

The Vaudevillians

A full-length play

By Brad Staggs

For Angela... the one who makes all the magic happen.

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ACT I

SCENE 1

CURTAIN OPEN and LIGHTS UP on the living room of the beautiful Adams' New York apartment. Up stage is an arched entrance into the living room. Beyond the arch, a stairway is seen. The front door of the apartment is also beyond the arch but not seen. We hear the front door open and two happy voices. The front door closes. ALFRED and JULIA ADAMS, Vaudeville and now Broadway stars enter. They are dressed for a night out at the theater. As they enter, they relax into the living room.

JULIA

I'm telling you, he is a hoot!

ALFRED

You are so right, Dear. His timing is impeccable.

JULIA

Do you think he writes his own material?

ALFRED

Oh, come now, Dear, Bob hasn't written his own material for years.

JULIA

I don't know. I was jealous of a few of the gags he used.

ALFRED

They were funny but he is more of a single joke man.

JULIA

You don't think we need more of those?

ALFRED

Madame, I don't need single jokes when I have the greatest actress of the stage to play off of.

Alfred bows to Julia who curtsies back.

JULIA

The lady from Connecticut thanks you, sir.

Alfred heads quickly to his typing desk and loads a sheet of paper into the typewriter.

ALFRED

I did, however, get a marvelous idea while watching the show tonight.

JULIA

Oh, wonderful! Do I get to play a princess longing for love?

ALFRED

No.

JULIA

A beautiful maiden with a flair for the dramatic?

ALFRED

Not this time.

JULIA

Then what shall your talented and beautiful wife play this time?

ALFRED

The ugly step-mother!

Pause. Julia doesn't lose her stage smile.

JULIA

The what?

ALFRED

We shall tell the fairy tale story of Cinderella from the viewpoint of the ugly step mother!

JULIA

Must you really keep repeating the word "ugly", Al?

ALFRED

She must be, don't you see? In face and personality, she must be ugly.

Alfred begins typing. Behind his back, Julia begins comically transforming herself into a hunch-back with a screwed-up face.

JULIA

And you want me to play... ugly?

ALFRED

It will be spectacular, darling! It will open with me, a newspaper reporter, coming to you, the ugly step-mother, to get the real scoop on our new princess of the kingdom.

Julia affects a Disney villainess-type voice.

JULIA

And what is it you would like to know, good sir?

Alfred turns at the sound of her voice to see what she has done. He smiles, leaping up from his chair to join in as the reporter.

ALFRED

Good evening, Madame Aschenputtel.

JULIA

You may call me Madame.

ALFRED

Thank you, uh, Madame.

JULIA

Don't mention it.

ALFRED

My name is Melvin Thorpe and I am a reporter at the Grimm Times, a thrice-weekly publication by the great William Randolph Hearst--

JULIA

The great?

ALFRED

Have to say that by contract.

JULIA

Oh.

ALFRED

You may call me Melvin.

JULIA

No thank you, Mr. Thorpe.

ALFRED

I understand. Now, Madame, We have heard rumors.

JULIA

I do love rumors. What sort of rumors have you heard?

ALFRED

That our new princess is not, technically, a real princess and that she was once... a commoner!

JULIA

Well, I don't mean to spread falsehoods about anybody, Mr. Thorpe, even when they're true--

ALFRED

Mr. Hearst insists on only the best falsehoods.

JULIA

I can tell you that our new beloved princess... was, indeed a commoner!

ALFRED

I knew it! How do you know this?

JULIA

Because she is my step-daughter!

ALFRED

Your what?

JULIA

Yes, she used to beg me to let her clean the house, wash the dishes, iron our clothing..

ALFRED

That is amazing! How long did this go on?

JULIA

For a full year, Mr. Thorpe, after I married her father and my two daughters and I moved in.

ALFRED

And how did she become a princess?

JULIA

Well, being a woman with a big heart and soul to match, my daughters and I would always entertain her in order to take her mind off of her dear, departed mother. After all, idle hands are the devil's playground.

ALFRED

That was very Christian of you.

JULIA

Wasn't it just? Anyway, even though we kept her busy, she insisted on going to her mother's grave every day. She was such a morose child.

ALFRED

And the graveyard is where she met the prince?

JULIA

No, it's where her tears grew the glowing hazel tree.

ALFRED

I'm sorry, the what?

JULIA

Yes, she cried so much that her tears caused the hazel tree which grew from her mother's grave to glow. And then the dove came along.

ALFRED

The dove?

JULIA

Of course! The ridiculous dove that would bring her everything she wished for.

ALFRED

A dove... which granted wishes?

JULIA

Well, it wasn't just the dove, after all.

ALFRED

It wasn't?

JULIA

Of course not, silly! When she wanted to go to the King's Festival, I, as a joke, threw some lentils into the ash of the fireplace and told her that if she could separate them, she could go with us. We all laughed. But then this entire flock of doves came swooping in and did it for her! We were all so amazed that I threw even more in the ashes and told her to do it again. And she did! Only more birds showed up than before and what she didn't know is that my youngest, Marjorie, has an allergy to doves.

ALFRED

An allergy... to doves?

JULIA

Yes, exactly! So we had to leave immediately before she started swelling up. Unfortunately, I forgot to lay poor Cindy's dress out for the festival and she thought we had left her on purpose. We didn't even know she had gotten to the festival until we saw her dancing with the prince in her beautiful dress that the dove had made for her.

ALFRED

The dove made a dress for her?

JULIA

Oh yes, along with gold slippers! Well, as you know, by the third night of the festival...

ALFRED

Wait, was that the night that the prince spread pitch on the stairs?

JULIA

Yes!

ALFRED

We were told that was to keep wild animals out. Something about wolves stealing delicious treats from little girls the previous nights.

JULIA

That is what they wanted you to believe! However, the truth is that the prince wanted to keep Cindy from running away from him again.

ALFRED

Again?

JULIA

She had run away from him the two nights previous.

ALFRED

A common girl ran away from the prince?

JULIA

I didn't say it made sense, Mr. Thorpe.

ALFRED

Of course, go on.

JULIA

The prince came to the house that night with one of Cindy's gold slippers which had become stuck in the pitch. He claimed that he would marry the first girl whose foot fit in the slipper! Of course, I want the best for my girls, so I had my daughters try on the slipper first. My eldest, Desdemona, has big feet. I advised her that she might want to remove her toes to fit into the slipper.

ALFRED

I'm sorry, did you say "remove her toes?"

JULIA

Of course, darling, this is for royalty! I will spare you the gruesome details, but she did so and the slipper fit! If it hadn't been for the doves, she would be princess now.

ALFRED

What did the doves do?

JULIA

They told the prince about what she did.

ALFRED

The doves... told the prince? In English?

JULIA

I would assume so. Unless he speaks French or Spanish. So my Desdemona, also with big feet, wants to try it on. I advise her that since her sister failed with the... toe thing... she might want to try removing her heel.

ALFRED

Her... heel...

JULIA

Of course, much easier to hide that way. And it worked! Until those doves came back.

ALFRED

Let me guess, they told the prince about the heel?

JULIA

Good, you're listening!

ALFRED

Oh yes, I am. Please, go on.

JULIA

So the prince returned Desdemona and asked if there were any other girls in the house. I, laughingly, told him that there was only the kitchen-maid. I mean, really, Cindy did tend to dress like one most of the time. She wouldn't even wear a girdle!

ALFRED

The shame!

JULIA

Exactly! The prince insisted, of course, and the shoe fit, of course. The girls wanted to celebrate with her but when they walked down the aisle at the royal wedding, the doves came down and pecked out their eyes!

ALFRED

The doves that could speak English?

JULIA

Yes, the same! So, yes, Cinderella was once a commoner who cleaned my house for a living and now she's a princess while my girls live in a poor house for the blind!

ALFRED

I have just one final question for you, Madame.

JULIA

I am more than happy to help, Mr. Thorpe.

ALFRED

Were you already here in the asylum when you heard these talking doves who grant wishes?

Julia and Alfred begin laughing and fall into each others arms.

JULIA

That will bring the house down, darling!

ALFRED

I need to work on the ending but you are an incredible ugly step-mother, my dear.

Affecting the voice and posture again.

JULIA

Tis true, tis true. If only that snooty step-daughter could have seen what you see.

ALFRED

She just needs to see you through my eyes, my love.

They kiss. Julia pushes him away toward his typewriter.

JULIA

Now quit dawdling and type out everything we just said. Let's get it into the show tomorrow!

ALFRED

Yes, my dear.

There is a knock at the door. Alfred starts to get up.

JULIA

You keep typing, darling, I'll get the door.

Alfred sits back down to type. Julia exits through the arch and we hear the door open.

JULIA

Isaiah!

We hear the door close.

ISAIAH

Hello, Mrs. Adams.

Julia enters with her arm draped through the arm of Isaiah Washington, their business manager. He is African-American and much more serious than they are, lacking most of a sense of humor. He carries a briefcase.

