DEAD END, DUMMY

By

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Originally produced by Coney Island, USA &

Originally Premiered in NYC at La MaMa

Cast of Characters

Three Men:

MAX MORINSKY: A Ventriloquist with acting experience. He wears a black derby, a white shirt, baggy pants and suspenders.

THOMAS EDISON: He wears a dirty, white lab coat and green visor.

DJ: He wears a white tuxedo, sunglasses and smokes a cigar. A thin cigar.

Two Women:

SARA HARDTBERN: A respectable but lower-class showgirl in her thirties. Max’s stage assistant.

BEETHOVEN: A serious woman dressed in formal black tie, tails and piano-key scarf. She should feel free to underscore much of the play with incidental music of traditional and improvised sources.

Two Extras:

SHADOWS: Nimble figures dressed all in black, perhaps wearing black hoods over their heads and under black hats. Their faces and gloved hands are covered all through the show. Their movements should be matched and stylized. They crawl along walls with their backs to the audience. They pose with hands in front of their faces. In some productions these ritualistic dream "shadows" will also become the simple means by which dummies stand and float on their own.

Two Puppets:

MOE: A ventriloquist’s dummy wearing a collegiate sweater with the letter "M’. Moe has freckles, buck teeth, a red crew cut and one eye that can wink.

PLUGGER MacPAT: A ventriloquist’s dummy ala gangster: white skin, slick black hair, beady eyes that shift back and forth. He wears a tuxedo and carries a violin case. Only his red lips show color.

CREDITS

Rights to the following songs should be secured by each producer of the play:

IF I COULD BE THE DUMMY ON YOUR KNEE!

Lyrics by Mort Greene, Music by Fred Stryker & Bud Lees

THE THING by C. Grean Harris

ACTING AND MELODRAMA

Whereas this play is a melodrama, it should not be directed or acted in accordance with the usually accepted Stanislavsky methods. Instead, the acting specifically should be rooted in the manner of the French acting teacher, Francois DelSarte (1811-1871) and the "DelSarte System" as introduced to the United States by his American student, Steele MacKaye. For more background on DelSarte the following book is suggested: DelSarte System of Expression by Genevieve Stebbins, published by Dance Horizons, New York, 1977. The actors in this play should wear heavy makeup.

SET DESIGN

The theater should be equipped with a proscenium curtain. The theater should be equipped with footlights. Six canvas backdrops, as called for in the scenes, should be painted. An easel and chair sit on a side of the stage. A piano is in plain view to another side of the stage. The piano is equipped with a music light. Also in plain view is a sound effects table. It is covered with amplifiers, equalizers, turntables, microphones, cables, wire and various obscure and ill-defined technology from no particular period. The table is also equipped with sound effect props of the radio age: sand blocks, bolts, latches, miniature slamming doors, windows, split coconut shells, etc.

PROLOGUE

[THE EASEL HOLDS A SIGN READING: “PROLOGUE: THE ACTORS NIGHTMARE. 1927” THE CURTAIN OPENS ON A DARK, EMPTY STAGE AND A PAINTED CANVAS BACKDROP DEPICTING THE BACKSTAGE BRICK WALL OF A THEATER. DIM, FLICKERING LIGHTS TURN INTO FIRE. SMOKE COVERS THE STAGE. RED LIGHTS FLICKED WITH YELLOW. THE SHADOWS STAND CENTER STAGE WITH THEIR BACKS TO THE AUDIENCE. THEY HOLD AXE AND SHOVEL. THEY WEAR PITH HELMETS. THEY MECHANICALLY MOVE AS IF DIGGING, REPEATING THE SAME MOTIONS AGAIN AND AGAIN. ONE SHADOW NERVOUSLY WHISTLES WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK AS THE OTHER RESPONDS IN RHYTHM WITH THE PHRASE: “CHINK." IT IS A STRANGE, ANIMATED MUSIC BOX TABLEAU. SOUND CUE: RUMBLE, CAVE-IN. THE SHADOWS GO RUBBERY-LEGGED AS IF IN A CARTOON. THEY DROP THEIR TOOLS AND CROSS THEIR ARMS OVER THEIR HEADS. THEY CROUCH BUT WALK IN LARGE STEPS TOWARDS MID STAGE. MAX MORINSKY ENTERS, CROUCHING BUT WIDE-STEPPED, STAGE LEFT. HE IS HOLDING A TEN FOOT POLE WITH A BIRD CAGE HANGING FROM ITS END. MAX IS SEEN ONLY AFTER THE ENTRANCE OF THE BIRD CAGE. HE IS DRESSED LIKE A TURN OF THE CENTURY DANDY. THE FLICKERING LIGHTS TURN TO GREEN. WHEN THE SHADOWS AND THE BIRD CAGE SEEM ABOUT TO COLLIDE AT CENTER STAGE, A DOWNSTAGE SPOT CASTS A BEAM THROUGH THE SMOKE. THE SHADOWS LOOK INSIDE THE CAGE. THEY STARTLE. THEY RUBBERLEG. THEY SCREAM. THEY JUMP. THEY DO A DOUBLE TAKE ON THE BIRD CAGE. THEY THROW THEIR HANDS UP IN SHOCK AND EXIT EGYPTIAN. THE FOOT LIGHTS TURN YELLOW. MAX SETS DOWN THE BIRD CAGE. CANARY CALLS-MAX IS THROWING HIS VOICE. HE OPENS THE CAGE, REMOVES THE BIRD IN CUPPED HANDS AND CROSSES DOWNSTAGE CENTER WITH IT CONCEALED IN HIS GRASP. RED AND YELLOW FOOTLIGHTS MIX BACK AND FORTH.]

MAX

They keep these canaries, in cages, down in the digs...waiting on the gas...things in the air...things you can’t smell. And if a canary should die... God forbid! ...It’s a warning! For the people! Warning! Clear outa here fast! Run! Fire! Cave-in! Save your own life...

[MAX THROWS THE BIRD ALOFT AS IF IN RELEASE--THE DEAD CANARY FALLS BACK TO THE STAGE.]

...but that ain’t no solace for the bird!

[MAX MUGS AND THROWS HIS HANDS OUT. HE PICKS UP THE DEAD BIRD. HE PUTS IT BACK IN THE CAGE. SOUND CUE: CRACKS. RUMBLES. SCREAMS IN THE DISTANCE. THINGS BEING CRUSHED. THE FOOTLIGHTS SWITCH TO BRIGHT RED. MAX EXITS, CROUCHING AND WIDE STEPPED, FUNERAL SPEED, WITH THE CAGE ON THE TEN FOOT POLE. MORE SMOKE. SOUND CUE: ECHOING LAUGHTER. BLACKOUT.]

Scene 1

MOE

Sara told me to break a leg on my way to the theater.

[Sara twists Moe’s leg.]

SARA

What about it, stool pigeon?

MOE

...oww...stop it...that tickles... oww ! Kiss me, Nurse!

[Sara belches in his face.]

MAX

That’s just too, too bad, trouper--I’ll find you some crutches! The show must go on! We’re on in 45 minutes. The audience... we’re actors!

[Max yawns, lies down, snores and whistles. Sara returns Moe to the trunk. She suddenly freezes into a statue pose of heavenly gesture.]

SARA

Forgive me! I’m not an actress? I paint my face, momma! I pretend to be Florence Lightningale! I got a classy New York stage name: Sara-

[She belches.]

-Hardtbern. Do you want my autograph? I’ve been studying the DelSarte Acting System, Max! It’s French! Watch this:

[She slaps Max. She assumes a statue pose of orientation.]

..."T.B. or not T.B."..."Get thee to a pharmacy"..."alas, poor dummy, I knew him, ladies and gentlemen"...

MAX

Three and a half minutes, Nurse Hardtbern!

[Moe makes weird noises. Sara takes him from the trunk, trembling.]

SARA

I’m afraid he’s got a terminal case of stage fright.

MAX

Stage fright? You can’t do this to me, Moe, we’re on in three minutes.

[Moe begins to hiccup.]

MOE

Water! Water! ... (hiccup)...

MAX

Nurse, water!

SARA

Water!

[Max puts a drink to his lips. The hiccups change.]

MOE

Put a paper bag over my head! ... hiccup)...

MAX

Nurse, bag!

SARA

Paper bag!

[Sara puts a bag over his head. The hiccups change.]

MOE

Scare me! Scare the living daylights out of me!...(hiccup)...

MAX

Nurse, scare him!

[Sara smiles and doesn’t move.]

DJ VOICEOVER

Ladies and Gentlemen and Children of ALL Ages...direct from the lower east side of New York: "The Doctor’s No Dummy"! The Max and Moe Ventriloquial Show featuring Sara Hardtbern as Nurse Lightningale. Let’s hear it folks!

[Show lights glare up on Max and Sara. They bow. Sound cue: The last bit of music in a show number. Applause.]

Let’s give ’em a big hand, folks! Let’s hear it for the Doctor’s sick jokes!

SARA

Matinee’s over! Next show in two hours! Are you ready for six more weeks on this road tour? Is anybody happy? Max?

[Max snores and whistles. Sara slaps him. The lights turn to red. Weird sounds. The shadows enter in slow motion and pack Moe back into the suitcase. Max sits down against the bale of hay, as if asleep, dreaming. The lights restore.]

MAX

Stop it! Stop it! NO! God forbid! Stop it...

[He sits up.]

...Sara?...I was having a nightmare...

[In a panic:]

Where’s Moe?

[Sara hands him a suitcase. Max throws himself on it.]

He’s safe!...he’s safe...

