



Hello?! The command comes from the very top ~ ~

Nick Stillen will direct a voluptuous remake of "Naughty Marietta".

Nick (however) is famed for his superb comedic talent.

And for directing eye-popping action movies.

So ... Musical comedy?

Nick claims that it is all like wading around in stilettos in freshly laid lava ...

But Nick **MUST NOT** fail!

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NICK STILLEN'S CASQUETTE GIRL

FOREWORD

The MGM film "Naughty Marietta" might have been a lavish Hollywood movie in 1935, featuring some of Tinseltown's favourite stars – however, it is a definite museum-piece now.

With schmoozy music (courtesy of Victor Herbert) and a drippy love story, the 1935 film will need a major overhaul in order to drag it into the 21st century. For instance, what can possibly be done with the male chorus belting out the chauvinistic "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!"?

Director Nick Stillen is not in the mood: he would much rather be bringing "Leviticus Uplifted" to fruition.

But there are people in high places who want the rehash of the operetta (which is devoted to and was inspired by the Casquette Girls) to become a roaring success.

Very high places ...

Very high places ...

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PROLOGUE

PROL Scene i: A Darkened Theatrette

Our camera is positioned as if it is part of the large plasma screen, such that Nick looks straight at the camera whilst watching the black-and-white film: "Naughty Marietta" of 1935. We hear the overture and first offerings. Also in the theatrette (unseen) is Nick's assistant, Gray Kramer.

The film begins with Nick laughing delightedly at something that Gray has said. At the same time, Nick feeds his face with something chocolate-coated and crunchy from a bag.

Nick *calling out* Well, I never had much luck at the craps table, but I'm global master at chutes and ladders.

Gray *voice-off* But can ya win much money from that?

Nick chuckles, absently waving Gray off.

A flickering light above Nick indicates that the projector is now running the film. Nick watches fondly as the MGM lion roars.

Nick *to himself* There goes old Leo, winding us up for the next hour-and-a-half of melodies and mayhem ...

The film continues (credits and overture).

Nick *calling out* Do we have to have the black-and-white print? Can't you get hold of a colorized version?

The film trundles on.

Nick *calling out, delighted* Hey! This is a porn flick, right?

Gray *voice-off* No way, man! It's a straight mews-com. Straight-up!

Nick *calling out, dissatisfied and* Then why is this Marietta "naughty"? Bad girl, slut, hussy, love goddess...

comedic

Gray *voice-off* No! She stays a virgin right up until the end credits.

Nick is bored and uncomfortable and shifts about in his seat.

Nick *calling-out,* Aw, now this chick is singing to a little birdie.
annoyed

Gray *voice-off* Yeah, she has a fabulous set of lungs. Some pipes!

Nick gives up. He has finished his snack, and so screws the pack up in a fatalistic way, chucking it over his shoulder. Then he stands and sidles out of the theatrette.

Nick *calling-out,* Send me a text when you got a colour version of this crap, will ya?
impatient

Nick stalks out into the darkness. We can just make out that Nick opens a door and exits through it.

Gray appears in the gloomy light with the projector light behind him.

Gray *to no-one* ... but you haven't seen the pirates yet ...

Our camera moves around, such that we can see Gray silhouetted by the huge plasma screen. The screen portrays Jeanette MacDonald singing "Chansonette". We do not hear the 1935 version of the song as we fade out. Meanwhile, Gray lights and smokes a cigar right in front of the fading screen.

FADE OUT AND SEGUE INTO NEXT SCENE

PROL Scene ii: A Dimly-lit Underground Bunker At CIA Headquarters

This is an ultra modern cavern in which the CIA operatives work. They work on an enormous glass table which is in fact a super touch-sensitive LCD computer screen. This screen is reflected up onto huge screens, such that all can see what is going on. Some sections of the screen focus inwards in high fidelity; others zoom out.

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There is a great bustle of activity, but all of it is professional and meaningful. The operatives wear grey jumpsuits and fitted Bluetooth earphones. We are able to make out only an indistinct buzz of voices: we cannot make out the actual words spoken.

And then, over all this crackles a very distinct female voice: "Sadler to the Whitehouse by south exit. Car is waiting."

Ralph Sadler scampers out of the room, peeling off his jumpsuit as he goes. From a peg, Ralph grabs his t-shirt and tracky dacks and scrambles into these items of clothing, whilst trying to slip his feet into a pair of loafers.

Ralph dives into a car which waits (engine running) in an underground chamber. This vehicle is disguised as a tradesman's panel van. Upon Ralph entering the back of the car, the driver (disguised as a tradesman) guns the car.

END OF SCENE

PROL Scene iii: In The Whitehouse, A Corridor Between Offices And Into A Secure Room

At the Whitehouse, Ralph meets up with Professor Matthew Crockett-Henschal who seems to be awaiting him in the corridor.

Ralph notices Matthew's surprised glance at his very relaxed attire as they head off along the corridor.

Ralph *apologetic* So sorry about the rig-out, Professor. I was working when the urgent call came through.

Matthew I don't care ... but **she** will.

Ralph halts, aghast. Matthew hurries him along, chuckling.

Matthew *reassuring* Explain it to her. What else is there for it? Come on! The General (General Grove, that is) and Mrs Glenville are up to speed with

where you and I left off last time.

Not that I can remember back that far ...

And then the two men attend the briefing.

The Briefing.

Ralph quickly apologizes for his casual getup, receives a tight-lipped response from Mrs Glenville and is shushed by General Groves. Apart from Matt and Ralph, the other occupants in the room: General Groves, Mrs Patricia Glenville (aide to the President) and her assistant (Aiden Hudson) and a couple of junior aides. Ralph and Matthew sit.

Aiden A high-end arms dealer working out of Beirut has made overtures, Ma'am, Sir.

It seems that –

Ralph *apologetic* But he's not actually *in* Beirut. And all indications are that he's from what was the Eastern bloc.

Excuse me. Sorry to interrupt, but ...

It's evident that he's much closer to home than --

Aiden *utterly patient;* Yeah, we'll get to that.

points to pertinent people So, it seems that a weapon may soon come onto the market with vastly superior capabilities than anything we've seen so far. It's totally ground-breaking ... radical. Added to which, it's apparently totally undetectable.

I've asked CIA operative Ralph Sadler to make you aware of this highly-charged situation that appears to be brewing. Professor Matthew Crockett-Henschal will fill you in on the current progress of our information-gathering from a psychological perspective.

General Groves and Mrs Glenville nod, impatient to hear the full story. Aiden continues.

how, but I guess we stumbled upon it whilst building our very sketchy psychological profile of this spirit-like man.

Oh ... and it's worth noting at this juncture that we aren't even sure of his gender. This could be a "Princesse", if you will. But we're leaning towards a male.

General Groves Continue!
impatient

The Professor makes a maximum impact with the use of his eyes.

Matthew I believe that we can flush him out with a most attractive lure.

It's probable (**very** probable) that the Prince is involved somehow in the dramatic arts. Television, film, stage ... and whether as an actor or crewman, your guess is as good as mine.

General Groves No guesswork please! We need to know for sure if he's an actor or what have you ... Let's remain focused on facts and disregard the unknown quantifiabiles here.

Now, who are our main competitors in the race to obtain "Marietta"?

Ralph Not the Middle-Eastern states, Sir, most of whom have expressed only lukewarm interest. They've been bitten before by just this kind of tricky gadgetry. And thus, they're standing back (which might otherwise have been surprising). But the Indian subcontinent is keen. They're sending a multi-flag delegation to meet with the arms dealer and thus with the Prince as soon as he surfaces.

Mrs Glenville Well, we need to get there first. Do we have a strategy in place for that?

Aiden Affirmative. "Operation Zingzing", Ma'am.

Mrs Glenville Ready for immediate deployment?

Aiden Affirmative, Ma'am.

Ralph Also, if I might add, a couple of minor East European nations have waved their handkerchiefs. We're keeping a close watch on any apparent undertakings in those quarters.

General Groves *nods* Fine. What next? Professor: you mentioned being able to flush out this guy? What's that all about?

Matthew *nods* The psych profile leads me to make several conspicuous inferences ... The upshot is that I've approached a group of the President's ticketed supporters in order to engage in a rather bizarre ploy, in keeping with the elements of "Marietta", "casket" and "France" (which sparse clues Ralph has already mentioned).
The negotiations have progressed speedily and we've obtained a guarantee that the 1935 film "Naughty Marietta" will be remade and revamped. Such a production will surely draw this unknown weapon-maker to the table like a pin to a magnet.

General Groves *totally unimpressed* What a crock! It just sounds too crazy. This guy won't nibble such a --

Mrs Glenville *alert* Who? Who are these money-men? I mean: can I trust them?

Matthew *looks about, unaware if the General's reaction should silence him* Roy Gilderstein has taken the reins as head of Production. Along with Roy, we've retained the Remi-Daas Consortium. The CEO there (Linus Conger) is putting it about that he's mad to remake this dusty old classic in honour of his late mother, whose favourite film this was.

Mrs Glenville Uh-huh.

Matthew And we have Lazy Dayz Productions, Al Aller Creepers, Joe & Midge Sedgemore and the Hallways Company. I'll be acting as the on-set production supremo so as to retain visibility.

Aiden That's good! And plenty of money. Good again!

Matthew Yep, plenty of brass.

Mrs Glenville And the director?

Matthew Nick Stillen, Ma'am.

Aiden Mr Stillen has openly expressed his doubts about remaking this film. No doubt we can bring him around, however.

Mrs Glenville *wary* Oh?

Ralph He thinks it's so outdated that it has historical interest only.

Mrs Glenville Well ... He's kind-of got a point there ...

General Groves *to himself* Ah! I don't like this scheme one bit. It smells stronger than a stale sardine.

Matthew Certainly, it's a museum piece, but --

Ralph Played at old folks' homes but nowhere else.

Mrs Glenville *smiling coyly* And only then if the inmates are either too drunk to care or are too spaced-out to know.

Matthew My sincere opinion is that we genuinely need Mr Stillen's co-operation if we're going to pull this one off.

Aiden *reassuring* Yes, but we'll all pull together to persuade him ...

END OF SCENE

TITLES roll through.



ACT I

I, Scene i: Christina Naylor's Kitchen

Christina and her helper Gloria are very busy making all sorts of treats for an upcoming dinner party. Nick sits on a stool, in the ladies' way, randomly trying-out various foodstuffs.

Christina *annoyed* Do you **have** to sit right there? We have a dandy balcony with views of --

Nick *determined* I want you to tell me what you know of the movie "Naughty Marietta", starring Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy. 1935. Directed by Woody van Dyke and financed by Hunt Stromberg. (I love that name: "Hunt": I want to conjure up nicknames for him).

Christina stands tall, hands on the counter. She takes a big breath. She appears mulish.

Nick *cajoling* Your opinion is my most earnest guide in any single undertaking. You know that.

Christina Well, you know that I'm descended from a real casquette girl. Mariame de Peirard arrived in New Orleans in 1720 and then married Mr Dirk Thomas. Their first child was born a bit later: Marcus Thomas. And so it went on and on until I came along so

many moons later.

It's all written in black ink in the back of a great big old leather-bound bible that's been handed down to my Mother.

Gloria *surprised*

I didn't know that! That you are a daughter of the King's daughters?

Christina *proud*

I always put it on my CV to impress --

Nick *confused*

Yes, yes! We're all thrilled to pieces that you have noble relatives. But what do casquette girls have to do with my chronically awful movie?

Christina

Start from the beginning.

Marietta is a French princess at the time of one of the Louis's: can't remember which one ... The Fourteenth? Fifteenth?

Anyway, they were sending orphan girls of good quality out to the colonies to marry bachelor settlers. The king gave them a casket (a small wooden box) in which to carry all their belongings. That's how come the name.

So anyhow, this princess wants to escape from a ghastly marriage. She disguises herself as one of these casquette girls and sails over the Atlantic. They get set upon by pirates but are rescued by a tough group of vigilantes, led by Captain Dick Warrington.

Nick gives a loud shout of laughter.

Nick *delighted*

I knew this would end up being a skin flick. Captain Dick! I love Captain Dick!

Christina

They fall in love after all sorts of escapades and then the French dudes turn up to drag the princess back to civilization. And then the lovers sing "Ah! Sweet mystery of life" on the staircase and it's all so romantic and then Captain Dick spirits her off on the back of his horse and they ride off into the night.

Both Christina and Gloria look goofy. Nick looks uncomfortable and bored.

Nick *sceptical* And I'll just bet that Dickie sings to the princess as he carries her off. Am I right?

Gloria *sentimental* Of course he does ...

Nick *appalled* I think I'll stick to the pirates. Maybe a sword fight with the vigilantes ...

Nick swings himself abruptly off the stool and marches off.

END OF SCENE

I, Scene ii: The Stillens Hold A Lavish Evening Barbeque

A large Hollywood crowd provides a frenzy of activity and merriment.

We hear Nick promise someone that he'll get hold of a choice bottle of cognac. We see Nick thread his way through the bevy of lovelies, with random comments as he travels.

SEQUE INTO THE NEXT SCENE

I, Scene iii: Nick's House, The Library-Den

Aiden Hudson (holding a balloon glass) is casually surveying the contents of Nick's den or library. He hums to himself.

On a coffee table stands (prominently) a bottle of Courvoisier VSOP liqueur cognac. A balloon glass is beside the bottle, already containing a medium amount of cognac.

Nick rushes into the library, stopping abruptly on seeing Aiden (who turns to smile at him) and then Nick spies the cognac. Aiden gestures in a negligent way towards the cognac. Nick does not look pleased.

Aiden *smarmy* "Very Superior Old Pale" ... I'm guessing -- your favourite.

Nick tries to relax; tries to smile.

Nick Ah! I promised Joe Mundie a snifter of real --

Aiden quickly approaches Nick: smiling, arm extended for a firm handshake.

Aiden We were introduced earlier on in the piece, but I believe at the time that you were distracted.

Aiden Hudson.

Here! Take this, with your compliments.

[Polite chuckle]

Aiden shakes Nick's hand and then pushes the other balloon glass into Nick's hand. Aiden gently clinks his own glass against Nick's.

Aiden Now that I have your attention, maybe you could spare me a couple of moments?

Nick is caught. He is suspicious, but not afraid.

Nick Sure! Would you care to sit down?

Aiden and Nick sit. They caress the glasses of cognac, savouring the flavour. Aiden is relaxed and at his ease: Nick is not.

Aiden You probably missed in all the hubbub of our introductions that I'm the noble assistant to Mrs Patricia Glenville in the Whitehouse. (You are probably aware that Mrs Glenville is the Liaison to the President).

And she and I are both great fans of your work, Nick, and that's a fact.

Nick *lost* Well ... That's ... ah ...

Aiden And both I myself *and* Mrs Glenville are eager to hear about your film: the one you're making just now.

This provides an instant misunderstanding, as Nick is directing "Leviticus Uplifted" as a kind of "reward" for also directing "Naughty Marietta".

Now Nick is immediately won over. He smiles and appears to visibly relax into his seat. Now he can talk about his favourite love-child.

Nick *beatific* Ah! God created the world and all its glories and all its creatures in just seven days.

And then He created Mr Paul Ernest Tremwag, who wrote "Leviticus Uplifted". Pulitzer Prize winner. Maybe rivalling Tolstoy, Shakespeare and Chaucer as the greatest writer in the history of the Western world.

Aiden Wow! Impressive.

Nick So the powerbrokers of Hollywood gave me the keys to the city and a file baked in a cake. They let off a brace of fire-rockets in my honour and then handed me the script. "Leviticus Uplifted" ... My God!

[Excessively eager]

If you ever doubted the capability of Mankind to rise above the squirming mess of Life and Death and Life-versus-Death and Living Death, then I can reassure you that P. E. Tremwag has nailed it.

Nailed it but good!

There is a slight pause. The men sip their cognac. The background noise of the barbeque is heard.

Aiden But that's --

Nick My brief is to direct this opus. I'll have Hollywood's finest sons and daughters at my command. Along with many stars of the London screen and stage. Add in some hot talent from Glasgow, Dublin, Paris, Berlin and Montreal.

Nick is completely overwhelmed by the magnificent picture he has drawn.

Nick Hand me the Oscar for best picture, gentlemen.
Just hand it over.

Aiden A masterstroke!

Nick Isn't it, though?

Aiden looks about.

Aiden *more severe* Well ... I was actually speaking about the casquette girl film: your remake of "Naughty Marietta".

I mean, of course your film about Leviticus will be awesome. No doubt about it.

Nick's moment of delight is over.

Aiden *more involved in his argument* We're all so thrilled at the W. H. The Casquette girls. Such a very important episode in our magnificent history, don't you agree?

Nick *reluctant* Sure! If you find that sort of thing entertaining.

Aiden But ... Pardon me, Nick.

[Leans forward suggestively]

Don't you think that it's kind of "sweet"?

Nick *aghast* "Sweet?"

Aiden is play-acting: he is working for effect. He is staring hard at Nick with a very stern look on his face. Then (with a muffled sigh) Aiden sits back, pretending to relax.

Aiden *softly* Cast your mind back to the way that bonnie England populated New South Wales. Take out your Thesaurus (Roget's Thesaurus) and look out every kind of simile for "toothless hag". The top brass in Mother England scraped up every evil slattern they could find on the filthy streets of London, hauled these "ladies" before the bewigged judges of the Old Bailey and then promptly transported them. Sent them to sea in leaky tubs to the other side

of the globe to cohabit in utter squalor with reprobate males (who were no better than the women).

Nick squirms: he does not want to be grilled in this way by this rather obnoxious man.

Nick *aside, caustic* Maybe I should be filming the founding of Sydney Cove?

Aiden *snorts* That's no way to settle a colony! That's no way to set-up the future mothers of a civilized country!

There falls a short, thoughtful silence.

Aiden *subtle* How much more rational was the scheme of the august King of France?

