.** See? So don't you worry your pretty little head. *(Patting her head; then smelling his hand:)* Maybe you should go clean yourself up and... *(Wiping the vomit off:)* ...maybe wash your hair so it'll look nice when they put the crown on.

*(GERALDINE sticks her tongue out at MANNY as she goes into her dressing room.)*

Hey! I still don't see the fucking County Commissioner of Roads nowheres.

**MANNY.** He's probably with my check.

**BULLDOG.** Don't get funny with me, Hollywood boy!

**MANNY.** He'll show. He'll show. He's officiating the marriage of Miss Hollywood and King Neptune.

**BULLDOG.** And then he announces that San Pedro gets the right of way. Right?

**MANNY.** Right.

**BULLDOG.** 'Cause if he don't, I gotta lot of property that ain't gonna be worth squat. A lotta land to fill that is gonna become just so much landfill and I might as well fill it with pieces of you. Got it?

**MANNY.** Loud and clear.

**BULLDOG.** I'll be watching.

*(From onstage, the sound of applause. BULLDOG exits SR. MANNY starts to leave SL but runs into JOEY.)*

**MANNY.** Mister Bananas!

**JOEY BANANAS.** Wasn't she great?!

**MANNY.** She...?

**JOEY BANANAS.** Lola!

**MANNY.** Amazing.

*(With a shriek of relief and joy, LOLA appears at the top of the stairs.)*

**LOLA.** Oh my God!

**JOEY BANANAS.** There she is! There's my goddess!

**LOLA.** Did you watch it?

**JOEY BANANAS.** Did I...? Couldn't take my fuckin' eyes off ya!

*(GUS runs on and knocks at one of the dressing room doors.)*

**LOLA.** It went so well!

**JOEY BANANAS.** It went great!

**LOLA.** I just had this feelin' of bein' "on," ya know?

**GUS.** You're on, Miss Smithers!

**LOLA.** I wasn't nervous at all.

**JOEY BANANAS.** You didn't look nervous.

**LOLA.** Did you notice that one place where my left and my right were goin' in opposite directions?

*(MISS SMITHERS comes out of her dressing room, nervously balancing a tray of glasses which are filled to varying levels with water. She puts the tray down and adjusts her hair in the mirror. GUS hurries off SR, trying to be as inconspicuous around JOEY as possible.)*

**JOEY BANANAS.** That's talent. None of them movie star dames can do that, I betcha.

**MANNY.** Probably not.

**LOLA.** It was an accident! I didn't plan it that way, it just happened!

**JOEY BANANAS.** Get outta here!

**LOLA.** Swear to God!

*(Without missing a beat, LOLA takes one of MISS SMITHERS' glasses and discreetly pours out the water.)*

I looked down and I thought, "Girls, what're you doin'?!" But then I thought, what the hell, I'm gonna go with it! You get lemons, you make lemonade.

**JOEY BANANAS.** I thought it was part of the act.

**MISS SMITHERS.** Wish me luck.

**LOLA.** Oh, wait a minute, sweetie. Here. Lose the coke bottles.

*(LOLA removes her glasses leaving MISS SMITHERS only slightly less blind than a bat.)*

**MISS SMITHERS.** But I can't see.

**LOLA.** With those lights in your face, who can see anyway? There! You got nice cheekbones and now we can see 'em.

*(LOLA gives MISS SMITHERS a gentle shove towards the stairs. MANNY catches her before she falls over.)*

**MISS SMITHERS.** Well, if you're sure.

*(MISS SMITHERS gropes her way onstage.)*

**LOLA.** Good luck, doll face!

**MANNY.** Break a leg!

**JOEY BANANAS.** *(Very threatening:)* What the hell kinda thing is that to say?

**MANNY.** It's tradition.

**LOLA.** Joey! It's like a...a theatre superstition. Means "good luck."

**JOEY BANANAS.** "Break a leg" means "good luck"? I been distributin' that kinda luck all over LA for years!

**LOLA.** You're so funny! My little bannankins.

**JOEY BANANAS.** Snooky-wookie!

*(LOLA grabs JOEY and sticks her tongue down his throat. From onstage we can hear MISS SMITHERS' act: a rendition of "Indian Love Call" on her home-made xylophone. One note is distinctly out of tune.)*

