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(18)



EPIC PROPORTIONS

BY LARRY COEN
and DAVID CRANE



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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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EPIC PROPORTIONS

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EPIC PROPORTIONS was produced on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theatre by Bob Cuillo, Brent Peek, Robert Barandes, Matthew Farrell, Mark Schwartz with Philip and Patricia Barry Productions and Robert Dragota.

Originally produced by Manahattan Punch Line Theatre, 1986.

EPIC PROPORTIONS was produced on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theatre by Bob Cuillo, Brent Peek, Robert Barandes, Matthew Farrell, Mark Schwartz with Philip and Patricia Barry Productions and Robert Dragota on November 30, 1999. It was directed by Jerry Zaks; the set design was by David Gallo; the lighting design was by Paul Gallo; the sound design was by Aural Fixation; the costume design was by William Ivey Long; the fight direction was by Rick Sordelet; the technical director was Peter Fulbright; and the production stage manager was Rick Steiger. The cast was as follows:

NARRATOR	Michael Carroll	1
CONSPIRATORS	Richard Ziman, Ross Lehman, Ruth Williamson	8
OCTAVIUM	Tom Beckett	7
LOUISE GOLDMAN	Kristin Chenoweth	4
BENNY BENNET	Alan Tudyk	5
PHIL BENNET	Jeremy Davidson	6
JACK	Richard Ziman	2
SHEL	Ross Lehman	3
SLAVEMASTER	Tom Beckett	
EXTRAS	Tom Beckett, Ross Lehman, Ruth Williamson	
ROMAN GENERAL	Richard Ziman	
EGYPTIAN DANCING GIRL	Ruth Williamson	
EGYPTIANS	Tom Beckett, Ross Lehman, Richard Ziman	
THE QUEEN	Ruth Williamson	
QUEEN'S ATTENDANT	Tom Beckett	
GUARDS	Ross Lehman, Richard Ziman	
D.W. DEWITT	Richard B. Shull	9
EXECUTIONER	Ross Lehman	
BRADY	Richard Ziman	
COCHETTE	Ruth Williamson	
COCHETTE'S ASSISTANT	Tom Beckett	
GLADIATORS	Richard Ziman, Tom Beckett, Ross Lehman	

CHARACTERS

Narrator
Conspirators #1, #2 and #3
Octavius
Louise Goldman
Benny Bennet
Phil Bennet
Jack
Shel
Slavemaster
Extras
Roman General
Egyptian Dancing Girl
Egyptians #1, #2 and #3
The Queen
Queen's Attendant
Guards #1 and #2
D. W. DeWitt
Executioner
Brady
Cochette
Cochette's Assistant
Gladiators #1, #2 and #3

PLACE

The Arizona Desert.

TIME

1930s.

EPIC PROPORTIONS

In the darkness, music begins: the soundtrack music of a great movie epic. As the music continues, we hear the sonorous voice of the narrator — very Orson Welles.

NARRATOR. In the beginning there was wasteland. *(The curtain rises, revealing an enormous set of stairs. Behind the stairs, there is the suggestion of endless desert.)* But this was not very interesting to look at. *(The curtain falls.)* And so in this barren desert there was built the greatest civilization man has ever known. *(The curtain rises, revealing enormous columns.)* And here was told the most epic of stories. With the majesty of *Cleopatra*. The sweep of *Intolerance*. ^{sexy lounge} And the vague, homoerotic undertones of *Ben-Hur*. This is a story about lust and revenge and fate and destiny. This is a story about a lot of things! *(Drums. The music shifts in tone as lights come up on two men and a woman dressed in Roman togas. They speak in hushed tones.)*
CONSPIRATOR #1. They say that Hechbides returns this very evening from his conquests in Sparta.
CONSPIRATOR #2. But does he seek Octavius's throne?
CONSPIRATOR #3. Nay! He is content with the life of a soldier and seeks not that of a ruler.
CONSPIRATOR #2. But if he does not, then who should lead us?
CONSPIRATOR #3. The Emperor would name his idiot bastard nephew, Homericus, as heir to the throne.
CONSPIRATOR #1. Say not so!
CONSPIRATOR #2. But what of the cries of the people?
CONSPIRATOR #1. When has the Emperor ever heard their voice?
CONSPIRATOR #3. But should Homericus ever take the throne it would be the end of us all.
CONSPIRATOR #1. We must not let that come to pass.

CONSPIRATOR #2. We must act this very day. *(They draw daggers.)*

CONSPIRATOR #3. But hush, Octavius approaches to address the mob. *(Octavius enters and waves toward the audience. There is the sound of a great mob cheering.)*

OCTAVIUM. Citizens of Rome —

DEWITT. *(Offstage.)* Cut! *(The soundtrack music stops. Louise enters. She is an attractive, neatly dressed young woman, carrying a clipboard. As the actors leave the stage, she comes forward and speaks to the audience. She addresses them as if they are a large crowd.)*

LOUISE. Okay. How 'bout that, huh? And you guys: not bad for a first time, or "first take" as you'll hear it called. For those of you who came in on the buses last night and don't know me, my name is Louise Goldman and I'm the Assistant Director in charge of Atmosphere Personnel, or "Extras." That's you. Now there are more than 3,400 of you out there, so it may take me a little while to get to know all your names. But I want you to know that if you have any problems, you can always come to me. I'm in the little blue tent next to the Sphinx of Antioch, and my flap is always open. So welcome to Molten Rock, Arizona, where we will be filming the D.W. Dewitt production of "Exeunt Omnes," which apparently is Latin for "everybody out." Who knew? I think you'll be excited to know that you are going to be part of the biggest epic ever made. If you look around, you can see that construction has already begun on over five hundred sets recreating the Ancient World from the Old Testament to the Roman Empire to the Land of the Pharaohs. *(She consults her clipboard.)* Now, even though the nearest town is over 240 miles away across scorching desert, that doesn't mean we can't have fun right here. So I've got a sign-up sheet for softball that I'll be posting by the Temple of Osiris, on the bulletin board next to the Oracle. Oh, and if anyone has a softball, that'd be great. Okay, I realize many of you have never acted in a motion picture before. Well, let me just say that if we all work together, then we'll have something we can all really be proud of. And I'm sorry there are only two bathrooms. All right, we're going to divide you up into a few groups for different scenes. So would you please count off by four, starting here. *(From offstage we hear voices beginning to count off.)*

VOICE. One!

VOICE. Two!

VOICE. Three!

VOICE. Four!

LOUISE. Excellent! *(Louise exits.)*

VOICE. One!

VOICE. Two!

VOICE. Three! *(Lights up on Benny. He is in his early twenties and wears a shabby toga. He is standing as if part of the great mob that has been listening to Louise. Phil enters. He is slightly older than Benny, dressed in 1930's farm clothes and wears a hat, like a character out of Grapes of Wrath. He spots Benny.)*

PHIL. Benny!

BENNY. *(Surprised.)* Phil! What are you doing here?

PHIL. Looking for you.

BENNY. How did you know I was here?

PHIL. Mom found this in your room. *(He produces a printed flyer and reads from it.)* "Extras Wanted." I managed to get on the last bus out here. Now come on. Get out of your little dress. You're coming home. *(Phil pulls Benny by his toga.)*

BENNY. *(Pulling away from Phil.)* Careful! Careful! *(Indicating the toga.)* These things come off real easy. And that's not gonna happen to me twice. I'm not going Phil. This is my chance.

PHIL. Come on, Benny. Look at those people. There's no way you're ever gonna get discovered here.

BENNY. Oh yeah? *(Pulls a Hollywood fan magazine from his toga.)* According to this magazine, Lydia Saint Clair was discovered while she was an extra in *Love's Sweet Surrender*. She went on to star in two movies and now ... okay, now she's dead ... But this is how she got her big break!

PHIL. All right, fine. What do you want me to tell Mom and Dad?

BENNY. Tell them to look for me up on the silver screen. Phil, I can't go back. This is my dream and if I sit around at home it's never going to happen.

PHIL. Wow. I've never heard you talk like that. Well ... good luck. Here ... *(Puts his hat on Benny.)* You know how you burn. *(Phil starts to go.)*

BENNY. Wait.

PHIL. What?
BENNY. Why don't you stay? We can do this together.
PHIL. Are you serious?
BENNY. Why not? They pay us a dollar a day and all we have to do is wave at an emperor now and then. It's like a paid vacation.
PHIL. (*Impressed.*) Really? A dollar a day?
BENNY. Plus meals! Look, Phil, you know what today is?
PHIL. Yeah. It's Mom and Dad's anniversary.
BENNY. They're probably just sitting down to supper now. Mom made her fried chicken. And her whipped potatoes.
PHIL. Yeah, and her creamed corn.
BENNY. And Uncle Frank and Aunt Millie will be there.
PHIL. And he'll tell his dirty jokes and she'll start to cry.
BENNY. And then Mom'll start talking about that girl Dad wanted to marry. And Dad'll start drinking and cleaning his guns. (*Phil thinks and says nothing. The voices counting off grow louder.*)
VOICE. Four!
VOICE. One!
VOICE. Two! (*There is a pause. Benny watches Phil. After a moment, Phil calls out ...*)
PHIL. Three!
BENNY. (*Pleased.*) Four! Phil, we're in the movies!
PHIL. Do I have to wear a skirt?
BENNY. Yeah. But when there's a breeze ... trust me, you'll like it. (*Lights fade on them and come up on Jack and Shel. They are on the production staff of the film.*)
SHEL. Jack, I've got those drawings of the Palace of Nembia.
JACK. What's today, Shel?
SHEL. Friday.
JACK. And what did you promise me for Friday, Shel?
SHEL. (*Under his breath, guiltily.*) Pyramids.
JACK. How's that?
SHEL. (*Louder.*) Pyramids. (*Defensively.*) But, there's no way. We haven't finished the Coliseum. We still need a horse for Troy. This picture just keeps getting bigger and bigger —
JACK. Shel, Mister Dewitt wants those pyramids.
SHEL. Mister Dewitt wants! Mister Dewitt always wants. Yesterday he handed me this. (*Shel hands a note to Jack.*)

JACK. (*Reading the note.*) "Do job." You're not doing your job?
SHEL. That's what I thought. It took me an hour to realize it's "Do Job." The Book of Job. And now he wants pyramids? (*Jack forcefully grabs Shel by the front of his shirt.*)
JACK. I don't care how you do it, but tomorrow there better be some pyramids.
SHEL. (*Almost a squeak.*) Hair ... you ... you've got ... hair! (*Jack releases him and exits, leaving Shel rubbing his chest. Louise enters. She is waiting patiently for the counting off to finish. Finally, the counting off is almost done.*)
VOICE. Two!
VOICE. Three!
VOICE. Four!
VOICE. One! (*There is a pause.*)
LOUISE. Okay! Now does everyone have a number?
OFFSTAGE CROWD. Yes!!
LOUISE. Remember them. They'll be very important later on. Now, the next scene we'll be doing is ... (*Shel frantically whispers in Louise's ear.*) "The Building of the Pyramids." So if you'll all follow Mister Silverman here — (*Indicates Shel.*) — he'll show you where to pick up your granite and logs. (*Lights fade on Louise and Shel. Music. We hear thousands moaning. Lights come up on the building of the pyramids. Benny and Phil wear harnesses of rope that lead offstage. They struggle as if they are pulling a great weight. The slavemaster yells at them. He is a large man, wearing an Egyptian headdress and carrying a whip.*)
SLAVEMASTER. Work! (*He cracks his whip.*)
PHIL. (*Struggling with teeth clenched.*) All we have to do is wave at an emperor now and then! It's like a paid vacation!
BENNY. (*Brightly.*) I think we got into that last shot.
PHIL. Yeah, us and a couple thousand other guys.
BENNY. Ssshhhh!
SLAVEMASTER. Work, you sons of jackals! Work!! (*He crack his whip. The tip of it catches Phil.*)
PHIL. Ow! Okay. That's it. I've had it. (*Phil pulls off his harness. Benny and the slavemaster stare dumbfounded.*)
BENNY. Phil, what are you doing?
PHIL. I've had enough, Benny.

