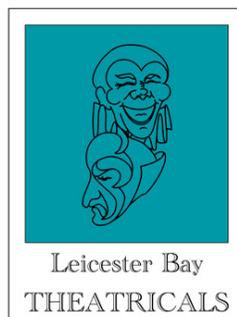


PERUSAL SCRIPT

GEEKS
& *GANGSTERS*
A COMIC FABLE

A play by
ROB. LAUER



Salt Lake City

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GEEKS & GANGSTERS

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GEEKS & GANGSTERS premiered at Western Wyoming Community College (Rock Springs, Wyoming) on September 28, 2007. It was directed by Rob Lauer; the set design was by Kameron Stone; the costume design was by Cathy Pilling; the lighting design was by Amy Critchfield; the sound design was by Beth Reis; production stage manager was Melissa Jensen. The cast was as follows:

Joe Shuster.....	KEITH CHRISTENSEN
Jerry Siegel.....	JUSTIN HOFSTAD
Sarah Siegel.....	ANGELA GRAHAM
Joanne Carter.....	AMBER McNEW
Bella	AMBER LEE GRAFF
David Goldman/Goober/Bill Dunn.....	DAVID BAKER
Luther Dumbrowski/Prof. Smalley.....	JORDAN DICKISON
Lois Amster.....	KAYLI JO WESTLING
Harry Donenfeld.....	JOEY WEST
Jack Liebowitz.....	CHRIS METZ
Frankie.....	KENNY THOMPSON
Sheldon “Shelly” Mayer.....	TREVOR B. DEAN
Pops.....	DUDLEY GARDNER
Mr. Eisner/Mr.Baum/Mr.Carter.....	DON WEST
Magazine Sales Rep/Cartoonist.....	ZAKK FRANCHINA
Aurora D. Grace.....	AMANDA VOLLMER
Roxy.....	MEGAN REES
Nurse Herman/Gussie Donenfeld.....	EMILY B. JOHNSON
Girl Student/Rose Liebowitz.....	SHANNA DANA
Naïve Freshman/Assistant/Policeman.....	TIM MERKLEY
Athlete 1.....	TOBBY SHAW
Athlete 2.....	ISAAC WEST

This play is dedicated to my brother,

CHRISTOPHER TODD LAUER

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: *AT RISE:* JOE SHUSTER—a frail, skinny seventeen-year-old boy who wears thick glasses—stands alone on stage and addresses the audience.

JOE: When I was nine years old I learned how to draw from Tarzan. No, Tarzan himself didn't swing in through my window and give me art lessons. I learned how to draw by studying the Tarzan comic strips in the paper.
(A black and white drawing of Tarzan, taken from the daily comic strips of the late 1920's, is projected behind JOE. He eagerly points out details in the drawing.)

See how those bold black lines make his muscles leap off the page? That fascinated me! I'd study his arms—so powerful they could propel his perfect manly body through the air, from one jungle vine to the next! Then I'd look down at my arms, which looked like bend-straws from the soda shop—and this feeling would well up within me: complete and utter despair! In the mad rush of those feelings, I'd snatch up anything on hand—wrapping paper from the butcher, the back of unused wallpaper—and I'd copy the lines of Tarzan's jungle-honed physique. In my stupid kid way, I thought that if I could just reproduce those lines myself that somehow I could make that perfect manly body my own, and the skinny little geek who stared back at me from the bathroom mirror would disappear. After a while I got pretty good at drawing Tarzan; but that geek was still there, staring back at me whenever I brushed my teeth or combed my hair. When I was eleven, I discovered the pulps and “Doc Savage Magazine!”

(The image of Tarzan disappears, replaced by the cover of a “Doc Savage” magazine. The square-jawed, red-headed hero is depicted struggling to escape some death-trap, his muscles ripping through his trademark white shirt.)

Doc Savage—“the Man of Bronze”—a scientific master-mind with a body even thicker with muscles than Tarzan's. In every daring escape, his pectorals and biceps would rip through his white shirt. And see how his thick red hair falls over his strong square brow—always in one perfect curl? It makes him look so...so Episcopalian...or Presbyterian—so not Jewish—like the geek in the mirror.

(A cover of “Spicy Adventure Stories” now appears behind JOE. It depicts a voluptuous beauty in strategically ripped clothing facing some dangerous menace.)

At twelve I stole a copy of “Spicy Adventure Stories” from the neighborhood barber shop and started to practice drawing the female form. Sometimes after a long night of drawing, I'd lie back on my bed and just...stare at the cover.

(A copy of “Amazing Stories” now appears behind JOE. It depicts an athletic man in red tights with a power pack on his back, in flight against a yellow sky. This cover excites JOE more than the others.)

The August 1927 issue of “Amazing Stories”—a classic! “Amazing Stories” was my favorite kind of pulp: Scienci-fiction—stories of inter-planetary travel, fantastic inventions and technological progress! And look at this guy! He's perfect! A muscular body—not as thick as Doc Savage's, but just as graceful as Tarzan's; and best of all, he's flying—floating effortlessly above the earth. I wanted to be that guy! Wanted to look like him; wanted to fly like him! Just leap gracefully into that sunny yellow sky and not fall back to earth...

(The magazine cover fades leaving JOE in a small pool of light.)

...Especially when I looked in the bathroom mirror...or when times got tough—like when Pop lost his job

and decided to leave Toronto and move us all to Cleveland—Ohio! During the first weeks of my senior year, as the new kid at Glenville High, I dreamed of nothing but flying away—especially when I was in that Hell known as gym class.

(The lights behind JOE rise, revealing TEENAGE ATHLETES in gym clothes exercising with dumbbells. Among them is DAVID GOLDMAN who seems to be the embodiment of the ideal all-American teenage athlete: handsome, tall and muscular with wavy black hair. Another teen, LUTHER DUMBROWSKI, looks more brutish; his head is shaved to hide the fact that he is prematurely balding. DAVID taunts JOE.)

DAVID: Hey, Shuster, are you gonna pump iron or just stare at us?

JOE: *(Lowering his voice in a sad attempt to sound manly)* Pump iron!

(DAVID effortlessly hands a dumbbell to JOE who nearly drops it. The ATHLETES laugh at him. Determinedly, JOE struggles to press the dumbbell above his head. Suddenly he stops, drops it to the ground and clutches his nose.)

LUTHER: Hey! What's the big idea?

JOE: Nose-bleed!

(JOE faints in front of the stunned ATHLETES as the lights on the scene fade to black.)

SCENE 2: THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. *AT RISE: JERRY SIEGEL sits alone in the waiting room. Eighteen years old, JERRY has little of the physical maturity associated with young men his age. Soft and doughy, he is painfully self-conscious in public, and he sits slumped in his chair with his knees turned in. His facial expression in repose could be read as one of complete boredom or of utter resignation to some awful fate. JOE, holding a bloody handkerchief over his nose, is escorted in by MRS. HERMAN, the school nurse. MRS. HERMAN sits JOE in the chair next to JERRY.*

MRS. HERMAN: Just sit there with your head tilted back until the next bell—

(The door to the principal's office suddenly opens revealing a very anxious principal, MR. EISNER. He sighs with relief when he sees the nurse.)

EISNER: Oh, it's just you, Mrs. Herman. *(To JERRY, with a sense of dread)* She's not here yet?

JERRY: Not yet, Mr. Eisner.

(With a weary sigh, MR. EISNER goes back into his office as if to await execution. MRS. HERMAN exits. JOE notices that JERRY is staring at his bloody nose.)

JOE: *(Defensively)* Nobody punched me...yet.

JERRY: Okay.

JOE: It's just a nose-bleed. I get 'em.

JERRY: Okay.

(JERRY continues observing the newcomer out of the corner of his eye. JOE stuffs the tissue in his bleeding nostril; then takes a note book and pencil from his book bag. Trying to keep his head tilted back as the nurse's instructed, JOE attempts, with great difficulty, to draw a picture in the notebook while holding it high above his head. HE ends up nearly laying down in his chair. Everything about the effort—from concept to execution—screams "Geek!" JERRY cautiously leans over to see what

JOE is drawing.)

JERRY: Is that Tarzan?

JOE: Supposed to be; I can't get the muscles in his upper-back quite right.

JERRY: It's better than I can do.

JOE: You draw?

JERRY: Not anymore; just doodles in the margins of my geography book.

JOE: Let's see.

(As JERRY rummages for his geography book, he drops a magazine on the floor. JOE sees the title of the magazine and lights up.)

JOE: "Amazing Stories"—that's my favorite issue!

JERRY: Mine, too! You like Sci-fi?

JOE: No...I love it! *(Offering his hand)* I'm Joe Shuster.

JERRY: *(Shaking his hand)* Jerry Siegel. You're new here, aren't you?

JOE: I transferred.

JERRY: From Eastman High?

JOE: From Canada.

JERRY: You're not American?

JOE: Canada's part of America. If you'd read your geography book instead of just drawing in it, you'd know that.

(Jerry's mother, SARAH SEIGEL, a middle-age housewife, storms into the office. Everything about her—her physical bearing, her manner, her Lithuanian accent—indicates that she is a force to be reckoned with.)

SARAH: Jerry!

JERRY: Now, Ma—

SARAH: Jerry, what happened? What's wrong?

JERRY: Nothin', Ma—

SARAH: I got a phone call, Jerry—a call! And I told Mr. Eisner not to call me here again unless blood was being spilt!

JERRY: It's nothing—

SARAH: Nothing? *(Seeing the bloody tissue protruding from JOE'S nostril)* Blood!

JERRY: No, Ma—!

SARAH: Yes, Jerry: I see blood!

JERRY: But not mine!

(EISNER has cautiously opened his office door. Seeing him, SARAH descends upon him.)

SARAH: Mr. Eisner, why am I standing here, and my son's not bleeding?

EISNER: Please, Mrs. Siegel: just calm down, and come into my off—

(SARAH is already storming past him into his office. JERRY gathers up his things and, with an apologetic look at EISNER, follows his mother. EISNER closes the door behind him as the lights fade on the waiting area and rise on the principal's office. SARAH stands, looking sternly at EISNER.)

EISNER: Mrs. Siegel, I know you asked me not to call you again unless—

SARAH: Unless blood has been—

EISNER: “—been spilt.”

SARAH: —Because my Jerry’s not a trouble-maker. He doesn’t bully others—

EISNER: *(Interrupting her, bluntly)* Mrs. Siegel, I thought you’d like to know that Jerome has been reading girlie magazines.

SARAH: What?!

EISNER: Yes, girlie magazines—here in school.

(EISNER takes a handful of pulp fiction magazines from a drawer and drops them on his desk. SARAH examines the top magazine, and is suddenly relieved.)

SARAH: No, no; these are detective magazines.

EISNER: The girls on the covers are nearly naked!

SARAH: Pish! You see chorus girls wearing less than that in a Fred and Ginger movie.

EISNER: It doesn’t concern you that Jerome has such pictures?

SARAH: My Jerry’s a good boy. He’d never think of girls in that way.

(Completely emasculated, JERRY sinks down in his chair.)

EISNER: Never?

SARAH: Never.

EISNER: Is that true, Jerome? You never think of girls in that way?

JERRY: *(Feeling damned either way, but wisely siding with his mother)* No...?

SARAH: He reads these magazines for the stories.

EISNER: And which esteemed authors does your son read?

(Opening a magazine, flipping through it)

Raymond Chandler? Dashiell Hammett? Dashiell? What kind of a name is that? Mrs. Siegel, no writer with an ounce of talent would be caught dead writing this pulp fiction trash.

SARAH: I don’t buy trash for my son!

EISNER: You bought these for him?

SARAH: I gave him the dimes to buy them with. But he buys science magazines, too. Show him, Jerry.

(JERRY hesitates.)

Jerome!

(Reluctantly, JERRY hands his other magazines to EISNER who glances over the covers.)

EISNER: These are Scienti-fiction magazines; they’re fantasies—fairy tales.

