

LIGHTS! CAMERA! MURDER!

by Todd Wallinger

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LIGHTS! CAMERA! MURDER!

A Full Length Murder Mystery

by **Todd Wallinger**

SYNOPSIS: It's 1948, and Hope Holloway is an ambitious young press agent on *Dial M for Migraine*, a detective movie that's three weeks late and half a million dollars over budget. To finish the movie, temperamental leading man Roger Drummond has to film one last scene, a scene in which his character drinks a poisoned cup of coffee. Roger gives the performance of his life, writhing in agony as he collapses to the floor. But when the scene is done, and Roger remains sprawled on the floor, Hope has a horrible realization: the coffee really was poisoned! Worried about the bad press this will generate, Hope quickly hides the body so she can solve the murder herself. But who could the murderer be? Alberto Bologna, the hotheaded director who's only pretending to be Italian? Gwendolyn Chambers, the bubbleheaded starlet who can't read her cue cards without squinting? Tommy Novak, the gawky production assistant who has a crush on Hope? Or one of several other unlikely suspects? With its crazy characters and snappy dialogue, this sassy send-up of the Golden Age of Hollywood is guaranteed to be a blockbuster hit!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 females, 4 males)

TOMMY NOVAK (m).....	Gawky production assistant. Has a crush on Hope. <i>(124 lines)</i>
HOPE HOLLOWAY (f).....	Ambitious young press agent. Invariably upbeat. Detailed to a fault. <i>(328 lines)</i>
ALBERTO BOLOGNA (m).....	Italian movie director. His fuse is shorter than a piece of macaroni. Speaks with an Italian accent. <i>(179 lines)</i>
MAXINE STEELE (f).....	Once an adorable child star. Now a tyrannical movie producer. <i>(77 lines)</i>

- FRED (m).....Burly cameraman. Eats more than he talks. No one knows his last name. (39 lines)
- VANESSA TIPTON (f).....Diva-like actress and Roger's loyal wife. Plays the frumpy secretary in *Dial M for M*igraine. (95 lines)
- GWENDOLYN CHAMBERS (f).....Bubbleheaded young starlet. Plays the femme fatale. (85 lines)
- ROGER DRUMMOND (m).....Temperamental leading man. Often missing. Plays the hard-boiled detective. (37 lines)
- LETITIA VENHAM (f).....Gossip columnist. Proves the pen can be nastier than the sword. (56 lines)

DURATION: 75 minutes.

TIME: 1948.

SETTING: A Hollywood soundstage.

SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: Morning.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: Shortly after.

SET DESCRIPTION

The set is a single room representing a movie soundstage. It's open on both ends. LEFT leads to the breakroom, dressing rooms, and producer's office. RIGHT leads to the exterior of the building.

The soundstage is set up to look like a private detective's office. The door to the office is UP LEFT. A desk and office chair are UP RIGHT. Three director's chairs are DOWN RIGHT.

PROPS ONSTAGE**ACT ONE:**

- wastebasket (next to desk)
- stack of cue cards (leaning against desk)
- newspaper, telephone (on desk)
- clapperboard (next to director's chair)

ACT TWO:

- wastebasket (next to desk)
- newspaper
- telephone
- clipboard
- coffee in blue cup
- coffee in white cup (on desk)

PROPERTIES BROUGHT ON**ACT ONE:**

- coffee in blue cup (TOMMY)
- clipboard (HOPE)
- pen (HOPE)
- wrist watch (HOPE)
- coffee in white cup (HOPE)
- megaphone (ALBERTO)
- coat (MAXINE)
- dress gloves (MAXINE)
- sandwich (FRED)
- movie camera (FRED)
- apple (FRED)
- script (VANESSA)
- pen (VANESSA)
- gum (GWENDOLYN)
- compact mirror (GWENDOLYN)
- lipstick (GWENDOLYN)
- reporter's notepad (LETITIA)
- pen (LETITIA)

ACT TWO:

- pack of gum (HOPE)
- ring (GWENDOLYN)
- doughnut (FRED)
- glass of water (MAXINE)
- dress gloves (MAXINE)
- reporter's notepad (LETITIA)
- pen (LETITIA)

COSTUMES

As this story takes place in the 1940's, all clothing should reflect the fashions of that time. For both men and women, this means high waists and square shoulders. Dresses and skirts should have knee-length hems while pants should be pleated. Here are some additional suggestions to help you individualize the characters:

TOMMY—Bow tie, sweater vest.

HOPE—Stylish jacket and skirt combination.

ALBERTO—Beret, ascot, knickers, tall boots.

MAXINE—Dark pantsuit. Enters wearing a coat and dress gloves.

FRED—Rugged work shirt and pants.

VANESSA—Frumpy dress, glasses. You might also give her thick eyebrows and a fright wig.

GWENDOLYN—Red dress, red pillbox hat, large ring.

ROGER—Rumpled suit.

LETITIA—Matronly dress, mink stole.

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

Lights! Camera! Murder! premiered at Johnston Heights Church in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. This production was under the direction of Carol Adams with the following cast and crew:

TOMMY NOVAK	James Henry
HOPE HOLLOWAY	Kim Chaput
ALBERTO BOLOGNA	Ted Staunton
MAXINE STEELE.....	Loreen Pollard
FRED.....	Jon Garcia
VANESSA TIPTON.....	Valori Bootsma
GWENDOLYN CHAMBERS	Vanessa Johnson
ROGER DRUMMOND	Lyle Gwynn
LETITIA VENHAM	Mary Ellen Schaafsma

Lighting by Steve Milligan, Randy Pollard

Sound by John Dryfhout, Mark Wilson

Sound Tech by Deb McCracken

Costumes by Cindy Orivolo

Props by Loreen Pollard

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT START: *TOMMY enters left with a very full cup of coffee in a blue cup. He carries it carefully to the desk.*

TOMMY: Okay, Tommy. Don't screw this up. All you have to do is carry this coffee over to the desk without spilling it. You can do it, old boy. Come on now. You're almost there.

HOPE enters left carrying a clipboard.

HOPE: Hi, Tommy!

TOMMY: *(Startled.)* AAAAH! *(Almost spills the coffee but catches himself in time.)* Gee whiz, Hope! You almost made me spill this! *(Gently sets the cup on the desk.)*

HOPE: *(Rushed.)* Sorry! It's just my naturally bubbly personality. People are always telling me to calm down, but I don't see how I can when there's so much energy inside me just waiting to burst out and—*(Sees the cup.)* Ooo. Is that coffee?

