

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

## ACT ONE

**Prologue:** A television studio.

**MUSIC:** (1.) **SOMETHING'S ON**

We open on a stage environment that suggests an aging theatre that was turned into a radio studio that, in turn, has been converted into a television studio, circa 1955. We could be “backstage” at any live program of the period. The look? A rhapsody of acoustical tile; arc lamps and boom mikes tangle together above; shafts of bright white light cut through the gloom. At rise, the **ENSEMBLE** is discovered dodging a disordered maze of props and set pieces. They seem to be “prepping” for a broadcast. They adlib brisk barks of greeting and high-pitched, last-second chatter. An **ACTRESS** appears, script in hand. She sets down her cardboard coffee cup and drinks in the scene, calm within the chaos that whirls around her.

ACTRESS #1

SEEMS LIKE NIGHTLY  
THERE'S SOME GUY SPINNING A PIE PLATE  
JUST SO **SOMETHING'S ON...**  
SEEMS LIKE WEEKLY  
SOME POOCH IS SAVING A FAM'LY  
JUST SO **SOMETHING'S ON...**  
SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW,  
SOME PROGRAM'S HITTING THE AIRWAVES  
JUST SO **SOMETHING'S ON...**  
AND THEN, IT'S GONE...  
YET, SOMETHING'S ALWAYS ON...

She is joined by two **OTHER ACTRESSES.**

THERE'S SOMEONE TAKING A PRATFALL..;

ACTRESS #2  
(a.k.a “COOCHIE”)

WINNING A QUIZ SHOW..;

ACTRESS #3  
(a.k.a “ELSA”)

PITCHING A NIGHT GAME..;

ENSEMBLE

SPINNING A PIE PLATE!

THREE ACTRESSES

IS THIS THE FUTURE.....?  
OR JUST A FLASH.....?

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THREE ACTRESSES

ARE WE "TODAY..?"  
OR TOMORROW'S TRASH.....?  
WHO'S GOT TIME FOR QUESTIONS..?  
YOU MIGHT MISS YOUR CUE..!  
WE'RE MAKING THIS UP AS WE'RE GOING ALONG --  
SOMETIMES MAKING GOOD;

ACTRESS #1

MOSTLY MAKING DO.

Lights shift to an area of the "set" where a balding **MAN** in his 30's is adjusting the antenna of a console t.v. He is **RONNY MAURO**.

THREE ACTRESSES

ALL 'CUZ SOMEPLACE  
THERE'S SOME "JOE" TUNING A PHILCO  
HE KNOWS **SOMETHING'S ON**.

RONNY

C'mon..., c'mon..., c'mon..!

He shakes the t.v. to get a better picture.

Damn..!

ENSEMBLE

SOMETHING...

He hits the set!

THREE ACTRESSES

HE'S NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE.

ENSEMBLE

SOMETHING...

He hits it again!

THREE ACTRESSES

THAT'S UNPREDICTABLE.

ENSEMBLE

SOMETHING HOT  
SETTING TRENDS.

ACTRESS #1

SOMETHING FORGOTTEN THE MINUTE IT ENDS...

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ACTRESS #4 emerges from the ENSEMBLE and assumes the role of **MERYL DEAN**, comely teevee pitch gal, who addresses the audience as if speaking into a camera.

MERYL

Broadcast live, from New York City, it's television's number one variety program: Edgar Callahan's 'Top of the Heap!'

RONNY finally gets in the teevee to work.

RONNY

Yes..!

MERYL

Here now, your host...: Edgar Callahan!

The ENSEMBLE **applauds**. Lights shift to reveal **EDGAR CALLAHAN** -- an unexceptional looking man in a dark suit and medium length hair, saddled with the the hang-dog look of a reticent funeral director. Still, something about him is commanding -- his manner, that of a 'hale fellow well met.'

EDGAR

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, thank you! "Welcome" from all of us here at the 'Studio Center' in New York, New York.

BEFORE WE BEGIN ALL THE FUN THAT'S IN STORE,  
I'VE A PLUG FOR THE WEEK THAT'S TO COME...:  
WE'RE HOPPING FROM HERE TO THE OPPOSITE SHORE  
WHERE I'LL BECOME A TEMPORARY "BROOKLYN BUM!"  
YES, TOP OF THE HEAP IS GONNA BE PART  
OF THE 'WORLD SERIES,' CIRCA FIFTY-FIVE --  
TO JOIN IN THE "HOOPLA" THAT'S SMACK AT THE HEART  
OF A HIST'RY-MAKING BROADCAST..., AIRING LIVE!  
BUT, THERE'S NO PLACE WE WON'T GO...;  
NO, NOTHING WE WON'T DO...;  
TO WOO OUR FAITHFUL VIEWERS --  
NAMELY, YOU AN' YOU AN' YOU AN' YOU AN' YOU!

On EDGAR's final "you" he points directly at RONNY -- really only pointing into a camera -- but, it hits RONNY like a bolt from above!

EDGAR

And I'm awful keen on asking local talent to perform on the show. So, join us, won't you, as we spotlight Brooklyn's very best? Who knows who we'll discover...

ENSEMBLE

YOU..!  
YOU..!  
YOU..!  
YOU..!

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The lights shift from EDGAR to RONNY, who grabs his jacket from a chair and exits fast! EDGAR continues, in pantomime, "introducing" the acts on his show. The ENSEMBLE suddenly floods onstage, becoming EDGAR's cast and crew.

ENSEMBLE

WE'VE GOT NO BOUND'RIES.....!  
NO SAFETY NETS.....!  
LIVING ON NERVE  
AND ON CIGARETTES.....!  
WHO'S GOT TIME TO WONDER...  
WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT..!  
WE'RE MAKING THIS UP AS WE'RE GOING ALONG --  
MOSTLY MAKING DO;  
SOMETIMES MAKING OUT!

ACTRESS #2

THAT'S WHY NIGHTLY  
THERE'S SOME HICK TELLING A TALL ONE  
JUST SO **SOMETHING'S ON...**

ENSEMBLE  
JUST SO **SOMETHING'S ON!**

ACTRESS #3

THAT'S WHY WEEKLY  
SOME FLATFOOT'S WORKING THE DAY SHIFT  
JUST SO **SOMETHING'S ON...**

ENSEMBLE  
JUST SO **SOMETHING'S ON!**

ACTRESS #1

AND WHY, MOSTLY,  
SOME PINUP'S PUSHING AN ICE BOX --  
LIKE SOME SIDESHOW CON..!

ENSEMBLE  
CON..! Ooooooooooooooooooooo

THREE ACTRESSES

IN PINK CHIFFON --

ENSEMBLE

SO SOMETHING'S ALWAYS ON!  
THERE'S SOMEONE PUSHING A WORKING A TELLING A PITCHING A  
WINNING A TAKING A SAVING A SPINNING A BROADCAST..!

ACTRESS #1

AND THEN, IT'S GONE.

ENSEMBLE

YET, SOMETHING'S ALWAYS ON...  
**SOMETHING'S ON!**

The scene shifts to...

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**Sc. 1: The Bali High - the main room. A little later.**

Benny Cortona's Bali High,' is a seedy dive that features exotic dancing and so-so comedy. It looks like a South Seas isle after a hurricane. Comics **GIL WEBSTER** and **RONNY MAURO** -- whom we know from the opening -- are on the stage, which amounts to a wide spot at one end of the bar. In their 30's, the BOYS wear tight dark suits and ties.

**MUSIC: (2.) THE GUYS TO SEE Instrumental Segue**

GIL

...anyhoo, folks..., not too long ago Ronny and me were a pair of unknown schmucks.

RONNY

Completely unknown! Aaaw, but today...

GIL

Today..?

GIL &  
RONNY

(Simultaneously.)

Everybody knows!

**Rimshot!** They hold for a semi-okay **laugh**.

CORTONA  
(v.o.)

That's it, folks..! Hands together for the pair'a putzos we at Benny's Bali High call "a Laugh 'n a Half..." Gil Webster and Ronny Mauro..!

Feeble **applause**.

RONNY

Thanks a bunch, folks..!

GIL

'Night..!

RONNY  
(Doubles back to add...)

We're here all week!

**MUSIC: (3.) THE GUYS TO SEE Instrumental Playoff**

GIL grabs RONNY and drags him off stage!

Focus shifts to...

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**An alleyway. Immediately following.**

The alley is next to Benny's. **COOCHIE KOVACK**, an overripe stripper in a faded kimono and little else, is grabbing a quick smoke. GIL bursts through the kitchen door with RONNY in hot pursuit.

GIL

"We're here all week?" Where the hell else are we gonna be?

RONNY

I'll tell you where...

GIL

(Cutting him off.)

Don't start. (Spots COOCHIE.) They're ready for you, "Cooch."

COOCHIE

(Scoffs.)

That bunch?

She stabs out her smoke and starts in.

RONNY

Hold up a tick!

COOCHIE

Ronny, I'm on..!

RONNY

Just a minute...

RONNY blocks her exit.

COOCHIE

I got a club full'a strange men waitin' to see me naked.

GIL

"Stranger" than us?

RONNY

All's I need is for you to tell Gil here that he's out of his freakin' gourd.

COOCHIE

(To GIL.)

You're outta your freakin' gourd.

She gives RONNY the "you happy?" look and he clears her path.

RONNY

Thank you.

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GIL

Ask him “how come?”

COOCHIE

(Knows she’s in for a long story..!)

Yeeesh!

RONNY

On account’a “the” Edgar Callahan is headed here, to Brooklyn, and my partner, Mister Gilbert Webster, don’t even wanna know about it.

COOCHIE

He said that..?

GIL

All I said was...

COOCHIE

(Interrupting.)

I mean “Callahan.” He said he’s coming to Brooklyn..?!

GIL

Says Ronny.

RONNY

I kid you not, Cooch. Last night I’m watching Callahan’s teevee show – you know, so’s I can lift some new gags – and that’s what I hear! And why shouldn’t he come to Brooklyn?! We’re here! Webster and Mauro!

GIL

Man, are you ever cracked..!

RONNY

“Cracked” nothing! You remember Joey Fink? From -- what was it -- summer of ‘48?

GIL

(Remembering.)

When we worked the bumper cars at Coney?

RONNY

That’s him. Only now, Joey’s a waiter at the Casa Manana, off’a Ocean Parkway. He says that’s where Callahan’s show is gonna be. If we stop by, Joey says he’ll “jimmy” the alley door and we’re in.

GIL

For what?

RONNY

A “meet” with the man himself!

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COOCHIE  
(Siding with RONNY.)

That could work.

GIL  
(To COOCHIE.)

Aw, jeeze, not you, too?!

RONNY

Gimme one good reason not to try?

GIL  
(Searching for something.)

We're booked. We got that stag party on Thursday.

COOCHIE

I'll work it for you.

GIL

The stag?

COOCHIE

Trust me, they're more interested in my ass... (Indicating RONNY.) ...than yours.

RONNY

You're very 'umerous.\* (To GIL.) So, what do you say? \*(humorous)

GIL

You're outta your head. (To COOCHIE.) The both of ya!

RONNY

I'm "outta" nothing..! (To COOCHIE.) Would ya tell him?!

COOCHIE

Boys..! Boys.., I've been listening to you two argue like this since we were ten. It can wait another fifteen minutes.

COOCHIE exits. RONNY regards GIL in silence for a moment as GIL bounces a small, red, rubber Spaulding ball against the alley wall.

RONNY

Some life you got going, Gilly: some life!... Where's your "fight?"

GIL

Everything's a fight with you.

RONNY

If I'm brutal.., so be it. Always the truth..!



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GIL

“Always the truth..?!” Like those jokes we stole off’a teevee, huh..? We gonna tell people the truth about them?

RONNY

Don’t change the subject.

GIL

But, any time I try to work up something new for our act...

RONNY

(Interrupts.)

Yeah.., Gilly, you and those homemade jokes of your’s.., I laugh. Honest! But, pitch ‘em at a bunch’a bohunks and they’ll land like battery acid. This is business. Our business. And television is rolling through the clubs like the Myrtle Avenue “EI” -- moving everybody but you and me.

GIL

Like I care.

RONNY

Oh, you care!

GIL lobs his ball at RONNY, who catches it!

GIL

‘Dodgers First,’ Ronny.

**MUSIC: (4.) DODGERS FIRST**

RONNY

(Not to be sidetracked.)

I’m in no mood...

GIL

I’ll go easy: no initials for players before ‘41.

RONNY

Gil, look...

GIL

S.J...

RONNY

Would you quit it..?

GIL

S.J...

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You're the worst..!  
RONNY

S.J...  
GIL

YOU'RE LIKE A MENTAL CASE..!  
RONNY

AND REMEMBER.., 'Dodgers First.'  
GIL

I got no time for kid games..!  
RONNY

Here's a tip: it ain't "Sister Joseph."  
GIL

S.J..?  
RONNY

Plays the infield.  
GIL

S.J..?!  
RONNY

Years ago.  
GIL

OKAY.., (Long pause.) IT'S "SPIDER" JORGENSON..!  
RONNY

VERY GOOD.  
GIL

Now, can we talk..?  
RONNY

MMMMMM....., no.  
GIL

Gilly, c'mon..! When we gonna get a shot like this?  
RONNY

J. R...  
GIL

Will you listen..?  
RONNY

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GIL

J.R...

RONNY

Cut the schtick..!

GIL

J.R...

RONNY

GIL.., COMICS HALF AS GOOD HAVE GONE ON THE AIR WITH CALLAHAN  
AND FIN'LY MADE IT CLICK..!  
FIN'LLY TURNED THE TRICK.  
JEEZE.., YOU'RE GONNA MAKE ME SICK..!

GIL

Lay off, Ronny. I mean.., schmoozing teevee types..? You know that ain't me.

RONNY

Okay. Okay.., so, how 'bout I "do" for the both of us? Huh..?

### **MUSIC: (5.) WHATEVER IT TAKES**

THE ODDS MIGHT BE LONG AND THE STAKES MAY BE HIGH  
AND LOADS 'A PALOOKAS ARE ACHIN' TO TRY  
TO BOLLIX US UP WITH A BOOT THE BRAKES.  
BUT, I'M GONNA DO WHATEVER IT TAKES.

THEY WANNA SET LIMITS..? SO, HOW 'BOUT THE SKY..!  
JUST YOU AN' ME, GILLY -- WE'LL SPIT IN THEIR EYE.  
BELIEVE YOU ME, "CHESTER", FOR BOTH OF OUR SAKES  
I'M READY TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES!

CALL ME AMBITIOUS,  
BUT, I'M NOT BLIND:  
GUYS WHO GET VICIOUS  
GET WINED AND DINED;  
GUYS DOIN' DISHES  
OUT BACK, I FIND  
GET LEFT BEHIND.  
AND I DON'T THINK EITHER OF US HAS THAT IN MIND..!

I GRANT YOU IT'S CHANCY; THERE'S PLENTY'A KNOCKS --  
BUT, BETTER THE KNOCKS, THAN STUCK UP ON THE BLOCKS.  
YOU DO ME THIS FAVOR AND, SOON AS IT BREAKS,  
YOU KNOW THAT I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES..!

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RONNY

I'M "THE PUSH" AND YOU'RE "THE PUNCH LINE"  
EVER SINCE BACK AT ST. JUDE:  
I WAS ALWAYS JUMPIN' THE LUNCH LINE,  
WHILE YOU WERE BUSY DUMPIN' ON THE FOOD.  
I'M "THE DRIVE" AND YOU'RE "THE DREAMER."  
AND THAT'S A PROMISE YA KEEP;  
'CAUSE IT'S GONNA CARRY US  
STRAIGHT TO THE TOP OF THE HEAP..!

GIL

Okay! "Done!" Go! Just leave me out of it.

RONNY

Consider yourself left.

GIL

You know, you scare me, Ronny. You really do.

RONNY

Whatever it takes, pal..; whatever it takes...

GIL exits.

EV'RYONE WISHES  
FOR ONE BIG SCORE.  
ME..? I'M AMBITIOUS  
FOR EVEN MORE.  
THIS LITTLE "PISHA'S"  
BEEN LIVIN' FOR  
THE CHANCE TO ROAR..!  
AND NOW THAT MY MOMENT IS HERE, I PLAN TO SOAR..!  
  
NO ROAD IS TOO LONG AND NO STAKES ARE TOO HIGH.  
AND ONLY THE RULES OF THE JUNGLE APPLY.  
THE DEVIL'S TO PAY AND HE'S RAISIN' THE STAKES;  
BUT, I'M GONNA DO WHATEVER IT TAKES!

**Blackout.**

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**Sc. 2: A television studio.**

Lights ghost up to reveal ACTRESS #1 – aka “NORMA” in the studio environment. GRIPS change the alley set.

**MUSIC: (6.) SOMETHING’S ON Reprise**

ACTRESS #1

IS THIS THE FUTURE?  
OR JUST A FLASH?

She is joined by ACTRESSES #2 and #3.

ACTRESS #1 &  
ACTRESS #2

ARE WE “TODAY”  
OR TOMORROW’S TRASH?

TRIO

WHO’S GOT TIME FOR QUESTIONS?  
YOU MIGHT MISS YOUR CUE.  
WE’RE MAKING THIS UP AS WE’RE GOING ALONG --  
SOMETIMES MAKING GOOD.

ACTRESS #3

MOSTLY MAKING DO.....

ACTRESS #3 slips into a pair of white gloves and, with them, the role of **ELSA ORWELL**. She strolls into the next scene. Focus shifts to...

**The Casa Manana. Two days later.**

The Casa Manana is a sprawling suburban supper club located on a choice piece of outer-borough property: overlooking a well-kept cemetery. CALLAHAN and company have arrived for a lavish reception hosted by **HARMON LAYBOURNE**, the club’s 50ish owner. He takes to the stage.

HARMON

(Quieting the crowd.)

Ladies and gentlemen! Ladies and.., if I might have your attention for a moment..?! Folks..?! For those who may be unaware.., I am Harmon Laybourne...

ELSA

Owner of this egregious beanery!

HARMON

That’s right, “Elser..!” (Explains.) Elsa Orwell, people -- from the papers. Anyhow.., I just wanna say... what an honor it is to have the Top of the Heap television program here at the Casa Manana for this -- what can I call it, but -- “momentous” week?

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**Applause.**

HARMON

For.., (Over the noise.) ...for, while we are Brooklyn's premier nightspot...

**Applause.**

...and, might I add, home to such luminaries as Miss Benay Venuta on not one but two separate occasions...

**Applause.**

...rarely do we "run" with a "gun" the caliber of a Mister Edgar Callahan.

HARMON prompts more **applause**. EDGAR takes it as a cue to enter. He mounts the stage as HARMON calls over the ovation...

I just wanted he should hear that..!

EDGAR

(Letting the applause die.)

Thank you, Harmon. And, rest assured, I intend to relish my status as a temporary "Brooklyn Bum!"

**Laughter** and **applause**. EDGAR mingles with the CROWD. RONNY appears, **applauding** loudly. HARMON signals for music.

**MUSIC: (6.) COCKTAIL PIANO Instrumental**

HARMON

Enjoy, people! Mingle..! Mingle..!

RONNY finds himself near ELSA.

RONNY

'Scuse me, but.., you're Elsa Orwell, right..? From the papers?

ELSA

Guilty.

RONNY

(Shaking her hand.)