SARAH: They stimulate his imagination. Jerry is very creative.

EISNER: We don’t allow pulp magazines of any kind in school.

SARAH: So students shouldn’t use their imaginations?

EISNER: Mrs. Siegel, imagination has no place in the classroom. Now, I know you want Jerome to graduate this year, especially after he failed a grade—

SARAH: *(Defensively; trying with difficulty to control her emotions)* He did not fail! He was held back because he missed so much time because of...of....

(SARAH’S emotions get the best of her; she almost weeps. Treading cautiously, EISNER comes closer to her, and softens his voice when he speaks.)

EISNER: Mrs. Siegel, I know all about...about that— which is why I’m surprised that you seem so unconcerned that Jerome is reading these violent crime magazines.

SARAH: (*Abruptly picking up the magazines*) Mr. Eisner, you needn't give Jerry's magazines another thought. I'll make sure he leaves them at home—

EISNER: Now, Mrs. Siegel—

SARAH: —along with his imagination! Come along, Jerry.

(SARAH and JERRY exit the principal's office. The lights rise once again on the waiting room. As SARAH passes JOE, she eyes him suspiciously. Unable to resist, she stops to interrogate him about his bloody nose.)

SARAH: Young man, what's all this? What happened here?

JERRY: (*Quickly coming to JOE'S rescue*) Ma, this is Joe Schuster—a new friend of mine—from Canada.

SARAH: (*Looking JOE over suspiciously*) And why has your Canadian friend been starting fights?

JOE: (*Incredulous—and flattered*) Start fights—me?

SARAH: (*As if citing indisputable evidence of guilt*) You're in the Principal's office bleeding.

JOE: Mrs. Siegel, I don't start fights; I'm the guy who gets fights started against him.

JERRY: It's just a nose bleed, Ma. He has 'em.

SARAH: These nose bleeds, your mother knows about them?

JOE: Yeah.

SARAH: Alright: as long as your mother knows.

(Kisses JERRY)

See you at supper time.

JERRY: Can Joe come over for supper tonight?

SARAH: I don't know what they eat in Canada. He might not like what we're having. But if his mother says he can...

JERRY: Thanks, Ma.

(SARAH exits. He sits back down next to JOE)

Do you have any more drawings you can show me?

JOE: (*Handing his drawing pad to JERRY*) Plenty! I draw men better than women. I could improve if I just had a girl to model for me.

JERRY: (*Studying the drawings with the earnestness of an art critic*) You're good, Joe—really good—and I know artistic talent when I see it. I've been looking to hire an artist, and I think I've found my man.

JOE: You mean a job?

JERRY: Can you keep a secret?

(He hands his copy of "Amazing Stories" to JOE)

Turn to the back; page 38; third column on the right; fourth advertisement down.

JOE: (*Reading from the magazine*) "Subscribe now to the most amazing new magazine in America: 'Science Fiction.'"

JERRY: (*Revealing a monumental secret*) "Science Fiction" magazine—that's me.

JOE: (*Amazed*) You write for it?

JERRY: (*Nodding, proudly*) I'm the editor and the publisher.

JOE: Wow! I didn't know a guy could be a magazine publisher while he's still a senior!

JERRY: Shhh! It's a secret.

JOE: Nobody knows?

JERRY: Just Ma—and now you.

JOE: *(A sudden realization)* Jiminy Cricket! You have a secret identity—just like the Shadow or the Scarlet Pimpernel!

JERRY: Or Zorro!

JOE: I've never met somebody with a secret identity before! Cleveland is so much more exciting than Canada! But isn't it expensive advertising in a national publication like "Amazing Stories?"

JERRY: Not really. I deliver groceries after school, so I saved the whole amount in only a year.

JOE: But what about publishing costs?

JERRY: Can you keep another secret? I'm a reporter on "The Torch."

JOE: The school paper?

JERRY: Yeah, but I don't do it because I care about the school news; I do it so I can use their paper and mimeograph machine.

(From his books, JERRY pulls a copy of "Science Fiction Magazine"—a dozen mimeographed pages stapled together.)

Here it is: Volume one, issue one of "Science Fiction."

(JOE reverently takes the "magazine" as if it was the Holy Grail)

JOE: Wow! But doesn't anybody notice all the paper missing.

JERRY: Not so far.

JOE: How many people subscribe to your magazine?

JERRY: In the past four months, subscription sales have increased by nearly 30 percent.

JOE: Wow! How many subscriptions is that total?

JERRY: Oh...fourteen...fifteen...Well, twelve to be exact—but with a talented artist like you on staff, I know we can produce a magazine that'll take the nation by storm.

JOE: *(Impressed)* Your staff? You have a staff?

JERRY: Well, that'll be up to you, Joe Schuster. Do I have a staff?

(JERRY offers his hand to JOE, who shakes it enthusiastically.)

JOE: You bet!

JERRY: Come on. I've got something to show you.

(The lights fade on the scene as JERRY starts off. JOE crosses downstage and addresses the audience.)

JOE: This Jerry Siegel was the most fascinating guy I'd ever met! To those around him, he was just a grocery store delivery boy—but to twelve scienti-fiction fans spread across these United States, he was a famous writer and magazine publisher! Suddenly, I was happy to stay earth-bound right there at Glenville High School!

(JOE crosses up stage as the lights rise on...)

SCENE 3: THE OFFICE OF "THE GLENVILLE TORCH". *A classroom serves as the newspaper's office. The only objects in the room designating it as the office are a poster on the wall bearing the paper's masthead and two old typewriters on a table next to a mimeograph machine. AT RISE: JERRY leads JOE into the room.*

JERRY: Here we are: by day, the offices of “The Torch”; by late-afternoon, the brain-center of “Science Fiction” magazine. I was thinking we could bring you on staff as “The Torch’s” cartoonist.

JOE: Gee! You could do that?

JERRY: Sure. I’ll talk to Lois Amster—she’s the editor. Here’s another little secret: Lois tries to hide it ‘cause she’s the “career-girl” type, but she’s a little sweet on me.

JOE: Really?

JERRY: Keep it under your hat. Here: I’ll show you the mimeograph machine.

(Suddenly LOIS AMSTER enters. An averagely pretty girl, she tries to appear confident and strong. Obviously, she’s spent many a Saturday afternoon at the movies, studying the mannerisms of Barbara Stanwyck and Rosalind Russell.)

LOIS: Hey! Only members of the “Torch” staff are allowed in here.

JERRY: I’m on the staff—I mean—I was...last year. I wrote—

LOIS: *(Remembering, unenthusiastically)*—those book reviews. Oh, yeah. Jimmy Siegel, right?

JERRY: Jerry Siegel.

JOE: *(Aside to Jerry)* I thought you said she was sweet on you.

JERRY: Shhh! *(Approaching LOIS, who seems preoccupied with something important)* Lois, this is Joe—Joe Shuster. He’s a new student—

LOIS: Listen, Jimmy—

JERRY: Jerry—

LOIS: I’m in the middle of a big breaking news story: Ethel Zimmer is using her position as chair of the Homecoming committee to get back at every girl who ever snubbed her—

JERRY: But Joe here is an artist and—

(DAVID GOLDMAN enters with a consoling arm around his girlfriend BELLA, who is clearly upset—almost in tears. BELLA is “the prettiest girl at Glenville”—and the most insecure.)

BELLA: Oh, Lois!

LOIS: Bella, I just heard all about it!

DAVID: Ethel Zimmer is being such a...such a witch—with a B!

BELLA: *(Shocked by his language)* David!

DAVID: *(Realizing he’s crossed the line)* Don’t print that, Lois.

BELLA: She’s can’t kick me off the Homecoming committee! I have rights, too. My boyfriend is Glenville’s star quarterback! Doesn’t that count for something?

DAVID: She’s just doing it to get back at me for that time during our Sophomore year when she knew that I knew that she wanted me to ask her to the spring dance, and I didn’t.

BELLA: Ruth Matthias told me that Rhoda Fingerhut told her that Ethel said she’s only letting girls serve on the committee whose fathers are doctors, lawyers or rabbis.

DAVID: Bella has to be on that committee. She can do more with crepe paper than any other girl at Glenville; she’s got a real gift.

LOIS: *(Getting out her pad and pencil)* I agree, but as a reporter I can’t let my own personal prejudices color my view of the facts. Bella, are you willing to make a statement for “The Torch”? Have you ever snubbed Ethel Zimmer?

BELLA: Never! I'm a nice person. Ask anybody. Ethel Zimmer is doing this to me because she doesn't think I'm good enough to be David's girlfriend. Maybe my family's not rich, maybe we're struggling—but so are a lot of other Americans. I wonder what President Roosevelt would think of Ethel Zimmer's attitude. I, for one, bet he wouldn't like it at all.

LOIS: *(Having feverishly taken down every word)* Beautifully put, Bella; Beautiful.

(JOE stares at BELLA with his mouth hanging open, completely taken by her. DAVID notices this and doesn't like it at all.)

LOIS: You want to make a statement, David?

DAVID: *(Tearing his focus from Joe; speaking with intense manly earnestness)* I think Ethel Zimmer's being dishonest, unjust and Un-American—and as Glenville's star quarterback, I feel I have a duty to defend truth, justice and the American way against people like Ethel Zimmer.

LOIS: *(Taking down every word, impressed by the gravity of the situation)* Wow! This is going to be a very important story!

(DAVID notices that JOE is still staring at BELLA. He glares at JOE, who instantly shrinks back.)

DAVID: Bella, you go on. I have some business here to take care of.

(BELLA leaves. DAVID approaches JOE menacingly.)

Hey, Shuster! I saw the way you were looking at my girlfriend!

JOE: You did?

DAVID: Yeah, and I didn't like it—not at all!

JERRY: *(Stepping between them)* So David, you've already met “The Torch's” new cartoonist?

LOIS: What?

(JERRY snatches the drawing pad from Joe and hands it to LOIS.)

JERRY: He's really good, Lois!

(DAVID is now twisting JOE'S skinny right arm in his muscular hand.)

DAVID: Do you know how easily I could break your scrawny little arm?

LOIS: *(Impressed by the drawings)* Wow! He is!

(To DAVID)

Hold it, Hercules! This kid works for me now.

(To JOE)

So kid, you want to be our car-toonist? I'll give you a full page for a comic strip in our next issue.

(Indi-cating Jerry)

Jimmy here will write the story—

JERRY: *(Correcting her)* Jerry—

LOIS: —and you'll do the pictures. I want something funny and upbeat—to counter-balance this whole Janet Zimmer affair. You up to it?

JERRY: Sure, Lois!

LOIS: *(To JOE)* What'a you say, Jimmy?

JERRY: *(Correcting her)* He's Joe—and yeah, he's up to it, too!

LOIS: Great!

(Linking arms with DAVID)

Come along, Golden Boy. Leave my little cartoonist alone. He's got nothing on you.

DAVID: Alright—

(To JOE, a parting threat)

But you keep an eye on your eyes, because I'm keeping my eyes on you.

(The lights fade on the scene as JOE hurries downstage and addresses the audience, horrified.)

JOE: Oh my God! He was gonna break my arm—my right arm!—ending forever my dream of becoming a famous comic strip artist! You know those Charles Atlas ads in the backs of magazines—showing a ninety-pound weakling at the beach getting sand kicked in his face by some bully? That was my life. When David Goldman wrapped his beefy mitt around my pencil-thin wrist, I was overcome by how brutish he was—how violent—how ape-like and dangerous! And I knew right then that somehow... I had to be more like him! I had ordered my copy of Charles Atlas's body-building book through the mail; had read it—twice! Now it was time to put that knowledge to use.

(With newfound determination, JOE turns and marches up stage as the lights rise on...)

SCENE 4: THE SEIGEL HOME -- AT RISE: SARAH and JERRY sit at the dinner table eating. JOE joins them and starts shoveling down his food so voraciously that SARAH stops eating and stares at him dumbfounded.

