

To: Harpo
From: Woollcott

By Josh Aichenbaum

based on *Harpo Speaks* by Harpo Marx
and the biographies of Alexander Woollcott

OPEN ON:

A RADIO. Feminine in pitch, the voice that comes on the radio belongs to a man, who's antagonistic in tone.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.) (RADIO)
This is Woollcott speaking. I would like to address one of you in the audience in particular. The rest of you may listen in but know you are eavesdroppers. As long as that is understood, I would like to take a journey with you, yes you, in opposition to that mysterious and relentless factor we call time, into the past.

INT. MODEL T - NIGHT

An owl of a man looks out his window at Broadway's lights. This is ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (37), in a rare, subdued moment.

SUPER: "April, 1924."

INT. THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL - DAY

A BELLHOP pushes a baggage cart through an affluent lobby, going past a dew-eyed ACTRESS who is absolutely livid.

She spots A NEWSSTAND.

INT. ROSE ROOM, THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL - SAME

Over lunch, a DOZEN LITERARY TYPES TALK OVER each other in a battle of the wits; Woollcott dominates the conversation, at their ROUND TABLE.

WOOLLCOTT
Hush, hush, with your imbecilic
logic, Dottie, all I'm saying is --

The actress throws a newspaper at him, with enough force to break his plate.

DEW-EYED ACTRESS
You're a cad.

Silence.

Woollcott's mustache bristles.

WOOLLCOTT

That your best? I've been called much worse by my friends. Take a seat, sit by the queen of acid insult, Dorothy Parker. F.P.A, make room. She storms in, in hopes you'll write her into our scene here at the Algonquin.

(to the actress, EXPLODING)

If my review disagreed with you, out with it or GET OUT! YOU STAND, SO DOES MY OPINION. LAST NIGHT, YOUR PETULANT OVERACTING WAS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE STAGE AND NOW TO OUR TABLE. CAD?! YOU'RE A HAG AT SEVENTEEN, CAREER FUCKED, AS I'M SURE YOU MUST HAVE BEEN TO GET THE ROLE. FOR THE SAKE OF THE THEATER-GOING PUBLIC, I HOPE YOU AND YOUR FUTURE BASTARDS END UP GIVING THE MOST HONEST PERFORMANCE OF YOUR LIVES ON ANY STREET THAT ISN'T BROADWAY!

She finally gets in:

DEW-EYED ACTRESS

I wouldn't wish anything so horrid on anyone.

WOOLLCOTT

Does anyone hear a fly BUZZING?

DEW-EYED ACTRESS

And yet I --

He SILENCES her with a look or gesture. A lanky humor columnist, FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS aka F.P.A. (43), shoots her a sympathetic glance. Woollcott glares at F.P.A., and F.P.A. looks away.

DEW-EYED ACTRESS

I know you'll die a lonely old man.

Only when she exits does the table resume its BANTER. Some berate Woollcott, while others APPLAUD him.

DOROTHY PARKER

Aleck, you deserve the title.

WOOLLCOTT

I know, I know --

DOROTHY PARKER
"The queen of acid insult."

WOOLLCOTT
I'm a fabulous monster.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE, THE SUN - VARIOUS DAYS

Glasses magnify Woollcott's beady eyes.

He types.

WOOLLCOTT
"The suffering of the audience was
beyond words."

A NEW DAY - His typing shares a machine gun's rhythm. His
bullets are the letters of the English language.

"His performance left the lukewarm taste of prune juice."

NEW DAY - The days' work and vitriol take their toll.
Negative reviews pile on his desk.

Not a happy man, he goes to type, but running on empty, has
nothing to say. One sentence in particular catches his eye.

"The writer should be gently but firmly shot at sunrise."

With a SIGH, he stops writing. He packs his briefcase.

His EDITOR approaches.

MANAGING EDITOR
Aleck, I need you at the Casino
tonight.

WOOLLCOTT
I already have plans, panning a
Shubert melodrama.

MANAGING EDITOR
Shuberts are avoiding cross-
pollination at the box office.
Postponed your plans. A new
comedy's having its premiere.

WOOLLCOTT
Get someone else on it. I'm not in
the mood for humor.

From an adjacent desk, the lanky humor columnist from lunch pipes up.

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

I'd go.

WOOLLCOTT

F.P.A. will --

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

That is, if I didn't have a date.

WOOLLCOTT

Who is it anyway?

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

My date?

WOOLLCOTT

The show.

The managing editor hands him a newspaper clipping.

WOOLLCOTT

(frustrated)

You'd have me review vaudevillians?

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

Acrobats!

WOOLLCOTT

I've no interest in attending amateur night.

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

I'd do it, really, I would but --

WOOLLCOTT

You have a date!

(to the editor)

Now, listen here, Munsey. As the most revered critic in this town, what I say goes, and I will not go, NO, I WILL NOT, WITHOUT THROWING A FEARSOME FIT.

He slams his FIST down on his typewriter. A car horn BLARES!

INT. WOOLLCOTT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

TRAFFIC can be heard faintly through Woollcott's window. He stares at his naked reflection in a mirror, disdainful of it.

Overweight, fat accentuated by shadow, he pushes the mirror out of his way, and it lands on his wardrobe for tonight. In a top hat and an opera cape,...

EXT. CASINO THEATER - NIGHT

... Woollcott lowers from a MODEL T, looking regal. TRAFFIC jam-packs Broadway. He bustles between cars and THEATERGOERS, cane tapping against pavement.

WOOLLCOTT

Out of the way, out of the way...
I've a play to tear to shreds.

The CROWD reaches a standstill. Woollcott bumps into who else but F.P.A.

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

Woolc, have you met Francine?

F.P.A.'s date is none other than the ACTRESS from lunch.

WOOLLCOTT

(to F.P.A)
I hope you fry in hell.

They pass under the marquee for:

THE 4 MARX BROS IN 'I'LL SAY SHE IS'

INT. AUDITORIUM, CASINO THEATER - CONTINUOUS

In a chiffon dress and a freshly coiffed blonde wig, MINNIE MARX (59) is carried DOWN THE AISLE with a broken leg. The audience gives her a STANDING OVATION. Stuck behind her procession, Woollcott doesn't even deign look back at F.P.A.

WOOLLCOTT

Who's that?

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

I believe mother of the acrobats.

Enjoying her celebrity, Minnie waves to the crowd.

Off of F.P.A. joining in and CLAPPING --

Woollcott takes his seat. Across the way, F.P.A. and his date flirt and canoodle. Woollcott HARRUMPHS and waits for the lights to dim.

When they do, the curtain opens on ZEPPO MARX (24), the youngest of the Marx Brothers and a handsome afterthought in the act.

He holds up a newspaper for the audience to see.

ZEPPO

Hello, here is a young society lady
who offers '*Her heart, Her hand,
and fortune*' to the man who will
give her the biggest thrill.

Zeppo steps aside, making room for a line of CHORUS GIRLS. They sing a sentimental ragtime number, '*Only You.*'

CHORUS GIRLS

*Only you, I love, I love you, dear.
I only want you near ♪*

ON WOOLLCOTT: determined to hate the show. At the first sign of him giving in to his inner closeted romantic --

INT. HOTEL SUITE, THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL - NIGHT

Woollcott POUNDS AWAY at his typewriter. The intensity of his rhythm suggests a negative review. But then he GUFFAWS, giddy.

INT. PRESS ROOM, THE SUN - DAY

Newspapers exit a printing press. Woollcott takes a freshly printed copy off of the conveyor belt and rifles through it. Proud as a peacock, he passes the managing editor and F.P.A., both of whom are in shock.

MANAGING EDITOR

You were there. What did he see?

F.P.A.'s best explanation is to point at the title of Woollcott's review:

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

"Harpo Marx and Some Brothers."

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - DAY

A beautiful HARP MELODY fades in, leading us through a flea-bitten apartment, with walls with water stains and a bed fit for a pauper. HARPO (35) is everything that Woollcott is not.



Harpo the harpist

Easy-going, quiet, he plays a majestic harp in THE BATHROOM while seated on the toilet. A telephone INTERRUPTS him. He palms the strings and exits, of course, not without FLUSHING.

He answers the phone, in his thick New Yawk accent.

HARPO (ON PHONE)
Yah? Hoppo speaking.
(then)
What review?

INT. LINDY'S DINER - DAY

In a corner booth, Harpo sits next to GROUCHO MARX (33). Biting wit always on the tip of his tongue, Groucho smokes a two-bit cigar, while reading the morning edition of *The Sun*.

HARPO
Well, is it good or bad?

GROUCHO
You really haven't picked up a paper? I forgot you couldn't read.

HARPO
Or speak. How bad is it, Grouch?

GROUCHO
Illiteracy? It's a growing problem in our country --

A WAITRESS comes over.

WAITRESS
You ready?

GROUCHO
-- our children aren't growing. Look at him. See, he doesn't even know how to pick up a menu. How can he eat if he can't read?

WAITRESS
Wise guy.

GROUCHO
Who, me?

WAITRESS
Yeah, you. What would you like?

HARPO

To know if we've been run out of town.

WAITRESS

I'll come back.

Groucho steals her hand.

GROUCHO

The *Times*, the *World*, *The Sun*, all the big critics loved us, and we love you. Two chocolate cakes.

WAITRESS

At this hour?

HARPO

Ice cream for me. With spinach.

GROUCHO

It's a celebratory breakfast.

WAITRESS

(mumbled)

Actors.

She heads off. Groucho folds and unfolds the newspaper.

HARPO

Well, are you gonna read or just play with your food?

GROUCHO

Oh, I'll read it. I'm not sure if you'll like it, but I'll read it...

HARPO

Why not?

In Groucho's pause is a tinge of jealousy. He reads.

GROUCHO

"Harpo Marx and Some Brothers. By Alexander Woollcott." Shall I go on? He does. "The show is a bright colored and vehement setting for the goings on of those talented cutups, the Four Marx Brothers. In particular, it is a splendacious excuse to see that silent brother, that sly, unexpected, magnificent comic among the Marxes, known as Harpo."

Groucho bats eyelashes at Harpo. Harpo turns red. Groucho has only gotten started. He rises from the booth and dances with the paper.

GROUCHO

"Surely there should be DANCING in the streets when a great clown comes to town, and this man is a great clown! Harpo, so styled because he plays the harp, says never a word on-stage, but when by merely leaning against one's brother --

(He leans against Harpo)

HARPO

All right, all right, Grouch --

GROUCHO

"-- one can seem irresistibly amusing, why should one speak?"

HARPO

Didn't the son-of-a-bitch say anything about you or Chico?

GROUCHO

Zippo. A sentence. Point being...
You have a fan.

The waitress arrives. Off of Harpo, with his bowl of ice cream and spinach, watching Groucho taking a sickingly big bite of chocolate cake, CUT TO:

INT. CASINO THEATER - NIGHT

RAUCOUS APPLAUSE reaches the Four Marx Brothers onstage as they take a final curtain call.

IN THE THEATER WINGS, Woollcott CLAPS loudest of all. He keeps CLAPPING as the curtain closes, and the cast exits. Harpo walks right past the big critic, who's suddenly starstruck. Woollcott backs against the wall. Then follows Harpo from a distance.

CHICO MARX (37) chases chorus girls to a baby grand, where TWO BACKSTAGE ADORERS have cornered Harpo.

TEEN FAN

You really can't talk?

(off Harpo's silence)

Well, can you or can't you?

Harpo does a GOOKIE: eyes-crossed, cheeks like a chipmunk. The grotesque and silly face makes the girls SCREAM!

INT. HARPO'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Harpo CHUCKLES to himself. He takes off his costume: his curly, red wig, ragamuffin raincoat, and ruffled top hat. Someone KNOCKS on his door, increasing in VOLUME and urgency.

HARPO

Yah, yah, keep your clothes on.

He keeps undressing -- he OPENS THE DOOR. Outside, Woollcott's caught off-guard. Down to an undershirt, Harpo has an athletic build.

HARPO

What can I do you for?

In every way imaginable, in shape, size, personality and education, these two men couldn't be any more different. Uncharacteristically, nervous...

WOOLLCOTT

I, uh, do a little chore now and then for a paper, *The New York Sun*.

HARPO

You...

WOOLLCOTT

The name is Woollcott. I take it you read my review?

HARPO

Yah.

(crossing to the mirror)

It was lousy.

Woollcott LAUGHS heartily, nerves gone. Harpo doesn't know what to make of Woollcott. He's barged into the room.

WOOLLCOTT

Might I ask what you disapproved of specifically...

He trails off. Harpo has taken off his pants, in getting dressed.

HARPO

You hardly mentioned my brothers.

WOOLLCOTT

Oh?

HARPO

And I couldn't tell whether you were giving me the raspberry or a build-up.

WOOLLCOTT

I- I was neither flattering nor making light. I meant every word I wrote. You are the most talented and genuine comedian I've ever seen upon the stage.

HARPO

And my harp solo?

WOOLLCOTT

What about your harp solo?

HARPO

You didn't mention it. Did you not like it?

WOOLLCOTT

My dear Marx, consider yourself fortunate I'm not a music critic.

This time Harpo LAUGHS. Maybe Woollcott's not as stuffy as he looks. He zips up his pants.

HARPO

Well, it's been a pleasure,...?

WOOLLCOTT

Aleck.

HARPO

Aleck, I have a date, and I'm late.

In his rush to go, Harpo drops his fedora.

Woollcott picks it up.

WOOLLCOTT

(disheartened)

A young lady, I presume?

HARPO

Poker game.

WOOLLCOTT

Precisely what my friends and I have in mind! If you can break your previous engagement, you'll feel right at home in their company at the Algonquin.

"The Algonquin." Harpo takes interest.

WOOLLCOTT

Bravo, I insist.

HARPO

No --

WOOLLCOTT

Come, buckety, buckety over to the hotel.

HARPO

I'm not -- If you want an intellectual, you want my brother.

WOOLLCOTT

Nonsense, Marx, this way.