It's "Ronny Mauro," Miss Orwell. I'm a real big fan of your column.

ELSA

Do tell..?

RONNY

Sure, sure..; can't start the day without a pot of jamoke, a few butts and 'Elsa Orwell' spread out on the kitchen table.

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ELSA

There's an image! Listen, prove your devotion and scare me up a Scotch?

RONNY

Oh. Uh.., sure.

ELSA

Double Sour. No cherry.

RONNY

Back in "a tick."

He crosses to the bar. ELSA is joined by HARMON.

ELSA

How do, Harmon..?

HARMON

(Holding out a wrist.)

Feel here, Elser! I've still got a pulse?

ELSA

There, there, Love.., (Clasping his hand.) Edgar's tickled. Your party's grand.

HARMON

From your lips... (He gestures in the direction God's ear.) You heard about Ciro's?

ELSA

(Nods "yes.")

Came over "the wire."

HARMON

So, that's what..? The Versaille, La Martinique and now Ciro's -- all down the tubes. This farshtinkener club business..! (Indicating the party.) But, this is good, right? A little mingle, schmingle, bingle and I survive.

ELSA

"From your lips."

EDGAR

(Bellowing.)

Elsa! Elsa Orwell..! (To the CROWD.) Drink her in, kids..: the reigning "Queen of the Big Town Tabbies!"

ELSA

(Anticipating.)

Not to worry, Edgar. Your item ran in the bulldog edition.

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EDGAR

That's "muh" girl.

ELSA  
(To HARMON.)

You know, Mr. Callahan started out in show business stringing me tepid "kiss-and-tell" items. (To EDGAR.) Remember? And here he is, the most influential man on television, and he's still at it. Is that "to laugh?"

HARMON

It's to laugh.

EDGAR  
(Not laughing.)

God blessed me with a wonderful memory. (He demonstrates.) Hugh D'Arcy's 'The Face on the Barroom Floor:' "'Twas a balmy summer evening, and a goodly crowd was there -- which well-nigh filled Joe's barroom on the corner of the square." I can recite all sixty-eight lines -- start to stop. But, television has no use for memory. (Changing the subject.) I'll have another tip for you tomorrow. Same gal.

ELSA  
(To HARMON.)

There's this little jingle singer on Edgar's program...: name of Meryl Dean.

EDGAR

Logging plenty enough airtime, but she's set her heart on a stint in the clubs.

ELSA

God love her, the poor thing!

RONNY returns with ELSA's cocktail.

HARMON

Bring her by. (Referring to his PATRONS.) These "eight balls" go "bugs" for anybody from "the box."

EDGAR

Wasn't it Garland Rice who wrote: (Recites.) "I am the conqueror of clown and king / Of prince and pauper in this shaking world / I rule the race, as to the field I bring / Power that leaves so many banners furled..."

HARMON

Whatever the hell that means...

EDGAR

It means that television is everywhere.



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RONNY

(Pipes up.)

I read where 20,000 teevee sets are sold in America each and every day.

EDGAR

Who's this?

ELSA

My drink.

RONNY

(Hands ELSA her cocktail.)

Double sour. No cherry.

EDGAR

Sounds more like your resume. (Reacting to his own joke.) Funny.

He wraps an arm around HARMON's shoulder and leads him off to chat.

RONNY

Is it me.., or did Edgar Callahan just "cut you a new one?"

ELSA

And you're offended. How sweet.

RONNY

That's the way you talk to someone "back issue" or somethin'. Not Elsa Orwell. You're "page one" in my book.

ELSA

The last person to land this humble scribe on the front page was Bruno Hauptmann. I covered the Lindburgh kidnapping. (Savors it!) Top of the fold, five weeks running. You wouldn't happen to be plotting a crime, would you, Mr. Mauro?

RONNY

Who..? (Caught.) Me?! Nah!!

ELSA

Fat lot of good that does me.

RONNY finally gets that she's making a joke and forces **a raucous laughs!**  
ELSA eyes him with amused suspicion.

You're not supposed to be here, are you?

**MUSIC: (8.) IN THE MOOD FOR YOU**

RONNY

Uuh..., look..., it's been a kick meeting you and all...

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RONNY starts go, but ELSA catches him by the hand, pulling him close...to dance.

ELSA

Oh, now..., don't run off. All evidence to the contrary, I can keep a secret.

RONNY

"Do tell..?"

ELSA

And, God knows why, but you're exactly what I'm in the mood for.

THAT SUIT OF YOUR'S IS STRICTLY ALEXANDER'S..;  
THE SHOES COULD USE A POLISHING, IT'S TRUE..;  
JUST LOOK AT HOW YOUR "FOUR-IN-HAND" MEANDERS..!  
SO, WHY IS IT ... I'M **IN THE MOOD FOR YOU?**

YOUR COIFFURE COULDN'T COME UP ANY THINNER..;  
I'VE HEARD THEY CALL THAT HAIRSTYLE "HONEYDEW..!"

ELSA

BUT, SWEETNESS, YOU MIGHT BE THE NEXT YUL BRYNNER...  
SO, WHAT THE HELL.., I'M **IN THE MOOD FOR YOU!**

SOME NURSE A YEN FOR CHINESE FOOD --  
THINK WANTON SOUP IS THRILLING  
AND EGG FOO YOUNG CAN SET THEM ALL A'QUIVER --  
I NEVER YEN FOR CHINESE FOOD..;  
MEN ARE MUCH MORE FILLING.  
THE BITCH OF IT IS.., THEY US'LLY DON'T DELIVER..!

LET'S FACE IT, ELSA'S HERE FOR THE DURATION;  
AND YOU, IT SEEMS, ARE WHAT SHE'S COME DOWN TO.  
SO, THOUGH I'M SENSING PROBLEM PERSPIRATION,  
I WAGER YOU'RE A SWAMP WORTH THE WADING THROUGH.  
YOU'LL SPRITZ A LITTLE FLIT AND WE'LL MAKE DO.  
THE FACT IS.., I'M **IN THE MOOD FOR YOU.**

RONNY

What say I show you the town?

ELSA

I hear the moonlight on Ebbets Field is breathtaking.

RONNY

But first, we do the clubs.

She tosses him her car keys.

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ELSA

I'm the olive and cream Eldorado. Out at the curb.

RONNY

(Smiles.)

IT'S LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE THE GAL WITH ALL THE ANSWERS..!

ELSA

EXCEPT, OF COURSE, TO WHO'S PURSUING WHO..?

RONNY

BUT, THANKS TO BOOZE...

ELSA

...AND OTHER MOOD ENHANCERS..,

BOTH

IT'S NOT THE KIND OF QUESTION THAT WE'LL PURSUE.  
FOR, SENSIBLE OR NOT; IT'S STRANGE BUT TRUE..:

ELSA

I'M ABSOLUTELY...

RONNY

...ABSOLUTELY...

BOTH

**IN THE MOOD FOR YOU!**

**Blackout.**

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**Sc. 3:        The Bali High - the alleyway. Later that night.**

**MUSIC:      (9.)    IT'S A JOKE**

GIL wanders down the alley.

GIL

“TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT YOUR LIFE,” RONNY TELLS ME;  
“YOU’RE SCREWING AROUND,” HE SEZ, “TAKE UP THE FIGHT..!”  
GIVES ME THE BUS’NESS LIKE SISTER THERESA  
AND, WHAT’S EVEN WORSE..,  
STARTS TO SOUND LIKE HE’S RIGHT...

COOCHIE drifts in.

(Spots her.) Hey, “Cooch”.., you seen Ronny?

COOCHIE

Not as yet.

GIL

Who we got comin’ for the first show? “Hoods” or “Hoops?”

COOCHIE

Prob’ly a bus tour from Singsing.

GIL

The Westchester crowd. At last..!

GIL digs a paper from a pocket and studies it.

COOCHIE

What’s that?

GIL

Nuthin’. A joke.

COOCHIE

Yeah? You make it up?

GIL

Kinda..; it’s new.

COOCHIE

You tell it to Ronny?

GIL

(Shakes his head “no.”)

You know him.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

COOCHIE draws up a chair and plops down.

COOCHIE

I know how to laugh.

GIL

You want me to..? Sure... Here.., it goes like...: (Reads the paper. Nervous.) "I know a few Catholics who think practicing 'the rhythm method' means whenever they wanna go all the way..." pause, pause, pause... "they gotta find a drummer."

COOCHIE looks confused. GIL explains.

...You know, for the rhythm or... Stinks, huh..?

COOCHIE

(Doesn't want to hurt his feelings.)

No.., no.., it's just... (Comes up with an excuse.) I'm not very musical.

She disappears into the club. GIL crumples the paper and tosses it.

GIL

...MAYBE RONNY IS RIGHT.

**IT'S A JOKE.**

JUST A JOKE.

JUST A SEVEN SECOND BIT.

WHAT'S THE DIFF'RENCE IF IT DOESN'T REALLY PLAY.

IT'S A GAG --

DON'T I WISH --

SO, WHO CARES IF IT'S FOR SHIT.

LEAVE IT LAY THERE..,

JUST.....

His voice trails off. A thought has hit him.

...LEAVE IT LAY.

He stoops to pick up the paper, half mumbling...

...rhumba.....a rhumba...

He jots a note and reads...

"I know this guy who thinks using 'the rhythm method' means ya gotta book a rumba band whenever ya wanna do it. I mean.., this guy's bumpin' bones to 'Tico-Tico-Tico!' That's gotta shake your "maracas..!" (Thinks for a second. Then...) Ba-dump-bump..!

GIL rips up the paper in half.

GIL

**IT'S A JOKE!**  
JUST A JOKE.  
NOT THE FREAKIN' BILL OF RIGHTS.  
SO, IT ISN'T WORTH THE WIND IT TOOK TO "SUCK."  
IT'S A YUCK  
AND THAT'S IT.  
NOT A 'CAUSE FOR SLEEPLESS NIGHTS.  
LET IT GO, GIL..!  
Jesus..! JUST LET IT.....FUCK!!!

He collects the pieces of paper and tries to fit them together.

NO MATTER WHAT I WRITE, IT ISN'T SHARP ENOUGH!  
WON'T SNAP ENOUGH!  
GOD KNOWS IT DOESN'T TAP ENOUGH!  
IT'S STILL THE SAME OLE CRAP I ALWAYS PASS!

THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY TO MAKE IT TIGHT ENOUGH  
OR TRUE ENOUGH!  
TO WORK THE DAMN THING THROUGH ENOUGH  
TO LAND IT IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF "CLASS..!"  
Yeah.., AND DI'MONDS MIGHT JUST DROP OUTTA MY ASS.

**IT'S A JOKE.**  
JUST A JOKE.  
LIKE A MILLION OTHER SPIELS.  
IF YOU SHOOT FOR MORE THAN THAT, YOU'RE BLOWIN' SMOKE.  
IT'S A LINE,  
NOT YOUR LIFE.  
SO, NO MATTER HOW IT FEELS  
WHEN YOU'RE PAUSING FOR A LAUGH AND HEAR IT CHOKE,  
LIGHTEN UP, GIL.  
IT'S JUST...

He stops abruptly. Relaxes. And then adlibs...

"So, back when my friends and I are, like, 14...15 years old, our parish priest says to us that he heard from the Pope – who, of course.., got it from God -- that the only "okay" way to get outta having a baby is to practice "the rhythm method." Now.., just the fact that we were hearing this from a guy who's celibate should've been a red flag. But, my friend Joey runs with this particular piece of theological insight! Only he translates it into "making love to music." So, ex-alter boy that he is, he starts "doing it to music. Sinatra's on the radio? Joey's "doing it to music! They sing the "Ave Maria?" He's doing it to music. An ice cream truck goes by.., he's doing it to music..! (Takes a beat, then...) By the time he was twenty-one, he had so many kids he started his own band! (With a grin.) I hear he's working up to an orchestra."

GIL sinks down into a chair, sits for a moment of silent satisfaction and then, sings quietly to himself...

GIL

**IT'S A JOKE...  
IT'S A JOKE...  
IT'S...A...JOKE...**

GIL starts to write down his new bit. RONNY enters and spots him.

RONNY

(Calling conspiratorially.)

Psst! Gil!

GIL

Hey, Ronny, I got something I wanna try out on you.

RONNY

Later. Just now..., I'm thinking of a 'player' with the initials 'E.O.'

GIL

What..?

RONNY

Try "Elsa Orwell."

RONNY ducks into the club. GIL is fast at his heels. Focus shifts to...

**The alleyway.**

RONNY and GIL enter to discover ELSA with, of all people, COOCHIE.

ELSA

(Giving COOCH the "once over.")

Ronny? Where are we?

RONNY

Welcome to Benny Cortona's Bali High Club! Elsa, I want you to meet Gil Webster, my partner in crime...

GIL

Miss Orwell.

GIL offers her his hand. ELSA ignores it.

ELSA

(To Ronny.)

I trust there's an explanation..?

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

RONNY

Promised to take ya clubbing, didn't I? (Easing ELSA into a seat.) Where better to kick it off than your own private floorshow? Starring Brooklyn's own Mauro... (Prompting GIL.)

GIL

(Keenly embarrassed.)

And Webster.

ELSA

(Realizing that she's been scammed.)

Lord, help me..!

COOCHIE

Not in here he won't.

RONNY

(Plowing on.)

This is usually where there's big applause...

COOCHIE **claps.**

...then, we come barrelin' onstage...

RONNY gestures to GIL to join him.

...and the music goes...

RONNY leaps to a piano and begins a vamp.

**MUSIC: (10.) THE GUYS TO SEE**

...and I say, "Evening, all! I'm Ronny Mauro. And this..."

GIL

"...is Gil Webster."

RONNY

Then, Gil goes...

GIL

"Hey, Ronny, of all the many..., many ovations we've gotten over the years..."

RONNY

(Interjects.)

"...And a lotta years it's been..."

GIL

"...that ovation... (Gropes for the word.) that..."

**MUSIC: The Vamp Halts!**



## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

RONNY  
(Helpfully.)

"...was the most recent?"

COOCHIE  
(Imitating a rim shot!)

Bah-dump-bump!

RONNY

"Not to worry, though, folks; me and Gilly are here to class this rat hole up..."

HEY.., IF YOU WANNA LAUGH --  
WANNA DOUBLE IN HALF..?  
I'M THE GUY TO SEE..!

GIL

SAY.., IF YOU WANNA JOKE --  
MAYBE NEED A GOOD POKE..?  
I'M THE GUY TO SEE..!

I TELL YA, FOLKS, THIS HERE'S THE PAIR  
TO SMACK A GRIN ON YOU KNOW WHERE.

RONNY

AND CRACK YA 'TIL YA THINK YOU'RE GONNA PEE..!

RONNY  
& GIL

SO, IF EV'RYTHIN'S CRAP  
AND YOU NEED A KNEE-SLAPPER,  
LOOK UP HIM AND ME..!

RONNY  
& GIL

BELIEVE ME.....,

GIL

I'M THE GUY...

RONNY

I'M THE GUY...

GIL

YOU'RE THE GUY..?

RONNY

HE'S THE GUY..!

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

WE'RE THE GUYS...  
GIL

There you go..!  
RONNY

WE'RE THE GUYS TO SEE..!  
RONNY  
& GIL

“Aaaaaah, the Bali High Club..! The Bali High...”  
RONNY

“Heckuva place, ain’t it? You gotta love a dive where they water down “da” drinks...”  
GIL

**MUSIC: The Vamp Halts!**

“...And hooooooooose down “da” drunks!”  
RONNY

Bah-dump-bump!  
COOCHIE

**MUSIC: The Vamp Resumes!**

“But, you can’t complain about the Bali High girls.”  
GIL

“Maybe you can’t, but, I got a quibble...: I find them very rude.”  
RONNY

Rude?  
COOCHIE  
(Mock offended!)

“Yeah..., rude!”  
RONNY

**MUSIC: The Vamp Halts!**

“Ya keep plugging that peephole in your dressing room wall!”

Baaaaah-dump-bump!!  
COOCHIE

**MUSIC: The Vamp Resumes!**

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

RONNY

“Aaaah, but then there’s Mauro and Webster... him and me!”

GIL

“I gotta tell ya, not too long ago, we were a pair of unknown schmucks..?”

RONNY

Can ya believe it? And today?”

COOCHIE

Today..?

**MUSIC: The Vamp Halts!**

RONNY, GIL  
& COOCHIE

“Everybody knows!”

THEY pause, breathlessly awaiting ELSA’s reaction.

ELSA  
(Wearily.)

Bah-dump-bump.

RONNY

AH, BUT, WHO BEATS A SCHMUCK  
WHEN YOU NEED A GOOD CHUCKLE..?

GIL

“Ronny..., I agree.”

BOTH

BELIEVE ME.....,

GIL

I’M THE GUY...

RONNY

I’M THE GUY...

GIL

YOU’RE THE GUY..?

RONNY

HE’S THE GUY..!

GIL

WE’RE THE GUYS...

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

That's the stuff!

RONNY

RONNY  
& GIL

**WE'RE...THE...GUYS...TO...SEE..!**

The routine ends. ELSA sits there, stunned. Finally, COOCHIE can't stand it and blurts out...

COOCHIE

And they kinda go on that way..!

RONNY

You like?

ELSA  
(Flagging an invisible waiter.)

Check, please..!

GIL  
(As embarrassed as possible.)

About all this, Miss Orwell....., I am...so...sorry.

ELSA  
(Rising to go.)

"Sorry" doesn't begin to cover it.

RONNY

Wait..! Gil.., Cooch.., could you give us a... (minute)?

GIL

Again, I'm really... (Stammering.) really...

Words just can't express how mortified he is.

ELSA

Really?

COOCHIE  
(Nods, grabbing GIL.)

Really.

They exit. ELSA collects herself to follow their example.

RONNY

Don't go!

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

ELSA

Stop me.

RONNY

(Pulls something from his pocket.)

I got your car keys.

ELSA holds out her hand and waits. RONNY slowly starts to back away. ELSA starts to approach him at a walk, hand outstretched. RONNY picks up the pace. ELSA follows suit. Finally, RONNY bolts from the room and ELSA runs after him as focus shifts back to...

### **The alleyway.**

COOCHIE drags GIL out into the evening air.

GIL

I'm gonna kill him.

COOCHIE

Ease up, Gil.

GIL

...I am! He totes Elsa-friggin'-Orwell around to see us and turns it into amateur hour! That tears it -- tears it up good!

COOCHIE

You've got something tearin' at you, all right.., only I don't think it's him.

GIL

I don't know what you're talking about.

COOCHIE

I got eyes, Gil..! I got ears. Two of 'each.

GIL

(Pauses. Then...)

You'll keep this is between us..?

COOCHIE

We'll see.

GIL

A "time or two" back, I'm at this "hole-in-the-wall" I know about over in 'the Village..?' It's the third show; "nuthin'" house; and the comic onstage.., he's riffin' about his life; just telling stories. No "chunks." No "snappers." So, I figure, hell.., I'll try it -- do a few minutes of my new stuff.

COOCHIE

Onstage?

GIL

No, I mean..., there at the bar for the owner and whatnot. And, Cooch..., a couple jokes hit. And it felt -- I dunno -- like an honest living. It felt honest.

COOCHIE

Gil, you gotta tell all this to Ronny.

GIL

The act isn't about honesty for him. It's about puttin' us over..! Puttin' something over. On someone. I dunno...: maybe on me.