BENNY. (*Desperately.*) Phil, don't.

PHIL. Forget it, Benny. Stay if you want, but I'm going home now.

DEWITT. (*Offstage.*) Cut! (*Phil throws his harness to the ground, forcing Benny to take the full weight of the offstage granite block. Benny is immediately yanked offstage. Louise enters, looking very concerned.*)

LOUISE. What seems to be the trouble here? Why have you stopped? (*Benny drags himself back on, hauling the enormous weight.*)

PHIL. Oh, I don't know. Could be the blinding heat. Could be the back-breaking work. Or it could be the big man with the whip!

BENNY. (*To Louise, struggling.*) For what it's worth, I'm having a great time. (*Then, aside.*) Uh, Phil, a little help?

PHIL. (*Ignoring him.*) I'm sorry, Miss Goldman, but this is not for me. If you'll just tell me when the next bus leaves, I'll get out of your way and you can get on with your movie. (*Benny hangs onto the slavemaster's arm for support.*)

LOUISE. But there are no buses. They've all gone. They won't be back 'til we finish shooting.

PHIL. (*Thrown.*) Well ... there must be supply trucks or a mail truck I could hitch a ride with.

LOUISE. No. We have everything we need right here.

PHIL. (*Desperate.*) But that means we're cut off from civilization.

LOUISE. (*Sympathetic.*) Mister Dewitt likes a closed set.

PHIL. Can I talk to Mister Dewitt?

LOUISE. No one talks to Mister Dewitt.

PHIL. Where is he?

LOUISE. (*Pointing up.*) Up there. (*Then, panicked.*) Oh God, he's looking at us. (*Suddenly we hear D.W. Dewitt's booming voice.*)

DEWITT. (*Offstage.*) Why have you stopped?

LOUISE. (*Indicating the slavemaster and Phil.*) This man hit this man with his whip.

DEWITT. (*Offstage.*) And?

LOUISE. (*At a loss.*) And ... he didn't like it. (*Jack enters. He's not pleased. But he covers it for Dewitt.*)

JACK. There's no problem, Mr. Dewitt. We'll be ready to go in a minute. (*To Louise, in a fury.*) What the hell's going on here?! These people are your responsibility!

PHIL. (*Stepping in.*) Excuse me, there's no need to yell at Miss

Goldman. It's my fault we stopped. I was just asking her about arrangements for me to go home. (*Jack laughs in Phil's face. The laughter builds. The others nervously join in. Suddenly Jack stops laughing and grabs the front of Phil's tunic, just as he grabbed Shel earlier.*)

JACK. (*In Phil's face.*) Nobody's getting outta here 'til this picture's in the can! (*Jack releases Phil, who rubs his chest.*) Goldman!

LOUISE. (*Instinctively protecting her chest with her clipboard.*) Jack! (*Calmer.*) Jack ...

JACK. I hope I won't have to come down here again.

LOUISE. Me, too. Not that we don't enjoy it when you do. (*Jack exits.*)

BENNY. (*To Louise, pulling against the weight.*) Uh, Miss Goldman? I'm sorry if we got you into any trouble.

LOUISE. Oh, it's not your fault.

BENNY. I thought your speech this morning was great.

LOUISE. Why, thank you.

BENNY. This whole thing's pretty exciting for me and everybody just seems so nice.

LOUISE. Well, then you'll have to come to one of our little get-togethers in the Forum.

BENNY. Will you be there?

LOUISE. (*Smiling.*) I think so.

JACK. (*Offstage.*) GOLDMAN!!

LOUISE. (*Starts to exit.*) Well, it was nice meeting you.

PHIL. Phil.

LOUISE. Right.

BENNY. Benny!

LOUISE. (*On her way out.*) Right! (*She exits.*)

JACK. (*Offstage.*) Everybody ready? And ...

DEWITT. (*Offstage.*) Action! (*The slavemaster enters and cracks his whip.*)

SLAVEMASTER. Work! Work! (*Benny and Phil return to pulling their granite block.*)

BENNY. Miss Goldman's really pretty. She's so pretty she should be in the movie.

PHIL. I'll tell you something, Benny. I sure don't intend to spend the whole time here hauling granite. And I'll bet she's a good lady to know.

SLAVEMASTER. Work, you sons of jackals! Work! *(The slave-master cracks the whip rather close to Phil.)*

PHIL. *(To the slavemaster.)* I know where your tent is.

SLAVEMASTER. *(After a beat, brightly.)* Good work! *(Cracks whip.)* Good work, you sons of jackals! *(Cracks whip.)* Good work! *(The guys continue pulling their stone. Blackout. In the darkness we hear a fanfare of trumpets. Lights come up on the three conspirators. They are engaged in the scene we saw earlier.)*

CONSPIRATOR #3. But should Homericus ever take the throne it would be the end of us all.

CONSPIRATOR #1. We must not let that come to pass.

CONSPIRATOR #2. We must act this very day. *(They draw daggers.)*

CONSPIRATOR #3. But hush, Octavius approaches to address the mob. *(Octavius enters and waves. The Mob cheers.)*

OCTAVIUM. Citizens of Rome, it is said that the War of Peloponnesia is fought not for profit but for the love of blood! *(The crowd roars.)* It is said that the days of the Etruscan Empire can be numbered by the jewels on the fingers of her citizens! *(Crowd roars.)* It is said that the — Ack!! *(The conspirators stab him from three sides. His death is elaborate and well-choreographed and ends with him falling down the stairs. The crowd roars even louder than before.)*

DEWITT. *(Offstage.)* Cut! *(Louise enters.)*

LOUISE. *(To the crowd.)* Okay mob, we're going to go back. Not bad, but it needs work. *(Indicates Octavius.)* Really hear what he's saying. Remember: You're an angry mob but you're not an unfor-giving mob. Let's rehearse it. *(To Octavius.)* Wally? Do you mind? *(She steps out of the way. Octavius comes forward.)*

OCTAVIUM. Citizens of Rome, it is said that the War of Peloponnesia is fought not for profit but for love of blood! *(The crowd roars.)* It is said that the days of the Etruscan Empire can be numbered by the jewels on the fingers of her citizens! *(Crowd roars.)* It is said that the — Ack!! *(Repeat stabbing and elaborate death. The crowd roars. Louise comes center.)*

LOUISE. No. I just don't feel like we've seen a man die here. Mob, it needs nuance, it needs variety. I know! Let's try breaking it up by groups: Ones, I want to see "Horror"; Twos, I want to see

come on as makeup girl

"Fear"; Threes, I want to see "Anger"; and Fours, I want to see "Sardonic-Amusement." Let's try it again. Wally?

OCTAVIUM. It is said that the — Ack!! *(Repeat stabbing and elaborate death. The crowd roars.)*

LOUISE. Okay. Ones: nice. I really got a sense of your "Horror." Twos: very good. The fear was strong but don't be afraid to be more afraid. Threes: special. That was some "Anger." Fours: I really couldn't tell what you were doing. Now remember, Fours, this is a mob that's been hurt before. You're bitter, but you try to hide the pain. Wally.

OCTAVIUM. It is said that the — Ack!! *(Repeat stabbing and elaborate death. The Fours laugh.)*

LOUISE. No! Come on, Fours. What are you doing!?! *(Sighs.)* Look, we really don't have time to work on this right now. I'm sorry, Fours, that's it for you today. *(There is grumbled protest from the Fours.)* I'm sorry. You can go back to your tents. Ones, Twos and Threes: Let's take it from the top of Octavius's speech. Wally? Wally? *(Octavius does not move. The Mob cheers. Louise and the other actors give the Mob a look. Lights fade on this and come up on Benny crossing the stage, very depressed. Phil enters whistling.)*

PHIL. Hey, what happened to you Fours out there? You guys were really a mess.

BENNY. I don't know. We just couldn't seem to get it together. How'd it go after we left?

PHIL. Piece of cake. Wrapped it right up. She said we're one of the best mobs she's ever worked with.

BENNY. *(Gloomily.)* Great.

PHIL. She looked pretty upset about you guys.

BENNY. *(Defensively.)* It was just a bad start. We'll get better.

PHIL. What happened to all those acting lessons you took?

BENNY. *(Getting upset.)* Look, it wasn't just me out there. Can we not talk about this?

PHIL. Fine. *(Long pause. He searches for a new topic.)* Hey, how about that pudding with dinner?

BENNY. You got pudding with dinner?

PHIL. Sure. Didn't you? *(Benny shakes his head. Phil attempts to make Benny feel better as they exit ...)* It was bad pudding. Lumpy. It had a skin. *(Lights come down on them as lights come up on Louise.)*

She speaks to the crowd.)

