

Woody Allen:



GOD A PLAY



SCENE: Athens. Approximately 500 B.C. Two distraught Greeks in the center of enormous empty amphitheatre. Sunset. One is the ACTOR; the other, the WRITER. They are both thinking and distracted. They should be played by two good, broad burlesque clowns.

ACTOR: Nothing . . . just nothing.

WRITER: What?

ACTOR: Meaningless. It's empty.

WRITER: The ending.

ACTOR: Of course. What are we discussing? We're discussing the ending.

WRITER: We're always discussing the ending.

ACTOR: Because it's hopeless.

WRITER: I admit it's unsatisfying.

ACTOR: Unsatisfying? It's not even believable. The trick is to start at the ending when you write a play. Get a good strong ending and then write backwards.

WRITER: I've tried that. I got a play with no beginning.

ACTOR: That's absurd.

WRITER: Absurd? What's absurd?

ACTOR: Every play must have a beginning, middle, and end.

WRITER: Why?

ACTOR (*Confidently*): Because everything in nature has a beginning, middle, and end.

WRITER: What about a circle?

ACTOR (*Thinks*): Okay . . . A circle has no beginning, middle, or end - but they're not much fun either.

WRITER: Diabetes, think of an ending. We open in three days.

ACTOR: Not me. I'm not opening in this turkey. I have a reputation as an actor, a following . . . My public expects to see me in a suitable vehicle.

WRITER: May I remind you, you're a starving, out-of-work actor whom I've

generously consented to let appear in my play in an effort to assist your comeback.

ACTOR: Starving, yes . . . Out of work, perhaps . . . Hoping for a comeback, maybe - but a drunkard?

WRITER: I never said you were a drunkard.

ACTOR: Yes, but I'm also a drunkard.

WRITER (*in a fit of sudden inspiration*): What if your character ripped a dagger from his robes and in a fit of frenzied frustration, tore away at his own eyes until he blinded himself?

ACTOR: Yeah, it's a great idea. Have you eaten anything today?

WRITER: What's wrong with it?

ACTOR: It's depressing. The audience will take one look at it and -

WRITER: I know - make that funny sound with their lips.

ACTOR: It's called hissing.

WRITER: Just once I want to win the competition! Once before my life is over, I want my play to take first price. And it's not the free case of ouzo I care about, it's the honor.

ACTOR (*Suddenly inspired*): What if the king suddenly changed his mind? There's a positive idea.

WRITER: He'd never do it.

ACTOR (*Selling him on it*): If the queen convinced him?

WRITER: She wouldn't. She's a bitch.

ACTOR: But if the Trojan Army surrendered -

WRITER: They'd fight to the death.

ACTOR: Not if Agamemnon reneged on his promise?

WRITER: It's not in his nature.

ACTOR: But I could suddenly take up arms and make a stand.

WRITER: It's against your character. You're a coward - an insignificant wretched slave with the intelligence of a worm. Why do you think I cast you?

ACTOR: I've just given you six possible endings!

WRITER: Each more clumsy than the last.

ACTOR: It's the play that's clumsy.

WRITER: Human beings don't behave that way. It's not in their nature.

ACTOR: What does their nature mean? We're stuck with a hopeless ending.

WRITER: As long as man is a rational animal, as a playwright, I cannot have a character do anything on stage he wouldn't do in real life.

ACTOR: May I remind you that we don't exist in real life.

WRITER: What do you mean?

ACTOR: You are aware that we're characters in a play right now in some Broadway theater? Don't get mad at me, I didn't write it.

WRITER: We're characters in a play and soon we're going to see my play . . . which is a play within a play. And they're watching us.

ACTOR: Yes. It's highly metaphysical, isn't it?

WRITER: Not only is it metaphysical, it's stupid!

ACTOR: Would you rather be one of them?

WRITER (*Looking at the audience*): Definitely not. Look at them.

ACTOR: Then let's get on with it!

WRITER (*Mutters*): They paid to get in.

ACTOR: Hepatitis, I'm talking to you!

WRITER: I know, the problem is the ending.

ACTOR: It's always the ending.

WRITER (*Suddenly to the audience*): Do you folks have any suggestions?

ACTOR: Stop talking to the audience! I'm sorry I mentioned them.

WRITER: It's bizarre, isn't it? We're two ancient Greeks in Athens and we're about to see a play I wrote and you're acting in, and they're from Queens or some terrible place like that and they're watching us in someone else's play. What if they're characters in another play? And someone's watching them? Or what if nothing exists and we're all in somebody's dream? Or, what's worse, what if only that fat guy in the third row exists?

ACTOR: That's my point. What if the universe is not rational and people are not set things? Then we could change the ending and it wouldn't have to conform to any fixed notions. You follow me?

WRITER: Of course not. (*To the audience*) You follow him? He's an actor. Eats at Sardi's.

ACTOR: Play characters would have no determined traits and could choose their own characters. I wouldn't have to be the slave just because you wrote it that way. I could choose to become a hero.

WRITER: Then there's no play.

ACTOR: No play? Good, I'll be at Sardi's.

WRITER: Diabetes, what you're suggesting is chaos!

ACTOR: Is freedom chaos?

WRITER: Is freedom chaos? Hmm . . . That's a toughie. (*To the audience*) Is freedom chaos? Did anybody out there major in philosophy?

(*A GIRL from the audience answers*)

GIRL: I did.

WRITER: Who's that?

GIRL: Actually I majored in gym, with a philosophy minor.

WRITER: Can you come up here?

ACTOR: What the hell are you doing?