JULIA

(To Alfred)

Look who has dropped by, darling!

ALFRED

(Going to Isaiah to shake his hand)

Isaiah! How fantastic to see you, my friend! How are you?

ISAIAH

Tired, Mr. Adams.

ALFRED

Nonsense, man, it's still early.

ISAIAH

It is, in fact, tomorrow now, sir.

ALFRED

Is it?

JULIA

For over an hour now, darling.

ISAIAH

You two never cease to amaze me.

JULIA

What do you mean?

ISAIAH

You have a hit Broadway show which you write, rehearse, and perform six days a week. Yet, what do you do on your one day off? Go see another Broadway show!

JULIA

What would you have us do, Isaiah? Sit at home doing nothing?

ALFRED

Sorry, old man, that's not our way.

ISAIAH

And what was tonight's show?

ALFRED

Bob Hope at the Palace! Even he doesn't know how long he will be running so we wanted to go tonight.

ISAIAH

I hear he's very good.

JULIA

He has incredible timing and can get an audience to laugh simply by looking at them.

ALFRED

He's got a bright future, I think. Only 27 and he's played a lot of the theaters we have.

ISAIAH

I'm glad you found him funny.

ALFRED

Hey, speaking of funny, you have to see the new bit we just came up with!

JULIA

Yes! We turn Cinderella on its head!

ISAIAH

Who?

JULIA

Cinderella. The old folk tale?

ISAIAH

I've never heard of it.

ALFRED

(To Julia)

How do you like that? We have the only business manager who has no knowledge of the classics.

ISAIAH

And how is your math and knowledge of the new tax code?

ALFRED

Do we pay that?

JULIA

I hadn't heard of such a thing.

ISAIAH

You two make the money and I'll keep you booked and out of jail for not paying your taxes.

ALFRED

Remaining out of jail sounds good to me.

JULIA

Yes, you win, Isaiah.

ISAIAH

(Pulling a ledger from his briefcase)

I have your receipts for the week from the theater.

ALFRED

Wonderful! How did we do?

ISAIAH

Not that good, I'm afraid.

JULIA

When you say "not that good, I'm afraid," what, exactly, does that mean?

ISAIAH

It means that you haven't had a great year since 1928, to be honest.

ALFRED

When you say "you haven't had a great year since 1928, to be honest," what does that mean?

ISAIAH

It means that nothing has rebounded since the stock market crash.

ALFRED

But this is 1931! That was... uh...

Alfred looks to Julia for help who just shrugs her shoulders.

ISAIAH

(Who has explained this a million times)

Two years ago. Not that much time. People simply don't have the money they used to.

ALFRED

I'm glad we got our comedy writing out of the way early tonight.

ISAIAH

It's 1:30 in the morning, Mr. Adams. What time would be late?

JULIA

When are you going to call us by our first names, Isaiah?

ISAIAH

Pardon me?

ALFRED

We've known you for over 25 years and you've been our business manager for 24 of those. Don't you think it's time for you to call us Al and Julia?

ISAIAH

I don't understand.

ALFRED

We're friends, Isaiah! You should call us by our first names as we do you.

Isaiah stares at them for a moment, not understanding.

ISAIAH

I'm sorry, is this part of your new comedy sketch I don't get?

ALFRED

(Giving up)

Never mind. We won't have to close the show, will we?

ISAIAH

No, you are doing just well enough to keep it open until the end of the run in four weeks.

JULIA

Good. And that's keeping everybody on, correct?

ISAIAH

It would be easier if you would cut a few of your stagehands.

ALFRED

Bite your tongue! We have never had to get rid of anybody and we are not about to start now.

JULIA

Besides, we made a promise--

ISAIAH

I know, to the employees of the theater that you would keep working no matter what.

ALFRED

We'll cut our share for the next four weeks.

ISAIAH

You've already cut your share to the point at where you can just get food. Thank God you paid this place off years ago.

JULIA

Is it as bad as the season of '29?

ISAIAH

No, it's not that bad.

ALFRED

See? There is light! The Adams' have never backed out of a deal and we're not about to start now.

JULIA

We'll make it up when we tour just as we have in the past.

Isaiah looks worried.

ALFRED

Isaiah? Is there something wrong with the tour?

ISAIAH

I will just come out and say it: Vaudeville is dying.

Alfred and Julia are both visibly shocked.

JULIA

You hush your mouth!

ALFRED

Take that back right this instant!

ISAIAH

It's true. I've hoped that I could find enough venues still open to not have to tell you this, but theaters are changing.

ALFRED

Changing? What do mean changing?

ISAI AH

The venues in the big cities are still there.

JULIA

Chicago?

ISAI AH

Yes.

ALFRED

San Francisco?

ISAI AH

Yes.

JULIA

Indianapolis?

ISAI AH

Of course.

ALFRED

Then who is closed?

ISAI AH

Salt Lake City...

JULIA

We never did well there.

ISAI AH

Omaha...

ALFRED

We did well there.

ISAI AH

Sheboygan...

JULIA

Not Sheboygan!

ALFRED
We must save Sheboygan!

ISAIAH
You can't save Sheboygan.

ALFRED
Are you sure?

ISAIAH
Quite.

JULIA
What good is our celebrity if we can't use it to get the things we want?

ISAIAH
The truth is that the old theaters are converting.

ALFRED
Converting to what? Stockyards? Rail yards?

JULIA
Prison yards?

ALFRED
Very nice.

JULIA
Thank you.

ISAIAH
No, they are converting to... movie houses.

Alfred and Julia are shocked again.

ALFRED
What?

JULIA
Eeeew! Who would want to sit in a room and watch a moving picture?

ALFRED
It can't even change from day to day.

JULIA

Nobody is there live!

ALFRED

There is no hold for laughter!

ISAIAH

It's cheaper to produce.

JULIA

Who wants cheaper?

ISAIAH

The financial backers.

ALFRED

No self-respecting actor will be in movies.

ISAIAH

The Marx Brothers did *The Coconuts* and *Animal Crackers* right here in New York at Astoria in the last two years.

ALFRED

I rest my case!

JULIA

Darling, we're friends with the boys.

ALFRED

That's how I know they're not self-respecting!

ISAIAH

Even Flo Ziegfeld has said this would be the last year for the follies.

JULIA

No!

ALFRED

Not Flo!

ISIAIAH

Yes, even the follies are closing.

ALFRED

But what can we do then?

JULIA

We're too old to work in the mines.

ALFRED

That's a good point, Dear. There aren't any mines close to here, are there?

ISIAIAH

No, they're a few miles away.

JULIA

You know what we need, Isaiah. What can we do?

ALFRED

Yes, we trust you. Please advise us about this... money issue.

ISIAIAH

Well, as it turns out, a Western Union telegram did arrive at the theater this afternoon.

Isaiah pulls a telegram out of his briefcase.

JULIA

Oh, how exciting! It's like a mystery not knowing what the future holds.

ISIAIAH

You find not knowing what is going to happen next... exciting?

ALFRED

Of course, dear boy. The mystery keeps us young. Please read it.

ISIAIAH

(Reading)

"Must talk at earliest convenience. Stop. Goldwyn getting into talkies. Stop. Want two of you to star. Stop. Thinking of turning me down? Stop." Signed "Sam Goldwyn"

Isaiah looks at them expectantly. No reaction but listening.

ISAI AH

Well? What do you think?

ALFRED

What does all of that mean? It's like another language!

JULIE

Darling, it means that Samuel Goldwyn wants to put us in his movie.

ALFRED

A movie?

ISAI AH

Yes.

ALFRED

That will be shown in converted vaudeville houses?

ISAI AH

Yes.

ALFRED

Convince me why we would want to do this.

ISAI AH

Okay... first, a movie would give you free advertising in all of the places you put on a show.

ALFRED

But those are the people who go to a movie, not theater.

ISAI AH

Second, the telegram is from Samuel Goldwyn himself!

JULIA

We've received telegrams from presidents.

ISAI AH

Third, the money.

ALFRED

Maybe we should at least meet with them.

JULIA

Yes, we probably should.

ALFRED

(To Isaiah)

When could we meet with them?

ISAIAH

I will make the phone call first thing in the morning.

JULIA

Why not now?

ISAIAH

It's almost 2 a.m.

ALFRED

You say that as if it's unusual. It's 2 a.m. at least once a day.

ISAIAH

Most people are sleeping right now.

ALFRED

That would be their own fault for missing out on all of the life at this time of the morning.

JULIA

Darling, I feel like dancing. Hum me a tune.

ALFRED

Gladly, my love.

Alfred hums a tune as he and Julia dance.

LIGHTS DOWN:

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP on the living room. Alfred sits at his typing table, smoking a pipe. Julia is reading a typewritten script in her chair near the typing table. They are wearing their "house" clothes. Isaiah is pacing.

