

ART OF WAR : EPISODE 1 "THE DRESS"

DRAMEDY

MARK A. DAHL

1. EXT.BRANDENBURG GATE, BERLIN - DAY

SUPER: Berlin, May 8, 1945

WWII has ended in Europe. Rubble and burnt out vehicles line the street. A convoy of US Army vehicles travels down the Unter Der Linder toward the gate. The street is crowded with Russian soldiers.

A record player balances on the turret of a tank. Soldiers sit on top. AMERICAN SOLDIER 1 feeds a makeshift electrical cord into the tank.

On the tank's hull, a hand-painted slogan: "Berlin or Bust."

CUT TO:

2. INT. US ARMY TANK - DAY

AMERICAN SOLDIER 2 connects the wires to a power generator, then pounds on the roof.

AMERICAN SOLDIER 2
Give her a whirl!

He hands a weathered LP up through the tank's hatch.

3. EXT / US ARMY TANK - BRANDENBERG GATE - DAY

American Soldier 1 grabs the record, places it on the phonograph and turns the knob. It powers on. The scratchy record plays and the American soldiers cheer. The first notes of Sophie Tucker's "My Yiddishe Momme" begin to play.

A RUSSIAN MP (grizzled, armed) and two SOVIET SOLDIERS wave down the tank. The Russian MP pounds on the tank aggressively.

RUSSIAN MP
(In Russian, subtitled)
Turn it off, now!

The American soldiers stand. The Russian MP motions to RUSSIAN SOLDIER 1 to turn it off. He climbs the tank and picks up the record as ROBERT WINBLAD (early 30's, war torn but determined, Army corporal) leans out of the turret and grabs the Russian soldier's arm.

ROBERT
If the record stops, the tank does too.

Robert forcefully takes the record.

RUSSIAN MP
 (In Russian, subtitled)
 Americans with their battle hymns.
 (In English)
 War is over, no more war songs.

Robert holds the record in the air.

ROBERT
 This is not just a record, it's a
 promise, and it's going to be kept.

The Russian MP places his hand on his weapon. Robert stays calm.

RUSSIAN MP
 Then I will turn it off, my way.

ROBERT
 You destroy this record, you'll
 have more than a war to worry
 about.

Robert motions to the caravan of shouting Americans backed up at the gate. The Russian MP eyes Robert, weighing his options.

RUSSIAN MP
 (humorless chuckle)
 Crazy Americans.

He steps back and motions for them to pass.

ROBERT
 Spasibo.

The Russian MP grunts and spits. The tank moves forward as the record plays. The tank passes through the gate. The camera pushes in. Music and war blend into flashback.

MATCH CUT TO:

4. INT. NYC BROADWAY THEATER - ORCHESTRA PIT - 1941 DAY

The full sound of a Broadway orchestra fills the air. Fingers on a piano, a bow on a violin, the conductor waving baton, audience members smiling, stage lights illuminate, the curtain rises.

SUPER: New York City, December 6, 1941.

CUT TO:

5. INT. NYC BROADWAY THEATER - STAGE - DAY - 1941

OPENING TITLE SEQUENCE

ARTHUR LEVITZ (Mid 30's, charismatic, neurodiverse, theatrical to the core, fast talking, quick-witted Jewish misfit) performs a showstopping drag number in the style of Ethel Merman. The theme of the original song is "I Will Be a Star". Arthur shines in the spotlight. He is in full vaudeville glory, backed by a dazzling Army themed chorus line. His red dress is spectacular, his makeup flawless, his movements precise. On the last line of the song, Arthur closes his eyes.

MATCH CUT TO:

6. INT. NYC BROADWAY THEATER - WARDROBE ROOM - DAY

Arthur opens his eyes and belts out the final note into a triptych mirror. He's standing on a tailor's platform, holding a feather fan. His lipstick is messy and his reflection isn't as fabulous as the fantasy we just saw. The applause roars from a nearby stage monitor. Arthur soaks it in, smiles, then curtsies.

ARTHUR
(to the invisible
audience)
Thank you. Thank you.

JAMES STEWART (20's, African American, loyal friend to Arthur, stagehand by day and Harlem ballroom fixture by night) stands in the doorway clapping.

JAMES
Fabulous, Arthur, fabulous!

Arthur jumps, startled, off the platform.

ARTHUR
James! You scared the life out of me.

JAMES
I could have sworn it was Merman herself.

ARTHUR
(impersonating Sophie Tucker)

You should hear my Sophie Tucker.

JAMES

Oh, I have. We all have. Still amazes me how you hit those high notes. Speaking of notes, what's the word from wardrobe?

Arthur flips through an empty notebook.

ARTHUR

Hmmm let me check. Wardrobe Department is in tip-top shape thanks to Arthur Levitz, Broadway costume designer to the stars.

JAMES

Wardrobe ASSISTANT, to the costume designer to the stars.

ARTHUR

Oh please, we both know who the real star is here. I can see it now... front page New York Times... "Arthur Levitz, The Male Sophie Tucker."

JAMES

Oh, Arthur. Vaudeville is dead.

ARTHUR

Bite your tongue.

JAMES

The world's in Technicolor. No one wants to see you dressed up as a fat old woman.

ARTHUR

Sophie Tucker is a living legend.

JAMES

Maybe try something current? How about Judy?

ARTHUR

Garland's just a flash in the Hollywood pan, you'll see. And I'm going to be famous.

JAMES

Ok, Miss Tucker. Till then, you finish my pants?

Arthur grabs a pair of slacks off the rack and hands them to James.

ARTHUR
You got my two bits?

Arthur sings the last line of the song again with over the top drama. James hands him a quarter with a smile.

JAMES
Thanks, you're a genius. And the
hems look great, as always.

Arthur hesitates, looking distressed.

ARTHUR
(faintly)
Great. I mean, you're welcome.
(beat, more serious)
I'm still twenty dollars short on
rent. The landlord has been
hounding Sarita for days.

James pulls out three more quarters.

JAMES
Here, take these. How is bubbe?

ARTHUR
Thanks James. She's doing... OK. Ya
know, we're looking for boarders if
you still need a place.

JAMES
I think I'd stand out just a little
bit in your neighborhood.

ARTHUR
You think? Oh, right. Well...

STAGE MANAGER
(on monitor)
Fantastic preview! Cast, please
meet in the house for notes. One
week until opening night, folks!

ARTHUR
(in the stage managers
voice)
One week until opening night,
folks!

JAMES
You really are a one man show,

Arthur. Coming uptown later?

James does a few steps of the Lindy Hop as Arthur puts on his coat. Arthur drops the quarters in his pocket.

ARTHUR
Doubtful. Rita is performing in the Village tonight, so we have to get ready for that.

JAMES
She paying you?

ARTHUR
I'm helping from the goodness of my heart.

JAMES
She's paying you.

ARTHUR
Clearly.

JAMES
Then I'll see you downtown later. I promised Rita I wouldn't miss it.

STAGE MANAGER
(on Monitor)
James to the stage, please.

JAMES
That's my cue, you walking me down?

ARTHUR
Nah, I have a few more things to do.

JAMES
S'long Mary.

James leaves.

ARTHUR
Shit.

Arthur pauses. He moves toward the costume rack. His hand lingers on one of three identical red dresses. A sign above reads "Miss Merman" His eyes dart to the door, then back to the dress.

ARTHUR
Hmm.

Arthur's Fantasy appears in the mirror.

ARTHUR'S FANTASY
Go ahead, Kid. It's just a dress.

Arthur hesitates. A beat of internal struggle. Finally, he grabs the dress and quickly slips it into a canvas bag, his heart thumping.

ARTHUR
No turning back now.

He takes a deep breath and tries to shake off the tension. He straightens himself and practices a controlled "goodbye". The central mirror shows Arthur, while the side mirrors reflect Arthur's Fantasy.