Confidence building, Woollcott leads Harpo down --

THE THEATER HALLWAY

Woollcott's the perfect straight man to Harpo's clown. In a bit fit for a Marx Brothers movie, Harpo switches their hats.

EXT. 44TH STREET - NIGHT

To *Only you* ♪, KIDS run up the street, free as can be.

Harpo and Woollcott stroll past them, looking silly in the wrong hats. In a tip-top mood, Woollcott notices the switch, 'Why, you!' and steals his back. Harpo goes to switch them again. But Woollcott catches him. They're stopped in front of THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL.

Harpo is in awe of the setting.

Feeling like a king, Woollcott motions, 'After you.'



Woollcott looking regal

INT. 2ND FLOOR SUITE, ALGONQUIN HOTEL - NIGHT

Men play poker. The men include F.P.A, HAROLD ROSS of *The New Yorker*, George Kaufman, who will write Marx Brothers' films, and one or two OTHERS from the Algonquin Round Table. The lot of them are all talk and intellectual testosterone meted out between puffs of cigar smoke.

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

Two days ago, you should've heard him yelling, 'Damn Acrobats!'

Woollcott's seated next to Harpo, who feels out of place.

WOOLLCOTT

Hardly.

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

Now he brings one of the acrobats in here like he's presenting his favorite son at court.

WOOLLCOTT

Hush.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I'll raise fifty.

WOOLLCOTT

You may think I alone possess the divine right of kings. My opinion isn't unimpeachable.

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

Alexander the Great's not almighty?

WOOLLCOTT

I might admit -- No, if I erred as far as the Marx Brothers are concerned, I did so in a great way.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Connelly?

MARC CONNELLY

I'm out.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

The acrobat?
(off of Harpo's confusion)
Either you're in or out.

HARPO

Uhh. Match.

HAROLD ROSS

Wait. He talks?

Harpo goes to speak. Woollcott interrupts him.

WOOLLCOTT

Where have you been all evening? Of course, he speaks.

HAROLD ROSS

In his act, he's deaf or dumb. I thought --

(to Harpo)

You don't talk, right?

Again, Woollcott interrupts.

WOOLLCOTT

Harpo, tell Ross he's a despicable country bumpkin. Tell him no one will ever read his inane magazine --

HAROLD ROSS

The New Yorker.

WOOLLCOTT

-- even once published. Harpo?

Instead of talking, Harpo plays dumb.

WOOLLCOTT

Harpo?

He drags on his cigarette. Then blows a smoke bubble. As the clown, he has the table's attention. To Woollcott's chagrin, Harpo blows another smoke bubble.

WOOLLCOTT

Enough with the blasted bubbles. Say something, so they know you're not as dull-witted as you 1 --
Speak.

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS

(barking)

Ruff, ruff.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Bad, Franklin. Sit.

WOOLLCOTT

Marx, you're testing my patience.

(off Harpo miming guilt)

Now don't you baby-face me!

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS
The guy's sorry. Shake and make up.

Woollcott offers a handshake. Instead, Harpo gives him a leg. Everyone but Woollcott LAUGHS. Woollcott's indignation only creates an even bigger UPROAR.

WOOLLCOTT
Marx, KINDLY CONFINE YOUR baboonery to the stage. Off it, you're a most unfunny fellow.

HARPO
Hey, Aleck. Happy? I'm talking.

Harpo puts an arm around him. Feeling victorious, Woollcott mirrors the gesture, an arm around Harpo.

Harpo swings a leg over him. Woollcott matches him, leg-over-leg. Harpo delivers the cherry on top. A smackeroo KISS! Woollcott's dumbstruck. Everyone else *ROLLS IN THE AISLES*.

As Harpo babbles, we stay ON WOOLLCOTT. *Is he embarrassed? Angry?*

HARPO
I never thought I'd be welcomed by intellectuals. Did you know I'm a second grade drop-out? When I was seven, Irish bullies dropped me out of a second grade window.

The crowd and Woollcott LAUGH. For the first time in forever, Woollcott is experiencing sheer joy.

EXT. THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL - NIGHT

We see the men playing poker through the second floor window.
CRANE DOWN TO--

THE FIRST FLOOR - A NEW DAY

A CROWD peers through the window at the celebrities inside...

INT. THE ROSE ROOM, THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL - SAME

Woollcott leads Harpo, who's in character and in costume, as the mute and angelic street urchin, around the famed Algonquin Round Table. He introduces him to its MEMBERS.

WOOLLCOTT

Dottie, meet Harpo. Alice Duer Miller, the novelist, meet a professional Faun's behind. This is Bea Kaufman, wife of the acclaimed playwright, who will write you your next hit show.

Harpo WHISTLES and holds up four fingers.

WOOLLCOTT

Yes, yes, for you and your brothers.

Woollcott continues INTRODUCING him to everyone at the table.

WOOLLCOTT

Harpo, say hello to Robert Benchley. Or don't.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Like a nervous schoolboy, Woollcott grins ear-to-ear.

WOOLLCOTT

I think... I've met somebody.

His sister, JULIE (48), feels momentarily years younger. She sits on a cot in a Spartan hospital room, like most, that lacks personality.

JULIE

You have?

WOOLLCOTT

I'll spare you the sentimental mush of when and where the stars aligned and how.

JULIE

Don't tease. Who is it?

WOOLLCOTT

Fate has no name. She's simply --

JULIE

Mr. Guppy, 'She'?

SILENCE.

She's violated his trust. Called him on his lie.

WOOLLCOTT

Yes, and that's all you'll get out of me. You ask for happier matters, and when I deliver, you needle and run away from confrontation.

Gait labored, she crosses to her purse and takes out a cigarette. An undiagnosed disease causes her hands to shake.

WOOLLCOTT

Julie?

She's physically incapable of lighting it.

JULIE

I always thought I took care of him. But now that Charles is gone, I feel so weak.

WOOLLCOTT

Grief at being widowed isn't a disease or even your diagnosis. Where's the doctor? I'm sick of this insufferable waiting.

JULIE

As am I. And now I have no one to wait with.

WOOLLCOTT

(doting)

No?

He lights her cigarette for her.

Smoke wisps around them, as they sit together on the cot.

JULIE

Someday, I'd like to meet her. Whoever she is.

Stubborn, he -- She refuses to let him turn away from her.

REMEMBER THEIR POSE, BROWS KISSED, their hair overlapping. She whispers into his ear.

JULIE

Puck, create mischief and love.

DISSOLVE TO:

MOTES OF DUST

hang in the air over **THE RADIO** from our opening.

WOOLLCOTT (RADIO/ V.O.)
 As if on a train, our odyssey into
 our shared history picks up speed.

INT. PARLOUR CAR, TRAIN - DAY

A blur of scenery seen through a train window. Harpo eyes it.
 Seated next to him, Woollcott eyes only Harpo.

WOOLLCOTT
 Usually, we rent the place for a
 weekend or the summer. Today will
 be a quick jaunt.
 (pause)
 Thanks for coming.

HARPO
 I'm honored really. Kept in such
 fine company.

Across from them are ALICE DUER MILLER (50) and BEA KAUFMAN
 (29), both more puritanical than the modern flapper -- not
 Harpo's type.

HARPO
 New York's two most intelligent
 girls. A hit show on Broadway. What
 more could I ask for?

Harpo returns Woollcott's gaze.

WOOLLCOTT
 If all goes well today, who knows...

EXT. NESHOBE ISLAND - DAY

A stone house resides on an 8 acre, forested island.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 We may even buy a house.

Alice and Bea exit a motor boat onto SHORE, where Harpo and
 Woollcott take in the view. It's too damn good to be true.
 Beautiful Lake Bomoseen recedes into the Vermont landscape,
 the Cedar Mountains in the distance.

Woollcott lets loose a joyous HOOT.

EXT. WOODS, NESHOBIE ISLAND - DAY

Harpo and Woollcott stroll the property grounds, exploring what feels like uncharted territory, a forest overgrown with brush.

WOOLLCOTT

If I had my way, we'd all live on Lake Bomoseen year-round. The Algonquin Gang could be the Swiss Family Robinson of Neshobe Island.

HARPO

The what family?

WOOLLCOTT

Sometimes, I swear -- Were you raised by wolves?

HARPO

I was a lone wolf on the streets of New York.

WOOLLCOTT

A second grade drop-out.

HARPO

Then it was Vaudeville.

WOOLLCOTT

Which amounts to the same as wolves.

(pause)

Was it lonely? Being a lone wolf?

HARPO

I imagine that's the fun of school.

WOOLLCOTT

What is?

HARPO

Making friends.

Together, Harpo and Woollcott navigate the forest.

HARPO

Growing up, I didn't have many. I had my brothers and a series of odd going-nowhere jobs. When Minnie roped me into the act --

WOOLLCOTT

Your mother?

HARPO

I had no interest in show business. There I was onstage in an all-white duck suit, so scared I wet myself.

WOOLLCOTT

You're lying?

HARPO

Hot piss streaming down my leg as I sang.

WOOLLCOTT

(LAUGHING)

There you have it, folks, the disgraceful origin of Harpo Marx! Out with it -- What song was it?

HARPO

"Oh, my Darling Nelly Gray!" But I couldn't sing, and I would learn I couldn't do speaking parts neither.

WOOLLCOTT

How so?

HARPO

I was told I performed well in pantomime but the effect was spoiled whenever I spoke.

WOOLLCOTT

Twenty years later, your critics have turned you into a star. I've been hounding Kaufman. He says he'd rather write for the Barbary Apes than the Marx Brothers. You and your brothers will have a new hit show for next season, I promise.

Harpo nods, mentally in Vermont instead of in New York.

HARPO

You were raised by -- What's the *Swiss Family Washington*? A play?

WOOLLCOTT

You truly are primitive. When I think of my childhood, I think of Julie reading me books, Dickens or --

HARPO

Julie's your... ?

WOOLLCOTT
 (lost in thought)
 Sister. My older sister.

The woods opens up to a bank and its lake.

WOOLLCOTT
 Where are you going?

Harpo takes off his shirt.

HARPO
 For a dip.

WOOLLCOTT
 This isn't some primitive nation
 where you can run around naked
 while caked in mud. You don't have
 swimming trunks.

HARPO
 Sure, I do. Inside.

WOOLLCOTT
 We're looking to purchase a
 property, not -- Marx, we have a
 train to catch this afternoon!

But Harpo has already run off toward the house. In his
 absence, a ROW BOAT approaches shore. Returning from their
 stroll, Alice and Bea arrive in time to hear the boat's rowdy
 VERMONT NATIVES.

VERMONT NATIVES
 Ahoy! We heard famous people are
 visiting Neshobe / Are you famous?!

WOOLLCOTT
 (bitter)
 Oh, good.

ALICE DUER MILLER
 What's going on?

WOOLLCOTT
 The natives have arrived.

INT. NESHOBE HOUSE - SAME

THROUGH A WINDOW, we see Harpo going through his day bag.

He hears the boaters creating a STIR YELLING AND CATCALLING...

OUTSIDE.

VERMONT NATIVE #1
Is that Marie Dressler?!

WOOLLCOTT
We're here for some peace and
quiet. We'd appreciate if you'd --

VERMONT NATIVE #2
Her? She's a man.

WOOLLCOTT
GET LOST!

INSIDE

Harpo gets a devilish idea.

EXT. NESHOBE ISLAND - SAME

The Vermonters nearly are upon Alice, Bea, and Woollcott.

ALICE DUER MILLER
It's nearly time we return home.

Woollcott's about to give in. Suddenly, a blur streaks past!
Caked in mud, in his stage wig but no clothes, Harpo wields
an AXE. He shouts and HOLLERS -- a cannibal out for blood!

Leaps through the water!

The Vermonters scare and SCREAM, nearly tipping in paddling
the hell out of there. Harpo ROARS at them, "Good riddance"
like a lion, or more like an adorable man cub. A job well
done, he bounds to shore. The water washes away his mud. The
tide dips below his "belt," exposing his bouncing, leaping
manhood.

BEA KAUFMAN
My dear Lord, I think I could die.

ALICE DUER MILLER
Happy?

BEA KAUFMAN
Just the former, dear.

Harpo SPLASHES.

HARPO
Our private island! Water's warm.

For a beat, Woollcott dares to look at naked Harpo.

HARPO

Aleck?

Then he looks anywhere but.

Deeply uncomfortable, he storms off.

IN QUICK CUTS:

Woollcott ducks under branches --

He stumbles for footing --

Who knows where he's going. With a towel around his waist, another under his arm, Harpo hurries to catch up with him.

HARPO

Hey, ... What's the matter?

WOOLLCOTT

Think what those provincial yahoos will tell everyone in town. No way we get the lease now. They say big city folk come here -- bunch of naked jackanapes.

HARPO

Who cares?

WOOLLCOTT

Who cares?! I do.

HARPO

Why?

They stand at a cliff.

Flustered, Woollcott's at a loss.

WOOLLCOTT

Because -- You're a faun's behind.

HARPO

Well, this faun's behind is getting some sun.

(pause)

Are you coming?

Harpo tosses him the spare towel.

WOOLLCOTT

What if someone comes by?



Harpo and Woolcott sunbathe on a bridge
photo collection of Bill Marx

HARPO
Let 'em look.

Harpo takes a path that leads from the cliff to a narrow bridge that gaps an inlet.

A beat. Woollcott follows him downhill.

THE BRIDGE

With his towel around his waist, Harpo lies down, face down, to give Woollcott privacy.

No one watches. Still, Woollcott wraps his towel around his waist. Only then does he dare remove his clothing, his pants and underwear.

Naked, he lies down. Harpo's at one end of the bridge, Woollcott at the other.

Exposed to the sun and to the beautiful world around him, Woollcott has never felt freer. His expression is that of pure bliss.

WOOLLCOTT (RADIO/ V.O.)
Come, come with me...

CUT TO:

THE RADIO

from our opening.