SARA

What did you dream?

[Sara takes the suitcase from Max and puts it back down. She sits. The lights turn to green. Sound cue: Rumble. Cave-in. During Max’s speech the shadows appear in the shadows.]

MAX

I was on a stage…I think it was the big Hoosic Falls Opry House...but it was ancient...dusty...like opening the chambers of a pyramid...like it was thousands and thousands of years old...hundreds and hundreds of mummies...each one positioned as if it were about to applaud...a mummy in each seat...it was standing room only...it was haunted...I was on stage...I had the creeps...it was sort of like needing a place to sit down in Pompeii...shadows...everywhere, shadows...I began to whistle...

[Max whistles “Whistle While You Work.”]

I was wearin’ a pith helmet...I could hear the steady "chink"…”chink”…”chink”… of a pick-axe as if others were digging for ruins... “chink”…

SHADOWS

...chink... chink …

MAX

...I did bird calls. Usually, I won’t touch bird calls with a ten foot pole...I started telling old jokes...the kind that your grandmother knows...plaster dust falling...I brought down the house....I don’t mean the dummies...I literally brought down the house...the ceiling caved in... the walls caved in... the Earth caved in... it was a very strange dream...usually, I won’t touch birds with a ten foot pole...where’s Moe?

[Lights restore to normal. Sounds fade. Shadows exit. Max knocks on the suitcase.]

Hello, Moe?

[Sara opens the suitcase and hands Moe to Max. Max puts his hand into Moe. Moe’s mouth opens and closes. Max tenses his vocal cords.]

I have mental laryngitis...I can’t make him talk!

SARA

It was only a dream, Max. We need a vacation!

MAX

Then, let’s go on vacation!

SARA

You mean it? Really, Max?

MAX

I’ll make all the arrangements!

SARA

Oh, boy! I’ll pack a picnic!

[She kisses Max. She exits. Piano interlude music. Max reveals a new painted canvas backdrop. The backdrop depicts a traditional 19th century American pastoral of cornfields and hayfields and church towers poking through the trees from the nearby town green. Also a cow. Max spreads a blanket.]

Choo-Choo-Choo-Choo

Woo-Woo

Choo-Choo-Choo-Choo

[Max makes like a train and pulls Sara in from off stage.]

SARA

We’re here! A pretend stage vacation…am I that good an actress?

[She strikes a pose.]

Rehearse...Picnic...Perform...Sleep! Rehearse...Picnic...Perform... Sleep!

This isn’t vacation. It’s a location!

[She hands Moe to Max.]

Relax, Max! Relax...try again.

[Max clears his throat.]

MOE (SINGS)

A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I...I, I, I need better lines.

[Moe looks to Max who clears his throat again.]

SARA

You need a good talking to!

MOE

I’m keeping out of this one!

SARA

Good. Stay that way--both of you!

[She pushes her hand in Moe’s face. She sings “If I Could Be The Dummy On Your Knee!)

If I had three wish-es I’d e-li-mi-nate two

I just want one wish to come true,

Tho’ I sound ca-pri-cious when I ask it of you,

Here’s what I wish I could do.

If I COULD BE THE DUMMY ON YOUR KNEE.

You’d have to learn to hold me awf-lly close to you.

The things you’d do – I’d do them too

IF I COULD BE THE DUMMY ON YOUR KNEE.

I’d be the smart-est dum-my you could see.

I’d get a chance to talk a-bout ro-mance that way

And ev-ry day we’d tete-a-tete

IF I COULD BE THE DUMMY ON YOUR KNEE

I’d take the words right out of your lips

And whisper them in your ear,

I’d take the love right out of your heart

And ech-o it back my dear.

If you gave me the op-por-tu-ni-ty

I’d do the things a hu-man sort of should

I’d show you I’m not made of wood

IF I COULD BE THE DUMMY ON YOUR KNEE.

IF YOU COULD BE THE DUMMY ON MY KNEE

I’d throw my voice at you til it was black and blue

I’d make you tell me “I love you”

IF YOU COULD BE THE DUMMY ON MY KNEE.

If you were made of plain ma-ho-ga-ny

That would be oak with me you gor-geous so and so

You’d be my wood-en Scar-lett “O”

IF YOU COULD BE THE DUMMY ON MY KNEE.

I’d close your eyes and wig-gle your ears

And all of those sil-ly things,

Your pulse would jump and so would your heart

I’d just have to pull the strings

And on our wood-en an-ni-ver-sary

We’d set-tle down and laugh at all the Di-onne Quints,

We’d have our own tho’ they’d be splints

IF YOU COULD BE THE DUMMY ON MY KNEE

Oh, Max...I love this little town. There’s such fun we can have here! A restaurant with a player piano... shops... fairs... hayrides... everywhere!

[Sound cue: Drum roll followed by cymbal clash followed by beats on a big bass drum.]

Listen! Someone’s drumming up a commotion right now! Wait right here you sweet thing! Don’t move! I’ll go and find out what all the excitement’s about!

[Sara runs off. As soon as Max sees her go he presses his head with his free hand. The green lights return for a second.]

MOE

Whoopee! This place is exciting. What’s on the menu today?

[Max opens and unpacks the picnic basket. Max consumes food and talks with his mouth full.]

MAX

Bread...wine...cheese. You know....stuff my mouth with food and I can’t talk to you....

[Max bites. Moe mumbles. Max swallows.]

What did you say?

MOE

I said: I like the outdoors. It’s so real. The sky...the birds... the birds. The way they all fly together, in V’s...as if they might know the whole alphabet.

MAX

Yeah...that’s the life. It is nice being here, away from it all...I think I love Sara...I love her not...I love her...but you need me too, Moe! I know you do. We’re business partners, we’re 50/50. You’re good to talk to. If only there were a way to touch all bases at once, rest and at the same time, oh, boy! Star in nine different shows! ...hold on a minute....

[He swigs wine or swallows food. He wipes his mouth.]

So, Moe! Why did the comic refuse wine at the party?

MOE

Don’t get stupid.

MAX

Well...don’t you know?

MOE

This is a dumb routine. I give up. Get it over with. I give up.

MAX

The comic refused wine at the party, you blockhead, because he wanted to get to the punchline!

[Moe laughs. Moe pretends to vomit.]

You crack me up! You know, I wish I could watch us sometimes.

[Sound cue: Four loud drum beats. Light cue: Yellow. Sara enters, running.]

SARA

Hurry, Max! Hurry! Famous American genius, Thomas Alva Edison, has just invented the light bulb, the record player, fire, the wheel and a silk purse out of a sow’s ear! Let’s go see a movie!

[Piano cue: Silent movie music. Film sequence projected onto set: a cowboy shoots his gun at the audience from The Great Train Robbery. Charlie Chaplin gets caught in a gear from Modern Times. The robot stands on its own from Metropolis. Jolson speaks in The Jazz Singer:]

JOLSON ON FILM

Come on, momma, listen to this!

[Film sequence ends with the lightning storm from Frankenstein. Max is overwhelmed and commits the sin of treating Moe like an inanimate object. Sara, also overwhelmed with the new world, drags Max off, leaving Moe alone with the hay, the blanket, the suitcase and the pastoral backdrop. Light cue: red. Moe floats above the stage and speaks by himself.]

MOE

Ladies and Gentlemen and Children of all ages: The only TRUE story about the day vaudeville died...

[Moe disappears above. Light cue: blue. It is night. Sound Cue: Wind machine. Sheet metal thunder. These sounds continue under the rest of the scene. Fireflies. Cutout black clouds and a black crescent moon lower from above on wires. Max and Sara enter through the orchestra of the theater. Max carries a lantern. They are both dressed in period rain gear. They reach the steps up to the stage. Sara sits on the lip of the stage. Max stubs his foot on a rock. A pre-storm wind blows heavy across the stage.]

MAX

Moe? Where are you?

SARA

Moe, I’ve got that kiss you always wanted from Hardtbern!

MAX

No use. Save your breath. I can sense that he’s come to some harm. What evil could have possessed me to leave him?

SARA

He’ll be alright.

MAX

He can’t defend himself.

SARA

It wasn’t your fault.

MAX

Well, it wasn’t yours! It was mine. It was mine.

SARA

You just went to see a movie...

MAX

I should have known better!

SARA

Oh, Moe! We’ve come back! It wasn’t so good!

MAX

It was a moment of weakness. It won’t happen again. The quality’s in the live acts: flesh and wood, blood and sap. We three stand united. Come on, Moe! The movie broke, the sound was bad. It was too big, too flat and it just disappeared. There was no encore. No encore at all.

SARA

Saw it twice, we did. It stayed exactly the same. We’re going back to New York!

MAX

Come on, Moe. We’re going home! We’ll knock it dead in a month!

SARA

Moe!

MAX

What’s happened to you?

[Sara finds Moe’s shoe. She points behind the bale of hay.]

SARA

Max! Look! Signs of struggle!

[She holds a smashed suitcase up to the light of the lantern. There is no dummy inside. A violent clash of thunder and lightning. Moe appears deus ex machina.]

MOE

No, Max. We will never work again. Wild currents flowing. Old ties breaking. The Wizard has innocently done an evil thing. What’s known is passing. We must all pull our own strings now, if we can find them. Edison enters. Good-bye, Max. Good-bye, Sara. We are all on our own.

[Lightning. Thunder. Just as suddenly as he entered, Moe exits, ex machina. It begins to rain. Max and Sara embrace and release. Sara blows a kiss skyward and starts to go. Max stays and clutches at the air. They stand apart. Light cue: Blue and green.]