COOCHIE

'Til you talk to him..., how are you ever gonna know?

GIL falls silent. Focus shifts to...

**The main room.**

RONNY trots on, **yelping** like the Fourth Stooge, and clearly enjoying the chase. ELSA isn't amused. They dodge tables and chairs.

ELSA

Christ almighty, I'm trapped in a cheesy two-reeler..!

RONNY

Can ya blame a guy for tryin'?

ELSA

Yes! For trying my patience..!

She grabs for the keys!

For trying a fast one!

She grabs for them again!

RONNY

It's just... we've gotta get to Callahan and you're our only shot.

ELSA

It's Edgar you're after?!

RONNY

All I know is, you plug an act in your column and next thing they're booked on his show.

ELSA

Is that how you see it?

RONNY

How else?!

ELSA

Let's assume, for a moment, that I was able to manage a casual introduction...

RONNY jingles the keys about her hand, but continues to hold onto them.

RONNY

No lie..?!

ELSA

With no promise of anything beyond that...

RONNY

Lady, I would owe you big! Anything you want.

ELSA caresses his hand.

ELSA

I'd like breakfast. In bed.

RONNY lets go of the keys.

RONNY

How do you want your eggs?

ELSA kisses him passionately then, steps back to survey the "damage."

ELSA

Unfertilized. I'll be out in the car.

ELSA exits. RONNY lets out a **whoop** of joy! He dashes off in search of GIL. Focus shifts back to...

**The alleyway.**

RONNY runs in.

RONNY  
(Interrupts.)

Gilly, it's done! It's done..!

GIL

What?

RONNY

Elsa...she's crazy for our act...she's gonna get us to Callahan.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

GIL

Ronny, I.; I...

GIL gives COOCHIE a look of sudden panic. She nudges GIL to come clean. GIL turns to RONNY and says, almost pathetically...

GIL

I'm out of it.

RONNY

(Stunned for a beat, then...)

Say again..?

COOCHIE

Gil...

GIL

(Anger flaring.)

No! I'm out of it..!

RONNY

Okay, lookit.., I'm sorry I sprang this on you, but I didn't know it was gonna happen.

GIL

It's not that.

COOCHIE

(Suddenly.)

Gil don't think you're funny.

RONNY

What?

GIL

We're not. The act...: it's...

COOCHIE

(Offering.)

For shit..?

RONNY

Come off it..! It's mint! Elsa Orwell loved it!

GIL

It's the same lame joke book crap we been doing for... god knows how long!

RONNY

Those snappers played great for the guys we stole 'em off. I know what plays. You 'make stupid,' you make good.



**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

GIL

Ronny, I don't want it like that!

RONNY

So, what do you want..., huh? Just tell me.

COOCHIE

Put in a new joke.

RONNY

A new joke?

COOCHIE

One of Gil's.

RONNY

One joke?

GIL

Yeah.

RONNY

'Baby boy,' it's a lock.

**MUSIC: (11.) WHATEVER IT TAKES Reprise**

COOCHIE

You swear?

RONNY

HEY, IT'S ONLY ONE JOKE,  
SO, IT AIN'T NO GREAT SHAKES,  
SEE, I'M GONNA DO..!

Suddenly, from the street, **the horn** in ELSA's car **honks!**

RONNY

Gotta go!

GIL

You are not going to regret this!

RONNY exits. GIL gives COOCHIE a big kiss.

**Blackout.**

**Sc. 4 Limbo - Television Studio. Saturday evening.**

**MUSIC: (12.) SOMETHING'S ON Second Reprise**

MERYL enters, chatting with two DANCERS. SIDNEY enters and hands her an envelope. MERYL excuses herself to scan the contents.

MERYL

"Dearest Meryl. As promised: the enclosed."

ACTRESS #2

**SOMETHING'S ON.....!**

Focus splits with...

**Limbo - Elsa's office.**

ELSA appears.

MERYL

"I lay it at your feet."

She finds a newspaper clipping.

ACTRESS #2

**GOING ON.....!**

ELSA

(Quoting her column in the clipping.)

"Take it from Elsa, the goofy grins spanning the pans of Edgar Callahan's sponsors have less to do with his Trendex numbers than with spokes-gal Meryl Dean."

ACTRESS #2

**ALWAYS ON.....!**

ELSA

"Rumor has it, she -- of the honeyed vocals and curvaceous physique -- is prepping for her nightclub premiere. Well, bait my breath..!"

Focus shifts back to...

**Limbo - Television studio.**

MERYL

(Returns to the note.)

"Drop by Monday. There's someone you need to meet. Your's, (Closing the note.) Edgar."

ACTRESS #2  
& TRIO

**SOMETHING'S GOING ON.....!**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

**MUSIC: (13.) HOT & COLD**

MERYL  
(Repeating the last word  
in the note to herself.)

Edgar...

I HAVE TO ADMIT HE HAS A KNACK  
FOR CHOOSING HIS MOMENTS..;  
FOR ACTING CONTRITE.  
BUT, IS IT SO EASY TO LURE ME BACK..?  
JUST DANGLE THE RIGHT KIND OF BAIT AND I BITE?  
WELL..., (She looks at the note in her hand.) I MIGHT.  
I JUST MIGHT...

HERE AM I....., MY MIND MADE UP.....:  
NO MORE MARRIED MEN FOR ME.  
THEN HE PULLS A STUNT LIKE THIS  
AND SUDDENLY....., I'M ALL AT SEA.

HEAVEN KNOWS, IT'S NONE TOO PLEASING  
FINDING I CAN BE CAJOLED.  
HOW I HATE THE WAY THE MAN CAN TEASE ME  
INTO TO BLOWING HOT AND COLD.

WHY AM I.., MISS COOL-AND-CALM..,  
SUCH A MESS WHEN HE'S INVOLVED?  
IN AN INSTANT I CAN FLIP  
FROM "PROBLEM SOLVED"... TO "UNRESOLVED."

(HE'S GOT ME) GRASPING AFTER STRAWS AND PRAYING  
I CAN SPIN THEM INTO GOLD --  
EVEN IF IT MEANS I'M PLAYING LOEB  
TO THAT MAN'S LEOPOLD?  
MAYBE MY DEFENSE IS STAYING  
EQUAL MEASURES HOT AND COLD.  
FIRST, HOT; THEN, COLD;  
THEN, HOT; THEN, COLD;  
THEN, NOT.  
AND THEN...

MERYL pauses, lost in thought. Then she suddenly exits, her decision made!

The scene shifts to...

**The Casa Manana. Main Room. Monday during cocktail hour.**

HARMON appears on the bandstand.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

HARMON

Ladies and gentlemen, I wanna introduce a little gal that, with any luck, we'll be hearing a whole lot more from. Let's coax a tune outta her..., eh..?!

HARMON to leads the **applause** as MERYL enters the club in a spectacular gown and takes to the bandstand. HARMON welcomes her and then steps down to the dance floor.

MERYL

IT'S A WOMAN'S PREROGATIVE TO CHANGE HER MIND --  
EV'RY "NO" IS A "YES" IS A "NO."  
IF YOU LOOK UP "PREROGATIVE," I THINK YOU'LL FIND  
THE TERM DEFINED LIKE SO:  
"AN EXCLUSIVE AND / OR SPECIAL RIGHT"  
TO REMAIN BETWEEN AND BETWIXT.  
BUT, I DON'T MIND CONFESSING  
ALL THIS SECOND GUESSING  
IS A BLESSING THAT'S DECIDEDLY MIXED!

GIL enters. He pauses to watch MERYL.

ALL THE SAME, I HAVEN'T DONE TOO BADLY  
PRACTICING THE THINGS I PREACH;  
(BY) SENDING "COME AND GET ME" SIGNALS,  
WHILE KEEPING...JUST OUT OF REACH!

(NO, I'M) NOT YOUR EV'RYDAY TOMATO --  
AFTER ME, THEY BROKE THE MOLD!  
THIS TOMATO'S A TORNADO  
THAT'S BLOWING NOT TOO COLD...  
NOT TOO HOT TO HOLD...  
BREEZIN' (IN), ALL TOLLED,  
BOTH HOT AND COLD..!

LIKE IT OR NOT, I'M HOT AND COLD.

**Applause.** HARMON joins MERYL onstage.

HARMON

She's Meryl Dean, folks -- give 'er a hand..! (To THE BAND.) One more time! Yeah!

The BAND kicks into MERYL's big finish!

MERYL

IF YOU LIKE YOUR WOMEN FICKLE,  
GUARANTEE YOU, YOU'LL BE SOLD  
ON MY BRAND OF SLAP AND TICKLE;

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

MERYL  
I'M THE GAL  
I'M THE GAL  
HOT AND COLD..!

THE BAND  
BOTH BASHFUL AND BOLD!  
WHOSE PASSION IS DOLED OUT...  
HOT AND COLD..!

## Big Musical Button!

HARMON and MERYL exit the stage to disappear into the CROWD.  
RONNY and ELSA appear, dancing "chummy." RONNY wears a snazzy  
sport shirt and a toupee. He spies GIL.

Gil!  
RONNY

GIL crosses to join them.

GIL  
(Notes RONNY's "hair.")  
What's with the "rig..?" (Tries to lift the toupee.) Trap and skin it all by yourself?

RONNY  
...Like you need the gruesome details.

ELSA  
We can't have our boy meeting 'the Big Man' toggged out like a "drifter." (To RONNY.) I'll  
go set him up for you.

ELSA gives him a good smooch and she's off.

GIL  
So, give: I wanna hear it.

RONNY  
What?

GIL  
The bit. (Impatiently.) C'mon. I wrote it all out for you..!

RONNY  
I gave it a look.

GIL  
And learned it, right..? (Annoyed.) Ronny.....?

RONNY  
(Changes the subject.)  
Some "room," huh? You get a squint at the "talent?"

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

MERYL approaches the FLOOR MANAGER. RONNY points her out.

RONNY

There's a "package."

GIL

(Intrigued by MERYL.)

Yeah, nice..; but, the bit..

RONNY

Show and tell time, "Chester."

RONNY approaches MERYL.

RONNY

'Scuse me, miss..? My friend here, he wants to make a pass at you, only he's real outta practice.

MERYL

Is he?

GIL

(On the spot, comes out with...)

Yeah.., uh.., see, it's the first time my ma's let me outta the house since "polio season."

RONNY

(After a beat, to MERYL.)

Help him.

And with that, RONNY beats a hasty retreat.

MERYL

Your friend is quite the, uh... (Stuck for the "polite" word to describe RONNY.)

GIL

And thensome.

MERYL

On the other hand, using polio as a pick-up line is fairly desperate. (Smiles.) But, clever.

GIL returns the smile and then, notices the SIDNEY signaling for her.

GIL

I think your ride's here.

MERYL gives him a parting glance and leaves. RONNY returns.

RONNY

So..?

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

GIL

(Not gonna give him the satisfaction.)

So..! "So," nothing, but that bit..!

ELSA appears with HARMON.

RONNY

(Interrupting.)

Yeah, yeah, the bit, the bit...: ya-da-ya-da "enough kids to start a band" ..; I know it.

ELSA

(Calls to them.)

Boys! Say, fellows..!

**MUSIC: (14.) MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE**

RONNY

This is us.

They cross through the room.

HARMON

What'cha up to, "Elser..?" Somethin' good?

ELSA

Oooh, just a little mingle, schmingle, bingle.., to quote a friend.

HARMON

(Laughs!)

That's the way it's done...

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE,  
OVER DINNER OR A DRINK.  
SCHMOOZE 'EM OR YOU LOSE 'EM;  
KID, IT'S LATER THAN YOU THINK.  
KIBITZ 'TIL THEY TINGLE  
IN THEIR SPECIALTY DU JOURS;  
AND MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE..?  
THEY'RE YOUR'S!

RONNY

There's Edgar!

EDGAR enters. ELSA grabs RONNY and GIL. They stalk EDGAR as he works the crowd.

HARMON

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

EDGAR

HI YA, MAXY -- HOW'S THE KID?  
CAUGHT YOU AT THE COPA.

HARMON

SHOW OF HANDS..; WHO THINKS HE DID?  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE.

EDGAR

HEY THERE, "SWEETNESS" -- YOU'RE A SIGHT..!  
IF ONLY I WERE SINGLE...

HARMON

...YEAH, RIGHT!

WITH A SHINE, AND A SHAVE,  
AND, SAY.., MINIMAL PRACTICE,  
YOU CAN MASTER THIS LOWEST OF CRAFTS.  
TRADE A JOKE -- SHOOT A WAVE --  
PAT A BACK -- 'CAUSE THE FACT IS  
IF YOU DON'T WORK THE FENCE, YOU'LL BE JERKIN' AT SCRAFTS.

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE...  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE..!  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE...  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE..!

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE;  
EV'RY SAVVY LITTLE SCHMO,  
KNOWS ENOUGH TO TOADY  
AND WE'RE TALKING QUID PRO QUO.  
SERVE IT ON A SHINGLE --  
ADD A COURSE OR TWO OF CROW..?  
AND MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE....

RONNY  
(Jumping in!)

WELL....., HELLO!

EDGAR

Have we met?

ELSA

Edgar, this is the very pair I've been telling you about!

WHAT GOOD LUCK..!



**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

EDGAR

... (Spoken.) Quite the fluke.

EDGAR picks up a phone at his table.

ELSA

YES, AND EVER SO TIMELY --  
(To the BOYS.) I WAS PLUGGING YOU MOMENTS AGO.

RONNY  
(Spoken.)

Ain't that right..?!

GIL  
(Aside to RONNY.)

Could you puke?

ELSA

THESE TWO PARTNER SUBLIMELY --  
WHICH SHOULD MAKE THEM IDEAL FOR A SPOT ON YOUR SHOW.

EDGAR  
(To the switchboard.)

Circle 5-9442. (To RONNY.) You're jugglers or some such..?

RONNY

We're Mauro and Webster, Mr. Callahan. (A blank look from EDGAR.) The comics..?

GIL

Pleased to meet...

EDGAR holds up his hand to silence GIL.

EDGAR  
(On the phone.)

Alice..? Listen, I've changed my mind. Have Artie bring the trousers by in the morning; he can fit me up at the hall. How's Senior Pepito? (Pauses for her response.) Mmmm...

ELSA  
(While EDGAR is occupied.)

Suppose I do the honors...: of course, you know Harmon Laybourne. And this fetching young thing is Mr. Callahan's protégé: Miss Meryl Dean.

MERYL

Hello.

GIL  
(Awkwardly.)

Uh..., yeah..!

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

HARMON

Boys, help me out. Edgar wants I should headline Miss Dean, but I dunno..; you'd pay good money to hear crooning outta such a skinny pigeon?

RONNY

For sure..! 'Specially bein' from teevee and all.., she's gotta play big with the "hoops."

GIL

(Explaining to MERYL.)

That's the "out-of-town" crowd. Package tours.

EDGAR hangs up the phone. RONNY sees.

RONNY

Gil and me believe very much in the power of television -- your program in particular, Mr. Callahan.

ELSA

You oughta go for that one, Edgar.

HARMON

(Chuckles.)

He's your kinda hungry.

EDGAR

Or "from hunger..?" All right, lads, seems I've got a ventriloquist with the croup. "Here's a nickel; what's yer dodge?"

RONNY

Here..?

EDGAR

Here and now. You need a solid "seven" for the spot on my show.

I NEED 'NASH'NAL' APPEAL,  
IF YOU WANNA PASS MUSTER;  
NOT SOME HACK FROM THE HONKIEST-TONKS.  
GIVE ME 'BRASH,' AN' NO DEAL.  
GIVE ME 'BRIL' IANT' AND, BUSTER,  
YOU'LL BE LOVED IN DUBUQUE LIKE YOU ARE IN 'DA' BRONX.

GIL

It's Brooklyn.., actually.

RONNY

Not to worry. We got schtick that'd play in Siam. Like.., (Blanks.) the bit about.., uh...

GIL

The neighborhood.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

RONNY

Right!

GIL

“Mr. Callahan, you can’t leave Brooklyn without meeting some’a the local ‘gentry.’”

RONNY

“The ‘what?’”

GIL

“The folks. Like my Nana Theresa -- as in Saint Theresa, ‘The Little Flower..?’ That’s who she was named after.”

RONNY

“Only not too long after!”

He takes a laugh beat.

EDGAR  
(Monotone.)

Funny.

RONNY

“The woman is so old, she was born in the Year...”

GIL &  
RONNY

“...of Our Loooord only knows!”

They take a laugh beat.

EDGAR  
(Monotone.)

More.

RONNY  
(Rattled.)

Let’s see, we, uh...

That’s when GIL spots **JOEY FINK**, their waiter friend, in the CROWD that has gathered to watch them perform. He pulls JOEY over and wraps an arm around his shoulder.

GIL  
(Seizing the moment.)

Then, there’s Joey here..! When he’s not passing out breadsticks, this guy’s busy making babies. That’s ‘cause he thought when the Pope said Cath’lics should practice ‘the rhythm method’ that meant ‘doin’ it to music.’ So, now, he’s got enough kids...

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

RONNY

(Finishing his thought -- a revelation!)

...uuuuuh: to start a band!

Only MERYL **laughs**. But, it enough to cut the tension. RONNY gives JOEY a huge, relieved grin.

Hiya, Joe.

JOEY

(Nervous at being the center of attention.)

Hey.

GIL

SEE, HE, ME AND RONNY, WHEN WE WERE KIDS,  
USED TO HANG OUT IN MY PARENT'S DEN --  
CALLED OURSELVES 'THE CHATTERLY PING-PONG CLUB...'

RONNY

...ON ACCOUNT'A HIS FOLKS HAD THIS DINNER TABLE  
SO GIGANTIC, WE WERE ABLE  
TO USE IT FOR PING-PONG, AFTER THEY CLEARED THE GRUB...

GIL

...And sometimes before dinner was done.

RONNY

(Without thinking.)

Yeah..! His sister swallowed more of my balls..!

MERYL, ELSA and HARMON **laugh**.

RONNY

What I say?

GIL

...AN' ON ACCOUNT'A WE FOUND THIS COPY  
OF 'LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER...'  
...MY POP HAD GONE AND HIDDEN BEHIND THE FRIDGE...

RONNY

& GIL

...‘Unabridged!’

GIL

SO, RONNY AN' ME WERE PINGING AND PONGING...

RONNY

...WHEN JOEY RUNS IN WITH THIS LOOK'A LONGING...

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

GIL

...'CUZ THE BOOK -- IT TURNS OUT --  
WAS MORE THAN JUST A SMIDGE...

RONNY  
& GIL

'...Unabridged!'

GIL

That's some racy stuff.

RONNY

Yeah..., that book got more "dog-eared" than a basset hound.

ELSA and OTHERS join in **laughing**.

GIL

You never saw three kids more "hot" to get a library card after that.

EDGAR falls silent. While RONNY and GIL await his verdict, the OTHERS  
comment...

HARMON

THIS IS.....WHAT?

MERYL

...SOMETHING NEW?

ELSA

...THOUGH, IT'S RAW..,

HARMON

...THERE'S POTENTIAL!

HARMON  
& ELSA

WITH THE RIGHT KIND OF POLISH.., WHO KNOWS..?

MERYL

THIS IS FRESH...

HARMON  
& ELSA

THIS IS TRUE..!

