

MARTIANS OVER BROOKLYN

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Laurie Bryant

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MARTIANS OVER BROOKLYN

By Laurie Bryant

Inspired by the infamous Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre radio broadcast of 1938. (Permission for use and adaptation of excerpts of original material secured from the estate of Howard Koch, author of the 1938 radio play.)

SYNOPSIS: On the eve of Orson Welles' 1938 radio broadcast, a Brooklyn neighborhood comes alive as the Bonacelli family deals with the grim reality of their father's abandonment by immersing themselves in science fiction, Hollywood movies, and eccentricity. Things get complicated with the arrival of Evelyne Alforde, a high-maintenance B-movie actress who has worn out her welcome in Hollywood and has come to join the radio cast of The Mercury Theatre's production of "The War of the Worlds." While Bonacelli's neighbors engage in a bit of class and personal warfare in an effort to escape the impending Martian onslaught, Evelyne hijacks the radio broadcast in an effort to gain air-time and 'Martian panic' takes over Brooklyn.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8-10 MEN, 16 WOMEN, 7 EITHER, EXTRAS)

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

POP BONACELLI (m).....Eccentric old man who claims to have fought in the Civil War; kindhearted and a wild storyteller but lives in fantasy world to escape reality. His son abandoned the Bonacelli family several years prior, leaving Patty and the kids without financial support. A show-stealing role. *(68 lines)*

JO BONACELLI (f).....Spunky girl of about 12, lives with mother, brother and Pop in a boarding house in Brooklyn; Jo is realistic and grounded. *(46 lines)*

- ANTHONY BONACELLI (m)....Jo's younger brother, a science-fiction fan with a great imagination, adores his grandfather Pop and believes Pop's outlandish stories. He believes his father is secretly working undercover as a spy for the government and will return someday. (47 lines)
- PATTY BONACELLI (f).....Jo and Anthony's mother, obsessed with Hollywood movies and movie stars and lives vicariously through them; left by her husband who one day went out for Yoo-Hoo and never returned. While she awaits his return, she struggles to survive by taking in laundry and cleaning for neighbors. (64 lines)
- MONA SILVERMAN (f).....Pushy and overbearing owner of the boarding house; has inflated sense of her own importance and status. Actress should have strong physical and vocal presence. (56 lines)
- MAX SILVERMAN (m).....Mona's long-suffering husband; a mild man who dreams of someday writing a book. (30 lines)
- MARYBETH SILVERMAN (f)...Mona and Max's spoiled daughter; friends with Jo and Anthony but delights in her perception of her family's lofty status in the neighborhood. (26 lines)
- CATHY (f).....A nurse, she lives in the boarding house; engaged to Mike the cop, she is eager to get him to finally walk down the aisle. (46 lines)
- MIKE (m).....The local beat cop; he is sensible but a bit gullible. (53 lines)
- LINDA (m).....Boarding house resident; a spinster waitress always searching for a man—any man, to marry. She is prone to hysteria and overreaction. (24 lines)

MARTIANS OVER BROOKLYN

- SAM GRAFTON (m/f).....Relative of Mona; sharp, low-level Hollywood agent; represents Evelyne Alforde, a B movie actress en route to New York for a small role in the radio performance of “War of the Worlds,” staying at Mona’s boarding house to save money. *(53 lines)*
- EVELYNE ALFORDE (f).....Glamorous actress of limited ability; she is arrogant and high-maintenance and determined to be a star. *(46 lines)*
- AGNES (f)Simple and eager, she is gopher and personal assistant to Evelyne. *(12 lines)*
- KATE (f)Local cabbie and resident know-it-all. *(17 lines)*
- NORMA (f).....Another cabbie. *(5 lines)*
- MARLENE (f)Waitress, Linda’s best friend. *(19 lines)*
- MRS. TRELLA (f).....Snooty local neighbor; always brags about her son the doctor. *(7 lines)*
- MRS. MIRANDA (f)High-strung local neighbor. *(5 lines)*
- SUSAN (f)A neighborhood girl. *(2 lines)*
- ANNIE (f).....A neighborhood girl. *(2 lines)*
- MILLIE (f).....A tough neighborhood girl. *(2 lines)*
- CHURCH LADY (f).....A neighbor on the way to church for End-of-the-World services. *(4 lines)*
- DAUGHTER/SON (m/f)Church Lady’s child. Doesn’t want to go to church twice in one day. *(3 lines)*

THE RADIO STATION

- ORSON (m)Director and actor, he is confident, intelligent, and smooth. *(37 lines)*
- THE PROFESSOR (m/f)Actor in radio drama. Intelligent and calm. *(10 lines)*
- MARTHA (m/f).....Actor and assistant director for radio show; sarcastic and sharp-tongued. *(17 lines)*
- ANNOUNCER (m/f)Actor on radio drama. *(9 lines)*
- NEWS REPORTER* (m/f).....Reader of the news on radio broadcast. *(4 lines)*

- MUSIC HOST (m/f)Character on radio play, introduces fictional music program (2 lines)
- MR. WILSON (m).....Character on radio play; may be doubled with COMMANDER. (4 lines)
- COMMANDER (m)Character on radio play; may be doubled with MR. WILSON. (2 lines)
- POLICEMAN (m)Character on radio play; may be doubled with LIEUTENANT. (2 lines)
- LIEUTENANT (m)Character on radio play; may be doubled with POLICEMAN. (1 line)
- ENSEMBLEAdditional male and female neighbors and 3-4 radio background voices may be added as desired.