ARTHUR
See ya later, Ethel. See ya later,
Tommy.

Arthur's Fantasy shakes her head no.

ARTHUR
Shit.

He adjusts his hat and smile and tries again.

ARTHUR
See ya later Ethel. See ya later,
Tommy.

ARTHUR'S FANTASY
Better.

He takes another deep breath, heads out the door and hits the light switch with his elbow.

CUT TO:

7. INT. BROADWAY THEATER - HALLWAY - DAY

The door closes behind him. A paper star taped to the door reads "Arthur Levitz." He takes two steps forward then two steps back, pulls the star off the door revealing a "Wardrobe" plaque. He nervously makes his way down the hallway, humming the last line of the opening song. He walks by a door with an authentic star that reads "Ethel Merman" and waves at the door.

ARTHUR
See ya later, Ethel.

CUT TO:

8. INT. NYC BROADWAY THEATER - STAGE DOOR - AFTERNOON.

Arthur attempts to conceal the bag with his overcoat. He passes and waves to TOMMY HIRO ICHIKAWA (19, first-generation Japanese American, stage door attendant with Broadway dreams) standing at his station.

ARTHUR
See ya later Tommy.

Tommy waves. Arthur hip bumps the stage door open, revealing a blast of sunlight and a mass of fans clamoring for autographs. He is taken aback. Post-matinée audience members' cheers fade when they see that Arthur is not Ethel Merman. The door shuts. Arthur is stuck.

TOMMY
Can you believe this crowd?

Tommy opens the door.

TOMMY
(to the crowd)
Hang in there folks, she'll be
coming out any minute now!
(To Arthur)
Looks like the show's gonna be a
big hit!

Arthur looks around, squirming for an escape route as the door shuts.

ARTHUR
Wonderful.

TOMMY
Wasn't Miss Merman amazing?

Tommy eyes the canvas bag.

TOMMY
You OK, Mr. Levitz? Normally you
gush as much as I do.

ARTHUR
(quickly retorting)
Yes, Ethel's performance today was
legendary, yes she's the biggest
star on Broadway, yes we will
continue to receive standing
ovations at every performance and

no,
 (whispers)
 we will not win the Pulitzer, but
 (full voice)
 Yes, we are strong contenders for
 the Delia Medal and yes, Tommy, you
 are making me late for my radio
 gig. Gushy enough?

 TOMMY
 (laughing at Arthur's
 dramatics)
 Much better!

Arthur tries to escape. Tommy grabs Arthur's arm, pulling him back. The door shuts.

 TOMMY
 Oh, Mr. Levitz, I almost forgot!

Tommy quickly goes to his station.

 ARTHUR
 I told you to call me Arthur.

Tommy returns with the ticket jacket.

 TOMMY
 Your comps for opening night, Mr.
 (beat) Arthur.

Arthur takes it. Another cast member flings open the door.

9. EXT. BROADWAY THEATER - STAGE DOOR - DAY

Arthur steps out and Tommy joins. The door hits Arthur in the ass and he drops his overcoat and the canvas bag.

 TOMMY
 Lemme get that.

 ARTHUR
 I can manage.

Arthur cannot manage. He stoops to get his coat and his hat falls off. Tommy grabs the bag.

 TOMMY
 Geesh this is heavy. What cha got
 in here Mr. Arthur?

Arthur puts on his smile and tries to look calm.

ARTHUR
Fabric scraps. Trash really. I'm a
lowly wardrobe assistant, Tommy. I
use them at home. Promise not to
tell?

Tommy places Arthur's hat back on his head and hands him the
bag.

TOMMY
Promise.

Arthur performs the rehearsed hat tip and smile.

ARTHUR
See ya later, Tommy.

Arthur dramatically pushes into the crowd. Tommy yells after
him, waving.

TOMMY
Ha! See ya later, Arthur!

CUT TO:

10. EXT. TIMES SQUARE - BROADWAY THEATER - DAY

The square is decorated for Christmas. Arthur puts his hand
to his forehead and cuts through the clamoring fans. Behind
Arthur is a four story painted advertisement of Ethel Merman
wearing the red dress. Ethel's silhouette appears in the
stage door and the crowd roars. A horn beeps and Arthur
realizes he's blocking traffic. Arthur shakes his fist at the
truck.

ARTHUR
You...

CUT TO:

11. INT. ROBERTS PICK UP TRUCK- TIMES SQUARE - DAY

Robert Winblad, now four years younger, Hollywood handsome
and full of wonder, leans into his horn, blaring over
Arthur's cursing. Robert chuckles to himself then pulls
forward through the light, taking note of anti-Roosevelt
protesters and pro-Nazi groups demonstrating.

12. EXT. COMMODORE RECORD SHOP - TIMES SQUARE - DAY

ARTHUR

Tourist! Learn to drive!

Robert's truck passes. Arthur turns the corner, where a group of Purity League representatives are demonstrating. They hold signs that read "Jazz Music Breeds Immorality," "Keep America Pure," along with a large white cross. Arthur stops. A sales sign reads "78's, two for a dollar." Arthur's Fantasy takes his over his reflection.

ARTHURS FANTASY
Two for a dollar? That's
practically free.

ARTHUR
I shouldn't.

ARTHURS FANTASY
Too bad, and you just got that
dollar. For all your hard work.

ARTHUR
True.

The temptation to go inside wins. He makes his way through the protesters. A PURITY LEAGUE WOMAN attempts to hand him a flyer.

PURITY LEAGUE WOMAN
Would you like to know more about
clean living?

ARTHUR
Oh honey, my bubbe was a
washerwoman. It doesn't get cleaner
than that.

The woman, undeterred, points to a Bible verse.

PURITY LEAGUE WOMAN
In Matthew, Jesus says that true
cleanliness comes from within.

ARTHUR
Well, Leviticus says to NOT wear
clothing of mixed fibers, so from
the look at your sad wool-rayon
BLAND, it's you who is unclean,
darling. Now, excuse me.

He smiles fakely, then enters the shop.

13. INT. COMMODORE RECORD SHOP - TIMES SQUARE - DAY

Jazz music fills the air. Piles of newspapers flank the door. JACK CRYSTAL (30's record shop employee) is delighted to see Arthur. He holds up "My Yiddishe Momme" by Sophie Tucker.

JACK
Arthur! I held it back here for ya!

ARTHUR
You found another one! Jack, you're a dream!

JACK
I'm pretty sure you've purchased every copy in Manhattan... what ya do with them?

ARTHUR
Protect them. The world gets crazier every day and if they can ban them in Berlin...

JACK
Any news from overseas?

ARTHUR
(shakes his head no)
Mmm-mmm.

Arthur points to a Billie Holiday "Strange Fruit" record behind Jack.

ARTHUR
Ooooh. And it's two for a dollar today?

Jack retrieves the record.

JACK
Every day. I never though I'd see the day where you'd want something contemporary.

ARTHUR
It's a gift for a friend. Although I do appreciate it.

Jack writes up the sales slip and puts the records in a bag. Arthur looks at the protesters.

ARTHUR
Can you believe this crap?

JACK
They've been at it all weekend.

That'll be \$1.03 with tax.

Arthur hands Jack the four quarters, takes the records, then makes for the door. Arthur grabs a copy of "The Jewish Daily Bulletin".

ARTHUR

Thanks, Jack. Keep the change!

Arthur exits. Jack looks down at four quarters. Laughs. He takes three cents from his pocket and puts the money in the register. Outside the window, Arthur hands the bulletin to the Purity League woman and says something to her. She clutches her pearls in shock as Arthur walks away laughing.

JACK

(shaking his head)

Oh Arthur, be careful out there.