HARMON, ELSA  
& MERYL

BUT, 'TIL SOMEONE INFLUENTIAL  
GIVES HIS BLESSING, I'M GUESSING THIS IS FAR AS IT GOES...

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

All eyes are on EDGAR. As he sits there mulling it over, EDGAR slowly recognizes RONNY. GIL can't stand it and mumbles...

GIL

Listen, Mr. Callahan, we've taken up enough...

EDGAR

(It hits him!)

Scotch Sour..! (Looks to ELSA, putting it together.) With no cherry..?

ELSA

(Embarrassed.)

Not for a long time.

At that, EDGAR lets out **a belly laugh!**

(To RONNY.)

Son, a few of your lines are too blue for my audience.., but, you've got the local hook. Lose the "balls" and I'll book you.

RONNY

You got it! No more blue balls!

The OTHERS **laugh.**

What I say?

EDGAR

(Aside to ELSA)

I'd say this evens us up.

OTHERS

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE...

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE...

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE...

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE,

BINGLE...

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE...

GOD IN HEAVEN HELP ME,  
HOW I LOVE A MAN WHO DREAMS.  
EVER WITH "THE ANGLES"  
AND "THE ALL-OR-NUTHIN' SCHEMES".

EDGAR hands RONNY a business card.

GIVE MY FOLKS A JINGLE,  
LET 'EM DO THE STANDARD SPIEL AND...

HARMON  
& OTHERS

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE...

EDGAR

DONE DEAL.

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

Thank you Mr. Callahan..!  
RONNY

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE..,  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE...  
EDGAR

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE..,  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE...  
HARMON  
& OTHERS

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE..,  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE...  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE, DONE DEAL!  
ALL

**Blackout.**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

**Sc. 7:**       **The alleyway behind the Bali High. Later that night.**

**MUSIC:**     **(15.) DODGERS FIRST Reprise**

RONNY and GIL enter tossing RONNY's hair piece back and forth instead of the Spalding.

H.R...!

GIL  
(Sings.)

Can you believe it..?!

RONNY  
(Speaks.)

H.R...!

GIL

HOLY JEESE..!

RONNY

GIL

LISTEN, I'VE GOT THIS OTHER BIT...;  
AND, BY THE BY, "H.R." IS "REESE.

RONNY

...What..? "Pee Wee...?"

GIL

"Harold" is his given name.

RONNY

Okay, give out: any other jokes?

GIL

Oh, so, now you're high on my new stuff?

RONNY

Gil.., we're friends for.., what..? Fifteen, sixteen years..?

GIL

Since 1940; St. Jude of the Epistle; Sister Mary Pat's catechism class.

RONNY

Right! Where we hooked up. And why? Because I laughed when you told the Sister you thought the Ten Commandments ought to be multiple choice.

GIL

Got us both in dutch.



**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

RONNY

And after that it was Hunt's Point. The first real taste...

**MUSIC: (16.) TOP OF THE HEAP**

RONNY

COUPLE OF KIDS AT AN AMATEUR NIGHT  
AT THE HUNTS POINT PALACE, UP THE BRONX.  
TWELVE YEARS OLD -- SCARED TO DEATH --  
BUT, WE GO, AND WE DO, AND WE WIN..!

GIL

Third place.

RONNY

(Without losing his intensity.)

Still "a win."

NEXT THING YOU KNOW WE'RE PAYIN' OUR DUES.  
IT'S BEEN BEER PITS AND BUST-OUTS AND STRIP JOINTS --  
WORKING ALL THE CONCEIVABLE CLIP JOINTS  
BUT, WE GO, AND WE DO, 'CAUSE WE KNOW  
SOMEDAY SOON WE START RAKIN' IT IN...

COOCHIE enters.

RONNY

You watch: we do teevee and, in a year, we're not just another act..., we're an industry!

COOCHIE

Yeah, well, before you incorporate, how's about a drink?

She reveals a bottle of wine.

RONNY

You heard?!

COOCHIE

You know it! Callahan thought you were funny?

RONNY

Of course!

GIL

It was kind of an accident.

COOCHIE

Sweetheart, this ain't nothin' short of a miracle...

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

COOCHIE

OUTER BOROUGH BUMS;  
BROOKLYN BORN AND BRED;  
EV'RYONE PLAYED YA FOR CHEAP..!

RONNY

That's for sure...

COOCHIE

COULD'A TWIDDLED YOUR THUMBS  
"PLAYED IT DEAD" -- BUT, INSTEAD,  
YOU MADE A HELLUVA LEAP..!

GIL

It's a start...

COOCHIE

WHICH PART OF THIS CONFUSES YOU?  
Look.., MAYBE YOU OUGHT'A SIT.

RONNY

Humor the lady.

COOCHIE sits GIL down.

COOCHIE

YOU EVER THINK YOU AND HE'D BE..?

RONNY

...WE'D BE?

COOCHIE, GIL  
& RONNY

A HIT.....?

GIL

Holy shit..!

COOCHIE  
(To RONNY.)

AM I WRONG OR RIGHT...  
ONLY DAYS AGO  
YOU'RE, LIKE, THIS BORDERLINE CREEP..?

RONNY  
(Oddly proud!)

Right!

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

COOCHIE

THEN, YOU MAKE THE JUMP..  
FROM YOUR AV'RAGE JOE  
RIGHT TO THE 'TOP OF THE HEAP..?!

GIL

You make a point.

COOCHIE

THIS IS, LIKE, COMPLETELY NUTS..!  
ODDS ARE, I MAY WEEP!

GIL

BUT, "NUTS" OR NOT..,

GIL &  
RONNY

...WE'VE A SHOT...

COOCHIE, GIL  
& RONNY

AT THE TOP OF THE HEAP!

COOCHIE

That's more like it!

GIL

You know what it feels like to me, Ronny..? V.E. Day. (To COOCHIE.) Me and Ronny must've worked five, six, seven block parties that night...for a buck here -- six bits there.

RONNY

Sure, sure. Just "makin' stupid..!" Oh, but, this.....

GILLY, "HAND TO GOD,"  
I'M A DIFF'RENT MAN  
FROM THAT YUTZ WHO USED TO "YANK" YOU..!  
SINCE WE GOT THE NOD,  
IT'S LIKE...LIFE BEGAN!  
SO, I FIGURE, THE LEAST THAT YOU'RE OWED IS A "THANK YOU."

GIL

HELLO, "AV'RAGE JOE..!"

RONNY

SO LONG, SHEEPSHEAD BAY..!

COOCHIE

ODDS ARE YOU'LL LOSE A FEW "SHEEP!"

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

COOCHIE, GIL  
& RONNY

AND AWAY WE GO!  
GONNA MAKE IT PAY  
BIG AS A STEEPCHASE SWEEP!

MUCH TOO LATE TO CUT AND RUN --  
WE'RE IN WAY TOO DEEP.  
WE'LL BE FOUND  
THIS TIME 'ROUND  
AT THE TOP OF THE...AT THE TOP OF THE...

MUCH TOO HIGH TO TOUCH THE GROUND!  
WAY TOO JUICED TO SLEEP!  
WE'LL BE FOUND,  
THIS TIME 'ROUND,  
AT THE TOP OF THE....AT THE TOP OF THE...AT THE TOP OF THE HEAP!

The scene shifts as RONNY, GIL and COOCHIE head off for a night of celebrating. As they wander off, the scene shift to...

### **Limbo - Elsa's office.**

ELSA appears.

ELSA

"Item: Those of us with permanent "invites" are eagerly anticipating this evening's dress rehearsal for 'Top of the Heap.' Word has it, Edgar Callahan's stint in the hinterlands has gleaned a pair of hot local funnymen -- a.k.a. Mauro and Webster -- as droll a pair to hit town since Martin met Lewis..."

### **MUSIC: (17.) THE GUYS TO SEE First Reprise**

SO, IF YOU NEED A JEST,  
AND YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH THE REST.., WELL,  
I THINK YOU'LL AGREE..!  
BELIEVE ME.....,

Focus shifts to...



## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

SIDNEY  
(Moving on.)

Miss Dean, you're up!

GIL retrieves the list and looks it over.

GIL  
(Disgusted.)

Nice.

RONNY snatches the list back, nervous that GIL might throw it away,  
MERYL enters.

RONNY

Hey..! Now there's a familiar package.

GIL

Yeah, yeah..., from Callahan's table..!

RONNY

Let's say "hi."

GIL  
(Starts to object.)

No., Ronny, I...

RONNY  
(Ignores him and calls out...)

'Scuse me.., Miss Dean..?!

MERYL

Yes?

RONNY

Just wanted to say "thanks" for the other night.

MERYL  
(Confused.)

Beg pardon..?!

RONNY

For laughing.

MERYL

Oh..! (Recognizing GIL.) Oh, yes, of course..!

GIL

Yeah, well.., (Embarrassed.) "thank you."

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

MERYL

I don't know that I did much to help.

RONNY

You laughed. And here we be.

MERYL

Congratulations.

RONNY

The name's Mauro – Ronny Mauro. (Indicating GIL.) And my partner Gil Webster.

MERYL

I remember.

SIDNEY

Miss Dean, we're ready to record your commercial. Could you boys excuse us?

RONNY

Oh..., yeah..., sure.

GIL

See you around.

MERYL

Absolutely.

RONNY and GIL exit.

SIDNEY

(Hands her a script.)

Here's your copy -- same as always.

MERYL

(Glancing at the script.)

We're doing this on some kind of film?

SIDNEY

It's called videotape. But, everything else is the same as "live" – same cameras, microphones. (Stepping out of "the shot.") Whenever you're ready.

MERYL

Thanks. (Hands the script back; hits her mark; then...) "Imagine with me for a moment, won't you? Imagine a romantic evening -- it's just the two of you. Why spoil it, when you can double check your charm with Perqadent Tooth Cleanser? It eliminates embarrassing mouth odor as it whitens and brightens. That's Perqadent -- in powder or paste -- because you are the very air she breathes..!"

EDGAR

(v.o. through a p.a. system)

Miss Dean..., Laster Brothers is paying something in the order of a hundred thousand 'per' for their spots. So, could you smile when you mention their product?

SIDNEY clears the set and beats a discreet exit. EDGAR enters and approaches MERYL. She turns away from him.

There's a man...up in Syracuse...owns a chain of supermarkets..? Seems he can organize a boycott of any item overnight – doesn't even have to be in his store. And you never know what's going to set him off. So, if you can't smile for my sake, do it for his.

MERYL responds with a chilly stare.

I've missed you.

MERYL

(An accusation.)

Have you?

EDGAR

Now, darling, you know how it's been. Phyllis is just back from Europe and trotting me from one benefit to the next.

He caresses her back. MERYL stiffens.

But, when I saw you just now..., well, I suppose I grew a bit lonesome.

MERYL

So, you chose as conspicuous a place as possible to "catch up?"

EDGAR

I was by your apartment last night. Late. But, you were out. The doorman -- Ernie, isn't it -- he wondered aloud why I haven't been around.

MERYL

Next time, I'd suggest that you phone first. Only I'm afraid there won't be a next time.

MERYL moves to exit.

EDGAR

I came over to give you this.

EDGAR holds out an envelope to MERYL.

It's a contract for a booking here at the Casa Manana.

MERYL pauses, takes the envelope and scans the contents.

Harmon enjoys tweaking me in public; but once I've gotten him alone...



## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

MERYL  
(Quietly.)

It isn't enough, Edgar...not enough...

MERYL hands the contract back to EDGAR.

**MUSIC: (18.) POOR, PATHETIC EDGAR**

EDGAR

So I see...

DARLING, YOU AND I.,  
WHEN IT'S ALL SAID AND DONE.,  
WHY, IT'S STRIKING HOW ALIKE WE'VE BECOME.  
SEEMS THE GAL I TOOK FOR "MAL'ABLE"  
HAS ME PRESSED BENEATH HER THUMB.  
IT'S SURPRISING – YES.  
AND, I HAVE TO CONFESS,  
I'M ASTOUNDED BY THE CHANGES I SEE.  
SUDDENLY, YOU'RE INDEPENDENT --  
SO SELF-POSSESSED,  
I'M IN AWE...  
AND I WONDER WHERE THAT LEAVES A MAN LIKE ME..?  
POOR, PATHETIC, LITTLE ME...

MERYL

Please don't try to manipulate me, Edgar. It's not one of your more attractive traits.

EDGAR

"Manipulate you?" To the contrary.., I am completely in your thrall...

POOR, PATHETIC EDGAR --  
PITY POOR, PATHETIC EDGAR,  
WON'T YOU, DEAR..?  
DESPITE THIS CRISP NEW ATTITUDE,  
MIGHT YOU BE KIND ENOUGH  
TO LEND A LONELY FRIEND A SYMPATHETIC EAR..?

CAN'T YOU SPARE A SHOULDER  
FOR A FELLA WITH A DREAM YOU USED TO SHARE..?  
MY DARLING, SHOW YOU CARE  
AND SHED A TEAR OR TWO FOR  
POOR, PATHETIC EDGAR...

Phyllis and I have an early supper; then; there's the dress rehearsal; so, I'll swing by your place afterward.., with your permission, of course.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

MERYL

Please, Edgar.., I don't want to do this anymore.

MERYL tries to go. EDGAR catches her wrist.

EDGAR

CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET..?  
DON'T TELL ANYONE I'M PUTTY IN YOUR HANDS.  
FOR NO ONE UNDERSTANDS  
THE WAY YOU WORK YOUR WAY ON  
POOR, PATHETIC EDGAR...

Ten o'clock, then..?

MERYL lowers her head, in defeat.

Good.

EDGAR releases her from his grasp and exits. RONNY and GIL enter, coats in hand, as if to go home. ELSA enters and spots them.

ELSA

There you are..!

RONNY

Hey, Elsa! You catch any of our set?

ELSA

Only just.

RONNY  
(Prompting her...)

Aaaaaand..?

ELSA

You were marvelous.

She kisses him.

Ready to go?

GIL

I.., uh.., I hate to louse things up.., but.., uh.., (Thinks and comes up with...) Ronny, didn't you wanna get into town by seven a.m.? (To ELSA.) See, we have to make sure every booker from the Brill Building on down Broadway cozies up to his teevee tomorrow night.

RONNY  
(Sees what he's up to.)

It's okay, Gil.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

GIL

(To ELSA, plowing on.)

...so, we're in for a pretty early day and all...

RONNY

Gil..! (GIL stops. RONNY chuckles.) You are such a rotten liar.

GIL

I just..., uh...

RONNY

It's okay. (Referring to ELSA, on the sly.) She's a lotta laughs.

GIL

Yeah?

ELSA

(Having obviously overheard.)

Besides, there isn't an agent who's in before ten.

RONNY

Good idea, though. (To GIL.) Meet me at Hanson's Coffee Shop at seven a.m.

GIL

Seven..?! (Gives up. Blessing them.) Go with god.

ELSA

Flatterer..!

ELSA and RONNY exit. MERYL spies GIL.

MERYL

You know, you really were very...very good the other day. That waiter you told the stories about..?

GIL

...Joey?

MERYL

Yes. He seems quite "the character."

GIL

Well..., maybe I jacked him up a skoshe, but that's pretty much Joey.

MERYL

Well, it was very...good.

GIL

Yeah..., you said.

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

MERYL

Where have you been performing? Bon Soir, perhaps..? Le Ruban Bleu..?

GIL

I only play clubs I can pronounce.

MERYL

I'm sure I've seen you somewhere...

GIL

There's a few "holes" where I might try out a new bit. I'm talkin' jazz cellars mostly...; where the stage is made outta swizzle sticks.

MERYL  
(Impulsively.)

Take me.

GIL

Huh..?

MERYL

Take me there.

GIL

Whenever.

MERYL

Now. I simply cannot face going home tonight.

**MUSIC: (19.) LET'S MAKE A NIGHT OF IT**

GIL

Well.., see.., (Hedging.) Ronny and me have this early call...

MERYL

I know, but, I need to go out, something terrible...

**LET'S MAKE A NIGHT OF IT --  
TAKE OFF FOR PARTS UNKNOWN...**

GIL

I don't know...

MERYL

TIPTOE AWAY  
TO A SMOKY CAFE  
WHERE WE CAN BE ALL ALONE...

(Spoken.) C'mon..,

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

MERYL

LET'S MAKE A NIGHT OF IT --  
STAKE OUT SOME 'BOITE DE NUIT...'

GIL

Guess a drink won't hurt...

MERYL

THERE'S COCKTAILS TO KILL  
'TIL, WE SETTLE THE BILL,  
BY WAKING THE MAITRE'D..!

BEEN THE CRAZIEST DAY...  
KINDA DAY WHERE YOU PRAY FOR A CHASER OR TWO  
TO UNDO THE EXCITEMENT..!  
BEEN THE CRAZIEST DAY..,  
BUT.., IN THE CRAZIEST WAY..,  
A NIGHT  
WITH A SIMILAR "BITE"  
MIGHT MAKE IT ALL OKAY...

SO.., WHY NOT MAKE LIGHT OF IT  
AFTER THE DARK DESCENDS..? OH..,

ELSA and RONNY appear.

ELSA &  
MERYL

...WHY NOT MAKE A NIGHT OF IT..?

GIL and MERYL exit. The GRIPS shift the scenery, moving ELSA and  
RONNY out into the streets. The stagecraft should be blatantly theatrical.

ELSA

How would you like to celebrate?

RONNY

We could hit the penny arcade. Could ya stand a hand of pokerino?

ELSA

I was thinking more along the lines of a booth at Monsignore.

RONNY  
(Impressed.)

Awful public, that..!

ELSA

Thought I'd let people gossip about me for a change.

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

ELSA

LET'S MAKE A SHOW OF IT!  
WHAT SAY WE SHARE SOME FUN?  
A QUAIN'T LITTLE PACT  
THIS AIN'T...

RONNY

...THAT'S A FACT!

ELSA

BUT, WHO SAYS IT CAN'T BE DONE?

RONNY

Done!

ELSA &  
RONNY

LET'S MAKE A GO OF IT,  
MAYBE WE WIND UP FRIENDS  
AND SPEND, FOR ALL WE KNOW OF IT,  
A NIGHT THAT NEVER ENDS...

Again the GRIPS shift the scenery and we discover GIL and MERYL on a street in Greenwich Village, where the night comes to life around them.

GIL

I KNOW THIS PLACE  
THIS RACY LITTLE CELLAR WITH THE SWINGINEST MIX  
IF YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR KICKS  
THEY'VE GOT JUST WHAT YOU NEED.

MERYL  
SOUNDS CHARMING..!  
UTTERLY

DISARMING..!  
SEE.., THERE'S THIS CREW  
THIS SCREWY BAND OF BOOZERS SETTIN' JUST THE RIGHT TONE  
GOT A STYLE ALL THEIR OWN  
WHY NOT FOLLOW THEIR LEAD..?

MERYL  
FOLLOW INDEED..!

THE COMICS HOLED UP THERE YOU'RE NOT GONNA CATCH  
GETTIN' BILLED ON THE PARAMOUNT MARQUEE...

RONNY  
STICK WITH ME  
'CAUSE...

BUT..,

GIL &  
RONNY

THE GENT WITH THE BENT AS ANTSY AS BEBOP,

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

GIL &  
RONNY

WELL, I'LL LAY A BET  
THAT YOU'LL OWE A DEBT  
'CAUSE HE'S GONNA SET YOU FREE...