GIRL: Does it matter if it was Brooklyn College?

WRITER: Brooklyn College? No, we'll take anything.

(She's made her way up)

ACTOR: I am really pissed off!

WRITER: What's eating you?

ACTOR: We're in the middle of a play. Who is she?

WRITER: In five minutes the Athenian Drama Festival begins, and I have no ending for my play!

ACTOR: So?

WRITER: Serious philosophical questions have been raised. Do we exist? Do they exist? *(Meaning the audience)* What is the true nature of human character?

GIRL: Hi. I'm Doris Levine.

WRITER: I'm Hepatitis and this is Diabetes. We're ancient Greeks.

DORIS: I'm from Great Neck.

ACTOR: Get her off this stage!

WRITER *(Really looking her up and down as she's lovely):* She's very sexy.

ACTOR: What has that got to do with it?

DORIS: The basic philosophical question is: If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it - how do we know it makes a noise?

(Everyone looks around, puzzled over this)

ACTOR: Why do we care? We're on Forty-fifth Street.

WRITER: Will you go to bed with me?

ACTOR: Leave her alone!

DORIS *(To ACTOR)* Mind your own business.

WRITER *(Calling offstage):* Can we lower the curtain here? Just for five minutes . . . *(To the audience)* Sit there. It'll be a quickie.

ACTOR: This is outrageous! It's absurd! *(To DORIS)* Do you have a friend?

DORIS: Sure. (*Calling to the audience*) Diane, you want to come up here . . . I got something going with a couple of Greeks. (*No response*) She's shy.

ACTOR: Well, we have a play to do. I'm going to report this to the author.

WRITER: I *am* the author!

ACTOR: I mean the original author.

WRITER (*Sotto voce to the ACTOR*): Diabetes, I think I can score with her.

ACTOR: What do you mean, score? You mean intercourse - with all these people watching?

WRITER: I'll lower the curtain. Some of them even do it. Not many, probably.

ACTOR: You idiot, you're fictional, she's Jewish - you know what the children will be like?

WRITER: Come on, maybe we can get her friend up here. (*The ACTOR goes to stage left to use the telephone*) Diane? This is a chance for a date with _____. (*use a real actor's name*) He's a big actor . . . lots of TV commercials . . .

ACTOR (*Into the phone*): Get me an outside line.

DORIS: I don't want to cause any trouble.

WRITER: It's no trouble. It's just that we've seemed to have lost touch with reality here.

DORIS: Who knows what reality really is?

WRITER: You're so right, Doris.

DORIS (*Philosophically*): So often people think they grasp reality when what they're really responding to is "fakeositude".

WRITER: I have an urge toward you that I'm sure is real.

DORIS: Is sex real?

WRITER: Even if it's not, it's still one of the best fake activities a person can do. (*He grabs her, she pulls back*)

DORIS: Don't. Not here.

WRITER: Why not?

DORIS: I don't know. That's my line.

WRITER: Have you ever made it with a fictional character before?

DORIS: The closest I came was an Italian.

ACTOR (*He's on the phone. We hear the party on other end through a filter*): Hello?

PHONE (*Maid's voice*): Hello, Mr. Allen's residence.

ACTOR: Hello, may I speak to Mr. Allen?

MAID'S VOICE: Who's calling, please?

ACTOR: One of the characters in his play.

MAID: One second. Mr. Allen, there's a fictional character on the phone.

ACTOR (*To the others*): Now we'll see what happens with you lovebirds.

WOODY'S VOICE: Hello.

ACTOR: Mr. Allen?

WOODY: Yes?

ACTOR: This is Diabetes.

WOODY: Who?

ACTOR: Diabetes. I'm a character you created.

WOODY: Oh, yes . . . I remember, you're a badly drawn character . . . very one-dimensional.

ACTOR: Thanks.

WOODY: Hey - isn't the play on now?

ACTOR: That's what I'm calling about. We got a strange girl up on the stage and she won't get off and Hepatitis is suddenly hot for her.

WOODY: What does she look like?

ACTOR: She's pretty, but she doesn't belong.

WOODY: Blonde?

ACTOR: Brunette . . . long hair.

WOODY: Nice legs?

ACTOR: Yes.

WOODY: Good breasts?

ACTOR: Very nice.

WOODY: Keep her there, I'll be right over.

ACTOR: She's a philosophy student.. But she's got no real answers . . . typical product of the Brooklyn College cafeteria.

WOODY: That's funny, I used that line in *Play it Again, Sam* to describe a girl.

ACTOR: I hope it got a better laugh there.

WOODY: Put her on.

ACTOR: On the phone?

WOODY: Sure.

ACTOR (*To DORIS*): It's for you.

DORIS (*Whispers*): I've seen him in the movies. Get rid of him.

ACTOR: He wrote the play.

DORIS: It's pretentious.

ACTOR (*Into the phone*): She won't speak to you. She says your play is pretentious.

WOODY: Oh, Jesus. Okay, call me back and let me know how the play ends.

ACTOR: Right. (*He hangs up, then does a double take, realizing what the author said*)

DORIS: Can I have a part in your play?

ACTOR: I don't understand. Are you an actress or a girl playing an actress?

DORIS: I always wanted to be an actress. Mother hoped I'd become a nurse. Dad felt I should marry into society.

ACTOR: So what do you do for a living?

DORIS: I work for a company that makes deceptively shallow serving dishes for Chinese restaurants.

