

## Starlight Excerpt

It's the end of the 1920s. Silent movies are on the way out. Now all the studios are scrambling for finances to make the new "talkies." Sol Sydney, the owner of Sierra Studios in Hollywood, and a small time bootlegger, needs to start making talkies instead of the serials the studio has always made.

In a casual conversation with one of his gangster friends, he mentions he needs money to finish his current production, *The Mad Sheik*. (All his moves start with *The Mad* ...) That conversation gets relayed to Chicago Charlie, of the Chicago mob. He sends his representative, Louis the Lip, to offer Sol money for a piece of the studio. Only with his offer, there's no turning it down. As part of this offer, Louis wants the studio's two stars, Rudy Belasco and Lanya Little, to sign an exclusive contract. As far as Louis the Lip is concerned, no contract is going to get Sol dumped into L.A. River.

But there are complications. Louis' girl friend, Velma, is a look-a-like for Mable, the wife of an out of work accountant, Arnold. And he is a look-a-like for Rudy. Velma is planning on making her own deal with Sol, and in the process, telling Chicago Charlie that Louis intends to knock him off. Then added to that, there is Sara, an aging actress, who is *violently* in love with Rudy. And Manny, Louis's bodyguard, who has a thing for Velma.

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### TIME

Hollywood at the end of the silent movie era.

### SETTING

There are two stage settings: (1) the movie scenes at the studio on the sound stage or being projected in a cinema and (2) the other non-sound stage scenes.

(1) All movie scenes are played against a downstage flat parallel to the audience. The flats could be on wheels and rolled on and off by the stage crew acting as the film crew.

(2) Upstage of the movie-scene flat is the area of the non-movie scene locations. These scenes can be set up behind the movie flats while the movie/studio scenes are being played so that scene changes can happen with as little interruption as possible.

### A NOTE ON THE MOVIE SCENES

There are two types of movie scenes.

- Those that are shown in a cinema. This includes background music.

- Scenes in the studio sound stage. The action and sound are normal.

#### A NOTE ON INCIDENTAL MUSIC

All movie scenes shown in a cinema have incidental music to match the action. That can be as simple as recorded or live piano music or it can be from a small group. There is also recorded music heard on the radio and live songs at the PussyKat Klub.

## PROLOGUE

(If there is a curtain, it is closed. Otherwise, the stage is dark while the house lights are on before the play begins.)

(About ten or fifteen minutes before CURTAIN TIME, the CINEMA MANAGER enters in front of the curtain or downstage. The house lights remain on. He is carrying an easel and a large poster of a movie that will be shown at the theatre: THE MAD TRAPPER. He puts the poster down on the floor, then sets up the easel with some difficulty. When he goes to pick up the poster, the easel collapses. There ensues some comic business of trying to set up the easel and place the poster on it before the easel collapses. He exits when he finally sets up the poster on the easel.)

(About five minutes before CURTAIN TIME, the CINEMA MANAGER enters DOWNSTAGE (or in front of the curtain). He is now carrying a few pieces of paper. He stands and looks out at the audience. The HOUSE LIGHTS remain on. He is a little hesitant to speak.)

## CINEMA MANAGER

*(to audience)* Uh, excuse me. Excuse me. Can I have your attention, please? *(to someone out front)* Hey, give me some light. *(A spot comes on him.)* Everybody, can I have your attention? Please. Can I have your attention for a moment? *(quickly looks over the papers in his hand)* I'm afraid I have some disappointing news. Um. It seems that Mr. Belasco and Miss Little won't be here for the screening of ... *(looks over his notes)* of The Mad Trapper. I have a note from the studio here somewhere. Oh yes, here it is, that I've been asked to read. *(finds note)* Uh, "Sierra Studios welcomes you to the first screening of the next instalment of The Mad Trapper, starring Rudy Belasco and Lanya Little. Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, neither Mr. Belasco or Miss Little are able to attend tonight's screening." *(looks up from note)* Uh, and I have another note from the studio.