**MANNY.** I'll just...leave you two love birds alone.

**LOLA.** Nah, that's alright. I gotta get changed. Here, you got lipstick all over your putz.

*(LOLA grabs JOEY's handkerchief and starts wiping his face vigorously.)*

**JOEY BANANAS.** That's right. Gotta get into your fancy dress for the crowning!

**LOLA.** And the wedding! Don't forget about the wedding!

**JOEY BANANAS.** *(Quietly:)* I thought we talked about the weddin' thing.

**LOLA.** Not ours; Miss Hollywood!

**JOEY BANANAS.** Oh, right.

**LOLA.** I swear, you're so fuckin' paranoid!

**JOEY BANANAS.** *(Guilty:)* Well, you know, you gotta get divorced before you can get married and I'm kinda Catholic.

**LOLA.** Oh, please, spare me your religious convictions! Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah! "Divorced." I should live so long!

**JOEY BANANAS.** It'll happen, I swear it, on my mother's grave!

**LOLA.** Great! 'Cept the old battle axe is still alive! *(To MANNY:)* Gotta mustache Pancho Villa would envy.

**JOEY BANANAS.** Hey! You leave my mother alone!

**LOLA.** Hey! I didn't bring her up in the first place!

**MANNY.** Hey! Hey! HEY! Guys! Miss Lola, you really oughta get ready. We're almost to the end of the pageant.

*(LOLA sweeps into her dressing room.)*

**LOLA.** Fine!

**JOEY BANANAS.** You're gonna make a beautiful Miss Hollywood! *(To MANNY:)* Isn't she?

**MANNY.** It's in the bag.

**JOEY BANANAS.** It better fuckin' be.

*(JOEY exits. MANNY starts to run off but stops; thinks better of it. He squares his shoulders and goes to Cheri's dressing room.)*

**MANNY.** Hey, Cherie. Sweetie. You're almost on. You wanta show me your monologue now?

*(CHERIE comes out wearing some vaguely Elizabethan gown.)*

**CHERIE.** What was goin' on out here?

**MANNY.** Ah, you know, artistic temperaments. Backstage stuff.

**CHERIE.** Uh-huh.

**MANNY.** Don't let it worry you any. You just go out there and give it your best shot and it's all gonna be fine.

**CHERIE.** You mean it's, "in the bag" for me, too?

*(A moment. MANNY knows he's seriously screwed.)*

**MANNY.** What? What are you talkin' about?

**CHERIE.** I'm talkin' about those two contestants you practically guaranteed the title to.

**MANNY.** Nahhh! That was just...hype. You know. Make everybody feel good. Like they gotta chance. You're gonna win, baby.

**CHERIE.** Why? 'Cause you rigged it?

**MANNY.** "Rigged it"?

**CHERIE.** I don't wanta be Miss Hollywood because my boyfriend pulled some strings. I wanta win because I was really the best. Because I had talent. Because if I don't really got it, then I'm wasting my time here and I oughta go home and get a real life and stop chasing' some pipe dream.

**MANNY.** What're you sayin'? "If I got talent..." You got more talent in your little finger than most of these girls got...

**CHERIE.** Then I'll win. If it's a fair contest. And if it isn't a fair contest, then I don't want any part of it.

*(GUS comes on SR.)*

**GUS.** Last contestant, Miss Cherie...

**CHERIE.** Cherie Miller.

*(GUS exits SR. CHERIE hurries up the stairs.)*

**MANNY.** I love you, Cherie!

**CHERIE.** I know you think you love me, Manny. I'm just not sure you really know what that means.

*(CHERIE disappears US. A very dejected MISS SMITHERS comes down the stairs.)*

**MANNY.** How'd it go?

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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