TOMMY: Huh? Oh, yeah—

HOPE: Let me at it! *(Grabs the cup.)*

TOMMY: Don't drink it! It's poisoned! *(Tears the cup out of her hands.)*

HOPE: What?!

TOMMY: Sorry. I don't mean it's poisoned now. But it will be. As soon as Roger gets here.

HOPE: You're going to poison our leading man?

TOMMY: Oh, gosh. I'm not explaining this very well, am I? Look, this cup is a prop for our next scene. Roger is going to take a sip, he's going to suffer a horrible, agonizing convulsion, and then he's going to collapse to the floor.

HOPE: So there's no actual poison in this?

TOMMY: Gosh, no. That would be dangerous.

HOPE: Then I guess there's no harm in me taking a sip. *(Grabs the cup again.)*

TOMMY: No, Hope! Don't! You're going to get me in trouble! *(Takes the cup back.)*

HOPE: All right, fine. I probably shouldn't have any more coffee anyway.

TOMMY: Why? How many cups have you had?

HOPE: I don't know. How many cups are in two pots?

TOMMY: You drank two whole pots of coffee? Wow! No wonder you're bouncing off the walls! (*Offers her the chair.*) Here, let me massage your shoulders. It'll help you relax.

HOPE: Sorry, Tommy. I don't have time to relax.

TOMMY: Come on, Hope. Even you can spare sixty seconds.

HOPE: All right. Sixty seconds, but not one second more. I've got a lot of work to do.

HOPE sits. TOMMY massages her shoulders.

TOMMY: What are you wearing under there? Football pads?

HOPE: Pretty stiff, huh?

TOMMY: Stiff's not the word for it. Your shoulders feel like they're made out of marble.

HOPE: Well, that's an improvement. Last week you said they were made out of steel.

TOMMY: Why do you let Maxine put so much pressure on you?

HOPE: It's not Maxine. It's me. This is my first gig as press agent. I want to do a good job.

TOMMY: Yeah, well, it's too bad you got stuck with such a dog. Even the title of this picture is horrible. *Dial M for Migraine?* Yuck!

HOPE: I don't think the picture's so bad. I mean, sure, we've had our problems, but that's all the more reason for me to do well! If I can get everyone talking about this picture, if I can make it the blockbuster it deserves to be, why, there's no limit to how far I could go in Hollywood!

TOMMY: Gee, I guess you're right. Just think, Hope. Someday I'll be a great director and you'll be a great press agent and together we'll make the world's greatest pictures—

HOPE looks at her watch. She springs out of the chair.

HOPE: Oh! See what you made me do? That was sixty-three seconds! We went three seconds over!

TOMMY: Gosh, Hope. What's the big rush?

HOPE: I need to find Roger. Letitia is on her way and—

TOMMY: Letitia Venham is coming here?

HOPE: Yes.

TOMMY: Letitia Venham, the Horror of Hollywood?

HOPE: Yes! Yes!

TOMMY: Why is she coming here?

HOPE: She wants to interview Roger, ask him how the picture is going. You know, stuff like that.

TOMMY: Oh, no! She must have heard the rumors going around. You'd better be careful, Hope. If Letitia finds out about the problems we're having, she'll blab them in her column and then this picture will never make any money!

HOPE: Don't worry. I've got it all under control. *(Holds up the clipboard.)* I've listed the twenty-six questions Letitia is most likely to ask and come up with the best answer for each.

TOMMY: Let me see that. *(Takes the clipboard. Reads.)* "Question number one, what is your name?"

HOPE: You see, if he says, "Roger Drummond," it might come off as too abrupt. I was thinking he could say something like, "Roger Drummond, star of the greatest film of this or any year."

TOMMY: Don't you think that might be overdoing it a bit?

HOPE: I'm just trying to keep things positive and upbeat.

TOMMY: *(Hands the clipboard back to HOPE.)* Good luck with that.

HOPE: Thanks, Tommy. *(Starts toward the left exit.)*

TOMMY: Oh, Hope?

HOPE: Yes, Tommy?

TOMMY: Have you given any thought to dinner tonight?

HOPE: Yeah. I'll probably just grab something on the way home.

TOMMY: I meant with me.

HOPE: Oh, Tommy. You're a nice guy and everything, but I don't have time to date right now.

TOMMY: It doesn't have to be a date. We could just get a quick bite. You'll see. I can gobble a hot dog in ten seconds flat.

HOPE: Sounds dreamy, Tommy, but I'm going to have to say no. Maybe later, after the picture is released.

TOMMY: *(Under his breath.)* If it ever gets released.

ALBERTO enters left holding a megaphone.

HOPE: Ooo, there's Alberto! See you later, Tommy!

TOMMY: Bye, Hope. (*Wanders off, exiting right.*)

HOPE: Oh, Mr. Baloney!

ALBERTO: (*Italian accent.*) Signorina Holloway, how many times must I tell you? It is Bologna! [Pronounced: buh-LONE-ya.] Not Baloney! Bologna! Baloney is a processed meat product. Do I look like a processed meat product?

HOPE: No, Mr. Bologna. You don't look like any kind of meat product.

ALBERTO: I will take that as a compliment.

HOPE: Have you seen Roger?

ALBERTO: What? Do you think I have eyes behind the back of my head? No, I have not seen Roger. Why do you not look in the breakroom?

HOPE: I did. I looked in the breakroom. I looked in his dressing room. I even looked in the commissary. He's nowhere to be found.

ALBERTO: How can Roger be nowhere? Everybody is somewhere!

HOPE: Yes, well, wherever that somewhere is, it certainly isn't here.

ALBERTO: How can Roger do this to me? This is the last day of shooting! How can I finish the picture if he is not here to be shot?

HOPE: Maybe he's just running a little late.

ALBERTO: Ha! That shows what you know! The last time Roger was running late, he never showed up at all! Why do you want to see him anyway?

HOPE: I need to prep him for his interview with Letitia.

ALBERTO: Letitia Venham is coming here?

HOPE: Yes.

ALBERTO: Letitia Venham, the Terror of Tinseltown?

HOPE: Yes! Yes!