*(He shuffles through the notes, dropping them on the floor. He bends down and goes through the notes on the ground until he finds the right one. He straightens up, leaving all but the note he found on the ground.)*

## CINEMA MANAGER (Continued)

I have another note from the studio. *(reads)* Uh. "Mr. Sol Sidney, Sierra Studio's president, would like to extend to you all a warm welcome to Hollywood's newest and gayest night club, The PussyKat Klub. Miss Little, who I'm sure you were all hoping to meet, will be the club's star performer tonight. And all this week, if you present your ticket stub at the door, there's no

cover charge to get in. After the show, Miss Little will be available for autographs.” (*looks up from note*) Uh. Right. So, enjoy the next instalment of the—

*(He bends down and retrieves another note, dropping the one in his hand and then straightens up.)*

CINEMA MANAGER (Continued)

*(reads) “The Mad Trapper” and (*looks up from the note*) our regular feature tonight, My Best Girl, starring America’s sweetheart, Mary Pickford. Uh, thank you. (*He exits leaving the notes on the floor.*)*

*(A minute or so passes with the house lights still on. The CINEMA MANAGER sheepishly enters and retrieves the notes on the ground. He gives the audience a “look” and exits.)*

*(BLACKOUT)*

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

The end of the next instalment of *The Mad Trapper*. This is a movie scene in the cinema to simulate a silent movie. The only sound is background music which would have been played at a cinema.

*We see a Title Card: The Mad Trapper Starring Rudy Belasco and Lanya Little Episode VII.*

*Close shot of EDNA (played by LANYA).*

*Title Card: Innocent Edna is alone in her cabin ready for bed.*

*(The INTERIOR of a log cabin in the far north. EDNA is sitting in front of a crude mirror brushing her hair. She is in her nightgown. Suddenly she turns to what is the door of the cabin. She looks shocked.)*

*Title Card: There is a knock on the door. Who can it be?*

LANYA

*(mouths) Who can it be? Is it you, Brad Bart?*

*Title Card: Is it you, Brad Bart?*

*(MANNY as the MAD TRAPPER enters. EDNA gets up and cowers. The MAD TRAPPER has a great beard and wears a coonskin hat. His clothes are ragged and filthy. He stops and eyes LANYA then laughs.)*

*Title Card: It's the MAD TRAPPER!!*

LANYA

*(mouths) Oh, no. It's the Mad Trapper. (She cowers as he comes closer.) Oh, Mad Trapper, what do you want?*

MAD TRAPPER

*(mouths) I want to kiss you.*

*Title Card: Edna cries out, "What do you want, Mad Trapper?"*

MAD TRAPPER

*I want to kiss you.*

*Title Card: "I want to kiss you!"*

*(The MAD TRAPPER grabs LANYA and they struggle.)*

LANYA

(mouths, while they struggle) Oh no! Let me go. Let me go. Oh, Brad, help me, help me. It's the Mad Trapper. He's about to defile me. He's mad and soon I won't have the strength to fight him off. Oh, Brad Bart where are you? You must save me before it's too late. You're my only true love. Although, there is a certain something about the Mad Trapper.

*Title Card: "Help!"*

(*LANYA breaks free and the MAD TRAPPER chases her around the cabin.*)

*Title Card: The Mad Trapper means to have his way with her.*

LANYA

(as she struggles—mouths) No, no. Anything but this.

*Title Card: A fate worse than death!*

(*LANYA and the MAD TRAPPER look to the camera and freeze.*)

(*END of SCENE*)

SCENE 2

ARNOLD and MABEL's dining room in their apartment. ARNOLD is eating his breakfast and listening to the radio, which is on the table. A jazzy instrumental is being played.

(*ARNOLD eats while he listens to the music.*)

MABEL

(off stage—in a loud, irritating voice) ARNOLD!

(*ARNOLD reacts to her voice by choking on his food.*)

ARNOLD

(to himself) Yes, Mabel. (He goes back to his breakfast.)

MABEL

(off stage) ARNOLD!

ARNOLD

(trying to patient) Mabel.

MABEL

(off stage) ARNOLD!

ARNOLD

MABEL!

*(He pauses in his meal, waiting for another call. When none comes, he goes back to eating.)*

MABEL

*(off stage) ARNOLD! (He chokes on his food.)*

*(MABEL enters. She's a bleached blond. Her hair is done up in metal curlers. She is wearing a fake fur trimmed dressing gown and has fake fur slippers on her feet. She's carrying a wooden spoon.)*

MABEL

ARNOLD!