* **NOTE:** *The character of the News Reporter is not connected with the Mercury Theatre show cast. He is an actual news broadcaster, and his radio news reports are authentic and give historical context for the events of the play. If doubling is required, consider having the actor do off-stage voiceovers for the news reports at the start and close of the play.*

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ACT ONE, SCENE 1

*The curtain opens to reveal a Brooklyn residential street of 1938. It is nearly eight p.m. Center is a stoop, with stairs leading to the door of a brownstone. Various extras as residents casually pass by, as it is a warm Sunday evening—October 30, 1938. The time is just after dinner. On the stoop sit three children, twelve-year-old tomboy JO is playing along with MARYBETH, a girl in a fancy dress and ribbons. JO's little brother, ANTHONY, is reading a copy of the science fiction magazine **Astounding Stories**.*

Lights up on an off-stage platform that serves as the studio for the Mercury Theater program. There is a lighted on-air sign, a few stools, large microphones on stands and a table with sound effects equipment scattered about. The "On the Air" light illuminates and the action on stage freezes. Instrumental big band music plays, and then stops abruptly. NEWS REPORTER sits on stool before a large microphone; he is wearing a white button-down shirt and tie, and his shirtsleeves are unbuttoned and rolled up. He is a working NEWS REPORTER.

SFX: Period music or radio clips play for about 20 seconds, then are interrupted by SFX of teletype, which plays under:

NEWS REPORTER: We interrupt this program to bring you a special news update. Britain's Lord Halifax has reportedly received a terse response to his letter of concern regarding the poor treatment of Austrian citizens by the occupying German forces. Chancellor Adolph Hitler repeated his desire to unify all German-speaking people under one flag, and promised to, quote, "vanquish anyone who stands in our way," unquote. We return you now to your regularly scheduled program.

SFX: Teletype out, music resumes playing, the "On the Air" light goes out.

Music fades under and out as the studio goes dark. Action begins on the main stage. POP tiptoes in from left, creeping as though on guard. He is wearing dark slacks and shoes, a Long John'-style shirt and suspenders, and a Civil War era soldier's cap. He carries a broom as though it were a rifle, and he approaches ANTHONY, JO, and MARYBETH, who are on the stoop.

POP: Any sign of those rebel rascals, Private?

ANTHONY: *(Stands and salutes.)* No, sir. All quiet. *(JO and MARYBETH roll their eyes. JO is embarrassed, and this looks like a regular occurrence.)*

POP: Keep a sharp lookout. We don't want General Jackson and his Confederates sneaking up on us, now do we? Oh, that Stonewall, he's a slippery one.

JO: Pop, can't you just sweep the stoop like a normal person?

POP: *(Steps closer.)* I can have you shot, you know. *(To ANTHONY.)* Carry on, Soldier.

ANTHONY: Yes, sir. *(Salutes.)*

MARYBETH: *(Bratty.)* I thought only officers got called 'sir,' and officers don't sweep the stoop.

POP: *(Steps very close to MARYBETH and looks down at her authoritatively.)* Plenty of room for two in front of the firing squad. *(He nods and slowly walks up the steps and exits into the house.)*

JO: *(Bouncing a small pink rubber ball.)* Come on, Marybeth. I gotta go in soon. Let's play stoop ball. I'll spot you five runs.

MARYBETH: In my Sunday dress? No way! My mom will kill me.

JO: Well, gee whiz, church was this morning. Why do you have to stay in that get-up all day for?

MARYBETH: I happen to like dressing this way. Not everyone is poor nowadays, you know. Besides, I want to look my best for when the new boarder arrives.

JO: Oh, yeah, the famous Hollywood actress nobody's ever heard of.

MARYBETH: Miss Evelyne Alforde, thank you very much.

ANTHONY: *(Excited.)* Evelyne Alforde? Wasn't she in *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*? I think she was one of the Clay People that lived in the cave on the planet Mongo!

MARYBETH: See? She's a famous clay person. And Mother says she's late, so she should be here any minute. (*Looks back and forth to stage left and right.*)

JO: Yeah, well, I wouldn't stay in my Sunday dress for somebody I never heard of.

MARYBETH: You haven't got a Sunday dress.

JO: (*Embarrassed, but standing her ground.*) Yeah, well, I bet she ain't getting dressed up to meet you.

ANTHONY: (*Without looking up from his magazine.*) Don't listen to her, Marybeth. I like that dress. (*A beat.*) You should just stay in it until tomorrow—you could use it for Trick-or-Treat! (*ANTHONY and JO laugh as MARYBETH sticks out her tongue at ANTHONY.*)

MARYBETH: And I suppose you'll be going as a brat for Halloween?

JO: (*Still laughing.*) Nah, he'll probably cut holes in a bed sheet again and go as the world's lamest ghost.

MARYBETH: (*Smugly.*) I've seen your mother's laundry on the line, and you Bonacellis don't have any bed sheets left without holes to cut holes in.

JO: (*Suddenly defensive and angry.*) They ain't all ours, and you know it! Mom takes in washing from lots of people.

ANTHONY: Yeah, and she only does your family's laundry because your mom thinks she's too good to get her hands dirty. And when our dad gets back from his secret mission for the government, we'll have plenty enough to buy new sheets for the whole block.

MARYBETH: Ha! Your father's not on a secret mission. My mother says he went out for Yoo-Hoo one night and just ran off and probably became a hobo on a train or something.

ANTHONY: (*Stands up to MARYBETH.*) You take that back! (*JO steps between them and tries to calm ANTHONY.*) Besides, if everybody knew where he was, it wouldn't be a secret, would it? Tell her, Jo. Tell her Daddy's working for the government.

JO: (*Softly tells him what he wants to hear.*) Yeah, Anthony. He's a secret spy for the government.

ANTHONY: See?

MARYBETH: Honestly. You and your grandfather should go as the front and back ends of a delusional donkey! Mother says crazy must run in your family or you were cursed by gypsies—

ANTHONY: You leave our Pop alone! He was a Civil War hero! And everyone knows your mom is a—

JO: *(Interrupts, calming him down again, she pulls him aside.)* Knock it off, Anthony. Her mom owns this place, and we've got nowhere else to go if they kick us out. I don't like it either, but sometimes you just got to swallow things that don't taste good.

ANTHONY: *(Smiles.)* Like Mom's cooking.

JO: *(Smiles back and nods.)* Like Mom's cooking.

ANTHONY: Fine. *(Goes back and sits down and makes nice, all is quickly forgotten.)* I am dressing up as The Thing for Halloween. I got my costume and everything. *(JO and MARYBETH look at each other and shrug.)*

JO AND MARYBETH: The what?