(*A Greek enters from the wings*)

TRICHINOSIS : Diabetes, Hepatitis. It's me, Trichinosis. (*Ad-lib greetings*) I have just come from a discussion with Socrates at the Acropolis and he proved that I didn't exist, so I'm upset. Still, word has it you need an ending for your play. I think I have just the thing.

WRITER: Really?

TRICHINOSIS: Who's she?

DORIS : Doris Levine.

TRICHINOSIS: Not from Great Neck?

DORIS: Yes.

TRICHINOSIS: You know the Rappaports?

DORIS : Myron Rappaport?

TRICHINOSIS (*Nodding*): We both worked for the Liberal party.

DORIS: What a coincidence.

TRICHINOSIS: You had an affair with Mayor Lindsay.

DORIS: I wanted to - he wouldn't.

WRITER: What's the ending?

TRICHINOSIS: You're much prettier than I imagined.

DORIS: Really?

TRICHINOSIS: I'd like to sleep with you right now.

DORIS: Tonight's my night. (*TRICHINOSIS takes her wrist passionately*) Please. I'm a virgin. Is that my line?

(*The PROMPTER with book peeks out from the wings; is wearing a sweater*)

PROMPTER: "Please. I'm a virgin." Yes. (*Exits*)

WRITER: What's the goddamn ending?

TRICHINOSIS: Huh? Oh - (*Calls off*) Fellas! (*Some Greeks wheel out an elaborate machine*)

WRITER: What the hell is that?

TRICHINOSIS: The ending for your play.

ACTOR: I don't understand.

TRICHINOSIS: This machine, which I've spent six months designing in my brother-in-law's shop, holds the answer.

WRITER: How?

TRICHINOSIS: In the final scene - when all looks black, and Diabetes the humble slave is in a position most hopeless -

ACTOR: Yes?

TRICHINOSIS: Zeus, Father of the Gods, descends dramatically from on high and brandishing his thunderbolts, brings salvation to a grateful but impotent group of mortals.

DORIS: *Deus ex machina.*

TRICHINOSIS: Hey - That's a great name for this thing!

DORIS: My father works for Westinghouse.

WRITER: I still don't get it.

TRICHINOSIS: Wait'll you see this thing in action. It flies Zeus in. I'm going to make a fortune with this invention. Sophocles put a deposit on one. Euripides wants two.

WRITER: But that changes the meaning of the play.

TRICHINOSIS: Don't speak till you see a demonstration. Bursitis, get into the flying harness.

BURSITIS: Me?

TRICHINOSIS: Do what I say. You won't believe his.

BURSITIS: I'm afraid of that thing.

TRICHINOSIS: He's kidding . . . Go ahead, you idiot, we're on the verge of a sale. He'll do it. Ha, ha . . .

BURSITIS: I don't like heights.

TRICHINOSIS: Get into it! Hurry up. Let's go! Get into your Zeus suit! A

demonstration. (*Exiting as BURSITIS protests*)

BURSITIS: I want to call my agent.

WRITER: But you're saying God comes in at the end and saves everything.

ACTOR: I love it! It gives the people their money's worth.

DORIS: He's right. It's like those Hollywood Bible movies.

WRITER (*Taking center stage a little too dramatically*): But if God saves everything, man is not responsible for his actions.

ACTOR: You wonder why you're not invited to more parties . . .

DORIS: But without God, the universe is meaningless. Life is meaningless. We're meaningless. (*Deadly pause*) I have a sudden and overpowering urge to get laid.

WRITER: Now I'm not in the mood.

DORIS: Really? Would anyone in the audience care to make it with me?

ACTOR: Stop that! (*To the audience*) She's not serious, folks.

WRITER: I'm depressed.

ACTOR: What's bothering you?

WRITER: I don't know if I believe in God.

DORIS (*To the audience*): I am serious.

ACTOR: If there's no God, who created the universe?

WRITER: I'm not sure yet.

ACTOR: Who do you mean, you're not sure yet!? When are you going to know?

DORIS: Anybody out there want to sleep with me?

MAN (*Rising in the audience*): I'll sleep with that girl if nobody else will.

DORIS: Will you, sir?

MAN: What's wrong with everybody? A beautiful girl like that? Aren't there any red-blooded men in the audience? You're all a bunch of New York left-wing Jewish intellectual commie pinkos -

(*LORENZO MILLER comes out from wings. He is dressed in contemporary clothes*)

LORENZO: Sit down, will you sit down?

MAN: Okay, okay.

WRITER: Who are you?

LORENZO: Lorenzo Miller. I created this audience. I'm a writer.

WRITER: What do you mean?

LORENZO: I wrote: a large group of people from Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, and

Long Island come to the Golden Theater and watch a play. There they are.

DORIS (*Pointing to the audience*): You mean they're fictional too? (*LORENZO nods*) They're not free to do as they please?

LORENZO: They think they are, but they always do what's expected of them.

WOMAN (*Suddenly a WOMAN rises in audience, quite angrily*): I'm not fictional!

LORENZO: I'm sorry, madam, but you are.

WOMAN: But I have a son at the Harvard Business School.

LORENZO: I created your son; he's fictional. Not only is he fictional, he's homosexual.

MAN: I'll show you how fictional I am. I'm leaving this theater and getting my money back. This is a stupid play. In fact, it's no play. I go to the theater, I want to see something with a story - with a beginning, middle, and end - instead of this bullshit. Good night. (*Exits up the aisle in a huff*)

LORENZO (*To the audience*): Isn't he a great character. I wrote him very angry. Later he feels guilty and commits suicide. (*Sound: gunshot*) Later!