SARAH: So, Joe, does your mother ever cook?

JERRY: Ma!

SARAH: What? The way he was eating, I thought maybe it had been a while.

JOE: I have to eat a lot these days, Mrs. Siegel. I'm in training.

SARAH: In training? For what?

JOE: I'm a Physical Culture enthusiast.

JERRY: That's bodybuilding, Ma.

SARAH: *(To JOE, incredulously)* You're a muscleman?

JOE: I'm an advocate of the Charles Atlas program. He's "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" ya' know. It's all about big, healthful meals and lots of isometrics.

SARAH: Ice-o-whats?

JOE: Isometrics: that's muscle working against muscle to create more muscle...like this...

(JOE takes a stance and pushes his palms together in order to work his chest. HE pushes hard, his frail frame trembling, his face twisted as he lets out little sporadic grunts. SARAH watches with some concern.)

SARAH: Aren't you afraid doing that might make something starts bleeding again?

JOE: *(Stopping, winded from his demonstration)* My nose bleeds are less frequent when I'm training. In fact, my entire physic has changed.

SARAH: What did it look like before?

(JOE flexes his upper body, leans in to SARAH and holds up his arm so she can feel where his bicep should be.)

JOE: Here, Mrs. Siegel, touch it. Don't be afraid.

(SARAH cautiously pokes at his little arm)

What do you feel?

SARAH: Bone?

JOE: A layer of hard muscle—very thin, but getting thicker every day. The great thing about isometrics is you can do them anytime, anywhere—just like pushups. (*JOE drops to the floor in a pushup position, startling SARAH*) After a big meal, I do pushups...as many I can!

(Obviously JOE can't do many pushups. After just two, HE's grunting, straining and panting. Again, SARAH is concerned about a possible nosebleed.)

SARAH: Maybe you better stop that before something pops. Jerry, if he makes himself sick, his mother's gonna think my cooking did it.

(JOE rises and returns to the table, exhausted, panting and red-faced.)

JOE: Physical Culture has changed my life.

SARAH: Yes...well...that's nice. Here: eat something else.

JOE: No thanks, Mrs. Siegel. I'm full, and you should save something for Mr. Siegel. Does he work this late every night?

(SARAH and JERRY suddenly look uncomfortable. The atmosphere at the table is suddenly tense.)

SARAH: Mr. Siegel...passed away...four years ago—may he rest in peace.

JERRY: ...May he rest in peace.

JOE: Gee...I'm sorry. I didn't know...

(SARAH rises, begins clearing the table and forces herself to sound cheerful.)

SARAH: Of course you didn't, Darling. You were in Canada. Let me clear the table so you boys can do your homework.

(SARAH exits into the kitchen with the dishes.)

JERRY: It's not homework, Ma. It's an assignment for "The Torch"—a big one. Joe and I have gotta come up with a comic strip. (*But JOE has returned to doing push-ups.*) What are you doing?

JOE: Changing.

JERRY: You really wanna be a muscle man?

JOE: Don't you?

JERRY: No!

JOE: Liar! Aren't you tired of getting sand kicked in your face?

JERRY: Is this because of David Goldman?

JOE: It's about all those guys who think they can bully us 'cause—'cause —

JERRY: —'Cause you were ooglin' Bella.

JOE: I couldn't help it. She's so pretty.

JERRY: I know. That's why she's David Goldman's girl.

JOE: I wish I could... draw her. You think she'd model for me?

JERRY: Kid, come back down to earth! Girls like Bella don't end up with guys like us. They end up with guys like—

JOE: —David Goldman! So I'm gonna be more like him.

(JOE returns to doing push-ups, struggling.)

JERRY: Stop that, before you start hemorrhaging again! David's a goober! All those athletic-types are! They've got brawn, but no brains.

JOE: Well, we've got brains, so if we get the brawn, too, we could get what they've got: the pretty girls—

everything.

JERRY: For tonight why don't we settle for just getting even with them?

JOE: How?

JERRY: Can you draw David Goldman?

JOE: I think so.

(JOE grabs his pencil and paper and follows JERRY downstage as the lights dim on the Siegel home, and the bright greens hue of a lush jungle rise on the two boys. Swing music—the wild instrumental of the Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing"—begins to play as underscoring. Literal reality is left behind as we enter the world of the boys' imaginations. From out of the darkness emerges DAVID GOLDMAN, dressed for school and carrying his books. JOE finishes a quick sketch.)

JOE: How's that?

JERRY: Erase the shirt.

(As JOE erases the drawing, JERRY rips DAVID'S shirt off of him in one movement. Embarrassed, DAVID covers his chest with his books. JERRY takes the books from him as well.)

JERRY: You won't need these because you can't read. You were raised in the jungle. *(To JOE)* Now get rid of the pants.

DAVID: Hey!

JERRY: And give him a leopard skin loincloth!

(JOE erases; redraws. JERRY rips off DAVID'S pants to reveal a leopard skin loincloth.)

JOE: Hey, he looks like Tarzan!

JERRY: Not exactly...for while he has Tarzan's physique, he is unfortunately dead from the neck up.

(JERRY taps DAVID'S head. Instantly DAVID wears a goofy, dimwitted expression. He slumps over and begins hopping about like an ape, scratching under his arms and snorting.)

JERRY: Behold the mightiest ape man in the world: Goober!

JOE: Goober?

JERRY: Goober the Mighty!

(DAVID—now GOOBER THE MIGHTY—beats his chest, and does a comic take on the classic Tarzan call. The lights fade quickly to a blackout. In darkness, the swing music continues. The lights rise on...)

SCENE 5: A ROW OF LOCKERS IN A HALL OF GLENVILLE HIGH-- AT RISE: A TEENAGE GIRL and a NAÏVE TEENAGE BOY stand at their lockers, reading and laughing at the latest issue of "The Torch." JERRY and JOE are nearby at their lockers, watching the STUDNETS with obvious pride. LOIS enters and goes to her locker.

JOE: *(Addressing the audience with pride)* Three weeks later when the next issue of "The Torch" hit the school hallways, "Goober the Mighty" was a big hit!

TEENAGE GIRL: Lois, this "Goober the Mighty" comic strip is hysterical!

(Reading the byline from the paper)

Who is Jimmy Shuster?

JOE: *(Suddenly deflated)* Joe—Joe Shuster!

LOIS: Oh, you know: that new kid.

TEENAGE GIRL: Point him out.

(JERRY and JOE strike a pose and try to be as conspicuous as possible. LOIS looks right past them.)

LOIS: Hmm...I don't see him anywhere.

JOE: *(To audience)* Of course, not everyone loved "Goober the Mighty."

(DAVID GOLDMAN—in his gym clothes—enters with BELLA and LUTHER. The TEENAGE BOY cheerfully approaches them.)

TEENAGE BOY: Hey, David! Have you seen this cartoon of you in "The Torch."

DAVID: *(Angrily)* Who said it was me?

(The TEENAGE BOY suddenly realizes his days may be numbered.)

TEENAGE BOY: Uh...everybody...?

DAVID: Well, everybody's wrong!

LUTHER: Yeah! David wouldn't ever wear a loin cloth like some kind of muscle fairy!

(BELLA has been looking at the comic strip with a smile.)

BELLA: It really does look like him, though.

DAVID: Bella!

(DAVID notices JERRY and JOE trying to sneak off)

Hey! Not so fast! You two geeks need to tell this misinformed freshman that your comic strip character isn't supposed to be me. Goober's a bone-head, a moron—whereas I'm President of the Latin Club, the Debating Team—

JOE: You are?

DAVID: I'm on the Honor Roll, too.

JERRY: Really?

DAVID: You sound surprised.

JERRY: I am.

DAVID: What?!

JERRY: I mean—I am?

LUTHER: Why don't we go for a little walk behind the football stadium?

DAVID: Mr. Eisner's coming!

(JERRY and JOE again try to escape, but LUTHER and DAVID each throw an arm over their shoulders—appearing friendly while holding them prisoner. MR. EISNER enters. JERRY suddenly gets an idea. HE pulls a pulp magazine from his text books and tosses it on the floor in front of the PRINCIPAL.)

JERRY: *(To Joe, loudly, conspicuously)* Joe, you dropped your copy of "Weird Stories."

JOE: *(Completely oblivious to the plan, pulling his copy of the pulp out from his books)* No. Mine's right here.

JERRY: Oops! Then it must be mine.

(Seeing the pulps, EISNER angrily confiscates them.)

EISNER: Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster: to my office—now!

(EISNER leads JERRY and JOE away. DAVID and LUTHER glare threateningly at them as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 6: THE SEIGEL FRONT PORCH, early evening of the same day. -- *AT RISE: JERRY and JOE sit on the front steps, each in deep thought.*

JERRY: I can't believe it!

JOE: I can't either!

JERRY: David Goldman—on the Honor Roll!

JOE: They really liked our work!

JERRY: He's got brains and brawn. He's a regular Renaissance man!

JOE: Do you know what this means?

JERRY: Nietzsche was right: God is dead.

JOE: (*Realizing there are two conversations going on*) What are you talking about?

JERRY: The injustice of our existence. What are you talking about?

JOE: Our future in the funny papers.

(Suddenly from across the street female voices can be heard arguing.)

JOE: What's that?

JERRY: Bella and her mother.

JOE: Bella lives across the street from you? Wow! Lucky you!

(The yelling continues. SARAH comes out onto the porch.)

SARAH: They're at it again? They do this every night. In a minute, they'll close their windows and give us all some peace.

(The yelling reaches a climax, then a window slams shut and all is quiet.)

JOE: How long has Bella been your neighbor?

SARAH: Why all this interest in Bella?

JOE: Don't you like her, Mrs. Siegel?

SARAH: She wears her sweaters too tight.

JOE: (*Grinning*) Yeah.

SARAH: —not that I blame her: girls these days want to look cheap. I blame her mother.

JERRY: Ma's never liked Bella's mother.

SARAH: Who she's putting on all that make-up for? A little lipstick's one thing—though at her age that bright red just makes her look hard—but all that eye shadow...and she always has it on. By seven a.m. she's completely painted up. I don't know. Maybe she's doing it for the milkman.

JERRY: Ma, the milkman's sixty and nearly blind.

SARAH: And as blind as he is, even he couldn't miss all that make up. She's a married woman with grown children; she shouldn't care what she looks like anymore. Some-thing's not right there; as the tree grows, so do the twigs, and that's all I'm saying about Bella or her mother. It's almost time for the "The Shadow."

JOE: Great! Thanks, Mrs. Siegel.

JERRY: Not so fast, Kid. We need to come up with a story for the next issue of "Science Fiction."

JOE: Can't we do that after "The Shadow" goes off?

JERRY: No, we can't. Now listen: I think I have an idea. You know how I always said if David Goldman had a brain, he'd be dangerous? Well, how dangerous would he be if he had a super-human brain?

(What follows is a mini-play-within-a-play; a comedic science-fiction melodrama that should be played as “over-the-top” as possible, in the manner of a 1930’s radio-drama such as “The Shadow.” JERRY narrates very melodramatically and lights rise in yard in front of the porch where the story is enacted. Throughout the story, the drama is heightened with chords of organ music. Lights rise elsewhere on PEOPLE standing in a Depression-era breadline.)

JERRY: The story opens on—the bread-line—a row of downcast, disillusioned men! The bread line! The last resort of the starving and the destitute! With a contemptuous sneer, Professor Ernest Smalley—Chemist—watched the unfortunates file past him.

(PROFESSOR SMALLEY [played by the same actor playing Luther] has entered.)

SMALLEY: *(To audience)* I must find the perfect subject for my experiment: a man with an abnormally small brain!

(A man in the breadline turns around catching SMALLEY’S attention. This is BILL DUNN [played by the same actor playing David]. Beneath his tattered trench coat, HE wears a faded high school letterman jacket. With a forlorn expression on his face, DUNN sighs. SMALLEY addresses the audience with wicked glee.)

