

A NEW MUSICAL COMEDY!



# MERTON OF THE MOVIES

BOOK BY

**DONALD BRENNER**

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY

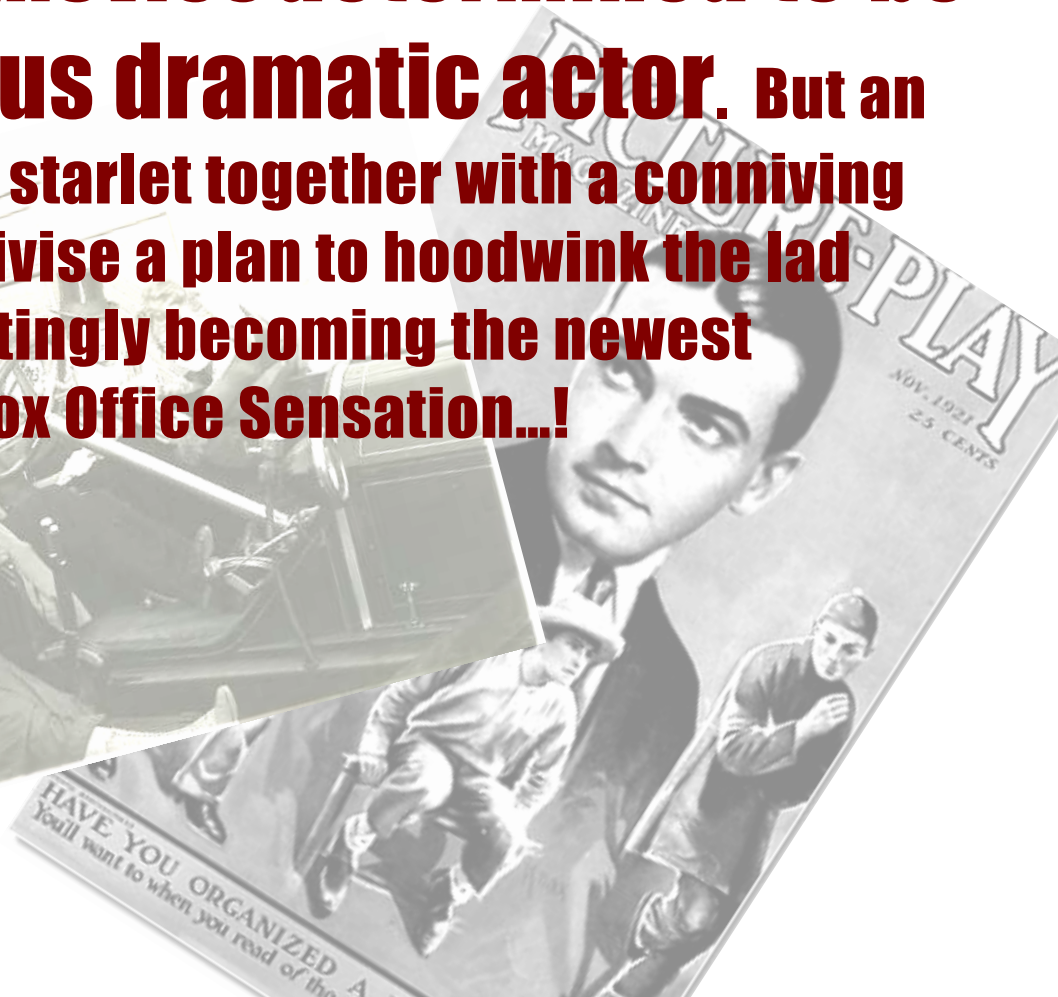
**DOUG KATSAROS**

Based on the play by **GEORGE S. KAUFMAN** and **MARC CONNELLY**  
and the novel by **HARRY LEON WILSON**



# **P**ICTURE THIS...

**A naive store clerk arrives in Hollywood during the rollicking era of silent movies determined to be a serious dramatic actor. But an ambitious starlet together with a conniving director devise a plan to hoodwink the lad into unwittingly becoming the newest Comedy Box Office Sensation...!**



# MERTON OF THE MOVIES

## THE CREATIVES



### DOUG KATSAROS

*(Music and Lyrics/Musical Direction)* Along with co-composing the recent viral Spidey Project, Doug

Katsaros conducted and arranged Broadway's **FOOTLOOSE**, orchestrated **THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW**, arranged **THE LIFE**, co-wrote and orchestrated **A...MY NAME IS ALICE**, co-wrote Hal Prince's **DIAMONDS**, conducted and appeared in Cy Coleman's **EXACTLY LIKE YOU**, composed **JUST SO, ORPHAN TRAIN, ABIE'S ISLAND ROSE**, and co-orchestrated and programmed **ALTAR BOYZ**. He is also the composer of the official theme song for the 125th Anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. He has played, sung & arranged for Gloria Estefan, KISS, Rod Stewart, Judy Collins, Peter Paul & Mary, Cher, Bon Jovi, LIVE, Frank Sinatra, Michael Bolton, Sinéad O'Connor, Donny Osmond, Aerosmith, B. B. King, Diane Schuur, Todd Rundgren, Richie Havens & others. Musical Director – **THE TOXIC AVENGER**. And yes, he is the man who wrote, "By Mennen."



### DONALD BRENNER

*(Bookwriter / Director)* New York Musical Theatre Festival: **THE MOST**

**RIDICULOUS THING YOU EVER HOID** (NYMF Award of Excellence). Off-Broadway: Emmy Award Winner Sherman Yellen's **DECEMBER FOOLS** and **MARCH MADNESS** (Abingdon Theatre), **A TALE OF TWO CITIES** (Mint Theatre). Lincoln Center: **ALI BABA**. City Center Encores!: **THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE** (Asst Director). Over seventy regional directing credits including: Jeffrey Hatcher's **WILDE GOES WEST** (Pioneer Theatre Olympic Play Commission Project), **THE GYM** (Berkshire Theatre Festival), **BEYOND GRAVITY** (New Jersey Rep), **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA** and **OLIVER!** Other regional credits include **PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!, CORPSE!, THE MATCHMAKER, RIDERS TO THE SEA** and **OUR TOWN**. His production of **1776** was named one of the "Top San Diego Productions of the Year" by PBS and earned him a "Best Direction of a Musical" Robby Award Nomination. Writer/ Director: **THE MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET** (Lucille Lortel Theatre) starring Tony Winners Debbie Gravitte and Chuck Cooper and **THE CHRISTMAS SWEATER** - Sold Out National Tour and Simulcast to 500 nationwide movie theatres.

For More Information -

[MertonOfTheMovies.com](http://MertonOfTheMovies.com)

## **CHARACTERS**

\* **MERTON GILL**

\* **FLIPS MONTAGUE**

\* **PLAYER 1** – Gashwiler / Mrs. Patterson / Jeff Baird / Stunt Pilot

\* **PLAYER 2** – Elmer/ Charley / Louie / Patron 3 / Cop 4

\* **PLAYER 3** – Sig Rosenblatt / Pickles / The Customer

\* **PLAYER 4** - Harry/ Esther Fitzroy / Mr. Holden / Waiter 1/ The Boss

\* **PLAYER 5** – Tom / Bobby / Waiter 2 / Patron 2 / Cop 3

\* **PLAYER 6** - Mrs. Leffingwell / Edna / Make-up Woman / The Mother / Patron 5

\* **PLAYER 7** - Vivian / Patron 4 / Cop 1 / Dance Hall Girl / Beulah

\* **PLAYER 8** - The Countess / Trixie / Patron 1 / Cop 2

**Musical Numbers**

**ACT I**

**Scene 1 – The Stock Room**

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE ..... *Merton*

**Scene 2 - Gashwiler’s Dry Goods**

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE - Reprise ..... *Merton*

**Scene 3 – The Casting Office**

NOTHING TODAY ..... *Harry, Vivian, Edna, Tom*

THE HAWAIIAN PRINCESS ..... *Flips*

**Scene 4 – Hollywood**

DEAR ELMER ..... *Merton*

**Scene 5 – The Casting Office**

STAGE FOUR ..... *Countess, Harry, Tom, Vivian, Edna, Merton*

**Scene 6 – Holden Studios Stage 4**

THE BLIGHT OF BROADWAY ..... *Flips, Harry, Tom, Vivian, Edna*

FIVE DOLLARS ..... *Merton, Esther Fitzroy, Rosenblatt, Charlie*

**Scene 7 – Hollywood**

SACRIFICE FOR ART ..... *Vivian, Tom, Edna and Harry*

**Scene 8 – The Set of “The Hazards of Hortense”**

WING WALKING ..... *Instrumental*

SLEEPY EYES ..... *Flips*

**Scene 9 – The Projection Room**

A SERIOUS PICTURE ..... *Merton, Flips, Jeff Baird*

**ACT II**

**Scene 1 – On the Set of “Hearts Ablaze!”**

BRILLIANCE ..... *ALL*  
THE CHASE ..... *ALL*  
SWEETHEART ..... *Merton*  
ROMEO..... *Flips*

**Scene 2 – A Private Dining Room at The Silver Pelican**

THE SILVER PELICAN ..... *The Waiters*  
FOR YOU..... *Merton*

**Scene 3 – The Million Dollar Theatre, Hollywood**

**Scene 4 – On Screen**

HEARTS ABLAZE! ..... *Instrumental*

**Scene 5 – The Million Dollar Theatre, Hollywood**

WHO’S THAT FUNNY GUY? ..... *The Patrons*  
SHE ..... *Merton and Esther Fitzroy*

**Scene 6 – Miss Montague’s Bungalow**

ROMEO - Rep..... *Flips*  
FOR YOU – Reprise ..... *Merton*  
SLEEPY EYES – Reprise ..... *Flips*

**Scene 7 – Hollywood**

STAGE FOUR - Reprise ..... *ALL*

# ACT I

## *The Action Takes Place in 1920*

*A silent movie title card reads:*

**"Dirty Work at the Border"**

*CURTAIN UP on the stock room behind Gashweiler's Emporium. The stockboy, MERTON GILL, is standing between two store mannequins. The female figure wears a checked gingham dress. The male dummy has a small tip-curved black moustache. As Merton acts out the scene, he moves behind and between the two dummies.*

*Anticipatory Music under:*

**MERTON**

*(as the Bandit)*

*Aye Carumba! My lovely seniorita! You will come with me!*

*(as the Damsel)*

*Have you no mercy? I loathe and despise you!*

*(as the Bandit)*

*Ha! Seniorita, you are a beautiful wildcat! But I, Snake le Vasquez, will tame you! Mwa ha ha ha!*

*(as the Damsel)*

*Oh, God in heaven, is there no help at hand?*

*(as the Hero)*

*Am I too late, Miss St. Clair?*

*(as the Bandit)*

*Sapristi! You!*

*(as the Hero)*

*Me! Buck Benson!*

*(as the Damsel)*

*Darling!*

**GASHWILER'S VOICE**

**MERTON!!!**

**MERTON**

*(oblivious, as the Hero, to the Male Dummy)*

*Now, viper, you shall fight me! Man to Man!*

*(Merton picks up the male dummy.)*

**GASHWILER'S VOICE**

*(More insistent)*

MERTON!!!

**MERTON**

And we shall see whose body goes over yonder cliff!

**GASHWILER'S VOICE**

*(finally)*

MERTON GILL put that dummy down!

*MUSIC out. Merton hurriedly puts the dummy down.*

**MERTON**

*(as himself)*

Yes, Mr. Gashwiler.

*Gashwiler enters.*

**GASHWILER**

What in the sacred name of time are you meanin' to do with that dummy?!

**MERTON**

*(Innocently)*

Why, whatever do you---?

**GASHWILER**

Play actin' all by yerself back here in the stock room. What am I payin' you five dollars a week for? And on top of everything else, you take off all last weekend --- during canning season, no less !

**MERTON**

Mr. Gashwiler, I told you: I - I had to go to Peoria last Saturday. For my Aunt Minnie's funeral.

**GASHWILER**

Well, if you got any other relatives thinkin' a dyin, ya might ask them to kindly remember I'm tryin' to run a business!

**MERTON**

I'll mention it to them, sir.

**GASHWILER**

And now Mrs. Leffingwell shows up!

**MERTON**

I'll take care of her right away, sir.

**GASHWILER**

Never you mind! Put those dummies away where they belong. Then get that crate of pickled beets on the shelf out by the cash register.

**MERTON**

Yes, sir...

**GASHWILER**



And remember: no more skylarkin' with those dummies!

*He begins to exit, stops, turns*

And, for gosh's sake, stir your stumps!

*Gashwiler exits into the stoe.*

**SONG – "CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE" > TRACK 2 <**

**MERTON**

"SKYLARKIN!"

THE MAN CAN BARELY FORMULATE A SENTENCE.  
YET, HE STIFLES MY AMBITIONS AND IDEALS.  
SOON COMES THE DAY HE'LL WALLOW IN REPENTANCE.  
SOON HE'LL KNOW HOW HUMBLE "HUMBLE" FEELS.

MERTON GILL I MAY BE HERE IN SIMSBURY, ILLINOIS,  
BUT SOON ENOUGH A BRAND NEW MAN  
WILL BLOSSOM FROM THIS BOY...

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE!

THE VERY NAME ALONE MAKES SCHOOLGIRLS FAINT, MAKES GROWN MEN  
JEALOUS, AND GIVES OLDER WOMEN PAUSE.

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE!

THE GREATEST ACTOR, GREATEST LOVER, GREATEST OF THE GREAT – CAN  
YOU NOT HEAR THE GRAND APPLAUSE?

EVERY GIRL WILL ASK MY FAVOR  
WHICH I'LL GRANT AS THEY ALL SIGH.  
WHILE EACH FILM IN WHICH I STAR  
WILL FORCE THE POPULOUS TO CRY.  
FOR CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,  
CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,  
CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE – THAT IS I.

*Esther Fitzroy enters with her reporter's notebook.*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And today, your humble reporter Esther Fitzroy has the pleasure of interviewing Hollywood's newest star, the heroic Clifford Armytage!

**MERTON**

Suppose we talk only of my work ---

**ESTHER FITZROY**

--- he said ---

**MERTON**

The work alone is what counts --- as I well learned in my correspondence course in film acting.

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And how we all adore your work with your perennial co-star, Beulah Baxter!

**MERTON**

Beulah Baxter is a magnificent actress! I'm honored to work with her here at Holden Studios.

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Ah, yes! Holden Studios! The most respected movie makers in Hollywood! Why then, I wonder, does such a serious film studio condescend to produce those slapstick Buckeye Comedies?

**MERTON**

*(Vehemently:)*

I hate the Buckeye Comedies! I've told Mr. Holden himself that the Buckeye Comedians' heavy horseplay debases a great art!

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And yet, this reporter found that Clifford Armytage has a supremely appealing courtesy for everyone he encounters. But most of all, for his dear wife...

**MERTON**

But she is more than a wife --- she is my best pal, and, I may add, my severest critic!

**GASHWILER**

*(Calling from offstage)*

*Merton!* We got a store full o' customers out here!

*Esther disappears.*

**MERTON**

Yes, Mr. Gashwiler.... I'm coming.

GOD IN HEAVEN HEAR MY PLEA  
FIND THE ACTOR INSIDE OF ME  
MAKE HIM STRONG AND MAKE HIM GOOD  
AND BRING HIM OUT TO HOLLYWOOD!

STEER HIM FROM MERE COMEDY -  
LET THE KING OF DRAMA BE...

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE...

...MUST SPEND HIS TIME REHEARSING HIS DRAMATICAL EXPRESSIONS FOR  
THE PLANS THAT HE HAS GOT.

*He quickly moves from emotion to emotion creating a new  
face with each word:*

Hate - Fear - Love - Despair!

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE...

...WILL BE LEAVING WITH THE MONEY HE HAS CLEVERLY BEEN STORING  
UNDERNEATH HIS LITTLE COT.

NO MORE SWEEPING OFF THE COUNTERS!

NO MORE WORKING NIGHTS TIL TEN!  
NO MORE DAYS OF SERVING CUSTOMERS,  
THEN SERVING THEM AGAIN!

NO MORE WAITING FOR ADVENTURE,  
FOR IT'S "NOW" INSTEAD OF "WHEN!"

Oh, God, for Jesus' sake, make me...

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,  
CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,  
CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,  
AMEN!

*Blackout! Lights up on the store...*

**GASHWILER**

Now Miz' Leffin'well, what is it you came in for'?

*Merton enters the store and begins stocking the shelves  
with the cans.*

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

A pound of butter and a gallon of kerosene, please, Mr. Gashwiler.

*Elmer pops into the store and hands Merton an envelope.*

**ELMER**

Say, Mert! I got your new publicity shots!

**MERTON**

Gee, thanks, Elmer!

**ELMER**

I gotta say myself: they sure do make you look like Mr. Harold Parmalee!

**MERTON**

How much do I owe ya?

**ELMER**

What kind of best friend do you think I am?! But when you become a big Hollywood star, just remember your ole' pal, Elmer Schnupp!

**MERTON**

Oh, I will!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

Merton, sorry to hear about the death in your family.

**MERTON**

Thanks, Miz' Leffingwell.

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

The world is full of troubles. But when I have a bad day, Mr. Leffingwell always suggests that we

take in the picture show. He knows how much I adore those Buckeye Comedies...!

*Dark Musical Sting!*

*Merton's head snaps towards her.*

**MERTON**

*(Incredulous)*

*What?!*

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

*(Oblivious)*

All those pratfalls and pie fights! Don't you love them, too, Merton...?

*Dark Musical Sting!*

**MERTON**

*(Blurting out)*

No!

**GASHWILER**

*(Warning)*

Boy...

**MERTON**

What kind of serious actor would pander to appear in such distasteful films?

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

Well, they're a sight better than any of those Beulah Baxter scenarios!

*Dark Musical Sting!*

*Merton takes a step towards Mrs. Leffingwell.*

**MERTON**

*Wha-wha-what?!*

**ELMER**

Watch it, Mert!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

Makin' us think she's doin' all those courageous feats in "The Hazards of Hortense!" That's a double!

*Dark Musical Sting!*

**MERTON**

*(Exploding)*

*That's a lie!*

**ELMER**

Oh, Lordy ---!

**GASHWILER**

Merton!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

What?!

**MERTON**

When Beulah Baxter films "The Hazards of Hortense" serials, she does all of her own feats of bravery herself!

**GASHWILER**

Down, boy!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

How do you know?!

**MERTON**

She told me so!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

When did you ever speak to Beulah Baxter?

**MERTON**

Last Saturday!

**GASHWILER**

What?!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

Where?!

**MERTON**

She gave a personal appearance in Peoria last Saturday! And when she spoke – I could tell she was speaking straight to me!

**GASHWILER**

I thought you were at your Aunt Minnie's funeral last Saturday!

**ELMER**

Uh oh.

**MERTON**

I – I ---!

**GASHWILER**

Boy – did you go to your Aunt's funeral last weekend or not?!

**MERTON**  
*(Defiant)*

No, Mr. Gashwiler!

**GASHWILER**

*What?!*

**MERTON**

I went to see Miss Beulah Baxter!

**GASHWILER**

Leavin' me here with a store full of customers --- in the middle of canning season?!

**MERTON**

And I'm not sorry, Mr. Gashwiler! *Not sorry at all!*

**GASHWILER**

Then Merton Gill you are *finished!*

**ELMER**

Finished?!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

Oh, my!

**MERTON**

You're firing me?!

**GASHWILER**

*Yes!* What do you say to that?!

**MERTON**

I say, "Thank you, Mr. Gashwiler!"

**GASHWILER**

*What?!*

**ELMER**

The boy's lost his mind!

**MERTON**

I can just make the 6:27 when she pulls out tonight! I'll be in Hollywood, California by Tuesday morning!

**MRS. LEFFINGWELL**

Hollywood?!

**GASHWILER**

*Get outta here, boy!*

**MERTON**

Oh, I'm gettin' out, Mr. Gashwiler! I am gettin' out for *good!*

**ELMER**

*(Calling out)*

*Don't forget to write, buddy!*

*And Merton leaves as the scene changes.*

**MERTON**

GOD ABOVE, TONIGHT I'M FREE!  
MERTON GILL FADES TO MEMORY!  
SURELY AS I BID GOOD BYE,  
AN ACTOR'S NAME WILL LIGHT THE SKY...

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,  
CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,  
CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE!

*As he runs offstage:*

THAT IS I!

*Blackout! Travelling music! The lights come up on...*

**SCENE 2 – HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE**

**"Nothing Today, Dear"**

*A woman sits at a desk bearing a sign  
proclaimin "Casting Director." A door behind her leads  
to the studio lot. There are several chairs, now filled with  
Hollywood hopefuls of various types, awaiting their turn  
at stardom.*

**SONG – "NOTHING TODAY" > TRACK 3 <**

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the telephone)*

Good morning, Holden Studios Casting Office! No, nothing today, dear.