SARA

Max?...Max, it’s starting to rain.

[She opens an umbrella and beckons Max in.]

We’d better find cover...head back to the town.

[Max turns his back on Sara.]

It’s just another storm on some field...Max, it’s going to pour, you’ll get sick. Please come under the umbrella...please! Please!

MAX

Everyone scrambles...everyone rushes...before your eyes, your world covers up. Who’s going to remember...Moe!...Moe...I’m standing my ground!

SARA

Max! It’s only a cloudburst. Cover your head. Come on!

[She turns. He does not.]

Max! I’ll care for you! We’ll get by...Max?

[Max shakes his fists at the heavens.]

MAX

No! Never! Stop! God forbid!

[Green light. Thunder.]

MOE! I’m with you, Moe!

[Sound cue: The rain falls heavy.]

SARA

Max! Listen...the wind is drowning your voice, you can’t fight the wind. Let me guide you!

MAX

Don’t you run like a coward, Sara! I’ll take up the challenge!

[Sara gathers her belongings.]

SARA

Come under the umbrella! Come here, you foolish man!

MAX

NO!

[Max runs offstage, into the storm, into the darkness. Sara drops the scattered remains she had gathered and just continues to clutch the umbrella.]

SARA

Max? I’ll wait for you, Max! Alright. Alright! How long will you take? Max?

[She drops the umbrella and runs against the storm.]

MAX!

[She comes back.]

...Max...

[Curtain. Sara steps in front of the curtain and sits in the empty chair next to the easel. From now on, through the rest of the play, she will be separated from the action of the story but will always be visible to the audience, reacting in character. Sitting and watching. Scene after scene.]

Scene 2

[While the curtain is closed, Sara changes the sign on the easel to read: “The Wizard’s Workshop. 1929” She sits back in the chair, folds her hands, and watches. The curtain opens to reveal a new painted canvas backdrop depicting three walls in a forced perspective interior of Thomas Edison’s lab. The walls are lined with shelves. The shelves are full of books, strange inventions and chemistry sets. A painted painting of Abraham Lincoln hangs on a painted wall. The framed motto: "Invention is 99% perspiration" hangs on another. A large wall calendar reveals the date: December 15, 1928. On stage, in front of the backdrop, is a Christmas tree covered in red, white & blue blinking lights. Wrapped presents sit under the tree. There is also a large long workbench. It is scattered with presents, books, inventions and chemistry sets. An unshaded light bulb hangs from above. Edison enters, disheveled, grease-marked, struggling with a Victrola with a fancy morning glory horn. He drops the machine on the desk. He cranks the machine, places the needle on the spinning record and puts his ear very close to the horn. The record begins with a brief musical flourish. The sound quality of the recording is tinny and scratched.]

78 RECORD

The purpose of this experimental record is to explain the all new Edison Double Disc Record. The first record in history with music on both sides. A different selection on each side. Double value for your money plain as daylight. On sale now to smart Christmas shoppers. The music on Edison Double Disc Records is the music itself; not merely our idea of what we can make the people think music ought to be. The Edison process of recording, as developed especially during the last few years----turn over---turn over---turn over---turn over---

[Edison turns over the record, winds the Victrola again and places the needle down on side B.]

---produces the naturalness and roundness and perfection of tone that is positively unequaled elsewhere. The singing voice, as recorded in the Edison laboratory, is the living voice of the artist: clear, flawless and natural---and natural---and natural—

[The record is skipping. Edison turns it off. He is upset and tired. Edison takes up a piece of chalk and numbers the cabinet of the Victrola.]

EDISON

One thousand, two hundred and ninety two.

[He checks his pocket watch. He yawns. He turns off the overhead light. We see Edison, by Christmas tree light, pushing things off the workbench. He stretches out on the bench and curls up to sleep. He snores and counts as he sleeps.]

...One thousand, two hundred and ninety three...zzz....one thousand, two hundred and ninety four...zzz....one thousand, two hundred and ninety five...

[Max enters, disheveled and unshaven. His hair is wild. His coat: torn and dirty. He searches for Edison, spots him asleep and stands behind the workbench. Max reveals a long knife and raises it over his head. Max begins to solemnly whisper Kaddish, the Jewish prayer from the dead.]

MAX

Yis-ga-da! v-yis-ka-das sh’may ra-bo.

[Max quickly finishes the prayer and then crosses himself as a Christian. He still holds the butcher knife over his head.]

THOMAS EDISON, I PRESUME!

[Edison mumbles in his sleep.]

EDISON

...zzz...one thousand, two hundred and ninety six...zzz...

MAX

Thomas Alva Edison, I’ve come to avenge the death of a very close friend!

EDISON

...zzz...one thousand, two hundred and ninety seven...zzz....

[Max shakes Edison.]

MAX

I’ve come to prevent the untimely passing of a good way of life!

EDISON

...zzz...one thousand, two hundred and ninety eight...zzz...

[Max shouts directly into Edison’s ear.]

MAX

THOMAS EDISON, stand up! Like a man! THOMAS EDISON, pick up a knife, a screwdriver, any weapon from your workbench, and FACE ME! Stand up, THOMAS EDISON! STAND UP! I challenge you to a duel!

EDISON

...Eh?

[He opens his eyes. He sits up.]

...EH?

[He looks about. He sees Max. He points to his ears, he holds up an index finger, he walks over to the Victrola and removes the morning glory horn. He holds the horn to his ear.]

EH?

MAX

DON’T YOU SEE WHAT I HAVE IN MY HAND? THE TIME HAS COME TO GRASP SOMETHING IN YOURS!

[Edison puts on his glasses. He looks at the knife. He nods. He puts down the horn, goes to the bench and picks up an early electric mixer. He plugs the mixer into the extension cord and points it at Max. He turns on the mixer blades at top speed. Max drops his knife and puts his hands over his head.]

What is that? Let me have one. Let’s fight on fair terms.

EDISON

He puts down the mixer & picks up the horn.

MAX

What kind of gun is that!?! I said: What kind of gun?

EDISON

Oh? It’s a three speed electric BEATER! Top secret. The first of its kind in history. My one thousandth, two hundredth and ninety ninth patent! You can buy one next month.

[Edison laughs. Max picks up his knife. Max laughs.]

MAX

Go ahead, then! Fight dirty. I’m game! I don’t scare. Prepare your defense. I said: The knife is basic and real! We’re fighting a duel!

EDISON

Who are you?

MAX

I’m Max! Max Morinsky! I’m very well known on the stage in New York!

EDISON

You must be the man who inspired the sign: Do Not Disturb! Mr. Max Morinsky. I’m Edison.

[He switches the hanging light bulb on and off, on and off.]

Couldn’t you get an appointment? You know, it’s rather late.

MAX

I don’t like your inventions. I don’t like your movies!

[Max forces Edison, at knife point, down into a chair.]

Sit down, Mister Edison! I want you to listen to me.

[He hands Edison the horn and then strikes a fisticuff stance.]

I’ve come to BATTLE with you! Face to face! I’m a vaudeville performer. I used to earn my living in the theater. Overnight: YOU invent! Coast to Coast: Theaters CLOSE! Theaters put in screens and projectors. I’m out of work! In my prime! No more lights. No applause. I feel like a freak! I’d join a sideshow but you’ve shut those down too! I’m here for revenge!

EDISON

I like theater, Max. I like actors. Really, I do. Honest. That’s a very sad story. Calm down. I never went to a sideshow. I’m sorry, Max. Truly sorry. Now, why are you here? What’s on your mind?

[Green lights. Max is possessed by two voices: A good Moe persona and a bad Moe persona. He throws the two voices into opposite corners of the room.]

BAD MOE VOICE

Use the knife, Max. Kill him. He’s trying to trick you. Listen to me, Max, kill him...kill him.

[Blue lights.]

GOOD MOE VOICE

Don’t do it, Max! Don’t listen to him! Put the knife down!

[Green light.]

BAD MOE VOICE

Pick it up!

[Blue light.]

GOOD MOE VOICE

Put it down!

[Max faces the audience and laughs madly. His face twitches. Max puts down the knife. Lights restore. Max and Edison laugh.]

EDISON

Ho-Ho...that’s a nice little Joan of Arc routine you’ve got there, Max. Bravo! Now, Max...really...do I have something here that might help? Should I record you? I don’t mind. Only it’s late and I was snoring, Max, and dreaming wonderful things.

MAX

My act would never work on record! It has to be live! Has to be live!

EDISON

Look, I’m being most kind. What exactly would you like?

MAX

A return...a comeback....or else a time machine to take me back to the days when the theater was…

EDISON

I CAN’T DO THAT!

MAX

Then, a showdown!

EDISON

But I’m just and inventor!

MAX

That’s what they’ll all say! All the inventors!

[Edison stands.]

You’re more important than that. More important than Washington! More than...Lincoln! More important than Jefferson! Moses!

EDISON

MOSES?...oh, you’re just saying that...you know, Max, I used to be part deaf.

MAX

SHOULD I SHOUT?

EDISON

No, no! Hearing aid...amplification!

[He puts down the horn and adjusts the device in his ear. Max puts up his dukes.]

MAX

You choose your own weapons!

EDISON

Young man, I don’t like your remarks. I take it, you’re mad?

MAX

Oh, yes! Mad? God will forswear!

EDISON

God and I get along, Max.

MAX

That’s not what I heard! You might think that I’m some Vinnie Ventriloquist, some skitzoid...but I’ve had visions! The smell of the greasepaint, the roar of the crowd, two boxes a board and a stage for my kingdom! I’m here to do battle with you, Tom Edison. This is a showdown, a showdown, a showdown for Moe and I challenge you to a duel!