SMALLEY: Aha! A former high school athlete! Perfect! *(Approaching DUNN)* How would you like a real meal and a new suit?

DUNN: *(Naively)* That’d be swell! But what do I gotta do for it? Nothing crooked I hope.

SMALLEY: My intentions are perfectly humanitarian—but if you doubt me—

(Acting offended, SMALLEY turns to leave. A loud sound-effect is heard: the sound of DUNN’S empty stomach growling. DUNN clutches his stomach.)

DUNN: No! Wait! I believe you!

(Stepping forward, shaking Smalley’s hand)

I’m Bill Dunn—former high school football star.

SMALLEY: I’m Professor Ernest Smalley—Chemist.

(An ominous chord of organ music is heard. DUNN looks around for the source of the music.)

Shall we go?

(The lights fade on SMALLEY and DUNN.)

JERRY: *(Narrating to JOE and SARAH)* Back at his palatial estate, Professor Smalley prepared his sinister experiment.

JOE: *(Enthralled)* What kind of experiment?

(Weird organ music—as in a 1930’s radio-drama—plays as a lights rise on SMALLEY melodramatically holding aloft a glowing green test tube.)

JERRY: Recently Smalley discovered a meteor in which he found a bizarre glowing green element!

SMALLEY: This exerted a strange influence on my laboratory rats. Now I shall administer it to a larger animal.

(With a diabolic laugh, SMALLEY empties the test tube’s contents into a coffee cup just as DUNN enters happily.)

DUNN: I’m so hungry I could eat a horse!

SMALLEY: Let’s start with some coffee, shall we?

DUNN: Gee! Thanks!

(DUNN takes the coffee and drinks it.)

SMALLEY: *(Aside to the audience with an evil laugh)* Aha! My experiment begins!

DUNN: This coffee tastes weird.

SMALLEY: *(Innocently)* Really? It's Maxwell House.

(DUNN grabs his own throat, gasping, and looks into the cup.)

DUNN: This coffee's green—and glowing! Hey! What was in it?

SMALLEY: I'm simply conducting a little experiment—

DUNN: An experiment—on me? Let me out'a here!

SMALLEY: No!

(DUNN tries to escape, but SMALLEY grabs him. They jerk one another left and right—three times—in a vicious struggle; each jerk is accented with the following words.)

DUNN: Let—me—go!

SMALLEY: You—must—stay!

DUNN: Let—me—go!

(Overpower-ing Smalley)

You sick Son of Witch—with a B!

(A melodramatic chord sounds as SMALLEY falls back, gasps, shocked at Dunn's profanity. DUNN runs off. SMALLEY cries out in operative anguish as the lights fade on him.)

SMALLEY: Noooooooooo! Come baaaaaack!

JERRY: *(Narrating)* Dunn made his escape into the night, running through the dark like a lunatic, babbling incoherently.

(Lights rise on DUNN as he breathlessly runs downstage. Suddenly in the dark distance, DUNN hears VOICES.)

FEMALE VOICE: Yackity-Yack-! Blah! Blah! Blah! Yackity-Yack! Blah! Blah! Blah!

(Lights rise elsewhere on a WOMAN talking on the phone, the words “yackety-yak” mimicking her conversation. Lights also rise on a PREACHER preaching, a BLONDE MOVIE STAR acting, a CROOK with a gun—each chanting “yackety-yak.” Their “conversation” grows in volume and intensity, until DUNN is forced to cover his ears.)

JERRY: *(Narrating)* Suddenly a holocaust of confusion burst upon his mind!

JOE: What was happening?

JERRY: The mysterious chemical had given Dunn superhuman hearing—and the ability to read minds!

DUNN: *(Unable to take the noise any longer)* Quiet!!!

(The FOUR CHARACTERS fall silent as they disappear into the darkness.)

JERRY: Not only could he read the minds of others, he could also control their thoughts!

(A POLICEMAN enters and approaches DUNN.)

POLICEMAN: Hey! The park closes at sunset!

(DUNN stares at the POLICEMAN and waves his hand. Instantly the POLICEMAN becomes robotic and speaks in a mind-numbed monotone.)

Never mind.

(The POLICEMAN robotically turns and exits.)

JERRY: Dunn wondered if the chemical had affected his sight. He fixed his gaze at a tiny red star and stared hard!

(DUNN looks up into the sky. A reddish light shines on his face, growing brighter and more intense.) Faster

than the speed of light, the star seemed to grow bigger and bigger until—

DUNN: Mars! I can see Mars!

JERRY: With superhuman hearing and sight—and the ability to read and manipulate the minds of others—the thing that had been Billy Dunn was now a—a—

JOE: *(Suddenly getting a brilliant idea)* A super-man!

JERRY: That's it, Joe! He was a super-man!

DUNN: *(Triumphantly)* I'm a super-man! And with my powers, I shall rule the world!

(DUNN laughs wickedly as the lights fade on him.)

JERRY: And rule the world he did! Sending out his superhuman brain waves, Dunn forced millionaires and captains of industry to write him huge checks against their will!

JOE: Hmmm...that seems a little corny.

JERRY: I'll keep working on it. *(Resuming his melodramatic narration)* Soon the headlines of every newspaper on earth were asking the same question.

(Lights rise on SMALLEY who reads a newspaper with the headline "Who is Bill Dunn?")

SMALLEY: *(Melodramatically)* "Who is Bill Dunn?" Alas! My mad experiment unleashed a great evil upon the world! Somehow I must atone for my great sin! I know: I'll write a letter to a major metropolitan newspaper, giving all the details of Bill Dunn's transformation!

(SMALLEY begins scribbling furiously as the lights fade on him and rise elsewhere on the newspaper EDITOR [played by the same actress who plays LOIS] reading Smalley's letter.)

EDITOR: *(Calling to Jerry)* Hey, Jimmy!

JERRY: You mean me?

EDITOR: Yeah! You! *(JERRY crosses to her, assuming the role of a REPORTER)* We got this letter from a Professor Smalley; claims he has the scoop on Dunn. The chief wants our top reporter to investigate.

REPORTER/JERRY: Gee! Thanks!

EDITOR: But our top reporter's not available, so we're sending you instead.

REPORTER/JERRY: Gee... Thanks.

(Lights fade on them and rise elsewhere on SMALLEY holding aloft a glowing green test-tube.)

JERRY: Meanwhile, Smalley had planned to destroy what remained of the mysterious element from space, but then—

SMALLEY: Hmmm...Perhaps I'm being a teeny bit hasty.

JERRY: Alas, the lure of super-human power proved too intoxicating.

(SMALLEY raises the test tube to his lip. It stinks, so he dumps it in a cup of coffee and is about to drink it when DUNN suddenly bursts in and approaches him menacingly.)

DUNN: Not so fast, Professor!

SMALLEY: Dunn! What do you want?

DUNN: Another cup of coffee.

SMALLEY: But it's mine! Let me drink it, and we can rule the world together!

DUNN: Sorry, Professor! The world's only big enough for one super-man.

(SMALLEY quickly swallows the coffee. In a rage, DUNN grabs his throat and strangles him.)

SMALLEY: No! No! No!

DUNN: Yes! Yes! Yes!

SMALLEY: No! No!—

(With a croak, SMALLEY dies in DUNN'S hands just as the REPORTER/JERRY enters.)

REPORTER/JERRY: Hi! I have an appointment with Professor Smalley—

(Seeing DUNN'S hands on the throat of the dead professor)

Oops! Never mind. See ya!

(The REPORTER turns to exit, but DUNN quickly drops SMALLEY, and points at the REPORTER, who freezes in his steps, suddenly unable to walk.)

Can't—move—my—feet!

DUNN: They're under the control of my super-human brain!

REPORTER/JERRY: Let me go—please! I'm just a simple, mild-mannered reporter—!

DUNN: —Who knows too much and who now must die!

REPORTER/JERRY: Oh, God! No!!!

DUNN: But first, using my brain waves, I'll send all the armies on earth to war against each other in a battle of total annihilation! And when it's over, I shall rule the world!

REPORTER/JERRY: *(Melodramatically, heavenward)* God help us all!

(Suddenly a heavenly beam of light falls on the REPORTER and church organ music plays. JERRY breaks character and resumes the narration.)

JERRY: Calling on all the resources of his merely human mind, the humble, mild-mannered reporter sent one last prayer heavenward to the Omnipotent One. Suddenly—

(DUNN begins to sink weakly to his knees, gasping for air.)

DUNN: What's happening?! The effects of the substance are wearing off! My powers are—leaving, leaving, leaving....

JERRY: Where once stood the confident, arrogant figure of the super-man, there knelt a drooping, disillusioned mortal.

(He struts over to DUNN, in character as the triumphant Reporter)

Dunn, tomorrow morning, it'll be back to the breadline for you! The Reign of the super-man has come to an end!

DUNN: *(Wailing melodramatically)* Noooooo!!!!

(The organ music swells as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 7: THE NEIGHBORHOOD SODA SHOP -- AT RISE: *It is late one afternoon, a few months later.*

POPS—the cranky old shop owner—is behind the counter mixing two cherry Cokes. JOE and JERRY are seated in a booth, discussing business.

JERRY: It's no good, Joe. "Science Fiction" magazine is dead.

JOE: No one renewed their subscription?

JERRY: Nope.

JOE: But "Reign of the Super-man" was so good.

JERRY: The reading public's like a finicky dame.

JOE: Publishing is one brutal business.

JERRY: You take your lumps and you move on.

(A traveling magazine SALESMAN has entered the pharmacy. He is dressed in a cheap suit, a gaudy tie and a white Fedora—the most expensive thing he’s wearing. He lugs two large heavy suitcases toward the counter. POPS reacts soon as he sees the SALESMAN.)

POPS: You! Turn right back around!

SALESMAN: Ah! Have a heart, Pops!

POPS: I tell you every month: this is a family business! I don’t carry pulps; only “Colliers” and “The Saturday Evening Post.”

(The SALESMAN lifts a suitcase on the counter and opens it.)

SALESMAN: But I got something new—

POPS: Is it “Colliers” or “The Saturday Evening Post?”

SALESMAN: It’s something for the kiddies; good, clean fun. They’re called Funny Books.

(THE SALESMAN takes some comic books from his suitcase; hands one to POP, who flips through it.)

POPS: They’re just old comic strips pages stapled together.

SALESMAN: Yeah! Everybody loves the funnies.

POPS: Who’s gonna throw away money on something they already get in the newspaper?

(Calling to JERRY and JOE as he places their drinks on the counter)

Boys, here’s your cheery Cokes.

(JOE crosses to the counter to get the drinks as the SALESMAN lays a small stack of comic books on the counter.)

SALESMAN: Tell you what, Pops: I’m gonna leave you a stack for free. See how they sell, and next month maybe we can talk business.

(The SALESMAN closes his suitcase and leaves as POPS calls out after him...)

POPS: It’ll never happen!

JOE: *(Picking up a comic book)* Pops, could I have one of those?

POPS: Take ‘em all if you want.

(JOE takes a comic book back to the table. Sitting back down, He takes a new pair of very thick glasses from his shirt pocket, puts them on. The new glasses alter his appearance, making JOE look like even more of a geek. JOE notices JERRY grimacing at his new glasses.)

JOE: What?

JERRY: They make you look so different.

JOE: The doctor said I needed a stronger prescription.

(HE begins to flip through the comic book).

There’s not even a story here; it’s just left over pages from the funnies stapled together like a magazine.

(DAVID GOLDMAN, LUTHER DUMBROWSKI and a Glenville FOOTBALL PLAYER enter the shop.)

DAVID: Hi ya, Pops!

POPS: Hi ya, boys. What’ll it be?

DAVID: The usual.

POPS: Ready for the big game tonight?

DAVID: Yes, sir.

LUTHER: (*Strutting menacingly over to Jerry and Joe*) Well, look who's here.