ANTHONY: *(Rolls his eyes.)* The Thing! *(He waves his magazine at them.)* Don't you read? It's right here in Astounding Stories! See? "Who Goes There?" by Don A. Stuart. The Thing's a shape-shifting alien from outer space that devoured a team of scientists in Antarctica.

MARYBETH: Ew. And there's a costume for that?

ANTHONY: Black pants, white shirt and a tie.

JO: If that's an alien, there were an awful lot of them in church today.

MARYBETH: If that's an alien, I better take a closer look at my father. He wears that every day!

ANTHONY: No! I said The Thing was a shape-shifter! *(ANTHONY dramatically acts out as much of this as possible as he tells the story.)* He steals the form, memories and personality of everyone he devours. See, he first kills and takes the shape of a scientist named Blair, and when they find out Blair's really dead and has become an alien, they have to be destroy him again to keep The Thing from escaping back to his home planet.

JO: *(Mischievously.)* So The Thing looks like a regular person, only he's really a hideous being from outer space.

ANTHONY: Now ya got it! *(He sits back down.)*

JO: Well, then forget Mister Silverman, I'd take a closer look at Marybeth's mother! *(JO and ANTHONY laugh and make like monsters, MARYBETH doesn't.)*

MARYBETH: Very funny. Anthony, I'd certainly believe you were a hideous being even without a costume, but will other people really know what you are just by wearing black pants, a white shirt and a tie?

ANTHONY: Sure! Anyone who's aces will get it!

Kids freeze as lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

Lights up on the studio set. An ANNOUNCER sits on a stool before a tall microphone stand. The "On the Air" sign illuminates and we hear the ANNOUNCER read from pages in his hand. MUSIC HOST is seated at a second stool, also before a mic. ORSON WELLES and several EXTRAS mill about in the background.

SFX: Three chimes OR one of the radio personnel plays three xylophone chimes just prior to their announcing call letters.

ANNOUNCER: *(After chimes.)* You are listening to CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System. There is a chance of rain tonight, and we'll see a low of about 48 degrees.

ORSON: *(Aside and 'off the air,' to entire radio cast.)* Be sure to play up the crowd noise. And make the hissing and creaking louder. This isn't a movie, you know. Sound is all we've got.

MARTHA: Okay, everybody. Here we go. Let's destroy the world.

The ANNOUNCER silently counts down from three by holding up fingers. The ON-THE-AIR sign illuminates.

ANNOUNCER The time is just before eight p.m., and we now take you to downtown New York, where you will be entertained by the music of Ramón Raquello and his orchestra.

He points to cue MUSIC HOST.

MUSIC: Spanish music, perhaps a tango, rises briefly and fades out.

MUSIC HOST: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We're coming to you live from the wonderful Meridian Room of the Park Plaza hotel, where Ramon Raquello and his orchestra will have you dancing into the night. First up, "La Cumparsita."

"On the Air" sign goes out; more Spanish music plays and gradually goes under as lights down on studio and lights up on stoop.

MIKE and CATHY enter arm-in-arm from left. MIKE is in his policeman's uniform, and CATHY in her nurse's uniform. PATTY enters via apt. building door carrying a basket of folded laundry. She is wearing an apron and has her hair up as if she has been doing housework. POP is sweeping the stoop. MONA stands beyond the steps, looking offstage, waiting for the arrival of her guest. JO and MARYBETH sit on the steps; ANTHONY is beside them, coloring a homemade sign on a stick.

CATHY: Patty Bonacelli! You're working on a Sunday?

PATTY: Every day, Cathy. *(Tired, she wipes her brow with her sleeve.)* Every day. Besides, I can't complain, right? You and Mike here worked today.

MIKE: Well, when you serve the public, you're only a call away from duty no matter what day it is.

PATTY: Unfortunately, the same goes when you serve Mona Silverman. *(PATTY approaches MONA.)* Here you go, Mrs. Silverman. I think I got the starch just right this time. *(She offers the basket to MONA.)*

MONA: *(Stares disdainfully at it and waves it off, refusing to touch it.)* Let's hope so. There are plenty of girls taking in laundry nowadays, you know.

PATTY: *(With dignity.)* Uh, Josephine, run this up to Mrs. Silverman's apartment, will you?

JO: Yes, Ma.

JO grudgingly accepts the basket, and climbs the stairs. MARYBETH gives her a smug wave that mimics her mother's. JO stops only long enough to stick her tongue out at MARYBETH's back before entering the house.

ANTHONY: *(Finishes his sign and proudly holds it up. It reads: "Welcome, Evelyn Alford.")* There, done!

PATTY: *(Excitedly, to MONA.)* So, Anthony tells me an actress is coming to stay?

POP: Actress? *(Crosses and stands beside MIKE.)* I love actresses. You know, I dated the great Greta Garbo once.

There are various responses of laughter and disbelief from those on stage.

CATHY: Come on!

MAX: That's it, Pop. Dream big! *(Laughs.)*

MIKE: Pull the other leg.

MONA: *(Seriously.)* Don't laugh. You'll only encourage him.

PATTY: *(Gently touches his arm, trying to steer him in right direction. She speaks to him as if he were a child.)* Now, Pop, you've never even met Greta Garbo. You've lived in Brooklyn your whole life. You just like her movies, don't you?

ANTHONY: *(Defensively.)* I believe you, Pop. What happened with you and Garbo?

POP: Oh, quiet and mysterious, that one! Like a sleeping volcano. We went for long moonlit walks on the beach, dipping our toes in the Pacific Ocean. And on warm summer nights— *(He embraces his broom as if about to kiss it.)*

MONA: Oh! *(She pulls MARYBETH close and covers her eyes.)*

PATTY: Pop!

POP: *(Stops and pats ANTHONY on the head.)* I'll tell you the rest when you're older.

ANTHONY: *(Disappointed.)* Aw, so why'd you two break up? She's the most famous actress in the whole world!

POP: *(Caught up in the nostalgia of it.)* It was different back then. Movies—and actresses—were silent. *(Pantomimes some hammy silent movie expressions suggesting two lovers in a romance, ending with a decidedly female eyelash-batting expression of love.)* But me and Greta, we were made for each other!