*MUSIC turns dour.*

**HARRY**

SHE SAYS THE SAME THING ALL DAY LONG.

**EDNA**

I HAVEN'T WORKED A DAY SINCE JUNE.

**TOM**

I DID A CAMEO LAST WEEK.

**VIVIAN**

ME TOO!

**ALL**

BUT NOTHING TODAY!

**HARRY**

THEY SAID MY ACCENT WAS ALL WRONG.

**EDNA**

THAT BEULAH BAXTER PIC STARTS SOON...

**TOM**

MAYBE SHE'LL KISS ME ON THE CHEEK.

**VIVIAN**

ME TOO!

**ALL**

BUT NOTHING TODAY!

AS FAR AS I CAN TELL THERE'S SIMPLY  
NOTHING TODAY, DEAR  
UNLESS YOU'RE THE STAR, THERE'S  
NO REASON TO STAY, DEAR.  
BEING IN THE MOVIES  
IS ALWAYS WORTH THE FUSS  
BUT THERE'S NOTHING TODAY – FOR US.

*Merton enters and looks about.*

**MERTON**

Excuse me, is this the casting office?

**HARRY**

What's it look like, Junior!

*The telephone rings.*

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the telephone)*

Holden Studios Casting Office, good morning. No, dear, nothing today.

*Merton, intimidated by the surroundings, quickly sits by himself.*

**HARRY**

THIS AIN'T NO WAY TO LIVE A LIFE!

**TOM**

MY WHOLE CAREER HAS HIT THE SKIDS!



**EDNA**

I COULD WAIT TABLES DOWN THE STREET...

**VIVIAN**

ME, TOO!

**ALL**

BUT NOTHING TODAY.

**HARRY**

WHAT AM I GONNA TELL THE WIFE?

**EDNA**

WHAT ARE WE GONNA TELL THE KIDS?

**TOM**

I GOT MY RENT, I GOTTA EAT...

**VIVIAN**

ME TOO!

**ALL**

BUT NOTHING TODAY!

AS FAR AS I CAN TELL THERE'S SIMPLY  
NOTHING TODAY, DEAR.  
THERE'S NOTHING TO WORK ON.  
NO PAY ON THE WAY, DEAR.  
BEING IN THE MOVIES  
IS AS GLAMOUROUS AS CAN BE.  
BUT THERE'S NOTHING TODAY – FOR ME.

*The telephone rings. Merton rises and crosses slowly to  
the Casting Director's desk. Meanwhile...*

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the telephone)*

Good morning, Holden Studios Casting Office! No, nothing today. Yes, perhaps next week. Good  
bye.

*(To Merton)*

Yes...?

**MERTON**

Good morning, Ma'am. I wish to act in the pictures at this particular studio.

**EDNA**

You 'n' me both, sonny!

*The others laugh.*

**MERTON**

And, of course, I would be glad to accept a small part --- to begin with.

**COUNTESS**

*(dryly)*

That's mighty big of ya, sweetie.

**MERTON**

And I am prepared to work hard -- in order to give the public something fine and worthwhile.

**HARRY**

Somebody oughta give the Boy Scout his goodie badge!

*The others laugh.*

**COUNTESS**

What's your name, honey?

**MERTON**

*(As practiced)*

Clifford Armytage!

**COUNTESS**

That's some warm name!

**MERTON**

My real name is Merton Gill. I thought I'd better change it to something that sounded a little more—well, you know.

**COUNTESS**

What'd've I seen ya in?

**MERTON**

Nothing... *yet!*

**COUNTESS**

Well, it's business as usual here.

**TOM**

I HAVEN'T SEEN A SCRIPT IN MONTHS.

**COUNTESS**

*(To Merton)*

You're registered with the Service Bureau, ain't you?

**EDNA**

MY PARTS JUST WIND UP ON THE FLOOR!

**MERTON**

Well, no. They might send me any place.

**HARRY**

I HOPE THE SKIN ON THIS KID'S THICK...

**VIVIAN**

ME TOO.

**ALL**

CAUSE THERE'S NOTHING TODAY!  
THERE'S NO REASON TO STAY –  
WE SHOULD ALL GO AWAY ...

*They all stand –pause.*

**VIVIAN**

BUT WHAT IF...

**ALL**

OK!

*They all sit.*

**MERTON**

I only want to work at this studio because I want to act in the company of Miss Beulah Baxter!

**COUNTESS**

Baxter, eh...?

**MERTON**

I don't know of anybody on the screen whose ideals are as fine as hers. Do you?

**COUNTESS**

Nope. She's got the finest set of ideals on the lot.

*The telephone rings.*

Excuse me.

*(Into the telephone)*

Good morning, Holden Studios Casting Office....

**ALL**

WELL, AS FAR AS I CAN TELL THERE'S SIMPLY  
NOTHING TODAY, DEAR.  
THERE'S NOTHING TO WORK ON...

**VIVIAN**

WE'RE ALL GOING GRAY HERE.

**ALL**

BEING IN THE MOVIES  
IS EXQUISITE, YES IT'S TRUE  
BUT THERE'S NOTHING TODAY –

*(to Merton)*

FOR YOU! NOTHING TODAY!

*The Countess hangs up.*

**COUNTESS**

Now, let me tell ya, Merton ---

*Flips Montague enters. She is not unattractive in appearance, though her features are far off the screen-heroine model. She is free and easy in her ways, revealing a self-confidence that almost amounts to impudence.*

**FLIPS**

What'd'ya say, Troupers?!

*Merton is immediately taken aback by this creature's free and easy manner.*

**HARRY**

Hey, Flips!

**EDNA**

Flips, dear!

**VIVIAN**

Hiya, doll!

**FLIPS**

How's things with you, Viv?

**VIVIAN**

I had two days over at United doing some boardwalk stuff!

**FLIPS**

Good for you!

**EDNA**

I could 'a' had a day there. But the director said I wasn't the bathing suit type.

**FLIPS**

Don't artists get the razz, though? How's by you, Harry?

**HARRY**

Had a day with Hugo over at Bigart.

**FLIPS**

Aw, he'd spend a week in the hot place to save a thin dime. Don't get your lemon in his squeezer!

**TOM**

What about you, Flips?

**FLIPS**

I could've gone on in a harem tank scene over at Consolidated.

**EDNA**

So why didn't ya?

**FLIPS**

They wanted me to dress the same as a fish. A girl's gotta draw the line somewhere. And me having the only freckles left in Hollywood. Ain't I the little prairie flower, growing wilder every hour?

*They all laugh good-naturedly.*

**TOM**

Look at my new stills! They make me look like Rudy Valentino.

**FLIPS**

Ooooo! Lemme see!

*They all gather around to examine the photos.*

*Anticipatory MUSIC under:*

**MERTON**

*(Fixated on Flips. To the Countess:)*

Who... who *IS* she?!

**COUNTESS**

Flips Montague – she's jazzy, dontcha think?

**MERTON**

*(A bit overwhelmed)*

I...I don't know *what* I think. I've never seen anyone behave like her. I think she's ...

*At last, firmly:*

...a bit too free and easy in her ways!

**COUNTESS**

Well, fill out this card with your name and address.

*Anticipatory MUSIC changes key:*

**FLIPS**

*(Staring at Merton)*

Who's he?

**VIVIAN**

New kid.

**HARRY**

He'll learn.

**EDNA**

Soon enough.

**FLIPS**

*(Continuing to stare)*

Kinda cute...

**TOM**

If ya like hayseeds.

**FLIPS**

Maybe I do...

*MUSIC out.*

**COUNTESS**

Hiya, Flips!

**FLIPS**

Hello, Countess! Say, listen, can you give the camera a little peek at me today?

**ALL**

"Nothing today, dear."

**FLIPS**

*(Laughing)*

Well, just thought I'd ask.

*Sig Rosenblatt enters, absorbed in some inner problem,  
and heads for the door leading to the lot.*

**VIVIAN**

Oh! Good morning, Mr. Rosenblatt!

**HARRY**

*Herr Director!*

**TOM**

Sire!

**EDNA**

Hello, Sig!

**FLIPS**

*(Calling out)*

Oh, Mr. Rosenblatt, one moment please!

*Rosenblatt glances up in annoyance. Flips flits across the room.*

**ROSENBLATT**

What is it, girlie?

***SONG – "THE HAWAIIAN PRINCESS" > TRACK 4 <***

**FLIPS**

YOU GOTTA LISTEN, MR. ROSENBLATT,  
I GOT A GREAT IDEA.  
BUT UP TILL NOW IT'S BEEN INSIDE MY HAT...  
I NEED THE WORLD'S MOST GIFTED MAN  
TO HANDLE THIS TORTILLA,  
AND THE WORLD'S MOST GIFTED MAN IS ROSENBLATT!

IF A STORY'S GOT SOME MERIT,  
HE'S THE ONE THAT CAN DETECT IT  
AND GET EVERY SINGLE NUANCE  
WHERE THE OTHERS WOULD HAVE WRECKED IT!

—but of course if you're busy just now—

*She starts to walk away. The director thaws ever so slightly.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Yeah, I'm busy alright... But whatja got...?

**FLIPS**

*(Returning to him)*

Thank you, Mr. Rosenblatt. It starts off kind of like this. You see,

I'M A BEAUTIFUL HAWAIIAN ISLAND PRINCESS;  
THAT MEANS PALM TREES, LIKE YOU USED IN "ISLAND LUST"!

*She pauses, gazing aloft.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Yeah, yeah! Go on!

**FLIPS**

AND MY FATHER,

*She drags Rosenblatt over to Harry, who jumps up and assumes the role of "The King."*

**FLIPS**

--- HE'S THE OLD KING MAUNA LOA ---

**HARRY**

*(As "The King")*

'Tis a far, far better thing than I have ever ---

**FLIPS**

--- HAS A HEART ATTACK, AND DIES AND TURNS TO DUST.

**HARRY**

*(Clutching his gut melodramatically)*

Aww, ya got me!

*He "dies." Stepping over Harry's body, she drags Rosenblatt to the next "scene."*

**FLIPS**

AS HIS DAUGHTER I GET ALL OF HIS POSSESSIONS!  
WHICH IS THIRTY FIVE VOLCANOES AND A CUE.

**ROSENBLATT**

*(Blankly)*

A billiard cue?

**FLIPS**

Yes.

AND EVERY MORNING, IN THE HOT HAWAIIAN LAVA  
I GET TO DO WHAT ONE DOES NOT NORMALLY DO - WITH A CUE.

**ROSENBLATT**

You do?

**FLIPS**

IT'S TRUE!

**ROSENBLATT**

What do you do?

**FLIPS**

I'M TELLING YOU!

*She backs him up into the next "scene."*

**FLIPS**

NOW THERE'S A VILLIAN WHO IS DESPERATELY WEALTHY.



*Tom leaps up and assumes the role of the villain, twirling an imaginary mustache.*

**TOM**

Myah-ha-ha!

**FLIPS**

HE OWNS A UKELELE PLANT AND TWO RESORTS.

**TOM**

*(Suddenly strumming an actual ukulele)*

PLUNKA PLINKA PLANKA PLINKA PLANKA PLUNK

**FLIPS**

AND HE USES ALL HIS EVIL TO SEDUCE ME!

**TOM**

*("Hypnotizing" her)*

You are getting very sleepy...!

**FLIPS**

BUT HE'S FOILED BY MY FIANCÉ, HERMAN SCHWARTZ.

*Flips grabs Merton and pulls him into the scenario. He is wildly embarrassed.*

**MERTON**

Oh, no, please!

**FLIPS**

--- He's a local native!

**TOM**

Curses!

*Merton struggles in vain to distance himself from the goings on but is carried along, pushed through the antics of the growing crowd of actors. HE is spun by Mr. Rosenblatt.*

**MERTON**

Oh, hello, Mr. Rosenblatt --- it's an honor to meet you, sir!

**FLIPS**

NOW IT TURNS OUT THAT MY HERMAN'S AN INVENTOR.  
AND HIS FOLDING UKELELE GETS APPLAUSE.

*VIVIAN grabs Tom's ukulele and slams it into Merton's unsuspecting hands.*

**VIVIAN & MERTON**

*(as if they are folding the ukulele)*

FLIPA FLIPA FLIPA FLIPA FLIPA FLIP

*The others clap! ("Well, will you look at that!")*

**FLIPS**

SO THE VILLAIN GETS HIS HIRED ISLAND HENCHMEN

**EDNA**

*(Becoming the Hawaiian Henchmen)*

HULA! HULA! HULA!

*VIVIAN drags MERTON away, again past Mr. Rosenblatt.*

**FLIPS**

TO SHOVE ME AND HERM DOWN KILAUEA'S JAWS!

*FLIPS grabs MERTON and they "fall" uncontrollably.*

**EDNA**

*(As if watching the two fallen bodies go into the volcano)*

Look out below!

**FLIPS**

BUT THERE'S A SECRET KEY THAT'S TIED AROUND MY ANKLE,  
WHERE MY FATHER PUT IT WHEN I WAS A TOT.

**HARRY** *(As the father)*

Never take it off!

**FLIPS**

SO WE FIDDLE WITH THE TOP OF THAT VOLCANO.

*She mimes all of this, all the while dragging Merton along with her.*

**EDNA**

*(Making a sound effect)*

Creek!

**FLIPS**

TILL IT SPITS US OUT!  
(WHICH IS GREAT, CAUSE IT WAS GETTING REALLY HOT!)

**TOM**

Get them!

**MERTON**

Oh no!

**FLIPS**

THEN THE HENCHMEN GET US CORNERED, AND WE'RE HANGING FROM "THE CLIFF OF CERTAIN DEATH" – IT'S QUITE A JAM!

**TOM**

Mya-ha-ha!

**FLIPS**

WHEN ALONG COMES MY OLD NURSEMAID DOWN BELOW US

**EDNA**

*(Playing an ancient old woman)*

Like me very own child, she was!

**FLIPS**

--- AND WE FALL,

*A pause as they "fall."*

TO LAND INSIDE HER HANDY PRAM.

**HARRY**

*(as a baby)*

Waaahhh!

**ROSENBLATT**

But what did you do with the pool cue?

**FLIPS**

THERE'S A COUPLE OTHER DETAILS TO THE STORY,  
AND YOU KNOW I'M ALWAYS OPEN TO SUGGESTION...

*Mr. Rosenblatt starts to exit.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Thanks. I'll give it some thought.

**MERTON**

I've got some stills that will give you an idea of the range of parts I am prepared to play.

*Flips quickly follows.*

**FLIPS**

But wait, Mr. Rosenblatt! I ain't told you about the big finale with the kangaroos and the calypso dancers!

*He exits thru the door.*

**FLIPS**

*(Calling after him)*

YOU'RE NOT ANGRY WITH ME, ARE YOU, MR. RO-SEN-BLATT?

*The door slams behind Rosenblatt.*

**FLIPS**

WELL, YOU THINK HE MIGHT HAVE ANSWERED SOMEONE'S QUESTION.

*Everyone (except Merton, of course) laughs uproariously.  
Flips turns to the Countess.*

**FLIPS**

Well, I hear they're shootin' some tenement stuff up at Consolidated.

*Flips turns to Merton.*

Thanks for bein' my fiancée, Kid. See ya 'round.

*She slaps Merton on the butt. Flips exits. Merton returns  
to the Countess, trying to recover his dignity.*

**MERTON**

That Miss Montague makes my head spin! And right there in front of Sigmund Rosenblatt! It's not the way a serious actress like Beulah Baxter would behave.

**COUNTESS**

You've taken a shine to Baxter, have ya?

**MERTON**

She's magnificent! And I am prepared to work with her at any time— I even completed a correspondence course in film acting from the Genral Film Production Company. In three weeks!

**COUNTESS**

Look, sweetie: your folks must be worried sick about ya.

**MERTON**

They both passed a few years back.

**COUNTESS**

But a good lookin' boy like you must have a sweetheart back home pinin' for 'em.

**MERTON**

Well, I did have a girlfriend. Edwina May Pulver. But the Pulvers moved away last year.

**COUNTESS**

*(teasing)*

J'ever kiss 'er...?!

**MERTON**

Once... But I was so nervous I never knew if I'd kissed her on the cheek or on the nose.

**COUNTESS**

Well, come back next week – maybe things will pick up.

*The telephone rings.*

Excuse me.

*(Into the telephone)*

Good morning, Holden Studios Casting Office! No, nothing today. Good bye.

*The Casting Office and the Countess fade into black as...*

**SCENE 3 – HOLLYWOOD**

*Merton crosses and sits on a park bench and takes out a pad and pencil. A silent film title card appears:*

**The Actor's Struggle**

**SONG – "DEAR ELMER" > TRACK 5 <**

**MERTON**

Dear Elmer,

HERE I AM,  
SAFE AND SOUND OUT IN HOLLYWOOD  
AND MY LIFE HERE IS MOSTLY GOOD.  
THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS TO SHARE, IT'S ALL EXCITING.

I'VE A ROOM  
JUST A MILE FROM THE STUDIO.  
IT'S A SWEET LITTLE PLACE TO GO  
AND THE LANDLADY'S KIND AND FAIR AND SO INVITING.

*Mrs. Patterson appears: she is far from being either "kind" or "inviting"...*

**MRS. PATTERSON**

Now, I want to be very clear about the money. It must be paid each week. *Strictly in advance!*

*Merton nods and crosses to the Casting Office.*

**MERTON**

TWICE A DAY  
I TAKE NOTE OF THE CASTING CHARTS.  
I CAN PICK FROM THE RIPEST PARTS  
AND THE COUNTESS BEHIND THE DESK MAKES SURE I'M CARED FOR...

*The Countess shakes her head and the title card reads:*

**"Nothing Today, Dear!"**

BY THE WAY,  
EVERY ACTOR I'VE MET IS JAKE,  
SAVE FOR ONE WHO I CAN NOT TAKE;  
IT'S A GIRL WHO I MUST ADMIT I'M NOT PREPARED FOR.

*Flips is entertaining a bevy of laughing actors when she suddenly spots Merton staring at her.*

**FLIPS**

*(Teasing:)*

Well, if it ain't my ole' fiancée, Herman Schwartz...! Hiya, Kid...!

*The actors giggle. Merton crosses quickly to the Countess.*

**MERTON**

*(to the Countess)*

So free and easy in her ways! What kind of people raised her?

**COUNTESS**

Flips' folks were vaudevillians.

*Meanwhile, Flips hasn't taken her eyes off of Merton.*

**FLIPS**

*(To Edna)*

What's the kid's name?

**EDNA**

"Clifford Armytage." The Countess calls him Merton.

**MERTON**

*(to the Countess)*

Well, her behavior isn't proper.

**COUNTESS**

Flips had a couple of bad years. Got engaged to a stunt guy – Billy – He taught her the ropes.

**FLIPS**

*(To Edna, still gazing at Merton)*

You hardly ever see a fella like that out here. All fresh and honest-looking...

**COUNTESS**

*(to Merton)*

Billy could jump through a plate glass window and walk away without a scratch. Then one day he's crossin' the street and gets hit by an ice wagon. Right there in front of Flips.

**EDNA**

*(to Flips)*

You gettin' sweet on the Kid, Flips...?!

**FLIPS**

I been down lovers lane, Edna. It ain't my kinda neighborhood.

*Flips and Edna exit. Mrs. Patterson appears.*

**THREE WEEKS LATER**

**MERTON**

EVERY WEEK  
I ADJUST TO MY NEW ROUTINE,

**MRS. PATTERSON**

Five dollars....

*He puts a five dollar bill into her outstretched palm. She exits.*

**MERTON**

GEARING UP FOR THE SILVER SCREEN;  
IT'S THE LIFE THAT I DREAMED OF BACK IN OLD SIMSBURY.

WHO'DA THOUGHT  
I'D BE LIVING THE LIFE OF EASE?  
I'M SO GRATEFUL, I'M ON MY KNEES.  
COULDN'T BE ANY BETTER, ELMER, DON'T YOU WORRY.

*Vivian enters the casting office carrying an infant.  
Merton and Flips observe Vivian's interaction with the  
Countess.*

**VIVIAN**

Say "Good morning" to the Countess, Toots. I'm sure you got somethin' for Toots and me 'cause its our birthday --- both born on the same day! Any little thing will help --- how 'bout it...?

**COUNTESS**

Sorry, Viv – its business as usual...

*Vivian exits sadly with the baby.*

**FLIPS**

*(Confiding to Merton)*

As usual, *rotten*. I ain't had but three days in over a month.

*Merton looks at her for a moment. Then, having made a  
decision, looks away and confesses.*

**MERTON**

I haven't even had one.

*Flips looks at him, concerned.*

**FLIPS**

Say, that's tough. Things ain't been this bad since the middle of the war. But I'll let ya in on somethin': I don't even wanna be no lady actor.