WOOLLCOTT (RADIO/ V.O.)
We do not slow for that splendid
decade that roared with the riches
of wit and wealth.

The radio rests on a DRESSING ROOM counter, next to Harpo's stage wig and top hat.

WOOLLCOTT (RADIO/ V.O.)
We roar with it!

INT. CASINO THEATER - DAY

We see legs, legs and more legs!

SUPER: "April, 1925." A row of CHORUS GIRLS high kick.

CHOREOGRAPHER (O.S.)

The back curtain parts.

Behind the girls, in costume, Groucho, Zeppo, and Harpo sit in a row of four chairs. One of the chairs is empty. Their CHOREOGRAPHER takes the stage.

CHOREOGRAPHER

Hold it -- Hold it. Where's Chico?
How hard is it to get all four Marx
Brothers in the same room?

GROUCHO

Let's take five.

CHOREOGRAPHER

No one's going anywhere.

It's been an excruciatingly long day. Harpo hangs his head.

GROUCHO

(to the choreographer)
We're here to try the new girls?
Pardon, how many of you have been
tried out by my brother, Chico? She
blushes. Give her five. At the very
least, she'll *find* him if not fuck
him --

CHOREOGRAPHER

No one's taking five.

IN THE BACK OF THE AUDITORIUM,

Woollcott enters. He looks around and scans --

THE STAGE

Before Harpo can nod off, Woollcott shakes him awake.

WOOLLCOTT

Guess who?

Instead of waking, Harpo crawls to the floor. Woollcott, laughing, lowers to all fours and joins him,

BEHIND THE BACK CURTAIN

WOOLLCOTT

I'd like a word. Will Harpo wakey?

Harpo cracks an eyelid.

THE STAGE

CHICO (37) returns from who knows where. He's a charismatic philanderer and lights up any room he enters, even when late.

CHOREOGRAPHER
Where have you been?

ZEPPO
I'd bet on his bookie.

CHICO
Meredith, Lillian --
(He waves to the girls)

CHOREOGRAPHER
All right, let's take it from --
NOW WHERE'S the dummy?

BEHIND THE BACK CURTAIN

Woollcott shows Harpo a legal document.

WOOLLCOTT
As of this morning, the deed is done. The house on Neshobe belongs to A. Woollcott, signed and dated --

CHOREOGRAPHER (O.S.)
Where's HARPO?!

THE STAGE

The choreographer is at wit's end. The brothers don't help.

CHICO
I know how we'll find him. We'll look here, and we see he's not here, so we look not here, and if he's not not here, and he's not....

GROUCHO
Either he's having an aneurysm or an idea. Let's hope it's an --

CHICO
(bolting)
I'll go to my bookie.

CHOREOGRAPHER
S-someone get him back here.

ZEPPO
I'll get him.

CHOREOGRAPHER
Someone who's not a Marx Brother!

Zeppo has already run off. Groucho, too, flies past --

THE BACK CURTAIN

GROUCHO
(to Harpo)
We're looking for Harpo and Chico.

Harpo hugs himself.

GROUCHO
And Chico!

Woollcott stops Harpo from running off. Nervous.

WOOLLCOTT
What do you say? Summer in Vermont
with me?

Harpo considers Woollcott. Then shakes on it, 'Deal.'

Before Woollcott can celebrate, Harpo bolts, joining Groucho in running past STAGEHANDS, who hammer flats. The noise of CONSTRUCTION is replaced by...

EXT. NYC SIDEWALK - DAY

... Harpo's favorite prop, his trusty automobile HORN. He HONKS, 'HONK, HONK!' as he and Groucho hurry up the street, looking conspicuous in costume. PEDESTRIANS point and gawk.

GROUCHO
You know, people are whispering...

In character, Harpo waves and HONKS at their fans.

GROUCHO
About you and Wookie.
(off Harpo's confusion)
Now don't play dumb. You'd have me believe you're so innocent you really don't -- ? You spend a lot of time with him.

Harpo stops honking. He removes his stage wig before talking.

HARPO

If they've got something to say,
they should say it to me.

GROUCHO

I am! I'm saying it to you. Think
about the act. Think how it will
affect your brothers if people
think you're swish.

They stand in the middle of a CROSSWALK. Harpo calls out.

HARPO

Aleck and I are vacationing in
Neshobe!

GROUCHO

You want people thinking you're a
faggot?

The lights change. Cars now HONK at them.

HARPO

You're so sure I'm not.

GROUCHO

What?

HARPO

That I'm not.

GROUCHO

I'm your brother.

HARPO

Yah?

GROUCHO

You're not swish.

INT. NEWMAN BROTHERS AND WORMS, STOCKBROKERAGE FIRM - DAY

An office of mahogany and leather. Groucho and Harpo sit
amongst INVESTORS, who watch a scoreboard of stock prices.
Lost in thought, Harpo tunes out their BROKER.

BROKER

A hundred shares, a hundred down.
That's a grand speculative. I'd buy
now.

GROUCHO
 If you say so, but --
 (off Harpo standing)
 What are you doing?

Harpo bats eyelashes.

He spins.

GROUCHO
 Don't you swish out of here!

As if on a catwalk, Harpo sashays out the door.

EXT. LAKE BOMOSEEN, MOTOR BOAT - (IN MOTION) - DAY

The boat speeds across the lake, with Woollcott's secretary, JOE HENNESSEY (30s), at its helm. A wave sprays Harpo and Woollcott, who are in back with the luggage. In reaction, Harpo acts like he ate a lemon to Woollcott's delight.

CUT TO:

SMOOTHER SAILING

Harpo and Woollcott mimic each other. Happy face. Sad face.

Harpo does a *gookie*.

WOOLLCOTT
 I've never understood how you...?

HARPO
 Cross your eyes. Puff your cheeks.

Harpo holds a finger up to Woollcott's nose to get his eyes to cross.

Then plies Woollcott's cheeks like putty.

HARPO
 The eyes, don't uncross them --
 Don't --
 (calling out)
 Look, Wookie gookie!

Docking the boat, Joe Hennessey enjoys Woollcott's cross-eyed attempt. Harpo's hands are still on Woollcott when he uncrosses his eyes. An intimate beat passes.

Woollcott leans forward to kiss Harpo. The boat rocks --

HARPO
Should we?

-- the moment interrupted.

Harpo takes up his luggage to disembark. ON Woollcott:
confused. *Was he just rejected? Or was it simply bad timing?*

EXT. THE DOCK, NESHOBIE ISLAND - DAY

Harpo stands behind Woollcott, who stares daggers at the lake.

WOOLLCOTT
What could be keeping them?

HARPO
When the world's got me down, know
what I do?

WOOLLCOTT
Act an imbecile.

HARPO
I stand on my head.

Harpo does a headstand.

HARPO
If you can think of something
crazier, do it, but a change in
perspective's all I ever need.

WOOLLCOTT
You and your philosophies can go to --

From around the bend, the boat returns.

WOOLLCOTT
Hello, ahoy there!
(to Harpo)
Our party has arrived. Come, greet
your friends.

Harpo refuses. He stays in his headstand.

WOOLLCOTT
Fine, they'll greet you.
(to those disembarking)
Say hello to our buffoon in
residence.

A HALF-DOZEN ROUND TABLERS disembark, including F.P.A, Alice Duer Miller, and Bea Kaufman. They greet an upside-down Harpo.

ROUND TABLERS

Hi Harp. / How's the weather down there?

HARPO'S UPSIDE-DOWN PERSPECTIVE; an untidy beauty approaches. NEYSA MCMEIN (36) has the haphazard looks of an artist.

WOOLLCOTT

Neysa! Have you met Harpo?

She's Cinderella if Cindy wore rags as a fashion statement. Harpo rolls out of his headstand, and he kisses her hand.

HARPO

(mispronounced)
Enchante.

Woollcott's good humor is gone in an instant.

EXT. CROQUET LAWN, NESHOBIE ISLAND - DAY

Woollcott Hammers a croquet wicket. He looks to...

THE PORCH

... where Harpo has his arms around Alice and Bea, across from Neysa, who's sketching the trio in a notepad.

HARPO

Do you do that professionally?

NEYSA

I do, and I hear you --

HARPO

I fool around.

Neysa smirks. Woollcott steps between them, with a croquet mallet.

WOOLLCOTT

Who's ready to get whooped?

HARPO

At?

WOOLLCOTT
Croquet. Do you have no culture?

Harpo uses his mallet for a lewd or silly purpose.

HARPO
Teach me.

Off of Neysa LAUGHING, Woollcott takes her under his wing.

WOOLLCOTT
Clearly, you two can't be on the
same team.

EXT. CROQUET LAWN, NESHOBIE ISLAND - DAY

It's Woollcott and Neysa v. Harpo and Alice. Harpo hits a ball through a wicket.

WOOLLCOTT
Beginner's luck.

Woollcott hits his ball through the wicket into Harpo's ball.

WOOLLCOTT
Meets expertise. Now I get to hit
your ball wherever I please.

HARPO
What? No -- NO, PLEASE --

Woollcott ROQUETS Harpo's ball.

CROQUET MONTAGE (IN WHICH WOOLLCOTT GOES FROM THE VICTOR TO A VERY SORE LOSER)

Croquet's a cultured sport everywhere in the world, except on Neshobe Island. Woollcott cheers on Neysa.

WOOLLCOTT
SHOW NO MERCY IN WAR, ROQUET HER,
HIT HER OFF THE COURSE.

Neysa steps on and ROQUETS Alice's ball.

Woollcott and Neysa dosey-doe in celebration. *WHACK! WHACK!* We follow a ball's impossible journey, over hill and valley, through a wicket. Harpo emerges from behind a hill, exiting a sand bunker to take in his miraculous shot. He tips an imaginary hat at Woollcott, goading him on. Woollcott fumes.

WHACK! WHACK! Two balls brush.

Woollcott gets in Harpo's face, as if arguing strike three.

<p>WOOLLCOTT IT DIDN'T HIT. THERE WAS NO CONTACT.</p>	<p>HARPO IT BRUSHED IT. (to Neysa) Tell him.</p>
---	--

Neysa nods, in agreement with Harpo.

WOOLLCOTT
WHO MADE HER ARBITER?

ALICE DUER MILLER
She's on your team.

Woollcott slams his mallet into the ground. Harpo steps on Neysa's ball and gives it a golf swing -- *WHACK!* END MONTAGE.

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

Relative calm and quiet. Neysa strolls the woods, searching for her lost ball. She can't find it. Harpo helps the search.

NEYSA
I couldn't possibly.

HARPO
Why not?

NEYSA
Because you've been terribly mean,
you have.

HARPO
I've always wanted to learn. If I
find your ball, you have to take me
on as a pupil, all right?

Off of Neysa agreeing, Harpo WHISTLES and points at her ball.

NEYSA
That's not fair. You knew where it
was all along -- You did.

(then)
All right, here's your first
lesson. First lesson's free.

HARPO
Then how much?

NEYSA
You couldn't afford it.

Her ball's caught in a bush. She leans on him to retrieve it.

NEYSA

As long as you have some paint, a
brush, and some canvas, you'll
never be lonesome.

She slips.

He catches her...

Kisses her.

NEYSA

I'm married.
(backpedaling)
Not that we can't fool around.

THROUGH THE WOODS

Woollcott spies on them, scowling.

WOOLLCOTT (O.S.)

I'd like to play a little game of
'Murder.'

INT. LIVING ROOM, NESHOBIE HOUSE - EVENING

Everyone's seated, except for Woollcott, who walks around and offers his friends slips of paper from a hat.

WOOLLCOTT

One of you is a coldhearted killer.
On your slip, you'll see
'murderer.'

Harpo sits on the armrest to Neysa's love seat.

HARPO

Is murderer spelled with one 'd' or
three?

WOOLLCOTT

Harpo, no need to advertize *your*
ignorance. At some point in the
evening, the murderer will kill in
secret.

Harpo unfolds his slip. He's the 'MURDERER.'

WOOLLCOTT

Then it's up to the detective...

Woollcott's the 'DETECTIVE.'

WOOLLCOTT

Goodie! Detective Woollcott's on the case! We'll be having supper in no time.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The table is set. Woollcott and his secretary bustle past.

WOOLLCOTT

I don't care if the food gets cold or molds --

JOE HENNESSEY

But --

WOOLLCOTT

--as long as the murder's unsolved!

They enter --

THE LIVING ROOM

All of Woollcott's friends are bored and hungry.

BEA KAUFMAN

No one's seen Alice in hours.

WOOLLCOTT

But where's the body? I know one of you did this.

Woollcott storms past Harpo, who grins, and Neysa, who looks under the weather. She stands.

HARPO

What's the matter?

NEYSA

I - I need to freshen up.

THE HALLWAY

She tries the bathroom door-- it's LOCKED.

NEYSA

(KNOCKING)

Hello? Is someone in there?

Harpo steers her away from the door. Pushy.

HARPO

Doll, let's go into another room,
eh, you're gorgeous. You're gorg--

NEYSA

Harpo, I don't feel (well) --

She falls to her knees and VOMITS. ON HARPO: stunned.

The bathroom door now CREAKS OPEN.

Alice leans out, with a roll of toilet paper.

ALICE DUER MILLER

Technically, I'm dead but --
(off Neysa reaching)
Dear, not with the evidence.

She rips off a piece of two-ply before handing the rest to Neysa. Enter Woollcott. Livid.

WOOLLCOTT

(to Alice)
You've been trapped in the latrine
this whole time?!

ALICE DUER MILLER

I couldn't leave once murdered.

Alice hands him the "evidence." On the toilet paper, someone's written in red lipstick:

YOU ARE DED

WOOLLCOTT

D...E...D?! [to Harpo] You're the
only one here who'd misspell a four-
letter word.

In the background, Alice helps Neysa to her feet.

ALICE DUER MILLER

Are you all right?

NEYSA

I haven't eaten -- the sun --

WOOLLCOTT

(to Harpo)
Well, I have a four-lettered word
for you.