He founded orphanages for French girls of good quality. And then (when they had reached the age of discretion) had them shipped to Louisiana as virgin brides for the planters and farmers. There's a really divine sweetness to this tale of the King's daughters.

Makes you proud to be American, huh?

Aiden stands, goes for the bottle of cognac, and refills Nick's and then his own balloon glasses. Whilst still standing, Aiden continues.

Aiden *cajoling* Your lovely wife ... The Prez herself ... And several other yummy ladies scattered about in your very own field of endeavour ... They have in their family trees (these notable females) virtuous young women sent specifically to be the wives and mothers of America. By the King of France. "Casquette girls".

[As he moves away]

Beautiful! It's beautiful!

Nick has had enough. He sculls his cognac and stands. His temper is under control; however, Nick is edgy.

Nick *sighs, shrugs* I can't do anything with it. Forget it.

Aiden *as if prepared for* You can do it, Mr Stillen. Of course ... Yes you can.

Nick's resistance

Nick *edgy*

It's just not palatable to the "now" audience. This old-fashioned schmaltz cannot (repeat **"cannot"**) be made into something new and vibrant. It's schtick and that's the end of the penny section. I mean ... music by Sigmund Romberg ... Sheesh!

Aiden *utterly patient*

Victor Herbert, actually.

The word has filtered down to me from "on high", Nick.

They are very enamoured.

Nick

I'd love to help you, but the story is pulpy, the songs are way outdated, and the romance is white-girl/white-boy chicken shit. Basically – it sucks!

Aiden *persuasive*

These movie fans who want to resurrect the flick are speaking in general terms of "cashed-up project" and "impressive funding" with --

Nick *exasperated*

The only event that I can possibly salvage from the 1935 original is the pirate scene. I'll have to extend it, remould it, add tons of computer graphics and --

Aiden *apparently pleased*

The movie fans will lap it up.

Nick *hard*

No they won't! It'll be a major flop. Could wipe out every plus I've had over the past couple of years. All that effort down the toilet.

God! You have a shitload of lousy ideas for every good idea of mine.

Aiden *determined to press on*

They are in high places, Nick. Very high places.

Nick *angry, pointing*

Listen to me --

Suddenly, Nick is confused. He stops like a freight train hitting a bridge.

Nick *appalled* Shit! I can't even remember your name.

Aiden *softly* It's Aiden Hudson, Nick.

Nick *angry* Aw, to hell with it!

Angry, Nick grabs what remains of the cognac and bolts from the room.

However, he stops (fuming with anger) and back-tracks. Aiden is surprised as Nick re-enters the room.

Nick *aggressive,* And your neat précis glorifying America's past was genuinely
pointing touching ...

Truly!

Except that you forgot to mention the first-comers.

Then you failed to recall those brave pioneers who came ashore
as an escape route from political and religious persecution.

Oh! And the slaves ... The slaves ... Yeah, the slaves from Africa...
Forgotten ...

And (just so as you know) for a while there (before Captain Cook
made it to Botany Bay), good old Mother England sent her outcast
vagrants and thieves to the Virginian tobacco plantations as
indentured labourers. So don't wave a map of New South Wales in
my face. Please!

Aiden ... That's your name, isn't it?

Aiden, there are so many, many people from all over the world
who have formed the backbone of our nation. And they weren't all
dewy-eyed ingénues sponsored by some wildly overdressed and
flamboyant European ruler who wanted to get in good with God.

Slamming the door behind him as he leaves, Nick stalks out of the room. Aiden is left staring open-mouthed at the slammed door.

END OF SCENE

I, Scene iv: The Men-Only Sauna At The OK Club

General Groves is in a heavily-steamed sauna with Noel Kidling. They are both wrapped in towels and swelter. [This scene gives us a chance to realize that Noel is not the vapour-head we think he might be in later scenes.]

General Groves You should have heard the horse-feathers story they tried to
disgusted unload on me!

Noel I told you to give the CIA a wide-berth.

General Groves Well, I sure wish that I'd listened to ya.

They must be catching too many of those witless witches and warlocks movies. They'll quit now while they're still safely clear of the booby hatch, if they know what's good for them.

Noel They won't, though ...

General Groves Why! Here's a genius who has developed a piece of equipment capable of pin-point accuracy and it can't be traced.

You could take the damned thing onto a jet plane and no-one would know any better ...

And then wipe out the East Coast with a well-timed facial tic.

And **he's** gonna come 'long to join the cast of this rehashed Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy musical extravaganza?

And **he's** gonna act and sing as one of Captain Dick's vigilante boys?

Come on now! Give me a break!

Noel *chuckles* Careful what you think out loud, my friend ... This mastermind

Nick *defensive* Hey! Wait just a minute! This certainly is not a nude women wrestling kind of story ... Far from it!

Christina *accusing* Okay, but you blew-up a bridge today nevertheless ... Or else a four-storey building.

Nick *gloriously proud* My boys and I took out a Nazi oil-bunker today so that my hero (Eugene) could prove to himself that God gives a purpose to everything.

Christina looks worried and confused.

Nick *explaining* My hero is troubled ... conscience-stricken by his religious beliefs. The concept of "war" and "killing" don't fit with what he sees as God's plan. Your basic ultimate moral dilemma.

Christina *wide-eyed* The Pulitzer-prize winning story!

Nick Yep! The boys got some superb camera angles. And anything that comes in short can be fleshed-out with CGI, of course.

But what we got is right on the money, in my opinion (humble as it might be)! Do we have a bearskin that I can wear when I do my Tarzan impersonation on the front lawn?

Christina *accusing* Gratuitous violence!

Nick *argumentative* Grat—

No! No, this is a hunky-dory war film. All bets are off as regards violence, bad language and occasional masculine nudity.

Christina You tell me repeatedly that my opinion is all that you care for. But what you *really* mean is that selected bits and pieces of my credo are worth saving (those bits that match your requirements) but the rest is dross to be jettisoned without a care.

Nick is lost. He makes an expansive gesture which intimates: "What have I done wrong?"

Christina Then why blow-up that bunker? There was no need to destroy it.

Nick We're following Tremwag's story, and so the script called for --

Christina Your hero is supposed to be a clever, caring man. Why would he want to blow-up thousands of dollars worth of stuff that he could have used later?

Nick *surprised* What stuff that he could have used later?

Christina *snaky* I know what this is. This is your exploitative side turning in on itself.

Nick *aghast* What?

Christina You can't let the enemy have it so you won't have it yourself.

Nick *horrified* What?

Christina This is just like you and your Aussie pals playing at croquet on -- What was the name of that island in Australia that we stayed at last year?

Nick *lost* Uh ... It was Lizard Island. What do you mean by dragging croquet into the mix?

Christina Lizard Island!

You and your male pals realized that you could beat the females at croquet by bashing the ladies' balls out of sight into the jungle scrub and never mind how that screwed-up your own chances.

Nick *even more lost* How -- ?

Christina *delivering the death-blow* We womenfolk spent all afternoon giggling and getting our newly-tanned legs scratched while we searched for our croquet balls.

You can't help yourself. It's called testosterone.

You just have to have men hitting other men and men shooting other men and men blowing up bunkers. Don't you?

Nick *defensive* Well ... yeah! That's what guys like in movies, and as I said before: it's a war movie full of blood and guts.

[Sneers]

And no bursting into song to pass away the time.

Nick puts on a ridiculous voice and starts to sing "There Is Nothing Like A Dame" except that he trashes the lyrics.

Christina Your source is a Pulitzer-Prize-winning book, Nick. You owe it to the author to honour the seriousness of the subject.

Nick blathers, stumbling over what he wants to say.

Christina And instead of wasting time on incendiaries, you could be directing the remake of the casquette girl thing.

This has the effect of deflating Nick's happiness as nothing else could.

Nick Oh, now! Don't spoil an otherwise perfect day.

Christina Come on, Nick! The President apparently wants it ... I want it ...

Nick *mulish* No ... Conversation over ...

Nick stalks off.

END OF SCENE

I, Scene vi: The Casting Of The Singing Picture

The scene takes place in a small meeting room which contains a huge plasma screen. The projection equipment sits on the table near to Jen such that she can direct operations.

Throughout, Nick is almost rude. He plays with his iPod, looks at the ceiling, flops his head into his folded arms (on the tabletop) and is generally uninterested. Gray often glances in Nick's direction, concerned and ill at ease.

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Other than Nick and Gray, Malay-born Jen Ong is in the meeting room in her role as the casting director. Jen's assistant (a chubby, bubbly young woman named Morgana) takes notes. From the production side: Roy Gilderstein and Linus Conger are present.

As the scene opens, we see on the plasma screen a quick succession of studio shots of various film stars (female).

Jen *caustic* So, as expected, I'm being approached by all the usual suspects. But I'm after a **particular** female, and no-one is pressing my buttons, so I'm getting edgy and cantankerous.

Linus *grinning* Never!

Jen And then I received **this!** And the search was absolutely over.

Now follows a superb photo of Jeanette MacDonald which fades out as several photos of Giselle appear.

Jen As you see, this girl looks amazingly like Jeanette MacDonald. She has a lovely figure, good diction, an appealing timbre to her voice, and sings coloratura. I couldn't have been more impressed.

Or relieved!

Linus *alarmed* "Timbre"? "Coloratura"? Does that mean she doesn't speak English?

Jen *patient* A coloratura soprano has a tinkling, delicious singing voice, Linus. I thought you loved this stuff.

Linus *being comedic* Well, you know, where I come from, a tinkling, melodious voice – Why we'd have called that a "canary".

The people in the room look about at each other. Then the secretary warbles delightfully in a sugar-sweet coloratura.

Linus *triumphant* Yeah! Like that!

Everyone relaxes and smiles (apart from Nick who is still divorced from proceedings).

Jen Thanks, Morgana. That was perfect.

I feel very strongly about this girl. She's right for the part.

I give you the Honourable Giselle Levisham.

And before you ask, Linus: "The Honourable" is a courtesy title in Britain for the son or daughter of a titled parent. In this case, her father is Sir Brian Levisham Earl of Watney CBE. And her mother is a Dame.

Everyone but Nick is awesomely impressed.

Nick *absently sings* There is nothing like a dame ...

[Snaps back to reality]

Okay: screen test.

And her love interest? What does he sing ... baritone? Tenor?

Jen Oh, he's definitely a baritone. And I've cast Trent Lincoln for the part of Captain Dick.

Some studio shots of Trent Lincoln now appear on the plasma screen.

Jen *continues* He has a mellow voice, a solid, masculine torso, and improves profoundly under make-up.

Gray Can't we change the name to "Rick"? We're going to be laughed out of the stratosphere if we --

Roy *firm* Production want you to stay 100% true to the original (wherever possible). He is (and always will be) Captain Dick.

Gray Okay then ... I've heard that Lincoln is difficult on set. Tantrums.

Jen His agent assured me that he's pulled it together and won't be a problem for us.

Nick *jaundiced* Yeah ... and Santa Claus lives at the North Pole.

Now a marvellous close-up of the late Douglass Dumbrille appears (circa the late 1930s) on the plasma screen.

Jen As it turns out, my most difficult remit is to find a modern-day Douglass Dumbrille: Prince de Namour de la Bonfain, who is the uncle to Princess Marie.

Morgana He sure looks like ... um ... a country doctor?

Roy My tax attorney?

Gray *delighted* Wait up! Wait up! I've seen a guy like that on a late night UK game show. He's ... He's ... Aw, to hell with it! What was his name?

Nick *dreary* The show is "Dislocation" and the guy is Johnnie Whitworth.

Gray slaps his hands together in glee. Except for Nick, everyone is pleased. Jen busily writes that suggestion down.

Nick You got Noel Kidling to take off Frank Morgan, and now possibly Johnnie Whitworth for the Prince. And this "The Honourable" girl's English, too ... Right? Are we not able to find a wholesome American girl to play Marietta?

I don't know ... Maybe I'm getting jingoistic in my middle age, but I'm feeling uncomfortable with all these **English** people milling about.

Does anyone agree with me? Would you care for me to expand my topic?

Linus *surprised* Who cares where they come from. It's the film that's important.

Nick stands abruptly.

Nick *heavily sarcastic* Okay, but here's another thing: with Noel Kidling playing the Governor, when I deliver my directorial instructions to him, please be sure to give me access to a translator.

Nick nods to the surprised faces looking wide-eyed at him. He begins to exit the room.

Gray *very surprised* Nick, his English is flawless.

Take it home and see what you think.

Nick waves the DVD away.

Nick *sour* I already know what I think of it, Gray.

Gray continues to try to press the DVD onto Nick.

Gray You know what? There's a bit of funny trivia associated with this one. The guys did the colorization thinking that the heroine was a blonde. And when the bigwigs over at MGM saw it, they quickly reached for the barf-bags.

Gray chuckles delightedly. Nick does not have a clue.

Nick Why? What was wrong?

Gray She's a dyed-in-the-wool redhead. I mean ... **was** a redhead. They had to redo every scene.

Nick *dismissive* I really don't give a flying fuck if she's got a blue rinse, Gray-Gray. My interest in this remake is zero. No, it's less than zero. Is that possible?

Gray watches Nick stride off and then catches up with Nick again. This time, Gray (the bigger man) actually grabs Nick's arm and forces the DVD into his hand. Nick looks surprised and displeased.

Gray *earnest* Nick, ya can't just dump this shit in my lap. There's pressure coming from everywhere. It's like an election campaign. Everyone's eulogizing this thing. Ya can't skirt around it any more like you been doing.

Nick *exasperated* Aw, come on, Gray! It's a crock ... I told you that repeatedly. It's "shut-down-turn-around".

Gray *desperate* Ya gotta throw me a lifeline, here, Nick.

Remember what Dutchy said: "Talk to the sword."

Now – what about this?

I'll prepare up a running sheet and we can work it over. We could

go fishing, like we used to ... And we could discuss it on the high seas.

Nick *hopeful*

Game fishing?

Gray *nods*

Sure! Sure! Dan Turbot.

enthusiastically

Nick *weakening, drawls* O ... k ... a ... y ...

Yeah, okay! We'll discuss the running-sheet in Dan Turbot's fishing boat. And I'll make sure that your name appears prominently in the credits (if we ever get that far) ...

END OF SCENE

I, Scene vii: Gray, Nick and Dan Turbot Go Big Game Fishing

The scene is uninviting, bleak, windy and rainswept. Dan Turbot's boatshed is one of many situated on seaside boardwalk. There is not much activity right now as the weather is rubbish.

Nick and Gray are seen to scurry along the boardwalk and into the shelter of Dan's boatshed.

The shed itself is utterly untidy in a seafaring way. Dan is working, and meanwhile is indulging in idle conversation with John Liversedge, who carries determined-looking camera equipment strapped to his body.

Nick and Gray are surprised to see John. John is delighted at the sight of Nick. Dan is scowling.

John *ebullient*

And here he comes ... The man who right now is hotter than a cheesy spud cooked in foil in July!

Nick nods to John, but passes him to shake hands warmly with Dan.

Nick

Dan, you keeping okay, now? No more of that ... um ... trouble you had a while back?

Dan *grouchy* I'm kind of okay now. And thanks for asking.

Argh! Damned rotten weather. Every time I see you, Nick Stillen, the rain don't cease for a five-week month.

John *bouncy* Nick ... Spill your guts for the peeps at home, will ya? They want to hear every riveting detail.

Nick *worried* Just a minute, will ya? Dan, are we gonna be able to get this fishing expedition goin' today? Or should we throw in the towel?

Dan Give it half an hour and then we'll push out to sea. Yep, we can make a go of it then, 'cording to this radar thing that I gotta look at instead of wettin' my finger and standin' on the jetty.

The other men laugh.

John There y'are! You got plenty of time now to give me an interview.

Nick *very unenthusiastic* Sure.

Dan *gravel-voiced* Comb your hair and get yerself a shave, man.

Nick drags his fingers through his hair.

Nick This is my Hollywood Vice look. Come on then, Johnny – shoot!

John starts the camera rolling.

John Are you happy with directing the remake of "Naughty Marietta"?

Nick *ironic, almost bitter* Am I happy with remaking that moth-eaten classic? Shit, no! It's at the pinnacle of post Great Depression escapism.

This jarring and over-structured film from the "bums-on-seats" era provided an opiate to a downcast populace (a downcast *filmic* populace).

And that's all that I am saying about that. Next question.

Dan claps and coughs.



NICK STILLEN'S CASQUETTE GIRL

ACT II

II, Scene i: The Brits Arrive In Los Angeles

I am sick to death of watching feet arrive as they step out of taxis and materialize into humans. Let's go for a different approach.

The hotel is the Four Seasons, Los Angeles. We can hear skat comments. As directed, we shall hear (in voice-over) various commentaries. At these times, a regular buffet of British accents assails our ears.

Throughout this entire scene [until advised], our camera will be directly above the action, not on an angle but directly above. And quite close: this is not in long shot. This means that people will enter buildings and our camera will have to pass through solid walls. Some boffin will work out how we are to achieve that.

Anyway, the limousine slash taxicab pulls up in front of the Four Seasons. Sir Brian Levisham steps out of the automobile and flicks at his coat as he stretches his legs. The driver strides around and opens the passenger door for Lady Iona.

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The hotel's porter and his satellites burst onto the scene. Brian ushers his wife into the hotel, whilst the porter et al deal with suitcases, valises, bags and a hamper.

Lady Iona *voice-over, taut* No, it's just a headache. You'll find me collapsed in one of the chairs which no doubt proliferate in the reception area.

Lady Iona (with head bowed) strides purposefully into the hotel. Brian totters along in her wake, evidently uncertain.

Brian *voice-over, vague* Er ... of course my dear ... Are you sure? ... Er ... shall I?

Lady Iona stops, turning towards her husband.

Lady Iona *voice-over, taut* Brian, would you be an absolute angel and sort out the room so that I might be able to drag myself off to bed? And ask for the resident nurse or paramedic or whatever he/she is to visit me upstairs for my immediate recovery?