MAN (*Reenters with a smoking pistol*): I'm sorry, did I do it too soon?

LORENZO: Get out of here!

MAN: I'll be at Sardi's. (*Exits*)

LORENZO (*In the audience, dealing with various people of the actual audience*): What's your name sir? Uh-huh. (*Ad-lib section, depending on what audience says*) Where are you from? Isn't he cute? Great character. Must remind them to dress him differently. Later this woman leaves her husband for this guy. Hard to believe, I know. Oh - look at this guy. Later he rapes that lady.

WRITER: It's terrible being fictional. We're are so limited.

LORENZO: Only by the limits of the playwright. Unfortunately you happen to have been written by Woody Allen. Think if you were written by Shakespeare.

WRITER: I don't accept it. I'm a free man and I don't need God flying in to save my play. I'm a good writer.

DORIS: You want to win the Athenian Drama Festival, don't you?

WRITER (*Suddenly dramatic*): Yes. I want to be immortal. I don't want to just die and be forgotten. I want my works to live on long after my physical body has passed away. I want future generations to know I existed! Please don't let me be a meaningless dot, drifting through eternity. I thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to accept this Tony Award and thank David Merrick . . .

DORIS: I don't care what anybody says, I'm real.

LORENZO: Not really.

DORIS: I think, therefore I am. Or better yet. I feel - I have an orgasm.

LORENZO: You do?

DORIS: All the time.

LORENZO: Really?

DORIS: Very frequently.

LORENZO: Yes?

DORIS: Most of the time I do, yes.

LORENZO: Yes?

DORIS: At least half the time.

LORENZO: No.

DORIS: I do! With certain men . . .

LORENZO: Hard to believe.

DORIS: Not necessarily through intercourse. Usually it's oral.

LORENZO: Uh-huh.

DORIS: Of course I fake it too. I don't want to insult anybody.

LORENZO: Have you ever had an orgasm?

DORIS: Not really. No.

LORENZO: Because none of us are real.

WRITER: But if we 're not real, we can't die.

LORENZO: No. Not unless the playwright decides to kill us.

WRITER: Why would he do something like that?

(From the wings, BLANCHE DuBOIS enters)

BLANCHE: Because, sugar, it satisfies something called their - aesthetic sensibility.

WRITER (All turn to look at her): Who are you?

BLANCHE: Blanche. Blanche DuBois. It means "white woods." Don't get up, please - I was just passing through.

DORIS: What are you doing here?

BLANCHE: Seeking refuge. Yes - in this old theater . . . I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. Could I get a coke with a little bourbon in it?

ACTOR (Appears. We didn't realize he'd slipped away): Is a Seven-Up okay?

WRITER: Where the hell were you?

ACTOR: I went to the bathroom.

WRITER: In the middle of the play?

ACTOR: What play? (To BLANCHE) Will you explain to him we're all limited.

BLANCHE: I'm afraid it's all too true. Too true and too ghastly. That's why I ran out

of my play. Escaped. Oh, not that Mr. Tennessee Williams is not a very great writer, but honey - he dropped me in the center of a nightmare. The last thing I remember, I was being taken out by two strangers, one who held a strait jacket. Once outside the Kowalski residence, I broke free and ran. I've got to get into another play, a play where God exists . . . somewhere where I can rest at last. That's why you must put me in your play and allow Zeus, young and handsome Zeus to triumph with his thunderbolt.

WRITER: You went to the bathroom?

TRICHINOSIS (*Enters*): Ready for the demonstration.

BLANCHE: A demonstration. How wonderful.

TRICHINOSIS (*Calling offstage*): Ready out there? Okay. It's the end of the play. Everything looks hopeless for the slave. All other means desert him. He prays. Go ahead.

ACTOR: Oh, Zeus. Great god. We are confused and helpless mortals. Please be merciful and change our lives. (*Nothing happens*) Er . . . great Zeus . . .

TRICHINOSIS: Let's go, fellas! For Christ's sake.

ACTOR: Oh, great God.

(*Suddenly there is thunder and fabulous lightning. The effect is wonderful: ZEUS descends, hurling thunderbolts majestically*)

BURSITIS (*As ZEUS*): I am Zeus, God of Gods! Worker of miracles! Creator of the Universe! I bring salvation to all!

DORIS: Wait'll Westinghouse sees this!

TRICHINOSIS: Well, Hepatitis, what do you think?

WRITER: I love it! It's better than I expected. It's dramatic, it's flamboyant. I'm going to win the festival! I'm a winner. It's so religious. Look, I got chills! Doris! (*He grabs her*)

DORIS: Not now. (*There is a general exit, a light change . . .*)

WRITER: I must do some immediate rewrites.

TRICHINOSIS: I'll rent you my God machine for twenty-six fifty an hour.

WRITER (*to LORENZO*): Can you introduce my play?

LORENZO: Sure, go ahead. (*THEY all exit. LORENZO stays behind and faces audience. As he speaks, a Greek CHORUS enters and sits in the background of the amphitheater. White-robed, naturally*) Good evening and welcome to the Athenian Drama Festival. (*Sound: cheering*) We got a great show for you tonight. A new play by Hepatitis of Rhodes, entitled, "The Slave." (*Sound: cheers*) Starring Diabetes as the slave, with Bursitis as Zeus, Blanche DuBois, and Doris Levine from Great Neck. (*Cheers*) The show is brought to you by Gregory Londos' Lamb Restaurant, just opposite the Parthenon. Don't be a Medusa with snakes in *your* hair when you're looking for a place to dine out. Try Gregory Londos' Lamb Restaurant. Remember, Homer liked it - and he was blind.