ANTHONY: So, what happened?

POP: Talkies! Once Garbo talked, you couldn't shut that woman up.

CATHY: *(Laughs.)* Pop, you wear me out.

POP: That's just what Greta said! *(He winks and pokes MONA in the ribs, she recoils in horror.)*

PATTY: Pop! *(POP switches arms and pokes MIKE instead.)*

POP: Now, Garbo was pretty, sure, but that ZaSu Pitts! Now there's a woman! *(Whistles in appreciation.)*

MAX: ZaSu Pitts? She's so plain. She looks like the checkout girl at Waldbaums.

POP: She's beautiful! It's just a girl-next-door kind of beautiful. And we had quite a romance, but it was complicated. You see, Greta wanted to marry me, and was jealous of ZaSu—

MIKE: Jealous? Come on, Pop. How could Greta Garbo be jealous of someone who looks and sounds like Olive Oyl?

MAX: *(Teasing.)* Say, I bet it was Popeye that was jealous, what with you dating his girl and all.

MAX and MIKE laugh as PATTY steps in to politely change the subject.

PATTY: *(Pulls POP away.)* Pop, it's about eight o'clock. Why don't you go warm up the radio? Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy are coming on NBC.

POP: *(Reluctantly moves toward stoop.)* Yeah, yeah. Edgar Bergen's all right, but I don't quite trust that Charlie McCarthy. Something's not quite kosher about him.

PATTY: Well, Charlie is just a puppet, Pop. And you always laugh at him. Now you run along and warm up the radio.

POP: Well, I suppose if Greta is coming, I could get ready for my date. You said she'll be here any minute, right?

PATTY: Yes, any minute. You run along and get ready now. *(PATTY sets POP going on the stairs and turns back to MONA.)* Sorry about that.

MAX: *(Watches POP for a moment.)* It's too bad, really. If half of what he says were true, his life would make a great book

MONA: Yes, a horror story. You and your books. He's a menace! Greta Garbo and ZaSu Pitts indeed! He's living in a fantasy world!

MAX: *(Laughs.)* Sure beats living here. Maybe he needs a roommate.

MONA: ...Max! He's off his head, maybe even dangerous!

MARYBETH: He threatened to have me shot!

ANTHONY: That broom wasn't even loaded!

PATTY: Pop's harmless, really. (*Changing the subject.*) So what about this actress coming here? It is true?

MONA: (*Comes center as she proudly pulls a paper from her handbag.*) I got a person-to-person telegram from her agent, Sam Grafton, saying Miss Evelyne Alford of Hollywood was coming to New York to work on her newest project and needed a quiet place to stay. I want to make sure we put our best foot forward, so if you would be so kind as to keep your father-in-law—

MAX: (*Interjecting diplomatically, trying to take the edge off.*) Contained.

MONA: (*Sharply.*)—locked up!

PATTY: (*Excited and impressed.*) Evelyne Alford? Gee! (*Makes a shy admission.*) I never heard of her—

MAX: Nobody ever heard of her.

CATHY: How does a Hollywood actress find this place?

MONA: Word of mouth among my Hollywood connections. We've had some very satisfied customers.

POP and JO return via house during this next. JO sits on the stairs, POP reaches the bottom step just in time for MONA to turn on him.

MAX: (*Chuckles.*) Yeah, that and her big shot agent is Mona's niece. I'm just glad to hear that now she books something other than animal acts, or we'd have that chimp that rides a bike staying here.

CATHY: Judging by the smell in the bathroom on my floor, I'd say he *is* staying here.

MONA: (*Turns to POP, accusingly.*) Have you been boiling garlic and lemons in the tub again?

POP: It helps my voice when I sing in the bath! (*He croons a few notes.*)

MONA: Do it again, and we'll see how well you can sing with an electric toaster in the tub!

PATTY: (*Rushes to POP's aid.*) He's sorry, Mrs. Silverman. And he won't do it again.

POP: So what's the big crime? I dried the garlic on the windowsill and then put it back in the kitchen where I found it.

JO: Oh, gross.

PATTY: Shhh! Josephine. There wasn't much garlic in the lamb tonight. *(To MONA.)* Please, Mrs. Silverman. Tell us more about that actress.

MONA: Well, she is very up-and-coming. The next big thing, her agent says.

PATTY: Oh, I bet she's pretty. Gee, my Tony and I used to love the movies. Every time I go to one now, I keep hoping I'll see him there, but he hasn't turned up yet. When he does, we'll have this big reunion scene, like when Robert Taylor was reunited with Greta Garbo on her deathbed in *Camille!* *(She is momentarily lost in the moment and stares dreamily off.)*

MAX and MONA exchange quick looks, and everyone is momentarily uncomfortable.

CATHY: *(Tactfully changing the subject.)* So...what else does that telegram say?

MONA: It says she's arriving tonight at Grand Central Station on the train from California.

PATTY: *(Back to reality.)* Train? Boy, you'd think those famous Hollywood types would fly on an airplane nowadays.

MONA: Not if she had any sense. You won't catch me on one of those airborne rattletraps again.

PATTY: Again? *(Impressed.)* You've flown before? On an airplane?

MONA: *(Smugly.)* Only cross-country.

PATTY: Flying seems so glamorous in the magazines. Was it unpleasant for you?

MAX: For everyone! *(Laughs.)* We flew to see her sister in Chicago last year on account of Marybeth getting carsick on long trips. The stewardess on the plane made the mistake of asking Mona to switch seats with a woman who was expecting and wanted to be on an aisle and nearer the bathroom. Oh, oh! What a scene!

MONA: *(Defensive. She waves her finger in MAX's face.)* Nineteen C! My ticket said my seat was number Nineteen C!

MAX: Oh, not this again!

PATTY: I don't understand. A seat is a seat. Why couldn't you change with the lady?

CATHY: Yeah, what difference does it make where you sit?