JULIA

(Showing a page to Alfred)

Darling, you have a typo here.

ALFRED

(Looking at the page)

Where, Dear?

JULIA

(Pointing it out)

Here where you have typed "I am a reporter at the GRIME Times," not GRIMM Times.

ALFRED

Oh, good catch. Please mark that for me.

Julia uses a pencil to mark the mistake. Alfred watches Isaiah for a moment.

ALFRED

You know, Isaiah, you may sit until he gets here.

ISAIAH

No, I really can't, Mr. Adams. I've never met a man from the movies before.

ALFRED

I've never met the Queen of England. Who have you never met, Dear?

JULIA
(Without looking up)

The Pope.

ALFRED
There you have it, we all have people we've never met but we don't go walking a trench into the floor because of it.

ISAIAH
But this man's powerful!

ALFRED
Oh yes, I can see how he has more power than the Queen and the Pope.

ISAIAH
Sir, this is the company who produced *Whoopie*.
(Blank stare)
Last year's biggest box office attraction?
(Blank stare)
Flo Ziegfeld produced it and Eddie Cantor starred!

JULIA
(Looking up)
Oh, is that what we received an invitation for last year?

ALFRED
Oh yes, I thought he was just opening a new show.

ISAIAH
It made almost three million dollars at the box office.

ALFRED
Can you imagine? Three million dollars. That's more than you could spend in one lifetime.

ISAIAH
Mr. Fitzmarket said he is very excited to meet you two.

ALFRED
Who?

JULIA

You know, darling Maurice Fitzmarket, the man from the film making company that Isaiah was going on and on ad nauseam about earlier today.

ALFRED

Oh, yes, the one who wears a bowler hat.

JULIA

That's right!

There is a ringing of the doorbell.

ISAIAH

That will be him! Everybody remain calm and know that this is just a simple business meeting.

Isaiah begins breathing deeply as Alfred and Julia look at him, then each other, and back.

ALFRED

You are the epitome of calm.

ISAIAH

Thank you.

The doorbell rings again.

JULIA

Shall I answer the door or will we be leaving Mr. Fitzmarket outside for the rest of the evening?

ISAIAH

Oh my god!

Isaiah runs to the front door as Alfred and Julia smile at each other. The sound of the front door opening.

ISAIAH

Good evening, Mr. Fitzmarket.

MAURICE

Please, call me Maurice.

ISAIAH

Please come in, sir.

MAURICE

Thank you.

Isaiah enters with Maurice Fitzmarket as Alfred and Julia stand to greet him. Maurice is carrying his bowler hat and a briefcase.

ISAIAH

Mr. Maurice Fitzmarket, I would like you to meet--

MAURICE

(Excitedly sets down his briefcase
rushing to shake their hands)

Alfred and Julia Adams! This is, indeed, a pleasure.

ALFRED

Why, thank you!

MAURICE

Yes, indeed! I have been to your show more times than I can count... including yesterday evening.

JULIA

Oh, you were at the show last night?

MAURICE

Yes, indeed!

ALFRED

I hope you enjoyed it.

MAURICE

Yes, sir, especially the new addition of the Cinderella sketch.

ALFRED

(To Julia)

There, dear, an unsolicited opinion direct from our audience! Mr. Fitzmarket liked the new sketch.

JULIA

Did you like the way we played off of the Grimm's fairy tale?

MAURICE

Oh, is that what it was? There was some confusion in the audience. I was just laughing because the two of you are so funny together!

ALFRED

So, you liked the sketch even though you didn't understand the reference?

MAURICE

That's right. You know what might help? You know the Playbill you give out before the show? Maybe if you explain in there what the skit is about, a lot more people will laugh.

JULIA

Thank you for your kind comments, Mr. Fitzmarket.

MAURICE

Aw, it was nothing. And please, call me Maurice.

JULIA

May I call you 'Mo'?"

MAURICE

Why would you do that?

ALFRED

She loves to shorten names.

MAURICE

I don't think I would like that much.

JULIA

Please have a seat, Mo.

Julia motions to the couch and Maurice sits with Isaiah right beside him.

MAURICE

I would like to get right to business, folks.

ALFRED

Please... Alfred and Julia.

MAURICE

All right, Alfred and Julia.

JULIA

See there, Isaiah, it's not that difficult.

MAURICE

(Pulling a contract out of his briefcase)

What we have here is an offer for a three picture deal with the Samuel Goldwyn Company which would allow us to produce three movies starring the incredible Alfred and Julia Adams.

ALFRED

That is certainly short and... short.

MAURICE

(Handing the contract to Alfred)

If you would like to read over the contract--

ALFRED

Oh no, contracts go to Isaiah.

Maurice hands the contract to Isaiah who looks at it in wonder.

JULIA

We never handle the business side.

MAURICE

And why would that be?

JULIA

Gets in the way of the creative side. So, would this movie making take place here in New York?

MAURICE

No, actually, we have studios and a headquarters in Los Angeles.

ALFRED

California?

MAURICE

That's right.

JULIA

But the Marx Brothers made their movies here in Astoria.

MAURICE

We have found that it's more economical to shoot pictures in California where we can film outside year round.

ISAIAH

Did you say California?

MAURICE

Absolutely! No snow in the winter, mild in the summer. I think you will both like it there a great deal.

JULIA

We have a life here in New York, Mo. A life that we have spent years building.

ALFRED

We've played in California. The Victoria in San Francisco, The Jose in San Jose, even played the first year of the Orpheum in Los Angeles. We are aware of what the weather holds in California but our home is here.

ISAIAH

(Looking up from the contract with a smile)

Guys, this is a real, honest-to-goodness movie contract!

MAURICE

We understand your hesitance, Alfred, Julia, but just hear me out, please.

ALFRED

Absolutely. We always listen to a fellow entertainer.

MAURICE

I'm actually just a lawyer for Mr. Goldwyn.

JULIA

And that must be very entertaining!

MAURICE

It can be.

ALFRED

Isaiah is our business manager and he's one of the most entertaining people we know. Tell Mo a joke, Isaiah.

ISAIAH

(Holding up the contract)

This... is a... movie contract!

JULIE

See? He's a riot!

MAURICE

(Not quite believing)

Yes, so I see.

(Getting back on track)

If we could know when you would be traveling through California next for your upcoming tour, we could schedule filming around your California tour.

ALFRED

Yes, well, we don't even know exactly what our tour schedule looks--

ISAIAH

(Pulling a type-written page from his briefcase)

Here is a copy of their tour schedule.

Alfred and Julia are surprised.

JULIA
We have a tour schedule?

ISAIAH
Yes.

ALFRED
For later this year?

ISAIAH
Of course.

JULIA
Did we approve this schedule?

ISAIAH
Do you ever not?

ALFRED
Is that proper?

JULIA
I guess... may we see where we're going?

ISAIAH
I'll show you after the meeting.

JULIA
Thank you.

MAURICE
(Looking over the schedule)
It seems that you have a three-week break between San Francisco and Portland, Oregon,
in August this year.

Alfred and Julia look at Isaiah who can't hold
their stare.

Alfred/Julia
Is that right?

MAURICE

Yes, that would be a perfect time for filming! It should only take two weeks but just in case...

ISAIAH

What a coincidence.

Isaiah is afraid for just a moment and then
Alfred and Julia smile and break out in laughter.

ALFRED

Well, my dear, we do have quite a bit of material to choose from.

JULIA

And we could write something just for the film. Something brand new!

ALFRED

(To Maurice)

Don't movie audiences get tired of seeing the same thing week after week?

MAURICE

Honestly, no. We haven't found that yet. And we keep releasing new movies to satiate their appetite.

ALFRED

How much material needs to be written for the movie?

MAURICE

Actually, we have staff writers who can write for you...

JULIA

Sacrilege, Mo! We've never used outside writers.

MAURICE

Then they could take what you write and make sure it is ready of film making.

ALFRED

If it were not already ready, why would you seek us out for your movie?

MAURICE

Because we believe you two have what it takes.

JULIA

What it takes to do... what?

MAURICE

To be stars!

ALFRED

No offense, Mo, but we already are stars.

MAURICE

Yes, but in Vaudeville and on Broadway. I don't like being the one to tell you, but those are dying. I'm sure Isaiah has already informed you of the dwindling number of Vaudeville houses.

ISAIAH

I have!

ALFRED

Yes, he has mentioned that.

MAURICE

The public that can't go to live theater can afford movies. The Marx Brothers are more well known than ever. Burns and Allen have made one short and are set to explode. More of the public knows who these people are because of movies, which can only help their stage career.

ALFRED

(To Julia)

All we've ever needed is each other and the stage. I've never even thought of anything else.

JULIA

(To Alfred)

Neither have I.

MAURICE

May I be honest for a moment, Alfred and Julia?

ALFRED

You're a lawyer, Mo, if you were honest, you would be disbarred immediately.

JULIA

But we won't tell if you won't. Go ahead.