(*He exits. DIABETES plays the slave named PHIDIPIDES and right now, he drifts on with another GREEK SLAVE as the CHORUS takes over*)

CHORUS: Gather round, ye Greeks, and heed the story of Phidipides - one so wise, so

passionate, so steeped in the glories of Greece.

DIABETES: My point is, what are we going to do with such a big horse?

FRIEND: But they want to give it to us for nothing.

DIABETES: So what? Who needs it? It's a big wooden horse . . . What the hell are we going to do with it? It's not even a pretty horse. Mark my words, Cratinus - as a Greek statesman, I would never trust the Trojans. You notice they never take a day off?

FRIEND: Did you hear about Cyclops? He got a middle eye infection.

VOICE OFF: Phidipides! Where is that slave?

DIABETES: Coming, Master!

MASTER (*Enters*): Phidipides - there you are. There's work to be done. The grapes need picking, my chariot must be repaired. we need water from the well - and you're out shmoozing.

DIABETES: I wasn't shmoozing, Master, I was discussing politics.

MASTER: A slave discussing politics! Ha, ha!

CHORUS: Ha, ha . . . That's rich.

DIABETES: I'm sorry, Master.

MASTER: You and the new Hebrew slave clean the house. I'm expecting guests. Then get on with all the other tasks.

DIABETES: The new Hebrew?

MASTER: Doris Levine.

DORIS: You called?

MASTER: Clean up. Let's go. Hurry on.

CHORUS: Poor Phidipides. A slave. And like all slaves, he longed for one thing.

DIABETES: To be taller.

CHORUS: To be free.

DIABETES: I don't want to be free.

CHORUS: No?

DIABETES: I like it this way. I know what's expected of me. I'm taken care of. I don't have to make any choices. I was born a slave and I'll die a slave. I have no anxiety.

CHORUS: Boo . . . boo . . .

DIABETES: Ah, what do you know, chorus boys. (*He kisses DORIS, she pulls away*)

DORIS: Don't.

DIABETES: Why not? Doris, you know my heart is heavy with love - or as you Hebrews are fond of saying, I have a thing for you.

DORIS: It can't work.

DIABETES: Why not?

DORIS: Because you like being a slave and I hate it. I want my freedom. I want to travel and write books, live in Paris, maybe start a woman's magazine.

DIABETES: What's the big deal about freedom? It's dangerous. To know one's place is safe. Don't you see, Doris, governments change hands every week, political leaders murder one another, cities are sacked, people are tortured. If there's a war, who do you think gets killed? The free people. But we're safe because no matter who's in power, they all need someone to do the heavy cleaning.

(He grabs her)

DORIS: Don't. While I am still a slave I can never enjoy sex.

DIABETES: Would you be willing to fake it?

DORIS: Forget it.

CHORUS: And then one day the fates lent a hand.

(The FATES enter, a couple dressed like American tourists, wearing jazzy Hawaiian shirts; BOB has a camera around his neck)

BOB: Hi, we're the Fates, Bob and Wendy Fate. We need someone to take an urgent message to the king.

DIABETES: The king?

BOB: You would be doing mankind a great service.

DIABETES: I would?

WENDY: Yes, but it's a dangerous mission, and even though you are a slave, you may say no.

DIABETES: No.

BOB: But it will give you a chance to see the palace in all its glory.

WENDY: And the reward is your freedom.

DIABETES: My freedom? Yes, well, I'd love to help you, but I have a roast in the stove.

DORIS: Let me do it.

BOB: It's too dangerous for a woman.

DIABETES: She's a very fast runner.

DORIS: Phidipides, how can you refuse?

DIABETES: When you're a coward, certain things come easy.

WENDY: We beg of you - please -

BOB: The fate of mankind hangs in the balance.

WENDY: We'll raise the reward. Freedom for you and any person of your choice.

BOB: Plus a sixteen-piece starter set of silverware.

DORIS: Phidipides, here's our chance.

CHORUS: Go ahead, you jerk.

DIABETES: A dangerous mission followed by personal freedom? I'm getting nauseous.

WENDY (*Hands him an envelope*): Take this message to the king.

DIABETES: Why can't you take it?

BOB: We're leaving for New York in a few hours.

DORIS: Phidipides, you say you love me -

DIABETES: I do.

CHORUS: Let's go, Phidipides, the play is bogging down.

DIABETES: Decisions, decisions . . . (*Telephone rings and he answers it*) Hello?

WOODY'S VOICE: Will you take the goddamn message to the king. We'd all like to get the hell out of here.

DIABETES (*Hangs up*) I'll do it. But only because Woody asked me to.

CHORUS (*Sings*) Poor Professor Higgins -

DIABETES: That's the wrong show, you idiots!

DORIS: Good luck, Phidipides.

WENDY: You're really going to need it.

DIABETES: What do you mean?

WENDY: Bob here is really a practical joker.

DORIS: After we're free we can go to bed, and maybe for once I'll enjoy it.

HEPATITIS (*Pops on stage*): Sometimes a little grass before you make it -

ACTOR: You're the writer!

HEPATITIS: I couldn't resist!

(*Exit*)

DORIS: Go!

DIABETES: I'm going!

CHORUS: And so Phidipides set out on his journey bearing an important message for King Oedipus.

DIABETES: King Oedipus?

CHORUS: Yes.

DIABETES: I hear he lives with his mother.

(Effects: Wind and lightning as SLAVE trudges on)

CHORUS: Over deep mountains, through high valleys.