ALBERTO: Oh, you cannot let Roger talk to her! She will twist his words into a pretzel and I do not like pretzels! They are much too salty!

HOPE: But Mr. Bologna, if Roger doesn't talk to her, she's going to write whatever she feels like writing. At least if I go over these questions first, he can chat up the picture's good points.

ALBERTO: What good points?

HOPE: Well, like the actors, for example.

ALBERTO: Hams, every one of them.

HOPE: Or maybe the script.

ALBERTO: Garbage. Pure garbage.

HOPE: How about the title?

ALBERTO: Worst title ever.

HOPE: Come on, Mr. Bologna. There must be something good about the picture.

ALBERTO: Yes. I understand the directing is brilliant.

MAXINE enters right wearing a coat and dress gloves.

MAXINE: Alberto! Alberto Bologna!

ALBERTO: Uh oh! I've got to go!

ALBERTO tries to sneak toward the left exit. HOPE exits right.

MAXINE: Stop right there, Alberto! You can't get away from me that easily!

ALBERTO: *(Turns back.)* Well, look who is here! Baby Maxie!

MAXINE: I told you never to call me that. I'm not a child star anymore. I'm a highly respected producer.

ALBERTO: I know, but it is so much fun.

MAXINE: Not as much fun as firing you would be.

ALBERTO: Please forgive me, Maxine.

MAXINE: Why aren't we shooting? It's nine o'clock. We should be shooting by now.

ALBERTO: We will be shooting. Very soon. Just relax.

MAXINE: Don't tell me to relax. This picture is three weeks late and half a million dollars over budget. Half a million dollars that came out of my pocket!

ALBERTO: Do not worry. The picture is almost done. We only have to shoot one more scene.

MAXINE: One more scene? Well, that makes me feel a lot better.

ALBERTO: All I need is one little thing.

MAXINE: Oh? And what would that be?

ALBERTO: Three more days.

MAXINE: Three days to shoot one scene?

ALBERTO: I'll settle for two.

MAXINE: You'll settle for one.

ALBERTO: But Maxine, how much would it cost? One thousand dollars? Two thousand dollars?

MAXINE: With this cast? Fifty thousand dollars. Which is exactly fifty thousand dollars more than I have.

ALBERTO: Why do you not look for some new investors?

MAXINE: I've tried, Alberto. Believe me, I've tried. Unfortunately, everyone in town knows this picture's in trouble. The last thing they want to do is throw good money after bad.

ALBERTO: I do not care if it is good or bad, as long as it is money.

MAXINE: Yes, well, you're the only one.

ALBERTO: Maybe you could take out another—how you say?—mortgage.

MAXINE: I can't, Alberto. I'm already mortgaged to the hilt. I've mortgaged my main house in Beverly Hills. I've mortgaged my beach house in Malibu. I've even mortgaged my vacation house in Lake Tahoe. What else do you want me to mortgage?

ALBERTO: Do you have a doghouse?

MAXINE: That's not funny, Alberto.

ALBERTO: No. It is not.

MAXINE: What I don't understand is where all the money went. You've burned through two million dollars and what is there to show for it? The lights barely work. The costumes are falling apart. And just look at this desk. It looks like it was made out of cardboard!

ALBERTO: Ah, but we used only the very best cardboard!

MAXINE: No more time, Alberto. You need to finish this picture today or I'll be ruined. Do you hear me? Ruined!

ALBERTO: Yes, Maxine.

MAXINE: (*Looks around.*) Wait a minute. Where's Roger?

ALBERTO: Roger? Roger who?

MAXINE: Who do you think? Roger Drummond, the King of Hollywood! Roger Drummond, the idol of millions! Roger Drummond, the star of this little picture you're making!

ALBERTO: Oh, that Roger.

MAXINE: We can't finish this picture without him! Hold on. Is that why you needed three more days? Is Roger missing?

ALBERTO: No. Of course not.

MAXINE: Thank heavens! Where is he?

ALBERTO: Someplace that is not here.

MAXINE: That's not helpful.

ALBERTO: It was not meant to be.

MAXINE: Well, I'm not leaving until I see him!

ALBERTO: Please, Maxine. You have to trust me. I want to finish this picture just as badly as you do. In fact, I have to finish it. Next week, I am taking a ship to visit my dear old mamma in Napoli.

MAXINE: Fine, Alberto. I'll trust you. Just know this. If you go even one more dollar over budget, if this picture is delayed even one more day, you won't have to take a ship back to Italy. I'll send you there myself! In a long wooden box! *(Storms off exiting left.)*

ALBERTO: *(To himself.)* Mamma mia! And they say my head is hot!

TOMMY enters right.

TOMMY: Um, Mr. Bologna?

ALBERTO: What is it, Tomasso? I swear you are more annoying than a spider in the spaghetti sauce!

TOMMY: It's about this next scene. You know how you wanted to do a high-angle shot? Well, I was just thinking—

ALBERTO: Thinking? Thinking?! Always with the brain you are thinking! If I wanted you to be thinking, I would have made you assistant director.

TOMMY: I thought I was assistant director.

ALBERTO: Not even close.

TOMMY: Second assistant director?

ALBERTO: Try again.

TOMMY: Third assistant director?

ALBERTO: One more time.

TOMMY: Third assistant to the fourth assistant director?

ALBERTO: You want to know what you are? I will tell you what you are. *(Lifts his megaphone. TOMMY covers his ears as ALBERTO shouts through it.)* You are Peon, Third Class!

TOMMY: What does a peon do?

ALBERTO: Everything he is told to do.

TOMMY: Sounds like a gopher.

ALBERTO: No! The gopher has big teeth that stick out like this. *(Waves his fingers in front of his mouth.)* You do not have big teeth. You have itty bitty teeth.

TOMMY: Okay...

ALBERTO: But I tell you what. If you do this one little thing for me, I may promote you.

TOMMY: To assistant director?

ALBERTO: No. (*TOMMY covers his ears as ALBERTO shouts through the megaphone again.*) To Peon, Second Class!

TOMMY: What do you want me to do?

ALBERTO: I want you to find Roger and bring him here so we can finish the shoot. If we do not finish the shoot, Maxine will go broke. And if Maxine goes broke, you can bet she will break us too.

TOMMY: But I don't even know where to look!

ALBERTO: Look everywhere! Look nowhere! Look someplace else!

TOMMY: Yes, Mr. Bologna.