**MERTON**

*What?! But dontcha love the movies?!*

**FLIPS**

Heart and soul. But I wanna be on the other side.

**MERTON**

Doin' what?

**FLIPS**

Maybe writin'. Maybe even producin'...

**MERTON**

But you're a *girl!*

**FLIPS**

That ain't stoppin' Mary Pickford.

**MERTON**

Really?

**FLIPS**

But she got Fairbanks and Griffith behind her. Every time I ask one of these guys, it's the same story --- "We needja doublin' for this one, fillin' in for a laugh." Chicken crap!

**MERTON**

*(Soberly)*

Oh...

**FLIPS**

Sorry, Kid. I gotta get to Movietone and try for a day's pay.

*She exits. Merton watches her go in awe. Mrs. Patterson appears.*

**MRS. PATTERSON**

Your rent, sir...?

**MERTON**

Oh, of course, Mrs. Patterson.... Five dollars, wasn't it...?

*He hesitatingly offers his last bill. She snatches it from him and exits imperiously.*

<b>Rock Bottom!</b>
---------------------

**MERTON**

OH!  
WHAT I'D GIVE TO TELL EVERYTHING.  
BUT THE TRUTH IS SO HARD TO TELL  
AND IT MISSES THE PROMISES OF FAME AND GLORY.  
OH!  
IF I LIVE TO TELL EVERYTHING,  
THAT WOULD MEAN I SURVIVED THIS HELL.  
WOULDN'T THAT BE SWELL!  
AND IT MAKES A MORE COMPELLING STORY.

**FLIPS**

Hey, Kid ---



*Merton turns to her.*

**FLIPS**

You take the streetcar out here?

**MERTON**

Yes.

**FLIPS**

Don't take the R line. It's too crowded and takes longer. Take the W....

*Merton stares at her. Then...*

**MERTON**

...OK...

*He turns to go.*

**FLIPS**

And don't bother comin' out here on Fridays.

*Merton turns back to her.*

**FLIPS**

You'll save the carfare. All the casting calls are in by Thursday afternoon.

**MERTON**

*(taken aback)*

Thank --- thank you, Miss Montague...

**FLIPS**

Anytime, Kid....

*She exits. He watches her go.*

**MERTON**

Well. I may have been too harsh in my assessment of Miss Montague. Her heart is in the right place. And that must count for somethin' in Hollywood...

*He examines his now empty wallet, shaking it vainly upside down. He sits back down on the park bench.*

Well, Elmer,

I MUST GO...  
TIME TO HEAD TO A NICE CAFÉ.  
IT'S BEEN SUCH AN EXCITING DAY  
AND I'M HEARING THE SOUND OF MY BIG PILLOW CALLING.

SOON YOU'LL KNOW  
I'M A MOVIE STAR MILLIONAIRE!  
'TILL THAT HAPPENS, WELL, YOU TAKE CARE,  
AS I KNOW YOU WILL...

Oh, God, please let an increase of prosperity be granted to producers of motion pictures. Amen.

SINCERELY, MERTON GILL.

*Merton shivers at the cold night and lies down on the park bench. Suddenly, the sound of a telephone ringing! Lights down on Merton and Lights up on...*

**SCENE 4 – THE CASTING OFFICE**

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the telephone, business as usual.)*

Holden Studios – yes, hello, Grace. --- *(a sudden excitement)* Today by ‘noon?! --- swell cabaret stuff?! Sure! ‘Bye.

*(To the crowd)*

Listen everyone! Sig Rosenblatt is doing a grand ballroom scene for the new Beulah Baxter 10 reeler, “The Blight Of Broadway!” They need you all right away ... Stage Four!

*MUSIC! The other telephone rings!*

**SONG – “STAGE FOUR” > TRACK 6 <**

**COUNTESS**

HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE,  
MORNING! YES, WE NEED YOU!  
BE HERE BY NOON – STAGE FOUR!

**ALL**

“THE BLIGHT OF BROADWAY!”

*The telephone rings again.*

**COUNTESS**

HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE,  
MORNING! YES INDEED, YOU!  
GET HERE REAL SOON – STAGE FOUR!

**ALL**

“THE BLIGHT OF BROADWAY!”

*She hangs up. The other telephone rings.*

**VIVIAN**

GOTTA FIND MY EVENING DRESS.

**TOM**

I GOTTA FIND MY TUX!

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the telephone)*

HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE,

**EDNA**

GONNA MAKE SOME BUCKS!

**ALL**  
BECAUSE THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
OPENED UP ITS DOOR  
AND WE'RE WORKIN' TODAY  
STAGE FOUR!

*Merton enters.*

**MERTON**  
What's going on?

**HARRY**  
There's work on the lot!

**MERTON**  
Oh! Thank heaven!

**TOM**  
Sig Rosenblatt is doing "The Blight of Broadway!"

**VIVIAN**  
With Beulah Baxter!

**MERTON**  
Beulah Baxter?!

*The telephone rings. Flips enters.*

**FLIPS**  
Women and children first!

*Merton steps aside to let Flips go in front of him.*

Thanks, Kid! Hullo, Countess!

*The telephone continues to ring*

**COUNTESS**  
Flips, Rosenblatt wants you for some baby-vamp stuff! Stage Four!

**FLIPS**  
Thanks, Countess!

*The telephone rings. Flips shoves Merton forward.*

**FLIPS**  
And ya gotta have somethin' for my pal here!

*Flips swats Merton on the butt.*

**COUNTESS**  
*(Into the first telephone)*  
HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
MORNING! SOMETHING'S BREWING!

*(Into the second telephone)*

BIG CITY STYLE, STAGE FOUR.

**ALL**

WE'RE ALL INVITED!

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the second telephone)*

HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING!

*(Into both telephones)*

PROP UP YOUR SMILE, STAGE FOUR!

**ALL**

WE'RE ALL EXCITED!

**MERTON**

Excuse...

**COUNTESS**

*(To Merton)*

GET OVER TO THE DRESSING ROOMS  
AND HURRY DOUBLE-QUICK.  
THEY'LL FIT YOU IN A COSTUME --  
40 LONG SHOULD DO THE TRICK!

**MERTON**

Ma'am, I want to thank you—

**ALL**

BECAUSE THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
NEEDS US ALL AND MORE  
SO WE'RE WORKIN' TODAY  
STAGE FOUR!

*They all run off! Merton crosses downstage as the scene shifts behind him:*

**MERTON**

A job at last! And just when I was completely out of money!

FINALLY I HAVE LANDED IN THE PERFECT POSITION  
WITH THE PERFECT DIRECTOR WHO APPRECIATES THE ART!  
FINALLY I'LL BE ASKED FOR THE QUADRUPLE TRANSITION...

*He quickly moves from emotion to emotion creating a new face with each word:*

Hate - Fear - Love - Despair!

WHILE I'M INCHING EVER CLOSER TO AN ACTUAL PART!

FINALLY I'LL BE ACTING WITH THE GREAT BEULAH BAXTER  
AND MY HISTRIONIC ARTISTRY WILL THRILL HER – YES, BUT WHEN?  
FINALLY THE JOY SHE FEELS WILL NOT HAVE OVERTAXED HER  
AND THE WEST SHALL BE WON, AND THE MEN SHALL BE MEN!

*Merton runs off as the music continues and the scene  
shifts to...*

**SCENE 5 – STAGE FOUR**

*The Stage contains a cabaret set, a gilded haunt of  
pleasure with small tables set around a central dance  
floor.*

*All of the extras and Flips --- now dressed in evening  
wear -- enter onto the set to pick-up the song again.  
Charley, the Assistant Director, fusses about the set.*

**ALL**

THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
SENT US HERE FOR MAKE UP  
COSTUMES AND HAIR, STAGE FOUR.

**CHARLEY**

I NEED MORE SMOKE HERE!

**ALL**

THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
GAVE US ALL A WAKE UP!  
LOOKS LIKE WE'RE THERE, STAGE FOUR!

**CHARLEY**

THIS AIN'T A JOKE HERE!

**ALL**

WE GOT AN OPPORTUNITY  
THAT'S TRULY HEAVEN SENT

**EDNA**

I'M GONNA PAY MY WATER BILL...

**TOM**

MY GROCERIES...

**HARRY**

MY RENT!

**VIVIAN**

ME TOO!

**ALL**

ME TOO!!!  
BECAUSE THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE

NEEDS US ALL AND MORE.  
SO WE'RE WORKIN' TODAY

**FLIPS**

Sing Hallelujah, you troupers!

**ALL**

WE CAN HONESTLY SAY

**FLIPS**

You can eat tonight!

**ALL**

WE'RE ALL WORKING TODAY  
STAGE FOUR!

*They all laugh and chatter. Merton enters in evening clothes.*

**MERTON**

*(To Charley)*

Excuse me... Is this Stage Four?

**CHARLEY**

None other.

**MERTON**

Thank you, sir! I'm Merton --- Clifford Armytage, and I am prepared to begin my portrayal!

**CHARLEY**

Look, bub: just because they put ya in a penguin suit, don't mean they're gonna use ya. Rosenblatt's gotta pick ya first.

*Charley exits.*

**MERTON**

*(concerned)*

Oh...no....

*Merton paces nervously. Flips suddenly spots Merton.*

**FLIPS**

Hey, Kid!

**MERTON**

*(Distracted)*

Oh. Hello....

**FLIPS**

I didn't know you in those steppin'-out clothes!

**MERTON**

*(Interrupting)*

I – I'm sorry, Miss Montague. I need to focus on my motivational preparation. I...

*He pauses and looks at her. Earnestly:*

I'm flat broke. Mr. Rosenblatt's just gotta pick me today...

**FLIPS**

Oh... sure...

*Charley and Rosenblatt bustle onto the set.*

**ROSENBLATT**

All right, let me see the New York swell types.

**CHARLEY**

*(Calling out)*

New York swell types!

*Flips links arms with Merton and purposesfully steps forward. Rosenblatt indicates Merton and Flips and a table down front.*

**ROSENBLATT**

You two - this table here.

*Rosenblatt moves on to another group.*

**FLIPS**

Ya see, Kid?! I brought ya luck!

**MERTON**

*(To Flips)*

Yes...! But... where is Beulah Baxter? We're supposed to work with her today.

**FLIPS**

Not in yer life.

**MERTON**

What?!

**FLIPS**

They'll shoot all o' Baxter's stuff on a closed set.

**MERTON**

*(Disappointed)*

*Oh, no!*

*Merton slumps in his seat, bereft with disappointment.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Let's try it, Charley.

*Rosenblatt picks up his megaphone.*

Lights!

**CHARLEY**

Lights!

*A glare of light comes on.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Camera!

**CHARLEY**

Camera!

*A whistle sounds.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Action!

**CHARLEY**

Action!

*Tango music begins. Extras move onto the dance floor.*

**FLIPS**

*(Hopping up, to Merton:)*

Let's dance!

*Merton remains seated.*

**MERTON**

*(A bit peevisly)*

I don't feel like dancing. I was expecting to work with Beulah Baxter.

*Flips resumes her seat, at first with annoyance, then brightens.*

**FLIPS**

All right. I bet we get more footage this way.

*She becomes coquettish, luring Merton with her wiles. Merton is still inconsolable. A whistle blows.*

**ROSENBLATT**

*Cut! Save it!*

**CHARLEY**

*Save it!*

*The lights jar off. Rosenblatt crosses to Flips and Merton.*

**ROSENBLATT**

You don't look too happy, fella. Charley --- get me a new guy down here.

**MERTON**

What?! No! I was just ---

**CHARLEY**

*(Calling out)*

New guy down here!



*Charley points at another extra*

**CHARLEY**

You ---!

*The chosen extra immediately pops up.*

**FLIPS**

But, Mr. Rosenblatt, *sir!*

*Everyone freezes.*

**ROSENBLATT**

What is it?

**FLIPS**

You can't replace him!

**ROSENBLATT**

Why not?!

**FLIPS**

It's just... Ain't the name of this picture "The Blight of Broadway?"

**ROSENBLATT**

What of it?

**FLIPS**

Well... he's feelin' it!

**ROSENBLATT**

Feelin' what?

**FLIPS**

The Blight...

***SONG – "THE BLIGHT OF BROADWAY" > TRACK 7 <***

CAN'T YOU SEE IN HIS EYES  
THERE'S NO ROOM FOR DISGUISE.  
HE'S AS BLEAK AS THIS DARK AND STORMY NIGHT.

**ALL**

OOH...

**FLIPS**

HE'S GOT DEMONS FROM HELL  
AND I THINK YOU CAN TELL  
WHAT HE'S GOT SHOULD GIVE EVERYONE A FRIGHT!

**ALL**

OOH...

**FLIPS**

THAT'S RIGHT!

IT'S THE BLIGHT...  
IT'S THE DEMON BLIGHT OF BROADWAY!  
IT'S THE BLIGHT...  
CAN'T YOU HEAR THE WICKED BUZZ!

OH HE'S GOT IT, YOU BELIEVE IT...  
TAKES A GENIUS TO PERCIEVE IT.  
I'M SURPRISED THAT HE'S THE ONLY ONE THAT DOES...

**CHARLEY**

Does what?

**FLIPS**

*Have it - the Blight --- of Broadway! That's what he's playin'. From the tip o' his noggin right down to his toot-toot tootsies. And he's feelin' it mighty bad!*

**ROSENBLATT**

The Blight, eh?

*He considers Merton for a moment. Then:*

Alright – I want a close up on this man alone. Somebody give him a cigarette.

*Charley puts a cigarette into Merton's hand and lights it.  
Merton has never smoked in his life.*

Now listen, mister: you're a prominent young club man – lots of class, see?

*Merton approximates a ridiculous pose of class.*

Right. You're dead tired . And you're bored, see? You're sick to death of of the whole game! ...

Lights!

**CHARLEY**

Lights!

**ROSENBLATT**

Camera!

**CHARLEY**

Camera!

**ROSENBLATT**

Action!

**CHARLEY**

Action!

*During the following, Merton affects a ludicrous attitude of bored high society. He occasionally puffs on his cigarette --- bringing about a choking fit.*

**FLIPS**

GET A LOAD OF THIS KID...

THERE, THAT THING THAT HE DID,  
HOW HIS SHOULDERS HOLD HIS HEAD ON BY A THREAD...

**ALL**

EWV...

**FLIPS**

HE'S GOT PATHOS GALORE,  
HE MAY SINK THROUGH THE FLOOR...  
IF THE BLIGHT DON'T PASS HE'LL SURE ENOUGH BE DEAD!

**ALL**

WOAH!

**FLIPS**

THAT'S WHAT I SAID!

**FLIPS & ALL**

IT'S THE BLIGHT!  
IT'S THE DEMON BLIGHT OF BROADWAY!  
IT'S THE BLIGHT,  
AND HE'S GOT IT TO THE NINES!

IF IT WEREN'T SO OUTRAGEOUS,  
I MIGHT GUESS THAT HE'S CONTAGEOUS!  
I'M SURPRISED YOU HAVEN'T GIVEN HIM SOME LINES...

*Merton, meanwhile, has taken on an expression of profound  
--- and unintentionally comic --- ennui. Merton turns his  
sad sack face toward Rosenblatt. Charley snickers and  
turns away.*

**ROSENBLATT**

That's the stuff! Now --- your heart's breaking! Give me tears! Things couldn't be worse! There's been a big earthquake, the ships gone down! Don't cover your face --- we're shooting your face, not the hair on your head! It's getting worse! Oh my God, you're miserable! Alright - Lights!

**CHARLEY**

Lights!

**ROSENBLATT**

Camera!

**CHARLEY**

Camera!

**ROSENBLATT**

Action!

**CHARLEY**

Action!

*The dancing start again. Merton breaks down in a fit of melodramatic sobs. Meanwhile...*

**ALL**

IT'S THE BLIGHT...  
IT'S THE FABLED BLIGHT OF BROADWAY!  
IT'S THE BLIGHT,  
AND WE'LL TAKE ANOTHER BITE.

WHILE WE DANCE AWAY THE HOURS,  
WE'LL BE UNDERNEATH THE POWERS  
OF THE TERRIBLE MALAISE THAT HAUNTS THIS NIGHT.  
IT'S BROADWAY'S AWFUL, HORRIBLE, DESPERATE  
BLIGHT!

**ROSENBLATT**

Cut! Save it!

*The bright movie lights jar off.*

**CHARLEY**

Take five, folks.

*All relax. Rosenblatt crosses to another part of the set.*

**MERTON**

*(To Flips, quietly)*

Thank you, Miss Montague.

**FLIPS**

Fer what?

**MERTON**

For... saving me from being replaced.

**FLIPS**

Aw shucks, Kid.

*Charley and Rosenblatt are separated from Merton and Flips, thus they cannot hear each other's conversations:*

**CHARLEY**

Say, chief, what's with you and the fella down front?

**ROSENBLATT**

Did you get an eyeful of that over-actin' bit of his? He brings a nice touch of comedy to the whole scene.

*Still at his table, having not heard the previous:*

**MERTON**

I'm glad Mr. Rosenblatt recognizes what a serious dramatic actor I am.

**FLIPS**

Well, you certainly are the actin'est kid on the lot!

**MERTON**  
(Sincerely)

Thank you.

*Jeff Baird appears in the corner of the set, looking about for someone. Flips spots him.*

**FLIPS**  
(Rising)

Oh! Excuse me!

*She dashes over to greet Jeff Baird.*

**FLIPS**

Jeff Baird!

**BAIRD**  
(Distracted)

Hey, Flips.

**FLIPS**

'Ja get a chance to look at my script?

**BAIRD**

How many times I gotta tell ya? We don't need any more writers --- especially one in a skirt.

**FLIPS**

Alright, Jeff. But what brings ya on *this* set?

**BAIRD**

I gotta script problem I want to run by Stanley.

**FLIPS**

He ain't here.

**BAIRD**

Damn.

**FLIPS**

So... Maybe I can help ---

**BAIRD**

*You?!*

**FLIPS**

Try me.

**BAIRD**  
(Reluctantly)

OK ---

*He visualizes the whole scene out front.*

**BAIRD**

Swell reception in honor of rich Uncle Rollo. The waiters are all on roller skates. The head waiter starts the fight by doing a fall with his tray.

**FLIPS**

*(Seeing it all out front)*

Where's Uncle Rollo?

**BAIRD**

Down left at the table.

**FLIPS**

Is he in the fight?

**BAIRD**

That's where I'm stuck.

**FLIPS**

*(Considering)*

Well... how about... He's awful hungry, see? And he starts eatin' the celery --- and everything he can reach! And when the mix-up starts, he just eats on and pays no attention to it. But he don't know a thing 'till Wally or someone crowns him with the punch-bowl!

*Baird bursts out laughing.*

**BAIRD**

Good work, Doll! Bring me another idea like that, and I'll give that script o' yours a look-see.

**FLIPS**

Deal!

*Baird exits. Flips joins Merton back at the table*

**FLIPS**

That was my ole' pal, Jeff.

**MERTON**

*(Mildly interested)*

Oh?

**FLIPS**

You might a' heard of 'em. Jeff Baird – the director of the Buckeye Comedies?

*Dark Musical Sting!*

**MERTON**

*The Buckeye Comedies?!*

**FLIPS**

I've actually been in half a dozen of 'em myself!

*Dark Musical Sting! Merton stands up.*

**MERTON**

Those Buckeye Comedies are a disgrace!

*She stands up.*

**FLIPS**

What's disgraceful about 'em?!

**MERTON**

All of that slapstick! And pies in the face! I think they're dreadful!

**FLIPS**

Do you have any idea how much dough those *dreadful* comedies brought into this studio last year?

*Flips looks around and lowers her voice so as not to be overheard.*

A sight lot more than any of your Beulah Baxter flickers!

*Dark Musical Sting!*

**MERTON**

Beulah Baxter is a great artist!

**FLIPS**

All they need in a Beulah Baxter movie is some filler to go in between her close-ups!

**MERTON**

*(Incensed)*

How dare you!

**CHARLEY**

*(Calling out)*

Ready on the set!

*Merton and Flips sit down. Rosenblatt appears at their table with Harry.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Now, girlie, when this gentleman asks you to dance, you follow him onto the floor. Got it?

**FLIPS**

*(Dryly)*

I've always had it!

**ROSENBLATT**

Good. Lights!

**CHARLEY**

Lights!

*A glare of light comes on.*

**ROSENBLATT**

Camera!

Camera! **CHARLEY**

*A whistle sounds.*

Action! **ROSENBLATT**

Action! **CHARLEY**

*The music and dancing start.*

**FLIPS**  
*(Contrite)*  
Sorry, Kid. Sometimes, I can be a regular megaphone mouth.

**MERTON**  
*(petulantly; avoiding looking at her)*  
What you do or think doesn't matter to me one bit, Miss Montague!

**FLIPS**  
*(Plaintively)*  
Listen, Kid --!

*Harry has arrived at their table.*

Care to dance, babycakes?! **HARRY**

*She looks helplessly from Merton to Harry.*

Oh... Sure! **FLIPS**  
  
*They go off to the dance floor. Flips looks back regretfully. Merton turns decisively away.*

**MERTON**  
*(To himself)*  
I was right about her in the first place! She's to be avoided! Good riddance, Miss Montague! And here's to your class-less career in the Buckeye Comedies!