ALICE DUER MILLER
 (to Neysa)
 Have you thought you may be...
 Pregnant?

Fuming, Woollcott looks from Neysa, who realizes she's pregnant, to Harpo, who goes to lay a hand on -- Woollcott smacks his hand away.

WOOLLCOTT
 Fuck you. There are rules and --

HARPO
 Aleck --

WOOLLCOTT
 -- YOU BROKE THEM. FRY IN HELL,
 GODDAMN CHRIST-KILLER, FRY --

NEYSA
 Aleck --

WOOLLCOTT
 CUNT, GET OFF ME.

Woollcott pushes past Neysa, in exiting. He storms out of --

EXT. NESHOBE HOUSE - NIGHT CONTINUOUS

Furious, Neysa pursues him.

NEYSA
 You owe me an apology.

WOOLLCOTT
 Whore, leave me be.

He stumbles down a path that empties onto

THE SHORE.

NEYSA
 Apologize to me and Harpo. Aleck...
 Quit acting so irrational.

Nowhere to run, he turns on her.

WOOLLCOTT
 You had your chance to turn
 rational and marry me, but you made
 your idiotic arrangement with Jack.

NEYSA

What?

(pause)

You were never serious.

WOOLLCOTT

What about my proposals weren't?

NEYSA

Is that what this is about?

WOOLLCOTT

It makes me sick -- Where is your hubby this summer? He's as bad as you are. Surely running around with some hussy, and you -- You probably don't even know who's the father.

NEYSA

I love Jack, and he loves me --

WOOLLCOTT

Hah.

NEYSA

-- and it's none of your business who we carry on with.

WOOLLCOTT

I couldn't keep track.

NEYSA

(attacking back)

Aleck, have you ever had the company of a woman? What of a man?

WOOLLCOTT

Quit this line of questioning --

NEYSA

I'm your friend. Yet I don't know if you've ever been fucked --

WOOLLCOTT

BITCH, I HAD THE MUMPS. That beastly complication ravaged me. Nearly killed me. Leaving me incapable of performing the act.

They both know he's lying.

NEYSA

I didn't know the mumps were capable of --

WOOLLCOTT

You could fill books with what you don't know. It astonishes me that there's no test for motherhood. Simply a willingness to open one's legs.

Exhausted from keeping up with his anger, she faces the lake, the presence of nature all around them.

NEYSA

I never thought I'd be cut out to be a mother.

WOOLLCOTT

Nothing to it. Wait nine months, open your legs again.

A tear streaks her cheek.

Woollcott sees it -- that he's gone too far.

WOOLLCOTT

Neysa, sometimes I may be a bitch, but...

NEYSA

Save it for Harpo. Just... Go.

EXT. NESHOBIE HOUSE - NIGHT

Woollcott trudges uphill, approaching the house; inside, Alice and Bea can be seen advising Harpo. They open the door for him.

Woollcott stops and listens to Harpo's approaching footfalls.

The two men stand opposite each other on the moonlit path.

HARPO

What do you say? Can we return to being friends?

WOOLLCOTT

Return to?
(brushing past him)
Friend, I'm off to bed.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A blue silk shawl lies at the foot of Julie's hospital bed. Jaundiced, she's propped up, in a room that has begun to resemble her, a pile of books and a vase of yellow roses on her nightstand. Her disease has left her in an extremely weakened state that makes it difficult for her to even speak.

JULIE
Mister Guppy?

Seated next to her, Woollcott can barely look.

She strains in picking up a book.

JULIE
Read. It'll help the time p --

She accidentally knocks over the vase.

Only a little water spilled.

Yet, for Woollcott, it's crushing.

JULIE
Aleck? I'm right here.

WOOLLCOTT
(crying)
If only they could tell you what's
wrong with you, but they never can.

She holds a finger up to his lips, 'Shhh.'

MATCH TO:

A MEMORY

of JULIE (16) and ALECK (5), as children on a SCHOOL STAGE. Aleck is Puck, the fairy from *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Julie, as Hermia, holds her finger up to his lips. Then pretends to sleep.

In front of them, the curtain parts. We revolve around them, as they remain perfectly still. Or, at least, as they try to be. Aleck holds a flower over her head that keeps tickling her nose. She opens her eyes and smiles, breaking character. They lean toward each other...

And their brows kiss.

END MEMORY.



Aleck and Julie, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

INT. SOUND STUDIO, CBS RADIO STATION - DAY

A RED LIGHT bathes Woollcott in its light, facing a CBS RADIO MICROPHONE. ON-AIR, he can't bring himself to speak. Instead, he suffers, alone with his pain.

END FLASH FORWARD.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Woollcott tears the petals off of a dead, yellow rose.

WOOLLCOTT

She's the sweetest, most genuine
creature the world's ever known,
and the world's ripped her from me.

SUPER: "April, 1928." Harpo sits next to him on a park bench.

HARPO

If I can do anything...

WOOLLCOTT

I don't need your sympathy.
(standing)
Your company will do.

They set off, approaching

A POND

HARPO

Tell me more about...

WOOLLCOTT

Julie? She's practically my mother,
and I was her doll. As a child,
she'd put me in dresses and rouge.

HARPO

Dresses?

Woollcott becomes guarded. He drops the flower in the pond. Harpo saves it. He wears it behind his ear.

HARPO

Did I ever tell you about the time
Grouch helped me become a lady of
the night?

WOOLLCOTT

A Harpo story?

HARPO

He put me in powder and rouge, and I put on Minnie's wig and dress and scared her half-to-death. Grandpa loved it because I kissed him, but my mother, '*Get that prostitute out of here! Get her out, get here --* "'

WOOLLCOTT

(laughing)
How old were you?

HARPO

Ten, eleven? I was proud of that performance.

They alternate skipping pebbles across the pond.

WOOLLCOTT

I was five when Julie first put me on the stage.

HARPO

And?

WOOLLCOTT

My debut was a disaster. It was a tableau vivant, a portrait, with no dialogue. And I was Puck the fairy.

Woollcott tries to lift a rock that's too big to carry alone. Harpo helps him. Together, they struggle to carry the weight.

WOOLLCOTT

My father didn't approve of our scenario. In it, he played the part of an abusive alcoholic -- Never could hold onto a job. "You can still be an actor" is what Julie told me after -- I told her off!

They hurl the rock into the pond, CAUSING ripples.

Harpo looks at Woollcott, as if asking, 'Why.'

WOOLLCOTT

Oh, I don't know. I suppose my schoolmates taught me '*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but my words from my mouth will surely hurt you.*'

HARPO

You had Irish bullies, too...?

WOOLLCOTT
They made a game of throwing me in
Hamilton's fountain.

Harpo senses his sensitivity. He moves on, from rock-to-rock
along the perimeter of the pond.

WOOLLCOTT
(melancholic)
A Harpo story's in order.

HARPO
Another?

WOOLLCOTT
Or else I'll fall into a stream of
self-pity. Please, what happened
after the Irish bullies dropped you
out of your second grade window?

HARPO
I became a second grade dropout,
you know that.

WOOLLCOTT
Please.

HARPO
My mother had a master plan for her
boys. Twenty years on Vaudeville. I
don't know how much rotten
boardinghouse food we ate. Living
was slim-pickings, but we made it.
Because of Minnie.

WOOLLCOTT
Let's skip Neshobe this summer.
Harpo, let's go somewhere lavish.

Woollcott slips into the pond. He embraces it. He SPLASHES!

WOOLLCOTT
Let's go today!

HARPO
All right.

WOOLLCOTT
To Europe!

HARPO
Where's the boat?

Harpo jumps into the pond.

WOOLLCOTT

And let's bring your mother!

HARPO

Now you've gone too far! Too far!

PASSERBIES double-take at the happy duo: the two children, at play. Over them cavorting, we hear:

WOOLLCOTT (**RADIO/** V.O.)

The world was once our private,
million-dollar playground, and now
that our playground's been
condemned,...

FLASH FORWARD - INT. SOUND STUDIO, CBS RADIO STATION - DAY

Woollcott speaks into his microphone.

WOOLLCOTT

... my only thought is how to
rescue it and our friendship. The
years pass, in rhythm with the bear
market plummeting towards our
inevitable destination... the crash
of nineteen twenty-nine.

INT. THE ROSE ROOM, THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL - DAY

Over the Algonquin Round Table's LUNCHTIME CHATTER, SUPER:
"June, 1929." At the next table over, Woollcott's a voracious
interviewer, opposite MINNIE MARX (64), a quintessential
stage mother and, like him, an unstoppable force.

WOOLLCOTT

Over the course of twenty years,
you roped each of your boys into
the act. Twenty years living week-
to-week. Twenty years of train
travel and rotten boardinghouses.
Over twenty years --

MINNIE MARX

Until you get to the question. I'm
not here for a puff piece in *The
Sun*.

Silence.

WOOLLCOTT

The New Yorker.

MINNIE MARX
Whatever paper.

WOOLLCOTT
Why are you here?

MINNIE MARX
Harpo talks a lot about his *friend*.
I wished to meet him. You eat here
with my son?

WOOLLCOTT
Is this your interview or mine?

MINNIE MARX
And summer with him.

WOOLLCOTT
We travelled to the French Riviera,
and we happen to enjoy our fierce
battles of croquet. Now may I ask a
question, or must I field yours?

You could cut the tension with a knife. The WAITER arrives.

WAITER
The usual, sir?

WOOLLCOTT
The house salad undressed.
Actually, my diet can go to hell.
Dress the salad.

From the adjacent round table, his friends make fun of him.

DOROTHY PARKER
What accoutrements can he have on
the side?

FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS
Heels for the heel.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Hold the handbag.

WOOLLCOTT
I can dress my own salad --

DOROTHY PARKER
With your taste?

WOOLLCOTT
Dottie, I'd design a better outfit
than those rags, I would--

Dottie jeers, "That so?" Minnie sends away the waiter, 'Nothing' for her. She looks Woollcott over, *all this talk of dresses and heels.*

WOOLLCOTT

Where were we?

MINNIE MARX

Write about the boys. Not me.

WOOLLCOTT

People wish to learn more about the Marx Brothers. That includes their mother.

MINNIE MARX

Why?

WOOLLCOTT

Because -- People love your boys.

The word 'love' lingers.

In reaction to his heartache:

MINNIE MARX

Would you like to know the secret to raising boys on vaudeville? This doesn't go in the -- Write your piece but --

WOOLLCOTT

No, no, on the record. Most mothers prefer their children suffer hell instead of Vaudeville but you practically enlisted your boys. Why?

A beat. She cooperates with the interview.

MINNIE MARX

It beat sweatshops.

WOOLLCOTT

Who worked in... ? Did the boys?

MINNIE MARX

I worked sixteen hour days. My husband, Frenchie --

WOOLLCOTT

I hear he was the worst tailor on the Upper East Side.

MINNIE MARX

If that's what Harpo told you, he was being kind. Somehow, we made due. I would come home exhausted, and my brother, Al --

WOOLLCOTT

Oh, Mister Shean ♪

MINNIE MARX

Yes, Al Shean, would come around with dimes for the boys. The sum grew as he grew more successful as an actor. Soon, he was handing out whole gold dollars, and I thought, here I am in a manufacturing line when show business is in my blood. Has Harpo told you about my father?

(off Woollcott's 'no')

In Prussia, he was a travelling magician and my mother a harpist, who yodelled.

Woollcott ROARS, with laughter.

WOOLLCOTT

Grandma Harpo, all right, all right, I need to know. The secret?

MINNIE MARX

Off the record?

Woollcott swallows his pride. He nods, in agreement.

MINNIE MARX

The secret to raising five boys on Vaudeville... Let them run free. Growing boys have *growing* needs.

(off Woollcott chuckling)

Laugh, but read the trades, and you'll see the same girl on sick-leave with appendicitis twice in two years. No girl has more than one appendix. Think about it. What do you think she had removed?

WOOLLCOTT

You condoned.

MINNIE MARX

Encouraged. On the road, there's no time for wives. But girls.

(MORE)

MINNIE MARX (CONT'D)
 I couldn't stop them from making it
 with the chorine, and neither can
 you.

She means well. Gives him a sympathetic look. The waiter
 delivers his salad. He prods at it. Then puts down his fork.
 Behind his smile is a world of pain and frustration.

WOOLLCOTT
 Everything I like is either
 illegal, immoral or fattening.
 (attacking)
 On the record, what's next for
 Minnie Marx, now that her boys are
 grown up --

MINNIE MARX
 They'll always be my --

WOOLLCOTT
 -- and you're no longer their
 manager?

On the defensive:

MINNIE MARX
 I have a new act. He needs a season
 or two on the road, and then --

WOOLLCOTT
 Who is it?

MINNIE MARX
 He'll be ready for the big time.

WOOLLCOTT
 Who?

MINNIE MARX
 My chauffeur -- It's my chauffeur.
 But -- If you only heard him sing.

Her LAUGHTER belies her eyes. Crow's feet accentuate her age.
 Woollcott sees that her best years are behind her and feels
 sorry for her.

MINNIE MARX
 Maybe I'll order...

He takes her hand and holds it.

WOOLLCOTT
 You turned our boys into stars.

MINNIE MARX

Our boys?

WOOLLCOTT

Are they not mine, too?

MINNIE MARX

(laughing)

No, you're *my* boy now. All mine.

WOOLLCOTT

And to think, I've only joined the act.

INT. FOYER, THE SANDS POINT ESTATE - NIGHT

We're at a party. Prohibition's clearly not under wraps. On a spiraling staircase, Woollcott has his arm around three of the Marx Brothers.

WOOLLCOTT

Why can't I be the fifth Brother?

GROUCHO

Because that's Gummo. Here, you be the fourth -- Be the fourth Brother. Anyone can be Zeppo.

WOOLLCOTT

Toast, toast --

Bitter, Zeppo throws back his drink.

WOOLLCOTT

To another season on Broadway!

EXT. SANDS POINT ESTATE - NIGHT

A PATIO, with a fountain and a beachfront view, could double as the Gatsby Estate. At a gala table, Groucho and Chico sit opposite Harpo and Woollcott.

