

**PERUSAL SCRIPT**

# Jimmy Stewart Goes to Hollywood

A PLAY BY

MAHONRI STEWART

*Based on the life of James Stewart*

WITH FOREWORDS BY GUILLERMO REYES AND PHILIP TAYLOR



Newport, Maine

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## **JIMMY STEWART GOES TO HOLLYWOOD**

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# FOREWORD 1

In an era of prominent biopics, bio plays hover next to them. Celebrity lives fascinate but they are often difficult to define and render credibly. A toned down version of Freddie Mercury's life in *Bohemian Rhapsody* created an international hit. Critics still contend that the film reduced Mercury's life to a rated PG-13 version, all palatable and mainstream, but extremely profitable. It led Elton John to speak out during the making of his biopic, *Rocket Man*, released in the summer of 2019, in which he revealed he at least did not lead a PG-13 life and that he expected the filmmakers to reflect it. So really what is preferable? To tell it all at the risk of alienating mainstream audiences or remain discreet and elusive? The box office clearly prefers one and critics another.

What if the star whose exploits are being dramatized really did lead a life without drugs, rock 'n roll, and sexual indulgence? Playwright Mahonri Stewart creates the drama and the tension of an honorable gentleman's life in Jimmy Stewart's unconsummated relationship (I'll assume) with actress Margaret Sullavan, whom he might have loved once but never married. By also facing up to the powerful, and corrupt studio culture (mostly the omnipotent MGM capo, Louis B. Mayer), Mahonri also creates a fascinating parallel between the real Mr. Stewart and the fictional "Mr. Smith" who went to Washington in Frank Capra's film. After reading or watching this play, we are likely to walk away with the same feeling of wistfulness and hope that we might feel after watching *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

This play creates that dimension, the link between Frank Capra's depiction of righteous Americana in many of his films and actor Jimmy Stewart's embodiment of the everyman in many of them. Not as handsome as Cary Grant (who claims even he can't play Cary Grant), and seen as an awkward, lanky man, Stewart became an exemplar of an American stand-up guy for film-goers. Mahonri Stewart's comedy of Hollywood manners, with the various go-getters and malicious gossips and rampant egos, allows for Jimmy Stewart to rise above corruption as he apparently did off screen and off stage as well. He even earns the Oscar away from more prominent players like Grant who wasn't even nominated for his lead role in *The Philadelphia Story*. Stewart won best actor instead for that same film.

The optimism is well earned. Jimmy Stewart is one of the few actors who inspired trust, who still today embodies the holiday ritual of watching *It's a Wonderful Life*, another Capra classic, of an American life rising from the alternate reality of never having existed. I believe this play will bring back those memories for older generations, but also inspire younger people who haven't seen Stewart's films to finally watch them.

The play creates fun roles for actors as well. Who wouldn't want to play Stewart to begin with, along with legendary figures such as Katherine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Henry Fonda, Louis B Mayer, and of course, the more ambiguous heroine Margaret Sullavan, a lovely woman who can't quite seem to land in the right place (at least in this play's interpretation). Sullavan becomes a tragicomic heroine, not quite able to make love work, but able to recognize the title hero's virtues on his eventual march to Hollywood legend status, not unlike the character Jean Arthur plays in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. For Sullavan, Jimmy Stewart also becomes the man who got away, and it lends the play its own element of poignancy. Good guys actually win from time to time, but a romance between Stewart and Sullavan became illusive, not meant to be.

It's rare to find heroes as venerable as this one and Mahonri Stewart has done great honor to that other Mr. Stewart. This protagonist goes to Hollywood in this case, not to Washington, but doesn't leave behind the small town ethos that informs him and gives him transparency. The play's a lovely read and it contributes to the discourse of a well-earned optimistic world view that we could use more of in our times.

**GUILLERMO REYES** has produced and published a variety of plays including the comedies, *Men on the Verge of a His-Panic Breakdown* and *Mother Lolita* as off-Broadway productions with Urban Stages; *Chilean Holiday* and *Saints at the Rave* at the Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville; the historical drama, *Madison*, at Premiere Stages,

winner of the New Play Award 2008, among other plays. In 2010, he published a memoir with the University of Wisconsin Press, entitled *Madre and I: A Memoir of our Immigrant Lives*, chronicling his immigration from Chile and growing up in the D.C. area and in Hollywood, CA. He's a professor at Arizona State University in the School of Film, Dance and Theater. Recently, in 2013, his play, *Deporting the Divas* was published in a new Cambria Series anthology, *Gay Drama Now* edited by John Clum, and another play, *We Lost it at the Movies*, was published by the Bilingual Review Press in the anthology, *Vaqueeros, Calacas and Hollywood*.

## FOREWORD 2

I have known Mahonri Stewart in a number of roles over the years. He was a teaching assistant in many of my screenwriting courses at Arizona State University back in 2012. As I stated in my evaluation report for Mahonri at the end of every semester, I wish I could have cloned him. He was far and away the most effective TA with whom I have ever worked. I also taught Mahonri in no less than four courses during his stay at ASU. This is when I began to appreciate his talent as both a playwright and as a screenwriter. It was exhilarating to see Mahonri's writing skills improve week by week as he hit a creative stride that I have rarely seen in another writer, period, let alone a graduate student.

I read two outstanding stage plays, several wonderful episodes for a high concept TV series and, finally, *Jimmy Stewart Goes to Hollywood*, a screenplay about the beloved actor's early career, with a special focus on his relationships with Margaret Sullavan and Henry Fonda. The premise is so simple, it's brilliant; powerful enough to fuel not only a screenplay, but also that always precarious transition to the stage. Both scripts work superbly and demonstrate Mahonri's grasp of writing for both stage and screen. I read a huge number of screenplays every year and I consider *Jimmy Stewart Goes to Hollywood* to be superior to most of them in every way: plot, character development, smart dialogue. This screenplay is not just for movie lovers, but for everyone. Pipe dream or prophecy, the encouragement and faith both men exhibited in me has kept me warm on many a dark night.

**PHILIP JOHN TAYLOR** is a screenwriter whose television credits include *Murder She Wrote*, *Mork and Mindy*, *Highlander*, *Knight Rider*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Zorro*, *Silk Stalkings*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, and *Soldier of Fortune, Inc.*, among other notable TV shows. He also wrote the screenplay for the film *I'm Dangerous Tonight*. Until his recent retirement, he was an assistant professor of screenwriting in the School of Film, Dance, and Theatre at Arizona State University.



**For Guillermo Reyes**

a lover and chronicler of Old Hollywood, and the Gatekeeper who let me in through the front door.

**For Philip Taylor**

who lovingly made an awkward, old-fashioned stutterer believe that he might  
have a chance in a cinematic world.



“He never fooled me, from the beginning. He was totally in love with her. He basked in the attention she gave him in her anxiety to see him succeed in films. And the role gave him a chance to articulate emotions toward her that had not been possible up to then in real life.”

— Kent Smith, as quoted in Lawrence J. Quirk’s *Margaret Sullavan: Child of Fate*

“I had seen Jimmy Stewart play a sensitive, heart grabbing role in MGM’s *Navy Blue and Gold*. I sensed the character and rock-ribbed honesty of a Gary Cooper, plus the breeding and intelligence of an ivy-league idealist. One might believe that young Stewart could reject his father’s patrimony—a kingdom in Wall Street.”

— Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography*

# Jimmy Stewart Goes To Hollywood

## CHARACTERS

*(Due to the number of characters presented, it's recommended but not required that actors be cast in multiple roles, except Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullavan. Can be doubled to 6m 4f)*

**JIMMY STEWART** • Tall, lanky, with a distinctive Pennsylvania drawl. Amiable, likably awkward, with an everyman quality about him that endears him to people. Lead role.

**MARGARET SULLAVAN** • Small, petite. Beautiful, but certainly not one of the typical femme fatales or ice beauties of this era of Hollywood. She is a warm, emotional personality that often brightens to a contentious heat when crossed. Lead role.

**HENRY FONDA** • A handsome, brooding, intense personality. He has a kind of sensitivity and occasional whimsy to him as well. Major role.

**JOSH LOGAN** • Artistic, idealistic, and intelligent. Major role.

**ALEXANDER STEWART** • Jimmy's stern, but loving father. Major role.

**BESSIE STEWART** • Jimmy's protective, but loving mother. Major role.

**LELAND HEYWARD** • Talent agent. Marries Margaret. Major role.

**KATHERINE HEPBURN** • The famous actress. Major role.

**CARY GRANT** • The famous actor. Major role.

**GINGER ROGERS** • The famous actress. Jimmy Stewart's girlfriend at one point. Major role.

**LOUIS B. MAYER** • Head of MGM. Major role.

**LUCILLE BALL** • The famous actress. Medium role.

**FRANK CAPRA** • The famous director of *You Can't Take It With You*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*. Idealistic, inspiring. Italian immigrant. Medium role.

**DODDIE STEWART** • One of Jimmy's sisters. Medium role.

**ROBERT PERRY** • Fellow Princeton student with Jimmy. Marries Doddie. Medium Role.

**GLORIA HATRICK MCLEAN** • Minor but important role.

**BILL GRADY** • Talent scout for MGM. Minor role.

**CARL LAEMMLE** • President of Universal Studios. Minor role.

**EDWARD GRIFFITH** • Director for *The Next Time We Love*. Minor role.

**GINNY STEWART** • Jimmy's youngest sister. Minor role.

**AL WADE** • A playwright at Princeton. Minor role.

**DONALD STUART** • Theatre Professor at Princeton. Minor role.

**CREWMEMBER** • Crewmember for *The Shop Around the Corner*. Minor role.

**ERNST LUBITSCH** • Director of *The Shop Around the Corner*. Minor role.

**PILOT** • World War II Airforce pilot under Jimmy's command. Minor role.

**MAN** • At one of Jimmy and Hank's parties. Single line.

Premiered at the Covey Center for the Arts on March 28, 2014 in Provo, Utah. The Cast and Crew were as follows:

**Jimmy Stewart:** William McCallister

**Margaret Sullavan:** Kate Forsythe

**Henry Fonda/Donald Stuart:** Jason Hagey

**Josh Logan/Leland Heyward:** Clayton Cranford

**Cary Grant/Frank Capra/Bill Grady/ Carl Laemmle/Al Wade/Pilot:** Alex Diaz

**Katherine Hepburn/Ginny/Lucille Ball/ Gloria Hatrick McLean:** Rebecca Minson

**Alexander Stewart/Edward Griffith/ Ernst Lubitsch:** J. Scott Bronson  
**Louis B. Mayer/Robert Perry/ Crewmember:** Adam Argyle  
**Bessie Stewart/Woman:** Jennifer Mustoe  
**Ginger Rogers/Doddie:** Jessica Myer

**Director:** J. Scott Bronson  
**Producer:** Zion Theatre Company  
**Stage Manager:** Ashley Kelly  
**Costume Designer:** Anna-Marie Johnson  
**Set Designer:** Hannah Kroff  
**Lighting Designer:** Pam Davis

**TIME:** Set chiefly in the 1930's through the 1940's.  
**LOCATIONS:** Pennsylvania; New York; and Hollywood, California.