EDISON

I challenge you to a debate!

MAX

A duel!

EDISON

A debate! And I’ll prove, I’ll convince you of each and every little thing that I say! A debate! I’ll go first!

EDISON

In the beginning, Dionysus was the God of Drinking and Whoopee. Once each year, over a long harvest time weekend, all the people of Athens walked out to the farms and slept under the stars, in the fields. They would wear masks. They would drink. They would orgy. This weekend was called: "Going to the theatre". This period: "The Golden Age". Athens was the hometown of democracy. It was very, shall we say, progressive place, Max. In America, as in Athens, Max, the "pursuit of happiness" is written right into the contract. We all want the same things! Laughter! Romance! Tragedy! Experience! Holiday! Reality! Art, Max; in other words, we want ART for our human souls! We all want to "go to the theater"!

[Pause.]

...but there were never enough tickets, Max. There were never enough. Before me, Max, America was half realized. Dionysus and Democracy were free passes for the few, the urban, the wealthy. The masses did not "go to the theater". I’ve given those people music. I’ve given them shows and appliances. I made light for them! They call me a WIZARD! I’m...a man. I live in New Jersey. I hold thirteen hundred patents on inventions that have helped the day to day lives of billions of people. In your whole life, Max, you’ve made how many people laugh? Eighty Three thousand? I’m proud. I’m not your rival! Think of me as your father...big brother. We’re on the same side. I’ve won our fight. The people all "go to the theatre" as much as they like. Take a break, trouper, shake? Take a vacation on me. We’ll work together on shows.

[He offers his hand.]

BAD MOE VOICE

Kill him, Max. Kill him. Kill him.

[Edison kneels and bares his breast.]

EDISON

Right now, every Main Street has an improved theatre or two. You can hear Caruso at home as you’re taking a bath. Fanny Brice can play the continent in a single night.

GOOD & BAD MOE VOICES

He’s a good man, Max. Good man. Kill him. Good man. Kill him.

[Max struggles with himself.]

EDISON

I take it you’re a specialty man, Max. That’s your weakness. Life’s too short. Some have to spend years practicing tap, lifetimes juggling.

(Max sprays his throat.)

MAX

Did I tell you I’m a ventriloquist? I do voices. I...I’ve played Brooklyn…Bridgeport...I’ve played Boston...I studied with the original. The Great Lester!

EDISON

Exactly my point! You’ve worked on two or three peculiar talents all your life, and that’s all you do...you do well, but the price of perfection? Where’s the diversity? Well-roundedness?

MAX

Other people. Other talents. You pay your nickel for your ticket and you see what’s inside. Shakespeare? Ballet? Comics? Take a chance!

[Edison begins to drag Max around.]

EDISON

BAH! Why should you? Why should anyone? Too many spectators! Invention spreads things out, gives us all a taste. Why leave your home when you "go to the theater"? I’ll put a plug on your Shakespeare.

[He cranks up the Victrola, replaces the morning glory horn and turns on a record that continues playing under the scene.]

Years ago, Max, I patented the phonograph and we all can summon our favorite piece of music.

[He mock conducts.]

---everyman’s a composer. My fellow inventors conjure the telegraph, the telephone--

[He picks up a receiver.]

---and everyone can now sneeze, burp or scream as far as they like--Hello, Operator? I’d like to place a trivial call to...Oshkosh!

EDISON

Hey, Max, you want motion?

[He turns on a movie projector.]

Look, Max, I’ll give you immortality with thirty five millimeter. You holding out for talkies, Max?

[Max scrapes the Victrola’s needle across Edison’s record.]

MAX

It took you thirty years just to learn how to talk!?!

EDISON

And I did it! Step by step! Patent by patent. We’re all talking. In all of the shows.

MAX

I know how to talk, you blockhead! I’m talking about LIVE theater! Performing it all the way through for the folks! Live! Live! Live!

[For just a second the lights turn to blue then restore. The media blitz is over.]

...you wouldn’t know...you wouldn’t know...

[Max cries. Edison pats Max’s shoulder.]

EDISON

Now let’s get you going. It’s late and I was snoring and dreaming wonderful things.

MAX

...a dummy...I had...something like a little kid...

EDISON

Here’s what I’ll do, you stubborn old geezer.

MAX

I don’t take charity, now.

EDISON

We’ll try and set you up in a new media, Max. Live, your way. I tinker. Don’t worry. Something’s bound to adapt...but you do seem to be in need of a partner, I think.

MAX

...it’s a deal if you give me a dummy! A dummy’s the deal. A dummy’s the deal...

[Edison opens the flap of a gift wrapped box and pours powders and chemicals inside. He attaches wires. The box glows. Sparks leap from the box. We hear a disembodied laugh from the box. A small arm emerges.]

EDISON

...hmm...rush job...hmm...curious...well…anyway, it’s on me, Max... patent number one thousand three hundred and one...hmmm...learn something new every day...

[Max opens the box and removes Plugger, a new dummy. Max puts Plugger on his knee. Plugger begins to move but does not talk yet. Max gets to know Plugger. Edison, meanwhile, dims the lights. He stretches out on the workbench and begins to snore.]

...one thousand, three hundred and two...zzz...one thousand, three hundred and three...zzz...one thousand, three hundred and four...zzz...etc.

[Max tries out several different voices for the new dummy.]

PLUGGER

Hiya...Hiya...Hiya...Hiya...

[Max settles on the gangster-like voice that will remain Plugger’s for the rest of the play.]

...hiya...Hiya, Max... [Pause.] Hiya, Maxie-Poo. Name’s Plugger...Plugger MacPat...spare a cig?

[Curtain. Edison sits at the control console, in character. Like Sara, he remains visible for the rest of the play. He continues to tinker with technical things.]

Scene 3

[While the curtain is closed, Sara changes the sign on the easel to read: “THE NOSTALGIA SHOW.1935” Sara wanders into the audience with a wicker basket of apples for sale for 5 cents. During the scene change we hear a recording of Al Jolson singing: “I Wonder What’s Become of Sally”)

AL JOLSON

Old time pals and old time gals,

Where are your smiles today?

Friends of old with hearts of gold,

Where have you drifted away?

Where is Johnny and Mary and all the rest?

And where is the one I love best?

I wonder what became of Sally-

That old girl of mine?

The sunshine’s missing from her alley

Ever since the day, Sally went away.

No matter what she is,

Wherever she may be,

If no one loves her now,

Please send her home to me.

I always welcome back my Sally--

That old girl of mine.

The curtain opens to reveal a new painted canvas backdrop depicting the interior of a 1930’s radio studio. The canvas, although representational, is painted after the fashion of a WPA Mural in brown sepia tones. This backdrop incorporates a real upstage door which can open and close. An illuminated "On the Air" sign hangs from wires overhead. Sara sits back in the chair, folds her hands and watches. Spot light on DJ, who is sitting before a 1930’s radio microphone and in the midst of faking a soft-shoe dance with sand-blocks. When the "dance" ends, he cues a recording of canned applause.]

DJ

Thank you, Fred Astaire. We’re just about out of time, but we’ll be back next week, live from Cairo, with Fred’s special guest, Little Egypt, belly dancing live for your entertainment.

[Canned applause. Knocks at the door.]

The Dance Date has been brought to you by Murray Space Shoes-makers of sole perfection. This is your announcer, Jay Walker-

[Canned laughter. Knocks at the door.]

-saying goodnight from Cloud Nine on the Standard Broadcasting Company. Stay tuned now for the news headlines, station identification and The Nostalgia Show, which follow immediately on most of these stations.

[Knocks at the door. DJ flips a switch and the "On the Air" sign turns off. He cues a tape of news tickertape machines overdubbed with 1933 Roosevelt inauguration news items-a tape recorded earlier by himself. Knocks at the door. Max enters. He has grey hair and carries a large violin case. DJ Motions for Max to pull up a stool and sit down. He runs back to his console. Max takes off his coat, looks around and scratches his chin.]

MAX

Am I early? Where’s the Stage Manager? Am I late? Did someone call places? How many minutes before I go on? Anybody wanna buy a duck?

DJ

Hold it! Pipe down! No loose lips-no shouting in the studio! Who do you think you are, Spike Jones singing 99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall? What’s in the case? Talk to me!

MAX

I was very well known on the stage in New York! Max Morinsky! Didn’t they send you my resume? I’m supposed to do a show here. The ventriloquist???

[DJ turns up the volume on a portion of the news. He moves his hand like a talking mouth puppet.]

DJ

Right. Right.

MAX

I do it the old way! How much time before I go on?

DJ

A few minutes...and don’t sweat it Just relax, keep talking, play to the mike. Nobody’s watching.

MAX

Their loss. Thanks.

[Max opens the violin case and removes Plugger. Plugger holds a small toy machine gun. Max also takes a copy of Variety out of the case. Max begins to test Plugger’s controls. He warms up.]

DJ

Hey, now remember, loose lips, we’re going back on the air. So QUIET now!

[He flips a switch and the "On the Air" sign goes on. Max and Plugger whisper quietly.]

Ready, Beethoven?

BEETHOVEN

Ready, DJ

 [DJ runs back to the console. He cues canned applause.]

You ain’t heard nothin’ yet!

[DJ cues more applause)

DJ

Yes, it’s true, folks. That’s Al Jolson himself singing in our studio tonight, reviving his classic, I Wonder What’s Become of Sally? Al Jolson on The Nostalgia Show!