*He raises his prop wine glass in a toast and drinks.*

**ALL**  
IT'S BROADWAY'S AWFUL, HORRIBLE, DESPERATE  
BLIGHT!

**ROSENBLATT**  
  
*Cut! Save it!*

*The music stops! Everyone freezes.*



**CHARLEY**

That's a wrap!

*Applause from the cast and crew. The bright lights go out. Rosenblatt exits.*

**CHARLEY**

OK, folks! I got your pay slips. But don't quit your day jobs! Ha!

*He hands out checks...*

Vivian... Tom... Edna... Harry...

*The extras converge on Charley. Merton just happens to be standing near him. Charley hands Merton his Talent Slip.*

**CHARLEY**

Here ya go, fella.

**MERTON**

Thank you, sir, for this....

*But Charley is already busy talking to someone else. Merton continues, to no one in particular:*

...Opportunity....

*Merton looks at the talent check, reading to himself:*

**MERTON**

"By cashing this check, employee understands that the Victor Film Art Company has the right to use any photographs of employee that its agents might this day have obtained! Amount – Five Dollars."

***SONG – "FIVE DOLLARS" > TRACK 8 <***

IN ONE DAY  
I HAVE MANAGED TO EARN AS MUCH  
AS IT ONCE TOOK THE BETTER PART OF A WEEK.

*Flips separates herself from the crowd of extras.*

**FLIPS**

*(Tentatively)*

Hey... Kid...!

*Merton does not look at her.*

**MERTON**

I MUST SAY.

I COULD CERTAINLY SEE MYSELF  
FINDING THIS AGREEABLE.

**FLIPS**

The cafeteria will cash your check.

**MERTON**

I CAN'T MISS!  
THE DIRECTOR FOUND WHAT I DID  
TO BE JUST WHAT HE NEEDED – I'M ON A STREAK!

**FLIPS**

Just thought I'd tell ya.

**MERTON**

AND NOW THIS.  
IT'S A SUM THAT A MONTH AGO  
WAS UNFORSEEABLE.

**FLIPS**

Well. See ya 'round the show shop...

*She exits.*

**MERTON**

FIVE DOLLARS WOULD APPEASE MRS. PATTERSON FOR  
SEVEN NIGHTS OF SLEEPING IN A BED.  
BUT FIVE DOLLARS WOULD BUY ROASTED HAM AND COBBLERS  
AND SOUP AND PIE AND JELLY SLATHERED BREAD.

FIVE DOLLARS IS A HANDSOME SUM OF MONEY.  
BUT IT LEAVES ME LITTLE CHOICE OF HOW TO SPEND.  
FIVE DOLLARS BUYS A WEEK WITH SILKEN SHEETS.  
BUT IF I CEASE TO EAT I FEAR WHERE THIS MIGHT END.

I'VE NEVER BEEN A SLACKER.  
I CAN OWN TO THAT AT LEAST.  
WITH SOME KETCHUP AND A CRACKER  
I COULD ORGANIZE A FEAST.

AHH...  
FIVE DOLLARS.  
FIVE DOLLARS.  
ALTHOUGH A LOT OF MONEY IT MAY SEEM.  
A FELLA'S GOTTA SLEEP SO HE CAN DREAM.

*Only Merton and Charley remain on the set. Rosenblatt enters. They ignore Merton, who can't help but hear their conversation:.*

**ROSENBLATT**

*(To Charley)*

Are we ready for the bedroom scene tomorrow?

**CHARLEY**

We need to get the prop rustlers to pull one of them beds outta storage.

**ROSENBLATT**

Well, I don't want just anything. There are hundreds of beds over there.

**CHARLEY**

We can look at 'em right now, if you want. They keep prop storage unlocked.

**ROSENBLATT**

Right!

*They exit.*

**MERTON**

Hundreds of beds?

*Esther Fitzroy appears.*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Your faithful reporter, Esther Fitzroy, couldn't help but notice that Clifford Armytage was smiling that rare smile which his admirers have found so winning on the silver screen!

**MERTON**

Yes!

**ESTHER FITZROY**

--- He said in the mellow tones that are his alone.

**MERTON**

I GUESS THERE WERE TIMES WHEN I NEAR GAVE UP THE STRUGGLE.  
I RECALL ONE SPELL, NOT SO MANY YEARS AGO,  
WHEN I CAMPED ON THE LOT, FINDING CLOSETS WHERE I'D SNUGGLE  
WHILE I STARVED DRINKING ONLY THE ODD CUP OF JOE.  
YET I FONDLY LOOK BACK AND REMEMBER IT WITH WONDER...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

--- He mischievously pulled the ears of the magnificent Great Dane that lolled at his feet.

**MERTON**

FOR MY DAY WAS DUE TO COME, AND WHEN PUSH CAME TO SHOVE,  
I PULLED MYSELF UP FROM THE DEPTHS THAT KEPT ME UNDER -  
AND I FELL IN LOVE, AND I LEARNED THE VALUE OF...

*Esther Fitzroy disappears, the actors are back to picking up paychecks and milling about.*

FIVE DOLLARS - I'LL CHANGE OUT OF MY COSTUME,  
CASH MY CHECK AND GRAB A LIFE SUSTAINING MEAL.  
THOUGH FIVE DOLLARS WILL TURN SOON ENOUGH TO NOTHING,  
HOW WONDERFUL A SOLID MEAL WILL FEEL.

THEN A HUNDRED BEDS TO CHOOSE FROM  
AND NO ONE NEEDS TO KNOW.  
I SHOULDN'T, I COULDN'T.  
NO I WON'T! OK, I'LL GO...

FOR FIVE DOLLARS.  
JUST FIVE DOLLARS.  
I'LL GET A CHANCE TO EAT AND SLEEP AND STAY  
AND LIVE AN ACTOR'S LIFE ANOTHER DAY!

*He exits amidst the other actors, who bid each other  
goodbye, then are off to separate parts of the stage where  
they don the attire of their "Day Jobs."*

**SCENE 6 – HOLLYWOOD**

*A silent movie title card reads:*

**The Actor's Survival Job**

**VIVIAN**

The guy on the set says "Don't quit yer dayjob!" Ain't that the truth!

**SONG – "SACRIFICE FOR ART" > TRACK 9 <**

*Vivian dresses as a waitress while she sings:*

**VIVIAN**

"WHISKEY DOWN," "TWO BABIES IN A BLANKET."  
JUST MORE LINES I GOTTA MEMORIZE.  
FILLING IN THE TIME BETWEEN THE PICTURES  
TILL THEY CALL ABOUT A JOB AND I GET OUTTA THIS DISGUISE.

*Tom has dressed in paint-stained overalls, ready to paint  
a house.*

**TOM**

PREP THE ROOM, NO DRIPPING ON THE LADY'S CARPET...  
THIS HALL PUCE, THE OTHER ONE IN APRICOT.  
CAMEL BRUSH, BE CAREFUL IN THE CORNERS;  
IF THE PHONE DON'T RING TOMORROW, THIS IS ALL I GOT.

**VIVIAN AND TOM**

YOU THINK I DO THIS FOR A LIVING?  
I'M KNEE DEEP IN RESEARCH FOR A PART!  
IT'S QUITE A PERFORMANCE I'M GIVING;  
WELL IT JUST GOES TO PROVE YOU GOTTA SACRIFICE FOR ART.

*Edna is sandwiched between two boards advertising "Eat  
At Joes."*

**EDNA**

EAT AT JOE'S, SEPULVEDA AND PICO.  
WALKING MILES IT HELPS ME TO KEEP FIT.  
HAWKING MEALS TO MOTORCARS AND TOURISTS;  
UNTIL THE CAMERA'S ROLLING, I'M STROLLING, DON'T MIND A BIT.

*Harry is sprizing a sample of perfume into the air.*

**HARRY**

MADemoiselle, PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE A SAMPLE?  
SPRAY THE AIR THEN BRISKLY SAUNTER THROUGH.  
JUST LAST NIGHT YOU SAW ME IN THE MOVIES...  
AIN'T IT CRAZY HOW THIS AFTERNOON I'M SEEING YOU?

**ALL**

BLESS MY LIFE!  
THIS MAKING MOVIES IS A SLOW BIZ.  
WHEN ALL MY FRIENDS SAY GROW UP AND GET A JOB, I TELL 'EM,  
"WHAT, AND GIVE UP SHOW BIZ?"

*Simultaneously:*

**VIVIAN**

WHISKEY DOWN, TWO  
BABIES IN A BLANKET  
JUST MORE LINES I GOTTA  
MEMORIZE  
FILLING IN THE TIME  
BETWEEN THE PICTURES  
TILL THEY CALL ABOUT A  
JOB AND I GET OUTTA  
THIS DISGUISE

**TOM**

PREP THE ROOM NO  
DRIPPING ON THE LADY'S  
CARPET  
THIS HALL PUCE, THE  
OTHER ONE IN APRICOT  
CAMEL BRUSH, BE  
CAREFUL IN THE CORNERS  
IF THE PHONE DON'T RING  
TOMORROW THIS IS ALL I  
GOT

**EDNA**

EAT AT JOE'S, SEPULVEDA  
AND PICO  
WALKING MILES IT HELPS  
ME TO KEEP FIT  
HAWKING MEALS TO  
MOTORCARS AND  
TOURISTS  
UNTIL THE CAMERA'S  
ROLLING, I'M STROLLING, I  
DON'T MIND A BIT

**HARRY**

MADemoiselle PERHAPS  
YOU'D LIKE A SAMPLE  
SPRAY THE AIR THEN  
BRISKLY SAUNTER  
THROUGH  
JUST LAST NIGHT YOU  
SAW ME IN THE MOVIES  
AIN'T IT CRAZY HOW THIS  
AFTERNOON I'M SEEING  
YOU.

**ALL**

YOU THINK I DO THIS FOR A LIVING?  
I'M KNEE DEEP IN RESEARCH FOR A PART!  
IT'S QUITE A PERFORMANCE I'M GIVING;  
WELL IT JUST GOES TO PROVE YOU GOTTA SACRIFICE FOR ART.

I AIN'T DOIN' THIS FOR THE GLORY!  
THAT'S PUTTING THE HORSE BEFORE THE CART.  
IT ISN'T THE HALF OF THE STORY,  
CAUSE IT JUST GOES TO PROVE YOU GOTTA SACRIFICE FOR ART.

**VIVIAN**

What can I Getcha?

*Blackout!*

**SCENE 7 – THE SET OF “THE HAZARDS OF  
HORTENSE”**

**TWO WEEKS LATER  
“Of Shattered Illusions”**

*Two weeks later. Charley is shouting offstage left.*

**CHARLEY**

Okeydokey, Sammy. Tell Mr. Rosenblatt the camera’s all set.

*Jeff Baird enters right and crosses the stage.*

**BAIRD**

*(indicating off right)*

Hey – Charley: some dirty tramp is over there eatin’ outta the garbage can. Better shoo him off the lot.

**CHARLEY**

Right away, Mr. Baird.

*Baird exits left. Charley calls off stage right:*

**CHARLEY**

Hey --- *you!* Whatta ya up to?

*Merton enters. Merton is a shadow of his former self. He is dirty and unshaven. He has clearly worn the same clothes for two weeks. But most of all, a certain hunted though still-defiant look in the young man's eyes betrays a man who has been living hand-to-mouth.*

**MERTON**

Excuse me, sir. Is... this where you’re filming the latest installment of the “Hazards of Hortense?”

*Charley eyes this vagrant suspiciously.*

**CHARLEY**

Who’s askin’?

**MERTON**

I... worked on one of Miss Baxter’s other pictures two weeks ago. I thought I might say hello...

**CHARLEY**

Oh yeah, the guy with the “blight.” How's things with you?

*Merton tries for a show of easy confidence.*

**MERTON**

Well... I've been between pictures for the last two weeks.

**CHARLEY**

You’re a big fan of Baxter’s, eh?

**MERTON**

I'd give anything to just see her from afar!

**CHARLEY**

Well just keep outta the way, got it?

**MERTON**

Yessir...

*Charley crosses away from Merton.*

**MERTON**

*(To himself)*

Gosh... I'm awful hungry...

*Rosenblatt enters. Merton is on one side of the stage, Rosenblatt and Charley are opposite him and are unaware of Merton.*

**ROSENBLATT**

All right, tell the pilot to taxi the plane onto the runway.

**MERTON**

*(To himself)*

A plane?!

*Charley picks up a megaphone.*

**CHARLEY**

*(into the megaphone)*

Bring the plane around!

**ROSENBLATT**

*(Grabs the megaphone)*

And send out Hortense!

**MERTON**

*(Looking out front)*

Here she comes!

*Lights up behind the upstage scrim. We see the blonde head of Hortense running on from stage left with a make-up woman fussing about her.*

*(Beside himself)*

My wonder woman! Beulah Baxter!

**ROSENBLATT**

*(Thru the megaphone)*

All right Hortense --- get your ass on that plane!

**MERTON**

How dare he speak to Miss Baxter in such a way!

*Hortense nods and runs off stage right. The scene behind the scrim fades away.*

**ROSENBLATT**

*(Thru the megaphone)*

And get that heap a junk up in the sky!

*Charley waves for the plane to take off. Mr. Holden enters.*

**MR. HOLDEN**

Good afternoon, Sig!

**ROSENBLATT**

Why, Mr. Holden!

**CHARLEY**

Sir!

**ROSENBLATT**

What brings the head of the studio to our humble little set?!

**MR. HOLDEN**

I hear exciting things are happening here today!

**ROSENBLATT**

Just some wingwalking for "The Hazards of Hortense."

**MERTON**

*(To himself, breathlessly)*

Wingwalking!

**MR. HOLDEN**

*(Impressed)*

Oh, my! What's the story?

**ROSENBLATT**

Beautiful Hortense is working as an American spy behind enemy lines!

**MR. HOLDEN**

Good stuff!

**ROSENBLATT**

Hortense has learned that her lover, Captain Jack Albright, is about to pilot into a deadly trap set by vicious German conspirators.

**MERTON**

The fiends!



**ROSENBLATT**

But Hortense convinces another pilot to give her a lift up into the sky so that she can warn her dear captain.

**CHARLEY**

Here comes the plane, boss.

**ROSENBLATT**

Give Mr. Holden your binoculars.

**CHARLEY**

Sure!

*Charley hands over his binoculars. Both Holden and Rosenblatt are peering out front through their binoculars. Upstage, the biplane appears suspended behind the scrim, its massive propeller facing the audience. The plane is now apparently flying over the studio lot. A pilot sits in the front. Hortense is standing on the rear seat, her head peeking over the top of the bi-plane.*

**MERTON**

*(Peering out front)*

How brave she is!

**ROSENBLATT**

Hortense spots Jack Albright's bi-plane, heading for the horrible trap behind her.

*Hortense points out front. Merton clutches his hands in a gesture of despair.*

**MERTON**

Oh, no!

**ROSENBLATT**

She climbs up onto the wing of the bi-plane.

*Hortense climbs onto the top wing of the plane.*

Once on top, she semaphore's a warning to her lover, using the maritime flag system they both learned as part of their military training.

*Whipping out two colorful signal flags, Hortense executes an elaborate semaphore message.*

**MERTON**

Heavens!

**MR. HOLDEN**

Good stuff!

**ROSENBLATT**

Thank you, sir!

*Merton is suddenly woozy.*

**MERTON**

Oh, I'm so hungry! I'm feeling light-headed!

**ROSENBLATT**

Hortense watches as Captain Albright turns his plane around, avoiding certain death!

*Hortense salutes and blows a kiss to the unseen captain out front.*

**MERTON**

*(weaving weakly)*

Oh, thank heaven!

**ROSENBLATT**

Hortense then parachutes from the plane to continue her work behind enemy lines.

*Hortense leaps victoriously from the plane and out of sight. The plane fades from view.*

**MR. HOLDEN**

*(Patting Rosenblatt on the back)*

What a shot, Sig!

**ROSENBLATT**

Thanks. Charley, make sure those prop guys put the plane away. Mr. Holden and I are gonna look at the rushes!

**CHARLEY**

Sure, boss.

**MR. HOLDEN**

Good stuff!

*Charley exits in one direction while Rosenblatt and Holden exit the opposite way.*

**MERTON**

*(To himself)*

How brave she was!

*Merton looks up.*

But wait! Miss Baxter is descending from the sky! Oh, I'm dizzy! I...I...

*Merton trips about the stage with his arms outstretched, trying to catch the falling star. Then, high above the stage, a colorful parachute lowers into view bearing Hortense. Hortense lands in a heap. She scrambles to her feet, dusts herself off and disengages from the collapsed parachute. She then whips off her leather*

*"Amelia Earhart" flying helmet. We can now see that it is not Beulah Baxter at all, but our own Flips Montague. Merton watches, dumbfounded.*

**FLIPS**

Hiya, Kid!

**MERTON**

*(weaving)*

Oh...!

*Merton faints! She races to his side.*

**FLIPS**

*(Calling over her shoulder)*

Hey, Charley! Bring a thermos a coffee double quick! Kid! Snap out of it!

*Charley rushes on with a thermos and a tin cup.*

**CHARLEY**

Here ya go, Flips!

*She cradles Merton's head in her lap while Charley pours coffee into the cup. He hands it to her.*

**FLIPS**

Come on, Kid. Just a little sip to get the ole' ticker goin.

*Merton begins to revive.*

**MERTON**

What?! Oh! I'm... so sorry!

**FLIPS**

I often have that effect on my public!

**MERTON**

*(the cobwebs beginning to clear, he sits up)*

Is Miss Baxter going to jump from the plane now?

**FLIPS**

Baxter?! Wingwalkin'?! Quit your kiddin'!

**MERTON**

But isn't she here at all?!

**FLIPS**

Why should Beulah Baxter loaf around on the set when she's paying me good money to double for her?

**MERTON**

*(Aghast)*

*Double for her?! But Beulah Baxter never allows any one to double for her!*

*Charley laughs a scornful laugh.*

**CHARLEY**

Bunk! He ought to see the stuff you done for her out on location, Flips. There's that motorcycle stuff. An' then there was the time—

*Flips can see that this is upsetting Merton.*

**FLIPS**

All right, Charley, I can tell him the rest. But do me a favor: run and ask that bum Rosenblatt if I'm released for the day.

**CHARLEY**

Sure, Flips!

**FLIPS**

Thanks!

*Charley runs off. Merton shifts uneasily.*

**MERTON**

Well, I'll be moving on.

**FLIPS**

*(stopping him, with great firmness)*

You can't fool any one, Kid.

**MERTON**

Well...you see...I don't—

*He breaks off. The girl now sends a clean shot through his armor:*

**FLIPS**

When'd you eat last?

*He looks at the ground again in painful embarrassment.*

**MERTON**

*(Quietly)*

I don't remember.

**FLIPS**

That's what I thought.

*She turns away, digs into the pocket of her jacket, turns back and forces some bills into his hand.*

Here.

**MERTON**  
*(Muttering)*

I can't take this...

**FLIPS**

Go to Mother Hagin's, that joint outside the gate. She has better breakfast things than the place on the lot.

**MERTON**

But if I go outside the studio gate, I won't be able to get back in again.

*She smiles suddenly.*

**FLIPS**

You want to get in again? Why?

*Merton pauses, then:*

**MERTON**

I've been sleeping in prop storage at night for the last two weeks.

**FLIPS**

Here? On the lot?!

*He nods.*

**MERTON**

I used the five dollars I made on the picture to eat in the studio cafeteria. But after a few days, I ran out of money. I could have written to Gashwiler and got some money to go back there—

**FLIPS**

Gashwiler? Where's that?

**MERTON**

No, Gashwiler was my employer. The town was Simsbury.

**FLIPS**

You got your start in that town?

**MERTON**

Lived there all my life. Then about a year ago, I saw an advertisement for the Talent Test and the eight-hour correspondence course in movie-acting.

**FLIPS**

A Talent Test, eh?

**MERTON**

Yes! So I mailed in the Talent Test right away. Oh, I was so afraid they'd tell me I didn't have any aptitude for movie acting.

**FLIPS**

*(wisely)*

But they didn't say that, did they?

**MERTON**

No siree! The letter said I had every aptitude in full measure!

**FLIPS**

*(dryly)*

And all ya hadda do was send in yer money...

**MERTON**

Yes! So I studied night and day for three weeks ---

**FLIPS**

Listen, Kid, I see where this is goin'. You thought bein' in pictures was easy. And that the money was big.