WOOLLCOTT

Blasphemy.

CHICO

Pictures are stealing our audience.

WOOLLCOTT

The only movie you've made, you took the camera and pointed it... Where? At your Broadway show --

GROUCHO
Broadway's going the way of
vaudeville.

WOOLLCOTT
-- *The Cocoanuts*. And where did you
shoot it?

GROUCHO
Animal Crackers's run was shorter
than *Cocoanuts*, --

WOOLLCOTT
I'll tell you --

GROUCHO
And *Cocoanuts's* shorter than *I'll
Say She Is*.

WOOLLCOTT
One borough away from Broadway.

GROUCHO
Soon, we'll close before we even
open. If it wasn't for the stock
market, I'd worry for my finances.

Groucho glooms.

WOOLLCOTT
If you insist on movie-making --

CHICO
We need a new show.

WOOLLCOTT
Exactly, you can perform on
Broadway while filming the same
show across the river at Astoria.

Woollcott stands.

HARPO
Where are you going?

WOOLLCOTT
I may never be a Marx Brother, but
I'll be your stage mother. Finding
your scribe.

Woollcott heads off.

In his absence, Harpo scans the crowd.

A SHY STARLET (21)

catches his eye. Then looks away. She feels like a wallflower. She watches the JAZZ BAND playing for the masses on the beach.

Harpo steps up to her, a wolf.

HARPO
Do I know you?

STARLET
(startled)
Oh, no. I wouldn't think so, sir.

HARPO
I do, don't I?

STARLET
I know who you are, Mr. Marx, but --

HARPO
I knew it.

STARLET
You wouldn't know me from any other girl.

She pushes past a WAITER WITH HORS D'OEUVRES, going through

THE CROWD

Woollcott drags George Kaufman behind him.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
I've said it before. I'll say it again, I'd rather write for the Barbary Apes than --

WOOLLCOTT
We know -- The Marx Brothers.

Woollcott trails off, seeing --

HARPO AND THE STARLET

Harpo pursues her past PARTIERS.

HARPO
Out of costume, most people don't recognize me. They don't even know I speak.

STARLET

When I first learned you spoke,
trust me, I was in shock.

HARPO

Did we date? Is that how we -- ?

She turns on him.

STARLET

We certainly did not. I was a kid,
a starry-eyed fan and scared to
meet you. Before you knew my name,
you asked me on a date! I think all
I said to you was, 'How do you do,
sir?' and, 'Oh, oh, no...'

HARPO

Are you still scared of me?

He does a GOOKIE.

Despite herself, she grins.

HARPO

How about a date?

She descends the PATIO STEPS, heading for the music.

STARLET

First, you'd have to know my name.
Susan. Susan Fleming.

HARPO

Phlegming. Everybody should flem at
least once a year.

SUSAN FLEMING

You are... ? Have we met?

HARPO

Banjo.

SUSAN FLEMING

Banj, we're not ready for a date.
How about a dance?

Harpo blanches. He looks down at his left feet.

Woollcott steps up to them, not looking to make friends.

WOOLLCOTT

(re: Susan)
Who's this?

HARPO
Phlegming.

WOOLLCOTT
I've seen you on the stage?

SUSAN FLEMING
In the Follies.

WOOLLCOTT
Something more tawdry. A burlesque
where the girls wore tassels on
their tits.

Uncomfortable, Susan shakes her head, 'No.'

WOOLLCOTT
You're an actress?

SUSAN FLEMING
I've made a career of it but --

WOOLLCOTT
Not cut out for it.

SUSAN FLEMING
No, it's -- Acting is my mother's
dream. I'd like to have time to
have hobbies and have a family.

ON Harpo: now with cold left feet.

SUSAN FLEMING
I was trying to get him to dance,
then someone I didn't know
interrupted and accused me of
burlesque.

WOOLLCOTT
How rude.
(pause)
The dummy may not dance. I do.

He offers his arm, and she accepts it. He leads her onto...

THE BEACH

... where the band plays *The Charleston* full tilt. Everyone's
splifficated. Happy out of their minds. Woollcott cuts a
surprisingly nimble figure.

He sweeps Susan into a spin, angling toward Harpo.

WOOLLCOTT
Say, can you two-step?

Both Susan and Woollcott try to get Harpo to join in.

SUSAN FLEMING
Dance!

Harpo only sways. It's his go-to dance move if you can call it that. Pushed by the crowd, Harpo steps in the rising tide. As if the water's a light under his ass, he suddenly dances at 78 rpm.

Faster, faster --

All three dance.

They spin -- *SPLASH!* Susan and Harpo fall in the water.

Woollcott's good cheer becomes fear. The crowd sets him off balance. He falls UNDERWATER, staggers to his feet, and sees

HARPO AND SUSAN,

helping each other up, hands on each other.

WOOLLCOTT

watches them, Harpo with Susan, with no room between them for anyone else.

He takes the PATIO STEPS, leaving them in his wake.

HARPO
Aleck? Hey, Aleck? Where are you going?

THE PATIO STEPS

Harpo jogs after him.

HARPO
We're having fun.

WOOLLCOTT
Who's stopping you? Go --

HARPO
Are you mad?

Harpo turns him. Woollcott is despondent.

WOOLLCOTT

Have your fun. Isn't that the big mystery behind your ignominious success?

HARPO

My... ? God knows I can't dance. Come back.

WOOLLCOTT

You want me to --

HARPO

Yes.

WOOLLCOTT

No.

HARPO

Come.

WOOLLCOTT

You don't want me.

HARPO

Listen, I don't know what I did. Call me a sonna bitch, yell... Don't just stand there. What the hell's the matter? Say something.

The jazz in the background fades. The silence is EERIE.

HARPO

Why aren't you talking to me?

ANGLE ON WOOLLCOTT

He reaches past his pain to tap his deep reservoir of anger.

WOOLLCOTT

Because you're a musicless chimp. Harpo, y - you're an unmusical imp.

REVEAL:

INT. WOOLLCOTT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Woollcott is practicing insults to his bedroom mirror.

WOOLLCOTT

(EXPLODING)

SHUT UP Y - Y- YOU INHARMONIC PUCK!

He's found the perfect insult. Yet it brings him no happiness. Off of his heartbroken reflection --

INT. NEWMAN BROTHERS AND WORMS, STOCKBROKERAGE FIRM - DAY

Groucho and Harpo sit opposite their broker.

HARPO

How much have we lost?

BROKER

You haven't. There's no need to panic.

Across the way, a machine spits out stock ticker tape, with the RAT-A-TAT efficiency of a semi-automatic.

GROUCHO

With the sound of that machine gun?

BROKER

What you need to understand is it's a global market.

GROUCHO

The Dow took quite the dip yesterday, not in the local swimming hole. Babson predicts --

BROKER

That doomsayer says the same thing every year, almost as if he's rooting for it. It's scare talk, frankly, and not very patriotic. If you're worried, here, set aside a few thousand --

GROUCHO

Dollars?!

BROKER

-- cash as a precaution to cover margins. As a -- Look at you two, you're comedians. Live a little. Laugh!

Groucho lets loose a LOUD FAKE BELLY LAUGH.

INT. BATHROOM, WOOLLCOTT'S APARTMENT - EVENING

A telephone RINGS over the noise of RUNNING BATH WATER.

Woollcott's MANICURIST reaches for it. Woollcott stops her.

WOOLLCOTT
(calling out)
Joe...?! Joe, the telephone.

In a silk bathrobe, Woollcott is receiving a manicure while also getting a haircut from a BARBER. His secretary enters. Four people in the room. We almost have a Marx Brothers scene on our hands. Joe turns off the water. He takes up the phone.

JOE HENNESSEY (PHONE)
Woollcott residence.

INT. LIVING ROOM, FRENCHIE AND MINNIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Harpo's on the line. In the background, FRENCHIE MARX (69) prepares dinner, in an apartment that exudes old world charm.

HARPO (PHONE)
Joe, is Aleck available?

INTERCUT THE TWO APARTMENTS AS NECESSARY

Woollcott indicates, 'No.'

JOE HENNESSEY (PHONE)
Aleck's out at the moment. He's...

WOOLLCOTT
Out with my favorite comedienne,
being Chaplin.

JOE HENNESSEY (PHONE)
Unavailable, regrettably.

HARPO (PHONE)
Joe, put him on, would you?

JOE HENNESSEY (PHONE)
I wish I could but --

WOOLLCOTT
Charlie Chaplin.

JOE HENNESSEY (PHONE)
He's out with W.C. Fields on quite
the bender. Shall I let him know
you rung --

Mad at Joe, Woollcott steals the phone and hangs it up.

HARPO

Joe...?

Harpo listens to, then hangs up the dead line.

WOOLLCOTT'S BATHROOM

The manicurist and barber exit past Joe, who stands at the bathroom's threshold.

JOE HENNESSEY

It's cruel, shunning people who
care about you.

Woollcott closes the door on him.

TO BLACK:

INT. DINING ROOM, FRENCHIE AND MINNIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

FOURTEEN MARXES FEAST around a crowded table, (including their SPOUSES and CHILDREN and the fifth Marx brother, GUMMO). And then there's Harpo, who's not mentally present. Chico pushes out his chair.

CHICO

Frenchie, it was delicious. Minnie.

MINNIE MARX

Stay.

CHICO

I wish but --

CHICO'S DAUGHTER

Daddy.

CHICO

It's business.

He blows a kiss, in exiting. Harpo sits between his disappointed niece (10) and his disappointed mother.

MINNIE MARX

That boy...

The Marx's affable father, FRENCHIE, passes by, chuckling.

FRENCHIE

Mein Chico sniffed out a game of
pinochle and didn't invite his
father.

HARPO
 (to Minnie)
 If he says it's business...

MINNIE MARX
 Losing money is 'business?' I give
 that boy so much love, and what
 does he do with it?

FRENCHIE (O.S.)
 Toast! I want to toast!

MINNIE MARX
 Throws it away at a poker table.

FRENCHIE
 I toast to --

ZEPPO
 No, you don't.

Onstage, Zeppo's overshadowed; offstage, he can be the
 funniest Marx Brother. With Chico gone and Harpo and Groucho
 preoccupied with their individual woes, Zeppo runs the show.
 He picks up and CARRIES Frenchie.

FRENCHIE
 Put me down, put me down.

GUMMO
 Let him have the floor.

GROUCHO
 (glum)
 Let him have the chair.

ZEPPO
 Frenchie can have the table.

Zeppo lands Frenchie ON TOP OF THE TABLE.

ZEPPO
 Stand -- Speak.

Minnie and Harpo watch on, not partaking in the fun.

FRENCHIE
 What to say?

ZEPPO
 Pull at our heartstrings.

GROUCHO
 Our hamstrings.

ZEPPO

Say anything, you ham.

Frenchie has a strong German accent.

FRENCHIE

Why -- I -- What to say? Three Broadway shows. Our boys now in pictures. I am -- We are so proud. Truth is we miss the old days when Gummo was in the show. He may not --

GUMMO

I preferred the war.

FRENCHIE

We do! We miss being on the road with you, you and -- Oh, Minnie, because of you, we have the five best boys in the world and, uh, look at their wives.

ZEPPO

At my wife?

FRENCHIE

No, no, -- Do not tell Minnie!

ZEPPO

To Minnie! Hear hear!

The table toasts, 'Minnie!'

She half-waves, in acknowledgement. Harpo sees that she's not feeling her best and tries to cheer her.

HARPO

I miss being your assistant. Onstage patching flats. Remember the carnations for Mr. Green's Cottage? Do you miss the old days?

Minnie shakes her head, 'No.'

Across the way, Frenchie tries to get down from the table. Zeppo won't let him.

HARPO

(to Minnie)

Well, I hear you're still at it... that your chauffeur only needs a few dance more lessons, and then --

MINNIE MARX
Why don't you settle down?

Harpo's in shock.

MINNIE MARX
Find a nice shiksa like your
brother.

HARPO
What have you done with my mother?

MINNIE MARX
(laughing)
Get married.

The festivities have roused Groucho's spirits. Seated next to his wife, he ESTABLISHES A RHYTHM on the table, starting up the vaudeville ditty, 'Peasie Weasie.'

GROUCHO
(singing)
*Way down by the sad seaside
sat two lovers side-by-side.*

Mood improved, Minnie joins in, singing with Groucho.

MINNIE AND FRENCHIE MARX
*First, he sighed and then she
sighed, and then they both sighed,
side-by-side.*

Frenchie joins in, too. Harpo observes the Marxian mirth going on around him. Groucho bounces his TODDLER in his arms. Zeppo and Gummo join in for THE CHORUS.

THE CHORUS
*Peasie Weasie, what's his name?
Peasie Weasie, Peasie Weasie,
what's his game?
He will catch you if he can.
Peasie Weasie.*

Harpo forgets his woes and sings:

HARPO
Peasie Weasie is a bold bad man!

INT. WOOLLCOTT'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Woollcott gets into his bath. He sinks under the water.

INT. DINING ROOM, FRENCHIE AND MINNIE'S APARTMENT - SAME

Harpo and the singing GET LOUDER.

HARPO AND SINGERS
*Went fishing last Sunday,
 and I caught A SMELT! Put him in
 the fire pan, and THE FIRE HE FELT!*

Harpo helps his niece onto her chair.

GROUCHO
 MINNIE ON THE TABLE. MINNIE!

MINNIE MARX
 (re: no)
 GREENBAUM.

SINGERS
*OF ALL THE SMELTS I EVER SMELT,
 I NEVER SMELT A SMELT LIKE THAT
 SMELT SMELT!!!*

Minnie caves. With help from Harpo, she climbs on the table. She and Frenchie STOMP their feet. The table SHAKES.

One of the Marx children makes a game of darting under it.