Thank you, my love.

Turning quickly on her heel, Lady Iona heads off. Brian watches her for a moment. He is concerned and attentive, whereas his wife is fatigued, brittle.

Brian *voice-over* Is there anything at all by way of assistance, my own --

Lady Iona *voice-over* Just do as I ask, lamb. And you'd best order me a tisane ... chamomile, lemon balm or some such.

Again, Lady Iona stalks off. Hesitant, uncertain Brian slowly makes his way towards the reception counter.

Johnnie Whitworth and Giselle have met up at the airport. Noel and some other ex-pat Brits collected them. Giselle rushes up to welcome her father, with the other people in tow. As Brian nears the counter, the other Brits descend on him, all speaking at once.

Giselle	Noel	Brian	Johnnie
Daddy!	Brian Levisham, as I live and breathe!	Ah! Goodness ... Here we all are, then! Hello, Darling!	I only ever drink with titled Englishmen, Noel. You know that! What's become of the

			absconded vodka?
--	--	--	------------------

Giselle More to the point: what have you done with my mother?

Brian She's ... um ... She's having a rest. Over ... Over there, actually ...

Camera returns to normal position.

Brian turns to the bemused young lady at the registration counter as he draws his gold credit card from his wallet.

Brian *to lady at counter* Ah! How do you do? Brian Levisham and wife --

The young lady takes the credit card, smiles politely and continues to work.

Johnnie That's **Sir** Brian and Dame Iona Levisham, Earl and Countess of Watney.

The reception lady looks a little bemused. Noel hangs over the counter as if assisting the girl in her work.

Noel *jovial* And he's a CBE for his pains.

Howsoever, you probably don't need to know that for the purposes of registering His Grace at your hotel ...

Johnnie *pretending contempt* No OBE yet? I'm bustling for one of those. Prostituting meself to no little purpose.

Brian *pretending chagrin* Blast! I haven't earned my OBE yet. Shall I head back for it?

Noel *feigning concern* Oh, yes, I should think so. Must get it right ...

Brian *feigning seriousness* Why don't we assist Johnnie to play the honours tart? That way (with any luck) we might kill two birds: score a gong ourselves **and** further Johnnie's race up the greasy pole. Now what do you think, old man?

The rest of the conversation is swamped by the reception lady and Brian winding-up the registration process with the usual instructions, pointing and smiling. Brian follows the lady's directions open-

mouthed. Lady Iona is seen in the background in the company of Giselle and a uniformed nurse, heading for the lift. Brian tears off after her. The bags follow at a discreet distance.

END OF SCENE

ii, Scene ii: "Ah! Sweet Mystery Of Life"

This scene is hugely reminiscent of the first meeting between Miss Dorothy and Millie's boss (Trevor Graydon) in "Thoroughly Modern Millie". Except that there is absolutely no singing: no lyrics, pure instrumental.

There are four events taking place at once:

- 1. Duncan Conroy-Pierce's studio orchestra is about to demonstrate to Nick their "modernized" and dramatic rendition of "Ah! Sweet Mystery Of Life". There are a couple of false starts owing to the timing of the tympani (Duncan has devised a very grand and strong intro).*
- 2. At the same time that Nick is trying to listen to Duncan's offering, he is distracted by the arrival of Giselle.*
- 3. Nick and Giselle turn in order for Nick to introduce Giselle to her co-star, Trent Lincoln. This results in Trent standing stock still, worshipfully gazing at Giselle. And likewise, Giselle blushes uncertainly and looks downwards in a coy manner.*
- 4. And then a mystical romantic interlude is imagined, as described below.*

Nick walks about in the rabbit warren of passageways in the film studio. He is distractedly flicking through vast sheafs of paper which he clutches in his hands. Nick is sweating in his frustration. Throughout, Nick is besieged by crewmen and female assistants who rush up to him for advice or to tell him some important news. Nick brushes everyone aside, or simply ignores them.

A female underling (Carmel) trails along behind Nick, obviously in sympathy with his pronouncements. Without pause, Nick shoves the papers into her hands.

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Nick *cheesed-off* It's just exactly like ... I dunno ...
... as if I had been wading around in stilettos in freshly laid lava.

Carmel *sympathetic* Ooooo! That can be so mind-numbing!

Nick *feeling sorry for himself* Tell me about it! And nobody has seen Gray for almost a week.
He's just up and vanished.
Leaving me all alone with this paper chase.

Carmel Well, Nick, Duncan has the orchestra ready for you to hear --

Nick stops, turning to face Carmel. He is agitated and desperate.

Nick *making a strong point* Do you know that I've turned **OFF** my cell phone? It was ringing non-stop.

Male voice off There you are, Nick. We've been trying to reach you. Your cell phone doesn't seem to be working.

Nick gives an expansive, meaningful shrug. More and more staff converge on Nick with their problems.

Nick *aggrieved* Exactly!

Duncan *calling to Nick over loudspeaker* Nick! We've beefed this up so that it is very rich and powerful.

Carmel helps Nick find a miked Bluetooth headset, which he quickly slips on.

Nick *over loudspeaker, still distracted* Okay! Fire away.

Duncan's orchestral offering begins with a burst of majestic tympani. In this first try, the orchestra miss their intro following the overwhelming drum roll, and Duncan stops them.

Nick is hardly paying any attention anyway, with so many people rushing up to him for advice. He is obviously losing it. Carmel tries desperately to shield Nick. Nick reefs the headset from his head and shoves it into Carmel's hands.

- About 8 or 9 otters scramble aboard, in a bizarre Disneyesque twist. They can be cartoon otters if nobody can come up with performing otters.
- Enraptured by Giselle, the otters attempt to “dry her with their fur” (in the manner of otters) and this causes the boat to overturn.
- Which leads to the wind-up: Trent carries Giselle in an easy manner back to shore whilst the cute otters watch them. Giselle and Trent are dripping wet but nevertheless look adorable.

And as the lovers wander off, the final notes of Duncan's rendition sweep across the studio, complete with a final fabulous drum roll. Some sporadic applause breaks out.

Nick *over loudspeaker* Duncan, that's superb. I love it! We'll use that without lyrics prior to the actual romance scene on the staircase when they actually sing to each other.

In spite of the imaginary scene described above, in real life, Giselle and Trent are still shaking hands. Enraptured, they are oblivious to all that goes on around them.

END OF SCENE

II, Scene iii: Nick Directs “Leviticus Uplifted”

This studio has a much calmer, more controlled atmosphere than the one in which “Naughty Marietta” is being filmed. Everyone on this lot seems to know what they are doing and there is no frenetic bustle. This is a welcome break: Nick was under siege in the studio where the filming of “Naughty Marietta” was taking place.

General Groves (dressed for golf and holding a nine-iron) wanders up to Nick as he enters the studio where Nick will be directing his real love: “Leviticus Uplifted”.

Nick is surprised to see the General, whom he recognizes. General Groves extends his hand and smiles as Nick frowns, disconcerted.

General Groves Nick Stillen? Yes, I recognize you from some of your films that I

might have seen. How d'you do? General Terry Groves.

The men shake hands, and then stroll further into the studio as they converse.

Nick *a little lost* General ... ?

General Groves Terry Groves. Attached to the office of Vernon Williams, Chief of Defence. Advisory capacity, y'understand.

Roy Gilderstein and I were having a convivial ale at the Golf Club ... Was that yesterday? The long and short of it is: Roy suggested that I come over and help you with this Leviticus film you're making.

Nick *at sea* I'm sorry, but I don't --

General Groves You're going to need a technical advisor on this film, correct?

Just between you and me, I'm a regular sucker for a good war film: gives me the ultimate rush.

And I like it fine when the filmmakers actually go to the trouble of getting things right. Armaments, tanks, uniforms ... It's usually a mish-mash of Korean War with the 6-Day-War and throw in some junk that some nerd found in his great-uncle's attic. Nah, they never get it right. That's where I come in! With me on your team, you'll get authenticity plus 10.

Nick *uncertain* That's very reassuring. And thank you! I welcome your input.

General Groves And you can ask me anything about army life, soldiers, bivouacs and chaplains in addition to the usual gruelling techno matters.

Nick stops. So also does General Groves.

Nick *thinking* O ... k ... a ... y ... I **do** have a question, as it happens ...

Are you acquainted with Linus Conger who is CEO of the Remi-Daas Consortium?

General Groves shrugs.

Nick (once again equipped with miked Bluetooth headphones) is positioned high up in an elevated chair inside the large film studio. He is peering into a gizmo which replicates a complicated movie camera. In the background we hear some thumping, banging and male grunting.

Nick pulls back, in disappointed frustration.

Nick *loudspeaker* Hold it! Whoa up!

Nick looks at a couple of crewmen below him, and they give him back look for look: the movie is not working out. That is to say, the actor playing the hero is not working out. Nick climbs quickly down from his perch.

Nick looks at the scene, and we note that most of the actors and crew are looking towards him. With a long sigh, Nick slowly peels off the headset, handing it over to somebody. Nick heads towards the leading man.

Nick Karl! Come over here. Come on ...

Nick puts his arm around Karl's shoulder and leads him off. Nick tries to be kind and encouraging.

Nick You are pouring out your heart to Captain Frieland in response to his very sympathetic, compassionate speech –

[To anyone close]

Hand me a script, will ya!

Nick flips through the script. Male fingers are seen to assist him.

Nick Yeah, yeah ... Here we are ... Thank you.

Okay! Now I'm gonna show you the essential elements in Eugene Gower's make-up ... He has to **look** tortured as well as sound it. Got that?

Nick (still holding Karl) turns, beckoning with head and eyes towards actor Guy Winstanley (who plays Captain Frieland).

Nick Guy, come over here and read from ... Read from page 53 ... Starting with "I appreciate how this is –". Start from there.

Nick pats Karl on the chest.

Nick *to Karl* Now, I want you to try for this interpretation of Eugene's character.

Nick hands over the script to Guy; however, Guy knows the lines already, and so waves it away. Nick nods, moving in close to Guy such that they will both be in frame during this dialogue.

Nick *to Guy* Take it away, big fella.

Guy is a consummate actor and so gives it his all, wringing all the possible pathos from his speech.

Guy *as Captain Frieland* I appreciate how this is tearing you apart, Corporal Gowers. Your God is fiercely paternal and you (the dutiful son) must obey his commands.

Could you not have perhaps ... perhaps become a conscientious objector?

Nick *direct to Guy* That's great, Guy!

As Corporal Eugene Gowers, Nick acts as if he is fighting against his own conscience rather than against the Captain.

Nick *as Eugene* I considered that to be an act of betrayal, Sir ... It's cowardice ... It's cowardice ... I couldn't even contemplate that ...

[Nearly in tears]

I have to be here with my buddies, fighting for my country and ... and ... and for the flag, sir. God demands it ... It's my duty. Sir!

Nick *himself to Karl* Now do you feel where I'm coming from here?

[To Guy]

Keep going!

Guy is stunned. Nick has delivered the lines exactly as Ernest Tremwag intended.

Nick Go on, Guy!

Guy hesitates, murmuring something. Nick and Guy almost seem to face-off as they listen to the replay of the previous speeches.

Female *voice-off, droning voice, no emotion*

Frieland: I appreciate how this is tearing you apart, Corporal Gowers. Your God is fiercely paternal and you (the dutiful son) must obey his commands. Could you not have perhaps become a conscientious objector? Gowers: I considered that to be an act of betrayal, sir. It's cowardice. I couldn't even contemplate that. I have to be here with my buddies, fighting for my country and for the flag, sir. God demands it. It's my duty. Sir!

Guy takes a huge breath and goes into character.

Guy as Captain Frieland Eugene ... The warrior has no argument with God's laws.

You talk about the flag, the nation, the motherland, the state – call it what you will! The people ... The people have a just and God-given right to exist, free from enslavement and captivity.

[Places his hands on Eugene's shoulders, whispers]

The warrior **defends** that right.

The mothers and the children and the helpless babes look forlornly to you and to your buddies to protect them from harm.

There is a pause. The Captain looks long and hard at Eugene, who drops his head. Tears well-up in Eugene's eyes.

Eugene/Nick *whispers* That's why I'm here, Sir. I have to defend the flag.

Captain Frieland gives Eugene's shoulders a squeeze of confirmation, and then lets him go. He turns and steps away, as if going to look out of a window.

Frieland/Guy

The soldier's duty to the people cannot and must not march in conflict with the laws of God. It is after all a Holy cause, and the warrior will not (**shall not!**) be diverted from his quest.

[Turns]

I hope that you'll take my thoughts on board, Corporal Gowers, and let's hear no more of the indecision and angst which has been tormenting you.

Eugene/Nick I guess so, sir.
unconvinced

Eugene/Nick stares off into space.

Frieland/Guy *paternal* If you can get over this brick wall in your mind, soldier, you'll
become a first-class sergeant, I've no doubt.

Our army needs men like you, Gowers.

With a quick head gesture, Captain Frieland indicates to Eugene that the interview is over. Eugene snaps a salute, which is acknowledged. Eugene moves to the door and opens it (Nick pretends to do so anyway). Eugene holds the door open. As he speaks (this is a pivotal scene) the camera closes in on Nick.

Eugene/Nick Captain ...

I look at every tree, and every cloud and ... and at every rock and
I see His majestic hand, carving out our world so that we are able
to live (not just exist like the animals).

He made us in his image, didn't He? That's what the Bible tells us.
Man is a superb living engine whose powers, thoughts and
appetites are God-given. And every man (even the lowest filthy
John Doe crawling along the gutter sniffing for a stale crust) has
innate dignity and beauty.

So I ask you: how can I lift my rifle to snuff out the life of such a
perfect creation? Because that's what you're telling me to do.

Captain Frieland and Eugene stare at each other.

Nick *to Karl* Does that make sense now?

There is a ghastly silence. Our camera pans the studio. Every person is frozen. They are enthralled by the stellar performances of Nick and Guy. (Guy's acting has improved markedly through working opposite Nick).

After two seconds, sporadic applause breaks out, then intensifies. There are yells of approbation and many tears. Several men step up to Nick and Guy to hug and congratulate them.

General Groves gives Nick a very strong handshake and promptly departs, playing with the nine-iron as if he has just teed-off.

As if in a dream, Nick speaks to some unseen crewman. Nick is staring at the departing figure of General Groves.

Nick *glazed look* Tell Karl that I need to speak to him in my office. I'll be taking over the role of Eugene Gowers.

There follows a long pause.

Male *voice off, very hesitant* Er ... sure, Nick ... Er ... Right away ...

END OF SCENE

II, Scene iv: Christina Naylor And Nick Recap The Story So Far

Christina is sitting up in bed, making notes in a clipboard. Nick is hunched in bed with his back to her.

Christina Don't say "hmpf!" like that. You've been hungering for exactly this kind of meaty part your whole working life. You got close in that Walter Mitty thing. That whetted the public's appetite. With this role, you'll show them what you are really capable of.

Nick *groaning* Stop ... Just stop ...

Christina But (on the flipside) you'll be taking on too much work and that's going to kill you.

Nick *groaning again* Agggggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ...

Christina Now, about Gray ...

You've been working with Gray Kramer for so many years that I've lost count. And this is totally out of character for him to disappear

without a word. His mother has been ringing me in tears.

Hey! Did you know that "Graham" is not his real name? She calls him "Kostya". From what I can make out, they're a European family: Lithuanian, or Finnish or –

You're not interested, right?

Nick *sleepy*

Nope. I don't care where he came from one single hoot ... I only want him back.

Christina *reasonable*

But until then, you need a second-in-command.

Nick

There's some kind of an English professor wandering about who blithely told me that Roy Gilderstein sent him over to be of assistance. Matthew Some-one-or-other ... I dunno ... Every time I turn over a rock a little British guy is grinning up at me.

What did the Aussies call them? "Poms"!

I'm gonna start calling those losers "Pom-Poms" – and to their faces!

Christina

That's not very helpful.

No, here's what I suggest. I'll be Gray for the next few days or weeks it takes until we find him. I'll be your right-hand man and help you get through this musical thing. That way, you can give your all to your Eugene project.

Nick rolls over. He is transfixed.

Nick *gruff voiced*

You gave me the distinct impression that you utterly despised my war movie.

I thought you were rooting for Marietta and her band of merry casquette maidens.

Christina

I am. But if the CIA is involved and all those British people that annoy you so much ... Have you met your heroine's mother yet? She is a titled English lady and she tosses her supposed

importance around like her tiara was her crown! Definitely high maintenance and a bad attitude. Nobody is getting near her baby girl with a 10-foot pole. Ugh!

No, I'll pull you through the Louisiana stuff and that will set you free. It's the least I can do.

Nick cannot believe what he is hearing. He lies on his back and pulls the sheet over his face.

Christina Okay ... what do you still have to do there? I know that Gray managed to film a lot of the background scenes ...

Nick mumbles something unintelligible from under the sheets.

Christina Just give me two minutes of your precious time, Nick, and then you can sleep.

Now, Gray managed --

Nick flicks back the sheets.

Nick Yeah, he got things going before the British arrived. We're starting on the Italian Street Song from a balcony day after tomorrow. We'll knock over the ballroom scene and a couple of bits and pieces ... And then we have a few weeks on the pirates and the minutemen ...

[Nick raises himself onto one elbow]

Actually we're situated on the East Coast for that.

I'm leaving the opening song sequence until last. And then into post-production. Other than that lot, my crew can film the rest (since all they'll be doing is mimicking the 1935 original).

Christina Fine! I'll take that on board then. My Aunt Sandra will gladly come over and run the show from here, family-wise.

Nick We'll end up hating each other and get divorced.

Christina No, we won't! This is an emergency, Nick. I want to help. And I

want to hear that Gray is safe as soon as he shows up.

Nick "Safe?"

Christina *in earnest* Worried. I'm worried. It's not like him to vanish. He's not a "vanishing" kind of guy.

Is he?

Nick appears stricken by the thought that Gray might have met foul play.