ALBERTO: Oh, and one more thing. This is very important. You must bring him back either dead or alive.

TOMMY: Which do you prefer?

ALBERTO: Alive. Then I will kill him.

TOMMY: I'm on my way!

TOMMY exits left. FRED enters left eating a sandwich. ALBERTO watches him cross the stage.

ALBERTO: Mamma mia! They will let anyone in here!

FRED exits right. VANESSA enters left holding a script. She's made up to look like a frumpy secretary.

VANESSA: Alberto!

ALBERTO: (*Turns. Startled by VANESSA'S appearance.*) AAAAH!

VANESSA: Why did you scream? You're not supposed to scream. You're the director. You made me look like this, remember?

ALBERTO: You think that was a scream? That was not a scream. That was a cry of delight. You know, like, "Wow! That is some kind of look! Hubba hubba!"

VANESSA: Oh, Alberto. Flattery will get you nowhere. A bald-faced lie, on the other hand, will get you a round-trip ticket to the moon.

ALBERTO: Did you want to talk to me, Vanessa?

VANESSA: Yes. I have a problem with my lines.

ALBERTO: Do not worry. A good face cream will take care of those.

VANESSA: Not the lines on my face! The lines in my script! Gwendolyn has more than me!

ALBERTO: So?

VANESSA: So I'm married to Roger Drummond, the King of Hollywood. That makes me the Queen of Hollywood. I should get more lines.

ALBERTO: But Gwendolyn is in half the scenes! You are in only this one scene!

VANESSA: Exactly. That's why I took the liberty of expanding the scene.

ALBERTO: Oh, boy.

VANESSA: See here, where Roger drinks the poisoned coffee? Now the script has me offstage at this point, but I was thinking I could run back in and wrestle Gwendolyn to the ground. You know, slap her around a few times. Maybe put a chokehold on her.

ALBERTO: But Vanessa, I cannot let you do that! It would destroy the integrity of the entire film!

VANESSA: I don't care about integrity! I'm an actress! I only care about my career!

ALBERTO: No. It is too late. I am not going to change the script now.

VANESSA: Oh, you want to play hardball, do you? All right then. Two can play at that game. *(Calls off left.)* Roger! Oh, Roger! I need you!

ALBERTO: There is no use calling your husband. Roger is not— *(Thinking better of it, ALBERTO falls silent.)*

VANESSA: Roger isn't what, Alberto? Roger isn't awake? Roger isn't feeling well? Roger isn't able to hear me because he has bananas in his ears?

ALBERTO: Please, Vanessa. Go back to your dressing room. I will come and get you when we are ready to shoot.

VANESSA: Wait a minute. Roger isn't here. Is that what you were trying to say?

ALBERTO: Now Vanessa, do not get excited.

VANESSA: Don't get excited? Roger left the house an hour before I did! Where could he be?

ALBERTO: I am sure there is a perfectly good explanation. Maybe his car broke down. Maybe he spilled a big bowl of soup on his pants. Maybe an earthquake wiped out the entire city.

VANESSA: For his sake, there'd better be an earthquake! (*Looks around.*) Hold on. Gwendolyn isn't here either.

ALBERTO: Gwendolyn? Uh, I think she's in makeup.

VANESSA: I just came from makeup. She wasn't there.

ALBERTO: (*Nervous.*) Oh, that's right. She said she would be a few minutes late. Her car broke down. Or wait. She spilled a big bowl of soup on her pants. No, no. Now I remember. An earthquake wiped out the entire city—

VANESSA: Don't lie to me, Alberto. I know perfectly well what's going on.

ALBERTO: You do?

VANESSA: Yes, of course. Roger's teaching her to play chess again, isn't he?

ALBERTO: What? Oh, yes! Of course! He is teaching her to play chess!

VANESSA: That's so nice of him. I mean, Gwendolyn is such a bubblehead. Why, she must spend hours on every move.

ALBERTO: Yes. I am sure it is a terrible sacrifice.

GWENDOLYN enters right chewing gum.

ALBERTO: Uh oh! (*Seeing a chance to escape, ALBERTO exits left.*)

VANESSA: Gwendolyn!

GWENDOLYN: Oh, hello, Vanessa. Does my lipstick look all right?

VANESSA: It's a little smudged.

GWENDOLYN: Oh, really? (*Checks her lips in a compact mirror.*) Gosh, I wonder how that happened. (*Pulls out a tube of lipstick and fixes her lips.*)

VANESSA: It's obvious, isn't it?

GWENDOLYN: Is it?

VANESSA: Why, sure. The game was too much for you. You must have been concentrating on the board so hard you smudged your lips without knowing it.

GWENDOLYN: Uh, sure. The board.

VANESSA: You know, Gwendolyn, I've been meaning to talk to you.

GWENDOLYN: About what?

VANESSA: I was looking at the script and, well, it just seems to be an awful lot of words for such a tiny little brain.

GWENDOLYN: But Tommy already went to the trouble of writing them all down for me. (*Picks up the cue cards.*) See?

VANESSA: I know, but cue cards are so unprofessional, don't you think? Especially since you can't read them without squinting.

GWENDOLYN: What are you talking about? I don't squint.

VANESSA: Honey, you look like a fruit bat staring directly into the sun.

GWENDOLYN: Oh, yeah? Well, maybe that's a character choice!

VANESSA: Well then, maybe your character can choose to say a little less. (*Grabs the cue cards.*) Here. Let me show you. (*Pulls out a pen and starts crossing off words.*) We'll cut that line. And that line. And—

GWENDOLYN tries to take the cue cards back but VANESSA keeps a tight grip on them.

GWENDOLYN: Give me them cue cards!

VANESSA: Not on your life!

GWENDOLYN: Give them back or I'll tell Alberto!

VANESSA: I'm doing you a favor, you dingbat!

GWENDOLYN: Well, if I'm a dingbat, you're a prima donna!

VANESSA: Simpleton!

GWENDOLYN: Diva!

VANESSA: Ignoramus!

GWENDOLYN: Uh... uh... diva!

VANESSA: You already said that!

GWENDOLYN: I can't help it! I ran out of words!

HOPE enters right, running.

HOPE: Ladies! Please! You need to stop fighting! Letitia will be here any minute now!

VANESSA: Letitia Venham is coming here?

HOPE: Yes.