MINNIE AND FRENCHIE
*PEASIE WEASIE, WHAT'S HIS NAME?
 PEASIE WEASIE, WHAT'S HIS GAME?*

INT. WOOLLCOTT'S BATHROOM - SAME

Underwater, Woolcott releases ALL OF HIS BREATH.

INT. FRENCHIE AND MINNIE'S APARTMENT - SAME

Harpo looks up at his mother, who's red in the face.

MINNIE MARX
HE WILL C- CATCH IF YOU C-A- N--

HARPO
 Minnie?

The left side of her face slopes.

She GASPS.

GRASPS for air.

SINGERS
PEASIE WEASIE, PEASIE WEASIE --

HARPO
 Minnie?!

SINGERS
-- IS A BOLD, BAD MAN!

She falls into Harpo's arms, limp as a doll. SHOUTS!
 COMMOTION! Some still sing, 'PEASIE WEASIE.'

INT. WOOLLCOTT'S BATHROOM - SAME

Underwater, Woollcott opens his eyes.
 All is too calm.

INT. FRENCHIE AND MINNIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A HEAD MANNEQUIN rests on the vanity counter. Next to it, Groucho and Zeppo wait their turn to sit by Minnie's bedside. Harpo currently sits by her. Half of her face appears normal. Half resembles the melted horror of a Salvador Dali painting.

HARPO
 (through tears)
 Minnie, I've come to pin the
 carnations on Mr. Green's cottage.

Minnie tries to smile. Can't. Stroke-stricken.

Next to Harpo, Frenchie cries.

Chico enters the room.

CHICO
 Where is, Minnie -- ? I...

Chico backs against the vanity counter, overwhelmed.

MINNIE'S FINGERTIPS flutter against the bedcover. Her eyes flit, trying to tell Harpo that her wig is off-center. He fixes it for her, and she manages the impossible. One last, indomitable smile.



Minnie with Zeppo, Chico, Groucho, and Harpo

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

MOURNERS wait their turn to add a shovelful of dirt to an open grave.

Harpo's next in line. Groucho refuses to give up his shovel. He keeps digging as if he alone can fill in the hole. Fed up, Zeppo cuts in front of Harpo --

HARPO

Don't.

-- and RIPS the shovel out of Groucho's grip.

Mad, Groucho heads past the line of mourners,...

... and past Woollcott, who catches Harpo's eye.

ZEPPO (O.S.)

Get to work.

Harpo takes the shovel and STABS it in the dirt.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

Past headstones, Harpo and Woollcott stroll.

Woollcott intends to make up the distance between them.

But doesn't know where to start. At long last...

WOOLLCOTT

I'm debating entering a new line of work. CBS plans on doing tests, God knows what, to see if my voice is suitable for the listening public.

In need of a friend, Harpo's faced with needless chit-chat.

WOOLLCOTT

None of which leaves me much time for my usual pieces in *The Sun* or my *Shouts and Murmurs*, --

HARPO

Aleck, nice seeing you, but --

WOOLLCOTT

But I'll have to make time.

HARPO

Family's waiting.

WOOLLCOTT
 We'll catch up?
 (...)
 When?

Harpo shrugs, in leaving him.

Woollcott stands alone in the cemetery.

INT. PRESS ROOM - DAY

A printing press runs. Woollcott watches, in horror.
 Newsprint blurs, the headline seen in glimpses:

WALL STREET

IN PANIC AS

STOCKS CRASH!

INT. NEWMAN BROTHERS AND WORMS - DAY

A stream of ticker tape ravel on the floor. A horde of
 STOCKBROKERS trample it as they YELL over each other and the
 Brothers' BROKER, who's on the phone.

BROKER (PHONE)
 Boys, it's a telegram.

INT. THEATER HALLWAY - SAME

Groucho yells into his end.

GROUCHO (PHONE)
 A telegram? Is that what this is?
 Reads more like a death threat.

Next to him, Harpo holds a TELEGRAM of his own. It reads:

"SEND \$10,000 IN 24 HOURS OR ELSE FACE FINANCIAL RUIN AND --"
 Groucho CRUMPLES his telegram. He goes to slam the line.

Harpo takes it from him.

HARPO (PHONE)

Artie, I'm worth a quarter million, more? Ten grand's nothing of two-fifty.

GROUCHO

Easy as pie, but you only bought one slice.

INTERCUT THE STOCKBROKERAGE FIRM AS NECESSARY

BROKER (PHONE)

Wire all funds you don't need --

GROUCHO

The rest is speculative.

BROKER

And then liquid assets are your best friend.

HARPO (PHONE)

Liquidate?

GROUCHO

I just bought a house. Ruth, the kids...

HARPO (PHONE)

The market fluctuates. Tomorrow --

GROUCHO

Don't you get it?! You'll be worth what the pawn shop will give you. The jig is up. I - It... It's over.

Devastated, Groucho slumps against the wall.

CUT TO:

AN IMPRESSIONISTIC DEGAS.

Hands lift the painting off of the wall, carrying it past...

INT. HARPO'S PENTHOUSE - DAY

... plants, pet fish, birds, and a croquet set in disarray. TWO MEN carry a chaise lounge past Woollcott, who enters the penthouse. The rest of Harpo's bachelor pad isn't as lively. There is an absence of furniture. Unfurnished, white walls.

Harpo haggles with a PAWNBROKER for the only item of worth left in the place...

His MAJESTIC HARP.

PAWNBROKER
Final offer. A grand.

HARPO
At thirteen hundred,

PAWNBROKER
Take it or leave it.

HARPO
You're stealing from me. Twelve.

Woollcott rushes in.

WOOLLCOTT
Out --

PAWNBROKER
Back off --

WOOLLCOTT
OUT, you bloodsucking racketeer,
before I grab you by the neck and
do not LET GO. PUT YOUR MONEY AWAY.

PAWNBROKER
I owe him -- For the paintings.

In escaping Woollcott, the pawnbroker throws cash behind him. Harpo and Woollcott are now alone.

WOOLLCOTT
Can you believe the vulture?! And
you, have you lost your mind?

Harpo picks up the fallen bills off of the floor.

HARPO
I'm short.

WOOLLCOTT
By how much?

HARPO
Three... Four...

WOOLLCOTT
Hundred?

HARPO

Thousand, and that's after selling.

WOOLLCOTT

You're not selling the harp.

HARPO

If I don't, I don't know what else to do. Can you...?

(off Woollcott's silence)

Forget it. I never asked.

WOOLLCOTT

I'm faring nearly as poorly. The whole world's singing the same sad tune. I came here, in hopes of a more heartwarming melody. Play me one.

Harpo sits down at his harp. He can't bring himself to play. Woollcott finds pennies in his pocket and jangles them.

WOOLLCOTT

If it helps, I'll toss the little I have at your feet.

He throws pennies that fall flat and ECHO.

HARPO

Just the sight of money makes me sick. Did I ever tell you about the time London pelted us with pennies? Groucho said --

WOOLLCOTT

"We came all the way from America, so at least throw shillings." There isn't a Harpo story I haven't heard.

HARPO

My first harp?

WOOLLCOTT

Your mother's idea. To add *class* to the act.

HARPO

Class earned an extra five dollars per month. We needed the money. Now I do.

WOOLLCOTT

You really wish to sell your namesake? I'm not stopping you.

HARPO

No, I -- The day I got the harp, I was so proud. A swipe of the strings, and I could shut Groucho up. I was no longer Adolph, the second grade drop-out or a lost cause in the act. I was --

WOOLLCOTT

Harpo, look at me.

HARPO

I was finally me.

WOOLLCOTT

We'll survive this together.

Harpo looks from Woollcott to the strings of his harp.

He plays the opening bar of music from "Only You."

As he plays the strings, we REVOLVE AROUND...

WOOLLCOTT

... who listens to the lilting melody, with his eyes closed. When he opens his eyes, across from him, Harpo's in costume: in his ragamuffin raincoat, wig, and top hat.

MEN IN SUITS bump into Harpo, sending him OFF-KEY. MORE MEN, YELLING, step in front of Woollcott. He takes to his feet in--

A DREAM - INT. NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE - DAY

THE TRADING FLOOR IS A MADHOUSE.

BANKER

AMERICAN STEEL 122!

MOB OF TRADERS

SELL!

ON HARPO: 'What to do?' In a pocket, he finds oversized scissors and CUTS the banker's ticker tape in two.

The BANKER runs out of prices to read. The traders fall quiet. Contented, Harpo goes to resume his song.

THE BANKER'S MACHINE BURSTS LIKE A DAM. TICKER TAPE SPITS OUT RAPID-FIRE!

BANKER
ANACONDA COPPER 92!

MOB OF TRADERS
SELL!

BANKER
UNION CARBON AND CARBIDE --

SELL!

Harpo -- jostled -- catches Woollcott's eye, 'Help.'

Woollcott tries to get to him. Traders get in his way. He pushes through the CROWD, stepping on TICKER TAPE that plies and pools, going up his knees,...

... up to his waist,...

... going past grown men who SOB, inconsolable.

Harpo's in sight.

A DEATHLY PALE BROKER JUMPS from a great height -- JESUS! -- into a TICKER TAPE DEMISE.

A sea of tape RISES like a tidal wave, crashing down on...

WOOLLCOTT
Harpo!

... pulling Woollcott --

UNDERWATER.

He collides with JULIE'S GAUNT and WATERLOGGED CORPSE. Their brows kiss.

INT. BEDROOM, WOOLLCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Woollcott wakes, in a cold sweat. He tries to control his breathing. Can't. Having a panic attack. The dream's over. Nightmare's not. He opens his bedside drawer and takes out a book that's hollowed out. Its contents provide him with hope. His HEAVY BREATHING is...

INT. SCREENING ROOM, ASTORIA STUDIOS - DAY

... replaced by the WHIR of a projector. The Brothers, their DIRECTOR, and a congenial exec, WALTER WANGER (30s), watch *Animal Crackers*, the film. The mood is downbeat. No laughter.

When Walter Wanger LAUGHS, it's loud and obvious.

ZEPPO

Do that once more...

WALTER WANGER

I'm allowed to laugh.

GROUCHO

Not after what you've done.

Bullied, Walter Wanger sits back. Depressed, Harpo watches his own performance.

ON-SCREEN, a butler takes Harpo's coat. Underneath, Harpo's in a tank top and ridiculously short shorts. Onlookers GASP, in horror.

IN THE SCREENING ROOM, Wanger can't help it. He laughs.

ZEPPO

That's it.

WALTER WANGER

Boys, Zukor's moving the business west. Not me.

DIRECTOR

All right, all right, stop the feed
--

WALTER WANGER

When East closes, I lose my job.

The room is quiet. Solemn.

The projectionist pulls the film.

HARPO

If the studio closes, how will we make movies?

GROUCHO

Better question. How will we make money?

CHICO

This pic looks as good as it'll ever look. What do you say we release it?

WALTER WANGER

The studio wishes to hold off till summer.

GROUCHO
You really are something.

WALTER WANGER
Given the state of the nation, I'd
add the state of this room, no one
knows if anyone has the stomach for
humor, let alone the wallet for it.

GROUCHO
I have debts.

WALTER WANGER
Releasing it any sooner --

GROUCHO
Harpo has debt --

WALTER WANGER
-- won't do any good. You got your
salary up-front, with no back-end.

Harpo shoots his brothers a conspiratorial look.

HARPO
Hold it... What's a back-end?

The Brothers wake from their despair, sensing an opportunity
for horseplay.

WALTER WANGER
How do you not know what your... ?
See, your back-end is --

CHICO
No, let's see your back end.

They bound over chairs. Like wild baboons, the Marx Brothers
strip him.

WALTER WANGER
Very funny.

They take off Wanger's jacket -- RIP OPEN his shirt.

CHICO
Which end is this?

GROUCHO
I'm not sure. Let's milk this for
all it's worth!

Off of Groucho "milking" Walter Wanger --

INT. HALLWAY, ASTORIA STUDIOS - DAY

Woollcott walks the hallway. He looks haggard, as if he hasn't slept in days, steels himself, stops, and opens the hollowed-out book.

Inside is THE DEED to the house on Neshobe Island. Seeing it gives him the resolve to continue.

A STUDIO EMPLOYEE approaches.

WOOLLCOTT

Pardon, have you seen -- ?

He hears the Marx Brothers's HORSEPLAY from down the hall and waves off the employee, 'Never mind.' He knows where to go.

INT. SCREENING ROOM, ASTORIA STUDIOS - DAY

The brothers have completely stripped Wanger, who CRIES from LAUGHTER.

WALTER WANGER

Strip me of my dignity -- please,
please, leave me my birthday suit!

ZEPPO

No promises.

The DOOR opens. Woollcott peers in.

In the nude, Wanger revolves for all to see. Though amusing, he's not why Woollcott's there.

WOOLLCOTT

(to Harpo)

Pardon, a word?

The brothers's AGENT steps past him into the room. Harpo signals to Woollcott, 'One sec' and turns his attention to the agent.

AGENT

Calm down now. Calm down. I've got
news, the usual types.

CHICO

Good news first.

In the background, Wanger dresses.

AGENT

You're set to go on tour. The theatres have forfeited a percentage of the box for an up-front booking fee.

CHICO

If the house is empty, how's that good? We get nothing.

AGENT

You get time. Tell your creditors you'll cover your margins by the end of the week.

HARPO

The telegram said twenty-four hours.

AGENT

You're Harpo Marx and employed. They'll give you an extra minute.

For the first time since the crash, Harpo is hopeful.

GROUCHO

What's the bad news?
(re: Woollcott)
Was it him?

ON Woollcott: temper rising.

AGENT

Zukor's shifting operations west.

GROUCHO

We heard.

AGENT

Which is why your last stop on the tour will be his office on the Paramount lot.

GROUCHO

California sun, eh? The bad news was him.

ON Woollcott: as he comes to realize...

AGENT

Nobody likes uprooting family. You'll have to, if you move to Hollywood.

His best friend is being stolen away from him.

CHICO
Home of the stars.

WOOLLCOTT
You... You wouldn't... move.