QUARTETTE

SO..., **LET'S MAKE A NIGHT OF IT.**  
LET'S TAKE A SOLEMN VOW...:  
HOWEVER IT WRAPS...  
WHATEVER IT TAPS...  
A NIGHT IS ENOUGH FOR NOW.

WHY MAKE A FIGHT OF IT,  
ONLY TO MAKE AMENDS?  
WHAT SAY WE MAKE A NIGHT OF IT --  
A NIGHT THAT NEVER ENDS..?

MAKE US A NIGHT, IN SPITE OF IT,  
THAT SOME...HOW...NEVER ENDS..!

RONNY and ELSA disappear into the night. GIL and MERYL linger behind for a moment, chatting quiet and then, meander off. A DARK FIGURE in a long coat with a hat pulled low over his eyes steps from the shadows and watches them go. It is SIDNEY.

**MUSIC: (20.) SOMETHING'S ON Third Reprise**

SIDNEY watches GIL and MERYL, as a TRIO OF ACTORS emerges from the wings.

TRIO

THERE'S SOMEONE TAKING A PRATFALL...;  
WINNING A QUIZ SHOW...;  
PITCHING A NIGHT GAME...;

SIDNEY exits, in the opposite direction.

SPINNING A PIE PLATE!

**Blackout.**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

### Sc. 7      The Casa Manana. The stage door. Six thirty Friday evening.

RONNY is there, dressed in his tux, which COOCHIE is vigorously brushing off. He is clearly agitated.

COOCHIE

C'mon, Ronny, simmer down...

RONNY

Where the hell is Gil..?! Where the hell is he?! It's six thirty already!

COOCHIE

You're sweatin' clean through your suit..!

GIL enters, jovially.

GIL

Hi ya, kids..!

RONNY

You..! How could you do this, Gil..?! We are: "yea" close to getting canned by Callahan, and this is how you breeze in..?! I gotta tell you.., I am nauseous -- I've gotta gut full'a freakin' grief!!!

RONNY gives him a shove.

Will ya say something..?!

He keeps on shoving GIL, who doesn't resist.

Where have you been for the last twenty-four hours?!

GIL

I was with the girl, Ronny...

RONNY

(Brought up short.)

Huh..?

GIL

With the girl.

RONNY

(A mix of disbelief & pride.)

Twenty-four hours..?

GIL

We were out most of the night. Hit clubs. Went walking for... I don't know how long. Then -- this is the beauty part -- I took her to six a.m. Mass. St. Peter's.



Mass..?  
COOCHIE

She'd never been.  
GIL

I hear ya.  
COOCHIE  
(Reads between the lines.)

So, bully for you, ya made it to Mass!  
RONNY  
(Remembering his anger.)

Easy, Ronny. Look at him. He's hooked. (She hands GIL his tux.) See you two after.  
COOCHIE

Thanks.  
GIL

COOCHIE exits.

**MUSIC: (21.) TELL THE GIRL GOODBYE**

RONNY  
"Hooked?" Did she mean..?

GIL  
I don't know what happened, Ronny. I really don't know...

I WASN'T PLANNING ON ROMANCE;  
LOVE WAS THE LAST THING ON MY MIND.  
THEN, I SAW HER THERE, ALL BEAUTIFUL AND SHY.  
I TOLD MYSELF, "NO.  
BEFORE YOU FIND THE NERVE TO SAY, 'HELLO.'  
"MISTER, YOU **TELL THE GIRL, 'GOODBYE.'**"

SHE RAISED HER EYES, AND IN A GLANCE,  
MY PLANS AND SCHEMES WERE SWEEP ASIDE.  
I'D FOUND A PLACE WHERE ONLY DREAMERS NEED APPLY.  
I FUMBLER AROUND --  
TOOK EV'RYTHING I HAD TO MAKE A SOUND.  
HOW COULD I **TELL THE GIRL GOODBYE?**

WE STOOD THERE A MOMENT  
A SMILE PASSED BETWEEN US.  
THAT LOOK OF HER'S SAID TO ME, "STAY."

## TOP OF THE HEAP

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GIL

AND THOUGH I KNOW I SHOULD RUN,  
THIS LONGING THAT'S STOLEN DOWN INSIDE OF ME  
WON'T GO AWAY.

SO LONG AS THERE WAS HALF A CHANCE,  
I HAD TO TRY TO MAKE HER MINE.  
IT MAY BE CRAZY, BUT, I NEVER COULD SAY DIE.  
SO, CALL IT UNWISE,  
UNTIL I SEE "GOODBYE," THERE, IN HER EYES.  
I'M NOT THE MAN TO LIVE A LIE.  
I COULDN'T **TELL THE GIRL GOODBYE.**

SIDNEY enters from the club.

SIDNEY

Mr. Mauro..?

RONNY

Not to worry..! He's here! Gil's here.

SIDNEY

Mr. Callahan needs a word with you.

RONNY  
(To GIL.)

Change and meet me.

He exits with SIDNEY.

GIL

SO, CALL ME A FOOL,  
AND MAYBE "EVEN STUBBORN AS A MULE."  
I'M NOT THE MAN TO LIVE A LIE.  
I JUST CAN'T **TELL THE GIRL GOODBYE.**

GIL exits into the club.

**MUSIC: TIMPANI ROLL!**

MERYL  
(v.o.)

Live from the borough of Brooklyn, U.S.A...! It's Edgar Callahan's Top of the Heap!

There is **applause** as the scene shifts to...

**MUSIC: (22.) TOP OF THE HEAP TELEVISION THEME Instrumental**

**Sc. 10      The Casa Manana. Backstage. Immediately following.**

The silhouette of EDGAR CALLAHAN looms through an upstage scrim.

EDGAR

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us here for a very special...a very unique “remote” telecast from the Casa Manana Club in the historic borough of Brooklyn -- home to the world renowned Brooklyn Dodgers. Coming up, we’ll meet the lads on the team, plus songbird Miss Patty Grant will entertain us, along with a pair of funny fellows -- Brooklyn boys -- Webster and Mauro..! But, before we enjoy a visit with each, let’s open with a spectacular attraction: here they are direct to us from Saltzberg, the wonderful Flying Ramons!

**MUSIC:      (23.)    ACROBATIC ACCOMPANIMENT Instrumental**

GIL joins RONNY, amid a flurry of “off-stage” activity: GRIPS pull cable and adjust equipment, DANCERS dash through, tumbling **ACROBATS** are seen through the drop.

RONNY

(Rubbing his hands nervously.)

Okay..! Okay..! Calm down... Okay... That’s us, Gil--we’re up soon.

GIL

What is that on your nails? (Grabs RONNY’s hand.) Polish?!

RONNY

(Defensive.)

Clear...! You had me going nuts.., okay? I needed a distraction. So, I got a manicure.

GIL

You are minutes from a pinky ring, my friend.

SIDNEY enters, followed by EDGAR.

SIDNEY

He’s ready for you.

RONNY

Yes..! Anything..! What can we do for you?

EDGAR

Just a moment. (To FLOOR MANAGER.) Sidney, could you..?

EDGAR gestures that he’d like the area cleared. SIDNEY nods, pointing to his watch that he has limited time.

Boys... (A beat.) Look, we’ve only about a minute, so, I’ve got to be direct. Right off, believe me, I fought for you...

## TOP OF THE HEAP

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GIL

What do you mean..?

EDGAR

I just got off the wire with the network. That bit about your friend..? It's out.

RONNY

(Pauses..., then...)

Sure, Edgar. (With a glance to GIL.) Whatever it takes.

EDGAR

I don't much like hearing from the executive suite.

RONNY

We can cut that bit. Anything...

EDGAR

Flat out, son, they don't take chances and neither do I.

RONNY

Flat out, son, they don't take chances. And neither do I.

GIL

(Angered!)

You cut that bit, you cut off our heads!

EDGAR

(Starts to respond in kind!)

It's talk like that, Webster..! (Controls himself.) I'm a tad particular about who I develop for my program. Miss Dean..., for one. First time I clapped eyes on her she was modeling in the restaurant at Bonds. Nice kid. The kind you've gotta keep a close watch on...: the clean ones...; see that no one smudges them up.

RONNY

No problem, Edgar – we'll slug in a bit about... (Thinking fast!) "...a guy so fat, he has an unlisted suit size..!"

EDGAR

You're in the lineup as scheduled.

RONNY

Thank you, Edgar.

FLOOR  
MANAGER

We're on in twenty seconds.

GIL

I got a joke, Edgar. How 'bout this..? Ask me the most important element in comedy.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

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EDGAR  
(Without humor.)

“What’s the most imp—“

GIL  
(Cutting him off.)

Timing.

SIDNEY

Ten seconds!

GIL

It’s timing.

EDGAR exits “onstage” and appears in silhouette.

EDGAR

The Flying Ramons!

Audience **applause**.

GIL

We’re walking.

RONNY

Gilly, we can’t.

GIL

And he can’t drop that kinda bomb and expect us to go on..!

RONNY

Please.., Gil.., it’s couple’a lines.

GIL  
(Thinking it through.)

This is about something else -- I know it.

RONNY

What makes you so sure?

GIL

Those things he said about Meryl...: that Edgar said...

RONNY  
(Doesn’t want to hear it!)

No! It’s about a bit! Period!

GIL

The only ‘chunk’ I give a damn about. And somehow he knew. I’m walkin out! You..?

## TOP OF THE HEAP

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RONNY

Gil., this isn't some shitheel club owner we're talkin' about! Edgar Callahan is the biggest name in the industry! Damn it, why is this one lousy joke so important to you?!

GIL

It's not lousy! It works! I know...: I've tried it!

RONNY

(This pulls him up short!)

What?! You... You tried the joke..? Where?

GIL

In this village club...

RONNY

You went on? Without me?

GIL

Yeah, Ronny, I did. And every time since -- when we do our standard schlock -- it's like I'm "just shy" of breaking into every curse word I ever heard! Just to feel anything near as real.

RONNY

Then, you owe me. You owe me at least this much...

**MUSIC: (24.) WHATEVER IT TAKES Second Reprise**

EDGAR

And now, ladies and gentlemen, as promised..,

RONNY

WE'RE GONNA GET THROUGH THIS -- JUST DO IT FOR ME..!

EDGAR

...Here's a team in their first appearance on our stage...

RONNY

...WE'LL LAY LOW A COUPLE OF MONTHS AND YOU'LL SEE..!

EDGAR

...And, hopefully, it's not the last...

RONNY

...THE STORM'S GONNA PASS; AND AS SOON AS IT BREAKS..!

EDGAR

...Let's have a wonderful hand for them as they come out...

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

RONNY

...WHATEVER YOU WANT, GIL; WHATEVER IT TAKES..!

EDGAR

..: Gil Webster and Robby Mauro.

RONNY

He messed up my name..!

GIL

Yeah. (Imitating EDGAR.) Funny.

He walks "onstage." RONNY follows...

**Onstage.**

**MUSIC: (25.) THE GUYS TO SEE Reprise**

RONNY

(Prompting GIL.)

...WANNA DOUBLE IN HALF..?

**I'M THE GUY TO SEE..!**

SAY.., IF YOU WANNA SMILE,  
DON'CHA DIDDLE THAT DIAL!

**I'M STILL THE GUY TO SEE..!**

GIL

I TELL YA, FOLKS, THIS HERE'S THE PUG  
TO SLIDE A GRIN ACROSS YOUR MUG.

RONNY

SO, FIX THEM  
PEEPERS SQUARE ON YOUR TEEVEE..!

RONNY

& GIL

SO.., IF YOU'RE UP THE 'CRICK'  
AND YOU NEED A RIB-TICKLER,  
BELIEVE ME, **WE'RE THE GUYS TO SEE..!**

GIL

"Evening, ladies and gentlemen, it's wonderful to be here on the Callahan show."

RONNY

"What an exciting program.., eh, Gil..?"

GIL

"I'll say."

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

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RONNY

“They got dancing girls; and they got acrobats; and they got diving horses.”

GIL

“So, who’d they get to host it?”

RONNY

“The most boring man alive.”

GIL

“If t.v. ever goes color, Edgar’s gonna stay black and white.” And.., speaking of black and white.....

**MUSIC: (26.) THE JOKE Reprise**

Ronny an’ I’ve.....we’ve got a question...

RONNY

(Under his breath.)

Gil, please...

GIL

**...IT’S A JOKE.**

JUST A JOKE.

JUST AN “EV’RYDAY” ROUTINE.

AND -- GOD FORBID -- I PUT YOU PEOPLE ON THE SPOT..!

But, the network says the folks at home’ll (Mimes changing channels.) “clickity click” if we do this a bit about my friend Joey...

SIDNEY

...What’s he doing..?!

EDGAR

(Calmly.)

Cutting his own throat...

GIL

HEY, BUT, YOU BE THE JUDGE..?

SEE.., I’LL SHOW YOU WHAT I MEAN..:

HEAR ME OUT, FOLKS..,

GOOD..? OR WHAT..?

See, the Pope says the only “okay” contraceptive is ‘the rhythm method..,’

RONNY

(Tries to interrupt.)

Never mind, him...: “there’s this fat guy...”



# TOP OF THE HEAP

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GIL

...which my cousin took as 'doing it to music.' So, now, he's got enough kids to start his own band. See..?

EDGAR

(Flags the ORCHESTRA.)

Arthur..!

## MUSIC: (27.) THE GUYS TO SEE Third Reprise

RONNY

(Thinks that it's his accompaniment.)

IF YOU WANNA LAUGH --

WANNA DOUBLE IN HALF, KIDS..?

**WE'RE THE GUYS TO SEE..!**

EDGAR

Gil Webster, ladies and gentlemen!

SAY YOU WANNA KICK --

EDGAR strides on camera and leads the **applause**.

MAYBE NEED A GOOD TICKLE..?

**WE'RE THE GUYS TO SEE..!**

I TELL YA, FOLKS,

THIS HERE'S THE PLACE

TO SMACK A SMILE

ON YOUR FACE

AND CACKLE 'TIL YA

THINK YOU'RE GONNA PEE..!

GIL

Will you tell him, folks..?

EDGAR

Webster and Mauro!

EDGAR clutches GIL around the shoulders in a menacing embrace. GIL shrugs away.

GIL

Screw you..!

GIL turns quickly and exits. EDGAR starts to follow him, but runs square into RONNY.

EDGAR

He'll pay dearly for this. You tell him that..! You tell him!

With that, EDGAR pushes past him and exits.

## MUSIC: (28.) THAT CLOSE

RONNY

Oh, shit, shit, shit, shit, shit..!

Lights iris down on RONNY. Focus shifts to...

**A backstage wall phone. Moments later.**

EDGAR appears. He is on the telephone.

EDGAR

I don't care if she's there or not, put her on. (A pause.) Elsa..? Take this down -- an open letter: Dear Elsa, I want to assure you I am deeply distressed by the appearance, on Friday's Top of the Heap television program, of performers whose behavior has become a matter of controversy...

EDGAR freezes in silhouette. Focus shifts to...

**A City Street.**

RONNY

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN  
**THAT CLOSE**  
TO THE START OF IT --  
NEXT DOOR  
TO THE HEART OF IT --  
NOT FAR  
FROM A PART YOU COULD PLAY...,  
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN  
ARM'S LENGTH  
OF A "GO", AND YET,  
**THAT CLOSE**  
TO A "NO", AND YET,  
SO NEAR,  
AND YET, SO FAR AWAY..!  
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN  
JUST SHY  
OF A TOTAL LOSS?  
THIS SIDE  
OF A QUARTER TOSS?  
**THAT CLOSE**  
TO A POSSIBLE SCORE.  
THEN, JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE  
**THAT CLOSE**, YOU'RE MARCHING  
RIGHT BACK OUT THE DOOR..!

Focus shifts to...

**Limbo - A restaurant booth. Later the same night.**

ELSA appears, having just hung up the phone with EDGAR.

# TOP OF THE HEAP

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ELSA

Read the rest of the copy back to me, will you, Norma?

Her secretary NORMA joins her, steno pad in hand, her coat and purse over one arm.

NORMA

(Reading from the pad.)

“To those who have taken offense, I swear that it is the last thing I wanted or anticipated, and I am deeply sorry.”

ELSA

(Cutting in.)

...”Truly, deeply sorry.”

NORMA

“...truly, deeply sorry.” End quote.

ELSA

Sign that ‘Edgar Callahan’ and trot it down to composing, would you, dear..?

NORMA

Yes, Miss Orwell.

They hang up simultaneously.

ELSA

(To herself, with genuine regret.)

I’m sorry, Ronny. “Truly, deeply...”

As characters leave the action of Act One, they join a chorus of voices that rings in RONNY’s ears, mocking his failure. Focus shifts to...

## A City Street.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN	RONNY
<b>THAT CLOSE</b>	RONNY & TRIO
TO THE MAIN EVENT..?	RONNY
LAST ROUND	RONNY & TRIO
IN THE TOURNAMENT..?	RONNY

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

ONE PIN	RONNY & TRIO
FROM A PROBABLE SPARE..? EVER THOUGHT YOU WERE	RONNY
ONE LENGTH	RONNY & TRIO
FROM THE FINISH LINE..?	RONNY
<b>THAT CLOSE</b>	RONNY & TRIO
TO THE DIAMOND MINE..?	RONNY
AS GOOD	RONNY & TRIO
AS IF ALREADY THERE..! EVER FELT LIKE YOU'RE	RONNY
ONE INCH	RONNY & TRIO
FROM THE HIGHEST PEAK..?	RONNY
HALF-WAY	RONNY & TRIO
TO A WINNING STREAK..?	RONNY
<b>THAT CLOSE</b>	RONNY & TRIO
THAT YOU'RE KNOCKIN' ON WOOD..? THEN, JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE <b>THAT CLOSE</b> TO CLOSING SOMEBODY HOSES YOU GOOD..!	RONNY

Focus shifts to...

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

### The alleyway behind Benny's.

RONNY waits. COOCHIE enters.

COOCHIE

Ronny..., uh..., Benny... he's in with a beer distributor -- you know how it gets.

RONNY

How 'bout I wait..?

COOCHIE  
(Coming clean.)

He don't want to see you, Ronny.

RONNY

Shit.

COOCHIE

With what's in the papers and all...; who knew he could even read?

RONNY

Right. Well..., better I should get it from you, huh..?

COOCHIE

Give it time...

RONNY

Time is no friend to me. I know from permanent. And this one has the stink of death. Deader even than Gil Webster is to me.

COOCHIE

It's... none of this is fair.

RONNY

Fair..?

THERE'S A LOT IN LIFE I'M NEVER GONNA GET,  
WHETHER OR NOT IT'S FAIR.  
I'M NEVER GONNA GET ANY TALLER;  
NEVER GETTIN' ANY MORE HAIR.  
AN' IF I DON'T GET TO HEAVEN,  
WELL..., IT AIN'T AS IF I HAD A SHOT.  
NO, THE ONLY THING THAT GETS ME --  
THAT TRULY UPSETS ME --  
ARE THE SHOTS I ALMOST GOT...