MAURICE

Do you both want to stay on the road forever? You're both, what, in your--

Julia coughs to admonish Maurice, more for the comedic effect than really caring.

MAURICE

Alfred, you are in your 50's, correct?

ALFRED

I am and feeling better than ever about being married to a much younger woman.

JULIA

Smooth talker.

MAURICE

You have been in Vaudeville since there were less than a hundred houses. You've lived the history of the theater. Now you can pass your knowledge on to the next generation of actors.

JULIA

Oh, Mo, you are good.

ALFRED

Yes, we are getting... I am getting older.

(Whispering)

She's 51.

JULIA

(Playfully slaps Alfred's arm)

I'm a 400-day 50, thank you.

ALFRED

And you keep me young, my love.

(They kiss)

And we have no intention of coming off the road or slowing down. This is fun, Mo. I can only wish for every actor to enjoy life as much as we do.

Maurice reaches in his bag and pulls out a piece of paper folded in half.

MAURICE

I understand. I have just one last item for you. you will see that this is signed by Mr. Goldwyn personally. This is how much money he is willing to offer you for a three-picture deal.

Maurice hands the paper to Alfred who unfolds it for he and Julia to see. They look at the same time and their eyes go big. Julia comically feints into her chair. Maurice reacts as if to rescue her.

ALFRED

(Without taking his eyes off of the paper)

You're still the best feinter in the business, Dear.

JULIA

(Without opening her eyes)

Thank you, Darling.

ISAIAH

(Excitedly)

Do we have a deal?

Alfred hands the paper to Isaiah who looks at it and feints on the couch.

MAURICE

Oh, that was very good, as well.

ALFRED

He's not acting.

Maurice shakes Isaiah, waking him up.

ISAIAH

What did I miss?

MAURICE

Are you all right?

ALFRED

We're about to sign the contract, Isaiah.

JULIA

(Sitting up)

I should probably be alert, then.

ALFRED

(Signing)

No need, Dear, years of practice at forging your signature.

MAURICE

What?

Alfred slides the contract to Julia.

JULIA

It was in our wedding vows. We took out the "obey" part and stuck in "ability to forge each others signature."

She signs and then hands the signed document to Isaiah.

MAURICE

Doesn't that get you in trouble?

ALFRED

Only in Milwaukee.

MAURICE

What happened in--

ISAIAH

We don't talk about Milwaukee.

JULIA

And congratulations for getting our names correct.

MAURICE

Isaiah was very specific about the details. But if I may ask, why did you change your name from O'Brien? It's a fine Irish name.

ALFRED

In today's world, it was too Irish. Too many theaters would not hire us and, when they did, they expected Irish ethnic humor.

JULIA

It was just easier to change the name.

(To Isaiah)

Is it official now?

ISAIAH

(Staring at the page, ready to cry)

You've made me the happiest business manager on the planet!

ALFRED

I believe that means we're in business, Mo.

They all shake hands.

LIGHTS DOWN:

CURTAIN CLOSE:

SCENE 3

We can hear the crew disassembling the set behind the curtain. LIGHTS UP as Alfred enters in front of the curtain holding a clipboard. He is dressed in "rehearsal" clothing and is looking around as if taking inventory. Julia enters, also in "rehearsal" clothing.

JULIA

I had a feeling I would find you out here.

ALFRED

Hello, Darling. I wanted to do a personal inventory on all of the lights. We'll get charged for every one that is missing or not working properly.

Until the sound of deconstruction ceases, some ad-libbing will be necessary. Alfred speaks toward the booth as if he is talking to his lighting tech.

ALFRED

All right, George, give me one...

(A light comes on and Julia dances into it)

Thank you.

(Light goes off)

Give me two...

(A different light comes on and Julia dances into it)

Thank you.

(light goes off)

Give me three...

(No light comes on. Alfred and Julia wait for a moment)

Hmmmmmm...

Alfred marks the lack of light on his clipboard.

JULIA

No light?

ALFRED

No light, Dear.

JULIA

(Mockingly dejected)

No dance.

ALFRED

You can always dance, my love.

They kiss and Julia dances around him as he laughs. Paul, the Stage manager, enters.

PAUL

I think we're getting close to done, Mr. Adams.

ALFRED

Excellent, Paul! Let's see it, then.

PAUL

(Yelling off-stage)

Open the main, please!

CURTAIN OPENS to reveal an empty stage with just a few pieces of scenery left to be removed and a piano with a bench.

The Stage Crew and a few Technicians are finishing tearing a set apart as Gypsies and Backup Singers separate costumes.

JULIA

Oh, Paul, it's so empty!

PAUL

Yes, Ma'am, that's our job.

Paul exits, obviously concentrating on his work. Julia wanders the empty stage, picking out a few specific spots.

JULIA

Here's where I did my prat fall after getting hit with the board.

Julia moves quickly to another spot as Alfred watches her, smiling.

ALFRED

Yes, Dear.

JULIA

And here is where I sang the high note in the western sketch.

Julia moves easily to another position on stage while Alfred watches and laughs.

ALFRED

Yes it was.

JULIA

And this is where you proposed to me six days a week for eight shows.

ALFRED

And where you laughed at me and called me a penniless vagrant.

JULIA

But you still did it.

ALFRED

I know. I wrote it that way. And I will go on proposing to you every day until you take this penniless vagrant into your heart.

JULIA

I miss it, Darling.

ALFRED

The show only closed last night, love.

JULIA

I know but four years of 32 week runs made this theater feel like... home.

ALFRED

We've had a wonderful run.

Jim, one of the stage hands, comes up to Alfred and Julia.

JIM

Sir... Ma'am... I wanted to tell ya, since this'll prob'ly be my last chance, it's been a real pleasure workin' for ya.

They're both moved. Alfred shakes Jim's hand and Julia can't help but give him a hug. Other stage hands, workers, and gypsies gather around them, wanting to shake hands and say their goodbyes. finally, Alfred gets up on a piano bench to address them all.

ALFRED

My dearest friends. Every one of you has worked so hard on this show and Julia and I cannot tell you how grateful we are. Some, such as Jim, have been with us since the beginning. A few, like Dorothy, only became part of our family on this run. But all of you are just as much a part of the success of this show as we are. Julia and I simply get to be the faces.

JULIA

We will miss you every day. our run at this theater may be over but there is always another theater, quite literally, around the corner. I am happy to say that each of you has secured employment in another show.

Those of you who are going to the Hope show, I apologize now.

(All laugh)

No, really, he's marvelous. Not as marvelous as we are, of course. We love you all.

Helen, one of the gypsies, comes forward.

HELEN

How about one more number?

Everybody agrees.

ALFRED

(To Julia)

What do you think, Dear?

JAMES

Just for us, Sir?

JULIA

(To Alfred)

I never turn down an audience.

ALFRED

Well, if we're to do this right, I don't play this old thing.

(Patting the piano)

I need--

One of the backup dancers presents Alfred with his ukelele, laughing.

ALFRED

Why, it's almost as if you knew we couldn't say no.

Alfred strums the first chord, a C chord, and the entire company knows what to do. Alfred strolls through the company playing and singing.

ALFRED

The simple life has a certain call,
with ease it comes to one and all.

You laugh with him and you joke with me,
it takes a man in love to see...

That you should dance.

Julia gets up and starts dancing.

ALFRED

A little harmless flirting is doing fine,
As long as they know that you're mine.
Your eyes could set this whole room alight,
your movement tells me that you just might...

Want to dance.

Alfred plays for a dance break. If there are other instrumentalists, they should join in. The Gypsies should dance, as well. Everybody just having fun. At the end of the dance break, it goes back to just Alfred and the ukelele.

ALFRED

We live in a tiny, run-down shack,
with no running water and a horse in the back.
But I'm the happiest man in the world I know,
Because every day I watch you glow...

When you dance.

Other instrumentalists may join back in as everybody dances around, having a great time. Each person should exit one at a time so that by the end of the song, the only people left on stage are Alfred and Julia. They kiss as he strums the last chord.

LIGHTS DOWN:

CURTAIN CLOSE:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE 1

CURTAIN OPEN and LIGHTS UP on the interior of a small 1920s Hollywood bungalow. Julia, Alfred, and Isaiah enter from the front door. They are carrying a few suitcases, Alfred's typewriter and ukulele case, and Isaiah's ever-present briefcase.

JULIA

Oh, Al, this is marvelous! Simply marvelous!

ALFRED

By golly, this will do just fine.

JULIA

It's so bright and cheery in here!

ISAIAH

And the best part is that the studio is paying for it.

ALFRED

Yes, that's Mr. Cheery himself, folks.

ISAIAH

Just doing my job, sir.

Julia goes to the window and looks out as Isaiah goes into one of the bedrooms.

JULIA

Look! I can see the Hollywoodland sign from here!

Alfred joins her.