CHICO
Future's in pictures.

WOOLLCOTT
You were born and raised, made into stars here in New York City.

GROUCHO
By you, I suppose.

WOOLLCOTT
With help from your mother. I've never heard anything so absurd. Your friends are all here.

ZEPPO
What friends?

WOOLLCOTT
(STYMIED, to Harpo)
D - Don't just stand there, mute, kowtowing to these three fraternal morons you call brothers. Tell them you'd rather perform as a single on Broadway than move to Tinseltown. Speak up, dammit, say something.

It's not an easy decision for Harpo to make.

HARPO
I perform with my brothers or not at all.
(to the agent)
You can relay that to Hollywood.

Woollcott is shell-shocked.

The agent nods, in exiting.

As the brothers return to their seats, and the director signals, 'Start the reel,' Woollcott recovers from his shock and glares at Harpo.

The Marx Brothers black-and-white comedy plays over his furious facade. In the audience, the brothers grow restless.

CHICO
Down in front.

ZEPPO
Get off the stage.

Still, Woollcott blocks the screen.

Groucho balls up a script page and throws it at him. Chico and Zeppo follow suit, like children in a snowball fight. Harpo leaps out of his seat...

... up to Woollcott, as if to protect him from the barrage. Thrown objects fly by.

HARPO
Move.

When Woollcott refuses to budge...

HARPO
Move.

Harpo tickles the angry, owl of a man.

WOOLLCOTT
Not in the mood -- Quit it.

A glimmer of a grin plays across Woollcott's lips. Seeing fun, the brothers run down the aisle, on Woollcott in an instant. Chico and Zeppo remove his shoes. Harpo unbuttons his shirt.

WOOLLCOTT
Stop it -- What are you doing?

Unlike Wanger, Woollcott fights back --

-- shoves --

WOOLLCOTT
STOP IT THIS INSTANT.

His resistance eggs them on. They pin him -- strip him --

On-screen, comedy.

On the floor, Woollcott kicks -- SCREAMS.

WOOLLCOTT
HARPO DUER MARX, GROUCHO, FRY IN
HELL! GODDAMN SONS OF BITCHES --

They rip off his shirt --

-- his pants.

WOOLLCOTT
CHICO, ZEPPO -- Fry in hell.

Spit dribbles down his lower lip, 'Fry in hell.'

Tears in his eyes.

WOOLLCOTT
(pleading)
Harpo.

Harpo sees what he's done and falls back. Ashamed.

Woollcott's hollowed-out book lies on the floor. Harpo picks it up. Groucho throws Woollcott's underwear in the air, and the brothers, minus Harpo, lift Woollcott and throw him into--

INT. HALLWAY, ASTORIA STUDIOS - CONTINUOUS

They CLOSE the door and LOCK it.

Naked, Woollcott scrambles and POUNDS on the door.

WOOLLCOTT
Let me in, you contumacious rats.
Let me in... let me...

He gives up, rolls of fat on display for ANYONE who walks by.

The door reopens. Harpo approaches, with Woollcott's clothes and the book.

HARPO
Aleck...
(pause)
Sometimes, we take gags too far.

Harpo offers him his clothes. Woollcott pushes them away.

HARPO
People are looking.

WOOLLCOTT
(EXPLODING)
LET 'EM LOOK. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
LOOK AT PUTT, LOOK, LOOK AT HIM,
THROW HIM IN THE FOUNTAIN! SWIM,
(to self)
Swim, you putrid aberration.

Woollcott bites down on his back teeth. His jaw grinds. Spittle clings to his lower lip and chin.

Harpo offers him his clothes. Woollcott snaps them up.

WOOLLCOTT
Why must you move?

HARPO
I told you. My brothers.

WOOLLCOTT
What about what's her name? Floozy?

HARPO
The Sands Point party?

WOOLLCOTT
Leaving her, too?

HARPO
I hardly know her. Besides, she's the settling down type.

WOOLLCOTT
And?

HARPO
You should meet someone. Plenty of dames who --

WOOLLCOTT
I'm incapable. Incapable of meeting anyone worth a damn.

Woollcott BEATS the dust off his slacks.

Puts them on.

HARPO
Why'd you come here?

WOOLLCOTT
(muttered)
You've no need for me.

Woollcott takes the book.

Heads off.

HARPO
Come back -- Aleck.

WOOLLCOTT

You're the one leaving. Get on that train, and I'll never speak to you again.

HARPO

We've been down this road. Earlier, what'd you want to tell me?

RED IN THE FACE, Woollcott turns on him:

WOOLLCOTT

THAT I HAVE NO MORE WORDS FOR YOU,
YOU HARMONIC PUCK.

Silence.

HARPO

Well, I do.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - DAY

A train whistle WAILS.

Piston rods PUMP.

HARPO (V.O.)

You're my best friend in the world.

INT. LIVING ROOM, WOOLLCOTT'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Woollcott stands at a window as if watching the train leave.

He crosses to a mantel. On it, there's an aged, yellow rose. Next to it is a photo of him and Harpo on Neshobe Island.

It pains him to remember.

WOOLLCOTT

When the world's got you down...

He lowers to all fours.

Tries to do a headstand.

Tumbles out of it.

Dejected, he lies on the floor. A RADIO stares back at him. He closes his eyes, and the opening to "Only You" fades in. Inspired, he takes to his feet and takes up a legal pad.

He writes,



Now that You Have Left Me

INT. RECEPTION AREA, CBS RADIO STATION - DAY

In a crisp suit and bow tie, Woollcott bustles to,...

RECEPTIONIST

Good afternoon, Mr. Woollcott.

... without greeting the RECEPTIONIST.

INT. SOUND STUDIO, CBS RADIO STATION - DAY

He hands the legal pad to the show's DIRECTOR.

CBS DIRECTOR

What am I looking at?

Woollcott opens a closet,...

WOOLLCOTT

Today's program.

... finds and empties a cardboard box.

CBS DIRECTOR

But -- This is a list of songs.

INT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

Sheet music lands in the box.

Woollcott faces a wall of sheet music.

His search is desperate, the shelves disorganized. *No, no, --
Yes!*

He lands a pile of sheet music in front of the CASHIER.

WOOLLCOTT

A dozen of these each.

Off of the cashier's bemusement, CUT TO:

THE CHECKOUT

The cashier dumps a massive pile of sheet music into the box. The music runs over and spills onto the floor.

What to do? Woollcott looks around and sees...

... a CHILD'S wheelbarrow in a dusty corner of the store.

INT. NYC STREET - DAY

Down a depression-era street, Woollcott pulls the wheelbarrow full of sheet music.

He picks up steam, weaving between PEDESTRIANS.

WOOLLCOTT

Out of the way, out of the way...

Folios take to the air.

WOOLLCOTT

I have a show to put on.

INT. SOUND STUDIO, CBS RADIO STATION - DAY

Nervous, Woollcott cleans his glasses. He sets them on the bridge of his nose. Seated before a microphone, he looks to the CONTROL ROOM, where the director signals, 'Three. Two...

'One.'

A light turns red, bathing him in its light.

Catty-corner, the show's ANNOUNCER speaks at a standing mic.

ANNOUNCER

Hear ye, hear ye, the sound of this bell signals that Alexander Woollcott, the town crier, has taken up his stand to address you, ladies and gentlemen.

We've heard the following in our opening.

WOOLLCOTT

This is Woollcott speaking.

Until now, we haven't seen that any sternness on his part comes from a place of vulnerability, as he opens up on-air:

WOOLLCOTT

I would like to address one of you in the audience in particular. The rest of you may listen in but know you are eavesdroppers.

INT. LOBBY, ALGONQUIN HOTEL - SAME

At the hotel's newsstand, a RADIO plays to PASSERBIES.

WOOLLCOTT (RADIO/ V.O.)
 As long as that is understood, I
 would like to take a journey with
 you, yes you...

An OLD LADY looks around: 'Who? Me?'

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 ... in opposition to that
 mysterious and relentless factor we
 call time, into the past.

Track through the opulent lobby. A rope barricade sections
 off the ALGONQUIN'S ROSE ROOM.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 As if on a train, our odyssey into
 our shared history picks up speed.
 Come, come with me. We do not slow
 for that splendid decade that
 roared with the riches of wit and
 wealth. We roar with it!

Once alive with banter, the rose room is mostly deserted.
 F.P.A. sits with Dorothy Parker and one or two others.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 The world was once our private,
 million-dollar playground...

INT. STUDIO, CBS RADIO STATION - DAY

WOOLLCOTT
 ... and now that our playground has
 been condemned, my only thought is
 how to rescue it and our friendship.

EXT. PITTSBURGH THEATER - DAY

The AUDIENCE entering the theater is sparse and dispirited --
 not a sell-out, by any means. The marquee advertises for,

The 4 Marx Bros in Animal Crackers

INT. DRESSING ROOM, PITTSBURGH THEATER - SAME

TRACK FROM A RADIO ON THE DUSTY COUNTER PAST Harpo's stage
 wig and top hat.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 The years pass, in rhythm with the
 bear market, plummeting towards our
 inevitable destination.

LAND on Groucho. In costume, he's restless.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 The crash of nineteen twenty-nine.

His eyes open -- bloodshot. Hasn't slept in days.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 Nineteen twenty-eight, twenty-
 seven, twenty-six. We keep going,
 into the past,...

INT. HALLWAY, PITTSBURGH THEATER - SAME

As if on a train, we push down the hallway and find Harpo.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 ... past the war that ended all
 wars and the sinking of the
 Lusitania.

Harpo hears Woollcott and stops walking.

INT. DRESSING ROOM/ PITTSBURGH THEATER - SAME

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 Our story begins before the turn of
 the century.

Harpo strides into the room.

HARPO
 Shut that off?

GROUCHO
 I've got insomnia. His voice helps
 me not sleep.

Instead of turning it off, Groucho turns UP THE VOLUME.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 In eighteen-ninety two, I'm a boy,
 who loves his sister dearly.

GROUCHO
 It's like the ocean, BLEATING.
 (off Harpo)
 (MORE)

GROUCHO (CONT'D)
 Hey, I can't be both funny and
 suicidal.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 After I saw my first play, my
 sister and I performed a tableau
 vivant. I was Puck from a *Midsummer
 Night's Dream*...

ON Harpo: remembering the bitterness of his last encounter
 with Woollcott.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 ... so naturally, when I first saw
 you at the Casino Theater --

He goes to turn off the radio. Groucho stops him.

GROUCHO
 He's talking to you.

HARPO
 He wouldn't.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 I swore I was dreaming.

GROUCHO
 Wouldn't he?

Groucho leers, puffs on his cigar.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 You were Puck.

Harpo disapproves of any insinuation. He glares at Groucho.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 Any eavesdroppers out there, you
 guessed it. The subject of today's
 program is none other than the
 silent Marx Brother, who plays the
 harp.

Harpo turns his attention to the radio. Groucho paces.

GROUCHO
 No audience means no money.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 He's moving to Hollywood.

GROUCHO
 How can I be funny when penniless?



Woolcott on the radio

Groucho stares at Harpo, who stares at THE RADIO.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
Harpo, last time we talked, I told
you, "I have nothing more to say to
you," and I don't.

GROUCHO
(off of Harpo's silence)
Sometimes, you really are dumb.

Groucho storms out of the room. Alone, Harpo turns back to
the radio.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
No, now that you have left, I don't
have a single word left for you.
Not a word.

Woollcott's abrasive tone rubs Harpo the wrong way.

He turns off the radio.

INT. STUDIO, CBS RADIO

Woollcott looks troubled, as if he knows that Harpo just shut
him out.

WOOLLCOTT
All I have left is this fading
memory of melodies we once shared.

Woollcott closes his eyes. The melody to "Only You" fades in.

IN FLASHES, we see...

-- HARPO AND WOOLLCOTT ON A TRAIN, as they sit side-by-side,
scenery a blur.

-- THE PLACID WATERS OF LAKE BOMOSEEN, as they skinny-dip.

-- ON NESHOBIE ISLAND. They delight while playing croquet.

BACK TO STUDIO

Woollcott takes heart. He signals.

WOOLLCOTT
Allegro!

Across the room, a BIG BAND ORCHESTRA occupies the back-half
of the studio, until now unseen.

The musicians follow his instruction and play even LIVELIER.

INT. PITTSBURGH THEATRE - DAY

In contrast, an EMPTY HOUSE watches the Marx Brothers' play, *Animal Crackers*.

ONSTAGE, a POLICEMAN detains Harpo, a crowd gathered around. His brothers protest the arrest in-progress:

GROUCHO

Don't take him away, officer. He returned the paintings.

POLICEMAN

All right, all right, I'll let him go this time.

(to Harpo)

But I want to give you some advice. You're running around with the wrong crowd of people. Do you want to be a crook?

Harpo nods, 'Yes.' Only a few LAUGHS reach him onstage. Somewhere, someone COUGHS. The mood in the theater is generally depressed.

POLICEMAN

Oh, why don't you go home?

CHICO

He ain't got no home.

GROUCHO

(improvised)

He lost it with the bull market.

IN THE AUDIENCE, MURMURS. A COUPLE rises from their seats.

ON-STAGE, the performers react to Groucho going off-script. He accosts the exiting couple.

GROUCHO

Was that too close to home? Pardon, too close to no home? You're not the only one who lost theirs -- Sir, where are you going? Ma'am, don't leave, leave him!

He hops off the stage and pursues them up THE AISLE.

GROUCHO

He paid good money for this show --
For what? He's not getting anything
out of it tonight. You stay, stay,
I insist, you stay, and I'll go...
No home.

Groucho's gone. ON-STAGE, everyone's at a loss. The show must
go on.

POLICE OFFICER

(to Harpo)

Now, why don't you go home?

The officer shakes Harpo's hand, causing stolen cutlery to
fall from Harpo's sleeve.

Any time the officer SPEAKS, more cutlery falls out.