DIABETES: High mountains and deep valleys. Where did we get this chorus?

CHORUS: At all times at the mercy of the Furies.

DIABETES: The Furies are having dinner with the Fates. They went to Chinatown. The Hong Fat Noodle Company.

HEPATITIS *(Enters)*: Sam Wo's is better.

DIABETES: There's always a line at Sam Wo's.

CHORUS: Not if you ask for Lee. He'll seat you, but you have to tip him.

(HEPATITIS exits)

DIABETES *(Proudly)*: Yesterday I was a lousy slave, never having ventured beyond my master's property. Today I carry a message to the king, the king himself. I see the world. Soon I'll be a free man. Suddenly human possibilities are opening up to me. And because of it - I have an uncontrollable urge to throw up. Oh, well . . .

(Wind)

CHORUS: Days turn into weeks, weeks into months. Still Phidipides struggles on.

DIABETES: Can you turn off the goddamn wind machine?

CHORUS: Poor Phidipides, mortal man.

DIABETES: I'm tired, I'm weary, I'm sick. I can't go on. My hand is shaking . . . *(The CHORUS begins humming a slow version of "Dixie")* All around me men dying, war and misery, brother against brother; the South, rich in tradition; the North, mostly industrial. President Lincoln, sending the Union Army to destroy the plantation. The Old Homestead. Cotton - comin' down the river . . . *(HEPATITIS enters and stares at him)* Lawsy, lawsy, Miss Eva - Ah can't cross the ice. It's General Beauregard and Robert E. Lee . . . Ah - *(notices HEPATITIS staring at him)* I - I . . . I got carried away.

(HEPATITIS grabs him around the neck and pulls him to the side)

HEPATITIS: C'mere! What the hell are you doing!?

DIABETES: Where's the palace? I'm walking around for days! What kind of play is this!? Where the hell is the goddamn palace? In Bensonhurst?

HEPATITIS: You're at the palace if you'd stop ruining my play! Guard! Come on now, shape up.

(A powerful GUARD enters)

GUARD: Who are you?

DIABETES: Phidipides.

GUARD: What brings you to the palace?

DIABETES: The palace? I'm here?

GUARD: Yes. This is the royal palace. The most beautiful structure in all of Greece, marble, majestic, and completely rent-controlled.

DIABETES: I bear a message for the king.

GUARD: Oh, yes. He is expecting you.

DIABETES: My throat is parched and I have not eaten in days.

GUARD: I will summon the king.

DIABETES: What about a roast-beef sandwich?

GUARD: I will get the king and a roast-beef sandwich. How do you want that?

DIABETES: Medium.

GUARD (*Takes out a pad and writes*) One medium. You get a vegetable with that.

DIABETES: What do you have?

GUARD: Let's see, today . . . carrots or baked potato.

DIABETES: I'll have the baked potato.

GUARD: Coffee?

DIABETES: Please. And a toasted bow tie - if you have one - and the king.

GUARD: Right. (*As he exits*) Let me have an RB to go with a regular coffee.

(*The FATES cross taking pictures*)

BOB: How do you like the palace?

DIABETES: I love it.

BOB (*Handing his wife the camera*): Take one of us together.

(*As she does*)

DIABETES: I thought you two were going back to New York.

WENDY: You know how fate is.

BOB: Unreliable. Take it easy.

DIABETES (*Leans in to smell the flower in BOB's lapel*): That's a pretty flower.

(*Gets an eyeful of water as FATES laugh*)

BOB: I'm sorry, I couldn't resist.

(*Offers his hand. DIABETES shakes it. Gets a shock from a joy buzzer*)

DIABETES: Ahhhh!

(*FATES exit laughing*)

WENDY: He loves to play tricks on people.

DIABETES (*To CHORUS*): You knew he was out to get me.

CHORUS: He's a scream.

DIABETES: Why didn't you warn me?

CHORUS: We don't like to get involved.

DIABETES: You don't like to get involved? You know, a woman was stabbed to death on the BMT while sixteen people looked on and didn't help.

CHORUS: We read it in the *Daily News*, and it was the IRT.

DIABETES: If one person had ho guts to help her, maybe she'd be here today.

WOMAN (*Enters with knife in her chest*): I am here.

DIABETES: I had to open my mouth.

WOMAN: A woman works her whole life on DeKalb Ave. I'm reading the Post, six hooligans - dope addicts - grab me and throw me down.

CHORUS: There weren't six, there were three.

WOMAN: Three, six - they had a knife, they wanted my money.

DIABETES: You should have given it to them.

WOMAN: I did. They still stabbed me.

CHORUS: That's New York. You give 'em the money and they still stab you.

DIABETES: New York? It's everywhere. I was walking with Socrates in downtown Athens, and two youths from Sparta jump out from behind the Acropolis and want all our money.

WOMAN: What happened?

DIABETES: Socrates proved to them using simple logic that evil was merely ignorance of the truth.

WOMAN: And?

DIABETES: And they broke his nose.

WOMAN: I just hope your message for the king is good news.

DIABETES: I hope so, for his sake.

WOMAN: For your sake.

DIABETES: Right and - what do you mean, for his sake?

CHORUS (*Derisively*): Ha, ha, ha!

(The light becomes more ominous)

DIABETES: The light is changing . . . What is that? What happens if it's bad news?

WOMAN: In ancient times, when a messenger brought a message to the king, if the news was good, the messenger received a reward.

CHORUS: Free passes to the Loew's Eighty-sixth Street.