I'LL FOREVER BE

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

	RONNY & ALL
<b>THAT CLOSE</b>	
	RONNY
AND IT'S 'NO CIGAR'..!	
	RONNY & ALL
FACE DOWN	
	RONNY
IN THE CAVIAR..!	
	RONNY & ALL
IN SHORT	
	RONNY
A SPECTACULAR BUST! I'LL NEVER BE	
	RONNY & ALL
HAIR'S BREADTH	
	RONNY
FROM A WALKAWAY..!	
	RONNY & ALL
<b>THAT CLOSE</b>	
	RONNY
TO A DOUBLE PLAY..!	
	RONNY & ALL
RIGHT THERE..,	
	RONNY
IF I COULD ONLY JUST... (Reaches for something 'just' out of reach.) NEVER EVER BE	
	RONNY & ALL
NEXT UP	
	RONNY
THE RECEIVING LINE..,	
	RONNY & ALL
ALL THANKS	
	RONNY
TO A PAL 'O MINE..,	

## **TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

RONNY  
& ALL

**THIS CLOSE**

RONNY

TO HIS OWN COZY PLOT..!  
'CAUSE, JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE  
**THAT CLOSE**, YOU FIND OUT  
ALL OF A SUDDEN YOU'RE NOT..!

RONNY falls to his knees as...

**Blackout.**

### **NOTE**

The first act ends. Yet, lights ghost back up slowly. RONNY has disappeared, but the remainder of the cast is present in the studio environment. They mill about, light cigarettes, study scripts, chat with one another -- as if the intermission were a commercial break. The curtain remains up and the 'studio grips' prepare for Act Two.

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

## ACT TWO

**Sc. 1**        **The television studio.**

**MUSIC:**     **(30.) SMALL, DARK ROOMS**

ACTRESS #2 appears.

ACTRESS #1

ANOTHER BEATEN DAY DESERTS  
THE STREETS OF BROOKLYN --  
ADMITS DEFEAT AN' WANDERS WESTWARD T'WARD THE TOMBS.  
LIKEWISE., 'ROUND THE BOROUGH,  
ONCE THE SHADOWS FALL,  
WE ALL STEAL OFF TO **SMALL, DARK ROOMS...**

TO WHERE THE CARNIE FOLK FROM CONEY.,  
TORPEDOES NAME'A TONY.,  
AND EV'RY CRUMB OR CRONY WORTH THE NAME  
IMBIBE A LITTLE TOO MUCH BOURBON,  
GET FEELIN' GOOD AN' URBAN  
THEN, PICK A POINTLESS FIGHT OR ANNOY ANOTHER DAME.;  
AIN'T IT ALWAYS THE SAME?

RONNY enters. He looks as if he has been on extended binge. We trail him back to the story as the scene shifts to...

**A Brooklyn Street. A week later.**

ACTRESS #1

AND IN THIS RUN-DOWN BAR AN' GRILL  
JUST OFF'A FILLMORE --  
A WORLD AWAY FROM WHERE THE CAFE CLATTER BOOMS --  
THERE'S A SULLEN FIGURE  
REELING FROM THE FALL.  
IT ALL HAPPENS IN **SMALL, DARK ROOMS...**  
VERY **SMALL DARK ROOMS...**

**Limbo - Bar**

BARTENDER  
(Hands RONNY a cocktail.)

Last call.

RONNY

Know what Brooklyn's got more of than any other borough? Do ya..?



# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

BARTENDER

(Repeats, in a feeble attempt to shut RONNY up.)

Last call.

RONNY

...It's cemeteries. (Lists them.) 'Greenwood...,' 'Union Field...,' freakin' 'Holy Cross...' That's 'cause no one gets outta here alive. Only me...goddamn it, I'm gettin' out...; there's gotta be an "out!" (His bravado fades.) There's gotta.....!

ACTRESS #3 enters and joins ACTRESS #1.

ACTRESS #3

(aka ELSA)

AMID THE BOOZERS, THE LOSERS, THE LOAFERS, THE GOFERS, THE GAFFERS, THE HACKS AND ALL THE HAS BEENS...  
HE SEES HIS FUTURE SLIP AWAY ON BOOZY FUMES --  
SPOTS HIS LAST FEW SCRUPLES  
BACKED AGAINST THE WALL.

BOTH

IT ALL HAPPENS IN **SMALL, DARK ROOMS...**

AND THOUGH, WITH EACH AND EV'RY SWALLOW,  
IT ONLY SEEMS TO FOLLOW  
HE'S GONNA WANNA WALLOW IN THE PAST...  
HE THINKS "TO HELL WITH IT" AND "SCREW IT!"  
BUT, SOMEONE'S GOTTA DO IT --  
AND, KID, THERE'S NUTHIN' TO IT IF YOU DO IT GOOD 'N GASSED...  
IT'S A REGULAR BLAST...

ENSEMBLE

ANOTHER DAY DECIDES TO DAWN  
UP OVER BAYSIDE...  
AND, WITH THE RISING OF THE SUN, ONE QUESTION LOOMS...:  
CAN A CERTAIN SOMEONE  
FIND THE WHEREWITHAL  
TO CRAWL OUTTA THOSE **SMALL, DARK ROOMS..?**

ACTRESS#1

...APPALLINGLY...

ACTRESS #3

...GALLINGLY...

ACTRESS #2

...**SMALL,**

ENSEMBLE

DARK ROOMS..!

ACTRESS #1

FROM YOUR FIRST FEW COCKTAILS  
ON TO FINAL CALL,  
WE ALL END UP IN **SMALL DARK ROOMS.....**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

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As the words die on her lips, COOCHIE enters. She finds RONNY face down on the bar. COOCHIE shakes his shoulder.

COOCHIE

Ronny..? (To herself about him.) Oh.., look'at'cha..?! (To him.) C'mon..! I have been all over after you.

RONNY rights himself.

RONNY

(Groggy -- grouchy.)

Leave off..!

COOCHIE

(To the BARTENDER.)

Cup'a jamoke -- black.

The BARTENDER goes for it.

Ronny, will you look..? (Shoving a paper scrap under his nose.) Word came in at Bennie's. It's that "character" over at the Casa Manana. He called about a job for you.

RONNY

Harmon Laybourne..! You straight..?

COOCHIE

Like a Jesuit. Now, clean up and get over there..!

The BARTENDER hands him a cup of coffee and RONNY downs it in a couple quick pulls.

The scene shifts to...

**MUSIC: (31.) MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE Instrumental**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

**Sc. 2      The Casa Manana. The main room. Later that day.**

A **JANITOR** is mopping the floor. **HARMON** is on the telephone.

**HARMON**

(Into the phone.)

Listen to me, ya dumb ox: Shrimp! Butter-freakin'-fly shrimp! Have 'em here by two-thirty, or you're boxed..!

**RONNY** enters as he hangs up the phone.

(Muttering.) Lousy... (Spotting **RONNY**.) There he is..! "Mauro" isn't it..? You're a tough one to track down.

**RONNY**

(Suspicious.)

How are you, Mr. Laybourne?

**HARMON**

(To the **JANITOR**.)

He wants to know how..? (To **RONNY**.) You're from Sheepshead Bay, right?

**RONNY**

Near enough.

**HARMON**

Where can I lay my hands on some shrimp?

**RONNY**

(Bewildered.)

Shrimp?

**HARMON**

Yeah, shrimp..! My treyf monger's at the bottom of the East River or somethin'...

**RONNY**

Geeze.., I don't know "beans" from shrimp.

**HARMON**

Then, I'm guessing you can't use a gross of cocktail sauce. I'll give you a "price..?"

**RONNY**

If that's why you asked me here, Mr. Laybourne, I gotta say...

**RONNY** stops short as **GIL** enters with **MERYL**. He and **RONNY** stare at one another.

**GIL**

Dodgers first, Ronny.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

RONNY

Awww...: no.

HARMON

Hear the man out.

GIL

Real softball...: R.C.

GIL pitches RONNY the 'Spaulding.'

RONNY

No. No way.

RONNY lobs the ball back at GIL and goes for the door. GIL blocks his exit.

GIL

Hey.., you wanna wail on me: do it..! You got cause.

RONNY

Trust me, I'm pissing blood!

Again, GIL blocks his exit, so RONNY slams his chest with both hands!

You are unbelievable! You know that..?!

HARMON

Mauro.., lookit.., certain of us in the business think your friend Webster here was just what Edgar needed: someone to knock him on his tokhes. Maybe he could'a picked a better time and place...

RONNY

You dunno the half of it. Gil went on without me in some Village dive and then, lied about it. Me, he lies to.., but, Callahan he has to tell the truth?!

**MUSIC: (32.) AIN'T IT THE TRUTH**

IT'S THE STORY OF MY FREAKIN' LIFE:  
EV'RY TIME I REACH THE NEXT RUNG,  
THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE MOUTHIN' OFF,  
WHEN YOU KNOW YOU SHOULD'A BIT YOUR TONGUE.  
AND WE LAND OURSELVES RIGHT SMACK BACK IN THE DUNG..!

**AIN'T IT THE TRUTH..?**

**AIN'T IT THE TRUTH..?**

TALLEY IT UP TO A RECKLESS YOUTH..!  
"THE TRUTH," THEY SAY,  
"WILL SET YOU FREE;"  
BUT, AIN'T IT THE TRUTH THAT TOPPLED ME..?

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

RONNY

TAKE IT FROM ME,  
IT AIN'T THE TRUTH  
SETTLES YOU SQUARE IN THE CORNER BOOTH..!  
"THE TRUTH WILL OUT,"  
I'VE HEARD IT SAID;  
BUT, AIN'T IT THE TRUTH THAT'S OUT INSTEAD..?

AIN'T IT A BITCH  
AIN'T IT A SHAME  
THAT I'VE BEEN A DUD TO DATE..?  
AIN'T IT'S A SWITCH  
THAT I CAN CLAIM  
TO MISS THE MARK BY SHOOTIN' STRAIGHT?!

RONNY  
(Overlapping.)

**AIN'T IT THE  
TRUTH..?**  
ALWAYS THE  
TRUTH..!

GIL

**AIN'T IT THE  
TRUTH..?**  
AIN'T IT...

GIL

...TRUE AS A BIT BUYS A BABY RUTH --  
THERE'S UMPTEEN MILLION  
WAYS TO FAIL..,

RONNY  
(Interrupts.)

BUT, **AIN'T IT THE TRUTH..?**  
**AIN'T IT THE TRUTH..?**  
FOR THIS GUY..,  
**AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?**

THE TRUTH'LL SET YOU FREE, ALL RIGHT --  
FREE AS A MAN CAN BE..:  
FREE TO STARVE; FREE TO FAIL;  
FREE TO DO A LITTLE TIME IN JAIL.  
BELIEVE YOU ME,  
AS FAR AS I CAN SEE  
THE ONLY THING I WANT FROM THE TRUTH  
IS TO GET IT FREE OF ME..!

GIL  
(Getting mad!)

Man, that's beautiful..!

WANNA WIN BIG..?  
BURY THE TRUTH..!  
DITCH IT, UNLESS IT CAN PLAY DULUTH.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

GIL

A GUY CAN DIE  
A MILLION WAYS.  
BUT, SO CAN THE TRUTH..!

RONNY

**AIN'T IT THE TRUTH..!**

GIL &  
RONNY

FOR THIS GUY...  
**AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?!**

HARMON

Listen, boys..., the point is, this is no time to run from Edgar Callahan. You keep at him.

RONNY  
(Scoffs.)

How?

HARMON

I put you on the bill with Miss Dean. You're good; you're bad..? Who cares? You'll prove that crossing Edgar Callahan don't have to be a death sentence. (Adding,with a shrug...) Plus, the press'll be all over it. And I won't have to pay for "print" for the rest of forever.

RONNY  
(To MERYL.)

You'd go for that?

MERYL  
(Nods "yes.")

I feel responsible -- after keeping Gil out all night. It can't have helped.

GIL

See, it's like this, Ronny..., we'd open here in two weeks...

RONNY

No..! Not! The lot of you are off your nut.

**MUSIC: (33.) HARMON'S TWO CENTS**

HARMON

Maybe so..., but, the way Edgar smacked you two..., that just don't "sit."

SEE.., I GOT A NOSE LIKE A CRAPHOUSE RAT;  
WHAT CALLAHAN DID TO YOU STINKS.  
TRUST ME, HE NEEDS A LITTLE TIT FOR TAT;  
NAMELY: YOU TWO TO KEEP COMIN' BACK LIKE A JINX.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

HARMON

How shall I put it..?

THE GUY'S A DICK.  
HE'S A DICK.  
AND A DICK IS A DICK  
OR, IN YIDDISH, "A PUTZ."  
AND WHEN A YUTZ...

GIL

...Who's a dick...

HARMON

...“WHO'S A DICK,”  
DOES YOU DIRT, **YOU “DO”** BACK  
OR YOU DRIVE YOURSELF NUTS..!

‘CAUSE A DICK ONLY DOES WHAT A DICK KNOWS TO DO,  
WHICH IS PUT IT TO FLY WEIGHTS LIKE HIM AND LIKE YOU.  
YOU GOTTA ADMIRE THE WAY THE MAN STICKS TO HIS GUNS  
WITH THE PUREST DEVOTION THIS SIDE OF THE NUNS.

THE GUY'S... (Spoken.) a “what..?”

MERYL  
(Pipes up!)

HE'S A DICK!

GIL

HE'S A DONG...

HARMON

...HE'S A SCHLONG...

MERYL

...HE'S A STALK...

GIL

...AND A STICK!

HARMON

BUT, THE “SHORT” OF IT IS, KID, WE'RE ALL OF US DICKS!  
WE'VE ALL “DONE THE DEED” WHEN WE SHOULD'A SAID “NIX.”  
IN THIS CASE, HOWEVER, THE ONE THING THAT “SOURS THE POT”  
IS THAT EDGAR'S A DICK WHOSE CONVINCED THAT HE'S NOT..!

OH, BUT.., THE GUY'S...

GIL, MERYL  
& HARMON

A DICK!

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

HARMON

AND, YET, DICKLESS AS YESTERDAY'S SCHTICK..!  
SO, WHY MAKE YOURSELF SICK  
FROM A PENCIL-THICK PRIZE OF A PRICK.  
MY FRIEND, LET FLY, 'CAUSE THE GUY'S...

GIL

THE GUY'S...

MERYL

THE GUY'S...

GIL, MERYL  
& HARMON

A DICK!

RONNY

I don't care if he's a "hose" as long as the Gowanus. He hasn't gone away. He won't ever go away.

GIL

Consider it. Okay..?

RONNY

Campanella.

GIL

What..?

RONNY

"R.C." It's Roy Campanella. Or Cullenbine.

RONNY exits.

HARMON

What's that mean..?

GIL

He's gonna come around. You'll see.

The scene shifts to...



**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

**Sc. 3**        **Washington Cemetery. Immediately following.**

**MUSIC:**    **(34.) SMALL, DARK ROOMS Reprise**

ACTRESSES #1 & #3 appear. RONNY enters.

BOTH

SMALL, DARK ROOMS...

SMALL, DARK ROOMS...

WE ALL

END UP IN SMALL, DARK ROOMS...

RONNY wanders among the headstones. Finally, he flops down on a plot and stretches out to stare up at the sky. **A DARK FIGURE** in a long coat and a hat pulled low over his eyes faces upstage, as if visiting a grave.

**MUSIC:**    **(35.) WHAT OTHER CHOICE DO I HAVE?**

RONNY

WHAT OTHER CHOICE DO I HAVE..?

WHAT OTHER CHANCE AT SUCCESS..?

MAYBE GIL'S RIGHT... MAYBE...

WHO THE HELL KNOWS..?

IT'S HONESTLY ANYONE'S GUESS.

HOW CAN I TRUST HIM, THOUGH..?

HOW CAN I NOT?!

GOTTA REMEMBER WE'RE FRIENDS.

HAVE TO HOLD ONTO THE HIST'RY WE'VE GOT.

THIS AIN'T THE WAY THAT IT ENDS...

Right..? sNOT THE WAY THAT IT ENDS.

STILL, THERE'S THIS VOICE FROM INSIDE

SCREAMING "YOU GOTTA STAY SAVVY;

GIL'S ACTIONS, TO DATE, HAVEN'T LEFT YOU MUCH ROOM TO REJOICE!"

BUT.., WHAT OTHER CHOICE DO I.....?

The FIGURE turns toward RONNY. This time it's EDGAR.

EDGAR

Trying that grave on for size?

RONNY

WHAT OTHER CHOICE DO I HAVE..?

EDGAR

There's always another choice.

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

RONNY

Hello, Mr. Callahan.

EDGAR

Can't imagine you're too pleased to see me.

RONNY

That's one choice.

EDGAR  
(Dryly.)

Funny.

RONNY

What brings you out to the bone yard?

EDGAR

Oh.., call it "morbid fascination" -- pondering the inevitability of it all... Alexander the Great.; in life, he was unconquerable. Know what it says where he's buried? "A tomb now suffices him for whom the whole world was not sufficient."

RONNY

You know a lot of useless stuff.

EDGAR

I know you've been to the Casa Manana. How useless is that?

RONNY

You tell me.

EDGAR  
(Somewhat revealing his motives.)

Miss Dean's a friend.

RONNY

Right..; and one of "the clean ones." You know, she's gonna appear there with Gil. They even want me in on it.

EDGAR  
(Pauses. Then...)

Good. I like it.....like it fine.

RONNY  
(Laughs.)

I bet..!

EDGAR

I make no secret of my distaste for Gil Webster. But, I have no quarrel with you.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

RONNY

You got a weird way of showing it.

EDGAR

That's why I'm here.

**MUSIC: (36.) YES**

Contrary to prevailing opinion, I come complete with a conscience -- one that's been nagging at me. Webster and I.., we see the world differently. Ah, but, you and I, son...

YOU AND I .., WE'VE PAID OUR DUES --  
WOULDN'T TRADE ... A SINGLE BRUISE..!  
EV'RY "NO" HELPED US ASSESS  
WHEN IT'S A PLUS TO SAY ..... "YES."

YOU AND I .., WE LIKE OUR PERQS:  
POWER; FAME ..; IN SHORT, "THE WORKS."  
BOOZE AND BROADS -- BUT, I DIGRESS.  
WHAT "WE" LIKE BEST ..... IS A "YES!"

THOUGH A BILLION BUMS THINK YOU MAKE THE CLIMB  
LAYIN' PLANS AN' PLAYIN' HUNCHES..,  
ONLY "BUMS" LIKE US KNOW TO SPEND THEIR TIME  
MAKING ALL THE RIGHT PARTIES AND TAKING SOME LUNCHES.  
RULE OF THUMB? WHEN YOU'RE CAUGHT IN A CRUNCH, IS  
BETTER START PULLIN' THEM PUNCHES.

YOU AND I .., WE KNOW IT'S TRUE:  
QUID PRO QUO ... HAS MORE TO DO  
WITH WHERE YOU SLEEP AND HOW YOU DRESS,  
AND HAVING THE GRIT TO SAY "YES."  
JUST "YES..!"  
FOR NOTHING BEATS THE SOUND.....OF A "YES."

EDGAR

It may just be that I hate to be proven wrong.., but I'd like to offer you another chance.

RONNY

You mean stab at your show..?

EDGAR

As a solo.., with a big buildup the week before..: I call you out of the audience -- we trade a few laughs -- the kind of "corn" the two of us like. What do you say?

RONNY

I...I don't really know.

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

EDGAR

Sure you do. Meantime., you and Webster...you open for Miss Dean if you like. I want nothing to change.