**MERTON**

Oh, it wasn't the money.

**FLIPS**

Well... what was it?

**MERTON**

*(From his heart)*

It's kinda hard to explain. It's something inside. Like writing a book. Or painting pictures. I want to do something fine. And worthwhile. The way Harold Parmalee does. Why, even *trying* to do it. That's worth sacrificin' and sufferin' for, isn't it?

**FLIPS**

*(moved by his genuineness)*

Why... I guess it is...

**MERTON**

And when you work hard, your hour is bound to come, don't you think?

**FLIPS**

Yes... Yes. I do.

**SONG – "SLEEPY EYES" > TRACK 10 <**

**MERTON**

*(continuing under as the song begins, gradually fading into pantomime)*

You see, the way they explained it in the correspondence course is that it's all in the way you work your eyebrows. Did you know there are four major expressions? Hate, Fear, Love and Despair. Everything else is just a variation on one of those four.

**FLIPS**

*(To herself)*

LOOK AT THOSE TWO SLEEPY EYES.  
JUST THE KIND I LIKE TO SEE.

NEVER MET A GUY WHO'S RECKLESS AS YOU ARE,  
FECKLESS AS YOU ARE TO ME.

THERE'S A COMFORT IN YOUR WORDS.  
YOU'RE SO INNOCENT AND NEW.  
AS YOU TRY SO HARD TO BE THE PERFECT MAN,  
I SEE THE PERFECT MAN IN YOU.

THERE'S NO SENSE IN US TOGETHER.  
I DON'T EVEN THINK YOU CARE.  
BUT I KNOW THAT WHEN YOU NEED ME,  
AND YOU'LL NEED ME,  
I WILL ALWAYS BE THERE.

**MERTON**

Like giddiness...it's a mixture of Love, tinged with a touch of Fear, like this...

**FLIPS**

YOU'RE A FUNNY ONE, IT'S TRUE.  
SOMEHOW GENTLE, SOMEHOW STRONG.  
I BELIEVE IN WHAT YOU SAY YOU WANT,  
FOR IT'S WHAT I'VE WANTED ALL ALONG.

YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW I'M HERE  
AND THAT CUTS ME DOWN TO SIZE.  
STILL, I'M TAKEN WITH YOUR DEEP AND SLEEPY EYES.

*Music continues.*

**MERTON**

Anyway, I wish I had my stills to show you.

**FLIPS**

Stills?

**MERTON**

My buddy, Elmer Schnupp, shot a bunch of movie-type stills of me. Do you think I look like Harold Parmalee? Elmer thinks I'm the dead image of him.

**FLIPS**

*(Suddenly aware of the resemblance)*

You know, Kid, you *do* resemble Harold Parmalee...!

*Merton slurps down more coffee and continues under the song, as before.*

**MERTON**

Well, that's what Elmer says.

**FLIPS**

*(Continuing, to herself)*

THERE'S NO SENSE IN US TOGETHER,

COULDN'T BE LESS OF A PAIR.  
STILL I KNOW THAT WHEN YOU WANT ME,  
AND YOU'LL WANT ME,  
I WILL ALWAYS BE THERE.

**MERTON**

I practiced riding with old Dexter, but that didn't go so well, either. I ended up in the dirt.

**FLIPS**

YOU'RE A FUNNY ONE, IT'S TRUE.  
SOMEHOW QUIET, SOMEHOW BOLD.  
YOU DON'T KNOW IT SO I'M TELLING YOU  
SOMEDAY SOON, TOGETHER WE'LL GROW OLD...

**MERTON**

I would've gotten back on the horse right away, but there wasn't anything for me to stand on.

**FLIPS**

*(Smiling, more to herself than to him)*

Oh, you dear thing....

*She discreetly wipes her eyes.*

**FLIPS**

All right, Kid. Go to Mother Hagins. Then go home and get some shut-eye.

**MERTON**

*(soberly)*

But I owe my landlady ten dollars. She won't let me back into my room.

**FLIPS**

Oh.

*She takes a moment. She fumbles obscurely, and comes up with more money.*

Here's twenty more.

**MERTON**

Oh, no! I can't let you do this ---

**FLIPS**

I'm staking you to cakes till you get on your feet, see? Meet me on the lot tomorrow morning about this time. The Countess'll let you in.

**MERTON**

Yes, Miss Montague.

**FLIPS**

Now you c'mon.



*She starts to help him to rise, with a hand under his elbow. He is quick to show her that he does not need this help.*

**MERTON**

I can walk all right...

**FLIPS**

Of course you can. You're as strong as an ox.

*He turns to her.*

**MERTON**

Thank you, Miss Montague

**FLIPS**

I ain't done nothin', Kid.

**MERTON**

No. You've saved me – twice. And I misjudged you. You're a true friend.

*He smiles and exits. She watches him go, shaking her head, and smiling.*

**FLIPS**

You poor, feckless, dub.

YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW I'M HERE.  
I SUPPOSE THAT'S SOMEHOW WISE.  
STILL, I'M TAKEN WITH YOUR DEEP AND SLEEPY EYES.

*Charley enters.*

**CHARLEY**

Rosenblatt says you're through for the day, Flips.

**FLIPS**

*(Preoccupied)*

Thanks...

*Charley turns to go.*

**FLIPS**

Hey Charley, do me a favor, willya?

**CHARLEY**

Sure.

**FLIPS**

Run over to Jeff Baird's office lickety-split!

**CHARLEY**

What for?

**FLIPS**

Tell him to meet me in the projection room first thing tomorrow morning!

**CHARLEY**

Tomorrow morning?!

**FLIPS**

First thing! I got a piece of property that'll knock his argyles off.

**CHARLEY**

Huh?

**FLIPS**

Tell him that --- Right off his tootsies!

*Blackout!*

**SCENE 8 – THE STUDIO PROJECTION ROOM**

**“The Montague Girl Intervenes”**

*Baird is seated in one of two chairs facing the audience, proofreading a script. Bobby, a production assistant, enters behind him.*

**BOBBY**

Mornin', Mr. Baird! Miss Montague said she'll be right out. She's gettin' the rushes set up with Herman.

**BAIRD**

Thanks, Bobby.

*Bobby exits as Flips enters.*

**FLIPS**

Mornin', Jeff!

**BAIRD**

This better be good.

**FLIPS**

You bet!

*She sits next to Baird.*

Roll it, Herman!

*The lights dim and a blinking light of a film projector behind them together with the flash of light on their faces indicates that they are screening film footage.*

**FLIPS**

Goody. They haven't started cutting yet, so all his close-ups will still be in... There he is! Ain't he the actin'est thing you ever saw?

*Baird is watching the screen intently.*

**BAIRD**

He looks like the first plume on a hearse.

**FLIPS**

But who does he remind you of? Get the profile and the eyebrows and the chin—there!

**BAIRD**

Why, I'm Lady Astor if he don't look like—

**BOTH**

Harold Parmalee!

**BAIRD**

And just yesterday I was thinking if only I could dig up some guy that looked more like Parmalee than Parmalee himself! Just enough more to get the laugh, see? And today you spring this lad on me!

**FLIPS**

Didn't I tell ya?!

**BAIRD**

Look at that face! By gum, the kid's a riot!

**FLIPS**

But wait! Watch this!

*They both stare at the screen and then abruptly dissolve in hysterics! The film has run out. The overhead lights come on. Baird and Flips stand up.*

**FLIPS**

So – what about our deal?

**BAIRD**

Let me get a look at this fella. If I think he can pull it off, I'll read that script of yours.

**FLIPS**

Great! He's waiting outside to meet you!

**BAIRD**

But, listen—does he know he's funny?

**FLIPS**

He don't know anything's funny. If he found out he was, it might sour him—see what I mean? In fact, I told him you might be doin something serious-like.

**BAIRD**

Got it. He's got to be as serious as the lumbago!

**FLIPS**

Right! And, besides—

*She hesitates briefly.*

**FLIPS**

I don't want him kidded, see? He's a decent fella.

*(reflectively)*

Innocent. And... *respectful...*

**BAIRD**

Respectful?!

**FLIPS**

*(smiling at the memory)*

To everyone else I'm "Flips," or "Honey" or "Girlic." But he calls me "*Miss Montague...*" It's... *nice.*

**BAIRD**

I'll watch out for him.

**FLIPS**

Good. Lemme bring 'em in.

*Flips opens the door. Merton enters.*

**FLIPS**

Jeff Baird, meet my friend Merton Gill. His stage name is Clifford Armytage.

*Merton crosses and offers his hand.*

**MERTON**

*(Formally)*

Very pleased to meet you.

*Baird stares intently at Merton.*

**BAIRD**

*(To Flips)*

What's this, my child? Who is this?

**FLIPS**

I told you, he's Merton Gill from Gushwomp, Ohio.

**MERTON**

Simsbury, Illinois.

**FLIPS**

Right.

**BAIRD**

Well, I'll be swoshed! If I'd seen him out on the lot, I'd 'a' said he was the twin brother of Harold Parmalee.

**FLIPS**

*(Exclaiming triumphantly to Merton)*

There!

**BAIRD**

Well, I don't know what your contracutual demands are, Merlin ----

**FLIPS**

Merton...

**MERTON**

"Clifford." I'm not interested in signing a contract with you, Mr. Baird. Not for any of those "mere comedies" you do.

*Winks at Flips.*

I want to do something fine and worthwhile.

**BAIRD**

Kid, those'r words out of my own heart...

***SONG – "A SERIOUS PICTURE > TRACK 11 <"***

I'VE ALWAYS HAD A DREAM TO MAKE A SERIOUS PICTURE.  
A SERIOUS PICTURE - FILLED WITH PATHOS AND ROMANCE.  
I'VE GOT THIS HEAD OF STEAM TO MAKE A SERIOUS PICTURE  
AND THOUGH I'LL SURELY LOSE MY SHIRT,  
I'VE GOT TO TAKE THAT CHANCE.

HOW MANY PIES CAN I KEEP THROWING?  
HOW MANY EYES CAN I KEEP CLOSED?  
NO, IN MY CRAFT I MUST KEEP GROWING.  
IF WE'RE NOT GROWING, THEN WE ARE LOST!

TOGETHER, YOU AND I, WE'LL MAKE A SERIOUS PICTURE.  
A PICTURE LIKE THE WORLD HAS NEVER SEEN!  
NO "MERE COMEDIES" FOR MELVIN!

MERTON...  
**FLIPS**

MERTON!  
**BAIRD**

CLIFFORD...  
**MERTON**

CLIFFORD!  
**BAIRD**  
WELCOME TO THE SILVER SCREEN!

I want to get out of all that slap-stick stuff, see? Something fine and worthwhile, like you say.

**MERTON**  
Well, I've never been one to withhold my talent from a director striving for higher things.

**BAIRD**  
Glad to hear it! Now, I'll put you on my payroll beginning today at sixty a week.

**MERTON**  
But I haven't worked any today.

*Baird waves a hand airily.*

**BAIRD**  
MARTIN, MY LAD, YOU'RE MAKING SERIOUS MONEY.

**FLIPS**  
MERTON...

**BAIRD**  
SERIOUS MONEY. FOR AN ACTOR ON THIS LOT.

**MERTON**  
CLIFFORD...

**BAIRD**  
CLIFFORD, MY STAR, THIS IS DELIRIOUS MONEY!  
WORTH EVERY PENNY WHEN YOU SHOW ME WHAT YOU'VE GOT!

ALL I HAVE DONE MUST BE REPAIRED.  
YOU'VE HELPED ME FIND A PATH THAT'S TRUE.  
NO MORE TAWDRY SLAPSTICK FOR BAIRD  
SINCE THERE'S YOU, MORTON,

**FLIPS**  
MERTON...

**MERTON**  
CLIFFORD...

**BAIRD**

YOU!

TOGETHER YOU AND I WE'LL MAKE A SERIOUS PICTURE.  
A PICTURE THEY'LL BE CLAMORING TO SEE!

**ALL 3**

A SERIOUS PICTURE...

**BAIRD**

Maybe Flips will do a guest turn!

**ALL 3**

A SERIOUS PICTURE...

**BAIRD**

How'dya like to do a western?

**ALL 3**

A SERIOUS PICTURE...

**BAIRD**

STARRING YOU...!

**MERTON**

*(It is sinking in)*

Starring me...!

*(Music continues)*

**BAIRD**

Now, you go up to a little theatre on Hollywood Boulevard—you can't miss it— they're running a Harold Parmalee picture. Study him. Because it's a typical Parmalee role I'm going to have you do, see?

**MERTON**

All right, Mr. Baird. And I'm very glad you're trying to do something really worthwhile.

**BAIRD**

Thank YOU, Mick, Mert, Clif... Mr. Armytage! And welcome aboard!

**MERTON**

Thank you, sir!

*Merton shakes Baird's hand. Baird moves to another part of the room, leaving Flips and Merton alone.*

**MERTON**

Oh, Miss Montague, I don't know how to thank you! You're just about the best friend I've ever had...

**FLIPS**

Aw, shucks, Kid.

**MERTON**

I've never met anyone like you. I've never...

*He trails off. Her face is very close to his as she looks up into his eyes.*

**FLIPS**

... Yeah, Kid...?

**MERTON**

...I...

*He grabs her and kisses her passionately! The Music swells!*

**MERTON**

*(Breaking from the kiss)*

Oh, excuse me – I – I – !

**FLIPS**

It's alright, Kid. Now get on up to the Boulevard and catch that flicker.

**MERTON**

Right!

*Merton exits awkwardly and runs to an area representing the lot outside. Hugging herself, Flips watches him go then crosses to Baird. Meanwhile...*

**MERTON**

I kissed her all right! And I'm pretty sure it was right on the lips!

NO MORE SLEEPING IN A PROP ROOM,  
NO MORE WRINKLES IN MY TIE!  
NO MORE DAYS OF FINDING SCRAPS TO EAT  
OR LIVING IN A LIE!  
WHAT I'VE LEARNED OF SOBER ACTING  
I WILL FINALLY APPLY...

It's true that prayers can be answered!

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,

**BAIRD**

Well, Flips --- let's talk about that script of yours!

**FLIPS**

And how about my becoming an Assistant Producer, too?

**MERTON**

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,

**FLIPS**

Just keep him straight and he can't help but be funny!



**BAIRD**

I'm laughing all the way to the bank!

*Baird exits.*

**MERTON**

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE,

**FLIPS**

*(Calling after Baird)*

He's gonna *break* the bank!

*(To herself)*

Now if I can just keep from breaking his heart...

*Flips runs off after Baird.*

**MERTON**

AM I!

**CURTAIN**  
**END OF ACT I**

## ACT II

### Scene 1 – The Set of “Heart’s Ablaze!”

<b>“Genius Comes Into Its Own”</b>
------------------------------------

*The set is a SALOON, consisting of swinging doors upstage, a long bar, a table and some chairs. A sign proclaims it to be “The Come All Ye Saloon.”*

*Harry is dressed as The Boss. Edna is The Mother. Vivian is dressed as a Dance Hall Girl. Trixie, Louie and Tom are Cowboys.*

*The cast is milling about excitedly. Pickles - The Buckeye Cameraman - enters and waves for them to pay attention. Baird hustles onto the set.*

**BAIRD**

Okedoke, folks! We’re gonna pick up where we left off yesterday. With a little luck, we’ll have this picture in the can by the end of the day!

*There are whoops of approval and applause.*

*Flips runs on. She is dressed as a typical western ingénue --- innocent bonnet, gingham dress etc.*

**FLIPS**

Jeff! Merton’s finished in make-up! He’s gonna be here any second!

**BAIRD**

Thanks, Flips. Now, everybody: The number one rule on this set - don’t laugh at anything!

**EDNA**

You’re killin’ me, JB.

**BAIRD**

It’s the way it’s gotta be. And don’t forget: we’re making ---

**ALL**

A serious picture!

*Merton enters. He is dressed in a cowboy outfit.*

**SONG – “BRILLIANCE” > TRACK 12 <**

**FLIPS**

THERE HE IS!

**PICKLES**

Hey, Champ!

**BAIRD**

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE!

**MERTON**

Thank you, my fellow thespians...

**ALL**

HOLLYWOOD'S NEWEST STAR!

**MERTON**

You're all *too* kind...

**BAIRD**

THE WORLD IS HIS,

**ALL**

CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE!

**BAIRD**

DESTINY'S BROUGHT YOU THIS FAR!

**MERTON**

Well, one mustn't argue with destiny! But JB --- I have one little question.

**BAIRD**

Of course! Pickles, make sure everybody's at places for Mr. Armytage's entrance into the saloon.

**PICKLES**

Got it, JB.

*Pickles corals the others and moves the camera.*

**BAIRD**

Now what's this about a question, "C. A."?

**MERTON**

Oh, "C. A." I like that. I'm a little worried about my trousers today. They seem a few sizes too large...

**BAIRD**

SO YOUR TROUSERS SEEM LOOSE.  
IT'S NOT HARD TO DEDUCE  
THERE IS NO GOOD EXCUSE FOR THESE JEANS !  
BUT YOU SEE, RIGHT BACK HERE,  
WITH THIS ROOM IN YOUR REAR,  
THEY'LL BE PERFECT FOR SERIOUS SCENES!

**MERTON**

What?

**BAIRD**

IT IS ROUGH, (AM I RIGHT?)  
WHEN YOUR PANTS ARE TOO TIGHT  
TO EMOTE WHILE YOU FIGHT, OR SEDUCE?

SO I ASKED, NO I BITCHED  
TILL YOUR PANTS WERE SO STITCHED,  
CAUSE YOUR ACTING'S ENRICHED WHEN THEY'RE LOOSE...

**MERTON**

Seriously?

**FLIPS**

IN THE CABOOSE.

**MERTON**

Well ---

**BAIRD**

IT'S BRILLIANCE, MY BOY!  
WE ARE MAKING MOTION PICTURES  
USING CELLULOID AND KLIEG LIGHTS,  
TELLING STORIES THAT THE PUBLIC WANTS TO SEE,  
AND IT'S SERIOUS AS CAN BE.

GENIUS, MY BOY!  
AND YOUR COSTUME TELLS THE STORY  
OF YOUR CONQUESTS AND YOUR GLORY;  
IT'S SO AUTHENTIC AND HISTORICALLY CORRECT,  
HOLD YOURSELF ERECT!  
YOU'LL EARN THE PUBLIC'S ACCOLADES,  
THEIR HONOR AND RESPECT!

Just let us do our jobs so that you can do yours. And in a little while, "Hearts Ablaze!" will belong to the ages!

**MERTON**

But, it's all happened so quickly! I mean --- even for an experienced serious actor -- like me!

**FLIPS**

LET ME GIVE YOU A HINT,  
WE WILL ALL MAKE A MINT  
IF WE CUT, SAVE AND PRINT, ALL TOUTE SUITE!  
THIS ONE'S DONE, THEN THE NEXT,  
CUE THE BAND, WRITE THE TEXT...

**BAIRD**

I CAN SEE YOU'RE PERPLEXED, HAVE A SEAT!

*He leads Merton to a chair on the set.*

WHAT WE'RE FILMING TODAY  
IS A SCENE OF DISMAY  
AND THE ACTION MIGHT PLAY AS DISTRACTING.  
BUT I NEED YOU SINCERE,  
TO APPEAR SO AUSTERE  
AND ADHERE TO YOUR SERIOUS ACTING!

**MERTON**

Of course... but I feel the camera hasn't been able to capture me at my best – like when Harry kept accidentally knocking my hat off my head yesterday.

**ALL**

BRILLIANCE, MY BOY!

**BAIRD**

WE HAVE CAPTURED EVERY NUANCE,  
EVERY CAMERA HAS KEPT ROLLING.  
IT'S SO FANTASTIC THAT I'VE GOT TO TELL YOU WHAT,  
I'M AFRAID TO UTTER, "CUT!"

**ALL**

GENIUS, MY BOY!

**BAIRD**

AND OF COURSE WE'VE GOT OUR "ANGLES,"  
AND OUR "EDITS," AND OUR "LIGHTING."

**ALL**

IT'S SO ELECTRIC AND EXCITING CAN'T YOU TELL,  
EVERYTHING IS SWELL?  
AND SERIOUSLY NOW,  
IT'S GOING SERIOUSLY WELL!

**BAIRD**

Everything will be just perfect when "Hearts Ablaze" hits the theatres next week!

**MERTON**

Next week?! That soon?

**BAIRD**

THERE ARE HEARTS TO BE WON  
AND A WHOLE LOT OF FUN...

**FLIPS**

HE MEANS "SERIOUS" FUN, DECKED WITH CLASS.

**BAIRD**

WHEN WE OPEN IN DAYS,  
ALL THE CRITICS WILL PRAISE  
CLIFFORD ARMYTAGE – RAISE HIM A GLASS!