**JIMMY STEWART GOES TO HOLLYWOOD** a play by Mahonri Stewart. 2 hours. Cast of 10 with actors playing multiple roles (4 f, 6 m) Several Interiors/Exteriors can be simply or elaborately portrayed. Period consumes of the 1920s to 1940s. Never in a thousand years would Jimmy Stewart have considered being an actor...that is until he met the lovely actress Margaret Sullavan. She inspired a new direction for his wonderful life. As the subject of one of the great, unfulfilled love stories in Hollywood history, Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullavan had a complicated, but beautiful relationship. Jimmy owed much of his career to the feisty, yet secretly tender Margaret. She not only believed in Jimmy's talent...but also in the goodness of his soul. Jimmy would need her faith in him as he faced an uphill battle against naysayers, manipulators, and a corrupt studio system that felt like it had little room for a starry eyed, stuttering yokel from Pennsylvania. Premiered by The Covey Center for the Arts, Provo, Utah, 2014. **ORDER #3301**

**Mahonri Stewart** is an award winning writer and educator. He has written over two dozen plays, most of which have been produced throughout the U.S. and Europe, including productions in Los Angeles, Scotland, and Switzerland. In 2004, his premiere play *Farewell to Eden* won the Kennedy Center's American College Theater Festival's National Playwriting Award (Second Place) and their National Selection Team Fellowship Award. Since then he has also received numerous other awards and honors and continues to expand his writing into various mediums, including screenplays, graphic novels, poetry, and novels. He received his MFA degree in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University, where he wrote both the stage version of *Jimmy Stewart Goes to Hollywood*, as well as a screenplay version. He received his Bachelors degree in Theatre Arts from Utah Valley University. He's a former Playwright in Residence at the Noorda Regional Theater for Children and Youth.

#### **REVIEW EXCERPTS:**

*"I found myself engaged from beginning to end thanks to [Mahonri Stewart's] well-crafted script. Stewart's natural and conversational writing style accentuated many of these great moments in [Jimmy] Stewart's life ... It was very evident that Stewart had done a lot of research in order to create such a detailed story."*

- Johnny Hebda, *Utah Theatre Bloggers Association*

*"We can't stress enough how much you are really missing out if you don't come see this touching, insightful, entertaining play about one of movie's true icons."*

- Chelsea Benjamin and Robert Craig, *Front Row Reviewers*

## Act One

### SCENE ONE

*JIMMY STEWART is playing the accordion. Jimmy is very tall (historically about 6'4), with a lanky build and long limbs. He has a sort of everyman air about him and speaks with a drawn out, stumbling Pennsylvania drawl. His mother BESSIE plays the piano with Jimmy's youngest sister (by five years) GINNY, while their other sister (younger than Jimmy by three years) DODDIE, is playing the violin. They are having great fun, as the song gets fast and furious. They end with a great flourish and they all laugh joyously.*

**BESSIE:** Jimsy, you must be the best accordion player in Pennsylvania.

**JIMMY:** I think that's because I'm the only accordion player in Pennsylvania.

**DODDIE:** That's not true. There's Robert Perry— I think he could give you a run for your money.

**GINNY:** You only say that because you're in love with him, Doddie.

**DODDIE:** Ginny! Shush!

**GINNY:** It's no secret that you've loved Bobby ever since you layed eyes on him and his squeeze-box.

**DODDIE:** Oh, wouldn't I like to be his squeezebox!

**BESSIE:** Doddie!

**JIMMY:** Now — well, now I don't think I approve of you loving anyone, especially Robert Perry.

**DODDIE:** You have no say in the matter, Jim.

*(Enter ALEXANDER )*

**ALEXANDER:** That accordion is the strangest payment I ever received. Last time I do business with a circus clown.

**JIMMY:** Oh, come— come now, Father— you know our melodious harmonies are sweet ambrosia to your ears.

*(JIMMY starts playing the accordion again. ALEXANDER sighs and tries to retreat into another room, only to be blocked off by DODDIE, who starts playing the violin again.)*

**DODDIE:** Come on, Papa, sing with us.

**ALEXANDER:** No.

*(Both JIMMY and DODDIE, still continually playing their music, follow their father, who still tries to retreat only to be continually blocked off.)*

**BESSIE:** Oh, Alexander, don't be a wet noodle.



**ALEXANDER:** I said no.

*(BESSIE and GINNY start playing the piano again.)*

**GINNY:** Come on, Papa... sing!

*(ALEXANDER grumbles and then finally relents and belts out a sonorous, yet tuneful bass, as he sings a classic song with his family. They all smile, laugh and enjoy. Lights fade slightly, showing a small passage of time and raise to find JIMMY and ALEXANDER sitting together. ALEXANDER'S face is in a news paper, while JIMMY is working on a model airplane. After a moment, ALEXANDER looks over his newspaper at Jimmy's airplane.)*

**ALEXANDER:** You still building those things, Jim?

**JIMMY:** Well, now — now aren't you the one who hung my model of The Spirit of St. Louis in the shop window?

**ALEXANDER:** Well— that was a work of art!

**JIMMY:** Thank you.

**ALEXANDER:** I guess it's better than that damn accordion. If we'd been able to give you some brothers, maybe you would have taken more to sports.

**JIMMY:** You know I tried my hand at-at football—

**ALEXANDER:** You should have stuck with it.

**JIMMY:** They put anyone who tried out on third string.

**ALEXANDER:** Still—

**JIMMY:** I never would have played. Ever. And can you blame them? I was a scarecrow in the middle of a football field.

**ALEXANDER:** You needed brothers, or at least friends. Boys your age. You've spent your whole life surrounded by women. Or worse, by yourself.

**JIMMY:** Father—

**ALEXANDER:** It's my fault.

**JIMMY:** I've been thinking a lot lately—what if I don't go to Princeton, after all?

**ALEXANDER:** You're going to Princeton.

**JIMMY:** I don't have the marks for Princeton.

**ALEXANDER:** I'll make it happen. I made some good connections while I was there, especially in the Church—

**JIMMY:** What about Annapolis?

**ALEXANDER:** What?

**JIMMY:** What if I became a pilot?

**ALEXANDER:** We all saw what kind of pilot you'd be when you fell off our roof trying to fly your makeshift airplane.

**JIMMY:** I was a child.

**ALEXANDER:** And you're still acting like one.

**JIMMY:** N-Now, now look here, father, I know I could become a great pilot. I already know so much about airplanes, you know I do—and you can't say it's not a manly profession—

**ALEXANDER:** You're going to Princeton. We didn't pay your way through prep school to go to Princeton, only to have you go to Annapolis...

**JIMMY:** Yes, well, I-I didn't really like Mercersburg, Father...

**ALEXANDER:** You don't go to Mercersburg to like it! You go to learn your duty to your God, to your country, and to your family!

**JIMMY:** I, well, I would have actually preferred to—to *be* with my family.

**ALEXANDER:** You need your mother's apron strings definitively cut. Once you graduate from Princeton, then you're going to come back here and run the store. You already agreed to this.

**JIMMY:** No, well, no, you agreed with yourself and I was just sort of, well, uhm— quiet.

**ALEXANDER:** The hardware store has been in our family for three generations. It's been our reliable bread and butter all that time and it will treat you well, just like it treated me well. It is the guardian angel of our family. With a little love and a little attention, that store will raise your family for you and keep you rooted here, safe and secure.

**JIMMY:** I love it here as much as anyone—but what— well, wh-what if..?

**ALEXANDER:** Don't break that Stewart tradition, son.

**JIMMY:** *(Resigned)* Yes, sir.

*(Blackout.)*

## **SCENE TWO**

*Enter JOSH LOGAN, a junior at Princeton and an attractive young man from Texas. He sits with DR. DONALD STUART, a professor at Princeton; and AL WADE, another Princeton Student. They are sitting with audition materials (such as actor's resumes, auditions sheets, notes, etc.) surrounding them on a table.*

**DONALD:** All right, I think we can all agree that one was pretty awful. Who's up next?

**WADE:** Uh, looks like a fellow named James Stewart. Anybody know him?

**JOSH:** *(Perks up)* Stewart? Yeah, I know him. He's in the Glee Club.

**DONALD:** Is he a good singer?

**JOSH:** Erm—

**DONALD:** I'll take that as a no.

**JOSH:** No, no, he's a decent singer. But no more than decent. I think he's there to attract girls. He couldn't get on any of the sports teams so—

**DONALD:** Handsome, is he?

**JOSH:** I think most girls would rank him pretty average.

**WADE:** *(With an insulting smirk)* But what's your opinion?

**JOSH:** *(Gives an annoyed look)* I think he's interesting. Has an—attractive personality.

**DONALD:** Do we even want to bother with this guy?

**JOSH:** I'm serious. There was something about him that really—impressed me.

**DONALD:** Is he someone we can use?

**JOSH:** Well, from his audition sheet it looks like he can play the accordion.

**DONALD:** I thought we had decided to get rid of the accordion solo.

**WADE:** No, you decided to get rid of it. I still say it stays. Every Triangle Club show has had one for years!

**DONALD:** It's a ridiculous tradition.

**WADE:** I'm the playwright, do I get a say?

**JOSH and DONALD:** No!

**DONALD:** As the faculty supervisor, I want to try to give you good guidance, Josh. But, obviously, you're the director, so I don't want to step on your toes.

**JOSH:** Then don't step on them.

*(Focus shifts to a number of AUDITIONERS who appear. They are gathered in the hall, practicing songs, monologues, trying to concentrate, etc. JIMMY sits next to ROBERT PERRY, both of them holding accordions, eyeing each other competitively.)*

**ROBERT:** So—Jim.

**JIMMY:** Robert.

**ROBERT:** How's the family at home?

**JIMMY:** They're, well, they're doing fine. Yours?

**ROBERT:** Fine.

**JIMMY:** Fine.

**ROBERT:** *(Awkward pause)* How's Doddie?

**JIMMY:** Stay away from my sister, Robert.

**ROBERT:** *(Awkward pause)* You auditioning for the accordion solo, too, then?

**JIMMY:** We kind of stick out.

*(Awkward pause. Sighs.)*

We accordion players can be a small pool, sure, but we don't have to be rivals.

**STAGE MANAGER:** *(calling out)* Stewart! James Stewart!

**ROBERT:** Break a leg, Jim.

**JIMMY:** Well, that's rude.

**ROBERT:** No, it's just an...

*(JIMMY exits into the audition room.)*

...expression. Damn. He's never going to let me date his sister.

*(JIMMY walks in front of Donald, Wade, and Josh into a spotlight.)*

**DONALD:** *(Quietly to JOSH and WADE)* His lower lip sticks out like a balcony.

**JOSH:** Give the fella a chance.

**JIMMY:** Hello. My-my name is James Stewart. And I'm auditioning for—uhm, wahl, I am auditioning for the—the a-accordion solo.

*(JIMMY begins to play and sing "Swanee River." Underneath it, we quietly hear JOSH, WADE and DONALD'S dialogue.)*

**WADE:** Well, he can certainly play the damn thing.

**JOSH:** Yeah, I think he's doing really well.

**DONALD:** I can hardly hear his singing...

*(Out to JIMMY)*

Project. Please, project!

*(JIMMY sings a little louder.)*

He looks so serious. Like his mother just died or something. I've never seen a more somber accordion player.

**WADE:** I hate "Swanee River"...

**JOSH:** Will both of you shut up?

**DONALD:** And look how he stoops over...

**JOSH:** Don't you see it?

**DONALD:** See what? He's awkward, he's gangly, he's...

**JOSH:** He's genuine.

*(Lights fade to show the passage of time and the cast list is up. A crowd has gathered around the paper. JIMMY pushes his way through to see. ROBERT is already there, scanning the list.)*

**JIMMY:** Did—did you make it, Robert?

**ROBERT:** Yeah, sure did.

*(JIMMY looks downcast.)*

But so did you. You got the accordion solo.

*(JIMMY brightens.)*

**JIMMY:** Really?

**ROBERT:** Congratulations. You're in show business, Jim.

*(Enter JOSH, who approaches ROBERT and JIMMY.)*

**JOSH:** Congratulations, fellas! I'm excited to have you both on board.

**ROBERT:** Josh Logan, right? Thanks for the opportunity.

**JIMMY:** I-I am very excited. But we-we've already met.

**JOSH:** I know—choir.

**ROBERT:** Sorry to meet and run, but I've got class.

**JOSH:** Go ahead.

*(Exit ROBERT.)*

**JIMMY:** So—any pretty girls in the cast?

**JOSH:** Oh, sure. A ladies' man, are you?

**JIMMY:** Aww, uhmm, still working on that—

**JOSH:** Well, maybe—maybe you're wasting your energy on them.

**JIMMY:** Hell's bells, Josh, they're the reason I'm doing all this artsy stuff.

**JOSH:** Of course, but—

**JIMMY:** How about you? Being a big shot director must bring them to you in the swarms.

**JOSH:** Yeah, I clock in my time, but there's another kind of company I like just as much.

**JIMMY:** Yeah? Who's that?

**JOSH:** Well, I'm enjoying my time with you for one.

**JIMMY:** You don't say—

*(Pause.)*

Oh.

*(Pause.)*

Oh!

**JOSH:** I didn't mean to shock you.

**JIMMY:** Well. Isn't that—something.

**JOSH:** Oh. Jimmy, look—I didn't mean to make things awkward. I thought maybe—never mind.

**JIMMY:** No, no—you know, Josh, something tells me I have you to thank for my part. The other two at the table didn't seem very, wahl, impressed.

**JOSH:** Well, you impressed me, and the director's the guy to impress.

**JIMMY:** Thank you. I really mean it.

**JOSH:** You have something special, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Aww, no, th-this isn't normally my thing.

**JOSH:** But maybe it could be. I'm serious. Have you had any ideas about being a professional actor?

*(JIMMY'S a little appalled by the insinuation.)*

**JIMMY:** Good Gawly, no! I'm going to be an architect!

*(JIMMY exits, as if he has been slandered. JOSH looks after him surprised, but bemused.)*

**JOSH:** Well, we'll see about that.

*(Lights dim.)*

### **SCENE THREE**

*A brief passage of time is indicated. A few cast members enter, including JIMMY and ROBERT. JOSH passes out scripts.*

**ROBERT:** Hey, Jimmy!

**JIMMY:** Er, hello, Robert.

**ROBERT:** I was surprised to see you at the Cottage Club social the other day.

**JIMMY:** Why? My father was a member.

**ROBERT:** Oh, yeah, I know there's that automatic membership thing for sons, but—

**JIMMY:** But what? You think I'm not good enough?

**ROBERT:** No, no, but—but you and—well—

*(ROBERT indicates towards JOSH.)*

**JIMMY:** Josh?

**ROBERT:** Well, yes.

**JIMMY:** What-well, wh-what does he have to do with anything?

**ROBERT:** The Cottage Club doesn't accept men who— well, they don't accept gay men, all right?

**JIMMY:** What? I mean, well, WHAT? Is that why it took them so long to invite me?

**ROBERT:** They mean to maintain a certain kind of reputation.

**JIMMY:** But—n-no, but that's not me. I—I like girls! I mean, I *really* like girls!

**ROBERT:** Then you and Josh—?

**JIMMY:** Nothing-absolutely nothing to it. Why, we're, uh, friends, good friends, but certainly not—oh, certainly not!

**ROBERT:** Look, Jim, it's none of my business—but, if there's nothing to it, then one doesn't want to gain that sort of—reputation. Maybe this isn't such a good idea for you, after all.

**JIMMY:** But, uh, I'm getting to be friends with Josh and some of the others now.

**ROBERT:** Keep your friends. Just be more—distant.

**JIMMY:** But I really am starting to enjoy...

**ROBERT:** Jim, I'm going to be straight with you. You're skinny, you're plain, you've never had a real girlfriend. You've already got an uphill battle when it comes to convincing the world of your masculinity. You don't need this, too.

**JIMMY:** *(Pause)* Wha-what a rotten situation.

**ROBERT:** Look, I'll be here, if you need any help, all right?

*(Pause.)*

So how is Doddie doing these—?

**JIMMY:** Stay away from my sister, Robert!

*(JIMMY retreats from ROBERT and approaches JOSH.)*

**JOSH:** Jimmy! You and your accordion were a hoot at the break the ice party last night. Brilliant stuff! I've got an idea about your role. What if we—?

**JIMMY:** I'm sorry, Josh, but I need to talk to you.

*(JOSH looks concerned, and directs a comment back to his cast.)*

**JOSH:** Start looking through your lines! Once Margaret gets here, we'll start.

*(JOSH takes JIMMY aside to a corner of the theater where they can talk privately.)*

What's going on?

**JIMMY:** Josh, I—I don't think I can do this after all.

**JOSH:** I don't understand. I thought you showed some real promise...

**JIMMY:** But I'm not an actor. And b-being seen as an actor, awww, well, it's just not—not—

**JOSH:** Not what?

**JIMMY:** Not doing me any favors.

**JOSH:** Who's been talking to you? What have they been saying?

**JIMMY:** N-nobody's been talking to me.

**JOSH:** Don't lie to me.

**JIMMY:** Really, well, really, that doesn't matter. What matters is-is that—

**MARGARET:** (O.S.) I am so, so sorry that I'm late!

*(Both JIMMY and JOSH turn to see MARGARET Sullavan entering in from the back of the theatre. MARGARET is a beauty, although not necessarily the traditional, glamorous kind. Rather, she has an odd mixture of strength and sensitivity that is attractive. She is petite and small, but moves with confidence. Her voice range can turn from the low and huskily emotional, to a high range enthusiasm that is almost falsetto. MARGARET Sullavan has emotional range, she has strength, she has soulfulness, she has a lust for life, and she has more than a little fire.)*

**MARGARET:** Josh, I had the deuce of a time finding the place. Please, forgive me.

**JOSH:** Without hesitation.

**MARGARET:** Thank you, thank you so much.

*(Noting JIMMY.)*

I'm so sorry, I interrupted your conversation. I must seem rude. Are you part of the cast?

**JOSH:** Well, Jimmy's not going to—

**JIMMY:** I-I, uh, well, yes!

**MARGARET:** Oh, lovely. Jimmy, is it then? Well, Jimmy, you have kind eyes. I really like that.

*(Back to JOSH.)*

Where's my script?

**JOSH:** On the lip of the stage right there.

**MARGARET:** Thank you so much. I'm very excited.

*(MARGARET goes to get her script and joins the rest of the cast, as JIMMY looks after her.)*

**JIMMY:** Who is that?

**JOSH:** Her name is Margaret Sullavan. Chuck Leatherbee from over at the Harvard Dramatic Society sent her my way. Says she's a dynamite actress. But, of course, he may be saying that partially because he's slee...

**JIMMY:** Margaret—Margaret, you said?

**JOSH:** It's great to have you back on board, Jimmy.

*(JIMMY walks away, pretending to look at his script, but is stealing glances at MARGARET.)*



*ROBERT walks over to him.)*

**ROBERT:** Why are you still here? Did Josh convince...?

**JIMMY:** I want to do this.

*(ROBERT notices JIMMY looking at MARGARET.)*

**ROBERT:** Yeah, she's pretty. But hardly a knockout.

**JIMMY:** Shut up, Robert.

**ROBERT:** Your sister, on the other hand—

**JIMMY:** Don't talk about my sister, Robert.

**ROBERT:** Still playing the guard dog, are you? Look. Well. She's pretty much my favorite person. Ever.

*(JIMMY looks over to MARGARET.)*

So—you're still going to hazard the association, are you?

**JIMMY:** You're still here, too, aren't you?

**ROBERT:** I've never been called into—question.

**JIMMY:** I'm staying.

**ROBERT:** Even with its—present company?

**JIMMY:** Especially with its present company.

**ROBERT:** I see.

**JIMMY:** Josh has had girlfriends, you know.

**ROBERT:** Playing both ways doesn't exactly let a person off the hook.

**JIMMY:** These are decent people—

**ROBERT:** You may not see it, Jimmy, but I do. You're entering a world that is utterly foreign to everything you were brought up believing. Believe me, those sluts and perverts aren't worth it.

*(JIMMY pushes ROBERT, which attracts the attention of the cast.)*

Whoa, Jimmy...

**JOSH:** Hey, fellas, what's going on over—?

**JIMMY:** What did you call my friends? What did you call them?

*(JIMMY pushes ROBERT again.)*

**ROBERT:** Stop it...

**JIMMY:** Say that about them again and I'll clock you one!

**ROBERT:** Stop it!

**JOSH:** Whoa there!

*(JOSH goes in between them, breaking it up.)*

This in not a good start to cast unity!

**ROBERT:** Jimmy, look, that came off wrong—but these people—

**JOSH:** Are you talking about us?

**ROBERT:** Jimmy and I were having a personal conversation...

**JIMMY:** These “people” you keep insulting, well, they—they saw James Stewart, lanky, awkward, self-aware Jimmy Stewart, and they saw some one worth knowing! And I feel the same way about them!

*(ROBERT looks around, a little dumb founded.)*

**ROBERT:** I’m sorry, Josh, I—you know, I should take my own medicine. I don’t think this is going to be my kind of thing. I’m sure there are plenty of people I can be replaced with.

*(Exit ROBERT.)*

**JIMMY:** Awww, I-I’m sorry. I-I didn’t mean to...

*(MARGARET begins to applaud JIMMY. JOSH and the cast join her. Lights fade.)*

#### **SCENE FOUR**

*The cast and crew of the play have surrounded Jimmy, who in his slow and rambling, but deceptively sly and knowing manner, is weaving a joke. They’re all entertained, including Josh and Margaret. Margaret’s look, especially, has a strong sense of maternal affection for Jimmy.*

**JIMMY:** This man and his wife are having breakfast, you see, and the husband, well, his name is John and her name—

*(Giving a wink at MARGARET.)*

Well, let’s-let’s say her name is Margaret, and so John says—no, wait, it’s the other way, it’s Margaret who says, “John, if I were to die, would you get re-married?” And John says, “Well, isn’t that the darndest thing! We have this wonderful breakfast and the sun is shining and there’s a nice breeze and you ask me a thing like that! That-that’s a terrible thing to say to a man the first thing in the morning. Don’t ask me that again.” But later, well, of course she asked about it again, you see, and he said, “What a terrible thing to ask a man. Terrible...” But she kept asking and he finally said, “Yes, I would re-marry, now will you stop asking me about it?” She said, definitely concerned, “Would you sell our home?” “No-n-no,” he replied. She thought about this and said, “Tell me you would at least sell our bed!” And he said, “No, no, why would I sell our bed?” And so she said, more than a little distressed, “Well, you certainly wouldn’t let her touch my golf clubs, would you?” And he said, “No, no, of course not. She’s left handed.”

*(The cast and crew laugh appreciatively.)*

**JOSH:** All right everyone, all thanks to James and all, but let’s get wrapped up and get some rest. It’s our

first tech rehearsal tomorrow. Hell week is officially upon us!

*(MARGARET wanders over to JIMMY.)*

**MARGARET:** Jimmy—I can call you Jimmy, can't I?

**JIMMY:** Well, uh, yeah, Jimmy's great, I guess. Coming from you, Jimmy's great.

**MARGARET:** James seems so formal. And I don't like Jim.

**JIMMY:** Truth told, neither do I.

**MARGARET:** I'm trying to figure you out, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Well, I would have figured that wouldn't take long.

