

MELANIE. I want something really ... vague. (*Lights fade on her.*)

GAVIN. " — and is horrified to realize he's a vampire." Hmm ... *Dracula* meets *The Omen*. Well, that's very interesting, Vince. (*As he paces.*) Now I assume you have a time-passing-montage in here to show the kid getting older: some little hints when he's in grade school and then — (*Listens.*) You serious? ... the kid's a baby through the whole thing? ... so have you pictured this creature of the night wearing Pampers or what? (*Glancing through the papers.*) Your movie. But I'd start thinking comedy. So ... (*Lights rise on Jeremiah in a lone desk at the back of the classroom.*) That's it? That's all my log lines? (*Glaring at Jeremiah, who can not look at him.*) That's everybody? (*Nothing.*) Okay, for the next class I want the one page treatment of your movie. That's one-page-single-spaced and don't play games with the margins 'cause I'm an old pro at that stuff. Any questions? Be off! (*The class empties, except for Jeremiah.*) Well ... you certainly put on a helluvan act last week. One sentence! That's all I asked for and you couldn't even manage to — (*Jeremiah hands him a paper.*) Why didn't you give me this before? JEREMIAH. 'Cause ... you'd read it out loud.

GAVIN. That's the way I work in here.

JEREMIAH. I can't ... talk. In front of people.

GAVIN. Get over it. (*Reading.*) "In Venice, a dashing American-aviator-slash-musical-comedy star pursues a poor American dancer posing as a rich heiress." (*A beat. Jeremiah waits anxiously for a response.*) Are you serious?

JEREMIAH. I've almost finished the first act —

GAVIN. You're writing *Top Hat*.

JEREMIAH. No, it's different —

GAVIN. Okay then, *Top Hat* meets *Flying Down to Rio*. This is the twenty-first century, Mr. Collins. Nobody wants to see this sort of movie anymore.

JEREMIAH. I do.

GAVIN. Okay, so do I. Congratulations, you just sold two tickets. "Aviator ... heiress ..." People don't even use those words anymore. You're writing something for Fred Astaire and I got news for you — he's unavailable.

JEREMIAH. Another actor could —

GAVIN. There are no more Fred Astaires! (*Hands the paper back.*) This is not gonna work. Let's try something else —

JEREMIAH. But ... I have pages ...

GAVIN. Hey, your call. You want to write this go ahead. Who knows — maybe it's great. They reopen RKO and exhume Ginger Rogers. But I don't think so. (*Jeremiah says nothing for a moment.*)

JEREMIAH. What should I write about then?

GAVIN. Well, what do you know? You said you spent some time in the desert — where? Arizona, Nevada —

JEREMIAH. The Kalahari.

GAVIN. Africa? (*Jeremiah nods.*) How long?

JEREMIAH. Born there. Left when I was fourteen.

GAVIN. What were you doing there?

JEREMIAH. Missionaries.

GAVIN. Well, don't know if we can use that but the setting's cool. Lions and tigers and stuff —

JEREMIAH. Tigers are mostly in India —

GAVIN. Okay —

JEREMIAH. I never even saw a lion —

GAVIN. You're allowed to make some stuff up here. Start thinking *King Solomon's Mines* or *African Queen*. Okay? Give that a shot. (*His lecture is over, and he packs up. Jeremiah doesn't move.*)

JEREMIAH. Did you ever meet him? (*Gavin is blank.*) Fred Astaire.

GAVIN. No. (*Lights rise on Melanie in her garden as they fade on Gavin.*) Unfortunately, by the time I made it to Hollywood everybody I ever wanted to meet was already dead.

MELANIE. These are all dead. I'll pull them out next week after the last of the peppers come in ... oh, thanks — yes, it is kind of ... symmetrical. I can't stand a garden that's all ... you know ... out of hand. Nice neat rows. (*Listens a moment.*) Out there, God no. This is the first garden I've had since I moved out of my parents' house ... too busy — work — the commute, God. Automatic pilot, I swear. Going through the motions. Just ... never any time ... (*She listens.*) Actually, it worked out great. They wanted to cut back on some of the "upper echelon executives" — which is a euphemism for "old" — so when they offered a golden parachute I grabbed it. Twenty-five years of that was plenty ... (*Laughs quietly.*) Twenty-five years of anything is tough. Article the other day about the rising divorce rate among recently retired people. Not that we're officially retired but — I did some figuring and back there — during the week — Gav and I actually saw each other, awake, about three hours a day. That's probably the biggest adjustment — at least for me. We're around each other all the time and now I've started — okay this'll sound crazy but — when we