[Canned applause. He honks a bicycle horn.]

Yes, Al, it’s that time again and we too wonder what’s become of Sally, and Weber and Fields, The Flip-Flop Girl, Nelson’s Boxing Cats, Eddie Cantor, Professor Backwards, and ALL the other vaudeville greats. Well, tonight we’re going to revisit a few of our "old time pals and old time gals"---but before we trip down some of those dusty lanes, first, here’s a message from our sponsor: This WPA Federal Theater Jobs Project is made possible by a grant from the Amalgamated Edisons, Inc. ---makers of Edison Toy Company, Edison Time Company, Edison Weather Company, Edison Light, Inc., Edison Dark, Inc., Con Edison, Pro Edison and Universal Edison Unlimited.

[He cues canned laughter.]

And now, Nostalgia Nuts-

[He shakes a rattle into the mike.]

--another nutty legend with us tonight. Put on your thinking caps and try and guess this one:

[He blows a horn into the mike.]

Do you all remember the fat gal in the galoshes, that happy lunatic with the broken umbrella? The wild, wet, warbling woman who made you and your best friends so glad you’d collected those rotten tomatoes?

[He cues canned laughter.]

The BIRDBATH WOMAN herself!

[He cues canned applause.]

That’s right, Fruitcakes! You’re getting a visit, right nostalgia here, right nostalgia now, with HELEN "WOLF WHISTLE" WATSON!

[Canned applause up a couple of points. DJ fakes an interview with Helen Watson by doubling on her lines in a falsetto nasal whine of a voice. He starts the exchange as Helen.]

DJ (AS HELEN)

Oh, thank you, DJ.

[He simulates Helen’s Looney Wolf Whistle which she is in the habit of offering to each man she sees.]

DJ

And thank you for the memories, Helen. You know, Wolf Whistle, one look at you and I start reminiscing about...my early SPITBALL DAYS!

[He cues canned laughter.]

Oh, we all love you for it! The old time gals! The old time pals!

[He simulates her Wolf Whistle.]

DJ AS HELEN

Suckers, DJ. You’re my looney, loyal suckers! I don’t know how you can stand me! I better whistle and get off the stage. I’m ready.

DJ

Here’s Helen with that little ditty she wrote for her kiddie: Whistler And His Dog!

[Canned applause. Wolf Whistle.]

DJ AS HELEN

Hit it Beethoven! Here goes nothing!

[DJ cues a 78 record of the real Helen Watson performing the song. He flips a switch. The "On the Air" sign goes off. DJ talks freely with MAX while they are off the air. All the time, Helen Watson’s record is heard playing under their dialogue.]

DJ

What a sight, Helen Watson!

PLUGGER

Yeech...let me plug her! Bang! B—Bang! Bang! Bang!

[DJ laughs.]

MAX

You know, that’s not exactly fair to the lady. Mrs. Watson wasn’t like that at all. I opened for her on my first road tour. She was the headliner, I was unknown. She pulled in a decent enough crowd. Very dignified. Drunk, but no ad lib, dignified. Do your research! Three times a day for three months I listened to that.

DJ

And you can still sit here and take more? You’re crazy.

MAX

It’s an occupational hazard. I’m a trouper!

PLUGGER

You and Moesy Woesy really did that, Maxie Poo? Geez, times musta been tough with that kid. Spare a cig?

[Max places a cigarette in Plugger’s mouth and then lights it.]

MAX

Ah, Helen...boy, was she sure fun to throw eggs at.

[Pause.]

Hey, DJ, those records and all. Does your audience know Jolson wasn’t really in the studio… is that allowed?

DJ

Sure. Same contract. Sometimes I just wing it right off what it says on the label but don’t get so self—important. You’re not the first guest to do the show live, one of the few, not the first. Keeps me on my toes...so, you want me to wing it for your intro or do you have something coming up you want me to plug?

[Max hands DJ a trick card that in transfer unfolds into an accordion list 3 ft. long.]

MAX

Career highlights...we can talk more after the show...and make sure to look over your cues for my skit.

DJ

CUES? ...yeah, thanks...you’re almost on, you know. Lemme skim this...yeah...yeah...hey...I DO remember you now...you’re MAX! That’s the Max, Max and Mr. ———MR. MOE! All those corny Hebrew and Irishman jokes! I saw you in Chicago once when I was...I couldn’t have been more than eleven. You have that goofy little shanty Irish puppet, right?

PLUGGER

Whatsa matter? He don’t like my kisser? Plug ’im! Bang! B—Bang!

MAX

Shut up.

DJ

Hey, you still doing family routines?

MAX

You better get back to the mike. Whistler’s puckering out.

PLUGGER

Maxie Poo knows her number by heart---burn.

[The record ends. DJ cues canned applause. DJ flips a switch. The "On the Air" sign illuminates. Max moves a stool near a studio mike, and puts out a bananaa, a cigar, a glass and a flask of whiskey.]

DJ

That was simply unnatural, Helen. Your lips sounded swell.

[He cues canned laughter. He fakes Helen’s retreating footsteps.]

DJ AS HELEN

Bye—bye, boys!

[He simulates Helen’s Looney Wolf Whistle. Helen is gone. He cues canned applause.]

DJ

And next, Nostalgia Nuts, our featured guest, a first for the Nostalgia Show: A new act making a debut! NEW Act?? On the NOSTALGIA Show!?! How could it be?? Could it be MAX MORINSKY MAKING A COMEBACK? You know, Max! The ventriloquist: "Very well known on the stage in New York"! That Max! With a NEW sidekick! The anticipation is killing me! Something new in nostalgia! Unheard of! I don’t know what to expectorate, Ladies and Germs, stare all you want at those glowing radio dials in your dark living rooms tonight———this new dummy you just wouldn’t believe. Max carries him around in a violin case! He looks like a gangster! He’s even got his own pint—size machine gun!

[He cues canned laughter.]

Our studio audience can’t wait to begin. So here they are! Our featured guests tonight: Max Morinsky and Plugger MacPat, introducing their new skit: THE JOB INTERVIEW!

[DJ sound effects four knocks on a door.]

MAX

Another one? All day like this! It’s open! Come in!

[DJ sounds effects a squeaky door. Very loud slam. Footsteps.]

PLUGGER

Cut the small talk! Give me the job or I’ll plug ya! Bang! B-Bang! Bang! Bang!

MAX

Y—Y—Yes, Sir! You’re hired, Sir!

PLUGGER

The billing’s: Plugger MacPat. Spare a cig?

MAX

There must be some mistake. I’m auditioning comics. Not bouncers. Please put down the gun.

PLUGGER

I saw a Variety ad: "Quist in Quest of Partner". You see, I’m breakin' into show biz, Maxie. Bang! B-Bang! Bang! Bang! With this machine gun you and me could go places. I’m better than Moe!

[Green lights bump in and out.]

MAX

MOE? You dare mention the late Moe, you...you...you...you gangster! YOU don’t know Moe!

DJ WHISPERS

Hey, you okay?

PLUGGER

LEAVE HIM ALONE! This is the NEW routine...it’s between us!

[DJ cues canned laughter. It seems to disturb Max’s timing. He clears his throat.]

MAX

Mr. MacPat! Moe was VERY well known on the stage in New York! The job’s for someone who could fill pretty big shoes!

PLUGGER

Fill ’em with what, cement? My feet and what shoehorn?

[Plugger gets canned laughs. As the routine progresses, Max catches on to working with DJ and begins to signal for laughs and applause by hand signal. This can be improvised live on stage each performance.]

MAX

Please, a little respect! Does the name Max Morinsky mean nothing to you?

PLUGGER

...Max...let me see, Max? ...wait a minute...wasn’t he very well known in the trash cans of New York?

MAX

That was rude, little man! Go away! No job!

PLUGGER

Bang! B-Bang! Bang! Bang!

MAX

That’s the nastiest, meanest, most dangerous "Bang! B—Bang! Bang! Bang!" I ever heard! Will you put down that machine gun? It’s making me nervous. I, I...I forgot what I was saying... where were we? Help me, man! Help me! Line! Line!

PLUGGER

Knock-Knock.

MAX

Who’s there? Who’s there?

PLUGGER

Pow! Socko! Left to the gut! Big Eddie told me to keep an eye on ya. I’m taking that job, remember? I call the shots! You’re just the straight man in this outfit.

MAX

You’re not as good as you think, kid! Big gun. No finesse.

[Max gets his first canned laughter from DJ.]

PLUGGER

There’s something about the look of Swiss cheese that I like. Want to make something out of it?

MAX

How does toothpicks sound?

PLUGGER

How does nervous wreck sound?

MAX

Knockout! I see that you have experience in this line of work. Tell me, do you have any references?

PLUGGER

No. Not a one. Anyone smiles at me: Bang! B—Bang! Bang! Bang!

MAX

You expect me to like that Bang! B—Bang! Bang! Bang! stuff? You’ve got a very strange sense of humor.

PLUGGER

That’s a compliment coming from you. I'd give you a hug if the gun wasn’t between us.

MAX

Let’s just shake on the deal. You got the job.

PLUGGER

That calls for celebration! Bang! B—Bang! Bang! Bang! B—Bang! Bang! Bang!...Bang!...bang!...bang!...B-Bang...bang...click...c—click...uh-oh…

[Pause.]

I need a contract! In writing! Clauses and agent! All perfectly legitima——ma——legitima——ma——ma——gita——ma——

MAX

You seem to choke on the word.

PLUGGER

I can’t say "legitimate".

[Canned laughs.]