**MARGARET:** Longer than you think. Tell me, what are you getting from this?

**JIMMY:** From what?

**MARGARET:** Josh says you're not interested in theatre.

**JIMMY:** Well, I think it's interesting, but, well, yes, Josh is right—not so *interested*.

**MARGARET:** You don't really seem the type—but I think it could be nice to cast against type.

**JIMMY:** I-I'm not looking to be cast in anything. I'm going to be...

**MARGARET:** ...an architect. Or a pilot.

**JIMMY:** You, uh, you've paid attention, Margaret.

**MARGARET:** Peggy.

**JIMMY:** You like to be called Peggy?

**MARGARET:** No, I hate it. Sounds like a servant.

**JIMMY:** Oh.

**MARGARET:** People call me Maggie.

**JIMMY:** Then I'll call you Maggie, too.

**MARGARET:** I said *people* call me Maggie. You're not people.

**JIMMY:** I-I'm not?

**MARGARET:** No. You're special. So you'll call me Peggy. Only people important to me call me Peggy.

**JIMMY:** *(Pleased.)* Peggy then.

**MARGARET:** So back on track. So what do you get? From theatre?

**JIMMY:** Do I have to get something?

**MARGARET:** Are you saying you don't want any thing out of this?

*(JIMMY looks at MARGARET searchingly, and she doesn't flinch away from his gaze.)*

**JIMMY:** Well, for one thing, I—well, darn it all—I get to talk to girls like you.

**MARGARET:** I get a lot of flattery in this business—but that was a real nice thing to say, Jimmy. Sounds genuine coming from you.

**JIMMY:** Well, that’s probably because it is.

**MARGARET:** And still you have those kind eyes.

**JIMMY:** Not a lot of girls are looking for kindness.

**MARGARET:** Everyone is looking for kindness. Even when they don’t know it.

**JIMMY:** So then what are *you* looking to get out of this?

**MARGARET:** By the time I am thirty-five, I want a million dollars and to have starred on Broadway.

**JIMMY:** You want everything then.

**MARGARET:** All of it. Fame. Fortune. Revenge against everyone who told me I couldn’t do it.

**JIMMY:** I don’t believe you.

**MARGARET:** Not everyone is as good of a person as you are, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** I-I’m not so good.

**MARGARET:** If you’re not good, then there’s no hope for people like me.

**JIMMY:** People like you are what make this world beautiful.

**MARGARET:** You don’t know me very well.

**JIMMY:** I, well, I w-would be more than happy to rectify that situation.

**JOSH:** Hey, you two, we need to be getting out of here soon! They always get on my case when we stay too late.

**JIMMY:** That’s-that’s fine. Just give us a minute!

**MARGARET:** I guess we’d better move it.

**JIMMY:** Margaret—Peggy, wait.

**MARGARET:** Yes?

**JIMMY:** I, uhm, wahll, The Cottage Club is having a social function and, you see, I’m a member, and well, uhm—

**MARGARET:** You would like me to come.

**JIMMY:** Yes.

**MARGARET:** In a pretty dress, perhaps?

**JIMMY:** If-if you feel, well, so inclined.

**MARGARET:** And of course I’m sure you clean up well in a tux.

**JIMMY:** I make a dashing figure, certainly. Angular, but dashing.

**MARGARET:** You, Mr. Stewart, have a date.

**JIMMY:** I do?

**MARGARET:** Yes.

**JIMMY:** I have a date?

**MARGARET:** You sound shocked.

**JIMMY:** Shocked? A little, uhm, yeah.

**MARGARET:** Maybe you should get used to it.

**JIMMY:** I could definitely work on that.

**JOSH:** I need you both out of here! Jim, go lock up the other rooms!

**JIMMY:** It's Jimmy!

*(To MARGARET.)*

We can work out the details tomorrow.

**MARGARET:** Sounds lovely.

*(JIMMY exits, an extra spring in his step. JOSH comes to MARGARET.)*

**JOSH:** Jimmy, huh?

**MARGARET:** Yeah. Jimmy.

**JOSH:** He's a good egg.

**MARGARET:** I know.

**JOSH:** I would hate to see his heart broken.

**MARGARET:** Why do you sound so certain that I would break it?

**JOSH:** I thought you were with Charles.

**MARGARET:** Maybe I'm hoping to—step up the ladder a bit.

**JOSH:** Jimmy's not exactly a "step up" on any social ladder. Sleeping with Jimmy won't get you anywhere.

**MARGARET:** You think I'm so cynical?

**JOSH:** From the stories I've heard, I know you are. As lovely as you are, Margaret, I think you would lick that boy hollow.

*(JOSH leaves MARGARET alone. She walks and looks out into the stage lights which are still on. She then looks towards the door that JIMMY exited out of, when the stage lights suddenly shut off.)*

**SCENE FIVE**

*The Cottage Club. ROBERT and DODDIE are by a punch bowl, dressed to impress.*

**DODDIE:** So when are we going to dance, Bobby?

**ROBERT:** In a moment, Doddie—I'm looking for your brother. Don't want you two to miss each other.

**DODDIE:** Didn't you tell him I was coming?

**ROBERT:** No, not really.

**DODDIE:** I thought you said you two were close.

**ROBERT:** Erm...

**DODDIE:** Bobby, you don't have to lie to me, you know. We Stewarts value straight shooters.

**ROBERT:** I-I know. But, Doddie, I really want to get in good with you, you know.

**DODDIE:** You're already in good with me, Bobby.

**ROBERT:** So then—this—us—

**DODDIE:** I like the idea of "us" as much as you do.

*(DODDIE and ROBERT are distracted as they see JIMMY and MARGARET enter. JIMMY has cleaned up really well, in a pressed, flawless tux, while MARGARET is an absolute vision in a gorgeous evening dress.)*

**ROBERT:** Here they are.

**DODDIE:** Jim!

*(DODDIE rushes to JIMMY, nearly bowling over her brother with a huge hug.)*

**JIMMY:** Doddie?! Wh-why I'll be an elephant's babysitter, what the heck are you doing here?

**DODDIE:** I'm here with Bobby.

*(ROBERT awkwardly approaches JIMMY and MARGARET.)*

**ROBERT:** Evening, Jim.

**MARGARET:** He goes by Jimmy now.

**JIMMY:** Doddie, this is my lovely date for the evening, Peggy Sullavan.

**DODDIE:** A pleasure!

**JIMMY:** Peggy, this is my sister Doddie.

**MARGARET:** How nice to meet you!

**JIMMY:** And you've—met Robert.

**ROBERT:** Wow, you look stunning, Margaret!

*(DODDIE gently elbows ROBERT.)*

Well, so do you, Doddie.

**JIMMY:** Peggy's an actress.

**DODDIE:** Are you any good?

**MARGARET:** I'm not sure I'm the proper judge of that.

**JIMMY:** I am and I'll tell you what, she's-she's fantastic, that's what she is. She-she has this husky, alluring, beautiful style in her voice when she acts and-and her eyes, w-well, her eyes! They just rivet on a person and they don't let go. It's like she's looking into your soul and there you are absolutely naked—well, n-not really naked, of course, but it's like she—like she sees you.

**DODDIE:** So you're going to be some one some day.

**JIMMY:** She already is.

*(MARGARET looks up appreciatively at JIMMY. He takes her hand and squeezes it. He is about to let go of her hand, but she clings to it. His hand clings back.)*

**DODDIE:** So are you in this play that Jimmy's doing?

**MARGARET:** Sure am. And your brother is a gem. Stewarts must come from good stock, because I've never met a nicer man.

**DODDIE:** Oh, Jimmy's not a man.

**MARGARET:** Sweetie, believe me, he certainly is. The best kind.

**DODDIE:** If you say so. I remember when he tried to fly a makeshift airplane off our roof.

**MARGARET:** Oh, now I must hear this story!

**JIMMY:** Oh, l-listen to that, my, w-well, it's my favorite song!

*(JIMMY pulls MARGARET onto the dance floor, to an upbeat swing dance.)*

**MARGARET:** So what is the of name of this favorite song of yours?

**JIMMY:** Haven't a clue.

**MARGARET:** I will get those stories out of her before the night is through, you know.

**JIMMY:** Not if I keep dancing with you.

**MARGARET:** *(Smile)* Keep dancing then. I love dancing. I couldn't walk for the first years of my life, you know.

**JIMMY:** Really? Looks like you're making up for it now.

**MARGARET:** I don't like barriers. I tend to just climb over them. No one tells me what to do, not even Nature!

**JIMMY:** You- you are a good dancer! Wish I, uhm, well I wish could say the same about me. I apologize to your toes in advance, madam.

**MARGARET:** Actually, you're doing well.

**JIMMY:** For a scarecrow, you mean.

**MARGARET:** Now stop that.

**JIMMY:** Stop what?

**MARGARET:** Making fun of yourself. You don't need to do that with me.

*(The song ends. The DANCERS applaud the band. The music changes to a slow, romantic song. MARGARET puts her head on JIMMY'S shoulder as they dance. JIMMY smiles as if he is in heaven. They just dance like that for some time, contented.)*

**JIMMY:** You gave them one heck of a performance, the other night.

**MARGARET:** Is it a bad thing that I love that applause so much?

**JIMMY:** W-why, no! You deserve every moment of it.

**MARGARET:** When I'm acting I—I feel such escape. Now I'm certainly often aware of that audience, just drinking in that attention, their eyes feeding me something—something I need! Oh, sometimes I feel like I need it so much. I'll tell you a secret, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** What is that?

**MARGARET:** I'm not very good.

**JIMMY:** N-now that's not — that's not true!

**MARGARET:** I've got you fooled, too, but — I get so scared. And I'm not the most beautiful girl in the world.

**JIMMY:** You are — why you're as a beautiful as they come.

**MARGARET:** That's nice to say, Jimmy, but I know how I stack up against the cold beauties and femme fatales. I'm just this mousy little thing.

**JIMMY:** Now, Peggy, I — I—

**MARGARET:** I'm being real with you here. Honest. It's good. I feel I can be so honest with you.

**JIMMY:** Well, I don't agree with what you said, but I'm-I'm glad that you feel you can be honest with me.

**MARGARET:** Not everyone wants you to be honest, you know. They want—something else. But-But then there are these moments when I just lose all that fakeness on stage and I—I become honest. Authentic. Me. That's the real irony of acting. I feel like I've touched something special. Something deep inside of me that I hardly remembered I had.

**JIMMY:** You make it sound like some sort of religious experience.

**MARGARET:** Well, my father was a vestryman at St. Andrew's Church.

**JIMMY:** I-I used to go to Church a lot with my family, too.



**MARGARET:** Pillars of the community, my parents. Upper class Virginians to the core, bewildered by their passionate, tomboy of a daughter. Been a while since I've set foot inside a Church.

**JIMMY:** Me too.

**MARGARET:** Look at us, a couple of anarchists, putting distance between us and our old lives.

**JIMMY:** It still tugs, though, doesn't it?

**MARGARET:** Yeah, it does. But acting, maybe it is something spiritual, like you said. God or not, it definitely fills—an ache.