Nick groans as he flops his head backwards and pulls the sheet back over his face. Oblivious, Christina continues to work.

END OF SCENE

II, Scene v: The Dishonest Interview On "Hollywood Unmasked"

To all intents and purposes, we are now watching a huge plasma screen. And on that screen is today's episode of "Hollywood Unmasked".

The host/anchorman is Jeb Wrestwraith.

The scene takes place in the foyer of an up-market cinema, complete with deep crimson velvet drapes and tasteful gold decor. Behind and around Jeb we see people thronging into the cinema.

Jeb *direct to camera* If you thought that it was virtually impossible for singing duo Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy to make a supersonic comeback, then think again.

"Hollywood Unmasked" has discovered that renewed interest in the romance of the Casquette Girls has been fired-up by the President's proud admission that she herself is a direct descendent of one of those French orphans who was shipped to the Americas to become brides for the bachelors here. And so suddenly (quicker than you can say "crinoline") we're all hotted-up for a timely

A roving camera in Queensland, Australia at the Australia Zoo has zoomed-in on a girl in a brief, summery outfit. Standing in front of a cage of tropical parrots, she tries to stop laughing as she mimics the bird-song which Jeanette MacDonald performs in the opening scene of the film.

As Jeb speaks (below) a lovely photograph of Jeanette MacDonald is overlayed with an even lovelier photograph of Giselle.

Jeb *voice over*

Hey! I won't hold you on tenterhooks any longer.

The search is over and the beautiful (and titled!) English actress Giselle Lewisham has won the plum role of Marietta and will be partnered by heartthrob hunk Trent Lincoln.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen: this will certainly be bigger than Ben Hur!

Jeb *direct to camera, smiling broadly*

A prodigious undertaking! And talking of "prodigies", director Nick Stillen was euphoric in his praise for this project.

The interview which Nick reluctantly gave to John Liversedge in Dan Turbot's boathouse has been digitally doctored. Nick appears to be standing in the foyer alongside Jeb (when as we know this footage was filmed in an entirely different locale and under quite different circumstances).

Nick

Am I happy with remaking this classic? A great cast and a great story. Yes, it's a dream come true. A chance like this only comes along ...

[Slight pause]

I'm more excited by this venture than anything I've done so far. It's at the pinnacle –

🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀 **Break** 🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀

Now the episode of "Hollywood Unmasked" as seen on the large plasma screen is switched off suddenly. Nick has been watching this travesty at the studio and has made his way to the nearest telephone.

Our camera follows Nick as (seething with ill-suppressed anger) he tears through the studio. Then our camera moves back such that we see Nick through a large plate glass window (referencing back to the large plasma screen).

Nick is utterly torn apart with immense anger at the sabotage of his interview with John Liversedge. He screams into the phone (we see this through glass).

Nick *totally losing it* Well, you find that Kramer asshole and when you do you better hide him away good, because if I ever get my hands on him ...

Nick slams down the phone and begins to wreck the office amidst a tirade of invective that is directed against Gray (whom Nick supposes to be behind this outrage).

END OF SCENE

II, Scene vi: The Queen Of Stage Mothers – Lady Iona Levisham

The studio has provided a dressing room for The Honourable Giselle which is sumptuous. A grand piano and lavish furnishings fill the room, which has a large en suite bathroom included. This luxurious dressing room contains many, many vases of the most beautiful floral arrangements. Fruit baskets and exotic food hampers proliferate.

Lady Iona Levisham is well presented: coiffeured, manicured and perfectly made-up, Her Ladyship wears a Channel suit. Giselle wears a French-designed track suit.

Lady Iona plays the grand piano such that Giselle (who stands to the side) may practise singing her scales. It is evident that Lady Iona is a very determined stage mother. As Giselle sings the scales and performs other vocal exercises, Lady Iona pouts and glares, intimating that Giselle must push herself harder.

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There is a brief knock at the door and a young black woman (Gracie Brione) enters, her face wreathed in smiles. Lady Iona and Giselle cease their practice. Lady Iona appears very displeased at the interruption.

Lady Iona Yes?
unwelcoming

Gracie closes the door and moves about the dressing room as if that was her job.

Gracie *bright* Hi there, ladies! I've been sent over by Mr Linus Conger. Isn't he the most amusing gent you've ever met! He makes me sick with laughing sometimes, especially when he --

Lady Iona *vexed* And (excuse me) but why would this Mr Conger (whom I wouldn't know from Adam) send you "over" (as you so politely put it)?

Gracie *proudly* I'm the assistant to Miss Levisham, ma'am. Her dresser, her confidante, her --

Quite put out, Lady Iona stands and moves quickly to the door. She flings the door open and stands as if guarding it, in a clear indication that Gracie must leave the room. Meanwhile, Giselle appears concerned for Gracie's future (knowing full well what her mother is about to do).

Lady Iona *determined* You may return to Mr Linus Conger (whoever he might be) and tell him that your services are not required. With The Honourable Miss Levisham's compliments.

Gracie *gob-smacked* But that was gonna be my job, Your Ladyship.

Lady Iona looks down at the floor in order to help keep her growing anger in check.

Lady Iona Well, it's not. Thank you for popping by, but your services will not be required.

Lady Iona still holds the door open and is now evidencing extreme insistence that Gracie leave.

Gracie *aggrieved* But I like to get my name in the credits. You know, "Assistant to Miss Levisham: Gracie Brione".

Lady Iona Not this time, Miss Brione. Please leave us to our vocal exercises.

Good day.

Gracie *stalling*

But Mr Conger said --

Lady Iona *more than firm*

I provide all the "services" which Miss Levisham requires. Leave!
Out! Now!

Discomfited, Gracie bustles out of the room, and Lady Iona slams the door on her exit.

END OF SCENE

END OF ACT II

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NICK STILLEN'S CASQUETTE GIRL

ACT III

III, Scene i: Sir Brian And Nick Practise Squash

The Hollywood Grand advertises amongst its many other attractions a pair of squash courts nearby to the gymnasium, swimming pool and sauna.

Our camera finds Nick and Sir Brian just finishing a friendly game of squash. The men are of about the same standard; however, Nick is the fitter of the two. Sir Brian appears to be seriously out of breath. Nick (with plenty of gas in the tank) is concerned.

Nick *concerned* Are you gonna be okay there?

Sir Brian *breathless* Yes! Quite marvellous. Just catching my breath.
and panting

Have to get out of the lion's den whilst the ladies are at the coal face, if you follow my meaning. They practise rigorously, you know: quite dedicated.

The two men gather their belongings in order to leave the squash court.

Nick *puzzled* Who's that?

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Sir Brian Why, Lady Iona and The Honourable G, of course.

 I tried to make a fist of jogging in the Park, you know, but it proved totally hellish. Dogs and what-not.

 Then Lord Salisbury put me onto squash, and I've been a new man ever since. My gents-only club and squash have been my saviours when the warbling starts.

 I mean, of course they have to rehearse and do their scales and so on, but ... Not really my thing, you understand.

Nick Yes, I do. Perfectly.

 But I can give you a suggestion there: another pastime that might just be the ticket for you.

 I believe that you've become acquainted with Professor Matthew Crockett-Henschal, who practically haunts our film set. Now he'd commit bare-faced murder for a punishing rubber of bridge, I understand.

 Are you at all acquainted with that card game?

Sir Brian Yes! A genuine aficionado. We're meeting up this morning, as a matter of fact for a rubber or five.

Nick Excellent!

 Well, thank you very much for the workout on the squash court. I thoroughly enjoyed it, sir. And I'm now taking a sauna, if you'd care to join me?

Sir Brian That sounds like rather a good notion. However, I'd better skip along and meet the Professor. Bridge maniacs cannot be kept waiting ...

The two men shake hands. Sir Brian totters off towards the showers, watched by Nick (who wears a quizzical expression).

Nick *to himself* I must ask Matthew if the British send their boys to school to learn to be "twits", or if it's inbred ...

END OF SCENE

III, Scene ii: The Brits Cannot Come To Terms With Being British

Back in Giselle's dressing room, Lady Iona paces up and down whilst Giselle gloomily looks out of the window.

Lady Iona *frustrated* The established maxim is that one never, **never** falls in love with one's co-star. Not under **any** circumstances.

I've been involved in the Arts since I was a tow-headed tot and believe me, it simply doesn't work.

Giselle's response is to sniff.

Lady Iona You only have to look at what happened between Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy. A fiasco! The studio system forbade them to do aught but pretend to loathe each other. Do you **really** want that on your plate, Fairy?

Giselle *reasonably* But **this** studio will undoubtedly sanction my romance with Trent. It will sell women's magazines and give the picture a ramp-up. It's all win-win for them.

Lady Iona gives a frustrated sigh as she flops onto a couch, shaking her head.

There is a loud knock at the door.

Sir Brian appears from nowhere and rushes to answer the door. The caller is Professor Matthew Crockett-Henschal. Sir Brian welcomes the Professor into the room.

Professor Good morning, everyone! Hope I'm not intruding.

Lady Iona *forcing a smile* Matthew! How lovely!

Matthew takes in the overflow of botanical specimens gathered in the room.

Professor Oh, isn't this charming! You've brought Hollywood to its knees, Giselle.

Giselle *arch* Thank you kind sir.

Brian *down-to-earth* It's like the hothouse at Kew Gardens.

[To Lady Iona]

Well, we're off to the Cato Room for a session of bridge. Back at our hotel.

The two men make for the door.

Matthew *parting shot* And you've not forgotten the grand affair at the Gilderstein residence this evening? It'll be quite a bun fight, I'm reliably informed.

Lady Iona Count me as a "no-show", my dear Professor.
I'm going to be laid-up with a vile head, I'm afraid.

Matthew *somewhat stunned* What! You know that in advance?

Lady Iona You'll have Brian the lion and Fairy ... I'm positive that not one soul will be aware of my absence ...

Brian *rushes* My dear wife is prone to excruciating migraines ... quite a martyr to headache ...

[Bending to kiss his wife on the brow]

It's alright, pet: shall explain it all to mine host and not another syllable need be uttered.

Giselle *shrewd* So ... You're not attending the dinner party this evening, Mummy?
Hmmm ..

Lady Iona *suspicious* No, Fairy ...

And that must not be viewed as a licence to cavort with Mr Lincoln, my dear.

END OF SCENE

III, Scene iii: A Very Swell Hollywood Dinner Party Hosted By Roy Gilderstein

Roy Gilderstein possesses a superb mansion in the Hollywood hills. He is not only staging this marvellous dinner party but will later throw a huge old-fashioned Hollywood party.

The dining room contains a very, very long dining table, which is peopled with a Who's Who of Hollywood royalty, particularly those leading lights who are connected with the remake of "Naughty Marietta". Roy's guests laugh and chat: it seems to be a very convivial dinner.

Our camera picks up the action as Noel Kidling holds forth. Unfortunately, for Nick, Noel has been seated beside him.

Noel *oration* The broad waveland men our she-folk got and gelt. On low cat-paws crept, again unto the blackness slank.

Except for Nick, those immediately in Noel's vicinity clap. Nick seems perplexed and lost.

Nick *totally bemused* Ah ... I'm sorry ... What was --

Matthew *translating* "Pirates came across the wide sea and snatched our maidens and our gold, then like a slinking cat, wafted back into the dark night."

[To Noel]

That was searing, Noel: very poetic.

Nick appears totally bemused.

Matthew *whispers* He's very excited at the prospect of the pirate scenes that you'll be shooting for your *magnum opus*.

Brian Now that's a sterling notion! I could go 12 rounds against Baron Stooke. I have it on the best of authority that he's quite a pugilist when he's on the go. There might be a huge and heavy belt involved in the proceedings. He could parade about as the Challenger, whilst I remain the Champ ...

[Warming to his theme]

Or swords ... shotguns ... bow and arrow ... Do you think perhaps that I could risk my demesne on the outcome of a board game with dice and tokens?

Brian laughs heartily. Linus is lost and looks it. Brian takes pity on him.

Brian *contrite* Oh ...

I do apologize. Really I do. I shouldn't have laughed. I'm rivetingly sorry.

No, my position is hereditary and will pass on to my son (when I fall off the twig). With the addition of a seat in the Lords.

Linus stares at Brian with mouth half-cocked.

Brian *explaining* The House of Lords. One wears a horsehair wig and gaudy robes and makes pertinent speeches. It's ... um ... very important (in a manner of speaking).

[Snaps out of his own trance]

Forgive me ... I'm rabbiting on about myself.

So! What is it that you do to earn a crust? Or perhaps you're a gentleman of leisure?

Linus *unemotional* I'm "money", Sir Earl. I'm one of the principal backers of this glorious motion picture. At least, my company is.

Brian *apologetic* I ... I can't be more penitent for my rudeness, Mr Conger.

Linus *matter of fact* You wanna know how it is that a dumb schmuck like me is

like what we're enjoying now. When the pool gets filled with soap suds ... And the baby elephant ...

More idle chatter and laughter follows. Nick appears to glaze over.

Male guest #1 And the game of snakes and ladders ...

Nick screws up his face, frowning. He is trying to remember where in the film "The Party" there is a game of snakes and ladders. The guests transmogrify into historical figures from the 18th century.

Noel That's your claim to fame, isn't it Nick? Snakes and ladders ... or they call it chutes and ladders here ... Great piety and strength of character take you up, whereas recidivism, wickedness and perpetual sin plunge one downwards.

Nick blinks in surprise. Then follows some rapid-fire dialog.

Female guest #2 Wouldn't you agree with that, Mr Stillen?

Male guest #2 The wages of sin and substandard upbringing --

Male guest #1 Those ill-bred pirates will ravage those poor unfortunate girls, as sure as check.

Female guest #1 'Tis a scandalous shame so it is. Why, those ruffians manhandling all that soft lily-white skin ...

Female guest #3 I can't think of it without feeling that I might suffer another of my fainting fits!

Male guest #2 And one of those lovely girls a princess royal with a voice to rival the angels, a kissable porcelain mouth and rosebud cheeks.

Female guest #2 Oh, Mr Stillen! You just have to make a strong push to save those innocent lambs from the slaughter!

Everyone at the table appears to be staring hard at Nick. They are all costumed as if actually from the times of Louis XV. The ladies seem to be grouped together as they fan themselves feverishly: they are outraged at the turn of events and imploring Nick to take immediate action. The men appear to be offended by the turn of events.

Suddenly, with a burst like a shriek, Nick comes out of his wild reverie. All the dinner guests surrounding Nick and Noel have returned to their everyday 21st century clothing and are conversing without direct reference to Nick.

Noel I said, Nick, that Sellers was of a certainty a comic genius but a flawed personality.

Male guest #3 He crumbled right in front of my eyes, you know.

Noel *concerned* You okay there, Nick? You look a mite peaky ...

Only random squeaking noises emit from Nick's quivering lips.

The major-domo stands behind Nick (to his left). He leans forward and whispers something to Nick. Surprised, Nick looks about and stands.

Nick *to the surprised guests around him* I'm so sorry ... Apparently, I've been summoned.

There is a ripple of surprise. We can hear murmurs: "Don't know what this is about ... Do you?"

Nick follows the major domo through the mansion to a room where the door is shut.

Major-Domo *very punctilious* A lady who works very closely with the President has requested a private word with you, Mr Stillen.

Nick *puzzled* The President? President of what?

Major-Domo *very quiet* Of the United States, sir: President Amilee D'Espardieu Archer.
Mrs Patricia Glenville, the lady's name is, sir.

Nick cannot believe that this is happening. The Major-Domo opens the door. Nick stands, uncertain whether to proceed.

Mrs Glenville *voice off* Come in, Nick! I may call you "Nick"?

The major-domo shepherds Nick inside. Then the door closes quietly behind Nick.

Nick looks around. Patricia appears quite at home.

Mrs Glenville stands, shaking Nick's hand. Then she passes to Nick a Silenzio unit. This is a complicated headset with mouth coverage in the manner of a gasmask. It allows those wearing the unit to speak and listen without any possibility of electronic eavesdropping.

Mrs Glenville quickly slips on her own Silenzio exclusion mask, and signals to Nick to do likewise.

Nick is perplexed, confused and alarmed. He begins to speak and is instantly silenced by Mrs Glenville's abrupt signal. She indicates that he must wear the unit.

Nick manages to get himself strapped into the Silenzio. He sits, as instructed by Mrs Glenville. The voices are now obviously emanating from a microphoned unit and a little crackly.

Nick *awkward* Kind of like the cone of silence in "Get Smart" ...

Mrs Glenville *chuffed* There! Hear that crackle? This room is fitted with eavesdropping equipment. Or else it's somewhere round about. Doesn't really concern us.

Following a brief knock at the door, the Major-Domo ushers in a maid, who presents well-crafted cakes and other finger food, plates, coffee and chocolates.

Nick *surprised* Why would anyone --

Nick glances towards the intruders.

Mrs Glenville Oh, it's all quite straightforward. And don't be alarmed: they can't hear us.

 No, they won't hear a single syllable that we utter.

Nick *dubious* But --

Nick is caught. He wants to eat the food and drink the coffee. To do so, he must remove the Silenzio unit. Thus, for the rest of the scene, both Mrs Glenville and Nick will provide comedy by this ON-OFF travesty.

Mrs Glenville We can take the gloves off and air our various grievances.

 Now, basically I'm quite fed-up with your bleating and whining, Mr Stillen. All of us loyal Americans at the Whitehouse want you to really put your shoulder to the wheel and get 100% behind the Victor Herbert musical extravaganza. We can't wait to see the fruits of your endeavours on the silver screen.

Nick looks horrified and makes a squeaking noise.

Mrs Glenville You want to know why all the pressure and all the hype, don't you? That's kind of understandable, I guess.

 Okay, Nick: and you're strictly under oath not to divulge any of the top secret classified back notes that I'm about to deliver to you.

 I must receive your honest assurance on that.

Nick stares, open-mouthed and bug-eyed.