CUT TO

14. EXT. RADIO STATION - WEST VILLAGE - SUNSET

Sunset over the city. A long line of well dressed patrons await entry. The station marquee reads: "Serenade with the Stars, Variety Show, Live 7pm, With : Orrin Tucker's Big Band, "Wee" Bonnie Baker and Special Guest host Fred Allen."

15. INT. RADIO SHOW LOBBY - DOWNTOWN - DAY

An "On Air" sign hangs above the bustling front desk. A door marked "To Soundstage" stands across the room, flanked by dressing rooms and a sound booth. The room hums with activity. Actors and musicians in tuxedos, scripts in hand, criss cross the space.

A radio broadcast plays overhead.

RADIO BROADCAST

... Japan threatens peaceful and innocent China. At this moment, she conspires with the Nazis and facists. While we speak, conferences are going on in Washington. We want no war in Japan, no sensible man wants war anywhere. We now turn back to New York.

At the front desk, HELEN FREUDENBERG (30's, bleached blonde bombshell, quick witted, Jersey City sharp) juggles phone calls, scripts, and schedules like a seasoned conductor.

Robert Winblad enters, scanning the room. He approaches Helen, glancing at his paper.

ROBERT
Mr. Henry Leonard?

Helen, mid-call, clocks Robert. Without missing a beat, she tilts her chin toward HENRY LEONARD (50's, fairy, father figure, station manager who has seen it all) who is directing the organized chaos. Henry spots Robert, motions him over.

HENRY
Helen, let the folks in.

Helen hangs up and struts toward the sound stage, eyeing Robert. She enters the soundstage door.

HENRY
You must be Private Winblad.

The phone rings.

ROBERT
Yes sir. Honor to be here.

The phone continues to ring. Henry looks at his schedules.

HENRY
(yelling)
Helen this phone! 30 minutes
everybody. Soundstage is open.

The actors and musicians disperse as Helen hurriedly re-enters the lobby and runs to the phone.

HELEN
(In a professional
operator voice)
WMCA, New York's premier public
service station...

HENRY
You found us OK?

ROBERT
Yes, sir. A quick seven hour trip
from Pine Camp. Easy as pie. This
is so exciting. A far cry from our
little station in Watertown.

HENRY
And you'll be here every Saturday?

ROBERT

If you're happy with me Sir, so is
the Army.

The ON AIR sign illuminates.

HENRY

Great, I don't want to train someone
new every damn week. One second.

Henry motions for Robert to follow. They peer into the sound
booth where a BROADCASTER (50's, gruff, cigar smoking
newsman) reads from a script.

BROADCASTER

The world today. WMCA presents a
summary of important news from
around the globe. Tonight we hear
from London, Manila, and
Washington. First, Bob Trout from
London.

The ON AIR sign turns off. Conversations resume, and Henry
opens the booth door.

HENRY

(to Broadcaster)

30 minutes. Plug tonight's stars in
your next transition, keep them
tuned in.

(To Robert)

We have a lot goin' on. Serenade is
our only live variety show. The
rest of the week we relay news and
interviews. But Saturdays?
Controlled chaos keeps me on my
toes. You'll be reading opposite
Mr. Arthur Levitz, who does our
commercial spots. If he ever shows
up.

Henry looks over to Helen still on the phone.

HENRY

(Mouthing the words)

Where's Arthur?

Helen shrugs.

ROBERT

Incredible. I've wanted to be an
actor since I was a kid.

HENRY

You and everyone else in New York.

Helen's phone call grabs the attention of Henry. He walks over to the desk and Robert follows.

HELEN
...we appreciate your feedback. Thank
you so much for calling WMCA,
recipient of ...

She reads verbatim from a plaque on the wall.

HELEN
(switching tones)
The citation of distinguished merit
for the improvement of race
relations from the National
Conference of Christians and Jews.
Have a nice day.

HENRY
What was all that?

Helen drops her telephone voice.

HELEN
Caller objected to yesterday's
"Message of Israel" broadcast.
Didn't like the rabbi.

HENRY
What was the objection?

HELEN
That the rabbi was Jewish.

HENRY
I'll allow it. Private Robert
Winblad, meet Helen Freudenberg.
I'd be lost without her. We all
would.

ROBERT
Pleasure to meet you, Mrs.
Freudenberg.

HELEN
Miss Freudenberg.

Helen wiggles her empty ring finger.

ROBERT
God bless New York City.

HELEN
Yes, bless him. Do I detect an

accent?

ROBERT

I'm from Texas, Ma'am. I couldn't be more excited to be on this show tonight. I'm a big fan.

HELEN

We're happy to have you.

HENRY

Give him the Army PSA. Our last Army actor didn't... quite work out... But that's yesterday's news.

HELEN

And good news for you.

ROBERT

Great news. Back in Watertown, all I do is schedule programming and transport soldiers. Then, this order comes through. I was in the right place at the right time.

Henry looks at the clock.

HENRY

Where the hell is Arthur?

16. INT. NYC SUBWAY - AFTERNOON

Arthur is lost in his world, humming the last line of the Broadway song. Station lights zoom past the train windows.

CLARA (African American, age 8) studies Arthur. Her MOTHER attempts to stop her staring.

Arthur stares at his reflection in the window glass. The reflection morphs into Arthur's Fantasy. He opens his leather satchel and dons a fabulous scarf.

CLARA

Why do you dress like a lady?

MOTHER

Clara! Sir, I am so sorry, she has a mind of her own.

ARTHUR

It's quite alright... and what makes you think I dress like a lady?

CLARA
Well, your hair is funny, you've
got no eyebrows and you wear
lipstick.

The mother covers Clara's mouth.

ARTHUR
Well.

Arthur looks into his fantasy reflection again. She laughs
and smiles. Arthur laughs and smiles setting the mother at
ease.

MOTHER
I am so sorry.

Arthur dons an oversized pair of women's sun glasses.

ARTHUR
Don't be. It's quite alright.

TRAIN CONDUCTER (OS)
Next stop fourteenth street.

ARTHUR
(Imitating the train
conductor)
Next stop 14th street.

CLARA
(Imitating Arthur)
Next stop 14th street!

They smile and laugh.

CUT TO

17. EXT. RADIO STATION FRONT DOOR - SUNSET

Arthur makes his hat and glasses a little crooked, musses his
hair, performs a practice gasp, then bursts through the
station doors.

18. INT. RADIO STATION LOBBY - EVENING

The lobby is now empty of performers and chaos. The ON AIR
sign is illuminated. Helen is smoking a cigarette and having
a drink. Arthur bursts through the doors. The clock reads
7:01 pm. Helen points at it without looking. Arthur drops the
canvas bag on the floor.

ARTHUR
I know, I know, Helen.

Arthur realizes he's punctuating his words with the record in his hand. A dead giveaway. Arthur takes off his jacket and hat, hiding the record. Helen stares angrily.

ARTHUR
It's customary for the receptionist to cheerily greet guests upon entry and politely take their coats and hats.

Helen changes her expression to an overly fake smile, waves and points to the coat rack. She drops the smile then looks at the bag, then at Arthur, then at the bag again.

HELEN
You want to get me fired? I got you this friggin' job and it makes me look like shit when you screw up.

ARTHUR
Couldn't get a cab?

HELEN
Save it.

Henry and Robert enter from the soundstage door. Helen quickly puts out her cigarette and waves the smoke away.

HENRY
Arthur, where the hell...

Arthur, startled, spins around open-armed, which sends Helen's drink sliding down the counter toward the bag. Arthur drops his coat. The drink explodes on the floor.

ARTHUR
The dress, the dress, the dress!

Arthur runs and wipes the liquid off the bag with his scarf. He opens it, searches for stains and is relieved there are none.

ARTHUR
Thank you magnificent God!

Arthur hugs the dress and lowers his head, Robert retrieves Arthur's coat from the floor. Arthur locks eyes with Robert and he attempts a more masculine presentation of a gay man clutching a dress.