POLICE OFFICER

Go home for a few nights --

(crash)

Stay home. Don't you know your poor
old mother sits there-- sits there--

(CRASH)

-- night after night --

LAUGHTER reaches Harpo onstage. It gives him no pleasure.

Off of one last, THUNDEROUS CRASH OF CUTLERY,

SMASH TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM, PITTSBURGH THEATER - DAY

Groucho smears his make-up. Bloodshot, he looks monstrous.

GROUCHO

There was no one to walk out on.

Downtrodden, Harpo sits by the dressing room counter.

HARPO

You walked out on *us*. We're no one?

Zeppo and Chico enter.

GROUCHO

No one, no one, nice to know you.

CHICO

The house will be better tonight.

GROUCHO

Will it?!

(to Chico)

Look at me, I pinch pennies. I invest carefully, and now I'm poorer than you are. Everything ever given to you, money, women, Minnie --

ZEPPO

You're asking for it.

GROUCHO

You've thrown away. You may have frittered away every dime you've ever had, but at least you had fun! Wee, now I'm having --

ZEPPO

Fun?!

Zeppo PUSHES GROUCHO AGAINST THE WALL. Groucho's stunned. When Zeppo lets him go, he backpedals.

Fight or flee?

HARPO

Where are you going?

GROUCHO

To find a tall building.

HARPO

Grouch --

ZEPPO

Good riddance.

Groucho doubles back as if to fight. Instead, he sings "Hooray for Captain Spaulding," as if it's a funereal dirge instead of a showtune.

GROUCHO

I cannot stay, I came to say --

HARPO

We have a show --

GROUCHO

I must be going!

He leaves.

Harpo takes out and rereads his telegram.

ZEPPO

Why do I put up with him?

CHICO

Five hundred a week, that's why.

HARPO'S TELEGRAM READS: "SEND \$10,000 IN 24 HOURS OR ELSE FACE FINANCIAL RUIN AND..."

In need of a pick-me up, he turns on the RADIO.

INT. SOUND STUDIO - DAY

Woollcott's ORCHESTRA plays *The Charleston* full tilt. Up from his desk, Woollcott dances, as if he's back on a beach at the Sands Point Estate.

BACK IN THE DRESSING ROOM

Chico and Zeppo react to the tinny recording, unmoved by it.

Harpo leans closer to the music,...

... and the music fades, replaced by A COMMERCIAL.

THE STUDIO

Woollcott dances back to his desk, passing the announcer.

ANNOUNCER

This program is brought to you by our sponsor, Cream of Wheat. Cream of Wheat is so good to eat, you'll want to eat it every day of the week. Monday, Tuesday [ETCETERA]...

THE DRESSING ROOM

The COMMERCIAL fails to provide Harpo with any solace.

HARPO

(re: the telegram)
I don't know what to do.

ZEPPO

You could turn off that racket.

Harpo hears Woollcott and stops Zeppo from turning it off.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 For those who are just joining us,
 I'm speaking to my good friend or
 rather, I'm not speaking to you,
 Harpo.

INTERCUT WOOLLCOTT AND HARPO AS NECESSARY

WOOLLCOTT
 I wasn't speaking to you the night,
 more out of gregariousness than
 appetite, your mother ate two full
 dinners instead of the conventional
 one. After seven choruses of the
 following vaudeville ditty, she
 passed when paralysis seized her...
 I wish I had been speaking to you,
 then and now. But I'm not.

Woollcott sits solemnly before the mic. He nods, and the
 ORCHESTRA starts up a wordless version of "Peasie Weasie."

Harpo reacts to the melody.

INT. THEATRE HALLWAY - SAME

Hunched-over, Groucho sits on the floor. He hears the music
 and peers into

THE DRESSING ROOM.

The four Marx Brothers listen to the song that they sang the
 night their mother passed away.

Any apologies are expressed silently.

INT. STUDIO, CBS - SAME

Over the music, Woollcott reads from his notes.

WOOLLCOTT
 "Minnie Marx was a wise, tolerant,
 generous matriarch. In the passing
 of such a one, with her work done,
 and children and grandchildren to
 hug her memory, you have no more a
 sense of death than when the Hudson
 -- sunlit, steady, all-conquering --
 leaves you behind on the shore on
 its way to the fathomless sea."

THE DRESSING ROOM

Tears in his eyes, Harpo EXCUSES himself. He exits into --

THE HALLWAY,

-- past Groucho, who reaches out.

GROUCHO

The guy may be a little swish but --

Harpo brushes him off.

GROUCHO

Listen to me when you're walking
away from me.

(then)

Guy's a good friend.

A pleasant beat between Groucho and Harpo.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

As Woollcott listens to the melody, his earlier celebratory mood is replaced by a depressed facade. The program comes to an end.

ANNOUNCER

This program has been brought to
you by the Columbia Broadcasting
System. You've just heard...

WOOLLCOTT

Alexander Woollcott.

ANNOUNCER

... the town crier, and Mark Warner
and his orchestra. I'm Don Ball,
wishing you a wonderful evening.

Woollcott hangs his head. Downbeat.

INT. RECEPTION DESK, CBS RADIO STATION - EVENING

With his head down, Woollcott buttons his coat.

He heads past the RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

Good night, Mr. Woollcott.

He MUTTERS, 'Night.'

About to exit, he pauses. He is a lonely man, facing a winter night alone.

WOOLLCOTT
Babs, you seem frightfully bored.
Accompany me to the taxi stop?

RECEPTIONIST
Of course.

WOOLLCOTT
Good, because I insist.

She packs up. The telephone INTERRUPTS their departure. Woollcott, hopeful, stares at it.

The receptionist, too, listens to the RINGING telephone.

WOOLLCOTT
What are you waiting for? Tell off
whomever it is for delaying our
evening stroll.

She picks it up.

RECEPTIONIST (PHONE)
CBS Radio.

She listens...

RECEPTIONIST
It's --

WOOLLCOTT
I know who it is.

Woollcott is hesitant to take the phone.

INT. HALLWAY, PITTSBURGH THEATRE - EVENING

Harpo's on the other side of the line.

He hears shuffling. Then BREATHING.

HARPO (PHONE)
Aleck...?

INTERCUT HARPO AND WOOLLCOTT AS NECESSARY

Woollcott can't bring himself to speak.

HARPO (PHONE)

Aleck...?

Silence.

WOOLLCOTT (PHONE)

Catch today's program?

HARPO

The tail-end of it.

WOOLLCOTT

And?

HARPO

It was worse than your review of
"I'll Say She is."

WOOLLCOTT

That lousy?

HARPO

Sentimental.

WOOLLCOTT

How could I ever swear off talking
to you?

HARPO

We're talking now, ain't we?

WOOLLCOTT

I hate myself for it. Do you?

HARPO

No.

Fighting tears:

WOOLLCOTT

I do.

HARPO

Enough with the self-hate. Tell me--

WOOLLCOTT

If only. I'm a monster.

HARPO

You're not.

WOOLLCOTT

I am. Monstrous --

HARPO

There's not a bone in my body that hates you. Hear me, Aleck? All I have is lots of love for you, all right?

WOOLLCOTT

Is that it?

HARPO

What? Not enough?

WOOLLCOTT

I should expect a helluva lot more. In all your blathering, you haven't told me one story.
(laughing)

From down the hall, Harpo's brothers appear. Chico mouths, 'We're on.'

HARPO

It'll have to wait. We've got a show.

WOOLLCOTT

So soon? With you moving, we'll need to find a way to stay in touch.

HARPO

We will, but I really have to --

Zeppo SHAKES Harpo's shoulders. Groucho grabs for the phone.

GROUCHO

So long, Wookie.

HARPO (PHONE)

Lots of love, all right?

WOOLLCOTT

Sure, lots of l--

Harpo has hung up.

"Love."

Woollcott listens to the dead line.

He hangs up the telephone.

The receptionist takes Woollcott's arm in hers. As they exit, they pass a radio.

We hear STATIC and then Woollcott's voice as if he's ON-AIR:

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 We cannot stop time. From one
 moment to the next, time outlasts
 even the red curtain that
 designates the bookends of our
 life's play.

The receptionist and Woollcott disappear from sight.

EXT. NESHOBE ISLAND - MORNING

Waves wash ashore.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 In any moment, all we can control
 is our character, and whether she
 or he is the heroine or villain of
 our story.

Alone on the island, Woollcott looks up. A motor boat approaches shore, coming from around the bend.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)
 This has been your town crier,
 Alexander Woollcott, bidding you,
 'Good day.'

SUPER: "June, 1936."

Woollcott approaches the boat, at first, excited.

Then confused. His secretary, Joe, disembarks alone.

JOE HENNESSEY
 Got the mail.

WOOLLCOTT
 You know perfectly well what to do
 with it.

JOE HENNESSEY
 Usually, you're excited to see
 who's --

WOOLLCOTT
 Stuff it. Where the hell is he? I
 know this wasn't your idea.

Woollcott looks around.

From the woods, Harpo sneaks up on Woollcott. In costume, he jumps on Woollcott's back or gives him a leg instead of hand.

Woollcott pulls him into a bear hug.

WOOLLCOTT

It's been too long. How have you been?

Harpo mimes.

WOOLLCOTT

What am I guessing at?

From the woods, Susan Fleming steps up to them. Harpo holds up her hand. He whistles and points at the DIAMOND RING on her finger.

WOOLLCOTT

Phlegming.

Woollcott's good humor immediately fades.

INT. KITCHEN, NESHOBIE CLUBHOUSE - DAY

Woollcott adds spoonfuls of sugar to his coffee, as if a surfeit of sweetener could offset his mood. He addresses Harpo,...

WOOLLCOTT

Paradise never lives up to the brochure.

... as if Susan weren't even there.

WOOLLCOTT

It's only natural you're mourning those better, bachelor days. It's been ... ?

SUSAN

A year in September.

WOOLLCOTT

Where has my chipper Harpo gone?

HARPO

You're picking up on our recent rough patch.

Susan shoots Harpo a look.

WOOLLCOTT

Even more than a domestic drama, I enjoy, when blood boiling over, the kitchen dispute devolves and becomes a delicious murder case. When you need a detective to step in, ring for Detective Woollcott.

SUSAN

We're looking to adopt.

Joe pours them each coffee and joins them at the table.

HARPO

The agency's giving us trouble.

WOOLLCOTT

Why?

HARPO

They know I'm a Jew sonuvabitch, and she's the opposite.

SUSAN FLEMING

Protestant.

HARPO

They say we're unfit parents.

WOOLLCOTT

It's perfectly clear you're unfit. I'm asking why adoption at all.

Woollcott looks from Harpo to Susan.

He notes her shame. She moves her hands away from her belly.

HARPO

We were hoping you'd pull some strings with the agency.

WOOLLCOTT

Who am I to speak?

HARPO

The kid's godfather, if you accept the dishonor.

Susan nods, confirming she, too, would like him to be the kid's godfather. Woollcott processes this development, jowls sinking, brow furrowing in an effort to control his emotion.

WOOLLCOTT

Susan. A word.

He gestures for Susan to follow him.

He PUSHES through the screen door, exiting onto --

EXT. THE PORCH - DAY

Susan feels and looks small, opposite Woollcott.

WOOLLCOTT

We will never speak of this again.

I will say it once and once only.

(hard beat)

I approve of you for Harpo.

Relieved, she embraces him. Surprised, he holds onto her as if she were his daughter and his shoulder were hers to cry on.

WOOLLCOTT

I... I always wanted to be a
mother. In this life, I'll have to
be a Godfather.

She wipes her eyes.

WOOLLCOTT

I assume I get naming rights.

SUSAN

(laughing)

You certainly do not.

She returns to the kitchen. Woollcott watches Harpo and Susan through the screen door.

SUPERIMPOSE OUR FIRST TITLE CARD:

*"In 1937, Harpo and Susan adopted their first of four
children. They named him William Woollcott Marx."*

Harpo and Susan exit from view. Woollcott reenters

THE KITCHEN

His exuberance dissipates. He's feeling the imminency of a life destined to be spent alone. He leafs through the mail.

In the next room, Harpo can be heard playing the harp.

♪ *Only You* ♪

Woollcott perks up at the melody.

SUPERIMPOSE:

"Harpo and Woollcott remained friends for the rest of their lives."

"On the anniversary of the Marx Brothers's Broadway debut, they wrote letters to each other from across the country."

Woollcott and then Harpo's voices fade in:

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)

Dear Harpo,...

HARPO (V.O.)

Dear Wookiee...

Woollcott carries the mail into --

THE LIVING ROOM

In the doorway, he watches Harpo play "Only You" on a small, travel-sized harp.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)

... it was ten years ago this evening that, thanks to an accidental detour to the Casino, I first laid eyes upon you.

In the background, Susan and Joe listen to the music.

HARPO (V.O.)

For eighteen years, as of today, you have toiled and labored for my happiness.

Woollcott sits in an armchair. He watches Harpo play.

HARPO (V.O.)

Eighteen years ago today, Billy's godfather met Billy's father.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)

No other accident I have ever been involved in has contributed so much to my enjoyment of this world.

ON WOOLLCOTT: listening to the harp melody.

SUPERIMPOSE:

"As the radio's Town Crier, Woollcott warmed the hearths and hearts of millions during the Great Depression."

ON HARPO: playing the strings.

"Harpo and his brothers made eight of their thirteen films in the 1930s. When the nation needed a laugh, they delivered."

ON WOOLLCOTT: nearing tears.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)

I love you dearly, and think the chances are I will continue to do so until one of us dies. After you.

HARPO (V.O.)

That's not why I'm writing, however -- I'm anxious to know about your operation. Are you going to have it, and if so, when?

"Alexander Woollcott died of a heart attack during a live broadcast on January 23rd, 1943."

Harpo plays one last series of golden notes.

"Harpo Marx died, also of a heart attack, on September 28th, 1964."

He palms the strings, ending their song.

HARPO (V.O.)

Love from all, Harpo.

WOOLLCOTT (V.O.)

To Harpo. From Aleck.

TO BLACK: