

## ACT TWO

*Ideally, some Astaire classics have played throughout intermission. \* Music plays as the houselights fade and rise on Gavin in his classroom. He holds a bunch of index cards.*

GAVIN. For the most part your act ones weren't too bad. Just remember: You are writing a movie. Don't talk about the action — show it! You want characters who just stand around and talk go write a play. Some of you neglected to adhere to the page count. Vince, unless you're writing for the Three Stooges there's no such thing as a nine page first act. Okay, moving on: act two. *(Writes on the board as he speaks.)* Approximately pages thirty to eighty. And it's all about plot, which is why the cards become very important. *(Showing them to the class.)* All your plot beats go right here. That way you can keep track of the three things you need in the second act: rising stakes, complications and twists. Some bad examples: Hero gets orders to abort mission but says hell with it, defies authority, and completes it at great risk to himself. Bruce Willis crap. Or ... long-thought-dead-wife shows up unexpectedly. *(Lights rise on Melanie leading Jeremiah in.)* And how 'bout the classic — if overused —

MELANIE. He should be back in a couple minutes.

GAVIN. Person you thought was good guy turns out to be bad guy. *(Lights fade on him.)*

JEREMIAH. Should I wait outside?

MELANIE. *(Laughing.)* No —

JEREMIAH. Until Mr. Miller gets home.

MELANIE. Don't be silly; sit down. *(He obeys. Silence.)* Can I get you something? Glass of wine? Soda?

JEREMIAH. No thank you.

MELANIE. How's school? *(He shrugs.)* Anxious to graduate?

JEREMIAH. *(Thinking a moment.)* No. Not really.

\* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

MELANIE. Any plans?

JEREMIAH. They'll tell me.

MELANIE. Who?

JEREMIAH. The Elders. I'll get a post.

MELANIE. You mean they just ... send you someplace? You have no choice in the matter?

JEREMIAH. No.

MELANIE. Little scary. Don't suppose you could request Hollywood?

JEREMIAH. I wish.

MELANIE. Why don't you ask them? *(He squirms, uncomfortable even with the thought.)*

JEREMIAH. Oh ... no.

MELANIE. Could you negotiate? They want to send you to "A" and you say "B" — and then you settle on "C" or something — *(To her surprise he busts out laughing. She watches a moment.)* You can laugh. *(He immediately stops, very serious again.)*

JEREMIAH. What?

MELANIE. Don't let me stop you. *(He looks a little confused. Trying to please her, he attempts to laugh, but it doesn't work. Finally, he points to her wine.)*

JEREMIAH. May I ... smell that?

MELANIE. Sure. *(He takes the glass carefully and sniffs the wine.)*

JEREMIAH. I changed my mind. May I have some?

MELANIE. Sure. *(She exits.)*

JEREMIAH. Something smells very good.

MELANIE. *(Offstage.)* Broccoli soup, with garlic and olive oil. And we're having brook trout for dinner. Hope that's okay —

JEREMIAH. Oh — anything. That last dinner ... *(He gropes for the words.)* Wow — it was ... my mouth was dancing the whole way home.

MELANIE. *(Offstage.)* That's one of the best reviews I've ever gotten. Oh, and tonight, if you want to say grace you go right ahead. I spoke to Gavin, he will not make comments all through it.

JEREMIAH. That's okay. I don't need to — *(She enters with wine and a cheese plate.)*

MELANIE. No, you do it if you want. It was kind of nice — something different. *(He sips the wine and reacts to the taste.)* My family just said prayers on high holy days. Passover, that sort of thing.

JEREMIAH. You're Jewish?

MELANIE. Yep. Both sides. *(He takes another sip; she notices his reaction.)* Try a cracker. Chemical reaction. It'll change the taste. *(He follows her instructions, and she watches. The wine suits him better this time.)*

JEREMIAH. Wow. You're right.

MELANIE. It's a sauvignon blanc. It goes with lighter seafood.

JEREMIAH. Were you a chef or something?

MELANIE. No. I thought about it —

JEREMIAH. Why didn't you?

MELANIE. *(Thinks a moment.)* It didn't seem ... practical back then. Gavin was trying to get a career going — we'd just moved out there and — so ... so I just sort of became an accountant.

JEREMIAH. When Mr. Miller started doing well you could've — maybe done something different.

MELANIE. Every time I thought about it they promoted me. And in the long run it was probably ... better for me. Forced me to ... deal with people. I had always been terrible at that —

JEREMIAH. Me too! I hate it!

MELANIE. It was the scariest thing for me —

JEREMIAH. Yes —

MELANIE. I used to stutter. I couldn't say my name till I was like ten. Melane Monica Manheim. Try that with a stutter. Took about forty-five minutes. *(Jeremiah smiles and nods sympathetically, as if he understands. Silence.)* I like your script so far.

JEREMIAH. You've read it?

MELANIE. Hope you don't mind —

JEREMIAH. Do you have any notes?

MELANIE. A question. Are you ever going to explain — is it ever going to come out where the mother is?

JEREMIAH. Do you think that's important?

MELANIE. Father and son, no mother. Audience might be curious. I was.

JEREMIAH. Mr. Miller hates exposition, but if you really think —

MELANIE. Just curious. It's your script. *(He nods. Silence.)*

JEREMIAH. She just left, that's all. She hated the desert — I remember that part. So "barren." That was one of her favorite words. *(Silence.)*

MELANIE. So what're you going to do with it when you finish? There must be all sorts of student competitions — festivals —

JEREMIAH. Kind of up to Mr. Miller. He thinks we'll get a bid-

ding war started —

MELANIE. *(Curious.)* Really? He does?

JEREMIAH. Says his agent's really excited about it. He's going to introduce me —

MELANIE. To Joel?

JEREMIAH. Right. He wants to take me out right after Christmas. Before I have to start my service —

MELANIE. Gavin's taking you out there? He said that? *(Jeremiah nods as she processes all this.)* I thought he was just ... "helping" you on this.

JEREMIAH. Sure. He's the senior partner. *(Hands her the title page.)* His name goes first. I thought it should be alphabetical, you know, but he —

GAVIN. *(Offstage.)* Hey, sorry I'm late. *(He enters carrying a grocery bag. Melanie quietly pockets the title page.)* Swiss chard. They were out of that bread.

MELANIE. So what did you get instead?

GAVIN. Nothing. My orders were "that bread." *(To Jeremiah.)* I learned years ago, never screw with her shopping list. *(He notices Jeremiah's wine and turns to Melanie.)* You corrupting this kid? *(Kissing her.)* Good job. *(Melanie takes the bag and exits.)*

MELANIE. Soup in a couple minutes.

GAVIN. It's been drivin' me crazy, but I figured it out in the checkout line. Get out the first act cards, kiddo.

JEREMIAH. First act? But we were —

GAVIN. It's just a little restructuring. *(Lecture mode.)* Now — what's missing from the story? *(Jeremiah shrugs.)* Fantasy! What's Jerry's fantasy? *(Melanie enters, hands Gavin his martini and exits.)*

JEREMIAH. He ... has a lot of them.

GAVIN. A father! He wants a father —

JEREMIAH. He has a father —

GAVIN. One that he likes. One that'll ... put his arm around him. Root for him. See, what we've got now — there's no emotional bond in the story for the audience to latch on to.

JEREMIAH. Who could we use?

GAVIN. Tell me about the coach again, what's his name?

JEREMIAH. Mr. Coburn. We called him Mr. C.

GAVIN. There you go.

JEREMIAH. Mr. Coburn was a jerk.

GAVIN. *(Not even listening.)* Denzel Washington. Come on,