(*To JOE, removing his new glasses*)

Hey, what's with the new disguise?

(*Looking through the lens, laughing*)

Wow! You must be goin' blind!

(*DAVID and his friends laugh as they take turns looking through the glasses.*)

JOE: (*Nervously*) Could I have my glasses back...please?

DAVID: (*Taking the glasses and handing them back to JOE*) Better give the kid his glasses back before you make him mad. You know, I saw him in the gym the other day, doing bench presses.

(*Sarcastically, the ATHLETES "ooh" and "ah" as if impressed.*)

How much were you pressing, big guy—five or ten pounds?

LUTHER: (*Snatching the comic book from JOE, flipping through it*) What are you girls reading? "Famous Funnies?" Ah, this is kid's stuff.

DAVID: (*Snatching a copy of "Science Fiction" from JERRY'S books*) And what's this?

JERRY: Could I have that back...please?

DAVID: You girls have you own magazine?

(*Reading from it, mockingly*)

"The Reign of the Super-man."

LUTHER: I knew you two were going steady but I had no idea you were also a literary duo.

JERRY: (*Under his breath*) Jealous 'cause your boyfriend can't read and write?

LUTHER: (*Grabbing JERRY by the collar*) What did you just say? You tryin' to be a smart-alex?

JERRY: It's "leck"—not "lex," Luther.

LUTHER: Huh?

JERRY: Smart-aleck—not smart-alex.

(*DAVID and the FOOTBALL PLAYER chuckle at this. Infuriated, LUTHER turns on JERRY.*)

LUTHER: You got quite the mouth on you, kid. Where'd you get that from? From your dad?

(*At the mention of "dad," the entire mode suddenly changes. DAVID and the FOOTBALL PLAYER stop laughing. JERRY looks shell-shocked, and seeing this, LUTHER mocks him with baby-talk.*)

LUTHER: What? I'm not supposed to talk about Daddy? Will that make the little boy cry?

DAVID: Hey, our sodas are ready.

LUTHER: (*Continuing his attack on JERRY*) Well, maybe somebody ought'a talk about it, because for all your smart-alecky talk, it looks like you're just as dumb as your old man—

(*JERRY'S eyes are now filling with tears. DAVID lays a hand on LUTHER'S shoulder; again tries to defuse the situation.*)

DAVID: Hey, Luther, Pop's got our sodas...

LUTHER: (*Shrugging off DAVID'S hand; continuing his assault on JERRY*) Some say he wasn't as squeaky clean as he seemed; that he had some racket on the side; that he got what he had coming to him. But I say he was just a dumb sucker who couldn't keep his smart-alecky mouth shut when the wrong guy came calling—

(*JERRY suddenly pulls away, tears streaming down his face and runs out of the shop.*)

DAVID: Luther!

LUTHER: *(Still calling to JERRY)* You think your old man was some sort of hero? Well, he wasn't! There are no heroes, you little fairy!

DAVID: *(Shoving at LUTHER)* Luther, shut up!

LUTHER: *(Shoving back)* Hey! I can talk if I want to!

POPS: Boys, cut that out!

FOOTBALL PLAYER: *(Defending LUTHER)* Yeah, he can talk if he wants to!

POPS: Cut it out, or get out!

LUTHER: That smart-mouthed little fairy had it coming!

DAVID: You shouldn't have brought up his father!

LUTHER: You're defending the little fruit?

DAVID: I'm not defending anyone, but...but you went too far.

LUTHER: *(Storming out of the shop)* I'm leaving!

FOOTBALL PLAYER: *(Following him)* Me, too!

DAVID: *(Starting to follow after them)* Aw, come on, fellas! Luther, wait—!

POPS: Hey! I got three sodas here that haven't been paid for!

DAVID: Sorry, Pops.

(DAVID comes back, pays for the sodas and takes them to the table where JOE sits)

Shuster, have a soda...Have two.

JOE: *(Timidly)* Thanks.

(Awkward pause, then...)

What just happened?

DAVID: You know about Siegel's father.

JOE: I know he's dead.

DAVID: He never told you how he died?

JOE: Was he involved in some..."racket"—like Luther said?

DAVID: Of course not. Luther's a moron! Mr. Siegel was just your average guy, trying to support his family. In his suit and hat, you'd see him, and you wouldn't—you know? He blended into a crowd. He owned this little shop; sold men's hats, second-hand suits. One night a few years ago, just after closing time, somebody walking by noticed the front door of the place was open, but the lights were out. They went in and there was the kid's old man—lying on the floor behind the counter—dead—some say in a pool of blood with two bullets in his head. The register was empty. They never caught the guy who did it.

(Noticing that JOE is stunned)

Siegel never told you any of this?

(JOE shakes his head "no." DAVID rises to leave.)

Wow. Guess it still really hurts.

JOE: Thanks...for taking Jerry's side.

DAVID: I didn't want to take sides, but what Luther did was...wrong. It was wrong, and I couldn't just stand there and do nothing about it.

(DAVID exits. The lights go down on the shop as JOE rises, walks downstage and addresses the audience.)

JOE: My best friend had a secret identity. To everyone around him, he was just a geek, like me. But when he was

alone, he was...what? I realized I didn't know him—not really. But this other guy—this star quarterback—Mr. Popularity, the guy most likely to do...well, anything he wanted—he was like an open book; no secret identity, no secrets at all. Him, I felt I knew.

(JOE crosses upstage to where lights are slowly rising on...)

SCENE 8: THE SIEGEL FRONT PORCH, on the evening of the same day. -- *AT RISE: JERRY sits alone on the front porch steps, flipping through one of the comic books that he took from the soda shop. He notices JOE standing there in the front yard, looking at him sympathetically.*

JOE: Jerry?

JERRY: *(Cutting Joe off; very animated, acting as if nothing happened; flipping through the comic book)* I've been studying this thing, and I was thinking—

JOE: Listen, Jerry—

JERRY: —why couldn't we tell a science fiction story in cartoons?

JOE: Jerry, why didn't you tell me?

JERRY: *(Turning to JOE, dropping the act; irritated)* Tell you what?

JOE: You know what!

JERRY: Because—and stop doing that!

JOE: Doing what?

JERRY: Looking at me like that—like I'm weak and pitiful—because I'm not! You know it's a good thing all those scienti-fiction stories are make-believe, 'cause if they weren't—if I had super-human powers, I swear some days I think I could destroy the world! Most of the time I just wanna bust somebody's skull in! Slam! Bam! Pow!

JOE: Who's skull?

JERRY: All those guys: Luther, David Goldman, the dirty mug who killed my dad! I'd crush 'em all! And then I'd—I'd...

(Deflating)

...Oh, I dunno what I'd do. Pop would still be dead. Ma would still be...she'd still be Ma, and I'd still be stuck here, probably not feeling one damn bit better; prob-ably still wanting to bust skulls. Luther was right: there are no heroes.

JOE: I don't believe that.

JERRY: Name one!

JOE: David Goldman. After you left, he stood up to Luther.

JERRY: Liar!

JOE: Honest Injun, Jerry! He defended you. So maybe you wouldn't bust his skull.

JERRY: *(Stunned by this news)* Wow. So David Goldman is...virtuous?

JOE: Just because a guy's handsome, popular and good at sports doesn't mean he's all bad.

JERRY: *(Despairingly)* But life makes so much more sense if he is.

(JERRY falls silent, lost in his thoughts. JOE sits next to him. After a pause, JOE speaks thoughtfully, earnestly...)

JOE: I guess we were wrong about him. Maybe it's us, Jerry, and not everybody else. Maybe we're the ones with the problem—the ones who aren't seeing things the way they really are. What do you think?

(JERRY doesn't answer right away. He just sits, staring straight ahead as if lost in his thoughts; then...)

JERRY: They thought he had some racket on the side, but he didn't. He was framed.

JOE: Who? Your dad?

JERRY: *(His eyes light up)* No. The guy on death row...for a murder he didn't commit!

JOE: Huh?

JERRY: *(Becoming more excited as an idea forms)* But one guy knows the truth, and if he can find the real killer and get him to the governor's mansion before midnight, the innocent guy on death row can be saved!

JOE: Are you crackin' up?

JERRY: *(Rising and starting to pace excitedly)* And he can do it because, he has super-human strength! Can leap over buildings; bend prison bars with his bare hands and bust through brick walls! Slam! Bam! Pow!

SARAH: *(Coming out of the house)* What's all the commotion out here?

JERRY: You're right, Joe! We were wrong about him!

JOE: David Goldman?

JERRY: No! Bill Dunn!

JOE: Huh?

JERRY: From "Reign of the Super-man!" So what if a fella has super-human powers as long as he uses them to protect the little guy?

(Gleefully throwing punches in the air)

Slam! Bam! Pow!

A MAN'S VOICE: *(Off stage)* Hey! Quiet down over there!

SARAH: *(Calling off)* Sorry, Mr. Baum!

(Having picked up the comic book)

What's this?

JERRY: *(Gleefully snatching the comic book from her)* The future home of—

(To JOE, imagining an advertising campaign)

"The Most Astounding Fiction Character of all time! A genius in intellect! A Hercules in strength! A nemesis to wrong-doers! 'The Super-Man!'—a science fiction story in cartoons!"

JOE: "The Super-Man?"

JERRY: *(Arm around Joe, pointing out in the dark night)* Can you see him?

SARAH: Who?

(Somewhere upstage a light rises on DAVID who is dressed in street clothes.)

JERRY: When there's a cry for help, he rips off his clothes!

SARAH: What?

JERRY: He rips his shirt off, revealing his massive chest and broad shoulders!

(DAVID rips off his shirt, showing off his muscles.)

JOE: I'm starting to see him!

SARAH: See who?

JERRY: He rips off his pants—!

SARAH: Jerome!

JERRY:—and he’s wearing tights—like a trapeze artist in the circus!

(Upstage DAVID rips off his pants revealing the black tights and boots of a trapeze artist. He flexes his muscles.)

JOE: *(Catching the vision)* To show off his muscles!

JERRY: Right! And he’s got tons of ‘em—big ones!

JOE: Like Tarzan?

JERRY: Bigger.

JOE: *(With growing excitement)* Like Doc Savage?

JERRY: Bigger!

JOE: *(Super-excited)* Like Charles Atlas—“the World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man?”

JERRY: Even bigger! ‘Cause he’s the Super-man!

(Upstage, DAVID breaks his pose and throws three powerful punches in the air as the lights fade on him.)

DAVID: Slam! Bam! Pow!

JOE: *(Excitedly to Jerry)* I wanna try drawing him right now! My art supplies are at home! Come on!

(Leaping from the porch and running off right, throwing punches)

Slam! Bam! Pow!

MAN’S VOICE: *(Off stage)* Shut up over there!

SARAH: *(Calling off)* Sorry, Mr. Baum!

JERRY: *(Calling after JOE)* Wait for me!

SARAH: Jerry, what you talking about? Who’s ripping off clothes?

JERRY: *(Leaping off the porch, throwing punches in the air)* Slam! Bam! Pow!

(JERRY runs off into the night.)

SARAH: *(Calling after him, confused and upset)* Jerome Siegel, you keep your pants on!!!

(The lights on the scene fade to black.)

SCENE 9: AT RISE: *A light rises down stage center on JOE. He addresses the audience, dramatically, with gravitas.*

JOE: To reach his full potential, the artist must have his inspiration, his muse, his—model. In our original story of the Super-man, there was the all-important character of the murderer’s girlfriend. And so we decided to pool our meager finances and hire—

(He takes a small piece of newspaper from his pocket; unfolds it and reads it dramatically.)

“Joanne Carter—artist’s model—reasonable rates.”

(From the darkness upstage, JERRY crosses into the spotlight carrying a telephone. JOE holds up the newspaper ad so JERRY can see the number as he dials. The phone rings. Both BOYS nervously hold their breath. Someone on the other end picks up. A MAN’S VOICE is heard. It is thick with an Eastern European accent; deep and gruff.)