Mrs Glenville Nick?

Nick *alarmed and hesitant* I ... I guess so, if ...

Mrs Glenville A whizz-kid electronics genius with a penchant for war games has invented a piece of equipment which is so revolutionary that it will haul us into a new era of warfare.

Again, Nick gives every appearance of being aghast.

Mrs Glenville We want to be the owners of that warhead or missile or bomb or whatever the hell it is. Us. Our side. The US of A, Mr Stillen.

 And whatever it is that you think about these people, they just aren't how they are portrayed in fast-action movies: slick, cool and masters of their fate. Not true by a long straw.

 They are people with strengths and weaknesses. Just like everyone else, really. We all have strengths and weaknesses.

 And this cat's weakness seems to be that he is of a definite theatrical bent. He is probably already slinking about your movie set and that's just how we want it. The CIA has top agents stationed at the scene. So you can leave the details to us.

Nick continues wide-eyed and horrified. Mrs is waiting for him to respond. He can only make wounded animal noises.

Mrs Glenville For all that you think the remake of Naughty Marietta will prove to be a box office lemon, we require and charge you to put some

backbone into directing it.

And I mean now! Immediately!

Mrs Glenville stands.

Mrs Glenville *effusive smile* By the way, I love your work: both as an actor and as a director.

Another interruption occurs.

Aiden sidles into the room, grabs a spare Silenzio unit, pops it on his head and then flicks a switch which causes Nick's unit to become non-operational.

Aiden speaks urgently to Mrs Glenville (we can't make out what he says), who then looks narrowly at Nick (who is still seated, and still aghast). Aiden flicks the switch again such that Nick is now party to the conversation.

Mrs Glenville When was the last time that you saw your buddy: Graham Kramer?

Nick *surprised* Gray? Ah That would be when we went big-game fishing ... With Dan Turbot ... A few days ago that would have been ...

Aiden *keen* Did you nab any trophies?

Mrs Glenville *castigating* Aiden, for goodness sake keep your natural *joie-de-vivre* in close check, won't you? We might be standing at the tickling point of a very serious scenario here. Have some compassion, won't you? Gravitas, man, gravitas.

Both Aiden and Mrs Glenville stare at Nick.

Nick *alarmed* What's going on?

Aiden There's a disused, abandoned building site up in the hills (not far from here), near to where they filmed a hilarious Peter Sellers movie some years back.

Nick "The Party"! Coincidentally, we were talking about it at dinner.

Aiden *nods* That's the one.

Mrs Glenville According to my aide here, Nick, some children were playing there and they've found a body.

Nick *strangled gasp* And you think that it might be Gray?!

Mrs Glenville *nods* Come on! Let's drive up there to check it out.

She removes her sound-proof Silenzio mouthpiece. She assists Nick to remove his, as Aiden removes his own. As they leave, Aiden shoves cakes into his mouth.

END OF SCENE

III, Scene iv: The Grim Rendezvous With Graham Kramer's Body PART 1

Aiden sits behind the chauffeur, facing the back of the bullet-proofed limo. Nick sits in the capacious back seat beside Mrs Glenville. Interior lamps illuminate the three passengers.

Both Aiden and Mrs Glenville each have a briefcase on their lap. Mrs Glenville chats on her car phone whilst Aiden selects and reads papers, which he then passes to his boss. The pair work steadily.

Mrs Glenville *[Into the phone]*

That's a negative. The Prez is in no way enamoured of the bill. She requires Lou to work longer and harder on his presentation. Got it?

[To Aiden]

I need the 3 or 4 sheets that Ginz shoved into your fist as we raced to the car.

Aiden calmly hands over papers to Mrs Glenville.

Meanwhile, Nick is uncomfortable, stressed-out and fidgety.

Nick How can you guys possibly work, damn it!

Aiden and Mrs Glenville continue as if uninterrupted.

Aiden The nation doesn't stop for a homicide, Nick. We've got to keep the wheels turning.

Nick mouths the word "homicide" and squirms in extreme panic.

Mrs Glenville Please keep calm, Nick.

Nick *upset* Calm? My side-kick ... my co-worker ... my fishing pal is probably lying on the cold ground without sign of life, and you want me to -
-

Aiden signals to Nick that he must remain silent.

Nick eyes his co-passengers with extreme dislike. He dives his hands into his pockets with great activity.

Nick Where's that darn thing ... ?

Nick reefs the Silenzio unit out of his pocket and fits it swiftly into place. We now hear assorted hisses, clicks and whirring noises: Nick is letting fly with invective, but his auditors are unable to hear him, as they are not yet wearing their Silenzio units.

Aiden looks at Nick, mildly amused. Mrs Glenville rolls her eyes, glances at Nick as if he were a problem child, and sighs.

Aiden and Mrs Glenville glance at each other, then retrieve their Silenzio units and put them on.

Nick *irate* -- so I wanna know (on the strength of that) if my friend Gray was **really** murdered. At least you can tell me that much.

Mrs Glenville Oh, yes. Definitely. That's affirmative.

Aiden The cop who rang me spoke of certain indications: it was definitely a hit man job, and some kind of ritual --

Nick *scathing* And this is presumably related to the hooded or caped men running about my filmset with bombs hidden in their underclothing. Soviet spies, no doubt!

Mrs Glenville *prim* You can make light of this if you want to, Nick.

Nick *outraged* I'm not making light of -- Why would **anyone** want to kill Gray?

(If the body *is* Gray's).

Mrs Glenville I won't be putting you to the trouble of peering into the body bag.

(Well, hopefully not ...)

But there are some interesting sidelines that might mean something to you (you being his friend and all).

Nick What kind of sidelines?

Mrs Glenville *airily* Oh, just this and that ...

They go on working, wearing the Silenzio units. Nick continues to appear agitated and distressed. Without looking up, Mrs Glenville delivers her thunderclap.

Mrs Glenville *matter of fact* You'd better prepare yourself, Mr Nick Stillen. Your pal whom you knew so well that he was like a brother to you was in reality an ex-Soviet military expert named Illich Kostya Kamaravich.

The camera moves away from the car.

Aiden *voice-off* Please try to master your grief. Your country needs you to stand firm and strong right now.

FADE OUT

III, Scene v: The Grim Rendezvous With Graham Kramer's Body PART 2

The scene is at the disused building site. It is dark and uninviting.

Nick is visibly distressed. He squats beside the body bag, trying to master his overwrought emotions. He looks up. Mrs Glenville and Aiden are watching him without emotion. Aiden even goes so far as to glance at his watch.

Nick *sarling* It's alright for you. Death and killings are par for the course for people like you.

Aiden *surprised* No!

Mrs Glenville *denying such a suggestion* I certainly do not have any experience of murder. That's just an outrageous thing to suggest.

Nick *upset* Then how come I don't see you evidencing any kind of sorrow.

There is no response.

Nick *jeering* Right! You don't care. Don't apologize ... I'll live with that.

Mrs Glenville angrily shoves her belongings into Aiden's hands, and sinks down to squat beside Nick. Nick studies her in his grief.

Mrs Glenville *very taut* No, I don't care and I have no intention of apologizing to you, Mr Stillen.

The only thing on this Earth that I care about is the President of the United States of America. Her wishes and commands are my daily bread.

And the latest "care" in her horizon is this weapon that seems to be on the loose. She wants to get it before anyone else does. Before some power-drunk maniac who is not of our faith holds the world to ransom with this super-duper cruncher.

Nick *upset and aggressive* And meanwhile, I'm being ordered to bring forth a rehash of a long-outdated piece of fluff, because **that's** going to make all this right.

[Heavily ironic]

There sure is an obvious link there, Ma'am, but it appears to be a tenuous one at best ...

Mrs Glenville *in Nick's face, whispers* My contacts at the CIA have confirmed that the charismatic bomb-maker of whom I spoke earlier (the long-awaited whizz-kid) has arrived at your set and is rubbing elbows with your team **as we speak**.

On ... your ... set ... Mr Nicholas Stillen.

Now maybe your buddy here (while he was alive) was somehow involved in that and that's what got him killed.

Nick *matter of fact*

That would seem to be a logical assumption, Ma'am.

[Looks about with a long sigh]

And am I next?

Mrs Glenville *taken
aback*

Nobody can predict that.

Nick

What am I expected to do, then? Continue with this farce?

Mrs Glenville *smiles
coyly*

Certainly. And put on your actor's face and pretend to the hilt that you are directing a winner.

Nick drops his head. Then he nods. Nick stands, helping Mrs Glenville to her feet.

Aiden *annoyingly over-
unctuous*

Do it for your pal Kramer, Nick.

Nick and Mrs Glenville stand side-by-side. They both look towards Aiden (who is looking from one to the other for approbation) with something close to loathing.

Nick *harsh*

Hudson, if you dare to set foot on my movie set, I'll have the uniform boys turf you out onto the street on your arse.

There is a brittle silence. The three stand about just as we left them. The camera moves back a very long way.

END OF SCENE

Scene vi: We Did Not Really Want To Know That Gray Was Like This

The Feds take Nick to see Gray Kramer's digs.

Our camera follows the party as they descend rough stone steps: under the floor there is a cavern. It is obviously an armoury of exceptionally high-calibre fire-power and ballistics. But the lighting is almost dim.

Nick is blown away and can't speak. His lips open and close but no sound emits.

In the background, an officer drones a catalogue of the cellar's contents into a hand-held voice recorder. A ruddy-faced policeman, beaming with pleasure, steps in front of Nick and confronts him.

Policeman *beaming* Pretty impressive, huh? What do you think, Mr Stillen? You never dreamed-up anything close to this in any of your films, now, did ya?

Nick baulks under this direct attack. But then the uniformed man steps aside, and Nick spots a Luger P08 pistol: he reaches out to touch it and then reels back in horror.

Policeman *voice-off* What is it? You seen a ghost?

Nick's mouth works, his eyes are wide open.

Nick *dreamily* I learned most of the words ... Dutch Schultz's last words, you know. I could recite them. "I'm a pretty good pretzler".

Nick tries to get a grip. He allows his whole body to shiver. He looks a mess.

Nick *gulping in air* I learned it, like I learn lines for a film. I memorized it all. The dog biscuit for the snappy dog, and the chimney sweep and the French Canadian bean soup ... Mother, Satan, the Chinaman and pavement bears ...

Aiden *voice-off* Mr Stillen, we need for you to stay cogent on this. Please focus – we need your assistance here.

Nick turns towards Aiden.

Nick He died in 1935, you know. That's when my film was made. The original of my film, that is.

Oh God!

Aiden *desperate*

Please don't lose it, Nick. We need your insight. Does any of this ring true? Did you have any idea that Kramer was leading this double life?

Nick *reciting*

"Be instrumental in letting us know. They are Englishmen and they are a type I don't know who is best, they or us."

Aiden *voice-off*

Take Mr Stillen home and get his wife to slug him with a stiff drink. Brandy would be best.

🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀 **Break** 🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀

Nick is standing in his study, leaning his forehead on the brick wall. He is nursing a balloon of brandy. Christina hovers in the background.

Nick *low-voiced*

I went into a kind of shock. It was just the most game-changing, life-intruding moment.

I got fuzzy and started thinking about Dutch Schultz and I started reeling-off his last words. I learnt his last words when I was a kid. Did I ever tell you that?

Christina

His mother rang me.

Nick whips around, aghast.

Nick *amazed*

Holy shit! Dutch Schultz's mother rang you?

Christina *patient*

No, Gray's mother!

Nick

Gray's mother rang you?

Christina

Yes. I told you already.

Nick *at sea*

Did ya?

Christina

He was of Eastern European heritage. Finding out that fact blew me away completely, never mind that he owned a world-class

arsenal in his cellar.

Nick *sadly*

I can't focus on it. It all seems so unreal. It's just ...

For how long have I known this guy and then it spins out that he is dealing with Chicago killers and Central American warlords, ostensibly via Beirut ... And I don't know what all ...

Nick shakes his head as he paces around in his study, sipping brandy.

Christina

So who is the arms-maker, now that we know who the dealer was?

Nick *shrugs*

General Groves and I will get together and –

Suddenly, Nick is arrested by an unexpected brainwave. He blinks, then slaps his forehead.

Nick *exultant*

The DVD!

Nick scrambles about in his study, searching through his piles of stuff for a simple DVD in a plastic case.

Christina *confused*

What?

Nick *shouting*

The DVD that Gray handed over to me. I haven't watched it yet.

Christina *surprised*

What ... really?

Nick *frowning in thought*

It's the colour version of NM. He almost **forced** me to take it in spite of my obvious reluctance. He got mad at me and ... And quoted Dutch Schultz back at me.

Shit!

Where is it? Where did I ... In the office!

Christina

You're in shock, Nick. Collect it tomorrow. Give this business a rest now.

Nick *calmer*

Okay ... Okay ... I'll pick it up when I next visit my set ...

END OF SCENE

Scene x: Nick Faces The Inevitable And Watches The 1935 Movie

Nick is holed-up in his home theatre, in the dark and alone. On the large plasma screen, the old black-and-white version of "Naughty Marietta" is screening. We cannot hear the movie; we simply watch Nick watching it. Nick shoves popcorn in his mouth and sips from a can of Coca Cola. He gives all the appearance of discomfort and lack of interest: Nick shifts about in his seat and rolls his eyes.

What we do hear is the following conversation.

Christina *voice-over* Are you listening?

Nick *voice-over* I'm thinking ...

Christina *voice-over* What are you thinking? I hope that you're trying to figure out who shot your friend.

Nick *voice-over* I'm thinking that I gotta do justice to Gray (no matter **what** he was doing behind my back) and at least watch the film.

Oh, God, I hate singing pictures. I'd much rather be in a chain gang along with those appalling Brits than ...

Christina *voice-over* Can't you at least **find** the DVD and then watch it? The colour DVD that Gray Kramer pushed into your reluctant hands?

Nick *voice-over* It's not in my office. I turned it upside-down.

I must be mistaken and I've left it in my car or somewhere ...

Christina *voice-over* Professionally speaking, you should have seen the 1935 film long 'ere this!

Nick *voice-over* I've been winging it.

So far, with Gray's assistance I've been able to hold it together. I guess that in his memory I should get myself up to speed.

Christina *voice-over* You might want to do that in order to provide professional directorial judgement. Mourning your friend is all very well, but --

Nick *voice-over* You're right ... You're right ... Can't postpone the inevitable another second, I guess ...

If I'm needed, I'll be holed-up down in the dungeon with a cup of popcorn and a bottle of Coke.

END OF SCENE

Scene vi: Nick Directs The Balcony Scene ("The Italian Street Song")

Nick, wearing headphones, addresses the actors taking part in the Zing Zing Balcony scene. He is in an elevated chair, at the same level as the balcony.

A group of Italianate strolling minstrels and puppeteers is represented at ground level on a cobblestone patio. Above them (on the balcony) stand the actors playing Marietta and Dick (that is, Giselle and Trent). Marietta/Giselle holds a small posy.

Nick

Okay, girs and boils: listen up to me!

We'll make a start on this scene, which is one of the first ensemble scenes we've filmed so far.

Before we all trudge over to the East Coast, I want to wrap-up some of this interior stuff. Everyone on their toes, please.

The story so far:

The girls have sailed from France, been attacked by pirates in sight of land, been saved by Warrington's militia and conveyed to town by the Governor. This is the promised dance where the girls get to meet all the pink-cheeked local yokels they are destined to marry. So this turns out to be some big occasion.

Marietta has escaped from the rigours of the folk dancing (followed by Warrington) up an impressive flight of stairs and finds herself on the balcony here. So Warrington urges Rudolpho and his troupe to sing for the lovely French mademoiselle. And (under his disparaging remarks) Marietta knocks him out with her

beautiful singing.

Our camera does a sweep of the whole scene, including crew and equipment.

Nick Is everyone in their places?

Our camera roves about, noting the happy group of actors who enjoy working with Nick.

Nick I want you all to sing out for real so that I get the correct physiological throat movements. And then we'll tidy it up in the studio later. So the Duncan Conroy-Pierce's studio orchestra will strike up on the tape and you all give it your best shot.

There'll be a couple of blinks of this blue light over here and then you're on! Just like we practised.

Giselle Just a minute! Nick, are we using "gay"? Or changing it ... Or ... ?

Nick *cannot hear* What's that?

Trent *shouts* She's worried about the "mandolinas gay".

Nick *at sea* Why?

Trent *embarrassed* Well ... You know ... Homophobia ...

Nick *dismissive* Oh no! No, that's okay. Leave it in. Anyone who takes offence at that is just too blue.

[A call to arms]

Okay! We all ready? Kansas: you'll give me a very robust Rudolpho to Trent's solid, Yankee Captain Dick. And everyone just enjoy yourselves. Remember that Captain Dick is a real winner with the Italian community.

And ... Action!

I do not want to waste time doing takes and retakes: we will show this sequence as the finished product, as if Nick was able to get this quality with just one take.

Dick *jolly* Hey! Here's my favourite puppeteer in the Colonies.

Rudolpho *hearty* Good evening to you, Senor Dick. And to the so lovely senorita at your side.

The men (including Dick) bow. Marietta nods slightly in acknowledgement.

Dick Oh ho! This fair lady needs to be cheered up. She's ever so homesick: longing for the glittering salons of Paris.

Rudolpho, would you be so kind as to reward us with a song ... for ...

Here, Dick fiddles about with his leather purse, and then triumphantly draws out a shiny gold coin.

Dick ... for a freshly-minted gold doubloon.

Dick flicks the coin down to Rudolpho who catches it easily in one hand. Rudolpho (laughing) shakes his finger at Dick.

Rudolpho *hearty* Ah, Senor Dick. Either you are out to impress your beautiful lady or else you are simply a generous man!

The crowd of Italians around Rudolpho laughs heartily. We just manage to see the blue light (this would not be in the film, so ensure that some of the crew are also visible) and into the music.

The girl (Rudolpho's daughter) sings in an indifferent mezzo-soprano.