ARTHUR

Miss Freudenberg, it looks like
your dress is unscathed.

HELEN
"My" dress?

HENRY
What the hell is this?

Arthur gives her a look, prompting Helen to play the part.
Helen takes the dress and hangs it on the coatrack.

HELEN
(over the top)
Oh my dress! Of course, apologies
Mr. Levitz. How absolutely horrible
of me.

HENRY
What part of, "your call time is
6:30," don't you understand? I told
you next time you're late you'd be
fired.

ARTHUR
You said my call time was 30
minutes before showtime. The first
commercial spot goes on at 7:30, so
as I see it, I'm right on time.

Henry, confused and disarmed, can't help being amused by
Arthur's logic. Arthur walks toward Robert.

ARTHUR
You, you're new.

HENRY
This is Private Winblad. Private
Winblad, the one and only, and very
LATE, Arthur Levitz.

ARTHUR
Here for the Army spots, I presume.
Nice to meet you...

Arthur extends his hand for a handshake, then attempts a
salute.

ARTHUR
Sir.

ROBERT
(laughs)
Much appreciated, but a

handshake'll do just fine.

Robert extends his hand and Arthur limply reciprocates.

ARTHUR

Sorry to keep you waiting.

ROBERT

Don't worry about it, Art.

Arthur almost corrects Robert's shortening of his name, but smiles instead.

HENRY

(Beat)

Hello?

Robert withdraws his hand. Helen holds out the script.

HELEN

Anyone interested in today's
commercials?

HENRY

Arthur, hurry up. Go run Private
Winblad's segment with him.

ARTHUR

Of course. Which dressing room am I
in?

HENRY

Three. It's always three.

Arthur grabs the folder from Helen and walks toward the dressing room. Robert follows. Arthur takes the paper star from his bag and plants it over the number 3 on the door.

ARTHUR

Please, after you. Now, don't be
nervous. Is this your first time?

(beat)

On the radio?

Arthur closes the door and gives Helen a raised eyebrow.

HELEN

Here we go again.

HENRY

Why can't I stay mad at him?

CUT TO:

19. INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

Arthur unpacks in a frenzy while Robert takes in the photos of stars on the wall and stares at his script.

ROBERT
It's my first time being on the radio, but I work in the Special Services Division.

ARTHUR
Special Services?

ROBERT
Movies, music, shows for the troops. That kinda stuff. Most of the guys are far away from home, so my department keeps up morale.

Arthur puts a makeup bag on the station.

ARTHUR
Shows for the troops? Like the USO?

ROBERT
Kind of. Soldier shows. Live performances, skits, songs, dance numbers. Musical reviews.

ARTHUR
Fun! Sounds like you do it all.

ROBERT
Hardly, I coordinate the actors and performers. This is my first time being one.

Arthur pulls his wrinkled tuxedo jacket out of his bag and gives it a shake, then hangs it up.

ARTHUR
Well today, you are one of us.

ROBERT
I'm worried I'll mess it up.

Arthur pulls out an eyeliner pencil and sharpens it.

ARTHUR
Oh, it's easy! All you do is read the lines marked Soldier.

ROBERT
(eyeing his script)

Soldier.

ARTHUR
(sarcastically)
You can read?

ROBERT
(laughs)
Of course.

ARTHUR
Here.

Arthur circles Roberts lines with his eyeliner.

ARTHUR
I do all the rest.

ROBERT
All the rest?

Arthur defines his eyes.

ARTHUR
Mmm-hmmm, There used to be three of us, but I can do lots of voices, so now they only need me. Well, except for the Army spot. That's why they need you. Well, you and me.

Arthur pulls more things out of his bag.

ROBERT
So where do we start?

Arthur holds the Sophie Tucker record in front of his face.

ARTHUR
(In Sophie Tuckers voice)
"Well I would start with a lively rag"...

ROBERT
We sing?

ARTHUR
Its a joke, a quote. Sophie Tucker?
(Tucker's voice)
"Last of the Red Hot Mamas?"

ROBERT
Oh! (laughs nervously) My parents didn't appreciate that kind of

entertainment.

ARTHUR
Jewish entertainment?

ROBERT
Off-color humor.

ARTHUR
And what color humor do you
appreciate, Private?...

ROBERT
Just Robert. Please.

ARTHUR
OK, Just Robert.

Robert changes the subject by touching an autograph of Rita Hayworth on the wall.

ROBERT
Is this real?

ARTHUR
Signed in this very room.

Arthur dusts his face with powder and grabs his tuxedo shirt.

ROBERT
Have you worked with all of these
stars?

ARTHUR
(exaggerating)
Most, easier to say who I haven't
worked with. But right now I work
on Broadway with Ethel. Ethel
Merman?

ROBERT
THE Ethel Merman!

Robert catches a glimpse of Arthur's chest which is shaved down to his hairy belly. Arthur turns away and buttons his tuxedo shirt and begins to gossip.

ARTHUR
Indeed! Do you have an ear for
scandals? You may not believe this,
but..

Henry opens the door.

HENRY

I need you backstage! Five minutes ago!

Henry slams the door.

ARTHUR

Not enough time now, Just Robert, but I promise to regale you with stories after the show.

Arthur grabs a bow tie.

ROBERT

I'd be honored.

Robert reads his script, Arthur finishes his bowtie.

ARTHUR

We'll go to Stewart's. You'll love Ruby, she's a real firecracker... Ruby is our favorite waitress... Oh! Don't fret, Just Robert. It's easy. Read your first line.

Arthur puts on his tuxedo jacket.

ROBERT

(Flatly)

Hello, My name is Army Reps Name and today I am here on behalf of the US Army to talk about the Selective Training and Service Act.

ARTHUR

(Concealing his shock)

That's... good. But try it again like you're talking to me, and where it says Army Reps Name, use your own.

ROBERT

Of course. Stupid.

ARTHUR

No going back, only forward. Try again.

Helen opens the door.

HELEN

Are you trying to kill Henry?

ARTHUR

He told me to help Robert.

HELEN

Places. That means now!

Robert looks terrified.

ARTHUR

(Concealing his worry)

Oh, don't worry, Just Robert.

You're going to be Just Great.

20. INT. RADIO SOUND STAGE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

An audience sits before a stage.

MUSIC IN: "On The Outside Looking In". The orchestra plays as BONNIE BAKER (24, Blonde, sweet and girlish) sings.

BONNIE BAKER

*I can see your eyes full of little white lies
As you light your cigarette*

Arthur stands at a microphone joyfully aware that Robert is watching him from the wings.

MONTAGE OF ARTHUR'S COMMERCIALS

Arthur holds up Rinso Laundry Detergent.

Arthur brushes his teeth with Pepsodent Toothpaste.

Arthur with a steering wheel for Chevrolet Automobiles.

BONNIE BAKER

*I can see your eyes full of little white lies
As you light your cigarette
And he's sitting there in my favorite chair
It didn't take you long to forget
It dawns on me it's easy to see that here's where
I've always been
On the outside looking in.*

End song.

ARTHUR

(Pulling Robert onstage)

This is us. Follow me. And smile.

Arthur and Robert take their places at a table cluttered with sound effect devices. FRED ALLEN (47, tall and lean, seasoned comedian) stands at a microphone.

FRED ALLEN
Orrin Tucker's Big Band and "Wee"
Bonnie Baker, ladies and gentlemen.
We'll be right back with more
entertainment right after this
important message from the US Army.

The orchestra plays a lead in.

FRED ALLEN
And now, we join the Jones family
as they finish their Saturday
dinner.

Arthur knocks on the door.

ARTHUR
(Mom voice)
Father, there's someone at the
door.

Arthur steps back and covers his face with his script to
sound far away.