MAN’S VOICE: Yeah?

JERRY: *(Nervously)* Uh—uh—

MAN'S VOICE: Hello?

JERRY: Joanne Carter, please!

MAN'S VOICE: Who?

JERRY: Joanne Carter.

MAN'S VOICE: Joanne? Joanne who? There's no—

(Through the phone, we now hear a shrill FEMALE VOICE.)

FEMALE VOICE: It's for me!

MAN'S VOICE: Who is this?

JERRY: Jerry Siegel—of Siegel and Shuster?

FEMALE VOICE: *(Irritated)* It's for me!

MAN'S VOICE: *(Aside to the female)* Pipe down!

JERRY: I'm calling for Joanne Carter. We saw her ad in the "Cleveland Plain Dealer."

FEMALE VOICE: *(Shrilly)* Give me the phone!

MAN'S VOICE: What?

FEMALE VOICE: He wants me! Just give me the phone already!

(The sound of shuffling is heard over the phone)

And shut the kitchen door behind you!

(More shuffling is heard. The FEMALE VOICE resumes speaking, but it sounds very different now: deep, sonorous and sensual—the voice of JOANNE CARTER.)

JOANNE: Hello; Joanne Carter speaking.

JERRY: Hello, Miss Carter. This is Jerry Siegel—of Siegel and Shuster?

JOANNE: Siegel and Shuster...? Yes, yes; of course. How can I help you, Mr. Siegel?

JERRY: We're calling in response to your ad in the paper. We're interested in hiring you to model for us.

JOANNE: Yes, yes; of course. What type of work are you interested in exactly?

JERRY: Well...uh...Let me transfer your call to Joe Shuster—the head of our art department. Can you hold a minute?

JOANNE: Yes, yes; of course.

(JERRY forces the phone onto a petrified JOE. When JOE manages to speak, his voice is very high.)

JOE: Hello— *(Quickly dropping his voice as low as he can)* Miss Carter?

JOANNE: Good day, Mr. Shuster.

(JOE freezes; doesn't respond.)

Mr. Shuster? Hello?

(JERRY kicks JOE, snapping him out of his confused state.)

JOE: I need you to model for me.

JOANNE: Yes, of course.

JOE: I'm gonna draw you.

JOANNE: Of course.

JOE: Okay?

JOANNE: For when would you like an appointment?

JOE: Uh...this Saturday...say, ten A.M?

JOANNE: Yes, yes; of course. Let me check my schedule, Mr. Shuster.

(There's a pause; then...)

Ten on Saturday is open. For how long would you like me?

JOE: Uh...four hours?

JOANNE: Alright. You know my hourly rate, of course?

JOE: Uh...yeah...it's in the paper.

JOANNE: Is there anything in particular you'd like to see me in?

JOE: Huh?

JOANNE: I can bring several changes of clothes, if needed—and of course, I have a swim suit to show off my legs—

JOE: Uh-huh....

JOANNE: But I must be up front with you, Mr. Shuster: I don't do nude modeling for anyone under any circumstances for any amount of money. You don't want me nude, do you?

(Hearing the word "nude," JOE suddenly has a meltdown. Blushing with embarrassment, looking down with a goofy grin on his face, he laughs to himself, nervously, uncontrollably. JERRY snatches the phone from JOE.)

JOANNE: Hello?...Mr. Shuster?

JERRY: Miss. Carter, this is Mr. Siegel again!

JOANNE: I was telling Mr. Shuster that I don't model nude—

JERRY: Oh, no, no, no! No!

JOANNE: But I can bring a swim suit.

JERRY: That's more than enough clothing. So we'll see you Saturday at ten?

JOANNE: Yes, yes; of course. And your offices are located where?

JERRY: Actually, we'll be working from my home this weekend: 10622 Kimberly Avenue in Glenville

JOANNE: Kimberly in Glenville. I'll see you Saturday, Mr. Siegel.

JERRY: Lovely, Miss Carter; see you then.

(He hangs up the phone; to JOE with stunned amazement)

She's coming...Saturday...with a swim suit!

(JERRY disappears into the darkness upstage with the phone. JOE turns and addresses the audience.)

JOE: My first female model! A beautiful shapely woman who would strike any pose I wanted. And I could look at her body; study it; let my gaze linger upon it without any embarrassment whatsoever—because that was her job: to be looked at; studied, reproduced. And we would be together—her and I, for four hours; together, alone....

(Upstage lights rise on THE SEIGEL LIVING ROOM. SARAH enters with some sewing and plants herself in a chair.)

...or so I dreamed.

(JERRY enters wearing a sports coat: an attempt to look more adult and professional. JOE crosses into the living room and starts to put on a sports coat—but then HE thinks of something. HE hits the floors and begins doing push-ups. JERRY rolls his eyes at this. Suddenly the doorbell rings, and JOE jumps to his feet and frantically puts on his coat.)

Oh, God!

JERRY: She's here! How do I look?

JOE: How do I look?

SARAH: Boys, you both look just fine—

(SARAH starts to answer the door, but JERRY darts forward and dances her back to her chair.)

JERRY: I'll get it, Ma!

(With SARAH seated, JERRY nervously runs to the door.)

JOE: Wait!

(JOE sits, opens his drawing pad, poses with his pencil ready to Draw and inhales to expand his newly "pumped up" chest.)

Alright.

(JERRY takes a deep breath and opens the door. Standing in the door way is the model, JOANNE CARTER. What first captures our attention is that she seems to be posing, leaning to one side of the door frame with her head held high. Her sunglasses and wide-brimmed hat captures our attention next: they are worn as if she is a movie-star trying to conceal her true identity. Her lips are coated in bright red lipstick with a cigarette held in them. All of these things create a façade that at first prevents our seeing the real girl beneath. Still the façade is impressive to JOE and JERRY. Both exhale in unison when they see her. JOANNE remains calm and cool. Still posing in the door way, she reaches up with one gloved hand, removes the cigarette from her lips and exhales deeply. Only SARAH notices that no smoke is exhaled. JOANNE attempts to speak in a low, sultry voice, but the effect isn't as convincing in person as it was over the phone.)

JOANNE: Hello, I'm Joanne Carter. I have a ten o'clock with Misters Siegel and Shuster.

JERRY: Come in!

(JERRY awkwardly bows and gestures for her to enter—in a way that brings to mind a 17th century courtier. JOANNE saunters into the house. JOE springs to his feet, as if he is going to speak, then panics, and quickly sits back down.)

JERRY: Please, have a seat.

JOANNE: Thanks—ever so.

(JOANNE sits with her sun glasses still on; takes a long drag off her cigarette and blows out non-existent smoke.)

JERRY: Can I get you anything, Miss Carter—a drink perhaps?

JOANNE: Thanks—ever so—but I think it's a little early in the day for that. Don't you, Young Man?

(SARAH, who has been amused by watching all of this, rises to shake hands with JOANNE.)

SARAH: Hello, I'm Mrs. Siegel.

JOANNE: Charmed.

SARAH: Why don't one of you boys offer to take Miss Carter's hat—and sun-glasses.

JOANNE: Oh, silly me!

(Attempting a sophisticated laugh, JOANNE removes her sunglasses and hat; and JERRY dutifully takes them.)

Thank you, Young Man—ever so.

(Without her hat and sunglasses, JOANNE CARTER now appears young—a girl, no older than JOE)

and JERRY—though the boys continue to seem unaware of this. Without her sunglasses, JOANNE feels naked and exposed, so SHE takes another drag off her cigarette, making quite a show of exhaling.)

SARAH: Miss Carter, your cigarette seems to have gone out.

JOANNE: Oh, dear. I thought it was a terribly smooth smoke.

JOANNE: Boys, why don't one of you offer Miss Carter a light?

(JOE grabs a cigarette lighter from the side table and bolts toward JOANNE, who nervously puts the cigarette to her lips and leans toward him. JOE tries to strike the pose of a suave Hollywood leading-man as he lights the cigarette. With the cigarette lit, JOANNE sits back and again strikes a pose.)

Thank you, young man—ever—

(SHE takes a drag off of the cigarette; then has a coughing fit. Obviously she is not really a smoker.)

SARAH: Boys! Some water!

(JERRY and JOE nearly knock each other over trying to get to the water pitcher and glasses. JERRY prevails in bringing the water to the still-hacking JOANNE.)

JOANNE: Thank you, young—*(cough!)*—man!

(She drinks water; then to SARAH.)

I never smoke before my morning coffee—and being in a rush today, I'm hadn't time for it.

SARAH: Then allow me...

(SARAH takes the cigarette and puts it out in an ash tray.)

JOANNE: So, Mrs. Siegel, when will your husband and Mr. Shuster arrive?

SARAH: *(Indicating JOE)* There's Mr. Shuster, there.

(JOE gives JOANNE a shy, awkward, little wave.)

JERRY: And I'm Mr. Siegel.

(JOANNE looks at SARAH, confused.)

That's my—uh—mother.

SARAH: So, you kids get to work, and when you're ready for a break, I'll fix you some sandwiches.

(SARAH sits back down and takes up her sewing.)

JERRY: Ma, you sure you're gonna be comfortable sitting there while we work.

SARAH: You plan on doing something that'll make me uncomfortable?

JERRY: No.

JOANNE: Should I change into my swim suit?

JERRY & JOE: Yes!

SARAH: There's no need for that. How many girlfriends of murderers run around in swim suits? Miss Carter has a darling little sweater on; if she removes her jacket that'll show all that's fit to be seen.

(JOANNE removes her jacket revealing a tight sweater, hands it to SARAH. Suddenly, SARAH sees that JOANNE'S bust—the result of an obviously stuffed bra—is much larger on one side and is sagging.)

Boys, turn around—now!

(The BOYS obey, turning their backs to JOANNE before seeing her bust. SARAH points at the girl's chest. JOANNE looks down and is horrified by what she sees. Together they work to correct the

situation. This involves JOANNE removing a lot of tissue from her bra, some re-stuffing, remolding, until finally the girl's figure looks normal. When the job is complete, SARAH gives JOANNE an encouraging pat on the shoulder and returns to her seat and her sewing.)

SARAH: Alright, boys: we're ready.

JERRY: Alright, Miss Carter, the character you're modeling for is the girlfriend of a murderer; you're beautiful, cold, unfeeling.

(JOANNE strikes a different pose for each adjective, trying to appear sophisticated, hard—but looking slightly silly.)

JOANNE: How's this?

JERRY: Perfect!

(Lights fade on everyone and everything except JOE. He addresses the audience as he draws.)

JOE: I always imagined the relationship I would have with my model; dreamt of long afternoons in my artist's flat: her, bathed in light, posing; me, sketching, sketching; our eyes locked—our mutual passion rising as I capture her forever on paper. That was the dream...

(The sound of JOANNE'S laughter causes the lights to rise on the living room. JERRY is leaping around the room, acting out his story, throwing punches at unseen villains—much to JOANNE'S delight.)

JERRY: Then the Super-man swoops in!

JOE: *(Dryly, to audience)* This was the reality.

JERRY: Slam! Bam! Pow!

JOANNE: Oh, that's just too wonderful, Mr. Siegel!

JOE: *(To the audience, bitterly)* Reality stinks!

JOANNE: How imaginative! And you'll sell this story to the funny papers?

JOE: That's where the money is, but if they won't buy it, I thought some scienti-fiction magazine might—as “a science fiction story told in cartoons.”

JOANNE: Oooo! How inventive!

(Having had enough of JOANNE'S seeming infatuation with JERRY, JOE puts down his pencil.)

JOE: Excuse me: our four hours are up.

JOANNE: *(To JERRY, disappointed)* Already? Feels like we're just got started.

JOE: You wanna look?

JOANNE: At what?

JOE: My drawings?...of you?

JOANNE: Mr. Siegel, I was so caught up in you—I mean, your story—I forgot why I was here!