LOUISE. Okay, quiet down everybody. It has become apparent that some of you are having difficulty understanding the things we are asking you to do. I am speaking of one group in particular. I'm not going to name numbers, you know who you are. But I thought everyone could benefit from a brief demonstration of the key scenes we'll be shooting today. To do this, I've asked one representative from each of your four groups to help me out. People ... join me. *(Four extras enter in plain togas. Benny is one of them.)* The first scene is "The Triumphant Return of Heebides." You, the mob, will be cheering and waving in the following manner: Ones, broad overhand sweep ... *(The first extra demonstrates by waving her arm over her head.)* Twos, upper lunge and wrist flick ... *(The second extra waves his arm up and down.)* Threes, robust vertical fist thrust ... *(The third extra raises her fist over her head and moves it up and down.)* And Fours, a full dorsal leap and swing. *(Benny jumps up and down, waving his hands over his head.)* And all together. *(They do it together.)* There. It looks just like a group of people waving. *(To Benny and the extras.)* People ... *(Benny and extras stop.)* Now let's quickly run through a couple of reaction shots: "Moses Bringing Down the Tablets." *(Benny and the extras gasp and look up, amazed.)* "The Parting of the Red Sea." *(Benny and the extras gasp and look out, amazed.)* "The Closing of the Red Sea." *(Benny and the extras turn around, look over their shoulders and gasp, amazed.)* Nice. Okay. I'd like to thank our volunteers. *(There is scattered applause.)* People. *(The extras start to disperse. Benny musters his courage and approaches Louise.)* Now, let's get going, everyone.

BENNY. Excuse me, Miss Goldman?

LOUISE. *(Barely paying attention; reading her clipboard.)* Mmmmm-hmmm?

BENNY. Um, I don't know if this is out of line or anything, but I was wondering if sometime maybe you'd like to —

LOUISE. *(Suddenly remembering.)* Oh! *(Turning to crowd.)* I almost forgot. In the "Angry Mob" scene, who did we finally decide is He Who is Without Sin?

VOICE. *(Offstage.)* I'm He Without Sin!

LOUISE. Okay, go to props and pick up your first stone. All

onstage, front of mob - double wrist flick
light, people. *(The Mob cheers. Louise heads off, having forgotten Benny. Lights fade on his frustrated look. Music returns as the lights come up on a Roman general. He speaks to the crowd. In dim lights we see Benny and Phil and two other extras. They are part of the Mob listening to the general. Phil is carrying a large sword.)*

ROMAN GENERAL. People of Rome, tonight we set sail against the Persian fleet! *(Mob roars. The four extras give the waves they just learned. They continue "acting" throughout the following.)* We shall give them battle and we shall return victorious! *(The Mob roars. The focus shifts to Benny and Phil.)*

BENNY. Hey, where'd you get the sword?

PHIL. Everybody in our group got one.

BENNY. You gonna get to use them?

PHIL. Sure. In the battle with the Persians. You guys are in that. I'm sure you'll get one.

BENNY. No, we're the dead bodies in that scene. We lie in the dirt and get picked at by the birds. *(Mob roars. Benny looks at Phil's sword.)* Phil, does it seem to you like the Fours never get to do anything fun?

PHIL. How do you mean?

BENNY. It seems like we always get the stuff nobody else wants to do.

PHIL. You're imagining things. You're just jealous 'cause I got the sword.

BENNY. I don't know. I guess you're right. *(They give a final wave, the biggest of all. Lights fade on them as lights come up on Louise.)*

LOUISE. *(To the crowd.)* Okay, the breakdown for "The Great Feast" scene is as follows: Ones, you'll be rejoicing with wines and sweetmeats; Twos, you'll be gorging on ripened fruits and cheeses; Threes, you'll be working on the roast suckling pig and wild boar; and Fours, half of you will be choking on fish bones while the other half is in the vomitorium. *(Beat.)* But first we've got to shoot this parade scene. So, everybody get to your marks. Now does everyone know what they're supposed to do?

OFFSTAGE MOB. Yes!

LOUISE. All right. Then ready ... and ... Go! *(Music is heard. Parade sounds.)* Straight lines! Straight lines! No! No! Only the oxen cross! Oh my God ... Hold it! HOLD IT!! *(Music stops.)*

Well, that wasn't pretty. Is that ox all right? Oh. Well, someone call the kitchen. Look, obviously this isn't working. I don't know why. Give me a few minutes to think. *(She studies her plans. Phil enters. He is dressed as a Roman peasant. He crosses to her.)*

PHIL. Excuse me, Miss Goldman.

LOUISE. Not now.

PHIL. Miss Goldman, I think I know how you might make it work.

LOUISE. Oh really?

PHIL. Yeah. See, I think you're bringing the flower girls in too soon. *(Shows her on the plans.)* And you see here where the fire swallows come in? If you brought them in on an eight count, in a zig zag pattern, then the elephants won't keep knocking over the swan girls. Then you can bring in the eunuchs in a simple cross-over pattern, which'll leave time for the contortionists seeing as they're so slow anyway. *(Louise studies the plans.)*

LOUISE. I think this may work. Phil, right?

PHIL. *(Pleased.)* Right.

LOUISE. Phil, how do you know this stuff?

PHIL. Marching band. I was the drum major in high school. I figured out the patterns and formations. We went all-state.

LOUISE. *(Impressed, looking back at the plans.)* Well, let's give it a shot. *(Turning to the mob.)* Okay everybody, we're going to try something new, suggested by ... *(Puts her hand on his bare shoulder; reacts.)* ... my assistant here. *(Lights fade on them and come up on Benny sitting alone in his tent. He is clearly looking the worse for wear. He sits, writing a letter.)*

BENNY. "Dear Mom: Sorry for not writing sooner, but I've been pretty busy. Yesterday was the Last Day of Pompeii, and I for one was not sorry to see it go. I haven't made too many friends here. Phil and I share a tent, but we're in different groups so I don't see him much. Most of the people in my group are pretty strange. A lot of them have been in prison. Miss Goldman said I'm one of the best of the Fours. She's the girl in charge of the extras. She's terrific ..." *(He sighs softly, as lights dim on Benny and come up on Phil and Louise. They are sitting on the steps, outside. It is night. Moonlight. Sound of crickets, etc. They are going over plans for an upcoming scene.)*

PHIL. *(Indicating on the diagram.)* See, when the back of the Temple caves in here, the Vestal Virgins come in screaming in a

double "V" pattern here. Then the horsemen come stampeding through from here and here on an eight count —

LOUISE. *(Finishing the thought.)* So then the High Priest can come tearing down the middle! Phil, you make it sound so simple. This'll be great.

PHIL. Great. *(Pause.)* Gosh, it sure is a nice night.

LOUISE. Sure is. *(Looking out.)* The ancient world looks so pretty when there's a moon.

PHIL. And look at all those stars.

LOUISE. You think that's a lot of stars? You should see how many there are where I come from.

PHIL. Where are you from?

LOUISE. Kipper's Bay, Alaska. Maybe you've heard of it. It's where Admiral Spearing froze to death on his way to the Pole. You'd love it.

PHIL. *(Hesitating slightly.)* You have a boyfriend back there?

LOUISE. I don't have anyone back there.

PHIL. No folks?

LOUISE. Papa was killed when the glacier moved.

PHIL. I'm sorry.

LOUISE. Six months later, Mister Dewitt came to town to film "Vikings Away."

PHIL. "Vikings Away"? That was one of my favorite pictures. You worked on that?

LOUISE. I was in it. You know the blubber scene? I was one of those girls. *(Phil is impressed.)* Anyway, they liked me and offered me a job. I had no reason to stay in Alaska, so I came here. How about you?

PHIL. I'm here 'cause I needed the work.

LOUISE. No. I mean, you got a girl?

PHIL. Oh. *(Pleased.)* No, no one special. *(Pause.)* It really is a nice night. *(Their eyes meet. There is a moment. Louise looks down at the diagrams.)*

LOUISE. I really appreciate all the help you've been giving me today.

PHIL. Are you kidding? I've had more fun doing this stuff with you than I can remember.

LOUISE. Well, I never could have got them through the Red Sea without you. Before you came, we were going to part it on the side.

PHIL. (*Modest.*) Well ...

LOUISE. You're just so clever with the patterns and formations. Have you ever thought of doing anything with it? Professionally, I mean?

PHIL. Are you kidding? All I've ever wanted is to lead a marching band of my own.

LOUISE. Really?

PHIL. Oh Louise, you don't know what it's like. To be out on the field, in your uniform, standing tall in scarlet and gold. And the crowd is hushed. All eyes are on you. And then you blow your whistle. And you march. You make a left, the band makes a left. You make a right, the band makes a right. And before you know it, you're spelling words! (*Beat.*) Anyway, it's just a crazy dream.

LOUISE. (*Swept up.*) No, you could do it, Phil!

PHIL. You think so?

LOUISE. I can see you in that uniform.

PHIL. Oh Louise! (*Suddenly they are kissing. Lights dim on them and come back up on Benny, finishing his letter.*)

BENNY. "Anyway, I miss you all very much. I don't know when this will reach you as there is no mail. But any day now you should be seeing my face up on the silver screen. Your loving son, Benny."

(*Benny, Phil and Louise exit. Egyptian music is heard. Three reveling Egyptian noblemen and a dancing girl enter.*)

FIRST EGYPTIAN. More wine!

SECOND EGYPTIAN. More music!

THIRD EGYPTIAN. More girls!

FIRST EGYPTIAN. Let our revels never cease! (*They all laugh. The dancing girl exits.*)

SECOND EGYPTIAN. Was it not amusing today to watch our Pharaoh bandy words with that arrogant Israelite, Moses?

THIRD EGYPTIAN. And was it not great sport to watch our Pharaoh mock him so when he did demand that we should let his people go?

FIRST EGYPTIAN. And oh yes, were we not all helpless with laughter when the bearded one did make his idle threat of Ten Plagues?

EGYPTIANS. Ten plagues! (*They all laugh. Suddenly there is growing sound of frogs croaking. The Egyptians look in horror at an offstage*

NO
vision. *The dancing girl runs on screaming. There is a frog on her back. The Egyptians run off screaming.*) Plagues! Plagues! (*Lights come up on Phil sitting in his tent. He is reading a script. Benny enters, looking awful. Phil quickly hides the script.*)

PHIL. Boy, do you look awful. How were they?

BENNY. (*Still in shock.*) After the first three I didn't think they could get any worse. Then we did "Boils." Then we had lunch.

PHIL. Ugh. How could you eat?

BENNY. Well, we did "Famine" in the morning so we were all pretty hungry. But before we could eat: "Locusts." Millions of them, coming out of the sky! My sandwich was gone in seconds! They were in my hair, my ears ...

PHIL. Oh my God ...

BENNY. (*Still in his nightmare.*) Then we did "Frogs." Phil, they shut the doors and dumped buckets of frogs on us. We were up to our armpits! Big, slimy, green frogs. The kind with the bubble under their chin that blow up when they get mad? And Phil, these frogs were mad! All I want to do right now is lie down for a week. (*Benny moves to the cot. He finds a script.*) What's that?

PHIL. (*Nervously.*) What's what?

BENNY. This is a script. Why is there a script here?

PHIL. (*Trying to be casual.*) Someone must have left it. (*Benny opens it.*)

BENNY. It has your name on it.

PHIL. (*Feigning surprise.*) Really?