**JIMMY:** You feel that ache too, huh?

**MARGARET:** I suppose everyone does. But sometimes you fill that ache, too, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Me? N-naw, I'm just—

**MARGARET:** You're not "just" anything. You're Jimmy Stewart and I'll love you until the day I die for it.

**JIMMY:** Peggy. I-I lo...

**MARGARET:** I'm going to be in another Harvard show after this.

**JIMMY:** Y-you are?

**MARGARET:** And then—then I'm going to conquer Broadway. Or Hollywood, if I have to settle for them.

**JIMMY:** You're going to be a star. Never-never doubt that for a doggone minute. A star.

**MARGARET:** I wish I believed in myself like you believe in me.

**JIMMY:** The, well, acting thing—is that it for you? I-I mean, do you see yourself doing anything else? With anyone else?

**MARGARET:** Sometimes I wish that were in the cards. I mean I want children—I want five children.

**JIMMY:** Five? Golly.

**MARGARET:** Gosh, sometimes I just ache for that sort of idyllic life. But I don't think that sort of thing was meant for tornadoes like me.

**JIMMY:** Why? Why can't you have both those lives?

**MARGARET:** I'm going to miss you, Jimmy Stewart. I'm going to miss you like I've never missed anyone. You know, I do see you. Like you said.

**JIMMY:** And what do you see?

**MARGARET:** I see something I thought I didn't believe in.

**JIMMY:** Which is?

**MARGARET:** A good man.

**JIMMY:** And-and is that enough? For a girl like you?

**MARGARET:** You're "enough" for any girl, Jimmy, if they know what's good for them. But—

**JIMMY:** But?

**MARGARET:** I don't know if I know any girl who's good enough for you. Certainly not me.

**JIMMY:** Why not you?

**MARGARET:** Jimmy...

**JIMMY:** Why not you?

**MARGARET:** Oh, Jimmy, let's just dance, okay?

**JIMMY:** Okay.

*(They continue to dance as the lights fade to black.)*

## **SCENE SIX**

*JIMMY is sitting at a table, drinking a cup of coffee, when JOSH bursts into the lounge. He rivets on JIMMY and points dramatically at him.*

**JOSH:** Jimmy Stewart! You're my new leading man!

*(JIMMY chokes on his coffee a bit, shocked.)*

**JIMMY:** Josh?

**JOSH:** I have been looking all over for you!

**JIMMY:** What are you doing here? I thought you graduated.

**JOSH:** Stanivslasky, my dear man!

**JIMMY:** Stan-staniv-stani-vhat? I mean Staniv-what?

**JOSH:** He's going to change everything!

**JIMMY:** Are you feeling all right, Josh?

**JOSH:** I've been in Russia! Charles Leatherbee and I went to the Moscow Theater and were hailed as the great intelligentsia from America! And I've come back with the Kremlin in my pocket and Stanivlasky and Danchenko in my heart! Chuck and I are going to change the face of American Theatre! And you're going to be right in the center of it.

**JIMMY:** Ohhh—oh, n-no, don't think I-I know what this is. Not another play!

**JOSH:** I couldn't get you out of my head, Jimmy— After Charles and Margaret broke up—

**JIMMY:** W-wait, Peggy and Charles broke up?

**JOSH:** Oh, long time ago! But then she and another actor, Henry Fonda, got together, but then—oh, listen

to me, I'm getting ahead of myself.

**JIMMY:** But Peggy—

**JOSH:** Forget Maggie for a moment! I'll get to her, I promise, but I'm telling you—Stanivlasky!

**JIMMY:** Who the hell is Stanivlasky?

**JOSH:** He's the man whose theories are going to transform you into a professional actor!

**JIMMY:** I'm going to be a damn architect!

**JOSH:** No, no, I'm going to put my foot down. Our last show together, Jimmy—you were superb! *Time Magazine* loved you for heaven's sake!

**JIMMY:** I just showed up with my Pennsylvania drawl and an accordion.

**JOSH:** Six glorious musical numbers! Jimmy, did you never get back to those talent scouts who wanted to talk to you?

**JIMMY:** I'm graduating this semester and then I'm going to spend my summer with my family.

**JOSH:** No, you're to spend the summer with us—

**JIMMY:** No, I'm not. After this summer I'm going to come back here and get my masters in Architecture.

**JOSH:** A waste of talent!

**JIMMY:** I have other talents, too! I'm done with all that monkey business.

**JOSH:** Now hear me out, hear me out. Chuck and I have started a new theatre company in Cape Cod—

**JIMMY:** I-I'm not—I'm not going to be an actor!

**JOSH:** And we just lost our leading man, that fellow I was telling you about, Henry Fonda—well, after he and Maggie got divorced...

**JIMMY:** I'm not going to be—w-wait, w-what? Peggy got married?

**JOSH:** I've got your attention now, don't I?

**JIMMY:** And then she got divorced?!

**JOSH:** After less than sixty days! Shortest damn marriage I've ever seen.

**JIMMY:** Is she all right?

**JOSH:** It's Fonda I'm worried about...

**JIMMY:** What do you mean by that?

**JOSH:** Let's put that aside, Jimmy—here's the thing. You were better than you thought you were. People noticed—I noticed.

**JIMMY:** I don't want to be an actor!

**JOSH:** (*Floundering*) Jimmy—please, we need you— ]

*(JIMMY starts to leave.)*

**JIMMY:** Sorry, Josh.

**JOSH:** Margaret is still part of the company!

*(JIMMY hesitates.)*

Just do it for this summer and then see from there. Call it your last hurrah in the acting world, if you want!

**JIMMY:** Peggy will be there?

**JOSH:** Come with us, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** *(Pause.)* What about my father?

**JOSH:** I'll talk to him. I can talk anybody into anything.

*(Blackout.)*

## **SCENE SEVEN**

*The Stewart home. "Happy Graduation!" and "Congratulations!" signs are up, while JIMMY, BESSIE, DODDIE, GINNY, ROBERT, and ALEXANDER are gathered, singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." They applaud.*

**BESSIE:** To my little boy—who became a man!

**DODDIE:** I don't know—he still looks boyish to me!

**JIMMY:** This coming from my little sister!

**DODDIE:** Who is about to come into her own womanhood...

**JIMMY:** I told you to stay away from my sister Robert.

**ROBERT:** Well, you can take it up with her. She's the one who said yes!

**GINNY:** Jimmy, at the rate you're going, *I'll* get married before you do!

**BESSIE:** Not if I have anything to say about it.

*(Back to JIMMY.)*

Although, if you're looking for a nice girl, Mary Anne Jones is still—

**JIMMY:** For the umpteenth time, Mother, I'm not interested in Mary Anne Jones!

**BESSIE:** I'm just saying, you could do worse.

*(BESSIE touches her son's cheek.)*

I still can't believe it. My son, off into the wild blue yonder.

**ALEXANDER:** Not yonder. Right here, at the store.

*(Awkward pause.)*

**JIMMY:** Father—

*(ALEXANDER goes aside, looking stressed. BESSIE follows him.)*

**BESSIE:** Alex?

**ALEXANDER:** Go back to the party. I'm fine.

**BESSIE:** What's going on?

**ALEXANDER:** Nothing.

**BESSIE:** Are you tired?

**ALEXANDER:** No.

**BESSIE:** You've been acting strangely ever since Jimsy came home.

**ALEXANDER:** Is that boy ever really going to come home?

*(BESSIE gives ALEXANDER a concerned look and then goes back into the party, where she seeks JIMMY.)*

**BESSIE:** Jimsy, what is going on with you and your father?

**JIMMY:** *(Playing dumb)* Going on?

**BESSIE:** You can't fool your mother. You've always been a bad liar.

**JIMMY:** I—Mama, there's this professional theatre group that wants me to do a show with them for the summer. A, well, a friend of mine called Dad and—well, Dad told my friend to have me talk to him directly.

**BESSIE:** And you still haven't done that?

**JIMMY:** Naaw. I—I've been waiting for the right moment.

**BESSIE:** You make the right moment out of the present. Go talk to him.

**JIMMY:** But I-I'm the guest of honor!

**BESSIE:** Go talk to him.

*(JIMMY nods and goes into the room with ALEXANDER.)*

**JIMMY:** Dad?

**ALEXANDER:** I got a call from a friend of yours.

**JIMMY:** Yeah, uhm, yeah. I-I know.

**ALEXANDER:** My concern was that I didn't get the call from you. Like I was someone to be afraid of. Like I was someone you couldn't look in the eye.

**JIMMY:** I-I knew you wouldn't approve.

**ALEXANDER:** So you sent your friend to soften me up?

**JIMMY:** Something like that.

**ALEXANDER:** Jimbo—what on earth do you want to get involved in stuff like that for?

**JIMMY:** I—I like the people. And they tell me I'm good at it. People like me.

**ALEXANDER:** People already like you.

**JIMMY:** I-I give people a little happiness up on that stage. Is there anything wrong with that?

**ALEXANDER:** Aren't you embarrassed up there?

**JIMMY:** Should I be? I mean, I-I stumble and fumble a bit. But that seems to make them even happier!  
They get a good laugh out of it.

**ALEXANDER:** So you're their clown.

**JIMMY:** Well, no, I-I don't think so. I'm not that kind of actor. I—well, I don't know, Dad—I show them it's all right to be a human being, I guess.

**ALEXANDER:** *(Shaking his head.)* No Stewart has ever gone into show business!

*(Beat.)*

Except one who ran off with a circus—and he wound up in jail!

**JIMMY:** You know I want to please you, Dad—but I just graduated college. I think it's time I made my own decisions.

*(There is a tense pause, as ALEXANDER assesses JIMMY. He then nods curtly.)*

**ALEXANDER:** That I can respect.

**JIMMY:** Thank you, sir.

**ALEXANDER:** But—but the hardware store will be waiting for you when it's time.

**JIMMY:** Dad...

**ALEXANDER:** It will be waiting.

*(ALEXANDER exits back into the party. BESSIE comes up to JIMMY.)*

**BESSIE:** It's my turn.

**JIMMY:** What?

**BESSIE:** When you were a child, I was your best friend. But as you grew older, you and your father became a little obsessed with each other.

**JIMMY:** *Mother—*

**BESSIE:** No, you listen. You want to go be with those actor types. Go ahead. I'm sure you'll live something beautiful while you're with them. But don't you dare let them change you.

**JIMMY:** Maybe I need change. Maybe I want change.

**BESSIE:** Don't become cynical. Don't let them take away my good, gentle boy.

**JIMMY:** I'm not a boy anymore.

*(JIMMY exits, leaving BESSIE mystified. Blackout.)*

## **SCENE EIGHT**

*JOSH and JIMMY enter the theater in the Elizabeth Theater in Cape Cod, where actors are memorizing lines, set builders are working, etc.*

**JOSH:** ...and here is the stage itself! We were lucky to...

**JIMMY:** So, uhm, Josh this is nice and all—but I haven't seen Peggy.

**JOSH:** Uhm, yeah, Jimmy, about that...

*(MARGARET enters from back stage of the theater, carrying a box of her things, with HENRY FONDA right behind her. Neither of them notice JIMMY or JOSH at first. In fact, they totally disregard all of the actors, set builders, etc. through their tempestuous argument.)*

**MARGARET:** Henry, it's over, it's done, just get away!

**HENRY:** Not until we have this out, Peggy, not until you own up to—

**MARGARET:** You don't get to call me Peggy anymore!

**HENRY:** All right then, Miss Sullavan, but you might not like some of the other names I come up with!

*(MARGARET slaps HENRY.)*

**JIMMY:** *(Whispering to JOSH)* Wha-what in tarnation...

**JOSH:** *(Whispering back)* Welcome back to the world of actors, Jimmy. We certainly like to make a scene.

**HENRY:** You know, that's when I first fell in love with you. When you would actually slap me in our first play together. No pretending there!