On the balcony, Dick struts about, listening to the singing. Marietta watches him with an ironic eye.

Dick *bombastic* Listen, my little iced cup cake. Listen to **real** singing; the way I like to hear it. How do y'think that **she** knows how to sing that song for me?

Marietta *off-hand* I've no idea.

As the girl sings, Dick picks up the lyric and sings along. Meanwhile, Marietta ignores him, as she pulls each flower from her posy and throws it down to the girls below. They catch the flowers and smile glowingly.

Dick roars with laughter and then grabs Marietta's upper arm. She tries to pull away, startled.

Dick *very scornful* Bet you wish you could sing like that now, huh?

Dick turns away. Marietta glares at his back, irate. Then she changes her expression from anger and scorn to naughty triumph. She picks up the soprano part and continues to sing.

Rudolpho's daughter is vastly surprised, and stops singing, eyes popping open. In fact, all the Italians are stunned as Marietta warbles deliciously out over the balcony.

Dick slowly turns, totally overthrown.

Marietta finishes to the ecstatic applause of the Italians, to whom she bows. Now she is conscience-stricken and turns to leave the balcony. Again, Dick grabs Marietta's arm.

Dick *shocked* That voice! Such phrasing, such –
You've been professionally trained, I don't doubt.

Marietta Oh come now! How could that be possible?
Only family singing on a Friday evening, you know, and church
socials. That's all.

Still holding her arm, Dick stares down into Marietta's face.

Marietta *uncertain* Please unhand me, Captain Warrington. This is not at all
becoming.

Dick *urgent* Wait! There's something ...
Listen! A pal of mine (a French pal) was telling me ... He once had
the good fortune to hear a noble lady singing in Paris. A princess
of the blood, she was.

And my pal said that she sang better than any nightingale.

Marietta *scornful* Lucky French friend. To have you as his bosom companion.

Dick Now, that wouldn't have been you, would it? The lovely princess?

Marietta Is that even likely, sir?

Dick *enlightened* Yes! The cosseted princess with the perfect hands that never saw
a day's work.

Marietta wants to leave but is unable to go.

Mariettao Oh really, Captain Warrington. Your imagination goes too far.
Running away from a *marriage de convenance*, am I?

Dick *low-voiced* He described your looks ... Your voice ... There can be no mistake,
Princess.

Suddenly, Dick/Trent scoops Marietta/Giselle to his chest so as to look at her face with great admiration and ardour.

Trent is so overcome with his adoration for Giselle that he kisses her with abandon. The entire cast freezes. When the kiss ends Trent (appalled by his own actions) steps back, whereas Giselle merely appears confused. She speaks to Nick, but stares at Trent.

Giselle *uncertain* I don't remember that kiss being in the script ... Sorry, Nick, but I
wasn't prepared for it.

Nick *yells* Cut!

Trent *aghast, blurts out* I ...

That was an impulse. I mean, she sang so sweetly and she ...
Well, **look** at her! She's so absolutely beautiful! I'm just like any
other red-blooded Yankee boy. How could I resist?

This naive admission is met with some laughter, some ribald catcalls from the males and a ripple of applause (all from the actors and crew). Even Nick grins in appreciation as he looks about.

Nick *kindly* It was a good impulse, Trent, and we're gonna leave it in. But
next time ...

Still tittering, the actors shift around.

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Nick approaches Giselle.

Nick My camera wants to make love to you. I don't blame Lincoln one bit.

Giselle *vastly embarrassed* You're a happily married man, Nick. I've met your wife. She's lovely.
You ... You shouldn't be cracking onto me.

Nick *surprised* "Cracking"?

Giselle Well ... I think you call it "hitting on" ... Please don't ... I'm awfully uncomfortable, if you don't mind my saying so.

Nick Well, I **do** mind, as it happens.
I'm the director, and my job is to ensure that what the camera sees pleases me. So what I was saying (without any sexual connotation) was that your portrayal of the escapee princess is overwhelming. In an aesthetic sense (which is where my direction is heading) you tick all the boxes.

Giselle *abashed* Thank you. I'm sorry that I misunderstood ...

Nick *earnest* I'll tell you something else, Giselle. If this picture is a hit, then it'll be all down to you: my casquette girl.

There is a slight awkwardness. Nick feels the need to fill the lacuna.

Nick You were chosen out of hundreds of other hopefuls on the strength of your likeness to Jeanette MacDonald. But on reflection, you have many, many talents that I can see and feel through my lens.
I'm not out to flatter you. I don't do sucking-up very well. That's not my game.
What I mean is: the observer will be dazzled by your stunning filmic presence.
Again: if the film flops, it won't in any way be your fault.

Is that what he meant?

Carmel totters away with Trent.

END OF SCENE

Scene vii: Packing To Leave For The East Coast

This scene is a medley of quick views of cast members and crew packing for the trip over to the East Coast.

Lady Iona will speak to Giselle and in doing so, will let us (the audience) know that that's what is going on.

Lady Iona is personally packing Giselle's clothes into a suitcase.

Lady Iona I heard about it, Fairy, and I'm not in the least impressed. Is Mr Lincoln taking over the direction from Mr Stillen, perchance?

[Change of tack]

I've no idea of the weather in Louisiana ... Or Mississippi, is it? ...

One assumes that it is cooler than Hollywood. Who knows?

Come on dear! Our plane leaves in 3 hours ... Let's keep moving!

More cast members are hurling things into bags or else neatly packing suitcases.

END OF SCENE

END OF ACT III



NICK STILLEN'S CASQUETTE GIRL

ACT IV

IV, Scene i: "Leviticus Uplifted" Where Filming Continues

Nick is still in Hollywood, even though all the other cast members and crew attached to "Naughty Marietta" have long since departed for the East Coast and continued filming.

In the usual darkened theatre, Nick and some others watch a rush from "Leviticus Uplifted". The Foley effects have not yet been added but the explosions and dogs barking sound acceptable.

The year is 1943, and the action takes place somewhere in Europe. It is twilight.

Eugene/Nick crawls up out of a river onto a dirty beach. Noises of warfare are round about. Eugene looks around him, scared.

Eugene is now placing a device into a small piece of guttering that is attached to a group of buildings. He adds fabric scraps and rags to plug the guttering.

Eugene turns and scampers back to the river and dives/clambers into the water. Wide-eyed, he watches the results of his exercise.

There is a tremendous, fiery explosion. Bits of debris and shrapnel whizz through the air towards Eugene, who must duck back into the water.

Dogs bark ferociously.

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Male #1 *voice-off* We'll put the guard dogs into post-production. They'll follow Eugene down to the water and run into it after you.

Nick lazily dons a Bluetooth headset and speaks to the disembodied voice. Christian (who sits beside him) does likewise.

Nick So why can't we do that now?

Male #1 *voice-off* Because the dog-actors are filming in Texas just now. They're available in a coupla days at best.

Nick *surprised* "Dog actors" ... Are you kidding me? You haven't by any chance been hanging around with Linus, have you? His funny pills can make you imagine the darnedest things.

Male #1 *voice-off* Not lately.

Christian So that's that – you have to shoot yourself getting into the water and swimming ... That's tomorrow, Nick.

Male #1 *voice-off* Christian, it should be a snap. Nick, you only have to dive in and swim around between obstacles. The water is crystal clear so's you can see what you're doing down there and we'll murky it up later.

Nick *lazily* Yeah – got it.

Christian And then you'll come out dripping wet **after** you've placed the device.

Male #1 *voice-off* That's when the other guys laud you as a hero – but God warns you that the sarge is pushing you to the very edge of conscience.

Christian If it's okay with you we'll film that after you emerge from the water.

Male #1 *voice-off* Then we can slot it all together – the entry into this river, the underwater scene, the exit from water, crawl up beach, plant explosives, the chase back (and the dogs will slot in later). The explosives we filmed last week. And then meet up with the other

Voice of God They'll court martial you, Eugene. They'll drag your sad arse through the legal system, find you guilty of refusing a direct command from your immediate superior, and you'll be hanged until you are dead.

Eugene Then ... Do I have a choice, Yahweh?

Voice of God Oh, come on Eugene! When is there ever a real choice? That's fairytale, magic stuff.

Eugene *mimicking God* Oh, come on, God ... Give me a substantial tree branch to cling to, or else maybe ...

Voice of God Yeah? "Or else maybe" what?

Eugene shakes his head sadly.

Eugene *thoughtful* It's the riddle of the ages that you set for us common, ignorant folk: to do the right thing and die for it, or to follow a foul call straight to Hell?

 I mean, where do I mark the line in the sand, God? Here? Here? Or maybe here ... ?

[Drags his foot across the sand at several spots]

 No offence intended but what kind of leader are you to give such non-specific orders?

Voice of God If I gave out the answers gratis, Eugene, then what would be the point of anything?

Eugene *stern* I've always been morally guided by the laws of God as enumerated in the Book of Leviticus.

There is no immediate response from God. Eugene grabs his Bible, which he has brought with him to the wash basin. Eugene wags the Bible at the sky.

Eugene *yells* This is the good book, God! The Bible! It contains your laws. So what I gotta ask you face-to-face is: How far does the torture of

Nick sits in his East Coast hotel room and has just outlined the above "dream" sequence to someone on the phone. The film unit has been working out of Biloxi.

Nick *into phone handset* I think that'll work better than actually **showing** the intended murder.

If you check in Tremwag ... Well, Tremwag only **hints** at the shooting. He leaves it up to the court martial to cover the minutiae. So we might just as well follow that lead. Yeah.

Nick strolls to the window and views the sights of Biloxi Mississippi.

Nick *into phone handset* Nah, they've all been here for weeks. Everything is the usual shambles. Christina did her best but she got countermanded at every turn.

Long sigh.

Nick *into phone handset* I'm gonna watch the rushes of the pirate attack. Tonight that'll be. I'm having trouble with the time zone having lost hours in the flight East yesterday.

What could they possibly have got wrong with a pirate attack?

END OF SCENE

IV, Scene ii: Filming The Pirate Scene – The False Start

We are beginning with a FALSE START (which reflects the kind of cutesie side-story traditionally incorporated into movies of the 1930's).

Nick's second-in-command (in Gray's sudden absence) had made a go of the pirate scene but had inadvertently botched it up. We see Nick throwing a hissy fit.

Then we do the real thing (in the following scene).

We may have one or two directorial interventions during this long, long sequence: but I want it to look as close to the finished product as possible.

A sunny day with gentle, smooth seas.

The beginning of the scene takes place aboard the sailing ship (of the Royal Navy) which is conveying the French girls to New Orleans. In the background, sailors work to the spoken orders of the officers. Then the men respond "Aye! Aye, Sir!" This is all done in clear British accents (Scottish, Welsh and English). One sailor plays a tin flute whilst another plays a squeeze-box.

Marietta and some of the girls have found a cosy retreat: on the main deck, out of the way, sitting on various items of cargo and bunches of nets. Marietta is the centre of attention. The other casquette girls look at her in something like worshipful adoration.

Marietta speaks (as always) in the manner of Jeanette MacDonald.

The girls have English accents: not lower class, but as if from "proper" middle class homes.

Marietta airily Besides, I shan't marry.

The response is one of murmured shock.

Marietta determined No! I've made up my mind to it. No man could **ever** carry me off.
No sir!

Girl voice-off But you're as light as a feather.

Marietta smirking Alright then. Let me rephrase my pronouncement.

No man would **dare!**

The response is gasps and cooing noises.

Marietta Why, I'd give him such a look of cold disdain as would set his
knock-knees a-trembling just like a blancmange.