BENNY. (*Not moving an inch.*) Why do you have a script?

PHIL. It's not important. I'll tell you later.

BENNY. Tell me now.

PHIL. (*Giving in.*) They're putting me into the Palace scenes. As a guard. I didn't ask for it, but Louise thought —

BENNY. Louise?

PHIL. Miss Goldman. She thought I'd be right for it.

BENNY. Congratulations.

PHIL. Benny, I'm sorry.

BENNY. Hey, don't be sorry. That's the way this business works. It's all who you know. You just have to be in the right place at the right time. Of course it's hard to be in the right place when you're up to your neck in frogs ... but them's the breaks. (*Sincerely trying.*)

I'm happy for you.

PHIL. (*Relieved.*) Wow. Benny, you're terrific. I thought you'd go through the ceiling over this. I mean, it's not much. It's only a couple of lines, but —

BENNY. Lines!?!?

PHIL. (*Desperately.*) Short lines. Little lines. Just verbs.

BENNY. (*Devastated.*) You got lines!?!?

PHIL. Stupid stuff, like "What ho!"

BENNY. (*The cruelest blow.*) You get to say "What ho!"?

PHIL. Uh huh.

BENNY. (*Taking a deep breath.*) Well, good for you. If you want, I'll help you work on it tonight.

PHIL. Oh no, Benny, you've had a hard day. You go out and have some fun.

BENNY. No Phil, I want to help you. Look, I took those stupid acting lessons for six months. One of us may as well get some use out of them.

PHIL. (*Apologetic.*) I'm supposed to meet Louise tonight. She wants to coach me herself.

BENNY. Louise.

PHIL. Yeah. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry. I was going to tell you. (*Benny appears stricken. He turns away and struggles to remain casual.*)

BENNY. About you and Miss Goldman? Oh, everybody knows about that. Even the Twos are talking about it. (*Benny calmly removes a small suitcase from under his cot and begins to pack.*)

PHIL. What are you doing? (*No answer.*) What are you doing?

BENNY. Packing.

PHIL. Look, maybe things'll get better.

BENNY. Sure, that's easy for you to say. You'll be up in the Palace munching grapes with the Queen. I've still got four more plagues to go! "Pestilence," Phil! I don't even know what "Pestilence" is! But I'll bet it's not something you want!

PHIL. Look, it's not always that bad. You got that orgy last week, didn't you?

BENNY. Sure! In Sodom and Gomorrah! Ten minutes of fun and then the wrath of God! (*His voice cracks. There are tears in his eyes.*) Let's face it, I'm a Four. I've been a Four all my life and that's all I'll ever be. (*Defeated, he sets down his bag and crosses to his cot.*)

PHIL. That's not true. I'll talk to Louise. Maybe she can do something.

BENNY. Okay, but you better do it soon 'cause next week is the fall of Rome, and I got a pretty good idea who it's gonna be falling on. (*Lights fade on them and come up on grips and stagehands preparing for the "Queen of the Nile" scene.*)

STAGEHAND #1. Set up for the "Queen of the Nile" scene!

STAGEHAND #2. "Queen of the Nile" scene!

STAGEHAND #3. Where's the Queen? (*The Queen enters.*)

QUEEN. (*Calling off.*) I don't have a goddamn cigarette! Louise! (*Louise hurries on with a pack.*)

LOUISE. Here you go, Estelle.

QUEEN. Thanks, honey. You're a peach. (*She holds out her cigarette expectantly. Louise lights it. The Queen inhales and savors her first breath.*) So, Louise, word in the make-up tent is you've got a boyfriend.

LOUISE. Oh, you know how people talk.

QUEEN. So do you?

LOUISE. (*Excited.*) Mmm hmm. Oh, Estelle, he's so sweet. I've never met a guy like him. He's smart and he listens to me and he helps me with my work.

QUEEN. Fooling around with him?

LOUISE. A lot.

QUEEN. You remind me of me when I was your age. (*Catching herself.*) Not that I'm not your age. (*Jack enters.*) *X to 4 throne sit*

JACK. Goldman! I've got to cover the "Burning Bush" scene, so you're gonna be shooting this scene yourself.

LOUISE. What? Oh, my God!

QUEEN. Hold it. What about Mister Dewitt?

JACK. He's in the Pyramid.

~~LOUISE.~~ He's in the Pyramid?

JACK. He says he's not coming out 'til we finish shooting.

LOUISE. (*To Jack.*) So, who's in charge?

JACK. I'm in charge.

LOUISE. Oh, no. (*Catching herself.*) But a good "oh, no." Like "Oh, no ... that's great."

QUEEN. (*To Louise.*) So you think you can handle this?

LOUISE. Absolutely. (*Jack exits.*) Let's go people! (*The Queen*

hides her cigarette. She and her attendant take their positions.)
Where's that new slave?

BENNY. (Offstage.) Coming! (Benny enters, excited.)

LOUISE. All right. New slave. Now all you do is stand here, fan the Queen and do whatever she says. Okay?

BENNY. Uh, just a few questions. Has my character always been a slave? How do I feel about the Queen? And is this a room I've been in before? (Louise sighs and quickly invents answers.)

LOUISE. Uh, you've always been a slave. The Queen doesn't know you exist. And you've served in her bedchamber ever since you became a eunuch. (Benny doesn't like this last part. Beat.)

BENNY. Or I could just fan her.

LOUISE. There you go. Everyone set! (Two guards enter and stand off to the side.) And ... Action! (Louise exits. Benny begins to fan. Soundtrack music.)

ATTENDANT. Why so sad my Queen?

QUEEN. A dark cloud of death hangs heavily about these chambers.

ATTENDANT. Why surely my lady jests. Does not the golden sun still ripen the sweet dates that fall from the majestic palm? No, my beautiful Queen, no harm shall befall you on a day such as this.

QUEEN. (Sighs.) I suppose. (To Benny.) Slave, bring me my sewing basket. (With great solemnity, Benny sets down the fans and crosses to a large basket. He brings it to the Queen. She opens it, looks inside and screams.) ASPS!!! (She throws down the basket and faints, as large rubber snakes come spilling out.)

ATTENDANT. (Pointing at Benny.) Guards, seize him! (The guards grab Benny and proceed to beat the life out of him. Suddenly the Queen sits up and calls offstage.)

QUEEN. Wait! Can we stop here? Louise!

LOUISE. (Entering.) Cut! What's the problem?

QUEEN. It's the rhythm. It just didn't feel right.

LOUISE. Estelle, the rhythm was great. I promise. All right? (Everyone returns to their places at the top of the scene.) Everyone set? And ... Action! (Music begins again. Benny, still uneasy, resumes fanning. As the scene proceeds he realizes that he's going to have to go through it all again.)

ATTENDANT. Why so sad my Queen?

QUEEN. A dark cloud of death hangs heavily about these chambers.

ATTENDANT. Why surely my lady jests. Does not the golden sun still ripen the sweet dates that fall from the majestic palm? No, my beautiful Queen, no harm shall befall you on a day such as this.

QUEEN. (Sighs.) I suppose. (To Benny.) Slave, bring me my sewing basket. (Far less enthusiastically this time, Benny crosses to the basket. Aware of what's coming, but unable to do anything about it, he gingerly hands the basket to the Queen. She opens it and screams.)

ASPS!!! (Snakes spill. The Queen faints.)

ATTENDANT. (Pointing at Benny.) Guards, seize him! (Once again the guards grab Benny and beat him to a pulp. Again, the Queen sits up and stops the scene.)

QUEEN. No. No no no. Can we stop?

LOUISE. (Entering.) Cut! What is it this time?

QUEEN. I don't know. The faint felt funny.

LOUISE. The faint looked fine. Estelle, please, let's just get through the whole scene once. Okay?

QUEEN. Okay.

LOUISE. Great. Everyone set? And ... Action! (Music. The scene begins again. As he fans, Benny stares at the basket with apprehension.)

ATTENDANT. Why so sad my Queen?

QUEEN. A dark cloud of death hangs heavily about these chambers.

ATTENDANT. Why surely my lady jests. Does not the golden sun still ripen the sweet dates that fall from the majestic palm? No, my beautiful Queen, no harm shall befall you on a day such as this.

QUEEN. (Sighs.) I suppose. (To Benny.) Slave, bring me my sewing basket. (Benny walks to the basket like a man going to the electric chair. When he reaches the basket he hesitates, unwilling to pick it up. Impulsively, he picks up a nearby bowl of fruit and brings it to the Queen. To his surprise, she looks up and smiles.) Ah, fruit.

(Benny brightens. She takes the bowl from him and carefully selects a piece of fruit. As she removes the piece, she looks into the bowl and screams.) ASPS!! (She throws the bowl to the ground. Snakes come spilling out. She faints.)

ATTENDANT. Guards, seize him! (Once again the guards total Benny.) Call for the Executioner! This slave must die at once!

GUARD. (Exiting.) Executioner! Executioner! (The executioner enters. He wears a black hood and carries an enormous axe.)

QUEEN. Executioner, this slave has attempted to assassinate your beloved Queen. Cleave him in two and bring forth his traitorous bowels so that all may see.

BENNY. (Having no idea what's going on.) But ... But ... But ...

QUEEN. Silence, villain! Your words are useless here! Prepare your flesh to receive the axe. (The executioner lifts his axe.) Come, Executioner! Execute! (The axe hangs in the air. Benny cringes. The executioner hesitates.) As your Queen, I command you to kill him!

EXECUTIONER. (Solemnly.) I cannot kill him. He is my brother. (All gasp. He draws off his hood. It is Phil. Benny is stunned.)

QUEEN. What is this? You would defy your Queen for the love of a brother? Never before have I witnessed such compassion. Such nobility. I am strangely moved. (Taking Phil's hand.) Tremble not, no harm shall befall you. Such virtues shall not go unrewarded. Gifts you shall receive. Treasures beyond your wildest dreams.

PHIL. And what of my brother?

QUEEN. Oh, he shall not be forgotten. (She goes to Benny. He looks up brightly.) Hang him by his ankles and cover him with leeches until the life is drained from his body as the juice from this fig. (She pops a fig into her mouth and turns to Phil. However it is hard for her to speak with her mouth full of fig.) Come and choose your treasure. (Phil and the Queen start to exit as the guards grab Benny and drag him off screaming.)

BENNY. Noooo! Noooo!

LOUISE. (entering.) Cut! Print it! Okay! A couple of rough spots, but not bad. (Phil runs to Benny who is lying in a heap on the floor.)

PHIL. Benny! Benny, you were terrific.

BENNY. (Dazed.) Huh?

PHIL. You were great! I gotta tell you, those acting lessons really showed. (Suddenly Shel runs on. He is sobbing. His clothes are covered with ash and soot.)