MONA: (*Dramatically.*) What difference? Only life and death! What if, God forbid, the plane was about to crash? And (*points upward.*) HE decides that I am the only one on that whole plane he wants to save? One look at the passenger list, and HE thinks I am in Nineteen C, so Nineteen C is where I am going to be. You think I should have Him looking all around for me?

MIKE: But what if it was the expectant mother He wanted to save? Then you'd luck out and get saved by accident.

MONA: (*Appalled and offended.*) Why should He want to save her over me? What, she's better than me or something? I'm not a good person? I'm not worthy of being saved? (*They all stare at MONA for a moment. She doesn't get it.*)

MAX: (*Throws up his hands.*) A book, I tell you. I could write a book!

Lights down on stoop.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

Lights remain down on stoop with action frozen. Lights up on studio.

SFX: Dance music plays for 15 seconds and abruptly cuts out, replaced by sound of teletype machine.

MARTHA points and cues ANNOUNCER. "On the Air" sign illuminates.

ANNOUNCER We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. Astronomers have reported explosions or similar disturbances on the surface of Mars. We will be back with more as this story develops but return you now to your regular program.

Music up for 15 seconds and then out. Lights out on studio. Lights up on stoop as MIKE, CATHY, PATTY, MONA and MAX stand at the stoop. PATTY is taking laundry off a line. ANTHONY is reading beneath the street light. POP exits the house. He is still wearing a hat, but has slicked his hair and is carrying a little bouquet of flowers with the roots dangling.

POP: Has my Hollywood honeybunch arrived?

MONA: Not yet— (*Angry.*) Are those from my window box?

POP: You want me to say no, don't you? (*He wanders away as he begins pulling petals off the flowers one by one and counting off.*) Greta loves me. ZaSu loves me more. ZaSu loves me. Greta loves me more—

MIKE: So, why should this actress choose a boarding house in Brooklyn? Wouldn't a Hollywood person want a nice hotel in the city near all the action? It don't add up.

CATHY: The Waldorf-Astoria! That's where all the muckety-mucks stay. (*Gasps and dreamily grabs MIKE's arm.*) The Waldorf! That's where we should stay on our wedding night! It would be soooo romantic.

MIKE: And expensive. (*He awkwardly pulls his arm back.*) Forget it.

PATTY: Oh! Maybe you could stay in the same room Joan Crawford stayed in when she married Franchot Tone. (*Note pronunciation: Fran-show.*) I read all about it in *Photoplay*. A real Hollywood romance—costars falling in love: partners on the set, partners in the boudoir! (*She teasingly nudges MIKE in the gut.*)

MIKE: (*Embarrassed.*) Forget it. This ain't no Hollywood romance.

CATHY: That's for sure. We've been engaged eleven years! Hollywood people are married and divorced by now. Sometimes twice!

MIKE: I told you! I want to have our wedding someplace special! I just haven't found it yet.

CATHY: Niagara Falls is a nice place. We could go by train and leave tonight—

MIKE: Everybody gets married at Niagara Falls. (*POP overhears and stops picking at his flowers. He rejoins the conversation.*)

POP: I almost got married at Niagara Falls once.

MIKE: See?

CATHY: Almost? What do you mean 'almost'?

POP: (*Wistfully as he comes center.*) Oh, I loved her. I met her in a casino. She was something of a gambler, you see, and the wedding was all set until someone bet her she couldn't survive going over the falls in a barrel. And... (*All follow as POP pantomimes someone going over the falls, then shakes his head sadly and respectfully removes his hat and bows.*)

ANTHONY: (*From stoop.*) Cool!

CATHY: (*Gasps.*) Oh, no! That's a terrible way to lose the love of your life.

MIKE: How tragic.

POP: (*Sadly.*) Yeah. (*A pause.*) But I put the fifty bucks I won down on that ol' Model T Ford, and we've lived happily ever after. (*Winks at MIKE.*) She don't talk back, and she don't mind me singing in the bath. Um, speaking of baths. I think I left my lemons in the tub. Anyone else for lemonade? (*The others groan as POP climbs the stairs. He stops and turns back.*) It's all right. I put gin in it to disinfect it.

MIKE: Well, that explains a lot, actually. (*POP exits as MIKE and CATHY move off right.*)

CATHY: (*To MIKE.*) Eleven years. I'm beginning to think you don't want to get married. (*They continue to talk privately. It is obvious they are arguing about getting married.*)

PATTY: Well, I'm still so excited about Miss Alforde coming here! Imagine! Coming here to Withers Street.

MONA: If she ever gets here. I sent that windbag of a cabbie to get her at the station an hour ago. Maybe this Miss Alforde just wants to be out of the limelight and the hustle and bustle of the city. This is such a peaceful place.

CATHY: (*Loudly whining.*) I wanna get married!

POP: (*O.S. or leans out window and calls down.*) Is that you, Greta?

MONA: Shut up! (*Calm again.*) There's lots of crazy people over there in Manhattan, you know.

MAX: Over there? You can't swing a dead cat without hitting a fruitcake around here, but you think she's worried about Manhattan?

MIKE: She's from Hollywood, for crying out loud! She'd be a fine one to talk. All that California sunshine and fresh fruit gets to a person after a while. They become—

CATHY: Happy?

MIKE: No, you know, odd. Maybe that's why they get married so often.

As PATTY begins to ramble below, an exasperated MONA exits into house, followed by MAX.

PATTY: Hey, maybe she's doing research for her new acting part or something! I read in *Photoplay* that they do that sometimes. You know, like she's maybe playing a down-on-her-luck Brooklyn housewife and she wants to see how working class people live. *(Getting carried away with excitement, she dramatically retells the plot.)* Just like that movie *Housewife*! Remember? The one where Bette Davis steals George Brent away from his poor devoted wife, I forget her name, and then George Brent tragically hits his own son with the car, but the boy's injury reunites his parents! *(She suddenly checks her watch and cheers right up.)* Oh, look at the time. My program is coming on.

PATTY rushes upstairs and into the building.

MIKE: Poor kid. She lives for all that Hollywood fantasy mumbo jumbo.