ALFRED

Well, looky there. I thought the Warner Brothers would have removed it to put their own name up there by now.

JULIA

Oh darling, you know Jack Warner would never spend that kind of money.

ALFRED

Very true. He's the only person that makes Jack Benny look like a big spender. I'm sorry, dear, I stole that joke from Hope.

JULIA

You should give it back.

Alfred sees the breakfast bar.

ALFRED

Look, Dear, I can set up this area as my typing space.

He sets his typewriter case on the breakfast bar.

JULIA

But where will we eat breakfast?

They stare at each other for a moment and then start laughing.

ALFRED

Oh, breakfast. As if anybody gets up early enough to for that anymore.

Isaiah enters from his bedroom.

ISAIAH

I am certainly glad that we are not paying for this. The cost must be well over a hundred dollars a month!

ALFRED

What makes you say that?

ISAIAH

This house has two bathrooms!

JULIA

You're joking!

ISAIAH

Have you ever known me to make a joke?

ALFRED

My god, the man is serious!

JULIA

Do you know what this means, Darling?

ALFRED

Twice the water bill?

JULIA

We each get our own bathroom!

ALFRED

Oh, how extravagant!

ISAIAH

Actually, one is attached to your bedroom so I thought that the two of you would get that one while I get the other.

ALFRED

Well, if you want to be the spoilsport about it.

JULIA

(Smiling)

Selfish.

Isaiah smiles and heads back into the bedroom.

ALFRED

Did you see that, Darling? Our dear Isaiah smiled! I do believe California agrees with his cold, analytical heart.

JULIA

I am going to take a few things into our bedroom and set up my bathroom.

ALFRED

I thought it was our bathroom?

JULIA

(Grabbing her travel case)

If you're lucky, I may leave you a corner for your toothbrush.

ALFRED

Your generosity knows no bounds, Dear.

They kiss and Julia exits to the master bedroom.

Alfred begins to set up his typewriter when there is a knock at the door.

ALFRED

(Toward the door)

Just a moment, please.

(He goes to the door, opening it)

Hello, Mo!

Maurice enters, wearing his trusty bowler hat.

MAURICE

Good afternoon, Mr. Ad--

(Alfred puts his finger up)

--Alfred. I wanted to make sure that you made it in today.

ALFRED

Mo, my friend, we are all present and accounted for. Nary a broken bone among us.

MAURICE

(Worried)

Broken bone? Did you have an accident? did something go wrong?

ALFRED

No, no, it's just an expression. Five day's journey to San Francisco, a week of performances, and now we are here.

MAURICE

You could have taken the train, you know?

ALFRED

I am not a fan of the trains. I would rather load up the Buick and drive.

Isaiah enters.

ISAIAH

Don't let him fool you, I do most of the driving.

MAURICE

(Shaking Isaiah's hand)

Good afternoon, Isaiah.

ALFRED

I do get easily distracted.

ISAIAH

If I let Mr. Adams drive, it would take us twice as long to get anywhere.

ALFRED

Why, Isaiah, that statement bespoke some humor.

ISAIAH

I call it truth.

ALFRED

Sometimes one and the same.

MAURICE

In any case, you really should get over your hatred of trains, Alfred. It really is the easiest way to travel.

Julia enters.

JULIA

Darling, I left you enough space on the countertop to lay your comb down. Well, at least, most of it.

MAURICE

Good afternoon, Julia. Welcome to Los Angeles.

JULIA

Oh, hello, Mo! I didn't hear you come in.

MAURICE

I was just telling your husband--

ALFRED

Didn't hear him, Darling? He could be a spy. I've heard that Los Angeles is filled with them.

JULIA

(Using a fake accent)

A spy, eh?

Alfred and Julia begin circling Maurice looking suspiciously at him. Maurice is confused.

MAURICE

What's happening?

ALFRED

(Also using a fake accent)

You will be quiet! We will ask the questions here.

MAURICE

I'm confused.

JULIA

That is just what I expect a spy to say to us.

ALFRED

Where are you from?

MAURICE

Los Angeles...

JULIA

Nobody is from Los Angeles! Where were you born?

MAURICE

Uh, Dubuque, Io--

ALFRED

You gave a verbal pause, you're lying!

JULIA

Besides, everybody knows there is no such place as Dubuque, Io. You're lying!

MAURICE

I'm not--

JULIA

The prisoner will stop talking with his mouth place unless being spoken at... or to...

ALFRED

...Or about...

JULIA

What is your mother's maiden name?

MAURICE

Can I speak n--

ALFRED

Answer the question!

MAURICE

Kramer!

Alfred and Julia stop.

ALFRED

Oh yes, would that be the East side Kramers?

JULIA

They were such good people. I liked her.

MAURICE

No, she's never been to New York.

ALFRED

Oh, never?

MAURICE

No. I hoped to get her there some--

JULIA

Then she is a spy!

Alfred and Julia can't hold it anymore and start laughing.

MAURICE

What's going on?

JULIA

Oh, my dear Mo, you must lighten up. You've been to our show, I thought you would recognize when we were doing a bit.

ALFRED

Mo, old man, you must really enjoy yourself more. Look at how carefree Isaiah is.

Isaiah, who has not cracked a smile the entire time, stares at them all.

JULIA

You should have seen how uptight he was when we first met.

MAURICE

I guess I just wasn't ready to be involved in one of your skits.

ALFRED

It's something we've just started trying. We bring up an audience member and his replies feed our comedy.

JULIA

It's very freeing and keeps everything fresh. It keeps us on our toes, as well.

MAURICE

Yes, I can see that.

ALFRED

I thank you for dropping by to check on us, Mo, but we need to get some writing done. We begin filming in two days, after all.

MAURICE

You would have had much more time for that if you had taken the train. They have these club cars that--

JULIA

We're not fans of the train, thank you.

MAURICE

I'm just saying that--

There is a knock at the door.

MAURICE

Ah, yes, I forgot to mention... I have a surprise for you.

JULIA

(Brightening)

A surprise? For us? Wonderful!

ALFRED

I haven't had a surprise for nearly a week!

MAURICE

May I?

ALFRED

By all means.

Maurice goes to the door.

MAURICE

Alfred, Julia, Isaiah, allow me to introduce...

(He opens the door)

...Mr. Oliver Treadwell.

Oliver Treadwell stands in the doorway. He is impeccably dressed, complete with an ascot and scarf, his long coat merely placed around his shoulders, and has an air of snootiness about him.

MAURICE

Please, sir, come in.

(Oliver enters, looking around as if
walking into a bowling alley)

Mr. Treadwell, allow me the honor to present Alfred and Julia Adams and their business manager, Mr. Isaiah Washington.

OLIVER

Good afternoon to you all.

JULIA

(In typical Julia style, coming to him
quickly to shake his hand)

Hello, Ollie! I'm Julia and this...

ALFRED

(Doing the same)

...is Al. We're very happy to meet you.

OLIVER

(Not pleased, pulling his hand back)

My name is Mr. Treadwell, not Ollie. I prefer Sir but Mr. Treadwell will do. This abode is abhorrent.

MAURICE

Mr. Treadwell is a Shakespearean trained actor who has been with Mr. Goldwyn since the beginning.

JULIA

(Keeping her composure, smiling)

And since Mr. Treadwell is obviously not able to give us his own resume--

OLIVER

I do not brag on myself. It's gauche to do so.

JULIA

What is it we can do for you... Ollie?

MAURICE

Mr. Goldwyn has personally asked Mr. Treadwell to be your co-star!

ALFRED

Our... co-star?

ISAIAH

Oh no...

MAURICE

Yes, and since, as you said, you start filming in two days, I thought it was a good time for you to meet.

ALFRED

I see. Mr. Treadwell, how much work have you done on the Vaudeville stage?

OLIVER

I am a Shakespearean actor. Well versed in the classics, prepared at any time to recite the words of the Bard,

(Alfred and Julia mouth the words "the
Bard" to each other as Oliver talks)

to create an unforgettable experience for those who are fortunate enough to be within earshot.

JULIA

That's fantastic, Ollie, it really is. But we--

OLIVER

(On a roll)

“What's he that wishes so?
My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin;
If we are mark'd to die, we are enow
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honor.”

(Oliver pauses for effect. Everybody
thinks he's finished and starts to quietly
applaud until he starts again)

“He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors,
And say "To-morrow is Saint Crispian."
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say "These wounds I had on Crispian's day."” Thank you.

Making sure Oliver is done, everybody claps politely.

JULIA

Well, that was... something

OLIVER

(To no one in particular, French)

Comment saurais tu? [*How would you know?*]

JULIA

Au fait, oui, je sais. [*By the way, yes, I know*]

ALFRED

(To Julia)

Bien dit! [*Well said!*]

For just a moment, Alfred is visibly shaken but composes himself quickly.

ALFRED

I'll tell you what, Mo, old man, Julia and I are going to retreat to the bedroom for a moment and have a discussion, if you don't mind.