LOUISE. My God, what happened?

SHEL. (Fighting for control.) We were ... we were shooting the "Burning Bush" scene ... You know the part where Moses says, "Oh Lord, what do you want of me? Why have you brought me to this place? Blah blah blah blah..."

LOUISE. Right ...

SHEL. So then Moses turns and sees the Burning Bush. And Jack yells "cut," 'cause the fire's not big enough. And I tell him it's really hard. I mean, have you ever tried to make "a bush that burns yet is not consumed"?

LOUISE. No.

SHEL. No, of course not! 'Cause that's a sign from God!

LOUISE. Sure ...

SHEL. But does Jack care? Noooo! He just starts yelling at me. "C'mon, you little idiot! I want size! I want spectacle! I want to see the power of God!" So I cranked it all the way up ...

LOUISE. (With apprehension.) And...? What happened? Where's Jack? (Off his hesitation.) Shel, where's Jack? (In answer, he blows a cloud of ash from his hand. Everyone gasps. Blackout. In the darkness we can see a lantern.)

LOUISE. Hello? Hello? Mister Dewitt? (Dim lights reveal Phil and Louise. Benny follows behind them, carrying a paper bag.)

PHIL. Are we almost there?

LOUISE. I don't know. I've never been inside the Pyramid before.

BENNY. Have you ever met him?

LOUISE. Not really. Jack was the only one allowed to talk to him.

PHIL. Look, Benny, when we get there just keep your mouth shut.

BENNY. I will. I will. I just want to meet him.

LOUISE. (Calling out into the darkness.) Hello? Mister Dewitt? Are you there? (Silence.) We brought sandwiches.

DEWITT. Over here. (They move toward the voice. A shadowy half-light comes up on Dewitt. He is an older man cloaked in black robes. We cannot see his face. He is hunched over a moviola, the flickering light from which throws huge shadows of him across the stage. There are reels of film and piles of loose footage about.)

LOUISE. (To Dewitt.) These tunnels are tricky.

DEWITT. (Barely looking up from his work.) Who are you?

LOUISE. (Dorothy before the Great Oz.) I'm Louise Goldman. I was Jack Kramer's assistant.

DEWITT. Where's Jack?

LOUISE. (With difficulty.) There's been a terrible accident, Mister Dewitt. On Chorev, the Mountain of God. Jack was a brave man and he put the picture ahead of everything, even his own safety.

(Becoming emotional.) He's gone now, but I know he would have wanted you to know how much you meant to him.

DEWITT. *(Beat.)* What kind of sandwiches?

LOUISE. *(Not quite understanding.)* What?

DEWITT. In the bag, what kind of sandwiches?

LOUISE. Uh, olive loaf and cheese. So anyway, I guess we need you to come out of the pyramid and take over again.

DEWITT. I quit two days ago. Didn't Jack tell you?

LOUISE. No. Why would you quit?

DEWITT. Sweetheart, I'm old. I'm old, and I'm tired, and I'm old.

LOUISE. But you can't give up now.

DEWITT. You know, it's funny you should say that. A few days ago we were shooting the Ten Plagues. And I looked out at all of these people suffering. But in the middle of them, there was this little man, refusing to give up. I couldn't take my eyes off him. And I just thought, I don't need to see this. This is too sad. I've made dozens of pictures. Enough is enough.

LOUISE. But you can't quit in the middle of this one. It's the greatest story ever told.

DEWITT. It's okay.

LOUISE. But we've all worked so hard.

DEWITT. Look, it's like I told Jack: You want to finish it, do it yourself.

LOUISE. Me? Oh, well ... I've directed some background shots, and I did a scene today, which frankly I think came out pretty good. But I don't know if I could take over the whole picture.

DEWITT. It's not that hard. It's all about lining them up and moving them around and getting them to do what you want. It's like a ... *(He searches for word. Phil raises a hand.)* Yes?

PHIL. Like a marching band?

DEWITT. Aww, I love marching bands! They taught me how to read. When I first came to this country, I used to go to the Rose Bowl and watch them spell out words. For the first three months, the only words I could write were "GO!" "TEAM!" and "COUGARS!"

PHIL. I was the drum major in high school.

DEWITT. Aww, I love that story.

PHIL. We went all-state.

DEWITT. Now it's a long story. Enough. Look, why don't you do this?

PHIL. Me? Okay.

DEWITT. Okay.

LOUISE. Okay? Phil, what are you talking about?

PHIL. I'll do it. I'll take over.

LOUISE. Honey, this is bigger than a marching band.

BENNY. Yeah. Phil, this is crazy

PHIL. Look Benny, if I'm in charge, I can change things. *(Meaningfully.)* I can give people parts. Big parts.

BENNY. *(Beat.)* Have I just been discovered?

PHIL. There you go. And Louise, I really think I can do this. But I need you to believe in me.

LOUISE. Of course I do. *(He kisses her. It's a long kiss that grows increasingly passionate. Benny is more and more uncomfortable. Phil and Louise realize Dewitt is there and quickly separate.)*

PHIL. Thanks! Thanks, Mr. Dewitt. You won't be sorry. *(Benny has wandered over to the moviola and glances down at the screen.)*

BENNY. Hey. Those people are naked.

DEWITT. Oh, uh, yeah. That's a ... different movie. *(Beat, as they all take this in.)* Go! *(Phil, Louise and Benny start for the exit. Lights fade on Dewitt.)*

PHIL. Oh my God!

BENNY. I can't believe it. I'm really gonna be in the movie.

PHIL. *(With a sly gaze at Louise.)* Maybe not just you.

LOUISE. What do you mean?

PHIL. You'll see. Come on, you guys! This is gonna be great! *(Benny and Louise start to exit. Phil stops them.)* Uh Uh. Action! *(Benny and Louise start off again, only this time they are rather self-conscious.)* Cut! *(Benny and Louise are startled and stop in their tracks. Phil is pleased with himself.)* Heh?

BENNY and LOUISE. *(Overlapping, feigning enthusiasm.)* Yeah. Sure. That's great. *(Benny and Louise exchange a look, and exit. Phil turns out to the front.)*

PHIL. Action! *(Music. Lights shift. Phil exits. The Pyramid drop flies out. The stage is transformed back to the "Queen of the Nile" set. During this, the narrator is heard.)*

NARRATOR. And so a boy did rise from the ranks to lead the

come to spot where we left off

people. And the story did resume pretty much where it left off. (Lights up on the scene we saw earlier. The Queen and her attendant are facing Benny. The executioner stands nearby, his face obscured by his hood.)

QUEEN. Hang him by his ankles and cover him with leeches until the life is drained from his body as the juice from this fig. (Beat; reconsiders.) Which I will enjoy later. (She hands the fig to her attendant and turns and starts off right.)

BENNY. Wait!

QUEEN. What?

BENNY. Hear me first, for I am not the simple slave boy I appear to be. I am, in truth, Prince Ramadidis. (The others react.) Yes, I was stolen as an infant from my natural parents during the Purge of Phythithia and raised by a flock of wild sheep. I return here now to claim the throne that is rightfully mine.

QUEEN. But this cannot be, for Ramadidis has been dead for lo these many years. Slay the imposter! (Suddenly Louise runs on dressed as an Egyptian princess. She wears an elaborate gold costume complete with bracelets and headdress.)

LOUISE. Wait!

QUEEN. What!?

LOUISE. Mother, spare him please. I beg you!

QUEEN. But what care you, the Pharaoh's daughter, for the fate of this treacherous slave?

LOUISE. As surely as the Nile overflows its banks ere the ibis sings its gentle song and the lotus blossom blooms, I do love Ramadidis.

QUEEN. But Princess Isis, you are betrothed to the Philistine king.

LOUISE. (Gesturing broadly.) How could I marry a man who slew my father? I hate that Philistine ... stein.

QUEEN. I will hear none of this. Guard her in her chamber until her nuptial day. Now take this man away!

LOUISE. No!

BENNY. Very well, but hear me now, oh Queen of the Nile. You may lock me away, torture me, kill me if you must, for I would sacrifice my life ere I would relinquish my love. (Dramatic pause. Then we hear Phil's voice from offstage.)

PHIL. (Offstage.) Cut! (Music stops. Phil enters. He is dressed for the

first time in contemporary -- 1930's -- clothes: smart slacks and an open shirt. He carries a megaphone and a clipboard and wears a shiny silver whistle around his neck. The executioner turns and we see that he has been played by another actor. There is general bustle about the set.) Oh man! That was great. (Calling off.) Tony, we're going to go with that one! Tell the boys to strike the set! Benny, you were amazing. Louise, fantastic.

LOUISE. (Doubtful.) Really? I just felt so ... I mean, I'm not really an actress. (The executioner snorts and exits.)

PHIL. Are you kidding? This is the best idea I've had so far. You know what I said the first time I saw you: That girl should be in the movie.

LOUISE. (Touched.) You said that? (Benny raises an eyebrow, knowing full well he was the one who said it. Louise, unconvinced:) If you say so ...

PHIL. Trust me. You were terrific. (Brady, the movie's writer, enters with pages.)

BRADY. Here's that new scene for Louise, all typed up. (To Louise.) He's got you laughing, crying, you try to kill yourself, and you do a dance. (To Phil.) Boss, I'm having trouble with the Gladiator scene. Can you come by?

PHIL. (Checking schedule.) No can do. I'm slaying First Born until six o'clock.

LOUISE. I can slay them, honey.

PHIL. Come on, sweetheart, that's not your job anymore. (Cochette, the costume designer, bustles on. She is very Coco Chanel, in a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, with a tape measure around her neck. She carries a bridal gown. She speaks in a broad French accent. An assistant accompanies her.)

COCHETTE. Zo, Philippe, here is ze bridal gown. I have vorked as fast as I can. (To Louise.) Up, up, up. Zo? (She ushers Louise over to a nearby pedestal. The men hoist Louise up. Louise holds the dress to herself and stands poised uncomfortably.)

PHIL. Cochette, you've outdone yourself.

COCHETTE. Her neck is too short, I make it long. He hips are wrong, I make zem right. Her bosoms ... (With a gesture.) ... zey wander. I rein zem in! Viz what you give me, I do ze best I can. (Cochette takes the dress. Louise is left stuck up on the pedestal. Shel

enters.)

PHIL. Okay, everyone, meet me in Mesopotamia in fifteen minutes. *(Phil and his entourage start to leave. Louise calls after him.)*

LOUISE. *(Stuck up on the pedestal.)* Phil, could I talk to you for a second?

PHIL. Sure. What? *(Phil and the group stop. Everyone is listening. Louise tries to speak in confidential tones.)*

LOUISE. Uh, what happened to ... *(To the onlookers.)* Hi. *(To Phil.)* What happened to you last night? I waited up.