CATHY: You would, too, if your life was a bad B movie. I mean, her husband goes out for a Yoo-Hoo and never comes back, leaving her with no income, two kids, and a father-in-law who is still fighting the Civil War and dates movie stars he's never met? No one would believe it if they put that on the silver screen. Come on. I'll walk with you.

CATHY and MIKE exit arm in arm.

Lights down ON STOOP, lights up ON STUDIO.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

The cast sits at stools before mics, and they read from pages in their hands, allowing the used ones to fall to the floor. "On the Air" sign illuminates.

MUSIC HOST: *(Into his microphone.)* That was the ever-popular "Stardust." And now we bring you another favorite, "Stompin' at the Savoy."

SFX: Music up for 15-20 seconds and under.

"On the Air" sign goes out.

ORSON: *(Con conversationally, to MARTHA.)* Any sign of that actress yet?

MARTHA: Not yet, Boss.

MUSIC UP again as dance music plays briefly, then under and out. Lights down on studio. Lights up on stoop. JO and MARYBETH and ANTHONY are again playing outside.

PATTY: *(Becomes visible at doorway or in window above stoop.)* Josephine! Anthony! Don't you want to come in and listen to the radio? That Charlie McCarthy is on!

JO: No, thanks, Ma.

PATTY: But he's so funny!

JO: He's a dummy, Ma. A ventriloquist's dummy! They're fine in person or in the movies, but somehow ventriloquism loses its magic on the radio.

PATTY: Suit yourself. Anthony?

ANTHONY: Coming, Ma. *(He closes his magazine, jumps up and runs inside.)*

Lights down on stoop, up on studio.

SFX: MUSIC plays for 15 seconds and is abruptly cut and replaced by teletype sound.

The radio cast mills about, the engineer points to the ANNOUNCER to signal the start of his 'newscast.' The "On the Air" sign illuminates.

ANNOUNCER: Listeners, we interrupt this program once again to bring you an update on the situation in space. In a CBS News exclusive, we will now go to Chris Miller, who is at the Princeton Observatory in Princeton, New Jersey speaking with Professor Peterson, a highly-respected astronomer and scientist. Chris?

SFX: teletype sound off.

ORSON/MILLER: Thank you. The professor is quite busy as you can imagine, but has agreed to share his findings with us. Professor? Professor Peterson? A moment for our listening audience if you will, please. Professor, the recent disturbances on Mars are clearly visible from your telescope, are they not?

PROFESSOR: They are.

ORSON/MILLER: They reportedly appear at regular intervals, as if timed. What do you make of them? Is this possibly an indication of life on that planet? Could they have been rocket launches? Are we in any danger?

PROFESSOR: No, sir. I would say not. The explosions are unusual, certainly, but are likely gaseous in nature, and with Mars being forty million miles away, I'd say we are in no danger at all. Even a planet as scientifically advanced as ours has yet to master space travel. *(A pause.)* Oh, excuse me. *(PROFESSOR rustles papers near his microphone.)*

ORSON/MILLER: Just a moment, listeners. The professor has just been handed a message. Sir, is that regarding the situation on Mars?

PROFESSOR: No, no. I have just been informed of a small impact or earthquake near Princeton and have been asked to investigate it.

ORSON/MILLER: And you are certain this is unrelated to our present observations on Mars?

PROFESSOR: (*Casually.*) Oh, yes, I should think so. This is probably a small earthquake along a minor fault line nearby, or perhaps a small meteor striking the ground. Nothing to worry about. We'll investigate once the sun comes up again in the morning.

ORSON/MILLER: Thank you, Professor. This is Chris Miller, from the Princeton Observatory. We return you now to our New York studio.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you, Chris. And we will again join our dance program— (*Rustles papers.*) Just a moment, I have just received this bulletin. Reports from our Trenton, New Jersey news bureau report a large flaming object, possibly a meteorite, has landed in a field in Grover's Mill. The flash was reportedly visible for many miles and the sound of the impact heard as far north as Elizabeth. We will have our team en route and will report from the scene as soon as possible. In the meantime, we return you to your scheduled music program.

"On the Air" sign off as MUSIC UP for ten seconds and OUT. LIGHTS DOWN on studio

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP on stoop. ANTHONY is standing, holding his welcome sign, and he, JO and MARYBETH have been joined by SUSAN, ANNIE and MILLIE, who stand in various positions on or around the steps, holding paper and autograph books and pencils. All but JO are anxiously awaiting EVELYNE's arrival. JO sits off to the side, tossing pebbles at the trash can.

SUSAN: You're sure she's coming tonight? A movie star from Hollywood is coming here? I never even heard of her.

ANTHONY: I told you, Susan. You'll recognize her as soon as you see her.

ANNIE: I don't believe him. He's always making stuff up, like his father being on a spy mission.

MILLIE: Anthony, if this is another one of your stories, I swear I'll slug you. (*She steps menacingly toward ANTHONY.*)

ANTHONY: No, I promise you.

MARYBETH: She's here! She's here! (*She points off left.*)

JO: (*Acts disinterested.*) Who?

MARYBETH: Evelyne Alforde. Look, getting out of that taxi! That must be her. Mother! Father!

MARYBETH runs into house to get her parents. The kids, except for JO, get excited and prepare their autograph books. JO, pouting, turns her back and ignores them and EVELYNE. KATE enters from left carrying a suitcase. She is followed by SAM, who has a small professional briefcase or portfolio, and EVELYNE, who carries nothing. EVELYNE is dressed glamorously, SAM is wearing a business outfit.

KATE: Here ya go. Silverman's Boarding House, Withers Street, beautiful downtown Brooklyn, U. S. of A. (*She puts down the bag.*)

SAM: Thanks. This will be fine. (*Hands KATE a tip.*)

EVELYNE: (*Arrogant and clearly dissatisfied.*) You call this fine? You said we were staying in New York.

SAM: This is New York. And a beautiful spot, too. Full of local, um, flavor.

KATE: (*Interjecting. A know-it-all.*) Excuse me, ma'am, but that is absolutely right. While Brooklyn was at one time a city to itself, it officially became part of New York City in the year 1898. So technically, this is New York.