(When JOANNE looks at the pad, she is stunned by the beauty of JOE'S drawings.)

JOANNE: *(Almost reverently)* Oh, my!

JERRY: Isn't Joe a swell artist?

JOANNE: Swell...but—

JOE: You don't like 'em?

JOANNE: Oh, they're beautiful...but—

JOE: But?

JOANNE: Do you think she really looks like me?

JOE: Absolutely.

JOANNE: *(Looking at the drawing, humbled)* No...no...

SARAH: Let me see. I'll decide.

(SARAH crosses and looks at the drawings... then at JOANNE...then back at the drawing. Quickly changing the subject with a forced smile, she heads for the kitchen)

Oh my: time to start supper.

JERRY: Excuse me a minute.

(JERRY follows SARAH off.)

JOANNE: That's how you see me?

JOE: Yes.

JOANNE: Wow...thanks...ever so.

JOE: You're welcome, Miss Carter.

JOANNE: Please: call me Joanne.

(Looking into her eyes, JOE is overwhelmed by this intimacy.)

JOE: You can call me...uh—

JOANNE: Joe?

(He nods, momentarily lost in her eyes)

Joe, I was wondering if—if Mr. Siegel—if Jerry—is always this—I dunno—energetic about things.

JOE: Well...not everything.

JOANNE: But his creations—like the Super-man—he's usually this enthused about them?

JOE: I guess.

JOANNE: I knew it! You can see it in his eyes: he has the soul of a real artist. And all that energy! It's so...so virile!

JOE: Really?

JOANNE: So masculine—you know?

JOE: No.

(JERRY enters with an envelope so full of loose change that it is about to fall to pieces.)

JERRY: Miss Carter?

JOANNE: Please, call me Joanne.

JERRY: It's been a pleasure working with you—

JOANNE: No, the pleasure's all mine!

(JERRY carefully hands her the fragile envelope full of change.)

JERRY: Here's the amount we agreed upon. And maybe in the future, we'll request your services again.

JOANNE: Oh...alright. Well, I'll be going then. Thank you...Jerry.

(Reluctantly she prepares to leave, but then she gets an idea)

You know, boys, I think the two of you are really on to something with this Super-man character—really I do!

(Looking deeply into JERRY'S eyes)

And I'm sure you have lots of other great stories and characters leaping around in there—don't you, Jerry?

JERRY: *(Oblivious to her, but not to her compliments)* Well, yeah.

JOANNE: I think I could benefit—as a model—working with you again—and you, too...uh...

JOE: *(Helping her remember)* Joe.

JOANNE: —Joe...so I would be more than willing to offer my services for free.

JERRY: Well...

(JOE rises from his chair and decides to take control of the situation.)

JOE: Yes! Thank you, Joanne. I know that I would benefit—as an artist—from working with you again.

JERRY: Well, alright then.

JOANNE: *(Offering her hand to Jerry)* Partners?

JERRY: *(Shaking her hand)* Partners!

JOE: *(Laying his hand on top of theirs, the awkward “third wheel”)* Partners!

(JOANNE continues to look adoringly at JERRY as the lights fade on the scene. JOE crosses down stage and addresses the audience.)

JOE: An artist’s life is one of constant rejection; he’s gotta develop thick skin. We sent the finished Super-man story to one paper after another, and they all rejected it; called it “immature” —and this from guys who were publishing Little Orphan Annie! Still we kept mailing it out. All the while, Jerry and I kept kicking around new ideas for other characters—and Joanne kept coming over to model for us.

(Lights rise on the Siegel living room. JOE crosses back into the scene, sitting back down and taking up his pad and pencil. JOANNE stands on a chair with a huge sheet wrapped around her waist. She fidgets with it, irritably.)

JOANNE: What’s this supposed to be?

JOE: A ball gown.

JOANNE: I dunno.

JERRY: No, it’s perfect. You’re a lady of the seventeenth century French court—beautiful, cold, unfeeling—seeking to entrap our hero—

JOANNE: *(Enthusiastically smiling at Jerry)* —“Henri Duval of France!” —

JERRY: —“Famed Soldier of Fortune!”

JOANNE: You are so creative!

JOE: Could you hold still please?

JERRY: This morning I had an idea for another character: “Dr. Occult: The Ghost Detective.”

JOANNE: Oooo!

JERRY: He has powers—can fly! I’m seeing him in a blue suit with a cape—

JOANNE: Like a magician? I love it! Does he have a girlfriend—maybe a beautiful assistant? Because I still haven’t modeled in my swimsuit—

JOE: That’s a great idea, Joanne!

JOANNE: What’a say, Jerry? You wanna see me in my swimsuit?

(SARAH enters with mail, hands a large envelope to JERRY.)

SARAH: You’ve got mail.

(JERRY opens the envelope; takes out the Super-man drawings, along with yet another rejection letter.)

JERRY: “The Super-man” rejected by another newspaper.

JOANNE: But he’s such a wonderful character!

JERRY: Maybe not as wonderful as “Dr. Occult.”

JOANNE: You're not gonna give up on "The Super-man," are you?

JERRY: None of the newspapers want him—and postage is getting expensive.

JOE: Oh, grow some thick skin, why don't you! You can't give up because of a little rejection. I don't.

JOANNE: Joe's right!

JOE: I am?

JOANNE: Sure! Maybe the papers don't want him, but what about your magazine idea...of a story told in cartoons?

(From his box of art supplies, JOE takes out the copy of comic book that he took from the soda shop. He opens it and looks at the inside cover.)

JOE: You're right, Joanne! We should pursue that! There's this company here. We should send it to them.

JERRY: I dunno.

JOANNE: Jerry, listen to Joe

JOE: Yeah—for once.

JOANNE: What have you got to lose: the price of postage?

JERRY: You're right, kid. I guess "The Super-man" deserves one more chance.

JOANNE: *(Playfully throwing punches)* Slam! Bam! Pow!

JERRY: Slam! Bam! Pow! I'll go mail it right now.

(JOANNE rips off the sheet and steps down from the stool.)

JOANNE: I'll go with you!

JOE: Hey, I still need you here!

JOANNE: Joe, you're drawing a dress, not me.

(JOANNE happily leaves with JERRY. Alone, JOE mumbles to himself as he resumes drawing and the lights fade on the scene.)

JOE: Thick skin...thick skin...thick skin.

SCENE 10: *A PUBLISHING OFFICE IN NEW YORK CITY. On the walls of the office hang framed copies of the magazines that this particular company publishes: crime and "girlie" pulps. AT RISE: The Company's owners—HARRY DONNEFELD and JACK LIEBOWITZ—are meeting with their new editor SHELLY MAYER. In dress and manner, HARRY and JACK exemplify the stereotypical Depression-era gangsters of the "Jewish Mafia" variety. HARRY is the older of the two; also the cruder. JACK is younger and aspires to be gentlemanly. SHELLY MAYER is short, skinny, near-sighted and bald: an adult "geek."*

SHELLY: Thicker skin, Mr. Donnefeld—you've gotta develop thicker skin if you're gonna stay in publishing.

HARRY: Hey, my skin was as thick as rhino's by the time I was five! Skin's got nothin' to do with it.

JACK: On the contrary, Harry: skin's got everything to do with it.

(Pointing to magazines on walls)

What'ya see up there? Skin, skin, and more skin. Even the cowgirl on the cover of "Western Stories" is showing cleavage.

SHELLY: Exactly! So don't be surprised when the mothers of America blame your magazines for everything—

from their husbands screwing around on ‘em, to junior smokin’ Mary Jane.

HARRY: They think having the Feds crack down on us is gonna stop their husbands from chasing skirt?

SHELLY: The Feds might leave you alone if you clean up you cover-art, show less skin.

HARRY: The skin on the covers is what sells ‘em!

SHELLY: Put something out there for the kiddies—something wholesome, squeaky clean.

JACK: We tried that with “Famous Funnies,” but they just sit on the newsstands.

(SHELLY picks up a copy of the Funny Book from atop Jack’s desk and flips through it.)

HARRY: Who’s gonna fork over a dime for what they’re already gettin’ in the daily newspaper for free. People want stories, not jokes; they want excitement, action.

SHELLY: Then give ‘em action—but maybe give it to ‘em in cartoons. And make it clean action—“socially uplifting” action— “educational” action.

HARRY: Educational?

SHELLY: There’s a lot of action in the history books: cowboys and Indians, the Civil War, Patriots and Redcoats. Make some comic strips out of all that and stick ‘em in a magazine.

HARRY: What’a ya talkin’ about?

JACK: *(Catching on; getting an idea)* He’s talking about “Action Comics!” Think about it, Harry. “All-American action stories for All-American kids.” Action stories that—

SHELLY: —teach good citizenship!

HARRY: Funny books with no funnies?

JACK: Funny books that’ll get the sob-sisters—and the Feds—off our backs. What mother is gonna complain if junior’s reading about—

SHELLY: —Pioneers fighting off Indians!

JACK: —Yeah! Or war heroes!

SHELLY: —Or maybe Elliot Ness and his Untouchables!

JACK: Now you’re goin’ too far.

SHELLY: But crime-fighting needs to be in there, too—cops bustin’ up crime rings.

HARRY: Oh, yeah. Our “associates” in our “other interests” would love that.

SHELLY: Okay—no cops then. Make it some scienti-fiction crime fighters.

(Going to his desk and sorting through his papers.)

Just yesterday, I found this lame story some jokers mailed in.

(Finding “The Super-man” drawings)

Here it is: “The Super-man.” Look at that drawing: a tough guy with super-human muscles swooping down to clobber a hold-up man.

(JACK takes the drawing from SHELLY and studies it.)

JACK: You think this could sell?

SHELLY: Why not? Scienti-fiction pulps sell big time. The idea’s a little rough, but buy it and have ‘em re-do it; make the character more colorful; maybe dress him in red, white and blue—

HARRY: More patriotic-like.

JACK: More “All-American.”

SHELLY: That’s it: “All-American” action stories.

JACK: “All American Action Comics!”

HARRY: Cut the “All-American” spiel! Make it just “Action Comics.”

SHELLY: (*Visualizing it*) “Action Comics.”

JACK: (*Settling the matter*) “Action Comics.”
(*The lights on the scene fade to black.*)

SCENE 11: *THE SEIGEL HOME* several weeks later **AT RISE:** *JOE and JERRY are working on a new comic strip idea. JOANNE is posing in her swim suit [again her chest has been enhanced with the aid of tissue] and wearing on her head, wire clothes-hangers that have been twisted into the shape of antennas. A sheet is tied around her neck like a cape.*

JOANNE: Why do I have wires growing out of my head?

JOE: They’re your antenna.

JERRY: You’re a villainess from another planet—the sworn enemy of “The Interplanetary Police.” You’re beautiful, cold—

JOANNE: —and unfeeling. Okay, but do I have to wear a cape just because I’m from another planet?

JOE & JERRY: Of course!

JERRY: Haven’t you ever seen “Flash Gordon” at the movies?

(*SARAH enters with the mail.*)

SARAH: Mail’s here. There’s something here for you, boys.

JERRY: Just another rejection letter, Ma. You know, Joe: I think “Interplane-tary Police” is our best idea yet.

SARAH: Actually this envelope feels different from all the other ones—and it’s from New York.

JERRY: New York?

(*JERRY opens the envelope and takes out several pages which he silently reads as JOE continues to draw JOANNE. Suddenly JERRY becomes excited, animated*)

Oh my God! Oh my God! Someone did it! They did it!

SARAH: Jerry?

JERRY: Joe, someone did it! Someone wants to buy the Super-man story!

JOE: What?

JERRY: They’re gonna pay us one hundred and thirty-five dollars for it!

JOANNE: Oh, Jerry!

JOE: One hundred and thirty-five dollars?

SARAH: What?

JERRY: (*Waving the contract*) Look! They even sent a real contract!