MAX

Wise guy! I happen to know that your family tree has some knot holes in it and is running with saps! Saps, I said! Knot holes and saps!

[He signals DJ for louder laughs.]

PLUGGER

Yeeeech...plug him! Slander now, huh, Maxie Poo? Watch your step. I’m a snake and I know what you’re thinking. I’ve got a good lawyer.

MAX

Good. And when your lawyer is here, we’ll draw up your contract. You’ll have to agree to sing, of course.

PLUGGER

Do I get to make up songs about my machine gun? La, La—La—La—Bang! Bang! ...it stinks. What do you do while I’m singing?

MAX

I smoke a cigar, eat a banana and drink a large shot of whiskey.

PLUGGER

I’ve got to do all the work while you have a good time?

MAX

I’ll save you the banana.

PLUGGER

Maxie Poo...I mean the rest of it, too. The whiskey and the smoke and the whiskey and the whiskey...why should I sing for your supper?

MAX ASIDE:

It’s a gag. Don’t you get it? It’s...come here...(whisper)...

PLUGGER

Nah, I bet you can’t do THAT!

MAX

Sure I can, Plugger. Let me show you. I will now smoke a cigar, eat a banana and drink a large shot of whiskey while Plugger MacPat sings an original song: I SHOT FRAN, SHE KISSED THE METER MAN. Hit it, Beeth——

PLUGGER

CUT! Not if I have to sing some stupid song I don’t like. I’ll hold my breath first.

MAX

Oh no, you don’t!

[Plugger holds his breath.]

No you don’t! No you don’t! No you don’t!

Light cue: Colors.]

SHADOWS OFFSTAGE

Chink!

[The lights flicker, pop, blackout. All is dark on stage except for the "On the Air" sign.]

DJ

What the...keep going! Keep going! We’re still on the air!

MAX

It’s too dark.

EDISON’S VOICE

This is radio!

PLUGGER

Oh, so you want to see how Punch and Judy got started?

[Max suddenly gasps for air. Sound cue: Shadow theme. Light cue: Yellow and red strobe lights. The shadows enter, one stage left, one stage right. They hug the walls. They move slowly. They keep their backs to the audience. They wear Con Ed hardhats with lanterns mounted on the hats. They carry bundles of thick, black wire cable. They lay cable, meet at mid—stage, dance a circle around Max. Max is tied in cable. The shadows exit, clinging the walls. Lights restore. Shadow theme fades. Beethoven plays the final chord of a song. DJ cues canned applause. Max holds a hand over one eye, in pain. He stares at Plugger, who grins. They continue to hold those positions.]

DJ

Oh! You should have been here, Nostalgia Nuts! What an act! Terrific! Terrific! Max Morinsky and Plugger MacPat!

[He turns up the applause. Applause out. He cues a 78 record: “When the Curtain Comes Down” by Ted Lewis and his Orchestra. DJ talks over the song’s musical intro.]

And now it’s time to sign off with Ted "Is Everybody Happy?" Lewis and his band, our last guests tonight who want to tell you what happens: When The Curtain Comes Down Sing it, Ted.

[We hear an edited version of the real recording by Ted Lewis. Max lowers his hand—he has a black eye. He continues to stare at Plugger who grins throughout the number as DJ sticks his head between them to get to the mike.]

TED LEWIS RECORD

Come on, bring up the curtain,

And let the play begin--

We’re actors and here for a day.

Life is a stage

Where it takes the best to win

So give it your all, folks,

While you may.

Too soon, the shadows will call

And someday that curtain will fall.

[DJ talks over a musical interlude in the record.]

DJ

This has been your host with the most saying goodnight until Nostalgia next week. Stay tuned for "the Esther Williams Show", which follows immediately on most of these stations. This is the National Network. Bye-bye.

TED LEWIS RECORD

Why the hero’s upon us, the villain is hit,

The heroine is happy, she blows his a kiss.

We smile at the ending, we laugh at the clown, ha—ha—ha!

When it’s all over, the curtain,

That curtain comes down.

[Blackout.]

Scene 4

[While the curtain is closed, Sara changes the sign on the easel to read: “The Boarding House.1944” She sits back in the chair, holds her hands and watches. Light cue: Green lights shine on the curtain. The entire scene will take place in green light only. The curtain opens to reveal a new painted canvas backdrop depicting a slanted room ala Heavy Expressionism ala the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari ala the Adding Machine. The boarding house room is not only slanted but seedy. The wallpaper is ugly. This is a boarding house room once occupied by Vincent Van Gogh. Max is in a t—shirt, shaving. Two chairs and an ugly kitchen table are the only set pieces. A whiskey bottle and shot glass sit on the table. A green metal light shade hangs from a wire cord. Max pulls the chain. A green bulb turns on. Max circles Plugger, who is tied, with rope, to a chair.]

MAX

The show must go on — God forbid the devils...

The show must go on — God forbid the devils...

The show must go on - God forbid the devils...

The show must go on — God forbid the devils...

Wipe that sabotage off your face — I know where you came from...

Wipe that sabotage off your face — I know where you came from...

Cat got your tongue tonight? - Simon Sez: No guns tonight!...

...nevermore...nevermore...nevermore... Cat got your tongue tonight? - Simon Sez: No guns tonight!...

...nevermore... ... ...

The show must go on — God forbid the devils...

[Edison enters, sleepwalking. His arms are outstretched. He crosses the stage.]

EDISON

...zzz...two million, six hundred thousand, five hundred and thirty seven...zzz...maybe we can book you on a USO Tour for the troops, Max...you’ll have to sweat a little Max...Something’s bound to adapt... sweat... zzz... don’t worry, Max...sweat...sweat...trust me...zzz...

[Edison exits.]

MAX

Don’t try and trick me — Don’t try and trick me... I’m not taking my eyes off of you! This is between us! He doesn’t even know that we’re here! It’s an illusion...It’s an illusion... you’re sly, but you can’t get to him now. The door’s locked! The windows! There’s no way, no in, and I’ve got the key! You’re under watch!

[Plugger mumbles even though Max is on the other side of the room.]

What was that?

[Sound cue: Thunder. Blue light special up on Sara. She dons a grey wig and puts on bifocals.]

OLD SARA

Will you be much looooooonnger, Max? Alas, poor dummy, I knew him Ladies and Gentlemen. Will you be much looooooonnger?

[Blue light special out. Sara, as before.]

MAX

Don’t think you can outsmart me! I’ve thought of everything.

[Max slaps a muzzle and a machine gun down on the table.]

Everything! So don’t think you can talk me out of it.

PLUGGER

The future’s on his side. You’re past. You’re fading... fading... fading...

MAX

I’ll last!

PLUGGER

Give in. Make a deal.

MAX

I’ll think of something.

[A telephone rings.]

Don’t answer! Let it ring another three days. You got him the number, didn’t you? You stoolie! You told him! Didn’t you? I’m watching you. Didn’t you? One more move and you’re finished. No one answers that phone, not if it rings non—stop for another three years.

[Max grabs Plugger.]

The show must go on — God forbid the devils...

The show must go on — God forbid the devils...

[Blackout.]

Scene 5

[While the curtain is closed, Beethoven, and not Sara, changes the sign on the easel to read: “Uncle Maxie’s Dumb—Dumb Show. 1959” Sara, still visible in the old lady wig, sits in her chair, her hands folded, watching. DJ joins Beethoven at center stage, in front of the closed curtain. DJ holds a large cardboard cue card. Edison snaps his fingers. Light cue: Bright white TV studio lights. House lights up in the audience. Beethoven and DJ act as if they have been trying to teach a song to the peanut gallery for some 15 minutes or longer. They both chew gum.]

BEETHOVEN

You gotta learn the song, kids, or Uncle Maxie can’t come.

[She goes back to the piano.]

DJ

Alright, boys and girls! Attention! Attention out there! Let’s everybody sing!

[Beethoven plays a simple melody as DJ sings song lyrics off his cue card. He attempts to get the audience to sing along.]

Dum — Dum. Dum — Dum.

It’s such a sunny day.

Watch Channel Five at Five O’Clock:

The Dum — Dum Matinee!

Ho - Ho

BEETHOVEN

Great! Terrific...we’re going on to the sixth time!...an audience of the dumb—dumb...

DJ

Alright, children! You can read, can’t you? Let’s try it once again, okay?

[They play and sing the song.]

DJ

Very, very nice children...but hold your applause.

BEETHOVEN

One more time, alright?

DJ

One more.

BEETHOVEN

A little bit faster this time.

DJ

That’s right.

BEETHOVEN

Ready, gang? Work on it.

[They play and sing the song.]

DJ

That was very, very nice.

BEETHOVEN

Perfect.

DJ

Wanna try it again?

BEETHOVEN

Might as well try it for twelve.

[They play and sing the song. DJ picks up a live microphone from his console. He speaks through the PA system with an amplified voice.]

DJ

Well, alright, kids. Now, when the clown comes in, I want EVERYBODY to sing, okay?

[DJ walks off the stage with the microphone. Beethoven plays warm up the audience music. The curtain opens to reveal a new painted canvas backdrop depicting a parody of a l950’s elementary schoolroom. There is a blackboard, bulletin board and alphabet cards. There are drawings of planes and bombs and missiles. The backdrop is painted in black and white only. A school teacher’s desk sits in front of the backdrop. In some productions, a black and white video monitor will hang on wires near the top of the backdrop. The video monitor shows a black and white test pattern.]

Stand—by.

BEETHOVEN

Stand—by.