**ALL**

AHHHHH!  
DON'T FORGET WHERE YOU ARE  
BECAUSE KID, YOU'RE THE STAR  
OF A HOLLYWOOD PICTURE, IT'S TRUE!

**BAIRD**

NOW YOU PULL UP THOSE PANTS,  
KICK THOSE SPURS, MAKE THEM DANCE!

WE'VE LEFT NOTHING TO CHANCE!  
GIVE ME DANGER, ROMANCE,  
GIVE ME YOU,

**EDNA**

HANDSOME,

**ALL**

YOU,

**HARRY /LOUIE**

HERO,

**ALL**

YOU,

**TRIXIE /VIVIAN**

SPECIAL,

**ALL**

YOU,

**TOM**

DARING,

**ALL**

YOU,

**FLIPS**

CLIFFORD,

**ALL**

BRILL-I-ANT YOU!!

**PICKLES**

Mr. Baird, we need you to look at an angle over here.

**BAIRD**

Excuse me, C.A.!

**MERTON**

Of course, J.B.!

*Pickles and Baird go off to attend to the light. Merton turns to Flips and smiles moonily.*

**MERTON**

I must say, Miss Montague, you're... you're even prettier than usual today.

**FLIPS**

Why, thanks, Kid...

**MERTON**

Especially pretty....

**FLIPS**

Awwww...

**MERTON**

Exceptionally pretty.... Extraordinarily---

**FLIPS**

*(cutting him off)*

I read ya. So things are all jake on the set, eh? I can hardly believe it's your first starring role!

**MERTON**

Well, I *did* take that correspondence course in film acting, you know...

**FLIPS**

Oh, yeah.

**MERTON**

And JB certainly recognizes me for the naturally gifted dramatic actor I am.

**FLIPS**

Well, I saw some rushes yesterday! You were stupendous!

**MERTON**

I wish JB would let *me* see the rushes.

**FLIPS**

Oh! ...*No!* A serious actor NEVER watches the rushes!

**MERTON**

Of course! I knew that! But some of the scenes seem almost... *comical!*

**FLIPS**

*Comical?! Not a chance!*

*Baird returns.*

**BAIRD**

OK, C.A.: Let me give you the dope on the climactic scene.

**MERTON**

*(Closing his eyes and getting into "character")*

Yes, yes, yes.

**BAIRD**

You're the only son of a widowed mother. Both you and she are toiling to pay off the mortgage on your little home. You -- by working as The Clerk in a very high-class emporium in New York City. And she -- by peddling her new and improved ... *prune juice!*

**MERTON**

*Prune juice!*

**BAIRD**

*Prune juice!* Now, your mother has given you all of her life savings and told you to go out West --- to escape the villainous landlord who is scheming to take all the money she managed to squirrel away.

**MERTON**

*(Grimacing melodramatically)*

The swine! That's "hate," mixed with "despair."

**BAIRD**

Exactly!

**MERTON**

Out there, in the great open spaces!

**BAIRD**

That's the idea.

**MERTON**

Where men are men!

**BAIRD**

Save it for the camera!

**PICKLES**

Ready on the set, JB!

**BAIRD**

Great! Now C.A. get yourself focused and give me an entrance into the scene that Harold Parmalee himself would envy!

*Merton exits heroically.*

**BAIRD**

Wonderful! Let's pick up from the end of the cowboy's dance with the dance hall girl! Lights! Camera! Action!

*A lively honky tonk tune begins. The dance hall girl dances a rowdy dance with a cowboy.*

*Suddenly, the swinging doors part and Merton swaggers into the saloon. Every one freezes and clears away. Merton looks about with an overly melodramatic look of superiority. He takes two ponderous steps into the bar and.... his trousers fall neatly down around his ankles, revealing his boxer shorts and garters! Merton quickly pulls his pants back up.*

**BAIRD**

Cut!



**MERTON**

*(Adjusting his trousers)*

Curses!

**BAIRD**

Why, Clifford, I swear I never thought your trousers'd do *that!* You sure have shown me up as a director.

**MERTON**

Well, I wouldn't go *that* far. Let's try again, shall we?

**BAIRD**

Absolutely not! I don't make my star do double time because of some fault on my part.

**MERTON**

But the take is ruined!

**BAIRD**

Not at all! The camera'll trick it up just fine. Nothin' below the waist!

**MERTON**

*(Bluffing)*

Oh. *Yes!* Of course!

**BAIRD**

*(Setting the plan in motion)*

Of course! Flips, take Clifford down to wardrobe and tell Howie to fix his pants proper so that doesn't happen again.

**FLIPS**

*(Understanding)*

Right away, Jeff.

**BAIRD**

And take your time!

*Merton starts to exit. Baird pulls Flips aside.  
Confidentially:*

Make sure you keep him off the set for five minutes.

*Flips nods and runs to join Merton as they exit. Once  
Merton is gone, to everyone:*

**BAIRD**

All right – Fifth Avenue – NOW!

*The Western scene is spun around to become the Fifth  
Avenue Emporium in New York City. Upstage center is a  
revolving door into the establishment. Stage right is a  
counter with a hinged section that lifts up for additional*

*access behind the counter. Mid right is a large open trunk. Stage left is another counter with a display of men's and women's hats. A chair in front of the left counter allows a customer to be seated while examining the merchandise. Mid left is a table displaying several pies. Vivian, Trixie, Louie and Tom run off stage to change their costumes.*

**BAIRD**

Edna?

**EDNA**

Right here, Chief.

**BAIRD**

We gotta wrap up this chase scene before the kid comes back.

*Baird crosses onto the set and indicates the various playing areas. Time is ticking.*

We're in the Emporium on Fifth Avenue. The Clerk is played by our own Clifford Armytage. Gosh, that handle stinks. Make a note: we gotta change his stage name back to Merton Gill.

**PICKLES**

Ha, "Merton!" Now *that's* a funny name!

**BAIRD**

Harry, you're the boss. Merton's Mother --- Edna ---

*Edna takes her place on the set as The Mother.*

--- is peddling bootleg whiskey.

**EDNA**

"Prune juice," anyone?

*General laughter.*

**BAIRD**

She's planning to steal the boss's dough. Meanwhile, the police are on their way in to make a raid. The Mother has just sent Merton out West to hide all the illegal bootleg money from the police.

**HARRY**

Got it, JB.

**BAIRD**

Now Pickles, keep me posted on how much time we've got left.

**PICKLES**

Just under five minutes, JB.

**BAIRD**

Criminy. Ready on the set: Lights, camera, action!

**SONG – "THE CHASE" > TRACK 13 <**

*Music! Throughout the filming of this scene, Pickles stands behind the camera, rolling the film while Baird calls out direction to the actors. Baird and Pickles change positions several times in the course of filming the scene.*

Alright! The Mother and The Boss are frantic!

*The Boss scurries madly about, trying to decide what to do.*

**BAIRD**

Now, Mother --- sneak down to get your hands on his money!

**EDNA**

I'M SNEAKING DOWN TO GET THE MONEY.

*The Mother sneaks toward the money box hungrily. The Boss catches her just as she is about to put her hands on the money.*

**BAIRD**

The Boss can see she's got the bills.

**EDNA**

THE BOSS CAN SEE I'VE GOT THE BILLS...

**HARRY**

Give me back the dough!

**EDNA**

HE WANTS TO TAKE BACK ALL THE MONEY!

*The Mother starts to cross angrily towards the revolving doors up center.*

**BAIRD**

Alright --- Cop Number One – come on in!

*The first cop spins dizzily into the room and tries to steady himself.*

**EDNA**

THAT'S IT - I'M HEADIN' FOR THE HILLS!

**HARRY**

*(Spotting Cop 1)*

Oh no, the coppers!

*Edna and Harry run to their respective hiding places and disappear.*

Now the rest of you cops come in the door.

*The remaining three cops spiral into the emporium.*

**COPS (PLAYERS 2, 5, 7, 8)**

WE ARE THE COPS,  
IT'S NO SURPRISE!  
OUR SHOES ARE BIG,  
WE CROSS OUR EYES!  
WE RUN IN CIRCLES  
AND WE SMASH EACH OTHER'S CROWN....  
AND THEN FALL DOWN!

*The Four Policeman all collapse in a heap inside the revolving door.*

**BAIRD**

Great! Now pull yourselves into formation! Salute! Spin around! Now high tail it outa the room!

*The Policemen have set themselves in two lines, saluted, spun and highstepped offstage.*

**PICKLES**

Four minutes, JB.

**BAIRD**

Mother – where are you?

*Edna pops up behind the right counter.*

**EDNA**

I'M CROUCHING DOWN BEHIND THE COUNTER.

*She sneaks over behind the left counter.*

**BAIRD**

Make sure the coast is clear.

**EDNA**

I'M MAKING SURE THE COAST IS CLEAR.

*She looks about and smiles mischievously.*

**BAIRD**

Yes --- now grab the box, take out the dough!

**EDNA**

I GRAB THE BOX AND TAKE THE DOUGH OUT.

*She does.*

**BAIRD**

Hide the money.

**EDNA**

I HIDE THE MONEY RIGHT IN HERE...

*She vulgarly puts it down the front of her blouse.*

**BAIRD**

Watch it, Edna --- this is a family picture!

*She shrugs and hides the money.*

Now take off down right!

*She runs off right.*

Perfect, doll! Now Cops!

*Vivian drags Harry onto the stage from off left. Harry looks about fretfully.*

**COPS (Players 7 and 8)**

WE ARE THE COPS,  
AND WE ARE SWELL!

*Vivian spots something on the front of her uniform and stops in her tracks.*

OH NO, THERE'S SCHMUTZ  
ON YOUR LAPEL!

*She starts to brush it off.*

WE HAVE TO BRUSH IT OFF  
SO WE CAN SAVE THE DAY...

*Tom enters from up right and crosses down to see what Vivian is doing. Meanwhile, Harry sneaks away from the two cops and hides behind the left counter.*

HE GOT AWAY!

*Vivian and Tom exit in opposite directions. Harry pops up behind the left counter.*

**BAIRD**

Ha ha! OK, The Boss checks to see if his money is still there

*Harry crosses to the box and opens it. The money is gone.*

**HARRY**

Gone!

*Harry puts away the money box and crosses to center, frustrated.*

**BAIRD**

Cops 1 and 2 run in now!

WE ARE THE COPS,  
WE ARE THE COPS,  
WE ARE THE COPS!

**COPS (Players 5 and 7)**

*Vivian and Tom run in from up left and up right.*

*Harry turns upstage. He is the apex of a triangle formed by Vivian, Tom and himself. The cops threaten Harry with their billy clubs.*

**BAIRD**

That's it, Boss – make a run for it.

*Harry runs upstage between the two cops. As he runs between them, the cops raise their billy clubs and unwittingly hit each other on the helmet. Harry dashes out the revolving door.*

*The cops spin around, dazed from their blows to the head.*

Now, cops – smash each other over the head! Little birdies are flying 'round your heads.

**COPS**

*(a little the worse for wear)*

WE'RE THESH COPS...  
OOH PRETTY STARS...

**BAIRD**

Now --- straighten up!

*They each snap to attention and go upstage to the revolving door*

*They get wedged in.*

**BAIRD**

*(laughing)*

Perfect! Not get outta there!

*Vivian and Trixie stumble through the door.*

**BAIRD**

OK, Mother – you're on now.

*Edna enters from down right.*

**EDNA**

I GOT THE MONEY AND I'M HAPPY.

**BAIRD**

But wait! You hear the coppers - better hide!

*She cups a hand to her ear as if she hears something in the distance.*

**EDNA**

I HEAR THE COPPERS, BETTER HIDE!

*She spots the trunk and races to it. She climbs into the trunk.*

**EDNA**

*(Closing the lid on top of herself)*

I CLIMB INTO THIS LITTLE TRUNKEY...

*She has a little trouble.*

**BAIRD**

Hurry up, Edna!

**EDNA**

I THINK MY BUTT'S AN INCH TOO WIDE!

*She makes it in.*

**PICKLES**

Three minutes, JB.

**BAIRD**

Now--- the other two cops are back in.

*Trixie and Louie run on from up right.*

**COPS (Players 2 and 8)**

WE ARE THE COPS,  
WE'RE FIGHTING CRIME!  
WE'RE SHOWING UP,  
AND JUST IN TIME!  
WE ALWAYS ACT  
LIKE WE ARE ABSOLUTELY DRUNK...

**BAIRD**

Now, Mother --- curiosity killed the cat --- you gotta look.

*Edna pops open the lid of the trunk and looks about.*

**EDNA**

Hellooooo....!

**COPS (Players 2 and 8)**

SHE'S IN THE TRUNK!

**EDNA**

Yikes! They're onto me!

*She crouches back into the trunk, slamming the lid over herself. The Two Policemen stumble to the trunk.*

*Louie locks the front of the trunk.*

*Trixie crosses up left to look for The Boss. But when Louie tilts the edge of the trunk to lift it, we see that there is no bottom to the trunk and Edna can slip out of the opening he has made.*

**BAIRD**

But no! There's no bottom to the trunk! Out she goes!

**EDNA**

*(Escaping from the trunk)*

Jokes on you, copper!

**BAIRD**

Try to escape up right, Mother.

*She runs blindly up right but soon sees Cop Number 4 waiting for her.*

Ah --- but there's a cop!

**EDNA**

Ahhhhhh!

*She stops in her tracks, hopping on her left leg to stop herself.*

**BAIRD**

Go the other way, Mother!

*She turns to take off in the opposite direction but immediately sees the other policeman. She hops on her right foot, trying to stop her momentum.*

**EDNA**

Oh, no, another one!

*She hops from one leg to the other, trying to decide what to do.*

**BAIRD**

Quick! Think on your feet, Mother!

*She turns her hops into an Irish jig.*

**PICKLES**

*TWO* minutes, JB!

**EDNA**

I'M GONNA MAKE IT TO THE DOORWAY.

**BAIRD**

But the two policemen catch themselves!

*They suddenly stop, realizing their folly and look about for The Mother.*



Wait!  
**TRIXIE**

After her!  
**LOUIE**

**EDNA**  
BUT THEY CAN'T CATCH ME CAUSE I'M SPRY!

**BAIRD**  
Scramble! All over the shop! Run after her!

*A wild chase around the shop ensues.*

Whoaaaaaaa!  
**TRIXIE**

Under the table, Mother!  
**BAIRD**

*She crawls under the pastry table from the upstage side, crawling toward the audience.*

Oh, God, my knees!  
**EDNA**  
I'M GOING UNDERNEATH THE TABLE!

Everybody - under the table.  
**BAIRD**

*Trixie and Louie execute a confusing crawling bit under the table.*

Edna, pick up a pie!  
**EDNA**  
AND NOW I'M PICKING UP A PIE...

*She grabs a pie from the table.*

**TRIXIE**  
*(From under the table)*  
We're comin'!

*The two policemen end up standing on the upstage side of the pastry table on either side of Edna.*

Everybody grab a pie!  
**BAIRD**

*The two policemen each grab a pie and hold it threateningly.*

Take that!  
**EDNA**

*Edna slaps her pie facedown on the table. Each cop, frightened by her action, does a little hop in place.*

**BAIRD**

And dive!

*Edna dives under the pastry table and crawls downstage under it again.*

And throw!!

*The Cops throw their pies at each other! Splat!*

**PICKLES**

ONE MINUTE, JB!

*Flips pokes her head in breathlessly.*

**FLIPS**

Better hurry – Merton's comin' down the alley!

*She looks nervously off-stage.*

**BAIRD**

The Mother escapes out the door!

*Edna dances toward the revolving doors.*

**EDNA**

I AM ESCAPING OUT THE DOORWAY.

**BAIRD**

Guys spin down stage!

**EDNA**

*Spinning around in the door, she finds a bit of custard on her dress.*

SOMEBODY GOT ME, AND I'M MAD!

*The two policemen dizzily spin to down center.*

**TRIXIE**

Whoaaaaa!

**BAIRD**

That't it! Look at each other.

**EDNA**

*(still in the door, spinning)*

I'M STILL ESCAPING OUT THE DOORWAY!

*The cops stop and look at each other's pie-covered face.*

**BAIRD**

Now look out front.

**EDNA**

*(last time around)*

YOU KNOW, THIS CUSTARD AIN'T HALF BAD.

*The cops look at the audience.*

**PICKLES**

*Thirty Seconds...*

**BAIRD**

Edna – get out of here! Cops - spin around!

*They spin in place.*

And.... pratfall!

**FLIPS**

Hurry! Here he comes!

**BAIRD**

Down!

*MUSIC STING*

*They fall backwards on their butts, tossing their legs into the air.*

Up!

*MUSIC STING*

*They sit up.*

Look out!

*MUSIC STING*

*They look at the audience in confusion, and a final fall.*  
*MUSIC ENDS.*

Annnnnnd..... cut! Save it! Great work, people! Now back to the Saloon – let's go, let's go!

*MUSIC picks back up at a frenetic pace...*

**PICKLES**

Ten seconds, JB...

**FLIPS**

*(seeing MERTON approach)*

Jefffff.....oh my....

**BAIRD**

Come on – costumes – table over there...!

*The others scramble to replace the dance hall costumes. Pickles moves the camera back to where it was for the Saloon scene. The set is spun around again for the Saloon barely in the nick of time. Everyone is unsuccessfully trying to hide the fact that they are panting. MUSIC stops.*

*Merton enters wearing new pants.*

**MERTON**

I think we got it all ironed out, JB.

**PICKLES**

Break's over, everyone!

*Cast pretends to be happy about the "break" being over.*

**BAIRD**

*(as if nothing has happened)*

Ahh, Clifford! That's much better! And you're...

*Baird notices that Vivian still has her cop moustache on and makes certain Merton doesn't see as he gestures to her to remove it, which she does.*

...you're back just in time for your most dramatic scene in the film – have you got it in you?

**MERTON**

It's what I've been preparing for my whole life!

**BAIRD**

Excellent! Now, Flips, let's go over the character details we discussed yesterday while Clifford was getting into make-up.

**FLIPS**

Sure, Jeff.

*They cross to a separate part of the stage. Edna crosses to Merton.*

**EDNA**

*(to Merton)*

Say, Clifford: the gangs goin' to Mother Hagin's for a wrap party tonight. You're comin', aintcha?

**MERTON**

*(lowering his voice)*

Tonight? Oh, gee, thanks Edna, but I have other plans...

*Meanwhile...*

**BAIRD**

*(to Flips)*

I read that script of yours last night.

**FLIPS**

And...

**BAIRD**

I think it'd make a great follow-up picture for our new star over there.

**FLIPS**

Terrific!

**MERTON**

*(to Edna)*

The truth is, I'm gonna ask someone special to have dinner with me tonight... kinda private-like.

**EDNA**

*(teasing)*

You sly fox! You got your eye on someone...?!

**BAIRD**

*(to Flips)*

And if the kid works out the way it looks like he's gonna, I think you can count on bein' Assistant Producer on the next picture!

**FLIPS**

Golly, Jeff, thanks!

**MERTON**

*(to Edna)*

Well, let's just say it's someone I've grown *awfully* fond of...!

**BAIRD**

*(to Flips)*

Now just do everything the way we rehearsed it yesterday when the kid wasn't around.

**FLIPS**

And you're sure he's not gonna notice what I'm doin'?

**BAIRD**

Let me handle him.

*Flips and Baird cross back to Merton.*

**BAIRD**

Now, Clifford, you've come out West where you've met the girl of your dreams --- played by our lovely Flips Montague...

**MERTON**

*(blurting out)*

She *IS* the girl of my dreams! I mean... she's *playing* the girl of my dreams so *perfectly*!

**BAIRD**

Isn't she? Now, your sweetheart has followed you into the saloon to wish you well before your big gunfight.

**MERTON**

*(Looking dreamily at Flips)*

How thoughtful she is...!

**BAIRD**

Indeed! Now, it's our hero's moment of heartfelt passion for his dear sweetheart.

*Merton looks out front with an expression of profound love.*

**BAIRD**

That's the ticket. Ready, Pickles?

**PICKLES**

All set!

**BAIRD**

Lights! Camera! Action!

*Great romantic music under!*

***SONG – "SWEETHEART" > TRACK 14 <***

**BAIRD**

Now, Clifford, give her the prairie roses you've picked just for her.

*Merton presents Flips with a bouquet.*

**MERTON**

*(Ardently)*

I ONLY WISH THAT YOU COULD BE MY SWEETHEART,

**BAIRD**

Flips -- take the roses, smell them and gaze at him lovingly.

*Flips follows Baird's direction.*

**MERTON**

FOR HEARTS LIKE YOURS ARE MEANT TO BE ADORED.

**BAIRD**

Now Clifford – hand over your life savings so she can make the down payment on the little cottage you will share after you've vanquished the villain.

*As Merton does this:*

**MERTON**

WITH YOU MY ONE AND ONLY,  
YOU'D NEVER ONCE BE LONELY.