GWENDOLYN: Letitia Venham, the Fiend of Filmdom?

HOPE: Yes! Yes!

VANESSA: Letitia Venham, the Malefactor of Movieland?

HOPE: Okay, that's a new one.

GWENDOLYN: Why is she coming here?

HOPE: Oh, she must have heard rumors we're having problems on the set and wants to find out if they're true.

VANESSA: Rumors? Listen, honey. Everyone knows this picture is the Titanic.

GWENDOLYN: And Vanessa here is the ice cube.

VANESSA: First of all, it was an iceberg that sunk the Titanic. Not an ice cube. And second, if anyone's sinking this picture, it's you!

HOPE: Don't you think that's going a bit overboard?

VANESSA: That's the problem. We're all going overboard on this one. And there are no lifeboats waiting.

HOPE: Well, if that's true, Letitia doesn't know it yet. She's always been very supportive of this film.

VANESSA: That's what's so odd. Normally, Letitia is the first to know if a picture's in trouble. She's like a vulture that way, circling high overhead, looking for any sign of weakness.

GWENDOLYN: I think she's more like a snake, the way she sniffs out blood in the water.

VANESSA: You mean a shark, dear. Sharks live in water. Not snakes.

GWENDOLYN: Oh, yeah? What about a plumber's snake?

HOPE: Trust me, Letitia won't find out a thing. Not as long as we act like we're one big family.

VANESSA: And what family would that be? The Borgias?

HOPE: Ha ha! That's the way, Miss Tipton! Keep those laughs coming!
(Gives VANESSA a playful punch on the arm.) Ow.

VANESSA starts toward the left exit with the cue cards. GWENDOLYN follows her.

GWENDOLYN: Now give me back them cards, you prima donna!

VANESSA: Over my dead body, you beefwit!

GWENDOLYN: Diva!

VANESSA: Chowderhead!

GWENDOLYN: Where do you keep coming up with these?

VANESSA exits left with GWENDOLYN following. FRED enters right. He's holding a movie camera in one hand and eating the same sandwich as before with the other.

HOPE: Fred! You're here!

FRED: *(Still walking.)* Yup.

HOPE: Have you seen Roger?

FRED: Nope.

HOPE: Will you tell me if you do?

FRED: Maybe. *(Exits left.)*

HOPE: *(Calls off left.)* Is that a definite maybe or just a possible maybe?

HOPE exits following FRED off left. ROGER enters stumbling in right, looking disheveled. He sinks into the office chair and puts his head on the desk. ALBERTO enters left. He's so wrapped up in his own thoughts, he doesn't see ROGER.

ALBERTO: *(To himself.)* Oh, this is terrible! Just terrible! If Roger does not show up, I will have to find someone who can double for him! But who else looks like Roger? I know! Roger does! I will find him, and then he can double for himself!

ALBERTO exits right. TOMMY enters left, he doesn't see ROGER.

TOMMY: *(To himself.)* Oh, Mr. Bologna is going to be mad! Mr. Bologna is going to be real mad! If I don't find Roger, Mr. Bologna is going to demote me and then I'll be Peon, Fourth Class!

TOMMY exits right. HOPE enters left, she doesn't see ROGER.

HOPE: *(To herself.)* Question number twenty-seven. If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be? *(Leans against the desk to write on her clipboard. She thinks for a moment, trying to figure out what's different on the set. Then she whirls around toward ROGER.)*
Mr. Drummond!

ROGER: *(Lifts his head.)* Shhhh!

HOPE: (*Rushed.*) I've been looking for you everywhere! Letitia Venham is going to be here—yes, that Letitia Venham, the Horror of Hollywood, the Terror of Tinseltown and about a thousand other names—but you don't need to worry because I've written down the twenty-seven questions she's most likely to ask and broken down each answer into five or six detailed but easily memorized paragraphs—

ROGER: Please! I've been out all night and the last thing I want to hear right now is your annoying, high-pitched voice! (*Drops his head to the desk again.*)

HOPE: (*Makes her voice ridiculously low.*) You can't sleep now, Mr. Drummond! Letitia's going to be here any minute and I need to get you ready for your interview—

ROGER covers his head with the newspaper. ALBERTO enters right.

ALBERTO: Wait one minute! Did I hear Roger's voice just now?

HOPE tries to block ALBERTO'S view of ROGER.

HOPE: What? I didn't hear anything.

ALBERTO tries to peer around HOPE.

ALBERTO: No. I am certain I heard Roger's voice! Because if I did not hear Roger's voice then I heard the voices in my head and those do not sound like Roger at all! They sound like my dear old mamma in Napoli! (*Sees ROGER under the newspaper.*) Aha!

ALBERTO yanks the newspaper off of ROGER. ROGER lifts his head.

ROGER: Buongiorno. [Pronounced: bone-JORE-no.]

ALBERTO: Roger, my friend! Where have you been? No, do not answer that. It does not matter where you have been. All that matters is where you are going. And where you are going is to drink this coffee! (*Picks up the coffee cup.*)

HOPE: No! Don't drink that! (*Grabs the cup.*)

ALBERTO: Why? What is wrong?

HOPE: Nothing!

ALBERTO: Then why can he not drink it?

HOPE: I don't know! But somehow Tommy will get in trouble!

ALBERTO: Oh, Tomasso! I should have known he would be involved!

HOPE: You won't make Roger drink it, will you?

ALBERTO: Not if you bring him another cup of coffee.

HOPE: Well, gee, Mr. Bologna, I'd love to get him some coffee, but I'm really a press agent so—

ALBERTO: *(Through the megaphone.)* Now!

HOPE: Yes, sir! *(Drops her clipboard on the desk and exits left.)*

ALBERTO: What is the matter, Roger? You are a great actor. Why do you allow yourself to come to such a state?

ROGER: You can cut the Italian act with me, Alvin.

ALBERTO: I do not know what you mean, my friend.

ROGER: This is Roger Drummond you're talking to, remember? We grew up on the same block in Hoboken?

ALBERTO looks around to make sure no one is listening.

ALBERTO: *(Drops his accent.)* Don't give me away, Roger! Please! It would ruin my career!

ROGER: Well then, you'd better cough up the money.

ALBERTO: I'm sorry, Roger. There is no more money.

ROGER: There's always money.

ALBERTO: Not this time. Maxine has mortgaged everything she owns. She can't put any more money in the bank.