ARTHUR
(Kid voice)
Mom! Dad! Someone's at the door!

Arthur creaks the chair for sound effect.

ARTHUR
(Dad voice)
Don't worry Mother, I'll get it.

Arthur stomps over to the door.

ARTHUR
(Mom voice)
I wonder who it could be?

Arthur opens the sound effect door.

ARTHUR
(Dad Voice)
Honey, there's a soldier at the
door!

Robert freezes, his line is next. In the wings, Henry looks
on. Arthur nudges Robert, pointing to his script.

ROBERT
(Stiffly)
My name is Private Robert Winblad
and I'm here on behalf of the U.S.

Army to talk about the Selective...
Service Act.

ARTHUR
(Dad Voice)
The selective what?
(Mom Voice)
Service AND TRAINING Act dear.

Robert fumbles trying to keep up.

ROBERT
Yes, The Selective Service AND
training act requires all men
between the ages of 21 and 45 to
register for the draft.

ARTHUR
(sotto voce)
Breathe dear, You're turning green.

Robert swallows hard. Henry pinches the bridge of his nose.

ROBERT
(full voice)
Green?

Robert is lost. Henry points to his script then throws it in
the air. Arthur points to Robert's line.

ARTHUR
(Mom voice)
YES, Our fine young men in green.
The US Army.

ROBERT
(Recovering)
YES, The US Army is calling on all
good and decent citizens in these
times of uncertainty to register.
After all, it's not a question of
IF America will join the European
War, It is a question of when, and
America will be ready.

Arthur nods "Good Job".

ARTHUR
(kid voice)
Gee, Dad! I want to sign up and
help my country.
(Mom voice)
You're too young, dear. You must be
twenty one. But Father will sign up

for you and our family.
(Dad voice)
And our country.
(kid voice)
Dad! You'll be a real hero!

ROBERT
Yes, he will, son. Men make the
Army, and the Army makes men.

ARTHUR
(Dad Voice)
The world is on the brink of war
son, it is my duty and honor to
defend my family and the great
United States of America.

ROBERT
Not just you Mr. Jones, all men
twenty-one to forty-five should
stop by your local Selective
Service office and register. Be a
hero.

FADE TO:

21. INT. STEWART'S CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Helen, Arthur and Robert are seated at a window booth, meal
in progress. All three are laughing so hard they can't
breathe.

HELEN
And his face! He looked like he was
gonna explode!

ARTHUR
Henry's always stressed. He loves
us, though.

ROBERT
But it was so bad.

HELEN
You recovered and he was happy. He
wouldn't have OK'd you otherwise.

ROBERT
I can't believe I get to do this
every week! Excuse me folks, I
laughed so hard I have to hit the
head.

They smile sweetly at Robert who heads to the toilet.

HELEN

Oh, that accent is so dreamy.

Arthur makes a nasty face at Helen.

HELEN

What now?

ARTHUR

Why dont you just throw your
panties at him.

Helen gulps down the last of her drink.

HELEN

Oh boo hoo, little baby jealous?

ARTHUR

Oh, I swear Helen! Do you have to
have everything?

HELEN

(interrupting)
Ya gonna eat that?

Before Arthur answers, Helen takes a bite of what is left on
Arthur's plate.

ARTHUR

(southern accent)
Oh Private Windblad, I'm just
famished, escort me to the
cafeteria? A lady can not legally
dine alone.

HELEN

I'm Scarlett O'Hara?

ARTHUR

You wish, Jersey.

HELEN

He clearly likes me, Arthur. You're
barking up the wrong privates.

ARTHUR

Wanna bet? Five bucks says he walks
out of here with me, not you.

HELEN

You don't have five bucks.

ARTHUR

True, because someone moved out.

HELEN

Don't put that on me Arthur. It's a rooming house.

ARTHUR

Traitor.

HELEN

I'll put up five bucks, but when you lose, be prepared to make me a new dress... of my choice.

ARTHUR

Deal. Get your money ready.

Robert returns from the bathroom and they switch to fake laughter.

ARTHUR

Now where were we?

HELEN

Yes, Robert darling, where were we?

CUT TO:

22. EXT. STEWART'S CAFETERIA - STREET CORNER - NIGHT

A HANDSOME MAN is chatting with people when he stops abruptly, distracted by the beauty of Rita. RITA (20's, trans female, flawless Rita Hayworth look-a-like) and James, now out of his crew uniform and wearing a stylish zoot suit, cross the street.

RITA

She needs a pre-show cocktail.

JAMES

Doesn't she.

RITA

Let's put on a show.

James and Rita strut across the street. An ANGRY MAN (40's, conservative) yells.

ANGRY MAN

Go back to Harlem.

RITA

Shut it, creep.

JAMES

How about YOU get out of OUR neighborhood.

ANGRY MAN

Ingrates... Whatever you are, should all be put on an island and shot.

RITA

Well, Merry Christmas, darling. You're on it.

CUT TO:

23. INT. STEWART'S CAFETERIA - NIGHT

RUBY, A butch waitress and amateur magician dressed in a man's suit, approaches the table.

RUBY

How we doing over here?

Ruby points to Robert.

RUBY

Hey, you gotta a little something on your ...

Ruby reaches over and pulls a coin fromn Robert's ear.

ROBERT

Wow!

RUBY

Don't tell me I'm your first trick?

They all laugh except Robert. All eyes are on him.

ROBERT

Sorry, am I missing something?

Helen undoes her belt and throws it on the table.

HELEN

Sorry boys, the less I wear the more comfortable I feel these days.

RUBY

If you're gonna start a-strippin', I'm gonna start a-watchin'.

HELEN
Ruby, you tease.

RUBY
That ain't a tease, THIS is a
tease.

Ruby struts seductively, flashing her shoulder in mock femininity. Helen stands and performs the walk better. The crowd roars.

HELEN
Ruby, you're lucky. You have no
idea what I go through to look like
this.

Helen cups her corset.

RUBY
To hell with all those torture
devices I say.

ARTHUR
You two are putting on quite a show
for the jam.

HELEN
And?

ARTHUR
And perhaps you're making Robert
uncomfortable.

HELEN
Perhaps it is you who's
uncomfortable, Arthur. And, perhaps
Private Winblad could speak for
himself.

Ruby starts to walk away.

HELEN
(loudly)
I'll have a Jello salad to go.

ARTHUR
You already had a Jello Salad.

HELEN
Friends who count, Arthur darling,
don't. So screw.

RUBY
Fruit or vegetable?

HELEN
Vegetable, I'm getting really sick
of fruit.

Ruby walks over to the men's restroom and pounds on the door.

RUBY
One at a time fellas.

James and Rita burst through the front doors. The crowd
erupts.

JAMES
Helen darling!

RITA
(To Arthur)
Hiya Mary!

HELEN
Ladies.

ROBERT
(Confused)
Who's Mary?

RITA & JAMES
(simultaneously)
Her.

Rita blows a kiss to the gawkers.

RITA
A soldier! (To Arthur) Do you have
my dress?

JAMES
(To Robert) Far away from home?

ROBERT
Texas.

RITA
(to Robert)
Texas, I make a heavenly barbecue.

JAMES
She'll make a wonderful wife one
day.

ARTHUR
Private Winblad is our new co-
worker.

JAMES
From tonight's radio play!

RITA
We never miss "Serenade With the
Stars," Texas.

JAMES
You're a real star.

RITA
Need a tour guide, lone star?

Arthur motions for them to hold off.

ROBERT
I must be the luckiest fella in the
world.

HELEN
How so?

ROBERT
Everyone said I'd hate New York
City, but first weekend here, new
job, new spot and new friends.

Arthur and Helen share a look.

ROBERT
That is, if you would consider me a
friend.

ARTHUR
I do.

HELEN
Me too.