EVELYNE: (*Unimpressed.*) Why, thank you. (*A pause while she tries to place KATE.*) And you are?

KATE: I'm Kate. (*A pause.*) The cabbie. (*Sees EVELYNE still struggling to make the connection.*) I just drove you in from Grand Central Station, remember? We chatted about the history of train travel and someone must've insisted I tell you all about my great-uncle Walter, because—

EVELYNE: (*Sarcastic and too sweet.*) Oh, what a fountain of completely useless information you are. Clearly even someone of your—ilk—should know that New York means Times Square, Broadway, Saks Fifth Avenue— (*Looks KATE up and down.*) Well, maybe you don't know the way to Saks after all. Anyway, this (*She looks around disdainfully.*) is most certainly *not* New York.

KATE shrugs her off as SAM pays her, and she sits near the stoop reading a newspaper she finds atop a trash can.

SAM: Look, Evelyne, baby. This is perfect. Quiet and out of the way—

EVERLYNE: And cheap?

SAM: Hey, we've got a budget. You want to spend more than you make on this gig? Besides, you'll be in Manhattan for the job tonight and then more auditions tomorrow—

EVERLYNE: *(Protecting her reputation in front of her 'fans'—the kids, who get excited every time she comes near.)* Auditions? Ha, merely a formality, I assure you. *(Pulls SAM aside, and drops the phony actress glitz.)* Sam Grafton, I've done enough pet shows and supermarket openings to last me a lifetime. You promised me a real New York gig, and if this job you got me tonight is anything like—

Pushed from behind by the other kids, ANTHONY rushes forward, still holding his sign. The other kids push up behind, waving autograph books.

ANTHONY: Hi, I'm Anthony. I saw you in *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*.

EVERLYNE: *(Embarrassed, she tries to dismiss him.)* I'm sure you're mistaken.

ANTHONY: Sure! You were Clay Person Number Two, doomed to live in caverns of Mongo by Ming the Merciless, remember?

SAM: *(Sarcastic.)* We've got our fingers crossed come Oscar time for that one.

SUSAN, ANNIE, and MILLIE react with disappointment.

MILLIE: *(Grabs ANTHONY by the shirt.)* We stuck around for Clay Person Number Two?

JO jumps up and separates MILLIE and ANTHONY.

SUSAN: You said she was a movie star. Clay People are not stars. Shirley Temple is a movie star.

ANNIE: Come on, Susan. Let's go. There must be something on the radio.

They exit, grumbling. AGNES enters, loaded down with suitcase and pushing along a steamer trunk. She is dressed simply and wears glasses.

AGNES: *(Interrupting, eager to please.)* I've got your bags, Miss Alforde.

EVELYNE: Are you sure you've got my makeup cases?

AGNES: Yes, all three, right here.

EVELYNE: Only three? Well, I'll have to make do. And my shoes?

AGNES: Two dozen, plus slippers to match every nightie.

MONA pushes her way in front of EVELYNE and takes her hand.

MONA: How do you do, Miss Alforde? Welcome to Brooklyn! I'm Mona Silverman. I'm sure my little niece, Sammy's, told you all about me.

EVELYNE shakes MONA's hand, but clearly hasn't any idea who she is, so SAM quickly intervenes.

SAM: Sure, sure. I told you all about Mrs. Mona Silverman, remember? My lovely aunt and owner of this fine establishment, who gave us a break on the rent. *(Sweeps arm to show off the building.)*

EVELYNE: *(Pulls her hand back, trying to be polite.)* Charmed, I'm sure.

MAX clears his throat and steps forward.

SAM: Hiya, Uncle Max. How's that book coming?

MAX: Still in the planning stages, but I'm gonna write it someday. You'll see.

SAM: Well, you let me know, and I'll shop it around for you. I'll make you a big name in publishing.

MONA: And my beautiful daughter, Marybeth. Marybeth, say hello to the nice actress.

MARYBETH: Hello. I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance...though Mother says that even though you're pretty and live in Hollywood, you're no better than we are—
(*Embarrassed, MAX clamps a hand over MARYBETH's mouth.*)

MONA: Ha, children! Such imaginations! Run along inside now, honey. Your radio program is coming on.

POP opens the door. MARYBETH exits into house.

MAX: (*Sees POP in the doorway.*) Speaking of imaginations—

POP rushes down the stairs and places himself directly before EVELYNE. He hands her the flowers and then crushes them in an awkward hug.

POP: Greta Garbo! Let me have a look at you! Aw, you're beautiful, baby. Just beautiful—but I have to ask, does ZaSu Pitts still ask about me?

The flowers fall to the floor and get snapped up by ANTHONY.

MONA: (*Pulls him away.*) Get off! How many times have I told you not to maul the tenants? (*To EVELYNE, embarrassed.*) Sorry about that. He's...old.

POP: (*He winks suggestively.*) I'm not that old—

MAX: (*Crosses to greet EVELYNE.*) So you're Miss Alforde. (*He gently kisses her hand.*) Max Silverman, at your service.

ANTHONY, still holding his sign, offers the flowers back to EVELYNE. She refuses them, but he stays nearby.

EVELYNE: (*Smiles at him, enjoying the attention. She points to ANTHONY's misspelled sign.*) It's Evelyn. With an 'e.'

MAX: (*Indicating the sign.*) Wouldn't everyone spell Evelyn with an 'e'?

EVELYNE: Of course. (*Slightly flustered and trying to recover.*) I mean, there is a second 'e' there at the end, (*She points.*) after the first two.

MAX: (*Trying to follow, he counts off three on his fingers.*) A second 'e' after the first two?

POP: (*Leans in and shrugs.*) I never went much for the smart ones.

PATTY rushes out of the door, shoves everyone out of the way and approaches EVELYNE and curtsies.

PATTY: (*Very quickly.*) Oh, Miss Alforde! I'm so pleased to meet you. I've seen all your movies. Well, actually, I haven't yet, but I will. But I'm sure they're wonderful. Do you know Bette Davis?