RONNY

Nothing? I don't get you.

EDGAR

Just keep me informed. Oh., and book a table for the opening. I never miss an opening...

YOU KNOW I CAN OPEN DOORS...  
YOU SCRATCH MY BACK? I SCRATCH YOUR'S.  
AND IT'S ALL SO EFFORTLESS  
ALL THAT I NEED IS A...

RONNY

...Yes.

EDGAR

AND GOD BLESS!  
FOR NOTHING BEATS THE SOUND.....OF A "YES..!"

RONNY

WHAT OTHER CHOICE DO I HAVE..?

OF A "YES..!"

WHAT OTHER CHANCE AT SUCCESS..?

OF A "YES..!"

NO OTHER ANSWER BUT "YES!"

**Blackout.**

The scene shift to...

**Sc. 4            The Casa Manana. The next morning.**

**MUSIC:        (33.) MINGLE SCHMINGLE BINGLE Instrumental**

MERYL is rehearsing with a **PIANIST**. HARMON enters, waving a newspaper!

HARMON

Have you seen it?! Webster?! Miss..? (Spots her.) You seen it?!

MERYL

Seen what?

HARMON

It's a miracle! A wonderment..., like from biblical days! Only this time, Elser's the one with the burning bush.

**MUSIC:        (37.) MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE Reprise**

Listen..., (Reads.) "Comics Mauro and Webster -- remember that naughty twosome...?"

Focus splits with...

**Limbo - Elsa's Office.**

ELSA appears.

ELSA

"...Of course you do. Well..,

THEY'VE BEEN TAPPED TO APPEAR  
AT THE CASA MANANA  
TWO SHOWS NIGHTLY FOR FIVE DAYS A WEEK.  
AND THEY'VE TEAMED, SO WE HEAR,  
WITH A POP PRIMA DONNA  
WHO'S PART VELVETY VOICE.., PART CURVACEOUS PHYSIQUE..!

Or is it the other way around?

ELSA disappears. Focus narrows to...

**The Casa Manana**

HARMON

(Reads.) "She's one 'Meryl Dean' by name. Promises to prove the nightclub-slash-eye opener of the year!" Hah!

SWEETHEART, IT'S UNHEARD OF;  
PRESS LIKE THIS YOU CANNOT BUY!

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

HARMON

HELL.., WHEN EDGAR READS IT,  
SOME POOR FISH IS GONNA FRY..!  
HOW'S IT FEEL TO WRIGGLE  
UNDERNEATH HIS SCALY SKIN?  
'CAUSE... MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE...  
...WE'RE IN!

Focus shifts to...

**Limbo - the alleyway.**

COOCHIE and RONNY appear.

RONNY

...In what..?! Where..?!

COOCHIE

The Morning Telegraph. Oh, tell me you missed it..!

RONNY

I haven't seen the paper yet.

COOCHIE

(Reads.)

"Sources have it that those Bad Boys of Broadcastland, Mauro and Webster, will re-team to appear..."

RONNY

How'd this get in the paper?

COOCHIE

"...to appear at Harmon Laybourne's within the next few weeks..."

RONNY

(To himself.)

Callahan?

COOCHIE

(Looks up from her reading.)

He goes on and on -- it's wonderful! Why didn't you tell me you and Gil were back together?

RONNY

I only just made up my mind that we were.

He studies the paper intently. They disappear.

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

## The Casa Manana.

MERYL and GIL appear.

...He gonna do it..?!  
GIL

Read it for yourself.  
MERYL  
(Handing him a paper.)

HOW THE HELL...?  
GIL

...NO ONE KNEW...  
MERYL

...'CEPT FOR YOU, ME AND... (It hits him!) JESUS!  
GIL

RONNY enters.

"JESUS?"  
RONNY

RONNY! YOU BUM! TAKE A BOW!  
GIL

SO, YOU SAW..?  
RONNY

...IT WAS YOU?  
MERYL

MAN, THIS ALL BUT GUARANTEES US  
WE CAN SQUEEZE OUTTA CALLAHAN'S CLUTCHES, EN HOW..!  
THAT IS SO BEAUTIFUL!  
GIL

Yeah, Gil. Sure.  
RONNY  
(Soberly.)

It is.  
MERYL  
(Equally cautious.)

GIL  
So..., we're good again? Friends.

RONNY  
Friends.

HARMON enters.

GIL  
Then, let's concentrate on opening big!

HARMON  
Even better...: let's open soon.

Focus shifts to...

**Limbo - Elsa's Office.**

ELSA appears. COOCHIE enters.

COOCHIE  
Thanks for lettin' me up, Miss Orwell.

ELSA  
Any friend of Ronny's...

COOCHIE  
(Handing ELSA and envelope.)  
These days..., there ain't a lot of us.

ELSA  
An invitation?

ELSA opens the envelope and scans the invitation inside.

COOCHIE  
Ya like the calligraphy? I take this class my nights off. For when I get too saggy to dance.

ELSA  
Harmon's moved up their booking.

COOCHIE  
Yeah..., Ronny wanted you should know pronto.

ELSA  
(To herself.)  
And by extension...\*

\*(Edgar.)



# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

WHAT SHOULD I TELL RONNY?  
COOCHIE

SAY HIS MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED.  
ELSA

GONNA RATE A MENTION?  
COOCHIE

ONE THAT'S NOT TO BE BELIEVED.  
OR, TO QUOTE A CERTAIN  
NIGHTCLUB-OWNING OLD SCHLEMIEL..,

“MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE?”  
COOCHIE

DONE DEAL.  
ELSA

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE..!  
COOCHIE  
& ELSA

Focus splits with...

## The Casa Manana.

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE..!  
GIL, MERYL  
& HARMON

GIL grabs MERYL and dances her around.

MINGLE, SCHMINGLE  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE..!  
MINGLE, SCHMINGLE, BINGLE...  
GIL, HARMON, MERYL,  
COOCHIE & ELSA

Done deal.  
RONNY  
(Quietly.)

## Blackout.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

### Sc. 5 Near the East River. The night before the opening.

GIL and MERYL are strolling, along a walkway near the river. Muted sounds can be heard from the harbor, but the city itself is silent. MERYL pauses to look out over the river and GIL sort of stumbles into her.

MERYL

Careful, you..!

GIL

“Careful” yourself, lady..; I’ve got about a half a bag on.

MERYL

That sounds dangerous.

GIL

What’s life without a little risk? I’m just feeling high about tomorrow night. Our opening.

MERYL

I’m glad of it, Gil. For the both of us.

GIL

(Gazing into her eyes.)

Yeah... (Snaps out of it.) And for Ronny.

MERYL

Ronny, too.

Suddenly, GIL takes her into his arms and kisses her. MERYL yields. Still, the kiss ends awkwardly.

GIL

Uh...

MERYL

...Huh.

GIL

Sorry.

MERYL

\*(apologize.)

Don’t...\* It’s...\*\*

\*\* (all right.)

GIL

(Suddenly!)

Meryl, c’mon: let’s do this..! We’d be good together.

# TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

MERYL

(With difficulty.)

Gil, there's so much you need to know about... So much I need to tell you...

GIL

Try me.

MERYL

That night... the first night down in the village..., there was something I wanted to...\*  
Someone I was running away from. \*(avoid.)

GIL

(Taken aback.)

I... (And yet.) I don't...\*

\*(care.)

MERYL

(Confessing to him, quickly.)

And I used you to do it. I'm sorry.

GIL

Look..., who cares why it happened? It happened. And I'm glad...

**MUSIC: (38.) YOU KNOW THE WAY**

MERYL

(Amazed at GIL's  
lack of anger.)

So am I.

ON BEHALF OF EV'RY WOMAN IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
I HOPE THAT YOU'LL ACCEPT MY HUMBLE THANKS  
FOR HELPING ME TO START  
SIMPLY THINKING WITH MY HEART...

GIL

I don't know that I get you...

MERYL

YOU KNOW THE WAY  
PEOPLE TEND TO WORRY  
OVER ANYTHING AND EV'RYTHING  
THAT SEEMS TO COME ALONG..?

YOU KNOW THE WAY  
WE QUESTION EACH CONVICTION;  
AS IF EAGER TO BELIEVE THE FIRST  
SUGGESTION THAT WE'RE WRONG..?

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

MERYL

IT'S COMFORTING TO KNOW FOR ONCE  
THAT SOMEONE'S OUT THERE SOMEWHERE  
SIFTING EV'RY INDECISION;  
TRACING GOOD AMONG THE BAD...  
WHO KNOWS ENOUGH TO KNOW HIS MIND,  
AND FIND THE PATH TO SOMETHING  
AS VERGING ON AN ANSWER  
AS IS LIKELY TO BE HAD...

I HOPE ONE DAY  
TO FIND THE STRENGTH TO JOIN YOU,  
BUT, FOR NOW I'M GLAD THAT YOU'RE AS STRONG  
AND CLEAR AS HERE TODAY.  
I NEED NEVER FEEL AS LOST  
NOW THAT I KNOW YOU KNOW THE WAY.

Tomorrow night is important -- my first chance to connect with something real..; to connect with me. Gil, I need to let "tomorrow" happen -- to be my own person. I suppose I'm asking if you can wait..?

GIL

Anytime...

MERYL

PERHAPS ONE DAY  
I'LL FIND THE STRENGTH TO JOIN YOU  
BUT, FOR NOW I'M GLAD  
THAT YOU'RE AS CLEAR AND STRONG  
AS HERE TODAY  
I NEED NEVER FEEL AS LOST  
NOW THAT I KNOW

YOU KNOW THE WAY...

GIL

ANYTIME  
YOU THINK YOU NEED  
A SHOULDER, KID,  
YOU DON'T NEED TO PLEAD...

I KNOW JUST WHAT YOU NEED.  
I KNOW THE WAY...

She then turns away and exits. GIL drinks it all in for a moment, and then exits. The scene shifts to...

### **The living room of Meryl's place. Immediately following.**

The room is cast in dim light. MERYL enters from the hall. She immediately senses someone is in the room. He steps from the shadows and is revealed as...

EDGAR

"Where did it come from?' someone said..."

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

MERYL

Edgar..!

EDGAR

“The wind has blown it in.’ ‘What does it want?’ another cried. ‘Some whiskey, rum or gin?’”

MERYL deposits her things on a couch and moves to the bar.

MERYL

Still the ‘McCallen..?’

EDGAR

(Nods “yes.”)

I’m a creature of habit. You changed the locks.

MERYL pours him a drink without acknowledging his statement.

Glad I pay the rent. Been reading all about you in the dailies -- you and your new chums.

MERYL

“Reading,” Edgar..? Or is it “writing?”

MERYL hands EDGAR his drink.

EDGAR

This isn’t about me.

MERYL

Isn’t it?

EDGAR

How could it be..? When I’ve come to you.., come crawling on my belly..?

MERYL

Stop it.

EDGAR

Come praying you’ll accept my pathetic little offerings?

MERYL

Everything you’ve ever done for me was to prove that I can’t escape your sphere of influence.

EDGAR

A rather grand pronouncement..., that.

MERYL

Though, for the life of me, I don’t know why you bother.

EDGAR

Dear, darling, Meryl..., if you only understood the hold you have over me -- your own raw power... I suppose it's a blessing that you don't. But, D'Arcy knew..: "Did you ever see a woman for whom your soul you'd give? With a form like the Milo Venus, too beautiful to live?" (A beat. Then...) "Too beautiful to live..."

MERYL

I think you should leave.

EDGAR

Which takes care of me. But, what about you?

MERYL

I've already left. And 70 million people have lined up to take my place.

EDGAR

Thank the lord for small favors.

MERYL

Ronny Mauro, for one. Or did you think I hadn't noticed? But, Harmon Laybourne's been pushed too often and too hard; and Gil...

She stops short.

EDGAR

Yes. Gil Webster.

MERYL

Edgar, please, I have feelings for him that are honest and good. I won't let you hurt him!

**MUSIC: (39.) POOR, PATHETIC EDGAR Reprise**

EDGAR

Then, you leave me no alternative.

MERYL moves away, but EDGAR grabs her by the wrist!

EDGAR

TELL ME THAT YOU LOVE ME;  
TELL ME ONE LAST TIME  
BEFORE THE LINE'S DRAWN IN THE SAND.  
WHY CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND  
MY DARLING, YOU BELONG TO  
**POOR, PATHETIC EDGAR..!**

**MUSIC: (37.) THE GUYS TO SEE Underscore Variation**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

EDGAR draws her close. MERYL is so frightened that she complies. Then, she struggles away from him. Again EDGAR clutches after her, **slapping** her across the face!

EDGAR

I've risked everything.....everything I am for you..! You won't to belong to anyone else -- not to him..!

Very deliberately, EDGAR **slaps** MERYL again. With a strangled cry, she drops to her knees on the floor. The air is suddenly split with **loud, offstage laughter** and **applause** as the scene shifts rapidly to...

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

**Sc. 6 Casa Manana. The kitchen. Opening night.**

RONNY and GIL enters from the main room, having just finished their act, the **laughter and applause** having been for them. COOCHIE and HARMON wait.

GIL

Any word yet?

HARMON

(Shaking his head "no.")

Nah..! And you saw it out there.., the place is jammed.

RONNY

(Reassuring GIL.)

She'll be here.

HARMON

I gotta get back up front.

He exits.

GIL

Lookit, there's a lot of heavy hitters out there. You.....you go work the room..., huh?

RONNY starts out, but COOCHIE stops him.

COOCHIE

Ronny, wait..!

RONNY

(Can't face her.)

What?

COOCHIE

The girl, Ronny..; you don't know anything. Right?

RONNY

What's to know? She's late, is all..; this is all about.....nothing.

RONNY exits. The scene shifts to...

**The main room.**

**MUSIC: (40.) YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE Scat**

A **TRIO** of SINGERS is onstage "scatting."



## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

TRIO

DO! DO! DO! DOO-BLE-EE-AH-BAH-DO-BOP!  
DO! DO! DO! DOO-BLE-EE-AH-BAH-DO-BOP!  
DO! DO! DO! DOO-BLE-EE-AH-BAH-DO-BOP-DO-WOW..!

As RONNY enters, EDGAR and his **PARTY** are discovered at a ringside table. The group includes ELSA and several **OTHERS**, specifically EDGAR's sleek, 50ish wife **PHYLLIS**. EDGAR spots RONNY.

EDGAR

Mister Mauro..! You can scratch that incredulous look..; it's me.

RONNY

No, it's.....well.., it's you and... this whole turn-out..!

EDGAR

You haven't met "the missus," have you, Ronny..?

RONNY

(To PHYLLIS.)

How do ya do?

EDGAR

(To PHYLLIS.)

Darling, you're about to see me do something completely of character: I'm going to apologise. (Loudly, to attract attention.) "Publicly..!" (He turns to RONNY.) I'm a hard-nose, Mauro. But, I'm willing to admit that I misjudged you. You gave a fine performance tonight. What do ya say to hashing things out between us..?

RONNY

What can I say, Mr. Callahan? Guess I'm a little floored.

EDGAR

Son.., that's what floors are for..!

His GUESTS **laugh**. EDGAR addresses them.

That.., and a bit of recitation. Hmmm..?

His GUESTS **applaud** to urge him on. So, EDGAR signals the BAND to halt -- which they do -- and he strikes a "hammy" pose.

"Say, boys, if you'll give me just another whiskey, I'll be glad,  
And I'll draw right here a picture of the face that drove me mad.  
Give me the piece of chalk with which you keep the baseball score.  
You shall see the lovely Madeline upon the barroom floor!"

RONNY slips away. ELSA tags after him.

EDGAR

(Continues.)

Hello, Ronny.

ELSA “Another drink, and with chalk in hand the vagabond began.

Elsa.

RONNY (“Hello.”) To sketch a face that well might buy the soul of any man.

Or should I say welcome back?

ELSA Then, as he placed another lock upon the shapely head,

To what?

RONNY With a fearful shriek, he leaped and fell across the picture -- dead.”

The “lucky unlucky” -- we few hardy souls who manage to thrive beneath the manicured thumb of Mr. Callahan.

ELSA

EDGAR “One fearful shriek, and there he lay..., across the picture -- dead.”

EDGAR’s GUESTS **applaud**. The BAND resumes playing.

**MUSIC: (40.) YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE Scat**

RONNY

I’m afraid I don’t follow you.

ELSA laughs.

What I say?

ELSA Nothing...: it’s... (She explains.) It’s just that I’m tickled to see that you’ve moved on to self-delusion...; (Casting an eye at EDGAR.) learned, I have no doubt, at the feet of the master. But, then, you’ve always had your own peculiar brand of naiveté: so aware of the cost, that you don’t know when you’ve been bought.

TRIO  
DO! DO! DO! DOO-BLE-EE-AH-BAH..!

There’s a sudden commotion in the kitchen! GIL bursts through a swinging door, followed by a **POLICE DETECTIVE** and HARMON!

HARMON  
Webster, stop! (To the room.) Stop him!! Please..!!

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

GIL doesn't get very far before he is headed off by a **PATRON** and a uniformed **POLICE OFFICER**. The **music** halts!

GIL

(At the top of his lungs!)

It's a set up -- it's..! (Searching for help.) Ronny..!?!)

HARMON

Ladies and gentlemen, please...!

HARMON takes to the stage.

Please.., I'm afraid this evening's scheduled performer.., Meryl Dean... She's been hospitalized..!

GIL is lead away by the POLICE.

Please, I... (Stuck for anything else to say, he turns to the **BANDLEADER**.) Play something. The doorman said he saw him -- Webster, I mean -- at her building, just before...

The **music** resumes. HARMON eyes EDGAR.

It was the doorman... He's the one that found her. Poor, poor girl.

EDGAR crosses to ELSA.

EDGAR

Pity about Meryl.

ELSA

(Appalled!)

Oh, for chrissakes, Edgar.., who else are you planning to bury?!

EDGAR

(To ELSA.)

You're drunk, dear. (To RONNY.) Take Elsa home.

RONNY hesitates. So, EDGAR repeats...

Take her home.

EDGAR rejoins his GUESTS. They exit.

**MUSIC: (41.) YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE**

ELSA

God, he's good...

RONNY

C'mon...

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

ELSA

...Isn't he good..?

I'VE GOT THIS "FRIEND" WHOSE NONE TOO NICE;  
BUT, YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE.  
HE'S HARD AS NAILS. HE'S COLD AS ICE.  
AND AS WELCOME AS A CASE OF THE FLU.  
HE'S LESS THAN WHAT YOU'D CALL A PAL;  
GOT MORE NERVE THAN A ROOT CANAL.  
BUT, FIRST RATE SCUM COME FAR AND FEW,  
SO, **YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL...HIS DUE.**

TRIO

DO! DO! DO! DOO-BLE-EE-AH-BAH-DO-BOP!  
**YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE!**

ELSA

YEAH, ANYTIME YOU'RE IN THE MOOD  
FOR A FELLA WITH A VILLAINOUS BENT,  
THIS DEVIL'S LEWD; HE'S RUDE; HE'S CRUDE;  
AND HE AIN'T ABOUT TO EVER REPENT.  
BY RIGHTS, HE OUGHTA DRIVE YA NUTS;  
BUT, WHO COULD HATE SO PURE A PUTZ?  
THOUGH HE MAY SCREW ME THROUGH AND THROUGH,  
I'M STICKIN' TO THE PREVALENT VIEW...