*Flips puts her hand melodramatically to her breast and accepts the money shyly.*

**MERTON**

BESIDES, YOU'RE ALL MY LITTLE HEARTSTRINGS CAN AFFORD!

**BAIRD**

Now Clifford, turn back to the camera and envision the life the two of you will lead together.

*Merton stares out toward the audience, milking the "pathos" of the scene for all its worth. The minute Merton's back is turned, Flips dismissively tosses the bouquet away, crudely lifts her skirt and puts the money in her garter belt.*

**MERTON**

*(lovingly)*

A COTTAGE WILL BE HOME FOR US, MY SWEETHEART,  
A CHARMING LITTLE LOVE NEST MEANT FOR TWO.  
AND NOTHING WILL BE MISSING  
FOR ALWAYS WE'LL BE KISSING;  
YOUR LIPS FOR ME ALONE AND MY TWO LIPS FOR YOU.

*During this, Flips stands behind Merton, sarcastically mocking his every move, much to the enjoyment of the rest of the bar.*

**BAIRD**

Yes, that's it. You're in love with an angel! Now turn to each other!

*Merton turns back to her, and just in the nick of time, Flips is back in place, looking up at him with adoring, innocent eyes.*

**MERTON**

*(To Flips, adoringly)*

OH SWEETHEART, I LOVE YOU!  
YOU'RE MINE ALONE, I KNOW.  
A CHASTE VIRGIN CREATURE,  
PURE AS THE DRIVEN SNOW.

**BAIRD**

Now, look out front and see the vision of your future!

*Merton does so. Again, the minute his back is turned, Flips resorts to her rough behavior.*

**MERTON**

I ONLY WISH THAT YOU COULD BE MY SWEETHEART,

*The dance hall girl dances with a cowboy. Flips crosses to the couple, punches the dance hall girl who collapses to the floor; Flips grabs her cowboy-companion and roughly dips him into a lover's embrace, kissing him savagely. Meanwhile:*

**MERTON**

FOR LOYAL AND TRUE BLUE YOU'LL ALWAYS BE.

*Merton starts to turn to look at Flips.*

**BAIRD**

Don't look at her! Make love to the camera!

*Merton snaps back. Flips grabs a turkey leg off the bar, gnaws on it disgustingly and tosses the bone over her shoulder.*

**MERTON**

A DAINY LITTLE BLOSSOM, A FRAGILE ANGEL DOVE,  
A VIRTUOUS VESTAL VIRGIN WHO HUNGERS FOR MY LOVE,  
SO FRAGILE AND DEFENSELESS, I'M THANKING GOD ABOVE!  
THE ONLY HEART THAT'S SWEET ENOUGH FOR ME...

*She pulls a card-playing cowboy up by the scruff of his shirt and forces him to dance with her, then spins him around, kicks him in the butt and laughs harshly.*

**MERTON**

*(passionately)*

I WOULD FIGHT FOR YOU!  
I WOULD LIE FOR YOU!  
I WOULD LAY DOWN MY ARMS AND DIE FOR YOU!

*Merton turns to look at Flips.*

**BAIRD**

No, not to her! Into the camera!

*Merton snaps back.*

**MERTON**

I WOULD TAKE FOR YOU!  
I WOULD GIVE FOR YOU!  
AND FOR ALL OF MY LIFE I WOULD LIVE FOR YOU!

*Flips sits in the cowboy's chair, plants her elbow on the table, daring the intimidated cowboy sitting across from her to arm wrestle her for the drink his friend left behind. He consents and she easily wins, banging his arm down hurtfully on the table. She then grabs the whiskey from the table, drinks it down, wipes her mouth with her sleeve and burps.*

*Meanwhile....*



**MERTON**

*(amorously)*

I ONLY WISH THAT YOU COULD BE MY SWEETHEART,  
FOR YOU, YOU KNOW, NO THING I WOULDN'T DO.

*During this, the bartender, fed up with this harridan, crosses out from behind the bar and demands that Flips leave his establishment. She takes out a gun and shoots him. He falls over, dead. She turns to the bar and flips down a sign reading "Bartender Wanted."*

*She then takes out a huge cigar, lights a match on the heel of her shoe and puffs the cigar happily.*

**BAIRD**

Finally the two lovers turn back to each other for a joyful embrace!

**MERTON**

MY SWEETHEART...

*Flips hides the cigar behind her back as Merton turns to her.*

**MERTON**

MY SWEETHEART...

*Flips snaps into her coy pose.*

**MERTON**

MY SWEETHEART...

*She steps into Merton's outstretched arms and demurely turns away from his eyes.*

**MERTON**

MY SWEETHEART...

**BAIRD**

Now Clifford --- a glad light comes into your eyes! Do a regular Parmalee!

*Merton smiles gleefully out. Flips whips her unseen cigar out from behind her back and leers crassly into the camera.*

**MERTON**

I LOVE YOU!

**BAIRD**

*Annnnd cut! Save it! And that, my friends, is a wrap!*

*Hoots, hollers and applause from everyone.*

**MERTON**

Now my performance belongs to the ages...!

**BAIRD**

And, art has its rewards, my boy: Starting with our next picture, I'm raising your salary to seventy-five a week.

**MERTON**

*(His guard down)*

Really?! Oh, my!

**PICKLES**

JB – the extras need to have their talent slips signed.

**BAIRD**

I'll be right out. And Flips, if you can wait a moment? I'd like to discuss something with you.

**FLIPS**

Sure!

*Baird exits behind Pickles.*

**FLIPS**

Kid, I'm so tickled with you, I could give you a good, big hug. In fact, I think I will!

*Flips impulsively hugs Merton. He is taken aback, but pleased.*

**MERTON**

Oh, thank you! I... I can't believe the week is over...

**FLIPS**

You had fun?

**MERTON**

I've had the best time --- practicing my art, getting to know JB, and Edna ... and... and most of all --- *you*, Miss Montague.

**FLIPS**

*(Shyly)*

Aw, shucks, Kid.

**MERTON**

In fact, if I may be so bold: What say you and I go out for supper tonight? My treat!

**FLIPS**

I guess you gotta right to, after that raise Baird just gave you.

**MERTON**

I'll say! Let's go straight downtown to a real restaurant --- the Silver Pelican ---and order the best dinner money can buy: lobster and chicken and vanilla ice-cream and everything!

**FLIPS**

Well, just this once. But Jeff wants to talk business with me. And we both gotta get outta these get-ups. Why don't you head on down to the Silver Pelican and I'll meetcha there?

**MERTON**

Sure – I'll get us a good table!

*He starts to exit then turns back.*

We'll have soup, too. One of those thick ones that costs about sixty cents. Sixty cents just for soup!

*He smiles innocently at her, then turns to go. He stops and turns back to her:*

Until we meet again, Miss Montague...

*He runs off happily.*

**FLIPS**

*(To herself)*

You poor feckless dub....

*Baird enters.*

**BAIRD**

Well, the squirrel's done it!

**FLIPS**

Ya think so...?

**BAIRD**

Absolutely! And congratulations – you're gonna get your first script produced! *And* you got yourself a job as Assistant Producer.

**FLIPS**

*(distracted)*

Thanks...

**BAIRD**

You don't sound too excited...

**FLIPS**

There's somethin' that worries me.

**BAIRD**

What's that?

**FLIPS**

When he finds out what we did. Think of it—to see his fine, honest acting turned into Buckeye slapstick! Can't you get that?

**SONG – "ROMEO" > TRACK 15 <**

HE THOUGHT HE WAS PLAYING ROMEO,  
A HERO WITH LOVE IN HIS HEART.  
HE ACTED LIKE HE WAS ROMEO,  
BUT THAT WASN'T NEARLY THE PART.

HE WANTED TO BE LIKE ROMEO  
WITH JULIET THERE AT HIS SIDE.  
HE TRUSTED ME, EYES OPEN WIDE;  
AND WITH EACH WORD I UTTERED, I LIED.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS PLAYING GALLAHAD,  
A KNIGHT ON A SILVERY HORSE.  
HE ACTED LIKE HE WAS GALLAHAD,  
BUT HE DIDN'T GET IT OF COURSE.

HE WANTED TO BE LIKE GALLAHAD  
WITH GUENEVERE RIDING ASTRIDE.  
I DON'T KNOW WHERE I'M GOING TO HIDE...  
IT'S TEARING ME UP ALL INSIDE.

ROMEO -  
THERE'S A MAN WHO WOULD TAKE HIS OWN LIFE,  
ALL IN THE NAME OF LOVE.  
WHO COULD KNOW  
I'D HAVE WANTED TO END UP HIS WIFE?  
THAT'S WHAT I'M THINKING OF...

**BAIRD**

Ya gettin' moony over the kid?

**FLIPS**

What?! *No!* I... I just got caught up in the part, I guess...

**BAIRD**

Well, don't worry. He's a born actor. And I never yet saw an actor that didn't cotton to applause.

**FLIPS**

I hope so, Jeffrey ole boy.

**BAIRD**

But get him to change his name back to Merton Gill. Clifford Armytage don't sound funny enough.

**FLIPS**

I'll see what I can do.

*Baird exits.*

HE THOUGHT HE WAS PLAYING ROMEO.  
CAUSE THAT'S WHO HE'S LONGING TO BE.  
NOW WHO DO I PLAY,  
WHEN HE FINDS OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT ME?

*The lights fade.*

**SCENE 2 – THE PRIVATE DINING ROOM OF THE  
SILVER PELICAN**

*The "French" Waiters are attending to Merton in a  
private dining room.*

**SONG – "ZE SILVER PELICAN" > TRACK 16 <**

**WAITER 1**

*Bienvenue sur Le Silver Pelican, monsieur...*

**MERTON**

Why, same to you, sir. I'm expecting *my best girl* any minute now!

**WAITER 2**

*Certainment, Monsieur!*

**WAITERS**

HERE AT ZE SILVER PELICAN  
EVERYSING WE DO IS TRES FRANCAISE.  
WE'LL GIVE YOU SOME SNAILS  
OR SOME FISH HEADS AND TAILS  
ZAT ARE COVERED IN ZE FLUFFY WHITE BERNAISE!

**MERTON**

Well, I know all about your Frenchified cooking.

**WAITERS**

MAKE SURE YOU BRING AN APPETITE  
FOR ZE FEET OF PIGS OR GARLIC BUTTERED PRAWN!  
OUR BREAD IS SO TALL  
ZAT YOU CAN'T EAT IT ALL  
SO WE CUT IT UP AND CALL IT A CROUTON!

**MERTON**

Oh! Just bring me dinner for two --- the best ya got!

**WAITER 2**

*Oui, monsieur!*

**WAITERS**

IS NOT OUR MASCOT SO UNIQUE?  
WE FEED YOU TILL YOU CAN NOT SPEAK.  
WE USE ZE WINE AND ZE GARLIQUE  
AND ONLY PERFECT FRENCH TECHNIQUE  
TO MAKE CUISINE TRES MAGNIFIQUE --!

*Flips enters. The Waiters rush to her.*

**WAITERS**

HERE AT ZE SILVER PELICAN  
WE DO EVERYZING ZE WAY ZE FRENCH WOULD DO  
MAY I BE OF SOME ASSISTEMENT TO YOU?

**FLIPS**

Thanks, Frenchie! I'm just looking for my friend, over there.

**WAITERS**

Ahh – *certainment* – We understand.

*The Waiters wink and exit. FLIPS goes to the table.*

**FLIPS**

Say, Kid! Almost couldn't find ya in this gussied up eatery.

**MERTON**

They had this private dining room available, so I took it. Now that I'm about to be a famous movie actor, I thought I'd better get used to this kind of thing.

**FLIPS**

Swell. Ya know, they looked at me cross-eyed when I asked the maitre'd for the Merton Gill party.

**MERTON**

I made the reservation under "Armytage."

**FLIPS**

Well, I guess we better can that "Clifford Armytage" stuff.

**MERTON**

Why?

**FLIPS**

Merton Gill is a much better name.

**MERTON**

You think so...?

**FLIPS**

I know so. "Clifford Armytage" reminds me of a feckless dub that was on the vaudeville circuit with Ma and Pa and me. The phoney stage name he picked out for himself was Clyde Maltravers. It wasn't 'til he changed his name back to his *real* name that he hit the big time.

**MERTON**

What was his real name?

**FLIPS**

Eddie Duffy.

**MERTON**

*Eddie Duffy?! The movie star?! Well, Clifford Armytage is out then! I'll do whatever you think best, Miss Montague. If you say it's so, it must be!*

*Merton looks into Flip's eyes. She averts his gaze nervously. The waiters appear with the soup course.*

**WAITER 1**

*Excusez-moi, mademoiselle et monsieur.*

**WAITERS**

HERE AT ZE SILVER PELICAN.  
WE'VE PREPARED FOR YOU A CREAMY LOBSTER BISQUE.  
FROM YOUR HUMBLE REQUEST  
WE HAVE BROUGHT YOU ZE BEST.  
I ASSURE YOU, TO IGNORE IT IS A RISK.

HERE AT ZE SILVER PELICAN.  
YOU MAY EAT WIZOUT ZE SLIGHTEST OF REMORSE...

*They realize the couple is impatient.*

WHEN YOU FINISH, WE WILL BRING ZE SECOND COURSE.

*The Waiters exit. Flips begins eating the soup, somewhat uncomfortable under Merton's loving gaze.*

**FLIPS**

Smells terrif. Musta set ya back a piece, Kid.

**MERTON**

Oh, nothings too good for you...

**FLIPS**

Well, after this picture, I'll get ya as good a deal as can be got. Trust me.

**MERTON**

Oh, I do. I'd be helpless without you.

**FLIPS**

*(Blushing)*

...Whatdaya talking about, Kid...?!

*The WAITERS swoop in.*

**WAITERS**

WE SEE YOU'VE FINISHED WIZ YOUR PLATE.  
WE TRUST ZE LOBSTER WAS FIRST RATE.  
AND NOW WE MUST NOT HESITATE.  
FOR IF WE DO YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT.  
AND ZAT MIGHT MAKE YOU SO IRATE...

HERE AT ZE SILVER PELICAN.  
OUR WISH IS ZAT YOU EAT DOWN TO ZE BONE...

*Once again, they have overstayed their welcome...*

I SEE IT'S TIME TO LEAVE YOU TWO ALONE. *Au Revoir!*

*They exit.*

**MERTON**

Really, Miss Montague...

***SONG – "FOR YOU" > TRACK 17 <***

THERE IS SOMETHING I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU.  
FROM THE MOMENT THAT WE MET, I'VE BEEN AT ODDS.  
YOU ARE DIFFERENT, IN A GOOD WAY, FROM ANYONE I'VE KNOWN,  
LIKE A FLOWER, YOU'RE A PRESENT FROM THE GODS.

EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED SINCE I GOT HERE  
HAS SOMEHOW BEEN BECAUSE YOU WERE INVOLVED.  
YOU ARE QUITE THE TOUGHEST PUZZLE I HAVE EVER COME ACROSS,  
BUT MAYBE NOW, JUST MAYBE, I'VE GOT YOU SOLVED...

**FLIPS**

*(Guiltily)*

Oh, I ain't done nothin', Kid...

*He brings out a small velvet box from his jacket pocket.*

**MERTON**

FOR YOU.

*He thrusts the package into her weakly yielding hands.  
She fumbles with the box and her own conflicting  
emotions.*

I FINALLY FIGURED OUT THAT I WAS MADE  
FOR YOU.  
AND WHAT I FEEL INSIDE WILL NEVER FADE  
FOR YOU.  
I NEVER HAD THE WORDS BEFORE.  
I NEVER SAW THE SKY BEFORE.  
I NEVER HEARD THE BIRDS BE-  
FORE YOU.

**FLIPS**

*(Nervously)*

I can barely see in here.

*She gets up from the table and moves downstage where  
there is better light. Merton rises and joins her as she  
opens the box.*

**MERTON**

I'M READY TO DO ANYTHING  
FOR YOU.  
ALTHOUGH I KNOW NOT ANYTHING  
WILL DO  
FOR YOU.  
I THOUGHT, IN LOVE, I'D NEVER FALL,



BUT NOW I KNOW I'VE FALLEN ALL  
FOR YOU.

*She takes a watch out of the box.*

The band is silk. But the watch itself is platinum. The salesman told me it keeps good time. For a ladies watch bracelet, that is...

*On the brink of tears, she studies the watch, a grateful smile forming on her lips. But then, she straightens her shoulders and turns to Merton with an artificial attitude of mild irritation.*

**FLIPS**

I never saw such a man! After all you've been through, I should think you'd have learned the value of money. Anyway, it's too beautiful for me. And I couldn't take it—not tonight. And anyway—

*Her voice catches and she turns away to quickly wipe away a tear.*

**MERTON**

FOR YOU.

**FLIPS**

Now you listen, you don't know me at all!

**MERTON**

I'D BE NO ONE IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR YOU.

**FLIPS**

Suppose something came out about me that you didn't know about?

**MERTON**

IT'S NOT SURPRISING THAT I'VE GOT IT IN  
FOR YOU.

**FLIPS**

I might 'a' done lots of things that would turn you against me.

*His own voice becomes somewhat husky.*

**MERTON**

I don't care what you've done.

I NEVER WAS THIS BOLD BEFORE.  
I'VE NEVER HAD A STORY,  
SO I'VE NEVER HAD IT TOLD BE-  
FORE YOU.

*She fights back tears.*

**MERTON**

*(More than a touch of the bully in his tone)*

Listen, Kid - stop this nonsense. You - you come here and give me a good big kiss - see what I mean?

*She looks at him from wet eyes, and amazingly through her anguish, she grins.*

**FLIPS**

You win!

*She falls into his arms. They kiss! Then, he holds her protectively in his arms.*

*His cheek is against hers and his arms hold her.*

**MERTON**

I'M FINALLY SURE OF WHAT I'VE GOT.  
I WOULDN'T BE IN LOVE IF NOT  
FOR YOU.

What do I care what you've done in your past? And listen here, Kid... Don't ever do any more of those stunts—see what I mean? None of that falling off streetcars or houses or anything. Do you hear?

**FLIPS**

*(Barely a whisper, her voice choking)*

*Yes... oh, yes...!*

*But suddenly, she steels herself and backs away from him.*

Now you sit down.

*He looks at her, stunned, then crosses to his chair at the table.*

**MERTON**

Alright.

**FLIPS**

We've...we've had one grand little evening. And now --- I'll let you go.

*She goes to the door.*

**MERTON**

*Go?! But there's four more courses!*

**FLIPS**

*(Grasping)*

I... need to see Jeff in the morning ... And I got --- lots of things to do.

*He stands up.*

**MERTON**

All this nonsense! I—I won't have it—see what I mean?

**FLIPS**

*(Ignoring him)*

And this.

*She looks lovingly at the watch in her hand.*

**FLIPS**

I won't take it. 'Till you give it to me again.

*She holds the watch out to him.*

**MERTON**

What do you mean?

**FLIPS**

The picture'll be out next week. And then --- if you want to see me again --- you can give me this.

*She puts the watch on the table and moves away quickly toward the exit.*

**MERTON**

*What?!* Of course I'll want to see you again! What's wrong?

*She takes a moment to steel herself further.*

**FLIPS**

I'm... scared.

**MERTON**

But you mustn't be. I... I know all about your fella --- and the terrible accident with the ice truck --- but nothing like that's gonna happen this time ---

**FLIPS**

It ain't that. I'm --- scared of how you'll take it.

**MERTON**

Take what...?

**FLIPS**

Anything you're gonna get.

**MERTON**

Well, don't be.

*He smiles nervously.*

**MERTON**

Now, you just forget it. And give me a good big—

*She turns impulsively away from him.*

**FLIPS**

I gotta go, Kid.

*She exits. Merton looks after her.*

**MERTON**

I THOUGHT, IN LOVE, I'D NEVER FALL,  
BUT NOW I KNOW I'VE FALLEN ALL  
FOR YOU.

*Merton sinks into his chair.*

*The lights fade.*

**SCENE 3 – THE MILLION DOLLAR THEATRE**

**“Five Reels – 500 Laughs”**

*A week later. Movie theatre patrons are excitedly milling about under the marquee outside of the new Million Dollar Theatre in Hollywood!*

*Merton enters with his top coat collar turned up and a hat pulled down over his face. He meanders through the crowd, listening to their banter, looking up at the marquis that reads MERTON GILL IN “HEARTS ABLAZE!”*

*Meanwhile on the opposite side of the stage, a similarly disguised man wearing a hat and dark glasses makes his own way through the excited throng, taking note of their chitchat.*

**PATRON 3**

There you are, Myrtle! I was worried you weren't comin'!

**PATRON 4**

You know I never miss a Jeff Baird picture!

**PATRON 1**

I loved the last one!

**PATRON 2**

Let's go grab our seats!