WOMAN: But if the news was bad . . .

DIABETES: Don't tell me.

WOMAN: The king would have the messenger put to death.

DIABETES: Are we in ancient times?

WOMAN: Can't you tell by what you're wearing?

DIABETES: I see what you mean. Hepatitis!

WOMAN: Sometimes the messenger would have his head cut off . . . if the king was in a forgiving mood.

DIABETES: A forgiving mood, he cuts your head off?

CHORUS: But if the news is really bad -

WOMAN: Then the messenger is roasted to death -

CHORUS: Over a slow fire.

DIABETES: It's been so long since I've been roasted over a slow fire, I can't remember if I like it or not.

CHORUS: Take our word for it - you won't like it.

DIABETES: Where's Doris Levine? If I get my hands on that Hebrew slave from Great Neck . . .

WOMAN: She can't help you, she's miles away.

DIABETES: Doris! Where the hell are you?

DORIS (*In the audience*): What do you want?

DIABETES: What are you doing there?

DORIS: I got bored with the play.

DIABETES: What do you mean, you got bored? Get up here! I'm up to my ass in trouble because of you!

DORIS (*Coming up*): I'm sorry, Phidipides, how did I know what happened in ancient history? I studied philosophy.

DIABETES: If the news is bad, I die.

DORIS: I heard her.

DIABETES: Is this your idea of freedom?

DORIS: Win a couple, lose a couple.

DIABETES: Win a couple, lose a couple? That's what they each you at Brooklyn

College?

DORIS: Hey, man, get off my back.

DIABETES: If the news is bad I'm finished. Wait a minute! The news! The message. I got it right here! (*Fumbles, takes a message from an envelope. Reads*) For Best Supporting Actor, the winner is _____. (*Use the name of the actor playing HEPATITIS*)

HEPATITIS (*pops on*): I want to accept this Tony Award and thank David Merrick -

ACTOR: Get off, I read the wrong message. (*Pulls out the real one*)

WOMAN: Hurry, the king's coming.

DIABETES: See if he has my sandwich.

DORIS: Hurry, Phidipides!

DIABETES (*Reads*): The message is one word.

DORIS: Yes?

DIABETES: How'd you know?

DORIS: Know what?

DIABETES: What the message is, it's "yes."

CHORUS: Is that good or bad?

DIABETES: Yes? Yes is affirmative? No? Isn't it? (*Testing it*) Yes!

DORIS: What if the question is, Does the queen have the clap?

DIABETES: I see your point.

CHORUS: His majesty, the king!

(*Fanfare, big entrance of KING*)

DIABETES: Sire, does the queen have the clap?

KING: Who ordered this roast beef?

DIABETES: I did, sire. Is that carrots? Because I asked for a baked potato.

KING: We're out of baked potatoes.

DIABETES: Then take it back. I'll go across the street.

CHORUS: The message. (*DIABETES keeps shhing them*) The message, he has the message.

KING: Humble slave, do you have a message for me?

DIABETES: Humble king, er, . . . yes, as a matter of fact . . .

KING: Good.

DIABETES: Can you tell me the question?

KING: First the message.

DIABETES: No, you first.

KING: No, you.

DIABETES: No, you.

KING: No, you.

CHORUS: Make Phidipides go first.

KING: Him?

CHORUS: Yes.

KING: How can I?

CHORUS: Shmuck, you're the king.

KING: Of course, I'm the king. What is the message? (*The GUARD draws a sword*)

DIABETES: The message is . . . ye-no - (*Trying to get an idea before spilling it*) no-yeah - maybe - maybe -

CHORUS: He's lying.

KING: The message, slave.

(*The GUARD puts a sword to DIABETES' throat*)

DIABETES: It's one word, sire.

KING: One word?

DIABETES: Amazing, isn't it, because for the same money he's allowed fourteen words.

KING: A one-word answer to my question of questions. Is there a god?

DIABETES: That's the question?

KING: That - is the only question.

DIABETES (*Looks at DORIS, relieved*): Then I'm proud to give you the message. The word is yes.

KING: Yes?

DIABETES: Yes.

CHORUS: Yes.

DORIS: Yes.

DIABETES: Your turn.

WOMAN (*Lisp*): Yeth.

(*DIABETES gives her an annoyed look*)

DORIS: Isn't that fabulous!

DIABETES: I know what you're thinking, a little reward for your faithful messenger - but our freedom is more than enough - on the other hand, if you insist on showing your appreciation, I think diamonds are always in good taste.

KING (*Gravely*): If there is a god, then man is not responsible and I will surely be judged for my sins.

DIABETES: Pardon me?

KING: Judged for my sins, my crimes. Very horrible crimes, I am doomed. This message you bring me dooms me for eternity.

DIABETES: Did I say yes? I meant no.

GUARD (*Seizes the envelope and reads the message*): The message is yes, sire.

KING: This is the worst possible news.

DIABETES (*Dropping to his knees*): Sire, it's not my fault. I'm a lowly messenger, I don't create the message. I merely transmit it. It's like her majesty's clap.

KING: You will be torn apart by wild horses.

DIABETES: I knew you'd understand.

DORIS: But he's only the messenger. You can't have him torn apart by wild horses. You usually roast them over a slow fire.

KING: Too good for this scum!

DIABETES: When the weatherman predicts rain, do you kill the weatherman?

KING: Yes.

DIABETES: I see. Well. I'm dealing with a schizophrenic.

KING: Seize him.

(The GUARD does)

DIABETES: Wait, sire. A word in my defense.