**MARGARET:** And yet you still didn't get the hint.

**HENRY:** How could I with what you communicated to me in those eyes after the slap?

**MARGARET:** Don't get sentimental with me

**HENRY:** Hell yes, you can do sentiment, too, but underneath that you're all fire and burns. Cream and sugar on a dish of hot ashes!

**MARGARET:** Yeah, I ended up being a little too hot for you, didn't I, Hank? Here you are 26 years old and handsome as sin, but you're an adolescent in the bedroom!

**JIMMY:** Erm, Josh, may-maybe we should leave...

**JOSH:** No, Jimmy. I think you need to see this.

**HENRY:** You—you want to go there? You who I caught with that son of a bitch womanizer Harris?!

**MARGARET:** Jed at least knew how to please a woman, Mr. Fonda!

*(MARGARET takes a set pillow and throws it at HENRY, who throws the pillow hard back at Margaret, which infuriates her.)*

You were a simpering little puppy—Jed was a cobra!

**HENRY:** I, at least, loved you.

**MARGARET:** Loved me? We were not living off love! Let me tell you what happened here, Mr. Fonda.

You saw a woman of passion, a woman of strength, a woman of authenticity—you saw a woman who could really slap you and you said, “If I can have her, then I must be worth something. If I can tame *her*, I may be a *real* man!” Well, let me tell you, Pinocchio—you’re not a real man, after all. I’ve been the one getting the big roles in New York now...

**JIMMY:** *(To JOSH, on top of MARGARET’S lines)* New York?

**JOSH:** Not now, Jimmy...

**MARGARET:** ...I’ve been the one getting the press and the agents coming after me. You, on the other hand, have to promise to help build sets and stooge for theatres to get \$5 a week with this dinky theater in Cape Cod! So, little man, let’s just drop the pretenses that you can keep up with me!

**JOSH:** Dinky theater, eh? You weren’t too big for this theater a little while ago, Miss Sullavan!

**MARGARET:** *(Twirling towards JOSH)* And let me tell *you* something, Josh—

*(MARGARET’S eyes widen upon seeing JIMMY.)*

Jimmy? Oh, Jimmy, what are you doing here?

**JIMMY:** Peggy, don’t you worry, I—

**JOSH:** He’s joining this “dinky” little theatre company. He’s now one of the University Players.

**JIMMY:** But, Peggy, what’s this about you going to New York? I-I’m here because—

**MARGARET:** Jimmy—Jimmy, it’s happened. I’m going to Broadway.

**JIMMY:** Th-that—that’s great. But I—I thought—

*(JIMMY trails off. MARGARET looks at JOSH accusingly.)*

**MARGARET:** What did you tell him?

**JOSH:** *(Defensively)* What does it matter to you? What do we little people matter to you anymore?

**MARGARET:** You’re a piece of work, Josh.

**JOSH:** I’m not the one who just played out my hot and twisted sex life for an audience.

*(MARGARET goes to JIMMY, threatening tears.)*

**MARGARET:** Jimmy—Please, don’t think—

**JIMMY:** Peggy, d-don’t you worry about any of that—



**HENRY:** Margaret, save the crocodile tears for another guy who deserves it! This one actually seems like a decent fella!

*(MARGARET shoots an icy stare at HENRY and then goes back to JIMMY with softness.)*

**JIMMY:** Peggy, I wish you weren't going.

**MARGARET:** I'm sorry you had to see all that, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Peggy, I don't care about any of—

*(JIMMY stops upon seeing MARGARET'S expression. MARGARET gives JIMMY one more soulful look, a peck on the cheek, and then exits with her box of personal items.)*

**HENRY:** Good to see you gone, you self-serving harpy!

**JIMMY:** Josh, I think you owe me an explanation.

**JOSH:** I'm sorry, Jimmy, but if I told you the entire truth, would have you even thought of coming?

**JIMMY:** That was my choice to make.

*(HENRY approaches them.)*

**HENRY:** *(interrupting)* Jimmy, is it? I'm Henry Fonda. I recognize that look on your face. I had one just like it plastered on my face six months ago.

**JIMMY:** Peggy's a gem. I don't want to hear—

**HENRY:** Of course you don't. I wouldn't have either. What chance is there for fellas like us, Jim?

**JIMMY:** I don't know what you're talking about. You're a much better looking man than I am.

**HENRY:** Yeah, I make good bait. But it's reeling in the prize that I'm no good at. What do they really want in a man?

**JIMMY:** *(Looking to where MARGARET left)* If I knew that, I wouldn't be here with you.

*(HENRY chuckles at this, then laughs outright.)*

**HENRY:** You are a good man, Jimmy Stewart. A damn good man.

*(Blackout.)*

## SCENE NINE

*JIMMY is in his dressing room, prepping for one of his 1932 Broadway performances of Carry Nation. There is a knock.*

**JIMMY:** Come in!

*(JOSH enters, carrying a newspaper, showing some signs of despondency.)*

**JOSH:** Hey, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Josh! Just the man I wanted to see! N-now I gotta say it, Josh, I had my doubts—why, I-I was about to throw in the towel and go back to Pennsylvania and then architecture and—but, you pulling me into all these plays, one after another after another and—

**JOSH:** Jimmy—

**JIMMY:** And here we are: Broadway! If some one had told me that I was going to be paid \$35 a week to go on a stage and make people laugh—I mean make people laugh on purpose—you know what I would have told you? I would have told you that you were a crank. Well, shame on me! Why, you're a prophet!

**JOSH:** Really, Jimmy—

**JIMMY:** Who would have guessed that a guy like from me, from a little town in Pennsylvania, could step in front of hundreds of people like that and make them laugh and get good reviews and— waahll— it's not very likely, is it? But you've made me a leading man! I even had an actress flirting with me yesterday—I didn't know what to do with myself!

**JOSH:** Jimmy!

**JIMMY:** *(Beat.)* Everything all right, Josh? You're, well, you're looking a little pale. Wait, that paper— oh. The reviews have come out, haven't they?

**JOSH:** Yes.

**JIMMY:** And they're not good?

**JOSH:** They lambasted us.

**JIMMY:** I—I see.

**JOSH:** Well, I guess you have your real life to go back to. Me? I don't know what I'm going to do with myself.

*(Pause. JIMMY mulls this over.)*

**JIMMY:** Well, now wait a minute, I say wait a minute there now. We're not going to go anywhere. We're in New York now—the city's full of plays! There's bound to be work for us.

**JOSH:** Since the stock market crashed, the work's dried up, Jimmy. Everybody's tightening their belts. And we have those damn movies to go up against—well, this was our chance to make the scene and we blew it!

**JIMMY:** You're right, we need to be practical. And, well, you're lucky. We Stewarts have pragmatism in spades. Let's start with cutting costs. Tighten our own belts.

**JOSH:** All right. Yeah. Okay.

**JIMMY:** Let's move into the same apartment—and bring in some one else to room with us, bring down the rent. You know anyone who'd be interested?

**JOSH:** Actually...

*(There's a fade and shift implying a change of time and place as HENRY FONDA'S face strains with luggage to an apartment. The place is kind of a dive, but HENRY seems plenty relieved enough to get to the apartment door. He knocks. JIMMY opens it.)*

**JIMMY:** Henry! Come in, come in!

**JOSH:** Hank! Good to see you! Do you need help with the rest of your stuff?

**HENRY:** This is it.

**JOSH:** Just two suitcases?

**HENRY:** The actor's life—

**JIMMY:** The actor's life!

*(Blackout.)*

## **SCENE TEN**

*JIMMY and HENRY are sitting down at a table in their apartment, taking their "roles" in building a model airplane, as if they could read each other's minds. JOSH walks by them and stops in disapproval.*

**JOSH:** Are you two at those things again? I thought I spent time with real artists, when I've really just bunked with children!

**HENRY:** Jimmy, do you think there is a difference between artists and children?

**JIMMY:** Naw, we all just tap into the same whimsy.

**JOSH:** I've found myself among boys when I asked for men!

*(JOSH storms off in an artistic flurry. JIMMY and HENRY just shrug him off, enraptured in their model building.)*

**HENRY:** You know building something this intricate and detailed—building something really worth while—it can be really tough, know your craft sort of stuff. But when you see it coming it together like this, you don't really mind the exertion, do you?

**JIMMY:** You consider this work? I do this for fun.

*(They smile at each other and continue to work on the plane. Time shifts again and a GROUP of people enter in a joyful bustle—bohemians, artists, musicians, and Broadway types. JIMMY, HENRY, and JOSH are throwing one of their "Thursday Night Beer Club" gatherings. HENRY is taking big slabs of raw meat covered in kosher salt and cooking them in a broiler, while another cook takes off the salt once they are cooked and then slices them, covers them with butter, and serves them in sandwiches. JOSH is talking with JIMMY.)*

**HENRY:** We've got more sandwiches ready!

**MAN.** Sandwiches? I'm here for the all you can drink beer!

*(There is laughter from the group.)*

**WOMAN.** You're an idiot, if you don't try the sandwiches. Great work, Hank.

**HENRY:** What can I say? I'm a culinary genius. If I ever fail as an actor, I'll open a sandwich shop!

**MAN.** It would probably pay more!

*(More laughter.)*

**JOSH:** We have some luminaries here tonight.

**JIMMY:** I think I just saw Helen Hayes.

**JOSH:** Yep, that's her all right. And there's Benny Goodman. Those folks over there are from NBC Radio. You and Henry struck quite the scheme with this Thursday Night Beer Club of yours. Cheap food and beer mixed with the chance to network, and you have the whole New York theatre, arts and music scene descend upon you.

**HENRY:** We probably spend more than we make with the \$1 price..

**JIMMY** ...but I love it!

**JOSH:** Don't worry about that. I just talked to Mildred Natwick. She's taking pity on you and covering the bill tonight. She's afraid that you and Hank will literally starve to death, if you keep this up.

**JIMMY:** Starve to death! Look at all that food!

**JOSH:** Which other people are eating.

**JIMMY:** Believe me, I eat more than my fair share of the hobo steak sandwiches.

**JOSH:** Yeah, we've seen how you eat!

*(Suddenly JOSH stops, shocked. JIMMY turns to see who he is looking at and see MARGARET enter the room. HENRY also sees her and immediately becomes sullen and stormy as they match gazes briefly. MARGARET dismissively ignores HENRY and goes straight to JIMMY.)*

**MARGARET:** Jimmy!

**JIMMY:** Peggy?

**HENRY:** Margaret?

*(MARGARET nearly bowls over JIMMY with a big hug and she gives him an affectionate kiss on the cheek. HENRY, meanwhile watches all of this go on and glowers at MARGARET, which she efficiently ignores.)*

**JIMMY:** What are you doing here?

**MARGARET:** I saw your show! And I heard about this tradition of yours—very clever, Jimmy. Very

clever.

**JIMMY:** Yeah, Henry and I thought...

**MARGARET:** You were wonderful tonight. Such great comic timing—the reviewers have been very kind to you! Deservedly so!