PHIL. I'm sorry. I was with the Sabine Women 'til almost 2:30.

LOUISE. *(Hating this.)* Will I see you tonight?

PHIL. Shel, when are we expecting the Angel of Death?

SHEL. 7:15.

PHIL. I can give you about half an hour.

LOUISE. *(Quietly.)* Why don't we let it go.

PHIL. Honey, I'm working real hard. You have to understand that. You're my girlfriend.

LOUISE. Uh huh.

PHIL. Hey, come here. *(She bends down. He gives her a big kiss. Then blows his silver whistle.)* All right everyone, let's see some spirit! *(Phil and his entourage exit. Benny is left with Louise. She is staring off after Phil. There is a pause.)*

BENNY. Hey, I thought you were real good in the scene, Miss Goldman.

LOUISE. Oh, thanks. You too. *(Pause. After a polite moment, Louise indicates the pedestal.)* Could you ... uh ...

BENNY. Oh yeah. *(Cochette's assistant enters to strike the pedestal as Benny lifts Louise off it. The assistant stops and looks at Louise in Benny's arms.)*

LOUISE. *(To assistant, awkward.)* How ya doin'? *(Cochette's assistant exits with pedestal. Benny sets Louise down.)*

BENNY. So ... have you had a chance to look at the scene we'll be doing tomorrow?

LOUISE. Yes.

BENNY. Well, I know in the script it says I'm supposed to kiss you a lot, but I just want you to know it's only acting, okay? I mean I'm not trying to pull anything.

LOUISE. *(Smiling.)* Benny ...

BENNY. I mean you're Phil's girl and all ...

LOUISE. Oh, that's just in real life. In the movie I'm *your* girl. In the movie I love *you*. All right, maybe not at first. You're just a simple slave boy and I'm a princess. But ours is a love that was meant to be. And I can only fight it for so long. You're everything I've always wanted. You're brave and you're strong and you're handsome. You've got to forget real life.

BENNY. Right.

LOUISE. If you'd like, we can work on it now? How about the scene in the passageway?

BENNY. Great. *(They get out their scripts.)*

LOUISE. *(Indicating the place on the page.)* From here. *(They take position. She speaks as Princess Isis.)* What? Who is there? Is someone there? In the passageway? *(Sees Benny.)* Oh. It's you. Come closer, simple slave boy. Be not afraid. *(She takes his hand. He reacts.)* I can hide my love for you no longer. Kiss me. Kiss me thus! *(Benny leans forward and passionately kisses Louise. They break away ... breathless. Recovering.)* That was good acting.

BENNY. Real good acting.

LOUISE. Yeah. You acted real good. *(As lights fade on Benny and Louise, the sound of thousands cheering is heard as lights come up on Phil. He quiets the mob.)*

PHIL. *(To the crowd.)* Thank you. Thank you for that warm welcome. I'll try and keep this brief. I just wanted to get you all together to tell you what a terrific job I think you're all doing. *(Phil applauds them, indicating they should give themselves a hand. The mob cheers.)*

VOICE. When are we going home?

PHIL. *(Surprised.)* Ah. Hard to say really. I've made some changes in the script, and there have been some setbacks. But I'm sure we'll be out of here in no time. Which reminds me ... *(Consulting clipboard.)* I have an announcement: Lyla Pinkus, who as you know was one of our Vestal Virgins, has given birth to a lovely baby girl. *(Cheers from the crowd.)* Mother and daughter are resting comfortably. The time of delivery was 12:41, and the weight at birth was eight pounds, two ounces. So whoever had those numbers in the pool, congratulations. Oh, and speaking of good news, we've been looking into the bath-

room situation. Now that we're finished with the Red Sea, it's all yours! *(Wild cheering and applause. Lights fade on this.)*

NARRATOR. And thus the King ruled with an even hand and a generous heart. Yet he did not know of the surprise to come.

(Lights up as Louise enters. She is wearing a birthday hat and is carrying a birthday cake with lit candles. She spots the mob.)

LOUISE. Hey, you guys. Did everybody get a hat?

MOB. *(Huge.)* Yes! *(The candles on the cake blow out.)*

LOUISE. Ooooooh. Hope you all made a wish. Okay, Phil's gonna be here any minute. And hey, thank you for keeping it a secret. I know how tough that is for you Twos. *(Murmured acknowledgment from the crowd. Brady, Shel, Cochette and her assistant come running in.)*

BRADY. He's coming!

COCHETTE. Everybody hide!

ASSISTANT. Get down! Get down!

SHEL. Kill the lights! *(Blackout.)*

LOUISE. Does anybody have a match? *(Louise is handed a lighter. She brings it to the cake. All of the candles light up at once. Silence as Benny enters. Suddenly lights are thrown on and thousands yell ...)*

MOB. Surprise!! Happy birthday Phil!!

BENNY. Nope. Just me. *(Quietly to Louise and the others.)* He's not coming.

LOUISE. What? He promised he'd meet me here.

COCHETTE. And what about ze mob? Look, zey all signed ze card. *(She opens up a card which, when unfolded, is so long it spills to the floor.)*

BENNY. *(To the mob.)* Uh, everybody! I'm sorry, but Phil won't be able to make it tonight.

MOB. Aaawww ...

BENNY. Yeah. He's got a meeting with Mister Dewitt. But we'll make sure he gets the card.

LOUISE. *(Blowing out candles, disgusted.)* I don't believe it. I can't go through with this. Do me a favor, Benny. Make an excuse.

BENNY. Sure. *(To the Mob.)* Everybody! Uh ... Louise ... Louise ... has diarrhea. *(Louise reacts, mortified.)* We've all got a six o'clock call tomorrow, so why don't we make it an early night.

VOICES. Oh. Okay! That's all right!

WOMAN'S VOICE. Hope you feel better, Louise! Try bananas! *(Louise shoots Benny a look. He mouths "Sorry.")*

LOUISE. Thanks, Beth!

SHEL. *(Exiting.)* 'Night, Louise.

BRADY. *(Exiting.)* 'Night, doll.

BENNY. 'Night, guys.

COCHETTE. Good night, Louise. Men! *(Spits.)* If you're feeling lonely, come by my tent tonight. Ve vill sing some songs.

LOUISE. No. Thank you, Cochette.

COCHETTE. Sad songs.

LOUISE. That's okay ...

COCHETTE. Good night, Louise. *(Cochette gives her one last lingering look and exits. Louise sits, miserable.)*

LOUISE. Benny, you can take off. I'll clean up.

BENNY. Oh no. I'll keep you company.

LOUISE. Let me ask you something: What is it about me that turns nice guys into jerks?

BENNY. Oh no, no, it's not your fault. He was a jerk way before he met you.

LOUISE. *(Smiles.)* Benny, I don't know what I would have done without you these last few weeks.

BENNY. Yeah?

LOUISE. Oh God, life was so much simpler back in Alaska. All there was was snow ... sky ... caribou. Big, brown eyes staring in the window. Kind of creepy, but at least they're dependable. You throw some bread crumbs out your window once, and you're on their migratory route forever. I wish I were there right now. *(She starts to cry.)*

BENNY. Oh come on, don't say that. People need you here.

LOUISE. Who needs me? The mob doesn't need me anymore, they have Phil. Phil doesn't need me, he has Phil.

BENNY. *(Hating to see her cry.)* Maybe I need you, Louise. Maybe I think Phil's the biggest fool in the whole world. Maybe I think you're just about the best thing that could ever happen to a guy.

LOUISE. You really feel that way?

BENNY. *(Evasive.)* I said maybe.

LOUISE. Hmm. *(There is a pause. Louise has stopped crying.)*

BENNY. But you love Phil.

LOUISE. *(More to herself than Benny.)* Do I?
BENNY. *(Tentative.)* I don't know. Do you?
LOUISE. I'm *seeing* Phil.
BENNY. Right.
LOUISE. But I certainly don't see much of Phil.
BENNY. Right.
LOUISE. And I see you *a lot*.
BENNY. Mmm hmmm.
LOUISE. Hmmm. *(Long pause. Their eyes meet. The only sound is that of the crickets. After a tortured moment they both tear their gaze away.)*
BOTH. *(Shaking their heads.)* Naaah. *(They smile at each other warmly, and more than a little regretfully.)*
LOUISE. Good night, Benny.
BENNY. 'Night, Louise. *(Benny starts to leave. Suddenly he swings around, Louise rushes from her seat, and the two are caught up in a passionate embrace. Music swells. Lights fade.)*
NARRATOR. Thus began the love affair that would change the shape of history. Never before had one small kiss ruled the future of so many. And yay, it was a good kiss! *(Lights come back up on Benny and Louise in the tent. They are both wracked with guilt.)*
LOUISE. About last night, that was my fault.
BENNY. No, it was my fault.
LOUISE. No, Benny, I wanted it to happen. I made it happen. It was my fault.
BENNY. All right. *(Beat.)* But the night *before* was my fault.
LOUISE. And the night before that was mine.
BENNY. Oh, God, we've got to end this now.
LOUISE. I know, I know.
BENNY. If Phil ever found out ...
LOUISE. I know, I know.
BENNY. So that's it. We'll break it off clean. Go back to being friends.
LOUISE. Right. *(Pause.)* That means no more little meetings behind the Sphinx?
BENNY. That's right.
LOUISE. No more midnight walks through the Gardens of Babylon?

BENNY. Nope.
LOUISE. No more "kiss the camel"?
BENNY. *(Struggling.)* We've got to be strong. We've got to stop this.
LOUISE. Do we?
BENNY. I don't know ... *(Benny and Louise suddenly begin to kiss passionately. Phil approaches the tent.)*
PHIL. *(Calling off.)* I'll be right there! I just have to get a couple of things! *(Benny and Louise break off mid-kiss.)*
BENNY. Oh no! *(There is wild panic as they both rush madly around the tent, looking for a means of escape.)*
LOUISE. Hide! *(Benny dives under his cot. Phil enters the tent.)*
PHIL. Louise. What are you doing here? *(Louise strikes a seductive pose.)*
LOUISE. Waiting for you. Mister.
PHIL. Oh honey, that's sweet. But I just stopped by for a second. I've got a meeting with Mister Dewitt. *(During the following scene Phil never stops moving, always gathering papers and files, etc.)*
LOUISE. *(Fast.)* Oh shoot. Oh well. Bye bye.
PHIL. Maybe we can find some time to talk tonight.
LOUISE. *(Too cheerful.)* Tonight, tomorrow, whenever. It's fine. *(Phil drops his pencil near Benny's cot. Louise screams.)* Ahhh!
PHIL. What?
LOUISE. The pencil. It just fell ... so fast. *(Phil starts to retrieve the pencil. Louise dives for it.)* I've got it! *(Phil reaches for the pencil. Louise pulls his hand away, as though playing a sexy game.)* Nope. Go get it. *(She throws the pencil out of the tent.)* Go! Get it! Go! Go! *(Phil is not sure what to make of this.)*
PHIL. Okay. *(Phil exits the tent to get the pencil.)*
LOUISE. *(Fierce whisper.)* That's it. I'm gonna tell him the truth. *(Benny sticks his head out.)*
BENNY. *(Fierce whisper.)* No!
LOUISE. I can't take this anymore.
BENNY. Sure you can!
LOUISE. I can't take the lying.
BENNY. The lying is great!
LOUISE. I'm gonna tell him.
BENNY. You can't!
LOUISE. Sshh! Sshh!