KING: Yes?

DIABETES: This is only a play.

KING: That's what they all say. Give me your sword. I want the pleasure of this kill myself.

DORIS: No, no - oh, why did I get us into this?

CHORUS: Don't worry, you're young, you'll find somebody else.

DORIS: That's true.

KING (*Raises the sword*): Die!

DIABETES: Oh, Zeus - God of Gods, come forward with your thunderbolt and save

me! *(All look up; nothing happens, awkward moment)* Oh, Zeus . . . Oh, Zeus!!!

KING: And now - die!

DIABETES: Oh, Zeus - where the hell is Zeus!

HEPATITIS *(He enters and looks up):* For Christ's sake, let's go with the machine!
Lower him!

TRICHINOSIS *(Enters from the other side):* It's stuck!

DIABETES *(Giving the cue again):* Oh, great Zeus!

CHORUS: All men come to the same end.

WOMAN: I'm not gonna stand here and let him get stabbed like I was on the BMT!

KING: Grab her.

(The GUARD grabs her and stabs her)

WOMAN: That's twice this week! Son of a bitch.

DIABETES: Oh, great Zeus! God, help me!

(Effect. Lightning - ZEUS is lowered very clumsily and he jerks around until we see the lowering wire has strangled him. Everyone looks on, stunned)

TRICHINOSIS: Something's wrong with the machine! It's out of joint.

CHORUS: At last, the entrance of God!

(But he's definitely dead)

DIABETES: God . . . God? God? God, are you okay? Is there a doctor in the house?

DOCTOR *(In the audience):* I'm a doctor.

TRICHINOSIS: The machine got screwed up.

HEPATITIS: Psst. Get off. You're ruining the play.

DIABETES: God is dead.

DOCTOR: Is he covered by anything?

HEPATITIS: Ad-lib.

DIABETES: What?

HEPATITIS: Ad-lib the ending.

TRICHINOSIS: Somebody pulled the wrong lever.

DORIS: His neck is broken.

KING *(Trying to continue the play):* Er . . . well, messenger . . . see what you've done.
(Brandishes the sword. DIABETES grabs it)

DIABETES *(Grabbing sword):* I'll take that.

KING: What the hell are you doing?

DIABETES: Kill me, eh? Doris, get over here.

KING: Phidipides, what are you doing?

GUARD: Hepatitis, he's ruining the end.

CHORUS: What're you doing, Phidipides? The king should kill you.

DIABETES: Says who? Where is it written? No - I choose to kill the king.

(Stabs the KING, but the sword is fake)

KING: Leave me alone . . . He's crazy . . . Stop! . . . That tickles.

DOCTOR *(Taking the pulse of the body of GOD)* He's definitely dead. We better move him.

CHORUS: We don't want to get involved.

(THEY start exiting, carrying GOD off)

DIABETES: The slave decides to be a hero!

(Stabs the GUARD; the sword is still a fake)

GUARD: What the hell are you doing?

DORIS: I love you, Phidipides. *(He kisses her.)* Please, I'm not in the mood.

HEPATITIS: My play . . . my play! *(To CHORUS)* Where are you going?

KING: I'm going to call my agent at the William Morris Agency. Sol Mishkin. He'll know what to do.

HEPATITIS: This is a very serious play with a message! If it falls apart, they'll never get the message.

WOMAN: The theater is for entertainment. There's an old saying, if you want to send a message, call Western Union.

WESTERN UNION DELIVERY BOY *(Enters on a bicycle):* I have a telegram for the audience. It's the author's message.

DIABETES: Who's he?

DELIVERY BOY *(Dismounts, sings):* Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you -

HEPATITIS: It's the wrong message!

DELIVERY BOY *(Reads the wire):* I'm sorry, here it is. God is dead. Stop. You're on your own. And it's signed - The Moscowitz Billiard Ball Company?

DIABETES: Of course anything is possible. I'm the hero now.

DORIS: And I just know I'm going to have an orgasm. I know it.

DELIVERY BOY *(Still reads):* Doris Levine can definitely have an orgasm. Stop. If she wants to. Stop.

(He grabs her)

DORIS: Stop.

(In the background a brutish man enters)

STANLEY: Stella! Stella!

HEPATITIS: There is no more reality! Absolutely none.

(GROUCHO MARX runs across stage chasing BLANCHE. A MAN in audience rises)

MAN: If anything's possible, I'm not going home to Forest Hills! I'm tired of working on Wall Street. I'm sick of the Long Island Expressway!

(Grabs a WOMAN in the audience. Rips her blouse off, chases her up the aisle. This could also be an usherette)

HEPATITIS: My play . . . *(The characters have left the stage, leaving the two original characters, the author and actor, HEPATITIS and DIABETES)* My play . . .

DIABETES: It was a good play. All it needed was an ending.

HEPATITIS: But what did it mean?

DIABETES: Nothing . . . just nothing.

HEPATITIS: What?

DIABETES: Meaningless. It's empty.

HEPATITIS: The ending.

DIABETES: Of course. What are we discussing? We're discussing the ending.

HEPATITIS: We're always discussing the ending.

DIABETES: Because it's hopeless.

HEPATITIS: I admit it's unsatisfying.

DIABETES: Unsatisfying!?! It's not even believable. *(The lights start dimming)* The trick is to start at the ending when you write a play. Get a good, strong ending, and then write backwards.

HEPATITIS: I've tried that. I got a play with no beginning.

DIABETES: That's absurd.

HEPATITIS: Absurd? What's absurd?

(BLACKOUT)

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