MAURICE

Please do! I'll be here learning at the feet of the master.

ALFRED

I see that.

(Alfred and Julia begin to exit and turn to Oliver)

Oh, and Ollie? I thought it was an interesting choice to skip large parts of Henry the Fifth's St. Crispians Day speech from Act 4, Scene 3. if only the Battle of Agincourt had been so short.

They exit to the bedroom, leaving Oliver and Maurice mouths gaping open. Isaiah smiles to himself.

ISAIAH

Gentlemen, if I could have just a word.

MAURICE

Um, yes?

ISAIAH

If I may offer a nickel's worth of free advice to you, don't ever... ever underestimate Mr. and Mrs. Adams. They are two of the smartest people I have met in my lifetime and they've been dealing with the likes of

(To Oliver)

you in theaters for over 30 years. They've had to open for acts that quoted Shakespeare while riding a bicycle on a line hung across a stage for change thrown on the stage. Try doing that.

OLIVER

But they don't seem to be--

ISAIAH

Educated? Enlightened? You won't find any diplomas or certificates on their wall but they've had to survive day-to-day performing for audiences that couldn't care less if they ate that night. Because they love it enough to live it. And now, they don't need that audience, they want it. A person like you is not going to break them.

OLIVER

I see.

ISAIAH

And one other thing... please stop talking about taking the train.

MAURICE

I was merely trying to point out that--

ISAIAH

Please, I beg you, leave it be.

MAURICE

I simply don't understand why they waste the time driving all--

ISAIAH

(Raising his voice)

Because people like me aren't allowed on most trains.

(Maurice and Oliver are both taken back)

Because...

because those two, who you would dismiss out of hand, would rather drive in a Buick with me cross country for five days than give one dime to anybody whose policy is to exclude a person based on their race. I am a negro business manager in a world I'm not allowed, by law, into many of the Vaudeville houses my bosses could play. But they refuse to do business with those places. They refuse to stay at hotels that don't allow me to stay there, too, or tell me that my entrance is in the back. It cost them business through the years but they didn't turn their backs on me and I'll be damned if I will stand here and let you laugh behind theirs.

The door to the bedroom opens and Julia and Alfred enter.

ALFRED

Gentlemen, Julia and I have spoken and come to a decision...

OLIVER

Mr. Adams, if you will allow me first.

(He approaches and shakes Alfred's hand
for real this time)

I would be most appreciative if you would allow me to appear in your film with you in whatever capacity you need to support you.

(Now Alfred and Julia are taken back as
Oliver takes Julia's hand and kisses it)

I am with you. After all, "All the world's a stage..."

JULIA

...And all the men and women merely players."

OLIVER

(To Isaiah)

Mr. Washington, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

(Back to Julia and Alfred)

I will see you both in two days time. Let's make some magic. Come, Mo, tis our exit.

Maurice, still in a daze, exits with Oliver. Alfred and Julia look at each other for a moment before smiling.

ALFRED

Oh, you are good!

JULIA

No, you are good!

ALFRED

You put the fear of you into that pompous windbag!

JULIA

You're the one who memorized the entire Shakespeare catalogue.

ALFRED

What else is there to do in Topeka for three weeks?

JULIA

It appears that we have a film to finish writing.

ALFRED

Then we best get to it, Wife!

JULIA

Do you think Ollie would mind playing a spy?

Isaiah smiles to himself.

LIGHTS DOWN:

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP on the bungalow. It's morning and Alfred and Julia are not up and moving. the front door opens and Isaiah enters carrying a bag of groceries. He carefully places them on the breakfast bar away from the typewriter and stack of papers. He carefully takes items out of the bag to put away in the kitchen. As he is carefully removing a can, there is a loud knocking on the front door. Isaiah almost drops the can, sets it on the counter, and goes to the door as quietly as he can as the knocking continues.

ISAIAH

(Quietly)

I'm coming!

Isaiah gets to the door, opening it. Maurice boisterously pushes his way in, followed by Art Price and Bill Leone, the writers hired by the production company.

MAURICE

Good morning, Mr. Washington!

(Isaiah is trying to quiet him down, to no avail)

This is Art Price and Bill Leone, writers for Mr. Goldwyn come to look at Al's script for the--

Isaiah puts his hand over Maurice's mouth.

ISAIAH

Shhhhhh!

He takes his hand away but Maurice is as loud as before.

MAURICE

What do you mean "shhhh--"

Isaiah covers Maurice's mouth again.

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

They're still asleep.

Isaiah takes his hand away.

MAURICE

(Whispering)

Still asleep?

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

Yes, still asleep.

MAURICE

(Whispering)

But it's after 10 a.m.

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

They were up very late last night... actually, this morning, writing.

MAURICE

(Whispering, he slows down his speaking while making motions with his hands as if he has to over-emphasize what he is saying)

This is Art Price and Bill Leone. They are writers on staff with Mr. Goldwyn. They've come with me to take a look at their script to make sure that it is ready for filming.

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

What are you doing with the... hands? We're being quiet, I'm not actually deaf.

MAURICE

(Whispering)

Oh yeah, sorry.

ISAIAH

(Whispering, shaking hands with the
writers)

Mr. Price... Mr. Leone... I'm Isaiah Washington, The Adams' business manager.

ART

(Whispering)

Nice to meet you.

BILL

(Whispering)

Good to be here.

ISAIAH

(Still whispering)

Please, have a seat. Would anybody like some coffee?

ART

(Whispering)

Oh yes, please.

BILL

(Whispering)

I would love some.

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

Mr. Fitzmarket?

MAURICE

(Whispering)

None for me, thanks.

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

I'll get it. Please, sit.

Maurice, Art, and Bill move quietly to the
couch. They all sit carefully at the same time.

ISAIAH

(Whispering from the kitchen)

Sugar anyone?

They turn to look at him.

MAURICE/BILL/ART
(Whispering)

What?

ISAIAH
(Whispering a bit louder and slower)

Sugar or cream?

ART
(Whispering)

Yes, please.

BILL
(Whispering)

None for me, thanks.

ISAIAH
(Whispering)

What?

BILL
(Whispering louder)

None for me, thanks.

Isaiah pours the coffee, puts the sugar and cream carefully into one cup, places the cups on a saucer, and comes to the living room with the two cups. He starts to hand the cups to Art and Bill and realizes he has them backward. He crosses his arms to hand them off to the correct person. As Bill takes his cup, it starts to shake and clink. He steadies it as everybody stares at him.

MAURICE
(Whispering)

Are there any pages of script out here that the boys could take a look at?

Isaiah shakes his head yes and heads to the typing section of the breakfast bar. He grabs the papers sitting beside the typewriter and brings them to the writers.

ART

(Whispering)

Wow, how many weeks of writing is this?

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

What?

ART

(Whispering louder)

How many weeks did it take for them to write this much?

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

No, that's last night.

BILL

(Whispering)

I'm sorry, it sounded like you said that all of this was from last night?

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

Yes, last night.

BILL

(In normal voice)

Holy--

Bill covers his own mouth with his hands. The bedroom door opens and everybody looks at it. Alfred walks out of the bedroom in his pajamas, slippers, and robe looking like he is still asleep. He goes to the kitchen and mimes the rest as he is sleepwalking.

He opens a cupboard, fetches a coffee cup, picks up the coffee pot, pours coffee into the cup, puts the coffee pot back, puts the coffee cup down, opens the refrigerator, pulls out the milk, pours some into the coffee cup, puts the milk back, closes the refrigerator, picks up the coffee cup, uses his finger to stir the coffee, smells it, takes a sip, and carries it back to the bedroom, shutting the door. Maurice, Bill, and Art look at Isaiah.

ISAIAH

(Whispering)

Sleepwalker.

MAURICE

(Normal voice)

Look, Mr. Washington, I appreciate that you are just trying to take care of your bosses, but we really need to talk to them about the script for tomorrow.

ISAIAH

Fine, but you get to deal with the repercussions.

MAURICE

Fine.

Isaiah gets up and goes to their bedroom door. He carefully looks at which way the door will swing when it opens and stands to the doorknob side of the door. He extends his arm and, very quickly and firmly, knocks on the door. He holds up a hand, counting down from 5. When he gets to zero, the door bursts open and a wide-eyed Alfred comes flying out.

ALFRED

There's a fire! The building is on fire! Women and children first! Julia, wake up, we're burning to the ground! I'll get the scripts, you save your dresses! Hurry!

Without looking at anything else, Alfred heads over to where his writing is and sees it's gone.

ALFRED

Oh my God, it's already gone! The fire killed my pages first!

Julia runs out of the bedroom in her silk pajamas, robe, sleep mask, carrying a stack of clothes. Her hair is completely disheveled. She immediately trips over the clothes as she enters the living room. Alfred runs to her, helping her up.

ALFRED

Honey, an A for the pratfall but F for timing! We need to--

They both finally look up and see Maurice, Art, and Bill looking at them in shock. Isaiah is leaning against the wall.