TRIO

(Shouted.) WHAT VIEW?!

ELSA

**YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL...HIS DUE.**

TRIO

DO! DO! DO! DOO-BLE-EE-AH-BAH-DO-BOP!  
**YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE!**

RONNY can see that ELSA is out of his control, so he exits. ELSA  
stumbled drunkenly onto the dance floor.

ELSA

THERE'S A PATH TO LIVING OUT A LIFE  
THAT'S FREE OF MORAL CRISIS.  
IT'S A ROUTE THAT CAGEY DEVIL KNOWS TOO WELL:  
WHEN YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH  
OF THAT RIGHTEOUS STUFF,  
MAKE A VIRTUE OF YOUR VICES;  
GOOD INTENTIONS ONLY PAVE THE ROAD TO HELL.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

ELSA

I KNOW THAT BUM FROM WAY BACK WHEN,  
SO, YOU FIGURE I'D BE ONTO HIS PITCH  
BUT, ANY TIME HE GETS THE YEN,  
I GET TAKEN BY THE SON OF A BITCH..!  
I ONLY HOPE SOMEDAY HE FEELS  
ANOTHER DEVIL AT HIS HEELS.  
BUT, 'TIL THAT HAPPY SWITCHEROO,  
I TELL YA ON THE LEVEL, IT'S TRUE...

TRIO

(Shouted.) SO, TRUE!

ELSA

YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL...

TRIO

HE'S ONE HELLUVA DEVIL..!

ELSA

AND YOU GOTTA GIVE THE DEVIL.....HIS DUE..!

ALL

AND HE'S ONE DEVIL THAT'S WELL OVER-DUE..!

**Blackout.**

**MUSIC: (42.) THE DEVIL HIS DUE BLUES Instrumental**

Lights ghost up to reveal ELSA alone on the club's deserted dance floor, looking spent and very lost. HARMON enters with ELSA's fur coat. As he wraps the coat tenderly around her shoulders, ELSA crumples into HARMON's arms. With him to support her, the two old friends exit slowly into the night as the scene once again...

**Fades to black.**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

**Sc. 7: The Edgar Callahan Theatre. Backstage. Four weeks later.**

**MUSIC: (43.) THE CALLAHAN SHOW THEME Instrumental**

SIDNEY enters.

SIDNEY

Okay, gather 'round, people! Listen up!

The activity backstage comes to a halt as EVERYONE turns to SIDNEY.

We're on the air in five minutes. But, first, Mr. Callahan would like to say a few words. Edgar..?!

EDGAR enters with his arm around MERYL. They make their way to center of the CROWD. ELSA appears among them.

EDGAR

Thanks, Sidney. I just want to take a moment to welcome back our Miss Dean.

Warm **applause**.

As you know, Meryl's been through quite the ordeal of late. And while there's really nothing we can do to change that..., (To MERYL.) well, I hope to God it helps to know you were very much missed. By the lot of us..!

Adlibbed agreement and stronger **applause**.

MERYL

Thank you.

EDGAR gives her a kiss on the forehead. They break.

EDGAR

Let's go, folks. I want to see all my ducks in a row..!

EDGAR exits.

SIDNEY

You heard the man. Four minutes, people..! We're on in "four!"

The CAST and CREW scatter. RONNY is revealed.

Mr. Mauro..? Edgar's gonna go to you after the opening. Just watch me for the cue, okay?

RONNY

Sure thing.

SIDNEY exits. RONNY approaches MERYL.

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

RONNY  
(Hesitant.)

'Scuse me..? Meryl..?

MERYL is startled to see him.

RONNY

Sorry! Didn't...didn't mean to spook ya.

MERYL

No.., I only... I was under the impression you were on next week's program.

RONNY

Edgar wants to promote me on air -- give it the big push. (An uncomfortable silence.) They let Gil off, you know -- let him go.

MERYL

I do...I know. Is he..?\*

\*(all right)

RONNY

None the worse.

MERYL

Edgar...

RONNY stiffens at the sound of his name. MERYL presses on.

Edgar promises that nothing more will happen to Gil. Can make me that same promise?

RONNY  
(Defensively.)

Gil's my oldest friend.

MERYL

Then.., I take that as your word. You'll excuse me..?

MERYL exits.

**MUSIC: (44.) MAKING STUPID (w / WHATEVER IT TAKES) Reprise**

RONNY

COUPLE OF KIDS AT AN AMATEUR NIGHT  
AT THE HUNTS POINT PALACE, UP THE BRONX.  
TWELVE YEARS OLD -- SCARED TO DEATH --  
BUT, WE GO -- AND IT'S DONE -- AND WE'VE WON...  
WE'VE WON.....! I'VE FINALLY WON...

(Spoken quietly.) What have I done?

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

SIDNEY crosses through.

SIDNEY

...We're on in five, four, three, two...

He mimes "one" and exits. The scene shifts...

### **Onstage.**

As the main drape rings down, EDGAR steps out before it. When the **applause** dies away, he greets the audience.

EDGAR

Friends, highlighting next week's show will be an old pal of ours, comedian Ronny Mauro. Ronny's out on his own now and debuting a new routine. Let's call him out for a quick "hello." Ronny..?!

**MUSIC: (42.) MAKIN' STUPID Instrumental**

**Applause.** RONNY enters like a "nut" -- loping about the stage like a gorilla or mincing like a dame -- so long as he demeans himself. EDGAR laughs. Once RONNY reaches EDGAR, he plays it straight and they join hands for the cameras.

EDGAR

(Still grinning.)

How are you, son? Fine having you back.

RONNY

(Fawning comically.)

Thank you, Mr. Callahan. Sir...Man...Person...Type-Person-Whose-Rings-I Kiss..!

RONNY slobbers noisily all over EDGAR's knuckles.

RONNY

What'd you have..; shrimp scampi for dinner?

EDGAR

(Yanking his hand away with an exaggerated gesture.)

Will you...?!\*

\*(cut that out)

The two of them share a laugh and RONNY cuts the schtick.

EDGAR

Say, I hear that when you're with us next week, you'll be flying solo.

RONNY

You are right. That is correct.



## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

EDGAR

Suppose we see a sample?

At EDGAR's coaxing **THE CAST applauds.**

RONNY  
(Coy.)

Weeeeeell.. After I finish your knuckles.

RONNY dives for his knuckles! EDGAR dodges him successfully and **laughs**, yielding the stage to RONNY.

EDGAR

Ronny Mauro, ladies and gentlemen!

RONNY

What I say..? (Very much a "bit.") What I saaaaaay?!!

SO.., HERE I AM ON "CALLAHAN" -- I FIN'LLY CAUGHT A BREAK..,  
**MAKIN' STUPID..!**

RONNY adlibs some inane "Jerry Lewis" style **yelping!**

I'M PLAYIN' TO AN AUDIENCE THAT'S MORE OR LESS AWAKE;  
TAKIN' STAGE AND  
**MAKIN' STUPID..!**

NO MATTER WHO I IRK FROM WORKIN' THIS FAMOUS A SHOW..,  
I SET THAT SELF-SAME, NO-SHAME, LOWER-YOUR-AIM OF A NOTION  
IN MOTION..:

AND.., SEND IT OUT TO EV'RY JERK WHO SWORE I'D NEVER BE  
HERE MAKIN' MY MOVE..,  
MAKIN' THE GRADE..,  
MAKIN' SURE HE HAD'A ASK, "FOR THIS HE GETS PAID..?"  
**MAKIN' STUPID -- THAT'S ME!**

But, I mean, what's really stupider, huh..? Dishin' up "dogs" at Nathan's? Or me,  
'cause I go: (More inane yelping and mugging.) hoi-hoi-hoi-hoi?! (Then, he adds quickly.) Don't  
answer that question. (Loses himself in thought for a second.) Stupid... (Then, shakes out of it.)

I'M JUST MAKIN' SOME FUN --  
AND MAKIN' A DENT --  
MAKIN' THESE THE SWEETEST MINUTES I'VE EVER SPENT  
**MAKIN' STUPID -- THAT'S ME!**

And with that, RONNY heads for the exit -- a little too quickly, as if he were  
afraid of something. EDGAR steps onto camera, leading the **applause.**

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

EDGAR

Ronny Mauro, ladies and gentlemen! Isn't he a pistol?

The music suddenly takes on a Latin beat. Focus splits with...

### Backstage.

RONNY finds himself face to face with MERYL, who is waiting for her next commercial. He catches her eye.

EDGAR

He'll be back with us next week. And now, I'd like you all to greet the latest Latin sensation.., Trina Valenzuela..!

The curtains part to reveal a pair of frilly-shirted **BACKUP BOYS** shaking maracas to the music. However, instead of heralding the entrance of **TRINA VALENZUELA**, RONNY enters wearing an improvised turban and shrieking like Carmen Miranda. EDGAR looks surprised, but lets it happen.

RONNY

(With a really hokey accent.)

I KNOW I SHOULDN'T DO "DIS"  
BUT, I CANNOT SEEM TO QUIT  
**MAKIN' "STOOPEED..!"**

Ai, ai, ai, ai, ai! (Sings.) NOW, RONNY-BOY, DON'T SCREW THIS  
UP -- YOU STILL COULD SCORE A HIT  
**MAKIN' "STOOPEED..!"**

TRINA tries to enter to do her act.

(Drops the accent.)

TRUE, I'M NOWHERE AS SEXY  
AS MISS TRINA FROM MEXICO...

RONNY pushes TRINA back offstage.

IT'S JUST.., (Struggling.) LONG AS I'M OUT, I...\*  
THERE'S THIS ONE NAGGING DOUBT I GET SO...\*  
CAN'T LET...GO..!

\*(wish I could clear the air)

\*(upset about)

He tries to get a grip.

THE ODDS MAY BE LONG...  
THE STAKES MAY BE HIGH...  
ONLY THE RULES OF THE JUNGLE APPLY...  
AND THIS IS NOT THE TIME OR PLACE!  
SOME FUCK-UPS YOU DO NOT ERASE

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

RONNY

BY MAKIN' A FUSS..!  
TRY MAKIN' A FACE!  
I MEAN, WHERE THE "PAY" IN MAKIN' THIS A FEDERAL CASE?  
**MAKIN' STUPID!** THAT'S...

Awww, hell..!

INSTEAD OF ALL THIS SHTICK,  
LET'S KICK INTO SOMETHING THAT'S FRESH..:

"What say," Edgar..? Huh..?

I DO THIS FREE-RIFF, SCARED-STIFF, THOROUGHLY- "IFFY" IMPRESSION  
OF A CONFESSION..!

Ya ever hear "da" one about the little gal singer and the big bad tee-vee host..? It'll kill  
ya. Practically killed her. (To EDGAR.) Right..?

EDGAR  
(Unruffled.)

Ronny Mauro, folks. Or is it Gil Webster? I've begun confusing the two.

RONNY

I wish, to god, I was, Edgar..; more like Gil, I mean... (Quietly.) More than anything.  
(Swallows hard and goes on.) You had it in for him, didn't ya? But, offing Gil yourself would'a  
looked too much like a vendetta. So, you set him up... Got the press all curious about  
our gig at the Casa Manana... And then, humiliated Gil in the most public way possible...  
(Referring to MERYL.) By hurting her. (Pause.) And I let it happen. (Glaring at EDGAR.) Jesus,  
you bastard! Look at you! Didn't you hear what I said?!

EDGAR

Funny. (Suddenly.) Oh, did I mention that we're trying a little something new? It's called a  
'video tape.'

EDGAR gestures toward a television monitor, where a **MAGICIAN** can be  
seen onscreen performing his act.

Turns out there's a place in television for the past after all. (To RONNY.) You were off the  
air before you were a quarter of the way through that ridiculous tirade. Not one syllable  
of your lies left these walls.

RONNY

Maybe I'm the one who needed to hear it.

EDGAR  
(Dismissing him.)

Tell yourself anything you'd like.

## TOP OF THE HEAP

8/1/07

MERYL  
(Suddenly!)

It's the truth.

EDGAR halts, caught off-guard! But, then...

EDGAR  
(With quiet menace.)

Don't be foolish.

Enraged, MERYL rushes at EDGAR, beats at him with both fists! Without thinking, EDGAR reacts, striking MERYL and sending her to the floor! EVERYONE ELSE freezes in shock and disbelief! Then, in silence, RONNY slowly crosses to MERYL and helps her to her feet.)

RONNY  
RONNY

He did it, didn't he? That night? The beating?

EDGAR  
(Rages!)

Lies!

MERYL  
(Ignoring EDGAR.)

Yes, he did.

They move to exit.

EDGAR  
(To the OTHERS.)

It's all lies! You all saw her! How she came at me just now..?!

ELSA stops RONNY and MERYL.

ELSA

I'll see that word of this reaches Edgar's precious public.

RONNY

Front page?

ELSA gives RONNY a "goodbye" kiss on the cheek.

ELSA

Top of the fold.

RONNY and MERYL exit.

EDGAR

No! No, you don't walk out of this room..!

**MUSIC: (45.) ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT Instrumental Reprise**

ELSA

Time to face facts, Edgar.

EDGAR

(Overlapping.)

This...this is nothing! It's already forgotten..!

ELSA

(Overlapping.)

Or is that no longer at part of your repertoire?

EDGAR

(Overlapping.)

You can't do this... You ca... (Realizing RONNY and MERYL are gone, in a whisper.) Meryl...

ELSA

How's this for copy? "What well-known show-biz string-puller has been tripped in a snare of his own making? The answer is no blind item, as this stunned devotee of Edgar Callahan can personally attest."

**Blackout.**

**Sc. 8      The alleyway. Late the same night.**

RONNY sits, bouncing GIL's rubber ball against the brick wall. GIL and MERYL appear at the entrance to the alley. MERYL gives GIL a last kiss and waits as GIL enters the alley. GIL watches RONNY for a moment and then wanders over to him. He carries a newspaper.

GIL

(Doesn't know how to start.)

D'ya hear..? The Dodgers won the Series.

RONNY

Gil.

GIL

Hodges drove in two runs with a single in the fourth and a sacrifice fly in the sixth. And they won. Their first title in.....?

RONNY

(Finishing GIL's sentence.)

...fifty-five seasons.

GIL

"Dodgers First."

RONNY

(Smiles.)

"Dodgers First..." Neighborhood must be going nuts.

GIL

It's like V.E. Day all over. (Pauses.) You made the front page too, you know.

GIL hands RONNY the newspaper. He **laughs** and reads...

RONNY

Page one. "An Elsa Orwell Exclusive." Att'a girl.

GIL

(Looks him right in the eye.)

What you did...

RONNY

(Trying to deflect the praise.)

Gil..!

GIL

Seriously, you laid it out plain! And that's for real.

RONNY

I guess.

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

GIL

And “for real” is all we ever get. (Pause.) So., we build on that., okay..? Something new?

RONNY

(Quietly.)

You will, Gil. Not me. That’s why I did it. You’re too good to go to waste.

GIL

We’re good together, my friend.

RONNY

Not me.

**MUSIC: (46.) WHATEVER IT TAKES Fifth Reprise**

RONNY

It’s time I took up shoe sales.

GIL

Ronny...

RONNY

I’ve also heard some very good things about truck farming.

GIL

Will you cut the crap?

YOU’RE THE “PUSH” AND I’M THE “PUNCH LINE...”

RONNY

Yeah, but., Gil., I’m not...

GIL

YOU WERE ALWAYS JUMPIN’ THE LUNCH LINE  
WHILE I WAS BUSY DUMPIN’ ON THE FOOD...

What say we work some front porches? There’s a hell of a lot of block parties going on out there.

**MUSIC: (47.) SOMETHING REAL**

RONNY

Gilly., I can’t do what you do! (Knocking on his head.) All I’ve got up here are “lines” -- worn-out snappers! (He adds...) That took me forever to memorize..!

GIL

Listen to me.,

**TOP OF THE HEAP**

8/1/07

GIL

RONNY, WE'RE FRIENDS.  
"FRIENDS" ARE FOR WHAT..?  
"GUTS-IN' IT THROUGH..?"  
"DOIN' SOME DEAL..?"  
OR TO HELP YOU TRY  
FOR **SOMETHING REAL.**

RONNY  
(Weakening.)

I dunno...

GIL

RONNY, I SWEAR..  
THERE'S SO MUCH MORE.  
FOR ONCE, PUSH THROUGH  
TO THE THINGS THAT YOU FEEL  
LOOK ME IN THE EYE..  
BUT, LEAVE OFF THE SPIEL..  
TRY **SOMETHING REAL.**

OTHER ACTORS IN THE CAST become visible in the wings and behind bits and pieces of the set, watching as the final scene plays out.

CAN'T YOU SEE..?  
YOU AND ME --  
WE DON'T NEED TO SET THE WORLD ABLAZE..!  
ME AND YOU..  
WE STAY TRUE --  
MAYBE SCREW AROUND A "COUPLE FEW" MORE DAYS..;  
THEN.., WHAT'S YOUR FAV'RITE PHRASE..?  
"FIND WHAT PLAYS..?"

RONNY, WE'RE BUMS --  
COMES WITH THE TURF.  
SURF AVENUE SQUARES --  
THERE'S YOUR APPEAL..!  
RONNY, SWEAR YOU'LL TRY..;  
'CAUSE YOU AIN'T THE GUY  
WHOSE LIKELY TO "KEEL."

**TRY SOMETHING REAL.**  
**TRY SOMETHING REAL.**  
**TRY SOMETHING REAL...**

OTHERS  
SOMETHING REAL...  
**TRY SOMETHING REAL.**  
**TRY SOMETHING REAL.**

GIL catches RONNY by the shoulder and they fall into an embrace -- forgiveness granted. Finally, RONNY breaks away.



RONNY

Okay. How 'bout this..:

COOCHIE enters. She and MERYL move toward THE BOYS.

RONNY

You remember back in Catholic School.., how the nuns used to use those little “clicky” noisemakers to direct us kids in church..?

GIL

(Knows exactly what he means!)

Like the ones in a box of Cracker Jacks.

RONNY

Exactly! (Demonstrating.) They go “click, click!” We’d all head for the pews. “Click, click!” We’d kneel. “Click, click!” Genuflect. You remember that..? To this day. when I hear the BMT clatter by.., I drop to my knees. (Looks to GIL.) Anything in that..?

COOCHIE

Oh. I get it. (Laughs.) I do! I get it!

RONNY, GIL and MERYL join in. The four of them form a tableau cast in silhouette as the alley rings with the **laughter** of an unseen audience.

**MUSIC: (48.) SOMETHING’S ON Epilogue Reprise**

ENSEMBLE

SEEMS LIKE, SOMEWHERE,  
THERE’S SOMEONE TROTTIN’ THE TRUTH OUT.  
SAVIN’ A FRIENDSHIP.  
MAKIN’ A DIFF’RENCE.  
INSTEAD OF PUSHING AND WORKING AND TELLING AND PITCHING AND  
WINDING AND TAKING AND SAVING AND...

The CAST begins to disappear into the wings. Finally, only EDGAR remains. He retrieves his hat and coat from a chair in the corner, takes a last look around and...

EDGAR

SPINNIN’ A PIE PLATE.

And with that, he doffs his hat and exits.

**CURTAIN.**

**MUSIC: (49.) BOWS Instrumental**