BENNY. (*Overlapping.*) Sshh! Sshh! (*Phil enters the tent. Benny hides. Louise turns her whispered fight with Benny into a sneeze.*)

LOUISE. Sshh! Sshh ... Ha Choo! (*Phil continues to search through his papers.*) Phil, there's something I have to tell you. (*Benny's hand reaches out and grabs Louise's ankle. She manages to pry herself away from his grip, using her other foot.*)

PHIL. (*Distracted.*) Hmmm?

LOUISE. Sometimes something happens between two people. You just have these feelings. And it doesn't matter whether they're right or wrong. You just have them.

PHIL. Awww. I feel the same way, sweetie. Have you seen my blue notebook? (*Unbeknownst to Phil it comes flying out from under Benny's cot.*)

LOUISE. Here it is!

PHIL. Can we do this later?

LOUISE. (*Resigned.*) Sure.

PHIL. Thanks. Hey, and maybe we can play that pencil game again.

LOUISE. You betcha, big guy. (*She growls at him.*)

PHIL. You're great. (*Phil gives Louise a quick peck and exits. Louise slumps down on Benny's cot. Benny sticks his head out from under the cot.*)

LOUISE. We've got to end this.

BENNY. I know. (*Beat.*)

LOUISE. Are you looking up my skirt?

BENNY. Yeah. (*Lights fade. When they come up we are in the center of a large arena. Noise of a great crowd. Octavius's trumpets play. Phil takes a position on the steps to address the mob.*)

PHIL. (*To the crowd.*) Now, before we begin, there's something we need to discuss. It seems that someone here thought it would be most amusing to make some small adjustments to the Trojan Horse. (*There is snickering from the crowd.*) Frankly I don't find that sort of thing funny. Someone's eye could have been put out. (*More snickering.*) Now until those responsible come forward, there will be no pudding with dinner. (*The crowd boos.*) Hey, it's up to you. We have a scene to shoot here. Bring in the Queen of the Nile. (*The Queen enters. Phil calls off.*) I need Isis and Ramadidis. (*Phil exits as Benny and Louise enter. They are costumed as Isis and Ramadidis. The Queen goes to Louise and Benny.*)

lipstick & compact
- no cig

QUEEN. (*to Louise and Benny.*) So, give me the dish on you two.

LOUISE. (*Nervous.*) Dish? There's no dish.

BENNY. (*Overlapping.*) No dish. No dish.

QUEEN. Oh, really? That scene in the passageway was pretty steamy!

LOUISE. We were just acting. (*The Queen laughs.*)

QUEEN. Oh, honey, you can't act. (*Louise doesn't quite know how to take this. Phil enters.*)

PHIL. Benny! Louise! Get over here.

LOUISE. (*Nervous.*) Morning!

BENNY. (*Overly cheerful.*) What's up?

PHIL. Everyone knows you two are in love. (*A look of horror passes over their faces.*)

BENNY and LOUISE. What?

PHIL. But the Queen has vowed to see you die in the arena.

BENNY and LOUISE. (*Weak.*) Oh.

PHIL. Your only hope is to defeat her three best gladiators. (*Three gladiators of varying ferociousness stand off to the side.*) Now you two love each other. It's like nothing you've ever felt before. But it's a forbidden love. And it's tearing you apart. Think you guys can do that? (*They stare at him.*)

BENNY and LOUISE. Uh huh.

PHIL. All right, let's try it. Good luck, honey. (*He kisses Louise and moves away.*) Everybody ready? And ... Action! (*The Queen enters and waves to the crowd. Sound of cheering. The gladiators begin to chain Louise to two columns.*)

QUEEN. (*To the crowd.*) Greetings my people! Treachery can be found in many places. Even in the bosom of your own family. Here chained before you stands my once beloved daughter, Princess Isis, who has cast her lot with Ramadidis, usurper of the throne. Since she desires no more than his heart, she shall have it ... on the end of a spear. He shall forfeit his life for our amusement!

GLADIATOR #1. (*Stepping forward.*) For you my Queen, with sword and shield I shall defeat him! (*He brandishes his weapon.*)

GLADIATOR #2. With spear and net he will be mine!

GLADIATOR #3. With a metal ball with spikes on it I shall be victorious!

BENNY. And I, with naught but the simple shepherd's crook

given me by my adoptive father, shall surely best you all. For I have love beating in my breast, while you mine enemies have naught but hatred and malice. (*Louise beams at him.*)

QUEEN. Let the games begin! (*Music. She steps back. The three advance on Benny. They circle him making low guttural noises. Suddenly they lunge. It is an elaborately choreographed fight. Benny wields his crook like a pro. Nets and shields are sailing through the air. One by one the gladiators are defeated. Benny runs to Louise's arms which remain restrained by her chains.*)

LOUISE. Ramadidis, dare I believe what I see?

BENNY. I say it now so that all may hear: I do love thee! I do love thee! (*He kisses her passionately. The clinch goes on and on. Her legs are intertwined with his. Her arms pull at the chains. Finally, Phil calls from offstage.*)

PHIL. Cut! (*Entering.*) Cut. Cut! Will someone make them cut? (*The lovers part, breathless. Phil crosses to them smiling, pleased with the scene. Joking.*) Hey you two, how long's this been going on? (*In a guilty rush it all spills out of them, their lines overlapping.*)

BENNY. It's only been three days, I swear.

LOUISE. It's just one of those things. It happened.

BENNY. You've got to understand. We were both so lonely.

LOUISE. I never saw you. I was angry with you.

BENNY. And now it's over.

LOUISE. (*To Benny.*) No it's not.

BENNY. No it's not. Not now that it's out in the open.

LOUISE. You've got to understand.

BENNY. We love each other.

LOUISE. Could someone please unchain me?

BENNY. We wanted to tell you.

LOUISE. We never meant to hurt you.

BENNY. We knew you'd find out. (*There is a long silence.*)

PHIL. (*Quietly.*) I was kidding.

BENNY. (*Lamely.*) Sssso were we?

PHIL. (*Glancing around the arena.*) I suppose everybody knew but me. I guess that makes me look pretty stupid.

LOUISE. Phil, we're sorry.

PHIL. How could you? Behind my back. After all I've done for you. I can't believe it. My girlfriend ... and my brother! It's ... it's

... it's a crime against nature!!

VOICE FROM THE CROWD. I think it's nice!

PHIL. (*Swinging around.*) Who said that? This is a private conversation. I believe you all have things you should be doing. (*Back to Benny and Louise.*) I suppose you're going to tell me this is all my fault.

WOMAN'S VOICE. Maybe if you spent more time with her, this wouldn't have happened!

PHIL. I've been busy!

MAN'S VOICE. Too busy to come to the party she threw for you??

ANOTHER MAN'S VOICE. Leave him alone! He's under a lot of pressure!

PHIL. Thank you!

ANOTHER WOMAN'S VOICE. I never thought they were right for each other!

ANOTHER VOICE. You could see this coming a mile off!

ANOTHER VOICE. Still, she should have broken up with him before she started with the brother!

ANOTHER VOICE. They couldn't help it! They're in love!

PHIL. That's enough!

SAME VOICE. Well, they are. (*Phil ignores this and turns back to Louise.*)

PHIL. All right, Louise, I forgive you.

LOUISE. You forgive me?

PHIL. You were lonely. I was busy. You were confused. We'll pretend this just never happened.

LOUISE. It happened, Phil.

PHIL. All right. It happened. But the important thing is that it'll never happen again.

LOUISE. It'll happen again. I love him, Phil. (*Benny grins. Phil looks at him.*)

BENNY. (*Small.*) Sorry.

PHIL. Well, then fine. You two are out of the picture.

GLADIATOR #1. You can't do that.

GLADIATOR #2. They're the main story now.

QUEEN. And, honey, the kids are terrific. You can't fake that stuff. (*There is cheering from the mob.*)

PHIL. (*Looking up.*) I thought I told you to talk amongst your-

selves! *(To the Queen.)* Now I can do whatever I want. And I say they're out of the picture. I don't care if they are the main story. We'll ... we'll rewrite ... we'll re-shoot —

QUEEN. *(With mounting hysteria.)* Oh no. Oh God no. That'll mean another month, two months. I can't take it here anymore! I have to get home. I have children, divorce papers to sign! This was picture was supposed to be my comeback. But it doesn't look like I'm coming back!

PHIL. I don't care! What I say goes!

BENNY. Phil —

PHIL. *(To Benny.)* I'm in charge here and I say you're out of the picture! And guess what? You're never going to see your Louise again.

LOUISE. Somebody please unchain me.

PHIL. Everyone, listen to me: From this day forth this man is a FIVE!! *(The mob gasps in horror.)*

LOUISE. Phil, no!

PHIL. Take him away!

LOUISE. *(Struggling against the chains.)* Benny! *(Gladiator #1 takes Benny. Struggle is useless. He pulls himself up and turns to Phil.)*

BENNY. All right, Phil, but listen to me: You can make me a Five. Take me out of the picture. Kill my dream. I don't care. I'd give up my life before I gave up my love. *(The mob goes wild. Benny is led off at spear-point.)*

PHIL. All right, people, I know we've had a rough morning. And we've all probably said things that we're sorry about now —

VOICE. Asshole!

PHIL. Or *will* be sorry about later. But we have a movie to shoot here.

GLADIATOR #2. No.

PHIL. No?

GLADIATOR #2. Forget it. We're done making this stupid movie. We wanna go home.

PHIL. Listen, give me a week. If not for me, then do it for Mister Dewitt!

GLADIATOR #2. No! Not for Mister Dewitt and not for nobody else neither! Who are you to ask us for one more week? One more week of building your cities and fighting your battles? I say who are you to ask us for one more day??!! *(The crowd cheers. Phil waits.)*

Finally they are silent, waiting to hear his response.) *Enter*

PHIL. *(Starting quietly.)* Who am I? Who am I? I'll tell you who I am. I'm one of you. I'm a Three. Remember? *(Seeing he's got them now.)* And you're right. This isn't Mister Dewitt's movie. And it's not my movie. It's *our* movie. This isn't about kings and queens and heroes. It's about *us*. And I think we owe it to ourselves to see it through. *(For the first time the crowd is uncertain. Even Gladiator #2 is wavering. He turns to Louise.)*

GLADIATOR #2. What do you say, Miss Goldman? We'll listen to you. *(There is general murmur of agreement from the mob. They all look to Louise. She hesitates.)*

LOUISE. Will somebody please unchain me?