*(She turns the radio off and then hits him with her spoon. He spits out his food. She gives him an angry look and exits. After a beat, ARNOLD turns on the radio and goes back to his breakfast.)*

MABEL

*(off stage) ARNOLD!*

*(MABEL enters, turns off the radio and hits him with her spoon. She gives him an angry look and exits. He waits for a moment, looks over his shoulder to see if she is there and then reaches over to the radio to turn it on. MABEL rushes in before he has a chance and hits him with the spoon.)*

MABEL

ARNOLD!

ARNOLD

*(trying to be patient with her) Yes, Mabel.*

MABEL

Don't "yes, Mabel," me. You know I don't like all that jazzy music.

ARNOLD

Yes, Mabel.

MABEL

*(hits him with spoon) I said, don't "yes, Mabel" me.*

ARNOLD

Okay, no, Mabel

MABEL

Funny guy.

ARNOLD

I'm not funny, Mabel. And neither are you.

MABEL

I hate it when you talk back. How long have we been married?

ARNOLD

*(patiently)* Three years.

MABEL

That's right. And what do I have to show for it? A crummy Hollywood apartment on Melrose overlooking a parking lot. And we don't even own a car.

ARNOLD

You liked it when we first moved in. It was near all the studios.

MABEL

That's when you had a job. Some sheik you turned out to be. I should've married Mervin. He's got a place almost in Beverly Hills and he's got a car, too.

ARNOLD

Well, I'm not stopping you.

MABEL

Very funny.

*(She's about to hit him but he grabs her arm.)*

ARNOLD

Do that again, Mabel, and I won't be responsible for what's going to happen.

MABEL

Hah! Now I can add wife beating to all your other faults. Getting fired just before Christmas.

ARNOLD

I wasn't fired. I was let go.

MABEL

Let go, he says.

ARNOLD

The boss gave my job to his nephew.

MABEL

*(wants to hit him, but stops when he looks at her)* And what did you do about it? Nothing. Oh, I have half a notion to walk out on you and leave you to your poverty.

ARNOLD

Well, why don't you. And while you're at it, you can take the other half with you.

MABEL

You'd like that, wouldn't you? So then you could smooch with all your floozies.

ARNOLD

Flooziess? Why I've never looked at another woman. Though God knows, why not.

MABEL

What about the girl in the butcher shop. I saw you ogling her.

ARNOLD

She was working the cash register. Where was I supposed to look?

MABEL

Oh, you have an answer for anything. *(He stands.)* Where are you going?

ARNOLD

I don't know.

MABEL

Well, you should know. You should be out looking for another job. What are we supposed to live on? Garbage?

ARNOLD

I thought that's what we were already living on.

MABEL

Hah!

ARNOLD

Anyway, it's Saturday. My boss said he'll give me a good letter of reference on Monday. Then I could start looking for work.

MABEL

*(raises spoon as if it to hit him)* Ooh, one of these days. *(starts to exit)* Some bookkeeper you are. You can't even keep yourself in a job. So, go to one of your floozies. See if I care.

ARNOLD

*(to himself)* I only wish. Listen Mabel, I don't want to fight. I'm doing the best I can.

MABEL

Well, that's not good enough.

ARNOLD

Come on, Mabel. I won't play that station if you'll lay off me.

MABEL

Well ... I guess I've been a little hard on you.

ARNOLD

Yeah, you and that spoon.

MABEL

Oh, well. Okay. You know, lovey dove, you could make it up to me if you buy me that pretty dress we saw window shopping last week. Then I'd have something decent to wear if we use those tickets stubs we got at the filum last night and go to that new night club.

ARNOLD

Oh, I don't know, Mabel. We shouldn't be spending any extra money until I can get another job.

MABEL

*(She makes up to him.)* Oh, shmoozy woozy. *(plays with his hair)* You wanna see your tootsy wootsy all dolled up, don't you?

ARNOLD

Well yes, but—

MABEL

Well. *(kisses him on the cheek)* It's just a little itty bitty dress. Nothing to get all worked up about. That is until we're all alone.

ARNOLD

Oh, all right. If it would make you happy.

MABEL

It would, sweetie pie. *(as she exits)* Just give me a minute while I take out my curlers and put on my face. *(blows him a kiss and exits)*