ALFRED

There's no fire, is there?

Isaiah shakes his head and mouths the word "no."

ALFRED

That wasn't the "the building is on fire" knock, was it?

Again, Isaiah shakes his head no.

ALFRED

That was the "there's somebody here to see you so get dressed before coming out" knock, wasn't it?

Isaiah shakes his head yes.

ALFRED

(Helping Julia to a chair)

Well, gentlemen, you have now seen us at our worst, so no harm done.

(Julia begins to slide out of the chair)

Dear, these nice men are here to talk to us, no sliding out of the chair yet. Isaiah, could we please get some coffee?

ISAIAH

(Teasing)

Are you sure? You've already had one cup.

Isaiah goes to the kitchen to get two coffees.

ALFRED

Ah, sleepwalking, too, eh?

Maurice, Bill, and Art shake their heads yes.

ALFRED

Congratulations, gentlemen, you've seen it all, now.

(Isaiah brings two cups of coffee)

Thank you, Isaiah. You should develop that sense of humor.

Alfred sets one cup on the table and drinks the other quickly.

ART

Does Mrs. Adams drink her coffee that quickly?

ALFRED

My dear wife doesn't drink coffee. Too much caffeine makes her stay up late. I do apologize, I am Alfred and this is my vivacious other half, Julia.

JULIA

(Sits straight up, smiling)

Yes, Darling?

ALFRED

Introductions, Dear.

Julia slouches back into the chair.

ART

It's an honor to meet you, sir. I'm Art price and this is Bill Leone. We're the writers Mr. Goldwyn was sending over.

ALFRED

Oh, wonderful! Fellow men of the word.

(Sees them holding his script pages)

I see my pages didn't burn up after all.

BILL

No, sir, we were just starting to go over them.

ALFRED

Gentlemen, will we be ordering lunch for everybody, then?

ART

What time do you normally eat?

ALFRED

Noon, when I get up, of course.

BILL

Al, that's still two hours away.

ALFRED

(Turning slowly to Isaiah)

What? It's still... pre-noon?

ISAIAH

They were sent by the studio and really need to talk to the two of you.

JULIA

Darling, did you just say that it's pre-noon?

ALFRED

Yes, love.

JULIA

Why?

ALFRED

I don't exactly know yet.

MAURICE

Mr. Adams, Mrs. Adams, have you been told what time we start in the morning?

JULIA

The fact that you used the phrase "in the morning" does not bode well.

ALFRED

So it is obviously pre-noon?

ART

We start filming at 8.

ALFRED

Oh, 8 isn't so bad. We can get dinner before going to the shoot, as they call it.

JULIA

That's lovely! That's close to our normal call time anyway.

ISAIAH

(Leaning in)

Just to let you know, they mean 8 a.m.

This is not registering with Alfred or Julia.

JULIA

But that's... pre-noon.

MAURICE

Yes, it is.

ALFRED

Very... pre-noon.

MAURICE

Technically, that's what time shooting begins, so you'll need to be there about an hour before that for hair, makeup, and costume.

Julia "feints" into her chair as Alfred simply stares at Maurice.

ALFRED

7 o'clock... in the morning...

ART

Al, your wife just fainted!

ALFRED

(Without any reaction)

Yes, she does that better and more elegantly than any actress.

(Julia begins snoring loudly. Alfred turns to her)

Julia, you have an audience!

JULIA

(Popping up off her chair, wide awake and smiling)

Good evening, everyone.

ALFRED

It's still morning, Dear.

JULIA

I thought that was a joke.

ALFRED

No, Dear, it is real.

JULIA

Oh my. Will this be our reality during the duration of filming?

MAURICE

I'm afraid so.

JULIA

Well then...

(She picks up the cup of coffee, drinking it down in one gulp)

...That was very hot! Excuse me.

Julia rushes to the bedroom and shuts the door.

BILL

She's quite the pistol!

ALFRED

That she is, Bill.

(Al pulls a pipe and tobacco out of the
pocket of his robe and sits in the chair)

Now, you have my script pages. What are your opinions?

ART

Well, we haven't really had a chance to go over them yet but there are a few things on the first cursary glance.

ALFRED

Fantastic! I'm ready to learn.

Julia enters from the bedroom having changed
completely into her "write at home" clothes and
her hair is done.

ART

Wow. If you will allow me, I have never seen a woman get changed that quickly!

JULIA

Quick change is one of our specialties. Especially after the stockyards in Dallas.

BILL

What happened there?

ISAIAH

We don't talk about the stockyards in Dallas.

Isaiah, Alfred, and Julia look down as if
remembering something and shiver at the same
time.

ALFRED

You are just in time, love. Bill and Art, here, are going to school us on film writing.

JULIA

(Sitting on the arm of the chair)

Oh, lovely! Go on, Artie and Billy.

MAURICE

That actually lengthened their names, Julia.

JULIA

(Nicely)

Don't mess with my process, Mo.

MAURICE

Yes, Ma'am.

ART

As I was telling your husband, Mrs... Julia, there are only a few things on cursary glance.

JULIA

I do love a good teaching session! Such as?

ART

You start your script out with the phrase "Lights Up." Obviously, this is a stage command as, in the picture business, we start with "Fade In."

ALFRED

How marvelous! Fade in.

(Pulls a pencil from his robe pocket)

Here, please make the correction.

Bill takes the pencil and writes on the script.

JULIA

What next?

BILL

I would suspect that when you're on stage, you just describe where you are. In pictures, we have to make it clear exactly where we are for the set designers, builders, lighting, and crew. So we use the words "exterior" or "interior" to let them know what to expect and where to set the shot up.

ALFRED

I see. Please make that correction. Isn't this amazing, Dear?

JULIA

It is so different... and technical! What page is that correction on?

ART

Um, we haven't gotten to the second line of page one yet, Ma'am.

JULIA

Well, this sounds like it will take all day.

MAURICE

Yes, Ma'am, unfortunately.

ALFRED

That's the kind of writing we love! Isaiah, I think we should order some early lunch because we are about to get to work!

ART

I do have a question about this first script, Al.

ALFRED

I am here to help, my good man!

ART

What is this "work with the audience" instruction?

JULIA

Art, have you ever been a spy?

LIGHTS DOWN:

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP on the bungalow. It's evening. the front door opens and Julia enters followed by Maurice.

JULIA

Thank you so much for giving me a ride, Mo. The streets in Los Angeles are still a mystery to me.

MAURICE

It was my pleasure, Mrs. Adams. But I would think that after going back and forth to the studio for the past two weeks, you would know your way by now.

JULIA

I'm too busy sleeping all the way there in the morning and waking up on the way back. But I guess I won't have to worry about that anymore.

MAURICE

Yes, Ma'am. Last day. This picture is in the can.

JULIA

In the can?

MAURICE

That's movie talk for the picture is done.

JULIA

I need to remember that. Where we're from, in the can means you're a little sauced.

MAURICE

I don't think anybody would say that about you since neither of you drink.

JULIA

Never could afford to, Mo.

MAURICE

But I thought that you and Mr. Adams were doing quite well.

JULIA

(Laughing)

No, silly, not money-wise. You can't be a drunk and put on a good stage show every day. We saw what happened to people who tried.

MAURICE

Oh.

Maurice stands there, looking nervous, fiddling with his bowler hat.

JULIA

Mo, is there something wrong? Something you need to talk about?

MAURICE

No, Ma'am, there's nothing wrong, per say.

JULIA

You've been standing there looking like there is something you want to say to me. And after two weeks here, I think you can call me Julia.

MAURICE

Well...

JULIA

Come over here and sit.

(She sits in the chair and he sits on the couch)

Now out with it. What is on your mind?

MAURICE

I hesitate to bring it up, but I need to.

JULIA

What, Mo?

MAURICE

I've worked for Mr. Goldwyn for several years now, as you know.

JULIA

Yes?

MAURICE

Recently, I was approached by a... competitor, and upstart film company, to work for them. We believe that this decade is going to be THE decade for the film business! It really is getting ready to explode.

(Looks down again)

Much to the detriment of the stage.

JULIA

Is that right?

MAURICE

Yes.

JULIA

Are you going to take this new job?

MAURICE

Yes, I am. Don't get me wrong, I love working for Mr. Goldwyn. I've learned the business and had a chance to meet incredible people like you and Mr... I mean, Al. But I want a challenge, believe it or not. Oh, I may not look like a man who loves change, but I am. Why, just today, I started wearing a newer style of hat!

JULIA

(Suppressing a laugh)

And it's quite fetching.

MAURICE

Thank you. But that's not what I'm really hesitating about.

JULIA

Al and I have always had a rule: if you need to say something, just say it!

MAURICE

Okay. The company I'm going to work for wants me to offer you a five picture deal to come work for us.

JULIA

I see. But we already have a three picture contract with Mr. Goldwyn.