RITA
It's settled. We're all friends.

JAMES
We're off for libations before
Rita's alcohol turns back into
blood. Join us?

ROBERT
Maybe next time, early morning.

HELEN
It sure is late. Robert darling,
would you mind terribly escorting
me to the subway?

ARTHUR

Ugh.

ROBERT

I'd love to. I've never been on the underground train.

RITA

Oh, you poor thing. Walking Manhattan in this weather?

ROBERT

Oh no, ma'am, I have a vehicle.

RITA

Dreamy. A single fella with his own car?

JAMES

That sure is something.

ARTHUR

Isn't it just.

ROBERT

You want a ride too, Art?

ARTHUR

Actually, I forgot something at the radio station. Helen, may I borrow your keys?

HELEN

No.

ARTHUR

Pretty please? I'll bring them to you tomorrow, I promise.

HELEN

No.

ARTHUR

I'll make it worth your while.

HELEN

Go on...

Arthur reaches in his pocket and pulls out a ticket envelope.

ARTHUR

Opening night, two tickets, great seats, to the most talked about show in town.

HELEN

Deal.

Helen hands over the station keys.

HELEN

Now, who on earth could I invite to go with me?

Helen bats her eyes. Arthur rolls his.

ROBERT

If it's not too forward, I'd be honored to accompany you, Miss Freudenberg.

HELEN

Why Private Winblad, I'd be delighted.

ARTHUR

(Defeated)

Well, It's been a long day and I really must be going. Walk with me, girls?

JAMES

Nice to meet you.

ARTHUR

Ta-ta, kids.

RITA

(blows a kiss)

The three walk toward the door, then stop at a table of friends. Rita pooches and poses for the onlookers. Arthur watches Robert and Helen.

ROBERT

Is it just me, or did she look a lot like Rita Hayworth?

HELEN

(Laughs)

ROBERT

Did I say something funny?

HELEN

She IS Rita Hayworth. Well, our Rita Hayworth anyway.

ROBERT

Huh?

HELEN
She's a female impersonator.

ROBERT
What? Like in the movies? But
she... he?

HELEN
She.

ROBERT
Well, isn't that something.

Ruby returns with two packages wrapped in parchment paper.

RUBY
Here ya go, gorgeous..

HELEN
What's this?

RUBY
Your usual.

HELEN
Oh, for my roommate.

ARTHUR
(Yelling)
She doesn't have a roommate!

Arthur and the queens laugh and run out the door.

HELEN
You owe me a dress!

24. EXT. WEST VILLAGE STREET - NIGHT

The queens are strutting down the street.

RITA
So where's the dress?

ARTHUR
At the station. Long story, but
maybe we can stop by Eve's bar
first.

JAMES
You haven't heard.

RITA
Arthur, Eve's closed.

ARTHUR
What?

JAMES
Raided.

ARTHUR
But why?

RITA
Maybe she forgot to pay off the
cops?

JAMES
Eve's no mobster.

RITA
We were making rounds to all the
bars and the police were out in
numbers. But, you know a night's
never complete without a stop at
Eve's, so...

JAMES
Rita was blotto.

ARTHUR
Shocking.

JAMES
Shocking, and almost got us locked
up. They barged in and arrested Eve
and a few other dykes for wearing
men's clothes.

ARTHUR
For wearing a tuxedo? She always
wears a tuxedo.

JAMES
They cited some "three article
rule".

RITA
Something about having to have
three articles of correctly
gendered clothing on. Then they
kicked everyone out and put chains
on the door.

JAMES

We went to bail them out yesterday
and they let everyone go, except
Eve.

ARTHUR
That's the second bar this month.

RITA
Soon we won't have anywhere of our
own left.

JAMES
You two need to be more careful.
Things are changing.

They walk in silence for a few moments. The group crosses
paths with a police officer. As they get closer the tension
mounts.

JAMES
(Code switching)
Good evening officer.

POLICE OFFICER
Pansies.

The cop spits on the sidewalk as he passes.

ARTHUR
(Under his breath)
Revolutionary.

Rita stops and turns back.

RITA
You got a problem with my friends,
sir?

JAMES
(under his breath)
Rita, please.

The Police Officer turns back and and grabs Rita's arm.

POLICE OFFICER
You want to spend the night locked
up, miss?

RITA
These gentleman are escorting me to
work. I have a family to support.

JAMES
She's sorry, aren't you, Rita?

ARTHUR
Sometimes she talks before she
thinks.

RITA
Oh yes, sir. I am sorry, I didn't
mean to offend our fine men in
blue.
(flirting)
Thank you for keeping us safe.

The cop lets go of Rita's arm.

POLICE OFFICER
You're lucky I'm on break.

He walks off.

RITA
(beat)
Fucking flatfoot.

JAMES
You're lucky you pass, Rita.

RITA
Luck has nothing to do with it.
Maybelline does.

ARTHUR
Oooooo ladies, look!

They are standing in front of a dress shop. Three dresses on
mannequins are beautifully lit in the window. In their
reflections, it appears they are wearing the gowns.

ARTHUR
Isn't that just divine.

RITA
You should have stood up to that
cop.

ARTHUR
For what? Calling me a pansy? I am
a Pansy.

RITA
(to James)
No, this kiss ass over here, "Good
evening officer, Oh She's sorry
officer."

JAMES

You two don't get it. You dress up,
flirt with cops and crack jokes,
but I don't have that luxury
because I'm colored.

(beat)

You get roughed up, I get locked
up. You get called names, I get
charges. I have to keep my head
down and hope for the best. I don't
get to be funny or fabulous or
loud.

RITA

(softly)

James...

ARTHUR

James, I...

JAMES

Just be careful. If not for
yourselves, at least for me.
Please.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry.

RITA

Me too.

JAMES

Thanks.

ARTHUR

But James, you and I both know I
could be wearing an Army uniform
and I would still get called a
pansy.

RITA & JAMES

(laugh loudly)

ARTHUR

It's not that funny.

JAMES

You're not picturing you in an Army
uniform.

CUT TO:

25. EXT. WEST VILLAGE STREET - NIGHT

Helen and Robert turn a corner.

ROBERT
There she is.

Helen fixates on a shiny burgundy Cadillac.

HELEN
Oh, Robert!

Robert walks past the Cadillac then crosses the street to a beat up 1932 pickup. Helen's expression changes. Robert opens the unlocked driver's side door and honks the horn.

ROBERT
Hop in! You have to get in on this side, 'cause that one only opens from the inside.

HELEN
Charming.

CUT TO:

26. INT. RADIO STATION DESK - NIGHT

Arthur turns the lights on and the queens fixate on the dress.

JAMES
(gasps)
You didn't!

ARTHUR
Let me explain.

RITA
Oh, Arthur, I wish I could afford to buy her.

ARTHUR
Oh honey, I wish you could, too.
But until then your rental fee will do.

Arthur holds out his hand and Rita grabs a ten dollar bill from her purse.

JAMES
Arthur, you could get fired for this, and... wait, now I could get fired for this. I'm an accomplice!

ARTHUR

Look, it's not a big deal. We make three costumes: two for the star and one for the understudy. Everyone knows Merman doesn't miss a performance until after the opening night reviews are in.

JAMES

This is a very big deal, Arthur.

ARTHUR

We need the money, and Rita promised she'd get me in the auditions for Pastor's in the morning.

JAMES

I hope this is worth it.

ARTHUR

I'll be the biggest female impersonator to come out of the New York vaudeville scene since Eltinge. You'll see.

JAMES

How many times do I have to tell you that vaudeville is dead.

ARTHUR

Bite your tongue!

RITA

So is Eltinge.

Rita makes the sign of a cross.

JAMES

Gone but not forgotten.

Rita picks up the dress.

RITA

Ooh, She's heavy.