*Merton and the other man accidentally back into each other down center. They both spin around. It is Jeff Baird.*

**MERTON**

JB!

**BAIRD**

Merton!

**MERTON**

I almost didn't recognize you, sir.

**BAIRD**

Oh – my disguise. I always sneak into the first showing of one of my films -- to get a bead on the audience.

**MERTON**

*(Indicating his hat and collar)*

I was afraid someone might recognize me, too. I didn't want to create a mob scene with my fans.

**BAIRD**

Smart thinking!

**MERTON**

I asked Miss Montague to come but she hasn't been feeling well for almost a week.

**BAIRD**

Flips? Oh – she's fine. I mean... just opening week jitters, I guess...

**MERTON**

You must be as nervous as me. This being your first serious picture, and all.

**BAIRD**

Indeed.

**MERTON**

Why haven't you made a serious picture before?

**BAIRD**

Oh, I guess sometimes we resist most what we do best....

**MERTON**

Really? I'd never thought of that... Well, good luck, Mr. Baird! And once again, I want to thank you for letting my dream of being a serious actor come true!

**BAIRD**

You betcha...

*Merton happily enters the theatre. Jeff looks about nervously and readjusts his disguise.*

**BAIRD**

*(To himself)*

... Don't thank me yet, kiddo...

*The lights fade.*

**SCENE 4 – ON SCREEN**

*An exciting motion picture fanfare! The screen lights up with a title card:*

<p><b>"Hearts Ablaze!"</b> <b>A Buckeye Comedy</b> <b>Introducing</b> <b>Merton Gill</b> <b>As "The Clerk"</b></p>
--

*What follows is a live presentation of the film "Hearts Ablaze" in which Merton, playing the Clerk, unintentionally instigates most of the jokes. There are piefights, crazy policemen, prat falls and much slapstick comedy.*

**SCENE 5 – THE MILLION DOLLAR THEATRE**

**One Hour Later  
Outside The Million Dollar  
Theatre**

*The scene shifts back to outside The Million Dollar Theatre. The crowd is now pouring excitedly out of the theatre under the marquee.*

**SONG – "WHO'S THAT FUNNY GUY" > TRACK 18 <**

**PATRON 1**  
THAT WAS FUNNY!

**PATRON 4**  
REALLY FUNNY!

**PATRON 3**  
WHO'S THAT FUNNY GUY?

**PATRON 1**  
NOSE IS RUNNY!

**PATRON 4**  
WHAT A HONEY!

**PATRON 3**  
THAT'S ONE FUNNY GUY!

**PATRON 2**  
THE WAY HE KEPT HIS FACE SO STRAIGHT  
WHILE EVERYONE PULLED THEIR CAPERS!

**PATRON 2**  
I CAN TELL YOU NOW HE'S A HIT ...

**PATRON 5**  
AND HOW!

**PATRON 1**  
GONNA READ ABOUT HIM IN THE PAPERS!

*MERTON enters from the theatre and wanders numbly  
into the crowd*

**PATRON 5**  
LAUGHIN'!

**PATRON 4**  
CRYIN'!

**PATRON 1**  
I'M JUST DYIN'...

**ALL**  
FOR THAT FUNNY GUY?

**PATRON 2**  
SIDES ARE HURTIN'!

**PATRON 3** (*Spots MERTON*)  
HEY, THERE'S MERTON!

**ALL** (*Closing in around MERTON*)  
YOU'RE THAT FUNNY GUY!!!

*MERTON is surrounded – the accolades are driving him insane.*

**PATRON 4**  
I THOUGHT YOU'D KILL ME WITH THAT BIT WITH THE HAT!

**PATRON 5**  
AND YOUR PANTS FALLING DOWN,

**PATRON 1**  
AND THE PIES GOIN' SPLAT!

**PATRON 2**  
NEVER SEEN A GUY WHO WAS AS FUNNY AS THAT!

**ALL**  
CAUSE YOU'RE A FUNNY FUNNY FUNNY...

**PATRON 3**  
BAIRD'S GONNA MAKE A LOT OF MONEY!

**ALL**  
YOU'RE A FUNNY FUNNY FUNNY...

**MERTON**  
(*At wit's end*)

Stop it! Leave me alone!

*The crowd is silent. MERTON runs away - the patrons watch him go, then suddenly burst out laughing again as they disperse.*

**MERTON**  
"MAGIC!"  
THAT'S WHAT THEY TOLD ME  
HOLLYWOOD HAD MAGIC AND MYSTIQUE  
"STARDOM!"  
A BILL OF GOODS THEY SOLD ME  
WHILE THEY'RE MOLDING ME INTO SOME COMIC FREAK!

AT LEAST FROM BAIRD, I UNDERSTAND --  
HE'S ALWAYS BEEN SO BASE.

BUT FLIPS, SHE MADE ME FALL IN LOVE  
WHILE LYING TO MY FACE!

WELL NO MORE!  
I QUIT!  
I'M DONE!  
I'M THROUGH!  
THROUGH WITH PICTURES,  
THROUGH WITH CONTRACTS!  
THROUGH WITH ACTING –

*He pulls out the watch and considers it...*

THROUGH WITH YOU!

*He is about to throw the watch on the ground. ESTHER  
FITZROY appears.*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And so, gentle readers, your faithful reporter, Esther Fitzroy, found our star of stars in a pensive mood!

**MERTON**

Go away!

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Ah, but being a figment of your imagination, I have no control over my own comings and goings --- after all: I'm in your head! Mr. Armytage ---!

**MERTON**  
*(flatly)*

It's Gill. Merton Gill.

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Of course, Mr. Gill. I take it you're still reeling from the reaction of the premiere audience...?

**MERTON**

How could they do this to me?

**ESTHER FITZROY**

"They?"

**MERTON**

Baird! His whole gang! And *her!*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Miss Montague?

**SONG – "SHE" > TRACK 19 <**

**MERTON**

*Yes!*

*She – (MUSICAL STING) of the slangy talk and regrettably free manner!*



*She – (MUSICAL STING) with no talent!*

*She – (MUSICAL STING) with no soul!*

*She – (MUSICAL STING) who was the ultimate betrayal!*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Ah, yes, Flips Montague!

SHE...  
WHO MADE SURE YOU WERE FED  
WHEN YOU HUNGERED?  
WHO MADE SURE YOU COULD PAY  
FOR YOUR ROOM TO LET?

**MERTON**

Well, I suppose she *did* do that...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

WHILE I'M STATING THE FACTS,  
WHO HAD SPARED YOU THE AX  
IN YOUR VERY FIRST TIME  
ON A MOVIE SET?

**MERTON**

...Right...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

WHO MADE SURE YOU WERE CAST  
IN THE PICTURES?  
WHO INSISTED THAT YOU  
PLAY THE LEAD?

**MERTON**

That's.... yes...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

AND WITH WORDS RATHER TENDER  
YOU ONCE DID BEFRIEND HER...

**MERTON**

"A TRUE FRIEND...."

**ESTHER FITZROY**

A TRUE FRIEND, INDEED.

IT WAS SHE  
WHO GAVE YOU A START.  
IT WAS SHE  
WHO SAW WHAT YOUR LIFE COULD BE.  
IT WAS SHE  
WHO MADE ALL YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE  
WITH YOUR DEBUT.

YOU WONDER WHO?  
IT WAS SHE.

**MERTON**

*She did help me. But they laughed!*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

YES THEY LAUGHED RIGHT OUT LOUD,  
THE FANATICAL CROWD.  
IT'S A WONDER YOU MISSED ALL THE GRAPPLIN'  
FOR THE MOST PERFECT PHRASE  
OF HOW YOU'D EARNED THEIR PRAISE;  
MORE THAN LLOYD, MORE THAN KEATON OR CHAPLIN!

AND HOW GRATEFUL THEY ARE  
FOR THEIR NEW RISING STAR.  
DO YOU KNOW THE EXTENT OF THE STAKES HERE  
OF THE DEPTH THAT YOU WROUGHT  
AND THE GRACE THAT YOU BROUGHT  
TO THE VERY FAVORITE GENRE  
OF SHAW, MOLIERE AND SHAKESPEARE?

**MERTON**

*Shakespeare!*

*Elmer Schnupp enters.*

**ELMER**

Merton! What're you doin' out here by yourself!

**MERTON**

Elmer! What are you doing here?!

**ELMER**

Well, you don't think for one minute that your best buddy was gonna miss your big time Hollywood premier do ya? I just made myself a reservation and took the train right out the minute I read about it in Mr. Gashwilers copy of Cameraland!

**MERTON**

Cameraland?!

**ELMER**

Oh, yes! Ever since he saw you in that featured role in "The Blight of Broadway," he's your biggest fan.

**MERTON**

Wow...

**ELMER**

Buddy boy, I am so proud of you!

**MERTON**

What?

**ELMER**

You were the best one in the whole film! Why, you shoulda heard the Gashwilers applaudin' for you at the end!

**MERTON**

The Gashwilers?!

**ELMER**

Mr and Mrs. They come out here with me just to see the premier. Mr. Gashwiler was afraid to hang around and see ya right now on account of him firin' ya. They rushed back to their hotel – but I'm sure they'd love to see ya if ya could find it in your heart to forgive him.

**MERTON**

Of course...

**ELMER**

When the lights come up at the end of the movie, Gashwiler turned to me with tears in his eyes and said "That Merton Gill is the best movie actor I've ever seen. I'm gonna put up a plate for him."

**MERTON**

A plate?

**ELMER**

Yup. A brass plate. On the front of the store proclaiming "Here Worked Merton Gill!" He said that he wants to honor Simsbury's illustrious son the way he oughta be honored!

**MERTON**

Golly...

**ELMER**

You probably got to run off to some big Hollywood party now – but could you maybe meet me for lunch tomorrow?

**MERTON**

Yes – yes, of course I can! And please tell the Gashwilers I'd love to see them, too!

**ELMER**

Oh they'll be tickled pink!

**MERTON**

Well --- we'll see you tomorrow. 12 o'clock!

**ELMER**

We're staying at the Hollywood!

**MERTON**

Great!

**ELMER**

And Merton --- I am so proud to be your friend.... You are a wonderful actor...

*Elmer exits.*

**MERTON**

IT WAS SHE...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

The audience stood up and cheered you...

**MERTON**

Yes, they did!

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And isn't that why an actor perfects his craft? For the approval of an audience?

**MERTON**

IT WAS SHE...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

To touch them and, yes, to lift them up for a single moment, make them forget their troubles and... laugh...!

**MERTON**

Yes...

IT WAS SHE...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And was not the work itself fulfilling?

**MERTON**

It was! And it was hard work. Why, it was a harder day's work than I'd ever put in at Gashwiler's. Comedy is a hard business...

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Might one say... A serious business...?

**MERTON**

Yes! Yes, it is serious! And its fine! And worthwhile!

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And what was it Mr. Baird said?

**MERTON**

"We resist most what we do best..."

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Yes... Thank goodness *someone* introduced you to him...

*Esther Fitzroy disappears.*

**MERTON**

SHE HAS TAKEN MY LIFE  
AND TRANSFORMED IT.  
I'M NO LONGER  
THE MAN I WAS BEFORE.  
BUT THE NERVE AND THE GALL,

SHE'S NO FRIEND OF MINE AT ALL;  
SHE'S SO MUCH...  
SO MUCH  
MORE!

*He runs off as the lights fade.*

**SCENE 6 – FLIPS’ BUNGELow**

*Flips sits alone in her living room.*

**SONG – “ROMEO – REPRISe”**

**FLIPS**

*(To herself)*

HE THOUGHT HE WAS PLAYING ROMEO...  
HE ACTED LIKE HE WAS ROMEO...  
HE WANTED TO BE LIKE...

*She starts to sob. Merton arrives outside her door and  
knocks softly.*

**MERTON**

Miss Montague? It’s me... Merton Gill.

**FLIPS**

*(To herself)*

Oh, Crim-in-y!

*She looks about the room, grabs a shawl, drapes it over  
her shoulders and sits in a chair, affecting a pose of poor  
health.*

**FLIPS**

*(Weakly)*

*...Come in...*

*Merton enters. Flips coughs melodramatically.*

**MERTON**

I... I haven’t seen you in over a week.

*Flips avoids his stare. She shifts uncomfortably.*

**FLIPS**

I... I been feelin’ real bad.

*Merton takes a step towards her.*

**MERTON**

Oh... I’m awful sorry.

*She stares at him, uneasy. Then, she appears to snap out  
of her malaise.*

**FLIPS**

*(With a bit more spirit)*

Well, don't be! I don't deserve your pity. And I won't take it!!

*He looks away.*

I've got to talk to you. Please. Merton, look at me.

*He turns to her.*

**MERTON**

Well...

**FLIPS**

You know very well what I want to hear you say. And I'll take every word of it. Shoot!

*He begins to pace a bit.*

**MERTON**

Oh... You mean about the... The *comedy* tonight. Well, there's... nothing to say. Except... You didn't actually think that tonight was a surprise for me, didja? Why, you and Mr. Baird must've thought I was awful dumb to think that... that he was really shootin' a serious picture...

**FLIPS**

Yeah...?

*He breaks off, made ill at ease by the incessant pressing of her look. He is caught and held by it to a longer silence than he had meant to permit. He makes a desperate effort to recover his balance.*

**MERTON**

And besides, what difference does it make?

*He falters and runs out of steam again under her gaze. He looks away.*

**MERTON**

I'm funny. Funnier than most of those Buckeye folks. And you know why? 'Cause I got what ya call "pathos." I'm...

*The pain he has been hiding betrays him at last:*

*... A clown...*

*She touches his arm. He moves away.*

**FLIPS**

Oh, Merton.

**MERTON**

No---

Yes!

**FLIPS**

*He turns to her. She opens her arms and gives him a little knowing nod. Quickly, he kneels beside her while her arms enfold him. She rocks him gently, smoothing his hair.*

There, there...

**FLIPS**

**MERTON**

... It just never occurred to me that makin' people laugh was doin somethin' fine and worthwhile...

**FLIPS**

Of course it is...

**MERTON**

Well, I never would've discovered it if you hadn't made it all happen for me.

**SONG – "FOR YOU – REPRISE"**

*He reaches into his pocket and takes out the watch.*

FOR YOU...

*She looks at him doubtfully. He smiles.*

**FLIPS**

*(Quietly incredulous)*

You givin' it to me again, Merton?

**MERTON**

OF COURSE, WHAT DID YOU THINK THAT I WOULD DO?

*She stares at him and smiles tentatively.*

I OPENED UP MY HEART AND IN YOU FLEW.  
IT KNOCKED ME CLEAR DOWN TO THE FLOOR!  
THERE'S ONLY ONE GIRL I ADORE!  
AND ALL I WANT IS SIMPLY MORE  
YOU.

*She takes the watch and looks at it lovingly.*

**FLIPS**

It's a beautiful watch.

**MERTON**

It'll look nice on your wrist.

**FLIPS**

Good. Cause I ain't ever gonna take it off.

*She continues to soothe and rock him.*

**SONG – "SLEEPY EYES REPRISE" .> TRACK 22 <**

...DON'T YOU KNOW THAT WHEN YOU NEED ME.  
AND YOU'LL NEED ME.  
I WILL ALWAYS BE THERE.

YOU'RE A FUNNY ONE, IT'S TRUE.  
SOMEHOW GENTLE, SOMEHOW STRONG.  
I BELIEVE IN WHAT YOU SAY YOU WANT.  
FOR IT'S WHAT I'VE WANTED ALL ALONG.

THERE'S NO NEED FOR ME TO FEAR.  
CAUSE WITH YOU I'VE GOT THE PRIZE.  
I'M A SUCKER FOR YOUR DEEP AND SLEEPY EYES.

*He smiles. He leans forward and kisses her chastely on the lips. They look into each other's eyes. Then he kisses her again, this time with far more gusto. She smiles.*

**FLIPS**

Hey – What say I get myself all dolled up and you take me out to dinner! I never got them four other courses!

**MERTON**

Sure!

*He gives her a peck.*

**FLIPS**

I gotta get ready!

*She crosses to the door, then turns to him:*

**FLIPS**

And dear one - that was a beautiful piece of work you did in that movie. That cinches your future. But Merton, dearest – Never, never, never let it show on your face that you think you're funny. That's all you'll ever have to be afraid of in your work.

*He smiles.*

*Flips exits. Once she is gone. Merton looks about the room. Then:*

**MERTON**

*(To himself, somewhat confused)*

I don't think I'm funny!



*Black out!*

**SCENE 7 – HOLLYWOOD!**

**"Onward and Upward"**

*Louie, Vivian, Edna and Tom are in attendance, the Countess is answering the phone.*

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the telephone)*

Holden Studios Casting Office! Big scene today! Yes, the new Merton Gill picture, "They're Nearly Sweethearts" – Stage Four!

**SONG – "STAGE FOUR REPRISE"**

*She hangs up the phone – it rings again, she answers.*

HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE,  
MORNING! YES, WE NEED YOU!  
BE HERE BY 'NOON – STAGE FOUR!

**ALL**

"THEY'RE NEARLY SWEETHEARTS!"

*The phone rings again.*

**COUNTESS**

HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE,  
MORNING! YES INDEED, YOU!  
GET HERE REAL SOON – STAGE FOUR!

**ALL**

"THEY'RE NEARLY SWEETHEARTS!"

*She hangs up. The other telephone rings.*

**VIVIAN**

GONNA NEED A SELTZER BOTTLE.

**TOM**

MIGHT NEED A DISGUISE!

**COUNTESS**

*(Into the telephone)*

HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE,

**EDNA**

GONNA THROW SOME PIES!

**ALL**

BECAUSE THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
OPENED UP ITS DOOR.

AND WE'RE WORKIN' TODAY  
STAGE FOUR!

*Esther Fitzroy enters, busily scribbling notes behind Sig Rosenblatt.*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

It is perhaps not generally known that the honor of having discovered Merton Gill should be credited to Director Sigmund Rosenblatt of the Victor forces.

**ROSENBLATT**

He appeared as an extra in Miss Baxter's tremendous hit, "The Blight of Broadway." Instantly, I was struck by the extraordinary distinction of his face and bearing. You may imagine my chagrin later when I learned that another director was to reap the rewards of a discovery all my own.

*They exit.*

**ALL**

THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
BIG NOTIFICATION  
MENTIONED A STAR - STAGE FOUR.

**BAIRD**

I NEED A SAND BAG!

*Vivian wanders over to Baird and hands him her purse.*

**ALL**

THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
GAVE US THIS LOCATION,  
SO HERE WE ARE, STAGE FOUR!

**BAIRD**

NO, NOT A HAND BAG!

*Baird gives purse back to Vivian, who exits.*

**EDNA**

I'M READY FOR MY CLOSE UP

**TOM**

ALL WE NEED NOW IS DEMILLE!

**LOUIE**

I WONDER WHEN WE'RE STARTING...

**ALL**

OH MY GOD, IT'S MERTON GILL!

*And Merton enters, walking up with Esther Fitzroy, still scribbling.*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And so, it is with Sig Rosenblatt's words still in my ears that I find myself in the presence of Merton Gill.

**MERTON**

Let us talk only of my work. Only *that* can interest my public.

**ESTHER FITZROY**

Have you ever thought of playing serious parts?

**MERTON**

No, comedy is my game! The favorite genre of Shaw, Moliere, and Shakespeare!

*Sig Rosenblatt is forced across the set by Beulah Baxter.*

**BEULAH BAXTER**

*(Screeching)*

Sig Rosenblatt?!

**ROSENBLATT**

Yes, Beulah, dear...?

**BEULAH BAXTER**

You get me in this picture with Merton Gill -- or *else!*

*They exit as Flips enters and walks lovingly over to Merton.*

**ESTHER FITZROY**

And Merton Gill's devoted young wife -- the former "Flips" Montague, daughter of a long line of theatrical folk -- is also the screenwriter and Executive Producer of all of Mr. Gill's pictures at Holden Studios!

**MERTON**

This little woman is not only my wife *and* my best pal --- but -- I may also add --- my severest critic.

**FLIPS**

Merton Gill, you come over here and give me a good big kiss!

*They kiss!*

**ALL**

BECAUSE THE HOLDEN STUDIOS CASTING OFFICE  
NEEDS US ALL AND MORE.

*Merton, Flips and Esther join in. Vivian enters with a sandbag. Pickles enters as well.*

SO WE'RE WORKIN' TODAY...

**BAIRD**

OK, pick up, end of scene five!

**ALL**

WE CAN HONESTLY SAY...

**BAIRD**

Cameras rolling!

**ALL**  
WE'RE ALL WORKING TODAY...

**BAIRD**  
Rolling, and speed!

**ALL**  
STAGE FOUR!

**BAIRD**  
Aaaannndd... ACTION!

**"The End"**

**CURTAIN**  
**END OF PLAY**