[House lights out. The video monitor goes live with the stage actually filmed and broadcast in black and white from the front and/or back of the stage. Beethoven plays an overture to The Dumb Dumb Show theme song. Max enters in clown costume. He carries Plugger’s violin carrying case.]

MAX

Hiya, kids! It’s another Dum - Dum Afternoon and that means it’s time for what, kids??? You know...right! So, come on!! Let’s go sing!

[He dances around as everyone in the world sings his theme song.]

Dum — Dum. Dum — Dum.

It’s such a dummy day.

Watch Channel Five at Five O’Clock:

The Dum — Dum Matinee!

Ho - Ho

[He laughs.]

Oh, we’re gonna have fun today, kids. That Dum-Dum Plugger MacPat will be here later, along with Bouncing Ball and Storybook Time. And right now, I’ve got the free gifts! Model trains and planes and Pee Wee Plugger Puppet Pals: Just pull the string

(ala Bela Lugosi in an Ed Woods movie)

Pull the strings!

 and he says different dum-dum things! Ten phrases in all you lucky kids here in our studio gallery...and Hi! Lucky mommies and daddies! Oh, you know what’s special today? This is Uncle Maxie’s Third Anniversary show, boys and girls. You know what an anniversary is, don’t you? No? That’s when you’ve had to put up with something for a whole year! A year’s a long time, boys and girls, and Uncle Maxie’s been here for three, so we’re gonna have some extra special treats in celebration later on in the show today. Alright? You know what, boys and girls at home? You can come visit your Uncle Maxie for a day and be part of the peanut gallery audience if only mommy writes to the station with any two box-top proof of purchase seals and 25¢ for postage and handling charges.

[Beethoven holds up a card board sign with a made up box office address for the show.]

You could come here, be on television, see what this Dumb - Dumb show is really like! But don’t write right now, because right now, we’ve got a Mickey Mouse cartoon!

[The video monitor shows a Betty Boop cartoon. If there is no video, we hear the soundtrack of the cartoon. It plays through the scene. Max calls up over his head, as if to an overhead control booth.]

Am I off the air for a minute?

DJ’S MIKED VOICE

Yes...but just for a minute.

[Max opens the violin case and removes props but no Plugger. He takes out a party hat, a flask of whiskey and a seltzer bottle.]

MAX

For those of you NOT watching, I will now drink a large shot of whiskey...and SWALLOW it...at the same time...

[Max drinks, moves downstage and waves to the kids in the audience. He smiles. He squirts a stream of whiskey. He makes faces and turns. Sara stands, shakes her head, puts on her coat, gathers her belongings and exits backstage. Beethoven puts on a headset. She listens to instructions, looks at Max, gives an OK sign up to the control booth.]

DJ’S MIKED VOICE

Warning on five second delay when we return to the air.

[Beethoven crosses to Max.]

BEETHOVEN

Happy Anniversary to You,

Happy Anniversary to You,

Happy Anniversary Dear Uncle Maxie,

Happy Anniversary to You!

[Max squirts Beethoven with seltzer. Beethoven listens to headset instructions and then takes away the whiskey and seltzer. She whispers to Max.]

Are you okay?

[Max nods yes. Offstage, DJ taps his finger on the microphone. Beethoven looks up to the booth.]

Say, listen, we sort of had a surprise party planned for you today on the show. Is that alright?

MAX

Surprise? Sure. It’s a living, sure. Whatever you say, sure! Well...surprise me. Let me have it. Forget about the script I’ve worked on for two weeks, sure! Bring it on! Let me have it! Let me have it!

BEETHOVEN

Happy Anniversary!

[She sprays Max with seltzer. Max shakes his fists at the control booth. Beethoven shakes her head no. Max slaps Beethoven’s back. They both laugh.]

MAX

You’re all right, Beethoven.

DJ’S MIKED VOICE

Stand-by for second cartoon.

MAX

Hey! Nah, nah, nah! The kids’ll be expecting-

[The video monitor begins a second cartoon. Max looks up to the booth for an answer and gets none. The second cartoon plays under the scene. Beethoven shrugs.]

BEETHOVEN

The kids don’t know the difference.

MAX

Well then let’s see this surprise. What do you want me to work with?

[Beethoven crosses to exit. Beethoven freezes. The video monitor freezes in one frame of the cartoon. The lights turn blue. A veiled woman enters, floating. She carries a cake covered with sparkling candles. Veiled Sara floats in slow motion.]

SARA CHANTS

Spirits — Chink.

Spirits — Chink.

Gather to the cake. Amen.

Quit the air — Sweeten here.

Gather here. Amen.

Relax here — Loosen here — Let go here.

Amen — Amen.

Watch this cake, Max.

In their face, Max.

When will you go home? Chink.

[In slow motion, she shoves the cake into Beethoven’s face. Beethoven exits. Sara exits. The lights and cartoon restore.]

DJ’S MIKED VOICE

Hey, Uncle Maxie! You feeling okay?

MAX

I’m fine! Who was that?...do you know who...do you? Who is that? What are you up to?

DJ’S MIKED VOICE

Just like on Truth or Consequences! We paid for her hotel, the round trip ticket. She can take a seat in the front row.

MAX

What is this? HEY! Wait a minute!

[The video monitor’s volume is suddenly turned up so loud that the cartoon soundtrack has to be shouted over. Sara enters, unveils herself and stands. She circles Max. Max doesn’t move but speaks with a choked voice.]

...Sara?...Hardtbern?...

[She nods yes.]

SARA

Uncle...Maxie...?

[Max begins to nod yes.]

You know...we used to be very well matched backstage in New York, Max-

[The shadows enter with video cameras. They dancea circle around Max and Sara as the lights turn red.]

MAX

...no...yes...it’s...look, Sara...it’s gotten bigger...why are you here?...no...look, why I set out...if only...if only...the gallery tricked me!...I think I’m playing to a live audience... they’ve got close—ups...they’ve got monitors...tape delay... monitors, monitors...they’ve always got a hand...controls somewhere...I’m keeping count...thousands of slights against me...it’s the dummy...Plugger’s in on it too...bad timing...

[Sara laughs. Shadows out. Lights restore.]

SARA

I never stopped believing in you, Max. Even after I lost track, oh, how I believed. I kept skimming VARIETY, the trades, and there you were, one day, host of your own show!

(with disgust)

 It’s cute...you look beat...I said to Nathan, my husband...Nathan, I used to help him, it’s not fair, he’s a talented man!

[She opens her bag and removes a hand puppet.]

I’ll work up a side act-

[The cartoon soundtrack softens but remains.]

DJ’S MIKED VOICE

Stand—by,

SARA

I’ll buy you a cup of coffee after the show!?!

[She would turn to go except that Max nods No. She talks fast.]

A drink?

DJ’S MIKED VOICE

We can’t keep stalling, Uncle Maxie.

[Max looks up to the booth and then nods no at Sara again.]

MAX

You’ve got to leave, Sara...

SARA

Max?!?

MAX

Sara, please...stand at a distance...

[She doesn’t move.]

MAX

SARA, GO AWAY!

[She smashes her puppet. Sara backs out in slow motion. Max yells up to the booth.]

ALRIGHT??

[He waves goodbye to Sara now that she’s gone.]

NOW GET THOSE FUCKING CARTOONS OFF THE AIR!!

[The video monitor goes live action, but now showsMax on stage with a five second delay. Max hears himself echo.]

So, come on, kids! Why don’t we see what Dum—Dum Plugger’s up to for the anniversary party...okay? Plugger? Plugqer? Where are you, Dum-Dum? I know you’re Fiddling about here, somewhere...

[He opens the violin case - no Plugger. He searches. He finds Plugger stuffed in a drawer of the desk. The dummy goes on his knee in a hurry. He puts the party hat on Plugger’s head.]

There you are, Plugger. Say HI to the kids!

PLUGGER

Hiya, Hiya, how are ya, dumbells? Anybody spare a cig? I hope you dumbells are still searching through daddy’s pants pockets for that green stuff like I told ya. Hiya. Hiya. Who’s got the cigars? Who’s got the dice? B—Bang! B-Bang!

MAX

Stop that, Plugger! Control yourself. Today is a special occasion. Did you buy me a present?

PLUGGER

Special occasion? Present for Maxie...what is it, April Fool’s Day?

MAX

You Dum—Dum! This is our anniversary!

PLUGGER

Aww, Honey!

[Plugger kisses Max. Max punches Plugger.]

Ow! Oh, THAT anniversary! That spot’s been sore for years!

MAX

None of your tricks, today. I want you to be good for a change, Plugger. We’ve invited lots of special boys and girls to a party and I want you to teach them good manners.

PLUGGER

A party, huh? I’ll be sooo good. I will. I will. Where’s the food? Where’s the punch?

[Max punches Plugger.]

MAX

Right, Dum—Dum! Today we’re going to learn how to mix up the punch.

PLUGGER

First, you wash your hands.

MAX

Hey! That’s right! Very good!

[Plugger bites Max’s finger. Max instinctively sucks the blood. Plugger laughs. Max rubs the finger on his pants and whispers to Plugger.]

Literally biting the hand that feeds you?...oww...

PLUGGER

Cry uncle, Uncle Maxie Poo? I’ll be sooo good. Where’s the punch? Where’s the punch?

MAX

I’m winding it up...now, Dum-Dum, tell the kids how they should plan for a party. First thing, you go to the freezer and get out the ice cubes. Now, Dum—Dum, you take the ice cubes and you stick them where?

PLUGGER WHISPERS

...come here...come here...you know where you can stick it…

[Max lends his ear to Plugger who whispers something obscene. Max grabs Plugger’s arm and twists is behind his back. Plugger speaks, in pain.]