ARTHUR

50,000 Rhinestones and pearls hand beaded by little old ladies that almost went blind.

RITA

Are you sure she couldn't just go missing?

ARTHUR

Oh I don't know, do you think they'll notice that a two hundred dollar custom beaded dress has disappeared?

JAMES

Two hundred dollars? Have you two gone mad?

RITA

So, is that a no?

ARTHUR

That would be a definite no, honey. James, it's going to be fine. I'll spray her down in vodka and put her back before tomorrow's matinee. No one will be the wiser.

James is uneasy but nods his head yes.

ARTHUR

Rita, you're sure I'm on the audition list?

RITA

I'm working the door.

ARTHUR

Perfect. Wait to you see her under the lights, Rita Hayworth herself would be jealous of this dress.

CUT TO:

27. INT. ROBERT'S PICKUP - NIGHT

Robert and Helen are driving along the river. There is clutter everywhere, as if he's been living out of his car. Helen is balancing her two packages.

HELEN

(Shouting over the engine noise)
Well, this is fun.

ROBERT

Huh?

HELEN

I said it's fun! A good chance for us to chat.

ROBERT
Miss Freudenberg?

HELEN
Robert, Could we do away with the formalities? With all this noise we shouldn't waste words.

ROBERT
OK, Helen! So, about Arthur...

HELEN
Go on.

ROBERT
Well, that dress in the lobby? The one Arthur was screaming about when I met him. It's not yours, is it?

HELEN
You are a bright one. No, it's not mine.

ROBERT
It's Arthur's?

HELEN
And what if it is?

ROBERT
You know what I'm saying.

HELEN
Then say it.

CUT TO:

28. INT. DRESSING ROOM / RADIO STATION - NIGHT

Rita has the dress on as Arthur pins it for her figure.

RITA
Oh Arthur, she's rich!

ARTHUR
(Impersonating Mae West)
"I've been rich and I've been poor...

ALL THREE
...rich is better."

Arthur picks up his new Sophie Tucker and Billie Holiday records.

ARTHUR
Look what I found.

JAMES
Oh, Arthur, another one? No wonder
you're always broke.

RITA
You must have a hundred already.

Arthur hands the Billie Holiday record to James.

ARTHUR
And this one's for you.

JAMES
Thank you.

RITA
She sang this last week at Cafe
Society. Not a dry eye in the
house.

ARTHUR
Yet, it's banned from radio play in
the south. And this record. This
record is banned in all of Germany.

JAMES
Here we go...

ARTHUR
When Hitler took power, he banned
Sophie from performing and ordered
that all copies of this record...

JAMES AND RITA
Be destroyed.

RITA
We know Arthur.

JAMES
Thanks to you... but buying every
copy you find isn't going to change
that.

ARTHUR
They're not FOR me. They're banning
books, closing bars, making up new
laws and arresting our friends.
What if they take our music next?

RITA

(Beat. The mood has turned serious.)
Well, lets get over to the bar. I don't want to be late.

CUT TO:

29. INT. ROBERT'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

They are stopped at a traffic light.

ROBERT
So Arthur is like Rita?

HELEN
Does it matter?

ROBERT
I've met queers before, but Arthur, he's... he's something on a different level.

HELEN
Queer is an ugly word these days.

ROBERT
Is it?

HELEN
The boys call each other gay or Mary... anything Dorothy Parker says. James prefers gay, Rita loves queen, Ruby likes dyke, but never lesbian and Arthur... Arthur is just Arthur.

ROBERT
I can't keep up.

HELEN
You can if you try, honey. It's a big wide world filled with all kinds of people.

ROBERT
Are all your friends...

HELEN
Gay? Honey, this is Manhattan. Everyone's gay.

Helen smiles and slides over to Robert.

HELEN
It's chilly, keep me warm?

CUT TO:

30. INT. DOWNTOWN DRAG CLUB - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Arthur and Rita are in the wings. Arthur is futzing with Rita's hair.

ARTHUR
You're a vision.

RITA
I couldn't have done this without you. Thank you.

ARTHUR
Just promise me you'll keep her safe and have her back in my hands tomorrow morning?

RITA
You're leaving?

ARTHUR
Not yet! I'll watch your first set from the back, but Sarita needs me to finish some sewing at home. Now promise me you won't go out on the town in the dress.

RITA
I'll be careful.

ARTHUR
I said promise me you won't go out on the town in the dress.

RITA
Fine.

ARTHUR
Rita...

RITA
I won't go out on the town in this dress.

ARTHUR
Thank you.

RITA

I'll lock her in the dressing room
right after the show.

ARTHUR
Good. Knock 'em dead.

RITA
I always do.

CUT TO:

31. INT. ROBERT'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Robert pulls the car over to the curb and turns off the engine. He turns on the radio.

MUSIC CUE: "While a Cigarette was Burning".

Robert leans toward Helen to open the door. Helen mistakes the lean in for a kiss and plants one on Robert.

ROBERT
Oh!

Helen sees her building.

HELEN
Oh, we're here. I thought you
pulled over...

ROBERT
For a kiss?

HELEN
I'm so embarrassed.

ROBERT
Don't be. It's just... is someone
watching us?

Robert points to the boarding house where a silhouetted figure peers at them from behind a curtain.

HELEN
That would be Miss Beauchamp. She's
more of a prison warden than a
house mother. She hates for any of
us to have fun.

32. EXT. BEAUCHAMP'S BOARDING HOUSE - MIDTOWN - NIGHT

Robert gets out of the truck. He walks around and knocks for

Helen to open the door. She steps out, Robert's retrieves Helen's packages.

ROBERT
See? Only opens from the inside.

He hands the packages to Helen.

HELEN
Thank you. Barbara will be so pleased. Do ring me about the show?

ROBERT
Of course. I look forward to it.

Helen walks up the steps and blows Robert a kiss from the landing. Robert catches it. Miss Beauchamp opens the door and Helen turns around grinning.

HELEN
(To herself)
Nice catch.

CUT TO:

33. INT. DOWNTOWN DRAG CLUB - NIGHT

Rita performs "While a Cigarette Was Burning" to a packed house. James watches from the back. Arthur slinks out the door.

RITA
(singing)
*While a cigarette was burning
My heart was burning too
A smoke ring for your finger
I fashioned in the blue*

CUT TO:

34. EXT. WEST VILLAGE STREET - NIGHT

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER SCENE

*While a cigarette was burning
Our smoke dreams all came true
We tried to make them linger
As lovers always do*

Arthur walks down the street and notices the shadowy figure of TRENCH COAT MAN 1. He is keeping Arthur's pace from across the street. Arthur looks at the man and stops in his tracks. The man approaches him, then walks by. They both turn and

look at each other. The cruising game. The man approaches and puts a cigarette in his mouth.

TRENCH COAT MAN 1
Got a match?

CUT TO:

35. INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Helen smokes in front of a freestanding mirror. The half eaten chocolate pie sits on her nightstand. She takes off her dress and turns sideways staring at her reflection. She removes her girdle, revealing another girdle underneath. She touches her belly.

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER SCENE

*From foolish dreams we woke
For loves that choke, that goes up in smoke
Now in each cigarette
I see you yet
Somehow I shall never forget*

CUT TO:

36. INT. YMCA - HALLWAY - NIGHT

We follow TRENCH COAT MAN 2. He passes a room where we glimpse a naked man in a small bed behind another shirtless man closing the door.

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER SCENE

*While a cigarette was burning
We loved and laughed and learned*

CUT TO:

37. INT. DOWNTOWN DRAG CLUB - STAGE - NIGHT

RITA
(singing)
*That hearts were made for breaking
While a cigarette burned.*

Rita bows and the crowd applauds. James offers Rita his arm. The two walk out the door. Rita is wearing the dress.