EVELYNE: (*Clearly lying, but enjoying the attention.*) Why, of course.

During this next, EVELYNE extracts her hand from PATTY's. PATTY stares at her own hand as though it has been touched by royalty.

SAM: Ha!

MAX: (*Aside, to SAM.*) So, *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*. You landed yourself a big fish here, huh?

SAM: (*Shrugs.*) It's a paycheck, and I get ten percent.

MONA: (*With an air of superiority, as if speaking to a servant.*) Oh, Patty, dear? Be a love and take Miss Alforde's bags to Mr. Norman's old rooms, will you?

PATTY: Oh, sure, Mrs. Silverman. I'd be happy to. (*She grabs bags from AGNES.*) Anthony, Pop, can you help me?

POP: (*As suavely as he can muster, he flexes his muscles as he picks up the bags.*) Why, certainly. (*To EVELYNE.*) I suppose I'll see you later. (*He winks.*)

PATTY, POP and ANTHONY cross to AGNES. PATTY and ANTHONY grab a bag or two. AGNES picks up a hatbox for herself and indicates POP should take the trunk. POP stares for a beat, snatches the hatbox from her hands and bolts up the stairs, following PATTY and ANTHONY.

MONA: You'll have to excuse us. We're actually on our way to an important appointment.

MAX: (*Sarcastically, bursting her bubble.*) Yeah, Mona and I are going to a very important movie. You wanna join us, Sam?

SAM: No, thanks. (*She laughs.*) Someone has to help Agnes unpack all those shoes. Besides, I want to listen to something on the radio.

MONA: Marybeth will be upstairs if you need anything.

MONA and MAX exit left. She is obviously nagging at him as they walk.

EVELYNE: (*Shoots a look at SAM and then quickly checks her watch.*) Oh, dear, look at the time! I told you we should go to the theatre directly. I really must go. My director must be frantic. They worry about me so.

SAM: (*Aside.*) Yeah, worry that you'll show up. (*To EVELYNE.*) You're okay for time anyway, you're not on until the second act.

AGNES: I really wish we had stayed in Hollywood, Miss Alforde. If you don't mind me saying so, I think you're at your best in the movies, where you get a few takes to get things just right.

SAM: A few takes? Since when is twenty-seven takes a few?

EVELYNE: Inflection is everything. There are many ways to interpret even the simplest lines of dialogue. It has to feel right. Not being an actor, you wouldn't understand.

SAM: I understand that in that scene you were being trampled by revolting zombies. You only had one line. How many *different* ways can you interpret, "Help! I'm being trampled by revolting zombies!"?

AGNES: If you don't mind me saying so, Miss Alforde, I think—

EVELYNE: (*Dismissively.*) I do mind you saying so. Your job is to fetch and carry, not give career advice. (*Indicating JO, who is still sitting near stoop.*) Perhaps this local urchin can show you to my room. You can put my things away and turn down my bed.

AGNES: Yes, Miss Alforde.

JO rolls her eyes, but gets up as AGNES fetches the steamer trunk and drags it to the stairs.

JO: (To AGNES.) I'm not sure what an urchin is, but that's fine talk coming from a clay person.

EVELYNE and SAM watch as AGNES comically drags the heavy trunk stair by stair, struggling with the weight. She's about halfway when she turns back.

AGNES: Don't you worry, Miss Alforde. I can do it.

AGNES finally gets to the top and enters the house.

SAM: You should go easy on Agnes, she's about the only fan you've got left in Hollywood. And you're right about one thing, career advice is my job. And I think maybe movies aren't for you. So now we're here to try something new with people that don't know your, er, work. It's an easy gig. A nice little part tonight. You've even got a powerful deathbed monologue about your childhood on the Jersey shore.

EVELYNE: Good. (A small laugh.) At least there won't be zombies. They're like animals and children, very hard to work with.

SAM: Uh, I guarantee there won't be zombies on this job. Just listen to your director, and whatever you do, don't improvise. He's a bit temperamental. And, honey, if this doesn't work out, maybe acting isn't your bag.

EVELYNE: Sam Grafton!

SAM: How many times have I told you to stick to modeling? Unlike your last gig, it's perfectly acceptable for a model to be stiff and lifeless.

EVELYNE: I assume you are referring to my last stage play? I'll have you know I received great notices from the reviewers! They said they absolutely loved my big death scene.

SAM: No, they said they were happy when you died! There is a difference!

EVELYNE: Well, forget the critics. They hate everything. I worry only about Mr. and Mrs. Front Porch, and the audience seemed to be having a wonderful time.

SAM: Are you kidding? *(She points her fingers at EVELYNE's head as though she had a gun.)* The Lincolns had a better time at the theatre after John Wilkes Booth showed up!

EVELYNE lets out a scream of frustration and stamps her foot.

SAM: *(Unaffected.)* Save it for the performance, honey. *(SAM checks watch.)* All right now, you better get going or you'll miss your cue. I'll get us set up here. You'll get your script at the studio.

EVELYNE: I still think I should have gotten it ahead of time. I like to prepare before I go on, especially if I have a monologue.

SAM: Believe me, sister. You're as prepared as you're ever gonna be. Rehearsal hasn't exactly been your friend. *(Quietly, to KATE, who stands when addressed.)* Take her to CBS studios on West 52nd. Come right back, and I'll pay both ways and have a little something extra just for you if you get her there in fifteen minutes. Oh, and don't tell her CBS is a radio studio. She thinks she's going to a Broadway theatre.

KATE: Are you kidding? On a quiet Sunday night, I can have her there in fourteen minutes flat if I carry her on my back. Let's go, Miss!

EVELYNE: Alforde. *(To MAX, pointing to sign again.)* Also with an 'e.'

KATE leads the way out, followed by EVELYNE. KATE starts talking as they exit.

KATE: CBS, huh? You know, I don't like to talk about it, but I'm kind of personally connected to CBS. William Paley runs that network, but he started in his family's cigar business, and my uncle has a cigar shop in Chicago... *(EVELYNE screams again from offstage.)*

Lights down on stoop, lights up on studio.

BY LAURIE BRYANT

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