MAURICE

Yes, you and Al do. But they only want... you.

JULIA

Oh.

MAURICE

You and Al would still be able to finish out your deal with Mr. Goldwyn. When that's done, you would just come work for us.

JULIA

Just me?

MAURICE

Yes.

JULIA

Can you tell me why?

MAURICE

Because we see you as the real talent. Don't get me wrong, we love Al and would consider him a great addition to the writing team, but the camera loves you. I've been watching the rushes and you've got the goods.

JULIA

I see, I see.

(Julia looks to be in serious thought for a moment, looks at Maurice, and starts laughing)

Oh, Mo, I'm so sorry, but we laugh at these things.

MAURICE

I don't understand.

The front door opens. Alfred and Isaiah enter in joyful moods. Maurice immediately looks worried while Julia smiles.

ALFRED

Darling, we are home! It is time to celebrate! Hello, Mo!

ISAIAH

Mr. Goldwyn is happy with what he's seen. He says that he might want to renegotiate for more pictures!

JULIA

Darling, Mo has just told me something that I find quite interesting under the circumstances.

Alfred kisses Julia and sits on the arm of the chair. Isaiah sits at the other end of the couch.

ALFRED

Really? My interest is piqued.

JULIA

First, let me tell you that this is all hush-hush. He would rather Mr. Goldwyn did not find out.

ALFRED

Oh, yes, by all means. Go on.

JULIA

Well, Mo, go ahead and tell him...

MAURICE

Well... that is...

JULIA

Oh, you are atrocious at this. It seems that our Mo has had an offer from a competing film company to work for them.

ALFRED

Good for you, old man! I'm happy for you. You deserve it.

Maurice feels smaller with every compliment.

JULIA

But are you ready for the interesting part?

ALFRED

Oh, there's more? Yes, please.

JULIA

They want to put me under contract.

ISAIAH

Just you?

JULIA

Yes.

ALFRED

Without me?

JULIA

Yes, Darling.

ALFRED

Well, that does put a spin on things, doesn't it?

JULIA

Naturally, I'll take the contract.

Maurice is surprised.

ALFRED

Naturally.

JULIA

And I'll want you and Isaiah out of my bungalow as soon as possible.

ISAIAH

It goes without saying.

JULIA

Mo and I shall go on to solo fame and fortune without the anchor of you two weighing me down.

Alfred, Julia, and Isaiah stand, shake hands very business-like.

ALFRED

We understand. Good luck with your future endeavors.

ISAIAH

We look forward to seeing your success.

Alfred and Isaiah turn to walk to the front door.
Maurice can't take it anymore and stands.

MAURICE

Just a moment!

ALFRED

Yes, Mo? I mean, Mr. Fitzmarket?

MAURICE

That's it? She throws you out and you put up no fight?

ISAIAH

We knew this day was coming.

ALFRED

Alas, yes we did, my friend. We have always known who the talented one, the beautiful one, the... I need another adjective...

JULIA

Humble.

ALFRED

Yes, thank you, Dear. The humble one was in the act. We knew the day would come when we would be thrown out as yesterday's food scraps. Au Revoir.

JULIA

I own everything we've written together.

ALFRED

Of course.

Maurice is mortified as Alfred and Isaiah turn to go. They stop and Alfred's shoulders start trembling then he starts laughing. Isaiah quickly follows.

JULIA

I knew you would crack first!

ISAIAH

You almost made it to the door this time!

ALFRED

It was humble that did it!

All three are laughing as Maurice is baffled.

MAURICE

What is going on?

Alfred comes to Julia and they hug. Isaiah goes back to his place on the couch.

ALFRED

You are so good, my love. I can't keep a straight face.
(To Maurice)

Please, Mo, sit down.

They all sit.

JULIA

I thought you would actually make it out the door this time.

ALFRED

I tried!

MAURICE

Would somebody please tell me what's going on?

ISAIAH

Mr. Fitzmarket, do you really believe you are the first person to try to break up this team?

JULIA

We're not laughing at you, Mo. Well, maybe a little. But this is the way we deal with this issue.

MAURICE

What "issue?"

ALFRED

Managers, agents, roustabouts, people have been trying to make one or the other of us go solo as long as we've been performing.

MAURICE

Roustabouts?

JULIA

Circus in Kentucky.

ISAIAH

We don't talk about Kentucky.

ALFRED

The point, old boy, is that we discovered years ago that we are and will always be much better as a team than as a solo act.

JULIA

So we started doing this overly-dramatic scene just to see how our dubious benefactor would react. And to have some fun.

ALFRED

It is the only time we can get Isaiah to cooperate in a gag. Thank you for that.

ISAIAH

I do my part.

ALFRED

(To Julia)

But you, my dear, "humble" was inspired! Your best ad-lib yet.

JULIA

Thank you, love.

MAURICE

So, you're not angry?

ALFRED

Angry? Quite the opposite! What you did and what the others have done simply proves to us that we are with the right person. You were just doing your job of spotting talent, and doing it quite well, I might add.

(Getting serious)

I know where the real talent lies in this team. I know that someday I will write a picture for Julia to star in opposite some leading man with real machismo. Obviously, that excludes Bob Hope. But we will do it as a team. I can't do my job without the love of my life and we can't do our job without Isaiah watching over us. Thank you for confirming that for us.

MAURICE

That is a relief for me! I came here thinking that, at the very least, I was going to get hit.

JULIA

Resort to physical violence? Please, Mo, we're better than that.

MAURICE

So I see.

ALFRED

You will be great in your new job, Mo. We know it. And, someday, Julia may be ready for that picture I'll write her.

JULIA

But, then again, maybe not.

ALFRED

We don't know. We just got to Los Angeles and it's still a big, wonderful, exciting mystery to us.

MAURICE

That is, perhaps, the nicest brush-off I've ever experienced. Certainly the most entertaining in hindsight.

(To Isaiah)

You must laugh constantly being with these two.

ISAIAH

Yes, it's a laugh every minute.

JULIA

Isaiah! That was very nearly a joke!

ALFRED

Good job, my friend!

Isaiah grins.

MAURICE

(Standing)

Julia, Al, Mr. Washington, I'll go now. I have a lot of work to do to get this picture out. And I'll be very happy to help do that.

ALFRED

(Shaking his hand)

Good luck, old boy.

JULIA

(Hugging him)

You'll be great.

ISAIAH

(Shaking his hand)

Don't let them push you around.

Maurice puts on his bowler hat and exits through the front door.

ISAIAH

Speaking of work, I need to take a look at the new contracts that Mr. Goldwyn sent with me.

JULIA

That is exciting! New contracts?

ISAIAH

I'll leave you two to talk about it. We just may be here for a while. Goodnight.

JULIA

Goodnight, Isaiah.

ALFRED

Goodnight, old friend.

Isaiah exits to his bedroom. Alfred sits on the couch and Julia snuggles up to him.

JULIA

What did he mean "we may be here for a while?"

ALFRED

Mr. Goldwyn seems to think that we are a perfect match for his studio and wants to extend our contract.

JULIA

Are you ready to get off the road, Darling?

ALFRED

I don't know, are you, Dear?

JULIA

Being here in one place, not worrying about getting my clothing to fit back in the trunk at the end of the day, eating real food... it's been a thought.

ALFRED

There are worse places to be.

JULIA

Alabama.

ALFRED/JULIA

We never talk about Alabama.

ALFRED

Perhaps we should try this... at least for awhile.

JULIA

We could teach others. Pass on our knowledge to the younger ones.

ALFRED

When was it that you realized that we truly are a team, my Dear?

JULIA

Chicago, 1907.

ALFRED

That's very specific.

JULIA

Do you remember our review in Variety following that show?

ALFRED

Ah, yes.

JULIA

"The O'Briens held second spot. Alfred O'Brien displays a voice of ability and genuine affinity for the musical instrument. Julia O'Brien, despite an overdose of make-up, showed personality and was able to put over a song with the added suggestion of a shimmy – but not overdone - and her gowns are very pleasing to the eye."

ALFRED

Obviously written by a cad who was jealous of a failed career.

JULIA

I remember wanting to quit after that review was published. My make-up was overdone but my gowns were pleasing to the eye?

ALFRED

In his defense, your gowns were very pleasing to my eye.

JULIA

You took me aside and told me that we were a team. Pleasing gowns or not, you would not go on without me by your side. I knew then.

ALFRED

I also remember being told by that reviewer that an O'Brien would never make it to the lead spot on the card... and to "get a regular hair cut and lose the armlets."

JULIA

He was right about the armlets.

ALFRED

I still have those. I wear them to bed every so often.

JULIA

When did you know we were an inseparable team?

ALFRED

The day I met you, my love.

They kiss.

ALFRED

Are you ready for this change, my Dear?

JULIA

It's not a change, Darling, it's our next adventure.

LIGHTS OUT:

END OF ACT II

THE END