The girls giggle delightfully.

~~~~~ **Break** ~~~~~

*Midshipman Quincy is surveying the horizon on the leeward side with the use of the glass.*

*Rosa sidles up to him. Quincy smiles at the girl.*

M/S Quincy                           'Afternoon, Miss Rosa.

Rosa                                   Hello.

*The young midshipman must continue with his work. Rosa is uncertain.*

M/S Quincy                           Taking a constitutional about the deck?

Rosa                                   Yes. We've all been vastly entertained by Mistress Marietta. She's  
ever so droll ... And quite a songstress, too.

*Midshipman Quincy nods as he plies the glass.*

M/S Quincy                           Yes, she's a corker. Not that you're not very pretty, too, Miss  
Rosa, if I may make so bold.

Rosa *slight curtsey*               Kind sir.

But Miss Marietta has sworn off men.

I can't at all see how as she'll fare in New Orleans if she doesn't  
wed.

*[Slight pause]*

I'm to marry a rich planter, I'm told.

*Midshipman Quincy forgets himself, and quickly looks away from the horizon directly at the girl.*

M/S Quincy *ardent* Gosh! I wish with all my heart that I were a rich planter, and not just a two-a-penny midshipman.

Rosa *mortified to have offended him* Oh, Mr Quincy! It was never my intention to disparage you. That was not my intention at all.

*A deep background cough brings Midshipman Quincy back to realization and he resumes his scanning of the horizon.*

M/S Quincy I may well get a promotion, of course (Heaven knows!) and I've a snug a little cottage as you'd ever see coming to me. It's in Suffolk. I'll have it when my poor Papa dies.

Rosa *shocked* Oh, Mr Quincy! Shame on you! Fie! For shame!  
You ought not to think of the demise of your sire in order to --

*Nick's voice now intrudes. He is in deep background, but loud.*

Nick *voice off* Turn this off! Shut it down! Shut it down!

Male *voice off* Mr Quincy! Have you spotted anything of interest yet?

M/S Quincy No, sir! Just the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, Sir.

Male *voice off* Jolly good. No pertinence please, Mr Midshipman. Remember your place.

*Again, Nick's voice intrudes. He is in deep background, but loud.*

Nick *voice off* Is anybody hearing me? Turn it OFF! Turn the damn thing OFF!  
Pause – or whatever it is you do ...

Male *voice off* Keep a sharp look-out, man. This is Pirate Passage after all.

M/S Quincy *confidential to Rosa* We're not far now, Miss Rosa. In just a brace of shakes, you'll be able to make out the first fall of land.

Crow's nest *voice-off, calling clearly* Land! Land sighted nor-west by west.

M/S Quincy *elated* Ah! Well said --

*The screen freezes. Nick is standing in front of the screen, obviously irate.*

*Nick (looking somewhat tiny by comparison with the figures on the screen) begins to bluster, waving his script in ill-disguised anger. He is addressing the position of the projector (so straight into our camera).*

Nick *furious*                      What the hell is this crap?!

*Over-excited and almost foaming at the mouth, Nick violently hurls his script to the floor and jumps on it several times. Then he distractedly drags his fingers through his hair. Then he speaks with arms flailing. Nick is beside himself with despair and anger.*

Nick                                      What have you done?!

The sailors and the girls are ***French***, not English.

Male *voice off*                      But you said that the pirates were American! That's what you told me.

Nick *demented*                      ***But these aren't the pirates!***

These are meant to be the French sailors who have to fight the pirates later on.

Give me air! Give me oxygen!

What planet are you on?!

*Nick is subsumed by his anger. He paces about, throwing up his arms.*

Nick *voice breaking*                We have sailors (French), virgins (French), filthy pirates (all of them assorted villains from every corner of the earth: but they speak like Americans or at worst British) and then Warrington's minutemen who are 100% Yankee.

*Nick stoops to scoop up his script and then he stalks off.*

Nick *voice-off, yelling*            Start over! Just start over!

END OF SCENE

#### IV, Scene iii: Filming The Pirate Scene – The Good Version

*A dull, sombre day, with choppy seas.*

*The beginning of the scene takes place aboard the sailing ship (an antiquated French merchant ship) which is conveying the French girls to New Orleans. In the background, sailors work to the spoken orders (delivered in French) of the Master. Then the men respond "A vos orders" and "Oui, M'Sire!"*

*Remember that as a merchant vessel, different courtesies apply.*

*This is all done in the French language. There is no music from the deck: instead, we will hear moody soundtrack music.*

*Marietta and some of the girls have found a cosy retreat: on the main deck, out of the way, sitting on various items of cargo and bunches of nets. Marietta is surrounded by lounging casquette girls who lean against her or against each other.*

*Marietta speaks (as always) in the manner of Jeanette MacDonald; whereas, the girls have French accents.*

*We won't bother with subtitles because it is evident even to the simplest intellect what is going on.*

Marietta *airily*                      Besides, I shan't marry.

*The response is one of murmured shock.*

Marietta *determined*              No! I've made up my mind to it. No man could **ever** carry me off.  
No sir!

Girl *voice-off*                      Mais ... You are so very ethereal and any man could carry you.

Marietta *smirking*                      Alright then. Let me rephrase my pronouncement.

No man would **dare**!

*The response is gasps and cooing noises.*

Marietta                                  Why, I'd give him such a look of cold disdain as would set his  
knock-knees a-trembling just like a blancmange.

*The girls giggle delightfully.*



- *It is obvious that the crew of the French merchant ship is an ill-trained rabble. On the other hand, the pirate captain has drilled his men: they can be seen to be very capable seamen, albeit filthy and poorly outfitted.*
- *The captain of the pirate ship takes a handy position in order for his men to swing aboard the French ship by use of ropes.*
- *The pirates are well-armed, even to the extent of daggers and knives clenched between their teeth. They either swing themselves directly onto the deck, fighting fiercely with all comers; OR they land amidst lines/rope ladders and hang off these to fight.*
- *The casquette girls hug each other in total fear, screaming and squealing in terror.*
- *For the ease of the pirate captain and his close companions, a large plank straddles both ships. The pirate captain strolls aboard the French merchant vessel. He looks about, taking mental stock of the vessel (again, with a view to future usage).*
- *The French merchant crew are easily subdued. Prisoners are tied up and chained together.*
- *The pirates discover the screaming casquette girls.*

Pirate captain                      Well, well, well ...

This is a sight to gladden an old sea-dog's heart.

*The pirates close in on the girls, pawing them. This behaviour is met with renewed screaming and the uttering of several French words.*

Pirate                                      I'd say they be French mademoiselles, Captain. By the language, at any rate.

*The pirate captain nods.*

Pirate captain                      *[Aside]*

My French don't stand up to close inspection.

*[Louder, to the ladies]*

Now, do any of you fair ladies speak English?

*Parlez-vous* England?

*With perfect poise and utter self-assurance, Marietta steps forward. She gives the pirate captain a look that would freeze burning coal.*

Marietta *frostily* I speak fluent English, my good man.

*The men voice their appreciation of Marietta's beauty.*

Pirate captain Ooo, indeed, gentlemen. Now that there is the ultimate in withering scorn, that look. Take careful note of it, my pretty boys. There ain't many women can manage such a disdainful --

Marietta *frigid* Kindly tell your men to cease and desist in their interference with these young ladies. They are all chaste and pure maids, untouched by the hand of man and --

Pirate captain *sneering* -- and their snow-white flesh unseen by male eyes ... Up until now, that is ...

*The pirate captain looks about at the pirates who ogle the girls lewdly.*

Pirate captain Alright! You heard Her Majesty: I want these females treated with due care and attention. Transport them back to our ship, and then we shall land them in long boats. No man is to violate any of these fair damsels until we get to shore and can divvie them up accordingly. Then every man-boy of you will prove his manhood to my complete satisfaction.

*The pirates roar with approval and laughter. The captain steps forward and tugs Marietta a little roughly aside.*

Pirate captain All except this little lady. She's **my** trophy. None of that terrified screaming for **this** ma'amselle ... She faced up to my size and strength with nary a blink. She's certainly the mare for my money.

*Thus the girls are either herded or carried from ship to ship via the plank. They yell and squeal accordingly. Marietta retains her supreme coldness and is led by the fingers across the plank, with the captain evidently in her thrall. Even though she is a captive, Marietta is clearly in control of her situation.*

*As an aside, the captain has organized some of his men to follow in his wake in the old French merchantman, now under his steerage.*

END OF SCENE

#### **IV, Scene iv:** The Arrival Of Warrington's Men

*The landing of the frightened girls by long boat leads to a bit of mayhem.*

*A couple of girls make a run for it, only to get taken by fast-running pirates on the beach. This causes great amusement amongst the other pirates.*

*An old fisherman hiding in his canoe in the reeds sees and hears the brouhaha. He shakes his head as he prepares to exit the scene in haste.*

Old fisherman *to himself*                      This looks like a job for Captain Dick and his minutemen.  
I'd better go warn him ...

*The camera now moves closer to the clearing in which the pirates terrify their desperate female captives. The pirate captain swigs rum from a small cask, then points to a boucan.*

Pirate Captain *to the girls*                      See this? Know what that is? Why that's a "boucan" and we freebooters use it for smoking our favourite cuts of meat.

Pirate #1 *gleeful*                      Wild turkey fowl and buzzards smoke up real nice.

Pirate Captain                      And that there is why noble gents like us gets called "buccaneers", which is supposed to be a insult, but we take it on board with pride, so we do.

Pirate #2                      And these are kegs of rum, my fine ladies. When sailing men like **us** get to drinking spirituous liquor like **that** – why, then we loose off our shyness and our natural reticence ...

*The men swagger about under the thrall of rum, such that they laugh immoderately and try to interfere with the girls (who screech and slap).*

*Drums are heard. The pirates suddenly become alert. They gather in a concerned huddle around their captain. The Pirate Captain appears to grimace in a sullen, frustrated way.*

*Whilst the pirates try to formulate a plan, Marietta can be seen to whisper to the startled girls, many of whom nod in agreement and/or understanding.*

Pirate #3 *worried*            D'you hear them drums, Cap'n? Them be from those dastardly militiamen.

Pirate #2                        We don't want no truck with them, Cap'n.

*The Pirate Captain signals for quiet. He is thinking hard. Just at the moment when he wonders if the females might not be used as hostages, Marietta has organized the ladies such that they tear off into the cover of the many copses and woods, holding up their skirts as they go.*

Marietta *shouts*                *Allez! Allez, mes fillettes!*

*Marietta herself quickly disappears.*

Pirate #4 *horrified*            Captain! Them women, sir --

Pirate #1 *aghast*                Oh no! God forbid I should be blind from my horniness, Cap'n but those --

Pirate Captain *angry*            Quiet, you baboons! Don't I have eyes? Can't I see that the French ladies have bolted?

*The drums become louder. We hear a full orchestral rendition of "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!"*

*Now Captain Dick Warrington and his loyal men appear through the thickets, marching in time to the fabulous music.*

*Now the pirates have no choice but to fight. Although they outnumber the vigilantes, they are outmatched by the superior strength and fighting prowess of the Yankee boys. The pirates are soon routed.*

*We see Marietta peeking from behind the trunk of a stout tree. She signals to the other girls to return to the clearing.*

*Meanwhile, Captain Dick surveys the landscape in a pleased way, as darkness begins to fall. Young French maidens are shyly accepting the protection of the gallant Yankees.*

*Using a pirate bandana as a rag, Dick wipes clean his sword and hunting knives and then stows them, as he inspects his musket.*

*Dragging his pipe from his pocket, he suddenly sees Marietta.*

Dick *to himself* Well, well, well ... How-de-doo-de? The spoils of victory are mine, methinks.

END OF SCENE

#### **IV, Scene v: A Flirtation In A Tree**

*Marietta calmly takes refuge in a large tree simply by climbing it. At the same time, Dick Warrington is happy and breathless. He has been wiping blood and guts from his sword and knives following his wonderful sword fight with the pirate captain (who now lies badly wounded on the beach). Dick stops and watches with some interest the elegant and beautiful Marietta nimbly climbing the tree.*

*With a loud crack of laughter, Dick lights his pipe (by dint of a burning piece of kindling from the pirate's campfire) and then trots over to the tree. He can hear Marietta whistling to a bird that is trying to deliver his sunset melody.*

*Dick joins in the whistling and Marietta becomes instantly silent.*

*Dick easily scrambles up the tree and can now sit on a stout branch in order to smile in a winning way at Marietta whilst he lazily smokes his pipe.*

*Marietta maintains an indifferent disregard, looking anywhere but at Captain Warrington.*

Dick *joyial* Welcome to the French colony of Louisiana, fair Mademoiselle.

*Marietta is not responsive.*

Dick *not to be put off* I am the gallant and brave (oh! and handsome!) Captain Richard Warrington.

*Still no response from Marietta.*

Dick *continues joyial* And there is certainly no need to thank myself and my men for rescuing you and your friends from the clutches of a band of

dastardly privateers.

Why, we were glad to be of service!

Yessiree ... Proud and glad and ...

*Marietta maintains her frosty ignorance of Dick. His smile drops and he becomes more natural.*

Dick *softer tone* Listen, Madame. I'm as sorry as I can be that your voyage to the Americas was fraught with such danger. But you have no need to fear myself ... I am always a gentleman. You may trust me implicitly.

*There is an awkward pause. Marietta bites her lip and relents.*

Marietta *a little shy* Thank you, Sir.

Dick May I know your name?

*Marietta clears her throat slightly.*

Marietta Marie Franini. That is my name. But ... But I prefer to be called Marietta.

Dick *almost worshipful* Marietta ... And you are no doubt one of the angelic casquette girls who --

*By this time, Dick has possessed himself of one of Marietta's hands. He strokes it, frowning.*

Dick *frowning* Your hands give you away, fair lady. You're no casquette girl.

Marietta *challenging* No? If not, what?

*Dick looks her over as he smokes negligently.*

Dick *confident* My idea is that you are the spoiled daughter of a wealthy Parisian merchant, escaping from a distasteful forced marriage to your fat second cousin.

*Marietta lifts her eyebrows.*

Marietta Fie! You're so close ... Well, well, indeed ...

Dick No, let me continue. I'm warming to my theme.

*Dick looks about, as if for inspiration.*

Dick                               Your beloved mother wept as she wrung her hands, begging you to obey your stern father. Meanwhile your noble sire gave you the most magnificent of a scolding and locked you in your room.

Marietta                           Go on! This is a delightful confection!

Dick                               Alright. But you weren't to be wed out of hand to a pompous and plump man of leisure. No, no – not you! In the dead of night (and wearing gloves to protect those pretty hands that I mentioned before) you shinnied down a handy water pipe, landing in a neat little heap on the ground with a "Woof!" sound.

Marietta *rolls her eyes*       A "Woof!" sound, did you say? What – am I a puppy dog now?

Dick                               Then you took on the guise of an orphan girl. Probably paid her a douceur in order to swap places with her. And here you are.

*The story is so close to the truth that Marietta frowns heavily.*

*Dick Warrington is smiling and inveigling.*

Dick                               Mmmm? Do I have it right?

Marietta *reluctant*           More or less .... more "less" than "more" ...

*A noise below distracts Dick. He looks downwards, through the leaves.*

Dick                               Well, look here! Governor D'Annard has sent along some drays and wagons to transport you ladies back to civilization. May I escort you down from this tree, Mademoiselle?

*Warrington strokes Marietta's hand and she seems about to acquiesce.*

*But then he spoils the mood.*

Dick *jovial again*           Or, perhaps I should call you Your Grace La Princesse? You certainly have the bearing and hauteur for that elevated title.

*Scared of discovery and angry at his insouciance, Marietta pulls her hand away.*

Marietta *cold*                I'll climb down from this tree using my own wiles, if you don't

mind, Captain. And I'll thank you to remain above me on the descent.

Dick *chuckling* So that I don't accidentally look up your skirts, hmmm?

*That is precisely what Marietta means, but she will not admit it.*

Marietta *scolding* Captain Warrington! Impertinence!

*Dick raises a warning finger.*

Dick Ah! Gloves. We don't want Her Ladyship to splinter her white skin.

*Marietta rolls her eyes at him and then retrieves her gloves. With a flourish, she puts on the gloves and begins the descent. Captain Warrington is solicitous, trying to ensure that her descent from the high branches of the tree will be safe.*

🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀 **Break** 🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀

*Nick has been watching the above with a few other people. He stands up, evidencing utter contempt.*

*The others appear surprised at Nick's reaction.*

Nick *contemptuous* And everyone is by now walking out of the movie house in total disgust. Well, I don't blame them for a second.

If anyone wants me, I'll be in Studio E, auditioning for a voice-only part in a kids' cartoon about a strange liaison between a school of porpoises and a lost duck!

*Nick stalks angrily out of the screening room.*

END OF SCENE

END OF ACT IV



## NICK STILLEN'S CASQUETTE GIRL

### ACT V

**V, Scene i:** "Leviticus Uplifted", Courtroom E West, 1944

*This is a very solid, robust and stately courtroom, in the manner of the Deep South.*

*Eugene/Nick sits at the front of the court beside his Defence lawyer, looking confused and perplexed.*

*Major Wallace Dunbar is an elderly officer with a marked Southern accent; he looks dyspeptic.*

Major Dunbar *aside*            Who're we waiting for, again?

Male *from aside*            Sergeant James W. Cameron, sir.  
*whisper*

*In the manner of an elderly man, Major Dunbar scans the room, open-mouthed. He gives a loud "Huf!" sound and returns to perusing papers.*

Sergeant-At-Arms            Sergeant James Cameron to court E West.  
*voice-off, calling loudly*    Sergeant James Cameron to court E West.

Sergeant James Cameron to court --

*Silence falls. Then we hear a strong male footfall. Major Dunbar looks up.*

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*Major Dunbar shakes his head, sighing loudly.*

Major Dunbar                    Can you believe that? A tough GI with I can't remember how many commendations gets wiped out in a crummy hotel room because of faulty wiring in a simple toaster.

Lieutenant Guiste            It's incredible.

Captain de Moines            Incredible!

Lieutenant Guiste            This is a complete shock, Your Honour. The guy was a card-carrying hero in every sense of the word ...

Captain de Moines            He was a racist bigot with passionate anti-Semitic bile instead of blood in his veins.

Lieutenant Guiste            That's a pretty harsh way to put it, sir.

Captain de Moines            He ordered his Corporal (whom he knew to be Jewish) to shoot an innocent civilian (also of the Jewish persuasion) without proof of any crime or traitorous activity having been lodged.  
*becoming heated*

Major Dunbar                    Gentlemen, that's enough, now.

                                          The absence of Sergeant Cameron's evidence here changes this whole shebang.

                                          I'm gonna deliver my verdict just this way: When ordered by Sergeant Cameron to shoot the civilian Vills Grooben of Neuteufel in Eastern France, Corporal Gowers obeyed.

Lieutenant Guiste            Obeyed?!

*aghast*

Captain de Moines            Yes Lieutenant, Corporal Eugene Gowers obeyed the command to shoot -- and missed.

Lieutenant Guiste            He missed because he shot into the air!

Captain de Moines            That's right, Lieutenant. The poor Corporal had a momentary episode of blindness at just the exact moment that he was

ordered to shoot the innocent man.

Lieutenant Guiste I beg your pardon, sir, but Corporal Eugene Gowers purposely shot into the air in direct disobedience to the Sergeant's command.

Major Dunbar Wait up a mite there, young gentlemen! I'm the Big Chieftain in this arena. My court, my rules.

My verdict stands for all of eternity.

Now, because of a dysfunctional kitchen appliance, we've lost a highly decorated man. He'll be greatly missed by the Allies. Of that you can be sure.

This is a crazy, crazy war. Our Army needs good, strong leaders like Sergeant Cameron, no matter how bitter and twisted his sick mind was.

Yep, he'll be well and truly missed ...

*The Major allows time for his words to sink in. Dunbar and Guiste glance at each other. They both attempt to form words but are unable to.*

Major Dunbar ***But*** ...

That toaster has saved the life of a very good man. A man whose love of God and of God's holy writ will ultimately make this world a better world, after the fighting's over.

A man who chose what was ***right*** above his duty. A very good man.

Lieutenant Guiste Is it possible that he ... That he tampered with ...

Major Dunbar I don't think so ... I believe ... You know what I believe?

That ***God*** tampered ...

*Both of the younger men look astounded and the Captain mouths the word "Wow ...".*



General Groves                    If only we could rope God into *this* one.

Nick *tired and dismissive*                    Why are you bothering? Let the spooks sort it out. It's their turf, after all.

General Groves                    It's funny. Loads of people buy that crap on TV sitcoms and such like that senior Army and Navy personnel are dodderly old farts who dribble into their cereal. Well, sir: the reason I got to the very exalted rank I achieved was owing to my first class brain. And that's a fact.

Nick *smiling*                        Like Colonel Hall in "Bilko"? God, my dad loved that show. I think he bought-up every tape.