**JIMMY:** Thank you, Peggy. I, well, I—aw, that means a lot coming from you.

**MARGARET:** I'm so proud of you.

**JIMMY:** Me? Look at you! You're the star of Broadway!

**MARGARET:** Not anymore. At least not for now.

**JIMMY:** What do you mean? Did your show fold?

**MARGARET:** Oh, no—something amazing has happened.

**JIMMY:** Well, I mean, well, are you going to tell me?

*(A number of people have stopped their conversations and are listening to JIMMY and MARGARET, including HENRY whose expression is becoming progressively darker.)*

**MARGARET:** *(Aware of the attention and milking it.)* I have big news for everyone! I'm leaving Broadway for a while.

**JIMMY:** But you're one of the best actresses in New York.

**MARGARET:** Oh, I'll still be acting. Just not in New York. I'm headed West.

**JIMMY:** You don't mean...?

**MARGARET:** Universal Pictures has signed me on. I'm going to Hollywood!

*(After a shocked pause, JIMMY yells in excitement. He embraces MARGARET, who squeals happily. HENRY, in a big huff, storms off to the side.)*

**JIMMY:** Oh—oh dear, I think Henry may be feeling...

**MARGARET:** Oh, he's good at feeling, Jimmy. It's just usually a feeling of self-pity.

**JIMMY:** I-I better go talk to—

**MARGARET:** I'm the one he's mad at. I'll talk to him.

*(MARGARET approaches HENRY as the rest of the group fades away or exits.)*  
I see you haven't changed a bit.

**HENRY:** Could say the same about you.

**MARGARET:** You keep good company, at least.

**HENRY:** You stay away from Jimmy. He may idolize you, but I've tasted your fruit.

**MARGARET:** But never knew how to relish it.

**HENRY:** Why are you doing this?

**MARGARET:** Doing what?

**HENRY:** Gloating.

**MARGARET:** You may not believe this, Hank, but I really did just come to see Jimmy.

**HENRY:** I said stay away from him.

**MARGARET:** I'm glad you're friends with him. He makes things better for whoever he's with.

**HENRY:** But you don't want the "better" things, do you? Just the cheap glitz and glamor.

**MARGARET:** You never had any idea what I wanted.

**HENRY:** You can say that again.

**MARGARET:** Look, Hank, you have the potential to be a somebody. A face like yours? Talent like yours?

You can be anything.

*(HENRY looks up at her, surprised. They connect for a moment.)*

I'm sorry I hurt you. I really am.

*(Pause; a noticeable shift.)*

But you need to stop all of these cold, shut-you-down, Protestant rages. They're getting in your way.

**HENRY:** *(Laughs bitterly)* You almost had me convinced that you had a heart for a second there.

**MARGARET:** You don't know how often I wished you could see my heart, Hank. But that sweet boy, he saw it. He's why I came over. So I don't know why I'm wasting my time out here with you.

**HENRY:** What does Jimmy have to do with you?

**MARGARET:** Don't underestimate him. The fates have big things in store for Jimmy!

**HENRY:** Then what do they have left for me?

**MARGARET:** The Fates gave you gifts a long time ago, Henry. Do something with them.

*(MARGARET exits. Still morose, HENRY exits as well.)*

## **SCENE ELEVEN**

*The apartment. JIMMY enters the room to see HENRY is folding his clothes into another suitcase.*

**JIMMY:** Why, well, Hank, w-what's going on here?

**HENRY:** Jimmy, you won't believe it! My role in *Farmer Takes a Wife* got their attention! It sure got their attention!

**JIMMY:** Got who's attention?

**HENRY:** 20th Century Fox.

**JIMMY:** Hollywood?

**HENRY:** Hollywood!

*(JIMMY whoops and embraces HENRY.)*

**JIMMY:** Hot Dog! You're going to be in the movies!

**HENRY:** So it seems!

**JIMMY:** This is big. This is really big, Hank.

**HENRY:** I know, I know! And you know what? Maybe you're next. This role of yours now, maybe the agents will get wind of the swell work you're doing in it and—

*(HENRY sees JIMMY'S expression fall.)*

Something happened.

**JIMMY:** Things didn't go well tonight. I won't be going back.

**HENRY:** I'm sorry to hear that, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** You know, I'm wondering if it's not for the best. I got another letter from my folks and my Dad—

**HENRY:** Now stop right there. You don't want to run that store, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** But am I really cut out for this?

**HENRY:** That's not the right question. Do you want to do this, Jimmy?

**JIMMY:** I—well—

**HENRY:** Because if you want to go be an architect or fly or whatever, then stop wasting your time here. But, if you value this—

**JIMMY:** I actually do, Hank. Well, I figure, well—well, darn it, that's the trouble. I'm just thrilled when I'm around folks like you or Josh or—or when Peggy was around—

**HENRY:** No, don't bring Peggy into this. Or me or Josh. Why do you do this? What makes you happy?

*(JIMMY is at a loss, but then looks over at an unfinished model of US Army Air Corps Martin Bomber. He stares at it somberly for a moment, but then smiles at HENRY.)*

**JIMMY:** I think what would make me happy at this moment is working on that Martin Bomber with you one last time.

*(They BOTH give each other knowing looks and, without another word go to their model making. In the unspoken language they have developed between each other, JIMMY and HENRY work on the model airplane.)*

**HENRY:** When I'm gone, I'll leave the painting of it for you.

**JIMMY:** *(thoughtful shift)* I used to run the projector in our town's movie theater.

**HENRY:** Sounds like a swell job for a kid.

**JIMMY:** I saw all those beautiful women and fell in love every time. I loved going to those movies, living those lives.

**HENRY:** Me too.

**JIMMY:** But I used to look at those men. They didn't look or act anything like me. Where did a guy like me fit into their world of manly heroes? You wouldn't see an accordion in the hands of Clark Gable, now would you?

**HENRY:** Now Jimmy—

**JIMMY:** When I look at you, though, Hank, I see a movie star! You're the man the casting agents are after.

**HENRY:** Well, here's what I think, Jimmy. I think it's the other way around.

**JIMMY:** What do you mean?

**HENRY:** We get caught up with ourselves—we have our own kind of nervousness we're constantly trying to hide up. And then somebody like you shows up and we get all self conscious again.

**JIMMY:** I wouldn't intimidate a man or woman in the world.

**HENRY:** That's not true. You expose that world as the fakes they are with your damn, frustrating authenticity.

*(Lights fade.)*

## **SCENE TWELVE**

*Theatre lobby. ALEXANDER and BESSIE are waiting for him after one of his performances in New York.*

**BESSIE:** Well, didn't I tell you? He's very good!

**ALEXANDER:** The costumes were horrible. None of those actors knew a thing about being in the military.

**BESSIE:** Yes, but Jimmy was magnificent.

**ALEXANDER:** Are we really encouraging this?

**BESSIE:** You should have seen him last time I came— so happy!

**ALEXANDER:** It's not—it's not the life for Jimmy.

**BESSIE:** And you're willing to decide that for him, are you? And if he follows your orders, and ends up miserable—are you willing to bear his resentment then?

**ALEXANDER:** And if he follows this path, and ends up ruined and in poverty— and I could have stopped him?



**BESSIE:** Remember the prodigal son. He had to make his own choices too.

**ALEXANDER:** I always related with the brother who stayed home.

*(JIMMY, still in costume, pops his head out into the lobby and sees his parents. Identifying them, he rushes to them.)*

**JIMMY:** I'm so glad you came!

**BESSIE:** It was even better the second time!

**JIMMY:** It was so good for you to come again, Mama!

*(JIMMY embraces BESSIE, delighted. He then faces ALEXANDER. There is an unspoken tension.)*

I thought you weren't going to be able to come, Father.

**ALEXANDER:** Your mother couldn't stop talking about the show. You're getting the lead roles now, she kept saying. How splendid you were, she kept saying. How could I not come after all that?

**JIMMY:** And what did you think?

**ALEXANDER:** *(Pause)* Your soldiers are wearing their hats wrong.

*(ALEXANDER adjusts JIMMY'S hat.)*

This is how they should be worn.

*(JIMMY and ALEXANDER look at each other solidly in the eyes, not without affection. Enter HENRY FONDA and BILL GRADY, a Hollywood talent scout.)*

**HENRY:** Jimmy!

*(HENRY and JIMMY embrace.)*

**JIMMY:** What are you doing here, Henry?

**HENRY:** What do you mean? You think I would miss your big opening? I flew in!

**JIMMY:** You didn't have to do that.

**HENRY:** Yes, I did. Now, Jimmy, I was surprised to be sitting in the same row as this fellow here. Let me introduce you both. Jimmy, this is Bill Grady.

**JIMMY:** *(Shaking BILL'S hand)* Good to meet you, sir.

**HENRY:** Bill's a talent scout for MGM.

**JIMMY:** Oh?

*(Beat.)*

Oh!

**BILL:** I was sent out to check out one of the actresses. But I think I will have someone else's name on my lips when I check back in with Louis B. Mayer.

**ALEXANDER:** Oh, but this acting thing is just temporary for Jimbo—

**BILL:** Not if I have anything to do with it. I want them to fly you out to Hollywood, James, and give you a screen test.

**BESSIE:** A screen test?

**BILL:** It's a kind of audition. If all goes well, as I think it will, they could offer you a position as a contract player for \$350 a week.

**JIMMY:** \$350 a week?

**BILL:** That doesn't sound like bad money, does it, Jimmy?

**JIMMY:** Not at all, sir.

**ALEXANDER:** Jimbo—

**JIMMY:** A screen test, you say?

**BILL:** If they like you, the contract would probably be for about seven years.

**ALEXANDER:** That seems like a long commitment.

**HENRY:** Jimmy, this is your chance.

**JIMMY:** Seven years?

**HENRY:** Jimmy, look at me. They're not asking men like Gable or Errol Flynn right now. They're asking you. I know you didn't see yourself on that silver screen when you were the one running the projector. But you need the imagination to see that maybe now it's possible.

*(ALEXANDER and BESSIE exchange a worried glance, but JIMMY is looking straight at HENRY and then looks back at BILL: )*

**JIMMY:** Mr. Grady, sign me up.

*(Blackout.)*

### **SCENE THIRTEEN**

*HENRY leads JIMMY into their new home in Hollywood.*

**JIMMY:** So is that really Greta Garbo's place next door? You're not pulling my leg?

**HENRY:** Yep.

**JIMMY:** You ever see her?

**HENRY:** You saw those high fences. She's pretty private—except when she complains about the cats.

**JIMMY:** Cats?

**HENRY:** I hope you're a cat person. I got a couple and then leave out food for the strays and, well, we've

garnered quite a collection now. Not allergic, are you?

**JIMMY:** No, but, erm...

*(JOSH enters.)*

**JOSH:** Jimmy! Just like old times!

*(JOSH comes and shakes JIMMY's hand.)*

**JIMMY:** Josh! What are you doing here?

**HENRY:** Didn't I tell you? Josh is helping David Selznick as a dialogue director.

**JIMMY:** But you've always said that stage acting was your thing.

**JOSH:** *(embarrassed)* Well, it is. Work kind of dried up for me in New York—but Henry's been, uhm, very kind to let me stay with him for a bit.

**JIMMY:** You really do collect us strays, don't you, Henry?

**HENRY:** My home is your home, fellas.

*(JIMMY starts rummaging through the luggage in the trunk and pulls out a box.)*

**JIMMY:** I have a gift for you, Hank.

**HENRY:** What? Jimmy now why did you do a silly thing like that?

**JIMMY:** Open the box.

*(JIMMY hands HENRY the box. Curious, HENRY opens the box and pulls the Martin Bomber plane they had been working on together, but now fully painted.)*

**HENRY:** *(very pleased.)* Jimmy, you son of gun. I know exactly where I'll put this.

*(HENRY gets some wire and hangs up the model airplane. They look at it admiringly.)*

Fellas, you're about to live the high life!