Ow! Alright! You stick the ice cubes in the punch bowl!

[Max releases Plugger’s arm.]

...that hurt...

MAX

You know, boys and girls, I guess I better teach the party lesson myself. Now, I have a bowl here with ice cubes and fruit slices and juices and cherries. Once I finish mixing the juice, I take the bowl and-

PLUGGER IMERSONATING MAX

-and dump it on my head.

[Max begins to follow the suggestion.]

MAX

Yes, and dump it on my head so that...

PLUGGER

Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, B—Bang!

[Max holds Plugger’s mouth closed so that he can’t laugh. Plugger laughs anyway. Max then works Plugger’s controls and gets his mouth to open but can’t make him talk. Max tries again. No success. Max twists Plugger’s head around l80°.]

MAX

And now, I think that it’s time for the Goodbye Song. Right, Plugger?

[Max twists his head forward again.]

PLUGGER

Not the song, Maxie! Anything but that song! Storybook time! I’ll even try milk and cookies! I’ll be sooo good.

[Max twists Plugger’s head again.]

MAX

Time for the song.

[Beethoven enters, sits at the piano and begins to play an overture.]

No, Beethoven. I’ve got a new Goodbye Song today. Just give me my Dum—Dum drumstick, Beethoven. I’ll lead. Give me an F. Just fake it.

[Beethoven gives Max a drumstick, plays an F, and fakes. Max holds Plugger tightly around the throat. Max sings the song: “The Thing” by C. Grean, as recorded by Phil Harris. Each time he sings the chorus, which purposely leaves out three words, he bangs the stick on Plugger’s head. Weird, dissonant sounds play under the song. Beethoven learns fast.]

While I was walking down the beach - One bright and sunny day,

I saw a great big wooden box — A—floating in the bay.

I pulled it in and opened it up — And much to my surprise,

Oh I discovered a \_ \_ \_ right before my eyes.

Oh I discovered a \_ \_ \_ right before my eyes!

I picked it up and ran to town — As happy as a king.

I took it to this guy I know - Who’d buy most anything.

But this is what he hollered at me — As I walked in his shop:

Oh, get out of here with that \_ \_ \_ before I call the cop.

Oh, get out of here with that \_ \_ \_ before I call the cop!

I wandered all around the town - Until I chanced to meet,

A hobo who was looking for - A handout on the street.

He said he’d take most any old thing — He was a desperate man-

But, when I showed him the \_ \_ \_ he turned around and ran.

But? when I showed him the \_ \_ \_ he turned around and ran.

I wandered on for many years - A victim of my fate.

Until one day I came upon — Saint Peter at the gate.

And when I tried to take it inside — He told me where to go:

Get out of here with that \_ \_ \_ and take it down below.

Get out of here with that \_ \_ \_ and take it down below!

The moral of this story is - If you’re out on the beach,

And you should see a great big box — And it’s within your reach,

Don’t ever stop and open it up — That’s my advice to you.

’cause you’ll never get rid of the \_ \_ \_ no matter what you do.

No, you’ll never get rid of the \_ \_ \_ no matter what you do!

[Beethoven plays her last piano chord with the pedal down so that the sound continues to resonate. As soon as he finishes the song, Max calmly detaches Plugger’s headstick from the dummy’s body. Max laughs macabrely and merrily waves Plugger’s head about the set. Sound cue: Echoing applause. The video monitor loses its picture and turns to static. The lights begin to tint green. Sound cue: TV white noise.]

EDISON’ S MIKED VOICE

We are experiencing technical difficulties, due to severe electrical storms.

[Max waves the head and body, laughs and runs out. Blackout. In the dark, after a pause, Edison speaks again over the PA system. It is an afterthought, almost a mumble.]

EDISON

...ingrate.

Scene 6

[While the curtain is closed, Max enters, dressed as in scene one. As if going on a turn of the century vacation. He looks about the theater as if it held warm personal memories. He spots the easel and blows on it. AS if it were dusty. He changes a last remaining sign. It reads: “Epilogue: The Swan Song. 1960” Max shakes dust off, and opens the curtain. He reveals the backstage painted canvas backdrop from the prologue. The stage is otherwise empty except for a dim hanging bulb, a step ladder, a bundle of BX electrical cable, an actor’s makeup table, the chair and easel. Max removes his hat. He blows dust off the makeup table. He paints one of his hands with makeup to look like a handy — A ventriloquist’s hand decorated with eyes and lipstick in creation of a talking face with a mouth formed between the thumb and forefinger. Max begins to bundle cable. The handy speaks. Max acts surprised. The handy has a new voice different from Moe or Plugger.]

HANDY

What ya doing, Max?

MAX

Working.

HANDY

Where are we?

MAX

An old theater. Backstage.

HANDY

Yours?

MAX

It’s abandoned. We’re in hiding. Back in the country.

HANDY

We gonna live here?

MAX

Restore it.

HANDY

Oh, so you’re putting in utilities?

MAX

Taking them out! Here’s an old Opry House, converted to storage, later forgotten. We’re going to fix it back up the way it was. Revive vau --- don’t ask so many questions.

[Pause.]

HANDY

Can I act?

MAX

No.

HANDY

Why not?

MAX

Make a name on your own first!

[Max wipes his hand on his pants, removing the handy. He goes back to work. He laughs. He pulls out a cable. The lights grow dimmer. Angelic Harp Music. Moe flies onto stage, horizontal, wearing paper angel halo and wings. Moe hovers above and behind Max on the ladder. Moe can move his mouth and speak without aid of Max.]

MOE

Why did the dog bury records at the funeral?

[Max shudders and drops the two loose ends of the BX cable that he was yanking on. The cables dangle from the ceiling.]

Max, I said, why did the dog dig a hole in the graveyard and bury the records?

[Max turns.]

MAX

Because he thought they’d forgotten his master’s voice.

MOE

You remember the old routines.

MAX

Can’t be beat. How are you, Moe?

MOE

Fine. Fine. Look at me, fine.

MAX

Yeah? That’s good. Me too.

[Pause.]

It’s been a long time, huh?

MOE

Yeah, long time.

MAX

Nice place here.

MOE

Why did you come, Max? Why are you here?

MAX

Thought I'd stay...visit...a little while?

MOE

I think you should go home, Max.

MAX

NO! Why can’t I stay?

MOE

Thanks for coming, but listen to me, You should go.

MAX

Listen, Moe, it’s all going to come back. Like it was. See, the good times. We’re gonna polish the act. I’ve got to pull out this cable, the fuses, the circuits, these power lines-

[The live ends of the two cables meet and spark, Moe’s wings flash in fire and burn. He falls to the stage. Moe coughs, then laughs, laying on the stage. Max gets off the ladder and sits cradling Moe in his arms. The stage rapidly fills with smoke. The lights flicker in red and yellow fire. Moe is scorched and bloody.]

MOE! Are you alright? Are you hurt? Moe! You okay?

[Moe laughs.]

MOE

No.

MAX

Your wings?

MOE

They were paper, a trick. I wanted to fool you...I thought maybe you’d go...well. Max...ha! It hurts...

MAX

Can I do...anything...

MOE

No. Get outa here. We both don’t have to stay.

MAX

But I was the one-

MOE

Wrong, Max. You’ve got no reason to be here.

MAX

I want to stay.

MOE

Get outa here.

MAX

You remember the old routines?

[Moe cries. Both cough on smoke.]

MOE

No, get... There’s smoke and flames.

MAX

Why, there you are, Moe. You know, I was worried. I heard you crying and screaming so loud yesterday...what made you so mad?

MOE

Please get out.

MAX

I heard you screaming all day. Why were you so mad?

[They perform the routine with increasing difficulty as the stage fills with smoke.]

MOE

Why, didn’t you see the bum review that I got in the paper?

MAX

No. What did the critic say?

MOE

He called my performance "wooden".

MAX

Well, what show were you in?

MOE

Macbeth.

 MAX

The Scottish Play!?!

 MOE

Don’t mention it…shhh…MacBeth

MAX

Did you play the lead?

MOE

No. I played the forest.

MAX

Typecasting, huh?

MOE

Yeah...you know, I almost quit the theater once.

MAX

Find yourself a steady job, huh? But what else could you do?

MOE

Well, I almost took a job in an antique shop, but then I turned it down.

MAX

Why, was it a lousy offer?

MOE

No, sounded perfect. Paid well, too.

[Max coughs.]

MAX

Then why did you pass up the job in antiques?

[Moe does not answer. Max raises and releases one of Moe’s arms. It falls limp. Max looks down, kisses Moe’s head and rests it in his lap.]

Then why did you pass up the job in antiques, Moe?

[Max draws two lines of makeup down from the corners of his mouth in imitation of the appearance of a dummy’s jaw. He finishes the routine’s punch-line in Moe’s voice.]

Because there wasn’t any future in it.

[Max lies down, still, without closing his eyes. The smoke grows denser. The lights fade. Curtain.)

 Curtain Call. During the middle of the curtain call, with all cast members on stage, Edison blurts out:]

EDISON

No! Stop! Hold your applause! It can’t end like this! The theater on fire…Max some kind of puppet-man…I don’t understand theater but I like theater. I like actors.

[Edison reveals a giant oversized check from a local utility company. His signature is on the big check.]

This is a check for one million dollars that I am donating to the theater company in your honor, Max! Applaud these actors! Applaud me!

[APPLAUSE.]

Thank you very much, Ladies and Gentlemen...it was nothing.

[Exit pursued by Max. Final curtain.]