ROGER: Well then, write me a check for what's left.

ALBERTO: I can't. There's just enough to pay for today's shoot, then it's all gone. Goodbye! Adios! Sayonara!

ROGER: I'm not asking for the world, Alvin. Just a measly fifty grand.

ALBERTO: Fifty grand? Hoo boy! You've got to get better at picking winners!

ROGER: Every horse I pick is a winner. Unfortunately, the horses don't always know it.

ALBERTO: I'm sorry, Roger. There's nothing I can do.

ROGER: Nothing?

ALBERTO: Nothing.

ROGER: Well, that's too bad because I would hate to let your little secret slip...

ALBERTO: You'd better not, Roger, or I swear I'll—

LETITIA enters right with a reporter's notepad and pen.

LETITIA: (*Writes.*) "The tension on the set is so thick you couldn't cut it with a meat cleaver. Even the director and star are at each other's throats."

ROGER and ALBERTO abruptly break apart.

ROGER: Letitia, please don't print that. We were just rehearsing a scene.

LETITIA: Oh, really? Then why did Alberto call you by your real name?

ROGER: What? Oh, that was just a slip of the tongue. (*To ALBERTO.*) Alberto, you've got to be more careful. My character's name is Nick. Not Roger. Nick.

ALBERTO: (*Italian accent.*) This is a very bad time, Letitia. Please come back tomorrow after we finish the shooting. Or better yet, come back on Sunday.

LETITIA: Sunday? Why Sunday?

ALBERTO: Because no one will be here on Sunday.

LETITIA: Ha ha. Very funny.

ROGER: Come now, Alberto. You know we're always happy to talk to Hollywood's most powerful gossip columnist.

ALBERTO: I do not know that. Stop telling me to know things I do not know!

ROGER: So what brought you down here, Letitia?

LETITIA: Don't be coy, Roger. You know this is one of the most anticipated pictures of the year. My readers will be disappointed if I can't dig up a little dirt about it.

ROGER: I'm afraid you won't find any dirt here. Alberto runs a tight ship.

LETITIA: Yes. And I think I know the name of that ship.

HOPE enters left with coffee in a white cup. She doesn't see LETITIA.

HOPE: Here's your coffee, Mr. Drummond. Hopefully, this will perk you up before the Terror of Tinseltown gets here—*(Sets the cup on the desk.)*

LETITIA: I'm already here.

HOPE: *(Whirls around.)* Miss Venham! Did you think I was talking about you? Ha ha! How silly! I wasn't talking about you. I was talking about the other Terror of Tinseltown. I mean—

LETITIA: You'd better stop right there before that hole you're digging reaches China.

ROGER takes a sip of the coffee. He spits it out.

ROGER: Ow! I burned my tongue!

HOPE: Gosh! I'm sorry, Mr. Drummond! I just poured it straight from the pot!

ROGER: You idiot! Don't ever serve me coffee straight from the pot! It has to be cooled off first!

LETITIA: *(Writes.)* "Drummond's assistant is a charmless little scatterbrain, utterly oblivious to the star's special needs."

HOPE: Oh, I'm not Mr. Drummond's assistant. I'm the press agent—

LETITIA: Oh, dear. You mean you're one of those dreary little flacks whose job it is to convince me that this is the greatest picture in history?

HOPE: What? No! Of course not! You're free to make up your own mind about the picture.

LETITIA: Thank heavens for that!

HOPE: Of course, the world's greatest actor might have a few opinions. As soon as I tell him what those opinions are. *(Pulls on ROGER.)* Come along, Mr. Drummond. Let's have a little talk.

ALBERTO: Oh, no! You are not taking Roger away from me! I need him to finish the picture!

HOPE: But Mr. Bologna—

ALBERTO: How many times must I tell you? It is not Bologna! It is Baloney! Oh, wait. Never mind. It is Bologna.

Still holding the cue cards, VANESSA enters left with GWENDOLYN.

VANESSA: There. I got it all down to one line. Now you don't even need the cue cards.

GWENDOLYN: Well, gee! If you're going to cut so many of my lines, I might as well not be in the picture at all!

VANESSA: You said it. I didn't.

Seeing ROGER, GWENDOLYN and VANESSA rush over to him.

GWENDOLYN: Roger, please tell your wife she's not allowed to cut my lines!

VANESSA: Roger, please tell your chess partner she doesn't deserve any lines!

ROGER groans and covers his head with the newspaper again.

LETITIA: *(Writes.)* "The two actresses are fighting like cats and dogs."

ALBERTO: Signoras, please! We have a guest!

ALBERTO gestures toward LETITIA. VANESSA drops the cue cards, and she and GWENDOLYN hurry over to LETITIA.

VANESSA: Letitia Venham!

GWENDOLYN: How nice of you to stop by!

VANESSA: You know, I was just telling Gwendolyn what a wonderful writer you are.

GWENDOLYN: That's funny. I could have sworn you called her a vulture.

VANESSA: Ha ha! Yes, well, if I did say that, I only meant that she has crystal clear vision and soars high above her rivals.

GWENDOLYN: Yeah. Sure.

VANESSA: Perhaps my memory is failing, dear, but weren't you the one who compared her to a snake?

GWENDOLYN: Huh? Oh, well, all I meant is that her skin is kind of scaly and she's got a forked tongue.

VANESSA: That's not really better.

GWENDOLYN: Letitia, listen. You don't want to write about her. She's nothing but a has-been.

VANESSA: Yes, well, she's a never-was.

LETITIA: I'm sorry. I didn't catch your names.

VANESSA: Why, I'm Vanessa Tipton.

GWENDOLYN: And I'm Gwendolyn Chambers.

LETITIA: *(Writes.)* "Vanessa Tipton. Gwendolyn Chambers." *(To VANESSA and GWENDOLYN.)* Excellent. Now I can make sure never to mention either one of you in my column.

VANESSA and GWENDOLYN look shocked. TOMMY enters right.

TOMMY: *(To himself.)* Oh, no! Roger is really missing this time! If he doesn't show up soon, this entire production will fall apart!

LETITIA: *(Writes.)* "This entire production will fall apart..."

ALBERTO: *(Exasperated.)* Gaaaah!

ROGER: Tommy!

ROGER jabs a thumb at LETITIA. TOMMY fails to pick up on his signal.

TOMMY: Roger! You're here!