*(A shift in time as guests file in, music starts playing, and a party begins. HENRY walks up to JIMMY with LUCILLE BALL.)*

Okay, pal, here's my girl that I keep talking about. James Stewart meet Lucille Ball.

**LUCY:** Please, call me Lucy.

**JIMMY:** And I'm Jimmy. Henry says that you're good at making him laugh!

**LUCY:** To be honest, I think he prefers crying! He's a bit sensitive, this little puppy of mine, but I like that. Had enough time with the rough types, to appreciate a sensitive soul.

**HENRY:** Hey, I'm a party animal.

**LUCY:** Let's cut the rug a bit then, honey.

**HENRY:** Oh—dancing.

**LUCY:** See what I mean? Do you dance, Jimmy? Maybe a little swing?

**JIMMY:** Yeah, a little bit. I mean I'm no one to throw into a Gershwin show, but—

**LUCY:** A-ha! You see that pretty girl over there?

**JIMMY:** Is that really...?

**LUCY:** Ginger Rogers.

**JIMMY:** I—I love her films.

**LUCY:** Ask her to dance, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Ask Ginger Rogers to dance?

**LUCY:** Do you Charleston?

**JIMMY:** Yeah, but—*Ginger Rogers*.

**LUCY:** She loves to Charleston.

**JIMMY:** Yeah, but I'm a—well, uh, what I mean to say is—I like women—I love women! I'm just...

**LUCY:** Scared of women.

**JIMMY:** Yeah.

**LUCY:** Adorable. Look, honey, Ginger's been through two bad marriages. A nice guy like you may be just what she needs.

*(Calling to GINGER.)*

Ginger, doll, come over here!

**JIMMY:** Oh, no, no, uh, really—

*(GINGER ROGERS comes over.)*

**LUCY:** This boy likes the Charleston.

**GINGER.** Is that so?

**JIMMY:** Uh, I, I suppose, uh—yes.

**GINGER.** Hank, you got something to dance to?

**HENRY:** Sure thing.

*(HENRY goes to prep the gramophone.)*

**GINGER.** I'm Ginger.

**JIMMY:** I, uh, well, I know who you are.

**GINGER.** And you are—?

**JIMMY:** Not as famous as you.

**GINGER.** An actor?

**JIMMY:** I—I just signed with MGM.

**GINGER.** A working man! All the better.

**JIMMY:** My name's Jimmy Stewart.

*(The music changes to an upbeat dancing tune which they can Charleston to.)*

**GINGER.** Will you dance with me, Jimmy?

**JIMMY:** Honestly—it would be a dream come true.

*(JIMMY and GINGER begin to dance. A group surrounds them to watch, and some jump in.)*

**GINGER.** Say, you're not half bad.

**JIMMY:** Did Ginger Rogers just compliment my dancing?

**GINGER.** Well, let's see if you deserve any more compliments later on. The night is young.

*(After watching GINGER and JIMMY dance for a moment, HENRY leans into LUCY)*

**HENRY:** If you'll be patient with me, I think I may be up for a dance after all.

**LUCY:** That's my boy!

*(LUCY and HENRY join the dancing, a contagious enjoyment affecting the whole room. The lights fade and there's a time shift. It's the next morning and HENRY is making some coffee. LUCY enters and comes in to snuggle him from behind.)*

**LUCY:** Hey, tiger.

**HENRY:** Have the lovebirds woken up yet?

*(JIMMY enters the room. He looks at HENRY and LUCY alternately, reddening.)*

**JIMMY:** Uh, uhm, well...

**LUCY:** Good morning, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Good morning.

**LUCY:** Is Ginger still asleep?

**JIMMY:** Uh, Ginger, yes, erm, Ginger's still a-asleep.

**LUCY:** We'll keep quiet for her then.

*(JIMMY, embarrassed, goes aside into an area designated for a backyard.)*

Is this his...

**HENRY:** ... first time? Yeah. I tried to urge him on in New York, but he had a bit of a—strict upbringing. That boy was as virginal as a priest.

**LUCY:** Do you think we shouldn't have...?

**HENRY:** I can go talk to him.

**LUCY:** All right.

*(JIMMY is leaning on the porch in the back, looking wracked with guilt. HENRY comes out and closes the door behind him.)*

**HENRY:** So—you spent the night with Ginger Rogers!

**JIMMY:** I, uh, I know.

**HENRY:** I meant it a little more positively than that. It's what we call "getting lucky" in these parts.

**JIMMY:** Don't get me wrong. She was—was—incredible. *Is* incredible! I mean—Ginger Rogers!

**HENRY:** Yeah, that's the spirit!

**JIMMY:** But...

**HENRY:** Now, Jimmy...

**JIMMY:** Look, I'm not judging anyone here—obviously, I couldn't anymore, even if I wanted to. But for you, well, yeah, that makes sense! But, well, uhm, that's not how I was raised.

*(Beat.)*

My mother would be so disappointed in me.

**HENRY:** You're not a little boy anymore, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** I was raised to respect women, to treat them with dignity and...

**HENRY:** Look, Jimmy, did you seduce Ginger? Did you get her drunk or do anything she was uncomfortable with?

**JIMMY:** No, of-of course not, but...

*(GINGER enters. LUCY indicates that they are in the back and she goes out and listens, unobserved.)*

**HENRY:** Then let her make her own decisions and you make yours. That's what respect means around here. Leave your parents and your background and all of that out of it. If you had followed your parents choices, you'd be in that hardware store, like a ball and chain. I'll tell you this, Jimmy, you weren't Ginger's first and you certainly won't be her last. So you two had some fun and shared an intimate moment—so what? You did not take anything from her last night.

**GINGER.** But did I take something away from Jimmy?

*(They both turn to see GINGER standing there.)*

Hank, can I have a moment alone with Jimmy?

**HENRY:** Sure.

*(HENRY exits into the house. GINGER cuddles into JIMMY and takes his hand. JIMMY looks down at her and smiles.)*

**JIMMY:** I, well, I didn't mean to make a scene...

**GINGER.** Jimmy, from what you told me last night, your parents sound pretty great.

**JIMMY:** They are.

**GINGER.** They didn't want you to come here, did they?

**JIMMY:** No.

**GINGER.** My parents were pretty great, too. But there were arguments and divorce and—well, there were times in my history where I would have loved your family centered, Sunday School life. Last night—you were gentle and respectful, but...

*(With a sly, happy smile.)*

...you had some surprising passion, too. I'm really going to treasure that. You've kept that feeling locked up all this time?

**JIMMY:** I must seem like such a weakling to you.

**GINGER.** No—no! You're very sweet. A real gentleman. Not to mention handsome.

**JIMMY:** Now I know you're just trying to make me feel better!

**GINGER.** No. No, I'm not. You're a rare breed around here, Jimmy. We're all here for different reasons, needing different kinds of—validation.

*(Beat.)*

Jimmy—would you like to keep this going for a while? Really try it out?

**JIMMY:** You mean—us?

**GINGER.** Yeah. I really wasn't planning on packing this up yet—this wasn't just some one night stand. I like you.

**JIMMY:** *(Pause; then a small, pleasant laugh.)* Ginger Rogers likes me.

*(GINGER leans in and the two embrace sweetly and affectionately. She kisses him.)*

**GINGER.** You think you could get used to that?

**JIMMY:** As long as you don't mind if I get a little star struck now and then.

**GINGER.** A man who relentlessly adores me? Yeah, I think I can make that do.

*(Another kiss and then they exit.)*

## **SCENE FOURTEEN**

*BILL GRADY [the same agent who “discovered” Jimmy in the theatre the night his parents came to his show] enters an office and sees MGM's big boss LOUIS B. MAYER sitting sternly at his desk.*

**MAYER:** What the hell do you think you're doing, Grady?

**BILL:** Howdy-do to you, too, boss.

**MAYER:** Don't get cute with me. Rapf tells me that you've been interfering with his film. Been saddling him with this James Stewart fella when he didn't want him.

**BILL:** Hey, I okayed the casting with Whelan.

**MAYER:** *After* Rapf told you that he didn't want Stewart in it! The character's a jockey, and you put a 6'2 actor in the role!

**BILL:** Jimmy can play it.

**MAYER:** This is not how we do things at MGM! Going to the producer over the head of the film's director—you thought that would fly?

**BILL:** Mr. Mayer, Stewart's talented. When I saw that play, he had that audience eating from the palm of his hand.

**MAYER:** I've seen this guy, Bill. He's lanky, awkward, has absolutely no sex appeal—completely vanilla—what were you thinking bringing him on? Tell me why I shouldn't fire both you and Stewart on the spot!

**BILL:** You can't fire me, Mr. Mayer. I just signed on for another five years. You fire me, my contract says you still have to pay me for that time. You want all that money to just go to waste, or you do want me to actually do my job?

**MAYER:** Casting shows is not your job!

**BILL:** You wanted me to find you talent, well, I found you talent. I trust my gut on this guy.

**MAYER:** *(Long pause.)* All right. Keep him in the film. But don't think it ends there, Grady. Both you and Stewart are on my radar now. And that's not a pleasant place to be.

*(Lights fade on MAYER and GRADY and switch to another office where EDWARD GRIFFITH enters to find MARGARET and Universal Studio's president CARL LAEMMLE in mid-argument.)*

**LAEMMLE:** Do you know how big *The Next Time We Love* is going to be, Miss Sullavan? And you want me to spoil it on a no-name actor! From another studio no less!

**MARGARET:** You won't be spoiling it on anybody. He is going to be big, Carl, he's going to be huge!

**LAEMMLE:** Tell me, Ed, have you heard of Jimmy Stewart?

**GRIFFITH.** Jimmy who?

**LAEMMLE:** If Louis B. Mayer has no inkling to have him headline a movie, why should I?

**MARGARET:** Don't be a numb headed idiot, Carl! It's not him you'll be headlining—it's me!

**LAEMMLE:** Exactly! Which is why I'm flummoxed! I'm giving you a chance here, Miss Sullavan. You've proven your worth to us, your films have been damn great, your acting top notch. Why would you want to risk it on a second rate character-juvenile actor when we should pair you with a real leading man?

**MARGARET:** You milk-licking, weak livered coward! Aren't you listening to me?

**LAEMMLE:** The role is already cast!



**MARGARET:** Then un-cast it! Look, I don't like the script, I don't give a shit for your leading man, and you and I both know that the only thing that is second rate around here is this studio!

**LAEMMLE:** Hey now!

**MARGARET:** So, if you want me to do this film without making life a living hell for all of you, then toss the other actor's ass at a different film, call up MGM, and get me Jimmy Stewart!

*(MARGARET storms out of the office, slamming the door behind her. LAEMMLE collapses into his chair and then looks up at GRIFFITH.)*

**GRIFFITH.** Carl, I think we both know what the only answer to a woman like Margaret Sullavan is.

*(Lights fade on LAEMMLE and GRIFFITH and switch back to Mayer's office, where MAYER is now alone. MAYER'S phone rings and he picks it up.)*

**MAYER:** Hello? Well, if it isn't the distinguished competition! You want who? Stewart? Did I hear you right? You mean *James* Stewart? You want to borrow him for how much? You sure? Well— damn. All right, Carl, sure, I'll be glad to get something for the guy. Well, have your people send me the papers. And, Carl—see ya at the next awards ceremony. I'll be in the winner's circle.

*(MAYER puts down the phone.)*

Well, I'll be damned. I still don't see what everyone sees in that skinny son of a bitch.

**END ACT ONE**

**42 pages to the end of Act Two**