were first married sometimes I'd wake up and look over at him and ... and I'd wonder, "Who is this person?" I know he's Gavin and I know he's my husband but I ... just ... who is he? And just recently I've started doing it again. Period of adjustment, I suppose, but just the other night — *(She listens, then smiles.)* You're kidding. Oh thank God I thought it was just me. But you're still practically newlyweds we're coming up on thirty years and — *(She reacts to Linda.)* Are you okay? Oh ... she's active, huh? ... *(Lights rise on Jeremiah in his room.)*

JEREMIAH. "African village. Day."

MELANIE. You're sure you don't mind? *(She reaches out, making contact just as the baby kicks; Melanie pulls back on instinct, then she smiles and reaches out again as the lights fade.)*

JEREMIAH. "The air, filled with hot dust and the smell of dead animals and human waste make it painful to breathe. A young boy kicks his only toy, a battered soccer ball." *(Lights rise on the Miller home. Offstage we hear Gavin and Melanie calling "good night.")*

"Suddenly, a scream pierces the village." *(Lights begin to fade on him as Gavin and Melanie enter. He moves immediately to the couch; she looks a little tense.)* "Another scream, this one even more painful ..."

MELANIE. Now was that so painful?

GAVIN. Define "painful." *(He turns on the TV. Lighting should give the impression that whatever he's watching is in black and white.)*

MELANIE. You were very ... civil.

GAVIN. What's that supposed to mean?

MELANIE. It means you were polite. Told a couple funny stories. Then the wall went up.

GAVIN. What'd you want — card tricks? This was not my idea.

MELANIE. I just wanted —

GAVIN. Ohhh — *Best Years of Our Lives*. 1946 Best Picture. I love this movie.

MELANIE. Did you like them? He's kind of quiet —

GAVIN. They're fine, okay. Just don't get too ... attached.

MELANIE. What's that supposed to mean?

GAVIN. I know how you are with people. Since we moved back here you've started collecting them.

MELANIE. Maybe you should try it. Might be nice if you had someone to —

GAVIN. Mel, please. *(Silence.)*

MELANIE. So what does a water lawyer do?

GAVIN. Sues fish. I don't know. *(Off her look.)* Environmental

stuff. *(Silence, except for muffled dialogue from the television.)*

MELANIE. Everything okay?

GAVIN. Yeah, fine. *(Silence.)*

MELANIE. You want me to unpack your office for you? *(No response.)* I went up to get some envelopes today and —

GAVIN. I'll take care of it.

MELANIE. When? How many years are you going to climb over those boxes? I just thought —

GAVIN. They're fine, hon —

MELANIE. But you've got all those empty book shelves and it's kind of silly to —

GAVIN. They're fine —

MELANIE. I don't mind —

GAVIN. Mel, I've used up all my dialogue being "civil" to your friends tonight. May I watch the movie please?

MELANIE. Fine. *(Silence.)*

GAVIN. I love this scene. Frederic March is so great. Come on, sit with me. *(She doesn't move.)* Myrna Loy, God. Wyler does a great shot here. Look at the way she's gazing up at her husband. She wasn't even nominated for this. Myrna Loy ... the perfect wife.

MELANIE. Why — because she's dead? *(Heading off.)* I'm gonna read.

GAVIN. Watch the movie. *(He stretches out on the couch; lights rise on Jeremiah.)*

MELANIE. I've seen it. *(Lights fade on the Millers as Gavin moves to his classroom.)*

JEREMIAH. "The boy sees the chief's wife, Maccacu, on the floor, about to give birth. Zoom in on: the midwife, lying dead a few feet away."

GAVIN. Act one. Twenty-six to thirty pages — no more. They're my favorite act to write because they're a breeze. Just as in life, the first act is usually pretty easy ... *(Lights shift to Jeremiah as Gavin sits to read pages.)*

JEREMIAH. Is it okay? More like what you wanted? I couldn't work any lions in. *(Gavin indicates "shut up" as he reads.)*

GAVIN. "The boy starts forward, then freezes. A deadly black mamba snake lies next to the midwife. The snake rears back, as if ready to strike." *(He says nothing for a moment, then looks up at the anxious kid.)* This is great! Great! Why didn't you show this in class?

JEREMIAH. I can't. I told you —