General Groves                    Just so ... Couldn't pour water out of a hobnail boot if they'd glued the instructions for doing so on the sole.

                                             Well, I like fine to use my grey matter as much as I possibly can

                                             ...

                                             Have any police officers so far quizzed you on the murder of your friend?

Nick                                    Not yet.

*General Groves gives Nick a sideways glance.*

General Groves                    Do you find that surprising ... or ... interesting?

*Nick shrugs.*

Nick                                    With CIA involvement, I'd expect not to hear another syllable about Gray Kramer's murder.

General Groves                    You think that this is a Code Crimson? "We'll say nothing and it will all just blow away"?

Nick                                    Sure. Looking back over my many years spent in Kramer's company, and in light of the weapons cache we discovered at his lodgings ... My guess is that he was CIA himself.

*General Groves grunts, and then stands back to overview his handiwork.*

General Groves *waving his marking pen about* I've eliminated the women.  
This is a man's crime. Men tend to be hit men. That is, the fairer sex ... Well, few ladies go in for --

Nick *doubtful* I dunno about that, Terry ...  
Nah, you can't eliminate the women. That's a relic from your past. Women are up there being presidents and all.

General Groves *reluctant* True.

Nick *decisive* Look! Let's push the females to one side (only for a brief moment) and concentrate just on the guys here ...

*Both men scan the board, thoughtful.*

General Groves You're in on the Top Secret concern about the warmonger with the smart bomb in tow? That's my understanding anyhow.

Nick *taking it in his stride* Yep! I'm on board.

General Groves Why don't we start there, then? Let's eliminate people who could not in all honesty fabricate an armament of any kind. Shoot! Might be able to step from *that* person to Kramer's killer in a heartbeat.

Nick *concerned* Should we be wearing those Silenzio things ... ?

General Groves *affronted* Shit no! Did those CIA turkeys make you strap on one of those gizmos?  
Gosh a'mighty! Those dimwits think that your crappy mews com is gonna draw out this joker. And they seem to think that he (or she) is here right now, lapping up the razzamatazz.  
I hope they're right. Bring it on!

*Nick tries not to laugh. He makes a fatalistic gesture. General Groves grabs a thick marking pen and crosses out the names TERRY GROVES and NICK STILLEN.*

General Groves                    Let's just suppose that the CIA people are on the money. We can eliminate much easier based on that.

I'm gonna cross you and I off the list right off the bat, because neither of us can stand a bar of this singing picture bullshit.

*Next, he pauses the tip of his pen next to PROF M C-H. With the following words, he slashes the pen through that name.*

General Groves                    So now we have Professor Matthew Crocket-Henschal. He's English, and he evidently loves this tra-la-la business. But he is working hand-in-glove with the CIA on this, so he's out.

*Over the next several men who are candidates and are eliminated, General Groves strikes name after name off his list.*

General Groves                    Trent and Kansas and the rest of the American Thespians are all bona fide actors who are here to work and to earn a buck and for no other reason. Strike, strike, strike.

Next, we are looking at Roy Gilderstein and Linus Conger.

Roy is a definite NO and so is Linus (in spite of his colourful past). Linus didn't even know what a coloratura soprano was, I hear. He might have shot Kramer (but I doubt it). Cross them out.

Sir Brian? Nah.

Nick *thoughtful*                    Hold it on the Earl of Whatnot. He **was** up at Cambridge at a very interesting time in history. It might be worth --

General Groves                    But he studied the Counter-Reformation. **Please!**

Okay! The other Brits are:

Johnny Whitworth. He's a game show host (what we once called a lounge lizard) – nothing more or less than that. Scrub him.

And I've been a good friend of the poetic Noel Kidling for more years than I care to recall. Noel couldn't peel a turnip, let alone



And her mother! Where can I begin with that harpy witch?

*Noel's voice rings out from behind them.*

Noel *voice-off*                      Offending she might hide amidst the dross of such a lank name-role, yet could not he blink to see her guilt.

*The two other men whip around, very surprised. Noel steps forward to shake the General's hand. The latter smiles warmly. Nick continues to watch Noel with suspicion and some dislike.*

*Noel signals to both men using mime that the room is probably bugged, and that all sensitive pronouncements ought to be written down. Nick ignores this advice.*

Nick *appalled*                      What the hell did he just say?

*Noel stands before Nick, looking at him in a world-weary way. This makes Nick distinctly uncomfortable.*

General Groves *voice-off whisper*                      He said: "Among all these crossed-out names in this long list, a woman's name hides. But our male eyes will not pick-up that she is the villain."

*[Returns to normal speaking voice]*

Is that on the nail, Noel?

*Noel retains his almost offensive eye-contact with Nick.*

Noel *grinning*                      Pretty damned close.

And I am (as it happens) a mean peeler of turnips. Spuds, too, in an emergency.

*General Groves and Noel chuckle.*

*Nick is very far from amused. He makes a gruff grunting noise.*

*Noel pulls the missing "Naughty Marietta" DVD from his pocket: the one which Gray had created for Nick.*

*Noel hands this to Nick, who takes it unthinkingly.*

Noel *chuffed*                      Luckily, nobody but myself was able to decipher Gray's message.



General Groves *puzzled* An' he didn't understand the message ... That's strange ... Must have been a doozy!

Nick *shocked* Matthew? He stole the DVD ... But ... Should we be saying this out loud?

General Groves  
*ignoring Nick* Is it worth our while to view the end of the DVD? Maybe that way you could explain how it all pans out.

Nick *appalled* Matthew is the high-level armaments guy?

General Groves  
*scornful* Of course not! He's the man who stole your disc, is all!

*Nick is so lost that he stands with mouth open glancing from one man to the other.*

Noel writes in small capital letters onto a piece of paper BUT HE SHOT KRAMER.

*This paper he holds up such that General Groves and Nick can see it fleetingly; then he tears up the paper into tiny pieces, which he pockets.*

Noel At least, that's the only plausible answer.

Nick *aghast* Why!? Why would he want to shoot ... um ... ? I always thought that he was a good man ...

Nick grabs some paper and scrawls I MEAN THE PROF.

*Once again, Nick's outburst is ignored as is his scrawled note. That note is violently ripped into shreds by Nick. Nick then defiantly shoves the shreds of paper into his mouth. [A couple of seconds later, Nick spits it out onto the floor, with disgust.]*

Nick Sheesh! Why did I do that?

*General Groves and Noel are no longer interested in Nick. They ignore him.*

General Groves Let's get back to Kramer's recorded message. I believe you claimed that you have deciphered it?

*General Groves mimes scribbling on paper.*

*Totally out of his depth and frustrated that the other two men seem to be talking above him, Nick whips out a hand and swipes the sticky label off Noel's forehead. There is no discernible reaction from Noel.*

Noel *smug*

Ahhhhh ... It was cryptic and fraught with hidden meaning ...  
Extracted from Arthur Flegenheimer's famous last words ...  
*[Touches his chest; ironic grin towards Nick]*

Like listening to your dear pal Noel Kidling wafting on ...  
But ... Well, I was able to make some sort of sense of it, I believe.  
Yes.

Nick *utterly at sea*

Dutch ... What ... ?

Noel

Gray seemed to be advising Nick, Terry.

"Look for something that a man would not care about, but that a woman would."

The fire-eating whizz-kid is (by my reckoning) ...

|                                             |
|---------------------------------------------|
| On the whiteboard, Noel writes THE C. OF W. |
|---------------------------------------------|

*General Groves gasps.*

*Nick has had enough. He grabs the DVD and (muttering to himself) inserts it into his laptop such that he is able to watch the ending. The other conversation takes place as Nick mutters.*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Nick mutters: ... get to the bottom of this ... can't understand what is going on ... what the hell does Gray Kramer have to do with this ... arms dealer my fat fanny! ... I learned every damn word of Dutchy Schultz's death speech ... Every fucking word ...</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Now the General both writes and speaks, in such a way as to preserve the essence of secrecy.*

General Groves

Of course!

*arrested*

General Groves writes: A DOUBLE-HONOURS DEGREE IN PHYSICS OXFORD 1980'S.

General Groves Said to have been a candidate for an internship at ...

General Groves writes: AT NASA – MARRIED BRIAN INSTEAD

General Groves The *egregious* Mmm-hmm instead.  
*laughing*

*Nick by now has the DVD playing.*

*Nick quickly positions the DVD such that Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy (in glorious colour) sing their last few notes. He scans forward and arrives at the start of the extra segment. This is filmed in very poor quality. Gray's face is close to the camera. He smokes a cigar, and often blows its smoke into the camera lens.*

Gray *to camera,* I won't be such a big creep. Oh, mama.  
*smoking* I was in the toilet and when I reached the ...  
If he wanted to break the ring no, please I get a month.  
Oh, mamma, mamma!  
Honestly this is a habit I get; sometimes I give it and sometimes I don't.  
Please mother, don't tear, don't rip; that is something that shouldn't be spoken about.  
Mother is the best bet and don't let Satan draw you too fast.  
Come on, mama. All right, dear, you have to get it.  
Look out mamma, look out for her. You can't beat him  
I will settle the indictment. Come on, open the soap duckets.

*The DVD finishes. There is a taut silence.*

Noel *calmly* I popped around to drop in on Mrs Stillen. She and I nuttet it out.

Nick *totally appalled* You dragged my *wife* into this?

*General Groves senses that Nick is at breaking point.*

General Groves                   Gentlemen! Tonight! We'll bring this all to fruition tonight. And Nick can get his life back.

*General Groves mouths the words: "I'll be packing heat tonight". Then he nods with eager certainty.*

END OF SCENE

### **V, Scene iii: Nick Plays At Chutes And Ladders**

*We are in close-up with Nick. Looking zonked and half-asleep, Nick sits hunched in his library, cradling a large balloon glass of Courvoisier. There is a dim, golden glow about the scene. Nick hallucinates as he drops in and out of sleep.*

*Through a golden mist, Nick climbs a ladder. At the top, he comes face-to-face with Noel. He is dressed as a Norse pirate.*

Noel *oration*                   The broad waveland men our she-folk got and gelt. On low cat-paws crept, again unto the blackness slank.

Nick *snarling*                   Can't you just talk to me in plain English, you sanctimonious bastard.

Noel *grinning*                   Great piety and strength of character have lifted you up, whereas recidivism, wickedness and perpetual sin shall plunge you down.

*Nick tumbles down a chute. He lands awkwardly, watched by a bevy of ladies (dressed as coquettish 18<sup>th</sup> century French girls). They tut-tut and fan themselves.*

Chorus of ladies               Oh, Mr Stillen! Save yourself! Save yourself!

*Once more, Nick struggles up a ladder. This time, Christina appears as a golden angel.*

Christina *beatific*               Do you have any idea what she's made? Any idea at all? But it's quite horrific. Truly!

Don't worry though: it's all in hand. Nothing further for you to do.

After tonight, your peace and tranquillity shall return to you,  
Nicholas.

*Nick looks worshipfully at his wife from the rung of his ladder.*

☞☞☞☞☞☞☞☞☞ **Break The Spell Is Broken** ☞☞☞☞☞☞☞☞☞

*In his library, Nick snaps awake.*

Christina *voice-off*,            Come on, Nick! Come and get dressed in your costume for the big  
*yelling*                            party.

*Nick sways a bit, trying to frame some words.*

END OF SCENE

## **V, Scene iv:** The Hollywood Brawl: Shootout And Disclosure

*No expense has been spared. The home of Roy Gilderstein has been transformed into a rehash of the Governor's mansion in the final scenes of the 1935 film.*

*A brightly-outfitted marching band marches in playing a rollicking rendition of "Ship Ahoy, Ship Ahoy who wants to marry a sailor boy".*

*There is a life-size waxwork of Jeanette MacDonald (in breath-taking Marie Antoinette gown) leaning over the banisters singing to a life-size waxwork of a bewigged Captain Nelson Eddy (resplendent in military uniform). Many photographers are busy snapping Giselle and Trent as they stand beside the waxworks, similarly outfitted and mimicking their poses.*

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*Guests have arrived decked out in finery reminiscent of the 1935 film. All the males have been requested to don pirate gear, whereas the highly-coiffeured females have dressed à la crinoline in metres of satin and lace.*

*The camera pans about the room, such that we (members of the audience) are aware of the jollity and high spirits being exhibited by the thronging guests. We spot General Groves and Nick in close, serious conversation. They are watching Lady Iona in a very determined way.*

*Amidst the glittering, rowdy throng, Sir Brian wafts across the camera-shot. He is speaking to some unknown person.*

Sir Brian *bright, jolly*      No, no, no! There's absolutely nothing suggestive in it ... Just a romp on the subject of chaps being chaps with chaps ... Boys rushing about on a spree, you see. Quite innocent ... Assure you!

*Sir Brian receives some kind of answer, then nods enthusiastically despite being somewhat jostled.*

Sir Brian                      Gosh! I mean ... Well, yes! That's provided that I'm able to fend off Bishop Hoad of Launceston, of course.

*As Sir Brian wafts by, he passes his wife very closely. She is involved in earnest conversation with Nick and General Groves. Sir Brian stops, looking concerned.*

Lady Iona *fiery, to the General*      You're being thoroughly ridiculous, you know. I simply can't be quizzed by two "gentlemen" who so closely resemble Walt

Disney's homage to J. M. Barrie's Mr Smee.

Sir Brian Are you alright, there, darling?

Lady Iona *impatient,* No ... I mean "Yes", of course, Brian.

*frustrated*

No! I'm utterly fine. I'm discussing some of Fairy's musical arrangements with Mr Stillen. And his aide ... er ...

*Sir Brian seems cheered by this. Yet he glances a couple of times towards the General.*

Lady Iona *dismissive* I'm quite alright, my dear. General Groves has been good enough to fetch me a martini.

Thank you, General.

*Lady Iona deftly extracts the drink from the surprised General's grasp. She sips, looking up with a naughty look in her eyes.*

General Groves I have been instructed by Madame President's confidential advisers that I am to offer you 47 million US dollars for your invention. That figure includes all plans, rough sketches and notes, and any other proprietary data pertinent to the weapon.

Lady Iona *aghast* Are you out of your mind, General?

General Groves *very deliberate* There cannot be and will not be **any** review on that figure I've just nominated, Your Ladyship. Please keep in mind that the Fintner Glade air crash could so easily be brought to your account.

Lady Iona *appearing outraged* General! Please don't spoil the tenor of this joyous occasion with harsh, unnecessary words.

The amount is agreeable in every sense of the word. Quite enchanting!

No, I meant that you've selected a very public place to make your generous offer.

General Groves Do I have your acceptance of the terms? When time permits, I'll personally escort you to the Whitehouse for the signing of

contracts with President Archer herself.

Lady Iona *pleased*

Lovely! I'm told that Amilee D'Espardieu Archer is herself a descendent of a casquette girl. If so, we'll have a jolly natter over a cup of tea and a plate of scones.

General Groves  
*brusque*

Ma'am.

*The General turns to leave Her Ladyship's side.*

Lady Iona

Just a tick, dear General Groves. How on Earth did you know? Did poor Mr Kramer blurt it out in a weak moment?

General Groves

Mr Kramer told us a lot of garbled nonsense.

It fell to the renowned wordsmith Noel Kidling to unravel the esoteric threads of that twisted skein. Along with Mr Stillen's good lady wife, that is.

But the real hero of the hour is right here. Indirectly, it was Mr Stillen showed us how it was to be done.

*Nick adopts a serious, learned and highly intelligent demeanour. Lady Iona looks in a very deliberate way at Nick as if she could not be more surprised.*

General Groves

Mr Nick Stillen is starring in and directing what I believe will prove to be a top-class motion picture: a war movie of Biblical proportions. And in one memorable scene, Nick is involved in plugging the conduits of a building with massive amounts of explosives. Quite a blast!

Now, the French word for a plug is "tampon".

*[Pause for effect]*

A gifted, innovative scientist in your youth, you have devised an undetectable bomb (a high-power explosive) which can be transported by an unsuspecting female in her ... um ... private body area ... er ... to any part of the globe in a plane, boat or

aboard a camel, so help me.

Lady Iona *softly,*  
*smiling like a cat*

The "Marietta".

General Groves

The unknowing carrier could even be given an intimate examination or body search without a single suspicion being raised.

Lady Iona *utterly smug*

Brilliant, what?

General Groves

And to give yourself a mite of street cred, you practised on a planeload of women prisoners being transported from gaol to gaol within the confines of the UK.

Lady Iona *blithely*

When in the Ladies room at a small Scottish airport, a matronly prison guard looks about her for a dispenser of personal items, and the Countess of Watney casually offers her a Marietta ... The job is done, gentlemen.

Nick *horrified*

It was command-driven!

You just had to wait for the plane to take off ... get into the air ... and you could then type in a code on your cell phone (say) and --

Lady Iona *purrs*

It worked like a charm, my dears. How would even the most exhaustive crash scene investigation conclude that a simple tampon might have caused the catastrophe?

*General Groves is outraged but maintains his cool. His chest heaves. Nick is similarly affected. Lady Iona is cool and enchanting.*

Lady Iona

Do you care to dance, Mr Stillen?

Nick *flat-voiced*

What a droll suggestion! However, I must politely excuse myself on the grounds that I washed my feet this morning and can't do a thing with them. Your Ladyship ...

*Nick gives a quick mock bow and turns away. Lady Iona smiles sadly and calls after Nick.*

Lady Iona *fading out* It was a lark. A response to the moral decrepitude of a lost generation. A mournful cry in the wilderness ...

🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵 **Break** 🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵

*The party continues to rock on.*

Nick I can't even begin to spew out similes for "bitch". Where's a Thesaurus when you need it?

Are you gonna have her arrested?

General Groves Not yet. She didn't kill your friend, however.

Nick Okay ... But the Scottish air crash --

*General Groves shrugs.*

Nick And tell me this: how did you come up with the final solution? Are you a genius, or what?

General Groves Oh! I (like Kidling) I rang your wife. She thought of it.

*[Nick gasps in total shock]*

Sure.

Well, I'm hardly acquainted with any other ladies of good character, am I?

*[Pause]*

Anyhow, the truth that sticks in my craw is that that English noblewoman will inevitably hit it off with our beloved President. They'll pal it up.

Nick Well, my chief despair is that our government will be forking out 47 million dollars for something that'll be eternally stowed away for posterity. Sheesh!

General Groves *matter-* Oh, no! We'll use the Marietta. You can bet your balls on that.  
*of-fact*

It will be a fiendishly cunning weapon against Columbian drug lords, Middle Eastern terrorists and so on ...

*[Pause]*

Used against them via their women and daughters, I mean. And our top scientific minds will doubtless develop its destructive potential.

*Nick stands open-mouthed as the words of General Groves sink in.*

## **The Shootout.**

*This is all action and frenzied activity.*

*During all the merrymaking, Matthew has seen that Lady Iona is being escorted away by CIA operatives and (for whatever reason) opens fire on her.*

*General Groves whips out his pistol and takes aim at Matthew.*

*More and more guests hoick small pistols from about their costumes and open fire.*

*People jump out of the way and scream: there is a sea of pulsating humanity. No-one knows what is what or who is who. Loud, screaming, pelting chaos is evident.*

*The upshot is that after several shots from CIA people and at CIA people, someone has winged Matthew and Trent Lincoln (costumed as Captain Dick) has taken a hit as collateral damage.*

*Most surprising of all is that Brian has extracted a very elegant pistol and (his face set in businesslike manner) is getting off some very serious shots at the people escorting Lady Iona from the room. Thus, Brian's mask of eccentric English nobleman is finally being stripped away.*

END OF SCENE



ending?

Male voice *off-screen* Doesn't one of the pirates say "fuck"? I'm sure he does.

Nick Well ... Okay ... That's not too bad.

"One swallow doth not a summer make."

But will they buy it? The public ...

Or are my initial fears gonna be realized?

*[Pause]*

Do we know if Trent Lincoln pulled through?

Female voice *off screen* It's a great family movie. I love it. My sister will love it.

Nick *loudly* Do we know if Trent Lincoln pulled through?

Female voice *off-screen* Er, yes, Nick ... He's recovering with Miss Giselle taking care of him.

Nick *waspish* Miss Giselle ... Whose noble mother has just been carted off to enjoy a cosy chat with Madame President. *C'est la guerre* ...

Nice kid. I'm glad he --

Male voice *off screen* Nick – it's Christian ... Wants to discuss tomorrow's shoot for your Leviticus film.

Nick I'll call him back.

I want to see --

Female voice *off screen* You'd better go and see what he wants, Nick. You know how he can work himself up into a --

Nick Hey! That puppy on the stairs is totally cute. What do they say? When something is too cute for words?

Female voice *off screen* "To die for."

Nick *exultant* "To die for"!

Male voice *off screen* Christian says that it can't wait. He has to call back a site agent in 5 minutes.

You'd better go see what he wants, NS.

Nick Okay, okay ...

Did you get my comment about the puppy? What is it? ... A cocker spaniel, I think.

Yeah! We need to follow Woody van Dyke's lead here. A cocker spaniel puppy scrambling up the stairs in the wake of the singing friends. Nice! Nice touch ...

*Nick stops. He smiles broadly, entranced with the opening scenes of the old 1935 film.*

END OF SCENE

END OF ACT V

END OF FILM