SARAH: A hundred and thirty-five dollars? Oh, let me sit down! This is too much!

JERRY: They want us to make some changes—

JOANNE: What kind of changes?

SARAH: For that much money—just do it!

JERRY: They want him to be “more American, more colorful.”

JOANNE: What does that mean exactly?

JERRY: I’ve got an idea, Joe! Why not mix “Interplanetary Police” with “The Super-man.”

JOE: Have the Super-man come from another planet?

JERRY: Yeah. He comes to earth to fight crime.

JOANNE: Why not fight crime on his own planet?

(JERRY is stumped for just an instant—then...)

JERRY: Because his own planet was destroyed!

JOANNE: How?

JERRY: I dunno. It just blew up—the way some planets do.

JOANNE: But if the whole planet blew up, how'd he escape?

(JERRY is stumped again. There is a longer silence. Then...)

SARAH: His mother—she knew what was coming, so when he was a baby, she put him in a rocket and sent it off into outer space, to save him—sort'a like Moses's mother did with him, ya' know?

JERRY: Great idea, Ma!

JOANNE: *(Sarcastically)* So if he's from another planet, does he have to wear a cape?

JERRY & JOE: *(In perfect unison)* Of course!

JERRY: A bright red one—

(Upstage a light rises on the actor who plays DAVID, standing with his back to the audience. A long red cape hangs from his shoulders.)

JOE: —with a tight blue suit—like a circus acrobat would wear— to show off his muscles!

JERRY: Red and blue—American colors for an American hero!

(DAVID turns around. He is in blue tights and on his chest is a yellow letter "S.")

JOE: And across his chest he can wear a big "S!"

JERRY: "S" for Superman?

JOE: *(With a sly smile)* And for Siegel and Shuster.

JERRY: Great idea, Joe!

JOANNE: Won't he stand out dressed like that?

(The lights fade on DAVID.)

JOE: No. He has a secret identity; most of the time he could hide behind a suit and glasses.

JERRY: Yeah! He blends into the crowd so he can investigate crime undetected.

JOANNE: Why does he get to investigate crime?

JERRY: Because he's a mild-mannered reporter working on the crime beat for a major metropolitan newspaper.

JOANNE: *(Looking to JERRY, hopefully)* Does he have a girlfriend?

JERRY: Nah!

JOANNE: But Jerry, every guy needs a girlfriend!

JOE: You're right, Joanne! Every guy needs a girlfriend.

JERRY: But Superman's too busy fighting crime to have time for all that mush.

JOANNE: But Jerry—

JOE: *(Getting an new idea)* A female reporter! Yeah, she loves Superman! She writes about him for the paper; is always swooning over his "virile, masculine energy"—all his "Slam! Bam! Pow!" stuff.

(Becoming passionate, having a little melt-down)

She pays absolutely no attention to the mild mannered reporter—because of his thick glasses and quiet ways! He's sitting right there next to her, working with her, watching her, day after day, and she has no idea

that he is really Superman!—That this poor, pathetic little geek is actually the love of her life!—That he loves her, too, but that he can't bring himself to tell her because of his damned secret identity!

(JOE freezes—realizing he's revealed his true feelings for JOANNE. The others just stare at him, dumbfounded; then...)

SARAH: That's very good, Joe!

JERRY: I like that!

JOANNE: *(Coming to JOE, tenderly touching his arm)* That's a wonderful idea, Joe—just wonderful—

(Then turning all her adoration back to an oblivious JERRY)

—especially the whole unrequited love angle.

(JOANNE stares love-struck at JERRY. In frustration, JOE screams, runs downstage as the lights fade on the scene.)

SCENE 12: *Downstage center, JOE regains his composure and tries to calmly address the audience.*

JOE: Great works of art are often born when the artist confronts his most tortured, painful emotions. If he's lucky, in the process he won't make too big a jack-ass out of himself. On the other hand, unless he does make a jack-ass out of his self, the situation that caused all those tortured feelings probably won't change much.

(The cover of issue one of "Action Comics" is illuminated behind JOE)

When the first issue of "Action Comics"—featuring our newly imagined Superman on the cover—hit the newsstands in June 1938, our lives didn't change at all. We were excited; tried to get Pops to carry it at his shop, but—

(POPS enters at one side of the stage and barks at JOE.)

POPS: I told you! I don't carry no pulps—just "Colliers" and "The Saturday Evening Post!"

(POPS exits, grumbling to himself.)

JOE: *(To audience)* See? No change there. Jerry and I wanted to get more stuff published, so we both started coming up with other ideas for stories—

(JERRY enters and crosses the stage with JOANNE following adoringly.)

JOANNE: Oh, Jerry! You have such an unbelievable imagination!

JOE: *(To JOANNE as she walks past him)* Hey! I said we both came up with ideas!

(But JOANNE doesn't even notice JOE as she follows JERRY off stage.)

JOANNE: You have the soul of a real artist!

JOE: *(Turning back to the audience)* Again: no change. But then a few months later, "Action Comics" wanted another Superman story. So we did one, mailed it off and cashed the check. Then they wanted another one—and another. By then we'd graduated from Glenville. We had planned on getting real jobs, but most months we were turning out new Superman stories and making \$135 between us. That wasn't bad money in 1938—not at all. For us, things seemed to be changing for the better; but for some other kids in the neighborhood...

(The lights dim on JOE and rise elsewhere as an upset BELLA rushes on, followed by DAVID.)

BELLA clutches David's letterman jacket in both arms as if it was a life-jacket.)

DAVID: Bella, be reasonable!

BELLA: I'm not crazy!

DAVID: Who called you "crazy?" Look: it's my letter-man jacket.

BELLA: But you gave it to me, David!

DAVID: When we were dating; now we're not, and I'd like to have it back, please.

BELLA: But it has sentimental value to me!

DAVID: It has sentimental value to me, too, Bella! I'm the one who earned it! I made those touch downs, not you! It was my ribs that got bruised that one time—and my shoulder that got twisted in that big Homecoming game!

BELLA: College has made you so stuck up!

(A TEENAGE GIRL runs on.)

TEENAGE GIRL: Hey, guys! Did you hear? A big car with New York license plates just pulled up in front of the Siegels' house, and then three guys dressed like Edward G. Robinson got out of it and went inside!

(The TEENAGE GIRL runs back off.)

DAVID: Bella, I'm not a kid any more—

BELLA: So I'm immature! Is that what you mean?

DAVID: I'm away at college; you're still in high school—

BELLA: So now I'm not good enough for the big college man!

(A high school FOOTBALL PLAYER runs on.)

FOOTBALL PLAYER: Hey! Did you hear? James Cagney is at the Siegels' house!

(The FOOTBALL PLAYER hurries off.)

DAVID: People change; they grow up. We've got nothing in common any more, Bella.

(BELLA starts to cry. DAVID puts a hand on her shoulder. She throws herself into his arms.)

BELLA: So what if we've got nothing in common? I'm a nice person, David. Can't I still be your girlfriend anyway?

DAVID: Bella, please stop doing this.

BELLA: Alright! Fine!

(BELLA angrily pulls away from DAVID as the NAIVE TEENAGE BOY excitedly runs on.)

TEENAGE BOY: Hey! Did you hear?

BELLA: James Cagney is at the Siegels' house!

TEENAGE BOY: Cagney's there, too! Wow! I only heard about George Raff!

(The TEENAGE BOY runs off.)

BELLA: You can have your stupid letter-man jacket, David! I don't want it anymore!

DAVID: Please don't be so angry—

BELLA: Angry? I'm happy—happy! 'Cause there are other fish in the sea, David—big fish!

(BELLA starts to exit.)

DAVID: Where are you going?

BELLA: To see what's happening at Jerry Siegel's house!

(BELLA runs off, leaving a befuddled DAVID behind as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 13: THE SIEGEL HOME... moments later. *AT RISE:* HARRY, JACK and SHELLY are seated on the sofa staring dumbfounded at JERRY and JOE—who sit silently and nervously in chairs across from them. The atmosphere is silent, tense; it is apparent that no one has spoken for several minutes. SARAH bustles in with a tea tray and begins pouring tea for the guests. Finally, JACK, still staring in disbelief at the boys, manages to speak.

JACK: So you're Mr. Shuster? (JOE nods, sheepishly) And you're Mr. Siegel?

(JERRY nods, sheepishly; then to SARAH as JACK accepts tea from her...)

And you're...?

SARAH: Mr. Siegel's mother.

JACK: He still lives with you?

SARAH: (Defensively) Of course.

JERRY: Mr. Liebowitz, it's not like we're kids in high school.

JOE: (Innocently, negating what Jerry just attempted) No; we graduated last June.

(HARRY starts to chuckle, like the cat that ate the canary.)

SARAH: Mr. Donenfeld, some people might think it's rude to laugh without telling everyone what's so darn funny. I'm one of them.

(SARAH'S tone of voice silences HARRY'S laughter immediately.)

HARRY: It's just that they're nothing but kids.

JACK: What Mr. Donenfeld is trying to say is given the high quality of your son's work, we were expecting someone much older.

SARAH: Jerry's a remarkable boy...and Joe is, too.

JACK: Indeed. But no boy is remarkable without a good mother.

SARAH: Well, you do what you can. It hasn't been easy...raising him by myself.

JACK: And Mr. Siegel?

SARAH: Mr. Siegel is no longer with us.

HARRY: Left you for a younger broad?

SARAH: He died...may he rest in peace.

JACK: May he rest in peace. I'm sure it hasn't been easy, but Mrs. Siegel, things are about to turn around. Yes, Mrs. Siegel, happy days are indeed here again, and I'm honored to be the one to personally bring you the good news.

(Gesturing to SHELLY)

Shelly....

SHELLY: We've decided to devote every single issue of "Action Comics" exclusively to Superman. Past issues featuring a Superman story have enjoyed brisk sales—

HARRY: 'Brisk?' It's like offerin' free smack to junkies. The kiddies can't get enough of him!

JACK: We want to feature Superman in full color on every cover, and on every single page of every issue.

JERRY: Wow. That's gonna take a lot of our time, Mr. Liebowitz—

HARRY: (Aggressively) Did somebody else get to you first?

JACK: (Cutting HARRY off) What he means is, several companies are preparing to rush Superman knock-offs into print. Show 'em, Shelly.

SHELLY: *(Hands the boys sample comic books from his briefcase)* There's "Wonderman," "Mystery Man," etcetera, etcetera...

JERRY: I've never seen these before.

HARRY: They ain't hit the streets yet.

JERRY: Then how'd you get them?

HARRY: *(Ominously)* Connections.

JOE: *(Flipping through the comics)* These drawings stink. The proportions are all off.

JACK: Exactly! What keen artist's eyes! That's why we want the two of you to work for us exclusively, producing all future Superman stories.

SHELLY: *(Taking two contracts from his briefcase)* In exchange for your services, you'll be paid ten dollars for each page of work published in "Action Comics."

JOE: Jiminy Cricket!

SHELLY: In addition, we will market a bi-monthly comic book entitled "Superman," devotedly exclusively to that character, for which you'll be paid an additional ten dollars per page. Now, we'll need you to produce forty pages—

SARAH: *(So overcome, she clutches her heart)* Oh my God!

SHELLY: —for each publication!

SARAH: *(About to swoon, she rises and paces back and forth, fanning herself)* Oh my God!

JOE: Jeez! That's six hundred dollars a month!

SHELLY: We have contracts here for each of you to sign.

(The BOYS prepare to sign the contract when suddenly SARAH bolts forward.)

SARAH: Wait! Don't do it!

JERRY: But Ma, it's six hundred dollars a month!

SARAH: *(Overcome, almost weeping)* I know, I know! But I don't want you to sign it—not until—until—

(Rushing to the phone with great energy)

—until I call that old high school principal of yours over here to watch! Once he's here, then you can sign!

(The lights on the scene fade to black.)

END OF ACT 1

27 More pages in ACT TWO