ROGER buries his face in his hands.

TOMMY: Hey, look, everybody! Roger's here!

EVERYONE: We know!

ALBERTO: *(Through megaphone.)* Listen up, you peoples! Now that everyone is here, we will commence with the shooting!

GWENDOLYN exits up left.

LETITIA: Where should I stand, Alberto?

ALBERTO: I am sorry, Letitia, but I must ask you to step outside.

LETITIA: Do I have to? I so wanted to see you work your cinematic magic.

ROGER: Come on, Alberto. Letitia can stay, can't she?

ALBERTO: Fine! Do what you want! I am only the director! It is not like I am important or anything!

ROGER: Letitia, you can sit in one of the director's chairs.

LETITIA: Thank you, Roger.

ROGER: It's the least I can do.

LETITIA sits.

ALBERTO: Now please, let us get started! If there is even one more interruption, I am going to lose my mind!

TOMMY picks up the cue cards. MAXINE enters left. She's no longer wearing the coat and gloves.

MAXINE: Roger! You made it!

LETITIA: Well! If it isn't Baby Maxie!

MAXINE: Stop calling me that!

ALBERTO: *(More exasperated.)* Gaaaah!

LETITIA: *(Writes.)* "The director is on the verge of insanity."

ALBERTO: *(To LETITIA.)* You! Stop writing!

LETITIA stops writing.

ALBERTO: *(To MAXINE.)* You! Sit down!

MAXINE plops into a director's chair.

ALBERTO: *(To TOMMY.)* You! Over there!

TOMMY hurries downstage.

HOPE: What do you want with me?

ALBERTO: You know what I want with you? I want you to go away!
That is what I want with you!

TOMMY: Here, Hope. You can hold the cue cards.

TOMMY hands HOPE the cue cards and picks up the clapperboard. While HOPE takes her position downstage, ALBERTO goes to ROGER.

ALBERTO: Now Roger, remember what I told you. This is your big death scene. As soon as you drink the coffee, you will know that you have been poisoned. Your throat burns. Your stomach hurts. But through it all, you try to tell Gwendolyn who killed you. Make me cry like a little bambino. Do you understand?

ROGER: Little bambino. Check.

ALBERTO: Gwendolyn? *(Looks around.)* Where is Gwendolyn?

TOMMY: Gwendolyn!

VANESSA reaches off up left and yanks GWENDOLYN onstage. GWENDOLYN is touching up her lipstick in the compact mirror.

GWENDOLYN: Do you want something?

ALBERTO: Yes. I am the director. I want to direct you.

GWENDOLYN: Oh. Okay. *(Crosses to ALBERTO.)*

ALBERTO: Now Gwendolyn, you have very deep feelings for Roger.

GWENDOLYN: How did you find out?

ALBERTO: I am not talking about you! I am talking about your character!

GWENDOLYN: Oh. Yeah.

ALBERTO: It breaks your heart to watch him die, but there is a—how you say?—guiltiness in your eyes, as though you might be the one who poisoned him. Can you show me this guiltiness?

GWENDOLYN: How's this? *(Makes a goofy expression.)*

ALBERTO: More guiltiness. Less stupidity.

GWENDOLYN: Sure thing, Mr. Bologna.

ALBERTO: And please, spit out your gum.

GWENDOLYN: Huh? Oh. *(Removes the gum from her mouth. Looking around, she sticks it under the top of the desk.)*

VANESSA: Do you have any direction for me, Alberto?

ALBERTO: Yes. Just try to blend into the background.

VANESSA gives ALBERTO a nasty look.

ALBERTO: *(Through megaphone.)* Places, everyone! Places!

VANESSA grabs GWENDOLYN and exits with her up left.

TOMMY: Uh, Mr. Bologna?

ALBERTO: (*Turns to TOMMY and continues to shout through the megaphone.*) Not now, Tomasso!

Too late, TOMMY claps his hands over his ears. Realizing, ALBERTO lowers the megaphone and proceeds to talk normally.

ALBERTO: I mean, not now. I am ready for the shooting.

TOMMY: But that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Fred isn't here!

ALBERTO: Fred? Who is this Fred?

TOMMY: He's the cameraman.

ALBERTO: (*Even more exasperated.*) Gaaaah!

TOMMY: Fred!

FRED enters left eating an apple.

FRED: Yup?

ALBERTO: Where is your camera?

FRED: It's next to the roast beef. (*Gestures off left.*)

ALBERTO: Well, go and get it! This is a movie set! Not a smorgasbord!

FRED: Can I finish this apple first?

ALBERTO: No, you cannot! If you finish that apple, I will finish you!

FRED drops the apple in the wastebasket and exits left.

ALBERTO: (*To himself.*) I swear, it would be easier working with trained seals. Or untrained seals, for that matter.

FRED enters left with the camera.

ALBERTO: Now, are we finally ready? (*No response.*) I said, are we ready?

EVERYONE turns to each other with half-hearted comments like, "Yeah, sure," "I guess," and "Why not?"

ALBERTO: All right then. (*Through megaphone.*) Quiet on the set!

TOMMY: Quiet on the set!

ROGER opens the newspaper and puts his feet on the desk.

ALBERTO: *(Through megaphone.)* Roll camera!

TOMMY: Roll camera!

FRED starts filming.

ALBERTO: *(Through megaphone.)* Tomasso, shut up!

TOMMY: Tomasso, shut up! Oh wait, that's me.

ALBERTO: *(Through megaphone.)* Clap the clapper! Clap the clapper!

TOMMY: Huh? Oh! *(Claps the clapperboard.)*

ALBERTO: *(Through megaphone.)* And action!

TOMMY: Uh oh!

TOMMY ducks out of the way. ALBERTO settles into a director's chair. VANESSA enters up left. She stands blocking the doorway.

VANESSA: Mr. Bullitt, a new client is here to see you.

ROGER: Thanks, Sally. Send him in.

VANESSA: It's not a him. It's a her.

ROGER: Then forget what I said. Send her away.

VANESSA: She says it's urgent.

ROGER: They always do.

VANESSA: Who? Clients?

ROGER: No, dames. There are only two things that are truly urgent in this world. Death, and that annoying itch in the middle of your back. *(Reaches behind him to scratch his back.)*

VANESSA: Good to know.

GWENDOLYN steps up to the doorway. Finding it blocked by VANESSA, she shoves her way in.