PHIL. *(Quickly under his breath, while unchaining Louise.)*

Louise, I'm sorry for everything I've done. I'll make it up to you. I promise. I'll set you free. Benny, too. Just tell them to get back to work and the buses and trucks will be here on Saturday to take them home.

LOUISE. They will?

PHIL. No. But they'll believe you.

LOUISE. What'll we tell them on Saturday?

PHIL. I don't know. We'll figure that out on Saturday.

LOUISE. You'll do anything to finish this picture, won't you?

PHIL. I knew you'd understand. *(Louise turns to the crowd.)*

LOUISE. Everybody! We're going home ... *today!!* *(A cheer goes up from the throng.)*

PHIL. No! No, you're not! You're staying right here! *(The Mob grows louder. The Queen and the two gladiators advance on Phil. Phil's eyes fill with fear. He holds Louise out in front of him.)* Stay back! *(Suddenly, he grabs Louise and runs off.)*

GLADIATOR #1. *(Running after him.)* This way!

GLADIATOR #2. *(Following.)* After him!

QUEEN. *(To the audience.)* Spread out! *(She runs off. We hear the sounds of chaos. Phil enters. He is dragging Louise with him. She is bound.)*

LOUISE. You know, I gotta tell you, you are the worst ex-boyfriend I have ever had.

PHIL. Shhhhh!

LOUISE. Oh that's nice. You gonna gag me again. Phil, this is

crazy. Let me go.

PHIL. As long as I have you they won't hurt me.

LOUISE. It's no use, Phil. They're going to find you.

PHIL. Not if I can get out of these clothes.

LOUISE. *(To a crazy man.)* Phil, we can still see you if you're naked.

PHIL. A disguise!

LOUISE. *(Relieved.)* Oh. Phew ...

PHIL. All I need is a little bait. *(Phil gags Louise and places her next to the proscenium. Phil hides behind one of the columns. Gladiator #3 enters and goes to Louise.)*

GLADIATOR #3. Miss Goldman! What happened? *(Louise tries to warn him through her gag.)* What? *(She tries again. Before he can comprehend, Phil emerges and puts his sword to the gladiator.)*

PHIL. All right, my friend. You're gonna get back there behind that column and take off all your clothes.

GLADIATOR #3. *(With raised hands.)* Okay, okay. But I gotta tell you, you don't need the sword.

PHIL. *(Indicating off stage.)* Just ... *(Phil and the gladiator exit. Louise is now alone and is still bound. The Queen runs on. She is in a wild panic, as though fleeing some offstage terror. Louise gets her attention through her gag. The Queen un-gags Louise and begins untying her.)*

QUEEN. Oh, honey, what did he do to you?

LOUISE. Estelle! What's going on out there?

QUEEN. It's chaos. The mob wants out of here any way they can. Some of the Twos are building wings out of feathers and wax!

LOUISE. Have you seen Benny?

QUEEN. They're bringing him this way. But you'll never get him away from that guard. The man's a brute.

LOUISE. Don't count me out yet.

QUEEN. Good luck, honey. *(While exiting.)* I'm gonna kill myself on these goddamn steps. *(Benny enters, pushed on by Gladiator #1.)*

BENNY. Come on. You've got to let me go.

GLADIATOR #1. I ain't taking orders from no Five. *(Louise crosses to the gladiator.)*

LOUISE. *(Sobbing.)* Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

BENNY. *(Surprised.)* Louise!

GLADIATOR #1. Miss Goldman, what is it?

LOUISE. I said ... *(The rest is just garbled sobbing.)*

GLADIATOR #1. *(Totally confused, moving closer to Louise.)* What?

LOUISE. I said ... *(More garbled sobbing.)*

GLADIATOR #1. Excuse me?

LOUISE. I said ... *(Suddenly stops crying.)* Stay away from my boyfriend! *(Louise knees the gladiator in the stomach, gives him a karate chop and a head butt and shoves him offstage.)*

BENNY. *(Amazed.)* Oh my God!

LOUISE. *(triumphant.)* Hey, the Arctic Circle is no place for sissy girls!

BENNY. Come on. *(They begin to exit.)* Where's Phil?

LOUISE. I don't know. The mob may have gotten him by now. *(Suddenly Phil appears.)*

PHIL. I don't think so! *(And with that, Phil grabs Louise and swings her around to his other side. He puts the sword to her neck.)*

LOUISE. Ah! That's cold. *(The Mob — in the form of the Queen, the Roman General, the Slavemaster and Conspirator #2 — runs in and corners Phil.)*

ALL. They're here! They're over here!

BENNY. It's over, Phil. Let her go.

PHIL. Make me. *(He draws his sword. Benny has none.)*

ROMAN GENERAL. Benny! Here! *(He throws Benny a sword. Unfortunately, he throws it point first. Benny screams and jumps out of the way. He glares at the general and picks up the sword. Benny begins to furiously stab and thrust in Phil's direction. It's all very intimidating until Phil knocks the sword out of Benny's hand. Preparing to toss Benny another sword.)* Benny! *(Frightened after the last throw, Benny stops him. He picks up his sword.)*

PHIL. All right, Benny. Let's settle this once and for all. *(Benny and Phil begin to duel. Meanwhile, the others untie Louise. The duel becomes more heated. Benny and Phil lock swords.)*

BENNY. Hey, that could have put my eye out. *(They continue fighting.)* Boy, when we get home you're gonna be in big trouble ...

LOUISE. Stop it! Stop it, both of you! Stop it right now! *(They are dueling behind the columns.)*

PHIL. Well, he started it!

BENNY. Did not!

PHIL. Did too! *(The air is ringing with the sound of steel against steel.)*

BENNY. Did! Not! *(Benny pins Phil.)* Say uncle!

PHIL. No!

BENNY. Say uncle!

PHIL. No!! *(Beat.)* Mom once told me you were an accident!

BENNY. *(Startled.)* What?

PHIL. Hah! *(Phil throws Benny off balance and dives away. He pins Benny. It looks like Phil has won the fight.)*

LOUISE. Phil! I'm pregnant! *(Phil is distracted by the news.)*

PHIL. What? *(Benny seizes the opportunity. He brings his sword up, knocking Phil's from his hand. He pins Phil to the floor.)*

BENNY. *(To Louise.)* You're not...?

LOUISE. *(Emphatically.)* Noooooooo! *(The Mob begins a shout, which leads to a chant.)*

MOB. Kill him! Kill him! Kill him! *(Dewitt enters upstage. He is wearing his Moses robe, and carrying two film canisters the way one would carry the Ten Commandments.)*

DEWITT. Stop! Stop! What madness is this? Look at you people. *(To Benny.)* A boy who would commit fratricide. *(To Phil.)* A leader who cannot lead. *(To Louise.)* And a woman who commits adultery with her husband's brother. Don't you know it's a sin?

LOUISE. Uh, he's not my husband.

DEWITT. Oh. Well still, it's not very nice.

LOUISE. You're right, Mr. Dewitt. We haven't behaved all that well. Let's face it, none of us is perfect.

VOICE. I'm He Without Sin.

LOUISE. Give it a rest, Carl! Anyway, we're done with the movie. We want to go home. Mr. Dewitt, it's time to let your people go.

DEWITT. Well, that's fine with me, sweetheart. But how? Jack was in charge of all that.

LOUISE. Then what are we going to do? *(There is a pause. Everyone looks around.)*

BENNY. Everyone, listen to me! We can't stay here and the only way out is across that desert. Sure, some of you are thinking we'll never make it. Some of you are thinking that we're gonna die out there in the heat and the sand and the dust. But I say we can do it! Hey, we're the guys who built the pyramids! *(The mob cheers. Benny takes his shepherd's crook from one of the others.)* We're the

guys who crossed the Red Sea and pushed that horse into Troy! *(More cheers.)* We're the guys who built Rome in one goddamn day! *(The mob goes wild.)*

LOUISE. Benny, you did it. You're the hero. *(He kisses her. The mob cheers.)*

BENNY. Louise ... when we get across this desert ... will you marry me?

LOUISE. Are you kidding?

BENNY. *(Insecure.)* Should I be?

LOUISE. No.

BENNY. Then, no.

LOUISE. Of course I'll marry you. *(She hugs and kisses him. The crowd cheers.)*

PHIL. Uh, Benny, I know I tried to stab you and everything. But you need a best man? *(Phil and Benny hug.)*

LOUISE. *(To mob.)* Hey, how 'bout that, huh? And look ... *(Re: film canisters.)* Mr. Dewitt saved the movie.

DEWITT. Uh, that's the other one again.

LOUISE. *(Icked out.)* Ah.

PHIL. So Benny, can you really get us out of here?

BENNY. If it takes me forty days and forty nights, I'll get us to Tucson! *(The crowd cheers again. Benny raises his crook high.)* Exeunt Omnes!!! *(As they all start up the steps and Benny leads the others out of the desert, the narrator is heard.)*

NARRATOR. And so a boy did lead the people through the desert. And he did deliver them unto the promised land that was the Greater Tuscon Area. And so it was written! And so it was done! *(Music. Curtain.)*

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

Daggers (CONSPIRATORS)
Clipboard (LOUISE, PHIL)
Fan magazine (BENNY)
Note (SHEL)
Ropes (BENNY, PHIL)
Whip (SLAVEMASTER)
Swords (PHIL, BENNY)
Diagram of scene (LOUISE)
Frog (DANCING GIRL)
Script (PHIL)
Small suitcase (BENNY)
Pack of cigarettes, lighter (LOUISE)
Fan (BENNY)
Large basket with rubber snakes (BENNY)
Bowl of fruit with figs (BENNY)
Enormous axe (EXECUTIONER)
Ash (SHEL)
Paper bag (BENNY)
Silver whistle (PHIL)
Pages (BRADY)
Birthday cake with candles (LOUISE)
Birthday card (COCHETTE)
Blue notebook (BENNY)
Chains, weapons (GLADIATORS)
Shepherd's crook (BENNY)
2 film canisters (DEWITT)

SOUND EFFECTS

Movie epic music
Drums
Fanfare of trumpets
Offstage voices
Offstage mob: cheers, roars, laughter, grumbling, snickering, boos,
shouts, chanting
Parade sounds
Frogs croaking
Dramatic music
Soundtrack music
Crickets