FADE TO:

38. INT. DOWNTOWN BAR - BAR - NIGHT

MUSIC INTERLUDE CONTINUES OVER SCENE

James and Rita are at another bar. Suddenly, the doors burst open and police raid the bar. Rita runs, but a cop roughly grabs her, ripping the top of the dress. Mayhem ensues. James throws a drink and escapes out the back of the club.

CUT TO:

39. INT. YMCA - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Trench Coat Man 2 opens his room door and enters, followed by a uniformed soldier. As he turns to close the door, the uniformed soldier is revealed to be Robert.

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER SCENE

*While a cigarette was burning
We loved and laughed and learned
That hearts were made for breaking
While a cigarette burned*

The door shuts.

CUT TO:

40. INT. ARTHUR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The door opens. Arthur puts down his bags and hangs up his jacket and hat.

SARITA O.S.

My boy, my love, is that you?

ARTHUR

Oh good, you're still up!

MRS. SARITA LEVITZ (Arthur's Grandmother, gentle and kind, yet comedic and strong) turns on a lamp above her chair, illuminating a few sewing machines and clothing draped all over the room.

SARITA

So much still to do, I fell asleep
in the goddamn chair.

Arthur goes through the pile of mail on the floor.

ARTHUR

Any word?

She shakes her head no.

ARTHUR
There's always tomorrow.

SARITA
My hands were cramping so bad I
could hardly thread a needle.

Sarita lights a cigarette.

ARTHUR
I'll finish this up for you. Did
you listen to the show?

SARITA
Of course, my love. I don't know
how you work with shitty actors
like that.

ARTHUR
He'll improve.

SARITA
Must be one hell of a looker.

ARTHUR
He is. Helen's all over him
already.

SARITA
Tell her she's welcome back home
anytime. I don't like her running
around with those Manhattan
vultures.

ARTHUR
Oh Bubbe.

SARITA
On your father's grave, I won't
push it Arthur, but trust me, you
two are safer together and safer
here in Brooklyn. Choose your
battles, Arthur. OK, enough
morality lessons, let me see the
dress.

ARTHUR
I rented it to Rita.

SARITA
But your audition?

Arthur hands her the money.

ARTHUR
It's ten dollars Bubbe.

She takes the money, kisses him on the forehead then goes to the closet and takes out a garment bag.

ARTHUR
What's that?

SARITA
Oh please, Arthur, you were 8 years old the first time you wore this dress.

She takes out the dress and Arthur undresses.

ARTHUR
That was just the first time you caught me. The first time I wore it, I was 6.

SARITA
I'll never forget it, I heard you singing in my room, cracked open my door and there you were, dancing around in this gown. You were so happy.

ARTHUR
You've always known me, Bubbe.

SARITA
It'll fit better now.

Arthur pulls the dress up.

ARTHUR
And I don't need a belt to keep it off the ground.

SARITA
You got my tickets?

She zips up the dress.

ARTHUR
I had to give them to Helen, sorry. I'll get some more. Of course she invited Robert right away. They were thick as thieves when I left.

SARITA

Oh Arthur.

ARTHUR

I just want him to like me.
Everyone loves queens on stage
Bubbe, but it's off stage that
counts.

SARITA

OK, my love. No looking back, only
forward. Just promise me one thing?

ARTHUR

Anything.

SARITA

The only black eye I want to see on
you is from eyeliner. Just be
yourself and people will love you.
I mean look at this punim, how
could they not?

Arthur looks at his reflection.

ARTHUR

It's beautiful, Bubbe. It's
actually perfect for Sophie. I just
need hair, and makeup, and shoes ,
and boobies, and ...

SARITA

Arthur, look at me. They're going
to love you. You are beautiful and
talented and one of the most
incredible singers I've ever heard.

ARTHUR

You have to say that.

SARITA

No, I don't. Your brother is a
fucking imbecile.

ARTHUR'S BROTHER

(From upstairs O.S.)

Hey! Fuck both of you!

ARTHUR

(laughing)

Bubbe!

SARITA

It's true. He's as bright as that
wash bucket. But you Arthur, not

you. You're brilliant and beautiful
and talented.

Arthur looks in the mirror and sighs.

SARITA
Say it out loud.

ARTHUR
I'm brilliant and beautiful and
talented.

SARITA
Say it like you mean it.

The fantasy appears.

ARTHURS FANTASY
I'm brilliant and beautiful and
talented.

SARITA
My boy.

ARTHUR
My Bubbe.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

41. INT. BROADWAY THEATER / WARDROBE ROOM / DAY

SUPER: December 7, 1941

Merman's voice fills the air from the monitor. Arthur talks
into the mirror, aggressively wiping off lipstick. He is
painted for an audition.

ARTHUR
Mean, mean mean!

ARTHUR'S FANTASY VERSION
Chin up kid, No looking back, only
forward.

ARTHUR
Rita better be dead, or I'll kill
her.

James, once again is standing in the doorway. He's holding
the canvas bag.

JAMES
I see you have heard.

ARTHUR
About what? James, I just had the worst audition in the world. Rita was nowhere to be found, I lied my way in the door and then there was literally three Judy Garlands. THREE. In gingham, PIGTAILS AND HER LITTLE DOG TOO!

JAMES
Oh boy. Well, you're really not going to be happy.

James hands the canvas bag over to Arthur. Arthur opens it and pulls out the dress.

ARTHUR
What the? What?

JAMES
Another raid.

ARTHUR
Oh my nerves, James. She promised! She promised me she'd keep it safe! I can't take this. This day couldn't get any worse.

Merman's singing stops abruptly mid-song. Confused, Arthur turns up the monitor volume but there is no music, only audience commotion. Sirens are heard in the distance.

ARTHUR
What now?

JAMES
Sounds like they stopped the show.

ARTHUR
They can't stop the show!

CUT TO:

42. INT. BROADWAY THEATER - STAGE DOOR ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Arthur and James descend the steps. The sirens grow louder.

ARTHUR
Tommy? What the hell is going on?

Tommy's is not there.

ARTHUR

Tommy?

Chorus members run down the stairs in panic. James runs into the hallway.

CHORUS PERSON

Get the hell out of here, guys!
We're under attack!

JAMES

Attack?!

CHORUS PERSON

The Japanese just bombed Pearl
Harbor!

ARTHUR

Pearl Harbor? Where the hell is
that?

CHORUS PERSON

Hawaii. Go, New York could be next!

Arthur searches for words but can't conceive what is going on.

ARTHUR

What? I don't understand. Where's
Tommy?

CUT TO:

43. EXT. BROADWAY THEATER - STAGE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Arthur and James exit the theater. The Air raid sirens are deafening. People are scrambling, crying and running. Arthur looks at the mad scene, then locks eyes with Tommy, who is looking directly at Arthur.

ARTHUR

Tommy!

Tommy is being harassed by a group of boys and some police have gotten involved.

JAMES

Hey!

They run over to him.

ANGRY BOY
Dirty Jap!

The police pull a boy off of Tommy. Arthur tries to intervene.

POLICE MAN
Stand back!

ARTHUR
Leave him alone!

TOMMY
Arthur?

ARTHUR
What has he done?

ANGRY BOY 2
Go back to your country!

JAMES
He's from California!

TOMMY
This is my country!

POLICE MAN
(to Arthur)
If you have family you love I
suggest you go. We'll take care of
this.

TOMMY
Guys, go. I'll be fine.

The sound of planes over Times Square makes Arthur look to the sky. People run and scream in panic.

ARTHUR
Bubbe!

Arthur runs toward Times Square amongst the mass panic. Telephone booths have long lines. He looks back as Tommy is being put into a police vehicle. A lady in front of him lets go of her newspaper which blows into the air. Arthur looks to the sky with tears in his eyes. He runs to a subway station and descends the stairs.

FADE TO BLACK