GWENDOLYN: Oof!

VANESSA: Ow!

GWENDOLYN sashays over to ROGER and looks around for the cue cards. Seeing that HOPE is holding them, she leans forward and squints.

GWENDOLYN: Nick, it's me.

VANESSA: Sorry, Mr. Bullitt. Do you want me to throw her out?

ROGER: What? And let you have all the fun? No, I'll take care of it.
And by it, I mean her.

VANESSA: Yes, Mr. Bullitt.

VANESSA gives GWENDOLYN a nasty look and exits up left. As the scene continues, GWENDOLYN reads the cue cards haltingly, struggling to see the words.

ROGER: Well, I never thought I'd see your face again.

GWENDOLYN: Why? Don't you like it?

ROGER: I like the face just fine. It's what's behind it that bothers me.

GWENDOLYN: If you're still angry—

ROGER: Angry? Angry doesn't begin to describe it. First, you leave me standing at the altar. Then you end up marrying my best man.

GWENDOLYN: What's so bad about that?

ROGER: He gave you my ring!

GWENDOLYN: Believe me, if there was any way I could make it up to you, I would.

ROGER: Oh, sure. You can try to sound all sweet and everything, but behind those words is a heart as bitter as the coffee in this cup.
(Picks up the cup.)

GWENDOLYN: Nick, I—

ROGER takes a sip of the coffee. He gags.

GWENDOLYN: What's the matter?

Setting the cup on the desk, ROGER grabs at his throat.

ROGER: My throat! It's burning!

GWENDOLYN: What happened? Did somebody poison you?

ROGER: Yes! And I know who it is!

ROGER slides to the floor, writhing in agony. GWENDOLYN rushes to his side.

GWENDOLYN: Tell me, Nick! Please! Who did this to you?

ROGER: The killer is—the killer is—

GWENDOLYN: Yes? Yes?

ROGER lets out a groan and dies.

GWENDOLYN: Oh, Nick!

ALBERTO: *(Leaps out of his chair. Through megaphone.)* Cut! Cut!

TOMMY: What he said!

FRED stops filming. GWENDOLYN breaks her pose.

GWENDOLYN: How was that?

ALBERTO: Brilliant! Simply brilliant!

VANESSA enters up left. Everyone is so busy with their own concerns, they don't notice that ROGER is still sprawled on the floor.

VANESSA: Does that mean we can go home?

ALBERTO: You can stay there and make brownies, for all I care! Yes, of course you can go home! That is a rip!

TOMMY: I think you mean "wrap."

ALBERTO: Rip! Wrap! Whatever you call it, this picture is finished!

FRED: Dibs on the cheese plate! *(Exits left with the camera.)*

GWENDOLYN: *(To VANESSA.)* You blocked my entrance, you scene stealer!

VANESSA: I didn't block your entrance, honey. You got stuck. Your hips are too wide for the door.

GWENDOLYN: Oh, a fat joke, huh? You take that back or I'll—I'll—

VANESSA: You'll what?

GWENDOLYN: I don't know, but you won't like it!

GWENDOLYN and VANESSA exit left, bickering the whole way.

LETITIA: (*Stands and applauds.*) Bravo! Bravo! Now that's what I call a triumph!

HOPE: Didn't I tell you Roger Drummond is a great actor?

LETITIA: Yes, but I had no idea how great. In fact, with that performance, I'd say he's a shoo-in for an Academy Award!

HOPE: Thank you, Miss Venham. Now if you don't mind waiting backstage, I'll bring Roger out in a few minutes.

LETITIA: A triumph! A veritable triumph! (*Exits left.*)

MAXINE: You saved me, Alberto. I didn't think you would, but you saved me.

ALBERTO: See? I knew it would be a piece of steak.

MAXINE: I think you mean a piece of cake.

ALBERTO: No, it must be steak. My doctor told me to cut back on sweets.

MAXINE and ALBERTO exit left.

TOMMY: Well, Hope, I guess this is goodbye.

HOPE: Yeah. I guess it is.

TOMMY starts toward the left exit. He turns back.

TOMMY: Um, Hope?

HOPE: Yes, Tommy?

TOMMY: Are you doing anything New Year's Eve?

HOPE: New Year's Eve? That's nine months away!

TOMMY: I know, but you said you might go out with me after the picture's released. Well, I'm thinking it's got to be released by then.

HOPE: Sorry, Tommy. I don't like to make commitments. I mean, that far in advance.

TOMMY: Oh, all right. Well, have a good life.

HOPE: Um, you too.

TOMMY: (*To himself.*) Have a good life? Why did I say that? I'm so stupid!

TOMMY exits left. HOPE goes to ROGER.

HOPE: Wow. That sure was a great performance, Mr. Drummond. Why, I could almost swear you really died. *(No response.)* Mr. Drummond? You can get up now. The shoot is done. *(Nudges ROGER with her foot. ROGER rolls over and his arm falls limply. HOPE drops to her knees.)* Oh, Mr. Drummond! Please don't be dead! I don't know what I'd do if you were dead! *(Tries to shake ROGER awake.)* Oh, no! You're dead! You're dead! You're really, really dead! *(Thinks.)* Wait a minute. Something seems awfully fishy about this. What are the chances you'd die at the exact same moment your character does? *(Stands up and looks around. Seeing the coffee cup, she picks it up with both hands and takes a whiff.)* This doesn't smell right. This doesn't smell right at all. I'll bet somebody poisoned this coffee. And the police will know who as soon as they analyze the fingerprints. *(Looks at her hands holding the cup. Alarmed, she sets the cup down.)* Oh, no! I got my fingerprints all over the cup! I have to wipe them off! *(Wipes the fingerprints off with her sleeve.)* There. Now they'll never know I touched it. But wait. If I report this, the police will keep the film as evidence and then it'll never get released! But if I don't report this, the murderer will get away with... well, murder! Oh, what am I going to do? *(Thinks.)* I know what I'm going to do! I'm going to solve this murder myself! And the only way I can solve it is to make sure nobody knows you're dead! *(Grabs ROGER'S arms.)* I'm really sorry about this, Mr. Drummond, but I'm going to have to find some place to hide you. *(Drags ROGER toward the up left exit.)* Now don't get huffy with me. I promise I'll come and get you when I'm done!

HOPE exits up left with ROGER. Lights out.

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